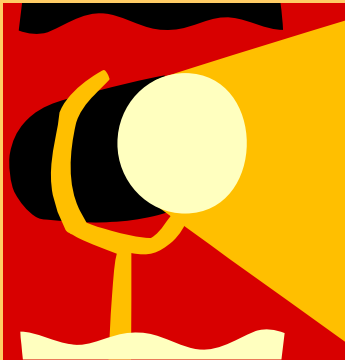


# Spotlight on Literacy

March 2009  
Volume 1—Issue 3



## IMPORTANT DATES

- 3-2 thru 3-5 MS District Reading Assessment Window
- 3-3 Argumentative Paper PLC
- 3-3 Scoring Writing, 7th Grade
- 3-5 Scoring Writing, 8th Grade
- 3-4 thru 3-13 Read 180 SRI Testing Window
- 3-10 Gallagher Class
- 3-16 thru 3-19 HS WASL
- 3-24 Gallagher Class
- 4-7 READ180 PLC

## Instructional Literacy Facilitators

Eric Bush- Jackson HS	x7195
Patricia Burke-Evergreen MS	x5763
Pat Collins-North MS	x4907
Cindy Foster-Eisenhower MS	x7518
Tasha Lewis-Center	x4071
Tessa O'Connor-Everett HS	x4437
Deb Ritchhart-HWD MS	x6483
Monte Scholz-Cascade HS	x6107
Barbara Tibbits-Gateway MS	x6712

## Curriculum Specialists

Loretta Comfort-Center	x4064
Jeanne Willard-Center	x4053

## Beyond The Book Report

*Heatherwood's 7th Grade Block Teachers and Librarian Lead The Way*

Looking for a new more effective approach for students to reflect and share their independent reading, the 7<sup>th</sup> grade block teachers were inspired by Nancie Atwell's use of book reviews outlined in *Lessons That Change Writers*. Atwell sums up why book reviews might be a good way to get kids thinking and writing about what they have read. "I teach book reviews first, because I want my students to begin to write in a formal, crafted way about the literature they're reading. This is good preparation for the critical essays they'll be required to write in high school and for the book reviews I hope they will read in the *New York Times Book Review* for all the Sundays of the rest of their lives."

The teacher-librarian and the 7<sup>th</sup> grade team at Heatherwood Middle School embraced Nancie Atwell's words and set out to make these reviews happen school wide. They began by creating a committee that had a representative from all three grade levels. Their objective was to go beyond the book report and create a community



of readers who enjoyed sharing their books. Kim Lien, a 7<sup>th</sup> grade block teacher, created eight days of lessons that focused on the following concepts:

- How is a book review different than a book report?
- What are features of good book reviews?



From left to right: Kim Lien, Sarah Pewitt, Mary Johnson, Teresa Allnoch (Librarian), and Cathy Schuyler

- How do you write an effective book review?
- What do you look for in a good book?
- Why do you love a particular book and why would you recommend it to others?
- Why is it important to present your book effectively?
- How do you present your book effectively?
- How can we find good books to read?

Another exciting aspect of implementing book reviews is that it offers the perfect avenue for connecting reading and writing. When writing a book review the writing process is extensively used by the students.

One teacher was quoted as saying, "The students saw themselves as real writers with a real purpose. They saw the effect that their writing had on others. They told me they felt empowered and successful."

Another teacher said, "The students learn from other readers and writers and they start to emulate their peers because they write and read in a classroom where they have plenty of time to do both, where they get to choose what they read, and where they receive plenty of feedback on their book reviews."

A student also remarked on the reading-writing connection by stating, "I liked the process of sharing book reviews because you can see how people read and write and improve on writing."

(Book Reviews continued on page 2)

(Book Reviews continued from pg. 1)

Here are other 7<sup>th</sup> grade student reflections regarding the book review process. . .

*"It helped that we shared our book reviews with the class because I actually found a really great book, read it, and now it's one of my favorite books!"*

*"I liked writing the book reviews. After reading a few, I found many books to read. It was hard at first, but after a while, it became easy. And when I shared mine, people wanted to read my book."*

*"I liked book reviews because they made me feel alive!"*

*"I actually liked writing the book review because it expands our thinking about the book. Not just to read it, but to enjoy it."*

*"What I liked was to have the opportunity to be able to look on-line and see all the good books recommended by students in our school."*

To see some examples of student book reviews go to the [Heatherwood Library web page](#); click on Destiny Book Search, and then type in a book title. Click on the title of the book and then you will see the link to the student reviews. A good title to try is [Breaking Dawn](#) by Stephanie Meyer.

