



# Virginia Association of Teachers of English

Winter 2005

The Newsletter  
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The Needle's Eye

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## Reflection and Look to the Future

Last year, 2004, VATE celebrated its 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary as a viable state affiliate of the National Council of Teachers of English. VATE has much to be proud of! VATE’s annual fall conference continues to highlight the year for our members. The October, 2004, conference, “New Frontiers in Teaching English,” held in historic Fredericksburg was well attended. Teachers from around the state gathered to hear Dovie Thomason, Sharon Draper, Orson Scott Card, and Kimberly Cuny as well as workshops, presentations, and discussions led by outstanding colleagues. The conference’s success is due to the dedication of educators who help organize, present, and attend. I would like also to give special thanks to Carrie Perry from Loudoun County for co-chairing the program and Becky Danello from Stafford County for co-chairing the site for the 2004 conference. Also, the countless hours that the Stafford County, Fairfax County, and James Monroe H.S. teachers contributed to making the 2004 conference a success will be remembered. Check out pictures from the conference on our web site.

With the success of 2004 behind us, I am proud to return for a second term to chair the VATE executive board. VATE’s new board looks forward to making 2005 a banner year for our organization. We want to hear from YOU as to how we can best represent and serve educators. The board is always interested in new ideas; our door is OPEN. We hope to continue to increase membership, honor the contributions of individuals and schools, and provide a forum for dissemination of information and exchange of ideas. For returning members, we appreciate your dedication to the English Language Arts teaching profession. For all new members, welcome aboard!

Janice Suppa-Friedman  
President of VATE

## New Needle’s Eye Editor

I am very excited about being the new editor of the *Needle’s Eye*. I believe that the *Needle’s Eye* should be an important part of VATE membership, serving as an informative and useful publication for the members of VATE. I hope that, in combination with the website and other publications, the *Needle’s Eye* will be a welcome resource for all. To help make this a useful resource, I will be focusing each issue on a specific theme. In this issue, you will read of the success of our last conference in Fredericksburg.

For the spring issue of the *Needle’s Eye*, I would like to focus on teacher leadership. What does it mean to be a teacher leader? How is leadership developed and fostered at your schools? What opportunities are available for leadership in the communities in which you teach? How does being a leader help your teaching? If you feel you have something informative to say about this topic, please consider writing a short article for the *Needle’s Eye*. Send submissions to: Greg Van Nest, Eastern Montgomery High School, 4695 Crozier Road, Elliston, VA 24087 or send them via e-mail to [gvanest@charter.net](mailto:gvanest@charter.net).

## A Renewal of Mind and Body!

As much as we all love teaching, it is a pleasure to fill out the requisite forms for a professional development day, and subsequently, an absence from the building. On Friday October 8, my colleague and I met for breakfast and took our time driving from Richmond to the VATE conference in Fredericksburg. There were no bells, no fires to put out and no papers to grade! And, it was a dress-down day to boot! We arrived for check-in, an easy process, and eagerly pawed through our “goody bags” finding much needed sticky notes and pens, as well as a copy of a book by Orson Scott Card. From there, before the first session began, we enjoyed chatting with the vendors, picking up more pens and sticky notes, and running into fellow English teachers we hadn’t seen since the last conference. There was an energy about the room. For three days teachers could enjoy the freedom of learning versus the responsibilities of teaching.

The program offered a variety of different sessions geared towards all grade levels. From hands-on activities with one sheet of paper to sessions on Go Read!, there was something for each English teacher to enjoy. Even if some of the ideas were ones we might have considered before, each presenter brought his or her own spin and excitement to the topics being offered. No one should have gone home empty-handed. In fact, many teachers probably had a few new tricks to spice up the lesson plans for Monday morning. I did hear a few people complaining that there were not enough sessions offered. To that I can only say: next year, sign up to be a presenter! We all have valuable things to share with our colleagues from around the state. Talk to your fellow English teachers, think of activities you do everyday, and write up a proposal! We can all benefit from joining a community of learners.

