education review

Golden, John (2001) *Reading in the Dark: Using Film as a Tool in the English Classroom.* Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

Understanding point of view, interpreting characters' actions, identifying themes—each of these skills is recognized as part of appreciating literature in most secondary classrooms. But often, students do not understand the subtleties of a writer's techniques to providing keys to meaning. John Golden, in his book *Reading in the Dark: Using Film as a Tool in the English Classroom,* suggests that studying film can improve students' skills in both reading and analysis. Golden's book provides the reader with basic terminology, film to literature links, and recommendations for movie segments. The appendixes include a glossary of terms, blank activity charts, an annotated list of resources and an index of the films discussed.

Although Golden includes a chapter on teaching complete films, his purpose is not to transform a language arts class into a film class. Instead, he provides sound advice for teaching such elements as point of view by moving from the techniques used in film to the techniques used in print. In addition, Golden recommends using only sections of a film, generally less than ten minutes, to highlight a particular point. The model Golden has developed begins by studying a film technique and then viewing a film example. Once skills of application and analysis are developed here, Golden moves to analyzing literature and literary techniques.

In the first chapter Golden introduces film terms directly relevant to literary techniques. The terms included are editing, framing shots, focus, angles, camera moves, lighting and sound. Incorporated into the discussion are a number of movie shots that exemplify the terms. These shots are effectively chosen so that the reader can immediately link the term to an example. By the end of the chapter on terms, the reader can understand how a director's message can be effectively transmitted to the viewer by use of available techniques. For example, lighting variations (low-key, high-key, bottom/side, front, or neutral) help a director make decisions regarding shadows, thus establishing suspicion or ambiguity or innocence. Then he suggests shots from films (in this case, a scene from Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing*). Finally, discussion following the film viewing would include naming the angles and interpreting the message.

Following one of Golden's suggestions, I read the text with a film (muted) playing in my VCR. That allowed me to note my own examples of what he was discussing. And as Golden points out, the

sound is not essential to understand angles, shots and camera movement. Later, I replayed segments to listen for the effects of sound.

As he discusses the film terms, Golden provides suggestions for having students experience the camera by designing a "camera" with a rolled up paper. Camera movements are also simulated through student action. To help students experience these decisions, Golden suggests using a flashlight in the classroom to demonstrate how lighting from different angles affects characterization. These practical suggestions could be implemented in any language arts classroom.

Building upon the terminology experience of chapter 1, Golden moves to "Film and Reading Strategies" in the next chapter. He begins with predicting, and then turns to responding to and questioning the text. The procedure he recommends starts with viewing a film segment. Once the students have understood how a director uses focus, shots, lighting, sound, and so on to communicate, they move to print text to use the same strategies. So, for example, Golden includes a chart showing how students predicted character, theme and setting in Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane*, and then moved to *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston. In each instance, the students must support their interpretations by linking them to the director/author's techniques. Because his purpose is to understand strategies, Golden does not suggest that a text be linked to its movie counterpart.

Storyboarding is another technique suggested in the "Reading Strategies" chapter. To create a storyboard, students select a segment of a story and transfer it to a storyboard. They link the story with techniques such as framing, angles and sound. To complete the storyboard, Golden next asks students to develop a soundtrack for a short story segment. This task requires in-depth critical thinking to justify music choices for particular print passages.

It is in the third chapter, "Film and Literary Analysis," that Golden outlines the connection between film techniques and literary techniques in character, setting, point of view, symbol and irony. As in the previous chapters, Golden's approach is clear and practical. He provides the reader with specific film recommendations. For example, he recommends using *The Remains of the Day* 1:27:17-1:30:20 (James Ivory, 1993) to discuss character. Golden also provides sample charts of actual class responses and practical suggestions for discussing literary elements in film. Thus, he begins the transition from film to print.

The final chapter provides suggestions for teaching a complete film. The challenge in using a complete film is in balancing the students' need to "have a somewhat genuine cinematic experience" and the teacher's need "to be able to point out and discuss significant details" (p. 97). Golden's approach considers this balance. The films chosen each come with a recommendation for appropriate grade level. Then, for each film, Golden provides a rationale for the film's choice,

suggestions for previewing through questions, and a viewing schedule. Each film is segmented, so that generally each viewing day includes about 25 minutes of viewing. For each segment, Golden suggests things to notice, identifies the segment, and lists discussion questions.

