

READING SCENE

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

| | |
|---|-----|
| <i>Award Winners</i> | 2 |
| <i>Book Banter</i> | 3-4 |
| <i>Preparing for 2004 Legislative Session</i> | 5-6 |

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

BY BONNIE TALLUTO

I am very proud to be a member of the New York Reading Association. Membership in our group allows us to freely discuss educational research and practices with a broad spectrum of professionals. As we look to our future we will advocate for effective comprehension practices, vocabulary instruction and middle school success by getting legislation passed for stronger teacher preparation and better libraries.

We will continue to share our personal "Focus on Practice" (The Language and Literacy Spectrum," vol 13, Spring 2003) with each other to this end. That was the main reason the New York State Reading Association was founded in 1965. You will see the depth and breadth of our membership reflected in the presenters at our 37th Annual Conference, November 22 – 25, 2003 at the New York Marriott Marquis in Times Square and in the authors and articles in the Spectrum.

It is amazing how our mission to promote a literate, democratic society that values lifelong learning for its diverse cultures is reflected across New York State in our NYSRA Conference 2003, Constructing Our Future: Creating Literate Lives program, The Language and Literacy Spectrum, Reading Scene, local council and Assembly of Delegates agendas. Let's continue to work together for the good of students in New York State.

I guess we all do talk to each other! Congratulations!

Bonnie Talluto, President 2003-04



Reading Scene

New York State Reading Association

Chartered by the
International Reading Association

Editors.....Dorothy Spear

President's Message.....Bonnie Talluto, President 2003-2004

Columnists.....Peter Manella, Francine Stayter,

The Children's Literature Committee

Contributors to this issue.....Bonnie Talluto, Kelly Rhine-Abiodun

AWARD WINNERS

On November 22, 2003, a reception will be held during the 2003 NYSRA Conference at the Marriott Marquis Hotel in Manhattan to honor the following NYSRA Award Winners. Congratulations goes to:

Literacy Mini-Grant Recipient
Rita Laskin, Scotchtown Elementary School

Reading Teacher of the Year Recipient
Cindy Pauldine,
Oswego City School District

Elementary/Secondary Teacher of the Year Recipient
Kelly A. Rhine-Abiodun, Valley Central School District

Exemplary Reading Program Award Recipient
Hawthorne Elementary School



Council Service Awards

Congratulations to the following 2003 Council Service Award Recipients. Each member was selected by their individual council for being in good standing, being active in local council activities, and for making significant contributions to local council programs. They will be honored at the 2003 NYSRA Conference at the Marriott Marquis Hotel in Manhattan on Saturday, November 22nd at the 5 p.m. reception.

- > Kathleen Conway-Gervais- Nassau Reading Council
- > Debi Costa- Suffolk Reading Council
- > Stiles Najac- Amy Bull Crist
- > Lesley Oransky- Rockland Reading Council
- > Beth Peller- Brooklyn Reading Council
- > Jan Peters- North Country Council of IRA
- > Kelly Rhine-Abiodun- Ulster
- > Dennis Rowen- Sullivan Reading Council
- > Greta Woo- Mid Hudson
- > Karen Young- Oswego Reading Council
- > Andrea Miale-Bronx Reading Council
- > Rochelle Sanders-Brooklyn Reading Council
- > Edith Brooks-Manhattan Reading Council
- > Evette Gonzalez-Queensboro Council of Reading
- > Rosemarie Leto-Staten Island Reading Council

BOOK BANTER

FALL 2003

In **Once Upon a Time** (Farrar, Straus, Giroux, '03) author Niki Daly tells the story of Sarie, a young girl in Africa who does not like to read aloud in school. She feels embarrassed when she stumbles over words she doesn't know. Her friend, Auntie Anna, understands the problem Sarie is facing. Auntie Anna likes to sit in an old rusted, non-working automobile and make long imaginary trips. Each Sunday Sarie is invited to join her. On one occasion, Sarie finds a book in the car. She gets all excited about the book and wants Auntie Anna to read it to her, but instead they read it together. Sarie takes the book to school and discovers that her teacher has the same book. With practice and encouragement each week, Sarie finally learns to read comfortably. This beautiful picture book underlines some of the differences between American and African schools, and focuses on the similarities of the feelings of children who are uncomfortable as they try to learn to read. This is a great book for the Primary grades.

