

Annenberg/CPB  
Professional Development Workshop Guide

Envisioning Literature

# Conversations in Literature

An eight-part professional development workshop  
for grade 6-12 literature and language arts teachers

Produced by Maryland Public Television

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ISBN: 1-57680-480-1

Funding for  
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is provided by Annenberg/CPB.

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# About the Workshop

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## Overview

***Conversations in Literature*** is a professional development workshop for literature and language arts teachers working with students in middle and high schools. Use these programs as a chance to step back from your professional life and think about the very basics of your career—remembering why you love literature and exploring what you can do to awaken this same sense of joy for the readers in your classroom.

In these programs, you will meet a group of people not unlike yourselves. Although they have made different career choices—some are teachers, some are professors, and others are authors—they all have several things in common.

They all feel that being engaged in literature is one of the most satisfying and enriching experiences of their lives. And they are also passionate about teaching literature. They all believe that it is important for all students to know the joys they themselves feel as they interact with poems, short stories, drama, and other works of fiction.

We brought these readers together to talk about some important works of classical and contemporary literature. As you observe their discussions, we hope you will do three things:

- Observe these readers and their discussions as examples of the ways effective readers interact with a text and each other.
- Explore the habits of the mind these readers employ and how these habits help them form unique and intricate interactions with the text.
- Think about the ways you can encourage these habits of the mind in your own students.

Our project was guided by the vision and research of Dr. Judith Langer, the director of the National Center on English Learning and Achievement, State University of New York—Albany. Dr. Langer has spent the bulk of her career exploring what goes on in the minds of all readers as they engage with a text, in order to help teachers be more successful in their work. She has found that effective readers have specific habits of the mind that help them be successful in negotiating literature. She calls these habits *envisionment building*. Envisionment building is a multi-part process in which readers use intuition, background experiences, and accumulated knowledge to construct meaning. As they read, envisionment builders adopt different stances in relationship to the text. They enter, move around, reflect upon, and objectify the text and their experience with it to form a constantly evolving envisionment of the world of the text and its relation to their own world as readers and thinkers.

# About the Workshop, cont'd.

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## Workshop Descriptions

### Workshop 1. Responding as Readers

In this session, you meet the readers—including Dr. Langer—who become a literary community in this workshop through their varied literary backgrounds. Dr. Langer introduces the major concepts of her work in understanding the processes through which effective readers interact with literary texts.

### Workshop 2. Envisioning

Dr. Langer explains the four vantage points, or “stances,” that effective readers take as they build “envisionments,” and the research process through which she identified them. She explains how each stance—Being Outside and Stepping Into an Envisionment, Being In and Moving Through an Envisionment, Stepping Out and Rethinking What One Knows, and Stepping Out and Objectifying the Experience—contributes to an evolving understanding of the text. The stances are demonstrated as the readers discuss Gary Soto’s poem “Oranges.”

### Workshop 3. Stepping In

In this session, the readers are outside of the text and stepping into it. In a discussion of James Dickey’s “The Life-guard” and Frank O’Connor’s “First Confession,” the group talks about their impressions, intuitions, and hunches that help them gather information as they first start to read. They also talk through sticking points when the information they encounter in the text breaks apart their envisionments, and demonstrate how they work to rebuild them, sometimes with the help of other readers.

Along the way, Dr. Langer’s comments explain how readers work as they step into a text. She also suggests ways in which teachers can apply what they see to their work in the classroom.

### Workshop 4. Moving Through

When readers are in and moving through a text, they interact very closely with it, actually living within the world its words create. During this session, the readers weave rich envisionments, calling on all they have known or experienced before to build and enrich their understanding. The group works with two texts, Cathy Song’s poem “Lost Sister” and Stephen Dixon’s short story “All Gone,” building on their initial impressions to examine motives, feelings, causes, interrelationships, and interactions as they create fuller envisionments of these texts.

Dr. Langer’s comments during this session point to the diverse paths readers follow when they stand in this relationship to a text, and explain why their actions are an important part of the effective reader’s arsenal in building more complex understandings and interpretations.

### Workshop 5. Rethinking

The readers demonstrate another important stance of competent readers: that of stepping outside the text and using what they have understood to rethink their lives. They discuss Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, looking at its treatment of familial relationships, and thinking about the places in their lives where these themes resonate, and ways it has made them rethink what they knew, said, or did.

Dr. Langer stresses that, while not all texts speak explicitly to readers in this way, seeking to find the places where their life intersects with the thoughts and behaviors expressed in literature is important for all readers.

# About the Workshop, cont'd.

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## **Workshop 6. Objectifying the Text**

This session showcases the reader as critic, as the community of readers steps out of the text to reflect on what it means, how it works, and why. Become part of the discussions that evolve as the readers look at Alice Walker's "Revolutionary Petunias" and Langston Hughes's "Theme for English B." The readers examine the author's craft, the structure of the text and its various literary elements, and choice of language in order to evaluate both works as pieces of literature. They also objectify and analyze their personal journeys through the texts.

Dr. Langer's comments throughout the session remind readers of the importance of critical analysis and evaluation of the text. She also helps teachers of readers by pointing out how the techniques used by the readers here can be explored in the classroom.

## **Workshop 7. The Stances in Action**

In order to show how readers move into and out of each of the stances as they build their envisionments, this session focuses on two extended discussions among readers. Individually and collectively, they enter and become immersed in their reading, step back and reflect on its ideas, and look at the piece as literary critics might. The texts the readers talk about include four poems that explore the Icarus myth—"To a Friend Whose Work Has Come to Triumph" by Anne Sexton, "Icarus" by Stephen Spender, "Icarus" by Edward Field, and "Landscape With the Fall of Icarus" by William Carlos Williams—and Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street*.

