



# A Master Class in Children's Literature

TRENDS AND ISSUES IN AN EVOLVING FIELD

**EDITED BY APRIL WHATLEY BEDFORD AND LETTIE K. ALBRIGHT**  
**FOREWORD BY AMY A. MCCLURE**

*Manuscript Editor:* Theresa L. Kay  
*Staff Editor:* Bonny Graham  
*Interior Design:* Jenny Jensen Greenleaf  
*Cover Design:* Pat Mayer  
*Cover Image:* iStockphoto.com/Andy\_R

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# Foreword

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## A Seed Is Planted *Launching the Master Class*

AMY A. McCLURE, *Ohio Wesleyan University*

Sometimes the best ideas happen by chance—a casual comment, a wondering query, a memory jogged plants a seed that grows into a fully flowering idea. So it was with the Children’s Literature Assembly (CLA) Master Class in Teaching Children’s Literature. The class was conceived at the 1993 NCTE Annual Convention in Pittsburgh during one of those author dinners so many of us have had the opportunity to enjoy. Several CLA members—Amy Cohn (then CLA president), Carl Tomlinson (professor at Northern Illinois University), and Amy McClure (professor at Ohio Wesleyan University)—were enjoying a delightful dinner with author Steven Kellogg. As always, Steven was an entertaining dinner companion, interested in the worlds of classroom teaching, children’s literature academia, and publishing. “How are you doing teaching future teachers about using books, when there is so much demand to teach phonics?” he asked. Conversation turned to the then-current debate about how to use children’s books in classrooms when the political climate was demanding more phonics-based teaching.

At that time the debate between whole language and phonics teaching philosophies was raging, with much polarization between the two perspectives. Whole language proponents often felt beleaguered and besieged. Teacher educators, particularly those who taught children’s literature courses and often had prepared those whole language teachers to use children’s books wisely and effectively, also felt isolated and unsupported. Many of them wanted their children’s literature courses to reflect their strong belief in and commitment to showing teachers how to create passionate, lifelong readers. Yet they had little training in how to do this. They typically had to accomplish this goal in a single course or less. Additionally, since many were the only children’s literature specialists in their university, there were few opportunities to share teaching strategies, favorite books, or syllabi with colleagues.

We realized there was a need for professors of children's literature to come together to discuss our work. We needed to share how we organized our courses, how we handled the typically crushing workload, what books seemed to work magic in turning college students on to reading and other issues. And we also realized there was no forum for this kind of sharing at NCTE, International Reading Association, or any other conferences typically attended by this constituency.

How to do this? we wondered. Carl had attended an NCTE session when he was a young professor in which Janet Hickman from The Ohio State University and Diane Monson from the University of Minnesota had presented their children's literature course syllabi. He recalled how much help this had been as he started his work in the field. What if we had a "master class," taught each year by expert children's literature professors, to help people share effective teaching strategies for their children's literature courses? The presentations would be followed by opportunities for the audience to discuss the topic that had been presented, sharing insights and ideas with each other. We presented the idea to the CLA board. Their enthusiasm was such that we immediately began work on developing a class for the next Convention.

Our first class occurred at the 1994 NCTE Annual Convention in Orlando, Florida. Our objective was to bring together children's literature professors from departments of education, English, and library science so that we could overcome perceived differences among these departments and build a strong cohort of people who would likely wish to meet on a yearly basis. Speakers included Taimi Ranta from the Illinois State University English Department, John Stewig from the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, and Christine Francis from the University of Alberta (filling in for Jon Stott). Each spoke on the challenges and issues involved in teaching children's literature from various disciplinary perspectives. A standing-room-only crowd listened to the speakers and then stayed for dinner following the session.

Attendance grew at each subsequent session. Topics such as how to organize a children's literature course, how to construct syllabi, favorite children's books used, the merits of various textbooks, assessment strategies, and other relevant topics drew increasingly larger numbers of attendees. A critical part of each program was the opportunity to talk with colleagues, sharing experiences, questions, and challenges related to the session topic for that year.

