

SDCTE ECHO

March 2022

Hello ELA Friends and Educators!

After a break and regroup, I am happy to share some exciting news with you today! Our Summer 2022 Conference is coming together. We are excited to bring Dave Stuart, Jr. to South Dakota to visit with educators here! We first met Dave at our 2020 online conference, and since then, he has visited with our online spring 2021 Book Study participants. If you don't know who Dave is, check out his website at www.davestuartjr.com. You can read the first chapter of his book *These 6 Things* for free on his website.

Our 2022 Author of the Year is Helen Frost. Helen was born in Brookings, SD. She currently lives in Fort Wayne, Indiana. "Throughout her career, writing and teaching have been inter-woven threads. She has published poetry, children's books, anthologies, and a play, as well as a book about teaching writing. She has taught writing at all levels, from pre-school through university and adult education." You can view her book titles and honors at her website: www.helenfrost.net.

We have a number of featured speakers sharing a variety of topics with us. As we get more details, we will update the site. Some topics include teaching Shakespeare that will include lesson sharing, the Jerome Norgren Writing Contest, roundtable sessions about spring book studies and cool lesson plans, and a graphic novel/comic book session. We are still in need of presenters. If you are interested, fill out the form in the link below and VP Elect Nicole Finnesand will be in contact with you. Some topics our members have expressed an interest in knowing more about include blackout poetry, spine poetry, LinkedIn and resumes, writing challenged book policies, and AP Literature, Language, and Composition teaching ideas.

We just wrapped up our 2022 Spring Book Study of *Disrupting Thinking* by Kyleen Beers and Robert Probst. We had 15 teachers participate in our weekly Zoom sessions. The conversations we had about reading and asking questions truly helped us all grow as educators! If you haven't been involved in one of our online book studies, I would highly recommend trying one out. The community and fellowship we share with other educators in our state truly help all of us grow and be better teachers for our students.

Summer YOUNiversity 2022 is quickly approaching! The Methods for Literature for Teaching Difficult History focus this year is September 11, 2001. We will feature a variety of books in a range of genres. Classes will start the week of June 13, 2022. More information will come out at the end of April.

Sending my voice and listening for your echo,

Corrine Kallemeyn
SDCTE President

HONOR OUR VOICES

The Stories We Carry With Us



JUNE 7 & 8, 2022

ARROWWOOD RESORT AND
CONFERENCE CENTER,
OACOMA, SD

SDCTE
SOUTH DAKOTA COUNCIL OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH

SDCTE 2022 Conference

[Register Here!](#)

[Call for Presenters](#)

Do you have a favorite lesson to teach, book to share, successful ELA strategy or method? Consider presenting at our 2022 Conference! We have 45-minute sessions or shorter 15-minute Roundtable discussions. Grab a teacher friend and come present!

Methods for Using Literature to Teach Difficult History

Focus: September 11, 2001

SDCTE
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SUMMER YOUUNIVERSITY
June - August 2022
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Teachers, Don't Miss Our Spring Giveaways!

Thousands of dollars in prizes

The WeAreTeachers Spring Break Giveaway

Win thousands in gift cards, technology, and more.

Remaining in Solidarity with Teachers

NCTE lovingly and courageously respects teachers and the teaching profession, today and always. Join us as we honor, respect, and advocate on behalf of teachers and students.

Freedom to Teach: Statement against Banning Books

Freedom to Teach Statement

School districts, the most active battlefield in the American culture wars today, are facing an unprecedented number of calls to remove books from schools and libraries, false claims about “obscenity” invading classrooms, the elimination of teaching about evolution and climate change, challenges to the need for making sense of and critiquing our world in mathematics classrooms, and legislation redlining teaching about racism in American history. These actions are putting excessive and undue pressure on teachers, who are caught in the crossfire of larger political conflict, motivated by cultural shifts and stoked for political gain.

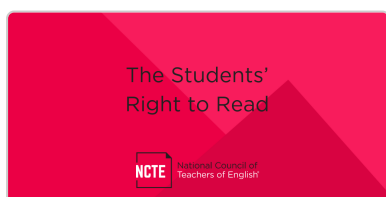
Teachers are being maligned as “harming” children and are subjected to constant scrutiny (and even direct surveillance) by many parents, school administrators, and activist groups. Some are afraid to offer their students award-winning books that may violate vaguely stated laws about teaching the history of racism or that may be misleadingly labeled as pornographic. As a result, teachers’ very ability to do their job is under threat.

