

Writing Matters



The Newsletter of the Alabama A&M University Writing Project

Fall 2005

So You Want a Revolution?

Kim Estelle

While attending the Summer Institute in June 2004, our rambunctious and spirited group of participants was discussing a *Breakthroughs* article “The Thorny Issue of Grading Writing Too Soon.” Our group members had varying points and opinions about the validity and feasibility of not grading a student’s paper until further in the writing process. “I can see that supporting content without assigning a letter grade too soon is important. It helps build confidence,” stated one brave member. “But students and parents need structure and feedback,” retorted another. “And my principal says I *have* to assign grades through the entire process,” moaned yet another. Back and forth the comments flew, pro’s and con’s, until we seemed to be stuck in one negative rut: “I just can’t do something this controversial.” My enthusiasm for the discussion quickly dissipated with the last “I can’t” comment. “Yes, you can,” I was thinking. “Just try it. Yes, you can. YES, YOU CAN!!!”

And then the thought in my head was echoed by the spoken words. “Yes, you can,” I distinctively heard. I thought I had made the mistake of letting my frustration get the best of me and speaking the words aloud myself. But the words were from the director of the Alabama A&M Writing Project, Gatsinzi Basaninyenzi. “Yes, you can,” he said again. I had not imagined it, and I hadn’t been the one to make the mistake of saying the words. Dr. Basaninyenzi had spoken them and they were no mistake. He had caught my attention and I waited to be re-energized by what else he had to offer. Dr. B went on to explain that one of the framing philosophies of the Writing Project was to enable innovative thinking and then put that thinking into practice. We can be that “revolutionary” if we so choose.

That particular discussion and its positive conclusion stayed with me. I have always been someone who thinks outside the box. For years I have wanted to

implement what some would call “radical” ideas into my teaching, but I have not had the confidence of network and/or like-minded people to do so. The Writing Project has given me that support and inspired me to do what I feel is right for my students even if those practices may be controversial.

But more importantly, in addition to the support from a nationally recognized organization, there is research behind the practices National Writing Project Teacher Consultants use. That research supports the “revolutionary” or unconventional practice that some teachers employ. The practices have proven to work in the classroom and the positive results are reported by the teachers who use them.

I was inspired by what Dr. B had said, and the Writing Project provided ideas and the research to support what I felt was best for my students. Because of the Writing Project, I employed some of the ideas I gleaned from last year’s Summer Institute in my own classroom. The results were fantastic! My students were writing vivid, well-worded pieces! My principal was truly impressed with my students’ work, and I have now been asked to share some the practices I use in my classroom with my colleagues. I will have the opportunity to lead a committee for sharing writing ideas! I get to be the revolutionary again! And the revolution is spreading!

But if that scares you, let me back up. You don’t *have* to be the radical or the revolutionary. That may not suit you. What may happen if you attend the National Writing Project Summer Institute is that you may find only a small seed of an idea will work for you. And that’s OK. The whole idea of the Summer Institute is to give you the seeds necessary to help plant new ideas either in yourself or in your students so that writing becomes a successful endeavor in all areas of life. You don’t have to swallow every idea whole. You just have to have the courage to write and be open enough to share that writing and some new ideas with new friends. The results may even be revolutionary without your intending them to be or they may not. What you will find is that you will have new ideas for teaching writing. Some of those ideas may work, some may not. But, at the very least, you will have made progress in planting some new ideas and practices. I am now fortunate to have people from the Writing Project to keep my feet firmly planted on the ground while the rest of the seeds I’ve planted reach for the lofty stars. The revolution seed I planted last year is beginning to come to fruition. And, that is exciting! *Viva la revolucion!*

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National *Writing* Project News

Americans Want Writing Taught in All Grades and Subjects . . . *And They Want it NOW*

WASHINGTON, DC—More than six in ten Americans (69 percent) believe writing should be taught across all subjects and grade levels, and it should happen immediately, according to a survey, “Learning to Write, Writing to Learn: Americans’ Views of Writing in Our Schools,” conducted by Belden, Russonello and Stewart for the National Writing Project. These Americans represent every income and education level, every political and ideological persuasion and ethnic group across every region of the country.

