National Council of Teachers of English Conference
November 20-23, 2025
Denver, Colorado
Professional Development Abstract

TEPS Committee, Dr. Frahm, Dr. Overholt and Michael Thomas (CTA Website):

Thank you for supporting my professional development at the 2025 National Council of Teachers of English Conference. The sessions I attended were directly relevant to my current coursework in English 10, in Communication for College and Career and for the Portrait of a Graduate initiative. Below are highlights from four of the most impactful sessions and their applications to our curriculum.

1. Lectio Divina: Shifting Annotation Expectations for Deeper Engagement

This session introduced Lectio Divina, a structured, Jesuit-inspired approach to reading that prioritizes slow, deliberate examination of text. Students annotate a passage multiple times, each through a different lens: literal comprehension, metaphorical meaning, personal reflection, and broader connections. This method moves students beyond superficial highlighting toward deeper textual analysis.

English 10 students annotate in every unit of study to strengthen close reading skills. The strategies, models and reproducible handouts provided at the session will enhance our current annotation practices, support more thoughtful classroom discussion, and lead to richer evidence-based writing. I plan to implement Lectio Divina during our upcoming units - *Fahrenheit 451* and *Great Speeches and the Art of Rhetoric* .

2. Future-Ready Literacy Skills: Making Student Learning Relevant to Pathways Beyond High School

This session focused on designing curriculum that aligns literacy instruction with the skills students will need in college, the workplace, and emerging career fields. The concept of "revolving literacy" was introduced as an instructional mindset that emphasizes adaptability, problem-solving, communication, and authentic application. The session connected directly to the "Portrait of a Graduate" initiative through research identifying key competencies for the modern workforce.

This session perfectly aligned with our Communication for College and Career elective, as the presenter emphasized transferable soft skills such as collaboration, ethical decision-making, resilience, and empathy; hard skills related to AI literacy, time-management and digital communication; and project-based tasks tied to real-world pathways.

Our curriculum already emphasizes building skills for technical writing, digital portfolio creation, interpersonal communication, and college/career exploration. This session affirmed our direction and provided additional frameworks and resources for instruction.

3. Using Graphic Nonfiction in the Classroom

This session, led by an experienced English teacher and author, introduced several websites and tools that make short, visual nonfiction texts more accessible for students. What I found most valuable was the connection between reading graphic nonfiction and strengthening students' research skills. When students learn to analyze visuals, they better understand why research includes elements like citations, valid evidence and even graphics. Small group interactions during the workshop allowed for valuable discussions about how to use graphic nonfiction more regularly throughout the year to help students develop stronger analytical skills.

I am eager to explore how I might include graphic non-fiction as companion pieces to *Of Mice and Men, Fahrenheit 451* and during our *Great Speeches and the Art of Rhetoric* units. I also shared materials with a colleague who is interested in running a Graphic Literature elective.

4. Boldly Disrupting the Five-Paragraph Essay: Teaching Students to Dream with Project-Based Learning

A panel of educators encouraged participants to move beyond structured and controlled inquiry in the classroom to include strategies for guided and free inquiry. The panel discussed how project-based learning assessments motivate and challenge students to make textual and personal connections while engaging in creative autonomy. One highlighted unit, *Civil Rights and Youth Advocacy*, demonstrated how students would analyze mentor texts, research topics based on personal interest, deliver a speech while incorporating rhetorical devices and appeals, and create advocacy plans that extend beyond the classroom.

Recently, I piloted a "non-essay" project in place of a traditional literary analysis essay for *Of Mice and Men*. Students synthesized ideas from Steinbeck's novel, a related nonfiction article, and personal experience, then chose a format/design to visually express the central idea and connections to the texts: Canva presentation, Prezi, hand-drawn mindmap, or even a physical house model. This session validated that the thought process informing the project is equal to that of a conventional essay while increasing student ownership and creativity. Moving forward, I would like to expand opportunities for multimodal assessments.

Also, we have traditionally required students to write a rhetorical analysis essay for our *Great Speeches and the Art of Rhetoric* unit. Additionally, students present slideshows on the speaker and the social/historical context of the speech. However, I am already considering how we might use a famous speech as a mentor text for students to model as they create and deliver their own speeches and advocacy projects.

Once again, I am so grateful for the district's investment in my professional growth. Time spent engaging with my CHS colleagues and with educators from around the nation was invaluably rewarding. The sessions I attended directly support our vision of preparing students not only for academic success, but for meaningful futures beyond high school.