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Educator Spotlight

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Educator Spotlight: Jenn Childress

Please tell us your name and your position.

My name is Jenn Childress (chill-dress), and I'm a literacy instructional coach for grades 6 to 12 at Stowe Middle School and Stowe High School. Previously, I taught 7th and 8th grade English Language Arts in Sheldon for many years. The coaching is a new position this year.

What is a book you love to teach?

Since I'm trained in the reading workshop and writing workshop model, I generally didn't teach just one book, but rather, genres. My favorite genre to teach is social issues. There are so many amazing books! [All American Boys](#) and [The Hate U Give](#) are just two examples. What's great about that genre is that there are so many avenues to go down, depending on students' interests; LGBTQ, women's rights, class, religion, race, immigration and so on.

Tell me a little bit about what Stowe High School is doing around transferable skills and proficiency-based learning in English.

We're beginning to talk a lot about Tier I instruction. How do we differentiate to target different learners? How do we give kids more choice in the texts they read and write? We are also working on fine-tuning our language for reporting proficiencies to students and parents. We have spent a lot of time developing learning scales that make targets clear for both teachers and students. We are also doing the work of backwards design for our units and planning multiple opportunities for assessment in order to provide students with many chances to show what they've learned throughout a unit of study.

What protocols or systems are you using to have these conversations?

Well, one of the things I established was a weekly meeting with each middle school team. I also meet every two weeks with the high school English department. This weekly meeting time is spent planning, reflecting, and looking at student work. If we can't meet, we reschedule so that we're together consistently once a week. Eventually, I'd like to have PLC time dedicated to looking at even more student work and data. We also want to work on vertical alignment of topics like argumentative writing; does what happens in say, 6th grade, get built on in 7th and 8th grade?

What's a success that you're proud of?

I co-taught a unit with the 8th grade science teacher, Ian Shea. He approached me and wanted to learn more about the writing workshop model. He had gone to the [Moth Story Hour](#), so we decided to look at oral storytelling. This was a lot different than written narrative, and it forced the two of us to go through that learning process. Kids read and wrote a lot, and then listened to many different Moth stories. Kids looked at the structures of oral narrative, which is an engaging form of storytelling. Of course, there are many things we'd change and improve next time, but for a first go-around, I thought it was pretty great. We worked with 8th graders, but I also think it would be great to do with high schoolers. *If you're interested in lesson ideas, [contact Jenn](#).*

Anything else you want to share about your work?

We're really exploring what it means to assess students in a proficiency-based world, at the high school and middle school. What does it mean to create tests that aren't point-based, but proficiency based? Is a question digging into a basic level, or is it a more proficient with distinction question? What about an essay question, with a range of information? I like to call it de-mystifying language arts. That's the biggest key to proficiencies, providing kids with that very specific feedback. And for teachers, it's knowing what strategies and depth of knowledge they're assessing. A lot of what I learned was from my time in Franklin Northwest, where we had great professional development in proficiency based learning where we thought about place based instruction, the workshop model, and the role of choice in the ELA classroom. I've been able to add on to this work in my new role. I learned so much from the great people there, and I feel really lucky.

Thank you, Jenn, for sharing the great work going on at [Lamoille South](#).

Quality Lesson Plans/Resources

[Twelve Inspiring STEM Books for Girls](#)

Share with your school librarian

[MTSS Resources for All](#)

K-12 content and more!

[Utopian Society Project](#)

Great interdisciplinary unit; student-centered and creative

[Who Wants to Be a Millionaire Google Slides](#)

Free download of a template to turn class into a quiz show (make a copy to use)

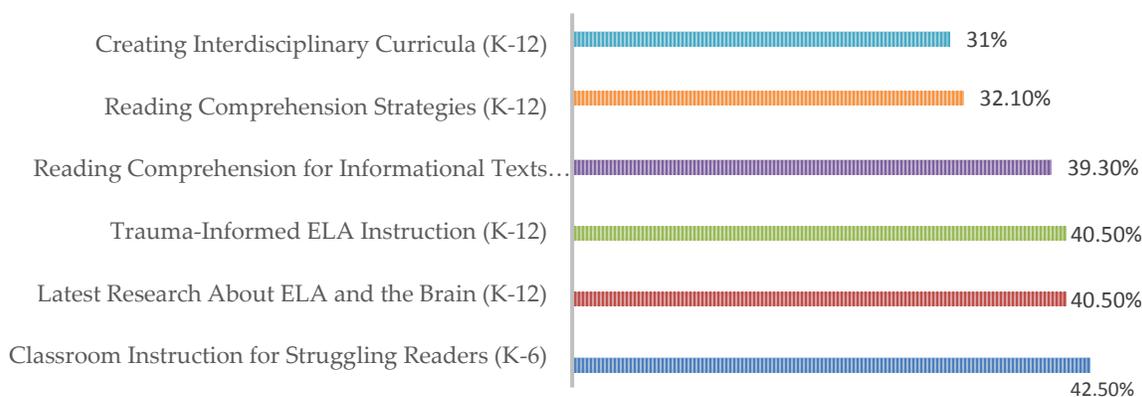
[The Difference Between Universal Design for Learning \(UDL\) and Traditional Education](#)

A primer on UDL; look for more on this topic in future newsletters

English Language Arts Professional Development Poll Results

In January, we sent two separate polls out to the English Language Arts (ELA) listserv. Congratulations to Karen Heath, the first to respond to a poll about favorite books. For a personal book, she recommends [The Time Traveler's Wife](#), by Audrey Niffenegger. Karen's professional book pick is [Visible Learning for Literacy](#), by John Hattie, Douglas Fisher, and Nancy Frey.

