

# TEACHER, WRITER, RESEARCHER

## Director's Corner

*CWP-Storrs has busy, productive fall semester*



Doug Kaufman, Elizabeth Simison, Jason Courtmanche, and Amanda Lister

by Jason Courtmanche (SI 99)

Several teachers from the CWP-Storrs and the other Connecticut Writing Project sites joined the more than 8,000 teachers who attended this year's NWP Annual Meeting and NCTE Annual Convention, capping off a productive fall semester.

Director Jason Courtmanche was joined by Associate Professor Doug Kaufman of the Neag School of Education, Elizabeth Simison (SI 14) of Bacon Academy in Colchester, and Amanda Lister (SI 08) of

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## Fall 2014

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*Where teachers come to learn to be better writers and better teachers of writing.*

## Two TCs Present Research at International Conference

Amy Nocton (SI 14) and Colette Bennett (Fairfield SI 12) worked together to disseminate their research far and wide.

by Amy Nocton (SI 14)

The "International Conference: ICT for Language Learning" celebrated its 7th convention this year with **223 attendees** from

over **54 countries**. There were 11 thematic areas and 132 papers presented. 72% of the people were from universities and 12% from primary or secondary schools.

The conference took place in English, and

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## New TCs Present Research on Cognition and Poetic Metaphor

by Danielle Pieratti (SI 14)

On October 27th, Amy Nocton and I had the pleasure of presenting our Summer Institute research project, entitled "I Don't Get It: Finding Lost Metaphors in Translation," at the annual conference of the Connecticut Council of Language Teachers (COLT).

Amy and I met and collaborated as 2014 Aetna Fellows of the Connecticut Writing Project at UConn. When we started working together, we discovered that, despite coming from different disciplines—Amy is a high school World Languages teacher and I teach high school English—we shared an interest in poetry and translation. Our final project presented our findings on the cognitive benefits of close reading and translating poetic metaphor, and built heavily on our attempts to fit poetry into our own Common-Core-aligned curricula.

The opportunity to share our work was exciting for me, since I had never presented at a conference before. It was also enlightening; as an English teacher, working with Amy has given me a unique opportunity to see the rich, text-driven experience she creates for her language students, and attending a World Languages conference reinforced the valuable perspective I gained from understanding the ways our

teaching practices overlap.

Presenting at COLT also handed me a first taste of the personal and professional rewards of participating in a Summer Institute. In particular, it bolstered my new sense of belonging to a welcoming community of teacher-writers—educational professionals that fit the definition of what a November forum article in *Research in the Teaching of English* calls not just "better teachers, but also knowledge-makers and advocates."

The article, "Teacher-Writers, Then, Now, and Next," reviews the development of the teacher-writer over the last four decades, and promotes a current "stance of agency, advocacy, and intellectualism," which "views writing as transformative, reaffirms teaching as professional practice, and positions teacher-writers as agents who can resist troubling current educational reform efforts."

With our presentation at COLT, Amy and I took a modest step towards agency by advocating for more poetry in the Common Core classroom, a task initiated by a small but vocal group of poetry enthusiasts who have expressed concerns over its dwindling emphasis in CCSS-aligned curricula. But for me, participating in the Writing Project has also sparked a

larger, more lasting transformation. It has helped me envision teaching as a collaborative culture, one in which, with our research, reflection, knowledge-making, and writing we empower not only our students, but our colleagues and ourselves as well.

\* \* \*

CWP-Storrs held Teacher-as-Writer workshops on Saturday, October 18th and Saturday, November 22nd on the UConn campus.

Teacher-as-Writer is a monthly gathering for teacher-writers who wish to devote time to their writing and gain feedback from other writers. Our informal meetings usually last around two hours and involve writing time with optional prompts and opportunities to reflect on and share our work.

We are looking for new members from the TC community and beyond, and hope to schedule a writers' retreat some time in the spring. Join us for our next meeting in January!

Contact Writing Programs Leader Danielle Pieratti at [dpieratti@swindsor.k12.ct.us](mailto:dpieratti@swindsor.k12.ct.us) for details.

