

# WILLA

## *A Journal of the Women in Literacy and Life Assembly of the National Council of Teachers of English*

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## Editors' Note

We are excited to be the new co-editors of *WILLA*. This 2009 issue of the journal brings to you six articles as well as a representative column and coverage of a recent Inglis Award. All of these selections offer insights on the impact of gender in language, literature, and life. We invite you not only to read but also to respond to these texts and the gender issues, challenges, and accomplishments they present.

The journal opens with two pieces about the current situation for young women in secondary schools today. The first of these, Pauline Schmidt's "Beyond Secondary Roles: What the Women of the Canon Teach Today's Girls," demonstrates what is perhaps a more typical approach to teaching literature at the secondary level. The next article is Ginger Goldman Malin's "She Opened a Book Slowly: How Urban Girls Found Their Literate Identities in Book Group," which shows a specific book group approach used in an urban environment to help Mexican-American girls work toward empowerment through the study of women's literature.

The third selection, "Breaking Into the Superhero Boy's Club: Teaching Graphic Novel Literary Heroines in Secondary English Language Arts," addresses the power and potential of gender images in a relatively new literary genre, the graphic novel. Author Katie Monnin demonstrates how graphic novels can align with IRA and NCTE standards, extend definitions of literacies, and expand literary approaches to gender representation.

The final three articles all involve a degree of personal narrative and understanding. Susan Schroeder's "What Teaching Methods of Inquiry Taught Me" shares what the author learned from teaching a new-to-her course and her reflections on the impact of what students learned not only about inquiry, but also about gender identity and sexual orientation. Connie Buskist recounts the experiences

of one of her particularly memorable students in "Request Permission to Come Aboard: Lieutenant Commander Liz Galloway (ret.) Reporting for Duty." In "Taking the Road Less Traveled: A Professor's Path to Becoming Educated," Jan Hogan shares her own experience navigating her higher education experiences while raising a family.

Add to these great articles Pat Kelly's column about her recent trip to Kenya and her impressions of opportunities for schoolgirls there and Lynne Alvine's acceptance speech for the Inglis Award (with a wonderful introduction by Judy Hayn). As and after you read, we hope that you will enjoy this issue, react to and act on its content, and contribute your thoughts and stories to subsequent issues of *WILLA*!

Best wishes,  
Hannah Furrow  
Edna Brabham

# Beyond Secondary Roles: What the Women of the Canon Teach Today's Girls

*Pauline Skowron Schmidt*

As a high school student, I attended a small, private, Catholic all-girls school; to some extent I grant credit to that experience for my successes in academia and life. I also grant some of the credit to my various modes of involvement in the arts; those experiences carried over to my pedagogy and philosophy of education when I taught at the secondary level. Upon re-entering academia to pursue my doctorate, I found deep, meaningful connections to what I suspected all along in the theoretical works of Dewey (1934) and Vygotsky (1978), and in the more practical works of Wilhelm and Edmiston (1998). The arts, specifically drama, play a crucial role in the cognitive, affective, and aesthetic development of adolescents.

To that end, while searching for participants for my dissertation on the arts and literacy learning, I was delighted to come across Miss Gwen Williams at Girls Academy (all names used are pseudonyms). She was exactly what I was looking for: creative, energetic, and engaging. I thoroughly enjoyed spending a school year observing her interact with her students. During this school year, she taught three sections of English 11, American Literature. The major works she covered were *The Crucible* (1952), *Fahrenheit 451* (1953), *The Great Gatsby* (1925), and *Hamlet* (1603). Her methodology was brilliant – varied, engaging, and challenging for her “college-bound” students. What shocked me was what the combination of these literary works meant for an all-female, adolescent audience. It was not my original intention to consider the impact of a canon-only curriculum on young, female students; I merely wanted to look at the arts and how (or if) they affect literacy learning. I sought out the experts in the field

of education (Belenky, et al. 1997; Gallagher, 2000), as well as psychology (Pipher, 1994) and sociology (Gilligan, 1982) to frame my own thinking and understanding of the effect of this curriculum. As I muddled through data, transcripts, video, and interviews, my findings varied among the seven focal students, but I realized that it was the story of the curriculum and culture of the school I simply couldn't resist telling.

## **All Canon & No Contemporary**

When I first arrived at Girls Academy for informal observations, Miss Williams was busy preparing to teach the popular drama *The Crucible*, written by Arthur Miller in 1953. *The Crucible* is based on real-life events that occurred in Salem, Massachusetts, in 1692, when nineteen men and women were accused of witchcraft and consequently executed. Of course, Miller himself has commented on the content of the story, admitting that it was just as much about contemporary events in America as it was about the witches in Salem.

Miss Williams described to me how she spent some time at the onset of this unit describing McCarthyism and the activities of the House Un-American Activities Committee. She also pointed out that the students had just finished studying that particular era in history in their American History and Government class at Girls Academy. However, since I was not observing their history class, I am not sure just how in-depth they studied this particular phenomenon.

After the students read *The Crucible*, they transitioned to the futuristic novel *Fahrenheit 451*, written by Ray Bradbury in 1953. In this novel, the

main character, Guy Montag, is a fireman whose job is to burn books along with the houses in which they are hidden. It was a strange concept at first, but it seemed that once the students began reading and understood what type of setting they were dealing with, this world made sense to them and even scared some of them. Even more interesting to me were the modern-day connections the students made throughout the unit as the class discussed different technologies that Bradbury was merely alluding to back in 1953.

The students frequently commented upon entering the room by saying things like, “What’s going to happen?” or “It’s getting intense!” as they completed the reading assignments independently. They were eager to ask questions and make comments about the society, often wondering why Montag just didn’t stand up for himself. They were quite relieved in the end when Montag finally makes his connection to the “Book People” as they felt the novel ended with some hope for the world.

Miss Williams followed up *Fahrenheit 451* with a novel written by yet another American male author: *The Great Gatsby*, written in 1925 by F. Scott Fitzgerald. This novel is told by a male narrator, Nick Carraway, and it focuses on the elusive main character, Jay Gatsby. As the novel unfolds, we discover that Gatsby has accumulated wealth and stature in the hopes of winning over his long-lost love, Daisy Buchanan, who has already married for wealth and social status. The students continually complained about Daisy’s inability to choose between her husband and Gatsby, whom she claimed to love. They had no problem with the fact that she would have to divorce Tom Buchanan to be with Gatsby; they seemed more preoccupied with the fact that Daisy was too weak to even make the choice.

Miss Williams designed this unit to coincide with research projects centered around the 1920’s era, so the students were reading this fictional novel set at that time and then researching non-fiction sources about it as well. They chose from topics/themes such as prohibition, the American Dream, mob violence, and changing female identities. They spent about one class per week explicitly discussing the research

papers or completing steps in the process in class, but the work for the final deadlines was all completed as homework outside of class.

The final unit of the year was the iconic drama *Hamlet*, written by William Shakespeare in 1603. Reading a Shakespearean play at every grade level is a requirement at Girls Academy, regardless of the fact that the curriculum of junior year generally deals with American literature. This didn’t seem to bother Miss Williams as she admitted at the beginning of the unit that it is her favorite play to read and teach. Most of the reading was done in class, with short reading assignments given throughout the unit. The students seemed engaged in this unit more than any of the others, even though the classroom became increasingly uncomfortable as the temperature spiked at the end of May.

Overall, they seemed to relate to the confusion and agony of poor Ophelia as she stands by and loves Hamlet, despite his madness. However, most of them criticized the way she followed the orders of her brother Laertes and her father Polonius, quite often wondering aloud why she didn’t just stand up for herself. Although most were shocked, they dealt with her suicide in a very mature manner. By the end of the play, they also commented on just how many senseless deaths occurred and what could have been done to prevent them.

What was most striking to me as the year progressed was my realization that although I was in a progressive classroom with a progressive teacher and very open-minded students, I was immersed in very traditional literature studies. That is not to say that the way the novels were taught was traditional, but the units themselves represented white male authors of time since past. Miss Williams made every attempt to make this literature come alive so the students could relate it to their lives today, but I just couldn’t get past the notion that a school which seemingly boasts “girl power” chooses literature that teaches these students through what can only be called “anti-examples.”

Miss Williams’s teaching methods impressed me because of her attention to detail and her seeming ease in bringing multiple perspectives into the

conversation about each of the units of study. This pedagogical attitude seemed to counteract the overarching and dominating male-centered curriculum. For example, she used several film clips at the beginning of the school year to help students form opinions on the concept of “witches” before students read *The Crucible*. She frequently made references to popular culture and asked students questions that encouraged them to make similar connections, ultimately helping the students make connections between major themes of these classic pieces of literature and their everyday lives.

One of the elements of the *Hamlet* unit that I found particularly interesting was the focus on the minor character Ophelia, particularly starting the unit with an activity that focused on her. In one of our conversations, I asked:

PS: With Hamlet...starting with Ophelia, what is your take on that? What do the girls get out of that? Is that the perk of the unit? Is that the attention-getter?

GW: I did that because they're all female students. I've toyed with the idea about making character observations...because a lot of plays don't look at gender roles. And why do characters make the decisions they do. That is a way for my students to focus in because it talks about relationships. I used Ophelia because I'm interested in her but not every classroom is. I had hoped to do more with that. Last year, I had an extremely perceptive group and they WANTED to talk about Ophelia and I was FASCINATED by that. This year, they weren't as interested... but it worked for the purpose of hooking them in.

Once hooked, these students seemed to have a vested interest in the lives of these characters, even when they saw them as starkly different human beings. The students paid particularly close attention to the weakness that they saw in Ophelia; during interviews, most of my focal students told me that they didn't like her because they would never kill themselves if a boy didn't love them back. Regardless of their own resolve, they could empathize with Ophelia and actually felt bad for her, knowing she felt trapped.

Since Miss Williams seemed likewise trapped in terms of curriculum choices, she describes her approach to teaching the canon in this way:

GW: Well, I usually deal with trying to turn a negative into a positive. Stereotypically weak women--I figure something good has to come out of that, you know. But a lot of the arguments I got was that they [Ophelia and Gertrude] are both products of their environment. And they both are. And I think it's REALLY important to analyze that. And society plays so much into things. At the end of the year, I kinda made that statement that literature is meant to be a message about society. Here we are in the modern age, modern women, what can we learn about women who were NOT independent? I think that came out in the classroom. A lot of negative stereotypes, a lot of negative reactions to Ophelia. You know, I get that. I like that they had a reaction, that it was passionate, that it was angry, they HAD a reaction, they weren't just passively taking it in.

Even though Miss Williams was told at the beginning of her career at Girls Academy that she had the freedom to choose “anything” to read in her curriculum, she was steered away from authors with diverse backgrounds and yes, even female authors. Regardless of that roadblock, her goal remained to have the students actively engaging with the literature.

### **Identity Shaping, or Cutting Out the Paper Dolls**

Adolescent girls can be influenced by many elements: friends, parents, and school. Yet the world around them also includes such entities as what they read, see, and experience on a daily basis. The identities of the focal students in this study were shaped and influenced not only by the canonical literature but also by the trade paperbacks they read with their peers, the use of popular culture (movies, TV, and music) in Miss Williams' class, their interaction with popular culture outside of school, and their position as compliant or “good students” in this school.

The students I observed were not only planning on taking the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) this school year, but also the New York State Regents

Examination in English Language Arts in June. In most of my observations, Miss Williams mentioned specific literary elements when discussing a chapter or scene from one of the units, to which the students were directed to “write that down” or “remember that, it’s important.”

This activity of learning the literary elements associated with classic pieces of literature sets up a very traditional classroom. The pedagogy of the school then implies that the students are “knowledge getters” and that they are there to learn the “right answers” to questions about the literature they read and study. There also seems to be the message that the students should learn these things for their own individual benefit. Being a “knowledge getter” doesn’t necessarily mean that a student will construct knowledge with peers or with the teacher. The students simply want to read the required literature, learn the necessary components, and take a test where they will demonstrate their knowledge in a very individualistic manner.

The problem with this approach is that these students are not learning the skills necessary for the spirit of innovation and collaboration needed for the 21st century (Miller, 2003; Miller & Borowicz, 2005). The students may seem intelligent on the surface since they are rewarded with good grades and recognition, with their names prominently displayed on the honor roll posters that line the main hallway of Girls Academy. Yet, they are not true intellectuals who thirst for knowledge for its own sake. These young women may do well as they further their education, but they are not being empowered to ask the essential questions that lead to a truer, more organic education.

These students are successful when they are correct in a school where traditional literacy prevails. They seek out this approval in many ways. The focal students all indicated a sense of apprehension over the “right” answer. Two students specifically, Brooke and Elizabeth, both mentioned being afraid to speak in class at the beginning of the year because they were unsure of their answers. Two others, Mallory and Veronica, the “Straight A” students, both talked about handing in drafts of their major

assignments so they could be corrected before they were actually evaluated for the real grade they would receive. These students all set meeting the teacher’s expectations as their ultimate goal in the classroom. There was definitely a preoccupation with the final outcome of learning, and it always connected to the student’s individual grade.

What seems most problematic in this setting is that it is an English classroom where the students are examining literature. From my own experience, literature poses questions and is perplexing at times; it deals with life’s greatest mysteries and conundrums and is rarely neat and clearly cut. These students, in this setting, have been taught to see the canonical literature they are studying as linear and to seek out definitive and correct answers to specific questions.

