



THE WORD ON

Washington State Literacy Association Newsletter

August 2016

Total Rebranding Is Underway!

Over the course of 2014-2015, the International Reading Association (IRA) formally changed its name and brand to the International Literacy Association (ILA). According to Christine Heesters, ILA's Director of Business Solutions, the change occurred because although as the IRA, the group's purpose was to "serve literacy professionals", specifically in the area of reading, the new ILA is "cause-based" and broadens the definition of literacy. ILA's Web Content Manager, Sara Long, further explained that the ILA researched both cause-based and membership-based organizations, and sought ways to merge the two platforms with a new vision and mission to encourage participation by new and varied stakeholders, including parents, educators, and researchers.

To that end, the Washington Organization for Reading Development, formerly known as "WORD", is also rebranding to better align as a state affiliate with the ILA. The new name for our state non-profit organization is the Washington State Literacy Association—WASLA. More details in our next newsletter on our new mission and vision! Stay tuned...



Mark your calendars:

9/17 WASLA Board Meeting

10/22 WASLA Kick-Off Party

11/5 WASLA Fall Conference
with Lester Laminack and
Dan Gemeinhart

Join WASLA
[here!](#)

In This Issue

- Total Rebranding
- Highlights and Reflections on the 2016 ILA Conference
- Historical Fiction Must Haves
- ILA Conference Quotes



C, I, T, cont...

Among many of the changes instituted by Peters, the hall-mark was his creation of the Gentlemen's and Ladies' Clubs in the school. Here, Peters noted, students learned the soft skills that businesses are looking for in their employees ... "They learned how to dress for success, answer the phone appropriately and professionally and how to speak to and treat others with respect." These skills, in turn, transferred into how the students approached their school work, their teachers, and each other.

Peters presentation was inspirational and challenging. He posited that "if you are focused on seat time, you are focused on the wrong end of the kid!" Read more about this inspiring educator [here](#).

Capture, Inspire, then Teach!

So exhorted Dr. Stephen Peters in his ILA conference presentation entitled "Creating Conditions to Succeed Against the Odds". Dr. Peters, a long time consultant and literacy conference speaker, gave up his lucrative career to take on the challenge of being the principal in a high poverty, low achieving high school in South Carolina.

Peters explained that over the decades, the "things" that have had the major influence on society and our children have completely reversed from what they were in the 1950s. For example, in the 50s the rank order of influences were the following: home, school, church, peers, then TV. Conversely in the present, the rank order is as follows: TV/Social Media, peers, church, school, home. For schools to have an impact/influence on their students, they need to capture the kids, inspire them, and then teach them.

Dr. Peters also declared that "demography is not destiny" and created a safe environment for both the students AND the teachers in his school. Peters noted that though his teachers were exhausted each day, they "caught the vision" for the school and have made it happen for the students.



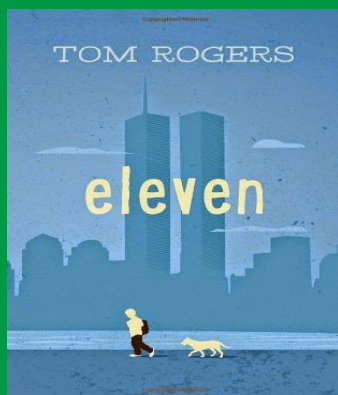
Historical Fiction you need!

It is hard to believe, but the fifteenth anniversary of 9/11 is next month. These titles are must haves for your classroom libraries!



***Saved by the Boats: The Heroic Sea Evacuation of September 11* by Julie Gassman**

A narrative nonfiction of how nearly 500,000 people were rescued from the Manhattan scene.



***Eleven* by Tom Rogers**

Alex Douglas turns eleven on September 11, 2001. This is the journey that day brings to him and his dog, Radar. It is a best-seller at the 9/11 Memorial Museum.

Cont. on pg. 5

Poetry! Can we incorporate this genre in all subjects?

The final day of the ILA Conference in Boston I found just the workshop: Teaching Content's Snap with Poetry and Apps! At first, the title didn't necessarily grab my attention but the questions in the description peaked my interest: *Do you need some inspiration? Are your lessons falling flat? Do your kids need motivating?* How could I pass this up? So for the next two hours I found engulfed in reading and performing poetry.

Poetry has always been my love and over the years I have found that it is becoming more difficult to integrate this genre into my lessons. My colleague and I last summer decided to take an idea we learned from a WORD conference in Spokane to give each of our students a "pocket" poem for their birthday. This sounded like a great idea to make connections with your students and I could be creative in how each poem could be displayed on his/her special card. Nevertheless, the pocket poems were a great hit and Oh My! did I hear about it from my students when I was a day late. They all loved the reading and the connections made the poem gave to the student. How empowering to make such a connection to students without embarrassing them too much. (I am a middle school teacher and recognition can sometimes be tricky!)

