

Illinois Language & Literacy Council



NEWSLETTER

Fall, 2007

President's Report

As the new president who is truly new to ILLC, I am free to say that everything about ILLC is impressive. The council has a number of officers who have served the students and teachers of Illinois for a multitude of years. Doris Aimers is "lifer" who was present at the first Young Authors Conference held in DeKalb thirty-three years ago and still works each spring to assign 700-plus students to rooms. Sharon Ball, secretary, has worked tirelessly for many years, sending notices and keeping the organization on track. Heather Van Meenen, treasurer, does a great job of accounting for every penny. Ruth Stevig joined shortly after Doris and continues to keep track of T-shirt sales (our money maker) and membership. Sue Anderson, as Young Author Conference Anchor, seems to be everywhere during the conference, making sure each task is completed well. The unparalleled Jan Dundon recruits authors to speak at the conference, arranges items to make the authors' lives easy, and transports tons of books to be given to the students. For the last two years, and hopefully for years to come, Christina Podraza has taken on the task of organizing the conference. In addition, except Vice President Leslie Forsman and I, all of the officers have donated multiple years to the council. Thanks to Meg Pyterek, historian; Kathleen Jesukaitis, political action coordinator; Jennifer Byrne, university representative; Dennis Szymkowiak, young author volunteer; Roxanne Henkin, advisor; and member-at-large, Gwen Zolezzi.

The Young Author's Conference is the highlight of ILLC's year. Across the state of Illinois, K-8 public- and private-school students are encouraged to produce original writing. School personnel determine their own methods for choosing the best works written and illustrated by their students. Based on enrollment, each school may send a specified number of young authors to the conference. When these students arrive in Normal the third Saturday in May, they arrive carrying the books they have authored. The students have opportunity to share their works with a small group of peers, to meet in small groups with a published author, to hear from a storyteller (K-3) or author (4-8), and to walk across a stage to receive a medal and hear their names and the titles of their books announced. No one has statistically measured the literacy benefit of these awards and this conference, but the enthusiasm of the students from across the state as well as testimony from now-grown "young authors," suggests the event carries lasting impact.

Two items I would ask of those of you reading this column. **1) If you would like to be more involved in the work of this council, contact me or any of the officers.** We always have room for willing workers. We especially need workers at the conference and a newsletter editor. **2) Ensure that your school gives students opportunity to participate in the young authors program.** Every child is a winner when he or she learns that the effort of working with words gives way to the joy of communication. Therefore, schools can celebrate multitudes of authors as students are given opportunity to craft words into stories and articles.

Carole Pelttari, ILLC President, 2007-2008.

In This Issue:

President's Report

Herrick Middle School/Downers Grove
Intergenerational Book Club

Just What is a Young Author's Conference?

Award and Grant Opportunities

Get Students Writing

Book Reviews

Author/Storytelling Web Sites

ILLC Board

JUST WHAT IS THE YOUNG AUTHORS' CONFERENCE?

The Young Authors' Conference, held each year in May at Illinois State University in Normal, Illinois, is an event sponsored by the Illinois Language and Literacy Council, in conjunction with the Illinois State Board of Education. Designed as a celebration to honor exceptional writing by students in grades K through 8, the conference provides an opportunity for these young writers to meet published authors and to hear how the authors themselves create the characters and stories that have become their books.

The day long event, held on a Saturday, actually begins on Friday night for students, parents, or volunteers who wish to come early to attend a panel discussion by the authors in the Bone Center bookstore. This is an informal chance to meet all of the authors at the conference, and to ask them questions about themselves and their work.

On the actual day of the event, which will be May 17th, this year, the students register in the ballroom where they receive their room assignments and a book bag containing a pencil and gold seal, which they can later place on their own story. After hearing an introductory speaker, parents take off on their own until the afternoon, and students head for small group sessions headed by volunteer parents and teachers. Students spend the next several hours sharing their stories, eating lunch, listening to authors speak.

The day ends with students and parents reunited in an awards ceremony where students receive certificates for participating in the Young Authors' Conference as well as copies of the books written by the author they

heard speak. The gifted young writers have had a full day, and often leave with stories for next year's Young Author competition starting to take shape in their heads.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!