The VATE planning committee did an excellent job of bringing in the keynote speakers. Dovie Thompson’s moving

story-telling experiences were set against the backdrop of George Washington’s childhood home. Sitting under a tent in the cool breeze of evening, we were caught up in each of Dovie’s experiences with her grandmother, with her students, and now with her audiences nation-wide. She reminded us of the importance of spoken word in our classrooms. Sharon Draper, our luncheon speaker, kept us motivated and entertained with her true commentary on the nitty-gritty of teaching. She read to us from two of her publications and stuck around to sell and sign her books. While the publisher had

not sent a few titles, I hope I was not the only one who sought out her books upon my return to school. And while I was unable to attend Orson Scott Card’s keynote speech or the activities on Sunday, I am sure both sessions were excellent. This is another joy of the conference. In past years, VATE has brought us wonderful speakers who help motivate us to keep getting up each morning to pursue the love of literature, verbals, spelling and thesis statements.

VATE is a weekend for escape and refreshment. Whether you come to escape the classroom for a day, to share what you know with others, to soak in what others can teach, or to simply steep in an atmosphere of shared learning, camaraderie and the celebration of English, the annual VATE conference is not to be missed. So look ahead now. Consider your plans for next October 14, 15 and 16. We will be meeting in Roanoke, Virginia, to hear sessions and speakers focused on next year’s theme, “The Voices of Virginia: Diversity, Story And Vision for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.” Prepare your proposals and let your departments know the importance of continuing education. Perhaps

next year, we can have a record turn out for the event, all enjoying what I like to call a little good, clean “English teacher” fun!

*Wendy Edelman is a faithful attendee of VATE conferences and teaches in Hanover County.*

*Sitting under a tent in the cool breeze of evening, we were caught up in each of Dovie’s experiences with her grandmother, with her students, and now with her audiences nation-wide. She reminded us of the importance of spoken word in our classrooms.*

## The Sixteenth National African American Read-In

Make Black History Month a significant reading event in your area by organizing a Read-In in your area. The Black Caucus of NCTE and NCTE are sponsoring this event, joining over a million readers in the Sixteenth National

African American Read-In on February 6, 2005. Download a Read-In packet and further information at NCTE’s website: [www.ncte.org/prog/readin/107901.htm](http://www.ncte.org/prog/readin/107901.htm).

## Award Winners at the 2004 VATE Conference

The 2004 VATE Conference in Fredericksburg was an amazing success, and one of the best parts of any Conference is the naming of award and grant recipients for the year. This year was no exception.

### Richard Meade Student Teaching Scholarship

Two future English Language Arts teachers received the Richard Meade Student Teaching Scholarship in the amount of \$500 each. Julie Isman, a student at VCU, and Ann Kirchman of William and Mary received the awards for 2004. Each of these women will use their \$500 scholarships during their student teaching experiences during the 2004-2005 school year. Their excellent scholastic achievement and dedication to the profession made them the perfect recipients.

### Leon F. Williams Award

The Leon F. Williams Award is presented to an organization, institution, or program that has made significant contributions to the teaching of English as a result of many people's endeavors, usually as a result of a program or project. This year's winner is the Tidewater Community College "Consortium for Innovative Instruction: Aligning Writing Instruction in Secondary and Postsecondary Institutions." This program has received several FIPSE grants to work with high school English teachers and those on the Community College level to reduce the need for remediation

in writing for freshmen student entering college. Numerous high schools have been involved, and students have benefited greatly from this program.

### VATE Honor Schools

Two schools received recognition as VATE Honor Schools. This award is given in recognition of 100% membership in VATE for the English teachers in the school. Representatives of Frank W. Cox High School in Virginia Beach and James Monroe High School in Fredericksburg City accepted the award on behalf of their colleagues.

### Teacher Mini-Grant

Finally, a \$500 Teacher Mini-Grant was awarded to Sonya Redd of Grayson County High School in Independence, Virginia, to begin a Reader's Workshop library in her classroom for the 2004-2005 school year. In this economically challenged area, students will have books available for them to read at home.

If you or one of your colleagues qualifies for any of the VATE awards, please consider submitting a nomination for an award in 2005. Information about awards, grants, and qualifications will appear in the summer edition of *The Needle's Eye* and at our website.

