

Public Language Awards Committee

Major activities: What major actions, projects, initiatives, or studies in your charge have been completed by your group since July 1, 2019? In each activity describe the more important features of the work, and connect your work to the NCTE Vision Statement, if applicable.

1. List names, affiliations, and geographic region for all committee members.
 - a. Allison Berryhill (chair) ICTE, Iowa
 - b. Kristina ByBee, Arizona State University, Arizona
 - c. Michelle Devereaux, Kennesaw State University, Georgia
 - d. Stephanie F. Reid, Arizona State University, Arizona
 - e. John Ritchie, Washburn Rural High School, Topeka KS, Kansas Association of Teachers of English
 - f. Executive Committee Liaison: Alfredo Luján
 - g. NCTE Administrative Liaison: Sarah Miller

2. What actions, projects, initiatives, or studies are “in progress” at this time?
 - a. We are in conversation with an EC Subcommittee regarding Doublespeak Award revision. Michelle Devereaux and Allison Berryhill met with the subcommittee on Sept. 24 to discuss award history and current concerns. The Public Language Committee will discuss the EC Subcommittee’s concerns at our annual meeting on Thursday, Nov. 5, 5:00-7:00 p.m.
 - b. Michelle Devereaux (incoming committee chair) has been in conversation with the *English Journal* editors, proposing a “Public Language” issue focused on strategies for teaching public-language critical thinking.
 - c. We are working with Sarah Miller to propose widening the window of publication dates for Orwell nominations. We want to make sure that books are “out in the world” for a minimum of nine months before the window closes. We are also working to move up the deadline for nominations to allow the committee more time during which to read the books.

3. What have you accomplished so far, and what is your timeline for future work?
 - a. We received nine nominations for the Orwell Award. The committee met twice via Zoom to distribute reading responsibilities (each nominated book was read by at least two reviewers, most were read by three or more). Committee members prepared rationale for consideration or dismissal of each book read. After discussion, we determined two books had risen to the top of our choices. We each agreed to read both books and vote on a Google Form. The winning book is *Linguistic Justice* by April Baker-Bell.
 - b. We received three nominations for the Doublespeak award. Rather than bestow the award on a single person, we decided to present the award to a phrase that has been used by many public figures during the past year: “China Virus.”
 - c. In-coming committee chair Michelle Devereaux was interviewed on “Late Night Live with Phillip Adams” for the Australian Broadcasting Company where she discussed the history and meaning behind the awards.

4. How has the work of your group contributed to NCTE’s role in shaping the profession of teaching and/or the understanding of literacy in educational contexts?
 - a. As the selection of *Linguistic Justice* as our Orwell Award indicates, language and equity are tightly entwined. Understanding how power structures use language to degrade, to confuse, to subjugate individuals as well as communities, and to maintain or extend power imbalances is essential as we move forward during these divisive times. The Public Language Awards Committee shines a spotlight on efforts to bring clarity and honesty to language used in the public sphere. It is our hope that

our committee can move forward with initiative to connect English teachers with the pedagogy and practice to address language injustice, in its many forms, in the classroom.

Suggestions from your group: Your good ideas help direct future NCTE actions.

1. What significant changes or trends in our field point to action from the Council?
 - a. Several Orwell nominations of late, including the 2020 winner, examine the ramifications of elevating one language over another as superior or more correct, thereby reinforcing systemic racism.

Our Doublespeak award this year is likewise an example of people using language divisively and to racist ends. Language that fuels racism to give power to some groups over others, used in the public sphere to sow hate, fear, and inequality, is of grave concern to our committee.

2. What trends need to factor into medium- to long-term NCTE planning?
 - a. Where are students learning about the role of language (speech, press) in a democracy? Have we abdicated this responsibility to our history-teaching colleagues? Our committee feels an urgency to empower English teachers to understand and teach the ways language influences public policy and the role of language in sustaining the free exchange of ideas in a democracy. Furthermore, teaching students to analyze and think critically about language used in the public sphere is essential.
 - b. Are pre-service teachers prepared to tackle weighty issues of language use/misuse by politicians and people in positions of power? The Orwell/Doublespeak awards were born out of the language distortion used during the Viet Nam War: “You always write it’s bombing, bombing, bombing. It’s not bombing! It’s air support!”(1972 Doublespeak Award). As people marched in the street, NCTE spoke up to contrast language used to elucidate and clarify versus language used to distort and deceive. Our committee urges NCTE to recognize a need for re-emphasis on strong teacher preparation for addressing public language use and misuse. This can, in part, come through prioritizing related sessions at the convention, inviting keynotes who address these issues, and publishing articles that provide teachers with understanding of why and how to teach critical analysis of language used in the public arena.

Allison Berryhill, Chair