In their zeal, activists of the current culture wars unfortunately treat teachers as if they are enemies. The truth is that teachers are uniquely important leaders who, in educating current and new generations of students, bear responsibility for this country’s future. They are trained professionals with one of the hardest and most demanding jobs, a job that requires deep commitment, but brings little financial reward.

Teachers need our support; they need our trust; they need to have the freedom to exercise their professional judgment. And that freedom includes the freedom to decide what materials best suit their students in meeting the demands of the curriculum, the freedom to discuss disturbing parts of American history if and when they judge students are ready for it, and the freedom to determine how to help young people navigate the psychological and social challenges of growing up. In short, teachers need the freedom to prepare students to become future members of a democratic society who can engage in making responsible and informed contributions and decisions about our world.

The stakes are too high. We cannot let good teachers leave the field because they no longer have the freedom to do their jobs. We cannot let the education of our children and young adults become collateral damage in partisan political machinations.

Authored by the four professional organizations for teachers: [National Council for the Social Studies](#), [National Council of Teachers of Mathematics](#), [National Council of Teachers of English](#), [National Science Teaching Association](#), and the [National Coalition Against Censorship](#).



The Students' Right to Read - NCTE

This statement was originally developed in 1981, revised April 2009 to adhere to NCTE's Policy on Involvement of People of Color , and revised again in September 2018. The Right to Read and the Teacher of English Overview: The Students' Right to Read provides resources that can be used to help discuss and ensure students' free access to all texts.

ncte.org

Engaging with Texts with Controversial Language: A Conversation about *To Kill a Mockingbird*

By Nicole Finnesand

Following a year of curriculum review in my district, the changes in our department meant that *To Kill a Mockingbird* has landed itself in my 9th grade ELA curriculum. My initial excitement soon turned to intimidation as I started preparing to teach the book. It has been 10 years since I last read (or taught) *To Kill a Mockingbird*. So much has changed in my own classroom practices, my teaching context, and our current world environment. This novel spoke to me in ways it never did before; I found myself with new perspectives towards outcast characters like Tom Robinson, Calpurnia, and Arthur Radley.

Part of this shift in teaching reflects my overall journey as an educator from fledgling to reflective, inclusive, and digging deeper. Reading about the experiences of the black characters in the Great Depression left me with one important, but daunting, task: confronting the use of language, particularly the n-word in a text. Because of my diverse student population and the current events in our school and world at large, I knew my students needed the space for this conversation about language with an invested adult and within the carefully created classroom environment.

If I'm being completely honest, I almost "abandoned ship" and the book altogether. However, after some meaningful conversations with other teachers, I decided the issue is too relevant, current, and impactful to leave behind. I felt compelled to proceed with my plans to teach the book. Other teachers may feel differently about the n-word in particular. However, I think we all encounter texts with controversial and inflammatory language, and I hope these tips may prove useful in a variety of contexts.

How we choose to proceed (and whether we choose to proceed) involves taking time to reflect and answering a few questions about your students.

1. Reflect on your students:

1. Who are your students? How will you proceed when students are offended by it? What approach will you take?
2. Do you have boundaries you will set? Will you decide those boundaries? Will students have a say?
3. How have you laid the foundation for having difficult and potentially controversial conversations in your classroom? If so, how did that go? What else can you do to continue to build that trust/rapport with ALL your students?

2. Reflect on your environment:

1. What is the climate in your school and community as it relates to race and controversy?
2. What is the current larger culture/context for teaching this word?
3. Do you have the support of your administration? To what extent? (Have this conversation with your administrators. Will they support you if a student says the word? If you say the word? If you assign a text with the word?)
4. What is your plan if an objection is raised about your text/teaching? Would you provide an alternate text that students could opt for?

3. Reflect on yourself:

1. Are you comfortable with teaching this word?
2. What are your biases?
3. What is your perspective? How did you develop it? Can you explain your thinking?

In My Classroom: There is no one-size-fits-all approach, and I'll have to revisit my decision with each group of students. For me, Dr. Stordeur-Pryor and Albert Cook provided really essential perspectives that ultimately led me to decide to teach *To Kill a Mockingbird* and the n-word, but with boundaries. First, my classroom has been practicing discussions all year rooted in civil discourse methods. Students don't have to agree, but they do have to hear each other out and respect each other's views. Without this classroom environment, I would not proceed. Second, before we read, I inform students of what is coming. This is one element of literature I don't want to surprise my students. I include the boundaries I personally have decided to set for my students with rationale and allow space for discussion. My practices this year include letting students this year encounter the word in the text, but we won't read it aloud. We will censor our conversations by talking about it as the "n-word."

