A Festival of Writing
2016 Edition

Prize-Winning Essays
from the Thirty-Eighth Annual
Youngstown State University
English Festival

Featuring
The Thomas and Carol Gay Lecturer
Matt de la Peña
The James A. Houck Lecturer
Steven Bickmore

10th–12th Grades
Wednesday, April 20, 2016

7th–9th Grades
Thursday, April 21,
or Friday, April 22, 2016

9:00 a.m.–3:45 p.m.
Kilcawley Center

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Introduction

For nearly all of its more than thirty years, the Youngstown State University English Festival Committee has published a collection of the prize-winning essays written during each Festival’s activities and competitions.

Such a publication is wholly in keeping with the Festival’s stated goal to “recognize and reward distinctive writing.” It is also a means for publicizing the extraordinary work that Youngstown-area students do at the Festival, both in preparing themselves by reading the works on the English Festival booklist and in composing thoughtful and engaging essays before and during the Festival.

The essays included in this 2016 edition of A Festival of Writing are no exception. They reflect the excellent language facility of our area’s students, as well as their careful reading and critical thinking. The YSU English Festival Committee congratulates those students whose work appears in these pages, and it commends the parents and teachers who have supported these young writers.

Jeff Buchanan  Angela Messenger  Gary Salvner

Co-Chairs of the English Festival Committee

2016 English Festival Booklist

7th–9th Grades

I Will Save You*
Matt de la Peña

A Nation’s Hope: The Story of Joe Louis**
Matt de la Peña

Doll Bones
Holly Black

Inside Out and Back Again
Thanhha Lai

A Monster Calls
Patrick Ness

Bomb: The Race to Build–and Steal–the World’s Most Dangerous Weapon*
Steve Sheinkin

Counting by 7’s
Holly Goldberg Sloan

Paperboy
Vince Vawter

10th–12th Grades

I Will Save You*
Matt de la Peña

A Nation’s Hope: The Story of Joe Louis**
Matt de la Peña

We Were Here
Matt de la Peña

Boy 21
Matthew Quick

Revolver
Marcus Sedgwick

Bomb: The Race to Build–and Steal–the World’s Most Dangerous Weapon*
Steve Sheinkin

Rose Under Fire
Elizabeth Wein

Leviathan
Scott Westerfeld

*indicates a title common to both levels
**English Festival bonus book
2016 Candace Gay Memorial Essay Contest

Prompt: In 750-1000 words, respond to the following:

Why do particular passages in books stay with us? How do movie sequences sometimes create the same effect? Pick a scene or two from one or more of this year’s English Festival books that read or feel like a movie scene. If you were responsible for adapting the selected scene or episodes, how would you maintain the book’s lasting impact in your film version?

First-Prize Essays

Wednesday

Lily AbiNader
Sharpsville Area High School

REVOLVER: The Movie

FADE IN:

INT. THE CABIN – WASH DAY, NIGHT

Inside the cabin, Anna, Nadya, and Sig all sit around waiting for Einar to return home. Anna and Nadya are bickering.

SIG

Won’t you two stop bickering?

The bickering continues. Sig leaves the cabin to go in search of his father. The two women are so engrossed in their arguing that they don’t question his leaving.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. CABIN DOOR – LATE AFTERNOON

Sig puts on his boots and grabs his skis from the pegs under the eaves at the short side of the cabin.

EXT. CABIN – LATE AFTERNOON

Sig is skiing towards the lake. Out in the distance a black smudge on the ice catches his eye. It starts to snow. Now at the edge of the lake, Sig tests the ice with his poles. He then sets out on the ice, towards the black smudge.

After finishing a book or a movie, I’m sometimes left with the feeling that I’ve experienced something that has influenced my life in a meaningful way. Reading Revolver, by Marcus Sedgwick, I felt that impact. Throughout the book, when reading certain scenes, it was almost as though I was a character, like I was in them. There were two scenes in particular that I found to be unforgettable.

One scene that had tremendous emotional resonance was when Sig sees the black smudge out on the lake, and deep down he knows it’s his father, dead. If I were to adapt this writing into a movie scene, I would focus on Sig’s observations and the emotions that arise as his understanding grows: first, briefly, confusion, giving way to shock, horror, and overwhelming sadness at the realization of his loss.

Revealing a character’s thoughts requires considerable skill on the part of the filmmaker. Sig is thinking about how he knows his father is out on the lake, how he knows the black smudge is really Einar. To capture this intuition on film, I would start with an extreme long shot at Sig’s eye level, with the camera just behind his shoulder, as if you’re standing right behind him and have the same view he does. In this shot, Sig is blurred, and the black smudge is in sharper focus. This demonstrates Sig’s thoughts, which are hyper-focused on the black smudge and what he fears it to be.

Following the extreme long shot, I would have a sequence of match cuts...
from Sig’s visual standpoint. On the ice, Sig feels like he’s lurching forward towards his father, and the match cuts will make it feel like the spectator is also lurching forward, caught up in Sig’s own adrenaline rush; nothing matters but the black smudge. It will feel to the spectator like they’re pushing forward through compressed time until they get to Einar. A zoomed-in shot, on Sig’s face, will disclose his grief.

INT. CABIN – MOON DAY, MORNING
Inside the cabin, Sig is holding the gun pointed at Wolff. Anna has just escaped from Wolff and is now by Sig. Sig is asking Anna to leave the cabin and catch up with Nadya.

SIG
(with eyes still on Wolff)
Please. For my sake. For your sake. For Pappa. For Mother. Do as I ask. Please?
After Sig asks Anna to leave, she still is hesitant, and stays for a few more moments before nodding and leaving.

ANNA
Sig. Remember your mother. Remember her, remember what she would tell you now.

WOLFF
(in disbelief)
Why? You could’ve won. You could’ve won. Why’d you miss?

SIG
(smiling)
My mother’s children are not murderers.

Sig hands the empty gun to Wolff, and walks towards the door. Wolff, shocked, gets one of his new cartridges and places it in Einar’s old gun. Sig reaches the door and opens it, praying to his mother and father. The revolver fires.

Another powerful passage in Sedgwick’s Revolver also carries the suspense of memorable movie scenes. The reader discovers the depth of Sig’s internal conflict through his debate of whether or not to take a person’s life. To adapt this writing into film, I would now focus what Wolff sees and his emotions because of those sights.

To begin, I would use a low-angle shot placed in front of Sig. This would show how the level of power in the room was shifted in Sig’s direction because he was now the one in possession of a working revolver. This dramatic shift in circumstances leaves Sig in control of the situation. He has suddenly become the “man of the house,” taking over his father’s role. Following this would be a high-angle shot placed in front of Wolff. This would further emphasize the fact that Sig is now the dominant man in the room. Because of this shot from above, Wolff looks insignificant and weak. Wolff sees Sig’s face become calm when he realizes his advantage and is no longer afraid; Wolff begins the whispered pleas for his life.

Revolver reads quickly and intensely, so much so that I got caught up in the action. The task of writing this essay opened my eyes to how many careful decisions regarding film technique go into adapting a book into film. Camera angles, and the different cuts and shots, can “magically” reveal the feeling behind a writer’s work. Many books I have loved have been adapted for the screen. Some share the lasting impact of the book; others, somehow, fall short. The sensory detail, suspense, depth of emotion, and relatable characters in Revolver would make it a great movie...that is, in the hands of the right filmmaker.

The dialogue used in this second screen play is quoted from Revolver on pages 185-188.
“Why do particular passages in books stay with us?” I feel that the answer to this is explained in the quote by Maya Angelou. “People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.” Books have a way of transporting us to the world they are written about. When we read, we become a part of that world. We feel what the character is feeling and go through the same experiences that they do. We become the character and remember afterwards what it felt like to be them. The same effect happens when we watch a movie. Historical movies transport us to events that happened years ago. Good writing, pre-production work, special effects, and music play a key role in doing this. The book, *Bomb*, by Steve Sheinkin, is the story of the race to build the Atomic bomb. As a reader, you experience the blood, sweat, and tears that went onto the construction of the world’s most dangerous weapon, and the devastation caused after it was used. The part from this book that I would choose to adapt into a movie scene would be from pages 193 to 200, where the first Atomic bomb is dropped on Hiroshima.

The first part of making a historical film is to do your research. Visiting museums and consulting with experts are a great source of information and inspiration. From there, pre-production on the movie can begin. Costumes will be made by studying what the Japanese wore at that time, as well as WWII pilot uniforms. For the scene after the bomb hits, each extra is going to require special-effects makeup. This will include effects of serious burns, shrapnel jutting out of their skin, and skin peeling off. Gruesome, yes, but historically accurate. The set-designers will have the task of making a street in modern-day Hiroshima appear as it did in 1945. The real challenge will come after the blast. We wouldn’t be allowed to destroy real buildings, so we shall make our own pre-destroyed, carved out of foam and fiberglass. Greenscreens will be placed around the perimeter of the set so that the rest of the city, before and after, can be made by the computer. Pictures of what Hiroshima looked like after the bomb is dropped will be tremendously helpful on this part. It will also be required to recreate the set of Los Alamos, or if possible, film in the real Los Alamos itself.

After the scenes have been filmed, the next step in production is special effects and music. Computer generated images, or CGI, has advanced so greatly over the years that actors can now walk through entire worlds and interact with characters that do not exist. If the imagery is bad, then it will remind audiences that they are watching a movie, and ruin the experience. The atomic reaction and explosion will be replicated by the computer, although research will be made to insure that it looks exactly like what really happened. The most important part of any movie is recording the soundtrack. If a character on screen is feeling sad, then the music is sad, which in turn makes the audience feel sad. The music will play a huge role in making the audience feel the devastation after the bomb is dropped. We may not remember the scene, but we will remember how it made us feel. If the music is what made us feel that way, then that is what we will remember.

The final step is to bring it all together. We start with a bird’s-eye view of the *Enola Gay* as it flies over Japan. The music makes it sound like they are marching off into battle. The dialogue
between the men in the plane is exactly what is seen on page 194 in the book, as the camera looks out over their shoulders. The button is pushed and the bomb falls out. The scene cuts to a house in the city below, with a young girl, Yohko, eating breakfast. She glances at the clock. “Oh no!” she cries. “I’ll be late for school! Goodbye mother!” We see the bomb falling towards the camera, then past it, hurtling towards the ground. Yohko climbs into a streetcar, sits down, and glances out the window to see two boys chasing a dragonfly. The camera cuts back to the bomb. It zooms in to the point where we can see the individual atoms splitting apart and releasing the energy. The music builds up to a crescendo. The boy reaches for the dragonfly. A silent flash of white light appears over the city, and then the sound rushes in through a rising tower of smoke. Yohko, who had fallen to the floor, steps out of the blackened bus. Her face shows shock and horror. The entire city is gone, while remaining buildings burn and collapse. Looking around, she sees people climbing out of the wreckage, exactly as they are described in the book, “...with horrible burns, their faces swollen, their blackened skin hanging in strips” (Sheinkin 196). The people move through the street like sleepwalkers, while Yohko herself is covered with bloody scratches. The music at this point is very simple and haunting. The somber music carries over to Los Alamos, where the scientists hear the news over the broadcast system. Different shots show them running through the corridors, shouting the news and starting to celebrate, until somebody receives a message with more details on the destruction. She reads aloud to the crowd the total number of deaths and casualties so far. As she does, the mood darkens, and silence comes over the room. “My God, what have we done?” somebody exclaims. Oppenheimer walks through the grounds on his own. He sees the other scientists, who had been celebrating just moments before, now walking as dazed and silent as the people in Hiroshima. A close-up of Oppenheimer shows a far off look in his eyes, as he says to himself in a barely audible whisper, “The reaction has begun.”

So, as you can see, if I were to turn this scene from the book into a movie scene, that is how I would do it. People argue that movies take away from the effect of imagining a story for oneself. Movies don’t take away from, but enhance the experience of the story, especially if it was something that actually happened. Through technology, music, or just good writing, we can see the world and the action much more clearly. The clearer we see it, the more we believe that we are there with the character. We become one with the story. That is why certain scenes stay with us, because sometimes those stories are real. And in the stories that we see as real, we will most always remember what we did as the character, and exactly how it made us feel.

