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Ohio's New Learning Standards and the Writing Process

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What We Learn When We Free Writers

by Penny Kittle



Fifteen minutes a day, and you'll have a book in a year, Don Murray told me. It was early in our friendship, and his advice came with a laminated sign that is still taped to the front of my computer monitor: *nulla dies sine linea*, or "never a day without a line" (Horace, 65–8 B.C). These words have allegedly hung over many writers' desks through the centuries. I wanted to be part of that club, so I taped the sign to the bottom of my monitor. I have tried for more than a decade since to respond to rather than ignore this wisdom.

Murray believed that a constant state of composition was essential for writers. He said, "I try to write every day," but more importantly, Murray described what happens when we don't, when we're out of practice. "And when I miss a day or two, or a week, it becomes harder and harder to write. I want to write for all the days I haven't written; I want to write more than I can write, and better than I can write. And therefore I cannot write at all" (1985). I know this. I know how much easier it is to think like a writer when I'm practicing every day, providing that practice is grounded in the conditions writers need: time to write and choice of what to write about (Calkins, 1994; Graves, 1983; Murray, 1977). Teachers have always struggled to provide both, particularly if they're not in the habit of writing—because it is easy to discount the value of those precepts when you haven't written something you consider important in years.

And now, with the adoption of the Common Core State Standards, there is a hurry-up feeling in classrooms. The standards did not change what we understand about the process of writing or its importance in leading writers to confidence and clarity with words. We are, however, faced with an important question: how do we give students time and choice in writing in this hurry-up world? Students need time to think about what to write and time to follow ideas and images in free writing, building the independence and confidence that we want them to have as writers.

As Tony Wagner noted in *Creating Innovators*, there are three interrelated elements to intrinsic motivation: play, passion, and purpose (2012). These are not words used in the Common Core State Standards, but they are habits of mind we must cultivate in writers. Time to wait for words is a critical stage in the development of independence.

My colleagues and I found an answer in a challenge to 55 sixth graders last fall: write each night in notebooks. We challenged every student in sixth grade because we refused to limit possibility or define our pedagogy around the 5 percent who might lose their notebooks more than once or forget them at home.

But let me make a few important points before you read farther. One point: Nightly writing was a class challenge, not homework. It was not graded, and no one was shamed for forgetting or for skipping a night or two.

Another: My colleagues and I wrote or sketched or listed ideas in our notebooks as well. We were part of the challenge. I confess that most weeks I scrambled to sit with my notebook outside of class four times a week, but as you'll see in the linked video interview of one teacher, our constant state of composition changed us as writers and leaders in the classroom. We wrote more this year than ever before. We deepened our understanding of writing, the content we teach.



Watch Kim Mathison, sixth grade teacher at Conway Elementary in Conway, New Hampshire, explain what she learned as a writing teacher through regular writing and revision in her notebook at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bajZ4Wl0g_0.

We celebrated the unexpected—the variety—the individual heart of student work often. We celebrated the risks students took as writers and thinkers, and their willingness to share what they were working on to learn from one another. The guidance counselor started a lunch group, Writers' Café, and a wide range of students gathered to share.

And lastly: We wrote and reread and practiced revising each day in class. We modeled and shared an interest in free writing as a community in the classroom first, sprung from the beautiful language of poetry or short readings from books, and then asked students to sustain writing and thinking at home in any way they chose to.

Nightly writing gave students freedoms we couldn't provide each day in class: they were in charge of when they wrote, how long they wrote, under what conditions (headphones in? on the floor? outside?), and, most importantly, what they wrote about. Student control nurtured student independence. Students did not ask, "What should I write about?" They learned to read their world like writers. They learned to wait for words. As you will see in the video, they wrote and sketched and explored genres by asking: "What do I have to say?" "What am I thinking about?"



Watch sixth grade students answer questions posed on their process as writers at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XFNp2dITuc4>. These interviews were conducted at the school in June of 2013.*

Donald Murray (1985), who first proposed that we teach students to work as writers do, suggested that a process approach to teaching writing included just three things:

1. Teach process, not product.
2. Write yourself.
3. Listen to your students.

And William Zinsser echoed this faith in process: "Trust the process. If the process is sound, the product improves" (2001). You will not see the hallmarks of teaching in a process-centered approach in many classrooms today, however. We assign writing products, which we don't write, and we too often can't find time for conferences. Somehow we hope that writers will grow under these conditions, and so often they do not. They depend on us for topics and for feedback for revision. We complain they are dependent, but we have made them so.

This persistent conflict is evident when I speak to teachers about writing workshop. "If I don't give them a topic, they can't write," teachers tell me. I believe both the lack of self-direction and the lack of motivation (these habits of mind that nurture lifelong seeking and learning) are a product of practices in our classrooms. Visit primary children who have been given the freedom and good teaching to work in a writer's workshop, and you have to wonder why so much has changed once they hit middle and then high school. A child who can manage the complexity of organizing information for readers about a subject he is passionate about (after collecting the information, sorting it, and determining importance) is suddenly in high school unable to write an essay without guidelines for each paragraph. We expect too little. We control too much. To mangle Zinsser's quote, when we focus on products, the process is dependent and does not last. It will not transfer to the wide range of writing that will be asked of all of us in the future.

I believe the challenge for all teachers is to live in a constant of state of composition. This means that ideas will spin inside of you while you're doing other things. I first considered what to say here as dawn crept over the skyline in my office. I began with pages of phrases and images from teaching in a jumble of notes—raw, unorganized thinking, which is an essential stage in my process, and something too often bypassed in hurry-up teaching toward products. I worked on ways to organize while driving to get groceries; I considered my argument and the evidence I needed while on hall duty. Because I worked on drafting this for several mornings in a row, I was constantly composting, turning over thinking as I reconsidered and deepened my understanding of what I had written just that morning. I trusted the process, which made finding words easier when ideas awoke me before the alarm.

*In the video, the students refer to RADaR in their writing. This is a revision acronym—*replace, add, delete, and reorder*—that Kelly Gallagher (2011) created.

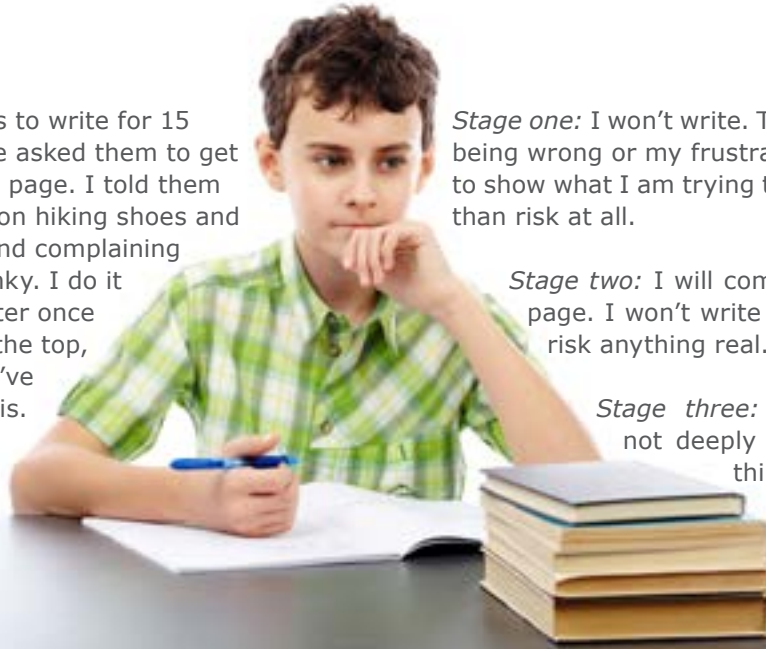
We challenged our sixth graders to write for 15 minutes, four nights a week. We asked them to get comfortable sitting with a blank page. I told them sometimes it is like my putting on hiking shoes and driving to Mt. Willard, cursing and complaining the whole way because I'm cranky. I do it because I know that it gets better once I'm on the trail. The view from the top, after all that work, is worth it. I've had enough practice to know this. Writing has to contain this knowledge as well.

Our work in sixth grade rested on the belief that teachers must be practicing writers. Writing your ideas and

experiences is a process you must practice to understand well enough to teach it to others. If you never liked writing—or never felt good at it—then you're having your students do things as writers that you yourself don't understand very well. The act of writing, even (or especially) when it isn't going well, is lesson preparation. If we understood this connection between writing and skillful teaching, we'd bring notebooks to every classroom, every staff meeting, and every evaluation conference.

I will enter class this morning with all this word work in my head. I'm prepared to model writing with my high school students. But consider one of my students: Robert, a senior, who didn't take an English class last year because he planned to take it online and then didn't. He barely passed his other classes, where the writing he had to do was minimal. He isn't ready to plan, organize, sift through ideas, and come up with good ones now that I've asked him to. He is mired in a belief that he is not a writer and will just have to suffer through a pile of assignments to earn high school credit. His eyes are focused on the last day of class. I have to set up conditions that will help him find words to name something important to him. Once he sees himself creating meaningful writing, he'll be willing to invest more.

Because I believe learning is dynamic, I expect Robert to move from resisting writing in September to exploration in his notebook by the end of the semester. I see all my current students sprinkled along a continuum of growth:



Stage one: I won't write. This is a defense against being wrong or my frustration with finding words to show what I am trying to say. I'd rather not try than risk at all.

Stage two: I will comply, but only to fill the page. I won't write what matters to me or risk anything real.

Stage three: I will write, but I'm not deeply engaged with my own thinking. I want you to tell me what to write, so I can do it the way you say so and move on.

Stage four: I freely write, explore, and trust that words can communicate my ideas. I find the surprise and joy in words that name my experiences. I want to write more.

Teachers can shift mindsets. If we say, "These kids won't . . .," we stop trying to move students along this continuum. Instead we must believe that no matter where we start as writers, we can reach for more. What classroom conditions will help each writer move? Freedom will lead writers to independence. Telling students what to write is dangerous teaching. Instead, let us reach to empower all our students. Let us find words to name what is vivid and crucial to us, so we are ready to pass on the energy of creation. In sixth grade, we asked students to live like writers, and we joined them. They left us in June as confident, fluent, independent writers, notebooks in hand.



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Deeper Writing: Writing Below the Surface of the Common Core

by Robin W. Holland

What do I write?

I don't know how to start.

I don't know where to start

Where am I supposed to get an idea for this paper? This assignment? This project?

They always say to write what you know.

But . . . I don't know what to write.

This chorus of laments and questions may sound familiar to you. Answering this chorus with supportive words, expert knowledge, and sound teaching is the challenge we encounter as teachers in 2014.

For over a decade, writing has taken a backseat to reading, as No Child Left Behind hid the reciprocal and symbiotic nature of these two subjects.

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS), on the other hand, have elevated writing and pushed it once more to the forefront. So the good news is we are now talking about writing.

With the Common Core's focus on engaging students in clear, coherent writing in a variety of text types and purposes, including argument and information or explanatory writing, as well as narrative

and sustained research, we are forced to critically examine what we are currently doing in writing classrooms across the nation.

For one thing, many of us will now be asking students to produce extensively more writing than we have expected in the past. And we may also be asking them to write more frequently.

CCSS Writing Standard 10 calls for us to *write routinely over extended time frames* making certain that our writers have ample time for *research, reflection, and revision*. In addition, and perhaps more importantly for this article, Writing Standard 10 also calls for *shorter time frames*—writing that can be completed in a *single sitting or a day or two for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences*.

In response to the requirement for both longer and shorter opportunities for writing, you may be chanting laments and asking questions similar to those of your students:

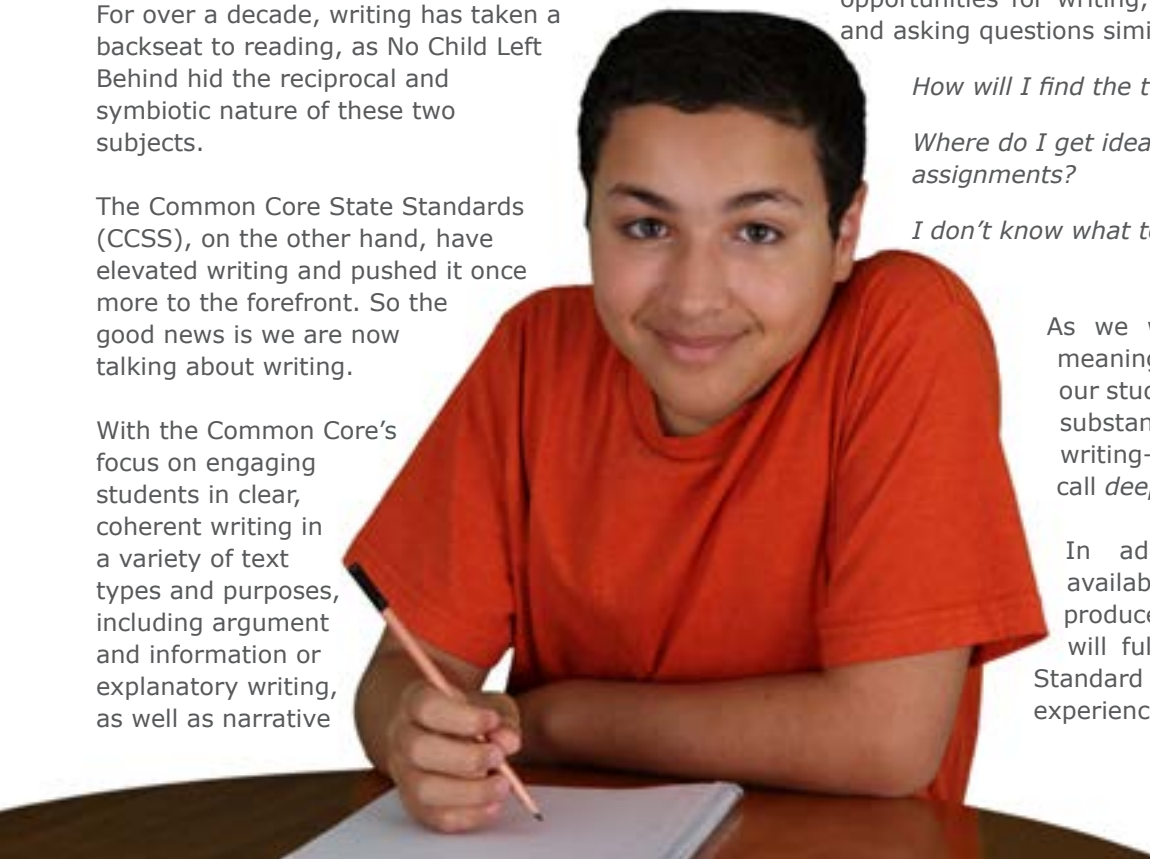
How will I find the time?

Where do I get ideas for all these writing assignments?

I don't know what to have them write.

As we wrestle collectively to provide meaningful writing experiences for our students—experiences that lead to substantive, meaningful, and authentic writing—I offer what I have come to call *deeper writing*.

In addition, I offer four readily available *sources of ideas* that will produce deeper writing—writing that will fulfill the requirement of Writing Standard 10 for short daily writing experiences.



