Seashore Trolley Story Time engaged young audiences in the history of transportation and the role it plays in people’s lives—here, an experienced facilitator leads reading and discussion of transportation-related materials, traditional books, and a graphic novel (see page 14).

PHOTO COURTESY SEASHORE TROLLEY MUSEUM
The Maine Humanities Council—a statewide nonprofit organization—enriches the lives of Mainers through literature, history, philosophy and culture. Our programs, events, grants and online resources encourage critical thinking and conversation across social, economic and cultural boundaries.

**BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

Chair
Peter B. Webster
South Portland

Vice-chair
Patricia B. Bixel
Bangor

Treasurer
John R. Opperman
Portland

Paul Doiron
Camden

Michelle Giard Draeger
Falmouth

Daniel Gunn
New Sharon

Stephen Hayes
Portland

Kathryn Hunt
Bangor

Ann L. Kibbie
Brunswick

Thomas K. Lizotte
Dover-Foxcroft

Erica Quin-Easter
Caribou

David Richards
Skowhegan

Liam Riordan
Bangor

Richard Speer
Lewiston

Kenneth Templeton
Brunswick

Maryanne C. Ward
Pittsfield

**STAFF**

Hayden Anderson, PhD
Executive Director
hayden@mainehumanities.org

Trudy Hickey
Office and Grants Manager
trudy@mainehumanities.org

Diane Magras
Director of Development
diane@mainehumanities.org

Gina Mitchell
Program Assistant
gina@mainehumanities.org

Karen Myrick
Administrative Assistant/Receptionist
info@mainehumanities.org

Nicole Rancourt
Program Officer
nicole@mainehumanities.org

Anne Schilt
Assistant Director
annes@mainehumanities.org

Elizabeth Sinclair
Director of the Harriet P. Henry Center for the Book
lizz@mainehumanities.org

Julia Walkling
Program Officer
walkling@mainehumanities.org

Kate Webber
Development and Communications Assistant
kate@mainehumanities.org

**CALL FOR NOMINATIONS**

The Maine Humanities Council seeks to expand its list of potential nominees to fill future openings on its Board of Directors. The Council seeks a wide geographic representation and range of civic and/or academic experience. To notify the Council of your interest, please send a letter and a résumé to:

Governance Committee Chair
Maine Humanities Council
674 Brighton Avenue
Portland, ME 04102-1012

We dedicate this issue to Judith Daniels; see opposite.
On September 1, 2013, the Maine Humanities Council lost a board member and good friend, Judith Daniels of Union, Maine. An English major devoted to the works of Jane Austen, Judith was a wise voice at meetings and a firm supporter of the Council’s work. She also knew how to encourage a project and how to hold a vision up high. This came from her experience in the late '70s and '80s as a pioneer in the magazine world; in 1977, she created Savvy: The Magazine for the Executive Woman.

Published in a time when high-level working women saw little celebration for their way of life, it sought to help these women feel that ambition would be rewarded, and to foster the commitment to excellence that characterized their work. Judith brought that ability to foster a commitment to excellence to the Council and other organizations on whose boards she served. We’ve become a stronger organization thanks to her questions, ideas, and input.

Sightseeing: The Humanities around the State of Maine

You’ve heard the talk recently about a crisis in the humanities: our education system has become narrowly focused on job training and the STEM disciplines; study of humanities on campus has lost popularity to the point where faculty positions—even entire departments—are being eliminated at colleges and universities; parents are reading less to their children; our public discourse is coarsening.

You could be forgiven for concluding that the humanities are in trouble. But as I travel around the state and see what’s actually going on in our communities, I find just the opposite. This is what makes me optimistic about the health of the humanities in Maine.

Ours is a state where day-to-day engagement with the humanities is woven into the very fabric of life. This engagement is an important part of what constitutes the strong sense of place that makes Maine so special. Go to any city or town in the state, and you’ll encounter history that’s alive, arts and culture thriving in unexpected places, neighbors debating with one another about what it means to live in community.

To me, this is where the humanities live and breathe. The humanities encompass the stories we tell one another, the history we share, and the conversations we have as we wrestle with how best to live our common values. To be sure, you’ll find Mainers engaged with the humanities in every public library, historical society, and town museum throughout the state, but you’ll also find the same in every diner and coffee shop.

The Maine Humanities Council is right at the center of the thriving public humanities activity in the state. To take just one example, in the coming months towns from York to St. Agatha will be participating in the Council’s Let’s Talk Local program. Let’s Talk Local provides communities a humanities-based facilitated forum for public discussion of an issue of local concern. Topics are chosen by community members, and discussions are based around a text that raises issues pertinent to the selected topic—short prose, poetry, visual art, or a film clip that can be read or viewed by everyone on the spot.

