



VOLUME 6 NUMBER 1

# PENNSYLVANIA WRITING PROJECT NEWSLETTER

FALL 1985

## FROM THE DIRECTOR: ROBERT WEISS

Opening doors. Of all the things the Writing Project does with and for teachers, opening doors is the one I'm most proud of. It opens doors when teachers present their best practices; when they conduct research on their classrooms; when they write articles and books for the profession at large; and personally when they tell their stories.

Since 1980, we have done much to open doors with teachers we have reached in Southeastern Pennsylvania. And we feel good about our efforts. But there are other doors you have asked us to open, doors which, until now, have remained closed. You've asked us how you can get copies of the National Writing Project Network *Newsletter*; you've asked us how you can become more involved with teachers from other sites; how you can be assured that the NWP publications will continue to offer books and pamphlets on the teaching of writing and the use of writing to learn; and how the NWP, the only large scale organization to solve the problems of illiteracy, can be kept viable and healthy.

After years of working on this problem, I am pleased to send you information on the NWP Sponsorship Program (the last page of this *Newsletter*). The costs are minimal: \$25 for an individual sponsorship. With your contribution you get, of course, four issues of the *Newsletter* (the only national publication by and for NWP). You will also make it possible for NWP to continue its networking activities.

More importantly, you will assure some of the intangibles that made our work possible—intangibles such as presence of the NWP model of staff development. As you know, the previous model of top-down inservice is still with us. NWP stresses the value of teachers teaching teachers. In addition, NWP is an ever-present influence on decision-makers both inside and outside education—a force which keeps before policy makers the importance of writing.

Because of NWP, no teacher need feel imprisoned behind closed doors. Please join me in supporting the National Writing Project.

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## THE 1985 SUMMER INSTITUTE

by Rudolph Sharpe

Dear Mom,

Well, I've been at Camp PAWP for almost four weeks now. The other campers are kinda nice—strange, sometimes—but nice. It's just like swimming—ya gotta do everything with a buddy. Ya write alone, but then ya gotta share with

a buddy, tell your buddy about his writing, help your buddy fix it up. I don't mind that TOO much. We laugh a lot, and sometimes they even cry when we read our writing (I don't Ma—well, not as much as THEY do).

The counselors are another story. They keep on making us write; they won't even tell us where the pool is! You shoulda packed more pencils and left my swim trunks in the drawer. Anyway, Uncle Bob W. is in charge. He talks to us about research and grammar. I don't think he likes grammar, but you tell her I think she's a really neat old lady. Uncle Bob M. talks to us too, but he talks about prewriting. I thought, "Now we get to the good stuff" until somebody explained that prewriting was just a way to get good ideas to write about (again!). I thought it had something to do with hormones! Aunt Jolene isn't around very much. They say she's got another group of campers to work with. Maybe they found the pool! Aunt Lois is a neat lady—she tells us about "conferencing" and "response groups." That means we can talk. Besides she has a pool!

It's not bad enough that we hafta write all the time, but they keep on making us do it over. They talk about revision—I think that means do it again, and this time get it right—we never FINISH anything. To make matters worse, we hafta READ what we wrote to the other campers. They call that "response groups," but I think it's just their way of keeping us under control.

Guess what, Ma. We gotta stay in one room all day. It's a nuclear science room in Schmucker Hall. It kinda reminds me of home. Can you still see the TMI cooling towers from the window? Once a week we have a party, but I can't live all week on cheese, crackers, and grapes. Oh, they give us an hour for lunch (usually), but they don't give us any food, and I spent all the money you sent me on books that we gotta read. I guess I should be thankful, though—at least we don't have to write about lunch (yet).

During the first week a whole bunch of new kids came to Camp PAWP for what they called a "workshop." I thought, "Wow, a bunch of new kids to play with." But all they wanted to do was talk about writing and write themselves. They only stayed three days. I guess they couldn't find the pool either.

We do get to do some arts and crafts. We made books of our own writing, drew some pictures and told all about them, and watched some television program where a little boy told how much he liked to write using the "process" approach. They called it "Presentations," but I figured it out. It's really arts and crafts time. We still hafta write!

Some other counselors came in to talk to us. Guess what about—you guessed it—WRITING! We heard a poet named

(Continued on next page)

Harry Humes. He made us write a poem—I even got to read mine out loud. They call that “publishing.”

They keep on telling us that when we’re finished here we’ll know a lot about the “writing process,” and then we can tell other people about it so that they can write all the time, too. At first that made me scared, but now I’m not so sure. Anyway, when I come home you won’t recognize me. I’m a lot thinner (no lunch, ya know), my eyes have a funny glaze over them, and my tan is gone. But boy, can I write. And ya know what, Ma? I like it!

*Rudolph Sharpe, Supervisor of secondary English in the Lower Dauphin School District, participated in the 1985 summer institute. His “aunts” and “uncles” are the 1985 Writing Project staff.*

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Simplify the vocabulary. Avoid pedantic mumbo-jumbo. You can sometimes substitute short, simple, vivid, easily understood words for the longer Latin or Greek equivalents. Instead of *confronting* problems, just face them. A *sine qua non* is merely a necessity. A *multi-faceted* problem is many sided. A *unilateral* treaty is a one-sided treaty. Don’t proceed on the assumption. Just assume.

— Edgar Dale

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## REPORT FROM THE SUMMER WORKSHOP: THE PROCESS-CENTERED WRITING CLASS

by Margaret M. Barnes, Timothy T. Graham,  
and Rudolph Sharpe

More than 100 teachers were not working on their tans last June 26 to June 28. They interrupted their summer plans to attend the 1985 Pennsylvania Writing Project (PAWP) Workshop. The event was held at the home of PAWP, West Chester University, under the directorship of Robert E. Weiss and Jolene Borgese.

After a warm welcome from Jolene, Bob addressed those in attendance on “Reeducating Ourselves and Our Students.” He shared a startling discovery. The writing process was described back in 1917 in a book called ENGLISH COMPOSITION AS A SOCIAL PROBLEM. Much that we know today about the writing process was known over fifty years ago by Sterling Andrus Leonard, the author of the book. Unfortunately, it had been forgotten since then. What evolved instead was the dreaded English Composition course.