*Danielle Pieratti teaches English at South Windsor High School. She holds an MFA in Creative Writing and has published her poetry in many journals, including the Paris Review.*

## TCs Present Research in Florence

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it was fascinating to listen to everyone use English as his or her means of communication during the various sessions.

Colette Bennett and I presented in the second session on Thursday, November 13th. Our paper was very well received. We had approximately forty people at our presentation, and numerous individuals approached us afterward for further information.

Additionally, my students and I have seen increased traffic on our blog, which is very exciting for us. Colette and I shared with the audience how my students benefit from a writing workshop format in the classroom to prepare their blog in both Spanish and English. We spoke about how the Common Core standards are encouraging teachers to broaden audiences

for their students and how blogging is an excellent outlet for expanding readership of students' work.

I have had several participants contact me directly from the Czech Republic, Belgium, Lithuania, and the Netherlands with regard to having their students start following our blog and commenting on our work. It was thrilling to share at an international level the work that I began this past summer during the CWP Summer Institute at UConn.

Colette and I are already scheming about how we might return!

*Amy Nocton teaches Spanish and Italian at RHAM High School in Hebron, where she was the World Languages Department Head for 16 years. She teaches UConn ECE Spanish and was the 2011 recipient of the ECE Teacher of the Year award.*

*Colette Bennett is currently the Language Arts Coordinator for West Haven Public Schools. For many years she taught the UConn ECE English course at Wamogo High School in Litchfield.*

## CWP TCs Provide Leadership Throughout State

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Manchester High School. They presented on the CWP's work providing PD in High Need School and providing research mini-grants to new TCs.

The CWP has been providing a great deal of PD in high need schools this year, mostly throughout Manchester Public Schools, but also at Metropolitan Business Academy in New Haven, the latter with funding from a High Need Schools Grant from the NWP, one of only 50 awarded nation-wide.

We have also provided PD in Columbia and Canterbury, and with the great help of the University Writing Center have launched new secondary school writing centers at Woodstock Academy and Manchester High School. In fact, this fall's

Secondary School Writing Centers Conference drew nearly 200 students and teachers from some 23 schools from across the state.

The High Need School Grant is also providing mini-grants for classroom-based research to 19 teachers from Metropolitan Business Academy. Coupled with funding from a Teacher Leadership grant also from the NWP, our site is providing mini-grants to 30 teachers, several of whom have already had their research accepted for presentation at local, national, and in one case an international conference.

Enjoy catching up with the goings-on of many of our TCs in this edition of TWR.

*Elizabeth Simison and Amanda Lister both teach UConn ECE courses. Elizabeth also teaches First Year Writing at UConn as an adjunct professor. Amanda was the 2013 co-teacher of the year at Manchester High.*

## Award-Winning Teacher Begins a New Chapter of Her Career

by Liza Escott (SI 07)

*After many years teaching at Lyman Memorial High School, TC Liza Escott accepted a new position at E.O. Smith High School. She discusses her transition.*

There are many similarities between E.O. Smith High School and Lyman Memorial High School. These include a warm and friendly teaching staff who members are willing to support each other and a student population that is actively involved in a variety of extra curricular activities.

*In any new job there will be challenges and learning curves, as well as the benefits that make it all worthwhile.*

However, it has still been quite a transition for me, coming from a school of less than 500 students to one that has over 1,200 students. Quite honestly, after the first month, I was still adjusting to many aspects of school life.

The drive is a little longer for me, which means getting up a little earlier; I am teaching 11th graders when I have been used to 12th graders for many years past; and I have not yet memorized the block schedule. But in any new job there will be challenges and learning curves, as well as the benefits that make it all worthwhile.

Some of these benefits include having the opportunity to continue teaching the British Literature curriculum which I know and enjoy, and working with staff and students who are all willing to point me in the right direction and assist me when I am confused. With this new position, a new chapter in my life has begun, and I'm savoring every word of it.

