

SPRING 2010

KEAN

M A G A Z I N E

THE BIG READ



America's **BIG** Problem Kean's **BIG** Solution

by Paul C. DiNero

Reading is the building block for learning. It educates, entertains and improves language. Reading gives perspective of history, people, places and things. It fosters concentration and focus, memory and discipline. Reading reduces stress.

With all the advances in technology, there has been a major shift in how Americans develop and nurture their minds. The truth is, too many of us would rather surf the Web, watch movies on our big-screen TVs or download music to our iPod, than sit and read a good book. Now, our digital thinking minds are faced with a national crisis.

Fewer than half of American adults read literature, according to a study released by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). Even more alarming is that the steepest rate of decline occurred among adults ages 18 to 24. The reality is that America isn't reading.

This semester, Kean University joined hundreds of communities nationwide in an initiative designed to restore reading to the center of American culture. It is called *The Big Read*, and it is made possible by a grant the NEA awarded to Dr. Mia Zamora, assistant professor in Kean's Department of English.

"As a university, we must be a leader in addressing the problem," said Zamora, who also coordinates Kean's world literature program. "This grant allows Kean to reenergize a love for reading among students and in the community."

In partnership with the Institute of Museum and Library Services and Arts Midwest, the NEA's *Big Read* program aims to address the crisis squarely and effectively by encouraging citizens to read and discuss a single book within their community.

"Students are disinterested in reading because it lacks immediacy," said Timothy Lowe, a senior English major at Kean. "Too many of us are bucking the process of intelligence. We expect information to be downloaded into our brains as expediently as putting songs on an iPod."

Like many students, Lowe is concerned with what the future holds if this issue is not brought to the forefront.

"My generation will eventually be in charge of this country and hardly any of us even read newspapers — scary fact," he said. "By bringing *The Big Read* to our campus, it will be near impossible for students to ignore this problem."

As host of *The Big Read*, Kean will carry out an extensive community-based reading program. All participants will be required to read the same book and engage in various activities, including discussions, lectures, movie screenings and performing arts events.

The selected text for Kean University's *Big Read* is Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*. Considered one of the finest books about the Vietnam War, the book was chosen from a list of 40 classic literary texts endorsed by the NEA.

"The NEA's *Big Read* program puts books in the hands of thousands of people," said O'Brien. "I am delighted that Kean University students will read my book, and that my work can be part of the solution."

Far from a combat story of pride and glory, *The Things They Carried* is a compassionate tale of the American soldier, brimming with raw honesty and thoughtful reflection. It challenges readers to ponder larger philosophical questions about truth and memory, and brings the reader closer to the emotional core of the soldier's experiences.

Kean's world literature professors have incorporated O'Brien's novel into their course syllabi. They attended a workshop in August to prepare them for integrating the reading and received educational materials such as readers', teachers', and audio guides, to support classroom discussions.

As part of *The Big Read* outreach component, the university has partnered with the Elizabeth Public Library as well as local veterans. Through its National Writing Project affiliation, Kean has expanded its effort to work with teachers at a variety of local high schools to encourage participation. In addition, Kean's student teachers-in-training will engage secondary-school students in the program by hosting a *Big Read* event in their future teaching districts.

"Our goal is to reach reluctant readers, and have them experience the power and pleasure of recreational reading regardless of their age," said Zamora. "We want them to remember this *Big Read* experience so that the next time they are intrigued by a book they will pick it up and read it."

That's exactly the message Kean University senior Matthew Skwiat is hoping gets across.

"Too often, reading gets stigmatized as difficult or boring," said Skwiat, a double major in English and history. "It can be challenging at times, but that is the beauty of it. When people choose not to read, they miss out on all the joys and beauties, the people and places, the methods and ideas that literature gives to us. Reading any kind of book adds to being a well-rounded person."

Kean University's *Big Read* will kick off with a campus celebration on February 4, at 3:30 p.m. in the University Center. The semester-long program will conclude with a reading from author Tim O'Brien on April 14, in Wilkins Theatre.

The Things They Carried is available for purchase in the Barnes and Noble campus bookstore. Several copies of the book in print and audio format will be available for on-site reading in designated *Big Read* areas throughout campus.

For more information about Kean University's *Big Read* or to participate in the program, contact Dr. Mia Zamora at mzamora@kean.edu or visit www.kean.edu.

"Novels are aimed not just at the intellect, but also at the heart and stomach and tear ducts and back of the throat of its readers. Beyond anything, I want readers to feel emotionally touched and emotionally engaged by my book."

