

Student Voices

Students make their voices heard in many different ways. From oral language to social networking, students' voices can help us rethink and reimagine our teaching, redesign our curriculum, and refocus our understanding of 21st century students.

As Sara Kajder writes in *Adolescents and Digital Literacies: Learning Alongside Our Students* (review below), we need to "Listen to the voices of our students and colleagues . . . who see power in engaging within a broader English curriculum, one that brings together traditional practices of reading and writing *and* new literacy practices fostering information literacy, working in on-line communities, and composing through new modes and media" (p. 48).

The following books present ways to use the many and varied literacies of reading, writing, music, art, and digital technologies to engage our students in powerful learning. These books will be instrumental in helping teachers to be even more responsive as students inform us of their needs, ask important questions, and join together to collaborate in authentic learning experiences.

***Adolescents and Digital Literacies:
Learning Alongside Our Students***

by Sara Kajder, NCTE, 2010, 118 pp., \$33.95,
ISBN 978-0-8141-5299-7.

Kajder uses the publication *Adolescent Literacy: An NCTE Policy Research Brief* as a framework to explore ways in which adolescent students engage in 21st century literacy practices. Through

myriad student and teacher examples and extensive research-based explanations, she shows the importance of thinking about literacy, and learning to read and write in digital spaces.

Her book examines possibilities for using new and traditional literacy practices together to help students become more skillful readers and writers.

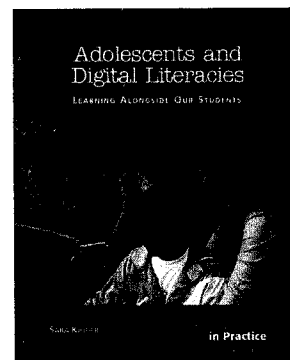
The author has organized information and examples around three areas: reading and composing multimodal texts; supporting collaboration and community through interactive, participatory media; and developing information literacy. Chapters emphasize the need to expand the more traditional definition of literacy beyond reading and writing print, to include "A variety of social and intellectual practices that call upon the voice as well as the eye and hand" (p. 51). This book presents exciting possibilities for learning in a new literacy landscape and provides information to manage the rapidly changing world of English language arts and to better understand the digital world of today's adolescents.

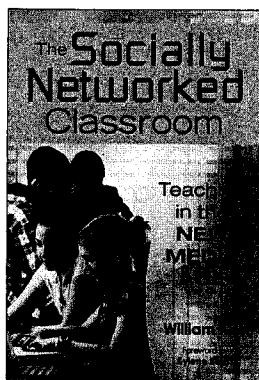
***The Socially Networked Classroom:
Teaching in the New Media Age***

by William Kist, Corwin Press, 2010, 135 pp.,
\$26.95, ISBN 978-1-4129-6701-3.

Reviewed by Priya M. Shah

This book focuses on the need for today's classrooms to include social networking and





other digital media as integral parts of learning. Through the voices of teachers and their students, Kist explores relevant questions, including, “What happens when our classrooms become as big as the world?” (p. 2). The chapters show the potential of “new literacies” or “screen-based literacies” for increasing student interactivity (social networking), writing collaboratively, sharing globally, and learning beyond the classroom walls.

Emphasizing the need for new media practices in the classroom, Kist chronicles a variety of teachers who are beginning—or continuing—to include social networking and digital media in their classrooms, and discusses their successes and failures. Examples range from a low-tech classroom environment to one of great sophistication with digital literacies. Blog posts from the field provide first-hand experiences of teachers using technology in their classrooms. This is a wonderful guide for teachers, regardless of their level of expertise with technology.

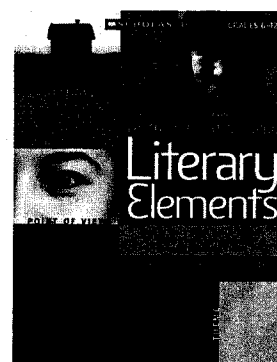
Fresh Takes on Teaching Literary Elements: How to Teach What Really Matters about Character, Setting, Point of View, and Theme

by Michael W. Smith and Jeffrey D. Wilhelm,
Scholastic, 2010, 208 pp., \$23.99,
ISBN 978-0-545-05256-6.