For example:

- 72 percent of Americans (67 percent of whites, 73 percent of African Americans, and 79 percent of Hispanics) strongly agree that “A person needs to be able to write well to advance in almost any career or job today.”
- In another instance, 72 percent of Americans believe that all future teachers should receive training in the teaching of writing and that training should be put into practice now. African Americans and Whites concurred by 71 and 72 percent respectively and Hispanics felt the most strongly at 76 percent.
- Unfortunately, the survey revealed a disturbing fact: only 23 percent of the public agrees that the schools in their community already do a good job of teaching writing (23 percent of Hispanics and African Americans and 24 percent of Whites).

Helping teachers teach writing is a priority for most Americans, and public opinion supports providing additional resources for teachers and offering workshops and additional training for current and future teachers to help them teach writing. This comes as no surprise to the National Writing Project (NWP), which is the nation’s premier effort to improve writing in America.

“For over thirty years, teachers from all over the country have participated enthusiastically in their local writing project’s institutes and workshops. They have gained confidence and excellent teaching tools and sometimes, to their amazement, a sense of how enjoyable writing can be,” said Richard Sterling, executive director of the National Writing Project. “Teachers will be delighted to know that the public, too, is serious about the value of writing.”

This survey strongly supports three reports issued by the College Board’s National Commission on Writing over the past two years: the first report, *The Neglected ‘R,’* issued in April, 2003, called for a writing revolution; the September 2004 report, *Writing: A Ticket to Work...Or a Ticket Out*, which surveyed 120 major American corporations, concluded that in today’s workplace writing is a “threshold skill” for hiring and promotion among salaried employees; the third report, *Writing: A Powerful Message from State Government*, issued in July of this year, found that despite the high value that state employers put on writing skills, a significant number of their employees do not meet states’ expectations.

“The demand from the public, state governments, and the business community reinforce our determination to place a writing project within the reach of every teacher in America,” concluded Sterling.

A federally funded program, NWP serves over 100,000 teachers a year at 189 university sites in 50 states, Puerto Rico, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Through its professional development model, NWP builds the leadership, programs, and research needed for teachers to help their students become successful writers and learners.

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*The only reason for being a professional
writer is that you can’t help it.*

--Leo Rosten



Teachers Teaching Teachers: Jim Gray's Legacy Lives On

Jim Gray, founder of the Bay Area Writing Project and the National Writing Project (NWP), is no more. He died on November 1, 2005, after 78 years of fulfilled life. Though he is no more, his vision lives on in all the 189 National Writing Project sites, which include the Alabama A&M University Writing Project.

As I wrote in the 2004 issue of *Writing Matters*, Gray's vision when he founded the Bay Area Writing Project in 1974 and later the National Writing Project in 1976 was to improve the teaching of writing using what was then a

highly innovative approach. After many years of experience teaching the teaching of writing at the University of California, Berkeley, and supervising beginning English teachers in the Bay Area, Gray became convinced that teachers of writing learn better from their peers, thus the teachers-teaching-teachers professional development model. Among the basic assumptions of the model are that "writing instruction

begins in kindergarten and continues through university;" that "effective teachers of writing regularly write themselves;" that "exemplary teachers make the best teachers of other teachers;" and that "writing is fundamental to learning in all subjects."

These assumptions are at the core of our programs here at Alabama A&M University Writing Project. Take the example of Mimi Hughes, who teaches at Bob Jones High School. Obviously, her students know what a wonderful teacher she is, for my nieces, Grace and Olivia whom she has taught, have told me

so. However, what may be a sad reality is that though many of her colleagues know through hearsay that she is a wonderful teacher, very few or none of them have actually benefited directly from her expertise. Generally, when we think of teacher professional development, we neglect to take advantage of teacher expertise in our schools or in other schools; instead, we spend inordinate amounts of money to bring to our schools an expert who may not be a classroom teacher. Jim Gray introduced an alternative model, where teachers teach other teachers.

