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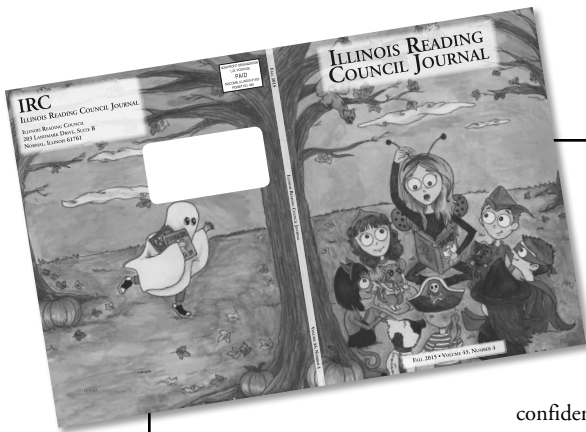
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About the Cover

The artwork on the cover is by Stephany Jimenez. Stephany is currently a graduate student at DePaul University on her path to pursuing a career in visual arts education. As an artist, her work employs a host of mediums that are illustrative and allow her to convey specific emotional meanings with great significance for herself and for others. As a teacher, she hopes to guide students in doing the same by creating a classroom environment in which she can cultivate strong ideas, opinions, and confidence, and can engage students in exploring who they are and who they want to become.

Ideally, her goal is to help students discover their identity and purpose on Earth.

MISSION

The mission of the Illinois Reading Council is to provide support and leadership to educators as they promote and teach lifelong literacy.

VISION

The Illinois Reading Council advocates quality literacy opportunities for all learners and serves as a primary organization that provides educators at all levels access to research, materials, and methodologies to promote and teach lifelong literacy and learning. Support of an active, well-organized system of local and special interest councils and state committees provides a viable network for communication, exchange of information, and grassroots involvement of a diverse membership. The Illinois Reading Council's publications, special projects, conferences, and workshops stimulate the personal and professional growth of educators.

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Editor's Page

Roxanne Owens, Editor



As indicated in our winter journal, I am experimenting with the content of the Editor's Page to try to discern what our members find to be a useful, intriguing, thought-provoking, and possibly interactive use of this space. The goal is to encourage people beyond my own relatives and friends to read the column.

Beyond Reading: Supporting Teachers as Writers

I recently had the pleasure of attending the Illinois Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators conference. One of the workshop sessions required participants to bring 10 copies of the first few pages of a manuscript to share with fellow writers during a critique session. Many educators harbor a desire to publish a children's book, so I wasn't surprised at the number of teachers in attendance. How many times do we tell ourselves that we must model what we are teaching our students? It makes sense that we read AND write with our students, thus it was gratifying to see so many teachers willing to share manuscripts they had written.

While I'm comfortable writing research pieces or providing feedback on someone else's manuscript, the prospect of sharing an *actual* story I wrote that *actual* people were going to read while I was *actually* sitting there was a prospect I found to be quite intimidating. I toyed with the idea of saying that my printer ran out of ink so I unfortunately couldn't bring my own manuscript to be read or critiqued, though I would magnanimously offer to critique other people's work during our workshop time—but

that seemed to be rather cowardly. Add in the fact that Julia Durango, author of several published children's books and past nominee for the IRC Prairie State Author of the Year Award, was in my critique group, and I was ready to run for the door.

Fortunately, my tablemates were quite skilled at providing helpful feedback on my story. They commented on the strengths of the piece and then made suggestions about elements that needed further attention. I resisted the initial (and I assume natural) desire to defend my piece and recalled all of the advice we give our students about the importance of revision. The participants made comments about strengths and possible revisions on each person's piece. It ended up being an inspiring and motivating afternoon, and I was glad I didn't give the old "my printer is out of ink" excuse.

What does all of that background have to do with this column? Sharing one's own writing can create a feeling of vulnerability that makes us uncomfortable. If we expect our students to share their writing, shouldn't we also push ourselves to do the same so that we can experience the benefits of other readers' eyes on our work?

Many of us belong to book clubs, but I don't believe as many of us belong to writing groups. Writing is an important component of literacy, and with the changing of the International Reading Association moniker to the International Literacy Association, we are all called to expand our attention beyond reading to an even greater extent than we do now. This led to thoughts about how we could use this space to support teachers as writers.

To this end, I asked participants from the conference if anyone would be willing to share a writing piece with the *IRCJ* readers for an experimental writers' group online critique experience. Teacher Raquel Harris graciously agreed. In addition to writing stories for children, Raquel is an active blogger on her site *This Quotable Life* (<https://thisquotablelife.wordpress.com>).

Here is how this will work. Read the excerpt from Raquel's manuscript *My Life According to Colors*. The author is interested in receiving feedback regarding the following questions:

1. Would you describe the characters as realistic and relatable? If so, why? If not, what change would you recommend?
2. Does the "voice" of the protagonist allow you to have a sense of "knowing" her?
3. Does the beginning of the story engage you?
4. I'm planning to start each chapter with a quote from an artist. Will that be something that appeals to middle grade readers?
5. Would you be interested in a spin-off series based on the other characters in the story such as *My Life According to Music*, *My Life According to Theatre*, etc.?

Provide your feedback on these questions and any other comments you'd like to make about the piece via e-mail to IRCJournal@illinoisreadingcouncil.org with "Writing Critique" in the subject line. Depending on the level of interest in engaging with some iteration of an interactive Teachers as Writers group, I'll work with the other *IRCJ* editors to arrange an online critique experience to share comments with our first Teacher as Writer, Raquel Harris. We'll see where the idea goes from there. Maybe we'll have enough people interested to create a few Teachers as Writers groups based on different audience levels or genres. Or maybe some of you will be inspired to arrange a Teachers as Writers group at your school. Or maybe more teachers will contribute other types of writing (e.g., research articles, poems, essays) to *IRCJ* for consideration.

Perhaps the next Newbery, Coretta Scott King, Schneider Family Award, Pura Belpre, or ILA Teacher's Choice Award winner is in our midst. We'll never know unless we are willing to share our writing with each other (and, of course, revise our writing).

PS: If you aren't ready to share your writing with IRC members or teachers at your school, another outlet for sharing your writing with others can be found at the following websites: www.fictionpress.com or www.Wattpad.com. Both are user-friendly sites that provide many examples of writing by people of all ages.

Happy reading!

Roxanne Farwick Owens