

New York City Writing Project NEWSLETTER

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A Teacher's Poem

This poem was written during the 1997 Invitational Summer Institute of the New York City Writing Project. It appeared first on the Op Ed page of the New York Times in September, 1997.

I am a New York City public high school teacher
Do not look surprised.
Do not feel sorry for me.
Do not pity me.
Do not offer me your condolences.
Do not pat me on the back, shake my hand,
Cross yourself or speak of my bravery.
Do not ask me if I receive combat pay
Or wear a bulletproof vest.
Do not ask me when I plan to get a real job,
Apply to law school,
Or what my first career choice was.
Do not assume my head is in the clouds
And I have no grasp on reality.
Do not sympathize, empathize,
Or tell me about the job opening in your cousin's business.
Do not suggest I join the Peace Corps.
Do not ask if my parents were teachers.
Do not ask if my parents were hippies.
Do not assume I am a saint, naive, innocent,
Searching for my childhood,
Living for the summers off,
Home by 2:15,
Use a red pen,
Play the Lotto,
Wish for the glory days of the past
Or would rather work in the suburbs, where I could *really* teach.

I am a New York City public high school teacher
Ask me why I chose to be a teacher.
Ask me if my students have books, supplies and chairs.
Ask me my opinion of Guiliani, Pataki and Crew.
Reminisce with me about your favorite teachers,
Share with me the qualities that made them admirable.
Tell me about your favorite projects and field trips.
Ask me what my students are working on now.
Gasp when I say how many students are in each of my classes.
Gasp when I say how many I see in a week.
Cry with me about Marc's sleeping in the subway,
Simone's losing her father,
Maria's thinking she's pregnant,
And Rick's dropping out of school.
Laugh with me about Kenny's insisting
(while caught in the hall) that it was the "Stalin in him,"
My classroom being toilet papered,
And the Great All-Out Classroom Trash Throwing War of '94
(fought just to get Sharon to smile on the last day of school).
Marvel with me over my students' intelligence
Achievements, diligence, creativity and strength.
Cheer with me as they write their college essays and take the S.A.T.'s.
Soar with me as they get their college acceptance letters.
Ask me how to create a scholarship,
Ask me how to volunteer.
Ask me about the many qualities needed to become
A New York City public high school teacher.

Lisa Lauritzen
Erasmus Hall Campus HS for
Humanities and the Performing Arts

Inside

On Identity	3
In the Classroom	11
When Schools Close	14

More Reflections on Reading	16
Steal These Ideas	18
Small Group Network	18
Project Notes	19

A Note from the Editors

Now that the school year is well underway, the pleasures of summer may seem a distant memory. The books you read while sitting on the beach, the people you met while travelling in another state or country, and the conversations you had while participating in a summer institute may feel remote in the midst of the daily demands of teaching. We do hope, however, that July and August provided you with time for both reflection and rejuvenation and that you returned to your school with fresh ideas and a renewed sense of energy and purpose.

As teachers, we know how necessary a summer vacation can be. The academic year is a long one and, as soon as it begins again, we are thrust into a world that requires us to draw on all that we are—intellectually and emotionally—as human beings. Lisa Lauritzen's poem on our cover page, which many of you may have first seen on the Op Ed page of the *New York Times*, speaks to the work we do each day. Indeed, in our interactions with students, administrators, colleagues and parents, we are continually summoning up different aspects of ourselves. In schools, we discover and re-discover who we once were and who we are, what we can do and what we fear, what we believe and what we reject. No matter what or where we teach, we find ourselves confronting and examining our values and wrestling with long-held beliefs. Our profession frequently requires us to bring the complexity of our very identities to the table.

In many ways, then, this issue of the Newsletter touches on the topic of identity, as our contributing writers explore their backgrounds and lives as well as their practice and their work environments. First, several teachers and one student write movingly, painfully and triumphantly about racial, cultural and sexual identity and the effect of identity on their lives in schools. Then we move directly into classrooms and view two teachers in the role of risk-takers; one writer discusses how her classroom was changed once she confronted racial issues while another contributor celebrates the success he had when he tried something new with the support of a colleague.

Sometimes our professional identities are very much tied to the schools in which we work. Two teachers share what can happen when a school closes and the professional community is dissolved. Finally, two colleagues reflect on their identity as readers and teachers of literature, responding to the reflective pieces published in the previous Newsletter.

This issue also includes our regular features: Steal These Ideas, The Small Group Network, and Project Notes.

The theme of identity is a complex one and we know that many of our colleagues took risks in sharing some of these pieces. We think you will find the stories they tell to be alternately disturbing, poignant and enlightening.

Please note: It is our policy to print student work as is, when excerpts are reprinted within teachers' articles.

Director's Note

The summer of 1998 marks the 20th anniversary of the New York City Writing Project. As we approach this milestone, I find myself thinking about my experiences with the Project. I have wonderful memories of the many friends I have made and the tears and laughter we have shared. Still, my history with the Project is largely characterized by my professional growth and the many questions I had and continue to have about learning. Most of all my thoughts turn to the context in which much of my Writing Project history has taken place--the professional development work with teachers in the New York City schools.

During its history the Project has created a variety of forums—summer and school-year programs, weekend retreats, Saturday meetings—to establish a professional community where teachers feel they can raise the hard questions about educating students. I do not only mean the complex questions surrounding curriculum, instruction and school culture, but also the issues of language, race, class and gender that impact on teaching and learning in urban classrooms. Like many of you, I have come to understand how important it is to keep these questions on the table. Recently, my colleague, Cecelia Traugh, reminded me that “questions make a meeting place.”

While our focus has always been on the teaching and use of writing, we have tried to be responsive to the needs and interests of teachers as new concerns emerge in the classroom. Recently, in many of our Writing Project seminars, teachers have been expressing growing concern about student literacy. At the same time that there is a call for more rigorous standards in all areas of education, teachers are finding that issues of language and literacy are commanding significant amounts of classroom time. As a result, we hear a greater urgency in the questions being raised: How do we help adolescents negotiate difficult text? How do we spark and hold an interest in reading and writing? What are the kinds of literacies students are bringing to classrooms that we do not yet understand or know how to build on? As these questions arise, the Project is committed to providing opportunities for teachers to meet in reflective communities where we can continue to explore what might be possible. In addition to our summer institutes, inservice seminars and small interest groups, the Newsletter can be another way of sharing your concerns and experiences. We invite you to keep raising questions and bring them to our meeting place.

Linette Moorman

Letters to the Editor

We encourage you to agree or disagree with a viewpoint expressed or to suggest a theme or topic for a future issue. Send your letters or suggestions to the NYCWP, Institute for Literacy Studies, Lehman College, 250 Bedford Park Boulevard West, Bronx, NY 10468. Attention: Newsletter. Or e-mail us at osterman@alpha.lehman.cuny.edu

On Identity . . .

Four of our contributors tackle the most basic, yet most difficult, issues of all: Who am I? How did I get this way? Where do I fit in? Where is my spiritual home?

Carmen Kynard, a teacher at Wings Academy in the Bronx, offers us a compelling autobiographical prose-poem in which she reveals the process, the people, and the events that formed her identity.

Andrea Barrow, a student at Urban Academy in Manhattan, wrestles with two sets of problems: those of being biracial and those of people who have problems dealing with her biracialism.

Aaron Listhaus, a teacher/school leader at Queens International HS, knew who he was. He found liberation through the search for the way to let others—most especially his students—know him, too.

In "The Homecoming," Julia Clarke, a teacher at I.S. 218 in Brooklyn, recalls an eye-opening experience as a newly arrived immigrant and her understanding, at last, of where home is.

The editors invite you to tell your story of personal identity and submit it for an upcoming issue of the Newsletter.

Life of a Historian

YOUNG BLOOD

1.

I don't remember very much. Just a few things. We didn't have much of anything. Mama fought my Headstart and kindergarten teachers who wanted me placed in Special Ed (as suggested on all of my report cards). Everything else is a blur... except I did have two teachers who had my back--Miss Earle and Miss Campbell.

2.

Miss Earle read a book to us about Martin Luther King. I had never heard of him. He started a bus boycott. He changed things for Black people. Miss Earle was so proud of him and she kept looking at me. She made sure this man would be someone her first graders would always remember.

3.

Miss Campbell was my 6th grade teacher. She didn't take no stuff. Not from her students. Not from no white folks either! She assigned a research paper. I wrote about Martin Luther King. It was a two page poem about what I had read about him. Still got it too. I must have written it at the explosion of the hip-hop era... because I didn't learn to hear rhyming anywhere else.

DA ACADEMY

4.

Why? Why is it that when my mother comes to school, people barely look at her? Why is it that when Megan's family comes into the building, the entire administration comes to hug them? Why is it that Cassie's art, which is not even that good, gets pimped so hard? Why is it that my art gets pushed into the furthest corners of the mind (and wall space)? Why did it not occur to anyone that I might have talent until I won a national award? Is it because my subject matter doesn't look like them?

5.

Her real name was Sister Charlesetta. We called her Sister Chuck. She kinda looked like the Chuck Wagon. She had that disease that makes your legs and ankles swell up like pillows. She didn't pick up her feet when she walked. I guess she couldn't. She kinda just slid across the classroom...rolling around like the Chuck Wagon...only without the dogs barking. I decided she was stupid after I chose to write about apartheid. She had never heard of it.

6.

I'm sitting in my economics class, talking about race in America. I'm tired sluggish. I haven't eaten for what must be two days. But Yo! This discussion has me mad open. Until... this teacher says to me, "Carmen, you have to always remember things have gotten so much better." For who? If it's so much better, why can't you teach me how this over-consuming, hyper-privileging system of economics necessarily and legitimately leaves me hungry tonight?

7.

American History and government with a teacher who looks like a walking/talking pear: "What's more important: Bleeding heart liberals or the conservative policy makers?" she asks. A heated debate sparks the classroom. Her answer: "You need both. You need bleeding heart liberals like Martin Luther King to shake things up. You need conservatives to create Civil Rights bills to make the changes long-lasting." What the hell is this fruit talking about? Somehow... Martin Luther King, the Civil Rights Movement seem so much bigger than that!

SKOOL DAZE

8.

Are people really this rich? G-Money over here just charges a brand new 1989 Maserati on her father's Visa gold card. Girlfriend is describing how the men in her family have historically held leadership roles. Clearly, she needs to get wit da program...stand up for your rights, girl! Ooops. Oh yeah. Her last name is Rockefeller. It hadn't occurred to me that her grandfather was J.D. And wassup with these Black people? A bunch of Carleton clones and I'm the

continued . . .

Fresh Prince of Bel Air who never gets to see Bel Air. All I gots to say is this: I mo get what they have...come hell or high water.

