

Confirmed Presenters
Presentation Title, Presentation Summary, and Biography/Biographies

Friday, October 23, 2026

Session 1

Susannah Richards presents *Escalating English Language Arts for Literacy Learning*

Summary: This presentation focuses on a curricular approach that integrates gifted education pedagogy with science of reading evidence. In this approach, students read high-quality literature of all types. Recent research indicates that students in elementary and secondary grades are reading and writing less than students of previous generations. This session focuses on using evidence-based practice to increase relevant and successful literacy development using high quality literacy and meaningful opportunities to demonstrate comprehension through reading, writing, listening, and speaking. It is on big ideas and not specific texts as the destination. The goal is to ignite, delight, and cultivate reading, writing, listening, and speaking as a lifetime habit that builds thinkers.

Biography: Susannah Richards is a professor who teaches literacy, literature, and teacher pedagogy courses. She regularly works in schools presenting professional development, supporting current teachers, and working with students. She recently chaired the 2025 Boston Globe-Horn Book Award committee. She has presented at hundreds of national and state conferences including the National Council of Teachers of English, American Library Association, National Council of Teachers of Social Studies, National Science Teachers Association, National Association of Gifted Children, International Literacy Association, state conferences, and collaborates with teachers all over the country.

Katherine Covino and Anne D. David present *The rock and the hard place: Censorship, moral traps, and moral injury in the English classroom*

Summary: Even if state or district policies do not require censoring books, the impacts of censorship do still impact teaching. This session will detail different kinds of censorship and how censorship leads to moral injury. Because, when teachers are forced to choose between selecting the best texts for their students, or following rules—written or unwritten—that restrict texts, they are in a moral trap, which can lead to moral injury. Participants will have an opportunity to

consider their own experiences in light of their learning in the session and leave with actions to support intellectual freedom in their classrooms and schools.

Biographies: Katharine Covino is an English professor at Fitchburg State University where she teaches writing, literature, and teacher-preparation classes. Current scholarship explores a) critical pedagogy, b) action research, c) AI bias, and d) censorship. Recently, she co-edited two well-received volumes. Prior to university teaching, she taught English in Austin, Texas.

Dr. Ann D. David is a Professor in Teacher Education at the University of the Incarnate Word in San Antonio. Her research focuses on censorship in English language arts classrooms and the teaching of writing. Previously, she taught HS English for 6 years in the Midwest.

Don Vescio presents *Integrated Ethical Architecture: Designing Learning Environments That Cultivate Judgment*

Summary: Generative AI has prompted many educators to revise their AI policies, but policies alone do not teach ethical judgment. This interactive workshop introduces Integrated Ethical Architecture, a practical framework for embedding ethical reasoning throughout course design. Participants will explore strategies for moving beyond compliance by designing assignments, discussions, and assessments that help students develop thoughtful judgment in AI-rich learning environments. The session combines educational theory with practical examples that participants can adapt to their own disciplines.

Biography: Don Vescio is Professor of English at Worcester State University and Co-Chair of the Massachusetts Artificial Intelligence Council for Higher Education (MACH). His work focuses on AI, curriculum design, faculty development, and educational strategy. Drawing on experience in both academic leadership and the humanities, he helps educators thoughtfully integrate emerging technologies.

Jaclyn Hoffman presents *Going “Glocal”: Making Space for Global Perspectives in the English Classroom*.

Summary: As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, U.S. classrooms are facing growing pressure to narrow curricula and limit access to diverse perspectives. This workshop examines how English teachers can sustain globally focused instruction while navigating an evolving educational landscape. Through collaborative discussion, lesson design, and classroom

examples, participants will develop standards-aligned strategies that foster critical thinking, empathy, and global competence. Educators will leave with adaptable resources and practical language for advocating for the value of global education in their schools and communities.

Biography: Jaclyn Hoffman is an English teacher at Londonderry High School in New Hampshire specializing in inclusive curriculum design and global learning. A 2025–2026 Fulbright Teachers for Global Classrooms award recipient, she recently completed field experience in India. She holds degrees from Columbia University and Boston College.

Session 2

Shawna Shapiro presents *"Eat More CAIL": Critical AI Literacy (and Language Awareness)*.