Further, the types of literature to which these students were exposed are problematic. Miss Williams told me during one of our formal interviews that when she was hired, she was assured that since Girls Academy was private there was more autonomy in terms of required curriculum. The reality, as this study revealed, is that the students read very traditional, male-centered, canonical texts. I’ve struggled to determine whether the school administration has reflected on the impact of this policy. Whether intended or unintended, there are consequences for these students. It was outrageous to me to hear Veronica tell me her thoughts about women authors. When she said, “Maybe a woman hasn’t written anything worth studying,” it nearly broke my heart! And yet, when I think about the message the students are getting by not reading any prominent or contemporary women authors, a statement like that makes sense. If these young, impressionable female students are trained to learn what’s important for tests and their subsequent education, then the components of the curriculum are just as important in shaping their knowledge as is the knowledge itself. If they have accepted that what they are learning is important and is written by important people, it seems valid that they would view the writing of women as sub-par within the academic realm.

This notion is reinforced by the female characters they are reading about in these canonical texts. As a whole, regardless of achievement or participation levels, all of the focal students described the major female characters they studied as weak, silly, ditsy, and one-dimensional, terms usually not coupled with positive connotations. As Mallory said, “these characters are the ‘anti-examples’ of what a woman should act like and be.” I couldn’t help but wonder why a school that markets itself on producing women who are capable of leadership roles would have students who read about women who do not personify these real-world examples.

Possibly the final predicament here occurred when Elizabeth told me that she never really thought about the lack of female authors and characters in the English curriculum. At first, I wondered if the question itself was too sophisticated and if adolescents are just too preoccupied with themselves to consider what they are studying. However, as I reexamined the transcripts of several different groups over the course of the school year, it seemed that the conversation always came back to the roles that these characters played. Ultimately it seemed that the worldview of these focal students was distorted by this exclusion tactic. They genuinely came to believe that what women write must not be worthy of academic analysis, otherwise it would be included in the curriculum at Girls Academy.

In sharp contrast to what was considered the required reading of the classroom were the trade paperback books that these students shared among themselves and read for pure enjoyment and entertainment’s sake. Almost all of the focal students paused when I asked them what they read in their individual interviews. Some even asked me to clarify the question, saying, “You mean like...*Harry Potter* or something?” When I reassured them that’s what I meant, they provided me with a variety of contemporary authors and titles, most of which I recognized.

Overall, it seemed they sought out modern day, realistic settings and even told me they enjoyed reading about things that could really happen. I also noticed that several of the books they told me about

were also recent movies or television series; for example, the *Harry Potter* (1998) books, *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants* (2003), and *Gossip Girl* (2002). The girls would share the books by reading them and then passing them onto a friend and then another and so on, then they would gather to informally discuss the books, creating an amateur book club or literary group. What seemed remarkable, and predictable, was that they all talked about how they enjoyed the books much more than the films or television series.

It seems that at a time when trade paperback books by certain authors are published in a serial manner while films are being released based on those books, it’s difficult to discern what was having more of an impact on the focal students at any given time. In most of the research I’ve reviewed, using any references to popular culture can prove to be advantageous in the academic setting. That being said, for this particular group of students, it almost proved to be more of a liability than an asset.

I noticed the distraction that occurred the day Miss Williams was using artistic renditions of Ophelia to introduce her as a character at the beginning of the Hamlet unit. The first class analyzed a painting and did quite well as far as staying focused, but the second class examined a photograph of the actress Kate Winslet from the 1996 film version. This second group of students was immediately distracted by the actress, instead of being focused on the activity. They were rattling off all their favorite Kate Winslet roles; my initial observation notes led me to believe that they were engaged in the lesson, but then when I reviewed the video tapes, I saw small groups of the students carrying on hushed conversations, long after Miss Williams made a noble attempt to refocus them on that activity.

In all, I wonder if it is the formality of the majority of the school that renders the students confused when they are presented with an innovative or creative lesson. After all, they are used to competing for top grades in an extremely individualistic setting. The focal students told me that most teachers lecture and give tests, so perhaps



they are simply confused when they are asked to work together or think critically when there may not be one right answer.

### **To Be (Compliant), or Not To Be**

My initial observations at Girls Academy were faintly reminiscent of my own experiences in high school. Everyone was pleasant, most students were well-rounded and involved in several different aspects of the school, and the competition for good grades was fiercely apparent. As previously mentioned, the school itself uses an interesting marketing technique: naming the alumnae. Upon visiting the school's website, there is a link to a long list of powerful women in several different fields: medicine, law, education, and the arts. The way that it is presented would lead someone to believe that these women became powerful during their formative years at Girls Academy.

The majority of the school's faculty is female, including the key personnel in the administration. So, the students saw powerful women in action in the classrooms, at major after-school functions, at sporting events, and at any of the artistic performances or shows. These strong female role models certainly assert power over the students, their grades, and their dress code. The students see that authority as leadership. There are no public negotiations apparent to the students, so they rarely see how these groups of women collaborate.

During my individual interviews, the students were very intelligent in the way they carried themselves, and it reflected their training well. They could recognize characteristics of strong females in real life and in fiction but for the most part, they were not displaying these same characteristics. They all turned in assignments on time, they came to class on time and prepared, and they raised their hand before they spoke, waiting patiently to be called on. For all of these girls there was the underlying fixation with the "right answers" and "good grades" beyond their own goals for their education.

I've imagined that if Girls Academy had a motto it would be something akin to "empowering young girls for nearly one hundred years." But I can't help

but wonder what kind of leaders are being developed in a context where the English curriculum remains male-dominated, where there is still an obsession with grades and high-stakes tests, and where these young girls are trained to be compliant, unquestioning students. Is part of the training then to learn how to play the "male-dominated" game and succeed beyond Girls Academy where the world is co-ed? Or, is the leadership characteristic ingrained in certain girls who just happen to choose to attend Girls Academy?

The dominating epistemology of Girls Academy and its students is very traditional, linear, and cognitive. Yet, so much of what I observed Miss Williams incorporating into her English classroom was not. Even though she successfully met the requirements of her job, she did not stop classroom discussion and activity at the objective level; students were socially and emotionally engaged. There is hope for the girls in her classroom.

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# She Opened a Book Slowly: How Urban Girls Found Their Literate Identities in Book Group

*Ginger Goldman Malin*

## ***Lover of Books***

*She opened a book*

*Carefully, Slowly*

*Each word was absorbed, eaten like a huge*

*Sunday dinner*

*She ate until full*

*She questioned, listened, learned, taught, laughed,  
struggled*

*But through it all*

*She opened a book*

*Carefully, Slowly*

*She had peace while in this book*

*She explored, went away for a moment*

*She hugged the book, and imagined herself  
jumping into the pages*

*She opened a book and released her true self*

*Released it like a white dove into a soft cloud*

*She, a mother and lover of words*

*A lover of rhythm, and thoughts*

*She opened a book and learned*

*Learned how to read for pleasure for the sake of  
pleasure*

*For the sake of togetherness,*

*Sisterhood, Strength, Respect and Care*

*Around our table she read*

*While words floated around her head*

*She learned*

*She became a lover of words*

*While Carefully and Slowly opening a book.*

- Ana (participant in Robins Alternative  
School Book Group)

## **Introduction**

By introducing high quality, engaging, multicultural literature (appendix #1) to twelve Mexican-American adolescent women in the Robins Alternative School Book Group, the Literature Sisters organization, and particularly its leader, Kathy Tillman, helped participants come to enjoy reading and responding to literature and to develop a literate identity. Through their transactions with literature, group members were able to live through texts (Rosenblatt, 1978) and evoke responses that the young women and Kathy shared, discussed, and collaboratively examined in weekly sessions. These conversations enhanced existing perspectives and views, while also serving to help the young women transform and construct new understandings. In this way, the book group became an intimate literate community that enabled its participants to learn how to engage in literate practices such as negotiating, comparing, evaluating, predicting, and reflecting on literature.

The concept of literacy described here comes from an understanding that “to be literate is to have the disposition to engage appropriately with texts of different types in order to empower action, thinking, and feeling in the context of purposeful social activity” (Wells, 1990, p. 379). Understood in this way, literacy refers to more than just an individual’s ability to read and write—it is invariably tied to the purposes involved in interacting or transacting with literature and the contexts in which these events take place.

At the beginning of the book group program, many (10 out of 12) of these young women considered themselves “non-readers” (survey, September) and felt that “reading was not a thing I did for me...I did it for school” (interview, February). Yet, by the end of the year, all (12 out of 12) of the young women defined themselves as “readers and writers” (survey, May) and saw literacy as essential to who they were as people.

### **Purpose of this Study**

In this study, the young women came together to read and collaboratively construct meaning from literature and, in doing so, successfully constructed literate identities. Although the girls’ collaborative talk about the texts provided the opportunity for communal meaning-making, their written poetry became the major way that they documented their growing understandings, thoughts and feelings. It is the purpose of this article to describe how the poetry of these young women became the vehicle that encouraged them to articulate and validate their meanings and, thus, become truly literate.

### **Methodology & Participants**

This paper offers data gathered from a one-year ethnographic study of an all-female adolescent book group that was located in an alternative urban high school on the south-side of Chicago. All 12 participants were self-defined Mexican-Americans ranging in age from 16-21 years. The data for this study included transcripts of 26 audio-taped book group sessions, responses from two surveys, fieldnotes from book group sessions and field trips, poetry produced by the participants, and transcriptions of formal interviews with the three teachers, the book group leader, and 12 young women.

Elise J. Robins Alternative High School served 29 students (12 girls and 17 boys) who had been expelled from public school or who had previously dropped out of the public school setting. The population was 97% Mexican-American with the other 3% consisting of students from Arab-American, Puerto Rican, and Polish-American backgrounds. All

12 book group members defined themselves as being of Mexican descent.

This group met for one hour once a week as part of the school curriculum. To gather data as a participant-observer, I attended every book group session for an entire school year (August through June). The school’s mission and policies required all students to participate in a same-gender reflections group where they could discuss issues related to identity, social grouping (such as gangs), self-esteem, and self-empowerment. The boys met weekly with a male teacher at the school while the girls met with Kathy in book group. Although actual participation in the group’s activities was voluntary, attendance was mandatory.

The twelve girls in this book group voluntarily agreed to participate in this study. Seven book group members participated for the entire year (Ana, Gloria, Lisa, Lupe, Maria, Sandra, and Sonia), two members left the school after one semester (Estee and Lea), and three members joined the group during the second semester (Eva, Lola, and Stacia). Four of the participants in the group were mothers (Ana, Lea, Lupe, and Sandra), and the school identified all of the other girls as at-risk for early motherhood. Since I had more time to get to know the seven girls who participated in book group for the entire year, they became the major informants for this study.

### **Selecting Texts that Inspire Connections and Conversations**

One of Kathy’s roles as book group leader was to “expose the young women to powerful feminist thought through literature so that they learn the language of power in order to use it for their own benefit” (interview, March). Kathy chose books in a genre that she referred to as women’s literature. These were works that were generally written by women and addressed the communal triumphs, hardships, histories, and experiences of women. In particular, the five books that were read and discussed in book group dealt with issues of sexuality, gender stereotypes, racism, sexism, and mother-daughter relationships. These books were chosen to expose the participants to other people and

to differing perspectives so that they would be better equipped to make decisions and choices about their present situations and future interests. As they learned to communicate their understandings, they were able to begin defining their literate identities that, in turn, led to increases in their self-confidence as readers, writers, thinkers, and women.

The canonized texts that are typically taught in traditional school settings often do not often reflect the histories, languages, experiences, and viewpoints of the students who are required to read them. Texts that depict these students' experiences are categorized under the term "multicultural literature," and they have been marginalized and reduced to a status of being supplemental to the literary canon (Willis, 1997). However, these texts often are very well written and reflect universal themes in the history, life experiences, culture, and literature of all people. Many of these texts were written by women and have long been used by women's book groups because they speak directly to the concerns of women. Miller & Legge (1999) note that these texts also trigger important conversations and connections among women because they legitimize and validate both their collective experience as women and their individual situations as females.

For similar reasons, Kathy Tillman chose mostly multicultural literature to share with the young women in this book group. Their personal growth and strength was further enhanced through literature discussions and poetry writing. These literary activities served as vehicles for the young women to share their own experiences, thus rendering them valid and important. The group also provided a context within which to practice the thinking strategies necessary to consider and ultimately challenge various injustices and reconsider how they want to live their lives.

### **Feeling Empowered Through Writing Poetry**

The poetry that the girls wrote allowed them to further reflect on the literature and ideas sparked in the discussion. Many of the girls indicated that writing poetry helped them to feel creative and artistic and gave them an outlet to thoughtfully react

to an experience by expressing feelings of fear, anger, joy, pain, or sadness (whole group interview, March). The girls indicated an understanding that their writing was read and listened to for its content and artistry rather than evaluated for form and grammar, which they understood as the purpose of their other school work. Even though some of the members did not often participate in discussion, their voices were still heard through their poetry. These poems were read to the group and then praised and applauded. Each girl generally chose five poems to submit to Kathy for possible inclusion in the poetry anthology published by the organization. Group members also performed their poetry for larger audiences at fundraisers and coffee shops, where they were further able to validate their life experiences as they created their literate identities.

