

EDITOR'S DESK

Good books make reading fun for students

When I was in middle school, I thought Mulan was the coolest Disney princess, but I related most to Belle. I felt a kinship with the woman more delighted by a castle's giant library than its wardrobe of fancy gowns, and who often hid behind books as a way to escape social interaction.



Jade McDowell
NEWS EDITOR

In some ways, a love of reading feels like an innate personality trait, similar to personal preferences about other hobbies. I grew up in a house full of books and frequent trips to the library; yet, in my immediate family the numbers are split right down the middle between the avid readers and those who don't spend much time reading for fun.

Research suggests that there are plenty of external factors that do influence people's reading habits, however. One study by the National Endowment for the Arts in 2012 found the likelihood that an adult had read a book for leisure in the past year was directly proportionate to their education level. Reading with your child, discussing books with them and



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald,

Tania Uribe, 11, reads along with her classmates in her copy of "Hatchet" by Gary Paulsen in Kyra Hruza's sixth grade "books and movies" class at Clara Brownell Middle School in Umatilla in September 2019.



providing them access to books they enjoy helps too.

The benefits of frequent regularly reading for pleasure are great. Reading builds vocabulary, strengthens communication skills, increases knowledge, improves memory and fosters empathy. I worry that the pandemic has caused more students to fall below grade level in their reading

skills, increasing the likelihood they will see reading as a chore.

It's vital, then, that we make sure students are reading books they will truly enjoy. If you're looking for books to tempt more reluctant preteen or teen readers, or to keep feeding the diet of your voracious reader, here are a few suggestions that helped feed my love of reading at that age.

One book I absolutely loved (still do, actually) is "The Watsons go to Birmingham — 1963" by Christopher Paul Curtis. The book stars fourth grader Kenny Watson, who recounts the exploits of his 13-year-old brother Byron and Byron's

buddy Buphead as he tags along. Most of the book is funny, but it turns serious and moving at its final destination in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1963 for what the book jacket calls "one of the darkest moments in America's history." The book is alternately hilarious and heartbreaking, and for me, as a kid, it was a great introduction to the Civil Rights era by a Black author.

If you're looking for books about spunky teens bucking the system, two I loved were "No More Dead Dogs" by Gordan Korman and "The Disreputable History of Frankie Landau-Banks" by E. Lockheart.

The first features an eighth grade football player who gets himself into trouble by writing a book review criticizing his English teacher's favorite book. The second features a teenage girl at a boarding school who anonymously takes over running a secret "boys only" club at the school.

If you're looking for more strong heroines, "Howl's Moving Castle" by Diana Wynne Jones is a great choice. The fantasy novel features Sophie, a young hat maker who is turned into an old woman after angering a witch and seeks a power-

ful wizard to undo the curse. The book was turned into an anime movie, which may entice some anime fans to pick it up.

"Running Out of Time," by Margaret Peterson Haddix, is another fun one, as the main character Jessie is shocked to discover she did not grow up in a village in the early 1800s as she believed, but in 1990s tourist attraction where visitors can watch "authentic" frontier living from one-way mirrors.

One of my favorite fantasy authors growing up was Robin McKinley. I love her fairytale retellings, and "Beauty," featuring Belle as a gangly tomboy, is one of the best retellings of "Beauty and the Beast" I've read. I also particularly enjoyed her original novel "The Hero and the Crown" and its prequel "The Blue Sword."

Other fantasy favorites from juvenile literature are "Ella Enchanted" by Gail Carson Levine and the "Goose Girl" series by Shannon Hale. For older teens (or those reading at a more advanced level) I would recommend the "Inheritance Cycle" series by Christopher Paolini or the "Books of Pellinor" series by Alison Croggon.

Enjoy!

COLUMN

BMCC remains committed to students

In 1962, our community took on the courageous challenge of opening one of the first community colleges in Oregon. In the nearly 60 years since Blue Mountain Community College first opened its doors and began serving students, much has changed. The college has celebrated triumphs and weathered challenges. The past year has brought about a particularly challenging time for our faculty and staff, students, and the communities we serve.



Dr. Connie Green

BMCC is working to address the issues that most rural community colleges in 2021 face: enrollment decline, budget challenges, poverty and COVID-limited contact. Despite these challenges, and what you may have read elsewhere, BMCC is committed to being your college and meeting the needs of the communities we serve. Failing you is not an option.

As the interim president at BMCC, my agreement with the Board of Education is to address these issues openly, and with the campus team and our community partners working together to create a stable two-year budget. This step will ensure BMCC's programs and services are strong and vibrant. In doing so, we will also become flexible and nimble to ensure the connections and the results increase.

