

TEXAS VOICES

A NEWSLETTER OF THE TEXAS COUNCIL OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

President's corner

By Markesha Tisby, President

TCTELA: A community of inquiry

I was a quiet child who got lost in books. I did not know then that those books were shaping a voice I would one day use to stand before the Texas State Board of Education and speak on behalf of nearly 400,000 teachers. I just knew that reading made me feel less alone and that the teachers who put the right books in my hands at the right time changed something in me that I am still discovering.

A few things helped me find my voice along the way. A mother who created a literacy-rich home. Teaching young learners. Supporting the educators who teach them. Joining TCTELA. Becoming a mom. Each one reminded me why this work matters and whose future is at stake.



But it was a question, not a moment, that set this particular journey in motion:

What Do Texas Teachers Actually Think?

After the proposed literary works list was presented at the January State Board of Education meeting, TCTELA partnered with a team of university researchers, including past TCTELA presidents Drs. Kim Pinkerton, Margaret Hale, and Diane Miller, to develop and disseminate a statewide survey. The question at the center of everything was not a general opinion or a political position. It was a structured, data-driven, text-by-text response from the people who would ultimately be responsible for teaching the proposed literary works list.

With the survey reaching over 2,600 ELAR educators, during one of the busiest times of the school year, the data told a clear story. Asking the question was only the beginning.

What Happens When a Community Answers Together?

This is where the inquiry became something larger than any one organization. Professional literacy organizations across

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Texas joined the effort. TCTELA board members, past presidents, and members prepared and delivered testimony. Written statements were also submitted. A coalition of voices, united by a shared commitment to Texas students, walked into the chambers of the State Board of Education and said, "We have data, we have expertise, and we are here to collaborate."

On April 7, 2026, I stood at that podium, and I said what I believed:

"There is still time. There is no prize for making this decision quickly. We have time to build something great for our Texas students, and they deserve it."

The Texas Tribune quoted those words, but what moved me most was knowing they were not just mine. They belonged to every teacher who completed the survey, every colleague who submitted testimony, and every organization that said yes when we asked for help.

Data alone does not change policy. People do. A community asking the right questions together is one of the most powerful forces I know.

What Do We Still Need to Know?

Phase Two is now underway, and the question has not changed. It has deepened.

K-5 ELAR teacher work groups, comprised of teachers from across Texas, were formed to provide more detailed, classroom-based feedback to the SBOE before the upcoming vote. We are no longer asking what teachers think in general.

Continued on next page.

President's corner (continued)

We are asking the people closest to the classroom to help us see what the data alone cannot show us.

This is what communities of inquiry do. They do not stop at the first answer. They follow the question wherever it leads, and they bring as many voices along as possible.

The K-5 ELAR teacher work group members displayed an unparalleled amount of commitment to this work during the busiest time of the school year. Between graduations, field trips, field days, awards ceremonies, talent shows, submitting grades, end-of-the-year parties, and more, each grade level team worked synchronously and asynchronously to consider which of their grade level standards could be taught with each proposed title.

Why It Matters

I think about that quiet child sometimes when I am in the middle of this work. I think about what it meant to her that someone put the right book in her hands at the right time. That is what this is really about. Not politics. Not policy for its own sake. It is about the child sitting in a Texas classroom right now, waiting for the right book to find her.

The question driving all of this is simple, even if the answer is not: What does it take to build something truly great for Texas students?

TCTELA has always believed that the work of teaching is best done in collaboration, not isolation. This project is proof of what becomes possible when we live that value out loud and let questions lead the way.

I'm deeply grateful to everyone who has linked arms during this process. Thank you to our research team, our work group facilitators, every work group member, the TCTELA Board, and all the individuals who work quietly behind the scenes to make this work possible.

The inquiry continues. And so do we.

from the blogosphere...

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Texas Voices, published four times per year, is a member of the National Council of Teachers of English Affiliate Information Exchange Agreement.

Why?!

By Eva Goins, Past President

Upon entering my classroom, before state testing anyway, my walls are adorned with mostly motivational posters. I do have the much needed and used anchor chart reminders of our Four-Square and Five-Square visuals that help with ECR and SCR writing, but the most important poster that has been a beacon of hope for me this school year is as minimalist as they come. As large as our workroom poster maker allows, the single word “Why?!” sits in bold red letters encased in a Batman-style fighting-scene bubble centered on a white background. .

It serves as a reminder for my students that whenever we are in a class discussion or they are having table discourse, I want them to channel that nagging two-year-old-brother mentality and keep asking each other why? The goal is that they will be willing to dig deeper into their conversations and not be satisfied with merely arriving at a surface level answer or response.

The “Why?!” phenomenon was hatched last August when I was in a PLC meeting with my grade level teaching partner and assistant principal. We were discussing how students didn’t understand the author’s purpose or really didn’t even care to investigate the importance of knowing why something was written. Sure, they can spew out the PIE-menu trick they learned in elementary school, but an author’s purpose transcends to persuade, to inform, and to entertain.

The “Why?!” inquiry in my classroom this year has allowed us to discuss texts more deeply and uncover the universal truths carried through the author’s carefully chosen words. Together, as evaluators and inquisitors, we can uncover lessons that stay with us long after the final bell.

We recently finished reading the short story *The Chaser* by John Collier. The conversation revolved around what was most dangerous in the story. Students immediately answered that the old man was the most dangerous as the seller of the elixirs. My teacher’s heart sank a little at such a surface-level response. But. Then. A student, who usually sits quietly and only talks when volunteered, looked at the blank space on the wall and said, “I don’t think that is the why.”

I must have looked comical, as I became an animated air-advertisement sock waving my arms in the air screaming, “Yes! Yes! You are right!” Our conversation then unfolded into so many powerful truths: “Real love requires freedom,” “Be careful what you wish for, because getting it might cost more than you expected,” and “We always want what we can’t have.”

As another school year quickly comes to a close, I will safely pack away my “Why?!” sign that is currently hidden behind my bookshelf vaulted into state-testing censorship. It will be the first poster I put up in my classroom next August because, just maybe, I’m onto something.



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Inviting Inquiry and Modeling Metacognition

By Tanesha Yusuf, Vice President-Elect

I was a bundle of nerves the first time I introduced my ninth graders to Socratic Seminar. I had received training through AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination), a program focused on providing students with opportunities to learn through inquiry. I felt confident practicing during professional development sessions, but transferring that learning to my

own classroom was an entirely new experience. Back then, this approach felt transformative compared to classrooms built around lectures, notes, and limited dialogue. I was never comfortable with that style of teaching, mainly because of the teachers that I had in high school. Asking questions was expected. Productive struggle happened even though I didn't know what to call it then. Fast forward years later when I became the one responsible for instruction in my own class, I knew that I wanted to do the same. Teaching is a tremendous responsibility, and I wanted to serve my students well. I was excited but apprehensive. I wanted to create a space where students could gather, read challenging content, and share their perspectives. With a lot of advanced planning and help from my peers, everything turned out just fine. I remember starting with a poem, but I don't recall the title. No matter the genre, students always annotated the selections in advance and jotted down wonderings as they read.

