

**Adult
Literacy
Resource
Institute/
SABES
Greater
Boston
Regional
Support
Center**



*A project of the
University of Massachusetts/Boston.
Sponsored by the Massachusetts
Department of Education and
the Boston BRA/EDIC/Office of
Jobs and Community Services.*

all write news

READING CIRCLES: A USEFUL TEACHING APPROACH

by Diana Satin

[Last year Diana Satin, who teaches ESOL at the Jamaica Plain Community Center in Boston, received a mini-grant from the A.L.R.I. to work on a curriculum project entitled "Reading for Enjoyment: Reading Circles for Intermediate ESL Students." The "reading circles" concept is a useful teaching approach which could be adapted for use with students at many levels and in various types of classes (ESOL, ABE, GED, EDP/ADP), so we're printing a condensed and edited version of her curriculum here. The full version, along with many of the supplementary materials she refers to, can be found in the A.L.R.I. Library.—Ed.]

WHY READING CIRCLES?

Inspired by a 1998 MATSOL workshop called "Reading the World: Bringing Literature to Life," which discussed a reading circles course for college-level ESL students, presented by Rosanne Trissler and Anna Safi of Johnson & Wales University in Rhode Island, I decided to adapt the curriculum to fit the limited schedule and particular English language abilities of the students in my Intermediate ESOL class at the JP Adult Learning Program. Reading circles are like book clubs: people get to choose which book they want to read, and then they work through it together, helping each other learn about what the book has to offer and discussing what they think of it.

I was attracted to the reading circles idea for many reasons: 1) It offers students a choice of books, and when people can choose the materials they work with, they enjoy them more and are more motivated to work through difficulties with language. 2) Students work together in groups, so each student can use her/his language or other strengths to help others whose skills may not be as strong in those areas. 3) Working in groups helps build com-

continued on page 2

CHANGES AT A.L.R.I./SABES

by Steve Reuys

Welcome back from summer, everyone! The year has only just begun, and we already have a large number of things to tell you about here at the A.L.R.I. They say change is good, but one can be forgiven for pausing to wonder about that on occasion. Anyway, please take a few minutes to read through this to find out what's new with SABES as a whole and with the A.L.R.I./SABES Greater Boston Regional Support Center in specific.

The SABES system in general will this year be working with the field in a number of new ways. We've made these changes after looking into research on professional development, getting feedback from the field, and receiving instructions from DOE. Research on professional development shows that it is more effective when done in a sustained and supported manner, so this year we'll be doing fewer one-time, individually-focused activities and more intensive, program-based work. For example, we have selected teaching writing as an instructional "theme" for this year and will be providing both region-wide and program-based staff development focused on this theme. We will also be helping programs with curriculum development and the Curriculum Frameworks and with planning for pro-

continued on page 6

Sept./Oct. 2003
Vol. XX, No. 2



Inside...

For Your Information 5
Party for David Rosen 7
New ABEBoston E-mail List . 8

**To Our Readers:
The A.L.R.I. will now
be publishing this
newsletter three times
per year instead of
six. The next issue
will appear in
January 2004.**

READING CIRCLES

continued from page 1

munity among students. 4) Students can feel a sense of accomplishment by completing a whole book in English. 5) Reading books offer opportunities to work on related skills (metacognitive reading, basic story analysis, map reading, vocabulary building, giving a presentation, etc.) and bodies of knowledge (geography, history, etc.).

I thought about which skills, abilities, and areas of personal development I would want my students to improve through this approach. They included: enjoying the English language via reading; gaining a sense of mastery over reading in English by completing a real live book that isn't written in adapted English; improving grammar and vocabulary; increasing their confidence in reading, writing, listening, and speaking in English; understanding and implementing basic story analysis (setting, plot, characterization, theme) and using those skills to follow the basic story line of a book written in English; being able to participate in small group discussions about the book; and working in small groups to prepare and present a final presentation.

PREPARING FOR READING CIRCLES

Find the books. I wanted the books we used to: 1) Be at the correct reading level. I attempted to find books that I thought students would be able to follow without getting frustrated by too many new words. I think ideally no more than ten or so new words on a page makes a book readable and enjoyable, although having more than that may be palatable if students have a great deal of interest in the book. Also, I found that books at lower language levels had themes that were too childish for my adult students. 2) Have a selection of themes, characters, and settings that would appeal to a variety of tastes and which include female as well as male protagonists. 3) Be available on tape, so students can listen and read at the same time. This solved the problem of students who read at different rates and the problem of having some students who read when it is assigned as homework and others who don't, since members of the groups stay together as they work through the books. It also gives auditory support for those who have stronger listening skills. 4) Have a recorded book length of about 4.5 hours, so groups would finish at about the same time.