This session can serve as your virtual workbook, helping you hone your understandings of the stances and how they contribute to rich and vital envisionments.

## **Workshop 8. Returning to the Classroom**

In the concluding session, the readers in this community talk about the ways in which Dr. Langer's work—and their own expertise as readers—can help the literature and language arts classroom become more thought provoking. Share in their stories of success and eavesdrop on classrooms throughout the country to see how teachers are encouraging their students to become rich envisionment builders.

# Workshop Components

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This guide provides everything you need to know to conduct this workshop, either with colleagues or on your own. (Note: if you are taking this workshop alone, you are your own *Site Leader*.) The workshop consists of activities carried out with your colleagues on-site (Workshop Sessions) and those to do on your own (Between Sessions). See Helpful Hints for Site Leaders on p. 6 for more information on preparing for workshop sessions.

## Workshop Sessions (On-Site)

Weekly workshop sessions may be scheduled around live broadcasts, in which case you will want to begin at least 30 minutes before the scheduled broadcast. You may prefer to pre-record the programs on videocassette and schedule the sessions at a time that is more convenient for all participants. Sessions work best when scheduled for a minimum of two hours.

Each session consists of three parts:

### Getting Ready

In preparation for watching the program, you will engage in approximately 30 minutes of discussion and activity.

### Watch the Workshop Video

Then you will watch the 60-minute video program. Within each program, there will be opportunities to pause the tape for discussion. If you are watching a real-time broadcast, you may want to consider the questions posed while viewing the program, and discuss them later.

### Going Further

Wrap up the workshop with an additional 30 minutes of discussion and activity.



# Workshop Components, cont'd.

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## Between Sessions (On Your Own)

### Homework Assignment

This guide suggests readings, activities, and questions to explore in your workshop journal. These assignments follow-up on ideas from the workshop or prepare you for the next one.

### Ongoing Activities

These activities are recommended, to carry on throughout the course of the workshop:

#### Keep a Journal

We encourage you to keep a journal. In addition to your homework assignments, all written activities should be kept in the journal, so that you can build upon your knowledge as you discover the many facets of envisionment building. Journal entries can be used as the basis for discussion at professional meetings or for email discussions on Channel-Talk.

#### Share Ideas on Channel-Talk

Subscribe to the workshop's email discussion list and communicate with other participants on Channel-Talk—the place to ask questions and share ideas. To subscribe to Channel-TalkLitConversations, visit:

**<http://www.learner.org/mailman/listinfo/channel-talklitconversations>**

### Extension: Classroom Connections

We provide activities that can help you put the practices you learn in this workshop into use in your own classroom.

### Additional Reading

Go online to find more resources and suggested readings to deepen your understanding and implementation of the practices shown in the workshop. Go to the *Conversations in Literature* Web site at:

**[www.learner.org/envisioningliterature/](http://www.learner.org/envisioningliterature/)**

# Helpful Hints for Site Leaders

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## Successful Workshop Sessions

These guidelines will help you conduct successful workshop sessions, particularly the Getting Ready and Going Further segments. These 30-minute, pre- and post-video group discussions will help participants better understand the video programs and enhance the workshop experience. Getting Ready prepares participants for what to focus on during the video programs and Going Further provides the opportunity to analyze and reflect on what they saw.

### Designate Responsibilities

Each week, someone should be responsible for facilitating the workshop sessions. This may be the registered “site leader” or another volunteer, or you may choose to divide and rotate duties among several participants. For the purposes of these instructions, we will refer to the site leader as facilitating the sessions.

### Prepare for the Session and Bring the Necessary Materials

The site leader should review the entire session in this guide prior to arriving for the session, as well as reviewing the Materials Needed (pp. 7-9) for that session. The site leader will be responsible for bringing enough materials for the participants. A few of the workshop sessions require group brainstorming or list making. It will be useful to have markers and a flip chart, as well as a few sheets of paper available for each participant.

If you are viewing the video programs on videocassette, the site leader should consider previewing them to help him or her recognize the suggested “pause points.”

### Before the First Session

You may want to photocopy this guide for all participants so they may follow along, refer back to ideas covered in the session, or have their homework assignments handy. Or, you may direct them to the workshop Web site at [www.learner.org/envisioningliterature/](http://www.learner.org/envisioningliterature/) to print the guide themselves (direct them to “Support Materials”). Either way, you will want participants to have the guide prior to the first session, so they will come prepared. Be sure participants know:

- they should bring a journal and a pen to each workshop session, including the first;
- there are suggested reading assignments prior to the first session (see p. 20); and
- it would be helpful if they were to review the first session in this guide prior to arriving.

### Keep an Eye on the Time

We have suggested the amount of time you should spend on each question or activity. While these times are merely guidelines, you should keep an eye on the clock, particularly if you are watching a live broadcast. You may want to set a kitchen timer before you begin Getting Ready to ensure that you won’t miss the beginning of the video. If you are watching the workshops on videotape, you will have more flexibility if your discussions run longer.

### Record Your Discussions

We recommend that someone take notes during each discussion, or even better, that you tape-record the discussions. The notes or audiotapes can serve as make-up materials in case anyone misses a workshop.

### Share Your Discussions on the Web

The workshop sessions serve as a starting point to share and think about the workshop ideas. Encourage participants to continue their discussions with participants from other sites on Channel-Talk at the *Conversations in Literature* Web site at [www.learner.org/envisioningliterature/](http://www.learner.org/envisioningliterature/).

# Materials Needed

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## Site Leader:

Before the first workshop session, be sure to inform workshop participants that they should **bring a journal to each session**.

You may want to have a **flip chart and markers** available during each session.

