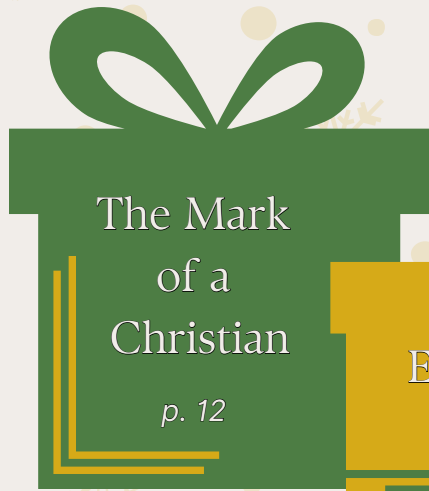


# THE WORD

DECEMBER 2023  
ISSUE 12

A NEWSLETTER FROM THE MESSIAH UNIVERSITY ENGLISH PROGRAM

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# ENGLISH MAJOR BINGO!

As English majors, we know a thing or two because we've seen a thing or two. If you encounter any of these unique experiences, mark them down to make a Bingo!

Dr. Smith mentions nature

Breath Prayers

Dr. Dunbar-Treadwell matches her Yeti

Class in Boyer

Have a friend who works at the Writing Center

Shakespeare mentioned

Dr. Smith performs a monologue

Awake past 1:00 a.m. writing a paper

Marilynn Robinson mentioned

Dr. Hasler-Brooks wears a blazer

Dr. Roth mentions a Blackwing 602 Pencil

Journal entries assigned as homework

**FREE SPACE**

Enrolled in a workshop class

"Break up into small groups"

See someone knitting during class

Forget to do reading for class

Prof. Rickrode passes a book around

Class is moved outside

Assigned books you've never heard of

Dr. Hasler-Brooks mentions *Their Eyes*

Late to class because you stopped for coffee

Assigned an 8-12 page research essay

Library magnet poetry

Dr. Roth wears Birkenstocks to class

# MAKE YOUR OWN

Can you think of anything we missed? Make your own Bingo board and send in completed copies to @MessiahEnglish on Instagram to be featured!

		<b>FREE SPACE</b>		



# THE GREAT ENGLISH MAJOR BURNOUT:

## BATTLING SUCCESS SYNDROME AND DISCOVERING OUR WHY

The title of English major comes with lots of questions. Common questions include, “Do you have any book recommendations?” and “What type of classes do you take?” as well as everybody’s favorite, “How are you gonna make money one day?” Among the many questions we receive from the outside, I often find the most difficult questions to be the ones that I ask myself. The questions of what to read next, and when will I have the time to read it?

Growing up I was constantly talking about books or nose deep in one. I would spend hours of my free time locked away in a quiet place with a book as my only companion, I lost countless hours of sleep secretly reading by flashlight beneath my covers, and I got in plenty of trouble reading when I was supposed to be doing something else. When preparing to come to college I collected a box full of books and a list with the order I was going to read them in. I was eager to explore the world of literature in an academic setting, but also to dive deeper into texts on my own time. Upon arriving at Messiah, I quickly realized that this list of books was a much taller task than anticipated. I found myself mentally drained from all my required readings and with hardly any time left for pleasure. When the summer after my first year rolled around, I found myself entirely burned out from reading. After all the in-class readings and essays that followed I had no brain power left to read for my enjoyment. This burnout led to quite a crisis for me. A crisis that forced me to reevaluate my study of English and to figure out the why behind my reading.

In order to figure out if this English major book

burnout was only a personal struggle, I decided to conduct a bit of research. Through my research I wanted to figure out if students are reading for pleasure during the semester, and if so what it is that they are reading. Through a survey distributed to select English classes I was able to find some pretty interesting information. While the survey is by no means perfect or sufficient to offer a representation of the entire Messiah English program, it is certainly enough to get us thinking. Approximately 33% of students responded with an adamant “Yes” when asked if they read during the semester, approximately 28% replied with an adamant “No,” and approximately 38% replied with an “In-Between” answer.