I've taken this inclusion in my classroom seriously, very acutely aware of my presence as a white, female authority figure. I often incorporated black voices in authority through texts and videos. I've taken my stance with their authority in mind. I also keep in mind that among the black community are differing views on how/when/if this word should be used, but I am cautious and give them ownership of the word over my own preferences and biases. In our *To Kill a Mockingbird* unit, we discuss the flaws in characters like Atticus Finch who often is perceived as the hero. But we'll discuss how that portrayal discounts authentic experiences of black characters like Tom Robinson (who is given no voice after the trial and his death) and Calpurnia (who has little meaning dialogue or character development). We'll ask hard questions and provide opportunities for students to give voices to those characters' perspectives.

I don't have all the answers, but my students have been receptive to my openness to discuss these questions in light of their present cultural realities. I'm honest about my misgivings about teaching the book and the n-word. I'm not sure it's the best book to teach, but in light of movements like #MeToo, BLM, and others in society, my school, and my classroom, TKAM feels more relevant than it did 10 years ago.

Resources: If you're struggling with how to teach texts with the n-word, here are some sources I found particularly meaningful:

Cicchiello, Christopher. "History Teacher Confronts N-Word in Classroom." *Times Union*, Hearst, 21 Sept. 2021, <https://www.timesunion.com/hudsonvalley/article/new-paltz-teacher-confronts-N-word-in-classroom-16473134.php>.

Coates, Ta-Nehisi. "In Defense of a Loaded Word." *New York Times*, 23 Nov. 2013, https://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/24/opinion/sunday/coates-in-defense-of-a-loaded-word.html?_r=1&. Accessed 30 Sept. 2021.

"Controversy Over a Literary Classic: Teaching 'To Kill a Mockingbird' Generates Calls to Ban the Book for Racial Slurs." *The Republic*, 16 Mar. 2019, http://www.therepublic.com/2019/03/17/controversy_over_a_literary_classic_teaching_to_kill_a_mockingbird_generates_calls_to_ban_the_book_for_racial_slurs/. Accessed 10 October 2021.

"Negro (the Word) A Brief History." *African American Registry*, AAREG, 28 Apr. 2021, <https://aaregistry.org/story/negro-the-word-a-history/>.

Pernell, Erica. "Resources for Teaching about the N Word." *E. Pernell Consulting*, <https://www.ericapernell.com/teaching-the-nword>.

Perry, Andre. "Good Teachers Use the N-Word." *The Hechinger Report*, 21 Aug. 2018, <https://hechingerreport.org/good-teachers-use-the-n-word/>.

Price, Sean. "Straight Talk about the N-Word." *Teaching Tolerance*, 2011, <https://www.learningforjustice.org/magazine/fall-2011/straight-talk-about-the-nword> Accessed 30

Sept. 2021.

"Ta-Nehisi Coates on Words that Don't Belong to Everyone | We Were Eight Years in Power Book Tour." *Youtube*, uploaded by Random House, 7 November 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QO15S3WC9pg>

"The N-Word in the Classroom | Elizabeth Stordeur Pryor | TEDxEasthamptonWomen." *Youtube*, uploaded by TEDx Talks, 28 January 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LauLaVT_ZY

"The Special Report: Reexamining the "N" Word." *Youtube*, uploaded by Areva Martin, 17 February 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QR2nxNUMniA>

"Why it's so hard to talk about the N-word | Elizabeth Stordeur Pryor." *Youtube*, uploaded by TED, 16 April 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CVPI8jRaAqM>



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When I began my career many years ago in a school where I was "the" English department, my first informal mentors were teachers involved in SDCTE. To this day, SDCTE continues to encourage the passion I have for my students and all things ELA. I value the professional and personal connections I've made through the years.

SDCTE is an amazing community! It has helped build my network where I can email any member to ask for advice, discuss new ideas, and exchange experiences. If other disciplines don't have a community like this one, they are certainly missing out! It has helped my teaching career so much.

I gain so much from my membership in SDCTE. Since joining as a fairly new and young teacher several years ago, I have met many amazing teachers who I now consider mentors and colleagues. I am comfortable emailing anyone in the group to ask for ideas or materials. I have always had positive experiences with the members and leaders in this organization, and it has helped me realize that I have great things to contribute to the group, my students, and the teaching profession in general.