I spent the summer looking at every book list I could find from ABE conferences, elementary school book catalogues, and catalogues of books on tape, such as <http://recordedbooks.com/> and <http://www.booksontape.com/> and reading many, many books—about 18—and previewing

about the same number of books. It was a challenge to find books that were at the correct reading level for my students and that had themes and plots that would be of interest to adults. I settled on three to use this time with my class (*Shades of Gray*, by Carolyn Reeder; *The Island of the Blue Dolphins*, by Scott O'Dell; and *Beyond the Mango Tree*, by Amy Bronwen Zemser).

A benefit of offering students three books to choose from was that when I repeated the reading circle curriculum twice in a school year, students could pick a different book to read. Our school purchased enough copies of each book so my class would be evenly divided among the three books—our classes have about 15 students, so I bought five copies of each book—and one tape for each book. (Many books on tape are available at libraries.) I copied each set of

tapes as a back up, just in case. I assumed there would be a naturally even distribution of students who would choose each book, but you may prefer leaving it open to having two or more reading circles on the same book. In this case you could take the books out from the library for students to preview and then purchase the books for the curriculum afterwards.

Set up the listening area. How you set up the reading/listening areas depends on your budget and space. Students need not to be distracted by other groups' tapes. If you have a room for each group, you need one tape player for each group. If you have one room for all students to share, as we did, you need headphones, a headphone jack multiplier, and a tape player for each of at least two of the

groups (the third group can use a tape player without headphones). We were lucky that another teacher in the program had scrounged from the high school trash two sets of six headphones, each set in a case that also served as a jack multiplier. (These can be quite costly to purchase.) Two groups used these, and the third group used a tape player with no headphones.

Gather supporting materials. I put together numerous materials that were relevant to the books. The core materials on story analysis, writing a book report, and giving a presentation came from the MATSOL conference. Most materials on metacognitive work and reading strategies came from Elsa Auerbach's work at the University of Massachusetts Boston. These were included in a Reading Circle Packet, which everyone received. I also put together packets that were specific to each book, including reading questions, supplementary activities, research topics, etc.

Set up a schedule. On a chart, I mapped out what our classes would like for the time we'd be spending on this

continued on next page

READING CIRCLES

continued from previous page

project, integrating the reading circles with our other ESOL pronunciation, conversation, and grammar activities. The class met three evenings a week and, since the students preferred reading/listening twice to each portion of the book, we spent portions of the first two nights each week doing that as well as doing pre-reading and post-reading activities, with part of our third evening devoted to supplementary activities. I also charted out what each reading group should be doing each of the fourteen weeks, including what chapters to read and what activities to do.

READING CIRCLES IN ACTION: GETTING STARTED

The first couple of weeks were devoted to introductory activities:

Reading Interest Survey: First, students filled out a reading interest survey by Elsa that I adapted, asking about their reading history, topics of interest, and reading strategies, and we then discussed their answers. The purpose of this was to have students begin thinking metacognitively about themselves as readers.

Choosing a book: I provided an overview of the course and brought in copies of each book. We discussed how the students chose a book to read, including such questions as, How do you pick books to read? Because they are short? Long? Because you like the cover? Because you know the author is good? I gave a disclaimer for the books, explaining that I chose these young adult books because the English level of adult books was generally too difficult for them, and because these books discussed real issues that they as adults would hopefully find interesting. I gave students 30 minutes or so to look through them. I put sign-up sheets on the wall, one for each book, with spaces for students to note their first, second, and third choices of books to read over the course of the semester. I wanted the groups to be fairly even in number in order to cover possible student attrition, to have at least four people in each group, and also so that groups could divide work for the final presentation equally. We negotiated so that all students were able to have either their first or second choice book. These groups now became the three reading circles. Students were given the choice of borrowing the books from the school or buying them through me. Most chose to purchase their book.

Elements of prose fiction: The class used excerpts from a GED preparation book to learn about basic story analysis: setting, plot, character, theme. I like Contemporary's *GED Preparation for the High School Equivalency Examination: Literature and the Arts* (1987) because of its simplicity and clear examples from important works of writing. If I were to repeat the project, I would go over the prose analysis in smaller chunks, as the students were going through their books. I think it was too much for them to take in and of itself, without being linked directly to their experience of the books they chose.

