

# New York City Writing Project NEWSLETTER

Vol. 14, No. 1 INSTITUTE FOR LITERACY STUDIES • LEHMAN COLLEGE • THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK Summer 1994

## Note from the Editors

The end of the year is a time for reflection and assessment. As teachers, as writers, as learners, the end of a semester provides us with opportunities to look at what we've done in our classrooms as well as reflect on our own work. In this issue of the Newsletter, we feature articles by teachers, students and Writing Project members which look back on the year, the semester, the class.

"Thoughts on Poetry" is a roundtable discussion among young writers at Prospect Heights High School where they explore their own writing processes. In this group interview, the students inquire into the nature of inspiration, and what motivates them to write poetry.

In "Looking at Teachers' Portfolios," we move from students as learners, to teachers as learners and offer excerpts from teachers' portfolios. These portfolio letters show us that the issues our students face as writers are often our issues as writers, too. In addition, these portfolio letters serve as a means of self-assessment for us as teachers, and how we approach the everyday challenges of the classroom.

We take a closer look at the classroom in "The Dinner Party," as Alan Stein guides us through a semester-long project in which a class of advanced placement American history students shapes a historical context for themselves. They make connections among historical figures from different time periods by inviting a chosen group of people for dinner and conversation.

"Reflections on a Core Program: James Madison High School," looks at an interdisciplinary, team-taught, high school core program and discovers students learning to depend upon and collaborate with each other.

Outside the classroom we glimpse into the life of a book group. Melanie Hammer recounts the history of her group as it evolves from six enthusiastic individuals reading an eclectic assortment of texts to a community of readers talking and arguing together.

Also included in this issue of the Newsletter is a letter from a parent, and the teacher's response to that parent, about the use of double-entry notebooks in the classroom.

If you have any ideas you would like to share with us, please don't hesitate to write. The Newsletter is always interested in hearing from you.

## Thoughts on Poetry: A Conversation with Young Writers

*The following conversation took place on April 8, 1994 at Prospect Heights High School. The poets are Jhoy E. Meade, Winston Skerrett, Haydn Hyacinthe, George Outlaw, Nikki Richardson and Nessa Myers. The advisors are April Krassner, a New York City Writing Project member and consultant and Jenny Seymore.\**

Seymore: The discussion we're planning to have today is a collective interview with all of you about creative writing and how you got into it and what you think about it.

Krassner: When did you get started writing? What was the first piece you remember writing?

Outlaw: I don't remember, but I was in the third grade, I think. And as I went on, I started writing poetry. And lucky for me, I'm the only poet in the family.

Krassner: What made you decide to write a poem? Was it just something that popped into your head or was it an assignment for school?

Outlaw: Well, I was stuck. I had to write things to express my feelings because in the third grade I wasn't doing too well in my English class. So, what I did was I would write things. I wrote my mom a Valentine's poem. It was funny for a first poem.

Krassner: Jhoy, you said something about writing. Was there a poem that you wrote about peace? Am I remembering this correctly?

Meade: Yeah, when I was back home in St. Kitts, I was in grade five, and the teacher asked us to write a poem. He said, "Write about anything." I got the words "green peas" in my head. Two words on the whole piece of paper and I couldn't come up with one single, solitary thing more. I mean there are peas in the ground, peas in salad, peas are green. Nothing worked so

### Inside

Looking at Teachers' Portfolios .....	5
The Dinner Party .....	6
Coordinating a Core Program .....	9
My Book Group .....	10
Correspondence .....	11

\*This project was directed by Kathryn Levy and made possible, in part, with public funds from the New York State Council of the Arts.

## NYCWP NEWSLETTER

I just left those two words there, and I never thought I would ever write poetry. Then I came up here, and I had this poetry class with Miss Meinhard as a teacher. I wrote one poem, and it came out pretty well.

Krassner: Winston, do you remember your first poem?

Skerrett: No. I don't remember. At first I wrote short stories. I learned to write in my class, special projects...

Krassner: When did you make the switch over to poems?

Skerrett: When I started Prospect Heights High School, I switched to poems because that was part of the curriculum and I had it once in my English class.

Krassner: When you write poems for your English classes, what kind of instructions are you given? Are you just told to go home and write a poem or are they more specific than that?

Skerrett: No, they give us a picture, something to write about, a picture of a mask, or a bean, or something.

Seymore: Bean?

Skerrett: Yeah. Anything. Even a cockroach. What do you see about this...all this stuff that brings art to it, write about. Anything that comes to mind. That's one of the ways I started writing poems.

Krassner: Is it easy or hard to write poems?

Richardson: Well, it depends on what you're writing. And it's hard to find a topic. You have to wait sometimes. You have to wait for it to come to you. You could say it's hard. It all depends on if you're a natural or not.

Hyacinthe: Sometimes I need inspiration, something to make me want to write something because if I'm just going to say "I'm going to write something," I just see it, and I get up and put a paper in front of me. Without anything to inspire me, I can't do anything.

---

### Newsletter Staff

Joan Eurell, *Empire State College*  
April Krassner, *Institute for Literacy Studies*  
Amy Prince, *Adult Learning Center*

Desktop Production: Eileen Cropper

Outlaw: Well, then it could be easy because if you do have something on your mind, it might come out as a poem and that can help you to write an even better poem.

Krassner: So if you have something on your mind already, sometimes writing poems is really a simple thing to do. How, then, would you define inspiration? What does that word mean to you?

Hyacinthe: It means something is real pretty or something that's real nasty-nice, like something that's an emotion but a very strong one, that's going to make me feel something.

Skerrett: Like a strong emotion, something that captures your eye, your heart. It makes you feel good.

Krassner: So inspiration makes you feel good? Can anger be a source of inspiration?

All: Yup.

Krassner: Boy, that got a resounding "yes" from everyone.

Myers: Once I was in class with this boy, and he made me mad. I sat down and wrote the whole poem straight out of my head, and I brought it in. It took me like five minutes.

Skerrett: Sometimes if you can't do something, then you want to prove to others that you can do it.

Krassner: So there's a difference between determination and inspiration?

Skerrett: A slight difference.

Seymore: What do you see as the difference between the two?

Skerrett: Determination is that you want to do something regardless of obstacles in the way. You're determined to do it.

Skerrett: And inspiration is something that brings out emotions inside of you.

Krassner: What makes a good poem? What do you think makes a good poem?

Richardson: When it comes straight from your heart.

Hyacinthe: Anything is good because it comes from feelings. You can't really judge. You might find it to be bad and somebody else might find it to be good. The ones that really capture you, the ones that really make you feel something, something you really listen to and they make you say, "Is this life or is this death or something?" Those are the good ones.

Skerrett: I like the ones that tell a good story, that give the meaning of something, express something or translate something that goes

on. Those poems bring things out. It's just like looking at certain pictures and taking the fine points of the picture and putting them into words.

Krassner: How do you know it comes straight from the heart? How can you tell?

Myers: Because when you read something, you can feel it in your heart and you feel that it's true.

Skerrett: When it comes from the heart, I just get right in and write, you write until you know. You don't feel tired, but you just continue it. Words just keep coming; it's a flow.

Richardson: When it flows on my paper and feels emotional...

Hyacinthe: If it's truthful, if it has a common theme so that everybody has an opinion, if you can really see the person put an effort on it, if it really captures your eye, and captures it when you read it and makes you think, then there's something that everybody has a common opinion on and strong feelings towards. And if a person could put that on paper, then they can obviously capture everybody's heart.