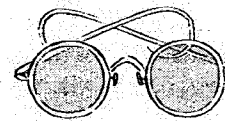
This conference can only be held with the help of the many adult volunteers who lead or assist small groups, escort authors, or perform other necessary tasks throughout the day. If you can help us in any way, please contact **Christina Podraza** at cpodraza@bsd2.org.

**MARK YOUR
CALENDARS NOW!**

**ILLINOIS YOUNG
AUTHORS' CONFERENCE**

SATURDAY, MAY 17, 2008

ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY



Young Authors' materials will be sent by ISBE to school districts across the state later this fall. Notify your district office to watch for these materials so your district will be included in this celebration of young writers! The materials will also be posted on the ISBE.org web site later this fall.

Get Students Writing for Young Authors' Conferences

by Doris Aimers

Each teacher has ideas for writing workshop. Here are a few more:

1. Hand out 100 topics for writing to place in writing folder (2-pocket folder for "works in progress" - separate folder for finished pieces.
2. Write every day for at least 20 minutes.
3. After a week choose a piece to work on. Remember, not every piece will be completed to final copy.
4. Meet with writing buddy for a conference. Each asks questions, gives positive feedback, and makes suggestions.
5. Work on revisions.
6. **Meanwhile**, in mini-lessons, teachers focus on character and plot development, setting, word choice, etc. Spend read-aloud time reading good literature.
7. When ready, can self edit, peer edit (word processor helps) , or even getting parents to edit, but teacher may want to do final edit. Piece is now ready for final copy.
8. During workshop teacher circulates and has mini-conferences. Donald Graves suggests questions such as, "Where are you now? Need help? What's next?" Some students may want a longer conference time.
9. Students will probably end up with 2 finished pieces a month.

Good sources:

Atwell, Nancy. Side by Side
Graves, Donald. A Fresh Look at Writing
Zemelman, Steve and Daniels, Harvey, A Community of Writers



Celebrate Writing in Your District!

Many districts who participate in the Young Authors' Conference not only send students to the state conference, but have a local celebration of writing for all students who enter their writing in the YA program. Often Illinois authors and storytellers are invited to speak at these celebrations. Using their literary expertise, these authors inspire, inform, and entertain the aspiring young readers and writers.

Illinois Author /Storyteller Information Available at these Web Sites

For Illinois author/illustrators , check out the web site of the

Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators at

www.scbwi-illinois.org.

Click on **Speakers Directory** for a wealth of information!

For Illinois storytellers, check out the web site of the

Illinois Storytelling, Inc. at

www.storytelling.org

Click on directory.

You're Never Too Old to Go Back to School....

If you happened to be in the hallways of Herrick Middle School in Downers Grove on Tuesday, May 22, at 8:45 am, you would have noticed some unusual members of the student body. Twenty four senior citizens, many of them grandparents of Herrick students, joined 97 seventh and eighth grade students for the first ever Intergenerational Book Club. Participants chose a book from a list of 13 titles compiled by Judy Belanger, retired LRC director. Each novel featured multigenerational characters. Seniors came to Herrick for a book talk by Judy and Linda Buehrer, Library Aide and had the opportunity to "check out" their favorite book. After two weeks of reading, the stage was set for the two age groups to come together and talk about their books. The cafetorium had 18 table groups set up with "Grandma's Cookies," juice, water, and coffee. Each group had at least one senior member and 5- 7 student members. As the students arrived, they found their tables and their assigned Senior citizens and the talk began! The room buzzed with conversations about books, generational experiences and all manner of book talk for 45 minutes! At 9:30, Dr. Susan Anderson, Reading Specialist announced the conclusion of the event and there was an audible groan. Even the students weren't ready for it to be over. The senior members stated they would eagerly await next's year's book clubs and the students were buzzing about it in their classrooms. It just goes to show, you are never too old for a good book!

Dr. Susan Anderson

Another Chance to Write!

The Secretary of State and State Librarian Jesse White has announced the **2008 Letters About Literature (LAL) contest**, a national contest sponsored by The Center for the Book in the Library of Council and the Illinois Center for the Book in partnership with Target.

This contest is another chance for Illinois students, grades 4 - 12, to put their reading and writing skills to work. Students will write a letter to an author, living or deceased, telling how the book has touched their life.

