When I read a magazine, whether it's a general interest publication or an academic journal, I expect to be informed, entertained, or even provoked, but only on rare occasions will I be moved to act. However, when I open a copy of English Journal, I know there is a strong possibility that what I read will cause me to do something—to pick up a pen, to go to my computer, to talk to a colleague, and, especially, to change my practice. I also know that those changes won't be restricted to what or how I teach. They will be changes in the way I think—the kinds of deep, lasting changes that happen when new actions grow out of new understanding.

To find out more about how English Journal articles have led to meaningful changes, I asked several teachers to write about “an English Journal article that made a difference.” The brief stories they tell capture the way in which, year after year, decade after decade, the right article in the hands of the right person at the right time has shaped the profession.

"Journals Across the Disciplines" by Toby Fulwiler (December 1980)

Michael Moore
Georgia Southern University
Statesboro, Georgia
Two things happened in my fifth year of teaching middle grades. The first was Toby Fulwiler's 1980 English Journal article, "Journals Across the Disciplines," and the second was my accidentally coming across The New Diary by Tristine Rainer (Tarcher, 2001) in the women's self-help area of a local bookstore.

Fulwiler's article got me thinking about using journals in my classes. This was an utterly new concept for me. No one I knew had ever considered having students write in a daily journal. But I knew Toby was right and that I had to get kids writing and thinking and had to figure out a way to make their writing meaningful and a way to personally respond. Fulwiler's article also got me curious about James Britton and his comments on expressive writing. It was what I was trying to do in my own personal journal and the article ended up being my springboard into Louise Rosenblatt, Maxine Greene, and many more.

At the same time I found Rainer's The New Diary and discovered writing in a journal did not have to be in sentences. A journal entry could be as simple as a list, as personal as a letter, as full of imagery as a poem and as fun as a dialogue. It was like cheese and grits. Since then journals have been a part of every class I have taught from middle grades to high school to university. I continue to experiment with the form and have never forgotten Fulwiler's words about the "importance of coupling personal with academic learning" (19).

"How Classics Create an Aliterate Society" by Donald R. Gallo (January 2001)

Sandra Young
Columbia College
Columbia, South Carolina
I always assign "How Classics Create an Aliterate Society" by
Donald R. Gallo when I teach Youth Literature to my college students. Without fail, classroom discussion escalates into a heated but healthy debate. According to Gallo, students’ negative experiences with the classics (which he claims were written for adult readers, not middle schoolers and teens) produces a lifelong distaste for books instead of the desired end: a love of reading. For support Gallo cites surveys of middle school and high school students who categorize the classics as “teacher books” and unenthusiastic testimonials from college and graduate students. One college student claims that a classic is a text that “requires a teacher to figure out a glimmer of what it says” (33). Gallo dismisses the lengthy and often dense openings of such novels as Silas Marner and The Scarlet Letter as fare meant to please the older reader and recommends providing students with what they truly want: texts that entertain, and texts that help students feel “normal, comfortable, [and] understood” (36).

Many of my future high school English teachers are afraid that if they do not teach the classics their students will not do well in college, will not perform well on standardized tests, and, worst of all, be considered “uneducated.” Gallo’s essay refutes these assumptions. I’m grateful for this since he empowers me to facilitate discussions about what we need and want literature to accomplish. Students can now envision alternatives to their own ways of thinking, commit to selecting relevant texts that engage and inspire, and still effectively teach the standards. Thank you, Don Gallo!

limited by the available number of copies of particular titles. One of the options was Fallen Angels by Walter Dean Myers (Scholastic, 1988) and, since our preservice classes had warned of the potential pitfalls of language and content, I sent the requisite letter home to parents.

At about the same time I received my February 1997 copy of English Journal. Donelson’s article raised many pertinent issues about book selection and censorship: challenges, policy, lack of support, not to mention how opinions about certain books change over time. Greenbaum’s stance that “censorship in literature is futile because, in literature, appropriateness is a myth” also resonated with me. I now teach at the high school level and I have students read several of the titles that appear on lists of most-challenged works of literature. Students are universally perplexed when they discover the book they are reading has been challenged and in some cases banned. Trying to discern why is almost always part of the class discussion.

As for Fallen Angels and my eighth graders, not one parent objected and all was fine. In hindsight, given the current anti-immigration climate, I might have been more worried about the book selected by another group of students, Patricia Beatty’s Lupita Mañana (Perfection Learning, 2000), the story of an undocumented worker. As Donelson and Greenbaum suggest, censorship is a moving target, and our job as teachers is to base our actions not on fears of what might happen but rather on the best interests of our students.

