The School Writing Project provides teacher professional development to promote student writing. SWP’s primary objective is to enable teachers to generate excitement, enthusiasm and improvement in their students’ writing.

Gastonia (Terri) Goodman, SWP Director, Bellaire High School
Caroline Glendenning, Layout Edi-

The School Writing Project would like to thank its donors. You have made the excitement of writing accessible possible for hundreds of students and teachers.

Teachers and administrators interested in professional development should contact Bernie Mathes or Gastonia (Terri) Goodman at (713) 348-3088
When students find their voice as writers, they enlarge their sense of their own purpose and their worth as learners. Many are surprised they have so much to say. When students edit their writing, many are editing their lives. Many are surprised to see themselves move from passive absorbers of school knowledge into active thinkers and interpreters of their worlds. When students see teachers write, they catch the contagious excitement of making words work for them. They see close-up the hard work of writing, of thinking about what to say, of choosing a form, of shifting a tone of searching for an image, of deleting, of searching for a word.

For more than ten years, the School Writing Project has brought together teachers who want their students to find their voices as writers. These teachers study the research on children’s development as writers and the pedagogical literature on good classroom practices. They share their own teaching strategies and advise each other’s work. But most importantly, they write. And in the sharing of their writing, they create the trust and commitment to powerful writing that they then carry into the classrooms. They feel tentativeness and hesitation of having to share their writing with others—the same hesitation that can silence student writers.

When Dr. Marvin Hoffman founded the School Writing Project, he insisted that the teaching of writing was about writing, about trust, and about development over time within a supportive community of writers. For the past four years, teachers whose classrooms exemplify the power of student writing have served as the leaders of this project. They have organized and taught the teacher writing seminars; they have put forward new plans for expanding the work into more schools. They have continued the great SWP traditions of publishing students writing and giving voice to student writers through public readings of their work. Hundreds of students across all grades, cultures, neighborhoods, and school environments throughout our city now call themselves “writers” because of the extraordinary work of the School Writing Project teacher leaders, teacher writers, and teacher learners.

We at the Rice University Center for Education applaud their accomplishments, celebrate their commitment to help all children grow as writers, and we affirm the commitment of the Center to supporting their efforts. Congratulations, School Writing Project, for another extraordinary year!

Dr. Linda McNeil and Dr. Ron Sass
Co-Directors, Center for Education
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There was once a very mighty Eagle. No one in the city knew about him. One day he found some friends and they were Johnny, Toller, Garrett, Derrick, Chase, Stephen and Greg. They loved to play together. But one day they met a troll. They did not know what to do. The troll was about to attack. The Eagle tried to fight him off but he could not. Garrett said "When all else fails RUN." So then the chase began.

At first the kids and the Eagle were ahead. Then the troll caught up. Greg said "Let's go through that narrow gap in the trees." "We have to go one at a time," said Johnny. So they went through. The troll tried to go through, but he hurt himself so much that he fainted.

The kids and the Eagle came to a clearing. They were lost! "What do we do now?" asked the Eagle. "There's the ocean," said Chase. "Let's fly over on the eagle's back." So they started on the long journey onward. "We'll never make it," said Derrick. "Who knows, we might," said Eagle. "Can you go faster, Eagle?" asked Greg. "Yes I can and I will." ZOOOOOOOM! "We're cruising now," Toller said. "To be exact we're going 2,000,000 MPH!!!!!!" "How long is the ocean?" asked Greg. "It's only 30,000,000 miles!" said Eagle. "Well then let's get started" said Toller. "We are started" Stephen reminded him.


"Where are we?" asked Garrett. "In the Pacific," said Eagle. "I heard that--" but at that moment there was a fierce wind from the ocean and it blew off Stephen. Luckily, he landed on an island. Meanwhile the eagle was circling down below the clouds. Now Stephen was having a great time until he met a grizzly bear. But at that very second, the eagle swooped down and tried to pick up Stephen, but the grizzly bear stopped him. "We cannot just leave him here," said Garrett. The next time they tried, they got Stephen and started on the journey again. They finally reached a continent. Eagle said, "we have to keep going." They finally reached America and they went home.

Five years later, there was a plane wreck that just happened to crash on the kids' street (meaning Johnny, Stephen, Garrett, Chase, Greg and Derrick). They were in the hospital for one whole year. Then the eagle swooped down into the hospital and went to pick the kids up. Then the Eagle took them on another adventure.

Now the kids immediately knew what was happening. "NOT ANOTHER ONE," blurted out Stephen. "Another what?" asked Eagle. "Another adventure of course," said Chase. "Let's end this conversation," said Eagle. "All right," said the kids, and were on their second journey. But they took a wrong turn and found themselves at the end of the world. The kids and Eagle were all scared, and had no clue as to where to go. But before the kids knew it the eagle turned around and took the kids home.

Five years later the kids had another adventure. It all started when the kids woke up on a Saturday and went to eat their cereal. When they tried to eat, someone said, "This stuff that you're going to eat is magical. It can take you anywhere." They said, "can we go to Europe?" Zap. They were in Europe. In Europe it was funny because they saw cheetahs, tigers, lions, and cobras. The problem was that the animals are meat eaters. So the kids looked for the magic cereal to get away, but could not find it. Johnny said, "If only Eagle were here." Then the eagle came! It took them home. At home everyone was still sleeping. So they played Gameboy. They also watched TV. When Greg's mom got up they went to a soccer game. Then they had lunch.
Help! Goodman Gang Needs a Teacher
Steven Ng, Second Grade

When I got to school this morning Mrs. Goodman was not there and we did not see a substitute anywhere. We decided we would not tell anybody and elect our own teacher. Derrick said if we elected him he would give us recess all day. Sarah said if we elected her she would give us a two hour lunch. So I stood up and said, "Your plans will not work. We have to stay inside the classroom all day to not get discovered. If you vote for me I will let you play Nintendo, watch television, and play computer games." Of course everybody voted for me.

Everything was going great for a couple of hours until the class got into a fight because the boys wanted to play Nintendo on the television and the girls wanted to watch cartoons. Before I knew it the kids were screaming, jumping over tables and throwing chairs. I turned the lights off and told the class to be quiet. It was too late. There was a very angry Mrs. Picklefoot. She said, "Put your heads to your desks." When she told us to look up we saw that all the boards were filled with homework assignments. Then she left. The next time Mrs. Goodman is absent we will march straight to the principal's office and ask her to call for a substitute.

The Lonely Player
Patrick Connelly, Third Grade

There is no one, no one more powerful than him,
He was the greatest ballplayer of all time,
Baseball was the thing that held him together,
He would drive down the bases as a locomotive,
He would motivate the players to their ultimate destiny,
A fine family, shelter, and a life,
This all was Jack Shields.

The players didn't worry about the coach.
Jack was the one they feared.
Jack didn't only rule baseball like a giant,
He controlled the hard times as well,
But he didn't know that hard times would
Knock him off a cliff too.

Bribes, cold money, the thing that got Jack in trouble,
He was accused of taking that awful money,
But the truth was, he didn't do it.
Jack was soon lost with himself,
Feeling pain hour after hour,
Asking "Why did this have to happen?"
"Why me? Why me?"

Jack is now retired from baseball,
After his popularity went down the drain.
But there is still that one spark,
That one spark inside him that keeps him going all the way.
Once there was a prince whose name was Daisy. He disliked his name! When he was a baby his parents had named him Daisy because he had pointed to their pet cow also named Daisy and shouted, "Me! Me! Me!" They tried to name him something else, but whenever they said another name, he just pointed to the cow named Daisy and said, "Me! Me!" again. So they named him Daisy.

Daisy had 2 cats, 5 birds, and 16 dogs. He was always moaning about his name. One day his maid was bringing him milk. His dogs were barking, his birds were chirping, and his cats were meowing. His maid walked in, carrying his milk. She started to walk away behind his chair when he heard a voice. The prince turned around and looked behind his chair. He asked his maid if she had heard the voice. "No, of course not," she said. When he actually paid attention to the voice behind his chair, he saw a cat, a bird, and a dog. "Oh, gosh," he said. "I'll never know who the voice is coming from." Then the prince went to bed.

The next morning, the prince was awakened by a voice that said, "Look at me. I am under your bed." The prince looked and saw nothing. It was early in the morning, so the prince just went back to sleep. But he had nightmares about ghosts in his castle. Later in the middle of the day he was awakened again by a voice that said, "Change your name. Your new name will be King Fred the 15th."

The prince said, "How can I be king? My father says I can't be a ruler until I earn a $1,000 and I don't know any way to earn money."

The voice said, "But you will be ruler. You will. You will."

The prince finally followed the voice and found his cat Bunny. "That's who it is!" said Daisy. "How can I be sure that I will be king?"

"There is going to be a plague of frogs and you have to stop them. Then everyone will be so grateful to you that they will be happy when you are made king."

"How will I stop a plague of frogs?" asked Daisy.

"Oh, that's simple. Just cast a spell on them to make them go back to the hill where they live."

"I didn't know that I was a wizard," said Daisy.

"Well, you are. Just say, 'Bibbity, bobbity, boo' and the frogs will go away," said Bunny.

Daisy waited patiently for two weeks for the day to come when he could work his magic. At last the frogs came. They were horrible. You couldn't look in any direction without seeing twenty frogs. The prince, remembering Bunny's advice shouted, "Bippity, Boppity, Boo." All of the frogs disappeared. The village people were astounded. They tried to make things disappear but it never worked. How could a young prince only ten years old be a wizard?

After he got rid of the frogs, Daisy went all around the country giving magic shows. He charged $10 a ticket. When he had put on a lot of shows, he finally had $1,000. He went back home and went into his father's room. He said to his father, "Uh, Dad, I have the $1,000 like you asked me to get."

The king said, "Do you need a crown?"

Daisy said, "Nope. I already have one."

The king said, "That's wonderful. I can finally go to Hawaii like I have planned for many years and do the hula while juggling."

And so the king happily set off on his long journey, putting his crown into his son's hands anyway. From then on, everybody always called Daisy "King Fred the 15th." His cats became his closest advisors, three of his dogs became ministers, two became town criers, and the rest filled up the pews when no members showed up for church. The birds kept everyone smiling.

—from the new King Fred the 15th:
You know when I pointed to that cow when I was a baby, I really didn't wanted to be NAMED after it, I just wanted to ride it!
Alex Tavangarian, Fifth Grade

"Why do we dream at night?" I asked as Grandpa as I watched the sunset.

"Well, I don't know, Brad," Grandpa answered "We just do it.''

"Can we go fishing tomorrow?" I asked anxiously.

Grandpa answered, "I don't see why not"

"Great! I'll go get ready for bed!" I said already running towards the porch. I thought of how lucky I was to have a small lake in my backyard. I loved the country. When I went into the house, I went straight to the guest bath.

Randy Gay, Fifth Grade

When we first got Jack, he was a cute, loving, playful, innocent puppy He was so curious, and he loved to discover new things. I still remember the day I first saw him. I remember that day in such great detail that it feels like it was just yesterday.

I popped up in bed and looked around my room as if I was worried about something. After a moment I calmed down and rubbed my eyes. Blindly, I reached over to my nightstand and felt for my glasses. This usually took a while because I never put them on the side right next to the bed. Never in the same spot either, because before I put them down I have to take them off, and I can't see a thing without my glasses on.

Anyway, I finally found them, put them on, and pushed the center close to my nose. I waited a few moments to focus my eyes. I leaned back down in bed. After a few moments, I sprang up again and yelled, "It's Christmas!!!" I rolled out of my bed, made a thud on the floor as I reached the ground, and headed straight for the door. I threw it open and headed for the stairs.

I rushed round and round the curved stairway until I reached the bottom. My socks made me slide on the wooden floor and lose my balance. After regaining my balance, I ran down the hall towards the living room. My parents were kneeling down next to each other, holding hands, apparently waiting for me. Broad smiles spread across their warm faces in unison as their heads moved closer together.

For a second I dragged my focus away from my parents and looked at what was behind them. Many presents were under the eight-foot tall Christmas tree. The majority of them were small but I was growing to an age where I enjoyed most of the small presents more than the large ones. The first one I noticed, though, was actually very large. In the top it had holes in it, and it didn't seem to be sealed. There was a humongous red velvet bow on the top that really caught my interest. I ran a few steps and slid on my knees the rest of the way towards it.

A muffled whimpering noise came from inside the box. I gently moved my hands toward the lid and grabbed hold of it. My fingertips touched the bottom of the lid and I lifted it up.

In the box was the most beautiful and cutest thing I had ever seen. It was a small puppy. His black, cold, wet nose popped through the box and sniffed the air. I reached inside the box and pulled him out. He licked my hands all over like there was no tomorrow. I loved him from the first second.

I stroked his little golden head and brought him close to my face, ignoring the possibility that he might take a nip at me. Instead of biting me, he attempted to lick the inside of my mouth…gross! I moved him closer to my cheek He accepted the opportunity and stroked his little wet tongue across my cold cheek. All of a sudden there was a bright flash. I jerked my head to the right.