The “Yes” respondents described their reading as a healthy escape from their academic studies. Many expressed a need for their reading to be light, mystical, and “something to help (them) escape the stress of the world.” The “No” respondents expressed a deep desire to read for pleasure but a lack of time and mental energy to crack open another book. Many shared that they’ve found it more important to diversify their extracurricular activities in fellowship with others. The “In-Between” respondents had some of the most interesting responses. What classifies someone as an in-betweener is what I saw as an irregular reading schedule that doesn’t place them within the “No” category but also doesn’t mean they are diving into a novel every day. Maybe they read a bit and then take time off, or they find little ways to get their literature fix throughout the week. Some of the students shared how they’ve moved towards occasional reading of shorter mediums.

Some read and marinate in a poem a week, others pick up the occasional magazine article. One student shared how they include literature in their Sabbath. During this day of rest the student takes time in both God's word and a piece of fiction to unwind and step away from the academic world.

Through the three data groups, there was a common trend that stuck out to me. Each group's relationship with reading was changed because of their English major. Each shared a need to escape from the academic reading style. While there is plenty of pleasure involved in academic readings of texts, the amount of mental engagement it requires is significant. The work of English is challenging. Sometimes what you discover can be unsettling and force you to see the ugliest sides of this world and yourself. While their love of literature may be unshaken, students need an escape from the weight of academic reads. Many have found this through exciting genres and new mediums. Others have found this by taking a step back and spending time in community.

During my post-first-year-book hiatus, I felt completely burned out. I still had a deep love for literature, but I felt a deep need to fully master a text, to get the highest grade possible, and to get a good job one day, so I can live happily ever after. I slowly began to realize I wasn't necessarily struggling with a book burnout, but I had a bad case of the success syndrome. This realization has led me to reevaluate how I go about my study of English. I now see each book in class not only as an opportunity to challenge myself and grow in an academic sense, but also to enjoy something beautiful or creative or insightful. I've convinced myself that I don't have to be afraid of being the dumbest guy in the room. I don't have to master every text on my own, but I can listen intently. I can listen to the world around me and enjoy the community diving into a text together. Since I've adopted this mindset I've found reading outside of class much more palatable. When I find myself with little time, I enjoy (virtually) flipping through the New Yorker, or reading a poem or monologue.



When I find myself with lots of time I'll crack open a novel or some informative non-fiction. I read because reading is both earth shatteringly challenging and redemptively liberating. When we forget the why behind our actions it's easy to lose the joy in it.

**"I DO ENCOURAGE YOU TO LOOK BACK AT YOUR WHY, TO NOT LOSE SIGHT OF THE REASON YOU CHOSE THIS MAJOR, AND THE WONDER THAT LIES IN OUR EVERYDAY ACADEMIC RIGOR."**

I'm not saying you need to read every free moment you have. Taking some time away and getting involved with new things can be extremely rewarding. But I do encourage you to look back at your why, to not lose sight of the reason you chose this major, and the wonder that lies in our everyday academic rigor.



*by Adam Carter ('25)*

# ALUMNI SPOTLIGHTS



## ALICIA SZOBYRN ('18) LEAD R&D PROJECT MANAGER AT WEBFX

As a software development project manager, I lead a team of developers, designers, and engineers to create digital marketing software for WebFX's 1500+ clients. I manage the product lifecycle, including research, specs, designs, development, testing, launch, and go-to-market communication.

My first book, *Gulch*, is in the revision stage, and I will be sending it to agents and publishers soon. Like *The Giver* but grittier, *Gulch* is a YA novel that explores mental illness in a compassionate way against the backdrop of a society fixated on perfection.

“Communicating clearly and concisely is paramount in my role as I lead a team through the ambiguous work of turning ideas into usable, helpful products. I also do a great deal of writing in my day-to-day, for a wide span of audiences—from technical specs for my developers to user-facing documentation for our clients. The critical thinking skills that my degree fostered benefit me every day as I research, troubleshoot, and work with my team to find solutions to difficult problems.”

## HOW DID STUDYING ENGLISH PREPARE YOU FOR THIS WORK?

“For as long as I can remember, I’ve loved words. I knew my career would center around language, one way or another—whether it was teaching, being an attorney, or writing—so it made sense for me to study English at Messiah. I loved my classes and classmates there, and I often even filled up my electives with extra English courses! My professors were fantastic. They invested in me; they believed in me; they challenged me to be better. Perhaps most important of all, they cared.”

