



## The Needle's Eye

### Summertime News

*Chris Woods, VATE President*

I love the summer. I love lemonade commercials on TV. I love swimming. I love sitting outside at restaurants downtown. I love ceiling fans on low in every room of my house. I love ice pops. I love flip flops. I love sun dresses. I love music festivals. I love the new freckles on my girls' noses. I love getting to be "just a mommy" again even if it is only for the summer. I love wrapping up another school year and finishing up "things" until fall. But the work of VATE doesn't end with the close of the school year.

### VATE Activism

At the end of this school year, I was contacted by Glen Hoptman, board member for the Commission for Civics Education via Millie Davis and Kent Williamson with NCTE. Glen was seeking help with the recent SOL testing issue on the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade social studies content being moved to the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade reading SOL test. Because I am not only an English teacher but have one daughter who just finished 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and one who is a rising 3<sup>rd</sup> grader, this issue was important to me for personal as well as professional reasons. I was delighted by the speedy response and wonderful input from our board.

Through a combination of ideas, Carrie Perry funneled all our collective opinions clearly into the following statement which I emailed to Mark E. Emblidge, President of the Virginia Board of Education; Senator Charles J. Colgan, Senate Finance Committee; and Delegate Robert Tata, House Education Committee:

The Virginia Association of Teachers of English opposes the movement to eliminate the testing of social studies in grade 3. Our primary reasons for rejecting this change include these points:

- *If these standards are not tested, they will not be taught with due emphasis.*
- *Social studies education contributes to improved literacy through the development of academic vocabulary and the use of engaging non-fiction reading.*
- *Eliminating this test removes 4 years of accountability measurement with one stroke.*
- *Any action that diminishes the importance of these foundational social studies concepts threatens our civic competency and undermines Virginia's national reputation as a leader in social studies education.*

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- *We are particularly alarmed by the suggestion that the assessment of some of these standards will be subsumed under the SOL Reading test.*
- *Doing so will diminish the quality and validity of the SOL Reading test.*

If you have been to a board meeting lately, you know nothing delights me more than for VATE to have an impact on an important issue in education like this. Thank heavens for email and the ability to get something like this discussed, compiled, edited, and sent off in a matter of two or three days. I received two emails of thanks - one from Glen and the other from Kenneth Bassett, VCSSSCE President.

I wanted to share excerpts from both letters with you here. The letter from Glen to the VATE board:

*I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your support in preventing the elimination of the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade history SOL exam. Your efforts were part of a very broad-based coalition that came together and influenced the Senate and House Appropriations Committee and ultimately the Superintendent. On Monday the House Education Committee is scheduled to meet and I hope the momentum that has developed can sustain the effort to call for a system wide evaluation of the SOL exam regimen.*

Ken's email was titled, *NewsFlash: Virginia Association of Teachers of English Opposes Elimination of 3<sup>rd</sup> grade Social Studies Test*" and he reported to his members:

*Below is the content of a letter recently sent by the President of the Va. Assoc. for the Teachers of English to the Board of Education and members of the General Assembly opposing the elimination of the 3rd grade social studies test. Their argument helps strengthen our case - preserving accountability for K-3 social studies is what is best for our students.*

I am quite grateful to our board for their commitment to education and Virginia's students and to be able to join with other Virginia educators for a common cause is inspirational and a significant part of what our association is all about.

### **Writer Give-Away**

In more good news, I received a wonderful letter from Jane Schumin, VATE member and Central Virginia Writing Project member in which she discussed how thrilled she and her class were to receive a visit from Virginia poet Edward Lull. Her letter, which is included in this issue of the *Needle's Eye*, exceeded my expectations for what one of these visits could mean to students and all involved. When I conceived of a "poets give-away," I never imagined just how profoundly a visit with a Virginia poet could impact not just the students, but the teacher and the poet as well. I know Sarah Tanner-Anderson, who handled many of the details for the first give-away, was as happy as I was to read Jane's letter. I am excited to report that Sarah will continue with the give-away again at this year's conference, with some assistance from me in selecting Virginia novelists to expand the drawing beyond our current pool of poets. Again, this is an example of what I like best about the privilege of serving as a VATE officer.