“‘Filth’ and ‘Pure Filth’ in Our Schools—
Censorship of Classroom Books in the Last Ten Years” by Ken Donelson (February 1997) and
“Censorship and the Myth of Appropriateness:
Reflections on Teaching Reading in High School”
by Vicky Greenbaum (February 1997)

Dorene Kahl
Eldorado High School
Albuquerque, New Mexico

While student teaching eighth graders, I attempted literature circles and, as is typical in schools, was

“Talk for the Mind”
by Joseph I. Tsujimoto
(January 1993)

Mark Vogel
Appalachian State University
Boone, North Carolina

How hard it is to persuade preservice teachers of the power of structured conversation to reveal the insights gleaned from writing and reading. How hard it is to convey how talk must be nurtured from day one on a foundation of trust and respect. How hard it is to show how community building can move beyond teacher control and listing of idealized goals to become the living breath of classroom
learning. Joseph I. Tsujimoto’s “Talk for the Mind” shows what can happen when students and their lives are at the center of the classroom and when systematically fostered talk is married to writing and response to reading. I use this article to show preserve teachers that cultivating talk can be “as important to learning as reading, writing, listening” (34).

Tsujimoto argues that secondary classrooms “have the time and space to cultivate the necessary attitude-feeling-principles” to make collaborative learning work, and illustrates the excitement when “the group’s power of mind exceeds that of the individual’s” (36). He insists that experiences of working together “are not simply intellectual acquaintances” to organize a mundane curriculum, and shows that when essential philosophical underpinnings for discourse are taught alongside tact, generosity, and risk taking, students learn “to speak to each other rather than to or through the teacher” (36). He illustrates how the daily act of sharing knowledge involves students learning from each other, and how nurturing this reorganization of values means “the development of the caring, critical, and creative mind” (35).

“Reading, Thinking, and Writing: Using the Reading Journal” by Ed Youngblood (September 1985)
Bill Broz
University of Texas–Pan American
Edinburg, Texas

I taught high school English from 1972 to 1997. By 1985 the Iowa Writing Project had revolutionized my composition classroom—composing is a process! But my literature classes were stuck following the textbook. I taught about literature as artifact: literary periods, genres, authors, and representative works. My students were mostly not engaged readers, not developing their reading and interpretive processes, until I read “Reading, Thinking, and Writing: Using the Reading Journal” by Ed Youngblood, a high school teacher. That article has guided invitations to read and respond to text in my classrooms ever since. Youngblood says, “I want students to make connections between what they read and their own lives . . . and . . . connections between different works they have read” (46). He tells how reading response journals helped his students develop as readers and thinkers. Youngblood’s shop talk is clear and adaptable. I still use sentence starters, as he suggested; for example: “I think . . . . I like . . . . I wonder . . . .” Youngblood cites no other works, though within a few years reading journals would be solidly grounded in theory and research by Robert Probst (rediscovering Louise Rosenblatt); Sheridan Blau; Richard Beach and James Marshall; and others. I thought, “I want these experiences for my students,” and, “I want to write EJ articles like this.”

“Just the FAQs: An Alternative to Teaching the Research Paper” by James Strickland (September 2004)
Mary Buckelew
West Chester State University
West Chester, Pennsylvania

Each summer, I review my curriculum and, much like a road map with historic and geographic highlights, the year spreads out before me. One summer, as I gazed upon the terrain, there it was: the deep, dark abyss my students and I would spend weeks upon weeks journeying toward. Although much of the journey is worthwhile, it is the final destination—“The Research Paper”—that I dread as much as my students. At the culmination, I would lug papers home that began with grand sweeping statements, segueing into poorly paraphrased paragraphs, with little critical thinking.

When I came across Jim Strickland’s article, I was hopeful. Jim wrote, “Instead of requiring students to write a paper in fifteen weeks that proves a thesis, we might better focus on teaching inquiry that is organic, developing and changing as the researcher wonders and learns” (23). Rather than come up with a thesis statement, students select a topic, identify an audience, and brainstorm questions that interest their audience and themselves. As students research the answers to their questions,
they have the freedom to explore the side roads, to change direction, to find historic and theoretical sites that may inform their answers. Throughout, their awareness of their companion travelers (readers) is heightened.

Now when I face the year the abyss has morphed into light and possibilities; i.e., we embrace the questions, answers, and the unknown. Thanks, Jim.

"On the Uses of Rubrics: Reframing the Great Rubric Debate" by Eric D. Turley and Chris W. Gallagher (March 2008)

Karin Jozefowski
Superstition High School
Mesa, Arizona

The pressure was on when a new issue of English Journal landed in my growing pile of reading. Reflecting on my own learning process and trying to narrow the focus for my master’s degree capstone paper, I found that Turley and Gallagher’s article caught my eye. Over the years I had read articles hailing rubrics as a magic solution and others railing against them, but Turley and Gallagher addressed the skepticism and strengths with keen clarity by framing their discussion around four guiding questions.