*Liza Escott was Lebanon's Teacher of the Year in 2012 and followed that up by winning the Connecticut Education Association's Susan B. Anthony-Prudence Crandall Human Rights Award in 2013 for her work with Lyman Memorial High School's GSA, which included organizing and running an annual Diversity Fair. Ms. Escott has continues to work with LGBT students from Lyman, E.O. Smith, and RHAM High School.*

### Save the Dates

#### Connecticut Student Writers magazine

Connecticut Student Writers magazine will be accepting submissions till January 23.

Reading Day will take place on February 7.

Recognition Night will take place on May 12.

Email submissions to [cwp@uconn.edu](mailto:cwp@uconn.edu)

<http://cwp.uconn.edu/ct-student-writers-magazine-2/>

#### First Year Writing Program's Conference on the Teaching of Writing

Writing as Translation

Submission deadline is January 31.

Conference will take place on March 27.

Email submissions to [teachingwriting2015@gmail.com](mailto:teachingwriting2015@gmail.com)

<http://fyw.uconn.edu/instructors/conference/>



## TC Returns to Classroom After Stint in Administration

by Katrina Bafumi (SI 12)

After a lifetime in Connecticut, four years with Berlin Public Schools, and a year with the Connecticut Writing Project Leadership Council, in the summer of 2013 I made the move to Boston.

*My year out of the classroom brought me more insight into the classroom than I ever imagined!*

That June, as I packed my life into a moving van, I told my students I would not be returning the following year and was met with absolute shock. With sincere concern, students questioned me, “Ms. Bafumi, are you ok—are you going to be ok?” I was, of course, ok, but our students often know us better than we know ourselves. As I prepared for my move, I was also preparing to leave the classroom. My move to Boston led me to a new role in the unfamiliar territory of Central Office as an English Language Arts Content Specialist.

In the end, my year out of the classroom brought me more insight into the classroom than I ever could have imagined. Nevertheless, my students were on to something in 2013 ... the classroom is where I belong.

And so, after a year with curriculum, data, and coaching, today you’ll find me back with students. My old (and current!) students can count on me to be forever surrounded by the piles of essays and books that become the artifacts of an English teacher, and I wouldn’t want it any other way.

*As an undergraduate and then graduate student at UConn, Katrina helped establish some of the first high school writing centers organized through the CWP’s partnership with the UConn Writing Center. She currently teaches English at Westwood High School, just outside of Boston.*

## Amy Golas Recognized for her Stellar Swimming Career at ECSU

by Amy Golas (SI 13)

Even before I was a reader and writer, I was a swimmer. My life has always involved being in or around a pool. Summers or winters, it was me, the smell of chlorine, and another long bus ride to a meet.

When I arrived at Eastern, the two things I knew for sure were that I was going to be on the women’s swimming team and that I would be an English major. Both of those decisions have been the most influential of my life. While at Eastern I experienced great success, both in the pool and in the classroom.

*Things that I thought at the time were just little things actually turn out to be pretty big in the long run.*

After graduating from Eastern, I had no idea how I wanted to use my newly earned B.A., but I returned immediately to fill the position of assistant coach to the swimming program. Over these past twelve years, I have watched the records I had left after my senior season be broken by many fast, talented, wonderful swimmers, and I loved every minute of it.

Last spring, I found myself happily enjoying the last day of school when I received a call from Eastern letting me know my accomplishments had not gone unnoticed, even all these years later. What had already been an enjoyable day packing up my classroom and preparing for the summer that lay before me suddenly skyrocketed into the atmosphere. My induction to the Eastern E-Club Athletics Hall of Fame in October will stand as one of the proudest, happiest days of my life so far.