An interesting outgrowth of the Master Class after several years was the National Survey of Children's Literature Teaching Practices, sponsored by the Children's Literature Assembly. Amy McClure and Carl Tomlinson surveyed CLA members across the country who were teaching children's literature at the university level, asking them to identify their textbook, children's books used

for common readings, teaching strategies, evaluation tools, and the like. Instructors were also asked to describe the attitudes of their students regarding the crushing workload of the typical children's literature course and how they handled the same workload themselves. "Teaching Children's Literature at the College Level: A National Survey of Practices" was first presented at a Master Class and then published in the Spring 2000 issue of the *Journal of Children's Literature*.

Since its inception, the Master Class has evolved to include authors and illustrators of children's books in addition to university children's literature instructors as presenters. Themes for each annual class have been generated from conversations among CLA members about challenging issues they face in teaching their college courses. As the Master Class has developed to match the interests and needs of its audience, its planners remain committed to providing a forum for professors of children's literature to share effective strategies for promoting a love of literature in ever-changing political climates and diverse academic contexts.

*A Master Class in Children's Literature: Trends and Issues in an Evolving Field* celebrates the Master Class in Teaching Children's Literature. We are so pleased and gratified that our idea has come to fruition. Readers will find chapters from selected master classes that provide helpful guidance for structuring and teaching their own children's literature courses. After you read this book, we invite you to come to the current classes at each NCTE Annual Convention for further conversation with colleagues. You will leave refreshed and encouraged to continue the important work of helping prospective and practicing teachers and librarians become passionate about books. They, in turn, will share that passion with children. What a wonderful legacy for the Master Class!

# Introduction

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## Introducing the Master Class

APRIL WHATLEY BEDFORD, *University of New Orleans*

LETTIE K. ALBRIGHT, *Texas Woman's University*

In her preface to this book, Amy McClure described how the Master Class in Teaching Children's Literature originated and how it has evolved over the years. She mentioned that the Master Class is now an annual event sponsored by the Children's Literature Assembly (CLA) at each National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) Annual Convention. As editors, we would like to build on Amy's introduction by discussing who we, the members of CLA, are; the intended audience for this book; why we believe children's literature is important; and what we hope to accomplish by teaching courses in children's literature at the university level. We also preview the structure of the book and each of its upcoming chapters.

### Who We Are

Members of the Children's Literature Assembly have one thing in common: we feel passionately about children's literature. Our membership is made up primarily of university instructors of courses in children's literature; most of us work in teacher education programs, some in English departments, and some in schools of library science. We also count among our numbers classroom teachers and librarians, those who are already opening up children's worlds through books and those who hope to learn more about how to do so effectively within the present-day realities of kindergarten through eighth-grade classrooms and libraries.

Truthfully, though, this doesn't tell much about who we really are. We'd like to paint a portrait of ourselves as passionate readers and teachers of children's literature by sharing a little more about the work we do and the way we act when we're together. Each year, we look forward with fervent anticipation to the NCTE Annual Convention. Observers will find groups of us excitedly talking

about the best book we just read, our friendships founded on our mutual love of children's books; touring the exhibits to discover new delights from each publisher; and standing in line to obtain a priceless autograph or snap a treasured photo of children's authors and illustrators who are like rock stars to us. We eagerly attend all of the CLA-sponsored events, beginning with the Saturday evening Master Class in Teaching Children's Literature, where we are fully absorbed in learning from our colleagues, the experts in our field, about how to include cutting-edge topics in our children's literature courses. We buy tickets to the Sunday morning breakfast and the all-day Monday workshop to bask in the presence of authors, illustrators, and editors who captivate us with behind-the-scenes peeks into their work and worlds. We enthusiastically join the crowd at the presentation of the Notable Children's Books in the Language Arts, furiously scribbling notes about which honored books we must read *immediately*. Many of us spend countless hours tirelessly planning and bringing these events to fruition, knowing that we ourselves will enjoy and learn from them immensely. We also look forward to receiving the twice-yearly *Journal of Children's Literature*, a wonderful benefit of membership in CLA, and read cover-to-cover its pages filled with previews or recaps of convention activities and dynamic articles about teaching with children's books. We are thoroughly addicted to children's literature!

