Literacy Outside the Box!

Attendees at the 2011 Illinois Reading Council Conference are in for a treat indeed, as we explore Literacy Outside the Box! As always, this year’s conference will feature the award-winning authors, prominent literacy leaders, and dynamic speakers you have come to expect from IRC, along with Illinois’ best teachers sharing their innovative ideas and practices. We will continue to enjoy traditional text formats while finding literacy in new places and exploring new and changing facets of literacy. Teachers and other literacy leaders are constantly vying for students’ attention—why should they read books when there are so many interactive choices and other activities that involve anything but books? What do we do about screen time, whether that includes large screens or the tiny ones they can carry around with them? What place can film, television, social networking, YouTube, blogs, vlogs, tweets, nings, and wikis play in literacy education? Can they learn about literacy through music and art? Mark your calendars now for March 17-19, 2011 and come along to Springfield to experience Literacy Outside the Box! Follow IRC Conference developments and get to know your speakers even better by following the IRC Conference blog at literacyoutsidethebox.blogspot.com.

Marc Brown

Guess who’s turning 30 this year? Everyone’s favorite aardvark, Arthur! His creator, Marc Brown, will be with us for Saturday’s luncheon to celebrate! Not only is Arthur featured in over 30 books and known worldwide in over 100 countries, he also stars in his own Emmy award-winning television series on PBS, produced by Marc Brown. If that isn’t enough, Mr. Brown and his wife have also created the critically acclaimed nonfiction Dino Life Guides for Families series. Plan on joining us for Arthur’s birthday party at the Saturday luncheon!

Jane Yolen

Jane Yolen is the author of over 300 books, including Owl Moon, The Devil’s Arithmetic, Briar Rose, How Do Dinosaurs Say Goodnight?, and The Scarecrow’s Dance. Few authors can boast the range of work that she has produced through her lifetime as one of America’s favorite writers, from rhymed picture books and baby board books through middle grade fiction, poetry collections, nonfiction, and novels and story collections for young adults and adults. She has honorary degrees from six colleges and universities, and her books and stories have won as wide an assortment of awards as her writing represents: the Caldecott Award, two Nebula Awards, a World Fantasy Award, two Christopher Medals, the Kerlan Ward, the Catholic Library’s Regina Medal, and the World Fantasy Association Lifetime Achievement Award. Jane Yolen is certainly a writer who will not be boxed in by any one genre, topic, or mode of communication: she blogs and skypes! We are honored to have her as our Friday banquet speaker this year.

Come Experience Literacy Outside the Box! at the 2011 IRC Conference.
Experience Literacy Outside the Box!

T.A. Barron

Ask T.A. Barron what drives him in everything he does, and he will tell you that he is a storyteller, whether it’s about being a dad, a conservationist, or writing another of his many award-winning books, including *Where is Grandpa?* *The Hero’s Trail: A Guide for a Heroic Life*, *To Walk in Wilderness*, *The Lost Years of Merlin* epic or *The Great Tree of Avalon* trilogy. He believes that “…there is no more powerful—or more exciting—way to convey an idea than through a story,” and many would agree with him. Indeed, both Madeline L’Engle and Robert Redford have sung his praises. He combines his storytelling ability with his passion for the heroic potential in every person to create books that inspire readers to make a difference in the world. He also sponsors an annual prize, the Gloria Barron Prize for Young Heroes, which is given to ten young heroes who have indeed done something to make the world a better place.

Patrick Carman

Patrick Carman truly represents “Literacy Outside the Box!” He is a self-proclaimed entrepreneur who has worked in advertising and created board games, and now writes award-winning fantasy books including *The Land of Elyon*, *Atherton*, and the book-video hybrid series *Skeleton Creek*. He has also contributed to *The 39 Clues* series, *The Black Circle*. His books have been translated into two dozen languages, and he reaches out to families in Central America and Mexico through his support of literacy campaigns and community organizations. Al Roker and Martha Stewart have interviewed him about his involvement in creating a new genre for today’s readers—that of the multi-platform reading experience. *Trackers*, which will be released in May 2010, is another example of Patrick Carman’s attempt to get kids to reconnect with reading. He knows that teachers can “…reimagine technology as something that creates millions of excited young readers,” and he will be with us for lunch on Thursday to encourage Illinois teachers and other literacy leaders to do just that.

