

Annenberg/CPB  
Video Library Guide

# **Making Meaning in Literature:**

A Video Library, Grades 6–8

A nine-part professional development video library  
for grade 6–8 literature and language arts teachers

**Produced by Maryland Public Television**

***Making Meaning in Literature: A Video Library, Grades 6–8***

is produced by  
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# About This Video Library

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## Overview

Every effective reader knows that engaging in literature brings many rewards. Literature's words and images are great cultural storehouses, affording readers a glimpse into the things centuries of people have thought, experienced, and valued. Through poems, plays, short stories, and novels, readers can escape their own lives—if only for a few moments—and become a part of things past, present, and future. As they live within the world of the text, readers can also consider a host of possibilities, stretching their minds to acquire an acute awareness of what they are and who they might be.

The key to this process is active involvement. Readers who interact with literature, experiencing the emotion of the plot with the characters and identifying elements both familiar and strange in the story, are better able to enjoy the true fruits of a text. Effective readers both expect and seek out this textual encounter, creating meaning by comparing the literary world to their own thoughts and experiences.

A decade of research conducted by Dr. Judith Langer, Director of The National Research Center on English Learning & Achievement at the State University of New York–Albany, has clearly demonstrated that this kind of experience with literature is something capable readers do as a matter of course. Dr. Langer talks about this process as one of creating an “envisionment” of the text. Envisionments are constantly evolving, painting rich pictures of understanding that effective readers construct as they make sense of what they are reading.

In the workshop *Conversations in Literature*, readers from all aspects of the educational community exemplify Dr. Langer's findings through their thoughtful conversations in literature. You may want to consult this workshop and its Web site at [www.learner.org/envisioningliterature](http://www.learner.org/envisioningliterature) to learn more about envisionment building and its implications for the classroom.

In her research, Dr. Langer found that students in all stages of learning and at all ability levels can and do create envisionments—if they are scaffolded by teachers who create an atmosphere in the classroom where they are supported to do so. In such an atmosphere, teachers expect that, as they read, students will probably have more questions than answers. They anticipate that the time they spend together will be a time for talking through these questions, working together as a literary community to dissect, unravel, and move forward within the text. In such a community, each learner is expected to offer a particular perspective on the text, and is respected for doing so, not only by the teacher, but also by his or her peers.

In this approach to interacting with literature, the teacher is no longer the sole source of information about a text, or the arbiter of what is a correct or incorrect interpretation of its words. The text itself is not looked at as a source of information, where readers go about their work trying to find the names of characters, a plot event, or validations for a generally accepted interpretation of the text that long-ago literary critics have offered. Rather, in an envisionment-building classroom, the task before readers is more open-ended. They read to explore the entire universe of the story world, seeking possible meanings and alternative interpretations. Simply put, they read literature as literature, not as a nonfiction article or a “how to” book, where the sole purpose is to converge on kernels of information.

In this video library, you will visit with language arts teachers and their middle grade students, all working together to construct the kind of literary communities where envisionment-building flourishes. With the counsel of our advisors, we have chosen these eight classrooms to represent as many geographical, ethnic, social, and student achievement levels as possible. The eight teachers you will meet have found a variety of ways to respect and support their students as they work. These classroom visits were captured as they occurred, offering a glimpse into some innovative ways of establishing and nurturing a literary and highly literate community in which all members move forward as diverse and respected voices.

# About This Video Library, cont'd.

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## Video Library Components

*Making Meaning in Literature: A Video Library, Grades 6–8* includes these resources:

- Nine videos, featuring teachers working with middle school students in classrooms around the country to enrich their lives by helping them engage in exemplary works of literature:
  1. Introducing the Envisionment-Building Classroom  
Length: 18:55
  2. Building a Literary Community  
Featuring Joe Bernhart of Houston, Texas  
Length: 18:55
  3. Asking Questions  
Featuring Ana Hernandez of Miami, Florida  
Length: 18:55
  4. Facilitating Discussion  
Featuring Tanya Schnabl of Sherburne, New York  
Length: 18:55
  5. Seminar Discussion  
Featuring Dorothy Franklin of Chicago, Illinois  
Length: 18:55
  6. Dramatic Tableaux  
Featuring Jan Currence of Berlin, Maryland  
Length: 18:55
  7. Readers as Individuals  
Featuring Flora Tyler of Las Cruces, New Mexico  
Length: 18:56
  8. The Teacher's Role in a Literary Community  
Featuring Barry Hoonan of Bainbridge Island, Washington  
Length: 18:55
  9. Whole-Group Discussions  
Featuring Linda Rief of Durham, New Hampshire  
Length: 18:55
- A library guide, designed to help you interact with the videos independently.

You can use the library guide as a focus of your outreach activities, or as you moderate or participate in workshop sessions centered on the video clips. The guide features pre- and post-viewing activities and discussion questions centered on each video clip.

- A Web site at **[www.learner.org/envisioningliterature](http://www.learner.org/envisioningliterature)**.

Here, you can access more resources about specific videos in the library. The Web site also has some unique resources, such as the original lesson plans and handouts that the teachers in the videos developed as they planned their work. Web site users can also access our Lesson Builder focused on envisionment. This template will help you construct and reflect on activities that promote envisionment-building in your classroom.

