

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Mary Ann Clark

I am delighted to begin the 2006-07 school year as President of the Florida Reading Association, an organization that has positively impacted my career time and time again. I look forward to working with the board members and local council officers to support the work of Florida's reading teachers and introduce this great organization to a new generation of literacy professionals.

As a young reading resource teacher in the late 1970s, I had the opportunity to attend my first Florida Reading Association Annual Conference in Miami Beach. I have been hooked ever since and rarely miss the fall conference! Year after year, I have always been able to count on dynamic presentations from a broad group of nationally-known speakers with diverse backgrounds, varying areas of expertise, and sometimes differing philosophies on literacy acquisition. What a stimulating experience!

The 44th FRA Annual Conference, "Taking Reading to Heart", will be held October 19-22, 2006 at the Wyndham Orlando Resort. Dr. Debra Wellman, FRA President-elect and General Conference Chair, has put together a fabulous group of speakers. Presenters include Tim Shanahan,

IRA President; Jack Pikulsky, IRA Past-president; Cathy Collins Block; Janet Allen; Carrice Cummins; Carol Santa; and Becky Rogers. In addition, Deb has brought together a wonderful group of featured authors for elementary and secondary teachers. Visit the FRA website at www.flreads.org to get a complete listing of the authors. Be sure to visit their personal websites to learn more about their books.

The International Reading Association has a position paper on the qualities of an excellent reading teacher. As you might expect, IRA advocates that reading teachers view themselves as life long learners. An important quality is that they must know a variety of ways to teach reading and be able to tailor instruction to individual students. Fortunately, school districts and universities provide necessary training for us to stay current in our field. Unfortunately, the training can sometimes be limited in scope or even biased toward a particular method or philosophy of teaching.

Therefore, it is critical for each of us to reflect on our knowledge base and to be responsible for our own professional development. Commit to building a repertoire of skills, strategies, and teaching behaviors that will lift the level of literacy for all the students we touch. There are many different paths to literacy and we owe it to our students to explore them all. Attend professional conferences when possible, interact with colleagues through professional organizations and, most importantly, read professional journals. Read, read, read !

Enjoy the beginning of another year of learning!

IN THIS ISSUE . . .

- . . . A note from the editor
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NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

Hi, Everyone,

Well, here it is back to school time and so soon! By the time you receive this newsletter many of you will be back in school already! For me, the first few days of the new school year have always been filled with the nervousness that all things new bring to the anticipation of starting over. What a wonderful gift we as educators have to begin afresh every year. Enjoy and keep up the good work! Below, please find website reviews from my Barry graduate students and other goodies.

Websites of interest:

In her President's Message, Mary Ann mentioned the IRA position paper on the qualities of an excellent reading teacher. Please see the websites listed below for Standards for Reading Professionals revised role definitions as of 4/10/06.

- http://www.reading.org/styleguide/standards_reading_prof.html
and Standards for Reading Professionals—revised 2003
- http://www.reading.org/resources/issues/reports/professional_standards.html

Natalie Bent, Barry University Graduate student:

www.proteacher.com/070063.shtml

- Links lead to shared ideas in relation to ESL students
- Useful ideas for teachers of ESL students
- v Website is large, but is organized in a manageable way...easy to navigate
- Be sure to analyze each idea and critically choose which ones to use

Jennifer Irla, Barry University Graduate student

<http://www.literacymatters.org/content/readandwrite/intro.htm>

- A large site with links to other websites.
 - Divided into:
 - *What is Content Area Writing?*
 - *Writing to Learn*
 - *Writing to Demonstrate*
 - *Knowledge*
 - *Lesson Plans*
- Excellent link examples of various expository modes and journal writing sites
- Easy to navigate
- A large variety of lesson plans to use for content area writing
- Good site for new and veteran teachers

Jean Reilly, Barry University Graduate student

http://www.state.nj.us/njded/njpep/pd/rfpd/motivation_background/resources/prior_knowledge.html

- Links for strategies for activating prior knowledge and building comprehension
- Free printable charts and organizers
- Easy to navigate and spend hours surfing

Looking forward to hearing from you! Thank you, Joyce V. W. Warner, Editor

..... **COMMITTEES**

SCHOLARSHIPS AND AWARDS

Pam LaRiviere, chairperson

Looking to support your ideas; have an action research idea in mind?