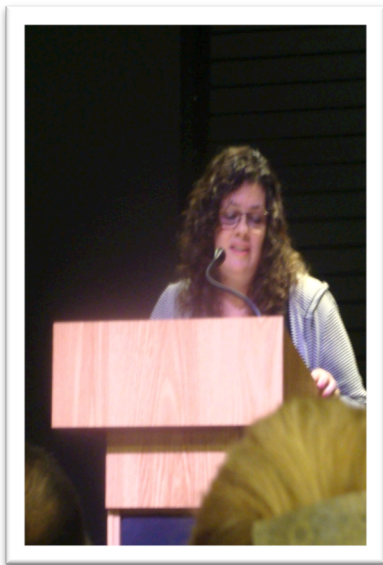
*Amy Golas teaches Language Arts at RHAM Middle School in Hebron. A 2003 graduate of Eastern Connecticut State University, Golas set many school and division records in seven different individual events and five relay teams.*

## Abercrombie and Andersen Read at UConn Coop Bookstore for Creative Sustenance

by Claire Morris, CWP Intern

It was a packed room at the UConn Co-op Bookstore at Storrs Center as Denise Abercrombie (SI 07) took the stage. She and her husband, Jon Andersen (SI 09), put together this Poetic Sustenance reading to help raise money and food donations for the Willimantic Covenant Soup Kitchen.

Denise Abercrombie is the English department head at E.O. Smith High School and has also taught at UConn and Quinebaug Valley Community College. Her poems have been published in many journals such as the *Minnesota Review*, *Fireweed*, and the *Connecticut Review*.



Ms. Abercrombie's reading invited listeners into glimpses of her world. "The Mary Kay Lady" told of a time when she was young and her family of all girls learned from the Mary Kay lady how to use make up. "Terry's Last Day Before Mansfield Training School" takes listeners into the world of Terry, the son of her old landlord, a boy with Down's Syndrome.

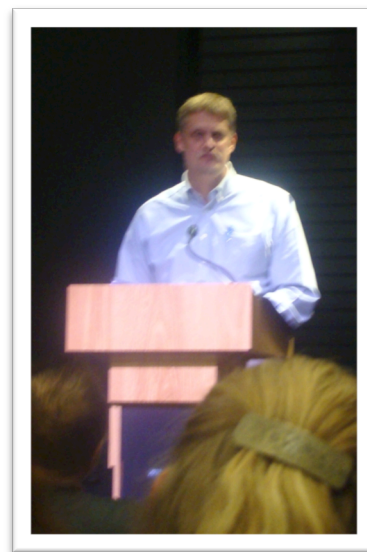
"Week 7" describes the experience of a group of students at E.O. Smith protesting the war. One of my personal favorites

"Abercrombie," compares the poet's family lineage to the commercial clothing store, Abercrombie and Fitch.

Ms. Abercrombie's poetry is relatable and often humorous, and she drew many laughs from the crowd. Her last poem, "Taking Turns," was dedicated to her husband, and offered a touching portrayal of married life.

Jon Andersen took the stage after an introduction by Sean Forbes, Director of the Creative Writing Program. Jon Andersen is an Associate Professor of English at Quinebaug Valley Community College and is the author of one book, *Stomp and Sing*, and the editor of *The Burden Note*, a bilingual (English/Serbo-Croatian) collection of poems.

Professor Andersen talked about his experience in Serbia, which much of *The Burden Note* is based on, and read a poem about a glimpse into Serbian life.



He discussed misconceptions people have about Serbia due to negative media portrayals of its people during the Bosnian War, when reality is in fact more complicated.

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## CWP Celebrates a Quarter Century of Aetna Awards

by Karelyn Kuczenski, CWP Intern

On October 23, the 25<sup>th</sup> Annual Aetna Awards Ceremony was held in the Konover Auditorium of the Dodd Center. The evening provided thought provoking material as undergraduate and graduate student writers, as well as CWP Teacher-Consultants, presented academic essays and creative works.

Distinguished Professor and Aetna Chair of Writing Lynn Bloom's presentation "Why True Stories Matter" was an engaging performance. Fifteen of Professor Bloom's students joined her onstage to deliver a narrated memoir, consisting of fifteen individual sentences woven together through common themes. She stressed the humanizing nature of storytelling and why it should be the most cherished art form.



CWP Director Jason Courtmanche called to the stage the winners of the Teacher-Consultant Writing Contest to read their works.

The audience adored Amy Nocton's (SI 14) poem "Governor of My Heart." Her performance was delivered with a confessional tone that captured the attention of everyone.

