



# The Exchange

Volume 26, Issue 2

April, 2014

## Message from the President . . .

by Kelly Gallagher, SRIG President

Dear Secondary Reading Community,

Teaching is hard, and when something is this hard, it helps to have someone standing alongside you. That's one of the reasons I value being part of IRA's Secondary Interest Reading Group (SRIG) community. This is where I come to stand next to—and to learn from—some very smart teachers.

We have all stood next to teachers who have profoundly affected us. In my early years, three come to mind: John Powers, a great teacher (now an artist) who took me under his wing; Carol Jago, who mentored me in the early days of the California Reading and Literature Project; and Mary K. Healy, a founding member of the National Writing Project, who taught me more about reading and writing than she will ever know. A teacher would be fortunate to have worked with any *one* of these educators at any point in his/her career. I was lucky to have sided up with *all three of them* in my first few years of teaching.

Today, years later, I am teaching at the Harlem Village Academies in New York and, again, find myself fortunate to be standing alongside another group of outstanding educators. Julie Wright is a remarkable teacher and coach from Ohio. Donna Santman has helped me to shift my thinking about the teaching of reading. Shelley Harwayne is one of the most gifted educators I have ever met. And Grant Wiggins has made me rethink how assessment drives deeper learning.

Of course, between those early years and today, I stood next to a number of other teachers who have profoundly impacted my classroom. Although there are far too many of them to list in totality here (many of whom are reading this), it is my privilege to announce that you will find the works of two of them in the pages of this newsletter:

- Tom Newkirk's "Our Metaphors Matter" (on pages 2-3) is an adaptation from his upcoming book, *Minds Made for Stories: How We Really Read (and Write) Informational and Persuasive Text* (to be published by Heinemann). In this article, Tom pushes back against the Common Core's definition of reading. Newkirk, a professor at the University of New Hampshire, might just be this country's most important voice when it comes to the teaching of reading, and I am grateful that he is giving the readers of this newsletter a sneak preview of his forthcoming book.
- On pages 4-5, Penny Kittle's "Investment and Independence: The Superpower of Story," argues that the best way to teach reading and writing is by having students tell their stories. Penny is an exemplary high school teacher in North Conway, New Hampshire, and a tireless advocate for authentic student reading and writing. At a time when narrative writing is being undervalued, Penny's article demonstrates that it's not only valuable but also essential. Her latest book is *Book Love* (published by Heinemann).

If you'd like to stand next to and learn more from Tom and Penny, I encourage you to attend the IRA conference this May in New Orleans, where they (and I) will be discussing "Minds Made For Stories: Reading, Writing, and Thinking Within the Structure of Narrative." This session will be held Sunday, May 11, from 3:00 to 5:00 p.m. in rooms 271-273 of the Morial Convention Center. We hope to see you there!

A final note: this May marks the end of my two-year term as SRIG president and, as such, will mark the transition of SRIG leadership to the incoming president, Julie Meltzer. As you can see by her message on page 6, the SRIG is being passed to very capable hands. I look forward to learning from the SRIG community under Julie's guidance. I would also like to thank our treasurer, Rita Noon; our secretary, Kathy Galvin; and our newsletter designer, Jody Mueller, for years of dedication to the SRIG. And last, a big thanks to all of you who have contributed to this community.

Kelly

P.S. I can be reached [kellygallagher.org](mailto:kellygallagher.org) and followed on Twitter (@KellyGtoGo)

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# Our Metaphors Matter

by Thomas Newkirk  
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I recently received a copy of Education Week with a slick surrounding advertisement from Curriculum Associates for a product called Ready, which provides a set of lessons aligned to the Common Core State Standards. Apparently this product has “Teachers of more than one million students already raving.” “Teachers grabbed them like candy bars.”

I tried to imagine this language being used about doctors or lawyers, or any other profession (“Cardiologists are eating up 4D imaging like Triscuits”). So, curious, I turned the page to get a sample of these lessons.

