

Western Kentucky University

# Writing Project Newsletter

FALL 2006, VOLUME 9, NUMBER 1



## From the hands of our leader...

“Greetings on the first day of spring! This morning we awakened to sleet and about midmorning, I looked out the window and saw big flakes of snow coming down. I hope when you are reading this that it’s sunny and warm and spring has REALLY arrived.” So began copy for the Spring newsletter, which has now been transformed into the Fall newsletter, thanks to our new editor, Shannon Anderson. It’s still cold on this October Sunday afternoon

as I look out my window at WKU’s campus. Some trees are empty of leaves; some are a riot of yellows and oranges. Time marches on!

So many things to tell you about.

I think I’ll simply list them:

1. Both Representative Ron Lewis and Senator Jim Bunning agreed to sign Dear Colleague letters that endorse federal funding for the Writing Project next year. If you have reason to contact them, be sure to thank them for their continued support of the Project. Both have signed this letter of support multiple times.
2. Our 20<sup>th</sup> Celebration of the Writing Project on May 19 and 20 was a huge success. Thank you for your words of appreciation and encouragement—and gifts! Gretchen and I truly appreciate each and every one of you. Cris Tovani was a terrific workshop leader, and we think you’ll find Linda Rief of the same quality next April 21. Please put the date on your calendar.
3. This past June we sponsored a highly successful Advanced Institute from June 12-16. It

focused on developing leadership abilities in the areas of school wide literacy, teacher inquiry, content area writing, and teachers as writers. In late winter/early spring, many of the group will be sharing the results of literacy projects they’re conducting in their schools this fall. We also sponsored a Writing and Learning Academy, that focused on standards

based units of instruction, open response, on demand writing, and writing as a process.

4. Life is all about change, and we have changes in personnel in the Project.

Our wonderful

Outreach Coordinators of six years have retired: Karen Alford (Rich Pond Elementary) and Karen Scott (Natcher Elementary). They have planned and implemented many excellent PD opportunities over the years for teachers in our region. Our new coordinators are Laura Houchens and Molly Wade. In addition, we had two new co-directors of the Summer Institute: Shanan Mills (Warren Elementary) and Vernessa Drake (Grayson County Middle School). Kudos to all these TCs!

5. Events to keep in mind: NCTE, Nashville—November 16-22; our “Classroom Publishing” workshop on November 18; applications for summer 2007 on line about Thanksgiving and due by the end of February; Linda Rief and our renewal Saturday workshop, April 21.



Photo of John’s Hands by Shannon Anderson

John

# Project XXI: A Mosaic of Writers

By Shannon L. Anderson  
Meade County High School  
WP XXI

The twentieth anniversary year of Western Kentucky University's Writing Project brought together another fine group of teachers and writers who set out to learn a few things. As with any year, I'm sure, the fellows walked away with so much more. Tremendous, lifelong friendships were formed, writer's who really didn't know they were writers discovered that their pens worked just as well as everyone else's, many tears were shed, and an abundance of food was eaten. It's hard to say what the best part was. Well, ok, it's not really hard to say. The best part was the writing that emerged from the minds of some of the most incredible teachers Kentucky has ever seen.

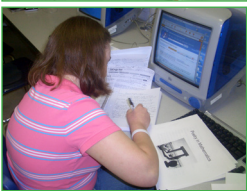
For the first time in its existence at WKU, the project had to find another venue due to the fire at Cherry Hall. The 20 teachers, three co-directors, and our fearless leader made a home at Warren Central High School. If not for the Macintosh computers we fought with on a daily basis, we never would have known the difference between the hallowed walls of Cherry Hall and the echoing passageways of Warren Central. We made it our home and it wrapped its arms around us and nurtured our writer's within.

I have had four months to reflect on my experience as a member of WP XXI. I have talked with friends made, revisited pieces written in that month and

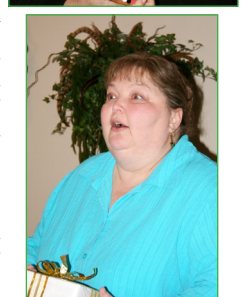
developed them further, shared my writing with my students, filled one Writer's Notebook and designed the cover of another and started writing on those pages that are my blank canvas, and, despite the loss of my grandfather and several hard days with my students, realized that I really am a better teacher than I was at the beginning of June. As the end of the past four months approaches and the busy days of school threaten to cloud my memory and make me forget all I learned on those warm days in June, I challenge each of you to remember what those days in the project were like and hope you will strive to recreate those moments you cherish for your students each week.

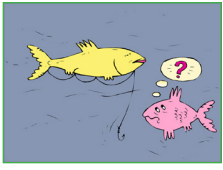
There is no doubt that we, as teachers, have one of the most difficult jobs in the world. With a little perseverance we can make a difference in the lives of our students and I have learned that sharing my writing with my kids is one way to show them that we aren't just making assignments but that we believe in and practice what we are teaching. This makes life in the classroom just a little more simple.

As the weather grows colder, I will keep the warmth in my life by remembering the kindred spirits I began to get to know on that day in June at Warren Central. I hope you will re-visit those WKU Writing Project moments at Western, too, and that you will remember all you've learned in your encounters with the WP. Happy Teaching and Writing from one fellow to another...