Our other poll was about which ELA professional development topics you'd like to see offered by the Agency of Education. We had over two hundred fifty responses! Thanks so much to everyone who contributed. Below are the most popular answers.



Look for information about spring workshops on these topics. You were also loud and clear about needing workshops to be accessible for people all across the state. If your school would be interested in hosting a workshop, especially in the southern region, or if you have any other comments and ideas, please [get in touch](#).

Digital Library: A Second Look at a Great Resource

Maybe it's been a few weeks (or months, or years...) since you've looked at the [Digital Library](#). Well, it's time to take a second look. Two things set this resource apart; firstly, every resource is vetted by at least three trained educators. Additionally, there is a specific focus on formative assessment. So don't stay up late or spend precious weekend time crafting every lesson from scratch. Head to the Digital Library instead. The [Advanced Search in Instructional Resources](#) lets you search by subject, focus area, grade, Common Core standard, and more. Some highlights from a recent search:

- [First grade "All About Frogs" informational text unit, including embedded assessments](#)
- [Early elementary focused video with strategies about questioning before, during, and after reading](#)
- [Fifth grade literary text skills "playlist" of six resources/lessons](#), including a very fun one about supporting inferences by playing ["Two Truths and a Lie"](#)
- [Middle school informational text skills "playlist" of six resources/lessons](#)
- [High school research skills "playlist" of six interdisciplinary resources/lessons](#)

If you run into any trouble accessing the Digital Library, contact [Sarah Birgé](#).

Questions? We've Got Answers!

We are hoping to have a regular Q&A section of the ELA newsletter.

Time-sensitive questions, of course, should be directed to [Sarah Birgé](#).

However, if you have a question that you think your fellow educators would also benefit from discussing, please send it along for a future newsletter. We're happy to keep questions anonymous or to quote you directly.

Thanks in advance for your help in making this newsletter a valuable and relevant resource for Vermont Educators.

VT Agency of Education
219 N. Main St., Ste. 402
Barre, VT 05641

(802) 479-1378

sarah.birge@vermont.gov

We're on the web!

[English Language Arts/Literacy](#)

That's So Punny

Most of us think of puns as silly fun, the sort of word play that makes people chuckle and/or groan. However, this [excellent article](#) makes a strong case for the analysis of puns as a way to "build critical thinking, literacy, and social and emotional skills." Best of all, you can use the strategies in this article to craft an entire unit, or to fill an extra 15 minutes with funny but useful content. This is also a concept with K-12 application.

Think of the great unpacking of idioms and figurative language in a groaner like, "Two friends sitting in a kayak were chilly, so they lit a fire in the craft. Unsurprisingly it sank, proving once again that you can't have your kayak and heat it, too." [Let us know](#) if you try out a 'punny' lesson and have feedback.

Upcoming Events and News

[Writing Proficiency and Strong Curriculum: New Benchmarks for Informative Writing](#)

March 12th and 13th, 2018, Lake Morey Resort, Fairlee VT

Back by popular request, the Vermont Writing Collaborative is delighted to announce a second opportunity to work with new K-12 benchmarks for informative writing. This two-day workshop will give educators an opportunity to dive into brand new curriculum-based, annotated benchmarks, K-12, for informative writing. Learn more and register with the [Vermont Writing Collaborative](#).

[Vermont Humanities Council Grants](#)

This grant program supports humanities-related projects serving Vermont audiences. See our full instructions on [how to apply](#). Applications are considered twice a year. The maximum award is \$5,000, and grantees must provide, at minimum, a one-to-one cost share (which may consist of cash and/or in-kind contributions). If you still have questions after consulting the guidelines, [contact](#) the Vermont Humanities Council.

[From Being Stuck to Making Things Stick: Teaching So Students Remember Webinar](#)

Tuesday, March 18th, 2018, 3 pm EST

Marilee Sprenger uses her book, [How to Teach so Students Remember](#), to share seven actionable and concrete steps that can be used in any classroom. These "practical strategies and suggestions" will "revolutionize the way you teach and immeasurably improve student achievement." [Register here](#). The webinar is free, but you may need to sign up to access.

[PLL's 2018 Summer Institute](#)

Wednesday, August 1st to Friday, August 3rd at the Stoweflake Resort and Spa, Stowe, VT

Our keynote speaker will be Gravity Goldberg. Gravity Goldberg is coauthor of [Conferring with Readers: Supporting Each Students' Growth and Independence](#), and holds a doctorate in education from Teachers College, Columbia University. Gravity is also the author of [Mindsets and Moves: Strategies That Help Readers Take Charge, Grades 1-8](#). Registration coming soon, learn more [here](#).

[Western Massachusetts Writing Project Summer Institute: Teaching Social Justice through the Lens of the Holocaust](#)

This free institute runs July 16th-21st. Includes presentations by Holocaust survivors and scholars, field trips to nearby resources on the Holocaust and Jewish life, and numerous opportunities for discussion, writing, and curriculum development. Low-cost housing available, three graduate credits for \$347 or 67.5 PDPs at no cost. [Learn more and apply](#).