One recurrent theme that emerged involved the girls' relationships with their mothers. A majority of research on mother-daughter relationships has focused primarily on white, middle-class teens from suburban environments (Way, 1996). This research shows that, as they age through adolescence, girls' needs for close relationships with people in whom they can confide is vital to their psychological health (Finders, 1997; Pipher, 1994; Taylor, Gilligan, & Sullivan, 1995). Yet, many of the subjects in these studies spoke about distrusting their boyfriends, being betrayed by their female friends, and not feeling comfortable sharing their experiences or ideas with their mothers. These negative experiences left them with few options for safely engaging in intimate relationships. In addition, researchers report that girls feel they need to conform to what others want them to say, think, and feel in order to become part of a social setting (Finders, 1997). However, like most teenagers, they may also perceive that entering adulthood requires them to separate from others, especially their parents, to become more independent (Muuss, 1996). Taylor and her colleagues (1995) described this transitional period as a dangerous crossroad for girls in particular because "either they will give up their voices to others...or they will give up their relationships with others and learn to be self-sufficient, entire unto themselves" (p. 24).

In discussing their responses to literature, the girls in this study shared feelings of distrust and instances of betrayal similar to those reported by the white middle-class teens in the studies described above. Although many of the book group members desired relationships in which they would find support and intimacy with their mothers, they often distanced themselves so that they could feel protected and independent. Examples of these tensions emerged as group members explored their ideas about mother-daughter relationships and wrote about their ideal mothers after reading the book *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (Danticat, 1994), a story about the experiences of a mother and daughter from Haiti.

***A Good Mother***

A good mother  
is someone who respects her child.  
A good mother  
is someone who cares for the well being of her  
child.  
A good mother  
believes and trusts her child  
A good mother  
loves her child, no matter what.  
A good mother  
is my mother  
and I am her child.

By Lupe

***My Ideal Mother***

Mom, as I sit and wonder how our friendship can  
be.  
When you hold me in your arms  
I feel your love for me  
Could this love go on forever?  
I need your love now as a mother  
And a friend.

By Lea

***My Ideal Mom***

My ideal mom would be someone who is always  
there.  
I wouldn't ask for much,  
just a mom to talk with, walk with, shop with.

The little things I missed out on as I grew:  
someone I would be able to cry with, laugh with,  
even just  
dye my hair with.  
Someone I could bring my friends with,  
buy my first bra with;  
Someone to be there when I got my first period;  
Someone to be there for all the mother-daughter  
sleepovers  
My ideal mom would just have to be a normal  
mom.

By Gloria

***My Ideal Mother***

My ideal mother wouldn't make me suffer;  
she wouldn't care more about her lover than  
her own daughter.  
My ideal mother would show me love  
instead of hate  
My ideal mother would bring me joy  
instead of tears, instead of fears.  
My ideal mother would love me!  
She would show me love instead of  
showing me her fist, pounding on my soul!  
Letting all my goals and dreams go!  
My ideal mother would never hurt my soul.

By Ana

These poems show that these urban, Mexican-American girls, like the white middle-class girls who participated in the research studies, also longed for love and friendship from their mothers. For them, an ideal mother would be "loving, trusting, and respectful." Yet, as implied in all four poetry examples, the girls' own mothers did not meet their ideal expectations of what a mother could or should be, and they did not provide the intimate safe relationship that they needed. In fact, they felt betrayed and isolated by their mothers and did not see their mothers as safe people in whom they could confide. These poems were particularly important for Ana, Lea and Lupe as they are already mothers themselves, and the literature discussion and their subsequent reflective writing allowed them to

consider what kind of mothers they want to be for their children.

Because the literature provided an ample amount of opportunity to examine the characters' relationships, these young women were able to use literate response as a vehicle for self-reflection and a mechanism to consider what they would possibly want in their own relationships. Through this literary process, the young women considered aspects of the characters' relationships, related them to their own relationships, compared them to other participants' perspectives; and then, through writing, were able to articulate and sort out their amended perspectives. As such, this literate process led to a broader insight and a greater awareness of the kinds of relationships they would ideally desire, and a beginning for recognizing how to obtain them.

### **Implications**

The mission of this book group was to empower young women. Kathy believed that empowerment came from "being recognized by yourself and by others as a strong, confident, intelligent woman" (interview, March). To do this, Kathy established a context for the participants to read, listen, speak, think and write about their experiences thus making their feelings "available to introspection and revision" (Livdahl, Wallman, Herbert, Geiger, & Anderson, 1995, p. 9). In practicing this type of critical reflective response, these young women were able to reveal the strength and knowledge that they always possessed but had not yet either discovered or validated.

The participants explained that they were not encouraged in school to express their thoughts or feelings evoked by literature. When Ana described her school experiences with reading, she said, "I'm not that good at school. It's always like being told what the book is about by our teacher and we never get to talk about it like we do in here [book group]. It is always like a test, not like, you know, just reading. I hate it, and I fail my classes because I don't like to read" (interview, February). Many of the other participants expressed similar trouble with school reading and compared their failure at it with their

successful feelings of reading in book group. For example, Sandra explained that, "In book group, we are all readers. I don't get along that well with everyone in school, but when we come here we all have reading in common, even if someone isn't that good of a reader...It brings us together as women because we talk about issues that are important to us. We learn from the books and from each other" (interview, February). This kind of feeling, one of coming together to discuss books and share ideas, is a common thread that runs through much of the research literature on women's book discussion groups (Gonzalez, 1997; Long, 1986, 1992; Sichertman, 1989).

Similar to the findings about women's book groups, this book group environment empowered its participants by offering them the tools and opportunities to explore the world through reading and responding to literature. Literary discussion groups can provide readers with a community and setting whereby they can examine their own and others' meanings constructed from literature. Since adolescence is a time when people are negotiating their identities in order to make the transition into adulthood, literature discussions that focus on and explore issues of self as related to such concepts as gender, culture, or social status could help smooth out these difficult and sometimes painful transitions. Furthermore, by asking questions and discussing responses, book group leaders can give adolescent participants the "opportunity to talk through—and thereby think through—issues of importance to them... that may help them cultivate their ability to make thoughtful and responsible decisions" (Taylor et. al., 1995, p. 121). This type of dialogic relationship with an adult fosters adolescents' ability to recognize the infinite possibilities that life has to offer them and begin to plan a way to recognize these possibilities.

Although it is important for all people to learn and practice thinking in this critical way, adolescents, and adolescent girls in particular, are at a stage in life when reflective and empathetic thinking is highly beneficial to their psychological health. Developmentally, adolescence is a time when people

ask the questions “Who am I?” and “What do I want to become?” (Erickson, 1968). According to Taylor, Gilligan, and Sullivan (1995), as girls enter adulthood, they are at a high risk for losing touch with what they know through experience because “their social location of class, gender, age, and for many, race or ethnicity, places them in a socially marginalized position that does not grant a public hearing of their experience, strength, or knowledge” (pp. 17-18). By engaging in conversations with others who value their stories and experiences, as was the case in this book group, girls are given the opportunity to explore and critique important life issues.

In this study, both the school and the book group organization philosophically maintained that through literate practices, such as those that occur in a book group, readers can learn to see themselves as creative, powerful, and purposeful individuals. In constructing communal meanings, participants in book groups do more than simply practice rote reading skills; they use reading as a communication vehicle to better understand themselves and others’ worldviews (Malin, 2007). This context for communicating is also important in that it nurtures a sense of self-esteem, accomplishment, and hope within the participants. The attention to individual growth through literary response may not be typical within more traditional educational settings, yet it is the foundation and main goal of most women’s book groups.

This book group was obviously unique in terms of being held in an alternative school with all Latina girls; yet, there are some aspects that can be replicated in more traditional settings, including: 1) introducing adolescents to texts with which they can connect and engage, 2) creating space and time for students to share their personal responses to literature, both orally and in writing 3) adopting a general philosophy that, as an art form, literature has no one correct way to be interpreted—this will encourage more aesthetic readings of texts 4) training teachers to act as mentors for students—helping them to learn and practice literacy behaviors—that is, to use reading and writing as a

means to critically understand the choices, perspectives, and possibilities that exist in the world.

According to the International Reading Association Position Statement, (2005), the ultimate goal of secondary reading programs should be to develop independent readers and learners who are able to utilize and apply literacy strategies to various situations in order to stay informed and make appropriate choices. Book groups seem to offer potential information to help schools accomplish this task. If adolescents are to view reading and writing as important acts that are worth pursuing and if they are to become literate lifelong learners, they need to become part of a literate community in which they can collaborate with others to further their understandings. Being a member of this kind of community means that they will have opportunities to respond to literature in authentic ways and compose texts that help them to express their ideas and feelings. The first step in doing this is to introduce young people to texts with which they can connect and engage. When they are engaged with texts, they will naturally make connections to them. They need to understand that making these personal connections is a strategy that good readers use to make sense of what they are reading and to construct meaning. In doing so, they will have reasons to share their responses, both orally and in writing, with others and subsequently form a literary circle with whom to examine their tentative meanings and determine those that best help them achieve their goals and reflect their beliefs.

Although the topics and texts that were introduced in this book group may have been too sensitive or risqué to share in typical classroom settings, they were within the boundaries of appropriate conversation material for this context. It is important to note that while the specific topics may be too personal to share in a larger and less intimate setting, it does not mean that a teacher should refrain from addressing important social and political issues such as sexism or racism with students. In an effort to stay neutral and unbiased because of their own fears and uncomfortable feelings, many teachers tend to virtually ignore these issues in classroom discussions



of literature. Such topics will also most likely not be brought up by adolescents on their own, and yet these concepts are vital for them to consider as they are forming their own beliefs and identities.

As these issues affect the daily lives of all students, they are critically important to them. Perhaps the most vital aspect of ensuring involvement from the girls in this book group was that the topics were salient to them (as they initiated many of them), and their ideas were indeed validated. Therefore, the second step to forming a literate community would be to ensure that all ideas and voices are heard and respected. If the community has both males and females, or if it is situated in a more traditional setting, evoking authentic responses may be a more difficult task, but these concerns should not preclude the group from discussing or responding to topics that are salient and important. However, based on this study, it seems clear that the girls responded differently in this same-sex group than they would have in a mixed-sex group, which is an important consideration. As such, teachers may want to provide opportunities for females and males to work in same-sex book groups to promote responses to topics that may be sensitive or off limits to discussants interacting with the opposite sex.

Another important aspect would be to create an atmosphere where sharing and exploring ideas as a group is encouraged. This means creating an environment that fosters conversation. For instance, in this book group, the girls sat around a table. A bright tablecloth hid the badly scarred wooden table. They also often had snacks and drinks so they would feel comfortable and at ease. Despite the fact that it was normally a rather dingy basement, the room was transformed into a bright and inviting space for grand conversations during the book group sessions.

The facilitator's attitude was also a vital component contributing to the success of the group. In maintaining the mission of the organization, Kathy did more than just apply best practice teaching methods. Instead, she challenged the deficit view that many educators have regarding low-SES and ethnic-minority adolescents (Pappas, 1999). Rather than thinking of the participants as at-risk, the term

generally used to describe them, she regarded them as at-promise (Oyler, 1996) students. In seeing the young women this way, Kathy employed a humanizing pedagogy (Bartolome, 1994) that respected and incorporated their perspectives and history into the curriculum and into her practice. As the young women were afforded opportunities to respond to literature in these ways, they were able to realize their potential as readers, writers, and thinkers—major aspects of a literate identity.

Finally, the effects of book group went well beyond the book group borders. Through their participation, the young women learned to see literacy as a means to gain vital understandings about who they are and what they can achieve. The young women then extended this knowledge into other contexts such as school, home, and work, where they had opportunities to display their new literate identities. In interviews, many girls explained that they began to feel as though they could succeed in college now that they were better readers and writers. At home, they read the children's books that they were given in book group to their own children or to younger siblings. They also shared the adult books with family members and friends and discussed their responses. The young women also believed that their ability to read and write well could extend into their working lives as these were skills that were highly desired, if not required, by employers. Overall, in attaining a literate identity, the girls not only gained confidence in applying their literate behaviors in other contexts, but they also extended the book group community to include others as they shared literature and their passion for reading with their family and friends.

### **Summary**

This study shows how important it is to make space for the necessary, yet often uncomfortable, conversations that can lead students to a new critical consciousness. By using literature as a starting place to initiate discussions on topics of concern, students have opportunities to practice literate strategies and reflect on important social and political constructs, which in turn can enable them to transform their own

beliefs and possibly their world. Even if this goal is difficult to achieve within a typical classroom setting, this study shows how important it is to offer occasions for young people, in this case adolescent women, to use exploratory talk and especially reflective poetry writing to construct meanings that support their learning and promote healthy life-long literate identities.

