



The Reading Forecaster

FALL EDITION 2009



Penny Plavala



Issue Theme:

*Great Reads
for a
Great Year!*

Welcome from the President

Penny Plavala, Multnomah Educational Service District

I am delighted to welcome you to the new school year and am honored to serve as president of the Portland Reading Council. Our mission is to support literacy in both the classroom and community. Although our region spans three counties and 14 school districts, the board is committed to providing opportunities for professional learning, sharing valuable resources, and supporting you in your daily work with students.

You may have returned to the classroom in September a bit wary of changes due to budget cuts and rising class sizes. One middle school teacher shared that she is determined to look past the challenges and said, "This is the only seventh grade year my students have. I want to be the best teacher I can be for them." I loved the sense of optimism and commitment revealed in this comment.

To help you be the best you can be, the Portland Reading Council and the Oregon Reading Association have many avenues of literacy support:

- Professional development via regional workshops, Teachers As Readers book groups, and opportunities to discuss hot topics at Literacy Happy Hour events
- Six idea-packed newsletters: *The Reading Forecaster* and the *ORacle*
- Listserv messages with teaching tips, reviews of resources, notices about upcoming literacy events, and other timely information
- ORA literacy grants and an exclusive member lending library
- The Annual African-American Read-In and the Celebrate Literacy Awards
- Two literacy-based web sites: pcira.wordpress.com and oregonread.org

As you can see, the Portland Reading Council is well equipped to provide significant and relevant support for you as teachers and as students. The more you stay involved with us, the more you'll gain from our relationship!

So please join us for an exciting, educational year of literacy learning for all of us together, and please invite your friends to join us as well. Let me know if there is anything you'd like the Portland Reading Council to do to help you be the best literacy educator you can be. My email is pplavala@mesd.k12.or.us. Looking forward to a great year!



Becky Bard



Come On, Get Happy!

The Portland Reading Council is thrilled to announce our very first all-member event of the year: the Literacy Happy Hour!

We invite our members to get together for food and beverages to chat about literacy and to network with each other. Bring friends – the more, the merrier!

What: Literacy Happy Hour

When: Tuesday, Nov. 10,
4:30 – 6:30 pm

Where: Stanford's Restaurant, 14801 Kruse Oaks Blvd, Lake Oswego (just off the intersection of I-5 and Hwy 217)

Appetizers provided.
No-host bar.

Questions? Please email
bbard@ttsd.k12.or.us

Someone Please Wake Up the Editor

Becky Bard, Tigard-Tualatin School District

It happens to the best of us. We sit down, ready to start the task at hand, fingers poised on the keyboard. And then... nothing.

I am certain that everyone, even those famed authors of the classics, had writer's block. Call it what you will – brain freeze, pencil paralysis, artistic obstruction – it's real and it happens to everyone. Even your loyal editor.

So when confronted with the fall issue of the *Forecaster*, I did freeze a little, despite the temperatures outside. I froze with the thought that I'd need to craft a little witty prose to welcome everyone back to the new school year. That, despite the fact that the words were not coming, I'd share some of the exciting plans that the Portland Reading Council has in store for its members this year.

And then, I recalled this issue's theme – **Great Reads for a Great Year**. If that didn't inspire me, then I'd have to give up my Reading Specialist Endorsement. It made me think – what makes something a great read? I think a great read is a book that draws a reader in to such an extent that there's a personal connection to the story and the characters. You feel the emotions. You taste the excitement. You need more. Ask any teenage girl if she'd move to Forks, and you'll get a resounding YES.

Author Scott Corbett said, "I often feel sorry for people who don't read good books; they are missing a chance to lead an extra life." And what lives they would miss out on! The opportunity to live forever and never age a day. The lifelong friendship built in the most trying of circumstances. The journey to worlds never imagined yet completely believable.

And better yet, the shared book experience. I just read what I think is a great picture book – ***Bats at the Library*** by Brian Lies. Listen to this and tell me if this exact experience hasn't happened to you:

*"Everyone – old bat or pup –
has been completely swallowed up
and lives inside a book instead
of simply hearing something read."*

Take the advice of our wise *Forecaster* correspondents and share great reads with your students this year as you browse the great reading in our articles. Join us on the web at pcira.wordpress.com/ or email me with your thoughts and ideas about great reads in our schools. Try sharing a great book with colleagues through a TAR group. Find out how great reads can be incorporated into your classroom reading instruction. And be sure to join us at our very first Literacy Happy Hour for members and friends on November 10 to continue the discussions.

