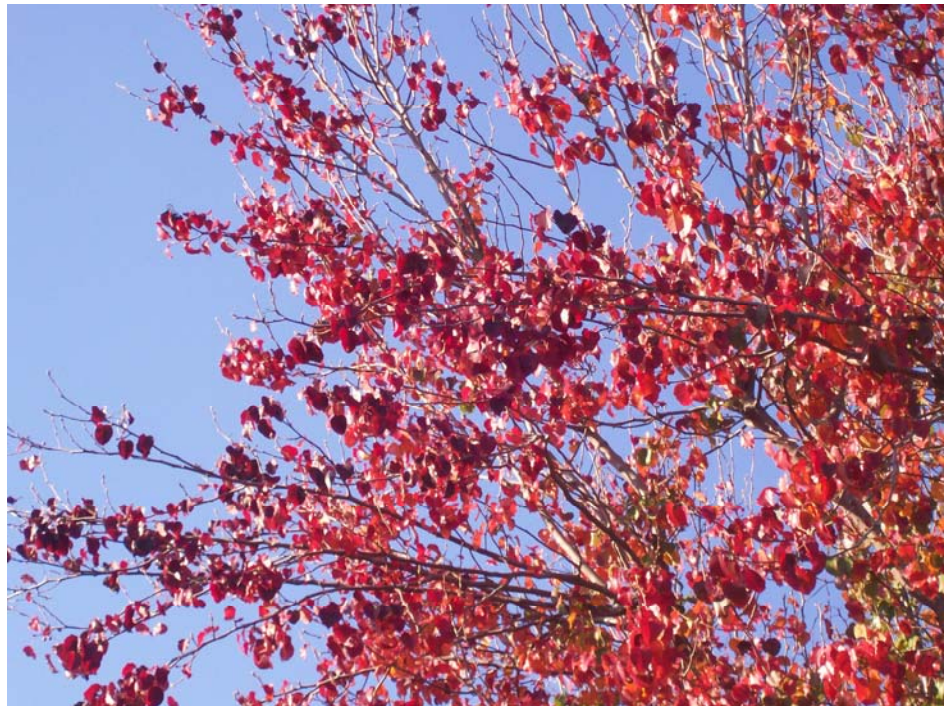


# SCOPE

NEWSLETTER  
OF THE  
NAGC  
CURRICULUM  
STUDIES  
NETWORK

MARCH 2009  
VOL 3, ISSUE 4



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR  
**Gifted Children**

## *From the Editor*

Winter is here, and with it, a turning point in the school year. The dreaminess and excitement of a new school year has faded. Don't get stuck in the daily grind! This edition of SCOPE is here to help you remember all of those INSPIRATIONAL reasons that you became a teacher. In this edition, Michelle looks back on the teacher who first inspired her to be herself and to find the "invisibles" in her classroom. Lauren reflects on her experiences becoming a teacher and encountering a new culture on a Navajo Reservation. I share some tips for getting inspired and staying inspired. You will also find inspirational quotes and vignettes. And in case you missed them at NAGC, a summary of this year's Curriculum Award winners are included in this edition. We hope that you will read these articles and share with us your story for the next edition. After reading, you'll be encouraged to once again write inspired curriculum to be delivered in a refreshing way, inspire your students, and inspire yourself.

~Leighann Pennington

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NAGC Curriculum Network  
**2009**  
Network Leadership

Network Chair: Carol Ann Williams  
Convention Program Chairs: Christine  
Briggs and Carol Ann Williams  
Newsletter Editor: Leighann Pennington  
Layout Editor: Brianna Pennington

## *From the Network Chair*

Great curriculum and great teaching go hand in hand. I am sure we all can remember one or two teachers who loved the subjects that they taught; made us feel valued and thereby, made a difference in our school lives. I especially remember two teachers, one from elementary school, who taught archeology, and one from high school, who taught art. Both had an infectious love for their subject matter that inspired me. They caused me to have a romance with these two disciplines that has lasted all my life. So bravo to all of you... those that write great curriculum and those who teach with joy and inspiration!