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**APPENDIX 1**  
**List of Texts**

Title of Text	Month(s) Discussed
Danticat, E. (1994). <i>Breath, eyes, memory</i> . New York: Vintage Books.	August, September, October
Mataka, L. (1999). <i>The strong black woman is dead</i> .	September
Souljah, S. (1999). <i>The coldest winter ever</i> . New York: Pocket Books.	November
Cisneros, S. (1987). <i>My wicked, wicked ways</i> . New York: Alfred A. Knopf.	December
Anonymous (1971). <i>Go ask Alice</i> . New York: Simon & Schuster.	February
Behar, R. (1998). "La cortada." In J. C. Oates (Ed.), <i>Telling stories</i> . New York: W.W. Norton.	March
Jackson, S. (1997). <i>Li'l Mama's rules</i> . New York: Simon & Schuster.	April
Fitch, J. (1999). <i>White oleander</i> . New York: Little, Brown and Company.	May
Reilly, P. L. (1999). <i>Imagine a woman</i> . In B. Muten (Ed.), <i>Her words: An anthology of poetry about the great goddess</i> . Boston: Shambhala.	June

# Breaking into the Superhero Boy's Club: Teaching Graphic Novel Literary Heroines in Secondary English Language Arts

*Katie Monnin*

*I wish to show that elegance is inferior to virtue,  
that the first object of laudable ambition is to  
obtain a character as a human being, regardless  
of the distinction of sex.*

— Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the  
Rights of Women* (1792)

I am often asked: “Graphic novels are longer comic books with superheroes, right?” My response: “Actually, graphic novels are more of a cousin to the comic book. And many are not about superheroes. Many focus on literary heroines.”

This article is about teaching graphic novel literary heroines in secondary English Language Arts (ELA). But before we look at how to teach graphic novel literary heroines in ELA, let's take a look back at why it is so important for ELA teachers to, first and foremost, begin to use graphic novels in their classrooms.

In 1978, following over thirty years of criticism, many comic artists had grown tired of hearing that comics were juvenile, lowbrow, and/or not “serious” literature; some critics had even gone as far as to claim that comic books were linked to a rise in juvenile delinquency (Hajdu, 2008). In response to these critics, many comic artists felt the need to prove that comic book literacies (the combination of print-text literacies and image literacies to tell story) could indeed work on a literary level. One comic artist in particular stands out. In 1978, Will Eisner wrote a graphic novel called *A Contract with God* (1978), and he is often credited with popularizing the term.

While a comic book is typically associated with a famed superhero who follows a singular plotline, from Event A (need for superhero) to Event B (superhero saves the day), a graphic novel pursues deeper literary involvement, a more intense relationship with the conventions and styles found in canonical, print-text literature. A graphic novel, in short, adopts the elements of story traditionally taught in ELA classrooms, elements of story considered worthy of serious literary attention. The point: Even though the graphic novel is related to the comic book, it is vastly more independent in terms of format and literary intention.

Despite the intentions behind the graphic novel, however, many teachers still have questions. Since I work with pre-service and in-service teachers, I am often asked: Can the graphic novel really be used in ELA teaching and learning as a valid literary format? Absolutely! The graphic novel not only requires its own unique label as a valid literary format, but also can be used in ELA classrooms to broaden preconceived notions about comic books and their association with male superheroes.

For example, over the last ten to fifteen years the graphic novel literary heroine has received significant amounts of attention (Gustines, 2006; Hajdu, 2008; Harris, 2008; Nagy, 2009; McCloud 2000, 2006; O'Quinn 2008). But, you might wonder, why the sudden attention to the graphic novel literary heroine? The story of the graphic novel literary heroine actually begins with Art Spiegelman's *Maus I* (1986) and *Maus II* (1991), which won a Pulitzer Prize in 1992. Because *Maus I* and *Maus II* were so

popular and so well accepted as “literary,” they are often cited as the first two graphic novels to finally break through the mainstream divide that still lingered between the comic world’s perception of graphic novels and the general public’s perception of graphic novels.

In other words, *Maus I* and *Maus II* broke through what was at first seen as “comic-like” and presented the graphic novel as a valid literary format to the general public. Those outside of the comic world who had previously felt that highbrow literature could only be found in print-text literacies actually found themselves labeling a graphic novel as highbrow literature. In short, since the publication of Eisner’s *A Contract with God* (1978) and Spiegelman’s *Maus I* (1986) and *Maus II* (1991), the graphic novel has been continuously experiencing a coming of age period. And although this coming of age has had many focal points, this article will focus on the specific coming of age experiences related to the graphic novel literary heroine (Carter, 2007).

So, what is a “graphic novel literary heroine?” Due to the graphic novel’s desire to operate on the same level as canonical, print-text literature, the graphic novel literary heroine is the main female character – just like it would be in print-text literature (Carter, 2007; Frey & Fisher, 2008; Schwartz, 2007). But, opposed to print-text literature, the graphic novel presents its literary heroine in more than one manner. The graphic novel literary heroine is represented with both print-text literacies and image literacies. Both words and images define the graphic novel literary heroine.

One of the most recognizable graphic novel literary heroines to appear in many ELA settings is from Marjane Satrapi’s *Persepolis I* (2004). Set during the Islamic Revolution in Tehran, Iran, *Persepolis*’ main character, Marjane herself, presents one little girl’s perspective on what it was like to grow up during this troubled time. And, just like *Maus I* and *Maus II*, *Persepolis* also captured the general public’s interest in reading graphic novels as valid literary texts, receiving numerous literary awards (in 2004, it received the ALA Alex Award, YALSA Best Books for Young Adults, Booklist

Editor’s Choice for Young Adults, New York Public Library Books for the Teen Age, and School Library Journal Adult Books for Young Adults). Despite the graphic novel’s growing popularity and the specific attention being paid by some scholars to the modern-day graphic novel literary heroine (Carter, 2007), however, the graphic novel literary heroine’s place in ELA teaching and learning is still in its early years of growth. Thus, this writing hopes to take the discussion about the graphic novel literary heroine, and her role in ELA teaching and learning, one step further.

In order to take this step, this article will present two ELA classroom studies where graphic novels and their literary heroines were emphasized. Snapshots of what occurred in these two high school ELA classrooms will be offered, and, it is hoped that ELA teachers will find that graphic novels with strong literary heroines:

1. Can be aligned to the IRA/NCTE standards, and
2. Can help move students away from the aged assumption that what appears comic-like and about superheroes might actually be a graphic novel with an unmasked capeless literary heroine.

### **Teaching Graphic Novels with Strong Literary Heroines in Secondary ELA**

Over the course of two school years, in two high school ELA classrooms, I aligned two graphic novels with strong literary heroines to the IRA/NCTE standards.

The two graphic novels of choice were: Marjane Satrapi’s *Persepolis I* (2004) and Kazu Kibuishi’s *Daisy Cutter: The Last Train* (2006). These two graphic novels were chosen for the following reasons:

- First, each graphic novel focuses on the development of a literary heroine.
- Second, each adopts the elements of story found in the IRA/NCTE standards.

And even though all of the IRA/NCTE standards can be applied to teaching graphic novels in secondary

**Figure 1:**  
**IRA/NCTE Standards 1 and 11**

<b>IRA/NCTE Standard 1</b>	Students read a wide range of print and non-print texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.
<b>IRA/NCTE Standard 11</b>	Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.

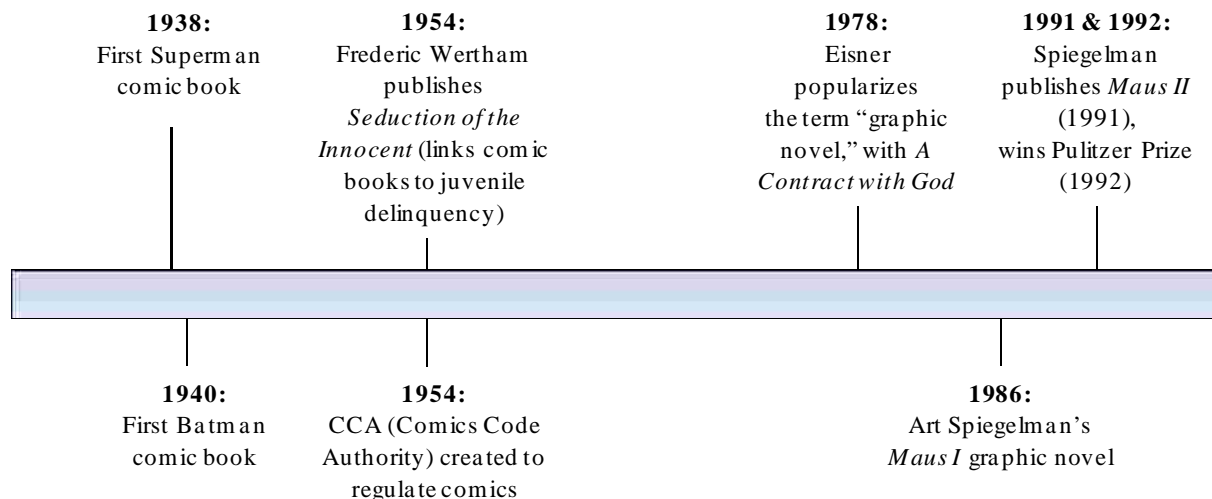
ELA (Carter, Monnin, Kelly, under review), Standard 1 and Standard 11 were deemed most appropriate and fitting for this work (see Figure 1). Because of its dual focus on building student understanding of a wide range of print literature, Standard 1 was deemed applicable to teaching reading with graphic novels. Standard 11 was also deemed appropriate, particularly because of its emphasis on asking students to be writers within a variety of literacy communities. In short, since the graphic novel format places value on both print-text literacies and image literacies, it is easily aligned to Standard 1, which focuses on students reading a diverse range of literature, and to Standard 11, which focuses on students writing with multiple literacies.

With these two IRA/NCTE standards in mind, let’s next look at some snapshots of what occurred in these two ELA classrooms where graphic novels with strong literary heroines were treated as valid literary texts. These pedagogical snapshots are presented in a before reading, during reading, and after reading format.

**Before Reading**

Before reading the graphic novels, it was important to build student schema. Since most students still assumed that graphic novels were somewhat of an identical – but longer – twin to the comic book, they were first shown a brief, historical timeline focused on the development of the graphic novel (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2:**  
**A Brief Graphic Novel Timeline**



**Figure 3:**  
**KWL Chart Focused on Graphic Novel Literary Heroines**

<b>K</b>	<b>W</b>	<b>L</b>
What do you <b>Know</b> about graphic novel literary heroines?	What do you <b>Wonder</b> about graphic novel literary heroines?	What do you want to <b>Learn</b> about graphic novel literary heroines?

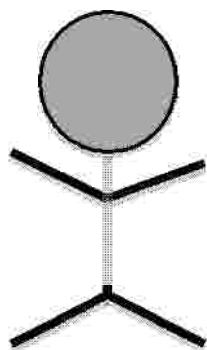
To build upon their new schema about the history of the graphic novel, and in reference to Standard 1, students were then given a KWL chart (Ogle, 1986) that focused specifically on the role of the graphic novel literary heroine. (See Figure 3.)

### **During Reading**

Once students filled out the K and the W columns of the KWL chart, they were next asked to read specific sections of the graphic novel. After each section, students were asked to add what they learned about the graphic novel literary heroine to the L column.

Again focusing on Standard 1, and during reading, students were then asked to fill out a cartoon characterization reading strategy. On their cartoon stick-figure, students were to add features, personality traits, and/or characteristics that they felt best represented the graphic novel literary heroine (See Figure 4).

**Figure 4**  
**Cartoon Stick Figure**



***Directions:** While you are reading the graphic novel, pay close attention to the literary heroine and add some features, personality traits, and /or characteristics o the below stick figure. Make sure that your decisions are based upon details found in the graphic novel.*

### **After Reading**

After reading, and in reference to IRA/NCTE Standard 11, students were next assigned a writing activity that built upon their visual and written descriptions of the graphic novel literary heroine seen in Figure 4. The directions read as follows:

Please review, both visually and in writing, the decisions you made to represent the graphic novel literary heroine. Make a list of the **3 MOST** important aspects of this literary heroine. After completing your list, decide upon two reasons to support each of your three choices.

After writing these lists and their supporting reasons, the last direction read: “Finally, reflect on your list, and your supporting reasons, and write an expository essay about your graphic novel literary heroine.

### **Findings from Teaching Graphic Novel Literary Heroines in Secondary ELA**

After the graphic novels were read and the student work collected, I quickly realized that this was some of the most thoughtful work of the year. After reading and then writing about a graphic novel, students expressed a more thorough, contemporary understanding of the word “literacy.” Two specific themes emerged from the students’ work, indicating that they were now defining “literacy” as including both print-text literacies and image literacies:

1. In terms of their reading responses (Standard 1), students indicated that they now considered both print literacies and image literacies as valid literary literacies.
2. In terms of writing (Standard 11), students indicated that they now desired to write

with both print literacies and image literacies as well.

Let's begin by discussing how students' reading responses (Standard 1) indicated a more thorough understanding of the word "literacy." When viewing the "K" and "W" columns of their KWL charts, students only used words to describe what they knew and wondered about the graphic novel literary heroine. After they read the graphic novel, however, and were asked to fill out the "L" column of the KWL chart, students not only used words, but also images. Eighty-nine percent of the students KWL charts displayed a transition from using only print-text literacies in the K and W columns, to using both print-text literacies and image literacies in the L column.