**Friday**

**Melia Lenkner**  
Greenville Area Junior/Senior High School

**Preserving the Impact**

While reading a novel, sometimes we as readers will stumble across certain passages or even whole chapters that stay with us long after we finish reading the book. These passages touch us, and the specific emotions we feel while reading them are what cause us to remember them. In a movie, the right combination of film techniques, dialogue, and camera shots can instill a certain emotion in the viewer similar to how carefully worded passages in a book can instill emotion in a reader. There were two scenes in the novel *Boy21* by Matthew Quick that touched me and had a lasting impact, and were written in a way that made me picture them clearly, like scenes from a movie. These scenes were the scene in which Finley discovers that Erin has been hit by a car and is hospitalized, and the preface.

The hospital scene is a stressful and helpless time for Finley, and these feelings carry over to the reader. He even says at the beginning of the scene that “It feels like I’m turning inside out,” just after he throws up (page 174). To help the viewer of the film adaptation feel the same pain and helplessness as Finley, the beginning of the scene would start off with a shot from Finley’s point of view as he runs into the hospital. Finley describes many things going on around him at once in this scene, such as a homeless man pacing and yelling and a television playing a show where a shark is eating a sea lion. All of the things going on around him are clearly overwhelming him, as he is already in a state of shock because of what has happened to Erin. The shot from his
point of view would be purposefully shaking, using the shaky camera technique to convey his panic. The sound around him would be distorted. Russ would hold his hand on Finley’s back and would ask if Finley was all right, and just after that the scene would cut to a different shot, a long shot, of Russ, Wess, and Finley in the waiting room, just as Finley doubles over and throws up. Finley later describes the situation and Erin’s condition "like a nightmare" (page 174). The shaky camera technique and distortion of sound would make the scene nightmare-like to the viewer and would inspire the same feeling of helplessness, fear, and confusion that is created by the passage.

The preface of *Boy21* reads very much like a movie scene to me. Like a perfect opening scene that would set the rest of the movie up, it instills a feeling of sympathy and understanding for Finley in the viewer or reader. It explains how Finley found his escape from his terrible life in basketball and sets up the rest of the basketball-themed novel. The screen would start off pitch black, with a voice-over by older Finley. “Sometimes I pretend that shooting hoops in my backyard is my oldest memory.” (page 1) The first shot would fade in, a close-up of young Finley’s face. The voice-over would continue, this time saying “Our house [had] been silent for a long time and I [understood] that my mother [was] not coming back.” (page 1), and then “I just [kept] shooting hoops, zoning out, pretending that I [would] never have to go into my house again--that I [would] never have to remember what happened before I began shooting hoops.” With this dialogue, the reader understands that Finley’s only childhood memories seem to be shooting hoops because that is all he wants to remember. His eyes are upward, and his expression is serious and determined, which would convey his hard work in the sport very well to the audience. The camera would zoom out to a medium shot, revealing that young Finley, aged somewhere between five and seven years old, is struggling to dribble a basketball that seems slightly too big for his hands in front of a lowered hoop in his cement backyard. Finley has very little talent, and he trained hard to improve at basketball, which can be shown through this scene. He throws the ball, and it barely brushes the net before bouncing to the ground. The voice-over by older Finley continues in the background as young Finley retrieves the ball and passes it to Erin. This introduces Erin into the story, and the time jump helps the viewer understand that Finley has been using basketball as an escape from his problems for a very long time.

Both of these scenes from *Boy21* were written to inspire a certain emotion in the reader, and that emotion makes the reader remember the scene. The hospital scene inspired a feeling of despair and helplessness, and the preface inspired a feeling of sympathy and understanding for Finley. Using the right dialogue and filming techniques, these feelings could be preserved in film adaptations of the scenes, and therefore the impact the scenes leave would also be preserved.
Books affect us more than we imagine. With stories, our mind can adventure to any destination and we can escape the reality surrounding us. Great novels stay with us, scorched into our memory for a length of time, some even becoming part of our philosophy. We like to think back to all of the unforgettable books we have read that have touched us emotionally or spiritually. One of the English Festival’s books this year that really spoke to me was *We Were Here*, by Matt De La Peña. If it were my duty to recreate this novel into an upcoming film, the most memorable scenes that stuck with me, and that I would turn most of my attention to, making sure they were included, are when Mong committed suicide, and when “Mexico,” or Miguel, finally told Rondell what he did to end up in a group home.

When we finally found out about Mong’s past through the folder Miguel stole, we saw a glimpse as to why he was so sick and deranged. Visualize looking at your father while he pulled the trigger aimed directly at you. Through this rejection, he told no one, keeping his tragic past behind him, and eventually not caring for whatever happened to him. I believe, at the end of his life, he finally found peace, becoming one with the ocean. Maybe that is why he decided at this point to drown. To depict this in a film; the scene of quiet desperation that Miguel and Rondell faced while Mong slowly made his way into the ocean drowning himself would be arduous work. Techniques like making the picture seem blurry and vibrating the camera may display the internal struggles Miguel and Rondell faced, while having the muffled, “Wha’chu mean Mexico? What’s happening, Mexico? Where’s Mong going, Mexico? Mexico? Mexico?” (192) be shouted by Rondell. I would use the technique of pulling the focus, first on Mong, and then focusing more on Miguel and Rondell. Alternating between the two focuses displays rack focusing. This heartbreaking scene jarred me internally. The same effect has to be in the movie. Displaying the same pulsations of the waves and the helpless cries of Mong’s friends would make this scene particularly heart wrenching. Producing the effect within the movie is extremely vital in order to keep the subtleties in the book alive.

The scene where Miguel finally told Rondell that he had killed his brother, Diego, also made the novel feel like a movie. In order to show the dramatic event that is unraveling, I would use high contrast lighting. To make this scene as vulnerable as in the book, I would have Miguel in a fetal position rocking back and forth while choppy flashbacks, using crosscutting, a film technique, shorn of the playful fight between Miguel and Diego. All while Rondell’s face is in absolute frozen, shock. Passionate, deep drums are playing in the background; which would be choppier, and more violent, thrashing and disturbing rather than the drums they played within the circle on the beach. These drums would get louder and louder, until finally it would all stop harshly, right as the knife hit Diego’s heart. This is use of montage, another film technique. The scene would cut back to Miguel, at the bottom of the frame to show his vulnerability, sobbing silently on the ground, and then pulling the focus, a film technique, to Rondell in the background, looking astonished and grief stricken. This is one of the most significant scenes in the whole novel. Leading up to this, we could only wonder why Miguel was in the group home to begin with, using minor clues. Distressing, disturbing, and terrifying flashbacks should show the truth that emerges from Miguel.

As I stated before, books provides us a break from our hectic lives, and lets us escape them for a bit. While this is true, stories also changes the way we experience and look at things in life. We can see things from a different viewpoint, in a way we have never thought of doing so. Movies also need to, with the best of their ability, depict the inner struggles characters face to make the book come to life, along with the lasting impact books give us. With the techniques I introduced, for example, music, sharp cutoffs, and the pulling the camera, these scenes will come to life on the full screen. It is difficult to maintain the subtle nuances the author adds to books. Directors seem to make scenes more action packed, and with that taking out crucial minuscule parts, to make it more relevant to the audience. Butchering *We Were Here* would weaken the impression felt by the audience. Portraying its morose scenes and bleak outlook on life itself just as it is in the novel is tremendously essential. I will pick up this book one day again, and a flood of emotions will rush into me. This is what the film portion needs in order to make a permanent impact on everyone who watches it, satisfying and quenching people’s undying thirst for a new take on life, and an escape from reality.
The scene fades in to a shot focused on a beautiful oak grandfather clock. The composition is low key, as it seems the only source of light is coming from dimly lit lamps placed around the room. In the background are dull pink walls, hardwood floors and a white ceiling. There are a few sporadically placed pictures hanging on the walls, and most of them are old, fraying images of people. The pictures are framed in gold. The camera focuses on the clock pendulum which swings back and forth. It clicks with every motion, and the movement leaves the audience in suspense. The tension breaks as the camera cuts to a reflection of a boy in the glass of the clock. He is wearing a plain gray shirt and khaki pants. He seems distressed, and is drenched in sweat. The boy is Conor whose fists are clenched and determination radiates from his face. Zooming out we see the back of the boy. Suddenly, he grabs the pendulum with his right hand.

Cut to a close-up of Conor’s face. His jaw is clenched and sweat drips from his forehead. He reaches toward the hands of the clock and pulls with all of his might. He then pushes with both hands and we hear a snap. The camera jumps to the clock which goes crazy, spinning around in circles until it strangely gains control. The hands slow down until they eventually stop spinning.

Conor notices something, as the camera returns to a close-up. With a look of concern on his face, he whispers, “Oh-no.”

From Conor’s point of view the shot is framed around the clock revealing the hands have stopped at a particular time, 12:07. We hear an eerie voice coming from behind Conor. It echoes, “As destruction goes, this is all remarkably pitiful.” (Ness 95). The voice continues, “It is the kind of destruction I would expect from a boy.” (Ness 98). Conor’s face is in profile and he gulps like he can’t believe his ears as the camera begins to pan right bringing into view what’s been behind him. We see from where the voice had been coming.

This cinematic description is just part of my adaptation of the book, A Monster Calls by Patrick Ness. While reading this sequence, which takes place on pages 93 to 98 in the novel, I felt transported into the scene. I wanted to capture the emotional impact the novel left on me without losing any details. It was important to me to keep Conor’s reactions and feelings in mind. It must be noted that this character is a young man who is emotionally unstable due to his mother’s illness and that he realizes her death is inevitable. This emotional understanding affects how Conor’s character should be visualized and portrayed. If a character in a movie or television scene is portrayed correctly, the audience can sympathize with the character’s story. It needs to impact the audience so that they identify with the emotions the character experiences as an effect of what is going on around them. By taking time to show how Conor’s fists are clenched and watch sweat drip from his face, the audience can feel Conor’s anguish. This helps them remember who Conor is: an emotional young boy who is going through a crisis. It is important to create this heart-wrenching effect on the audience, which impacts how they remember the story.

While adapting this scene, I also kept specific camera angles in mind. By cutting from one shot to another, the audience has time to focus on the reactions of the character. The pan at the end of the description leaves the audience in suspense, wondering what’s about to happen. Keeping a steady camera angle with very few effects helps establish stronger characterization. Too many special effects and too much camera movement would distract the audience from the emotional turmoil of Conor. Using the shots from Conor’s point of view helps the audience remember the significance of the protagonist in this novel.

Another part of a film that creates a long term impact on the audience’s mind is the colors and props of the setting. For example, I kept in mind the fact that Conor was at his grandmother’s house and the emotional undertone. The colors and props had to display this and express the mood to the audience. This is why I chose to make the colors and lighting very dull and dim. These details should make people feel sad and remind them of what the character is feeling. I specifically chose understated set pieces for an older house (like Conor’s grandmother’s), such as the lamps and the golden frames. These are minor details for this scene, because, ultimately, the camera spends Sixty-Nine Years!

Help us to celebrate the English Festival’s 39th year.

It’s a Valley tradition.

Think of your family members who attended the Festival in the late 1970s—teachers? grandparents? parents?

Who do you know who attended in the 80s? 90s?
the majority of its time capturing the
clock and Conor which are the more
important aspects.

As the panorama shot ends, the
camera’s gaze lands on a large yew
tree that sits on the opposite side of the
room. The tree has to twist in multiple
directions to fit inside of the home, and
it still consumes half of the room. The
monstrous tree seems personified, as
its branches grow limbs. What seems
to be most surprising is the top of the
tree, where the branches form a head.
The sticks and twigs perfectly bend and
twist, giving the tree, rather, the mon-
ster, a face. The only part of the monster
that isn’t consumed by branches and
twigs are the two hollow spaces on ei-
ther side of the nose. They seem to form
eyes. Conor doesn’t seem surprised, only
terified, as if he knows what is com-
ing. He stares up at the monster, which
stares back.

“Leave me alone!” Conor shouts
up to the monster. As he speaks, the
camera follows his gaze upwards until
it is finally eye level with the monster.

“Why would I do that? I have an-
other tale to tell you.” The monster
grins in a strange way as he speaks. The
camera cuts to an aerial shot of Conor.

“It is as fair as stories go. It speaks
of a man whose ego is larger than his
head. In the end, he is punished for his
evil deeds” The monster speaks once
more. The camera cuts to a full shot
of Conor, who looks around the room
at the mess he has made. After a few
seconds, the camera returns to Conor’s
point of view.

“Tell me more.” Conor says. The
monster grins and the shot fades out.