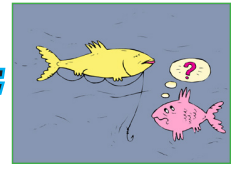


Faces of  
Project XXI





# Food for Thought



---

By Pat Puckett  
WP XIX

---

What does a high school math teacher, middle school special education teacher, and an elementary school writing teacher have in common? Answer: everything, but it took me a while to figure that out.

During the summer of 2006, I facilitated a workshop on Closing the Achievement Gap for the Writing Project at Kenlake State Resort Park. When I was first asked to be a facilitator, I was very hesitant to accept. Yes, I had participated in the Writing Project at Western Kentucky University, been a member of the scoring team for portfolios in my school for many years, and had participated in a workshop on achievement gap in the area of gender the previous year, but I kept thinking “What can a high school math teacher contribute in a room full of English teachers?” I accepted the challenge anyway, and began preparing for the job.

In March of this year, I went to the first meeting for facilitators and began to think even more “What am I doing here? I really am not qualified to do this?” I even voiced those concerns to Dr. Hagaman, and being the encourager that he is, he told me that I could do it. So, I just kept plugging along, hoping that I didn’t make a fool out of myself.

Throughout March, April, and May, I worked on gathering materials for the workshop. My area of expertise was to be “Inquiry Learning,” and I knew that I had a lot of work to do to get ready.

June finally arrived, and it was time for the workshop. I still had in the back of my mind that I might not know what I was doing, but I was determined not to let the other presenters down. Carol Withrow was the elementary consultant, while Michele Hill was the middle school consultant. Both of these ladies are very knowledgeable about reading and writing activities that will help to close the achievement gap. I knew I really didn’t have to specifically address these issues because these ladies had come prepared to deliver a wealth of knowledge over our three day workshop. My focus then became how to incorporate technology, as well as inquiry learning, into the classroom to help close some of these achievement gaps.

One of the activities that I presented was helping teachers develop a WebQuest. I really was surprised to see that so many of the participants had heard of a WebQuest, but really had no idea how to write one. The WebQuest is an ideal tool for incorporating technology and inquiry learning into the classroom, because the teacher can design the quest as in depth as they want in order to get the level of achievement that they desire. A good WebQuest sets up a situation, and then gives the student appropriate websites in which to investigate the situation. The WebQuest is truly a technological dream in that it requires that the student do most of the work, while the teacher becomes simply the “guide on the side.” Learning by doing is one of the most effective

ways to promote retention of material among students, and retention leads to better achievement; thereby closing the achievement gap a little at a time. The nice thing about a WebQuest is that it can be used for all levels, from kindergarten through college level courses.

Another piece of technology that I presented this summer was the Classroom Performance System, or “clickers.” This technology is a system that is designed to help the teacher monitor achievement by giving students an opportunity on a daily basis to answer multiple choice questions through the use of an infrared “clicker” much like a TV remote. The CPS system then records the answer that each student chose and instantly reports back to the teacher about the progress of the class on each question. When I first began using this system, I wasn’t sure I was going to like it because I had to write all of my questions to use each day, which became a little overwhelming. Through a stroke of sheer luck, I learned that if I had the test generator that comes with my text in Examview format, I could simply make a test, quiz, or daily assignment using this software and quickly import it into the CPS system software. Immediately I called the manufacturer of my textbook, and found that my test generator does come in Examview format, as do many of the test generators that educators can now get with their textbooks. Once that piece of software arrived, I began to see how dramatically something so

*...see Food for Thought on page 5*

# LETSWork Institute brings Inquiry Groups to Ohio County

*“The common eye sees only the outside of things, and judges by that, but the seeing eye pierces through and reads the heart and the soul, finding there capacities which the outside didn’t indicate or promise, and which the other kind couldn’t detect.”*

*Mark Twain (Joan of Arc)*

---

By Ann Nance  
WP VI

---

Nine of us gathered at Ohio County Schools one Thursday afternoon of each month and looked at student writings. One word, one thought, one extra space spoke to us as we read. Building an inquiry community was easy, flawlessly textbook.

As our group grew closer and more open, our talk about what we saw in the writing opened beyond the criteria for writing required by the state for student portfolios. We began to see what each student writer was saying or not saying. I was amazed at the depth of the teachers around me, how intuitively they pulled a “next lesson” for each student. What gives birth to this possibility? I believe it is time. Time for contemplation, consideration, and reflection, guided through disciplined conversations.

My study with the LETS Work Institute during the summer of 2005, involved using protocols to discipline conversation in looking at student work with “fresh eyes.” As participants boarded planes heading home to Louisiana, Kentucky, Arkansas, Michigan, Maryland, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Arizona, we recognized how grand this process was in theory and dreamed of how great it could become in practice. I believe this process is a spark of learning and thinking that will lead to consuming fires of influence in the instruction of writing.

Our hope was to continue the group into the next school year, but as changes in writing requirements, schedule crowding, and classroom demands grew, it appeared that our community would disband. I was delighted to send the

e-mail two weeks ago stating that our superintendent did indeed value the work and had pledged continued support of the group!

Ohio County’s Community of Learners, a dedicated crew of nine teachers from 4th through 12th grades will continue to meet one Thursday a month to look at student writings. We will open our understandings of how these glimpses should drive instruction by trying new protocols and discussing/challenging writings on the subject of best practices in teaching students to write.