Seymore: When you say "bring something out," can that also mean talking about something that ordinarily isn't talked about?

Skerrett: Yeah.

Krassner: See, I'm really curious to know what that something is because at this point, it seems kind of undefinable.

Skerrett: Sometimes it's just a word, or the way in which they put the words together.

Seymore: Do you think there's a connection between poetry and music?

Skerrett: Yes. Most singers sing of emotions.

Myers: I think the music came, I think people started writing poetry from music because it's very soothing and relaxing.

Krassner: What are the hardest poems to write?

Myers: When you actually like something or when it has a meaning to it or a strong meaning, those are hard ones to write and love poems. It's hard to love; it's hard to put on paper because...

Richardson: Because there's not a lot of love in the world. There's a lot of hatred.

Hyacinthe: Some people have to fake it, but whatever love is to you, just put the feeling that it gives to you on paper. To me, that's the most important.

Skerrett: For me, the hardest poems are the ones where someone gives a picture and tells you to write about it. That's very hard because, it's very hard to define on paper in a way others can understand.

Krassner: How do you think your poetry has changed from when you first started to write until now?

Myers: At the beginning, when I first started, I thought it was a joke, you know, a game, and I didn't think I could write anything. I thought it was just going to be a class. When I realized how I could write, then I came to be a good poet and now I like it.

Hyacinthe: For me, when I first started to write poetry, I started in third grade and they were really simple and everything, and I tried just to make them rhyme. Now my poems are more mature and they're more articulate.

Seymore: So you don't feel you have to rhyme and it's not so much the simple form as the emotion.

Skerrett: That's true. At first, I thought all poems had to rhyme. They don't necessarily have to rhyme. Just have poetry and a picture, like paint a picture on a piece of paper so that the poem will look like the picture, and you will understand what it's saying.

Myers: I've only been writing poems for about a year. And I haven't changed all that much, but when I started, it was like mostly about why I was normal and stuff. It got a bit too mushy.

Outlaw: Well, when I first started, I thought the only thing you could do is rhyme to make it sound good, but as I began to find out that you didn't have to rhyme, the poetry got better. And since I've broken out of it, my writing has gotten better. I started to enjoy it. Now I can just bring it out and I can just tell you how I feel, and that's it. It will be on the paper, no rhyming. And, that's the way that I like to do it even though I still rhyme off and on.

Krassner: What's the most fun thing about writing poetry?

Richardson: You get to curse.

Meade: It's when you write something, and you're proud of it, and you show other people, and they really like it. That's what I like about it, feeling really proud.

Myers: The feeling. I prove something to myself. I prove something to myself and my family.

Outlaw: What I like a lot is when you get to laugh. In the first poem I ever wrote, I had three words that rhymed and I didn't know how to put them together so what I did was I just put them on one line, and then, there was something that I could put with the other ones, so I put that on another line. Then you have a poem that says, "give me a hug, but don't step on my rug bug." You get to laugh instead of just feeling emotional.

*continued . . .*

## NYCWP NEWSLETTER

Seymore: What do you do with your poems when you're finished writing them? Do you keep them secret, show them to your family, or to your friends, or do you put them in the school magazine or send them to *The New Yorker*?

Hyacinthe: There's a few of my poems that I let everybody see, but some of them are so personal that I don't even show them. Even if I get a certain point in my life when I look at publishing anything, I don't think I would put them out.

Skerrett: Sometimes I don't even know where my poems are because I write on the way home, on the way to school. Some I give to friends. Some are probably in the back of a textbook or something.

Krassner: So you just write wherever you are.

Skerrett: That's right. Now I'm working in a small book, but it's filled.

Outlaw: Usually, I show my poems to my mother...if they're good. But, really what I will do, I will hold on to them until there's a topic that comes up about poetry. Then I will bring them out, and, I guess, I will share with everybody the ones that I really like the most.

Krassner: Do you have a favorite place that you like to write?

Richardson: In the bathroom 'cause it's quiet, 'cause nobody is going to walk in on you. You get to lock the door and just sit. If somebody disturbs you, you lose all your concentration.

Skerrett: I'll write anywhere; it doesn't really matter to me.

Hyacinthe: I have to write by myself, in private. I like to write in the summertime when it's nice and hot. I take a nice cold shower, then I go into my room, and I write in the dark with just a little light on, just enough to see.

Meade: If I think of something, I'll go find my book and start writing bits and pieces. Or, if it's a whole poem, I stay and write the whole poem and then I'm done. I'll go back later and fix it. If I feel that I've got the right poem, that's it. I don't do anything before or after except maybe fix it afterwards.

Krassner: What about the rest of you? Do you do any sort of revision?

Meade: Once, I made up one poem. I took notes of little bits and pieces, and I sat down and made a whole poem out of it. And then the next day, I got it and fixed every single line, adding lines, changing lines, taking out a word, adding a word. It looked like a real mess, but it came out really nice.

Hyacinthe: Sometimes I really feel like I'm in the mood, and I'm in the heat of the moment so I write one paragraph or something and

after that forget it, I just lose the mood. It could take me like a month or two. And a case in point, there was this one poem that I started. I wrote like two paragraphs, and then it took me another year to finish it. And then, I never really got into it until the next year when I felt the same way again.

Outlaw: What I like to do is if I don't think it's too good after I write it the first time, I take out the lines that I think are the best and then I start another poem and I will put all those lines back in it and usually it comes out better.

Seymore: Why do you think poetry is important in the world? I mean people have been writing poetry it seems like for thousands of years. What do you think poetry does for people?

Skerrett: Well, actually you just write it out on paper instead of expressing anger on someone else. That's one of the reasons.

Myers: It makes people so relaxed that they forget about what happened that day or what happened in their life and it makes them feel they are appreciated when they write. It makes them feel more relieved to go on in life no matter what is going to happen later.

Myers: I heard they use poetry for therapy. As for me, I just do it for fun, to have fun.

Krassner: We've been talking a lot about writing poetry. What about reading poetry? Do you get something out of reading poetry as well?

Skerrett: Yeah. You get something out of it. You get like a type of feeling the person feels. What was this person thinking about? What was born in this person? What is this person writing about? It gets you going, thinking.

Outlaw: And it can also bring back memories. If you have written a poem about something that happened to you and you can remember that day when you were happy or sad and how it happened, you'll see how poetry relaxed you that day and I guess that's how you would really start to get interested in it. The day when you wrote for it to relax you 'cause for me, I like to use writing as a relaxant.

Skerrett: Sometimes, poems, you know, inspire you. Sometimes if I read a good poem and I don't like the way it ends, I write a version of it but in my own vision I try to end it.

Seymore: Do you think that poetry makes you more aware of the power of language in general? The power of speaking, the power of telling the truth, the power of expressing yourself in the world? Do you think that somehow you're learning something from it?

Skerrett: When you write, that's like a power. It's like a power to me, every time. When you write, you tell the truth.

