

The Pennsylvania Writing & Literature Project

Newsletter



Volume 25, Number 2 Winter, 2005

A Journey Never to be Forgotten: The Writing Institute

Join us from June 27 – July 21

Meet Remarkable People! Rejuvenate! Reflect! Write!

Follow the path of past Writing Institute participants who signed on for a journey of a lifetime and join us this summer 2005 for the Pennsylvania Writing and Literature Project's Writing Institute. Along the way, you will meet remarkable people, rejuvenate your personal life, and refuel your professional life. We offset the cost of the experience with a \$400.00 stipend. According to past participants, the Writing Institute is one of the most rewarding ways to earn six hours of graduate credit. Don't miss out on this opportunity!

Last year at the outset of the journey, Writing Institute participant, Craig Casner, wrote, "*In What a Writer Needs*, Ralph Fletcher related writing to a bus ride to no particular place. That's why I'm here. I'm excited about the ride. I'm not

all that concerned about the destination, not because it's not important, but rather because I'm confident I'll end up someplace satisfying on many levels. I'm



here to look out the window, feel the breeze, talk to the person seated beside me, turn down an unknown road, and just maybe, drive for a brief while. Summer Insitute? No. Summer Road Trip."

At the end of the journey, participant Cathie Cooper reflected, "Thank you for expanding my world! This is the first thought that comes to my mind when reflecting on what the past four weeks with PAWLP have meant to me. My friend and I always looked forward to our first get together after any of our big trips, where we reminisce and list highlights and lowlights from our experience. Just like all of my travel adventures, the highlights of the Institute far outweigh the lowlights.

Highlights of the Institute include: **Philosophy** – Teachers teaching teachers. I didn't realize how powerful this was going to be. I've never participated in a conference – or educational experience – where the modeling by the leaders/presenters, etc. was so effective and ap-

-continued on page 7, column 3

The National Writing Project's E-Anthology

You are a writer. You are surrounded by your Institute colleagues who come from a variety of backgrounds and can provide invaluable feedback and encouragement to assist you in developing your ideas. Imagine being able to expand this writing community and solicit feedback from an even broader, more diverse group. You can create this opportunity for yourself through the National Writing Project's *E-Anthol*

ogy, an on-line support network for members of local Writing Projects across the United States. A group of us in the Summer 2004 Writing Institute participated and were quite pleased with the outcome.

The *E-Anthology* has a variety of features. A good place to start was the "Guest Book," where participants introduced themselves electronically. These entries ranged from simply a name, job title, and

location to haiku about the experience of writing. After reading a piece, it was often interesting to visit that site and learn more about the background of the writer.

One of the most exciting features of the *E-Anthology* was the "Open-Mic" site, where you could post your writing for three kinds of review: (1) your piece could be "blessed" - receiving positive comto

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FROM THE DIRECTOR ANDREA FISHMAN

PSSA WRITING REDUX

Happy 2005!

As many of you may know, 2004 ended with some very good news for PAWLP and for the whole six-site Pennsylvania Writing Project Network (PWPN). In November, this Network entered a partnership with PDE's Division of Assessment to become their staff development providers for the new PSSA Writing Assessment. In December, PWPN conducted eight, best-practice rollout sessions across the state, highlighting features of the new mode-specific holistic rubrics. Now the six Writing Project sites are available to do in-district workshops for those unable to attend the PDE-sponsored sessions.

Of particular interest to those of you reading this column, I'm sure, is the question, "What makes the new rubrics different from the domain scoring guide?". And the answer is, "Very little." Not only do all the domains remain in place for each mode, but they are named under each holistic score point in virtually the same language as that of the domain guide. Focus continues to require a sharp, distinct, controlling point with awareness of task. Content must be substantial, specific, and illustrative. Organization requires effective structure. Style means precise use of words and sentence structures. And Conventions means correctness of sentence structure, grammar, usage, spelling, and punctuation.

The differences come as additions made to clarify the modes. Instead of a generic "task" in each case, tasks are defined. Narrative tells a story, real or imagined. Informational writing is explanatory. Persuasive convinces and even states its focal point as a position or a claim.

In terms of Content, Narrative is a story line developed through the narrative elements (eg., plot, characterization, dialogue, setting). Informational content is developed through selected details, examples, and anecdotes; Persuasive content adds reasons to that list.

