

# South Carolina Association for Middle Level Education Journal

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Volume 3

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## Front Matter

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## South Carolina Association for Middle Level Education Journal

March 2024

[www.scamle.org](http://www.scamle.org)

An affiliate of the [Association for Middle Level Education](http://www.scamle.org)

The South Carolina Association for Middle Level Education Journal is an open-access, peer-reviewed publication that highlights research-based best practices that improve middle schools and the learning that occurs within and outside of the classroom. Readers of this journal are generally teachers, administrators, and other educators who are interested in the issues that young adolescents ages 10-15 and educators of those individuals face. The South Carolina Association for Middle Level Education Journal is published once a year in an online format. Archived volumes can be viewed here: <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/scamle/>

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## CALL FOR MANUSCRIPTS

### Manuscript Deadline: November 30

Classroom teachers, administrators, teacher educators, pre-service teachers, graduate students, and researchers are invited to submit manuscripts to the South Carolina Association for Middle Level Education (SCAMLE) professional journal. The SCAMLE Journal welcomes high-quality manuscripts of varying lengths that address the issues and needs of young adolescents. We accept practical, theoretical, and empirical papers, literature reviews, and book reviews specific to middle level education. We also accept creative writing and original artwork from middle level students and educators. Your manuscript must be original and must not be currently submitted for publication anywhere else.

### SCAMLE Journal

The South Carolina Association for Middle Level Education (SCAMLE) Journal is an open-access, peer-reviewed publication that highlights research-based practices that improve middle schools and the learning that occurs within and outside of the classroom. Readers of this journal are generally teachers, administrators, and other educators who are interested in the issues that young adolescents ages 10-15 and educators of those individuals face. The South Carolina Association for Middle Level Education Journal is published once a year in an online format. Archived volumes can be viewed here: <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/scamle/>

### Preparing Your Manuscript

Use the following guidelines to prepare your manuscript:

1. Include a separate cover letter:
  - a. List your name and school name, mailing address, and email address
  - b. List any co-authors in preferred order with the above information for each
  - c. Include a title, abstract (no more than 100 words), and key words
  - d. Confirm that this work is original and has not been published elsewhere, nor is it currently under consideration for publication elsewhere
2. The body of the manuscript should not exceed 15 pages. Text should be double-spaced in 12-point font, preferably in Microsoft Word.
3. No identifying characteristics may appear in the body of the manuscript (i.e., names of participants, authors, or schools must not appear in your manuscript).
4. All submissions must conform to the style found in the 7th edition of the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA).
5. Full references for all citations should be included, following APA guidelines.
6. If student artifacts are included (i.e., artwork, photos, writing, etc.), authors must provide written permission releases for the use of the artifacts.
7. Images should be in .jpg format.

### Submitting your Manuscript

Manuscripts should be typed in Microsoft Word and sent as an email attachment to [SCAMLEJournal@usca.edu](mailto:SCAMLEJournal@usca.edu) or [deborahmc@usca.edu](mailto:deborahmc@usca.edu) before the deadline.

### Review of your Manuscript

The review process includes a preliminary evaluation by the journal editor for appropriateness, followed by a double-blind peer-review process with at least two reviewers from the SCAMLE Journal Editorial Review Board. Acceptance is determined by the reviewers' recommendations and balance of topics in the annual issue. Your manuscript will be evaluated using the following criteria: <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1hoKGvEoC-dEEicZxIsZpGWItUZFW8Af2sHIXIikzg7o/edit>

A decision is typically rendered within 8-10 weeks from the call deadline. Please send questions about manuscript submission to the Editor, Deborah McMurtrie, at [SCAMLEJournal@usca.edu](mailto:SCAMLEJournal@usca.edu) or [DeborahMc@usca.edu](mailto:DeborahMc@usca.edu)

Please contact [DeborahMc@usca.edu](mailto:DeborahMc@usca.edu) if you are interested in reviewing manuscripts for the SCAMLE Journal.

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## Avoiding Burnout: Resources to Help the Overworked Teacher

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### Introduction

Everyone knows that teaching has always been a demanding job; however, in the last decade the demands on teachers have increased. Today, teachers have to answer to parents, administrators, legislators, and the general public when it comes to their classroom practice and educational beliefs. In addition, long hours, classroom management issues, lack of support, low pay, poor working conditions, and the demands of high-stakes testing have all contributed to widespread teacher stress. As an English teacher, I remember the stress level and how I was always looking for ideas and practical strategies that would help me deliver a rich and rewarding curriculum for my students. I made every effort to stay current in the field, by reading professional material, attending conferences, and sharing ideas with my colleagues. To combat the demands of stress on the job, teachers need support in a variety of ways. Having professional resources that offer easy and practical strategies that help with planning and delivering lessons that are both interesting and engaging to students can be an asset to alleviating some of the stress teachers are experiencing.

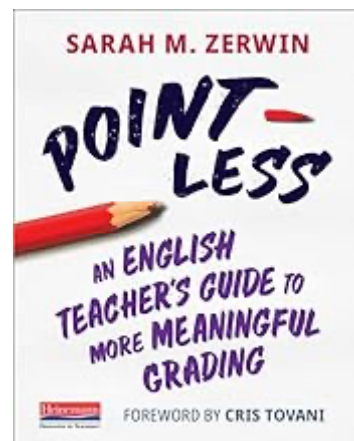
This collection of resources will make your teaching life so much easier. Bringing these authors into your classroom to help you teach will be a good way to alleviate some of the stress you may be feeling. These resources can give teachers a broader understanding of how to configure a classroom that is inclusive and welcoming and focuses on learning and growing students as readers, writers, and thinkers. Sarah Zerwin's book *Pointless: An English Teacher's Guide to More Meaningful Grading* offers teachers a new way to think about how to assess and evaluate students in a way that places the emphasis on learning not on accumulating points. Creating a classroom where teachers combine the reading/writing workshop model into one literacy model is the premise of Walther & Biggs-Tucker's book *The Literacy Workshop: Where Reading and Writing Converge*. It offers teachers a way to save time and energy. Having an American author and classroom teacher co-author a book on nonfiction revision is a gift to teachers. Collard & Spandel's book *Teaching Nonfiction Revision: A Professional Writer Shares Strategies, Tips, and Lessons* belongs on the shelf of every English teacher who feels the

stress of teaching writing. Once again, Kylene Beers offers teachers some new thinking in her second edition of *When Kids Can't Read What Teachers Can do, Second Edition: A Guide for Teachers Grades 4-12*. All teachers have students who struggle as readers and this book offers valuable insight into ways teachers can help these students make steady progress and feel confident as readers. No matter where you are in your current understanding of the reading and writing workshop models, Ellin Keene's book *The Literacy Studio: Redesigning the Workshop for Readers and Writers* will give you an opportunity to rethink the way you plan instruction for your students. Readers of Linda Rief's book *Whispering in the Wind: A Guide to Deeper Reading and Writing Through Poetry* are bound to come away with a fresh perspective on the role of poetry in the middle school English/Language Arts classroom. This is a how-to book for teachers to encourage students to see that poetry exist everywhere in the world. Rief is convinced that teachers will see the poet in every one of their middle school students. (VAO)