## Looking at Teachers' Portfolios

*What issues come up for teachers as keepers of portfolios? How is our process, our learning, similar to and different from our students? What can be learned when we look at teachers' portfolios?*

If I drew a picture of the Summer of 1992, it would be a circle in motion, not representing closure, but rather what I began with, what I know now, and how I will continue. A year ago, when my teaching career had barely begun, I knew one solid truth I still know today: in order to be a teacher, I must become a learner. This is what keeps the circle in perpetual motion, and, though it is considerably wider after the New York City Writing Project experience, the process of teacher as learner must continue—to abandon the latter would necessarily result in forfeiting power of the former. To be a teacher without engaging in learning would be to break the circle. (Jane Sorenson\*)

Many of us have been exploring strategies of alternative assessment for a few years now. We have asked our students to collect written work in folders and write cover letters in which they discuss their progress in a class or chart their thinking about a particular issue in regards to their learning or even focus on a single piece of writing as they trace its development and assess what they have learned. Aside from using student portfolios as an assessment tool, some of us have experienced portfolio assessment directly by assembling one, ourselves, as a culminating activity in workshops offered through the Writing Project.

Teachers are accustomed to observing learning. We see our students develop curiosity as they acquire new knowledge. More often than not we learn alongside our students, but our primary concern is with our students. When teachers become students, we have the opportunity to identify with the students we teach, not vicariously, but whole-heartedly as we walk in their shoes. When we look at teachers' portfolio cover letters what is striking is that as students teachers learn from both the outside and the inside.

As teachers giving assignments, we've been on the receiving end of student disgruntlement and resistance. At times students claim the task is 'stupid,' or that they have better things to do with their time, or that they simply can't do it. As adult students our resistance may be slightly more articulate, but it is a resistance nonetheless. We may envision ourselves playing hookey, or not doing the assignment; we may make exceptions for ourselves or try to find loopholes in the rules. Our rebelliousness mirrors the attitudes of resistance and fear that our students exhibit. We see this is so, and we recognize it in ourselves.

I was asked to write a letter to introduce my portfolio. In the beginning I thought, "Gee! I really have nothing worth putting in this folder." Then I thought if I didn't do it as [the teachers] said, I would make them feel bad, and I, myself, would feel bad too. Because, after all, I want to be a good student. (Chen Li)

Here, the initial hesitation is offset by the desire to be the dutiful student. It is an ambivalence we have perceived in the classroom from students, but we may not have known we could enact it ourselves in not wanting to do the assigned work..

In addition to recognizing assignment resistance, the portfolio cover letters reveal the frustrations and constant searching for a clearer sense, a "felt" sense, of writing and learning and teaching. Over and over again the teachers write that they are not satisfied with their pieces, their thinking, their teaching.

I am not yet satisfied with it [the piece] and I know I will continue working on revising it. It does please me to know that I could stick to this task though in the face of a frightening lack of confidence in myself as a writer. As a teacher, it taught me to appreciate more deeply the frustrations that my students must encounter. (Anna Hayward)

Ms. Hayward moves back and forth from looking at her own work to thinking about her students and their work. Through the experience of writing and her struggles to develop confidence as a writer, she has come to a deeper understanding of her students' difficulties with the process.

But writing is not always a struggle. It is fun and engaging. It is compelling. As teachers we witness the incredible power and magic of writing. As students we get to feel the power.

The first piece [in my portfolio] is about my early writing experience. I didn't have time to complete it, but I had tremendous fun just doing the beginning. When I read it to my group the first time, a very tall gentleman said he was very touched by the relationship between the grandmother and the granddaughter that I described in this writing. He said he couldn't remember if he had had an experience like this himself. I was very moved by what he said and for the first time I felt my writing could actually touch the heart of somebody who is of a different culture, different race, different sex and probably different age too. (Li)

Here the portfolio letter proclaims a sense of wonder from an insider's point of view. Chen Li, by her own admittance, has written before, but she has never felt the impact of her own voice no how her own words can cut through cultural differences to reach someone.

One of the reasons teachers decide to participate in the summer seminars is because they are interested in looking at their own writing. They may also have questions about their practice, or they may want to investigate learning theory. Sometimes teachers come to the seminar not knowing what they'll find, but open to what the summer has to offer.

When I came to this seminar, I wasn't quite sure what to expect. Even on the first day, however, I found myself defending what must have been subconscious expectations. "I'm a reader, not a writer," I explained to the stranger sitting next to me. But the writer's cramp gave way to ideas and an occasional irrepressible flow of the pen, and after the second meeting with my writing group, I said to myself (very quietly to myself), "Maybe I am a writer." (Sorenson)

Like Ms. Li, the seminar has helped Ms. Sorenson redefine herself. She has come to see herself, to think of herself, as more than a reader and a teacher but as a writer and a learner as well.

\*All names used in the following article have been changed.

The primary reason [I had] for applying to participate in this program was to address the fear I have of writing. I came here not as a writer but as a teacher who needed help in teaching writing. The messages I have heard will be passed along to my students. It is as if I have taken a baton in a relay race just in time. The challenge is for me to look back through all my notes, double entries, loops, questions raised, free writing, and revisions and to then organize my thoughts so that I can pass all of this onto my students. It is my joy and my responsibility to give them the best and let them burst with pride and the love of learning. (Hayward)

Here is an exuberance and an enthusiasm for learning that Ms. Hayward brings to her classroom. She is enthusiastic and eager to return to the role of teacher working alongside her students helping them to understand how they learn, helping them to overcome the obstacles to their learning.

I chose this [for my portfolio] because I started to catch on to what I needed to tie this story together in this process piece. This realization was similar to the one I had when I wrote the exam essay in college. I had the feeling in this piece that I was on my way. This also happens when I am painting or drawing. It's as if I am riding through the work on the tip of my brush or pen with a kind of relaxed concentration. (Hayward)

Through writing Ms. Hayward comes to a deeper understanding of how she writes by making connections within her own literacy history. She connects writing with drawing noticing the similarities among different creative processes. This private revelation will have a public purpose when she begins to share her learning with her students.

In the portfolio cover letters teachers use their work to look at their work. As writers we see what writing is all about for us. As teachers we wonder how our students' processes are similar to and different from ours. We reflect on our process to adjust our practice.

The experience of writing "Voice" made me realize that, as a teacher, I can't be surprised or disappointed when students don't adhere to my schedule, i.e., first draft due Monday, second draft due Tuesday. I'm reminded of "Keep the Doors Open" by Liza Ketchum Murrow in which she describes a student who is ready to begin writing a story, but the teacher insists that he brainstorm first. She says that process writing can become as rigid as the traditional approach. (Cara Milner)

Because the summer seminars ask us to move in and out of our teacher/student roles, we can look at theory and practice simultaneously instead of separately. The way we write or teach may not be the way our students write or learn. The idea is to understand and develop a tolerance for a multiplicity of strategies and then to figure out how to make it all work in the classroom. The portfolio is a place for teachers to bring all the pieces of themselves together to see how all their roles as teacher, student, reader, writer, et al work together.

Here, I'm trying to understand what I've learned, where this fits into my idea of myself as teacher and writer. It's rough and brief, but reflective. It came early on in the seminar, so I view it as a sort of stage setting or tone setting. Being that it is unfinished, I notice that this may be a part of an ongoing dialogue I romantically perceive sharing with others sometime in the future. (Victor Perón)

Later on Mr. Perón uses his portfolio to make plans for his classes. He reassesses choices he has made in the past. The summer seminar has afforded him the opportunity to question his practice as well as confirm theory. The portfolio has afforded him the opportunity to articulate both.

