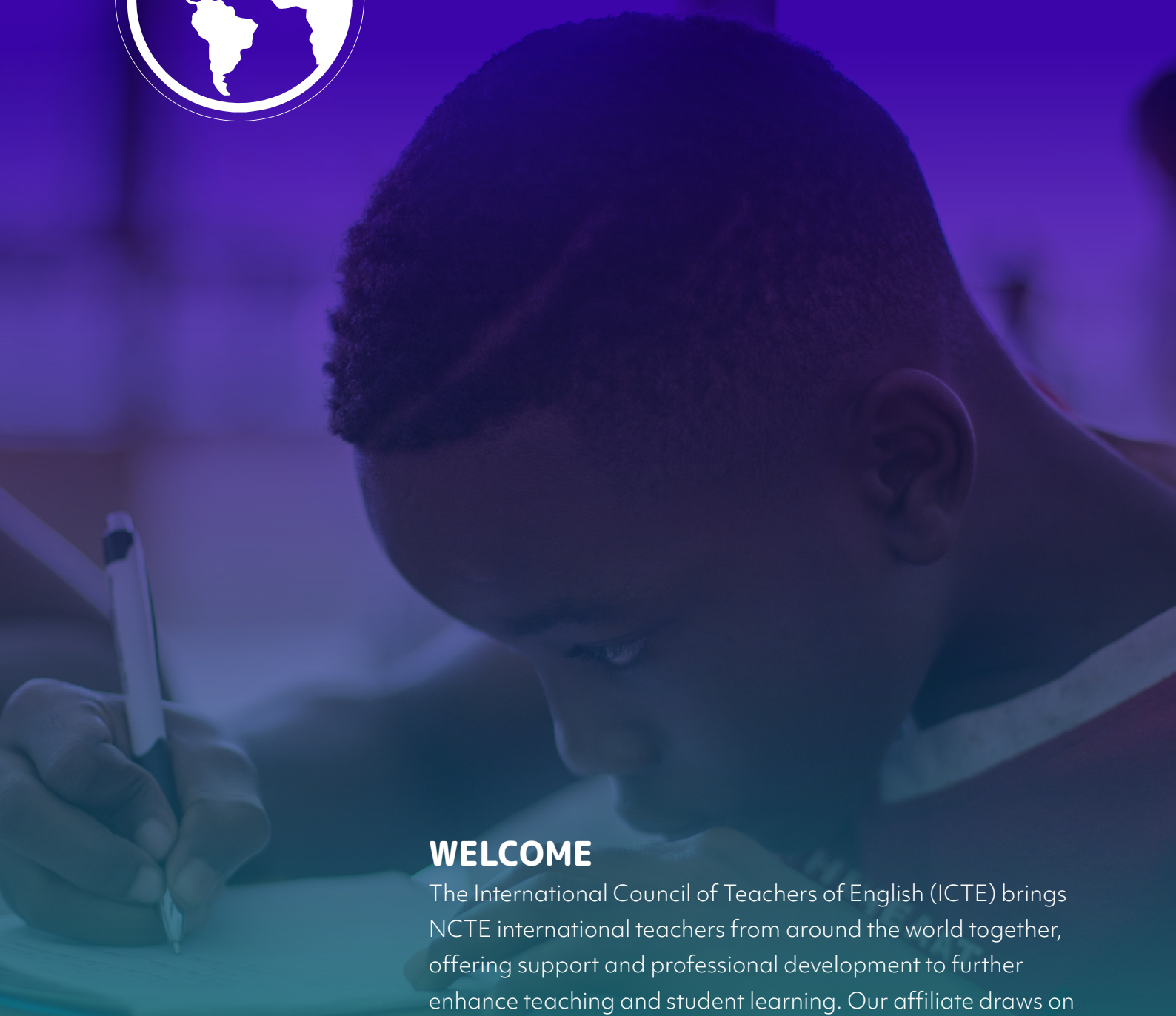




INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL OF  
TEACHERS OF ENGLISH  
FALL 2023 | ISSUE 08



## WELCOME

The International Council of Teachers of English (ICTE) brings NCTE international teachers from around the world together, offering support and professional development to further enhance teaching and student learning. Our affiliate draws on a wealth of NCTE support materials and will be expanding this knowledge-set to cater specifically to educators interested in international education.

See Story  
On Page 4



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## International Council of Teachers of English

AN NCTE AFFILIATE

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### SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

We welcome submissions for our ICTE members stationed around the world! Manuscripts should range in length from 500 to 2,500 words. Please contact us if you would like to submit longer manuscripts. Follow the NCTE guidelines for nonsexist use of language.

### CONTACT

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Please join our Facebook group to keep updated on the latest in international education. Click [here](#) to view the group. Alternatively, you can find us by searching for "International Council of Teachers of English."

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# WHAT'S inside

- 
- 4** International Council of Teachers of English honored with 2023 Affiliate Newsletter of Excellence Award
- 
- 5** Laurie Halse Anderson Speaks!
- 
- 6** Teaching for the IO or teaching with the IO? *By Dr. Anna Androulaki-Woodcock*
- 
- 10** What Are English Teachers For? *By David Jepson*
- 
- 16** How PBL Builds Literacy Across Content Areas *By Suzie Boss*
- 
- 20** Cultivating and Navigating Online Writing Spaces as “Walled Gardens” in ELA Classrooms *By Emily Plummer Catena, Bethany Monea, Megan Skeuse, Ananya Kulkarni, and Amy Stornaiuolo*
- 
- 27** Empowered Writing through Movement in the International English Classroom *By Dr. Kathleen Waller*
- 
- 31** Combating Fake Reading: The Literacy of Echo *By Kristian Kuhn*
- 
- 33** Negotiating Around Myths in Academic Writing in a Non-English Environment *By R. Paul Lege*
- 
- 37** Literacy Equity and Equality in the Classroom: Digital Storytelling on the Rise *By Brett Pierce, Meridian Stories, Freeport, Maine*



# International Council of Teachers of English honored with

## 2023 Affiliate Newsletter of Excellence Award



**2023 AFFILIATE**  
Newsletter of Excellence Award

The International Council of Teachers of English is excited to receive the 2023 NCTE Newsletter of Excellence Award.

Congratulations to our newsletter team of Stephen Cooley, Stephanie Feo-Hughes, Maria Tet Kelly, Stacey Wilkins and Jennifer Williams.

"It is truly an honor to work with editor Stacey Wilkins and the rest of the ICTE Board on the newsletter," said Stephen Cooley, who is also the ICTE Vice President based in Hong Kong. "The great thing about it is that it fosters connections and collaboration among international educators around the globe in exciting and meaningful ways."

We also must thank our writers from the Fall 2022 and Spring 2023 newsletter issues that were appraised by the NCTE Standing Committee on Affiliates judges. The judges said the ICTE Newsletter should be commended for publishing "great topics for the articles you include."

Writers from those newsletter issues submitted for judging include Dr. Olabisi Adenekan, Andrew Cohen, Dr. Mellissa Gyimah-Concepcion, Christina Dobbs, Kristian Kuhn, David Giles, Kai Guo, LeeAnne Lavender, Dr. R. Paul Lege, Rachel McDonald, Christine Montecillo Leider, Brad Philpot, Brett Pierce, Dr Jason S. Polley, Tami Ranado, Peter Smyth, Hengky Susanto, Chris Taylor, Jennifer Williams and David James Woo.

"Participating as a writer and contributor to

the ICTE Newsletter is an honour because of the level of dialogue that emerges from the topics Stacey and her team so artfully put together, and because of the professional connections that can result," says contributor LeeAnne Lavender, an independent educational consultant for storytelling and global citizenship based in Canada. "After my last piece was published, I was at a conference and met fellow digital storyteller Brett Pierce; it turned out he was working on an article for an upcoming issue, and we had such a meaningful conversation about how our work aligned. There's a real sense of community with the ICTE team and newsletter."

Established in 1992, this award recognizes outstanding newsletters of affiliates of NCTE that have published a minimum of three newsletters from May 2022 through the program deadline on June 30, 2023.

Newsletter submissions are judged on content (particularly the inclusion of current, pertinent information with a good balance between theory, practice, and professional growth in formation), quality of writing, a clear and accurately defined purpose for the publication, a format which aids the reader in locating information and is easy to read, and the use of graphics to aid the overall effectiveness of the newsletter.

The Affiliate Newsletter of Excellence Award winners will be presented at the 2023 NCTE Annual Convention in Columbus, Ohio on November 19.





**LAURIE HALSE ANDERSON** is a *New York Times*-bestselling author known for tackling tough subjects with humor and sensitivity. Two of her books, *Speak* and *Chains*, were National Book Award finalists. Two more books, *The Impossible Knife of Memory* and *Shout* were long-listed for the National Book Awards. Laurie has been nominated for Sweden's Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award seven times; this is her greatest honor. The American Library Association gave Laurie the Margaret A. Edwards Award for her significant contribution to young adult literature. She has been honored for her battles for intellectual freedom by the National Coalition Against Censorship and the National Council of Teachers of English. She is a member of RAINN's National Leadership Council and frequently speaks about sexual violence.



# Laurie Halse Anderson Speaks!

**Date: Tuesday, October 3**

**Time: 7p-8p (Eastern time)**

ICTE is proud to partner with the Connecticut Council of Teachers of English to present an evening/morning (depending on your time zone!) with Laurie Halse Anderson, author of *Speak*, *Catalyst*, *Shout*, and *The Impossible Knife of Memory* to name but a few.

Laurie is a fierce advocate for intellectual freedom.

ICTE members will be allowed to join this event for free. You will receive a code to join closer to the event time, which you can join live or later watch the recording.

Hope to see you there!



