

## For Your Consideration

On the Passing of Paula Danziger

In 1972, Dr. Maria Schantz, chair of the Reading Department at Montclair State College, invited me to teach a course in adolescent literature. I accepted, and on the first night of class, I was greeted by a young woman who told me she had already taken the course for credit with Dr. Schantz, but she wanted permission to sit in to see what I was going to do. That young woman was Paula Danziger.

During that semester I learned to adjust to some of the “antics” of Paula until . . . I had assigned the students to read Mildred Lee’s *Sticks and Stones*, a controversial novel for its time, about a group of teens who call a loner classmate a homosexual. In the story this leads to rumors and repercussions in the small town where the boy lives.

During a class discussion of the book, a male student stated, “I would never let any students of mine read such a book. It might give them ideas.” At that point, Paula picked up her heavy, plastic pocketbook and threw it at him, and the class began to spiral out of control. I told Paula she was suspended for three weeks. “Go home. Read. Write.”

For me, those were the three loneliest weeks of that class. When Paula returned, she handed me a package with her writings. I took the package home, read what she has written, and laughed a great deal. The following class meeting I had her read her work to the entire

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class, and they applauded loudly. I told Paula if she finished writing the book, which she already had done, I’d try to find a publisher.

She brought me her finished manuscript a couple of weeks later, and I liked it very much. I took it to one editor friend who was not amused. So I showed it to another

editor who loved it. The book, *The Cat Ate My Gymsuit*, was published in 1974, and thirty years later is still in print and doing very well. Paula and my family became very good friends. She was wise, witty, and wonderfully wacky at times. She was most caring and compassionate. We shall miss her.

### So Many Good Books; So Little Time!

As *ALAN Review* readers, we recognize the advantage of bringing newer books into classrooms to meet the diverse and changing interests, needs, and abilities of students. Through reading this publication and by attending conferences, many of us are introduced to new books and methods and become familiar with many authors who can touch the minds of young and old.

A common problem in many English classrooms is the teaching load consisting of too much material to be covered with too many students. There are teachers who resist change. Reports from consultants and authors making school visits tell us that teachers

often say they are satisfied with what they have been using for many years, and they don't have the time to add anything new. Some admit they are not willing to make changes. As one teacher said recently, "I just don't have the time to read more books." So while we are embarked on a campaign to LEAVE NO CHILD BEHIND; however, are we also on a campaign to LEAVE NO TEACHER BEHIND?

Good books make meaningful reading happen. One parent told me that she was thrilled when her son, who seemingly had reading problems, discovered *Ironman* by Chris Crutcher and was turned on to sports books. He really hadn't known that there were sports books like this around. A good librarian then gave him a copy of *Slam* by Walter Dean Myers. He zoomed through that book. It's interesting that few teachers have a unit of sports or use sports books to hook their students.

A book such as David A. Adler's splendid biography, *George Washington: An Illustrated Biography* (Holiday House), shows us a true leader for his time and puts politics and patriotism in a perspective worthy of study. Betsy Harvey Kraft's *Theodore Roosevelt: Champion of the American Spirit* (Clarion) offers more insight into the American Presidency as the reader witnesses Roosevelt's strong feelings about women's rights and a futile attempt to "reform the court system" so that if the public didn't like the ruling by a judge, they would have the right to challenge the verdict. An interesting idea?

Wade Hudson has done a remarkable job in *Powerful Words*

(Scholastic). More than thirty African Americans from colonial days to contemporary times speak out against racism and slavery to show how African Americans have contributed so much to their community and to American history. Commentators include Benjamin Banneker, Sojourner Truth, Mary Church Terrell, W. E. B. DuBois, Marcus Garvey, Malcolm X, the Rev. Jesse Jackson, among

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others.

As English teachers we are concerned with language and lives, fiction and nonfiction. Jordan Sonnenblick, in his novel, *Dreams, Girls, and Dangerous Pie* (Daybue Insights), reveals the strong feelings a young teenage boy has for his younger brother who has leukemia, and at the same time, his frustrations at watching his parents focus most of their attention on the ailing

child and seemingly overlooking him as "the other son." He has interests, questions, needs too. A very powerful story.

Three books of poetry caught my eye.

*Here in Harlem: Poems in Many Voices* by Walter Dean Myers (Holiday House) recaptures the voices of many who grew up or who live in Harlem. Students, a numbers runner, veterans, a furniture mover, a hairdresser, an artist, a boy evangelist, and a nurse are just a few who have their thoughts and experiences depicted by this talented poet. Myers claimed to write this after being inspired by Edgar Lee Masters's *Spoon River Anthology*. So he created his own "street corner in Harlem," and the many characters in his book passed there or near there and spoke and thought, very much alive in their community, complete with hopes, dreams, and frustrations. Heavily illustrated.

Paul B. Janeczko in *World Afire* (Candlewick Press) tells readers about the many people who went to the circus for all kinds of interesting reasons—to see the freaks, to see the animals, to see the Greatest Show on Earth. Using a true event that happened in Hartford, CT, on July 6, 1944, he reminds us of a fire that broke out at the circus where many were killed and injured. Watching the characters face the catastrophe, and many who were caught up in it, becomes the basis of each poem told by a specific character—a parent, a firefighter, a state trooper, a nurse, among others. Exciting in its horror.

Naomi Shihab Nye, in *Is This Forever or What? Poems and*

*Paintings from Texas*, has brought together poets and artists who depict the variety of cultures and talents as one drives across this very large state. The book is filled with beautiful words and pictures which show, for the most part, common people reflecting on their settings and circumstances.

Space limitations prevent me from annotating every book I would like to list here. So I have chosen just a few topics and some of the books published in 2004 that I think would be suggestions for any classroom.