I see myself primarily as a learner; this is why, I suppose, I'm a teacher. Teaching, for me, brings experience, language, and formal training into being. I see writing as another experience, a moment characterized by actively engaging with memory. Writing gives shape to experience, allowing me to see myself. Teaching and writing I see as inextricably linked....The seminar, too, has forced me to question how I teach my literature classes. I've gone as far as to question the relevance of many of the texts I've taught because of the discomfort many of the students appear to sense. This is not to suggest discomfort is wrong, but, rather, to wonder about method. Journals and individualized portfolios, along with conferencing to establish, orally, where the student has been, where the student feels growth has occurred, and where the student is willing to go, I will try in the fall. I also want to experiment with varied media—slides, sound, film, etc.—to present material. And I definitely will work first from whatever the student brings to the subject, whether accurate historically or not. (Perón)

When teachers learn, we learn not only for ourselves but for our students as well. We adapt to the fish bowl environment well, looking outward and inward and outward and inward and outward through the glass walls.

April Krassner  
Adult Learning Center

## *RICHARD STERLING TO HEAD NATIONAL WRITING PROJECT*

Richard Sterling, director of the New York City Writing Project since its inception in 1978, and director of the Institute for Literacy Studies, has been appointed executive director of the National Writing Project. He will take office in October when James Gray resigns. While Richard will be greatly missed here in New York City, his vision, energy and intellect are sure to enhance the National Writing Project.

In our next issue of the Newsletter we will feature a conversation with Richard Sterling.

# The Dinner Party

*In 1991 Alan Stein was a participant in the summer seminar Writing about Our Practice. The following article, developed in that course, takes us through a semester-long project Mr. Stein conducted the previous spring with his advanced placement history class. Mr. Stein is currently a member of the Writing Teachers Consortium.*

I have been teaching the Advanced Placement American History course in my school for many years. This past year's AP class was heterogenous, not only in ethnicity, but in attitude. Only a few were self-motivated, many were indifferent, and several were unprepared for the demands of a rigorous course. I wanted to design a project that not only would appeal to these different levels, but would also introduce them to research skills, improve their reading and writing abilities, and have them, in some form of journal, reflect on the connections between their thinking and their writing. I wanted to design a project that would motivate students to pursue scholarly research, to use the library not for the mere collection of data, but to apply that data for a larger purpose: to discover what is unique as well as what is common about the past. The "Dinner Party" project was designed to achieve these goals.

At an Advanced Placement conference last year, I listened to a teacher describe a review assignment in which his students were asked to invite people from different eras for dinner and hypothesize what they might have to say to one another. I thought about this idea and how I could expand it into a semester project that would not only serve the needs of reviewing for the AP exam, but would also provide challenge and meaning for my students. The assignment would fulfill the requirements of design including research and journal keeping, and, ultimately, the students would produce a significant piece of writing. Briefly, the students would be required to invite four historical figures from different periods to dinner, create a conversation, prepare a menu, and write not only the paper, but also reflect upon their thinking and writing.

## INTRODUCING THE ASSIGNMENT

I introduced the "Dinner Party" project by asking the class whose opinions they would like to hear on the topic of Reconstruction, a unit we had just completed studying. Some of the choices were obvious: Abraham Lincoln, Andrew Johnson, Thaddeus Stevens. Some were humorous: Mike Tyson, Al Sharpton. Some were intriguing: W.E.B. DuBois, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Mark Twain. All the names were written on the board. I then gave them fifteen minutes to write what any one of these people might have to say about the topic. David acted as host and invited four of the names on the board to his home for dinner. I asked him to seat the guests, suggest a menu, and begin the conversation. He invited Abraham Lincoln, George Bush, Dan Quayle, and Leo Buscaglia. The students exchanged some thoughts, but it was obvious they were talking off the top of their heads. I told the class this was an introduction to a term-long project, and that I would like them to keep a journal recording their thoughts about each stage of the project. Their first

entry would be what they thought of that day's class, how they viewed the project, and any potential problems they might foresee.

Now the class was ready to move on to the next phase of the assignment which was to choose one historical figure from each of the following periods of American History: Colonial - 1800; 1800-1865; 1865 - 1945; and 1945 - present.

The following week I collected their journals and looked at their choices which ranged from the expected to the surprising. Joanne chose Abigail Adams, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Ivana Trump because they were all strong women who made an impact on their times. Kenny selected Thomas Jefferson, Edgar Allan Poe, Albert Einstein, and Richard Nixon because he thought four quirky people might be interesting to talk with. The journals were returned with comments and suggestions, giving the students an opportunity to change their choices or expand upon their explanations. The students seemed to be having fun.

## RESEARCH

The next piece of the assignment was the actual research. For each historical personality chosen, the students had to look up five personal events, five local events, five national events, and five international events. They were to create some form of time line to illustrate these events. I drew a standard time line and suggested some other ways they might depict the passage of time. These charts became the heart of the project giving students the opportunity to observe historical connections on an individual level and enabling them to place their characters within a specific context, and see what forces - unique and similar - helped shape the lives of these people. Diana constructed four jigsaw puzzles of her characters, providing me with a key in case I had difficulty (I did!) putting the pieces together. Liz designed four model paper trains, each car revealing information, and each engine designed as a metaphor for her characters (Pathfinder - Roger Williams; Silver Bullet - John Brown; Red Star - Joe McCarthy; Express - Al Sharpton). Christina drew four trees with branches representing the different historical events. Barely remembered names seen in passing while reading a text book, became living personalities when placed within context, connected to the community, the nation, and the world around them.

In the next stage, the students met in groups of three. The purpose of the group was to create an environment in which students could help each other discover the topics they would write about. Each student displayed his/her time line to the other members of the group while the others examined the charts, and wrote a memo suggesting topics that the four historical figures might have in common. Group discussion followed. The other teacher and I shifted from group to group listening. I would suggest possible areas of intersection (i.e. Henry Thoreau and Andy Warhol on nonconformity) or a group member would offer a topic (i.e. Henry Ford and Madonna on business ethics). Eyes would begin to light up and words would fly as we moved around the room. Often, voices called out seeking approval for their ideas and breakthroughs. Most groups finished that period though a few continued after the class and some requested time the next day. The students described the process in their journals. Their reflections tended to be general but gave some idea of how the group offered assistance. Liz thought the

group helped her to focus on topics of conversation:

The suggestions that were submitted to me from the other two members of my group with regard to conversation topics were: revolution, organization of government in the U.S., and international conflict.

For Christina the group work served another purpose:

Studying my time lines in that fashion gave me insight into the lives of each of my people as a whole as well as showing me that even people who lived hundreds of years apart can have things in common.

Lauren was able to find her topics:

Breaking up into groups was very helpful. The people were able to see connections...that I wasn't able to see....They were able to see that all the men lived through a war and that they were involved in politics.

From the outside of the room it may have seemed chaotic, but students were talking with one another, listening to one another, and learning from one another.

#### DINNER CONVERSATION

The class was now ready for the last stage of the project. They were to create a dialogue, a conversation, a story choosing any form or medium, written, visual or audio. The discussion had to reflect a legitimate interchange of ideas rather than statements of information and opinion. The student could serve as facilitator and would have to prepare a menu including at least one authentic dish from each period. Finally, each student would have to prepare a cover letter, addressed to me, summarizing and evaluating the entire project.