Summary: This workshop shows teachers how they can promote Critical AI Literacy (CAIL) with a focus on language awareness, so that students become stronger readers, writers, and media consumers (and creators). We open with a KWL activity to gauge what participants know and want to know about AI and CAIL. I then present a CAIL framework drawn from my work on critical language awareness (CLA) showing how I employ it in HS and college curricula focused on racial/linguistic justice, news media literacy, and multilingualism. Participants will have opportunities for their own applications and share-outs, as well as Q&A throughout.

Biography: Shawna Shapiro is a Professor of Writing and Linguistics at Middlebury College. Her research focuses on innovative pedagogies for multilingual and multidialectal writers. Shapiro's work appears in many peer-reviewed journals, including RTE, CCC, and TATE. She published books with TESOL/NAFSA , Multilingual Matters, and Routledge. More at <https://sites.middlebury.edu/shapiro> and <http://clacollective.org/>.

Sophia Tatiana Sarigianides, Rebecca Ashley, and Alexis Demers presenting: *Applying Social Class Literacy To Literature & Students' Lives*

Summary: This panel presents approachable, engaging strategies for teaching about social class to students in middle, high school and college classrooms by foregrounding the impact of social class on our thoughts, beliefs and feelings and showing how these strategies deepen literary engagement and impacts students' understandings of their own lives. Using a sociocultural understanding of social class (Reay, 2005), presenters will share successful strategies for

building a brave space for discussion, introducing fruitful key concepts about social class, sample textual analyses, and writing prompts.

Biographies: Sophia Tatiana Sarigianides is Professor and Coordinator of English Education at Westfield State University in Western Massachusetts, where she has been preparing teachers for 16 years. Her publications focus on social class literacy, the impact of social class literacy on working-class students, antiracist literature instruction, and young adult literature.

Rebecca Ashley is Department Head and teaches 12th grade ELA at Canton High School. She earned an MA in Urban Education and another in Educational Leadership. She has been teaching for 28 years and is a past president of NEATE. She has presented at NEATE and NCTE on social class & racial literacy.

Alexis Demers, a 7th grade ELA teacher at West Springfield Middle School, earned her MAT from BSU, and her MA in school leadership from AIC. She has been teaching for 14 years. She has presented on her teaching around social class at the NEATE, NCTE and YAL Summit conferences.

Julia Dantzler and Nadia Tavares present *Graphic Novels for High Engagement and Multi-lingual Learners*

Summary: This session explores how graphic novels such as *Hey, Kiddo* by Jarrett J. Krosoczka can foster student engagement, agency, and rigorous literary analysis in secondary English classrooms. Drawing from classroom-tested lessons, participants will leave with practical strategies, including worksheets, graphic organizers, vocabulary activities, and discussion protocols, that support diverse learners such as multilingual learners (MLs) and reluctant readers.

Biographies: Julia Dantzler is a second-year English teacher at South High Community School in Worcester, Massachusetts. She earned her B.A. (2024) and M.A.T. (2025) from Clark University. She has presented at the Massachusetts Reading Association, Massachusetts Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, MIAA DEI Youth Summit, and Connections Conference.

Nadia Tavares is a first-year English teacher at South High Community School in Worcester, Massachusetts. She earned her B.A. (2025) and M.A.T. (2026) from Clark University. She has presented at the Massachusetts Reading Association and Connections Conference and has conducted research on feminist pedagogy and restrictive district policies.

Joanna MacKenzie presents: *Beyond Behavior: Student Voice, Literacy Access, and Academic Belonging*

Summary: Students with emotional and behavioral disabilities are often viewed through a deficit lens before they are recognized as capable readers, writers, and thinkers. In many educational settings, academic expectations are lowered in the name of support, limiting opportunities for students to engage in rigorous learning and demonstrate growth. This interactive workshop explores how Bodies of Work, Evidence Collections, and structured student conferences can create meaningful access to literacy through accountability, participation, and high expectations. Participants will examine common barriers, explore classroom-tested examples and adaptable resources, and develop practical inclusive practices that support meaningful literacy engagement while ensuring all students have opportunities to contribute, demonstrate learning, and be recognized as valued members of the academic community.

