Dear Readers,

In January, as the Writing Project Staff moved hopefully into the new year, we gladly waved goodbye to 2021 and the challenges the continued spread of Covid-19 brought to teaching. While last year’s summer brought excitement to many teachers who were eager to return to their real classrooms, no one fully understood then what challenges awaited them there. Although there was some speculation, teachers were ill-prepared for the number of students who were sick and absent from school; the number of teachers who also caught Covid-19; the demands associated with acceleration and attendance; and the extensive substitute teacher shortage that impacted teaching and administration.

But, the letting go and moving ahead associated with the new year, also included a reflection about the previous year that went beyond the challenges associated with Covid-19. Last year the Writing Project offered an online Summer Institute, attended by 14 teachers, where we created a supportive, on-going community who rose to the challenges of on-line interactions. We found ways through Zoom to engage teachers in inquiry, involve them in book clubs and writing groups, and support them in presentations about their practice. The

Welcome to the latest issue of the UCI Writing Project's newsletter, WordPlay. The newsletter staff has been hard at work finding and creating articles that we hope will be both interesting and entertaining. I am especially excited to share with you an article by Dee Dee Carr, who is a long-time Writing Project Fellow, and has recently published a memoir titled *The Diplomite*, which describes her childhood adventures as the daughter of a Foreign Service officer stationed in places such as India, Iran, Austria, France, and Egypt during some of the most historic events of the mid twentieth century. Having just finished reading *The Diplomite* I can highly recommend it. It is a story that is full of the joy of a loving family life, as well as plenty of humorous anecdotes.

In addition, this month you will also find a spotlight on another of our new Fellows, Jacqueline Hernandez, a thought-provoking OpEd piece by Huy Chung, and a poem by Megan Grint, as well as news of many upcoming events both local and national.

Beginning in our next issue, we plan to create a Teacher Resource column. We would love to hear from you about your go-to sources for lesson ideas, teaching strategies, supplemental materials, etc. If
success of this on-line interaction in both 2020 and 2021 has caused us to consider a hybrid model for our Summer Institute in 2022.

Reflection further reminded us that 2021 Covid-19 did not stop us from organizing and delivering our annual 2021 December Literacy Conference in conjunction with the UCI WRITE Center. Instead, staff addressed the organization demands of a virtual all-day conference, including finding speakers and creating a virtual conference platform. Cornelius Minor and Troy Hicks were the keynote speakers who presented to 300 attendees, a number that pleased and surprised us given the incredible substitute challenges. The conference addressed The Way Forward: Creating Engaging and Equitable Literacy Practices for K-12 Learners. Keynote and breakout session speakers addressed both the social emotional and mindfulness issues faced by teachers along with important practical ways to teach to and touch students' lives. Cornelius Minor reminded teachers of the need for self-care as part of any effort for educational ingenuity.

One teacher wrote in her evaluation: “This has been the most difficult teaching year of my life! I have seriously been considering leaving the profession. This conference is just what I needed...I feel reconnected to why I became a teacher - ready to move forward!”

These reflections about 2021 reminded us of the importance of community and the ongoing need for professional development that feeds pedagogy and the soul. Robert John Meehan, poet educator, speaks to this issue in stating, “We realize the most important resource that all teachers have is each other. Without collaboration, our growth is limited to our own perspectives.” The Writing Project remains dedicated to serving and supporting teachers; our strength lies in the commitment within our community to each other.

Sincerely,
Catherine D’Aoust
UCI WP Director

you have ideas to contribute, please contact Laseanda Wesson.
laseandawesson@gmail.com

Did you know that UCIWP is part of a nationwide community: the National Writing Project? Educators anywhere can tap into the power of the NWP network to support writing and the teaching of writing. NWP and its local Writing Project sites host a broad range of online opportunities for educators and for youth where they can engage, learn, and work together on areas of interest, starting with their dedicated online community, the Write Now Teachers Studio. Open learning opportunities range from webinar series to curriculum projects. Many of the events listed below in our Upcoming Events column are hosted by the Write Now Teachers Studio, and we encourage you to find out more by visiting the NWP website linked above.

Wishing you strength and courage in all you do.

