

# English Matters

*for faculty, students & alumni of the GVSU  
English Department*

Winter 2026



## Contents

[\*Message from the Chair\*](#)

[\*Student Spotlights\*](#)

[\*Alumni Spotlights\*](#)

[\*Meet the Newest Members of Our Community\*](#)

[\*Innovative Teaching and Faculty Engagement\*](#)

[\*Popular Reads Recommended by Students\*](#)

[\*Note from the English Department Chair Elect\*](#)

[\*2026 Winter Newsletter Committee\*](#)



GRAND VALLEY  
STATE UNIVERSITY

# Message from the Department Chair, Dr. Shinian Wu

Welcome to the Winter 2026 edition of our newsletter *English Matters*!

As I reflect on the past year, I'm happy to report some good news while keeping an eye on the challenges and tasks ahead of us. The good news is that we finally finished revising our undergraduate English curriculum with the primary goal of realigning our degree program more closely with the contemporary needs and interests of our students while maintaining the core values of a liberal and humanities education. It was a three-year endeavor, and I wholeheartedly thank my colleagues for their dedication, effort, and time in working together to get this job done! Our ESL Minor Program has also been revised successfully to meet the new standards of the Michigan Department of Education as we train the next generation of teachers of English language learners. The landscape of English Studies keeps shifting in response to today's culturally and demographically diverse, digitally savvy, and increasingly AI-dominated world in which English majors find their niche—being critical thinkers, analytical readers, and reflective writers that no technology can ever replace!

We live in an era of changes, some mandated from the above, others of our own volition, all with a core mission in mind that doesn't change: serving our students! We help them to learn, to be wise, to gain new knowledge and skills, to succeed and thrive. It's both a joy and a struggle. While we wish our students more joy than struggle in their college journey, "there is always a moment in any kind of struggle when one feels in full bloom. Vivid. Alive" (Alice Walker). All of us should feel optimistic about the future!

This semester is also the final semester in which I conclude my three-year term as chair. I'm very grateful for the trust my colleagues placed in me three years ago. I also want to say that I've tried my utmost to serve the role the best I could. As no chair is perfect, and I'm ready to own my share of faults and mistakes, I also learn from them. "Mistakes are the portals of discovery" (James Joyce)!

Please enjoy this edition of *English Matters*!  
Shinian

## Student Spotlights

### Read with the Student Reading Series

Our English Department student Breyden Cantu is one of the event leaders

The Student Reading Series (SRS) is a student-led organization within the Writing Department. Currently, there are six group leaders, and **Breyden Cantu**, who is majoring in English with a literature focus and Writing, is one of them.

SRS dedicates one day a month every semester to allow students from all majors/minors to share their creative/academic works, and functions as a comfortable place to do so. Events are normally held from 7-8:30 pm in the Honors College Reading Room. The most recent event, a successful scrapbooking session, was centered around sharing work that has been left as drafts, while crafting and socializing.



*Photo from the SRS  
Presents: Scrapbook Session*

# English Department Oldenburg Writing Contest

Hear more about the composing process from one of last year's winners

The Oldenburg Writing Contest has been running here at GVSU for decades, and it serves as an exciting way to celebrate and uplift our student authors across all departments. This contest honors E. William Oldenburg, a former chair of the English Department, a published author and poet, who had a love for American literature and theater. He passed away in 1974 in an automobile accident, and this contest was founded to honor his contributions to the English Department and to GVSU as a whole. The contest joins together the English, Classics, and Writing departments to accept submissions across a wide range of categories, including nonfiction and fiction, short stories, poetry, drama, as well as analytical, personal, and persuasive essays. For each of the categories, students can receive prizes, with first place earning \$100, second place earning \$75, and third place earning \$50.

**Clare Dillon**, a student in the English Department, interviewed **the recent graduate and first-place winner in Poetry Noah MacLachlan**. Let's learn about Noah's composing and submission process.

***Q: Can you tell me a little about the piece you submitted that won?***

**A:** My winning portfolio was a series of poems. The first was about child soldiering in Africa, with it adopting a more narrative style from the perspective of a child whose life of peace in his village is disrupted by soldiers. He is trained to fight and loses his innocence throughout the piece; the peaceful imagery contrasted with violence as it progresses. The second was more about the environment, using allusions to Greek myth and Mother Nature to reflect on the impact of humans on the world. The third was more of a reflection on childhood and how, with growing up, comes the loss of innocence and pure joy as we're exposed to death, taxes, and the real world.