For illustration, let's go back to Mimi. When Mimi attended the NWP Summer Institute in 2003, she was one of the sixteen teacher experts who, for four weeks, wrote and shared what had worked best for them in the classroom. That summer, Mimi taught us that "every student can learn to get the best possible grade in the shortest amount of time while maintaining a positive attitude and the highest level of self-confidence." "Eureka!" was her teacher demonstration, appropriately titled. But, wait a minute! Had we heard her right? What about students with the "learning problem" label? We wanted to know more, so we invited her to tell us more about her theory and practice at the Advanced Institute. For two consecutive Saturdays Mimi taught us, her fellow teachers, about the needs of dyslexic learners and how to inspire them to be confident. And she shared success stories.

At our writing retreats, the assumption that "effective teachers of writing regularly write themselves" also proved true. For two days, usually in August, we get together and away from our homes, doing nothing but writing, writing again, and sharing. Our writing environments are of course more inspiring than those we sometimes subject our students to. In August 2004 for example, about twenty of us spent a weekend at Monte Sano State Park writing and sharing. In August 2005, about fifteen of us once again spent a weekend at a hotel facing Guntersville Lake. With such a view, we could not *not* write.

Indeed, Jim Gray's legacy lives on here at Alabama A&M University Writing Project, for "teachers teaching teachers" is what we are all about. In a famous speech, "The Atlanta Exposition Address," Booker T. Washington advised to the "thirsty" more than a century ago: "Cast down your bucket where you are." Jim Gray's philosophy with regard to teacher professional development was basically the same. We teachers who are thirsting for instruction or inspiration have an abundant supply of refreshing ideas right at our feet; we have only to "cast down our buckets."

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Alabama A&M University Writing Project

The mission of the AAMU Writing Project is to improve the teaching of writing and to enhance reading and learning in all content areas—kindergarten through college—in the schools of North Alabama.

The AAMU Writing Project recognizes the great importance of teacher knowledge, experience, expertise, and leadership support.

Believing education to be the great equalizer, the AAMU Writing Project holds that access to high-quality education is a basic right of all learners.

Through its network of teachers, the AAMU Writing Project seeks to promote exemplary instruction of writing in every classroom.

The AAMU Writing Project values diversity. Our lives are enriched when we interact with persons of diverse racial, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds.



Teacher Summer Invitational Institute

National Writing Project Summer Institute Fellowships

Monday, June 5 – Friday, June 30, 2006

Alabama A&M University Writing Project is accepting applications for sixteen Summer Institute fellowships.

Successful candidates will receive a stipend.

To be eligible, applicants must be teachers in North Alabama.

To obtain application forms, go to

<http://www.knology.net/~aamuwritingproject/institute.html> and click on 2006 Application.

For more information, call (256) 372-5391, or send e-mail to writingproject@aamu.edu.



Deadline: March 15, 2006

Our *Writing* Journal

Honey, This Isn't about You: The Teacher's Role in the Writing Classroom

Leilani Kesner

Last week, I get this tech boy in my creative writing class. See, these tech boys leave campus for part of the day at a technical school down the road where they work on cars or motors or welding machines or what have you. Then they return to our school, which is where they are when our new by-the-book principal discovers them, sitting in the gymnasium unsupervised for the last 45 minutes of class. So, the principal comes up with a bright and shiny new plan to put each tech boy into a makeshift study hall, supervised by whichever teachers have the smallest classes at that period.

Now, I happen to have a room full of students in my creative writing class, but I also happen to be asking the principal for about 130% of the school's entire professional development fund to go to the NCTE conference in a couple of months. So, there you go. I've suddenly got a tech boy.

The next day, my tech school student, whose middle name is Wolfgang—named after Wolfman Jack, he explains, not Mozart as I'd imagined—arrives at 2:46 and hands me his paper and says, "I'm suppose to sit in here," and I say, "Right, I've been expecting you, Chris." I explain that this is creative writing and that most days we'll be finished with our mini-lesson by the time he gets here, so students will be writing by the time he comes in. I tell him to sit anywhere he wants. He picks the first seat he comes to. He is quiet. He looks around the room.

