



# CONNECTIONS

Spring 2018

## Conference Theme: Let Freedom Read!

**Saturday, September 22, 2018**  
**Chandler-Gilbert Community College**

Keynote Speaker: Jeff Zentner  
Author of *Goodbye Days* and *The Serpent King*  
Winner of ALAN's Amelia Walden Award

Join us as Jeff Zentner discusses creating works devoted to young adults. Zentner, a Teen Choice nominee, will hold a hands-on writing workshop and book signing.

Additionally, the conference will highlight a variety of presenters along with an afternoon session dedicated to allowing our students the chance to raise their own voices.

Register online at: <http://www.aetaconnect.org/conference-registration.html>

Arizona English Teachers Association is the state affiliate of the National Council of Teachers of English.

Keep up with affiliate news and conference information at <http://www.aetaconnect.org>

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## LET FREEDOM READ!

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“What is your favorite Banned Book?” This question was asked of the YA authors participating in last year’s AETA statewide conference. The answers not only included some of our favorite titles, but validated our work in the classroom. This exchange, and a desire to celebrate the intellectual freedoms so cherished in our country and in our English/language arts classrooms, planted the seed for this year’s conference theme: Let Freedom Read! In an appropriate coincidence, Banned and Challenged Books Week will start on September 23<sup>rd</sup>, the day after our fall conference at Chandler-Gilbert Community College. What better way could there be to launch Banned Books Week in our schools and libraries than to spend Saturday, September 22<sup>nd</sup> in the company of fellow teachers who love books! We are a dedicated group of professionals excited to learn how to help our students access the reading material and information needed to become the most educated, productive member of society possible.

The first book I defended was *The Outsiders* in the late 1990s. A parent was concerned about the subject matter—gangs. The latest was last month when I taught Neal Shusterman’s *Unwind*, a dystopian novel set partially in Arizona. A trailer shown by one of my colleagues as an anticipatory set triggered a parent complaint, a ban on the trailer, and a fresh look at our district’s book challenge procedures. The book survived, and a novel vetting committee was added to our district’s ELA framework. My own challenge to this book came when one of my students (Astrid, a pseudonym) confessed to me that she found it “morbid and disgusting.” Her father, who to his credit actually read the book, took his concerns about the book to my principal, who listened, but stood firm on allowing this book to be taught in our school. Defending our choices of class reading material can be one of the tougher parts of our jobs, but it is of the paramount importance.

The fact is, literature can be, and is often crafted to be, unnerving. Some students are ready for the experience and others are not. This makes our role as guides in the ELA classroom crucial. Through our knowledge of our students and classrooms, we prepare students for these difficult conversations. We know how to use literature to guide students through the kinds of critical thinking and debates which will serve them in the future as they become thoughtful scholars, citizens, voters and policy makers. We know how to help students see beyond the word “gang” to the theme of being an outsider—a painful part of the development of any adolescent, particularly one who is as disadvantaged in terms of socio-economic opportunities, as Ponyboy was. The freedom to read what is controversial, unpleasant, even morbid, is our right—if the literature is illuminating. Students have the right to read engaging literature that speaks to them, whether it’s set in Oklahoma in the 1960s or Happy Jack, Arizona sometime in the future. They have the right to explore themes of loneliness, violence, and complex social issues in the safe space of a classroom guided by a teacher who can help them peel back layers of plot, dialogue and symbolism to uncover deeper understandings of our society. After all, aren’t our students so often living those issues? Why should they be prevented from reading about them?

Astrid didn’t like *Unwind*, but she participated in a Socratic Seminar that touched on the definition of a soul and initiated great conversations with universal questions she prepared ahead of time. She understood that while we don’t always like a book, it can still teach us something. Ironically, the next book she chose to read on her own was Stephen King’s *It*. I’m not sure how King’s brand of “morbid and disgusting” was more palatable to her than Neal Shusterman’s, but it was her right to read it and to find the value in story. So we say Let Freedom Read. And write. And think, speak and debate. Our intellectual freedoms are central to our classroom curriculum and instruction. Please make plans now to join us at CGCC to learn more about how we can support each other in the fight to protect these freedoms.

