

Systems Newsletter

Center for Gifted Education

The College of William and Mary

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Poetics: Core Content for Gifted Students

Among the worrisome gaps in the education of American students is poetics; the lost core component of formal language study. This gap would appear to indicate a widespread failure of intellectual awareness of the importance of poetry and technical poetics to the educated mind. Even in schools that assign students a strong list of novels and provide challenging programs of vocabulary and grammar, the study of poetry and its technical details may be limited to reading a thin assortment of poems from a so-called interpretive point of view—an oblivious approach that imagines poetry can be adequately appreciated through the mere meanings of words, ignoring the poet's constructions of vowel and consonant sounds and the relationships of these sounds to the ideas of the poem. The necessary technical substance of poetry is thus ignored but for a whisk at the surface: rhyme, sonnet form, alliteration, personification, simile, and metaphor.

The result is an intellectually damaging relegation of poetry to the literary sidelines—something extra to pursue if class time permits.

This won't do.

Poetry is not an option; it is not extracurricular. An understanding of poetry and technical poetics must be one of the core components of a rigorous and advanced language curriculum. It is not just that there are poems and poets so famous that to lack

familiarity with them constitutes cultural ignorance; it is that the technical elements of poetics—necessarily first learned through the serious study of poetry—are employed in all genres of advanced writing by poets, novelists, politicians, and essayists. It is that talented and powerful writers of every genre incorporate poetic techniques into their writing; students must understand poetics, or they will be incapable of understanding great prose. If they can't read poetry very well, they won't be able to read novels very well, either.

Poetics is what distinguishes great prose from common prose.

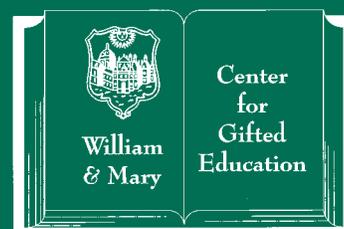
Poetry cannot be studied in a self-contained unit and then, like Peter Pan's shadow, folded and put away in a drawer.

In fact, the poetry/prose division itself is a false dichotomy. We may separate poetry from prose in our organizational thinking when we develop curricula, but real writers don't separate them so exclusively. Poetry and prose are inextricably involved. Literature presents us with a kind of seamless, unsegmented continuum from the least poetic prose to the most poetic poetry, and it is impossible to identify a line that utterly separates the two. Abraham Lincoln wrote technically proficient poetry as a young man and used the same classical poetic techniques in his Gettysburg Address, even submerging a verse of end-rhymed iambic

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From the Editors



We would like to welcome you to the third in a series of *Systems* that addresses themes in gifted education from multiple perspectives. This issue focuses on language arts for gifted learners.

In the first article, Michael Clay Thompson presents his argument for the inclusion of poetics in language arts curricula for gifted students. Mr. Thompson, a former classroom teacher, now works as an educational consultant and author. His poetics curriculum is available from Royal Fireworks Press. The second article explores the Jacob's Ladder and Navigators series developed by the Center for Gifted Education. This article was written by Dr. Heather French, who earned her Ph.D. at the College of William and Mary. A former middle school language arts teacher, Dr. French worked with Project Athena during her time at the Center. Bronwyn MacFarlane, a current doctoral student at the Center, wrote our third article, a survey of contemporary research on writing instruction for gifted learners. References for these articles are available on the Center's website, cfge.wm.edu. Finally, we have included an annotated bibliography of recently-published fiction appropriate for gifted learners in grades K-2, 3-5, 6-8, and 9-12. We hope that the information contained in this spring issue of *Systems* is helpful to you in your work with gifted students.

Poetics

(cont'd from page 1)

trimeter in the text:

We **can** / not **de** / di **cate**

We **can** / not **con** / se **crate**

We **can** / not **hal** / low **this ground**.

The final two syllables of Lincoln's sentence are both stressed; such a double-stress is called a *spondee*, a technique that poets use to focus emphasis. Having learned to use spondees in his early poetry, Lincoln used them repeatedly in the Address: *brave men, this ground, died here*.

Herman Melville wrote poetry into the pages of *Moby Dick*, but disguised it as prose and concealed it in ordinary-looking paragraphs. We have to arrange Melville's paragraph like a poem to realize how poetic his prose is:

one serene and moonlight
night when all the waves
 rolled by
 like scrolls of silver,
 and by their
soft suffusing seethings
made what seemed
 a silvery silence,
 not a solitude

In this passage Melville used alliteration and consonance on the *s* consonant and assonance on the long *i* vowel (and other techniques as well) to create the effect of serenity.

Some who do not know poetry well prefer to think—*hope*, even—that these poetic details don't require stressful intellectual exertion, that they are subconscious accidents of inspiration, that they are just what happens when a talented writer puts serene pen to paper. This is worse than false; it is an insult to poets. It is essential to understand that the powerful experience we often have with a poem is caused by the strenuous, even heroic work of the poet as artist. Poems are not freewritten journals. They are not spontaneous accidents of relaxed writing; they are planned—just as planned as all other forms of serious art. It takes more than talent to write a poem; poets have to know what they are doing in every syllable. Poems are constructed with an elaborate set of tools that have technical names and precise functions.