## KIMI CUNNINGHAM GRANT ('01) NOVELIST

I write novels! My books are categorized as mysteries and thrillers, but I tend to consider them literary suspense. That is, there are elements of suspense, but the books are more character-driven than plot-driven. Readers might call them “slow burns.”

Look for Kimi’s new novel,  
*The Nature of Disappearing*, in 2024!



TO VIEW KIMI'S WEBSITE





**TINA LAMOREAX ('21)**  
**DIGITAL CONTENT PRODUCTION ASSISTANT**

I help voice, produce, and write for the the Ritter Insurance Marketing podcast The Agent Survival Guide. In the two years I've worked at Ritter my growth as a writer has gone far beyond my expectations.



**TO LISTEN TO TINA'S PODCAST**

“Through my work at The Swinging Bridge magazine and writing classes at Messiah, I found a passion for discovering people’s stories through interviews. This led me to create a podcast for my internship at Cozy Cat Press where I interviewed authors about their books. Having these experiences on my resume/portfolio post-graduation allowed me to show, not tell, my talents as a writer.”

**HOW DID STUDYING ENGLISH PREPARE YOU FOR THIS WORK?**

“In my English courses at Messiah, I was frequently challenged in my thinking and writing, which helped me learn to persevere and explore situations from multiple perspectives.”

**CORA TAYLOR ('15)**  
**TEACHER AND DEPARTMENT CHAIR**

As a classroom teacher and educational leader at Albert Einstein High School, I am passionate about teaching literature from diverse perspectives and ensuring that students have an empowering educational experience. I am a creative problem-solver and consider the diverse learning needs of my students while working to make curriculum accessible, reflective, and meaningful so that all students can have academic, social, and emotional success.





# WHEN BOYER GOES

# ★ VOGUE ★

## AN INSTAGRAM SERIES

You open YouTube and click on a celebrity Vogue 73 Question Interview. Soon enough, you can list Adele's go-to groceries, Taylor Swift's favorite superpower, and Michael B. Jordan's novelist of choice. Replace these celebrities with our very own English professors and you have yourself Instagram's newest creation: English Vogue, Boyer office edition. With student Emma Bane ('25) as your host, you will soon learn about Dr. Dunbar-Treadwell's hot take on the Sheetz versus Wawa controversy, Dr. Hasler-Brooks' secret tap-dancing talent, and Dr. Roth's summer of smuggling Bibles from Hong Kong into China. Keep reading for all things quirky and fascinating.

As prospective students, many of us sat in Open Houses hearing about the personability and hospitality of Messiah professors. Need proof? Here is a series-worth of proof. Stepping foot into Dr. Dunbar-Treadwell's, Dr. Hasler-Brooks', and Dr. Roth's offices proves that – while they may deserve the red-carpet experience of Vogue's celebrities – they are simply human. Their lives encompass more than academia, and they are relational people with diverse interests. By posing professors as multi-faceted and down-to-earth people, this series destigmatizes the “lofty, unapproachable” professor by accomplishing a charming work of humanization instead. Some may even call this a digital manifestation of the English majors' call to humanize, and by some, I mean me. So, let the Vogue-style trivia commence!



Have you heard of Funko Pops? Well, Dr. Dunbar-Treadwell owns and displays an array of them in her office. Her collection consists of fierce women who inspire her, ranging from Lorelai Gilmore to Ruth Bader Ginsburg to Poppy from *Trolls*, who, according to the Professor's loved ones, is the “cartoon form” of her. Aside from Funko Pops, Dr. Dunbar-Treadwell believes that “your coffee should be an accessory” and that structure and data are “really fun.” She brings a colorful and artistic flair to the academic world though her love of makeup, which she views as her “mini art project.” Her versatility is captured in one declaration: “Here's this research paper I published, but also let me tell you about what I bought at Sephora today.” If you see a bright orange Beetle piping The Beatles, wave to the one and only Dr. Dunbar-Treadwell.



You will never catch Dr. Hasler-Brooks wearing flats over heels unless she is going on a run. You will, however, catch her watching her favorite film *10 Things I Hate About You* and eating string cheese, her favorite late-night snack. Her fondness for the film is unrelated to its Shakespearean reference, so “don’t tell Dr. Smith.” She is not much of a crier, so no movie will jerk her tears, but an “Olympics commercial” or something sports-related may occasionally evoke a tear or two. As the winter months approach, Dr. Hasler-Brooks is ready, but “if there’s no snow, then [she doesn’t] want anything to do with it.” She also does not want anything to do with all-nighters, but she has still pulled several of them, so to the sleep-deprived readers, know you are in good company. While she has not made her Messiah dancing debut yet, Dr. Hasler-Brooks claims she will show us her tap skills at one point. So, when you walk Boyers’ halls, keep your ears perked for the day her heels’ clinking shifts to tapping.



