High School Matters

What Happens in Vegas . . .
Ends Up in Your Classroom

On behalf of the Secondary Section Steering Committee (SSSC), I’m pleased to announce our decision to change the name of this standing column, formerly “From the Secondary Section,” to “High School Matters.” Why? Certainly not to confuse you, but rather, as our mission statement suggests, to focus more explicitly on the purpose of our existence: “The Secondary Section enhances the professional lives of secondary English language arts educators and the quality of education of their students by providing multiple forums for significant dialogue on historical, current, and emerging topics of interest to secondary English language arts educators” (http://www.ncte.org/secondary; italics in original). High school does, indeed, matter!

We hope that through this column, our Secondary Section webpage (http://www.ncte.org/secondary), and our High School Matters blog (http://nctesecondary.blogspot.com/), you will find that we reflect and support your classroom needs. In turn, we members of the SSSC (http://www.ncte.org/secondary/committee) want to continue hearing from you through emails, through discussions on the NCTE Connected Community, and through face-to-face conversation at our Annual Conventions.

The 2012 NCTE Annual Convention

Speaking of conventions, mark your calendars for November 15–18! I trust you are counting down the days so you’ll be set for all that NCTE has to offer at its Annual Convention, this year in Las Vegas, Nevada! There’s no bluffing—you can bet that there will be no limit to the advantages you can take away from the more than 150 sessions and special programs geared toward English language arts high school teachers. Encourage your administrators to ante up so you can steal away a few days from your classroom as you won’t want to pass on this opportunity to join the ranks of thousands of ELA teachers across the country who will rake in the benefits.

With the many convention options, the payoff will be big for you and your students! Just look what’s in the cards and whom we’re bringing in.

For openers, before you fold after a long day of traveling on Thursday, head straight to the MGM Grand Hotel for the Secondary Section Get-Together. You’ll be an active player as you participate in an engaging activity focused on the conference theme “Dream! Connect! Ignite!” There’s the probability that you might even meet a soon-to-be lifelong professional colleague as you rack up your creativity and pick up a hot lesson idea or two. But here’s the kicker: following the icebreaker, those two high rollers of adolescent literacy, former NCTE president Kylene Beers and Robert Probst, will present “Literature as a 21st Century Skill” and reveal some ideas from their hot-off-the-press book, Notice and Note: Breakthrough Strategies for Improving Comprehension (Heinemann, Fall 2012). Kylene and Bob are two of a kind with their continued promotion of strategies to support struggling adolescent readers. No doubt you’re already familiar with some of their past publications, including Beers’s When Kids Can’t Read, What Teachers Can Do, Probst’s Response and Analysis: Teaching Literature in Secondary School, and their shared anthology (with Linda Rief) Adolescent Literacy: Turning Promise into Practice.

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You’ll want to catch this pair to get an edge on their latest research!

**Take a Chance on High School Matters**

Our next event falls on Friday afternoon with our double session of High School Matters (HSM). If you’ve never attended this event before, all you need to do to raise your expectations is ask a previous attendee about the session, as many participants claim year after year that HSM is the highlight of their entire convention experience. Scattered throughout the afternoon will be a tray of mini-keynotes. We’ll want to give our first VIP and former NCTE president, Carol Jago, a special hand as she returns to share her latest book recommendations. Carol’s theme this year is “The Warmth of Other Suns . . . Between the Covers of a Book,” and I’ll wager you’ll want to stake out the nearest bookstore to check these books out on your own.

Second, tech-shark Sara Kajder will present “Igniting Imaginations: Teaching English Now,” pushing out an Ignite presentation and then pointing out how we can create our own Ignite presentations to enhance our classroom instruction. Finally, we’ll hit the jackpot as Sarah Brown Wessling, 2010 National Teacher of the Year and author of NCTE’s *Supporting Students in a Time of Core Standards: English Language Arts Grades 9–12*, shares “Making Mistakes: My Favorite Successes That Came from Failures While Implementing the CCSS.”

Besides these three keynotes, you’ll also have the opportunity to select from 25 different roundtables focusing on traditional and progressive strategies and lessons geared for the high school classroom. Some of the options on deck will be implementing 21st-century literacies, including using blogs, tablets, smartphones, and social networking; teaching a variety of types of literature, including manga, dystopian novels, young adult literature, and the classics; working with a variety of types of student writing, including creative writing, school publications, and violent writing; incorporating a variety of ELA and cross-curricular methods, including book clubs, project-based learning, student-generated art and music, persuasive speaking, and the Socratic method; and exploring professional areas and interests, such as working with student teachers, carrying out roles as department chairs, and writing for *English Journal*. And don’t count out a possible wild-card topic we might throw in on site.

With all these choices you’ll certainly find many to suit your interests; however, to get a leg up on as many as possible, bring your colleagues with you so you can split up and then later pool all that you’ve gleaned. The easy way to guarantee yourself a spot at the topic that draws your greatest attention is to arrive early. Of course, halfway through the HSM session, you’ll have an opportunity to shuffle for the second slot that draws your attention. Where you sit at this carousel of roundtables is your call. Regardless, you’ll easily plug into this fast-paced session, and you won’t be tempted to cut out early.

**The Secondary Luncheon: A Win for All**

Finally, for our Secondary Luncheon on Saturday, I can assure you that our speaker, Sherman Alexie, will rock the full house! Ace author, poet, and film-
Despite our 2012 location, I'm confident you'll find your NCTE Annual Convention experience to be no gamble; instead, with the special Secondary Section events as well as numerous other available sessions, you'll cash in on myriad new ideas and strategies to take back to your classroom. Plus, if this year's Annual Convention is your first, the odds are that you will naturally want to make the NCTE Convention an annual event! So show up, mark your places, and return a winner!

I look forward to seeing you in Las Vegas!

A classroom teacher for 34 years, Kay Parks Haas is currently adjunct assistant professor at Johnson County Community College. She is a former president of ALAN and is chair of the Secondary Section and member of the NCTE executive committee. She has written several articles and columns in *English Journal* and *The ALAN Review* and has coauthored *Teaching English Creatively* and *Using Young Adult Literature in the English Classroom* with John H. Bushman.

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**Harvey Daniels—2012 CEL Exemplary Leader Award Recipient**

Harvey “Smokey” Daniels is an extraordinary teacher leader whose writing, presentations, and professional development work define a model for teaching and leadership development based on research, best practice, common sense, trust, and respect. An author, editor, and consultant, he is a professor of Education at National Louis University in Chicago, Illinois (currently on leave). Smokey served as Co-director of the Illinois Writing Project for 26 years. A prolific writer, he has authored or coauthored 17 books, beginning with *Best Practice: Bringing Standards to Life in America’s Classrooms*, now in its fourth edition. In addition to books, he has contributed numerous articles and essays in professional journals. A common thread runs through his writings: literacy is accessible to all, and it should offer joy to all.

In 1989, Smokey founded a summer residential retreat, the Walloon Institute. During Walloon’s two decades, thousands of teachers from across the country were renewed and inspired, helping them to create classrooms that are experiential and active through increased levels of choice and responsibility, which in turn leads to higher student achievement. Smokey’s commitment to exceptional teaching led him to spearhead the creation of Best Practice High School in Chicago in 1966. In addition, his belief in the leadership capacity of committed teachers launched the Center for City Schools, a dozen interrelated projects that supported teachers and parents in restructuring schools around Chicago and the Midwest. In his numerous workshops and presentations, Smokey connects theory and practice in a way that embodies the kind of learning we envision for our students and ourselves. Smokey Daniels has initiated work that is visionary, and his impact on the profession is of lasting significance.