



The Reading Forecaster

FALL 2011

President's Message

Barbara Kutasz, Mt. Tabor Middle School, Portland Public Schools
Becky Bard, Student Teacher Supervisor, Portland State University

Welcome to a new year with the Portland Reading Council! We are honored to be co-presidents this year working with an excellent group of literacy professionals on the PCIRA board. This year should be an exciting one as we look forward to many opportunities to meet and learn from our members.

The theme of this newsletter, Accelerating Achievement in Reading & Writing, is so appropriate to keeping this school year moving forward. We are all looking for ways to help our students achieve as readers and writers, yet our school day is only so long. Let's face it – all of our classroom time is valuable, especially now as more schools are working with tighter and tighter schedules. The time we have with our students to teach reading and writing has to be as efficient and effective as possible. The articles in this issue are all designed to give our members creative and innovative ideas to use in the classroom for accelerating the achievement of our students.

We want to take a moment and recognize our newest members from the Mount Hood Council. All the educators who were previously members of the Mount Hood Council will now be able to take advantage of the many opportunities available in the Portland Reading Council, and our entire organization is stronger thanks to the many talents that these educators bring. Welcome!!

Throughout the year, the Portland Reading Council provides support for educators through various outlets – our newsletters, our [Facebook page](#), our [website](#), professional development events, Literacy Happy Hours, and of course, the invaluable ListServ. If you ever need more information about anything that the Portland Reading Council is doing, feel free to contact either of us at bards4@comcast.net or bkutasz@pps.net.

Now go do those wonderful things with your students that you do everyday and enjoy the success of watching their achievement – and love of reading – grow!



Barbara Kutasz
Co-President,
Portland Reading
Council



Becky Bard
Co-President,
Portland Reading
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Issue
Theme:

*Accelerating
Readers and
Writers in the
Classroom*

The Professional Development Picture: What it is and how PCIRA fits in

Barbara Kutasz, Mt. Tabor Middle School, Portland Public Schools

Packing my bags for a three-day trip to a distant city. Gathering my cup of tea and my laptop and settling in to my favorite chair. Inviting a couple of friends over for a decadent chocolate dessert and lively conversation. What do these three scenarios have in common? Each is the prelude to valuable professional development.



Traditionally, teachers and school districts have often thought of professional development in terms of conferences, institutes and workshops where teachers are able to learn from top experts in the field. Today, though, there is a wealth of rich professional development available in a multitude of formats. Truly, there is something for everyone and PCIRA and its parent organization, ORA, are at the forefront of ongoing literacy education in Oregon. As you read through this list of professional development activities you are sure to be inspired.

Professional Development Conferences, Workshops & Institutes: While there are now many venues for professional development, the traditional conference is still an important vehicle. ORA will offer its [Winter Institute](#) on February 10-11, 2012, featuring Katie Wood Ray, Kylene Beers, and Bob Probst.

Professional Learning Teams and Book Study Groups: Bringing together groups of teachers to read and discuss professional books is a powerful way to increase professional knowledge while building collegial relations between teachers. PCIRA is pleased to offer Teachers as Readers (TAR) Book Groups to interested teachers. Groups select their own books and meeting schedule and members may choose to receive credit from PSU. PCIRA offers a \$50 stipend for TAR Book Groups to use as they see fit.

Professional Journals and Newsletters: One of the best ways to stay abreast of current developments in any field is to subscribe to professional publications. In its *Reading Forecaster* newsletter, PCIRA strives to strike a balance between articles addressing the hottest topics in literacy education and ideas that teachers can use in their classrooms right away. The *Reading Forecaster* is available online. ORA publishes the [ORACLE](#) to keep members up to date on literacy happenings around the state.

Online Resources: A teaching colleague of mine states, only half jokingly, that you can teach anything using Google and Youtube. Having the wide world of information at our fingertips can be both inspiring and daunting. The trick is to rely on high-quality sites that provide consistent, reliable information and ideas. A wealth of information is

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available at pcira.wordpress.com (the PCIRA website) and oregonreading.org (the ORA site). Additionally, up to the minute links and information are available through the PCIRA [Facebook](#) page, so become a "friend" today.