The Berry Picking Man (Farrar, Straus, Giroux, '03) by Jane Buchanan is a story of how a girl bonds with both her mother and a lonely, ill, berry picking man. Old Sam has no friends or family. When he needs help, he calls on Meggie's mother, who always drops what she is doing to help him. Meggie, being the youngest, is frequently brought along on these missions, often unwillingly. After being hit by a car while on the way to someone's house for Christmas, Old Sam is sent to the hospital. Later discharged, and wheel-chair bound, he goes home. Meggie is guilt-ridden and asks her father to bring Old Sam to their house for Christmas. Meggie's sisters are not too happy with Old Sam at their house. During his stay Meggie realizes that she doesn't have to like Sam to care about his feelings. She gives him a jar of pickles (his favorite food). Her sisters also get the Christmas spirit and give gifts to Old Sam. These acts of kindness renew the friendship and camaraderie among the three sisters. This book would make a great read-aloud for Third to Fifth Grade anytime, but especially around the winter holidays.



When John, a British demolition expert, is killed in an explosion in Russia, his fiancée Annie and his younger sister Hayley decide to travel to Siberia to see if they can discover what really happened, because they both firmly believe that John was far too careful to let himself be blown up in one of the buildings he was hired to demolish.

In **Phoning a Dead Man** (Holiday House, '03) they discover a connection with the Russian Mafia. There is the possibility that John's death was staged and he may still be alive somewhere.

Author Gillian Cross generates excitement and suspense throughout the novel by weaving his story line through the perspective of several characters. This is often a gripping novel, suitable for upper junior and senior high school students.

George Washington's Teeth (Farrar, Straus, Giroux, '03) by Deborah Chandra and Madeleine Comora uses verse to create a great read-aloud, involving students in predicting the ending rhymes. The story recounts historical events during the adulthood of George Washington, as well as personal challenges he faced at the time of those events. This would be an excellent book to use around George Washington's birthday. It culminates with a listing of interesting facts about Washington and the American Revolution. Superbly selected photos and illustrations by Brock Cole make this book enjoyable for anyone over the age of eight.

Gail Gibbons has done it again! **Tell Me, Tree** (Little, Brown, '03) is a nonfiction picture book that could be used in just about any elementary classroom, but is more suitable for the upper elementary grades. It contains a great deal of information about trees including their different kinds, their parts, how we identify them and how the process of photosynthesis works. The book also shows students how to make a book of leaf prints. If you haven't seen a Gibbons picture book this—or **Halloween** (Holiday House, '02)—would be a good beginning. Ms. Gibbons brings the Halloween customs and beliefs of the past to life with her very special illustrations.



Merry Christmas Big Hungry Bear (Blue Sky Press, '02) by Don and Audrey Wood, is a delightful holiday story for all ages about a friendship between a mouse and a big hungry bear. With its colorful illustrations and large print, this book can easily be used as a read-aloud for Primary ages. It is a nice way to explain to others how much more special it feels to give than to receive.

Someday (Orchard Books, '02) by Jackie French Koller is set in a small town in Massachusetts about 1938. Celie and her family have lived in their house for generations but their house and town have been slated to be torn down to make way for a reservoir for the people of Boston. For years the project has been talked about: "...Someday it will happen." Well, that someday is now. Ms. Koller shows us how Celie and her family cope with seeing their land move forever under water.

