

SCOPE

NEWSLETTER
OF THE
NAGC
CURRICULUM
STUDIES
NETWORK

FALL 2011



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR
Gifted Children

From the Editor

The theme of the Fall 2011 edition of SCOPE is “Reaching and Teaching Gifted Girls.” Many of you have probably wondered how you can help the gifted girls in your classrooms reach their full potential. How can you help girls preserve their identities as scholars through middle and high school? Integrating academic success and giftedness into their identity as they grow up is important for girls to achieve later in life. This edition gathers resources, including books and links which are primers on the gifted education and psychological research about gifted girls, including texts such as *Smart Girls* and *Remarkable Women*. This newsletter and these books are a great place to start your journey; after reading, you’ll feel knowledgeable and more prepared to inspire the gifted girls in your classroom. The first article is about nurturing writing talent in gifted students by Professor Jill Olthouse. As you know, many gifted girls excel in writing, so let’s support their talent through the grades. Brianna Pennington, our faithful layout editor, brings her expertise as a school counselor to this edition, sharing insights into how teachers can use cinematherapy and bibliotherapy to positively impact gifted girls. Finally, check out Amazing Reads for Amazing Gifted Girls to find stories led by characters who can be role models for your students.

-Leighann Pennington, Editor

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NAGC Curriculum Network

2011

Network Leadership

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From the Network Chair

In the summer the village was never too hot, for the steep, surrounding mountains cast long shadows. In the winter it was never too cold, for the mountains shielded the village from the fierce wind.” From Kathryn Lasky’s *The Gates of the Wind*, these lines seem to describe the perfect place, predictable and calm...like the school where we sometimes envision ourselves teaching. If you know this book, though, you know that “old Gamma Lee” yearns for adventure...wants to spice up her predictable life. When I read this wonderful story, I am reminded of teachers who find themselves “at home” in gifted education. You are the dreamers, the doers, and you spice up your students’ lives with your certain sense that teaching, learning, and adventure cannot really be separated. I hope many of you will join us in for New Orleans for NAGC Convention, where hundreds of exciting ideas will be swirling! And to each of you, I wish an adventure-filled school year.

-Sally M. Dobyms, Network Chair

Nurturing Writing Talent in Elementary, Middle, and High School

by Jill Olthouse

Author and educator Mem Fox described writing as a “battlefield” because writing can be very difficult, both intellectually and emotionally. For writing talent to develop, students need supportive teachers at every age level; these teachers help students work through occasional bouts of anxiety, boredom, and frustration in order to arrive at victorious moments when students present strong and unique voices. At each phase of writing talent development, teachers can help students face the major challenges of that phase and savor the accompanying accomplishments. Based on my reading, my research with talented student writers, and my five years’ teaching experience, I propose the following crucial stages at each level of writing talent development.

Elementary School: Genre & Authorship

An important concept for young gifted writers to grasp is that there are many different forms or “genres” of writing that exist for many different purposes. Elementary instruction is often focused on learning to read picture books and simple texts. But young gifted children are ready for more, including reading and writing poetry, letters, speeches, scientific reports, and even short novels. If students are not yet proficient in handwriting, they can still write by scribbling and having the teacher “translate,” by using picture writing, or by typing on computer and using programs like *KidPix* and *Storybook Weaver*.

The second important concept for elementary age writers is “authorship”; when young students understand the concept of “authorship”, they know that all texts have authors and that it is a fun and important job to be an author. Students learn the concept of authorship by talking about a book’s author, by sharing their stories aloud in front of audiences, and by recording their writings in hard copy, professional-looking books such as those produced by inexpensive spiral book-binding machines or online services like lulu.com.

Middle School: Community and Identity

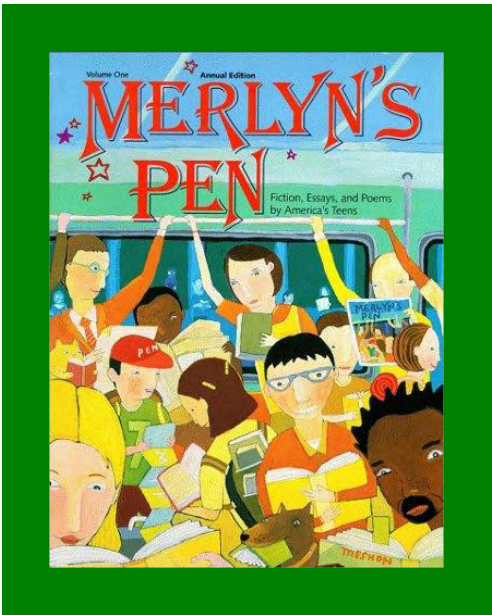
Middle school is a wonderful time to nurture young writers because the middle school model values academic work that is personally relevant and occurs in the context of a learning community.

