

Literacy for All: Empowering Student Voices and Creativity in the Classroom

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Literacy for All: Empowering Student Voices and Creativity in the Classroom

Editorial Introduction

Suzanne Porath ~ Kansas State University

Through the decades, classrooms—and teaching approaches—have changed. But one constant has remained. Literacy continues to be the thread that weaves all classrooms together, no matter the age or grade level or content. Though it has changed shapes and styles, from pencils and chunky writing tablets to digital devices, literacy remains a vital element of education and of the world beyond the classroom.

Across the four works in *Literacy Connections* inaugural issue, a shared theme emerges: the transformative power of creative, student-centered approaches in literacy education. **Kamishia Childs** champions authentic and culturally responsive writing experiences to empower learners, while **Christina Hoverman's** engaging lesson on Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" demonstrates how visual and performative elements can unlock deeper comprehension and connection. **Lori Rice** inspires students to explore perspective and language through reversible verse poetry, fostering critical thinking and creativity. Meanwhile, **Marcus Hora** highlights Megan Dowd Lambert's "Whole Book Approach," which reframes picture book reading as an intersection of literary critique and art appreciation, inviting children to actively interpret visual and textual elements. Together, these pieces advocate for innovative strategies that not only deepen students' understanding of language and literature but also nurture their curiosity, voice, and ability to engage with diverse perspectives.

In "Beyond 21st Century Learning: C.O.U.N.T on Creating Authentic and Relevant Writing Experiences in the Classroom," **Kamishia Childs** emphasizes the importance of integrating authenticity and relevance into writing instruction to enhance student engagement and creativity. She critiques traditional methods focused on standardized testing and highlights the need for curricula that address students' diverse cultural and real-world contexts. Childs introduces the C.O.U.N.T. framework—Culturally responsive writing, Opportunities to write beyond assessment, Unpacking problems through writing, Narrative writing, and Technology integration—as a guide for fostering meaningful writing experiences. She advocates for writing to be seen as a tool for communication, reflection, and problem-solving across disciplines. Childs stresses the value of embracing digital literacies and multimodal writing to prepare students for future challenges. Her work calls for systemic shifts in educational approaches, ensuring that writing becomes a transformative and empowering skill for all students.

Christina Hoverman's lesson plan for teaching Edgar Allan Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" engages resistant learners by blending art, dramatization, and analytical discussions to connect students with Poe's work. Aiming to demystify Poe's complex descriptions and atmosphere, Hoverman uses group activities where students analyze and illustrate the opening scene to deepen their comprehension. The visual poster, enhanced throughout the lesson, symbolizes the house's deterioration, mirroring Roderick Usher's mental state.

In the climactic scene, student actors reenact the dramatic finale while the symbolic poster is torn, reinforcing the story's themes. This approach fosters investment and a visceral understanding of symbolism, atmosphere, and the connection between the house and Roderick's decline. Reflective discussions and an essay prompt encourage students to explore broader themes of mental illness and the human condition. Hoverman's creative pedagogy ensures deeper engagement with Poe's gothic masterpiece while addressing 11th-grade Ohio state standards.

In her article, **Lori Rice** explores the engaging and creative potential of reversible verse poems in a fourth-grade classroom during Poetry Month. Inspired by Marilyn Singer's collections, *Mirror Mirror* and *Follow Follow*, Rice introduces students to this unique poetic form, which reads forward and backward with differing perspectives. The activity begins with a brainstorming session where students create word banks on their chosen themes, followed by composing free verse poems. The challenge arises when students craft reversed versions of their poems, emphasizing perspective shifts, word choice, and punctuation.

Through drafting and refining, students explore language intricacies while enhancing their critical thinking and creativity. Rice highlights the process's enjoyment and the depth of engagement, noting that students eagerly tackle the complexities of reversible verse. This activity not only fosters a love for poetry but also demonstrates how innovative literary exercises can develop students' expressive and analytical skills in an interactive and meaningful way.

In his review of Megan Dowd Lambert's *Reading Picture Books With Children*, **Marcus Hora** highlights the innovative "Whole Book Approach" (WBA), which centers art, design, and children's responses in the story time experience. Rooted in Lambert's experience at the Eric Carle Museum, the WBA encourages critical thinking and engagement by exploring picture books' physical features, such as typography, page design, and endpapers. Hora notes how children's observations, such as noticing design choices in *Madeline* or *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?*, can spark deep discussions.

Though skeptical of its classroom practicality due to time constraints and lack of standards alignment, Hora appreciates the book's potential for fostering rich literary and artistic appreciation. Ideal for educators and librarians, the text offers extensive resources and questions to guide discussions. Hora concludes that Lambert's approach unlocks children's natural curiosity, merging literary critique and art appreciation in early literacy.

The inaugural issue of *Literacy Connections* celebrates the creativity, dedication, and passion of educators who dare to innovate and inspire. The transformative practices showcased here remind us that literacy is not merely a set of skills to be taught but a powerful means of expression, connection, and growth. From culturally responsive writing frameworks to engaging poetic exercises and creative interpretations of literature, these approaches illuminate the boundless potential within our classrooms to shape confident, curious, and empowered learners.

As literacy educators, we stand at a pivotal moment in education—one that calls for courage, collaboration, and the sharing of ideas. **Your voice, your experiences, and your reflections are vital to this dialogue. We invite you to join this growing community of educators by**

submitting your own stories, research, and innovative practices to *Literacy Connections*. Together, we can elevate the voices of teachers and students, creating a lasting impact on the future of literacy education.

The power of literacy lies in its ability to transform lives. Let us continue to innovate, collaborate, and amplify the voices of those who know its power best—teachers and students. We look forward to your contributions as we build a space where ideas flourish and the future of literacy education is shaped.