# Teaching for the IO or teaching with the IO?

**Dr. Anna Androulaki-Woodcock**  
AA Educational Consultancy,  
Wiltshire, United Kingdom

The IB Internal Assessment (IA) feedback has just been shared with Language A teachers, and it has been met with responses ranging from agreement to complete bafflement. Personally, I have decided to practise as much detachment as possible so I can address some of the issues the task raises for students and teachers as provocations which require contemplation rather than an inadequacy of students and/or teachers. I think this is fair and right considering IB assessment is not norm-referencing and the relationship of IB teachers to the IB is that of professional accountability.

Despite the surprises of the results for some and the continuous search of lost lesson time, the task has been welcomed by teachers as a constructive move away from the old IOC, and students, overall, seem to be responding pretty well to a complex task which is also strictly timed. There seem to be a lot of formulas out there and practical tips about organisation, structure, timing, formulation of GIs, etc.

I know I have authored a few of mine. Some of these are more helpful than others. Some are verging on the formulaic more than others. Some read more like instruction manuals than teaching protocols. This advice serves a purpose, that of completing the task, but it can also be a distraction from the real questions in our classrooms: what are our students learning and how? Are we teaching them the 'what-to-do' as opposed to the 'how-to-do'?

What I would like to propose is that we consider whether we need these formulas and recipes in the very final stages of the IO, for the more mechanical and technical aspects of the final product, in the same way we edit a piece of writing for line spacing, indentation, etc., after it has been written. Instead, we must focus more on the processes that can make the IO an experience integrated in student learning, not task execution.



The reason I suggest this is that formulas and repeated practice and drills may – just may – help students get good grades, but investing in the mental and cognitive processes of abstraction and theorizing that the task requires of students will produce learning, and that can make it possible for every student to complete the task in a confident and rewarding way. Not to mention the benefits of such transferable knowledge for the course, in other subjects and beyond. In other words, before we start looking at the minutes and the marks and the moderation algorithms, we must rewind and begin at the beginning. Which practices and approaches can support the development of competencies students need to not only complete the IO but to do so in a manner that benefits their learning?

**1. Foster a connection with texts.**

Emotion is the way into literary exploration for any reader or any age, and we must help students articulate their 1 emotional response on their way to justifying it, analysing it and explaining it. If they are to talk about issues relevant to local and/or global contexts of which they have direct or indirect knowledge, how can this be done without a personal connection with the works exploring these issues? Our assumptions and assessment-driven practices push us to jump into the analysis of the text and the practice of ‘skills’ making the discussion exclusively text-centred, leaving the reader (student) stranded on an island of miscomprehension. Personal response has often been interpreted by students – and possibly teachers – as totally reader-

centred with little or no connection to the text.<sup>1</sup> It is not surprising then that “personal response” does not feature in the new Subject Guides, but instead the focus is on the agency of students as readers (see Readers, writers and texts Area of Exploration). What I am proposing is to honour the students as agents of the reading by creating more opportunities for a student to respond as a person to a text. This can be done in small groups, in collaborative app spaces or in short pieces of writing that are more like the personal essay rather than any of the IB assessments to build a bridge from personal writing to the formal essay (Moffett 1989). In fact, the constructivist

**However, it is precisely this engagement which will allow our students to become more competent readers and develop the habits of mind of highly literate readers (Blau, 2003) with all the implications such competence has for them as IB learners but also assessment candidates.**

approach students are required to employ in all their IB assessments calls for exactly that; the personal essay (or all kinds of personal writing) can constitute the space where students can find agency as constructors of meaning.

- 2. Value reading.** This may seem like a very obvious statement. Students will have to read in order to respond to texts, identify issues to discuss, explore the way authors use language to create meaning. Yet, we are not always aware of how they engage with the texts in that very first encounter. Are they reading for comprehension of facts and events? Are they reading to summarise? Are they reading to identify key passages for assessments? If these

<sup>1</sup> The misunderstanding of reader-response as a text meaning anything the reader wants it to mean may be responsible for creating some prejudice against personal responses by students, but this is a discussion for another piece.





questions constitute more or less the repertoire of our approaches to reading, then students can be said to read the texts for use rather for engagement. However, it is precisely this engagement which will allow our students to become more competent readers and develop the habits of mind of highly literate readers (Blau, 2003) with all the implications such competence has for them as IB learners but also assessment candidates.<sup>2</sup> Direct instruction opposes such competence, and could also be said to encourage the practice of a more mechanistic delivery. The exploration of issues literary works concern themselves with can only begin with reading

that is immersive (Bruns 2011) rather than a right-answer approach or the teaching of a set of critical practices by the teacher.

3. ***Understanding how we understand and explore the issue.*** The IO is asking the students to think conceptually while making factual connections with the texts and the extracts. This negotiation of the ways the specific can be linked to the abstract and the converse is an everyday mental process for young adults, but one they are quite likely not asked to observe or verbalise anywhere else. Students are able to create 'theories' about everyday activities and ordinary things, from the video games they play to the way they dress. It is inductive thinking. In this sense, the task does not require them to learn a new skill but to extend this skill to include literary texts and the articulation of a 'theory' derived from these texts. Ironically, writing may be

the best starting point in their attempt to become more aware and intentional about their conceptual understanding of these issues for their IO. Writing affords them more time to process their thinking and it is personal and reflective. How can we use writing activities which will make it possible for students to connect an example (extract) to a generalisation (whole text) to the theory (global issue). Imagine, for example, giving students different extracts and asking them to respond to them in a short piece of informal writing, then bringing them together to discuss their responses and invite others to comment on them before

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**The difference is between teaching the 'what' as opposed to the 'how-to' so the IO does not represent knowledge but a way of knowing, which they can then use and apply to other processes and other assessments.**

.....

they are asked to create a 'theory' (a global issue and, possibly, an argument about it) that would explain these interpretations. The extracts can be from the same work or from different works and the sharing of the responses and the comments can be done in class before students formulate a theory they all agree on. One can actually ask the students to think abstractly and give them keywords, prompts or sentence structures. Or one can lead students to an understanding of how they think abstractly. The difference is between teaching the 'what' as opposed to the 'how-to' so the IO does not represent knowledge but a way of knowing, which they can then use and apply to other processes and other assessments. What my experience

<sup>2</sup> Not surprisingly, there are three instances of the word "engagement" in the May 2022 Subject Report for Literature and they all appear in the IA section. The Language and Literature May 2022 Subject Report stresses "personal interpretation" with two instances of it in the IA section. While these terms may be interpreted slightly differently, they both reference the importance of student agency.





as a teacher and a workshop leader has taught me about the IO is that we tend to compartmentalise it because of its unique nature and structure. All the other assessments in Language A involve writing and some good old-style textual analysis. This compartmentalisation is contrary to how students learn and how the curriculum has been designed, and so it is to be expected that the IO is seen by many students and teachers as an obstacle, rather than an opportunity. This opportunity is cognitive, social and metacognitive; this is such stuff as learning is made on.

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## About the author

**Dr. Anna Androulaki-Woodcock** has been teaching IB English since 2002 and has been leading IB workshops for Language A for fifteen years. Her perspective has been shaped by teaching in very different and diverse contexts in Greece, Germany, the UK and China. The administrative positions she has held, viz. those of Diploma Programme Coordinator and Head of English, inform her understanding of contextual and pedagogical implications for the teaching of English for both students and teachers. Dr. Anna Androulaki-Woodcock has a passion for reading, for learning that defies expectations and curricula, for asking questions as well as for strategic thinking for educational institutions. She is the author of several academic papers in theoretical linguistics (the area of her PhD dissertation), the Oxford University Press *English A: Literature IB Prepared following and the Course Companion of the same subject*. Her experience from working at residential schools has enhanced her awareness of the impact of holistic education on teaching and lifelong learning. She can be reached at [aaeducationalconsultancy@gmail.com](mailto:aaeducationalconsultancy@gmail.com)



# What Are English Teachers For?

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## Introduction: The Role of English Teachers

I used to love diagramming sentences. For those of you who are unfamiliar with this procedure, diagramming offered a simple, visual way to show the grammatical relationships among words in a sentence. Although diagramming was probably introduced to students in Middle School, I used to spend some time with Upper School students on it. For the students who learned how diagramming worked, it was often an enjoyable way to demonstrate and clarify their understanding of the structure of the English language. But at some point in the 1980s, as I recall, the study of grammar as a stand-alone topic was dropped from Upper School English courses. There were good reasons for this, perhaps, and I suppose that one could argue that students' foreign language courses were a better home for an emphasis on the grammatical structure of language than the English course. I mention this here just as an example of how the English teacher's role has changed. From

what I can see, I doubt that an Upper School English teacher today would be expected to focus any part of the course on grammar.

Is it time for the role of English teachers to change yet again, now that generative artificial intelligence programs are becoming widespread? Should the teaching of writing be dropped from Upper School English courses now that AI applications like ChatGPT are available to students? English teachers in secondary and higher education certainly had a challenging school year in 2022-23. Many periodicals have published articles like the Atlantic's "The First Year of AI College Ends in Ruin" (<https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2023/05/chatbot-cheating-college-campuses/674073/>), which describes the great difficulties teachers now have in determining the degree to which AI is responsible for student writing. Next school year, many English teachers will probably demand that all writing assignments be handwritten in class with no technology. The English classroom may become a



neo-Luddite sanctuary from the modern world. Alternatively, maybe some English teachers will just drop the teaching of writing altogether. This surely sounds like a mistake, but since ChatGPT can quite easily produce the 5-paragraph essay that English teachers typically assign, it is certainly time for English teachers to ask what they really want their students to learn. In fact, given that the use of AI is likely to become even more embedded in all forms of communication in today's – and tomorrow's – world, an even more radical question arises: What are English teachers for? To answer this, perhaps a place to start would be to recognize that programs like ChatGPT “differ profoundly from how humans reason and use language,” in the words of Noam Chomsky (<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/08/opinion/noam-chomsky-chatgpt-ai.html>). Chomsky's major point in this article is that ChatGPT and programs like it mostly work by statistical prediction instead of developing an underlying “deep structure” model of language. As Chomsky further says, the human mind “seeks not to infer brute correlations among data points but to create explanations.” If we believe Chomsky, artificial intelligence seems to operate quite differently from human intelligence. Do we really want to surrender all human communication to a non-human form of intelligence? Of course not. Regardless of the extent to which writing remains in the English curriculum, what really matters is the preservation of truly human intelligence. Below, I will briefly outline three areas in which English teachers can nurture and cultivate their students' human intelligence.