Another issue is that poetry is afflicted with stereotypes that interfere with its profile in American education. These stereotypes include the idea that poetry is an art form mainly for girls, or that poetry is effeminate. It is also thought by those who have never read the major poetry of American or British literature that poems should be pretty, or should express feelings more than ideas—disregarding the fact that even an introductory knowledge of great American and British poetry shows that poetry attacks the same great range of serious subject matter as any other art form. One outsider's stereotype is that a poem is just a kind of jingle, is just prose lines with rhymes at the end. Believing this, innocent readers look for the "poetry" at the far right side of the page; in doing so, they miss most of the poetry,

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From the Executive Director

Dr. Joyce VanTassel-Baska

One of the special opportunities afforded to me as the president of the National Association of Gifted Children is the chance to lead a group of educators to countries of interest, studying their education in general and gifted education in particular, as well as soaking up their culture along the way. It was my privilege to be able to lead such a group to China over 16 days in December, 2005 as a part of the People to People Ambassador Program—40 educators representing 15 states and various roles from teacher to coordinator to school head to parent from public and private schools. The trip focused on three cities—Beijing, Nanjing, and Shanghai. Visits to schools, universities, and special institutes and Centers constituted the professional portion of the program. At each site, we met with students, teachers, and administrators, observed classes, exchanged views, and learned about how the Chinese “do gifted education.” We also shared our research and practices in the United States through presentations and discussions.

In preparation for the trip, my co-leader Dr. Chwee Quek, former graduate student and now special assistant in the Singapore Ministry of Education, and I prepared a bibliography for delegates to read prior to the trip. Included on this list were specific books on Chinese culture and education as well as

recent works that allow us to understand China in the world context, such as *The World Is Flat* by Tom Friedman. Films and novels were also recommended to provide insights into Chinese thinking, perhaps best seen through the arts. We also created a chart that compared China, Singapore, and the United States on important dimensions of educational implementation, using it as a backdrop to making onsite comparisons as we went along. A bibliography of readings in gifted education was prepared and selected articles forwarded for delegates to read in advance. A set of powerpoint slides was created to provide further background on the topics to be discussed, providing research and practice paradigms. Our topics ranged from quality curriculum and instruction to teacher preparation to developing scientific talent to creativity. For access to these materials, please refer to the Center for Gifted Education website at William and Mary (<http://cfge.wm.edu>).

Yet not even these readings prepared us for the trip itself and the learnings that accrued. It is one thing to understand Buddhist philosophy and Confucianism; it is quite another to see them assiduously applied in educational settings. It is one thing to know that education is valued in China; it is quite another to see that espoused value enacted with such diligence and seriousness. The

translation of the value system, a blend of Maoist thought and Confucian ideals, yields educational settings that are intense and serious, highly selective in their student body, and rigid in their program of studies. The preferred mode of education of the gifted is acceleration, having students complete eight years in four using teacher discretion in compressing the content for each subject studied. Yet the Chinese also care about the development of the whole child, especially in physical education.

Very few formal programs for the gifted exist in China—45 was the number we were given. However, many schools are highly selective in their student population, taking in only the top 1% or less of those who apply and providing a rigorous program of study. While these programs may not be labeled gifted, they bear all the earmarks of such programs as we know them in the U.S.

Of special note are Centers and Institutes that China sponsors for top students in specific areas of learning. Top young writers are encouraged to develop their talents over multiple years in an online relationship with professional writers and tutors who nurture them to write for publication. We met and interacted with one 14 year-old who had been working with institute personnel for four years; she already had two published novels to her credit. Scientific talent is also encouraged early and developed over time. The science center in Shanghai, for example, has a teacher liaison for each school to work with students and teachers on science and to scout out the most talented for entrance into the Saturday and summer program experience at the Center. A major focus of the work with students at the Center is research, getting them involved in ongoing projects and preparing presentations of their work for others. The Center also provides teacher training on a broader scale



Chwee Quek and Joyce VanTassel-Baska, coleaders of the People to People Ambassador Program, take a break at The Great Wall.

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to encourage science teaching that will spark student interest and learning. A science exploratorium on site enhanced the opportunities for students to play with scientific ideas in a less formal way.

Comparisons to the United States educational system for gifted learners are difficult to make, given differences in scale and the paucity of fully developed gifted education programs in each setting. However, there were several striking observations that I made which may hold up well across a greater range of classroom and school visits.

One observation is the structured way that teachers approach lesson planning in China compared to the U.S. Each lesson is carefully laid out with a timetable to ensure that all is accomplished in the 50 minutes allotted. No instructional time is wasted, with multiple instructional strategies employed during the period, including active and passive learning opportunities and multiple modes of communication in foreign language classes (English). Yet the content of the learning is frequently at a basic level, with little emphasis on higher level thinking or serious reflection of the learning acquired. The tradeoff in our classrooms in the U.S. is openendedness and higher level thinking without the clarity of purpose and execution linked to specific outcomes desired.

At the school level, it appears that the Chinese principal has greater power and authority than in the U.S., controlling and shaping the program for gifted learners to fit a preconceived vision for a specific school. Teachers are encouraged to follow prescribed approaches to success, and innovation at the individual teacher level is not strongly encouraged. Schools tend to be known for developing specific talents, such as foreign language. Even universities have a theme-based orientation. One university in Nanjing was proud to be thought of as an international exchange university, with cooperative programs in several countries, including Korea.

While fewer children are served as gifted in China than here in the U.S., those that are served are provided comprehensive programs in self-contained settings where intellectual abilities are pressed to high level performance over time. The students are highly attuned to the need to articulate ideas, formulate questions, and query ideas, displaying all of the gifted attributes we cherish here and being systematically nurtured in these intellectual habits of mind. Even the domain-specific talent development outlets they have outside of the school setting provide ongoing opportunities and intensive development.