The PAWP Workshop was a chance for teachers to familiarize themselves with the writing process. By updating our knowledge of composition and encouraging dialogue about it, we can prevent this “new” approach from becoming a “lock-step” program like the “old” approach. It is flexible for each teacher.

The workshop encouraged an atmosphere of mutual support and community among the teachers involved with the process. The participants develop their respect for their young writers and grow as writers themselves by participating in workshops and implementation groups. Belief in the writing process and belief in its effectiveness are essential.

What are the basics of a strong writing program?

—Teachers must be a great audience for their students’ writings. They must always want to hear what their students have to say. Donald Graves says, “The teacher must be the learner.” Be prepared to let the child become the “expert” in his own piece.

—The writing-centered classroom must be predictable. The teacher must do a lot of preparation and planning to achieve this. Writing time must be a time of calm productivity. The writing-centered classroom is a busy place with a lot going on, but it is never meant to be pandemonium.

—Teachers must find time for writing. It must happen often, preferably daily. Apply this concept across the curriculum.

—Students must know that their voices will be heard throughout the process as their piece develops. All responses will be meaningful and respectful. They should be involved with selecting their pieces for evaluation.

—Teachers should be prepared to write with their students. Writers work best in the company of writers. A writing community should grow in every classroom.

—Students should want to produce their best. They should be encouraged to make multiple drafts of a piece. Teachers should believe that their students want to produce the best writing possible.

The three-day workshop was structured after the outline of Kirby and Liner’s book, *INSIDE OUT*. Kirby identifies the process steps as “getting it started, getting it down, checking it out, and getting it right.” Writing-process teachers recognize in these steps the familiar prewriting, planning, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing. Before the workshops began on the first day, the attending teachers broke into two discussion groups: the Not-So-Knowledgeable Group led by Bob McCann and Jolene Borgese, and the Knowledgeable Group led by Bob Weiss and Lois Snyder. The following workshops would focus on specific elements of the writing process.

Six workshop options dealt with “Getting It Started and Getting It Down.” Prewriting techniques at the elementary level was presented by Chris Kane of the Philadelphia School District. Jolene Borgese discussed prewriting at the secondary level. Susan Smith (Rosetree-Media School District) shared classroom management techniques and atmosphere at the elementary level, while Rosemary Buckendorf (Exeter Township School District) presented the same topic for secondary level teachers. Lois Snyder offered Learning-Centered Writing, while Bob McCann presented a workshop on the use of computers with the writing process.

Teachers participating in the workshops found out quickly that they were not there just to listen to the experts. Just as their students are the experts on their writing, the teachers were encouraged to share their expertise with one another through writings and discussion. Ideas, questions, concerns, and shared laughter flew through the air like fireworks. As one participant commented, “This is mind-boggling!”

Day 2 was time to think about implementation and what Kirby called checking it out, and getting it right. Sixteen sessions were offered. (That’s a lot of “stuff” being consumed.)

By 9:00 all participants were grouped by grade level. How do rookies in the writing process implement what they have learned into their classrooms? That was to be the question of the morning. Instead, the question became, “What’s going on in my mind?” Some people were confused—something quite common with writing process rookies (and many veterans). Some members of the groups were frustrated and hostile, due only to their confusion. Many questions were still unanswered when the session ended.

The next sessions were on Rewriting and Revision; Response Groups; and Conferencing.

The Rewriting and Revision session was presented by Jolene Borgese, who defined revision as playing with language, seeing the written piece again, and fixing the piece. Other definitions of revision by Graves, Murray, and Mohr were offered. Jolene suggested the use of the ARMS method: ADD something, REMOVE something, MOVE something, SUBSTITUTE something. She used the book *IT WAS A DARK AND STORMY NIGHT*, edited by Scott Rice, to direct a writing activity on story openers, and this activity soon became the talk of the day.

The Response Group session was hosted by Bob McCann, who covered response group functions and procedures and had many good suggestions for classroom management.

Lois Snyder's session on conferencing was a distinct pleasure. She pointed out that conferencing does not have to be a complicated issue, it is merely "talking to people about their writing." Her initial writing activity showed how to enable children to select their own topics. The different types of successful conferences were also discussed.

Publishing and evaluation ideas were presented by Sue Smith. Publishing, contrary to the understanding of many participants, does not have to be a formally bound book. Publishing can be as simple as oral reading by the author or the teacher, displaying the piece somewhere, or submitting it to a newspaper or magazine. The important thing is to have publication as a goal, giving the author a purpose and an audience.

Joan Skiles shared ideas and experience with those who teach primary-age children. Participants in this workshop did extensive work with clustering, which turned out to be particularly helpful to kindergarten teachers. Joan ended her session with a slide show illustrating the writing process. Great public relations for parents and administrators.

It was now time for Implementation Group II. What a difference from the first session only hours before! Confusion was still present, but a different type of confusion. Ideas and excitement were flowing from one to another and back again. Seed had been planted and nourished.

The third day of the three-day writing workshop was devoted to Dan Kirby, well-known author and teacher. Those of us who had spent a hectic two days needed to hear Dan's practical, witty advice on the teaching of composition. More like a warm conversation between friends than a formal address, Dan's speech cautioned all of us to slow down, relax, be happy, and enjoy the process of teaching. We can't be the ones who teach it all, so we need to set realistic goals and get students to write as much as possible. We can provide the context for writing, invite our students to write well and often, but we must also give them up at the end of the year and trust that we've done our best to make them better, more informed writers.

Our role as teachers of writing is threefold: we coax, we coach, and we consult. As coaxers, we encourage risk-taking; we ask our students to experiment with language and ideas. When they produce something that is new, unique, or interesting, we provide positive response to help them move ahead in their writing. As coaches, we must "get dirty" along with our students. We must write with them often, show them how the process works (or doesn't work) for us, show them our difficulties and our successes. We need to show them that we have a game plan, but that sometimes that plan isn't going to work. Instead of quitting the game, we help to provide an alternative game plan. As consultants, we provide the technical knowledge every writer needs. When students reach stumbling blocks in their writing, we show them possibilities for overcoming that obstacle.

Throughout the day, Kirby's message to teachers of writing at all levels was positive, animated, and consistent—keep the process of writing simple, pain-free, and fun. How can we do that?

—Celebrate success: publish often.

—Model the process.

