



COLUMN: THE SHIFTING LITERACY LANDSCAPE

COLUMN EDITORS: ANN D. DAVID AND ANNAMARY L. CONSALVO

COLUMN INTRODUCTION

Literacy things are changing in the State of Texas. Whether it is HB 3, the Science of Teaching Reading, the new ELA TEKS, or the yet-to-be-designed ELA STAAR test, the pathways beneath our feet are uncharted. But one of the best ways to wayfind is to work together, each person seeing a small piece of the whole landscape, sharing what we know with one another, and making informed, thoughtful decisions based on what we know and learn. Things will keep changing, even as we strive to implement the change ahead of us, but together we will find our way.

A GIFT OF GRACE

A gift of this pandemic—which doesn’t minimize, in any way, the very real pain and grief it has also brought—is grace. As a friend recently said, “We don’t have less work, but people seem far more willing to accept when we have to say no or turn down a project.” For example, as the deadline for publishing this issue of *TALE* arrived, Amy, the editor, reached out with a thoughtful email asking if we had a column, or if we didn’t. She framed this ask in the context of the end of the semester, and the demands that timeline imposes. She ended by explaining that it was okay and understandable, whether we had a column or not.

My response was, nope, we don’t. Maybe we could? Anna and I then went back and forth, thinking about what was possible in a few days, and what might be reasonable. Because of that initial bit of grace Amy extended us, and the grace we extended one another, we found a few kernels of time to write a few words.

So that’s our hope and wish for you as we near the end of this year, and look ahead—with hope—to next year: extend grace, and receive grace. Extend grace to your students; receive the grace they extend to you. Extend it to family and friends, and receive it as they extend it to you. What do we mean? Kindnesses small and large, forgivenesses large and small, lending a hand, receiving a hand, breathing, listening, and extending oneself whenever possible – even a little. Joy Harjo says it well in



her eponymous poem “I could say grace was a woman with time on her hands, or a white buffalo escaped from memory./ But in that dingy light it was a promise of balance.”¹

This easily could have turned into a column about the need for self care around the holiday season and end of the semester. But too much of what is written about self-care is about taking time that none of us really have or buying things with money that is very likely short. Instead, we (Ann and Anna) see that keeping our humanity and others’ humanity at the center of our field of vision is one key to self-care. That might mean letting tests and curriculum and benchmarks and grades and deadlines fade at the edges. In the midst of a global pandemic and, for many, a wrenching economy, keeping the humans in the center is better for everyone. And in keeping that center, joy and grace and hope can take root.

Also, we’ll leave you with a few reading recommendations for what we hope are longer stretches of time over the holiday season.

ANN’S RECOMMENDATIONS

While I’ve not had the concentration for reading since March, these are a few pieces that held my attention and interest.

- **YA: *They Went Left* by Monica Hesse**
A story of the Holocaust, but one that begins after liberation. I so appreciate Hesse’s ability to weave an utterly gripping narrative, and one that resists the neat boxes we so often want to put historical events in.
- **Long form article: “I Want My Damn Respect, Too” by Cynthia Cooper-Dyke**
<https://www.theplayerstribune.com/posts/cynthia-cooper-dyke-wnba-basketball>
I don’t follow sports at all. But sports writing is my jam. This is a first-person narrative that begins with one woman’s skill on the basketball court, and follows the arc of the founding of the WNBA through the dissolution of its strongest team. Real and raw and powerful, at turns funny and heart-wrenching.
- **Nonfiction: *Palaces for the People: How Social Infrastructure Can Help Fight Inequality, Polarization, and the Decline of Civic Life*, by Eric Klinenberg**
A fascinating look at why libraries hold communities together with the combination of physical places and human capital. I keep reflecting on how schools are similar to libraries in these ways, and then wondering how to take the learnings from the world of libraries into schools.

ANNA’S RECOMMENDATIONS

¹ Joy Harjo “Grace” from *In Mad Love and War*, copyright 1990 by Joy Harjo and reprinted by permission of Wesleyan University Press. Retrieved from <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/51641/grace-56d22f847bb9e>



As much for myself as for you as I look back on this last year's small bites of books and longer articles.

- **YA, Older Youth and Adults: *The MaddAdam Trilogy: Oryx & Crake; The Year of the Flood; and MaddAdam* by Margaret Atwood.**
A smart, engaging, dystopian not-so-far-off future world with its own surprising yet believable seeds and sprigs of hope.
- **Long form article: “Thirty-six Thousand Feet Under the Sea: The Explorers Who Set One of the Last Meaningful Records on Earth” by Ben Taub.**
<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2020/05/18/thirty-six-thousand-feet-under-the-sea>
An account of the years-long undertaking of exploring the deepest crevices of the earth's oceans. At times breathtaking, spooky, and reminiscent of much older accounts of exploration, this article helps to put into perspective the vast stretches of space, time, and water, that humanity travels through.
- **Nonfiction: *Cultivating Genius: An Equity Framework for Culturally and Historically Responsive Literacy* by Gholdy Muhammad**
A four-part framework, focusing on the healthy development of identity, skills, intellect, and criticality, is a relevant approach for all students. Muhammad derived her notion of historically responsive literacy from a deep study of Black literary societies in the 1800's.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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Ann D. David, PhD, is an associate professor in the Dreeben School of Education at the University of the Incarnate Word where she teaches future teachers. She taught high school English and theatre in the Midwest for six years before completing her PhD at UT Austin. She's been a teacher-consultant with the National Writing Project since 2001 and currently works with the San Antonio Writing Project. Dr. David's research interests focus on writing and the teaching of writing. Dr. David has published in *English Journal* and *Teaching and Teacher Education*, and *English in Texas* and has contributed to *Writers Who Care*, a peer-reviewed blog sponsored by NCTE's Commission on Writing Teacher Education.