My overall impression from this limited look at Chinese gifted education was very positive, sensing the urgency with which schools practice their craft and the stakes for educating China's future leaders. It also was a bit frightening in the sense that we as a country do not take either education or gifted education as seriously as does China. With a new \$50 billion budget for gifted education and a research institute conducting research that is being directly applied by the schools, the likelihood that China will become the learning laboratory for the world in

educating gifted learners may not be too far-fetched. For the U.S. to compete in this area of education successfully over time, we will need to focus our efforts on talent development for our top students more strongly than we currently do and provide the resource support to make gifted



NAGC Division Chairs Barbara Hutton (with Pam McKinney) and Penny Choice celebrate the end of the trip.

programs viable in multiple settings. We may know what to do to educate the gifted, as our research suggests, but we appear to lack the will to execute that knowledge consistently over time. There are other countries who are gaining the expertise and who clearly have the will. China is surely one of them. 📖 📖 📖 📖 📖

Poetics

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precisely as someone who only looked at the last four notes of each line in a Mozart concerto would miss most of the concerto. Mozart was perfectly aware of every note played by every instrument in the entire concerto, just as great poets are perfectly aware of each stress, each vowel, and each consonant in each line of a great poem. Poems are emphatically not mere prose lines with rhymes at the ends; they are poems all the way through, and it can take a great deal of hard work, even for a poetic genius, to make them that way.

The fact that every syllable of the poem is intentional should not come as a surprise. An architect draws plans for every wall, not just the west wall. A painter combines two colors in full knowledge of the color theory that governs the way the two colors interact. A composer of symphonies knows that she is writing in a minor key, knows the name of each note she puts on the staff, knows how many octaves the woodwinds are above the strings in a particular passage. If she did not know these things, and employ strict technical knowledge with skill, the completed symphony would not sound so natural and spontaneous. In order to be emotionally moving, the symphony must be under strict intellectual control.

Like science or medicine, all serious art involves elaborate learning, specific techniques, and complex decision-making.

So with poems. Serious poets touch our hearts and spirits because they use their minds to assemble complex levels of

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components that permit something to be called a poem, including meter, rhyme, vowel sounds, consonant sounds, figures of speech, and so forth. The final result is a unified and coherent work of art that moves us or illuminates our experience.

The techniques used by great poets are elaborate, subtle, and professional; a great poem may contain elements and techniques that only other poets or the most educated readers will perceive. For a glimpse of what this means, consider rhyme. To the outsider, rhyme is rhyme, but to the poet who knows the professional details, there are dozens of named kinds of rhyme: perfect rhyme, near rhyme, consonant rhyme, double consonant rhyme, anarhyme, half rhyme, pararhyme, apophony, masculine rhyme, feminine rhyme, double rhyme, trochaic rhyme, dactylic rhyme, oblique rhyme, reverse rhyme, first syllable rhyme, identity rhyme, apocopated rhyme, half-double rhyme, trailing rhyme, amphibaenic rhyme, additive rhyme, elided rhyme, mosaic rhyme, rich rhyme, eye rhyme, macaronic rhyme, wrenched rhyme, imperfect rhyme, weak rhyme, mirror rhyme, internal rhyme, leonine rhyme, intermittent rhyme, beginning rhyme, monorhyme, and slant rhyme—to name a few.

If we take rhyme as just one example of the difference in depth between what the outsider thinks and what the serious poet knows when writing a poem, this list of rhyme options is illuminating.

Like all other professionals, poets know the details of what they are doing, and this takes on even more meaning when we reflect that most great novelists and playwrights also write poetry. Virtually all major writers use poetic techniques to enhance their writing. A novelist does not think, "I can't use alliteration to emphasize danger in this sentence because alliteration is a poetic technique."

"But did he really know he was doing that?" asks the student who knows little about poetry and who would prefer to think that poetry is easy, rule-less, an absence of standards rather than a supreme deployment of higher writing standards. "Yes," is the answer, "the poet did know he or she was doing that." Poets are not the only artists who are unaware of what they are doing; instead, their awareness of each detail of language — its meanings and its sounds — is heightened

to the extreme.

Some view serious poetry's incredible, symphonic control of vowels and consonants with displeasure, as though it were a contradiction of genius or inspiration to know what you are doing. There is a feeling that poetry should not be so conscious, that the poet should just be transported by an ecstasy of inspiration. But this is naïve. Technical knowledge and severe effort does not destroy a poet's soaring imagination; rather, it is precisely this knowledge of techniques that allows the poet to put an inspiration on paper, as a great poem of universal humanity, rather than as a self-indulgent journal entry. There are no sloppy great poems. Would Mozart's symphonies have been more inspiring if he had not known how to read music? Knowledge is not the enemy of beauty; it is technical ignorance that would prevent an

"Knowledge is not the enemy of beauty; it is technical ignorance that would prevent an inspired person from becoming a poet."

inspired person from becoming a poet.

No, poetry is not the undisciplined, spontaneous, and primarily emotional expression it is often imagined to be; nor is it an effeminate art concerned with writing "pretty" poems as some may believe.

Poetry is a fully conscious, advanced art form—highly developed, often technically accomplished, and as meticulously designed as a painting, a sculpture, a bridge, or a symphony. A poem is a serious work of the mind. It is just as likely to focus on a tragic or ugly truth as it is to focus on beauty. Poems are hard to write; great poems are extremely hard to write. "The fascination of what's difficult," William Butler Yeats said, "has dried the sap from my veins."