Along with indicating that their reading experience had undergone a transition from valuing print-text literacies alone to valuing print-text literacies and image literacies together, students also indicated that they now viewed the act of writing as involving both print-text literacies and image literacies. Students exhibited this transition in regards to writing in two steps: first, they asked if they would be "allowed" to write paragraphs that included both print-text literacies and image literacies; and, second, students used both print-text literacies and image literacies to write about the graphic novel literary heroine. Breaking down many of the visual stereotypes typically missing in conversations about print-text only literature, students used both words and images to highlight what they learned about the graphic novel literary heroine. For example, one student wrote, "Daisy Kutter is like a" and drew a female stick figure wearing a cowboy hat. This student then wrote, "I never thought of girls as cowboys." Describing Marjane's autobiographical character, another student drew a map of the country Iran and wrote "1979" underneath the country's borders. Then, this same student added a little girl standing near a city labeled "Tehran." This second student then wrote, "If she did not write this book, I would not have known how a little girl experienced Middle East problems. I used to think of men fighting

wars," which was followed by an illustration of two armies of men facing each other with guns.

Taking their cue from the graphic novel format, students demonstrated that they not only understood that they could read with both print-text literacies and image literacies, but also write with both print-text literacies and image literacies.

### **Implications for ELA Classroom Practice**

One implication suggested by this work is that graphic novels can be aligned to the IRA/NCTE standards. Students were able, in short, to work through the activities presented in a before reading, during reading and after reading format, and, in doing so, successfully demonstrate their abilities to read and write about graphic novels.

Another implication suggested by this work is that, when asked to read a graphic novel, students are likely to define literacy as including both print-text literacies and image literacies. As many literacy scholars (Buckingham, 2003; Carter, 2007; Hobbs, 2007; Kress, 2003; The New London Group, 1996) now advocate, our lives are no longer dominated by print-text literacies alone, but, instead, by a variety of literacies. The world told and the world shown are different worlds (Kress, 2003). During our current time in history, then, it becomes imperative that students be able to read and write with both print-text literacies and image literacies, for both types of literacy singularly and together influence the modern reading world (Buckingham, 2003; Kress, 2003; The New London Group, 1996).

A final implication of this work is subtle, yet significant. Because students were able to define/describe the literary heroine in both words and images, it is worthwhile to note that it might be wise for the ELA community to conduct further research on the issue of gender representation in graphic novels. For instance, one question that this work begs us to ask in the future is: "In what ways, are students able to use both print-text literacies and image literacies to define/describe the graphic novel literary heroine?" Or, perhaps, "In what ways do students use print-text literacies and image literacies



to represent male and female graphic novel characters?”

### Final Thoughts

Since we are living during a time that many literacy scholars see as the greatest communication revolution of all time, there are many, many more questions that can be asked about the graphic novel's place in ELA teaching and learning. This work merely presents a few ideas for not only aligning graphic novels to the IRA/NCTE standards, but also for teaching graphic novels with strong literary heroines. As we pay more attention to the graphic novel, and its place within ELA teaching and learning, I hope that more teachers will find and share all of the interesting and diverse ways they too have fit graphic novels into their ELA curriculums. In fact, I encourage teachers to share their ideas on my blog:

<http://teachinggraphicnovels.blogspot.com/>

As I end my thoughts on teaching graphic novels with strong literary heroines in these two secondary ELA classrooms, I keep thinking about a quotation one of my students wrote out and gave to me following our work with graphic novels:

*A friend is someone who gives you a book you have not read.*

- A. Lincoln

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# What Teaching Methods of Inquiry Taught Me

*Susan Schroeder*

Helping my students to think critically about social justice issues—the environment, poverty, race, prejudice and discrimination—has been a challenge for me as a teacher educator on an urban campus. I have aimed to get ELA pre-service teachers, a wonderfully diverse group, to question social inequalities they see rather than accept things the way they are. However, when it comes to gender, I have had to take a lesson from my students.

Last year I taught a course for the first time that was quite a change for me. It was not a teacher education course but had legacy as its theme: Celebrating Life and Leaving a Legacy. I planned to include a writing assignment about construction of gender identity but did not stop to consider LGBT youth in the class whose lives were shrouded in silence and might remain that way if no opportunity were provided to begin a conversation about gender and socially constructed identities. I was caught up in developing library resources and curriculum for freshmen and ways to think critically about legacy. I knew gender identities could be derived from books (Hartman, 2006) and that value could be gained from describing constructions of gender but never thought about how gay students might benefit from examples of characters in books or how straight students might be moved to develop identities with an expanded worldview, one that includes gayness defined in their own terms.

In this article, I describe a mini-unit I taught with first-year students in a course on foundations of inquiry designed to help them make a successful transition from high school to the intellectual challenge of college. This was the only course I taught all year that was not a teacher education course, and I watched with interest as students began

to recognize that knowing a lot would not do them much good unless they could do something with what they knew by turning it into an argument. I applauded as they learned to pay attention to what others said and wrote and began to summarize their arguments and assumptions. I did not, however, get to cheer as students had a light bulb moment for identifying how hegemonic heteronormativity is made and maintained, because no such moment took place. Looking back on planning for this course, I can think of ways that I might have encouraged my students to think about this more.

## **Overarching Theme**

Students who registered for my section of the course knew that its theme would be Celebrating Life and Leaving a Legacy: How can I be remembered? I was pleased they explored this question when they anticipated themes in Green's novel *Looking for Alaska* and by reading and discussing poems: W. H. Auden's "As I Walked Out One Evening," Edna St. Vincent Millay's "Not So Far as the Forest," and Robert Frost's "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening." They thought about how the author regarded legacy when they discussed Randy Pausch's *Last Lecture* and when they used elements of reason to attempt to sort out whether Alaska's death had been accidental or suicidal.

But I was dismayed when I realized that relationships in both the novel and the memoir were heterosexual, so next time I will ask students to find evidence of diversity in these texts and in the poems, assuring them that in addition to race, class, and culture, they need to look for gender variance. I will work with these texts by encouraging students to find evidence that people enact sex, gender, and sexuality

continually as social constructs in each book and poem. They can reflect on many aspects of life that are socially constructed and gendered by listing roles performed around them and imagining alternate ways of being in the world. Suggesting to students that traditional power hierarchies exist and labels serve to police behavior within them, I will include a mini-lesson on the origin of such words as “fag,” a word that is sometimes used in a deliberately derogatory way but at other times without thinking. I hope to help students discover for themselves how heterosexuality is established as the only valid sexual orientation in each book and identify which voices are missing completely. As a feminist educator, I know the question to be beneficial, and am surprised that I did not think to ask it when the course ran the first time.

### **Goals in a Time Capsule**

I started the course by asking everyone, “How are you going to live life to its fullest?” Students’ answers were to be stored on small bits of paper in a glass jar that served as a “time capsule”; they would be able to see how they had met their goals at the end of the semester when the time capsule was re-opened. Earlier the same day, they read “The Dash,” a poem by Linda Ellis, thought about what they might change in their lives, and watched a short video of one of Randy Pausch’s last speeches in which he says, “We don’t beat the reaper by living longer. We beat the reaper by living well.”

Asked about living life to its fullest, many students wrote that they wanted to “take risks and try new things.” Some added “without fear.” The next most frequently stated goal was to “meet new people and make new friends.” Several said they wanted to make a difference in the world, pushing themselves to “be great,” to “not give up, no matter how hard something may be,” to “not give up until [their] dreams are fulfilled,” or to “go an extra step to help others and defend what is morally and personally right.” A few students said they wanted to do what would make them happy “no matter what the cost,” to “do things with people that mattered [to them]” or to “do things that would make [them] happy.” One

person wrote “not to be scared to show who I am.” Several others stated they would “gain self control,” “make smart decisions,” “become more confident,” “work harder at school,” “do well in school,” or “find out what makes me, me.”

I opened the jar and began to read, wanting students to confidently pursue the goals I found but feeling concern for their safety at the same time. After reading the goals, I was ready to go ahead with the assignment of a written description of how they had constructed gender identities. The writing increased their awareness of their ability to exercise choice in their lives and conveyed the idea—to some for the first time—that gender is socially constructed.

Students had already talked about the protagonist in Green’s novel who as a young girl had lost her mother. Although Alaska may have regarded her mother as a role model, students hypothesized that the many books she read may well have influenced her to become the round character in the novel they liked very much. Alaska’s outspoken defense of women, her independent spirit, and the company of male friends who respected her collaboration as a prankster fascinated students. They were asked to consider which books, people, historic events or media had influenced them significantly when they constructed their gender identities. A few days later, they had written descriptions to turn in.

### **Constructing Gender Identity**

An African American student responded by writing that when she was younger, her gender role models were the older women in her life. Her grandmother, great grandmother, mother and aunt were “strong, powerful, beautiful Black women who had shown [her] how to keep [her] head up, no matter what struggles arose.” Teasha (not her real name) was also drawn to the Williams sisters, Venus and Serena: “They caught my attention because I played tennis in high school, and I loved the fact that two Black women were dominating in that sport.” Her favorite relative was an uncle with whom she spent a lot of time going on long day trips: “We used to drive around everywhere,” she said. Her uncle became a

sitter for Teasha when her mother decided to go to college and continue to hold two jobs. She reflected,

Life experiences have influenced my ideas regarding gender the most. As we grow older and have different things happen to us and meet new people, our thoughts and ideas begin to change and our ideas begin to grow and take shape.

The statement may suggest competing discourses of femininity and a separation of what is acceptable for girls from what is acceptable for women, possibly an affirmation of the identity-acquisition process that Teasha went through as a girl when she was exposed to models of behaviors in natural settings she believed she needed to acquire to function but then put aside in exchange for a more active learning process based on life experiences that triggered conscious reflection and analysis. Both processes are acceptable to her, but one is appropriate for girls and the other for women.

Another student, a young woman from a rural southern town, claimed gender identity could be attributed largely to the influence of persons in her past rather than ongoing life experiences. Fanny singled out twin aunts as “big sisters” who took care of her when both of her parents worked as the ones she tried to copy because they seemed “cool.” She added her second grade teacher who was “such a caring person and made class fun for students.” She “really loved” her, she said, and returned to her classroom as a volunteer when she was in high school to find “it was just as good as I remembered it.” Fanny also looked up to her mother and said, “She has worked hard her entire life to give my sisters and me a good life. In elementary school, she always volunteered to go on our fieldtrips and all of my peers loved her. I already know I am like my mom, to be honest.”

A young woman in the class who came from a Midwestern middle-class suburb described her family as having the greatest influence in her construction of a gender identity:

I was never very feminine or masculine. My parents allowed me to try what I wanted and

create myself. My aunt is very sexy. She has always been good looking and an independent spirit. She is an RN and has supported herself and three sons. I am her namesake so she has always treated me like her daughter. I learned a lot from her. My sister-in-law taught me how to deal with life when it’s so hard and how to be an independent woman.

As a child, Vange was allowed to try out different gender roles, speaking her mind and standing up to other playmates or slowly beginning to develop more feminine characteristics to anticipate filling traditional roles as a wife and mother. Electing not to become passive and obedient, she suggested, Vange accomplished what seemed to be a kind of synthesis as she navigated her way to a gender identity that maximized independence. She rehearsed roles based on models in a process of trial and error that allowed her to analyze which roles to keep and which ones to discard.

Another student looked up to older girl cousins when she was younger but, in later life, she has revered Hillary Clinton “because she has overcome many things” and Drew Barrymore “who is also a very strong woman and has overcome drug addiction and a rough family background.” To characterize her construction of gender identity, Cally said, “It really became finalized going to an all-girls high school. We were taught that women could do anything and to be proud of being strong.”

The young women’s reflections demonstrated agency and the social construction of gender in each case. Male responses were much less detailed. They may not have thought about the topic as much as female students had. One student said he valued time with an uncle because he taught him how to hunt with a gun. Another claimed that his family, all of whom were very diverse, strong individuals, had had the greatest influence on his construction of gender identity. I believe I could do a better job of framing the assignment, since Alaska was the only example used when it was provided for students.

Had there been a sustained focus on gender in the course, writing tasks and dramatizations might have permitted male and female students to take a closer

look at the hard work people do to maintain gender, and how norms and systems of privilege are established and policed to keep heterosexuality as the only valid sexual orientation, thus marginalizing anyone who is not heterosexual.

Looking back on this first attempt to teach freshmen to think critically about how they can be remembered and the kinds of writing they produced, it can be said that one reflection on the construction of gender identity does not constitute a focus on gender nor does it provide a basis for personal and social change. Although the task of completing descriptions of factors and characters who helped students construct their gendered identities contributed to the important dialogical relationship between teacher and student and provided compelling examples, it led neither to personal awareness of sexuality nor to an open discussion of homophobia.

If I add a third book to the required readings in the mini-unit that opens the course, I will consider *Rainbow Boys* by Alex Sanchez. It is a book about three gay teens whose altered relationships with others and new understanding of themselves definitely merit investigation as a legacy. Gay freshmen in the class challenged to achieve an identity could benefit from seeing examples of what it is like to become aware of their sexuality. I am thinking students could complete a survey that would reveal their level of discomfort around the issue of gayness before reading the book. Once students had aired prejudices and stereotypes that distanced them from gayness, they could begin to generate their own questions about sexuality and participate in discussion. The next class will look different, especially if students do read *Rainbow Boys*. The class will be framed to open with gender from the start—and to open minds by the end of the semester.

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# Request Permission to Come Aboard: Lieutenant Commander Liz Galloway (ret.) Reporting for Duty

*Connie Buskist*

“Sir, request permission to go ashore.”

“Permission granted,” said the Captain.

The boatswain announced, “Standby to pipe the side. Shipmate going ashore,” and blew his pipe.