I came across three that gave me pause. Under the category, “Key Ideas and Details in Informational Texts,” there was the objective “Finding Main Ideas and Details.” And under “Key Ideas and Details in Literary Text,” were these two lessons:

- Lesson 7: Finding the Theme of a Story or Drama
- Lesson 8: Finding the Theme of a Poem

What struck me in all of these was the use of the verb “find.” This language matters, our metaphors, in particular, matter—and in this case reveal the conception of reading that underlies a teaching approach. Reading becomes an act of location. Comprehension is a sort of treasure hunt, an act of extraction. And because these themes or key details pre-exist, because they are absolute-

ly there, in the text, accurate assessment is possible. If I hide my dog’s favorite toy in the yard—he either finds it or he doesn’t. I can tell definitively. Since I hid it I know where it is. (Note that the expression “hidden meaning” also uses that metaphor.) The writer-reader transaction is a game of hide-and-seek.

What we have is a metaphor of the text as a space, an expanse, a container in which knowledge exists. This is the dominant metaphor of the publishers guidelines developed by CCSS writers David Coleman (now President of The College Board) and Susan Pimentel. Funded by the Gates Foundation, these guidelines will be consequential in the development of textbook lessons and very likely items on standardized test. Note the persistence of this metaphor of finding as they describe the reading process:

- “drawing knowledge from the text itself”
- “acquisition of knowledge”
- “complex text is a rich repository”
- “they need to read and extract knowledge and insight”
- “gathering evidence, knowledge and insight from what they read”
- “close reading and gathering information from specific texts should be at the heart of classroom activities...”

This consistency is too great to be accidental. The text is viewed here as some kind of territory in which “knowledge, evidence, and insight” preexist prior to any reading act.

The job of the student is to locate and “gather” or “extract” or pull from a “repository.” They clinch this metaphor when they emphasize that the reader should stay within the “four corners of the text.” The reader is, in effect, fenced in.

This conception of reading is text-controlled, text-dominant—as the meaning is already there. I always felt this power imbalance when taking a standardized test, as if I had to fit in someone else’s skin; I had to psyche out what “they” felt was significant. I had to abandon my own pattern of attention which normally serves me well.

Coleman and Pimentel have come in for some criticism concerning their advocacy of cold reading of complex texts (Snow), but it seems to me the more basic question is about their conception of reading itself—the metaphoric story they tell. For it runs counter to a transactional or constructionist model of reading in which knowledge is made and not gathered (the difference is profound). From a transactional perspective, the text does not have a determinate theme, existing within its four corners—that theme arises in the experience of reading, an interaction between reader and text.

An example: Years ago, my son, age about eight, decided to watch a film version of Macbeth with me, maybe thinking it was an action movie, which it sort of was. He hung in there for quite a while. Later in the day we met one of my graduate students, and I mentioned that we had watched Macbeth together and she asked him what he thought of it.

# Our Metaphors Matter

by Thomas Newkirk

*continued from page 2*

“Good,” he said, “it’s about these little boys who are killed.”

“Little boys who are killed?” That’s what Macbeth is about? Then I recalled one brief scene, a matter of seconds in the movie, where McDuff’s children are killed. That would register with an 8-year-old, but I never would have picked it as a major event in the play—though as I considered it, this was the most heinous act in the play, the degraded boundary of Macbeth’s ambition. I learned something from his response.

From a transactional perspective, the text is not a defined space in which meaning exists, to be found by the reader. Rather the act of reading is an experience, in time, shaped by the writer, but profoundly influenced by the prior knowledge, purposes, emotional responses, and acts of attention of the reader. As the great Roman philosopher Seneca put it:

There is nothing particularly surprising about this way which everyone has of deriving material for his own individual interests from identical subject-matter. In one and the same meadow the cow looks for grass, the dog for a hare, and the stork for a lizard.

