Winter Weekend lends context to and community around reading a work of literature. Learn about its lingering impact on two Orono teachers on page 6 and get the details about the MHC’s next Winter Weekend on the back cover. PHOTO: DAN D’IPPOLITO
The Maine Humanities Council, a statewide non-profit organization, uses the humanities—literature, history, philosophy, and culture—as a tool for positive change in Maine communities.

Our programs and grants encourage critical thinking and conversations across social, economic, and cultural boundaries.

A LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The Maine Humanities Council
is an affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Editor: Diane Magras
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On Listening

For two days in mid-September, the Maine Humanities Council brought together cohorts of program facilitators for orientation, training, and fellowship. Some of the topics were technical, such as tools and approaches—for leading group discussions of ancient poetry, to mention just one example. Other topics were more practical: what can we do to create a “vibe in the room” that will be conducive to participants making meaningful connections with one another and the text? Throughout, the conversation was driven by the MHC’s desire to live out as fully as possible our vision of Maine’s communities transformed by the power and pleasure of ideas.

The MHC has a statewide network of facilitators, folks with expertise at leading group discussions and creating spaces where people can connect. Our facilitators make the scope and breadth of MHC programming possible. From Bethel to Lubec, from St. Agatha to York, if you have ever attended an MHC program, you probably have a pretty good idea about how important the role of the facilitator is.

Right now in Houlton’s Cary Library, *Let’s Talk About It* participants are reading about and discussing the relationship between health care providers and patients. In South Paris’s *New Books, New Readers*, adults who struggle with literacy are exploring what it means to be a pioneer in this country, past and present.

In Rockland, community members are gathering in *Think & Drink* to talk about the unique “nations” or groups within a community and how they interact.

At our facilitator trainings back in September, I heard again and again one of the most important tricks of the trade: that effective facilitation has more to do with listening than speaking; usually the most important thing a facilitator can do is to ask questions and leave room for responses, rather than delivering a classroom lecture.

The MHC offers a wide variety of programming that can take many different forms, but at its core, we bring Mainers together to talk and listen.

You can read more about the MHC’s work and even get the perspective of a program facilitator in these pages. Thank you for your support of the Maine Humanities Council.

Hayden Anderson
*Executive Director*
It's a simple idea, really, to orchestrate a conversation about some important topic, with a few drinks and some experts. An audience assembles in a friendly, sociable space that serves drinks, and settles in. A moderator introduces a small panel of two or three people with relevant expertise and prompts them to speak briefly to the issue at hand, then invites the audience to discuss the issue amongst themselves in small groups. After twenty minutes or so, the group reconvenes — audience and panelists — and spends some time having a single, larger conversation. Then it’s over. People linger or spill out into the night.

But behind each successful Think & Drink session lies a surprising amount of careful thought, deliberate planning, and deft interpersonal skills. To begin with, the topic on the table must be large enough to be compelling to a wide range of people, but small enough to be given a clear name; it must be able to stand alone, but also find a meaningful place in a series; it must be important both to people in general and to the specific people who live in Maine communities. The current series was developed in close consultation with scholars and MHC staff. It is centered on citizenship, and each session explores how citizenship is shaped by particular issues: climate change, inequality, dissent.

These are the topics for this year’s Think & Drink sessions all across the state, but the conversations that take place around them are molded to suit the particular communities in which they occur.

In Bangor this year, the setting is Nocturnum Drafthaus, a local hotspot that offers local beer, live music, and good food for not much money on days like Taco Tuesday. It’s a place people like to come to and relax.

Our moderator in Bangor is Dr. Darren J. Ranco, Associate Professor of Anthropology, as well as Director of Native American Studies and Coordinator of Native American Research, at the University of Maine at Orono. Darren lives in Bangor’s close neighbor Orono, where he also grew up — a townie, a member of the Penobscot Indian Nation. He left when he was 17 and stayed away for 20 years, while he attended college and graduate school and began his career, until it was time to move home. Darren thus brings to each Think & Drink discussion both broad professional expertise and a deep understanding of the local community, as well as his considerable charm.

In planning a session, Darren is keenly aware that while the topic must be roomy in order to invite people into the conversation, when it comes time to actually talk, there must be particular narratives and perspectives to allow a way in. For his September session on “Citizens and the Climate,” Darren sought out two perspectives grounded in Mainers’ own experience: that of Long Island lobsterman Steve Train and of people-focused climate activist Andy Burt, whose current work is the Down to Earth Storytelling Project.