The sideboys lining the plank saluted as Lieutenant Commander Mary E. Galloway (Liz) left the “ship.” Long ago, sideboys were the young sailors who were expected to hoist ships’ visitors either up or down the side of the ship to or from a smaller boat. The seaman in charge of calling them for the job, the boatswain, used his whistle, or pipe, to bring them together. Today, this “piping the side” is the final part of the traditional Navy retirement ceremony during which the retiree leaves the ship for the last time. In Montgomery, Alabama (200 miles from the ocean), where LCDR Galloway retired, this ceremony was held in a high-rise building, not a ship. However, the ceremony was just as moving as the distinguished 24-year veteran ended one career and set her eyes on her next life goal: becoming an elementary school teacher.

Many teachers start out in different careers and then eventually find their way into education. A few even retire from one profession before beginning teaching careers. These teachers enter the field with a wealth of background knowledge and prior experiences to share with their students. Few teachers, however, enter the field with a prior life as interesting or as ground-breaking as LCDR Liz Galloway.

I first met Liz when she was a graduate student in my reading education class. It didn’t take long to see

that she was smart, motivated, and hard working—qualities that are imperative for being a good teacher. It was the fall of 2006, and she was winding down her Navy career. Liz had been stationed at Maxwell Air Force Base since 2004, where as an instructor teaching Joint Education, as well as distance learning courses, she was teaching over 600 military officers including international officers from over 70 different countries. During her time at Maxwell, she taught in seminar and developed two correspondence courses that supported over 12 thousand military officers around the world. She also helped design and develop an online master’s degree course for Joint Forces, the first of its kind. As a student in our alternative master’s program in childhood education, Liz was not new to education, just new to teaching children. Her desire to become an elementary teacher began in 1994, but she knew she would finish her Navy career before pursuing it.

Liz was born in Montgomery, Alabama, but grew up in the small town of Skipperville, Alabama. She joined the Navy shortly after finishing high school. Certainly when she joined she could not foresee the role she would eventually play for women in the Navy. Indeed, the first few years of her career were typical. As she moved her way up the Navy ladder and was stationed in various places, she took college courses. Liz earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration from Old Dominion University in 1987, at which time she was commissioned an Ensign in the United States Navy. Liz was then stationed in the Philippines where she was later promoted to Lieutenant Junior Grade and

was selected to attend Surface Warfare Officer School, which prepares officers to serve at sea. During this training, Liz was promoted to Lieutenant.

At the time, in 1991, women were excluded from combat positions in the military so could only serve on support ships in the Navy. But that was about to change. In 1992, just after Liz completed Surface Warfare Officer training, Congress passed the Defense Authorization Act which repealed the long-standing combat exclusion law for women. A new door was open to women, and Liz jumped at the opportunity, requesting to be sent to a combatant ship. "It was meant to be. It was our time, and I wanted to be a part of it," Liz remembers.

Liz was sent to duty on the USS Bowen FF 1079 as the Anti-Submarine Warfare Officer and the coordinator of the Women at Sea Program. With this assignment, Liz became the first female officer to be assigned to a combatant ship. She and the 12 enlisted women who were stationed with her on the USS Bowen were not greeted with enthusiasm. Most of the crew was bitter about having women on board. The Navy provided sensitivity training to the men, and their perception of the training was that they were all seen as potential rapists, making them hesitant to interact with the new female crew members. The commanding officer, however, was determined to see women successfully integrated on to his ship. The crew eventually warmed up to the idea and as Liz puts it, "We grew, and we learned from each other." Liz was on the USS Bowen for three years and during this time women crew members were coming and going. When Liz left, there were five female officers serving on the ship.

In her next assignment, Liz made history as the first female to report to the USS Tortuga, an amphibious assault ship, where she was the Second Division Deck Division Officer and also continued as the Women at Sea Coordinator. In this assignment, Liz was the only woman on a ship with 600 men (350 Marines and 250 ship's company)! However, her experiences on the USS Bowen had helped prepare her for the new adventure. She knew the men would not want her there, and she also knew that the men's wives would not be happy about having a woman

onboard. The only scenario she could imagine was that she would spend months at sea with no one speaking to her, so she decided to be proactive. Before meeting the Tortuga in Turkey, Liz arranged a dinner with the commanding officer's wife and the ombudsman. She introduced herself and let them know she would be serving on the Tortuga (they had not been informed of this fact before hand). She talked to the wives of the crew and let them know that she would only be there to do her job. She asked them to put themselves in her husband's place as she spent months at sea with 600 men and helped them to understand the importance of women transitioning into these traditionally male roles.

As Liz joined the crew and began supervising men who did not want to work for her, she made sure that she let them know that she was a seaman, just like them, and that they could act naturally around her. She was given special quarters—a stateroom that another officer had to relinquish in order for her to have a private room (he was, of course, not happy about that). A lock was placed on the bathroom door, and the men did not like that. They worried that Liz would take 30-minute showers, keeping them locked out of the bathroom. But as it turned out, she was always waiting for them to come out! The men were always fussing about the perceived injustices that her presence presented. However, the crew eventually learned that she was not as primpy as they expected her to be and that small issues could be easily addressed. Liz worked with the ship's supply officer to stock the ship's store with appropriate personal items. At first he would order things without asking her, ending up with items that clearly were not necessary. As more women joined the crew, Liz suggested he take a survey to see what items would be most beneficial to have available. The transition on the Tortuga turned out to be amazingly smooth. Liz was onboard the ship for a year and a half, and by the time she left, 50% of the officers were female. In fact, a woman has now even served as the executive officer on the Tortuga. Liz marvels at how seamless it now is for women to be at sea. "It is really nothing for a woman to be on a ship now, all natural, no fuss. It is wonderful to know that I was the one that started

it and that it is now working out well. People don't realize what went into that."

During her years at sea, Liz was also raising a family. At that time, it was uncommon to be married with children and be on a ship. Liz's oldest son, Blake, was 10 and her youngest son, Bryce, was 2 when she first went to sea. This was not easy for Liz to do, and she met with differing opinions about her decision to do so. While some women said they were inspired by her courage and the sacrifice that must be necessary in leaving her children behind, others questioned how she could be away from her children and accused her of being a horrible mother. Liz believes it is harder for women to be away from their children, but understands that men will often disagree with this. Certainly most men are not questioned about their decision to be away from their children as they serve their country. Today we hear stories of mothers serving in active duty away from their children all the time. Liz was a forerunner in this respect.

While serving on the USS Tortuga, Liz earned a master's degree in Human Resources from Troy State University. After leaving the Tortuga, she served out the rest of her career on dry land, first in Indianapolis and finally at Maxwell Air Force Base in Montgomery, AL. She was promoted to Lieutenant Commander in August 1998 and in 1999 earned a masters degree in Military Science and Operational Art from the Air Command and Staff College at Maxwell Air Force Base. Liz received numerous decorations during her 24-year career. However, she considers her greatest accomplishment in the Navy to be the trailblazing she did in helping to remove the barriers between men and women. Women no longer have a choice of being at sea—everyone does a tour on a ship. Women are expected to do everything men do. They now have both the right and the responsibility to go to sea and defend their country, fact that eases resentment that was felt by both men and women.

At her retirement ceremony, Liz stated that she had served her country and was now ready to serve her community. She felt she had come full circle, being born in and finally returning to Montgomery.

The semester after retiring from the Navy, Liz completed her student teaching in a second grade classroom and then in a sixth grade classroom where she received high marks. Liz loved teaching children and also found it challenging. She once stated, "I have been on a ship with 600 men, but nothing is more intimidating that walking a group of sixth graders to the bathroom!" She learned that young students are much different than sailors who know how to follow orders. "You have to tell them everything. On a ship, you just tell them and they get in a line and do it. In the school, you have to say, 'no hitting,' 'walk in a straight line,' and keep telling them over and over."

Following her graduation, I caught up with Liz as she was completing a semester-long substitute job in a fourth grade classroom. She was thoroughly enjoying teaching children, and felt she was learning so much. However, she was also discovering things she could not have anticipated. Although she felt academically prepared and confident in her classroom management and teaching skills, things that she credits to her course work and field experiences in her education program, she still worried about whether she was doing things correctly and if she was covering the curriculum satisfactorily. She was teaching in virtual isolation, and the camaraderie she had always enjoyed in the Navy didn't exist in the school. On a ship, crew members are forced to get to know and depend upon each other (really to stay alive), but in the classroom there was little interaction with colleagues and very little time to ask for help or advice when problems arose. Most of the teachers left quickly after school, but Liz was staying until 7:00 p.m. several nights a week trying to keep up. She had moved from a male-dominated field to a female-dominated field and discovered that the rules were quite different in this new setting. She liked being around women for a change, but felt she needed to learn to be less direct and aggressive in dealing with fellow teachers. Although these skills were vital in her previous work, she worried that they were not appreciated in a school environment.

She did break through some of these barriers and felt as if the teachers with whom she worked with



liked and respected her. They were amazed to learn out about her background and told her that her life was very inspiring to them. She knew she was an oddity in the teaching community but also knew she had a lot to offer because of her past experiences. Her firsthand knowledge was especially useful in dealing with the many students in the school who came from military families because she could really understand what they went through.

Throughout her semester in the fourth grade classroom, Liz worked hard to continue to become a better teacher. She stated,

I do want to do a good job. I make a lot of mistakes in there, but I learn from them. There are so many times when I realize that I am reflecting back on the day and what has happened. I realize I shouldn't have done that, I should have done this...or I am thinking about what can I do to motivate this student or reflecting on a conversation I had with a child that day. I put a lot into my teaching and sometimes I obsess over it. I worry about burning out if I don't control that aspect of my personality.

Liz excitedly applied for teaching jobs for the following fall, including the position in which she was substituting. She thought that she had a good shot at the job. The principal was very positive, and she felt she got along well with her colleagues. But, amazingly, not only was she not offered the fourth grade position; she also did not get a job in any of the systems in which she applied. For Liz, the most disheartening news was that the fourth grade position she had hoped to get was filled by a man who was completing a bachelor's degree. In fact, that year, most of the positions in the upper grades of the school were filled by men. Ironically, after 24 years of endeavoring to get positions normally filled by men, she lost a position, normally filled by a woman, to a man.

When Liz emailed me to let me know she did not get a job, it was obvious that she was devastated by the turn of events. She had returned to her old job at Maxwell Air Force Base (now as a civilian) where

she was making more money than she would have made in the public schools. She wrote,

To lose a job to a man is just about more than I can take at this time in my life. I struggled with a male-dominated career field for 24 years only to have it thrown in my face as I venture out on my chosen second career. As a single mother and provider, I picked myself up and sought employment elsewhere. I am very qualified for the position I am working in and like my job very much, but I must admit that my heart is broken because I so wanted to teach [children]. I am not closing the door entirely; I will keep up my certification, and maybe one day in the future I will look for another [public school] teaching job. If it is meant for me to be a teacher, I am sure doors will open for me, but for now I will sit in my corner, lick my wounds, and heal from this tragic disappointment of my dreams to mold young minds. I truly feel the public school system has lost a valuable asset in me. I do not mean to sound full of myself, but I have the confidence in myself to know this to be true.

In March of 2009, I wrote to Liz to see if she would pursue a public school job for the fall. She wrote,

To answer your question: No, I am not going to seek out a teaching job. I am not sure I will ever pursue a teaching job. I really like my current job and I have decided to stay with it as long as I can. My contract is good until September, 2011, and hopefully the overall contract will be renewed at that time. With that said, it has all worked out well for me. I would [most likely] be without a job at the end of the school year if I would have been teaching [due to the economic problems in the state at the present time]. It is not a good time for teachers right now. I am still in education, just military and adult education. I am teaching a seminar now, and it has been good. I have no background knowledge for this course, so it is challenging. I am doing pretty well so far though.

I am disheartened to realize that Liz may not use her elementary teaching degree and that perhaps childhood education has lost another great teacher. If I were a principal, I would grab her up in a heartbeat because she is exactly the type of teacher I would want on my faculty. But my perspective is that of a teacher educator. Liz is strong academically and has so much life experience to bring into the classroom. She is a life-long learner, and she continually strives to improve herself. She works hard and knows her strengths and weaknesses. Liz is also independent, confident, and straight forward. I see all of these characteristics as the epitome of what a teacher should possess. However, I wonder if those particular qualities might be intimidating for principals, especially male principals, who may feel more comfortable hiring young, inexperienced teachers straight from an undergraduate program who would be less likely to question or assert themselves. I also wonder whether Liz lost out on her fourth grade position because the principal felt it more important to hire a man than to choose someone who could bring a wealth of knowledge and experience to the position. I don't know the reason Liz was not chosen for that particular position. Maybe the young man hired had incredible life experiences, amazing teaching skills, and an uncanny ability to relate to fourth graders. I will never know, of course. But what I do know is that they missed out on a great female teacher.

Postscript: In May, another note came from Liz. She was applying to the Department of Defense Dependents Schools (DoDDS) for the 2010-2011 school year and needed a reference letter. It seems that Liz just couldn't suppress the urge to teach children after all! After sending her a draft of this article, I received another note from her. She said, "As I read this article, I became inspired to seek employment again in the public school system. Although it may be too late to pursue employment for this school year, I am going to keep my online application updated and keep an eye out for teaching opportunities."

When I met with Liz recently she continued, "Although I have a really great job that pays extremely well, and I am very happy doing it, I know that something deep inside me wants to make a contribution by teaching children. What I said at my retirement is true, I want to serve my community and my present job does not allow me to do that. I need to be teaching children."

