

pressconnects.com Weather Jobs Cars Homes Apartments Cl

pressconnects.com Press & Sun Greater Bing

search All Customer Service: [Subscribe Now](#) | [Pay Bill](#)

NEWS **SPORTS** **BUSINESS** **ENTERTAINMENT** **LIFE** **NATION/WORLD** **OBITU**

OUR SCHOOLS

Posted Sunday November 11, 2007

[email news](#) [mobile news](#) [RSS](#) [text alerts](#)

Text Size

Home → Our Schools

Infusing old with new

Tier districts add in more recent books with classics

By [Debbie Swartz](#)
Press & Sun-Bulletin

STORYCHAT: [Post Comment](#)

Dickens and Shakespeare have been joined by Zora Neale Hurston, Jerry Spinelli and Sue Monk Kidd in area schools districts, as the value of contemporary literature in teaching students has increased over the years.

"By using contemporary novels, we're able to discuss, get a closer look at and delve into these issues that students deal with today," Windsor English Language Arts teacher Denise Riley said.

Riley, who is also the English Department coordinator for grades six to 12, said books like Jerry Spinelli's "Stargirl," "Crash" and "Maniac Magee" deal with a variety of topics -- bullying, individuality, class cliques -- that students deal with in society. Reading about characters they can relate to, she said, can help guide them through the difficulties of adolescence.

"They'll be able to know they aren't the only ones experiencing these things," Riley said.

Contemporary novels also play a role in getting students interested in reading, she said, which is difficult with today's popular culture attractions such as video games and the Internet. "There's a competition between reading and what they'd rather be doing," Riley said.

Classics, she said, are still being taught. Windsor eighth-graders will read Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream," which is relevant to modern times.

"Four hundred years later, people still do crazy stuff for love," Riley said.

Others novels, she said, have been removed from the curriculum because students aren't able to relate to the characters or plot. "We're getting rid of 'Great Expectations,'" Riley said. "It's really boring for them."

Sometimes, literature that has historically been taught in schools is mixed with contemporary pieces, she said. "To Kill a Mockingbird" by Harper Lee had been joined by Sue Monk Kidd's "The Secret Life of Bees," Riley said, as both deal with racial and family issues.



STEPHEN JENSEN / Special to the Press & Sun-Bullet

Owego Free Academy English teacher Chris Evans discusses Frank McCourt's novel "Angela's Ashes," with students David Pulford and Kristy Motsko, both seniors, during their English class.

Related news from the Web

Latest headlines by topic:

- [Classical](#)
- [Pop/Rock](#)
- [Classics](#)
- [Arthur Miller](#)
- [Harper Lee](#)
- [Games](#)
- [Vocal](#)

Powered by [Topix.net](#)

Past Arti
Sun | Mo

Not all schools have adopted the use of contemporary literature. While students at Binghamton High School might read contemporary poetry and a few articles from the New York Times and The New Yorker, the vast part of the curriculum is focused around classics, said English teacher Cindy Antos.

She said her International Baccalaureate students understand the value of the literature she teaches, which ranges from ancient Greek plays to Arthur Miller's "The Crucible."

"They're much more serious young scholars," Antos said. "It's not pleasure reading, it's academic reading, and they understand this."

Fellow teacher Sally Crossley said her 11th- and 12th-grade English students read mostly classics -- from Shakespeare to Mark Twain -- but have been introduced to some contemporary pieces, such as Tim O'Brien's 1990 novel "The Things They Carried."

Crossley said classical pieces contain fundamental elements of literature that students need to learn. "By teaching the classics, they learn about composition," she said.

While a story written 100 or more years ago might seem dated to some, by using the correct approach, it is possible to teach students the value of the story, teacher Quana Brock said. "Everything can be made relevant," she said.

Crossley agrees. "You can take any piece of literature and make it come alive," she said.

Seniors in Owego Free Academy's Advanced Placement English class have a few nonclassics on their list, teacher Chris Evans said. "Tuesdays with Morrie," by Mitch Albom is a favorite.

"A lot of them tell me it's the best book they've ever read, along with 'Angela's Ashes,'" Evans said.

The mixture of classic and contemporary novels and short stories takes nothing away from the important aspects of reading -- such as visualizing and connecting with characters and their stories -- which he is trying to teach, Evans said. "The good readers can make connections with anything," he said.

Using contemporary pieces gives them another tool to encourage a lifelong habit of reading, Evans said.

"As teachers, we want them to love literature as much as we do," Evans said.

STORYCHAT
 Post a Comment

This article does not have any comments associated with it

[↑ Our Schools index](#)

Print this article
 Email this to a friend
 Subscribe Now
 [Search our archives](#)
Advertisement

WATCH OUR TV HOME TOURS AT

WWW.JOHNURNSHOW.COM

Partners: Jobs: CareerBuilder.com | Cars: cars.com | Apartments: apartments.com | Shopping: ShopLo

[Customer Service](#) | [Subscribe Now](#) | [Pay Bill](#) | [Place an Ad](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Jobs With Us](#)

Press & Sun-Bulletin

Copyright © 2007 Binghamton Press & Sun-Bulletin
All rights reserved. Users of this site agree to the Terms of Service
and Privacy Policy/Your California Privacy Rights, updated March 2007.
Problem with this site? Please contact the webmaster.
Gannett New York network: Binghamton | Buffalo | Elmira | Ithaca | Poughkeepsie | Rochester | Westc