

THE GIFTED EDUCATION REVIEW



Challenging Students to Think Critically

Socratic seminar is a tool all teachers should have in their toolbox to foster critical thinking in their classroom. Through practice, both the leader and the participants gain deeper understanding.

by Michelle Wright Swain

When talking about the 21st century education, you often hear mention of “The Four C’s” – Communication, Collaboration, Critical Thinking, and Creativity. Socratic questioning is one strategy that has been used in “classrooms” for centuries to address these essential learning skills, providing the opportunity to engage in critical thinking and craft logical arguments while communicating with peers to collaborate in achieving deeper understandings.

One way to implement Socratic questioning in the classroom is through Socratic seminar. Socratic seminars

are a highly-motivating forum for scholarly dialogue in any classroom, fostering active learning as students engage in the higher level thinking skills of analyzing, evaluating, and synthesizing ideas inherent in a selected text. The focus is on presenting students with questions, rather than answers, with the intent of enlarging understandings rather than challenging beliefs.

There are four essential components to an effective Socratic seminar – the text, the questions, the leader, and the participants. They are equally important and must each be prepared in advance for a successful seminar.

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GIFTED EDUCATION REVIEW

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Embracing What Wasn't

The Counterfactual as a Practical Tool for G/T Social Studies

by Joe Russell

As a teacher of gifted kids and a social studies guy, I have long lamented the fact that social studies often seems to be treated as the throwaway discipline among the four core content areas. Despite being the curricular area where many schools service their gifted students, you just do not see a lot of research devoted to effective education for gifted students in social studies courses. Nor do you see nearly the number of publications on effective teaching practices when compared to the other content areas. Additionally, the educational standards for the social studies vacillate between a subset of language arts in the Common Core and election year political nonsense in the TEKS.

However, the problem is deeper than that. The problem with social studies education does not lie solely in a lack of research or an abundance of unclear standards. Those issues are only correlates to the true problem that most social studies education simply lacks any real purpose. You can clearly explain to people why kids should

learn language arts or mathematics. As a practical matter, everybody needs to be able to read and write and, if you are good at science, there is probably a job out there for you somewhere that pays very well. But when it comes right down to it, what do you do with a passion for history or economics? Or better yet, what is the point of mentoring a gifted learner along a path to an advanced level of performance in those subject areas unless you have set for yourself the goal of creating the world's best *Trivial Pursuit* player? And if you think of the social studies as a content area like the others, random factoids and fascinating anecdotes are the best you will ever impart to students.

That is not to say that ours is an irrelevant discipline. Far from it. But it is one that is taken for granted because what we teach is so fundamental to the human condition that most people do not think about it consciously. Most of the time we do not consider economics and government and psychology because we are too busy living with their consequences in our lives. We also

do not think about the significance of historical events, because we are too busy living in the midst of history as it is being made and playing our parts in it. So to try and appreciate the nuances of these fields in a careful, analytical way is, as sociologist C. Wright Mills said of his own discipline, like trying to push a bus that you are riding in.

That is all fine and good, but identifying a problem in the abstract does not help you when a gifted kid rolls into your history class and stops pushing the bus pretty early on because he or she does not see the point. Anyone who has spent any time with a gifted student knows what happens to the rest of the class when he or she stops pushing.

So, a practical piece of advice for reaching the G/T kid is to stop trying to get him or her to remember what really happened and make him or her tell you what might have happened. I am talking here, of course, about the "what if" scenario or, as it is called when "serious" people discuss it, the counterfactual.

Now, I am also aware that many of the trained historians who might have been reading this article and agreeing with much of it probably just turned away in disgust. They understand that history is a business of research and evidence, and this kind of silly conjecture is the realm of poorly-written science fiction and bad television. I would suggest that our students do not know that. Not yet. And if we are ever going to get them to a point where they understand and appreciate the purpose of a careful and precise analysis of historical events, then we have to capture their interest first. Gifted learners, especially, are often hooked by the unusual or imaginative. So, when an idea is presented in a way in which they might never have considered it, they may find themselves engaging with what you are presenting in a more meaningful way. Consider the following as an example:

Mr. Jones is an 11th grade US History teacher in a room full of mixed-ability students. He has just begun a unit on the Constitutional Convention. Mr. Jones has managed to engage his on-level and struggling learners, but he has a gifted student, J'Bria, who is simply uninterested. When Mr. Jones asks J'Bria why she is not interested, she says it's because the government was created by a bunch of dead white men, many of whom were slave owners. It is hardly worth learning about and people would be better off to just forget all that stuff. As a means of engagement, when Mr. Jones differentiates his next assignment, a formal essay on the nature of compromise in The Constitution, he discreetly changes the prompt for J'Bria to, "How would the course of American history have been altered had George Washington not presided over the Constitutional Convention and agreed to serve as our nation's first president?"