Networking opportunities: Ever notice that sometimes when you attend a conference it's hard to leave the rich conversation at the lunch table to return to the powerhouse sessions on the schedule? That's because one of the most valuable, and often underrated, forms of professional development is the luxury of time to talk with others engaged in the same endeavors. For this reason, PCIRA offers "Literacy Happy Hours" from time to time throughout the school year.

De-Constructing an Article of the Week

Joan Flora, Canby High School, Canby School District

SNAPSHOT FROM
HIGH SCHOOL

It's important to ease the way for struggling readers and writers so they internalize gateway skills, such as understanding what they read well enough to write accurate summaries.

With my 9th and 10th grade striving readers, I begin by selecting an article at an easy instructional reading level, about 5th grade. Our first Article of the Week was "What are Faces For?" from *Ask* magazine. I presented the short article in four pieces of about 3-4 sentences each, one chunk for Monday through Thursday. Students worked in pairs to determine what the important ideas and words were. They marked the text to indicate words, if any, that could be quoted or simply used in that day's paraphrase. They discussed how to paraphrase ideas and wrote a 1-2 sentence paraphrase. For students who didn't know how to begin, I provided a stem sentence, such as, "Scientists claim that faces" As students finished their paraphrases, 2-3 partners displayed their work on the document camera so we could discuss the accuracy of the paraphrases and admire the variety of writing styles. One student quipped, "There's lots of ways of being right with writing."

On Friday, we wrote the topic sentence as a class, identifying the author, the title of the article, and the main idea of the piece, along with an apt verb to tie our thinking together. My sample summary showed students that after the topic sentence, all I did was add my four paraphrases in chronological order to create my finished summary. This article didn't need transitions to link the paraphrases (that's a mini-lesson for next week's article), but the returning sophomores remembered transitions from last year and included them.

Students then write a reaction / response paragraph, creating a page of written thinking. As they gain confidence and skill, I'll choose more difficult articles with more complex content. Students approaching grade-level work are ready to take on a full Article of the Week and can mark the text, paraphrase, and summarize on their own.

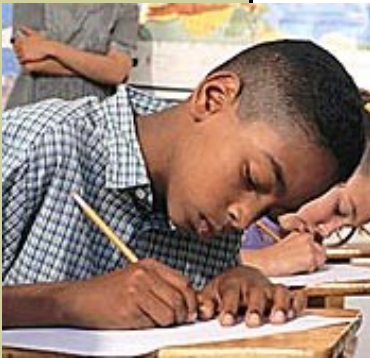


**SNAPSHOT FROM
MIDDLE SCHOOL**

Making Gains with a School-wide Writing Assessment

Susan Morgan, Fowler Middle School, Tigard Tualatin School District

This year Fowler Middle School teachers will be accelerating student writing by implementing a school-wide common formative writing assessment. While the state assessment of writing in 7th grade is no longer in place, it had traditionally served as more of a summative assessment, or autopsy, so to speak, with results only becoming available to teachers after 7th graders had moved on to 8th grade. The truth is, in order to adjust instruction to meet the specific needs of their students, teachers need to have access to assessment results that are more frequent and more timely.



For this reason, all students at Fowler will complete a writing assessment in their homeroom in mid-November. The administration of the assessment will occur just before two back-to-back district inservice days, which will allow ample time for teachers to both receive training on the state writing scoring guide and to collaboratively score the assessments. The benefits of this method are twofold: students will receive timely and specific feedback, and teacher teams will have the opportunity to discuss the results and plan instruction to address student needs. Then in March, a second school-wide assessment will take place, which will both allow teachers to measure student growth and to make adjustments before the end of the school year so that all students are making gains.

Such an emphasis on non-fiction writing in every content area has been shown to improve student achievement overall. In fact non-fiction writing and collaborative scoring of student work are two of the five indicators that were common to all "90/90/90 Schools", which are characterized as having high (90%) minority enrollment, high poverty levels and high achievement (Reeves, 2003). With their commitment to the implementation of a common formative writing assessment, the teachers at Fowler Middle School have taken the first step toward achieving similarly impressive results.

Reeves, D. (2003). High performance in high poverty schools: 90/90/90 and beyond.