Ann Rinaldi's **...or give me death** (Harcourt, '03) is a novel about Patrick Henry's family. Sarah Henry, Patrick's wife, is slowly losing her mind and is confined to the cellar of their home. (In those days it was there, or the lunatic asylum!) Since Mr. Henry is away advocating independence for the colonies their children must take care of the plantation as well as their ailing mother. Much of the responsibility falls to Anne, the oldest female. Each of the five Henry children are very affected by their Mom's illness, and their father's frequent absences. This absorbing novel would be terrific paired with **Give Me Liberty** (Scholastic, '03), a non-fictional account of the Revolutionary Period.

Here are some books that describe life in other areas of the world, that might help our students better understand how different circumstances can shape our lives.

Year of No Rain (Farrar, Straus, Giroux, '03) by Alice Mead is the haunting story of one boy's life after his village is attacked, leading to his displacement, and his desire to return home. Ms. Mead gives a brief history of the civil war which has raged almost continuously since 1983 in southern Sudan, to create the background against which to tell Stephan's story. This book is truly special because it does portray a real picture of life in the widely scattered villages of the Sudan. It gives readers just a peek at the courage displayed by children who just want to live with their families without constant fear of attack.

Zulu Dog (Farrar, Straus, Giroux, '02) by Anton Ferreira is also set in Africa but this time the location is South Africa, near the Port of Durban on the Indian Ocean coast. Through Vusi, an eleven-year-old Zulu boy, Ferreira shows many details of tribal life. Gillette is Vusi's dog, with razor-sharp teeth, who helps him develop a friendship with the daughter of a neighboring white farmer. This friendship has a decisive impact on Vusi's whole family. There is hope that a new generation of South Africans will build a better future by overcoming the deep hatred bred by apartheid.

Chang and the Bamboo Flute (Farrar, Straus, Giroux, '02) by Elizabeth Starr Hill is a story about a mute Chinese boy and his friend Mei Mei. Chang lives on a houseboat on the Li River in southern China. His father uses cormorants to fish downstream by the ocean. This sixty-page book gives a glimpse of the life of poverty faced by a family totally dependent on the vagaries of weather. Floods, for example, can wipe away almost everything; but not the strength within. *And that is the lesson in this paradoxically up-lifting tale: that in the face of natural calamity our courage, our spirit to survive, may be all we have, and it is sufficient.*



NYSRA Children's Literature Committee
Esther Berkowitz, Suzanne Cecil, Faye Cohen,
Debbie Dermady, Tom Havens, Linda LaRou;
Alice Sample (Chairperson)
*For past Book Banter go to nysreading.org and
click on Book Banter.*

Preparing for the 2004 Legislative Session

It's right around the corner. The 2004 Legislative session convenes on January 5, 2004, with the presentation by the Governor of his annual State of the State message and the introduction of his 2004-2005 budget proposal.

As we approach the commencement of the session, all involved in education issues are girding for what could be a long and difficult process. Some points to keep in mind:

- ❖ this is an election year for all Assembly Members and Senators -- but NOT for the Governor;
- ❖ the state is running a significant (multi-billion dollar) budget deficit for the second consecutive year with no hope for improvement in the immediate future;
- ❖ the ruling of the courts in the Campaign for Fiscal Equity case is putting substantial pressure on lawmakers and others to resolve the education financing issue;
- ❖ No Child Left Behind is putting new strains on our schools and school professionals.

Such a combination of factors contributes to the likelihood that the 2004 session will be contentious and draw some very clear lines in the sand. And that scenario makes it important that reading professionals -- members of NYSRA -- be prepared to make frequent and substantive contacts with legislators and Regents and others involved in the decision-making process.

There are three levels of "homework" to making such contacts:

- ✓ whom to contact;
- ✓ what is the message;
- ✓ what information can be shared.

In terms of whom to contact and what information can be shared, NYSRA members are alerted to keep posted to the NYSRA website for updates on making contact. We will use the web-site as much as possible for updates, alerts, collateral materials, and sample contact letters and messages. In a year such as we foresee ahead, it will be important that as many members as possible get involved in such contacts with our legislators.

In terms of the basic message, NYSRA members should become familiar with the following key issues that will form the foundation for our state advocacy efforts this year. They begin with an understanding that NYSRA will strongly support reading professionals and methods.