Reviewed by Sarah Fox Sparber

In this new book, Smith and Wilhelm share their belief that literature holds the profound ability to enhance the lives of readers, and they express their love of good literature through anecdotes and personal experiences. Their fundamental concern is that current teaching practices too often prevent middle and high school readers from making meaningful connections to texts. As a result, even compelling literature rarely im-

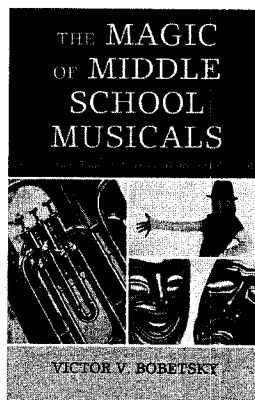
pacts their lives. To correct this problem, the authors present their research-based approaches to teaching literature, believing that these will help students to develop an appreciation of literature and improve as readers and writers. Their instructional principles focus on broadening students’ understanding of four literary elements: characterization, setting, point of view, and theme. Each element is explored in its own chapter, which contains information about theory and ways to implement it in practice. The many practical lessons and classroom activities will provide help for middle and high school teachers looking to engage their students while helping them to connect meaningfully with texts.



The Magic of Middle School Musicals

by Victor Bobetsky, Rowman & Littlefield
Publishers and National Association for Music
Education, 2009, \$24.95, 155 pp.,

ISBN 978-1-57886-868-1.



Students love to express their feelings and thoughts in multimodal ways. Music, art, drama, and movement enrich all our lives, and performing in a school play is often what students remember, long after graduation. For the teacher, directing and producing a class or school production is an engaging way to create community, differentiate instruction, and assess learning. Regardless of your subject or grade level, Bobetsky will guide you through all the steps involved in casting, rehearsing, producing, and performing a play or musical show with middle school and older students. His

book provides ways to incorporate many strategies that can enhance reading comprehension, including theater games, tableaux, improvisation, active listening, and writing and learning lines in a script. It is especially exciting for teaching students about projecting their voices and helping shy students gain the confidence to speak in front of an audience. You don't have to be a music or drama teacher to benefit from reading this book. It will enrich your teaching and provide unique ways for your students to participate in collaborative, interactive, learning experiences.

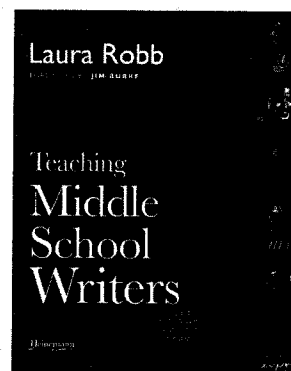
Teaching Middle School Writers: What Every English Teacher Needs to Know

by Laura Robb, Heinemann, 2010, 333pp., \$35.63, ISBN 978-0-325-02657-2.

Laura Robb's latest book includes practical, research-based information about exciting ways to teach writing. Inspired by the secret writing lives of students she has taught, this book shows the importance of listening to students' voices through writing, drawing, speaking, or connecting with each other online. Robb presents a redesigned writing curriculum framework that includes traditional writing process, researching

and inquiring, extended time for writing, and opportunities for students to make topic and genre choices.

The book presents a wealth of information that includes structures and schedules for writing workshop; possibilities for mentor texts and topics; ways to include powerful writing on a daily basis throughout the year; how to make meaningful connections between reading and writing; explorations of different genres; writing process strategies; and ways to use digital media and online writing. Robb also includes ideas for using texting, blogs and other online engagements that will help students learn about digital media as they learn to collaborate and write together. This book, and its accompanying DVD, will provide many important writing ideas and strategies to reach and teach middle school students in ways that engage and excite them about writing.



Call for 2011 Halle Award Nominations

The NCTE Richard W. Halle Award for Outstanding Middle Level Educator honors a middle level educator who has consistently worked to improve the quality of middle school education and middle school educators, especially in the English language arts. Originally established in 1996 by the Junior High/Middle School Assembly, this award pays special tribute to a person who has worked to improve schools and schooling for the middle level—teacher, principal, college faculty, curriculum specialist, or supervisor.

Nomination information can be found on the NCTE website at www.ncte.org/awards/halle and must be submitted no later than **June 1, 2011**. Results will be announced in September, and the award will be presented at the 2011 Annual Convention in Chicago, Illinois, during the Middle Level Get-Together.