*Submitted by Nancy Moskway-Vadersen, Past President*

## Edwin A. Hoey Award

The Edwin A. Hoey Award recognizes exceptional English language arts teachers of grades 5-8 who have demonstrated excellence in teaching English language arts and inspired a spirit of inquiry and a love of learning in their students. Applications

for NCTE's Edwin A Hoey Award for exceptional middle level English language arts teachers are being accepted until April 10, 2005. Check the NCTE website for details and nominate someone today! <http://www.ncte.org/about/awards/sect/mid/107051.htm>

## Education Policy and English Language Arts

April 14, 2005, will be NCTE's second "Education Policy and English Language Arts Day" in Washington, D.C. at the Barceló Hotel, 2121 P Street, NW, Washington, D.C. Registration for this event is free to NCTE members, but you need to register with NCTE. The purpose of this event is to learn about

English language arts legislation issues, learn how to schedule meetings with Congressional representatives, and tour historical and educational sites in Washington. For more information, go to the NCTE website, [www.ncte.org/announce/115893.htm](http://www.ncte.org/announce/115893.htm). The registration deadline is March 14<sup>th</sup>.

## A Prelude to an Exciting Future

What a community I am about to join! I have known for some time now that I wanted to be a teacher, and that English was my passion. I have spent a lot of time thinking about the students, my content, and lesson plans with which to dazzle those students. I am very excited to step into that new frontier. I had *not* given a lot of thought to this community of teachers I am about to join. The VATE conference opened my eyes to a new world.

For those of you whom I did not meet at the VATE conference, I was one of two honored recipients of the Richard A. Meade Scholarship. I am a student at VCU, and began my internship in January. The conference was such a wonderful prelude to my internship. The workshops I attended provided me with wonderful ideas for teaching students to write, enjoy poetry, and experience novels.

I arrived by train from Richmond, and Rosemary Balgavy was at the train station to greet me. As we drove to the hotel, she pointed out some of the beautiful sites in Fredericksburg, a town that reminded me of my historic home town, Marshall, Michigan. When we arrived at the hotel, Rosemary introduced me to India, who invited me to join her for breakfast.

After a day of workshops, we all climbed aboard two trolleys and rode to Ferry Farm, George Washington's boyhood home. I walked through the lovely garden, which was well tended even though October was already upon us. The weather was made to order, a lovely breeze off the Rappahannock tousled my hair as the sun warmed my shoulders. I drifted over to the tent where Dovie Thomason, our speaker for the evening, would soon mesmerize us all. I listened to the group buzz about the events of the day as I waited for the presentation to begin. Dovie's stories about her grandmother brought tears to my eyes, and her stories about teaching and speaking brought laughter to my lips.

I woke early the next morning, eager to attend more workshops, and excited to receive my award at the luncheon. The workshops did not disappoint, providing me with lots of goodies

for the future. As I approached the ballroom, the beautiful voices of students from a local high school choir floated out into the hallway. I sat down at the table and felt immediate camaraderie with my tablemates. We chatted about ourselves and the workshops as we enjoyed a fabulous luncheon. The food was truly exceptional all weekend. As we indulged in "Mary Washington's Gingerbread," Sharon Draper, our keynote speaker for the event, dazzled and amused us. The icing on my cake was receiving the scholarship.

After lunch I attended a rousing workshop on the SOLs and Kim Cuny's workshop, "Teacher Communication in the Classroom." I was delighted by the participants' willingness to share ideas and resources. Teachers are truly a unique group.

I joined a group of teachers from Loudoun County and students from Radford University for dinner. Another feast! Great food and great company, followed by words of wisdom from Orson Scott Card, who certainly rattled Strunk and White's cages.

The final event was a fabulous brunch prepared by our culinary hero for the weekend, Chef Lincoln. Kim Cuny gave an inspiring presentation about teaching for tolerance, and before I knew it was time to bid farewell to my new friends.

I was excited about becoming a teacher before I attended the VATE conference—excited about helping my students come to love literature, poetry, and writing as I do—now I have even more to be excited about. VATE honored me with the Richard A. Meade Scholarship and introduced me to this wonderful community of teachers *and* learners—a community that welcomed this future teacher with genuinely open arms.