The “activity sheets” listed below are contained within this guide. **Make copies** for each participant.

## Workshop 1

- Activity Sheet: Reader’s Biography Pre-Write
- Video Program: Workshop 1. Responding as Readers

## Workshop 2

- Activity Sheet: Sample Discussion Guidelines: Building a Literary Community
- Activity Sheet: Literary Hunt
- Activity Sheet: Think Aloud Teacher Resource
- Activity Sheet: Sample Think Aloud Response
- Activity Sheet: Student Think Aloud
- Poem: “Oranges” by Gary Soto
- Video Program: Workshop 2. Envisioning

## Workshop 3

- Activity Sheet: Photo Response
- Activity Sheet: Student Think Aloud (from Workshop 2)
- Poem: “The Lifeguard” by James Dickey
- Short Story: “First Confession” by Frank O’Connor
- Poem: “Let America Be America Again” by Langston Hughes, or Site Leader’s selection\*
- Video Program: Workshop 3. Stepping In

[\* **Site Leader:** The Langston Hughes poem “Let America Be America Again” can be found in *Literature: An Introduction to Reading and Writing*, 5th edition, Edgar V. Roberts and Henry E. Jacobs, Prentice Hall. Copyright 1998. ISBN 0-13-010076-5. The poem is also available online and can be accessed at the workshop Web site. Go to the *Conversations in Literature* Web site at [www.learner.org/envisioningliterature/](http://www.learner.org/envisioningliterature/) and click on “Workshop 3. Stepping In” and “Background Reading.” If this poem is not available to you, consider an alternative selection that is rich in language and meaning.]

**Note:** *Envisioning Literature* by Dr. Judith Langer is referenced throughout the workshop. While not required, it is recommended reading for participants. *Envisioning Literature* is available from the Teachers College Press, Columbia University. Copyright 1995. ISBN 0-8077-3464-0.

Many of the literary pieces discussed in this workshop may be found in *Literature: An Introduction to Reading and Writing*, 5th edition, Edgar V. Roberts and Henry E. Jacobs, Prentice Hall. Copyright 1998. ISBN 0-13-010076-5.

Bibliographic information and URLs for other reading assignments and suggested reading are available within each chapter of this guide and on the *Conversations in Literature* Web site at [www.learner.org/envisioningliterature/](http://www.learner.org/envisioningliterature/).

# Materials Needed, cont'd.

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## Workshop 4

- Activity Sheet: Reader's Profile
- Activity Sheet: "The Lottery" Discussion Guide
- Poem: "Lost Sister" by Cathy Song
- Poem: "Sympathy" by Paul Laurence Dunbar\*
- Short Story: "All Gone" by Stephen Dixon
- Video Program: Workshop 4. Moving Through

[\* **Site Leader:** "Sympathy" by Paul Laurence Dunbar can be found in *Literature: An Introduction to Reading and Writing*, 5th edition, Edgar V. Roberts and Henry E. Jacobs, Prentice Hall. Copyright 1998. ISBN 0-13-010076-5. The poem is also available online and can be accessed at the workshop Web site. Go to the *Conversations in Literature* Web site at [www.learner.org/envisioningliterature/](http://www.learner.org/envisioningliterature/) and click on "Workshop 4. Moving Through" and "Background Reading."] ]

## Workshop 5

- Activity Sheet: Hints on Helping Students...
- Play: *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare
- Video Program: Workshop 5. Rethinking

## Workshop 6

- Activity Sheet: Venn Diagram: Cinderella, a Cross-Textual Study
- Poem: "Theme for English B" by Langston Hughes
- Poem: "Revolutionary Petunias" by Alice Walker
- Poem: "Richard Cory" by Edward Arlington Robinson, "Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night" by Dylan Thomas, "She Walks in Beauty" by George Gordon, Lord Byron, or Site Leader's selection\*
- Video Program: Workshop 6. Objectifying the Text

[\* **Site Leader:** Select one of the listed poems, or one of your own choosing. Online versions of the texts can be accessed at the workshop Web site. The poems listed are also available within several anthologies listed on the Web site. Go to the *Conversations in Literature* Web site at [www.learner.org/envisioningliterature/](http://www.learner.org/envisioningliterature/) and click on "Workshop 6. Objectifying the Text" and "Background Reading."] ]

# Materials Needed, cont'd.

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## Workshop 7

- Activity Sheet: Envisionment-Building Stance Wheel (two copies for each participant)
- Activity Sheet: Envisionment-Building Stance Wheel Sample Questions
- Poem: "Icarus" by Stephen Spender
- Poem: "Icarus" by Edward Field
- Poem: "To a Friend Whose Work Has Come to Triumph" by Anne Sexton
- Poem: "Landscape With the Fall of Icarus" by William Carlos Williams
- Novel Excerpt: Chapter 1, *The House on Mango Street*, by Sandra Cisneros, or Site Leader's selection—an alternative Chicano/Latino text with questions framed in the four stances\*
- Video Program: Workshop 7. The Stances in Action

[\* **Site Leader:** If this text is not available, consider selecting a short, compact piece by another Chicano/Latino author such as Pat Mora, Rudolfo Anaya, Julia Alvarez, Ana Castillo, or Gary Soto, just to name a few. Formulate questions that elicit responses from all four stances, similar to the Getting Ready activity for Workshop 7. The Envisionment Building Stance Wheel Sample Questions activity sheet in this guide can assist you in creating a variety of questions. Online links to Chicano/Latino authors and resources can be found on the workshop Web site. Go to the *Conversations in Literature* Web site at [www.learner.org/envisioningliterature/](http://www.learner.org/envisioningliterature/) and click on "Workshop 7. The Stances in Action" and "Additional Reading."]

