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## Reading And Responding In The 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Digital Literacies And The NYSRA Charlotte Award

*Pegeen Jensen, Christine Paige, Dawn Sweredoski, and Elizabeth Yanoff*

### ABSTRACT

Reading projects that integrate technology engage today's students and prepare them to be literate in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In this article, we describe in detail successful podcasting and wiki projects conducted with NYSRA Charlotte Award nominated books. We also explore additional digital literacy projects that teachers can use in their literature programs.

### AUTHOR INFORMATION

Pegeen Jensen, Saddlewood Elementary School, South Colonie Schools, Albany, New York; Christine Paige, Educational Technology, The College of St. Rose, Albany, New York; Dawn Sweredoski, Lowville Academy Middle School, Lowville, New York; Elizabeth Yanoff, Teacher Education, The College of St. Rose, Albany, NY.

We would like to thank the 2010 and 2012 NYSRA Charlotte Award committees, the NYSRA board, and the participating students, authors, illustrators, and publishers for their support of these projects.

Correspondence concerning this article should be directed to Elizabeth Yanoff, The College of St. Rose, Albany, NY 12203 or [yanoffe@strose.edu](mailto:yanoffe@strose.edu).

Katherine Paterson, noted author and National Ambassador for Young People's Literature, recently responded to concerns about the iPad with the question, "Are we witnessing the long anticipated death of the book?" (Paterson, 2010, para 2). Paterson's response, with which we'd agree, was no. Books will always have an important place in our lives and can't be replaced by electronic texts. As Gioia (2005) suggests, the reading of literature contributes to our "civic, personal, and economic health" (para. 17).

As reading rates are declining (National Endowment for the Arts, 2004) and teachers are facing ever increasing demands on their class time (e.g. Copenhaver, 2001), teachers must work even harder to connect students to literature. Therefore, we would also want to ask, how can technology support reading of books? In our work in elementary and college classrooms, we have found technologies to complement and enhance our close reading of traditional texts, and in this article we'll present several examples of how we have used technologies to support our reading programs.

We have tried to ensure that we are using technology meaningfully and to extend students' understandings. As Gray suggests, "technology should focus on meeting curricular goals or addressing a pedagogical problem" (Gray, 2009, p. 2). We have continually asked ourselves how technology can allow us to reach out to others and create new possibilities for our students (Vasquez, 2010).

During the 2009-2010 school year, Pegeen, Dawn and Liz have engaged students in reading for the New York State Reading Association Charlotte Award. Since 1990 the New York State Reading Association has sponsored the NYSRA Charlotte Award, which is given



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every two years to authors and illustrators of books which are chosen by school age readers. The goal of the award committee is to encourage reading and to help teachers find books that their students will want to read (NYSRA, 2010). To add to successful past practices of the NYSRA Charlotte award, we have created several new digital literacy projects to engage readers and to extend their experiences reading the nominated books. Christine, as an educational technologist, has supported our work. We will present our successes with podcasting, wikis, websites, and email as well as discuss current and future ways we can utilize digital literacy projects to support students' reading.

### **Podcasting for the NYSRA Charlotte Award**

#### **What is a podcast?**

Podcasting provides an authentic project for integrating reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Riddle (2010) writes that podcasting is a “morph of the words ‘iPod’ and ‘broadcast’” (para 2); podcasts are digital sound files that can be easily shared on the web. Creating podcasts requires students to flexibly use their literacy skills to communicate with an authentic audience about topics of interest. In promoting the NYSRA Charlotte award, podcasting allowed us to communicate our favorite books with other NYSRA readers and the world.

#### **Podcasting with college and first grade students**

To begin the podcasting project, Liz's college students chose books nominated for the primary grades NYSRA Charlotte award (see resources) and prepared for an interactive story book reading (Barrentine, 1996) with Pegeen's first grade students. Initially the college students read the books aloud to the first graders. First graders kept notes about their favorite books and then formed small groups based on these favorites. Meanwhile, Liz and the college students reviewed podcasting scripts published online and decided to use the following format for our podcasts: introduction, plot summary, reasons for liking this book, and suggestions for who would also like this book. After we discussed the format with the students, students brainstormed ideas and decided what would be the most important information to share with listeners, practicing important comprehension and composition tasks throughout their discussions.