Special thanks to VATE for honoring me with the Richard A. Meade Scholarship: Jan, Carrie, Rosemary, Frances, India, Lisa, and last but absolutely not least, Leila.

*Julie Isman will receive her Master's in Teaching from Virginia Commonwealth University in May. She is currently completing her internship at Matoaca High School in Chesterfield County teaching British Literature with 11th grade students.*

## VATE Website Gets Facelift

If you have not been to the VATE website lately, it would be worth a visit. The site has been redesigned and reorganized. Some of the new features include monthly educational links on the homepage, a Current Events page, and a printable membership form. In addition, you will find a forum for discussions and a mailing list. Please visit the site soon at [www.vate.org](http://www.vate.org). We would

love to hear from you on how we can make this site even better for our members.

*Linda MacCleave is the new VATE webmaster. She can be contacted at [ljbm@comcast.net](mailto:ljbm@comcast.net)*

# CALL FOR 2005 PROGRAM PROPOSALS



## Part I. Proposal Application

Person submitting the proposal (please circle): Dr., Mr., Mrs., Ms.

Last name	First name	Middle initial
Institutional Affiliation:	_____	
Position and/or Title:	_____	
Mailing Address: (street)	_____	
	(City)	(State) (Zip)
E-mail Address:	_____	
Phone Number: (Home)	_____	(Work) _____

Local Affiliate of VATE (if known) or School District/County: \_\_\_\_\_

### List of Co-presenters

(Please include professional titles, institutional affiliations, and E-MAIL ADDRESSES OF ALL PARTICIPANTS.):

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_

### Type of Presentation (check only one):

- 50 min. session:** Designed to provide an overview of a given specific topic
- 75 min. mini-workshop:** Uses an interactive format and audience participation.
- 1/2-day institute:** Allows for the most in-depth sharing of a topic with suggested follow-up activities (three hours)

### Strand Addressed (check all that apply):

- |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Reading         | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature (traditional, canonical) | <input type="checkbox"/> Instruction             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Writing         | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature (multi-cultural)         | <input type="checkbox"/> Technology              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Grammar         | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature (young adult)            | <input type="checkbox"/> VAME presentation       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Differentiation | <input type="checkbox"/> Our Changing Language               | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please describe) |



## Virginia Association of Teachers of English Application for Membership

Print, complete, and mail the form with your \$15.00 or \$5.00 (student membership) annual dues to our Executive Secretary, Chuck Miller. You can also join through your local affiliate.

Date \_\_\_\_\_  New member  Renewal

Name \_\_\_\_\_

(Circle one)

K-12 English Teacher, Grade \_\_\_\_

K-12 \_\_\_\_\_ Teacher, Grade \_\_\_\_

College English Teacher

K-12 Administrator

College Administrator

VDOE Employee

Student

Retired Teacher

Parent

Citizen

Other \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

School \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Mail the above with a check to VATE for \$15.00 or \$5.00 for a student membership to:

Chuck Miller  
Executive Secretary—VATE  
1417 Birchwood Drive  
Crozet, VA 22932  
(434) 823-1483  
CMillerCrz@adelphia.net

J.T. Henley Middle School  
(434) 823-4393  
(434) 823-2711 fax

## Become a VATE Board Member!

Are you interested in learning more about the Virginia Association of Teachers of English? Do you have great ideas to increase VATE membership? Have you always wanted to become part of your professional organization? Are you looking for interesting, active professional development activities? If so, several VATE Board positions are now available.

If you are currently teaching on the college level, why not become the **VATE College Member-at-Large Elect**? In this position, you will represent the interests of English/Language Arts professors in VATE policy decisions and work to increase membership among your colleagues and students in Virginia.

Maybe you are part of an active affiliate or would like to start one. Why not become the **VATE Affiliate Chair** and bring your enthusiasm and expertise to the entire state? As Affiliate Chair, you would oversee the active affiliates in Virginia, help to encourage members to begin new affiliates, or revitalize those that

need some help building membership. This Board member also rewards Honor Schools, those schools that have 100% of their English/Language Arts department members joining VATE.