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Many of the talented student writers I interviewed cherished times in middle school when they were given very open-ended assignments, and were allowed to write on topics of their own choosing. This sense of freedom allows them to develop a unique writerly vision, style, and identity.



These writers were lucky enough to find other students who were also excited about writing, and these peers gave them conceptual critiques. In a “conceptual critique,” the person who gives feedback looks for the author’s overall intention in the piece, and offers specific suggestions on how to communicate that purpose more effectively. Feedback includes discussion of the writers’ specific strengths, as well strategies for improving the piece. A conceptual critique is more effective than a vague, yet positive response and is also more effective than a tallying of surface level errors.

Teachers in middle school can model and teach conceptual critiques, and can create an open writing community in the classroom. In a “writing community,” peers feel safe expressing their ideas with others, and come to think of writing as a series of conversations with people they like and respect. As part of their writing community, gifted middle school students need opportunities to interact with other talented peers and to submit their work for publication. Teachers can create a writing community in the classroom by making writing time fun with classical

music, snacks, or colorful stationary items, by bringing in guest authors to speak, by highlighting successful child authors (like Mattie Stepanek, Gordan Korman, Christopher Paolini, and Nancy Yi Fan), by having all the students read and discuss their motivations for writing, by asking students to read and discuss professional authors’ reflections on writing (such as Stephen King’s *On Writing*), and by teaching students to submit their works to national publications such as *Merlyn’s Pen*.

High School: Creativity & Careers

Gifted writers in high school often enroll in advanced classes such as AP or Honors. These classes generally focus on developing analytical thinking and formal writing conventions. The trick for high school teachers is to teach these skills while also allowing students to continue to explore the silly, dark, and emotional aspects of writing. Students need to know that the formal models of academic writing can co-exist with individual interests and self-expression. One way for students to learn this is to develop their own research projects that align with future career options. Gifted high school writers are capable of developing original research projects (projects that involve collecting new data and interpreting it, rather than just synthesizing information from other sources), but they are not often asked to so. Another challenging option is the multigenre project. In a multigenre project, students interweave a variety of genres (for example, poetry, editorial, and personal narrative) into an expression of a common theme.

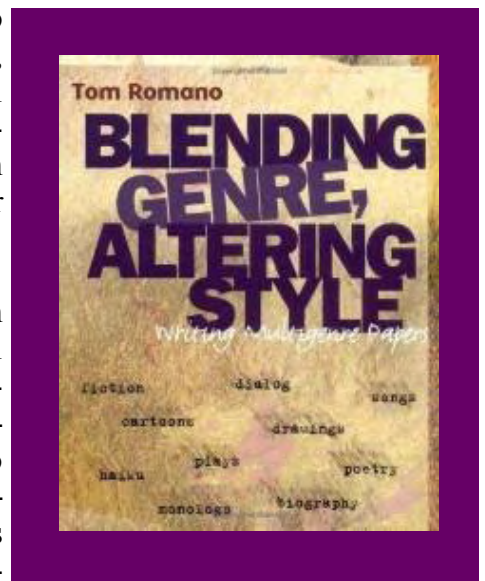
Writing is a skill that can hold students back or help them advance in many different careers. Teachers in elementary, middle, and high school do make a difference in how talented writers face the challenges that writing has to offer.

Works Cited

Fox, M. (1988). Notes from the battlefield: Towards a theory of why people write. *Language Arts*, 65(2), 112-125.

Author Biography

Jill Olthouse completed the Ph.D. program in Curriculum & Instruction (Gifted Education) at the University of Toledo, and is now a Visiting Assistant Professor in the Special Education department at West Virginia University. Her email is jillolthouse@gmail.com



Using Bibliotherapy and Cinematherapy to Impact the Friendships and Social Lives of Gifted Girls

by Brianna Pennington

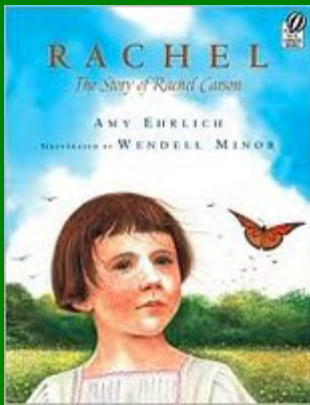
When there is social conflict or she doesn't feel accepted, it can be hard for a child to learn, especially for highly sensitive gifted girls. In your classroom, small-group counseling group, or gifted program, you can use books and film clips to discuss social issues, like how to build friendships and overcome obstacles related to cliques or exclusion. The methods of cinematherapy and bibliotherapy can be effective even for introverted students, and these methods are a really great fit for gifted girls who are often introspective and sensitive.

In this article, I will share general advice and tips that I have learned as a school counselor from facilitating a counseling group called Connect, which is for 4th through 6th grade students. This small-group counseling session meets weekly about discusses methods for how to make friends. I'll also share examples from books and movies that you can easily use in your classroom or counseling group.

