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Featured Special Interest Group: Literacy and Social Responsibility

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by Melanie Cohen Goodman, Chestnut Hill College

The Mission of IRA's [Literacy and Social Responsibility Special Interest Group \(L-SR SIG\)](#) is to study, understand, and advocate for high quality programs which integrate community service, participatory citizenship, social responsibility, appreciation for diversity, environmental stewardship, character education, and/or caring behavior into the development of literacy across the curriculum. L-SR Past President and Membership Chair, Melanie Goodman, shares what makes the SIG unique and fun.

1. Are you especially proud of any of your SIG's projects?

Members of the L-SR SIG are proud of all our activities including our consistently engaging sessions at [IRA's annual convention](#) dedicated to introducing conference attendees to top-notch key note speakers and interactive round table presenters, our new special service award for students, informative [newsletter](#), creative [website](#), and most recent professional venue—the [LSR e-journal](#). We work to build community at our sessions and leadership dinners, and online now via [Facebook](#). We should also mention our newest award under development is for books that address—you guessed it!—literacy and social responsibility.

Our newest project just unveiled last year is the Literacy and Service Recognition Award. This annual award celebrates the work of students (K-16+) who have been nominated by teachers and librarians for exemplary community service involving some form of literacy. Alma Flor Ada and Isabel Campoy inspired this award, provided seed funds, and serve on the award committee chaired by Denise Stuart. Award winners are presented with an engraved plaque and certificate of recognition and invited to showcase their work at IRA's annual convention as part of the L-SR SIG program. The inaugural first place winner was a team of third-grade students in an advanced literacy class at the Columbus School for Girls, who traveled to Orlando to present their service project last year. The work of Ahlam Jallaq, Aubrey Lanham, Ailis Rees, Leslie Robins, and Evelyn Stuntz was celebrated for developing and expanding Project S.O.A.R. (Save Our Albatross Research). Visit the [L-SR website](#) for submission details and information about our first award recipients.



Photo caption: Evelyn Stuntz, Leslie Robins, Ahlam Jallaq, Ailis Rees, and Aubrey Lanham along with teacher Debbie Charna display the service award and certificate at their school library.



Photo caption: Denise Stuart, Awards Chair of L-SR SIG, presents Literacy and Service Award certificates to the 2011 winners from Columbus School for Girls for Project S.O.A.R. (Save Our Albatross Research) at the L-SR SIG session. Ahlam Jallaq, Aubrey Lanham, Ailis Rees and Leslie Robins, traveled to Orlando with nominating teacher Debbie Charna and Director of Lower School Joan Hill.

2. What does your SIG program look like at the Annual IRA Convention?

Our Literacy and Social Responsibility (L-SR) SIG conference program has always engaged the most dynamic keynote speakers. Children's literature is the vehicle of choice through which Opening Keynoters and noted children's book authors Eve Bunting (*The Terrible Things: An Allegory on the Holocaust*) and Lynne Cherry (*The Great Kapok Tree*) have addressed issues of social justice. On more than one occasion, praise for the talent and courage of our keynoters has drawn high praise and much appreciation from a room filled to capacity with conferees.

In various conference venues, L-SR SIG conferees have tapped to the lyrics and songs of singer, songwriter, and Grammy Award winner John McCutcheon; waxed poetic with Dixie Goswami; and were ready to march to the Capitol with literacy advocate Patrick Shannon. A more recent keynote address was offered by authors and educational consultants, Alma Flor Ada and Isabel Campoy (our very own!), whose "transformative education" practice suggests that teacher practitioners incorporate reflection to "give voice to life experiences." A potpourri of Roundtable discussions at the L-SR SIG sessions continues to add an authentically interactive component to an already lively SIG session.

The Closing Keynote address has been a welcome addition to the L-SR SIG program and well received by conference attendees, many of whom remain in the conference room for our business meeting (organized and run by L-SR President, Patricia Dean) at which point they are invited to become active members and perhaps consider a leadership role in our SIG. Unique to IRA and truly a wonderful moment in the life of our Literacy and Social Responsibility SIG was the inclusion of students as recipients of the Literacy and Service Recognition Award in Orlando in May 2011.