Biography: Joanna MacKenzie is a dual-certified English and Special Education teacher at Harding High School in Bridgeport. She has taught inclusive English and self-contained programs for students with emotional and behavioral disabilities. She is passionate about literacy access, student voice, and creating equitable opportunities for all learners.

Saturday October 24, 2026

Session 1

Brooke Eisenbach, Jason Frydman, Michelle Pate, Natasha Segool, Julie Sochacki, Michael M. Gale, Jennifer Marro, Amanda Y. Gonzalez, MaKenna Sweeney, AJ Asomani-Adem, Audrey Milam, Afua A. Busia, Kara Dembowski, and Lesley Undergraduate Students present *Pushing past censorship to ignite mental health literacy: Using contemporary literature as an essential bridge in the ELA classroom*

Summary: Today's adolescents face rising mental health challenges. At the same time, censorship and book bans continue to expand throughout the country. Literature holds the potential to serve as an essential gateway to reduce stigma and normalize mental health conversations in the classroom. This roundtable session explores a variety of contemporary titles educators can infuse into the classroom to blend the teaching of ELA and MHL for adolescent learners. Presenters will share strategies for implementing the literature, suggestions for centering ELA state frameworks alongside the pillars of MHL, and facilitate conversations on navigating censorship battles in the middle/high school classroom.

Biographies:

Brooke Eisenbach is an Associate Professor of Middle and Secondary Education at Lesley University. She is a co-editor of *Fostering Mental Health Literacy Through Adolescent Literature*. She is a former middle level ELA teacher and a former recipient of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) Outstanding Middle Level Educator Award.

Jason Fryman is an Associate Professor of School Psychology at NC State. He is a co-editor of *Fostering Mental Health Literacy Through Adolescent Literature*. He is a licensed psychologist and nationally certified school psychologist. He has been recognized for professional contributions by the American Academy of School Psychology and the North American Drama Therapy Association.

Michelle Pate DAT, LPC, ATR-BC, is an Associate Professor of Art Therapy at Lesley University. She earned an M.A. in Community Counseling from Wayne State University and a Doctorate in Art Therapy from Mount Mary University. Her teaching, research, and advocacy emphasize undergraduate art therapy education, inclusion, and equitable access.

Natasha Segool is a Professor and Co-Chair of the Department of Psychology at the University of Hartford. She is the author of numerous publications focused on teacher and student stress and wellbeing associated with educational systems. She's a licensed psychologist and nationally certified school psychologist.

Julie Sochacki is an urban educator and holds three Connecticut certifications: ELA teacher, literacy specialist, and intermediate administrator. She is a Clinical Associate Professor of English at the University of Hartford where she leads the English Secondary Education program and the university's general education writing program.

Michael M. Gale Ph.D., L.P. is an Associate Professor of Counseling Psychology at Springfield College. He is a licensed psychologist and PSYPACT credentialed provider whose work focuses on adolescents/young adults in school and outpatient settings. His scholarship centers on internalized racism, multicultural training, and anti-oppressive clinical supervision.

Jennifer Marro M.S.Ed., holds a BA in English and an M.S.Ed. in higher education. She is currently a full-time mom to two elementary school-aged children. She recently finished the manuscript for her first children's book "Wherever You Wonder" about a young girl's experiences with ADHD.

Amanda Y. Gonzalez holds master's degrees in Clinical Practices, School Psychology, and Elementary Education, as well as a sixth-year certificate in School Psychology. Amanda is a certified school psychologist and elementary school teacher in Connecticut. She is a doctoral candidate in Clinical Psychology at the University of Hartford.

MaKenna Sweeney is an early career educator with experience in both public and private secondary education settings. She graduated from the University of Hartford with a Bachelor's Degree in English/Secondary Education and currently teaches English Language Arts at the high school level in Connecticut.

Akua "AJ" Asomani-Adem, PhD., HSP. is a licensed psychologist with an interest in children's reading, writing, and motivation to learn. AJ completed her Ph.D. in School Psychology and has a Master of Science in Education. She also has experience implementing reading and writing interventions in schools.