—Evaluate fewer pieces, but provide active response throughout the process.

—Teach grammar, mechanics, and crafting as part of the process.

—Make time for your own writing.

—Relax, calm down, and enjoy the many surprises that the teaching of writing can bring.

*Margaret M. Barnes teaches 1st and 2nd graders in the Oxford Area School District; Timothy T. Graham teaches 3rd grade at the Linwood Elementary School, Linwood School District; and Rudolph Sharpe is a supervisor of secondary language arts in the Lower Dauphin School District. All three were Fellows in the 1985 summer institute.*

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The written word  
Should be clean as bone,  
Clear as light,  
Firm as stone.

— Anonymous

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## PROJECT NEWS

On eight Tuesdays from January through March, fifteen teachers under the leadership of Jolene Borgese could be found in a writing course at Academy Park High School in the Southeast Delco School District. So exciting was the experience that ten of the participants enrolled in the PAWP Summer Institute at West Chester University.

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Doris Kirk and Rosemary Buckendorf coordinated a one-week workshop in mid-June in the Pottsgrove School District. From 8:30 to 3:30 each day eleven elementary teachers worked under the leadership of Doris and thirteen high school teachers worked with Rosemary. This enthusiastic group of teachers summed up their experience as "the best inservice course ever!"

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Ed Bureau coordinated a late-June writing course for fifteen teachers in the Pennsbury School District. Ed's leadership and presentations from Roselle, Buckendorf, and Tortorelli helped to make this workshop successful.

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The Project's first course, Strategies for Teaching Writing, is planned for the Pottsgrove School District and the Bucks and Berks Intermediate Units; the Computers and Writing course is being offered for the Great Valley District and the Lancaster-Lebanon Intermediate Unit. Inservice programs are scheduled for the Northern Lehigh and Pottsgrove School Districts and for the annual meeting of the Pennsylvania Association of Elementary School Principals.

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## ATTEND NCTE CONFERENCE IN PHILADELPHIA

The National Council of Teachers of English is holding its annual meeting in Philadelphia November 23-26, 1985. Each day, sessions will be held on teaching writing from primary grades through college, and the conference program will feature such major speakers as Susan Sontag, Diane Ravitch, Jerome Bruner, Susan Stamberg, and Jamake Highwater.

The NCTE program includes a Saturday session (3:15 - 4:30 P.M.) on revision, conducted by Martha Menz, Jolene Borgese, and Lois Snyder. Following this session is the National Writing Project "cash bar," where you can meet with other teacher-consultants from across the nation to share experiences joyful and woeful.

You are, of course, invited to participate in the NCTE conference. All it takes is a note to NCTE Registration, at 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, Illinois 61801. Request a registration form. Actually, you may attend NCTE whether you are a member or not; of course, members attend at a discount.

Are you willing to provide a bed for another PAWP teacher during the NCTE convention? Teachers from other Pennsylvania cities are seeking inexpensive lodging for a few days. Please call the Project office if you'd be willing to put up a fellow teacher.

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## NCTE OPPOSES WRITING AS PUNISHMENT: A RESOLUTION

This resolution stems from a concern that the use of writing assignments as punishment remains widespread, despite its ill effects on student attitudes toward and learning of this important life skill. Proposers of the resolution cited a national survey of teachers showing that 54 percent of respondents were aware of "the practice of assigning writing to punish students or to extinguish unacceptable behavior."

The aims of sound writing instruction are defeated when teachers and administrators of elementary and secondary schools—and even offices in the judicial system—assign copywork or themes as punishment, the proposers said. They added that both research and English teachers' experience confirm that students who have experienced punitive writing assignments form negative attitudes toward writing.

RESOLVED, that the National Council of Teachers of English condemn punitive writing assignments;

that NCTE discourage teachers, administrators, and others from making a punishment of such writing as copywork, sentence repetition, original paragraphs and themes, and other assignments which inhibit desired attitudes and essential communication skills; and

that NCTE disseminate this opinion to the appropriate audiences, including the general public.

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## AN ENGLISH (LANGUAGE ARTS) CONFERENCE: "REVITALIZING THE ENGLISH CURRICULUM (K-12)"

The Delaware County Intermediate Unit will sponsor a conference which will focus on revitalizing and improving the English (language arts) curriculum on Tuesday, November 26, 1985, from 8:30 until 11:00 A.M. Nationally known author/educator James Moffett and Hans Guth, author and professor, San Jose State, will be the featured

speakers at a site in Delaware County to be selected. Following keynote addresses from the principal speakers, each of the speakers and Robert Boynton, former principal, Germantown Academy, and now textbook publisher, and Edward Shuster, author and Language Arts/English Curriculum Coordinator of the School District of the City of Allentown, will conduct small group sessions which emphasize different aspects of the English (language arts) curriculum.

Administrators and classroom teachers are cordially invited to attend the morning conference, and registration will be limited to the first 160 participants. A registration fee of \$5.00 per person will be charged. For more information, contact Dr. Nicholas A. Spennato, Delaware County Intermediate Unit, 6th & Olive Streets, Media, PA 19063.

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## OUT AMONG THE "ENGLISH": A BUSINESS TEACHER AT PAWP

by Marcia A. Wiker

In the movie, *Witness*, the old Amish farmer warns his daughter-in-law to be careful out among the "English" when she ventures from their little Amish town to the big city. And here I sit, a business teacher, among the "English" (elementary and secondary teachers of writing) in a Summer Institute—the Pennsylvania Writing Project.

What am I doing here? I don't belong here. Most of these people write extremely well, teach writing, have read about writing, and have taken other writing workshops. They know something about the theory, methods, and terms being tossed around. I have never taken any course that prepared me to teach writing. But I teach writing when I ask students to write sentences for vocabulary words, compose at the typewriter, write an application letter or resume, and dictate their own letters. What do I know about writing?

Like most Institute participants, my students, and the students in Emig's study of twelfth graders, I wrote only required school projects. Usually, there was no guidance in the writing of a paper, only requirements as to format and length. Papers were expected to be finished when submitted, graded with meaningless comments and numerous red marks, returned, and never read or heard of again. The painful, confusing routine discouraged voluntary writing.