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 .....

## Ideals: The Principle of Excellence

When Socrates was put in prison by the Athenian authorities for corrupting the youth, his friends asked him why he remained in jail despite having opportunities to escape. He answered that physicists might say that the cause of his being in the prison was that his bones happened to be situated in this location, but that he would say the cause of his being in prison was that he thought it best to be there. Throughout the dialogues of Plato, we learn that understanding the meaning of anything is in terms of its excellence.

For example, we learn about dancing partly by watching a great dancer perform. By distinguishing between a great dancer and a lesser one, we see that dancing is an activity in which one can succeed or fail. If there were

no differences in degree, we might still be able to identify the activity of dancing, but we would not understand it. We understand

by the principle of excellence through the recognition of differences of degree.

A simple demonstration of this idea can be seen if we were to draw two circles on a piece of paper. One of them is likely to be a better circle than the other – better in that it more closely approximates perfect circularity. Although we could classify both drawings as “circles,” it is by distinguishing the better circle from the worse that we understand what circularity means. Through the difference in degree between the drawn circles, we can project the ideal of the perfect circle.

This Platonic approach is inherent in the English teacher's attempts to help students learn to communicate effectively.



For instance, by comparing a sample of a student's writing with one written by a published author – or perhaps even by comparing a sample of a student's writing with one generated by ChatGPT – the English teacher can show how the pieces of writing differ in degree, and from that difference, we can potentially project the ideal for that piece of writing.

Identifying and classifying are important operations of intelligence, but truly human intelligence operates by idealizing. By teaching students to apply the principle of excellence and to seek and long for – that is, love – the highest ideals, like truth, goodness, and beauty, the English teacher can help young people develop judgment and taste and can contribute something unique and indispensable to their intellectual, moral, and

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**On the other hand, the imagination, when harnessed by a poet, was also the power of creativity and creative thought.**

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aesthetic growth.

### **Imagination: The Power of Creativity**

The 17th century French mathematician René Descartes is known as one of the most important makers of the modern world. His great contribution to philosophy was in his separation of mind and matter. The mind, or subjective experience, is "in-here"; matter, or objective reality, is "out-there." This absolute separation provided the necessary framework for modern science to develop its relentless focus on "objective reality" through the tools of mathematics and experiment

in support of the reason (logic, rationality, etc.). However, Blaise Pascal, Descartes's contemporary and an equally adept mathematician, proposed a third dimension between this mind-matter dualism: the heart. By this he meant an intuitive or imaginative way of knowing that was, in some ways, superior to reason: "The heart has its reasons of which reason knows nothing."

This same intermediary between mind and matter was called the imagination by Samuel Taylor Coleridge in the early 19th century. He explained that the imagination on one hand was an agent of perception, that is, an active power that transformed raw sensory data into knowledge. On the other hand, the imagination, when harnessed by a poet, was also the power of creativity and creative thought. Maybe Coleridge had in mind Theseus's scornful words in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*:

Lovers and madmen have such seething brains,  
*Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend  
 More than cool reason ever comprehends.  
 The lunatic, the lover and the poet  
 Are of imagination all compact. . . .  
 The poet's eye, in fine frenzy rolling,  
 Doth glance from heaven to earth, from  
 earth to heaven,  
 And as imagination bodies forth  
 The forms of things unknown, the poet's  
 pen  
 Turns them to shapes and gives to airy  
 nothing  
 A local habitation and a name. (V, i, 4-8,  
 12-17)*

Theseus's dismissive attitude toward the imagination and toward poets seems a bit excessive, especially given that he himself is the poetic creation of Shakespeare. English teachers call this "irony."

The imagination is a power distinct from the





“cool reason” of mathematics and science, and the study of the imagination, that is, the study of poetry and poetic language, gives students a kind and depth of insight that is impossible to achieve in any other way. The English teacher is the guardian of the flame of imagination and poetry, and a world without them would be cold and inhuman.

### **Literature: The Hope of Humanity**

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn has fallen out of favour somewhat in recent years, probably due to his lack of enthusiasm for certain superficialities of outlook that he observed once he had the opportunity to experience Western civilization first-hand after his exile from the former Soviet Union. However, he won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1970, and for a period of time in the 20th century, his was the most powerful public voice of conscience and freedom.

In his Nobel Prize Lecture, he discussed different scales of values throughout the world and raised an alarm:

*For humanity as a whole, packed into one single clump, such mutual lack of understanding carries the threat of a quick and stormy death. Given the existence of six, or four, or even two scales of values, there can be no united world, no united humanity: we will be torn apart by this difference in rhythm, this difference in oscillation. We will not survive on one Earth, just as no man can survive with two hearts*  
(Solzhenitsyn, 17).

But he also could see a solution to this problem: “Who is there who might possibly be able to instil in the bigoted, narrow, stubborn human essence the grief and joy of those faraway others, the perception of a range of facts and delusions never personally experienced? ... Fortunately, there does exist in the world a means to this end! It is art. It is

literature”  
(Solzhenitsyn, 18-19).

Solzhenitsyn argued that learning empathy for others living in different places and times enhances our humanity and might be the salvation of the world. No stranger to oppression, violence, and lies, Solzhenitsyn nevertheless believed in the power of truth to overcome the lie, and in doing so, he

**Literature is the English teacher’s speciality; in no other school subject are students likely to experience the illuminating ideals of human existence so deeply.**

amplified the message of William Faulkner, whose Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech 20 years earlier had concluded by saying:

I believe that man will not merely endure: he will prevail. He is immortal, not because he alone among creatures has an inexhaustible voice, but because he has a soul, a spirit capable of compassion and sacrifice and endurance. The poet’s, the writer’s, duty is to write about these things. It is his privilege to help man endure by lifting his heart, by reminding him of the courage and honor and hope and pride and compassion and pity and sacrifice which have been the glory of his past.

[\(https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1949/faulkner/speech/\)](https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1949/faulkner/speech/)

Literature is the English teacher’s speciality; in no other school subject are students likely to experience the illuminating ideals of human existence so deeply. It is through world literature that humanity can most eloquently speak words of hope to students today.



## Conclusion: Human Intelligence

Some of you may have recognized the origin of this essay's title in Martin Heidegger's "What Are Poets For?" This magnificently opaque work was based on a speech he gave in 1946 about the poet Rainer Maria Rilke. The origin of his title was, in turn, taken from a line in a poem by Friedrich Hölderlin that goes: "and what are poets for in a destitute

**I would suggest that Rilke can indeed be seen as the kind of poet who speaks in accents far removed from the banalities of artificial intelligence, and who therefore exemplifies the kind of human intelligence that English teachers need to promote.**

time?" For Hölderlin and Heidegger, a "destitute time" was one in which the god has departed from the people, but the people don't know it yet.

Heidegger characterized our godless modern civilization as a relentless parade of the "fury of self-assertion which is resolutely self-reliant" (Heidegger, 114). Opposed to modern people's self-reliant self-assertion are the poets who dare to "sing the healing whole in the midst of the unholy" (Heidegger, 137).

Heidegger seemed unsure whether or not Rilke was the poet needed in this "destitute time"; however, I would suggest that Rilke can indeed be seen as the kind of poet who speaks in accents far removed from the banalities of artificial intelligence, and who therefore exemplifies the kind of human

intelligence that English teachers need to promote. In this spirit, I will conclude with a poem of Rilke's called the "Archaic Torso of Apollo," which was

written 115 years ago when Rilke was working as a secretary for the sculptor Auguste Rodin in Paris.

In this poem, the speaker begins describing the headless statue of an ancient god with penetrating eloquence, but as the poem reaches its end, it seems that the statue is somehow viewing us; viewing, evaluating, and judging. The "Archaic Torso of Apollo" is a profound work of imagination about a broken statue whose gleaming, glistening brilliance not only dazzles and bursts like a star but also challenges and astounds.

*We cannot know his legendary head  
with eyes like ripening fruit. And yet his  
torso  
is still suffused with brilliance from  
inside,  
like a lamp, in which his gaze, now turned  
to low,  
  
gleams in all its power. Otherwise  
the curved breast could not dazzle you so,  
nor could  
a smile run through the placid hips and  
thighs  
to that dark center where procreation  
flared.*

*Otherwise this stone would seem defaced  
beneath the translucent cascade of the  
shoulders  
and would not glisten like a wild beast's  
fur:  
would not, from all the borders of itself,  
burst like a star: for here there is no place  
that does not see you. You must change  
your life.*



### Translated by Stephen Mitchell

(<https://poets.org/poem/archaic-torso-apollo>)

I am no expert in Rilke's poetry, but it seems to me that this poem, imperfect though it may be, dazzles and challenges as much as the headless statue was said to. Like the poem's speaker, our apprehension of the qualitative difference between our minds and the ideal beauty of the human/divine image -- bedimmed though it has been by time and chance -- is almost overwhelming. Almost, because the demand for the heart's transformation in the poem's last sentence provides a way, maybe the only way, to respond with imaginative integrity. I leave this with you as an example of what English teachers are for -- we are here to lead our students on journeys to the deep heart's core.

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### About the author

**David Jepson** started his career in secondary education some 45 years ago as an English teacher in Massachusetts. He has taught in upstate New York, San Francisco, Switzerland, and for many years at TISIS The American School in England, where he also served in various administrative positions, including Head of Upper School, Academic Dean, and Director of IT. Currently, David is Director of Studies for the TISIS Foundation, which is the organization that supports the TISIS schools in Switzerland, England, Portugal, and Puerto Rico. David can be reached at [djepson@tasisengland.org](mailto:djepson@tasisengland.org).