Practical Methods:

Any of the questions below can be used independently or as part of a group. Students can respond through writing in journals or discussing one-on-one or in small discussion groups.

Biography for All Ages



One small informal bibliotherapy assignment involves biography. Students can research the lives of gifted women, such as Eleanor Roosevelt, Madame Curie, Jane Goodall, Rachel Carson, and Louisa May Alcott. Some successful people had lonely childhoods and learned to make friends later. This information can help a gifted girl feel like she is not the only one—she is not alone. Students can respond to the following questions after reading a biography.

1. Did she have friends? What did they have in common?
2. Did she spend time alone as a child? What did she like to do?
3. When and how did this person make true friends?

One excellent biography choice is: *Rachel: the story of Rachel Carson* by Amy Ehrlich.

Books for Upper Elementary and Middle School Girls

Friendships change from elementary school to middle school as girls change from children into adolescents. Sometimes friends grow apart and people change, and while this process is a natural part of growing up, it can still lead to hurt feelings and heartbreak.

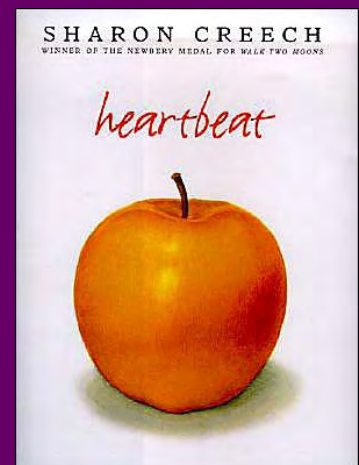
Heartbeat

Reading the book *Heartbeat* by Sharon Creech addresses how friends change in middle school. You can read this short, free-verse poetry book out loud or send it home with students. It is a short, easy read with well-developed characters, Annie and Max.

Discussion Questions

1. How is twelve-year-old Annie's relationship with her best friend Max changing?

“These methods are a really great fit for gifted girls who are often introspective and sensitive.”



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2. What do you think Annie should do when Max ignores her?
3. Why do you think Max ignores Annie sometimes and acts distant?
4. Have you ever grown apart from an old friend? When should you reach out to save the friendship? When should you accept the changes?

Stargirl

Another book upper elementary and middle school girls will love is *Stargirl* by Jerry Spinelli. The main character, Stargirl, is a unique girl who was recently homeschooled and starts at a new high school in Arizona. At first, she confused everyone because she dresses weird, plays the ukulele and has a pet rat and she doesn't seem to care what other people think. Girls can admire Stargirl and find a role model through her example. This book can also lead to many thoughtful discussions about the dilemma of

being true to yourself vs. changing who you are to fit in.

Discussion Questions

1. How is Stargirl unique? Why do other students not accept her?
2. Stargirl tries to change to fit in. Have you ever done this? What happened? How did you feel?
3. Later in the book, Stargirl is shunned for acting differently from her peers. How does it feel to be ignored? Have you ever been ignored? Have you ever ignored someone else? Share how you felt in each situation and what you learned from the experience.
4. How does Stargirl try to make friends? What advice would you give her?
5. Stargirl tries to be a cheerleader and later becomes "Susan" where she dresses just like everyone else. Have you ever changed

yourself to fit in with the crowd? What happened?

Activities for Middle and High School Girls

- Watch film clips from the movie *Mean Girls*, written by Tina Fey
- Read an excerpt from the non-fiction book that *Mean Girls* was inspired by: *Queen Bees and Wannabes* by Rosalind Wiseman



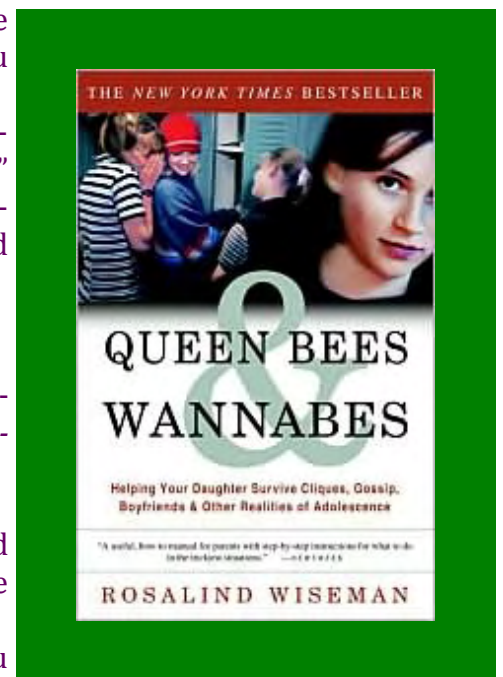
Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever experienced cliques? Were you on the inside or the outside?
2. How did you feel when you met a "mean girl?"
3. What should you do in response to a mean girl's actions?
4. What should you do when you feel left out?

