

FROM THE EDITORS

TOBY EMERT

Agnes Scott College, Decatur, Georgia

R. JOSEPH RODRÍGUEZ

California State University, Fresno



Artifacts, or objects, are present in everyone's life. Memories of objects are powerful pulls on identity. Objects are handed down, over generations, some brought from foreign trips as mementos. These objects are special, and they tell stories.

—KATE PAHL AND JENNIFER ROWSELL, *ARTIFACTUAL LITERACIES: EVERY OBJECT TELLS A STORY*

Throughout history, people have imbued objects with meaning and significance. Family heirlooms, souvenirs from traveling, documents that memorialize the people we love, tokens of appreciation or kindness, even objects that signify challenge, struggle, and pain become keepsakes that remind us of who we are and who we have been. The artifacts of our lives excite us, soothe us, cajole us, and inspire us; they invite us to reminisce and share stories, connect with the past, and reflect on the future. An object's materiality is powerful and evocative. It is easy to recall how a childhood toy felt when you picked it up or the slant of the script from a special handwritten note, for example, because the artifacts we keep and hold in memory shape us and sustain us.

Classrooms are filled with objects that symbolize the stories of our work: the posters on our walls, the



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photographs on our desks, the files of papers and lesson plans and assignment guidelines, the books from our college classes that still occupy a space on the shelf, a particular pen, or a small gift from a former student—these are reminders of who we are as teachers, of why we persist, and of the legacy we hope to leave. This issue of *English Journal* explores teaching and learning artifacts and the memories they arouse. In the call for manuscripts, we asked writers to consider this question: “How does artifactual inquiry help us learn, understand, and teach?” We were interested to know about the ways in which English teachers perceive their identities to be marked by personal and professional artifacts and about the ways in which teachers are asking students to consider the significance of the artifacts of their lives. Authors shared both kinds of stories.

In the High School Matters feature, Amanda K. Palmer offers a heartfelt account of the gift of a drawing by one of her students after his class read *The Great Gatsby*; she also recalls her fear of losing that drawing and other mementos when Hurricane Harvey pummeled southeast Texas in 2017. Dawan Coombs and Rachel Knecht Freeze describe a lesson on teaching the young adult novel *The Serpent King*, in which students curated a museum-style exhibit of personal objects that connected them to the characters in the novel. Timothy J. Duggan recalls a school project from his middle school days that he still displays in his office and asks readers to consider the pitfalls of what he calls the “disposable curriculum.” Sheridan Steelman explains how she inspires her students to engage with Shakespeare by offering them opportunities to examine historical documents that help students understand the setting, characters, situations, and dialogue in his plays. Tiffany DeJaynes reflects on the power of sharing personal artifacts in a tenth-grade English course that highlights qualitative research to teach students about the tenets of inquiry and to build community. John Wesley White questions his reverence

for two poems—artifacts from his own reading life and his training to be an English teacher—when the preservice teacher candidates in his class offer interpretations of the poems that he had never considered. And Tony Schiera and Rachel Schiera detail the story of developing an artifacts-rich curriculum for high school students in Oman and offer tips for translating what they learned for the English classroom.

Rounding out the issue are three general interest articles. Nancy Frey and Douglas Fisher write about their work with teachers in a high school in California where the English faculty led an initiative to develop courses that highlight college and career readiness. Burke Scarbrough, Ben Pieper, and Hayley Vetsch share their experience of designing a unit they taught in three disparate classroom settings that employs role-play to address issues of censorship. David Slomp's report on a multiyear project developed with a team of middle school and high school English teachers in Alberta, Canada, illustrates how

scaffolded composition instruction can foster independence in young writers.

We expect that as you read the articles in this issue you will be reminded of scenes from your own teaching life and that you will also be inspired to create units and lessons that leverage the emotional power of artifacts to engage us and teach us. **EJ**

WORK CITED

Pahl, Kate, and Jennifer Rowsell. *Artifactual Literacies: Every Object Tells a Story*. Teachers College P, 2010.

TOBY EMERT and **R. JOSEPH RODRÍGUEZ**, in their roles as classroom teachers and teacher educators, have both developed many lessons that highlight the use of artifacts to invite students to share stories and to reflect on content. Toby is a professor of English education in the Department of Education at Agnes Scott College in Decatur, Georgia, and Joseph is an assistant professor of literacy, multilingual, and multicultural education at California State University, Fresno.

ABOUT THE COVER: WHAT MAKES AN ARTIFACT?



Cover Photo: *Artifact* by Janet Wong

When I was a writer-in-residence for the University of Southern California Writing Project, a requirement for our journals was to choose an artifact, write about it, and then write about the writing. My junk drawer provided plenty of inspiration. What makes something an “artifact”—instead of just a piece of stuff? And, beyond that, what makes something an artifact that represents our times?

Janet Wong is the author of thirty books for children and young people and the co-creator, with Sylvia Vardell, of *The Poetry Friday Anthology* series; their most recent book is *GREAT Morning! Poems for School Leaders to Read Aloud* (Pomelo Books, 2018). A member of NCTE for nearly twenty years, she has served on the NCTE Commission on Literature and the NCTE Excellence in Poetry for Children Award Committee. She can be contacted at janet@janetwong.com.