From the Editor

Energizing English

For the last few years, teachers have really been taking it on the chin. Since the downturn in the economy, earning a professional wage for professional, public work has become a reason to be demonized. And, teaching literacy—a set of skills, abilities, and “habits of mind” not easily or cheaply measured—has helped land our profession in the sights of remarkably reductive forces. I spoke with a woman recently who just retired from teaching after 20 years. Smart, enthusiastic, and still in love with working with kids, this barely-over-40 teacher says it’s time to move on—and that quite a few teachers in her district feel the same way. How many more of our colleagues, if they had the opportunity, would make the same choice right now?

The present climate of reform has had some demoralizing effects on teachers, to be sure, but most of us will weather them and keep our eyes on what matters most: the students we serve. And I can say as a teacher educator that the new professionals entering our ranks and the applicants to teacher education programs are as enthusiastic and positive as ever. Their energy and ambition inspire me and confirm my hopes for a sunny future for US students. But as a new year is just under way and as, for the present time at least, the hits are still coming, it’s time for all of us to get a shot in the arm.

For more than 100 years, English Journal has helped teachers stay focused on what really matters and to get new ideas that can refresh their classrooms and their critical thinking about educating young people. We hope this issue, themed “Energizing English,” will give you something positive to think about, to talk about with colleagues, and to remind you why you were interested in teaching English in the first place.

In This Issue

Are you looking for a new way to bring energy to your teaching of drama? Check out Margaret A. Dunaney’s article on using prop boxes. Want to explore a new genre with your students? Read the articles on graphic novels in this issue by Kathryn Strong Hansen and Ashley Kaye Dellacqua and the article about zines by Rebekah Buchanan. Would you like to get your students to learn to use the power of narrative to get more involved in their communities? Ralph L. Wahlstrom can show you how to use war diaries as a model, and Christine Rogers Stanton and Karl Sutton can show you what happened when they assigned Photovoice stories and interviews with local elders. Would you like to rediscover a familiar genre or teaching practice with a new approach? April Brannon’s article uses imitation to get students excited about poetry, and Paul Morris’s article raises the stakes on prewriting.

Would you like to have a new conversation with colleagues down the hall (or, more likely, on the other side of the building)? Read “Math in the Margins” by Bonnie S. Sunstein and her colleagues, in which they describe a fascinating series of assignments that engaged students from rural Iowa and urban Massachusetts in discussions about writing in math class. This clash of several cultures ends quite happily.
From the Editor

As Nancy Mack advised in her excellent “EJ in Focus” in 2008, it’s important that teachers “[m]ake the time to give in to delight” (19). “[T]oo frequently,” she says, “the fast-paced world of the classroom distracts us from taking the time to enjoy the moment” (19). These days, it’s more likely that the world outside the classroom robs teachers of their best moments. The world outside the classroom is presently turbulent and probably more than a little frustrating and enervating for all educators. But, we can make our classrooms dynamic spaces that energize us and remind us continuously why it is so fulfilling to work with young people. We hope the ideas shared in this issue of English Journal will help bring many new opportunities for you and your students to find delight in your classroom.

Note

Work Cited

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.

Kate and Paul Farmer Awards

The Kate and Paul Farmer Awards are given to authors of the best articles published in English Journal during the previous volume year. Eligible entrants must be high school teachers and may include those on leave or not currently teaching. Winners of the 2012 awards are Shannon Falkner, for “‘Signs of Life’ in the High School Classroom: Analyzing Popular Culture to Provide Student Choice in Analytical Writing,” November 2011, Vol. 101.2; and Fahima Ife, for “Powerful Writing: Promoting a Political Writing Community of Students,” March 2012, Vol. 101.4.


Awards will be presented at the NCTE Annual Convention in November during the Secondary Section Luncheon.