## How PBL Builds Literacy Across Content Areas

**Suzie Boss,**  
author and PBL advocate,  
Portland, Oregon

Helping students find their voice, improve their writing through critique and revision, cite reliable sources, and connect with authentic audiences are familiar goals for English teachers. Increasingly, as project-based learning (PBL) gains traction in international schools, the same goals are also showing up across content areas, creating new opportunities for interdisciplinary learning.

Matt Elms, who teaches eighth-grade Social Studies at Singapore American School, offers a good example. His students participate in an international competition called National History Day. This annual project (which is an extended PBL experience, not just a one-day event) challenges them to conduct research, analyze historical events, and produce original products to bring their interpretations to an audience. For Elms, the challenge doesn't stop at teaching students to think like historians. "This is a writing competition," he says. "Students need reading skills, research skills, the ability to make an argument backed by evidence, and then to put it all together [to produce a documentary, website, exhibit, or performance]."

Focusing on literacy instruction doesn't run counter to [best practices for PBL](#). Rather, it's a surefire strategy to improve project design. Whether PBL is happening in the English classroom, in another content area, or through interdisciplinary collaboration, students need to hone their communication and research skills as they set out to solve an open-ended problem or respond to a challenge.

When teachers across content areas share a common understanding of what makes for effective PBL, they are well-positioned to collaborate on interdisciplinary projects. Recent research about PBL shows a range of benefits for students, including improved informational reading in the elementary grades, improved achievement on Advanced Placement exams, and increased language proficiency among middle school English learners (Deutscher et al., 2021; Duke et al., 2020; Krajcik et al., 2021; Saavedra et al., 2021).

During project design, teachers can identify key moments to lean into literacy instruction





and build important thinking skills.

At project launch, the goal is to spark curiosity and set the stage for deeper inquiry. Teachers often plan a field trip, guest speaker, compelling video, or hands-on activity to get students asking questions about the learning ahead. If students only ask about logistics (“When is this due?”), or expect the teacher to do all the thinking (“What should I be curious about?”), that’s a clue to teach questioning strategies. For example, introducing a thinking routine such as [See, Think, Wonder](#) or the [Question Formulation Technique](#) can help students ask more probing questions.

Well-designed projects are open-ended; there’s not one “right” answer or solution. “That open-endedness is a thrill for many students but can also be intimidating,” acknowledges

James Kowalski, Social Studies teacher at Seoul International School and co-affiliate coordinator of National History Day Korea. For teachers, the challenge is to cultivate curiosity but provide enough structure “so that students aren’t swimming in the middle of a vast ocean. They know someone’s there with them to provide examples, to help them explore,” he says.

Students’ initial questions set the stage for the next phase of learning: building knowledge and skills. PBL teachers support learners with a wide range of instructional strategies, such as curating resources, teaching mini-lessons, and facilitating hands-on activities. Students may need help determining reliable sources or accessing difficult texts. For example, a high school Chemistry teacher often does a

read-aloud to help his students understand the structure of scientific journal articles. In an elementary classroom, students might create their own illustrated dictionaries to build vocabulary for a project about architecture and design.

Information literacy is a natural by-product of high-quality PBL. “Students develop a fluency in being able to identify the credibility of sources,” Kowalski says. “It’s increasingly important for students to think skeptically and critically about information. Where are they getting information and how are they synthesizing that in conjunction with their own ideas?”

Research in PBL is not limited to traditional sources.

Students often consult with content experts as part of their inquiry. PBL teachers can help them sharpen interviewing

skills, improving students’ speaking and listening skills in the process. Before his students interview experts for their podcasts, Alex Campbell, a Social Studies teacher from the U.S., invites a local journalist to critique their interview questions and share strategies for asking follow-up questions.

Next, students apply what they have learned to create original products or solutions to their driving question. In the PBL classroom, this is an iterative process, much like the writers’ workshop. Whether they are producing documentaries, creating infographics to explain data, inventing apps or games, or advocating for policy change, they improve their products by giving and receiving constructive feedback.

**It’s increasingly important for students to think skeptically and critically about information. Where are they getting information and how are they synthesizing that in conjunction with their own ideas?**



The opportunity to revise and improve their work “is what makes this awesome,” says Elms. Finally, students present their polished work to an authentic audience. They need to think critically about how to connect with their audience and be ready to respond to questions. Teachers can prepare them for success by modeling presentation techniques, planning practice sessions, and teaching students how to give effective peer feedback.

The student choice that’s a key element of PBL means teachers need to be comfortable responding to students’ diverse needs for support. Elms uses formative assessment to manage lesson planning. He explains: “When I see three or four students struggling [with something specific], I’ll say to the whole class, ‘I’m going to do a lesson on this today. If you would like to listen, come join us.’ But it’s not optional for those who need it.”

Learning to manage the moving parts of a project takes time. Teachers who are new to PBL can get off to a faster start by joining a well-designed project. The following examples are open to international students, create opportunities for interdisciplinary learning, and include resources to support educators.

[National History Day](#) is an extended project experience for students in grades 6-12. Some 500,000 students from around the world participate annually, choosing a specific topic related to the contest theme and then producing an original research paper, documentary, exhibit, or website. (For 2023-24, the theme is Turning Points in History.) Resources are provided for both students and teachers.

[Project Citizen](#), a civics project developed in the U.S., has been adopted in countries around the world through the [Center for Civic Education’s Civitas International Program](#). Through Project Citizen, students identify and research community problems or issues

of concern and then advocate for policy solutions as engaged citizens.

[The Goals Project](#) is an annual project that engages students around the world in tackling the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Students decide how they want to take action. In past years, final products have included original songs and videos, digital games, community art installations, and social media campaigns. Resources and mentors are provided to support students and teachers.

[G.L.O.B.E.](#) (Global Learning and Observations to Benefit the Environment) is an international science and education program that engages students in scientific data gathering and communication. Students publish research reports based on their investigations and can participate in a virtual symposium with other young citizen scientists and experts.

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To help improve project design, Suzie Boss and colleague Myla Lee created this infographic with prompts for teacher reflection at each stage of PBL.

## DESIGNING EFFECTIVE DIGITAL-AGE PROJECTS FOR EQUITY, INQUIRY, AND LITERACY

### REFLECTION QUESTIONS

**LAUNCH PROJECT**  
Spark curiosity, create need-to-knows and connect prior knowledge

<p><b>Equity</b> How can you connect the project to students' culture, social location, and family traditions?</p>	<p><b>Inquiry</b> How can the launch spark students' curiosity to engage in the project and want to learn more of the content?</p>	<p><b>Literacy</b> How can students formulate and comprehend questions?</p>
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**BUILD KNOWLEDGE, UNDERSTANDING, & SKILLS**  
Acquire new knowledge/skills and investigate need-to-know questions

<p><b>Equity</b> How can students have access to resources and information to build content and understanding?</p>	<p><b>Inquiry</b> How can students determine reliable information?</p>	<p><b>Literacy</b> How are you using digital tools to build the essential skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing?</p>
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**DEVELOP & CRITIQUE**  
Apply learning to create a product or solution and improve with feedback

<p><b>Equity</b> How can students use available resources and assets to develop the product/presentation?</p>	<p><b>Inquiry</b> How can students use questions to critique each other's product/presentation?</p>	<p><b>Literacy</b> How can students actively receive (listen) and give (speak or write) feedback to improve work through iterations?</p>
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**PRESENT PRODUCTS**  
Share results with an authentic audience and reflect on growth

<p><b>Equity</b> How can students present to authentic audiences that are directly impacted by their product?</p>	<p><b>Inquiry</b> How can students use audience engagement to reflect on their own growth as a learner, problem-solver, and thinker?</p>	<p><b>Literacy</b> How can students choose an appropriate mode to reach their audience?</p>
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THE PBL PROJECT PATH WAS DEVELOPED BY @PBLWORKS  
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# Cultivating and Navigating Online Writing Spaces as “Walled Gardens” in ELA Classrooms

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Unsplash | Nick Morrison

*Two central tensions—structure and privacy—emerged when a group of teachers developed Write4Change, an online writing space that connected students in the United States, Italy, and South Korea.*