Liz plans to finish up her commitment to Maxwell Air Force Base this next school year and then reapply for public school jobs in her community for the following year. I will keep my fingers crossed that a principal recognizes her potential. Someone great is waiting to come aboard. I surely hope that permission will be granted.

# Taking the Road Less Traveled: A Professor's Path to Becoming Educated

*Jan Hogan*

To learn or not to learn: that is the question. And it is not an uncommon question for women who find themselves in the position of choosing between life responsibilities and pursuing an education. What makes some women choose to continue their education beyond high school, while others follow another road? There are likely as many reasons as there are women. Some choose marriage. Some choose work. Some choose vocational school. Some can't afford tuition. Some are single parents and the sole support for their children. And still others lack the self-confidence regarding their ability to learn . . . which is exactly where I found myself some twenty-five years ago. This is the story of my journey . . . my road to becoming educated.

Eight years after graduating from high school, I managed to summon the courage to attempt college. I still had no idea what I wanted to be when I grew up, although most would agree that at twenty-six, I already was grown up! With a failed marriage behind me and a four year-old son to support, I decided to consider the option of returning to school. When I looked at the college catalog with the vaguely familiar new book smell, I saw many things I'd like to become, but they all required me to take real courses. Unable to make a decision about a major, I decided to take a career development test. The results were shocking: Educator.

Knowing that there must be some mistake, I took the test again. I answered the questions differently this time and anxiously awaited the results from the test. What was I going to be? A noble social worker? A nurse? I must admit, the thought of comforting the uncomfortable patient or putting a smile on the face

of a sick child made me feel warm inside. I had always been interested in a medical career, and the more I thought about my future as a nurse, the more excited I was about what was quickly becoming my career choice.

Then the results from my second career development test arrived. I anxiously opened the envelope, certain that the results would confirm what I had already decided would be my future career. Educator . . . What?

Familiar with the saying "the third time's the charm," I was certain that this time the assessment would reveal what I knew was the truth... that I should indeed become a nurse. After all, in the words of Julia Roberts in *My Best Friend's Wedding*, "Jell-o can never be crème brûlée," and in my mind, if I followed the advice of the first two career tests and majored in education, I would be settling for Jell-O! Besides, I had heard about how little pay and respect teachers received; now that I had decided to get a degree, I felt that I was entitled to my fair share of earnings and respect. I did consider the positive points, however, and realized that an educator's work schedule from 8:00 to 3:00 daily and with seemingly endless summer vacations could be good for a single parent.

The results of the last assessment arrived. With outcomes of all three tests pointing to the field of education in hand, I adjusted my taste buds to Jell-O and registered to begin working on an elementary education degree.

As I looked over the required courses, I found one that absolutely terrified me. It was a speech course . . . the course that would most likely be a stumbling block for a person who lacked confidence as a learner

and suffered from painful shyness when it came to speaking in public. Because I couldn't bear the thought of taking this course, I decided I had better develop a strategy . . . possibly the first in my life. In an effort to waste as little money as possible, I would take all of the potential stumbling blocks first. If truly wasn't cut out for college, it would be better to know as early as possible. Developing a strategy proved to be one of the smartest decisions I've ever made, for it was through this strategy that I would soon learn something important about myself: I was teachable!

On the first night of class, the syllabus was passed out. As I read it, I was hit with a wave of nausea and sweating palms. I began to wonder if I would ever have an opportunity to taste the Jell-O, as there were several seemingly impossible assignments and course requirements on the syllabus, not the least of which was a ten-minute speech on the last night of class. Now, ten minutes sounded like an eternity to me and all the other students, but, as the oldest in the class, I decided to press forward and volunteer to go first. I was operating under the belief that because of my bravery I quite possibly wouldn't be graded as stringently as the others. As I began to get into the material, prepare, and deliver the dreaded speeches, I discovered something that would serve me throughout my education: I was not supposed to know how to speak in public at the beginning of the semester. None of us were. The question, rather, was, "Would I be an able speaker by the end of the semester?"

Suddenly I had an insatiable appetite for Jell-O as I had stumbled upon a revelation . . . a revelation that would bring down the many walls that I had built around my life in an effort to not get an education. I suddenly understood that there wasn't a professor on campus who would have a job if students came to class already having mastered the course material. I approached each semester's registration silently repeating this new-found philosophy to myself. "You don't know this material now, but you will in sixteen weeks."

When I finally came to the conclusion that I was capable of learning and must become a teacher, I was

a twenty-six-year-old single parent with a four-year-old son. I had resigned myself to the fact that I would likely be a single parent forever. I had no idea that, while I had been busy doing a terrible job as a paralegal, I had already met my husband.

It was a day much like any other. I wandered into the copy room of the law firm and there he stood, stuck to the floor in front of a copy machine that was the size of a minivan, wondering how in the world to make copies on this machine. Just borrowing the conference room for some out-of-town business, he looked a little lost. I offered to make the copies for him, and that was the end of the exchange . . . almost. He held out his hand, introduced himself, and waited to receive my name. "Jan" was my only response. I had no intention of giving him my last name. Many months later, I learned that, after I left, he had taken an office telephone directory from the copy room with the intention of asking me out. And after eight months, he did just that just in the nick of time because it was the last day of my employment with that firm.

As we dated, my motivation for completing a degree increased exponentially since my future husband had a computer science degree and a master's in business administration. I didn't see myself as an intellectual match for the man I decided to marry on our third date. He waited patiently and supportively as I took classes. After more than three years of a long-distance courtship, we married. My son Matthew, then seven years old, and I relocated to a town that was almost one hundred miles from my college, and I had one year of school left.

Actually, I didn't think this plan was so bad. I could commute for two semesters. It would be easy. I would simply schedule my remaining classes on Tuesday and Thursday between ten and three. That would give me time to fly down the interstate and pick up Matthew before the afterschool program ended. It was a perfect plan . . . except for one thing. There were no classes for me to take on Tuesday and Thursday. And so, my Tuesday and Thursday classes from ten until three turned into my Monday through Friday classes at 8:00 a.m. This meant leaving home by 6:00 a.m., with my new husband, previously

childless, responsible for getting our son up, fed, dressed, and dropped off at school.

Like most things, if you take them prayerfully and one day at a time, they pass . . . and often with a happy ending. On May 22 of 1993, I graduated. It was a glorious day. I walked. And through this whole experience, in addition to learning that I was teachable, I learned something else that was very important: The hardest part of school had been making the decision to go! And with this lesson fresh in my mind, I simply made the decision not to stop. On June 6, just a little over two weeks after graduation with the ink hardly dry on my diploma, I began working on my first graduate degree and secured my first job as a fourth grade teacher.

I loved everything about my life that year with my new family, my coursework, and my job. As far as I could tell, the career assessment had been exactly right. My fourth grade class seemed a perfect fit. I fell in love with those children, often at the expense of my own child. I attended their Christmas party but not his. I hosted their Valentine's Day celebration but not his. And I attended their field day but not his. A few days later, I received a pink slip and began the long summer of waiting to find out if I would be called back for the coming school year. I was thankful when I received the call.

A couple of weeks later, I received another call, this one from my doctor. I was going to have a baby in April. In spite of my school situation, I was excited beyond belief as was the rest of my family. How could I not be delighted? I knew this baby. I had been planning on her for years. I had chosen her name right after I began doodling "Mrs. Hogan" on the cover of my college binder, which had actually been a full two years before my husband proposed!

But how was I to break this glorious news to the principal I had begged to bring me back? This dilemma worked itself out, however. She let me keep the job and said that I could have a four-week maternity leave but only if I maintained perfect health for the entire school year and visited the doctor in his last appointment slot of the day. I wasn't the least bit worried about the house of cards I was building. I had my job back, a baby on the way, and I

would be finished with my master's degree at the end of the spring semester. What planning! What timing! A Broadway choreographer couldn't have pulled this off any better.

As the end of the school year approached, so did my due date and my master's comprehensive exam. I will never forget that exam. I had been so nervous studying and preparing. I had barely noticed how many little league games I had missed for my son, who remained a good sport as long as his dad was there. I arrived for my exam a few minutes early to gather my thoughts. During this period of gathering, I noticed a twinge of pain, but it soon subsided. It was somewhere between questions two and three that I realized the recurring pains might be labor, and between questions three and four that my timing of the pains indicated that I should get to the hospital . . . as soon as I finished the exam! I had already had a talk with my daughter about the proper way for a southern lady to enter the room or, in this case, the world. As I gathered my belongings, anxious to make arrangements for my husband to meet me at the hospital, my phone rang. He was already at the hospital, albeit the wrong hospital, with his father, newly minted stroke victim.

Within four weeks time, the following events occurred: My father-in-law's stroke was pronounced minor; I brought a beautiful baby girl home from the hospital; and I had taken and passed my comps, was preparing to graduate, and was finishing the year with my fourth grade class . . . all in a state of sleep deprivation and post-partum depression. My husband took his vacation to care for the baby while I returned to work. I received quite the welcome from my students. (The last conversation I'd had with them had been over the classroom intercom from the delivery room. SAT testing began the day Francie was born, and I felt they needed last-minute reminders.) With one week of school remaining, I was called to the office and given an envelope. Another gift certificate, perhaps? Nope. Just a pink slip. And this time, I would not be invited back.

Although I adored being at home with my new daughter, I couldn't shake the pain of losing my teaching position. I pined over my lost job and the

students I might never see again. This went on for months. The holidays came and went, and I decided it was time to resume my role as student, this time in a doctoral program. I knew this wouldn't be easy with a husband and two children, but it had always been my plan, or at least, it had become my plan once I had come to the conclusion that not stopping was easier than starting.

Paperwork in order and grandmothers on call as sitters, I once again returned to school. This felt like home, and somewhere around my third quarter, I was asked to teach an undergraduate course. With more excitement than I had ever felt over a job, I accepted. My part-time workdays were busy but delightful, and my nights were filled with learning of my own. The rest of the time was reserved for my family . . . which actually felt like the majority of time.

Life was flying by. With already three academic quarters of teaching under my belt, I was prepared to enjoy the holidays with a twenty-month-old and a son who was all too happy for Santa's sleigh to make stops at our house once again. He was playing the role of big brother and enjoying the land of make believe, if only for the benefit of his sister. But I knew he was growing up. He was in sixth grade now, and even though he could still play make believe at home, in his other world he had become too big to need me to accompany him on a field trip, bake cookies for a school party, or even attend field day, which he declared was "no big deal." The opportunity to be his mommy had ended, and somewhere along the way, I had become his mother. The holidays had come and gone, but on January 5, 1997, I discovered that I was going to have another baby. And a little simple math revealed that the very month she would leave me for kindergarten, her big brother would leave me for college. I came to an immediate conclusion that day . . . I would not miss another field day as long as I lived.

My "second-chance-to-do-everything right" baby was due on the 18th of September, and she served as a reminder that it wasn't too late to do everything right with her big sister as well. I had yet to miss a field day since there hadn't been one so, currently, I was holding at 100%! It was this rating that led me to

develop a smell test, so to speak. When faced with the choice between school and my family, I would close my eyes and envision my husband walking one of my daughters down the aisle. Then I would ask myself, "How much would you be willing to pay to watch that dance recital you missed?" Realizing that I would never have enough money, even if it was possible, to buy back events that had been important to my children, I knew I had to find a way to finish my degree without paying for it with my children's precious moments. From that day forward, all assignments and all studying took place between the hours of 4:00 and 7:00 a.m. By the time I woke them up for school, I had put my books away.

Smell test in place, I registered for classes that would take me away from my family and home on two nights a week for the spring semester. It was the second-to-last semester in my doctoral coursework. As a grown woman, I felt that I had a good grasp on the importance of attending the classes that I was paying to attend. However, my children were getting older, and although I didn't realize it at the time, there was bound to be an occasional conflict with our schedules. One such conflict occurred during the spring of my last year of my program. Earlier in the semester, my youngest had caught the highly contagious rotavirus. She was only six months old and had to be hospitalized. Of course I stayed with her, which caused me to miss class. Show me a professor who wouldn't understand these circumstances! However, later in the semester, another issue arose. This time, it was with Francie. Her three year-old pre-school was going to sing at a kindergarten graduation. I knew that I already had one absence, but decided to run the dilemma through my smell test. I came to the conclusion that missing my daughter's performance was the thing I would regret when her father was walking her down the aisle. Before I left campus for the day, I called my professor and left her a message so she would know why I wasn't in class. By the time I got home, there was a scathing message on my answering machine, declaring that I was not doctoral material and should rethink my decision. Rethink my decision? Not on

your life. My grade, my decision . . . although I knew I was in for a sleepless night.

The next morning, filled with dread and unsure of what to expect, I returned her call. After ten minutes of very angry ranting about my lack of professionalism and my lack of qualifications as a doctoral candidate, she fell silent. At last it was my turn. I could beg for forgiveness for my lapse in judgment. "I'm so sorry you feel that way, Dr. Doe. But I must be honest with you about this situation. If I had the opportunity to undo yesterday, if I could rethink my decision, I would make exactly the same decision. So with regard to me, do whatever you have to do." Click. I decided at that very moment, that I would never make a student feel as if she had to be inadequate in one area of her life in order to be successful in another.