**Pointless: An English Teacher's Guide to More Meaningful Grading** by , Sarah M. Zerwin, 2020, 192 pp., Heinemann. ISBN 032-510-951-6

"Teachers will find ways to navigate grading obstacles and learn how to repurpose the grade book into a living warehouse of descriptive data that informs feedback and reflection" (p. viii).

All teachers have many demands on their time both inside and outside the classroom, but English teachers are particularly susceptible to these demands since, very often, they walk out of school most days with a briefcase filled with assignments to grade. Unfortunately, too many English teachers still believe they should collect and evaluate everything students write. In part, this assessment practice occurs because teachers believe the grades in their grade book are one way for them to keep track of students' effort and work. Teachers may also believe that the grades reflect student learning. As well, teachers are aware that the grade book may be considered the measure of their teaching and student learning. Sarah Zerwin calls the accumulation of grades in schools as "academic wealth" (p.4) and she emphasizes that students, parents, teachers, and administrators see this as the focus of education. The truth is, grades do not reflect student learning but rather reflect student compliance in the race to accumulate points. I remember how I felt the



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grade book was a trap both for me and for my students. Like many English teachers, I was open to any suggestions that would lighten my grading load. I also wanted to explore ways to include student voices in the assessment and evaluation process. Zerwin believes it's time English teachers rethink their grading practice and move away from assigning points for student work to a system where the focus is on providing "concise, descriptive data that serves as meaningful and specific feedback" (p. ix) to students during the learning process that will move them forward as learners. Zerwin proposes that teachers shift their grading practice from points for a product to "learning that lives in the process" (p.ix). She offers some solid ideas about ways for teachers to accomplish this.

The book is easy to navigate. It is organized in seven chapters and readers can choose which chapter best suits their needs. At the end of each chapter are examples of student grade letters where students reflect on their learning over the course of a semester and determine what their grade should be. As well, Zerwin has offered "Navigating Obstacles" where she addresses problems that may occur as teachers think about trying this new method of assessment. Zerwin addresses the following ideas: the problems with the point system; how to establish learning goals for students; how to focus students' attention on learning rather than being compliant and completing reading and writing tasks; the importance of feedback on students' work to move them forward as reading and writers; how to use the grade book as a source for students to evaluate their own work; how to make decisions about final grades through conversations with students.

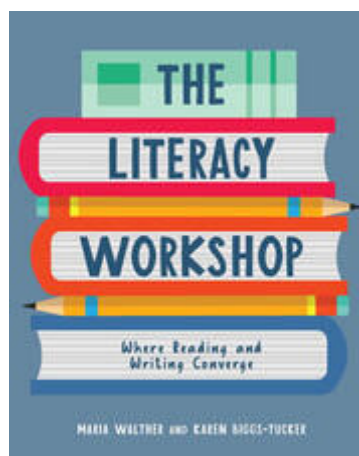
Teachers will benefit from the ideas presented in "Chapter 1: Acknowledge the Problems with Points". Zerwin shares how grades do not reflect student learning, in fact, they get in the way of student learning. Teachers say that growing as readers and writers is most important but the truth is what is most important to students and parents is the grade. Zerwin comments on how her students learned ways to manipulate points on assignments and especially how those students who were concerned with getting a high grade, developed ways to get the grade without working terribly hard. These students learned how to play the game of school and grades. For those students who did not want to play the game, the points/grade system hurt them in many ways. As Zerwin points out "The grading system rewards compliance over learning" (p.5). As a result, Zerwin was convinced she needed to develop a system that did not focus on grades.

"Chapter II: Establish Clear and Meaningful Learning Goals" will help teachers establish a foundation for this new method of assessment. Because both the ELA standards and the curriculum learning objectives are broad, it is impossible for teachers to address everything in those documents with their students in any depth. Zerwin states that teachers then need to decide what they value the most for students to learn. This decision is a significant one since it shifts the focus from points to learning. Zerwin writes, "...learning becomes the foundation of our teaching and it gives students a different and compelling purpose for their work once the need to collect

points is gone" (p.20). By adopting the less is more philosophy, teachers can then address the celebrations and challenges students face as readers and writers. Zerwin wants her students to read because in that reading, students learn about the complexity of the world and of the human experience. She also wants her students to write for a variety of purposes and audiences because in that writing, students craft their voice and articulate their ideas that can contribute to the greater social discourse. For teachers, setting authentic reading and writing learning goals for students sets them up for reading and writing in their lives both in the classroom and beyond; this sets students up to successfully address the many literacy demands of an ever-changing world.

In addition to the collection of ideas shared in each chapter, there are many samples of charts, final grade guidelines, data tracking conference tables, grade book data charts, online resources, and examples of ways to manage feedback and student reflections. Zerwin's book charges teachers to reflect on their beliefs about process, product and the point system. She encourages teachers to make a paradigm shift at the same time acknowledging that this is not an easy task but one that will place students as learners at the forefront of grading. (VAO)

**The Literacy Workshop: Where Reading and Writing Converge** by Maria Walther & Karen Biggs-Tucker, 2020, 285 pp., Stenhouse. ISBN 162-531-196-6



If there is one topic my colleagues have often been interested in, it would be ways to develop a workshop model. My journey to a workshop model took time, effort, reading, and attending conferences. I started out as a traditional teacher with kids in rows, assignments with due dates and points, a focus on product with limited attention to process, and the ever present teacher's

red pen. It was clear to me that students weren't always interested or engaged in the classroom. Through my own learning, I came to understand the workshop model and slowly implemented the instructional strategies, structures, and routines one-by-one. For example, I would conduct an interactive read-aloud to see how my students responded to this instructional strategy. At another time, I would conduct a mini-lesson followed by supported independent reading or writing. My goal was two-fold. First, I wanted to be sure I planned and implemented the instructional strategy with fidelity. Second, I wanted to observe students' interest and engagement with the strategy. Over time, as I became comfortable with each of the workshop elements, I was able to develop a full reading/ writing workshop model. In the model I learned, reading and writing workshop were kept separate.

