## **Praise for Poetry**

"Why I Force My Students to Memorize Poetry" by Andy Waddell, which appeared in the Summer issue, was a beautiful article. It articulated so clearly the gift that we open again and again throughout our lifetime when we have memorized a poem.

Years ago, in a retirement tribute to my twelfth-grade English teacher, I wrote: "She filled our heads with words, with gorgeous rhythms and melodies, and we came to feel awe for the beauty and majesty of the sound of language. While we are likely this hour to forget where we put our keys or our glasses, we have with us always the lyric wonder and promise of renewal of 'Whan that Aprill with his shoures soote' etched within us, claiming a place of permanence in our memory's treasure trove.

"Other teachers helped us chart our course through the topographies of history, of chemical and quadratic equations, of cells and laws of motion, of foreign idioms and conjugations. These are no small tasks, and their successful accomplishment is not trivial. But Miss Denton was a cartographer of a different sort; she gave us sextants and maps (of words and images and metaphors, of poetry and art and human urgings) so that we could chart the quiet, essential streams that flowed deeply within

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us, streams, that in the end, would be the only true paths by which we find our way."

I hope Mr. Waddell's students come to appreciate the gift of language, with all its transformative possibilities, that has embedded itself within their souls.

> -DR. SHERI LINDNER Former High School English Teacher **Clinical Psychologist** Port Washington, N.Y.

## **Rely on Retired Teachers**

I was particularly pleased to read Congressman Michael Honda's article, "Preserving the American Dream," in the Spring 2011 issue. I feel so much affinity toward this man who spent 30 years as a teacher, principal, and school board

member not only because I taught high school English for 34 years but because I am married to a Hungarian refugee who, like the Congressman, knows all too well about struggling in school, dealing with non-native English language speakers, and enduring the indignities of internment camps. I only wish there were far more educators in Congress.

Only then might our education system be the most important issue in America.

Congressman Honda writes that it is his hope that the National Commission on Education Equity and Excellence "will bring together some of the foremost experts on education from across the political spectrum in order to conduct a national dialogue on school finance and equity.... It is only by talking with teachers, parents, students, advocates, school board members, counselors, principals, and

superintendents ... that we can understand what is needed to make public education work in every community."

However, I believe Congressman Honda omitted one of the most valuable resources in public education that is *not* currently being tapped: the strength and wisdom of recently retired teachers.

> Many, like Congressman Honda himself, have so much to offer education, if only they were asked or offered a small remuneration in exchange for staying connected to the work they've loved so much for so many years. Granted, we can't all become congressmen and make the impact that Honda has, but we can help provide the additional resources that he posits

"poor and minority students often require ... to address needs that originate outside the classroom."

-KATHY A. MEGYERI Washington, D.C.

## **A Word on Time**

There is just one line in Congressman Honda's article that I have to take issue with: "for best results, students need more class time." More seat time in a traditional classroom is not what is

needed. Teachers do need some time to prepare lessons and mark student work. Lengthening the school day in the normal manner in which it is done will only dig into this time.

What students need is not more instructional time, but more "distractionfree time" to absorb what they are supposed to learn. In the old days, we might have simply said they need a quiet place to do their homework. I propose that at the end of the school day, extra time should be utilized for a supervised study hall staffed by parent volunteers or other school staff (and a few teachers). This would ensure that children have phone-free, distraction-free study time, and also that teachers still are provided the time they need to prepare and grade.

-ALAN BRÖNSTEIN Central High School of Philadelphia

## **Summer 2011 Correction**

In "Why I Force My Students to Memorize Poetry," Andy Waddell, referring to Robert Frost's "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," intended to write that he has "never found a better way to teach iambic meter." He mistakenly wrote "iambic pentameter." The poem is in iambic tetrameter. We regret that we did not catch this error, and we thank the alert readers who notified us. The corrected article is available at www.aft.org/pdfs/american educator/summer2011/Waddell.pdf.

-EDITORS