Books can leave a great impact on
our minds, our hearts, and even our
lives. Particular scenes in books can es-
pecially become locked into our memo-
ries. The novel I Will Save You had an
incredibly memorable passage that I will
remember for years to come. The day
Kidd threw himself off the cliff in Cardiff
felt as if it were my own memory. When
he was sitting on the bench with Olivia
waiting for the grunion, his anxiety over
Devon felt painful to read. Despite Ol-
ivia’s pleading, it did not stop him from pushing
Devon, or in reality him-
self, off the fence into the
sand below. I could feel
his desperation to save
the girl he loves when he
said, “I had to save Olivia,
I had to make him hurt
me instead” (291). The
aftermath of the fall gave
an even greater sense of
urgency. Kidd also said, “I
felt slippery fish going on
me and I heard Mr. Red
screaming my name and
screaming for everyone
on the sand to back away
from me....” (292). The detailed imagery
of Cardiff by the Sea and the feeling of
suspense and emotional intensity made
that passage feel alive and cinematic.

Memorable movie sequences can
also leave the same impression as books
do. They are action-packed, suspense-
ful, and wild, just as Kidd’s moment on
grunion day was. The only difference is
that movies can often present a more
visual and tangible account of a story
than words do. In movies, you can
see the character’s pain through the
actor’s grimace on his face. You can
feel more in tune to what’s happening
through background music or the tones
of the voices of characters. Adapting
the grunion day scene from I Will Save
You into a film would make that portion
of the novel even more realistic and
powerful.

To leave the same effect as the
book, I would try to focus on the ten-
sion, suspense, and emotions built
when he fell off the cliff during that
scene. Olivia and Kidd must both be on
a cliff high above the ocean so that Kidd
can dramatically fall below to the sand.
Olivia will be screaming and pleading
for him to stop while a crowd will be
below for him, waiting for the grunion
to come. As Olivia is in her despera-
tion, the camera will focus on her face
to really portray the emotional agony
she is experiencing. Kidd’s back will
be facing the camera as he is standing
on the edge of the cliff to convey the
determination and resolve he has. He
will finally stop the Devon inside of
him from hurting Olivia. As he breaks
through the fence and falls, the camera will be switched to Kidd’s point of view. Once he reaches the ground the camera will slowly black out to show how Kidd is losing consciousness. Showing the fall and aftermath in Kidd’s perspective will allow the viewer to get a better idea of how he would have felt in that situation. The viewers would be able to feel Kidd’s fear as he falls to the ground and his confusion as he is blacking out.

Another important aspect to portray in the film version of this scene would be the sound and music to go along with the action and movement occurring. Before Kidd plummets and takes his fall, there will be instrumental music playing in my film. It should be dark, foreboding, and slowly increasing in volume and force. As the music is playing, Olivia’s screams should also be audible. Her voice would be like the choral part of the music composition to portray the panic and horror felt in this scene. At the moment Kidd begins to fall off the cliff everything should become silent. That moment of silence will bring a great sense of suspense, especially after the abrupt stop of the music’s growing force. As Kidd falls, the silence will remain until he hits the ground and a large thump will be made. After that thump, the screen will slowly fade away as the viewer will be able to hear the screams of the crowd and the reactions of the people after what seems to be a suicide attempt. The returning of sound would bring back the viewer from the climax of the scene and give them an idea of what is going after his blackout.

In conclusion, both movie sequences and book excerpts must be suspenseful, emotional, and provocative in order to become truly memorable to us. They can leave us thinking that we were actually experiencing the story ourselves. Dynamic passages in books often mimic how a movie scene would run in this way. The author of I Will Save You was able to beautifully portray the emotions on the grunion day scene through the tension between the characters and the suspense leading up to Kidd’s decision to push Devon off the cliff. Creating that scene into a film would also create the same impact by using various techniques, such as the use of music, sound, drama, and action. Through these methods, stories can engulf our minds and stay with us forever.

**Third-Prize Essays**

**Wednesday**

**Kaleigh White**

Conneaut Area Senior High

**A Part of Ourselves**

Oh, the joy of books. Every day, thousands are sold at stores all over the world, such as Barnes & Noble, Follett’s, and Books-A-Million. Through social media, teenage girls get together and discuss these books, create art, and even write their own stories about the characters. Just what is it that makes these “fangirls” feel so emotionally attached to a book? Why is it that anyone feels any empathy at all for people that don’t even exist?

The reason certain passages stick with us long after reading them is because humans are naturally overemotional creatures who have brains that are amazing at storing and recalling memories. When you see a word, your brain automatically remembers a reminiscient experience or feeling, providing you with an emotion of some sort.

Perhaps the word “basketball” brings back memories of shooting hoops with your best friend, and therefore creates feelings of happiness and nostalgia. Perhaps the word “space” makes you think of stargazing with your parents as a child, creating sentiments of nostalgia and love. Whatever the situation may be, there is a common theme in the emotions and memories brought up: nostalgia. Words tend to bring back memories that cause you to feel a certain way. Books are made up of these beautiful, thought-provoking words. Certain passages remain in our hearts even after the hero puts down their sword because the words open the floodgates to a whirlpool of memories, nostalgia, and ideas.

Scenes in a movie are known to have a similar effect, only this time being created by what our eyes see. Much like words, objects can hold a fair amount of sentiment in them, and movie directors know this. Just like authors, screenwriters use certain words (and objects) to drag the viewers into the plot by their heartstrings. Be it joy, fear, anger, or disgust, movies and their objects work in the same way as books and their words do to bring back a store of memories and emotions.

A part of the book “Boy21” by Matthew Quick that reads like a movie is chapter 38. At this point, Russ is no longer going by his nickname (Boy21) and is taking Finley to go stargazing. Before dawn fully hits, they talk about their pasts, which is hard for both of them. Their backstories include the death of loved ones, dire situations, and horrible consequences. The scene was
very well written and did an incredible job of illustrating the tenderness of the moment.

If I were in charge of directing a movie or television adaptation of this scene, I would do everything I possibly could to keep the bittersweet emotions evoked by the moment intact. One of my biggest complaints about movies is that the directors change the setting in order to make it easier to film. To prevent this, I would start by making sure that the set was made the way the book describes it. I would ensure that the minute details were kept, such as the squishiness of the mat, the number of their viewing station, the road they go down, and the layout of the room downstairs.

The next thing that would definitely need to be perfect is the lighting. Obviously, it can’t be the pitch black darkness that it truly was in the book, because then we couldn’t see anything. Therefore, a soft blue lighting would do well for this scene. Also, we wouldn’t bathe the actors with it; it would only be shone upon them enough for the camera to clearly see them. This is getting into the most miniscule of details, but it accurately sets the calm yet tense mood of the scene.

Keeping the script almost verbatim to what the characters say is also important. Of course, some things would have to come out, as descriptions would be shown to the viewer rather than told. However, all of the action would remain—they would still climb up a spiral staircase to get to the top of the viewing area, Finley would still almost sink in to the mat, Mr. Allen would still leave shortly thereafter, and so on.

Another thing that would change is what we refer to in theatre as “dead air.” It happens when there is silence for too long and the scene becomes odd and misshapen. For example, they obviously wouldn’t sit for 15 minutes looking at the stars before beginning to talk; rather, they would gaze only for a few seconds before they start to speak.

The last thing I would be sure to do is keep the emotion and tone of voice the same as I interpreted it the first time I read it. Tears were brought to my eyes at how bittersweet this moment was. From the pain in their words to the quirkiness of their “library voices,” everything would have the same feel to it as in the book.

When we watch or read of someone falling into the hands of some unknown circumstance of fate, we naturally feel emotions. We feel fear, urgency, anger, sadness, and all sorts of other sentiments that make us continue reading. By the time we’re done, we’ve gone through a journey with the characters. We were with them in their times of triumph, as well as all of their downfalls. When you turn the page only to find the word “Acknowledgments,” a part of you is naturally left wanting to feel more. You’d latched onto the feelings of these people for hours, and with the turn of a page, you’re supposed to leave them. That’s why people buzz about books online. That’s why books get turned into movies. That’s why we get attached to books—because we leave a part of ourselves behind at the close of every cover.
they do something nice, they may be reminded of this idea and share it with the person they’re doing something nice for. Those words could stay with them for their entire life.

Beyond words, so much more is capable. If a reader can see and hear a book, a certain event, emotion, or idea should stick with them all the more. Whenever a book is brought off the page into film it gives the viewer a window into the world of a certain book. Events seemingly jump off the screen as the reader is transported into that time and place and becomes part of the action. Emotions are expressed through body language, facial expressions, and oftentimes subtle hints in the lighting, framing, soundtrack, camera angle, or other cinematic techniques. When these components are combined with the plot, the overall point of a scene should create the same effect as a book. These elements enhance the story and engage the reader’s senses of sight and sound.

To better illustrate how this is done, look at the section of *Counting by 7’s* where Henry (Willow’s friend from the plant nursery) helps her plant a garden. This is a cheerful passage that demonstrates people’s kindness and willingness to help a friend in need. The challenge of taking this passage from the book and transforming it into a movie scene is in maintaining the book’s lasting impact.

It begins on page 332 where the book states,

“But it’s not just the regular nursery van that arrives at 10:07 A.M.

What pulls up is a large truck. And there is a forklift in the back. A van follows with four workers.

I go out to the street, and Henry and his cousin Phil are just lowering the lift-gate.”

In a movie, I would begin this scene with an establishing shot, to show the setting, which from a high-up, far away point of view would pan over the Gardens of Glenwood and rest on the road where Henry would be pulling up as Willow runs out to meet him. I would zoom in as they lowered the lift-gate to draw the viewer’s attention to the action.

The book describes the interior of the truck as follows,

“In the truck I see a big box of timber bamboo. It is being transported on its side. Standing upright, it would be over twenty feet tall.

There are other plants in the truck:

- Pink stripe phormium.
- A diverse selection of flowering vines (to climb up the metal poles to the second story).
- Ground cover.
- Even a three-year-old cherry tree.”

(Page 332)

Moving on, I would film from Willow’s point of view with hopes that the audience will at least subliminally feel more of a connection with her. I would pan around the truck showing the assortment of plants inside. One nice aspect of film is that it brings to life and vividly pictures things the book can only describe. As the phrase goes, “A picture is worth a thousand words.”

After this the book shares Willow’s feelings. (Page 332)

“I am overwhelmed.
But there isn’t time to express it because there is a lot to be done.
The four workers cut down the sunflowers.

This would have been sad except that it isn’t now.”

To convey these emotions on screen, I would show a close up of Willow’s face, centered in the frame, where she would be looking overwhelmed. A montage would be an effective tool to show lots of work happening in a small amount of time. Examples of events that I would add in the montage include cutting down the dead sunflowers, Willow happily hanging the sunflower stalks from the second floor balcony (which would aid in not making it seem sad that the sunflowers were cut down), the workers putting in the bamboo, Henry telling Willow that it is all a gift, and to end it, Lorenzo (a worker at Bakersfield Electric) bringing solar-powered lights and explaining the concept of favor banks, which I touched on before. I would display each of these scenes in a joyous way and possibly play lighthearted music to further convey the emotion. The main goal of the montage, though, would be to take all of the small pieces and combine them to demonstrate the overall theme.

Generally, these unthought-of components in a movie turn out to have monumental effect on the lasting impact of a film. They express the events, ideas, and emotions of a film and consequentially help the audience become attached to a movie. Without them, who knows if a tear ever would have escaped to prove that someone really did connect with a story?
Particular movie scenes and book passages stay with us so frequently because they give us a feeling that we can relate to and understand. Also, something else that can make us glued to a specific scene in our favorite film or novel is how well the writer describes the scenes. They may use distinct, vivid details that stick out in the reader or watcher’s mind. Or, they could just so happen to relate to an emotion or a certain time in someone’s life that he or she can relate to.

In the novel *A Monster Calls*, by Patrick Ness, a certain scene stuck out to me at the end of the book. It stuck out to me, not because I could relate to it, or understood what it must be like to have your mother dying of cancer or to have a gigantic Yew tree that transformed into a monster following me around all the time. The scene stuck out in my mind because it was so well-written and beautifully tragic all at once. As I read the final words in the book, my stomach dropped, my heart sank to the bottom pit of my stomach, and I felt as if I had just experienced Conor’s life as I were him. It all made sense to me, perfect sense. More perfect than anything I had ever experienced. I understood that story more and craved it more than anything I had felt in a long time.

If I were to be held responsible for adapting a scene worthy enough to be put into a movie, I would choose this outstanding scene. In the last scene of the story, Conor and his Grandma finally enter his mum’s hospital room for the very last time. They mentally prepare themselves, knowing in their hearts that this is more than likely the last time that they will see Conor’s Mum alive. Conor, however, already knows what he must say to his mother due to the incident that had just occurred between the monster and him. He would tell his mother the truth, the only truth. The one he been holding in for so long because he could not admit just how right the truth was.