In this scenario, Mr. Jones has differentiated brilliantly for his gifted learn-

er. He has kept the spirit of the assignment the same for all of his students (the role of compromise in elected government), but has offered an intellectual challenge to his gifted student that challenges her assumptions about historical events but does not disrespect her by forcing her to abandon her own beliefs without reason. Because she has to logically support what might have been in her counterfactual, J'Bria will have to display a clear knowledge of actual historical events to show how the two things differ. In this way, Mr. Jones still satisfies any curricular standards that require an understanding of



The Constitution and prominent founders like George Washington but has done so in a way that engages J'Bria's unique manifestation of giftedness by introducing a larger element of evaluation and synthesis into the assignment. Mr. Jones has also maintained a level of rigor in the assignment appropriate for a gifted learner. While his on-level students are probably struggling just to remember all the actual historical details of the Constitutional period, J'Bria would clearly not be challenged by that and needs expectations that challenge her appropriately.

A couple of things should be carefully considered when using the counterfactual. First, the student's response to a prompt like the one in the scenario

needs to dwell in the realm of the plausible. J'Bria's essay cannot be a work of silliness or fancy best left to subpar cable television programs masquerading as history. Similarly, the work that she produces must be grounded in the historical record like any other student's. This will ensure that the vital skill of research is taught in the assignment. Finally, J'Bria's thesis must be supported logically. This will likely not be as linear as the students doing the more traditional assignment, but if she has adhered to the first two considerations, then the logical inference of her arguments should be reasonable and

easy to follow.

To be fair, this is an ideal scenario and this tool, like any tool, is not always the right one but can be a powerful one when seeking to capture the imagination and unique intellect of a gifted learner. It honors their process of learning and makes them feel empowered to apply what they learn to their own reality. That is the real purpose of the social studies, *to train self-realized, self-actualized citizens capable of the awesome tasks of civil engagement and self-governance*. If we do that, then all of us in the social studies, especially when teaching our most capable kids, need every tool we can get because we have our work cut out for us. ■

Growing in the Classroom with Growth Mindset

by Kristen Lamb

What does it mean to have a growth mindset, and why is it relevant in the classroom? In the classroom, we strive to provide our students with engaging tasks and lessons engineered to spark their curiosity and motivate them to love our subject just as we do. One student at a time, right? But what happens when our well-planned, well-executed, and world-changing lesson falls on deaf ears? We go home another day, another dollar – “We’ll get that hard to reach student (fill in the name here) next time.” We sigh, as we pack up our belongings, tonight’s work, and head to the car.

What is growth mindset and why is it relevant in my classroom? Growth mindset is the belief that intelligence and learning can be developed over a period of time. Most commonly found in students is what we would consider a fixed mindset, or the belief that intelligence is something one is born with – a trait that cannot and will not ever change. When students have a fixed mindset, they focus on the outcome or the product as opposed to focusing on the process. As a result, students miss opportunities to learn from their mistakes for fear of appearing dumb or performing poorly. A fixed

effort. By praising students for their effort, we encourage students to persevere through challenges. Students begin to develop the ability to recognize the value of certain strategies that are used during the process as well as valuing the struggle that leads to success.

Learning does not happen quickly. Students can become quickly discouraged when learning doesn’t come easily or naturally for them. As teachers, we can dispute this natural tendency to throw in the towel by teaching our students about historical figures who tried multiple times and finally got it right

When students have a fixed mindset, they focus on the outcome or the product as opposed to focusing on the process. As a result, students miss opportunities to learn from their mistakes for fear of appearing dumb or performing poorly.

Developing growth mindset is not a cure-all and will not solve all of our classroom issues. It will not magically transform our classrooms into the classrooms we all see on the example videos in professional developments or workshops. In these videos, students are transfixed and mesmerized, hands raised, eager to answer questions, or skillfully participating in small group discussions as their teachers stand in the front, unruffled and just as mesmerized by the brilliant, on-task remarks they overhear as they sweep through the room. No, just like any other technique offered, this will not turn your class into the ones you see on TV as you roll your eyes and say under your breath, “Yeah, right.”

So, we arrive back to our origi-

nal question. What is growth mindset and why is it relevant in my classroom? It’s the student who sits in your class, eyes glazed and unfocused – it’s the student who shuts down as soon as class begins, because your class does not come naturally to them.

A growth mindset affords students the safety to embrace challenges as an opportunity to learn and improve. Students with a growth mindset value hard work and effort and look forward to developing their abilities – even in the class that doesn’t come easy to them.

