Recently, I have reflected on the ideas around the study of Genre. In light of the plethora of information swirling around college and career readiness, 21st century skills, and the Common Core State Standards, literacy instruction seems to be at the forefront of the minds of many.

It is apparent that as teachers of literacy we enjoy books. Books help us to relax, escape, and learn about new ideas, people, places and cultures. Today, we can read books in a variety of forms—audio, digital, and print. Therefore, it makes sense to us to use books, in authentic ways, to help our students think more deeply about reading and writing.

When I think about helping students to be better readers and writers, I take pause as I reflect upon the work of Peter Johnston. In Choice Words, Johnston writes about how our language and our actions impact the development of a sense of agency in our students. If we want our students to be readers, we must treat them like
readers; if we want our students to be writers, we must treat them like writers, through our use of authentic instructional techniques that engage them in the same thinking that proficient readers and writers engage.

Leaders in the field of Literacy have written a great deal about the study of genre as a means of teaching reading and writing: Carl Anderson, Lucy Caulkins, Heather Lattimer, Ralph Fletcher, Katie Wood-Ray, Randy Bomer, and many others have helped us to guide students to look more closely at text and to teach students how to apply such close study to their own writing.

What is Genre?

According to Dictionary.com, genre can be defined in the following ways:

1. a class or category of artistic endeavor having a particular form, content, technique, or the like: the genre of epic poetry; the genre of symphonic music.
2. Fine Arts.
   a. paintings in which scenes of everyday life form the subject matter.
   b. a realistic style of painting using such subject matter.
3. genus; kind; sort; style.

 adjective
4. Fine Arts. of or pertaining to genre.
5. of or pertaining to a distinctive literary type.

For the purposes of this piece, we will use the term genre to pertain to a distinctive literary type. Written genres can include, but are not limited to, fantasy, biography, memoir, realistic fiction, poetry, song lyrics, forms, bills, brochures, maps, ads, magazine articles, and hundreds of other kinds of texts.

What is the role of genre in reading and writing?

As proficient readers, we realize how to adjust and monitor how we read specific types of genres. For example, we may read a list of top 10 songs differently than the way we read a new recipe that we intend to prepare. We may approach an informational text on an unfamiliar topic in a different way than we would approach the latest novel written by a favorite author. We go into text with an expectation. We understand the need to adjust our reading according to the way the text is worded or structured. When we scan a credit card statement we look for recent charges. When we read a recipe, we look for a list of ingredients. When we read an ad we look for cost or description. We have built a body of knowledge and use it to effectively navigate through a text, often times unconsciously.

As we begin to consciously understand the aspects of genre, we are able to understand the writer’s craft and the process authors may go through to present their
ideas. Authors make decisions about language, word choice, dialogue, structure, organization, and much more.

In the Fountas and Pinnell book, Genre Study: Teaching with Fiction and Non-fiction Books, the authors begin to explore characteristics of Literary Genre, including realistic fiction, historical fiction, fantasy, narrative nonfiction, expository nonfiction, and biography.

When we write in a particular genre we think about what we have read and how it is like what we want to write. When we want to write a biography, for example, we want to research a particular person and uncover information about his or her life. We would want to convey it in an interesting, perhaps passionate way, highlighting particular experiences or achievements. If we want to write a fantasy, it may be important to visualize a setting in an imaginary sense. If we were writing informational text, we may think about ways to present the information to readers so they can make sense out of it. We may want to use organizational structures to present the information in a logical way for the reader.

What are the instructional implications for this kind of thinking?

We can present this in three instructional contexts: Reading Workshop, Writing Workshop, and Interactive Read Aloud. In a Reading Workshop this can be accomplished through the use of mini-lessons, book talks, conferences, independent reading book clubs, and writing about reading; through Writing Workshop via writers' talks, mini-lessons, conferences, independent writing, guided writing, and group share; and through the use of Interactive Read Aloud with the use of questioning techniques that focus within, beyond and about the text. These contexts will allow you to go deeper into conversation about genre and implications for future reading and writing activities.