Teachers might focus learners on reading and reading strategies one day, then turn to a focus on writing and writing strategies another day. This is how I conducted my workshop. What Walther and Biggs-Tucker share in their book is for both primary and intermediate teachers to think about the similarities between the reading and writing workshops and merge these common threads into a literacy workshop where students lead the way and make decisions about whether to focus their efforts on reading or writing. By doing this, teachers have more time to plan, teach, observe students' learning, conference, and offer feedback to both individuals or to a group; students have more time to authentically engage and have choices in their reading, writing, and learning. Teachers will find this resource informative and easy to navigate. For teachers both novice and veteran to the workshop model, this book provides new insights into how to develop a literacy model that merges reading and writing seamlessly.

The book is divided into two parts. "Part I: Exploring the Landscape of Literacy Workshop" has four chapters that focus on planning and launching the workshop. "Part II: Zooming In – Literacy Workshop Demonstration Lessons" has five chapters which focus on ideas for developing lessons that include instructional strategies for teaching the elements of fiction and nonfiction. In this section, many of the lessons traverse all content areas.

"Chapter 2: Planning for Literacy Workshop – Behind the Scenes" offers teachers the basic structures, and elements of the workshop model. Many of these will be familiar to those teachers who have read about or tried to develop a workshop model. Of course, the idea of predictable structures and routines is at the heart of good teaching but is especially important for the workshop model since it provides both teachers and learners with a sort of teaching and learning map. As well, the gradual release of responsibility is also fundamental to the workshop model where the teacher leads the learning and gradually turns over the choices and responsibility for learning to the students. One of the goals of the workshop model is to develop the skills and strategies in students so they can emerge as independent readers and writers. Another important goal is to develop a classroom environment that is collaborative, where students support each other in the service of growth as learners. Of particular interest to teachers in this chapter is the "Literacy Workshop Planning Template" which provides guidance on the framework for planning. The authors also provide a reproducible template in the appendices. The authors make the point that the design of the literacy workshop is not a one size fits all but depending on the teacher and the needs of the students can take many paths. As well, teachers are reminded that students will need time and practice to understand the workshop model, their role as readers and writers, and the control they have over their own learning.

"Chapter 3: Launching the Literacy Workshop – Developing a Purposeful and Joyful Learning Community" and "Chapter 4: Fostering Independence and Engagement During Literacy Workshop" offer valuable insights into the how and why of

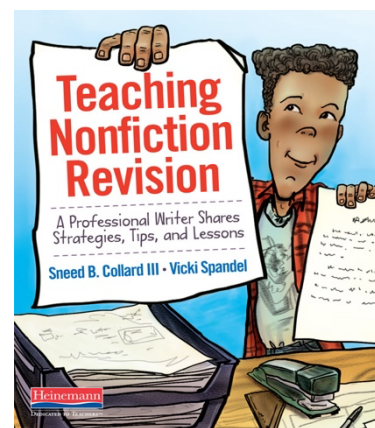
literacy workshop. Included in these chapters is a collection of charts, examples of student writing, teacher and student questions to explore, guides for monitoring student progress, ideas for conferencing with students, ways to encourage student reflection on their efforts, and lists of books for teachers to further their learning about the literacy workshop. Part II offers a collection of demonstration lessons that every teacher will find valuable. Teachers can pick and choose from the comprehensive list of well over 20 lessons in this part of the book based on their needs and the needs of their students. The lessons are detailed in a way that makes them easily understood and implemented. The topics for these many lessons vary and include ideas for: interest, self-awareness, collaboration, types of questions, ways to research, visualization, themes, writing style, making connections, an author's purpose just to name a few. There is also a section for online reproducible resources where teachers can download and print demonstration lessons and appendices. At the back of the book, there is a comprehensive list of both professional books for teachers and children's literature. This book is a gift to teachers who want to create a workshop model that offers them ways to: plan effectively, maximize time for teaching and learning, and create a welcoming and nurturing classroom environment that values students' potential to be proficient learners. (VAO)

**Teaching Nonfiction Revision: A Professional Writer Shares Strategies, Tips, and Lessons** by Sneed Collard III & Vicki Spandel, 2017, 240 pp., Heinemann. ISBN 032-508-777-6

"...revision involves taking rough text and transforming into something clear, fluent, informative—and yes, engaging" (p. xiv).

English teachers spend countless hours marking student work and offering comments to help student writers grow. The goal of teachers' commentary is to help students see areas to work on in their writing. Teachers assume students will take their suggestions to heart and make revisions to their work in an effort to improve

their writing skills. Very often, when students get their writing back, they only look at the grade, paying little attention to the teacher comments. As a student, I remember getting back English assignments that were covered with red pen markings. Most of the markings were errors in spelling and grammar with almost no comments on what I did well. I learned to not pay attention to the markings because they usually focused on my mistakes and offered almost no comments on what I did well or how I could improve my writing. The result of the



teacher commentary was that I developed the belief that I was not a good writer.

More teachers are now embracing the process writing format where students write regularly, conference, make revisions, and publish their work in class. In order for students to grow as writers it's important they understand the significance of the revision process. Teachers need to explicitly teach revision strategies to help students accomplish this skill. Collard & Spandel's book is a must-have in the ELA classroom. Sneed Collard III is a celebrated American author who has written a collection of more than 80 books for young people, an adult memoir, and now has co-authored this professional development book for classroom teachers. He brings a wealth of knowledge to share with teachers on how to demystify the revision process and he offers simple strategies to effectively teach revision. In the introduction to the book, he writes "Professional writers consistently apply proven strategies to hammer and reshape nonfiction until it becomes something that educates and excites readers" (p. xv). Having a professional writer's perspective throughout this book is more than valuable.

