To The Finish Line

By Ivy Phillips, TCTE President

Much of my time is spent with young students and athletes: I am a middle school teacher, a middle school cross country coach, and a varsity track and field coach. Since it is track season, I find the metaphor of the running on the track to be juxtaposed nicely with teaching. The finish line is close – summer is almost here: we are rounding the last curve of the 400-meter dash, but as many of you runners may know, the last 100 is no easy feat in a 400. The runner who wins the race is the runner who is able to push through the finish while exuding strength and confidence.

As our school year concludes, we must be reflective regarding our practice. How will you improve on the race next year? What strategies worked – and didn’t? I, for one, know that it will be a demanding end to the race, but I also know the end of one race begins the training for the next. As we reflect on our practice from the 2013-2014 school year, let us do so in such a way as to prepare for the 2014-2015 school year.

Ivy Phillips
TCTE President, 2013-2014

Visit our website (http://tneauncouncilofteachersofenglish.webs.com/) for more details on leadership opportunities with TCTE.
On the Virtue of Giving Young Writers the Freedom to be Stupid by Dwight Robert Wade

“As long as the writers are providing support and reasoning to their claims, however silly or stupid, then the young writers are out of the nest and flapping their wings. And they’re finding that they’re happy and enjoying themselves. They are writing.”

I say stupid—because it’s a more catching title—but what I really mean is silly, which at the right time in the development of young writers, there is virtue in giving them the freedom to be silly, or to be stupid, if you like. I mean actually encouraging them to be silly, or stupid—whatever disarms them of their fear of the blank page. It doesn’t matter what you call it. What is important is that the demand to discover some great truth about their subject matter, to be brilliant, that such unrealistic and debilitating burdens be lifted. These are unreasonable expectations of young writers, expectations that can hinder the development of writing ability at a time in the development of that ability when the linguistic faculty may be at its ripest for development.