Finishing up my course work during the summer term, I began the search for my second position as an elementary school teacher. It was my desire to secure a position in an inner city school in order to gather data for my dissertation. The search was easy. I was hired by the first principal to interview me and began working at a school where I was a terrible fit. I was not prepared for the violence that would surround me that year, and everything I had learned in my doctoral coursework seemed to be slipping away. For the first time in six years, I felt as if I was incapable of teaching a single soul. Although I was able to regain my footing after a couple of months, I knew that it wouldn't be possible for this to be a permanent position for me, and I wondered if it was going to be possible for me to squeeze a dissertation from thirty-six weeks that could truly be classified as lemons.

The next three years were spent writing, and the 4:00 a.m. mornings began earlier and earlier, finally landing on 3:30 a.m. My children didn't realize what was taking place in my life, or that I was still working on a degree, although occasionally Christina, now four years old, would ask, "Did you finish your paper, Mommy?" I would answer, "I'm still working on it." She never asked when I was working on it. Although the hours were absolutely crazy, I hadn't missed a single school party, field trip, or field day. My little paper was coming along nicely

. . . at least the latest of my forty or fifty drafts appeared to be coming along nicely.

Life was flying by at the speed of sound, and I often felt as if my worlds were colliding. The worst of the collisions occurred toward the end of my program. Another school year had raced by, and when Francie's second field day arrived, so did Matthew's high school graduation. In addition, the first complete draft of my dissertation was due. I had missed a lot with Matthew. There were many empty places in my mind where memories should have been stored . . . and many empty photo frames. I had done much better with my girls, but that didn't stop the pang of guilt that came from knowing that after thirteen years in this school, thirteen years I thought would last forever, I still didn't have a field day picture of Matthew.

Those were the thoughts that rolled through my head as I trailed Francie from relay to relay. It was an unseasonably cold, dreary May morning, and a heavy coat was necessary. It seemed a perfect fit for my mood. Camera in hand, I patiently followed her, snapping as many pictures as possible, choking on the regret from opportunities lost with Matthew. With the last relay run, Francie crossed the football field to retrieve the long awaited traditional field day Popsicle. She looked so small from where I stood as she sat down on the field and leaned against the fence, another photo opportunity. I raised the camera and located a blurry Francie through the viewfinder, manually adjusting the camera to bring her into focus. One more tiny twist of the lens revealed a cherry-red mouth and blonde ponytail bouncing in the wind. Standing above her, Matthew had arrived to witness one final field day. I pressed the button. An almost silent click captured my prize, a solitary picture of Matthew on field day.

These are just a few of the stories I've collected on my journey. There are many more that I could tell and even more that I've forgotten. It is my hope that what I've lived and learned along my road to becoming educated will serve to encourage every wife, mother, single parent, widow, or empty-nester who ever thought that earning a college degree would be impossible . . . perhaps even wringing her hands

over whether or not she would even be capable of learning, while balancing the responsibilities that life eventually brings to each of us.

When my journey began, I had no idea that I would be a student for the next fourteen years, taking only two semesters off during that time. I had no idea that I would marry a wonderful man, give birth to two more children, attend countless field trips and school parties, teach fourth grade in multiple schools, earn a master's degree, teach on multiple college campuses, and earn a doctorate (graduating the same year my firstborn finished high school).

But all of these things did happen, and they happened while I was becoming educated. The life that occurred during my learning actually made me a better student, deepening my understanding of just about everything, and making me proud to call myself an educator. I wouldn't choose any other road, because no other road could have led me to the realization that sometimes the Jell-O actually *IS* crème brûlée.



# Girls and Women

*Patricia P. Kelly, Retired Representative*

One of the advantages of having emeritus rank is the privilege of continuing to serve on doctoral committees. Recently at Virginia Tech one of my doctoral students, Heather Switzer, defended her dissertation, “Making the Maasai Schoolgirl: Developing Modernities on the Margins.” She had spent eight months in Kenya collecting data, and during that time I visited her just prior to the turmoil and bloodshed caused by the disputed presidential election in December 2007. Her base of operation was her tin hut and a small vegetable garden near Kajiado in the Rift Valley, home of the Maasai. From there, she and her research assistant, who also acted as a translator, visited primary schools and did more than a hundred interviews with girls ages 12 – 17, focusing on two questions, among others: When does a female become a woman? Are you a woman?

And so it was that in early October 2007 I sat with Heather in Nairobi because my project work had kept me in the city and I was soon slated to leave. She had boarded what she laughingly referred to as a “goat truck” in the early dawn the day before. The goat truck is a pickup that went each morning to the nearest town center, picking up people, animals, and merchandise on the way, and returning in the darkening evening with perhaps the same people but different animals and merchandise. In Africa, a pickup truck can never be too full. From the nearest town center, she would take two or more mini-bus rides into Nairobi, depending on the many vagaries of the buses and drivers.

And so we sat in Nairobi in a setting only a day away in distance but years away in culture. Heather is a courageous woman, a dedicated scholar, and a vivid storyteller. Although she spun out stories of her arduous daily routines with humor and pathos, there

had to be much loneliness and even fear that she dealt with every day. On the other hand, Heather was no stranger to Kenya or to Africa, having been a Peace Corps teacher in Ethiopia, who was evacuated during a dangerous conflict there.

Having financed her year in Kenya on her own, Heather received an AAU American Dissertation Fellowship to help support her year of data analysis and writing upon her return to the United States. During her dissertation defense she talked about these Maasai primary school girls’ conception of themselves as “schoolgirls,” even those who had been circumcised, which automatically made them women under local social norms, or those with a child at home. They were not women; they were schoolgirls, they said.

When I think of these schoolgirls, clinging to girlhood, I see them in stark contrast to a meeting of middle school girls in our university town, who were discussing sexuality, sexual harassment, and empowerment with a group of university faculty women that had worked with them during the year. The university female faculty studiously referred to these 6th, 7th, and 8th grade girls as “women.” Young women perhaps, but using the term women did not ring true for me. It sounded awkward and somehow inappropriate.

But what made these middle school girls want to embrace being called women with all the inherent implications and responsibilities? Is it that they knew they could usurp the term without having to accept being a woman? They could remain girls, protected by societal norms, while playing with the idea of being women. The Maasai schoolgirls know all too well what awaits their acceptance of being called women. Their mothers, sisters, and friends are living

examples of the effects of poverty, early marriage, and multiple children. A two-minute video at

<http://www.girleffect.org/#/video/>

called “The Girl Effect” powerfully demonstrates the plight of the girl child in developing countries and the potential positive outcomes of assisting this half of the world’s population. It’s mostly in black and white with written words only, but the dramatic effect is stunningly memorable. One scene shows the GIRL overcome by flies, husband, babies, hunger, and HIV, then stripped of all those to stand alone ready to make her way toward changing the world.

The schoolgirls in Heather’s study wanted to postpone marriage and children; they wanted an education, good jobs to help their families, and independence to make decisions about their lives. Though the images they might evoke for these dreams would differ from the university town middle school girls’ dreams of their futures, they are no doubt basically grounded in the same goals.

Worlds apart. Girls. Women. Different realities of girlhood and womanhood. Trapped by gender. Defined by gender

# 2007 Inglis Award Presentation: Lynne Alvine

*Judith Hayne and Lynne Alvine*

## **Judith Hayn:**

Each year the National Council of Teachers of English gives the Rewey Belle Inglis Award to someone who is an Outstanding Woman in English Education. The recipient is selected by a committee of members of WILLA, the Women in Literacy and Life Assembly of NCTE, in response to a national call for nominations. This year's recipient is worthy of the honor for her many accomplishments, but it is a special privilege for me, as Chair of WILLA, to present the Inglis this year because the winner is also my friend, Lynne B. Alvine.

Lynne Alvine's dedication to English education is monumental; this is her 21st consecutive NCTE Annual Fall Convention. She has served as secretary of the Executive Committee of the Conference on English Education (CEE), has edited the "Conversations from the Commissions" Column in English Education, has served as chair of WILLA and of the Doctoral Student Assembly. Lynne initiated and was the first chair of what is now the Commission on Gender, Race and Class in Teacher Education Programs; she was a founder and charter member of WILLA and is still an active, productive member of that NCTE assembly. She co-edited the text *Breaking the Cycle: Gender, Literacy and Learning*.

She has been an English teacher educator since 1986, mentoring countless women into the profession at Virginia Tech, Hollins College, and presently at Indiana University Pennsylvania where she teaches undergraduate and graduate classes in English Education and serves as Coordinator of the Master of Arts in Teaching English program, advising both prospective and in-service secondary English teachers. Having served for 14 years as Director of the Southcentral Pennsylvania Writing Project, a site

of the National Writing Project, Lynne has worked closely with public and private school teachers for many years and she continues to be active in the NWP site at IUP. Since 2003, she has served as the Director of the IUP Oxford Summer Study Program; she has conducted workshops for teachers and worked in schools in Durban, South Africa. Finally, Lynne helped initiate the IUP Safe Zone Program for LGBT students and employees at IUP eight years ago and continues to be a sustaining member of the Safe Zone Program committee.

Lynne's contribution to my life reminds me of what Alice Walker's wrote about friendship: "No person is your friend who demands your silence, or denies your right to grow." Because she listens to me and other women she has mentored and because she has helped all of us grow, the Rewey Belle Inglis Award recipient for 2007 is rightfully, Lynne Alvine.

## **Lynne Alvine:**

This is my 21st consecutive NCTE fall convention. I think my first CEE luncheon cost about \$10. We have come a long way!

I am honored to accept the 2007 Rewey Belle Inglis Award. When I think of those who have received this award in the past, I am, indeed, deeply honored and more than a little humbled.

Since this award was first given in 1989, I have known most of the recipients, and I believe I have seen all of the past Inglis Awards presented! Many of the recipients have been important to my work in the Council and in the profession: Jeanne Gerlach, Janet Emig, Nancy Martin, Leila Christenbury, Jo Gillikin, Patricia Kelly, and Nancy McCracken have all mentored me along the way.

Just yesterday Nancy McCracken led a dynamic NWP session titled "21st Century Girls in the Mix"

focused on the challenges that girls and young women continue to meet in school. Indeed, we may need to focus on the education of girls, now, more than ever.

Current world conditions suggest a global war on women and girls, and a need for strong leaders who are fully educated, especially a need for women with strong voices who will speak out against the brutal living conditions of others around the world.

Despite progress that has been made in this area, the cultural practice of female genital mutilation continues in developing nations and in the US.

The raping of Muslim women and girls as a weapon of war and as a strategy for ethnic cleansing continues.

A disproportional percentage of the victims of AIDS in African countries and in other developing nations are female. Contributing to the surge of the disease are poverty, the lack of education and other resources – and the denial of condom distribution, based on religious ideology and political expedience.

And, here in the US, we need to support women in the profession now, more than ever.

Federal “No Child Left Behind” legislation continues to bully the predominately female K-12 teaching force. Whether they have been overtly disingenuous or simply misled, politicians of both major parties have joined the cry for “tougher and tougher standards” and, in the process, have engulfed the public schools in a struggle that may best be understood with both a feminist and a Marxist lens.

Teaching to the test, deprives students of the engaged, more holistic learning that could empower them to be critical thinkers and informed citizens. Though the pressures of NCLB threaten to disempower and deskill all teachers, the demands have been especially demoralizing to veteran teachers who know so much more about real learning than they are being encouraged—or even allowed—to demonstrate in their teaching.

Finally, NCLB is taking its toll on English teacher educators, on you and on me. We are being disempowered, deskilled, and demoralized as well. We introduce holistic, integrative strategies for

literacy learning and our beginners are met with “teach to the test” mandates in the schools.

They look to us for guidance in how to survive, and we are busy trying to figure out how WE will survive the ratcheting up of expectations for our teacher education programs—designed by state legislatures and/or departments of education that are clueless as to how beginners best learn the art and craft of teaching English.

These are not easy times in which to be an English teacher educator. Thankfully we all have each other.

Peter Medway tells the story of a time when he thanked Jimmy Britton for all Jimmy had done to mentor him in his professional work. Jimmy jingled the change in his pocket and said, “Well, you’ll hitchhike along with me for a while and later you will give a ride to someone else.”

So, if I have been able occasionally to offer someone a ride, it was because so many others have cheerfully carried me.

Thank you.



*The Women in Literacy and Life Assembly of  
The National Council of Teachers of English*

## Call for Manuscripts

We invite contributions to the journal that represent perspectives, formats, and voices focusing on the status and images of women. *WILLA* publishes critical essays, teaching strategies for all levels, bibliographies, interviews, personal essays, short stories, poetry, and other creative works. Each manuscript should be no more than 12 double spaced pages in current APA style. *WILLA* is a blind peer reviewed online journal. Place the author's personal and institutional identification including an e-mail address on the cover page only. Deadline for submission for the 2010 issue of *WILLA* is June Friday, 18, 2010. All submissions by this date will be considered. Send manuscripts as Word documents by email to: hannahf@umflint.edu.

Go to the *WILLA* Journal online at

**<http://www.willa.us/index.html>**

and click on "Publications" to see archived issues.

# WILLA Membership Form

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WILLA Members are needed to help with working groups a projects. Please indicate an area of interest.

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## Membership Rates

Regular 1-year Membership: \$15.00 • 2-year: \$30.00 • 5-year: \$70.00 • Student: \$7.00

Please send this form and the membership fee (make checks payable to WILLA) to:

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