- The Studies and Research Committee is seeking teachers who have ideas that make a difference in their students' literacy skills. Perhaps you have been thinking, "Yes, I'd like to do something differently, but I don't know much about the research." You are just the one we're looking for. FRA is committed to encouraging professional growth through research in the classroom. We want to help you take your idea and turn it into something that will make a difference in kids' reading. Perhaps you heard a new idea in professional development workshop or from a speaker session; perhaps you must implement an action research for a district requirement; perhaps you have an idea of your own that begs to be implemented; then this is the opportunity for you!
- Submit a proposal for the Marilyn F. Sharp Classroom Action Research award. If all you need is help to implement your idea, a little bit of courage and a few hundred dollars, this award is for you! Details can be found on the application that is posted on the FRA web site, www.FLReads.org. Click on *Scholarships and Awards*. If you still need help, contact the *Newsletter* editor and she will put you in touch with a committee person who can help you.

ADOLESCENT LITERACY

Ellie Somers, Chair

Two great Literacy Projects successes:

- The FRA Student *Book Hook* Contest
- *Reading Poster Exhibition*, piloted at the Secondary Reading

STUDIES AND RESEARCH

Judy Moore, Chair

Teachers on the Cutting Edge

The Cutting Edge was mailed in May. Read about the importance of *Leading the Way to Literacy* no matter what your role: teacher, principal, supervisor, reading specialist, media specialist, literacy coach, or student. The next "hot topics" for *The Cutting Edge*, will be on comprehension. So if you have ideas, drop a line to a letter to the *Teachers on the Cutting Edge* editor, Judy Moore or the newsletter editor.

..... **CONGRATULATIONS**

Proposed amendments to the FRA By-laws

On June 4, 2006 the FRA Board of Directors approved two proposed changes to amend the FRA By-laws:

..... **ANNOUNCEMENTS*****Proposed amendments to the FRA By-laws*****Proposed Amendment # 1:**

Amend FRA By-laws Article VII: Election of Vice President Section 1, "Mode of Election" to read as follows:

""The Vice President shall be elected by mail ballot, except in the event that there is only one candidate."

Proposed Amendment # 2

Amend FRA By-laws Article VII: Election of Vice President Section 3, to amend the first sentence to eliminate the parenthetical "with provisions for write-in candidates."

..... **CONFERENCE CORNER*****FLORIDA READING ASSOCIATION –
4TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE – 10/19-22/06***

Where: Wyndham Orlando Resort

For information contact Program Chairperson, Debra Wellman

dwellman@rollins.edu or www.flreads.org

See features below!!

FRA Something for everyone:**KEYNOTE SPEAKERS**

Janet Allen is an international consultant recognized for her literacy work with at-risk students. She is currently spending her time researching, writing, speaking, and conducting literacy institutes across the country as part of her Literacy Leadership Collaborative. Dr. Allen has received several teaching awards including the Milken Foundation's National Educator Award.

Dr. Cathy Collins Block is a Professor of Education at Texas Christian University in Fort Worth, Texas and has been honored as one of the Outstanding People of the 20th Century, 2000 Outstanding Intellectuals of the 20th Century, and Who's Who in the World. Cathy has written numerous college textbooks and is an author of the Stanford Early School Achievement Test (The Psychological Corporation).

Dr. John J. (Jack) Pikulski is a Professor of Education at the University of Delaware. He is a recognized leader in the International Reading Association. He also has the honor of having been elected a member of the prestigious Reading Hall of Fame.

Dr. Carol Santa is the developer of Project CRISS (Creating Independence through Student-owned Strategies), a research-based, national support system with the goal of increasing student-centered teaching, independent learning, and student achievement.

Dr. Timothy Shanahan, professor of urban education at the University of Illinois at Chicago and director of the UIC Center for Literacy, is president of the International Reading Association and will serve until May 2007.

FEATURED SPEAKERS

The Bag Ladies, are classroom teachers who present Make 'n Take workshops and create hands-on projects for each of their 17 thematic units for grades K-6.

Dr. Carrice Cummins is author of *The Power of Retelling: Developmental Steps for Building Comprehension*. Together with Dr. Vicki Benson, Dr. Cummins is co-director of AB & C Productions, Inc. (<http://www.wrightgroup.com/index.php/home/profdevelopment/insight/meetourauthors/106>).