9.

I'm Pre-Med. A year of calculus. A year of organic chemistry, human biology, developmental biology, molecular biology. I hate this stuff. This bell curve grading looks like it's tracking me. The student with the highest score gets the A. The one with the lowest grade gets the F. Score range in between. Why is it that the rich kid from Andover, for whom this curriculum is simply a repeat of his/her \$20,000/year college-preparatory academic background, always gets the A? Why is it that non-Andover kids, the ones without the BMW's and the 6 figure homes, work their asses off for a C. I can't stand these classes and I can't stand the people in them. But that's okay. It's all about money. When I finish, I'm gon be paid!

10.

The Bluest Eye... If I were only rich. If I were only white. Everything would be alright. I'm lost and I don't know my way back. How have I come to hate myself and my experiences so much that I'm willing to perpetuate the system that put me here? How did I let this go so far? What will I do to nurse my way back to health? What will I do to bring myself back to me?

What will I do to bring myself back to me?

GIRLZ IN DA HOOD

11.

Consortium for Young Women with Kalamu Cache: Now Cache was a trip and a half. Man that woman had energy! Had to! She ran the only community cheer center for women of color in East Palo Alto. She was a whirlwind of a woman, a whirlwind of energy that I needed needed to be wrapped up in. So there I was, writing grants... teaching...and liking it!

12.

The National Black Women's Health Project. This organization is amazing. This is what I want to be about! Incredible women! Where have you been all my life ?? Maybe... I don't need an M.D. to create a clinic that addresses the health care needs of Black women, while also serving as a community center. A public health school will give me this preparation!

13.

Another C. Oh No! No! No! No! Not this time! I know this stuff. I'm not taking another C on a biology exam. I'm going to see

Dr. Stockdale (one of the leading breast cancer researchers in the country) and ask him wassup wit id. (At Dr. Stockdale's office) Me: I keep getting these grades, but I know this material. Him: Can I see your test?... Hmm. Yes. I can tell you know your biology by the way you answer the question. Me: So how did I get a C? Him: Well that's how the bell curve works. What were your high school biology classes like? Strong? Weak? Me: Very weak. Him: Well... that's your problem. You're going to have to work harder than the other students. Many of your peers have already learned this material so it's just a review for them. Just take the Cs for now. You'll catch up by the time you get into the upper division and then everyone will be at the same place. What type of medicine do you want to practice? Me: I'm really interested in OB/GYN. I'd like to have my own clinic that addresses the health care needs of Black women, while also serving as a community center. I'm curious to hear some of your ideas about high rates of breast cancer among Black women. What are ways to address this in research and practice? Him: Hmmm. I wouldn't know. That's not my focus. Is there anything else? Me: No... I found out everything I need to know. Thank You. Exit. I'm outta here! Peace out Dr. Stockdale! Peace out Pre-Med!

14.

It was Fall and I was deep into my Feminist Studies major. Things started falling apart again. Why does this keep happening to me? Why can't I just seem to find something to hold on to? This class, this major, still ain't enough. It's not what I thought it would be. We've been sitting around here while discussing the sociopolitical impact of a patriarchal system that benefits men, while subjugating women to the status of homemaker/housewife. What women are they talking about? Not my mother. Not my grandmother or her mothers. I have never met a housewife... except the ones whose houses my aunts cook and clean in. On top of this, my roommate's boyfriend just got jumped outside my apartment. My friend and his entire fraternity, Alpha Phi Alpha, were beaten by the police. My best friend's father, a young man, just died of a hypertension-related disease. My uncle is in jail. Most of my male cousins are headed there. How has this patriarchal system benefitted them? Yo Professor! You cool as hell! But as far as I'm concerned, this class ain't teaching me a damn thing.

15.

A Pajama Jammy Jam. 6th Grade Style. My best friend, Jennifer, me and 15 young women from the Consortium had a slumber party in my dorm room. We took them everywhere. They were all over the dorm. For the first time, I was homesick and it felt really good. I never thought I would miss home. All those bad memories that I wanted erased. Even though times were rough, there was always an aliveness. A funky kinda groove. Double-dutch. Hop scotch. Freeze tag. Dancing in the street. Pop-lockin. The

energy of these young women from the Consortium is a reminder of everything I had... and still have. And just think... all this time, I been thinking I got nuthin.

16.

I haven't really let this medicine thing go yet. This community clinic thing is starting to get empty for me. I still have so many questions. I'm learning more and more about the discrepancies in infant mortality among African American babies, breast cancer among Black women and hypertension in the African American community. Yet I have no social analysis, no understanding of why the hell this happens in the first place? How can I fix what I don't understand?

CULTURE-SYSTEMIC REVOLUTION

17.

Professor Wynter had a different approach to writing. Writing was the way to Freedom. Revolution. Consciousness. A way of questioning. A way of deconstructing... and reconstructing. This is what she asked for in her class. My research for her class was a play/conversation between three women. One was an African woman faced with the encroaching Western world of development, requiring her mental and physical death. One was a Caribbean woman living in rural poverty. One was a teen mother in Urban America. I engaged my questions, issues, the history learned in this class by making these three women talk to each other. Professor Wynter loved it... This was something I could get into!

18.

Professor Porter had me on the Malcolm X panel with five other professors. I could talk about whatever I wanted in relation to Malcolm. It was right after the movie. I was focused on Black and Latino youth--challenging the idea that their knowledge and understanding of Malcolm X was limited to the wearing of a baseball cap. I talked about the historical reality of Black and Latino youth in America vs. what the X symbolizes. I talked about the consumption/materialization of hip-hop culture, a culture these youth alone create. I don't remember my exact words anymore! I just remember my homies out there in the crowd! Hyped... and amped!

19.

I just finished my thesis. It was slammin (at least I think so)! I used the writing of Black women and the characters which they represent to engage the sociohistorical reality of poor Black women in the United States. Central to this analysis was an exploration of the limits in which feminist studies, as a paradigm and discourse, had historically functioned to privilege white, upper-middle class women. The feminist studies department must not have liked it too much, because they tried to deny my honors status...until every Black professor at the university stepped up ready to do battle. Ain't it a

trip how some people be talkin about how oppressed they are, yet be oppressing other folks through the system they claim does not benefit them.

20.

A crack addicted woman frantically ran up to me, begging me to adopt her baby. I was horrified. She was looking dead into my eyes. I froze. I couldn't say anything. I couldn't do anything. All of a sudden everything about school seemed so useless. What good is a degree if I can't understand why this is happening... much less stop it. I was prepared to drop out. Forget this college stuff. I went straight to Professor Wynter's house. This is what she had to say... "What are the strategies that your disciplines use to keep this woman invisible? Marginal to its discourse/paradigm. Study it, figure it out. These are the strategies that destroy her. These strategies are defined here at the university: from the discourse of economics which prescribes underdeveloped favelas and inner cities as it develops the West; to the discourse of anthropology as it creates an Other and then studies it; to the literature department which creates special courses in African American fiction so that 'American Fiction' courses continue ostensibly to exclude African American writers; to a feminist paradigm which cannot explain the social reality of crack addicted women in inner cities." "Carmen," she said, almost whispering, "Remember the passage in *Ambiguous Adventure* by Cheikh Kane. You have a right to go to their schools. Find out how they conquered without being in the right. Remember that after the cannons were fired, it was the school and its system of logic that maintained the hegemony of the West. So you see, it is the system of logic, as generated and recycled at the university level, that systematically and systemically creates the lived experience of that woman you saw. Always keep her in your mind as you go into your classes. "My darling," she said in her Jamaican accent, "You must stay here with us... and never forget her."

MY CLASSROOM

21.

Tomorrow the kids come. I'm reaaally a teacher. I have my own classroom. South Central was mind-blowing, devastating... but not even that school looks like this one. How will I create an environment for my 6th graders that is power! Magic! Intense... in the middle of this bottomless pit. Wait! What the hell was that? A rat?! (Damn... them suckers grow big in NY!) Where the hell did it go? In my closet? Here let me shake this closet and scare dat little fat sucker out. Hey... this closet moves. Look at that BIGGGG hole! (later that night) "Daddy, what did we do to keep the rats out?" "You don't remember? Plug up the holes with steel wool. (pause) Baby, what kinda school you at?" "Don't ask." I never told him about the real horrors--like the students who come in describing routine "round-ups" on the street as they play football and police officers who sweep the street and grab anyone for a line-up who fits the description of a Black or Latino male.

22.

I am designing my own curriculum in American Studies. Institute N.H.I., a Black think tank based in California of which I was one of the founders, gives me my intellectual backbone and motivation. I am really into this curriculum thang! "Clearly (Carmen's) remedy relies not on the providing of, say, night time basketball (which merely reinforces our society's warehousing paradigms), but of direct intellectual motivation through a minds-on approach to the issues that are of vital concern to the students; not least of which is the issue of their being, as minority students, discouraged from the engaging in a high level of intellectual activity, or to consider it a normal part of their lives" (a quote from Professor Wynter).

23.

Margaret, Alabama. A small rural town where my father and his 14 siblings were raised. I always loved coming to this place when I was growing up. Big Foot Country. That's what they call it. Red dirt. No locks on the doors. Play in the road all day (it's not a street because it's not paved... no kinda tar, just dirt). I haven't been here in at least 10 years (they have street signs now).

I see now the way crack devastated these American Backwoods. Dirty, boarded up shacks that huge families called home... like the one my grandmother lives in and raised all her children in. Trailers resting on bricks on the unlevelled land, bulging because bricks cannot sustain the weight of the house and its inhabitants. This was always there. Strange, I never saw this before. Yet I know Margaret hasn't changed. My sight has. It's a new vision. I understand something new: where this comes from... and where we must go.

24.

I honestly never meant to stay in school this long. To teach this long. Something draws me here. I'll be here for awhile.

Carmen Kynard
Wings Academy

Bi-racial Blues

People always tell me I'm "the best of both worlds"...but they don't realize that I am stuck between them. Being half black and half white puts me in a weird place. I'm not all one or all the other. I fit right in the middle, only that's not where I'd like to be.

In the sixth grade I hung out with a crowd of black girls. I always

got teased about having only half the color and half the rhythm. I never minded; I was just happy that it never excluded me from the gang. As far as they were concerned if I was half black, then I was black. It wasn't until junior high school that it became more of an issue. In seventh grade most of my friends were black. I guess by junior high kids become more aware of the people they hang out with; race doesn't only become an issue but behavior does as well. Towards the eighth grade, I had more white friends. My black friends labeled me as confused because I spoke proper English, hung out with white girls, but still committed myself to staying friends with my black friends. I was told that I didn't act black enough to be black. I remember a time that I was in class and I had left the room for a short while. Not too long afterwards, I came back to find that my black pencil box had been colored in on one side with white-out. A message over it read: "Not black, Not white...what is she?" I

laughed because if I hadn't, I would have cried. Not only was it coming from friends, but from family. I was repeatedly told that I had an inferiority complex because I was hanging out with white girls and needed to feel validated. The funny thing was, the white girls never accepted me fully either. I believe that that's because of my taste in music, the slang I spoke, and my "other" friends. I tried and tried to fit in, watching my language,

changing the music I listened to, and even my clothes. I can remember actually buying certain albums to fit in. It didn't matter. Nothing could change either group's perception of me.