Now that I read poems to my students at least 3 times a month, I wanted to see if this workshop could provide other ways in making each student feel special on their day. However, this wasn't all that I took away from this workshop. I also found a plethora of ways in incorporate poems into my lessons.

The first thing that happened at 8 a.m. was the poet, Brod Bagert from New Orleans, stood up and performed a poem of his that taught us something about science. Newton's ideas were correct to a point until Einstein agreed only when the motion was slow. Immediately I thought how could I get some Science, Math, and History vocabulary in my classroom that could benefit students outside my walls? The idea of performing a poem rather than just reading a poem, will take some getting used to but I am willing to try.

You would think as a teacher, performing would come naturally. No! I found that my confidence is high when what I am doing is something that I have practiced and feel it is my own. However, Brod Bagert pointed out there are three types of audiences: light-bulb, ostrich, and karate kid. I sway toward the ostrich, put my head in the sand and hope no one will notice. The meaning of these words should be taken literally. Continued on last page...



Adora Svitak



Kwame Alexander

The Power of Words

Timing is everything. The two keynote speakers Adora Svitak and Kwame Alexander, who opened the ILA Conference, hit it out of the ballpark (grand salami style). They were a breath of fresh air that the room full of literacy educators and advocates were waiting to take in.

Adora Svitak, who grew up in Redmond, is most known for her TEDtalk “What adults can learn from kids.” She was an impressive spitfire who we could see was ready with her primary sources to backup her question “What is literacy for?”

“Books can set the stage for emotional literacy,” she stated. “With all the events that are happening in our country and our world, books and literature are what can help educate all and bring us together.” Ms. Svitak recommended *Time*’s article “[Reading Literature Makes us Smarter and Nicer](#)” and studies have shown being actively engaged in a text can help a person have more empathy. The more variety of books and text we can bring into our classrooms and to our students, the more our students’ minds will not only open but accept.

I doubt the two keynote speakers talked to one another about their speeches but they melded together perfectly. Kwame Alexander, author of *Crossed* and *Booked*, came out and exclaimed, “Here is what’s going to save us...BOOKS!”

Power or Words cont...

Mr. Alexander challenged teachers and librarians to take a look at our bookshelves and see if diversity is present. “Sometimes we don’t need to teach the curriculum, we need to teach the child!” he stated. He posed these three questions to teachers as we are heading back to our classrooms:

1. What are you doing?
2. Why are you here?
3. Why are you doing this?

And then he stated, “If you know the answers to these, we all might be saved. The minds of adults begin with the imagination of a child...we have the power to make or break a child.”

Diversity + Equality =

Freedom

Click here to hear more from [Kwame Alexander](#) on NPR.

“If you want to build a ship, don’t drum up people together to collect wood and don’t assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea.”

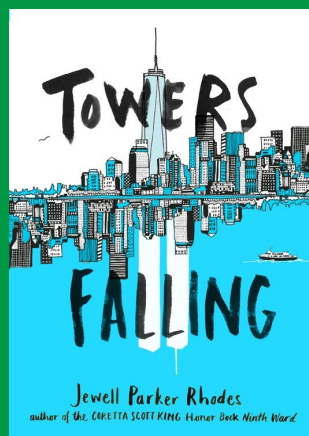
Antoine de Saint-Exupery

Historical Fiction cont...



***Nine, Ten: A September 11 Story* by Nora Raleigh Baskin**

Go on a journey to see how four middle schoolers, Sergio, Will, Naheed, and Aimee, living across the United States are brought together because of the events that happened on September 11, 2001.



***Towers Falling* by Jewell Parker Rhodes**

Why does Deja's father get angry every time the Twin Towers are mentioned? She doesn't understand why her 5th grade teacher is making such a big deal about these towers. With her friends, Ben and Sabeen, by her side, she discovers how a tragedy can bring a community together.