Audrey Milam, PhD is a postdoctoral fellow with a strong interest in promoting equitable access to educational and mental health services. She has experience implementing reading and mathematics interventions in both school and after-school settings in the Southeast United States. Audrey has also contributed to research evaluating the effectiveness of reading interventions and methods for identifying learning disabilities. In her clinical work, she thoughtfully integrates the assessment of learning difficulties within comprehensive evaluations of neurodevelopmental conditions, allowing her to make targeted, evidence-based recommendations to support literacy and academic skill development at home and in school. In her free time, Audrey enjoys reading, writing, and participating in book clubs.

Afua A. Busia, PgDip is a learning support teacher for elementary students for the International School of Indiana community. She has a bachelor's degree in psychology and postgraduate degree in education. Afua has over a decade of experience in special education in international schools.

Kara Dembowski MA, LMHC, ATR is a mental health counselor working within a special education school in MA, with experience providing clinical and case management services to children, adolescents, and young adults. She holds a Masters in Art and is a Licensed Mental Health Counselor and a Registered Art Therapist.

Matthew Goetz presents *"I Don't Know": Teaching Authentic Vulnerability in the Age of Curated Certainty*

Summary: Students increasingly inhabit a world shaped by curated identities, algorithmic certainty, and performative correctness. In this session, participants will explore how these cultural pressures affect classroom discourse, interpretive confidence, and authentic student engagement. Drawing from classroom experiences, literacy theory, and interdisciplinary inquiry, this workshop argues that vulnerability is not incidental to learning, but necessary for it. English classrooms can become spaces in which ambiguity, uncertainty, and authentic intellectual risk-taking are actively cultivated--rather than avoided. Participants will leave with practical strategies for fostering discussion, inquiry, and interpretive confidence in an educational landscape increasingly shaped by performative curation.

Biography: Matt Goetz taught internationally in Beijing following ten years as a U.S. Navy officer and graduate study at Harvard. He has taught English and History across public, boarding, and international schools and is experienced with IB, AP, A-Levels, and Common Core curricula. Matt serves as a NEASC accreditation cochair and currently teaches high school English in Connecticut.

David Olio presents *Responding to Censorship with the Integrity of Inquiry*.

Summary: The Russian dissident Solzhenitsyn declared "literature that dares not transmit the pains and fears of a society does not deserve the name of literature; it's only a facade." However, too many contest texts that speak to our full human experience in our current teaching ecosystems. This session will begin with the speakers gut-wrenching experience of a contested text and subsequent separation from a Connecticut district. Together, then, we will turn the focus to the joy of inquiry, a cornerstone of our teaching and learning lives. The workshop invites each participant to reflect on and produce a short memoir vignette for cataloguing in a public celebration of moments of inquiry and learning.

Biography: David Olio is a retired, award-winning high school English teacher at South Windsor High School in Connecticut. He made national headlines in 2015 when he was pressured to resign for allowing a student to bring a contested Alan Ginsberg poem to their AP/UConn ECE Literature and Writing course. He is a past president of NEATE, his work has been featured on the Teaching Channel, and he published a memoir, *Dance Like a Wave of the Sea*, in 2025.

Session 2

Michelle DeBlois presents *Picture This: Art-Based Strategies for Literacy, Risk-Taking, and Community*

Summary: What happens when we hand students a marker instead of demanding a paragraph? In this hands-on session, elementary and middle-level educators will experience three low-prep, high-impact art-based literacy strategies: (1) Draw Me a Tree (a poetry-generating drawing activity), (2) Finish the Picture (a creative writing prompt), and (3) Pictionary Formative Reading Check (a playful comprehension assessment). Participants will walk away having created their own ready-to-use materials, along with strategies for using visual art to build trust, reduce self-censorship, and cultivate a classroom community where every student feels safe to take creative risks.

Biography: Michelle DeBlois: Tripp Middle School ELA Teacher, Vice President of the Maine Council for English Language Arts (MCELA); Maine Student Book Award Committee, Teacher Member (2017-2022), 20 years as a Maine public school educator, Master's Degree in Literacy Education

Alexandra Wolf presents *Navigating the Censorship of Writing in the Classroom: Lessons from Youth Prison Educators*

Summary: The censorship of writing and restrictions on how educators are permitted to teach writing are not new; however, navigating these restrictions in the classroom may be more fraught than ever. This workshop serves as an opportunity for educators to explore the experiences of youth prison educators, who navigate intensive restrictions and engage with censorship regularly. After diving into those lived experiences, the session will introduce fugitive pedagogy as a framework to navigate these experiences. Participants will then dive into moments of censorship in their settings in small working groups and discuss how they can navigate specific situations in their context.

