Dear UCI Writing Project Community,

Wow! My first three months at UCI have flown by. I have a lot to share.

First, our transition plan was approved by the California Writing Project, and we recently kicked off a couple of programs. The Virtual Youth Program started on October 11th serving students in Grades 3-8. We also kicked off Writing Project II on October 5th and our advisory board meetings on October 4th. Finally, registration is open for our December 8th conference: Reclaiming Student Agency to Develop Creative and Critical Readers and Writers. Here’s a link: https://writingproject.uci.edu/conferences.html

I’m also starting to meet our fantastic community. I recently met the other UCI California Subject Matter Project directors and directors of other California Writing Projects. I’ve also started meeting many of you (our fellows) through Writing Project II and the Advisory Board.

Dear Writing Project Friends,

It seems astonishing that it has been a year since we started working on the first issue of WordPlay. It has been very rewarding to get so much positive feedback from so many of you. As we move into our second year of publication, I really hope that we can encourage all of you to consider submitting articles. The newsletter should be a reflection of our community and what makes it so special. Some ideas to consider for future issues:

- Opinion pieces
- Poems
- Classroom strategies
- Book recommendations/reviews
- WP strategies/practices that have “stuck” in your teaching
- Other ideas?

You may send submissions to mrsharrington@gmail.com, and I look forward to hearing from you.

In this issue you will find information about several upcoming events, including a free WRITE Center webinar by Deborah Farmbry focusing on Social Emotional Learning applied
Despite meeting so many great people, I’m also interested in connecting with the fellows who can’t attend those activities. If you haven’t been involved with the Writing Project for a while, please reach out to me about ways the Writing Project can support you in your work. I’d love to hear from you!

Our team has been planning to develop leadership opportunities and find ways for people to get more involved. We’d love input on how to re-engage everyone after some difficult pandemic years. I have a feeling that teachers are ready to bounce back and make teaching fun again. I’m also betting that people have a lot to write about. Let’s bring our community back together, share our stories, and get reinvigorated!

Please reach out if you’d like to get involved in some of our programs. Our December conference could be a great place to reconnect. Hope to see you there!

Best,
Michael

to writing, as well as our UCI December conference on literacy. I strongly encourage you to attend both of these events. There is also an interesting article by Michael Hubbard describing an environmental justice project his 5th graders engaged in last year, as well as an article by Laseanda Wesson about the Pathway curriculum writing project that is underway under the leadership of Carol Booth Olson. Look for your friends and colleagues in the pictures.

Finally, many congratulations to UCIWP fellow, Vicky Nguyen on receiving the Distinguished Educator award from the Greater Irvine Chamber of Commerce. Read more about Vicky’s work [here](mailto:eharring@uci.edu).

I wish you all a suitably spooky Halloween, and a happy Thanksgiving.

Liz Harrington, Editor
[eharring@uci.edu](mailto:eharring@uci.edu)

**Mark your Calendar**

**Upcoming events**
Wednesday, October 19
4 - 5:30 p.m. PST, 7 - 8:30 EST Getting Lit: Exploring Literacy through a Lens of Transformative SEL, Exploring Real Emotions, Real Life, and Real Learning. Deirdre Farmbry, Ed. D
No charge. [https://www.writecenter.org/webinars.html](https://www.writecenter.org/webinars.html)

9:00 a.m-10:30 a.m. PDT Emergent Writing: Engaging Young Writers with Joy and Intention
[Zoom](https://www.writecenter.org/webinars.html)
Have you ever wondered how young children learn to write? Join us in the NWP Write Now Teacher Studio to explore this question with early childhood educators and colleagues from the Philadelphia Writing Project (PhilWP).

Oct. 9-23 Write Out
Write Out is a free two-week celebration of writing, making, and sharing inspired by the great outdoors.