My father had a camera against his right eye, and I could see that under the camera he was grinning from ear to ear. He slowly lowered the camera. "Merry Christmas, Julie," he said He opened his arms very wide, setting the camera down. With the puppy in my left hand, and my right arm stretched out, I crawled on my knees to go hug my dad. When I reached him my mother joined in and embraced both of us. The puppy was in the middle licking my cheek. We were all giggling, especially me. It's hard to keep from giggling when a puppy's licking your face with his little wet tongue. When he stopped licking me and we all calmed down, I said, "Jack!" "Hmm?" my mother replied. "Jack," I said again. "That's what I'm going to call him." My mom tilted her head, looking curious. "Why are you going to call him that?" she inquired. "I just think he looks like he's destined to be called Jack. Don't you think so too?" My mom returned her head to the normal position and said, "Yes, I do. Jack is a great name."

Brecca Larrew, Grade 5

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Moving On cont.

room to brush my teeth. After I brushed my teeth with the awful tasting Colgate toothpaste I went to bed.

The next day I woke up at 6:00 am, got dressed, and went to wake Grandpa. I went down the hall and into the room that Grandpa always used. When I walked in the doorway, he was snoring peacefully. I didn't want to wake him, but if we were going to catch fish, we couldn't go late so I woke him up. "C'mon Grandpa! It's early and the fish are out!" When he finally got out of bed and got ready we went down the porch. As we walked down the porch steps, Grandpa grabbed his chest. "What's wrong Grandpa?" I asked, alarmed.

"Get your father quick!" his voice sounded urgent, so I wasted no time.

I sprinted into the house yelling, "Dad, Dad, come here quick! Grandpa's hurt!" My dad was on the porch before I was. I didn't know what was going on, but then I saw something I had never seen before. There was a tear streaming down my dad's cheek.

"Come here son," my father said in a serious voice, but I knew that he was hiding his sorrow from me. I came forward and looked at him. His strong hand ran through my black hair. "Brad, your grandfather was a good man, and he didn't do anything wrong. He has gone to a better place though," my father told me in a sad voice.

"No, no! I won't accept it," I said running to my room. That night I went outside and watched the sunset. I cried because just the night before, I had watched the sunset with my grandfather. I had to escape my feelings; I had to move on. I jumped in the lake because I thought it would wash my feelings away, but it didn't.

The next day there was a knock at the door. It was Ben, my best friend.

"I heard about your grandfather, and I'm sorry about that," Ben said.

"Yeah, thanks," I said, turning away to hide my tears from him. "You okay, man?" he asked

"Yeah, it's just that I was born in his house, and he was the first person I ever saw," I said.

"C'mon, let's go swim," Ben said.

"Yeah, swimming might make me feel better," I replied. I put on my swimming trunks and we went swimming. Ben and I were both always trying to beat the other at something, so we had races in the lake, diving competitions, even breath contests. When we were done having contests, we just played around. One time he snuck up on me and dunked me underwater, but I retaliated by pulling him down with me. Then we had underwater battles. I had him by the waist, and he had me by the head. Then we both let go and paddled up as fast as we could. When we broke the surface, we were gasping for breath.

Ben managed to gasp, "Truce!"

"Truce!" I said. Then we got out and Ben went home. I had fun in the lake, but not that much fun because Grandpa was still in the back of my mind.

That night all my relatives came for the funeral. The day of the funeral was a sunny day, which would have been nice if we weren't going to a funeral. When we went to the funeral, the priest was late so we had to wait in the hot sun until he came. When he finally came and finished the service, everyone cried. My father even shed a few tears down his usually straight face.

When we left, I asked my mom, "Will our lives change now that Grandpa is gone?"

"Not much Brad, we won't get visits from him anymore, but other than that, not much," my mom answered.

I thought back and remembered that I had wanted to help carry the coffin, but I had been too short and not strong enough. Now all I wanted to do was rest.

"The soccer championship is tomorrow," my father said when we got home. "Do you feel like going?"

"Yeah, I guess so," I replied. I had been looking forward to this, but it didn't seem as fun as before.

The next day, I went to my game. In the first half, their team scored. Then Matt, another friend of mine, scored for our team. Then a kid on the other team got past our goalie who had come out. It was an open shot, so I sprinted back as fast as I could. I jumped in the way of the shot. I blocked it, but I was winded and substituted out. I was put back in with three minutes left with the score tied. I intercepted a pass, and I dribbled through the defense. I shot. The goalie dived. I was slide-tackled from behind. It seemed as if time had slowed. Then the ball went in. I was falling, but I saw the ball go in. The referee helped me up. Then my team held the other team off for the last minute and a half.

"We won! We beat 'em!" yelled Matt when the final whistle was blown. They grabbed Matt and me, who were the goal-scorers, and hoisted us onto their shoulders.

I was happier than I ever thought I would be after my grandfather died.

After all of this I learned that I need to grow up and move on. I couldn't keep mourning for my grandfather forever. I felt that my grandfather would be proud of me because I had discovered that I could still be happy enough even though he was gone.
**Eagle**
Maria Reyes, Second Grade

Freedom, Power, Majesty
Ability To Swoop Down Prey
Able To Turn The Whole Head Around
Known For Their Sharp Eyesight
The Sharp Talons
Victorious

**Hamster**
Rene Tinoco, First Grade

I have a hamster. His name is Buddy. It's colors are white, brown, and black. His long body is as long as a toy car. I give him hamster food. He's fun to play with. I put his in a little car. I push him fast. He's two years old. He sleeps with me when he gets out of his cage. I caught him yesterday. They bought me it. I like my hamster a lot.

**Going to the Ranch**
Jacob DeLeon, First Grade

I go to Mexico and I go to the ranch. I have a lot of pigs in the ranch. I have a lot of little pigs. My brother and I go in the cage and feed the pigs. We feed the big and the little pigs leftover food. I have a picture with them. I like to go to Mexico because I get to go to the ranch.

**My Dog**
Damaris Garcia, Kindergarten

My dog's name is Little Star. I have a Chihuahua and sometimes she bites me. She likes to nap. She wakes me up all the time. She wants to run to me and I am her mom. Her mom loves her.
My Friend's Wedding
Hannah Rodriguez, Second Grade

On Saturday, it was my friend Courtney's wedding. My mom and I held the bride's train. I felt a little nervous and scared because there were a lot of people and I had never done it before. Her dress had beads where I was holding it, and it was white. My sister was the flower girl, and my friend Andrew was holding the rings.

The place where the wedding was held was called Helen's Garden. Helen's Garden had lots of pretty flowers and a water fountain where the water came up, but not to drink. After the wedding, we went to her house and ate some appetizers and snacks. Then, some of us went to go eat with her at Pappadeux. It was good, but it was cold outside. My dad took some pictures of us. We got to eat chocolate cake with strawberries.

Courtney chose me to hold the train because she knew I wouldn't let go of her train. I did a good job because I didn't let go of her train or let it drag. I felt excited to hold the train. I would do it again.

Mi Sueño
Araceli Landin, Third Grade

Yo soñé que vivía en Hawai
Y que bailaba arriba del mar
Y le cantaba a los peces
Hasta que un día vino una ballena
Y me tragó. Y allí adentro cantaba y bailaba
En la panza de la ballena
Para los peces que habían en la panza de ella.

I Wish
Aide Martinez, Fourth Grade

I wish you would be the one for me
With your beautiful eyes
And your wonderful fur
I love you my kitty
Now Purr.
I Want to Wax a Worm
Catherine Janzer, Third Grade

I want to nose dive into my dog's fur.
I want to piggyback ride on a polar bear's back.
I want to ooze through a bowl of goose feathers.
I want a lion limping while I lick his leg. I want to fiddle in the middle of a kettle.
I want to tackle a turkey with a toy.
I want to bully a big brown bear.
I want to zonk a zebra into a zoo.
I want to catch a cat and make it go cuckoo.
I want to gargle a goose.
I want to dump a duck.
I want to explore an elephant's ear.
I want to watch a shark scrub itself.
I want to wax a worm.

I Want to Hover
Michael Mueller, Third Grade

I want to belly flop in a brown belly of a bear bowling alley. I want to ogle an ancient octopus in an ocean full of olives. I want to deck Moby Dick on a duck. I want to take a tyrannosaurus Rex to Timber Town. I want to budge a birthday cake into a bunny's big belly. I want to hover.

Galveston Bay
Danielle Brown, Fourth Grade

A faint smell of rotting salmon invaded my nose as I baited my hook at Galveston Bay. I stared around in amazement at the petite water beetles and the quacking ducks. The sun glowed lovingly as the heavy salty air pushed down on my tired shoulders. Spying down, on the rocks, I noticed algae climbing onto the jagged peninsula trying to link itself to the grassy shore. Seagulls floated gracefully on the water as an immense crab scuttled across the road. The shrimp I baited my hook with seemed to struggle to dive away. I heard the seagulls and fishermen laughing like elated dolphins. After fishermen plunged their hooks into the water, these splashes make waves crash like race car drivers. Like a visitor fading into the darkness, the sun said, "See you later." My last thought was: the water in Galveston Bay is so placid, so why does it smell like rotting fish?
Sarah Armstrong, Fourth Grade

At noon in the heart of Silver Glen, a miniature aqua-tinted figure plopped into the crystal stream of Everlasting Forest. Everlasting Forest was a tranquil place with its rippling waterfalls and oaks and maples watching over you.

As a young farmer and his milky-white husky came hiking on an imaginary path, a figure hid in the shrub next to it. After the farmer was gone, a second figure appeared. When the second figure heard the shrub next to her thrash, she hid in a shrub too. When the forest figure hopped out of the shrub, the second figure saw that it was just Cobweb, her best friend. She wore a dress made of morning glories strung together by poison ivy. The second girl hopped out of the shrub she was hiding in. The first fairy saw that it was Pea Blossom, her friend. She wore a dress made of tiger lily petals laced together by vines. She had turquoise lips from munching on stolen blueberries from the Farmers' Market. "Hi, Pea," said Cobweb.

"Hi, Web," said Pea Blossom. "We better hide before a human finds us."

"I do not see any men here," said Mustard Seed, Pea Blossom's little sister who had just pounced on the lowest branch above them. As she waved her hand to motion hello, they could see her feeble hands were soiled, bruised, and wrinkled from soaring from tree to tree. Her torn dress was made of mustard blossoms and sewn together by Spanish moss. Her eyes were the color of a pleasant peach waiting to fall off its tree. Her hair was a wildly hot, ochre color like a fire about to strike the forest. "Well," she pushed her big sister, "What human? I don't see any human."

"The human I'm talking about is called Dale and he knows about the fairies. I think he must have a bee in his bonnet about us."

They were so deep in conversation that they did not realize that a dark figure was gliding from tree to tree. It moved as swiftly as the golden eagle of Scotland. When the figure was right behind them, they turned around and screeched, then everything went black.

When they awoke, they found themselves in a burlap sack. "We must be in Dale's sack," said Pea Blossom. "We can use my pocket knife to cut the sack," said Cobweb. Mustard Seed turned around to see their route. The knife gnawing on the sack sounded like scratching on wood.

Finally, they were free. "I think we should put some other fairies in the sack," said Mustard Seed. They put three things in the bag and flew after him.

When Dale got to the town square, he got out a hazel megaphone. The three mischievous fairies hid behind an old wrinkled oak tree that Robin Good Fellow had pointed out to them on the way there. "Come, Come all. Come look at my fairies," Dale said. With that one word, fairies, and everyone looked at him. "It's only ten gold coins to see them," he said.

Within an hour everyone had paid. He opened the bag and grinned an evil grin. Then he heard a sudden cry of, "Boo, Boo!" The townspeople were yelling at him. He looked into the bag and saw three round, sparkling, smoke-gray stones covered in leaves and vines. The townsmen were climbing onto the stage and the tailor had a straight jacket. He ran off the stage and the fairies followed him, but the townspeople were still following him like THE ZOMBIES FROM THE BLACK LAGOON, which was the monster play he had watched the night before. The fairies took an invisible rope and tripped him, making a loud THUMP! The butcher held Dale down as the tailor strapped him into the straight jacket. Then they threw him into a padded cell that was as white as cream.

AFTERWORD

In two years, the fairy-folk realized that Dale was old and didn't have a good memory. Mustard Seed, Cobweb, and Pea Blossom never worried about him again. All they did was sleep, play, and laugh all day. That all happened in a little forest called Everlasting.
The Fight
David Joya & Matias Gallegos

One day Marco was shooting his BB gun in the park. This is when this other boy named Gohan came with his pellet gun and shot Marco. Marco screamed, "Ahhhhhhhhhh!" in a terrible voice.

Gohan shot him again and said, "Shut the hell up." Marco was tough enough to run to the police. Gohan started to run to his house, but he got chased by a rotweiller. He didn't get bitten because he shot the dog three times. Gohan laughed hysterically. That's when three police cars were chasing him. When he got to his house, he looked for his dad's car keys to escape from the cops. When the cops got to his house they said, "Come out with your hands up or we will extremely fire." Gohan did as he was told except he said, "If you start shooting, I'll kill myself." The police said, "We won't shoot if you come out with your hands up!" Then Gohan got out and spent two years in juvenile. Now Gohan lies in juvenile guilty for what he did, and he learned a really good lesson.