Let’s Talk Local is just one example of how the humanities enrich and improve the lives of Mainers and their communities. I believe it’s also a great illustration of how the humanities offer a powerful approach for engaging with some of the most difficult problems we face more generally as a society. By reflecting on our history, by engaging fully with the richness of perspective offered by literature and philosophy, by exercising the skills that enable us to think critically and communicate clearly with one another—these are the ways we become more thoughtful, compassionate, and wise in our dealings with one another.

Enjoy this newsletter. As you read about some of the other great humanities programming that’s going on throughout the state, I hope you’ll be as inspired as I am by the people and organizations who champion the humanities in Maine. And I hope you’ll share my optimism about the tremendous impact the humanities can have in continuing to shape the future of our state.

Hayden Anderson, PhD
Executive Director

IN MEMORIAM: JUDITH DANIELS

On September 1, 2013, the Maine Humanities Council lost a board member and good friend, Judith Daniels of Union, Maine. An English major devoted to the works of Jane Austen, Judith was a wise voice at meetings and a firm supporter of the Council’s work. She also knew how to encourage a project and how to hold a vision up high. This came from her experience in the late ’70s and ’80s as a pioneer in the magazine world; in 1977, she created Savvy: The Magazine for the Executive Woman. Published in a time when high-level working women saw little celebration for their way of life, it sought to help these women feel that ambition would be rewarded, and to foster the commitment to excellence that characterized their work. Judith brought that ability to foster a commitment to excellence to the Council and other organizations on whose boards she served. We’ve become a stronger organization thanks to her questions, ideas, and input.
Right after my high school graduation, I spent a year abroad as a member of Up With People, a music-oriented service tour. One of the high points of that year was staying with host families in each community we visited. In those homes, we learned about each town, city, and country in far deeper and more interesting ways than hotels could have offered. We truly connected with people, who are indeed the heart of every place on this great planet. I learned the world is not as vast as I had once thought and that people are not so much divided by differences as they are connected through commonalities.

Since my return 15 (!) years ago, I’ve craved the essence of that experience. I’ve found bits here and there, but in my role as a cleverly disguised responsible adult, those encounters have been much harder to come by. It’s far more difficult to intimately experience what makes a community tick by randomly popping into homes, schools, and community hubs when you seemingly have no purpose other than a personal quest for understanding. Because of this, I eventually started to accept that I would have to learn to live with that experiential craving; I would have to ignore my hunger for that type of intellectual tourism. But then I became Program Officer for the Maine Humanities Council and started visiting Let’s Talk About It programs in libraries around Maine, where, it turns out, these unassuming gatherings offer some of the richest windows into community I’ve encountered.

I first experienced this phenomenon when I visited Naples Public Library in June. I thought I was going to participate in a discussion about Mari Tomasi’s Like Lesser Gods, which I did, but that was merely the surface of the conversation. I learned about a woman’s father who had worked in the quarries in her native state of Massachusetts. I heard about a man’s late wife and her beloved dog who now forever sleeps by her side. I listened to stories of how individuals and their families came to the area: Polish grandparents, Italian parents, and French millworkers. We talked of acceptance, priority, relationships, and the meaning of hard work. The sixteen of us were bound together by real emotions sparked by a work of fiction. I’ve visited Naples on a few occasions before to see the lovely sites of Sebago, browse shops, and grab a bite to eat. The first time I felt as though I actually truly saw Naples, however, was the hour and a half I spent with the members of the Naples Public Library book group.

Recognizing the positive impact this event had on me, I drove to Winslow Public Library two weeks later hoping the enchantment and kinship generated by my first Let’s Talk conversation wasn’t a fluke. I wasn’t disappointed. The small, diverse group gathered to discuss The Minutemen and Their World by Robert Gross, an intensely researched and detailed historical account of the industrious and isolated townspeople of Concord, MA, during the Revolutionary period. Meeting just a week following Independence Day, the discussion began with connections to the principles founding our country and perspectives on past and current notions of patriotism and who we are as a nation. The images of Fort Halifax surrounding us in the library’s meeting room stimulated conversations about the area’s history and its relationship to the timeline of the Revolution.