[Center for Performance Assessment.](#)

**SNAPSHOTS FROM
ELEMENTARY**

Improving Writing at Sandy Grade

Sarah Hagestedt, Sandy Grade School, Oregon Trail School District

Walking into school this year, it is difficult to find a place to step when there are so many students crowding our classrooms. A couple of years ago in Sandy, we may have agonized over how we could conference adequately with each student to help them improve their writing skills and strategies. Considering the numbers of bodies in our classrooms, without working smarter, we would definitely be working much harder to maintain our previous level of student contact. We owe thanks to our partnership with Regie Routman for showing us the way.

We realized the need to do more modeled and shared writing with our students but also to balance that with public conferences. With the public conference, we are able to teach the skills that kids need in the context of their own writing. I admit, public conferences were

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scary at first, not only for teachers but students as well. Teachers were worried that students wouldn't want their work shown in such a public forum, but once students saw the rich format and the power their writing provided, they were eager to participate.

Early in the process of our training, teachers conferenced with a target student in front of the class. Now a year later, as we have dedicated time to high quality modeling and practicing, we are finding that some students now are seeking and getting productive feedback from peers before they conference with an adult. Students have taken more responsibility for their own writing, revising, and editing process.

For more information on Regie Routman in-residence, [click here](#).



What Does T.A.R. Mean?

Book Groups Offer Informal Opportunities for Professional Development

Terri Hjelm, Retired PPS

How many teachers join Portland Reading Council or ORA and wonder what the initials T.A.R. represent? How many still wonder when they're invited to join a local board? How many teachers keep wondering until they are invited to join a reading council book group?

At the October PCIRA board meeting these confessions were shared by several members, this writer included. The exciting news is: **T**eachers **A**s **R**eaders is a book group program supported by the International Reading Council on a local level. Book groups encourage relevant, fun, and informal professional development built around reading. When teachers describe their insights or share personal reading journeys in book groups, new ideas blossom inside their classrooms.



Each book group is individual with no one set reading list determined by ORA or the PCIRA. The T.A.R. group decides on their own what book they think would be interesting, helpful or important to read. Each group plans their own meeting style and schedule. Some schools have "walk and talk" book groups. They meet on the track and walk in small groups discussing the book then come back and share what they've learned from each other. Another group might switch walking partners every few minutes to get the full benefit of hearing a variety of perspectives. Still more book groups meet at local coffee shops after work. Others meet once a month for dinner and talk books. When working to meet needs with less and less resources, professional book groups are positive options inspiring new ideas. They keep us grounded in an often stressful environment, and offer opportunities to strengthen relationships among colleagues on a personal and professional level.

Portland Reading Council can offer your book group \$50 for support (up to 10 groups a year) upon acceptance of your proposal. Those funds may pay for snacks, books, or anything your group chooses to dedicate the funds towards. One (\$50) PSU credit is even available, if groups are interested.

Contact Terri Hjelm with any questions: terri-hjelm@comcast.net.

[Download an application.](#)

Ask Penny

by Penny Plavala, School Improvement Specialist for the Multnomah ESD

Dear Penny,

How do I know if my students are learning along the way before a chapter or unit test? I keep hearing about formative assessments, but I am not sure where to start.

Neil in North Clackamas

Dear Neil,

Guess what? I have a good feeling that you are already offering formative assessments opportunities in your classroom.

You want a type of assessment that monitors student growth – something you can use to provide targeted feedback so students can master the content goals, right?

I have just finished reading literacy guru Cris Tovani's latest book ***So What Do They Really Know? Assessment That Informs Teaching and Learning*** (Stenhouse, 2011). She candidly shares her own struggles with assessment and offers successful and practical ideas from her classroom.

Tovani explains that formative assessments come in many shapes and sizes and might include:

- student surveys and responses
- writing samples, drafts over time
- conference notes
- exit tickets
- silent-reading response sheets
- double-entry diaries
- annotated text
- response journals

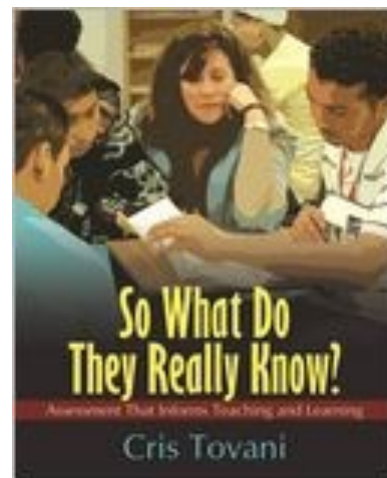
You can learn so much about students' thinking and how they comprehend the content through these assessments – and then use the data to inform your instruction.