Organizational distinctions are made, too. Narrative is a sequence of events while Informational and Persuasive use structures like comparison and contrast, cause and effect, and problem-solution.

Reviewing all this, you can see that none of our shared fears came to pass in these new rubrics as currently written.* No formulaic format is prescribed. No variety of content is either prescribed or proscribed. No point of view is mandated or forbidden. None of the distinctions we've worked so hard to make have been blurred: point still differs from topic. Focus, Content, and Organization remain distinct domains.

I imagine readers asking now, "If so much remains the same, why make these changes at all?". You can find PDE's rationale in its own words on their website (as Writing Highlights PSSA 2005). But I'll save some of you the trip. The shift from domain scoring to holistic, which is the fundamental difference now, serves both fis-

cal and educational purposes. Fiscally speaking, holistic scoring is much less expensive than domain. It takes less time and money to train scorers and score papers. If we want to keep large scale, direct assessment of writing in Pennsylvania – which we do lest it fall off the radar screen entirely – it must be economically viable as holistic scoring seems to be.

The educational purpose is one stated but not highlighted in PDE's rationale, so I want to highlight it here. These new, mode-specific holistic guidelines are "limited for scoring shorter, on-demand written responses. *Because PSSA writing samples are students' first drafts, it is more appropriate to score them using specific criteria for an on-demand response.*" (PDE, 10/21/04, p 2. Italics mine.)

In other words, PSSA's large-scale assessment measures only one kind writing and writing ability: the on-demand test kind. It is summative, not formative. A snapshot, not a response intended to inform learning. It may be necessary but it is not sufficient when considering the writing instruction in our classrooms, the development of writing ability in our students. For instructional purposes, the domain rubric remains the preferred tool, as PDE itself says. And because PDE's Division of Assessment has so carefully kept the test rubrics in line with the domain guide, now we may actually have a system that distinguishes between large-scale and classroom assessment, between large-scale assessment and classroom instruction. A happy new year for Pennsylvania teachers and students, indeed.

* PDE considers these rubrics drafts until after they're piloted this year.

The National Writing Project and TCs: Perfect Together

KUDOS

Fellows new to **PAWLP** receive a packet of information from the National Writing Project about the numerous ways TCs can participate in national programs designed to support classroom practice. If you've mislaid this packet or (gasp!) never received one, here in a nutshell are some of the opportunities NWP offers.

Every year nearly a thousand TCs, site directors, and national staff attend NWP's annual meeting, held in conjunction with the National Council of Teachers of English annual conference. Following several keynote speakers, participants can choose from a host of concurrent sessions, addressing both site issues and teaching strategies. In the Spring hundreds meet in Washington, DC to discuss continued Federal funding with area legislators. Both meetings are a chance to see our site in a national context.

For those unable to travel to national meetings, NWP offers online resources such as *E-Voice*, NWP's electronic newsletter and online discussion groups for special-focus networks. Authors and Issues Online conferences are sponsored yearly. Authors who have participated in this forum in the past include Donald Murray and Jeff Wilhelm.

Special-focus networks address the challenges and needs of specific learning communities. These networks have online discussion forums, strands at the NWP annual meeting

as well as events of their own. Those interested in the needs of English Language Learners, Urban Sites, Rural Sites, and Teacher Inquiry Communities, should check to see how they can become involved in these networks. Further NWP's special initiatives enable sites and TCs to participate in collaborative pilot projects such as the Teacher Exchange Program and the Project Outreach Network, an initiative dedicated to examining issues of diversity at individual sites.

NWP also offers TCs the opportunity to share their work with a national audience through *The Voice* and *The Quarterly*, its two periodicals. Fellows so inclined to write professionally can also apply to participate in one of NWP's writing retreats. Of course, those merely wishing to grow their expertise by reading of others' experiences can access one of NWP's many fine publications as well.

Information about all of these opportunities and more can be found at NWP's website, writingproject.org, or by contacting **Andy Fishman** or **Mary Buckelew** at **610-436-2202** for further details. Remember we are only one of one hundred seventy-five sites across the country. If you thought we were great alone, think how much greater we are within these numbers. Find out more now!

-Judy Jester, PAWLP Co-director, teaches Middle School English in the Kennett School District.

Cecelia Evans, a 1981 Writing Fellow, and **Mary Buckelew**, PAWLP Associate Director, were awarded \$10,000 from the Ethel Sargent Clark Smith Memorial for Dr. Evans' "With Pens in Hand" family literacy program.