The most powerful piece of these relationships turned out to be that, despite generational differences, gender lines, demographics, or any other of our standard societal divisions, we all connected with the core of the human element of individuals from 250 years ago. Beneath the carefully presented statistics and facts, we uncovered truths about the lives of people that we could all relate to. We discovered that the relationships between adolescents and their parents, pressures young adults face, challenges between neighbors, and both the conflicts and camaraderie between community members are timeless. In just a short amount of time, we broadened
The deep connectedness between participants of these facilitated discussions continued to present itself when I visited both Shaw Public Library in Greenville and Princeton Public Library’s Let’s Talk About It groups. I arrived in Greenville for a conversation about Eva Hoffman’s Lost In Translation. This memoir about a Polish immigrant and her struggle to develop a sense of self and place ended up sparking an extremely vibrant and emotional dialogue that could have lasted well beyond the allotted two-hour meeting time. Greenville may appear to be a small quiet town on Moosehead Lake, but their Let’s Talk About It group is delightfully well attended by enthusiastic and insightful participants. After more than a decade of participation, this book group has formed a deeply supportive bond that fosters trust, compassion, and tolerance. What’s more, this extends to newer members as well as visitors. Our discussion began with general reactions to the book and quickly developed into the sharing of personal stories of feeling “lost in translation.” We listened to individual accounts of moving and assimilation, adjusting to life after the death of a spouse, and the trials of growing up. We talked about how a culture’s definition varies between family, neighborhood, town, state, region, and time. We grappled with the notion of our own sense of place— with those people and areas that have defined who we are. And, in doing so, we recognized the power of community.

Like Greenville, Princeton’s group was formed years ago and has become a highlight of each participant’s summer. This small but mighty collection of folks held a weighty and touching conversation about small town life based on Richard Russo’s Empire Falls. The links between remarkably similar. As one gentleman commented, this story “brought back memories of when I was little, living in a small town where everybody knew everybody.” He grew up in southern New England in the 1930s, but somehow we all knew precisely where he was coming from.

I feel extremely lucky and grateful for having the honor of experiencing these amazing slices of Maine in such an intimate way. It is clear that books and discussions allow us to connect with each other in seemingly magical ways. They turn our vulnerabilities into acceptable links that make us all human. We can share personal experiences through characters, both fictional and real, who expose their secrets and lives freely. Suddenly, we realize we are no longer talking about the books, we are talking about ourselves. It is at this moment when we become a community.

“IT IS CLEAR THAT BOOKS AND DISCUSSIONS ALLOW US TO CONNECT WITH EACH OTHER IN SEEMINGLY MAGICAL WAYS.”

Nicole Rancourt, once a middle school teacher of the humanities, joined the MHC as a program officer last spring. This article first appeared in the September 2013 issue of our eNewsletter and blog Notes from an Open Book.
What does *A Streetcar Named Desire*, a play written 47 years ago about a family in New Orleans, have to say to Mainers today? Quite a lot, it turns out. There has been a lot of debate about the value of the humanities in the press recently, with many questioning their relevance. The over 300 audience members who attended MHC’s performance and discussion of the play last April as part of our domestic violence initiative had no such concerns. They experienced the vitality of the humanities as they discussed scenes from a play that raised many difficult questions connected to this critical issue in Maine. The play provided a way to talk about a very difficult issue. Audience members in three communities across the state listened to one another, shared questions, and spoke from their hearts.

Last fall, the MHC began a new domestic violence initiative as part of its longstanding *Literature & Medicine* program. The initiative seeks to engage both the public and health care professionals in discussion of this issue. It will also provide support for the variety of professionals who care for those suffering from domestic violence, including advocates and those working in the legal, judiciary, and health care fields. We could not do this alone, so we asked members of the Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence (MCEDV), who have worked long and hard to raise awareness and engage Mainers in discussion of this issue, to partner with us. They agreed and have been educating our staff and our other partners, helping shape our public programming and informing all that we do. We also turned to the Elmina B. Sewall Foundation and the Maine Community Foundation for support that, combined with funds donated to MHC’s Fund for *Literature & Medicine*, made this work possible.

The performance and discussion of *A Streetcar Named Desire* was the first part of the domestic violence initiative, which was focused on engaging the public. The MHC commissioned Outside the Wire, a nationally renowned social impact theater company, to develop a piece focused on this theme. The MHC has worked with them before, most recently bringing them to Maine in 2011 to perform “Theater of War” and “End of Life.” However, this was the first time that we have been involved in the development of one of their performances from the ground up. MHC staff and members of the MCEDV worked closely with Outside the Wire to identify key issues that the performance needed to focus on, select the play and scenes to be performed, develop the questions for the audience, and identify appropriate panelists. This collaboration resulted in performances of two scenes from Tennessee Williams’ *A Streetcar Named Desire* for the public in Bangor, Lewiston, and Portland.

The play, set in the 40s, takes place in the small French Quarter apartment of Stella and Stanley Kowalski. In the two scenes selected for the performance and discussion, Blanche DuBois has come to stay with her sister Stella and is critical of her living conditions and husband, Stanley. The audience begins to share Blanche’s concerns when Stanley yells at Stella and slaps her after she requests that he and his friends end a late night poker game. Stanley’s anger escalates over the course of the evening as she refuses to comply with his demands for quiet. He finally
becomes so enraged that he beats her, only stopping when, with difficulty, he is pulled away by his friends. Horrified, Blanche takes Stella to a neighbor’s home. When Stanley recovers himself and realizes that Stella is gone, he breaks down in tears, yelling her name and asking her to come back to him. She does. The next day, Blanche confronts Stella and tells her that she must leave Stanley. But Stella refuses, stating that Blanche just does not understand either Stanley or their relationship. She makes it clear that she is staying, and the scene ends with Stella, whom we learn is pregnant, defiantly embracing Stanley in front of Blanche.