### **National Gallery of Writing**

I would also like to encourage you all to visit the National Gallery of Writing website to include a piece of your writing in the gallery. I would encourage you to browse the galleries to see what other

associations have their writing posted. It is a ground-breaking and beautiful-looking website as well and I plan for VATE to start our own gallery soon.

### **Conference 2009**

I am glad summer is here. This has been a long school year for many of us. I do so hope you and your school system have fared well in light of this year's budget cuts. It seems that in my area the cuts were bad, but not quite as bad as we all had feared. VATE is in a similar situation this year and I am quite appreciative of those who have gone the extra mile to see VATE through these lean times. This year's conference is quite important for our association's financial livelihood. VATE hopes for your continued support and in return will again provide the collegiality and inspiration we so love about our conferences.

Join us October 30 through November 1, 2009 for a unique conference experience in Colonial Williamsburg. Our President-Elect Adria Merritt has selected fantastic historic learning and sight-seeing activities as well as rejuvenating speakers who will get our creative minds working on how we can pull these great ideas back into our class rooms. I look forward to seeing you all at the beautiful and relaxing hotel in Williamsburg to catch up on friendship news and achievements as well as to get to know those of you who are attending for the first time.

### **VATE Writing and Publishing Opportunities**

Please do not forget to how important it is for you to submit articles to the *Needle's Eye* as well as the *Virginia English Bulletin*. These are **your** publications and VATE wants to have your writing included in addition to our board member news and highlights.

Enjoy your summer and I hope to see you all very soon... October, at the latest!

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## **Changes and Challenges**

*Chuck Miller, VATE Secretary*

"Well, my bags are packed. I'm ready to go." Twenty-four hours from now, I will be on a plane to Rome to visit my daughter who is finishing up a study abroad. My wife, my son, and his girlfriend will be traveling with me for what promises to be a great family time in "the Eternal City."

However, due to publication lag time, by the time you read this article, I will be back to the reality of the classroom. Middle school summer school, to be exact. Or, is that surreality? Nevertheless, I wanted to take a few moments to touch base with the VATE membership in the summer issue of *The Needle's Eye*, as I had a few thoughts I wanted to share.

Returning to the executive board as treasurer is Peggy Gearhart. Peggy has previously served as the elementary-member-at-large. And in a "previous life" before teaching, she has had banking experience. I appreciate very much Peggy's willingness to take on this major commitment and yet again to assume a leadership role in our organization.

Switching gears to "what could they possibly be thinking," you may be aware of the controversy surrounding the recent movement to eliminate the grade 3 social studies SOL test and to subsume some of the social studies SOL's under the umbrella of the SOL reading test. In these current economic times, some teachers may question the value of joining professional organizations. The incident above is just one example of why organizations such as VATE are important and relevant.

They provide us an opportunity to have a voice, to weigh in on important issues that are facing education today. So, I encourage you to renew your membership when you receive that postcard from me, and I challenge you to spread the word about VATE to your colleagues and to promote VATE membership in your buildings when you return to school in the fall.

I would be remiss if I did not put in a plug for our fall conference at the Woodlands Hotel in Williamsburg, October 30-November 1. President-elect Adria Merritt has designed an outstanding program. She has also instituted some fun, family activities for Friday afternoon and evening. So, bring the kids and your spouse or significant other and enjoy Colonial Williamsburg, while at the same time taking part in what is always one of the finest state affiliate conferences in the nation. After all, you would expect nothing less from an organization that has been recognized as an NCTE Affiliate of Excellence two years in a row. Registration and hotel information may be found online at our award-winning website, [www.vate.org](http://www.vate.org).

### **If You Win a Poet....**

*Jane Schumin, Stuarts Draft Middle School*

I had heard that folding an entry for a drawing accordion style could improve one's chances to win. This was my thought when I was asked to put my name in a drawing for a poet at the 2007 VATE conference. I carefully folded my entry thinking what an impact a poet could have on my students. Like most people, I never win anything, yet I put that accordion-folded paper in the box.

I won poet Edward Lull! Excited knowing anything that could enhance poetry in my school would be a boon, I came to school the next Monday announcing I had "won a poet." Little did I know the effect Mr. Lull would have on us.

Ed contacted me soon after my "win" and lamented coming "over the mountain" from Williamsburg during the winter. We agreed on a date in March. This gave me time to get ready.