I would start off by creating a melancholy aura for the person watching. It would be a sad, despairing scene, but also one with much love and a sense of peace and relief, not only for the characters but also for the person watching. It would start off with a dark, almost gray and black tint, almost like old black and white films. Everything would be uncomfortably silent. The tone and the mood as Conor and his Grandma walk into his mum’s room would be, as stated before, sad but also with a sense of relief and satisfaction in the air. Since it would be so quiet, there would be no music either.

Then, the camera would zoom in and focus on only Conor and his Mum, their arms wrapped around each other, embracing as if they never wanted to let go of each other. A tear would run down Conor’s cheek as he said his final words to his mother. “I don’t want you to go,” Conor would whisper. The camera angle of just Conor and his mother would hold itself there for a few moments. Then, slowly, it would zoom itself back out into an aerial view of the hospital room. Grandma sits at the bottom of the bed, her face in her hands, weeping for her beautiful, strong daughter while Conor and his mother still sit in a strong embrace. And the monster, invisible to everyone but Conor stands behind him in a dark corner, watching the tragic scene, moment for moment.

Suddenly, the cameras shift in an instant from an aerial view, to a clock. The clock is positioned at 12:06. It sits, its hands not changing. After about fifteen seconds, after the camera very slowly zooms into the clock, closer and closer – the clock changes to 12:07. There is where the movie ends and the screen turns completely pitch black, holding itself there for a few moments. Long enough for the reader to take in the life changing moments that Conor just went through into account. Then, right before the credits play, a quote, in small dainty, white letters would appear on the screen. It would say, “Stories are important, the monster said. They can be more important than anything. If they carry the truth,” *A monster Calls*. The quote then sits on the black canvassed screen for about thirty, or forty seconds before disappearing. Then, finally, the credits begin to roll with a calm, acoustic melody playing in the back.

In closing, next time you read an outstanding novel, or watch a superb movie – think about a certain scene that stuck with you. Ask yourself why. Can you relate to it? Whatever it may be, know that the author did it for a reason. They wanted those specific moments and scenes to stick with you and dwell inside your mind. If they hadn’t, what kind of a writer would they be?
Williamson Fund Impromptu Prize-Winners

Impromptu Prompts for 2016

20 April
SENIOR IMPROMPTU ESSAY

PROMPT: A literary critic once wrote, “Each individual carries a seed of destiny within him or herself and is thus endowed with a mission – which may be only dimly perceived – to grow, to struggle free and assert his or her own unique existence.” After reflecting on characters from this year’s Festival books, choose at least two who can be identified with this idea of mission. Explain whether you think these characters recognize and accept their missions. Also explore how one’s knowledge of his or her mission spurs his or her character development within the book.

21 April
JUNIOR IMPROMPTU ESSAY

PROMPT: Young adult literature is rarely written by young adults; it is written by people who were young years ago. Consequently, can authors who may be (well) beyond their teenage years actually remember what it is like to be young? Think back to this year’s Festival booklist and explain which book (or books) effectively reveals what being young is all about. Discuss which book (or books) creates an authentic world, young adult characters, and way of talking like a young adult.

22 April
JUNIOR IMPROMPTU ESSAY

PROMPT: The quest is frequently used in literature as a plot device or even as a symbol. Identify at least two characters from the books on this year’s Festival booklist who ventured on some type of quest. Explain how the travel or the obstacles of these quests advanced the plot and/or contributed to the characters’ development.
A mission of history: a common theme to be explored in literature, especially in young adult novels. Authors capitalize on the intricate character and plot of the book’s “destiny.” Take for example Rose from *Rose Under Fire* or Deryn from *Leviathan*. Both of these strong female protagonists thrived on fulfilling their predestined “mission.” It was through these two characters that the reader followed the actualization and determination of these individuals’ existence, if only for a few hundred pages.

The first book mentioned, *Rose Under Fire*, was a historical fiction which followed the moving tale of a young World War II pilot. Rose, the main character is thrust into her destined mission with such force that it takes her a short time to recognize it. Rose, a pilot in a simple messaging brigade, is captured by German soldiers after a brief trip gone wrong; this ultimately lands Rose in a concentration camp, Ravenbruk. It is during her time spent in this camp that Rose becomes aware of her true destiny: to help her fellow prisoners by whatever means necessary. Right then and there, Rose accepts that mission. Her knowledge and full awareness of the horrors occurring behind the scenes of the German Nazis’ front spur her to achieve her goal. As her friends reveal the awful and inhumane testing they are subjected to, Rose becomes increasingly supportive and determined. Even in the final leg of her mission, the actual liberation of her friends and her, Rose remains strong. By the end of the novel, Rose is depicted in a scene uncasing her raw emotion and horror to what she saw at long last. Her character had become one of little responsibility to the leader and an inspiration for those around her to survive. It was her mission – her destiny – alone that her character to become so profound.

Deryn in Scott Westerfeld’s *Leviathan* follows a very similar path to the ascension of being a truly inspiring character. Deryn’s mission is one that she is shielded from for a portion of the book. It is not until tragedy strikes that she becomes fully aware and reluctantly accepts her fate. Deryn jumps several obstacles keeping her from her dream job, piloting, in the beginning of the book. It is from the second that Deryn disguises herself as a boy that the reader becomes fully aware of how driven she is to accomplishing her goals. It is not until the crash landing in German territory, however, that Deryn’s goal truly is revealed: she is to help her and Alek’s crew, to fulfill her mission for the English side of the war. Although hesitant to aid Alek, as he is Austro-Hungarian, she readily accepts the challenge. It is this goal, this knowledge of the task at hand, that fuels Deryn to complete her mission. Constantly faced with the danger, of being discovered, of Germans attacking, of Alek’s crew revolting, Deryn powers through. In the end she emerges successful, having fulfilled her destiny’s mission: the egg is alive and well, satisfying the Englishmen and Alek and his crew survive perfectly unharmed. It is only though her determination to complete her mission that Deryn is successful, showing her character to have developed to its full potential of greatness.

So, yes, while the classic tale of a mission of destiny seems to be a recurring theme, it is one that carries a lot of truth. Each book is an individual, and each one tells the story of a moving journey, one that creates characters so real and inspirational. It is through these books *Leviathan* and *Rose Under Fire* that the theme is masterfully showcased.
Young Adult Authors Who Found Their Way In

Young. What a thing to be. No cares in the world, then suddenly many come at once. When a book is written by an adult to capture a young person’s life and experience, is it always properly written? No, not always. However, in three English Festival novels, the authors very well expressed youth through their writing.

First and foremost, the novel *A Monster Calls* wonderfully creates authentic, teenage thoughts and ideas. Many teens encounter their own “monsters” while growing up. Though Conor had a truly tragic event unfolding in his life, he managed to cope, as people must do. One thing making this story truly realistic was his troubles dealing with emotions. His outbreak at his grandmother’s house, though he did not realize it then, was his beginning to cope with emotions and learning to share and express himself. Expression of young characters is hard in real life, and his novel demonstrates that perfectly.

Another novel that well expressed aging and what is important to teens was *Inside Out and Back Again*. Though the story was set overseas at first, the main character was still very similar to an American teen one may encounter in a middle or high school. A main idea shown in this novel that is often portrayed by young adults is independence, yet attachment. Like her mango tree, the main character grows throughout the story. She learns to move on from her old life to her new life, as many teenagers must. Another link between the main character and any other young adult is that although she is growing older and more independent, she still puts family high on her list of priorities. The author’s technique of incorporating this was well executed. It leaves young adults who have finished the book with a connection and a sense of sameness with the characters.

Along with feeling family connections, every teen is stubborn and headstrong. These traits are very strongly shown by the characters in the novel *Doll Bones*. The characters will stop at nothing to get the doll to her gravesite resting place. Though not many teens have experienced the exact goal, many teens have encountered feelings of strong determination towards a goal. This novel is also a great example of how when a friendship or bond is formed, it definitely stays at heart.

These three coming of age novels are some of the Festival books that well envision being a teenager in a big, big world. Unfortunately books that well communicate what it is like to be a teenager seem few and far between. A novel written about a teenager should contain raw emotions, strong dialogue, and an insight into the teen’s mind. *Inside Out and Back Again, A Monster Calls*, and *Doll Bones* are three novels that strongly encase being a teenager. Since many adult writers cannot properly demonstrate youth, maybe it should be left to a teen, or maybe just authors like these.

Questing to Advance the Plot

In literature, there are many plot devices used during the course of the novel to present conflicts, keep readers engaged, and even have a plot in some form. One of these is the “quest,” a heroic journey to accomplish some feat, or for the good of either the world, or another character. This is used frequently in literature and can be found in two of this year’s selected Festival books: *A Monster Calls* and *Inside Out and Back Again*.

The first example of a quest is in that of the Monster in *A Monster Calls*. Specifically, this is the yew tree monster. This monster can be seen as a symbol of justice, as it does what is right, although it may not always seem that way until one realizes morality is not always as black-and-white as we think. This monster has been called upon once again for a new quest – to make Conor stop denying his true feelings about his dying mother, that he wants her to die so that he can move on, and feel closure. Conor originally still denied the truth, until he could do so no longer. This shows Conor only wants to pretend that he can help her. He also advances the plot through this quest, as Conor finally comes to
YSU English Festival

Second-Prize Essays

Wednesday
Hayley Shasteen
Western Reserve High School

Seeds of Destiny

There is a garden in which humanity has spontaneously matured, pushing through the gravel and soil in order to complete their missions and assert their own realness. Cracking through cement in the gardens of their stories, the characters of Joe Louis and Robert Oppenheimer and his team- of physicists from this year’s English Festival books can be identified with the mission of breaking free, climbing towards the sun, and asserting their realness.

A single punch symbolically ends both WWII and racial discrimination. As Joe Louis takes on the German in the boxing arena, he carries the weight of his past on his shoulders, remembering the low slung light of his childhood. The crowd behind him that typically breathes discrimination down his neck is suddenly lit up with acceptance. The American flag has become Louis’ heart, waving with every hurried beat. His destiny has become a pronged fork: take down the German for America’s soldiers in battle and win the fight for his people that are beaten and killed for their color. He recognizes and accepts his mission; he faces the fight with fists closed tight and with his brain wound terms with his mother’s death at the end of the novel.

Another example of a quest in *Inside Out and Back Again*, is radically different. This quest is in the form of Ha’s exodus from Vietnam to America with her family, and her trying to be respected, and well-liked while there. This quest shows Ha’s determination and strong will in Vietnam, on the ship to America, and even while being teased and made fun of in America. It shows she is also perseverant, kind, and brave, as she is mocked and tormented relentlessly, but she still does not give in to others.

In conclusion, quests are present as plot devices in many literary works. Two quests are carried out both by the yew tree monster and Ha. These quests also both advance the plot by introducing conflicts and new events as well as expose crucial details about the characters in both books. Quests as a plot device, in general, are drastically overused. However, when used sparingly and correctly, literary works incorporating these quests and the quests themselves are able to become widely known classics and will last with readers for their lives.
Being young is a curious thing. You try to figure out who you are, while dealing with a multitude of stress. Being young is a frightening time, littered with pleasures. It's a hard concept to capture in words. However, some authors do it wonderfully. From the 2016 English Festival list, the books *A Monster Calls*, *Counting by 7’s*, and *Inside Out and Back Again*, capture what it's like to be a young adult.

*A Monster Calls* really captures what it’s like to be a young adult. First of all, Conor is experiencing loss for the first time. Conor is forced to let go of his mother, who is dying of cancer. Conor also must battle depression as a result. Although it is not directly stated, Conor’s disinterest in activities (such as school) and anger heavily imply that he is depressed. Many young adults battle depression on a daily basis. Conor also deals with people not believing in him. When he tries to tell his dad about the Monster, he does not believe him. When he tries to tell the headmaster that he did not beat up Harry, the Monster did, she does not believe him. Adults often times do not believe or worry about teenagers’ concerns, blaming it on hormones or “teenage rebellion.” Young adults are treated like children but expected to act like adults. I am sure Conor, a fictitious character written by an adult, can relate to that statement.

Willow in *Counting by 7’s*, also written by an adult, also provides a great example of what it’s like to be a young adult. Not many young adults are child geniuses, but Willow has one trait in common with most young adults. She tries to make sense of the world. Willow’s obsession with learning and observing is just her trying to learn about the world since she wants full understanding and control in many situations. Willow does not like when things are out of her control, and I’m sure many young adults would agree. Willow, like Conor, also experiences symptoms of depression. Her dropping out of school and lack of emotion in some situations are symptoms. Once again, depression is fairly common in young adults.