For the group discussions, I provided various question stems to get them started like, "What do you think the author meant by...?" "How does this relate to...?" "Why do you think the author wrote this piece?" "What lines stood out to you and why?" These stems became the catalyst for deep discussions. When given the opportunity to share thoughts, provide evidence, and communicate with peers, students rise to the occasion. One of



my favorite parts of the discussion was watching students react when I refused to give them cues or reveal my thinking. It was difficult, but I didn't share my opinions with them during these times. No matter how badly I wanted to say, "Right on!" or "Do you really think so?" I didn't. It was imperative that they formed their own opinions and listened to others so they could reflect on their own

thinking. Metacognition leads to an awareness of the cognitive process and an analysis of thought. Inquiry and metacognition prepare students for whatever future they seek. They will develop the tools to problem solve. They will have experience making connections. They will be independent thinkers, able to perform at a high level in the postsecondary world, work, or military. Students are able to make better decisions when they are able to process their thinking. Questions that spark deep thinking don't always have to be in a seminar or fancy circle, they can be embedded in lessons in advance or created during inquiry.

When we add inquiry and create a structure for rich discussions, we build a culture where we don't just listen to respond, we listen to understand. I recall the looks on my students' faces when I told them that they would need to also create questions to ask each other. There were looks of confusion and concern. I'm sure that they were thinking, "Shouldn't the teacher be asking the questions?" Not all of the time. Deeper learning and understanding occurs when we all play a role in learning. There may be times when a "sit and get" lesson is necessary, but there are also plenty of times when perspectives followed by evidence and experience are meaningful. The questions create the community. Sometimes questions are better than answers.



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From Compliance to Curiosity: Building a Culture of Inquiry in a High School Classroom

By Elizabeth Moll, TCTELA NCTE Liaison

Walk in. Look up. Glance around the room. Books open. 28 of 30 students are writing. Objective posted. Teacher walking, pacing, conferring with two of 30 students. Timer running. Look down. Record. Walk out. In the state of Texas, the ideal classroom observation looks like this. They've trained for it. They, being the teachers and the students. And this teacher, they will likely score well on their TTESS observation. The students may just as likely pass their state exams. This is compliance. This can even be learning. This is not critical thinking. It is not inquiry.

The reality of a Texas classroom is based on right or wrong thinking—our 'two plus two equals four' or our 'best answers are C.' It is built on teacher validation and task completion, which

with better questions. For example, thinking is limited when I ask, "According to Atticus, what is the one way that all men are created equal?" This answer can be located directly in the text. And there is a place for this type of question in a classroom. But it cannot stop there. The conversation must shift into something deeper. It can transition, shift into something deeper: "How does Atticus's claim about equality challenge the way society actually treats people?" Extend that to asking about a wondering, a noticing, a justification of thinking. Questions open thinking more than answers do.

After the questioning strategies have changed, move students to debate. This is your power move as a teacher. A student

cannot write what they cannot say. Get them talking first. Have them defend ideas; better yet, have them defend an idea that is not their own. They will be moved to consider not only their own ideas and thinking, but that of their peers. In challenging each other, they may decide to evolve their own thinking. The conversation may move from "I just picked this because it sounded right" to "Okay, wait... now I actually kind of believe that cupcakes without frosting COULD be considered a muffin." When they're done, let them write because this thinking will naturally improve their writing.

And when Marcus gets two minutes into writing, begging for a writing life preserver, avoid immediate rescue. Let the silence happen. Let him revise and change.

Let's be honest, it's uncomfortable. They feel uncomfortable, and so do we. It takes time. Maybe Marcus struggles today at two minutes, but tomorrow makes it to three. Struggle is thinking, not failure.

Students are more capable than we assume. They don't need teachers to rescue them; they've come to rescue us. Rescue us from stagnant thinking. Their curiosity increases when our control decreases. When that control is released, even the most reluctant students will engage when the ideas matter, and when they are the ones who control the narrative. In this process, students gain confidence, voice, and ownership. Their inquiry will lead to better discussion, better writing, and *authentic* engagement.

The goal is not for students to have the right answer, but for them to believe their thinking is worth sharing. And once they believe that, they don't just complete school... they begin to engage with it.



we too often mistake for thinking. By the time students reach 9th grade, the path is forged. Students don't question the answers. In fact, they search for the *right* one. The process of doing just that is great for subjects like Algebra or Biology. But English is a language art for a reason. There is not always a right answer. Inquiry feels uncomfortable because students haven't been taught how to do it.

Inquiry is not a free-for-all. What we deem good teaching doesn't get thrown out the window in a world of student-centered inquiry. It's also not just simply asking questions or lacking all structure. Instead, inquiry is structured thinking. It's guided by questioning that starts with a seed and ends with a field of different trees—trees each student grows in an attempt to meet the world with critical, independent thinking. As the instructional leader in the room, you are in the position to plant the seed, to guide the growth—not to limit it, reshape it, or fix it. It starts

Obstacles are needed for authentic inquiry

By Christopher Duke, Digital Coordinator, TCTELA

“Mr. Duke, just tell us the answer.” If I had a dime for every time I heard this plea after asking questions meant to spark inquiry and original thought, I could probably buy a triple burger from Whataburger—because dimes don’t buy much these days. This question has always frustrated me as an educator in the humanities. I usually respond, “Sometimes there is not a ‘correct’ answer to that question.” In a recent lesson I had a student look at me as though I had challenged them to run a mile, “Then why ask a question if it doesn’t have a correct answer?” This floored me. Throughout most of my career, I have taught STAAR-tested subjects, along with some advanced courses, so I am familiar with these kinds of questions, but post-COVID, this has become a far more common question and point of frustration.



It is no secret why the student wanted a simple answer. They wanted to be able to write it down so they could get it right on their assignment and get a good grade. This reaction by the student is, I think, a mix of things including

standardized testing fatigue. We train our students to find answers in multiple choice formats, multi-select, and constructed responses, but have taken away the friction. I intentionally make as much time as possible for authentic inquiry in all of my classes, because I believe it is the best way to learn critical thinking. In the book, *The Obstacle is the Way* by Ryan Holiday, the author explores how obstacles and friction are what lead to better long-term results in a variety of scenarios. I have started to see this as a means to enhance classroom instruction. The book draws heavily from Stoic philosophy, particularly *The Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius, the 2nd century Roman Emperor who was a famed philosopher. Marcus Aurelius’ quote, “The impediment to action advances action. What stands in the way becomes the way.” This quote has become a source of interest in my personal life as well, as I recently have taken to studying the stoics more closely personally, and I have found that this idea, about the obstacle leading to a better result, is truly the way forward in education. Students won’t develop authentic and critical thinking skills without obstacles. First let me define obstacles, as a young student growing up, I had tons of obstacles to learning that students today don’t have. I didn’t have a portable internet connected device until I was 17 with my first personal laptop computer. The obstacle for my learning was access.