Diane Bates, 1984 WC Writing Fellow and Reading Specialist at Howard High School in New Castle County is presenting with Dr. Gerry Henwood, Literacy Specialist at Lower Merion High School, at the IRA in San Antonio this spring on the role of the secondary reading specialist in a vocational and a traditional academic high school. The focus is on the deficiency among high school students to adequately deal with varied forms of tech-based literacy.

Lesley Roessing, an '02 Writing, '04 Lit Fellow, and Middle School Language Arts teacher in the Ridley School District, had her article "Toppling the Idol" published in September's *English Journal*.

PAWLP Co-director, **Lynne Dorfman** and PAWLP Assistant Director, **Rose Cappelli**, facilitated a microworkshop on reading and writing nonfiction at the Keystone State Reading Association convention in October, 2004. They have been invited to conduct a full-day institute on nonfiction at next year's KSRA convention.



SAVE THE DATES!

From Battles to Barbisols:
Finding the Story in History

March 5, 2005

8:30 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
Sykes Student Union Building,
West Chester University

Keynote Speaker: Jennifer Armstrong

Author of *The Dreams of Maire Mehan*, *Mary Mehan Awake*, *Shipwreck at the Bottom of the World* (1999 Orbis Pictus award), *Black-Eyed Susan*, *In My Hands: Memories of a Holocaust Rescuer* (with Irene Gut Opdyke), and other historical fiction books for middle/high school students and picture books for younger readers.

Planting Reading &
Writing Strategies for
Literacy Growth

April 2, 2005

8:30 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
Mill Creek Elementary School,
Central Bucks School District

Keynote Speaker: Mary Beth Allen

Author of *Guided Comprehension:
A Teaching Model for Grades 3 - 8*

PAWLP'S 25TH Anniversary Celebration **Celebrate Literacy VI Conference**

June 28 & 29, 2005

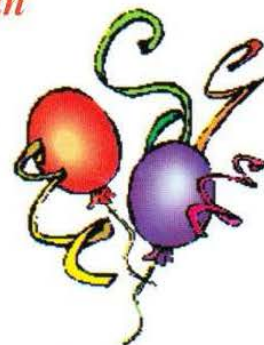
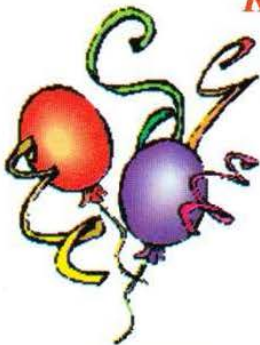
**Keynote Speakers: Regie Routman
and Patricia Reilly Giff**

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For more information on any of these programs visit our website at www.pawlp.org,
call 610-436-2202 or e-mail cupton@wcupa.edu

An Unforgettable Course: Teachers as Readers and Writers in the Southwest

What do you get when you take 15 inquiring minds, add a few dusty roads, a desert landscape covered with cacti, a big sky with an astounding nightly sunset, green chilies at least once a day, and a group of eager travelers? Why the group of Teachers as Readers and Writers in the Southwest, of course!

That's right, fifteen fearless explorers jumped aboard the ship that started making preparations for voyage in the spring of 2004 with the fearless Captain Mary Buckelew at the helm joined by her steadfast skipper, Diane Dougherty. The crew, anxious for an experience, began preparing. Feet first they jumped in, immersing themselves in the local writings, studying the diverse culture, traveling through their imaginations.

**Together they gallop in a
Southwestern direction
Sharing the markings of breeding,
The desire of discovery.
Ready to race through a desert
Washed in words**



*Jessie Lynn Shaffer with local author
Jimmy Santiago Bacca*

After several monthly meetings, exciting discussions on Blackboard, and acquiring the educational background necessary to set forth in this new land, the group headed for Albuquerque, New Mexico. With an

itinerary slated with three city stops (Santa Fe, Taos, and Albuquerque) the group piled into their touring vehicle and set off.

Outside of those windows, the travelers caught their first glimpses of a terrain so different from home, a desert land covered with cacti and brush, burnished mountain and butte, a place where houses made of earth blend and bond with their surroundings. Mesmerized by what they saw, the travelers were ready to embark on an adventure filled with tours and author visits, exploration and writing, a course carefully crafted by a former native to the land, Captain Mary.