## **Whom This Book Is For**

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This edited volume is for anyone who has a passion for children's books. The Master Class was created for university instructors of children's literature who prepare elementary and middle school teachers and librarians so that they might share ideas and learn from their colleagues. This book will allow this audience to do just that. It will also appeal to those students that we teach: preservice and practicing classroom teachers and librarians who work with children in kindergarten through eighth grade. Anyone who wants to learn more about critical current issues in the field of children's literature will find much to ponder within these pages. In addition to addressing critical issues, all of the chapters include teaching strategies. Most of these strategies have been developed in our college classes to deepen the knowledge of adults who introduce literature to children, and most were designed to be adapted and applied for use with elementary and middle school students.

## Why We Teach Children's Literature

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We teach children's literature, quite simply, because we love it. Most of us fell in love with reading at an early age and have cherished memories of books that made indelible impressions on us as children. Teaching children's literature allows us the opportunity to continue the magic of reading aloud, introducing books, and discussing texts with undergraduate and graduate students. All of us who teach children's literature at the college level have experienced the thrill of helping adults who didn't love reading or books as children to become passionate about children's books, and it is the books themselves that ignite this ardor. Our work as instructors of children's literature is challenging and exciting and deeply fulfilling.

## Why We Love Children's Literature

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We, the editors of this volume and speaking on behalf of the Children's Literature Assembly, know that we are not alone in recognizing the value of children's books. Anita Silvey, former publisher of children's books for Houghton Mifflin, editor-in-chief of *The Horn Book Magazine*, and president of the Children's Book Council, recently edited *Everything I Need to Know I Learned from a Children's Book* (2009). This collection of essays from celebrities, leaders, and "notable people from all walks of life" highlights the books that these eminent individuals read as children that have resonated with them throughout their lives, inspiring them, motivating them, helping them to understand the complexities of life, and teaching them lessons by which to live.

All of the essayists in Silvey's (2009) collection discuss the impact that specific books had on their lives; many of them also elaborate on the worth of children's books in general. Novelist Meg Wolitzer wrote, "Good children's books give you an early sense of the multiple textures of the world. They remind you that there is, in fact, no single world—but many of them" (p. 77). Caldecott winner for both *The Polar Express* (1985) and *Jumanji* (1981), Chris Van Allsburg learned from reading *Harold and the Purple Crayon* (Johnson, 1983) that he could create his own world by creating books. Beloved author Judy Blume stated, "Some books you never forget. Some characters become your friends for life" (p. 85). These are the books that many of us turn to again and again, just like visiting old friends. Revisiting the books of our youth also allows us to return to our childhoods. Eric Rohmann, Caldecott-winning author/illustrator, attested, "Today when I read *Charlotte's Web* [White, 1952], I am a boy again" (p. 185).

Jerry J. Mallett, curator of the Mazza Museum of International Art from Picture Books, didn't read his first "quality" children's book until after he became a teacher, while he was taking his first children's literature course. He commented:

What a wonderful life I have had being surrounded by the most marvelous art and literature imaginable. It all started with *The Twenty-One Balloons*. From it I learned that it is never too late to have your life changed by a children's book. (Silvey, 2009, p. 211)

Renowned educator Jack Pikulski credits reading children's books to his daughter as the impetus for reorienting his career from focusing on children with reading problems to opening up the world of children's literature to all readers. He commented that even now, in his "mature years," he still reads children's books and always will (p. 145).

At the 1997 Master Class in Teaching Children's Literature, which focused on "Uses and Abuses of Children's Literature in the Classroom," presenter Dan Hade posed a theory "based on the need to reestablish a 'spirituality' in our approach to children's literature" (Pierce, 1998, p. 103). Hade's theory expresses the reverence that all of us who teach children's literature at the college level feel about the subject of our work. Hade proposed four paths by which adults can invite children to experience the literature created for them:

- The positive path of awe, wonder, mystery, and delight.
- The negative path of living through pain and suffering, daring the dark, and confronting our fears.
- The creative path of playfulness, imagination, and giving birth to new perspectives.
- The transformative path of justice and compassion, where pain is transformed into compassionate, just action. (Pierce, 1998, p. 103)

Undergraduate and graduate courses in children's literature provide opportunities for preservice and practicing teachers and librarians to encounter books from each of these paths. Recently named National Ambassador for Young People's Literature, Katherine Paterson (the second to hold this position, succeeding author Jon Scieszka) wrote of the wonder she felt when she read *The Secret Garden* (Burnett, 1911) as a child (Silvey, 2009). Many of us introduce such wonder-inducing books in the beginning of our children's literature courses because they produce the same sense of awe, mystery, and delight in adult readers as they do in children (Martino, 2008).