April DeCesar is a dynamic and energetic presenter whose acclaims include Florida's Primary Teacher of the Year and nominee for Disney's American Teacher Award. April's session will provide you with opportunities to teach *smarter not harder!*

Melissa Forney is a dynamic presenter who spends much of her time writing books for teachers, books for kids, or speaking at educational conferences. See (<http://www.melissaforney.com/aboutme-bio.htm>)

Becky Rogers' research interests are in the areas of discourse studies, educational linguistics, and critical literacy. Her first major research project was a three-year ethnography in an inner-city school in upstate New York, where she studied the nature and consequences of family and community literacy practices. See (<http://news-info.wustl.edu/sb/page/normal/617.html>).



Becky Rogers

The Sisters - Real life 'sisters' Gail Boushey and Joan Moser are known by the teachers they've worked with in Washington state and throughout the country as well researched, strategic, and fun. See (www.the2sisters.com).

FEATURED AUTHORS

Marianne Berkes is the author of many nature-themed picture books, including *Seashells by the Seashore*, which was inspired by a trip to Sanibel Island. See (www.marianneberkes.com)

Lynne Cherry - Through her books and newsletter, *Nature's Course* (www.cce-ane.org/), she encourages teachers to involve their students in "Participatory Democracy"—inspired by the stories in children's books. See' (<http://www.lynncherry.com/bio.htm>)

Lesa Cline-Ransome developed an interest in the field of education while and began working as a substitute teacher in the New York City school system. Later began writing for children in collaboration with her husband, children's book illustrator James Ransome. See (<http://www.nationalbook.org/lcransomebio.html>)

Henry Cole is the illustrator of many beloved books for children, including his own *Jack's Garden* and *The Sissy Duckling*, by Harvey Fierstein. See (<http://www.authortracker.com/author.asp?a=authorid&b=11941#bio>)

Carol Crane, the author of fourteen books, is a historian and has always been a journal writer. Her greatest joy is to have a child say, "Wow! I didn't know that". See [**Sleeping Bear Press**](#).

Chris Crutcher is the critically acclaimed author of six novels and a collection of short stories for teenagers. He was awarded the American Library Association's Margaret A. Edwards Award, honoring his lifetime contribution in writing for teens.

See(<http://www.authortracker.com/author.asp?a=authorid&b=16156>)

Pamela Duncan Edwards is the author of numerous popular picture books, including *Livingstone Mouse*; *Roar! A Noisy Counting Book*; *Some Smug Slug*; *The Worrywarts*; *Clara Caterpillar*; *Wake-Up Kisses*; *Rosie's Roses*; *The Leprechaun's Gold*; and *Gigi and Lulu's Gigantic Fight*. See (<http://www.harpercollinschildrens.com/HarperChildrens/Kids/AuthorsAndIllustrators>)



Chris Crutcher

Cheryl Harness is an author and illustrator. She is known for her engaging approach to history, seen in such books as *Three Young Pilgrims*, *Ghosts of the White House*, and *Remember the Ladies*. *Just for You to Know* is her first novel. See (<http://www.authortracker.com/author.asp?a=authorid&b=15389>)

James Ransome's work has appeared in nearly fifty books for children, including the Coretta Scott King Award Book *The Creation* by James Weldon Johnson and *Satchel Paige and Major Taylor: Champion Cyclist*, both written by his wife, Lesa Cline-Ransome. His traveling exhibit, Visual Stories, is featured in libraries and museums throughout the country.

See (<http://www.authortracker.com/author.asp?a=authorid&b=12628>)

Margriet Ruurs writes children's and educational materials. Her favorite genre is poetry and she likes to make silly rhymes! See [writing programs in schools](#) and www.kalwriters.com/kidswwrite and (<http://www.margietruurs.com/about.html>) a web magazine that publishes writing by children.

Diane Stanley is a masterful storyteller whose fairy-tale reimaginings have been hailed by critics, including *Kirkus Reviews*, who proclaimed *The Giant and the Beanstalk* "inspired," and *The Horn Book*, who called *Goldie and the Three Bears* "delectable, at once saucy and tender." Diane has also delighted readers with novels such as *The Mysterious Matter of I. M. Fine* and her award-winning series of picture-book biographies. See (<http://www.authortracker.com/author.asp?a=authorid&b=12765>)

Steve Swinburne is an author of children's books which draw on his wide range of life experiences and his interest in biology. He loves to write and take photographs for children's books. See (<http://www.steveswinburne.com/bio/index.htm>)

See the FRA website for more detailed information and to register online

http://www.flreads.org/Annual%20Conference/44thConference/44th_conference.htm

FRA LEGISLATIVE REPORT from Florence Brainerd
FRA's Legislative Advocate

June 2006

On May 5, the Florida Legislature ended another productive session, funding more money to education, and passing the Governor's A++Plan.