What Is Deeper Writing?

By deeper writing I mean writing that challenges writers to engage in a thorough search of memory, critical analysis of relationships and situations, and powerful exploration and discovery of themselves and the world.

Deeper writing is writing that digs beneath the surface, underneath the obvious observations and topics, to reveal that which is in the background, unnoticed and unexamined. It is reflecting with the pen—thinking and writing critically, pushing metaphors to the limit, searching for relationship and relevance where they are not easily detected.

Deeper writing touches both the reader and writer with emotions we have buried or ignored, and it surprises us with fresh perspectives of the familiar. I have found this to be true no matter what the mode of writing—expository or information, argument or academic, narrative or poetry.

In my book *Deeper Writing: Quick Writes and Mentor Texts to Illuminate New Possibilities* (Holland, 2012), the essence of deeper writing is expressed as follows: “Deeper writing and thinking forces us to ask again and again: What more? What else? Why? And so what?” (p. 2).

Why Is Deeper Writing Important?

In *Because Writing Matters: Improving Student Writing in Our Schools* (NWP & Nagin, 2006), a comprehensive summary of writing research and practices within the National Writing Project, Carl Nagin indicates that “writing is a gateway for success in academia, the new workplace and the global economy, as well as for our collective success as a participatory democracy” (p. 2). And he further indicates that “learning to write requires frequent, supportive practice” (p. 12). Evidence throughout this text shows that writing performance improves when a student writes often and across content areas.

During the 2005–2006 school year, we introduced and intentionally practiced deeper writing at Salem Elementary School (Columbus City Schools). We used the four sources of ideas that I will be sharing in this article, supported with mentor texts and suggested writing possibilities. Our writing test scores increased significantly. The number of students passing increased from 78 percent to 96 percent on the Ohio Achievement Test. Our principal attributed this gain largely to the work we had done with deeper

writing in after-school writing groups for both teachers and students. Our program provided a multitiered professional development experience over three years, as teachers in the writing groups wrote and learned from each other, taught in the student groups, and transferred the practices they were learning to their individual classrooms and students.

What Do We Know About Writing?

As we move into full implementation of the Common Core, it is critical that we remember, consider, and analyze what we already know about effective writing instruction. The following principles undergird the development and practice of deeper writing:

- We encourage our students to write what they know, but we must foster learning about other interests and topics about which to write, as well.
- We know that our students need time to write, but time without instruction, strategies, and models is not enough.
- We know it is important to provide multiple models of good writing, but we must also promote analysis and discussion of the models or mentor texts so that students may discover, explore, and identify specific features, structures, or other elements as possibilities for their own writing.
- And we know that receiving specific feedback on writing that clearly identifies what works and why, what is confusing or incomplete, and what is unnecessary is also essential for improving writing.

In the context of the above principles, my own writing practices, and writing work with both students and teachers, over the past decade I have been developing short writing experiences using mentor texts to invite writing.

Resting firmly on the work of Donald Graves and Donald Murray in encouraging students to write what they know in substantive ways; using mentor texts as models, touchstones, and “instructors” based on the work of Katie Wood Ray and Ralph Fletcher; and promoting the use of free writing, paying homage to Peter Elbow, the resulting quick writes or writing invitations are based on time-tested, best practices in teaching, learning, and writing. The flexibility of the resulting writing experiences allows

for writers to select the elements of any given writing possibility and/or mentor texts that are most personally meaningful and useful in relationship to the task at hand and their own context, content, and chosen container. [A representative collection of these are gathered in *Deeper Writing* (Holland, 2012). Additional writing experiences are also suggested on my blog, *Deeper Writing (and Reading) of the World*.]

Four Sources of Writing Ideas, or the Four C's of Deeper Writing

No matter what we are writing, I believe the initial ideas and the subsequent developing ideas can be categorized under one of four sources: context, content, container, and container lining.

But before we delve into each of these sources of writing ideas, it is essential to state clearly that these are not linear. They are not steps in which we must start with the first one and move through the others in sequence. Rather, an idea for writing may arise from any one or two or all of the four sources and may be further developed in any of the others as the writing progresses.

Context

Where does writing come from? How do ideas arise? Where do we "find" writing?

What models of writing will inform our writing in particular contexts?

Writing comes from somewhere. We don't write in a vacuum. This is particularly true when we are writing nonfiction. We write because . . . We write about . . .

It may be a conversation in which we engage or overhear. It may be an image or piece of art that we see, or perhaps it is music or other sounds that we hear. It may be a book or several books we read. Our idea may arise amid an experience or event. Our compulsion to write may come when we are in a particular place or when we are with a specific person. Or we may discover sudden inspiration in our idle wonderings or focused inquiries.

Life experiences compel us to write. In specific circumstances, we feel we must capture our thoughts and feelings. For example, we all experience loss through death. What do we write in this context?

Several of my favorite writers have been inspired to write as they struggled with the deaths of loved ones.

- As Nikki Giovanni sat beside her mother's hospital bed, she wrote the poems collected in *Acolytes*.
- Jane Yolen's husband was diagnosed with cancer. She wrote *The Radiation Sonnets* during the painful time of his treatment. A year after his death she wrote *Things to Say to a Dead Man*.
- Mary Oliver's partner of more than 40 years died, and Oliver gave us the poignant, yet hopeful, poems in *Thirst*.
- More recently, *My Brother's Book*, one of Maurice Sendak's last published works, was a tribute to his dead brother.

Sometimes a situation in which we find ourselves begs us to write.

In the Columbus Area Writing Project, we begin our summer writing institute each year with a retreat at Kenyon College in Gambier, Ohio. I love this campus, and this place is always for me a context which fosters my best writing.

Several years ago on a stormy night at Kenyon, my friend and fellow CAWP codirector Kevin Cordi had just regaled us with his version of "The Blood Brothers," one of the scariest horror stories I have ever heard, when every light on the campus went out. It was pitch black. No stars, no generators. Just darkness. I began to reflect on the effect of darkness. Why are we afraid of the dark?

I knew I would write about this.

I immediately began to think about mentor texts and ultimately wrote a prompt entitled "Black as Pitch," which delves into not only dark, but the significance, connotations, and symbolism of black as a color, and then blooms into considering other colors as well.

Content

What meaning do I want to make?

What meaning do I want readers and hearers to construct?

What models of writing will show me how other writers have constructed similar meanings?

Sometimes we come to the page knowing the meaning we want to make. Other times we struggle to find the idea at the edge of our awareness, while we wrestle to explore and discover the meaning we want to construct. And occasionally, we are simply handed an idea fully formed, ready to spill onto the page.

One summer, I was rereading *Night* by Elie Wiesel and at the same time leading the summer institute retreat. Our theme that year was immigration. We read a number of pieces in *The Line Between Us*, including the poem "Running to America" by Luis Rodriques. I was struck by the juxtaposition between the border crossings described in our institute texts and those recounted by Wiesel. I immediately connected both of these border crossings to Middle Passage—the common denominator and essence of this juxtaposition being fear, darkness, and cramped spaces. I felt compelled to write. In one sitting, I wrote the poem "Border Crossing Protocol." Here are the first several lines:

Why must border crossings be cramped
with people crushed and stuffed like smelts in a
sauce of sweat and urine and feces and fear?
Who decided that nakedness—with all precious
personal possessions stripped and stolen—was the
appropriate attire for such journeys?

As I began this poem, I also knew I wanted to end with images of mothers and the message that they all want the same things for their children.

The poem ends:

The mother—holds her child and
Her northstar hope
Her promisedland dream
Her borderless desires
For her child
The mother—crosses imaginary lines
Back to the place
Back to the time
When the people could fly.

Sometimes we just know exactly what we want to say—or it is given to us. Other times we struggle to create the meaning, to discover the content. I am still trying to write a piece that expresses completely the complexity of emotions and thoughts I experienced as I neared retirement. I have written several pieces that have yet to capture the exact essence of this transitional time in which I felt ecstatic and excited, yet fearful and sad. Periodically, I open several related files on my computer and continue to explore my confusing reactions during that experience.

Container

What container will hold my meaning?

How can I present my meaning to my readers, my audience?

What models of texts will show how others have used a particular container?

Just as the beauty of flowers is enhanced by the perfect vase, so the appropriate container will both reveal and enhance the deepest meanings and nuances in your writing. The right container will empower your message and allow your words to soar.

By container, I mean traditional genre or form of writing, but I also mean so much more—I include the ultimate purpose, use, and audience in the concept of container, as well.

Where and how will the writing be shared or published—on the radio or Internet, in a book or journal, in a small group or on a bulletin board?

"Border Crossing Protocol" was a poem (genre) but ultimately fit into a larger container. It became a video created with Movie Maker which includes images, vocal and instrumental music, and meaningful transitions between slides—all of which support, illustrate, enhance, expand, and create meaning. All of this is the final container for my original idea.

There is a writing prompt I use in which we begin with a piece we have already written and rewrite it several times—switching genres at a rapid pace. This form of revision often leads to discovery and surprise. For example, in working with one student, as we played with rearranging, deleting, and punctuating his sentences, we discovered that his long, rambling war story was actually a poem. Perhaps my retirement piece has not yet found its appropriate container.

We can approach containers in two ways. We can pour our meaning into a specifically chosen container which seems appropriate for the writing. Or we can also start with a container and then intentionally construct our writing to fit. When I discovered ghazals, I spent the next month reading every ghazal I could get my hand on, and then for the next few weeks after, writing whatever meaning I wanted to make in the shape of a ghazal. (A ghazal, pronounced “guzzle,” is a traditional eastern poetic form. For more information, see my blog post [Guzzling Ghazals](#).)

Container Lining

How do we see what we are writing?

What lenses do we wear as we write (or read)?

What lenses will our readers or audience wear?

What models of texts have been written from a perspective similar to my own?

Container lining is my personal language for the lenses through which we see the world—our personal perspectives.

We can see all of the four sources of ideas illustrated as we consider the image below. The set table is the *context*. The bread is the *content*. The basket is the *container*. And the *container lining* is the lens or perspective through which we see the bread. The color, texture, fabric, size, and draping of the lining all affect how we perceive the bread. We don’t look at the bread directly, but through the filter of our lenses—through the aura created by not only the context and the container but also the container lining.

What are my container linings or my personal perspectives? What are the lenses I wear as I navigate reading and writing and everything else I do?

I am African American, woman, Christian (specifically Episcopalian). I am short. I am teacher (retired after 35 years from public school). I am Democrat, Ohioan, alumna of OSU, homeowner, wife, stepmother . . . and the list could go on for pages.

Everything on my list colors what I read in books and see in the world—and also everything I write. I am always wearing at least one of these lenses—looking through at least one container lining. Your list—your container linings or lens—is different from mine, but your list is equally as long and complex.



Creating Writing Invitations to Deeper Writing

All writers have these four sources of writing ideas readily available. These same four sources of ideas are also available when we create writing experiences for our students. We can offer them as starting points, structuring our writing experiences to invite their use.

Although the quick writes I develop and regularly use with both students and teachers vary tremendously in text types and purposes—argument and information or explanatory writing, narrative, poetry, and more—they all have several basic components that have become my standard framework as I continue with this work. I suggest the structure in the box to the right as you develop your own invitations to deeper writing.

As we continue to collectively explore ways we can foster substantive and meaningful writing for our students, while helping each one meet the Common Core Standards in writing, I encourage you to be in what Donald Graves called a state of constant composition.

I encourage you to always be ready to receive a writing idea—thinking about writing when you are not actually facing the paper, thinking about your own writing and invitations you will offer your students, thinking always about the contexts, contents, containers, and container linings that will lead you and your students to deeper writing.

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Structure to Deeper Writing

<i>Background narrative</i>	How did this topic come about?
<i>Mentor texts and discussion</i>	What are ways to approach this topic or idea?
<i>New writing possibility</i>	What are writers invited to write?
<i>Sharing</i>	What was written?
<i>Debriefing</i>	How did the writing go? What was hard or easy? What did I discover? What might be done differently?

What's the Story? Writing and the Common Core State Standards

by Karla J. Hieatt

The Reality

I have always preferred teaching literature over composition. Short stories, novels, dramas, poems . . . each lends itself to rich discussion and thoughtful introspection. Life lessons can be gleaned from works, and cautionary tales exist for teenagers who might lack life experiences. Within a comprehensive English language arts classroom, literature can overshadow the teaching of composition. I know that there have been times when, engrossed in a novel study, I have shortened the writing component—or even eliminated it from the unit. Always, my students would work on journals and quick-writes, reflections and exit slips. However, during these periods, the time and attention required for brainstorming and drafting, for workshopping and revision, would be lacking. Telling myself, “It’s okay. Sometimes the students need to produce an essay within a class period. After all, they will have to perform under the same conditions on the ACT!” eased my guilt and made me feel better about the extra time the class devoted to an exercise like a Socratic seminar. I mean, students love talking about whether or not John Proctor is a tragic hero in *The Crucible*. The opinions they hear and arguments they take from the discussion stay with them. Right?

Well, those luxuries that I took under the old state standards are no more. With the adoption and implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), the type, the quality, and the frequency of writing that will be required of my students have changed. No longer can I modify the writing process so drastically—not if I want my students to find success within the classroom and on their end-of-course exams.

The CCSS focuses on three types of writing: informative/explanatory, opinion/argument, and narrative. Regardless of the type of writing, mentor texts play a curial role within the learning process. According to Ralph Fletcher (Choice Literacy, n.d.), “Mentor texts are any texts that you can learn from, and every writer, no matter how skilled you are or how beginning you are, encounters and

reads something that can lift and inform and infuse their own writing. I’d say anything that you can learn from—not by talking about but just looking at the actual writing itself, being used in a really skillful, powerful way.” In essence, Fletcher advises that mentor texts should be meaningful, that writers should learn from them, not just be exposed to them so that teachers can check “mentor text” off their list of teaching resources.

So how can mentor texts inform writing? How might they be infused into a classroom and lend themselves to discussion of craft and content in a way that will inform the students on multiple levels? One possibility includes approaching informative and argumentative writing using thematically related articles and asking students to annotate and respond and to critique ideas found within the pieces. These observations could easily serve as a springboard for more formal informative or argumentative writing. Kelly Gallagher’s “Article of the Week” (AoW) concept (Gallagher, n.d.) outlines possible procedures that an ELA teacher could employ to help not only expose students to various writing styles, but afford them practice with close reading—dissecting works and pulling information to support claims. Gallagher notes that “part of the reason my students have such a hard time reading is because they bring little prior knowledge and background to the written page. They can decode the words, but the words remain meaningless without a foundation of knowledge. To help build my students’ prior knowledge, I assign them an ‘Article of the Week’ every Monday morning. By the end of the school year I want them to have read 35 to 40 articles about what is going on in the world. It is not enough to simply teach my students to recognize theme in a given novel; if my students are to become literate, they must broaden their reading experiences into real-world text.”

