# ENGLISH IN TEXAS

Challenge
*Accepted*:
Teaching *with*
strength *and*
resilience
*in times of* change.

TCTELA
Texas Council of Teachers of English Language Arts

# 2023

## Embracing Boldness

An Exploration
of the Power
of Language

# 58TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE & EXPOSITION
## EMBASSY SUITES BY HILTON | DENTON CONVENTION CENTER

FEBRUARY 3-5, 2023

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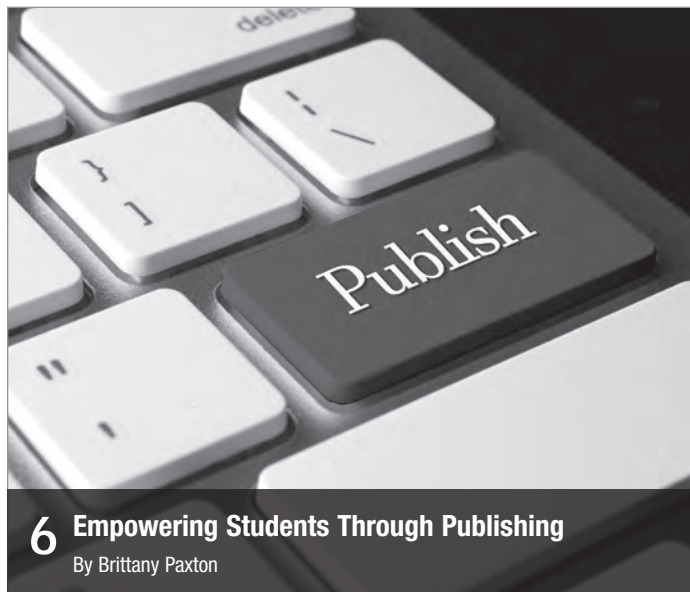
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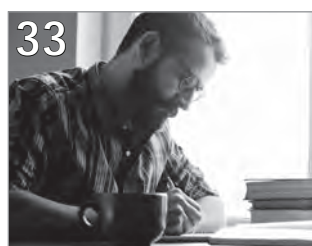By Kelsey Walker and Sally Seitz

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Dear Readers,

Greetings! Here we are at the beginning of another school year, perhaps approaching this one with caution, wondering what kinds of changes might happen this year. How appropriate that the theme for this issue is "Challenge Accepted: Teaching With Strength and Resilience in Times of Change." While this theme explores change, it also focuses on the development of strength and resilience. The articles in this issue are not only intended to explore changes we can make in our classrooms that will benefit students, but also to focus on developing strength and resilience within our lives so that we can continue to be the best for our students.

How does a teacher turn non-engaged and socially distant students into published authors in one semester? Accompany Brittany Paxton in "Empowering Students Through Publishing" as she relates the post-pandemic experience of working through planning for social-emotional learning, esteem lifting, and the writing process with middle schoolers. This relevant and moving article is an engaging read as the author shares her own honesty about the teaching and publishing process.

In "Capturing Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Through Children's Books," Tami Morton and Sarah Akram explore the use of the Collaborative Academic, Social, and Emotional (CASEL) program via children's books to integrate SEL into the daily routines of a first-grade classroom post-pandemic. Read this article to learn more about the components of the CASEL program and how one teacher used children's books to provide SEL as well as academic learning for her post-pandemic students.

Authors Cailyn N. Dougherty, Michelle Parker, Lautrice Nickson, and Casey Creghan describe the value and benefits of allowing students "choice" about what they want to read, in the article "The Impact of Student Choice on Reading." The authors provide suggestions for implementing self-selection as well as for supporting students as they select their own reading materials.

A collaboration with Austin Film Festival and Austin Independent School District secondary English teachers resulted in a Digital Storytelling nine-week program. In "Austin Film Festival's Digital Storytelling Curriculum: A Deep Dive Into Story as a Critical Means of Communication and Creative Expression," authors Kelsey Walker and Sally Seitz give an inside look at how the English language arts TEKS are aligned with the screenwriting curriculum, allowing all students the opportunity to draft an original short screenplay. Digital Storytelling bolsters students' creative and communicative skills while acknowledging storytelling as an ever-present aspect of real life and allows students a technology-rich unit in writing.

Students are not the only ones who have experienced trauma because of the pandemic and other upheavals in the country and the world. Educators experience trauma not only through their lived experiences but also through personal identification and empathy for the students in their classrooms. Stephen Wilhoit explains how he used the expressive writing process to begin to cope with trauma and experience resiliency in "Building Resilience in Challenging Times: Expressive Writing Exercises That Help."

Samuel J. Ayers, in "Journaling for Personal Well-Being," describes different types of journals and their purpose in helping teachers find a way to create time for "self care" in their lives. Read this article to find journal types you may not have encountered or tried yourself, and take some time to find an avenue to strengthen and build resilience for your well-being.

In the final article, Kimberly Athans draws on personal experiences as a child watching *Mister Roger's Neighborhood*, and as a teacher who has tried to incorporate several of his ideas into the high school English classroom. In "Why Secondary Teachers Need Fred Rogers," Athans details specific suggestions and insights from the red-sweatered Mister Rogers and other scholars who can help both teachers and students build the strength and resilience needed as they face the challenges inside and outside the classroom.

Thank you for continuing to accept the challenge to teach with strength and resilience in these times of change. Keep reading, learning, and take care of you!

—*English in Texas* editors
Vickey M. Giles
Angelia Durand
Elizabeth (Polly) Treviño
Mary E. White

## ABOUT THE EDITORS

**Vickey M. Giles, Ed.D.**
Vickey Giles is an Associate Professor at Houston Baptist University and serves as Associate Dean for Doctoral Programs and Grants. Before joining the faculty at Houston Baptist University, Giles served as Superintendent of Schools in a Houston area public school district. She began her teaching career as a high school English teacher, taught elementary school general music, and then moved into administration, where she served as a high school and central office administrator before serving as superintendent. Giles has presented at conferences locally, nationally, and internationally. She also served as a column editor for *Voices in the Middle* for several years. While she has spent much of her career in administrative roles, she always finds ways to integrate her love of reading and literature into her work.

**Angelia Durand, Ed.D.**
Angie Durand currently serves as an Associate Professor at Houston Baptist University, where she teaches undergraduate and graduate reading and literacy courses as well as curriculum and instruction and research. Durand loves sharing books and reading strategies with her classes and ends each class with an enthusiastic read aloud. Previously, she served as a Research Assistant Professor at the University of Houston. Most recently she worked with colleagues from the College of Science on a STEM education capacity grant funded by the National Science Foundation. When not planning a class presentation or writing a presentation, she enjoys spending time with her family and friends traveling or at the bay on the water, reading for fun, and shopping for bargains.

**Elizabeth (Polly) Treviño, Ph.D.**
Polly Treviño is an educational consultant in language and literacy education. She consults nationally in early literacy, reading education, multilingual education, and educational evaluation for private- and public-sector clients. Previously, she was a college professor for second language acquisition, bilingual/ESL education, linguistics, and reading foundations at Houston Baptist University. She also worked on professional development and research grants in emergent bilingual education at Texas A&M University and was a secondary ESL teacher in Texas public schools. Her research interests are language and literacy acquisition and teacher development. She has a passion for all things language, and her favorite toy as a child was a Speak-and-Spell™ electronic spelling toy.

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# Call for Manuscripts for Future TCTELA Journals

***English in Texas,*** Vol. 53.1—Spring/Summer 2023
**Theme: Embracing Boldness: An Exploration of the Power of Language**
**Manuscript Deadline: April 1, 2023**
**Column Deadline: April 15, 2023**

**Call for Submissions:** *"Words are to be taken seriously. I try to take seriously the acts of language. Words set things in motion. I've seen them doing it. Words set up atmospheres, electrical fields, charges. I've felt them doing it. Words conjure. I try not to be careless about what I utter, write, sing. I'm careful about what I give voice to."* —*Toni Cade Bambara*

With this reference, TCTELA President Dr. Roni Burren announced the 2023 conference theme: **Embracing Boldness: An Exploration of the Power of Language.** Language has the ability to pull us apart, but it also has the profound power to name common understandings. Words can be politicized, divisive, and marginalizing, yet they can also be restorative, connective, and universal.

For the Spring/Summer 2023 issue of *English in Texas,* we invite you to consider the role language plays in every aspect of our classrooms. Some pedagogical questions to consider for manuscript submissions are any of the following, any fusion of the following, or any extension beyond the following:

- How does written and spoken language impact classroom instruction? How do we teach students about the intricacies of language?
- Which texts, characters, or real-life heroes exemplify what it means to use language in a profound way?
- How do we teach writers to write boldly and bravely?
- How has the language of the current political climate, nationally and/or in the state of Texas, positively or negatively impacted the ELAR classroom?
- How are we positioning multiple languages and dialects within our classrooms? Why does this matter?

More broadly, you may also consider the following:

- How can we cultivate more linguistically inclusive schools?
- How does language bring us together?
- What does it mean to teach literacy in a bold fashion?

**FOCUS ON THE THEME:** We invite interested individuals to submit manuscripts, conceptual, creative, reflective, student-authored, pedagogical, research-based, and/or theoretical, as related to this topic of **Embracing Boldness: An Exploration of the Power of Language**.

**INQUIRIES AND INNOVATIONS:** Additionally, we welcome educational research relevant to the work of ELAR educators.

**STANDING COLUMNS:** We also encourage brief contributions in the form of standing columns. These center on topics that interest you but do not necessarily align to an issue's theme or full-length manuscript requirements.

| A Seat and a Voice at the Table | Keeping Your Wits About You | Teaching Outtakes |
|---|---|---|
| This column focuses on supporting diversity, equity, and inclusion to empower groups that are too often marginalized in the ELAR classroom. <br><br>What does your seat at the table look like day-to-day? How are you striving to bring diverse texts, methods, and instructional design to the forefront of 21st-century instruction? <br><br>*"Diversity is having a seat at the table, inclusion is having a voice, and belonging is having that voice be heard."* —*Liz Fosslien* | This column focuses on teacher self-care in today's often challenging educational environment. <br><br>How do you keep your wits while the world spins–often wildly!–on its axis each day? What are your personal and professional approaches to bringing hope and balance to the world of teaching? <br><br>*"If you can keep your wits about you while all others are losing theirs, and blaming you….The world will be yours and everything in it."* —*Rudyard Kipling* | This column focuses on sharing the "aha" lessons from the "uh-oh" moments in your classroom. <br><br>As educators, we often talk about "what works," but how has the "not working" turned you into a more knowledgeable practitioner and a more streetwise professional? How did the "not working" inform you in your teaching and help you to grow? <br><br>*"Mistakes are a fact of life. It is the response to error that counts."* —*Nikki Giovanni* |
| To submit any of these standing columns for publication consideration, please contact the editorial team at EnglishinTexas@uhd.edu with a 100-150-word summary of your idea **BEFORE** submitting. | | |

**SUBMISSION GUIDELINES, 2023-2025:** Please refer to the Texas Council of Teachers of English Language Arts-*English in Texas* website, https://www.tctela.org/english_in_texas, for manuscript submission guidelines. Do not hesitate to contact the editorial team at EnglishinTexas@uhd.edu should you have any questions.

# Call for Reviewers

*English in Texas*, the premier journal of TCTELA with a readership of 1,000+ throughout Texas and the U.S., is seeking reviewers to join the current group of professionals serving on our review board. We highly value peer review by all stakeholders: practitioners, academicians, and administrators who support the teaching of English language arts. We are looking for reviewers with a wide variety of interests and areas of expertise.

If selected you agree to review no more than THREE manuscripts in a 12 month period. Manuscripts should be reviewed and returned within 15 days. If you are unable to complete your review within 15 days, you can decline to review for that cycle. Please note, however, that after two failures to review or two late reviews, you will be removed from the active list of the review board.

If you are interested, please let the editorial board know by contacting us at EnglishinTX@hbu.edu. We look forward to hearing from you.

# Call for Manuscripts for Future TCTELA Journals

*English in Texas,* Vol. 53.2—Fall/Winter 2023
Theme: Pandemic Panacea: Enacting & Extending Lessons Learned About ELAR Instruction
Manuscript Deadline: September 1, 2023
Column Deadline: September 15, 2023

**Call for Submissions:** *"As literacy education professionals, we must reject the notion of 'behindness,' expecting instead that children come to us rich with experiences, new knowledge, and multiple ways of speaking, writing, and drawing that we can learn about and teach into going forward." —Katherine Bomer*

The Fall/Winter 2023 issue of *English in Texas* is focused on lessons learned (and those that we are still learning) about what ELAR instruction looks like when the world is beset by a global pandemic. The last three years brought many challenges to the doorsteps of ELAR classrooms. In the spring of 2022, The New York Times reported on significant reading losses for early childhood and high-poverty students (2022, March 9). It did not take long for those outside of our classrooms to characterize negatively the impact of online, hybrid, and other nontraditional learning environments in regard to literacy.

Rather than being driven by deficits, let us be guided by Bomer's image of teaching "into" what comes next. For the Fall/Winter 2023 issue of *English in Texas,* we invite you to consider how you met and are still meeting the challenges that have been swirling about our classrooms since March 2020. Some pedagogical questions to consider for manuscript submissions are any of the following, any fusion of the following, or any extension beyond the following:

- What happened in your classroom and in your pedagogy when you opened the door beyond the physical walls?

- Did you learn something new about online literacy education?

- Upon our return, what did you learn about face-to-face interactions with students as they read, write, and talk?

- How did the pandemic expand or shrink literacy learning?

- What new perspectives and experiences did your students bring into your classroom?

More broadly, you may also consider the following:

- How did you "teach into" the new?

- How did you collaborate with colleagues and professional organizations in new and unexplored ways?

- **pan·a·ce·a** /panə′ sēə/ *noun* A solution or remedy for difficulties.

**FOCUS ON THE THEME:** We invite interested individuals to submit manuscripts, conceptual, creative, reflective, student-authored, pedagogical, research-based, and/or theoretical, as related to this topic of **Pandemic Panacea: Enacting & Extending Lessons Learned about ELAR Instruction**.

**INQUIRIES AND INNOVATIONS:** Additionally, we welcome educational research relevant to the work of ELAR educators.

**STANDING COLUMNS:** We also encourage brief contributions in the form of standing columns. These center on topics that interest you but do not necessarily align to an issue's theme or full-length manuscript requirements.

| A Seat and a Voice at the Table | Keeping Your Wits About You | Teaching Outtakes |
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| This column focuses on supporting diversity, equity, and inclusion to empower groups that are too often marginalized in the ELAR classroom. | This column focuses on teacher self-care in today's often challenging educational environment. | This column focuses on sharing the "aha" lessons from the "uh-oh" moments in your classroom. |
| What does your seat at the table look like day-to-day? How are you striving to bring diverse texts, methods, and instructional design to the forefront of 21st-century instruction? | How do you keep your wits while the world spins–often wildly!–on its axis each day? What are your personal and professional approaches to bringing hope and balance to the world of teaching? | As educators, we often talk about "what works," but how has the "not working" turned you into a more knowledgeable practitioner and a more streetwise professional? How did the "not working" inform you in your teaching and help you to grow? |
| *"Diversity is having a seat at the table, inclusion is having a voice, and belonging is having that voice be heard."* —Liz Fosslien | *"If you can keep your wits about you while all others are losing theirs, and blaming you….The world will be yours and everything in it."* —Rudyard Kipling | *"Mistakes are a fact of life. It is the response to error that counts."* —Nikki Giovanni |

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### Reference

Bomer, K. (2021). Leaving behind the "learning loss": Loving and learning from the ways students talk, write, and draw right now. *Language Arts, 98*(6), 352-359. See p. 353.

# EMPOWERING STUDENTS
## Through Publishing

By Brittany Paxton

Brittany Paxton has taught English for ten years and now serves as an instructional coach at Clear Creek ISD. Her teaching interests include student autonomy and accountability, social-emotional learning, and writing for authentic audiences. She can be reached at brittpax@gmail.com.

**Abstract:** One of the most difficult parts of the writing process for many teachers is publishing. It is easy to focus writing instruction on the process itself and give publishing much less time—or leave it out completely. Many teachers are unaware of options they have to help students publish outside of essay contests and often rely on gallery walks or student presentations that limit publications to within the classroom. But publishing is so beneficial for students both during the writing process and as whole learners. By publishing, students will more fully understand author's craft and the entirety of the writing process. They will also develop numerous soft skills like empathy and self-efficacy. Publishing leads to an increase in students' perception of themselves as learners and helps them take ownership of their writing. Once their work is published, students can hold readings across their district, further cementing their identity as authors and building a community among other students.

*Keywords:* publishing, writing process, social-emotional learning, conferring, self-efficacy

When I started teaching a decade ago, I was stuck in a cycle of low expectations. I assigned my first piece of writing; the results were disappointing. Students were unsure and confused about what an essay entailed. Their responses were little more than an incoherent, unconnected series of sentences. I turned my disappointment outward and assigned another, much harder essay, expecting students to show me how bad their writing could really be. Rather than reteaching or scaffolding future instruction, I was determined to show them how far behind they were by letting them fail and fail again. My freshmen and I were in a downward spiral that lasted all year and ended with discouragement and disenfranchisement. As a teacher, I didn't feel proud of my instruction, but instead of reflecting on my own values, philosophy, and skills, I lashed out at an entire generation of students, lamenting the lack of values and skills of "kids these days."

Since that first year of school, I've grown as an educator through research, reading, and training. I've become increasingly intentional in raising my expectations of the capabilities of students and have learned how to empower students to take ownership of their learning. When I moved to my current district that embraces authentic publication, I was excited to see publishing as part of the curriculum because I knew that publishing would enable deeper understanding of writing and increase some social skills like communication and receiving feedback. Initially, I believed that publishing was limited to creating a polished product that could be shared with other students, maybe even entered in a contest. I didn't understand the depth of social and emotional development students would undergo when publishing a piece of writing.

Social-emotional learning in conjunction with academic instruction has become increasingly important for me, and I've found that I've developed a greater emotional intelligence along with my students as I've become more intentional in embedding social and emotional learning into my instruction. At first, I believed that social and emotional learning required something extra of me, but I've learned that much of what we do as language arts teachers inherently helps students develop beyond academics. In order to publish their writing, students have to both analyze character in mentor texts and create character in their writing, both of which increase empathy (Junker & Jacquemin, 2017; McTigue et al., 2015). Publishing also requires students to take ownership of their learning and advocate for their needs as writers and for their role in the writing process. After publishing, students will have a self-efficacy that can drive their belief in possibilities for themselves. Without working outside of my curriculum, I was able to include social and emotional learning that was immediately applicable and changed student thinking and behavior for the better.

At some point in learning more about authentic literacy strategies, I came across Nancie Atwell's (1998) belief that student writers take more ownership of their writing and understand its power more thoroughly when they consider the effect it will have on an audience outside of their classroom. This was an appealing thought, but I still had concerns about requiring, or even encouraging, students to share their writing publicly. A significant portion of my students had dysgraphia, dyslexia, or are emerging bilingual students. I did not want to put them in a position where people would judge their progress unfavorably. Further, I knew that publishing would require them to be vulnerable, and I didn't know

if they were socially ready for that. So, I approached publishing with them delicately. I was intentional in my choice of a piece of writing that would be published and built a scaffolding system that would benefit all of my authors and give them lots of opportunity for practice and conferences. While we had written many texts throughout the year, I had an idea for a publishing project that I thought would invigorate our class. I was excited when it was time to start our writing project and totally transparent that it would end with published children's books, but I never could have imagined the growth I would see over the unit.