# Viewing Suggestions

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## How To Use the Video Library Resources

You can watch each video in the library individually, and use the guide to go further in exploring the teaching techniques and educational issues the video contains. However, the nine videos in this video library can also be used in an integrated fashion.

We would suggest that you first read the library guide to select videos for viewing according to your purposes. Once you have selected a video clip to view, review the specific materials in the guide that relate to it. You will probably want to pay particular attention to the “Before Watching” suggestions to focus your viewing.

After viewing the video, you may want to return to the guide to complete some of the suggested activities and discussion questions. At any point in this process, you may also want to consult the library Web site at [www.learner.org/envisioningliterature](http://www.learner.org/envisioningliterature). There you will find a wealth of materials supporting the video clip, including the original lesson plan that guided the work you saw in the video.

This library guide also contains helpful hints for people who would like to use these video clips as a centerpiece for a professional development seminar for their colleagues. See Tips for Facilitators on page 5 for some suggestions about organizing and moderating these seminars.

## Different Audiences, Different Purposes

*Making Meaning in Literature: A Video Library, Grades 6–8* presents a wealth of resources that the educational community can use in many ways to help students effectively engage in and interact with literature.

**Classroom teachers** can use this video library:

- as a professional development resource, exploring the envisionment-building process.  
In these videos, teachers will be able to observe the teacher attitudes and behaviors that foster a growing community of learners focused on interacting with literature, in which students of all ability levels are succeeding. They can reflect on their current practices, and revisit the goals they have for their work and that of their students. Teachers can work with these videos individually or together with other teachers, using the suggestions in the guide that accompanies each video to direct a professional development workshop.
- as a resource for curriculum planning and text selection that highlights the importance of active interaction with works of literature.

Teachers can also use the text and teacher techniques showcased in the video as a springboard when they plan similar or adapted experiences for their own students.

**Preservice teachers** can use this video library as a practical resource to observe actual classroom events. They can see how teachers present materials related to literature, and the ways they react as students deal with these materials. Because these experiences were recorded as they occurred, viewers will see a complete picture of what happens in an actual class—a stage where the plays aren’t scripted and the actors are exuberant improvisers. In this way, these video experiences give flesh to the bones of educational philosophy in a way texts never could.

**Teacher educators** can use these videos to enhance their instruction, introducing preservice teachers to the realities of the classroom focused on teaching literature. Each video clip could be used as a case study to examine and assess teacher planning and implementation, teacher and student attitudes, the ways in which each lesson succeeds, and the reasons behind its success.

# Viewing Suggestions, cont'd.

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**Administrators**, including supervisors, principals, and group or team leaders, can use this video library:

- as a personal resource to explore new emphases in a tested and highly successful method of language arts instruction.
- as the centerpiece for professional development seminars, to introduce groups of teachers to the ideas and pedagogy that support envisionment building in the classroom.

**Educators** can also use these materials for community outreach, sharing models of sound classroom practices with educationally oriented organizations, such as the PTA. Through them, they can see how students excel when they are encouraged to develop and depend upon their own mental acuity to engage in works of great literary merit.

This video library can also be used to show **families** successful language arts classrooms throughout the country. Teachers can show families the videos as models for appropriate ways to support their children's education at home, either as a partner with a school or in a home schooling situation. Activities or discussion questions from the guide can be reproduced as handouts to spur parent participation.

## A Word About the Educational Focus of the Project

This video library celebrates classroom practices that promote active and engaged learning. The teachers in the video library have made these basic assumptions about their work and their students' work:

- Good works of literature are an important part of every language arts curriculum. They can help students as they learn to read, write, speak, and listen.
- Readers can purposefully interact with a variety of literature to make sense of the text. In doing so, they rely on what they know and what they have experienced, and employ not only their logic, but also their intuition.
- In this interaction, readers form unique and diverse understandings that grow richer as they are shared with their peers in a respectful classroom atmosphere. These understandings are firmly rooted in the text.
- Through active engagement in a text, students develop strong mental muscles of logic and analysis on which they can rely throughout their academic career.

## Learning Objectives

After viewing these videos, and interacting with them in some of the ways suggested in this library guide, all members of the language arts educational community will be able to:

- Explain how the teaching practices of the classrooms they have observed in the videos are similar and different from their own practices, or those they have observed.
- Describe ways in which teachers can use or adapt the activities in the videos for use in their own classrooms.
- Reflect on the value of encouraging students to take a more active and engaged role in their work with literary texts, and the implications this has for their role in facilitating this work.



# Tips for Facilitators

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The *Making Meaning in Literature* video library components can be used to help plan professional development workshops for many different groups, including classroom and preservice teachers, team leaders or lead teachers, and supervisors.

You can use the list below to help you make these seminars as helpful as possible for their participants.