Watch a fantastic interview with Cris Tovani as she discusses formative assessments:

<http://www.literacylabs.org/>

Happy Learning!

Penny



Motivating Your Students to Read Oregon Battle of the Books Selections

Debbie Tofte, Chehalem Valley Middle School, Newberg School District

In 2006, a group of Oregon school librarians were inspired by the success of similar programs they had seen in use in other states. These dedicated individuals designed such a dynamic program for Oregon. Today, since the first Battle of the Books event in Oregon, thousands of children have participated. Enthusiastic readers from elementary school to high school have hungrily devoured millions of pages in excellent books.

To motivate my 7th grade readers, I present them with my own personal challenge for Battle of the Books. In mid-October, I post the covers for all the books in my room with my own goal to have them all read by the first week in January. Then, as I read a book, I update my status on the display. The students enjoy seeing what I'm reading, "reminding me" of the deadline, and offer encouragement if they notice my pace slows. If they encourage me along the way and I am successful in my goal, we enjoy a small celebration and I draw names for kids to win the books I have read...my dog-eared books reflect how much I enjoyed my Battle of the Books journey. I have found the most rewarding result of this shared experience is that I am able to have incredibly rich conversations with students about the books. This year, I encourage you to take on the same challenge and see how many benefits you (and your students) will reap!



Oregon Reading Association 2.0

Nathan Traller, ORA Vice President, Bonny Slope Elementary, Beaverton School District

Every educator knows the only constant in education is change. Whether it is format, funding, philosophy or simply just the diverse needs sitting before you, there is always something new. Our school landscape in Oregon looks very different than it did ten years ago, but one constant is the need for strong literacy skills.

At the Oregon Reading Association (the state affiliate of the International Reading Association) we have been working hard to revision where our organization should change to be a relevant supporter of literacy in this new era. One new format in place this year is a new approach to professional development, which has traditionally been focused on a single large state conference in February. This year our format has changed to a more nimble and flexible approach. This August a successful Summer Writing Institute was held in Eugene. Participants said they loved the timing prior to the school year.

Next up in February, our Winter Institute in Portland will span two days (Feb. 10-11) and feature Katie Wood Ray and Kylene Beers. There will be in-depth time with the featured experts and team planning time, as well as breakout sessions with many more presenters. The institute will incorporate Common Core Standards so that Oregon educators have a jump on this change.

Coming in April, a student and new educator conference will feature Regie Routman and promising practitioners from our local schools. These new changes address the need for flexibility, depth and focus that professional development in funding strapped times requires! I am excited most of all about the impact for our students.



Globetrotting by Blogs: No Passport Required

by L. A. Henry and L. Zawilinski

How do you motivate your students to become excited about writing? Do you wonder how to help them think more critically about literature, global issues, or multiple perspectives? Are you looking for an easy way to engage students in 21st century learning? If any of these questions have crossed your mind, introduce your students to a cultural exchange with blogs.

What is a blog?

Blog is short for web log, an easily editable web space that is often likened to a shared digital diary or journal. Bloggers (people who blog) create posts that highlight personal experiences, state opinions, or describe events. Posts can include text, photos, images, and video. Each entry is time stamped in reverse chronological order with the most recent post appearing first. Blogs can be individual or collaborative with either private or public settings for viewing and participation.

Why blog with your students?

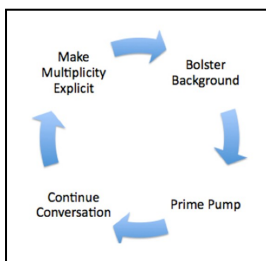
Blogs provide a unique platform to open students' writing up to authentic audiences beyond the teacher, classroom, and local community. Even our youngest students can compose comments on a blog! Blogs also support the development of higher order thinking and 21st century literacy skills. Students are introduced to multiple perspectives as they share their own thoughts and ideas about a given topic. Additionally, students who rarely contribute during class discussions are given a voice through the use of blogs.

What is the best way to use blogs?

The most exciting way to use blogs is to partner with classrooms in other parts of the world. This helps students develop cultural understanding and global awareness. For younger students, this type of cultural blog exchange can be set up as a class-to-class blog in which the teacher guides the students in a shared writing experience to develop each blog post. For older students, a student-to-student blog exchange provides an opportunity for your students to have their own "pen pal" that they can write to through the blog.