The actors’ powerful staged reading made the scenes come to life. After the performance, Outside the Wire’s Bryan Doerries facilitated a discussion of the scenes with each audience and a small panel of community members (including domestic violence prevention advocates, law enforcement, and medical professionals).

So what were the discussions like? Powerful. In each, audiences explored key issues, questions, and misperceptions related to domestic violence. While many things were discussed, the audiences at each site focused on these major questions:

- Why would someone stay in an abusive relationship? What is the role of bystanders? And how can we best help someone in this situation and end the cycle of violence? Bryan Doerries created a supportive atmosphere for discussion of this difficult issue and asked people to respond to the play from their hearts. This helped many audience members feel comfortable to do just that—they shared their questions, viewpoints, insights, and even occasionally their own experiences in the process of exploring this issue with one another. This, and the comments what was depicted in the play was very familiar. At one site, an audience member added that we need to remember that abuse doesn’t happen only to certain people, those on the “other” side of the fence, neighborhood, or town. “Any one of us, no matter what our class, education, gender, race, age, orientation, religion, or job, can be victims, abusers, and bystanders. We are not talking about ‘others’; we are talking about us.”

Audience members expressed frustration with Stella, who, though pregnant and beaten by her husband, chose to return to him. “Why doesn’t...
may remain in an abusive situation. She pointed out Stanley’s controlling behaviors — for example, he controlled their finances and set the rules for the household. Stella was also pregnant, making leaving more complicated. She had nowhere to go. And she may have believed that he was sorry, that the “real” Stanley emerged when he broke down in tears, and that he will not do this again. “And it is important to remember that there is love, too,” she added. “If there was only the abuse, she would not be with him.”

What can a family member or bystander do? In the play, Blanche risked her relationship with her sister by demanding that Stella leave Stanley. Her efforts were unsuccessful and pushed Stella further away from her. When Doerries asked the audience what went wrong and what Blanche could have done differently, it prompted a police officer who works on domestic violence cases to point out that Blanche’s harsh, judgmental tone only served to further alienate Stella, who has already been isolated. Rather than telling her what to do, Blanche could have expressed concern for the safety of Stella and the baby, asked Stella how she feels about what happened, let her know that she is there for her, and listened — all allowing Stella to have some control in a situation where that has been systematically taken from her by Stanley. There was also a lot of discussion about how Stanley’s friends were complicit in the violence by alternately remaining silent or making light of it, and what they might have done differently. This led audience members at each performance to share their own concerns about what to do when witnessing abuse — they did not want to be complicit by their silence, but were uncertain what their role should be, fearing that they might make the situation worse. Advocates reminded all that help lines are not only for those suffering abuse; they are also for anyone — bystanders, family, friends, co-workers, neighbors, providers — trying to help someone.

Other audience members were clearly struck by Stanley’s vulnerability when he broke down. Some wondered what had happened in his past to make him so violent and how he could be helped. When asked by facilitator Bryan Doerries, some felt that Stanley was genuinely sorry for what he had done. At one site, an audience member asked everyone to remember what Stanley had done. “The bottom line is that he has beaten his wife, and that is never acceptable. Period.”

A panelist who is an advocate pointed out that Stanley was exhibiting classic behaviors of an abuser throughout the scenes presented by the actors: controlling and manipulative behavior followed by a tearful apology when faced with the potential loss of control over Stella. This included a display of tenderness combined with a gift (in this case, money) as recompense — both are tools used by an abuser to maintain control over the victim by drawing her back in.
“If there were not moments like this, why would she stay? And was Stanley in despair over his violence toward Stella, or that she had left and might get out of his control?”

The project isn’t over. In the upcoming year, the MHC will be holding reading and discussion groups based on the L&M model with a variety of professionals who care for those affected by domestic violence. These groups will include staff at domestic abuse prevention organizations, healthcare, judiciary, and law enforcement, with readings that will raise issues they face in their work caring for people suffering from domestic violence.

The following are our partners for and some of their comments regarding this special project.

**Domestic Violence Prevention Organizations**

**Amanda Cost**, Program Coordinator, Spruce Run: Penobscot County

**Julia Colpitts**, Executive Director, Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence: Statewide

**Emily Gormley**, Public Awareness and Community Support Coordinator, Caring Unlimited: York County

As we continue to find new and different ways to work together and raise awareness, we continue to move closer toward our goal of bringing an end to domestic violence in Maine!