How do we develop a growth mindset in our students?

Praise the Process. Teachers can cultivate a classroom rich in growth mindset by praising students for their

on the 1,011th time. Each time before that, they learned to change it, improve it, and, finally, to get it right. Students can reflect on something they were once not good at but have now skillfully mastered.

Stretch Your Students. Purposefully build in problems and tasks for those students who may be more naturally apt in the subject. These students will find value in challenge, they will grow, and they will learn. Allowing these students to glide seamlessly through our classes is a disservice to the students. Stretching the students does not necessarily mean more work for the students – it means more meaningful work for them.

Provide Self-Evaluation Opportunities. By administering pre-test and

post-test to your students, you are providing a visual representation of growth to your students. They can look at how much they have improved as well as reflect on the challenges and the efforts they put in learning the material as measured by their growth between assessments. This personal growth can also take the form of a simple checklist of concepts. Students are presented with a checklist of objectives they are to learn by the conclusion of the unit. They can check off items they already know prior to even beginning a unit and check off items as they learn them throughout the unit. You can also have students reflect and journal regarding their process and efforts. Remember, the focus is the process and the product is a result of the process.

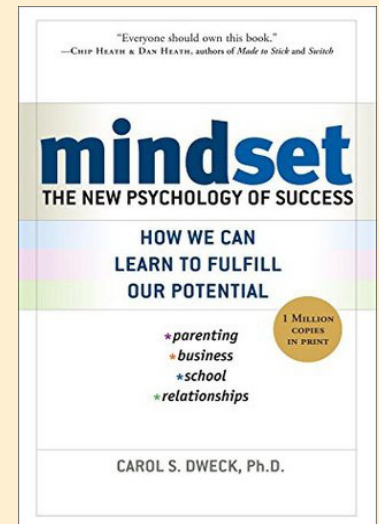
Grading the Students' Growth. As we grade students' progress, we focus our grading on terms such as "not yet" or "in progress." This reinforces the

idea that objectives not mastered at the given point will be mastered in just a matter of time. It teaches students that their abilities are fluid as well as their motivation. In addition, by grading effort, students can be graded on their effort as evidenced by their perseverance (and in some cases their struggle). In contrast, students who may otherwise naturally sail through the content can be rewarded for challenging themselves.

By cultivating growth mindset in our classrooms, we are not just teaching students content relevant to our subject. We are teaching them life skills and how to navigate through life successfully. Growth mindset skills can be applied to any subject, to any personal issue, and to any new objective or task the student sets out to learn. Teaching growth mindset teaches our students how they can find success for themselves. ■

Growth Mindset

The concept of the "growth mindset" was first proposed by Stanford University Professor Dr. Carol Dweck in her 2006 book, *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*.



Current Research in Gifted Education

by Jeb Puryear

The intent of this section of Gifted Education Review is to take recent research in the field of gifted education and articulate the implications for practitioners and administrators in the field. This installment includes four articles. The topics range from differentiation in math and reading programs to more big-picture items such as programming for English-language learners and the need for support even among the brightest students.

Shaunessey-Dedrick, E., Evans, L., Ferron, J., & Lindo, M. (2015). **Effects of differentiated reading on elementary students' reading comprehension and attitudes toward reading.**

Gifted Child Quarterly, 59(2), 91-107. doi:10.1177/0016986214568718

In their study, Shaunessey-Dedrick and colleagues studied the reading comprehension and attitudes among students at eight Title 1 schools. Practitioners know both of these are important to long term student success. In half the schools, they implemented a new curriculum based on Renzulli's Schoolwide Enrichment Model (SEM). They found that student scores were higher in the SEM schools. However, they didn't find an increase in positive reading attitudes at these schools. This is somewhat interesting because many times engagement and student

interest are seen as a first step to high achievement. In this study, they found that achievement increased without such a first step. Another relevant takeaway from this study is that while Renzulli's work is typically associated with the gifted or with high achievers, this study would suggest a broader application. This may provide evidence that strategies used with gifted students may hold potential for all students. Importantly, they did see differences in how well the intervention worked across racial and socioeconomic groups. As such, we should be mindful of the different effects new curriculum can have.

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Challenging Students to Think Critically

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The Text – The text for a seminar may come from a variety of sources including readings in literature, history, science, math, health, philosophy, as well as from works of art or music. It can come in a variety of forms, such as excerpts from a novel or play, a passage, poem, speech, sermon, essay, editorial, cartoon, song lyrics or music, and even video clips. The key in selecting the text is to ensure that the piece is a discussable artifact, rich with ideas, issues, complexities, ambiguities, contradictions, and/or mysteries. A piece organized for a textbook as a didactic tool is not ideal. It is also important to consider the length and appropriateness of the piece. Text that is too long or cumbersome may make it difficult to cite evidence during the dialogue, a critical element to the seminar structure.