Because I never felt that I fit in anywhere, I did what seemed natural. I became close with those like me. My three best friends and two ex-boyfriends are all bi-racial. It seemed easy and comfortable to be with them. The best part was there was never any explaining to do about why I acted or spoke a certain way. None of them ever got scared and shied away or teased when I acknowledged both parts of me. The thing is they all seemed to connect with one race more than the other. I never felt that way. I was always right in the middle. I think my features are the reason for my feeling that way. I look right about in the middle. I have full lips, and pale skin. My nose and hair are somewhere in between as well. I never looked either part.

When I hit high school, I stopped trying to find a race to stick with. I was content with being Andrea and ended my search for a one-race label. Although it sounds odd because I am both black and white, I always feel the need to make a connection to one. What didn't help was that I had friends who always made my racial make-up an issue. Every joke or story that was told by a black friend had to be explained differently to me because I wasn't black and didn't understand black people and their lifestyle. Again, the only thing I can do is laugh because if not, I am accused of being TOO sensitive.

Because I never felt that I fit in anywhere, I did what seemed natural. I became close with those like me.

Now the trouble is, I'm looking for a history, a people to identify with. People always tell me that I'm black and should label myself as such, but I can't. Black people have common connections to each other. White people react to me differently than fully black people. I can never get involved in a discussion about how whites react to black people or something as trivial as black hair products.

In many cases I find myself defending what I am and who I am. There was one time when I decided to tell a black friend of mine that all the times she had ridiculed me, I had laughed out of sheer discomfort. I let her know that after awhile the comments about being half white began to hurt, not to mention all the jokes she had made to me about not knowing what to be black *really* is. I mean, what does that mean? Does it mean that because I am half white I am less black? Yes, I am less black...but I'm not. My thoughts came out all jumbled up and I ended up crying because I became so frustrated with trying to put feelings into words...feelings that I've never been able to explain. Then she described how she has a white friend who she always teases about being white. She told me about how the jokes never bothered her friend and how I have "issues I need to deal with." Yes, I've come to a conclusion. The issue I need to deal with is: how do I deal with those who constantly make an issue of my race(s). I have come to the conclusion that *she* was the one that needed to deal with the fact that I am both black and white. Before then I never realized that it could make anyone else uncomfortable. It just seems that unless I'm with my bi-racial coalition, I feel like I'm always gonna be on the outside looking in.

If this article about me confused you, you're starting to get a better sense of my life caught between two separate worlds.

Andrea Barrow
Student
Urban Academy

Telling The Truth: A Journey

It is not that being gay is the most important part of my life, nor is the reason I came out to my students an attempt to quell the barrage of personal questions my students ask. It is a response to the assumption, of my students and people in general, that I am straight. In the summer of 1995, I attended a summer institute addressing racism and prejudice. In this venue I began to come out to people I was meeting for the first time. Previously, I would come out only to people I had already known fairly well. When acquaintances assumed that I was straight, I had allowed them to continue in their erroneous assumption. However, letting a remark pass in which I was assumed to be straight was tantamount to lying. Once the assumption was left unchallenged, it became fact. As a result, I then needed to explain to prospective friends that I was not what they had assumed I was. Did they then wonder about other issues in which I had misrepresented myself?

I noticed that heterosexuals declare their orientation in subtle ways, without much thought and without any risk. In polite conversation, networking among professionals, at conferences and workshops, adults freely talk about their spouses, their in-laws,

children and home lives. Being homosexual means steering clear of such topics, paying attention to pronouns, always using "I" instead of "we" (so as not to arouse the dreaded question, "Are you married?"), being as non-descriptive as possible about your personal life. People who know me even a little bit know that this is the antithesis of my personality.

I longed for the right approach. How could I let people know that I was gay just as they let me know that they were straight? The easiest solution would be to bring up my "lover" as people would discuss their wives and husbands. A simple approach, yet too indirect to suit me or some people's naiveté. Also, I was troubled by my need to legitimize my orientation by using my lover as a shield. If I were single, how would I go about it? As with most social interactions, we learn from our parents, relatives, friends and the media. I had never seen, heard or read about how homosexuals make their orientation known to others in polite conversation. So at thirty-five, I was still refining my social interaction skills.

During the summer institute, I was completely honest with new acquaintances. Feeling my oats with coming out in this way made the institute a seminal point in my life. I noticed how people were unaccustomed to gays being so open without being flamboyant. I stopped speculating what someone's response to my homosexuality might be, only venturing forth if I thought the odds were in my favor. I no longer felt that I had to justify, qualify or explain my orientation. I did not wait to ascertain whether people supported gay rights, had gay friends, or were homophobic. I stopped asking permission to let people know who I was.

In the past, being in the closet with students had been a moral dilemma; now it became a moral imperative. At first when students would ask if I were married, I would answer in the negative. When I was single there was little issue in this. When I met and subsequently moved in with my lover (also at issue is the term lover, or any other term that seems to suggest less than husband or wife) to answer "No" to the question "Are you married?" was no longer acceptable. I am married. We share a household, sleep in the same bed even when we are angry with each other, support each other through crises, family problems, et al. We have morning discussions of what we should have for dinner, who is going to take the dogs out, who is going to do laundry and who did those things last time. We worry about money, save and spend jointly and, in general, live the life of a married couple. So yes, I am married. To say that I am not is to belittle the core of my home life.

At first, when students asked about my marital status, I began to say that I was married. When students then asked about my wife, I would explain that I wasn't married in the traditional sense. This would confound them and somehow communicate the message that any further questioning would not be welcomed. I longed for the wherewithal to tell them the truth, up front, directly, without shame, embarrassment or equivocation. Heterosexual teachers never think about this, never go through this moral dilemma, and feel perfectly comfortable either disclosing personal details to their students or making it clear that it is none of their business.

Keeping my sexual orientation from my students had always weighed on my conscience. How could I teach my students to be proud of their heritage, their cultures, their native languages, their

continued . . .

customs and beliefs if I couldn't do the same? After all, I had quit smoking cigarettes because I didn't want my students to smoke them. In addition, I had already come out to the faculty of my school. Knowing that the school that I work in is progressive, humanitarian and alternative, I knew that coming out to my students posed little risk to my professional career. After the institute, I promised myself that I would not let the next opportunity evade me.

That opportunity finally presented itself. I had walked into a colleague's class to discuss a student. While I waited for her to finish a conversation she was having, I looked at the activity her students were engaged in. Students were reading books from "The Rainbow Curriculum": *Heather has Two Mommies* and *Dad's New Roommate*, books written for children that show same-sex marriages and same-sex parenting. In talking with the students, I learned that the class was involved in a human sexuality unit dealing with sexual orientation and prejudice. When I asked the teacher about other activities she had planned, she told me of the speakers she had lined up. We discussed the drawbacks of having people with whom the students have no connection address our students and then leave, allowing our students to dismiss them as they walk out the doorway. As an alternative, I offered to come into her class and speak to her students about being a homosexual. She readily accepted and told me that she had always wanted to ask me, but knew that she would have to wait until I was ready to volunteer.

I knew that whatever was to happen in the classroom would be manageable. My concern centered on what would happen in the hallways or the student lounge. My school is a very close-knit community. I wondered if students would stop talking to me, afraid of being branded gay by association. Since we have no faculty bathrooms, I was also afraid of how students would behave around me in the men's room.

I did not receive much support from close friends and colleagues at first. Fear of discrimination, being ridiculed by students, even violence were all possibilities I was reminded of. As a courtesy, I apprised the principal of my intention. She did not understand why I was about to expose my personal life to our students out of context. After much thought, I met with her again. I began to understand why in fact I needed to do this. One reason was to attach a face, real, concrete, someone they already knew, to the concept. If any students were gay bashers, it might make a difference to them to know that someone they knew--possibly learned from and respected, someone who had helped them with something they needed--was gay.

The other reason was for the ten percent of the students who might be gay, sitting in a room feeling as if they were the only ones

in the world and as if they had no one to talk to or to look towards as a role model. Thinking back to when I first realized that I was gay, I recall that there were no people who were publicly gay. There were no openly gay men or lesbians in Congress; the President did not have openly homosexual friends. I remember watching Paul Lynde on *The Hollywood Squares*, an obviously effeminate man. I assumed he was gay, although it was never mentioned. I wondered about *The Odd Couple* and thought that Felix Unger was gay, rationalizing his wife Gloria and their two children as T.V. magic. Of course there were magazines I could look at and gay bars I could go to. What I lacked was a vision. At sixteen most teenagers are busy planning their lives: What will I be doing when I am thirty, forty, fifty, etc.? These fantasies are largely based on the lives of one's parents or role models. I knew that I would not be marrying a woman or having children, so I could not envision my future at all.

I had discussed with my colleague the appropriate preparation and timing for her class. I had asked her to have her students write down questions they wanted to ask in advance so I could prepare myself. They knew that a "someone" was going to speak to them about being a homosexual but they did not know who that person was. Their questions were written anonymously so as to insure their candor.

When I walked into the room, the students were visibly very shocked. I'm not sure

whether they were surprised that I was gay or because they never expected one of their teachers to come out to them. There was an air of apprehension in the room. We were all very tense. As I walked through the room, I began to scan for familiar faces. Most of the students had been in my classes previously. I knew almost everyone by name. As I began my story I could see the shock of recognition cross everyone's face. When I spoke about carrying around a secret that couldn't be shared, some nodded in empathy. When I spoke about fear of rejection, feeling like my friends and family didn't really know me, they understood. When I spoke about what is was like to be called "faggot" by my classmates, I saw faces that flushed with guilt. When I asked if anyone had ever teased someone about being gay, most nodded.

I do not think that students' opinions of me have changed much. Students who hated me probably still do. Students who respected me do so as well. Most students wrote me to tell how much they respected me for having the courage to come out to them. It is this respect that carries them across the threshold to tolerance and acceptance, since many of these students come from countries where sexuality is not discussed and "alternative" lifestyles are punishable by death. While some students could not get past their

How could I teach my students to be proud of their heritage, their cultures, their native languages, their customs and beliefs if I couldn't do the same?

religious beliefs, all were able to tell me how they felt.