Biography: Alexandra Wolf is an assistant professor at Eastern Connecticut State University (ECSU). Her work interrogates writing instruction across the school-to-prison pipeline, emphasizing instruction that is accessible, authentic, and disability-affirming. Before her time at ECSU, Alexandra taught English language arts, writing programs, and special education in public schools and youth prisons.

Session 3

Kennita Ballard presents “*Reading Against Erasure*” *Using Black and Jewish Literature to Teach Critical Thinking and Critical Empathy*

Summary: This interdisciplinary session explores the connections and distinctions between Black and Jewish narratives during Jim Crow America and Nazi Germany through both ELA and Social Studies lenses. Using literature, testimony, and primary sources, participants will explore how students can analyze propaganda, censorship, dehumanization, resistance, and historical erasure while practicing critical thinking and critical empathy. This session will model culturally responsive and historically grounded teaching practices that help students engage with difficult histories, evaluate multiple perspectives, and make meaningful connections between literature, history, and the world around them.

Biography: Kennita Ballard is an educator whose work centers culturally responsive literacy, Holocaust education, and educational racial equity. As an alternative certification veteran educator transitioning from Kentucky to Rhode Island, her work focuses on helping students critically engage with history, identity, memory, and justice through interdisciplinary literacy, inquiry, storytelling, and culturally grounded teaching practices.

Max Limric, Bryan Ripley Crandall, and Emmi Lawson present *The Power of Many Languages: Diverse Literature and Translanguaging at a National Writing Project Site*

Summary: For over 13 years, the Connecticut Writing Project (CWP) at Fairfield University, an affiliate of the National Writing Project, has offered young adult literacy labs for Connecticut students, including immigrant- and refugee-background youth. Amidst book bans designed to limit young people’s access to literature about diverse identities and languages, this workshop highlights the linguistic and cultural relevance of multilingual texts and engages participants in interactive language learning games to empower language learners and to build culturally relevant pedagogy.

Biographies: Max Limric is a second-year teacher. He has a bachelor's in English and Spanish from Fairfield University, and a master's in Elementary Education from the same institution. He is currently pursuing TESOL certification.

Emmi Lawson is a first-year English teacher at Fairfield Warde High School. She has a bachelor's degree in English from the University of Connecticut and a master's degree in secondary English education from Fairfield University.

Bryan Ripley Crandall is Director, CWP-Fairfield, and Professor of Literacy in the School of Education and Human Development at Fairfield University.

Nicole Godard and Kevin McKenna present *Whose Thinking Counts? Rethinking AI Use as a Question of Authority and Voice*

Summary: When students reach for AI, we tend to ask whether they cheated. This workshop asks a different question: what does it mean that students so readily grant algorithmic text the authority they withhold from their own thinking? Drawing on a four-problem diagnostic framework - Policy/Norms, Belief, Capacity, and Motivation - participants will examine the conditions under which students defer to AI as authoritative knowledge and leave with a menu of proactive teaching moves designed to restore student voice as the kind of knowledge an ELA classroom is meant to cultivate. A diagnostic framework, concrete strategies, and sample assignments are provided.

Biographies: Nicole Godard is a Curriculum Director and AP Literature teacher at Hampden Charter School of Science and Co-Director of Teacher Programming for the Western Massachusetts Writing Project. She is pursuing an Ed.D. in Curriculum & Instruction. Her work centers on writing pedagogy, instructional design, and teacher development.

Kevin McKenna is an Instructional Designer at UMASS Amherst, where he supports faculty in designing accessible online learning experiences. He is pursuing a Ph.D. in Teaching, Learning, and Curriculum Studies. His work focuses on the intersection of pedagogy and technology in higher education, with particular attention to writing-intensive courses.

Tara Temprano presents *Cultivating Student Voice Through Poetry in a Changing World*.

