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WELCOME TO THE NEWLY-ONLINE *WISCONSIN ENGLISH JOURNAL!*

Dear Reader:

As I write this, the mid-day sun offers a false sense of warmth that belies the 26 degrees and upcoming 45 mph winds. It's a lovely Sunday afternoon, just right for curling up with my favorite blanket, one or two cats and a dog, and a novel.

As your new *WEJ* editor, I thought I'd take a moment to introduce myself. My name is Patty Rieman, and I began my journey as an educator in 1982. After graduating from the University of Tulsa in 1982, I taught K-8 special education classes in Tulsa, Oklahoma for 10.5 years, cross-categorical special education classes in Loves Park, Illinois for one year, and special education classes in Sandwich, Illinois for four years. In 12 of those years, I was teaching English Language Arts to students aged 10-15 years, all of whom had IEPs for social-emotional disorders, cognitive disorders, or learning disabilities. As an avid reader of pretty much everything, those ELA classes were always my favorite to teach.

I attended Northern Illinois University for both my Master's in Education and my doctorate. Upon entrance to the Ed.D. program, I focused on secondary education and curriculum and instruction; however, the department chair immediately recruited me to teach an introductory reading methods course. I bravely gulped and dove in, scurrying to learn the material two weeks ahead of my students. I also began to take graduate courses in literacy education; so many, in fact, that the same department chair finally suggested that I change my degree program to C & I with an emphasis in Literacy Education. And the angels sang, and here I am now, 25 years later—your faithful *WEJ* editor.

In addition to being on the board of WCTE, I am in my 17th year as a Professor of Education at Carthage College in Kenosha, Wisconsin, teaching courses in reading and language arts methods, disciplinary and content area literacy, multicultural children's and young adult literature, and curriculum and instruction. I also often serve as thesis chair for Master of Education candidates, which never fails to refresh my knowledge and open my point of view to current issues in education.

**With the technical assistance of the amazing Adrian Hook, we have changed our WCTE website and moved from a print journal to an online format. Please let us know what you think of the new format. And please do consider [submitting a manuscript](#) for our Summer 2025 issue!

Stay warm, friends, and don't forget to read something wonderful.

Yours in the name of life-long literacy,

Patty Rieman



STUDENT SHOWCASE

Alliyah Hansey, Senior

Plum City High School

Science Gone Wrong

Throughout history and literature, the pursuit of scientific advancement has often led to unintended consequences. Two compelling examples of this are the development of DDT, a chemical pesticide, and the creation of Frankenstein's monster in Mary Shelley's classic novel.

Science can be both revolutionary and disastrous. The creation of DDT and Frankenstein's monster were first put out to help the world. In the end, we find that the creation of these did the opposite. Through environmental devastation caused by DDT and the moral lessons of Frankenstein, we can explore how scientific advancements, while beneficial, can lead to catastrophic outcomes.

Dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane, more commonly known as DDT, was one of the first modern insecticides. Its original purpose was to help control diseases like malaria and typhus. There were many other reasons as well that NPIC refers to such as, "the reason why DDT was so widely used was because it is effective, relatively inexpensive to manufacture, and lasts a long time in the environment" (NPIC 1). This pesticide was used in large amounts, even being hailed as a miracle by the people. The long-lasting effects of DDT became more and more evident over time. It is a persistent organic pollutant, meaning it does not easily break down



in nature. Because of this, it will start to accumulate in the fatty tissues of living organisms. Due to the persistence in the environment, and its toxic effects on various species, global bans or restrictions were issued. However, by this time the damage was already done.

Scientists often overlook the ethical aspects when it comes to invention. Rather than figuring out long term outcomes, they focus on temporary success. This can clearly be seen with the invention of DDT. From the beginning, they believed it to be good, even saying it, “...promised freedom from malaria, typhus, and other insect borne diseases” (Arnold 2). Freedom almost always comes with a price, even with the inception of new findings.