In serious language arts curricula for gifted children, poetry may not be ignored or diminished. As an element of culture, poetry is a primary form of expression in every society we know—from Beowulf to Pushkin, from Pacific Island chants to Stephen Foster, from

Homer to Chaucer, from the Anglo-Saxons to slave spirituals. Poetry is a universal and irresistible form of human expression. It is the music of our cerebral hemispheres.

And there is, after all, this: some poems are among the supreme creative accomplishments of the world—poems of such stature that not to know them is to have one's education blighted. Like the Sistine frescoes of Michelangelo, or the sculpture of Bernini, or the Mona Lisa of Leonardo, or the novels of Dostoevsky, or the dome of Brunelleschi, or the clarinet concerto of Mozart, or Thomas Jefferson's *Declaration of Independence*, or Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech, or the *Narrative of Frederick Douglass*—like these and a hundred other works we could not imagine being without—there are poems that become a profound part of one's intellectual life: Homer's *Iliad*, the sonnets and poem-plays of Shakespeare, the poems of Emily Dickinson and Walt Whitman.

Prior to the experiencing it, students may think they don't want to study poetry, that it is not important; what counts most is how students feel afterwards. There are many things in life that we care nothing for prior to an authentic encounter with them, but afterwards, we would not surrender our knowledge of them for the world. I would, under no circumstance, forget William Butler Yeats's "The Lake Isle of Innisfree," or Elizabeth Bishop's "Visit to St. Elizabeth's," or W.H. Auden's "In Memory of W.B. Yeats," or A.E. Houseman's "To an Athlete Dying Young." If you told me I could never again read *Romeo and Juliet*, I would be deeply saddened.

Caring about things that one has come to know through academic experience is one of the signal characteristics of the educated mind. Not every content has the power to help us care, or to clarify our thinking, or to suggest meaning. Not every page of curriculum can become one of the favorite things we ever learn in our entire lives. But there are many poems that can do this.

For gifted children, poetry is beautifully appropriate curricular content; it is intensely cognitive and affective, it is complex and multileveled, it combines intense examination

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Adding Depth and Complexity to Language Arts for Gifted Learners

Teaching language arts to gifted learners is becoming more complicated with each passing school year, particularly in light of the growing support for heterogeneously grouped classrooms. As the demands on teachers' time continue to increase, two of the fundamental elements of language arts study for gifted learners—depth and complexity—are increasingly neglected. Depth refers to the extent to which students have explored a piece of literature through activities such as conducting original research, developing a product related to the text, and/or exploring major concepts through multiple applications and perspectives. Complexity encompasses the use of higher level thinking skills, the consideration of multiple perspectives, and the use of multiple primary and secondary sources while reading and responding to literature (VanTassel-Baska, 2003a; VanTassel-Baska & Little, 2003; VanTassel-Baska & Stambaugh, 2005).

In the language arts curriculum developed by the Center for Gifted Education at the College of William and Mary, the inclusion of depth and complexity is achieved through the emphasis on literary analysis and persuasive writing, as well as the use of Paul's (1992) Reasoning Model to promote higher level thinking. Studies conducted on the effectiveness of the language arts curriculum developed by the Center for Gifted Education have illuminated the benefits of challenging high ability students to work at higher levels of thought, to complete open-ended tasks, and to engage in real-world problem solving. When these criteria are met through high level content, students show gains in literary analysis and persuasive writing, two skills that require strong critical thinking abilities (VanTassel-Baska, Avery, Hughes, & Little, 2000; VanTassel-Baska, Hughes, Avery, & Little, 1996; VanTassel-Baska & Bracken, 2005).

Unfortunately, use of the William and Mary curriculum, which spans an entire semester, is not always feasible given the many other demands on teachers and students, including state assessments for which all students need preparation. Many educators believe high ability students will naturally do well on state academic assessments. Some teachers of high ability or gifted students; however, are realizing that although these students are capable of higher level thinking, they do not always understand the connection between higher level and lower level critical thinking skills (VanTassel-Baska & Bracken, 2005). Because of this potential disconnect, high ability students may not perform as well as expected on state assessments, which tend to focus on lower to mid-level thinking skills.

This issue is further complicated in Title I schools where high ability and gifted students often come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Because of their limited experience with reading and their overall lower reading achievement scores (NCES, 2004), these students are at a greater risk for not fully developing and exhibiting

strong reading comprehension; therefore, these students may potentially miss the connection between lower order and higher order critical thinking. Teachers want to challenge these students by using high level curricula developed specifically for high ability students such as the William and Mary language arts units, but they also know these students must be prepared for the state assessments.

These dilemmas indicate a clear need for curricula that bridge lower order and higher order thinking while simultaneously preparing high ability and gifted students for state assessments in reading comprehension and challenging them to improve critical thinking skills. The *Jacob's Ladder Reading Comprehension Program* was developed specifically by the Center for Gifted Education through Project Athena, a five year curriculum intervention study funded by the U.S. Department of Education Javits Program to meet these particular student needs.

Jacob's Ladder is intended to aid students in moving from basic, concrete comprehension skills to more abstract, higher level, critical reading skills while using the same text as the basis for questions at each level. Curriculum that deliberately moves students from concrete to abstract thinking enhances reading comprehension skills (Fielding & Pearson, 1994; Villaume & Brabham, 2002) and promotes greater

reading growth (Taylor et al., 2003; Knapp et al., 1995). *Jacob's Ladder* was designed to both enhance reading comprehension and to promote higher level thinking through a series of "skill ladders" that use, in part, Paul's (1992) Reasoning Model as guidance for the types of questions asked in each "ladder" (VanTassel-Baska, French, & Stambaugh, 2004). The questions that accompany each reading selection are written in a "ladder" format with three "rungs." The most concrete question serves as the lowest "rung," the middle "rung" bridges the concrete and the abstract questions, and the highest "rung" focuses on

higher order critical thinking questions (VanTassel-Baska, French, & Stambaugh, 2004).

