"Reception moments," modern literary theory, and the teaching of literature

The way we construct meaning from literature is, of course, determined by all sorts of factors that extend well beyond the personal. This is something we may have always known, in one way or another, but recent literary theory has helped us to understand more precisely the important role that culture, history, and the nature of language play in the way readers of literary texts produce "meaning." Theorists like Foucault (1979) and Fish (1980), for example, have demonstrated that we cannot regard literary texts as we once did—as monolithic, objective containers of "truth," with a single, fixed, and perhaps even "correct" meaning, put there by an author who was deemed to be almost God-like in his or her insight and wisdom. We now regard the process of creating meaning as a kind of collaboration between the author, the reader, the culture or "interpretive community" the author and reader inhabit, and the language with which the text is constructed. In Barthes' famous language, this change marked the "death" of the "Author-God" (1972, p. 257).

This shift in critical perspective has had important ramifications for how educators teach literature and how students are taught to read and interact with the texts they encounter in classrooms (Bartholomae & Petrosky, 1986; Berthoff, 1999; Donoghue, 1998; McCormick, 1994; Moffett, 1968; Richter, 2000; Smith, 1985). Because of this shift, we must now ask our students to address more ambitious and complex questions about how literary texts create meaning.
We must now ask our students, for example, to recognize the "multivalent" nature of language, to consider literary interpretation as a provisional enterprise, and to explore ways that culture determines interpretive possibilities. In so doing, we are asking them to understand the relationship between art and culture in a much more sophisticated way, and we are inviting them to participate in intellectual inquiry that is more challenging, responsible, and rewarding.

Foucault, Fish, and other modern literary theorists are often difficult for students to read and understand, and asking high school or even undergraduate college students to read through original work by writers like this is often not practical. But there are accessible and engaging ways that we can bring these critics' important ideas about reading literature into our classrooms. I believe that the best way to do this is to show these ideas in action: by using "reception moments" in the history of a literary text to show how the estimation of a text's value can change dramatically. Reception moments provide students with the opportunity to actually see literary value in the process of being constructed. Literary history is full of such moments, and even a cursory discussion of criticism devoted to a literary text like Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1988) or Chopin's *The Awakening* (1994) or Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1990) presents students with significant challenges to traditional simplistic conceptions of how literary value is determined. This approach provides students with the unique opportunity to watch a culture work at defining itself, its literary canon, and its critical vocabulary and methodology.

Exposure to "reception moments" also helps students understand in a very concrete way that literary value is socially constructed, and that deriving "meaning" from a literary text must be regarded as a significantly provisional enterprise. The study of important reception moments of a single text also helps students begin to understand that modes of criticism have changed over the years and that these changes have led to increasingly more complex, contradictory, open, and unfinished "readings" of literary texts. I have used this approach and the critical texts I mention here in introductory and advanced-level community college literature courses, and I believe that this approach is appropriate and replicable in a variety of other educational environments, including junior and senior high schools.

Before we move on to specific classroom suggestions, I would like to briefly discuss some of the relevant literary theory this article is designed to illuminate. Some of you may wish to go directly to the section headed "Classroom applications," though I hope that you will return to the theory section, as it provides material that may prove useful if you try this approach in your classes.

**Traditional "conduit" models of communication**

Traditional models of communication posit a relatively straightforward exchange of information between communicator and audience. Historically, these models conceived of language as an efficient and effective communication tool. While the language used in literary texts might be richly connotative, densely textured, and purposefully ambiguous, readers were assured that with some patience and resourcefulness, it could eventually be mastered, its essential meanings discovered and explained.

Generally speaking, the "conduit" model of communication is predicated on the belief that language can communicate "objectively." This model also informs "the sensible belief that a text means what its author meant," as Hirsch argued (1967, p. 1). Searle's "speech-act" theory (1969) is a well-known system predicated on this understanding of the way language works. Searle postulated a model of communication as a generally forthright and direct activity involving the speaker, the language, and the receiver. Searle and others argued that good will could be counted on to overcome a great deal of ambiguity and potential miscommunication. This model of communication obviously affected the way critics approached literary texts, and traditional schools of literary criticism like New Criticism are predicated on this model of language (Tompkins, 1980). Many English department curricula, especially in junior and senior high schools, continue to be based on this model.