**One mare rears her head,
Nostrils full of a scent known well.
She leads them,
Hoofs imprinting
On a land
So old, so new.**

Their first stop, Santa Fe, captured the character of New Mexico with its old square and classic adobe architecture. Taos brought relaxation, a scenic mountain view, writing by the Rio Grande, and a sunset like no other, a miracle of color across the sky. Albuquerque gave a taste of city life, a closer view of the diversity that is so wholly New Mexico. The visits with local authors who were studied brought to life a world that existed only on paper, an experience that will not be forgotten. A trip to the Taos Pueblo and Hacienda de los Martinez was a journey back in time, a reminder of how the cultures lived in the past and present — a reminder of why bridging into the future can be complicated.

Georgia O'Keefe probably

summed this experience up best in 1977 when she wrote:

“When I got to New Mexico that was mine. As soon as I saw it that was my country. I'd never seen anything like it before, but it fitted to me exactly. It's something that's in the air - it's different. The sky is different, the wind is different. I shouldn't say too much about it because other people may be interested and I don't want them interested.”



photo by participant Becky Miller

The mystique of New Mexico is one all her own, one not easily forgotten by 15 travelers who hated to leave, who would do this all again in a second. Perhaps another voyage will call them again or maybe some of you reading this will be eager to join. If so, jump aboard; the journey is one you will undoubtedly never forget!

**Together crossing the shallow waters
Of the Rio Grande,
Taking a long drink,
Filling a deep thirst,
They find the essence of it all.**

- by Jessie Lynn Shaffer, a '94 Bucks Writing Fellow, who teaches Middle School English in the Neshaminy SD and PAWLP's Visualizing Words and Worlds at the Michener Art Museum.

Regie Routman's Reading Essentials: The Specifics You Need to Teach Reading Well, a book review by PAWLP Co-director Chris Coyne-Kehan

Regie Routman's latest book on the teaching of reading is an essential addition to the professional library of anyone passionate about the subject, as so many of us are. Her down-to-earth style is evident in all four parts: *The Essential Reading Life*, *The Essential Reading Day*, *Teaching Essentials*, and *Advocacy Is Also Essential*. Within each part, chapters address the skills and strategies needed to teach reading well such as relying on an optimal learning model; organizing classroom libraries and schedules; independent reading *balanced* with shared and guided reading; teaching comprehension; making assessment work for you and your students; making every minute count; and so much more. Try It, Apply It boxes and Teaching Tips are woven throughout the text.

As I read Routman's book, she seemed to address all the latest issues surrounding the teaching of reading: leveling books, self-selection, time management, reading

aloud, reading conferences, grouping children for guided reading, frequency of meeting with groups, high-stakes testing, and commercial reading programs. She gives us the voice and respect we need as educated teachers of reading to take professional responsibility for what we believe.

Decision-making should come from us, she asserts, when it comes to teaching our students to become life-long readers. "We are teaching in difficult times. Increasingly, restrictive programs and materials are becoming part of our classrooms without our input or approval. The voices wanting to 'fix' education are loud and insistent, but they are not teachers' voices. We must become brave and knowledgeable enough to articulate our concerns in a respectful manner. And we must go even further. For the sake of our students and for the healthy future of education, we must become visible, active agents for change." (page 200)

In her last chapter, entitled "You Only Have So Much Time" her advice is that we live an interesting life and spend most of our planning time thinking -- thinking about our students' needs, the purpose of our lessons, the effectiveness of those lessons, and goals for our students as well as for ourselves. She invites us to continually ask when planning work for students, "How is this activity helping my students become more independent as readers, writers, and thinkers?" (page 205)

Reading Essentials is a book that I will turn to again and again throughout my teaching career. Now I anxiously await the arrival of her latest book, *Writing Essentials*, which is due to arrive any day now.

Regie Routman is the Keynote speaker at this year's Celebrate Literacy! Conference June 28 & 29. Enrollment is limited. Call 610-436-2202 for information.

E-Anthology - continued from page 1

ments only; (2) "addressed" - requesting feedback on a specific area of your piece, i.e. "How could this be more persuasive?"; or (3) "pressed" - receiving any feedback the reader chose to provide. Those of us who participated posted both our narrative and persuasive pieces from the Institute. Not only did we learn that there is value in getting the perspective of writers outside of your immediate community, but by reading the other postings, we were able to hone our own response skills and to gather great ideas for our own writing or for writing we

might like to do with our students.

