

Member Spotlight – Sarah Gay

The Bio: This is my tenth year of teaching, and my second year as a Teacher of Academically Gifted Readers in South Portland Public Schools. In my first eight years I taught English courses at South Portland High School and Humanities on an Expeditionary Interdisciplinary middle grade team in Bath, Maine. In my new role, I work with students in grades three through eight as well as their classroom teachers. The bulk of my time is spent in small groups with highly-motivated readers exploring challenging and complex texts and the social and emotional connections between texts and real-life.

A Favorite Book: My favorite book to teach is Laurie Halse Anderson's *Fever 1793*, which I most often teach to fifth or sixth graders. Anderson has written extensively about her research and writing processes, which makes her almost a classroom partner for teaching this text. Students explore the culture of medicine, the concept of infrastructure, how race and class impact opportunities, and the intersection of science and myth. The characters also create opportunities for students to discuss how emotions impact decision-making, and how perceived maturity impacts the responsibilities adults will offer to children. I began this book with a sixth grade group just before remote learning started, and they have drawn profound connections between our current pandemic and the events of 1793: the far-reaching impacts of misinformation and fear, the contrast between religious faith and faith in science, the power of helpers stepping outside of their realm to fix societal problems, and, most notably, the tragic reality of children forced to grow up too fast to survive a changing world.



A Go-to Strategy: My go-to is the classic Think-Pair-Share. It gives students time to organize their thoughts, bounce ideas off a buddy, and hear a range of perspectives. Many of my students struggle with anxiety, and this gives them the perfect blend of structure and space.

An Influence: For the last three years, I have been teaching graduate courses in the University of Southern Maine's teacher education program. Working with new teachers has been the most inspiring, challenging, and influential act of my teaching career. Bearing witness to these aspiring educators' meaning-making processes helps me to rethink, reframe, and improve my practice immeasurably.

Something Personal: I have three kids, a second grader and twin kindergarteners. We love cooking; we hunt down weird ingredients, explore farmers' markets, and play around in the kitchen. Our favorite outing is an afternoon at a local brewery. The kids play lawn games and enjoy awesome food truck offerings, and my (librarian) husband and I talk shop with the brewers and chefs.