Finally, the character Ha in *Inside Out and Back Again* provides many things that young adults can relate to. One is fear of change. Ha is greatly saddened when she leaves Viet Nam for America, and she constantly notes how things are not the same. Another thing young adults can relate to is Ha’s realizations of injustice. For example, she touched her big toe to the floor first in the morning since she thought it was unfair that only male feet could bless the floor. When you are a young adult, you begin to realize injustice and begin to rebel or challenge authority.
YSU English Festival

Friday
Ashley Fabian
Liberty High School

Quests: Wisdom Through Trials

This prompt asked me to describe how characters embarked on quests. However, a quest does not have to be physical in the sense of leaving home or traveling. A quest can be physical but can also be an emotional or mental journey. While Zach from Doll Bones leaves his home on a physical quest, Conor from A Monster Calls sets out on an emotional quest, and Kidd from I Will Save You confronts both his past and present on a mental quest.

In Doll Bones, Zach agrees to help Poppy and Alice fulfill the demands of a possessed China doll by burying the doll in East Liverpool, Ohio. This journey poses danger to the junior high trio and tests their friendship at the same time. Their bus trip, boat theft, and library break-in all prove Zach’s willingness to help his friends despite his wavering faith in the reality of the circumstances. He also learns how to be vulnerable with his friends by opening up to them, thus strengthening their friendship and ultimately completing their quest.

While physical quests are packed with adventure and thrill, you should not underestimate the prominence of emotional quests. When Conor must face his mother’s losing battle with cancer, he is terrified of the inevitable and also in denial of it. When he is visited by the Monster, he begins a journey of inner peace where he learns to accept his mother’s death and cope with changes in store for his life. The Monster in a way, acts as Conor’s own process of maturing and overcoming the loss of a loved one.

The quest of mentality, and, furthermore, the meaning of our lives is difficult to complete. In I Will Save You, Kidd goes through his quest almost unknowingly. Numerous characters throughout the story question their purpose and their pursuit of happiness and lead Kidd to do the same. Kidd, at the same time, suffers from his haunting past, which he must overcome by facing his inner demons and alter ego, Devon. What Kidd faces is the question of what he will become. Will his past dictate his future or can he change? People like Mr. Red and Olivia provide him with philosophy and encouragement toward morals and identity and allow him to complete this quest of mentality although his fate, to us, remains open by the end of the story.

These three young men – Zach, Conor, and Kidd (Devon) – all learn valuable wisdom in enduring trials of the mind, body, and soul through their unique quests. It is no doubt that their stories not only teach more about themselves, but also the people and environment around them.

Third-Prize Essays

Wednesday
Elise Rickert
Greenville Junior/Senior High School

Destiny: What You Do, Who You Are

Destiny. It is not a light word. It sits heavy in the mouth, pouring slowly, thickly out off the tongue, tapping the roof of the mouth. It sinks slowly into the brain, echoing. The word carries so much weight, so much thought. Often, people mistake this word as meaning a person with a destiny has some grandiose future, simply because it is said with such weight. In reality, it means everyone has a future; a person to become; a mission to conquer, whether it be to buzz an enemy drone and tell the truth about the experience in a prison camp or to learn how to be okay and face reality despite a tragic event occurring. The seed of destiny is shown in both Rose Under Fire and I Will Save You.

Elizabeth Wein’s novel Rose Under Fire shows a girl who is determined to fly a plane to the troops, to fly near the Eiffel Tower, and to buzz an enemy drone. However, destiny has bigger ideas than that for her. After being placed in a prison camp and finally being set free, her mission in life is apparent. By telling her story, more and more people know the truth of what life is like and how far a human can be pushed without breaking. Through these events, the heroine discovers who she is as a person and not just a pilot.
Imagine losing both parents. Imagine waking up in the hospital, only to learn one’s reality is not real. Imagine not knowing who one’s self is. Imagine the pain, confusion, and emotional rollercoaster that a person would experience because of this. That is exactly what happened to Kidd in *I Will Save You*. The title says it all. He saves himself, even by creating another reality with Devon. By going through all of that, by experiencing the loss of loved ones and identity, it was destiny and it lead him to the discovery of who he is, both parts of him.

These books teach the characters their mission in life- self-discovery, that was their destiny after all- but more than that, it plants the seed inside the readers. By reading these books, by seeing them accept who they are and moving forward from that in order to better themselves, the reader in conjunction searches within his/her self and finds their mission. They accept their mission of self-discovery and through that learn to heal from the tragedies that plague them, and the reader learns too, to keep marching on.

In both books, their acceptance of their personal mission betterers them as people and pushes the character development to further depths, causing the reader to grow as well. Through *Rose Under Fire* and *I Will Save You*, it is learned that “each individual carries a seed of destiny...”. It is their job to water, save, and grow that seed into a rose, even if they are under fire.

Authors of many books are not as young as the characters they are trying to portray. It takes immense skill and practice for an author to truthfully convey the feelings and thoughts of youth when they are no longer that age. They must use their past experiences and their arsenal of writing tools to do this successfully. This is proven by a select few of the English Festival books that best reveal what it truly means to be young.

*Doll Bones* by Holly Black elaborates on multiple themes of what is like to be young. In her book she pens a common fear that the majority of children face, the fear of growing older. This is displayed by Poppy and her thoughts. Poppy worries that as her friends grow older they will no longer care about what they used to and start liking other people romantically or even other things. Poppy even goes on to say she feels like a part of her is dying. Many children and young people can sympathize with this. They feel as if once they get older they have to be serious and they have to lose part of themselves. This book does a wonderful job showing this. *Doll Bones* also does a great job of conveying the thoughts of adventures that youth desires. *Doll Bones* is a book that artfully displays the thoughts of youth.

*Counting by 7’s* is a great book that describes a girl struggling to fit in and be herself at the same time. In this book Willow’s struggles are written with such poignant feeling. Willow on her first day of school wishes to wear her gardening outfit that shows her personality perfectly, but when she gets to school, she is treated as an outcast. She battles throughout the book with accepting herself and letting others accept her. This falls true for many young struggling to find their people. It is hard for teens especially to find people who understand them. Willow as a character becomes relatable as she herself tries to find her place. *Counting by 7’s* is an extremely relatable book.

*A Monster Calls* is a wonderful book that describes a boy’s journey to accept...
his mother’s death. It is interesting to compare the narrative of the book to the struggle in one’s life. Everyone has to face disaster in their life and this book correlates with the anguish one feels. A Monster Calls masters the feelings of anguish a person feels, especially one who is so young to encounter this for the first time.

Writing in a narrative of youth can be extremely difficult, but if done right, can be beautiful and relatable. Doll Bones, A Monster Calls and Counting by 7’s are a perfect example as they are exquisitely written and expose what it truly means to be young.

Many characters from this year’s English Festival’s book list went on quests. Some were literal, such as Alice, Zach, and Poppy’s journey. While others were more symbolic, such as Conor O’Malley’s quest to find peace in A Monster Calls.

Alice, Poppy, and Zach went on a quest to save The Queen. The Queen is a beautiful porcelain doll that the kids use in their games. However, the three begin to drift apart and their friendships are put to the test. When odd things start happening involving the Queen, they must travel near Youngstown, far from their homes, to give the poor doll closure. Along the way, they come across many obstacles, such as the doll’s terrifying and supposed demonic tendencies, breaking the law by breaking into a library, and the knowledge that their parents must be worried sick.

The obstacles they encountered weren’t just physical, but emotional as well. Zach’s desire to grow up, to move on from the silly games they played, matched with Poppy’s desire to hold on to their childhood, to the happy memories, that surrounded them, caused many fights among the group. However, through the quest to help the Queen, Poppy and Zach begin to understand each other more, agreeing to grow up but never forget each other, their childhood, or the Queen. They buried the Queen where they intended and returned home, closer than before.

As for Conor O’Malley in A Monster Calls, his quest is less literal. Conor’s mother has cancer and doesn’t show any hope of getting better, but still Conor holds on to whatever hope he can to her being cured. He is haunted by nightmares of letting her go and is sometimes violent or aggressive towards others because of this. Until one day, he is visited by The Monster, an ancient being who resides as a yew tree in Conor’s backyard. The Monster decides to tell Conor three stories every day at 12:07, and after three stories, Conor must tell his own story.

The Monster’s stories are tales filled with men torn by greed, men who get what they deserve even though it may not appear that way, and the idea that there are multiple sides to every story. When the time comes for Conor to tell his story, he breaks down; the fear of losing his mom is too great. But even so, he learns to let her go, to accept his estranged father, to love his grandmother with the iron fist. Conor’s quest was to find peace in his life, to work through a depression.
Interviewing Matt de la Peña: A Foot in Both Worlds
by Abby Stevens
Fort LeBoeuf High School

Picture a sidewalk in the summer. The earth has heaved up underneath, splitting the concrete into two jagged halves. Now, imagine standing there barefoot with one foot on either side of the divide, bare soles itching and burning against the sun-baked stone.

Author Matt de la Peña, as he told students at the annual YSU English Festival, seeks to explore through his writing the feeling of belonging to two different halves; or, as he calls it, “the mixed experience.”

Invited to be the Thomas and Carol Gay lecturer at the Festival, on April 20, de la Peña fielded questions about his experiences as a writer to an eager group of readers. In doing so, he revealed how his experiences in life have helped him as an artist.

With writing that he likes to describe as “conversational,” he explores the nuances of “working class people – the people [he] grew up with.” Many of these characters are also racial minorities. “I like to write about marginalized people,” de la Peña says, “regardless of race.”

Additionally, his upbringing as a half Latino, half white child helped give him perspective for his books. “You have a foot in both worlds,” he says. “It’s a great place to be an observer.”

However, de la Peña refuses to take full credit for the impact his novels have, saying that “the reader comes and makes it more important than it actually is. They give it meaning.”

De la Peña understands the importance of reading, writing, and creativity among young people. “Creativity can save people,” he says. “There’s no better place to put your sadness than art.”
Four years ago, Ashley Orr was not even considering participating in a study abroad program. The only reason she went to Youngstown State University’s study abroad fair was for the free food, she says: “I was very excited about free pizza.”

Today, at the 38th annual YSU English Festival on April 20, Orr stands in front of a group of journalism track participants as a Rhodes Scholar. Having participated in the journalism track herself when she was in high school, Orr says speaking at this press conference “is really cool.”

The Rhodes Scholarship is widely regarded as one of the world’s most prestigious scholarships. It is an all-expense paid opportunity to study at the University of Oxford and has been awarded to pioneering scientists, politicians, artists, and business people since 1902. “To be in those ranks is really exciting,” Orr says.

Her role as a scholar is not a recent development, however. Orr was valedictorian and student body president at Columbiana High School, a student government position she currently holds at YSU. Being the only child of a single mother, Orr says the opportunity to study free of cost (in tandem with a strong mathematics department) is what lead her to Youngstown State University, not to mention the city itself. Orr says, “I love Youngstown. There’s a lot of history here; it has a good story.”

Orr recounts the city’s authenticity, a characteristic that could be used to describe herself. The Rhodes Scholarship looks for young people with “moral force of character and instincts to lead.” These virtues are displayed in the service Orr has done during her time at YSU; she heads two campus organizations of her own creation and has received federal grants for her work in poverty alleviation. “My biggest motivation is service,” Orr says.

Poverty will be the main subject of Orr’s research, she says. “The statistics are really overwhelming. For a numbers person like me, that means a lot.” Her personal experience also affects her intentions, from growing up in a single parent household to her time in Youngstown: “I’ve seen the poverty trap.”

Orr intends to study macroeconomics in human capital, a subject she is very interested in. She is excited to see Youngstown State receiving recognition, since this is the university’s first ever Rhodes Scholar. “It’s wonderful to see a university celebrated for academics. We’re here to produce human capital.”

Being the face of YSU academics, Orr attempts to keep the pressure at bay: “I try to live up to my own expectations and the expectations of other people have for me.”

When asked what advice she’d give to young scholars, Orr stated, “Don’t do it for the end goal; do it for the journey.” It is apparent that Orr’s journey of service, dedication, and leadership has prepared her for both academic and individual success.