Do you have elementary school girls who are experiencing bullying, exclusion, or cliques? Check out *My Secret Bully* by Trudy Ludwig!

A Safe Space for Girls

In conclusion, when girls feel safe in your classrooms, that they can talk about social issues openly, they will feel more accepted and learn more effectively!



The Editor Recommends Amazing Reads for Amazing Gifted Girls!

The Hunger Games Trilogy by Suzanne Collins

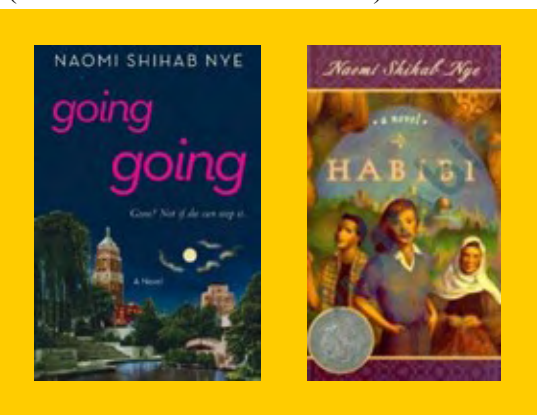
Looking for a strong female role model? An adventurous girl who is intelligent, resourceful, and brave, yet who girls can still relate to? If you haven't heard of Katniss, the main character of *The Hunger Games*, then you've probably just been stuck under a huge pile of papers to grade. This trilogy, which includes *The Hunger Games*, *Catching Fire*, and *Mockingjay*, is the latest of the Young Adult books like *Harry Potter* which are "crossovers" from teen reads to widespread popularity. Girls will love to read this, especially when they hear a movie version is in the works (to be released in March 2012).



Going, Going by Naomi Shihab Nye

Going, Going is the story of a girl who stands up for what she believes in and makes a big difference in her hometown of San Antonio, Texas. The main character, Florrie, is turning 16 and she takes her passions to the next level. Disturbed to see independent businesses dying in her hometown, Florrie convinces her friends to boycott corporate chains like Wal-Mart and franchise restaurants. Even when the boy she likes disagrees with her, she doesn't abandon her purpose, but stays true to herself and her dreams.

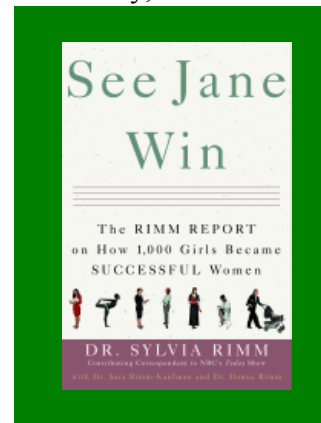
Girls who read *Going, Going* will also enjoy Nye's other work, such as the novel *Habibi*, about a creative girl who finds her own way when she has to adapt upon moving to Jerusalem with her family, and *A Maze*



Me: Poems for Girls. Gifted girls in middle and high school will love these books!

Resources for Teachers and Parents

1. *Smart Girls: A New Psychology of Girls, Women, and Giftedness* by Barbara Kerr
2. *See Jane Win* by Sylvia Rimm, *How Jane Won* and *See Jane Win for Girls*
<http://www.seejanewin.com/>
3. *Girls, Women, and Giftedness* by Julie Ellis and John Willinski
4. *Teaching and Counseling Gifted Girls* by Susan K. Johnsen
5. *Remarkable Women: Perspectives of Female Talent Development* edited by K. Arnold, K. Noble, & R. Subotnik.
6. Hoagies' Gifted website: collection of articles about Parenting Gifted Girls
http://www.hoagiesgifted.org/parenting_girls.htm



NAGC 2011: Advancing Potential and All That Jazz

It is time again for the Annual Convention and with everyone meeting in New Orleans, "Laissez les Bontemps Rouler" (Let the good times roll!). The Curriculum Network will be participating in a "JAM Session" this year and our focus will be *Differentiating Instruction in the Days of Louisiana's Comprehensive Curriculum*. If you feel that your hands are sometimes tied when it comes to differentiating for the needs of your advanced students, **come visit our JAM session on Friday, November 4 from 4:00-5:00pm** during the conference. We will also be celebrating our annual NAGC Curriculum Award winners at our evening event on **November 4 from 5:45-9:00pm in the Steering Room of the convention center**. We always see so many ideas when we visit with our winning curriculum writers and this year will be no exception! Finally, if you are interested in becoming more involved in our network, we encourage you to join us for our **business meeting in the Durham room on November 4th from 1:45-2:45pm**. This is the year to become involved in the Curriculum Network! We look forward to seeing everyone in New Orleans!