As more research went on, new studies emerged. Generations are now facing the results of misuse of knowledge. Research done by *Scientific American* has proven this statement, even going on to say, “...children’s prenatal DDT exposure might also affect their own future children” (Arnold 4). Grandchildren of women who were exposed to the pesticide have been found to have higher BMI, early puberty rates, breast cancer risk, and cardiovascular disease risk. Although DDT is banned in many countries, the previous misuse continues to affect the world to this day. This highlights the importance of monitoring and managing environmental contaminants for public and environmental health.

In Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Victor Frankenstein's insatiable curiosity and desire to uncover the secrets of nature lead him down a perilous path. He wants to help humanity by trying to find a way the human body would be rid of disease. Victor was fascinated by the aspects of life and death. He reflects on his early fascination with the hidden laws of nature, stating, "The



world was to me a secret which I desired to divine. Curiosity, earnest research to learn the hidden laws of nature, gladness akin to rapture, as they were unfolded to me, are among the earliest sensations I can remember" (Shelley 29). Due to this, and his wish of being famous, he creates his infamous monster. However, this quest for knowledge comes with a grave warning as Victor later advises, "Learn from me, if not by my precepts, at least by my example, how dangerous is the acquirement of knowledge and how much happier that man is who believes his native town to be the world, than he who aspires to become greater than his nature will allow" (Shelley 43). This quote proves that knowledge comes with consequences if not used correctly. The consequences of his ambition become evident when he is horrified by the creature he has brought to life. The scene unfolded with his fretfulness, "unable to endure the aspect of the being I had created, I rushed out of the room and continued a long time traversing my bed-chamber, unable to compose my mind to sleep" (Shelley 47). These quotes illustrate the profound impact of Victor's creation, both on himself and on the broader themes of the novel, highlighting the dangers of unchecked ambition and the pursuit of forbidden knowledge.

Although *Frankenstein* is a science fiction novel, readers are still able to see the tale in their day-to-day life. Frankenstein highlights the regret of creating something meant to be good that turns out to be the opposite. DDT was created to help people fight diseases. This in turn caused generational damage that scientists did not anticipate. Both serve as powerful cautionary tales about the unintended consequences of human ambition and scientific exploration. In *Frankenstein*, Victor's relentless pursuit of knowledge leads him to create life, only to be



horrified by the result and the subsequent destruction it brings. He reflects on his early fascination with nature's secrets and warns of the dangers of overreaching ambition. Similarly, DDT was initially hailed as a revolutionary pesticide, promising to control pests and improve agricultural yields. However, like Victor's creation, the widespread use of DDT led to unforeseen and severe consequences, including environmental damage and health risks to humans. Both narratives underscore the importance of considering the ethical and long-term implications of scientific advancements, reminding us that the pursuit of knowledge and progress must be tempered with caution and responsibility.

In conclusion, both Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and the history of DDT illustrate the profound impact of unchecked scientific ambition. Victor Frankenstein's tale is a stark reminder of the dangers of pursuing knowledge without considering the ethical and moral implications. His creation, which was meant to be a testament to human ingenuity, instead became a source of horror and regret. Similarly, the initial promise of DDT as a groundbreaking pesticide eventually gave way to a litany of environmental and health issues, demonstrating the unforeseen consequences of technological advancements. These stories serve as enduring lessons on the necessity of responsible innovation, urging us to weigh the potential risks and benefits carefully. As we continue to push the boundaries of science and technology for the future, it is important to remember the past.

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STUDENT SHOWCASE

Madelyn Kopp, Junior Student

Plum City High School

Why *To Kill a Mockingbird* Should Be Taught in Schools

Did you know that Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* often comes out on top in polls about important books? In fact, it came in first for a World Book Day poll of British librarians that asked : “Which book should every adult read before they die?” So, why is this book being banned? Many people say that its mentions of sexuality and rape, language, and other things make teachers and readers uncomfortable. Opposing all this, I believe that *To Kill a Mockingbird* should be taught in schools.