EDUCATION FUNDING

The Governor signed a \$71.3 billion state budget after vetoing \$435 million worth of line-item projects. K-12 Public Schools are funded \$18.8 billion, an increase of \$1.8 billion over last year. That includes enough for teacher pay raises and increased spending for each student by 8.7 percent. It also creates a new \$147.5 million performance pay plan that will pay bonuses to the highest performing teachers - 5% of their salary. The budget also includes \$2.1 billion to hire teachers and pay other operating costs.

Several funding line items that will affect FRA members are:

Teachers Lead Program	\$45 million
Excellent Teaching	\$98 million
Reading – FEFP	\$111.8 million
Reading Programs —“Just Read...”	\$76.5 million
A++ Initiative	\$18 million
Education Partnerships	\$8 million
Innovative Pilot Reading Programs	\$2.5 million - vetoed
Teacher Professional Development	\$135 million

LEGISLATION- The A++ Plan

HB 7087 – Education - A++ Plan - aka Secondary School Reform, passed both houses late in the session. The intention is for the Florida's middle and high school curriculum and classrooms to be injected with “rigor and relevance”, giving students more choices and opportunities to design their futures. Higher standards will be expected and intensive reading instruction will be available when needed, in addition to exposure to higher levels of mathematics and science instruction. The desired results are for students to be better prepared for higher education and the workforce. Reform must include small learning communities and industry-focused career academies to address the academic needs of struggling students, non-traditional learners, and those capable of advanced and postsecondary coursework.

Of interest to FRA members is the fact that the bill requires students scoring Level 1 on the FCAT reading to be provided with intensive reading courses. Those scoring Level 2 in reading will be provided with remediation specific to identified skills gaps.

The bill provides for reading instruction to be funded through the FEFP. It codifies the establishment of the Just Read, Florida! Office to support district implementation of comprehensive reading plans, trains teachers and principals in reading research and instructional strategies, creates multiple designations and credentials for reading teachers, reviews teacher certification exams, and works with teacher preparation programs to ensure integration of reading research.

The bill supports the findings of the Paperwork Reduction Task Force, appointed last year to eliminate duplicative paperwork and data collection requirements. It requires school districts to appoint a teacher representative at each school to gather suggestions from teachers on paperwork reduction solutions. Eventually, suggestions work their way to DOE.

Among other education issues in the 160 pages, the bill:

- Provides that school districts may not be penalized for using co-teaching strategies, under the class size requirements, to ensure effective instruction;
- Provides that school districts may not begin the school year earlier than 14 days prior to Labor Day;
- Prohibits school districts from assigning a higher percentage of first-time teachers to “D” or “F” schools or schools with above average minority and economically disadvantaged students.

STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION -Sunshine State Standards – Reading/Language Arts

In providing an overview of the proposed Sunshine State Standards for Reading and Language Arts, Chancellor Cheri Yecke informed the State Board of Education that the Standards will now include standards for all students including those with special needs. The proposed standards are currently on the Department’s website for input and comment. The final document will be presented to the Board in June for approval.

GOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS ACTIVITIES - Political Involvement for Teachers

Teachers can be a vital force in making education decisions at the local and state level. There are amazingly large numbers of legislators who are teachers or married to teachers. If not running for office personally, members of FRA and local councils can participate on governmental relations committees, and invite legislators or candidates to receptions and special occasions. Members should interview candidates, and go all out to support those who mirror the passions of the teaching profession. Legislators do not forget those who support and give them a chance to legislate. This is what members of all active associations do for exposure and recognition of their cause.

Contest Winners

Book Hook Contest

Dr. Michelle Kelly reports, FRA Announces the first annual Student *Book Hook* Contest Winners

Mrs. Walters’ and Mrs. Blackmore’s 5th graders at Dr. Phillips’ Elementary swept all of the awards for FRA’s Student Book Hook Contest. The Grand prize winner was Eric Polansky, first prize went to Zachary Holbrook, and second prize was awarded to Sitaara Ali. The essays appeared in the Spring 2006 edition of the *FRA Newsletter*.

See photo of the winners. Congratulations!



