A Letter to Teachers

from **Kylene Beers,** Senior Reading Advisor
Teachers College Reading and Writing Project
Columbia University, New York, NY

Dear Educator:

For almost a quarter of a century, *Elements of Literature* has set the standard for bringing the best research and teaching expertise in language arts to classroom practitioners who apply research in real classrooms with real students. Holt's unwavering goal for *Elements of Literature* has been applying the best instructional research to classroom practice. This consistent commitment to good teaching has made me feel at home at Holt as program author and in my work with struggling middle-school students.

In late 2005, the author, consultant, and editorial teams began talking about what was then just an upcoming edition, but, over the next several years, became the book you now hold. "What will be critical in literacy education during the next decade?" we asked. The answer was apparent: Holding on to the power of timeless literature while responding to the shifting literacy demands of the 21st century, incorporating effective use of technology in the classroom, honoring the growing diversity of our students, and addressing the range of skills students bring to the classroom. All of these priorities play themselves out against the backdrop of the increasing pressure that you—the teacher—feels each day as you teach a standards-based curriculum. Never before has good teaching been as critical, demanding and absolutely necessary for our students' success.

Kylene Beers's letter continues on next page.

WHEN THERE'S MORE TO KNOW ABOUT READING INSTRUCTION…

Beers, K. 2002. *When Kids Can't Read/What Teachers Can Do.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Beers, K., Probst, R., and Rief, L., eds. 2007. *Adolescent Literacy: Turning Promise into Practice.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Alliance for Excellent Education. 2004. *Reading Next: A Vision for Action & Research in Middle and High School Literacy.* Literacy.

For more from Kylene Beers… go to thinkcentral.com



Each of us who has contributed to this edition—editors, consultants, reviewers, and authors—has done so because we believe that in teaching all students we must first teach each student, and that each student is a promise of a better tomorrow. We contributed our time to this project because we believe that what you do and what you say to the students in your classroom make an incredible difference. Now, please let me introduce you to the other members of the author team. We are all proud to call you a colleague and to join the journey you now begin with your students.

PROGRAM AUTHORS:

Kylene Beers

Carol Jago

Deborah Appleman

Leila Christenbury

Sara Kajder

Linda Rief

Carol Jago

The book you hold now is the result of a collaborative effort of authors, consultants, editors and classroom teachers who, together, considered the issues in language arts instruction for the twenty-first century.

As you look through the pages, you'll see the influence of Carol Jago, who constantly returned us to the backbone of this series—great literature:

"Words. Words. Words." That's all they are, yet when the words are Shakespeare's they have the power to transport readers. I want students to enjoy contemporary literature for all that it brings to their lives; but I also want them to read the classics so they can see the wine dark sea through Homer's eyes and reflect on ways that human nature, for better and for worse, remains surprisingly constant through the ages. Great literature is a window to times and places we can never travel except on the page. With Emily Dickinson I believe that there really "is no frigate like a book to take us lands away."

Carol Jago
Teacher, Santa Monica High School, California
Director, California Reading and Literature Project, UCLA
Author, Heinemann Publishers
Board Member, National Council of Teachers of English, Los Angeles, CA



WHEN THERE'S MORE TO KNOW ABOUT TEACHING THE CLASSICS…

Jago, C. 2000. *With Rigor for All: Teaching the Classics to Contemporary Students.* Portsmouth: Heinemann.

Calvino, I. 1999. *Why Read the Classics.* New York: Pantheon.

For more from Carol Jago… go to thinkcentral.com

Deborah Appleman

Finally, we would come full circle in our discussions as Deborah Appleman kept us focused on why studying literature is so important. Her vision of literature instruction helped guide the entire project:



"Reading literature is one of the few school subjects that is also recreation. How, then, should teachers approach literature in ways that encourage students to both love literature and to learn from it? Although literature remains a powerful site for self-exploration, it is also an opportunity to enter textual worlds far different from one's own experiences. Our job is to teach them the critical tools that help them read closely as well as to interpret broadly."

Deborah Appleman
Professor and Chair, Educational Studies
Carlton College, Northfield, MN

WHEN THERE'S MORE TO KNOW ABOUT TEACHING LITERATURE…

Appleman, D. 2000. *Critical Encounters in High School English.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Scholes, R. 2001. *The Crafty Reader.* New Haven: Yale University Press

For more from Deborah Appleman… go to thinkcentral.com

Leila Christenbury

You'll note teaching tips and powerful instructional strategies that were the direct result of Leila Christenbury's efforts. Leila reminded us that great literature without effective practice of informed teachers means little:



"Even though schools are large and busy places with hundreds of students and adults interacting every day, the fact is that most teachers work alone and often feel isolated. Reaching out to other teachers, reading professional literature and going to conferences, finding and using the many resources available can open up classrooms and connect teachers to a world of effective strategies and appropriate support. This connection is crucial; the practices of informed teachers make a critical difference in student achievement."