Charles Vousden (SI 83) read an excerpt from his prose fiction piece, "An Honorable Man." His character's reflections on

## Local Poet-Teachers Return from Serbia

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Professor Andersen also read two controversial poems, one entitled, "Sonnet for a Nun," which discusses atheism, and another entitled "Luminous Moment," which is about catching a glimpse of Barack and Michelle Obama on television standing in front of a banner that is supposed to say, "Moving America Forward," but a man blocking the d makes the sign appear to say "Moving America For war."

Professor Andersen's poetry contemplates important issues and makes listeners think.

This pair of poets put on a great reading and raised money for a worthy cause.

## Aetna Awards

death, memory, and self-realization made for an intriguing, well-received reading.



Mary Ellen Ellsworth's essay "Garlic Harvest" discussed her garden and the metaphor of growth. The audience enjoyed the creativeness of her winning piece.

The full-length pieces are available at <http://cwp.uconn.edu/teacher-writer/>.

## CREC: An "Intense Commitment," A Worthwhile Commitment

by Kathleen Butler (SI 14)

Working for Capitol Region Education Council is like painting a white picket fence for a finicky but generous little old lady: the expectations are very high, but she will provide you with the paint, specify the number of coats, pour you infinite glasses of chilled lemonade, bake you cookies (soft!), and give you a big tip as long as you show you're dedicated. The CREC motto is "intense commitment," and it's true—one must be intensely committed to student welfare and outcomes in order to have a successful career here.

However, resources are ample, and instructional support is excellent. Teachers who are new to CREC are given lots of help, including instructional coaches and a curriculum. That being said, no one is spoon-feeding us. I've created nearly all of my assignments and lesson plans from scratch (excluding the occasional lesson I swipe from the internet, as we all do. I cite it!). That CREC has a rigidly prescribed, scripted curriculum is absolutely a misconception. In reality, it's a loose, skill-based curriculum (written by a curriculum coordinator with a wide range of classroom experience, great ideas, and realistic yet rigorous goals) with suggested essential questions, and a few suggested assignments, but by no means are we expected to ascribe to these. We are, however, required to make sure we teach the Common-Core skills prescribed, and our students are tested at the end of each quarter with a CREC-wide assessment, much like the Smarter Balanced will be.

*I've always believed  
that growth doesn't  
occur without a little  
discomfort.*

It can all be a bit daunting for a new teacher—for any teacher, for that matter. My classroom is metaphorically outfitted with a revolving door to accommodate the curriculum coordinator, an instructional coach, and of course the occasional administrator. I've always believed, however, that growth doesn't occur without a little discomfort. A workout without a bit of soreness the next day is not really a workout, and I push myself much harder if I know that everyone is watching. Though the frequent observations are a little intimidating, they're also incredibly eye-opening, helpful, invigorating, and absolutely worthwhile. I've grown since I started here, and I'm so glad of that, if not for myself then for the students, who are, of course, the most important thing.

CREC students come from all over the Hartford region, arriving with disparate abilities and drastically different histories. The academic standards at CREC are high—many students have told me they had to make a big adjustment when they got here. Every CREC educator is tasked with assessing where each student falls on the continuum of educational needs, which ranges from "This student needs educational triage—stat!" to "Holy cow, I think this kid is smarter than I am." Though each student is gifted with unique skills, they are all ready to work, and they see education as an opportunity, not as an entitlement. They are intensely committed to us, so we are intensely committed to them.

*Kate Butler teaches at Sports and Medical Sciences Academy.*

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Now Accepting Nominations for and Applications to the 2015 Summer Institute!

If you have never attended, apply! If you have attended, recommend a colleague!

Applications are due by March 21, 2015. The SI will run from June 29 to July 24.