Each session’s audience is also particular, and every time a surprise. The events are free, and registration is not required. People come with a range of investments and experiences around the session’s topic: some with deep knowledge and committed views, but others are just interested, or curious, or come along with a friend, or happen by.

As he does this work, Darren thinks
“People come with a range of investments and experiences…”

a great deal about how the cultural landscape of Bangor seems to be reshaping itself. This has been happening for a long time. Even as recent census data suggests the population of the city is declining, the work of the Downtown Bangor Partnership is showing real positive effects. Bangor now hosts a successful concert series and supports arts events in a variety of ways—and there’s a burgeoning local beer scene, with a growing roster of excellent local breweries and a lively annual beer festival.

In locating Think & Drink amid all this, Darren starts by comparing it with Green Drinks. In Bangor, that group meets at a different brewery or pub and arranges targeted project work at places like the local homeless shelter. Darren says, “Green Drinks is a social group that also Does Good” (capital letters seem to be implied)—“but Think & Drink is different. It’s more like a salon.”

But what, one might well ask, does it do?

When the stage is set and the event begins, Darren aims to create a series of ‘lens-turning moments.’

The first such moment happens as the panelists speak in “Citizens and the Climate.” When Steve Train describes what he sees from his boat in Casco Bay, everyone—however much they already know or don’t know about climate change—has their existing lens turned, refocusing on Steve’s particular experience.

A second moment comes when the members of the audience turn to listen to each other and a third when the group reconvenes as a whole. In this iterative process the lens sometimes reveals other abiding concerns beyond the ‘official’ topic—concerns like what does it mean to be ‘a Mainer’? What investments and experiences do people bring with them as they think about their world—and how do those of someone born and raised in Bangor differ from, cohere with, and contradict those of someone recently arrived here? These are concerns that seem particularly alive in Bangor.

What successful Think & Drink sessions do, then, is provide multiple opportunities for people to test, enliven, and recalibrate their ideas and opinions. Many of these are opportunities for listening: to the panelists, to the moderator, to the others at the table. But equally valuable are the handful of moments in which each person has the chance to express their own view on a complex issue to this small, receptive group of strangers. In this moment, a person has the chance to hear themselves think literally—to practice saying, or trying to say, what they mean about something that matters.

The final turn comes at the end of the session. Darren likes to close with an open question: “So. What can we do? We here, what can we do?” In asking this, he asks us to go beyond even this idea work and consider how what we think might shape what we do.

This is heady stuff. Then Darren laughs. “But it isn’t the masterclass in whatever topic,” he told me. “It can’t be. People are also there to have a drink and good time; it needs to be light as well.”

How does he keep it light? The same way he keeps our conversation light: with wry humor, often at his own expense. He hopes it helps the group keep some perspective. “We all need to get over ourselves a little, don’t we, so we can talk the difficult things through.”
ON PIONEERS AND FRONTIERS:
A NEW BOOKS, NEW READERS EXPERIENCE

BY REBECCA DAWSON WEBB

Some of the women had never voted before, and they plan to now.

We meet in a windowless room that has the feel of a large utility closet, long tables pushed together in an awkward fit, under dull lighting. The women arrive carrying multiple, heavy concerns — longing for their kids, longing for release, which always feels too far off. They are working jobs, working programs, taking classes, and coping with stress and quarters that are too close. They are wary about trust. These women are acutely aware of rights — the rights they have lost, the rights they may not fully regain. But one right that these women have not lost, though they are incarcerated at the Southern Maine Re-Entry Center, a minimum-security women’s prison, is the right to vote. Maine and Vermont are the only two states in our country with no restriction on voting rights for felons.

As they drift into the room, the women’s moods are palpable, and often reflective of the latest issue they are coping with. Yet many remain remarkably positive. We begin by taking some deep breaths and checking in, acknowledging the separate realities of each of our worlds.

We have gathered to discuss the 14th Amendment, the central theme of “Pioneers and Frontiers,” the most recent series of the Maine Humanities Council’s New Books, New Readers program. The program — children’s books curated around a theme that invites adult-level discussion — is targeted for emerging adult readers. Most of these women have little or no trouble reading. Still, because the books are short and the topics deep, New Books, New Readers works particularly well in correctional facilities. There have been other series with other women at this same location, ones on hope, community, friendship, and the value of sharing your story. The discussions have been rich and honest. The women connect the topics to their lives. “Pioneers and Frontiers” is a less intimate series yet still so relevant. It offers a history lesson in hope, struggle, and triumph. The books tell the story of those who have fought for equal rights: the right to vote, the right to equal treatment, and the right to fair access. The subject is particularly pertinent today.