And, I do, too. I imagine the list he makes as he takes inventory of my class: "Geek sophomore ... Track guy senior ... Prep senior ... Geek senior ... Trouble freshman ... Misfit sophomore ... Weirdo senior ... Cheerleader junior ... Where'd-he-get-that-scar?/freshman ... Special ed./junior ... Special ed./senior ... What's-he-doin'-in-here-with-them?/sophomore ... Daneline/junior ... Goth/freshman ... Suicide/sophomore ...

I figure Chris is going to have his head down on his desk and be fast asleep in ten minutes, and I'll have to wake him up, and he'll be angry and my writers will be disturbed . . .

Goth/suicide/senior ... Does-her-mamma-know-she's-in-this-class?/junior ... Trouble ... Trouble ... Special ed." I figure Chris is going to have his head down on his desk and be fast asleep in ten minutes, and I'll have to wake him up, and he'll be angry and my writers will be disturbed, especially Blake, who would be a favorite of mine if I had favorites, which, of course, I do not. Instead, for a while Chris just keeps making whatever list he's making in his mind and then he takes out his biology book and pretends to do some work and then the bell rings.

The next day, he comes back, comes in at 2:46, sits down at his desk, and takes out a spiral notebook like a lot of the kids in the class write in. It's brand new. And, he starts writing. He's a writer.

I'm sure this is a good kid. I imagine for a moment that my friend in the registrar's office has given me the "best" tech boy, but I have imagined having the "good kids" culled out and sent to my classes for years—even years when to my surprise someone will look at the kids filing out of my room and whisper, "Ooh—boy, you've got some humdingers in that class."

One day this week, we are still peer-editing work at 2:46 when Chris Wolfgang comes in. His seat is empty, but he's looking around the room, so I put him in with a kid I know well and say to her, "Look, some teachers have student teachers. Well, today, you're going to have a student student. Tell Chris what we're doing. He's a writer, too." And before long, Chris is pulling out his notebook. My tech boy is reading his work to cheerleader senior and to goth/suicide, who are now his friends, Anna and Angela. Later, they will speak to each other in the hall, and the other tech boys will look at him bemused, and the other cheerleaders will look at Anna suspiciously and the other goth/suicides will look at Angela with eyes that say, "Is he okay? Is he one of us?"

One day, I notice that the clock in my classroom says "2:48" and I think, "Where's Chris?" And, I wait five minutes. Then, I think, "Dadgumit! Where is Wolfgang?" And, I have visions of his

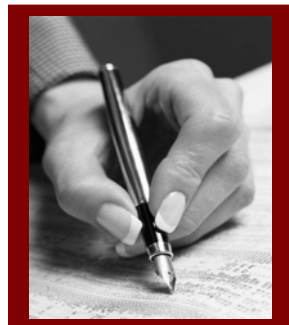
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getting caught smoking in a hallway. Then, I wait another five minutes, and I think, “Where is that tech boy?” Then, I have visions of the board meeting where it will be explained that *when* Chris was arrested for drug trafficking at our high school, he was missing from my class and I had failed to report it. And, that board member—you know the one—will get up and say, “If only Mrs. Kesner weren’t so incompetent, this child would never have begun his life of crime.”

So, I get up and walk to the back of the room to call the office and ask if the tech bus has arrived or is instead, maybe, hopefully, running late. And, there, in a back row in the middle of the room far from his usual seat is Chris with his new but filling-up-fast spiral notebook. He has come in—honestly, I don’t know when— maybe he’s been there all along; maybe he hasn’t gone to tech school that day; maybe he’s come in at 2:46 just like always, and I’ve been writing and just haven’t noticed him sit down. All I know for sure is that when I walk toward the back there he is, writing, writing, writing. I pick up a file folder I don’t need and go back to my desk holding it in my hand like I haven’t been checking up on Chris Wolfgang Tech Boy Writer at all.