I feel enormously proud of what I have done. I have given students a model for being proud of who they are. My students are immigrants, often the victims of prejudice and scorn by "Americans," immigrants of past generations. There is little validation for their heritage, culture and language in today's society. For the ten percent of these immigrants who might also be homosexual, they are all the more scorned and hated. I don't claim to be the spokesperson for gay America, nor do I claim responsibility for the movement of the gay agenda. I simply live my life with values, ethics and pride.

Aaron Listhaus
Queens International HS

The Homecoming

I didn't want to come to America. I didn't want to leave my friends. I didn't want to miss the beauty pageant or the dance group performance that we'd spent months preparing for. I wanted to experience the anxiety that came with taking entrance exams for middle school. I wanted to go to the same mission boarding school that two of my sisters attended and follow them to the high school. Although it had been difficult at times to go through the same kindergarten and elementary schools where the teachers had taught five brothers and sisters before me, I wanted the tradition to continue.

Alas, what I wanted didn't matter. My eldest sister had promised our mother before she left for the United States that should anything happen to her, my sister would raise the youngest child. My mother died in April, 1971 so I was going to live with my sister in America.

It took four years to get my father's consent for me to leave. Over those years, I heard many stories about America—the streets are paved with gold, kids don't leave their homes to go to school, they turn on the T.V. Everyone talked about and prepared for my departure many times. Each time the scheduled date came and passed and I remained in Liberia, I became less interested in America.

A few days after my birthday in July, 1975 my brother, Junior, told me that I was leaving for America. I had been told that before and it didn't happen so I didn't believe him.

The wheels were in motion, though. I got immunization shots that were required for entry into the United States. Junior went to the principal of my school and settled on a date that would be my last day at school. On that Friday people brought things and we had a party. I made something, too, fried fritters. It was the first time I'd made fritters that were nice and fluffy and not flat like pancakes.

My friends cried and said their goodbyes. They promised to write and I said I'd write, too. But I didn't cry. It was officially my last day, yet I believed that I would be back in school again when Monday rolled around. I knew that something would go wrong and, once again, I wouldn't leave for America. So I didn't embarrass myself with weepy goodbyes. I just had fun.

But when I got home, Junior had bought a suitcase that sat opened on the sofa. I got scared.

Junior asked me to bring out all of my "good" clothes which he folded neatly and packed into the suitcase. My favorite everyday "yard" clothes—the too small dress with the faded brown bottom and gold top that my godmother had sent me from America when I was five and the light blue skirt with the hole in the back where a dog chasing me had grabbed—were not good for America.

Junior took me to his tailor and had me measured for a lapa suit and gown. Except for African costume day at school, when we abandoned our uniforms, I never wore lapas. Since I was leaving Liberia, I guess my brother felt I had to look Liberian.

When Monday morning came around, I woke up and got dressed for school as usual. But Junior told me I didn't have to go. He said that I was "finished" with that school. No more Monrovia Demonstration Elementary School. No more Mrs. Wilson standing at the gate with her long, fat rattan. Then it hit me. I realized that I really was leaving for America.

I crawled into my favorite spot in the house, a tiny space between the sofa and the wall, and cried. I cried for hours. I wouldn't talk to anyone or leave my spot. I couldn't talk to anyone.

My brother, Leon, stole away from college to come to see me off. My two sisters who were away at school had not made the honor

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roll the week before and so could not leave campus. My sister, Sista, with whom I shared a room at Junior's house, had been meaner to me all weekend. She blamed me for leaving her alone.

Leon arrived home with two 45 records, an Elton John record about a man leaving on a plane and "When Will I See You Again," by the Three Degrees. He played the Three Degrees' record and pleaded with me to leave my corner.

Leon was my favorite brother, but I never did anything he told me to without giving him a hard time. If I was out in the yard playing and he called me in to study my lessons or do my homework, I'd flip my hand down toward the ground (a sign that meant drop dead) and keep on playing. A few minutes later, he'd sneak up behind me, but my friends would let me know he was coming and I'd take off running.

Leon would chase me around the neighborhood and dogs would chase him chasing me. (It was during one of those chases that a dog came from the side and got a hold of my skirt.) We'd be cursed for running through other people's yards, disrupting conversations and jumping over pots of food cooking on coal stoves. I'd usually run around a couple of times before he could catch me. When he caught me, however, Leon would whip me all the way home.

We sat on a chair crying and listening to the record. "When will I see you again? When will we share precious moments? Will I have to wait forever? Will I have to suffer and cry the whole night through?"

I begged Leon to talk to Junior so he wouldn't make me leave, but he said that leaving was probably the best thing for everyone involved, because it would lessen the load Junior had to carry. Junior was under 30, recently married, and raising five siblings. He was glad to get rid of one.

Leon bathed me and got me dressed. I still cried and begged to stay even as everyone got into my uncle's car for the trip to the airport. Standing at the top of a flight of cement steps, I asked, "What if I threw myself down the steps and broke all of the bones in my body, will I have to go to America?" Junior stopped on about the fifth step, turned around and said, "Even if you fall, I will scrape you off the ground and put you and your broken bones on that plane." He stayed one step ahead of me for the rest of the way down, because he knew that if I could ask, I would do.

At the airport, Junior saw one of his friends who was also traveling. He asked her to watch me on the plane and make sure I got to my sister. I boarded that plane vexed with him, my uncle, the woman whom I'd sit next to, everyone.

The escalator at Kennedy International Airport is what most impressed me when I arrived. I recall watching in awe as clusters of people descended into what seemed like a cavern. When it was my turn to stand on this strange apparatus, I refused. My brother's friend tried with gentle words to goad me onto the "stair-machine." When we reached the bottom, I looked back and said to myself, "Moving steps?" I wondered if the other tales I'd heard about America were true.

As we drove along the Belt Parkway from the airport to my sister's apartment in Sheepshead Bay that Tuesday morning, I noticed that except for taller buildings, better paved roads, and a multitude of pink faces, New York didn't seem that much different from Liberia.

I barely knew my sister. She is almost 20 years older than I am. The longest time I'd ever spent with her was when she returned home for our mother's funeral in 1971. Other times that she returned home, we'd have to get all dressed up just to go to say hello to her. My fondest memory of her is of the time she wrote my name on the ten cents copy book she had bought for me when I was in kindergarten.

My sister had nothing good to say about the clothes in my suitcase. They were all my good clothes, most of which she had bought and sent home for me, but she called them crap. "Look at this, look at this," she said pulling up random socks that didn't have a mate to show to her friend. "Why would 'they' send this girl all the way here with one, one foot of socks?" She had sent them home like that, and my brother had kept them and included them, hoping that I'd meet their mates.

As my sister and her friend, another Liberian lady who is considered more relative than friend, rummaged through the suitcase in search of letters and other things that were packed in there, she made derisive comments about people I'd just left and was missing terribly. I was especially hurt by what they said about my sister-in-law, Junior's wife. They said that she had never wanted us to live with her and my brother and that she had resisted that idea for a long time, even after we were in the house. I loved my sister-in-law. If she had had a problem with us coming to live with her, once we were there, she didn't act like it. I never knew she didn't want me around on those Saturday evenings when I buttered and floured the pans that she used to bake cakes and breads for Sunday. I had no idea that she hadn't wanted me around. She always left extra batter in the bowl for me to lick.

I had to get out. I had only walked from the car to the building and I was afraid to go out, but I had to get out. I asked my sister if I could go for a walk, and she handed me keys. Tears were streaming down my face as soon as the apartment door closed behind me. I walked down the hallway and exited the building through the door we had entered earlier. With tear-clouded eyes, I stepped onto the sidewalk. It was only about five feet from the huge steel door. As soon as I stepped onto the sidewalk, I collided with a tall, skinny, blond haired man. He took a step back and let a thick glob of spit fly out of his mouth. "I hate niggers," he said and continued walking.

I was shocked by the spit that had landed on and was trickling down my shoulder. In Liberia, we reserved our spit for people we truly hated. But even then, people thought of something else they could do besides spitting. I remember once I spat on the ground in front of a girl I was vexed with in order to challenge her to a fight. (If she walked on it, we'd fight. If she walked around it, I'd curse her and she didn't care.) But that was the extent of my badness. This man had spit on me, and he didn't know me. I didn't know then what a nigger was, but I knew that he hated me and he didn't even know me.

As I wiped the spit off my shoulder with the handkerchief I had in my hand, I felt more alone than I'd ever felt in my entire life. It was the first time I'd ever experienced such hostility and I didn't like it. I was beginning to understand what being alone was, because I'd felt that way when I was with my sister in her apartment and when I was outside where I'd sought refuge. I wanted to be back home.

Over the next fifteen years, the one thing that was always on my mind was going Home. Even during college when I was inundated with schoolwork and travelling, it would just hit me. Home. It seems

strange now as I sit on this small rickety plane, looking at the red soil and lush green vegetation below that I realize that I am scared. I'm shaking. I'm wondering if the boy next to me notices. It's hot. I'm cold.

"It's not that bad, man," he tells the girl in the seat ahead. "People coming back to Monrovia. Some schools now open, de people making market, de now clear all those dead bodies from de airfield. You will see. It not da bad."

I sit on my hands to keep them from shaking and rock back and forth. I half listen to the boy's conversation and half listen to the phrase that's getting louder in my head. When the wheels of the plane hit the ground, I hear my voice clear above the cheers of the other passengers, "Oh God. I want to go home."

Julia Clark
IS 218

In the Classroom...

Writing Project teachers often take chances. We may decide to explore challenging issues with our students, experiment with unconventional pedagogical approaches, or open our classrooms to other colleagues. Thankfully, we are often willing to share both our successes and struggles with each other, whether it be in print or in conversation. In this section, Theresa Davidson describes how her initial uneasiness about race dissipated once she addressed the issue in her English class. William Klann shares the success of a project he initiated with the guidance of Alan Stein, a Writing Project teacher-consultant.

Acknowledging Racial Attitudes: It's Worth It

So how does it feel to be a white person reading memoirs, autobiographies, and fiction, written by African-American writers? I recently read *The White Boy Shuffle* by Paul Beatty. Why don't I just be honest? After reading the book, I feel guilty. The treatment Black people have received in this country is clear. Awful doesn't even capture the significance or the sheer horror of what has happened in the past and what continues in the present.

As a teacher of American History I cringe at the painful thought of facing my students with this truth. Many heroes I glorified for years were actually evil, cruel scoundrels. They were people who invaded other lands, took over, and enslaved their inhabitants. They wrote documents which guaranteed equal rights only for rich, white men. They spoke against one man owning another as a slave, while at the same time owning slaves themselves. They raped, tortured, lynched and pillaged.