If you like to publicize events or work with the media, then the **Public Relations Committee Chair** is the one for you. This person would work to publicize the annual conference and other activities to spread the word about VATE.

Maybe you are handy with a pen and enjoy different writing challenges. The **Special Publications Chair** sees that the VATE brochure is kept up-to-date and helps develop any other publications that the board deems necessary.

Why not become a more active VATE member today? If you are interested in any of the Board positions, please contact Nancy Moskwa-Vadersen, Past President, at Ocean Lakes High School, 885 Schumann Drive, VA. Beach, VA 23454 or e-mail her at [nsmoskwa@vbschools.com](mailto:nsmoskwa@vbschools.com).

## From the VATE Executive Secretary

Thanks so much for being a part of our ninetieth anniversary year in 2004. Last year was indeed an exciting one. Our conference in Fredericksburg was bigger and better than ever. But, we did not just rest on our laurels and look back to the past. We also looked ahead to the future. In our efforts to improve communication with our members and to help us continue to grow as a vital professional organization, we launched our new, improved VATE website. The address is the same: [www.vate.org](http://www.vate.org), but the site has a fresh look. If you still have not checked it out, take the time to do so; I think you will be impressed.

The new year, 2005, promises to be equally exciting. As you can see, our newsletter, *The Needle's Eye*, also has a fresh look, thanks to Greg Van Nest, who has just recently taken over the role as editor. Greg brings a lot of talent and enthusiasm to the job, and I am looking forward to the changes and improvements he plans to make in future issues of *The Needle's Eye*.

Perhaps the most exciting aspect of the new year will be the program that President-elect Hood Frazier is developing for the annual conference, which will be October 14, 15, and 16 at the Wyndham Hotel in Roanoke. For the first time ever, VATE will be sharing its conference with another professional organization, VAME, the Virginia Association of Multicultural Education. The theme for this year's conference is: *Voices of Virginia: Diversity, Story and Vision for the 21st Century*. Plan now to attend the

conference, or better yet get involved as by presenting or chairing a session or by serving as a member of Kathy Kelly's local arrangements team.

The new year will also bring new challenges to us as professionals. We and our students will continue to be impacted by the effects of the SOL's and the "No Child Left Behind Act." At times, it seems like we are a bit disenfranchised and that our opinions regarding matters that are of great importance to us are at times disregarded. Consequently, I can think of no better reason to join your fellow educators across the Commonwealth in membership in VATE. VATE is your organization, and it provides an opportunity for your voice to be heard.

Take a minute to look at the address label on your *Needle's Eye*. If the date on the label is 2005, then you are already onboard for the new year. But if the date on your label is 2004, then this will be your last issue of the newsletter unless you renew your membership. So, don't delay-renew today! Simply send the enclosed membership application along with a check for your dues (still a bargain at only fifteen dollars) to me at: 1417 Birchwood Drive, Crozet, VA 22932.

Yours in a unique bond,  
Chuck Miller  
VATE Executive Secretary

# Whew! Alas!: An “Insider’s” View of the VATE 2004 Annual Conference

I was greeted by two conflicting emotions on Monday, October 11, 2004. My first sensation was one of relief. The annual VATE conference was completed, and we’d survived. No more sitting in afternoon traffic on my trips from Leesburg to Fredericksburg to attend planning committee meetings. No more proofing and reproofing and fighting with Microsoft Publisher to finalize the conference program. No more running around the conference center, trying to make sure that everything was running smoothly. No more worrying that something would go wrong.

I luxuriated in the sense of freedom. Whew! It was over. We’d done it!

When I arrived at work that morning, I logged on and found a long list of waiting e-mails; several people had tried to contact me while I was out on Friday, October 8, and I had some catching up to do. I handled the e-mails, then returned some phone calls and cleared a few stacks from my desk. Life was getting back to normal, and that was just fine by me. So I thought.

I checked my e-mail around 10:00 a.m. There were no new messages. After a meeting, I checked my e-mails again: one message from a teacher with a question. I verified some information and sent an answer. No other e-mails arrived. I started moving forward with a project that I had not really tackled, thinking I would get to it after the VATE conference. It was perfect timing: my afternoon was unencumbered and a deadline was looming.