Chris doesn’t know Blake, African American junior, Blake who moves his desk to the corner by the window and writes everyday like his whole life he has just been waiting for the moment when someone would say, “Hey, write that down,” Blake who soaks up lessons on writing like he was thirsty, like he has been dying from lack of finding out how to be a writer. Sometimes, when Blake’s writing, he looks up and looks around the room at everyone else writing and smiles like there is no better place on earth than this classroom and no better people than these people, and then he starts writing again. But, this day isn’t like that; this day Blake looks up searching. Then, he glances at me like I’m supposed to do something now, and he’s just waiting patiently for me to figure out what that is and do it.

Now, if students write for a long time, I give them a stretch break, but in creative writing I call it a mingling break, because sometimes my writers are



quiet and introverted or even if they are loud and laughy, they are loud and laughy only with the friends they already know. So, when Blake looks at me like I’m supposed to know what comes next, all I know to do is call for a mingling break. Kids get up and mingle. It’s been

three weeks now, and we can all give our names and add “I’m a writer” without blushing, so now when we stretch, students move around more. Without my suggesting it, they go over to other desks, to someone they know by name instead of label, someone who is their writing friend. A lot of students go to Blake’s desk to mingle. But, today, Blake moves first. He goes straight over to Chris’ desk, the new one in the back. Chris doesn’t mingle yet though he knows Anna and he knows Angela. Blake, a stranger, puts a hand on Chris’ shoulder to let him know he’s there. “I’m Blake,” he says. “I’m a writer.” Chris smiles back and shakes Blake’s hand and says something I don’t catch. I can’t hear them anymore. They’re both soft-spoken young men, writers in their own world now, a world in which I am superfluous.

AAMU Writing Project Calendar of Events

Summer Invitational Institute June 5-30, 2006

Four weeks of exhilarating professional development for teachers of all content areas and grade levels.

Visit our website for an application.

Invitational Technology Institute June 5-9, 2006

AAMU Writing Project Teacher Consultants are invited to apply for this week-long institute exploring digital storytelling.

Writing Retreat August 25-27, 2006

AAMU Writing Project Teacher Consultants are invited to apply for this refreshing professional writing retreat. Come join us and spend time writing in a quiet picturesque setting.

Visit www.knology.net/aamuwritingproject for details on any of these programs.

Writer's Block and the Writing Retreat

Carolyn Creighton

A writer's block is like a black hole in your mind that not only sucks out your words, but also sucks out your imagination. There you are—new folder, new tablet, special pen, an environment of colleagues ready to create and then there is you—your supplies as pristine as when they toppled out of the Wal-Mart sack. When there are no words and no imagination to lay ink to pad, you may as well go to bed, which is what I did. I planned to be prone until 5:29 ½ PM and then rejoin my chorus of writers at 5:30 PM, hear their jaunty jibes, and enjoy a special meal with people who accept you just the way you are—people you call friends. Writing project people.

But then, the air conditioning reconstitutes you and the lunch is forgotten and the details of the writing retreat lay out in front of your pillowed eyes and you dutifully roll over, open the still pristine pad and lay a little ink on the lines. What could be simpler—pages of nothing, pages without vision or focus, the Herculean efforts of a writer blocked, a writer struggling to tell a tale, offer an imaginative phrase, wax either poetic or philosophical or both in an effort to rejoin the creative group where writing takes place.

Constructing Young Readers

Kathy Barclift

Do you remember learning to read? Did you have to wrestle with every word on the page, or did the act of reading come more naturally to you? When I remember my own experiences of learning to read, I recall Dick and Jane, little student books, and the teacher's big book propped on an easel. I remember a circle of small chairs and groups called red birds, blue birds and yellow birds. Two phrases of an old phonics song echo in my memory: “*m* makes a murmuring sound” and “*b* makes a bubbling sound.”

By far my best memories are the ones that included read alouds. Every day after lunch my first grade teacher would read to us. One particular book stayed with me, *North to Freedom*, about a boy escaping Nazis in World War II. It was a peculiar choice for a first grade class, but it fired my imagination. My

parents read to me also. Books like *Heidi* and *The Adventures of Robin Hood* drew me into their settings. I fell in love with reading and became an avid reader. I traveled the world and had amazing adventures just from my corner of the bedroom.