*\*Ann Nance went to a week long institute in California last summer and has been conducting Inquiry groups related to writing back in Ohio County since then. She is the district writing coach in Ohio County.*

***“Words are only painted fire; a look is the fire itself.”***

*Mark Twain (A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court)*



# Summer Advanced Institute: Building Leaders through Celebrating Change and Guiding Growth

By Cheryl Gilstrap  
2006 Advanced Institute Participant

The week of June 13-16 was a time for renewal and a time for new learning for the members of the Western Kentucky Writing Project Advanced Institute. They met at T.C. Cherry Elementary School in Bowling Green, thanks to its principal, Judy Whitson. Members included Yvonne Bartley, Chris Carter, Rhonda Godby, Bonnie Hartley, Sara Jennings, Marsha Kerr, Susan Lyons, Cindy McIntyre, Donna McPherson, Nora Neagle, Denise Reetzke, Jan Swisher, Judy Whitson, and Mary Lou Wiese. It was led by co-directors Gaye Foster, Cheryl Gilstrap, Ann Nance, and Sherry St. Clair.

Members of the institute formed reading and writing groups with each member choosing the book she wanted to read. Cherry Boyles provided new information about the core content 4.0, the requirements for the portfolio, and the new analytical scoring guide.

Sherry St. Clair guided us through the details of the depth of knowledge--which reinforced what Cherry told us. Gaye Foster brought in a couple of her students from Allen County High School who took the role of facilitator as they guided the entire group through a Science content area literature circle/response group.

Ann Nance brought information and practice in

protocols for examining student work. Cheryl Gilstrap brought professional books and high interest student books to share with the group. The sparks that fly when Writing Project Fellows get together kept everyone wanting more. The networking, the friendships, and the collegial atmosphere are just a few of the intangible products that will continue to produce sparks that will ignite our need to be better at what we do and what we love---teaching.

Several participants are involved in leading literacy projects back in their schools as a result of the Institute, and will share them at a later workshop open to all Project teachers and their friends.

## *Food for Thought*

simple could affect my classroom. I began using it on a daily basis, and saw achievement begin to steadily improve. The biggest change that I noticed was that some of my boys who normally did very little began to participate more, and even seemed excited on the days that I used the "clickers." Technology is a huge asset for boys because it gives them something to do that allows them to move around a little, thereby stimulating the brain. Once the participants this summer saw what the system could do, they too were hooked. To learn more about the "clickers," visit [www.einstruction.com](http://www.einstruction.com). I really don't want to think

*...continued from page 3*

about how differently I would have to teach if I suddenly did not have these in my classroom any longer.

Through my experiences the last two years with the Writing Project and the workshops presented by them, I have learned that a high school math teacher can make the difference in helping to close the achievement gaps in reading and writing. I felt that many of the participants in our workshop this summer were glad to see how a content teacher, other than English, was incorporating many of the strategies that were presented in their own classroom. At the end of

the workshop, I was immensely glad that I had not said no when asked to be a facilitator. I believe that I grew both personally and professionally because I not only learned about the areas that I presented, but I also got to witness the wonderful activities that the other two presenters brought to the workshop. The participants benefited because they got perspectives from three rather diverse individuals, but at the end of the day we all learned that we have a love of teaching and learning that bonds us. We all have something to give, in and out of our areas of expertise. If two diverse areas like mathematics and English can converge, then anything is possible!

# WKU Writing Project Forms Professional Study Group to Investigate Kentucky's New Scoring Rubric's Application in the Classroom

By Rhonda Godby  
WP XII

During those long summer days, before school started, the education field seemed to be blossoming with up to the minute ideas, assessment, curriculum guides, and programs. It was stated that we would be getting new reading books, new core content, and a new scoring rubric for writing. It almost seemed a little like Christmas with all the new information pouring in. However, with the word new comes a certain degree of apprehension, confusion, and sometimes utter chaos even when the newer program is better and what you wanted. I guess we all have a certain degree of wanting things to stay the same, in order for us to feel confident and comfortable in what we are doing.

The Writing Project knows that with any change their must be adequate training, information and support for the teachers. That is why one of their professional groups has been looking into the new scoring rubric. The goal of this group is to develop an article to assist all teachers with using the new scoring rubric as a teaching tool, not simply a method for scoring the portfolios--at the end of the year.

To date this small cluster of teachers and administrators have met two times. During the first session the group mainly met to see how much training they had each obtained. Within a short period of time, the group discovered that even though they all had training on the new scoring, they all felt pretty novice at being able to apply their knowledge. Not only that but everyone was full of questions, many seemed somewhat unanswerable at the time. This was somewhat intimidating. However, they all agreed that the new scoring rubric was a positive for Kentucky's Writing Program.

On the second meeting, the group began with discussions on what questions they could answer, since the last meeting. Then they decided that the best way to get answers to their questions was to delve right in. So, each participate began distributing her portfolio from past years. Without sharing the score placed on each portfolio, the group began to rescore the portfolios,

using the new scoring rubric. Once each portfolio was scored the group began to discuss what changes they saw, what "aha" moments they had, what questions were answered, and what new questions arose from the scoring. It was at that point that this group began to see the value of this type of group meeting. The group echoed over and over that this was the best approach to learning how to use the new scoring rubric, by simply using it and working through the questions, in small professional groups.

As the group read through each portfolio, they discovered that it was very hard not to score the portfolio as a whole work, as we have done in the past. Finally, the group stopped to rethink. They made multiple copies of the rubric, in order to have a scoring sheet for each piece. In using the new rubric this group also realized that they had to think more about each aspect of the portfolio. The group immediately found themselves talking about things they noticed with the portfolio pieces and offering suggestions to one another on what could have been done to have assisted this student during the proofreading/editing stages.