Carol Ann Williams  
Curriculum Studies Network Chair

### **Memoir of an Invisible** *by Michelle Cosmo*



I can't remember ever speaking when I was in elementary school. There was nothing more frightening to me than being wrong. I spent most of my elementary school years being laughed at and teased because I was dyslexic. That meant no one in class saw things the way I did. Apparently, my way was the wrong way. When it came to junior high school, I became quite good at being invisible.

The only good thing about being an invisible was the silence. That meant you never missed a thing. Staring at people became a hobby of mine. If I am to be totally honest, it became an obsession. Nothing fascinated me more and I was good at it too! I mean I really had it down to a science. I could tell you exactly when Summer was going to toss her golden locks over her shoulder in order catch the attention of the high school quarterback. I could also time the red-headed valedictorian's fiery scowl when he immediately responded by flirting overtly.



I remained an invisible and silent for the majority of my high school career until I was slotted to take a class called Sociology. Our fearless leader, Mr. Mac (whose real name no one could ever pronounce) described that the class would be about studying people and their behaviors. I was in absolute awe! I was able to spend 52 minutes doing what I loved best – watching people! I watched as the head cheerleader acted like a bubble head and said ridiculous things that would drive the class valedictorian to spit a sarcastic remark back at her. Of course there was also the “insane intellect,” who was above any of the typical high school antics, who would shoot his comments right from the hip aimed directly at the school “jocks.” This almost always ended with some kind of conflict that led to someone going to the principal's office. We would spend our days watching movies and discussing controversial issues that were just on the cusp of being

inappropriate for high school students.

And, all the time I watched; remaining one of the invisibles. It was my very own heaven right here on earth. It was my sanctuary.

However, knowing how “way leads on to way,” all good and bad things must end. Mr. Mac was certainly no ordinary teacher so it was not surprising that his “final” would be anything less than extraordinary.. We would take no “test;” we were to write an essay and the rules were simple. We were to turn in the essay a week before the two hour time period allowed for our final and he would read our essay to the class, conference with us and let us go. The person with the highest grade would get to leave first and so on and so forth. To your average Joe, it may not seem like a big deal, but in Cape May County leaving school early as a senior was “the bomb!” The essay topic was simple: “What is it that you think I want you to learn from this class?”

I found that the answer seemed obvious, but the fear of being wrong, even on paper, made me nervous. I wrote about perspective and how we needed to step outside the way we see things to experience the way other people see the world. To me, this was being an adult. When the day of the final arrived, we all settled in to hear the results. Mr. Mac had told us that there was only one A+ and that he was disappointed because a lot of us hadn't taken the assignment seriously.

*Continued on page 3*

*“I became a teacher not just because I had something to say, but also to stand sentinel, looking for other invisibles, destined to give them the same worth that had been bestowed upon me.”*

Continued from page 2

I was sure I was in trouble and of course the A+ had to have been written by the class valedictorian.

When Mr. Mac began reading my essay first, I remember sliding down in my chair in embarrassment. Everyone was staring at me and Mr. Mac continued to read. He told me, in front of the class, that I had taught him more in five pages than he had taught me all year. When I told him that I didn't understand, he responded, "I learned that just because someone doesn't say anything, doesn't mean that they have anything to say." I couldn't do anything but grab my paper and run.

When I was safely across the school parking lot, tucked into the safety of my car, I read the note Mr. Mac had scribbled in the margins – "Thank you for teaching me, Michelle."

It wasn't until that day that I understood my purpose. Someone had told me that my words had worth— and so did I. I became a teacher not just because I had something to say, but also to stand sentinel, looking for other invisibles, destined to give them the same worth that had been bestowed upon me. If you are a true teacher, it isn't a profession, it is who you are. You remember every day before you step into the sanctuary of your class room, why it is you're there. It has been ten years since I began teaching and there isn't a day that goes by that I don't remember Mr. Mac.

## Where Teaching, Culture, and Inspiration Intersect

by Lauren McMillin

Below, see an interview with Lauren McMillin, about her journey as a teacher and the unique experience of completing student teaching on a Navajo reservation.

### 1. What inspired you to become a teacher in the first place?

I decided to become a teacher while student teaching. Throughout my college career I have balanced two sets of interests, political advocacy and education. I had always intended to pursue the political advocacy path, but chose a nontraditional student teaching placement that resulted in my desire to continue serving students in an educational advocacy role.