Liz Harrington, Editor
eharring@uci.edu

A Writer's Journey
by Diana Carr

https://myemail.constantcontact.com/WordPlay--The-UCI-Writing-Project-s-Newsletter.html?soid=1134239284057&aid=0CwBZz3UUDM
In 1986 I became a UCI Writing Fellow. I may have been the only kindergarten teacher in the program that year. I continued to meet with our writing group from the institute until I moved to Colorado for four years. There I found another writing group, this time for women seventy or older. The group focused on memoire, not my favorite genre. But I went along with it, and *The Diplomite* was born. It is the story of my childhood as the daughter of a U.S. Foreign Service Officer. It begins in 1947 with our first post, New Delhi, and ends in 1955 in Cairo. The aftermath of World War Two and fading British Colonialism hover in the background, but the book is mainly about the adventures my sister and I had as children in Delhi, Paris, Vienna, Teheran, and Cairo. These adventures include snakes in the garden, Mahatma Gandhi’s assassination, battling lice, breaking “detective” ladies’ code, finding hidden passages, a secret stash of Nazi swords, learning about a “wife family” and how a narrow well saved a life. It is also about being “the other” and learning to accept cultural differences.

The writing took thirteen years, and I enjoyed almost every minute, both in Colorado and now back in California. My process is to write a draft of around five pages at a time, read it out loud over and over until I like it, then print those pages. Seeing them in print offers a fresh insight for me. I revise the copy, and then am ready for my writing group (which is once again the remnants of our old institute gang.) With their help, I return to the computer, make revisions, and go onto the next five or so pages. After attending a San Miguel Allende Writing Conference, I began working with a writing coach. This gave me deadlines as well as sound advice. I sent her twenty pages at a time of writing group approved copy. Of course, this led to more revision. The last two years of my writing experience involved painfully cutting out whole sections in order to tighten the writing, and to meet a three hundred page limit.

On my writing coach’s advice, and a reality check, I self-published with Bookbaby. To be honest, the publishing process is at the bottom of my list of “Favorite Things About Writing.” But I jumped through the hoops because I want people to read my book and appreciate the dedication of our Foreign Service and State Department.

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**Mark your Calendar**

**Upcoming events**

**Wednesday, Feb. 16** Striving to Stay Ahead of the Code: Inquiries into Teaching Writing with Writing Assistance Tools
3 p.m. PST

*Meeting*

Live presentation and discussion sharing the inquiries of teachers in the National Writing Project into the potential, if any, for writing assistance tools in the writing classroom.

**Thursday, Feb. 17** AUWP Scholar Series: Dr. David Stovall
3 p.m. PST
Meeting
Dr. David Stovall is a professor in the departments of Black Studies and Criminology, Law & Justice at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC). His scholarship investigates three areas 1) Critical Race Theory, 2) the relationship between housing and education, and 3) the intersection of race, place and school. (Read more here)
Free to register at: https://augusta.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_9o66CGgbZPV3VGK
Zoom link will be emailed to registrants the day before the event. Questions? Contact Dr. Rebecca Harper at rharper7@augusta.edu

Thursday, Feb. 17  Let's talk *Ain't Burned All the Bright* with Crandall and Hankin
4 p.m. PST
Meeting
Studio member Bryan Ripley-Crandall is turning 50 in February, and his birthday wish is to have at least 50 Studio members join him in reading Jason Reynolds' new book, Ain't Burned All the Bright, with artwork by Jason Giffin. Another Studio member, Paul Hankin, has the very same birthday, so as 'birthday brothers,' Bryan Ripley Crandall and Paul W. Hankins, invite you to a Zoom book party on February 17 to celebrate and discuss this wonderful book. It's the perfect follow-up to Jason Reymold's visit with us on January 8.
RSVP using the Meeting link above.

Wednesday, Feb. 23  Six-Word Memoirs: The Only Limit is Your Imagination
4 p.m. PST
Meeting
Called “on a quest to spark the creativity of others” by Oprah Magazine, Larry Smith is the founder of the Six-Word Memoir Project. Larry will share his unique approach to storytelling, share stories from classrooms’ six-word projects, and lead the group in a “Six-Word Slam” in which all are invited to share their own Six-Word Memoir about their life, why they teach, or even six words on something they never expected to experience in the classroom.