How do you get started?

First, if you're new to blogs, join the new IRA social network, Engage, and check out the [Teacher to Teacher Blogs](#). In this blog community, you can read a variety of blog posts and leave comments. In doing so, you would be adding your voice to a literacy community while getting a feel for blogging! You might then start your own blog (if needed, elicit the help of a technology teacher, library media specialist, or tech-savvy student) to better understand the way blogs are organized and to become familiar with blog features.



Next, review the HOT Blogging Framework (Zawilinski, 2009), which helps scaffold students as they develop their blogging skills. Identify curricular areas that you would like to integrate into your students' blogs. Aside from literacy skill development, blogs are a great way for students to acquire and expand content knowledge in a variety of subjects (e.g. geography, science, history, culture). Finally, don't forget to provide your students with lessons on Internet safety, digital citizenship, and netiquette to ensure respectful social interactions.

Now that you know the basics of blogging, here are some resources to support your blogging journey:

Resources from the Authors

Zawilinski, L. (2009). HOT Blogging: A Framework for Blogging to Promote Higher Order Thinking. *The Reading Teacher*, 62(8), 650-661.

Video Recording of Globetrotting by Blogs presentation at IRA 2011 Annual Convention featuring L. A. Henry and L. Zawilinski



[Click to play](#)

ReadWriteThink.org Strategy Guides and Lessons

Teaching with Blogs

<http://www.readwritethink.org/professional-development/strategy-guides/teaching-withblogs-30108.html>

Online Safety

<http://www.readwritethink.org/professional-development/strategy-guides/onine-safety-30107.html>

E-pals Around the World (Grades 6-8)

<http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/pals-around-world-178.html>

Weekly Writer's Blogs: Building a Reflective Community of Support (Grades 9-12)

<http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/weekly-writerblogs=building-1113.html>

Examples of Classroom Blogs

Travel Buddies/1st & 2nd Grade: Cultural Exchange between Kentucky, USA and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

<http://tbteresiano1ano.blogspot.com/>

<http://tbteresiano2ano.blogspot.com/>

Mrs. Yollis' Classroom Blog: Third Graders Learning and Sharing Together

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

Huda Kaen's 8th Grade Blog in Makassed Saida, Lebanon

<http://hblogging.edublogs.org>

Blog Providers

Edublogs for Teachers and Students

<http://www.edublogs.org>

21 Classes Cooperative Learning

<http://www.21classes.com>

Landmarks Class Blogmeister

<http://www.classblogmeister.com>

ePals Global Community: Locate Classrooms around the World

<http://www.epals.com/search/>

Reference

1. Zawilinski, L. (2009). HOT Blogging: A Framework for Blogging to Promote Higher Order Thinking. *The Reading Teacher*, 62(8), 650-661.

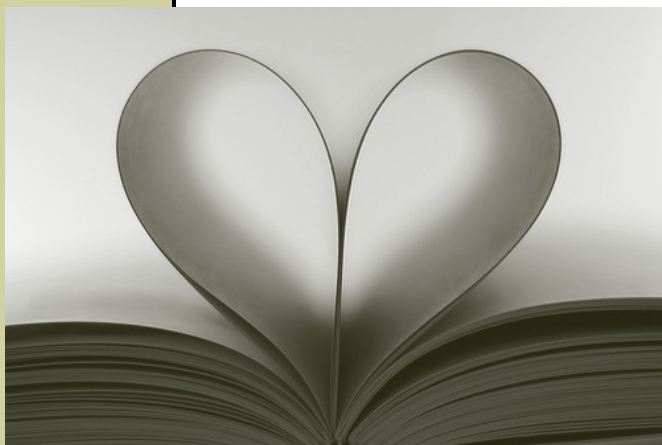
Laurie A. Henry is an assistant professor at the University of Kentucky, lauriehenry@uky.edu. Lisa Zawilinski is a faculty member in the College of Education, Nursing, and Health Professions at University of Hartford, zawlinsk@hartford.edu.

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There's Something

From Steven Layne's "Life's Literacy Lessons: Poems for Teachers"
(International Reading Association, 2001)

There's something in their eyes
There's something in their hearts
There's something in their souls
That longs to hear a story.