Poet Ed Lull with teachers from Stuarts Draft Middle School

The gentleman that he is, he sent me a few of his published books to warm my children up to his style. I presented his "light pieces" whose topics included dogs, dating, and squirrels. Ed is also an historian, with poems about early America. Finally, I shared that he had a former career as a naval officer on a submarine. When Ed came to Stuarts Draft Middle School, my students were ready.

After sharing time with us in class, our team gathered in the forum to ask questions and listen to Ed's now familiar poetry. I initially worried about my students' behavior – would poetry keep their attention? As he began reading, I watched the children come under the spell of a gracious, creative man. When he asked for questions, hands darted up. He spoke of inspiration, writing style, and, of course, submarines. When our time was up, the students enthusiastically applauded.

After handshaking and expressing heartfelt thanks, I watched Ed and his wife leave the school. I thought my brush with the poet was over. I was wrong.

This fall I received an email from Ed. He wanted to give our school a set of books of poetry he had edited with Carolyn Kreiter-Foronda, Four Virginia Poets Laureate: a Teaching Guide. After contacting Community Bank to sponsor the donation, he set up a date to enthrall us once again.

Ed did not disappoint. His humor and genial manner captivated his audience. After presenting the books to our librarian, Rhonda Carwell, he charmed us with his works. This time, however, he cut short his reading and asked for questions. Once more, students' hands shot up.

Soon after his visit, Ed emailed me, giving me a gift of poetry. The poem described his visit to our school. Each child on our team asked for a copy of their own. To say VATE and Edward Lull affected my life would be an understatement. I look forward to the next VATE conference in October.

### On Visiting Stuarts Draft Middle School

Ninety-six beaming faces,  
As only sixth-graders can beam,  
eagerly anticipated  
what I would bring to them.  
They had been briefed:  
They knew who I was  
And why I was there.  
I read a patriotic poem,  
Then a couple of light verses  
With surprise endings.  
They delighted in these poems.

Just a few minutes into the program  
I asked if anyone had a question.  
About fifty hands flashed into the air;  
They were really prepared.

The energy level in the room  
pumped me up.  
The quality of the questions  
and the way they were asked  
belied their age.

Their interest and enthusiasm  
with poetry made my day.  
However, nearly a third of the questions  
Were on the subject of submarines  
And life in the undersea Navy.  
Clearly they knew more about me  
Than I knew about them.

When lunch period ended our hour together,  
A dozen hands still waved.  
I pray I filled their lives that day  
The way they filled mine.

Ed Lull, 2009



## Lobbying for Literacy

*Sarah Tanner-Anderson, Vice President, Virginia Association of Teachers of English*

As a young English educator, there are times when I feel that legislators are so completely disconnected from our profession that they could never initiate real change in 21<sup>st</sup> century education. Rather than being discouraged by that disconnect, however, I chose to take my voice to the big city as an advocate for literacy reform.

On April 23, 2009, donned in high hopes and my I-can-so-do-this suit, I joined fellow VATE Board member Jan Suppa-Friedman for a day of advocacy at NCTE'S Literacy Education Advocacy Day in Washington, D.C.

After arriving at the Capitol building, Jan and I nestled into our meeting room to prepare for the day's events. NCTE Washington office director Barbara Cambridge welcomed us and explained the importance of our voices as advocates for English educators across the nation. She asked that we take proactive stand *for* education rather than simply complaining *against* established policy; therefore, our goal for the day was to focus on two key "asks" of our legislators – support for the National Day on Writing and support for a bill that centers on improving student literacy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. NCTE Executive Director Kent Williamson provided us with a brief overview of the 2009 NCTE Legislative Platform from which both key "asks" stemmed.



Sarah Tanner-Anderson and Jan Suppa-Friedman

In our informational packets, we had a copy of the bill proposal and a letter to members of Congress seeking support. As indicated in the letter, The National Day on Writing has been developed to "draw attention to the remarkable variety of writing we engage in and to help connect writers from all walks of life." NCTE has developed a gallery forum, The National Gallery of Writing, to showcase works of writing from all ages, areas, occupations, etc. We heard remarks by Congresswoman Dina Titus expressing to us the importance of recognizing the power of writing across our country. As the National Day on Writing was currently proposed as a House of Representatives bill by Congresswoman Dina Titus and Congressman Todd Platts, we were asked to seek support and possible co-sponsorship of a similar bill when meeting with our senators later in the afternoon.