Thursday, Feb. 17  AUWP Scholar Series: Dr. William Pinar
3 p.m. PST
Meeting
Free to register at: https://augusta.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_9o66CGgbZPV3VGK
Zoom link will be emailed to registrants the day before the event.

Feb. 23, March 9, March 24, May 11, May 25  “Teaching, Living and Learning During A Pandemic: A Writing Workshop” facilitated by Carl Finer, UCLAWP Fellow. For more information, contact Faye Peitzman peitzman@gseis.ucla.edu

Feb. 25 -27  CATE (California Convention of Teachers of English) Convention
Long Beach Hilton.
UCIWP’s Jennifer Naumann, plus a host of other exciting speakers, including Jennifer Fletcher. Find more information and register for the convention here: https://www.cateweb.org

Friday, March 4 First Chapter Friday with Don Zancanella
4 p.m. PST  
**Meeting**  
Learn more about Don and his work at [https://www.donzancanella.com/](https://www.donzancanella.com/)

**Saturday, March 5**  
San Diego Area Writing Project's Spring Writing Conference via Zoom.  
[Register here](#).

**Thursday, March 31**  
EMWP Book Club: Creating Confident Writers by Troy Hicks & Andy Schoenborn  
3 p.m PST  
**Zoom**  
Join us to discuss Creating Confident Writers: For High School, College, and Life by CRWP's Troy Hicks and Andy Schoenborn. We'll discuss the sample activities provided in the book, how to adapt the activities to different teaching contexts, and the content shared on the book's companion web page: [https://hickstro.org/confidentwriters/](https://hickstro.org/confidentwriters/)

**Friday, April 1**  
First Chapter Friday with Special Guest Ann E. Burg  
4 p.m. PST  
**Meeting**  
Grab your favorite snack and beverage and join us for a short reading and casual conversation with Ann E. Burg!  
Learn more about Ann and her work at [https://annburg.com/](https://annburg.com/)

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**Summer is Coming!**  
Check out some of our UCIWP summer activities

**Summer Institute**  
Last summer the UCI Writing Project had our second, all virtual, Summer Institute with fourteen fellows, two associate directors - Laseanda Wesson and Mark

**Summer Youth Program**  
The UCI Writing Project is celebrating the 39th year of its Summer Youth Program. Since its establishment in 1984, the Summer Youth Program has continued to grow and thrive, impacting thousands of students from around the globe.
Vermillion, two co-directors - Marianne Stewart and Mary Widtman, and one amazing director, Catherine D'Aoust! We launched our Institute with the theme of Adjusting Your Teaching Compass to "True North". We added new routines, beginning with Writing Into the Day and ending with Catherine leading us in a "Compass Close" as she guided us towards "True North".

In spite of being in a Zoom Room every day, we were able to create a strong community through reading, writing, laughing with joy, and exploring the inquiry presentations that were uniquely meaningful to each fellow.

The 2022 Summer Institute will be a hybrid program that will run 4 days per week (M-Th), 9 am - 3 pm, starting June 27 - July 2; 1 required in-person meeting per week at UCI. the theme is Growing Stronger Together.

Be on the lookout for an email requesting the names of colleagues or friends who you think would be valued fellows in our institute.

Mary Widtman

We are looking for Grades 1-8 writing and math/science instructors for this summer! If you are interested, e-mail us at uciwritingproject@uci.edu for more information.

Reading Corner

Playing Matchmaker: Using Reading to Inspire Writing and Vice Versa

When I became a librarian, I thought I would be talking to students about books all the time. While that is part of my job, it definitely does not play as big of a role as I thought.

It has been from my experience that teachers who expose or bring books in their classrooms are the ones who develop lifelong readers. A librarian helps, but it is the teacher who has the real impact. Here are some fun and quick ways to bring books into the classroom.

- Read the first few lines of the book. Have students write what they think the next line will be and then see who gets the closest.
- Visit BookTok. I am always surprised by the amount of books being checked out due to TikTok. Students review books for students as well as parents and teachers who review books for babies to elementary kiddos to middle and high school students.
- Read a description of a character from the book. Have students write a prediction about what will happen to the character. Then have the class vote on the most likely one.
- Take the title of the book and have students imagine what the book would be like in a different genre. Example: Two Can Keep a Secret by Karen M McManus. Read the description on the back. Then have students turn it into something else: Romance, a Cookbook, a Disney Movie, etc. You can even assign different styles or topics to different groups or students.