Gun Safety

Over 1,000 children have been shot with every sort of gun. This isn't a true story. It's a story that my friend Matias and me who are eleven years old wrote, and we do know about gun safety. The following are rules you should know:

Rules for Parents
1. never let a kid use a gun
2. put a safety gun lock on a gun
3. leave guns unloaded

Rules for Children
1. whenever you see a gun to tell police, parents, or teachers
2. never play with a gun
Mi Clase
Abigail Velize, Second Grade, Rice

Mi clase tiene 4 mesas. Hay 3 mesas que tienen 3 sillas y 1 mesa que tiene 4 sillas. Mr. Arredondo, mi maestro que es tan bueno, nos da más de una vez el recreo. Son 14 estudiantes. Hay 6 niñas y 8 niños. Hay 7 computadoras. Mi favorita parte es cuando el maestro nos lee un cuento. Lee muy bien.

Mi Piano
Jorge Clifton, Second Grade, Rice

Todavía recuerdo la primera vez que toqué el piano. Me sentí muy emocionado. ¡Ya quería aprender a tocarlo! Cuando empecé tenía mucho miedo y pena, pero poco a poco he ido mejorando. Ahora mi Nuevo maestro me ha enseñado cosas que me gustan y que no sabía.

La primera pieza completa que toqué me hizo muy feliz. Mis papás y mi hermanita también se emocionaron. Ahora, mi piano y somos Buenos amigos y mi piano es feliz cuando lo toco yo.

People
Doris Amaya, Fifth Grade, Cage

So hot in the day with the Sizzling sun shining on you
Get up at 4 in the morning
With the roosters yelling
Going to walk to the next town
If no one hitches me a ride
Going to milk the cow
Going to ride the horse
Up the mountain and down again
To go to my house to my family
So hot in the day but cold in the night
Let the horse go free

Boy
Doris Amaya, Fifth Grade, Cage

The boy with the Missing finger
The boy who is
Alone in the world
The boy who makes
His own money
The boy who
Cleans his shoes
The boy who is
About my age
The boy with
The dirty clothes
The boy with
Torn up shoes
The boy who doesn’t
Have enough money to go to school
The boy who
Begs people who walk by for money

14
Ring! Ring! Ring! Ring! Ring! "SHUT UP YOU DUMB PHONE!" I said as I walked lazily to the phone. Before the phone rang, I was sitting comfortably on my big couch watching SISTER SISTER.

"Hello."
"Who's this?", somebody asked in a scratchy voice.
"AAA…manda w…ho's th…is?"
"You know who this is."
"No. I don't. Who do you want to speak to?" I asked changing the subject.
"Let me talk to your Grandma."
"O.K."
"Grandma"
"What?"
"They want you on the phone."
"Who is it?"
"I don't know. How am I supposed to know if they don't tell me their name?"
"Hold on. Let me get the other phone."

When my Grandma finally got to the phone she was talking for a short period of time when she told me to go take a bath because I was going somewhere. I said, "Where?"

"Just get ready and I'll have your clothes ready on the bed." When I finally got out of the shower I got dressed and I put on my black dress with my dark purple flowers with my black shoes. When I got all done with my hair I went to sit down in the living room and a few minutes later my dad came to pick me.

We were laughing about something but I don't know what we were laughing about. Then all of a sudden we arrived at a funeral home. I didn't know why we were there until I saw her, the one I love, the one who loves me lying in the coffin. The coffin she dreamed of having, but I never thought she would have her dream coffin. I just stood there staring. I just stopped thinking at that moment, I was so devastated, I couldn't believe it. I couldn't believe I had to find out at the funeral. She was just lying there. So then I started to cry; my eyes were so red and my eyes were so blurry. I couldn't even see. I didn't stop crying. I didn't stop the tears from rushing down my eyes. She was the best Great Grandma I had ever had. My hands were shaking and I was biting my nails. I just stood there like a statue staring. It was like somebody ripped out my heart and cut it up in to little pieces. I was mad that she was dead.

So I ran out to the parking lot and opened all the memories I have of her. Like her sewing box, the maroon colored box with flowers of all sorts and I remembered how she used to sew. She would sew everywhere, everything. Everyday I walked into her house and she would be sewing and she always had a beautiful smile on her face like an angel.

Then I started to look for my dad. I looked everywhere, all over the place, but I couldn't find him. So I took another look at my Great Grandma and she was wearing those beautiful earrings, the ones I once lost but found. She had her beautiful gown on. The one with flowers on it, the one she got for her anniversary. I just stood there. I just stood there looking at her with her white curly hair and her gold rimmed glasses. Then I remembered the dress she gave me. I remembered the way my eyes lit up. Like a shooting star. The way I hugged her halfway to death.

But death finally came to her. In some special way. She means more to me than anyone in my family, because of the way she looks. No. That's not it, because of the way she dresses. No. I just don't know. There's just one thing about her that makes me want to be with her forever and ever.

I remember the last time I saw her. It was a bright beautiful day, the sun was out it was not that hot and I said, "Grandma are you happy?"
She said, "Yes, why do you ask?"
"I just wanted to know," I said reaching for a pecan. "So when you die you can be happy."
"I'll be happy. Don't worry. I'll remember every single one of you."
"O.K."

My last words were, "I love you, I'll always love you forever and ever." But it all had to come down to this.

Goodbye Grandma, I love you
I AM THE FEAR
Mario Sapon, Eighth Grade

You can try to do away with me, but I keep coming back.
I destroy and deceive with hate and disgust.
I am the thief of a soldier's life in combat.
You can hear the sound of tanks and guns penetrating the night's silence,
The roar and ferocity of bombs target at old villages.
I destroy everything in my way and leave no sign of remorse.
You can hear the scare in a child's voice as he prays for serenity.
You sense insecurity and concern in the eyes of a father as he speaks to his family.
In the midst of it all there is hope.
Faith the size of a drop of water evaporating, leaving the world forever.
Aspiration coming in the night like a dream and taking you to another world
making everything that seemed bad
Better.

Doves vs. Hawks
Leigh Owens, Eighth Grade

She just wants to live her life, free of hard decisions,
To eat, to drink, to raise her hatchlings.
Minding her own business,
Calm and peaceful,
A Dove.

Can't make a noise, can't make a noise, I say to myself over and over as I crouch, petrified, in the dense tropical forest of Vietnam. Sweat is stinging my skin as I wait endlessly for the jagged shape in the fog to mysteriously reappear again as if out of nowhere. In my mind, I depict a graceful, white dove strong and bold, soaring high above the clouds far above me away from Vietnam, away from hate, from blood and killing, away from war. I see a moving bush in the distance. A moving bush? Huh? I hush the annoying voice inside my head and tell myself that this is a very serious situation, life and death. But all I see is a dove, a calm and free dove. The image is so serene, so beautiful. Suddenly, I hear a shot and feel it piercing my chest, like a knife through bread, ripping and tearing. I watch the dove, once calm and controlled, frantically flying in all directions, not knowing where to go, what to do. All she wanted to do was to eat, drink and raise her hatchlings. Not to get mixed up in something awful and inhumane like war. All I wanted was peace.

Circling in on her prey, going for the kill, sharp black talons,
Piercing heartless eyes zeroing in on her victim.
Striving for victory,
Aggressive and strong,
A Hawk.

Lieutenant hasn't given the signal. Why won't he put his arm down? We need to go. We can't just wait here like sitting ducks while others roam toward us like lions. We got to go. To go and win. I can almost smell the victory, so close. I can envision the North Vietnamese tracking us down, smelling us like dogs. I hear a shriek and in my mind I see a fierce hawk ready to fight, talons set, and beak in a killing position. I look up and there is only the dense canopy of trees and vines and the thick cloud of mosquito's overhead. No hawk. But, it seemed so real, I said to myself. It was so proud, so strong. I look up to my lieutenant, thinking he better hurry up, or I'm going to go without him and I hear a scream and see an explosion, small, but deadly. I realize, this is it, let's go! I run, crawl, hop and hide trying to catch the enemy. I suddenly spot them, spraying fire, I hit two. Wanting more gone, not thinking, just knowing. WAR. Victory. Winning is not an option, it must be done.
But when will this dream come true?
Or will it be a nightmare that arrives in my mind?
The darkness, the unfamiliar landscapes of a jungle, the guerilla war tactics.
How can the nightmare last?
And will you ever wake up from this bad dream?
When will the feeling of security be reborn in your thoughts?
Friendship is long forgotten on this long journey.

I am a cemetery
Filled with different types of bodies.
Size, age, race not being of importance.
I am the thief of a soldier's life.
I can draft new souls with the help of life.
I smell like the gray haze of smoke that roams in your lungs and plunges the
air after a fire has consumed it all.
A horrendous smell of a forgotten man left behind in the jungle, a man who
fell to a grenade and paid the price for eternity.
A living hell.
Where everyone who seemed your buddy turns to a beast and betrays you.
One bite of me will poison and stop the terrified hearts of wives and
children back home.
A rotten grapefruit that tastes harsh and bitter.
I have a rough surface, I am a massive asteroid that has dent the surface of
the earth
Leaving a mark forever.
A stain never removed, a scar marking a life for eternity.
I look like a speeding 18-wheeler coming at full speed right at you.
A dodging bullet aimed at the heart,
With the sole purpose to destroy and ruin.
I can be heard for miles away over the backs of the mountains.
I get louder and louder.
A rumbling voice that terrifies the soul when everything else is peaceful.
A collection of gunshots, loud explosions of bombs blowing up any hope,
weeps, and cries of desperation calling for help.
Everyday brings tests of courage and will.
As the sun shines over the horizon, it brings a new hope for peace.
I wake from this nightmare, and think of it all being true
The bombings, the guns, the burning of the human flesh
Will it ever stop?
Will the hope for peace and tranquility ever be achieved?
Will the North Vietnamese cease their attacks and fulfill a long awaited desire?
I am the fear.
I am WAR.
I wake up every day hoping some things have changed
But of course they never do
I see violence every day on my way to school
And think to myself
Why God?
Maybe not tomorrow or a week from now
There won’t be help in this world
But I believe in my heart that some day
We all will stop the violence and hopefully it will be soon
Then, just as I realized the dancing lights were no longer behind us, I heard a screeching noise right outside my window. It was fogged up too much for me to see out the window, so I had to clean it off some to get a clear view of what exactly was going on just a few feet from my door. Taking my shirt sleeve, I rubbed off some of the condensation and made a little viewing area just big enough to see a giant sports utility vehicle right beside us. Now, it isn't the fact that it was huge that got my blood pumping. NO, it was more of the fact that he was about 4 inches away! I let out a small cry so soft I wasn't sure I even made a noise.

The driver was, let's just say, not in the best condition. His eyes seemed to be barely open and his actions were questionable. I closed my eyes. I knew it was too late for anything. We were going to die.

A news report on the crash later that night went as the following: "Laura Wakefield and her two sons were hit this afternoon at 3:53 on the I-45 freeway. Her small family car was impacted from the side by a sports utility vehicle. As the larger vehicle hit the smaller car, it carried it past 4 lanes of heavy mid-afternoon traffic and finally smashed the car into the guardrail. Laura Wakefield and her youngest son, Joseph both died on the scene. Christopher Wakefield, age 13, is now in critical condition while Zachary Williams, the driver of the SUV is being released. He is being charged of driving under the influence of alcohol, speeding, and two counts of unintentional manslaughter.

My eyes sprung open only to see a blurry image of a small room with empty blue walls, a small ceiling fan whirling above my head and a mirror, reflecting a beam of sunlight coming from a window somewhere in the room. Panicking, I shuffled around in what appeared to be a bed. That is, I tried to shuffle, but my arms and legs didn't seem to respond. Just then I heard someone enter the room.

"Hello, Christopher. I'm Doctor Wallace. Now, I know you've got lots of questions, but first, you're going to have to do as I say so we can get to that question and answer part sooner, okay?"

I nodded my head to signify my approval.

"Alright, let's see here. Tell me if this hurts."

Doctor Wallace started at the foot, tapping it with his pen.

"OWWW!" I screamed.

"I guess that hurt," he said calmly.

This went on for about thirty minutes until he got to my rib cage. He said he was already sure I had fractured the majority of my ribs and there was no point in smacking them to find out which ones were broken. Then he got to my head. Telling me to keep my eyes open, he flipped on a small flashlight.

"OK, well there's some good new and some bad news. Which would you like to hear first young man?"

"The good, please."

“Well, the good news is that you're not going to die. In fact, you're healing quite quickly. You're in great shape compared to how you came in about a week ago. The bad news is that I have some disturbing information for you. It's about your mother and brother. Christopher, I'm sorry to tell you this, but both your mother and younger brother perished in the accident. Joseph was killed instantly after the car broke off a chunk of the guardrail and it smashed into his skull. There was no hope for him. Your mother also died. Her side and front airbags did inflate, but glass and metal destroyed them the instant the car was hit. She was killed from loss of blood. She was unconscious so she felt absolutely no pain. I'm so sorry. If you want more details, just nod your head. I'll understand if you don't wish to speak at this moment."

I nodded. Not because I wanted to know more, but because it felt natural. I was still trying to get all of that information, all of that pain into my brain. So with tears in my eyes, I nodded my head.