## Workshop 8

- Activity Sheet: The Envisionment-Building Classroom Triangle Model
- Activity Sheet: Taking Stock: The Teacher as a Reflective Practitioner
- Video Program: Workshop 8. Returning to the Classroom

# About the Contributors

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## Reader's Biographies

*"Tell me what you read, and I will tell you what you are."*

With apologies to Anthelme Brillat-Savarin

In this series, you will meet a number of readers who came together to talk about literature and the ways it permeates their lives. Since we couldn't incorporate all their thoughts in the videos, we thought you might like to learn more about them. In these excerpts, they talk about their lives as readers and lovers of literature.

### **Group One:**

Dale Allender  
Patricia Elam  
Carol Jago  
Linda Williams

### **Group Two:**

Rafael Alvarez  
Pat Bradford  
Bobbi Houtchens  
Jeff Wilhelm

and Judith Langer

**Dale Allender** is the associate executive director of the National Council of Teachers of English.

"I remember in grade school when RIF came to our school. RIF: the Reading is Fundamental program. And I remember picking up two books. One was a book of ghost stories and one was, oddly, a child's encyclopedia of Greek mythology. And I enjoyed reading the ghost stories, but I don't know what happened to that book. However, the other one—the tales of Greek mythology—stayed with me for the longest time. Even today, one of my two greatest passions is mythology. The other is jazz."

"When I pick up a book now, I really, really want to look for its authenticity. And by that, I mean if I look at a collection of short stories, for example, that depicts a period in history or a cultural perspective or an ethnic community, I really want to know that that writer is either from that community or is an insider into that community. Of course, I'm looking using other criteria as well: Is it interesting? Is it a topic that's of interest to me—such as myth, mystery, or politics? But, at a deeper level, I want to know that what I'm reading is organic to the community that it's coming from."

"My maternal grandfather was named Ralph W. Turner and I don't know what the W stands for actually. When I was a kid, he was just Poppy. He was an avid reader. He had books everywhere in the house—and newspapers, magazines from popular culture, books on sports, politics, pop psychology, religion—just absolutely everything. He always wanted either my mother or my sister to be a schoolteacher. Neither of them became teachers but I became the teacher and I'm the one that has his books. And in reading those books that he read, there are things that I learn about him and there's direction I get. I have copies of the first editions of *Black Boy* by Richard Wright in which he wrote that it was his second copy. He had many of Wright's other works as well, such as *Black Power*, and *Black Metropolis*. When he died, I inherited most of his library. I've kept many of them, but some have found their way to other libraries, including that of the Wisconsin Black Historical Society."

**Patricia Elam** is a writer who also teaches at a high school in Washington, D.C. and a Baltimore area college.

"I like to read a lot of different writers because I want to know what is beyond me. By the same token, I want to see how other people interpret the same kind of lives that I see around me, so I like to read a lot of different black writers to see how they model blackness. That's really interesting to me. But then I like to go outside of that and see what other people's experiences are—whether they're similar or different from the lives I have seen."

# About the Contributors, cont'd.

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"I grew up in Boston in the fifties and it was extremely segregated. I even remember there were parts of Boston that black people just were told not to go into, because they might not get out alive. I remember my mother getting lost somewhere in south Boston once and being really concerned about her getting back home. I also integrated a private girls' school that was predominantly white. I was only 10 and so it was a very emotional experience. It was something I wasn't totally prepared for. These experiences have always been a strong part of my writing."

"When I first started writing, I didn't think of myself as writing literature. I was just writing what had to get out. I guess I thought that way because of the models before me. I wanted to have the same effect on readers that I felt when I read. I think of Paule Marshall's *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, one of my most favorite books in the world. That book was just so beautiful to me. To this day, that's what I want to do. I want to write a book that will make someone feel the way that book makes me feel when I read it and I've read it several times and always feel the same way."

**Carol Jago** is in her 27th year as a teacher at Santa Monica High School in California.

"For me the biggest thing that we gain from literature is expanding our worlds—knowing how other people think and feel. I don't know what it'd be like if the only people that you knew about were people you got a chance to meet in your life. So, you know all these middle-class people and what else would you know. I mean reading is just a window to another world."

"Oh, ... there's hundreds, perhaps thousands of books that I wish I'd read, but, increasingly, the books that I wish or plan to read are more classical—Dickens, Flaubert, Balzac, and many more. I haven't had the time or the self-discipline to do that before now."

"I really love being in book clubs and I miss it when I'm not. Right now, we run a book club for teachers at UCLA and that's the only book club I'm in at the moment. There's been a time when I've belonged to about five clubs at once. Each one had its own personality, which is one of the things I liked about that experience. The best book clubs form when people really leave a lot of their personal lives behind. It's not just to get together to chat about our families; it's really coming together to talk about the books. That's a hard line to draw because, so often, books invite you to talk about your personal stories. For a time we had a club at my high school, mostly involving members of the English department. I can remember when *Love in a Time of Cholera* first came out. Discussing that book helped us to understand why we have philosophical differences about teaching. Our approaches to those characters in those books were fundamentally different. We were split down the line. And that was just a really interesting experience."

**Linda Williams** teaches in the Baltimore County Public Schools in Maryland.

"The first time that I read Langston Hughes's poetry, I thought to myself, this is somebody who really understands me. And I just thought that was so wonderful. So, I thought to myself, 'I need to read some more African American authors because I probably can relate to a lot of the things that they've written as well.'"

"I go to the library every week and I read each night before I go to bed. For those times, I want to read something that really truly is an escape because I read a lot of things for school and for classes and those kinds of things. So, a lot of times it's not great literature but it's still reading. A lot of times, I select books for that kind of reading based simply on their titles. That's how I first found Barbara Kingsolver. Her books had such interesting titles: *Pigs in Heaven* and *The Bean Trees*. I had to pick them up."