This text is insightful and invigorating. The approach is fundamentally sound. The emphasis is clearly on analysis of techniques and how understanding the meaning of the techniques improves reading and analytical skills. It is well written for the novice in the field of film. Using Golden's recommendations, charts, and directions, a teacher could begin implementing these techniques immediately. Given the media-rich environment so many students thrive on, linking film to literature may be one of the best fresh ideas for opening print media. Not only for the improvement in reading and analysis that Golden promotes, but also for the improved skills related to film appreciation, this text is worth considering for the language arts teacher. Golden's "Introduction" describes the stereotype of movie day: "Lights go off, heads go down, and teachers finally get some grading done" (p. xiii). But that is not the point of this text. Here, Golden finds a workable approach "to help students improve their reading and analytical skills" (p. xiii). Although Golden's students "complained" that they could never "just watch a movie anymore" without analyzing it (p. xiv), Golden found that by using the film unit, he saw marked improvements in reading and analysis.

Pages: **175**   Price: **$26.95**   ISBN: **0-81413-872-1**

Reviewed by Marian Salwierak, St. Gregory's University

Ivory, Gary editor (2001) *What Works in Computing for School Administrators* . Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press.

There is the tendency to think that school administrators, as educational leaders, are very knowledgeable about computing and all things to do with technology. After all, they are the ones making decisions on these things, right? Alas, such is not the case. School administrators are recruited from the ranks of teachers, and many have little understanding of technology as it applies to school administration. Where does the school administrator turn to enhance his or her computer skills in ways that are succinct, relevant, and doable? Gary Ivory's book "What Works in Computing for School Administrators?" fills this gap and comes as a welcome addition to the school administrator's library. With 15 years of experience as a school administrator, Ivory absolves the reader from the need to be "good at" technology. His philosophy is one of "what [can] computers do to help you get through your day?" This text is the nearest thing to a CliffsNotes on computers for School Administrators, and Ivory's book could be summed up in the acronym KISS ("keep it simple and straightforward" p. 13).

The book is divided into 13 very readable chapters that deal with computers as useful tools to improve the school administrator's tasks. Chapter one on presentation software by Irma Trujillo and Steve Leaske sets the tone with the statement, "As you learn to use presentation software, stick with the basics." They unashamedly acknowledge that in the past, their own prowess in computer wizardry actually obfuscated their content. "We began to suspect that all the glitz was distracting them from our message" (p. 12). Trujillo and Leaske proceed to outline the basic steps necessary to create a "bare bones" PowerPoint presentation. However, packed within this rich chapter are sound guidelines for effective communication. The 7 x 7 rule, not reading your slides to the audience, and using the content wizard are some of the nuggets of wisdom from this digital duo.

Anne Moore has two very useful chapters on how to conduct library and Internet searches. Moore, a library expert, simplifies the search process by breaking it down into steps that help eliminate the mountains of irrelevant material generated by even the simplest Internet search. She gives sound advice on the different logic used by different search engines (Goggle and AltaVista for example), and demystifies the cryptology of Boolean logic. Moore wisely advises the reader to view the Internet "in terms of its strengths and weaknesses" rather than deify or demonize it.

Mario Martinez's chapter on "The Consultant Decision" grapples with the question of when and why an administrator should decide to call in a consultant. He outlines what a consultant can and cannot do, and stresses the importance of developing a relationship of trust. Martinez also provides a useful list of areas where a consultant may be able to help. Finally, he reminds the reader that, even in a technological world, word-of-mouth is still one of the best ways to find help. Other useful chapters deal with database management, time management, decision-making tools, and the administrator as a technology leader.

This book provides a no nonsense approach to computers that simplifies the task of computer competence. It should be of help to school administrators who wish to utilize technology while remaining focused on their primary task of, in Ivory's words, "making schools be good places for children, supporting teachers' efforts, and having a meaningful career for yourself" (p. viii). The black and white illustrations are adequate, although color would have provided more authentic computer screen images. This book is a very readable introduction to computers for the busy and perhaps technology-challenged administrator who needs a quick guide to computers.