On a temporary summer job during college, I was required to write a letter. With no idea where to begin, I was rescued by the experienced secretary in the office. Employers rate the inability to compose as a serious deficiency of beginning workers. Our students will be required to write as part of their jobs, often with no training in writing beyond our classrooms.

One month ago I was one of the not-so-knowledgeable's about the writing process. In fact, I knew nothing about it at all.

I didn't even understand simple English words I thought I had learned years ago. To me a response was something that came in the mail weeks after you wrote a letter asking a question. A conference was something you attended on the weekend for which the District only paid part of the expenses. An audience was a group of people who poured out of an auditorium when the show was over. Publishing was an industry responsible for all those books in our classrooms, libraries, and homes. Modeling was a job that paid much more than teaching for posing in beautiful clothes or none. Sharing was for jelly beans, chocolate bars, and anything else good that someone else had and you didn't. And, a timed writing was something five minutes long that measured a typist's speed in words per minute.

The things I heard that first week of the Institute certainly did not match these definitions.

My interest in writing developed recently when I discovered, to my amazement, that I liked to write, preferably at a typewriter or word processor. My writing has included machine instructions for my students, memos for my friends, and writing for my family. The machine instructions made it easier for me to teach machine operation and allowed me to tailor the material to my class. The favorable reactions of my family and friends delighted and surprised me. Without knowing it, I learned the rewards of writing for an audience. Because the word processor made rewriting easy, I began to revise and edit my work more, without knowing they were steps in a process. From reading *Writing On-Line* (Collins and Sommers) this summer, I found that many English teachers were discovering the same benefits of word processing with their students.

Knowing little about the Pennsylvania Writing Project except that people I knew and respected had attended and recommended it, I applied for the Summer Institute with the goals (in order of importance) of earning six credits, improving my writing, and improving my instruction of writing.

What was I doing in this Summer Institute for writing? Learning. I was learning the writing process definitions of response, conference, audience, publishing, modeling, sharing, and other writing terminology. I was learning to write for 5, 10, 15, 30 (oh horrors!) minutes at one time on my own (freewriting) or someone else's topic (focused freewriting). I was learning that writing assignments weren't just for English and elementary teachers any more. I heard professional writers and a poet talk about writing, and I even tried to write poetry and fiction. Not only did I learn what a response group was, but I started to contribute to mine, finding unclear passages to question instead of just grammar errors—a real breakthrough for me. Speakers and presentations during the four weeks showed me writing can and should be thoughtfully included across the curriculum by science, social studies, psychology, math, and business teachers.

Repeated writing opportunities proved to me we must show our students we all can write and will only improve with practice. The theories and names of researchers were starting to sound familiar. I never will be an expert on writing, but I've progressed to a-little-bit knowledgeable (that's dangerous, isn't it?).

Probably the most helpful and, at the same time, most painful part of the Institute was the hour-long presentation. Presenting a technique for teaching writing to the other Institute participants brought on severe anxiety attacks and was undoubtedly responsible for increased sales of tranquilizers and aspirin. When it was finished, though, in addition to the overwhelming feeling of relief, there was something else. There were suggestions, compliments, ideas from other teachers. Seldom do other teachers in our own schools or subject areas have a chance to see and comment on our techniques. We can learn a great deal from each other—even those in other fields or at other teaching levels.

In a meeting with our own Business and Business English teachers a few years ago, we found we had much in common and could learn from each other. However, time to work together never materialized. We need to work on providing more time for inter-departmental efforts throughout the school.

What will I do differently next year because of this Institute?

1. Ask students to write at the beginning and end of a unit what they already know or just learned;
2. Have students write regularly to learn to express themselves for personal as well as business reasons;
3. Use a technique from a teacher in the workshop

session to have students expand a sentence for a vocabulary word into a paragraph;

4. Incorporate more writing on tests;
5. Incorporate the suggestions from my co-participants on my business dictation/composition presentation to improve the composition portion and emphasize its importance;
6. Make more positive and fewer negative comments to students;
7. Respond to my students' writing assignments and encourage revision instead of merely grading them in red much later;
8. Model more—writing when my students write—although I have always typed with them if possible, not knowing I was "modeling";
9. Develop a more organized and extensive letter writing unit, incorporating parts of my presentation and real letters to be answered and compared to my solutions.

That looks like a long list of new school year resolutions to try to fulfill. And honestly, I have my doubts. Marvelous ideas from other summer workshops that promised fantastic results were not greeted enthusiastically by my students. Will my students be able to improve their own writing and recognize the changes that are needed? Will I be able to limit myself to asking questions and refrain from telling them what to change? It may take a great deal of class time and much teacher preparation to complete some of these projects. I may find the students are not the only ones who balk at exerting the required effort.

I also have doubts about myself as a writer. Will I continue to write after this Institute when no one is there to say "Write for the next 20 minutes"? Most of the changes I made in my drafts have been self-motivated, but as there has been no real instruction in writing, perhaps I didn't improve the draft. Perhaps the first draft was the best one. Reading Donald Murray's first edition of *A Writer Teaches Writing* made me wonder if I know enough about writing to teach it.

I have learned and benefited from contact with new people and new theories this summer. My job now is to apply the theories for my students and to continue to expand my writing knowledge and skill.

Would I recommend the Writing Project to other business teachers? Probably, especially if they already have an interest in writing themselves or recognize the need to teach writing to their students. There will undoubtedly be times when they may hate me for recommending it, but they will probably grow and benefit from the experience among the "English."

*Marcia A. Wiker teaches business at the Penn Wood High School in the William Penn School District. She was a Fellow in the 1985 Summer Institute.*

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A simple test of one's writing is: Is it tellable? Is there substance, or does the meaning vanish when you rephrase it for someone else?

— Anonymous

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## NCTE TEACHER-RESEARCHER GRANTS PROGRAM

The Research Foundation of the National Council of Teachers of English invites K-12 classroom teachers to submit proposals for small grants (up to \$1,000) for classroom-based research on the teaching of English and Language Arts. These grants are intended to support research questions teachers raise about classroom issues. They are not intended to support travel to professional meetings, to fund the purchase of permanent equipment or commercial teaching materials, to provide extended release time, or to underwrite research done as part of a graduate program. Address requests for information, application guidelines to Teacher Researcher, NCTE, 1111 Kenyon, Urbana, IL 61801.