I was privileged to have a fantastic school library and an equally amazing librarian. But my access was limited to me getting the books I needed/wanted to read physically. Having access to the internet opened the door for me to read, research, and learn more independently than ever before, but my teachers had given me the tools to explore critically with an eye for

legitimate sources. I wasn’t alone as the rest of the country experienced this kind of growth. The perception that new technology enables access for all learners has merit (at least when they are able to afford it). The very notion of having access to so many learning tools with 1:1 Chromebooks or iPads has had a massive impact on access for students, but that is not the main issue we need to solve in education today.

While access has been improved, we have flattened the expectations in our classrooms to accommodate the STAAR and its mountain of data that comes with it. Unintentionally, we have removed the essential obstacles to learning that made it worth its pursuit for students for hundreds of years. The art of the struggle. Allowing students free rein on Google, Wikipedia, and other research tools was a good way to enable access, but has turned into students now using LLMs to fabricate answers instead of the active pursuit of authentic and critical research. Any experienced teacher knows that the keys to effective research papers are a structured rubric with clear and high expectations, along with monitoring of student progress. With LLMs it sometimes has become comical how fast students try to submit work thinking that they have “created” a great response. This limits their ability to actually authentically struggle to write a great paper. It also is why I have seen the ability of students to argue and have civil discourse in classroom discussions falter in recent years. We have given students access to so many tools, but have not introduced effective obstacles to create more authentic inquiry. I don’t want to make things so difficult for students that they struggle to care about the subject matter, I want them to see that the struggle is a real benefit to the learning process. One of the tools I have used in this pursuit is making them use physical journals as the place where they capture their thoughts. The physical act of writing I find is still the best way for students to make connections to what they are learning. But that is only part of it. The second tool is structured and unstructured civil discourse. By having turns and talks daily in the classroom, the notion of speaking about what they are reading or studying becomes easier, so when we have graded discussions, the expectations can be elevated. The third and most vital, is focusing their research by locking in their devices to a handful of places to ensure they are getting high quality resources. I tend to loosen the reins as the year goes on, but only when I see a class is ready. The reality is outside of school, students will have a hard time making tough decisions if they don’t have a safe place to practice solving them and making mistakes in a learning environment.

We, as educators, must be arbiters of information in our classrooms, and in that role we need to give our students obstacles that require them to exercise their skills in order to produce authentic and critical inquiry.

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Into the Unknown: Learning alongside students through the 90 Second Newbery Competition

By Heather Alambarrio, Vice President of Affiliates

Are you a literacy teacher who enjoys competition? The team I teach with has a passion for board games—you could call us *ludologists*, which is a word they taught me this year. I love when people teach me new words! Our board game sessions can be intense, though we all walk away smiling. It was in one of these sessions that I saw a colleague in a new light—she loves to win. The great thing about her is that she loves even more when learners win! I'll admit, I was overwhelmed when she pitched the idea of having our fourth and fifth grade students submit entries for a filmmaking contest. However, I love a good adventure even more than I love board games. So, I agreed to teach something I'd never taught, never even done!

The 90 Second Newbery competition is a film festival in which young filmmakers create a film to represent a Newbery Award Book or Newbery Honor Book in around 90 seconds. There were rules and guidelines, and there was a lot to learn for novice filmmakers and their teachers. Only one of my teammates had ever been through the process with their students, and they had only attempted to enter the festival once. We created a plan that began with a genre flood, in which students are immersed in a new genre to discover the characteristics of texts in that genre. We did refer to the films as texts, which helped capture students' interest and was also true to the State of Texas's definition of text.

Students took notes of what they saw, what they liked, what they hated, and what piqued their curiosity. I had my students record the title of the book each film represented and the title of the film as well so that they could reference it during their creative process. We created slides to walk through the rules of the contest and the structure of the unit. We shared book talks and trailers for lots of Newbery books to let students choose what they would like to read and if they preferred to work in a group or independently. We also communicated details about the competition with families so that parents would be aware of the reading load and we could ensure learners had access to their selected texts.

This project could easily overwhelm learners, so we set up checkpoints along the way and conferred with groups



regularly. We planned lessons on choosing the most important events of the plot to film, lessons on theme, and even a lesson on adding a twist to the original, which the Newbery Film Festival encourages. Learners read in class and at home. Because motivation was high, few students pushed back about getting their books finished on time. I did find that I needed to remind students who receive accommodations of

ways to tackle a lot of text when there's a deadline. We helped some students find access to audio texts or read-aloud versions. Some of my emerging bilingual students needed to read slowly as the books exposed them to complex vocabulary in English.

Students began crafting costumes and scenery out of household items, craft paper, and SO MUCH TAPE! Our parent volunteers even went and bought more tape of all varieties so that students could continue creating. We had giant spoons for *The Tale of Despereaux* by Kate de Camillo, a basketball hoop for *The Crossover* by Kwame Alexander, and a trip to the cafeteria for scenes from Jerry Craft's *New Kid*.

Script writing was a vital part of the process, and we modeled writing scripts from a familiar text in front of our students. I modeled struggling to get dialogue right and working to make scenes funny with stage directions. Rather than just reading a drama, learners were creating them, so the elements of drama were far from mundane; they were vital to our filmmakers. As in any important creative process, any great competition, there was also drama between creators. Learners had to work through creative differences such as which scenes to cut, who would play a favorite role, twists, navigating a shared digital script with multiple young writers working in the same document at once, and so many sound issues.

This project taught so many skills. There were filmmaking skills such as blocking, sound engineering, camera angles, editing, and *foley art*—sound design in post-production intended to mimic real sounds. As teachers, we saw that the most common issue for young filmmakers was sound quality, so I called in a friend who is a sound engineer and father of a student in my class. He delivered fascinating professional development for us and made recommendations ahead of filming days that proved vital. We enjoyed learning about a

Into the Unknown: Learning alongside students through the 90 Second Newbery Competition (continued)

new and complex topic that we could turn around to teach our students.

The weeks of filming were by far the most intense. There was no studio lot, just our classrooms, hallways, and courtyards for groups to use. Some students chose to film at home, which is permitted in the 90 Second Newbery Film Festival guidelines. There were parents in some films, neighbors, and a few toddlers.

We knew not all filmmakers would be recognized at the awards event in San Antonio, but we celebrated with our own red-carpet event. Filmmakers dressed up and had the chance to watch films created by other groups and leave feedback. Learners voted on awards including Best Sound Quality, Best Acting, and Best Film. A teacher with a knack for 3-D printing even provided miniature Oscar awards to give out. Parent volunteers helped decorate and take pictures during the event. It was the best kind of organized chaos!

My favorite takeaways from this unit were not the technical knowledge that students gained, though I am proud of that. Nor was it that several groups had films recognized at the awards and screening in San Antonio, though that was rewarding.