Fountas and Pinnell outline 6 major steps in Genre Study:

- **Collect** a set of high-quality texts that are clear examples of the genre you are preparing to study.
- **Immerse** the students in the genre by reading to them, allowing them to look through text, all while discussing what they encounter.
- **Study** closely the common characteristics evidenced. They begin to witness the commonalities of a particular genre and understand how the authors present such characteristics. Create a list of what you and the students are noticing.
- **Define** the genre by utilizing the list you’ve created to write a working definition. This working definition is a work in progress that might be revised as you learn more about the genre.
- **Teach** through the list of what you’ve noticed and the working definition using intentional language in a series of mini-lessons, specifically designed around the particular genre.
- **Read** a lot of the genre you’re studying by facilitating an environment conducive to the study. Provide labeled baskets filled with texts, read aloud high-quality examples, engage students in short, oral reviews, create a list of texts you’ve shared and what you’ve noticed.
- **Revise** your working definition and add to your list of characteristics.
To read more about this approach to instruction, *Genre Study: Teaching with Fiction and Nonfiction Books* is available for purchase through Heinemann Publishing. Fountas and Pinnell (2012, 8) explain, “Our primary interest in this book is to build your knowledge of genre and to help you apply genre knowledge to the effective teaching of reading comprehension, though we also make a link to writing.”

As actors who improve their craft by selecting mentor actors to study, readers and writers must too, improve their craft and deepen their understandings, by selecting mentor texts. As Pam Allyn writes, “Genres are containers of thinking. They help us to orient ourselves to the kind of story we are hearing and its purpose” (2012, 16).

Citations


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**H-APP-Y Learners**

On Thursday, March 20th, Juli Quinn and Kristin Jamieson, Randall Elementary School teachers and adjunct instructors in the Literacy Department, presented a workshop titled, H-APP-Y Learners: Using Kindles and Apps to Promote Literacy at “Celebrating Partnerships” the First Annual PDS Celebration between SUNY Cortland and its professional development partners. Those in attendance found the workshop to be informative and exciting.
Certification Information

Certification in Literacy Education
Test: Literacy CST (065)
Times: Afternoon Only - All Test Dates

Literacy CST will be available on computer only, effective September 2014

Refer to the following important dates regarding current exams. When computer-based testing begins follow these guidelines:

*NYSTCE computer-based testing is available year-round by appointment, Monday through Saturday (excluding some holidays).

*For computer-based testing:
Check seat availability at www.pearsonvue.com/es/sa/.
Locate a test center at www.pearsonvue.com/es/locate/.

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Make sure you apply for your certification through TEACH once you have passed the required certification exam and completed all course work.

Link to the TEACH website:
http://www.highered.nysed.gov/tcert/teach/
Over the past several semesters I have written about newly released or revised texts that you should consider incorporating into your professional library. In this edition of the Book Nook, I want to again share with you some thoughts about texts that you might want to consider perusing. The selection of texts this time is rather eclectic, a mixture of texts for professional growth and reflection, with those texts that are easily accessible and will impact your teaching methodology.

*Closer Readings of the Common Core: Asking Big Questions about the English/Language Arts Standards* edited by Patrick Shannon. (Heinemann, 2013, 978-0325048765)

To begin, as we are all trying to adopt, and/or adapt to the CCSS, I highly suggest all teachers in the field read the new text *Closer Readings of the Common Core: Asking Big Questions about the English/Language Arts Standards* edited by Patrick Shannon.

What is to follow is adapted from my book review that was recently published in the Winter/Spring 2013-2014 edition of *The Reading Professor*, a publication forum for the Professors of Reading Teacher Educators, a special interest group of the International Reading Association.

