



Introduction from the Editor's Desk

It's the beginning of September and all over the Commonwealth students are back in the classroom and teachers are working hard to reach all students with texts that engage them and help them grow both as readers and as people. This is a hard job. The cultural divide feels deeper than ever and teachers are increasingly concerned about how to walk the tightrope of putting texts in student's hands that allow them to think and learn, while also honoring the beliefs of families and communities. Teaching can also be a lonely job. This year I am blessed to have an incredible team of teachers. Working closely with these other professionals provides a great deal of confidence which allows us to make the bold choices our students need in order to grow. However, not all of you have the same level of support in your buildings. It can be easy to feel totally alone. This issue of the VEJ provides research and classroom ideas that I hope will help ease the isolation you may be experiencing if you're feeling like a small island in the middle of a big hurricane.

VEJ Writing Award Winners

The lasting impacts of the COVID 19 Pandemic caused the VEJ Writing Award, which was last given in 2020, to go on a long hiatus. This year's award winners were chosen from Volume 71 (Issue 1 and 2) which was published in 2021. The winner of the Virginia English Journal Writing Award for 2024 goes to Michelle Lague from George Mason University for her article *Re-imagining Remediation: Problematizing Adolescent Literacy Remediation* (Volume 71, Issue 1, Summer 2021). If you missed reading it the first time around, I encourage you to do so now. You will find excellent research and ideas that may just change how you approach helping your struggling readers. Michelle will be given a certificate of recognition at the Fall 2024 VATE Conference. Honorable mention goes to Monica R. Manns *An Introduction to the Culturally Responsive Education Model (CREM): A Personal and Professional Journey to Reflective and Transformative Pedagogy* (Volume 71, Issue 1, Summer 2021) and Chea L. Parton for *Who's 'Ere? Identifying and Addressing Rural Erasure in ELA Classrooms* (Volume 71, Issue 2, Winter 2021). While we know these awards are long overdue, we are pleased to finally be able to recognize these wonderful authors.

This Issue

English and Language Arts Educators know that we're not just teaching the mechanics of reading, or the knowledge of how to comprehend a simile. We are deeply invested in providing students with texts where they can see themselves, and find opportunities to explore worlds and cultures they may only be able to visit in their minds. Authors were asked to consider how we can use windows, mirrors and sliding glass doors to engage our students and broaden their perspectives. Within this issue, Katie Dredger shares how critical it is to provide adolescent readers with a wide variety of texts even in the face of book banning calls. Katie D. Phelps shares a text setlist which will "encourage young women to be confident in themselves and others." Liz Shanks provides us with the history of book banning and offers a practical solution to help students read these works through a lens of censorship deepening their understanding of the texts and themselves. Kyle Trott offers a comprehensive overview of Institutional Education which offers excellent grounding in understanding where we have come from in order to see where we are headed. Jodi Bailey reviews Erin Shadowen's book *Critical Thinking in the Elementary Classroom: Engaging Young Minds With Meaningful Content* which gives practical solutions to having in-depth discussions with all ages of students. Finally, since no poetry was submitted for this issue, I'm offering up a favorite lesson based on George Ella Leon's poem "Where I'm From" that I use early in every school year to help create community in the classroom. Consider it a little back to school gift. Have a great year everyone! I hope to see all of you in Harrisonburg in October.

In this issue, the authors focus on ways to use texts, classroom conversations and activities to provide windows, mirrors and sliding glass doors by answering the following questions:

- Why should we continue to provide students with a wide variety of texts in the era of book banning?
- How can we offer female-identifying students books that will help them deal with relational aggression in order to form healthy friendships and coping mechanisms?
- How can we use a lens of censorship in Literature Circles to help students compare and contrast books from the canon with frequently challenged texts?
- How can we use the history of institutional education in order to help shape where we are going?
- How can we teach students to think and speak critically in the classroom at all ages?
- How can we continue to provide students with opportunities to see themselves in the texts they read and learn about the experiences of others who are not like them while still meeting the expectations of all other stakeholders?

I am extremely grateful for the authors who submitted their work and the reviewers that gave valuable feedback. This issue had fewer submissions than the previous one. If you did not get a chance to write or review for this issue, I hope you will consider doing so in the future! You will find the call, deadline and submission information at the end of this issue.

Sincerely -

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