The best part was watching students devour award-winning texts and had to collaborate to bring it to life for an authentic audience. I love teaching synthesis, and this project required rereading, processing, and creating something new out of what readers had learned. They had to view the text from the lens of the author, the characters, and the eventual audience. This promotes empathy.

Creating a short film requires creativity, grit, revision, and a team, even for those who choose to work independently. Even monologues require a camera crew! Collaborating around an engaging, complex task forced learners to grow in communication, negotiation, and responsibility. This process would have been impossible without a strong team of teachers, students, amazing student volunteers, the authors of fantastic texts for kids, and James Kenedy, whose 90 Second Newbery competition inspires kids around the world.

As a teacher, the adventure of the 90 Second Newbery Film Festival stretched me, frustrated me, overwhelmed me, inspired me, touched my heart, and taught me that embracing the unknown alongside students can be joyful. How will you step *into the unknown* in the coming year?



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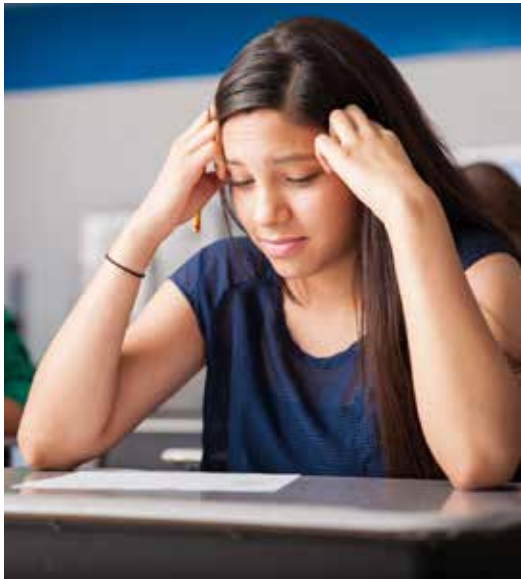
The struggle they deserve

By Janeth Cornejo, Middle School Section Chair

I watched a sixth grader stare at a blank page for eleven minutes.

The prompt asked students to explain how the Great Depression affected *Bud in Bud, Not Buddy*. It was a good question. Students were reading the novel in class and had participated in several discussions over the text. The prompt added to the discussions and asked students to think across history, character, and text all at once.

Around her, the classroom looked like any classroom. A few students were already writing, fast, the way some kids do when they like a prompt and feel sure of themselves. Others were working



slowly, pencil moving and then stopping and then moving again. One was flipping back through the book to find text evidence. Another had his eyes on the ceiling, mouthing words I couldn't hear. And there was my student, the one I had been watching. She hadn't moved her pencil. She sat with it in her

hand and her eyes on the page, and after eleven minutes, she had not written a single word.

Her teacher walked over and did what a lot of us would do. She gave the student a different prompt. Shorter, easier, less demanding. What can you tell me about Bud? The student began to write and finished in less than ten minutes. The teacher looked relieved. I don't know what the student felt.

Here is what I think was happening, though I want to be careful about claims I can't verify. The student seemed to have the thinking. She had read the book. She probably knew, the way her classmates knew, what the Depression did to Bud. But the move from understanding a story to writing analysis in academic English is a long climb. The prompt required the students to organize their thinking. The Depression caused. The Depression made Bud. Because of the Depression, Bud. None of those sentence beginnings were in her toolkit yet, at least none that any teacher had given her.

I see students like this in every class. They sit alongside students who grew up with a strong grasp of English, some bilingual and able to speak multiple languages with ease, some who arrived recently and are still finding their footing in English, and students who are somewhere in between. They bring different languages, different schools, and different experiences with academic English. What they share is that they are doing two jobs at once. They are learning the content, and they are learning the language to talk and write about the content. That second job is invisible to most adults in the building, and it is constant.

When we lower the rigor for students, we are answering the wrong question. The question shouldn't be, "Can they handle this?" The question should be, "What do they need to climb this?"

A ladder is the answer I keep coming back to. And a ladder gets built one rung at a time.

I worked with the teacher to analyze the students' finished product and we realized that a majority of students struggled to write their thoughts into organized writing. So a week after the eleven-minute moment, we started over with the same prompt. Before any writing happened, we guided students to discuss. Students talked about Bud's suitcase. They discussed, in a mix of English and Spanish, that Bud carried his mother's flyers because he didn't have her anymore. We jotted notes on the board in both languages. The next day, we identified students who needed a small word bank. Orphan. Hardship. Survival. Hope. The day after that, sentence frames. The Great Depression caused _____. Because of the Depression, Bud _____. The day after that, students rehearsed ideas out loud with a partner before putting pencil to paper.

This is what productive struggle can look like for emergent bilingual students. It looks like a student wrestling with a real question over real time, with real tools nearby. It looks like long pauses and switching between languages, erasing and starting over, asking for a word. It does not look like a frozen stare. A frozen stare is what happens when the climb is real and there is no ladder. It also doesn't look like the teacher doing the majority of the work and students copying down cookie cutter responses.

This second go around, the rigor hadn't been lowered. It had been climbed with supports along the way. The writing wasn't perfect. The verb tenses wobbled. But students now had organization, a claim, evidence, and an explanation of why it mattered.

That is the thing I think we miss when we hand a student an easier prompt. We don't just lower the rigor. We send a quieter message. That we don't think they can do the hard work. That the struggle isn't for them.

Here is the part I want to sit with, because it is the part that matters most. When we build the ladder instead of swapping the prompt, we send a different message. That we believe they can climb. That we know the climb is hard. That we are going to be there with them while they do it. And the climb itself becomes a gift. The students who wrestle with cause and effect in two languages are not behind their classmates. They are doing a more complex piece of thinking than the prompt asked of any of them, because they are doing it across two linguistic systems at once. With the right tools nearby, that complexity becomes a strength.

That is what a community of inquiry actually feels like for emergent bilingual students. It is not a place where everyone arrives at the same answer in the same way. It is a place where everyone is offered the climb, and offered the help they need to make it.

When we skip the ladder, when we hand a student an easier prompt instead of a stronger scaffold, we don't grow a community of inquiry. We grow a classroom where some students get to think hard, and others get to be quiet.

Every student deserves the struggle. Not the watered-down version we hand them when we mistake their language for their ability.

Beyond STAAR: what counts as learning in Texas classrooms?

By Angeles Munoz Carranza

Each spring, classrooms across Texas shift after STAAR testing. The pace changes, and the intensity of test preparation comes to an end. What follows is often treated as a transition toward the end of the school year, but it can be one of the most meaningful instructional moments we have. This period offers time to pause and think about what we are doing, what students have experienced, and what we still have the opportunity to build. Rather than seeing it as time to wind down, it can be used to refocus instruction in ways that are more responsive to students and more reflective of what we value as learning.