Teachers will find this book easy to navigate. It is divided into seven parts and each part has very short sections that teachers can choose to suit their immediate needs. "Part I: Setting the Stage" will be of particular importance for teachers since it focuses on the beliefs about teaching revision, helpful steps for students to engage in effective revision, creating an environment that supports revision, and balancing expectations. The section on creating an environment that supports revision is an essential read. It outlines students' negative beliefs that revision is tedious, time-consuming, and not worth the time. Helping students understand that professional writers view revision as a commitment to both their message and to their audience. Revision is the means to revisit, refine, and rework their writing in order to create something people want to read. This section addresses some of the following ideas as well that teachers will find useful: creating a workshop atmosphere, student choice about what to write, ways to collaborate about their writing, taking risk with new ways to write, student ownership of their writing, and teacher modeling.

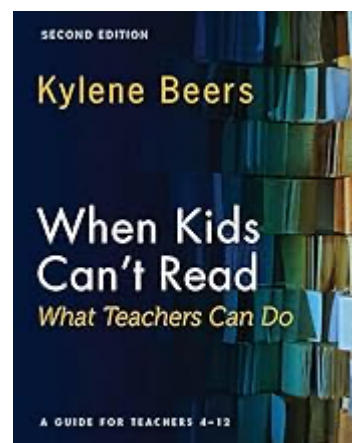
Parts II-VI offer a comprehensive collection of teaching strategies for teaching nonfiction revision that "follow specific approaches many professional writers use to revise their work" (p. xv). The authors make it clear that although their book primarily targets grades 4-8, teachers at all grade K-12 levels can adapt lessons to fit their needs.

In Part II-VI, the collection includes such strategies as: choosing main ideas, researching an idea, addressing transitions, sentence order and length, eliminating unnecessary words, show don't tell, emotional impact of writing, using strong verbs, cohesion, organization, and voice. After each strategy is explained, there is a section that offers tips to help teach the strategy. The authors have kept the strategies as short as possible and easy to read to accommodate the life of the busy teacher.

Part VII offers some suggestions to share with students to help them finalize their revision process. It encourages students to take time away from their work so they return to their writing with fresh eyes. Very often, students will see things they did not see before the break. Giving writing a title begins with the writer offering a working title to begin with and then once the writing is finished, the student will revisit the title to revise it. Some good advice to students is that often when published writers revisit their work they wished they had said something differently. This is a good thing because it means the writing process is ongoing and that there is always something new to use for the next writing.

There are also three appendices that will be helpful to the busy teacher. They offer the following: a checklist of revision possibilities, recommended nonfiction books for students, recommended nonfiction books for adults. As a former classroom teacher, I encourage teachers to take a close look at the offerings of this book. Teaching revision is hard work and having a resource like this that offers detailed instructional strategies will make a difference in classroom practice. It will also make a difference in the writing growth of your students. It's a must-have in your professional library. (VAO)

**When Kids Can't Read What Teachers Can Do, Second Edition: A Guide for Teachers Grades 4-12** by Kyleene Beers, 2023, 418 pages, Heinemann. ISBN 978-325-14459-7



The "Prologue" of this new/old book will make readers stop and think. Do you remember where you were and what was going on in the world in 2002 when you may have read the first edition of this book? As the author so aptly asks readers, how have the past 20 years vanished so quickly? She continues to explain in the first few pages of the book how she quickly realized

that creating a second edition of her first book by simply making changes and additions was not going to be adequate to do justice to a book that would go into teachers' hands a second time. Believe me when I say that we, her readers, are beneficiaries of her decision to rewrite the entire book. However, do not worry. Kyleene continued to address her elusive student, George, who has haunted her throughout her career. Each chapter of this second edition is bookended with letters to him. She has written each chapter with her readers in mind, keeping chapters concise and focused while illustrating her points with vignettes and anecdotes. Indeed, reading this book is like sitting alongside Kyleene and enjoying a deep, thought-provoking conversation about students and their literacy learning.



Readers should not be intimidated by the length of this book. Once you begin reading, if you are like me, you will not be able to put it down. You may even be surprised that a book with 418 pages is divided into only four sections: “Reading Matters,” “Comprehension,” “Word Work,” and “Making Reading Matter.” To better understand the foundational belief behind this book, consider Kyleene’s first sentence in “Chapter 1:” “This new edition, like the original edition, is based on my bedrock belief that reading, though not an innate ability for anyone, is a critical skill for all” (p.3). As you continue to read to the book’s final page, you will come to realize how critical it is for every teacher in every school in every classroom to stop and think about her statement. Why should any children in our country, regardless of their ages or their zip codes, not have access to adequate and effective reading instruction? Are many adolescents simply destined to spend their school years struggling to read the texts put in front of them?

If you decide to read Kyleene’s book, you are a teacher who has recognized the problems adolescents are having with reading and are searching for ways to help students. The good news is that you have found the resource you need. “Chapter 1” gives you the foundation you need to understand the process of reading. When you look at the figure on pages 24-27 of the reading behaviors of skilled and less skilled readers, your students will immediately pop into your mind. You may be surprised at how many of those students display the behaviors of the less skilled readers. The question you must ask yourself is what have you provided for remediation to help them? If the answer makes you uncomfortable, you will find help as you continue to read.

In “Part 2,” Kyleene addresses comprehension by giving her readers the tools to help students grow into their own self-efficacy and agency. She writes, “Helping kids become skilled readers requires teaching kids how to struggle successfully through a text” (p. 49). After all, struggle does not automatically end with failure. Four reading strategies that Kyleene shares in this part of the book for deepening comprehension include: making an inference (chapter 6), accessing prior knowledge (chapter 7), clarifying meaning (chapter 8), and extending understanding (chapter 9). These chapters are filled with examples and ideas for instructional plans and learning scaffolds that will empower students to struggle successfully with challenging texts. Plus, templates for the learning scaffolds are included in the appendices.

If someone were to say to you “Tell me about the types of word work you do with your students,” what would you say? How do you *know* what your *students know* about words? In “Part 3,” you will take a deep dive into Tiers 1, 2, and 3 words and find an easy-to-read figure, correlating specific vocabulary scaffolds with questions to ask so you can determine what your students know about words. Kyleene even includes the page numbers with the scaffolds, making it that much easier for you to navigate the book quickly. Additionally, “Part 3” includes chapters on preteaching vocabulary, context clues and word parts, fluency and automaticity, spelling, and phonics. Yes, there is a chapter on phonics for secondary students.