"The African American authors that I read in college were some of the best writers I had read. I was just amazed at how powerful their writing was. I think I have always been just moved by Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, especially the section in it where he's in the college and they have the African American males in this boxing match. I mean it...it really made me just examine the experience of African Americans in this country and to begin to evaluate my life against them. Because I think when I was growing up, I wasn't too aware of prejudice and discrimination. I'm not saying that it didn't exist and that I didn't experience it. It was just that I don't think that I was aware of what was happening. And some of the literature that I read when I got to college really opened my eyes."

# About the Contributors, cont'd.

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**Rafael Alvarez** is a veteran city desk reporter for *The Baltimore Sun* and a writer.

"Phillip Roth has a novel which I believe won the Pulitzer in '97 called *American Pastoral* and it's all about the breakup of the American family and, through it, American society; because of the effects of Vietnam and Water-gate. But the back story is all about the making of gloves and the glove industry which flourished in the United States up through about the 1950s. I knew nothing about the American glove industry. However, through a work of literature not only did I see it, but I also understood it. If I had read a book of non-fiction and learned facts about the glove industry, about all I would have known were dates, people, famous tailors, and such. Through Phillip Roth, I gleaned this information and much, much more, including the front story, which was the disintegration of American society."

"Another book that has been very important to me would be *The Magician of Loveland* by Isaac Bashevis Singer, which I read maybe 15 years ago. It launched me on my journey through Jewish fiction and, through Singer, I learned about struggles between man and this invisible God and how you could go about your life. You know, Singer wrote either about seventeenth-century Poland or twentieth-century New York City. You could be in a cafe-teria on the Upper West Side, you know, eating your stewed prunes and have an argument with God at the same time. And that, I found that to be fascinating."

"Some people chase directors; they'll watch everything a particular director has done and it becomes a body of work. I chase authors. I'm working my way through all of Bellow and all of Roth right now. The way folks will read *Rolling Stone* to...maybe to choose what albums or CDs they're going to buy, I read the *New York Times Book Review* every Sunday and I look for things that interest me. I wait for new works by familiar authors to come out. Some-times I'll get turned on to writers after they've died. It happened to me in 1981. I was 23 years old and read an obitu-ary about this great writer with this amazing walrus mustache named William Saroyan. I'd never heard of him. Now, in the '30s, he was huge, but by the end of his life, he was almost unread. And because of this obituary that appeared in *The Baltimore Sun* and this great face and this great humanity and this guy that wrote about his uncles from the old country, which reminded me of the old country of my parents, I started reading Saroyan."

**Pat Bradford** teaches English at Flowers High School in Prince George's County, Maryland.

"Literature became a world for me when I was very young when I would go to the Hadley Park Library in Nashville, Tennessee, and check out eight books on Saturday and read them and take them back the next Saturday and try to get eight more. It just creates a world, a world different from the one you have to live in every day."

"I have to read literature to be able to teach. So, it's my livelihood. It's my livelihood in that it keeps me alive. I'm still reading African American authors that I didn't get to read when I was in public school. I didn't know about them. I just discovered Zora Neale Hurston in the last 15 years. And I'm...I'm just still catching up. You know you have a stack of books next to your bed and these are the classics. These are things that you know you have to read. And so I'm still catching up."

"There's a novel called *Ceremony* by Leslie Marmon Silko. The main character's a Native American who's come home to the reservation after the Vietnam War. And he has to deal with being an American and being a Native American. He has to deal with the old traditions of his people, as well as the anger he feels because of the war. And I'm a product of the Vietnam War—when I graduated from high school, my friends went off to that war. So I think that novel is excellent. It has poetry, it has folk tale, it has ritual, it has everything, and then it's the coming-of-age story because the character's sick and he doesn't become well until he understands the old and new."

**Bobbi Houtchens** teaches at San Bernardino High School in California.

"Through literature, I learn how other people live, I learn not just in fiction but, but in biographies of people. And as far as being a teacher, I think it really helps me be a better teacher because I can read professional literature all the time and look for the best ways to teach, especially when I come up against kids who hate to read. And a lot of my students really hate to read. And if I can find ways to get them into reading and to teach them how to be readers, then I know no matter what problems they face in their life, they can escape just like I escape sometimes in a book."



# About the Contributors, cont'd.

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"I always felt like I wasn't ever Mexican enough to really fit in with my Mexican relatives. And I never really was white enough to fit in with my dad's side of the family. So I felt like I was always walking on a fence, hoping I wouldn't fall and be discovered not to be really a part of either family or a part of either group. So when I finally took a Chicano literature class, I found out there's a whole bunch of people like me who feel like me that are from mixed backgrounds. When I started reading a lot of Chicano literature, I started seeing myself reflected there. And it was so validating to me that it hurts when I see kids who are black or Cambodian or Latino not seeing themselves in the literature we have at school. And so I've really been like an urban academic guerilla warrior, trying to fit all these different ethnic kinds of literature into what I teach."

"Of course, I like to read in bed. So every night before I go to sleep, I read for at least half an hour...unless it's like two nights ago when I knew I had to get up early in the morning and I was just at the end of another psychopathic serial murder novel, I read till midnight and then I was so tired the next day I cursed myself...but I know I'll do it again the next time."

**Jeff Wilhelm** is a professor of literacy education at the University of Maine, Orono.

"Sometimes I'll recall a character in a book as if they're my friend. And...and it takes me a while sometimes to figure out that it was a character in a book and I didn't really go through that experience with them. It's so very intense that the characters in books that I really engage in become friends of mine, they become objects that I think with and use to think with. I often have the same kind of feelings about authors too—that if I read a lot of work by a particular author, I'll feel like I'm coming to know them—that their next book is like an invitation to dinner. You know, Katherine Paterson is one of my favorite young adult authors and you know I just feel like she's such a great-hearted person and that I know her in some really intimate way through her books. And the same is true with...with many adult authors too."