After reviewing our "assignment" regarding the National Day on Writing, we moved into the comprehensive literacy bill. Barbara Cambridge explained the distinctiveness of this bill; rather than centering solely on reading *or* writing, this bill clearly indicates that the two are inextricably interconnected. Furthermore, this policy is unique in that it is comprehensive in nature – children from birth through twelfth grade would be provided with learning opportunities, funding would be distributed to all states to ensure implementation, and on-the-job professional development would be offered. Bethany Little, Chief Education Counsel for Senate Health, Education, Labor & Pensions (HELP) Committee, spoke to us about the significance of this bill and expressed the need to move No Child Left Behind (NCLB) forward as soon as possible. As the bill will be forthcoming, our "mission" for the afternoon was to ask our legislators to support this bill when it came across their desks.

In order to be fully prepared for our legislative visits, we had an opportunity to practice our "asks" with other NCTE members. Jennifer Mascho, Legislative Assistant for Congressman Timothy Johnson, provided us with insight to a typical visit. She stressed that legislators are "just people" and that they enjoy visits from their constituents. We then enjoyed a mock-visit demonstration by Katie Van Sluys

and Stacey Novelli, detailing what we should strive to accomplish from our meetings. Finally, NCTE President Kylee Beers expressed the importance of sharing our personal stories and passion when speaking with our legislators. We were then dismissed for our afternoon meetings.

Jan and I made our way over to the Russell Senate Building to meet with a representative from Senator Jim Webb's office. We posed for photos outside of Webb's office, and, after a moment of acting like complete tourists, we reported for our meeting with Maribel Ramos, a Legislative Assistant for Senator Webb. Little did we know that we would soon be joined by two other educators and a representative for *USA Today*. Jan and I were not prepared to juggle the number of people present, however, with grace, we persevered. Ramos indicated that Webb may be interested in supporting these bills as he is a writer himself who values literacy and education, but she would have to discuss the phrasing of the bill with the Senator before committing to support and potential co-sponsorship.

Our next appointment was two floors above Senator Webb's office, so we ascended the beautiful marble staircase to report for our meeting with Leah Ralph, Senior Legislative Correspondent to Senator Mark Warner. Again, pausing for the sake of tourism to take photos, Jan and I began to enter the office when we caught a glimpse of the former Governor. Jan exclaimed, "There's our Senator!" and, as he briskly rushed down the hall, arms filled with paperwork, he smiled and waved cordially. After his presence was a just a breeze behind him, we realized that we missed a photo op! Ms. Ralph genially welcomed us in and listened attentively as we pitched our "asks." She believed that the Senator would be interested in both the National Day on Writing and the Improving Student Literacy bill, although she indicated that she would have to speak with Warner before providing a certain answer.



Jan Suppa-Friedman, Congressman Tom Perriello, and Sarah Tanner-Anderson

From the Russell Building, we then hustled to the Longworth Building to meet with a representative from Congressman Tom Perriello's office. We met with Ericke Cage, Legal Counsel to the Virginia 5<sup>th</sup> District Representative, who indicated that his mother was a teacher, and that he most certainly understood the value of comprehensive literacy education. Like Ms. Ralph and Ms. Ramos from the Senator's offices, Mr. Cage believed that the Congressman would be interested in supporting both bills; however, he would need to confirm that with Perriello himself.

After a productive afternoon, Jan and I walked to the Rayburn Building for debriefing. We shared our stories, submitted reports, and a sneak-peek of the National Gallery of Writing. As

I reflected on the day, I simply could not express how important this learning experience was for me. At first, I was skeptical that my voice would not be heard on Capitol Hill; however, in all of my meetings, I learned that our legislators DO want to hear from us, their constituency, as we are the experts of our field. I felt that our concerns fell upon compassionate ears, and I was humbled to have been a part of such an empowering experience.

Tired yet satisfied with our advocate work, Jan and I boarded the Metro back to Vienna. As we parted ways, I gave her a big hug of appreciation. I am thankful to have had the opportunity to share my first NCTE Literacy Education Advocacy Day with such a wonderful mentor!