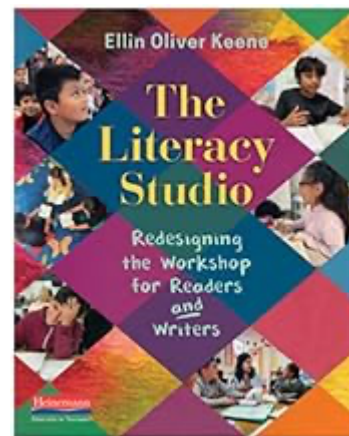
Lastly, Kyleene leaves readers with a mission in “Part 4: Making Reading Matter” to do exactly what she sees as the most important part of helping older students develop as readers—setting up supports and classroom conditions across all content areas and disciplines in grades 4 – 12 to help students understand that yes, reading and struggling successfully matters. For students to grow as readers, Kyleene writes, “We motivate kids to read by surrounding them with books that reflect who they are and what their interests are, by giving them time to read, and by making sure that time encourages them to think about themselves as readers” (p. 284).

Kyleene has completed this new edition of her old book by including thirty templates and lists to support your teaching of reading skills and strategies. The extensive bibliography provides readers with a plethora of future reading resources. Using every inch of space between the covers, Kyleene even included charts inside the front and the back. Readers will certainly get their money’s worth with this book.

As a fan of Kyleene Beers and someone who faithfully relied on her original version of this book with my own middle school students, I am so happy I read this second edition. Kyleene made me think about reading instruction, but, more importantly, she made me think about all the Georges who sit in classrooms every day, just waiting for knowledgeable teachers to show them the way to becoming successful readers. (JRG)

**The Literacy Studio: Redesigning the Workshop for Readers and Writers** by Ellin Oliver Keene, 2022, 214 pages, Heinemann. ISBN 978-0-325-12005-8

Even teachers who willingly and enthusiastically support the workshop model for instruction have one nagging nemesis—time. In her latest book, Ellin Oliver Keene confronts this issue of time by redesigning the familiar workshop model into what she has named a “literacy studio.” As she worked alongside teachers and students inside classrooms, Ellin became acutely aware of the amount of time being spent in transitions between reading and writing workshops. She noticed that students did not have enough time to immerse themselves in independent reading and writing opportunities. She wondered if they saw themselves as agents for their own growth as readers and writers.



No matter where you are in your current understanding of the reading workshop and writing workshop models, this book will give you an opportunity to rethink the way you plan instruction for your students. After reading this book, I found

myself thinking about how much sense Ellin makes when she suggests combining the two workshops into one as a better way to integrate reading and writing. Plus, having one integrated literacy studio in lieu of two separate workshops could mitigate the never-ending issue of time.

In the “Prelude” Ellin writes: “This book is about authenticity. It is about how we can transform students’ literacy learning into a process that aligns more closely with what readers and writers do outside an academic setting” (p. xiv). If you are intrigued by this concept, you will find a roadmap in this book for redesigning the instructional model you use with readers and writers in your classroom.

Ellin takes us through her thought process in “Chapter 1 Why Literacy Studio?” to explain why she believes that current practices in reader’s and writer’s workshops should be changed. She cites numerous researchers and their studies that support the idea of teachers capitalizing on “the symbiotic relationship between reading and writing” (p. 7). Additionally, she lists three goals of this book: 1.) helping students see the connections between the books they read and their work as writers, 2.) providing students with more choice in the texts they read and the topics about which they write, and 3.) giving students more time to read and write each day (p.8).

Ellin begins “Chapter 2 Time for a Reboot” with a review of Donald Graves’s seminal 1983 work and provides readers with a brief history of reader’s and writer’s workshop. She explains how the four foundational components of time, choice or ownership, response, and community have always been essential in a workshop and continue to be essential in the Literacy Studio (p. 17). She asks teachers who teach in a reader’s and writer’s workshop model to think deeply about whether they authentically have the important classroom conditions in place to support the optimal language learning of readers and writers (p. 29). She goes on to offer the Literacy Studio as an alternative instructional model for workshop teachers facing constraining demands such as lack of time and too much content to teach.

The most important chapter in this book may be “Chapter 3 It’s All About the Planning!” Ellin credits Debbie Miller and Samantha Bennett (2007) with introducing her to the planning wheel which she then revised to better fit her ideas for the Literacy Studio. Readers will find the template for this tool, along with record-keeping forms, in the appendices. Also included in this chapter is a transcript of a model lesson plan that includes the lesson (which she calls the crafting session), the independent work time (which she calls the composing time), and the sharing time (which she calls reflection). Additionally, scattered throughout the book are QR codes that lead readers to abundant online resources and adaptations for students with learning differences, English learners, and very young children. Readers will also appreciate the intermediate and primary grades Literacy Studio yearly timelines that are at the end of the chapter.

The remaining chapters are dedicated to each of the Literacy Studio components. In “Chapter 4 All Together Now:

Exploring the Craft of the Reader and Writer in Crafting Sessions,” Ellin once again considers time management and presents an in-depth look at a Crafting Session. “Chapter 5 From Crafting to Composing: How It All Comes Together” is quite an enjoyable read as Ellin uses the metaphor of the Literacy Studio as an artist’s studio filled “with canvases and brushes and paint of every color” (p. 86). Extending this metaphor to the Literacy Studio, the brushes are the instructional moves teachers make—think-alouds, modeling, and demonstrations. The paint colors are “the learning targets in literacy: concepts, tools, strategies, standards, processes, craft moves, curriculum, and areas of focus that will never find their way into a standards document—think developing characters or manipulating white space in poetry” (p. 87). The canvases are the materials, including a wide range of text complexity and diversity. The chapter ends with sample lesson outlines that incorporate reading and writing strategies, tools, and standards.