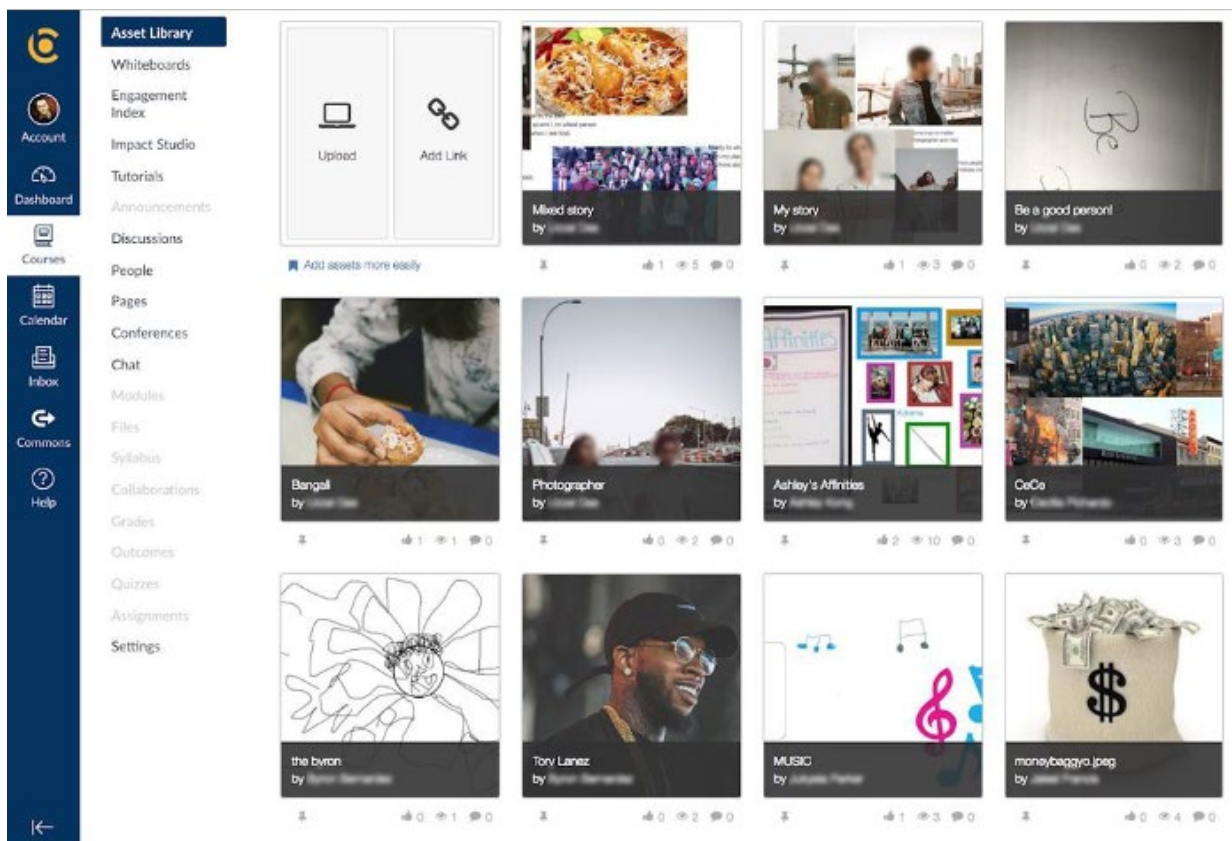
Many English Language Arts (ELA) classrooms invite students to share their writing with others through different digital tools and online spaces (e.g., Canvas, Padlet, and Google Classroom), but it can be challenging for educators to know how to design such experiences. We bring together our perspectives as a middle grades teacher (Megan), high school student (Ananya), and university-based educators and researchers (Emily, Bethany, and Amy) who worked collaboratively in an online writing space we developed called Write4Change (W4C).

From our experiences using, designing, and researching W4C, we propose a metaphor of “walled gardens” as helpful for educators to support student engagement and learning when forming and facilitating online writing spaces. This metaphor primes us to think critically about how to nurture the unfolding “garden” of student writing within

intentionally constructed “walls” in ways that balance structure and privacy with creativity and openness.

We collaborated with other international educators in creating the semi-private online writing space W4C. W4C linked high schoolers in Italy, the United States, and South Korea whose teachers expressed interest in connecting students to share their writing about global, local, and personal issues of concern in the members-only space for the school year. W4C is an ongoing and evolving space that has moved across multiple platforms. For the iteration under discussion in this article, we customized a Canvas site with additional multimodal composing tools (see Stornaiuolo, et al.); students could post writing, videos, images, and links in a “whiteboard” gallery visible to all community members who could “like,” comment, and/or remix posts (see Figure 1).





**Figure 1.** Whiteboards in the W4C community, as seen in this screenshot, offered students opportunities to compose, collaborate, and connect multimodally.

Figure 1. Whiteboards in the W4C community offered students opportunities to compose, collaborate, and connect multimodally. We worked with teachers to develop writing activities aligned with learning objectives while also researching how students and teachers were using W4C. We engaged in design cycles to reflect on and (re)develop six units of writing curricula centered on multimodality, cross-cultural communication, and social change cohering around “storytelling.” After working with international classrooms for a year, we also created a summer program for youth research fellows, adolescents interested in “writing for change” who could provide insights about digital writing spaces and work with materials the international students had created. Over one summer, 28 youth research fellows participated in W4C, testing curriculum and engaging in data collection and analysis.

Ananya, one of the youth research fellows, has continued working with us as a thought

partner and collaborator. She responded to writing prompts and commented on, shared, and circulated peers’ posts. As a researcher, she collected data about fellows’ experiences through reflections, surveys, and interviews and analyzed the materials created by peers in Italy, South Korea, and the United States. Emily, Bethany, Megan, and Amy served as designers, researchers, and moderators.

### “Walled Garden” Metaphor

A guiding metaphor to describe educational online writing spaces emerged from our collaborative W4C work: “walled gardens.” We found W4C functioned as a semi-structured space (“garden”) for students to experiment and “grow” ideas with authentic yet moderated audiences, around which we created “walls” to define community boundaries (making the space semi-private). Working in W4C revealed two key considerations in creating walled garden writing communities: structure and privacy.



Regarding structure, we often asked ourselves: how much structure should we offer as educators? How much freedom should students have to take ideas in different directions? We navigated this tension by offering students options of using multiple modalities and writing on their choice of topics while centering prompts and activities on shared purposes and visible learning goals. Prompts focused on thinking about self and the local in relation to global others, listening to different voices, and creating opportunities for dialogue around and impact through writing (see Table 1).

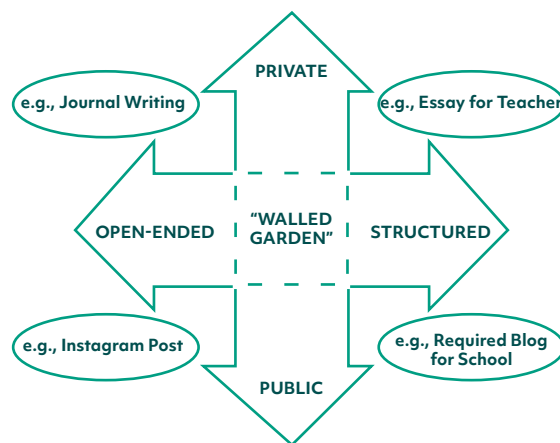
**Table 1. Sample W4C Prompts**

TOPICS	ACTIVITIES
Images of Home	Take a photo of something you think of as "home."
Favorite Home Foods	Share food images you associate with "home."
Words at Home	Share a favorite word/phrase you hear at "home."
Collage of Home	Create a photo story using others' creations: What does "home" mean to you?
Remix of Home Collages	Remix at least two "home" collages together to show different ways people think about "home."

Table 1. This series of prompts from one W4C unit focused on representations of "home" and facilitated students in progressing toward identity exploration and collaborative composition.

The second consideration involved privacy: how to set up walls around the garden and whom to allow inside—and whom we cannot "keep out" (e.g., administrators and platform data collectors). In the semi-private W4C space, only enrolled youth members and educators had access to the Canvas site; students discussed feeling safe in the enclosed, educator-moderated environment while still experiencing the public nature of sharing personal work with global audiences.

We created a heuristic (Figure 2) to guide decision-making about where and when to create walls—providing intentional, curated spaces for interaction, collaboration, and idea circulation—and how to tend gardens, cultivating spaces for ideas to grow and flourish with scaffolds to support blooms.



**Figure 2.** A graphic heuristic helps teachers design walled garden online writing spaces attuned to key tensions experienced in W4C.

We do not suggest there is always a "just-right" approach or platform for every classroom or that balance can be definitively determined. We offer, instead, that educators can continually consider and negotiate how tensions between publicness/privacy and structure/choice unfold in their contexts in relation to curriculum, goals, and students. Table 2 provides questions to help educators incorporate the "walled garden" metaphor and heuristic and make choices about shaping online writing spaces in their classrooms.



**Table 2. “Walled Garden” Questions for Educators**

DIMENSION	TENSION	GUIDING QUESTIONS
“Walled”	Navigating publicness/privacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What does it mean for an online writing community to be “walled” in your context?</li> <li>• What audiences might you invite in?</li> <li>• How might these walls be stifling?</li> <li>• How might writing be shared beyond the walls?</li> <li>• What protections and support do your students need?</li> <li>• In what ways is educational technology peering over the garden walls (e.g., commercialization, surveillance)?</li> <li>• How will you make an online writing space feel authentic and safe?</li> </ul>
“Garden”	Navigating structure/open-endedness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How is control over design and moderation of online writing spaces distributed in your context?</li> <li>• Who makes decisions about what seeds (prompts) are planted?</li> <li>• In what ways do platform designs and tools structure your garden?</li> <li>• How much choice and freedom will students have within the space?</li> <li>• How will you cultivate, tend, and prune ideas?</li> <li>• Who will do that gardening work?</li> </ul>

Table 2. The “walled garden” metaphor invites a series of critical questions.

**Tensions in Online Writing Spaces**

We thought about these balances between structure/open-endedness and publicness/privacy from Ananya’s student perspective. Ananya discussed the importance of offering organized but open ways for students to “introduce” themselves when joining W4C. As an initial W4C assignment, fellows were invited to create multimodal collages

capturing their interests and personalities and to comment on others’ collages. By encouraging students to share “small personal details at first, something as simple as where we grew up or a favorite song or artist,” Ananya recalled W4C prompts offered opportunities for conversations with strangers. Ananya described feeling more comfortable and motivated to interact with distant peers and use collaborative forms of writing in W4C (e.g., remixing whiteboards). These forms of intentional, open-ended

multimodal introductions helped W4C feel like a community of writers and impacted how students responded to subsequent prompts.

Students were later invited to compose their own, someone else's, or a fictional story as part of a unit on representation: "The story can be a narrative or another form (poem, song lyrics, etc.) or multimedia (digital story, video, etc.)." Ananya emphasized this subsequent prompt because of the multiple pathways it offered to respond and the writerly connections and inspiration it provided her:

*It was different from any other kind of online interaction I had experienced in the past. While there was some hesitation at first, once people moved past the initial fear of expressing themselves in front of what felt like strangers, it opened me up personally to perspectives I never would have otherwise heard. It was an experience that I won't forget because people were able to tell their stories.*

Ananya is a trilingual person of color who has been a student in the United States and Germany. While engaging with others' stories in response to this "write a story" prompt, she was struck by a peer who detailed their experience as a person of color in a primarily white context.

The content of the post allowed Ananya to identify with a distant peer she had never met or "spoken" to because Ananya shared similar experiences.