While children’s literature has been criticized over the past few decades for producing books that are too “dark” or deal with subjects that are too “heavy” for their intended audience, all children have fears and bad days. Unfortunately, too many experience pain and suffering on a daily basis. The best children’s books that confront the negative side of life do so in masterful, age-appropriate ways that allow readers to better understand themselves and the world around them, providing both mirror and window (Bishop, 1990). In our courses, we attempt to balance these books with those that inspire joy and creativity. *Salon* magazine founder Laura Miller, writing about her first reading of *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (Lewis, 1950), said that this was the book that turned her into a reader because she discovered that someone else had an imagination like hers. She continued, “It showed me how I could tumble through a hole in a world I knew into another, better one, a world fresher, more brightly colored, more exhilarating, more fully felt than my own” (Silvey, 2009, p. 65). Many adult readers make these new discoveries of imagination for the first time in their college children’s literature courses.

Finally, we believe that children’s literature can be transformative—for both children and adults—and we hope that the students who enter our classes will be moved to take action for social justice by the books we share with them and in turn will foster transformative reading in the children they teach. In her article “Taking Children’s Literature Seriously: Reading for Pleasure and Social Change,” our colleague Vivian Yenika-Agbaw (1997) argues that inviting children to read for pleasure is necessary but not enough, and she asserts that even young children can be taught to read critically and to identify racism, sexism, and other prejudices that reproduce an unjust society.

## **What We Hope to Accomplish**

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In 1997, Dan Hade challenged attendees at the Master Class in Teaching Children’s Literature “to develop our own theories about the central importance of literature” in the classroom rather than relying on policymakers, school administrators, textbook publishers, or other constituencies to make these decisions for us (Pierce, 1998, p. 103). Members of the Children’s Literature Assembly have been grappling with this challenge ever since, and developing—and sharing—our theories about the primacy of children’s literature at the college level and in elementary and middle school classrooms has been at the heart of every Master Class and every other CLA-sponsored event. We, as editors, have also responded to Dan’s call in creating a conceptual framework for the contents of this book. Based on our attendance at Master Classes over a number of years,

our reading of the articles originally written about those classes, our work with chapter authors for this book, and hundreds of informal conversations with colleagues about our teaching habits and goals, we believe that college courses in children's literature should foster passion, connoisseurship, and generativity.

### *Passion*

We have already discussed our passion for children's literature but want to reiterate here that we believe all elementary teachers and librarians should be passionate about children's literature to ignite that same passion in the children they do and will teach. The amazing body of children's literature that has been published and the creative and innovative publications that are currently being produced assure that teaching with children's literature should never get stale. It is in children's literature courses at the college level that preservice teachers discover—often for the first time—the wealth of books available to children and also where they learn how to make these books a vital part of classroom instruction and daily school life.

Those of us who teach college children's literature courses are shocked and disheartened when we encounter teacher candidates or practicing teachers who are not readers themselves, but unfortunately this happens far too often. Susan Gebhard (2006) writes movingly about when this happened to her the first time she taught children's literature at the college level and how she changed her teaching as a result of discovering that many of the students in her class had not had positive experiences with books or reading. By immersing her students in literature and allowing her own excitement for reading children's books to be evident to her students, a number of them became enthusiastic readers for the first time in their lives. Gebhard wrote about this experience: "It seemed imperative for me to instill in them a sense that reading can and should be fun—and that it was okay to display an over-the-top love for books!" (p. 459). Gebhard believed that her passion would be contagious to her students, and it was.

