

# VATE VOICES



October 2017

## Thank You for Reading Tori Otstot, Editor

Welcome back, teacher friends!

By now, your school year is well underway. You've worked on building a community in your classroom, helped students understand your classroom expectations and procedures, collected writing samples, conducted diagnostic testing, organized countless forms, and maybe even got a little sleep at night! One thing that I hope you've found time to do is register for our upcoming fall conference and book your hotel room at our conference hotel, but if you haven't, you still have time! Please check out the flyer in the newsletter for more information, and visit our website to register for the conference and book your hotel room.

## 2016 High School Teacher of Excellence Jenny Martin

Last November at the National Council of Teachers of English, Dee Grimm from Turner Ashby High School in Bridgewater, Virginia was awarded the 2016 High School Teacher of Excellence at the Secondary Section Luncheon in Atlanta. VATE and Rockingham County Public Schools helped to cover the travel costs so that she could attend the conference to receive the award. Grimm was one of 10 teachers nationally to receive this recognition. Now, a newly retired educator, Dee taught English for 41 years. During that time she went through the National Board Certification process two times, mentored other teachers through the process, and described herself as a reflective teacher who rarely taught the same way twice. The NCTE High School Teacher of Excellence Award was established in 2001 by the NCTE Secondary Section to recognize and celebrate one high school teacher from each geographical affiliate.



The 2017 award recipient is Victoria Ingroff Garren from Thomas Jefferson High School. To learn more about the NCTE High School of Excellence Award visit <http://www.ncte.org/second/awards/hste>

## Conference Preview Ashlee Meredith, President-Elect

*Matthew Quick*

Matthew Quick is the New York Times bestselling author of *The Silver Linings Playbook*, which was made into an Oscar-winning film; *The Good Luck of Right Now*; *Love May Fail*; *The Reason You're Alive*; and four young adult novels: *Sorta Like a Rock Star*, *Boy21*; *Forgive Me*, *Leonard Peacock*; and *Every Exquisite Thing*. His work has been translated into more than thirty languages, received a PEN/Hemingway Award Honorable Mention, was an LA Times Book Prize finalist, a New York Times Book Review Editors' Choice, a #1 bestseller in Brazil, a Deutscher Jugendliteratur Preis 2016 (German Youth Literature Prize) nominee, and selected by Nancy Pearl as one of Summer's Best Books for NPR. The Hollywood Reporter has named him one of Hollywood's 25 Most Powerful Authors. All of his books have been optioned for film.

Matthew spent the first few years of his life in Philadelphia before being raised just across the Delaware River in Oaklyn, New Jersey. He graduated from Collingswood High School (class of 1992) and La Salle University (class of 1996), where he double-majored in English and secondary education. He taught high school literature and film in southern New Jersey for several years, during which he coached soccer and basketball, chaperoned trips to Peru and Ecuador, initiated a pen-pal exchange with students in Namibia, and counseled troubled teens.

In 2004 Matthew made the difficult decision to leave teaching and write full time. He received his Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing from Goddard College in 2007 and an Honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters from La Salle University in 2013. He lives with his wife on the Outer Banks of North Carolina.

*Freyja Bergthorson*

Freyja Bergthorson has designed and taught a series of five weekly classroom management workshops for Loudoun County Public Schools. These are offered two to four times each school year, and she has been doing this for more than 10 years now. In Loudoun, she trains beginning teachers during the Beginning Teacher Institute and at two mini-conferences held each year. She is also a Teacher Trainer for the VEA, and teaches classroom management and other workshops for them when needed. She has given presentations on a variety of topics at VATE, NCTE, VSTE, ISTE, Longwood University, and for the VADOE. She was an English SALT (department chair), lead mentor, and an English teacher at Farmwell Station Middle School for 16 years before becoming a technology resource

teacher in 2014. Additionally, she is a past VATE webmaster & board member.

*Jocelyn A. Chadwick, PhD*

President of National Council of Teachers of English, Jocelyn A. Chadwick, an English teacher and scholar, is a former professor and now occasional lecturer and conducts an occasional seminar at Harvard Graduate School of Education. She has worked with Ken Burns and PBS. Consulting with teachers and students around the country, Chadwick also is an expert consultant for NBC News Education. Recently published: *Common Core: Paradigmatic Shifts, Teaching Literature in the Context of Literacy Instruction*, "Mark Twain Meets Generation Z: Challenges, Questions, and New Perspectives," "We Dare Not Teach What We Know We Must: The Importance of Difficult Conversations," and "21st Century Challenge: Necessary Perspectives on Uncle Tom's Cabin and Adventures of Huckleberry Finn as Anti-Slavery Novels," *Critical Insights: Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. In progress: *Writing for Life: Using Literature to Teach Writing*.