Pages: **252**   Price: **$24.95**   ISBN: **0810841746**

Reviewed by: Dr. Dominic Scott, Assistant Professor, Department of Educational Foundations, Millersville University

Mahoney, Jim (2002) *Power and Portfolios: Best Practices for High School Classrooms.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Power and Portfolios: Best Practices for High School Classrooms, by Jim Mahoney is a wonderfully engaging and hopeful exploration of the power structures in a typical classroom. The author shares his insights with educators on ways that they, too, can create classes where students feel motivated and empowered. Mahoney masterfully frames his discussion around three variables that Nancie Atwell (1987) claims affect power: time, ownership and response. In essence, Mahoney has used what Donald Graves (1992) and Nancie Atwell "wrote for elementary and middle school students and adapted it for senior high students" (p. v).

Mahoney begins the book by explaining how power plays an integral role in our lives, especially in school. He claims, "Choose any aspect of school and see if it doesn't have something to do with compliance or taking away power; somebody exerting power by wanting somebody else do to or be something" (p. 1). He recounts an engaging personal anecdote describing when he shared power one summer with a group of "so-called loser kids" who had failed their last English class and were forced to repeat the course. Throughout the summer the students and the teacher "were reading multiple books and were writing many papers that told of their lives, their struggles, their great moments" (p. 4). As the chapter closes, Mahoney analyzes his success and reiterates Atwell's three areas of control: time, ownership and response. He argues that time is a power issue because "decisions must be made about how much **time** will be given to things that need to be taught and learned" (p. 6). The second part of control is **choice**. Do teachers really give students choice in what and how they are going to learn and demonstrate their learning? And finally, Mahoney describes the third power area of **response**. He argues that teachers need to move away from the Skinnerian attitude of rewards and punishments and offer students thoughtful comments and feedback in order to promote greater learning.

A story about excited students who are anxious to create their portfolios in Mr. Mahoney's class serves as a springboard to the chapter, entitled "The Portfolio - Starting Off." Following these amazing examples are even more stories about students working past the last class day of the school year to finish their final portfolio assignments. Mahoney believes that his students took ownership for their work and devoted much time to their portfolios, because it was an opportunity for them to "compose a life" or use their writing portfolios as a way to make "sense of the big and small issues in their lives" (p. 14). During the school year, students completed several different types of writing assignments, which were placed along with reflections in the portfolio. In the reflections, Mahoney pushed his students to think deeply about their writing and share the human story behind each piece

of writing. Students also selected metaphors that captured themselves as they matured as writers. The chapter closes with another touching story about a girl, named Sheila, whose portfolio was stolen on the last class day. Sheila posted signs around the school and even offered a monetary reward for her lost portfolio. Mahoney, citing Sheila as an example, states that portfolios are powerful, because they help students to view their work as important and meaningful.

In Chapter 3, Mahoney describes "how my students and I work together to create their portfolios" (p. 22). The chapter is filled with a nice balance of background information about portfolios, specific guidelines for teachers interested in using portfolios in their own classrooms, and personal stories taken from Mahoney's own classroom where he implemented portfolios. The chapter focuses on the mechanical aspects of creating a portfolio. For example, Mahoney talks about the ways that his students make their portfolio binders using different types of cardboard. He also recounts a humorous story about his discovery of pizza boxes, which served as storage containers for his students' portfolios. A sample list of items that are included in the portfolios is also provided. For example, students include an acknowledgement thanking those people who helped to create the portfolio, a table of contents, a letter to the portfolio reader, literary artifacts, reflections, records of books read, biographical pieces, a front cover and reader response sections. Mahoney states, "When given the time and opportunity to choose, students will spend uncountable hours without any thought other than the fascination of the work" (p. 29).

In chapter 4, Mahoney shifts his emphasis to the writing that is included in the portfolio. Critics of the book may claim that Mahoney really begins to deviate from the intended purpose of the book, namely to discuss the role of power and the portfolio in a secondary classroom. The information in chapters 4 to 7 could fit nicely into any language arts methodology textbook. Mahoney discusses various ways that teachers can promote literacy in their secondary classes. He uses the portfolio as a framework for developing students' reading and writing skills. One suggestion for this section would be to place more emphasis on the connection between portfolios and power.