"I read a lot of different things for different purposes. When I get up every morning, I read the newspaper. I can't even eat breakfast until I've read the newspaper. And I talk to my kids about the big things in the news and that's kind of how we start our morning. But when I read a book, that's a different situation. I want to clear some time. I do read a little bit before bed every night and occasionally, when I'm into a book, I'll fill in any point of the day with the reading that I can. But I prefer to clear a few hours to read. And that's where I'm in my most engaged as a reader. So at that point I'll kind of clear the decks, let people know I'm going to be reading. I might take, you know, water or something with me. I usually flip through the book, read the front matter, look how many pages it is, get a sense of what the book's about, maybe reflect a little on who recommended the book, and, and then I get down to it. And once I start reading, it may take me a little bit to get into it, but once I'm into it, then I don't want to stop. And, you know, that can be dangerous. I remember when I was coaching cross-country, teaching high school, and I was reading *Too Late to Phalarope* and I couldn't stop. I stayed up all night, then I read it during all my free periods, and then I had to ask my assistant coach to take the practice because I just couldn't not finish the book. And then I finally did and there was still time for practice. You know, I could have got down there and finished up but I had to think about it."

"When I read a book that I'm not into, I don't persist unless I've got a reason to, such as my book club is reading it, and I want to talk to them about it. But if I don't have a special reason to read it, I don't, because there are so many great books to read in the world. I've got a shelf full of ones that I want to read. So, as I recognize that it's not right for me at that time or maybe I'm not the audience that book was written for. Sometimes I'll return to the book a couple of times and try it again."

**Judith Langer** is a professor at the State University of New York—Albany and director of the National Research Center on English Learning and Achievement.

"I grew up in a literary family, in a reading family. From the earliest times, we told stories, we sang stories. I remember going to the library weekly, even more often, from the time I was a very, very young girl. Probably well before I was able to walk to the library, my mother carried me, or pushed in a carriage to get books. We were always surrounded with books."

# About the Contributors, cont'd.

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"I learned to read at home before I went to school. And all of my reading in the school I attended concentrated on the "Dick and Jane" kinds of readers. And I did what was necessary in class because I was a very compliant child. But the reading, that wasn't reading to me. Reading was when I went home and read the books, read the stories, discussed those, wrote my own stories as well."

"Let me see if I can tell you the books that I remember from my early growing-up years. It was very traditional and you can probably tell something about my background when I describe it. I remember from a very, very young age having the Mother Goose books—the kind that have the hand-painted pictures. And I recall loving those books and reading, not only being read to, but reading the Mother Goose rhymes time and time again—loving the rhymes and loving the pictures. I remember being read and then reading the Hans Christian Anderson fairy tales, Aesop's fables, repeatedly. I can remember that as I got a little bit older, I loved *Mary Poppins*. I read that book many, many, many times and actually started writing stories, pretending that I was Mary Poppins and could fly through the air. I read *Gulliver's Travels* many times because it brought me to such wonderful imaginary worlds. I remember reading the Bobbsey Twins from cover to cover because they were just so wonderful and I could share them with my friends. And then as I got older what I did was start getting into reading in depth. From high school on, I became interested in particular periods or particular cultures or particular groups, particular authors. And I would read everything about that issue, that era, or that author. For example, when I started to read about the Bloomsbury group, I read all of the books that I could find written by anybody in the Bloomsbury group, or by anybody who the Bloomsbury group met, even tangentially, because it was such a wonderful era. So I read a lot of bad books as well as good books, ones I didn't enjoy... but it was that stepping into a literary world that was terribly important to me."

"I've spent my entire professional career being interested in how the mind works and how individuals become highly literate. How they can learn to read, write, navigate text, communicate with others in ways that we consider in our society literate ways of getting through life. I became particularly interested in it because I felt that there were ways in which the understandings of how we make meaning—there are ways in which those understandings might give us new vantage points for informing instruction, informing how we went about conceiving how teaching and learning actually could occur in the classroom. So, my goal from the very beginning was not just theory building but trying to create new theories that might be effective in the classroom. The reason I did this is that I found that, wherever I go in most societies, you have people who can read well, develop stories well, and communicate to each other well. Some people are more highly educated than others are, but all have ways of creating stories. When you create stories, you're manipulating language, text, and mind. I wanted to better understand those strengths so that we all could understand better how taking that as a starting place improves instruction."

## Advisory Board

In this project, we have been fortunate enough to have the support and guidance of nine advisors who represent many segments of the language arts educational community. With their assistance, we have designed *Conversations in Literature* to meet the needs of language arts educators working with students in middle and high school.

Judith Langer, Chief Content Advisor

Dale Allender  
Arthur Applebee  
Elizabeth Close  
Shawn DeNight  
Frank Horstman

Alfredo Lujan  
Elizabeth Penfield  
Sallie Snyder  
Betty Tillman

# About the Contributors, cont'd.

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## **Judith A. Langer, Ph.D.**

Judith A. Langer is professor of education at the University at Albany, State University of New York. She specializes in studies of language, literacy, and learning. Her research focuses on how people become highly literate, on how they use reading and writing to learn, and on what this means for instruction.

Her major works examine the nature of literate thought—the knowledge students use when they “make sense” and the ways in which their learning is affected by activities and interactions in the classroom. She has studied reading and writing development, the ways in which understandings (envisionments) grow over time, how particular literacy contexts affect language and thought, and the contribution of literature to literate thought.