The Questions – There are three types of questions to craft when building a seminar – opening, core, and closing.

Opening – The opening question should be relatively broad and open-ended, causing students to delve into the text as they explore the ideas and issues involved. It should be somewhat provocative, with no single right answer. The responses to the opening question will spark new questions from both the leader and the participants, which will further the dialogue. Ex: “Why did the author create this text?” or “What was the author’s purpose in writing this piece?”

Core – The core questions should be designed to reflect back to the text (to specific content) or to focus on central points. These are typically “how” or “why” questions of interest to the leader and the participants that ask students to interpret information or explore a concept within the text. Core questions are used to move the dialogue along, sparking responses when students stray too far from the text or when dialogue stagnates. It is recommended to have two to five core questions prepared, as some of them may emerge organically during the dialogue. Ex: “How is the concept of bravery addressed in the text?” or “Why

do you think the character took the action they did?”

Closing – The closing question establishes relevance. Participant responses to the closing question should connect both to the real world as well as demonstrate personal application to self. Ex: “When have you exhibited bravery in the manner explored in the text?” or “How would you react if put in a similar situation?”

The Leader – In a seminar, the leader plays a dual role as both leader and participant, actively engaging students with the text and modeling the habits of mind needed for thoughtful exploration of the text. It is the leader’s responsibility to keep the discussion focused and intellectually responsible while drawing students into the conversation and encouraging them to provide evidence from the text to support their responses.

The Participants – The participants share the responsibility for seminar quality and must prepare in advance for a successful seminar. They must learn to study the text in advance, listen actively to their peers, share their ideas with textual evidence, and seek

clarification of other's statements. It is helpful to remind students of good seminar behaviors prior to conducting the seminar and to reflect on their seminar behaviors following a seminar in order to improve for the next one.

Student participation should be organic. Students should not raise hands, but rather monitor verbal and non-verbal clues from their fellow participants to determine when and how to enter into the dialogue. The leader helps facilitate this by occasionally calling on a student who may be having a hard time jumping into the flow of responses. For quiet or reluctant students, the leader may initiate a token system, providing the student with three tokens which must be forfeited if the student is called on and passes. When the student is out of tokens, they must provide a response if called on. Eventually, these students will push themselves to enter the dialogue earlier and preserve their tokens. The leader may also intervene with students who contribute too frequently, provid-

ing them with tokens which must be forfeited each time they contribute and causing them to be silent once they are out of tokens. Both methods are short term, since students tend to self-regulate quickly after using tokens.

If you have a large group, you may want to use the format of inner and outer circle. This creates a fishbowl effect with the inner circle actively participating in the seminar and the outer circle observing while completing some sort of task related to listening and note-taking. Outer circle participants share insights with the inner circle by using a "hot seat," which is an empty chair in the inner circle meant for outer circle participants to sit in, share their insight, and then vacate for the next person.

There are three potential components for assessment – pre-seminar tasks, seminar, and post-seminar tasks. While it is recommended that notes be taken by the leader during the seminar to capture the thinking trends and ideas explored as well as keep track of student participation, it is

not recommended that a grade be acquired from the seminar itself in order to encourage authentic dialogue rather than contributing for the sole purpose of a grade. There are many pre-seminar task students can use to initially engage with the text and demonstrate knowledge and understanding for a grade, including a quick factual quiz, completion of a graphic organizer, structured or free-write responses, or creating questions that should be posed in the seminar. Post-seminar tasks should focus on an element or concept of the seminar and explore it further, whether through a research project, essay response to the closing question, letter to the editor, or by creating an original work of art.

Socratic seminar is a tool all teachers should have in their toolbox to foster critical thinking in their classroom. Through practice, both the leader and the participants will hone their skills to gain deeper understanding of the content, creating a more challenging and engaging learning experience. ■



Recommended Reading for Gifted Students

by Laila Sanguras

"Firelit rooms lined with books—these are the places in which important things happen."

Anthony Doerr
All the Light We Cannot See

It's week three of the new school year and you stand in front of your class, jittery with an excitement that rivals the caffeinated benders of your college days. In your hand is a book, a literary grenade that will either incite

your class into palpable enthusiasm for words or that will be the fodder for the ubiquitous "Last Book I Ever Read" soliloquy at your students' future dinner parties.