The design of *Jacob's Ladder* and the assessment records that accompany each reading selection allow teachers to determine individual students' strengths and weaknesses in each of the targeted skill areas. Teachers can then tailor the assignment of reading selections based on the areas in which students need additional work and/or those areas in which students are most likely to experience success. Development of student dyads also facilitates growth in critical thinking and reading by pairing students with similar strengths or pairing students whose strengths and weaknesses are mirror images of each other.

To encourage depth in student analysis of the text, students are required to reread the text multiple times and to engage in analysis, synthesis, and evaluation at the conceptual level; this in-depth analysis is facilitated by the use of short passages that can be read, analyzed,

"Some teachers of high ability or gifted students, however, are realizing that although these students are capable of higher level thinking, they do not always understand the connection between higher level and lower level critical thinking skills."



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and reread during a class period (Little, 2003; VanTassel-Baska, French, & Stambaugh, 2004). The short reading selections chosen for the *Jacob's Ladder* curriculum meet several of the criteria for appropriate literature choices for gifted learners as outlined by Little (2003): emphasis on variety, open-endedness, the ability to inspire contemplativeness, and intellectual challenge. In addition, the structure of the increasingly complex questions requires students to reread the text, as each question requires students to provide support for their answer from the text (VanTassel-Baska, French, & Stambaugh, 2004).

In addition to encouraging depth, *Jacob's Ladder* promotes complexity through the use of open-ended task demands that foster a tolerance for multiple viewpoints and the development of a shared understanding among students, an important element of successful differentiation for gifted learners (Struck, 2003; VanTassel-Baska, French, & Stambaugh, 2004), through the use of student dyads during the discussion of each text (VanTassel-Baska, French, & Stambaugh,

2004). Open-ended task demands also encourage students to further explore the issues being raised by the text or the questions being asked about it (Struck & Little, 2003).

In addition to *Jacob's Ladder*, the Center for Gifted Education has developed *Navigators* to promote depth and complexity in language arts curriculum for gifted learners. *Navigators* are novel studies for advanced readers that focus on the promotion of higher-level thinking and complexity of thought through varied responses to literature. *Navigators* are designed to be flexible, to target a variety of ability levels and learning styles, and to be implemented in a range of classroom settings, from independent studies to reading group work to whole class analyses of novels.

Each *Navigator* includes a series of open-ended, higher level questions focusing on the following: important story elements that should be explored during the reading process; literary elements including plot, setting, theme, conflict, climax, and denouement; the assumptions, motivation,

actions, and portrayals of specific characters; the big ideas or concepts that are central to the story; and the importance and power of connections between the text and the reader. As with *Jacob's Ladder*, all the questions in the *Navigators* require students to return to the text and support their answers with evidence from the novel.

Following these questions, each *Navigator* includes a series of differentiated activities designed to expose students to or give students more practice with key learning models, such as the Literature Web and the Hamburger Model, that are incorporated into all William and Mary language arts units. In addition, a collection of Interdisciplinary and Research Activities are provided to encourage connections between the novel and other areas of study such as science, math, history, technology, and current events. As with the William and Mary language arts units, the research questions included in *Navigators* are issue-based requiring students to explore multiple perspectives, use

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Teaching of Writing to Secondary Gifted Students

Written expression is a fundamental part of communications skills. Teaching writing is; therefore, an essential aspect of language arts education. The sheer amount of information, scholarship, and advice available to teachers on this topic can be overwhelming. As an aid to sorting and processing this information, a synopsis of current research and recommendations on teaching writing to secondary gifted students follows.

Vocabulary

- In order for students to write, read, and speak well, they must possess a rich vocabulary (Ediger, 1999, p. 7; Laflamme, 1997, p. 372; Manning, 1999, p. 103).

- Descriptive writing necessitates a larger vocabulary than reading (Smith, 2003).
- Teachers must be enthusiastic about teaching learning strategies for vocabulary and highlight interesting words used throughout the day (Brabham & Villaume, 2002; Laflamme, 1997, p. 380). New words must be connected to previous knowledge and experience (Laflamme, p.380; Ediger, 1999, p. 14).
- Teachers must offer direct instruction of techniques or procedures to develop a varied vocabulary and involve students in applying definitions to various situations appropriately (Laflamme, 1997, p.380).

Integrating technology and writing instruction

- Software can assist with the basic processes of transcription and sentence generation (e.g. spelling checker, speech synthesis, word prediction, and grammar and style checker), cognitive and planning processes (e.g., prompting programs, outlines and semantic mapping software, and multimedia applications), and collaboration and communication (e.g. computer networks).
- Distance learning opportunities have dramatically increased options for meeting the needs of gifted students.

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Teaching of Writing

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Although they can be expensive, programs such as the Johns Hopkins Writing Tutorials and online AP classes allow students who demonstrate grade-level proficiency to work with more challenging materials (Capurro, 2003).

- Fouts (1997) found that writing skills were most directly affected by the use of laptops, followed by communication and presentation skills. Fouts also found that teachers, parents, and students generally saw a real or potential value in laptops for learning.