For info, go to <http://cwp.uconn.edu/summer-institute/> or contact the office at [cwp@uconn.edu](mailto:cwp@uconn.edu)



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## Reflections of a First Year Teacher, or John Keating Meets Reality

by Kate Schneider (SI 13)

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The day I wrote this piece marked a milestone in my teaching career—I'd officially been a full time teacher for three whole months. My district has a couple other first year teachers, and we regularly seek each other out to trade tips, share advice, and commiserate about the challenges that we're experiencing. Recently, we were sitting around at one of these vent sessions, and someone brought up how vastly different the reality of what being a first year teacher was from our expectations back in August. The three big ones were:

*Expectation: Regular teaching is just like student teaching.*

Reality: When it comes down to it, student teaching three to six full weeks in the classroom, and you get a full semester to review the materials and get ready. While it was exhausting, I was able to design, plan, and implement these beautiful lessons. Because there were two teachers in the classroom, I could do amazing activities. The classroom had been set up, policies and procedures had been established; my only responsibility was to get into the classroom and teach.

And then you head into the school for your first year of teaching and realize how much had been handed to you. You want to have high expectations for yourself, but you also need to be reasonable about what you can accomplish. The workload doesn't end after three weeks. It ends after 180 days, with various ebbs, flows, and stresses. Sometimes you're going to have to accept "good enough" instead of "perfect."

*Expectation: I'm going to be able to waltz into the school, stand up and be the next Erin Gruwell, John Keating, or Mr. Miyagi.*

Reality: I studied incredible educators—teachers who dedicated their entire lives to their craft, who made a meaningful difference. These teachers never seemed to struggle with grading, or not having enough time during the day to plan, or teaching the procedure to hand in homework on time, or what to do when a student has a total meltdown because they wanted to use their green pen, which isn't in their desk. Their classrooms simply appeared to flourish on their own.

This year, I've come to the conclusion that teaching has to be perfected over years and years of practice. When I look back at those teachers now, I notice that most incredible educators are at least a decade into their teaching careers. They didn't create outstanding units and procedures in three months. They grew into these roles and perfected them as each year went on through tons of reflective practice, and as time goes on, I will too.

*Expectation: When I'm a teacher, I'll just shut the door and it'll be just me, alone with my class.*

Reality: I depend on my fellow staff members way more than I thought I would. There is support everywhere in my building—the attitude is that *we are all in this together*. I honestly don't think I would have survived my first month here without my amazing teammates, my administrative staff, my old cooperating teacher, and the rest of the faculty and staff at school. They have helped me through every imaginable crisis.

Teaching is not an easy career, but we're able to adapt to that by creating a community of teachers. Fellow teachers want you to succeed. This year has been totally different from what I expected walking in, but I'm thankful to have the support behind me to survive it.

*Kate Schneider teaches fifth grade at Ashford School. Last year as a graduate student, Kate ran the Secondary School Writing Center Outreach Program and helped establish a student-led writing center at Woodstock Academy.*

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## Pre-Service English Teachers Explore Censorship, Book Banning, and the Future of Print Books in First Year Experience Course for Future Teachers

*This fall, Jason Courtmanche took students from his Pre-Teaching Secondary English course on two field trips, one to the Mark Twain House and Museum and another to the Yale University Art Gallery, where they attended the first day of the Special Collection Odd Volumes: Book Art. In the following interviews, Undergraduate Facilitator Shannon Bollard and student Katherine Kelly discuss the importance of exploring censorship and banned books with students.*

*by Shannon Bollard and Katherine Kelly*

### **Could you provide a summary of both trips? What concepts did you focus on?**

*Shannon:*

Since the topic of the class is Pre-Teaching Secondary English, the Mark Twain House and Museum (MTHM) field trip was selected in order to express the need to teach banned books, specifically *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. This book is taught in some schools and banned in others, yet very few actually teach it the way it should be taught. Instead of taking into consideration the historical context of the book, many either ban the book because of its use of vernacular or teach it on how the characters are presented without keeping this context in mind.

The Yale University Art Gallery trip was originally planned just to be able to appreciate what our state has to offer. Not only did we get to see the art gallery and some very interesting book art, we also visited Atticus Bookstore Café and were able to see the original bookstore café! All in all, this trip was more about the idea of books and appreciating them for more than what we can teach—via works of art (such as the book art in the museum) or as ways to relax (reading and enjoying some food while in the café).