Tips for Journalism Articles

• Prepare ahead. Research the author and plan your questions.
• Think of a good lead—a one-sentence paragraph that will catch the reader’s attention.
• Keep paragraphs and sentences brief and to the point.
• Focus on what makes this person interesting and relevant.
• Use active verbs and straightforward description. No fluff.
Interview with Matt de la Peña: Listening and Learning
by Abby Hancox
Northwestern Middle School

When talking about composing a novel author Matt de la Peña says that being a good “stalker” is a very important aspect.

Matt de la Peña is the author of ten books for young adults, including I Will Save You and Mexican Whiteboy. When interviewed by students participating in the YSU English Festival at Youngstown State University, de la Peña had many stories to tell and advice to give.

When asked where he got his inspiration for I Will Save You from he stated that he had two main sources: his sister and a hospital that he worked at in his younger years. De la Peña went on to explain that his sister was severely depressed and working in a hospital for the mentally ill was where many of the key points from the novel arose from.

Later in the interview many questions about “what it took to be a successful author” and “what advice might you have for aspiring writers,” de la Peña said that being a good “stalker” was key. He explained that a good writer does a lot of listening and learning from other art forms. As for the advice for aspiring authors, de la Peña had several things to say. “Reading is the fuel that writers need,” says de la Peña. After explaining that one must be a fluent reader before you can be a fluent writer, de la Peña says that writing is not about providing answers and that the best authors keep you guessing.

At the beginning of the interview, de la Peña gave a sneak peek of what it was like to be an author. He writes from 6:45 am to 3:00 pm and gets most of his writing done when walking around a park near his home. To sum up the interview, de la Peña says that when writing a novel what other people think isn’t important and what “works on the page” is all that matters.

An Interview with Heidi Daniel: Libraries Never Say “No”
by Nadine Buckley
Shenango High School

It’s the time of year again for the YSU English Festival, and this year’s guest, along with Matt de la Peña, is Heidi Daniel. Heidi Daniel is the executive director of the Mahoning and Youngstown Public Library System. A small woman with thick glasses, she starts the interview saying she has a minute fear of speaking in a school. But that fear evidently goes away as the interview starts. The journalism students ready their pencils as Daniel is prepared with an answer for every question.

She begins by giving a little bit of background information on the library system she works in. She explains that they have fifteen branches, spanning from Sebring to Springfield. “We have quite a wide foot print,” she explains. The libraries have 187 employees and provide different services, depending on age, from toddlers just learning to read to senior citizens who can’t leave their houses. The library is especially working hard to provide after-school programs for teens. Some of these include crafts, music, and activity programs. Teens can get help with homework and even online tutoring. Daniel explains that they are trying to expand their audience of teen readers through E-books, while at the same time keeping a large and varied collection of physical books.

On being asked what influenced her to work in the library, Daniel replied that her parents were not rich, and they couldn’t afford much. But the library was the one place where there was never a “No.” Anything she wanted she could have. This is why Daniel feels that it is so important to support the library system. It gives people of all ages a place to find resources, to study, or just to sit and think. Daniel says that when she got her master’s degree to become a librarian she never looked back.

In 2015, Daniel was voted as the “Ohio Librarian of the Year.” On being asked how she felt about it, she said, “It was the happiest moment of my professional life!” She states that she was both honored and surprised, especially as it was told to her on her birthday. “I may have cried a little,” she ends with a smile.
Interviewing Matt de la Peña: “Don’t Hurry; Don’t Rest”
by Paige Brockway
Uralsine High School

According to The Atlantic, reading is dead, or soon to be. The amount of books read is 18% less than ten years ago, but hundreds of students from seventh to twelfth grade are proving them wrong with the help of Matt de la Peña, an author who’s written ten books and received multiple awards.

Youngstown State University (YSU) hosted its 38th annual English Festival, three days dedicated to students participating in workshops, discussions, and games including common books they’ve all read. The Festival took place April 20-22 to celebrate, discuss, and share the love of reading.

Guest speaker Matt de la Peña gave lectures and assisted in the journalism workshop by answering students’ questions. He provided students an insight on writing skills, what inspired him, and general life lessons. He shared intimate feelings about his books, like We Were Here was his favorite book and writing The Hunt, a sequel to The Living was most difficult for him to write. In addition, de la Peña states that his favorite thing to write about is kids on “the wrong side of the tracks” and his favorite ending was I Will Save You.

Notably de la Peña spent two years working with troubled kids and this gave him important life lessons and stories to write about. He spoke about his childhood as a reluctant reader and sport-loving kid. On multiple answers de la Peña states, “A basketball scholarship was my only way to college.”

He also informed students that “no matter how famous a writer you are you always feel self conscious about your writing; the story is never done.” His advice on writing included key points like live in the moment, read every type of genre, and listen more, talk less. He explained to the student developing your voice takes time and publishing takes longer. He used his favorite quote “Don’t hurry; don’t rest” to describe this process. He spoke about how he finds inspirations everywhere and in everything, even using a student as an example saying “you’re an evil queen [ha ha] No, maybe a boxer.”

He also spoke of the banning of his books saying, “It doesn’t make sense and it breaks my heart.” De la Peña gave students much to think about from an author’s point of view rather than just a reader’s – advancing these teenagers’ love and interest in reading and writing so much further.

Interview with Randy Testa: “Be Open to Surprise”
by Jackie Grisdale
Poland Middle School

Randy Testa, a Stow, Ohio, native, visited YSU today as a guest speaker for the annual Youngstown State University English Festival. He spoke about his childhood and also gave details about his jobs at Harvard University and Walden Media. One of the main reasons Testa visited the English Festival this year was to talk about one of the upcoming events at Harvard that helps teachers work with books and movies to improve their techniques.

Currently Testa teachers at Harvard, but in the past he has also worked at Walden Media. At Walden Media he worked to turn books like The Giver,
Festival of Writing 2016

Second-Prize Articles: Wednesday

Interview with Matt de la Peña: A Foot in Two Worlds
by Moira Armstrong
Howland High School

“Everything on the Wikipedia page about me is totally wrong,” laughs young adult author Matt de la Peña, addressing a group of high school students preparing to interview him. “It’s my dream to one day have a correct Wikipedia page. Maybe one of you could write it!”

De la Peña, the Thomas and Carol Gay Memorial Lecturer at the 2016 Youngstown State University English Festival, spoke to the students about his writing, life, and how the two are intertwined today.

While Wikipedia mistakenly reports him to be a Pennsylvania native, de la Peña was born and raised in California, just north of the Mexican border. However, being only half Mexican, he felt out of place, and the feeling persisted as he grew older and even left his hometown. “It was like having one foot in one world and one in another,” he says. “With my family, I didn’t feel Mexican enough… in college, I didn’t feel white enough.”

Such experiences have shaped his novels, many of which feature mixed-race protagonists. His subjects have earned him somewhat of a reputation as an author of “Hispanic books,” but he dismisses the label, declaring “I’m going to write what I write,” as he has over the course of his ten novels.

His career has had its ups and downs as well. Mexican Whiteboy was widely banned, and while he says he once thought having a banned book would be cool, he described “a book with a brown main character being snatched from a brown kid and put in a box in a basement” as “not right.”

However, de la Peña intends on continuing as he always has. His next project will be a young adult adaptation of Superman – “the most stereotypically white superhero,” de la Peña remarks, “and I can’t wait to put him in a relationship with a Latina.”
YSU English Festival

Interview with Ashley Orr: Dedication to the Common Good of Others
by Sara Altieri
Laurel Junior Senior High School

Ashley Orr, a senior at Youngstown State University, had the distinct honor to speak to a group of roughly 20 high school students at the 38th annual Youngstown State University English Festival on Wednesday.

Ashley applied for and received the Rhodes Scholarship, a scholarship to attend one of England’s top colleges, Oxford University. According to the Rhodes Scholarship website, recipients are not only chosen because of academic achievements but because of their character, dedication to the common good of others, and leadership abilities.” Ashley encompasses all of these qualities and more as she displayed when she spoke to the students.

Ashley has been in the shoes of the students attending the English Festival: “It’s crazy to think that I went to this [English Festival] for six years, came to Youngstown State for four years and I’m speaking at the Journalism Workshops that I sat through!”

Many of the attendees would say that Ashley is relatable. She came from a single parent home, ran cross country for six years, and was president of her high school student government for her senior year.

Ashley says she has wanted to attend Oxford University because of the academic resources and the legacy Oxford has. Aside from performing phenomenally in academics, Ashley is involved with many organizations on Youngstown State’s campus to help spread information about poverty. She was driven by her single mother sometimes struggling to make ends meet.

Ashley will be leaving the United States on September 22, 2016, to study at Oxford where she will remain for the next two to three years at least.

She leaves this advice to those who desire to help the community or world, “Find what you are passionate about and then focus your time and energy on it.”

Best luck to Ashley Orr at Oxford!

Second-Prize Articles: Thursday

Interview with Matt de la Peña: “Reading Is the Fuel”
by Riley Britt
Beaver Local Middle School

On Thursday, April 21, the students at the YSU English Festival interviewed Matt de la Peña, a young adult author. Her shared personal stories that have inspired him to write and words of wisdom for young aspiring writers.

“Reading is the fuel writers need,” said de la Peña. He tells students to speak less, listen more. To gather ideas from all areas in life, whether it be other books, movies, art, music, or even something as simple as overhearing someone’s conversation on the subway. He believes the most important quality a writer needs is the ability to be observant, to look at everything as a story.

He shared with students aspects of his writing process. Matt de la Peña lives in Brooklyn, as he told students, and every morning wakes up at 5:45, says goodbye to his wife and their two year daughter, leaves for work, and writes everyday from 6:45 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Although he spends his day writing, he says his best ideas come to him as he walks 3.1 miles around the park near his apartment.

“I will stop and record my ideas into my phone as they come to me,” says de la Peña. With this he further reminds students to never quit thinking. He shares a time when writing his book
Heidi Daniel tells us that some of her favorite books are *The Hunger Games* and the *Harry Potter* series. Teens that read these kinds of books would definitely enjoy this library and its 15 branches which have thrown parties around book themes.

In 2015, Heidi was selected as the Ohio Librarian of the Year. She says it was “such a surprise and an absolute honor!” The thing that inspired Heidi the most to work as a librarian is her memories from childhood. Her family was not rich; so, she was used to being told *no* as a child when she wanted to buy things. The library her parents took her to was a place where she was told *yes*. She loved the learning experience and decided to become a librarian after college.

The best part of her job now is “Being able to design and develop a library that fits and connects the community and being able to see people using that building.” The library offers a variety of different cards for everyone. They range from digital cards to children’s cards.

Anyone who wishes to donate books should take them to the Friends Bookstore in Poland. The library does not accept them. The money received from selling the used books is given to the library from the Friends Bookstore.

Ball Don’t Lie* that his editor suggested cutting the first 90 pages of the book. At first he says he was devastated that had been four months of his life; however, he stayed resilient. He cut the part in his book and learned a valuable lesson, to always allow for other people’s opinion.

Matt de la Peña concluded the interview by telling the English Festival participants that he most enjoys writing and creating characters around their age. He loves to have his characters experience things for the first time, like love and death. He told them how he enjoys travelling around the country speaking in front of kids just like them, who want to learn more about being a writer. Even though the students are there to learn from him, he says he learns more from them as they give him insight and inspiration for writing his next adult novel.

To finish up, he says, “You never know when I would choose someone like you to write my books about.”
Interview with Matt de la Peña: “Read the World”
by Haley Dees
United Junior High School

On April 22, Matt de la Peña was interviewed during a journalism workshop for the YSU English Festival. He gave young writers advice on how to get a book published as well as insight into his characters and his own life. He is the bestselling author of six young adult novels, including We Were Here, I Will Save You, and Mexican Whiteboy.

When asked how basketball influenced him, he said that from basketball he took discipline. “Writing is really all discipline,” he said later in the interview. While explaining his status as a “mediocre student,” he said, “I knew it would be hard to get into college without a basketball scholarship, so I put all my eggs in that basket.” He later explained what it took to be a writer, simply saying, “It’s such a journey,” and “this is the one job where it pays to be a stalker.”

Later, when asked about his reading habits, he said, “Read not only books; read the world.” Following that, he said, “Some of the most important writing I do never makes it into the novel.” When asked about the publication process, he replied, “Getting your voice out there is a decade long process.”

Later he was asked about the characters of his books. He replied, “It’s not just the main characters that have pieces of me in them.” He also explained the inspiration behind Kidd in I Will Save You. “I really was exploring the idea of self-sabotage,” he said. “Kidd is so confused with this idea of him being a good kid; he’s trying to punish himself.”