### 2. What is it about the material you teach that inspires you? Why do you want to share this with others?

My degree is in social studies education. This applies to sociology, psychology, geography, history, and government. What fascinates me about my discipline is the interdisciplinary nature of it. An integral component of understanding anything in social studies is taking into account the human dynamics involved. Wars are won and lost based on the whims and pressured decisions of leaders. And how do these people become leaders? By using their sway over people, or by navigating interpersonal skills to surround themselves with power, securing their power. Human dynamics are absolutely vital to understanding government as well as history, the two subjects I was most familiar

teaching. In seeing my content through this lens, it allowed me to relate large governmental concepts and historical events to students' lives, by drawing parallel human connections to the ones they see daily.

### 3. What did you hope to learn by teaching on a Navajo reservation?

I chose to do my student teaching on a Navajo reservation because I wanted student teaching to be my primary activity in that semester. I wanted to create a situation where I was not tied to a job, other classes, extracurriculars or social life. I saw an opportunity to experience a different culture, in a way I had not done before. I grew up in suburban central Ohio and went to a university without much minority population. By teaching on

a reservation, I was hoping to learn as much from them as I was teaching them. So often, I think that teaching is viewed as an activity where learning goes in one direction. I wanted to avoid that, and thought I would learn more about another culture, another lifestyle, and myself by living on the reservation.

*"An integral component of understanding anything in social studies is taking into account the human dynamics involved."*

### 4. What did you truly end up learning on the Navajo reservation?

I learned a great deal about myself and the dynamics of cultural relativity. The community I lived in became incredibly welcoming when they realized I was there to learn and not to help or judge their community by my standards. I began paring down the amount of things I have and enjoyed the value of being outdoors much more. Their values of communal resources and strength of community gave a concrete example of many of my own values of service to others and valuing team advancement over personal gain.

Continued on page 4



Continued from page 3

**5. Can you tell me about your teacher preparation at Miami University or Indiana University? In what ways were you prepared? In what ways were you unprepared?**

At Miami University, much emphasis was placed on the methodology of teaching, the content instruction I feel was not as strongly emphasized. It was incredibly hard to graduate with both an education degree and a content area degree. I felt that as a teacher, having a degree in your content area was necessary because of the interdisciplinary nature of the subject. Within social studies, there is a wide

of each of the rights, and are given their task: to select 10 of these rights to keep.

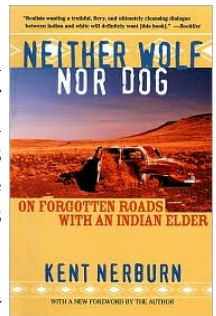
This seems like a simple task, and at first the students do not seem to be that engaged. They are most excited that desks have been moved out of rows and into collaborative circles. After a few minutes, you start to see the discussions starting. The students in the groups are having difficulty eliminating two of the rights when they read the descriptions and realize what would be lost. The seemingly obvious ones to initially eliminate are reconsidered. Groups are unable to come to a consensus on which to keep and which to eliminate because each of these rights provides opportunities that are often taken for granted if not faced with the task of eliminating even one of the rights that Americans define as theirs.

**7. How do the lessons you learned from teaching inspire you in your career even today?**

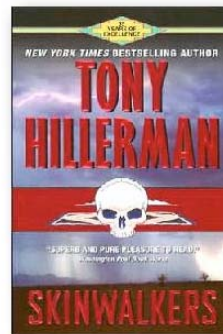
In my career now, I seek to support students as they implement change on their campuses. *The idea of listening to understand instead of listening to respond is an idea I first was able to articulate while on the reservation*, and the benefits of actively practicing this was incredibly beneficial to me. I have taken this lesson into my current work and am passing it to the students I work with. Additionally, since my work is conservation/environmentally oriented, many of the values of relating to the land around you and the way we treat our resources I acquired while teaching in New Mexico influence my current tactics and strategies.