But I found myself checking my e-mail again and again. Still no new messages. What was I expecting? It hit me that I was suffering from withdrawal. I needed a Jan-fix!

I met Jan Suppa-Friedman via e-mail when she was serving as program chair for the 2003 VATE conference in Virginia Beach and was trying to nail down all the details of the presenters at that conference. She’d had to deal with flooding, courtesy of Hurricane Isabel, and was scrambling to get the program completed in time for the conference. She wrote me to accept my proposal and work out a few details. At the Virginia Beach conference, Jan recruited people to serve on the site and program committees for the 2004 conference. For some reason

I thought, “That sounds like fun.” And—I think—because I felt I already knew Jan, I gave her my name and contact information.

Some time in January 2004, I received an e-mail from Jan, reminding me of my offer to help and an invitation to the first planning committee meeting to be held at the Holiday Inn Select in Fredericksburg. I had forgotten about that little form I’d turned in at the conference in Virginia Beach, but Fredericksburg was pretty close, and I figured there’d be some small job I could do for the cause.

A VATE annual conference is the result of the efforts of two committees: the site committee and the program committee. Sometimes these committees work in geographically dispersed settings, but this year Jan was in the unusual situation of heading both groups. We met monthly from January until July, then bimonthly in August and September. Most of the work, however, we accomplished on our own, outside of the meetings. Still, I learned very quickly to look forward to these meetings, as they were wonderful opportunities to meet and work with colleagues from nearby school divisions and to watch our incremental progress in completing our goals. There really was no sense of being a stranger; we all were committed to making this project a success, and committee members stepped up to provide support when and where it was needed. We quickly became a team.

In between meetings, I got e-mails. Most of the messages came from Jan, who was providing necessary details and support for me as I learned how to manage all the information that was to be placed in the conference program. Her e-mails were long, chatty, and full of information, and it was rare for a day to go by without at least two, and sometimes as many as five, e-mails from Jan.

This is what I was missing, I realized. I missed my friends and my project. What was I going to do without their regular role in my life?

I was in mourning. Alas!

I share my story with you with the hope that it will inspire at least a few of you to consider increasing your involvement in VATE. If you’ve never attended the annual conference, please find a way to do so next year (it’s in Roanoke!). You will find it

## Committee Responsibilities:

### Annual Conference Program Committee

- Chair (this post is held by the VATE Vice President)
- Program (the physical booklet)
- Call for proposals (sent to all VATE members)
- Speakers (opening session, luncheon, banquet, brunch)

### Annual Conference Site Committee

- Chair
- Registration
- Publicity
- Goody bags
- Book sales
- Meals (luncheon, banquet, brunch)
- Exhibitors
- AV equipment

rewarding and exhilarating. You will go back to your classroom with exciting ideas that you can implement immediately and with a charge that will last for a long time.

And if you have attended a conference or two, then I strongly encourage you to consider volunteering in other ways. In the box on page 6, you will see a list of the committee responsibilities for each of the conference planning committees. When the annual conference is being held near where you live, you should seriously think about how you can participate as a

member of the site committee. When the program committee chair works in a locality near where you live, consider offering your services to that person. Watch for calls to participate, and then raise your hand. You will work hard, but you will relish every moment of it. And when it's over, don't be surprised if you want to go back and do it all over again!

*Carolyn Perry is the English Supervisor for Loudoun County Public Schools.*

## Looking for Inspiration

When I first decided to go back to school to become a teacher, I was met with the many reservations of people who were teachers, knew teachers, and were taught by teachers. You won't make any money, you won't be supported by the administration, you won't last more than a couple years; these phrases I heard each time I mentioned my new path. I was given a hundred reasons why I shouldn't become a teacher, but I knew there had to be some reason why so many people became teachers despite the perceived downfalls.