This time invites us to reconsider what we recognize as evidence of learning. For many students, particularly emergent bilinguals, standardized assessments capture only part of what they know. When students are expected to demonstrate understanding only in English, their full thinking is not always visible. The challenge is not a lack of understanding, but the limits of the assessment itself. Research has shown that language proficiency and academic knowledge are often conflated in testing contexts, which can obscure what students know and can do (Gándara & Escamilla, 2017). As teachers, we see this every day. Students make connections, explain ideas, and show insight in ways that do not always translate within the structure of a test.

Learning does not end with a test. In many classrooms, stronger evidence of learning emerges when students can draw on their full linguistic repertoire. From a translanguaging perspective, students use their languages together to make meaning (García & Wei, 2014). When this is reflected in classroom practice, their reasoning becomes clearer and more complete.

A student may read and annotate in English, talk or draft ideas in their home language, and then write a response in English. Another student may use a visual with bilingual labels to organize thinking before writing. These approaches do not lower expectations. There are ways of making student thinking visible while maintaining academic rigor.

These practices align with the English Language Proficiency Standards (ELPS), which emphasize listening, speaking, reading, and writing as interconnected. When students are given multiple ways to demonstrate understanding, teachers gain a more accurate and complete picture of the emergent bilingual's learning. This shift also allows assessment to

reflect the learning process, not just the final product.

During the April Elementary Section meeting with the Texas Council of Teachers of English Language Arts (TCTELA), educators shared how this work is already happening in classrooms, especially in the weeks following testing. One teacher described using writing portfolios, where students revisit earlier work, reflect on their growth, and revise with purpose. Even if portfolios were not implemented earlier in the year, this is a good time to begin. A post-testing portfolio can serve as a bridge to the next grade level, giving students a space to document their progress and carry their work forward. The portfolio provides opportunities to document growth over time and offers a broader view of student learning (Valencia, 1990). Section leaders also shared ideas and examples through the TCTELA Elementary Section resources, which can support implementation in different classroom contexts.

Another example discussed was the use of book clubs. In these classrooms, students had the opportunity to select texts, guide discussions, and build understanding together. This approach shifts the teacher's role and positions students as active participants in their learning. As students ask questions, respond to one another, and make connections, they develop understanding through interaction. These practices reflect dialogic approaches to literacy, where learning develops through shared thinking and conversation.

During the Elementary Section meeting, I also shared practical strategies that can be implemented immediately. One of them is literacy BINGO (see Figure 1), which offers structured choice



Fig. 1: This Literacy BINGO can be used as an end-of-year assessment tool to document student learning beyond standardized testing.

Continued on next page.

Beyond STAAR: what counts as learning in Texas classrooms? (continued)

while maintaining clear expectations. Students might read a poem, listen to an audiobook, or talk with a family member about a story. These types of activities recognize that literacy development is connected to students' home and community experiences (Moll et al., 2006). They also make reading feel more meaningful and less restricted to a single format.

Choice boards provide additional flexibility in how students respond to texts (see Figure 2). Students may choose to write, create visuals, or record spoken responses depending on how they want to express their understanding. This approach reflects a multimodal view of literacy, where meaning can be represented through multiple modes, not only through writing (Kress, 2010). In both literacy BINGO and choice boards, the focus shifts from completing a task to demonstrating understanding in ways that are meaningful and accessible to students.

After STAAR, these instructional moves can help re-engage students in meaningful ways. Replacing a traditional quiz with a reflective journal creates space for students to think about what they learned and how they learned it. Student-led discussions allow students to take ownership of their ideas and learn from one another. These shifts may seem small, but they can have a strong impact on how students experience learning at the end of the year.

As tools such as Artificial intelligence become more common in classrooms, the role of the teacher remains essential. Students need guidance to question information, evaluate sources, and

think critically about what they encounter. These tools can support learning when used intentionally, but they cannot replace the thinking, interaction, and relationships that shape classroom learning.

The weeks after STAAR are not instructional downtime. They are an opportunity to expand what counts as evidence of learning and to center student voice. In Texas classrooms, assessment can move beyond a single measure and reflect the full range of what students know and can do.

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Fig. 2: This choice board is designed as an end-of-year assessment to document student learning through reading, writing, speaking, and reflection.

Inquiring through *Testimonio*: building classroom communities of story and agency

By Gage Jeter and Aimee Myers



In a true community of inquiry, questions are not merely academic exercises; they are the keys to unlocking the rich, diverse narratives present in every Texas classroom. As ELAR educators, recognizing that every student possesses a unique and valuable story is not simply an acknowledgment of difference; it is a cornerstone of effective pedagogy. It is a fundamental cornerstone of effective pedagogy. These narratives often take the form of *testimonio*: oral and literary first-person accounts that blend individual and communal voices, often carrying a clear socio-political purpose (Anzaldúa, 1990; Cruz, 2006; Gutiérrez, 2008).

When we embrace the many languages and lived experiences represented in our schools, we honor the principle that every narrative deserves to be heard. This commitment requires us to actively cultivate inclusive environments where students feel empowered to share their stories through reading, writing, and discussion. *Testimonio* creates a safe space where individuals and communities can confront injustice together (Abril-Gonzalez, 2020; Myers, 2023). By creating these spaces, we help students draw upon prior knowledge, build bridges between home and school, and develop a sense of belonging vital to academic success.

As we build these communities of inquiry, our responsibility is to move beyond traditional, monocultural pedagogical models. By incorporating multilingual texts, leveraging translanguaging

strategies, and designing project-based experiences, we empower students to challenge assumptions and engage in critical dialogue. This approach not only enriches the learning experience but prepares the next generation of readers and writers to navigate an increasingly complex global society.

Along with guest editors Ángeles Muñoz and Esmeralda Cartagena Collazo, we invite you to share your inquiry-driven practices by contributing to the Fall/Winter 2026 issue of *English in Texas*: “*Testimonios in Motion: The Intersections of Literacy, Language, Identity, and ELAR Teaching and Learning*.” We seek manuscripts exploring multilingual strategies, culturally responsive dynamics, and students as agents of change. We also encourage brief contributions for our standing columns:

- Teaching on the Front Lines: Navigating challenges to professional judgment and text access in Texas.
- Emerging Voices: Vital inquiries from beginning Texas ELAR teachers (1-5 years).
- Youth as Knowledge Generators: Championing youth as knowledge creators and activists.

Manuscript Deadline: September 1, 2026. For submission guidelines or questions, please contact the editorial team at EnglishinTexas@twu.edu.

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Wonder and curiosity in middle school reading

By LaWanda Williams, Executive Secretary

In middle school classrooms curiosity fades when students begin to need it the most. Research shows that reading interest frequently declines during early adolescence due to increased curriculum demands and limited autonomy (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Wigfield et al., 2016). During this stage, education shifts from *learning to read* to *reading to learn* in order to construct new meaning. This represents a significant cognitive transition, one that can diminish the curiosity and wonder associated with reading for many students. When success is defined primarily by correct answers or test scores, students may become less willing to take risks, ask questions, or explore uncertainty.