She is presently studying the professional and classroom features that accompany English programs where students are “beating the odds” in literacy. Her work on envisionment building has had a major impact on literature instruction and assessment. She serves on many advisory boards and national reform groups involved in reconceptualizing literacy education.

Langer has published in a wide variety of journals and collections. Her books include *Reader Meets Author/Bridging the Gap*; *Understanding Reading and Writing Research*; *Children Reading and Writing: Structures and Strategies*; *Language, Literacy, and Culture: Issues of Society and Schooling*; *How Writing Shapes Thinking: Studies of Teaching and Learning*; *Literature Instruction: A Focus on Student Response*; *Literature Instruction: Practice and Policy*; and *Envisioning Literature: Literary Understanding and Literature Instruction*. *Effective English Instruction* will soon be published.

Langer has been director of the National Research Center on English Learning and Achievement (CELA) since 1987. The Center's research, including Langer's work on envisionment building, has been primarily funded by the United States Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI). She is also chair of the Department of Educational Theory and Practice.

Langer serves as the chief content advisor for *Conversations in Literature*.

## **Dale Allender, Ph.D.**

Dale Allender currently serves as the associate executive director of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE). A former teacher of Iowa City Community School District, Allender has also lectured at Grinnell and Coe Colleges. He has also served the language arts community as an editorial board member of *The New Advocate*, as representative-at-large for the Alliance for Curriculum Reform, and in his current position as the NCTE liaison to the Iowa Council Teachers of English and Language Arts Executive Board.

A recipient of the National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Institute for Native American Literature fellowship and numerous other awards, Allender has also served as a consultant and curriculum developer for a number of media projects, including *Songmasters: The American Road*, a music recording of traditional socially conscious songs performed by contemporary popular music artists; *Tutu and Franklin: A Journey Towards Peace*, a dialogue between Desmond Tutu and John Hope Franklin and 21 international, multicultural high school students; and *Regret To Inform*, an award-winning documentary on widows from the Vietnam War, featured on PBS.

Some of Allender's recent publications include “Deep Reading: Building a Schematic Bridge Across World Mythology and Multicultural Literature” which appeared in *Multicultural Review*, “The Myth Ritual Theory and the Teaching of Multicultural Literature,” “Standing on the Border: Issues of Identity and Border Crossing in Young Adult Literature,” and “African and African American Voices and Experiences” which is included in *Adventuring With Books*.

# About the Contributors, cont'd.

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## **Arthur N. Applebee, Ph.D.**

Arthur N. Applebee is professor in the School of Education, University at Albany, State University of New York, and (with Judith Langer) is director of the federally sponsored National Research Center on English Learning and Achievement. The Center has an active research and development agenda in elementary and secondary instruction, in effective uses of technology, and in teacher education.

During his varied career, Applebee has worked in institutional settings with children with severe learning problems, in public schools, as a staff member of the National Council of Teachers of English, and in research and professional education. He joined the faculty at the University at Albany from Stanford University in 1987, as part of a SUNY-wide Graduate Research Initiative designed to place the University at Albany at the forefront of literacy research in the United States.

With degrees from Yale, Harvard, and the University of London, Applebee's work focuses on how children and adults learn the many specialized forms of language required for success in school subjects, life, and work. His numerous books and articles focus on particular issues in curriculum and instruction in reading, writing, and the English-language arts. Since the early 1970s, he has also worked with the National Assessment of Educational Progress, helping to design, implement, interpret, and report a continuing series of evaluations of the educational attainment of U.S. students.

An internationally recognized expert, Applebee consults at the national, state, and district level on effective approaches to curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Applebee is a former editor of *Research in the Teaching of English*, a past president of the National Conference on Research in Language and Literacy, and a recipient of the David H. Russell Award for Distinguished Research in the Teaching of English, from the National Council of Teachers of English.

## **Elizabeth Close**

Elizabeth Close is the director of educational outreach for The National Research Center on English Learning and Achievement (CELA). Before assuming that role in 1999, she taught for many years in the Guilderland Central School District near Albany, New York, and in the Roosevelt and Sachem Central School Districts on Long Island. As a teacher, she was one a number of teacher/researchers working with Judith Langer and her research staff in the Envisioning Literature Project.

Close completed her undergraduate work at the State University of New York at Stony Brook. She did her graduate work at Hofstra University and the University at Albany. She has been active in the National Council of Teachers of English, serving on the Secondary Section Steering Committee, the Executive Committee, and as chair of the first Middle Level Nominating Committee. She was the recipient of the 1999 NCTE Edwin A. Hoey Award for Outstanding Middle School Educator in Language Arts and received a Paul and Kate Farmer Writing Award in 1993 for an article in *English Journal*. She was co-editor of "Middle Talk," a column in *English Journal*, and co-editor of *A Middle Mosaic: A Celebration of Reading, Writing, and Reflective Practice at the Middle Level* (NCTE, 2000).

## **Shawn Eric DeNight, Ph.D.**

Shawn Eric DeNight has been a high school English teacher since 1985. At Miami Edison Senior High School, he teaches English and journalism. He is also the language arts department chairperson. In 1999, he earned certification from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards in English/Language Arts for adolescents and young adults. He has worked with the National Board as an assessor and as an assessment developer. In 1995, he received his Ph.D. in English education from the University of Miami. His dissertation study investigated the effects of teacher-written comments on the quality of students' writing.