"Reading in the Zone" and book reviews are an integral part of effective independent reading in the classroom. If you missed our article about "Reading in the Zone", check out the December *Spotlight On Literacy* issue on the district website at: <http://www.everett.k12.wa.us/literacy/Secondary%20Reading>



## Professional Learning Community Updates

### Collection of Evidence

Results for the COE binders are scheduled to be available April 24<sup>th</sup>. Due to this, we cancelled our February COE PLC date and moved it to May to address augmentation issues. The meeting dates for COE PLCs for the rest of the year are: March 9, May 4 (unless the binders are still at OSPI), and June 1. These meetings will be at Cascade High School's library from 3-5p. Please mark your calendars and we will see you then.

### Argumentative Paper PLC

The collaboration among those who are teaching Argumentative Paper has been phenomenal this year. At the next PLC on March 3, we will look at student papers that used literature as a basis for their argument. After analyzing the various approaches employed, we will score a couple of these papers with our new rubric. This will give us all an opportunity to practice and do a bit of "calibration." Teacher-librarian Barbara Stolzenburg also will share some effective research strategies. The next PLC is March 3 from 3:00-5:00 at Cascade High School Library.



## Big Six Research Skills

*Use these to help you plan mini lessons or as your guideline for student research writing.*

### #1 Task Definition—What do I need to do?

- Define the problem
- Identify the information needed

### #2 Information Seeking Strategies—What can I use to find what I need?

- Brainstorm all possible resources
- Select the best resources

### #3 Location and Access - Where can I use to find what I need?

- Locate sources

- Find information within the sources

### #4 Use of Information—What information can I use?

- Engage with the resources—read, hear, view and touch

### #5 Synthesis—How can I put my information together?

- Organize information from multiple sources present results

### #6 Evaluation—How will I know if I did well?

- Judge the results (effectiveness)



# Loving Non-Fiction in a Fiction-Loving World: Reading and Writing History

By Allison Larsen, Everett School District's Humanities Curriculum Specialist

Recently, I found myself having a conversation with some good friends about books we have read. My friends talked about great books such as *The Secret Life of Bees* by Sue Monk Kidd and *Prodigal Summer* by Barbara Kingsolver. Then they asked me what I had read recently. Somewhat hesitantly, I replied *Empire of Wealth: The Epic History of American Economic Power*. As you can imagine, this was met with a silent pause and then the question, "Do you like non-fiction?"

We only need to read books like *Salt: A World History* by Mark Kurlansky, *Seabiscuit: An American Legend* by Laura Hillenbrand, or any one of Doris Kearns Goodwin books to see how engaging historical non-fiction can be. Reading and writing history can engage students to study history in-depth and improve their critical thinking skills. It is vital that we teach students how to read and write about history.

## Importance of Vocabulary

In order to increase student success in history, we must ensure students are learning content specific vocabulary. One important step in teaching this vocabulary is to pre-teach key words before each unit. Students should not only be finding and memorizing definitions, but restating definitions in their own words and creating their own pictures depicting key vocabulary words before reading historical content. Students should also be using these key vocabulary words when writing about historical events, both in short answer and extended response situations.

## Asking Good Questions

When students are reading history, we must encourage them to ask questions, identify cause and effect, and recognize historical themes. Asking good questions about what we read is a learned skill, not intuition. Effective questions go beyond asking students to simply recall. They create curiosity about what might happen next, they create discussion, and they engage us in debate. Encourage students to use sticky notes when reading to flag items about which they have questions, and encourage them to discuss and debate with each other.

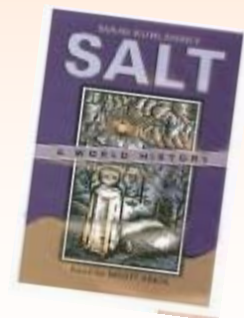
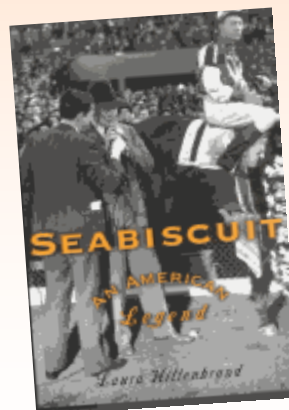
## Writing Deepens Understanding

We should be asking students to be young historians making sense of multiple causes and effects and recognizing historical themes that define human interaction throughout time. Through writing, students are given the opportunity to analyze historical events at a depth that helps them further understand cause and effect and historical themes. When students write about history, they should not stop at simply reporting facts. They should be making comparisons between historical events, looking for connections, empathizing, interpreting and drawing conclusions. Their writing should encourage other students to ask questions and debate.