So what does this look like? The instances vary, depending upon the task, but the quickest example to grasp comes with the assignment of a paper on a piece of literature, say The Old Man and the Sea—an example I choose because the novel, almost certainly with some intention, is a novel that describes the writing process, the process of fishing up truths from the sea of possibilities: “each [fishing] line, as thick around as a big pencil” (11). I tell the students, in my stand—sibilities: “each [fishing] line, as thick around as a big pencil” (11), I tell the students, in my stand—2—sibilities: “each [fishing] line, as thick around as a big pencil” (11), I tell the students, in my stand—sibilities: “each [fishing] line, as thick around as a big pencil” (11), I tell the students, in my stand—sibilities: “each [fishing] line, as thick around as a big pencil” (11), I tell the students, in my stand—sibilities: “each [fishing] line, as thick around as a big pencil” (11), I tell the students, in my stand—sibilities: “each [fishing] line, as thick around as a big pencil” (11), I tell the students, in my stand—sibilities: “each [fishing] line, as thick around as a big pencil” (11), I tell the students, in my stand—sibilities: “each [fishing] line, as thick around as a big pencil” (11), I tell the students, in my stand—sibilities: “each [fishing] line, as thick around as a big pencil” (11), I tell the students, in my stand—sibilities: “each [fishing] line, as thick around as a big pencil” (11), I tell the students, in my stand—sibilities: “each [fishing] line, as thick around as a big pencil” (11), I tell the students, in my stand—sibilities: “each [fishing] line, as thick around as a big pencil” (11), I tell the students, in my stand—sibilities: “each [fishing] line, as thick around as a big pencil” (11), I tell the students, in my stand—sibilities: “each [fishing] line, as thick around as a big pencil” (11), I tell the students, in my stand—sibilities: “each [fishing] line, as thick around as a big pencil” (11), I tell the students, in my stand—sibilities: “each [fishing] line, as thick around as a big pencil” (11), I tell the students, in my stand—sibilities: “each [fishing] line, as thick around as a big pencil” (11), I tell the students, in my stand—sibilities: “each [fishing] line, as thick around as a big pencil” (11), I tell the students, in my stand—sibilities: “each [fishing] line, as thick around as a big pencil” (11), I tell the students, in my stand—sibilities: “each [fishing] line, as thick around as a big pencil” (11), I tell the students, in my stand—sibilities: “each [fishing] line, as thick around as a big pencil” (11), I tell the students, in my stand—sibilities: “each [fishing] line, as thick around as a big pencil” (11), I tell the students, in my stand—sibilities: “each [fishing] line, as thick around as a big pencil” (11), I tell the students, in my stand—sibilities: “each [fishing] line, as thick around as a big pencil” (11), I tell the students, in my stand—sibilities: “each [fishing] line, as thick around as a big pencil” (11), I tell the students, in my stand—sibilities: “each [fishing] line, as thick around as a big pencil” (11), I tell the students, in my stand—sibilities: “each [fishing] line, as thick around as a big pencil” (11), I tell the students, in my stand—sibilities: “each [fishing] line, as thick around as a big pencil” (11), I tell the students, in my stand—sibilities: “each [fishing] line, as thick around as a big pencil” (11), I tell the students, in my stand—sibilities: “each [fishing] line, as thick around as a big pencil” (11), I tell the students, in my stand—sibilities: “each [fishing] line, as thick around as a big pencil” (11), I tell the students, in my stand—sibilities: “each [fishing] line, as thick around as a big pencil” (11), I tell the students, in my stand—sibilities: “each [fishing] line, as thick around as a big pencil” (11), I tell the students, in my stand—sibilities: “each [fishing] line, as thick around as a big pencil” (11), I tell the students, in my stand—sibilities: “each [fishing] line, as thick around as a big pencil” (11), I tell the students, in my stand—sibilities: “each [fishing] line, as thick around as a big pencil” (11), I tell the students, in my stand—sibilities: “each [fishing] line, as thick around as a big pencil” (11), I tell the students, in my stand—sibilities: “each [fishing] line, as thick around as a big pencil” (11), I tell the students, in my stand—sibilities: “each [fishing] line, as thick around as a big pencil” (11), I tell the students, in my stand—sibilities: “each [fishing] line, as thick around as a big pencil” (11), I tell the students, in my stand—sibilities: “each [fishing] line, as thick around as a big pencil” (11), I tell the students, in my stand—sibilities: “each [fishing] line, as thick around as a big pencil” (11), I tell the students, in my stand—sibilities: “each [fishing] line, as thick around as a big pencil” (11), I tell the students, in my stand—sibilities: “each [fishing] line, as thick around as a big pencil” (11), I tell the students, in my stand—sibilities: “each [fishing] line, as thick around as a big pencil” (11), I tell the students, in my stand—even as a small child—because there is generally little plausibility in their being brilliance in their perceptions when they have yet even to plumb the depths of puberty. But turn in the most outrageously silly and stupid piece of writing—so long as there is some correspondence with the facts of the text—and that’s a big fat A for effort, an A with a slap on the back, a heart-pumping jot of teacher encouragement, a resounding yes that can be heard up and down the halls, across the football field, and down the street to where confused motorists give pause at red-lights to wonder why suddenly all the birds for miles have taken flight to the skies, all singing in harmony to herald the moment that a writer has been born.

That’s what I’m talking about, the freedom to be not-brilliant. Not-brilliance, for most, is an essential first baby-step to becoming a writer. It is a freeing freedom.

Perhaps it’s just my impression, but it seems this freedom is a freedom that’s given all too rarely. For it seems that the widening of the eyes I see when I offer this freedom to students shows such a delighted surprise that students think the teacher has lost their ever-loving mind—and if you didn’t already know, students love a crazy teacher, defined as a different and refreshing teacher, the teacher that does the unexpected, the not normal, that which might seem crazy.

And they especially love a crazy English teacher. It seems to be something they have gathered from television and the movies, that free spirit, the English teacher.