Handing out the books the MHC provides is always a delight. Occasionally one of the women will recognize a title, and exclaim, “Oh, I love this book.” Receiving the books is a visual, tactile experience. The women gently open the covers and run their hands and eyes across the pages, taking in the many different styles of print and artwork. Recently, one of the women commented on how much she preferred the feel of certain books to others. We all started to pet the pages and noticed the variations — smooth, grainy, thick, thin. And then, of course, we had to smell them. Children’s books are a reminder of the joy of reading and the way it is a full sensory experience. Almost all of the women in the class have children or grandchildren they will share their books with. One grandmother in the “Pioneers and Frontiers” group, who wanted to know more about the history of Thanksgiving, is sending the books to her granddaughter but asking her to wait to read them until they can do so together.

Around our joined tables, we read aloud. We look at pictures. We talk about the Constitution and the Bill
of Rights. The women reflect on which of the Bill of Rights matters to them most. They all value the 4th Amendment that protects the right to privacy and prohibits warrantless search and seizure. One of the women is particularly interested in the 8th Amendment which prohibits cruel and unusual punishment; she is writing a paper about the death penalty. We note how many of the first ten amendments set down rules about what constitutes a fair trial. The women observe how much they don’t remember or never knew from their history classes. But they are interested in learning now.

We focus on the 14th Amendment, the one that is cited in more legal cases than any other because of its Due Process and Equal Protection clauses. We learn about its ratification in 1868 which granted “all persons born or naturalized in the United States,” including our newly freed slaves, equal protection of the laws.” And then reading Granddaddy’s Gift, we see the way that Jim Crow laws turned African Americans, newly minted citizens, into second-class ones who could not vote unless they were able to pass a literacy test or pay a poll tax and be brave enough to face the threat of violence. Freedom on the Menu and Rosa remind us of those who protested Jim Crow laws with sit-ins at lunch counters and bus boycotts during the 1960s. Lillian’s Right to Vote celebrates the 1965 Voting Rights Act, whose key provision—that promised federal oversight to ensure that any changes to voting laws were not racially discriminatory—was struck down by the Supreme Court in 2013. We talk about all the disenfranchised in this country and the voting restrictions that were in place in 14 states this fall for the first time in 50 years for a presidential election.

Some of the books address the fraught issue of immigration. Coming to America tells the history of immigration and how it started back with the nomads who traveled to Alaska from Asia during the Ice Age. In Emma’s Poem, we learn about the source of the words: “Give me your tired, your poor. Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free.” And we see an Italian grandmother in Picnic in October celebrating this invitation and thanking Lady Liberty for taking her in. These books remind us that we all come from immigrants, many of whom came to America looking for a better future.

We are also reminded that the journey to a possible better life is not easy. My Diary from Here to There offers us the perspective of a young Mexican girl making the difficult transition to life in the United States, where her father, a legal citizen, has come to find work picking fruit in the fields of California. And Separate is Never Equal highlights the fact that hard-won dreams are achieved through determination and struggle, like the fight for equal access to a quality education.

These are important reminders, especially now.

This yearning—for equal rights, for a better future, more opportunities or a second chance—is something we all share. Certainly these incarcerated women do. We all want our stories to be heard and our voices to matter.

And this is what New Books, New Readers does: it connects through stories—the books to the people, the individuals to each other, the larger themes to the particulars. Children’s books are such a simple delivery method, but such a potent opening for conversation and greater understanding.

Rebecca Dawson Webb is a regular facilitator for MHC programs, including Let’s Talk About It and New Books, New Readers. She is also a longtime writing coach, teacher, and editor, who leads memoir writing workshops and is passionate about helping people share their stories.
THE TRICKLE-DOWN
OF WINTER WEEKEND:
Q&A WITH CLAIRE MORIARTY
AND JIM BULTEEL
OF ORONO HIGH SCHOOL
BY DIANE MAGRAS, EDITOR

Claire Moriarty and Jim Bulteel, members of Orono High School’s English Department (with Erika Dixon, Amanda Johnston, Don Joseph, and Chris Luthin), are among a group of educators who have, in various combinations, attended Winter Weekend for the past 15 years. For years, I’ve heard about these teachers adapting what they’ve learned at the Maine Humanities Council’s popular big book gala to their classrooms.

In celebration of Winter Weekend’s 20th anniversary, I asked Claire and Jim to share their thoughts as educators on the Winter Weekend experience.

Q First off, what are your general goals regarding Winter Weekend for the classrooms and more at Orono High School?