It was, however, how her peer drew on multiple genres and modes to share the story—the combination of images and "spoken-word style verses"—that elicited an emotional response from Ananya. The openness in topic and approach contributed to what Ananya specified as the "most important part of the experience": "the fact

that the assignment was to tell a story in a creative manner which expressed any part of your identity."

From these connections, Ananya described feeling "free" to compose a multimodal poem in response to the same "write a story" prompt, expanding how she could explore her story and make connections to experiences and various literacies. This "structured openness" allowed Ananya to answer the prompt in ways meaningful to her, bringing in her experience living across multiple cultures through text and image while also understanding how her writing might be taken up by cross-cultural readers who could potentially see themselves in her reflections—as she had seen herself in another W4C writer's. Ananya wrote about the town she grew up in (see Figure 3).

Rauenberg

Winds start blow  
And everyone forgets the snow  
The sun comes out from the clouds  
And lights start to shine

Hope starts to show  
And cherry blossoms grow  
Petals fall in showers  
And clean, fresh air swells as the evening falls

And laughter echoes through the city  
The smell of wet grass flows through my home  
And the world begins to glow  
The sun puts on a show



**Figure 3.** Ananya created this multimodal poem about her hometown in response to a "write your story" prompt.





## Considerations for Designing Walled Gardens

Ananya's W4C experiences illustrate how open-endedness can be helpful when navigating multiple public audiences and purposes. However, an online writing prompt is only as open-ended as the modalities and other features available in the space. For instance, Korean W4C student-participants were constrained by the platform's limitations around what types of alphabetic text it could recognize and had to draw Korean letters in their responses. Teachers must carefully consider affordances and limitations of platforms and tools in combination with aims and content of prompts and students' products, as all contribute to how students experience a space as structured or open-ended, public or private. We found it helpful to design prompts making genres (e.g., poetry), formats (e.g., video), and/or languages (e.g., multilingual response) open to student choices. We also created space in content by offering options in focus yet providing clear guidelines and welcoming students' experiences without requiring disclosure.

From our W4C work, we offer the following two suggestions that align with the two axes of the "walled garden" heuristic.

### 1. Foster structured openness through flexible, multimodal platforms and prompts.

We developed structured openness within W4C through intentional community building with interactive prompts; shared core themes; and multiple, progressive approaches to topics. To center collaborative writing approaches, we suggest educators spend time considering their purposes for bringing in an online writing platform and emphasize

working to create community and familiarity within one open-ended space that aligns with learning goals and the context.

Students find deeper engagement in learning one set of tools, participation norms, and interactive dynamics with a stable moderator set. In a single, carefully cultivated walled garden, the interface and tools can become familiar, and educators can offer a moderated space where they post open-ended prompts that maintain structure in a multimodal online forum.

### 2. Openly reflect on private and public aspects of your garden and roles and responsibilities around each.

Teachers need to carefully weigh roles they take up within walled gardens, making decisions about how public the writing platform is designed to be and when and how to moderate directly, observe, and scaffold through probing: whether to offer feedback publicly or privately (and in what voice, formality, and stance) and how and when to encourage peer sharing and collaboration. We found it effective to respond to writers by first offering support and encouragement, then asking targeted questions ("What made you choose a collage?"), then explicitly

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**Such an approach allows students to feel comfortable as they learn how to navigate the space virtually and interpersonally.**

.....

naming capacities for peer collaboration ("I wonder if you could find someone else on W4C who looked into a similar area."). Such an approach allows students to feel comfortable as they learn how to navigate the space virtually and interpersonally.



## Design of Online Writing Spaces for Classrooms

By being selective and transparent about digital tools and how they fit with our goals (Garcia and Nichols), we can create meaningful and safe forms of choice that allow students to select aspects of their identities to share and in what writing forms as they navigate multiple audiences and purposes. Teachers can consider making decisions with students, developing shared community agreements, discussing data privacy and consent, and inviting student moderation. Educators and students need to develop critical orientations toward digital literacies (Aguilera and Pandya) to increase awareness of and confidence about how their writing can travel beyond classrooms' garden walls.

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"A version of this story was originally published in *English Journal* 112.1 (Sep. 2022), pp. 71-79. Copyright 2022 by the National Council of Teachers of English. Reprinted with permission."



Empowered Writing through

# Movement in the International English Classroom



Dr. Kathleen Waller,  
The Matterhorn, Basel,  
Switzerland

Probably like many of you, I went into teaching English because I loved literature and enjoyed working with teenagers. While these have remained true, I have developed lots of reasons for teaching that evolved over the years, but the one that became my center is this: Everyone can write. Everyone has a voice that deserves to be heard.

Of course, teaching writing also means teaching literature...and language and ideas and...well, what it means to be human. But this simple reductionist idea in my teaching was sparked by a conversation with Julia Lesage, iconic editor at the academic film journal *Jump Cut* during my PhD studies. In a small room seminar, she proclaimed just that: I believe everyone can write.

Everyone just needs a chance to develop their writing. This mantra can be expressed in many empowering ways to students. We can keep high standards and expectations for all. We can differentiate to reach all in our classrooms. We can teach all students tools that can help them write not only whilst in school but beyond.

Over the years, I have found that another, perhaps unexpected, way we can do this is through movement. Using short, directive movement as part of lessons about writing can help us inspire creativity, reach all students, make memorable experiences, and combat deferring to AI.

## Inspiring the creativity within

As a long-time athlete, I have always been interested in the mind-body connection, something that's easily thrown around in schools these days. I wanted to go deeper than 'seeking calm' or 'avoiding stress' in trying to pursue these benefits in the classroom. Although those ht we could go further.

In a weekend-long yoga workshop on Space & Flow in Vienna with Raphan Kebe, we were first asked what we wanted to get out of the course. My response was creativity. I knew Kebe had a unique, jazz-like way of approaching yoga and I thought it might be useful to my writing.

One of the concepts we investigated in movement was called Creativity in Constraint, which has become my approach to helping students and professional writers alike understand methods of using text types, genres, and even the five-paragraph-essay model to not only be successful in sharing a communicated message but also be more creative.

One of the activities that I brought to my classroom almost directly was the “physical kōan.” Whilst a Zen kōan is a set of parameters which has no one solution and creates meaning out of uncertainty, a physical one is a riddle of movement in the body. My adapted model cleared the space in the room, then asked students to move from one side to the other all the while on one foot and making a 360 degree turn at some point. Every single time, all the students first hopped across the room with a (wobbly) turn in the middle somewhere. Fine, ok, assignment complete. But can anyone, I questioned, find a different way to complete the same riddle?

Hopping from one foot to the next, spinning a bum on a desk, even doing a cartwheel in an outdoor class setting were alternative responses. Great, so, how do we apply this concept to our writing?

Suddenly, light bulbs were going off all over the place. Everyone had something to say about the creative process and writing essays. Often, they came up with ideas I hadn’t thought of or gave us issues to debate. The students were actively internalizing their process as writers and understanding essay writing as a creative act.

### Reaching all students

With the success of this experiment, I went on to try others. Of course, we all learn that moving students around during a lesson can help to keep attention at the very least. Stand-up reading and acting of drama tend

to invigorate the room. Many of you might use the agree/disagree model where students stand around the room to debate an issue. I love this one and also make sure there’s a soft ball being passed around to the speaker. It keeps us awake but also empowers the speaker, who might normally take a passive role in their chair. Sometimes we forget to do this in DP classrooms or during PD with staff, but it’s just as important for them.



The reasoning, however, is not simply to wake up. It goes beyond this. We are juxtaposed with different parts of the classroom environment and students. We see from a new perspective. And, as we move, we may gain moments of reflection in our learning. I can’t go into all the details here, but I’ll share a couple of other ideas that have worked.

Read the room as students walk in. What do they need today? Creativity functions best with a lucid mind, so a tricky combination of relaxation and alertness is best. But we also want students to feel optimistic and courageous, especially if they might be writing or, even more so, sharing their writing with others.



These activities don't have to take a lot of time. Even five minutes can make a difference at the start or in the middle of a lesson. As teachers, we constantly read the room. Are students getting it? Falling asleep? Confused? Hungry? In response to these situations, we sometimes plow through lessons with little success, and other times pivot in unexpected ways to bring the classroom alive again.



Even as students come into the classroom, I like to welcome them individually and get a gauge on the emotions and attitude in the room. Occasionally, we start with a pose from yoga, things you can easily find online. If there is tension, for example, we might start with something like Eagle Pose, which has a feeling of drawing one's tension in and then releasing. If students lack confidence, we might do Warrior 2 together. I always give students the option to participate or not. These might not seem directly related to

writing, but to feel ready to write, releasing tension and creating a trusting environment are central to students' experiences.

And students with injury or physical disability can still participate. It can help them to see that you've thought of the way they can be included and might help students with learning differences understand this is just a way we can all help each other to assert our authentic selves. There are many resources online, like yogis in wheelchairs or modifications for different bodies.

### **Mind-body metaphors**

Another way to make the movement in the classroom more directly connected to the writing process is through metaphor. Of course, the more metaphor we can include in our classrooms, the better!

In one activity, I like to look at the spine as the initiator of movement and stability in the body.

We can do spine rolls and then slowly move our appendages along with the spine, considering the way it holds us all together. Then, we talk about thesis statements or central themes of poems.

Another thing we can do is use Lion Breath for courage. Why is the lion a symbol of courage?

**It's a great talking point for students. You can use other animals as well. It's fun, makes us relax, and is also memorable.**

How can we channel a fierceness within ourselves to create? It's a great talking point for students. You can use other animals as well. It's fun, makes us relax, and is also memorable.



Students move too frequently through the different classes of their day with routines and repetition. Some of these routines are wonderful for learning as well, but a small use of the body to talk about a lesson will surely stick in a student's mind.