First grade students practiced their writing skills when they wrote the podcasts with the college students in an interactive writing format (Tompkins, 2007). Students were excited to practice their reading and speaking skills when they rehearsed their podcast. On recording day, Liz came with her laptop computer to record the completed presentations. Using Audacity, a free digital recording program (see resources), we were easily able to record and upload to a website all of the student podcasts. We celebrated our project by listening to the podcasts and students were thrilled with the final product. This review of *Martina the Beautiful Cockroach* demonstrates what two students able to accomplish.

College student: Salutations. Welcome to another New York State Reading Association Charlotte Award podcast. Today we have first graders talking about the book *Martina the Beautiful Cockroach*. Written by Carmen Agra Deedy. Illustrated by Michael Austin.



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First grade student: Hi I'm in first grade at Saddlewood Elementary School. I like the book *Martina the Beautiful Cockroach* by Carmen Agra Deedy and Michael Austin. This book is about a cockroach who has to get married. She has a coffee trick. She tricks them by dripping it on their shoes. And some get mad. One doesn't. I like it because it has beautiful pictures and it is hilarious. I think kids will die laughing if they read this book! I think kids one to ten will like this book!

College student: Thank you for that review of *Martina the Beautiful Cockroach*...

All of the podcasts for this project are available at <http://charlotteaward.wordpress.com/2010-nominees/charlotte-podcasts/>.

### **Benefits of podcasting for our college and first grade students**

This project allowed Liz's preservice and inservice teachers to see literature response in new ways. Teachers experienced the thoughtful responses of young readers as well as considered how podcasting lessons could meet many of the required NY ELA standards, including emerging standards for digital literacy. The college students were also able to practice using the podcasting technology and were further inspired to try this new technology in their own classrooms for literature response as well as other curricular needs.

For Pegeen, the sense of communicating beyond the four walls of our classroom was what made this project effective. First graders have some sense of the wide reaching ability of the internet. Posting a podcast and giving the world a window to our thinking empowered the first graders. They knew their audience could potentially act on their recommendation, get the book from the library or buy it from the bookstore. Experiencing the power of words at a young age is part of laying a strong foundation for communication in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## **Wiki Book Reviews**

### **What is a wiki book review?**

Wikis also have great possibilities for literacy teachers. "Wikis are collaboratively authored, searchable documents linked internally and externally" (Morgan & Smith, 2008, p. 80), and for Dawn, a wiki book review has become basically an online database of book reviews. The wiki that Dawn created places special emphasis on the NYSRA 2010 Charlotte Award nominated books and those which are being reviewed for the 2012 nominations list by sixth grade students. This user friendly technological 21<sup>st</sup> century vehicle allows students to travel beyond the confines of the classroom and share their enthusiasm for really great books with others. Students are not relegated to just sharing their love of literature with the twenty or so peers in each individual reading class. Instead, the wiki enables and empowers the sixth grade students to share their book reviews with a global audience. Both the podcasting and wiki projects are possible within a Web 2.0 world (Handsfield, Dean, & Cielocha, 2009), a world in which we can share and collaborate in reading and writing with others.



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### How did the wiki evolve?

Students traditionally self-select, read and write reviews of books for outside reading in Dawn's classroom. The reviews are handwritten on index cards following a set format that includes: the student's name, title of the book, author, genre, description of the book, a quote from the book with the page number, and a reflective piece. Students then present their book review using the information from the index card, along with displaying their book, and showing a prop that is created to bring the book to life. In Dawn's classroom five book reviews are shared simultaneously. Students enjoy the social interaction this type of presentation provides. However, both Dawn and the students wondered how the sharing of the book reviews could be expanded to include more people.