We started this project in January 2021 at a time when we were desperate for human connection. We had spent the spring of 2020 at home learning remotely due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In the fall of 2020, we started a school year with some students in person and some in online school, but due to illness, quarantines, or personal choice, students bounced back and forth all year between remote learning and coming to school. Everyone was trying their best, but the inconsistency made it hard to build a classroom community. This was as critical for me as it was for my students. It's easy to think of community as a need for students, but the lack of connection with and among my students was causing me to flounder. I was unsure of myself and my instructional strategies. But I was determined to find some way to adjust my instruction to fill this desperate need.

For me, the value of publishing goes far beyond the writing process. The texts that we read and write build community and they develop our empathy. When we read books together, we create connections with one another. Sharing our writing requires bravery

and vulnerability. Publishing our writing means taking ownership of it and advocating for our own thoughts as authors. It means gaining self-efficacy and believing that each student is a writer. When we started the project in January, capturing these social and emotional skills was critical for my students and for me. I had no choice except to take what felt like a big risk and embark on a project outside of my comfort zone.

## Process

When I decided to have students publish, I knew that I would have to handle publishing carefully. I taught inclusion classes with 30-40% of students who were English language learners or had an IEP or a 504 due to dyslexia. I am proud of the students I teach and the growth that they make as writers during the year, but I also knew that I have to be careful about whom I let into our world. Many people would see only what they lack and not what they have overcome. Further, many students hold a poor view of themselves and their skills. If I told them upfront that we were working on a text that they would publish for the whole world to see, they would be too intimidated to even start. For those reasons, I chose a style of writing that would feel attainable for them but that I knew would be more challenging than it appeared: children's literature.

To begin the writing process, I built students' schema with lots of children's books rich in text and images. Initially, I had some concerns about using children's literature in a course for high school freshmen. I wanted to ensure they didn't feel patronized, so I made it clear that as writers, we have to study our craft. Also, I worried that the text in picture books would be too far below grade level to challenge my students enough for them to learn. I learned, however, that many picture books have significantly challenging text structures and require lots of inferencing skills to make meaning from images.

I applied for and received a grant that allowed me to purchase pre-illustrated templates for students to use as a starting point and that paid for the publishing fees for the books to be printed and bound. Students had to make inferences about literary elements like plot, character, and setting based on the images in the book. Then, they had to create a narrative that fit the images while including details to clarify distinct elements of their story.

When our templates arrived, the first step was for students to pick a set of illustrations that appealed to them before we started the writing process. This generated a lot of interest and discussion of possible stories. Students were also highly interested in naming their characters. However, when we started the process of brainstorming and storyboarding, interest in the writing process lagged. My initial plan was to let them choose templates one day and spend the rest of the week storyboarding and writing a first draft. Naively, I provided little support outside of instructions to outline a story with some opportunities to confer with a teacher. It became obvious that I would have to build in several lessons with daily models that students could work through at their own pace.

Our district has built curriculum around reader's/writer's workshop, so I built each scaffolded lesson around six critical elements of instruction: independent reading, mentor texts, minilessons, reader's/writer's notebooks, collaboration, and conferring. Each class period started with independent reading of choice novels for students. As they read, I conferred with them to ask about an area they were struggling with as writers. For example, if they had been struggling to develop character in their own writing, I would ask questions about how the author in their novel was developing character. Next, I would choose a picture book to use as a mentor text during whole group instruction and leverage the craft moves in that book for a minilesson on writing. When students started writing in their notebooks on their own, they had a collaborative team to consult if needed as well as both scheduled and impromptu conferences with a teacher. My co-teacher and I held most of the conferences with students, but I leveraged the support of our instructional coach to confer with students as well.

In order to create a tightly woven narrative, students needed to understand the illustrations and how the illustrations connected to one another (see Figure 1). While they were in charge of their own narratives, they needed to make inferences rooted in the illustrations. I anticipated this being an easy step for students, but I had severely underestimated the difficulty of making these inferences. Students were immediately frustrated, and their responses to this frustration included laying their heads on their desks, talking to their friends, turning to their cell phones for distraction, or complaining about how dumb the assignment was.

| Illustration 1: What do you see? | Illustration 2: What do you see? They are leaving their island to go on an adventure. | How are they connected? |
|---|---|---|
| Timmy is showing Bertram an amulet that he got from his parents. | | Timmy wants to go find his parents using the only thing he has left of them |

*Figure 1.* To begin, students looked at each illustration in their books and described what they saw. This was their first attempt at making meaning between the images.

Initially, I was frustrated because I had put so much energy and hope into this project. My personal mantra as a teacher, though, is to look at the system, not the student, as the problem, so I examined the systems I had put into place to support students through their writing. In the words of James Britton (1970), reading and writing "float on a sea of talk" (p. 164), and I realized that students hadn't had enough opportunity to talk about what they saw on their pages. So, I put students into groups based on their book themes, and they talked through their impressions of the story collaboratively and then while conferring with either my co-teacher or me. After having the chance to talk, they were much better able to see the connections in their illustrations and to write a summary of the story they envisioned (see Figure 2).

Write a summary of the images you see in your book.

A brunette girl is sitting on the beach looking a little frustrated, surrounded by papers with frustrated scribbles. Then a blonde girl comes up to the brunette girl with a smile on her face, maybe the blonde girl wanted to go for a walk but the blonde girl fell into the water and turned into a mermaid.

The blonde and brunette girl are now sitting in the water but I think that the blonde girl gave the brunette girl a necklace that gives the brunette girl the ability to breath underwater. The girls start to swim down, and finally the come across a few mermaids and introduce themselves.

The blonde girl introduces the brunette girl to her mom who I think is the queen because she seems to be in a palace and is wearing a crown. The brunette girl is now on the shore waving back to her friend, the blonde girl. The brunette girl sits on the beach where she sat before but this time she is surrounded by pages and pages of artwork.

*Figure 2.* Students wrote a summary of the images of the book to help them construct a narrative.

After students had a summary of a narrative based on their illustrations, we had a series of lessons on literary elements (like character and setting) and author's craft (like word choice and dialogue). In order to fully understand these elements as both readers and writers, we started with mentor texts and analyzed a particular element or device. Students then applied that skill to their own writing. They studied all of the elements and devices far more deeply than what appeared directly in their drafts, but it was important that they fully understand their craft and made

intentional decisions about what to include and why in order to have a fully developed narrative (see Figures 3 and 4).

| Character Name | What is your character like? | What drives your character? |
|---|---|---|
| Matthew | Matthew is very hardworking and generous. | Matthew is a farmer, and he farms to provide for himself and Flanagan. |
| Flanagan | Flanagan is very helpful. He always tries to help around the farm. He's really curious and gentle. | Flanagan is always trying to help to people. He helps people because he naturally has that desire. |
| Roman | Roman is a little snobby. He likes things going his way. He's not totally heartless, but sometimes his selfishness can get in the way of certain things. | Roman doesn't really do much. He grew up in he city so he believes that he is better than the country people. His mindset isn't necessarily intentional. |
| Eleanor | Eleanor is gentle and quiet. She's very smart and keeps to herself most times. | Eleanor runs the city market. Her love for helping people is the reason she opened the market in the first place. |

*Figure 3.* Students used this chart to create an in-depth profile of the character in their books. Because we were focused on social emotional learning, a deep understanding of character was critical.

| Character Name | Dialogue #1 | Dialogue #2 | Dialogue #3 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Molly | "Come on sally put on some sunscreen," insisted Molly. | "Sally, you're little you don't need to see the map," implied Molly. | "If this lady doesn't get her hair out of my face!" shouted Molly. |
| Brittney | "This lady is snoring so loud." | "Sally was right!!" | "I'm so tired. I don't want to run anymore." |
| Sally | "Molly, I think we got on the wrong train." | "I want a hotdog so bad." | "Hurry up! You're running so slow." |
| Granny | "Girls, the stadium is just right that way." | | |

*Figure 4.* Students used this chart to envision dialogue for each character. They didn't use all of the dialogue but thought that creating lots of dialogue for the character would create a more fully developed character.

At this point, they began drafting their narrative. Conferring with each author was my primarily role during this part of the process.

My co-teacher and I had plans for whom to confer with each day based on need, but we maintained flexibility for students who were unexpectedly stuck in the writing process. I was careful to let them struggle when it was beneficial but also keep them from getting overwhelmed with frustration. By holding individual writing conferences with each student, we were able to meet the needs of students based on what we knew of them as learners as well as what was written in their IEPs or 504s.

This step of the writing process required the most flexibility on our part. Many students finished within one week and wanted a teacher to look it over before they were ready to submit, while other students wanted lots of support from a writing partner almost daily. By this point in the year, most students had a trusted shoulder partner to talk to. Their most common need was someone to listen to and validate their ideas. Some students finished with only one writing conference with a teacher while others had a dozen. This was also the most fascinating part of the project. Students had really developed a sense of ownership by doing all of the lessons to lay the groundwork for their narratives and had established their identity as authors. They would talk about their own craft and the effect they wanted to have on the reader. For the first time in my career, I was working as an advisor to students, and they carefully considered my suggestions, weighing my advice with their own goals. In previous years, students had looked to me as the expert; this year, they became the experts.

During a writing conference, I would begin by asking students which step of the process they were on and what choices they were currently making in their writing. When we listened to their responses, we guided them toward thinking about how the choice would impact their audience and the perception of their overall

meaning. I remember conferring with one student who, previous to the project, immediately laid his head down any time he was asked to write. He was concerned about the actions of the parent in his book. He wanted it to be abundantly clear that the dad in the story was going to rescue the little girl even when she was on a daring adventure because he thought that the kids who read his book needed to have faith in their parents. I never asked him why that was so important to him.

As students completed their drafts, I met with them individually to read the draft together and discuss any remaining changes that needed to be made. At this point in the process, students were still quite nervous about their writing. They needed a lot of reassurance that they had written something worthwhile. I sat with numerous students who started the conversation with "I know this isn't very good" or "You can tell me if it's bad." The key to improving their perception of their own talents was having other students read their work. They were so proud of their classmates, and the excitement of vulnerably sharing their writing was contagious. Students were motivated to finish so they could share their writing with their community.

One student in particular was especially concerned with his draft and he expressed an incredible awareness of audience. The images in his book depicted a variety of aliens shooting a space laser at their adversaries. He worried that he couldn't write a narrative that would be age-appropriate for all elementary students. We talked a lot about the difference between the needs of a kindergarten student and a fifth-grade student, and he decided that he would write his book specifically for an upper elementary student because he felt that some of the details, like the use of space lasers as weapons, were too violent for a very young student. When we held readings of the books with elementary classrooms, he made sure to choose a fifth-grade room and donated his book to a fifth-grade class.

As students made their way through the writing process, they did need more support in the revising and editing part of the process than I had anticipated. I had lessons about grammar, mechanics, and usage that were rooted in reading mentor texts and imitating authors. Students edited a lot of their writing on their own, but I still acted as a copy editor and made extensive notes to help guide their editing. We talked about the role of editors and the importance of editing. I held meetings with individual students acting as an editor and talking about ways to correct their mistakes. As authors, they always made the final decision for how they wanted their writing to appear.

The last step in the writing process required them to write an author's biography for the back cover of their books and to provide a dedication at the front of their books. This was by far the most rewarding part and the place where I could see their writing become real for them. I expected to get lots of dedications to parents, and I did. I didn't expect the number of dedications they wrote for future readers. One student dedicated his book to "the students of Clear Creek ISD because they'll be the next generation and they should see that anyone can write a story no matter how old or experienced" (see Figure 5).

**Part II: Dedication**
*Authors dedicate their books to a person who has been influential in their life.*

Examples

- For Carley, who was a better person than I was even though she was a dog
- For the students of Lyons Township High School in Illinois
  Because that kid in the back row asked
- For my wife, Stephanie, because you love me

Who would you like to dedicate your book to? Why?

My little brother to show him that anything is possible when he get older and never give up.

*Figure 5.* Students used examples to guide the writing of their dedication.

The publication process took weeks, but in May, we received the printed and bound copies of their children's books. Now that they had printed books to hold, it was important for them to have readings to promote their books on our district's elementary campuses. I contacted some of their favorite elementary teachers, and we set up virtual meetings with the authors. During their meetings, they read their books and described their writing process. They often stayed longer to answer any questions that the elementary students or teachers had. Then, at the end of the school year, we donated all of the books to our local libraries.

## Outcomes

### A Sense of Completion and Fulfillment

My initial goal for the publishing project was for all students to have a deeper understanding of the necessity of the writing process, specifically revising and editing—two parts of the writing process they typically ignore. Students had completed the writing process before in earlier grade levels as it is one of our strands of TEKS. However, they had never had to understand the gravity of creating a product that was finished and polished enough to be sent to a publisher. Further, I wanted them to fully consider the effect their writing had on a reader because for their entire writing lives, they had considered only their teacher and possibly classmates as their audience.

Every single student who started the project published a children's book. This alone made this the most successful assignment I have ever given. Students were so invested in the books that no one even asked me what their grades were or how they were being graded. They cared only about the completed product. While students were not as invested in the editing phase as I had hoped, they were diligent in making revisions. They wrestled over which words to use to make the greatest impact and whether to include specific details about a character. In writing conferences, they often asked if including something would distract from the story or enhance it. While they listened carefully to my response, they always made the executive decision about their stories because they were the authors.

Students were also quite engaged with learning exactly who their audience would be and tailoring their writing to that group. They

were careful when deciding which grade level was most likely to read their book to make sure the content was appealing to that specific audience. When they were finished writing, they chose classes to read their books to based on the audience they intended for their narratives.

We completed this project early in the spring semester, a time when many other English I teachers are gearing up for the STAAR test by pushing expository writing. To some, it seemed incomprehensible that I would spend six weeks on narrative writing when a major standardized test that required an expository essay was on the horizon. Honestly, I was worried about this decision myself, but I know what the research says about authentic writing and learning. When the scores came in two months later, about 10% more students passed the STAAR test if they were in classes that participated in the grant-supported children's book writing project as opposed to those who were not, regardless of whether they were students with IEPs, were English learners, or were on-level students.

### Increased Self-Efficacy

Many of my students had years' worth of educational baggage that led them to believe they were not good readers, writers, or learners. Whenever my students seemed to be giving up at a task, all I had to do was look at their testing history to see "Does Not Meet" attached to their name year after year. When students are repeatedly told by our educational system that they do not meet expectations, regardless of how hard they try, they learn to stop trying. This is an uphill battle for any teacher, and I knew this was an area that I had to combat.

In the beginning of the project, I struggled to get students invested, and my hunch was always that they didn't feel like they could complete it, and that the idea of other people seeing their work was a level of vulnerability they weren't ready for. When I scaffolded the steps, students could see a clear path forward that allowed them to make slow but steady progress, and that seemed to alleviate the overwhelming feeling of having to publish an entire book. Writing conferences were critical for building a sense of confidence in students. After they had multiple conferences with my co-teacher and me, we invited other campus and district personnel to have writing conferences with students. They also had numerous opportunities to collaborate with peers. Each positive interaction that resulted from sharing their book with an adult or peer built a little more self-efficacy. By the time the books were published, some of my most guarded students were willing to read to entire grade levels at local elementary schools because of the pride they had in their work and in themselves.

It's hard for me to capture in words the changes that I saw in them. When it was time to read their writing, one of my students was so nervous, he was shaking. For his reading in particular, an entire grade level of elementary students and his principal were in attendance. But once he started reading, his face lit up and he started smiling. Afterward, he said that he couldn't believe they were so interested in his writing.

### Greater Empathy

One of my biggest concerns when I started this project is that I didn't feel that students in my classroom were exhibiting empathy in the same ways as I had seen in the past. We were in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, and students seemed to be in self-preservation mode. It was hard for them to consider the perspectives of other people when they were struggling in so many ways.

As they began working on their books, specifically on developing characters in their stories, I could see them processing the perspective of other characters. They looked carefully at the facial expressions and actions of characters in their illustrations to see how they would respond to one another. They made predictions about what could lead to the thoughts and feelings that were apparent in their characters. As an example, one student had an illustration in which a character slowly turned into a bug. She had to think deeply about the different ways a person might respond to that. During a writing conference, she told me that she believed that turning into a bug would be awful, but it was clear from the illustrations that the character in the book enjoyed it. She had to put her own feelings aside to consider why that character would be happy about becoming a bug, and this sharpened her ability to empathize.

Students also began to empathize more fully with each other as they collaborated. Because they were all facing the same pressures of publishing, they were more invested in each other's writing. When giving feedback, they were both honest and gentle in a way I had never seen before. Having to consider their audience also made them more empathetic. During collaboration, they would often ask each other questions about how children would respond to a certain aspect of the story. Some of my students had elementary-aged siblings, and their advice was in high demand. Students would seek them out to ask questions like "Is this too scary for your brother?" or "Would your sister think this is funny?" Writing their children's books required them to take on the perspective of the audience to make decisions about their writing in a more tangible way than writing had in the past.

### Extended Communities

From the beginning of the project, students were aware that one of the outcomes would be reading their books to students at local elementary schools and then donating their books to those libraries. This was a critical part of the project because one of my professional goals for that year was to build the social and emotional skills of my students, and I believed that this type of community outreach would enable them to exhibit leadership skills and would showcase the way they had developed throughout the project academically, socially, and emotionally.

Many of my students had never received any type of academic honor, especially in reading and writing. This was the first time they were ever asked to share their writing outside of the four walls of a classroom. Students were able to read to a local elementary classroom or our preschool room that is housed within our high school. One student chose to read to the preschool room, but when it was time, he hesitated. He told me that he had never read anything out loud since he had to read to his teacher in elementary. I reminded him of the power of his words and how much work he had done to become an author. I told him that other people needed to know about what he had accomplished so that they could feel accomplished too. When he returned afterward, he said that he felt like a celebrity and that the teacher had to keep reminding the kids to move back to their seats because everyone wanted to sit at his feet while he read. Reading his writing with this type of reception built more confidence in this student than any award ever could.

At the end of every reading, the teacher in the room with the younger children would talk to them about how anyone can be a

writer. They had the opportunity to ask questions of my authors, and at the end of the question-and-answer portion, the teachers would always ask if any of the younger students thought they could be writers now. In every room, several students raised their hands. Throughout the writing process, I encouraged and praised my students every way I know how, but nothing I said could have built their self-efficacy the way this experience did. For the first time, they could see that the words they write matter.

As a teacher, I never considered that I also could extend my community, so I was surprised when this project strengthened my relationship with other teachers in my district. At the end of the project, I asked students to choose a favorite teacher they remembered from elementary school. I then emailed those teachers to invite them to a reading of the children's books. I had the opportunity to share success stories from students they had taught sometimes as many as ten years previously.

### Reflections

Not long after we sent off our books for publishing, my students were writing poems in class. One student asked me where and when these were going to be published. His expectation had changed; for him, writing ended with publishing because it was worthy of being read. Before this experience, I don't think a single one of my students believed this about themselves. In fact, most of them cited writing as a weakness, and their entire goal tended to be "finish an essay."

The part of the process they treasured most, though, wasn't the writing itself. It was the authors' readings. At first resistant to the idea of reading to a group of elementary students, they brightened when actually faced with the task. Some even had question-and-answer sessions where they talked about how they built character or included dialogue. In almost every elementary classroom, someone asked the high school author how they came up with all their ideas. They immediately began talking about their thinking as authors. In one of the books, a girl befriends a school bully after they both have the same experience with a scary dog in their neighborhood. My student told the elementary class that he came up with his ideas when he saw that the girl in the book had a choice about how she could respond to the bully, and he wanted to show everyone that people can be forgiven.

My students were proud of the impact they were able to have on younger kids in the district, and I was proud of the community they were building. For me, getting to meet with their previous teachers from elementary and plan their readings was a way to build a connection. Elementary teachers deserve a lot of credit for what our high school students accomplish, and they often don't get to see the way their students mature throughout their school experience. I was excited to share this moment with them.