Special education instructional techniques in teaching writing

- Journal writing and word processing can be powerful tools for improving student writing and increasing self-confidence in gifted students with learning disabilities. Guest speakers, daily teacher read-alouds, and field trips are also useful (Doney, 1995).
- MacArthur (1996) found that students with learning disabilities produced better essays when dictating to scribes or speech recognition systems. Despite the potential benefits; however, speech recognition systems place demands on students; they must be trained to use the system, which requires speaking clearly without extraneous sounds, pronouncing punctuation, and correcting errors, and these processes may interfere with the student's ability to compose.
- A meta-analysis of research on teaching expressive writing to students with learning disabilities identified several themes critical to effective writing expression: adherence to a basic framework of planning, writing, and revision; explicit instruction of critical steps in the writing process and of features and conventions of genres or text structures; and provision of feedback guided by the information taught (ERIC/OSEP Special Project, 2002).
 - Simple access to word processing has little impact on students' propensity to revise the

work of students with learning disabilities. MacArthur (1996) found that instruction in revision combined with word processing can significantly increase the amount of quality revision by such students.

Gifted education and the teaching of writing

- Black (1999) discusses the need for teachers to make allowances for different student learning styles and present opportunities for children to both develop their areas of strength and strengthen their weaker areas. Black suggested alternate ways of teaching writing to children, including role-playing, storytelling, and provision of multisensory stimuli.
- Educators responsible for planning language arts programs for high ability learners need to consider multiple variables in the areas of differentiation approach, content, and individual differences among gifted learners. Teachers can differentiate the language arts curriculum in the five areas of literature, writing, language skills, oral communication, and foreign language (VanTassel-Baska, 2003).
- VanTassel-Baska and Stambaugh (2006) suggest that from the beginning of their formal schooling, gifted students should be given an abundance of opportunities to write. Since writing is a thinking process, it gives the gifted child the opportunity to develop excellence in thought as well as in writing.
- The fundamental skills associated with a process writing approach should be used with gifted learners at all stages of development. Specifically, these are prewriting, paragraph development, theme development, development of introductions and endings, work on supporting details, effective use of figures of speech, editing, teacher and peer conferencing, revising, and rewriting (VanTassel-Baska & Stambaugh, 2006).
- Writing instruction for gifted learners should balance creative writing forms

and analytic expository forms, including persuasive writing. Writing instruction should also include exposure to good writing through extensive reading, critiques of others' writing, and many opportunities to practice their own writing skills (VanTassel-Baska & Stambaugh, 2006).

- Gifted students must be given the opportunity to discuss ideas orally. Improvisation and extemporaneous presentation, as well as formal debate, can provide high level oral language experiences for the gifted (VanTassel-Baska & Stambaugh, 2006).

Interdisciplinary connections

- Skill in writing is developed and refined through practice, and writing fosters learning in all disciplines. Students should, therefore, have frequent opportunities to write in all areas of the curriculum (Langer, 2001).
- Egelson, Harman, & Bond (2002) found that students attending schools which required a senior project indicated a more positive association with the following specific skills than did their counterparts at control schools: writing a research paper, preparing and presenting a speech, carrying out a plan, and conducting interviews.

Professional development for language arts teachers

- In an action research study, Watson and Lacina (2002) found that preservice teachers did not perceive themselves as writers and tended to lack confidence in their own writing abilities. This is a sobering finding, as Issacson & Gleason (1997) suggest that modeling the writing process for students is an important part of teaching writing.
- Students whose teachers have special training in writing instruction perform significantly better than those with untrained teachers (Pritchard & Marshall, 1994).
- Barr (1994) found that most teachers seemed willing to try new strategies but

Continued on page 9, Teaching of Writing



Annotated Bibliography of New Books for Gifted Children

The search for high-quality literature selections can be a never-ending quest for teachers. To aid in this endeavor, we offer a list of recently-published books appropriate for K-12 gifted students to serve as a resource for language arts teachers.

Grades K-2

Muth, J. (2005). *Zen shorts*. New York: Scholastic, Inc.

Three siblings meet a storytelling panda named Stillwater in this lovely introduction to Zen philosophy. The "real-world" scenes are illustrated with watercolor paintings, and the panda's Zen stories are accompanied by Japanese-style ink drawings. Artistic children will enjoy comparing the two distinct illustration styles, while those more philosophically-inclined will enjoy the panda's non-Western perspective on topics such as anger and misfortune.

Sabuda, J. & Reinhart, M. (2005). *Encyclopedia prehistorica dinosaurs: The definitive pop-up*. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press.

Fans of dinosaurs and paper engineering alike will find much to appreciate in this prehistoric extravaganza. The beautifully detailed two-page pop-ups accompany information about a variety of dinosaurs. Mini-books incorporated into the pages feature their own pop-ups and more trivia. This book is a good choice for gifted children who are reluctant to read fiction but love to learn new information.

Spinelli, E. (2001). *Sophe's masterpiece*. New York: Simon and Schuster Books for Young Readers.

This book tells the bittersweet story of a talented young spider whose gifts go unappreciated by those around her. Finally, she meets an expectant mother and sacrifices her heart to weave the perfect gift for the new baby. The lyrical text is complemented by beautiful watercolor illustrations by Jane Dyer.

Ward, H. (2001). *The tin forest*. New York: Dutton Children's Books.

This is a simple but compelling tale of a man who chooses to make the best of the

dreary, garbage filled world and is unexpectedly rewarded for his persistence and optimism. The conflict between the main character's dreams and his outward circumstances reflects the tension that many gifted students feel. With its encouraging message, *The Tin Forest* is a great starting

point for discussing how to see the potential in every situation then taking responsibility for making the changes that need to occur.