There are 3 levels of participation -

Level 1 - Grades 4 - 6

Level 2 - Grades 7 & 8

Level 3 - Grades 9-12

There are national and state prizes.

Deadline for entries - December 14, 2007

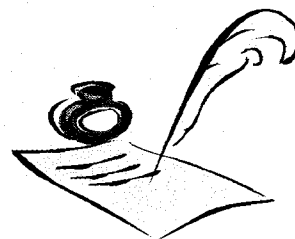
For more information, entrance forms, and guidelines, these sites will help:

www.loc.gov/letters

www.cyberdriveillinois.com

Source:

www.cyberdriveillinois.com/press/2007/august/070816d1.html



Can Your Students Predict the Next Newbery Award Winner?

Mock Newbery contest deadline -
January 10, 2008

Anderson's Book Shop in Naperville is sponsoring a mock Newbery award contest open to anyone who would like to involve their students in reading some good books.

- Go to www.andersonsbookshop.com
- Click on Reading Lists
- Click on Mock Newbery List
- You'll find a list of 25 mock candidates
- At the bottom of the list, you'll find directions for entering your school or class

Anderson's will announce the winner and honor books of the mock contest before the official Newbery winners are announced.

NATIONAL FAMILY READING NIGHT

is

THURSDAY,
NOVEMBER 15th!

Why not turn off the T.V. -
Grab a good book (or two) -

Gather
your family around
and

READ together!!!

Award and Grant Opportunities Abound at IRC Web Site

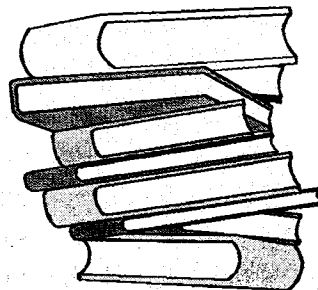
www.illinoisreadingcouncil.org

Why not nominate yourself or a colleague for the **Illinois Reading Educator of the Year** award? Application forms are now available online for this award which recognizes outstanding teachers who promote literacy among students, colleagues, and their school community.

Deadline for the application form, letters of recommendation, and your philosophy statement are due by December 15, 2007.

Many more award and grant opportunities for Illinois educators can be found at this site. Why not check it out? You or someone you know might be the perfect candidate to win!

Go to the web site and click on
Awards and Grants.



Books to the ceiling,
Books to the sky.
My pile of books
Are a mile high.
How I love them!
How I need them!
I'll have a long beard
By the time I read them.
-Arnold Lobel-

Book Reviews



Bucking the Sarge

by Christopher Paul Curtis

The final seventy pages of Christopher Paul Curtis' *Bucking the Sarge*, build into a colossal crescendo. Curtis has again used his skill to produce the type of book that Rudine Sims labels "culturally conscious." *Bucking the Sarge* "reflect[s] and illuminate[s] both the uniqueness and the universal humanness of the Afro-American experience from the perspective of an Afro-American child or family." In this case, Curtis uses multiple perspectives from a child, a family, and an entire community of African-Americans to develop universal themes.

The text of this book is so rich and full that Curtis has the mind moving in three directions at once, quickly pulling the reader into the story of one young man's determination to live honestly despite being raised by a dishonest, cheating, abusive mother, "aka the Sarge." On the first page the reader learns that Luther T. Farrell is both no common young man and one ordinary teen. Commoners are not philosophers, and they do not stay after school to gather ideas for a science fair project in order to win for the third year in a row. But ordinary teens generally identify with losing a wallet – or some equally necessary item. The similarities and contrasts continue.

Curtis clearly shows vulture-like characteristics motivated by greed and self-indulgence through the Sarge; Darnell Dixon, the Sarge's boyfriend and minion; another student's drug abusing mother who neglects her children and can do nothing when evicted from one of the Sarge's houses; and the D.O.G., Dontay Orlando Gaddy whose TV commercials offer to make millions for the little guy that can come up with a reason to sue someone – anyone. But in the middle of all the cruel circus antics, quietly living to make a difference are Mrs. Bohannon, the science teacher who stays after school to discuss Luther's project and "was almost as excited about it as [he] was;" Mr. Brown, referred to as "Old Man Brown, the harried but efficient principal; the Patrick family, who we learn late have been quietly watching in the wings and caring for years; and Chester X, one of the Sarge's intended victims who outwits the Sarge and shows Luther a way out.