**8. Name a few books that inspired you along the way:**

*Neither Wolf Nor Dog* by Kent Nerburn is an interesting take on Native gender relations. This was an issue I struggled with while on the reservation, and this explained some of the dynamics for me

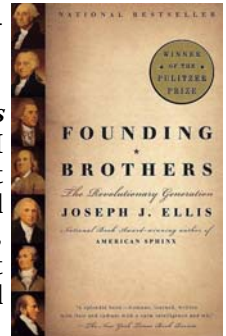


*Skinwalkers* by Tony Hillerman explored issues of the Navajo culture that are not discussed by natives because they are considered taboo.



*Founding Brothers* by Joseph Ellis: I

read this book in my educational cohort junior year. It looks at the founders and the relationship they had with each other, and looks at this defining American event through the human dynamics that shaped it.



breadth of information to cover. With just the education degree, I felt that I would be armed with enough information to moderately teach many subjects, but to confidently teach none of them.

At Indiana University, the preparations took place in the form of monthly classes. The focus was on cultural instruction, making sure that we were prepared to be accepted into the community. Even exceptional teachers fail on the reservation if the community feels they are not there for the right reasons.

We formed a bond with the group that provided the support network during this experience and were able to learn from previous program participants. Most importantly, we learned how life works on the reservation, and what to expect in the coming months to minimize the amount of culture shock. This instruction was highly effective, as many participants agreed with me that the transition back into non-reservation culture was more of a shock than the transition into it.

**6. Please tell me about a lesson, whether planned or on the spot, where you felt inspired? Or where you inspired your students?**

**An Inspiring Lesson:** In my senior government course, the first lesson I'm able to give is the introduction of the Bill of Rights. I've been a support to Mr. Marquez's lectures up until now, but this is the first lesson I'm giving on my own. This class has a fairly rigid lecture and test format. I decided to deviate from the traditional structure and do an activity with the students. The students get a description

**For more information about Indiana University's program, the American Indian Reservation project, visit : <http://education.indiana.edu/AmericanIndianBRReservationProject/tabid/4212/Default.aspx>**

# Congratulations to NAGC's 2008 Curriculum Studies Award Winners!

On Friday evening at NAGC in Tampa, we hosted our annual Curriculum Awards Night and were pleased to present and showcase our Curriculum Awardees and their curriculums.

## ***Budding Botanists at Work: A Life Science Unit***

This unit integrates *systems* thinking throughout and deepens students' understanding of botany as it relates to plants, seeds and even cells as "systems." Students are guided throughout the unit by using the concept of "generalizations" to enhance their ability to "think like a scientist." Hands-on investigations and scientific reasoning are highlighted helping students to develop a systematic set of inquiry skills.

**Grades:** First and Second

**Author/s:** Center for Gifted Education: The College of William and Mary

Cindy Holub

Dr. Joyce Van Tassel-Baska

Dr. Bruce Bracken

Dr. Tamra Stambaugh

Dr. Janice Robbins

Dr. Valerie Gregory



## ***Record Makers and Breakers: Using Algebra to Analyze Change***

This unit on algebra is devoted to the study of *change*, one of mathematics' overriding principles. Students use both qualitative and quantitative data to analyze change. Students learn that not only is algebra a set of concepts tied to the representation of relationships either by words, tables or graphs but that it is also a style of mathematical thinking for formalizing patterns of change. After engagement is established, students have an opportunity to investigate the concepts and then reflect on and communicate their findings with their peers.

**Grade:** Five

**Author/s:** M. Katherine Gavin, Ph.D.

Linda Jensen Sheffield, Ph.D.

Suzanne Chapin, Ph.D.

Judith Dailey

Tutita Casa, Ph.D.

Jill Adelson

***Would you like to become more active in Curriculum Studies? Consider becoming the co-editor of SCOPE! Technical and layout skills especially welcome!***

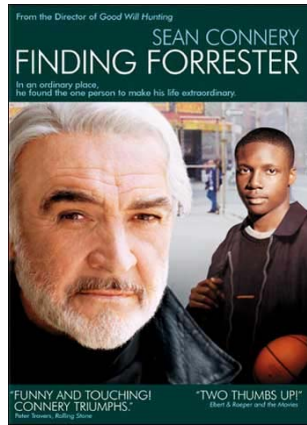
**Email Leighann Pennington at  
Leighann.Pennington@gmail.com for more information.**

# Inspirational Movies



**Mad Hot Ballroom:** This documentary follows three schools, in distinct neighborhoods in New York City, as they learn to dance, learn about themselves. Their infectious enthusiasm will inspire you and show you another way for children to learn.