Jennifer Serravallo reminds us that teaching reading is not only about skill development; it is also about helping students enjoy reading. Students are unlikely to engage in ludic reading, reading for pleasure, if they do not experience joy, which in turn negatively affects reading growth and exploration (Serravallo, 2015). For junior high students who are developing their identities and independence, motivation is closely tied to relevance, choice, and meaningful connections. Even small increases in engaged reading can build vocabulary, comprehension, and critical thinking skills (Krashen, 2004).

As teachers, we can make intentional shifts to promote curiosity and wonder in our classrooms. First, students should see that teachers genuinely value reading. Modeling enthusiasm and sharing personal reading experiences can make a powerful impact. Teachers can also spark student interest by beginning lessons with questions rather than answers; this positions reading as a tool for discovery rather than simply a task to complete.

Providing varied reading options is equally important. Offering choices such as audiobooks, graphic novels, song lyrics, traditional novels, and even subtitles allows students to engage in ways that feel meaningful to them. Additionally, students should have opportunities to communicate about what they read through book clubs, partner reading, peer discussions, and reader responses. Curiosity is inherently social; when students engage in collaborative conversations, they build understanding together (Vygotsky, 1978).

Supporting struggling readers is also essential. Celebrating their progress—rather than focusing solely on deficits—helps reduce anxiety and fosters a more positive reading identity. Selecting texts and topics that connect to students' lived experiences further deepens engagement and motivation.

Reading exists far beyond the classroom. Sustaining curiosity and wonder means helping students recognize reading as part of their everyday lives—from electronic billboards and restaurant menus to text messages, video games, and social media. Encouraging independent reading based on personal interests, along with opportunities to make real-world connections and respond in varied formats, reinforces the idea that reading is both relevant and meaningful.

Curiosity is the foundation of deep learning. When educators design questions that honor student interests and allow space for thinking and processing, they create opportunities for students to rediscover the joy of learning. Given the number of students



who continue to read below grade level, it is imperative to nurture curiosity throughout the middle grades. By fostering a classroom culture that values inquiry, student voice, and exploration, teachers can help middle-level learners rediscover both the joy of reading and the power of wondering.

The next step is action. Teachers can begin by incorporating one curiosity-driven strategy into their instruction each week, such as starting lessons with open-ended questions or offering students more choice in reading materials. They can also commit to modeling their own reading lives by sharing what they read and why it matters to them. Creating structured opportunities for student discussion—through book clubs or peer conversations—can further strengthen engagement.

Finally, educators can reflect regularly on their practices, asking whether their classrooms prioritize compliance or curiosity. Small, intentional changes can lead to meaningful shifts in student motivation and achievement. By taking these steps, teachers move beyond teaching reading as a skill and instead cultivate lifelong readers who are curious, engaged, and empowered.

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Beyond the Conference Badge: Rethinking What Counts as Professional Learning

By Lois Barker, President-elect

Let me paint a familiar picture. It's June, and you're scrolling through your inbox when you spot it, an email from your district with the subject line: *Required Professional Development: Register Now*. You click it, sigh, and start scanning for dates that don't conflict with the two weeks of real rest you've been guarding like a dragon hoards gold.

Sound familiar?

Here's the thing: many of us have been conditioned to believe that professional learning only "counts" when it includes a name badge, a continental breakfast, and a certificate of completion. While those structured opportunities matter, they represent only one slice of the professional learning pie. The truth is, some of the most transformative growth we experience as literacy educators happens in spaces we might not even call "professional development." That's a perspective worth examining.

What Is Formal Learning?

In the context of teacher professional development, formal learning refers to organized, structured educational activities typically designed and delivered by institutions or organizations to build professional knowledge and skills (Richter et al., 2011). These experiences typically follow a predetermined curriculum, have defined learning objectives, and often result in certification, credit, or documentation. For ELA teachers, formal learning might include any of the following:

- **Conferences and conventions.** Events such as the NCTE Annual Convention (headed to Philadelphia in November 2026) or our beloved TCTELA Annual Conference offer curated sessions led by researchers, authors, and practitioners in the field. These events provide rich opportunities to hear keynote speakers, attend workshops, and engage with the latest scholarship in literacy education.
- **District-sponsored professional development.** These sessions are arranged by your campus or district and often focus on instructional priorities such as curriculum implementation, data analysis, or new assessment frameworks. They're structured, scheduled, and typically mandatory.
- **Graduate coursework and advanced certifications.** Pursuing a master's degree, earning a reading specialist certification, and completing endorsement programs through a university are among the most intensive forms of formal learning.

- **Webinars and online courses from recognized organizations.** Groups such as NCTE, ASCD, and edWeb.net offer live and on-demand professional learning with continuing education certificates. These programs carry institutional backing and often align with recertification requirements.



The hallmark of formal learning is its intentional design: someone planned the experience, set the objectives, and structured it to support participant learning (Shamir-Inbal et al., 2025). It is typically top-down, organized by entities outside the individual teacher's immediate control.

What Is Informal Learning?

Informal learning, by contrast, is self-directed, often spontaneous, and rooted in teachers' everyday classroom

experiences. (Kaulens, 2019). It doesn't come with a syllabus, and there's no certificate waiting at the end, yet it's no less powerful. As Wohlfahrt (2018, as cited in Kaulens, 2019) notes, one of the biggest limitations of formal professional development is that the content teachers study is often disconnected from their specific classroom contexts and real learning needs. Informal learning fills that gap by connecting what teachers experience daily to their professional growth. For ELA educators, informal learning takes many forms:

- **Social media engagement and online communities.** If you've ever scrolled through #DisruptTexts, #TeachLivingPoets, #BookChat, or #ELAchat and walked away with a new mentor text idea or a fresh take on a canonical novel, congratulations. You were learning. As Greenhalgh and Koehler (2017) document, teacher-driven hashtag communities on social media serve as "just-in-time" professional development, offering flexible, responsive support that traditional PD models often cannot.
- **Professional reading and podcasts.** Picking up a copy of Penny Kittle and Kelly Gallagher's *180 Days* over the summer, listening to the NCTE podcast, or reading articles in *English in Texas* are all meaningful informal learning experiences.
- **Collegial conversations and self-organized groups.** Hallway conversations about how a lesson went, group texts with your department about a student's essay, and the book study your ELA team organized on your own initiative are all forms of collaborative informal learning. Greany et al. (as cited in Greany & Kucera, 2025) found that

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Beyond the Conference Badge: Rethinking What Counts as Professional Learning (continued)

teachers' informal learning activities range from staffroom conversations and engagement with educational reading, including through social media, to more structured routines such as collaborative lesson planning and joint moderation of student work.

- **Classroom experimentation and reflection.** Every time you try a new writing workshop model, run a fishbowl discussion, or revise your independent reading program based on what you noticed students doing last semester, you are engaging in informal, reflective learning.

Research by Trust et al. (2014, as cited in ERIC) found that teachers' professional learning extends well beyond what school leaders typically plan for. In addition to district-initiated formal PD, teachers engage in self-initiated informal collaboration with colleagues and pursue independent learning. When districts support only formal channels, teachers lose access to the collective knowledge generated by informal and independent efforts. Neither formal nor informal learning is inherently superior. They serve complementary purposes, and the most well-rounded educators draw from both wells.