### HISTORICAL FICTION

- Chotjewicz, David, translated by Doris Orgill. *Daniel Half Human: And the Good Nazi*. (Atheneum)
- Disher, Garry. *The Divine Wind*. (Scholastic)
- Hassinger, Peter W. *Shakespeare's Daughter*. (Harper Collins)
- Hobbs, Will. *Leaving Protection*. (Harper Collins)
- Hooper, Mary. *Petals in the Ashes*. (Bloomsbury)
- Hughes, Pat. *The Breaker Boys*. (Farrar Straus Giroux)
- Morgan, Nicole. *Fleshmarket*. (Delacorte)
- Rinaldi, Ann. *Finishing Becca*. (Gulliver/Harcourt)
- Wilson, John. *The Flags of War*. (Kids Can Press)
- Wolf, Allan. *New Found Land*. (Candlewick Press)
- Yolen, Jane, and Robert J. Harris. *Prince Across the Water*. (Philomel)

### SHORT STORIES

- Gallo, Donald R., ed. *First Crossing: Stories about Teen Immigrants*. (Candlewick Press)
- Howe, James. *13: Thirteen Stories about the Agony of Being Thirteen*. (Atheneum)
- Kurtz, Jane. *Memories of Sun: Stories of Africa and America*. (Amistad)
- Peck, Richard. *Past Perfect, Present Tense:*

*New and Collected Stories*. (Dial)

Singer, Marilyn, ed. *Face Relations: 11 Stories about Seeing Beyond Color*. (Simon & Schuster)

### FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION

- Augarde, Steve. *The Various*. (David Fickling)
- Barren, T. A. *The Great Tree of Avalon*. (Philomel)
- Barry, Dave, and Riddley Pearson. *Peter and the Starcatchers*. (Hyperion)
- Card, Orson Scott. *Maps in a Mirror*. (Orb)
- DeLint, Charles. *The Blue Girl*. (Viking)
- Finke, Cornelia. *Dragon Rider*. (The Chicken House/Scholastic)
- Hayden, Patrick Nielsen. *New Magics*. (Tor)
- Jacques, Brian. *The Long Patrol*. (Firebird)
- Kindl, Patricia. *Owl in Love*. (Graphia/Houghton Mifflin)
- Pierce, Tamora. *Trickster Queen*. (Random House)
- Shusterman, Neal. *The Eyes of King Midas*. (Simon Pulse)
- Tunnell, Michael. *Wishing Moon*. (Dutton)
- Werlin, Nancy. *Double Helix*. (Dial)

### GENERAL NONFICTION

- Hill, Laban Carrick. *Harlem Stomp: A Cultural History of the Harlem Renaissance*. (Little, Brown)
- McClatchy, J. D., with photographs by Erica Leonard. *American Writers at Home*. The Library of America, 2004.
- McWhorter, Diane. *A Dream of Freedom: The Civil Rights Movement from 1954-1968*. (Scholastic)
- Meltzer, Milton. *Hear that Whistle Blow! How the Railroads Changed the World*. (Random House)
- Philbrick, Nathaniel. *Revenge of the Whale; The True Story of the Whaleship Essex*. (Puffin)
- Prince, Bryan. *I Came as a Stranger: The Underground Railroad*. (Tundra)
- Warren, Andrea. *Escape from Saigon. How a Vietnam War Orphan Became an American Boy*. (Farrar Straus Giroux)

### SCHOOL DAYS

- Bloor, Edward. *Story Time*. (Harcourt)
- Clement, Andrew. *The Report Card*. (Simon & Schuster)

- Moore, Peter. *Blind Sighted*. (Speak)
- Moriarty, Jaclyn. *The Year of Special Assignments*. (Scholastic)
- Nelson, Blake. *The New Rules of High School*. (Viking)
- Peck, Richard. *The Teacher's Funeral*. (Dial)

### FAMILY

- Carey, Janet Lee. *The Double Life of Zoe*. (Atheneum)
- Dessen, Sarah. *This Lullaby*. (Penguin)
- Fogelin, Adrian. *The Big Nothing*. (Peachtree)
- Gilbert, Sheri. *The Legacy of Gloria Russell*. (Knopf)
- Konigsburg, E. L. *The Outcasts of Schuyler Place*. (Atheneum)
- Krishnaswami, Uma. *Naming Maya*. (Farrar Straus Giroux)
- McCord, Patricia. *Pictures in the Dark*. (Bloomsbury)
- Mosher, Richard. *Zazoo*. (Graphia/Houghton Mifflin)
- Supplee, Audra. *I Almost Love You, Eddie Clagg*. (Peachtree)

### MYSTERY AND SUSPENSE

- Balliett, Blue. *Chasing Vermeer*. (Scholastic)
- Shan, Darren. *Cirque Du Freak: Hunters of the Dusk*. (Little, Brown)
- Stine, R. L. *Dangerous Girls*. (Avon)
- Taylor, G. R. *Shadowmancer*. (Putnam)
- Wooding, Chris. *The Haunting of Alaiabel Gray*. (Orchard)

### SPECIAL YOUTH, SPECIAL PROBLEMS

- Galloway, Greg. *As Simple as Snow*. (Putnam, 2005)
- Grimes, Sally. *Spilled Water*. (Bloomsbury)
- Hinton, S. E. *Hawkes Harbor*. (Tor)
- Korman, Gordon. *Son of the Mob: Hollywood Hustle*. (Hyperion)
- Leavett, Martine. *Heck, Superhero*. (Front Street)
- Morgenroth, Kate. *Jude*. (Simon & Schuster)
- Sanchez, Alex. *So Hard to Say*. (Simon & Schuster)
- Twomey, Cathleen. *Beachmont Letters*. (Boyd's Mills Press)