Dear UCI Writing Project Community,

I’m thrilled to be stepping into my role as the new Director of the UCI Writing Project! Over the last few weeks, I’ve started meeting some of the people that are a part of this wonderful community. I actually had the honor of stopping by both the Summer Institute and the Summer Youth Program to see some of you in action this summer. I witnessed amazing writing activities, collaboration, sharing, and learning.

And singing!

It was energizing to see some of the exceptional teachers and writers that make this project such a success.

Another reason that I’m excited to be a part of the project is that I am a former Writing Project Fellow myself (albeit from the UCLA Writing Project). So, I’ve had some experience with a Summer Institute, Summer Youth Program, and conducting writing PD in schools. In fact, my experience in the Writing Project inspired me to pursue my Ph.D. and write one of my first research papers: *Writing to Read*. I’ve spent the years since conducting research to design effective

Welcome to the Back-to-School edition of WordPlay, the newsletter of the UCI Writing Project. This month I am delighted to welcome Michael Hebert as our new Director. Michael, we are thrilled that you are here. I am sure that everyone is looking forward to meeting you and working with you in the coming year.

September is the month of two important events for educators: Banned Books Week and International Dot Day. Banned Books Week is a time for both teachers and students to reflect on the ongoing practice of banning books in schools. Carol Mooney’s article addresses the ways in which current book bans are both different from and similar to those in the past, while Megan Grint shares an activity from her classroom in which students engage in an inquiry lesson that introduces them to some banned books. International Dot Day is referenced in Allison Serceki’s review of *The Dot*, in our Book Review column. Dot Day may be unfamiliar to those of you who teach Middle and High school, but it is worth checking out the resource that Allison links in her review. Dot Day is an opportunity to highlight inclusivity and the power of recognizing that everyone has an artist within them.
writing interventions for students with disabilities.

I’m obviously taking over a project that has had a long history of exceptional and consistent leadership from Catherine D’Aoust and Carol Booth Olson. I can’t possibly expect to fill the shoes of these amazing leaders. So, I think the thing to do is just kick off my flip flops and enjoy walking in the sand alongside all of you instead.

I’m looking forward to getting to know you and finding ways to inspire the next generation of writing teachers together. Let’s have some fun with it!

Sincerely,
Michael Hebert

A successful Summer Institute has added a new crop of enthusiastic educators to our community, all eager to share the wealth of ideas they learned with their new students this year. In this issue you will find the first of our new “Spotlight on New Fellows” columns, introducing Eric Gulley. In future issues we will continue to introduce the 2022 Fellows.

A new school year is always exciting, challenging, and a little scary for everyone involved. I hope that this month’s WordPlay will give you some food for thought as well as some ideas for your classroom. As always, I encourage you all to submit articles, or ideas for articles. Please email me at eharring@uci.edu if you would like to contribute.

With all good wishes

Liz Harrington, Editor

Mark your Calendar
Upcoming events

**Wednesday, October 19**
4 - 5:30 p.m. PST, 7 - 8:30 EST
No charge. Registration opens August 15. [https://www.writecenter.org/webinars.html](https://www.writecenter.org/webinars.html)
Thursday, December 8
8:45 a.m. - 3:45 p.m. PST Reclaiming Student Agency to Develop Creative and Critical Readers and Writers. An in-person literacy conference presented by UCI Writing Project, the WRITE Center, and the National Writing Project. Speakers include: Kelly Gallagher and Penny Kittle, Gholdy Muhammad, and Julia E. Torres, Jennifer Fletcher, Carol Jago, and more

Also available: a virtual conference with speakers Kelly Gallagher and Penny Kittle, Gholdy Muhammad, and Julia E. Torres. Information at [https://writingproject.uci.edu](https://writingproject.uci.edu)

Opinion

“Books Unite Us/Censorship Divides Us”
by Carol Mooney

When I transferred to Villa Park High School in 1987, I brought with me a poster from my junior high classroom: “The Most Banned Books in America.” The 100+ titles included many which continued to appear on subsequent lists during the next thirty years, including The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn; Of Mice and Men; To Kill A Mockingbird; Lord of the Flies; The Great Gatsby; The Catcher in the Rye; 1984. I can’t recall whether or not The Color Purple was there. Walker’s classic appeared in 1982, probably the date of the poster; also the year the American Library Association began tracking banned and challenged books; also the year Banned Books Week was launched in direct response to the U.S. Supreme Court’s ruling in Island Trees School District vs. Pico that “the First Amendment limits the power of junior high and high school officials to remove books from libraries simply because of content;” also the year the ALA noticed an unusual surge in challenging and banning books across the country.

My students were intrigued by the poster and even though we continued to observe Banned Books Week annually and I purchased additional materials with updated lists and attractive graphics, it was the original poster disintegrating on the wall that generated the most conversation, especially as many of the works were designated Core in our ELA classes. And whenever OUSD added new titles, titles which often appeared in later lists—The Color Purple, The House on Mango Street, The Kite Runner, Bless Me, Ultima, Beloved, The Handmaid’s Tale, The Absolutely True Story of a Part-Time Indian— the kids “tracked” whether or not the books they read recreationally, the books they studied, the
books they shared in Book Clubs, were challenged or banned. They did not find the books threatening nor for the most part did their parents.

While issues of sexuality, violence, language, magic/witchcraft, and age-appropriate topics drove the challenges during the last two decades of the 20th century, the 21st century reflects a shift in focus.