Inside a comprehensive ELA classroom, teachers must effectively manage their time and use the best tools available. Gallagher’s AoW program presents exercises for reading and writing, all while pushing our students to

become participants in the world around them and arming them with knowledge they can incorporate into future drafts and discussions. Educators are welcome to delve into Gallagher's collection of Articles of the Week; they are easily found on his website. With a little more work (on the teacher's part), grouping articles can take place, and then students can be asked to write responses that require them to draw conclusions, enhanced by textual support, in the form of informative and/or argument writing. As with all writing, this should be modeled and practiced numerous times before student competency is expected; and if this is an established routine within the classroom, this competency will be achieved.

Yet, as educators, should we be content with mere competency from our students? In my opinion, no. Instead, we should prepare our students not only for end-of-course exams but for whatever comes next. My hope is, as teachers of ELA, we are all modifying the wonderful suggestions and research brought forth by our content leaders including—but not limited to—Jeff Anderson (2005), Jim Burke (2013), Kelly Gallagher (2011), and Penny Kittle (2008). I doubt that I would survive the transition to CCSS without their guidance. Honestly, I am not sure my students will be successful in the world of CCSS without my accepting help from these scholars who have devoted their careers to helping the masses.

For many of my students, their next step is college. Therefore, I have had to ask myself what I can do to help prepare them for university-level writing. Utilizing the CCSS, what skill sets should I stress to ensure their writing stands out when compared with that of other students?

The answer to this question has brought me back to my true love within ELA: literature. My writers—my students—need to develop a personal style and voice within their work. Within narratives, we are exposed to beautiful writings of various styles. Therefore, my first requirement for a class is very simple in nature. Some classes have elaborate projects assigned in addition to the reading. Other classes track their progress and experiences in a reader's notebook modified from the works of Aimee Buckner (2005, 2009). My expectations vary from class to class, depending upon

the ability of my students. As with all facets of education, one size does not fit all and modifications are the norm. Always though, the students are asked to read.

When we discuss our readings, students are expected to share their thoughts on how the author has written the work. While some students do not know they are critiquing an author's style (this vocabulary comes later), they do know what they like. Normally, students like vivid descriptions and meaningful dialogue. As we work on writing our own narratives, we focus on those components. In the back of my mind—and on my curriculum map—I know that they are techniques will eventually pepper all types of their writing.

The Activities

As my students enter class, they are each handed an index card. On one side is a "simple" word (*yes, no, blue, green, paper, etc.*). On the flip side is a word that connects with a feeling or emotion of some sort (*love, hate, disgust, confusion, flirtation, etc.*). No two cards have the same pairing of words. Automatically, the kids know something interesting is about to happen. The bell rings, and as we settle in for the period, I ask for a volunteer. Without a moment of hesitation, Cody raises his hand. Cody is very personable and willing to play along with any activity. Secretly, I am thrilled to have him as my volunteer.

"Okay, head up to the podium. Now, tell us . . . what two words do you have on your card?" I ask as he moves to the front of the classroom.

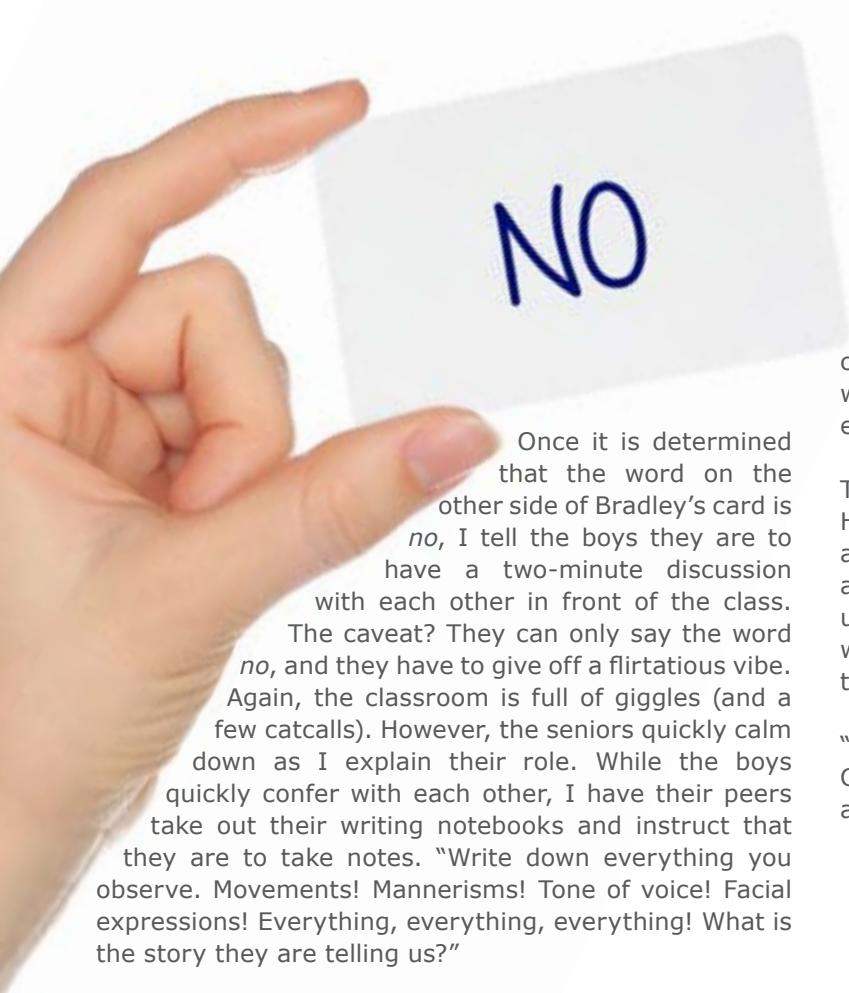
Cody smiles mischievously and says, "Orange . . . and flirty."

Oh, so this is why Cody is so eager to volunteer. He is been intrigued by the word *flirty*. Giggles spread throughout the classroom. "Well, well, well. Cody, which word would you like to focus on for the next few minutes?"

"Flirty!"

"Alright. Who else in here is flirty?" I call out, scanning the crowd until Bradley simultaneously raises his hand and stands. He knows he will be in front of the class as well.





Before the bell rings, I ask students to revisit their current literacy narrative drafts, marking places that would benefit from a bit more detail attached to the existing dialogue within the tale.

The next day, the class participates in a similar activity. However, instead of being limited to one word, students are paired and assigned roles (*tourists, snobs, jocks, etc.*) and asked to create an over-the-top skit or interaction using their assigned characters. As before, their peers would evaluate the interaction, paying special attention to what the characters said and how they said it.

"Let's start with the 'stereotypical freshman couple.'" Curtis and Margot walk to the front of the class and, already in character, begin.

"Oh, Baby, I missed you so much last period. Forty minutes! That is just too long for a class. How can they expect us to be apart for so long?" Margot asks with wide eyes, leaning into Curtis, who looks at her with an adoring gaze.

His quick, stammering reply nails that of a nervous young teen, in love for the first time.

"I know, Baby. Don't they understand how we need to be together? I love you soooo much. These two weeks have been the best two weeks of my life."

Margot nods her head enthusiastically. "Mine too! I don't know how I lived before I found you! Do you want a piece of candy? Curtis! Look! The candy is the color of love!"

"It's the color of our love. We should get married! Will you marry me?" Curtis proposes.

"Of course, Baby!" Margot squeals in delight.

Beyond offering a few laughs and opportunities to reminisce about what ninth grade was like, the skit served as a great starting point for discussion. The students were struck by the authenticity of the dialogue. Repeatedly, the seniors stated, "Freshmen around here actually talk like that" and "Everything with them [freshmen] is punctuated with exclamation marks. You can hear it in their voices." The lesson? Provide believable dialogue. Allow your characters to speak—and think—as they

Once it is determined that the word on the other side of Bradley's card is *no*, I tell the boys they are to have a two-minute discussion with each other in front of the class. The caveat? They can only say the word *no*, and they have to give off a flirtatious vibe. Again, the classroom is full of giggles (and a few catcalls). However, the seniors quickly calm down as I explain their role. While the boys quickly confer with each other, I have their peers take out their writing notebooks and instruct that they are to take notes. "Write down everything you observe. Movements! Mannerisms! Tone of voice! Facial expressions! Everything, everything, everything! What is the story they are telling us?"

The timer starts, and the boys begin talking:

"No."

"No?"

"No, no, nooooo. . . ."

Cody flashes Bradley a winning smile and caresses his bicep. Bradley, shaking his head, takes a step away. Cody follows him, and the conversation continues, culminating in Cody sitting in the chair at my desk, taking off his shoes . . . then his socks . . . trying to lure Bradley over to him.

"Time!"

The gentlemen pull themselves together and head back to their seats.

"Now, what did we notice? Give me descriptive phrases, please." Comments like "His touches were tender" and "Bradley shrank from Cody's hands and eyes" fill the classroom until it is time to move on to the next pair. By the end of the activity, students understand that the taglines and imagery we couple with dialogue are just as important as what is being said. We need to document not just the discussion but the feelings.

actually would if they were real. Avoid stilted dialogue and be a true reporter of events. Listen to how people talk and utilize those patterns and nuances. Complement those with the mannerisms and reactions (highlighted the day before) to create a complete story.

These minilessons were used with our literacy narrative unit, and without exception, the students produced richer writing after incorporating these concepts. Rather than commenting on his reading teacher's fat arm, Michael wrote: "She would walk around the room in some type of floral dress that accentuated only one thing: her arms. I can recall that every time she would write on the board her pale, flabby, alabaster skin would never cease to sway . . ."

Likewise, Cody captured his thoughts about losing the school spelling bee:

"Emerald," the head judge said.

"Emerald," I thought. I took a deep breath.

"E-M-E-R . . ." I was stuck . . . I had no clue. My heart was a battering ram trying to escape my chest. Was it an A or an E?

"E-L-D. Emerald," I said. The buzzer sounded. That buzzer meant one thing; I was wrong. I was wrong . . . The entire gymnasium heard my heart plummet into my stomach. The audience sat silently. They didn't laugh or snicker; half of the students would not have known that I was wrong if it wasn't for the buzzer. They did not make it to the school-wide spelling bee, but I did and I was wrong. I was a big, fat loser.

As I walked down the steps of the stage with tears streaming down my face I heard my mother's voice faintly: "It's okay Cody," she yelled from afar. It was not okay. I was too embarrassed to watch the rest of the contest. A river of shame flowed from those same blue eyes that were filled with hope just minutes before, cascading down my chubby cheeks and hiding the colorful tiles of the hallway that had started this journey. As I sat in my classroom alone I learned one of life's greatest lessons: sometimes you just are not good enough.

Obviously, the students could incorporate descriptions and dialogue into pieces of narrative writing. Yet, how might these skills transfer to other modes? How might narrative techniques invigorate informative/explanatory and opinion/argument writing? Can students, ones raised on the five-paragraph essay and OGT prep prior to CCSS, be weaned from the formulaic approach to writing and feel secure enough to personalize their pieces?

The Experiment

When the class moves to the "compare-and-contrast" unit in which the students are informing and explaining the similarities and differences between topics, I ask that they familiarize themselves with the two popular compare-contrast formats (block method and point by point) for future reference. However, I require that they avoid these structures as they draft their pieces for an assignment that asked them to write about the public versus private life of one of their peers. Yes, they need to have a thesis. Yes, they need to compare and/or contrast points. Yet, how their essays unfold is totally up to them.

When Spencer brings his rough draft in for a whole-class revision, he seems apprehensive at first, stating that he is not sure if we will like what he has done. He informs us that he has made up many details (which I had stated was acceptable for this assignment) and that he has decided to "tell this like a story."

As he reads his draft to the class, we take notes on our copies of his essay. We note the piece's overall strengths and weaknesses. The good? His details are exquisite.

One student says, "You totally get it. You have captured what Anthony is like in school. Right here, when you put





'I could always count on him to be sitting readily in his desk, minutes before the bell loudly announced the beginning of class. His books would be stacked neatly next to a kid with perfect posture and a positive attitude. With mild intrusion, Anthony would casually observe his classmates, soaking up the discussions and knowledge around him.

He was so quiet that I periodically forgot about his presence in the class.' I mean, look at him! Anthony could be doing that right now!"

Another student comments that even though the private life was made up ("Everyone knows Anthony isn't a party animal. He doesn't go to frat parties!"), the small details woven into the essay help provide believability. "In your conclusion, you write 'I caught glimpses of my partner in crime all through the night, but all I got was a nod of approval as he kept an arm wrapped around a girl. His smirk told me that I had been exclusively allowed to join this well hidden side of him.' That is really awesome because, yeah, we know how Anthony smirks sometimes. But there are plenty of people—readers, I guess—who wouldn't know Anthony. We all know someone who smirks and someone who always gets the girl. You've just connected with those people."

By the time Spencer's final draft was completed, it was evident that he had managed to let his readers know that the essay was one in which he would be comparing and contrasting Anthony's public persona and private life, stating "he [Anthony] added an entire book of memories to the only chapter of his life I knew so far. I am one of the few people, if not the only one, to experience, survive, and remember the other Anthony" early in the writing. Previously, that descriptor had been clunky and formulaic.

Likewise, Spencer's inclusion of thought—what my students refer to as "internal dialogue"—was much sharper and more realistic. During the first round of revisions, Spencer had referred to himself as a "chum," something numerous students critiqued negatively. Rather than relying on an outdated, age-inappropriate term, Spencer characterized his own innocent nature and—hinting at Anthony's lack thereof—instead wrote: "My curiosity was especially sparked when I noticed his blotchy attendance record to Thursday practices, and his unkempt condition on Friday mornings in class. What could he be doing? Was he hiding something dark? Or was it just a coincidental occurrence? Finally I asked him what he was up to. The answer that I got was an invitation to his house one Thursday afternoon. 'Come prepared for some fun,' he had said. It was an intriguing response that produced in my mind the expectation of hitting some golf balls or playing a new video game. But Anthony had more up his sleeve."

The Hope

Spencer's writing has been enhanced by the use of narrative techniques. He took a bland topic and brought his finding to life in a way that was memorable and intriguing. Moreover, Spencer enjoyed writing the paper. Will this approach work for every writing assignment in every class? No, of course it will not. Yet, as his teacher, I have tried to arm Spencer—and all my other students—with the knowledge and the tools to approach all types of CCSS-stressed writings in a creative manner. An eye for detail and the incorporation of meaningful narration or dialogue when and where appropriate can make a piece shine when compared with others. My hope is that this push for creativity and the reminder that they should go beyond their comfort zones when writing not only will aid them on their end-of-course exams and in their college classrooms but will encourage them to experiment with words and enjoy writing long after they are past the point of receiving grades.

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“Will You Be My Preceptor?”*

by Kevin Stotts

Be patient, listen quietly, the writing will come. The voice of the writing will tell you what to do.

—Donald Murray

Chances are, Dear Reader, you are a language arts teacher, or to the layperson: an English teacher. So let’s play a game of LAT—Language Arts Trivia. Our first category will be Great Influences in the Teaching of Writing.

Question: Which two men, initially popular in the 1970s and 1980s, were sometimes referred to as “the Donalds”?