This "over-the-top love for books" is what we hope to demonstrate for our students and to instill in them, always with the ultimate goal that they will inspire the same passion in generations of elementary and middle school students. Children's literature researchers provide substantial evidence of the positive effects a teacher's reading behaviors can have on students' reading practices, and all of these researchers cite a teacher's knowledge, love, and sharing of children's books as the keys to producing these positive effects (Dreher, 2002–03;

Kolloff, 2002; Layne, 2009; Worthy, 2002). Applegate and Applegate (2004) surveyed 195 prospective teachers and found that 54.3 percent of the respondents were “unenthusiastic” or unengaged readers. We have seen similar proportions in our own teaching, but the good news, based in our experience and supported by all the previously cited studies, is that it is never too late to change an unenthusiastic, unengaged reader into an enthusiastic, engaged, passionate reader. This happens routinely in college children’s literature courses, and forums such as the Master Class ensure that we will continue to strengthen our teaching so these transformations keep happening.

### ***Connoisseurship***

Nurturing teachers and librarians to be passionate about children’s literature is not enough, however. The Master Class was designed for those instructors of college children’s literature courses—already passionate about their chosen field—as a forum for connoisseurs of children’s literature to share their expertise with one another. By definition, a connoisseur is “a person who is especially competent to pass critical judgments in an art, particularly one of the fine arts, or in matters of taste” as well as “a discerning judge of the best in any field.” The chapters of this book address issues that will assist teachers, librarians, and children in becoming connoisseurs of children’s literature.

The application of connoisseurship to the arena of education originated with Eliot Eisner (Smith, 2005), and we believe that his understandings of connoisseurship apply perfectly to the field of children’s literature. We suggest that adults who are connoisseurs of children’s literature read children’s books first and foremost for their own aesthetic enjoyment. They appreciate what children’s books have to offer them as adult readers. For Eisner (1998), connoisseurship and criticism work hand in hand, with the connoisseur appreciating a work of art (or an educational practice or a children’s book) and the critic delving further to evaluate that same work of art and share that evaluation publicly.

We believe that even children as young as kindergarten age are capable of becoming children’s literature connoisseurs. Former CLA board member Glenna Sloan wrote the seminal *Child as Critic* (2003), now in its fourth edition, and was one of the first to advocate for developing a kind of connoisseurship among child readers. Our goal as college instructors of children’s literature is to prepare teachers and librarians who are such connoisseurs of children’s literature themselves that they will ignite a passion in the children with whom they work so that, as adults, those children can look back and remember the children’s books that changed their lives.

## Generativity

At the 1996 Master Class in Teaching Children’s Literature, Rudine Sims Bishop of The Ohio State University spoke about how the knowledge that preservice and inservice teachers gain in their college children’s literature courses should enable them to become generative (Pavonetti, 1997), meaning “with productive capability.” Specifically, she asserted that teachers need a knowledge base that allows them to become generative—capable of making productive decisions—in three areas: building a classroom library; creating themed instructional cycles based on children’s literature and connected across genres; and selecting children’s books to “enrich the total curriculum” (p. 67). Helping our students make informed decisions about building their classroom libraries is always a paramount goal for those of us who work with current and future teachers.

In our teaching, college instructors of children’s literature in teacher preparation programs also thoroughly address the second and third areas introduced by Bishop, and many CLA members who contributed to this volume have also published widely on ways to incorporate children’s literature throughout the elementary and middle school curriculum. Both Janelle Mathis and Kathy Short have focused much of their scholarship on text sets and thematic, literature-based curriculum (see, for example, Mathis, 2002; Short, Schroeder, Laird, Kauffman, Ferguson, & Crawford, 1996). *Children’s Literature and Learning: Literary Study Across the Curriculum* by Barbara Lehman (2007); *Children’s Literature in the Reading Program: An Invitation to Read*, edited by Deborah Wooten and Bernice Cullinan (2009); and *The Wonder of It All: When Literature and Literacy Intersect* by Nancy J. Johnson and Cyndi Giorgis (2007) all offer numerous theoretically based instructional strategies that foster both literary and literacy learning for diverse students. We would add to Bishop’s recommendations that teachers and librarians both should possess the generativity to work together to incorporate children’s literature throughout the elementary and middle school curriculum.

We would also add a fourth area in which both teachers and librarians should be generative: advocacy. We hope—and believe—that prospective and practicing teachers and librarians who are exposed to all that children’s literature has to offer them as professionals and the students with whom they work will become advocates and activists for the inclusion of literature in the elementary and middle school literacy program; the importance of self-selected, independent reading for all students in kindergarten through grade 8; the building of classroom libraries; and even the existence of school libraries—all of which have been threatened, and in many places have disappeared, over the past decade.