A Claire: I heard somewhere that “reading and writing should float on a sea of talk.” That’s the spirit of the Maine Humanities Council Winter Weekends, a spirit we want to foster in our classrooms; the idea that our conversations, however informal they might seem, go somewhere.

Jim: We’re a school that places great emphasis on rich seminar discussions, especially in the Humanities. Winter Weekend gives us the sources, the depth of scholar’s knowledge, and not least, the enthusiastic shot in the arm to want to bring great literature in front of young people. Winter Weekend condenses the expertise of scholars for us to mine for ideas not just about the books but about the contexts out of which those books sprang. It reminds us that when a student leaves school, and goes on with life, literature can stay with them and enrich their life’s course. One day, I’d love to see a former student, now in Carhartts or a pressed suit, show up at Winter Weekend and join us.

Q Could you share some examples of what you’ve done over the years with your Winter Weekend experience?

A Claire: Listening to speakers at the 2010 Winter Weekend certainly helped me frame a semester-long study of George Eliot’s Middlemarch. Our high school class met seminar-style a couple of times a week; we tackled everything from the novel’s political setting to the choreography of marital spats. Students set up their own web page, chatted nightly, carried raging arguments into other classes, and capped the whole thing with a graduation weekend spent binge-watching the British TV serial, which they pronounced not nearly as good as the book. Oh, and t-shirts. They made t-shirts emblazoned with their logo: the Middlemarchers.

Jim: The experience of reading a great book, a huge door-stopping volume, is rare for my students. “Too long!” they moan, when I hand them Anna Karenina. “Still too long,” they say, when I ask them what they’ve learned, but, as one student said to me today, “Now I see the ideas. Actually, I like this book.”

I think of my classes as the literary equivalent of the slow food movement. Slow reading—luxuriating in the text—understanding it as a work of artifice, of meaning made by construction and imagination, is a skill I think each student should possess. Whether, in their future lives, they read again I won’t know—but I hope that if they don’t, they will learn to slowly appreciate portraiture, the symphony, or another of the art forms.

Q Each year, I notice both of you taking notes (especially Claire). I wonder what you’re looking for each year and how you translate that to the classroom.

A Claire: It’s not so much what I’m looking for but what I come upon. Notes give form to what’s going on in my head. For example, notes have allowed me to press Tolstoy and Proust into service in a couple of nonfiction
Each year, members of Winter Weekend’s audience members return their copies of that year's book, which are donated to Orono High School. The following Winter Weekend alumni texts are active in Orono’s classes this year: Anna Karenina, Swann’s Way, and The Inferno. In the wings for use another year (some have also been used in the past): Middlemarch, One Hundred Years of Solitude, The Iliad, The Odyssey, and Moby Dick.

Toni Morrison’s Jazz, Frederick Douglass’ autobiography, all the way to Othello. The renowned speaker wasn’t there to offer advice on the design of a high school English course, and I wasn’t there to look for it. But there you have it. A draft syllabus materialized in my marginal notes as if in time-lapse photography.

Jim: There are fashionable movements in literary criticism, but what Winter Weekend does is provide what doesn’t often get recognized: intellectual fun—appreciation and thoughtfulness. Where else can you go to put those two words together?

Q: Are there books or topics you’ve dreamed about for Winter Weekend?

A: Claire: Well, I do have a life-threatening crush on Gustave Flaubert, and the Lydia Davis translation of Madame Bovary is fabulous…
All of the teacher participants pose for a Winter Weekend 2016 group shot, with the six Orono teachers congregating on the far right. PHOTO: DAN D’IPPOLITO

Jim: The great poets have been overlooked recently. Surely Emily Dickinson should be a topic one year, and Elizabeth Bishop another? And who could provide more width of possibilities for planning the weekend than William Blake? Art, poetry, psychology, history—eccentricity! And Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* have resonated through Dante and Shakespeare down to today’s many translations. Austen invented the free indirect narrative point of view in the simply delicious *Emma*. Finally, that great novelist, Conrad has three candidate books, I think: *Nostromo*, *Lord Jim*, and *Heart of Darkness*. Oh, Kafk! And *The Brothers Karamazov*…How long have you got? I’m barely getting started…

Q: How would you recommend *Winter Weekend* to other teachers as a content opportunity for the classroom?

A: Claire: The book selections themselves—and the extraordinary presenters—are the best argument for *Winter Weekend*. Spending the better part of a year (or the whole of February break!) making your way through some deliciously long work you’ve always meant to read (or finish); the sheer pleasure of reading, in the company of others, of talking and listening, of sharing a meal, is what defines *Winter Weekend*: the restorative power of it all.