Continued on page 10, Annotated Bibliography

Teaching of Writing

(cont'd from page 8)

were unwilling to discard "tried and true" methods. Simmons (1991) suggests that teachers' refusal to accept innovations such as whole language study can be seen reflected in approaches to teaching reading, literature, and writing.

Recent research on teaching writing

- Carlin-Menter and Shuell (2003) found that when the organizational skills necessary for successful writing were emphasized throughout a unit, there was a significant increase in students' scores on the organizational quality of the essays from the pre-test to the post-test, especially for students who received low scores on the pretest.
- In assessing the value of writing journals, Skerritt (1995) discovered that most students considered journals to be worthwhile and believed they were helpful in various other aspects of the English curriculum.
- Cox (1995) reports that writing assessment activities tended to be a mix of traditional paper-and-pencil activities and formal writing assignments. Although paper-and-pencil activities appeared to dominate the classroom in terms of regular and routine use, writing activities carried more weight in the computation of course grades. Writing portfolios were not found to be in general use.
- The importance of teacher feedback on student learning does not correlate with the degree of feedback offered to students. Data collected from 55

middle school English classes indicated that incidents of high quality instructional feedback and individualized instruction occurred in a small number of smaller classrooms and never occurred in larger classrooms. Teacher qualifications were unrelated to teaching practices. Reduced class size did not directly impact the nature of teacher practice observed in these classrooms, a finding consistent with research on class size reduction in elementary classrooms (Gilstrap, 2003). (References are available on the Center's website.)

by Bronwyn MacFarlane

Systems is a newsletter published by:
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Annotated Bibliography

(cont'd from page 9)

Grades 3-5

Balliet, B. (2004). *Chasing Vermeer*. New York: Scholastic, Inc.

Friends Petra and Calder must solve the mystery of a stolen Vermeer painting aided by Petra's journals and Calder's Pentomino puzzles in this engrossing mystery. Gifted children will enjoy solving the many puzzles in this book, from the central question of who stole the painting to the Pentomino code hidden in the illustrations, and many will find a kindred spirit in either Calder or Petra.

Birdsall, J. (2005). *The Penderwicks: A summer tale of four sisters, two rabbits, and a very interesting boy*. New York: Knopf Books for Young Readers.

This tale of the summer adventures of the Penderwick sisters won last year's National Book Award for Young People's Literature. Readers who enjoy books like *Little Women* and *Anne of Green Gables* will find this book pleasantly familiar ground. Gifted children may find kindred spirits in practical, motherly Rosalind; headstrong Skye; artistic, novel-writing Jane; and imaginative, animal-loving Batty.

Buckley, M. (2005). *The sisters Grimm: Fairy tale detectives*. New York: Abrams Books for Young Readers.

In this first installment of a new series, Sabrina and Daphne Grimm learn two facts that will change their lives: they are descendants of the fairy-tale collectors Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm, and those brothers were actually writing a history book, not a collection of fictional folk tales. The sisters soon find themselves living in a New York state populated by characters such as Jack-the-Giant-Killer and Prince Charming. Students who enjoy the original Grimm tales will love catching the references to familiar stories, but even those unfamiliar with the source material will enjoy this funny fairy-tale adventure.

Divakaruni, C. (2005). *The conch-bearer*. New York: Aladdin Paperbacks.

This novel is steeped in the folklore of India. It tells the story of Anand, a poor village boy who is entrusted with a magical conch shell, and his companion Nisha. Guided by a mysterious mentor named Abadhyatta, the children must undertake a perilous journey to return their treasure to its rightful home. When their journey reaches its end, they must also decide whether they are willing to give up their lives and families in order to protect the shell. A sequel, *The Mirror of Fire and Dreaming*, was recently published, so student who enjoy this book will be able to continue the series.

Grades 6-8

Drake, E. (2003). *Dragonology*. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press.

Any of the books in Candlewick's "Ology" series will be beloved by fans of fantasy or simply of detailed illustrations and books-within-books to explore. *Dragonology* claims to be a facsimile edition of an 1896 manuscript written by a dragon expert. It includes details of the history, taxonomy, and language of the dragon species. Other books in the series offer similar explorations of wizards, fairies, and Egypt.



Funke, C. (2003). *Inkheart*. Somerset, UK: The Chicken House.

Like Michael Ende's classic *The Neverending Story*, this novel will find a permanent place on the shelf of every reader who dreams of finding a way into the pages of their favorite book. It recounts the adventures of Meggie, whose father has the ability to pull characters out of the books he reads aloud. When he reads *Inkheart's* villain, Capricorn, into the real world, Meggie must use her own talents to save those she loves from this new evil.

Huser, G. (2003). *Stitches*. Toronto, ON: Groundhouse Books.

Stitches is an intense novel that deals with issues such as death, disability, bullying, and the sometimes high price paid by those who are different. It is a good choice for artistically gifted boys, who will be able to relate to the struggles of the protagonist, Travis, who escapes from his many problems by creating and performing a puppet version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Naidoo, B. (2004). *Out of bounds: Seven stories of conflict and hope*. New York: HarperCollins Children's Books.

South Africa under Apartheid is explored through the eyes of children in this short story collection. Each of the book's stories is set in a different decade and narrated by a different character. Taken together, they offer a portrait of South Africa that is sometimes harrowing, sometimes inspiring. Children concerned with issues of social justice will find much to think about in these pages.