In 2000, Miriam Martinez (a contributor to this volume) and Lea McGee were asked by the editors of *Reading Research Quarterly* to examine the role of

children's literature in past and present reading instruction and to make predictions about children's literature for the future decade. At that time, these authors were encouraged by the exponential growth in children's book publishing; the advances in quality of picture books, historical fiction, and nonfiction; and the increasing recommendations of reading researchers and textbook authors to include literature in literacy instruction, all of which had occurred during the previous decade. They predicted that an increasingly diverse student population would demand the publication and classroom inclusion of more books in which students could see themselves, and they also predicted that the development of online and digital literacies would influence both publication and instruction in ways that couldn't be imagined.

A decade has passed since Martinez and McGee conducted their review, and their two predictions have been realized. What they could not have predicted at the hopeful dawning of the new millennium was the way the political climate that dominated most of the next decade would result in a narrow, skills-based, standardized test-driven definition of reading founded on state and federally sanctioned and scripted instructional materials developed from "scientifically based reading research." Instead, the authors anticipated a broadened definition of literacy that "suggests that only literature provides the multiple layers of meaning necessary for acquiring the strategies, stances, and ways of deep thinking that we are coming to define as literacy" (Martinez & McGee, 2000, p. 167). While we believe that Martinez and McGee's assertion is true of the world in which we live, the schools in which teachers and librarians work and children learn have, for the most part, become more constricted in the past decade than ever before.

The national movement for teachers to use a skills-based, scripted curriculum to teach reading not only has resulted in a loss of time and space for literature in classrooms and schools but also has "trickled up" to influence the ways in which reading methods courses are taught at universities, with many universities being hounded by state departments of education and local school districts to design their courses based on these classroom realities. In some cases, university programs and professors have acquiesced; others have fought (Brenner, 2007). Coupled with changes in reading methods courses has been the elimination of children's literature courses in many teacher preparation programs (National Council of Teachers of English, 2001).

These movements led NCTE to reaffirm its commitment to literature-based teaching through two resolutions (National Council of Teachers of English, 2001, 2006). Hoewisch (2000) presents a thorough case for the importance of children's literature courses in teacher preparation programs. We believe that becoming advocates for children's literature will require teachers and librarians who are

deeply knowledgeable about the theoretical, research, and policy supports for keeping children’s literature vibrantly alive in schools, and we assert that this knowledge is most likely to be acquired through college courses in children’s literature.

## How This Book Is Organized

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Rather than a chronological retrospective of the Master Classes in Teaching Children’s Literature in the order in which they occurred, this book is divided into three sections: “Laying the Foundation,” which includes three chapters; “Broadening Our Reading Worlds,” which includes five chapters; and “Responding to Challenges, Celebrating Possibilities,” which includes four chapters. Below is a brief introduction to each section and the chapters included. At the time each Master Class occurred, an article recounting its major points was published in the *Journal of Children’s Literature*, and those references are included in the following overview.

### *Laying the Foundation*

Chapters in this section focus on how educators might structure university-level children’s literature courses; what some of the issues are that are currently at the forefront of the field; and how to encourage a variety of responses to literature. We begin this section the way the Master Class actually began, by looking at alternative ways of teaching children’s literature at the college level. That Master Class was held in 1996, and speakers included Rudine Sims Bishop of The Ohio State University; Christine Francis of the University of Alberta; and Kathy Short of the University of Arizona (Pavonetti, 1997). In “What’s Going On in Children’s Literature Classes?” (Chapter 1), Miriam Martinez and CLA Past President Nancy Roser return to this topic more than a decade later by analyzing 55 children’s literature syllabi and talking in depth with four noted professors about how they organize their courses.

In Chapter 2, “Uses and Abuses of Children’s Literature,” CLA Past President Evelyn B. Freeman looks closely at four current trends and issues in the field of children’s literature—books as commodities; technology and books; genres of children’s literature; and reading for pleasure—and evaluates the positives and negatives of each. The Master Class that originally considered uses and abuses of children’s literature in the classroom was held in 1997, where speaker Dan Hade of Pennsylvania State University raised issues about how and by whom

the importance of children’s literature in the elementary classroom is established; Freeman of The Ohio State University discussed trends in nonfiction and informational texts for children; and Shirley Crenshaw of Westminster College urged participants to evaluate their own teaching and syllabi by reflecting on the values and theories they hoped to address in their courses (Pierce, 1998).