**"Open" and contingent models of communication**

Modern literary theorists have focused their attention on the nature of language, and have postulated
a more complex and problematic model of communication. As they have sought to answer some fundamental questions about how language works and how a literary text produces meaning, they have replaced the old “conduit” model with one that views language as much more unpredictable and unstable. Responding to and deriving meaning from literary texts, therefore, becomes much more complicated.

Although there continues to be difference of opinion about this—and about the work of writers like Barthes (1972, 1975), Derrida (1981, 1988a, 1988b, 1988c), and Foucault (1973, 1979), the theorists who have perhaps done the most to challenge us to think in new ways about language, reading, and literary interpretation—it has nonetheless become widely accepted in academic circles that communication is complicated in many ways by the nature of language. Modern theorists see language as essentially “slippery” and “multivalent,” a complex term that suggests language is “always changing, and always changing in more than one way” (Leitch, 2001, p. 1818). This has had significant consequences for our understanding of how literary texts produce meaning. As I hope to demonstrate, this new model of language should affect how we teach literature to the students in our classrooms.

**Literary interpretation must always be provisional and “unfinished”**

The argument that language is fundamentally unstable and “slippery” is only the first important premise of this new theoretical framework. A number of modern literary theorists go on to argue from this premise that because language is slippery, the art of reading and, by extension, literary interpretation, must always be conducted as a conditional enterprise, with the understanding that all “readings” of a particular text must be, at least to some degree, “unfinished” (Culler, 1982; Derrida, 1981, 1988b, 1988c).

Barthes, Derrida, and Foucault are influential theorists in this regard, and their ideas about language and reading warrant brief review here. Barthes' most significant work related to our discussion here is probably “The Death of the Author” (1972). In this essay, Barthes challenged the traditional idea of the author as a “genius” who operates independent of history and culture, and who is solely responsible for putting the meaning “in” literary texts. Barthes argued for a very different and much more complex conception of the author and the literary enterprise. For Barthes, an author functions in ways that are intimately linked to history, language, and culture:

We know that a text is not a line of words releasing a single “theological” meaning (the “message” of the Author-God) but a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centers of culture. (p. 256)

Once this old conception of “the Author” is removed, Barthes argued, “the claim to decipher a text is quite futile. To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing” (p. 256). Barthes went on to celebrate the “birth of the reader,” and introduced into modern literary theory a new variable—the role that the reader plays in creating meaning with a literary text. Without a God-like “Author”—and the authority that implies over what a literary text can mean—deriving a “fixed meaning” from a literary text becomes virtually impossible. As Richter has observed, Barthes demonstrated in *S/Z: An Essay* (1970) that “any genuinely complete analysis of a fictional text would be so long and complex as to be nearly unreadable” (Richter, 1998, p. 948).

Derrida's ideas related to language and reading appear in perhaps their most accessible and teacher-friendly form in his discussion of Paul de Man's controversial wartime writings (Derrida, 1988a). Derrida's essential argument was that language is multivalent and “equivocal.” Because communicating with language is a complex activity, Derrida stated that reading and analysis must be conducted with “caution, rigor, and honesty” (p. 592). Derrida concluded—quoting from de Man—that achieving mastery over a text may indeed be impossible: “there is never enough knowledge available to account for the delusion of knowing” (Derrida, 1998a, p. 638; see also Culler, 1989).

Foucault constructed an argument similar to that of Barthes in his most succinct and accessible
work on this subject, his essay “What Is an Author?” (1979). Foucault posited that literature is the product of a complex process influenced by politics, history, culture, and their relation to power, and that an author’s “work” and the unity it designates are probably as problematic as the status of the author’s individuality” (p. 980; see also Foucault, 1973). For Foucault, as well as Barthes and Derrida, it is simply not possible to achieve mastery over a text with a single authoritative reading. The work of modern literary theorists, including these and other important thinkers like Bakhtin (1981), poses a significant challenge to the old model of literary interpretation, often still used in classrooms, which suggests that a single, fixed meaning has been put “in” a literary text by a “transcendent” author (Foucault, 1979, p. 988), and that it is the reader’s job to “find” it. These theorists posit a new, much more richly complex model of reading and literary interpretation.