Diana wrote a short story in which the protagonist, a writer (herself), suffering from writer's block, went into the woods to try to refuel the creative process. She encountered Ben Franklin, Henry Thoreau, Emily Dickinson, and Joan Baez.

"Well you see that was where I did some of my best writing. It's quite an interesting story how it came about that my friend Ralph bought me that land." Ben leaned in so as not to miss any details. "I was out with a friend in the Concord Woods and inadvertently I set the forest on fire. Needless to say I was no longer welcome in Concord so I took the opportunity to go away. I needed to get away from society in general."

Emily slowly lifted her head and said, "I can understand that. Much of my life was spent in seclusion from the rest of the world."

Ben sat back. "Well I can't imagine life without really living it. Most of my life was spent travelling and living life to the fullest, if you know what I mean?" Ben said as he leaned over and put his hand on Joan's knee.

Diana, a poet, and very interested in the process of composing, brought Franklin alive by emphasizing one of his more notorious character traits. But she also joined the three characters in a discussion of the merits of living life to its fullest as opposed to the comforts of seclusion. The characters transcended their times, but remained true to their lives.

Liz, a train aficionado, held her dinner in an abandoned subway station near Times Square. A nearby trash bin served as her table,

allowing the rats to be responsible for cleaning up. Her guests were Roger Williams, John Brown, Joseph McCarthy, and Al Sharpton. Her menu included Tongue Canapés (especially for Sharpton), Scrambled Brains (for Brown), Manhattan Salad with Russian dressing (with Senator McCarthy in mind), and Big Macs. They discussed revolution and violence.

Mr. Brown: We can't spend our time worrying about the future alone. We must take care of what is going on now, and if it requires revolution and violence on a small scale, then so be it. Look what happened in Kansas. As a child I never intended to hack any one's family to death, but I was so overtaken by my desire to rid this country of all slavery that I was compelled to commit the murders I did. It was for justice's sake. The Negroes are my friends. I only wanted to help.

Mr. Sharpton: Sounds like a lot that went on in Kansas is similar to the Bensonhurst case.

Mr. McCarthy: You know I like this Brown guy - talking about ridding this country of all slavery - that's a refreshing expression for the whole situation... If it's anything for democracy go right on ahead with it because it helps defeat the enemy.

Jonathan hired Michael J. Fox and his DeLorean to pick up John Hancock, Andrew Jackson, Henry Ford, and Madonna. They exchanged views on business ethics and fulfilling the American dream.

Madonna: The simple secret was to "Express Myself."...I'm a "Material Girl" - one who is very rich, very smart, very influential. I'm so wealthy that I don't know what to do with all of it! I reached the top all by myself.

Hancock: I did not quite make my money the old fashioned way at the start. I am a great businessman....I turned my inheritance into a gold mine. I invested in fur traders and distillers....It has been said that "money makes the man." In my case that is absolutely true.

Ford: Unfortunately for me my fortune did not appear overnight...I am a self-made man who has lifted himself up from the gutter and put himself on top of the world.

Jackson: My entire family died before I was fifteen. I was left to make my own way....So I decided to pick up again and was determined to become a lawyer....I worked hard..., invested more, but never forgot the Eastern bankers. I entered politics, became a military hero, and was catapulted into the presidency.

Not all of the papers were as perceptive or as clever, but many were extraordinary. Perhaps the stimulation of the assignment tapped into an imagination and creativity that had not been evident all year. The papers indicated that the students had undergone a significant learning experience, one that required them to explore history in a way they had never done before, and one that required them to think historically, i.e. to be able to see historical figures as part of a specific historical context. Yet, they were also able to examine the universalities of history and to understand these as part of human nature. Their menus and their seating plans were not just

addenda but an integral part of the assignment. "We are what we eat" became more than just a hip cliché. Seating arrangements made them think about position, interests, and conviviality. These parts of the assignment gave greater understanding to the way in which people live and relate to one another. History ceased to be a mausoleum but instead became a dynamic stage where flesh and blood human beings discussed issues of central importance to the students' lives.

**REFLECTIONS**

The completion of this project has given me much satisfaction. It was difficult and the students were not always cooperative. But the viability of the assignment was confirmed by the end result. Most gratifying were the final journal entries and the letters the students wrote in which they reflected upon the entire semester project. This time I gave them a list of specific questions to stimulate their reflections.

What did the assignment tell you about the individuals and the periods? Were there any surprises? What were strengths of this report? Weaknesses? What was important to you during the process of preparing this report?

What did these young people learn about history? Obviously they garnered a lot of information, biographical and contextual. They learned that history is a continuum, with many constant issues and problems. They they also gained insight into human nature and into the intellectual content of history. Moreover, the project required students to make connections between their writing and thinking. It gave them wide discretion in making choices during segments of the project. And it asked them to think from time to time about what they were doing. Jill, a young woman with many personal problems with relationships wrote:

I learned a lot about myself through the project...I realized if only I had been this enthusiastic about all my work my teachers might have actually liked me....Through this I know how much I like to write. For years I have written great poems...but I never really showed it in my school work. It was always such a private part of my life but now I feel I should express it more.

Jonathan had this reaction:

The assignment required me to learn about the people...about their interacting, their surroundings.... I found that the men I chose were very much the same even though each led completely different lives....A major strength of the project was that it allowed me to make all the decisions and get as crazy as I wanted to without having to worry about something not belonging.

Many students, while well behaved, highly motivated, and somewhat confident, rarely find a connection between what they learn in school and what they need to know in the outside world. This assignment demonstrated that there is a connection, that history is not irrelevant, and that learning history can be fun. It is essential that students see and understand these connections, that they be stimulated to take imaginative leaps, that they have a voice in the learning process - then history can come alive. It is possible.

Alan Stein  
WTC Consultant

## Reflections on a Core Program: James Madison High School

*In the Language and Learning Core Program students learn what it means to be a member of a collaborative group. Responsibility and conflict resolution skills develop naturally as students participate in the program.*

Over the course of the school year, our Language and Learning Core teachers and students helped develop a sense of community, based on the use of writing in participating subjects. While last year I found the task overwhelming, this year I feel more confident. I find myself thinking about the students in the core experience and am proud of what we have to offer them.

The Language and Learning Core Program at James Madison High School consists of classes in English, Spanish and Global History. There are three classes of sophomores in our core, and, generally, three collaborating teachers, one for each subject area. The teachers I am working with this year, Dr. Maria DiLorenzo (Spanish), and Mr. Charles Packowski (Global History) are enthusiastic and creative teachers who enjoy using writing as a learning tool. We work as a team sharing ideas, writings, and concerns about students. In this supportive atmosphere, our core grows as a family, and our students begin to see learning as a process that extends beyond the four walls of a classroom.

This year we have used extensive dialogue writing in all three of the core classes. In their writings, students have been able to see situations through the eyes of another person which has in turn helped students become more aware of those around them. In a world where many of us are concerned about the inability of our younger generation to develop compassion and sharing, we in the core have been pleased to observe a deepened sense of community in our students. This has not evolved by accident. Each teacher in our program strongly values cooperation and sensitivity. When these values are modeled daily by the teachers and enforced in the classroom, they become absorbed by the students.

It is also an advantage that the students and teachers in the core program work with each other over the course of a full school year. Students know what to expect in each of their core classes, and do not have the added stress that those students who change teachers in the spring may experience. Teachers can pace their lessons and topics accordingly knowing that the year is spread out before them. Time gives us a chance to get to know ourselves, as well as each other. Time also gives us a chance to develop and grow.