Getting to Know Your New Novel: Students filled out the form called "Discussion I: Getting to Know Your New Novel" to help them get basic information about the books they had chosen (title, author, etc.), and to begin thinking about the story itself and why they chose it. Students also wrote the names of the other students in their reading circle. (It's surprising how often they don't know each other's names, even if they've been studying in class together for months!)

Reading strategies: We then went over a list of reading strategies put together by Elsa Auerbach. These include pre-reading strategies (such as asking questions based on the title and skimming for the general idea), during-reading strategies (such as guessing the main idea of each paragraph and drawing pictures to show what you see in your mind's eye) and after-reading strategies (such as retelling the story in your own words and evaluating what you read). Each week, they chose different reading strategies to try out with the reading. Looking back on the process, it would have been better if I had divided the discussion of reading strategies among different days, instead of going over all of it in one day. Again, I think it was too much for students to absorb in one fell swoop, and this made it difficult for them to integrate it into their reading habits. When I asked them weekly to choose a strategy to try out, many ended up using the quickest they could find, instead of trying out different ones. Perhaps I would discuss one section at a time (pre-reading, during reading, and after reading strategies), and ask students to try out particular strategies each day. This way students would have experience with most of the strategies, and be able to draw on them in the future as they

continued on next page

The *All Write News* is published every two months by the Adult Literacy Resource Institute/SABES Greater Boston Regional Support Center, which is primarily funded by the Massachusetts Department of Education, the Boston BRA/EDIC/ Jobs and Community Services Department. All signed articles represent the opinions of the individual authors and not necessarily those of the A.L.R.I. or its staff, nor does material included here necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Massachusetts Department of Education or the federal government.

Please send all material for the newsletter to the editor, Steve Reuys, at the A.L.R.I. (E-mail address: steve@alri.org; regular mail address: see last page of this issue. If sending by regular mail, please include, if possible, a computer disk (Mac or PC) with material saved as a "text only" document.) For more information or for permission to reprint articles, please call Steve at 617-782-8956 x14. Complete issues of this newsletter published since March, 1998, can be found in PDF format in the "Publications" section of our web page at: <http://www.alri.org>.

READING CIRCLES

continued from previous page

deemed them useful.

Warm up questions: The reading circles discussed the warm-up questions that related to their own books before they began reading/listening. The purpose of this activity was to help them get cognitively ready for the topics in the story by thinking about their opinions of the issues, and, as they related to these issues, bringing their own knowledge and experience to bear on the content to assist in their comprehension.

READING CIRCLES IN ACTION: IN THE BOOKS

Once the groups started listening/reading, this is what each week would include:

On Mondays: I would ask students to choose a particular reading strategy from the handout to use that day. Then they would read the pre-listening questions from their particular reading circle's packet. These questions were designed to help students use higher level thinking skills to look for the main points in the story. They then looked over the post-listening questions, which asked for more literal information and were intended to help students find the important details of the story they needed to understand in order to follow the action. Those who chose a pre-reading strategy used it, and then they listened to the recording of the book as they read along for about 30 minutes and used a during-reading strategy if they had chosen one. They noted new vocabulary they found. After reading/listening, the students who had chosen a post-reading strategy used it, and they looked up new vocabulary. (One student compiled a study list of about 700 words, including their definitions, on an Excel spreadsheet! He shared it with his reading circle and me, and we were all quite impressed.)

On Tuesdays: they reviewed the vocabulary they had found the day before, and then read/listened to the same section of the book as on Monday. Afterwards, the groups answered the Post-Listening questions and the Pre-Listening questions in their circles. For homework that day, students would write in their Response Journals. I gave them a handout on how to record their thoughts and feelings in response to what was happening in their books, based on material I found on the Internet by Bruce Gordon (<http://www.nides.bc.ca/Assignments/Novels/Giver/Assigng2.htm>). The handout included suggestions, such as writing things they had learned, predicting what would happen in the next

chapter, or writing a letter to a character to give advice. They also had the choice of writing in some other way in their journal. Since I gave this as homework, some students participated in this and some didn't, unfortunately. This is one of the activities I would like to have had time for in class, but our schedule has its limits.