The responsibility of novel selection comes with a great deal of pressure, especially with gifted students. If you recommend a book that your students fall in love with, you are a hero, a life changer. If you miss the mark, you risk losing credibility with your students.

They may grant you one more gratuitous suggestion, but it will be met with skepticism as they doubt your competency and secretly (or not) wonder why they aren't just teaching this class.

The books in this list are fiction and are loosely grouped by grade level. The purpose is to offer suggestions that may not be typical school reading. Some are best for independent reading while others are more appropriate for guided reading. All are amazing.

Early Elementary

Gaston written by Kelly DiPuccio and illustrated by Christian Robinson

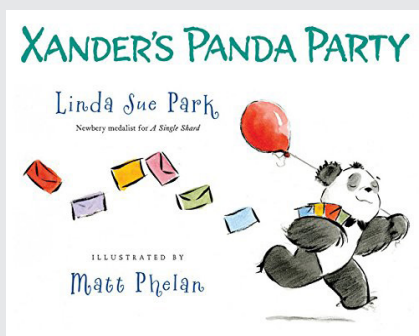
40 pages; Atheneum Books for Young Readers



Gaston is a bulldog living in a poodle world; Antoinette is a poodle living in a bulldog world - you can imagine the problem. The pups question their identities as they try to fit in, questioning what it means to be a family. This is a heartwarming book that easily lends itself to discussions and formal reading responses.

Xander's Panda Party written by Linda Sue Park and illustrated by Matt Phelan

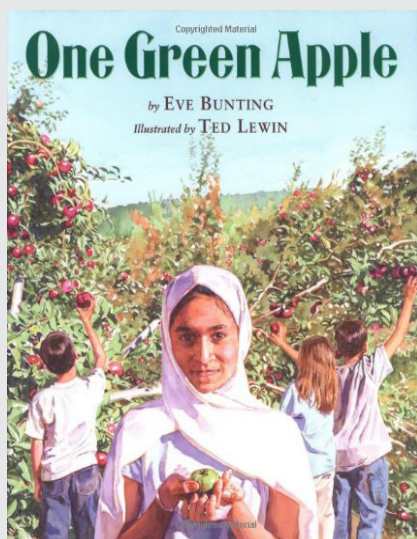
40 pages; Clarion Books



A fun read-aloud, this is the story of Xander who wants to invite all of the bears at the zoo to his party. But the koala won't come because she is a marsupial. When Xander extends invitations to all mammals, he realizes he is still excluding the reptiles. As the party gets bigger and bigger, readers learn about animal species and the importance of inclusion.

One Green Apple written by Eve Bunting and illustrated by Ted Lewin

32 pages; Clarion Books

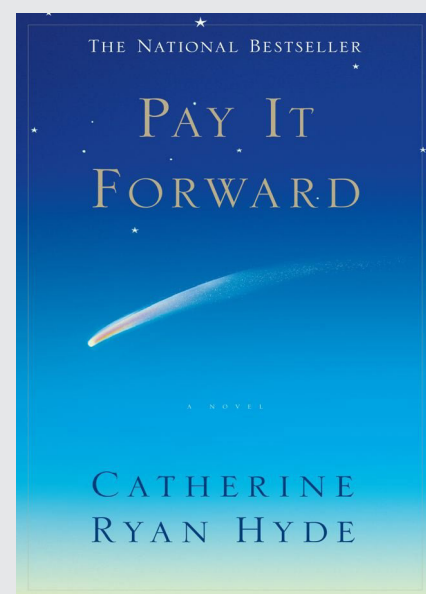


Bunting exquisitely tells the story of Farah, a Muslim immigrant who does not speak English and is trying to fit in at her new school. The message of empathy is clear and the prose is beautiful. Farah describes her discomfort, "I am tight inside myself" as she connects her new world experiences to the old.

Late Elementary

Pay It Forward: Young Readers Edition by Catherine Ryan Hyde

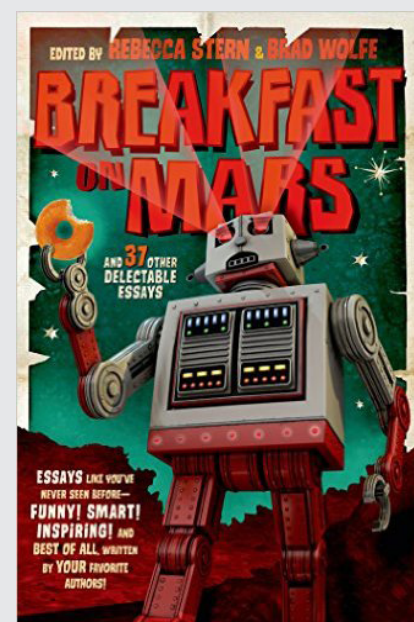
288 pages; Simon & Schuster/Paula Wiseman Books



This is the children's version of the amazing novel-turned-movie. It speaks to the hearts of servant-minded children and is deeply inspiring. If you have children, read it to them. If you teach children, read it to them. If you know children, give it to them.