*Tracy Robertson*

Tracy Robertson serves as the K-12 English Language Arts Coordinator for the Virginia Department of Education. Prior to the current position, Tracy was the High School English Specialist at the Department. With more than 35 years in education in all levels, she has extensive teaching experience in middle and high schools in the commonwealth. She holds leadership roles in state and national English education organizations including being Past President for the Assembly of State Coordinators for English Language Arts (ASCELA) and serving on the board for the Virginia Association of Teachers of English.

*Special Conference Event*

Enjoy a candlelight tour of the Rising Sun Tavern where a tavern wench will greet you as if you were an 18<sup>th</sup> visitor arriving to spend the night in Fredericksburg. Built by Charles Washington as his home in 1760, the building was later operated as a tavern and served as the social center of town. Although the tavern lost its liquor license in 1823, the tavern wench today can serve an enjoyable shot of living history. Come hear stories of how you could be drafted into the navy and what mind your P & Q's really means. Costumed and in character interpretation. Wine and cheese will be served.

**Call for Submissions: Virginia English Journal  
Sean Ruday, Editor**

Virginia English Journal  
Winter 2018  
"Who tells your story"

The brilliant musical *Hamilton* asks an important question about the nature of knowledge and storytelling: "Who tells your story?" This question, used in the play to address the idea that certain historical figures have had their stories told

more than others, also raises important issues related to the English classroom.

Reflecting on the question "Who tells your story" can prompt us as English teachers to consider thought-provoking ideas, such as:

- What kinds of stories do our students most encounter?
- In what ways do the stories with which our students interact align with their lives?
- In what ways are these stories incongruous with our students' lives?
- How can we encourage and enable our students to tell their stories?
- What teaching ideas or practices have you used that can facilitate meaningful and personal writing from students?
- In the Winter 2018 issue of the *Virginia English Journal*, we'll consider the importance of students reading and writing meaningful stories and celebrate teaching practices that lead to this important work. You are invited to submit a manuscript that addresses the importance of storytelling and the instructional methods that can make this possible.

This issue of the *Virginia English Journal* will contain three types of articles, described below:

**Feature articles:** These are longer articles of 3,000 to 5,000 words that blend research and practice, providing educators with theoretical understandings as well as practitioner-friendly ideas.

**Great teaching ideas:** Shorter articles of 1,000 to 2,000 words that focus on effective and innovative teaching practices that other educators can quickly put into action in their classes.

**Promising young scholars:** This section is designed for English and English Education majors interested in sharing their ideas with an audience of fellow educators. Articles in this section should blend research-based insights with practical suggestions for application and share unique perspectives on English instruction.

Submission deadline: November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017

Please find additional submission guidelines at [www.vate.org](http://www.vate.org)

We have a gorgeous new website!  
Please check it out at  
<http://vate.org/>

**Magnetic Poetry Mentor Text Poems**  
**Beth Ramsay**

Over the years I have found that the best way to teach students to analyze a text is to put them into the role of the writer. Through the use of mentor texts and focused creative writing assignments, students are able to contemplate authorial choices and consider the impact that those choices have on the meaning of a text. I use brief "writer's craft" creative writing lessons that allow students to work with the same themes, motifs and devices used in the mentor text. I build these lessons with "rules" to familiarize students with the techniques that will appear in the mentor text and to help them feel free to play with language without having to face the "blank canvas" without support.

Playing with Words

This past February, in honor of Black History Month, I gave students a list of words taken from Angelou's "Still I Rise." I randomized the words and put them into a table that they used as a "bank" to construct their own poems related to Black History Month. Some students chose to cut out the words so that they could manipulate them on their desks, while others chose to simply select words off of the page. This one-hour activity produced a compelling snapshot of how students viewed their histories and their futures.

The Big Reveal

The last step of the assignment was to reveal the mentor text and analyze how Angelou's diction, figurative language and use of repetition enhanced the theme. Students then compared their own texts to Angelou's and were amazed at both the similarities and differences between their poems and Angelou's. Through this exercise, students were able to understand the relationship between language choices and meaning and were able to "converse" with a famous writer about a common subject. The lesson can be adapted to longer poem or passage, but is probably best suited to longer poems and works with rich imagery and language.