Recently, I presented at a showcase with two of my authors. They clutched their books, flipping through them to remember every detail of the process, visibly nervous. Watching their clammy faces made me nervous too. How easily I had forgotten how truly capable they are. As attendees circled our booth, I watched my teenage students perk up like freshly watered seedlings. Everything about their language had changed since I met them as incoming freshmen. They spoke to district leaders about their process as writers and about how they used their platform to encourage younger kids to become writers too. They were brave and confident and truly owned their work. I could not have felt more proud of them than in that moment.

### Teachers as Writers

One of my most tightly held beliefs as a teacher is that modeling is the most powerful strategy we have. I modeled writing and reading, feedback and revisions, courtesy and core values. So, it shouldn't have surprised me when, just before we sent off our books to print, a student asked, "Miss, where is yours?" I was immediately embarrassed and told him that I didn't write one. He looked disappointed as he cited all the reasons I had told him about why publishing is important. He said that I didn't know how it felt to have to make sure my writing was good enough for everyone to read, not just the people in the classroom. I had told them many times that publishing meant that they were capable and brave and that I had confidence in their writing skills. If I didn't publish my writing, what did they say about me? I promised him and myself in that moment that I would be vulnerable myself and seek out the opportunity to publish.

If publishing is important for students, then it's important for us too. It's important that we continue to experience the entire writing process and remember what it's like to start brainstorming on a blank page and finish by making changes based on feedback from our peers. In order to be effective and empathetic teachers, we have to experience the vulnerability of creating a piece of writing and sharing it with an audience. Students produce what teachers model, so if publishing is critical for students to take true ownership of their writing, and I believe that it is, we have to be willing to model that because only if we have the experience of being the writer are we able to teach the writer.

Publishing is vulnerable for me just like it is for students. But vulnerability is growth. According to Brene Brown (2013), "Vulnerability is the birthplace of love, belonging, joy, courage, empathy, and creativity" (p. 74). If we want our classroom communities to be places where people belong and are free to have courage and empathy and to be creative, and I think we all do, then we have to be willing to take opportunities for growth, and that's what publishing is.

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# Capturing Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Through
# Children's Literature

By Tami Morton and Sarah Akram

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**Abstract:** Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, young children did not attend school in the traditional setting. However, many teachers, schools, and districts conducted online instruction to allow students to still learn despite the restrictions. After two years, teachers and students returned to the classrooms and schools. However, the time away from school resulted in several issues. One, children's learning practices were atypical due to the great amount of time online. The second issue reinvigorated the need for social-emotional learning (SEL) for students. This article traces the use of SEL by a first-grade teacher who incorporated children's books that focused on the SEL competencies as described by the well-known Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional (CASEL) program (CASEL, 2019a)—including mental health conditions, substance abuse, skills to manage emotions, establishing and maintaining positive relationships, and responsible decision-making. The first-grade teacher shows her strength as a teacher to support her students during this time of transition.

*Keywords:* COVID-19 pandemic, elementary, social-emotional learning, children's books

In 2020, people all over the world were familiarized with COVID-19. In effort to keep more citizens safe, every public place from stadiums to schools closed. Initially, the time that everything was closed was designed as a temporary closure. However, that was not the case, and the time extended for almost two years. Though the break from the classroom was very unexpected, the pandemic provided time for reflection and growth for today's classroom teachers. When students had to initially stay home and attend school digitally, all in-service educators knew that this unique form of instruction would be challenging to manage with young children. Elementary children primarily used computers to play games or add clip art to their papers and projects. Before remote instruction could even occur, students had to gain new knowledge and skills by focusing on their teachers (who were often beginners to computer software themselves) online. Fisher, Frey, and Hattie (2021) insightfully explain that the pandemic teaching of 2020 was not distance learning. It was also not homeschooling, which is a choice parents make for particular reasons (e.g., religious, safety, dissatisfaction with their public schools). This was "crisis teaching" (Fisher et al., 2021, p. 1). Teachers had to be astute, intentional, and purposeful with their remote teaching more so than ever before.

Nonetheless, elementary teachers met the challenge and were essentially in the forefront in finding the best ways to provide distance learning to their diverse students. Elementary teachers were working hard to first learn how to use and manipulate computer programs, like the various learning management systems (LMS) and available appropriate resources for the different elementary grades. It was essential for teachers to become proficient immediately because they needed to understand the computer programs well enough to teach content to children and teach parents how to provide support. All this required information

needed to be transferred to students and parents before instruction of new knowledge could even occur. Teachers held video conference meetings to share guidelines and rules for the online class. For example, computer users know and expect that there will be times when the computer has technical issues. The computer may need to be rebooted or restarted to work. Primary-level students are not yet able to fix their computers, so parents or guardians must be present in the classroom to be the "help desk" attendants and address any of these computer errors. All of these issues impacted teachers but also their students and parents.

By the 2021 school year, a majority of Texas teachers and students were back in the classrooms for traditional in-person learning. A vaccine was available for adults, and protocols had been established to try to ensure that all educators and students could feel safe. However, the return to the classroom did come with a cost. The impact of the pandemic was eye-opening. "The crisis had an impact on not just academics but also the broader health and well-being of students, with more than 35 percent of parents very or extremely concerned about their children's mental health" (Dorn et al., 2021).

As the students returned to classrooms after the mandated COVID-19 protocols lifted, teachers not only saw a considerable decrease in academic abilities, but social-emotional issues in students were evident. These students were very different from students in previous years, especially in lower elementary grade levels. In previous years, first-grade students had already undergone one to two years of schooling; however, this was the first time being in a classroom for many students. This was also the first year that teachers had to teach students to maintain six feet of separation because of social distancing protocols that were prescribed by the CDC. With knowledge of this instruction, teachers recognized characteristics of students with separation anxiety, those who were troubled by noise, and those who were uncomfortable being around other people. While young students may not understand the pandemic, they do understand that their parents and other adults are concerned. Sadly, many students had suffered significant personal losses like deaths of one or more members in their families.

Though the pandemic brought students' social-emotional learning needs to the forefront, teachers have been reconnecting with the

positive effects of SEL training and instruction in K-12 classrooms introduced in the 1990s (Gimbert et al., 2021; McKay-Jackson, 2014). When social-emotional learning was initially introduced, districts used several programs for moral development, character education, and performance of character traits (Elias et al., 2008). The ideas behind these ideals of morality and character traits were further investigated and refined into a myriad of programs catered for SEL for elementary students. School districts were responsible for finding the best program match for their educators and students. The best program would provide the most suitable SEL content and pedagogy for students in their district. The state of Texas requires that all districts offer a mental health curriculum for all students in grades kindergarten through 12th grade. The curriculum covers "mental health conditions, substance abuse, skills to manage emotions, establishing and maintaining positive relationships, and responsible decision-making," as stated in Texas Statutes Education Code 21.462.

The CASEL framework is popular because it is the earliest evidence-based program that provides five core competencies in SEL: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (Gimbert et al., 2021; Kaufman et al., 2021). When the district brings a program to the schools, it includes educator training for each competency. Even though the competencies are strong, there are limitations to the CASEL framework. The packaged program created is not culturally responsive, making it challenging for educators to follow, particularly when facing race or trauma (Gimbert et al., 2021). CASEL acknowledges their lack of focus on equity in the program framework and is working to incorporate the characteristics necessary to support the growth of SEL into a more inclusive perspective. Though it is understood that the CASEL program lacks equity, the framework of SEL—self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2019a)—does provide a platform to understand how the core competencies lend to classroom practices that would support today's students. The authors support the decisions made at the district level in selecting appropriate SEL programs for affiliated schools and educators. Even before teachers understand and know their programs in various districts and schools, they can provide opportunities for growth for their students. After the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting school closings, teachers need assistance with approaching SEL with students. This article provides creative ideas that highlight the competencies and the corresponding instructional, culturally relevant practices that teachers may use.

This article also shares how Sarah (second author) has been able to support her young students after being isolated in their homes throughout the pandemic. She anticipated that all students would need to be exposed to social-emotional learning primarily because they lacked language and learning in a community setting. Sarah immediately integrated collaborative groups, opportunities for oral language in both academic and social settings, and exposure to children's books which stimulated engagement. As a graduate student and veteran teacher, Sarah knew the importance of research that supported oral language (Clay, 1991; Roskos et al., 2009), reading aloud (Fuhler & Walther, 2007), and working collaboratively (Harvey & Daniels, 2009) to create a strong foundation in her classroom. All these actions were crucial to incorporating social-emotional learning to make learning successful in her first-grade classroom.

Sarah teaches first grade in a small suburban city near Fort Worth,

Texas. She could not help but consider her first-grade students' behaviors before COVID-19 and make comparisons to their behaviors. The students in Sarah's current first-grade classroom often get tired quickly and want to rest. In addition, first-graders enjoyed kinesthetic activities and playing with their friends in the past. Therefore, it has become imperative to find activities for students to return them to pre-pandemic normalcy and allow them to play and learn with their peers.

## Interactive Read-Alouds

To return to pre-pandemic school routines, Sarah continued to use interactive read-alouds to share books with her students. An interactive read-aloud is an instructional practice used with students. The teacher reads a children's book and encourages interaction, questioning, and oral language in a whole-class setting. As students listen to stories selected by their teacher, they are encouraged to comment on the illustrations, make personal connections, and even retell the story (Tompkins et al., 2022). The interactive read-aloud is an impactful procedure to use that encourages oral language. Roskos et al. (2009) further justify the significance of oral language because it provides the foundation for literacy learning for young learners. Furthermore, Doyle and Bramwell (2006) explain that teachers should integrate social-emotional learning with interactive read-alouds of children's literature in order to weave in these significant concepts seamlessly.

Sarah was confident that using interactive read-alouds of children's books would be a critical means to support social-emotional learning in her first-grade classroom. Through literature, students will also build self-efficacy and agency. These benefits impact the core competencies of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. What follows are suggestions for children's books and classroom activities that could be used to assist in the development of the core competencies for social-emotional learning.

## Core Competency 1: Self-Awareness

In the elementary classroom, self-awareness is an attribute that is essential to success in learning. Learners must understand themselves to grow in both mind and spirit. Self-awareness can also link to identity and agency. All students' identities are multifaceted, so teachers must have purposeful instructional practices that aid in students' understanding of themselves and the development of their agency (Jagers, et al., 2016). These conversations can also help teachers understand diverse students' identities and help transform pedagogy.

**School and Classroom Connections: Literature Suggestions and Instructional Practices**

**Self-Awareness Children's Literature**

Students must be able to understand their identity. Therefore, children's literature in Sarah's classroom is carefully selected to help students identify their strengths and implement them into their learning and other aspects of life.

*I Like Me!* by Nancy Carlson (1990) helps students identify their strengths when they read how easy it is for the pig to find her talents. In the first-person narrative, the main character describes herself as her own best friend and talks about things she likes to do, such as drawing and bike riding. The character also discusses what she does when she makes mistakes. This book helps students identify their

positive attributes. In Figures 1 and 2, these first-grade students identify the excellent qualities and activities they enjoy doing.
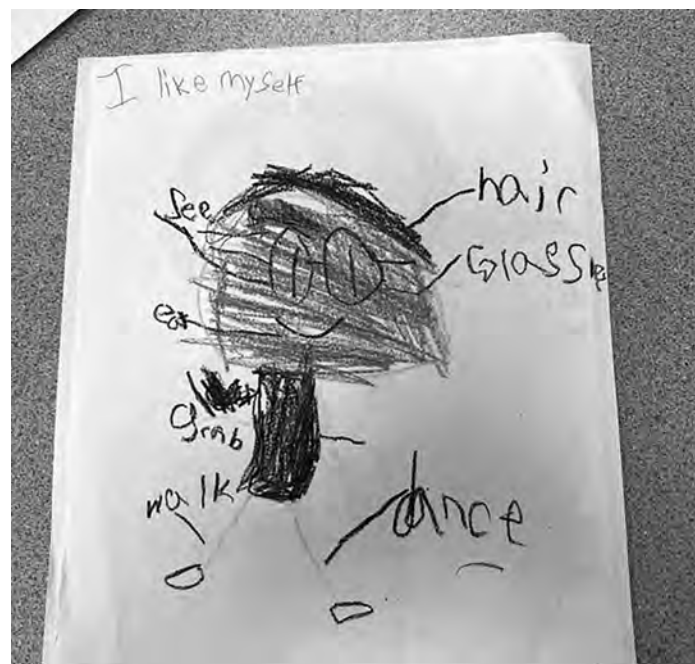


*Figure 1.* I like to dance.
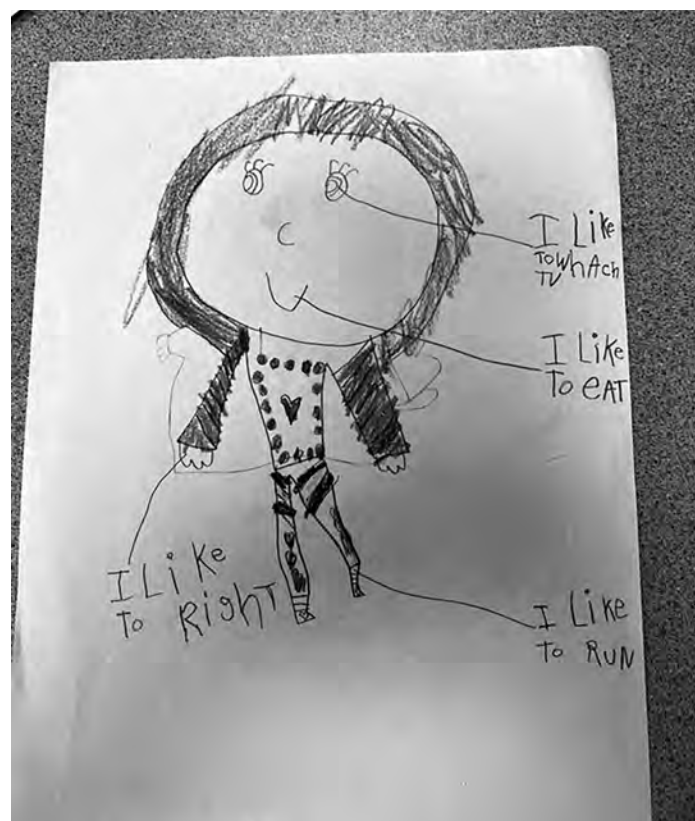


*Figure 2.* I like to watch tv. I like to eat. I like to right. I like to run.

*I Am Enough* by Grace Byers (2018) is a story about a girl who focuses on her strengths and highlights positive things about herself. Sarah's first-grade students listen to this story as it helps them see the best versions of themselves.

**Communicating With Classmates**

Another instructional practice that supports self-awareness is using grand conversations. A grand conversation is a discussion

where teachers encourage oral language and response from young students (Tompkins et al., 2021). Students and teachers should have grand conversations accompanying these books. The teacher models how to have conversations by posing questions, such as How can you identify your strengths?, What makes you unique and amazing?, and How can you use your strengths to help you achieve a growth mindset?

## Core Competency 2: Self-Management

Self-management refers to students in the educational setting who can effectively manage their social-emotional and self-administering skills to work collaboratively in a group. The skills include classroom directions, such as asking for help when needed and knowing when to wait in line for a turn.

**School and Classroom Connections: Literature Suggestions and Instructional Practices**

**Self-Management Children's Books**

*My Mouth Is a Volcano* by Julia Cook (2005) provides excellent examples for students to learn how not to interrupt others while talking. This picture book helps them realize that there should be a rule about interrupting others and listening.

*What If Everybody Did That?* by Ellen Javernick (2010) is a story where the characters make poor choices, such as not reading signs like "Do not feed animals at a zoo." The author emphasizes the phrase "What if everybody did that?" and the illustrations highlight disastrous situations if everybody made the same mistake. This book helps students realize the importance of following all the rules. The phrase "What if everybody did that?" is repeated in the classroom when students have just broken a rule so that all the students can reflect on what would happen if they all made the same mistake.

**Social Contract**

Another classroom connection for teachers and students is discussing a social contract for the classroom. The social contract is an agreement made by the students about their behavior during the school day. For example, teachers may begin the conversation by

asking questions such as How should a leader be treated?, How do you want a leader (teacher) to treat you?, How do you want to be treated by one another?, and How do you want to treat each other when there is conflict? When students answer these questions with concepts like paying attention, listening quietly, and being kind to others, respect emerges, and these words create the class promise to add to the social contract. Writing a social contract together is significant because everyone who signs the contract abides by these rules and holds each other accountable. See Figure 3 for an example of a contract written in Sarah's first-grade class.
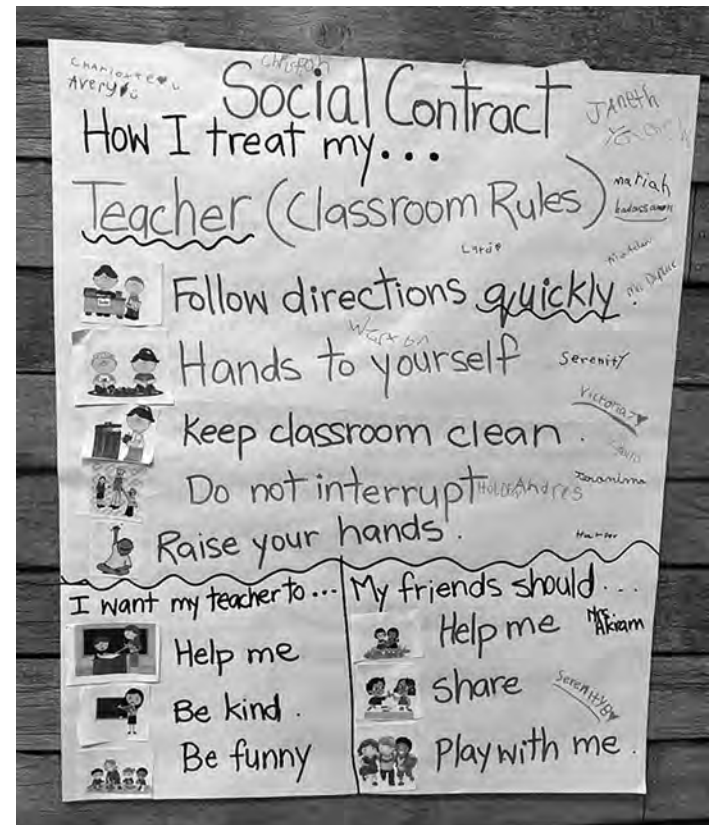


*Figure 3.* Social Contract

## Core Competency 3: Social Awareness

The social awareness competency has become of great significance recently in light of the racial inequities prevalent in school settings nationwide. When teachers consider social-emotional learning and specifically social awareness, the core topics found on the subject are establishing a safe school climate and investigating bullying (Yang et al., 2020).

**School and Classroom Connections: Literature Suggestions and Instructional Practices**

Research has found that schools with positive school climates are beneficial to the social-emotional learning within a school. Understanding and condemning bullying at elementary, middle, and secondary levels is also helpful (Yang et al., 2020).

**Social Awareness Children's Books**

Children often worry about how others perceive them. They want to be well-liked and accepted by their peers and others; however, at times, that is not the case. These books are two great examples of showing characters who are okay with being different than their friends.

*The Bad Case of Stripes* by David Shannon (1998) is a story about a girl who worries about what others think of her, and each worry adds color to her face giving her stripes; this book helps students understand why they should not worry about others' opinions.

*The Rainbow Fish* by Marcus Pfister (1992) is an example of how one's bad attitude can affect others' perceptions of them regardless of how beautiful they are on the outside.

### Cooperative Learning

In Sarah's classroom, cooperative learning strategies are incorporated in various lessons throughout the day primarily because it helps create a positive learning environment. Students work in groups to solve problems, where the teacher facilitates discussions by modeling using conversation stems. Students help one another as well as learn from one another. Lyman (1981) explains the "think pair share" strategy, which is an excellent way to incorporate cooperative learning.