Breakfast on Mars and 37 Other Delectable Essays Edited by Brad Wolfe and Rebecca Stern

240 pages; Square Fish



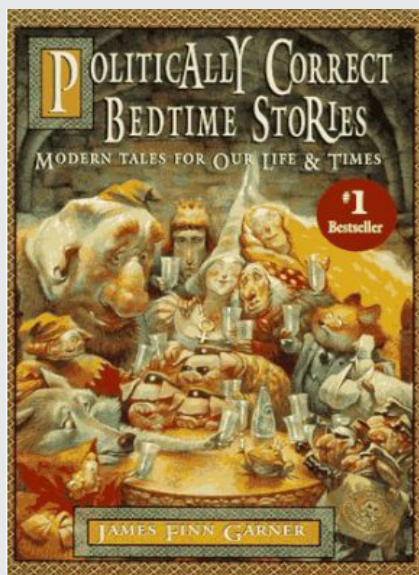
Fiction or nonfiction? We don't know and don't care. This is a must

read for any classes working on essay writing (as all classes should be). It's a collection of essays written by some extremely talented writers (Scott Westerfeld, Ned Vizzini, Wendy Mass...) and can be read as small pieces or altogether. Each essay lists the traditional essay prompt at the top and then an interesting, won't-make-you-want-to-poke-your-eye-out kind of essay. You owe it to yourself, your students, and your eyes to pick this one up.

Middle School

**** This list assumes that you have read and recommended everything by David Levithan, John Green, Marie Lu, Jandy Nelson, Christopher Paolini, Chris Crutcher, Rick Riordan, and E. Lockhart to your students already.**

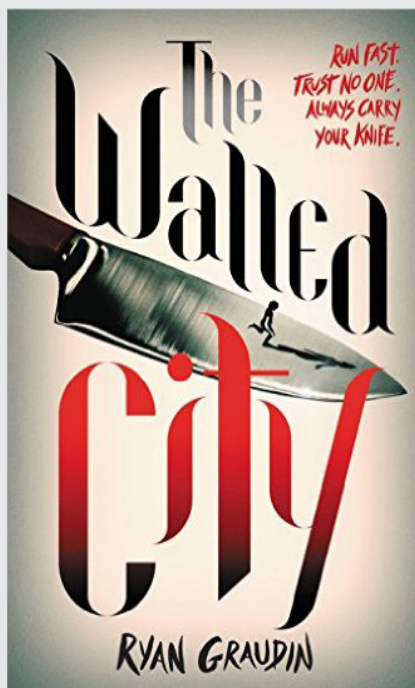
Politically Correct Bedtime Stories by James Finn Garner
112 pages; Souvenir Press



Who loves satire more than gifted middle schoolers? Their teachers! This is a short text, but has so much potential for the directions

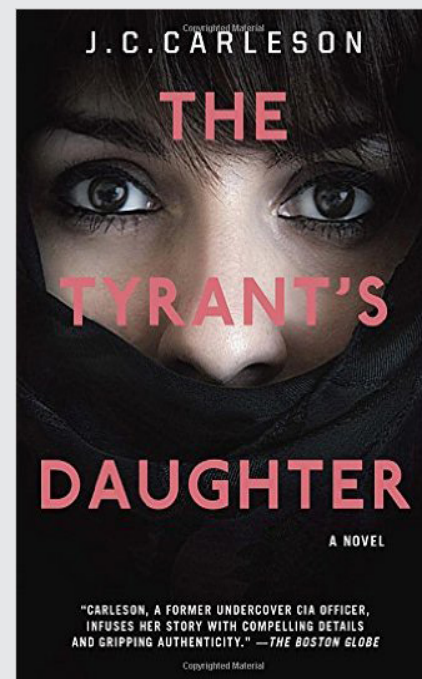
you can take your students after reading it. It is a collection of traditional fairy tales that are retold without the sexist, sizeist, and racist tones of their predecessors (think "Little Red Riding Hood" calling out the wolf for being a sexist outcast). It's clever in a "you have to be smart to understand it" kind of way that gifted kids love.

The Walled City by Ryan Graudin
464 pages; Little, Brown Books for Young Readers



The Walled City, a place of gang rivalry, homelessness, and prostitution really existed in Hong Kong in the 1950s. Graudin writes the stories of three fictional characters living in this city, trying to survive and escape. It's a unique and haunting dystopian novel that won't leave you. (And, just so you know, the city is now a beautiful park with a chess garden.)