Reading Poster Contest Winners

Dr. Ellie Somers reports, FRA announces the first annual FRA ***Reading Poster Contest for Secondary Schools***. Students from Broward, Miami/Dade and Monroe counties piloted the contest this spring. Posters were displayed and voted upon at the April 2006 Secondary Reading Council Conference and at FRA's Leadership conference in June 2006. Winners were announced at both conferences.

See photo of the winning posters. Congratulations !



Student Winner: Juan Guzman, grade 9, South Miami Senior High School, Miami, Florida.

Student Winner: Miguel Saludes, grade 9, South Miami Senior High School, Miami, Florida.

Student Winner: Sulay Palenque, grade 9, South Miami Senior High School, Miami, Florida.

Student Winner: Luis Isla, grade 12, Homestead Senior High School, Miami, Florida.



Student Winner: Jorge Marrero, grade 10, Felix Varela Senior High School, Miami, Florida.

Spring and Summer News from the Local Reading Councils

You may contact any local council through shirleyJG13@aol.com

District 2 – Bay, Calhoun, Gulf, Jackson, Washington May/June 2006 – E. Luke

The **Bay County Reading Association (BCRA)** has this news of events:

- BCRA sponsored the annual District Spelling Bee
- BCRA Board members volunteered as judges for District History Fair
- BCRA helped to organize a Secondary Literacy Council
- BCRA assisted with Superintendent's Summit
- BCRA sponsored Dinner Meeting to install new officers

District 3 – Leon May 2006 – S. Hinsley

The **Leon County Reading Council (LCRC)** has felt great responsibility for the literacy endeavors in our county and surrounding areas. Therefore, the focus this year has been on involvement of middle schools and high schools. This is a snapshot of on-going endeavors and continuing programs/events that LCRC is organizing for the 2006-2007 school year.

- "Vote for Books" workshop series of this year's eight FRA nominated K-2 picture books was well attended.
- Member communications:
 - E-Mail Notices: to all our membership
 - Newsletters: LCRC published a fall edition and a spring edition. See website below
- "Let's Care and Share a Book" project (Read Across America) was extremely successful
www.bay.k12.fl.us/bcra

**FLORIDA
Reading
ASSOCIATION**

Take Reading to Heart!
Florida Reading Association's
Fall Conference
October 19-22, 2006
Wyndham Orlando Resort



The Florida Reading Association invites members and others interested in the goals and purposes of FRA to attend the Annual Conference. Go to www.Flreads.org for the conference information.

- The Middle School Poetry Contest - "POETRY JAM"
- Spring Banquet April 27th
- "*Family Reading Parties*" - Community Outreach opportunity through Adult and Community Ed. Office

<http://mel25345-01.k12.fsu.edu>

**District 9 – Brevard, Orange, Seminole
May/June 2006 – S. Gibson**

The **Brevard Reading Council** is looking forward to next year as it offers professional development opportunities and fellowship to its members. For information on Brevard Reading Council, please contact Sheryl Finch or Lynne Nilles, Brevard County.

The **Orange County Reading Council** hosted a Family Reading Night in March at the Herndon Plaza branch of the Orlando Public Library. Council members read to children and their families! In April, OCRC held their annual Spring Brunch at Dubsdread Country Club. The guest speaker was Luanne Nelson, Director of Reading First Professional Development at the University of Central Florida, Orlando. Her topic, "From Reading First to Reading Next" provided attendees with relevant and current information. Following this, OCRC held its award presentations for people, schools, and organizations voted on by council members. Installation of Officers concluded this event with Enrique Puig installed as President for 06-07.

www.orangecountyreadingcouncil.org.

The **Seminole Reading Council** held its final meeting in May at the Educational Support Center. "Musical Literacy" was presented by Lynn Shroeder, who demonstrated the connection between music and literature. Lynn's creativity and presentation proved motivating to all who attended. This summer, on July 10th, SRC is joining with National Board Certified Teachers to host "Leaping Into Literacy" at Millennium Middle School. Dr. Rick DuVall is the keynote speaker and sessions presented by board certified teachers are designed to motivate attendees for the upcoming school year. SRC's co-presidents for 06-07 are Taylar Clements and Analexis Kennedy.

www.scps.k12.fl.us/src/index.html

**District 11 – Sarasota
May 2006 – A. Smith**

The **Sarasota Reading Council** has presented their members this year with opportunities for social interaction, networking and professional development. They ended their very successful year with three events: the Student Poetry Contest, a Model Reading session, and the annual Literacy Banquet.