Rubrics were still a new concept to me and seemed a brilliant way for students to access the magic recipe of good writing, but as Turley and Gallagher aptly noted, rubrics should be more than a prescriptive tool. They should be a negotiated language for discussing quality in writing if they are to incite and inform dynamic dialogue in the classroom. Turley and Gallagher acknowledge and honor the slippery subjectivity of assessment by viewing rubrics as a flexible tool when created by students and teachers collaboratively. Since my reading of that article, every writing assignment in my class reflects, directly or indirectly, on the four guiding questions they posed because they offered more than a framework for assessing writing. They offered a framework for teaching writing as an active learning process.

"The Ripple Effect of Self-Censorship: Silencing in the Classroom" by Elizabeth Noll (December 1994)

Judi Franzak
New Mexico State University
Las Cruces, New Mexico

Every semester I encounter the same concern from my students. Whether they are in Methods of English, Young Adult Literature, or Reading in the Content Areas, several students are sure to ask, “How do I know that what I am teaching is ‘safe’?” The answer, of course, is that we never know and that no idea or text worth teaching is safe. I refer my students to an article from English Journal that continues to influence me today: “The Ripple Effects of Self-Censorship” by Elizabeth Noll. While I had taken risks as a teacher and advocate for my students’ right to read, until Noll named the concept of self-censorship for me, I had not thought through the ways in which I was complicit in limiting students’ experiences with texts (or pedagogy, as she mentions). Understanding that self-censorship is a form of self-protection that effectively serves the interests of those who would dictate curriculum makes my work harder, and for this I am grateful. I question myself when I shy away from texts or issues that I do not feel prepared to teach. I question my students when they voice their fears. I return us to the questions Noll poses: “What are our individual and collective responsibilities in advocating our students’ intellectual freedom?” “What are our beliefs about the roles and responsibilities of schools as institutions of a democratic society?” And, most pressing for me, “in what ways do we support and silence our colleagues’ freedom of expression?” (64). These questions are touchstones that can guide us throughout our careers.

"Literature IS" by G. Robert Carlsen (February 1974)

Susan Steffel
Central Michigan University
Mount Pleasant, Michigan

I became a brand-new teacher only months before Bob
Carlsen’s article appeared in *English Journal*. I happened upon that particular issue in a colleague’s classroom. I read it cover to cover, joined NCTE, and the rest is history.

At that time, I was discovering that the direct instruction methods I had been taught to use weren’t working. I wanted my students to love literature and was also convinced that they needed to critically analyze each piece to fully appreciate it. They weren’t buying it. Teaching literature was completely dependent on how I viewed our reasons for reading. Then, at the peak of my frustration, Carlsen’s article reminded me of the importance of literature in all of our lives and argued that there was no need to defend literature because it stood strong on its own. He contended that we read literature “because it’s there” (23) and that people will continue to read (and write) stories because “we are story making animals” (24). The article reminded me that it was the thrill of “finding myself in a story” that drew me into literature over and over again. I needed to help my students find their own connections in their reading; it was essential that they enjoyed reading and continued to read once they left my classroom. It was an aha moment for me.

Now, as I complete my 20th year as a professor of English education and my 38th year in the classroom, this single article continues to ground my approach to teaching literature and reading and continues to be required reading for my preservice teachers, reminding them of the *real* purpose of literature. Carlsen still resonates 37 years later.

**Dan Kirby’s “Professional Materials” Column**

My own contribution to the list is not one article but a series of columns edited by Dan Kirby in the late 1970s. At that time I was a new teacher in a small town in Wyoming and, in each issue of *English Journal*, Kirby’s column brought to my remote outpost news of the latest books in the field. The reviews, some written by Kirby and others by his friends and colleagues, were smart, chatty, sometimes a little irreverent, and on the cutting edge. Through Kirby’s “Professional Materials” column, I discovered James Britton and Nancy Martin, George Hillocks Jr., Mina Shaughnessy, and even Kurt Vonnegut’s *Wampeters, Foma, and Granfalloons*. The world of English teaching was much larger and more interesting than I’d previously known.

A final note: All the articles mentioned here are available to subscribers in the *English Journal* archive at the NCTE website and through the JSTOR database available on many university library websites. I encourage readers to seek them out. While it’s true that the teaching of English language arts changes and that keeping up with the most recent thinking in the profession is important, it may also be true that an article that made a difference once before—even one written 30 years ago—could make a difference again.

**Works Cited**


*Don Zancanella* is a professor in the Department of Language, Literacy, and Sociocultural Studies at the University of New Mexico. He is the former chair of the Conference on English Education. He may be reached at zanc@unm.edu.