"I know this is painful, but just listen. The road you were on was really slick because of the rain. A drunk driver with three times the legal limit of alcohol swerved wildly behind your car. Then he drove to your side and slammed the SUV into your car.

He pushed both cars into the guardrail where you were sandwiched in. Your mother and brother died but somehow, your side airbag did its job and made sure you lived to see another day. You suffered broken legs, broken hip, eight fractured ribs, a shattered left arm, three broken fingers, a broken collarbone, and a broken shoulder. You also lost a lot of blood from all the shattered glass.

Your mom, Laura, did a lot of work in the hospital. Everyone here liked her. She was a good person and your little brother always put a smile on our faces. We'll all miss them. We will be hurting with you, so remember you're not alone. I'm sorry."
Excited and anxious I wake up,
I run to my parents room, I stumble and fall
Hearing my tumble, my parents awaken,
My Dad looks at my scrape and says…
"Patience my son, have good patience."

We start off the day having French Bread and liverwurst,
My Dad says, "Please eat slowly son, bamboo don't just run away,"
Fishing, fishing, fishing was all I was thinking,
Through my vision I…,
Unpercievingly tipped over my water,
My Dad looked at me and said…,
"Patience my son, have good patience."
Through bamboo fields all of us looked for bamboo branches,
My Dad tells us, "The best bamboo branch is thinner at the tip than the base,"
Not paying attention, I sprint out, chopping as many bamboo branches as I can grab,
I raced back swiftly, I was blinded by the mass of branches and tripped,
Looking at me and then at the empty patch, my Dad said…,
"Patience my son, have good patience."

My Dad was constructing my fishing pole,
I was eating my lunch,
I looked out of my window and saw…,
My best friend, fishing with his Dad,
Eager to run out and borrow a fishing pole…,
But I was stopped,
My Mom scolded me, saying I had to wait and eat lunch,
While moaning and groaning, my Dad looked at me and said…,
"Patience my son, have good patience."

It was a dream to cast my rod in the sea,
I waited patiently, looking for a slight bob in my cork,
After 2 minutes, I wondered if I still had some bait,
Lifting my rod up, I was astonished as…,
I had apprehended a baby angelfish,
Awed with extreme emotion, I nearly fell into the water,
Running to my Dad to show him but…,
His face was red with wrath and disconcert,
I then looked at him and said…,
"Patience Dad, have good patience."
Glossary

Güipil (Gwee-peel): the blouse of a Maya woman
¡Aguacates deliciosos, una mano a buen precio!: Delicious avacados, 5 for a good price!
Iguana Tables: some people eat iguanas and they are often sold live at the market place
Fresco de mora: a blackberry drink
Quetzal: Guatemalan currency
Machete: an all purpose blade used by many peoples, not only Guatemalans
El Mercado: The market place
No es cualquier lugar

Yo slago al sol,
Mis sentidos se encienden
Absorbiendo todo lo que pueden

Yo vi:
Turistas Americanos con ojos cubiertos rápidamente pasan por iguanas en las mesas
Güipiles de multiarcorisis debajo de una area soleada, contando historias de ancestors poderosos.
La joben indita,
Modesta del lado de tesoros.
Gotas saltando mientras mujeres en la pila colectan, balancean, y van en una cabeza alta despacio.

Yo oigo:
Una multitud aprezurada con quezales clic-clanc.
Ventas anunciadas,
"¡Aguacates deliciosos, una mano a buen precio!"
Mujeres charlando en el Mercado, tiendas lado a lado.

Yo saboreo:
Un fresco de mora para refrescarme en el camino,
Elote asado-JUGOSO,
El aire salado, polvo levantado por piez apurados.

Yo huelo:
Tortillas humeantes
Hierbas curiosas y especias misteriosas
Suerpos chorreando de sudor que venden en el sol.
El olor suave de la orquidia, detrás de una oreja.

Yo siento:
Canastas de tortillas, tejidas por los ciegos,
E filo lizo de un machete-nuestra navaja suiza.
Rayos del sol sobre nuestras cabezas oscuras con una carga calurosa.

Visitantes saben al llegar,
Estos no es cualquier lugar,
Es…

El Mercado
Unknown Travel
Mary Caitlin Carnett, Sixth Grade

Hidden,
I sit.
Stars are glistening jewels,
Imbedded in the sky.

Greens, purples, and blues,
On the threshold or the cave.
Deer sprint across the field.
Like shooting stars.

Out I leap,
Into the lush plain.
Dew licks my feet as I run,
Like little kitten tongues.

Swirling and unclear,
All my senses alter.
I close the book,
And I am back.

Surrounded by familiar things.
Turn off the light.
Until tomorrow.

Simple Pleasures
Andrew Franco, Sixth Grade

Introduction:
A few weeks ago all of TH Rogers 6th grade had to write an ode on their experience helping the multiple impaired children at our school. The classroom that I helped was a class of kids older than I. This ode, Simple Pleasures, is dedicated to the friendliness and sincerity of Mrs. Teague's classroom of non-verbal students.

Class of six special teenagers
Struggling to control their bodies and focus their minds.

How could I help?
Where should I go first?

I brought a rattle to a red-headed girl.
She smiled.
I shook it.
She shook it.
She smiled.

Every visit was different.
A different student
A different toy.
But always the same reaction
Smiles of golden joy.

One day we entertained with a performance.
No smiles.
Too Complex.
I rolled a toy truck on a boy's sholder.
He smiled.
Simple pleasures
Smiles of golden joy.
I identify this room with one word—jail. No, it's worse than that, we don't think with our minds but with our hands that look rusty and roughed up from all the writing. Instead of cleaning, we get homework and more homework. Mr. Brown allows nothing but writing. Our pens work one thousand miles per hour or the speed of light or, at least in my mind, my pen works like a dream. When you don't bring your homework the BIG BOSS punishes you with A.I.P. and makes you waste your time after school. When I enter this room I'm being destroyed slowly into a whole new person who loves to write.

When I enter this room and see the man with the blackest beard, I feel like someone slices my mind into several pieces. My fingers feel nothing, no pain but the movements of writing. I can't scream but in my mind I'm dying in torture. Mr. Brown, god of writing, the reason writing exists, makes me think now that everything would be much easier without English class 8th period. The only way my hands will ever relax and get some rest will be when I'm gone. I've never taken notice of my hands and what they mean to me. Mr. Brown made me see the light towards my hands. God of writing, the only teacher that makes me see the light and makes my pen and mind work at the same time.

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Vacation to Mexico

Javier Costilla

I went to Mexico to visit my grandma
I thought it would be a bad vacation
There were a lot of beautiful girls
Like when the flowers are blooming in the atom
My grandma had a lot of beautiful chickens
Where I saw her she was a little wrinkled
She was about 5 feet 10 inches.
She was wearing some makeup but you could
Still see her little wrinkled face.
We started to hug her and I could see her crying
So I went to the table to get a napkin to I could clean her eyes
We waited till morning to eat but when we got up my grandma
Had already killed a pig on the very next day I went across
The street to buy some tortillas when I saw the most cutest girl
So I started to talk to her when her father came and said are you
The grandchild of Brijida Torres and I said yes and I told him I came
To buy some tortillas and he said that I didn't have to pay so I told her I would
Talk to her later 'cause I had to take the tortillas to my grandma so I left
Still looking at her the whole time. And after that I had a very great time and I got to
Know her a little bit more but I was very sad that I had to leave Mexico
From now on I call her and ask her what she is doing. So then I had got home to Houston and left for school the day after I got to my house.
I never had any friends. Never thought I needed any. I was the quietest in my class till about, sixth grade. That was the year I met Lisa. I was in homeroom on the first day of school. Lisa walked up to me and just started talking.

Lisa was very tall and pretty. She had short black hair kind of like coal. I could tell by the way she looked at me we would become best friends, and we did.

Lisa had a boyfriend named Michael. Michael was very nice to me. I hung out with the two a lot. There was just one problem with Michael. He always beat on Lisa. For example, she would say something he didn't like and he would just slap her.

I didn't know what to do. One day, I decided to talk to my mom. I walked into the kitchen. I said to my mom, "Mom what would you do if you had a friend who's boyfriend abuses her?"

She looked at me for a long time then said, "No one has the right to hit, or touch anyone who doesn't want to be touched. Your friend needs to dump him and quick, because it might get too bad, and he might kill her!"

The next day I told Lisa what my mom said. Lisa looked at me for a long time, very strangely. All of the sudden she began to cry and say, "Ashley you are a really good friend." I thought to myself that is the nicest thing anyone has ever told me. I began to cry too!

When Lisa saw Michael that day at lunch, they sat together and talked about it. Later on that day she told me she dumped him. I was very happy.

While we were walking home, me and Lisa, we saw Michael coming down the street. He looked extremely mad. His fists were bladed up together.

We began to turn around, when he pushed me to the ground and pulled Lisa. When I finally got up they were gone. I ran home, and told my mom. She called the police. The police and her family searched for her all night.

The next morning, on the news, they said that a teenage girl was found by the river bank: in her underwear. It looked like the girl was badly beaten and choked to death. Next to her lay a teenage boy, he appeared to have been shot in the head three times.
I thirty years & more
in this rich soil of big schools
am like the tree growing roots silently
breaking through its own bark to expand
in the silent gaps of night
pushing out new branches

I stand still
in this place
feeling the sweep of flocks the light & leave

& today, like a mockingbird,
one with a voice and a tune
he creates new time after time
so
I stand still and listen
to spontaneous churltes and scrills and flutes and hoots
and catch the rhythm of the clouds
and the pinks of the azaleas
in his repertoire
let the wind blow hard
let the sparrows dive
in chattery cloud mass through my leaves and out
he sings clear full chortle
for the whole world or the world of himself

& delighting in his tunes as she does
other rich wonders
is creature of iridescent hue,
  turned this way brilliant sapphire shot with emerald
tilted that, muted black
a bird I cannot name,
a bird like a kingfisher, but not,
an Indian name and no translation

whose song is so quiet that only when the breeze is not
shushing through the leaves can I hear
mozartian intricacy and fantastical variations
her trills and runs and witty play
echoes of bells of a foreign land

beautiful beings,
let my branch
offer you a moment's rest so you may
sing out who you are this afternoon
and then create anew tomorrow

These pieces offer a glimpse of the ongoing experimentation and work with many forms of writing in a School Writing Project classroom. First we, as members of the class, help each person develop trust in his own voice. We take risks for readers, who listen carefully and honor our painful personal revelations.

Beginning with the personal and deepening into an appreciation of other people, cultures, and literary works, our writing informs and is often inspired by our reading. Always it needs to be real. Whether students are writing analytical essays, double-entry journals in response to novels, monologues in the voice of a character, research papers or poems, they know they will have peer responders and an adult reader who want a real experience. We work hard for readers who are not satisfied with the pretentious or facile but who vocally welcome the discovery that Leonardo painted hair like swirls of water or Cormac McCarthy echoed the opening scene of a doomed Indian nation in the final image of his main character.

I look for the moment when a young writer becomes so engaged in letting his readers feel and understand as he does that labor becomes play, and then he learns to fly.---Priscilla Fish
Today
Stephen Funderburk

Today I will flee from the earth
into the majestic heavens of space.
I will say no to the admiring stars,
no to the company of the rotating planets.
I'll greet and adore the silence,
kiss and embrace the darkness.
No to the buzzing murmur of the doorbell,
no to the stare of the television.
I will twist and tie the weight of the world
as the tortuous winds of the fall do to the leaves.
I will say no to the beckoning of the dream of the
one I love.

No to the pillow that holds my head,
no to the hands of the bed that cradles my body.
Today I will fly on the clouds of the meditation over
the stair steps of heaven.
I will say no to the basement of envy that leads to
the temple of hell.
No to the chairs of war and destruction that are locked to
our people.
No to the green stuff that rules our lives.
No to the stuck up nose and the shoulder shrug
in the hallway of school.
No to the whispers behind my back as I pass by.
I will listen and understand every atom of my being
until I find total inner peace.
I will say no to the cry of the spirits.
No to the singing of the angels.
Today, I will just be alone.

The Native Land
Thresiamma George

The russet sun slowly drifted down over the gray horizon, drawing over the world a black cover. Not a single
star adorned the hazy sky. The air was hot and full of dust, topped with the sickening smell of gasoline. Sitting in the
back seat of my father's old gray Cutless Sierra, with the window slightly open, I observed this transition from day to
night, while my father and I cruised down Highway 90. Although a year had passed since I had come here, my heart still
would not adapt to this foreign land. The language, the love, the culture, the friendship—all so different.