**Literary “meaning” is socially constructed**

In conjunction with this new model of language, modern theorists have gone on to demonstrate the fundamental role that culture plays in the way we produce meaning when we read a literary text. Because literary meaning can no longer be regarded as “self-evident” or objectively contained within a text, we now must see “meaning” as something that is socially constructed. Fish has argued, for example, that “the objectivity of a text is an illusion” (1970, p. 140), and that “there are no fixed texts but only interpretive strategies for making them” (1976, p. 484). Culler (1975) has suggested that a literary text “has meaning only with respect to a system of conventions which the reader has assimilated” (p. 116). Making meaning with a literary text is now seen as a dynamic process—responsive to and in part determined by political, ideological, and historical conditions. Obviously, as these conditions change, so do the meanings we create with the texts we read. As I think we will see, this poses important challenges for teachers of literature.

I do not wish to suggest here, as some scholars have argued, that theorists like Barthes, Foucault, and Derrida advocate an extreme form of relativism—that, for example, one reading of a text is as good as any other or that all truth is subjective (see Dassenbrock, 1991; Iser, 1978). On the contrary, at its most essential, the argument these theorists advance is that any ethical and responsible reading of a literary text must proceed with a sense of humility in regard to the complexity of language, and with an equally respectful willingness to acknowledge the complex role historical conditions play in how we make meaning with literary texts.

**Classroom applications**

As teachers, it is essential that we help students begin to appreciate the complex interrelationship between language, culture, and history as factors that influence the way we respond to and make meaning with the literature we read. There are any number of ways this important task might be accomplished in our classrooms. Before I move on to discuss the variety of options available to teachers, I would first like to provide a specific, detailed example of how the study of “reception moments” can introduce students to the kind of richly complex questions we need them to consider. I will focus on Mark Twain’s novel The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, for it is widely known in the U.S., it is assigned with great frequency in a variety of contexts, and its astonishingly varied critical history provides us with a paradigm for the type of interpretive challenges that “reception moments” can create for our students.

**The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn**

*Huckleberry Finn* has occasioned critical debate almost from the moment it was published, and for over 100 years the novel has continued to be an impetus for all kinds of significant discourse about race, history, human character, and the art of literary interpretation, among many other things (Champion, 1991; Crouch, 1999; Ford, 1999; Graff & Phelan, 1995; Inge, 1985; Sattelmeyer & Crowley, 1985; Vogelback, 1939). The last 15 years have been especially noteworthy, as there has been intense scholarly discussion of the novel, much of it focusing on whether the novel and its author are racist (Alberti, 1995; Chadwick-Joshua, 1998; Henry, 1992; Hitchens, 1985; Kaplan, 1985; Lester, 1992; Morrison, 1993; Takaki, 1993; Wallace, 1992).
There are many reception moments related to *Huckleberry Finn* that a teacher might choose to discuss with a class, but for the purpose of providing a specific practical example of how my approach might work in the classroom, I will focus on three well-known reception moments that I have used successfully in my own class: the statement from the Trustees of the Concord Public Library in 1885 that banned the book; comments by Hemingway (1935/1998) and Trilling (1977) that declared the book “great”; and the 1992 article by Wallace that declared the book “racist.”

**The Concord Public Library, Hemingway, Trilling, and Wallace**

The Trustees of the Concord Public Library in Massachusetts, as many readers familiar with criticism of *Huckleberry Finn* know, issued a statement “banning” the novel soon after it was published. This famous denunciation is among the most well-known reception moments in the history of American letters:

The Concord (Mass.) Public Library committee has decided to exclude Mark Twain’s latest book [The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn] from the library. One member of the committee says that, while he does not wish to call it immoral, he thinks it contains but little humor, and that of a very coarse type. He regards it as the veriest trash. The librarian and the other members of the committee entertain similar views, characterizing it as rough, coarse and inelegant, dealing with a series of experiences not elevating, the whole book being more suited to the slums than to intelligent, respectable people. (Twain, 1999, p. 308)

Fifty years later, *Huckleberry Finn* was declared “great” in the most unequivocal of terms. In 1935, Hemingway pronounced that “All modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called *Huckleberry Finn*” (1935/1998, p. 23). Trilling later voiced a similar sentiment, declaring that *Huckleberry Finn* was “one of the world’s great books and one of the central documents of American culture” (Trilling, 1977, p. 319). The kind of change these two critical texts reflect obviously suggests that literary meaning and value are, as Warner (1987) has observed in another context, “never essential and timeless but always contingent on cultural politics” (p. 5). Clearly, this rather astonishing transformation in critical estimation raises important questions about the nature of language, and demonstrates the operation of very different kinds of cultural norms that have created a different kind of “value” for this text. Students invited to consider reception moments like this have the opportunity to examine a momentous literary event: in this case, a culture in the process of elevating a once “banned” and rather obscure text to the status of a “classic.”