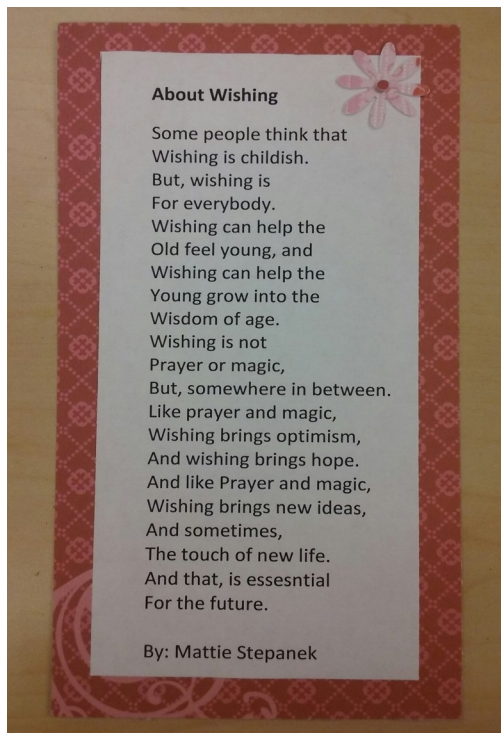
Fiction as Prescription

Teresa Toten, author of *The Unlikely Hero of Room 13B*, *Beware That Girl*, and other YA titles, led a moving and inspiring session at the ILA 2016 conference titled *Shelving Mental Illness: Exploring and Experiencing Mental Health in Young Adult Fiction*. As educators, we have all dealt with students who struggle with mental illness, including depression, OCD, bi-polar disorder, self-harm, and PTSD. Toten makes a compelling case for fiction as a 'prescription' to help teens deal with such difficult issues, as well as helping them feel less alone in their struggles. She is working on creating a program similar to one in the United Kingdom called Shelf Help. It is, in essence, a list of YA titles in which the characters struggle with a variety of mental illnesses. Sorted by author and type of mental illness, such a list is an invaluable resource for teachers, administrators, paraeducators, medical professionals, parents, siblings, and friends who are helping young people navigate the complex and intimidating world of living with a mental illness.

After reading *The Unlikely Hero of Room 13B*, one young person with OCD wrote to Toten telling her they had given it to their close friends and family to read, and it helped them understand the struggles they went through on a daily basis. This reader also said, "it made me feel less alone in the world," a powerful, positive connection for young people who are statistically more likely to commit suicide than their peers without mental illnesses.

I read *The Unlikely Hero of Room 13B* in one two-hour sitting, not able to put it down. It is deeply moving, surprisingly funny, and very authentic to the lives of our students. It begins with Adam Spenser Ross, the protagonist who struggles with OCD, choosing a nom de guerre for his therapy group—Batman. The entire group, made up of Wonder Woman, Thor, Spiderman, and of course, Batman, navigate the world of living with a mental illness together with the aid of their therapist. It is a beautifully written, touching book that I highly recommend. Below are a few more titles you might consider 'prescribing' to any of your students who are dealing with mental illness in their own lives, or in that of a loved one.

- ***The Perks of Being a Wallflower*** by Stephen Chbosky—sexual abuse, depression
- ***Tyranny*** by Lesley Fairfield—anorexia/bulimia; graphic novel
- ***Will Grayson, Will Grayson*** by John Green and David Levithan—depression
- ***Wintergirls*** by Laurie R. King—anorexia
- ***Impulse*** by Ellen Hopkins—suicide, self-harm
- ***Hold Still*** by Nina LaCour—depression, suicide
- ***The Reluctant Journal of Henry K. Larson*** by Susin Nielsen—bullying, suicide
- ***Cut*** by Patricia McCormick—cutting, self-harm
- ***Scars*** by Cheryl Rainfield—sexual abuse, self-harm
- ***Schizo*** by Nic Sheff—schizophrenia



An example of a birthday poem given to students.

Poetry! cont...

As the two hours continued, I found myself understanding that closing myself off from the other subject areas only limits my choices in what needs to be taught. I am not a science or math teacher, but as an English and Literacy teacher I can empower my students to be curious about word meanings and innovative in their research on subjects of interest. Students today want the instant gratification of success. But are we allowing them to have the struggle and time to work out difficulties in order to be successful?

I am energized and anxious to begin this coming school year with my poem performance. I know I will over practice and change my mind often, but in the end it only means I will success.

Looking for a poetry resource check out [The Poetry Foundation](#).

ILA Conference Quote Corner

"Books are the mirrors so we can see ourselves. Books are the windows so we can look out." -Kwame Alexander

"You cannot change the students but you can change the way you teach." -Pernille Ripp

"People don't ask why kids are dribbling basketballs in the gym, but they don't hesitate to ask why students are just reading and writing." -Donalyn Miller

"You don't have to tell a true story to tell the truth." - Janiel Wagstaff

"If the world is changing and the school's are not, why are we surprised scores aren't improving?" -Steven Layne

"Books provide a rehearsal for the real world." -Kelly Gallagher



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