On Wednesdays: we worked on various supplementary activities related to the readings. The week students began reading their books, they filled out the Discussion II: Story Map sheet, including setting, characters and relationships between the characters, main events of the first chapters of the book, and what they thought the possible theme of the story was. In this way they reviewed the work we had done earlier on prose analysis. The following week I distributed maps to each group relevant to the stories they were reading, and we did various activities using these maps. The purpose was to have a real image of the setting and to increase their literacy in reading maps and their knowledge of geography. The next week I taught writing and reading reported speech, since it is so commonly used in literature. I asked students to write a description of their favorite interaction between characters in their books, using reported speech.

The groups also did a variety of other supplementary activities. Each circle worked together at a computer to create character webs, using the "draw" function to describe a character in a particular situation. Students filled out the Discussion III: Character and Plot sheet to analyze the main character of their book, how the plot had developed, how they hoped the story would end, and whether or not they thought it would actually unfold that way and why. This helped them become involved in the story and think about how they might write a story themselves. Students used PowerPoint on the computers to portray favorite scenes with images and

words. Discussion IV: Putting Events in Chronological Order asked students to go over the main events in the chapters they'd covered up to that point and to summarize them on a time line. We listened to relevant songs, when I could find them. And students took on the role of a character in a particular situation in the story and wrote a letter to another character or wrote a diary entry.

READING CIRCLES IN ACTION: WINDING UP

At the end, as the groups finished reading their books, they discussed general questions, designed to help them think about their opinions regarding the main issues of the book.

continued on next page

READING CIRCLES

continued from previous page

Then the students in each reading circle worked together to write a book report. A guide was included in each reading circle's packet, and we reviewed how to write a good paragraph. Each student took responsibility for writing a paragraph on one of the aspects of prose analysis: setting, plot, characters, and theme, and all students contributed to the paragraph on their opinions about the book. After writing the book report, the reading circles each put together a final presentation for the rest of the class, focusing on the plot, setting, historical background, characters, author's intentions, and the group members' concluding remarks about the book. (Having written the book report helped prepare them for this presentation.) They worked on making the presentation as interesting as possible, such as by using visuals and by not reading the report.

As is always the case, at the end of this project there were some things I thought I might do differently next time. For instance, I would leave more time for students to discuss the books. Too often this aspect of the project felt rushed, and it is quite important for students to process their thoughts about the books as a group, both for comprehension and for language development. But I would certainly continue to use this curriculum. I saw people enjoying reading in English—some of whom completed their first book. I saw people develop their English reading, writing, listening, speaking, presentation, and computer skills. I saw people increase their knowledge of themselves as readers, as well as of map reading, geography, social studies, and history. I saw people help each other with all phases of the project, sharing knowledge and skills when needed. Most of all, I saw people increase their self-confidence in all these areas, and this was the most rewarding part of the project for me. •



FOR YOUR INFORMATION

STATE BUDGET RESULTS ARE FAVORABLE TO ABE

The ABE community in Massachusetts should congratulate itself on its successful advocacy efforts this past spring and summer regarding the FY04 state budget. This was a difficult time for all of education and human services in Massachusetts, and it's a tribute to all the work put in by students and staff at ABE programs across the state as well as the efforts of our friends and allies that the legislature and governor continue to believe in the importance and value of adult basic education. The state ABE line item for FY04 suffered a cut of only approximately 1% from last year's appropriation and stands at \$27.8 million. Combined with the cut in federal funding to Massachusetts for ABE (the result of changes in our state's allocation due to population changes), most programs have received a cut of approximately 3% in their funding for the current year—not good, but it certainly could have been much worse.

There was also one other qualified success pertaining to ABE in these budget struggles. With Massachusetts instituting a new work requirement for parents of under-school-age children who are receiving TAFDC, the legislature did act to mitigate this somewhat by, for the first time under welfare reform, allowing these parents to count education and training toward this work requirement. Initially, the Governor vetoed the provision, but both houses overrode his veto, so the provision is now law and may have some effect on the number of welfare recipients seeking to attend ABE programs.

MAKING VIRTUAL VISITS

Susan Gaer and I will soon begin the fifth year of a fascinating free project in which classes and schools across the world are matched for a Web-based "virtual visit." This year's project is called the Understanding Cultural Differences Classroom Virtual Visit Project because adult learners, and young people in elementary and secondary schools, will not only share with their partner schools pictures and writing about themselves, their school and their community, but they will also choose a cultural understanding theme to discuss.