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### A CHANGED POSITION ON FLUENCY, SHAPE AND CORRECTNESS

by Valerie A. Shulman

I am a dedicated professional. I work long, hard hours before, during and after school. I believe that students should write and write often, and I believe that writing should be encouraged by teachers in all content areas. I believe these things now, just as I have always believed them. But, something is missing in my classroom, and something is missing in my own writing.

Before I became a Pennsylvania Writing Workshop fellow, I was convinced that I understood the writing process and how it should work in the classroom. My kids engaged in all sorts of prewriting activities. Response groups were an integral part of my classroom routine. I included a number of revision exercises in my lesson plans, and I encouraged my students to ask their parents and teachers to proofread their papers. That seems, even now, like a lot of knowledge imparted and a lot of good teaching, so what's missing?

A few short weeks ago, I discovered that I was misapplying all of these fine teaching techniques simply because I didn't know what was wrong with my students' writing or, as a matter of fact, my own writing. This became clear when Dr. Robert Weiss, co-director of the Pennsylvania Writing Project's summer institute program, emphasized that most teachers approach writing instruction from the wrong standpoint. He maintained that they teach correctness first, move onto discussions of shape, and concentrate on fluency last. He argued that fluency is the most important aspect of writing and that students must gain a sense of their writing "voice" before they are ready to determine the shape of a given piece of writing. Weiss also insisted that correctness, the least important characteristic of writing, should be the last thing with which teachers concern themselves. I gave Bob Weiss's lecture serious thought because he was describing just the sort of thing I was *really* doing in my composition classes.

Over the years I've found that my kids make certain kinds of errors in their written work. Errors in sentence structure abound—errors like faulty parallel structure, faulty subordination and coordination of sentence elements, and misplacement of modifiers. I've also found that students' papers often lack coherence. Their work contains shifts in number, tense, and point of view. And, more often than not, there is no logical development or progression of their ideas. Of course, errors in punctuation and usage are the rule rather than the exception.

I had to do something about all these errors! The only logical thing to do was to revamp my entire composition program. What I did was to develop an organized and

efficient way of approaching the teaching of writing. "Efficient" is the operative word here. I wanted to cure all my students' writing ills in the one short year they were held captive in my class.

First, I taught them about all the errors. I gave them rules and worksheets. One would think that the wan and bored looks they gave me in the process would have discouraged the most persevering soul. Not this one! Not me! I was convinced that correctness was like castor oil—tough and hard to swallow—but good medicine!

After subjecting my students to at least four weeks of errors, I tackled organization. They learned all about topic sentences and appropriate details. And, finally, I taught them how to organize the three-part essay with its formula introduction, body and conclusion.

It was only after all this instruction in the avoidance of error and the use of "proper" methods of organization that my students received their first direction to write. How could they write before I had taught them anything? But, did they write? In reality they were told to make an outline expanding upon one of the several literary topics I had assigned. Well, my students made their outlines. I, in turn, took all of those outlines home with me, graded them, and returned them to the students with directions to make revisions—revisions I decided they should make! Some of my kids were a bit confused and asked for conferences; during these conferences I told them exactly what they were doing wrong. At this point they didn't have anything to worry about because I had given them direction; they did not have to seek direction for themselves!

Once I was satisfied with the outlines, my students waited for more direction. I instructed them to go home and write the introductions and conclusions to their papers. Of course, I never told them that I didn't write my introduction or conclusion first—that I, in fact, started to write somewhere in the middle of my papers. I also never gave up any of my valuable class time to let them get started on their writing.

When my students finished the rough drafts of their introductions and conclusions, they were placed into response groups. While in these groups, they listened attentively to each other's work. But, something was wrong! All they listened for was the required information—information I required! They addressed no other concerns. Logical flow and coherence were forgotten. I walked around the room reminding students they were looking for a little more than required content. Somehow my students muddled through, though I'm still not sure they knew what I was talking about.

Once written conclusions and introductions were put aside, students began to work on the bodies of their papers. A few days later, they returned to their response groups. The same problems occurred. I walked around the room and tried to correct the mess I created.

Finally, students were given a two-week period in which to complete their papers. They were encouraged, and in some cases required, to get an adult proofreader. I found that students were more than willing to go to another adult for further direction. In fact, the only problem I encountered in this phase of the program was convincing them that some of their math teachers were capable proofreaders.

I am sure my audience is wondering about the results of this "organized" and "efficient" approach to teaching writing. I can't lie. Over the past five or six years my students have turned in "better" papers. I see some (but not as many) of the kinds of errors I have listed above. Their papers also have a semblance of sense they did not have before. But, something is still missing! My students' compositions no doubt represent some of the most boring and stilted intellectual drivel I have ever come across. In

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Philadelphia Fellows are urged to encourage colleagues to consider attending the 1986 summer PAWP Institute. Detailed information will be forthcoming. The Project office may also be called for further information - 436-2297.

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fact, a dose of ten papers makes for a very effective tranquilizer. While it's true that many of my students "test out" of College English 101 and come back every year to tell me what a great job I'm doing, I know in my heart that their papers are still as dull as they were when I had to read them. Now, the only difference is that someone else has to do all the reading—and, yes, all the correcting. What was missing in my composition program? What is missing in my composition program?

My participation in PAWP's summer institute has forced me to examine my own writing process. Revelation after revelation has occurred to me throughout the four-week period. However, the most powerful of those revelations took place when I met with my response group for the first time. At this meeting, we decided to revise our book reviews. Since I already spent a week revising the assignment, I was in no hurry to let three teacher-types tear it to shreds. Of course, I graciously allowed all of my partners to read their papers first. I was amazed. They all wrote in the first person, and their work had a personal touch and spontaneity which mine lacked. While it was true that my work was, for the most part, correct and well organized, it was written in such a ponderous, academic tone that I had no intention of "sharing" it. Why were their papers so much more interesting than mine? There was much more to it than the first person versus the third person dilemma. Throughout my schooling—secondary, undergraduate and graduate—I had written prose for only one audience—the teacher. And, the letter A became the most active and important word in my graduate school vocabulary.

My book review should have been written for my peers. My purpose was to encourage them to read the book. I'm sure I did not; I probably put them to sleep just as my students have put me to sleep for so many years. What has been missing in my writing is the same thing that has been missing in my students' writing—personal voice. A sense of who is writing and to whom the writing is directed is a concern I never pointed out to my students.