If Dr. Roth had a tattoo, he would get the “iambic” poetic foot over his heart, using this mark of unstressed and stressed syllables to mimic a heartbeat. His favorite board game is *Ticket to Ride*, current TV obsession is *The Morning Show*, and favorite ways to decompress are through cooking and baking. The red bicycle Dr. Roth received for his seventh birthday was “awesome,” boasting a “banana seat” and “big twisty handlebars.” As exciting as it was to receive this gift, Dr. Roth says that the biggest surprise of his lifetime is the fact “that [his] wife wanted to marry [him].” Book a tour of his office to see his Nabokov and poetry collection.



*by Serena McQuoid ('24)*

Are there any pressing questions you need our English faculty to answer? Scan the QR code to visit Messiah’s English Instagram page and DM us questions for our next guest, Professor Rickrode! Keep your eyes peeled for upcoming videos during the Spring semester. Until then, go say hi to one of your English professors.



# WORK IN PROGRESS:

## "THE ONTARCH PROPHECY" FROM ACHALLA

by Nik Lego ('24)



Achalla is a collection of myths from my fictional land of Candor, a grim country of constant warfare, dynastic blood worship, and rich subcultures. In its writing, I aim to echo powerful stories like *The Aeneid* or *The Iliad*, offering a deep look into a culture entirely different from the modern Western world we know.

It begins with the creation of the universe, where metaphysics and metaphor together set the stage for the coming conflict, heralded in by the Candorians' hero: Achallan. He is both Achilles and Messiah to these ancient people, demigod war hero and divine savior, shaping the future of the young world through alliance, conquest, and legendary as well as bloody deeds. Given this focus on one epic hero, the world-building in Achalla has an intense cultural bias, written from a revisionist perspective - after all, "history is written by the victor." The excerpt below hails Achallan as "The Ontarch," a savior who will lead his people out from the metaphysical oppression of nature, affirming their right to exist through his holy conquests, carving out a place for the "pariah race of Men."

When the universe itself doesn't seem to want you, it will take a hero like no other to defy it.

*You have discovered the Song of the Shaper, hidden between the words of Earth's beginning.  
The Ontarch anonave is coming, ruling kind of being, who will cut for us a shape of our own.  
He will wield a key in the steel shape of a battle-spire, first of its kind.  
He will find this hidden heart deep within the flames of sanctity, born of the Seventh Corner.  
He will stir the fates mixed in blood, and crush the stones of the ancient Heresiarch.  
He will give his life in the manner of the dead Paravant Preeminent, older than music.  
He will be severed into crimson mist, and remain mortal-crowned as a bleeding ghost.  
He will come again, bringing a Second Shape to the Altar of VAR-ET-HYR.  
Six are the Secret Truths of the Pariah race of Men. Blessed be the Ontarch.*

# TONI MORRISON AND THE CALL TO IMAGINE

## NOTE FROM THE CHAIR

by Dr. Kerry Hasler-Brooks

Throughout my time as a college educator, the purpose of higher education has become more and more tied to career preparation. This is not news to anyone. The shift to career preparation has been explained, re-explained, and debated by many of us for the last decade. In many ways, the attention and resources being given to career services align with best practices and offer holistic care for students as learners and as people. Colleges and universities must take career preparation seriously not only to recruit and retain students but also to support students' intellectual, social, mental, and economic wellness. Career preparation is, in my mind, a matter of justice in higher education today. It is also, however, too often narrowly designed and practiced.

Many institutions offer programming to prepare students with the necessary knowledge and skills of the applied arts and the liberal arts to contribute to the diverse professional contexts that they will enter after graduation. Students are prepared to understand, engage, and contribute to the world as it is. Perhaps it is less clear, or less clearly stated, however, that robust career preparation requires the intentional and focused cultivation of the imagination—the ability to dream, speculate, and create the world not as it is but as it might and should be.