## Core Competency 4: Relationship Skills

Healthy relationship skills are imperative for students when interacting with peers, adults, and family members. Young people must have the emotional intelligence to read others' feelings to work collaboratively. Students build relationship skills and strengthen them when students interact with the community at large. Young students who can participate in field trips, meet community helpers, and engage in community service learn how to build relationships with diverse people in their neighborhoods and communities (McKay-Jackson, 2014).

### School and Classroom Connections: Literature Suggestions and Instructional Practices

Teachers should include interactions with community leaders in their lessons. Police officers and other officials should be invited into classrooms to interact with students. Teachers invite parents to read to the classrooms, discuss their jobs, and participate in other learning activities. Field trips to meet community leaders at their workplaces should also be offered to students.

### Community Helper Children's Literature

*A Hero Like You* by Nikki Rogers (2020) is a story about community heroes, such as police officers, firefighters, and lifeguards. This nonfiction book highlights the characteristics of heroes and how they help encourage students to adopt these qualities and be helpful to their communities.

*My Principal Is a Superhero* by Joey and Melanie Acker (2019) is a story about a school principal named Mr. Clarkson. Mr. Clarkson makes the school a better place by helping the students and families. Mr. Clarkson pushes cars if needed, fixes the copier, greets students every day on the speaker where his voice saying "good morning" is heard all over the school. The teacher in the story believes that Mr. Clarkson is always saving the day. The school is a safe learning environment for teachers and students because of their "Super Principal."

### Field Trips and Zoom Interviews

Teachers should introduce their students to community helpers. Distance learning, which became prominent during the pandemic, depends heavily upon video conferencing platforms such as Zoom, Skype, and Microsoft Teams, and these tools enable teachers to bring these heroes into their classrooms. Skype a Scientist (skypeascientist.com) is a free website that connects scientists with schoolteachers. Teachers can invite scientists from different fields into classrooms.

## Core Competency 5: Responsible Decision-Making

The last core competency, responsible decision-making, provides a connection to ways of making constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions to realistically evaluate the consequences of various actions in the classroom and the community (Hannigan & Hannigan, 2020). Through student reflection and planning for future events, teachers can guide responsible decision-making.

### School and Classroom Connections: Literature Suggestions and Instructional Practices

Benson (2022), in his booklet *Building SEL Skills Into Your Lesson Plans*, emphasizes the benefits of integrating social-emotional learning into lesson plans. Teachers should incorporate SEL through cooperative learning strategies. Students should be allowed to work with other students, and every activity should have options to collaborate and communicate with one another. Teachers execute lesson plans that provide opportunities to discuss the text and work on projects collaboratively through lesson plans. Teachers should model and teach proper ways to communicate. Teachers should help students set learning goals and then include them in the lesson planning while teaching them how to achieve these goals.

### Responsible Decision-Making Children's Literature

*The Magical Yet* by Angela DiTerlizzi (2020) encourages children to not give up. To understand that they cannot perform a difficult task

yet, and by working hard and setting goals, they would be able to achieve what they cannot accomplish "yet."

*The Dot* by Peter H. Reynolds (2003) is a story about Vashti, a girl who does not know what to draw during her art class; her teacher encourages her to create a dot, which was framed and displayed. This gesture inspires Vashti to create more dots. This book is a story about motivation to help students focus on their strengths and set their learning and life goals.

## Personal and Learning Goals

In Sarah's classroom, students set goals during the year, and once they have met the goal, they move on to the next learning goal. The teacher holds one-on-one goal meetings where students look at their scores on various assessments and identify their strengths and weaknesses, and they then create a learning plan with the teacher. Figure 5 shows one example of a student's reading goals in Sarah's class. The young learners create a to-do list at the end of the day for the next day. They write down what they need to do to prepare them for learning as well as create a list of materials they will need for all the classes. Students then bookmark pages in their books and gather the materials for the next day. See Figure 4 for an example of daily to-do lists and Figure 5 for an example of student goals.
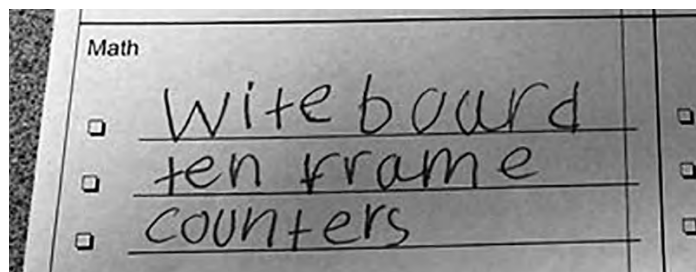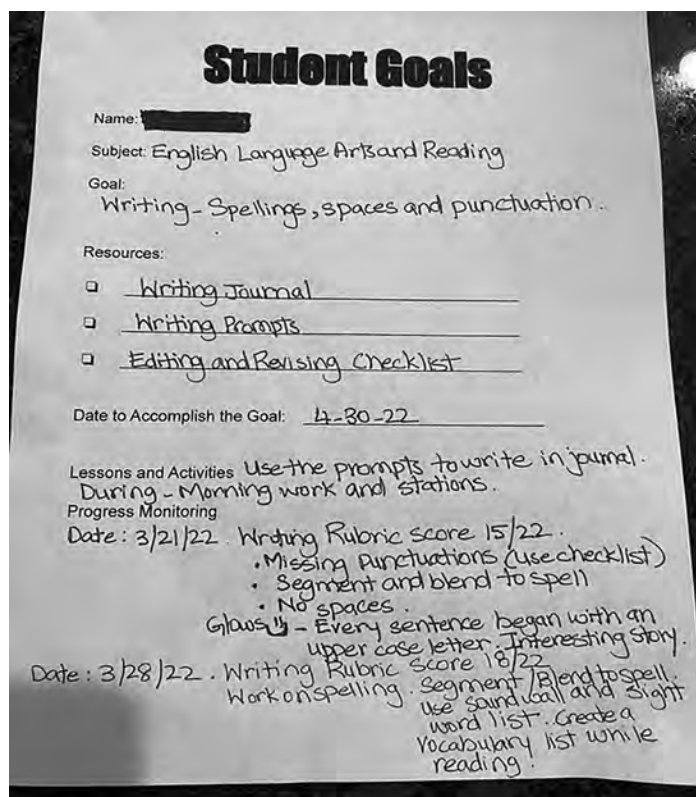


*Figure 4.* Daily to-do lists.



*Figure 5.* Student goals.

## Discussion

The COVID-19 pandemic forced classroom teachers nationwide to stop, think, and reflect on how to proceed. Teachers had to provide strength, even when they were fearful about their safety and their family's safety. In addition to providing stability through the unknown for students, the pandemic brought forth new demanding challenges to address. Initially beginning instruction online during this chaotic time, teachers were able to regroup and return to the classroom. Once children returned, it was apparent that there were learning gaps. Inevitably, teachers had to plan to teach the standards and review all the concepts lost. Elementary teachers also are the first to notice evidence of mental health issues (https://www.mentalhealth.gov/talk/educators). Teachers are resilient and strong, so many are willing to accept the challenge. Sarah is an example of a strong, resilient teacher who incorporated children's books and research-based activities into her classroom to help her students academically and mentally. The recommendations that align with the CASEL core competencies of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making are just that. Though not a comprehensive list of books, it provides a starting place for other classroom teachers who are juggling the integration of mental skills and academic skills.

## Conclusion

Daniel Goleman (1995) was one of the first authors to write a book focused on social-emotional learning. Goleman explains that emotional intelligence can matter more than IQ. He describes how fear from traumatic experiences can alter behavior and cause issues in people's social-emotional well-being. However, if the fear has not turned into a mental illness such as PTSD, it can be counteracted by relearning. Eventually, this fear can subside with time or with favorable conditions.

Similarly, the COVID-19 pandemic has created multiple fears and given rise to many traumatic experiences in students. By incorporating SEL, the developed fears and other social-emotional issues have deepened. However, the COVID-19 pandemic can be resolved and subsided. Classroom teachers have the knowledge, understanding, strength, and resilience necessary to help their students succeed in classrooms, schools, and communities.

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# THE IMPACT OF STUDENT CHOICE ON READING

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**Abstract:** As the world around us becomes more accessible, so do our students' options to engage with that information. With the increased disconnect within the classroom, many educators are seeking ways to re-engage students. Research supports the use of choice for reading within the classroom to increase engagement. The article establishes the impact of student choice on reading in a 21st-century classroom through the use of a volume log with built-in research elements into the individual students' areas of interest in topics, authors, and genres of reading to encourage reading goals to increase throughout the school year. Through choice, students have an opportunity to build their joy in reading, establish authentic reading lives, and gain skills in an academic setting through the use of book talks, reading speed rounds, and reading stations.

*Keywords:* student choice, reading, education, engagement

As adults, our desire to read relies largely on the prospect of choosing what we want to read. It is unrealistic to believe this does not also play a part in a child's desire to read. Why then do we tend to limit our students' reading by also limiting their choices to what we desire they read? As teachers focus on state standards and prepare students for the future, student choice often becomes nonexistent. This leads children to be disinterested in books, in stories, and in reading in general. The International Reading Association (2014) conducted research in the United States and the United Kingdom which suggested that "variation in reading achievement is related to motivation, engagement, and enjoyment of reading" (p. 2). Students who fully engage with reading of their choice often retain more unfamiliar sentence structures, enrich their vocabulary, and deepen their content

knowledge (International Reading Association, 2014). Providing student choice could positively impact the amount of reading in which a child will willingly participate.

Choice allows students to become invested in their education and enables them to thrive and achieve at higher levels (Dabrowski & Marshall, 2018). Through the implementation of choice within the classroom we honor students' needs for belonging, autonomy, and desire for engagement (Glasser, 1997). Furthermore, students build and exhibit good work habits that have a positive impact on their overall learning (Denton, 2005). In addition to these benefits, Glasser (1997) identified students ability to develop their own understanding and connections between academia and their own opinions and belief systems when provided opportunities to select their own reading materials.

Independent learning experiences are created when students are allowed to make choices regarding their own interests in education. Choice is rooted in psychology and nurtures a healthy development of autonomy for students (Dabrowski & Marshall, 2018) as well as motivation, healthful functioning, and performance outcomes (Patall et al., 2010).

Advanced technology has provided instant access to students' interests and choices. According to Skeeter et al. (2016), "[Students'] technology-rich world is robust with opportunities for decision-making and choice, but when they enter the classroom, the opportunities for choice are much more limited" (p. 6). Providing options in learning gives students a sense of responsibility and happiness in their work. Students who are more joyfully engaged are better able to process the material and retain the content and skills they used (Loertscher & Willis, 2006).

## Allowing Choice When Reading for Enjoyment

According to the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (n.d.), "Reading is a primary way to come to know things. Every time we read and comprehend a text, we add to the knowledge that helps us make sense of further texts" (para. 4). Selecting one's preferred reading material encourages engagement in the materials and enables the reader to attain a higher level of understanding of the written word. With this connection to the text, the reader creates learning routines suited to their own abilities and interests. Opportunities for choice are necessary for relationship building and student buy-in to occur (Skeeter et al., 2016). Students who choose their own reading selections can read and hold academic conversations with more depth and complexity without struggling to create connections and master skills (Collie & Brown, 2015).

Although reading in schools is required, including choice increases the joy of reading, which prevents a disconnect for students (Skeeter et al., 2016) and creates an authentic relationship between the reader, the book, and the content area. The more a student engages in reading, the more they want to continue to be involved in reading, leading to independence and goal-setting possibilities. Traditional classrooms focus on implementing whole-class novels where the teacher guides students through the process of learning. Gallagher and Kittle (2018) recommend there should be a balance between "independent reading, book clubs, and core texts, so students have a choice in what they read 75 percent of the time" (p. 12). Additionally, by providing student choice, we can overcome the issues that prevent students from becoming motivated to read, such as decision paralysis and disinterest (Gallagher & Kittle, 2018). Reading choice allows students to "follow their strengths, interests, or even instincts" (Pritchard, 2018, p. 38) to find literature

that creates motivation, both intrinsic and extrinsic, for their engagement.

## Ways to Implement Choice

Demonstrating how to slow down and engage with the book as a conversation versus a one-sided story is essential for students growth in reading (Kittle, 2013). While there are many ways to approach academic discussions within the classroom, it is crucial to focus on the end goal: engaging students' conversations based on interest-based books.

### Book Talks

One way to approach these meaningful conversations is by establishing time in class to discuss different books both academically and non-academically. The approach used in many secondary courses is called a book talk. Book talks are an opportunity to discuss a self-selected book with the classroom and typically covers:

- The author's name

- Genre of book

- Synopsis without spoilers

- Why they would enjoy reading the text

- Who would also appreciate reading the text

These areas provide students with guidelines on sharing their books with the class or in smaller groups. Kittle (2013) maintains that it is essential to create the process carefully as reading should not be a chore that you engage in hesitantly; we want students to approach reading with a sense of joy, curiosity, and interest. Additionally, guiding students in the process encourages them to make lists or summarize the types of books they have enjoyed in the past (Kittle,

2013). When starting the process of getting a book talk up and running, the first step is modeling. To start, teachers will need to consider the type of books they read when they were their students' age. Then, they will select books from their childhood or include current high-interest books to share with students. Establishing the process is essential before moving on to the next step. Once established, the teacher can begin including books from their own reading life. During book talks, challenge students to jot down information about the books shared. When students are allowed to create a preferred book list, it provides research opportunities into other books they may find pleasurable (Kittle, 2013). As students become adjusted to book talks, then conversations will feel less one-sided or flat. Through book talks, students will find peers with similar reading interests, which will allow for groups to meet. When students engage in the love of reading, their engagement with academic reading will be much more substantial and easier to obtain (Maguire et al., 2020).

In these thematic groupings, the prospect of interacting with different genres of books gives students the ability to learn, remember, and engage with new knowledge to form connections with previous knowledge and assist in layering further information onto the foundation of older information (Pritchard, 2018). Book talks can happen as a whole class or in small groups; to begin this process, students may do best by engaging in smaller choice options at the beginning, such as with newspapers, social media posts, and magazines (Federici, 2019). Students need to be given information about what choice is, how to use choice as a benefit, and how to apply skills learned to their choice novels (Federici, 2019).

### Reading Speed Rounds

Another valuable way to implement choice in reading is by having speed rounds with first chapters of novels or stations with particular genres. Students can move throughout the room during focused periods to explore genres of interest and several options

BOOKCLUB

within those genres. Introducing student choice in a supportive and collaborative environment by emphasizing individual book consumption engages the love of books which is essential to create a sense of community and joy (Federici, 2019). Providing students with an opportunity to engage in the non-academic exploration of genres with a variety of chapters or mentor texts allows students to remove the heaviness of academic expectation and turns this portion into more of an adventure with their friends to find books that interest them. Chunk this station approach so as not to overwhelm students and to provide ample time for exploration. Consider your students' interests area; if students in your class prefer nonfiction books, then starting here would create more buy-in than selecting from the classics. If we focus on their interests, we will find that engagement increases students' interest as it creates a sense of authenticity and a deeper understanding (Federici, 2019).

### Reading Stations

According to Nations and Waite (2013), reading centers, also known as literacy stations, provide students with opportunities to have hands-on access to reading materials in a non-pressured environment with the intention for exploration. Using stations provides students time to preview short stories or first chapters of books in various genres without any need for completing the entirety. Creating stations that stay in your room so students can reflect when they are not sure what to read next is another helpful tool to keep the conversation going (Gallagher & Kittle, 2018). Gathering materials can be organized through professional learning communities, classroom libraries, and reaching out to your school librarian. Providing students with opportunities to share out their own book choices can also result in including those in your reading stations for other students to explore that vary by table.

Having a student plan will allow the educator to create stations that will grow students in both their reading lives and in academic subjects. This plan should include a theme, a topic or focus for the centers, directions for self pacing, and an activity for completion. Every station does not need to be focused on skill mastery; however, it does need to havve a collection of books for students to explore and books should vary per table.

To implement reading stations, first compile a large collection of books within each genre. Ensure that books cover multiple levels for students of various abilities. Next, determine the size of the groups and arrange seating to support your group sizes, and make sure there are at least two options for each student to select from. Providing this option will insure that there is at least one book during this rotation that the studnet can engage with while completing the task

you have provided them. Tasks could be as simple as constructing feedback on whether the student recommends the book, or it could be mastery focused where the student is dabbling with the book while applying skills from a lesson that the teacher has modeled.

### Concluding Thoughts

With the growing distraction of technology, it is imperative that opportunities to engage in choice are provided for students and embedded within the curriculum at all levels of instruction. Ideally, literacy instruction should not be limited to the language arts classroom alone; however, it is a great starting point for any eductor seeking to include additional literacy exposure. Choice can be provided through library visits, book talks, speed rounds, and reading stations to expose students to a multitude of different genres, authors and topic areas. Through this exploration of text, students and teachers are collaboratively engaging in literacy and building a community of readers as well as establishing a pattern for life long reading. This builds a deeper connection with and understanding of the text in any content area.

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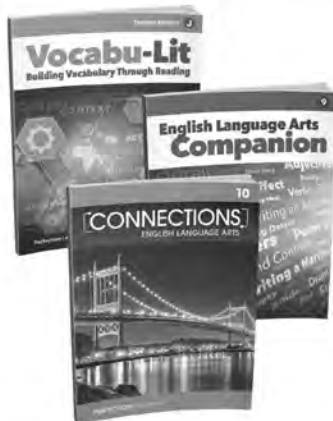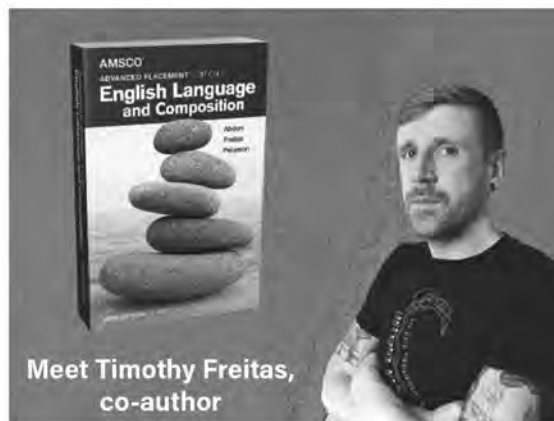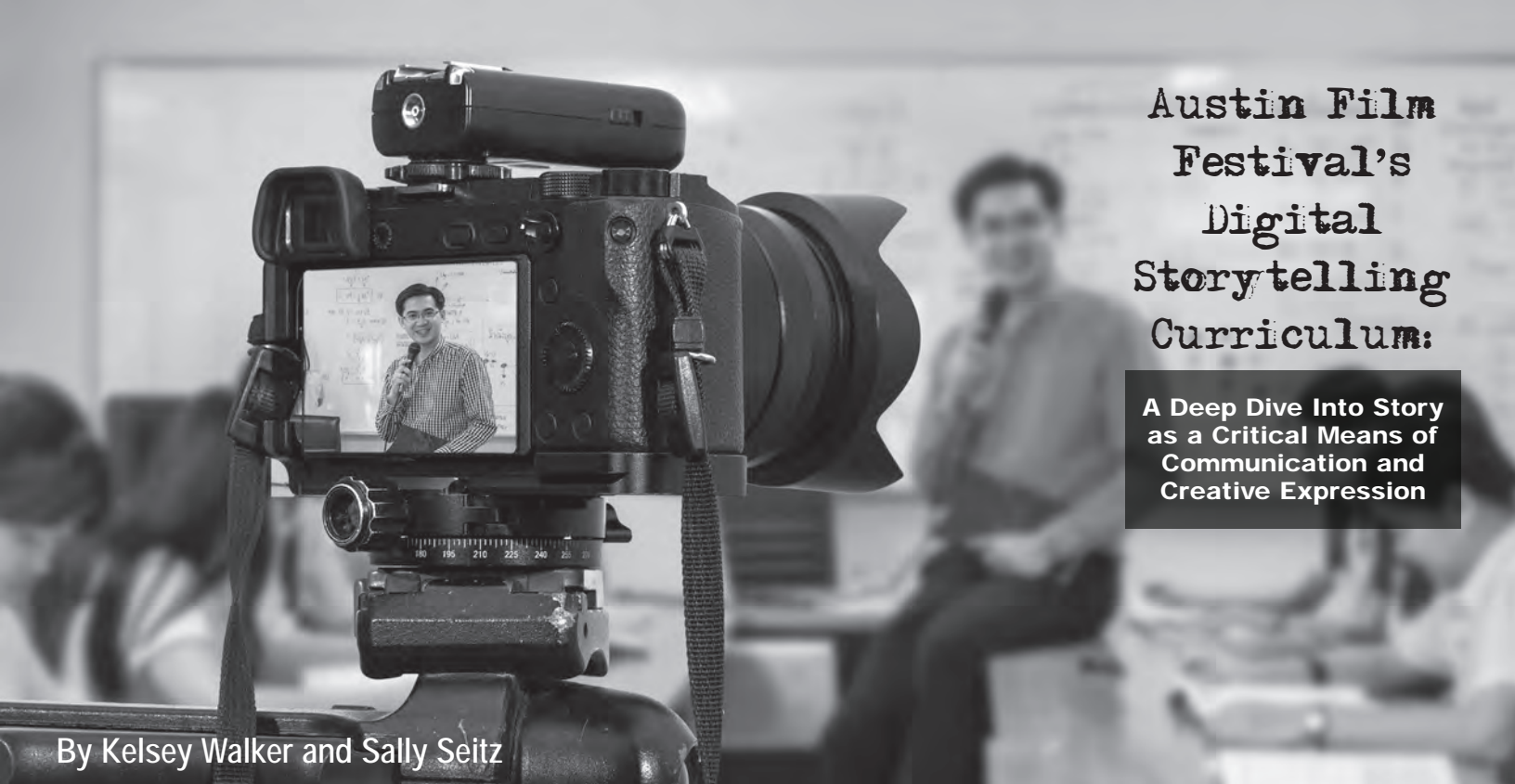
# Austin Film Festival's Digital Storytelling Curriculum:

**A Deep Dive Into Story as a Critical Means of Communication and Creative Expression**

By Kelsey Walker and Sally Seitz

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**Abstract:** Austin Film Festival's Digital Storytelling Curriculum examines the art of storytelling as a critical tool for communication. Developed collaboratively with Austin Film Festival and Austin Independent School District secondary English teachers, Digital Storytelling is nine-week, English language arts screenwriting curriculum in which all students draft an original short screenplay. Digital Storytelling bolsters students' creative and communicative skills while acknowledging storytelling as an ever-present aspect of our lives. Within the screenwriting unit, students are encouraged to harvest personal stories and then translate them into original screenplays. This article presents the curriculum's purpose, structure, application, and benefits for students in both a classroom and post-academic setting. The program's success can largely be attributed to two important pillars: a hands-on, experiential curriculum as well as an emphasis on connecting students to professional writers, filmmakers, and media artists.