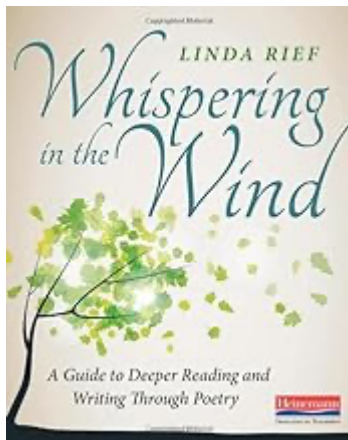
Likewise, “Chapter 6 The Heart of Literacy Studio: Independent Composing” includes both a primary and intermediate Composing Session. Transcripts of the interactions between Ellin and students make these sessions come alive for readers. “Chapter 7 Composing: How It All Comes Together” provides readers with step-by-step suggestions for launching Literacy Studio for the first time, how to confer with readers and writers, and how to establish invitational groups. If sharing sessions in your workshops have become rote, boring, and dull, you will thank Ellin for turning this time on its head as you read the final “Chapter 8 Reflection: The Home for Important Questions and Life Lessons.” Ellin believes in the innate capacity of children as brilliant thinkers and creative language users. As such, she believes reflection is more than simply sharing. She writes: “Reflection is a time for the class to think together about teacher- or student-generated global questions and to share progress as readers and writers. Reflection is student centered, student led whenever possible” (p. 176). In Figure 8.1 (p. 183), she includes a sampling of global questions that were created by teachers as an example for readers to create their own questions.

Ellin closes her book with a “Postlude.” She writes: “Though this book is ultimately about what makes sense to young readers and writers, it is also about what is more efficient, effective, and expedient to us as teachers” (p. 198). We all know the familiar adage about not reinventing the wheel, but after reading this book, you just might find yourself reinventing your reading and writing workshops into a Literacy Studio. (JRG)

**Whispering in the Wind: A Guide to Deeper Reading and Writing Through Poetry** by Linda Rief, 2022, 200 pgs., Heinemann. ISBN 978-0-325-13417-8

Just like Linda Rief, I, too, was an English Language Arts teacher of middle schoolers. Just like Linda Rief, I, too, found my students less than enthusiastic when it came to the dreaded poetry unit in April. Just like Linda Rief, I, too, came under the influence of Georgia Heard (1999, 2016) and her Heart

Maps. Unlike Linda Rief, I did not provide my middle schoolers with the deep literacy experiences around Heart Maps that Linda shares with us, her readers, in this book. Reading this book has made me want to get busy and create my own Heart Book of poems and poets that I love. Believe me when I say that you will find yourself googling the poems and poets Linda and her former students share in this book.



At first, I did not know what to make of this book. After all, there are more pages devoted to student work than actual text by the author. What I came to discover as I read is that Linda intended for this book to show exactly what she included in the book's subtitle: the deeper reading and deeper writing that her students experienced as they diligently explored poets and poetry. Linda's

goal was for her middle schoolers to look to poetry as inspiration for themselves as readers and writers. Instead of cringing when they heard the word *poetry*, she wanted them to luxuriate in a poet's words and seek them out. If what Mark Doty (2010) says is true, "Poetry is the human voice," Linda takes his words one step further by saying, "I wanted my kids to hear those voices and know each other" (p. 4). Readers of this book will find students' voices at the heart of this book, just as they are in their Heart Maps and Heart Books that Linda shares.

This is a how-to book for teachers to incorporate Heart Maps and Heart Books into their own work alongside students. Those of us who live our teaching lives in the company of middle schoolers know what unpredictable worlds theirs can be. We also know there is brilliance just waiting to be expressed inside those young adolescent minds. Linda shows what can and will happen when middle schoolers are given the guidance, freedom, choice, opportunities, and tools to access their innermost thoughts. In Linda's own words:

Ultimately, I want the students to notice the poetry in anything they read—novels, editorials, informational pieces, articles—anything. I want the students to realize that sitting beside clear, beautiful language, steeped in strong feelings, could enrich and elevate their own writing in any genre. (p. 9)

In addition to providing readers with abundant examples of her students' work, she includes instructions for creating the Heart Books and an evaluation rubric in the Appendix. She also includes extensive research supporting the connection between art and the English/Language Arts classroom. There are examples and instructions for the various art techniques she shares with students: contour drawing and watercolor, torn or cut paper, collage, Zentangles, and photography (p. 37). If you are someone who does not consider yourself to be much

of an artist, a quick tutorial by your school's art teacher could come in handy. Then again, you may have aspiring artists in your middle school classroom who could teach their classmates the techniques.

Readers of this book are bound to come away with a fresh perspective on the role of poetry in the middle school English/Language Arts classroom. While creating and implementing the Heart Books with students may seem intimidating, proving young adolescents with the singular experience of connecting with poems that help them "gain insight into all that's important in their lives" (p. 159) is invaluable. (JRG)

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# Uniting Students with Literacy Connections in Mathematics

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**Abstract:** Literature provides opportunities for students to connect to mathematics, as well as each other. Reflecting on personal identities, storytelling, and place-based connections are avenues to enhancing the relevancy of content across the curriculum. Literature can bridge the divide for students reluctant to see the beauty in mathematics. It can also be the impetus in helping unite students as they gain a better understanding of cultures and places beyond their own. Stories, along with interactive tasks, give context for collaborative experiences. This article shares resources and strategies for building understanding and collaboration among students using cross-curricular connections between mathematics and literacy.

*Keywords:* Mathematics, literature, interdisciplinary, literacy, storytelling

## Introduction

The 2020's are challenging unity among young adolescents in American society. Troubling issues include social justice concerns, a mental health crisis, wars and rumors of war. Young adolescents are often caught "in the middle" of the larger societal and personal challenges, and often mathematics is taught using little cultural connections (Sagun, 2010). Our young adolescents are beginning to show their resilience from the global pandemic that cut many people off from social engagement but are needing more opportunities to develop their ability to communicate socially and academically. So, how can educators help unite students in classrooms that engage them in creative, integrative ways that also enhance academic skills in a social context? Particularly in mathematics classrooms where algorithms and procedures usually take the forefront, we believe educators who promote unity and listening to one another while also providing

rigorous content help young adolescents connect their lives to mathematics. We suggest teachers can be intentional about better understanding students by uniting them using literacy as a conduit for problem solving. What can we do to help students consider their relationships with each other and stories they read? In this article, we share resources and strategies for building understanding and collaboration among students using cross-curricular connections in mathematics to literacy. We believe four elements provide deep connections between mathematics and literature: storytelling, journaling, hearing all voices, and focusing on place-based learning. For each of these elements we provide a discussion and how to integrate a literacy connection.