The answer (of course?) is Donald Graves, the elementary specialist, and his mentor Donald Murray, the high school authority (and writer of the opening quotation). But wait, we have a problem with this game, for nothing is trivial about the contribution of these two gurus. Do yourself a favor, one that may transform your teaching forever, and immerse yourself in a study of these two. (A selective list of their important works is found at the end of the this article.)

Murray is the father of the writing process. In the essay “Teaching Writing as a Process not Product,” he pens: “And once you can look at your composition program with the realization you are teaching a process, you may be able to design a curriculum which works. Not overnight, for writing is a demanding, intellectual process; but sooner than you think, for the process can be put to work to produce a product which may be worth your reading” (Murray, 1972).

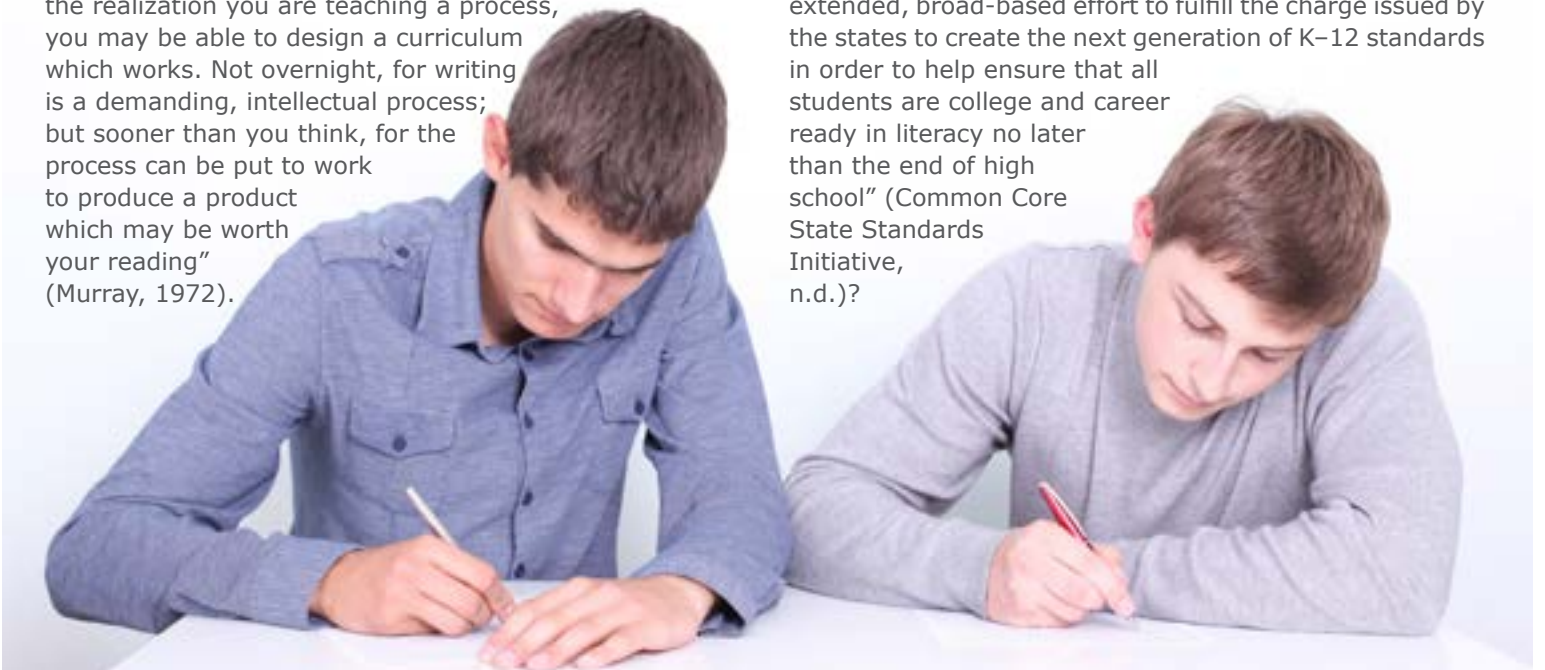
Murray is the one who taught us that writing may be divided into three stages: prewriting, writing, and rewriting.

And in the essay “All Children Can Write,” Graves states:

I think that if teachers understand the following four components, their writing programs will serve the children well. These components are adequate provision of time, child choice of topic, responsive teaching, and the establishment of a classroom community, a community that has learned to help itself (Graves, 1985).

In brief, Graves gave us the writing workshop.

How do these two writing teachers provide you with a transformative experience? By understanding them, you develop a thoughtful, artful definition of “good writing” and a philosophy for teaching, one that goes beyond a philosophy of teaching writing. But with the Donalds at your core, how do you proceed in the 2010s and beyond? After all, these two men died before the adoption of the Common Core State Standards in English language arts. What would they say about “the culmination of an extended, broad-based effort to fulfill the charge issued by the states to create the next generation of K–12 standards in order to help ensure that all students are college and career ready in literacy no later than the end of high school” (Common Core State Standards Initiative, n.d.)?



Common Core ELA Standards—The Writing Process Lives

Perhaps we should remember the old nugget about not being able to see the forest for the trees. Too many of us can get caught up in looking at the standards as a checklist, similar to a set of isolated skills, which we incorporate into our student learning objectives. We post daily in our classrooms and turn in our lesson plans with the objectives in Reading, Writing, Speaking & Listening, and Language. And we may succumb to the enormity of our complex, demanding profession, focusing on the strands, anchor standards, and grade-specific standards. In other words, we see the trees. But in the introduction of the Common Core ELA Standards, within Key Design Consideration, the document reads, "Teachers are thus free to provide students with whatever tools and knowledge their professional judgment and experience identify as most helpful for meeting the goals set out in the Standards." In other words, we must be vigilant in remembering Murray and Graves, practicing their ideas, and seeing the forest.

The Common Core State Standards ELA document includes a section titled "Production and Distribution of Writing," and in Grade 6, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.6.5 reads, "With some guidance and support from peers and adults, [students] develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach." And in the "Range of Writing" section, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.6.10 asserts, "[The student will w]rite routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences." Murray's mantra that writing is revising and Graves's chant of conferring with students do not contradict these mandates; rather, they can be made the heart of these anchor statements.

But, and you probably knew a "but" was coming, to be an authentic teacher of writing in the Murray-Graves way of thinking, is hard work (this is called understatement), and with our new principles, even harder. For when we examine the specifics of their philosophies, our new charge becomes near impossible with all the expectations (and future evaluations at stake). Will our best practices conflict with grade-specific standards? In Murray's essay, "Teaching Writing as a Process Not Product," he includes the implications of teaching process, not product, for the composition curriculum. For example, in Implication No. 5, he notes: "The student is encouraged to attempt any form

of writing which may help him discover and communicate what he has to say. The process which produces 'creative' and 'functional' writing is the same. You are not teaching products such as business letters and poetry, narrative and exposition. You are teaching a product your students can use—now and in the future—to produce whatever product his subject and his audience demand" (Murray, 1972). And yet the Common Core dictates that high schoolers must write arguments with "an organization that establishes clear relationships among claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence" (Common Core State Standards Initiative, n.d., ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.1a). In addition, they must "write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content" (Common Core State Standards Initiative, n.d., ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.2).

Do We Really Understand Murray and Graves?

The writing process and writing workshop concepts have suffered some misinterpretation. The process is not linear but rather recursive, and every individual's process is unique, so assigning a writing process task daily (and expecting everyone to complete it for a formative assessment) doesn't really mesh with the core of the philosophy. In addition, critics have tried to paint the work of Graves and Murray as a touchy-feely-anything-goes love fest, with correctness as a nice feature but not "that" important. Both men would have disagreed. Virtually all authors of writing improvement over the last 30 years have either worked with one of the two masters, worked with both of them, or studied them extensively. So, fortunately, we do not need to re-create the wheel. Several of their followers (Lucy Calkins, Nancie Atwell, Ralph Fletcher, Tom Romano, Peter Elbow, Tom Newkirk, Georgia Heard, Jeff Anderson, Penny Kittle, and more) have written about teaching short lessons in the context of the students' writing. In "Welcome to Writer's Workshop," Steve Peha, writer and educational consultant, addresses grade-specific standards with minilessons. He writes, "The best mini-lessons are based on real things that real writers really need to know. They are practical and immediately useful. They are targeted to address, in a timely way, the specific challenges writers face as they explore new writing tasks and genres" (Peha, n.d.). We can indeed teach the serial comma, or semicolon, or intensive pronoun, but the test comes with how and when. Meeting that challenge, my friends, is our directive.

And Finally

How does one incorporate an organic philosophy with these formal edicts? In a 1995 interview, Graves said: "Above all, get together with other teachers. Don't do it alone" (Graves, 1995). And in working with schools all over the world, he observed that "the teacher has high expectations for herself or himself, and in turn has high expectations for the kids. And nothing stops them. No poor administration, no cut of budget—nothing stops them." The short answer to the question, then, is to work with others and plow ahead. No shortcuts. No formula. No easy path.

Immerse yourself in all things Murray and Graves (and recruit others to join you); then find a peer (or two or more) and collaborate, commiserate, and celebrate. We all want our students to be college and career ready after 12 years of schooling, but when it comes to the demanding work of teaching a genuine writing process, we can proceed with the "tools and knowledge [our] professional judgment and experience identify as most helpful for meeting the goals set out in the Standards" (Common Core State Standards Initiative, n.d.). Let's do it with confidence, excitement, and wonder.

But there is always the sense of joy at discovering new learning from children, colleagues, and other writers. Let's enjoy the trip.

— Donald Graves

Words to Write By

Donald Graves

- "When you demonstrate what you do when you write, you not only show children how to write, you show them how to use their time."
- "I pulled my chair up to a child and just plain observed the child write. I recorded everything the child did, I drew and labeled the process by numbers; I tried to anticipate what the child would do next (big mistake) and learned quickly that anticipation was just not quite right. I had to follow the child."
- "Although writing-process work helps all writers, it seems to be particularly successful with people who see themselves as disenfranchised from literacy."

- "Every study of young writers I've done for the last twenty years has underestimated what they can do. In fact, we know very little about the human potential for writing."

Donald Murray

- "Write fast—write badly—so you will write what you don't yet know you knew—and so you will outrun the censor within us all."
- "Writing is thinking. Writing isn't writing what you thought of what you previously thought or what somebody else has thought; it isn't so. So I think that it's much more rigorous and demanding to be told that you have to find your subject, and you have to develop your ideas and how you present them through writing."
- "The daily practice of craft sharpens the writer's vision and tunes the writer's voice. Habit makes writing easy."
- "Finish. Submit. Many have talent. Some begin; few finish. The field is left to those of us who have little talent and great stubbornness."
- "Write with your ear."

A Selection of Works

Murray's Works

A Writer Teaches Writing: A Practical Method of Teaching Composition (Houghton Mifflin, 1968)

Learning by Teaching (Heinemann, 1982)

Expecting the Unexpected (Heinemann, 1989)

A Writer Teaches Writing (Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1990)

Crafting a Life in Essay, Story, Poem (Boynton/Cook, 1996)

The Craft of Revision (Harcourt Brace, 1998)

Write to Learn (Harcourt Brace, 1998)

My Twice-Lived Life: A Memoir (Ballantine Books, 2001)

A Writer Teaches Writing, rev. 2nd ed. (Cengage Learning, 2003)

And one about him: *The Essential Don Murray: Lessons from America's Greatest Writing Teacher* by Donald Murray; Thomas Newkirk and Lisa C Miller, editors (Boynton/Cook, 2009)

Graves's Works

- Balance the Basics: Let Them Write* (Ford Foundation, 1978)
- Writing: Teacher & Children at Work* (Heinemann, 1983)
- A Researcher Learns to Write* (Heinemann, 1984)
- The Writing and Reading Process: A New Approach to Literacy*, with Jane Hansen (Heinemann, 1986)
- Build a Literate Classroom* (Heinemann, 1991)
- A Fresh Look at Writing* (Heinemann, 1994)
- Writing Conference Principles*, with Jane Hansen (Heinemann, 1994)
- The Energy to Teach* (Heinemann, 2001)
- Testing Is Not Teaching* (Heinemann, 2002)
- Teaching Day by Day: 180 Stories to Help You Along the Way* (Heinemann, 2004)
- Inside Writing: How to Teach the Details of Craft*, with Penny Kittle (Heinemann, 2005)
- A Sea of Faces: The Importance of Knowing Your Students* (Heinemann, 2006)
- And one about him: "Don Graves Remembered," by Tom Romano (*Language Arts*, vol. 89, no. 1, September 2011)

* In 1862, Emily Dickinson wrote a letter to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, an editor, writer, and longtime contributor to the *Atlantic Monthly* who would become her longtime correspondent and mentor. In one letter, she writes, "Are you too deeply occupied to say if my verse is alive?" And later makes another request, ". . . will you be my preceptor, Mr. Higginson?"

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Kevin Stotts retired in June 2013 after teaching English language arts for 39 years (12 years in Columbus City Schools—Whetstone, South, Columbus Alternative; the other 27 at Upper Arlington High School). He became a much better writer and teacher of writing after helping design a new writing curriculum during the summer of 1982; "we wrote our own pieces, consulted with our peers, and revised. Thus, we embodied the truths of the Donalds, and our students were the beneficiaries". He is blessed to have worked with so many hard-working, progressive teachers who challenged him to become better. Kevin still coordinates Poetry Out Loud at UAHS and assists at the state level.

Fear, Pain, Desperation, or Joy? The Multigenre Research Project

by Allison L. Baer

Contrary to what many young writers believe, writing is a true process. Very rarely does an author, whether published or unpublished, sit down and pound out a first draft worthy of attention. Rather, this process involves staring at a blank screen or sheet of paper and agonizing over that first sentence that will transform the seemingly vast blankness into a true wonder of inspiration and intelligence. And once finished, the author sets it aside, comes back to it, and realizes that it must be changed. Thus the process begins again. Revision, editing, rewriting—over and over and over. All part of the torment some simply call the *writing process*. The purpose of this article is to describe one kind of writing, the multigenre research project (MGRP), that supports students through the writing process, making the process less burdensome by incorporating choice and personal interest.

The Process of Writing

According to Graham and Sandmel (2011), there is no commonly agreed-upon definition of the writing process, but there are elements that most agree upon. These include, but are not limited to, planning and organizing ideas, creating and acting on a writing plan, and reviewing, editing, and revising. In addition, the writing has a true purpose and audience in mind, and the writer owns the entire process, including self-evaluation and reflection.

But no matter the definition, writing is hard. Helen Hazen (2013) affectionately refers to the writing process as one that “involves a lot of fear and pain” (p. 100), and Anne Lamott (1994) says it “can be a pretty desperate endeavor” (p. 19). On the contrary, another well-published voice, Jane Yolen (2003), says that writing is joyous and encourages aspiring authors to not be afraid and “grab hold of the experience with both hands and take joy” (p. 20).