*Keywords:* storytelling, communication, creativity, screenwriting, revision

**"OMG,** I have to tell you what happened at lunch!" I'm sure we've all heard similar exclamations as students file in through our classroom doors eager to recount recent events to their peers. Young people have an inspiring knack for finding the excitement in something as ordinary as lunch, or third period, or even a math test as they overlay their unique perspective to create a gripping new tale with ease. Yet, even beyond our adolescent years, storytelling is an ever-present part of being human. From discourse with friends, to pitching a new idea at work, to recalling what happened over the last year, storytelling is essential form of communication. Just like reading and writing, storytelling, which is often a dynamic utilization of the two, is a skill of self-expression imperative to student development as it is the universal means in which humans present their distinct point of view. Encouraging students to tell their story not only affirms that their perspectives are valid but also teaches them to access the elements of their personal experiences in tandem with their imagination that they wish to share with their community. Students learning to tell their story are students learning how to be heard.

## Austin Film Festival in the Classroom

Austin Film Festival (AFF) is a nonprofit arts organization founded on the idea that more storytellers deserve a platform in which to be heard. Established in 1993, AFF was the first organization of its kind to celebrate the often-unsung writer and their creative contributions to film and media. AFF's official mission is to further the art and craft of storytelling by inspiring and championing the work of writers, filmmakers, and all artists who use written and visual language to tell a story. As one initiative that supports the organization's mission, AFF supports Texas's next generation of storytellers through its year-round, youth art education initiatives, known comprehensively as the Young Filmmakers Program (YFP). Designed to introduce young creatives to the arts of screenwriting and filmmaking by working hand-in-hand with industry professionals, the program seeks to develop students' storytelling abilities while illuminating both the possibilities and realities of

working within the film and entertainment industry. The program's success can largely be attributed to two important pillars: a hands-on, experiential curriculum as well as an emphasis on connecting students to professional writers, filmmakers, and media artists.

## Digital Storytelling Curriculum

YFP has grown to be nationally recognized by its signature, in-school Digital Storytelling (DS) curriculum. Developed collaboratively with Austin Film Festival and Austin Independent School District secondary English teachers, DS is nine-week, English language arts screenwriting curriculum in which all students draft an original short screenplay. Formally launched in 2002, DS has served thousands of Central Texas high schoolers by encouraging students to harvest stories from their own lives, transform those stories into scripts, and experience the challenging, yet rewarding process of turning personal narrative into art. Offered at no cost to participating schools (which included Bowie High School, Akins Early College High School, and Crockett Early College High School for 2021-2022), AFF provides the necessary tools, training, and support system to implement DS into any classroom. Additionally, AFF often provides a trained arts educator to co-teach the curriculum with the students' English teacher. DS allows students to experience all stages of the creative process from within the classroom.

### Digital Storytelling Lesson Approach and Purposes



Figure 1. Lessons in Screenwriting

Writing an original short screenplay can seem like a daunting task, even for professional writers. Approaching the art of a short script (roughly 15 to 30 pages) like a condensed and simplified full-length film, DS presents the writing process as 13 lessons (see Figure 1) that take students from brainstorming through revision, with attention to learning industry-standard script formatting. This practical approach focuses on marrying creativity with discipline as students clarify key story concepts, plot points, and theme before drafting. DS lessons are designed to build upon one another, each utilizing the activities from the previous lesson to work closer to the end goal: a complete, original short script students can present with pride.

From our time teaching DS, we have observed student growth and motivation in a variety of areas including students taking more interest in reading and writing, showing more confidence with technological tools (e.g., cameras and video-editing programs), and being more willing to collaborate with and help peers. Yet, perhaps most importantly, DS pushes students to take ownership over their creative voice. Students are encouraged to write a story that is wholly their own. Students think deeply about a number of questions: What is it that I want my story to stay?, How do I want my audience/reader to feel?, What part of my perspective do I feel compelled to share?, and so forth. Such questions, though large, are essential to telling a story with clarity. The following lessons not only are instrumental for discovering students' answers to these questions but also for providing clear examples of how the unit contributes to student development.

### Key Lessons and Examples of Growth

Lesson 3 provides an in-depth analysis of the Three Act Structure—the film industry's standard story outline for screenplays. Most collegiate-level film programs spend beginning semesters teaching and analyzing the Three Act structure, as it is universally accepted as the most effective way to craft stories for the screen. In this lesson, the Three Act Structure is parsed into its essential components including "the inciting incident" and "the choice," the moments that set the protagonist's journey into motion. Students watch and analyze past AFF selected short films as they identify the key elements of the Three Act Structure presented. By clearly identifying these structural elements, students are able to confidently begin translating their own story components into this professional outline. The story structure worksheet (see Figure 2) helps students determine the essential story elements needed before they start diving into their screenplays.



Figure 2. Story Structure Worksheet

The story structure worksheet also serves the purpose of countering students' feelings of being overwhelmed and the apprehension of not knowing exactly where to start. The story structure worksheet guides students from their initial brainstorming process through the completion of the script. "Identify your protagonist" is a manageable first step and much more attainable than simply starting with "draft a screenplay." Once students know the character who is driving their story and identify the incident that sparks their journey, creativity flows with ease.

### The Bravery of Pitch Day

Lesson 5 focuses on the art of the pitch, an essential skill for any creative career. Students watch professional pitches from previous Austin Film Festival writers' conferences before crafting pitches of their own. Through a provided pitch structure, students prepare 90-second pitches that must clearly demonstrate an understanding of their script's main story elements, as defined in Lesson 3. During class, each student stands in front of their teacher and peers to pitch their script's story. While practicing the important skill of public speaking, students learn how to craft language with the goal of intriguing an audience. In this lesson, students are able to receive feedback in a supportive, encouraging environment and improve their stories' concepts before they even commit to writing drafts.

Though writing is generally a solitary process, a principal component of screenwriting, filmmaking, and all story-centered endeavors is having the confidence to share your idea with other people, along with the ability to provide constructive feedback. During the pitch day, students grow as they overcome the nerve-wracking experience of speaking before the class. These fears are often alleviated when peers ask one another questions, eager to know where each story is going. As the class time progresses, the classroom transforms from a group of timid students into a group of passionate creatives excited to start writing with more direction.

Lindsay (all names are pseudonyms), a Crockett High School Student and a 2022 DS participant, comments on her experience pitching: "I'm

usually a very quiet person, so this was the first time I've ever gotten to share my ideas with others, and I've actually felt proud of my own work. I loved this unit and loved writing out my script."

Of course, most students will not find themselves on a career path of pitching to movie producers, but public speaking and the art of crafting a persuasive, compelling argument are applicable to almost all workplace environments. This lesson allows students to practice a vital communication skill in a low-stakes and constructive environment.

### The Realities of Revising

Once students have completed a first draft, it's time to delve into the tough but true lesson that writing is rewriting. Lesson 12 focuses on the development of the students' first drafts by giving students time to share their newly completely scripts with peers. After reading through their partner's script, students use a guided feedback worksheet (see Figure 3) to both celebrate the strengths of the scripts as well as identify aspects of the story that need clarification or thoughtful rethinking. In partners, students talk through the notes they have provided and received as they articulate a plan for rewriting. Students start to change their view of the practice of revising writing not as a tedious task, but rather as a means for making their stories stronger.



*Figure 3.* Guided Feedback Worksheet

Eli, a Bowie High School Senior and a DS Fall 2021 participant explains, "[I learned that] writing is a process and quite a lengthy one at that. Revisions are super important. Though I understood that before, it's clearer now more than ever when in a class that requires truly good writing."

The objective of this lesson expands beyond the improvement of student scripts to explore the importance of both giving and receiving constructive notes with grace. As students transition out of high school, producing work for a review process will be a reality of their professional lives. Lesson 12 prepares students to embrace feedback as something to digest, process, then apply discerningly

to their work. This lessons also provides students with examples of substantive feedback.

## Stories Are Meant to be Shared

The final lesson of the screenwriting unit is the script reading! During this class, students sit in a circle, assign reading parts, and hear their stories informally performed aloud. This lesson is definitely the most fun and rewarding of the unit, as nothing is quite as exciting for the students as hearing their scripts brought to life. Typically, this class starts with the teacher asking for a volunteer to hear their script read first. This question is always met with the silence of several intimidated and nervous students, until one brave soul volunteers. After the first script reading, without fail, students' hands go up volunteering to share their work next. Hannah, a Bowie High School Senior and a DS Fall 2021 participant explains, "Around one month ago, I sat in the back of the class, alone, and didn't feel confident enough to speak up. But through this program, through this amazing and once in a lifetime opportunity, I felt heard and confident." Teachers often report increased engagement from students who are typically reserved in the classroom setting, delighted to see shy students eager to share their work.

Script sharing is also an opportunity to relish in the students' hard work and to recognize the development of their voices as writers. Previous lessons provided space for constructive feedback, so this concluding lesson focuses on the importance of celebrating our creative accomplishments. For most of these students, this is the first time they have ever been exposed to storytelling in this format, so time should be dedicated to reflect on how far they have come within this completely new medium. Due to the collaborative nature of previous lessons, students feel comfortable sharing their stories, most of which come from a very vulnerable place.

The curriculum has particular success in engaging emergent bilingual students in the language arts. When including dialogue in a script, students are encouraged to write authentically, which means that they get to express their thoughts in their own words and portray themselves and their experiences accurately as they reveal stories that are important to them. While emergent bilingual students may feel challenged by the expectation to use formal English in academic writing, screenwriting provides an artful avenue for using language and expression that is more of a mirror to students' day-to-day lives.

## Preparing for the Next Chapter

Teaching students how to effectively communicate and, more specifically, how to authentically express their personal experience is pertinent to their future success. From ever-emerging social media platforms to anecdotes in future job interviews, consuming, creating, and articulating story will not only be a fact of life for this generation, but a critical tool in both personal and professional settings. By teaching the fundamentals of storytelling and providing students the space to practice in a supportive environment, DS gives students the foundation needed to envision their future stories within both professional creative industries and beyond.

It is no secret that arts education opportunities are often underfunded within schools. This lack of funding directly impacts the resources available for students interested in developing their creativity and pursuing artistic careers. For many students, a career in the arts is a path many do not know exists because these paths are not highlighted in traditional curriculums. Beyond its exploration in story, DS aims to expose students to potential careers within film, television, and the media arts and ignite new interests for students to explore beyond the class. Sarah, a James Bowie High School Junior and a Fall 2021 DS student, explains, "I've always been interested in the movie making process, and now that I understand it better. I'm much more inspired and excited to explore it as a creative avenue." Many DS students go on to pursue screenwriting or other forms of creative writing at the collegiate level.

We believe this generation's greatest strength is their adaptability. From an unanticipated transition to online learning, to masks and social distancing, to broader cultural shifts, this generation has demonstrated its resilience in the face of great change. But have they been given the time and space to reflect upon society's massive reshaping? Storytelling is an essential tool for processing change. Story links our emotional response to an event, allowing us to reflect upon our personal experience. Then, by articulating our reflection of this event, we foster connections with those who have experienced and grown from change in similar ways. To say that our students have persevered through immense change over the last three years would be an understatement. By sharing their stories, students acknowledge the ways in which these obstacles have forced them to grow.
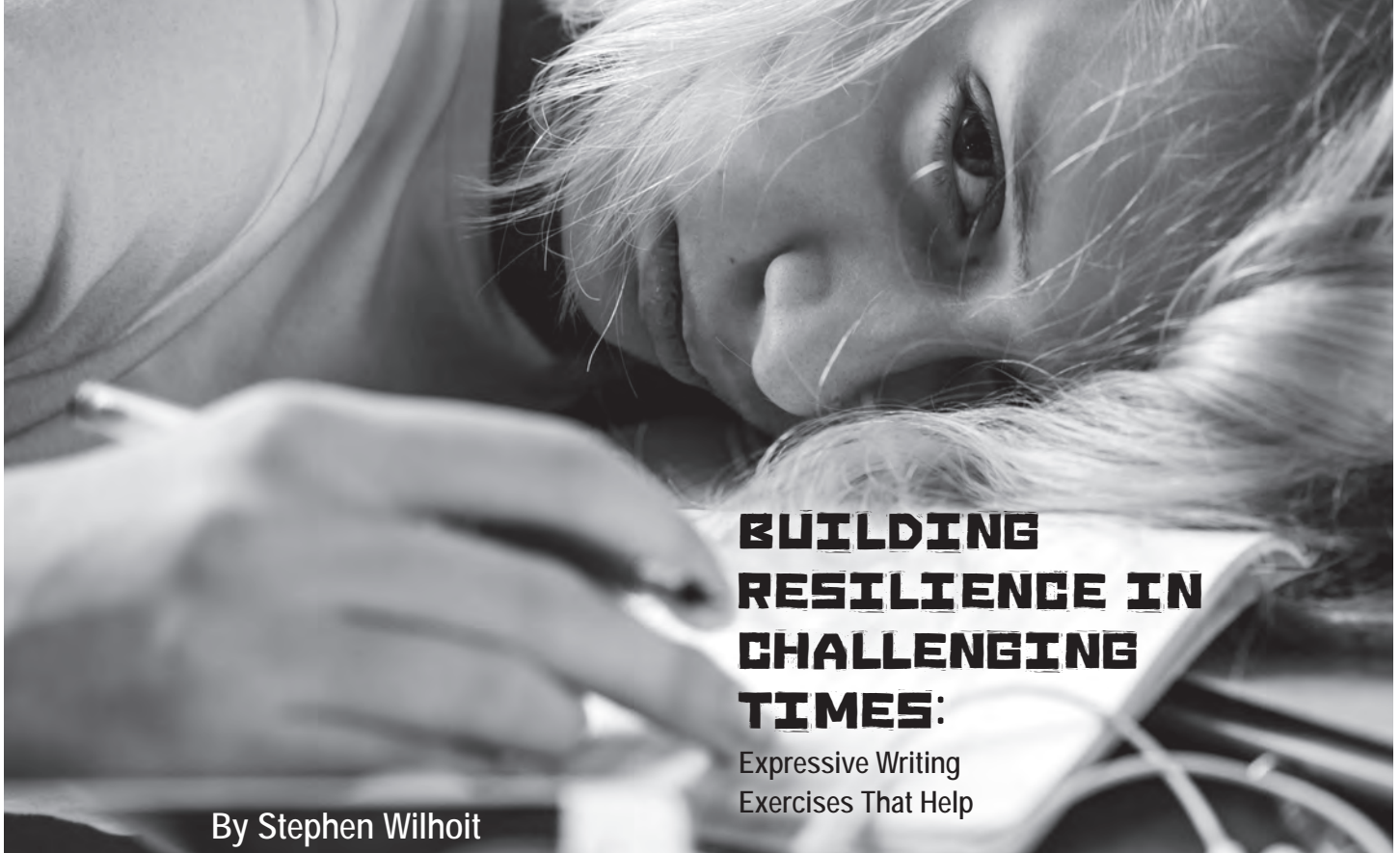
# BUILDING RESILIENCE IN CHALLENGING TIMES:
## Expressive Writing Exercises That Help

By Stephen Wilhoit

Stephen Wilhoit is a Professor of English at the University of Dayton and Director of Faculty Career Enhancement at the Ryan C. Harris Learning Teaching Center. He teaches a wide range of undergraduate and graduate courses in literature, composition, and creative writing and oversees faculty development programs related to professional development and vocational exploration. He has authored three textbooks (Pearson) and numerous articles on a range of topics, including rhetoric and composition theory, creative writing pedagogy, teaching assistant training, faculty development, and vocational discernment. He can be reached at swilhoit1@udayton.edu.

**Abstract:** Resilience in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic has become a crucial skill for college instructors to develop. Fortunately, the ability to "bounce back" from trauma can be learned and/or strengthened. This article examines pandemic-related trauma and the psychological benefits that expressive writing offers. The author then presents a sequence of five expressive writing exercises designed to help college instructors identify the sources of trauma associated with COVID-19, reflect on their emotional responses to the pandemic, and build the resilience they need to persevere and thrive.

*Keywords:* resilience, expressive writing, COVID-19 pandemic, well-being, college instructors

In addition to being an English professor at my university, I serve as an associate director of our learning teaching center. In this second role, I've worked extensively over the past two years helping colleagues cope with the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. They've come to me for advice on how to address a wide range of emotions stemming from the crisis, including anger, frustration, sadness, loneliness, confusion, and disillusionment. Worn out and burned out, many have had a hard time just hanging on.

At first, I wasn't sure how to help the faculty and staff who contacted me mainly because I didn't know how to help myself. I was struggling with the same challenges, even to the point of considering early retirement. When our campus closed due to COVID-19, the work that used to bring joy and meaning to my life now brought stress and uncertainty. Disappointed in my efforts to teach online and isolated from my students and colleagues, I felt powerless in the face of circumstances beyond my control.

In order to cope, I turned to an activity that helped me during other trying circumstances in my life—expressive writing. I hoped that putting my experiences and feelings into words would relieve the anxiety I felt and perhaps provide me the sense of control I needed to persevere. Through lots of trial and error, I eventually developed a sequence of expressive writing exercises that helped me cope with the pandemic-related challenges I was facing and strengthened my resilience.