More information about Emergent Writing and Write Out at [https://studio.nwp.org](https://studio.nwp.org)

Thursday, December 8
8:45 a.m. - 3:45 p.m. PST Reclaiming Student Agency to Develop Creative and Critical Readers and Writers. An in-person literacy conference presented by UCI Writing Project, the WRITE Center, and the National Writing Project. Speakers include: Kelly Gallagher and Penny Kittle, Gholdy Muhammad, and Julia E. Torres, Jennifer Fletcher, Carol Jago, and more

Also available: a virtual conference with speakers Kelly Gallagher and Penny Kittle, Gholdy Muhammad, and Julia E. Torres.
Information at [https://writingproject.uci.edu/](https://writingproject.uci.edu/)
Reading Corner

Book Reviews

The California Recommended Reading List has changed radically in 2022. Gone are the classics and now most books are less than 7 years old. The list is not what should be taught in class. Rather the list suggests what a student should read to round out their reading experiences. Since many of these books are newer, there are resources available to bring these books into your classroom: Teachingbooks.net. This is a database paid for by the state of California in order to provide resources and encourage teachers and students to branch out and read new texts. Ace of Spades and They Called Us Enemy, reviewed below are two books from that list.

Liz Taireh

Ace of Spades
by Faridah Àbíké-Íyímídé

Aces never lies. School can be cut throat, but nothing quite like Niveus Academy. Aces, the Gossip Girl-like spreader of gossip, is out for blood. Literally. The school’s privileged and perfect population are hiding a secret, one of institutionalized racism that resides at the heart of the school.

Devon and Chiamaka were almost done with high school, so close to starting their adult lives…until Aces makes it their mission to

Other Words For Home
by Jasmine Warga

“…and, I just want to live in a country where we can all have dinner again without shouting about our president or rebels or revolution…”

An honest, hopeful, and relevant tale of a young Syrian girl who comes to live with her uncle in Ohio, United States. Published in 2019, the issues in this book are extremely fresh and could be easily supplemented with non-fiction pieces if adopted for curriculum purposes.

Knuffle Bunny
by Mo Williams

Those who know me know I love the book Knuffle Bunny by Mo Williams. One of the things I love about it (besides the engaging story, characters, and creative art) is the multiple ways you can close read it to elicit different comprehension and inferential thinking. For years, I used the book to help students name, describe, and understand emotions with evidence such as sad to frustrated and inconsolable or happy to ecstatic. I also used the book to teach character traits and had students take
stop them in their tracks. This truly devious and maddening thriller will have you guessing until the end.

Writing Idea: Look at the quotes and the student’s schedule from the beginning of the book. Imagine what could be the dreams...and the nightmares of Devon and Chiamaka.

_They Called Us Enemy_ by George Takei

(Book Trailer from Teachingbooks.net)

Another Trailer

1942. Japan bombs Pearl Harbor. Four year-old George Takei, living in LA, is living an ordinary life. Until he isn’t. Takei is taken from Los Angeles, after spending nights in horse stalls, to a Japanese Internment Camp. This memoir from a larger biography and made into an engaging, thoughtful, and compelling graphic novel that hooks readers from 10-whenever your eyes no longer can read the small print.

More than just giving facts about the Japanese Internment, Takei gives life and context to a horrific event that happened less than 100 years ago. He tells not only about the time in the camp, but also the time leading up to being forcibly removed from his house and the struggle with homelessness after being released from the internment camp.

_Liz Taireh_

Warga’s story, written in the format of a free-verse poem, is narrated by 12-year-old Jude, who suddenly finds herself seeking asylum in the United States with her mother. They go to live with her maternal uncle and his family, including her cousin who is half Syrian and half white. Her father and brother stay behind in Syria for different reasons. Jude gives a perspective and point of view of a person who feels alienated and is being judged based on her skin color, the kind of clothes she wears and the food she eats. Jude’s words depict the difficulties of all those displaced because of local conflicts and wars and are adjusting to a new reality that is difficult but also appears to be hopeful. Throughout all of Jude’s difficulties, she finds joy in her new life in the United States and develops friendships throughout the way.