Understanding that writing can be hard, painful, torturous, draining, and joyful, all at the same time, how do we encourage our students to become writers? How can we, as educators, help those young people in our classrooms become less afraid of the blank page and find joy in writing—particularly when one of our academic responsibilities is teaching how to write a research paper? I propose that we introduce our students to the multigenre research project, a different approach to writing and research.

Multigenre Writing Defined

Because writing is a process, it is often messy and can take many different forms. The process addressed here actually results in one product made up of potentially many voices, genres, time periods, and perspectives. According to Tom Romano (2000):

A multigenre paper is composed of many genres and subgenres, each piece self-contained, making a point of its own, yet connected by theme or topic and sometimes by language, images, and content.

In addition to many genres, a multigenre paper may also contain many voices, not just the author’s. The trick is to make such a paper hang together. (p. x)

Romano’s multigenre papers were based upon personal experiences, as they were autobiographical in nature, with students telling their own stories in multiple pieces. Gillespie (2005) used the multigenre concept and had her students respond to a text and ultimately improve their critical thinking skills. Both these researchers used the multigenre project as a format for personal expression about the writer or a chosen text.

Building on Romano's concept of writing multiple genres, a colleague, Dr. Jackie Glasgow, and I revised the idea and created the multigenre research project. Understanding that the more typical research paper often leads to papers that are boring, plagiarized, and artificial (Mack, 2002), we wanted to revitalize the research process by introducing students to the idea of writing more as Romano (2000) had envisioned it. The foundation of this kind of writing is the same as Romano's and Gillespie's (2005) multigenre projects, but instead of the pieces being based on individual experience or response to a text, each individual piece has evidence of solid research about a self-selected topic. In other words, we took the more typical research paper and motivated students by allowing more choice in format and genre. Thus students wrote such things as letters, editorials, poetry, journals, brochures, social media (i.e., Facebook pages), emails, etc., to show what they had learned about a topic.

The Multigenre Research Project Writing Process

The process begins with the student choosing a topic in which he or she is interested. Choice is encouraged, because real research is most certainly based in the author's interests—something that the author wonders about and has some passion for. Allowing students the choice of topic is more engaging for them and keeps them interested over the long haul (Harvey, 1998). In my experience, students have chosen such topics as roller coasters, the Chicago Cubs, the Detroit Tigers, high heels, child soldiering, golf, plastic, Ireland, World War II, Calvin and Hobbes, chocolate, M. C. Escher, breast cancer, Frank Lloyd Wright, and many more. The other positive aspect of having students choose their topics is the teacher's experience after the projects are turned in. Reading these projects is always quite interesting, and that is a teacher's dream come true—grading interesting writing.

Once the topic is chosen, the research and writing begin. My requirements for the MGRP are shown in Table 1, and an explanation and example of each requirement follows.

Table 1. Multigenre Research Project Requirements

Minimum requirements for the multigenre project (items to be in this order in final project):

1. An interesting cover and cover page that introduce your topic effectively
2. Table of contents
3. Prologue—tells the reader how to read the paper. It is like an invitation to the reader to enter your paper and learn from you, the author. This is also your chance to build the reader's background knowledge of your topic, so use it as an introduction to your project as well. Also, what writer's stance did you take, and what reader's stance do you expect of your readers?
4. Minimum of five original works (i.e., written by you) representing at least four different genres. Each piece must teach something substantial and different about your chosen topic. In other words, the reader **MUST LEARN SOMETHING** substantial about your topic from each piece.
5. A series of repetends—a way of connecting the genres, the string that holds it all together (could be a continuing scene, pictures, graphs, quotations, facts, etc.). These are the only parts of the MG paper that will not be your original work, but the reader must learn something about your topic from the repetends.
6. A notes page—reflective in nature that describes the inspiration for each piece in the paper. It should provide a complete explanation of what is fact and what has been created or assumed about the situation. You must also document your sources for each original piece within your explanation. **YOUR PAPER WILL RECEIVE A GRADE OF ZERO IF THE NOTES PAGE IS MISSING.**
7. Reference page using *APA*, 5th edition. One resource must be from a research-based, peer-reviewed journal, and you must use at least five other different sources including online and print sources. While you may choose to use Wikipedia as a source, this cannot count as one of the six required sources. Rather, Wikipedia can be a good place to begin to find sources for your research.

Front Matter

The first three items in Table 1—the cover page, table of contents, and prologue—constitute the *front matter* of the MGRP.

The purpose of the *cover page* is to introduce the reader to the topic in some interesting way, e.g., a picture or graphic that piques the reader's interest and makes her want to jump into the project and learn more. Sometimes the cover page can reflect the topic and the contents and be far more than just a cover. For example, one student researched homeless children and found that many of these children carried everything they owned in a backpack. He presented his research in a notebook that he had embedded within a backpack to show this sad but true fact about his topic.

The obvious reason for a *table of contents* is to organize the information for the author and help the reader know how to navigate the project.

The *prologue* is the author's opportunity to address the reader directly and explain how he wants the reader to approach the research. This piece also requires the author to explain his rationale for doing this research. In other words, the author needs to prove to the reader that this research is actually worth reading. In addition, the prologue should clearly identify any bias the author may have about the topic. One student chose to research gun ownership, and his prologue included the fact that he was a card-carrying member of the National Rifle Association; he acknowledged his personal bias and encouraged the reader to try to read his work through the author's eyes. Figure 1 is an example of a well-written prologue.

Dear Reader,

Welcome to my project on Calvin and Hobbes. I hope you enjoy the work that I've put into this project. Over the course of this project you will read various original pieces, which I have created that will hopefully help you to learn a decent amount about the characters, Calvin and Hobbes, as well as their creator, Bill Watterson.

The main reason that I chose to do this project on Calvin and Hobbes is because of the influence that it had on me as a child, right up until the present day. The comic strips bring back many good memories of my childhood. I also like to think some of my experiences as a child do relate to Calvin's. Which, in turn, makes the books that much more enjoyable.

When you are reading through my paper, please don't take yourself or me too serious. To be able to enjoy Calvin and Hobbes, you must be willing to learn, but not necessarily in a serious manner. I ask that you take the time to think where Calvin's perspective is; that of a six-year old boy with way too active of an imagination or that of Hobbes, his stuffed tiger that only comes to life for Calvin. A question I would like to pose to you as you read through this paper is; do you think Hobbes is an imaginary friend to Calvin, a living/breathing creature, or a stuffed animal? I'll let you decide. In closing, I would like to thank-you in advance for taking time out of your day to read through my project.

Sincerely,
Ryan Nykamp

Figure 1. Example of prologue

Five Original Works

The original writing, item 4 in Table 1, is the heart of the MGRP, as this is where the author shows her research. I require that the author create at least five original pieces using four different genres. For example, she may write a poem, letter, brochure, journal entry, and editorial or some other combination of genres. I take the time in class to teach my students how to write in these different formats by showing them primary sources, letters, newspaper articles, websites, and other documents, and have them pick out the facts within each. These student-created pieces may well be fictional in nature, as they are likely to include made-up people and places; but each one must have substantial research about the chosen topic embedded within it. One former student, researching the guillotine, had two letters—one from Monsieur Guillotine, who invented the machine, and another from the child of a woman who was to be killed by it. The child's letter asked him why he created such a horrific thing, and his return letter explained that his intention for it was not to be an object of mass murder, but to be an efficient way of punishment. The two voices were authentic in sound and the letters authentic in format. Figures 2, 3, and 4 provide examples of original MGRP pieces from other projects.

As can be seen in Figures 2–4, each original piece has solid evidence of research seamlessly embedded within the authentic structure of the chosen genre. Whether the *I Am* poem about pandas where the reader learns where they live, what they eat, and how they live, or the *Letter to Home* as one learns about the odd building that Henry Holmes, one of America's first serial killers, was building in conjunction with the 1893 Columbian Exposition, or the ABC's about the Cubs describing ball players, each piece is based in research that was done by the author. This was then presented in different formats or genres that seemed to fit well with what the author had learned about the topic.

I Am

I am from Sichuan, Shaanxi, and Gansu,
from both the wild jungle and captivity,
I am from far and near,
from London Zoo to the Wolong reserves.

I am from fights against disease,
the roundworms found in my food,
living in my body and making me ill.
From fights with rival males,
bumping and shoving,
finding a mate after winning a match.

I am from large and thick trees,
easy to climb up, but hard to go down,
a haven from leopards, jackals, and stoats,
even dholes cannot harm me here.

I am from black and white fur,
a thick and oily coat of hair,
cleaned with soil, flakey and dry,
warm from the glistening white snow
that falls on the broad, tall mountainside.
From isolation on the range during chiller months,
when warm, mating begins with noises anew,
bleating, howling, growling and grunting.

I am from time well spent among bamboo,
with tree-like branches and leafy green shoots,
flat teeth gnawing and pounding,
the rough tongue ignoring the shards.
From occasional mice, lizards, and cockroaches,
mostly nourishing with arrow bamboo,
preferring instead umbrella,
rich in early summer with soft shoots and tough leaves.

I am from time,
from far and near,
from predators and poachers,
from bamboo and warm fur,
I am the beauty of the Chinese mountainsides.

Figure 2. Pandas—*I Am* poem by Amanda Klein

Letter to Home

November, 1891

Dearest Mother,

Despite some rough times, James and I are faring well here in Chicago. There is no shortage of work here as it seems that everywhere you look new homes, stores, and buildings as high as the clouds are being built. We are currently working downtown on a building they call the Monadnock Building. With 17 floors, this building is the tallest in Chicago. The building is nearing completion and we're told that we will have work when construction begins on the exposition in Jackson Park.

We worked briefly for a man in Englewood, near where we stay with Ms. Nellie, who calls himself Campbell. We never saw Mr. Campbell but worked for his partner, a man by the name of Henry Holmes. Holmes seemed like a very nice fellow at first. He's preparing a building, a monstrosity of a building at 63rd and Wallace that locals refer to as "the castle," into a hotel for the fair. We never understood the design. There are halls that meander through the building, doors that lead to nowhere, and secret chambers accessible by trap doors that he says are for storage, but to us seem to be in odd places. There were areas of the building that we were told not to enter under any circumstances, such as the basement. Ned, who works in the Pharmacy, says Holmes, who runs the Pharmacy, is a nice fellow, but says there's something about him he can't understand and that he doesn't trust him. We worked for Holmes for about one week when we were fired for no apparent reason. Mr. Holmes claimed that our work was not acceptable. We've heard that he does that to all his workers. He said he would pay us, but we haven't seen any money. Ms. Nellie is treating us well and hasn't fussed about us paying our room and board.

We'll try our best to be home for Christmas. Give our love to father and our dear sister, Lila. Do write soon as it would be great to hear news from home.

With much love –

Evan and James

6351 Peoria Street

Englewood, Ills

**Figure 3. The 1893 Columbian Exposition—
letter by Jeff Fisher**

Kerry Wood—

In 1998, twenty-year-old Kerry Wood had what many sports fans and writers have called one of the most dominant pitching performances in all of baseball history. In just his fifth major league game, Kerry Wood struck out a National League record-breaking 20 batters while not walking a single one. Wood became an instant fan favorite and remained with the Cubs for his next eleven seasons.

Lee, Derrek—

Lee helped the Florida Marlins seal the Cubs' fate in the 2003 playoffs. All was forgiven, however, after Lee was traded to the Cubs in the offseason of that same year. In 2005 he became the first Cub in decades to legitimately contend for the triple crown and finished the season among the league leaders in home runs, batting average and RBI's. Still playing for the Cubs, Lee is currently a fan favorite.

**Figure 4. The Chicago Cubs—
Examples from the ABC's by
Adam Shockley**

Repetends

The *repetends* are a unique part of the MGRP. At first, they can seem confusing to the students (who sometimes call them *repentance*, although they are not sorry to come up with them). However, the repetends are actually quite simple. Their purpose is to create a bridge or tie between the original pieces. The repetends themselves are not original pieces; in other words, the students, for the most part, find various artifacts as they are doing their research and use them as repetends. Depending on the chosen topic, the repetends can be direct quotes, pictures, graphs, recipes, etc., that also teach something about the topic; they are, in a sense, a different kind of evidence about the student's research. Some student authors may use a repetend to introduce a piece; for example, a project about Alzheimer's had different pieces that described the various stages of the disease from the perspective of a woman who was watching the progression of the disease in her husband. Each repetend had a quote from a research source that described the stage in technical terms. Repetends can also be pictures of people, places, or things. When writing about attention deficit disorder, one student used repetends that were pictures of famous people with ADD. Whatever the author chooses, the repetends should ultimately teach more about the topic and support the original pieces.

Notes Page

The *Notes page* is where the author explains each original piece in detail, specifying the sources and identifying what is fictional (people, places, etc.) as opposed to truth; the author also notes and cites any direct quotes within a piece and basically explains his rationale for creating each piece. Now here is the key point: The information in the Notes page is essential, because without it, especially if the writing is well done, the reader cannot necessarily tell fact from fiction. I strongly encourage my students to give a full, detailed explanation of each original piece and clearly state each source used in creating the piece. When I grade the MGRPs, I read the Notes page entry first and use that information when reading the original piece. I should be clear, too, that the Notes page may actually be several pages long, perhaps including a paragraph about each original piece; and there are students who also explain their repetends in the Notes page as well. Figure 5 shows the Notes page entry for the *Letter to Home* written by Jeff Fisher and that appears in Figure 3.

Letter to Home

In this piece I introduce my readers to the first two members of the family that experience the Columbian Exposition. Here, using the names of my sons, Evan and James, I write a letter to their parents. The boys have travelled to the Chicago area to find jobs in the construction trade. They work briefly, like so many did, for Henry Holmes and then find work in downtown Chicago working on the Monadnock building, designed by Burnham and Root, with the promise of work in Jackson Park when construction begins on the fair. Information for this piece was taken from the article "Behind the Folklore—No Exit," at www.supernaturals.co.uk/Legend%20NE.html, and *The Devil in the White City* (pp. 85–93).

Figure 5. Notes page entry for *Letter to Home* written by Jeff Fisher

Reference Page

This is basically a Works Cited page where the author has to list, in correct format, any and all sources used in the process of researching and writing the MGRP. It should be substantial, and as noted in Figure 1, Wikipedia cannot be used as a primary source; Wikipedia might be a starting point, an initial source of ideas, issues, and possibly direction, but it is not acceptable as the definitive source for research. The ultimate purpose of the MGRP is to help students become true consumers of research, and in that process, I teach them how to discern true research from popular press.

Some Concluding Thoughts

As part of my research into the writing process of the MGRP, I asked students what they thought of the whole project. What follows are direct student comments:

"I think it's a fun way to do research. I think students of all ages would appreciate this kind of project because it gives you full autonomy and you're researching something that's important to you. It's a great way to learn!"

"This project was a lot of work, but I learned a lot and the way I got to present my knowledge made me feel a great sense of accomplishment about this project that I don't think you can always get from just writing a paper."

"Fun"? "Appreciate"? "Great sense of accomplishment"? Isn't this what teachers want their students to experience when learning? Is this not what makes learning more relevant, and could it possibly make teaching more interesting and fun for us?