M.T. Anderson

M.T. Anderson has to be one of the most diverse authors around! While you probably know him best as the author of the award-winning *The Astonishing Life of Octavian Nothing*, his other books range from biography picture books, *Handel, Who Knew What He Liked*; to young adult science fiction, *Feed* and *The Suburb Beyond the Stars*; to comedy fantasy, *Whales on Stilts* and *The Clue of the Linoleum Lederhosen*; and to his blissfully peaceful picture book described as an “homage to simplicity,” *Me, All Alone, At the End of the World*. M.T. Anderson’s books have won a myriad of awards, including the National Book Award for Young People, the Los Angeles Book Prize, the Boston Globe-Horn Book Award, and the Michael L. Printz Honor. Don’t miss lunch on Friday with M.T. Anderson!
Experience Literacy Outside the Box!

Mordicai Gerstein

We are so fortunate that Mordicai Gerstein will be with us for the 2011 conference! His books cover a wide gamut of styles, age groups, and topics from fantasy and biography to Biblical retellings and the amiably absurd (The Absolutely Awful Alphabet). His popular picture books include nonfiction and fiction alike. The Man Who Walked Between the Towers recounts Phillipe Petit’s tight rope walk between the twin towers of the World Trade Center, accompanied by breathtaking scenes of the city from different perspectives; Carolinda Clatter!, in which a giant falls in love with the moon, is reminiscent of Scandinavian folk legends; and A Book, whose characters live in a book and awake each morning when the book is opened and fall asleep when the book is closed, has been described as metafiction in picture book form. Mordicai Gerstein’s work has garnered him the Caldecott Award, the Parents’ Choice Gold Award, the Boston Globe/Hornbook Award and the American Library Association’s Notable Children’s Book Award. Along with writing and illustrating books for children, Mordicai Gerstein is a painter, sculptor, and prize-winning designer and director of animated films who loves making books and sees it as an adventure. Come see what adventures he can offer to you and your students!

Vaunda Micheaux Nelson

Vaunda Micheaux Nelson understands the power of story; her mother read to her and her siblings every day, and her father recited poetry to them. Her first book, Always Gramma, describes a love that doesn’t change, even though the people involved do, and can help readers deal with the onset of aging difficulties. Many of her books offer touching insights into history that allow their readers to learn about the past while giving them opportunities to grow personally. Juneteenth explains a holiday that resulted from the slow spread of the news of emancipation and emphasizes education and achievement. Bad News for Outlaws is a biography of Bass Reeves, the first African-American deputy U.S. Marshal. Her books have won numerous awards, including the 2009 Coretta Scott King Award (Bad News for Outlaws), the Notable Children’s Trade Book in the Field of Social Studies, and a Parents’ Choice Gold Award. We are indeed honored to have Vaunda Micheaux Nelson as one of our featured speakers.

John Rocco

What do quahogs, Whoopi Goldberg, Shrek, and The Lightning Thief have to do with each other? If that seems like a disparate list that couldn’t be contained by any kind of “box,” you need to make it a point to come see John Rocco and find out. One of the most talented illustrators of our time, he creates the covers for the wildly popular Percy Jackson and the Olympians series. He has also crossed over into the world of author/illustrator with Moontpowder, Fu Finds the Way, and Wolf! Wolf!, which was the 2007 winner of the Borders Original Voices Award for Picture Books, as well as four other awards. He will entrance you and your students with his beautifully detailed art, his sincerity, and his story.

Come Experience Literacy Outside the Box! at the 2011 IRC Conference.
Explore Literacy Outside the Box!

Frank Serafini

Breakfast Friday morning will be served in the presence of a true renaissance man who seems to have lived his entire life outside the box—Frank Serafini. His life work (so far) has included photography, writing, illustrating, playing music, and of course, teaching. His work with school age children includes 12 years spent as an elementary teacher and literacy specialist; his writing for kids includes a series of nonfiction picture books focusing on nature (the Looking Closely series), which he not only wrote but also illustrated with his own photographs. His work with educators includes providing staff development and teaching at Arizona State University as an Associate Professor of Literacy Education and Children’s Literature. His writing for educators includes such books as The Reading Workshop, Reading Aloud and Beyond, and Classroom Reading Assessments. He is hard at work on a project involving visual literacy, just another example of stretching outside the literacy box.

Barry Lane

Barry Lane is a writer who teaches writing. His book After THE END: Teaching and Learning Creative Revision has taught thousands of young writers the skills to enliven their writing, especially with “snapshots” and “thoughtshots.” Teachers can use his Hooked on Meaning video series to incorporate writing prompts and enjoyable skill instruction into their writing programs in a way that improves test scores and attitudes. Other books by Barry Lane include The Reviser’s Toolbox, But How Do You Teach Writing? and 51 Wacky We-Search Reports. He even has a CD of Recycled Fairy Tales that will help your students learn about perspective. Barry has taught writing in classrooms across the country, in university settings, and even in prisons. You will come away from your time with Barry smiling and loaded with practical teaching ideas to use as soon as you return to your classroom.