Another topic of the interview was his banned books. “The more aware people are of your work the more likely they are to get banned,” he said. “Mexican Whiteboy was deemed being anti-white.” When asked if being of a different race put him at an advantage or disadvantage, he simply replied, “It is changing.”

Interview with Randy Testa: “Be Open to Being Surprised!”
by Delaney Zilla
Greenville Junior/Senior High School

Randy Testa, a Harvard graduate, a public speaker, a person who turns the best thoughts from a book into a film, and a book lover talked to students at the 38th annual YSU English Festival on April 22, 2016. He came to YSU because he loves being around young adults and teachers.

In the early years of Testa’s career, he helped out young boys who were dyslexic or who had a delay with learning how to read. Testa said, “...reading was easy for me as a child but it was so sad that other kids could not experience reading like I could.”

Testa’s eleventh grade English teacher played a big role in his life. Due to his high reading level, she made a special curriculum or course of study so that he could fulfill his full potential. Until it shut down, Testa worked for Walden Media. His job was to look at
the movie script that was limited to 109 pages typed and double spaced to see what could be taught from the movie and what could the average teacher do with it.

Shortly after Testa graduated from Northwestern, he traveled to Bloomsburg, PA. There he met an 84 year old woman, Alvina Krause. He and a group of eight studied acting for two years with her. Krause was Testa’s inspiration for life and for acting. When Testa discussed this, he had large hand gestures and walked around the room so all the students heard the story of his inspiration.

A student asked Testa if he could change anything in his life what would it be. His response was that he would have gotten involved in plays much earlier in life than he did.

To end the press conference, Testa’s advice to the students was “Be open to being surprised!”

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**Third-Prize Articles: Wednesday**

**Interview with Matt de la Peña: “I Am Whatever You Say I Am”**

by Adriana Italiano
Jackson-Milton High School

For Matt de la Peña growing up in a poor working class family near the Mexican border gave him plenty to write about. De la Peña, who was interviewed Wednesday at the Youngstown State University English Festival journalism workshop, attributes his successes to the people he encountered while growing up in a Mexican-American household. “The people I grew up around are the stars of the story,” he said.

De la Peña is in the Youngstown area as the 2016 Thomas and Carol Gay Lecturer, who were the co-founders of the English Festival. After writing ten books and recently receiving the John Newbery Medal for his story Last Stop on Market Street, de la Peña believes that young adult novels are the “adult literature of yesterday.”

He reflects on his time in high school, living in a poverty-stricken household, believing that he has been able to see the world more clearly as being of mixed race, giving him a “foot in each door” as he writes for adolescents about the real world today.

“I’m not really writing books; I’m plagiarizing the world,” he said. With a BA from the University of the Pacific and an MFA in Creative Writing from San Diego State University, Matt de la Peña believes that “creativity can save people,” especially in the age of the standardized testing and structured school lessons with very little room to branch out and explore. “I want to write for life,” he said, noting that he is an anti-message writer believing that “the reader is smarter than the writer.”

De la Peña’s novel Mexican Whiteboy was banned in Tucson High School in Arizona, for containing “critical race theory” in 2012, but he believes that it is a “powerful gesture” that still resonates today.

Now a father to a baby girl Luna, age two, with wife Caroline, Matt de la Peña definitively thinks that his conversational writing style is something he seeks for answers in other art forms. Drawing inspiration from other authors like Sandra Cisneros, Junot Diaz, and Cormac McCarthy, he believes that his ideas of “marginalized people” in the world today always “show something bigger” in the coming of age genre.

When asked about his first inspiration about becoming an author, he noted that the spoken word helped him feel “visceral” and that his continuing love of literature began in college which he attended on a full-ride basketball scholarship.

De la Peña closed the news conference Wednesday morning by explaining that it was his hardships during adolescence that truly guided him to be the writer he is today, quoting Eminem saying, “I am whatever you say I am.” De la Peña will be in Youngstown through Friday, working and discussing with teens at the 38th annual English Festival.
Ashley Orr is a senior at Youngstown State University where she is in the University Scholars Program in the Honors College and majors in mathematics and economics. Ashley is the first Rhodes Scholar to be selected from YSU. Because of Orr’s hard work and determination, YSU is only the fourth public university in Ohio to have a student win the award in the Rhodes’ 112 year history. Orr will be studying at the prestigious Oxford University for two to three years for free because of her amazing achievement.

If you think that’s it for what Orr has to offer, you’d be wrong. Along with her other achievements, Orr is also president of the YSU Student Government Association, co-founder of a poverty awareness program in the city of Youngstown, and is active in a wide range of volunteer service in the community.

“As a first generation college student, I am so appreciative of the support I have received at YSU, specifically within the Honors and Scholars programs,” says Orr. “I am a direct product of my peers, mentors, and friends and family; so, thank you.”

With all of the success that has come her way, her biggest inspiration was and still is her grandma. “She’s a strong woman,” Orr said. “In this world, you have to be strong, especially in a male-dominated major like mathematics.”

While staying strong is one of her biggest motivators, it’s not the only one. Orr loves staying motivated and active in her community through her acts of service. “Poverty awareness is very important because the statistics are overwhelming,” added Orr. “The productivity difference between here and other parts of the world is what really bothers me, and I want to help change that.”

Although Orr is getting the tremendous amount of attention she deserves for winning the Rhodes Scholarship, she explains that it wasn’t easy to get where she is today. “Watching my parents struggle when I was growing up really motivated me to do my best in everything that I do, and that’s definitely paid off,” Orr said. With a huge award like this one, Orr explained that she feels a lot of pressure to find success, but no matter what, she’ll always remain humble.

If Orr could give a piece of advice to anyone, she would tell them, “Do it for the journey and remain powerful every day.” Though this experience has been overwhelming, Orr doesn’t see herself as any different than anyone else.

Lastly, Orr added, “I hope my peers across YSU’s campus take advantage of the amazing opportunities that YSU offers all of us, and, further, that they believe, as I do, that YSU students can and are changing the world for the better. I am confident that there will be more YSU Rhodes Scholars.”
Interview with Matt de la Peña: “Be a Good Reader”
by Bella Marchionte
Niles Middle School

Matt de la Peña joined a group of teens to speak to them about his life as an author. He shared with them his feelings and thoughts about his career and books. Every student eagerly asked him questions.

On April 21, 2016, de la Peña was at Youngstown State University to explain to teens about his successes and failures. He talked about his inspirations for his books. “You cannot be a good writer until you’re a good reader,” de la Peña tells the teens while giving advice to the aspiring authors.

De la Peña began his career in 2005. He graduated from San Diego University with an MFA in creative writing. Nowadays, de la Peña teaches writing courses at New York University.

In his spare time, de la Peña enjoys playing basketball, writing and spending time with his two year old daughter, Luna.

Matt de la Peña spoke to the teens about his love for young adults. “Inside of me is still a seventeen year old boy,” de la Peña tells them.

De la Peña has written ten books so far; one has been made into a movie while the other won the Newbery Medal.

As the onlookers write down as much information as they can, de la Peña shares a word of advice about writing a book; “Talk less; listen more.” Matt de la Peña will continue to write more books and will proceed to capture the reader in his captivating young adult literature.

Interview with Heidi Daniel:
Designing and Developing Libraries
by Faith Brown
West Branch Middle School

On Thursday, April 21, 2016, Heidi Daniel, a director and former Ohio Librarian of the Year 2015, had a conference with middle school aged children about herself and the Mahoning County Library. This conference was held at the 2016 YSU English Festival to make people aware of the programs the library holds and to help students learn to write a newspaper article.

Heidi Daniel has two kids and a husband. They grew up in Texas and moved to Ohio. Heidi grew up in the Midwest. She became interested in reading when her parents read to her at a young age. She enjoyed going to the library and not being told she couldn’t have something because it cost too much.

Heidi enjoys designing and developing libraries to help kids and ensuring that teens and the community have access to the resources they need. Heidi enjoys reading young adult literature like Harry Potter and books written by John Maxwell.

Heidi was voted the Ohio Librarian of the Year in 2015. She said it was one of the happiest moments of her professional life.

The Mahoning County Library offers a variety of programs for people of all age groups. The library is working on developing strong programs for middle school aged children. The library also offers different card choices. There is a card for young children that has no fines on it. When a new branch is opening, the library will ask middle school age students what they want to see in the library. The library offers physical books and e-books. The library runs mostly on donations. A new library being built has an estimated cost of 2.9 million dollars and will be named after someone who has donated over 60% of the estimated cost of the library.
This year’s YSU English Festival hosted Newbery award-winning author Matt de la Peña. During some of the sessions, students in certain tracks had the opportunity to ask him questions about various aspects of his writing career and his personal background.

The author stated that the reason a lot of his novels are for young adults is because he loves coming of age stories. He says he enjoys sharing the stories of his characters’ first experiences in life. The majority of his work focuses on working-class teens who are often “pushed aside” in society. Some experiences in his life he had that affect his writing come from working at a group home after college and working at a schizophrenia home during his last two years of college.

He also incorporates the experiences he had from his own childhood. When asked about his biggest influence, he responded, “The biggest influence of my writing is growing up near the Mexican border.”

The author’s work can be viewed as controversial with numerous schools that have banned some of his books. One book, *Mexican Whiteboy*, has been banned in Arizona schools due to being seen as anti-white, say some sources. One source denies this, saying that Arizona merely removed a class that included the book in its curriculum.

As for de la Peña, he says he feels saddened by the banning of the book. He explained that it breaks his heart to know that his target audience, working class kids who are often written off due to their less than ideal background stories, will not be able to read his work.

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Randy Testa, a Harvard Graduate School of Education Director, came to the YSU English Festival to inform students in seventh through ninth grade how he has turned several books into movie scripts.

Testa was born in Akron, Ohio. He graduated from Harvard with his Masters in Reading Education. He started off his career by becoming a third grade teacher.

Testa’s next job was working at Walden Media. He worked on movies such as *The Giver*, *Holes*, and *Charlotte’s Web*. At Walden Media, Testa worked with teachers before a movie came out and set up programs so the teachers could display the film to their students.

As a kid, Testa would go to the library and get a lot of books to read. Kids his age would pick on him because he was so smart.

“They were wrong and I was right,” Testa said about the people who picked on him.

Testa was inspired by his eleventh grade English teacher. He talked about how he and his smart friends were skipping school because they weren’t learning anything. His teacher set up a whole new class so they could be more challenged in school.

Another person who inspired Randy Testa was an 84 year old lady from Bloomsburg named Alvina Krause. Testa stayed at her house and learned how to become an actor.

Testa described himself as hopeful. He said to be nosy if you want to make it in the movie business.

“Be open to surprise,” Testa said as he ended the interview.
Renga Riot

About Renga Riot

These poems are written collaboratively in a short period of time. The names of the authors precede their poetry.

First Prize

Wednesday

By
Tiffany Nigrin, Lakeview HS
Ruiting Feng, Grove City Senior HS
Taylor Horn, Lakeview HS
Courtney Banks, West Branch HS

The sun fell too fast
Beneath the white horizon
Frozen in darkness
Scraping shovels play a song
Warning others of the storm

The chill of the air
Raining down its frozen tears
The streets disappeared.

By
Andrew Brockway, Cardinal Mooney HS
Olivia Hedge, Newton Falls HS
Ahmad Amireh, Liberty HS
Noah Seinker, Mohawk Jr/Sr HS
Jesse Bolling, Fort LeBoeuf HS
Cassandra Signor, Niles HS

Sunlight shines through trees
Light dances on the water
Shining onto leaves

The horse stops to slowly drink
While I nap in the shade to think

Reminisce all day
Full moon fills the empty sky
Wolves howl till sunrise.

By
Justin Leunis, Hickory HS
Zack Baker-Stow, East Palestine HS
Abby Rowe, Struthers HS
Kris Winford, Cardinal Mooney HS
Mekayla Murchison, Liberty HS
Trenton Snow, Grove City Senior HS

The winter was cold here.
Winter snow covered the trees
I can feel it now
Faint, fingertips, brush my back
Jerk, seize, I turn around quick

The wolf stood, vicious
Its eyes pierce my ever being
Leaving me lifeless.

Thursday

By
Kareena Thakar, Highland MS
Elycia Smith, David Anderson HS
Bella Marchionte, Niles MS

In crisp Autumn air
Leaves paint the sky, vivid shades
Summer has faded

He flapped his wings so bravely
Against the wind that stopped him

The eggs came to life
Its nest a shelter of love
Children of nature.