The Tyrant's Daughter by J. C. Carleson
304 pages; Ember



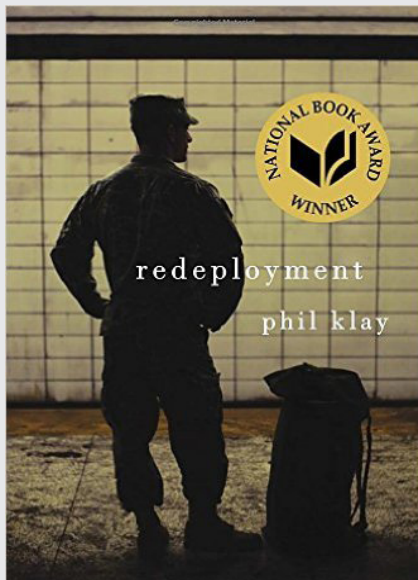
It is inevitable that we grow up to realize that our parents aren't perfect. Laila, the protagonist, deals with typical teenage struggles: adjusting to a new school, dealing with an annoying little brother, and navigating the complexity of young love. However, she is also dealing with rumors that her father, the murdered king of a Middle Eastern country, was a cruel dictator, that her mother is willing to sell her soul (and her daughter's) for the life she once had, and that her friend is part of the resistance movement that may have been responsible for her father's death. The characters are so honest and so real that it's painful.

High School

These contain mature content and language.

Redeployment by Phil Kay
304 pages; Penguin Books

Prior to reading this, I would have insisted that *The Things They*

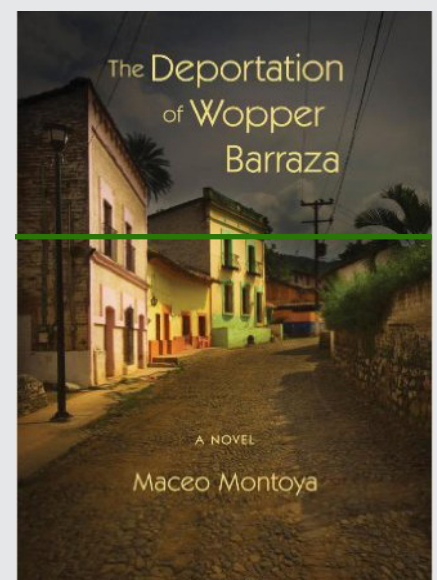


Carried by Tim O'Brien was the one and only war novel that should be read in high school. Similar in style, *Redeployment* is told in a series of vignettes that are soul bruising and excruciatingly real. By reading the

stories of those involved in the war in Iraq, you are drawn into the brutal reality and contradiction of war and its aftermath.

The Deportation of Wopper Barraza by Maceo Montoya
224 pages; University of New Mexico Press

What does the future look like for an immigrant? For his children? For Wopper, the future is grim. After multiple arrests, he is deported to a small village in Mexico – a place he hasn't returned to since moving to California when he was a toddler. Told from multiple perspectives with humor and grit, this is an unusual and thought-provoking story



of an unlikely hero.

The next issue will focus on compelling pieces of nonfiction to challenge and interest gifted readers at all levels. ■

Current Research in Gifted Education

Continued from page 4

Rubenstein, L. V., Gilson, C. M., Bruce-Davis, M. N., & Gubbins, E. J. (2015). **Teachers' reactions to pre-differentiated and enriched math curricula.** *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*, 38(2), 141-168. doi:10.1177/0162353215578280

Teachers hear repeatedly in professional development settings about the important of differentiating instruction and providing enrichment experiences for those students that need them. However, the implementation of such measures is difficult when teachers find themselves left to devise such curricula on their own. Rubenstein and colleagues provided a third-grade curriculum to teachers which had techniques of differentiated instruction and enrichment built in so that it would be appropriate for students of all ability levels. Among these were triggers for potential differentiation opportunities

including pre-assessments. While this single third-grade math curriculum isn't a magic bullet for all classroom settings, the feedback the researchers received from the teachers who used it included key findings. Teachers expressed the most positive views about having pre-assessments included for each unit of study. That the tiered instruction in the units themselves had direct connections to pre-assessment performance was another bonus. They said the creation of such specifically tailored pre-assessments is often a real, practical hindrance to good differentiation instruction. One takeaway, might be that schools/districts should focus on making these sorts of connections in the development of their own curricula. The researchers found that students of all levels seemed to benefit from different levels of instruction when the curricula had been well thought out beforehand. They also found that the teachers themselves became more comfortable with the material because the tiered instruction forced them to consider it from differ-

ent levels for a more thorough understanding.