This text is a must read for understanding how blind implementation of the CCSS can result in negative consequences “...for teachers, the curriculum, and most importantly our learners, if the Common Core State Standards are implemented without forethought as to what and who are privileged in the CCSS framework” (Morse, 2014, 43). In this text, leading researchers in the field speak to the ways in which the CCSS privilege certain types of knowledge, and ways of knowing and learning, and provide data to support their positions and concerns. Do not think that this text is a “Negative Nellie” concerning the CCSS, for it is not. One of the things I liked about this text, is the upfront acknowledgement that there are real benefits
for students in the CCSS and these benefits are clearly delineated. It is, however, also critical in the sense that its purpose is to inform and make the reader aware that he or she can be an active agent of change in the ongoing development and implementation of educational reform.

Two additional recently released books that you may find beneficial include the following:


As we head into full implementation of the CCSS, with its increased focus on reading and writing informational texts, this short and informative new text by Georgia Heard is another must read! This text is an easily accessible read for ideas and mentor texts to teach the seven traits of writing with nonfiction informational mentor, or touchstone, texts. The text begins by explaining why and how mentor texts are important to developing the writing craft components of voice, point of view, text structure, and precise language, to name some of the topics addressed in the text. The chapters are short, however, they are packed full of relevant topical information, including lesson ideas and lists of suggested mentor texts.


This new text, is an excellent companion text to accompany *Finding the Heart of Nonfiction* by Georgia Heard. As the title implies, Buckner focuses on how we as teachers can increase comfort with writing informational texts through the utilization of a writer’s notebook. This text is easily accessible and, like the Heard text, it is packed with information on strategies and activities to engage your students with informational text writing. Buckner also includes original student work samples, so that the reader can see a possible end product from the engagements and ideas provided.
Registration for graduate students will begin on **Monday, March 31st** and end on **Friday, April 18th.**

*After April 18*, summer registration continues through the first day of the session using the alternate registration process. The alternate registration form is available on the Registrar’s site and the Summer Session site.

### Graduate Student Registration

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Time tickets are now available on myRed-Dragon. To find your time ticket log into your myRedDragon account, click on the **student tab**, and find the registrar’s section on the left sidebar. From there you can access your time ticket by clicking **check registration status**.

Graduate students do not need a PIN number, only a time ticket.

[https://www2.cortland.edu/offices/registrars-office/registration/](https://www2.cortland.edu/offices/registrars-office/registration/)
2014 ALA Award-Winning Literature

**John Newbery Medal** (most outstanding contribution to children's literature):
*Flora & Ulysses: The Illuminated Adventures*, written by Kate DiCamillo

**Randolph Caldecott Medal** (most distinguished American picture book for children):
*Locomotive*, illustrated and written by Brian Floca

**Coretta Scott King (Author) Book Award** (recognizing an African American author and illustrator of outstanding books for children and young adults):
*P.S. Be Eleven*, written by Rita Williams-Garcia

**Coretta Scott King (Illustrator) Book Award**: 
*Knock Knock: My Dad's Dream for Me*, illustrated by Bryan Collier and written by Daniel Beaty

**Coretta Scott King/John Steptoe New Talent Award**: 
*When the Beat Was Born: DJ Kool Herc and the Creation of Hip Hop*, illustrated by Theodore Taylor III

**Coretta Scott King – Virginia Hamilton Award for Lifetime Achievement**: 
Authors Patricia and Researcher Fredrick McKissack

**Michael L. Printz Award** (excellence in literature written for young adults):
*Midwinterblood*, written by Marcus Sedgwick

**Mildred L. Batchelder Award** (outstanding children's book translated into English for publication in the United States):
*Mister Orange*, written by Truus Matti and translated by Laura Watkinson

**Schneider Family Book Award** (embody an artistic expression of the disability experience):
*A Splash of Red: The Life and Art of Horace Pippin*, written by Jen Bryant and illustrated by Melissa Sweet (for children ages 0-10)  
*Handbook for Dragon Slayers*, written by Merrie Haskell (for middle-school ages 11-13)  
*Rose under Fire*, written by Elizabeth Wein (for teen ages 13-18)

**Alex Awards** (10 best adult books that appeal to teen audiences):
*Brewster*, written by Mark Slouka  
*The Death of Bees*, written by Lisa O'Donnell  
*Golden Boy: A Novel*, written by Abigail Tarttelin  
*Help for the Haunted*, written by John Searles  
*Lexicon: A Novel*, written by Max Barry  
*Lives of Tao*, written by Wesley Chu  
*Mother, Mother: A Novel*, written by Koren Zailckas  
*Relish*, written by Lucy Knisley  
*The Sea of Tranquility: A Novel*, written by Katja Millay  
*The Universe Versus Alex Woods*, written by Gavin Extence

**Margaret A. Edwards Award** (lifetime achievement in writing for young adults):
*Markus Zusak*

**Theodor Seuss Geisel Award** (most distinguished book for beginning readers):
*The Watermelon Seed*, written and illustrated by Greg Pizzoli

**On January 29, 2014, the American Library Association (ALA) announced the top books for children and young adults.**

**May Hill Arbuthnot Honor Lecture Award** (recognizing an author, critic, librarian, historian or teacher of children's literature, who then presents a lecture at a winning host site):
Brian Selznick will deliver the 2015 lecture.

**Stonewall Book Award - Mike Morgan & Larry Romans Children's & Young Adult Literature Award** (English-language works of exceptional merit for children or teens relating to the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender experience):
*Beautiful Music for Ugly Children*, written by Kirstin Cronn-Mills  
*Fat Angie*, written by E. E. Charlton-Trujillo
Stay Up-to-Date with Paperwork

Filing for Candidacy
This form is to be completed by all students in a literacy master’s program. It can be completed and filed once a student has completed at least 6 credit hours.

Teacher Certification Recommendation Authorization
By completing this form the student allows SUNY Cortland to share his/her personal information with the New York State Education Department to be recommended for teacher certification. In order to receive certification the student must complete and submit this form.

Change of Status
When a student applies for a literacy master’s program, and does not yet have proof of initial certification, a “w” for “wait” is added to his/her program code (LEDW). In order to graduate, the department must remove the “w” (LED) from the program code. The student is responsible for completing and submitting a Change of Status form. Complete this form, provide proof of certification, and turn both into your advisor.

To access these forms visit:
https://www2.cortland.edu/offices/registrars-office/forms.dot
Be sure to order your cap and gown, hood, tassel, and diploma cover.

Follow this link:
http://www2.cortland.edu/events/commencement/graduatecommencement/Students/capgownhoodstassels.dot

Guest tickets are not required for admission into the Graduate Commencement ceremony. You will only need to bring your Student Line-Up Ticket with you. Bring the whole family and celebrate your accomplishments!

Graduate Commencement
Are you ready?

When:
Friday, May 16th at 7 p.m.

Where:
Park Center Alumni Arena

Not sure if you have completed all of the necessary steps to participate in commencement this spring?
Visit the commencement webpage and view this checklist:
http://www2.cortland.edu/events/commencement/graduatecommencement/Students/checklist.dot

In order to participate in commencement you must purchase a diploma cover through our online ticketing process. The diploma cover is linked to your Student Line-Up Ticket (which you must bring with you the day of commencement). The diploma cover will be handed to you as you walk across the stage. Please have a credit card ready. On March 26 at 9 a.m. the link will go live and you will be able to do so. You will only have access to this site if you have applied for graduation.

Visit the commencement webpage for more information:
http://www2.cortland.edu/commencement/
CONTACT US
Literacy Department
Cornish Hall
Room 1303

Phone: 607-753-2705
Fax: 607-758-5006

Find us online!
http://www2.cortland.edu/departments/literacy/

Questions?
Contact someone in the literacy department
Or
Stop by our office

Office Hours
Mon., Wed., Thurs. 7:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.
Tues. 7:30 a.m. - 4 p.m.
*Every Other Fri. 7:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.
*Call Ahead Fridays

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Email: erin.patch@cortland.edu