*Kat:*

Our field trip to the Mark Twain House began with a private tour of the house before the museum officially opened. We spent an hour and a half exploring the house and learning about the Clemens' daily lives. When the museum opened to the public, we escaped the crowds by moving to a classroom where we received a presentation on teaching Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by placing it within its historical context. The museum also houses special exhibits and an art gallery, but we had only enough time to quickly breeze through the gallery before our ride arrived.



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## Books ...

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On our next field trip, we visited the Yale University Art Gallery, and more specifically the exhibit "Odd Volumes: Book Art from the Allan Chasanoff Collection." The day opened at Atticus Bookstore Café.

We spent nearly three hours inside the art gallery and saw almost every exhibit. The "Odd Volumes" exhibit was both disturbing and compelling, as it commented on both the importance and the insignificance of the physical book in a technological age.



**Why were these ideas stressed, as opposed to other potential topics?**

*Shannon:*

As future teachers of English, we could have gone to any author's house in Connecticut. However, not every house offers this same sort of lesson on banned books, especially one as controversial as *Huckleberry Finn*. At the end of this day, it was important for future educators to see the book in a new light—instead of viewing it how their teachers

may have taught it. They needed to understand the book in its historical context to truly appreciate the genius Samuel Clemens was and the need to teach the book effectively to our students.

For the Art Gallery trip, we originally wanted to visit more in New Haven—such as the Beinecke Rare Book Library. We wanted to have the chance to get in there and see rare books in their original forms. However, it didn't work out due to time and practicality. Instead of giving up on the trip, we decided to stick to the art gallery and Atticus Bookstore Café in order to focus just on books—on the literacy aspect of teaching that ties us all together.

**Did the students react to the material in unexpected ways?**

*Shannon:*

One of the students dropped her mouth and sat there in shock the entire time she was learning about *Huckleberry Finn*. When our speaker—Craig Hotchkiss—was mentioning the various ways teachers taught the book and why it wasn't true to the text, she exclaimed how her teacher taught her the 'wrong' way and how, within this new light, she realized how important the text was. It was actually such a perfect moment—I myself was never taught *Huck Finn*, so the lesson on the book seemed natural to me, but her reaction really reinstated why it is important for us to bring our students to places such as these in order to truly appreciate what the book has to offer.

The student reactions weren't unexpected—they were all as fascinated and

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## More on books ...

*continued from page 11*

interested as I was. No one really wanted to leave Atticus Café when we went there, mostly because we loved browsing and viewing the books. Once we visited the gallery, we spent lots of time in each exhibit. Everyone was interested in various pieces—some liked the European paintings whereas others liked the Chinese statues—but once we all made it up to the book art, we ended up staying there the longest. Some students took pictures, while others really examined works of art (some even were trying to read what the books were saying even though the words were sometimes cut off). In the end, everyone was just as fascinated by it as I was—so while it was expected, it was still a great confirmation the trip was worth it.

### **What was the most valuable insight you gained from each trip?**

*Kat:*

The knowledge of how *Huck Finn* fits into history; I had never been taught about the novel that way in high school, and the presentation was eye opening. There are a lot of people who align themselves with the school of thought that an author's intentions cannot and should not influence the way a reader views a text, but I think Mark Twain would greatly disagree with that belief. The Yale Art Gallery's exhibit left me feeling sad and violated; as someone who loves the smell of old books and feeling a spine crack on a new book, it was painful to see books being torn apart, burnt, and mutilated for the sake of art. However, the exhibit was also strangely beautiful—the different pieces seemed to suggest a need for paper books in this tech-filled world, even if they are needed only to create art.



### **As future educators, how did these field trips deepen your understandings of teaching Humanities?**

*Kat:*

Both of these field trips have influenced the way in which I will teach my future classes. The trip to the Mark Twain house made me realize the importance of digging deeper into a book or subject and understanding as much as I can before I attempt to teach that book to others. Although English can be a very subjective class, it is definitely important to understand how literary works functioned within a social and historical context. Viewing the "Odd Volumes" exhibit at the Yale Art Gallery made me realize that my future students might not have the same connection to physical books that I have, but that does not mean it is not an important connection to make. Technological advances can bring great progress, but I don't ever think that a physical connection to a book or a historical object can be replaced.