Once each portfolio was scored and discussed, each person shared the score that the portfolio had obtained using the old rubric. All pieces but one scored exactly the same with the new rubric as that of the old. That was somewhat of a relief to those there, because it gave everyone the sense of still having some understanding of what was going on. However, the one difference was the dialogue. The new rubric made it much easier to look at smaller parts of the whole; therefore, making the steps to get to a proficient or distinguished much more attainable, when using this in the classroom.

After spending hours in the principal's office analyzing the new rubric, everyone left with a new found confidence. Each boasted, for a moment, on their new found knowledge. However, all were quick to comment on how actually using the scoring guide had made the difference. Everyone decided that would be the key for all educators and their success with this. If one wants to truly understand the new rubric, one must first apply it to students' writings.

# Review: "In the Beginning" Video Series with Fletcher and Portalupi

By Jennifer Renfrow  
Central City Elementary  
WP XII

You might consider me a first year teacher. No, it isn't my first year. I have been teaching for 10 years, but I do consider myself to be a first year teacher. This is my first year teaching kindergarten. After years with third graders, I took a big chance and made a huge change.

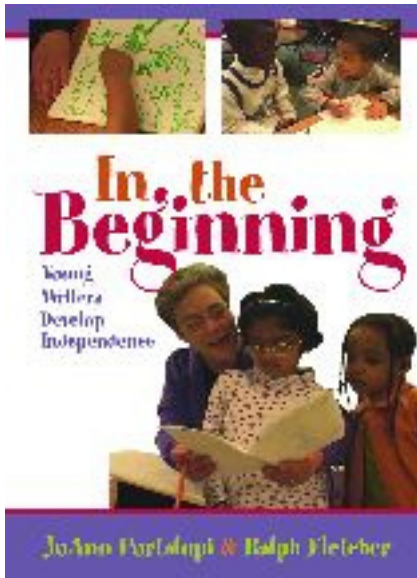
Since at least the first day of school, I have been dying for my students to write. Day after day, my fellow teachers and I have plotted. How can we get them to write their first sentence or have the confidence to sound out words?

When I was asked to review the video, "In the Beginning" with Fletcher and Portalupi visiting a kindergarten classroom taught by Emelie Parker, I jumped at the chance. I have read Ralph Fletcher's What a Writer Needs. I was convinced he knew what this writing teacher needed. And he did!

Watching "In the Beginning" was like reading a catchy lead to a novel. Each section of the video left me begging for the next episode.

The first section of the

video was called "Word Work". In this section, Ms. Parker works on sounding out words from the students' stories. Each child had a wipe-off board where he or she worked at his or her own level. Sounding out the word pancakes, some children had "pk." Others had sounded out "pancakes." Ms. Parker's language during this lesson was the key to helping the students think through this process.



The next section of the video was entitled "Editing". This teacher's use of language again was the key to the lesson. "What do good writers do...." was in every conversation.

Another strategy shown was "Record Keeping and Quick Assessments". Using a writing folder Ms. Parker showed strategies for record keeping that were always with the students and always at her fingertips. Her constant assessment allowed her to plan her next lessons immediately.

I would recommend "In the Beginning" and the other videos that follow in the series to any kindergarten teacher, but also, to all primary teachers.

## Toe in the Water

By  
Ann  
Nance



Toe in the water- sensing the temperature  
Who wants to wade out and swim?  
Join me.

Determining depth and distance  
Setting safety nets, securing life vests  
Our norms

How long? How far? How deep?  
Framing the question;  
A snapshot of colleagues

You first- take the plunge  
Examining the work- trust us  
Building community

Looking deeper- on the sandy floor...  
Did you see that?  
Yes, there it is again!

Insight, direction- we're there!  
Oops! Look again, past that wave  
Refracting light bends the question

Lapping in, lapping out  
Curious children seeking sand  
dollars-  
Finding treasure  
-achn  
7/11/05

*All Elementary and Middle School Teachers, Curriculum Coordinators, and Administrators  
An offering from WKU Writing Project:*

# **“Publishing Student Writing”**

A workshop developed for teachers by teachers!

## **Saturday, November 18, 2006**

**Diana Flener and Sara Jennings**

**6 hours**

This will be a “Make It—Take It” workshop with many ideas on ways to publish student writing. Student samples will be shown, and participants will receive a packet of usable information along with a suggested bibliography of professional and trade books to use with students. Be prepared for a day of hands-on learning!

**Place: TC Cherry Elementary, Bowling Green, KY**

**Time: 9:00 am – 4:00 pm, (one hour lunch, on your own)**

**Cost: \$40**

*\*\*Writing Project Fellows admitted free when they bring a paying friend! (Pre-registration still required.)*

To Register: Online registration is available at [www.wku.edu/wp](http://www.wku.edu/wp). Be sure to include an email address and phone number when registering. Please send your personal or school check to WKU’s Writing Project Office by November 16, 2006 (WKU Writing Project, English Dept., Western Kentucky University, 1906 College Heights Blvd. #11086, Bowling Green, KY 42101). NO SCHOOL POs ACCEPTED—if WKU has not received a school check by November 17, 2006, participant must bring paperwork showing a check has been mailed. Otherwise, participant must pay with personal check and seek reimbursement from your school or district.