Massive structures and heaving lights adorned the city like imperial jewels adorn a queen. Yet there was an
emptiness inside. The heart of the city was shiveled up like dried rasins. No teak, rosewood, mahogany, palms... The
car came to a sudden halt at a red light. I closed my eyes and drifted back to the Eden that I had left. Always green and
lush, with its lemon bright sun, where the morning dew tasted like droplets of honey, where the trees grew everywhere
concealing the naked body of Mother Earth. There in Eden, the gentle summer breeze was always laden with the scent of
coco-nuts, that could tickle your nose like a soft, little feather. The road home always smelled of golden ripe mangos,
that hung from the mango trees on either side. On the way to school, I'd admire the beauty of the thick green paddy
fields, dancing in the wind, where the little blue hornbills caught their daily meal, where the cuckoo chants his version of
the blues. Memories of Sundays were always pleasant at Papa's house. At night we'd sit in the veranda of Papa's house
and tell each other jokes; laughing out loud until we'd cry. But of all the memories, the memories of Papa, my uncle,
clung to my heart like a little child who'd cling to his mother's skirt. His thunderous laughter echoed in my ears...Life
was so wonderful in that Eden lost. This was indeed the Eden in every foreigner's heart. This was my native land...
The car jerked forward hurling me back into the present times and places. Heaving a sigh I looked outside
again. Everything was the same and the hazy sky still bore no stars.
To My Seniors: Musings on Floor Friday  
*Gastonia (Terri) Goodman, teacher*

I’m from another generation, another country, a world apart  
and from across this great divide I watch  
loose hipped cheerleaders bounce as they walk  
skirts flare and skim tanned mid-thighs

Seniors like bookends bend over their journals  
burnished gold in the morning light  
illuminated in youth a thing of brave beauty  
with promises to keep.

And I think about the Romantic poet, William Wordsworth,  
who whispers to me across the ages about "animal gladness"  
as he watched his younger sister Dorothy play.

This Friday gift of journal writing  
as leaves rain down on Rachel and Morgan’s hair  
and shadows recede from the courtyard light  
while I earlier watched Jennifer’s furrowed brow  
keep rhythm with her pen.

And from my own youth, Cat Stevens sings,  
"Oh very young, what will you leave us behind?"  
Will it be the memory of unrestrained laughter  
on the edge of spring, or the sound of guitars  
strumming a refrain to whispered weekend plans?

And I marvel at these students of mine  
as they search out freedom between the lines.

---

**Behavior Self Portrait**  
*Kelli DeRegnier*

My earth is a succulent peach  
ripe with color  
I paint the faces, the hills and  
the valleys of my world  
I mold them in clay with each step  
forward I take  
The trees, little shops, and  
school notebooks take shape

I hold in my hand the pen of life  
and each time  
I dip into that well of ink,  
I feel more alive  
The world continues to grow and a  
path set out before me  
It is I who decides my future  
and I alone  
I look to vibrant sunsets and night  
skies filled with stars  
Morning softball games when the dew  
still blankets the ground  
College papers, studying abroad  
recognition and success  
But for now, I am just an artist with  
a blank page set before me  
Sketching out my future, sketching  
out my dreams

---

I wrote this poem after taking my senior students outside in search of beauty. It is a  
practice of mine on Fridays to link our classroom study of literature with personal writing often  
using contemporary poetry as a prompt. It was the beginning of spring and there was an end of  
year restlessness as we began our study of the Romantic poets. But outside in the natural light  
with pens and journals, my students were silent, lost in private thoughts, creating their own  
poems, writing without pause. As I watched them I felt moved and marveled at how lucky I  
was to have shared so much with them through their writing over the year. All our writing  
whether we were engaged in expository essays, research papers, or poetry, all of it a rich source  
of creativity that found a ready audience in our classroom writing workshops.

As one of my senior editors wrote in the forward of our class literary anthology, "We  
are united by the bond of a writer to a writer that allows us to connect in a way that no other  
class can. It is an amazing experience to be able to share your writing with your peers. You can  
see a part of their lives that you never get to see in chemistry or algebra. It is almost like you  
get a personal tour of their pains, joys, and dreams."  

---

Terri Goodman
The Inside of a Seashell

Analee Bivins

The inside of a seashell,

Seen only by the sea.

What does the salty water feel, what doesn't it know?

It leaves a song so everyone will savor the beauty,

Of the unknown, of the inside.

But sometimes magical things happen.

Sometimes we meet people who have been

To the end of the rainbow,

Who have flown in-between the stars,

Or traveled among angels.

Sometimes we meet people who make their own magic.

Mee Maw is one of those.

She told me about the time she got to be on

The inside of a seashell.

She said

Inside it was dark but it still possessed perfection,

Like the twinkle in an infant’s eye.

Colors popped and sparkled metallic.

The sea shone,

Almost as if fish had flashlights.

She said

You couldn’t see where the ocean began,

But you could hear it whisper its musical praise

As it crashed on the shore.

And the waves caressed her feet.

She said

Where the sand was wet, on the edge of the water,

Little creatures waddled leaving teeny prints to

Run your fingers over.

She said

There is nothing like the Pacific Ocean after

The sun goes down,

"It's like being on the inside of a seashell."

Pastures of Glass

Nancy Brown

The

venice of

my dreams rides

a sea with a glass shell.

I can walk on water. and it is

not ice. For the flames that I envision

would certainly not have dissolved such a falsity

by now. Heated and restless, stained with passion.

gentle, steady pressure against the callused

feet of my generation. And I got a

good vibe flowing 'cos I know

that love is a rare thing and

life is not art, but rather

art is that which

transcends

life.

Swaying with the wind, like a palm, is the sick

perfume of money. I am lost in it, delirious,

and. My speech runs in circles, and on

my tape loop is a prayer for venice.

That she would be bathed in a

wash of lambsblood and be

swallowed by her sea

that she might again

smell of salt and

God. She has

lived a

long,

rich

life. She

asks for pasture.

pastures of

glass flooding

venice.
Padded Walls
Julian Villgaomez

Six houses down
Tarmac dripping in a blistering white-hot sun
My padded room, my asylum tapestry
My strait jacket squeezing vengefully
Tentacles pulling, drowning me slowly
Deeper into the pitch darkness of Stagnaton

The tranquilizing sonata sways behind me
Soothes the hungry mouth of savagery
Numbs the paralyzing fear to apathy
Calming the tentacles if only momentarily
A march a dirge a mere coda dividing
Presto--a life all to its own

Heard only dimly in a dulled consciousness
A bundled-up thin candy shell
Artificial dye melting on the tarmac below
Under a nuclear sun

The bonds release their strangle hold
My straps turn to autumn leaves and scatter in the breeze
Outside to once to burn on my own two feet
Let my soles sling to the flypaper on which I tread
Running instinctively Running headlong
Into the blinding light of freedom

Soon I long for those straps that bind
Soon I yearn to be back among the pillows
My childhood friend, my walls of down
The bonds I've grown to hate so well
The jacket I wear with a wicked grin
And desert-dry eyes that need not blink

Passions and fears push and pull to the brink
Promise and Failure tack me up with tape to sever myself and tear at the scars
But that final leap grips my heart still

I know how it blinds to be outside
I've seen only lonliness in light
So the straps loosen once more
This time I am able to rip myself astray
The tape leaves its mark as I rip free
And layer and layers of myself peel away

Now there is only I in the light
Now an island amongst thrashing seas
Along in the bough of faces
A green desert all to my own
And my soles no longer hold to the melting tarmac
And the sixth house my asylum no more
The Holocaust
Deborah Irwin

Six million lights
Burning as one
Trying to be brave
Trying not to run

Standing up
Doing so much to cope
Following rules
Trying not to lose hope

For many years
Suffering with pain
Fearing their beliefs
Would never remain

What did they do?
Why were they blamed?
Because they were different,
Because they weren't the same

It seems so wrong
So much pain was caused
Tortured and beaten
Followed by an applause

As time went on
They did what they were told
Trying to hide their fear
Of being controlled

Holding on their beliefs
Hoping to forget their fears
Wanting a better life
Holding back their tears

Even though they knew
They might suffer forever
The lights burned as one
Hoping together

Six million lights
Could take no more pain
They sadly burned out
And (today) their beliefs remain

The Day Daddy Became Dad
Analee Bivins

It used to be a welcome.
"Fee, Fi, Fo, Fum. I smell the blood of an English mum."
And we'd run and hide.

While hearing footsteps clamp down the hall.
But that was when I was small.

When innocence and
construction paper birthday cards were enough.

Now when my Dad arrives home,
Nothing is good enough.
"Well, where have you applied to today?"
That's his greeting.

Leave me alone, I think as I walk off.
"Hi to you too," is all I can mumble.
And checking my email,
There he is bombarding me.
But it's virtual nagging.
"Check this college site out."
"Deadlines are fast approaching."
"Do something!"
And although he doesn't say it,
I know he is thinking it.
"Why aren't you as excited about college as Leah?"
And when he finally pats my head,
"I love ya kid."

I roll my eyes and think.
Aren't you a little confused, you love your other daughter.
And he sits there at dinner,
Stroking his mustache,
telling me about some scholarship
To another school I know I don't want to go to."
"Lipsom, Harding, Pepperdine, Texas Tech...
Clare, you're getting older now,
Make a decision."

He never comes home just to see me,
Like he used to.
Never to play hide and seek,
Or flip me like Mary Lou Retton.

All I hear are schools and scholarships,
And reasons why I'm not succeeding in the role of
Perfect Daughter #2.

And when did crayon colored pictures,
And roller skate performances
Cease to excite my Daddy?
And deep down I know.
The day innocence left is the day
Daddy became Dad.
The Me That You See

Allison Silva

the me that you see
she doesn't stay for too long
she is crying and leaving
and left out to pray
the me that you see
is only a cover
she is hanging and drying
and pressed white and clean
i try to differentiate myself
but it's just not working
she is the only one
people like to see
i try to keep her away
with all of my mistakes
they can try to meet me
but i'm never new

the shackles of pettiness
to which i am bound
clamp my wrists
like the fashion bracelets whcih fit too tight
bought small in vain
not wanting to look at my portly wrist
and the shallow straitjacket
fitting like the designer shirt
bought too small for too good a price
constricting fashion
blinding judgement
blinding facade

mother forgive me
for i have sinned
i have tresspassed
from within
i have tempted
i have lusted
no salvation
i can't be trusted
i cheat
i lie
i steal
i try
i have abandoned all that you teach
stumbling blindly to the truth
i have lost all faith in your god
i have lost all faith in you

from Autobiography

Jazmin Cavazos

When I was younger, I thought that if I picked up a stray penny on the street I would go to hell for being greedy. I would just glance at a penny, want it for a second, then quickly walk along, convinced that the devil was hiding behind a wall, watching and ready to tug the string that would pull the penny and my greedy self nearer to him and the gates of hell.

I was a hyper and uncoordinated little kid, always running somewhere and always falling before I arrived. My father's disdain of my female self made me a tomboy, always ready to be triple-double-dared by my comrades to jump from the swing or to eat the most creative concoction at the lunch table. In pre-K I was one third of the Three Amigos that consisted of me and two little boys (one of which I had a very secret crush on) that always started trouble on the playground, the ones who liked to snicker at the sticker of Little Red Riding Hood showing her panties as she ran from the spider. We would keep to ourselves, our small group would command the building blocks, or the playhouse, or the tricycles, whichever activity we chose. When school was over, we'd high five each other before going our separate ways. After a particularly fruitful day we'd help each other remove the tattle-telling notes the teacher had pinned to the back of our shirts, where she was convinced we couldn't reach and where our parents were sure to notice. We'd stand in the corner, removing notes from each other's shirts, knowing that these were the bestest friends we'd ever have, knowing that we would be punished if we were caught. But the teacher never gave thought to the fact that we, the Three Amigos, loved each other. She never thought of the compassion we had for each other, and the audacity that we possessed.

* * *

The words swirl and tumble in the darkness, eventually materializing as letters and sentences on paper. Sometimes they are not so kind.

Prisoners that have huddled into dark corners until nothing exists but dark corners are unwilling to shed their shackles and face freedom, no matter that their bodies are now wrinkled, pale and deathly thin, unrecognizable remnants of the bodies they possessed in youth, the passage of years and the absence of light leaving marks upon their skin and their mind and their spirit. The would not face freedom if and when te occasion arose, afraid not only of the consequences freedom would bring, but, having become accustomed to isolation and darkness, freedom itself.

Words are like that, sometimes.
I use reflective journals in my classroom. I use them because, for me, they help me accomplish my goals as a teacher, which amount to helping my students become more complete human beings, particularly through the practice of reading literature and writing. I believe that one of the most difficult dictums to undertake is (as Socrates said) to “know thyself.” I also agree with Shakespeare’s doctor in Macbeth whose best prescription is “heal thyself.” Both of these tasks require time, and time requires space. When I value the “writer’s notebook” (my name for the reflective journal) in my classroom, I give my students time and space in which to think their own thoughts, to write in their own voices, to ask their own questions, to answer in their own way. I give them the license to develop their own opinions. I give them 5-20 minutes of a very crammed schedule in which to explore, discover, ponder, or, if needs be, to veg-out. During these minutes, which often feel “stolen” from the all-important curriculum, I allow students to write, to draw, to re-read earlier notebook entries. I encourage them to write about whatever interests them, and I also give them an optional starting point in the form of a short reading, a question or a general topic. In the 12 years I have been teaching and using this pedagogical tool, 99% of my students have identified the writer’s notebook as the most important thing they got out of the class.