The science fair project provides the climax when we learn that not only does it win, but the mayor,

the newspapers and the TV station have been invited to the presentation because the findings – which will put the Sarge in deep trouble – have already been reviewed by community leaders who wish to rectify the situation throughout the city. Luther's late realization that his project would have repercussions for his mother would be unbelievable if Curtis had not already shown us through the losing of the wallet and many other moments that common sense did not always find space in a brain occupied with school, the unexpressed and unrequited love of a certain young woman, being fully in charge of a group home for elderly men, and simply hoping to stay alive by staying one step ahead of the Sarge.

Are abuse, neglect, greed, lust for power, and self-indulgence restricted to the black community portrayed in this book? Of course not; therein is the universality of the theme. Every teenager will face negative situations, although few situations will be as extreme as those faced by Luther. If this fictional character can search out positive role models, hold to his ideals, and act when the opportunity presents itself, maybe his example can lead other marginalized individuals – of any race or background – to aspire to reach goals they had never before considered.

Reviewed by Carole Peltari

For adults -

A Respectable Trade

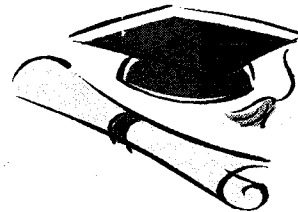
by Phillipa Gregory

This is a compelling page turner using the slave trade as a theme. The setting is Bristol in the 1780's. It is hard to imagine human beings being so cruel. The word "respectable" in the title explains the reasoning used to justify the practice.

Gregory describes the emotions of the characters through their actions and voices. It was hard for me to continue reading when I wanted to avoid thinking about this shameful time in history. Yet, I couldn't put the book down. This was also a love story and for me, the final message is "Love of money is the root of all evil."

Reviewed by Doris Aimers

**ILLC Board and Committee
Members 2007-2008**



Carole Pelttari, *President*
carole.pel@hotmail.com

Leslie Forman, *Vice President*
lforsman@hotmail.com

Sharon Ball, *Secretary*
sharonb277@aol.com

Heather Van Meenen, *Treasurer*
dvanmeen@sbcglobal.net

Christina Podraza, *Past President*
cpodraza@bsd2.org

Sue Anderson, *Young Author
Consultant*
anderbrose@aol.com

Ruth Stevig, *Membership Chair &
Fundraising Chair*
stevig@sbcglobal.net

Jan Dundon, *Author Coordinator
Literature Consultant*
jdundon@kjdundon.net

Meg Pyterek, *Historian*
pyterek.m@nb27.org

Kathleen Jesuskaitis, *Political Action*
kathleenjesukaitis@u46.org

Jennifer Berne, *University Rep.*
jberne.@nl.edu

Doris Aimers, *Young Author
Committee*
fdav236@sbcglobal.net

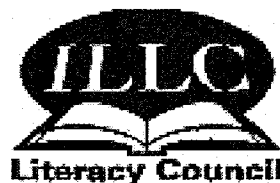
Dennis Szymkowiak, *Young Author
Committee*
dshimmy@aol.com

Roxanne Henkin, *Advisor*
rockyrlh@aol.com

Gwen Zolezzi, *Member at Large*
gzolezzi@sbcglobal.net

Board Meetings
(Time and place to be arranged)
Saturday, February 2, 2008

Monday, June 16, 2008



Newsletter Editors: Heather Van Meenen & Ruth Stevig

ILLC Welcomes New Members!

If you have a friend or colleague who might be interested in joining ILLC, encourage them to join IRC and ILLC. Once they've joined, please notify Membership Chair, Ruth Stevig, at stevig@sbcglobal.net. Include your name and their name. We will enter you in a drawing for a free renewal of your IRC/ILLC membership. The drawing will be held at our February meeting.

You can join IRC and ILLC online by going to www.illinoisreadingcouncil.org or you can print a copy of the membership form. Be sure to check ILLC as one of your council choices!

To read is to empower
To empower is to write
To write is to influence
To influence is to change
To change is to live

- Jane Evershed