The project is for students who would like to learn and collaborate in a global environment using email and the World Wide Web, and who would like to discuss strategies for overcoming cultural misunderstanding, ending cultural conflicts, and/or bringing about world peace. This year, too, we will encourage partnering sites to choose a film or video which students at both sites can view, and then discuss by email. The exchanges are usually conducted in English, and many of the students are learning English as a second or other language (ESL/ESOL). You can see completed projects from the previous four years at <<http://www.otan.dni.us/webfarm/emailproject/email.htm>> (choose the "Virtual

continued on next page

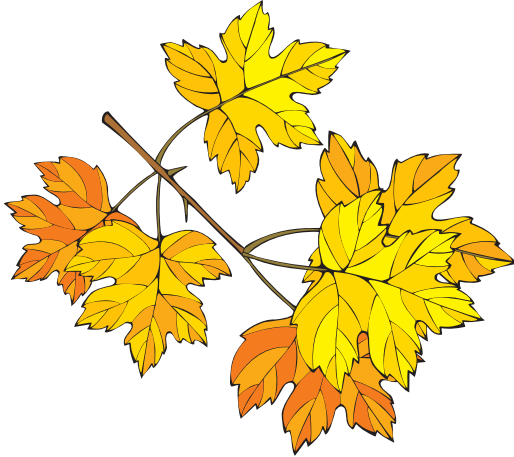
FOR YOUR INFORMATION

continued from previous page

School Visit” link).

If this sounds like a project you would like to learn more about, and possibly participate in, go to the International Classroom Virtual Visit electronic list sign-up page at <<http://lists.literacytent.org/mailman/listinfo/icvv>>, subscribe, and then write a message introducing yourself and your class. You can also view archives there of others’ introduction messages.

—David J. Rosen



WRITE FOR THE NEWSLETTER!

The *All Write News* is published by the A.L.R.I., but it is meant to be **your** newsletter. Its purpose is to present news and information dealing with adult literacy/adult basic education and to provide an open forum for materials written **by** and **for** adult literacy/adult basic education practitioners in this area. We encourage people to send us: • articles that share practitioners’ thoughts, experiences, and concerns; that reflect various approaches to adult basic education; that present ideas about teaching; or that explore important issues facing the field; • reviews of books, instructional materials, curricula, websites, software, audio-visual materials, etc.; • information on resources (financial or otherwise) available to programs; • responses to previously-published articles; • material in other, non-prose formats (such as poetry, cartoons, etc.). Articles should usually be not more than five or six double-spaced pages in length, though there have been exceptions to this.

Please send all material to me at the A.L.R.I., 989 Commonwealth Ave., Boston MA 02215, and, if possible, please include a computer disk (Mac or PC) with your material saved as a “text-only” document. Or you can e-mail it to me at: <steve@alri.org>. The deadline for submitting material for an upcoming issue is two months after your receipt of the previous issue. Please call me at 782-8956 x14 to ask questions, discuss an idea, or get further encouragement. Thanks.

—Steve Reuys

CHANGES AT A.L.R.I./SABES

continued from page 1

gram improvement. You’ll be hearing more about these new SABES initiatives as the year progresses.

At the A.L.R.I. the main news is the resignation of our Director of many years, David Rosen. This is a huge loss for us here at the A.L.R.I., where David has provided his extraordinary leadership since 1986. This also represents a loss for the field at the city, state, and national levels, though David may continue to work on a variety of related projects as an independent consultant. So, although David is definitely not retiring and is not leaving our field entirely, he will no longer be working with most of us, and we’ll be providing an opportunity for us all to say good-bye and thank-you at a party of October 8. (See box at left.)

Following David’s departure, we will not be able to refill the position of Director, due largely to funding considerations. (Attempting to fill David’s shoes would have been difficult enough anyway, but the loss of our funding from the state Board of Higher Education a couple of years ago meant the loss of a major source of funding for this position, which for a time David sought to compensate for through special project grants.) We have instead decided on a reorganization of the existing staff in our office, based on a sharing of administrative responsibilities between Maria Elena Gonzalez and myself. My title will no longer be “Staff Development Coordinator” but will instead now be “A.L.R.I. Coordinator”; I will be doing many of the fiscal and other administrative tasks that David used to do, along with some parts of my former job. Maria will remain as “SABES Coordinator” and will now also have general responsibility for overseeing our staff and program development activities, along with some administrative responsibilities as well. Specific responsibility for each part of our SABES workplan will rest with various staff, and administrative support will be provided by our office staff. For example, registration for activities will now be handled by our Office Assistant, not by me, while our Administrative Assistant will deal directly with presenters regarding payment paperwork.