One of the foundations of all college-level children’s literature courses is awareness of the myriad ways readers might respond to children’s books. This was the theme of the 1999 Master Class, at which Rick Kerper of Millersville University shared a project he developed for responding to Caldecott Award–winning picture books; Janelle Mathis of the University of North Texas described her work with personal text sets; and Nancy Johnson of Western Washington University explained a strategy she developed in response to Lois Lowry’s *The Giver* (1993), where students create a “story arc or story ray” (Giorgis, 2000, p. 75). In Chapter 3, CLA Past President Marjorie R. Hancock, known for her work in children’s literature and response, revisits Louise Rosenblatt’s (1938) reader response theory and considers how readers might respond to children’s literature in the second decade of the 21st century and beyond.

### ***Broadening Our Reading Worlds***

This section focuses on the importance of children’s literature professors knowing deeply the characteristics and elements of children’s literature as well as ways to engage readers with literature. This knowledge is first communicated in college classrooms and then passed along to the children with whom students in these college courses will work. Chapters in this section move beyond the image of reader as engaged but passive to the role that reading plays in creating a more just and equitable—as well as interconnected—world. Each chapter in this section emphasizes a particular type of book or category of literature.

Chapter 4 highlights the art of the picture book, just as the 2000 Master Class did. At that class, Barbara Kiefer, then at Teacher’s College, spoke about her experience as chair of the 2000 Caldecott Award committee; Michael Tunnell of Brigham Young University shared his experiences as a picture book author, and Barbara Elleman of Marquette University described her work on a biography about picture book author/illustrator Tomie dePaola (Giorgis & Johnson, 2001). In her chapter for this text, Cyndi Giorgis provides numerous strategies for studying and responding to picture books that teachers and librarians can use with children.

The focus of the 1988 Master Class was children’s literature about mathematics, and CLA Past President Terrell Young and his colleagues Amy Roth McDuffie and Barbara Ward return to that topic in Chapter 5. At that class, Cyndi Giorgis

of the University of Las Vegas shared the results of two action research studies she conducted about children's mathematical responses to literature, and Patricia Austin of the University of New Orleans discussed criteria that children's literature with mathematical dimensions should meet and analyzed specific examples of such books (Young, 1999). In their chapter, Young, Roth McDuffie, and Ward consider books with mathematical dimensions published in the past decade and provide a model for helping educators make thoughtful decisions about *which* books to share with children and *ways* to share those books that can be applied to other genres of literature as well.

Multicultural children's literature is a topic that was highly important when it was the focus of the Master Class in 2007 (Ernst & Mathis, 2008), and its importance has continued to grow since then. At the Master Class, author Sharon Flake and illustrator E. B. Lewis captivated the audience with stories about why they create books in which African American readers might see themselves. In Chapter 6 of this text, Janelle B. Mathis expands the topic to consider the increase in books published representing a range of cultures and ways to respond to multicultural literature within a contemporary context.

One specific culture beginning to be represented in children's books is the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning/queer (LGBTQ) community. These books, though absolutely necessary, are still highly controversial. Why these books are important and ways in which college children's literature instructors handle the controversy that surrounds them were the subjects of the 2005 Master Class in Teaching Children's Literature. Speakers at that class included authors Nancy Garden and James Howe and professors Linda Lamme of the University of Florida and Patricia Austin of the University of New Orleans (Albright & Bedford, 2006). In Chapter 7, April Whatley Bedford reviews the body of children's literature with LGBTQ characters and ways to nurture gender diversity through children's books.

An area of interest to many children's literature instructors but a field of expertise to only a handful, international children's literature was the topic of the 2002 Master Class. Hazel Rochman, reviewer and editor for *Booklist*, opened that session with a moving speech about her experiences as an immigrant, followed by presentations from professors Junko Yokota of National Louis University, Barbara Lehman of The Ohio State University, and Elizabeth Poe, then of West Virginia University, about the ways in which they incorporate international children's literature into their teaching (Hancock, 2003). In Chapter 8, Kathy G. Short provides compelling reasons for including international literature in children's literature courses as well as guidance for how to do so effectively.