These activities are great for the international environment, which is often multilingual. Moving the physical body is a fun way to share Mother tongues in the room (how do you say lion or arm in your language?). These seemingly small uses of multilingualism are proven with research to be especially empowering confidence-builders for students. Additionally, those not so comfortable with their non-native language skills or accent might feel freer expressing themselves with their body's movements.

### **An antidote to AI?**

The IB is already taking an integrated approach to AI, considering its benefits alongside the dangers of relying on it too heavily or creating hurdles to student learning. If students can learn from a mind-body perspective, they may also be aware when it is useful and appropriate to use AI for benefit. In other words, they can articulate the different layers of learning and methods of producing writing. By teaching writing with the physical body, that is, as an active part of oneself, students may be more able to recognize its value as an integral part of themselves. It becomes a personal act.

Understanding writing from the inside out and being asked to play with its functions and structures in creative ways helps students internalize what they learn. Greater knowledge allows them to be more creative with their writing and to use writing to express their creativity in other domains.

The possibilities for movement in the English classroom are endless. Try some safe experiments and see where it leads you. Or, let the students create lessons with their bodies that surprise you. At the very minimum, even a concentrated approach will give students more agency in their learning, showing them that awareness and health of the mind and body will let them thrive.

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### **About the author**

**Dr. Kathleen Waller** *has more than twenty years teaching experience in the American and IB systems and holds a PhD in Comparative Literature, MA in Literary & Cultural Studies, and MAT in Secondary Education and English Literature. She was an English curriculum coordinator in Hong Kong, a department head in Vienna, and has worked as an exam author and examiner for the IB. She is also a published author with a novel and two books for teachers with Hachette's Hodder Education, including Language A for the IB Diploma: Concept-Based Learning, a resource for all language A teachers on the current IBDP syllabus. Last year, she launched The Matterhorn, an online conceptual publication on Substack, looking at the intersections of literature and the arts and became a certified yoga teacher. Her new project – Yoga & Writing – also on Substack, is a community and podcast filled with ideas and tips, some of which you might find useful in your classroom. <https://yogaandwriting.substack.com/Kathleen> can be reached at [kathleenw6@gmail.com](mailto:kathleenw6@gmail.com)*



# Combating Fake Reading: The Literacy of Echo

**Kristian Kuhn,**  
The National Writing Project,  
Rochester, New York

After having spent twenty years in the classroom, one thing is becoming crystal clear to me – students are reading far less of what we assign to them than they ever have in the past.

On the first day of school this year, I asked my students the following question: by show of hands ... how many of you qualify yourselves as being readers?

I teach five sections of secondary ELA, and in four of those classes of twenty-eight students apiece, only two hands went up. In the fifth class ...there were zero hands.

Out of 140 students, eight are readers.

Given that my principal goal in the classroom is to foster a passion for learning, I realized that I'm up against some pretty difficult odds.

And after having a lengthy discussion with my students as to why this current state of affairs exists, here's what I've come to know:

1. We might want to reconsider teaching whole-class texts

2. The texts we are choosing for our students are not resonating with most of them
3. And the big one ... students want to see themselves reflected in the texts they read

So, I'm going to change the way I teach literature going forward.

I want to call it The Literacy of Echo.

Personally, when I look at my top ten favorite books of all time, I hold them so near and dear because I can see myself reflecting back to myself through the characters and events.

Or, in other terms, I can hear my voice echoing back to me through the voice of a character in the book.

As a teenager, I wanted to hear my life story and my struggle to find "self" echoing back to me.

And guess what? All 140 of my students agreed with this idea.

They want the echo effect when they read.

MacBeth, Gatsby, and the like represent the





classics and warrant being taught ... but most of our students do not become lifelong learners and readers because we saddle them with these texts.

In fact, specifically with regards to MacBeth, three students out of 140 attest to having read more than half of it last year.

We are not fostering a love of learning. We are breeding intellectual disengagement.

We're at a crossroads ... do what we are doing and face these staggering statistics ... or radically change our approach to the teaching of literature.

My notion of The Literacy of Echo works like this ... no more whole-class text teaching.

And of even greater importance, we need to change the paradigm of how we view instruction and ask ourselves the following question: are we teachers of literature or are we literacy instructors?

Whether we are the former or latter, we know who we should be in the classroom given today's focus on standards-based learning.

And here's yet another possible obstacle: are we in districts with rigid curriculum maps that are still centered upon the classics (Dead White Men), or are we in districts with more representative voices?

I say that we start offering students the opportunity to hear their lives echoing back to self.

Therefore, I'm all in on offering Literature Circles.

I can teach close reading skills through smaller texts like poetry, short stories, and even excerpts from seminal texts. Heck, students love to act out plays. I could go this route too.

Teenagers try on a modicum of masks as they come of age. This is their reality – to construct

their identities. Few of our students will don the mask of Othello or Hester Prynne. But many can see themselves in the character of Charlie from The Perks of Being a Wallflower – and further – in characters like Winter in the The Coldest Winter Ever.

There is so much good literature that our students would love to read. And we all know – when we have created readers – we have planted the seeds of lifelong learning.

The Literacy of Echo.

I'm going to let my students hear their lives and their stories in the texts I offer.



#### About the author

**Kristian Kuhn** calls Rochester, New York homebase, where he has taught secondary ELA for over twenty years for the Rush-Henrietta Central School District – a deeply diverse and welcoming community. In addition to this role, Kristian is also a lead teacher for the National Writing Project. A man with several irons in the fire, Kristian is very active in the social media world where you can find him curating his popular YouTube Channel (*Teaching Teachers How to Teach Writing*) as well as his Facebook group: *Teachers Making Better Writers*. An avid paddle boarder and runner, Kristian definitely enjoys the great outdoors. At present, he has authored one textbook, *Teaching Teachers How to Teach Writing*, and is currently peddling a second textbook to prospective publishers: *What If We Taught Composition Like Bob Ross Teaches Painting*. Feel free to reach out to Kristian at [teachingwritingcoach@gmail.com](mailto:teachingwritingcoach@gmail.com) or visit his webpage at [www.teachinghow2write.com](http://www.teachinghow2write.com) to learn more about his PD offerings and consulting gigs.





Negotiating Around Myths in

# Academic Writing in a Non-English Environment

R. Paul Lege, PhD,  
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Teaching academic writing in a non-English environment such as in Japanese universities is a rather unique but challenging experience. Unlike a US or UK college setting, the language abilities of ESL students are often less proficient, and the expectations of ESL faculty members (who are mostly Japanese in my situation) as to what a writing instructor should teach can be rather narrowly framed (Hatase, 2011). My first advice to anyone seeking to teach academic writing in a Japanese graduate school would be to find out what the faculty or institution expects of such instruction. This can take some negotiation; for example, many institutions in Asia may want the focus to be on grammar development rather than understanding the elaborative moves of a thesis or dissertation.

While things have changed in my department over the last decade, I still must convince some of the ESL faculty that academic writing is not simply about grammar instruction. More importantly, I have to battle a few of the persistent myths associated with such advanced writing.

Some of these myths include the length of such writing, the importance of citations, and the use or role of the passive voice. While there are other persistent and outdated views, I would briefly like to share how I have managed to negotiate with some of my Japanese colleagues in the attempt to dissuade them from promulgating these counter-productive myths about academic writing.

However, such myths are not just limited to Japan, as I have encountered them in other parts of Asia as well.

## **Length of a thesis or dissertation**

Though not as prevalent today, many ESL students and some faculty in our program continue to hold to the idea that a graduate student must write exhaustively to fulfill the degree requirement or to impress the reader. This quantity-over-quality view persists despite our stated guidelines that restrict the word count of a thesis or dissertation. The reason for such a view is that some supervisors and students misconstrue the



point of a thesis, which should be about expressing an idea concisely and not producing a tome on what is known in the secondary literature. Such a view often results from too much selective contextualization resulting in a detour away from the main discourse. Unfortunately, even when interesting, such writing illustrates selective bias.

I have argued against the “quantity” approach on three grounds. First, in general, learners who engage in lengthier writing tend to have substantially more problems with coherence. Second, in many instances, such writing becomes dependent on intentional and unintentional plagiarism.

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## I have reminded faculty and students that referencing is not for decorative purposes, but is a tool for justifying what is needed and culled from other sources.

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Time is the main factor in these first two points (Vangah et al, 2016). Since many of our students are on time-restrictive scholarships, the longer their paper becomes, the more likely they will suffer from coherence issues and show signs of plagiarism, as they are working under the pressure of a deadline. The third point relates to the costs of checking and publishing lengthy academic papers, which have gone up substantially over the last few years. One way I have tried to illustrate this point is by showing a clip from the movie *Genius*, in which the editor Max Perkins (Colin Firth) battles the writer Thomas Wolfe (Jude Law) in trying to cut down on the length of a 5,000-page novel.

### The referencing myth

Similar to the quantity over quality myth, some faculty and students believe that the

“scientific merit” of academic work rests on a large number of citations. Advocates of this view believe that graduate work must be loaded with tons of citations, which really only creates the illusion that a search for information is the same as research for knowledge. This, of course, leads to an overabundance of quotations, frivolous data references, and creates reading obstacles (such as having 3-6 citations in one sentence). What exacerbates this further, is the tendency of some faculty to allow students to use footnotes (or authorial commentary) as a sort of trash bin for non-essential elements.

I have reminded faculty and students that referencing is not for decorative purposes, but is a tool for justifying what is needed and culled from other sources. Certainly, referencing can (and should) be used to support an argument, but the writer should follow up with a proper form of analysis. Unfortunately, many students will string a bunch of quotes together, or excessively paraphrase and summarize, with little or no evaluative analysis. While in some cases the student may believe they are attempting to avoid plagiarism (Merkel, 2020), in most instances, overzealous referencing results in little, if any, originality of thought, as the student is simply regurgitating what is in the literature. Thus, I use the acronym A.R.E. to teach students that referencing is a device, not simply to avoid plagiarism, but to be used based on need, and that the sources students use must be A.R.E.: accessible, reliable, and evaluated.