The writing process is, no doubt, hard work. It requires time, extreme effort, creativity, commitment, and energy. We write, rip it apart, write some more, rip that apart, then go back for more of the same. In the experience of those students whom I have had the privilege of teaching the MGRP, writing is hard, but it is also fulfilling. Maybe, just maybe, your students, too, can "take joy" in the writing process by engaging in authentic research and writing through the multigenre research project.

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Soldiers' Stories: Dealing with War in the Classroom

by Ruth McClain

In Margaret Atwood's *The Robber Bride* (1993), while trying to put life's problems into a historical perspective, the military historian Tony utters, "War is what happens when language fails." I prefer to think that language is what happens when young men and women go to war.

Another fall quarter had arrived, and as the students drifted into the classroom and took a seat, I greeted those who were returning from previous courses. On the sheet listing all the names was also a notation about whether or not the student was a veteran. I couldn't help but notice that now, as in previous classes, almost all those returning from war took a seat along the perimeter of the room, sitting with their backs to the wall as if they were still in a war zone and must keep an eye on the exit. Many of these new students had confronted sensory overloads and social awkwardness; others didn't want to talk about anything or remember the images they carried in their heads. They simply waited expectantly for the class to begin.

Over and over, I had questioned myself about what a woman with no military experience herself could offer these soldier students. They didn't need a lecture. What meaningful writing assignment could I possibly offer? Many of these young returning soldiers had done amazing things under insanely stressful conditions, and now here they were, sitting in a safe classroom waiting patiently for a composition assignment that may or may not have any meaning for them. I agonized about this, and finally it came to me that it was not what I could teach these young warriors; rather, it was what they could teach me if only I gave them the autonomy to do so. My job was to provide the critical skills they needed and then empower them to write about what really mattered to them.

Of course, teachers at every grade level often struggle with how to help students deal with war and related issues. No matter how hard we may try to avoid them, questions about war can creep into the classroom, and the discussions are sometimes pervasive, sometimes graphic. However, by providing students with reading and writing opportunities clearly outlined in the English language arts Common Core curriculum, we can offer numerous opportunities to help students write analytically, write

I-Feel-like-I'm-Fixin'-to-Die Rag

*Yeah, come on all of you, big strong men,
Uncle Sam needs your help again.
He's got himself in a terrible jam
Way down yonder in Vietnam
So put down your books and pick up a gun,
We're gonna have a whole lotta fun.*

(Chorus)

*And it's one, two, three,
What are we fighting for?
Don't ask me, I don't give a damn,
Next stop is Vietnam;
And it's five, six, seven,
Open up the pearly gates,
Well there ain't no time to wonder why,
Whoopee! we're all gonna die*

*Well, come on generals, let's move fast;
Your big chance has come at last.
Gotta go out and get those reds—
The only good commie is the one who's dead
And you know that peace can only be won,
When we've blown 'em all to kingdom come.*

*Well, come on Wall Street, don't move slow,
Why man, this is war au-go-go.
There's plenty good money to be made
By supplying the Army with the tools of the trade,
Just hope and pray that if they drop the bomb,
They drop it on the Viet Cong.*

*Well, come on mothers throughout the land,
Pack your boys off to Vietnam.
Come on fathers, don't hesitate,
Send 'em off before it's too late
Be the first ones on your block
To have your boy come home in a box.*

**Words and music by Joe McDonald, (c) 1965
(renewed 1993) Alkatraz Corner Music Co.
Used with permission,
<http://www.countryjoe.com/game.htm#cheer>.**

informative/explanatory texts, and develop real or imaginary narratives.

Two Wars: Antiprotest Songs

Sarah came into class wearing her headphones, and as she took a seat, I could see her lips moving to music I could not hear. When I asked her what she was listening to, she named an artist I had never heard of, and so I asked her to let me listen. What burst upon my ears made little sense to me, but it obviously had engaged her. She said it was a song about protesting the war in Iraq, and certainly she found it more engaging than text documents. I told her that my generation had its antiprotest songs as well, and we found ourselves briefly engaged in dialogue that clearly spanned at least three maybe four generations. By now, other students were drifting into class, and I quickly learned that the fathers, uncles, brothers, and grandfathers of these current students had been in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan.

My war was actually World War II, but I knew that if I told her that, she would really think me ancient. So, I chose Country Joe McDonald's "I-Feel-like-I'm-Fixin'-to-Die Rag" from the Vietnam War. I pulled up the words on the computer, not even sure that she would be remotely interested.

Sometimes, we just have to seize a moment, so I abandoned what I had planned for the day, and I asked the class to work in groups of three and find major issues McDonald addresses in the song. With very little help, the class identified these:

- The beneficial economic aspects of war as found in stanza 3—"There's plenty good money to be made . . ."
- The fact that wars produce generals—"Well, come on generals . . . your big chance has come at last"
- The fact that it seemed unpatriotic not to support the war—"Come on fathers . . . send 'em off before it's too late."

So, how does what happened in Vietnam compare with what has happened in the current wars? With a little research, I found that the number of antiwar songs released from the Afghanistan-Iraq era greatly outnumbered the songs released in the Vietnam era. Sensing a bit of enthusiasm from the students, I asked them to consider some essential questions:

- How does war affect individual people?
- What was the American people's response to the Vietnam War or the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan?
- Does the music support or condemn American involvement in said war?
- Why is music such an effective and powerful form of protest?
- What event is this song written for?
- What effect is the author trying to initialize?

The students then wrote an informative essay based on their research of a song of their choice from a war of their choice. Sarah chose "Not in My Name" by John McCutcheon.

Not in My Name

The first and third stanzas read:

*You see the plane in the distance
You see the flame in the sky
See the young ones running for cover
See the old ones wondering why
They tell us that the world is a dangerous place
We live in a terrible time
But in Hiroshima, New York or in Baghdad
It's the innocent who die for the crime*

*We stray and we stumble in seeking the truth
And wonder why it's so hard to find
But an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth
Leaves the whole world toothless and blind*

*Through the ages I have watched all your holy wars
Your jihads, your Crusades
I have been used as inspiration, I've been used as
an excuse
For the murder and the misery you've made
I thought I made it clear in the Bible
In the Torah and in the Koran
What is it in my teaching about loving your enemies
That you people don't understand?*

©2001 John McCutcheon/Appalsongs (ASCAP), Denver, CO. Used with permission, October 2001, <http://www.folkmusic.com/lyrics/not-my-name>.

Through her research, Sarah discovered that the song uses contemporary lyrics to connect to the past. She writes, "This is a song about a highly disputed U.S. attack on three Afghan villages—Gerani, Gangabad and Koujaha—which killed between 30 and 143 people. The Afghan officials claimed that 147 civilians had died in the attack, and the Afghan government voiced heavy protests. The American military did acknowledge that there was the possibility that many civilians had been killed but claimed that the Taliban had forced civilians to remain in their homes and then those homes were bombed. Therefore, the U.S. government stated that the deaths were the result of the Taliban grenades and not U.S. bombs. Lawmakers in Afghanistan, however, rejected that claim and asked that the U.S. cease all bombing. The 147 deaths brought Afghans into the streets in protest and resulted in additional rioting when people from three villages found 15 newly-discovered bodies (Cockburn, 2009)."

Sarah then used the information she had gathered to write an informational essay detailing how the song portrayed the actual incident of the three Afghan villages.

War and the Novel

Since the beginning of recorded history, war has defined the story of mankind in profound ways. In "The Literature of War," Rea Berg writes, "Man's propensity for war reflects not only the sublime heights to which he can rise in selfless acts of courage but also his fallen nature. It's no wonder, then, that history is so often characterized by wars that were fought and by the literature created by those seeking to ascribe meaning to times of tremendous upheaval."

Over the years I've taught any number of war novels from *The Red Badge of Courage* to *The Things They Carried*, and although I had used several films dealing with the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars, I had never taught a novel about those wars. That changed for me after reading Kevin Powers's *The Yellow Birds* (2012), the story of two young soldiers trying to stay alive. As the book reviewer James Percy (2012) explains it: "In the northern city of Al Tifar, 21-year-old Pvt. John Bartle and his platoon engage in a bloody campaign to control the city. Before his deployment Bartle promised the mother of 18-year-old Pvt. Daniel Murphy he would take care of her son,

bring him back alive. It is a promise that, as Powers reveals from the earliest pages, he will not keep. But in the meantime they suffer through basic training together, followed by Iraqi street fights that leave rooftops covered in brass casings and doorsteps splashed with blood—all under the command of the growly, battle-scarred Sergeant Sterling, who punches them in the face one moment and claps them on the back the next, ordering them to combat both the insurgents and the mental stress that threaten to send them home in a box with a flag draped over the top."

I have always felt that discourse in our schools is sorely lacking. I wanted the students' voices to be heard. I especially wanted those with a military background to feel free to share their experiences and opinions. I wanted them to claim their voices as intellectuals and thinkers and to share new insights and analyses with those in their immediate classroom community and further in their workplaces and among family and friends. So, I had to construct a platform for such discourse.

I asked the students to form a circle and leave one empty space for me. I would read a controversial statement that I had composed and ask them to freely comment. Some statements would be based on the novel; others would be general. There would be no need to raise hands; rather, students would jump in with their opinions when they saw an opening, as this is how adults carry on a conversation. Of course, the degree to which teachers address war directly depends on the age and needs of their students, but my students were old enough to engage in in-depth questions about what lessons, if any, are ever learned from war; how war impacts those on the home front; what conflicts arise; and what issues impact those who fought those wars. The only rule was that each student had to comment with something other than a "yes" or "no" answer or an "I agree" answer. The class would get either a collective "A" for the day if all students made a contribution or a collective "F" if they failed to accommodate every student. We know that grades are important to students—and we also know that some students tend to monopolize conversations—so a collective grade encourages students to make time for everyone to comment. Sometimes, the students answered analytically; sometimes they synthesized. And for some students, just making one comment was more than they had done in any previous class. Regardless of which level of Bloom's taxonomy they used, they loved the exercise.

The Statements—A Sampling Only

1. Bartle is haunted by his time in the war and what happened to Murph. Murph's death is the cause of his anguish—he would not have had such a hard time reentering society if Murph had lived.
2. My sympathies lie mostly with _____ because _____.
3. In disposing of Murph's body, Bartle committed a crime more heinous than any he may have committed in battle.
4. Soldiers should not question orders nor dwell on war's futility.
5. Soldiers are generally never aware of their own savagery until engaged in war itself.
6. It is possible to survive as a soldier without allowing oneself to be moved by war's brutality.
7. Rate *The Yellow Birds* on a scale of 1 to 5 and provide your justification, with 5 being an outstanding book and 1 being of no consequence.
8. The military is correct in telling soldiers that death is the "great unifier," that it brings people "closer together than any other activity on earth."
9. The concept of death in civilian life is different from the way a soldier views death in war.
10. Killing is always justified in wartime.
11. The colonel's concern for the troops is genuine. He is not preening before the media.
12. The United States should reinstate the draft and include women.
13. Sweethearts at home should never send a soldier a Dear John letter.
14. Bartle does not want to follow standard procedures with regard to Murph's body. He makes the right decision.
15. Sterling is justified in shooting the old hermit with the mule.
16. Powers probably named the book after the canaries from the coal mines that Murph describes to Bartle. That title is appropriate.
17. We aren't told how Bartle's trial—or court martial—plays out or exactly what he is charged with. Regardless, he should end up in prison.
18. By the end of the novel, Bartle has healed.
19. The story unfolds in a nonlinear narrative, with scenes alternating between Bartle's time as a soldier at war and Bartle's time as a veteran. The story is better told this way than chronologically.
20. Bartle's own mother has no ability to understand her son when he returns. There is no way that any of us can grasp what a soldier's experience in battle is like.
21. Bartle made the right decision in writing the letter to Murph's mother.
22. Reading fiction about war gives me better insight about what it's like to be in a war than reading nonfiction about war—such as newspaper accounts.
23. "In war, there are no unwounded soldiers." —José Narosky
24. "War is only a cowardly escape from the problems of peace." —Thomas Mann
25. The ending of the novel is more melancholy than hopeful.

The following aren't questions but observations:

26. Note Bartle's mention of Murph's eyes, as early as page 7, which have already "fallen farther into his sockets." Consider how that represents a foreshadowing of Murph's death. Also note the parallel between Bartle's floating in the James River once he's back home and the disposal of Murph's body into the Tigris.
27. On the plane home, Bartle feels he has "left the better portion" of himself behind. What does he mean? By the time he arrives in Richmond, he has lost his way—and his will—as if he had "vanished into thin air." How would you describe his condition? Is his behavior typical of that of returning vets?
28. *The Yellow Birds* is more a novel about friendship than war.
29. When Bartle returns home, the first person he sees is his mother. How has their relationship changed—and why? What does Bartle's experience reveal about the effect of the war on veterans' families?

30. Bartle believes that cowardice is what motivated him to join the military; he also believes it's what prevents him from becoming a man. When in the novel is Bartle truly a coward, and when is he truly brave? How do you think his notions of cowardice evolve or change throughout the book? And how are they intertwined with his feelings of guilt?
31. In an interview, author Kevin Powers said, "If I tried to summarize what I was exploring in the book, it would be this: what does it mean to try to be good and fail?" Discuss this question with your group. Have you ever experienced this personally? If so, how did you come to terms with it?
32. "War will exist until that distant day when the conscientious objector enjoys the same reputation and prestige that the warrior does today." —John F. Kennedy. True or false?

The veterans in my class said that just being given a chance to tell their stories and be listened to intently made it possible for them to speak, to feel respected, and sometimes to say things they had never told anyone. Such listening makes the environment safe: veterans know they will not be criticized or grilled—and the listener's silence gives them permission to tell their stories in the way they choose.

In the *Washington Post*, columnist Paula J. Caplan (2011) writes, "For the civilians, the experience was transformative. Whether it was bonding over the sadness of losing a loved one, a sense of powerlessness in not being able to help someone in danger, or a shared understanding of the fragility of life, civilians who had thought they'd have nothing in common with veterans were surprised by how easily they could relate to their experiences."

As the teacher, my job is to listen, record comments with only a check, and enjoy the discussion that ensues. And, by the way, the students love to do this.

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Revise, Resee, Revisit: Revision as a Social Activity in the Classroom

by Kalyn Fowler

I talked to my students one day in March last year about their writing and asked them if they honestly read their submitted work even once before printing it. Three students out of sixteen in one class had read their work, and five students out of twenty-one in the other had. Ouch! What a blow to this English teacher's heart. I said aloud, "Oh, that hurts. But I see the lack of revision in your work."

Revision is a topic in which I have had a high interest since I began teaching. I wanted to understand more about what motivates students to revise, how they go about the process of revising their work, what I can do as a teacher to help them revise more effectively, and what they can do to help each other. And so I began my own investigation into what happens when students revise independently, with a peer, and with me. Table 1 shows a list of questions I considered.