These various changes also mean that we will no longer be doing some things that we have done in the past. Because of the new program-based focus of much of SABES’s work for this year (as described above, and in other ways), we will not be providing programs with the open invitation to request from us what we used to call “program-tailored” staff/program development activities, nor will we be issuing open invitations for mini-grant projects. We are also changing the frequency of publication for this newsletter—instead of publishing every two months, six times a year, we now plan on publishing every four months, three times a year, probably in September, January, and May. As of now, we expect you will continue to receive our activity announcements at the beginning of each month (except during the summer), though this may change as well, depending on

continued on next page

CHANGES AT A.L.R.I./SABES

continued from previous page

the need for publicizing activities.

So, who remains on our staff and what positions are currently vacant? Right now the A.L.R.I. staff consists of: Steve Reuys, A.L.R.I. Coordinator; Maria E. Gonzalez, SABES Coordinator; Sandra Darling, Librarian; Akira Kamiya, Computer Field Technologist; and Tina Viggiano, Administrative Assistant. Ernest Best, Director of MassAAL (the Massachusetts Alliance for Adult Literacy) is still work-

ing with us, out of our office, though the MassAAL grant is being administered this year through the SABES Southeast Regional Office. Deborah Schwartz is returning this month to the A.L.R.I. as a part-time Instructional Specialist. Over the summer we lost our Office Assistant, Julie Bures, who resigned to take a different job. We want to thank Julie for her work over the past two years and to wish her well in her new position, and we hope to soon be hiring a new Office Assistant. Finally, we also are in the process of hiring a new half-time Curriculum and Assessment Coordinator. •

GOOD-BYE/THANK YOU PARTY FOR DAVID ROSEN (& FUND-RAISER FOR BALF)



When: Wednesday, October 8, 2003. 6:00-8:00pm.

Where: Doyle's Cafe, 3484 Washington St. (corner of Williams St.), Jamaica Plain. Close to Green St. T stop on the Orange Line. Parking available behind Doyle's and across Williams St.

What: Buffet-style snacks/dinner.

Cost: \$18/person, plus any donation you may wish to make to BALF. David has requested that this event also be a fund-raiser for the Boston Adult Literacy Fund, so, when signing up to attend, you are urged to consider adding a donation to BALF to the amount of your check. (For example, writing a check for \$25 means a \$7 donation to BALF, a \$30 check means a \$12 donation, etc.)

If you plan to attend: We need to have a count of how many people to expect, so please RSVP by Sept. 30. Please send a check, along with your name, phone number, and e-mail address, to: Steve Reuys, Adult Literacy Resource Institute, 989 Commonwealth Ave., Boston MA 02215. Please make your check payable to the Boston Adult Literacy Fund, since they have kindly agreed to handle the fiscal side of this affair.

We hope to see you on Oct. 8!

SIGN UP NOW FOR THE NEW ABE BOSTON E-MAIL LIST!

For the past few years the A.L.R.I. has maintained an e-mail list containing the addresses of several hundred ABE practitioners in the Boston area, which we have used (very sparingly) to communicate urgent news to the field. However, this list was of limited utility, since it only allowed *us* to send messages to *you*, and was time-consuming to maintain in its current form,

So earlier this year we decided to phase out the old list and in its place to set up a new and different sort of list—an e-mail list server through which anyone on the list can communicate with all others on the list. We think this will be a useful step in promoting communication among everyone in our field in this region and will further promote the use of e-mail as an efficient way of distributing important information.

The list will allow the A.L.R.I./SABES to continue to send out announcements to the field, and it will also allow ABE practitioners and programs in the Boston region to get information out to one another about events, job postings, and other items relevant to ABE in this area. (Please note that this is NOT intended to serve as a discussion list. Also, to ensure that the list is being used for the proper purposes and in an effort to minimize spam, the list will be moderated and all posts will be subject to administrator approval.)

We invite all those involved in the ABE field in the Greater Boston region to sign up now. To join this list, go to <http://lists.literacytent.org/mailman/listinfo/abeboston>.

Adult Literacy Resource Institute

989 Commonwealth Avenue
Boston, MA 02215

*Massachusetts
Readers: Please
Open Promptly—*

*Announcements
of Upcoming
Staff Development
Activities at the
A.L.R.I. Enclosed*