In more recent years, the novel’s fortunes turned dramatically once again, as *Huckleberry Finn* became the object of passionate attacks, some of them almost breathtaking considering the praise once lavished on the novel. In “The Case Against Huck Finn,” Wallace (1992) argued that “The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, by Mark Twain, is the most grotesque example of racist trash ever written” (p. 16). Wallace was joined by many others who condemned the novel and the author as racist. This is another example of how reception moments can provide students with the opportunity to witness momentous cultural events. In this case, we see a culture in the process of reevaluating and rereading one of its most valorized “classic” texts, exploring the possibility that it can no longer respond to the novel the way it once did, when historical conditions and social norms were very different. Students will no doubt be familiar with at least some of the vocabulary of the important cultural discussion that occurred during these years—“multiculturalism,” “political correctness,” “the Western canon,” and “great books”—and they can be invited to explore the nature of language and how social and intellectual climate determines to a significant degree the kinds of things being said about works of literature. All of these texts have the advantage of being accessible and easily understood by students at a variety of levels.

**Developing class discussion**

I always spend at least one class period talking about *Huckleberry Finn* in general terms, discussing key characters, relationships, and scenes, before I introduce its critical history. To begin our discussion, I distribute these reception moments for students to read for homework, and once
students have read this material I pose the following questions:

1. What do you make of the dramatically different opinions about the novel contained in these selections? Are some “right” and others “wrong”?

2. Do these differences surprise you? Everyone has read the same book, after all. Shouldn’t reaction to the book be less dramatically different?

3. At least at one point in its history, *Huckleberry Finn* was considered a “classic” American novel. Many academics and literary critics of course still consider it a classic. In your judgment, is this novel still great, still a “classic”?

4. How does a work of literature become a “classic”? Does it involve a man in flowing robes stepping down from a mountain with tablets in his hands, announcing “This is the list of great books that you must always revere”? Or do we get our classics in other ways?

I begin our discussion by breaking the class into small groups and asking each group to see if they can arrive at some kind of consensus about these questions. If they can’t, I ask them to record why they experienced conflict or difference of opinion. I have each group appoint someone to report for the group, and I give the class about 30 minutes to work.

I visit each group to keep conversations moving forward and to introduce additional questions. I do not provide any “answers” at this time, but I do respond to queries related to clarifying our objectives for this activity. My goal here, and throughout, is to get students thinking for themselves.

After about 30 minutes of discussion, I ask each group to report to the class. This almost always leads to a rich and wide-ranging discussion, where groups (and individuals) find themselves in opposition to other groups (and individuals) on key points related to literary judgment and interpretation. I record each team’s results on the chalkboard, and I allow everyone to comment on what each team has to say. I respond to inconsistent thinking or faulty logic, and to the conflicts that arise in terms of competing estimations of the novel’s value, with additional questions.

When this discussion has run its course and there are many unresolved ideas and issues in the air, I move on to discuss modern literary theory. I tell my class that modern literary theory has sought to find answers for just the kinds of questions we have been debating. I present this material primarily through lecture. Spending time on participatory, active-learning activities like the one I have described prepares students to engage with—and be receptive to—the material that I present. I make my comments regarding modern literary theory in much the same way I discuss the theory in this article, and I am very careful to present it as a set of ideas that I want them to think through carefully and about which they should form their own opinions. The use of reception moments helps focus and illustrate this discussion quite dramatically, and in this context students usually find modern literary theory quite intriguing.