The topic, as I worded it later that year, in August, was "What happens when students revise and evaluate their

writing? How can I help students revise independently?" I researched for data that show how students respond to various types of revision methods. My investigation focused on the smallest class I had ever taught—10 middle-class honors juniors—in the confines of Room 105, in a school of under 400 students that sits between rural southwest Ohio cornfields.

In short, I immediately observed that, for this group of students, revision is social—meaning that they needed to discuss what they were doing. In September, I had only asked students to revise twice in class (we were beginning our first formal writing assignment), and each time I asked them to revise alone, they immediately turned to one another and started talking. This was not social discourse; they were talking about their writing in whispers: "I really don't know where my thesis is going," "I know I need to change my first point," "My word choice sucks," etc. After one particular class session, I began wondering if my question should be, "What happens to student writing when revision is a social activity in the classroom?"

Table 1. My Mind Wanders to Wonderings

- What keeps my students from revising?
- How do I teach revision more effectively?
- How can I encourage student revision?
- What happens when students revise with their peers?
- What happens when students conference with me?
- How does a student respond to conferences with me differently than he or she does with peers?
- What structure is most effective for peer conferencing?
- What do students need to know in order to revise their essays independently?
- How can student reflection be used to inform or guide student revision?
- How can I use teacher-student conferences to spur independent revision for a later assignment?
- How do students feel about revision?
- What do students think about revision? (I believe feeling and thinking are separate concepts.)

The Aha! Moment: Whispers of Revision

Near the end of our first quarter, I asked students to list revision priorities and was pleasantly surprised when almost everyone immediately chimed in, and I could barely keep up while writing on the Smart Board. Their ideas impressed me. And every now and then, I joined in to support an idea. For example, I added that “expanding” (one of the ideas that was suggested) could be thought of as “exploding the moment,” and I drew a little bomb beside it, emphasizing that such expansion often needs to include quote analysis (delving deeper into the text, lingering with language). When we discussed organization, I drew glasses (very poorly) to illustrate the need for focus. I have discovered that juniors in high school still love pictures, especially when their teacher draws those pictures poorly. Feeling confident that my class was well equipped to begin revising, I reached to set the timer for ten minutes and asked the students to start revising independently, but I reminded them that the last part of class would be set aside for discussing their revisions with a peer.

Before I could even finish adding ten minutes to the time, my well-behaved, conscientious honors juniors were suddenly loud, turning to talk to one another. “What?!” I thought. “This is unusual. They follow directions so well.” Shelby* raised her hand to ask me a question, and it took a full five minutes for us to get on track to start the timer again. Just when I thought that independent revision would commence, after I said, “Okay, seriously. Ten minutes. On. Your. Own,” Eli walked up to my desk and asked me to check his prompt and thesis.

Satisfied with my response (I merely nodded and said, “It reflects your insights clearly”), Eli sat down, and after literally almost twelve minutes of trying to start independent revisions, his eyes opened wide, he jerked his hand through his hair, but he never stopped. Whitney looked content, and Jacqueline seemed relaxed but productive.

After only six minutes, Evie and Kylie began whispering. Within thirty seconds, the class was bubbling with chatter. I didn’t stop the students, but after the timer jingled, I asked them to write a brief reflection of their independent revision: What did you address in your revision? Was the

list of priorities helpful? How do you think your revision went? Do you think you will continue with this prompt for your formal essay? The first person to finish the reflection was Elizabeth, after writing for only two minutes. The longest reflection time was four minutes, and that was Eli’s. After the reflections, I allowed students to discuss their progress with partners. They immediately turned to each other, and the conversations were natural: “I just need to elaborate more,” “I think you could go a lot more in depth with that,” and “so what’s your thesis?” are just a few examples of the productive dialogue I heard. Of course, a couple of groups started to drift off task, discussing the upcoming girls soccer tournament game, but they redirected themselves after less than a minute. As a wrap-up, I asked who shared their thesis statement with another student, and all ten students raised their hands. Another dance-worthy moment! They started with a primary priority without my direction.

I will be honest. At first I was frustrated. I wanted them to do what I had asked, which was work independently on their writing. I usually do not mind answering questions, but I had to stop myself from rolling my eyes when Shelby and then Eli insisted on asking questions when I had explicitly emphasized *independent* revision time. I did not understand why it took so long for us to focus on that task, and even after we did, I was annoyed that Evie and Kylie were whispering with three minutes left. But as I sat “cooking” my notes after class, between the bells, I wrote two questions: (1) Is revision a social activity?? (2) Is it more effective or meaningful when revision is social?? I felt energized. I knew I had discovered a treasure, but I was not quite sure what exactly I should do with it. I wished I could have sat with those thoughts longer, but, alas, the day moves ahead and my standard juniors awaited my attention.

The questions followed me throughout the rest of the day. They were itching at me, crawling into my mind as I read “Ambush” aloud to my standard juniors and as I paused to allow my film students to write notes as we began our unit on Hitchcock. What is so important here? Could this change my questions? The experience of frustration changing to an aha! moment encouraged me to step back and observe my students—to let the process happen, not to push it in the direction in which I thought it should be going.

*Names have been changed to protect confidentiality.

Students' Original Understanding of Revision: Initial Surveys—"That's a hard question"

In a short survey, I learned that my students have varying levels of revision knowledge, understanding, and application. Two students already saw their writing process as mostly revision: "I do like eight revisions before the final," "I revise 95%. They start really bad . . ." Others primarily edited, rather than revising: "I think revision is to go back and look over and correct any mistakes," "I go about revising by first checking grammar." I had one student somewhere in the middle; she knew the difference between editing and revising but did not always revise: "Revision involves the grammar aspect, as well as the content. You must check for errors, but you must also check for validity in the information. After writing, I usually don't want anything more to do with an essay, so I just put it away and be done with it." Time is an issue that every student said prevents meaningful revision. Other problems involve motivation, procrastination, and uncertainty: "To be honest, pure laziness keeps me from revising."

We also had a follow-up discussion about the meaning and purpose of revision, and it was fascinating to listen to their honest thoughts. I think the relaxed environment (there were only eleven of us, including me, sitting in a circle chatting about revision, and the discussion was not graded) helped my students feel more comfortable sharing their personal experiences. I wrote minimal notes, concentrating on reactions rather than direct quotes. Students were open and engaged, leaning forward and smiling, nodding their heads in agreement, or tilting in wonder at each other. Despite some of their reluctance to revise, I saw that my students were willing to talk and think about why it is important.

The goal was for my students to become more comfortable with revision and see its value so they would revise their own writing more effectively. I realized, however, that I needed to facilitate their revision by teaching them strategies and giving them the time to think, draft, rest, and revise. In the survey, my students communicated that they needed time to step back from their work and then come back to it, so I collected essays for a few days and then returned them for fresh-eyed revision. Nine of my ten students said that they enjoyed the time away from their essays and that the hiatus helped to focus their writing.

In the first weeks of focused research, I learned that revision is an even more complex process for my students than I had anticipated. I learned where they were in their understanding, how much time they spent revising, and what kept them from revising. As I read through my notes and continued my constant metateaching, I realized I had not learned what motivates them to revise; as a result, I asked them verbally, and then I changed the survey (which I used as the post-survey; see Appendix A at http://www.ohiorc.org/orc_documents/orc/adlit/inperspective/2014-03/vignette5AppendixA.docx) to include the simple question, "What motivates you to revise?"

Insightful Conversations

When I contemplate conferencing, I am reminded that students want to discuss their ideas. When they sit alone and begin to revise, they often look frustrated or confused. Sometimes they do not even start. When they do begin, it seems to be because they *should*, not necessarily that they have focus. But they are honors students, so they feel obligated to complete any assigned task. On the other hand, even when I ask them to revise individually, they whisper and talk; and if I let them, the chatter spills spontaneously around the room. My students come alive when they verbalize their ideas—eyes wide open and hands gesticulating, they are excited about their thoughts, or at the very least, much more engaged.

Peer Conferences: Spontaneous and Guided Discussions

Spontaneous, informal peer conferences popped up in every class writing period, particularly in the early drafting days. I noticed my students articulating their ideas, then perusing their texts for quotes, and naturally transitioning between bouncing ideas back and forth among themselves and delving into the book for close reading. Whitney and Eli had a particularly lively conversation: "I think I have a thesis . . ." "It's an outline, Eli. It doesn't have to be perfect." Jacqueline posed questions to whoever would listen and respond, and at the end of their interaction, she excitedly said, "Yay for team thinking!" Every student participated in these informal writing discussions within a forty-minute period.

The formal peer reviews allowed each writer to decide the areas on which his or her peer would focus (see

Appendix B at http://www.ohiorc.org/orc_documents/orc/adlit/inperspective/2014-03/vignette5AppendixB.docx). Overall, my students responded well to structured peer reviews, but the most positive feedback came when I allowed them to choose their own partners. On one occasion I asked students to work with someone new, and as I observed them, the conversations were less productive, and the written reflections clearly conveyed their frustration.

Teacher Conferences

My goal for individual conferences with students was to have a clear focus throughout, based on each student's individual concerns (see Appendix C at http://www.ohiorc.org/orc_documents/orc/adlit/inperspective/2014-03/vignette5AppendixC.docx). My pupils seemed a bit nervous at first, but I tried to put them at ease, slowing down and addressing one issue at a time. At times, I felt like I spoke too much; in any case, I endeavored to listen.

The miniconferences Jenine Mayer writes about intrigued me: "My concentration was keen because I had a clear focus and knew I had to process information right then" (quoted in Hubbard & Power, 2003, pp. 117–118). I engaged in miniconferences using her chart as a guideline to collect information efficiently but meaningfully. I see the miniconference as one solution to my problem of desiring verbatim comments but not wanting to miss what else is going on around me at the same time. When I focused on one student at a time, with only a few defined questions, I was more confident that I had gathered quality data and had processed the data effectively.

Throughout the year, I began each conference with a simple "How's it going?" While most students were able to provide explicit points that they wanted to discuss right away, Elizabeth giggled and said, "Bad," and Donna looked at me with wide eyes and said, "Just bad."

After asking what concerned them most about the essay and what was going well, we dove right in, and I began reading essays aloud, with the paper between us. More often than not, students would stop me and point out a sentence structure or grammar error they wanted to change right away, although I was not going to say anything about grammar just yet. That created an almost awkward moment when they wanted to take the essay and scoot it toward them, scribble the error and correction, and then allow me to see it again. It seemed like they

wanted me to know that they knew better, but I assured each of them that I understood it was a first draft; the creative air felt stifled in a race to "fix" small mistakes, instead of focusing on larger concerns, such as validating the essay's argument.

I asked each of them to tell me their thesis, and I continually flipped back and forth to ask how the main points supported the thesis. At first I thought maybe I was going overboard, but they really seemed to understand as the conference went on that everything must relate to the thesis statement. In Elizabeth's case, we ended by discussing a new thesis statement, and I listed her ideas as she said them. Similarly, Beth wanted to reword her thesis, so we started with a basic sentence and refined from there. Her face lit up when she saw the final product and realized it was her work; I was simply writing down the ideas she was verbalizing, asking questions, and rewriting as she spoke. I learned this strategy from Dr. Davis and Dr. Richards at Wittenberg University, and I remember how helpful it was to have them write my ideas as I spoke. I loved seeing the understanding and excitement in Elizabeth's and Beth's eyes as I was able to help them see their own thoughts more clearly, like my professors had done for me. Elizabeth and Beth both left nodding and slightly smiling, and I was satisfied with twenty minutes well spent with each of them.

Another affirming conference experience this year was with Eli. I am most concerned about conferencing with the highest-level writers because when I was in high school, I felt my English teacher did not push me to improve enough. She was an incredible teacher with contagious energy, and I practice much of her style with my students, but I did not feel particularly challenged when I wrote for her class. I have made it a mission to challenge even the best writers to progress so they do not have the same experience I did. Eli's writing is beautiful, but at the end of his first conference I pointed out that the conclusion (his favorite part) was the only paragraph that oozed his voice with clear passion. I suggested that he infuse every page with as much flair as his closing lines. I was thrilled to find this recommendation proved valuable for him, and his writing style improved not only in that particular essay but in every essay since. As Mayer says, it is easy to visualize the conference afterward: "I also processed the data every time I looked over my anecdotal record. For this reason, much of the miniconferences are in my long-term memory" (quoted in Hubbard & Power, 2003, p. 118). Using these simple questions and only jotting

down a few key phrases kept me focused and gave the conferences direction.

After the first set of conferences, I asked students to bring two copies of their drafts in order to avoid the awkward “paper grab.” It was more effective if students remembered to bring extra copies for their own comments during the conferences. I was able to give feedback and mark up my pages without worrying that I was stepping on their toes when they needed to scrawl a revision. They seemed more comfortable writing their thoughts on separate drafts.

Changing Perspectives—How Students Reveal Understanding of Revision: “We are not married to our drafts”

Another method I tried for the first time was to have students write drafts of essays they may choose not to revise or expand for the formal piece (Appendix D at http://www.ohiorc.org/orc_documents/orc/adlit/inperspective/2014-03/vignette5AppendixD.docx shows some examples). I wanted them to get their ideas down about topics they chose, instead of prompts I gave them. The writing was nonthreatening because they knew they were not being graded; we had read and discussed Anne Lamott’s *Bird by Bird* (1994), and my students embraced Lamott’s concept of the “shitty first draft.” I will continue this practice, because on the revision day, my students were not anchored to what they had written; they were willing to make changes and resee their ideas. I could have jigged around the room, I was so happy to observe them openly considering significant revisions.

Self-Evaluation Candid Comments

Revision and self-evaluation are closely linked; if students can effectively evaluate their writing, they have to know what they have revised and what still needs to be improved (see Appendix E at http://www.ohiorc.org/orc_documents/orc/adlit/inperspective/2014-03/vignette5AppendixE.docx). Every time I read self-evaluations, I learn so much about my students: the way they think, their writing choices, the strengths and weaknesses they recognize in their writing, etc.

I am interested in student reflection and how I can use it to help my students learn from the process of writing and correct their mistakes before submitting their essays. Often when students evaluate their own essays, they

pinpoint the areas of weakness and can reasonably predict their scores on the rubric. It puzzles me that they know those weaknesses exist and they understand the requirements of the assignment, but they do not revise their writing accordingly. I’m not sure how to improve this problem. I use reflection frequently, and my students seem to respond well when I give them the opportunity and time to think and write about their work, but some of them do not realize their mistakes until they are evaluating their essays just before they turn them in. I consistently emphasize the importance of revision and encourage students to reread their essays several times. It confuses me that they would not take the time to revise well before they submit the essay. If they know their weaknesses and can evaluate correctly, why are they not addressing problems as they write? Some of them simply do not seem to care.

When my students submitted their first analysis essays, I was literally tapping my toes in anticipation of reading their self-evaluations. I wanted to know what they felt was the most effective form of revision and why. Since I decided my research question would include revision as a social activity, I had been antsy for some tangible data. Although I encouraged my students to take their time writing the self-evaluation, I had to force myself not to hover directly over their shoulders (I literally walked in a circle around their ten desks, a hawk waiting to swoop).