Now forty years later as I teach my primary students, I endeavor to make them “fall in love” with reading, too. To attempt such a task, I have had to ask, “Where does reading begin?” For many, reading begins in school with the recognition of letters and their corresponding sounds, because today's busy society causes many parents to shift literacy responsibility to the schools and teachers.

In reality, reading begins with the development of oral language in children, even in their mothers' wombs. Babies listen and imitate sounds, learning quickly to manipulate adults with a “coo” or a “wah.” In an ideal situation parents talk to, listen to, and read to their children every day. Rich language experiences include songs, rhymes, and chants. Early positive experiences with books and stories help children develop attitudes like, “Reading is a good thing,” or “I can read.” Such children come to school possessing a great deal of knowledge about books, words and letters. They may even be reading when they begin formal schooling.

AAMU WP and Inservice

This past July, Gatsinzi and I attended the NWP Inservice Institute to which twelve writing projects had been invited. We spent four days in the Conference Center at Babson College in the beautiful New England town of Wellesley. Along with directors and TCs from sites as far apart as Hawai'i and Vermont, we listened to the wisdom of NWP folk who have built successful inservice programs and then did some collective brainstorming to find solutions to our challenges. I'm not sure if the highlight of the conference was the final lobster dinner or the poem Gatsinzi composed and performed at the Poetry Slam.

After the institute, participating sites were invited to apply for inservice jumpstart grants designed to fund our brainstorming into the realm of the actual. AAMU WP received one of these grants, and we are currently using some of the money to develop TC teacher demonstrations into inservice presentations. So be on the lookout for AAMU WP's growing inservice program and don't be shy about voicing your ideas.

Sandra Shattuck
Programs Director & Inservice Coordinator

Summer Institute 2005

Teaching and Learning the Write Way

Becki Savage-Owens

What do a high-school math teacher, a middle-school science teacher, an AP English teacher, a kindergarten teacher, and a handful of college professors have in common? All these people, and a few others, came together last June for the 2005 AAMU Writing Project Summer Institute.

I really wasn't sure what to expect when I walked into the conference room that first week in June. Certainly, I'd hoped to hone my own writing, and I did, but I never dreamed I'd gain so much more than an opportunity to put pen to paper. But then, I didn't really know yet what the Writing Project was all about.

Imagine the chance to learn from and share ideas with the best of the best educators around. Think how wonderful it would be to recreate and perfect the most effective lessons from the combined experiences of teachers from every grade level and discipline. Envision yourself as part of a progressive team of teachers whose primary goal is not just promoting writing across the curriculum, but giving teachers the tools to bring out the hidden inner-writer in every child they teach. Then you'll begin to understand the Writing Project.

It was with great trepidation that I prepared to stand in front of my now fellow TC's—that's teacher consultants in WP lingo—and present my writing lesson. I was sure I couldn't relate my secondary English lesson on using drawing as a catalyst for writing to college professors or math teachers, but I soon learned that my fears were unfounded. I, like all the project members, had a dedicated group of colleagues eager to help me improve and expand

my techniques so that they could apply to a variety of teaching settings. Everyone saw ways to use my ideas in his or her own class instruction. And I gained great insights from others' presentations on how to incorporate their approaches toward teaching writing into my classes. But mostly, I realized that writing isn't limited to English class. It can and should be an integral part of any discipline.

Math students can overcome anxiety by writing. Science students studying genetics can predict their future children's appearance through Punnett squares and narrative. Students in every subject matter can write and publish "Anything Books" on, well, *anything*. And teachers *can* find ways to help their students write with strong and skilled voices.

But teachers, like their students, need the confidence to say, "I can." The Writing Project gives teachers that self-assurance. Through sharing ideas and actually putting those writing techniques into practice, I and the other participants of the AAMU Writing Project Summer Institute have become more than teachers who hope to teach writing; we have become teachers who *write*.



Summer Institute Participants 2005
Alabama A & M Writing Project

Poetry--Summer Institute 2005

Golf, from A to Z

Stan Gibby

Ace is the place that I've never been,
Bogeys, I hate you, without and within.

Chip shots, if only I could hit them,
Driving range, good shots leave my system.