**Cynthia Freeman Cyr**, Executive Director, WomanCare: Piscataquis County

Having the opportunity to partner with the Maine Humanities Council on the production of *A Streetcar Named Desire* furthers our investment in the performing and visual arts as a powerful tool for engaging the public in a discussion of the dynamics of domestic violence. …Live drama of the caliber that we witnessed in April cannot be kept at arm’s length and draws the audience into a relationship requiring them to respond.

**Rebecca Hobbs**, Executive Director, Next Step Domestic Violence Project: Washington & Hancock Counties

**Jane Morrison**, Executive Director, Safe Voices: Androscoggin, Franklin & Oxford Counties

…we see this dynamic time and time again. Why do the victims stay? They stay because they have nowhere else to go, they stay because they are financially dependent, they stay because of children, and they stay because they are so mentally or physically beaten down and controlled that they think they cannot exist on their own.

**Matthew Perry**, Assistant Team Leader, Young Adult Abuse Prevention Program, Family Crisis Services: Cumberland County

Domestic Violence is a learned behavior…. We are instructed quite loudly throughout our lives that violence is wrong and we should never hurt someone else, especially those we love and especially women. But at the same time we all receive consistent subtle messages from our culture and daily lives that trump that lesson and justify violence against our loved ones, especially women. …We need more community members to be aware of the issue, become an active bystander and prepare to offer support and resources to a family member, co-worker, or community member.

**Lois Reckitt**, Executive Director, Family Crisis Services: Cumberland County

Outside the Wire

**Bryan Doerries**, Artistic Director

If there’s one thing that I’ve learned from listening to our community partners in Maine, it’s that domestic violence can be a profoundly isolating and shameful experience.

**Phyllis Kaufman**, Producing Director

Independent Scholar

**Jean Sanborn**

To learn more about domestic violence and what you can do to help, visit the Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence online at mcedv.org.

24-hour Helpline: Each domestic violence prevention project across Maine encourages people dealing with abuse, community members trying to help someone, and social service providers to use the help line covered by staff and trained volunteers. People can receive help safety-planning, information about options, crisis counseling, emotional support, and advocacy.

From Area Code 207
1-866-834-HELP
1-800-437-1220 (RELAY)

National Hotline
1-800-799-7233
1-800-787-3224 (TTY)
The Digital Age, with its new networks, technologies, and modes of communication, is alternatively posited as the future and the demise of the humanities. On one hand, its capabilities promise to aggrandize the humanities and its endeavors; online classrooms, ePublishing, virtual archives, and other developments can expand the reach and deepen the inquiries of literature, history, and art. At the same time, the Digital Age is accused of catapulting the humanities into a state of crisis. This era and the changes it engenders have been linked to phenomena from the death of the book to the decline of the music industry. Many worry that modern technology, mobile communication, and the multi-tasking they demand have distracted us from the larger questions—ontological and moral—that the humanities beg us to consider. Against this backdrop, skeptics of the Digital Age often regard the humanities as our last hope, the thing that might save us from a dystopian digitized future.

Compelling arguments have been made for each of these positions. But ultimately, I’d like to consider a different, less polarized narrative. In this piece, I bring together texts that I hope will lead us to a more nuanced understanding of the interactions between the humanities and the Digital Age, without glossing over the tensions that exist between them.

In March 2011 and April 2012, MIT Social Scientist Sherry Turkle delivered speeches at two major TEDx conferences. Turkle has studied the effects of technology on society for over thirty years, and the talks—entitled “Alone Together” (2011) and “Connected but Alone” (2012)—express her growing concerns about life in the Digital Age. Both talks shift the focus away from the alluring opportunities our new technologies offer, asking us to consider instead what is lost in the present era of constant, digitized communication:

*Technology is seductive when its affordances meet our human vulnerabilities. And it turns out we are very vulnerable indeed. We are lonely but fearful of intimacy. Connectivity offers for many of us the illusion of companionship without the demands of friendship. We can't get enough of each other if—we can have each other at a distance in amounts we can control... [If we can] hide from each other even as we are continually connected to each other. To put it too simply, we would rather text than talk. Online connections bring so many bounties, but our lives of continual connection also leave us lonely. Often we are too busy communicating to think. (Turkle, “Connected but Alone”)*

In the digitized world, intimacy and conversation wane. We're caught in a treacherous cycle: as a culture we find ourselves lonelier than ever, yet we've forgotten how to fill those voids through real-time, face-to-face connection. Moreover, our mobile technologies have propelled us into a state of perpetual distraction, diminishing our capacity for self-reflection and critical thinking. Flooded by superficial communication, we find ourselves distant, preoccupied, and paradoxically, alone.

Turkle’s claims are perceptive and imperative. Her words will undoubtedly resonate with anyone who has ever found his or her focus fragmented by ringtones and notifications or felt a friendship shrink to a string of text messages and Facebook exchanges.