## Planning for a Professional Development Opportunity

- Contact the people you would like to attend the workshop, offering several alternate dates for your meeting. Try not to pick dates that coincide with other activities or vacation days.
- Think about what you hope to accomplish with the group. Are you interested in having them see another classroom to look for new ways to approach literature, or for classroom management techniques, or text selection, for example? Try to make a mission statement to share with the group during your first meeting.
- Review the materials related to each video and select the videos your group will view. Plan a logical order for presenting the clips you have selected. Try to keep in mind the group's main interests in doing so.
- Find and secure a place for your meeting. The location should be easily accessible to the group, with adequate seating, and appropriate outlets for a VCR and monitor.
- Notify group members of the meeting time and place. Establish a system for notifying members in case of an emergency postponement.

## Before Each Meeting

- Review the video you intend to view in conjunction with the print materials for the video in this library guide.
- Decide on a time frame for the workshop. We suggest that you consider 20 minutes of pre-viewing discussion or other activities, 20 minutes to view the video, and 20 minutes for a follow-up discussion or activity. The library guide lists suggested activities and discussions for pre- and post-viewing. You can select from among them, adapt them for your group's purposes, or create activities of your own.
- Gather any other materials you will need for the discussions or activities you have planned. You may want to assemble notebooks or folders with blank pages for participants to use in taking notes or reacting to the discussions or activities in which they engage.
- Familiarize yourself with the equipment in the room where you will be meeting.

## During Each Meeting

- Greet the group and explain why they have been assembled and, briefly, give an overview of what they will do in the session.
- Set their purpose for viewing the video. This can be a selected question for discussion listed in the library guide, or one of your own choosing.
- Encourage participants to note any comments they may have as they watch.
- Show the video clip. Ask participants if they would like to review any parts of the video.
- Follow up the video with a discussion point or activity in the library guide. You can adapt these or create your own, depending on the needs of the group. Try to present a mix of talking, watching, and doing during each session.

# Tips for Facilitators, cont'd.

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- If you are having a problem starting discussions, ask the group to talk about the things they *didn't* understand in the video clip.
- Watch the time carefully and adjourn on time. Talk about your next meeting, reminding the group about time, date, and place. Remind participants that they can find out more information related to the video at the library Web site at **[www.learner.org/envisioningliterature](http://www.learner.org/envisioningliterature)**.

## Materials Needed

You will need to assemble the following materials to help you in using these video clips in a professional development workshop:

- A VCR and viewer (television set or monitor) to show the videos
- Notebooks or paper, pencils or pens

### TIPS

- Be sure to position the monitor at a place where all participants can view it easily.
- Adjust the lighting to avoid reflections or glare.
- Check the connections between the VCR and TV or monitor, and make sure they are both plugged into a working outlet.

Other materials may be needed for activities suggested in this guide. Consult the guide materials related to each video clip to find out the scope of these activities and plan your session accordingly.

### TIPS

- Read the sections of the guide devoted to activities and discussion questions related to each video several days before the workshop. Note materials that are needed and gather them before your session begins.
- A dry-erase board, flip chart, or large pieces of art paper will help in recording major points raised in session discussions.

# About the Contributors

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## Featured Teachers/Schools

### **Joe Bernhart, Fondren Middle School, Houston, Texas**

Joe Bernhart received his degree in secondary English (K–12) from the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee in 1994. Following a year of substitute teaching in Milwaukee public schools, he took a full-time language arts position at Fondren Middle School in Houston, Texas, where he has worked for the past six years. He currently teaches seventh-grade magnet and pre-AP students.

Mr. Bernhart is a lead teacher in the Houston Independent School District. He is also active in the Greater Houston Area Writing Project. During 2000, he assisted as a convention planner for the annual middle school convention of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), and participated in the National Writing Project, a month-long professional development workshop.

Believing that literature helps people understand themselves and the world in which they live, Bernhart uses contemporary young adult literature to engage students in discussions on such critical topics as race, equality, and justice. He is committed to teaching in an urban district.

Fondren Middle School in Houston, Texas, is an urban magnet school for math and science. Tracking divides students into a magnet (or honors) program, a pre-AP program, and a general program. While most students in the general track can walk to school, many magnet and pre-AP children are bused from outside the immediate area. The majority of children are either African American (60 to 65 percent) or Latino (20 to 30 percent), with a range of other ethnicities, including Asian, accounting for the rest of the student body. The school has only a small percentage of Anglo students. Although Fondren's enrollment has decreased in the last few years, it stands at more than 1,000 students, packed into a building designed for 800. All the lockers have been bolted shut, and the school uses portable T buildings to house some classes.

Class size ranges from 30 to 35 students, creating a challenge for teachers like Joe Bernhart who employ collaborative learning strategies in their classrooms. Nevertheless, the set-up of Mr. Bernhart's room emphasizes the importance of students working together. Depending on the activity, students sit either at pairs of desks facing each other or in groups of four to five desks pushed together. Because the school uses 90-minute periods on an A/B schedule, Mr. Bernhart has ample time for student-centered activities. He draws on a mix of informal and authentic assessments to gauge children's progress. Students can demonstrate mastery through such alternatives as skits, talk shows, scrapbooks, acrostics, and movie recommendations to a character.