The dilemma is that once the book reviews are completed, what does one do with the review? Dawn was concerned that this invaluable information was being lost: index cards were tossed in the wastebasket, stored in a folder and/or placed in a file box, which was cumbersome. Dawn found that students would not take the time to look through the cards. Along with the teacher, the students had concerns such as: how can I see and listen to everyone else's book review if they are presenting at the same time, and what are our peers, and especially our friends reading in their classes? Dawn decided that the wiki Web 2.0 tool would be a solution to these problems and also provide students with a legitimate reason to use technology for information and understanding.

### Creating our wiki

As the creator of the wiki, Dawn first had to decide the purpose, rationale, and content of this educational wiki. The wiki would be and is a venue for discussions about literature, book reviews, and for promoting the NYSRA Charlotte Award books. Dawn created a wiki using PBworks (see resources and Dawn's site <http://readagoodbook.pbworks.com/FrontPage>).

The next step in creating the Wiki was creating the FrontPage of the wiki which is the first page that is viewed. This page has a brief description of the wiki, explanations and directions for the wiki and an Add a Comment box which is there by default. Pages such as: Ask the Teacher, Book Review Format, Genres of Books, Novel Discussions, NYSRA 2010 Charlotte Award Ballot Books, and NYSRA 2012 Charlotte Award Committee Reviews were added to the wiki. The Genres of Books page has a table of contents with links to additional pages. Because students have their favorite genres, Dawn decided to have students place their book reviews according to the genre so that anyone accessing the wiki for information would be able to easily locate their favorite genre and read the reviews. However, the Charlotte Award pages were created allowing all genres to be placed on the pages. This would encourage students to try another genre based on their peers' recommendations.

As the "Administrator" of the wiki, with the power to add users, Dawn's next step was the responsibility of teaching students how to use the wiki and giving them access as "Writers." Writers have the privilege of editing and adding new pages, adding comments, and uploading files. Students are then ready to add a book review to the wiki by following links from Dawn's school website. At this point students decide which page is the best placement for their book review. Once this decision is made students see additional directions reminding them of the index card format they have previously used:



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The following format should be used to discuss the book you have read. Enter your book review in the comment box below by clicking on Add a comment. Make sure you check your spelling and punctuation.

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Student Name: First initial and last name

Title of the Book:

Author:

Genre:

Description of the Book:

A description of the book, is 25 – 50 words – Do not give the ending under any circumstances. Do not use the book jacket for this part; to do so would be plagiarism.

Quote from the Book:

A quote from the book that you find of particular importance or interest – the quote should really give the flavor of the book or the message (theme) it is trying to convey (get across) or something that a character says that you connect with or agree with. Put the page # where you found it!

Reflective Piece:

A reflective piece is to write about what you think of the book – it has to be more than, “I liked it.” Tell why you rated it as you did using a scale of 1-10 with 10 being one of the best books you have ever read and if or why you would vote for this book to receive the Charlotte Award.

(<http://readagoodbook.pbworks.com/FrontPage> )

With their handwritten index card to refer to, the book review is then typed into an “Add a Comment” box. The last step in the entire process is to click the Add comment tab and the review is immediately posted. The amount of time allocated to this endeavor is dependent only upon the speed and accuracy of students’ typing abilities.

The wiki is continually under construction and stamped with the time and date of every addition, revision, and deletion. The wiki will continue to expand as students and the administrator of the wiki, Dawn, continue to collaborate as books are read and reviewed during the school year. The book review of the 2010 Charlotte Award nominated book *Stolen Children* by Peg Kehret is one example of this collaboration.

*Stolen Children*

Peg Kehret

Realistic fiction

Description: This book is awesome. It is about a teenager and a little girl who get kidnapped. The kidnapers want money. If they don't get what they want who knows what will happen to the two girls. This book will have you on the edge of your seat.