Moreover, particularly in light of the \$169 million Reading First program grant, we need to advocate against allowing a limited view of research to distort reading instruction in the state. We must consistently remind others that neither phonemic awareness nor phonics - though important elements in learning - is sufficient in the development of literacy.

We will also focus on ensuring access to effective and purposeful professional development opportunities. To this end, it is important that Regional School Support Center staff include professionals with reading (vs. special ed., curriculum, or other) certifications. Those who provide professional development to thousands of teachers in developing methods and materials will have a long-term impact on reading instruction and instructional materials in the state. As such, they need to be grounded in proper and research-based practices and methods and include reading professionals.

*No Child Left Behind
is putting new strains on
our schools and school
professionals.*

With this as background, we outline several legislative and budgetary positions that will serve as the focal points for our advocacy in the coming legislative session:

- ❖ support for a comprehensive literacy instruction that reflects current research, but does not limit instruction to a narrow interpretation of the those results; never losing sight that comprehension is the goal;
- ❖ ensure that students in need of reading skills enrichment under Academic Intervention Services have access to a certified reading teacher;
- ❖ ensure that students in lower performing school districts have access to certified reading teachers, quality textbooks and adequately equipped and staffed school libraries;
- ❖ support for programs and staff development that enhance adolescent literacy development and instruction;
- ❖ ensure that Regional School Support Centers and agencies implementing Reading First staff development are staffed with certified reading specialists;
- ❖ ensure that there is more effective communication and collaboration among SED, K-12, and teacher educators in higher education;
- ❖ ensure that those who prepare pre-service teachers to teach reading and writing are themselves certified as reading specialists;
- ❖ support for the inclusion of members of this professional organization on those task forces and boards created by SED for issues related to literacy;
- ❖ support for the provisions of the New Centuries Libraries Act including requiring school libraries in all elementary schools, and employing certified school library media specialists;
- ❖ increased appropriations for Educationally Related Support Services Aid as a means to supporting the learning needs of all children;
- ❖ support continued investment in smaller class sizes in the earlier grades as well as for universal pre-kindergarten services.

As the legislative session unfolds, NYSRA will issue statements relating to the Governor's proposed state budget as well as various specific legislative initiatives on these topics and others. In addition, we will offer comments and input for policies and actions being considered by the State Board of Regents.

Again, it will be a difficult year for legislative advocacy -- but an important year. All NYSRA members are urged to get involved in our advocacy efforts. We promise to provide the tools, the information and the access. We ask that you commit to sharing your time to get involved in these important efforts.

**New York State
Reading Association**

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We're on the web!
www.nysreading.org



At Large Membership Registration Form

New York State Reading Association 2003 – 04

Membership Year is May 16, 2003 – May 15, 2004

Please complete all parts of this Membership Registration form.

Last Name _____ First _____ Middle _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Home Phone _____ Business Phone _____

Fax _____ E-mail _____

School District/Company _____

Position _____

Are you a former member of NYSRA? _____ YES _____ NO _____

If yes, which Council? _____

Membership \$35.00 _____

Language and Literacy Spectrum subscription \$5.00 _____

Total _____

Mail with your check or Purchase Order payable to: New York State Reading Association

Or, pay by credit card:

Visa _____ Mastercard _____ Discover _____ American Express _____

Name on card: _____

Credit card number: _____

Expiration date: _____

Signature: _____

Mail to:

Membership
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Albany, NY 12201-0874

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nysra@capital.net

IMPORTANT NOTES FOR NYSRA LEADERS

- NYSRA now accepts credit cards.
- We have a pilot At Large Membership of \$35 for this year.
- You will be getting two electronic issues of the Reading Scene.
- The website is changing to include electronic voting and a discussion board.
- NYSRA can keep up your membership database.
- Members must send a \$5 subscription to receive The Language and Literacy Spectrum.
- There will be only two Assembly of Delegates' meetings this year.
- Information at our AOD meetings will be delivered electronically for the most part.