

Why Science Fiction in the Classroom? I don't think I've expressed my thoughts on this any better than here. - Julie

Goals for Millennium Philcon "Science Fiction for Young Readers"

Draft

What tools do young people need in order to thrive within the rapid rate of change in our society? What will help them become understanding and able decision-makers in the future? They need the skills to read with comprehension, to critically assess source and content, and to interpret scientific information. They also need a conceptual framework within which to test new ideas, to develop their own sense of the potential benefits and risks of new technologies.

If all this rings a bell within the sf community, it should. We are the keepers and lovers of a body of work which is read to be enjoyed and which digs into the concepts of science with imagination, creativity, and a thorough appreciation of consequence. We know its value. But does anyone else?

In the past, sf literature, with few exceptions, has been viewed by educators as little more than entertainment for young readers, something to perhaps whet the appetite for "real books" later in life or encourage a reluctant student. Today, curriculum experts are taking notice of something we've taken for granted: that those most comfortable with the flood of new technologies and scientific discoveries, those most able to see past the novelty to the potential, have been prepared by their choice of literature. We are living in a science fictional world and science fiction readers have the advantage of knowing the terrain.

As a result, and also in answer to the need to develop language skills in all areas, science curriculum is now embracing the use of science fiction writing and reading to help students become scientifically literate – to have the flexibility of thought and imagination they will need.

As readers, writers, and educators, we have decided to bring our combined knowledge of science fiction and the needs of young readers together in order to produce a series of programming in the Millennium Philcon. This programming, while details remain to be established through consultation within and without, would focus on three major areas.

First, there would be events aimed specifically at educators, with the intention of providing practical, classroom-tested ways to incorporate science fiction into their lesson planning, both in science and language arts. Part of this would include helping to identify the science fiction materials appropriate to various classroom needs and their students. There are several experts attending the Millennium Philcon qualified to prepare such events and we would hope to involve educators and their boards in the planning, to have them recognized as professional development for credit.

Second, there would be events aimed at anyone seeking to encourage young people to read science fiction. There are several YA and children's authors attending the Millennium Philcon who could form a core of readings and other events to expand the awareness of literature available for young readers.

Third, there would be events meant for young readers and writers. These could involve a wide variety, depending on the programming already planned for the worldcon, but potentially could include plays, contests, workshops, meet and greets with YA authors, and other events.

Obviously, there is ample potential to combine elements from the above three threads to accomplish more than one goal per event, although a distinct educator/librarian series would be required in order to ensure credit for attending individuals.

At the Millennium Philcon, we will have an unprecedented opportunity to share our love of sf with both young readers and those responsible for their education. We hope everyone involved will join us in developing ideas and events for this important, worthy purpose.

A love of reading produces a person who is literate.

A love of reading science fiction produces a literate person open to new ideas, critically aware of the consequences of change, and ready for the future.

Julie E. Czerneda,

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Millennium Philcon was a rousing success. The sf community continues to develop and offer programming for educators and readers. It's becoming commonplace -- though never taken for granted -- that major conventions such as national or worldcons will offer a full day of such educator programming. A sign of the seriousness with which conventions take this responsibility is that space and time is often donated to the organizers, and, whenever feasible, such programming is offered free to educators and the interested general public. As someone familiar with professional development for educators, I can attest what is offered is practical, useful knowledge of the highest calibre. If you are considering using science fiction with your students, an excellent starting point will be such programming at a science fiction convention. Check online for the one nearest you. If they don't offer educator programming, make the suggestion. Your interest may be all the encouragement they need. (Feel free to send them to me if they have questions on how to get started, what works etc. Happy to help, believe me.)
- Julie, May 2010