Quote: "Tubby be cat." (p. 58)

Reflective Piece: I think this book is outstanding. I rate this book a 10 because it is so intense. I chose that quote because I love it how the little girl talks wrong. Like instead of Tubby is a cat, she says "Tubby be cat." I would choose this book for the Charlotte Award 2010 Ballot.

(<http://readagoodbook.pbworks.com/NYSRA-Charlotte-Award-2010-Ballot-Books> )

### **Benefits of using a wiki**

Students of all ability levels achieve success reading a good book and sharing information from their handwritten index card book reviews using the wiki. For example, students who are reading below grade level can self select a primary Charlotte nominated book and contribute to the wiki. Additionally, the wiki provides all students with an authentic reason to revise and edit their work to make sure it is presentable for publication. The handwritten index card then serves as their rough draft. Finally, the wiki gives students the capability to upload photos, videos, and other files. It is and will always be a work in progress and as the technology advances, so too will the students.

### **Websites, Email, and More Reading Responses & Technology**

While we are thrilled with the success of these two projects, we are continually extending our understandings of how to connect readers and enhance reading through technology.

### **Websites, blogs, and email**

As part of the work of the NYSRA Charlotte Award committee and with the support of the NYSRA board, Liz initiated a blog, to serve as a hub for information regarding the award and nominees (<http://charlotteaward.wordpress.com/>). Visitors to the site can find links to information about the books, authors, illustrators, and publishers as well as the latest news about nominees and the award. Dawn has a detailed website for her classroom ([www.lacs-ny.org/webpages/dsweredoski](http://www.lacs-ny.org/webpages/dsweredoski)) in addition to the wiki that also shows the potential for using websites to encourage reading. Templates such as those provided through free publishing platforms such as WordPress (<http://wordpress.org/>) allow for quick and relatively easy creation of websites. We would like to explore further the possibility for online conversations through our websites and blogs.

In addition, we have connected participating classrooms with nominated authors and illustrators for email interviews (<http://charlotteaward.wordpress.com/charlotte-interviews/>). Email allowed the young readers to gain access to authors and illustrators that otherwise would not have been possible. Young readers thoughtfully created questions that showed deep understanding of the texts and were excited to talk to published professionals. For example, students asked,

What inspired you to make this book?

*In all the pictures detailed emotion is shown. How do you show the feelings this strongly?*



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*Is this about your culture or have you just heard about it?*  
(<http://charlotteaward.wordpress.com/charlotte-interviews/> )

We found that most authors and illustrators include an email address on their websites, and classroom teachers would be able to contact authors and illustrators this way as well. We also see the potential for readers to sharing reading responses together through email.

### **Considering new digital literacy projects**

Christine notes interactive whiteboards are an emerging technology. Interactive whiteboards engage students in literacy learning in new ways. Interactive whiteboards are the first educational technology intended primarily for teachers (Betcher & Lee, 2009). Previous technologies were designed for the general consumer and then adapted to be included in a classroom. Interactive whiteboards allow for the teacher to interact with their class by demonstrating, modeling, and manipulating what is projected on the board by a simple touch. With the software included with the boards, audio translations can also be integrated with the visual tools portrayed on the board. This interactive technology of the interactive whiteboard allows learners to immerse in the sounds of the words they are learning. As we consider new ways to respond to literature we are considering how we might use interactive whiteboards.

We also continue to consider how to use technology to engage our struggling students in literacy. Technology such as talking story books, internet based learning resources, Voice Thread, and software programs can be helpful in reaching students who require additional assistance in literacy. Christine finds in her work as an educational technologist that technology provides motivation for students also because it is fun, interesting and always changing.