Eagles are as rare as the birds,
Fore, the worst of four-letter words.

Gimme, the name of a real short shot,
Hazards out there, I'm in 'em a lot.

Impossible lies are certainly no treat,
Juniors are kids I never can beat.

Kick is what I need to get it real close,
Lag putts are the type that I hit the most.

Mulligan, a second chance to improve,
Numbers too high, I'm not in the groove.

Ot of bounds means you have to add two,
Par is a score I often can't do.

Quotes from the great ones, easy to say,
Rough is high grass and no fun to play.

Shank is a shot I hate to hit,
Tee it up high and tell it to sit.

Up and down is my goal from the fringe,
Victory out here always gives me a twinge.

Whiff and I feel I must swing harder,
X-outs are balls meant for the water.

Yips are what keep my putts from the ring,
Zero, my score before I ever swing.

Times

Sherry Torain

In the stillness of mind and body we come to
know,
What action to take and direction to go.

Know thyself,
Accept thyself,
Love thyself,

Just be calm, be brave and true,
Keep your head and you'll make it through.

Seek out silence for solace gained,
Opportunities to reflect, and listen in refrain.

Love one another and help those in need,
Regardless of race, or color or creed.

Each day is a good day to lose self in others,
And any time is a good time to see all mankind as
brothers.

The Glory of Springtime

Margie M. Sanders

Thank you, God, for the little things
That you often send our way-
The things we take for granted
And never remember when we pray-
A big golden sun rising just over the horizon
Flowers hiding under the snow
Awakening again to live and grow-
Leaves that fell to the ground to die
Enriching the soil where they lie-
Lifeless-looking naked trees
Bursting with healthy buds
In the springtime breeze
To only name a few examples of
The greatness of God's love and power,
And in this blaze of springtime glory,
Tell me, who can doubt
The springtime story.

AAMUWP Goes National

...On the National Scene

Among the one thousand writing teachers and site leaders attending the National Writing Project (NWP) Annual Meeting in Pittsburgh, November 17-19, were representatives from the AAMU site: Kathy Barclift, Co-Director; Symmetris Gohanna; Leilani Kesner; Wendy Neff; and Gatsinzi Basaninyenzi, Director.

The NWP meeting is held in conjunction with the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) Annual Convention and includes a variety of workshops and presentations for writing teachers and NWP leaders. "This year there was an even better variety of things to attend," said Barclift. "My sadness was I couldn't get to *everything!*"

Neff agreed, saying, "The two technology workshops on Thursday really fired me up." She was excited about using Movie Maker in her classroom and about online anthologies for students.

Gohanna not only attended workshops, but also facilitated one with Will Banks from Eastern Carolina University. In "Copyright... Copyleft," Banks and Gohanna discussed how information is shared in a digital age.

Likewise, Kesner participated in an NCTE workshop called, "Dozens of Things We Learned through National Board Certification" and chaired the national business meeting of NCTE's Assembly for National Board Certified Teachers.

But, the annual meetings aren't all work! On Thursday evening, Barclift, Gohanna, and Kesner shivered through an art walk, visiting a few of Pittsburgh's galleries, and ending with a reception at Pittsburgh High School for the Creative and Performing Arts (CAPA), where they enjoyed desserts and hot tea, a "Youth Philosophy" exhibit, and performances of two short student-written plays.

Many participants agree with Gohanna, though, that "walking through the NCTE exhibits" was a highlight of the event. Teachers returned home laden with freebies for the

classroom! "I couldn't believe they were giving away so many books," said Neff.

Neff explained that the most important thing achieved from the meeting was a "common thread, common experiences to talk about" and an opportunity "to get to know the members of the leadership team in ways you just don't at a regular meeting."

Next year, we hope that many, many more Alabama A & M Teacher Consultants will make plans to attend, since the meeting will be held in Nashville in 2006.



Proposals are now being accepted for "The Complete Teacher: Bringing Together Knowledge, Experience, and Research," the 2006 NCTE Annual Convention in Nashville, Tennessee. The Convention will be held November 16-21, 2006. Visit ncte.org

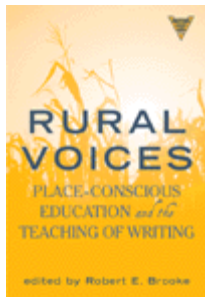
AAMU WP goes national ...