For those with a vested interest in the humanities, Turkle’s arguments hold an additional significance. “We confront a paradox,” she asserts, in which “we insist that our world is increasingly...
complex, yet we’ve created a communications culture that has decreased the time available for us to sit and think uninterrupted. We ramp up the volume and velocity of communication, but we start to expect fast answers, and yet in order to get them we ask each other simpler questions, we start to dumb down our communication, even on the most important matters. Shakespeare might have said, ‘we are consumed by that which we are nourished by’ (‘Alone Together’). Truncating our space for expression and our time for contemplation, digital communication curtails the complex questions that form the crux of the humanities. From this vantage, the future of literature, philosophy, history, and the like seems bleak indeed.

I find it interesting, too, that Turkle turns to Shakespeare at this moment in her speech. This impulse to return to the classics is a trend among those who recognize the ominous implications the Digital Age yields—both for society at large and for the humanities specifically. In his recent defense of the humanities in Scientific American, John Horgan argues that “it is precisely because science is so powerful that we need the humanities now more than ever.”

He goes on to describe the humanities-based course he offers to freshmen at the Stevens Institute of Technology. The course syllabus “includes Sophocles, Plato, Thucydides, Shakespeare, Descartes, Hobbes, Locke, Kant, Mill, Marx, Nietzsche, William James, Freud, Keynes, Eliot.” This list of the “Greatest Hits of Western Civilization” again illustrates the desire to hone in on the classics when confronted with the perils of the Digital Age.

There is an undeniable logic to this urge. Overwhelmed by the complexities of the Digital Age, we seek out the great works that exist beyond it, unsullied by its complications. Such texts offer us familiarity, clarity, and, in many cases, insight: digital technology and communication do indeed nourish and consume us simultaneously. The fact that Shakespeare’s words lend themselves so completely to our current paradox is a testament to the timelessness of his prose. And yet, perhaps there are other texts—texts born in and from the Digital Age—that are in some ways better suited to articulate and examine the specific challenges this era holds.

Take, for example, Lidia Yuknavitch’s 2012 novel, Dora: A Headcase, which features a sassy and alienated video-artist coming of age in Seattle. The lines between the digital and unmediated reality blur in the high-tech world of Dora and her peers, and Yuknavitch’s protagonist proves strikingly aware of how technology defines her experience:

“You know what? Seventeen is no place to be. You want to get out, you want to shake off a self like old dead skin. You want to take bow things are and chuck it like a rock… You stuff your ears with ear buds blasting music so loud it’s beyond hearing, it’s just the throb and heat and slam and pound and scream of bodies on the edge of adult. You text your head off. You guerilla film. We live through sound and light—through our technologies.

On one level, Dora’s words evoke familiar tropes of the marginalized, searching American teenager (and indeed, reviewers of the novel have noted the similarities between Dora and Heller’s Holden Caulfield). But this passage—with its references to texting and guerilla filmmaking, and with its astute imagining of a self constructed through sound and light—departs from established literary conventions in important ways. With Dora, Yuknavitch plunges us into a fictional realm in which intimacy, expression, agency, and art prove inextricable from the technologies that produce and transmit them. By weaving culturally specific technologies into the fabric of its narrative, the novel offers a fictional framework to explore the intricacies of the Digital Age.

A project generated by Yuknavitch’s contemporary on the Portland, Oregon literary scene, Cheryl Strayed, offers a final ground for considering the new interactions between the humanities and the Digital Age. Best-known for her luminous, immensely popular memoir Wild: From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail, Strayed is also the writer of a lesser-known collection of texts: a web-based advice column entitled “Dear Sugar.” Fearless, revealing,
and beautifully crafted, Strayed’s column departs from the conventions of the advice genre in significant ways. In turn, her audience—the virtual community of readers that gathers to receive her guidance—defies expectations of internet commentary and communication. In these ways, “Dear Sugar” provides intriguing counterpoints to Turkle’s fears about the Digital Age.

One of my favorite Sugar columns is called “The Obliterated Place.” In it, the letter writer is so heart-broken over the premature death of his son that he is unable to compose his thoughts in traditional letter form. Instead, he offers Sugar a list. Here are some excerpts:

1. I don’t have a definite question for you. I am a sad, angry man whose son died. I want him back.
2. I’m a father while not being a father. Most days it feels like my grief is going to kill me, or maybe it already has. I’m a living dead dad.
3. Your column has helped me go on. I have faith in my version of God and I pray every day, and the way I feel when I’m in my deepest prayer is the way I feel when I read your words, which feel sacred to me.
4. I will understand if you choose not to answer my letter. Most people, kind as they are, don’t know what to say to me, so why should you?