Visit the [VATE Blog](#) to read Jan's perspective.

## Voices from the Blue Ridge Writing Project, 2009

Sara Zeek, Lord Botetourt High School, BRWP 2009 Fellow

**“Teachers Are Writers-- What a Wonderful Reminder !” ~Suzanne Reisinger, BRWP fellow**

*“Dear Dad:*

*I'm here today because a long time ago, when I had that horrible job at Braum's Ice Cream and Dairy store, and I whined about not wanting to be there, and how much my arm was hurting from scooping really hard frozen ice cream, you said I should quit that job.*

*You were not trying to set me up for a life of being a quitter. No. In fact, you went on to say that life is too short not to spend time doing what we love to do. Life is too short to work at a dreary job.*

*So I remember that every time I am reminded how much I love what I do. I love writing and teaching and that is what this Summer Institute is all about...” ~Aileen Murphy, BRWP fellow and co-director*

On the first day of the Blue Ridge Writing Project we were asked to consider why we had chosen to spend our summer reading and writing when most teachers were finding other ways to spend their time. We shared stories of family members who were relaxing at lake houses, taking trips to foreign countries, or just staying up late and sleeping in. But each of us had a specific reason for attending class from 9 a.m. until 4 p.m. four days a week.

*“I joined the BRWP to become a better teacher. My drama students are expected to write reviews, journals, research papers, and short plays. One of my weakest skills has been grading the writing process and I want to improve in that area.” ~Rachel Sailer, BRWP fellow*

Some participants said they wanted to explore writing in a new genre; others said they wanted to be better teachers. So we dove into the writing project experience by reading books authored by experts in the field. We debated the value of technology in the English classroom. We bemoaned the SOL tests and mourned the poems we used to teach. Everyone agreed that we were there for the right reason: writing is something that we do and love.

*“The BRWP has been like a permission slip for me...permission to write for myself, to read what I want, and to share with other teachers of writing as we grow both personally and professionally.” ~ Molly Scanlon, BRWP fellow*

The first day of the institute was a little like that first day of middle or high school, or maybe even college. We all were looking for permission to join the class, to be ourselves, to write about what was important to us. Everyone was a little nervous and searched for that seat that fit just right. There was arranging and rearranging of brightly colored pens. Notebooks with covers that revealed a little about the owner's personality were open, ready for the words to flow. A little spark of tension circled the room.

*“The BRWP appealed to me because I teach all grade levels of middle school English. I feel that being in a class that includes writing, reading, and speaking will help me empathize with my students!” ~Georgia Mayo, BRWP fellow*

Nervous laughs and encouraging smiles punctuated the readings of drafts and the discussion of Anne Lamott's book, *Bird by Bird*. Soon, though, we were scribbling out our first responses about a place where we went on vacation with our families. The follow-up activity made us face our fears of sharing

those drafts with the larger group. It's often frightening to share a piece of writing with a group, especially when they are all English teachers, too, but those barriers dissolved quickly on the first day as we found an audience eager to nurture and praise the efforts of others.

*"The opportunities provided for me by being a member of the Blue Ridge Writing Project are immeasurable. Not only am I submersed in a community of writing and teachers, I am given the opportunity to stretch and grow as a writer and a teacher. From the four short weeks of the BRWP, I'm going to take away many ideas to use in my classroom, and, more importantly, develop a better sense of myself as a writer."* ~Kellee Barbour, BRWP fellow.

The Blue Ridge Writing Project has already developed into what teachers know every classroom must become for writers to be successful: a community where everyone is safe to express their thoughts, in writing and in speaking. Starting with Nyanne Hicks's ice breaker, "A Place Where Everyone Knows My Name," we were drawn together by a common love for language. Nyanne shared the story of her name, which she did not like as a child. She then asked us to tell the stories of our names to each other. We learned each other's names, but we also heard the stories of our families, of our friends, and of places and experiences that were important to us. We shared the beginnings of the stories we would tell over the next month.