It is often in the process writing pieces that we have an opportunity to see how student thinking develops. As they learn about themselves as community members, they begin to show their concern for absent members, fellow students on whom they've come to depend.

In my opinion our group worked very well together. We all agreed on what we were doing from the first day and basically agreed on everything because we voted on all of our ideas... The only conflict we had was on Monday when Josephine was absent. She had our project (character maps). So that day we decided to

*continued . . .*

correct our picture descriptions and therefore did not let our period run to waste. I think our group and I had a lot of fun being together. (Arthur Bogoraz)

The groups set their agendas and encourage each other to participate as fully as possible.

Well I was late coming into my group because I was sick, but the people in my group accepted me right away... Everyone in the group contributed. Allison drew the pictures. Leon, Josephine and I colored them in. The positive aspects are that we got work done and got along well... We were very organized except for one setback. Josephine was absent one day and we were unable to work on the poster, but we worked everything out smoothly. (Christina Boyle)

The process pieces reveal how the groups work to build community spirit.

My group worked well together except for today. I mainly contributed my ideas of what photographs and pictures to cut out and what to add in to make it look like the character. Everyone else brought in supplies and helped cut out stuff. One positive aspect of working with my group is that we all got along well. No one thought they were better than anyone else or thought that they were boss. My group was faced with a terrible problem. Hanley and Allison were absent from class on the day before the project was due. Hanley had all the articles. And it was really hard on me because I was borderline on passing this class. No one else had to worry about failing. If I could change one situation, I would have changed the fact that I didn't call everyone in the group to tell them to come to class and have everything ready. But no one knows what to expect the next day. (Michael Fontanez)

Students value each other's contributions while negotiating conflicts and resolving problems.

I guess that I really took charge this time... At first I was upset because the members of my new group were sitting in their desks like vegetables... After I rearranged our play so that everyone was involved equally, we really began the work. Lawrence showed so much effort, that it surprised me very much. He showed complete responsibility. When I was assigning homework for all of us, he took on the most challenging activities that took a long time. I only wished that Sherwin and Andrea were a bit more "involved." I only regret screaming at them every second. So, the next time some of my group's members are falling asleep, I'll be more polite and back off. (Sophia Shalmiyev)

Writing to learn gives our students a chance to hear their inner voices, to sort out what they think and how they feel. In a day and age when our young people are, more often than not, passive viewers of distressing worldwide problems and dilemmas, our Language and Learning Core students are encouraged to be active participants in their education. Our students are given many opportunities to create, think, feel, write, share and reflect. Their humanness is noticed and their growth, both academic and social, is rewarded. Working in a small community of students and teachers feels good. It feels right.

Barbara West Prenner  
James Madison HS

## My Book Group

*Melanie Hammer writes about the inside goings-on of her longstanding book group revealing how decisions are made, how individual responses can develop into a group interest, and how themes develop over time.*

Once again my book group has been making its usual phoenix-like rumblings. At the moment, I have in hand a lengthy excerpt we want to argue about, and I've gotten some phone calls, made some calls, and yes, after seven years or so, it's safe to say we still have a book group.

We weren't always like this. When we said, "Hey, let's make a book group" at a Writing Project meeting in 1986, we had energy and enthusiasm. There were six of us—Beth, Elaine, Gail, Marcie, Robin and me. It was simple. We picked out books, read them, and then we talked about them. Sure, we always stopped to catch up on what we had been doing in our own lives, but we also had a series of rich, wide-ranging discussions about what we'd been reading.

In our early days, we read an eclectic selection of fiction, non-fiction, and poetry, fearless in the face of length. We picked what interested us, without a defined method or system, although looking back now, I see certain threads. Fiction appealed to us, but, for the purposes of the book group, it seemed better to read things we wouldn't necessarily read on our own. As a group of six women, all teachers, there were areas towards which we were more inclined. So we read Carol Gilligan's work on women's psychology, Dorothy Dinnerstein's book on sexual relations and society, and *Women's Ways of Knowing*. We read books on people's own journeys into education and adulthood, including John Wideman's *Brothers and Keepers* and Mike Rose's *Lives on the Boundary*. We read quite a few "coming of age" books, both fiction and non-fiction, from Tobias Wolfe's recent autobiography, *This Boy's Life*, to Henry Roth's autobiographical novel about growing up on the Lower East Side sixty years ago, *Call It Sleep*.

With six fairly opinionated individuals turning their gazes on a book, sometimes it seemed as if we had read different books with the same title. Mike Rose's book got severely criticized for starting to tell about his life, but backing off from his sexuality, bringing up such strong feelings in us that it was difficult to discuss the aspects of the book we did like. What some of us felt was an annoying, gratuitous end of Marianne Wiggins' book *John Dollar* made many of us so angry—"I hate this Wiggins person," Elaine announced—that we dismissed it. I, for one, am happy to say that it no longer occupies space on my bookshelf.

Periodically each of us would come to book group with titles we'd heard about, and we read books I can say I would not otherwise have encountered; Keri Hulme's Maori-influenced novel *The Bone People*, for example, or Buchi Emecheta's story of a Jamaican girl's experiences in London, *The Family*. By the time we got up to reading Deirdre Bair's biography of Simone de Beauvoir, we were more experienced—and busier!—so we allowed two book group sessions for that, the first half for one meeting, the second half for another. Then we allowed two sessions to read one of de Beauvoir's novels, *The Mandarins*, but sometimes even allowing a long time for a book doesn't work. Most of us drowned in the section of David Grossman's

450-page novel, *See Under: Love*, told in the first-person, female, voice of the Atlantic Ocean, and could read no further.

We made certain mistakes, some of which we learned to see in advance, and others which will probably remain unavoidable. Reading a novel by de Beauvoir after we had read her biography worked nicely, as did reading Shirley Jackson's *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* along with a biography of her, but other attempted pairings did not. We had a lot to say about Mary Catherine Bateson's *Composing a Life*, for example, but barely a word about her memoir, *With a Daughter's Eye*. Now we avoid repeating the same author so close together. Certain books did not work at all. Some of us liked Doctorow's *Billy Bathgate*, but the discussion of the book took about ten minutes. I had really enjoyed Mona Simpson's first novel *Anywhere But Here*, but her second, *The Lost Father*, which I had suggested, was a disaster. *My Antonia*, by Willa Cather, many of us agreed, was a book we may have loved in high school, but didn't hold up for us as adults. We had great discussions of the "classics" we read, but noticed how hard they were to finish. For fiction, it's hard to tell in advance what will work with a reading group.

As time has gone on, it's beginning to take us almost as long to find a date to meet as to discuss the book. We now have six small children among us, and several alterations in jobs have made our responsibilities heavier than they were when we started. It also takes us longer to select a book. Certain books come up as suggestions many times, but we're starting to realize we'll never get around to Marcie's perennial suggestion of short stories by Katherine Mansfield, or Elaine's of *A River Runs Through It*. Those of us who were interested have long since read it on our own. Robin and I had a great discussion of *Middlemarch* and would love to read more Eliot, but realize that that's highly unlikely, and although I've wanted to read James' *The Golden Bowl* or *Wings of the Dove* for years, I won't hold my breath. Elaine says she'd prefer to read non-fiction pretty much exclusively; but fiction seems to be what many of us have a better chance of finishing. "I read it already" is a major stumbling block in book selection, as is, "I've already passed that point in my life and I don't want to read about it." A book has a better chance of selection if it's out in paperback, and we can read it on the train.