The district mandates certain skills that teachers must cover, but does not require the use of particular texts, leaving teachers free to select the books they will use in their classrooms. With his seventh-grade magnet and pre-AP students, Mr. Bernhart tries to introduce engaging young adult literature, often with a Latino or African American protagonist. Although students must pass the high-stakes Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS), Mr. Bernhart does not teach directly to the test, believing that he addresses the necessary skills through his regular curriculum.

### **Dr. Janis Currence, Ed.D., Stephen Decatur Middle School, Berlin, Maryland**

Dr. Janis Currence holds an undergraduate certification in special education and elementary education from the State University of New York at Geneseo, a master's degree in education from Salisbury State University, with a concentration in supervision and administration, and a doctorate in curriculum and instruction from the University of Maryland's School of Education at College Park.

Dr. Currence has over 30 years of teaching experience in a variety of settings, including primary and secondary special education, a program for socially and emotionally challenged secondary students, and regular English classes at the fourth-, sixth-, and eighth-grade levels. She also has extensive experience working with teaching professionals. She has been a writing resource teacher for teachers of eighth- and ninth-grade English in Worcester County, Maryland, and has provided in-service programs for teachers in Worcester, Wicomico, and Dorchester Counties. In 1998, as an adjunct professor at Salisbury State University, she taught a course entitled "Reading and Writing in the Content Areas for Secondary Teachers." She has served as both professional education consultant and teacher/consultant for the Eastern Shore Writing Project, and co-directed two writing project Summer Institutes at Salisbury State University.

# About the Contributors, cont'd.

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Dr. Currence presently teaches seventh-grade integrated language arts at Stephen Decatur Middle School in Berlin, Maryland. Teaching on the classroom level—or as she says, “in the trenches”—is her true professional calling.

Stephen Decatur Middle School is located in Berlin, five miles from Ocean City on Maryland’s Eastern Shore. It is the largest of Worcester County’s three middle schools, with approximately 650 students in grades seven and eight, of whom 30 percent are minorities. Decatur draws its students from three areas—a retirement community, a tourist destination, and a rural town. Most live outside walking distance. Families represent a wide range of incomes. Many older family members, especially those in Asian American households, are employed at nearby Perdue Farms, while many others work in Ocean City’s thriving tourism industry. At the time of our visit to Dr. Currence’s classroom, Stephen Decatur was administering the Maryland School Performance Assessment Program (MSPAP) at the end of each year. Results were used to rate the school and had no bearing on whether a child was promoted. Students also take the Maryland Functional Reading and Writing tests, which they must eventually pass in order to graduate from high school.

Although its students come from neighborhoods pocketed by both ethnicity and social class, Decatur has a close-knit school community. The building’s four wings house separate schools-within-a-school, each with its own teaching team and student population. This fosters a sense of security and identity by allowing children to interact within a smaller group of peers and adults. Teaching teams, two at each grade level, encourage interdisciplinary learning and create a standard set of behavioral and academic expectations across the day. Jan Currence’s seventh graders know, for instance, that they must use correct punctuation not only in integrated language arts (ILA), but also in science and social studies. Dr. Currence’s team includes two math teachers, two ILA teachers, one social studies teacher, and a science teacher, as well as an educational assistant and an in-class special education resource person. The team has regular meetings to facilitate cross-curricular planning. Class periods are double-blocked to allow greater freedom of instruction.

Within a seventh-grade class of 26 to 28 students, Dr. Currence may have reading levels spanning from second grade through college. According to county mandates, she must focus on particular genres—realistic fiction, historical fiction, mythology, poetry, and drama—but within this structure she may select the individual texts her students will examine. To accommodate the range of interests and skill levels in her classroom, and to give children a voice in their own education, she allows students great flexibility in what they choose to read. She also reads books aloud to engage children in challenging discussions of texts that are above their reading level but not their comprehension. Individualized learning goals and performance-based assessments are the norm, and Dr. Currence regularly enlists students’ help in developing rubrics and grading criteria.

## **Dorothy Franklin, DeWitt Clinton Elementary School, Chicago, Illinois**

Dorothy Franklin began her teaching career 16 years ago as a coordinating teacher for four-year-olds at a suburban Chicago daycare center. After two years, she accepted a position as a teacher’s aide in the reading center of the Evanston Township High School. During her 10 years there, she received her elementary teaching certificate with an endorsement in language arts and embarked on a master’s degree in reading. She also developed and implemented a pull-out program for students living below the poverty line who scored below the 35th percentile on standardized tests in reading and math.

For the past six years, she has taught sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade English language arts at DeWitt Clinton Elementary School in Chicago, Illinois. Her hope is to inspire students who did not receive adequate literacy experience in the critical primary years. In the past, she sponsored a student newspaper that received critical acclaim from Mayor Richard Daley, and she now runs a drama club where she helps students write and produce several shows each school year. Franklin has also taken a leadership role in establishing a school-wide reading team at Clinton, coordinating quarterly meetings, sharing standards with school staff, and providing one-to-one support for new teachers.

In 1999, Ms. Franklin won the Golden Apple Award for Excellence in Teaching from the Golden Apple Foundation in Chicago, Illinois. She then joined the foundation’s newly formed Reading Interest Group to draft a Reading Bill of Rights, which has since been ratified by the foundation and accepted by Mayor Daley. The committee, in concert with Chicago Public School administrators, is spearheading a campaign to assist all schools in identifying or hiring reading specialists.