**Q: How long were you working on this piece? Did you write it for Oldenburg, or for something else?**

A: The overall portfolio took several months to revise, with all of the poems originating from my Intermediate Poetry Workshop class. While each came from a variety of prompts and exercises—and from many sources of inspiration—they all come together as what I view to be some of my best work.

**Q: Have you submitted to Oldenburg before? What's the process like?**

A: I have submitted to Oldenburg before. The process itself can be a bit intimidating, especially because of the more formalized nature of the competition. But I think it's about shaking off those nerves and just submitting what you're proud of and trying to put your art out into the world—even if it doesn't get selected.

**Q: Any advice for writers thinking of applying?**

A: Revise all you can, and don't be afraid to tell your story. All writers put a bit of themselves into their work, so even if it's fiction or poetry or drama, tap into what you know. In doing so, you'll find novelty and create more meaningful work that will last much longer with both the author and the audience.

If one can remain within the few rules of submitting one piece per category and not re-submitting a piece from the previous year, Oldenburg is a great opportunity for student writers to share their work and receive recognition! If you did submit to Oldenburg this year, watch your email to see if you've won, and don't miss the awards ceremony in April! If you did not participate this year, watch for the next call for submissions in January 2027!



# Alumni Spotlights

Read and find out what our English alum are doing now

## **Savannah Layson**

Savannah graduated from the English Department in 2019. Following graduation, she has found herself in the AEC world, currently at Rockford (construction). Her main responsibility is proposal writing, but she also manages social media and does other various writing projects. After finding that she had not been doing much personal writing, she challenged herself to write one short story a month. She also recently got married to another GVSU alumnus (a film and video major). If anyone is interested in learning more about the field of proposal writing, she would be happy to connect.

## **Jennifer Hoewe**

Jennifer Hoewe, Ph.D., is an associate professor in the Brian Lamb School of Communication at Purdue University. Additionally, she is the Associate Director of the Center for American Political History, Media, and Technology and Co-Founder and Co-Director of the Purdue Research in Media Effects Lab. Her primary research and teaching areas are political communication and media psychology. She has published more than 50 peer-reviewed articles and book chapters. Her book, *Enjoyment Is Breaking News*, will be published by MIT Press in September 2026.

Hoewe completed her undergraduate work in 2007 at GVSU, where she received the I Am Grand Valley Leadership Award. After graduation, she worked as a journalist and as a press assistant for a member of Congress. She then completed her master's degree at Michigan State University in 2010, followed by her Ph.D. at Penn State University in 2015.

While at GVSU, she worked at *the Lanthorn* and played on the club volleyball team. These experiences provided opportunities for growth and learning that prepared her for her current career and through which she made lifelong friends.

## **Sarah Zandstra**

After many years teaching at Chandler Woods Middle School, Sarah

recently transitioned to teaching Young 5's. It was a big shift from middle schoolers to the youngest learners, but it has been incredibly rewarding. Early in her career, she never imagined herself teaching such young students.

She began her journey in education by earning her undergraduate degree at Grand Valley State University, and then took a meaningful detour to raise her own children. When Sarah returned to the classroom, she found a renewed passion for teaching and learning.

Now, Sarah truly loves going to work each day. Watching young students grow academically, build confidence, and develop a love for school is something special. Her undergraduate experience at Grand Valley State University laid the foundation for her career by teaching her how to think critically, adapt, and connect with students at all stages of development.

Sarah's advice to current students is to stay open to unexpected paths. Careers evolve, and sometimes the most fulfilling opportunities are the ones you never planned for. Follow what excites you, and do not be afraid to grow along the way.

### **Bethany Hansen Dubuc**

Bethany graduated from Grand Valley in 2012 with an English degree and a minor in Applied Linguistics. She later earned her master's degree in Healthcare Administration, with a minor in IT management.

She currently works for a tech company based in Chicago called CCC Intelligent Solutions. Her job title is "Field Consultant," but her role is more like a translator. She works directly with end users and brings their experiences and feedback back to the developers.