In any event, Mahoney begins chapter 4 by stating that the portfolio owner should possess a writer's mind, meaning that "ideas for writing may be on the front burner, ready to be put down on paper" (p. 52). Students can keep a journal to capture samples of their work. Introducing this idea to the class is accomplished easily by asking them to complete a series of quick writes. Mahoney provides lots of possible topics for the quick writes, which simply get the students' ideas onto the page. Many of the writings are not evaluated. Instead, they may just collected in a "compost heap" where "we just let the stuff pile up, one layer on top of another" (p. 61). The author periodically encourages students to revisit their former writing and "gives air to the material." Mahoney continues with more practical suggestions for conducting a writing workshop, mentioning writing conferences, praise, grades and

strategies for strengthening one's writing through sophisticated sentence structures.

"Magic Words," the title of chapter 5, describes specific ways that teachers can help their students become more proficient writers in the different genres. Mahoney again provides wonderful details and directions for developing the students' repertoire of writing. He states, "it takes a community to help create a literate environment in a classroom and in a school" (p. 84). When students personalize their writing by selecting topics deemed important, then the students' learning experience becomes more profound. Teachers might ask their students to write poetry or prose to share their memories of death, recall their early memories as a child, express gratitude and thanks for gifts, or connect information between different subject areas.

Once again, Mahoney reiterates his themes of power in chapter 6, which focuses on another aspect of literacy, reading. He suggests that teachers give students time to read and the luxury of selecting when and what they want to read. Mahoney suggests specific ways that teachers can help their students to improve their reading speed and comprehension. He hopes that teachers will support their students to take reading risks and "broaden their horizons" (p. 109). Teachers should build a classroom library, filled with books that will get the students "in a reading mode" (p. 110). Classroom discussions, literature circles, and dialogue journals build and sustain students' interest in reading. In addition, Mahoney proposes that teachers, who are often more proficient readers, model reading and writing strategies for their students to show them how "the teacher actively makes meaning of the text" (p. 119).

Continuing with the theme of reading, Mahoney discusses literature and the importance of reading in Chapter 7. He extols the benefits of Young Adult Literature, particularly its widespread appeal to teenage readers. Mahoney encourages teachers to make literature easily available to students. He also offers techniques for responding to literature by writing literary letters and supporting ideas with selected quotes from the text.

In chapter 8, Mahoney discusses the prickly task of evaluation. The ultimate goal is to get students to self evaluate and critique their own work and progress. When students self evaluate, the learning becomes more powerful and permanent. In this chapter, Mahoney situates evaluation by looking backward and forward. He asks his students to review their work, select items that best represent them and reflect on their improvement. He also asks them to look to the future and set goals that correspond to selected standards or criteria. Mahoney returns once again to the issue of grading and final exams. He proudly claims, "in the last ten years of teaching, I have neither given a test nor put a grade on any single paper."

At this point, some readers may begin to question their ability to

implement some of Mahoney's ideas. In this book he offers excellent examples of effective instruction, a level of teaching that all teachers aspire to reach. However, Mahoney could strengthen his message by elaborating on some of the challenges and problems that he encountered to implement such an instructional approach. At times, his message seems to be "too good to be true." Did he meet resistance from his colleagues or students? How did he overcome these obstacles? Does this approach work with diverse student populations?

The chapter entitled, "Making Sense of High-Stakes Testing," Mahoney shares with teachers his approach for preparing students to take high-stakes tests. During the school year in his class, Mahoney underscores the value of reading and writing in his curriculum. He remains true to his beliefs and does not deviate from them, even in regards to testing. "Three weeks before the test administration," Mahoney pauses and helps his students analyze previous tests. As they usually do, his students read, write and share their impressions and ideas for succeeding on the tests.

And towards the end of the book in chapter 10, Mahoney expounds on the benefits of attending professional conferences and participating in professional organizations. In an age when many administrators have limited budgets, they prohibit their teachers from attending such events. Mahoney offers a solution to this problem by paying for many of his conferences out-of- pocket. In his opinion, the conferences are "gifts to myself" (p. 164).