## *Responding to Challenges, Celebrating Possibilities*

The final section in this volume focuses on recent trends in the field of children's literature that offer possibilities as well as dangers. All children deserve the right to read for pleasure, to read for their own purposes beyond those required in the classroom, and to have access to books that will make them more socially aware and active citizens. The last chapter in this section focuses on this notion as well as on the idea of "generativity"—teachers and librarians as capable, informed, and effective decision-makers about children's literature.

One challenge to the field of children's literature in the new millennium has been the phenomenon of children's books achieving the status of bestsellers. While this would seem to be a positive movement, it also has its drawbacks; thus, the impetus for selecting children's books as bestsellers was the subject of the 2003 Master Class. At the class, speakers included Patricia Austin of the University of New Orleans and Barbara Lehman of The Ohio State University, bestselling children's author Nancy Farmer, and children's book editor Judy O'Malley (Vardell, 2004). Each looked at the topic from a different perspective, and Barbara A. Lehman and April Bedford give an expanded view of each of those perspectives in Chapter 9.

Like the bestseller phenomenon, the ever-changing world of technology has influenced children's literature in countless ways. At the 2004 Master Class, Michael Joseph of Rutgers University and creator of the Child\_Lit discussion list; Cynthia Leitich Smith, a children's author with an extensive and active website; Terry Borzumato, then representing Random House Publishing; and Sylvia Vardell, professor and CLA past president, each described how the Internet had changed their work in children's literature (Bedford, 2005). Sylvia M. Vardell revisits those topics, along with new technological advances, in Chapter 10.

Challenges to children's literature often come in the form of threats of censorship or demands to remove books from classroom or library shelves. Responding to censorship challenges was the subject of the 2001 Master Class, where author Lois Lowry spoke about her reactions to having some of her books challenged, and Ginny Moore Kruse, director of the Cooperative Children's Book Center, offered valuable advice to teachers and librarians dealing with threats of censorship (Pavonetti, 2002). Linda M. Pavonetti furthers those topics in Chapter 11.

The final challenge discussed in this section is how to foster children's love for literature in a high-stakes testing environment. This was the climate in which educators and children were ensconced at the time of the Master Class in 2006,

and unfortunately, things have changed little since then. In 2006, four speakers shared their insights about keeping the love of literature alive in such an environment: authors Jim Murphy and Candace Fleming and professors Nancy Roser of the University of Texas and Kathy Short of the University of Arizona (Mathis & Albright, 2007). In Chapter 12 of this volume, Lettie K. Albright offers recommendations to help teachers and librarians advocate for the inclusion of children’s literature in elementary and middle schools.

## Conclusion

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To conclude this text, we return to the conceptual framework we established in the beginning of this introduction and consider how to develop passion, connoisseurship, and generativity in response to each of the issues addressed in the preceding chapters. We also examine themes across Master Class topics and pose lingering questions related to each topic. Finally, we offer recommendations to help teachers interrogate their own teaching with the goal of making it increasingly literature-based.

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This collection of essays shares the dedicated work of educators who believe wholeheartedly in the power of literacy to shape young lives. Since 1994, these educators have participated in the Master Class in Teaching Children's Literature sponsored by the Children's Literature Assembly during the Annual Convention of the National Council of Teachers of English.

Chronicling the highlights of these Master Classes, this collection is for teacher educators who are interested in children's literature, teachers and librarians in children's literature courses, and everyone else who has a passion for children's books. Each chapter focuses on a contemporary issue in children's literature, providing suggestions, strategies, and resources for implementation and instruction.

The first section, on laying the foundation of children's literature courses, includes chapters on how to structure such a course, hot topics in the field, and how to encourage a variety of responses to children's literature. The next section encourages teachers to broaden their reading worlds in chapters that focus on particular types or aspects of books, including illustration and design, books about mathematics, gender diversity, and multicultural and international literature. The final section addresses challenges and possibilities, such as the impact of new technologies, censorship, bestselling books, and keeping the love of literature alive in today's high-stakes testing environment.

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