To start, many people say that the novel's use of a particular racial slur, totaling forty-eight mentions, is harmful to students—especially ones of color. Now, this is true, but I would also like to mention the use of that same exact word in today's world. Multiple students in my school, most of whom are white, might hear or repeat this word every day. This word is also played in just about every rap song there is. Assuming that kids and teachers are uncomfortable with reading or teaching a word they are exposed to almost daily holds no value.

Continuing the theme from my last point, people are also mentioning that *To Kill a Mockingbird*'s mention of sexuality and rape are also part of the reason the book should be banned. Why? It is speaking the truth, making an issue in our world painfully apparent. People are uncomfortable with the fact that other humans are being raped. As a whole, we try to cover it up—especially when it comes to men. Thinking back to the novel, during his testimony, Tom Robinson says, “She reached up an' kissed me ‘side of th’ face. She says she never kissed a



grown man before an' she might as well kiss a [black man]. I say miss Mayella lemme outa here an' tried to run but she got her back to the door an' I'da had to push her." (Lee 194) "Black man" is a replacement for a racial slur.

Rape is happening all around the world, to many. Why are we ignoring it? According to the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network, "About 3% of American men have experienced an attempted or completed rape in their lifetime and one out of every ten rape victims are male." How can we as a society, ignore the rape that is happening around the world in real life, and choose to ban a book for it?

Another thing about *To Kill a Mockingbird* is that it is an amazing example of learning from past mistakes. Racism was, and still is a real thing, segregation was a real thing. Ignoring our country's mistakes isn't going to make them go away, it will make them worse. Harper Lee wrote *To Kill a Mockingbird* as a memoir. The plot and characters are based on Lee's observations of her family, her neighbors, and an event that happened near her hometown when she was ten. We can teach this book as a reminder of what has happened and why it should never happen again.

My last point is that people need to become more comfortable with being uncomfortable. Learning to be comfortable in the discomfort helps us to become better people. Accepting that life is hard and everybody's life is different is essential to being a human. For example, at the beginning of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Scout, Jem, and Dill are all incredibly uncomfortable with Boo Radley, but throughout the story the reader will notice them becoming more comfortable with Boo until Scout finally says "Why he hadn't done any of those things... Atticus, he was real nice..." (Lee 281) We should all take a hint from Scout and get over ourselves.



To conclude, *To Kill a Mockingbird* is a beautifully written piece of literature that everyone can learn from, and I think it should be taught everywhere.

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Research at the Ready

Dr. Karla Erwin
Assistant Professor of Education
University of Wisconsin-Whitewater

Close Reading in the English Classroom

As English teachers, we want our students to be critical thinkers and consumers. We also want them to engage with text, not just for themselves but for the world around them. Many times we see students who are disengaged with school and learning. One way to address disengagement is to use the close reading strategy. Research shows us that when using the close reading strategy, middle and high school students are engaged with text and critically think through complex questions and discussion. The question is then, how do we leverage close reading in order to enhance our students' critical thinking skills?

What is Close Reading?

Close reading is an intensive analysis of a text to understand what it says, how it says it and what it means (Shanahan, 2012). When we use close reading with students, we observe them interacting with the text and developing ideas that they may not have formed after just one or two readings. It is an interaction between the reader and the text, focusing on careful observations and interpretations. Close reading is something that we teach our students to do, rather than something we just do to them or for them (Lehman, 2013). It is a tool that supports a wide variety of thinking and is useful across any genre of text.

Close reading has five main components. The components include reading short, complex texts, rereading the text multiple times, annotating the text, answering text-dependent questions, and having collaborative discussions throughout the learning process (Fisher & Frey, 2015).

Text-dependent questions include four phases (Fisher & Frey, 2015). These phases involve answering questions about what the text says, how does the text work, what does the text mean, and what does the text inspire you to do (Fisher & Frey, 2015).