- About 115 people including 6 school administrators, teachers, students and parents and judges attended the Student Poetry Contest at Selby Library. The winners from each school read their poems and overall winners were announced in four grade-group categories. The grand prize winners were published in the May edition of Peppertree Magazine.
- The Literacy Banquet began with Peggy Condin-Paquettes' stand-up comedy routine that had us chuckling over teacher, parent and administrative foibles. Nominees for "Literacy Teacher of the Year" were recognized for their outstanding contributions and two winners were declared.
- The new SRC Board was installed and outgoing President, Pam Donehew, was lauded for her outstanding leadership. Of note, is a new position created by the SRC Board that of Web Chairperson whose responsibility it will be to maintain and update the SRC's web page.

District 13 – Lee
May/June 2006 — M. Schneider

The **Lee County Reading Council (LCRC)** hosted their annual end of year banquet on Thursday, June 1st. Rayann Mitchell, from IRA, was the featured speaker of the evening. The board for the upcoming year was sworn in at this time and Teacher of the Year awards were distributed:

- Debra Horn was recognized as the Elementary School Reading Teacher of the Year:
- Linda Gobran, from P.L. Dunbar Middle School, was recognized as the Middle School Reading Teacher of the Year;
- Yolanda Richardson, from South Fort Myers High School, was recognized as the High School Reading Teacher of the Year.

These teachers were also recognized and presented with certificates by the Lee County School Board on May 2nd. Work continues on developing the first ever Lee County Reading Council website, with a planning session scheduled for mid-June.

District 14 – Miami/Dade, Monroe
May 2006 — K. MacDonnell

It was a busy spring for the **Dade Reading Council (DRC)**

- January 31 – Networking - FCAT Reading Strategies by Gloria Plaza and Katia Lopez.
- February 5 – African American Read-in at Southland Mall. Stories were read to children and books were given away for home libraries. A program of poetry and music by children was the highlight of the event.
- February 28 – Networking – Hot Topics for 2006. Sponsored by Newbridge/Sundance.
- April 1 – FRA Honor Council Status achieved.
- April 22 - Reading Day in the Malls - This year they were in four area malls: Aventura, Dadeland, Southland, and Miami International Malls. Volunteers read stories to children and gave them books to take home for their libraries.
- May 6 – Awards and Installation Breakfast – Officers for 2006-2007 were installed, various awards were presented, and Teachers as Heroes were recognized for their accomplishments.
- June – A retreat will be held at Books and Books in order to plan for the coming school year.

Two special notes for District Directors, Councils and council members:

1) We'd like to share your wonderful speakers and your local reading conference and workshop information in the newsletter. Please make recommendations for author speakers and provide the dates and locations of your local reading conferences.

Please send your information to the newsletter editor, Dr. Joyce Warner, at jvwarner@gate.net or jwarner@mail.barry.edu.

Ideas for your teacher bag of tricks

Teacher books worth previewing:

Beck, I. L., McKeown, M. G. & Kucan, L. (2002). *Bringing words to life*. New York: Guilford Press

Beers, Kylene. (2003). *When kids can't read: What teachers can do*. Portsmouth, NH: Hienemann.

Billmeyer, Rachel & Barton, Mary Lee. (2002). *Teaching reading in the content areas*. Aurora, CO: McREL.

Readance, J. E., Bean, T. W. & Baldwin, R. S. (2004). *Content area literacy: An integrated approach*. Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt.

Robb, Laura. (2003). *Teaching reading in social studies, science and math*. New York: Scholastic

A multidisciplinary tale:

The Night Sky Lights up with Stories

by Nanette L. Avery Ed.S.

Email: mrsavery@hotmail.com or www.nanetteavery.com

Teacher/Miami-Dade County

Science instruction has come a long way since the days of simply reading from a textbook. Our classrooms bring a philosophy of teaching which captures the interest of our students through the means of discovery, exploration, problem solving, and process thinking. We teachers have become very adept in the art of quick-change artistry.

My role was to design a successful set of lessons which would introduce early elementary students to the

"Sky." The earliest component of my curriculum began with an investigative study of the sun, moon, and stars. The tricky part was trying to bring into the unit an activity which would integrate our science investigation with an art, science, and language arts connection. What better way to bring the world of science alive than to include literature into the program? That is exactly what we did!