David M. Schwartz

David M. Schwartz is the author of over 50 books for children. He has traveled the world to learn about math and science, and, well, everything he can find. Then he shares what he learns to help math and science come alive for children and adults alike through his award-winning books and presentations, and in his blog, connecting math, science, literature, and everyday life. His exciting books include Where in the Wild?, If Dogs Were Dinosaurs, and How Much is a Million? This dynamic speaker’s energy is contagious, and he will inspire and renew you with his passion for teaching and learning.
Explore Literacy Outside the Box!

Danny Brassell

Spend some time at the 2011 conference Thursday with a reformed reluctant reader who is now dedicated to creating passionate readers! Danny Brassell, an Associate Professor at California State University, is the founder of the Lazy Readers’ Book Club, Google’s #1 ranked website for cool, short, “book club recommendations” for all ages. His experience as a classroom teacher ranges from working with pre-schoolers to rocket scientists, and his numerous articles and books include Comprehension That Works: Taking Students Beyond Ordinary Understanding to Deep Comprehension, co-authored with Tim Rasinski, and 75+ Reading Strategies: Boost Achievement and Build a Life-Long Love of Reading. Make it a point to attend at least one of Danny’s sessions—you will laugh and learn and come away ready to try something new that’s “out of the box.” He and Timothy Rasinski will be together for lunch on Thursday.

Timothy Rasinski

Timothy Rasinski is one of the country’s foremost experts on fluency. He has written over 200 articles and has authored, co-authored, or edited over 50 books or curriculum programs on reading education. He is author of the best selling book on reading fluency, The Fluent Reader and co-author of the award winning fluency program Fluency First. He is also co-author (with Danny Brassell) of Comprehension That Works: Taking Students Beyond Ordinary Understanding to Deep Comprehension. Timothy has served on the Board of Directors of the International Reading Association, as a teacher of Title I, elementary, and middle school in Nebraska, and as a professor of literacy education at Kent State University. He has received both the A.B. Herr and Laureate Awards from the College Reading Association and will team up with Danny Brassell for the Thursday luncheon.

Marion Blumenthal Lazan

Marion Blumenthal Lazan began speaking publicly about her Holocaust experiences in 1979. Since publication in 1996 of her memoir, Four Perfect Pebbles, co-authored by Lila Perl, over one million students and adults in 33 states, Germany, and Israel have heard her moving, first-hand account of the Blumenthal family’s life, including events preceding Kristallnacht, to imprisonment in Nazi concentration camps, and finally, to liberation. Marion has spoken at IRC conferences in the past and in over 100 Illinois communities, and each time, her audience comes away amazed, inspired, and with a clearer understanding of the Holocaust and of why its teaching is so important. She asks her audiences to be tolerant of others, to avoid stereotyping individuals, to be true to themselves, and to not blindly follow a leader. Her story is one of perseverance, determination, faith, and hope, and you will not want to miss it.
Embrace Literacy Outside the Box!

Jeff Anderson

Jeff Anderson—also known as the Write Guy—has worked with struggling writers and readers for almost 20 years. He enjoys sharing joyful strategies that have worked in his inner-city classrooms. In particular, he enjoys helping teachers integrate grammar and editing instruction into the processes of reading and writing. Jeff has written articles in NCTE’s Voices from the Middle and English Journal, as well as Educational Leadership. NCTE awarded Jeff with the Paul and Kate Farmer Award for his English Journal article on teaching grammar in context. He has published three books, Mechanically Inclined, The Craft of Grammar, and Everyday Editing, as well as three staff development DVDs. I’m sure you will start your day right on Thursday by having breakfast with the Write Guy.

Donalyn Miller

Toni Morrison said, “If there’s a book you really want to read but it hasn’t been written yet, then you must write it.” That’s just what Donalyn Miller did when she wrote the wildly popular book The Book Whisperer: Awakening the Inner Reader in Every Child. According to Donalyn, “Reading is the inhale and writing is the exhale.” She teaches sixth grade social studies and language arts in Texas, and she is the poster child for teaching literacy “outside the box.” She is able to awaken her ‘dormant’ readers and transform them into strong, capable, passionate readers who not only love books and reading, but who also achieve extraordinary levels on standardized tests! Her experiences using blogs, podcasts, and wikis to support reading and writing in her classroom will give you ideas galore for helping your students awaken their own passion for reading and writing. You will be able to get your students to read over fifty books in a year, just like hers do!