Meaning is made, not found. Or as Plutarch wrote over two thousand years ago: “The mind is not a vessel that needs filling, but wood that needs igniting.”



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This commentary is adapted from the final chapter of Minds Made for Stories: How We Really Read (and Write) Informational and Persuasive Texts. To be published by Heinemann in Fall, 2014.

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# Investment and Independence: The Superpower of Story

by Penny Kittle#

Daniel rounds the corner of the hall in a sprint for my classroom door just before the bell. The only thing in his hand is half of a chocolate glazed donut on a paper plate. (The other half is hanging out of his grinning mouth.) No pen. No book. No investment in English class.

He ducks into my room. He'll last about ten minutes before he signs himself out to the bathroom/library/nurse/guidance to wander the halls, reluctantly returning to the silence of a room of readers. He's a fish slipping by me in this stream we call school. My dad taught me that the best fishing is done first thing in the morning—before light—but with this boy, it is late afternoon: he's in 11<sup>th</sup> grade. I've got things to teach him, but he doesn't trust me. Not yet. Maybe not ever. I've been studying disengagement for some time and students like Daniel are the hardest to reel in. He's given up on finding his life within these walls.

This is what I know: teaching Daniel means knowing his story. Kelly Gallagher, Tom Newkirk, and I will argue in our IRA session in May that story is bigger than genre; it is a frame for thinking. Here I want to consider how story forms the core of teaching writing because it leads students to engage in a thoughtful, rigorous process of crafting ideas. Daniel and his classmates are motivated by autonomy, mastery, and purpose as we all are (Pink). I seek ways to give him control over his learning in order to drive him to connect deeply to the possibilities in learning to craft writing. In my classroom this begins with story.

We know stories move when characters want something. What does Daniel want? I want him to find books that ignite his curiosity and lead him to read deeply, slowly, and

well. I want him to write with a sense of craft guiding him. (And I want him to stop sneaking donuts into my class.) I find out by reading his writer's notebook that he wants his brother back. Incarceration has splintered his family. My work is to align his life with literacy.

The writing process offers rich rewards to those who are willing to engage. The work of seeking, finding, and recreating an experience can teach Daniel the pleasure found in writing. Investment teaches this, not us. We create the classroom conditions that lead to investment. The conditions identified by Donald Graves: time, choice, and response are still our best guide for leading writers (1983). I work to teach not just how to write, but *why* to write. Students begin to understand when we model this: when we fashion the stories that have formed us, taught us, frightened us even, and changed the arc of our lives.

I start with a scene: I remember the night when my father drew a graph as he argued with my older sister. "Here's your life, Linda," he said as he drew the x-axis on a folded over page from *The Oregonian*, "and if you go to college you get just a few more years to explore and think—" he bracketed the college years in heavy black marker, "before you get married and your life is over." That ending, a long black parallel line, was punctuated by silence. Moments before my mom had been washing dishes; now I heard her shut off the faucet.

I sketch a storyboard of scenes that show how college changed me. I model decision-making by peeling back the draft to the tangled scraps in my notebook. Daniel watches me struggle to capture words I overheard that night, then mix them with

descriptions of my father, my sister, and the silence of my mother down the hall. I model the importance of conferring as I solicit and respond to student feedback on my draft.

Judith Barrington says, "It is no easier to write your own story well than it is to write anything else well. Like any other literary genre, memoir requires you, as Annie Dillard said, 'to fashion a text'." This fashioning of texts means discovering ideas as you write, making claims, revising the flow and structure of sentences, then deleting whole sections as you reread and feel the piece tilting away from your central idea. It also means working with words. As Tom Romano said, "First words let me say what I think. When I begin working with them, letting them talk back to me, trying alternatives, language leads me to clarity and thinking I didn't have when I trusted the gush. I get to my best writing that way. I get to my best self."