*Shannon Bollard and Katherine Kelly are both sophomore English and Pre-Teaching majors, and both are Undergraduate Facilitators in the First Year Experience Program. Shannon took the Pre-Teaching Secondary English course last year. Katherine took it this fall. Both hope to be accepted into the Neag School of Education's Integrated Bachelor's/Master's Program for Secondary English Education.*



## Another Teacher-Consultant Wins Teacher of the Year Honors in her District

*Patricia Baruzzi (SI 02) was named E.O. Smith High School's 2015 Teacher of the Year.*

### **Why did you become a teacher?**

I decided to become an English teacher as a result of being accused of plagiarism. Of course, I did not plagiarize and was devastated that my freshman English Composition teacher would suggest such a thing. Determined to prove her wrong, I dedicated my entire first semester of college to writing, in particular academic writing. By semester's end not only had I earned an A in the class, I had fallen in love with literature and conducting literary research and analysis.

### **What was the biggest success you had this year in the classroom?**

Without question my biggest successes came when students engaged in Socratic Seminar discussion. My only intervention in this student-driven discourse was to insist that the seminar be broken into the seminar discussion and a reflection paper. Each class chose different weights for the seminar and the reflection paper. The students blossomed! My thinking is that they had such a say in the process that they really owned it and this resulted in the best Socratic discourse ever!

### **What is something you still struggle with in the classroom?**

To this day, I struggle with depth over breadth and managing class discussion. I find myself extending units beyond the timeline of the curriculum because discussion is so rich and the students are making myriad connections. I balance my lack of time control by taking joy in the fact that when the bell rings students want to keep talking and leave the classroom still discussing. Isn't that what teaching is supposed to do?

### **What is your favorite text to teach and why?**

Hands down, my favorite text to teach is *The Great Gatsby*. This spring will be my tenth year teaching the novel and I finally feel as though I get it! Not many sixteen year-olds see relevance between the text and their lives. Admittedly, it is a stretch to ask them to relate to such extravagance and wealth, still, there are connections between the novel and life in 2014 America. I tell my students that *Gatsby* needs to be read at different stages in their lives. I feel honored to expose my students to their first excursion into Fitzgerald's world.

### **What's a piece of advice you wish someone had told you as a first year teacher?**

Let your students know that you live an interesting life! The best way to do this is with occasional personal anecdotes and through the process of writing. My students write in class almost every day. When I ask them to respond to a prompt or reflect on something, I try to sit down at a student desk and write right along side of them. In addition to showing that I have a life too, it also shows them that I value writing. I am happy to share my writing with them and have even been known to put myself into a student response group.

### **What is the process like for becoming a Teacher of the Year?**

The process is a humbling one. Knowing that one or more of your peers took the time to fill out a nomination form and submit to a committee composed of past TOYs is both humbling and incredible. I was notified by a building administrator, my department chair, and a past TOY that I had been selected as Region 19's 2015 Teacher of the Year; I cried. I received beautiful lilacs and a lovely note and walked out of the principal's office stunned and grateful.

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## Connecticut Writing Project-Storrs

The CWP-Storrs was established at UConn in 1982. Through its annual Summer Institute, the CWP offers opportunities for professional growth to teachers in all disciplines who recognize the worth of using writing as a means of learning. Improving writing skills improves thinking skills and thus leads to higher levels of achievement. The CWP also offers professional development services to schools and districts, and a variety of opportunities for students to publish their writing.



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*The Connecticut Writing Project-Storrs is one of nearly 200 local sites of the National Writing Project. The NWP is a professional development network that serves teachers of writing at all grade levels, pre-K through university, and in all subjects. The mission of the NWP is to improve student achievement by improving the teaching of writing and improving learning in the nation's schools.*

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