Of course, when I say writer, I mean someone who can think independently—and I presume that being able to think independently is what we writing teachers are really all about, teaching students to think for themselves, to come about their own personal meaning in determining how The Old Man and the Sea speaks to them. Never mind the essential enthusiasm that being able to freely speak their mind sparks. The freedom to be not-brilliant is the first step on the road to being maybe-brilliant. But they do not have to be brilliant, ever. They just have to someday be able to stand on their own two feet, to walk as free men and women, fishing their own truths from this magic sea of possibilities in which we live, not living dependently on the truths of others who have done the fishing for them. I start to say here, give a man a fish, feed him for a day, teach him to fish…

But instead I return to that qualification I left stranded above, the qualification that their writing must bear some correspondence with the facts. Maybe, if you ignore the ignorance of the anachronism, a student could get away with a paper claiming that The Old Man and the Sea is an allegory about the Cuban Missile Crisis—and we would just smile. Maybe we would just be amused if a student evidenced the claim that the novella is about dangers of space travel. Maybe we would be impressed if a student followed the theme of luck. Maybe we would be humbled if some blue moon a student independently developed the idea that Hemingway was writing a biographical account of the process of writing. As long as the student’s writing does not have that Sparknotes smell, it does not matter. As long as the students support their writing with evidence from the text, it does not matter. As long as they do not try to tell you that The Old Man and the Sea is, without any supporting details, an allegory about the famous low-speed chase of Oj Simpson in the white Bronco. As long as the writers are providing support and reasoning to their claims, however silly or stupid, then the young writers are out of the nest and flapping their wings. And they’re finding that they’re happy and enjoying themselves. They are writing. And they are writing with enthusiasm. This happens. I have seen it. And it is a great joy as a teacher to be outrageous, to give students freedom, to give them the freedom, to see them learning to fly.

Go ahead. Try it. Read students the most brilliant rehash of the standard study-guide lines. Wad that trash up and toss it across the room to the can where it belongs. Then, take that paper in which a student took risks to chance their own thoughts and ideas. Take that paper, read the whole of it, give a pregnant pause, turn, and put it on the wall where everyone can see it, front and center. Take a short, silent, and admiring look at that brave student’s work, turn back, and say. That’s what I’m talking about. That’s an A paper.

Let freedom reign, the freedom to be silly, stupid if you like. It’s not the quality that counts. It’s finding confidence in one’s ideas, confidence that one can do this writing thing, confidence that voice can be found. We start with easy. We make it easy. We dispense with the debilitating standard of brilliance. We make writing fun—because, after all, it is. We are happy when we’re free, and happier still when we encourage other minds to be free.

Freedom. It’s not just what we live for as teachers. It’s what we live for as human beings.

Dwight Robert Wade
Executive Director, Tennessee Council of Teachers of English
Multiple-genre novels are, for all intents and purposes, books whose plot unfolds through multiple writing styles. Recently, young adult literature titles written in the multiple-genre format have exploded in their appearance. Writers of these unique novels weave their storylines through emails, text-messages, blogs, poetry, diary entries, newspaper articles, phone call transcripts, conversations, tape recordings, song lyrics, and more. If there is a writing genre in existence you are safe to assume that it has either been featured in a multi-genre novel or will soon be. For more info on the novel shared in this example, visit the author’s website at http://stevekluger.com/#HOME.html.

Melissa Comer, Associate Professor, TN Tech University

Planning sheet developed by Melissa Comer & Leslie Suters

WORDLE
http://www.wordle.net/
A Ray of Hope

Darkness.
It drapes, it submerges, it wraps around me; a blanket of the softest silk.

Yet I find no pleasure in it, for I am alone.
The gloom engulfs me, the pain of no one seeps into me.
The night is empty,
The silence is piercing,
The darkness is vast,
The loneliness, overwhelming.

Then…Light
Reaching, leaping, swathing me in its golden beams.
Dappled brightness on the forest leaves, brightness sparkling on the ocean’s sprays.
Wrapping me in its warm embrace,
Calming me;
Soothing me;
Seeping through me, warming till all is golden.
Its ever-going joy abounding throughout the world;
Spreading joy and love and hope.
Always shining a ray of sunshine through the darkness;
There’s always a ray of hope.