Nathan finished first, and I was excited when his response to the question about the most effective revision method mentioned the conferences he had with me. Next, Haley reached out with her essay, and I snatched it up. The first line of her note to me was “The conference with you helped me understand my writing and mistakes . . .” Smiling, I walked over to the desk where Shelby, Donna, and Beth had stacked their essays. I was slightly disappointed to see that Donna felt she needed more explanation in our conference. To close every conference, I asked if the student had any other questions or if there was anything I could clarify (I have this documented on my chart), and she said, “No, I’m good.” However, as I read through the other evaluations and notes, they all stated that peer or teacher conferences were the most helpful parts of the revision process.

I was hoping at least half of them would acknowledge the conferences as the most helpful portion, and I was astonished with a nine out of ten. While they are all honors-level students, and there are only ten of them, they have

widely varying writing styles and processes. Nathan and Eli particularly surprised me, because they tend to be more independent. Nathan had not asked many questions up to that point in the year, but he did conference with me three times. Eli is just so self-sufficient that I was not sure what he had taken from our conference. Overall, I feel validated that the data I have collected, especially my students' own comments, show that revision as a social activity improves their writing.

Revision Reflections

Perhaps the most effective form of data collection has been simply asking my students to reflect on their revision process. I have found them quite perceptive and candid about their writing. In the post-surveys, everyone but Eli and Whitney expanded the time they allotted for revision, often doubling the estimate on the initial survey. Every student commented on the value of conferencing this year, just as they did in the self-evaluations.

Questions linger: Why do some students seek several additional conferences, while others shy away? Personality? Preference? Why the contradiction between written responses and action for a few students? I have one student who writes—and talks—about revising but does not practice it. Although questions remain, one certainty revealed itself: Revision is naturally social for this group. The more conferences, the more comfortable and confident most students seemed to feel with their writing.

Students want to “improve” almost everything: thesis statement, word choice, transitions, flow, voice, analysis, introduction. Whatever it is we are discussing, my students want to improve it. Every student wrote the word “improve” somewhere on his or her revision survey. I also read “make better” several times. They understand that revisions will shape their writing. When I think of improve, I immediately think of Whitney. She would revise everything in her essay until the end of the year if I let her. She is so focused on every detail and driven for perfection. At the same time, I also think of Donna, who said in one conference, “It all needs improvement.”

Conferences allow students to talk about depth, which improves their writing. I now know how much conferences matter to my students' revision process, and it seems that their primary concern is often depth of their ideas. My honors juniors understand more about revision, and their revisions are an honest effort; we have made positive progress. From the beginning of the year, it has been clear that my students want to improve, but their comments remind me that they need to learn from their peers and me. Simply stated, revision is social.

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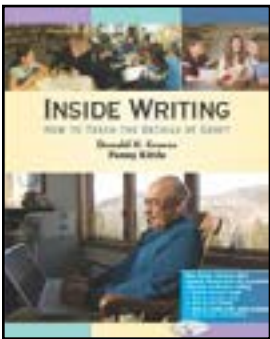
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For Your Bookshelf

Books by Graves and Kittle; Bedard and Fuhrken; Ayres and Overman; and Romano

by Carol Dodson



Inside Writing: How to Teach the Details of Craft, by Donald H. Graves and Penny Kittle (Heinemann, Portsmouth, NH, 2005)

Inside Writing is not a new book. If you search your bookshelves, you might find it tucked away between larger books such as those by Nancie

Atwell, Lucy Calkins, and Jim Burke, but you'll want to take another look. The book is more than a book. It includes a DVD and a separate book of prompts and pages for quick writes accompanied by examples from Penny Kittle and other professionals. Although the book is focused on grades 2 through 6, the information about teaching and learning writing is timeless and ageless. The DVD is filled with classroom scenes and children's voices. It also includes Graves and the teachers writing, talking about their writing, and getting students excited about their writing. If you buy this book, the DVD is a good place to start, followed by reading the book and periodically checking out *My Quick Writes*. The importance of teachers writing with their students is paramount, but the craft of writing is also a major part of this work. From choosing the best noun or verb to finding a sentence that reveals the writer, the writer's craft is evident throughout. The prompts for quick writes focus on such areas as dialogue, point of view, and thoughtful topics for writing and investigating. The quick writes are there for both teachers and their students to engage in, but some are strictly for the teacher.

If, during the years of teaching "on-demand writing" and sometimes ignoring the writing process, you have moved into other ways of teaching writing, this book with its accompanying DVD and quick writes will remind you of how well your students wrote when they engaged in writers' workshop, peer conferencing, and other key parts of the process of writing.

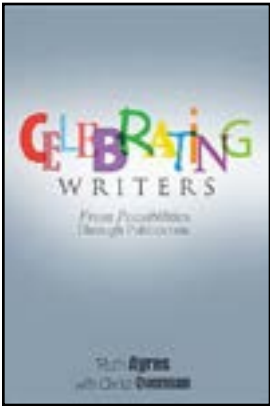


When Writing with Technology Matters (e-book) by Carol Bedard and Charles Fuhrken (Stenhouse, Portland, ME, 2013, <http://www.stenhouse.com/emags/0937/index.html>)

Bedard and Fuhrken explain the importance of technology in teaching language arts.

Focusing on writing, the authors share ten reasons why technology matters. The reasons run the gamut from student motivation and engagement to the use of technology to become not just technologically literate, but also expert in visual and informational literacy. The writers focus on two major projects, one with upper elementary (grades 4–5) students and the other with middle school students. The first project involved movie making, complete with storyboards, lots of reading, individual and collaborative work, and revision of their work. The middle school project, "Creating the Nonfiction Visual Essay," engages students in cross-curricular research and inquiry. Teachers will be able to follow this same process with their students because of the care with which the authors present the material. They explain the steps that include reading and annotating historical novels, preparing for and engaging in research, storyboarding, and finally developing the visual essay. Examples of charts and other student work are provided.

This book is an important addition to your digital bookshelf not only because it offers detailed step-by-step instructions for projects that use technology to increase learning, but also because Bedard and Fuhrken support the use of technology for many types of writing that are demanded in today's world. Their practical ideas for using blogs and other social media will go a long way toward alleviating the trepidation that many teachers feel when faced with new technologies.



Celebrating Writers from Possibilities Through Publication, by Ruth Ayres and Christi Overman (Stenhouse, Portland, ME, 2013)

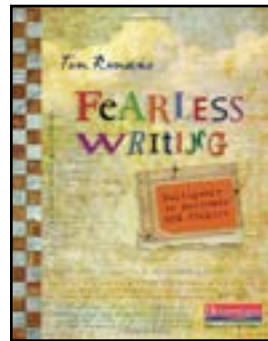
I debated about including this book by Ruth Ayres and Christi Overman in the bookshelf for teachers of adolescents because the focus is on younger students. My reservations ended as I read the book and realized

that celebrating writing is important for all ages, even through adulthood. *Celebrating Writers* fits perfectly with the theme of this *In Perspective* issue, as the authors speak of the need to celebrate the process and place less emphasis on a perfect product that comes at the end of a writing project. Combining the theoretical with the practical, classroom-based ideas, worksheets, and examples reveals how well the process works with real students in real classrooms. Throughout this five-chapter book, the authors provide a guide for the writing process accompanied by joy and enthusiasm for writing. Teachers who use this book will find ways to improve their student-teacher conferences and to show students how to give feedback to each other about their writing.

Ayres and Overman stress the importance of writing partners for feedback and of reflecting on their writing, but they don't stop there. They offer concrete suggestions for choosing writing partners and then explain how to teach reflection, providing questionnaires, starter pages, and samples of student reflections. They share three types of reflection: private, public, and digital.

In Chapter 3 the writers share how to expand the scope of students' writing into digital writing and writing for social media. They explain how their students learn about social media and provide samples of the charts and other materials they use. If you're thinking about starting class blogs or using Twitter to improve student writing, you'll find this part of the book just the guide you need. In the final chapters of the book, Ayres and Overman continue to stress the celebrations and offer concrete suggestions for many ways to celebrate writing, both informally and formally.

The complete text is currently available on the [Stenhouse site](http://www.stenhouse.com), but this is a book that you will want to include on your bookshelf so that you can return to it over and over.



Fearless Writing, by Tom Romano (Heinemann, Portsmouth NH, 2013)

Tom Romano tells us that multigenre writing is "an immersion in a big topic of personal importance." Romano shows us some of the amazing writing accomplished by his students when they are

unchained from a single genre and shown how to mix genres effectively into a multigenre research project. In *Fearless Writing* Romano provides a winding road map to inspire teachers and their students. He carefully outlines his assignments and strict requirements for multigenre research projects and then shows how students fulfill the requirements creatively with unique blends of narrative with argument, factual articles, drawings, and mementos. The creativity is not without structure. The author emphasizes the importance of a word or the placement of a comma. He addresses the craft of writing, and it shows in the writing of his college students. He makes many of their papers available on his website.

The book is divided into five sections that include such areas as the history of multigenre writing, important components of the paper, and grading of the work. For detractors of narrative writing who claim that narrative is somewhat unimportant and unnecessary, Romano's discussion of multigenre classics such as *Moby Dick* and *To Kill a Mockingbird* provides convincing evidence of the importance of mixing narrative style with expository writing.

If you want to stretch your students' writing and help them experience the excitement of successful writing, *Fearless Writing* is just the book to inspire you and give you the strategies and plans for making this happen.

Carol Brown Dodson is ELA specialist and outreach specialist for the Ohio Resource Center. Dodson was an English language arts consultant for the Ohio Department of Education and is past president of OCTELA (Ohio Council of Teachers of English Language Arts). Dodson, formerly a high school English teacher, department chair, and supervisor of English language arts in Columbus Public Schools, serves on the Ohio Graduation Test Reading Content Committee.

From the ORC Collection

More Resources for “Ohio’s New Learning Standards and the Writing Process”

Resources from the ORC Collection

Besides the numerous direct links to rich resources found in the articles in this issue, here are some additional excellent resources from the ORC collection.

ORC #5929

Writing about Writing: An Extended Metaphor Assignment

One of the best ways to improve writing is to spend some time reflecting on how you write. This five-part lesson asks students to reflect on their writing process and helps teachers learn more about students’ habits and techniques as writers. Using Richard Wilbur’s poem “The Writer” as an inspiration, students write their own extended metaphor, describing themselves as writers. Because the activity asks students to reflect on their writing habits and process, the lesson is useful at key points in a term—at the beginning when writers are getting to know each other, at a point in the term when students need to consider changing or adding new techniques, or at the end of the term, when students reflect on their writing over the course of the class. Reflection journals allow students to continue this process throughout the year.

ORC #17687

Writing Process Presentation

This PowerPoint presentation is designed to introduce students to three major elements that constitute the writing process (invention, composition, revision) and the strategies for inventing, composing, reviewing, and proofreading. The eighteen slides presented here are designed to aid the facilitator in an interactive presentation of the nuts and bolts of the writing process. This presentation is useful for the beginning of a composition course and/or for the beginning of a writing project. The PowerPoint opens with notes pages and may be viewed as a slide show. Clicking on any slide provides an opportunity to edit slides.

ORC #17549

Using the RAFT Writing Strategy

This strategy guide introduces the RAFT technique and offers practical ideas for using this technique to teach students to experiment with various perspectives in their writing. RAFT is a writing strategy that helps students understand their role as a writer and how to effectively communicate their ideas and mission clearly so that the reader can easily understand everything written. Additionally, RAFT helps students focus on the audience they will address, the varied formats for writing, and the topic they’ll be writing about. By using this strategy, teachers encourage students to write creatively, to consider a topic from multiple perspectives, and to gain the ability to write for different audiences. RAFT assignments encourage students to uncover their own voices and formats for presenting their ideas about content information they are studying. Students learn to respond to writing prompts that require them to think about various perspectives: **Role of the writer, Audience, Format, and Topic.**

ORC #7182

Understanding Writing: The Rhetorical Situation

This PowerPoint presentation focuses on a variety of factors that contribute to strong, well-organized writing. The presentation, intended to introduce students to the rhetorical situation: writer, purpose, audience, topic, and context, is suitable for the beginning of a composition course or the assignment of a writing project in any class. By downloading the PowerPoint or by right-clicking on any slide, it is possible to view the notes and to manipulate the order of slides or to create a customized show.

ORC #1341

Creative Communication Frames: Discovering Similarities Between Writing and Art

In this lesson, students compare writing with art, specifically Impressionism. Students examine a work of art of their choice to discern purpose, audience, form, and function. Their observations and reflections emphasize the use of transitional and comparative vocabulary to discuss similarities between writing and painting. Although this lesson compares the elements of Impressionism with those of the writing process, the activities could be adapted to any art form. Links to virtual art museums, interactive organizers and charts, and ideas for implementation are available at the website.

ORC #1346

Memories Matter: The *Giver* and Descriptive Writing Memoirs

This lesson provides students with a scaffold for creating meaning from text by having them discuss the importance of preserving a written history of humanity and reflect on the ways in which prior knowledge and life experiences influence others. Students begin by reading and analyzing *The Giver* by Lois Lowry. Using the experiences of the novel's main character as inspiration, students compile their own list of life events and create a series of memoirs. The writing process and Internet research are emphasized in this lesson. Links and references for teachers are available at the website.

ORC #4389

Build It Up, Trim It Down

This lesson uses a sports writing context for students to practice key reading and writing process skills. Presented with data and highlights about a sporting event, students synthesize the information and write original sports summaries. The emphasis on summarization and revision strategies supports students in addressing one aspect of their writing.

ORC #17239

Change My Mind: Persuasive

Change My Mind is based on the concept that students will be bombarded with persuasive techniques in all aspects of their lives. They need to recognize when persuasive techniques are being used and, in turn, how students can use them to try to persuade others. This project is directed at the persuasive writing process but moves students into writing argumentative papers. The multimedia kit includes a teacher guide, five videos, and a website.

ORC #8245

Revising Drafts

This content resource contains an online handout which is designed to motivate students to revise their drafts and to provide specific strategies for revising. The FAQ format addresses students' concerns and questions about revision and provides information regarding what revision is and is not. Students are guided step-by-step through the revision process.

Adolescent Literacy In Perspective

Each issue of *Adolescent Literacy In Perspective* highlights a topic in adolescent literacy. Here you can read teacher-written articles, see what experts in the field are saying, gain insight from students, and find resources for classroom use.

What Is AdLIT?

Advancing Adolescent Literacy Instruction Together (AdLIT) is designed to address the unique literacy needs of adolescent learners by promoting and supporting effective, evidence-based practices for classroom instruction and professional development activities in Ohio's middle and secondary schools.

About the Ohio Resource Center

The Ohio Resource Center works to improve teaching and learning among Ohio teachers by promoting standards-based, best practices in mathematics, science, reading, and social studies for Ohio schools and universities. The Center's resources are available primarily via the web and are coordinated with other state and regional efforts to improve student achievement and teacher effectiveness in K-12 mathematics, science, reading, and social studies. To learn more about ORC, visit the website at www.ohiorc.org.

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