**Delving deeper**

In terms of specific ways a teacher might use a reception moment to focus class discussion, the statement by the Trustees of the Concord Public Library, for example, serves to explore a number of important issues related to the social construction of literary value. The criteria applied in terms of value in the statement—the novel’s irreverence, the fact that the experiences related in the novel are “not elevating,” and the sense that those responsible for selecting books for this library considered the book not fit for “respectable people”—may seem quaint now, but the feelings expressed obviously reflect certain kinds of cultural norms and ideas about what good literature is and what kinds of texts are appropriate for “the reading public.” These were dominant cultural values that Twain knew very well and about which he appeared to have been deeply conflicted—at times embracing them, at other times mocking and subverting them (Brooks, 1933; Emerson, 1984; Kaplan, 1966; Pizer, 1976; Powers, 1999). Students are usually quick to recognize that the values expressed in this statement mark it as the product of a particular historical moment, and from that starting point a teacher might direct class discussion in any number of very interesting and important directions. A teacher could ask students to consider where dominant social values come from, how dominant and oppositional social norms interact, or how a culture chooses the art it values and canonizes.
Similarly, a teacher might bring in literary criticism to explore a particular reception moment. Selections from Arac (1997) would certainly be appropriate to share with many literature classes. Arac argued, for example, that *Huckleberry Finn* became “canonized” for a complex variety of reasons related to post–World War II liberal political values:

It was only after the Second World War that *Huckleberry Finn* achieved massive canonicity in the schools, as the great spiritual representative of the America that had become the dominant power in the world, and that aimed to embrace alien peoples with the loving innocence that Huck offered Jim.... *Huckleberry Finn* [also] served a national and global political function as an icon of integration, and the importance of this cultural work overrode the offense the book generated among many of its newly authorized, but also newly obligated, African-American readers. (p. 21)

A teacher could use Arac’s analysis of this reception moment, as I have, to pose questions related to how transformations in critical valuation occur. Students can also be asked to consider different kinds of cultural norms and how these norms create very different kinds of readings and evaluations of literary texts.

For advanced or upper-level classes, or to build a still more challenging instructional unit, teachers might also ask students to read conflicting contemporaneous assessments of a particular work. When I teach *Huckleberry Finn* in advanced classes, for example, I often have students read Smiley’s (1996) essay “Say It Ain’t So, Huck: Second Thoughts on Mark Twain’s ‘Masterpiece’” and Morrison’s Introduction to the novel for a 1996 edition. These two essays were written by acclaimed contemporary novelists and were published within months of each other, but they present startlingly different estimations of the novel. In “Say It Ain’t So, Huck,” Smiley argues that *Huckleberry Finn* isn’t even a “good book,” let alone a “masterpiece”:

So I broke my leg. Doesn’t matter how.... At any rate, like numerous broken-legged intellectuals before me, I found the prospect of three months in bed in the dining room rather seductive.... Great novels piled up on my table, and right at the top was *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.... The novel took me a couple of days (it was longer than I had remembered), and I closed the cover stunned...by the notion that this is the novel that all American literature grows out of, that this is a great novel, that this is even a serious novel. (p. 61)

Providing a dramatic counterpoint to Smiley, Morrison called *Huckleberry Finn* an “amazing, troubling book” (p. 392), and argued that the novel deserves to be considered a “classic”:

For a hundred years, the argument that this novel is has been identified, reidentified, examined, waged and advanced. What it cannot be is dismissed. It is classic literature, which is to say it heaves, manifests and lasts. (p. 392)

I use statements like these to discuss the influence of powerful cultural arbiters like Hemingway and Trilling who helped shape public opinion about literary texts. I also use readings like this to explore how competing, overlapping, or oppositional cultural values interact and manifest themselves, and to discuss how certain social norms and values become dominant. This is an intriguing, complex, and surprisingly untidy process, and reception moments like this help to illustrate it.

The approach I advocate can be used successfully with any number of writers, and I have used it with texts like Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (Norton, 1996), Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (Norton, 1992), and Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* (Norton, 2001), all frequently taught in junior high schools, senior high schools, and colleges. I have also used it in my classroom to teach writers as diverse as Emily Dickinson, Kate Chopin, James Baldwin, T.S. Eliot, Langston Hughes, John Steinbeck, N. Scott Momaday, Ernest Hemingway, Herman Melville, Zora Neale Hurston, and William Faulkner. I would like to briefly discuss one of these—Kate Chopin—to show how this approach might be applied to different kinds of writers.