### Use of passive voice

In virtually every conference, seminar and classroom that I have led in Asia, invariably one person (whether faculty or student) will assert that the passive voice is more



academic than other forms of register. Of course, this is just as misguided as the “quantity” related issues discussed above. Such a view derives from a misunderstanding of how the passive voice can and might be used in some aspects of advanced research writing. Indeed, some disciplines and journals may prefer the use of passive voice in the meta-discourse, while others may discourage its use. The real point is that whether the writer employs the active or passive voice, this has less to do with being academic and more to do with writing efficiency; that is, being concise and coherent.

Using the passive voice has numerous risks that can harm the rigor of an argument and the overall coherence and conciseness of academic writing (Sigel, 2009). While the passive voice may have its place, passive sentences are generally longer, more vague, and problematic when the writer uses it to hide the intended subject of the sentence. A clever writer can use the passive voice as a tactical ploy to omit, mislead, or be opaque. Moreover, the use of passive voice can be an issue for ESL students. Without proper instruction, ESL students will compose long sentences (6-10 lines long) that embed passive verbs multiple times. (I once had a student who wrote a 17-line sentence with seven passive verbs.) Even when such writing appears to be stating something, upon further examination, the intended meaning is often quite different. Furthermore, since many of the corrective grammar applications, such as Grammarly, discourage the use of the passive, and more ESL students are using them, the writing instructor will need to explain and guide learners according to the expectations of the discipline, department, or institution.

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## A person seeking to teach academic writing courses in Asia will need to be prepared to negotiate around such myths.

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### Conclusion

Academic writing is quite a broad topic with varying approaches dependent on the discipline and the research question. Since there are many ways to approach a research question, this form of expression necessitates diversity, but expects conformity once the researcher chooses an avenue of discourse to pursue (just note the numerous writing conventions). Meanwhile, issues such as length, referencing, and use of the passive do not define this form of writing, though they certainly can impact the effectiveness (and the costs) of what a researcher needs and intends to express on paper. While some of this discussion may be apparent in the West (though the use of the passive is still contentious), myths surrounding the idea that a lengthy thesis that is heavily laden with citations (especially commentary footnotes) and written in the passive voice illustrate that “scientific” endeavor persists in many Asian countries. A person seeking to teach academic writing courses in Asia will need to be prepared to negotiate around such myths.

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**About the author**

**R. Paul Lege, PhD**, is an Associate Professor in the Graduate School of Law at Nagoya University. He has taught academic writing in Japan for more than twenty years including face-to-face classes, hybrid online courses, as well as remote and long-distance learning. He can be reached at [xrplege@law.nagoya-u.ac.jp](mailto:xrplege@law.nagoya-u.ac.jp)





# Literacy Equity and Equality in the Classroom:

## Digital Storytelling on the Rise

**Brett Pierce,**  
Meridian Stories, Freeport, Maine

Digital storytelling is the capacity to communicate using text, sound, music, and images – both still and moving. You don't have to use all of these modes, but they are the main components of digital storytelling. This suggests that to effectively communicate digitally, you are not just working on one plane of communication, with text, but on four interrelated planes: music, sound, imagery, and words. And in that range lies the complexity and wonder, the challenge and opportunity, of digital storytelling.

Historically throughout Western cultures, the primary source of information has been print-based. The printed word has been at the center of humanity's traditional literacy and has become the basis of our entire education system. But print-based literacy, for middle and high school students, is generally exciting only for those who have a solid command of language and ideas. In the United States, according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), that number is only around 37 percent of twelfth graders and 34 percent of eighth graders. Those are

the percentages of students whom the NAEP deem "at or above proficient" in reading (2019). This means that over 60 percent of American students are at or below a basic level of reading. The figures are roughly equivalent for writing. And one can extrapolate from these percentages globally, raising them a tad higher in some countries and crushing them to single digits in other countries. In short, the capacity to write well – to communicate through writing to make an impact – is a privilege for a minority of humankind. And yet, it's the 'literacy' for all of humankind.

I fully support the argument that textual literacy is a critically vital skill that allows us to organize our thoughts, build arguments, communicate concisely, conduct research, and validate theses. However, I also believe that textual literacy – the organizing of ideas, through the command of language, using words and sentence structures – is no longer the dominant literacy of humanity, but is, in fact, of equal educational value to digital literacy. The two literacies don't compete,



but instead complement and energize each other. But that only happens with an acknowledgement: there is a new literacy in town – on Earth – and we, as educators, have not been paying close attention. If the dialogue that propels our current culture is primarily happening inside of a digital platform that subsists on a mix of text, sound, music, and imagery, then our students need to be prepared to be productive and articulate participants on this digital platform. They need to be substantive digital creators – storytellers.

Take a beat and jump into the shoes of your students. Given a choice, would they want to graduate excelling at the ten-page essay or the ten-minute digital story, which shows off their capacity to combine music, imagery, sound, and words with thought-provoking and emotional effect, and, more importantly, can be shared widely on multiple platforms, without a publisher's blessing, in their community and beyond? The answer should be both. But if they were forced to choose... ?

I repeat: it's not one or the other. It's both. Each type of literacy points to different parts of the brain; different emerging cultural and scientific needs of society. But in schools, we are primarily ensconced in just one literacy, and this, I would argue, is doing a disservice to our students.

So, what exactly is digital literacy? There is no simple, definitive understanding of this phrase. It is both the capacity to understand information and knowledge that is represented digitally – what is often the primary focus of the phrase “media literacy” – and the capacity to create information and knowledge utilizing a range of digital tools. In other words, it is a new form of reading and writing.

The writing part of this literacy is digital storytelling, the subject of my book [Expanding Literacy: Bringing Digital](#)

[Storytelling into Your Classroom](#). And this new writing opens up tremendous opportunities for vastly more than the roughly 35% who are “proficient” or “advanced” text writers. Why? Because digital storytelling is visual. Digital storytelling is aural. Digital storytelling is dynamic: it moves ... literally. In digital storytelling, swaths of new pathways to communicate effectively and meaningfully become available.

Take a panning shot of your classroom in your mind. What do you see? An Actor, Director, Sound Whiz, Composer, Musician, Alpha Logistics Person (Producer), Graphic Designer/Artist/Cartoonist, Hair and Make-Up Lover, Photographic/Lighting Pro, Gamer and Video Enthusiast? How about Writers and Storytellers? All of these ‘types’ are an integral part of digital storytelling. They all have an important role to play in this ‘writing’ process. For us educators, this is unbelievably exciting. That 35% ... just shot up.

To help open up this literacy portal for teachers in the classroom, I created [Meridian Stories](#), which challenges students to work in teams to create curriculum-driven digital stories. Meridian Stories has over 125 fully developed digital storytelling projects in many content areas, and an annual digital storytelling competition which is a blast for students (15 different Challenges) and I encourage you to consider joining.

BUT, you don't need Meridian Stories to make this all happen. You just need a dose of risk-taking and knowledge of a few digital narrative formats ... which you already have. The movie trailer. The commercial. The podcast. The pitch video.

The Vlog. The newscast. The game show. Now match them up to the content you are teaching. For example:

- Sportscasting – Create a sportscasting team - announcer, color commentator



and field reporter – and sportscast, live, a moment in history that you are studying.

- Photographic Storyboard – Create a photographic storyboard – original photos only – of a short story you are reading. And ... you get to add one new scene.
- Game Show – Design a game about a famous historical or scientific figure, where the players are given clues as to who the person is and what they have achieved. Make it a podcast.
- Commercial/PSA – Pick a side in the debate about GMOs and create a 90-second commercial selling your arguments.
- Vlog – Take your viewers on a short, edited personal journey about your team's relationship with ... social media.
- Weather Forecasts – Inside of this genre of presentation, forecast the near future of ... a literary character, a country, a river ecosystem.

These are digital narrative formats that are designed to both deliver information and create an impact.

These are digital narrative formats that demand from small student teams creativity, problem solving, iterative thinking, leadership, active listening, compromise, time management, and digital creation skills.

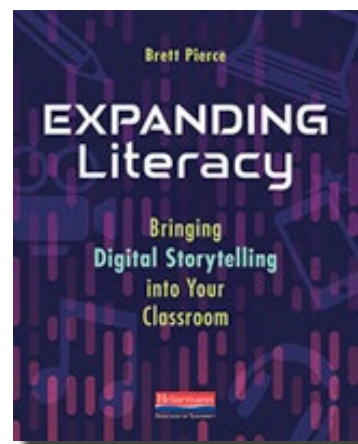
These are digital narrative formats that challenge students to communicate effectively and meaningfully – to be literate – inside of the digital universe in which they spend an awful lot of time.

These are digital narrative formats that are ... fun. That's the bottom line. They are deeply engaging and enjoyable. And in the end, they deliver to the students, in addition to the curricular content you are targeting,

digital literacy skills that contribute to the development of your students' voices and that help shape their post-secondary school aspirations.

### Meridian Stories Discount for ICTE Members

Meridian Stories also runs an annual digital storytelling global competition that serves up fifteen digital storytelling Challenges each year, wherein the submissions (no more than 4 minutes) are due in April. The cost to participate, per school, is \$250. Brett is happy to offer ICTE members 20% off this registration fee. Just email Brett at [brett@meridianstories.org](mailto:brett@meridianstories.org) to request this discount or ask further questions about this fun opportunity. You can see this year's Competitive Challenges [here](#)



### About the author

**Brett Pierce** is a program developer, producer, teacher and writer who has spent more than 30 years - most of them with the Sesame Street Workshop in New York City - working in media production that engages and entertains around a defined curriculum. Most of Brett's media work has been international in his developing and producing curriculum-driven programming from South Sudan to Iraq, Poland and North Macedonia. Brett is the Founder and Executive Director of Meridian Stories, a US-based non-profit that offers schools a wide range of creative, curricular-driven digital storytelling projects for middle and high schools. He can be reached at [brett@meridianstories.org](mailto:brett@meridianstories.org)



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