I think it will take a long time to find my own voice. The real problem, however, is not what to do with my own work since my primary responsibility is to my students. How can I encourage them to find their own distinct and meaningful voices? How do I convince them that what they have to say is important and that there is an audience for their ideas—an audience other than the omniscient teacher? Now that I have a handle on my priorities, I am prepared for September. The recent work in composition research provides practical suggestion on top of practical suggestion for the teaching of writing. How I'll piece it all together is yet another dilemma which must be resolved. But, I do know several things. Beginning in September, my students will write, and they will engage in some kind of writing activity everyday. They will start off writing to say something about themselves and for themselves. By publishing their work on my classroom walls and bulletin boards, I will help them to see that they do have something to say. At the conclusion of the year, I hope they will expand their focus and attempt to reach a wider range of audiences.

*Valerie Shulman teaches senior high English in the Chester School District and was a Fellow in the 1985 Summer Institute.*

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## TWO OLD FRIENDS

*by Patricia Kurz*

It is a day of excitement. At 12:30 I will be having lunch with George. Gosh, it's been years since we've gotten together. I remember we were inseparable in school. It's been fifteen years since graduation. George and I haven't gotten together since our fifth year reunion.

What a lunch! We had so much catching up to do. George looked as handsome as ever in his blue striped suit. I'd been so busy with my work at the advertising agency, business trips, accounts, etc., that we lost touch. I had so much to tell George about my family, the summer house and, of course, the trip to the Orient last fall.

I went on and on, barely touching my food. When I stopped to sip my drink, I noticed George had been rather quiet. Really, I hadn't given him much time to speak. I sat back and listened.

Hard times had hit this old friend. He lost his job with the company. Something about building a new image they said. He started drinking. Maria kept nagging about his problems. It just got to be too much. Well, she left George last spring. My, how things change. I always thought George would make it. He was so sure of himself in the old days. He had such big plans for himself.

After dessert, we clasped hands and planned to get together real soon. I stopped at the restroom on my way out. George was gone when I returned to the lobby.

The sun was shining brightly as I stepped into the parking lot. I made my way through the parked cars over to my Porsche. I remember thinking I must get this car washed as something hard struck my head. I sank to the ground. Someone grabbed my purse and darted away between the cars. As my eyes closed, I noticed something familiar about that blue striped suit.

*Patricia Kurz teaches in the West Pottsgrove Elementary School.*

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## WILL PENNSYLVANIA HAVE A NETWORK OF WRITING PROJECTS?

A move is afoot to provide state funding for Writing Project sites in Pennsylvania. During legislative deliberations on this year's budget, the House of Representatives adopted an amendment to provide \$150,000 to five existing sites as a commitment to this program. This funding did not remain in the Conference Committee Report on the budget.

According to Representative Elinor Z. Taylor of Chester County, the Writing Project could become part of Governor Dick Thornburgh's Agenda for Excellence at a minimal cost and contribute to improving the writing skills of Pennsylvania teachers and students. Representative Taylor, the ranking minority member of the House subcommittee on higher education, feels that Pennsylvania has not yet successfully addressed this issue. She has formulated legislation that would support several writing project sites, including ours at West Chester University, and would provide for networking activities.

Your support for this legislation would be most welcome. More about our lobbying efforts will be in future newsletters.



Doris Kirk, 1981 Fellow, from the Coatesville Area School District, has been named a consultant to the State Department of Education Writing Project.

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1984 Fellow Connie Broderick (Southeast Delco School District) was awarded the Special Education Teacher Distinguished Service Award for the school year 1984-85 by Sigma Pi Epsilon Delta, a Special Education Honor Society.

\*\*\*\*\*

Bruce Fischman (1984 Fellow; Upper Perkiomen School District) was an afternoon consultant to the NEH Summer Institute for Teachers at Beaver College.

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**NOTE:** Please send information for *Crow Corner* to:

Mrs. Vicky Steinberg  
1018 Deer Run  
Reading, PA 19606

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If you wish to become a writer, write.

— Epictetus

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## TEACH ME TO DANCE, PETER ELBOW

by Agnes A. Cardoni

Suppose you want to learn to dance, but are shy. Dancing school is out, because you can't bear the thought of others watching as you stumble around the floor. Instead, you buy a kit with a record, booklet or directions and some numbered, yellow plastic feet, and you practice in the privacy of your livingroom.

Clumsy at first, you lumber from foot to foot, trying to match *your* feet to the plastic ones beneath you. You keep at it, and gradually, even without a lot of talent or luck, you learn to dance. Now you can throw the plastic ones away and start trusting your own feet.

Perhaps learning to write is like learning to dance. There seem to be as many sets of "steps" in the writing process as there are in a how-to-kit on dancing. Every teacher has some sort of method and "steps"—even Peter Elbow. The difference with Elbow is that he tells you at the outset that you need to be skeptical of the order of the steps; you need to de-emphasize the steps as soon as you feel strong enough. You can rearrange, improvise, as the occasion invites. He helps you get rid of the plastic feet quickly.

At the outset of *Writing With Power*, Elbow admits that he should have used more specific steps in his previous book, *Writing Without Teachers*. Yet in the second book he doesn't go off in the opposite direction and give you steps and only steps. Instead, he acknowledges the need for steps, gives strategies, encourages awareness of writing processes, and then trusts the reader's judgment in using all this.

*Writing With Power* is divided into six parts, the first beginning with "A Map of the Book," designed to show you that you can "get there from here" by choosing your

own sequence of issues addressed in the book in whatever order you need. Where you need order, steps, Elbow is there; where you can improvise, he moves out of the way.

Section I deals with the preliminaries: freewriting strategies, writing in bursts, and the myth of saying it right the first time. Section II gives strategies for producing writing when there is nothing coming readily to mind or paper. Of particular use to those of us who teach writing as well as write ourselves are the chapters "Metaphors for Priming the Pump" (a perfect metaphor for getting started), and "Poetry as No Big Deal." Section III deals with the options available in revising and editing, and for Elbow they are just that—options. In Sections II and III Elbow comes closest to the cookbook method of teaching writing. But the summary statements at the ends of the chapters are hard to argue with. For example, Chapter 12, "Thorough Revising," concludes:

Fix readers and purpose in mind.