*For more information, contact Mollie Wade at [mwade1984@aol.com](mailto:mwade1984@aol.com).*

**REGISTRATION DEADLINE: November 16, 2006**

15 paying participants are required for each workshop or the workshop will be cancelled. Please leave an email address and phone number in order to receive workshop cancellation information.

PD credit may be available for this workshop. Check with your district’s PD coordinator.



*"Piece by piece we come together as one."*



*Western Kentucky University Writing Project XXI  
Summer 2006*



**Director: John Hagaman**

**Co-directors:  
Vernessa Drake  
Shanan Mills  
Mollie Wade**



**Writing Project XXI Fellows:**

**Shannon Anderson, Lisa Bartley, Mandy Browning,  
Lisa Cary, Kim Dennison, Karen Hite, Matthew Holmes,  
Taiwana James-Bradford, Nicole Jenkins,  
Jocelyn Mansfield, Michele McCloughan, Cassandra Owens,  
Donjea Revo, Mario Riley, Nicole Robinson, Jill Satterfield,  
Rebekah Sode, Julie Whitcomb, James Willett & Jamie Williams**

# So Your Kids Don't Want to Write

By Brenda Grinstead Roberts  
WPV

"The important thing is not so much that every child should be taught, as that every child should be given the wish to learn."

-John Lubbock

"Writing class has really helped me write. It has given me new ideas to write about. I feel like a much more confident writer. I am also developing new skills. I have learned numerous things. One thing that has really helped me is the different ways I have learned to brainstorm," Whitney Botts, a sixth grader, said.

"The writing class showed me that writing is fun, not just putting words on a piece of paper," according to sixth grader Amber Fultz.

How do I make writing meaningful for my preteen students? I know from education and experience when students have an authentic reason to write, they invest more time and effort, especially in revision and editing. Previous experience teaching in primary grades had led me to believe most students loved to write. The primary students appeared to feel proud of their work, and self-esteem rose as students shared their stories aloud and received positive feedback from their peers. The primary students said they loved seeing their stories displayed on the walls, and they proudly carried home an anthology, published with grant money, which included a piece of writing from

every student. These students are now high school graduates; some of them have told me writing workshop is their favorite memory of elementary school.

My experience with fifth and sixth graders is quite different. Many preteen students do not seem to care about improving the quality of their writing, and revision is nonexistent when they do not care. Frustrated with the lack of effort and quality writing, I ask a class of beginning sixth graders to write me a letter, with no strings attached, ex-



pressing how they perceive writing. Although many of the letters are positive, some of the letters contain phrases such as, "I hate writing," or "I don't understand why we have to do it (create a portfolio) every year." Some students expressed they feel embarrassment when they see their writing in a classroom or hall display, and few are willing to share aloud. Perhaps, publishing among their peers is no longer enough. How can I motivate these students so that they really want to become

better writers? I know that if I can answer this question, the students will become personally involved, and the quality of the writing will naturally improve. The students will actually want to revise, and in addition, the school day will become much more enjoyable for them and for me.

As I think back through the years of experience, I realize my primary students were free of the stress of the required pieces in the portfolio. Since they had total choice in Writing Workshop, they were more personally involved. Several students often asked if they were required to go to recess; they wanted to continue writing. As teachers, we have learned from the research of Lucy McCormick Calkins, Donald Graves, Nanci Atwell, and others that students must have choice to become personally involved in their writing. During the past three years, I have experimented with activities, which interest the preteen students and

encourage personal involvement. These activities not only get the students involved, they also help students write pieces that meet some of the portfolio requirements. The high-ability students will always meet the requirements, but my students with learning disabilities in reading and writing have become heavily invested in these activities also.

Many of the most successful pieces of writing developed

*...continued on pages 11-*

# So Your Kids Don't Want to Write

out of a statewide contest sponsored by the Kentucky Association of School Administrators in which the students write about their favorite school employee. The students brainstormed ideas and wrote about teachers, lunchroom staff, custodial staff, bus drivers, classroom aides, principals, parents, grandparents, brothers, sisters, and ... goats.

The memoirs are always heartwarming; therefore, I encourage the students to type the memoirs and to print them on decorative paper to use as gifts. One girl put a memoir in her mom's Christmas stocking after "Santa" stuffed the stockings, while another girl wrote about her dad who passed away years ago; she framed the memoir for her grandmother for a Christmas gift. Teachers shed tears as they read the memoirs, but few of the students seem to understand why the recipients cry. Because the students receive so much praise and positive feedback, many of them continue to write memoirs throughout the year. One girl told me she is writing a memoir about her relationship with her younger brother, although there are so many things to write, it might become her first book. Materials included in *Building the Foundation the Right Way*, by Donna Vincent, WKU Writing Project Fellow, serve as a guideline for the students. Memoirs published in *Country Living* magazine are real life examples I share in class. We read many memoirs together and generate a list of qualities contained in memoirs before the students write.

Amber Fultz wrote about her fourth grade teacher, Kellie Long, a WKU Writing Project Fellow.

## My Wonderful Teacher

What a difference you have made in my life

By Amber Fultz

Will she be nice? Will she be mean? Will she give a lot of homework? Well, it was my first day at Eastern. I hadn't seen my teacher yet. I was eager and nervous to see her.

She is slim with beautiful blonde wavy hair and blue eyes that sparkle in the light.

I remember one time in science that we learned about how snakes peel their skin. When we learned about this, she said, "We are going to make our own snake skin, then peel it off."