*Winter Weekend* is authentic professional development. There is nothing medicinal about it, nothing in the Read-This-It’s-Good-for-You vein that can blight some literary discussions. All of us return revitalized, animated; and that experience enriches both teaching and learning. I so look forward to reading *Palace Walk* and hearing what you all have to say about it.

Jim: I can’t quite figure out why I don’t see more of my colleagues from around the state here, especially those who teach the great books. AP English Lit teachers ought to be mobbing you to get in, I think. I’m convinced they would leave refreshed and revitalized and eagerly seeking the opportunities to bring yet another wonderful story to their students.

With eagerness matched by no other professional opportunity in the year, I await *Palace Walk*.

For more information about this year’s Winter Weekend, refer to the back cover of this publication!
**CASTINE**

$1,500  *Pulitzer Goes to the Movies*

Planned in conjunction with the 100th anniversary of the Pulitzer Prize, Witherle Memorial Library hosted a film series over the winter showcasing film adaptations of Pulitzer Prize-winning books. Dr. Michael Grillo, Film Department Chairperson and Associate Professor of Art at the University of Maine, Orono, discussed the impact of each film and explored what the films say about the cultural climate of the U.S. at the time of their release. The series featured *The Age of Innocence*, *In This Our Life*, *The Caine Mutiny*, *All the President’s Men*, *The Color Purple*, and *The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love.*

*Witherle Memorial Library, Castine*

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**MILBRIDGE**

$1,000  *Stories of Downeast Women Working for Equality and Enrichment in their Communities*

In 1868, Congress passed the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution guaranteeing equality for all before the law. One central issue since that time has been the enfranchisement of women and their full participation and representation in politics—all the way to the highest office in the country. Exploring this issue, the Women’s Health Resource Library hosted a book discussion series framed around the book *The Highest Glass Ceiling: Women’s Quest for the American Presidency* by Ellen Fitzpatrick (2016). The series included book discussion, a storytelling and arts workshop, and a community celebration of Downeast Women led by facilitator Bernadette Anand.

*Women’s Health Resource Library, Milbridge*

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**PORTLAND**

$850  *Art in Exodus*

In recognition of World Refugee Day, which takes place every year on June 20, Maine College of Art presented the second annual *Art in Exodus* exhibition, a mentoring, exhibition, and storytelling project through which refugee artists share their art and culture. Featured artists included Kifah Abdullah from Iraq (acrylic paintings); Nabaa Alobaidi from Iraq (traditional pyrography woodburning); Titi De Baccarat from the African country of Gabon (mixed media paintings, sculpture, and jewelry); Jawad Alfatlawi from Iraq (handmade traditional instruments); and Diana Brown from Colombia (wearable textile art).

*Maine College of Art, Portland*

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**CENTRAL MAINE**

$700  *Picturing the Past Through Photographs*

Organizational members of the Central Kennebec Heritage Council worked together to promote and present exhibitions and/or activities using their photography collections to provide community learning experiences about the past. The project exhibitions took place at L.C.Bates Museum, Margaret Chase Smith Library, Taconnett Falls Chapter of the Maine Genealogical Society, Skowhegan History House, Fairfield History House, the Fairfield Victor Grange, and Norridgewock Historical Society. Each museum’s images showed a unique view of its town’s history and citizens.

*Central Kennebec Heritage Council*
Join us at our 20th annual Winter Weekend to explore Naguib Mahfouz’s Palace Walk

BOWDOIN COLLEGE, MARCH 10 & 11, 2017

In this pivotal novel, Naguib Mahfouz shares a Dickensian portrait of a patriarch: 45-year-old Al-Sayyid Ahmad Abd Al-Jawad, father and husband, despot and lecher, a man who demands strict adherence to the tenets of Islam inside his home, though he is indiscreet and unfaithful to a great many of them outside. The story chronicles the awakening of his family—his wife Amina, who, by her husband’s command, has not left her house in 25 years; and two of his sons, one a patriot and the other a scholar, both against his wishes—against the backdrop of Egypt’s own awakening in the period leading up to the Egyptian Revolution of 1919.

Winter Weekend—the MHC’s big book gala—includes scholar presentations, a themed meal, a musical performance, and two days of camaraderie with other enthusiastic readers.

COST: $245/person (lectures, meals, book, background readings); additional sponsorship gifts are always welcome.

FMI: mainehumanities.org
CEUS: available for teachers

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