I first began to understand why people became and stayed teachers while taking Education classes at Radford University. My eyes were opened the first day of class when my professor, Dr. Kathryn Kelly, walked into the room and proclaimed that she would show us how students learn and it would be up to us if we had the courage to actually teach them that way. Dr. Kelly, Dr. Carolyn Mathews, and Dr. Robert Williams helped me to rekindle the passions for learning that I thought I'd lost. I began to remember myself as a student. I remembered the teachers who kept me in school and helped me initially find the passions I was just now rediscovering. I remembered how I learned best and how I didn't.

I had rediscovered my passions, knew I wanted to teach, and was just beginning to get my feet wet when I attended my first VATE conference. Five of us, all blocking students, instructed by Dr. Kelly that we had to "get involved," headed to Virginia Beach. We were in awe. The conference was filled with creative teaching ideas, Young Adult books, positive attitudes, and teachers who loved teaching. We returned to Radford with a secret; we now knew how to dispel the negative woes of teaching.

I am now in my third month of teaching. I have never before been so overwhelmed, overtired, undernourished, or happy. The first month and a half were the most challenging. With four preps and a handful of students I had no idea how to even begin to help, I found sanity in the notion that I would be attending the VATE conference in October. It was the inspiration I needed to

begin my first year.

The conference, held in Fredericksburg, Virginia, and focused on the theme New Frontiers in Teaching English, introduced me to a variety of different strategies. I learned how to bring the "Thought Police" into my classroom and teach risky literature. I learned how to teach my students reading through cooking, and create classrooms conversations through sticky notes and chalk talk. I learned that the way I stand says a lot about how approachable I am as a teacher and that the art teachers have the right idea in having a bright and cheery classroom. I learned how to teach revision to my students without doing it for them and then sat for hours re-thinking my entire understanding of the writing process.

I was also introduced to Sharon Draper, a writer of young adult novels. I had not heard of her before, but I will never forget her now. Her words proved to me again that the love of teaching does not have to fade. You could hear it in her voice, feel it in her descriptions of students, and as I would find later, read it in her books. I returned to my classroom with two of her books in hand. They have been passed around quicker than notes and whispers. I also recently ordered *Romiette and Juilo*, a novel I can't wait to teach with its canon counterpart.

I needed to be inspired the weekend of October 8th. I was looking for a sense of rejuvenation; a sense I was not feeling at home. I was looking for teachers who, despite teaching for twenty years, still loved to teach. I was looking for teachers who had the courage to teach the way we all know students learn. I feel very fortunate to know the secret and I hope in twenty years, new teachers, looking for their inspiration see me and my peers still loving what we do.

*Kelly Sage is currently teaching at Blacksburg High school in Blacksburg, Virginia. She teaches 9th and 10th grade General and College English.*

The Needle's Eye  
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## Announcements

### **VEB Editor**

*Virginia English Bulletin* seeks applications for a new editor for the term of January 1, 2006 - December 31, 2010. Criteria and application form are on the VATE web site <http://www.vate.org>. Deadline for mailing applications is March 31, 2005. Inquiries can be made to Patricia Kelly at [kellyp@vt.edu](mailto:kellyp@vt.edu), or Carolyn Mathews at [cmathews@radford.edu](mailto:cmathews@radford.edu).

### **Calls for Manuscripts**

The *Virginia English Bulletin* invites you to submit articles, essays, poems, or reviews for the Spring 2005 issue, which will focus on writing and learning in the English language arts classroom. We all want students to write well, and we want them to use writing as a vehicle for understanding. We know the power of writing to teach, as we're aware that students learn more effectively the information and concepts about which they write. Writing can help us gain clarity and sometimes solve problems. With this issue of the *Bulletin* we seek articles both about the teaching of writing and about using writing to teach. The deadline for the Spring issue is April 1, 2005. Please see the fall issue of the *Bulletin* for more information or contact the editor, Carolyn Mathews, at Radford University, P.O. Box 6935, Radford, VA 24142 or e-mail her at [cmathews@radford.edu](mailto:cmathews@radford.edu).

“The Needle's Eye doth supply the thread that runs so true.”

### **Call for News items**

If you have news items related to teaching English and language arts that you would like to share with fellow English teachers,  
please send them to  
[gvannest@charter.net](mailto:gvannest@charter.net)