Mahoney concludes the book by sharing the dilemma he constantly faces: balancing student control and teacher control. He grapples with giving his students structure and the necessary knowledge and skills that will enable them to be successful in the future and with allowing them the freedom to be independent readers, writers and thinkers. On the last page, he states, "I marvel at how lucky I have been to have made the gigantic paradigm shift from a teacher-directed classroom to a student-centered one" (p. 170).

Overall, Jim Mahoney conveys a powerful message to the education community. To motivate students and push them to greater intellectual heights, educators must begin sharing the power in the classroom. The portfolio offers a framework; it serves as a teaching and assessment tool that allows teachers to restructure their classrooms. Teachers can experience once again "the joys of helping adolescents come to terms with their world by showing them to use the power of reading and writing" (p. 170).

References

Atwell, Nancie (1987). In the Middle: Writing, Reading and Learning with Adolescents. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook.
Graves, D., & Sunstein, B. (Eds.). (1992). Portfolio Portraits. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Pages: **180**   Price: **$21.00**   ISBN: **0867095296**

Reviewed by Nathan Bond, Southwest Texas State University

Shore, Rebecca (2002) *Baby Teacher: Nurturing Neural Networks from Birth to Age Five.* Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Education.

Baby Teacher: Nurturing Neural Networks from Birth to Age Five, by Rebecca Shore is an outstanding book. Shore manages to put pertinent research and personal experience into a compact collection of significant findings about development in the young child. Shore had a twenty-year career in public education, has a music background, a doctorate in administration and policy, and now teaches at a university. Her combination of interests, parenthood, scholarship, and career make her a good choice for writing a book such as this.

Shore specifically sets out to address faulty assumptions that stifle the development of babies and young children. She makes the reader aware that infants and young children come hardwired to receive complex data, and they can take in and process far more than has been previously thought. In fact, babies have more brain cells at birth than they do any other time in their lives. One of our mistakes in designing the environment of the infant and young child is that we tend to select things based on adult perception rather than on what research says is actually best. Children seek out complexities in their environment. We know they are attracted to the human face but as Shore tells us, this seemingly simple yet interesting oval shape actually transmits over seven thousand expressions.

Communication is important to the young child; language should be fostered. An interesting bit of research reflects that the more educated a mother is, the more likely she is to speak to her child. This is brought to light when we are told that by the age of three, children of educated. Professional parents had heard approximately thirty million words; children with low socioeconomic moms had heard around ten million. Facts like this have tremendous implication for educating parents about the importance of talking with their babies. Shore suggests hospitals should provide parenting classes before you can take your baby home. She also stresses the point that young children need relationships with people, not with the television. Fifty-five thousand pediatricians have taken a stand recommending that children should not watch television or videos before their second birthday.

Shore explains clearly how in the early years of development, children are better able to acquire multiple languages. At the root of learning other languages and other cognitive skills is the fact that children are talked to and engaged. Engaging children in conversational activities and showing and telling them what things are, how they work, and why

they are important helps to set the stage for learning.

Of particular interest are Shore's comments on the importance of music. She places emphasis on playing Bach's music for young children. Fascinating information is given to support her claim that music helps to prepare the child for future learning. Even if each child exposed to music in his youth does not become a musical genius, there is evidence to show this exposure can be beneficial, and no proof that it hinders development.

Shore discusses the findings of many researchers and theorists. Her comments about the works of Renate Caine, Marian Diamond, Montessori, Vygotsky, and Piaget will be of special interest to educators. Her explanations of their beliefs are presented well and reflect her clarity of understanding. At the end of the book, Shore moves us from her research and personal experiences to practical, hands- on suggestions for preparing the environment and working with young children.

Early childhood educators will be drawn to this book because it does a great job of bringing together so much of the research and theories about which we study. Parents and others interested in caring for children will find the book offers practical information for use in enhancing the child's development.

Pages: **206**   Price: **$24.95**   ISBN: **0 - 8108-4284-X**

Reviewed by Dr. Kathleen E. Fite, Southwest Texas State University

home | reviews | editors | contribute | subscribe | publishers