The developers do not always understand the normal workflow or context for end users' needs, and often end users do not know how to articulate their needs into actionable next steps. Bethany serves as the go-between, articulating the technical aspects in layman's terms that customers can understand, while also communicating what the people who use the software actually need from the products the company offers.

**Tess Dornan**

Tess is currently teaching English 11 and Honors 11 at Coopersville High School. Her time with the GVSU English Department fueled her love of literature and gave her the skills to develop her teaching. The Teaching Literature and Writing to Adolescents classes were essential to her career. She has used lesson plans, guides, and activities from those courses in her classroom. Additionally, two amazing professors supported her and inspired her to become the encouraging educator she is today.

The advice she would offer English majors is to never forget their “why.” She explained that everyone has that book or love of writing that drove them to this subject. Never forget why you chose this noble craft of English and literature. As for education majors, it is easy to get swept up in the stress of teaching and finding your place after graduation. Year one is always the hardest but remember that the work you put in at the beginning will guide the rest of your career. Even when things get hard, show up and stand proud for your students. Finally, she shared a piece of advice she learned from a GVSU professor: keep Saturdays sacred. Give yourself a day each week to do something for yourself.

**Nick Viau**

English has always been a part of Nick’s identity. He initially planned to teach it but soon realized that being in the front of a classroom was not a good fit for him. He switched to communications with an English minor and loved how the two melded. He loved his English courses—so much so that he graduated just three credits shy of a double major.

He became a passionate writer and committed to working with words for a living. After graduation, a series of chance encounters led him to an assistant role at GVSU in the University Marketing department. Writing was not his responsibility at first, but his English background was well suited for developing content. Marketing, after all, is storytelling, and English taught him how to be a storyteller.

For the past twenty years, he has helped tell Grand Valley’s story in a variety of roles, including his current one as a Marketing and Branding Content Manager. That storytelling passion also extends beyond his

professional work. He has published two memoirs about his outdoor life and is writing his first fiction novel. English remains at the center of everything he does. It is a versatile area of study that applies to a multitude of industries.

### **Nella Dutton**

Nella currently resides in Otsego, Michigan. She works as a fifth-grade teacher with a deep passion for teaching reading and writing. She loves helping students discover their voices as readers and writers. She also enjoys having a front-row seat to watching their confidence grow throughout the year. In addition to her classroom role, she serves on her district's literacy team, where she collaborates with colleagues to make instructional decisions that support all students. Much of her current work centers on Michigan's new dyslexia law, and the team is thoughtfully aligning its practices with research-based best practices to ensure students receive effective, equitable literacy instruction.

Nella's undergraduate degree from GVSU has been foundational in this work. It strengthened her ability to think critically, analyze complex information, and communicate clearly—skills she uses daily as an educator. Her advice to current students is to embrace opportunities that challenge their thinking, as those skills will serve them well in any career path they pursue.

### **Alora Bower**

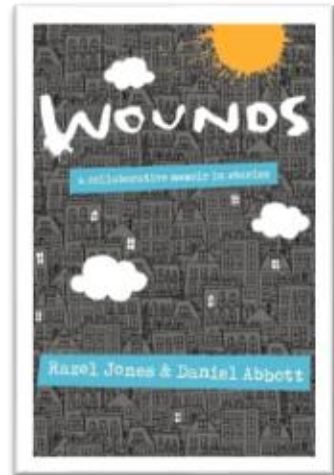
Alora was the recipient of the 2024-2025 Award for Distinguished Performance in English Education. During her time at GVSU, she studied abroad in Maastricht, Netherlands as both a student and teaching assistant, an experience that gave her new perspectives on education systems and learning. Additionally, she was an undergraduate research assistant for the Autistic Representation Database, Head Editor for the Writing Department's newsletter, *InWriting*, and Nonfiction Editor for the student-led literary journal, *fishladder*. Currently, she is working at WGVU Public Media as an Education Associate, where she engages with teachers and partners across West Michigan to provide educational services such as professional development, educator resources, family workshops, and community programming.