SCAMLE

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## Our Identity Stories: Storytelling as a Tool

First, building a classroom environment where everyone has value and collaboration is key. A place where it is expected that we make mistakes and learn from them begins with trust. We must teach our students to trust the process, trust one another, trust that eventually each of us will know more. We believe two things must accompany trust: A growth mindset (Dweck, 2006) and productive struggle (Hiebert & Grouws, 2007). These two elements are conduits to helping students find solutions to problems (Toney, 2019). Toney (2019) examined the impact of three different mindset strategies on middle school math students' attitudes toward math: "yet", "process praise", and "celebrating success". He found that sixth graders show the greatest impact using the celebration of successes where they had struggled!

In order to create a culture that challenges and embraces struggle, we believe we start by building a community of learners who trust and accept unknowns. Helping students build relationships takes effort and the teacher sets the tone. A tool for engaging students, building community, and exploring challenges can happen with literacy skills (Sircey, 2017) and more specifically, story-telling (Landrum, Brakke, & McCarthy, 2019). Sircey (2017) examined middle school math students' who were given specific literacy tools such as storytelling as a strategy to help build a classroom environment conducive to learning math and providing experiences to learn about each other. Reading allows students to learn through others' stories. In our writing, we each can learn through personal stories.

Let's begin with asking our students to share their own stories as opportunities for young adolescents to get to know one another, connect to literacy, and discuss unknowns. Two experiences students can engage in are timelines and text lineages. Bishop, Downes, and Farbe (2021), wrote *Personalized Learning in the Middle Grades*. They share how asking students to explore and examine their own lives and goals allows them to grow and monitor their own challenges and successes. We suggest two books to use in helping

students think about their own lives: *The Dot and the Line* and *The Day You Begin*.

### ***The Dot and the Line: A Romance in Lower Mathematics (1963)* by Norton Juster**

What better than a light-hearted mathematical romance to fire up a classroom of young adolescents? In *The Dot and the Line* (Juster, 1963), a relationship grows when the dot wants to impress the line. The story depicts love across boundaries. After reading the book, there are two areas to explore – 1) geometry concepts and 2) questions relating the story to young adolescent identities, relationships, and self-concepts.

#### Related Math Activities:

- Analysis of introductory geometry vocabulary
- Student drawings of introductory geometry vocabulary - hand-drawn and utilizing interactive software such as the DESMOS Geometry tool. <https://www.desmos.com/geometry>
- Comparison of mathematical relationships
- Exploration of architecture

### ***The Day You Begin (2018)* by Jacqueline Woodson**

Jacqueline Woodson (2018) wrote, *The Day You Begin*. This picture book allows students to relate challenges in their lives to mathematical struggles. A growth mindset is illustrated by the main character. Using this book to talk about how we overcome challenges is a great segue to connecting perseverance in the math classroom and can open up discussion in a variety of ways. Woodson's YouTube version (2021) features the author introducing the book. It is a nice book to introduce preservice teachers how to integrate math into an ELA class. After reading the book, the following questions are used for reflection and discussion:

- What are your cultural connections? What stands out?
- What feelings/memories come forth for you?
- In what ways can you connect some part of this book to one content area? How would the standards fit?
- How might you extend the content connection to another content?
- Why does this book matter for students? For identity? For class community building? For fostering a love of literacy?
- What do you notice about the pictures in the book?

## **Journaling**

We often associate journaling with language arts, but the mathematics classroom is another appropriate place for student expression. Journaling is a great way for students to share their ideas, their concerns, and a way to monitor their growth as budding mathematicians. We can begin the year or the semester asking students to reflect on their own mathematical journey, their past, and their hopes for the future. One way to do this is by sharing *The Girl with a Mind for Math: The Story of Raye Montague* (Mosca, 2018). This is a story of dreams and prejudices and ultimately success. After reading the story, students can write their own math

autobiography. Students can describe their math journey in written narratives, verbal stories, by drawing pictures, and/or by creating a timeline of milestones. After reading, the following questions can stimulate students' sharing their own journeys:

- What did you find particularly insightful in the book?
- What were the pivotal moments in your own math journey?
- What experiences impacted you as a mathematician?

Text lineage is also a form of journaling. Goldie Muhammad (2018) uses text as a way for students to share their own journeys. A text lineage is an illustration, usually written in words, but could use images, and books that influence our own ideas related to perseverance and dreams.

In the math classroom we can ask students to design and display their own experiences that impacted their journeys. *The Housekeeper and the Professor* (Ogawa, 2003) is the story of a mathematician who experienced a traumatic head injury and can only remember things for 80 minutes at a time. The characters are the housekeeper and her son who learn to grow and trust, and, in turn solve problems together. Together a class could create a text lineage to describe the professors, the housekeeper, or her sons' lives. Teachers can use the literature to help students get to know one another and examine mathematical literacy. Japan is the setting of this story. Consider the equation the professor loved. There is a consistent theme of productive struggle and perseverance. For example, the professor had a "a special feeling for what he called the 'correct miscalculation,' for he believed that mistakes were often as revealing as the right answers. After reading, students can then create their own text lineages to talk about how they attempt or are challenged by problems and how they persevere. Allowing students to explain their world in numbers can give them the opportunity to explore their worlds mathematically.

#### Related Math Activities:

- Lineage - personal, story characters, and/or historical figures
- Examination of 'amicable numbers' as noted in the story (Ogawa, p. 18-22)
- Analysis of student collected data of heights and birthdays
- Place-based data analysis - population through historical periods, median income, demographics, climate, ecosystems
- Measurements with scaled maps (geography of Japan's islands), cartography, explorations of landforms

## **Hearing All Voices: Listening and Learning**

Whose stories do we hear? As teacher educators, we want to bring various perspectives to our students as well as stories that can bring multiple meanings to our future teachers. We ensure that instruction fosters learning that is active, purposeful and democratic (Bishop & Harrison, 2021).

Diverse learning opportunities expose students to “multiple, diverse perspectives and viewpoints” (Bishop & Harrison, 2021, p. 27). We invited our colleagues to talk about their own experiences:

“I never considered myself a mathematician, always a reader and a writer. Math has always been a daunting subject for me. My math teachers always explained concepts too fast for me and I was always afraid to ask questions for fear of being embarrassed or feeling “dumb”. I wanted to learn the concepts and understand how they all build on one another, but I let my fear control my ability to ask questions before, during or after math class. When I felt brave and confident enough to ask questions, I was left feeling humiliated and I let myself be ok with “getting by” in math.