The genre is of little importance next to this process of discipline and struggle that results from chasing coherence. It is the writer's passion to be understood that creates the voice in a text—the urgency in tone—the unfurling of an irrefutable argument; to teach students where this comes from is essential. Story engages students because they shape their life experiences.

Yet when I proposed a new semester course at our high school for this fall called *The Art of Story*, a colleague quickly dismissed it as not for college-bound students. Ah, here we go again with the narrative disrespect: it's the *easy* genre, the unit you toss into September to get to know students before you actually begin teaching "real" writing. The Common Core's David Coleman is famous for saying he doesn't care about your

# Investment and Independence: The Superpower of Story

by Penny Kittle# # continued from page 4

story—so why should anyone? It is ironic how we revere the great stories fashioned by Fitzgerald and Lee, by Master Will and Goldman or Salinger, yet we discount the art of crafting those stories. When are students in middle and high school encouraged to write fiction? What better way to deeply understand the craft of scenes and the development of plot—the problematic relationships between characters and the layering of values, beliefs, and ideas in literature—than to study some and craft our own? Anyone who thinks this is easy hasn't written a story in a very long time. Perhaps ever.

My colleague Ed Fayle wrote on an early draft of this article, "It seems as though there's an element of respect missing if a student's voice, if their attempts at story and craft aren't important enough to recognize. Whose story is more important than the one your students have to tell? You don't have to have a name like Fitzgerald or Lee to have your story be *important*. A sense of civil rights, of simple, dignified humanity tells me that everyone has a story to tell."

Teachers often tell me there is little room for narrative in a curriculum packed with novels and analytical essays. Yet, large amounts of reading in unsupported environments coupled with a decreased support for underprepared college students, means students today must be fueled by independence to succeed beyond high school. I have brought more students to independence and resilience with complex texts through narrative than any other genre.

Story has brought Daniel back to me. Through story, he has produced his best work of the semester. I watched him pour himself into a series of flashbacks that captured two

children becoming young men. He shared early drafts of scenes with his writing group and smiled when they showed him where they could see and hear his brother in his words. For weeks he wasn't late to class. As Don Graves said, "Our anxieties about child growth lead us to take control of the writing away from the children...when children feel in control of their writing, their dedication is such that they violate the child labor laws. We could never assign what they choose to do." Daniel mailed his final draft to prison. Daniel didn't just change his writing in this process; he changed as a writer.

We must lead students to confidence and independence as they move through school. I've found that memoir and fiction lead to a rich payoff in engagement. We've heard a lot about accountability for products, but what have we gained if that product comes as a result of constant teacher intervention—what to say, how to say it, what form, what revisions or edits are needed? Paul Tough named the qualities for success beyond high school: persistence, self-control, curiosity, conscientiousness, grit, and self-confidence (2012). When we fuel our classrooms with the stories of our students, we teach a rich writing process layered with those qualities.

Consider what engages you in reading and writing and teach from that place. Last night I squealed through my snorkel mask as an eight-foot Manta Ray skimmed by inches from my nose. I am alive with that experience this morning. I want to paint it for you and in that writing, relive it myself. I could argue for the preservation of our oceans with passion and attention today because I want to connect

you to the exhilarating fear of swimming with sea creatures. I would research thoroughly—consider the merits of sources—and work harder than you expect to write well. Why? Because literacy lives in my experiences, sparking a greater understanding and appreciation of them. When reading and writing is a way to deeply experience what I am already connected to, I understand its power. Teaching reading and writing through student stories and passions is not only possible in this age of the Common Core State Standards, I believe it offers students like Daniel a reason to reach for them.