-Kelly O’Rourke, AETA Executive Secretary

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# CONFERENCE PROPOSALS

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AETA's STATEWIDE CONFERENCE 2018--Saturday, September 22,  
2018

Chandler-Gilbert Community College

## CALL FOR PROPOSALS

**Conference Theme: Let Freedom Read!**

Keynote Speaker: Jeff Zentner

Author of *Goodbye Days* and *The Serpent King*

Winner of ALAN's Amelia Walden Award

### 1. Presenter(s) Information.

Include name(s), title, school affiliation, mailing address, and all contact information (home phone, work phone, cell, email). If you are part of a group presentation, all correspondence is sent to the first presenter's name. Please keep your colleagues informed as correspondence continues. In accordance with professional tradition, all presenters must register for the conference.

### 2. Type of Session:

**a) Group presentation**—50 minutes shared amongst all presenters

**b) Individual presentation**—the program committee will put two to three presenters together in one session along the lines of a similar theme/approach

### 3. Session Title:

Suggested Strand:  **Writing**     **Reading/Literature College & Career Readiness**     **General**  
Suggested Level:  **Primary**     **Intermediate/Middle**     **Middle/Senior High**     **College**

Suggested Theme: Our theme of Let Freedom Read! is not a mandate for content. As English teachers, we are equally concerned with the freedom to write, think and debate. Please feel free to submit proposals that support all aspects of our role as promoters of English and language arts.

NCTE & AETA value multi-cultural voices and those who advocate for the underrepresented in our classrooms and in our profession. Please check one of the Rainbow Themes from the established caucuses of NCTE below if you feel your presentation addresses one of the groups below.

- Black & Latinx Caucus
- American Indian Caucus
- Asian/Asian American Caucus
- Jewish Caucus
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

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## CONFERENCE PROPOSALS

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### **4. Description.**

Concurrent sessions will be held throughout the day on Saturday. These 50-minute sessions typically present a best practice or engage the audience in a focused presentation and/or discussion of a topic relevant to the theme of the conference. Describe the session in detail in 2-3 paragraphs in which you provide explanation of background to and identification of the topic, its relevance to the conference theme, methods and materials to be used, including audience participation.

### **5. Abstract.**

Give 4-5 lines of description to appear in the conference program. Identify the intended audience(s) and area of focus.

### **6. Presentation Needs.**

Each session meeting room is a mediated classroom (equipped with computer station, audio, video and projection).

**Arizona's English/Language Arts teachers have much to offer each other!  
Please reproduce this call for proposals and distribute among your friends and  
colleagues.**

**Send or E-mail your Proposal by May 15, 2018 to:**

BRIAN & KENA TAYLOR  
175 N 1300 W  
PIMA, AZ 85543  
[CBTAYLOR@ASU.EDU](mailto:CBTAYLOR@ASU.EDU)

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# CONFERENCE REGISTRATION FORM

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## Arizona English Teachers Association 2018 Conference Registration

Pre-register by September 7 to ensure that conference materials and meals are available to you. All conference participants and presenters are responsible for conference fees. If you have questions about AETA registration, please email [Renee.Rude@cgc.edu](mailto:Renee.Rude@cgc.edu).

**Option 1:** Register and pay online at [AETACConnect.org](http://AETACConnect.org).

\_\_\_\_\_ REGISTRATION **\$110 (if paid by Sept. 7)** / \$120 (if paid after Sept. 7)  
Full Conference Package (lunch, registration, membership)

\_\_\_\_\_ STUDENT REGISTRATION **\$45 (if paid by Sept. 7)** / \$55 (if paid after Sept. 7)  
Full Conference Package (lunch, student registration, membership)  
This option is for full-time undergraduate and graduate students.

\_\_\_\_\_ BUNDLE REGISTRATION **\$330 (if paid by Sept. 7)** / \$340 (if paid after Sept. 7)  
4 Full Conference Packages (lunch, registration, membership)  
School districts are invited to send 4 educators to the conference for the price of 3.  
Please provide names and contact information for all attendees.