So here I am, a member of the white race, teaching my mostly Black teenage students about the atrocities which other members of my race committed. I feel ashamed, humiliated, trapped by the past.

For many years this shame and embarrassment kept me from being honest with my students in the classroom. I never mentioned

the word race or discussed racial issues. I stuck to the subject matter, ignoring any allusions to race on my students' parts. I thought that perhaps if ignored, the students would be silenced.

One day several years ago, I was teaching a group in the resource room. A student who seemed volatile sat across from me talking to another teacher. He was discussing the Muslim religion with her. Wanting to steer clear of the conversation, I pretended not to hear what he was saying. He began to speak louder, looking over at me as he spoke. Still, I did not respond. Finally, he began to confront me, saying, "Hey, teacher, can't you hear me?" My response was to ask him to be quiet, because my group was being disturbed. He looked at me with fire in his eyes and said, "You're the White Devil! You're nothing but a White Devil!" I got up from my seat and called for security to come and remove him from the room.

I was upset. How dare he speak to ME, a TEACHER, in that way. He was breaking through my code of racial silence. I just wanted to blot him out. As he left in the hands of a security officer, he yelled out, "Sure, you're making me leave because you don't want to hear the truth." And he was right.

I thought about the incident for quite some time afterward, hoping with all my heart that I would not have to deal with that student again. I was afraid of the honesty with which he was confronting me. I wanted to push him far away from me.

Sometimes what we fear and try to avoid is the very thing we need. The new semester came and, sure enough, Warren was in my class. As he entered the room on that first day, our gazes locked. We both remembered.

Warren and I battled in class that day, and for many days afterward. I wanted to stay in my TEACHER role and he wanted...What did he want? "You can't teach." Then to other students, "Look at her. She doesn't know what she's doing." After a while, calling security, telephoning his parent, and threatening to fail him in the course proved futile. I felt battered by his constantly confrontational manner. He would not let up. Now I'm glad he didn't.

He wanted me to be real with him. I didn't realize it until a long time afterward, but back there in the resource room, Warren had tried to initiate a dialogue with me, which he stubbornly pursued, until I relented. I realized that I had to look at my racial attitudes and prejudices honestly. They were not going to go away. I saw that racial attitudes were real and present in each of my classes.

I believed that talking openly about them would help. I entered the racial dialogue which was ongoing among my students. I listened and found that I was listened to. I spoke honestly and respectfully and I found that I received honesty and respect in return. I began to see the misunderstandings and walls which my TEACHER role incited. I saw that I needed to be a person first, instead. That semester I embarked on a journey which changed my practice and also changed my life.

Warren became my bridge to a more truthful reality. As I took my first halting steps, I saw that he was more than willing to meet me. I remember listening for the first time to the anger he expressed toward policemen. I was horrified to learn that he and so many others of my students were harassed regularly, even on their way home from school. I, in turn, painfully spoke about racial prejudice

continued...

I experience while living in a primarily Black neighborhood.

In the next semester of that school year, Warren was in my class again. As a class we read *Native Son* by Richard Wright. Warren became very interested in the book and our class discussions were lively and open. Often I disagreed strongly with Warren's opinions, but I now accepted that he was allowed to have them. He began to listen to mine. He started to keep a notebook where he would write his opinions about parts of *Native Son*, or his thinking, generally. He would then periodically give me that notebook to read and discuss with him. Appreciation and respect developed. I ached, but I learned.

Now, several years further down the road, I am still learning. Every time a student comes and tells me his story of police brutality, or a Black colleague is concerned about traveling in my neighborhood because of an incident that happened years ago, I hurt. And I am embarrassed and humiliated all over again. But something is different now. I can talk honestly about prejudice and injustice. I can empathize when someone is hurting and receive sympathy when I've been treated unjustly. When I'm the one who has offended, I can look at it and apologize. I can also ask for apologies. It isn't easy. And it hurts a lot. But I've found over time that it's worth it.

Theresa Davidson
Automotive HS

The Shakespeare Seminar

The Shakespeare Seminar is a Theater Arts elective offered for English credit. This semester, we examined four plays in detail, including *Macbeth*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Othello*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Alan Stein, the on site teacher consultant for the Writing Project, and I decided to team teach; he was present during our Wednesday session, and he often dropped in on Thursdays. Alan helped me create exciting writing opportunities for the students, and his help was invaluable.

When I thought about ways to use writing in the Shakespeare Seminar, I had a few goals. I wanted the students to write often. I wanted the writing to enhance their understanding of the text. I wanted them to write for a wide range of purposes and in many different forms. I wanted them to work on revision. I wanted them to have fun with the writing. And I wanted the students to have a vested interest in their writing, to create pieces which they valued and saw as "meaningful."

The students were asked to keep a writing notebook which was used only in class. The notebooks contained logs, predictions, reflections, and specific written assignments designed to supplement and enhance their understanding of the texts. The assignments included the following:

*After finishing *Macbeth*, the students wrote a letter to Shakespeare to offer comments or to ask specific questions about the play.

*During *Othello*, they wrote a point-of-view piece which explored the relationships between the main characters.

*After finishing *Romeo and Juliet*, they revised the ending by selecting one moment where the tragedy could have been avoided and developing an alternate series of choices by the characters.

*During *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, students kept response logs and were given ten minutes at the end of each period to offer comments or ask questions about specific lines which "grabbed them."

We also asked the students to write about process. They wrote about their own writing process, the revision process, and the process of reflection. By the end of the semester, the notebooks contained many different styles and forms of writing, all of which reflected or enhanced the students' experiences with the four plays we examined.

Alan and I decided to have the students choose one or more pieces from their notebooks for revision purposes. We told them that the goal would be the creation of a book, a final published product which would contain their revised, edited pieces. "Plays, Letters and Books of Shakespeare" is the final result of our work in the Shakespeare Seminar.

THE PROCESS

I was pleasantly surprised by the students' willingness to write in class. From the very first assignment, they required, and desired, more time to write in class than I had anticipated. I was particularly impressed with Benjamin, Darren, and Tahisha; their eloquence and focus caught me quite off guard. At the same time, several students were working far below grade level from the very start. The class was heterogeneous, and I knew that the writing would be as varied as the academic abilities of the students. Even so, almost all of the students were able to focus on in-class writing assignments and make contributions to their notebooks and the class discussions which would follow.

I must admit that several students dropped out completely, including one special education student and one truant. Both seemed confused and frightened by the intensity of the in-class writing. They both seemed to enjoy Shakespeare's plays when we discussed them in class, but their writing skills were so far behind their verbal skills that it was nearly impossible for them to express themselves in writing. Many students also came extremely late during the semester, so their contributions were erratic, at best.

Alan and I became aware of the attendance problem immediately. The project we developed took this into account. When it came time to publish our work at the end of the class, all students were expected to select one (or more) pieces from their notebooks for revision. Therefore, if they missed one or two of the in-class writing assignments, it limited their choice. The students could make up an assignment they had missed if they desired, but making up in-class assignments was not required. Every student who had written anything was expected to revise and publish at least one piece. The revision and publication of at least one piece was a non-negotiable class requirement from the very first.

I was surprised that each student knew almost immediately which piece they wished to revise for the final book. In fact, it was difficult to get them to read all of their work before making their

NYCWP NEWSLETTER

selection. Their choices were varied, encompassing every type of writing assignment offered during the class. The level of writing was equally varied.

After the initial entry of their first drafts, each student was placed in a small revision group of two or three students. Alan and I provided each group with a model for feedback, including active listening and the fishbowl technique. This conversation was typical:

- Simonica: "You didn't explain anything about..."
Mario: "No! You have to say it like this: "What I heard when you read your piece was..."
Simonica: "Oh, right."
Karlyn: "Yeah! Show some respect!" (Laughter)
Simonica: "What I heard you say was..."

After the feedback sessions, we asked the students about their notions concerning revision. Most of them thought of revision in terms of editing, a traditional view of many students in this school. We dissected the word (re/vision = to see again...) and asked them to "see their pieces again" using the feedback from their groups as fuel for change and growth.

Their second drafts emerged slowly. When these drafts were completed, we asked the students to write about the process of revision. I was pleased to see a wide variety of tactics and approaches being used in their second efforts. Some students had revised through addition of detail, some revised through subtraction of tangential material, some had scrapped their first effort altogether, and some had decided to change form rather than content. They shared their different approaches to revision and took note that nobody had mentioned spelling or grammar at all.

As we closed in on final drafts, we discussed editing. Certain students were able to edit their own pieces by themselves or with the help of a writing partner. Many needed to meet with Alan or me in private conferences concerning editing, and all of them received written editing comments on printed drafts. Most of the students were able to edit from our written or verbal suggestions, but others needed help that bordered on remediation.

One student in particular needed more support. He used invented spelling, but he was unable to connect sounds to letters so the "words" did not resemble his ideas in the least. He was unable to read his own text at all. He had no strategies to decode text. At the same time, he was dedicated and responsible. He knew how to use the computers better than I. In short, he was a mystery.

I decided to have him dictate his ideas to me as I recorded them. We tried to base our work on his first draft, but we could only make sense of several sentences. His final piece is in the anthology.

The editing process felt rushed and incomplete. There is never enough time! But we did manage to put forth our best effort in creating the anthology.

Here are two pieces included in the anthology.

Iago, the Villain

*I have a secret to be told on the down low,
that I, Iago, hate a man named Othello.*

*The reasons why, you will soon learn,
why I take 2 "O's" and 1 "T" and pray that's where he'll burn.
I just can't understand,
why I wasn't his right hand.
He passed the title on to another,
why did he have to play a brother.
I will make him take the life,
of the "sweet" one he calls his wife.
By whispering vile rumors in this ear,
his wife won't live to see next year.
I've done my deed, and Desdemona is dead,
it should have been Othello instead.
Who cares! As long as they're not together,
now I can rest with ease forever.
Everyone dies, and everybody knows,
that I was Othello's biggest foe.
Now I'm punished, tortured, cursed by all the land,
and I only have one thing to say...Damn!*

Benjamin Salley

*William Shakespeare
Back in the days old time
Drive 60049 Ackers St. 43b*

Dear William Shakespeare:

I'm writing to you in regard to your two films that I have seen which are "MacBeth" and "Romeo and Juliet".

I think that "MacBeth" is one of the most exciting, daring, courageous films I have ever seen. You would have loved it! I love it from the very beginning, where Polanski has the witches bury the head of a dead knight in the sand with his knife and a drip of blood, to where MacBeth meets the three witches and they tell him his future. From the murder of Duncan all the way to the very end where MacBeth beheaded by the honorable McDuff the movie brings your words to life. I feel that "MacBeth" is one of your best plays, and I think you are a fine author.