I thought, "How are we going to do that?" Then she pulled out some glue bottles. She put a little dot of glue on our hands.

Then she said, "Rub the glue all over your hand, then sit and wait until it dries." When we peeled off the dried glue, it really looked like snake skin that had peeled off.

She taught me the meaning of life. How? By teaching me new things every day, and she made it exciting to learn. Also, she taught me that reading is like an adventure and she made it seem so fun. I didn't like to read at my other school. She did more than just that. She loved me as a friend.

She was different from what I expected. She was perfect; she was Mrs. Long, my fourth grade teacher. I will love her forever, and Mrs. Long will always be my most wonderful and best teacher ever.

Eastern Elementary School's yearbook editor, Cathy Lenhart, publishes writing in the yearbook every year. She asks the students to write reflections about their experiences at Eastern. An area educational consultant and a WKU administrator, neither of whom know any of the students, judge the best pieces. Elizabeth Cross' reflection appeared on page one the first year.

## The Beginning of the Rest of My Life

By Elizabeth Cross

It was the first time I felt independent. I was in kindergarten and I thought I could conquer the world, but I had a long way to go. While I traveled through kindergarten, I had learned my ABC's and 123's and I thought it was the greatest thing in the world.

At the end of kindergarten, I moved up to first grade. Then I started traveling in the world of words and learned to read and write. I learned new words and realized that I was learning more every day and had opened my eyes to a whole new world.

I had noticed that first grade had gone by so fast and I was heading on up to second grade. When I say second grade, field trips jump into my mind. Everyday became a new adventure! When my teacher announced that we were going to the Louisville Zoo, my body filled with glee! That was an awesome experience! Learning kept going and soon I was in the third grade. The third grade was a great challenge, in writing because I would soon be in the fourth grade and have to write a portfolio. Writing a portfolio in fourth grade was a great learning experience and it was torture! I revised all of my pieces so many times that I memorized them all!

After my portfolio, I zoomed on up to fifth grade! I couldn't believe that I was in fifth grade. The one thing that stands out during fifth grade is MATH! That year my mind was filled with fractions, long division, and algebra! That year the Science Fair was introduced to me. My project was one of the winners and this was very gratifying.

Now I'm moving on up to the last year at Eastern Elementary. By now, I had met many great teachers and friends. My first years at Eastern seemed hard and complicated at times, but looking back, those years were simple and good.

My ABC's and 123's had turned into MATH, SOCIAL STUDIES, SCIENCE, READING, and WRITING. I felt independent when I was in kindergarten, but now after all the years my independence has grown. Now I realize that this is the beginning of the rest of my life and my independence will grow even more. After middle school, high school and college, I hope to be what the teachers and adult leadership have worked hard to make me. I know I'll be a better person.

# So Your Kids Don't Want to Write

Edelin Silab won a competition to determine Eastern Elementary School's 18-member flag corp. The students enter the contest in several categories including art, music, writing, speech, website or PowerPoint presentation. An outside judge determines the winners who are responsible for raising and lowering the flag each day. A part of Edelin's piece follows.

What the American Flag Means to Me  
By Edelin Silab

The flag means something different to everyone in the United States, but the flag means something more different to me. If you asked me what the flag means to me, it would mean something completely different to me because I have two different types of bloodlines in me. My mother is a Mexican and my father is Filipino. That is why my meaning of the flag is different. One meaning to me is that in this country people treat you like a human being, not different from someone else. They don't judge you by the way you look, or the race that you are. People in the United States of America treat you like a person. The flag means that a lot of people have come to this country to make their lives better and to make something out of themselves.

Some of the students who consistently write well are students who voluntarily joined an after-school writing group. The small cohesive group encompassed girls of all ability levels. The girls provided feedback to and encouraged each other, not only during weekly meetings, but also throughout each day, and at night on the phone. Not only did every student in this group achieve success as a writer, each gained confidence, which helped her improve in other areas. We often used a book titled, *Discovering the Writer Within*, by Bruce Ballinger and Barry Lane, to spark ideas.

"Little did I know that joining this group would make me love writing," Whitney Botts, a sixth grader, said. Whitney later won the Kentucky Junior Beta Club statewide essay contest for grades 5-9,

and competed in the national competition.

An excerpt follows.

On Track with Beta  
By Whitney Botts

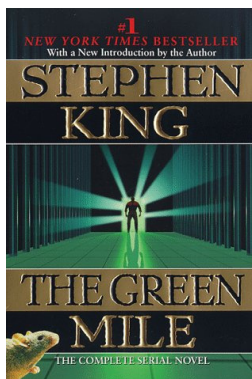
When I first started Beta, I felt like I was just hopping on a train headed on a long journey through life. And thanks to what Beta has taught me I have stayed pretty straight on the tracks. Beta is a lot like a train. It has many essential pieces that work together to move forward. Beta has kept me on track with numerous things. For one thing, it has kept my grades up. Another thing it has done for me is it has given me a chance to help my community. It has shown me how important it is and what a great responsibility it is to work in a group. It has also shown me how to be a leader and be a good role model. ...

In Beta, the most important thing you have to have in order to participate is good grades. This is like the engine of the train that moves it forward. Before Beta came along, my grades were important to me and I kept them up, but there really was not any meaning in them. Now that I have Beta, I want to make good grades so I can stay in Beta. It is like a treat. Most kids want to be a Beta member. Beta really helps schools because kids try, to make A's and B's so they can get in Beta and stay.