# About the Contributors, cont'd.

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In 2000, Ms. Franklin participated in the Chicago Area Writing Project Summer Institute and now acts as teacher/consultant, offering demonstrations for other educators. She has delivered presentations at Clinton and Northeastern Illinois University on literature-based instruction. She has published an article, "Thinking About Thinking: A New Look at Comprehension," in the *Illinois Reading Council Journal*, and most recently co-wrote a proposal to open a new charter school in Chicago.

DeWitt Clinton Elementary is an urban K–8 school in Chicago, Illinois, that serves a primarily first-generation immigrant population speaking more than 17 different languages. The majority of students are Hispanic, Middle Eastern, Russian, or Bosnian, with a small minority of other nationalities and ethnicities. Many of Clinton's children require ESOL or bilingual assistance. Approximately 50 percent are below grade level in core subjects, and 85 percent qualify for free or reduced lunch. In the tradition of a neighborhood school, all of the approximately 1600 students live within walking distance of school grounds. Clinton experiences a high rate of transience as families move into and out of the surrounding areas.

Classes at Clinton hover around 28 to 30 children of all abilities. In Dorothy Franklin's double-blocked language arts classes, the average reading level is fifth grade, with some students as low as third and others as high as ninth. Franklin also has students in various stages of the bilingual program. Teachers meet in grade level teams to discuss the status and well-being of individual students. Language arts teachers for grades five through eight also hold weekly meetings to discuss issues of curriculum.

Illinois does not mandate texts that schools must teach, only skills and concepts that they should address. Some schools have created a list of approved texts, but teachers at Clinton have free rein in selecting their material. Franklin has chosen to use novels and self-selected reading materials.

Torn between the order of a traditional classroom and the excitement of collaborative learning, she struggles to strike a suitable balance in her own room. Students usually sit in rows, with desks grouped in twos or threes to facilitate discussions. At times, however, they arrange their seats in a large circle so they can participate in a whole-class dialogue.

## **Ana Hernandez, Howard Doolin Middle School, Miami, Florida**

Ana Hernandez earned her bachelor's degree in English education from Florida International University in April 1997. While at the university, she substitute-taught in the Dade County Public Schools and was a lead teacher for SummerLink '95 and '96, a six-week program for inner-city minority children. She has served as both vice president and president of the university's Future Educators of America and was selected to the Omicron Delta Kappa National Leadership Honor Society. She was also founder and student editor of *EduTrends*, a monthly newsletter for the Future Educators of America Organization.

In 1998, Ms. Hernandez was honored as the Sallie Mae Outstanding First-Year Teacher for her work in the Campbell Drive Middle School in Homestead, Florida. A member of the Phi Delta Kappa National Education Honor Society, she has also served as vice president and president of this organization.

Ms. Hernandez is currently working toward a Master of Science degree in education at the University of Miami, focusing on reading and learning disabilities. She teaches sixth- and seventh-grade language arts to gifted students at the Howard A. Doolin Middle School in Miami.

Named after a Dade County music teacher, Howard Doolin Middle School in Miami, Florida, is a fine arts school with an emphasis on character education. The school building was constructed in 1997 and has a spacious, open feel. It serves the rapidly growing, racially and economically mixed neighborhood of West Kendall. Most children walk to school or take a bus paid for by their families; the district does not arrange transportation if students live within two miles of school. The student population is approximately 82 percent Hispanic (many from South America) with a smaller percentage of African Americans, Caucasians, and Asian Americans. Although many students are bilingual, classes are conducted in English. Students take the Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test (FCAT), an essay and short-answer exam, at the end of each year. The school receives a grade based on student results.

# About the Contributors, cont'd.

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Doolin boasts a Gifted and Talented (GT) program into which students are admitted based on an IQ test or teacher recommendation. Class periods last nearly two hours, in an ABC schedule, allowing adequate time for a wide range of activities within a single period. Because GT classes are looped in the sixth and seventh grade, teachers like Ana Hernandez have the additional luxury of working with the same students for two full years before passing them to their eighth-grade instructors. As a department, the language arts teachers establish a scope and sequence that prescribes what standards and objectives teachers should address, but allows for teacher discretion in how to meet these goals.

Ms. Hernandez strives to incorporate connections from literature into what students are studying in other subjects and into their own lives and choices. She employs a mix of both formal exams and project-based assessments in her classroom to monitor student progress.

## **Barry Hoonan, The Odyssey School, Bainbridge Island, Washington**

Barry Hoonan, a two-time participant in the Fullbright Teacher Exchange to Great Britain, has 19 years of experience in public school classrooms. He currently teaches the grade five/six cluster at Odyssey, an alternative school for grades one through eight on Bainbridge Island, Washington, which features multi-age classes and a high level of parent involvement. Although Hoonan teaches all subjects in his cluster, his true passions are literature and writing.

