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Martha Canter : Green and Golden

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Alumni



MARTHA MCKAY CANTER
BA, ENGLISH '93
MA, ENGLISH EDUCATION
'09

I could tell any number of stories about why I became an English major. There's the one about how my middle school English teacher awakened me to the beauty of words. From a very young age I have swooned at a cleverly constructed sentence. That would be my version of the freshman essay, which, in spite of its saccharine, is no less true. Then there's the one about how a Virginia Woolf novel I read during my MA program at USFSP rocked

my world. Also true. I love a good story as much as any person whose curiosity brought them to this page. You could say literature was my first love, the pretty stories and the ones about subjects that aren't so pretty.

Stories are the reason I study and teach English, but not only those found in books. You see, we humans are symbol using and storytelling animals. Our symbols are the words we use to understand ourselves, and to understand and communicate with each other. We turn these words into stories that shape our beliefs, and by extension our very identities. Our stories are influenced by the places we live and those we visit, by the events we experience and observe, and by the people we meet and the stories they share, stories that have, in turn, shaped them. Studying English helps us to understand this powerful functionality of words, which positions us to solve problems by repairing misunderstandings between ourselves and others.

Maybe I always had a hunch that words were powerful, but it was the guidance of the

literature faculty at USFSP that opened my eyes to it, because they are fully versed in the power contained in words. This brings me to the story of how after earning my MA at USFSP I entered a doctoral program to earn my Ph.D. in English. I now have the pleasure of teaching college students about the beauty and power of words myself. If you're reading this and thinking maybe you want to get your MBA, that's great! But I suggest you study English first. If you're thinking that science is more your thing, that's great, too! Still, study English first. In fact, no matter what field you want to make your profession, you will benefit by studying English, because we humans are symbol-users who understand everything we know of the world through the stories we tell ourselves and each other.

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Heidi Hamlin, *Alumni Relations Officer* (727) 873-4259 - HHamlin2@usfsp.edu

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