Turkle claims that we “use technology to dial down human contact,” and she fears that the Internet exemplifies this impulse: online we can “bail out of the physical real,” project identities that conceal our vulnerabilities, and interact with masses of people in insubstantial ways. And she’s right. We could call upon countless examples of cyber-bullying, snarky comment boards, and web-based hate speech to further illustrate the fact that the internet can be a landscape of loneliness, disconnect, thoughtlessness, and fear. But what the above letter demonstrates is that the Internet can also be a ground for vulnerability and humanity.

What Sugar’s response to the letter demonstrates is that profound connection and extraordinary art are also possible through the mediums of the Digital Age. Her answer mirrors the list configuration of the letter:

Dear Living Dead Dad,
1. I don’t know how you go on without your son, sweet pea. I only know that you do. And you have. And you will.
2. Your shattering sorrowlight of a letter is proof of that.
3. You don’t need me to tell you how to be human again. You are there, in all of your humanity, shining unimpeachably before every person reading these words right now.
4. I am so sorry for your loss. I am so sorry for your loss. I am so sorry for your loss.
9. Small things such as this have saved me: how much I love my mother—even after all these years. How powerfully I carry her within me. My grief is tremendous but my love is bigger. So is yours.

To grasp the full significance of Sugar’s column for the relationship between the humanities and the digital, however, we must look even more closely at her language. Because while “shattering sorrowlight of a letter” and “Sugar is the temple I built in my obliterated place” and “let your dead boy be your most profound revelation” move us because they strike at truth, so much of their power also lies in their aesthetic force. Each sentence Sugar offers rails against the linguistic laziness of the Digital Age, reassuring us that art and literature can indeed thrive here.

There it is again, that oppositional language. Sugar “rails against” the
prevailing tendencies of the Digital Age, and it's impossible to do justice to the radical emotional, political, and artistic work that she does without acknowledging the unique challenges of the contemporary moment. But still, we can't lose sight of the fact that the community of “Sugarland” exists as it does not in spite but because of the conditions of the Digital Age. This virtual space is one of simultaneous disclosure and anonymity, a realm removed from the immediacy of real time, where people nevertheless delve deeply into very real predicaments and pain. Like Yuknavitch’s Dora, the virtual/textual world of Sugarland emerges from loneliness and doubt of the Digital Age, and it is constructed through the new mediums this era offers.

As Horgan notes, the need for the humanities intensifies in our contemporary lives. And the “classic” humanities texts continue to instruct us and accrue new meanings in the Digital Age, just as they always have. Let's continue to lean on their wisdom. But let's look, too, to other texts— to the multimedia, the experimental, and the not-yet-canonized. In these exciting, imaginative territories, synergetic exchanges between the digital and the humanities thrive.

A 2011 Bates graduate, Gina Mitchell worked in social justice before joining the MHC as a program assistant last winter.
**SELECTED GRANTS:**
**JANUARY THROUGH OCTOBER 2013**

The Maine Humanities Council’s grant program assists non-profit organizations in Maine develop public projects that incorporate one or more humanities disciplines. We’re particularly interested in supporting projects that are collaborative, stimulate meaningful community dialogue, attract diverse audiences, are participatory and engaging, and invite discovery of the humanities in interesting and exciting ways. These pages highlight some of our recent grants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BANGOR</th>
<th>DENMARK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>$10,000</strong> Exhibition Display Upgrades</td>
<td><strong>$1,000</strong> Stories From the Past; Sounds From the Future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Bangor Museum and History Center will increase its visibility and ability to display its collections to the public in a city-wide exhibition through the purchase of lightweight, modular exhibit display walls and lighting. By having the ability to display more objects simultaneously throughout Bangor, the entire city becomes the gallery and everyday immersion occurs for the public in unexpected, high traffic areas.</td>
<td>In collaboration with Northeast Historic Film in Bucksport, new scores will be created for several archival films about Maine. The film premiere will include a panel discussion to expand upon the images while considering issues of Maine’s cultural history and future, role as a cultural ecosystem, and future as an icon of Americana.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**LEFT:** Stanley R. Howe, Executive Director Emeritus of BHS, is shown with Eben Miller, History / Honors Program Coordinator at Southern Maine Community College. Miller presented “Nelson Dingley, Jr.’s Daily Evening Journal,” a talk which explored the extent to which experiences in Lewiston and Maine were emblematic of the Northern home front during the first years of the Civil War. His talk paid special attention to soldiers’ news from the war front, expressions of Unionism, economic and cultural developments, and the evolution of emancipation as a wartime policy. PHOTOS COURTESY BETHEL CITIZEN; INSET: Along Maine’s Appalachian Trail was a reference for a topic in the lecture series.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BETHHEL</th>
<th>KENNEBUNKPORT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>$500</strong> Trails, Trials, and Tourism: Capturing the Maine Experience</td>
<td><strong>$500</strong> Seashore Trolley Story Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This series of five lectures (Apr. 13 – Oct. 12, 2013) coincided with the commemoration of the Civil War Sesquicentennial plus several noteworthy events around Bethel. Topics included: Teaching the Civil War in Maine, Northern Civil War Home Front, Western Maine’s Mountains &amp; Hudson River School, The Appalachian Trail in Maine, and Emergence &amp; Impact of Auto Tourism.</td>
<td>This program was designed to engage young audiences in the history of transportation and the role it plays in people’s lives. Elementary school students read and discussed transportation-related materials, traditional books, and a graphic novel, led by an experienced facilitator. A narrated ride on a restored vintage streetcar enhanced their experience and understanding of the museum’s work, too. A goal of the project was to attract new audiences. The report wrote, “Not only did the program increase visitor counts, including people who had never come here before, but our volunteers who operate the streetcars, and without whom we could not stay in business, were also very energized and grateful to have lots of children, parents and grandparents to share the museum with!”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**LEFT:** Along Maine’s Appalachian Trail was a reference for a topic in the lecture series.