In October of 2000, he was named to *USA Today's* All-USA Teacher Team. In 1994, he was selected as Florida's state teacher of the year. In 1997, he participated in a teacher exchange program to Russia and Ukraine sponsored by the United States Information Agency. At his school, DeNight sponsors the National Honor Society, supervises a

# About the Contributors, cont'd.

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computer writing lab, and chairs the school's accreditation self-study team. For his school district, he works as a facilitator at the Zelda Glazer Writing Institute, a two-week summer inservice program dedicated to the teaching of writing. He has also been a leader in the district's intergenerational community outreach programs.

## **Frank Horstman, Ph.D.**

As the K-12 specialist in English-language arts for the Maryland State Department of Education, Frank Horstman works with a variety of issues related to language development: curricular design, instructional implementation, assessment, and school improvement. Specific projects have ranged from kindergarten—MMSR training, to primary—managing the Reading Excellence Act Grant, to middle—range finding for the Maryland Functional Writing Test and the Maryland School Performance Assessment Program, through high school—collaborating on the development of the English High School Assessment. While he received his formal training in applying theories in cognitive psychology, linguistics, and classical rhetoric to improving writing instruction, Horstman credits the training he received from his English, journalism, and foreign language students with helping him develop a very practical perspective on English language arts. He also believes that serving as both a staff development facilitator and an administrator have helped him to see the learning process from still other perspectives. Horstman welcomes the opportunity to support educators in their goal to improve student achievement in English-language arts.

## **Alfredo Celedon Lujan**

Alfredo Celedon Lujan is a native of the village of Nambe in northern New Mexico. He currently teaches English at the Native American Preparatory School in San Ysidro, New Mexico. Lujan is active in many national language arts organizations. He is National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) Rainbow Strand planner for Middle and Secondary Sections, a member of NCTE's Steering Committee, Secondary Section, and a member of the Early Adolescent Language Arts Committee with the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.

Previously, Lujan taught English at Pojaque Middle School, chaired the NCTE Committee on Racism and Bias, and was a member of NCTE's Commission for Literature. He also served as a SLATE (Support for the Learning and Teaching of English) representative in New Mexico, and edited *Capirotada*, the newsletter of NCTE's Latino Caucus. He has also held leadership roles in educating teachers, serving as an instructor at the Bread Loaf/Gallup-McKinley Teachers Institute, and as an instructor/facilitator in many Writing Across the Curriculum workshops and inservices.

His publications have appeared in *The Council Chronicle*, *California English*, *La Herencia del Norte*, *Bread Loaf Rural Teacher Magazine*, *Bread Loaf News*, *A Work of ARTE*, *New Mexico Sports Journal*, *Puerto del Sol*, and the *New Mexico Humanities Review*.

Lujan was a National Endowment for the Humanities Fellow (1985, 1989, 1990), won first place for student writing portfolio in the Quality Education Awards Program at University of New Mexico, and has served as a writer-in-residence for the Anchorage and Mat-Su School Districts in Alaska.

## **Elizabeth Penfield, Ph.D.**

Elizabeth Penfield is professor emerita of English at the University of New Orleans. She is the author of four books and numerous articles published in state, regional, and national journals, including *Arizona English Bulletin*, *English Language Arts Bulletin*, and the *ADE Bulletin*. Her book *Short Takes*, published by Harper Collins, is currently in its seventh printing. She is a contributor to the *Longman Bibliography of Composition and Rhetoric*, and her article "Freshman English/Advanced Writing: How Do We Distinguish the Two?" was published in *On Teaching Advanced Writing*. Together with Charles Moran of the University of Massachusetts, she edited the NCTE publication *Conversations: Contemporary Theory and the Teaching of Literature*. Penfield has also presented papers to many state, regional, and national groups, including the Conference on College Composition and Communication and the National Council of Teachers of English.

# About the Contributors, cont'd.

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Penfield's principle areas of interest are composition and rhetoric, and contemporary literature. She has consulted on writing with schools throughout Louisiana and for the Wyoming Conference on Freshman and Sophomore English. She has also chaired the New Orleans Writing Project. At the University of New Orleans, she has directed the freshman program, chaired the English department, and served as associate dean of liberal arts.

## **Sallie Snyder**

Sallie Snyder is a former language arts/reading supervisor for the Miami-Dade County Public School District where, during her 25 years in the district, she also taught high school English at all levels and was an assistant principal for curriculum.

In addition to her other responsibilities as supervisor, she served as the district administrator for Dr. Judith Langer's study on exemplary English instruction in the Miami-Dade County area. She also had the pleasure of being both a facilitator for the Zelda Glazer Miami-Dade County Public Schools/University of Miami Writing Institute for 10 years and a member of the Pacesetter English teacher training team for three years. While working as a supervisor, she served on several state committees and served a term as president of the Florida Council of Language Arts Supervisors.

Before moving to Florida, Snyder taught language arts in Ohio, California, Nebraska, and Georgia. Now living on the southern Oregon coast, she is an adjunct teacher of writing at Southwestern Oregon Community College, and, in addition to her work for Maryland Public Television, works part-time as a consultant for a publisher.

## **Betty Tillman**

Betty Tillman currently teaches ethnic literature, American literature, and European literature at Raoul Wallenberg Traditional High School in San Francisco. She serves as head of the English department there, and is very instrumental in its program to support beginning teachers. Her 35-year career as a language arts educator has also included numerous positions on Wallenberg's Literature Review and Recommendations and Fine Arts Core Curriculum Committees. Holding a master's degree in theater and communications from the University of New Orleans (LSUNO), Tillman has advised the drama clubs in many of the schools in which she has taught, and coordinated talent shows and other opportunities for student artists to showcase their talents. In September 2000, she was selected to take part in the Toyota International Teacher Study Program in Japan.

Tillman has also created and presented a video for middle and high school teachers on teaching techniques for African American students, entitled, "I Didn't Do Nothin', Why You Always Picking on Me?"