A convenient feature, called "My Portfolio," opened a folder which contained all of an individual participant's posted pieces, responses to those pieces, and responses the participant had sent to others. There was even a way to respond to responses, to extend and deepen the discussion.

Some sites took advantage of a feature called "A Day in the Life," in which participants shared experiences directly from their Institutes, shedding light on the unique flavor of each group. For example,

some groups were focusing on a sense of place, leading to a lot of descriptive writing, and others were engaged with themes, such as cultural differences, which were generating more persuasive writing.

All of these options combined to provide a special opportunity to participate in a national community of writers. We heard voices from cities, suburbs, mountains, deserts, and coastlines. It was worth the trip.

- by Cathie Cooper and Janice Ewing, 2004 Summer Writing Institute participants

Education Matters

A column from Michaels Associates LLC

Teaching children to write poetry can be a fun and rewarding task, according to Regie Routman, who has authored the *Kids' Poems* series. When Ms. Routman began teaching young children to write free-verse poetry, she was surprised at the amount of inventiveness that kids had. Students who had previously struggled with writing skills excelled in these lessons. Able to express creativity and imagination, children at all levels improved their choice of words and their excitement for writing increased. Writing about family, pets, sports, or whatever was on their minds, the children's poems showed energy, rhythm, passion, shape, and keen observation.

Teaching poetry writing so that all kids are successful requires an in-depth introduction, including lots of exposure to poetry. Regie Routman's *Kids' Poems* books take you through the steps necessary to begin teaching poetry writing in kindergarten through fourth grade. She explains how to get started, begin to teach poetry writing, write the first poems, share and celebrate the poems, as well as publish the poems. The easy-to-follow books include grade-appropriate examples of actual children's work. Routman feels it is important that children see and hear immediately that a poem:

- ♦ can be about anything

- ♦ can use a few words
- ♦ has a unique form and shape
- ♦ may or may not have rhythm and a beat
- ♦ often ends with a punch
- ♦ has a title
- ♦ may use inventive spelling
- ♦ let's us get to know the poet
- ♦ is easy to create
- ♦ may be serious or humorous
- ♦ usually expresses important personal feelings

(Source: *Kid's Poems*, Regie Routman, Scholastic's Instructor).

Michaels Associates, LLC carries all of Regie Routman's books, including her *Kids' Poems* books – *Teaching Kindergartners to Love Writing Poetry*, *Teaching First Graders to Love Writing Poetry*, *Teaching Second Graders to Love Writing Poetry*, *Teaching Third & Fourth Graders to Love Writing Poetry* – at a cost of \$10.95 each. Her newest book, *Writing Essentials* – Heinemann Oct 2004 – is priced at \$29.50.

Readers of this *Newsletter* can receive a 20% discount on any of Regie's books when ordering through Michaels Associates LLC. Request the discount by mentioning the *Newsletter* when you call or reference the book in the body of your purchase order. Offer expires February 28, 2005.

- Ellen Kalik,
Director of Marketing,
Michaels Associates LLC

A Journey Never to be Forgotten...continued from page 1

appropriate. Whoever dreamed up and implemented this concept was truly a visionary!

Community – Supportive, celebratory. What an amazing group of individuals! I have the unique individuals in my classroom. My goal is to build an even tighter community.

Identity – Undergoing a transformation. Developing confidence. I am a writer! What a powerful tool to be able to share with my students!

Choice – Even when responding to focused free-writes. Ownership. Freedom.

Challenge – “Dendrite aerobics!” Perfect for the lifelong learner inside of me! I can't wait to share that term with my students, some of whom feel they're already smart and therefore don't have to stretch. Watch out! We're all going to get in even better shape together!

Time – The perfect gift to give! I feel like we had plenty of time to accomplish the tasks at hand. I didn't feel pressured – a key to being creative. When I look back, though, I think, WOW!, how were we able to do all of that! Quality and quantity!

Practical – Useful information and ideas, from all the presenters, to use in our classroom and to continue to stretch and challenge ourselves as educators.

E-Anthology – Expanded community for feedback and support. Well worth the time and highly recommended. I'll have to write a persuasive piece for the 2005 Fellows to consider.

Anthology – I usually take photographs to preserve memories. I'm sure, over the years, as I pull out the anthology and re-read our stories, I'll have a picture, and a fond memory, of each person in our group.

Join us for an unforgettable journey.

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