Leila Christenbury
Professor of English Education
Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA

WHEN THERE'S MORE TO KNOW ABOUT GOOD TEACHING…

Christenbury, L. (2006). *Making the journey: Being and becoming a teacher of English language arts.* 3rd ed. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Website: read/write/think.org

Journals: *English Journal, Voices from the Middle*

For more from Leila Christenbury… go to thinkcentral.com

Sara Kajder

The literacy demands of the 21st century are, of course, tied to a world that is increasingly more networked, more wired, more dependent on a wide range of technology. As Sara Kajder constantly pushed us to remember…

> *"Equipping our students with 21st-century literacies means, in part, expanding the technology toolset students use as readers and writers. But that shouldn't surprise us because literacy has always been intimately tied to technology. We must teach them how to synthesize a range of texts that appear on a screen at lightening speed and communicate to authentic, global, wired audiences with the explosion of new tools, modes, and media now made readily accessible by Web 2.0."*

Sara Kajder
Assistant Professor
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, VA



WHEN THERE'S MORE TO KNOW ABOUT TECHNOLOGY…

Kajder, S. 2003. *The Tech-Savvy English Classroom.* Portland, ME: Stenhouse.

Alvermann, D. 2007. "Multiliterate Youth In the Time of Scientific Reading Instruction." In *Adolescent Literacy: Turning Promise into Practice* edited by K. Beers, R. Probst, and L. Rief. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, pp 19-26.

For more from Sara Kajder… go to thinkcentral.com

Linda Rief

As much as I'd push us toward reading, Linda Rief would push back, showing us time and again that we want students who read as a writer and write as a reader. As Linda put it…

> *"Writing, every bit as much as reading, helps our students become literate, articulate, and thoughtful citizens of the world. Reciprocal processes, both require capturing and working out meaning. When students are given opportunities to write about their reading—short, quick responses to questions—What did this reading bring to mind? What questions did it raise? How does this alter or confirm my view of the world?—our classrooms become laboratories of high level thinking and our students become problem-solvers and producers of ideas. They move from just answering to questioning, just knowing to creating, just consuming to producing."*

Linda Rief
Instructor, University of New Hampshire
Summer Literacy Institute
Teacher, Oyster River Middle School, Durham, NH



WHEN THERE'S MORE TO KNOW ABOUT WRITING…

Rief, L. 2003. *Quickwrites.* NY: Scholastic.

Alliance for Excellent Education. 2007. *Writing Next: Effective Strategies to Improve Writing of Adolescents in Middle and High Schools.*

For more from Linda Rief… go to thinkcentral.com

Real Issues, Real Experts

Holt's program consultants come from richly varied areas of educational expertise to ensure that the program meets the disparate needs of your classroom—students who have comprehension problems or are learning English as a second language, who are visual learners or are disengaged. These specialists have done the research and provided the best practices to help you do the best for your students.

Comprehension



"Too many students do not leave a text with an understanding of an author's ideas. This shuts them out of rich opportunities to make contact with life lessons and human universals that literature offers, not to mention experience with the exquisite language that expresses such ideas."

Beck and McKeown developed an approach to comprehension called Questioning the Author which is the basis of many of the During Reading questions in *Elements of Literature.*

Isabel L. Beck
Professor, Department of Instruction and Learning
Senior Researcher, Learning Research and Development Center
University of Pittsburgh, PA



"Questioning the Author has been shown to be successful in supporting students to develop meaning from what they read and a coherent understanding of a text."

Students build comprehension as they read by using the sequenced questions built into *Elements of Literature.*

Margaret McKeown
Senior Scientist, Learning Research and Development Center
University of Pittsburgh, PA

Grammar in Context



"Along with diction and rhetoric, grammar is organic to the crafting of sentences and text. Writers with an awareness of grammar can make informed choices about how word order affects meaning. We can make our students better writers if we teach them to use grammatical knowledge."

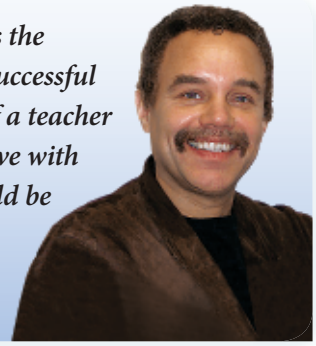
The Grammar Link feature in *Elements of Literature* offers students contextual examples drawn from the literature to help them better craft their writing.