**Finding Forrester:** a gifted boy seeks out a writer who is a self-appointed hermit, to help him reach his writing potential.



**Stand and Deliver:** Based on a true story, Jaime Escalante proves that his students in inner-city L.A. can learn calculus—they overcome their adversaries to prove their potential.



**\*More inspirational movies about teaching, as well as books, will be included in the next edition.**

**Email SCOPE at [projectaspire@gmail.com](mailto:projectaspire@gmail.com) to contribute titles that have inspired you.**

## Inspirational Quotes

*Teachers like you contributed their quotes that inspire them in their teaching careers daily.*

"Educating the heart without educating the mind is no education at all." –Aristotle

"To give anything less than your best is to sacrifice the Gift." –Steve Prefontaine

"A teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence stops."—Henry Adams

"Anyone who has begun to think, places some portion of the world in jeopardy." –Dewey

"Education is a social process. Education is growth. Education is, not a preparation for life; education is life itself." –Dewey

"Seldom was any knowledge given to keep, but to impart; the grace of this rich jewel is lost in concealment." –Wendell Phillips

**Check out this website for more inspirational quotes for teachers:**

<http://www.inspirational-quotes.info/teacher-quotes.html>



# Inspiration Vignettes

## 1. Why did you decide to become a teacher?

I became a teacher to help cultivate a new generation of questioners, of people who do not take their experiences at face value. This Socratic method is especially rare in schools who serve the impoverished and overlooked, as they are churned out to become the next generation of laborers and/or unemployed.

## 2. What inspires you on an everyday basis in the classroom?

Every day in my classroom I would look for that one new idea, that one great thought, that our work together had inspired. Something unanticipated and interesting that would keep me coming back for more.

- Jeremy Cohan



Do you have inspiration quotes or vignettes about your teaching that you would like to share?

Send them to [projectaspire@gmail.com](mailto:projectaspire@gmail.com) and they will be featured in our next edition.

## Attention, Teachers! Five Top Tips for Getting Inspired and Staying Inspired by Leighann Pennington

### 1. FIND A MENTOR:

You can be both encouraged and challenged by someone who has years of experience as a teacher. Whether it is bouncing ideas off another person for a lesson plan, working through a problem, or dealing with criticism from a parent, student, or colleague, **a mentor may be the sunshine you need to keep doing your job well.**

Consider looking outside of your school for a mentor; maybe there was a professor at your college or graduate school you admired, someone you met at a conference, or even another teacher you observed or wanted to be like. You could even consider someone who is practical with common sense, but who is not a teacher by profession. The potential mentor is someone who might shed new light on your concerns or suggest a new approach to teaching, like a scientist, pediatrician, psychologist, even your grandmother—anyone who understands and works with children. Overall, choose someone you respect to consult for advice and who can give you **perspective**, outside of your day-to-day life at school. Arrange a time to talk to your mentor on a regular basis—you can meet for coffee or chat by e-mail or phone.

### 2. WATCH ANOTHER TEACHER AT WORK:

Ask to observe a lesson or class that sounds fun and interesting, outside of your grade level or discipline. You will discover new instructional models and ways of engaging students. For example, after I observed an eighth grade history lesson about the American Revolution, I considered how I could use debate and encountering multiple perspectives, as well as new ways to organize my classroom. During a science lesson, I pondered how I could integrate creative, hands-on “experiments” into the history or English classes I teach and help students figure out their own approaches to questions. **When you observe another teacher you admire, you will leave feeling inspired. You will leave with fresh ideas to integrate into your classroom.**

*“Clear these things out of your way as soon as possible, so you can focus on what DOES inspire you.”*



### 3. GET THOSE “UNINSPIRING” THINGS OUT OF THE WAY AS SOON AS POSSIBLE:

You know what I’m talking about: annoying paperwork, the constant e-mails from that certain parent, an observation by your principal or department head. Maybe it is your messy desk or piles of ungraded essays or exams—all those things you’ve been meaning to do, that niggle at the back of your mind when you sit down to clear your head. Just get it over with! Do it right now! **Clear these things out of your way as soon as possible, so you can focus on what DOES inspire you.** Your mood will improve and you’ll have more time to write creative curriculum and try out new instructional models, or whatever energizes you as a teacher. Chances are you’ll also feel less preoccupied. Then you can fully devote your attention to your students and remain “in the moment” during instructional time.