*At first my motive in participating in the BRWP was recertification points and a desire to learn how to really teach writing, even though I am not currently a writing teacher. However, after Day 2 I realized that this summer institute would mean a lot more to me. The writing has been cathartic and therapeutic and connective. Over the past ten days, we have all stretched ourselves and have gotten to know each other very well. I believe that even though it's only been a few days, we all feel like we belong."* ~Jackie Oster, BRWP fellow

Add to this great beginning a few guest speakers, a little academic research, a lot of jokes about aphorisms, two or three book reviews, the Lemon Lime Ladies, and some great morning coffee, and you have the perfect ingredients for personal growth, confidence building, and best of all, making new friends who celebrate each other's differences and encourage each other's talents.



Nyanne Hicks, Aileen Murphy, and Anita Booth

The Blue Ridge Writing Project returned this summer to the campus of Virginia Tech in Blacksburg through the efforts of three dedicated women. Co-Directors Kelly Belanger, Director of the Center for the Study of Rhetoric in Society, and Aileen Murphy, Assistant Director of Creative Writing at Virginia Tech, are collaborating with Nyanne Hicks, who recently retired from Blacksburg Middle School and is serving as the project's Teacher Consultant Facilitator. We are certainly thankful for their time and hard work, for without them, we would not have this opportunity.

The National Writing Project (NWP) is a professional development network that serves teachers of writing at all grade levels, elementary through university, and in all subjects. The mission of the NWP is to improve student achievement by improving the teaching of writing and improving learning in the nation's schools. Teachers who participate in summer institutes are considered teacher consultants and are available to demonstrate a writing-related teaching strategy to teachers as professional development and to community and civic groups interested in writing and education. Anyone interested in more information about The Blue Ridge Writing Project, should contact Aileen Murphy at [aileen@vt.edu](mailto:aileen@vt.edu) or visit the website at <http://www.rhetoric.english.vt.edu/svwp/index.html>.

## VATE Honors Members Who are Newly Published Authors

We're adding a new feature to *The Needle's Eye* that honors members who have recently had their works published. VATE celebrates your hard work and would like to share your good news with others. Please email your information to [szeek@bcps.k12.va.us](mailto:szeek@bcps.k12.va.us).

### VATE Honors Published Authors

**Diane Carroll Vogel**, a long-time VATE member and retired English teacher, has co-authored *Prayer, Faith and a Bit of Chocolate* with Rosemarie Gortler and Sallie Bachar. Their book, which was released in May of 2009, is a collection of real-life, true stories about everyday miracles that happen in people's lives. The authors know that a bit of chocolate also lifts the human spirit, so for added comfort, they interspersed family favorite chocolate recipes in with their stories of encouragement and inspiration.

**KaaVonia Hinton-Johnson, Ph.D.** of Old Dominion University has published two works. In *Sharon Draper: Embracing Literacy*, Hinton-Johnson explores Draper's life and work as a teacher and a supporter of literacy. Hinton-Johnson's second book was co-authored with Katherine T. Butcher. The text, *Young Adult Literature: Exploration, Evaluation and Appreciation*, is published by Prentice Hall and has been described as "a cutting edge resource for teachers who want to connect with their techno-savvy 21st century students and in turn connect them to the literature of today" (weread.com)

**Mary R. Bailey**, a secondary English teacher who lives in Central Virginia, has published *Vhan Zeely and the Time Prevaricators*. Bailey's narrative introduces young readers to eleven-year-old Vhan Zeely, who is unhappy with her dull life and bored by what seems to be an endless summer. When the McPreveys and their two obnoxious boys move into town, however, life on 2nd Street changes forever. Vhan soon realizes her parents have been keeping a secret from her—a secret she is determined to uncover. Yet in an attempt to unlock her family's past, Vhan is thrust into a world she is little prepared to understand.

Two long-time friends of VATE, poet and literary activist **E. Ethelbert Miller and Scott Loring Sanders** have also joined the club of those recently published. **Miller's** new memoir "*The Fifth Inning*" is now available and recounts the stories of a man who sees the end of life approaching without sentimentality. **Sanders'** new book for young readers, *Gray Baby*, tells the story of Clifton who has witnessed two violent acts and seeks to discover truth for himself and his family.

## A Letter from NCTE on the National Day on Writing

Dear VATE Members,

The Resolution for a National Day on Writing has been introduced in the House of Representatives by Congresswoman Dina Titus (D-NV) and by its 27 cosponsors. House Resolution 524 (H.Res.524) has

been referred to the House Committee on Education and Labor for review.