Cho, S., Yang, J., & Mandracchia, M. (2015). **Effects of M3 curriculum on mathematics and English proficiency achievement of mathematically promising English language learners.** *Journal of Advanced Academics*, 26(2), 112-142. doi:10.1177/1932202X15577205

Much of the work in the area of English Language Learners (ELL) and gifted relates to identification practices and language development, so the study by Cho and colleagues is unique. Over a one year period, the Mentoring Mathematical Minds (M3) curriculum was used with third-graders. The researchers wanted to know if the generally positive effects of the programs could be replicated among the ELL learners. They also wondered if there would be a side benefit of increased language development. The M3 curriculum uses student inquiry methods and focuses on "big ideas" that encour-

age students to “think deeply” about math topics. The curriculum also supports ELLs with the use of scaffolded academic language and practical/non-verbal techniques when possible. The researchers found a large positive effect of the M3 curriculum for math achievement, but there was no corresponding increase in reading ability. It may be that the gains were purely in the use of the academic language of math which was not assessed in the reading measures. This would be important by itself, since supporting academic language is a very common theme in ELL research. Another important finding in the study was that teachers who were observed to follow the curriculum more closely had students with greater gains. Having a good plan for curriculum only takes us so far. We have to be willing to actually carry it out. This applies to all curriculum, but particularly for the ones targeted at a specific group.

Salmela, M., & Maata, K. (2015). **Even the best have difficulties: A study of Finnish straight-A graduates’ resource oriented solutions.** *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 59(2), 124-135. doi: 10.1177/0016986214568720

At first glance, one might look at this article and question its usefulness due to the setting, but it is precisely the themes that emerged (similar to those that appear in the United States) which make it important. Salmela and Maata interviewed 14 students that had completed their secondary studies in Finland regarding their adversities and difficulties in school as well as their strategies for dealing with them. In general, they found three difficulties: navigating peer relationships, dealing with their wide ranging interests, and coming to terms with their own goals and abilities. This is an important finding, because it suggests a certain universality in the issues high-ability

students deal with in school settings. The researchers found that students who made the best use of resources around them (e.g. school mentoring programs and positive social groups) had the greatest satisfaction and most positive feeling about their experiences. The researchers found that those students whose programs had supported the taking of academic risks (and corresponding support after a failure) showed the most positive academic outlook.

The implication here is that students, particularly high ability ones, need to be told mistakes and adversity are not signs of weakness, but opportunities to grow. The authors suggest “if schools left more room for learning life and surviving wounding experiences, youths could learn to face the dark sides of life” (p 133). This fits well with the broader literature suggesting a need to nurture more healthy forms of perfectionism among gifted students. ■

The Authors

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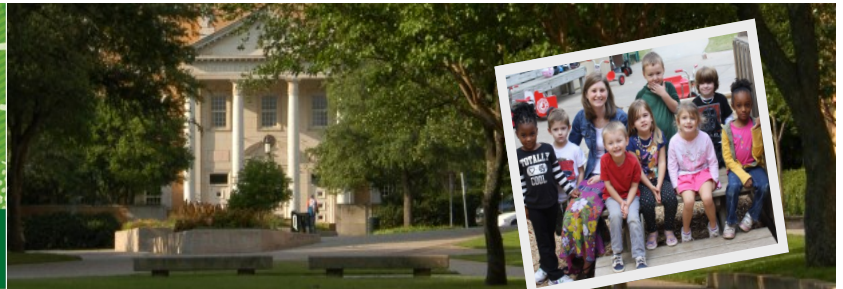
at The University of North Texas

Laila Sanguras is a former middle school Language Arts teacher who struggles with reading “adult” books, unabashedly admitting that she enjoys kids more than grown-ups. With overflowing bookshelves and an e-reader that needs more storage, she is sure that she has paid the college tuition of the Amazon executives’ children. Win-Win.

Michelle Wright Swain is the director of Gifted and Advanced Academic Services in Round Rock ISD and currently serves on the NAGC board. She was the 2011 TAGT President and received the 2013 TAGT State Administrator of the Gifted Award and the 2015 NAGC Gifted Coordinator Award.

Gifted Education Review is published by **The Passionate Mind Institute**, a nonprofit 501(c)3 charitable institution dedicated to research, education, and support in the fields of creativity, giftedness and talent, and the arts. Your tax-deductible donations make *The Gifted Education Review* and other valuable programs possible. Make a contribution and learn more at <http://www.thepassionatemind.org>.





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