So, yes, BMCC is experiencing significant transition and change to meet the current reality. The college will

begin a search for a new president. The intent is to not pass on current budget challenges for a new president to handle. The college and its board of education recognize that for BMCC to continue to meet the evolving needs of its students and communities, it, too, must adapt. That means BMCC will change how we are organized, how we operate and how we partner. This can be a scary endeavor.

It can also be an opportunity. BMCC has an opportunity to renew its commitment to students and the community while reviewing its internal organization and structure. It has an opportunity to serve students in new ways in a post-pandemic era that will see our economy in recovery and our local industries adapting to the challenges of the past year.

Like most community colleges across the country, BMCC has experienced enrollment decline for the past several years. This was exacerbated by the pandemic over the past year, which forced us into virtual learning, and became a major challenge for the hands-on Career Technical Education programs. In 2019-2020, the college received 31.03% from state funding, 32.38% from student tuition and fees, and 36.59% from local property tax revenue.

Many community colleges, including BMCC, have had to raise tuition to help cover costs. BMCC has also taken steps to reduce its expenses, reducing nearly \$2 million for the 2020-2021 budget. These reductions were in materials

and services and staff development, as well as a reduction of 24 positions. Last year had difficult decisions. The intent of the board is to make any additional reductions for the 2021-2022 budget so that the expenditures and revenues balance and the college is "right-sized" for the future.

How does BMCC do this? Through inclusive conversations with faculty, staff, students and the community.

Now, a discussion does not necessarily mean all things change. A discussion means we learn, listen, and consider implications so that we can make informed decisions moving forward.

While this process will be challenging — and even heartbreaking — for many, BMCC's faculty and staff are resilient. They have weathered past storms, and each time the college comes out stronger. With these impending changes, there remains one constant: BMCC is committed to the students and communities it serves. Our administration, faculty, staff, and board are committed to strengthening BMCC so that it can thrive and be the affordable, high-quality educational option for Eastern Oregon. We are committed to working with local industries to put Eastern Oregonians back to work and reinvigorate our local economy. We are committed to being "students first." And, just like when we first opened our doors in 1962, we are committed at BMCC to you — our community.

Dr. Connie Green is interim president of Blue Mountain Community College.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Oregon needs tighter mink regulations

The Center for Biological Diversity is absolutely aiming to reshape how Oregon treats animals by seeking to end beaver trapping and hunting last year and this year improve how mink farms are regulated.

Here's why: COVID-19 can and has been passed back and forth between humans and mink (this has already resulted in a viral mutation). COVID-19 has ravaged mink farms in Europe and the U.S. At least three mink escaped an Oregon mink farm that was quarantined following a COVID-19 outbreak (and two tested positive for COVID-19).

In addition to the threat of mink becoming a reservoir for COVID-19 mutations that may undo our human vaccination efforts, we're concerned that farmed mink could spread COVID-19 to wild mink and their relatives, like otters, fishers, martens and badgers, potentially decimating wild animal populations.

We've been through a lot this past year. A lot has changed. Many of us are thinking about what we want to keep changing. If we want to stop the next pandemic and get this one under control, we need to make changes to the facilities that provide ideal breeding grounds for pandemics.

Oregon's mink factory farms are a threat to public health and wildlife. Our petition to add mink to ODFW's prohibited species list and Senate Bill 832, the bill to close Oregon's mink farms and shift their workers to new employment, would reshape our relationship with animals to provide us all a safer future.

Lori Ann Burd
Center for Biological Diversity

CORRECTIONS

It is the policy of the Hermiston Herald to correct errors as soon as they are discovered. Incorrect information will be corrected on Page 2A. Errors committed on the Opinion page will be corrected on that page. Corrections also are noted in the online versions of our stories.

Please contact the editor at editor@hermistonherald.com or call (541) 564-4533 with issues about this policy or to report errors.

SUBMIT A LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Letters Policy: Letters to the Editor is a forum for the Hermiston Herald readers to express themselves on local, state, national or world issues. Brevity is good, but longer letters should be kept to 250 words.

No personal attacks; challenge the opinion, not the person. The Hermiston Herald reserves the right to edit letters for length and for content.

Letters must be original and signed by the writer or writers. Anonymous letters will not be printed. Writers should include a telephone number so they can be reached for questions. Only the letter writer's name and city of residence will be published.

OBITUARY POLICY

The Hermiston Herald publishes paid obituaries. The obituary can include small photos and, for veterans, a flag symbol at no charge. Expanded death notices will be published at no charge. These include information about services. Obituaries may be edited for spelling, proper punctuation and style.

Obituaries and notices may be submitted online at hermistonherald.com/obituaryform, by email to obits@hermistonherald.com, by fax to 541-276-8314, placed via the funeral home or in person at the Hermiston Herald or East Oregonian offices. For more information, call 541-966-0818 or 1-800-522-0255, x221.