

2018

The Literary Canon: Virtue, Vice, or Both

William P. Bintz

Kent State University, wpbintz@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/jblri>

 Part of the [Curriculum and Instruction Commons](#), and the [Language and Literacy Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Bintz, William P. (2018) "The Literary Canon: Virtue, Vice, or Both," *The Journal of Balanced Literacy Research and Instruction*: Vol. 4 : Iss. 1 , Article 5.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/jblri/vol4/iss1/5>

The Literary Canon: Virtue, Vice, or Both?

William P. Bintz
Kent State University

Abstract

This article evolved from recent conversations with middle and high school English/Language Arts teachers about the literary canon. The conversations were based on a question posed by one teacher in a professional development workshop: “To teach or not to teach the literary canon? That is my question.” Other teachers quickly stated that they have always struggled with this question and still do today. As a former English/Language Arts teacher, I recognized the importance of this question and afterwards spent time asking myself: Is the literary canon a virtue, vice, or both? This article shares my current best thinking about this question. I begin with background on the conversation and then discuss what teachers did and did not talk about. Next, I share a text set of picture books to help teachers and teacher educators continue talking about the literary canon. I end with final thoughts, one of which is that teacher preferences and pragmatics are important but insufficient when talking about the literary canon. Research on reading and curriculum theory is most important.

Keywords:

Literary canon, picture books, reading, curriculum theory

Real change begins with the simple act of people talking about what they care about.

–Margaret Wheatley, *Turning to One Another*

Margaret Wheatley is a management consultant interested in developing new organizational structures to help people talk and think together. This is a good, but not a new, idea. A long time ago Ludwik Fleck (1935), medical doctor and biologist, asserted that knowledge isn’t individually discovered but socially constructed through thought collectives, “communities of people who learn to think together through mutually exchanging ideas and maintaining intellectual dialogue” (Short & Burke, 1991, p. vii). Talk is important, in business, medicine, law, government, etc. It is especially important in education.

This article is about teacher talk. It evolved from a recent conversation between middle and high school English/Language Arts teachers about the literary canon. The conversation was based on a pressing question posed by one teacher but shared by

all: “To teach or not to teach the literary canon? That is our question.” This question sparked my own thinking about the literacy canon, especially in light of Common Core State Standards that places an emphasis on informational text. I begin with some background on this conversation and then discuss what teachers did and did not talk about. Next, I share a text set of picture books to help teachers and teacher educators continue talking about the literary canon. I end with final thoughts, one of which is that teacher preferences and pragmatics are important but insufficient when talking about the literary canon. Rather, recent advances in reading research and curriculum theory are equally, if not more, important.

Background

Recently, I was invited to attend a short,

departmental meeting with a group of middle and high school English/Language Arts teachers. The purpose of the meeting was for teachers to discuss topics and questions that have a sense of urgency for them. My role was to introduce myself as a literacy educator and listen to the discussion. A variety of topics were shared. One topic was the literary canon. The question was “To teach or not to teach the literary canon? That is our question.” The teachers were clearly divided. Most teachers were staunch advocates and considered the literary canon a virtue. Others were harsh critics and regarded it a vice. Although the meeting was brief, the conversation was genuine and stimulated my own thinking about the literary canon.

The Literary Canon

Disagreement over the literary canon is not new. According to Sunstein (1994), “literature selection and student choice are topics in a long and vigorous conversation for as long as English has been a subject in American schools” (p. 48). Historically, the literary canon has been defined as “a group of literary works remaining essentially unchanged from decade to decade” (Stotsky, 1990, p. 8). This definition is accurate and inaccurate. It is accurate in that the canon does consist of a group of literary works, also referred to as great books and the classics. It is inaccurate in that different works have been included over the decades and continue so today. Among others, the new classics include popular authors such as Maya Angelou, Amy Tan, Chaim Potok and Sandra Cisneros, all of whom are “sharing the bookshelves with F. Scott Fitzgerald, John Steinbeck, William Shakespeare, and J.D. Salinger” (Stotsky, 1990, p. 63; Kelly & Kelly, 1997). Instead of maintaining uniformity and consistency, Green (cited in Charles, 1993) argues that expanding the literary canon has been a good thing because it “grants audibility to voices seldom heard before” (p. 3).