**RIGHT:** Perfect attendance is awarded with travel mugs to these grandparents, juice cups to their grandchildren, and locomotive-shaped biscuits for their pint-sized dog.

---

**STAY APPRISED OF MAINE- AND HUMANITIES-RELATED CURIOSITIES OF ALL KINDS, INCLUDING NEWS AND EVENTS!**

**FOLLOW**
- Follow us on Twitter: @MaineHumanities

**LIKE**
- Like us on Facebook: Maine Humanities Council
Alex Brown, grad student and intern for Schoodic Arts for All, has installed a book with each photo in the exhibit, inviting townfolk to write their stories in each. She is transcribing and compiling them into a book that SAA will publish and give to the local historical society.

**NORTH BRIDGEWOOD**

$300 | Burnt into Memory: Stories of the Brownfield Fire

As part of a series of Maine History programs in the fall of 2013, the library sponsored a presentation by storyteller and oral historian Jo Radner. Her subject was the memories of residents during the terrible Maine wildfires of 1947 and the related issues of community responsibility in times of disaster. The audience was invited to share their own memories of the fire.

[North Bridgton Public Library](#)

**PORTLAND**

$1,000 | Victorian Fair

On September 8, 2013, a diverse range of scholars, tradespeople, and performers from across New England assembled on the Mansion lawn to offer historically accurate demonstrations of arts, technologies, and literature of the Victorian period. This learning event for all ages provided context for the Mansion’s spectacular original 19th century interiors and decorative arts.

[Victoria Mansion](#)

**WINTER HARBOR**

$5,350 | Winter Harbor Historic Photo Project with Penobscot Marine Museum

This joint project included a photography exhibit (July through August 2013) featuring 45 photographs made from glass negatives in the Penobscot Marine Museum collection. The photos showed daily life in the Winter Harbor area dating from the early 1900s. Local students are using the exhibit, artifacts, and related oral history activities as a research project for the local historical society.

[Schoodic Arts for All](#)

**PRESQUE ISLE**

$800 | Visiting Author Series

As part of the annual writer series and Common Read program at Edmunds Library on the NMCC campus, Maine author Monica Wood visited on April 24, 2013. Monica gave a presentation, read from her book When We Were the Kennedys, and held a book signing in the library (open to the general public). She also visited an Advanced Composition class at NMCC.

[Northern Maine Community College](#)
WINTER WEEKEND 2014: CRIME AND PUNISHMENT
BY FYODOR DOSTOEVSKY
MARCH 7 - 8, 2014
BOWDOIN COLLEGE
BRUNSWICK, MAINE

Can murder be a moral act, leading to a social good? Do those of powerful moral capacity have the right to murder lesser human beings toward such an aim? A positive answer to these questions leads Rodion Raskolnikov to murder his pawnbroker and her sister, but he can’t take his theory all the way: the very act of murder shakes him so much that he leaves her wealth and flees, a hunted man in more than one sense.

Fyodor Dostoevsky’s Crime and Punishment (1866) is a thriller, a crime novel, and a classic of Russian psychological realism. The brutal squalor, haunted moral struggles, and case against Russian radicalism are hallmarks of Dostoevsky’s mature work. They also create a swift-paced story and characters that feel achingly real.

Join the Maine Humanities Council in March 2014 to enter Dostoevsky’s dark world of moral conflict during the 2014 Winter Weekend.

Winter Weekend is a humanities experience that, through lectures and discussions, unites historians, writers, artists, public intellectuals, and others to help us understand each year’s book in its rich historical and cultural context. We will be reading the 1993 Vintage Classics edition of Crime and Punishment, a translation by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky. Local libraries and bookstores may also be able to provide a recorded version.

Sign up soon; this event often has a waiting list!

For more information or to register, visit www.mainehumanities.org/programs/2014.html (a printable registration form is available online).