Brain cells seem to be thawing out. It's going to be a great year!

What Are TAR Book Groups?

Joan Flora, Canby School District

Teachers as Readers are book groups in which teachers read and enjoy quality literature. This, and the confidence it builds for teachers, contribute to the rich, literate environment of classrooms and encourages students to become lifelong readers.

Teachers as Readers Book Groups consist of teachers who:

- Select quality children's or adolescents' books and/or a professional book to read and discuss.
- Meet on a regular basis to read and discuss the selected book(s).

Why Should You Form Book Groups with Teachers?

- To explore your own literacy.
- To share quality literature with colleagues.
- To model lifelong reading pleasure.
- To gain experience and confidence with book discussion.
- To reflect upon and learn from personal experience with books.
- To enhance teaching and learning.
- To earn one PSU credit per 10-hour class.

Tips for Book Group Facilitators

- Establish a relaxed, positive environment. This is a literacy adventure that is meant to be fun and rewarding on a personal as well as professional level.
- Read the book(s) to be discussed.
- Make mental notes (Post-Its help) of four to five open-ended discussion questions; use these only as necessary to restart conversation or to steer conversation back to the book.
- Value the personal experiences and multiple interpretations that grow out of those experiences.
- Welcome and encourage dissension... lively, interesting discussions result.
- Occasionally, ask someone to bring information about the author, another book by the same author, or reviews about the book.
- Eliminate guilt. Not finishing a book isn't a crime.
- Schedule a separate session for talk about teaching techniques and student connections. (Or reserve the last few minutes of each session.)
- Encourage tentative voices. The less talkative members of the group need opportunities to join in the conversation.
- Be a good listener; let conversation develop.
- Don't be afraid of silences.
- Sit back and enjoy the experience.

Interested in starting a TAR group at your school? Please contact Joan Flora at 503-263-7200 ext. 5410 or floraj@canby.k12.or.us to learn how PCIRA can support your group with funds for books, ORA memberships or snacks for your meetings, and how you may qualify for one hour of PSU credit.



Joan Flora





Nancy Sullivan

Great Reads for High Schoolers

Nancy Sullivan, Madison High School
2008-09 Celebrate Literacy Award Winner

Looking for some great reads for your high school students? Here are some books you can recommend with confidence...

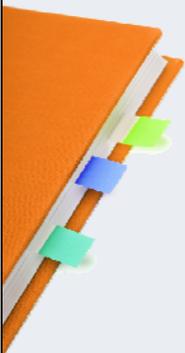
Last spring I read Michele Jaffe's *Bad Kitty* with the Madison Library Club – the Library RATs (Readers And Thinkers). This contemporary novel is set during seventeen-year-old Jasmine Callihan's family vacation in Las Vegas. Jas enjoys playing detective, and she and her two best friends end up entangled in a quirky mystery involving some larger-than-life characters. The dialogue was so witty that I found myself laughing out loud. Though its hot pink cover might make you think this is a "girl book," the RAT boys really enjoyed not only reading it, but the looks they got while carrying it around.

If you have students who "don't like fantasy," *The Folk Keeper* by Franny Billingsley might just change their minds. The "folk" are dangerous beings who live underground and must be placated by Folk Keepers, who are always boys. Corinna is an orphaned teenage girl who disguises herself so that she can perform this task, including cutting her hair everyday (as it grows two inches per night). This memorable coming-of-age story is written in diary format and includes plenty of intrigue and a budding romance. Thanks to the Children's Literature Alive! Foundation, we were incredibly fortunate to have Franny Billingsley visit in April, and we had lots of converts!

Finally, *Feed*, by M.T. Anderson, is the book I'm most looking forward to reading with students this fall. In this futuristic cautionary tale, the "feed" is an implant that transmits information directly into people's heads. Discussion topics will include consumerism and its effects, thinking for oneself, and teenage love. The book's language can be crude, but it's nothing I don't hear everyday walking down the halls in our school (in fact, the author says he eavesdropped on a lot of teenage conversations to write this novel). Anderson will present at the Multnomah County Library 2009 Teen Author Lecture in October, which I will attend with a group of my students.



What great reads do you recommend for high school students? Continue the discussion at pcira.wordpress.com or at our Literacy Happy Hour on November 10.



