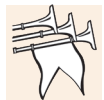




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**Chalkboard** is the newsletter of the Oregon Council of Teachers of English, an organization that has existed for 100 years to support teachers of English and the language arts in Oregon elementary and secondary schools, community colleges and universities.

**Chalkboard** is our way of keeping our many members and friends informed about OCTE activities, programs of the National Council of Teachers of English, conferences and learning opportunities for students, research tidbits, book recommendations, and more.

**Chalkboard** is a member of the NCTE Information Exchange.

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# Chalkboard

WWW.OCTE.ORG

PETER THACKER, EDITOR

## NW REGIONAL NCTE CONFERENCE

March 1-3, 2014 ~ Portland  
PORTLAND MARRIOTT DOWNTOWN



Jim Burke

What is happening on March 1st and 2nd? We thought you might like to re-think images of late morning bed rest to join other impassioned English teachers restive for new ideas and scintillating conversations.

You will be "Leading the Way" surrounded by cohorts from over twenty states. They will range from first grade to graduate school teachers, from AP instructors to ESL experts, from parents to researchers, from authors to critics.

You can sample strands from Rethinking Schools, the Writing Project, the American Library Association, and William Stafford's centennial celebration. You can hear

180 Presenters • 140 Sessions • 3 Post-conference Institutes  
Common Core • Reading & Writing Instruction • Technology Authors  
Assessment Practices • Social Justice

national luminaries Chris Crutcher, Carol Jago, Jim Burke, Linda Christensen, and Joanne Yatvin, not to mention Kim Stafford, Allen Say, Virginia Euwer Wolff, Penny Plavala, John Golden, Joan Kaywell, and Tim Gillespie.

Sessions on CCSS abound as do those addressing literacy across the curriculum and social studies workshops to tickle the fancy of you middle school language arts/social studies aficionados. In other words, this is a dream conference for those who revel in the teaching of reading, writing, and discussion, those like you who love to engage with ideas and possibility. Join us in Portland at the Marriott Downtown Waterfront for gorgeous views and a community of engaged thinkers.



Yong Zhao

## Oregon English Journal Wins Again



The *Oregon English Journal* received the 2013 NCTE **Outstanding Affiliate Journal** award for the "Literature across Borders" issue, guest-edited by Tim Gillespie. Most recently, the *OEJ* had also won the 2011 award for its themed issue on "New Uses of Technology in Schools."

The next themed issue in spring 2014 is "Working with Reluctant Readers and Writers." If you'd like to submit an article, you can find the call for manuscripts on our website: <http://www.octe.org/oregon-english-journal.html>

*Submission deadline is February 1, 2014.*



# 30<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL OREGON WRITING FESTIVAL Saturday, May 3, 2014 ~ Portland State University

The Oregon Writing Festival is an annual event designed to recognize and encourage the efforts of Oregon students and teachers to improve writing. It is co-sponsored by the Oregon Council of Teachers of English and the Graduate School of Education at Portland State University. More than 800 students from across the state participate every year. Join us on the 30th anniversary.

## Keynote Speakers



Grades 4–5

**Matt Holm** is author/illustrator (with his sister Jennifer) of the enormously popular *Babymouse* and *Squish* series, including *Babymouse: Rock Star* and *Babymouse: Mad Scientist*, and *Squish: Super Amoeba*. Book number 18 of *Babymouse* will appear just before the May 3 Writing Festival.



Grades 6–8

Featured frequently on the *New York Times* bestseller list, **April Henry** has written more than a dozen mysteries and thrillers that students can't wait to get their hands on. Her books are igniting a love for reading. They include *Girl, Stolen*; *Torched*; *Shock Point*, and *The Night She Disappeared*.



Grades 9–12

Author **Kim Stafford** writes in many genres. He's the founding director of the Northwest Writing Institute at Lewis & Clark College. His books include *100 Tricks Every Boy Can Do* (a memoir), *The Muses among Us* (a book about writing and teaching), and *Early Morning: Remembering My Father, William Stafford*.

## OCTE Fall Conference Recap

The Fall OCTE Conference was a great success highlighted by wonderful presenters and authors. Upon arrival, OCTE gifted each participant with a book by one of the Oregon Spirit Book Award winners, a special treat for all those who chose to spend their Saturday with us. Teachers chose from many literacy sessions, then heard Roland Smith who captivated us with his humor, connections to young readers, and stories of outdoor adventure during the General Session. At lunch, participants had their books autographed, conversed with other teachers, and browsed through the many books and materials in exhibitors' booths. Our day ended with Penny Plavala leading us through new learning around the Common Core, a raffle of books, and celebrating 100 years of OCTE with birthday cake.

The OCTE board wants to thank all those presenters who made our Fall Conference a quality experience. Presenting at an OCTE conference is an excellent way to share your expertise, to meet other English Language Arts teachers, and to help shape the future of our organization and profession. Do you have an idea for a presentation? An instructional model you've developed? Strategies that have worked well in your classroom? Consider presenting next year at our 2014 OCTE Fall Conference. Proposal forms will be available in early spring at <http://www.octe.org>.