Read over raw writing and mark important bits.

Find your main point.

Put the parts in order on the basis of your main idea.

Make a draft.

Possible detour: deal with a breakdown.

Tighten and clean up your language. Reading out loud helps.

Remove mistakes in grammar and usage. (p. 138)

In the relaxed tone Elbow adopts, these ideas are easy to take. Maybe reading Elbow is like dancing with a good partner: better and easier than following plastic feet on the rug.

Sections IV and V are other-centered, in that they discuss the importance of audience. Thinking about the readers often makes me feel schizophrenic. Certainly I want to be read and understood, but I want also to keep what is *me* on the page, even after having been told my piece is unreadable.

For example, I recently wrote a poem and gave it to my husband. He who is my most frequent, favorite, and (when necessary) my most critical audience, didn't "get it." I was crushed and furious. Here's the poem:

### On Being the First Awake

Newspaper late

T V silent

Sleeping

child and man

vulnerable

lost to me

Oh, to crawl under the sheets

under his wing

drift off in dream-trust

the world enclosed

the shells close the pearly dark

around us

the third eye accepts the light.

So what's not to get here? Well, there's that pearly dark, and that third eye . . . / made the leap to the space between my eyebrows but maybe, as Elbow suggests (p. 198), I was "stuck too much in [my] own magnetic field," and I couldn't bring my reader with me. I hate to admit it, but that seems to be the problem with the last four lines of the piece. Perhaps feedback from several people, as Elbow suggests in Chapter 24, would help me open up the ending and yet not make it sound like a Hallmark card.

Section VI is my favorite section, and the one I went to first. This is where the speculative stuff is. It is here that Elbow says,

. . . if you want your reader to *experience* your thinking and not just manage to understand it—if you



want him to feel your thoughts alive inside him or hear the music of your ideas—then you must experience your thoughts fully as you write. (pp. 339-40, emphasis mine)

If you go back over that passage and substitute "audience" for "reader," and some form of the word "dance" for "thought" or "ideas," you come back to what I said earlier about dancing and writing as being similar. Good writers and good dancers make their work seem effortless; they lead gently but surely; and they do not need their 14-step writing process poster or their yellow plastic feet in plain view.

Another simile comes to mind at this point: teaching is like going in every day and trying to lift an elephant. I borrowed that from a novel I read last summer (*The Small Room*, by May Sarton), and I yelled it out when Dan Kirby asked for teaching metaphors at the PAWP workshop this summer. Perhaps both dancing and lifting the elephant work for writing. Elbow himself says that the theme of his book is remember to keep at writing even when you feel you can't, when you are overwhelmed, sweaty, weak. In teaching and in writing, sometimes we do it in spite of the obstacles. And for most of us, a paper due or a class of 25 adolescents can be formidable "elephants" indeed.

In teaching and in writing, when the magic is there, we can lift the elephant; when it's not, at least we exercise our muscles, stay in shape for when it comes back. We must become involved in the process as the dancer becomes part of the dance. We must try to do it so that the question William Butler Yeats asks at the end of "Among School Children" is prompted by the way we teach as well as the way we write:

O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,  
How can we know the dancer from the dance?

Peter Elbow's *Writing With Power* can go a long way toward helping you and your students to dance.

A participant in the three-day workshop on the process-centered writing class, Agnes A. Cardoni teaches senior high in the Wilkes-Barre Area School District.

\*\*\*\*\*

No passion in the world, no love or hate, is equal to the passion to alter someone else's draft.

— H. G. Wells

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### SAT SCORES UP — YES, UP

Although scores on the Scholastic Aptitude Test have been climbing since their low point in 1979-1980, no increase has been so large as that reported for the 1983-84 school year.

The College Board announced in mid-September that the average SAT scores increased one point on the Verbal section, to 426, and three points on the Math section, to 471. Almost a million high school students took the latest SAT. Even though the average score of those who intend to be teachers rose four points on the Verbal and seven points on the Math, that group as a whole remained well below the national average.

—Reprinted from NCTE  
COUNCILGRAMS, November, 1984

## PAWPers' POETRY

### THE MEMORY

by Irene Finnegan

I will not break my promise  
to a wide-eyed ten year old  
I have that memory of mine  
that makes my heart run cold.

I will do as I say  
you will get your wish  
Please do not fret today  
I will not relinquish.

Irene Finnegan teaches mathematics and language arts to 6th graders at the Downingtown Elementary School, Downingtown School District.

\*\*\*\*\*

### I THINK I'LL BE A TEACHER WHEN I GROW UP

by Karen V. Crawford

D d d oooo you know I stutter?  
I guess you do.  
Is it written on my school record?  
Or across my face?  
You never call on me.  
(But then I never raise my hand.)  
Shhhwoooo!  
You'll never get to hear me  
Daffy-Ducking my way through that interminable  
tunnel,  
That neverending maze where d's and t's roadblock  
my larynx  
And lock up my brain.

A fifth grade teacher who likes to sing?  
A man no less.  
You're a novelty for 1955, you know.  
*How Much is that Doggie in the Window?*  
*Davy Crockett*  
*Take Me Out to the Ball Game*  
Like Santa Claus, you lean your ear my way.

Me?  
You want me to lead the class?  
Words march out beating on those d's, those t's.  
You can leave my bedroom mirror, Annette Funicello.  
I've got a song to sing.  
Mr. Roberts,  
You have made all the difference.

Karen V. Crawford is a third grade teacher at the Blair Mill Elementary School, Hatboro-Horsham School District.

\*\*\*\*\*

Good writing is disciplined talking.

— James Boswell

\*\*\*\*\*

## RESPONSE GROUPS IN FIRST GRADE ON THE FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL

by James B. MacCall

As a first grade teacher at Delcroy Elementary School, I have learned the advantages of developing the fluency of writing while the children get more fluent in reading. Both processes go hand in hand. But while the fluency of writing grew, the ability to respond to writing did not seem to grow.

How many times did I hear,

"I liked the story."

"It was nice."

"It is a good story."

The same lines were then repeated 25 more times around the response circle of children. I knew this had to end, but how? How could I get first graders to respond with more detail?