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## A Message from Julie Meltzer, President-Elect

Hi all,

*As many of you know, until recently I was an educational consultant and program evaluator who specialized in helping schools and districts assess, design and implement literacy improvement initiatives. I have been lucky to partner with several terrific colleagues in that work over the years – Jeff Wilhelm, Judith Irvin, Cheryl Liebling, Lori DiGisi and Evan Lefsky to name a few.*

*This past August I decided to take a position as Director of Curriculum, Assessment and Instruction in the small district on the coast of Maine where I live. Therefore, like most of you, I am again on the “ground floor” in the swirl of politics and policies that define the current educational space nationally and locally.*

*As I work with teams of teachers and administrators to determine what makes sense for children and the adults who work with them, I return again and again to the centrality of content literacy at the middle and high school level. We want our students to develop the skills to read, write, present, research and think about content in deep and meaningful ways. For many of our students, their ability to do this depends on our ability as educators to scaffold those skills with increasingly complex text and concepts, providing modeling, guided practice and feedback in the service of learning content.*

*When I used to do focus groups with middle and high school struggling readers, no one ever told me that they thought it was good to be a poor reader – that we should do whatever possible to leave them to their destiny of partial literacy and lack of access to opportunity. Many told of avoiding reading because they were not “good at it,” of being embarrassed and of not getting the help they thought they needed. I know that many of these students put up resistance and are not the easiest to help. Yet each time you break through by responding with patience and expertise, you are affecting not only that student, but his/her future possibilities, moving the needle from despair to hope. Is literacy enough? No. It is necessary but not sufficient. But it IS necessary – like clean water and air. Seriously.*

*Since August I have worked with middle and high school teachers on content reading and writing; have taught a graduate course for CTE teachers in incorporating literacy into their program area teaching and learning (e.g., agriculture, culinary arts, health sciences, building trades); and have launched a mentor text initiative in the district where teachers will be working together to choose sets of books that can serve as models for writing while also integrating and reinforcing science and social studies content. I am working as fast as I can to help us respond to the call for an overhaul of teacher evaluation systems, the need to implement the Common Core and the Next Gen Science Standards, the mandate for proficiency-based diplomas, etc. I am sure you are doing your version of the same!*

*In the chaos of flying mandates and changing tides, it is easy to forget what makes sense, what the goal is. Let’s not let ourselves – or one another – lose sight of the importance of what we do when we support our students to read, write and think at high levels across content areas.*

*I am looking forward to being the SRIG President and to meeting and corresponding with many of you over the next two years. I have greatly enjoyed the opportunities I have had to present to the SRIG at the Annual Convention (2007 and 2012) and to write for *The Exchange*. I feel very lucky to be part of this group of dedicated educators.*

Sincerely,

Julie





Canadian Network of IRA Councils (CNIRAC)  
&  
Canadian Special Interest Group (C-SIG)



You are cordially invited to  
*The Sixteenth Annual  
Canadian Reception*



at the 59th Annual Conference of the  
International Reading Association

**Sunday, May 11, 2014  
5:00 - 8:00 p.m.**

**La Galerie 5 - Second Floor  
The New Orleans Marriott Hotel  
555 Canal Street, New Orleans, LA 70130**

**Light Refreshments & Cash Bar**

**Sponsored by:**

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**Hosted by:**

**Canadian Network of IRA Reading Councils (CNIRAC)  
Canadian Special Interest Group on Literacy (CSIG-L)  
Secondary Reading Special Interest Group (SRIG)**

## Regular Meeting of the Secondary Reading Interest Group of the IRA

April 20, 2013  
3:00 p.m. – 5:45 p.m.  
San Antonio, Texas

**Call to Order:** Kelly Gallagher, President, convened the regular meeting of the Secondary Reading Interest Group of the IRA on April 20, 2013 at 3:00 p.m. in San Antonio, Texas.

### Old Business

*Reports:* The Treasurer's report and the Secretary's minutes of the May 2, 2012, meeting was accepted and approved. Reports were made available for those interested.

