From the Editor

Issues and Innovations

Teaching secondary and middle school English has never been easy. Anyone who’s done the job for even a day is aware of the myriad complexities, bedeviling details, unanticipated circumstances, and just plain exhaustion that would drive most people into far less interesting and challenging professions. At this point in this editorial, I had planned to survey some of the specific political challenges educators are facing in this moment of our professional history; but, frankly, daily newspapers, political candidates, and for-profit corporateers are already getting enough of our attention. Instead I’ll keep the focus on us. I’ve been wondering lately how good English teachers remain enthusiastic about their work in the present climate. What sustains effective teaching?

One answer I’ve found to this question involves innovation. Many of my colleagues in secondary and middle schools remain admirably engaged and even optimistic about their work, and a major quality that these colleagues share is that they have developed a disposition toward innovation. Naturally curious, excited about new ideas, and eager to implement them, teachers with a disposition toward innovation are never bored, are energized by challenges (which they see as opportunities), and they are too busy enjoying their work to be distracted by negative, outside influences.

In two recent issues of English Journal (September 2011 and January 2012), we focused on the now-100-year history of NCTE and this journal. As I read and thought about all that has been done in the last century, I’ve become increasingly convinced that a major role of English Journal is to harness, share, and promote innovation in the teaching and learning of English language arts. By innovation I most certainly do not mean racing toward the next big thing. Rather, good teachers keep the most important goal in mind, helping students learn what matters, and developing and redeveloping ways of making that learning happen. Often innovation means bringing new tools, texts, or ideas to the classroom; sometimes innovation means making use of older tools, texts, or ideas in the new contexts of today’s classrooms. Over 100 years old and tens of thousands of teachers strong, the profession of English teaching contains a wealth of energy, ideas, and materials for inspiring and sustaining a disposition toward innovation.

Innovation in This Issue

As we have for the past few years, we have reserved the May issue for articles that were not submitted for a particular issue theme and that were rated highly by peer reviewers. These articles—along with the other features, poems, and columns published in this issue—represent innovation in a variety of areas of English language arts.

Mary Amanda Stewart and Leslie David Burns and Stergios C. Botzakis describe approaches to ethnic literatures that will engage students in personal reflection and that align to new standards that most English teachers in the United States are encountering. Two other articles examine the challenges posed by a relatively new genre, graphic novels: Paula Wolfe and Danielle Kleijwegt discuss the need to transform students into “active perceivers” of graphic novels (using Shakespearean graphic novels as examples), and Mary Rice explains why she has continued her efforts to teach this innova-
tive genre despite the many complex problems it raises. While she focuses on a more traditional genre, Jacqueline Edmondson—a published biographer—suggests new ways of bringing biography to secondary students; her exploration of biography is especially well timed as many teachers are currently faced with finding informational texts for their students.

Amanda N. Gulla gives an in-depth description of a reading workshop that shows how important it is to develop all students’ personal engagement with the texts they read. Joanne S. Gillespie’s students work together to identify authors, debate their merits, and ultimately select one as their school’s author laureate. William P. Bintz harnesses his students’ creativity and funny bones by having them write poem parodies that, along the way, teach students close reading skills and deep understanding of poetic texts.

Leah A. Zuidema, whom readers will recognize as coeditor, with Jonathan Bush, of the “Professional Writing in the English Classroom” column, turns her attention to systematic grammar study, sharing ways to engage students in language analysis using several innovative methods. Writing on an especially original topic, Anne Elrod Whitney examines teachers who write about their teaching, and she offers great advice for those of you who wish to write for EJ and other education publications.

With the publication of the May issue of English Journal we note that we’re coming to the end of yet another long school year, filled with challenges, successes, and many, many stories. As our minds turn to summer, and the creative renewal that a shift in focus brings, I hope you’ll feel inspired to allow your disposition toward innovation to flourish, and that this issue of EJ will help.

Ken Lindblom has taught English and writing at Columbia High School (East Greenbush, New York), Syracuse University, and Illinois State University, and he is now associate professor of English and director of English teacher education at Stony Brook University (SUNY). He has been editor of English Journal since 2008.

New Editors to Begin with EJ’s September 2013 Issue

NCTE is pleased to announce that the next editors of English Journal will be Julie A. Gorlewski and David A. Gorlewski and that their five-year term will begin with the September 2013 issue. Julie is currently assistant professor of secondary education at the State University of New York College at New Paltz. Julie served as teacher of English and then chair of the English Department for twelve years at Maryvale High School in western New York. She earned a PhD in Social Foundations of Education in 2008 from the University at Buffalo. David is currently assistant professor in the School of Education at D’Youville College in Buffalo, New York, where he teaches courses in curriculum planning, English methods, and educational leadership. He is also a former high school English teacher and assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction. He earned an EdD in 2000 from the University at Buffalo.

Until January 1, 2013, all manuscripts (except those specifically intended for the September 2013 issue or later) should be sent to EJ’s present editor, Ken Lindblom, at English_Journal@notes.cc.sunysb.edu.