

ENGLISH JOURNAL

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Magazines in the English Classroom

What magazine or periodical publication do you find useful in the English classroom?

Periodicals bring the real world into our classrooms and provide materials which help entice students into reading and writing. The submissions to *Booksearch* this month remind us to look beyond our textbooks for material to enrich the language arts curriculum.

The magazine mentioned most frequently in response to this question was *Merlyn's Pen*, which publishes student writing and art. Somewhat surprisingly, the next most frequently mentioned magazine was *The New Yorker* . . .

Merlyn's Pen: The National Magazine of Student Writing. Merlyn's Pen, Inc., Box 1058, East Greenwich, RI 02818, quarterly during the school year.

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If I could highlight one magazine that I have found useful in my English classroom, it would have to be *Merlyn's Pen*. Suggested grade levels are 7-10, and all work is by students within these grades. Herein lies its singular appeal. My ninth graders respect their peers' efforts and enjoy reading material that interests them rather than what the teacher says is "good for you." Many lively discussions have been sparked by a *Pen* essay, short story, cartoon, or poem.

Initially I ordered the *Pen* for my academically gifted freshmen but have since used it across other levels as well. There is enough variety within a year's subscription to appeal to most students. Even juniors have not been bored by material written by seventh or eighth graders.

Most issues have a theme, and a flexible, open-ended teacher's guide is included. What has been a useful feature recently added this year is a notation of reading comprehension level and literary techniques used in the short stories. The layout and artwork (also student generated) are very appealing; cost is reasonable; advertising is appropriate and kept to a minimum.

As a teacher of composition, I appreciate the editorial comments which let students know that real editors, not just their instructor, expect above-standard writing skills. Students are encouraged to submit their work; as they read, they tend to take their own writing more seriously. Who knows? Something may qualify for the *Pen*.

At the end of each year I take a vote on whether or not to renew. Across the board the response is *Yes!*

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Whatever their reasons for coming in contact with this magazine, student readers find the stories, poems, and essays appealing in both form and content. *Merlyn's Pen* does not shy away from controversial topics—divorce, euthanasia, and parent-child conflicts, for example—but it also includes a balanced proportion of humorous and upbeat pieces as well. Teachers will appreciate the high quality of the student-written material, and they will find the accompanying pamphlet of teaching ideas helpful.

The unique aspect of *Merlyn's Pen* will be discovered by students who become inspired to submit their own writing to the magazine. The editors take a personal interest in the work sent in and actually correspond with the students who contact *Merlyn's*. Some young writers receive enthusiastic acceptances from the magazine, and others, of course, receive rejections. But students whose writing falls somewhere in between—showing potential but needing revision—are offered a most unusual opportunity. Such students are sent an encouraging letter along with an edited copy of the draft. Before resubmitting, the student is free to write back to *Merlyn's* or to call the magazine's 800 number to discuss ideas for improving the draft in question. I know of no other student writing publication that takes such a time-consuming approach in responding to the efforts of young writers. Of course, *Merlyn's* cannot answer every submission in this way, but the editors do acknowledge each piece they receive.