Mr. Hoonan has a master's degree in teaching from Lesley College in Massachusetts. Winner of the 1990 Christa MacAuliffe Award for teaching excellence in Washington State, he has recently seen his work published in *Beyond Reading and Writing* by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and *Literature Circles and Response* (Christopher-Gordon Publishers, 1995). He is also a member of NCTE's Reading Commission, and he serves as a consultant for school districts conducting workshops on integrating reading, writing, poetry, and the arts into instruction. Mr. Hoonan's teaching style has been influenced by such notables as Judith Langer, Linda Rief, Nancie Atwell, Donald Graves, and Jerome Harste.

The Odyssey School is an alternative public school on Bainbridge Island, eight miles from Seattle by ferry. It is one of four elementary schools serving this community of 20,000. When it opened five years ago, it had 75 students in grades one through six, organized into multi-grade groupings known as clusters. This year, the school grew to 125 students with the addition of a grade seven/eight cluster. Class size at Odyssey is on a par with that at other island elementary schools. Students are looped, staying with the same instructor for two years. Although approximately 80 percent of older family members commute to Seattle, the school represents a wide range of incomes and includes artisans and local farmers as well as stockbrokers and lawyers. Families must agree to volunteer between five and 10 hours a month at the school before they may enroll their child. With twice as many applications as available spots, the school has a lengthy waiting list and is currently evaluating whether it needs to undertake further expansion—and if so, how to achieve that growth while maintaining the current sense of community.

Odyssey is located in a spacious old elementary library building and is designed to have the nurturing feel of a one-room schoolhouse. Students call teachers by their first names. The elementary grades spend part of each morning together, and they share computers and other resources as needed. Each elementary cluster has one teacher who is responsible for all instruction. Within such a small environment, families are a vital resource, sharing their skills and expertise in the classroom. For instance, since Barry Hoonan's expertise lies primarily in language arts, he recruits family members who are strong in math and science to help teach advanced concepts to his cluster. Teachers of grades one through six coordinate a three-year cycle of instruction together. Although the state mandates that children must know certain concepts by certain grade levels, it has been supportive of Odyssey's alternative approach to education.

Like all public school students in Washington, children at Odyssey must take the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) in grades four, seven, and 10. However, for Mr. Hoonan, assessment is far more than a measure of what students have accomplished; it is also a tool to help them grow. Mr. Hoonan keeps a daily journal on the progress of individual students and targets five or six students a day for individual assistance. He has children maintain a portfolio of their work, and actively involves them in establishing the criteria on which they will be evaluated. In addition, he asks families to conduct formal interviews with their children at various points in the year, using a sheet of questions designed to show students the progression of their thinking over time.

# About the Contributors, cont'd.

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## **Linda Rief, Oyster River Middle School, Durham, New Hampshire**

Linda Rief is a full-time eighth-grade language arts teacher at Oyster River Middle School in Durham, New Hampshire. She is also an instructor in the University of New Hampshire's Summer Reading and Writing Program and has taught graduate courses for Northeastern University and Simmons College in Boston, Massachusetts. She is the author of *Seeking Diversity: Language Arts With Adolescents* (1992) and *Vision and Voice: Extending the Literacy Spectrum* (1999)—a book and companion CD—both published by Heinemann. Several book chapters and articles have appeared in *Portfolio Portraits* (ed. Donald Graves and Bonnie Sunstein), *The Portfolio Standard*, *Language Arts, Learning, Educational Leadership*, *Instructor K–8*, and other professional journals. She is co-editor with Maureen Barbieri of *All That Matters: What Is It We Value in School and Beyond?* (Heinemann, 1995) and *Workshop 6: The Teacher as Writer* (Heinemann, 1994). With Barbieri, she co-founded and co-edited, for five years, *Voices From the Middle*, a journal for middle school teachers, published by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE). She has also designed and hosted two television series for the Massachusetts Corporation for Educational Telecommunications in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

In 2000, Ms. Rief was the recipient of NCTE's Edwin A. Hoey Award for excellence in English Language Arts teaching, a finalist for New Hampshire Teacher of the Year, and the recipient of the New Hampshire English/Language Arts Teacher of the Year. In 1999, she received the Richard W. Halle Award presented by the middle school assembly of NCTE, and in 1988, she was the recipient of one of two Kennedy Center Fellowships for Teachers of the Arts.

Although Ms. Rief continues to conduct numerous workshops throughout the U.S., sharing what her students know and are able to do as readers, writers, and learners, her full-time commitment remains with her students.

Oyster River Middle School is located in Durham, New Hampshire, not far from the state university. Serving 800 students in grades five through eight, the school strives to maintain its focus on students as individuals, and on their particular educational, social, and environmental needs as adolescents. Students are assigned to a team of four teachers (social studies, science, math, and language arts) who will work with them for the duration of the school year. Teams are responsible for between 100 and 110 students, and class size stands at 25 to 28. Every quarter, a different specialist in music, art, health, or life skills joins the team. Students do not have to pass a high-stakes exam at the end of middle school, but they do participate in testing through the New Hampshire Educational Improvement and Assessment Program (NHEIA). The state evaluates school performance based on the results.