Reading and writing fiction can take us to amazing, imaginary worlds and give insight into great characters and, therefore, ourselves. But I love non-fiction...the discussion, the debate, and the analysis of real world events. Reading and writing history can change the world for us and our students.

For further information regarding integrating reading and writing into your instruction, Allison recommends.....

- *How Students Learn: History in the Classroom* by Donovan and Bransford, NRC (2005)
- *Teaching Reading in the Social Studies* by Jane K. Doty (2003)
- [www.readingquest.org](http://www.readingquest.org)





## High School Literacy Review

One of the needs that surfaced during the High School Literacy Leaders meetings over the past two years is the issue of number and quality of novels and nonfiction text available in our four high schools. Department heads, team leaders and IFLs expressed concern that books are dwindling, and, as a result, students spend excessive time reading in class, thus eliminating chunks of essential teaching time. Surfacing, too, was the desire for a fresh look at the novels we have been using. Do we want to consider adding a few more contemporary texts?

With this end in mind, we began our High School Literacy Review in earnest this school year. Representatives from each grade level at each high school have come together several times to investigate best practices in literature and reading, analyze the texts we presently have on our shelves, and research both contemporary and traditional titles. The Lit Review team members are in the process of reading and writing reviews of each of the texts brought forward by grade-level teams for consideration. The books that we are considering are listed below:

**Grade 9- Multicultural Literature:** *Of Mice and Men* , *Romeo and Juliet* , *Life of Pi* , *On the Edge of Survival*, *Voices of the Holocaust*, *The Secret Life of Bees*, *Monster*, *Ender 's Game* , *Who am I?*

**Grade 10 -World Literature:** *Things Fall Apart* , *Kaffir Boy* , *Long Way Gone*, *Night*, *Monkey*, *Red Azalea*, *Last Empress* , *House of Spirits*, *Siddhartha*

**Grade 11 - American Literature:** *Catcher in the Rye*, *The Great Gatsby*, *The Crucible*, *Into the Wild* , *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian*, *Nickel and Dimed*, *Snow Falling on Cedars*, *Color Purple*, *Black Boy*, *Huck Finn*, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*

Building reps have been holding grade-level meetings to keep English teachers informed and to request feedback. Hopefully, each high school teacher has been able to attend a meeting and to provide input. When the team meets again in the middle of March, the task will be to come to consensus on three or four core texts at each grade level that will be read by students at all the buildings. By instituting some common texts across district, we will be able to provide our students common experiences with literature. Using some of the same books, we will also have the opportunity to collaborate on lesson planning.

Best practices tell us that students should be reading a variety of genres and numerous books during the school year. Teachers will be expected to use three of the four core texts each year in addition to anthologies and other novels used at the building level. Our hope is to work together as grade-level teams to pool existing lessons and create new ones, if appropriate, for each of the adopted texts. We will have a Moodle site so that English teachers can communicate electronically across district; this will be a great tool to facilitate sharing.

The Lit Review Team has devoted many hours to this endeavor so that our students will be reading quality literature that challenges their thinking. Equally important is our desire to select rich literature that teachers will enjoy instructing. The Lit Review Team is energized at the prospect of new materials and curriculum; we hope all teachers will be equally excited. If you have any questions or comments, please get in touch with your building representative ( see below ) , IFL or Loretta Comfort.

**Team Members:** Michelle Crews, Ruth Hunter, Sue Johnson, Bev Nyberg, Carole Woods, Margie Burr, Chani Craig, Victoria Johnson, Kathy McCormack, Kristin Price, Jen Weber, Nick Anderson, Judy Baker, Keith Gerhard, Steve Johnson, Jared Kink, Torri McEntire, Robin McCleave, Bruce Overstreet, Deb Kalina, Neelz Gharavi, Ed Bowers.