## Razel Jones



Razel Jones earned his BA in English Language and Literature from GVSU in 2007. He co-authored *Wounds: A Collaborative Memoir in Stories* with Daniel Abbott, who is also a GV alumnus. Currently, Razel serves as an Assistant Director of Human Resources in the Metropolitan Government of Nashville and Davidson County in Tennessee and also runs his own human resources consulting company.

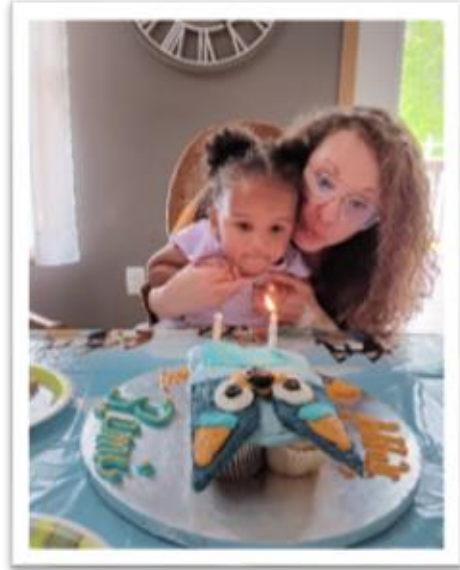
In March, Razel returned to the English Department to provide a DEI workshop for faculty and staff. Several attendees had even taught Razel during his time as a student!



# Meet the Newest Members of Our Community 2025-2026

## Prof. Lindsey Hall

Lindsey Hall is a new affiliate faculty member teaching English Education courses. She brings a range of domestic and international teaching and learning experiences to her work at GVSU. A former elementary special education teacher in Denver, Colorado, Lindsey also served as a literacy specialist and primary teacher educator with the United States Peace Corps in Uganda, East Africa. At the conclusion of her Peace Corps Service, she continued her work in Uganda as an Education Specialist with an international non-governmental organization, providing education technical support and professional development for all the organization's education related projects across the country. Transitioning back to the United States in 2019, she began her doctoral studies in Curriculum, Instruction, and Teacher Education at Michigan State University, specializing in Language and Literacy Instruction and English Language Learners. At MSU, she taught undergraduate courses in children's literature and teaching English Language Arts in the PK-6 classroom. Her doctoral dissertation is a case study of an elementary school in a Midwest US School District, analyzing how the school and district respond to the strengths and needs of newcomer multilingual students and their families. She recently concluded her work as the K-12 programs manager with the Refugee Education Center in Grand Rapids, where she designed and managed after-school and summer learning opportunities for children and youth of refugee backgrounds. Lindsey has a very energetic, independent two-year-old daughter named Remi who loves watching Bluey, reading books, writing in her notebook, and being outside. All things that her mama loves to do, too!



## Dr. Jesse Cook



Greetings! My name is Jesse Cook, and I am visiting faculty member in the English Department. I hail from the American West, where I completed my Ph.D. at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. I primarily work on early twentieth century American literature, with an emphasis on work and labor within literary fiction and drama. My research moves past the material conditions of work to focus on American literature's theorization of work as an extension of selfhood. You can read some of my scholarship in

*Modernism/Modernity* and *The Space Between*. I am also the former managing editor of the journal *MELUS*, and I am currently working for the journal *J19*. When I'm not writing, editing or teaching, I am usually at the movie theater. Come by and say "hello!" I would be happy to chat about literature, film, or our pets (I have a mischievous mutt named Dexter)!

## Allyson Albrecht



Allyson Albrecht is the new part-time Academic Department Coordinator in the English Main Office. Split between the Classics Department in the mornings and the English Department in the afternoons, she is excited to return to Lake Huron Hall after graduating from GVSU in Winter of 2020 with a BA in Theatre and Classics. Previously she has worked in banking and then for the GVSU's College of Engineering

as the Secretary of the Innovation Design Center on the Pew Campus. After office hours she has taken theatrical costume design contracts with the GVSU Theatre Department, Circle Theatre, and Aquinas Theatre Department. Originally from Karlin, Michigan, Allyson now lives in Grand Rapid with her fiancé and two cats and loves to spend her free time listening to an audio book and crocheting/sewing.