Patricia A. Edwards

Patricia A. Edwards, a distinguished professor of teacher education in the College of Education at Michigan State University, is president-elect of the International Reading Association and will become President in May, 2010. In addition to service in a number of capacities to IRA, she received the Elva Knight Research Award, the Michigan Reading Association Celebrate Literacy Award, and the prestigious Michigan State University 2001 Distinguished Faculty Award, among many others. She authored two nationally acclaimed family literacy programs: Parents as Partners in Reading: A Family Literacy Training Program and Talking Your Way to Literacy: A Program to Help Nonreading Parents Prepare Their Children for Reading. Patricia has taught in public schools and universities for over twenty-five years and has written countless books and articles focused on family/intergenerational literacy and emergent literacy. She is widely published and respected, and we are indeed fortunate that she will be joining us at our 2011 Conference.

Come Embrace Literacy Outside the Box! at the 2011 IRC Conference.
Ruth Culham

If you have used any of the writing traits materials, you won’t want to miss Ruth Culham—she is the world-renowned expert in this field! She has a passion for teaching writing and helping teachers and students that is unparalleled. A classroom teacher for 19 years, she was named English Teacher of the Year in Montana and has specialty degrees in Library Science, Elementary, Middle, and Secondary English Education. Her books and materials on the traits are research-based, practical, engaging, and most importantly—effective. Among her books are *6+1 Traits of Writing: The Complete Guide for Primary Grades*, *Using Picture Books to Teach Writing with the Traits*, *Writing to Prompts in the Trait Based Classroom: Content Areas*, and her newest book, *Traits of Writing: The Complete Guide for Middle School*.

Cindy Middendorf

Cindy Middendorf has more than 30 years experience teaching and learning in the classroom, the last 22 with kindergarteners. She has a reputation for practical, fun, teacher-friendly presentations loaded with use-it-tomorrow ideas, so you won’t want to miss this one! She has been honored as a Disney Teacher of the Year nominee, and was named to The National Honor Roll of Outstanding American Teachers. Her web site, [www.cindymiddendorf.com](http://www.cindymiddendorf.com), provides everything from classroom songs and poems to classroom management ideas. Her expertise on brain-based best practices in early literacy is evident in her three books: *Differentiating Instruction in Kindergarten*, *The Scholastic Differentiated Instruction Plan Book*, and *Building Oral Language Skills in PreK-K*.

Jacquie McTaggart

After spending 42 years teaching children in the classroom (and supervising 24 student teachers), Jacquie McTaggart turned her attention to helping teachers. Her books include *From the Teacher’s Desk* and *If They Don’t Learn the Way You Teach, Teach the Way They Learn* and have been described as common-sense, practical, insightful, easy-to-read, and elegant. But she doesn’t stop there—she maintains an interactive web site for teachers at [www.theteachersdesk.com](http://www.theteachersdesk.com), publishes a monthly online newsletter for teachers, mentors student writers, and provides professional development in numerous venues. Jacquie will share 60 high-quality, kid-friendly web sites that you can take back to your students to help them learn next week. (An extra bonus—some lucky attendee will win a door prize!)
The theme for the 2011 Illinois Reading Council Conference is **Literacy Outside the Box!** This idea has been brewing since I heard Jim Burke speak in 2007; he asked his audience to consider what constitutes reading—does listening to audio books count? After all, there is meaning-making involved. Here’s another question—does sending a text message in clipped spelling count as writing? Is it harmful, or could it help literacy skills in the long run? The shifting definition of reading and literacy is a trend that will continue as long as new technologies continue to shape our world and that of our students. Text format is not the only reason for thinking about **Literacy Outside the Box!**

Recent economic downturns and the resultant increased class size, emphases on RtI and other data-driven assessment, alternative schooling, second language learners, children who are homeless or have other emotional needs, and students from an array of cultures, require that teachers and literacy leaders adopt new ways of thinking about improving literacy skills.

It is critical that we stay current with our students’ needs and interests, and that we do what we can to prepare them for a world that none of us can conceptualize. As our students’ world expands exponentially due to technological advancements, our need to stay current expands along with it. Illinois Reading Council members and Illinois teachers in general have been innovative leaders for years, boldly adopting new perspectives and identifying creative options in order to meet the needs of their students. Plan to join some of the world’s best authors and internationally renowned literacy leaders at the 2011 Illinois Reading Council Conference. As we challenge ourselves to approach traditional literature in new ways and embrace the vast variety of potential that technology offers, we will indeed be pursuing **Literacy Outside the Box!**

**Don’t forget to** follow IRC Conference developments and learn more about your speakers by following the IRC Conference blog: [literacyoutsidethebox.blogspot.com](http://literacyoutsidethebox.blogspot.com).

Cindy Wilson
2011 Conference Chair