The Wisconsin State Standards inherently value objective, close, analytical reading and aim to move students in that direction. Standards that close reading are not limited to R.1, which requires students to read closely and cite specific textual evidence; R.3, which requires students to analyze how ideas develop and interact; R.4, which requires students to interpret words and phrases and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning; R.5, which requires students to analyze the structure of the text; R.6, which requires students to assess how the point of view shapes a text; and finally, R.9, which requires students to analyze two or more texts to build knowledge (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2020). As English teachers, we want to ensure that our standards are met and students understand the concepts and rigor of the standards. Using close reading as a strategy will support the needs of our students.

How to Teach Close Reading

Texts used for close reading must be worthy of the time devoted to support students' critical thinking development. These texts can be excerpts of longer works or short stories. The standards, as shown above, articulate the importance of this work. Once text is selected, educators create goals and targets for reading. The framework includes a first read, where students get the "gist" of the text. Since we have various levels of students within our classrooms, we know that some students will understand more than others from this initial reading. Afterward, we may have students reflect on a low-level question that asks what the text says, including who, what, where, and when. The students would then engage in a collaborative conversation discussion to reflect on their answers to these questions.

After students engage in collaborative conversations about what the text says, they participate in a second reading. This reading typically includes a question that helps them narrow their focus on vocabulary or structural elements. These questions are a part of phase two in text-dependent questions and address the broad question of how the text works. Following this focused and intentional reading, students have a second collaborative discussion about any vocabulary or structure type questions they now understand. The questions and readings completed during



phases one and two support students and form a bridge to phase three questions, which focus on inference.

Students must have a clear understanding of what the text is saying and how the text works so that they are able to use that understanding to build and create inferences. Educators may stop at phase one and two type questions, believing students grasp the text’s content and vocabulary. However, the bridge needed to become critical thinkers and consumers of information is found in phases three and four, where deep thinking is key to the process.

Phase three answers the question: What does the text mean? This is where our students are able to make inferences (Fisher & Frey, 2015). They use their inferences to connect with the author’s purpose and explore intertextual connections. Phase three involves three types of inferences: lexical, predictive, and elaborative (Gunning, 2020). Lexical inferences occur when the reader makes an informed judgment about the meaning of an ambiguous word using grammatical, contextual, and structural cues. Predictive inferences involve forming a plausible hypothesis, while elaborative inferences involve filling in unstated information (Gunning, 2020).

These inferences are important to know as educators because they help support readers in bridging the gaps between the text’s explicit content and what is “between the lines.” This understanding enables our readers to engage in the higher-order thinking needed for the final phase of text-dependent questions.

The final phase of text-dependent questions is phase four, where the text inspires the reader to take action (Fisher & Frey, 2015). This phase focuses on applying what has been learned to form an opinion or argument with evidence through completing a task. Students use their annotations, ideas, and collaborative discussions to engage in tasks that allow them to make the text their own. By making the text their own, students generate ideas and connect them to their lives and actions inspired by the text. Tasks in this phase include presentations, writing from sources, Socratic seminars, debates, or investigations of a claim or topic.



Through these phases of text-dependent questions and collaborative discussions, along with the other components of a close reading, students gain a deeper understanding of the text. This strategy not only fosters engagement but also cultivates critical thinking skills, empowering students to analyze and connect with texts on a meaningful level. Close reading is especially effective when the text lends itself to deep thinking and when there is intentional purpose behind its use.

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Viewpoint

Amy Heusterberg-Richards

Opinion on Play-Based Learning

As of this school year, my teaching career is officially an “adult.” These now-eighteen years in public education have offered me that confident maturity of a senior walking the hallways of their high school. They’ve also offered me a touch of that older-teen skepticism (“oh man, this again” or “yes, yes, I already know”) that can come as a veteran in one’s career. In fairness, I’ve seen educational trends come and go – trying trendy seating only to deflate those exercise balls, learning new technologies only to return to that classic pen+paper, and the like.