# **Innovative Teaching and Faculty Engagement**

**Faculty engagement in teaching, community, student collaboration, scholarship, and professional achievement**

## **Introducing Mindfulness for Student Well-Being**

**Dr. Amy Masko** has been teaching a course titled “Mindfulness for Student Success” (IDS 105) for the past several years. The course is a 1-credit class targeted toward first-year students at Grand Valley as a tool to help them cope with the new stresses of college. This fall she will be offering a special section targeted toward English education and PCKET majors.

The class meets for 90 minutes once per week for 8 weeks total. Students learn several different meditations that help with grounding emotions in the present moment. It also works on helping students to develop a gentle, non-judgmental approach toward emotions, which helps with mental health. Additionally, students will learn the neuroscience behind meditation.

Dr. Masko has been in education for over 30 years and knows the stress that comes with the profession all too well. Her hope is that by offering a 1-credit course like this to future elementary and secondary teachers, she can help teach the skills needed to improve the work experience for GVSU students. People who choose this career do so because of a deep desire to teach the next generation— to share their own love of literature, language, and learning. Motivation to devote themselves to this profession is strong, yet burnout can take over. She hopes this class will give students the tools to more successfully and happily navigate their education careers.

The special section for English education and PCKET majors will be offered Wednesdays in Fall 2026 from 3-4:30 PM.

# Leading Family Literacy Events in Local Schools

**Dr. Pengtong Qu** and her PCKET students have participated in the local schools' annual Family Literacy Nights since 2023. This March, they visited Zinser Elementary, where the students led interactive literacy activities in the classroom and shared take-home resources that families could explore together. The event created opportunities for families, future teachers, and the school to connect, enjoy reading and writing, and understand literacy practices that families value at home.



## Faculty-Student Collaboration in Action

**Dr. Rachel Anderson** collaborated with **Bran Hurst** over the last year and a half. They were a student in Dr. Anderson's Octavia Butler class in Fall 2024. From that class, with the support of Dr. Anderson, Bran produced a paper and presented it at the SFRA (Science Fiction Research Association) in Rochester in the summer of 2025 and was subsequently asked to submit the paper for the graduate student presentation award (there's no undergraduate category!). Later, Bran went on to present at an online digital humanities workshop and submit a paper to summer 2026 SFRA conference in Lansing, Michigan. They are also a semifinalist for an ETA Fulbright award to Vietnam.

Dr. Anderson is currently working with Bran on an independent study where they are collaboratively examining the development of science fiction fan communities and their structuring of queer speculative fictions in a variety of print and online spaces today. Part of this work will be done at Michigan State University's world-famous archive of pulp SF magazines.



## Shinian Wu Study Abroad Endowed Scholarship

With the help of the University Development Office, **Dr. Shinian Wu** set up this endowed scholarship to “provide financial help to students in all concentrations of English Studies (literature, English education, applied linguistics, and ESL) who participate in the English Department’s study-abroad programs” (Initiation Statement of the Scholarship).

Dr. Wu, whose travels have taken him to 18 countries, is a strong advocate for the internationalization for our curriculum and for our students. He believes that we live in a global society where cultures, societies, and economies are closely interconnected. Students who participate in study-abroad programs gain valuable international perspectives and insights from local cultures and people they interact with. When we visit other places, we should always learn something new and different. He cites American novelist James Michener: "If you reject the food, ignore the customs, fear the religion, and avoid the people, you might better stay home." This scholarship encourages students, through studying abroad, to eat the local food, learn the local customs, study the local religion, and talk with the local people! Taking GVSU courses in a foreign country is not merely a relocation of these courses. It’s also extracurricular learning that benefits students both personally and professionally.

The English Department currently runs two study-abroad programs: one to Cape Coast, Ghana, led by Dr. Amy Masko, and one to Maastricht, the Netherlands, led by Dr. Lindsay Ellis and Dr. Colleen Brice. Students who participate in either program can apply for this scholarship.



Study-abroad in  
Cape Coast, Ghana



Study-abroad in  
Maastricht, the Netherlands

## Faculty Award

**Dr. Brian Deyo** was the recipient of the University's Pew Teaching Excellence Award in Fall 2025 for his innovative, intellectually challenging teaching that involves and engages students through multimedia assignments, including podcasting projects and field trips.