More recently, the International Reading Association (IRA) defines the literary canon as “the body of literary or other artistic works that a given culture defines as important at a given time; that is, works perceived by that culture to express significant

values and to exemplify artistic excellence” (National Council of Teachers of English & IRA, 1996).

What Teachers Talked About

Most of the teachers talked about the literary canon as a virtue. For them, it was a simple matter of personal preferences and school pragmatics. They preferred a literary canon because they believed students should read “the classics.” They identified *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare, *A Tale of Two Cities* by Charles Dickens, *Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain, *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee, *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne as examples of literature all students should be required to read in school. Their rationale was that classics such as these are challenging texts and the best literature for students to understand universal themes and grapple with essential questions. Most importantly, reading a common set of classics helps students develop a common literary heritage. Ultimately, this heritage indicates and defines a “well-educated” person.

In addition to preference, these teachers also viewed the literary canon as pragmatic. One teacher asked, “If not school, then where?” This teacher, and others, believed that middle and high school is the best place, and for many students the only place, to read classical literature. Another teacher added, “If in ninth, not in tenth.” This teacher believed that not only should the classics be read but also different canonical texts need to be grade-specific in order to avoid duplication of readings. The literary canon was pragmatic because these teachers believed that parents, principals, and community members expected them to teach the classics and would “not only question but criticize us if we didn’t.”

Other teachers viewed the literary canon as a vice. While acknowledging that classic texts are challenging, these teachers believed that the canon assumes, even requires, competent readers in the classroom. Many of their students, however, were struggling readers. These teachers also raised the interest factor. Selecting and using canonical texts in the classroom assumes students already have, should have, or will have personal interest in these works. They also raised the question of voice. For them,

when teachers require reading for students, they impose their own voice and preferences on them. These teachers reject the proposition that one size can fit all. They argued that today student populations are increasingly diverse, especially in terms of culture, ethnicity, language, and socio-economic status. Given this diversity, the literary canon limits teacher abilities to teach all students. In addition, they saw little relationship between common core state standards and the literary canon. They noted that common core state standards do not require specific texts to be read in order to meet specific standards. Finally, teachers raised the question of relevancy. They questioned to what extent the literary canon was relevant to and beneficial for most students, unless, for example, they aspired to be an ELA teacher, English professor, or literary expert or critic.

What Teachers Did Not Talk About

After the meeting, I spent time reflecting on what teachers did and did not talk about. Teachers clearly talked about the literary canon in terms of personal preferences and school pragmatics. What I found most interesting, however, was what they did not talk about. Specifically, no talk occurred around the relationship between the literary canon and recent advances in reading research and curriculum theory.

To be fair, the meeting was too brief for teachers to talk about research and theory. Even if there were time, it is not likely that teachers would have spent much time talking about research and theory. Typically, those topics are for discussion in graduate classes at the university, not departmental meetings in schools. Many teachers simply do not value research and some of their reasons are legitimate. For instance, all too often much educational research is virtually unreadable and therefore inaccessible to teachers in large part because it requires specialized knowledge of vocabulary and statistics. Research can also be impractical because it focuses on theory not practice. Even worse, research can be deceptive and regarded as “simply a propaganda tool for those trying to push a particular approach” (Duke & Martin, 2011, p. 9).

That said, I still could not help but notice that talk

about the literary canon did not include any discussion on reading research and curriculum theory. And yet, talking about the literary canon (or any issue related to reading) but not talking about the research on reading and curriculum theory can be problematic. The literary canon is a collection of readings and therefore is curriculum. Specifically, it is one part of a comprehensive curriculum for English/Language Arts. The literary canon also involves reading classic literature. Therefore, talking about the canon means also talking about curriculum theory and reading research.

Reading Theory

Talking about theory is not always easy. Over the years I have found selected trade books to be useful for thinking about reading theory. *Eat Your Peas* (Gray & Sharratt, 2000) is one of them. It is a delightful book that has much potential for thinking about the relationship between reading theory and the literary canon.