## COVID-19, Trauma, and Resilience

Kira et al. (2021) identify three types of trauma that people experience. Type I is brought about by a single emotional blow, such as the death of a loved one; type II involves a series of blows that continued over time then ended, for example childhood sexual abuse; type III, the most severe, involves continuous, ongoing emotional blows with no known end. Many experienced

the COVID-19 pandemic, with its seemingly endless variants and unpredictability, as a type III trauma, the most difficult to defend against or mitigate.

Resilience is defined as the ability to "bounce back" from trauma—not to avoid it or somehow "cure" it, but to reconcile oneself to it and continue to live a positive life. More specifically, resilience is:

> the psychological quality that allows some people to be knocked down by the adversities of life and come back at least as strong as before. Rather than letting difficulties, traumatic events, or failure overcome them and drain their resolve, highly resilient people find a way to change course, emotionally heal, and continue moving toward their goals. ("Resilience," 2020, para. 1)

The American Psychological Association (APA) (2020) echoes this definition, characterizing resilience as "the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, threats, or significant sources of stress. . . . As much as resilience involves 'bouncing back' from these difficult experiences, it can also involve profound personal growth" (para. 2).

The APA (2020) identifies three core components of resilience: wellness, healthy thinking, and meaning. Wellness involves taking care of yourself physically and practicing mindfulness; healthy thinking involves accepting change, remaining hopeful, and learning from your past; and meaning involves finding purpose and helping others through difficult times. All of these components can be learned and/or strengthened through practice and conscious attention.

### Resilience and Expressive Writing

When engaged in expressive writing, people record their thoughts and feelings. The writing, whether on the page or the screen, is spontaneous and informal; writers do not concern themselves with matters of surface correction, such as grammar or spelling, or with organization and structure. The writing is free-flowing, personal, and private. The expectation is that no one other than the writer will read the text, unless the writer chooses to share it.

The psychological and emotional benefits of expressive writing are clear. Summarizing years of research, Pennebaker and Evans (2014) conclude:

> people who engage in expressive writing report feeling happier and less negative than they felt before writing.

Similarly, reports of depressive symptoms, rumination, and general anxiety tend to drop in the weeks and months after writing about emotional upheaval. Other studies found improvement in overall well-being and improved cognitive functioning. (p. 11)

However, to build resilience in response to trauma, expressive writing must involve more than a cathartic outpouring of emotions. Instead, writers need to analyze the feelings they express in order to identify how their emotions and experiences are linked. This analysis leads to insights which can propel and empower well-being, help the writer persevere in times of crisis, and guide actions the writer can take to create a better future. In *Writing as a Way of Healing*, Louise DeSalvo (1999) explains the benefit of expressive writing this way:

> We can't improve our health by free-writing . . . or by writing objective descriptions of our traumas or by venting our emotions. We cannot simply use writing as catharsis. Nor can we use it only as a record of what we've experienced. We must write in a way that links detailed descriptions of what happened with feelings—then and now—about what happened. (p. 25)

To improve our resilience, we must use expressive writing to better understand the sources of our trauma: what we experienced, how we responded to what happened, and how we might address those feelings now. Employing expressive writing to examine traumatic events in our lives builds resilience by helping us understand and move beyond those experiences. As DeSalvo (1999) explains:

> This is because as we write we become observers—an important component of resilience. We regard our lives with a certain detachment and distance when we view it as a subject to describe and interpret. We reframe the problems in our life as challenges as we ask ourselves how to articulate what is on our mind in a way that will make sense. (p. 73)

By analyzing and interpreting our expressive writing, we distance ourselves from the trauma we're experiencing and enhance our resilience by connecting past experiences with present conditions and future possibilities, promoting our well-being, engaging in healthy thinking, and constructing meaning in our lives.

### Expressive Writing Exercise Sequence

As the changes to my personal and professional life brought on by the pandemic began to weigh on me and I found myself unable

to help my colleagues meet the challenges they were facing, I turned for insight to a number of texts that discuss the connection between expressive writing and resilience, for example *Writing as a Way of Healing* (DeSalvo, 1999) and *The Story You Need to Tell: Writing to Heal From Trauma, Illness, or Loss* (Marinella, 2017). Most helpful, though, was *Expressive Writing: Words That Heal* by James Pennebaker and John Evans (2014), which offers a wealth of research on the benefits of expressive writing and a series of writing exercises people can use to build their resilience.

Drawing on Pennebaker and Evans, I began to experiment with various expressive writing exercises to see which might more effectively help me better cope with the stress I was experiencing, address the powerlessness I felt in the face of the pandemic, restore a sense of purpose to my work, and bring joy back into my life. I ended up with a sequence of five exercises that helped me achieve these goals. The exercises are brief enough that you could complete them all comfortably in one sitting. However, you may find it more helpful to complete the exercises over the course of a few days so you have time to reflect on what you wrote in one task before tackling the next. As you complete these exercises, keep these suggestions in mind:

1. Write for a short period of time—anywhere from ten to fifteen minutes. After the time has expired, read what you've written. If you decide you'd like to pursue something you wrote in more detail, complete another brief round of writing and review the results again.

2. Write quickly. Do not edit yourself as you write. Errors in grammar, spelling, syntax, or punctuation are irrelevant. Just let your thoughts flow and get words on the page or screen. Remember, no one but you will see what you're writing unless you choose to share it.

3. If you stall out while writing, quickly reread what you've written, pick a topic or idea to pursue further, and write about that.

4. After you complete each exercise, read and reflect on what you've written. Is there anything there that surprises you, something you hadn't recognized before, that puzzles or interests you enough to think about further?

A quick note of caution: People often feel sad immediately after writing about a traumatic event in their lives. However, these feelings usually pass after an hour or two and afterwards most people feel better and less stressed (Pennebaker & Evans, 2014).

**Exercise 1: Tell Your Story**

The first exercise focuses on narration. How did the COVID-19 pandemic manifest itself in your life? When did you first feel its impact? What has happened to you and those you care about during the crisis? How has your experience of the pandemic changed over time? What were key turning points for you? Everyone's experience of the pandemic has been unique: what is your story, both personally and professionally? As you write about your story, focus on key details—specific events, settings, and people.

Telling the story of your COVID-19 experience is vitally important to building well-being and resilience. As Pennebaker and Evans (2014) write: "Stories are an essential part of who we are. They provide a way for us to understand both simple and extremely complicated experiences. Just as we need stories to convey ideas to others, we also need stories to understand things that happen to us"

(p. 48). Employing expressive writing to explore your experiences during the pandemic can help you identify possible origins of the trauma you may be experiencing now and, as DeSalvo (1999) recommends, attach your current feelings to their sources.

**Exercise 2: Explore Your Emotions**

For this exercise, write candidly about your emotional responses to the pandemic. What are your feelings today? How have they changed over time? What is your emotional response to the pandemic's impact on both your personal and professional life? What words best capture the range of emotions you feel or have felt over the past two years: anger, frustration, loneliness, despair, bewilderment, loss, fear, uncertainty? Have you experienced positive emotions at times? Admiration for the way your students have persevered? Hope concerning emerging medical advances? Surprise at how well teaching online went for you? Pennebaker and Evans (2014) explain the task this way: "Write your deepest thoughts and feelings about the trauma or emotional upheaval. . . . In your writing, really let go and explore this event and how it has affected you" (p. 109).

Resilience involves reestablishing emotional well-being following a traumatic event (American Psychological Association, 2020). Acknowledging both what you felt at the time of the crisis and now is crucial to bouncing back from it. Importantly, as you explore your feelings, do not pass judgment on them. Your concern is not whether your emotional responses are right or wrong, whether they are justifiable, or even if they are completely understandable to you at this point. Your emotions just are, so treat them that way while completing this exercise. Be honest with yourself as you write and remember, no one else is going to see what you write unless you want them to.

**Exercise 3: Shift Perspectives on Your Experiences and Emotions**

This exercise requires you to shift your perspective and gain some distance on your experiences and emotions. Imagine a friend or family member asks you to explain the relationship between what happened to you during the pandemic and your emotional responses to them. Write out what you would tell that person. To complete exercise 3, you are linking insights you gained from the first two exercises, the story of what happened to you during the pandemic and your emotional responses to the crisis. However, exercise 3 encourages you to gain some perspective on your experiences by analyzing and explaining the connection between key events in your life and your emotional reactions to them. Clarifying the connection supports well-being, encourages agency, and promotes resilience (DeSalvo, 1999). Your writing in this exercise is still informal, personal, and private, but the new point of view you are assuming may help you understand both your experiences and feelings in new, productive ways. Again, do not judge your thoughts and insights as you write, and don't worry if the connections you're exploring are not yet clear. The goal is to get them on the page or screen so you can reflect on them after you've finished writing.

A variation on this exercise advocated by Pennebaker and Evans (2014) is to write about your experiences from a third-person point of view. Instead of using "I," employ a third-person pronoun of your choice ("he," "she," or "they," for example). Pennebaker and Evans (2014) explain why shifting pronouns in your writing may help you better cope with a life crisis:

Changes in pronoun use suggest changes in perspective.

When dealing with something as massive as trauma, it is important to see it from several different angles. No perspective is better or more valid than others; instead, it's important to get a sense of the many dimensions of the trauma you have experienced. (p. 50)

Just this shift in point of view will provide you some psychological distance on your experiences and a new perspective to consider. The insights you gain may help you derive a clearer sense of meaning from your experiences, a central component of resilience (American Psychological Association, 2020).

### Exercise 4: Affirm Your Strengths

What are your personal strengths, gifts, and abilities? What can you do well? As you look at the stressful situations you face, what strengths can you draw on in response? How have you effectively responded to the challenges posed by COVID-19? These can be small successes—for example, something you did in the classroom or at home that helped someone who was struggling or something you did to overcome a difficult situation you faced. If you have a hard time identifying your strengths, consider what other people have identified as your gifts. What have colleagues, family, or friends identified as things you do well? Your strengths can be physical (stamina, energy), intellectual (intelligence, reason), or emotional (empathy, stability). Practice self-compassion and view yourself in the best light possible. Forgive yourself any shortcomings and focus instead on the personal strengths that emerged as you faced challenges posed by the pandemic. The key is to identify the skills, abilities, talents, and gifts that you possess and can or have drawn on in a time of crisis. Do not be modest. Instead, honestly identify what you do well.

Embracing positive emotions and healthy thoughts is crucial to building resilience (Maynard, 2021). As Pennebaker and Evans (2014) put it: "In affirmative writing, we pay attention to the present and look forward to the future by writing about our strengths in body, mind, and spirit" (p. 158). According to Newman (2016), practicing self-compassion and cultivating forgiveness are both crucial to building resilience. This exercise encourages you to pursue both goals.

### Exercise 5: Envision the Future

For this exercise, imagine what the future will be like when you overcome any COVID-related challenges you are facing today. Though times may seem desperate and hope hard to find, what would a better future be like? You may not know at the moment how you'll arrive at that future, but just imagine what it would entail. Be as optimistic as you like. Focus on key goals you have— for example, how you'd like to live your life when the threat of COVID-19 has passed or how you'd like to build on the lessons you've learned about yourself these last two years.

Though the pandemic has been highly traumatic for many people, looking for positive benefits from the experience is important to building resilience. Research has shown that people who actively look for benefits when writing about traumatic events cope much better than those who do not (Pennebaker & Evans, 2014). As you complete this exercise, consider ways you may have benefitted from your experiences during the pandemic, no matter how challenging they've been. Pennebaker and Evan (2014) recommend you consider questions like these: "What things have you learned, lost, and gained as a result of this upheaval in your life? How will these events in the past

guide your thoughts and actions in the future?" (p. 116). According to the American Psychological Association (2020), finding purpose and meaning in traumatic experiences is crucial to building resilience. Writing about the future can help you do this.

### Conclusion

Resilience involves the ability to bounce back from adversity, to continue on in the face of challenges that may seem overwhelming at times. Crises associated with the COVID-19 pandemic caused many educators to become disillusioned with their work, especially as campuses closed, variant seemed to give way to variant with no known end, and the scope of our daily interactions with colleagues and friends were reduced to email exchanges and meetings on Zoom. The real question now, though, is how we will thrive in spite of these challenges. As with other trying times in my life, writing about the difficulties I faced due to the COVID pandemic helped me better understand my experiences and persevere with hope. Expressive writing builds resilience because it encourages mindfulness, promotes self-understanding, and helps people "manage their thoughts and feelings with non-judgment, loving-kindness, and compassion" (Glass, 2019, p. 242).

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# Journaling for Personal Well-Being

### By Samuel J. Ayers

Samuel J. Ayers prepares elementary and secondary teachers and principals in the Lubbock Christian University School of Education. He taught in San Antonio (Alamo Heights ISD) and Lubbock before serving as a principal and associate superintendent in Lubbock ISD. He can be reached at sam.ayers@LCU.edu.

**Abstract:** Journaling can be a tool for improved mental health during a time when the COVID-19 pandemic has been challenging for educators both professionally and personally. The author discusses the many types of journals that writers might choose to keep, including an exercise journal, bullet journal, free writing journal, gratitude journal, travel journal, reflective journal, and prayer journal. The author also provides suggestions for getting started, including using prompts, setting aside time each day, and considering digital options for those who prefer technology to writing by hand. Reflective thinking is critical to a teacher's effectiveness and learning, and journaling regularly can provide support in these areas. Teachers who see the benefit in their own lives are more apt to introduce the practice and benefits to their students.

*Keywords:* journaling, types of journals, writing, self-reflection, journaling apps

Strength and resilience have taken on additional meaning as the COVID-19 pandemic created challenging times across the nation and around the world. As educators knew they must help their students navigate online learning, they simultaneously—along with a myriad other adults—rediscovered how the application of journal-writing strategies allowed for the processing of a range of emotions and the creation of greater self-awareness.

In the Hallmark movie *Five More Minutes* (Cooper & Hayter, 2021), a young woman misses her grandfather who recently died and wishes she had just a little more time with him. But she discovers his journal that he began writing after high school, throughout his military service, and upon returning home. It is through reading her grandfather's journal that she gains new insights into his life experiences, his struggles, and his character.

In the Sony Pictures release *A Journal for Jordan* (Black et al., 2021), a soldier deployed to Iraq writes a journal of advice to his infant son. The writings create an avenue for providing his son with information about his father's background and beliefs while also conveying messages of encouragement and love.

A common theme in these two films is journaling. Ackerman (2018) suggests that the very use of the word *journaling* for most people conjures images of middle-schoolers making diary entries to deal with adolescent drama. But journaling is a tool that can be employed by adults. In fact, across time, famous people have used journals: Leonardo da Vinci (inventor/artist), Frida Kahlo (artist), John D. Rockefeller (businessman), Marie Curie (scientist), Samuel Clemens (author), Thomas Edison (inventor), John Steinbeck

(author), George Marshall (General), George Patton (General), George Lukas (film director and producer), and Oprah Winfrey (actress and talk show host), among many, many others (Prichard, 2015). Even this brief list of people representing a range of careers and interests validates the use of journaling in more than an educational setting.

## What Is Journaling?

To define journaling, one must first define *journal*. Simply put, a journal is a record that accounts for any number of experiences, events, observations, wonderings, and the like. So, journaling is the act of using a journal for a personal means. Levesley (2021) suggests it is expressing your thoughts and feelings with words or illustrations and can include documenting personal goals or reflecting on people, interactions, and events. A journal can also contain a to-do list. Spelling and grammar are not a concern. The purpose is to capture personal, reflective thoughts or creative ideas.

## Why Journal?

The benefits of journaling are typically related to the emotional well-being of the writer. Ackerman (2018) indicates this kind of writing can serve as a helpful tool for reducing stress, managing anxiety, or working through depression. The act of writing in this manner has the potential to identify personal fears or problems with possible solutions. Additionally, positive self-messaging can be experienced through journaling and reflecting on the writing.

Dr. Stuart Spendlove (personal communication, December 30, 2021), a clinical psychologist and an adjunct professor at Brigham Young University, stated,

> Journaling is particularly helpful for individuals with anxiety and depression. Asking a client to journal their worries or other negative thought content related to sadness, worry, rumination, etc., helps unload the mind. Our minds are like cups or other vessels with limited capacities. When the vessel is full of negative thoughts and worries, there is little room left for the mind to function properly—that is, attention, concentration, logic all spill over and get lost because the cup is full of the negative stuff. Journaling allows a person to put on paper what has been circulating in the mind and thereby free up some space in the mind to concentrate on other things—sleep, daily living activities, tests, lectures, performances, etc.

Skip Prichard (2015), a corporate senior leader and a business speaker, recognizes the benefits of journaling for self-awareness, but he primarily utilizes it to enhance his leadership. He believes this method of reflective writing can result in improved demeanor, better organization, and enhanced decision-making. He encourages business leaders to write in the morning before starting their daily work activities.

Dr. Carlos Perez (personal communication, December 28, 2021), a Lubbock Christian University professor and the chair of the Psychology and Counseling Department, journals regularly. When asked about his motivation for journaling, he stated,

> I use it to process, think, and work through any experiences or feelings I'm working through. When I'm stressed or anxious, I use it to put my feelings and thoughts on paper, which externalizes my experience. Once it's on paper, I can separate myself from my stress and think through it with a clearer mind.

Dr. Perez clearly demonstrates the function of using journaling to manage important issues causing stresses in life. There may be a multitude of reasons for journaling, all individualized to the person doing the writing, but the point is the benefit to the writer through the process of journaling. Add to that, there are many ways to journal, which can also impact the effectiveness of the experience of the writer.

## Types of Journals

Journaling does not need to be confined to writing endless paragraphs about daily activities or thoughts. Done in this way creates the possible loss of benefits to the journaling effort. A variety of options are available and can be beneficial depending on the purposes for writing, ranging from recording data, to keeping track of comments, to allowing ideas to flow effortlessly with a stream of consciousness feel, all equally valid and helpful to the writer.

### Exercise Journal

Barth (2020) writes about the benefits of physical health improvement through the act of writing. Recording baseline data, workout routines, and progress made during exercise can be reviewed to determine what is working and what is challenging. Noting nutritional choices and new recipes can assist with the overall benefits of all aspects impacting exercise. Additionally, Barth stresses that the complexity or simplicity of journal writing is up to the writer. He carries a writing instrument and index card with him so that when he thinks of something he wants to write about, he will not forget. By jotting down those ideas, he then affixes the card to a larger notebook to keep for future reference.

Personally, I first stumbled into an exercise journal while recording my high school workouts and mile times during track season. As an adult, I have revisited the exercise journal since my last doctor visit when he suggested I lose weight. The entries did not begin as a positive experience, but I am anticipating an eventual benefit to the reflective process this time around.

### Free Writing Journal

Free writing and stream of consciousness writing are often used interchangeably. Peterman (2020) describes this writing style as completely unedited and unstructured in nature.

There are no rules or guidelines. Simply writing thoughts as they come to mind is called free writing. When a structured approach is difficult, a less formal approach can validly start the writing process effectively. Kay Valek, my ninth-grade English teacher, introduced our class to this style of journaling by beginning each class with ten minutes of free writing in spiral notebooks. Initially, this was a painful exercise for me since I did not find writing to be an enjoyable experience, but appreciation followed as the year passed. Eventually, the practice of free writing in a journal allowed me to explore my interest in certain topics and activities, even leading to learning about photography and trying distance running, two of several passions I have been pursuing for years now.

### Gratitude Journal

Keeping a gratitude journal involves noting the good things experienced with the hope of reducing the tendency to focus on the negative. A daily recollection of positive experiences or things thankful for from throughout the day tends to foster genuine appreciation. While this can be a dedicated format, I typically

incorporate this type of writing as part of my other journaling experiences. Perhaps the most vocal proponent of the gratitude journal was Oprah Winfrey, who often spoke on her television show about her own love for reflective writing, and she encouraged viewers to adopt the regular practice of keeping a gratitude journal.