Classes at Oyster River are heterogeneously grouped and meet every day for 55-minute periods. The daily schedule includes a common planning time, allowing teams to check on the progress and well-being of individual students in a timely fashion and to meet with family members as necessary. Teams also use these daily meetings to explore possibilities for making cross-curricular connections—particularly those with local significance. One year, for instance, in a collaborative project with the music teacher, Linda Rief's eighth-grade students studied the nearby Lowell mills from various academic perspectives and capped the experience off by writing and producing a musical.

Ms. Rief incorporates multiple intelligences and alternative assessment opportunities into her teaching, believing that young adolescents need choice in what they study and how they express what they have learned. Her students keep portfolios and academic journals to provide a long-term view of their learning, and they decide which pieces to submit in their portfolios for a grade. They may even place work from other classes in their language arts portfolio. Ms. Rief believes in using evaluation as a teaching tool, saying that "evaluation should keep them moving forward, it shouldn't stop them." Together, she and her classes establish grading criteria, and students often grade their work before she does. They also complete quarterly self-evaluations to measure their own progress over time.

# About the Contributors, cont'd.

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## **Tanya Schnabl, Sherburne-Earlville Middle School, Sherburne, New York**

Tanya Schnabl, a sixth-grade language arts teacher at Sherburne-Earlville Middle School in Sherburne, New York, has made a career of helping students connect literature to their own lives. She began teaching 14 years ago at a high school in Guilderland, New York. Within a year, she moved to Farnsworth Middle School, also in Guilderland, and found her calling. Hired as a language arts and social studies teacher, she came to realize that integrated, thematic units helped students make connections across the curriculum. Schnabl worked closely with other teachers to plan these kinds of experiences.

In 1993, Ms. Schnabl wrote a chapter in the book *Children Exploring Their World: Theme Teaching in Elementary Schools*. Soon after, her classroom was highlighted in *Instructor* magazine for a theme on architecture. In 1995, she was chosen to be an assessor for the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. While in Guilderland, she also created a summer “Boost” program for struggling readers.

Ms. Schnabl works with teachers throughout the area, with an emphasis on implementing alternative teaching methods to help students be more successful learners. She encourages teachers to communicate with each other and find ways to integrate subject areas in order to make learning more meaningful to students.

Sherburne-Earlville Middle School is located 15 minutes from Colgate University in rural New York State. The school building houses both the middle school (450 students in grades six through eight) and the high school, each with its own principal. Sherburne’s school district covers the largest area of any in the state. Historically, the region has relied on farming for its economic base, and although a few of the school’s families are employed at the university or nearby Proctor & Gamble, many others live on working farms or in trailers. Students often have to help with chores before school or to baby-sit siblings in the afternoon until a parent arrives home. Approximately 47 percent qualify for free or reduced lunch. As is typical of the region, minorities make up only one or two percent of the student body. Despite the wide range of family incomes, people describe Sherburne as a close-knit, friendly town with a strong sense of community. The school actively encourages the involvement of families in their children’s education, and they have recently begun a family literacy program to improve the reading skills of parents and other relatives.

According to standardized tests administered at the end of eighth grade, Sherburne-Earlville is a typical rural school. The school climate, however, is vibrant, and both the faculty and the administration are committed to their students. Over the past several years, Sherburne-Earlville has hired additional language arts teachers to reduce class sizes to the current 10 to 16 students per section. The school now hopes to do the same with the other core subjects. At the time of the taping, classes met for 80-minute periods every other day, but in Fall 2001, sixth graders began to have 80 minutes of language arts every day. In 2002, the school also instituted heterogeneous class groupings. Every classroom has four computers with Internet connections. In addition, Sherburne has worked to provide teachers with the tools they need in the classroom—for instance, by assigning them to interdisciplinary teams that share a small subset of the larger student population. Teams meet two or three times a week to brainstorm possibilities for integration and cross-curricular collaboration, to discuss the welfare of their students, and to share their support for one another. The school also joins with representatives from the local elementary and high schools to map a cohesive curriculum across grade levels.

Within the framework established by the school, teachers are free to design their own curriculum. For Tanya Schnabl in her sixth-grade language arts class, the only mandate is that students must have 10 polished pieces of writing in their portfolio by the end of the year. Ms. Schnabl is a proponent of using literature to enhance the study of history and cultures. This year, in collaboration with a social studies teacher, she helped her students orchestrate a Greek festival, an Egyptian funeral procession, and a feudal feast. The culmination of extended study, these celebrations were held after school to allow families to attend. The final cross-curricular activity of the year involved math, science, social studies, and language arts classes as students assessed the impact of a proposed dam and met at a mock town council meeting to lobby for or against its construction.

Ms. Schnabl enlists family members in their children’s learning through frequent notes or phone calls. She also involves students in assessing their own academic performance, asking them to evaluate their work according to a rubric and to determine what they would have to do to “bump it up” a grade.



# About the Contributors, cont'd.

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## **Flora Tyler, Picacho Middle School, Las Cruces, New Mexico**

Flora Tyler graduated from New Mexico State University in 1980 with a degree in elementary education and an endorsement in K–12 special education. For 12 years, she worked as a special education classroom teacher of students in kindergarten through ninth grade, incorporating Nancie Atwell's vision of readers and writers workshops into her own special education setting. More recently, she has shifted to a regular classroom in the hope of reaching a larger population of students. She currently teaches sixth-grade language arts at Picacho Middle School in Las Cruces, New Mexico. Beginning in the 2001–2002 school year, she will teach seventh-grade language arts at Sierra Middle School.