_Other Words For Home_ greatly reminds me of Katherine Applegate’s _Home of the Brave_, a story I read with my 7th graders about a boy named Kek from Sudan. I have been thinking that it would be interesting to read both books and compare both the stories and the writing structure with students.

Jasmine Warga’s writing is lyrical, deeply engaging, and filled with hope and empathy. From her biography:

opposing opinions on whether the father in the story was a good dad or not and debate the issue with evidence from the text. This year, as I work with UTK teachers and our youngest learners, we use the book to help students learn and understand the power of using their words. We read the book and talked about what Trixie, the toddler main character in the story, could say if she could speak. It reinforces the concept teachers are helping our youngest students learn, using their words to express their emotions and desires. This book is a powerhouse source for teachers’ comprehension work with students; if you haven’t read it, check it out.

Allison Serceki
“We are in a period of human history, where empathy is needed more than ever. No one ever grows poor from giving, sharing what you have does not make what you have worth any less. I guess that’s what this book is really about, the ever-growing need for generosity. Generosity is just another word for love.”

Warga’s words ring true because, in my opinion, empathy and kindness are learned behaviors that we can all choose to make throughout our days.

Megan Grint

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**Spotlight on a Classroom**

**Students Starting a Conversation to Build Lasting Change**

By Michael Hubbard

Jody Bonk and I had the privilege of working with the California Watershed Project, CWP, last school year 2021-2022. This is my contribution…

While teaching students to make good individual choices is something we need to continue to encourage, we know that isn’t enough. Whether it’s the 8 million pieces of plastic that get into our oceans on a daily basis (link) or the microplastics that already exist in our bodies, we see that the target in teaching our students to be agents of change must also change.

We need to get students to look at the systems we are all involved in and change them to make a real difference. This is the deeper work. That's what I focused on. Getting students to see how systems in their school can be started, removed, or modified to create real and lasting change for the better.
My 5th grade Deerfield Elementary students learned where plastic comes from and the effects on the environment when moving crude oil through the refinement and raw plastic, called nurdles, creation process. The students examined single-use plastics and how many of these one-time-use plastics are overflowing into wildlife habitats. Yet, the students also saw that many of these single-use plastics are still needed in all areas of modern life, from keeping our food safe to medical instruments and computer pieces.

Finally, the class moved forward to its true goal, to understand what systems we can change at our school. We explored our school’s use of plastics and learned that our school has recycling bins, yet those contents go into the same bin that all other trash goes in. We learned that thousands of single-use plastics are used for student lunches every day. We then discovered that the plastic rewards we give to students in our PBIS programs are thrown away only days later. Three systems that could be changed. By writing letters to our principal, we began a conversation that not only will change our school’s systems of how plastic is treated, but, if followed up, may lead to greater positive ecological systemic change throughout our entire school district.

Pathway to Success
by Laseanda Wesson
On select early Saturday mornings, you will find a group of committed elementary, middle, and high school educators gathered in the education building of the UCI campus. These weekend warriors have all answered the call to develop Pathway tutorials for the UCI Writing Project. The goal is to help students become deeper thinkers and enhance their social-emotional learning.

These tutorials will support and aid classroom teachers as they help students become successful readers and writers. A primary emphasis of the tutorials is to highlight the use of cognitive strategies to construct meaning. There is an emphasis on selecting texts that deal with issues of equity, identity, belonging, social justice, empathy, or topics like courage, resilience, leadership, facing adversity, making tough choices, etc. The tutorials will also integrate principles of culturally sustaining pedagogy.
Shepherded by Carol Booth Olson, these teacher leaders gather to discuss, collaborate and encourage one another. They are motivated and determined to do this vital work. Work may not be the correct term because these teacher leaders dive into each task with fervent curiosity, passion, and joy! An amazing mentor team, consisting of Undraa Maamuujav, Catherine D’Aoust and Huy Chung, in addition to CBO, partners with the tutorial writers to provide assistance, resources, and pep talks.

This coordinated cohort is a dream team who are devoted to the success of all students. It is a special community. It is a committed community. It is teachers.