

# CULTIVATING COMMUNI-TEA

## WHAT IS “TEA TIME” AT UAF?

Tea Time is an initiative designed by Dr. Sarah Stanley and Naomi King to cultivate community and enhance engagement within UAF’s English Department.

Their aim has been to address stereotypes about English majors by showcasing the value and versatility of their studies, and by providing a dedicated space for intellectual and social interaction.



The proposal “Tea Time – Cultivating Community and Creativity” won the 2024-25 Student Belonging and Community Award!



Mentor Sarah Stanley, English Department Chair and Associate Professor, and undergraduate student Naomi King.



Tea Time encourages students to engage with literature and foster fellowship over the comfort of tea. At every gathering, students engage in thoughtful conversation, share literary analysis, and impactful experiences, all of which affirms identity and builds a sense of community and belonging.

## STEEPING...

I was tasked not only to plan an event for my fellow English students, but to plan from 4166 miles away! Fortunately, I’ve had (nearly) 4 years to connect with those within UAF’s English department through virtual class discussions and workshops. Drawing on those interactions, I’ve planned each Tea Time with the intent of respite from the grueling hours of lectures/homework while still engaging brains in the joys of literary discussion. I initially struggled with this dichotomy, but then I asked myself: what might stop YOU from coming to Tea Time?

Aside from my introvertism, there’s my job, exams/essays, and exhaustion. These roadblocks meant Tea Time had to be relatively short, not mentally overbearing, and refreshing. Therefore, Tea Time is no more than 45 minutes, contains light reading, and yummy treats. The treats were easy to coordinate with the readings, and the readings with the literary-themed tea supply, so next was how to spur discussion. I would read each chosen text and write out my curiosities. Commonly, they concerned the history of the subject matter. Where did the tradition of gingerbread come from? What are the “Nicean barks of yore?” Why are hatters “mad?” Then came the best part: research! I’ve had the pleasure of connecting answers to these questions for Tea Time attendees, simplifying convolutions, and presenting them for casual discussion.

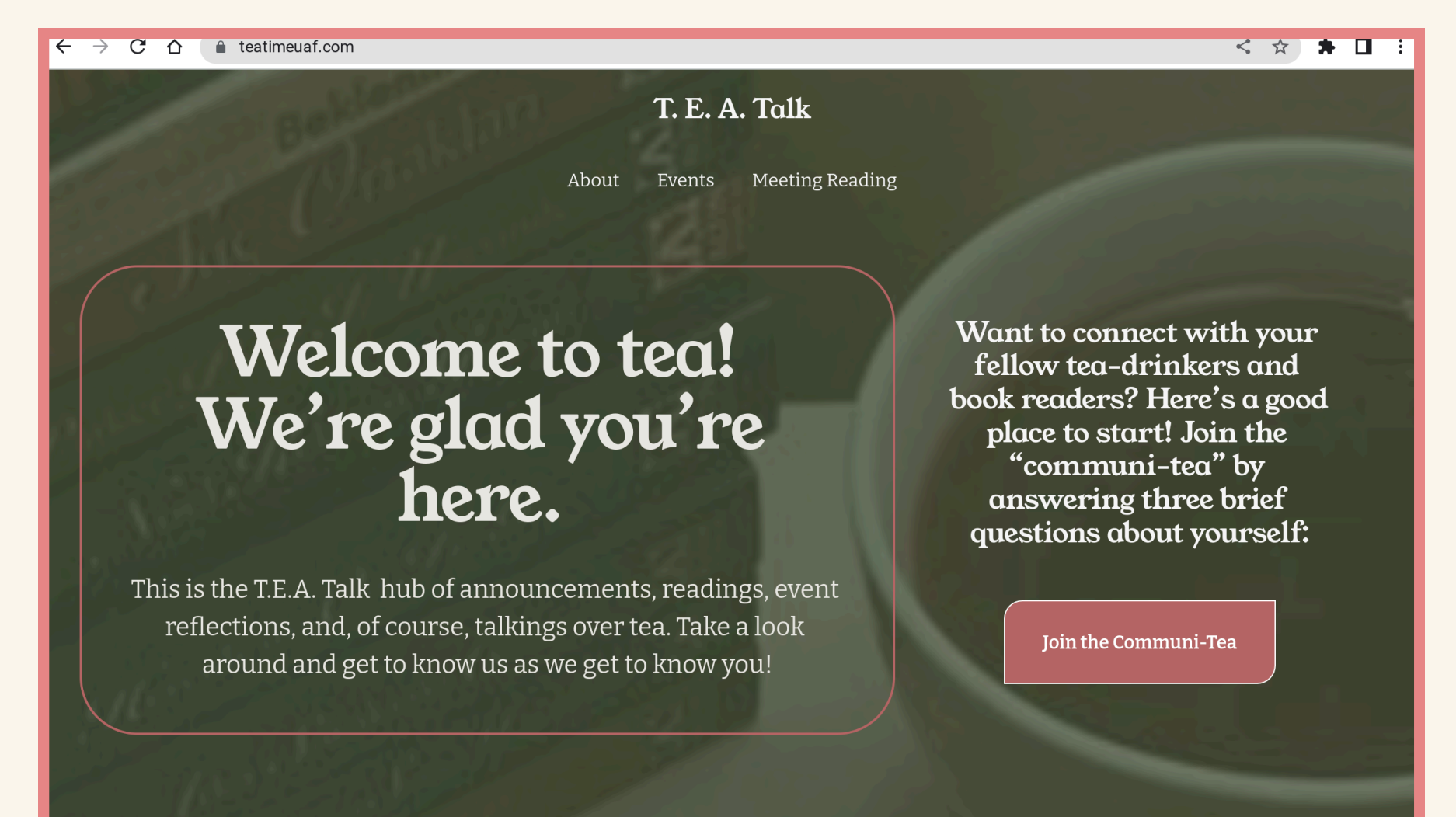
There were points during each planning process that I wished there was a perfect formula for community building! Nevertheless, with each Tea Time gathering, I receive more insight not only into how to cultivate community, but also how to maintain it. While instilling value into my community of English students, I develop my own sense of value and belonging!



## NECESSARY CREATIVI-TEA



In addition to event planning, there was also the task of event advertisement. There has been much trial and error in creating flyers to appeal to the English department’s diversity!



For further promotion and source of community, Tea Time has a website (teatimeuaf.com)! Creating my first website was a welcomed challenge, and it stands as a monument and archive of our growing community.

## TEA-M EFFORT

While I’ve put much time and energy into the development of Tea Time, the final product of each gathering couldn’t exist without support from English department faculty and donors. Every Tea Time, my plans are faithfully executed by the team through the purchasing of materials and the transforming of Gruening 850 into an affable atmosphere. It has been through community that the larger community has grown!