Great Read Alouds for Middle School

Barbara Kutasz, Portland Public Schools

You already know that reading aloud to middle school students is a worthwhile and beneficial activity. However, you may find yourself in the position of having to justify time spent on reading aloud, whether it's to parents, administrators or even your students. In the 6th edition of *The Read Aloud Handbook*, Jim Trelease states that until about eighth grade, children usually listen on a higher level than they read, and can hear and understand stories that are more complicated and more interesting than anything they could read on their own. So, the issue for middle school teachers becomes one of carefully selecting those books that will satisfy those dual demands of being "more complicated and more interesting."

The books discussed below are ones that have successfully engaged the 6th, 7th and 8th graders in my classroom while providing important opportunities to examine various aspects of literature. Each touches on issues critical to middle school development – fitting in, building community and finding one's way in society.

Rodman Philbrick's *The Mighty* (originally published under the title *Freak, The Mighty*) is the story of two boys who couldn't be more different, yet share one crucial attribute: they don't fit in. Maxwell Kane is a large boy with learning disabilities and a troubled past. When a brilliant but physically disabled boy moves in next door, the two form an unlikely duo and spend their summer having extraordinary adventures that begin in a fantasy world, but become all too real.

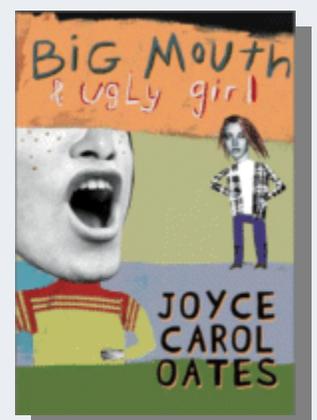
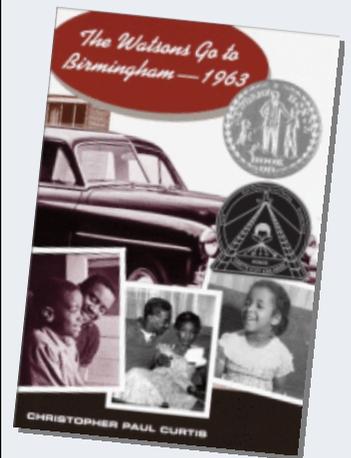
Watsons Go to Birmingham, 1963 by Christopher Paul Curtis has been around since 1995, but is deserving of a second look. Though frequently used in elementary schools, this book explores themes of racism and violence more appropriate to 8th grade. *Watsons Go to Birmingham, 1963* is perhaps the best book I have found for discussing "tone" and "mood" with students. The first half of the book is screamingly funny, quickly drawing the reader into the world of the Watson family – an African-American family traveling from Detroit to Alabama in 1963. The second half of the book presents events based on the real life church bombing that took the lives of four young African-American girls that are as compelling as they are horrifying.

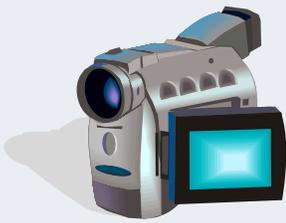
Gordon Korman's latest book, *Schooled*, makes a delightful read aloud, full of outrageous characters and preposterous situations. Students will relate to the main character, Capricorn Anderson, and the difficulty this boy, who has been raised by his grandmother on a commune, has fitting in at a traditional school. Two other books that also explore the theme of being a teenage outsider are Jerry Spinelli's *Stargirl* and *Big Mouth and Ugly Girl* by Joyce Carol Oates. Both make excellent read alouds, although *Big Mouth and Ugly Girl* is perhaps most appropriate for a mature 8th grade audience.

In *The Read Aloud Handbook*, Jim Trelease says, "We read to children for all the same reasons we talk with children: to reassure, to entertain, to bond, to inform or explain, to arouse curiosity, to inspire. But in reading aloud, we also condition the child's brain to associate reading with pleasure, create background knowledge, build vocabulary, [and] provide a reading role model." Enjoy reading these or other books aloud with your middle school students and know that it will be time well spent.



Barbara Kutasz





The Future is Here: Today's Young Adult Novels Blend Storytelling with Multimedia

Nathan Traller, Beaverton School District

By now there's a good chance you've seen a young person with a copy of *The 39 Clues*, a multi-book series conceived by Rick Riordan, former middle school teacher and author of the famed *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* series. These fast moving books have intriguing puzzles that span the globe and travel through history as a brother and sister team race to find clues leading to a life-changing secret. The puzzles are challenging and the action is swift, and, in an interesting twist, each book is written by a different YA author, the likes of Gordon Korman and Patrick Carman chipping in. My first encounter with *Maze of Bones*, Book One in the series, was from 5th graders suggesting it as a read-aloud. I found myself engrossed in a plot with many historical ties to Benjamin Franklin and the Revolutionary War Era.