I also think that "Romeo and Juliet" was a great play. It is a beautiful story about two lovers who love each other more than life itself. I think it is a wonderfully written romantic story. "Romeo and Juliet" proves that there really is a such thing as true love. Their passion for each other was a never ending passion that only two people who are truly in love could feel. However, I was very saddened that the two lovers had to die in the end. I would have loved a happy ending where the two finally do get to be together and live happily ever after. Despite the death of the two lovers (or maybe because of it!), I think "Romeo and Juliet" is a great play. I love your work!

*Yours truly,
Tahisha Beresford*

THE RESULT

As for my goals, I feel that I was partially successful. The students did write often. The writing did enhance their understanding

continued...

of the text. They did write for a wide range of purposes and in many different forms. They did work on revision. But did they have fun with the writing? Did they have a vested interest in their writing? Did they value it and see it as "meaningful"?

On the last day, Alan and I asked the students to reflect on their experiences in the computer room and in the class in general. The feedback was honest, insightful and helpful. Their reflections also gave me a taste of their feelings about their writing.

I now have reason to believe that some of the students did have fun and considered their work important. Here are a few examples which surprised me - and pleased me - very much:

I notice that my writing has improved and I can write freestyle. I also notice that when I write I am in a world of my own... Anonymous

...when you get response from other people, they direct you and help you see how you can change up the whole piece... Anonymous

I made changes in my piece because my class helped me put things in order. Plus I became Desdemona... Simonica

The first draft, I just wanted to get everything down on paper...but the final draft I really got busy....Richard

I picked...Desdemon's Diary because I thought of more things to write about, and I love role playing. I felt I was really her in a way. Desdemona was my favorite character in "Othello"Karlyn

I have never had much luck with "projects" which require a "product" to be created, but this has been a different sort of product. The book itself seems to be a celebration of the process; while the process was different for every writer, it was meaningful and challenging for almost everyone.

William Klann
Erasmus Hall Campus HS for
Humanities and the Performing Arts

When Schools Close...

Two of our writers, Amanda Gulla and Nancy Richardson, share their experiences of working in schools that are about to close. Both pieces were written in the schools' final year of operation--Gulla's school in 1996 and Richardson's a year later. Gulla is now at PS 41 in Greenwich Village and Richardson is currently working at Martin Luther King, Jr. HS on the Upper West Side of Manhattan.

Although the closing of each school resulted from different circumstances, both pieces reflect the emotions the writers felt about the loss of their professional communities. We know many Writing Project teachers have worked under similar conditions. We encourage you to respond.

Closing Governors Island

I saw Jeremy today. I took what was left of my class to the Aquarium and there he was with his new class and his new teacher. His deep dimples and curly hair made him stand out from the hundreds of children crowded around the beluga whales. He stared at me for a minute when I called out to him. He couldn't quite wrap his five-year-old mind around what Ms. Gulla was doing there in front of him. His mother ran over and hugged me. "Boy, does he miss you!"

Just that morning, I'd been thinking about Jeremy. As the school bus passed the Verrazano Bridge, I remembered how he loved to talk about bridges, and knew the name of every one in the New York area. Before they moved to Staten Island, I told his mother I wouldn't be surprised if he grew up to be an engineer.

I started this year with twenty-six kindergartners. In the beginning of the year it seemed as if they were all clamoring for attention at once. I quickly became adept at reading who could do what, who needed help when, and how to tie fifty-two shoes and still get to a prep on time. As the Coast Guard proceeds in shutting down Governors Island, my class has dwindled steadily. So far, I'm down to fifteen kids. I'll be losing three more next week. These kids have come such a long way. Brittany couldn't form any recognizable letters in the beginning of the year. Now she writes her name and can spell a few words. Jayla is writing her own story books. I wish I could be around to see what happens in their lives as they progress through school.

Life in the military often means moving frequently. Over the six years I've been on the island, I've seen a lot of children come and go when their parents were reassigned. I've noticed that about three weeks before they move, they begin to detach. The most agreeable, sweet-natured kids will pick fights with their friends and act out in class. This behavior accelerates as the moving date approaches. Imagine this happening to an entire community over the course of a few months. I sometimes picture the island as a ghost town, with snow drifts blowing through the abandoned commissary and the ferry terminal overtaken by seagulls. Not a likely fate for this real estate gem, but at times like this the imagination tends to wax poetic.

It is easy to seem a bit over the top in talking about a place like Governors Island. There is no other place like it in my experience. It is the oldest military base in the country, in continuous operation over three hundred years. The Coast Guard has decided they are unable to afford to maintain the base, which is so expensive because of its landmark buildings and ferry access. It is hard to believe that in a year in which Congress gave the Pentagon billions more than it asked for, it couldn't spare the Coast Guard a few extra million to maintain its largest base anywhere in the world. Sure, they will still be in operation in this region. I just hope those weekend fishermen in East Hampton aren't anywhere near the railings of their boats when they have that sixth margarita. Even if search and rescue services aren't cut, there is a tragic disregard for history at work here. Can you imagine the French offering a three hundred year old military base for sale?

For the six years I've been teaching on the island, I've been in one of the few New York City public schools that is worthy of the

children it endeavors to educate. The building is clean, safe, well-equipped, and built on a kid-friendly scale. I remember some of the crumbling buildings I taught in before I came to Governors Island—places that reflect a total lack of regard for children and teachers. In most of the public schools I've seen, a playground is a fenced-in patch of concrete. At my school, children have green lawns to play on, and state of the art equipment to work with. That is only as it should be. No child deserves less.

On some level, it's easy to dismiss all this rage as anger and sadness over losing a nice, cushy job. There are plenty of people who will never understand that there is nothing easy about being responsible for children's education. The only thing I can compare it to is doing a one-woman interactive theater piece for six hours a day, where not all of the audience members necessarily want to be there. Sure, I will miss the familiarity. Certainly I'm apprehensive about leaving the colleagues who have become my dear friends. But beyond all that is the sense that here is an exemplary school that exists as a part of a totally unique, historically rich community. And it is likely to end up as a gambling resort or some other profit-making venture.

I know I'm a lot luckier than someone getting downsized from a corporation. At least I know I'll have a job. But there is this feeling of helplessness and frustration. There is nothing we can do to save our school. Its closing is not about us. Last week we planted a time capsule on the campus. The Coast Guard put a granite marker over it that looks remarkably like a tombstone. Normally, I have great school spirit and a strong sense of history. I thought I'd want to contribute something to be remembered in the time capsule. When the time came, I felt too despondent to bother. My desire to hold on in these dwindling days far exceeds my ability to grasp. To feel better in the face of this impending loss, I'll need to access a child's adaptability. Just let go, and be open to the idea that someplace new can feel like home. After all, it seemed to work for Jeremy.

Amanda Gulla
PS 41

Goodbye, James Monroe

I was racing along 110th Street on the twelfth of November in 1993, clutching a *New York Times* as I headed toward my car pool rendezvous spot. I happened to glance at the front page of the *Times* when my eyes jumped from the words "Ramon Cortines" to "Plans to Close Two Big High Schools" and finally "James Monroe." I stopped in my tracks. Moments later, I met my car pool, which was full of Monroe teachers, and proceeded to read the *Times* article to my astonished audience. By the time we arrived at Monroe, everyone was dazed by the news. Yes, we knew we'd been on the SURR list of troubled schools for some time, but to read about plans for our demise in the *New York Times* was a shock to all of us. (Mr. Cortines later wrote a letter to the Monroe staff apologizing for the unseemly way we had learned about the plans for the closing of our

school.)

A week after the *Times* article came out, the initial shock we had felt had changed to disbelief, anger and anxiety. The 1997 closing date seemed distant. Some thought things might change, that maybe the decision to close Monroe would be reversed. New issues had emerged for staff and students. Meetings were held, letters were written and discussion never stopped.

Our Writing/Study Committee was meeting at this time. Gloria Golding (another teacher) and I had agreed to co-chair the group because the NYC Writing Project had just left Monroe the previous semester. Thank heavens we had our committee. It provided a place for us to share thoughts and feelings. We talked and wrote about our concerns.

Gloria Golding describes the situation as follows: "Our Writing/Study Committee met for its usual weekly meeting. The members strolled in one by one with open mouths and drooping faces that had disbelief written all over them. An endless series of questions poured out: 'Why are they taking the drastic step of closing the school?' 'Are there not other ways of helping to remedy the poor academic performance of the failing students?' 'What will become of the students?' 'What will become of us?' Alas, we took turns telling how we felt. This was a forum for venting our pent-up emotions."

When word got around, the students echoed our concerns. It was confusing for them to hear that their school would be closing. Most of them had never before heard of a school closing. Their friends and families pelted them with questions about Monroe: Was it a dangerous place? Why was it closing? Did they learn anything in school? What were the teachers like? Many students were completely overwhelmed by the situation also.

Some of us felt as though we were on a deserted island. Others saw themselves adrift in the wide ocean with no rescue ship in sight. The bottom had fallen out of the bucket. As we listened to each tell of varied feelings, we tried to comfort one another. We felt the need to try to formulate plans to help prevent this terrible thing from materializing.

Were we too late?

Our writing team agonized together, brainstormed together, laughed and cried together. These processes strengthened our bonds. Decisions had to be made. Through healthy, practical discussions, we were able to help each other make the painful choice, to stay or to go at once. We now found it necessary to integrate resumé preparation into our meeting agenda, a facet we had never thought of before.

In spite of the many excellent strategies proposed, the powers that be would not relent and the decision to close the traditional James Monroe High School in June of 1997 remained firm. Hence the exodus of students and staff began. Now the halls seemed lonely; the torch was dimmed.

In September 1994, the restructuring plan went into effect. There was no new freshman class and Monroe took on a new look. Some of our colleagues had already gone to other schools and information came filtering back to us slowly. One former Monroviaan reported, "It took a little bit of adjustment to change schools, but now I'm glad I'm here." An oft-heard comment from those at different schools was "You never know how much you had until you don't have it anymore."

continued . . .

According to a staff member who remained, "The atmosphere of our school is as if someone had died. So many of our colleagues have either retired or transferred." On the other hand, this teacher also noted that it had been interesting to see former colleagues really blossom in their new school environments.

In June I handed in six choices on the school transfer list to the Union rep. I even had a job interview at an alternative school. I'm so tired. Soon we'll all be starting over. Each of us is trying to decide on the best direction to take. I know somehow life will go on, but there is a big question mark. Where will we be the day after Labor Day?

Nancy Richardson
Martin Luther King, Jr. HS

More Reflections on Reading...

In our previous issue teachers and students reflected on their development as readers. Their stories inspired other Writing Project colleagues to share their experiences with us. Below Donna Mehle and Amy Goldfarb take us on yet another journey back in time.