By
Lily Kathryn Cicatella,
St. Stephen School
Kayla Adams, Highland MS
Genesis Johnson, South Range MS
Destiny Goldner, LaBrae MS

Swift River White
Soft as the spider web silk
Pushing through the banks

Salty Waves of the Ocean
Warm and cold differences

Raindrops splatter down
The pitter-patter of drops
Crashing down to earth.

By
Kaitlyn James, Howland MS
Kiersten Roncaglione, Conneaut Valley MS
Kortni Fuller, Conneaut Lake MS

Sparkling in the sky
Slowly covering the ground
All around is white
Hot cocoa after playing
The sun may start to come out

The cold air around
Having blankets to keep warm
And the hot fire.

By
Briana Hanlon, Beaver Local MS
Jenny Postlewaite, Conneaut Lake MS
Jessanne Saxton, Northwestern MS

Walking through the woods
Hearing all the birds sing songs
Watching water move along

The wind blows and flowers grow
Listen and feel the nature

Nature is perfect
Silent, peaceful, but mostly
Nature is unique.

Friday

By
Laura Denman, Maplewood HS
Rosalie Chambers, Pymatuning Valley MS
Aiden Orlovsky, Canfield Village MS
Hayden Garner, Western Reserve MS

Summer is a break
There is no school and more fun
Birds sing, flowers bloom

Sunny skies and ice cold drinks
Blistering heat and sunscreen

Warm days and cold nights
Beach vacations and cruise lines
All swimming, diving
Rushing of the wind.
The crashing of the water
Nature will depend.
The Rain begins to pour hard.
The dry season is over.
Waters flood the land.
The many cracks of lightning
The humans rush in.

By
Tanner Hoffer, Crestview MS
Alycia Ruiz, Greenville HS
Maxamum Masaki, Poland Seminary HS
Rowan Mentzer, Greenville HS
Trinity Toporcer, Struthers MS
Hailey Bilbrey, Pymatuning Valley MS

The velvet roses
glisten in the morning rain
like teardrops of doves
petals glowing in the sun
but in the shadows lie thorns
roses are disguised
combine purity and pain
beauty can betray

By
Isabella Pansera, Riverside HS
Isabella Serrano, Greenville HS
Grace Huff, Mars Area MS

Icicles everywhere
Snow flurries twist and turn sky high
Snowmen are abound
Hot cocoa by the fireside
Trekking snow prints a mile long
Snow angels cover the lawn
Wreaths checked out on every door
Winter time is here

By
McKenzie Smith, Maplewood Jr/Sr HS (PA)
Nicolete Paldino, Bristol HS
Anastasia Monrean, Ursuline HS
Kaila Mattheis, Mineral Ridge HS

Spring creates beauty
Flowers begin to bloom
The leaves start to show
The sky is marbling blue
With birds chirping all morning.

Animals come pout
The morning breeze cools you down
Spring is time for love and growth to
start anew and bring hope.

By
Loran Bennett, Girard HS (PA)
Eli Haye, Wellsville HS
Romeo Gabrielson, Bristol HS
Ben Targove, Canfield HS
Trey Wilt, Greenville HS

The beautiful sky
Our world is magnificent
Encouraging me
About to meet someone new
Hoping that they truly will not judge
Waking up for school
Another day of learning
Hoping for new friends.

By
Michael Tokor, Wilmington Area MS
Mara Hessler, Grove City MS
Zaria Cole, Jefferson K-8 School
Mackenzie Hause,
St. Michael School

Living in the sky
Existing for unknown life
Shining down to Earth
Inspiring hope for me
Also causing lunacy
All the facts not known
Disappearing in the clouds
It has gone away.

By
Alannah Boyd, Beaver Local MS
Clare Ryan, Salem Junior HS
Reed Stanyard, Lincoln K-8 School
Ashley Simmons, Windham Junior HS

Raindrops fall away quickly
Forming puddles on the land
Children run and play
The clouds clear and sun comes out
Its rays shine upon the Earth
When the day is gone
Kids must go inside to rest
Now the fun is done.
I hear leaves rustle,  
I hear water flow loudly  
I love the forest.

Leaves blowing in the soft wind,  
Birds chirping on a hot day.

Nature’s amazing,  
It produces lots of life,  
Keep it beautiful.

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**Friday**

By  
Dean Esmail, W.S. Guy MS  
Sydney Turner, Akiva Academy  
Anthony Morelli, Jackson Milton Middle School  
Dylan Thompson, United Local HS

Powdery snow falls,  
It strikes the ground building tall  
Children throw snowballs.

Winter is a gorgeous time  
The bright moon makes the ice shine.

Bundle up to play  
Run outside and laugh all day,  
Winter’s here, hooray.

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By  
Drew Clark, Springfield Intermediate School  
Lexi Wonner, Springfield Intermediate School  
Joselyn Warga, Girard HS (PA)  
Anastasios Sdregas, Cardinal Mooney HS

Can you see the tree?  
The tree walks and talks and sees  
Listen and you’ll see

It tells me stories at night  
Stories of love, hate, and fright

From the church next door  
It always sees the kids play  
It lives peacefully.

---

By  
Elizabeth Herdman, Poland MS  
Sara Hill, Struthers HS  
Jade Frazier, Austintown Fitch HS  
Jessica Schmid, Austintown MS  
Riley Burke, St. Christine School  
Brianna Rhea, St. Patrick School (Kent)

Silence in the wind  
Nature takes its course on life  
The pain will end soon  
The mist will be gone for now  
But soon the sun will return  
It won’t help to scream  
The distress can be ignores  
The earth dies, I won’t.

---

By  
Elizabeth Vennetti,  
St. Christine School  
Breanne Welsh, Cardinal Mooney HS  
Ethan Faatz, Maplewood HS  
Andrew Knotten, St. Charles School

White flakes falling down  
Melting when they touch the palm  
No two are the same  
Lots of snow means sled riding  
Christmas around the corner  
People gather together  
They laugh and share their stories  
While kids open gifts.
The English Festival Writing Award for Teachers

The English Festival Writing Award for Teachers was established to reward teachers for excellence in writing about and in response to the YSU English Festival. The submission may be centered on a Festival book, Festival author, and/or Festival experience. The entry may be personal, reflective, and/or critical in purpose. It may utilize experiences of the Festival, the reactions and responses of students, and/or outside critical or popular sources.

First Prize Article

What the YSU English Festival Means to Me

Sarah R. Valingo
Crestview High School
Columbiana, Ohio

I struggle to encapsulate what the Youngstown State University English Festival has meant to me over the last twenty years. Every year that I return, I stand next to the table of books in the back of the Chestnut Room (because I will have to buy some), and I take a deep breath as I stare out across that crowded room. My heart is full. I have always loved it, but the reasons for that love have shifted in unexpected ways. As a middle and high school YSU English Festival participant, I was awed by the enormity and freedom of a college campus. I didn’t truly understand the scope and importance of the event as much as the location. Now, as a teacher, I am awed by the enormity of the crowds of students and teachers who attend the Festival and the reading freedom that they find there. The English Festival has had such an impact on me, both as a student and as an educator, that I feel the need to explain through a few key moments.

The most powerful thing about the English Festival is the books. As a teacher of ninth graders, I am frequently the first bastion for young adult novels, and I encourage my students to read books that challenge them. Because of this, I have encountered an occasional challenge to specific books in my classroom, wonderful books like Speak and Athletic Shorts. Through years of consistently choosing books that are important and challenging, the English Festival has become a bastion of young adult literature, and, without trying, it has provided me with a reference point, a rock to stand on. Sometimes I cannot fill the holes in my students’ lives, but books have a way of patching things together with universal truths. For students who are not readers, books need to be relatable and easy to understand. Classics, sometimes, just don’t cut it. I knew that my students needed something a little more palatable than the previously required classics. So, just this past year, I asked to teach Speak, a Festival choice from my senior year of high school, as a whole class novel. Support was low for using a young adult novel, and the content was considered questionable for both its literary merit and appropriateness. I was able to support my choice by stating that it had been a Festival book. This was sufficient evidence of literary value. While many of my students didn’t enjoy Melinda’s journey, almost all of them read it. And, of course, there are a few who needed her voice and her story.

Those students thanked me and asked for more Laurie Halse Anderson. One girl told the class about her struggles, and she cried. Some of us cried with her. I can’t be sure that the Festival’s unknowing support was the deciding factor. I feel it was, and I am infinitely thankful for the experiences Speak provided and will continue to provide for my students and me.

I am a pusher of readers (and non-readers) because I feel that the skill and love of reading are the best gifts that I have to offer. As silly as it may sound, in the face of struggling students, data-driven administrators, and punctilious parents, defending the student reading can be a challenge. The English Festival is important because it supports my belief in reading at a time when (and in an area where) such support is sorely needed.

As a celebration of books, the English Festival promotes reading in a positive way. It supports my students who are already readers and encourages my nonreaders by giving them a community. They sit in college class-rooms filled with other readers who are excited about books. They get to experience their reading in new and relevant ways, creating connections
with others, the world, and within themselves. Students discuss reading and writing with authors, which has a value beyond counting. For some students, this is the equivalent of being touched by a star. It sparks their reading and writing lives in ways that I sometimes cannot. In the beginning of my career, I taught at a school where most of my students did not come to me as readers. I had a few, but I will be honest and say that I was one of those bad teachers who brought students who did not read all of the Festival books. I am not sorry. Those kids needed to see YSU, and one of them needed to meet Chris Crutcher. This 17-year-old boy, who had lived through a fire when his family didn’t and struggled to find a reason to finish any book, didn’t read Deadline. He should have. I had put Crutcher’s work in his hand before. I am still not exactly sure what Chris said that resonated with this boy, but I know the power of Mr. Crutcher. The student didn’t say much on the way home, but the next day he borrowed Deadline and then Angry Management a few weeks later. He spoke about the characters with me, expressing a wonder and gratitude to find people who understood his reality. At the end of the year, after he (just barely) graduated, I noticed that my copy of Angry Management was missing. I knew who had it, and I knew he needed it more than I did. I hope he still has it and still finds himself in those pages.

Teachers tend to be a rather humble group. We know that we do some of the most important work in the world, but, until recently, we, as a group, have not been inclined to publicly discuss the difficulties of the job. There have been countless times when I, personally, have felt ready to give up. It happens every year, right around February. The students are antsy. State testing is looming, and my brain is tired. We are all silently screaming for summer. Then April arrives with the English Festival and its inspiring teacher sessions. This past year, Matt de la Peña spoke to us about an English teacher whom he had in high school. He spoke highly of her, talked of how she had changed his life, and expressed his gratitude for the encouragement she offered. He also expressed his gratitude for all of the teachers in the room who cared enough to give students the right books, the right words, and the right attention. I really love my work, and I know I am luckier than most in that I get to do it. Sometimes, though, when viewed through the lens of the day-to-day grind, it is hard to see that it matters. Matt’s words made me feel appreciated during the most stressful time of the school year. I’m not afraid to admit that I cried a little. Some others cried with me, and we all felt a little vindication.

The English Festival is home to so much I value, both as a person and as an educator. Books have been a staple in my life for a long time, and the most enjoyable part of my job is sharing them with my students. The English Festival connects me to my students, colleagues, and community through books and it enriches my experience with all of these in a variety of ways. My students and I read books we may not have otherwise chosen, and we discuss them. We buoy each other through the challenging ones, and we celebrate important moments together. We learn about ourselves and each other through these books. The English Festival is home to a tribe of teachers and other professionals who feel as I do about reading, education, and the importance of our role in it. It is home to my tribe. Every year, I get to reach out to other teachers, and we talk. We talk books, and we always talk about how wonderful the Festival is for us. Lastly, the English Festival values teachers. It celebrates us and the work we do with our students. That alone is reason to attend!

I feel as if I still have not managed to adequately express my feelings about the Festival. I didn’t get to mention my personal experiences with meeting the authors, the awesomeness of students’ winning prizes, or my appreciation for the people who take on the daunting task of running the Festival every year. I hope it will suffice to say that I am incredibly grateful to teach in a place with such a wonderful event and for all of the powerful experiences that it has created.
A Festival of Writing
2016 Edition

Prize-Winning Essays
from the Thirty-Eighth Annual
Youngstown State University
English Festival

Featuring
The Thomas and Carol Gay Lecturer
Matt de la Peña

The James A. Houck Lecturer
Steven Bickmore

10th–12th Grades
Wednesday, April 20, 2016

7th–9th Grades
Thursday, April 21,
or Friday, April 22, 2016

9:00 a.m.–3:45 p.m.
Kilcawley Center