**TOTAL:** \$ \_\_\_\_\_

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# CONFERENCE REGISTRATION FORM

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Arizona English Teachers Association  
2018 Conference Registration

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

STREET ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

CITY: \_\_\_\_\_ STATE: \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE: \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_  Home  Work  Cell

E-MAIL: \_\_\_\_\_

Level of service or interest:  Elementary  Middle  
 High School  College/University

Participation in conference:  Presenter  Participant  Board Member

AFFILIATION/SCHOOL: \_\_\_\_\_

TITLE: \_\_\_\_\_

STUDENTS: Degree program: \_\_\_\_\_

Anticipated graduation year: \_\_\_\_\_



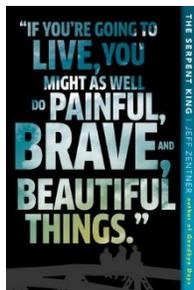
**Register  
Today!**

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## Book Review

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It is our pleasure to announce this year's keynote speaker: Jeff Zentner. He is the author of several books including *The Serpent King* and *Goodbye Days*. His debut book, *The Serpent King*, received the William C. Morris award. Zentner earned a Teen Choice award nomination for his young adult literature.



*The Serpent King* follows the story of three unlikely friends in the rural South and the struggles of high school. Written from the point of three different narrators, Zentner grapples with abuse, loss, grief, isolation, depression, and social media from various perspectives. It becomes easy to identify with fragility of life for these teenagers as they thwart social norms.

*The Serpent King* is published by Random House.

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## End-of-the Year Reflection

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As the school year nears its conclusion, take a few moments to reflect. Take time to reflect on this year's successes. Reflect on your growth as an educator. We ask our students to reflect frequently, but rarely demand this practice of ourselves. For many of us, this year presented unforeseen challenges and led us to question our own abilities. We found strength in our stories and in numbers. We stepped outside our own comfort zones to demand change. We expressed our own personal struggles, inside and outside of the classroom, for the first time. Now, we need to celebrate our successes, our small victories.

As I reflect, I find solace realizing the finish line is near. Unlike previous years, an unimaginable focus occurred this school year. While I questioned my willingness and desire to remain an educator, I decided to stay the course. Here it is, April. Somewhere along the way, I remembered why I chose to become a teacher. In a time when teachers leave the classrooms at alarming rates, I am grateful for not throwing in the towel. I found my voice. Stepping outside of my own comfort zone, I educate people about the role of teachers – at times, to the disdain of those not expecting a full-court press about class sizes, school security, or adequate funding. With each encounter, I recognize my growth in advocating for my students, my fellow educators, and for my career.

- Esther Bateson, AETA member

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## #RedforEd

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From a grassroots movement initiated by two elementary school teachers from the West Valley to a full media blitz. Last week, school district employees – classified and certified – voted their conscience regarding a potential walkout. On Thursday, the results indicated nearly 80% voting were in favor of a walkout.

Attempts to assuage the #RedforEd movement one week prior by proposing a 20% increase to teacher salaries by 2020. His plan to fund the first installment of raises came from other underfunded state programs resulting a backlash and a call to vote for the walkout. A walkout is scheduled for April 26. Districts across the state sent home notices that schools will close.

After a decade of underfunding and cuts to education, the conversation is happening. As educators, we need to educate the public on the following points:

- For a decade, the state has cut school funding to the tune of \$1.1 billion dollars.
- Teacher-to-student ratio ranks 48<sup>th</sup> in the country.
- Counselor-to-student ration ranks 50<sup>th</sup> in the country.
- There are over 2,000 teacher vacancies in the state currently.
- In response to a lawsuit over proposition 301, the Arizona Supreme Court stated the legislature: “could not constitutionally disregard the statutory directive to increase the base level funding.” This resulted in proposition 123, which ultimately ruled unconstitutional as well.

Demands from the grassroots movement:

1. A 20 percent increase for teachers from a sustainable revenue source.
2. Restore education funding to 2008 levels.
3. Competitive pay for all education support staff.
4. Permanent salary including annual raises. This demand includes creating a “permanent” step-and-lane salary structure.
5. No new tax cuts until per-pupil funding reaches the national average.

Districts and Charter schools sent notices to parents about potential closure. Various organizations/associations representing teachers also sent out walkout information this weekend. Take the time to read your school’s stance and guidelines regarding this initiative as districts and charter schools’ support varies from location to location.

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*Connections*: The newsletter of AETA

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Contact us with announcements, information, or stories for our Summer edition