**Another Unwanted Star Will Rise**

By Greg Jones  
Grade 12

i fought through the terror of being an unwanted star  
as the teardrops fell  
i gave hope to my brother  
as the diamonds danced in his future  
i laughed as they let out desperate cries  
while he rooted  
i paved the way  
carving the moon, sun, ocean into *my* image  
holding the weight on my shoulders  
and the world in my right hand  
gold in the left  
i knew  
it couldn't be a surprise  
that my history was a gift  
and his dreams were paved  
and from here on out we'll see better days  
another unwanted star will rise

**Ancestors**

By Tyreil Mayo  
Grade 12

Sometimes I wonder,  
The wicked thoughts racing through the heads  
Of a race of degenerates.

"Offend their brains."  
"Lock them down with shackles, chains,"  
Surely, their lineage will be stained."

And yet, now I see this same race,  
with the same skin, rooted with evil seeds,  
But the chain is being broken.

Slowly, we're both being set free.

Chains were placed on my ancestors to make them slaves  
However, chains were placed on them by their ancestors.  
They have been plagued  
Like newborns with a terminal illness infected by their  
mother.

Not to discredit the great warriors who fought for my rights,  
but we must stop.

Stop seeing white, stop seeing black, and just start seeing  
*people*.

For long as we continue to say we are still oppressed, we  
will be.

But the chains are being placed upon us on our own.

It's time to stop pretending that we are our ancestors.

**Sweet Brown**

by Elle Anderson  
Grade 12

The bitter tears of my ancestors  
Trembling with soulful cries  
As one towered by many  
Our roots will rise  
Oils of the mocha skin  
Melt like gold  
While the dust of the black youth  
Dance so old  
The swelling of brown thighs  
Rooted from birth  
Yet another slave dies  
Shoulders stripped of their worth  
You'll find awful shame  
In the air of black history  
Like a twisted frame  
Pictured with prejudice blistering  
Offended by the bitter taste  
With sweetening black pride  
The sticky feel of hateful paste  
Our black history cried

**We Still Livin'**

By Rhonda Cummings  
Grade 12

Shame on those who made us die off  
When we walk through the fields of cotton  
Shame on those who just made it a drop-off  
While we sat there and went rotten

Teardrops from dark nights as we lay on the ship  
Crescent moon lay on our skin  
Teardrops from the assailants whip  
Lord knows it was a sin

But gloomy days are gone;  
The awful hardships are gone  
We still will continue to rise on

Terror in our eyes  
Lowered lips & soft cries  
And then we ask: why?

Why are we here?  
What is my purpose?

But we won't continue to be wordless  
For goodness sake we are not worthless!  
We are here.  
We have risen.  
We have vigour.  
We still livin'.

**Directions:** Use the words below to create a poem. It should contain **at least three** of the following poetic devices: metaphor, simile, alliteration, personification, and repetition. 15 line minimum

wondrously	gifts	ancestors	gold	dream
awful	clear	rise	weakened	laugh
hope	offend	soulful	like	cries
gave	falling	teardrops	lowered	rooted
eyes	hard	shame	fear	shoulders
terror	pain	gloom	pumping	shoot
diamonds	twisted	trod	dust	lies
cut	walk	air	bitter	dirt
moons	suns	living	offend	history
ocean	still	black	words	shoot
slave	oil	daybreak	dance	thighs
up	hatefulness	nights	swelling	surprise
tides	room	down	kill	write
Like, as	As, if, or,	Me, mine	just	springing
I, I've, I'll	you, you'll, your	And, yet, but, for	broken	leaping



*Virginia Association of Teachers of English*

Please contact Peggy Gearhart at [peggy.gearhart@lcps.org](mailto:peggy.gearhart@lcps.org) to update your email and post office address so that you will not miss a publication or announcement. Encourage others to join VATE online at [www.vate.org](http://www.vate.org).

**VATE VOICES**

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The Virginia Association of Teachers of English is committed to enhancing the quality of the teaching of English and language arts in the Commonwealth.



THE VIRGINIA ASSOCIATION OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH  
LANGUAGE ARTS PRESENTS ITS 2017 ANNUAL  
CONFERENCE:



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**JOCELYN CHADWICK**  
NCTE PRESIDENT



**MATTHEW QUICK**  
NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR



**FREYJA BERGTHORSON**  
VEA TEACHER TRAINER

**OCTOBER 20-22, 2017**

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