**Kate Chopin**

Chopin was known primarily as a “regional” writer during her lifetime, and her early short stories drew strong support from many contemporary reviewers who praised her use of dialect and “local color.” In 1899, however, she published *The Awakening,* a much bolder and more controversial
kind of story, about a woman trapped in a bad marriage who pursues emotional and sexual fulfillment outside of it. Reviewers at the time criticized the book so venomously that Chopin quickly issued a “Retraction” (Chopin, 1994, p. 178) and ultimately stopped writing altogether (Seyersted, 1969, pp. 164–185). In what is one of the more tragic chapters of American literary history, Chopin’s work languished in obscurity for the next 70 years.

Students are always surprised to learn that literary reputations are often very unstable and contingent on all kinds of cultural politics and norms, and the history of Kate Chopin’s reception as a writer provides a fascinating way to introduce students to important questions of how language works and how literary texts produce meaning. Students are always interested in exploring how something like this “happens”—in this case, how Chopin moved from obscurity to prominence—and the study of reception moments can help frame this issue in very powerful ways. The story of how Chopin’s work was “rediscovered” and recognized as important raises all kinds of questions about culture, language, and gender that students find important and interesting.

Early reviews of the novel, for example, provide engaging (and very accessible) reading for students, and can be very effective if assigned in conjunction with more recent assessments of her work. In 1899, for example, the reviewer for The Los Angeles Sunday Times called the novel “unhealthy, introspective and morbid" (Chopin, 1994, p. 170). In that same year, the reviewer for Literature called The Awakening “an essentially vulgar story” (Chopin, p. 168). For teachers who wish to build instructional units around reception moments like this, these readings can be assigned along with work like Seyersted’s landmark chapter from Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography (1969) entitled “The Long-Neglected Pioneer” (which I have used successfully with my students). All of this material can be assigned in a wide range of educational settings.

Other options
The approach to teaching literature that I advocate here is an excellent way to introduce students to the pleasures of reading literary criticism. Even for teachers who wish to provide students with only modest exposure to literary criticism, focusing on “reception moments” engages most students’ interest and curiosity. As English teachers well know, students usually respond to literary criticism with a mixture of awe, fear, and despair, but an approach like this provides them with intriguing questions to consider and interesting problems to solve. For teachers who wish to pursue a more ambitious agenda, this approach can also be used as a way to show how modes of criticism have changed over time and how these changes have led to (or been accompanied by) increasingly more complex and unfinished “readings” of literature.

For teachers who enjoy focusing on the historical and social context of a work of literature, this approach is ideal, for it lends support to the idea that a work of literature (and even the way we “read” a work of literature) arises out of particular set of social and historical conditions. For any teacher who wishes to move beyond the New Critical approach to reading literary texts, an examination of reception moments can provide students with the opportunity to read assigned texts in a much more sophisticated and, I would argue, a much more responsible way.

Reception moments make theory practical
Students generally find the idea that there are no “right” or “wrong” readings of a literary text to be liberating. As I indicate to them on the first day of class, the enterprise of “interpreting” literary texts is a complicated one, influenced by all kinds of factors outside the text itself. These include societal norms and values; how a student has been taught to regard and respond to literature; a student’s gender, race, age, and life experience; and even the student’s past experiences in English classes. This is not to say, as some critics have suggested, that in the realm of reading and the related discipline of literary interpretation everything is relative, that there are no “absolute” values, and that clever critics can make literary texts say whatever they want them to (Dassenbrock, 1994). I propose, instead, that responsible reading and literary criticism must begin with an understanding that communicating with language—and particularly with the language found in literary texts—poases many challenges, and that the art of literary interpretation must always be informed with a deep respect for
the complexities posed by language, culture, and history. Our students have much to gain from modern literary theory, and reception moments can help bring this important theoretical material to them in an engaging and accessible way.

Sullivan teaches at Manchester Community College (English Department, Great Path, Manchester, CT 06040, USA). He may be reached by e-mail at psullivan@mcc.commnet.edu.

REFERENCES


---

**JAAL seeks submissions for new department**

The Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy seeks submissions for a new department, First Person, which will debut in Volume 46, fall 2002. First Person will provide space for opinions, commentary, creative examinations of contemporary issues in literacy education, and personal reflections on classroom practice. We seek lively writing with a strong authoritative voice. Submissions should be 6 to 10 typed, double-spaced pages. Questions or comments should be directed to Editor Todd Goodson (tgoodson@ksu.edu). Please send submissions to the International Reading Association's headquarters (PO Box 8139, Newark, DE 19714-8139, USA).

“Reception moments,” modern literary theory, and the teaching of literature 577