We began by reading aloud from our science textbook, which introduced the students to a concise introduction to the night sky. This gave way to the opening of dialogue whereby the children had many questions about the stars. By reading aloud to the students the non-fiction book, *The Sky is Full of Stars*, by Franklyn M. Branley, they delighted in answering many of their own questions by listening and observing the illustrations. Focusing on the brightest stars and constellations, the class began to get an understanding for the "sky pictures" the stars can make - "constellations." A few of the children had already heard of the "Big and Little Dipper", and by pointing out the book's illustrations they could make a visual connection to the name and configuration of stars.

This activity led us to a teacher directed discussion about people of different cultures and their stories of long ago, which were often used to explain the "constellations". The children began to understand that legends and myths were narrated to explain and interpret changes that the stars appeared to have made from season to season, as well as why the stars

seem to move. Reading aloud from Native American stories acquainted the class to those hero and animal constellations which adorned this rich culture. The wonderful book, *In a Circle Long Ago*, by Nancy Van Laan, furnished the students with an understanding of the unique connection between nature, the appreciation for the natural environment and the Native Americans. That evening for homework the students were instructed to ask a parent or grown-up to take them outside to look at the sky.

The next day we got together and compared what they had viewed the night before. Those who did not live close to the city lights were able to observe a vast array of stars. Many children admitted that they had never really looked up at the night sky before. All were especially delighted to learn that they were soon to become creators of their own constellations and write a myth which would explain its origin. At the start of the lesson, I introduced the art portion by modeling, step-by-step, the method that they were going to employ to design their constellations. As each step was demonstrated, questions were answered and soon the children were ready to work. They began with a brain storming session to decide what kind of constellation they would like to construct. We shared ideas and contributed suggestions. Then, each child was given its materials that had been prepared during *B.C. time*. (*B.C. time -before children time – -this will often cut out any down time during class work and instructional teaching time!*)

1 inch square graph paper
Black construction paper
Colorful stick-on stars
Lined writing paper

Setting out graph paper, they penciled in star locations and lightly connected them like a dot-to-dot. When they were satisfied with their constellation “draft” they were given the black construction paper and tiny star stickers to best replicate their “graph paper constellation” onto the black paper.

The completed constellations then became a “pre- writing” tool. The students were engaged in a process of discovery as stories begin to surface and evolve from their “constellations.” In contrast to the pre-writing process on blank paper, the search for a story idea began to emerge more easily for many of the students. They would now appraise their finished “constellation” and generate a myth.

It was wonderful to see how excited the children became as their creative energy turned out original stories. Influenced by their prior knowledge of myths from our earlier lessons, the simple stories they wrote had more meaning and significance to each child. An underlying appreciation was beginning to germinate.

Applying this union of literature and art to embellish a science lesson, our culminating activity was a formal presentation of each written piece and constellation. All work was later displayed on our science bulletin board. In very few lessons the children gained new insights into *the night sky*.

So now, when the moon is full and the night is clear, I often have a special satisfaction knowing that the stars above and I have a special secret. The night sky lights up with stories.



FRA Membership
Post Office Box 12187
Tallahassee, FL 32317-2187
www.FLReads.org

Check Appropriate Box: [] New [] Renewal

Name _____

County _____ E-mail _____

Home Address _____

City _____ State/Country _____

Zip Code + 4 _____ Home Phone _____

Employer _____

Work Address _____

City _____ State/Country _____

Zip Code + 4 _____ Work Phone _____

Occupation: [] Elementary Teacher (PreK-5) [] Secondary Teacher (6-12)
[] District/School Administrator [] College/University Instructor
[] Retired Educator [] Student
[] Consultant/Representative [] Other _____

Preferred Mailing Address: [] Home [] Work

I am a current member of: [] International Reading Association
[] Local Reading Council _____

The membership year is from July 1 through June 30. Membership applications received after March 1 will become effective immediately and extend through June 30 of the following year.

Membership Type: [] Regular \$25
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VOLUME XXVI, NO. 3

SUMMER 2006

Articles for the next *FRA Newsletter* should be sent to the newsletter editor:

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NOTE: E-mailing articles allows the editor to cut and paste your information directly into the *FRA Newsletter*.

FRA Newsletter

Published by the Florida Reading Association, an affiliate of the International Reading Association

Deadlines for Upcoming Issues

Issue	Deadline
Fall 2006	September 30, 2006
Spring 2007	February 28, 2007
Summer 2007	July 1, 2007

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