The next part of the train is the boxcar. Sadly to say, I didn't help my community at all until I joined Beta. That was like a train hauling around an empty boxcar. There was emptiness in what I was doing. Now that I am in Beta, we are always thinking of a new scheme that we can do that will help our community...

When you are in Beta, you lead the school, which is a very important responsibility that can be used for the good of the entire school. The road I travel on this train I am sure will have its sharp turns and bumpy tracks, but I have beta that will guide me through the hard times and teach me new lessons that will help me on my long journey.

The Courier-Journal's 4 Your Info page for students publishes book reviews, movie reviews, game reviews, and commentaries. Each of the students wanted to write a movie review when they saw a peer's movie review in the newspaper.



Brian Foley's book review follows.

The Green Mile  
By Brian Foley

The Green Mile is a hall in the Cold Mountain Penitentiary, with convicted criminals who have a date with "Old Sparky," Cold Mountain's electric chair.

But Cold Mountain's prison guard, Paul Edgecombe, has worked on the Mile for many years and he's never seen anyone like John Coffey, a man with the body of a giant and the mind of an infant. Now Edgecombe has found out the truth about Coffey, and it has changed his life forever.

The title is The Green Mile and the author is Stephen King. The book is a fiction book. Here is some of the story.

In the beginning, John Coffey gets caught with two dead girls and has to go to the Cold Mountain Penitentiary. John Coffey was a special man who had a great gift. He could see other people's pain and take it from them.

John runs into problems with a certain guard named Percy and falls in love with a mouse named Mr. Jingles. John becomes friends with Paul, who he calls "Boss." Paul has medical problems of his own, and when John finds out about it, he shows Paul how he can help. When Paul learns about John's special gift, he realizes John could help other people. Melinda, the wife of the warden of the prison, has a brain tumor and not much time to live. So the guards of the Mile help John escape momentarily the penitentiary to have him use his special gift on Melinda. Every time John helps someone, he becomes sick. John had helped many people and animals so he is extremely sick after helping Melinda. When John returns to the Mile, she sleeps for a long time before he has to go meet "Old Sparky."

A lot happens on the Green Mile as inmates are executed and others wait for their moment with "Old Sparky". Prisoners die, and others discover who are really criminals and who are not. Guards and prisoners are both taught lessons in how to treat people with kindness and caring while awaiting death.

This book taught me how different people deal with death, and how some just take it for granted. It also taught me that you have to look beyond what is before your eyes to see the whole truth about something or someone.

Not everybody is bad, and sometimes the people we think are bad are really angels among us.

Students often discover they love to write poetry. Alisa Maysey, WKU Writing Project Fellow, recently became guest poet to the Eastern sixth graders, where she discussed a dozen poetic terms including imagery, simile, metaphor, and onomatopoeia. After listening to many models of "place" poems

# So Your Kids Don't Want to Write

written by Maysey's Glasgow High School seniors, the sixth graders then wrote their own "place" poems.

Lucy McCormick Calkins, in her book, *The Art of Teaching Writing*, discusses her own discovery about writing poetry, under the tutelage of Georgia Heard. Heard explains there are two camps in poetry; the formalists write poetry in terms of fixed forms, and the free verse poets find forms in rhythm and content. Free verse is much easier for children to write because they do not have to remember all of the rules. George Ella Lyon's book, where I'm from, and Georgia Heard's book, *Awakening the Heart*, present models of many kinds of poems. Student models of various kinds of poems can be found in *The Art of Teaching Writing* by Lucy McCormick Calkins and *In the Middle, New Understandings About Writing, Reading, and Learning* by Nanci Atwell.

Maysey says it is much easier for students to write a poem, which scores proficient or distinguished, than it is to write a fictional short story, which scores well. She refers the students to the scoring guide for poetry developed in recent years and to the marker papers for grade level samples, available on the KDE website.

Eric Massengill said he started thinking about his grandmother's place, which he loves, while he listened to some of the poems Maysey's students wrote. Although he does not like mowing the grass, he sure likes the reward he receives for doing it.

## Mowing Grass By Eric Massengill

Walking to the shed  
Starting the lawnmower  
Turn on that monstrous machine  
Start up the hilly yard  
Feels easy at first  
Blazing 95 to 100 degrees  
Three times my body weight  
Slow but strong steps  
Shirt drenched with sweat  
Face is blood red  
Hair drenched  
Legs throbbing with pain

Last little bit to fight  
Feels like a ton on my back  
Nasty green blade in my eye  
Turn off that monstrous machine  
Slowly walk to the wooden bench  
Rewarding lemonade  
For a job well done



Baseball is on Brock Johnson's mind.

## Champs By Brock Johnson

Bats cracking,  
Baseballs flying,  
Children screaming,  
Parents cheering!

Bats cracking as if you were chopping wood.  
Baseballs flying like jets taking off.  
Children screaming as if someone is killing them.  
Parents cheering as if their son just hit a homerun.

Last inning of the championship game.  
Down 3.  
Three outs.  
Our turn to bat.  
I'm up.  
I hit an inside the park home run!  
Now down 2.  
Trey up to bat.

He gets a single.  
Josh up now.  
He flies out.  
Tyler up to bat, single.  
We had extra innings.  
Two people on, I'm up.  
I hit a home run!

We're the Little League Champs!

Katie Schuck writes about seeing the buffalo at Yellowstone National Park.