Introduction of 2013-2014 Officers:

- President – Kelly Gallaher
- President Elect – Julie Meltzer
- Secretary – Kathy Galvin
- Treasurer – Rita Noon

### Close of Business

### SRIG Session

#### **Research Roundup: What Are We Learning About Strategy, Research and Design to Successfully Teach Secondary Learners to Read and Write Complex Text? – Julie Meltzer**

J. Meltzer shared what researchers around the country are discovering as key to successfully supporting students to read and write in the ways described in the CCSS and how organizations, districts and curriculum developers are changing the way curriculum, instruction and assessment are designed and implemented to support these changes. The presentation ended with a discussion of Carol Dweck's research on mindset and how the mindsets of teachers and students may be a critical ingredient for success.

#### **Strategies for Teaching the Reading and Composing of Narrative Texts – Kelly Gallagher**

K. Gallagher explored the importance of teaching students to critically read narrative texts, as well as strategies for improving students' abilities to write in this discourse. Gallagher examined why it remains important students are given opportunities to sharpen what Judith Langer calls "literacy thinking". Using the *Writing Next* recommendations to read, analyze, and emulate models of good writing, the audience read an article from the *Los Angeles Times* and explored how the author framed his argument.

#### **Teaching the Reading and Composing of Information/Explanatory Texts**

J. Wilhelm explored the contexts and processes for teaching the five kinds of knowledge and the five kinds of composing necessary to successfully read or compose anything. This model was applied to the teaching of argument writing as a form of inquiry across the grades and disciplines.

Drawing for Prizes

Adjournment: President Kelly Gallagher adjourned the meeting at 5:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Kathy Galvin, Secretary



**Membership Matters** — With increasing attention to concerns about adolescent literacy achievement, brought about by student performance on high profile tests like the PISA and NAEP and recent broadly disseminated reports on the literacy learning needs of adolescents, we have been given an unprecedented opportunity. The Secondary Reading Interest Group can work within IRA to build a stronger presence for secondary literacy concerns, stronger representation of these concerns and interests on the conference programs, and more attention to older students' needs in general.

As your president, I would like to encourage you to build this effort. You may not be aware that IRA awards time on the national conference based on the size of special interest groups. The more members we have, the longer the time given over to our program, and the greater the size of the meeting room assigned. To be counted, SRIG members must also be current in their IRA membership.

I would like to ask you to please take a moment to check on your IRA membership and renew it if necessary. In addition, please feel welcome to pass this newsletter on to others in your professional circles who may be interested in joining our Secondary Reading Interest Group. A membership form for the SRIG is included on the back page of every newsletter. Help build a stronger presence for secondary literacy and adolescent learners within IRA!

Our \$10 yearly dues help to defray costs for newsletter preparation and mailing, for meeting expenses, and for occasional actions taken by the membership.

**The Mission of the Secondary Reading Interest Group is to:**

- encourage the study of the reading process at the secondary level;
- encourage research and evaluation relating to secondary reading programs;
- act as a clearinghouse on secondary reading;
- provide a network among secondary educators; and
- sponsor a meeting at the IRA Annual Convention

**The Philosophy of the Secondary Reading Interest Group is based on the belief that:**

- reading is a process;
- literacy has value beyond economic benefits; and
- we have the resources to make significant and lasting changes in reading today.

**IRA Secondary Reading Interest Group — Membership Form**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone: (     ) \_\_\_\_\_ Fax \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

School Affiliation: \_\_\_\_\_

School Reading Specialist (  middle  high )      College Professor      District Reading Specialist  
 Classroom Teacher (  middle  high )      School Administrator      Other \_\_\_\_\_

IRA Membership # \_\_\_\_\_ Expiration Date \_\_\_\_\_ Renewal  New Member

Paid: Check  (made out to SRIG) Cash  **Mail to : Rita Noon, 2083 Lac Du Mont, Haslett, MI 48840**

**Receipt**

Received from: \_\_\_\_\_ Amount: \$10.00

For membership in IRA Secondary Reading Interest Group (SRIG)

From: May 20\_\_\_\_ to May 20\_\_\_\_ Paid: Check  Cash

Rita Noon, Treasurer/Membership Chairperson