—Heidi Hanson, Conference Chair

## WEBSITE WINS TOO!

Our much-improved OCTE Website under webmaster Jenny Gapp was recognized by NCTE with its **2013 Affiliate Website Honorable Mention Award**. Jenny says she's not stopping there! Check out the Website (<http://www.octe.org/>) and keep up with OCTE's centennial-year activities.





# A Letter from the Editor

As your editor and now a state policy analyst for NCTE, I will be catching you up on issues that affect us as educators. As English teachers we must be concerned at our school districts' and state's mandates that hurt students and hinder good practice. Recently I was distressed by a report in *The Oregonian* (9/12/13) that 90% of ESL, 80% of SPED, 60% of African-American and 40% of all entering seniors had yet to pass the writing sample now necessary to get a high school diploma. Once again those who don't teach make absurd policies that cannot stand up because the public won't stand for that level of failure. Remember when the Certificate of Initial Mastery (CIM) was proposed as a sophomore standard? Only 15% of students in the state were certificate-ready when the CIM was piloted. However, at the State Superintendent's insistence, we proceeded. Within a couple years the certificate was moved to the senior year and within another few years, the CIM was abandoned.



The sad, if not devastating, facts are that students lose confidence, even interest, in writing, and schools and English teachers are blamed for poorly preparing students. The corollary becomes: Public schools aren't working, bring on the private sector. I urge all of us to start asking the big questions: Are students truly failing? Are we truly failing our students? Why are our expectations of students ratcheting up when resources to help students are precipitously diminishing? Why is the state instituting this graduation requirement? How can we reverse this decision until adequate resources are in place to help guide students as writers? This situation is no small matter. Start speaking up!

While you are at it, show solidarity with Portland teachers as they approach a potential strike. They fight for all of us, students and teachers, when they demand that high school class loads be capped.

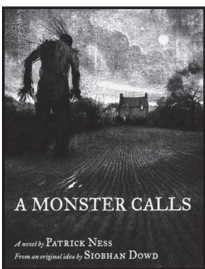
And now another unsupportable mandate. Why would so many (almost 16,000 according to *The Oregonian*) students be failing the state writing test, jeopardizing their graduation? Instead of keeping class size at a level that allows us to respond with depth to student writing, English teachers are now being saddled with class loads ranging from 180 to over 200 students. What can the state expect?

Not every letter I write will be so calamitous, but goodness gracious...!

Yours,  
Peter Thacker

As newly-minted editor of *Chalkboard*, I have asked teachers to submit student reviews of the winners of Oregon Reader's Choice Awards (ORCA) and Oregon Spirit Book Awards and other books of distinction. We have chosen two reviews of ORCA books submitted by Stuart Levy, librarian/teacher at Inza R. Wood Middle School in Wilsonville to present in this issue. We are so honored to have Logan and Leo inaugurating what we hope will become an on-going feature of our newsletter. (The pieces have been edited for length and ease of reading.)

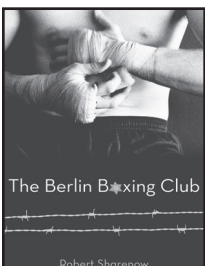
# READ THIS!



**Review of *A Monster Calls* by Patrick Ness**  
(Middle School Division Award Winner)

An amazing story of great heartache told beautifully by Patrick Ness. Conor's mom has cancer and he can't bring himself to think about the truth: that he wishes she'd either get better or die because the not-knowing is too great for him to bear. In fact, he has the nightmare every night about it. Meanwhile, all Conor wants is to be punished for anything because he thinks the truth is such a terrible thing to believe. However, no one thinks he should be punished because, well, his mom has cancer. and the school bully is so mean he completely ignores Conor. At the end, the saddest possible thing happens...

Reviewer: Logan



**Review of *The Berlin Boxing Club* by Robert Sharenow**  
(High School Division Award Winner)

When I first looked at the Berlin Boxing Club, it looked like boring historical fiction that I would never want to read in my life. Then I started to read and was immediately immersed in the world of Karl Stern and the troubles of his half Jewish family. When Hitler rises to power, Karl is beaten up at school. His father gives him boxing lessons with the famous German boxer Max Schleming so he can protect himself. As Hitler comes into more power, the book takes a turn for the worse...

Reviewer Leo

## *Please Post*

# OCTE MEMBERSHIP GROWTH

OCTE received the **2013 NCTE Membership Recruitment Award** recently for a 22 percent increase of members from 2012. Membership is only \$25 (\$10 if you are a full-time student), and you receive the award-winning *Oregon English Journal*, lower conference registration, and so much more. <http://www.octe.org/join-octe.html>

*A terrific gift for your teacher friends!*



## OREGON POETRY ASSOCIATION STUDENT CONTEST INVITATION

Teachers are invited to encourage your students to revise and select their best poem to enter the **Oregon Poetry Association Annual Contest** by the 10th of Feb, 2014. For contest rules and details: <http://oregonpoets.org/contests/student-contest/>

Also, questions can be emailed to Steve Jones, contest co-chair at [srjones24407@gmail.com](mailto:srjones24407@gmail.com). The contest will award 40 cash prizes and publication in an OPA student anthology, *Cascadia*, in four grade divisions: I. K-2nd, II. 3rd-5th, III. 6th-8th and IV. 9th-12th. The contest will be judged by published poets and writing teachers, who understand and appreciate vivid and playful poems.