Summary: Rather than a lecture-based format, this workshop will model instructional practices through collaborative exploration. Participants will analyze short, accessible poems connected to current themes, participate in guided discussion protocols, using Reading Squares Discussion mats to promote respectful dialogue, and experiment with brief reflective poetry writing designed to support student advocacy and voice. Small-group collaboration will allow educators to adapt these strategies across grade levels and instructional contexts. By the end of the session,

participants will leave with a curated menu of instructional strategies, discussion structures, and writing activities that support poetry instruction amid uncertainty. More importantly, they will leave energized and equipped to empower students to read, write, and speak with intention, using poetry to understand the world and imagine possibilities for change.

Biography: Tara Temprano is a 4th- and 5th-grade Writing Interventionist, writing consultant, and published poet. She leads The Poet's Playground, an inclusive NJ poetry circle, and facilitates engaging workshops on writing, grammar, assessment, and student voice. Her award-winning work has appeared in numerous literary publications and festivals.

Session 4

Nancy Hope presents *Beyond the Heritage Month: Engaging Students with Inclusive Literature*

Summary: Stories involving diverse perspectives belong in the English classroom throughout the year, not just during a designated heritage month. In addition to offering universal themes such as family or friendship, they foster identity, empathy and prosocial behavior through reading about other cultures in a range of genres. This session will introduce book selection tools that prioritize authentic voices, as well as curated book lists. Practical strategies and resources for weaving historically and culturally accurate books into established curricula and programming will be covered with an eye to creating meaningful experiences for all students.

Biography: Nancy Hope is the Freeman Book Awards executive director. Formerly, she was the Kansas Consortium for Teaching about Asia associate director, a U.S. Navy line-officer, a textile designer and dyer in Japan where she lived for 8+ years, and a media specialist at Boston Children's Museum.

Sayward Parsons and Abigail Marks present *Exposing Process: Disrupting Traditional Form*

Summary: This workshop explores ways we can stretch, bend, and push out against the boundaries of traditionally structured writing. Presenters will share ways they've countered AI with assignments that include physicality and favor unexpected connections over form. Participants will consider what they most value in original student work; there will be time to brainstorm how to disrupt their own formal assignments to encourage the unexpected.

Biographies: Sayward Parsons has been teaching English for twenty five years; the last sixteen in Newtown, Connecticut. She presented on using YA Literature in AP Lit at the 2019 NCTE conference in Baltimore.

Abigail Marks has taught English at Newtown High School in Connecticut for 22 years, also serving as Department Chair since 2014.

Todd McKinley presents *Seeing, Being, Feeling the Text: Engaging Students with Challenging Texts*

Summary: When teachers ask students to engage with text, what experiences allow students to see, hear, and feel the texts. Todd will share key ideas from Chisholm and Whitmore's "Reading Challenging Texts: Layering Literacies Through the Arts" to engage participants in art-based approaches to engaging with texts. This session will allow participants to experience a visual arts-related instructional strategy, The Cordel, and a Choral Montage to support students' engagement with challenging texts, fiction and nonfiction. These strategies will also allow teachers to apply strategies intended to foster inquiry with and for their students.

Biography: Todd holds a doctorate in Literacy Education, and he has been an educator since 1996. Todd shares his passion for writing with colleagues at conferences and writing retreats while advocating for literacy education in his current role as a curriculum coordinator in Vermont.

Mark Bartomeli presents *Emotional Structures and Curriculum: A Classroom Framework for SEL, Cognition, and Literary Analysis*

Summary: This workshop introduces a functional methodology for integrating emotional analysis and SEL competencies directly into established curriculum. Participants will explore how to view emotions as mappable structures within a text. Using guided metaphor, visual cognitive tools and student-facing interfaces, educators can guide both literary interpretation and student metacognition. Emotions can become as standardized as theme or characterization. Drawing from a classroom pilot and student data, the session demonstrates how these emotional structures bridge CASEL competencies with ELA standards. Attendees will interact with usable

examples and collaborate on strategies to scale this framework across various grade levels and classroom dynamics

Biography: Mark has been teaching 7th Grade ELA for five years. He received his bachelor's degree from UConn and a Master of Arts in Teaching from Sacred Heart University. His work and interests focus on merging emotional analysis, cognition, and curriculum standards into practical classroom frameworks.