**Travel Journal**

Although travel continues to be impacted by the global health issues, keeping a written and visual record during travel of people encountered and places visited—including a scrapbook dimension with the addition of collected programs, tickets, maps, and other items related to the experiences—can enrich those travel experiences even after the journey has been completed. The travel journal can address local visits to points of interest (e.g., parks, exhibits, parades, performances, movies) or travel to distant locations. My own travel journals resemble the scrapbook format, while my wife describes places visited each day along with specific descriptions and feelings associated with restaurants and points of interest.

**Reflective Journal**

Reflective writing requires focusing on the significant events and experiences in life. These can be distant or recent, facilitating the contemplation and recording of lessons learned. Educators who use reflective journaling do so for a variety of reasons, personal and professional. The benefits include adding a perspective that facilitates objective problem-solving and considering how to best meet the needs of specific students. Additionally, reflective journaling as a process for students offers an opportunity to practice metacognition in a way that our often turbulent and noisy lives don't allow. Both Skip Prichard's (2015) and Carlos Perez's (2021) use of journaling could be considered reflective since they both describe the personal and professional benefits they experienced. My own use of reflective journaling led to further developing some of the ideas in those entries to be stories I shared with family members. In fact, I maintained a collection of letters that I presented to each of my daughters upon their graduation from college. Another

collection of reflective childhood experiences and lessons learned was presented to my grandchildren.

**Prayer Journal**

There is nothing more personal than a prayer journal since it encompasses the spiritual side of human nature. A journal such as this can include scripture references or thoughts from meditation and prayer. Specific prayer concerns are often the focus. Personal prayer journal entries typically list or describe people or situations of concern that are later included as parts of prayers or meditation. My wife records key words or phrases about the characteristics of God and an abbreviated daily prayer list of people with issues that come to mind. Answers to prayers often surface as part of this practice. Even though public schools in the United States embrace separation of religion and school, in these challenging times of the pandemic-caused uncertainty, this kind of relative journaling can offer solace to the writer on deeply personal levels.

## Helping Strategies for Journaling

Key to the success of journaling for personal or professional use is the method that works best for the situation in which it will be practiced. Once the educator knows when to write and how to approach it for the most impact, the practice of journaling can be used as a teaching and learning strategy with consistency. As someone decides to use journaling for increased health benefits, learning about how to search for and use the method that works best is key. Mentioned in this section are some of the ways journaling can be started.

**Prompts**

A prompt is a statement or thought that encourages or launches the writing process. Sometimes it is helpful to begin writing with a specific prompt. These prompts can be personally developed and used as needed, but some journal writers might seek motivation to write using prompts from other sources. Naujalyte (2018) provides 75 quality prompts and Petruska (n.d.) provides 65 interesting

prompts for consideration. These and other sources found easily in online magazine articles and blogs provide options for the journal writer who wants or needs a prompt to start journaling.

## When and How to Journal

Scheduling 10-15 minutes for journaling daily is helpful, especially in a comfortable and calming spot away from the busyness of the day. Write or draw what comes to mind or use a chosen prompt. Think of journaling as an internal conversation. Important to realize is that writing by hand or drawing is preferable to using a computer or iPad as the slower and effortful act of writing by hand seems to force the brain to better engage with the information being processed. Technology may impact the efficiency of producing writing, but the purpose of journaling is not as much for efficiency as it is for the benefits of reflection and other positive outcomes, so writing by hand is definitely worthy of serious consideration.

## Digital Options

In the hectic world in which we find ourselves, there are those who are just much more comfortable with technology applications (apps) than with pen and paper. Journaling apps are available for iOS and Android users who fit this description. Additionally, Pot (2022) highlights and provides pricing for the most popular apps. These include Day One for Mac and iOS users, Diarium for Windows users, Momento for social media users, Grid Diary for templated users, Five Minute Journal for beginners, Dabble Me for journaling over emails, and Daylio for "non-writers." Most cost $3-$5 per month, and some have pricing for a full year. The variety available for those who are technology skilled and interested means that users can likely find an app that is best suited to them as writers.

## Reflective Practice

Given the emotional benefits, journaling can be beneficial to teachers personally and professionally. Educators are trained professionals entrusted with tremendous responsibility, accountability, and ethical constraints. As professional practitioners, teachers are expected to improve their effectiveness and enhance learning experiences for their students, and maintaining a reflective practice through journaling can help teachers meet those expectations. Osterman (1990) revisited the research of Donald Schön and noted that skilled practitioners reflect on their practice, which is a key ingredient to their professional growth. This belief is reflected in T-TESS, the current formal teacher evaluation system, as educators are expected to complete a post-conference self-reflective piece as part of the evaluation cycle. Furthermore, when teachers view

journaling based on their own experience as an effective learning tool, they are likely more committed to introducing reflective writing as a regular practice for their students.

## Final Thoughts

Ultimately, journaling is an individual and private activity for personal benefit. Dealing with stress, turning inward, and thinking more clearly (e.g., Ackerman, 2018; Barth, 2020; Pritchard, 2015) are just a few of the many benefits associated with reflective journal writing. That there are many types of journals means that selecting the right journal for a journal writer's specific purpose and aim is important to make the experience the most effective and convenient. The act of journaling has the potential to impact daily life in the most positive of ways, especially during challenging times like these. Committing to the journaling process may be an activity worth considering as an investment in mental and physical health with multiple enduring benefits for both teachers and their students.

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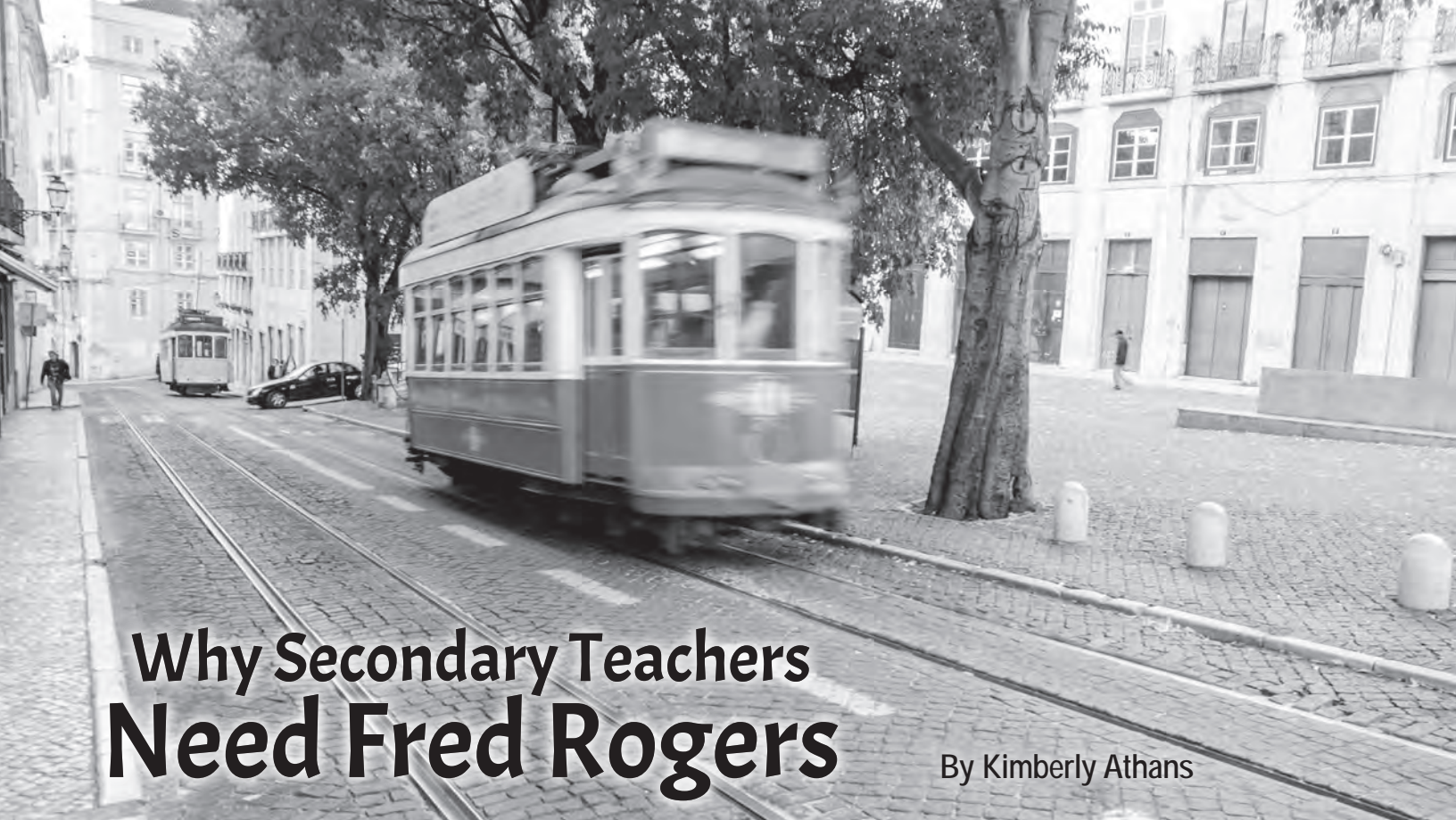
# Why Secondary Teachers Need Fred Rogers

By Kimberly Athans

Kimberly Athans teaches literacy and education courses at Point Loma Nazarene University in San Diego, California. In her over 25 years in teaching, she has taught middle and high school English in California and Texas, as well as composition and rhetoric and literature courses at the community college level. Her research focuses on best practices teaching writing, on literacy in secondary schools, and on the legacy of the National Writing Project. She can be reached at kathans@pointloma.edu.

**Abstract:** This article discusses the legacy of Fred Rogers, and bridges the connections of his work in early childhood development to the needs of older students. The author draws upon her own experiences as a child watching *Mister Roger's Neighborhood*, and as a teacher who has tried to incorporate several of his ideas into her own high school English classroom. She argues that especially in this time of uncertainty, change, and political unrest, and when facing students after a long absence in a pandemic, teachers need to be equipped to meet their students' social- emotional needs before their academic needs. The article offers specific suggestions and insights from Fred Rogers and scholars on social-emotional learning to help teachers and students cope with the challenges they face today.

*Keywords:* teaching in a pandemic, the legacy of Fred Rogers, social-emotional learning, secondary English, teaching resilience and empathy

On his PBS television show, Mister Rogers used to sing a song called "It's You I Like." The song gained notoriety when he sang it with Jeff Erlanger in 1981, the ten-year-old boy with severe disabilities who would subsequently introduce him into the Television Academy Hall of Fame in 1999 ("Jeff Erlanger," n.d.). The lyrics (Rogers, 1971) repeat the words "it's you I like" throughout and other lyrics emphasize how people are perfectly likable exactly as they are, right then and always. These lyrics are the echoes of a man who dedicated his life to making children feel understood, valued, and loved. They could be on a poster in every classroom in America. They should be stamped on the heart of every teacher who walks into the profession with the intention of making a difference in the lives of young people.

## Who Was Fred McFeely Rogers?

Fred Rogers was born in Latrobe, Pennsylvania, in 1928, a community "with its tidy homes and many parks and playgrounds [that looked] like quintessential small town America" (King, 2018, p. 20). This town became his vision of the neighborhood, a place where "children could feel understood and valued" (p. 158). A victim of childhood bullying, illness, and isolation, he turned to puppetry, music, and ministry to channel his emotions. His life philosophy came from a quote from *The Little Prince* which reads: "It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye" (de Saint-Exupéry, 1943, p. 50). That is how he lived his life each day, and from all who knew him, he was the same person offscreen as he was onscreen. Rogers was concerned with matters of the heart above all else, a mantra that allowed him to become a pioneer in social-emotional learning in early childhood education.

Rogers became the producer, writer, performer, director, and program manager of *Mister Roger's Neighborhood*, a show that

began in 1968, airing over 1,000 episodes in 33 years. Storytelling was also at the heart of what Rogers did on his show, a technique taken from early child development scholar Margaret McFarland, whom he worked with for many years. He took his calling very seriously, stating: "If it's for the children, it has to be the best we can give" (as quoted in King, 2018, p. 165). McFarland's influence was invaluable for the program. He met with her weekly to discuss the scripts, music, and letters from his audience:

> She said that attitudes aren't taught, they're caught. If the teacher has an attitude of enthusiasm for the subject, the student catches that whether the student is in second grade or in graduate school. She said that if you show them what you love, they'll get it and they'll want to get it. (King, 2018, p. 138)

Every day before the show, Rogers uttered a prayer: "Dear Lord, let some word of this be yours" (King, 2018, p. 204). Rogers used television as a conduit for his ministry. While he never mentioned God, the music he composed, stories he developed, and themes of his program all centered on the Christian principles of loving your neighbor and self, living a consciously moral and authentic life, looking for the goodness in everyone and accepting them as they are, and being kind to others. In fact, many of his aphorisms (see Appendix A) have become well-known sayings of kindness and love that followers of Rogers's life and work often espouse. His focus on social-emotional learning over cognitive development, coupled with his insistence on authenticity, honesty, and sincerity, was what made his show unique. As King (2018) offers, "While Sesame Street used fast pacing and quick cut technique to excite and engage young viewers ad keep them glued to the screen, Fred Rogers deliberately headed in the opposite direction, creating his own quiet, slow paced, thoughtful world, which led to real learning in his view" (p. 194). Rogers championed an approach that allowed children to take their time to process their learning and to use their imagination. It was that stillness and philosophy of deeply, simply, and slowly that made him a national icon.

### What Can Secondary Teachers Learn From Fred Rogers?

Although much of Fred Rogers's work was in child development and early childhood education, and although the age range for the audience of his program was for children ages 3-7, his teachings are just as relevant for older children and teenagers. As a former high school English teacher of 20 years, I used many of the same things Rogers did in my own classroom. For example, I always strove to offer my students time to think and read silently. I knew how their fast-paced, stressful lives were bombarded by noise and distractions, and I attempted to offer them a safe haven of silence. I had a reading corner with a rug and pillows in my classroom, low lighting or natural window light for quiet time, and lots of color and comfort. I wanted my classroom to feel more like home, much like Fred's 1950s living room set. I started each year having them write "Where I'm From" poems, and learned their names by the end of the first week of school. I always incorporated projects where they could work in groups and use art supplies so that they could showcase their creativity. Sometimes we went outside and sat in the shade of the trees to read or write in our journals. I encouraged them to live in the moment and practice mindfulness. I called on them by name and gave them hand-written individualized feedback and comments on their papers. I also read to my students almost every day and established rituals and routines they could rely upon. We created a class book of six-word memoirs at the end of the year, and I wrote a memoir for each of them. I practiced active listening,

worked very hard at getting to know each and every student, and paid attention to what was going on in their lives. Sometimes I brought in goodies for celebrations or rewards. I went to their plays and their games, their choir concerts and their poetry readings. I had a chalkboard in my room filled with their quotes that amazed me, and I showcased all of their work. I framed artwork by former students and hung it on my walls. By the time I got to my twentieth year, my room was quite cluttered, full of trinkets and coffee mugs and little gifts from previous students, but I wouldn't have it any other way. I did these things to show my students that I cared about them. Academics and learning were important, but *they* were even more important.

I created every activity, assignment, and assessment with the intention of bringing out the unique individuals my students were. For example, when teaching *Frankenstein* to my seniors, I had my students create a monster that represented their fears, asking them to write an explanation of the symbols/imagery/portrayal of their monsters. I remember one student had tape over the mouth because she felt like speaking her mind got her into trouble, another had two tickets to prom in their hand because they always felt like the only one who was alone, another student had a bandage over her heart for the pain of her parents' divorce. I will never forget Andy's monster with his monster's stuttering speech bubbles because he, too, struggled with stuttering his whole life. After the whole-class share of our projects, Andy said he never spoke for that long in front of a class, and if it weren't for our class, he never would have done it. There were many tears shed in that moment by his classmates.

Carol Jago (2020), associate director of the California Reading and Literature Project at UCLA, speculates about the need for teachers to recognize the vulnerability of their students in the pandemic, thereby creating a classroom community where students support one another, urging:

> Generating sympathy isn't enough. We need to nurture empathy. Fortunately, English teachers have at their fingertips a powerful tool for teaching empathy—literature.
>
> Books situate social-emotional issues within real world settings, both past and present. They invite classroom conversations about controversial issues and allow room for children to ask themselves, "I wonder what I would have done? I wonder what I might have felt." (paras. 5-6)

Like Fred, I used stories to usher in conversations about what it means to be a human being in our world, how to live for the greater good and love our neighbor, and how to live an authentic life. As Jago (2020) states, there is no better medium than literature to teach empathy and understanding of self and others.

Now more than ever before, students need an adult in their lives who cares about them. They need teachers who are there for them, who see them, who listen to them. They need safe spaces of refuge in an ever-changing, often scary world. They need a Mister Rogers, and we can provide that for them in so many little gestures and intentional ways. Fred loved a sign on his college campus so much that he scribbled the message on a piece of paper and carried it in his wallet for years. It read "Life is for service" (Tuttle, 2019, p. 30). This is a testament to the servant heart of teachers. We are called to teach, and no matter where we end up in our careers, those souls in our classroom are our responsibility. As we continue to trudge through compassion fatigue, languishing, cognitive deficit, and the ways in which the pandemic has affected our mental,

physical, social, emotional, and spiritual well-being. The sobering statistic that 71% of our students are suffering from stress, anxiety, and depression (Son et al., 2020) is disconcerting to say the least, making our need for Fred's legacy even more timely.

I remember a time when I was teaching *Macbeth* to my seniors. Many of them were not taking it seriously or were putting their attention and efforts into their other classes. No matter how I tried to make connections to Shakespeare and our lives today, they were disengaged. One morning as I saw them exchange flashcards for their other classes for the big quiz coming up, I had had enough. I spontaneously stated that we had finished reading Act III, and that we were going to write. I told them to review independently for 15 minutes, while I went to the front of the room and wrote a prompt that took up the entire board. As I sat there and watched them reading the prompt, I felt vindicated. Finally, they will take my class seriously, I thought. This is not the blow off English class where we just hang out and discuss books.

Then something happened. I looked at them. There they sat in their seats with tired eyes, probably from staying up late to study the night before, or to ride the bus from an away game, and here they were now, most of them probably without any breakfast, at 7:45 in the morning, writing about Macbeth's descent into madness. I saw their distinctly different backpacks next to their desks, laying haphazardly all over the floor, their lunch bags spilling out among science goggles and choir music folders. I saw their wrinkled shirts and their pajama bottoms (one girl had slippers), and even a blood testing kit for diabetes. At that moment, it hit me. I saw their souls. I was suddenly very aware of the power I had. As they sat there biting their lips and scratching out phrases on their papers, flipping quickly through the text for enough quotes to get an "A," I realized I was not showing them anything, except that I wasn't listening to them or adjusting my teaching to meet them where they were. I remember getting tears in my eyes and feeling like a mother more than a teacher at that moment. I learned a lot about myself and my

seniors that day. It was humbling, to say the least.

One of the things Fred Rogers is known for is the saying that teachers, coaches, mentors, and parents need to love their work in front of kids. This idea comes from Margaret McFarland who invited a sculptor to a work with children at the Arsenal Center. She implored him not to teach sculpting, but "to love clay in front of the children" (King, 2018, p. 139). Tuttle (2019) muses, "I wonder if he ever considered this: that like the sculptor loving the clay, which helped them to better love the clay, he was loving the children themselves in front of them" (p. 63). Not only did I fail to love Shakespeare and figurative language and poetry in front of my kids that day, I also forgot to love them. I had forgotten one of Fred Rogers's most important lessons: grace. Biographer Maxwell King (2018) stated that Fred Rogers was all about grace—in everything, for everyone. He saw God in all things, and of course he gave away that grace.