Read full article

"Making Literature Real:" Using Banned Books in the Classroom
by Megan Grint

The banning of books is not a new act of violence towards education and progress. It is a phenomenon people have witnessed throughout history since 213 B.C. and yet, it seems to shock the masses each time it happens.

When I started teaching Fahrenheit 451 by Ray Bradbury to my 8th grade classes, many students saw the novel at its surface level: a fictional, futuristic dystopia that could NEVER happen in our country, in our society, in our community, etc. So, when I heard that a book burning event taking place in Huntington Beach, CA in 2017 was making the rounds on social media, I knew I had to connect what we were reading to the realities we were about to face.

I presented this lesson in 2018 during my time as a new fellow in the Summer Institute and have revised it to my updated 2022 version. There are three hyperlinks for you to follow, explained below:

This slideshow is the bulk of the information you'll need. It includes my original lesson abstract, standards, research, sample work, sample agendas, my lesson, and my reflections. It includes videos, information, and photos.

This worksheet is what is given to students during class to work in their group. You'll see student samples of this worksheet in the slideshow.

This list is of suggested banned books to use for your class. Unfortunately there are many banned books to choose from, so this list is quite short. These are all books that are on my bookshelves in my classroom. If you don't have access to these books, ask your school librarian if there are school copies.

As teachers in this space, we are all aware of the repercussions of banning and burning books. We are also aware of the fact that the banning and burning of books is rarely successful. After all, what is cooler to a teenager than something that is banned, forbidden, or prohibited? I hope this lesson finds its way into your classroom sometime.
and I hope that you enjoy it. If you have any questions about the lesson, feel free to reach out to me at megangrint@gmail.com

Reading Corner

Book Reviews

**Truly Devious**
by Maureen Johnson

Ellingham Academy is a school of the elite: engineers, writers, actors, musicians, and... detectives? Stevie is just as surprised as you that her love of murder mystery podcasts landed her at this majestic institution, for free no less. It is a refreshing change from her traditional, plain, lower middle class parents. The reader is lost in the opulence of the setting, but also in the diversity of characters. Believable? No. Highly intriguing? Absolutely. The reader is presented with not one but two different mysteries to figure out. Everyone has secrets, of course. These are mysteries, after all. And it will not be the ending you will expect. **Truly Devious** is a fast read, both as a physical book and an audiobook. A truly enjoyable read and a great accompaniment to **Only Murders in the Building**.

**Field Guide to the Supernatural Universe**
by Alyson Noel

First ghosts. Then monsters. Is there anything else that could make the already awkward Max stand out even more? It's not that he attracts them, it's that he can see them when no one else can. Junior high is tough enough without everyone, including the principal and your dad, thinking you are a delusional deviant. While his widowed father finds a new job and sets new roots, Max is sent to live with his eccentric grandfather. Infamous in paranormal seeking circles, Max's relation makes Max seem normal, which may or may not bode well for the summer to come. Full of quirky characters and the quest for his grandfather's book, **Field Guide**, this is a quirky and enjoyable read that will transport you to a well-developed universe.

**The Dot**
by Peter Reynolds

**The Dot**, written by Peter H. Reynolds, is a great story to read at the start of the school year because of its message and International Dot Day. **The Dot** is about a young girl, Vashti, who does not consider herself an artist. However, her teacher cleverly helps Vashti see that she is an artist, inspiring Vashti to participate in art more extensively than she previously did. Vashti inspires another to follow their artistic talents by the story's end.

Besides the theme of an artist residing within each of us, several other messages and themes to explore exist. For older students, having them think of themes or messages from different points of view is one way to deepen their thinking.
Possible writing assignment: Read the description of the book and have students create a preliminary police report with key facts, names, and descriptions for both mysteries. After reading the first chapters, have them add information to both case reports.

*Liz Taireh*

Possible Writing Assignment: Have students write a profile of characters or suspected characters. Have students continue to add as more oddities occur.

*Liz Taireh*

One idea is to have readers think about what message a teacher may take from the story and then compare and contrast this perspective to what message or theme a student may take away from this story. From these two different perspectives, ideas such as a growth mindset may provide some intriguing conversations and writing opportunities.

Lastly, every year students around the world participate in International Dot Day. The event takes place each year around September 15th – this year, it will be Thursday, September 15th, 2022. [Here is a link](https://myemail.constantcontact.com/WordPlay--The-UCI-Writing-Project-s-Newsletter.html?soid=1134239284057&aid=MMMzwtaV_6U) to the site for more information and resources if you are interested in celebrating this day with your class.

*Allison Serceki*

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**Spotlight on Our New Fellows**

**Eric Gulley**

I currently teach English 3 and AP Language and Composition in the Fullerton Joint Union High School District. I believe the subject of English is a perfect vessel to help students learn to think critically about the world around them. One passion of mine is helping students look at the different worldviews that constantly bombard them and make informed decisions about what to believe and how to live their lives.
With my time at the summer institute, I decided to explore ways to better teach research skills. After working to narrow down my focus with Virginia Reischl, my focus question became: How can I scaffold research instruction by giving multiple smaller research assignments, thereby making research and evaluating sources a habit throughout the year? This coming year, I plan to implement engaging research activities as bell-starters. I have created collaboration and peer-to-peer instruction activities to guide students in finding information, exploring biases, and analyzing rhetoric in order to determine the credibility of sources. My hope is that if students are able to critically evaluate sources, they will be able to become more informed members of society who can make positive changes in their lives and the lives of others.

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