Amy Benjamin
President of the Assembly for the Teaching of English Grammar
Consultant for National Council of Teachers
Recipient of Excellence in Teaching Awards from Tufts University and New York State English Council

For more from Real Issues, Real Experts . . . go to thinkcentral.com

Adolescent Literacy

For many students, the teacher is the individual most responsible for successful lives. Who can deny the power of a teacher who enables students to fall in love with learning? Academic success should be an opportunity for all, not just a gift to some.

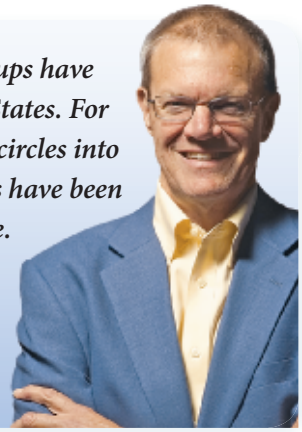


Eric Cooper has reviewed both *Elements of Literature* and *African American Literature.*

Eric Cooper
President for National Urban Alliance for Effective Education

Literature Circles

Over the past decade, reading groups have just about doubled in the United States. For teachers trying to bring literature circles into our schools, these adult book clubs have been our implicit model—our prototype. Adult book clubs are voluntary groups of friends that create a powerful and caring community among us.



The Read On feature of *Elements of Literature* and Holt Leveled Library offer opportunities for bringing literature circles into the classroom.

Harvey Daniels
National-Louis University, Chicago, IL

Visual Arts and Literacy

Art opens new ways of seeing the world. Through art, students can often find new ways of seeing literature and new language for expressing those insights.



Analyzing Visuals gives students a concrete expression of the principles used in visuals and in literary analysis.

Ben Garcia
J. Paul Getty Museum
Education Specialist, School Programs, Los Angeles, CA

When students learn to "read" visuals, they start seeing connections and themes and they become more astute readers of other media and of literature.

Analyzing Visuals appears at the beginning of each Collection and within selections.

Victoria Ramirez
Museum of Fine Arts
Interim Education Director, Houston, TX

Adolescent Literacy



Taking Action on Adolescent Literacy is the title of my recently published book. It incorporates my life's work. Motivating students to engage with meaningful reading and writing in content area classes is the key to their achievement. Improved literacy and learning must be supported by a school wide effort to create a literacy-rich environment for students.

See Judith Irving in the Professional Learning Video *Reading Narrative and Expository Text.*

Judith Irvin
Professor, Department of Educational Leadership and Policy
Florida State University

English Language Development



Teaching is assisting students' performance at the Zone of Proximal Development (Tharp & Gallimore, *1988). This requires an understanding of the means for assisting students during literacy activities that are socio-culturally meaningful. My research is focused on unfolding those socio-cultural components to be used as tools for effective teaching practices.*

The English Language Development Program addresses the acquisition of critical English language skills.

Hector Rivera
Assistant Professor, School of Education and Human Development
Southern Methodist University, Dallas, TX

English Language Development



Many students enter our classrooms without the basic skills in English that they need to be successful. We want to support teachers in meeting the needs of those students and provide a program with a literary base that is accessible to those students.

English Language Development is a program that helps students who are acquiring English to get the critical skills they need.

Mabel Rivera
Research Assistant Professor, Texas Institute for Measurement, Evaluation, and Statistics, University of Houston

For more from Real Issues, Real Experts . . . go to thinkcentral.com

Academic Vocabulary



In many cities and school districts, students who are acquiring English are the fastest growing population. Acquiring academic language, the language that is used in schools, in testing and in scholarly discourse, is the key to success for these students.

Academic Vocabulary is introduced at the beginning of each Collection and reinforced throughout it so that students can master it.

Robin Scarcella
Director, Program in Academic English/English as a Second Language
University of California, Irvine, CA

Differentiated Instruction



When you change the way you look at your students with disabilities, the way those students look to you will change. You will see the possibilities, and in that vision, you will see the power of the inclusion.

Meeting the needs of a wide range of abilities is at the core of *Elements of Literature,* with scaffolded instruction for the student and suggestions in the Teacher's Edition for the instructor.

Patrick Schwarz
Professor, Diversity in Learning and Development Department
National Louis University, Chicago, IL

Adolescent Literacy



We need take an honest position with regard to the literacy development of African American adolescent males. Neither effective reading strategies nor comprehensive literacy reform will close the achievement gap … unless meaningful texts are at the core of the curriculum.

Elements of Literature and *African American Literature* provide meaningful texts as well as effective reading and comprehension strategies. Alfred Tatum talks about engaging African American males on the Professional Learning Videos.

Alfred Tatum
Associate Professor, Department of Curriculum and Instruction
University of Illinois, Chicago, IL