What Formal Learning Offers

Formal learning offers structure, credentialing, and access to vetted research and expert-led instruction. When you attend a TCTELA or NCTE session, you benefit from a program committee's curation, which has reviewed proposals for quality and relevance. District PD often aligns with campus goals and state standards, such as the TEKS. Graduate programs provide depth of study and theoretical grounding that most informal settings cannot match. For teachers seeking career advancement, leadership opportunities, or salary increases tied to additional credentials, formal learning is essential.

What Informal Learning Offers

Informal learning offers immediacy, relevance, and agency. When you're grappling with how to teach argumentative writing to a class struggling with claims and evidence, you don't need to wait for a conference session next February; you need an answer now. That's where a quick search of an online teacher community, a colleague's recommendation, or a professional blog post can be invaluable. Informal learning also empowers teachers to direct their own growth. You choose what to read, whom to follow, which conversations to join, and where to invest your time. That sense of autonomy over one's learning is a powerful motivator (Kaulens, 2019).

The Access and Equity Factor

This is where the balance conversation gets real. Let's be honest about what it takes to engage in formal professional development:

- **Cost.** Conference registration fees, travel, hotel stays, and meals add up quickly. The 2026 NCTE Annual Convention offers discounted member pricing, but even with that, attending a national conference can cost hundreds of dollars—and not every teacher or district has that budget.
- **Time.** Graduate programs require years of sustained commitment. Even multi-day conferences demand time away from the classroom, family, and other responsibilities. For teachers juggling second jobs, caregiving, or other commitments, setting aside days for a workshop is not always feasible.

- **Access.** Not every teacher lives near a major conference hub. Rural educators, in particular, may face significant barriers to attending in-person events. And while virtual options have expanded since 2020, they are not universally available or equally engaging.

Informal learning helps bridge these gaps. It is often free, flexible, and available wherever you have an internet connection, or even just a colleague down the hall. A robust personal learning network (PLN) on social media can cost little more than your attention and willingness to engage. A book study with your team costs the price of a paperback and a few after-school snacks. This doesn't mean informal learning should replace formal professional development. It means we need to value both and recognize that a teacher who spends their summer reading professional texts, participating in online discussions, and redesigning their curriculum is engaging in serious professional learning, even without a certificate to show for it.

Free and Low-Cost Learning Opportunities This Summer and Fall

To put this philosophy into practice, here are several free and low-cost opportunities to explore right now:

edWeb.net

If you haven't discovered edWeb yet, this is your sign. edWeb.net is an award-winning, free professional learning network with a community of more than one million educators. It hosts about 400 new webinars each year and maintains an on-demand library of more than 4,000 archived sessions covering literacy, assessment, AI in education, student well-being, and much more. Best of all, edWeb provides continuing education certificates accepted for PD hours and teacher re-licensure in 42 states, including Texas. You can join professional learning communities on edWeb organized by topic, grade level, or interest area—and everything is self-paced (edWeb.net, n.d.).

Facing History & Ourselves

Facing History & Ourselves offers in-person and online summer professional development workshops designed for ELA and social studies educators. Their seminars integrate equity-centered pedagogy, identity exploration, and literary analysis in ways that are immediately applicable to the secondary ELA classroom. Many of their on-demand webinars are free and qualify for PD credit (Facing History & Ourselves, 2026).

NCTE Member Resources and Events

NCTE continues to offer valuable learning throughout the year, not just at the annual convention. Their current webinar partnership with United Way of New York City features a four-part series on equity, literacy, and technology for middle- and high school English teachers. NCTE also hosts Text and Tech: Reading Together, a book club series co-produced with the Sora reading platform. Many of these events are free or included with membership (NCTE, 2026). Additionally, keep an eye out for the 2026 Tyrolia Literacy Institute, a writing retreat co-hosted with NCTE that features small-group work on craft and teaching.

National Writing Project Summer Institutes

The National Writing Project (NWP) operates more than 150 sites nationwide, and many host free summer institutes or offer stipends to participating teachers. These institutes follow

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Beyond the Conference Badge: Rethinking What Counts as Professional Learning (continued)

a teachers-teaching-teachers model and emphasize both writing craft development and writing instruction pedagogy. In Texas, the National Writing Project of Northeast Texas at East Texas A&M University is hosting a two-week virtual summer institute, with continued monthly participation throughout the 2026–2027 school year. If there is no site near you, many NWP programs now offer hybrid or fully virtual participation (National Writing Project, 2026).

Learning for Justice

Learning for Justice (formerly Teaching Tolerance) offers free, self-paced, on-demand webinars covering topics such as culturally responsive teaching, supporting immigrant students and families, and trauma-responsive education. Their resources are grounded in social justice and are especially valuable for ELA teachers seeking to build more inclusive classroom communities (Learning for Justice, n.d.).

Coursera and edX

Both Coursera and edX offer free courses from institutions such as Harvard, Stanford, and MIT on topics including curriculum development, educational technology, and the science of learning. While certificates of completion may require a fee, the course content itself is typically available at no cost (Class Central, 2026).

Build Your Own: The Personal Learning Network

Finally, don't underestimate the power of curating your own learning experiences through a personal learning network (PLN). Follow ELA-focused hashtags such as #DisruptTexts, #TeachLivingPoets, #BookChat, or #ELAchat. Join Facebook groups like Teachers Ask Teachers or Middle School Teachers Rock. Subscribe to educational blogs and newsletters. Start or join a book study with colleagues. As Lalande (as cited in TeachThought, 2025) defines it, a PLN is "the group of people that you connect with to learn their ideas, their questions, their reflections, and their references." The online, global, and personal nature of a PLN is what makes it special—and building one is completely free.

A Call to Broaden Our Definition

As TCTELA members, we already believe in the power of a professional community. We attend conferences, contribute to English in Texas and Texas Voices, serve on committees, and mentor the next generation of ELA educators. This summer, I want to challenge all of us to broaden our definition of what counts as professional learning. Read the book on your nightstand. Join that online discussion. Try something new in your lesson plans. Talk to a colleague about what's working and what isn't. Document your learning, even informally, in a journal or a notes app—so you can see how far you've come by August. Professional growth doesn't begin and end with a conference badge. It lives in every conversation, every book, and every moment of reflection that makes us better for our students. So this summer, learn formally. Learn informally. Learn on purpose and learn by accident. Just keep learning.

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Planning reading: Text Selection and Eyes on Text Times

By Shona Rose, PhD; Recording Secretary for TCTELA

Yesterday, I washed an heirloom quilt that had been under the bed in the basement for about 30 years. The pieces from some of the more ancient cloths disintegrated and the rough cotton batting escaped into the washing machine and refused to go down the drain. For some reason, the washing machine didn't have a cleanout door. Unfortunately, the drain was craggy cast iron well past smooth and well corroded from the hard Panhandle water and muck from the daily drain. You could say, the drain lacked fluency. It couldn't take the flood of water.