### **Reflections**

We began with Katherine Paterson's (2010) question about the "death of the book" (para 2). We strongly believe books are still relevant and important to our students. What we also would suggest, however, is that technologies such as podcasting and wikis can complement and enhance the ways our students read and respond to books. Through digital literacy projects like these students are able to connect and share with others, to learn new literacies, and be more motivated to keep reading great books, like those nominated for the NYSRA Charlotte Award. We look forward to continually finding new ways to read and write in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **Resources**

#### **Podcasting**

Podcasting essentials

<http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/printouts/podcasts-nuts-bolts-creating-30311.html>

Audacity (free digital audio software)

<http://audacity.sourceforge.net>

#### **Wikis**

PBwiki

<http://www.pbwiki.com>

Wikispaces

<http://www.wikispaces.com/site/for/teachers>



### Authors' Note

The winners of the 2010 NYSRA Charlotte Award were announced in May 2010 after the projects described in this article were completed. The primary book award was given to *There Is a Bird on Your Head* by Mo Willems. The intermediate grade book award was given to *Stolen Children* by Peg Kehret. The young adult book award was given to *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins. Over 12,000 New York students voted.

### 2010 NYSRA Charlotte Award Nominees

#### Primary

- Berkes, M. (2007). *Over in the Jungle: A Rainforest Rhyme*. Nevada City, CA: Dawn Publications
- Broach, E. (2007). *When Dinosaurs Came With Everything*. NY: Atheneum.
- Deedy, C.A. (2007). *Martina the Beautiful Cockroach*. Atlanta, GA: Peachtree Publishers.
- Farrell, J. (2007). *Stargazer's Alphabet*. Honesdale, PA: Boyds Mills Press.
- Hopkinson, D. (2008). *Abe Lincoln Crosses a Creek: A Tall, Thin Tale*. NY: Schwartz & Wade
- Kulka, J. (2007). *Wolf's Coming!* Minneapolis, MN: Carolrhoda.
- Madison, A. (2007). *Velma Gratch and the Way Cool Butterfly*. NY: Schwartz & Wade.
- Noble, T.H. (2007). *The Orange Shoes*. Chelsea, MI: Sleeping Bear Press
- Posada, M. (2007). *Guess what is growing inside this egg*. Minneapolis, MN: Millbrook.
- Willems, M. (2007). *There is a Bird on Your Head*. Mo Willems NY: Hyperion.

#### Intermediate

- Auch, M.J. (2008). *A Dog On His Own*. NY: Holiday House.
- Hiscock, B. (2008). *Ookpik: The Travels of a Snowy Owl*. Honesdale, PA: Boyds Mills Press.
- Holm, J.L. (2007). *Middle School is Worse Than Meatloaf*. NY: Atheneum.
- Kehret, P. (2008). *Stolen Children*. NY: Dutton Juvenile.
- Marx, T. (2007). *Steel Drumming at the Apollo*. NY: Lee & Low.
- Paulsen, G. (2007). *Lawn Boy*. NY: Wendy Lamb Books.
- Perkins, M. (2007). *Rickshaw Girl*. Watertown, MA: Charlesbridge.
- Sanchez, A. (2008). *The Invasion of Sandy Bay*. Honesdale, PA: Calkins Creeks Books.
- Wilson, N.D. (2007). *Leepike Ridge*. NY: Random House.
- Zimmer, T.V. (2008). *42 Miles*. NY: Clarion.

#### Young Adult

- Anderson, L.H. (2008). *Chains*. NY: Simon & Schuster.
- Bowers, L. (2007). *Beauty Shop for Rent:...fully equipped, inquire within*. NY: Harcourt.
- Collins, S. (2008). *The Hunger Games*. NY: Scholastic.
- Crane, E.M. (2008). *Skin Deep*. NY: Delacorte.
- Ellsworth, L. (2007). *In Search of Mockingbird*. NY: Henry Holt & Company.
- Kent, R. (2007). *Kimchi & Calamari*. NY: HarperCollins.
- Kilbourne, C. (2007). *Dear Jo: The story of losing Leah...and finding hope*. Montreal, Québec: Lobster Press.
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- Schmidt, Gary D. (2008). *Trouble*. NY: Clarion.
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