Tech Matters – Amanda Lowe, AAMU WP's tech liaison, attended NWP's annual intensive TL institute in July in West Virginia. She is now the proud owner of a 256 MB jump drive.

Writing & Technology Writing Retreat (WAT) – Symmetris Gohanna attended NWP's first retreat dedicated to professional writing by teacher consultants who use technology to teach writing. Sandra Shattuck was a member of the facilitation team that designed and led the retreat and will participate again for the second WAT retreat in August 2006.

Directors' Retreat – Gatsinzi Basaninyenzi is on the planning committee for this annual event to be held in July 2006.

Book Reviews



Rural Voices: Place-Conscious Education and the Teaching of Writing

Edited by Robert E. Brooke (2003, Teachers College Press) \$16.00 (\$21.95 list)

In *Rural Voices: Place-Conscious Education and the*

Teaching of Writing, Robert Brooke and his colleagues at the **Nebraska Writing Project** offer classroom-based essays written on the premise that “real accountability emerges when education teaches how to live well, actively, and fully in a given place.” Grounded in the rural schools and communities where these teachers work, this book—an outgrowth of research led by the **Rural Voices, Country Schools** project of the National Writing Project and funded in part by the Annenberg Rural Challenge—will inspire and instruct educators everywhere.

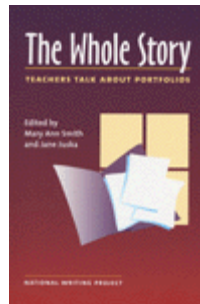


Writing America: Classroom Literacy and Public Engagement

Edited by Sarah Robbins and Mimi Dyer, foreword by Paul Lauter (2004) \$18.00

This book tells the story of how Georgia-based National

Writing Project teachers and their students used the study of their community to build their own community—one committed to the stewardship of communal spaces and ideas. The book details the students' inquiry-based studies of topics as diverse as the area's Cherokee heritage and the redevelopment of Atlanta. Readers will be inspired to help their own students create engaging projects that take literacy from an isolated skill to a socially relevant enterprise. (Copublished with Teachers College Press)



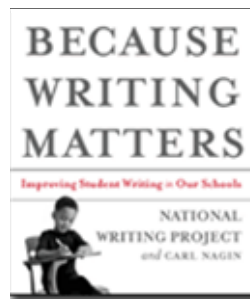
The Whole Story: Teachers Talk about Portfolios

Edited by Mary Ann Smith and Jane Juska (2001) \$13.00

What happens when students are allowed to tell the whole story about their

learning—when their accomplishments are not defined solely by a standardized test?

In *The Whole Story: Teachers Talk About Portfolios*, 11 teachers describe the advantages and complexities of using portfolios as a way to evaluate and promote student achievement. Each author offers a compelling look at how students learn to reflect on their work and make judgments about quality. At the same time, the teachers must make judgments about how well the portfolio system is working.



Because Writing Matters

"At last a book that is both comprehensive and up-to-date on the status and importance of writing in America."

—DONALD GRAVES

Professor Emeritus, Education, University of New Hampshire

Writing is the single most important skill for students' academic and professional success. Yet in the last twenty years, it has received little attention in our nation's schools, and national assessments show that just one in four American students is able to write proficiently. *Because Writing Matters*, a new book by the **National Writing Project and Carl Nagin**, affirms that writing must be a central focus in all classrooms if schools are to improve student performance.

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Awards & Accolades

AAMU WP is delighted to work with such gifted teacher consultants, some of whom have earned the following recognition:

- **Susan Clark**, Madison County High School. Received the Golden Apple Award.
- **Kathy Barclift**, Farley Elementary. Elected President of the Alabama Council of Teachers of English, the state affiliate of NCTE.
- **Wendy Neff**, New Hope Elementary. Received the Jenice Riley Memorial scholarship from the Alabama Humanities Foundation for her project of recording stories of senior citizens.