We used to have a few adjunct activities to go along with the book group. Nights at "Selected Shorts," the short story readings at Symphony Space, were a regular feature for a few years, as were readings at the 92nd Street Y. We've fudged a bit the past couple of years, going to the movies once in awhile instead of reading a book, but we've had plenty to say about both *The Joy Luck Club* and *Gas, Food, Lodging* over brunch afterward. We meet less often than we did in the beginning, but I estimate that we've read over fifty books together over the years. There's a list somewhere and that shared literary history grows every time we talk about a book.

It's been suggested that we just admit we're a group of friends who like to get together, and drop the books as an excuse, but we don't. We've always gone the summer without meeting, and that three-month break has been known, from time to time, to stretch longer. We always come back. One of us picks up the phone and starts a chain, and the next thing we know, we're reading and talking, eating and arguing again.

Melanie Hammer  
Nassau Community College

## Correspondence

Dear Mrs. Hirshfeld,

Both my daughter and I are quite upset that you removed the grade for *Huckleberry Finn*. She spent the entire week and weekend reading the book and taking notes. She was honest enough to decide that she could not sign your statement about using Cliff Notes or other notes, and for this, she was penalized. She did not use the notes instead of reading the book, she only referred to the notes to explain something that she didn't understand.

My daughter is a hard working conscientious student and I feel that she was unjustly punished.

Sincerely,  
Mrs. L

Dear Mrs. L,

I was surprised to read that your daughter saw a non-graded notebook as a penalty. Writing-to-learn activities are not meant to be graded. They are designed to help readers make meaning of texts on their own, to explore and discover without being limited by someone else's view. Afterwards we come together in small discussion groups and then in one large group to share ideas. Then we can look at secondary sources. Review books are for review, after learning has taken place.

If we have any hope of producing a nation of thinkers, we have to provide students with an educational environment which fosters inquiry, exploration and discovery, where thinking is not constrained by "getting it right," where learners come to realize that confusion and ambiguity are normal and acceptable stages in the discovery process. If I grade a double-entry notebook, I grade it on the basis of honest commitment to the task, not on "getting it right" or "getting it all." I have discussed this with this extraordinarily insecure class. They don't believe me, and I really don't blame them. This is why I didn't fail students who used review books. I understand that, for their entire academic life, "getting it right" for a high grade which will get them into a first class college, which will get them a first class job, has been their primary motivation. We have done this to them. I feel partly responsible and committed to affecting change.

Students were given the option not to be graded on their notebooks, even before I asked them to sign the declaration. Some students who expended a great deal of effort on their notebooks and did a wonderful job, asked not to be graded. I would have given each of them A's. In their cover letters some said that they didn't think their notebooks would have gotten good grades because they couldn't figure everything out. Another student said that she chose not to have her notebook graded so that she could write what she really thought instead of what she thought I wanted to hear. She felt freer and got a lot more out of the exercise than she had previously. She did not feel penalized.

Finally, Mrs. L, I have been impressed with your daughter's intelligence and her motivation. I would love to see her try writing-to-learn for herself, the way it was meant to be. I think she would be amazed at how far her own thinking might take her, and perhaps feel rewarded for her efforts, even without a grade.

Sincerely,  
Helaine Hirshfeld  
Clarkstown North HS

## Students and Teachers as Writers

### WORKING

*The following is a point of view piece written in response to the American Social History Project video entitled "Heaven Will Protect the Working Girl." It was written by a student in Linda Farrell's class at Martin Luther King, Jr. High School.*

I'm a colored seamstress, now that those women have gone on strike them company owners decided to use us colored folk instead. Why should I work for them 'cause they ain't got no one else? Well I guess I have no choice. I'm most likely to make more anyway. Something just keeps holdin' me back. When no one was on strike why ain't they call me then, but I needs the work.

I done started working and it ain't as bad as I thought it was. The overseer's rough, but he ain't nothin' I can't handle. Now all of a sudden them women that went on strike wants me to come join a union with them. I kinda want to 'cause these working conditions is ridiculous, but I'm use to it 'cause I use to work in the hot sun all day down south.

Maybe I will join a union, but what's gonna happen when them women go back to work, I'm a be out of a job. I think I'll just stay right here, earn my keep, and not think about that damn union cause it ain't gonna do much for me anyway. All it's gonna do is probably bring mo' trouble for us colored folk that we don't need.

Cleo Thompson  
Martin Luther King, Jr. HS

### DRIFTING

Drifting wood slowly smooths in the  
sea, like today...black, white, and gray  
sea shells drift through the day

### WAVES

Waves come in, waves go  
out, waves keep going on and on,  
leaving nothing but the sea...

### MORNING

Sun comes up light shines down  
mockingbird sings a pretty song

David Ban  
Fieldston Lower School

### WHEN I WAS A SUB...

(to be sung to the tune of "When I was a Lad")

*Realizing that humor is a mainstay of survival, I offer this with no apologies but many thanks to Gilbert and Sullivan.—M.A*

When I was a sub in '64  
I had five classes, didn't ask for more.  
But a huge homeroom was given to me—  
As well as patrol around floor 3. (2X)

I patrolled those halls so artfully,  
They gave me an office on floor 3. (2X)

As that young sub, I wasn't a jerk.  
I filled out the buff cards like the finest clerk.  
I filled out the buff cards so carefully,  
They furnished my office on floor 3. (2X)

Buff cards done—that "professional chore."  
I couldn't even dream of doing more.  
But soon BEDS forms were on the scene,  
Not even time to hit the latrine.  
I bubbled in the BEDS so cleverly  
Now I net a nine-figure salary. (2X)

In '89 I moved to ESL  
Where my bubbling skills serve me well  
I do BESIS Report and LAB Exam  
I bubble and I bubble—ad nauseam. (2X)

In between I meant to teach,  
But soon pink bubbles were in my reach.  
I bubbled in those bubbles quite impeccably  
I bubbled all day on floor 3. (2X)

I taught so little they rewarded me,  
By giving me an office above floor three. (2X)

Now I'm in a position to bubble more.  
I bubble all day on the 4th floor.  
I bubble all day—periods 5 through 8  
I bubble early; I bubble late.  
I bubble pink. I bubble green.  
I'm living my reign as Bubble Queen

So young subs all who want to rise,  
A Masters in Bubbling, I do advise.  
Perfect this skill—and of position you'll be.  
You'll be given an office right next to me! (2X)

Marcia Aronson  
Evander Childs HS

## Project Notes

The school year has ended, but the memory of all of the varied activities in which Writing Project teachers had taken part remains vivid. Here's a summary of some of the highlights of the spring and summer....

### INDIVIDUAL ANNOUNCEMENTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS:

Long-time Project member and WTC teacher-consultant Helen Ogden officially retired from the Board of Education. Helen's work as an on-site teacher-consultant these past ten years has influenced and empowered teachers in many Queens high schools (most prominently at Bayside HS, Franklin K. Lane HS and Grover Cleveland HS) and she has been instrumental in the development of many of our teacher-consultants. She will be greatly missed, but we expect (and hope) that she will continue to serve the NYCWP in a variety of capacities. Ronni Tobman-Michelen assumed Helen's responsibilities at Flushing HS, returning to the role of on-site teacher-consultant that she assumed in the early years of the WTC.