This picture book tells the story of a mum who wants her daughter, Daisy, to eat her peas. Daisy says, “I don’t like peas.” Mum tries a new tactic. She offers pudding for dessert if Daisy will eat her peas. Daisy repeats the same refrain. Mum ups the ante by offering Daisy pudding, staying up late, and skipping her bath. Daisy rejects these offers. Mum adds more and more offers but to no avail. Finally, Daisy agrees to eat peas if her mum eats brussels. Mum refuses because she doesn’t like brussels. But, they both like pudding.

In this story peas can be viewed as a metaphor for classic literature in the literary canon. For instance, peas can be a physically healthy food and classic literature can be an intellectually healthy read. Mum wants Daisy to eat her peas but she does not like peas. Similarly, teachers want students to read classic literature but all too often students do not like these books. Mum tries to entice, or bribe, Daisy to eat peas but she refuses. Teachers try creative approaches to engage students to read the classics but they often resist, some even refuse (Simmons, 2000). Mum and teachers are involved in a balancing act. Mum balances peas with pudding. Teachers balance reading the classics (peas) with accommodating

personal tastes (pudding) (Sunstein, 1994). Text, motivation, and engagement are key.

Texts

Teachers often talk about the literary canon in terms of single texts, e.g. “All ninth graders should read *To Kill a Mockingbird*.” Much reading research, however, indicates that students benefit most when teachers move from a single-text to a multiple-text mentality, that is, move from a basal or textbook to text sets or linked or texts (Short, Harste, & Burke, 1995; Harste, Short, & Burke, 1988; cf. Bintz, 2015). Linked texts provide readers “multiple entry points to understand essential questions in canonical texts” (Wold & Elish-Piper, 2009, p. 88). A good example is using linked texts with a very popular canonical text.

To Kill a Mockingbird deals with racism and social class in the Deep South during the 1930’s and explores universal themes like prejudice, violence, and hypocrisy. This text can be linked to *A Taste of Colored Water* (Faulkner, 2008) and *White Socks Only* (Coleman, 1996) to highlight segregation and Jim Crow laws; *Ruth and the Green Book* (Ramsey, 2010) to introduce the Esso Station pamphlet called *The Negro Motorist Green Book*; *Freedom Summer* (Wiles, 2005) to teach the Civil Rights Act and its aftermath; *Sit-In: How Four Friends Stood Up By Sitting Down* (Pinkney, 2010) and *Freedom on the Menu* (Weatherford, 2007) to describe famous events at Woolworth lunch counters; *Henry’s Freedom Box* (Levine, 2007) and *Freedom Song* (Walker, 2012) to share the story of a young boy who literally mails himself to freedom. These linked texts discuss important events and characters that occurred both before and after the time period in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Although a creative instructional strategy, teachers may or may not have success using linked texts to teach canonical texts. Other factors are involved, like student interest, motivation, and engagement.

Interest, Motivation and Engagement

Much research indicates that “text is a key factor in students’ motivation” (Ivey, 2011, p. 22). So are interest and motivation. Interest in reading predicts

students’ reading comprehension and even trumps poverty (Gambrell, 2011). Similarly, motivation and engagement increase when reading experiences are relevant to students’ lives and students have opportunities for choice and self-selection. Teaching the literary canon becomes problematic when this body of research and these factors are not taken into consideration.

Pennac (2006; 1999) argues the issue is more than problematic. Requiring students to read texts that ignore relevancy and personal interest is inconsistent with fundamental rights of the reader. Readers do not have to defend or set aside their reading interests nor do they have to read other people’s preferences. They have the right to read their own preferences. Similarly, the International Reading Association advocates “Children’s Literacy Rights” (IRA, 2000). One is the right to access a wide variety of books and make decisions about their own learning.

In the end, research on reading theory indicates that the literary canon can be a virtue, a vice, or both, depending on perspective. Using the perspective of a multiple-text mentality and instructional strategies like linked texts can make the literary canon a virtue in the lives of students. However, from the perspective of teacher preferences and school pragmatics others believe the literary canon can be a vice for students.

Curriculum Theory

Like reading theory, I also have found trade books to be useful for thinking about curriculum theory. *Winnie the Witch* (Paul & Thomas, 1987) is a great example. It is wonderful book that also has much potential for thinking about curriculum theory.

This is the story of Winnie and Wilbur. Winnie is a witch and Wilbur is her black cat. They live in a black house, black inside and outside. Because everything is black, Winnie can’t see Wilbur when he is on a chair, so she sits on him. She can’t see him lying on the rug, so she trips over him. To solve the problem, Winnie waves her magic wand and turns Wilbur bright green. Winnie can’t see Wilbur when he is outside in the grass, so she tripped over him and fell into a rosebush. This time, Winnie waves her

wand and turns Wilbur multi-colored. Now she can see Wilbur everywhere. But Wilbur is miserable. Finally, Winnie waves her wand and returns Wilbur to black and makes her house multi-colored. (Paul and Thomas, 1987)

This story offers an interesting way to think about teaching and curriculum theory. At the story level Winnie has a problem and it centers on Wilbur, her cat. She tries to solve the problem by changing Wilbur from his natural color to a different color but that does not work. In the end Winnie realizes that the solution is not changing the color of Wilbur but changing the color of the house in which Wilbur lives. At another level let's suppose that Winnie is a teacher and not a witch, Wilbur is a student and not a cat, and the house is the curriculum and not a residence. Teachers encounter problems in the classroom almost every day and very often they center on students. Teachers try to solve these problems but sometimes their first inclination is to change the student instead of changing the curriculum. When Winnie changed the house instead of the cat, she metaphorically changed the curriculum not the student and that change successfully solved the problem. Keeping this metaphor in mind, this story is useful for thinking about the literary canon not only as an instructional problem but also a curricular issue.

It is important to first note that curriculum is a messy term. Historically, it derives from the Latin word *currere*, meaning the course to be run. Today, this definition continues to significantly influence the curriculum field. Over the years, however, different definitions and types of curriculum have been developed including social curriculum, recommended curriculum, written curriculum, mastery curriculum, taught curriculum, supported curriculum, learned curriculum, generative curriculum, and tested curriculum (Glatthorn, 1987). More recently, social learning, inquiry-based, and critical literacy theories of curriculum have gained popularity (cf. Lewison, Leland, & Harste, 2008). This diversity of theories demonstrates that defining curriculum has been, and continues to be, a fundamental conceptual problem in the field of education.

Perspectives on curriculum have also changed. Berghoff describes how curriculum theory has

changed from a perspective of transmission to a perspective of inquiry (B. Berghoff, personal communication, October 10, 1992). From a transmission perspective, the purpose of curriculum is to pass on cultural knowledge, the valued knowledge of the past; knowledge is transmitted to students and organized by single disciplines; the curriculum is standardized, focuses on predetermined content, and organized by separate subjects and isolated skills. From an inquiry perspective, the purpose of curriculum is to function as a working democracy; knowledge is socially constructed, interdisciplinary, and highlights multiple ways of knowing; the curriculum is open-ended, focuses on content, process, and the construction of personal knowing, and is organized by focused studies.

Curriculum theories differ by perspective but also by learning theory. Harste (cited in Short & Burke, 1991, p. ix) states that "learning theory is an important consideration when thinking about curriculum". From a transmission perspective, learning is receptive, focused on mastering isolated and discrete skills and leading to understanding predetermined content. A major goal is for students to demonstrate knowledge and skills in a final product. From an inquiry perspective, learning is active and based on personal experience. It starts with curiosity, is driven by personal interest, involves risk-taking, supports reflection, and ends with connected knowing. A major goal is the development of voice, that is, helping students hear their own voices, as well as the voices of others.

Like reading theory, different perspectives on curriculum mean that the literary canon can be viewed as a virtue, a vice, or both. From a transmission perspective, it can be viewed as a virtue if the aim of schooling, in general, and the English/Language Arts curriculum, in particular, is for students to learn the collected wisdom of the past, the genius of authors who have written enduring literature, the cultural knowledge that has accumulated over the decades through that literature, and develop a common literary heritage. From an inquiry perspective, the literary canon can be viewed as a vice if the aim of schooling is for students to learn and appreciate how to take charge of and invest in their own reading, writing, and learning. Moreover, the literary canon can be viewed as a vice

if the aim is for students to learn and appreciate how to develop rich reading histories based on their own preferences rather than the preferences of others, read widely and deeply and share their readings thoughtfully with others, and make interdisciplinary connections from readings.

Starting and Continuing the Talk

Finally, like reading and curriculum theory, I have found trade books to be useful for starting and continuing discussions about important topics and questions that matter to teachers. *Grandpa's Slippers* (Watson, 1989) is a good example.

Table 1
Picture Books and Curriculum Focus

Picture Books	C&I	C&C	C&HD	C&P	C&E	IC	MC	C&T
<i>A Nice Walk in the Jungle</i>	X							
<i>Arthur Writes a Story</i>								
<i>First Grade Takes a Test</i>				X				X
<i>A Fine, Fine School</i>					X			
<i>Five Little Fiends</i>						X		
<i>Flood Fish</i>	X					X		
<i>Testing Miss Malarkey</i>								X
<i>Weslandia</i>		X			X			
<i>Eat Your Peas</i>		X	X		X			
<i>Dear Mr. Blueberry</i>		X		X				
<i>The Incredible Book-Eating Boy</i>		X		X				
<i>Edward the Emu</i>	X		X	X				
<i>Josepha</i>				X	X		X	
<i>Roxaboxen</i>		X	X		X			
<i>Once Upon an Ordinary School Day</i>		X		X	X			
<i>The Wise Woman and Her Secret</i>	X			X	X			
<i>Listen to the Wind</i>			X	X	X		X	
<i>The World that Loved Books</i>		X		X		X		
<i>Mrs. Spitzer's Garden</i>			X		X			
<i>Winnie the Witch</i>		X		X		X	X	
<i>Head, Body, Legs</i>				X		X	X	
<i>Thank You, Mr. Falker</i>			X		X			
<i>Mr. Lincoln's Way</i>			X		X			
<i>Duck, Rabbit</i>				X				
<i>All I See</i>	X	X		X				
<i>Grandpa's Slippers</i>	X			X				
<i>Luke's Way of Looking</i>	X	X		X		X		
<i>Daft Bat</i>				X				
<i>Seven Blind Mice</i>	X			X				
<i>The Sign Painter</i>	X	X		X	X			

Note.

C&I: Curriculum & Inquiry

C&C: Curriculum & Creativity

C&HD: Curriculum & Human Development

C&P: Curriculum & Perspective

C&E: Curriculum & Experience

IC: Interdisciplinary Curriculum

MC: Multicultural Curriculum

C&T: Curriculum & Testing

Grandpa's Slippers is a humorous book that can help teachers start and continue the talk about the literary canon.

This book tells the story of a grandma determined to replace grandpa's old slippers. Grandpa is equally determined to keep them. Grandma buys grandpa new slippers but he refuses to wear them and keeps wearing his old ones instead. Grandma hides his old slippers, but he finds them. She throws them in the rubbish bag, in the compost bin, and under a pile of leaves but he always finds them. One day, Grandpa's slippers fell to bits in his hands and he had to wear his new slippers instead. He was surprised and happy that his new slippers were very comfortable. Grandma looked at grandpa's old cardigan and said he needed a new one.

Grandpa's slippers can be viewed as a metaphor for teachers and their beliefs about reading and curriculum theory. At one level Grandpa is an endearing character. He loves his comfortable slippers and wants to keep them. Over time, however, Grandma sees he needs new slippers and is determined to make him get a new pair. At another level let's suppose that Grandpa is a teacher and slippers are his beliefs about reading and curriculum. Grandpa wants to keep his current beliefs because they are familiar and comfortable. He does not want new beliefs and is determined to keep his old ones. Beliefs about reading and curriculum have, and will continue to, continually change. Like Grandpa who needs to change his slippers, teachers need to continually outgrow their current beliefs about reading and curriculum. In other words, like Grandpa, teachers over time need to continually exchange old slippers for new ones.

To start or continue the talk, I include a text set and grid of high-quality picture books that addresses a different aspect of curriculum (see Table 1). I share picture books because they are a staple in most elementary classrooms but "haven't been fully embraced beyond elementary classrooms for their potential to serve teaching and learning" (Martinez, Harmon & Roser, 2009). Middle and high school

teachers can use this text set to support their own teaching and learning about curriculum. Also, each picture book has multiple layers of meaning and therefore invites multiple interpretations and rich discussion. Lastly, picture books are short can be read quickly, aloud or silently, which allows more time for teacher talk.

Final Thoughts

This article was sparked by a question that really mattered to a group of middle and high school ELA teachers: "To teach or not to teach the literary canon? That is our question." The teachers were divided. Most answered "Yes" and considered the literary canon a virtue. Others answered "No" and considered it a vice. My best response is this: it can be both. It just depends. Like Grandpa, it depends on what slippers we want to wear, that is, what beliefs we want to hold about reading research and curriculum theory. What it should not depend solely on are personal preferences. Teacher preferences are important, but irrelevant to this question. They are irrelevant because teaching is not a personal preference profession. It is a research-based profession and teachers are research-driven professionals (Duke & Martin, 2011). As such, personal preferences only matter when they are grounded in research.

The same is true for school pragmatics. Pragmatic concerns only impact how quickly quality schools and professional teachers can implement research-based instructional decisions. They should not interfere, and certainly not prevent, teachers from developing and implementing research-based instruction. Pragmatics is more about when, not if.

Ultimately, "To teach or not to teach the literary canon? That is our question" is a legitimate question. The problem is that this question cannot be answered by considering, if not privileging, only personal preferences and school pragmatics. The question should be examined and decided by reasoned argument and informed by research. Nothing should trump research.

References

- Allen, J. (2003). But they still can't (or won't) read! Helping children overcome roadblocks to reading. *Language Arts*, 80(4), 268-274.
- Bintz, W. P. (2015). *Using paired text to meet the Common Core*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Charles, J. (1993, November 20). The democracy of inclusion: American Indian literatures in the English language arts classroom, presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English, Pittsburgh, PA, (17-22).
- Cunningham, A.E., & Stanovich, K.E. (1998). What reading does for the mind. *American Educator*, 22, 8-15.
- Duke, N.K., & Martin, N.M. (2011). 10 things every literacy educator should know about research. *Reading Teacher*, 65(1), 9-22.
- Fleck, L. (1935). *Genesis and development of a scientific fact*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Gambrell, L.B. (2011). Seven rules of engagement: What's most important to know about motivation to read. *Reading Teacher*, 65(3), 172-178.
- Glatthorn, A. (1987). *Curriculum leadership*. Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED278176)
- Harste, J.C., Burke, C.L., & Short, K.G. (1988). *Creating classrooms for authors*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- International Reading Association. (2000). *Making a difference means making it different: Honoring children's rights to excellent reading instruction*. Newark, DE.
- Ivey, G. (2011). What not to read: A book intervention. *Voices from the Middle*, 19(2), 22-26.
- Kelly, K.M., & Kelly, P.H. (1997). Barbara Kingsolver's the bean trees: A new classroom classic. *English Journal*, 86(8), 61-63.
- Lewis, M., Leland, C., & Harste, J.C. (2008). *Creating critical classrooms*. New York, NY: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Martinez, M., Harmon, J., & Roser, N. (2009). Using picture books with older learners. In K. Wood & W. Blanton (Eds.), *Literacy instruction for adolescents: Research-based practice* (pp. 287-305). New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- National Council of Teachers of English & International Reading Association. (1996). *Standards for the English language arts*.
- Pennac, D. (1999). *Better than life*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.
- Pennac, D. (2006). *The rights of the reader*. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press.
- Short, K.G., & Burke, C. (1991). *Creating curriculum: Teachers and students as a community of learners*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Short, K.G., Harste, J.C., & Burke, C. (1995). *Creating classrooms for authors and inquirers*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Simmons, J. S. (2000). Middle schoolers and the right to read. *ALAN Review*, 27(3), 45-49.
- Solomon, C.W. (1999). Lucy in the chocolate factory: From the business world to the high school classroom. *English Journal*, 88(5), 62-66.
- Stotsky, S. (1990). Do we have, or have we had, a literacy canon in our secondary schools? What literature surveys reveal, presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English, Atlanta, GA.
- Sunstein, B.S. (1994). Attempting a graceful waltz on a teeter-totter: The canon and English methods courses. *English Journal*, 83(8), 47-54.
- Wheatley, M. (2009). *Turning to one another: Simple conversations to restore hope to the future*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.
- Wold, L., & Elish-Piper, L. (2009). Adolescents and texts: Scaffolding the English canon with linked text sets. *English Journal*, 98(6), 88-91.

Literature cited

- Bodsworth, N. (1990). *A nice walk in the jungle*. New York, NY: Viking Penguin.
- Brown, M. (1996). *Arthur writes a story*. Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company.
- Cohen, M. (2006). *First grade takes a test*. Cambridge, MA: Star Bright Books.
- Coleman, E. (1996). *White socks only*. Park Ridge, IL: Albert Whitman and Company.
- Creech, S. (2003). *A fine, fine school*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.
- Dyer, S. (2001). *Five little fiends*. New York, NY: Bloomsbury Children's Books.
- Eversole, R. (1995). *Flood fish*. New York, NY: Knopf Books for Young Readers.

- Faulkner, M. (2008). *A taste of colored water*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.
- Finchler, J. (2003). *Testing Miss Malarkey*. London, England: Walker Children's.
- Fleischman, P. (2002). *Weslandia*. Somerville, MA: Candlewick.
- Grant, J. (1999). *If you're riding a horse and it dies, get off*. Peterborough, NH: Crystal Springs Books.
- Gray, K. (2000). *Eat your peas*. New York, NY: Henry N. Abrams.
- James, S. (1996). *Dear Mr. Blueberry*. New York, NY: Aladdin.
- Jeffers, O. (2007). *The incredible book-eating boy*. New York, NY: Philomel Books.
- Knowles, S. (1998). *Edward the emu*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.
- Levine, E. (2007). *Henry's freedom box*. New York, NY: Scholastic.
- McPhail, D. (1997). *Edward and the pirates*. Boston, MA: Little Brown and Company.
- McGugan, J. (1994). *Josepha*. San Francisco, CA: Chronicle Books.
- McLerran, A. (2004). *Roxaboxen*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.
- McNaughton, C. (2005). *Once upon an ordinary school day*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Merriam, E. *The wise woman and her secret*. New York, NY: Aladdin.
- Mortenson, G. (2009). *Listen to the wind*. New York, NY: Dial.
- Parlato, S. *The world that loved books*. Vancouver, Canada: Simply Read Books.
- Pattou, E. (2001). *Mrs. Spitzer's garden*. New York, NY: Harcourt.
- Paul, K., & Thomas, V. (1987). *Winnie the witch*. Brooklyn, NY: Kane/Miller.
- Paye, W. (2005). *Head, body, legs: A story from Liberia*. New York, NY: Henry Holt & Co.
- Pinkney, A. (2010). *Sit-in: How four friends stood up by sitting down*. New York, NY: Little Brown Books.
- Polacco, P. (1998). *Thank you, Mr. Falker*. New York, NY: Philomel Books.
- Polacco, P. (2001). *Mr. Lincoln's way*. New York, NY: Philomel Books.
- Ramsey, C.A. (2010). *Ruth and the green book*. Minneapolis, MN: Carolrhoda Books.
- Rosenthal, A. K. *Duck, rabbit*. San Francisco, CA: Chronicle Books.
- Rylant, C. (1994). *All I see*. New York, NY: Scholastic.
- Walker, S. (2012). *Freedom song*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.
- Watson, J. (1989). *Grandpa's slippers*. New York, NY: Scholastic.
- Weatherford, C. B. (2007). *Freedom on the menu: The Greensboro sit-ins*. New York, NY: Puffin.
- Wheatley, N. (2001). *Luke's way of looking*. Brooklyn, NY: Kane/Miller.
- Wild, M. (1993). *Our granny*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Wiles, D. (2005). *Freedom summer*. New York, NY: Aladdin.
- Willis, J. (2006). *Daft bat*. New York, NY: Sterling.
- Young, E. (2002). *Seven blind mice*. New York, NY: Puffin.

© 2017. *Journal of Balanced Literacy Research and Instruction* is produced and distributed to its members by the Balanced Literacy Instruction Special Interest Group of the International Literacy Association.
ISSN:2328-08