—Tim O'Brien
Author of *The Things They Carried*



The **BIG** READ AT KEAN UNIVERSITY SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

KICK OFF PARTY

Thursday, February 4 at 3:30 p.m., University Center Atrium
(Remarks, music, and food reception)
Featuring: Chris Bollawage, Mayor of Elizabeth, Dawood Farahi, Kean University President, and Dorothy Key, Director of the Elizabeth Public Library

VIETNAM WAR FILM SERIES

Wednesday, February 10 at 10 a.m., Elizabeth Public Library
Platoon
Thursday, February 18 at 2:30 p.m., Kean University, CAS Room 106
Vietnam Soldiers' Story: Invisible Enemy
Wednesday, February 24 at 10 a.m., Elizabeth Public Library
Good Morning, Vietnam
Thursday, March 4 at 2:30 p.m., Kean University, CAS Room 106
The Fog of War
Wednesday, March 10 at 10 a.m., Elizabeth Public Library
Rescue Dawn
Wednesday, March 24 at 2:30 p.m., Kean University, CAS Room 106
Apocalypse Now

TEEN BOOK DISCUSSION

Thursday, March 11 at 5 p.m., Elizabeth Public Library
The Things They Carried by Tim O'Brien

THE WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVE ON

THE VIETNAM WAR
Saturday, March 13 at 2 p.m., Elizabeth Public Library
Book discussion of *A Piece of My Heart* by Keith Walker

AMERICAN PLACE THEATER COMPANY

Thursday, March 25 at 12:30 p.m., Kean University's Little Theater (UC)
The Things They Carried, Theater production

ELIZABETH PUBLIC LIBRARY VETERANS PANEL

Monday, March 29 at 7 p.m., Elizabeth Public Library
Veteran Perspectives on the Vietnam War

KEAN FACULTY & STUDENT VETERANS PANEL

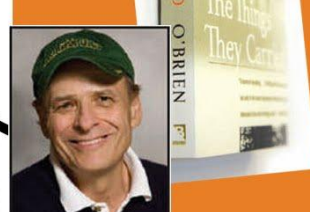
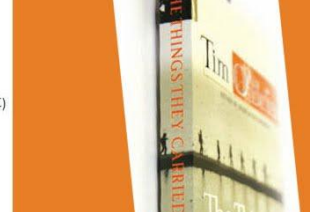
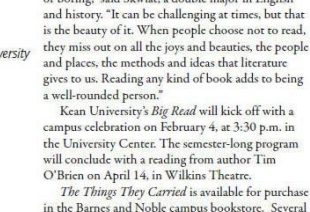
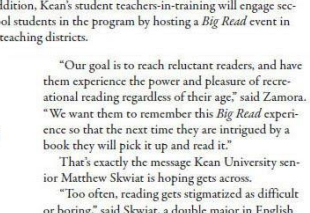
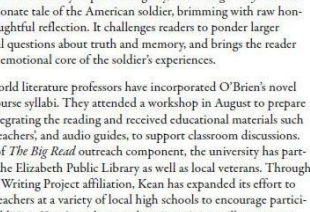
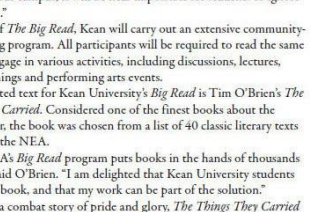
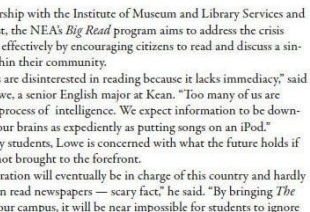
Thursday, April 8 at 2:30 p.m., Kean University, CAS Room 106
A Comparative Discussion of Combat, Now & Then

A READING AND TALK BY AUTHOR TIM O'BRIEN

April 14 at 12:30 p.m., Kean University, Wilkins Theater

THE LITTLE READ

Children's programming in conjunction with *The Big Read* will take place throughout the month of March at the Elizabeth Public Library, including story time gatherings, arts & crafts and a celebration of the Vietnamese New Year (called "Tet"). Books to be featured include *Ten Mice for Tet*, *How Tiger Got His Stripes: A Folktale from Vietnam*, and *Children of the Dragon: Selected Tales from Vietnam*.





Mia

ZAMORA

It is Dr. Mia Zamora's drive to share a global sense of the world with students that's at the core of her passion as a teacher.

"I strive to help students see themselves as global citizens," said Zamora, an assistant professor of English and coordinator of the world literature program at Kean since 2005. "My goal is to give each student a glimpse of their own great potential in the world."

A Fulbright scholar, Zamora teaches specialized undergraduate courses in numerous literary disciplines, as well as a graduate course in contemporary literature. She is a faculty consultant for Kean's National Writing Project and the driving force behind *The Big Read* initiative.

"Literature allows us to see things from new perspectives," said Zamora, a former president of the New Jersey College English Association. "It is essential in living a good life - like breathing in clean air, eating good food or listening to music you love."

Recently, Zamora developed a proposal for a degree in Asian studies with Drs. Sue Gronewold and Xurong Kong of Kean's history department. The program will introduce TravelLearn courses in China and India, as well as a dynamic lecture series, entitled *Human Dignity, Literature, & Asian Studies*.

Committed to becoming a literary scholar and educator, Zamora earned her M.A. and Ph.D. in comparative literature at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where she was a fellow of the Center for Southeast Asian Studies. She completed her Postdoctoral Teaching and Research Fellowship at Fordham University and is currently a member of several literature and writers associations. Zamora's recent book, *Nation, Race & History in Asian American Literature: Re-membling the Body*, was nominated for a national Literary Studies award.

In addition to her professional pursuits, Zamora loves to travel, cook, and read and is a proud mother of two boys.

"As a teacher and a mother you get to impart knowledge, skills and wisdom to young minds," said Zamora. "But truthfully, I am the one who receives such gifts each and every day."



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~Dr. Mia Zamora