Story Time with Daddy

"Red dog, green dog, blue dog," Daddy recited in a droopy voice as he propped himself up on an elbow next to me. Uh-oh. He wasn't going to be hanging in long. Darn. It didn't matter that I'd heard Go Dog Go a million times before. I wanted to hear it again. I loved hearing Daddy's silly voice while my eye scanned the page looking for my favorite purple dog. But I forgave him. There was tomorrow night, I knew he'd get through it then. Story time was a nightly ritual in my home.

When I decided to teach high school I never thought I'd wind up recreating that ritual in different shapes and forms for my 15 and 16 year olds but I find myself doing it more and more.

It all started in my third year of teaching when I happened to read an excerpt from *The House on Mango Street* in a ninth grade English class. By the grace of God I was observed that day. I was nervous, however, because I didn't feel my lesson was substantive enough. Reading aloud? Reader response? Nice, but what did you do with it? I was shocked when my supervisor thought it was an effective lesson although it could have used a couple of additional pieces. She praised the reading aloud as a way to challenge kids. She also reminded me that my acting training paid off in my reading skills. Hello? It's funny how you take things for granted. On a more practical level, she informed me that responding to a text read aloud is good practice for the Regents Exam that loomed in the future. Terrific. I had permission to do what I sensed teenagers enjoyed just like I did as a 5 year old child (and even as a 32 year old!).

But because I'm a good Irish Catholic, I didn't trust this permission. Reading aloud was just too, well, pleasurable, I guess.

It just couldn't be right. Moreover, these kids are teenagers. Old enough to be reading for pleasure on their own. Why should I be catering to their disinterest in silent reading? So there. My mind was made up. I didn't do much more reading aloud the rest of the year.

Then we started reading the play *Fences* and we resumed reading aloud. It's a play, after all, so I felt that wasn't too sinful. But I started getting a lot of flack from my students for constantly interrupting to ask analytical questions. I had an open rebellion after a while. One week night I was out on a date and I was fretting about getting a lesson plan with the requisite discussion questions and writing exercises together. Finally, my companion was getting exasperated with my angst and said, "Why don't you just read the scene together and that's it? What's the big deal?" I was caught up short. "That just doesn't feel like enough, I guess," I told him. But the next day I decided to do just that and have the kids write in response to the scene afterwards. You can see it coming, can't you? It went just wonderfully. We all got a real sense of the scene and their responses were terrific. Hmmm.

Then I moved to EBC High School where many of my ninth graders were reading below grade level and for whom English is not the first language. I feared doing full length novels with them. I saw how difficult it was the year before to get through *Things Fall Apart* when only half the class was doing the reading at home. I decided to read aloud short memoirs, ask them to write their own and then do a play the first semester. The second semester we did another play and the students worked in groups reading aloud short stories from Latin America. I was trying to build in guaranteed reading. I didn't want to worry and be frustrated with the ability or willingness of my students to read on their own. I had too much else to worry about.

I spent last summer up at Lehman College in a course called "Literature for my Classroom." Here we broke up into small groups where we found, read, discussed and wrote about literature we were interested in. My group chose global short stories. Each of us picked three we wanted to read and we created our own anthology to read together. During the second meeting we had to decide how to work together. Someone suggested reading the stories aloud. Reading aloud? Oh my god. You've got to be kidding me. We're adults. And I don't want to suffer through some bad reading, thank you very much. Well, let me tell you, it was a wonderful experience. We were bowled over by how much we loved hearing folks read. It reminded me of working on a play together. It reminded me of being part of a more traditional community somewhere in another part of the world (we were doing global short stories, after all!) where folks sit around and tell stories. It was terrific. Besides enjoying the stories more, we formed a kind of reading community that wouldn't have happened in just the same way if we had just read silently and discussed. I'm convinced.

Part of that summer's work included presentations from different teachers about the work they were doing in their classrooms. I was impressed over and over again by the way the elementary teachers worked. They, of course, did a lot of reading aloud and reminded us high school teachers of the power of this technique. I decided to look for children's versions of myths to bring back to my 10th grade curriculum.

Another presentation was about independent reading groups in the English classroom. I had tried reading workshop in my classroom

and felt pretty disillusioned. It seemed, well, lonely. My students didn't particularly enjoy sitting around and reading by their lonesome. Some of my students just weren't able to. Independent reading groups seemed to be a good alternative. And they have been. My students really like picking a book (out of a small selection) and setting their own reading goals. Of course, it's been very different from what I'd like it to be. Instead of engaging in deep conversation to process the books, many of my groups spend the time simply reading, either aloud or silently. When I start to get upset with this (why aren't they talking!!!), I realize the absurdity of my desire to control their work. My students are reading. They're reading. They're not finishing the books, however. I was a bit disappointed to see only one person stand up when I asked to shake hands with those who honestly completed the books. But I know that they were reading when they were with me in class. That's more than I can attest to if I had assigned a novel for at home reading.

Of course, I still hope to find ways to encourage and support independent reading at home. I want my students to be able to read and respond to literature both in and out of class. I know this is an issue for many teachers around the city right now. Like them, I continue to search for answers.

So there you have it. I've come to embrace my high school classroom, whether it's a play we read together as a whole class or a memoir or myths they read in small groups. I find myself designing curriculum more and more around in-class reading rather than around the assumption that my students are reading at home. At the moment, it just doesn't happen by and large. Not to mention that it's a lot more fun doing it together. Kind of like story time with Daddy.

Donna Mehle
East Brooklyn Congregation HS
for Public Service: Bushwick

The Reading Rebellion

My 11th grade teacher settled the class down to begin its silent reading time. This was a twice a week event held every Monday and Friday for twenty- five minutes. I am not sure whether it was designed this way to get us, the students, engaged in reading, or more as a break from teaching for the teacher. The idea was for each student to read an assigned book, quietly and independently at his or her own pace.

This term's book was *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen, a book that would eventually become one of my favorites when I chose to read it two years later, but at this time, my junior year in high school, it was not even a consideration. I am by nature stubborn and obstinate. This makes me both always right and usually unable to follow directions and rules. This in mind, when I was handed my copy of the book, I took one look at its impressive size and decided against reading it. To be honest, it was not just the thickness of the book that repelled me, but the fact that at the time I was reading only books by JD Salinger and George Orwell. I would rotate the authors one after the other and when I had completed their nominal library, I would begin again.

As the murmurs in the class began to diminish and the heads began to lower into their books, either in sleep or in rapture, I would open my copy of *Pride and Prejudice* on top of my desk, and on my lap would be *Seymour, An Introduction*. As I turned the page in *Seymour*, I would turn the page to *Pride and Prejudice*. It was a simple procedure. My head was lowered. I was captured in thought and no one was the wiser. On occasion the teacher would venture from the desk and wander around to see what everyone was doing. As she neared my desk my heart would begin to beat as if out of my chest in anticipation of being caught cheating.

Cheating! I look back on it now, through the eyes of an adult and more importantly through the eyes of a teacher, and am bewildered at the idea that a student could get in trouble for reading. Today, with my students, I would be elated if I caught them reading. What a crime! Yet this is what I felt. If I was not reading what the teacher wanted me to read I would be in trouble. I know this because I was caught a few times. In fact, on one occasion my house was called: "Your daughter was found with a book!" I was then moved to the front of the class for silent reading where the teacher could keep her eye on me. This, however, while deterring me a bit, did not stop me. I just became more crafty in my deception.

I passed the class, or should I say classes, as this was done in almost all of my English classes throughout my time in high school. I dutifully spit back at the teacher all that she had told me about the book. I was able to answer all of her multiple choice and short answer questions, write her words in my essays. The "book report" was a little more difficult and required not only some of my own thoughts but time perusing Cliffs Notes as well.

*We were bowled over
by how much we
loved hearing folks
read.*

I was a cheater, a sneak, a liar... but, more importantly, I was a reader. This, however, did not carry much weight as a student. Perhaps this was one of the reasons I became a teacher. More importantly, it may be the reason I rarely, if ever, assign a book. My students are asked to read any book of their choosing within a theme. Hopefully, I am helping them to become readers without the cheating, sneaking, lying...

Amy Goldfarb
East New York Family Academy

Steal These Ideas

The formal and informal sharing of classroom projects and activities has always been an integral component of Writing Project seminars and meetings. Below, several of our colleagues provide us with a glimpse of a recent success. We encourage you to adapt whatever you like. You may even want to get in touch with some of these teachers, each of whom could tell you richer and more detailed stories about the work described below.

In July 1996, Annamary Holmes of IS 218 in Brooklyn participated in the Writing Project's advanced seminar, *Literature for my Classroom*. As a culminating activity of the course, teachers compiled an annotated bibliography of all the books and stories they had discovered. With this in mind, Annamary and teacher-consultant Lisa Rosenberg invited Annamary's students to produce an annotated bibliography of the books they read individually that year. The finished product, a fifteen page booklet, contains an annotated list of fiction and nonfiction works accompanied by summaries and critiques from the students. It is Lisa and Annamary's hope that this booklet will find its way into the hands of other students, providing them with a guide for possible outside readings.

Mark Neustadt of E.B.C. School for Public Service: Bushwick wanted to encourage his students in Global Studies to raise their own questions in response to reading assignments and class activities. So, Mark designed a new type of notetaking. Mark tells us that he asked students to draw "...a large 'L' on every page of their notebook, leaving a margin on the left side and a margin at the bottom. Students were instructed to review their notes daily and to write in the left-hand margin all questions that they had, and on the bottom of the page to write a one- or two-sentence summary of their notes, answering the lesson's Aim question." Mark hoped that this note-taking method, if done repeatedly, would keep students engaged in the material and encourage them to raise questions. This method bore fruit; students were writing their own questions and were writing more complete notes. In addition, after some time, they seemed better prepared for exams.

Graphs, charts and visual maps seem to help many students think about and prepare for writing a formal essay. To help students compare and contrast two readings done in class, Michael Lalan of E.B.C. School for Public Service Bushwick designed a chart. The chart had space for students to describe their thoughts and feelings about various aspects of the book or story: setting, character, plot, conflict, etc. When it came time to write an essay on the readings, students were encouraged to refer back to this sheet. Michael used a similar chart to help his 9th grade English class clarify and write about the relationships between Troy and his family in *Fences*. A similar idea was used successfully by Anita DiNaro of the Law and Government Campus Magnet HS in Queens. Ed Osterman introduced Anita to character webbing, a visual map activity he learned from Marie Edesess of Metropolitan Corporate Academy in Brooklyn. Students place the name of a character in a circle. Then, students select adjectives or qualities that describe the character,

putting each word in a circle that is connected by a line to the original circle containing the character's name. From there, students must extend the "web" by finding quotes from the text that demonstrate or "prove" that the character does, indeed, exhibit each quality. These quotes, along with their page numbers, are then written in circles that are connected to the circles containing the descriptive words. These character webs can be done individually or in teams, and they can be done on large newsprint and displayed around the room. Anita found that this mapping activity helped her students find specific textual material for use in their essays *Beowulf*.