NCTE is eager for the Resolution to get to the floor for a vote. You can have a part in that move by [writing to your Congressperson in the U.S. House of Representatives](#) to ask her or him to become a cosponsor for the bill.

While you can send the model letter as is, we hope you will choose to modify that letter to tell why you think the National Day is important to your students and to you as a teacher. After you [review the resolution](#), you could choose to emphasize one or more of the "whereas clauses" that establish why NCTE thinks this day is significant. The passion and commitment to writing that you express could motivate your Representative to be a cosponsor and to vote for H.Res.524.

Barbara Cambridge  
Director, NCTE Washington Office

## **The National Gallery of Writing is Now Open**

*An invitation from Carl Rich, NCTE*

NCTE asks all of us to promote teaching and learning by doing something we do every day: **writing.**

Think about the writing you do on a given day: a letter to a parent, feedback on student work, a quick email to a friend, a text message to your spouse. Emergent technologies have enabled us to compose like never before. A piece of writing no longer means a piece of paper. We can compose meaning with our keyboards, with our cameras, and even with our cell phones!

It is in this spirit that NCTE announces the opening of [The National Gallery of Writing](#), an online gallery where writers from all walks of life can submit their writing.

"I'd like to encourage you—and other VATE and NCTE members—to consider starting a [Local Partner Gallery](#) with your classes or other groups," says Carl Rich, of NCTE.

Local Partner Galleries are the perfect way to feature student writing and to celebrate the many roles writing plays in our lives. Creating a gallery is simple, quick, and most importantly—fun!

The possibilities are endless. Some ways teachers are planning to use Local Partner Galleries include:

- Highlighting a special year-end assignment
- Sharing slideshows and photos from a writing-across-the-curriculum project.
- Uploading video and audio compositions of students performing original poetry
- Using a local gallery for parents and students in an afterschool program.
- Developing a community-wide summer writing topic.

Get started by [requesting a Local Partner Gallery](#) today and your students' work will be published for the world to see on October 20, 2009—The National Day on Writing!

[Follow us on Twitter!](#) Add dayonwriting (<http://twitter.com/dayonwriting>) to your Twitter feed and get the latest updates on the National Day on Writing and the National Gallery of Writing.

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# GREAT TEACHING IDEAS CALL FOR MANUSCRIPTS *Virginia English Bulletin*

The *Virginia English Bulletin* invites you to submit articles of two to ten pages describing great teaching ideas. Chosen submissions will be featured in our Great Teaching Ideas column, which appears in each issue of the *VEB*.

No one teacher possesses all the knowledge required to teach the ever widening range of topics and students that we face from year to year. Yet there is a solution. We can learn from each other. This column asks you to share with fellow teachers the activities, materials, or assignments that have worked for you and your students. By sharing ideas and borrowing ideas teachers work together to develop repertoires of strategies that work. We invite your submissions.

**2009 DEADLINE:  
Fall / Winter 2009: October 1<sup>st</sup>**

Authors should submit their articles electronically as e-mail attachments, preferably Microsoft Word or Corel WordPerfect; however, other formats and word processing programs, such as Open Office, are acceptable. We do not accept simultaneous submissions. **Please include your mailing address, as well as a short biographical sketch including the name of your school, position, courses taught, and a brief statement about your professional life; also include a statement of submission noting that the work has not been simultaneously submitted elsewhere for publication.**

**Send copies to Robert Williams, Radford University, P.O. Box 6935, Radford, Virginia 24142.** The editor reserves the right to modify manuscripts to fit length and language considerations. e-mail address: [rohwilli@radford.edu](mailto:rohwilli@radford.edu). Please include "VEB Submission" in the "Subject" line of your e-mail.

### ***The Needle's Eye* has gone digital.**

In an effort to lower publication costs and go green, *The Needle's Eye* is now being published in a digital format.

Please contact Chuck Miller at [cmillercrz@roadrunner.com](mailto:cmillercrz@roadrunner.com) to update your email address so that you will not miss a publication announcement.

### *Virginia Association of Teachers of English*

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The Virginia Association of Teachers of English is committed to enhancing the quality of the teaching of English and language arts in the Commonwealth.