By: Madison Morris
Hutchison School

The Brightness in Me

The sun looks like a ball of fire, with gold glimmering rays.
It rests in the sky as the earth spins gradually around it.
It calls out my name as I play in the breeze and swing swiftly on a nearby swing.
Its beaming hot rays makes sweat trickle down my forehead all the way down to my belly button.

It looks like a campfire, with white clouds surrounding it reminding me of soft white marshmallows.
I want to touch it and hold it in my palms.
I want to put it in my pocket to keep it safe so that whenever I am sad, I can pull it out and let its cozy feeling spread throughout my body and out the tips of my little piggy toes.
I want to put it into my heart so that I can shine bright on the inside and out.
I want to feel its power come over me and fill me with warmth.
The sun shines brighter than the shiniest diamond.
The sun is calmer than the calmest sea.
The sun’s beauty is never ending and its feeling never goes away.
The sun is God’s hand-made miracle, just waiting to be touched by a soft, gentle hand.

By: Leelee Denton
Hutchison School

To share your musings in poetry or prose, please email Melissa Comer at mcomer@tntech.edu or Kristen Trent at kpennycuff@tntech.edu
Out of the woods
(Inspired by summer reading: Inside Out & Back Again by Thanhha Lai)

I have as many friends as I do meals,
   No one to back me up.
And my father has long passed,
   Now I must grow up alone
And “…no longer live waiting” (Lai 252).
In this world where I have no home.

   My parents have names,
   But to a stranger, I am no one.
   The power left inside me
   I must use to make them proud.
Pushing through isn’t supposed to be easy,
   But they have higher expectations.

   Everyone has been here before,
   All given a place and position.
I walk out onto the field as an outcast,
   Given the chance to prove my point.
Running leads to more,
   But I must remember that I am here to try.
Find what you’re made of they said,
   A place is now mine.

   My family holds me in their hands,
   And I’m small enough to fit.
Welcome to the new free land.
Learning how to speak, not just in my head,
   Learning to talk so I can be heard,
   “I’m practicing to be seen” (Lai 161).
They pick on me and I’m taught revenge,
   The constant bickering quickly ends.

All the sudden they let me go,
   I’ve grown out of their palms.

   The storms gather near,
   Not sure if I’m hearing the rain out my window,
   Or the thunder in my head.
   But I am bigger than they are—
   Measuring by heart.
Society is a wave crashing on me,
   The constant rainfall.
The last sight I saw was the first drop of the morning,
   Falling ever so innocently.
I manage to pull out my umbrella and walk through,
   The everlasting storm of life.

   They see the frowns surrounding us,
   I see them look around.
In a split second they all fade into the worried-eyed crowd.
   Now they are all the same.
It’s love that helped me through,
   Love from family and friends.
But the most effective love,
   Is the kind coming from complete strangers.
You don’t know me,
   I don’t know you.
Memories of them come to mind.
   I flash a smile,
You return the favor adding in a conversation.
   Now we are best friends,
I see that we are the only ones standing strong,
   Away from the toxic crowd.

By: Sam Tancredi
Many teachers are striving to incorporate a balanced approach to both reading and writing, especially in meeting the varied demands placed on them by the Common Core Standards. The Tennessee Council of Teachers of English hopes to help teachers examine and improve their pedagogy through the exploration of multiple approaches to harmonizing literacy within our classrooms and our schools. By discovering strategic approaches to reading and writing instruction, education professionals will have the opportunity to gather new knowledge on best practices, evaluate their current practices, and discuss and learn from other classroom teachers and experts in the field.
The TN Association of School Librarians would like to extend an invitation to TN English teachers for our Fall conference October 23-25 at the Embassy Suites in Murfreesboro. While some of our sessions are geared toward librarianship, we also have an all-star lineup of award-winning authors, as well as breakout sessions related to research resources and other information literacy skills.