One fascinating educational movement that I’ve begun studying of late, though, seems to blend the tried-and-true with the trendy, the classic and the new. It’s as old as mancala boards and as innovative as the International School of Billund (totally worth a Google!). That movement is play-based learning.

As all those theorists purported during our college textbook readings, play is the most natural, instinctive learning experience. Educationally, play-as-learning is growing more and more prevalent abroad as whole school philosophies. Prominent American educational leaders – like Harvard University through its Pedagogy of Play website and Edutopia through its “Making Learning More Playful” series – are leaning into play-based practices as well. Key principles of such pedagogy redefine “play” to become instructional approaches that are joyful, iterative, interactive, and meaningful. Even for high school teachers, play can be a valid educational avenue for secondary classrooms – rather than simply a reward or break from “serious” learning. Students can learn advanced English Language Arts skills through tableaux and



role-playing and card games and gamified units and more!

Despite play’s natural presence and its educational benefits, barriers do remain.

Sometimes called the “paradoxes of play-based learning” (<https://isbillund.com/academics/pedagogy-of-play/#paradoxes>), our educational system and play aren’t always ideal partners. Experienced educators know, however, that not fitting within the traditional system is an unacceptable reason to dismiss impactful instruction. Instead, we should ponder what play-based techniques we can bring into our practices. We should consider how we can harness the joy of play within the structure of a classroom. We should explore how we can best engage students – young or old – through play. We should encourage creativity, collaboration, and risk-taking for their benefits to both academic growth and socio-emotional development.

Eighteen years of “growing up” in education has led me to believe that play belongs in every school — especially secondary ones. For those looking to dive deeper, I invite you to join me in exploring this approach further. Together, we can discover new ways to make play a meaningful part of learning for students of all ages.

*Amy Heusterberg-Richards holds eighteen years of high school ELA teaching experience and is a decade-long IB teacher. In 2018, she was Wisconsin’s selectee and national qualifier for the NCTE’s Teacher of Excellence title. Her book **All Subjects in Play: Play-Based Lessons for the Secondary Classroom** will be published in March 2025 through Routledge’s Eye on Education.*



Call for Manuscripts Summer 2025 Honoring Student Voices

ELA Educators: Do you read student work and wish to amplify the student's message or share the joy of student creativity? Here is your chance! The Summer 2025 *Wisconsin Education Journal* will showcase the talents of English Language Arts students in grades 5-12 as well as those of preservice ELA educators. You are also invited to share your own research or viewpoints on the best ways to honor student voices.

The deadline for submissions to the Summer 2025 Wisconsin English Journal is May 5, 2025. Please submit manuscripts to Dr. Patty Rieman, Editor, prieman@carthage.edu.

Submission Guidelines Where possible, please include charts, graphs, children's artifacts, bulleted points, and/or figures to vary the format, enhance the content of the article, and include children's voices where appropriate. Digital images in accepted manuscripts must be at least 300 dpi at the size they will be used.

Format All manuscripts should be prepared according to the style specified in the 7th edition of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* with the following exceptions: (a) a running head should appear on the cover page and all subsequent pages; (b) page numbers should appear on all pages; (c) the end matter should be ordered as follows: Author's Note, Children's Books Cited (only for cases in which there is a lengthy children's book list), and References. Please double-space the manuscript. Do not use footnotes or endnotes. To ensure impartial review, information that identifies the author should not appear in the manuscript.

Review Process

All submissions to *WEJ* go through an initial screening process in which they are read by the editorial team. Feature articles chosen to undergo additional peer review are sent anonymously to at least two members of the Editorial Review Board. There are several factors editors consider when making publication decisions. These factors include the potential of the manuscript to advance knowledge and inform practice in the field, the quality of the writing, and to appeal to the journal's diverse readership. NOTE: The review process will not begin until the submission deadline has passed for the issue.