## Ever Waiting By Katie Schuck

The fear of death drifted into my mind  
As I eyed the mighty horns of the buffalo  
I could see the horns pierce through my body  
Nostrils snorting  
Hooves stomping  
Buffalo grunting  
Ever waiting for the buffalo to cross  
I held tightly to the car seat  
Terror still prickled my back  
As we started to drive away  
Even though traffic still stopped us  
Horns honking  
Breaks screeching  
Cars moving  
Ever waiting  
For the buffalo to cross

Several students started writing this poem "just for fun." They shared the poem at a Barren County Board of Education meeting during Board of Education Appreciation Month.

Making the Connection (an excerpt)

Principals are like the nucleus of the school; they direct all of the activities.

Office staff members are like the nuclear membrane; they hold the nucleus together.

....

Students are like the cytoplasm; without them, there'd be no need for anyone else.

Board of Education members are like the cell wall; they support Barren County Schools.

Without each of these things, the cell will not work.

Barren County Schools aren't just a part of Kentucky; they are a part of the world.

"Writer of the Week" is a school-wide program, which honors

# So Your Kids Don't Want to Write

students biweekly for their writing. Each teacher submits three pieces of writing, and celebrity judges choose a winner from each grade. The winning pieces hang in a prominent location at the school, and the winners get their picture made and receive a certificate. Occasionally the students get to eat lunch with the celebrity judge. Judges have included city and county elected officials, firemen, policemen, retired teachers, high school and middle school teachers, high school and middle school English classes, coaches, and pastors.

Some of the students have written persuasive letters to area business owners and managers seeking donations of trees for the playground. One area manager said, "After reading those letters, there was no way I could say no to those kids." Some other students wrote city and county elected officials to ask them to build a skate park. Area officials have considered the request. Other students have been surprised to turn on the television to see a piece of their writing rolling up the screen on the local cable access channel provided to the school districts. We often videotape students for the cable access channel reading a piece they have written.

All of these ideas are fun for the students, give the students an authentic reason to write, and at the

same time, these ideas help students create pieces of writing which meet various portfolio requirements. When the students become deeply and personally involved in the writing, the quality naturally improves. Even the most reluctant writers have enjoyed these activities and have written pieces of which they can be proud. I do not have to push or cajole the students to finish. They are truly excited and proud of their

work. As students become personally involved, students and teachers come to know each other in a more personal way and everyone benefits.

The writing of most students improves when they feel they have a meaningful reason to write, and

receive positive feedback, especially from sources outside of school. I want every student to be successful, and I feel frustrated when not every student is successful. As I began this research project, my original question was how to get better quality transactive writing. I discovered my question changed over time, and I soon realized that my original question was too specific; therefore, I started focusing on how to get better quality writing. I learned in Teacher-Researchers at Work that changing the question as the research evolves is a normal process.

Publish! Publish! Publish!  
Publish in a way that is meaningful to your students, whatever the age.



## Bibliography

Atwell, Nanci. 1998. *In the Middle. New Understandings About Writing, Reading, and Learning*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Ballenger, Bruce, and Barry Lane. 1989. *Discovering the Writer Within*. Cincinnati, OH: Writer's Digest Books.

Calkins, Lucy McCormick. 1986. *The Art of Teaching Writing*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Fletcher, Ralph. 1993. *Breathing In, Breathing Out*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Graves, Donald. 1983. *WRITING: Teachers and Children at Work*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Heard, Georgia. 1999. *Awakening the Heart. Exploring Poetry in Elementary and Middle School*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Lyon, George Ella. 1999. *where I'm from, where poems come from*. Spring, TX: Absey & Company.

MacLean, Marion S., and Marian M. Mohr. 1999. *Teacher - Researchers At Work*. Berkeley, CA: National Writing Project.



# Leadership Team Members

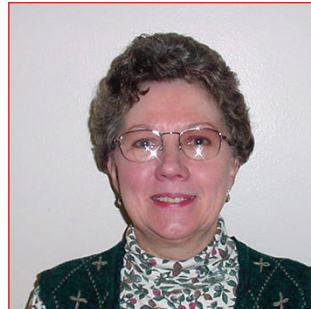
Watch for photos of the rest of the Leadership Team in the Spring Issue



Angie Skaggs



Ann Nance



Anne Padilla



Cheryl Gilstrap



Bonnie Hartley



Byron Darnall



Laura Houchens



Gaye Foster



Cindy Cole



Linda Martin



Liz Jensen



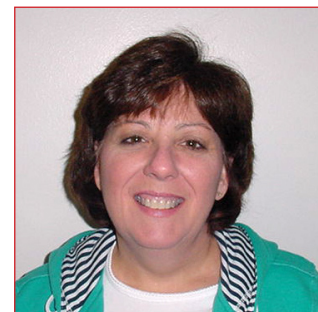
Richard Haynes



Shanan Mills



Sonya Otto



Yvonne Bartley

Leadership Team Members not pictured: Shannon Anderson, Bonnie Honaker, Janet Martin, Dwight Holder, Katharine McCalla, Michele McCloughan, and Mollie Wade.

SAVE THE DATE:

April 21, 2007

Linda Rief

author of

*Seeking Diversity: Language Arts*

*with Adolescents*

will lead

the Spring Workshop at WKU

Western Kentucky University  
English Department  
1 Big Red Way  
Bowling Green, KY 42101

NONPROFIT ORG.  
U.S. POSTAGE PAID  
PERMIT NO. 398  
BOWLING GREEN, KY  
42101