An idea came to me, not under the apple tree, but standing in front of the produce section in the local supermarket. Why not use apples? Good red apples are the kind we all love and the green underdeveloped apples are those that we leave behind at the counter.

The first day of school in my classroom is devoted to apples. We make apple name tags, hear apple stories, count apples for a math lesson and so on throughout the day.

With visions of red and green apples going through my head, I decided to incorporate response groups that very first day instead of waiting until later in the year. This would give me more time to model the ideas of response that I wanted from the children and they also would have more time to practice this idea.

That night I prepared for this lesson by choosing two short stories about apples. I then cut two large apples out of paper, one red and the other green. Finally, I reviewed my thoughts and made a mental outline to prepare for the next day.

After lunch, the class and I made a large apple shape in the reading area and we all sat on the floor. I told them that this was going to be our reading and sharing time. Each day we would sit together to read and talk about a story, book, or drawing.

I read both stories to the class and held up my red apple and explained to the class how red apples had grown for a long time in the sun. I further explained that red apples start out green but with the sun's warm shine, they turn red and have finished growing.

I add additional explanation that a good red apple makes a person feel good in their "tummy" and a good "red apple" comment makes a person feel good inside their "heart."

"I enjoyed this story so much that I am going to give it a 'red apple.' Not a real apple, but a good comment about it. I like this story because it was a happy story."

At this point I then say, "For such a good red apple, I deserve an apple sticker."

I place an apple sticker on myself and ask if anyone else thinks he or she could make a red apple comment about one of the stories.

As you can guess, every hand is up and waving. Each child is then given a turn at saying a "red apple" response. From this early start, I make sure that each child gives a good comment and more importantly, a reason for the good response.

If by chance a child is unable to think of a comment, he is guided by me into making a good comment. If a child gives a negative response, I try, by asking questions, to guide him into a positive statement.

The introduction of "green apple" comments then follows in the same lesson. "Green apples," as I explain,

"are apples that are not ready yet. They are apples that need a little more help from Mr. Sun to grow into red apples. Green apples need to do some changing to become red apples. Some stories are the same. They need some help and some changes to turn them into good stories."

"We know how to make good apple comments, but what about a green apple comment? A green apple comment would be something that you think would help the story become much better."

"I have a green apple comment about our story. I think that the man planting apple seeds needs a friend to help him."

I would then ask if any of the children could make a green apple comment. Due to being a more difficult task, there may only be a few suggestions. Each one that is a constructive criticism is accepted and praised. If any statement is too negative, I try to guide the speaker into making it a more positive response.

At the end of the lesson, I ask each child to return to his or her seat and write about a favorite part of the story. This draws the lesson to a close.

This first revision lesson usually lasts between fifteen to thirty minutes depending on the length of the story chosen and the number of children in the discussion. It provides a start in the process of responding to pieces of writing. Just like writing, responding needs to be practiced every day.

*James B. MacCall teaches first grade in the Southeast Delco School District and was a Fellow of the 1985 Summer Institute.*

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

## ADORATION OF ADVERBS

In a letter to Theodore Roethke on November 6, 1935, Louise Bogan wrote about reading the letters of Henry James.

I take back a lot I said about James. I'm reading the letters, which I was unable to read, for years, and they are very fine, once you get used to his eccentricities. And now I can read the later manner like a shot. . . . It's really a beautiful manner, for anyone who likes periodic sentences. He says that the real test of a real feeling for writing is a passion for adverbs. . . . "I'm glad you like adverbs—I adore them; they are the only qualifications I really much respect, and I agree with the fine author of your quotations in saying—or thinking—that the sense for them is the literary sense." That shows the difference between a prose-writer, even a great prose-writer, and a lyric poet. You can't be a lyric poet and love adverbs.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

CECELIA G. EVANS is the 1985-86 *Newsletter* editor. She recently received a doctorate in reading/language arts from the University of Pennsylvania. A 1981 Fellow of PAWP, she served as co-director of the 1982 PAWP Philadelphia Summer Institute and taught an inservice course "The Teaching of Writing: K-12" to Philadelphia teachers in the fall of 1982. Cecelia is a reading teacher at the Belmont School in Philadelphia.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

**SCHEDULE OF PROJECT MEETINGS**

<u>Date &amp; Time</u>	<u>Program</u>	<u>Place</u>
Sunday, October 13 1:00 - 5:00 P.M.	A Writer Leads us in Writing, with Sharon Sheehe Stark	West Chester University Campus
Saturday, November 23 3:15 - 4:45 P.M. 5:00 - 7:00 P.M.	Revision Presentation, with Jolene Borgese, Martha Menz, and Lois Snyder; National Writing Project Cash Bar	(Must be registered for NCTE Conference. Consult NCTE Program for locations.)
Saturday, January 11 (Snow date, January 18)	With Vincent Balitis, fiction writer	West Chester University Campus
Saturday, February 15 (Snow date, February 22)	With Judith Scheffler, West Chester University English Department	West Chester University Campus
Saturday, March 15	"Our Town," a video on writing, thinking, and learning in all grade levels. From North Carolina Writing Project.	TBA
Saturday, April 19	TBA	TBA
Saturday, May 17	Luncheon for new PAWP Fellows	West Chester University Campus

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## PENNSYLVANIA WRITING PROJECT NEWSLETTER

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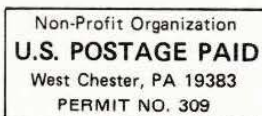
The purpose of the *Pennsylvania Writing Project Newsletter* is to link together all teachers of writing in our area. The *Newsletter* features articles on the teaching of writing, information about writing courses, conferences, project meetings, reviews of books, and events relating to the writing process.

We seek articles from all teachers of writing at all grade levels and from anyone else interested in writing and the teaching of writing. All articles will be considered. Please send all articles, questions, and comments to: Robert H. Weiss, Pennsylvania Writing Project, West Chester University, West Chester, PA 19383.

The Pennsylvania Writing Project (PAWP) is an affiliate of the National/Bay Area Writing Project and a training site for the nationally validated New Jersey Writing Project. PAWP was created by the sponsors under grants from the William Penn Foundation and the University of California at Berkeley, with the National Endowment for the Humanities.

### **Pennsylvania Writing Project**

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**THIRD CLASS**