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#### 4. DO SOMETHING THAT MAKES YOU PROUD OF YOURSELF:

Do something that inspires you and helps you to become a better person. You will inspire yourself and your students when you share your recent accomplishments with your classes. For example, I started cycling on a regular basis, and was excited to complete a hilly bike ride from my apartment to Back Bay, a nearby nature preserve, which took almost three hours. When I shared this story, my students were impressed by my athletic feats and then they discussed stories of bicycling with their families.

Last year, I coordinated a book drive with the sixth grade class, combining my love of books and service learning, garnering the enthusiasm and respect of students and parents is my proudest achievement. Through participating in this service project, I became more confident as a teacher, proud of myself and my students—as a result, my students respected me more and became truly excited about both academics and service.



#### 5. TAKE A RISK:



Try something you are afraid of, even something you know you are not naturally good at. Share with your students not only your achievements in life, but your trials with learning new things. You'll understand the experience of the student for whom your subject matter doesn't come easily. For example, I took a painting class last January. Each Tuesday night, I entered an art studio at the local community center. I learned to mix colors, examine the angles of light, create dimension with color. I perused art books at the library, got lost in the aisles at the art store, choosing paints and brushes. However, I had a small problem—I could not draw, not at all. The 3-D images in my hand just would not come out of my hand. This certainly made it difficult to complete a still life of pears, but I learned to overcome that frustration, to balance my weaknesses (like drawing) with my strengths, using complementary color to help those pears appear multi-dimensional.

Taking the painting class benefited my teaching immensely. First of all, in history class, I integrated newfound art knowledge, like the path of lapis lazuli which traveled from Central Asia all the way to Ancient Egypt—I became interested in how science helps us understand paintings were constructed and preserved, which inspired me to research and share ways that science contributes to archaeology and history. Secondly, I empathized with my students. Staring forlornly at a blank canvas, pencil in hand for sketching, I felt frustrated; I thought, "Ugh, I'm terrible at drawing. Why am I even here?" **I realized that some students must feel like that when they enter my class each day and are asked to sit before a blank piece of notebook paper and write.** Sometimes I was tired on a Tuesday, and didn't want to go to class. Once again, now I know how my students feel, getting up every morning to come to school, even on days they don't feel like it. I showed my students some of my paintings, and I was rewarded with their positive responses. My paintings exemplified the reward of trying your best.

What does it feel like to be completely new in a discipline, with overwhelming amounts of information to learn? You're a novice again, just like your students!

***If you take a risk in your intellectual life, you will understand your students on a deeper, more intuitive level; you'll empathize with the stumbles and excitements of the learning process.*** So get out there! Right now you could be taking a few artsy digital photos, trying a new class at the gym, cooking an exotic dish, fixing the lawnmower, or gardening without a green thumb. Try something new that you, admittedly, are not so good at.



## Article Contributors

**Michelle Cosmo** teaches 8th grade English in Perth Amboy, NJ. It was the community's sense of family that drew her to settle there and she continues each day to involve every one of her students in their education. She instills a sense of family in her classroom creating a learning environment that is ever-evolving and inspires her every day. She has two Bachelor of Arts degrees from Georgian Court University in English and Secondary Education. She also earned a Master's degree in Theology from Kean University. In the summer of 2008, she worked as a Teaching Assistant for the course Writing and Imagination at Johns Hopkins University's Center for Talented Youth (JHU-CTY), where she wrote this article as part of our memoir unit to share with students.

**Lauren McMillin** most recently has served as an Organizer for the National Wildlife Federation in Columbus, OH. She graduated from Miami University with a B.A. in Political Science and a B.S. in Integrated Secondary Social Studies Education. She also participated in the American Indian Reservation Program through Indiana University.