I’m a writer myself so maybe that’s why I value the writer’s notebook so much. I know the benefit it has for my own practice of writing and thinking. I have carried my writer’s notebook with me for 15 years, and I suspect I will continue to do so for as long as I live, or as long as I care to think about things. In the world I live in, the hours move very fast, there is so much to do, to accomplish and yet not enough time. In 15 minutes of silent reflection a day means one is slowing down, taking stock, seeing what’s already there, right before her. Those moments of reflection can make all the difference in our futures. If I don’t make the time for them, who will? Who will teach our children that they need to create time for themselves in which to think, in which to make their lives meaningful? -- Christa Forster

If, during this night, the world dons a dress, I want it to be my size: silk arms cut just above my wrists, the bodice cupping my chest closely, accentuating curves which rise with the planets. Within my flesh, coffee would be brewing, couples exiting the cinema, lovers heaving. I feel it anyway. Why these separations? In my pockets, the secrets of alleys, dining rooms, and narrative dreams. My hair scattered over Cuba and fingers thumbing firs in the Arctic. My rump on the now cool floor of New Mexico. My eyes the rain in Japan, rice fields, the wine terraces of Napoli, and Mesopotamian olive lashes.

My body, incapable of holding a universe although I will it. There is somewhere a wiser woman, stepping into the slow rose comfort of dawn, brushing her hair over the Atlantic, slipping her feet into a pair of mountains, readying to fling open the door of the continents, and step out.

Southern California, 1992
Christa Forster, teacher

Rain won’t affect bamboo’s determination to flower. The sand has no choice of where it will blow, on what night, into what barrio, whose eye. Nothing is certain. (Know this truth to be easy to know.) Hemingway came here -- 1941 -- to write ad copy for Ballantine Ale: Purity, Body, Flavor. Ground buckles up in Los Angeles, June 29 1992. The center of gravity shifts. One thousand-year-old Monzo granite falls on a wild sheep. I saw one once, its big horn jutting out of the ledge’s profile, like an ampersand, misplaced. Blink & it’s gone.
A Dream

Yadira Coyote

I used to live in a neighborhood where I would always hear sirens like a constant cry for attention from a child at night. A person was robbed daily especially during the night. Since robbery was so common, the police would stay and patrol the neighborhood. Every once in a while someone would be shot and sometimes even killed. My neighbors said, "It is a place where the sun will not shine." They believed that it would be better to be robbed than to be killed because material things could be replaced, but life is one possession that is priceless.

Unfortunately, most of the stolen properties were never replaced because the neighborhood was poor. People would only have enough money to pay their bills and buy a few groceries. Many neighbors complained about the crime situation but never did anything to solve the problem. I remember our neighbor, Juana, would come and complain to my mother about how much she hated living in the neighborhood. Juana said, "I am soon going to move into a place where there is some peace and quiet and where will not have to lock my doors from top to bottom just to try to make it through the night safely. I want a place where the sun will not shine." They believed that it would be better to be robbed than to be killed because material things could be replaced, but life is one possession that is priceless.

Now as I look back on my childhood, I know that dreams can come true. I am very fortunate that I was able to leave my old neighborhood for a new neighborhood near a park where birds sing.

I Was Walking Down the Hall and Wondered What it Would be Like if I Were Depressed

Erin Cooper

Soggying down the hall
I don't really know why or what I'm doing.
Going to
Going to a destination of my class
that I am worrying about failing.
See the double doors fixing in my mind
Head straight for the double doors on my way out
Only outside
But not there.
Soggying. Full of weight/pain
So burdened but I still don't know why or what I'm doing.
Sigh. Go straight straight
Turn off bathroom
Two more doors
Grip doors
Open doors
Head to mirror.
Still at the mirror but I am staring, staring at my selfness.
Reach out, touch sink.
Holding sink, close eyes.
Look at mirror again.

Still.
Sigh.
Grip sink. Mirror/stare.
Look look look what is happening.
I am crying. And I don't know why or what I'm crying.
No tears on dry face.
Crying, but still crying.
Two perfect tears of blackest coal.
Soggying in front of mirror,
looking for tears that I feel running down my cheeks
but are not there.
I'm still crying. Crying on the inside.
Bitter tears but no idea.
Definitely soggying in front of the mirror
Mirror/stare but no more no more.
Mirror/stare into oblivion, reflection of my deepest thoughts.
But go go feeling better not really.
Adolescence is a contradiction.
Soggying down the hall
I like the color blue a lot.

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Yadira Coyote

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Unfortunately, most of the stolen properties were never replaced because the neighborhood was poor. People would only have enough money to pay their bills and buy a few groceries. Many neighbors complained about the crime situation but never did anything to solve the problem. I remember our neighbor, Juana, would come and complain to my mother about how much she hated living in the neighborhood. Juana said, "I am soon going to move into a place where there is some peace and quiet and where will not have to lock my doors from top to bottom just to try to make it through the night safely. I want a place where the sun will not shine." Everytime I hear Juana say those words, I thought of how I also wished to live in a house where there was harmony. I always dreamed my family and I would live in a house near a forest or park where the only sounds I could hear were the beautiful songs the birds sang. My dream house would have huge windows that decorated the front of the house so that I could see the sunrise early in morning. Smaller windows would surround the remainder of the house so that the wind could roam freely around the house like wild horses on a praire. Laughing so gratefully, I imagined myself running after a butterfly. My mother would be inside the house cooking a delicious meal for the family. My father would come home eager to see his children after a day of hard work. As a child, I wished that my dream would turn into a reality.

Now as I look back on my childhood, I know that dreams can come true. I am very fortunate that I was able to leave my old neighborhood for a new neighborhood near a park where birds sing.
shy greetings and smiles in los angeles
first glances and mopping up stains
they share a coffee
black, no sugar
and sit by the boulevard
speaking of lines
and spanish
and houses with a view of that
damned hollywood sign
‘i want a real kiss’
she tells him hesitantly
‘an honest-to-goodness-
look-at-her-lip-gloss-
true love-
so-real-you-can-taste-it-
hollywood screen kiss’
and traces the table with nails shorn too
close
for comfort
‘those kisses never last long’
he answers back.
‘i’ve had them.
they taste like spit
and the lip gloss always comes off.’

*w

‘well, i’ve been to a house with a view of
the
hollywood sign’ she delcares
‘the roof was badly made
and the wallpaper was peeling off the
walls
in each of the 23 rooms.’
having each destroyed
the other’s vision
they set out again
each going their separate lonely ways
untitled (cont.)
walking
at nite
in los angeles
the next morning they meet again
hung over and disillusioned
in a greasy spoon
far away from the boulevard.
'did you get it?'
he asked
'that honest-to-goodness-
look-at-her-lip-gloss-
true love-
so-real-you-can-taste-it-
hollywood screen kiss?'
she shakes her head no.
'and did you find that perfect
house with a view of the hollywood
sign?'
he nods.
'yes, but it was already occupied.'
he nodded and rose
as did she
and they returned to the starry morning
outside
in los angeles

the next morning they meet again
hung over and disillusioned
in a greasy spoon
far away from the boulevard.
'did you get it?'
he asked
'that honest-to-goodness-
look-at-her-lip-gloss-
true love-
so-real-you-can-taste-it-
hollywood screen kiss?'
she shakes her head no.
'and did you find that perfect
house with a view of the hollywood
sign?'
he nods.
'yes, but it was already occupied.'
he nodded and rose
as did she
and they returned to the starry morning
outside
in los angeles

With Images Tattooed
Diana Cook

I want to write something that will be read by thousands.
I want my feelings to be felt through writing.
I want to hold our our arms-stretched through the tip-topped
fingertips - -
and let myself fall through the waves of heat and waves of hurt to
the
ocean's grainy bottom.
I want the purple, red, orange of the sighing sunset, sinking behind the
edge of the world, to fill each crevice and angle of body glow
me
from the outside inside out.
I want to peel off my layers slowly until there's nothing left but dreams
and dreams and dreams.
I want to be a thousand poems read by one person, to feel the eyes
analyzing
the way my shapes are nestled together, with my images tattooed in
people's
brains, sighing, sinking into everything.

Untitled
Diana Cook

She was salsa
flavored, the medium kind.
She heard voices like water
and she harmonized.

She liked back doors
and shortcuts and what no one
expected. She hates quiet,
loves quiet, can't make up her
mind. She was dressed-up in
words, the adjectives, the
nouns, trickled in like lazy
soldiers - - reluctant, deter-
mring. She was pressed up
against the walls of picante and
spice. She's all emptied out,
she's colorless now.

Word of the Day
David Weil

Today's Miriam Webster's Word of the Day is;
a phrase. That's funny, you would think that a service
based out of a dictionary would have a more precise
definition of "word." I must heartily applaud them
(despite their misnomer) for the valuable service they
provide, their e-mailbox-filling word of the day.
Today's word is "sub rosa." I haven't the slightest idea
what it means, but that's the fun part. I look at the
word, puzzle a bit, and then mutter "oh the hell with it"
as I open the mail and end my ignorance. Sadly, the
word itself is rarely, in its definition, as exciting as its
name. For example, the word for the 14th was
"excoriate" which only means, "to rub the skin off/
abrade" or "to scold harshly." Those are okay defini-
tions, and, looking at the etymology, they make sense,
but come on! Excoriate! It sounds so cool in my head,
and then I get this semi-pathetic let-down of a defini-
tion. It really is like opening a CD shaped Christmas
present and discovering a very flat sock. Still, I love
language, so I tolerate the process, although I excoriate
their lack of showmanship.
I almost quit teaching yesterday. The reasons welled up in my consciousness and by third period, were ready to explode. The memories of a student calling me "Bitch" when I asked him to return to class instead of standing in the hall and the "F--- You" I received as a quiz answer from a disgruntled student had been reverberating in my mind all Thanksgiving Break. By Monday morning, after grading 170 book reports and character analysis projects, after spending $43.97 on copies at Office Depot because the school copier was broken, I had had it.

But then a curious occurrence intervened--my fourth period class of surly, unresponsive students who generally read on a 6th grade level--actually responded to a lesson.

It all began in my third period class. We had read the first three chapters of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* by Thanksgiving Break. When they returned to school, the students remembered nothing. It was as if I was starting a new school year. Instead of responses to my questions about the plot of the book, I received confused and quizzical or empty stares. "Where am I? What is she saying?" the stares seemed to say. We struggled through chapter five where the narrator is expelled from school. And then discussion--no reaction from the kids about the injustice of the narrator's treatment by the president of the college--no reaction to anything. "Are they still breathing?" I asked myself. And as my unanswered discussion questions reverberated in the emptiness and a great void of education and thought hung over the room, the bell for lunch rang ad the room quickly cleared. I was ready to cry.

I had intended to continue the literature circles activity that accompanied our reading of *Invisible Man* after lunch, but the break gave me time to reflect and compose myself. Fortunately, just that morning, I had checked out from the library Tom Romano's book *Clearing the Way*. I have always sought comfort in ideas from writing workshop manuals. They offer an interesting if somewhat distorted view of high school writing workshops--an ideal, a utopia toward which to strive. To calm myself, I began to read the chapter on implementing a writing studio in a high school class. After reading the first few paragraphs, my mind was set.

When the students and the Void returned from lunch, I announced we would put aside *Invisible Man* and concentrate fully on writing a personal narrative in a workshop atmosphere. "Hooray!" I heard from one camp of students who showed their distaste for the novel with daily whines of "This is boring" and "What's the point?" From some disappointed students clearly disturbed by the abandonment of the book I heard, "Are we going to read it again after this personal narrative writing?" After encouraging these students to read it during independent reading, I told all of the students we would spend the remaining forty minutes of class generating ideas for writing or percolating ideas as Tom Romano would say. The Void siddled out of the room.

I also explained a new grading system. Their grade would be comprised of participation and development in their own writing. They would not be measured against some absolute standard of A, B, or C. Furthermore, I would be instituting a raffle system for good citizenship. For every good deed that they performed, whether it be straightening books, getting to work immediately, trying a new writing technique, I would reward them with tickets. At the end of the semester, I would hold a drawing for gift certificates at Best Buy--the more tickets, the more chances. With the new format explained, we spent the rest of the period writing memory monologues, a stream of consciousness writing exercise that helps students find a topic for personal narratives.

But it was really my fourth period class--at thirty-four my largest and as a result of overcrowding and timing (the last class of the day), my least motivated class--that the magical transformation occurred. By the end of third period, I had pulled out two additional prewriting activities--a response to "My Lucy Friend Who Smells Like Corn" by Sandra Cisneros and a word ticket exercise where students choose words pasted on tickets from a bowl and manipulate them into a sentence or poem. And I had perfected my delivery of the new format. I knew for sure this format would be a welcome change from the inferencing exercises I had organized around our reading of *Of Mice and Men*.

The students looked a little suspicious when I told them we would be doing something fun until the Christmas break. Experience has taught them that a teacher's idea of fun is rarely their idea of fun. Writing about themselves and opening up to a teacher--doesn't really sound like fun. But, as I announced the new grading policy, I could see the relieved students nodding in approval. Finally, they might have a chance at the elusive "A." And then I announced the raffle. "Wow, Miss! You really want us to learn!" Santiago declared. The other kids smiled in implied agreement. "Yes," I replied. It
was this gesture plus the new freedom in the writing workshop that breathed life into the stagnant atmosphere we had cultivated in fourth period.

For the rest of the period, I sat back and marveled at the new energy--students engaged in writing, looking up words in dictionaries without my prompting--but mostly students enthusiastic about being in school. This class for whom school is simply a hurdle to get over, an irrelevant institution in their lives, a building where you bide your time until real life begins at graduation, transformed into a serious class about learning and discussing a topic on which they are experts. I hope I can sustain this atmosphere.

After the prewriting exercises and an informal peer response activity to hone ideas for the personal narrative, the class ended on a high note of kids walking out with smiles and some even lingering after the bell to finish their peer response questions.

And as the students filtered out, I abandoned my plans to quit teaching--mainly because I want to see where this workshop will lead, but also because I realize what keeps me teaching.

I know why I went into teaching--I wanted to make a difference in the lives of young people, I wanted to stay young myself. But what keeps me teaching are the little victories--the small, almost unnoticeable sparks in students' eyes that show they are interested in developing intellectually. Yesterday, instead of talking or drawing on the desk, Jason, who hasn't turned in a single assignment all year actually stayed focused for half of the period. Yesterday, Santiago, a congenial, but not exactly dedicated student (his main concern was just passing the class) wrote two things he was so proud of he begged to read them to the class. Yesterday, Richard, a special education student with severe writing fluency problems, wrote six sentences about Aerosmith, his favorite band of the week. Yesterday, Alexis actually smiled in class.

I have a whole list of little victories from today that I could tell you too, but you get the drift.

A Success Story
Mary Selvas, Deady Middle School, SWP Qualitative Research Group

I thought that Roman was going to throw up. He held his head down. He mumbled to himself as if he were a street person aimlessly walking through Barnes and Noble. We were headed for the Storytelling Contest, and it was clear Roman hadn't practiced enough. Friday I caught him after school and told him to show me what he planned for Saturday. The janitor Maria came in to clean my room, and I urged her to be part of our "audience." Roman began. He told the story of The Witches Face accurately although without expression. By the time he got to the ending, he was losing it. I reminded him what time I would pick him up on Saturday, and we discussed how he needed to practice and put expression in his story.

Saturday he was supposed to be at Deady Middle School at noon. He was late. Actually, he and Rocio--who was going to help me cheer Roman along--arrived about the same time: 12:15. Roman looked ill. I tried to keep everything light and joking, but all Roman could talk about was how if we got into a terrible accident, he would have to forfeit the contest.

We arrived at Barnes and Noble early. Roman wanted to know where a good bathroom was. Although it didn't look too good for the contest, I didn't want Roman to give in to his fears. I wanted him to compete, to maybe hear some good storytellers. I thought, all in all, it would be a good experience for Roman; however, I was beginning to have some doubts.

So Roman wouldn't pass out, I took him to the room with all the headsets, hooked him up to CD's so he could listen to some music. I told him I would get him when they were ready to start the contest.

He looked sheepishly at me as I ran out the door over to Randall's Grocery to buy a disposable camera since the camera I brought wasn't working. I got back just in time for the contest to begin. Roman was no longer on the headsets.

As I ran through the aisles of the bookstore looking for him, Roman slyly appeared. He probably would have left if he could have figured out a way to do it.

And so it began. The first boy, an eighth grader from Fondren Middle School, who was obviously as terrified as Roman, told his tale. The girls that followed were much better, some quite expressive, and we were all sure Roman didn't have a chance.

Roman's turn. He told his tale accurately able it without expression. It was clear that the terror hadn't left him, and I applauded wildly when he was finished.

After all the K-8 students had competed, all the contestants were told to come up to get their certificates of participation, and that the winners would be announced.
A Success Story, cont.

There was to be a runner up and a first place winner for every grade level. The eighth grade first place winner was going to be announced. It was ROMAN, our Roman. Rocío and I went wild. Roman's eyes got big as mangoes. We couldn't believe our luck. Roman and the Fondren boy were the only two 8th graders in the contest. Roman was miraculously cured. Suddenly, he walked a dancing step, clicking his heels, head held high.

"I've never won anything," Roman said. He was so amazed. He received a $20.00 gift certificate for Barnes and Noble which he promptly spent on Wolfrider and a collection of 13 Tales of Horror as well as a Harry Potter bookmark for himself and a Winnie-the-Pooh bookmark for his mother.

We couldn't let the day end there. We were off to Baskin Robbins to celebrate—a banana split for Roman and a caramel sundae for Rocío. It turned out to be a grand day after all.

Hannah

Margie Crawford

I didn't really know what to expect when Hannah arrived in my classroom. During inservice, Ms. Perry reviewed the special education students, but Hannah's name wasn't on the list. However, since her reputation preceeded her, I asked Ms. Perry why she didn't have an IEP or list of modifications for Hannah. It seems that while everyone knows that Hannah is ED, she has not been labeled. That's definitely a bad sign—one that usually means that everyone acknowledges that a child would probably qualify for a label, but for one reason or another, the parents will not approve testing by the school, or if a child is tested, they may refuse the label. I had observed Hannah in action last year with her fifth grade teacher. I remember how she often remained in the hall at her locker after the other students had gathered their books and entered the classroom. I just couldn't understand why her teacher couldn't get Hannah into the classroom on time. I would soon find out.

We begin each year with Camp 6. At the first session, prior to the beginning of school, we gather all the sixth graders together to acclimate them to their schedules, the physical layout of the school, and their teachers, so that the first week of school will be "comfortable" and tearless. One of our goals was to "break-up" the cliques from the fifth grade from Rogers. I watched Hannah as the other kids wandered in from their summer vacations. The Rogers kids huddled together appraising the "new kids on the block," but Hannah didn't join any of those groups. The students from the other schools looked apprehensive and their parents looked hopeful. Hannah looked angry. Great start. When Mr. Muzyka called out our homeroom assignments, I found out that I was the lucky one! I had Hannah in homeroom.

The first day of school...

With the turmoil of camp and the opening of school come tears, fears, and second thoughts about entering a Vanguard school. And that's just the parents! The children seemed eager to begin. When period 6 entered my room on the first day of school, Hannah was one of the last students to enter, and she sat at a table near the door by herself. As the last few students entered, I could see them glance around the room for empty seats; they all found places, but not with Hannah. "Oh well," I told myself, "this means nothing. This is just a coincidence that they are not sitting with her." Ha!

The Honeymoon...

The typical late summer honeymoon began and I hopefully assumed that Hannah had "gotten her act together" over the summer. She was very quiet, always completed her work, and although was not "unfriendly" when I greeted her each day, she didn't ever seem "happy." The honeymoon with Hannah finally ended before parent night. During class one day, Hannah raised her hand, and when I called on her, she asked to use the restroom. My restroom rules are simple;
when direct teaching is not taking place, students may sign out as needed. I called on Hannah, believing that she had a question about the lesson. She stated that she needed to use the "bathroom." I asked if she could wait until I had finished, but she blurted out, "No, I have to defeicate. I have to go NOW!" I was taken aback. I told Hannah to take the hall pass and go and wondered how many students had to use the dictionary for that one. After class I told Hannah that she should be careful about what she said in front of the whole class. She retorted, "Well, I knew you wouldn't let me go because you were teaching, and I had to go right then and I knew it would take a while." I let it go.

Beware of the raised hand...  

Within a few days, the raising of the arm triggered another outburst. I make a concerted effort to call on every child everyday. I'm not usually successful, but I do try. Hannah raised her hand at the beginning of a discussion. I had carefully prepared a series of questions, and the discussion was going quite well...until she raised her hand and called my name several times. The kids know the rule...don't call my name, don't wave your hand, or...I won't call on you. Hannah was waving her arm wildly and calling my name. I very nicely reminded her not to do either, as I have reminded other students, but she was not to be put off. She complained that I never call on her (I always did, of course), that I was ignoring her, and that this happened to her everyday. I felt we needed to "clear the air," so when the bell rang, I kept her with me for a few minutes, guided her into the hall, and basically let her have it. And I felt bad.

By this time, I had assigned seats to the children, and I was determined that no one sit alone. Unfortunately, Hannah antagonized her partner almost every day. I offered Emily to her as a sacrifice, but even sweet Emily managed to antagonize Hannah by merely sitting at the table. I noticed that Hannah would push Emily's books close to the edge of the table to make room for her own materials. Emily would try to ignore Hannah, but Hannah did not want to be ignored. Sometimes I would hear Hannah "accuse" Emily of moving her materials. I tried to watch the duo (for my own protection), and I knew that Emily had done nothing wrong. On occasion, I would simply ignore the situation until the end of the period and then hold Hannah back to talk. On one occasion, I suggested to Hannah that perhaps she would like to sit by herself. That was not the right thing to say.

"I'm always alone."
"Well, Hannah, I thought you might prefer to sit by yourself. You have a lot of books and a big pencil bag, and I know you don't like to put your stuff on the floor, so I thought you might like a table of your own."
"If I have to sit alone here, that means I'll be sitting by myself in every class. It's always like that."
"But Hannah, you must have three partners in science. All the tables in that room seat four."
"But I don't get along with those kids. They're always talking about me."
"What are they saying?"
"They hate me...everybody always hates me...it's always been like this."

What I was doing wrong...  

I just couldn't do it to her at this point. Her work was fine, not the best in the class, but very good. Now, however, she began to pick at me. She would insist that she couldn't see the board, overhead, television, computer, or whatever I was using. My rule is, if you can't see, move without permission...just move. Well, Hannah had to raise her hand so that she could publicly complain about the situation and be invited to move. She did this several times until I thought I would flip out! One day, I called on her, listened to her complaint with a stone face, and continued talking to the class when she had finished. It was a bad scene in a slow motion play.

Hannah: Miss...Miss Crawford, didn't you hear me? I can't see because of the glare on the board. I can't see.
Ms. Crawford: [Looks at Hannah; continues lesson]
Hannah: Miss Crawford, didn't you hear me?
Ms. Crawford: [Continues the lesson]
Hannah: Well, you can't blame me if I don't get the notes. I can't see and you won't talk to me.
The CLASS: Looks at Hannah when Hannah is talking; looks at Ms. Crawford when Ms. Crawford is talking.
Ms. Crawford: [realizing she has reverted to ten year old behavior, reconsidered and tries to reason with Hannah]
Hannah, what is our rule when we can't see or hear what is going on in this room?
Hannah, Cont.

Hannah: I don't know. You wouldn't answer me when I told you I couldn't see. Now I don't have the notes. How am I supposed to know what's going on? You didn't answer me.

Ms. Crawford: [Display aggravation with Hannah, glare at her]

The CLASS: [Display aggravation with Hannah, glare at her]

Why Hannah, I'm so sorry. I thought you knew the rule since I let you move most every day. If you can't see, just move. It's ok. I want you to learn. [Ms. Crawford has to maintain her calm persona but she can feel her chest getting hot!]

A little one-on-one...

Hannah was the topic of discussion during several Tuesday morning cluster meetings. Apparently I wasn't doing too badly with her considering the comments of the other teachers. I really felt sorry for her because I couldn't imagine what it would be like to feel so hated in sixth grade. I decided that I would take an entirely different approach with Hannah. I would "kill" her with kindness. The day after the "play," I greeted Hannah with a huge smile and a big hello. During homeroom, I asked her if she would mind doing some errands with me. She was thrilled, as all sixth graders are, to roam the halls. This accomplished three things. First, I could really get some errands out of the way. Second, Hannah felt important and liked. Third, the other students in my homeroom and I had a few minutes of peace.

Next, I went to the cafeteria and had lunch with Hannah. It was casual; I bought something to eat and told Hannah I just wanted to sit down for a few minutes before returning to my lunch bunch. I can't even tell you what we talked about...conversation didn't flow easily, but we both survived. I saw such a frustrated and unhappy child...unhappy with herself as well as the other students.

I think we have a truce, but I don't know how we got there...

For some reason, Hannah's behavior in my classroom became rather peaceful, but now she chose the hallway and or lockers for her battleground. The first incident occurred when she ran into the room screaming that William had thrown his books at her. His version was that one of his books had dropped out of his locker and it did hit her arm, but he certainly didn't throw it at her. I had taught William's sister, knew his mother, and was reasonably sure that the book was not thrown at her. Hannah was not to be placated by my assurances of an accident, however, and wanted to report the incident to our assistant principal. I refused to give her a pass, and her true colors "truly" came out. I moved William's locker, assuring him that I believed it was an accident. I offered the top locker to Hannah, but she refused...she said she was too short to reach.

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Before I knew it, Hannah was talking about how she had lunch with her mother and her mother told her to stay away from Olivia because she was black and a bad person, and so on. My eyes must have bugged out of their sockets when she started on this one.

Hannah, you just can't continue to start fights with other students. I'm running out of lockers!

Ms. Crawford, you don't understand, nobody likes me. I don't know why, but they don't. Everybody hates me. Hannah, in order to have friends, you have to be a friend. [I couldn't believe I said that] You can't constantly put people down and then expect people to like you.

I don't put people down.

Hannah, you do. I've heard you. For instance, when Carolee askey Olivia which club she was in, you blurted out that she wasn't in any club, she was in study hall. Olivia is in study hall, it's true, but you weren't part of their conversation, you intruded, and Olivia doesn't need the fact that she is in study hall pointed out to the entire class.

Well, Ms. Crawford, the fact is, she is in study hall. Nobody likes me, I don't know why. I've tried everything. Sometimes I give the kids money so they'll like me, but they take the money and leave me. It's so bad, Ms. Crawford, that I don't know what to do. [Hannah is in tears by now. I am very close...] I've even been to a psychiatrist, but she couldn't even help me.
Hannah, has anyone been nice to you this year?
Well, Caroline was nice one day. She said something nice to me, and I told her I really appreciated it. Caroline is the only one.

Well Hannah, Caroline is very nice. Even if you only have one friend, you're making progress. I think that when we return from Christmas, you need to really work on being a friend. [I was ready to pay Caroline myself.]

After this conversation, I thought we were making progress. Hannah started coming to my room for lunch along with fifteen other students. I thought that was a good sign. Maybe she could develop some relationships in a casual but guarded, environment. But in class, she can still become combative. One day I asked the students to read a chapter of the core book to themselves and write questions that they would like answered by the class. This was unusual because I usually read the core books to them.

Ms. Crawford, I don't understand anything I'm reading. I can't read this book.
Hannah, I've read most of the book to you so you should have a sense of the characters. I have to be sure that you can handle this level of reading on your own. But I told you, I cannot understand it.

Hannah, let's go into the hall and discuss this...[in the hall] Hannah I really think you're a wonderful reader. I find that if I have trouble, I read a few paragraphs aloud. That helps me understand. Why don't you sit down here in the hall and read a few paragraphs aloud? Then come back in here when you think you're back on track.

I can't do that, it's embarrassing.
OK, let's go. I have a quiet place in mind where you can read. [I walked her to the conference room behind the Vanguard office and left her there with a smile and a wave and told her to return when she felt more confident. Hannah was not pleased with the isolation, and I didn't know if I had done the right thing.]

**Bad hair days happen...**

Hannah has dark brown hair, about my length. Sometimes she pulls it back, but most of the time it falls in her face. I have been struggling to have my hair grow so that I can pull it back and not worry about it. Finally, I, or my hair, made it. I wore it pulled back and all the kids commented on it. Hannah also liked it. The next day, she wore hers back, but mine was down. She was a little miffed.

Ms. Crawford, why didn't you wear a pony tail today?
Oh, I don't know why Hannah, I guess I didn't feel like it today.
Well, Ms. Crawford, I think we should wear pony tails the same day.
Well Hannah, I guess I'll have to call you in the morning to see how we're going to wear our hair, huh? [I was just kidding. Hannah grinned.]

**but they don't last.**

I don't know where Hannah and I are heading. Every day is a new day, and I cannot predict what will happen. I feel as if we have to come to some kind of understanding, but I'm not sure what that understanding is or how long it will last. Our semblance of peace remains, but is punctuated with outbursts. I really don't think Hannah can help herself, and I'm not sure that I can help either.

**Overheard today...**

Caroline, just tell me what I should get you. I'll get you a big present for Christmas. Please, just tell me what you want. I can get you anything as long as it doesn't cost over ten dollars. Just tell me what you want.
You don't have to get me anything, Hannah. Really.

**Merry Christmas.**
School Writing Project: Learning From Each Other

Leslie Dabney, Grady Middle School

I've always loved to write. In second grade, I won a best short story contest. Mine was about a grasshopper that talks its way out of being devoured by a preying mantis. (Yes, I was fascinated by insects at the time.) My mom still has that story. It was written in pencil on a Big Chief tablet page. When the grasshopper spoke, the words were shakily written to show his fear. The story was very short and really ridiculous now that I look back on it.

But my teacher, Mrs. Deaton, found something magical in my writing. She wrote a note to my parents on the back of my story that said, "My husband, who is a professional writer, read Leslie's story and thought it was so creative for such a young person. Please encourage her to continue writing." She had no idea how much those words meant. I was already on my way to becoming a writer.

At different points in my life, my writing stopped. I was too preoccupied with social events, work, and school to devote the necessary time to writing. In college, I found myself writing again as the news editor for the paper on campus. One of my journalism professors thought I had the knack and encouraged me to write news stories. I also wrote for the Kerrville Mountain Sun and Fredricksburg Standard-Radio Post. I will never forget the words of the Standard-Radio Post editor, "Once the ink is in your blood, Leslie, it never goes away." I've always kept those words close to my heart.

I come from a long line of educators. Both of my grandfathers were teachers and administrators. My paternal grandmother was a science teacher. My father was a teacher, principal, and now superintendent. Because they were so involved in education, the rebel teenager in me wanted to be something different; however, I always felt drawn in some strange way to teaching. Lingering in the background, it patiently waited for the right moment to emerge.

As a child, teaching fascinated me. Here's a childhood memory that plays over and over in my mind: I'm bored. I want to play "teacher." I need a class, so I make up a gradebook with about 25 imaginary names and the 26th name is my younger brother Ray. He is the only real student in my class, and of course, he's the only one who is bad. Everything he does is wrong. I can fill in pretend grades for the other students, but Ray can actually turn in the work, and I can actually grade it. It's always bad. He fails. I don't explain why to him; he just can't do anything right. Poor guy. It was a powerful thing, being the teacher. I had the power to give good remarks and bad remarks. I liked that feeling of being totally in control. That's how I pictured teaching.

I'd like to say that teaching naturally mixed with my love for writing, but it didn't. Teaching and writing seemed separate to me. How could writing, something so personal and spontaneous, go with teaching, something so seemingly formal and authoritative? I did not know the answer and did not even consider the question until I had taught for several years. In my third year of teaching, feeling the need for rejuvenation, I joined a group called the School Writing Project. this is where I learned to combine writing with teaching.

SWP is a network of teachers who come together and discuss ways to build strong reading and writing environments in the classroom. The teachers in the group consider themselves readers and writers. They are constantly searching for better ways to inspire their students and themselves, and they share these new ideas with each other. SWP believes that the teacher is not so much the leader of the classroom as she is the monitor. The teacher must be involved in the classroom writing activities so that she can understand the challenges a student writer may face and offer possible strategies for success.

The knowledge I continue to gain from the project transfers into my classroom everyday. The students quickly learn that writing is a journey. They learn that writing can be changed and that it's okay if a piece doesn't turn out the way it's expected. At the end of each semester, they reflect on their strengths and weaknesses and share their accomplishments in the form of writing portfolios.

SWP has taught me much more than how to be a teacher-writer. It has also taught me to be compassionate about my students and to look at each one individually. It has taught me to search for the strengths in a student, not the weaknesses. It has taught me to examine other teachers and seek knowledge from them, taking their ideas and molding them into my own. It has taught me to trust my instincts and try new approaches to teaching. I really didn't know what a teacher could be before I joined this group.

My contributions and accomplishments in education are directly related to SWP. Teaching students to connect to what they read and write about their experiences and feelings and to share this with others in quite and achievement, but it's not unique. I know many SWP teachers who do this. In fact, those are the teachers who taught me! I never lose sight of that. What I am is what I've gathered from other exceptional teachers.
The room was quiet as Crystal read her poem. The quiet was that magical quiet, the quiet that envelops a room when a child is reading a piece that moves her audience. She finished reading and there was a moment of silence recognizing Crystal's accomplishment, and then applause.

Crystal was a quiet student, one of our students whose outside school issues are so overwhelming and complex that their focus on being a student is challenged. Her self-confidence was extremely low and when she stood up and read this poem in front of her peers, she had accomplished something. This was one experience that would boost her self-esteem and lend value to her self. This was one of the experiences that cause me to have passion for my position as an educator.

On any given day I may feel frustrations. I have had moments when the challenges are so consuming that I want the school day to end immediately. There are times when I am reactive instead of proactive, when I am preoccupied by paperwork and not fully present to teaching my students, or when a student's actions seem so severe that the day is interrupted. And sometimes tears well up in my eyes (especially that first year), and I wonder how this feeling that contradicts the Crystal moment can happen.

Our job is time sensitive. We have a certain amount of days with our students, a limited number of hours within those days to teach. And we have to maximize each day to effectively push our students to higher levels, not wasting a moment. I sometimes feel a twinge of failure at one o'clock or a pang of defeat at eleven that makes me long for just a few moments to process, de-brief and de-stress. But I know that we have not a second to waste, so I swallow and tell myself, "Don't waste their time, move on and regain that energy, that passion you have for teaching."

When I do feel that this job is difficult and full of challenges, I have to turn that reality upside down--recognizing that their is a special challenge in working to push children to the height of their potential, knowing that it’s invigorating to open up the space and the place for students to learn, create, and teach one another. These are the moments where I feel that in my classroom the education rock has been moved and I am facilitating a learning environment where kids are teaching, learning, and sharing. This is when I feel the passion for what I do. Suddenly standardized tests and a plethora of homework and paperwork no longer matter.

This job is challenging. But the challenges are paired with those Crystal moments and days that are worth a hundred obstacles.

Crystal Moments
Tricia DeGraff, Cage Elementary

Mom
My mom is as beautiful as can be
She has long curly hair
A brand new car
and a brand new life
and lots of friends
She has parties at night
with her friends
She has kids, Jason, Laura, and me
She says if you try hard
you can make it
When I was 6 my mom
left me
When I was 10 she came
back and wiped
The tears from my face.
Dear School Writing Project Friends and Colleagues,

This issue of Impressions is a snapshot of the work that the School Writing Project teachers and students have been engaged in during the school year. The poetry, narratives, journals, and short stories reveal the complexities, challenges, and rich rewards that accompany life for teachers and students in the classroom.

Yet in many ways, this is an incomplete picture of our year. Behind each piece of writing there is a year’s worth of interactions that occurred in workshops, classrooms, and readings that helped us all grow as professionals and in our humanity. My new friend and colleague, Mary Selvas from Deady Middle School, inspired me this year by describing our SWP workshop this way:

“We came and we shared our stories. They vary from person to person and day to day. They vary from the frustrations that we feel, experiments in teaching that we try, special moments that we have as teachers. We share. We listen. We commiserate. We identify. We focus on ourselves as professionals, turn our mirrors toward each other, look for ourselves in each others face, find ourselves in someone else and we are reminded. We are reminded why we chose to become teachers. We are reminded of what it is we hope to accomplish with our lives. We see the passion in each others eyes, feel each other’s fierceness and gentleness; we are reminded.”

This linking of experience and story is such an integral part of the School Writing Project. It is a professional development model based on building trust in small collaborative workshops. We come to know each other through study, writing, and observing each other’s classrooms. It is through this process that we come to take risks and deepen our knowledge as teachers. We experience what it means to be vulnerable and validated as writers and we pass it on to our students.

One final snapshot comes to mind. It is the end of the year reading for the SWP Elementary and Middle School students. After two students read poetry inspired by their Vietnam research projects, Johnston Middle School teacher, poet, and Vietnam Veteran, David Brown dedicates a poem he wrote about the war to the efforts and creativity of the two students. In that brief moment and exchange, all of us in the audience, once strangers, became powerfully linked through writing.

For those searching for this strong connection between reading and writing, I hope that you will consider becoming a part of the School Writing Project next year and share in the complete picture of our work.

Sincerely,

Gastonia (Terri) Goodman
Director of the School Writing Project
Rice University Center for Education

The School Writing Project

Professional Development

A Teachers’ Collaborative Approach to Literacy

The School Writing Project can work with schools and school networks to form teams of SWP-trained teachers to create school-wide writing programs.

Call (713) 348-4728 for more information.

Registration Form

(Complete form for each participant. Please circle program desired. Workshops run for 10 sessions and begin the end of September, for the fall semester and begin February for the spring semester.)

Traditional Program - A semester long workshop offered during the fall and spring semesters. This program addresses the issue of traditional isolation of classroom teachers by forging a collegial school atmospheres through study, discussion, and sharing of writing approaches. Each participant attends 10 two-hour workshops in which she/he explores in a group setting all the rich and varied issues relating to writing. This program is underwritten by Houston Independent School District and free for teachers.

Reflective Journaling/Creative Writing Workshop: Year long workshop devoted primarily to sustained reflective journaling about one’s own classroom experience. Teachers will examine their own teaching through journaling and will participate in a qualitative study which will clarify and expand their understanding of reflective practice. Weekly meetings will focus on journaling as a means to more effective teaching and self-renewal in the classroom. All grades and subject areas are welcome. No previous journaling experience necessary. Sliding fee scale.

Writing Leaders: Year long workshop designed to train teachers with previous SWP experience to lead future workshops.

Please answer the questions below:

Name: ___________________________ Learning Community ___________________________

School: ___________________________ Route #: ___________________________

Home Address: ___________________________

School Phone: ___________________________ Home Phone: ___________________________

E-mail address: ___________________________ Principal: ___________________________

1. Have you participated in reading or writing projects previously? If so, which ones? (continue on back)

2. What primary goals (personal writing, classroom strategies, teacher-designed research, etc.) do you have for participating in the School Writing Project? (continue on back)

Return this application to:
The School Writing Project
Rice University Center for Education
P.O. Box 1892
Houston, TX 77251-1892
Fax: (713) 348-5459
Tel: (713) 348-4728