Preparation and imagination are often made into foils of each other. To be prepared, especially for work, is understood to be a sign of maturity, ability, or dependability. To imagine is understood, at least in the mainstream, to be a sign of distraction, eccentricity, frivolity, impracticality, or immaturity. It is vital, however, that we understand and practice imagination not as a counter to mature preparation for work and service but rather as an essential aspect of what it means to be prepared to live, work, and serve well in the contemporary world. We must take seriously the calling to prepare and the business of

preparing students to use curiosity, speculation, and creativity to imagine new possibilities for the world and to make wise assessments about the ethics and justice of pursuing those possibilities.

For novelist Toni Morrison, the practice of justice is tied to the practice of imagination. Her fiction is described as an imaginative “force” that “gives life” to “American reality.” The play of the imaginative and the real drives *Beloved*, the surreal ghost story based on the true account of Margaret Garner, an enslaved Black woman who escaped bondage and—in the upside down world of slavery—killed her daughter to save her from reenslavement. Morrison did significant historical research for the book but refused, in her words, “to find out anything else about Margaret Garner. I really wanted to invent her life.”

By way of informed invention, Morrison brought Garner back to life as the fictional character Sethe. By imagining Garner as Sethe, Morrison could write her as a full, complex, and thus real woman filled with love, fear, wretchedness, and joy more truthful than the facts discoverable in the flawed historical record of antebellum America. As Morrison has said, it is the act of adding to the “real”—writing “the actual and the possible”—that allows her to find and voice forgotten and unsayable truths: “Only imagination can help me.”

In *Beloved*, and in all her fiction, Morrison imagines freely and spontaneously as well as ethically and responsibly to create art, to tell a good story, to make whole a people that history had forgotten, and thus to invigorate the world with justice. She enlarged the way we imagine ourselves and the way we live in and move through the real world of American life. By opening up what we imagine about ourselves and about others, Morrison equips us and calls us to live more beautiful and more just lives.

You can read the full essay at [vocationmatters.org](http://vocationmatters.org).



# THE MARK OF A CHRISTIAN

A couple of weeks ago in my Emily Dickinson class we looked at the poem “Song of Myself” by Walt Whitman. “Song of Myself” is a poem that’s rather hard to sum up. It is an insanely beautiful (and insanely long) free verse poem where Whitman ponders the self, humanity, God, and just about anything else you can think of. Amongst Whitman’s poetic musings and poignant thoughts, I found myself quite challenged by one of the lines. In section 48 of the poem the speaker ponders his relationship with God and the world stating, “I hear and behold God in every object, yet understand God not in the least” (Whitman, Section 48, Line 18). The idea of being able to know and see God yet not understanding him is quite peculiar. As 21st-century Christians with 2000 years of post veil faith under our belts, we often trick ourselves into claiming that we understand God. I, for one, am certainly guilty of this. We trick ourselves into believing that by reading closely enough, praying hard enough, and studying theology enough, we can finally be good Christians who understand God. But through Whitman’s words I found my subconscious beliefs being challenged, and I was left asking: What is the real mark of a Christian? Is it to understand God, or is it something much deeper?

When pondering what it means to follow Christ I found myself being drawn to the story of Jesus calling his first two followers. The language “Fishers of men” has become such a commonplace term for Christians that I think we’ve failed to realize just how strange this situation is. Imagine some random guy comes up to you at work, tells you to follow him, and that he’s going to help you catch people. Pretty strange right? I have very little belief that Peter and Andrew understood what Jesus was asking of them, but it doesn’t matter whether or not they understood. What matters is that they listened. Peter and Andrew realized that there was something different about this man. Something that was worth following. While eventually Peter and Andrew do gain some understanding, their relationship is based on a desire to follow and obey. I’ll never understand the suffering of this world, how God can be both outside of time and fully omnipresent, if we have freewill, and why God would put on flesh to take the punishment that I deserve, but I can listen. I can seek the face of God in both the hills and valleys of life, and rest upon his blessed assurance. I will never be able to fully understand, but luckily I have a God who does, and all he asks is that I listen.

*by Adam Carter ('25)*

**“AND HE SAID TO THEM, “FOLLOW ME, AND I WILL MAKE YOU FISHERS OF MEN.”**

*MATTHEW 4:19 (ESV)*