Rogers is revered for cultivating honesty and authenticity in himself in the same way he cultivated self-love in his viewers: "by choosing good liturgies and keeping them day after day, program after program . . . song after song" (King, 2018, p. 102). We have liturgies (or work of the people) in our classrooms. Daily or weekly rituals, traditions, expectations, activities, and schedules, we keep these to help our students build discipline in their work and to lessen their anxiety by giving them something to rely on. Another way to ease the transitions in the day-to-day classroom, especially amid the backdrop of whatever may be happening in their town, city, or country, is to connect the dots. As Tuttle (2019) espouses:

> When Fred Rogers addressed issues of difference … he was connecting the dots…between the grown-up versions of these social realities and their analogue issues in childhood … If we are going to develop generations of emotionally intelligent adults, we must address the emotional needs of the children who will become them. (p. 92)

## Social-Emotional Learning

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) defines SEL as "the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions" (Finn & Hess, 2019, p. 7). In short, it is the integration of social and emotional development of children and adolescents within academic learning and curriculum. The five SEL competencies are self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision-making, social awareness, and relationship skills (CASEL.org). Teachers can implement social-emotional learning in their classrooms in the following ways: be intentional, create a warm and inviting classroom culture, focus on relationship-building and connecting with teachers and peers, make discipline more inclusive, foster empathy in your classroom, have students actively engage in activities that are relevant to them, let them have choices in their assignments, have them make goals and help them reach them, take the focus off of grades and place it on learning, foster inclusive practices and a sense of belonging in your classroom, greet them at the door and ask them about their day, play learning games together, lead morning or restorative justice circles, and model taking care of yourself. Benefits of including social-emotional learning in your classroom include the following: improves classroom and school climate, increases student motivation, teaches problem-solving and coping skills, improves classroom behavior, increases students' ability to manage stress and depression, helps students with goal setting, increases academic achievement, provides a safe space to talk about feelings, and supports self-efficacy and student advocacy. Intentionality while planning lessons is a good way to incorporate social-emotional skills, as is differentiating instruction for all learners according to mind styles, learning modalities, and multiple intelligence theory. Ask yourself, "What do I want my students to know, feel, and do at the end of this lesson?" (Martinez, 2016). Social-emotional learning is something most teachers have been doing naturally for decades; however, in this day and age, intentionality with these practices is vital. Students are dealing with more adult issues and carrying the weight of significant problems now more than ever before. Review the social-emotional learning wheels for elementary and secondary students (see Figures 1 and 2) and notice the dramatic difference that a few years make as far as the emotions that our students are working through in our classrooms on a daily basis.

It is especially important as we return to our classrooms following the pandemic that we review these concepts and think about strategies that we can use to implement some of these ideas. All students need to develop self-awareness of the ways in which the pandemic has changed their lives. They need to consider the emotions they are experiencing and the most effective ways for them to use these emotions in their learning and interactions with others. The focus of teachers should be on teaching "self-awareness and regulation skills, whether it is through morning messages and circle time for young children or narrative writing and group discussion for older students" (Meyer, 2021, Regulating section, para. 1). Questions which evolve from these discussions may be: *Who am I? Why do I feel this way? How can my emotions help me learn? How can I be happy?* (Meyer, 2021, Regulating section, para. 4). "Exploring a sense of self and identity is critical to SEL development, and students need this exploration as their lives move beyond the pandemic" (Meyer, 2021, Regulating section, para 5). The underlying need for SEL goes well beyond the pandemic. Finn and Hess (2019) argue that SEL is, among other things, an "attempt at rebalancing an education system that in recent decades has focused overmuch on reading and math scores while giving short shrift to character development, civic formation, and the cultivation of ethics among its young charges" (p. 7).

Perhaps the most important thing that secondary teachers need to remember, as they teach 150-200 students each year, is to help students to realize their gifts and contributions that they bring to your class or school and to celebrate their uniqueness. Rogers



*Figure 1.* Emotions Wheel for Elementary

Courtesy of San Joaquin Valley Writing Project, California Association of Teachers of English Convention, February 2021.
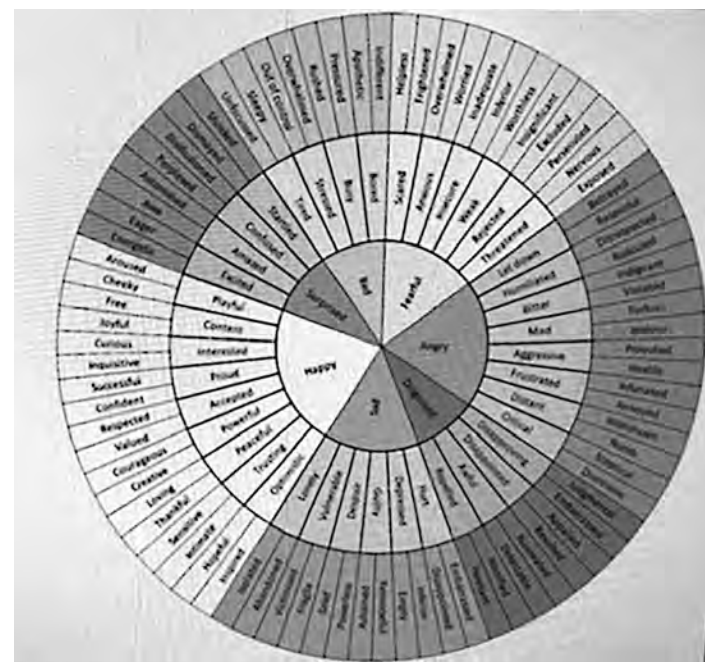


*Figure 2.* Emotions Wheel for Secondary

Courtesy of San Joaquin Valley Writing Project, California Association of Teachers of English Convention, February 2021.

referred to this as individuation, a Jungian term that refers to:

> a lifelong process of integrating influences and instincts that make a person whole, a discovery of his or her uniqueness. It also carries with it the idea that we become who we were intended to be, by design, not just who we think we should be. (Hollingsworth, 2005, p. 120)

When Amy Hollingsworth (2005) was interviewing Fred Rogers, she asked him to imagine that he had one final broadcast and could share the single most important lesson of his life. Rogers responded,
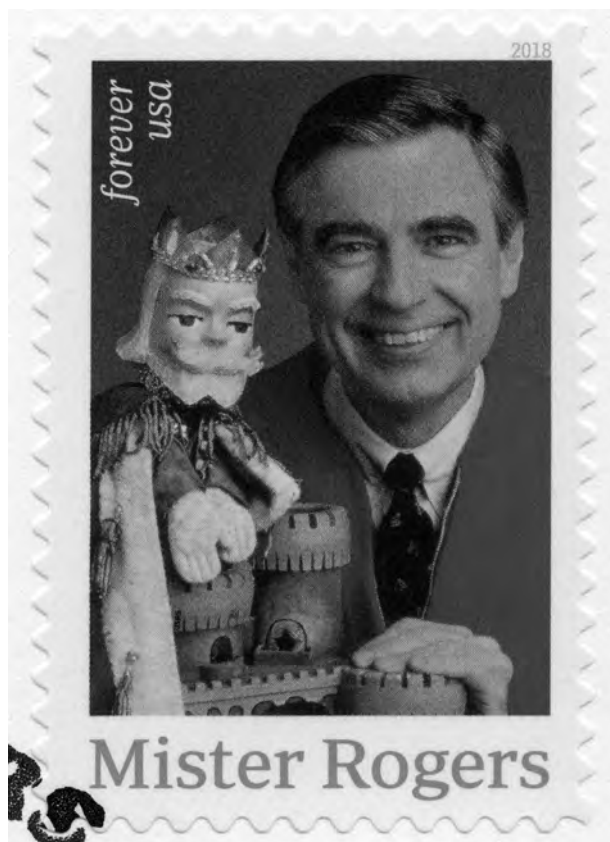


"Well, I would want [those] who were listening to somehow know that they had unique value, that there isn't anybody in the whole world exactly like them and that there never has been and there never will be" (pp. 160-161). Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could see his final wish as our own personal goal and reminder as we went back to school in the fall? Fred Rogers taught America about early childhood, he was an exemplar of the best values a person can possess, and he deeply and profoundly affected several generations of people. Wouldn't it be even more wonderful if his legacy could live on through us in America's classrooms? I can't think of a better way to create a beautiful day in our neighborhood.

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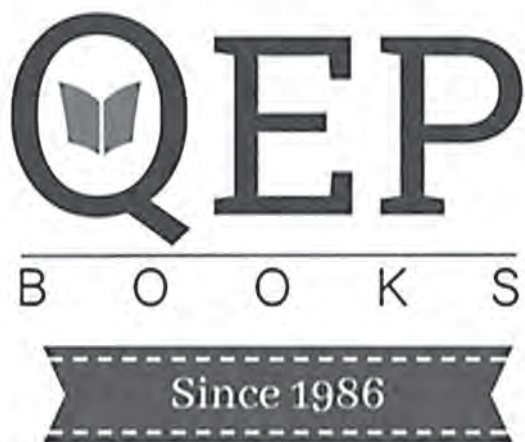
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## Appendix A

### The Aphorisms of Fred Rogers

1. Try your best to make goodness attractive.

2. Look for the helpers. There will always be helpers. If you look for the helpers, you'll know there's hope.

3. Everyone has something special to offer the world.

4. The best gift you can give a person is your honest self.

5. You have made this day special just by being you.

6. What is human is mentionable, and what is mentionable is manageable.

7. You are loved and capable of loving.

8. Love is at the root of everything—all learning and relationships.

9. I like you just the way you are.

10. Children long to belong. I think they really love to know they are part of something important.

11. I offer an expression of care to every child.

12. Children have deep and complex feelings, just as adults do.

13. The outside world of children's lives have changed, but the inside world hasn't.

14. You don't have to do anything sensational for people to love you.

15. So much that is spontaneous is what can be truly inspired.

16. You're the only person like you in the whole world.

17. People like honesty.

18. Be in touch with your inner child.

19. I care about you.

20. Music is essential to our being.

21. Children confront fears through play.

22. All I can do is be myself.

23. Children can have a full range of feelings and express them in healthy, positive ways.

24. I don't think you have to use labels to allow people to see what inspires you.

25. One of the greatest helps in the development of literacy is the dining room table conversation.

26. I think people should have complete silence every day.

27. Give the kind of nourishment that comes from an understanding of development of the human personality.

28. Children long to belong and feel as if they are a part of something important.

29. Life is a continuum and so are the ways of expressing life and creativity.

30. It is alright to share your feelings, especially negative ones.

31. Self-knowledge is the starting point of authenticity.

32. Self-esteem in a child comes from truth about themselves.

33. I found that suppressing feelings has the same fate as trying to suppress a beach ball in the ocean-they both come out sideways.

34. How we see ourselves affects how we see others.

35. There is one thing that evil cannot stand, and that's forgiveness.

# Editorial Policies for *English in Texas*

*English in Texas* is a peer-reviewed journal.

## *ENGLISH IN TEXAS* EDITORS

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Houston Baptist University

*Angelia Durand, Ed.D.*
Houston Baptist University

*Elizabeth (Polly) Treviño, Ph.D.*
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Houston Baptist University

## JOURNAL ADDRESS

919 Congress Avenue, #1400
Austin, Texas 78701
512.617.3200

## ACCEPTED MANUSCRIPT CONTENT

Articles on all aspects of English language arts instruction are invited. Student literary work will also be considered. All submissions should align with the issue's specific theme.

## FORMAT FOR MANUSCRIPTS

Please refer to a current issue of the journal for examples of the format and style elements described below. Manuscripts should be submitted electronically.

*Submissions should be sent to Editor at EnglishinTX@hbu.edu. Microsoft Word 2007 or higher is preferred.*

Manuscripts: Suggested length limit is 2500-3750 words for research, 2000-3000 words for classroom innovation manuscripts. All typing, including footnotes, references, and quoted materials should be double-spaced and in 12 pt. font. Margins of at least 1½ inches should be left at the top, bottom, and sides of the pages. Manuscripts should be typed in the following order:

*Title page*. The title page should give the title of the manuscript. Each author's name should be placed under the title. Underneath a short dividing line at the bottom of the page, please provide the author's name, highest earned degree, and current professional position. In addition, include contact information, address, telephone number, and e-mail address. Include a short three-sentence biography suitable for publication. End with a statement confirming that the manuscript has not been submitted or published elsewhere.

*Abstract*. Please include an abstract of 150-200 words and a list of 5 keywords pertaining to your manuscript.

*Text.* Following the introduction, long papers should be divided into appropriate sections with headings. First-order headings should be centered, boldface, uppercase and lowercase headings. Second-order headings should be flush left, boldface, uppercase and lowercase headings. Third-order headings should be indented, boldface, lowercase paragraph headings ending with a period.

*Quoted literary material*, such as lines from poetry, should include attribution with original author's name and title of work.

## CREDITING SOURCES

*See the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (7th ed.) for a complete guide.*

### *Citing References in Text:*

Citations should be given in the text by enclosing in parentheses the surname of the author(s) and the year of publication; the page number(s) should be included only when a direct quotation is used:

(Jones, 2010)
(Jones, 2010, p. 156)

*E-mail citations:*
L. A. Chafez (personal communication, March 28, 1997).

*Website citations:*
Kidpsych is a wonderful interactive website for children (www.kidpsych.org).

### *Reference List*

References for all citations should be typed, double-spaced, and listed alphabetically on a separate sheet(s) following the text.

*Journal Article:*
Author, A. A. (year). Title of article. *Title of Periodical*, xx, pp-pp.

*Book:*
Author, A. A. (year). *Title of work*. Publisher.

*Online Article:*
Author, A. A. (year, month). Title of article. *Title of Journal, xx*(x). http://www.apa.org.monitor

*Motion picture citations:*
Producer, A. A. (Producer), & Director, B. B. (Director). (year). *Title of motion picture* [Motion picture]. Country of Origin: Studio.

*Figures (Table, Charts, Graphs).* Each figure should be provided on a separate sheet. All artwork to be submitted to the printer should be high-resolution linotronic output, 1200 dpi preferred or clean solid black-and-white laser output at no less than 300 dpi. (Consult the Editor for details.) The desired location of figures in the text should be noted, and figures should be numbered appropriately so that they correspond to the mention of them in the text.

*Style.* All accepted manuscripts are subject to editing. The guide for style is *The American Psychological Association* for documentation and *The Associated Press Stylebook*. In some instances, however, TCTELA reserves the right to use unique stylistic elements for aesthetic purposes. Manuscripts not submitted in this format may be returned to authors for revision at the Editors' discretion.

*Note: Manuscripts will not be returned to authors after the editing process has been completed.* Questions concerning all editorial matters should be directed to the Editors.

## REPRODUCTION OF CONTENTS

## EVALUATION OF MANUSCRIPTS

Manuscripts are accepted for consideration with the understanding that they have not been published previously and are not being considered simultaneously for publication elsewhere. The right to reject any manuscript or to return it to the author for format, style, or other revisions before accepting it for publication is reserved to the Editors.

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The Texas Council of Teachers of English Language Arts, with 1,000+ members, represents a dynamic field of educational professionals. The following publications represent numerous direct marketing advertising avenues that reach the English language arts teachers in Texas. Advertising in more than one publication can provide you with two months to a year of exposure for your company.

## ANNUAL CONFERENCE PROGRAM
Each year, the Texas Council of Teachers of English Language Arts publishes a conference program that is distributed to 900+ conference and tradeshow attendees.

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Standard size inserts are charged at the full page rate plus $50 per 100 pieces as a handling charge. Additional charges may be incurred based on weight or size of piece.

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Only electronic art will be accepted for full color advertising. Additional fees will be billed for any ads that are not electronically submitted. See specifications listed on the back of the advertising insertion order for more information on acceptable advertising formats and make-ready fees.

1. No cancellation accepted after closing date.

2. No agency commissions or cash discounts.

3. All advertisements are accepted subject to the policies and approval of TCTELA.

4. TCTELA reserves the right to withdraw an advertisement at any time without prior notice to the advertiser.

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7. Advertising rates are subject to change. Contact TCTELA Office for information on current rates.

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## 1. PRODUCING YOUR AD

**Dimensions**. See the Advertising Information page. Ads, especially partial-page bleed ads, should be designed so they can be placed on either left or right pages.

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**Type/Fonts**. Adobe Type I fonts are preferred, TrueType fonts are acceptable. Choose bold or italic fonts when needed; don't apply bold or italic styles to plain fonts or your type may not output correctly. To avoid font issues with EPS files, all EPS fonts must be conferred to outlines. If you are knocking out white type against a black background in a color ad, make your background a "rich black" of 40% Cyan and 100% Black to ensure crisp type.

**Crop Marks/Bleed.** Use crop marks to indicate bleed and trim. Offset your crop marks enough to keep them out of the bleed.

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All ads should be accompanied by an acceptable proof. Laser or inkjet proofs for 4-color ads are not acceptable. If you do not provide the required proof for color ads, TCTELA will not be responsible for reproduction quality.

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## 3. SENDING US YOUR AD

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Send us your ad on CD, floppy disk, or via e-mail if it does not exceed 5MB when stuffed. We do not accept ad submissions via FTP. Please scan your disk with a virus checker before sending it.

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Any disk intervention required by TCTELA or our printer may result in additional charges to the advertiser. If we encounter a minor problem with your ad, we will attempt to fix it and let you know what the problem was. If we cannot fix it, we will ask you to correct the problem and submit a revised file on disk via overnight delivery, or FTP to the printer directly, assuming our deadline permits it.

The most common problems include images that are too low-resolution, missing Macintosh screen and/or printer fonts, incorrect ad sizes, images not converted to CMYK, text outside the safety area, ads created in nonstandard or Windows applications, and embedded color profiles that add LAB color.

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- Assignments generated by students' performance levels
- Progress Monitoring Reports
- Instructional videos for Writing TEKS with scaffolded lessons
- STAAR TEKS aligned Vocabulary practice
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### Reading Language Arts 3rd-5th grades

Consists of a pretest, 3 interim assessments, and a full length practice test that are TEKS based (formatted like STAAR).

### Reading Language Arts 3rd- English I/II grades

Consists of a pretest, 2 interim assessments, and a full length practice test that are TEKS based (formatted like STAAR).

### TEKS Writing Skills Editing

Each grade level 3rd - English I/II consists of learn (videos), practice, assess, and edit passages.

### TEKS Writing Skills Revising

Each grade level 3rd - English I/II consists of learn (videos) and practice passages.

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To request proposal, please email info@summitk12.com.

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**Texas Council of Teachers of English Language Arts**
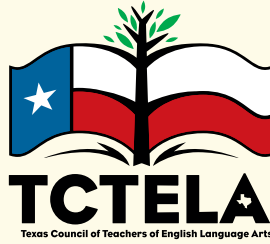
# 2019-2024
# Strategic Plan

## Mission

TCTELA will advance the literacy growth of all Texas students by developing a network of diverse professionals and by providing professional development based on best practices in education.

## Core Values

1. Texas students' needs drive decision-making at TCTELA.

2. TCTELA offers something unique and crucial to English language arts/reading educators.

3. The work of teaching is best done in collaboration, not isolation.

4. Reading and writing are reciprocal and interconnected.

5. TCTELA advocates for students and educators.

## Vision

The vision of TCTELA is to be recognized by educators, policy makers, and other stakeholders as a leading voice in the field of English language arts and reading.

## Overview of Goals

**Goal 1: TCTELA fosters leadership.** TCTELA will strengthen its standing in the field of education as a key professional organization with a long, reliable history of quality leadership in English/language arts and reading education.

**Goal 2: TCTELA promotes community.** TCTELA will facilitate a collaborative community of professionals who learn, explore, and connect.

**Goal 3: TCTELA supports instruction.** TCTELA will offer research-based professional development, grounded in best literacy practices, for every ELAR professional throughout the state.