In addition to challenging her students to take risks and stretch their expectations, Ms. Tyler has also worked as mentor to teachers who want to expand their own repertoire of classroom skills and strategies. In this capacity, she has reached beyond the walls of her own school to present at various conferences at the district level.

Ms. Tyler credits the work of Yetta Goodman, Donald Graves, Nancie Atwell, Lucy Calkins, Regie Routman, Linda Rief, David Lazear, Thomas Armstrong, and Howard Gardner as influential to her understanding of how people learn, as well as the approach she takes to assessment in the classroom.

Picacho Middle School in Las Cruces, New Mexico, is founded on the principles of collaboration and interdisciplinary learning. Students in grades six through eight work with cross-curricular, thematic units that have bearing on children's daily lives and decisions. The school hopes to help students learn to make smart choices based on facts, not myths and misperceptions. Classes are also designed to help students feel good about themselves through a sixth-grade team emphasis on multiple intelligences. As proof that this philosophy works, the school touts its high daily attendance and active programs in music, art, athletics, and community service.

The student body is predominantly Hispanic, with smaller populations of Anglo, African American, Native American, and Asian students. While some children come from affluent households, many are from migrant families or live in shelters and other temporary housing. Language barriers and a lack of staff to conduct home visits complicate the process of contacting family members. Although a few schools in the area have begun dual prep programs where all students are taught in two languages, Picacho continues to use an ESL approach in which students are mainstreamed with help. As required by the state, all sixth graders take the New Mexico Writing Assessment, in which students have three hours to respond to a writing prompt. The state also mandates that students in grades six through eight take the TerraNova, which helps determine what rating a school receives.

Class size at Picacho ranges from 23 to 25 students meeting in 85-minute blocks. Teachers at each grade level are divided into two teams, each responsible for 120 to 150 children. They have one 45-minute common planning period. In Flora Tyler's sixth-grade team, teachers collaborate to sketch out the highlights and themes for the year's curriculum, including at least two week-long interdisciplinary units per semester. The team's emphasis is on challenging all students through individualized expectations and support. Tyler also works with the second language arts teacher to plan common objectives for each quarter, although their classes usually take different routes to arrive at these goals.

Ms. Tyler's classroom is a celebration of different learning styles. She frequently uses music, art, and imagery to set a mood or make a point—for instance, reinforcing the meaning of punctuation by having students click, clap, and snap the different rhythms each mark produces. Students are required to incorporate multiple intelligences into any presentation, and may ask their classmates for their help and expertise in completing a project. Tyler's goal is to instill a sense of self-worth in each of her students by helping them to discover and develop their areas of strength.

# About the Contributors, cont'd.

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## Advisors and Content Experts

### 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.

Dr. 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.

Dr. Langer is director of the National Research Center on English Learning & Achievement (CELA) funded by the United States Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement. She is also chair of the Department of Educational Theory and Practice.

Dr. Langer serves as the chief content advisor for all the *Envisioning Literature* workshops and libraries, including *Conversations in Literature* and the *Making Meaning in Literature* video library and workshop.

### Dale Allender

Dale Allender currently serves as the associate executive director of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE). A former teacher in the Iowa City Community School District, Mr. 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, Mr. 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 21international, multicultural high school students; and *Regret to Inform*, an award-winning documentary on widows from the Vietnam War, featured on PBS.

Some of Mr. 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 & Achievement (CELA). 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, Dr. 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, Dr. 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 in particular on 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, Dr. Applebee consults at the national, state, and district level on effective approaches to curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Dr. 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.

## **Ana Hernandez: See above**

## **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 MWT and MSPAP, 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, Dr. 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 has helped him to see the learning process from still other perspectives. Dr. Horstman welcomes the opportunity to support educators across Maryland in their goal to improve student achievement in English language arts.

## **Mara Johnson**

Mara Johnson, a native of the District of Columbia, holds a bachelor's of science in elementary education from D.C. Teachers College with a minor in speech, a master's degree in reading from University of the District of Columbia, and certification in middle school foundations from National-Louis University.

Ms. Johnson has devoted her career to teaching in Washington's inner city schools, beginning at Meyer Elementary School where she taught grades three through six for 18 years. For the past 11 years, she has been a reading instructor at Garnett-Patterson Middle School (grades six through eight). At various points, she has served as building resource teacher, standards specialist, mentor teacher, the multicultural chairperson, member of the personnel selection and textbook selection committees, spelling bee coordinator, and sponsor of the ski club. She has also won two Teacher-to-Teacher Awards for her work on instructional materials designed to help children develop vocabulary, reading, writing, and speaking skills. During the summer of 2000, she worked as the assistant program manager for the Summer Arts and Smarts Program offered by the D.C. Department of Parks and Recreation.

# About the Contributors, cont'd.

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## **Elizabeth Penfield**

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.

Ms. Penfield's principal 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.

## **Linda Rief: See above**