For the past several years, he has been working on figuring out how to effectively bridge analogue pedagogies with digital multimedia storytelling projects in all the courses he teaches. For example, in ENG 105/CLA 131, "The Romans and Us: An Introduction to the Interdisciplinary Environmental Humanities," a first-year learning community (FYLC) he co-teaches with Professor Charles Ham, students engage in the practice of keeping commonplace books where they store literary extracts from their readings, make connections between course materials and field trips to places like The Highlands Nature Preserve where they document their experiences on their smart phones, then curate and translate their experiences in the course into stories in the form of a podcast they make in groups at the end of the semester.



## Popular Reads Recommended by Students

Wondering what to read this year? Students in the English Department have ideas for you.

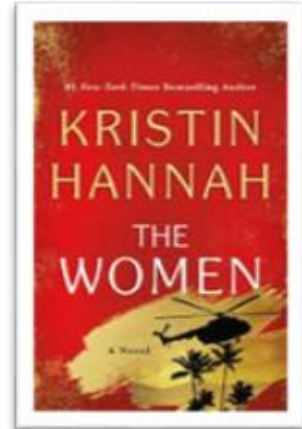
### Valentina Lopez

#### ***The Women* by Kristin Hannah**

Year of Publication: 2024

Genre: Historical Fiction

A powerful historical novel that follows a young American nurse serving in the Vietnam War as she experiences the trauma of combat, the strength of female friendship, and the challenges of returning home to a divided nation.

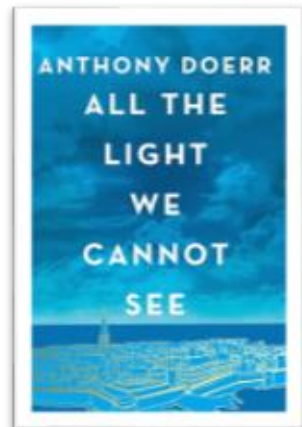


#### ***All the Light We Cannot See* by Anthony Doerr**

Year of Publication: 2014

Genre: Historical Fiction

This Pulitzer Prize–winning novel intertwines the lives of a blind French girl and a German soldier during World War II, exploring how courage, survival, and small acts of kindness persist even in the darkest moments of war.

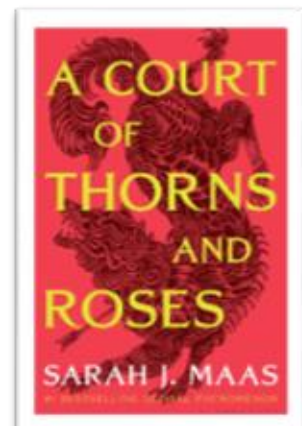


#### ***A Court of Thorns and Roses* series by Sarah J. Maas**

First Book Publication: 2015

Genre: Fantasy / Romantic Fantasy  
(Romantasy)

This bestselling fantasy series follows Feyre, a young woman drawn into a magical faerie world where political intrigue, romance, and war reshape her destiny.



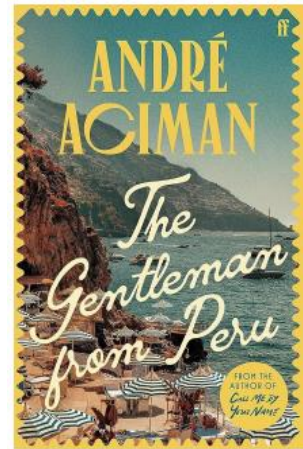
## Clare Dillon

### ***The Gentleman From Peru* by André Aciman**

Year of Publication: 2024

Genre: Fiction

Although it is a short novella, *The Gentleman from Peru* takes readers on a stunning journey through love, grief, and hope. It tells the story of a group of friends who encounter a mysterious man while on vacation. The man, who appears to possess impossible knowledge, shares the enchanting and devastating tale of his history.



### ***Blue Sisters* by Coco Mellors**

Year of Publication: 2024

Genre: Fiction

When tragedy strikes these four sisters, they struggle to fend off their own personal demons and return to each other. Like a modern-day *Little Women*, *Blue Sisters* deals with the overwhelming grief of families torn apart and the persevering love of sisters. Warning: this book will make you miss your siblings.