There's something in their eyes,
That sparkles like a gem;
Each time I tell them of a book I'd like to
read to them.

There's something in their hearts,
A yearning deep within;
They're hoping I will take them to a place
they've never been.

There's something in their souls,
Which craves the chance to meet;
The characters who seem to somehow
make their lives complete.

There's something in their eyes
There's something in their hearts
There's something in their souls
That longs to hear a story.



Register Now for the ORA Winter Institute, Friday and Saturday, February 10-11, 2012

Mark your calendar for the Oregon Reading Association's Winter Institute at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Portland. On Friday there will be two strands—an elementary strand with speaker Katie Wood Ray and a secondary strand with speakers Kyleene Beers and Robert Probst, nationally-recognized experts. Saturday starts with a review of the Common Core Standards and next steps by Penny Plavala of the Multnomah ESD followed by small sessions featuring local literacy experts and teachers sharing practical literacy strategies for your classroom. One graduate credit is available. Learn more: www.oregonread.org.



Making Every Interaction Count

Dot McElhone, PhD. Assistant Professor, Portland State University

*You've just finished reading aloud *Corduroy* (Don Freeman) to your second grade class. You close the book and ask, "What problem did Corduroy have in the story?"*

You call on Alex, who says, "He couldn't stay in the palace."

How do you respond?

The pressure to do more in less time can easily find its way into our class discussions, turning conversation into a race for the right answer. Under such pressure, we might go on to another child to see if they can share something about Corduroy needing a friend or losing his button. We might also hint at the answer we are looking for ("It has something to do with his clothes"), narrow the question ("Did he lose his keys or his button?"), or answer the question ourselves.

In my research, I have found that when teachers make these kinds of talk moves more often, their students tend to grow less in their comprehension achievement and reading engagement. A more productive way to use our literacy time may be to try to pack as much thinking as we can into every interaction we have with students. In order to help our students become critical, questioning, active readers, we need to talk with students in ways that help them see themselves and each other as people with important ideas about texts.

For example, we might respond to Alex in one or more of the following ways:

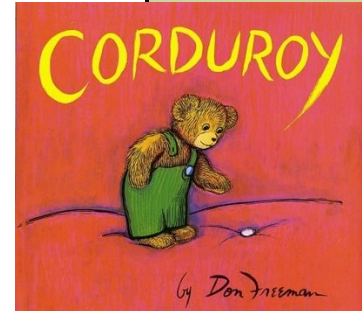
- *Ask for elaboration (Say more about that.)*
- *Ask for clarification (I'm not sure I'm following you. Could you say it another way?)*
- *Ask for evidence (What did you see or hear in the story that tells you that was Corduroy's problem?)*

By pressing Alex to say more about his thinking, we tell him and his peers that his ideas merit consideration. We show students that reading isn't just about correctly answering the teacher's questions. We give ourselves a useful window into Alex's thinking that helps us understand more about how he constructs meaning with text. And we offer Alex an opportunity to re-examine his thinking. By talking it out, he may find his way to a conventional understanding of the story (or he may enable us to see the story in a whole new way).

Even when students offer the answers and interpretations we were expecting, we can respond by pressing them to think further. We can even teach students to push one another's thinking by asking one another these kinds of questions.

Imagine 30 students trained to follow up on each other's comments, discussing Corduroy's problem in pairs. The room buzzes with questions like "Why do you think that?" "Can you give an example?" "Would you tell me more about what you're thinking?" In this moment, these students are living literate lives. They are challenging, questioning, and grappling with multiple interpretations of texts. They are rehearsing the kinds of language they will need as they come to write critically about their reading. And they are coming to see themselves and one another as readers whose interpretations are worth considering.

That's time well spent.



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Special Thanks

The Portland Reading Council Board would like to thank and recognize

Trish Merrick

for her outstanding graphic design work on the *Reading Forecaster* newsletter.



Literacy Calendar of Events

ORA Winter Institute

February 10-11, 2012, Crowne Plaza Hotel, Portland

[Learn More](#)

African American Read-In

February 12, 2012, Concordia University, Portland

[Learn more](#)

**ORA Student and Beginning Teacher Conference
featuring Regie Routman**

April 14, 2012, Concordia University, Portland

PCIRA Board Meetings: Portland Reading Council board meetings are open to all members. For more information, contact Barbara Kutasz: bkutasz@pps.net