Text is kinda like the water not flowing through my washing machine drain. It takes time for readers to process a large volume of text. When we plan reading lists—like the one currently being debated at the State Board of Education—it's important to think about how long it actually takes students to read all those words. And when we plan instruction—regardless of curriculum—understanding how long it takes to pass eyeballs over text and let the mind hear the words...well, that kind of knowledge is invaluable.

Hasbrouck and Tindal have researched how long it takes folks to read stuff aloud: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED594994.pdf>

Most people read faster silently, but these norms give us a general picture of how long it takes to read things for each grade level. Once you figure out how many words a particular text has, you can use the fluency norms to see how long it would take a kid to read the thing. When TEA proposed their list to the SBOE in January, Heather Cato and I took the list and calculated how long it would take to simply have kids read the texts. We also

compared the Bluebonnet/Amplify oral reading times. Here's the data: <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1jfvTcj4ACujb1Fg2bcWbmGfODYYYakr-z?usp=sharing>



If you are reading aloud to kids, most folks say that comprehensible input is between 100 and 120 words per minute.

Once you have the time settled, you have a good idea about how much class time—minutes, days, weeks, months—a particular text will take to read. Invaluable for communicating expectations to all kinds of folks from administrators to those making the laws about book lists. Do we truly have enough time for students to read the required texts? Time to check the fluency plumbing

and instructional materials to see if it's possible.

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- Hasbrouck, J., & Tindal, G. A. (2006). Oral reading fluency norms: A valuable assessment tool for reading teachers. *The Reading Teacher*, 59(7), 636–644. <https://doi.org/10.1598/RT.59.7.3>
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English in Texas, Vol.56.2—Fall/Winter 2026

Theme: Testimonios in Motion: The Intersections of Literacy, Language, Identity, and ELAR Teaching and Learning

Manuscript Deadline: September 1, 2026

In today's diverse educational landscape, recognizing that every student possesses a unique and valuable story is not merely an acknowledgment of individual difference; it is a fundamental cornerstone of effective pedagogy, particularly within English Language Arts and Reading (ELAR). These unique and valuable stories can take the form of testimonio: oral and literary first-person accounts blending individual and communal voices, often with a clear socio-political purpose (Anzaldúa, 1990; Cruz, 2006; Gutiérrez, 2008). When we embrace the myriad of languages, cultural backgrounds, and lived experiences represented within our classrooms, we honor the principle that every narrative deserves to be heard and understood. This commitment extends beyond simple tolerance, requiring educators to actively cultivate inclusive environments where students feel empowered to share their stories through reading, writing, and discussion.

Testimonio creates a safe space where people confront injustice both as an individual and as a community (Abril-Gonzalez, 2020; Myers, 2023). Creating space for these narratives allows ELAR educators to tap into students' prior knowledge, build bridges between home and school, and foster a sense of belonging that is essential for academic success and social-emotional well-being. Furthermore, when students see their own stories reflected in the literature they read and the writing they produce, they are more likely to develop a strong sense of self-identity and a belief in their own potential as learners, enhancing their engagement with the curriculum.

As educators, it is our responsibility to adapt our instructional approaches to ensure that all voices are not only heard but also valued and integrated into the learning process in ELAR contexts. This means moving beyond traditional, often monocultural, pedagogical models to embrace culturally responsive teaching practices that recognize and affirm the diverse backgrounds of our students. In the realm of ELAR, such practices might include incorporating multilingual texts and resources that reflect the students' cultural heritage, utilizing translanguaging strategies that leverage their full linguistic repertoires, and designing project-based learning experiences that allow students to explore topics relevant to their own lives and communities through creative writing, literature circles, and critical analysis. By creating opportunities for students to share their perspectives, challenge assumptions, and engage in critical dialogue about texts, we can foster empathy, promote social justice, and empower them to become active agents of change in their own lives and in the world around them. This approach not only enriches the learning experience for all students but also prepares them to navigate an increasingly interconnected and complex global society, making it especially relevant for preservice and practicing ELAR teachers who seek to inspire the next generation of readers and writers.

We welcome submissions on conceptual, reflective, pedagogical, research-based, or theoretical manuscripts that explore a diverse range of contributions, including but not limited to:

- Reflections on multilingual instructional strategies and their impact on literacy teaching and learning
- Personal narratives illustrating the power of story in enhancing literacy development
- Insights into culturally responsive teaching practices and their relevance to classroom dynamics
- Critical perspectives on literacy education, social justice themes, and students as agents of change
- Strategies for differentiated instruction to support diverse literacy learners
- Approaches to authentic assessment for storytelling and/or collaborative writing
- Community-building practices that foster a love for reading, writing, and other literacies
- Approaches to fostering biliteracy and supporting multilingual learners, including strategies for educators who don't speak their students' home languages
- Digital and multimodal literacies: how students compose testimonios across platforms and media
- Family and community literacies: partnering with families as co-educators and honoring out-of-school literacy practices

FOCUS ON THE THEME: We invite manuscripts that are conceptual, reflective, pedagogical, research-based, or theoretical as they relate to the theme of literacy and identity in ELAR education.

INQUIRIES AND INNOVATIONS: We also welcome educational research relevant to the work of ELAR educators, whether theme-dependent or generally applicable to the ELAR community.

STANDING COLUMNS:

Brief contributions in the form of standing columns are encouraged. These can center on topics of interest that do not necessarily align with the issue's theme.

- **Teaching on the Front Lines:** Texas ELAR teachers are facing unprecedented challenges to their professional judgment and students' access to diverse texts. This column will share stories of navigating censorship in Texas schools, highlighting strategies for advocacy, collaboration, and text selection. We seek to empower educators to build resilient systems that ensure all Texas students can engage with a wide range of voices and stories.
- **Emerging Voices:** This column will highlight the vital inquiries of beginning Texas ELAR teachers (preservice or inservice with 1-5 years of experience) as they navigate the early stages of their professional journeys. Inspired by the "Future Is Now" roundtable sessions at NCTE, we provide a platform for emerging scholars to share their questions, explorations, and insights.
- **Youth as Knowledge Generators:** This column will champion the power of youth as knowledge creators, challenging the traditional research paper and exploring how young people's original research and creative scholarship can inform public policies and activism in Texas. We seek to publish accounts of innovative youth-led projects conducted in schools and communities across the state.

Submission Guidelines: For detailed manuscript submission guidelines, please scroll down to the Submission Guidelines section. For any questions, feel free to contact the editorial team at englishintexas@twu.edu.

Send manuscripts and inquiries regarding publication to: TCTELA Headquarters/English in Texas • 919 Congress Avenue, Suite 1400 • Austin, Texas 78701 • 512.617.3200

Email: englishintexas@twu.edu (subject line: "English in Texas Submission or Query")

We look forward to your contributions!

Lead Editors: Dr. Gage Jeter & Dr. Aimée Myers

References

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