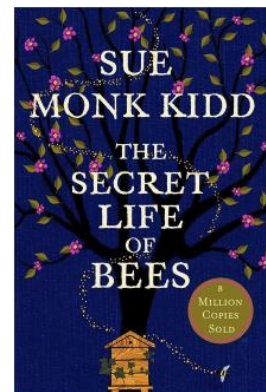


### ***The Secret Life of Bees* by Sue Monk Kidd**

Year of Publication: 2001

Genre: Fiction

When young Lily runs away from home with her nanny after their hometown becomes unsafe for both of them, she meets three miraculous, beekeeping sisters who teach her to see life differently. Set in 1964, amidst a tumultuous time of prejudice and racism, *The Secret Life of Bees* is a tale of family, faith, and womanhood.



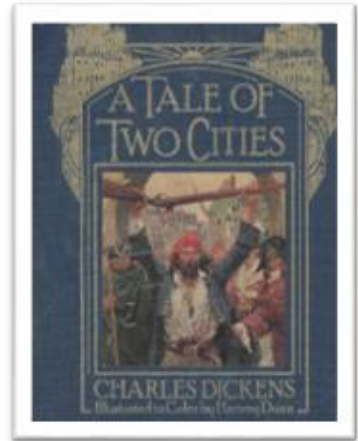
## Breyden Cantu

### ***A Tale of Two Cities* by Charles Dickens**

Year of Publication: 1859

Genre: Classic/Historical Novel

Arguably consisting of the greatest opening and closing lines in literature, this story of sacrifice, resurrection, and justice is a beautiful, consistent depiction of the French Revolution (and Dickens at some of his best writing).

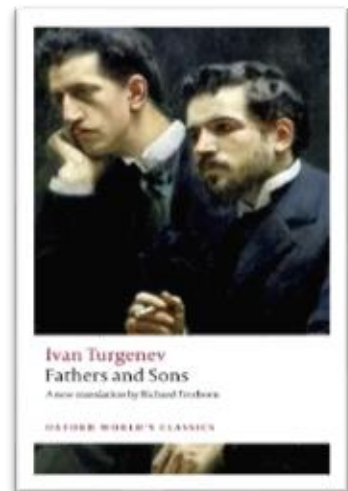


### ***Fathers and Sons* by Ivan Turgenev**

Year of Publication: 1862

Genre: Classic/Realist Novel

Along with Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, and Chekhov, Ivan Turgenev is essential to Russian literature; the book is a warm, thought-provoking read of a generational conflict against the backdrop of Russian societal change and nihilism.



### ***Where Angels Fear to Tread* by E.M. Forster**

Year of Publication: 1905

Genre: Classic/Family Drama

In my opinion, there are some very striking and beautiful language-filled novels, but then above them is the prose and work of Forster: this relatively short novel is Forster near his worst (which says a lot), preparing you for the quiet, rich greatness of his best works.

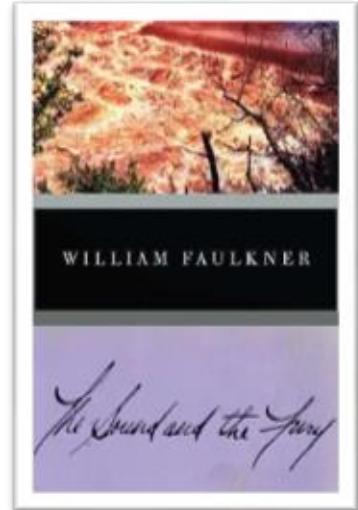


***The Sound and the Fury* by William Faulkner**

Year of Publication: 1929

Genre: Classic/Modernist Novel

To understand this is to solve one of the world's most elaborate puzzles, as Faulkner has written a great, compelling story, and perhaps the most complicated novel in literature.