Grades 9-12

Chabon, M. (2001). *The amazing adventures of Kavalier and Clay*. New York: Picador.

Older teenagers who read comic books will find good reason to venture into more traditional prose in this novel, set in the early 1940s. Joe Kavalier, via Houdini, escapes from Nazi-invaded Prague to New

Continued on page 11, Annotated Bibliography

Poetics

(cont'd from page 5)

of the world with an array of abstract and artistic concepts, and it is one of intellectual history's foremost devices for inquiring into meaning.

By learning poetic techniques when they study poetry, gifted students will be equipped to perceive and appreciate them in all forms of advanced writing. Poetry serves as the launching platform into the highest levels of language arts.

by Michael Clay Thompson

Annotated Bibliography

(cont'd from page 10)

York City to live with his cousin, Sam Clay. Joe is a man angered by the Nazi presence and separated from his family and younger brother; Sam chooses to focus on the inner world of his imagination. Together they create comic books - *The Escapist*, *The Monitor*, and *Luna Moth* - set in Nazi Germany. The novel follows both men and their comic creations from boyhood to manhood and draws on actual comic book history from Marvel to enrich the story.

Fforde, J. (2003). *The Eyre affair*. New York: Penguin Books.

This is the first novel in a series featuring heroine Thursday Next. The books are set in an alternate 1980s Earth in which cloned dodos are the pet of choice and everyone loves literature. In *The Eyre Affair*, the villain finds his way into *Jane Eyre* and kidnaps the heroine, setting off an international panic. Thursday Next, a member of the Literary Police, is assigned to find her own way into the book and save the day. Readers will enjoy the references to both classic literature and popular culture.

Foer, J. (2003). *Everything is illuminated*. New York: Houghton Mifflin.

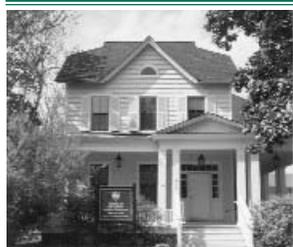
This complex novel follows a character named Jonathan Foer as he searches for a woman who may have saved his grandfather from the

Nazis during World War II. The story of the search is told through letters written in the sometimes hilariously broken English of Alex, a Ukrainian student who guides Jonathan on his journey. This story is interspersed with excerpts from a novel, written by Jonathan, recounting the mythical history of his grandfather's shtetl. Reflective gifted students may relate to both Jonathan's search for his past and Alex's search for his identity.

Fowler, K.J. (2004). *The Jane Austen book club*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons.

This charming metafictional novel will delight fans of Jane Austen. A group of readers come together to discuss the complete works of Austen; readers familiar with the books will enjoy both the different perspectives on her novels and the ways in which Fowler's characters and plots mirror those of Austen.

by Easter Christopher



Upcoming Events

NATIONAL CURRICULUM NETWORK CONFERENCE
March 6-8, 2006

**SUMMER INSTITUTE ON CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION
FOR TEACHERS**
JUNE 26-28, 2006

SUMMER ENRICHMENT PROGRAM
(BROCHURE AVAILABLE LATE MARCH)
Session One: July 10-14, 2006
Session Two: July 17-21, 2006
Session Three: July 24-28, 2006

ADVANCED PLACEMENT INSTITUTE
July 31, 2006 - August 4, 2006

Language Arts

(cont'd from page 7)

a variety of sources, formulate arguments, and use analyzed data to support their arguments.

It is difficult for teachers to adequately meet the needs of all their students, especially in heterogeneously grouped language arts classrooms. In an effort to address common problems with providing gifted students with the necessary depth and complexity in their language arts curriculum, the Center for Gifted of Education at the College of William and Mary has developed a series of units and supplementary material for teachers to use in a variety of contexts. (References are available on the Center's website.)

by Heather French

Center for Gifted Education
announces
**Professional Summer Institute:
Curriculum and Instruction for High-Ability Learners in Diverse Settings**

June 26-28, 2006
University Center
College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia

The purpose of this Institute is to provide teachers and administrators with the knowledge and skills to utilize high quality curriculum, strategies, and materials, within effective programs for advanced learners. Institute participants choose one strand.

INSTITUTE OFFERINGS:

The Center for Gifted Education Language Arts Curriculum
The Center for Gifted Education Problem-Based Learning Science Curriculum
The Center for Gifted Education Social Studies Curriculum
Challenging Gifted Students in Mathematics
Differentiating Programs and Services for Low-income, Minority, and Learning Disabled Gifted Students
Teaching Science to Primary Students
Using a Reading Comprehension Program to Promote Higher Level Thinking
Developing Exemplary Gifted Programs
Designing Curriculum for High Ability Learners

INSTITUTE FACULTY:

Dr. Kim Chandler, Center for Gifted Education, Virginia
Dr. Valerie Gregory, Center for Gifted Education, Virginia
Gail Kaplan-Wassell, Montgomery County Public Schools, Maryland
Dr. Donna Poland, New Horizons Governor School, Virginia
Dr. Janice Robbins, Center for Gifted Education, Virginia
Molly Sandling, Williamsburg-James City County Schools, Virginia
Tamra Stambaugh, Center for Gifted Education, Virginia
Dr. Joyce VanTassel-Baska, Center for Gifted Education, Virginia
Mary Ann Yedinak, Sycamore School, Indiana

For more information contact the Center for Gifted Education at 757-221-2166 or visit our web site,
www.cfge.wm.edu/summerinstitute.php



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