Photo caption: Patrick Shannon presents as keynote speaker at the L-SR SIG session in Orlando, 2011.



Photo caption: John McCutcheon performs as he discusses Literacy and Social Responsibility at the L-SR SIG session at Chicago 2010.

3. Are there other benefits to joining your SIG?

As a member of the L-SR SIG you will benefit from the opportunity to dialog and exchange ideas with colleagues who are interested in social responsibility and literacy. Under the leadership of ejournal editor, Margaret-Mary Sulentic Dowell, we offer a [peer-reviewed journal](#) and each year, accept submissions for that journal. Reviewers represent a diverse geographical board with a wide variety of expertise, interests, and experience. The submission process is becoming increasingly competitive. Last year, we received 16 submissions and published five manuscripts, approximately a 33% acceptance rate. The most recent call and submission requirements can be downloaded from the link above.

Members also benefit from the opportunity to serve fellow educators by creating strands for display on the [L-SR website](#). For example, Best Literacy Practices with Pro-social Twists is a new instructional strategies project under development as a website strand this year. At least five research-based and highly regarded literacy strategies appropriate for grades four through 12 will be presented in a user friendly format including: Definition, Goals, Teacher Preparation, Instructional Procedures, Prosocial Enhancements, Relevant Common Core Standards, and Further Resources. Please contact L-SR Secretary, Beth Breneman, at bethbreneman@comcast.net for information about the web-based strategies project.

Also, keep in mind that we're on Facebook! Members can benefit by using Facebook for building their professional communities and for publicizing their publications and projects to a broader audience. Please join us on [Facebook](#) and search for "Literacy Responsibility." Our Communications Chair, Ernie Bond, set up the site specifically for our LSR SIG. Log on, check it out, and add your own comments and connections. Not sure how to join Facebook? It's easy...just go to the website above and follow the instructions. You'll need an email address and a password. It's lots of fun!

4. Is there a way to find out more information about your SIG?

All those interested in the IRA Literacy and Social Responsibility SIG are invited to visit the [LSR website](#), created by Web-manager, Kaye West, at www.csulb.edu/misc/l-sr to learn more about the organization. The website includes information about our SIG: past and upcoming programs, resources including reviews of professional and juvenile literature, a list of websites related to the mission of the L-SR SIG, and ways to get involved in our Special Interest Group.

In addition, every spring prior to the [IRA Convention](#) members receive an electronic copy of the L-SR program and update of SIG activities in the annual "[Literacy & Social Responsibility Newsletter](#)" thanks to our Newsletter Editor, Susan Speer-Powers.

Currently, there are no dues for the L-SR SIG, but you must be an up-to-date member of IRA. Please contact Melanie Cohen Goodman, Membership Chair, goodmanm@chc.edu to become a member and learn about volunteer opportunities.

5. What presenters and topics will be featured at your session in Chicago?

Program Chair Andrea Karlin has announced two keynote presentations, one by innovative author/illustrator David Geister titled, "Memories and Stories from the Past: Historically Responsible Books for the Present and Future," and the other by dynamic author/poet Kwame Alexander, "Words Changing Worlds." In addition, round table discussions will include these topics: "What ARE the Gaps: ELs in Mainstream English Classrooms;" "Not Just Dead White Guys: Using Multi-Genre Writings to Study Overlooked Heros;" "Cinderella's Prince Who? Looking at Resourceful Females in Multicultural Folk Literature;" "Putting Into Practice: Ecological Literacies for Classroom Instruction;" "Fostering Social Responsibility Through Inquiry;" and "Wiki Writers: Students and Teachers Making Connections Across Communities."

Please join us in [Chicago](#) on Tuesday, May 1, 2012, at the Hyatt Regency McCormick Place, CC21, from 3:00 p.m. to 5:45 p.m.!