It was late in life that I encountered an individual who not only had a love for math, but a passion for teaching it and then I was able to build my confidence in the content. However, my love for reading and writing was unhinged. I began as a timid reader and writer, and was sent to “reading lab” for a short while, so my mother and father would read to me and take me to the library and bookstores to expose me to the kinds of books that I enjoyed reading. After some time, I turned my book collection into a library, and I would rent out books to friends. I developed a community of readers among my friends and soon after my best friend and I started writing plays and acting them out. This was how my love of reading and writing started.

I always ask students if they are readers or writers and then ask them to explain why. We begin class with a read aloud, journal writing or a brief discussion on the journal topic.” - (Literacy Professor)

Giving voice to students requires a variety of avenues for participation including written, verbal, and signal responses. Classroom questioning techniques include volunteer and non-volunteers. Tools such as equity sticks or random name generators like WheelofNames.com help ensure diversity in how teachers select participants. Technology tools such as Menti and Flip where students provide responses give voice to more students, encourage participation by all, and offer opportunities for collaboration. Integrating the technology can help make all students feel seen and heard and help the class make democratic decisions.

Sharing *The Girl with a Mind for Math: The Raye Montague Story* (2018) by Julia Mosca can inspire students to overcome adversity to solve problems and attain their goals. Raye Montague is an empowering example of how a young person was able to share her voice. Personal stories allow our students to identify with and learn about the uniqueness of individuals. This book includes a timeline of milestones in Ms.

Montague’s life. Additionally, *The Girl with a Mind for Math* can be a springboard for STEAM activities.

Related Math Activities:

- Creation of timelines - personal or of historical figures and/or events
- Analysis of measurements of naval ships and submarines
- STEAM Activity: Peer collaboration in simulated ship building. Teams build a ship utilizing a limited number of various materials provided - paper, paper clips, wood sticks, straws, aluminum foil sheet
- Comparison of mathematical identities: Raye Montague’s story of mathematics and engineering
- Sharing heritage: Place-based connections using literature

### Place-Based Connections

A third experience young adolescents can learn from is using place-based connections. Books are sometimes windows, offering views of worlds that may be real or imagined, familiar or strange. These windows are also sliding glass doors, and readers have only to walk through in imagination to become part of whatever world has been created or recreated by the author” (Bishop, 1990, p. ix). When we provide our students with opportunities for exploration of new places, concepts, histories, and people, they gain understandings about places near and far. At a time in their lives when so much is unknown, middle school students deserve opportunities for engaging, enriching lessons that introduce concepts, places, and people who can inspire them to think deeply about their place in the world. These windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors await and entice our students to go beyond what and where they know to learn more about the world in which they live. For example, we can virtually visit Peru while reading *Patterns in Peru* (2007) by Cindy Neuschwander. In this story, Bibi and Matt Zill must use their algebraic knowledge of patterns along their adventure to navigate their way. The patterns in the story include repeating, positional, and growing patterns. There is even a T-chart in the book! The main characters must think critically to extend patterns to guide their way to the Lost City when they are suddenly separated from their parents.

Related Math Activities:

- Construct algebraic patterns with color tiles (or other manipulative) and discover linear functions
- Place-based data analysis - population through historical periods (South America, The Inca Civilization, Machu Picchu), median income, demographics, climate, ecosystems
- Measurements with scaled maps (geography of South America, Peru, Machu Picchu), cartography, explorations of landforms
- Mathematical analysis of cultural designs in art and clothing

Where stories take place and/or using stories that relate to students locally can inspire students to problem solve and work strategically to understand how people live in

community. Incorporating literature into math lessons allows students opportunities to get to know one another, learn about careers which prioritize math, examine mathematical applications through authentic situations, and gain insights about historical figures who made contributions in STEM fields. While connecting students to their own communities is critical, books can allow students to take adventures into other cultures. Since the books are being used as entry points to connect with students, it is not necessary for the books to align with the reading level of the students. Relevancy can be established in adolescent literature, children's books, and picture books.

Examples highlighted in this article include: *The Dot and the Line: A Romance in Lower Mathematics* (1963) by Norton Juster; *The Day You Begin* (2018) by Jacqueline Woodson; *The Housekeeper and the Professor* (2003) by Yoko Ogawa, set in Japan; *The Girl with a Mind for Math: The Raye Montague Story* (2018) by Julia Mosca; and *Patterns in Peru* (2007) by Cindy Neuschwander. Each of these narratives weaves mathematical concepts with elements of history and allows students to develop their geographical knowledge. The stories offer glimpses into the lives of mathematicians, engineers, researchers, and writers. Through these stories students are able to see, hear, and discuss how math concepts are applied to real life situations in different places. Lessons can be extended for students to create their own math stories and through this, they can see themselves as mathematicians, engineers, architects, researchers, and/or writers. Elements of adventure, art, suspense, and rich characterizations provide high interest and engagement for concepts that might otherwise be difficult to garner students' attention. Each story immerses students into a particular place – the faraway lands of Peru and Japan, for example.

Exploration of the settings of the stories can serve as connections to our students' lives and provide opportunities for place-based lessons which add authenticity to our lessons. The interdisciplinary possibilities with math and literature are numerous. According to the Association for Middle Level Education (AMLE), curriculum should be relevant, challenging, integrative, and exploratory. AMLE promotes education that is responsive, challenging, empowering, equitable, and engaging (2024). *The Successful Middle School* (Bishop & Harrison, 2021) explains integrative curriculum as including inquiry of significant problems and societal issues. Communication and collaboration are essential in the process. Finally, three of NCTM's (2014) seven Effective Mathematics Teaching Practices include: facilitating meaningful mathematical discourse, supporting productive struggle in learning mathematics, and posing purposeful questions.

## Conclusion

While we work to unify our students, we should keep in mind that collaborating with our colleagues sets a powerful example. Reaching across the hallway to share ideas can provide the benefit of a cross-curricular approach. While teachers explore the mathematics of the literature in one class, colleagues can spotlight and expand upon additional discipline-specific content. Intentionality is key. What do

middle schoolers spend their time thinking about and doing? In a path forward for one's own ideas, consider books and media, and community-based connections, along with questions and interests from students. The intent is to make learning student-centered and student-focused, helping students see the relevancy of content and collaboration. As we work through authentic tasks, we develop as citizens collaborating with each other at increased levels of engagement. We create a culture of engagement, curiosity, and collaboration when we give our students opportunities to make connections and explore their wonderings.

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