The authors alone are worth the trip to Murfreesboro this October. We have several with TN connections like Vince Vawter, whose book *Paperboy*, was named a 2014 Newbery Honor Book and Chris Grabenstein who co-writes with James Patterson. In addition, we have ten more authors who will be doing breakout sessions and signing books. You can see more at [http://www.tasltn.org/conference](http://www.tasltn.org/conference).

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**CHECK OUT THE NEW ONLINE REGISTRATION PAGE FOR TCTE’S FALL PDI**

Call for Papers

*Tennessee English Journal* is seeking articles for its next print edition, to be published in October 2014. We seek articles that are of interest to teachers of English and language arts at all levels. *TEJ* readers appreciate articles that show real students and teachers in real classrooms engaged in authentic teaching and learning.

**Submission Guidelines**

- The deadline for articles for the 2014 edition is 1 July 2014, but we welcome your submissions at any-time.
- We prefer articles to be submitted electronically via e-mail as a Microsoft Word document or rich text format file. If you cannot submit articles on-line, we will accept manuscripts, provided you also send an electronic copy saved on a CD.
- Submit manuscripts to Susan North, Editor, *Tennessee English Journal* via e-mail at Susan-North@utc.edu or at Department of English, #2703, The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, 615 McCallie Avenue, Chattanooga, TN 37403.

**Topics of Interest**

- Research reports
- Descriptions of teaching practice
- Lesson plans
- Book reviews
- Interviews with authors, educators, and political figures or opinion leaders
- Editorials
- Creative works such as artwork, cartoons, or poetry
- Student writing and/or art work
- Thematic essay—Submissions on any topic will be considered, but we especially welcome thematic essays on the PD Institute theme, “Bridging Reading and Writing”.

Visions and Revisions

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Spring 2014
**Bridging Reading and Writing in the Classroom**

Many teachers are striving to incorporate a balanced approach to both reading and writing, especially in meeting the varied demands placed on them.

In an effort to share and examine best practices, this theme solicits manuscripts that share strategic approaches to reading and writing instruction. Consider evaluating current practices and/or your own approach to literacy within your classroom or school.

Consider the following questions: How do you create an environment with a balance between reading and writing? How do you engage learners and stimulate discussion and reflection? What challenges have you experienced in the classroom with engagement and with instructional strategies? How do you engage students in a meaningful way? What ideas draw interest from students? Which instructional strategies work best for bridging reading and writing in the classroom? How do you assess reading and writing?

Also consider addressing texts that have informed your teaching of reading/writing. What texts and models have strengthened your professional knowledge of literacy instruction and/or assessment?

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**Keep in Touch**

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TCTE exists to support the teaching of writing, reading, and literacy across the state and to provide a professional network for the support of educators.

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~An exciting state annual conference
~Awards and scholarship opportunities for early career and veteran teachers
~Publications including newsletters, journals, and books

Become a Member Today using the membership form on the website!

2014 NCTE Annual Convention
"Story As the Landscape of Knowing"

November 20-23, 2014 | Gaylord National Resort

Make plans to attend the 2014 NCTE Annual Convention at the Gaylord National Resort! The beautiful resort hotel is just outside Washington, DC, and will be a terrific location for four days of professional rejuvenation!

Mark your calendar and register now at http://www.ncte.org/annual/registration.

Don’t forget to check out these other exciting events as well:


♦ “Making Meaning: Teaching and Learning Together” Literacies for All Summer Institute, July 17-19, 2014, Pasadena, California

Check Out Our Website:
http://tncouncilofteachersofenglish.webs.com/

Visions and Revisions

Visions & Revisions is a peer reviewed publication of the Tennessee Council of Teachers of English. It is distributed three times per year in May, October, and February. For information, or to submit articles, please contact the editors:

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and Kristen Trent at kpenny@tntech.edu

or visit the Publications Page of the TCTE website for the Call for Manuscripts.

We Hope to See YOU

TCTE Professional Development Institute

September 26-27, 2014
Memphis, Tennessee