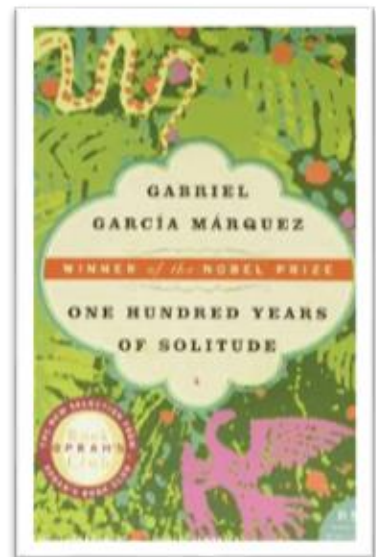


***One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel García Márquez**

Year of Publication: 1967

Genre: Magical Realism

The all-time favorite book of my brother, this novel is a fascinating short recount of a wide scope of Latin American history told through generations of one of the most well-imagined fictional families in literature.



## Looking Forward...

### Note from Dr. Brian White

#### English Department Chair Elect

Hi, everybody. I'd like to begin this note by thanking our colleague, Shinian Wu, for his hard work on behalf of the English Department during his tenure as Chair. Shinian is the 11th Chair I've had the privilege to know and observe. Like most of his predecessors, he was reluctant to assume the title and the responsibilities. Like all of his predecessors, he has done his best to support and encourage our faculty, to help us maintain and develop programs that serve our students and our communities well, and to promote the value(s) of liberal education. Please join me in thanking Shinian for his tireless efforts on our behalf.

One of my concerns in stepping into the Chair's position is that, although Shinian is my senior, I am not as spry as he is. I can't—no, I won't—promise to answer emails in the middle of the night. If I ever do, I might not be alert enough to answer others after sunrise. But like Shinian, I hope and promise to do my best.

If you have worked with me for any length of time, you already know that my best is not always very good. That lesson has been driven home to me as I have worked to reinvent myself in my more senior years. In my early 50s, I began learning Spanish. In my early 60s, I finished an additional MA (in Applied Linguistics, with the excellent linguists of our own department as my professors). Now, in my mid-60s, I'm taking piano lessons. All of these ventures into new territory have pushed me to learn, grow, try, fail, and succeed. I've tried really hard in every arena. And, from time to time, I've failed hard in every arena. In Spanish, I've been laughed at (only once, but unforgettably) by native speakers. In Applied Linguistics, I've had an article or two roundly rejected. And when it comes to piano—I'm in my third month of lessons after a 55-year hiatus—my dog has begun to howl when he sees me sitting down to practice. Most of the time, when I hit the wrong note, I know it. Sometimes, I need my teacher to point out my errors and show me how to fix and avoid them. Always, I do my best to get it right.

And sometimes, I'm grateful to say, I succeed. For example, I could have written this letter (mostly correctly) in Spanish, and were I to read the Spanish version aloud, I doubt that the natives would make fun of me. And I've published an article or two (along with Dan Brown) based on what I learned in the MA-AL. And yesterday at the piano, I played O Sole Mio perfectly, from start to finish (kind of my theme song).

In a couple of months, I'll start another new venture, this time as Chair of our community of teacher/scholars. I'll be the 12th Chair of English since I arrived in 1990. And like all those who preceded me, I'll do my best.

Brian

# 2026 Winter Newsletter Committee

## **Breyden Cantu**

I am a sophomore studying Writing and English Literature. I love stories in every form--books, film, song, spoken word, everything and anything. When I am not reading or writing, I am more than likely overanalyzing a movie or searching for new albums. I am excited to be part of the department community and to keep exploring all things literary.



## **Clare Dillon**

I am in my third year here at Grand Valley State, pursuing a Bachelor's in English with an emphasis on language and literature, along with a writing minor. When I am not working in GVSU's Writing Center, I love reading fiction books, specifically thrillers and mysteries. I had a fantastic time writing for this newsletter!



## **Valentina Lopez**

I'm a Secondary English Education major. I was born in Bolivia and moved to the U.S. when I was 13. I've always loved reading and writing, and I genuinely enjoy working with kids, so becoming a teacher feels like the perfect fit for me. I'm excited to keep growing and to help future students find their own passion for literature.



## **Pengtong Qu**

I am an Assistant Professor in the English Department who enjoys collaborating with students to create department newsletters! My recent reading interest is children's books. My little one Eirene "forces" me to explore tons of them with her every day!



## Stay Connected with the English Department



English Department,  
Grand Valley State University



@gvsuenglish



**GRAND VALLEY**  
**STATE UNIVERSITY**