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How has your writing affected your teaching and conversely, how has your teaching affected your writing?

When I first started teaching, I had only read a handful of junior novels. In my first year, we were studying mapping so I decided to find a book that my class could use to enhance the mapping unit. I picked up *Island of the Blue Dolphins* by Scott O'Dell and was blown away by the storyline. Just entering the profession, I had never imagined that YA fiction could be so gripping. We used the novel to map Karana's island as well as investigating the characters and storyline.

I use literature whenever I can to enhance the learning process. The students love it. I strongly feel that good literature can take a dry topic and bring it to life for the sometimes-unmotivated student. A few years back, I was teaching several First Nations expectations and I couldn't find a book I liked to help support the topic. Driving down the 401 later that year, I told my wife that I had been thinking about a storyline that I felt could help me teach my First Nations material. She laughed because she was the one who had always wanted to write. I told her she could have the storyline if she wanted and run with it, but she said no; it was my story and I should be the one write it. A year later *Broken Circle* was accepted by Napoleon Publishing. A year after that, *Broken Circle* won Best Book of the Year by the Canadian Toy Testing Council. Last year, I went for an author talk at Sharon Public School and I saw my dream come true... the entire Grade 5/6 classroom was covered in historical research, plot breakdowns, character development and art, all tied to *Broken Circle*. It gave me shivers. In fact, seeing all that work on the walls meant more to me than actually having the book published in the first place. I then knew that a fellow teacher understood why I had written the book. It was one of those special moments I don't think I will ever forget.

Kiera, the heroine of *Stolen Away* goes through a lot. She is an Irish girl who is kidnapped and taken as a slave by Vikings and later rescued from an accident by the Beothuk (a now-extinct First Nations people). She is a character who often has no power, and yet still resonates as a strong woman. What

characteristics does Kiera possess that help her to survive in her situation? What do you hope that students may learn from Kiera?

I wrote *Stolen Away* with my daughters in mind. A message I wanted the girls to carry with them as they spread their wings and ventured out into the world was that there is a lot in this world that is beyond their control. We must try to make the best out of the situations we find ourselves in. Therefore, what will end up defining you as a person are the choices you make on situations that are within your control. Kiera led her life with a good heart and found increasing strength as she overcame the significant obstacles that were thrown at her. I have faith that my daughters will do the same with their own lives. I hope students who read *Stolen Away* receive that same message as well.

You are a grade two teacher, yet your novels so far are for students in grade four and older. Do you think you will write books that 6-9 year olds can enjoy?

Hmmm, that's a good question. Right now, I'm getting ready for the fall launch of my new junior fiction novel *Emerald Key*, which is being published by Dundurn. I've also been working with my wife on a couple of adult novels. I can't say that a book for 6-9 year olds is on the radar at this time, but I wouldn't write off the possibility that it might happen some day.

Authors have power. What do you hope to achieve with yours?

We do? (*lol*) I strongly believe in the expression, "If we don't learn from history, history will end up repeating itself." I look around the world today and see us following a dangerous path mapped out by the Romans 2,000 years ago. Their society started off as a flourishing democratic republic. Eventually, nation building ground to a halt as infighting and bickering consumed the political leaders who struggled for personal power and influence within the world's largest superpower. With no end to the deadlock, a military dictatorship took over Rome, the only option remaining to keep the country moving forward. Does that path sound strangely familiar? My favourite novels right now are *The Hunger Games* Trilogy. Those books really struck a chord with