Congratulations to Lillian Rossi-Maida and Marianne Arcadipane of FDR HS, who received a Disseminator's Grant from the Board of Education in recognition of their collaboration on a course of Latin American art and literature. In addition, Lillian, one of the founding members of the NYCWP and a WTC teacher-consultant, was recognized as Teacher of the Year at FDR HS.

Patricia Tubridy of JHS 180 received a Chase Active Learning Grant for the Television Communications Lab Program. The grant is for "Young Urban Planners."

Beverly Marcus, Maureen Nobile, and Marianne Rose presented their Urban Sites research projects at one of the our final Saturday meetings of the year. The session was chaired by Nancy Mintz.

### NEWS FROM THE ELEMENTARY TEACHERS NETWORK:

During the spring semester, Yvonne Vega and Tina Pinckney presented their work with the Primary Language Record to their colleagues at CES 42.

This summer ETN held two seminars. The introductory seminar was taught by Barbara Batton and Yvonne Smith, pre-K teacher at CPE I. They were assisted by two interns, Yvonne Vega, a second grade teacher from CES 42 in District 9 and Louisa Cruz, one of the founding teachers of Muscota New School. The advanced seminar was led by Elaine Avidon, Joan Gadson, a guidance counselor from CES 42, and Vivian Wallace from CCE.

### NEWS FROM THE JHS WRITING AND LEARNING PROJECT:

As usual, various in-service seminars were offered this spring. The seminars were coordinated by Project directors Linda Vereline and Linette Moorman.

Under the direction of Linda Vereline, the JHS Writing and Learning Project once again offered three Interdisciplinary Saturdays

this year. Participating teachers came from three different schools districts (Districts 25 and 27 in Queens and District 19 in Brooklyn) and continued their development of interdisciplinary work. Linda was assisted this year by Alan Stein, Linette Moorman, and Cecelia Traugh.

### NEWS FROM THE WRITING TEACHERS CONSORTIUM:

A hearty thank you to all of our NYCWP teacher-consultants who coordinated in-service seminars this spring. They include: Linda Farrell and Alan Stein at Aviation HS; Lydia Page and Beverly Marcus at the High School of Teaching; Jocelyn Tord and Thomasina LaGuardia at John Jay HS; Ed Osterman and Nick D'Alessandro at Martin Luther King, Jr. HS; Gilda Tesser and Claudette Green at DeWitt Clinton HS; Joe Bellacero and Claudette Green at Taft HS; Lisa Rosenberg and Ronni Tobman-Michelen at Flushing HS; Barbara Martz and Candy Systra at John Dewey HS; Alan Stein and Roseanna Bigham at Clara Barton HS; Linda Correnti and Marlene Dodes at Grover Cleveland HS, and Barbara Martz and Louise MacCallum at New Dorp HS.

At several high schools, WTC participants coordinated three-session mini-courses for colleagues who had never participated in any WTC seminar. These teachers include: Benetta Dunning and Karen Bonnick of Columbus HS; Martha Stephens and Barbara Kalsmith of Wingate HS; Matt Clayton and Carmen Daniels of Barton HS; Carol Kearney and Mike Kilbert of Cleveland HS.

Our school-based writing/study committees continue to do exciting work. At Evander Childs HS, the group led by Joe Bellacero and Ruth Licht produced a publication of staff writing from teachers, paraprofessionals and security guards. In addition, committee members Marcia Aronson, Pat Cousins, and Bruno Palazzo led workshops for their colleagues on special topics. At Brooklyn Technical HS, Phyllis Witte and her colleagues sponsored a student writing contest entitled "Hidden Voices," honoring the writing of students from whom we seldom hear. The winners received financial prizes, and their work was published in a school-based magazine. At Bayside HS, Kathleen Jensen and Syd Beiner led the group in a study of Korean literature and culture. At Newtown HS, Mary Carter and Benita Daniels and their colleagues continued their exploration of the Elmhurst community, planning a publication of Newtown/Elmhurst stories. At Madison HS, Richard August and Geraldine Curulli led their group through a series of discussions and writing activities on controversial educational issues. Nancy Richardson, Gloria Golding, and their group members published a magazine of writing tips for the James Monroe HS faculty.

Two new writing/study committees were formed this year. At Wingate HS, Barbara Kalsmith and Edith Roberts led a committee which visited various museums in order to produce a manual for their colleagues listing possible trip locations for students and appropriate writing assignments for students. Marianne Rose of Columbus HS led a new committee which explored issues of multiculturalism and investigated the possibility of a creating a writing center in the school library.

NEWS FROM THE SUMMER INSTITUTES

As always, the NYCWP offered a variety of institutes and advanced seminars in July. We are pleased to report that, once again, we received an overwhelming number of applications for the Invitational Summer Institute, and we thank all Project members who recommended colleagues for the Institute. If only we had spaces for all of the fine teachers we interviewed!

Linette Moorman and Paul Allison co-coordinated our annual Invitational Institute. Sue Case and Barbara Martz co-coordinated the Open Institute which this year focused on the reading and writing of biography and autobiography.

With advice and assistance from Cecelia Traugh, Andrew Galinsky and Alan Stein, we co-coordinated an advanced institute for former NYCWP participants. In this institute, some participating

teachers reflected on and wrote about aspects of their work whereas others chose to design curricula. It is our hope that this advanced institute will become a regular fixture of our summer program.

As usual, the summer activities were initiated by a three-day writing retreat. This year the retreat was co-coordinated by Amanda Gulla and Laura Pacher.

A special note about two unique workshops offered this July. In collaboration with the American Social History Project, the NYCWP ran a four-day workshop for English and history teachers. Christine Cziko of the NYCWP teamed up with Linda Ellman of the ASHP to co-coordinate these activities. For two days, Elaine Avidon, Gail Kleiner, Ed Osterman, and Cecelia Traugh coordinated a workshop in writing across the curriculum for the directors and staff of the new Coalition Campus High Schools.

**URBAN EDUCATION IN THE 90s: RETHINKING THE POSSIBILITIES**

**A City-wide Educators Conference for teachers pre-k through 12, adult educators, after-school youth practitioners, and school administrators  
November 4 - 5, 1994**

On Friday afternoon November 4th, the conference will begin with a celebration of student work. Outstanding classroom projects and student work demonstrating achievement over time will be the focus. This will be followed by a series of readings by well-known "urban" authors and selected New York City students. On Saturday morning, Dr. Manning Marable, Director of the Institute for Research in African American Studies at Columbia University will give his keynote address, followed by a full day of sessions, workshops, panel and round table discussions. The cost of the conference for the two days will be \$55. If you are interested in making a presentation at the conference or contributing to the student work display, please contact Linette Moorman or Elaine Avidon at 718.960.8758.

For further information please call 718.960.8758



New York City Writing Project  
LEHMAN COLLEGE  
The City University of New York  
250 Bedford Park Boulevard West  
Bronx, New York 10468-1589

Nonprofit Org.  
U.S. Postage Paid  
Bronx, New York  
Permit No. 632

Thomasina LaGuardia  
333 Pearl Street  
New York, NY 10038

New York City Writing Project  
**NEWSLETTER**

INSTITUTE FOR LITERACY STUDIES • LEHMAN COLLEGE • THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK