



Step In and Try It: The Writers' Workshop

Last year, I began teaching fifth grade Language Arts. I had just finished the six week Writing Project and was ready to "conquer the writing world" with my fifth graders. I began Writer's Workshop by trying out some of what I had read in Fletcher's books and just trying some things on my own. I found out that it was quite difficult to stay focused with all of the students working at their own levels and needs. I quickly did some reflecting and adjusted the workshop to include rubrics and checklists for myself.

My students came into the class hesitant about writing, yet gradually asked for more and more writing time. They felt dejected when we didn't have time to write every day. I tried to make more time, but wasn't real great about it. By the end of the year, I was incorporating more of my English grammar lessons as mini-lessons and allowing more time to write. What wonderful writers many of them became! The writing proficiency results didn't turn out as well as I had hoped, but the kids did write at the end of the year that they *felt* like writers. They loved writing by now and wanted to do more of it. This, I guess, was the positive outcome of the workshop.

This year, I am starting out with more understanding of what needs to happen during the workshop. I am more specific about my mini-lessons and the writing process. Our school has also chosen writing improvement as part of our school improvement plan. As part of that I am to help with teaching other teachers about the Writer's Workshop.

I look forward to collaborating with other teachers and pushing myself to improve with the workshop format and time constraints. My class already moans and groans when I have to curtail the writing time. It is exciting, though, that they already feel like writers and we have established a writing community in our room. I'm hoping to see them succeed by the time we take the proficiency exam in January.

By Wendy Wilson



GREAT BASIN WRITING PROJECT

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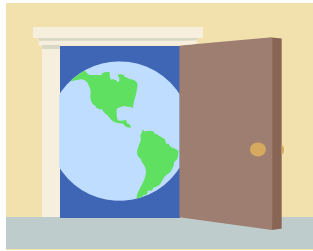
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THE WALK



A covey of quail gathered ahead of us on the dusty deer trail which paralleled the willowed covered creek bed. The quail chattered nervously as the little boy and I walked closer to their buffet of leaves and seeds. We walked quietly and tried to step where the grass was green which alleviated crisp, crunchy noises that would spook the birds.

A doe and fawn foiled our attempt to sneak up on the birds. The deer noisily trampled over broken-down dead willow branches as they hurriedly left their watering sanctuary behind the chokecherry bushes. The deer had seen us, but we had not seen them.

The birds scattered. Some fluttered their wings and aimed their short flights towards the golden flowering rabbit brush. Others ran for hideouts under the sage brush. They hid quickly, leaving nothing for us to watch.

"Why did they run?" asked my five year old companion.

I said, "They are so small and we look very big to them. We are not part of their natural surroundings, so we scare them."

We walked on up the trail past a misplaced apple tree.

"How did that tree get here? Who planted it?" again I was questioned.

"Maybe a bird visited the orchard by our houses and carried part of an apple with seeds up to this very spot. Maybe the seeds got covered with dirt, rain sprinkled them and they began to grow."

As we reached the top of the canyon, we found ourselves looking out over the ranch, its green fields, and cattle down below. We could see Wilson Reservoir in the distance and tiny dirt roads winding the brushy hills around us.

My little friend said, "Sit down on these rocks and rest."

As we rested our legs and he twisted a stick in his ever moving hands, he peered upwards towards the white clouds bobbing aloft in the Nevada blue sky.

"Do you see the big, big cloud that looks like it has legs?" he asked.

"Yes, I do," I said.

"Wouldn't it be neat if that cloud was a big soft trampoline, like in my yard? And you could jump on it, as high as you want and never fall off because it is so big and soft. You could jump and do tricks as long as you want. You would never get hurt on that cloud. Wouldn't it be fun?"

"You have a great idea, Aram. I would like to try jumping high on a cloud also. Maybe we could jump from cloud to cloud."

We headed down the canyon and I thought of the questions and mind set of my young walking partner. He had questions and comments about everything that crossed our path. As we reached our homes, I wondered if children learned more by the opportunity to question or if they learned more from the answers they receive. It was obvious at that moment that a classroom does not stop at the door of a school, perhaps it only begins on the way out the door.

By Jerry Cooney

Substitute "damn" every time you're inclined to write "very;" your editor will delete it and the writing will be just as it should be.

~Mark Twain

DID YOU KNOW....

- There are 22 countries where more than half the population is [illiterate](#). Fifteen of them are in [Africa](#).
- The women of [Iceland](#) earn two-thirds of their nation's [university degrees](#).
- More than half of [Indonesia's](#) primary school teachers are [under 30 years of age](#).
- Thinking of becoming a teacher? Head to [Switzerland](#). [Teaching salaries](#) there start at \$US 33,000.
- Kids in [Mali](#) [spend only 2 years in school](#). More than half of them [start working](#) between the ages of 10 and 14.
- Teachers make up [7.8 percent of Iceland's labor force](#) - and they only have to [teach 38 weeks per year](#).
- [Central European](#) men don't teach. In [Hungary](#), [Czech Republic](#), and [Slovakia](#), over 75 percent of [lower secondary teachers are female](#).

Information from:

<http://www.nationmaster.com/facts/Education>



My experience with the Great Basin Summer Writing Project 2006 was life-changing in many ways. First of all, as a school nurse for Elko County School District, I feel honored to have met the most quality group of educators in our region. I have a newfound appreciation for the art of education.

The unique mix of personalities and writing styles in our group was quite inspiring! Basking in the warm light of their kindness, humor and encouragement, I found what Tom Romano calls, my "authentic voice." What a revelation!

I wrote the following piece during our group outing to Lamoille Canyon. It generated much response, both from our region and across the country. To me, it is a simple tribute, a cherished memory, the evidence of healing that comes when one is willing to be real.

Untitled Memory

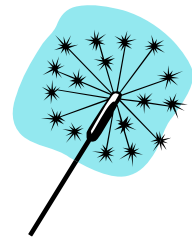


Slamming doors and sauerkraut breath,
Beer belches and lots of yelling at mom,
What did you look like, way back then?
I search my memory but I can barely see your face.

You taught me how to ride a bike without training wheels,
Helped me light sparklers and smoking snakes on the 4th of July.
You took me to the liquor store on Saturdays,
To buy more beer for you and a "Cup-o-Gold" candy treat for me.

We moved a lot, I remember that
Except one time you did not move with us
And you were gone,
Except for brief visits at Grandma's house, with

Slamming doors and sauerkraut breath,
Beer belches and lots of angry words for mom.
What did you look like, way back then?
I search my memory but I barely remember your face.



A long bus ride from downtown
To our apartment in suburbia,
A long letter admitting your sin,
And the scourge it left on our family.

An offer to rebuild, however that may be,
Asking for forgiveness, not demanding anything in return.
Great courage and open hands,
I saw your face, for the very first time.

You were there on my wedding day, when your first grandson was born,
At our new house in the desert far away,
You were at every holiday mom could stand for you to be around,
I learned to love your face and who you had become.

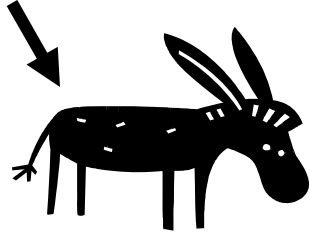
I moved even farther away, you remained behind,
With outstretched arms and open hands,
Supporting, cheering on, my greatest fan
And now I see the face of a hero .



Lying in the that human depository,
Blind, paralyzed, hardly able to speak,
No slamming doors or sauerkraut breath,
No beer belches or angry words,
I search my memory and see my Dad.

By Cathi Fuller

NEVER ASSUME



If you always "assume," it will get you into trouble,
To "assume," can pop your glowing happy bubble.

Dissect the word and you will see,
That the first letters of three,
Spell out "ass" ----

This word alone makes you feel that you have no class.

If you take the letter "u" and apply it to the first,
"U" become the ass---

But this too will pass,
For the last two letters spell "me,"
Which "to assume"
Has consumed!

By Carol Ford

I Am What

I am what I am. I am tired. Tired of cleaning house, folding clothes, fixing meals. Exhausted from staying up late to talk with my husband and then getting up three times a night to pee. I am tired of worrying about my kids and the babysitter, my husband and his job, my sister and her sick son.

I am what I am. I am emotional and weepy, cranky and quick to yell. I am indecisive, overwhelmed by trying to do too much.

I am what I am. A mother, a wife, a sister, a daughter, a friend. I am a woman with needs, a wife with wants, a mother with fears. I am a jack-of-all trades who enjoys working at more than one and then gets tired.

I am who I am. I am the person who hold it all together, the one my children and husband depend on. I am glue. I am tired of being glue.

By Trulee Stocking

Just Five More Minutes!

"Mrs. Karr, yo Mrs. Karr, what do we have to write about?"

"Anything you want, kiddo."

"No, Mrs. Karr, what I mean is, what do ya want us to write about?"

"Absolutely anything that comes to your mind."

"What do ya mean?"

"Think of something that interests you, maybe it's on your mind now, or how you feel today, or an incident that happened yesterday. Whatever you would like, write it down on paper and go for it."

"Are you serious?" Nobody has ever asked me to write about anything I want."

"Well here's your chance, dude."

"COOL!"



This was a perfect example of my first time introducing Writer's Workshop this last year. Writer's Workshop is a way for students to write freely and develop published stories at their own pace. My students were flabbergasted that I was willing to let them write about anything. In fact, there were a couple of students who sat at their desks still stunned, and praying that I was going to put some type of prompt on the board. At least that way they could just make up something really quickly and get the activity over with, as one of my students confessed later on in the year.

It never really struck me how teachers, including myself, limit a child's choices in expanding their writing experiences. We expect student's to do their very best, learn many ways of writing, and score high on tests. When in reality we have provided little on teaching strategies, no openness for creativity, and minimal writing time. I could just see the damage we, as teachers, were doing every year, and then we wonder why our schools never make AYP (Average Yearly Progress.) The students were graduating grade levels but failing their potential to write because we were holding them back in their writing opportunities and not realizing it.


The proof for me in all this was found, and changed drastically this last year, with the success of Writer's Workshop. Writer's Workshop has truly given a new meaning to being a teacher and writer. The students love to write. Everyday is an inspiration when they say, "Can I have five more minutes?"

There is nothing more gratifying than the time we spend together sharing our thoughts and hearing the OOOOHHHH's and AAAAHHHHH's after every presenter. In fact, Writer's Workshop has helped my students to see the light at the end of the tunnel so clearly that their success in writing has helped double our schools' writing scores for the first time ever. Now that I know the power of Writer's Workshop, I can't fathom teaching writing any other way. It has built a foundation for my students' writing and allows them to expand in any direction they wish. As one of my students said to me at the end of the year,

"You know, Mrs. Karr, this is pretty cool stuff you're teaching us, but I still can't believe it's writing!"

By Audrey Karr

“It’s Magic”



Kelly Moon, Denise Tanner, and I weren’t sure what to expect when we drove to Las Vegas last summer for the Critical Friends Coaches Training presented by the Southern Nevada Writing Project. Do we really need training on being a critical friend? Robert McGinty of the Great Basin Writing Project assured us that we did, and he was right. It only took about fifteen minutes for Tom Frasier, our certified trainer, to explain the overview and a brief guide to the practice of CFGs for us to realize we were in for an interesting and informative week. By the end of our intensive training, we had a deepened personal and professional connection with our “Southern writing friends,” and we were convinced of the powerful potential of our newly found resource.

The Critical Friends Group (CFG, another acronym to add to your repertoire), is a professional learning community committed to “improving practice through collaborative learning.” The CFG concept was first initiated by the Annenberg Institute for School Reform in 1994, but was taken over by the National School Reform Faculty (NSRF) in 2000. They could have made a “monetary killing” with this idea, but they wanted to provide a useful tool for

teachers at no charge. That is why their website, which houses a wealth of useful information for teachers, can be accessed without any type of fee. In fact, Denise said that the best thing she took away from “the poorly named Critical Friends workshop” was the information that she found on the NSRF website specifically the team building and listening activities. Ideas from this website have already been successfully used in various classrooms and in professional development meetings at both Elko and Spring Creek High Schools. Kelly, who has successfully used several of the protocols from the website, has been so impressed with the positive results that she termed her new resource as “magic.” Not only does it give examples of different types of protocols to use for examining student work, for finding solutions to dilemmas, and for learning from texts, but it also provides user-friendly step by step directions to these protocols. There are also tools to use in building and maintaining professional learning communities including ice breakers and warm-ups.

If you would like to know more about the “critical friends process,” you can contact either Kelly Moon at E.H.S., Denise Tanner at E.J.H.S, or Cathy Smales at the NNRPDP, or if you would like to be trained to be a CFG facilitator, contact Robert McGinty at 753-3879. The Southern Nevada Writing Project will provide another training next summer. We do suggest checking out the website. No matter what it is called, the results are the same. It is a powerful resource!

By Cathy Smales

UPCOMING EVENTS

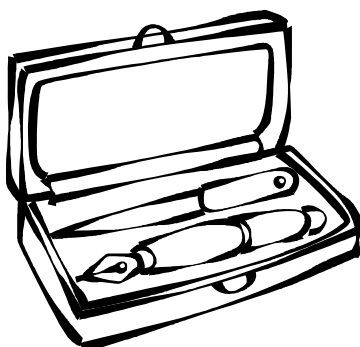
Inside Inquiry—A Teacher Inquiry Communities Network Institute
July 27 - July 30, 2007
Babson Executive Conference Center
Wellesley, Massachusetts

The Teacher Inquiry Communities (TIC) Network offers a four-day summer institute to support writing project sites in developing and sustaining inquiry communities. By the end of the institute, they hope to demystify the idea of inquiry and inquiry communities by engaging participants in reading, writing, and thinking about inquiry, developing inquiry questions, gathering and analyzing data, and thinking about how to go public with the work.

Food and lodging costs will be covered for institute participants by the NWP. Sites are expected to cover all travel costs.

This institute is by application only. Those interested need to contact Robert McGinty at the Great Basin Writing Project. Deadline for registration is February 2, 2007. Applications and further information about this event can be found at the National Writing Project website:

www.writingproject.org



Rural Sites Network Conference:
*Weaving Threads of Change:
Revising Writing in Rural
Landscapes*
March 9-10, 2007

Host site: *High Plains Writing Project*

Go to Albuquerque to explore opportunities and issues facing rural schools. Join a collective dialogue and build ongoing relationships. Consider multiple perspectives on rural education and the many threads that teachers weave together every day to help students achieve and succeed.

Deadline for registration is February 9, 2007. Get more information about this event at the NWP website.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR for the 2007 K-12 LITERACY & LEARNING CONFERENCE

The Northeastern Nevada Regional Professional Development Program, in Partnership with the Great Basin Writing Project, presents the K-12 Literacy and Learning Conference on Friday January 26th and Saturday the 27th.

The Friday night session will begin at 4:00pm and is being held at the UNR Fire Academy in Carlin. This session will feature guest presenter Dr. Jeffery D. Wilhelm, author of *Reading Don't Fix No Chevys*, *Literacy in the Lives of Young Men* and will include a dinner.

The Saturday session will begin at 8:00am and is also being held at the Fire Academy in Carlin. Saturday activities include break-out sessions that will focus on differentiated instruction, problem-solving and higher order thinking skills, reading and writing in content areas, and student engagement. Presenter of the break-out session are teacher and administrators from schools in Elko, Eureka, Humboldt, Lander, and White Pine.

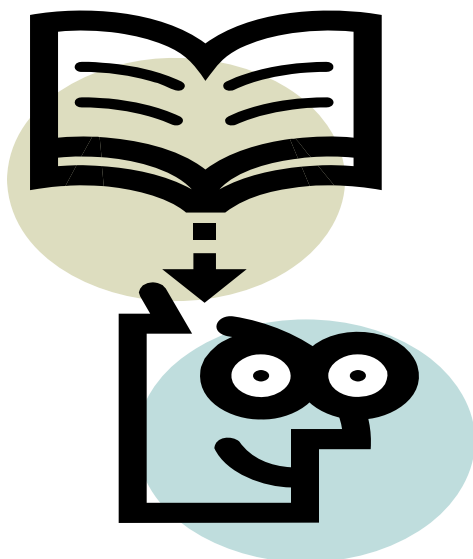
If you are from Humboldt and White Pine counties that would like to attend, NNRPPF will pay for a substitute for half a day to allow you time for travel.

One graduate credit through SUU (\$15 fee) plus a homework assignment **or** ½ in-service credit will be available for this conference.

Please e-mail Chris Back at the NNRPRD to let her know if you anticipate attending, as space is limited. You can also e-mail her with any questions at—

cback@elko.k12.nv.us

Registration/information packets will be e-mailed on January 2nd.



Friday's guest speaker, Jeffery Wilhelm, is an Associate Professor of English Education at Boise State University where he teaches middle and secondary courses on literacy. Before joining the college ranks, Mr. Wilhelm was a teacher at the middle and secondary school levels where he taught reading and language arts for fifteen years.



Other books by Wilhelm include:

Reading IS Seeing: Learning to Visualize Scenes, Characters, Ideas, and Text Worlds to Improve Comprehension and Reflective Reading

Action Strategies for Deepening Comprehension: Using Drama Strategies to Assist Improved Reading Performance

Improving Comprehension with Think-Alouds: Modeling What Good Readers Do

**Strategic Reading: Guiding Adolescents to Lifelong Literacy Hyperlearning: Where Projects, Inquiry and Technology Meet*

**Imagining to Learn: Inquiry, Ethics and Integration through Drama*

**Reading Stephen King: Issues of Censorship, Student Choice and the Canon*

Gotta BE the Book: Teaching Engaged and Reflective Reading with Adolescents

Standards in Practice: Middle School Language Arts

* These publications were co-written with other authors.