

## Stories from the Field

**Editors' Note: Stories from the Field** invites readers to share a story about young adult literature. This section features brief vignettes (approximately 300 words) from practicing teachers and librarians who would like to share their interactions with students, parents, colleagues, and administrators around young adult literature. Please send your stories to: jbach@lsu.edu.

### A Special Guest

#### Matt Skillen

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While reading about the Klondike Gold Rush in Jack London's *Call of the Wild*, my seventh-graders wondered why the author points out the fact that tenderfoot explorers of the frigid Alaskan frontier would bring short-haired pointers to pull their dogsleds. It seemed like an interesting question that deserved some time for investigation. And, as it turned out, this question, and the possible answers it would produce, aligned with state standards as they pertain to the connections readers make between characters and setting in literature.

Austin, a six-year-old German Short-haired Pointer, joined our family after we adopted him from the Kansas Humane Society. Austin was a gentle soul who loved being around people. To facilitate this line of inquiry in my classes, it was decided that Austin

would be our special guest. By introducing Austin to my students, thereby allowing them to infer how a dog like Austin might survive in Alaska, it was my hope they would begin to understand London's purpose for including those details about the inexperienced mushers.

If you have read London's story, you know that the main character is Buck, a large Scotch Shepherd/St. Bernard mix breed. Buck's story progresses through the hands of the many owners he encounters throughout his life. The turning point in the story involves a hero named John Thorton, who saves Buck from imminent doom. After sharing the story of how I met Austin at the Humane Society and brought him home to be a part of our family, Jacob, a student in one of my classes, looked up from his desk and said, "Mr. Skillen, you and Mrs. Skillen are like Austin's 'John Thorton,' aren't you?"

I thought about it for a moment and said, "Yes, Jacob, I suppose we are."

### "The Family That Reads Together . . ."

#### Charity Cantey

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*Dear 7th-grade family,  
This copy of The Hunger Games is a gift to you in celebration of the joy of reading. We hope that you will read it together as a family or pass the book from one*

*family member to another. As you read, discuss your thoughts about and reactions to the book, its characters, and the issues it raises. Then join us on Wednesday, May 5, at 6:30 p.m. in the school library for an evening of book discussion and refreshments.*

*Happy Reading!*

With that invitation, our middle and high school library played host to an enthusiastic community of readers eager to share their thoughts about YA literature. Aiming to bring parents, teens, and school personnel together through literature, we utilized grant funds to purchase a copy of Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games* for each family in 7th and 10th grades. We prepared some discussion-starter questions (Team Peeta or Team Gale—which should Katniss choose? What was your first thought when you finished the book? If you were Katniss, would you have

volunteered for the Games?), decorated the library with student artwork (illustrations of favorite scenes, a hand-carved model of Katniss's bow), brought in the food, and let the book talk begin. The discussion was lively—who knew 10th-grade boys would have such strong opinions about Katniss's romantic prospects??—and the sense of community from this shared reading experience was inspiring.

Among its many benefits, the event provided a unique opportunity to 1) connect teens and parents with books and get them talking together in interesting ways, 2) allow teens to see their parents reading for enjoyment, and 3) expand the idea of reading, making it a social event. The Community Reads received rave reviews from parents, teachers, and students, and we're looking forward to hosting them as an annual event.