The Small Group Network: What's Happening?

For teachers, the fall semester not only means a return to classrooms, but also the re-establishment of our commitment to professional development. For many Writing Project teachers in the metropolitan area, these professional activities extend beyond the boundaries of our school's walls to the homes, libraries and cafes where we meet with some of the friends and colleagues we have met in Writing Project inservice seminars and summer institutes.

So, as autumn becomes winter, we see a re-emergence of the small reading, writing and study groups Writing Project teachers have created to maintain contact with one another and to continue their own learning. We also want to remind you that it is never too late to establish a small interest group near your home or school.

Here's an update of what's been happening:

Enid Kaplan and Tracy Peers Pontin inform us that the reading group of Westchester and Manhattan teachers will resume meetings with a discussion of James McBride's *The Color of Water*. The group is looking toward memoir, Enid tell us, after their reading of Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*.

Last spring several members of the study group comprised of Paul Allison, Linda Correnti, Eileen Cuff, Marie Edesess, Melanie Hammer, Barbara Martz, Ed Osterman and Alan Stein engaged in a heated and lengthy discussion of Alfie Kohn's *Beyond Discipline*, a provocative book which argues that classroom management is really a curriculum issue. This group may next turn its attention to a reading and discussion of the New Standards.

At Theodore Roosevelt HS, several teachers, excited by their participation in a reading-writing inservice seminar led by Ronni Tobman-Michelen and Janeth Wynter-Bell, have formed a reading group in school. Along with Ronni, members include Jane Berkowicz, Sonia Guzman, Jeanne Marie McAnanly, Nan Millman and Janet Saraceno. Their first book was Ursula Hegi's novel *Stones from the River*. Ronni informs us that they will probably launch this year's Book Club by inviting colleagues to read Frank McCourt's *Angela's Ashes*.

As a result of their participation in Writing Project seminars, many teachers at Roosevelt HS have rediscovered their love of writing while others have begun to develop a poet's voice they never knew they had before. To celebrate these voices, several Roosevelt teachers organized two "Open Mike" readings at a local pizzeria. Writing Project participants along with their friends came to listen to the writing that was read and the music that was performed. This new "tradition" will continue in the 1997-98 school year.

Last spring on-site teacher-consultants Nick D'Alessandro, Debra Freeman and Nancy Mintz began meeting after work on Friday afternoons at Sante Fe in Park Slope, Brooklyn. Nick says, "We process what happened during the week, and we support each other in a relaxed convivial atmosphere."

Something exciting has been happening at the Institute for Literacy Studies on Friday afternoons. A group of teachers, administrators and staff developers have been gathering together periodically to explore the issue of adolescent reading. The participants include Paul Allison and Kiran Chaudhari of University Heights HS, Marty Gensener of Community Service Academy, Rick Levine of Fannie Lou Hammer HS, Judy Scott of City-As-School and Linette Moorman, Elaine Avidon, Lena Townsend, Cecelia Traugh and Linda Vereline of the Institute. Cecelia tells us, "So many people keep saying that high school students can't or won't read so we wanted to explore what that really meant. So far we've been looking a lot at students as readers." We certainly hope this group will share their studies more formally with us at some point in the future.

If you are currently participating in a writing or reading group, let us know what's been happening. Please inform Ed Osterman if you would like to create a particular interest group. The NYCWP's small group network may be the best way for you to stay involved.

Project Notes

As always, we'd like to acknowledge some of the activities and achievements of NYCWP teachers over the past several months.

Several dear and long-time friends of the Project retired last year. Susan Guzman participated in the very first NYCWP Summer Institute in 1978. She was one of the teachers who helped build the Project in its early years. In the early '80s, Susan served as writing coordinator for her James Monroe colleagues and co-coordinated several of our early in-service seminars for high school teachers. Susan, who has taught English at Columbus, Monroe, and Truman High Schools in the Bronx, has been a fine and dedicated teacher and an articulate supporter of the Project. Her students and colleagues will miss her as will her friends at Lehman... Renee Kranz also retired in June. During her tenure at Newtown High School, Renee taught in the Writing Project's Language and Learning Core, helped create and maintain the school's annual writing contest and was a

regular member of the Project's writing/study committee at Newtown. While serving on this committee, Renee became very interested in multicultural education and began to work with the Council for Unity at her school. Renee informs us that she has been asked by the Council for Unity to continue her work with them.

Cheers and congratulations are always appropriate when Writing Project teachers see their work published. Lisa Lauritzen of Erasmus Hall Campus HS for Humanities and the Performing Arts saw "A Teacher's Poem" published on the Op-Ed page of the *New York Times* in September. Lisa, who has been a regular participant in the NYCWP in-service seminars held at her school, wrote and revised this poem with the support of her writing group in the NYCWP's Summer Institute this past July...The ever prolific Phyllis Witte of Brooklyn Technical HS saw one of her poems published in the journal *Malachite and Agate* last spring...Jeff Gilden of Great Neck North High School had a short story "Coda" published in a recent issue of *Kerem*...In our previous issue, we announced the publication of Nick D'Alessandro's essay, "Things that Don't Have to Do with English: The Hidden Agenda," in Heinemann's new book *Meeting the Challenges: Stories from Today's Classrooms*. The essay was recently reprinted in the National Writing Project Quarterly.

We would like the Project Notes column to be as inclusive as possible. What Writing Project member:

- has received an award or special recognition?
- has recently won a grant?
- has had a story, essay, poem or book published?
- has presented work at a local or national conference?
- has created a writing, study, or reading group?

Please let us know what you know.

Congratulations are also in order for our colleagues whose work has recently been awarded and acknowledged. Teacher-consultant Nigel Pugh of Robert F. Kennedy Community Middle School/High School in Queens was named 1997 Educator of Excellence by the New York State English Council. Last spring Nigel also received another award: he became a U.S. citizen...Donna Mehle of E.B.C.

NYCWP NEWSLETTER

High School for Public Service Bushwick was awarded an Impact II grant that will prepare parents to make home visits to families of new students, thereby reinforcing the ties between school and community... **Everton Sylvester** of Progress High School in Brooklyn, a participant in one of the Project's in-service seminars, won a Fellowship to the Sundance Film Festival. He submitted a partial script and a one-page treatment, his first attempt at writing for the screen. As you may realize, Sundance reviews over a thousand submissions and selects only 12 fellows each year!

In May teacher-consultants **Nick D'Alessandro**, **Nancy Mintz**, and **Ed Osterman** represented the NYCWP at the annual Urban Sites Conference in Pittsburgh. Along with members of the Philadelphia Writing Project, Nancy and Ed discussed their experiences in the first year of the Students at the Center (SATC) program. As you may know, SATC is operating in three cities: Chicago, Philadelphia and New York. In each city, a Writing Project site is one of the participating organizations.

In June Nancy and Nick also conducted a workshop at a weekend retreat in Tarrytown, New York for middle and elementary school teachers from schools in the Chancellor's District. Their workshop, "Writing from the Hood," made use of some of the poetry Pittsburgh teachers shared at the Urban Sites Conference.

Teacher-consultant **Harriet Stein** represented the Writing Project in Albany last June at a two-day institute on standards sponsored by the New York State Education Department.

In August Associate Director **Linda Vereline** presented a two-part workshop "Concepts of Leadership" at the National Writing Project's retreat for Project Outreach held at the Chauncey Conference Center in Princeton, New Jersey.

Hector Vila, who co-coordinated last summer's Invitational Institute with **Ronni Tobman-Michelen**, has been quite busy. He delivered a paper entitled "The Issues of Authority, Collaboration and Ownership in a Student-Centered Curriculum: Reconsidering the Introduction to Literature Class" at the University of Southern Maine. The focus of Hector's talk at the Portfolios and Writing Conference/NCTE in New Orleans, was "The Portfolio, Curriculum and Research Paper: The Issues of Authority, Collaboration and Ownership as Sources for Critical Writing and Assessment in the Introduction to Literature Class." Hector also spoke about writing and technology at the Computers and Writing Conference in Honolulu, Hawaii. His paper was entitled "Interactive, Collaborative and Critical Writing: Using "Enabling Constraints" and CommonSpace to Enhance Skills, Create Voice and Amass Writing Portfolios for Assessment."

In May, Writing Project director **Linette Moorman** and a team of teacher-consultants (**Paul Allison**, **Nick D'Alessandro**, **Debra Freeman**, **Claudette Green**, **Lona Jack**, **Thomasina LaGuardia**, **Nancy Mintz**, **Barbara Martz**, **Ed Osterman**, **Alan Stein**, **Harriet Stein**, **Ronni Tobman-Michelen**.) helped design and launch the activities of the Manhattan Superintendent's Literacy Initiative. The workshops that our colleagues led for teams of teachers from

nearly every Manhattan high school were enthusiastically received! Kudos to **Linette** for her tireless efforts in seeing that these meetings were both exciting and productive for participating teachers. We expect that the initiative will continue to operate throughout this school year.

Another lively summer has come and gone at the New York City Writing Project and we want to acknowledge the superb work of all involved. Once again **Ronni Tobman-Michelen** led teachers in the Invitational Summer Institute. This year Ronni co-taught with **Hector Vila** of William Paterson University of Northern New Jersey, and **Kiran Chaudhari** of University Heights HS in the Bronx served as their intern. *Students at the Center* (SATC) offered a first summer institute entitled *From Exploration to Essay*. **Nancy Mintz** and **Alan Stein**, teacher-consultants who work in SATC schools, co-coordinated and **Theresa Davidson** of Automotive HS in Brooklyn served as intern. **Nick D'Alessandro** and **Amanda Gulla** of PS 41 in Manhattan led this year's Open Seminar, *Literature and Literacy*. Two advanced seminars were also offered, each one building on the work begun so successfully in the previous summer. *Literature for my Classroom* was co-coordinated by **Barbara Martz** and **Ed Osterman** with **Tracy Peers Pontin** of Lincoln High School in Brooklyn and **Portia Dillard** of E.B.C. School for Public Service Bushwick assisting them. *Leadership for Advancing Reading and Writing* was once again led by **Paul Allison** of University Heights HS and **Gail Kleiner** of Middle College High School in Long Island City with **Carmen Kynard** of WINGS Academy in the Bronx and **Miriam Borne** of Wingate High School in Brooklyn serving as interns.

New York City Writing Project

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