What sets the series apart, however, is the added content that supports the story on the web at www.the39clues.com. The rich additional clues and puzzles are far beyond gimmick level; they actually enrich the reading experience of the very well written books. Each book comes with a set of randomized clue cards that provide access to hints on the web. I found myself drawn into one of the detailed e-cards. Just as stories are told through various formats, the authors of this creative content are pushing the envelope for today's readers.

Even further down this path of reshaping the traditional novel is Patrick Carman's *Skeleton Creek*, a story that is told along two tracks. Sarah and Ryan find themselves investigating strange happenings in their town of Skeleton Creek, Oregon. When a suspicious accident leaves Ryan stuck in the house (and forbidden from seeing Sarah), he communicates through his journal. Meanwhile, Sarah tells her side through video clips. The clips are accessible through codes within the book that link to Sarah's video experience on . The sum is greater than the parts as both the book and the Website create a rich and scary experience that, yes, is only the first book of an addictive series. This could be a very attractive read for reluctant readers, 10 and up.

So what are we traditional book-lovers to do? I remind myself that authors today are creating content in so many ways because the tools are so accessible. I'm sure this is the way our students will be creating "books" when they become authors.

Web Links



A Bevy of Book Ideas on the Web

Becky Bard, Tigard-Tualatin School District

Sometimes, it can be a little overwhelming to walk into a bookstore or library and try to find the real gems that could make a difference for you or your students. Fortunately, lots of people have done that for us, and they have invited us to visit them in cyberspace to narrow our choices. You'll want to visit and revisit these terrific sites very soon. Visit our Website at: pcira.wordpress.com, and you'll find direct links.



Multnomah County Library School Corps www.multcolib.org/schoolcorps/services.html

Our very own Multnomah County Library system has a wonderful service in which teachers can access book information online. Be sure to click on the Gotta Read Book Lists and the Novel-Ties!



TeachersFirst 100 Best Books www.teachersfirst.com/100books.cfm

This list, created by members of the NEA in 1999, lists 100 books that your students really should read. Although the list is ten years old, it's a super list of what are now classic books.



Teachers and Families Book Lists www.teachersandfamilies.com/open/summerread.html

There are so many great things to visit on this site. Book lists can be selected by grade level, K-12, and there are specific theme lists for middle and high school students. Don't forget to click on the Lifetime Reading List. How many have you read?



Super Blogs to Share

- readergirlz.blogspot.com
- guyslitwire.blogspot.com
- readertotz.blogspot.com

Blogs are an amazing way to keep great books current and exciting. These gender and/or age specific blogs provide not just book reviews, but ongoing discussions about books and links that kids and teens will enjoy. If you want to find more blogs about children's books, go to a great blog from RIF at www.rascofromrif.org or visit childrensbooks.about.com and click on the **What's New/Hot** link under "Browse Topics". There you'll find a link to several other blogs that you and your students may enjoy visiting.

Got more Websites to share? Email me at bbard@tttsd.k12.or.us or drop by the Portland Reading Council's Website at pcira.wordpress.com and leave a comment. Have a wonderful trip through cyberspace!

The Oregon Reading Association is on the Web
www.reading.org

Thank you!

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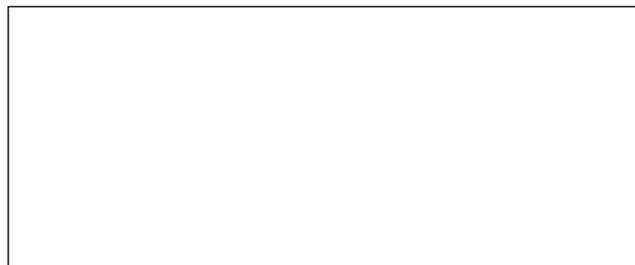
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Literacy Calendar of Events

- **Literacy Happy Hour**
Tuesday, November 10, 2009, 4:30 - 6:30 pm
Stanford's Restaurant, Lake Oswego
(see page 2 for details)
- **African American Read-In Celebration, Sponsored by the Portland Reading Council and the Multnomah County Library**
1st or 2nd Sunday of February, 2010 - Stay Tuned!
North Portland Branch Library