With any of these suggestions, you are giving creative writing prompts and previewing different types of books that they might pick up later. Happy reading and happy writing!
Book Reviews

One of Us is Lying - Karen M. McManus
5 students walk into detention, four walk out alive. Simon dies but who killed him? Meet the 5 detention bound students. Full of twists and turns, you realize you can’t trust anyone. “They all have a motive. They all have something to hide. They all have a history with the deceased. And one of them is definitely lying.”

Told from the perspective of all of the characters, be ready to love some and be annoyed by others. Everyone has a secret to hide. But not everyone winds up staying alive. The basis for a Netflix series, the book is a quick read that will knock your socks off.

Liz Taireh

Ground Zero by Alan Gratz
A few years ago, it seemed like every librarian and teacher was recommending their students read Alan Gratz’s novel, Refugee. His newest novel, Ground Zero, hits hard like Refugee while also making the global concepts and consequences of 9/11 accessible to younger readers.

Brandon has to go with his father to work at the World Trade Center because he was suspended from school for the day. It’s September 11, 2001, but, of course, neither Brandon nor his father could ever imagine what would happen on this day. In the paralleled second story, Reshmina dreams of life beyond war in Afghanistan where her brother is threatening to join the Taliban and her home is bombed after she protects an American soldier on September 11, 2019.

Two kids. 18 years difference. Countries apart. The world will never be the same.

Liz Taireh

Voices in the Park by Anthony Brown
Voices in the Park by Anthony Brown is a powerful picture book recounting a day at a park from the perspective of four different characters. The book lends itself well to third grade literacy standards (perspective, character traits) and beyond. In fact, graduate students enjoyed examining the text for all types of nuances the words, font, and illustration convey as well as the societal concepts that can be derived from these components of the text. This book lends itself to multiple reads, allowing students to examine what they notice throughout. While this book is currently out of print (this could be reversed if enough people ask the editor to republish the book…), there are used copies available and multiple videos of the book being read aloud such as this one. This book is a treasure that will allow for deep thinking and great discussion in your classroom, and I recommend one copy per group of students as one way
Read more to foster discussion and discovery of the many components hidden in plain sight within the text.

Megan Grint

Allison Serceki

Spotlight on Our New Fellows

Jacqueline Hernandez

Hello! I'm Jacqueline and I am currently my school's TOSA, a new role for me this semester, and I am finishing up the second half of my fifth year working in the Santa Ana Unified School District. I student taught in a high school, but got a job in middle school with the gritted-teeth thought, "I can do anything for a year," but I have grown to adore this quirky age. I love teaching and engaging with students, so shifting into a different role this semester has been quite the transition, as I am finding new ways to connect, engage, and sneak into even more classrooms.

One of my biggest goals as a teacher is to consistently create opportunities for and guide my students through making connections with the real world, a skill and drive that was only enhanced by my time spent in the UCI MAT program a few years ago. With that in mind, my inquiry project this summer revolved around the question, "How can I create a consistent classroom culture in which students make critical connections between the themes we discuss and the real world?" This question is clearly a year-long venture, but for my inquiry specifically, I chose to focus on the teleplay, "Monsters Are Due on Maple Street." With the aid of Laseanda Wesson, we worked towards creating a unit that started our scholars off with a little gamification as they were thrown into a mock simulation of what it might be like to be a scapegoat. The Dot Game gave us a point of reference, so even if my scholars struggled to directly connect to the "real world" we all had something to draw on as we continued through our unit and got familiar with the concepts of mob mentality and scapegoating. Engaging my students with the game and then reader's theater made it easy to get student involvement as we talked about what happened in the play and how we have seen that in our lives today and throughout history. My struggling readers were able to look at social experiments and microwaved versions of historical events like the Salem Witch Trials, the Red Scare, and the murder of Kitty Genovese, and see how all of those things come to play in our story and in our lives today.

At the end of the day, as ELA teachers, we want our scholars to be able to read, write, listen, and speak. Leaning into a teaching philosophy that hinges on a classroom culture of communication and connection making has made that task easier, more enjoyable, and given my scholars the space to stretch and flex their muscles in new ways so they can see their own power, appreciate a variety of perspectives, and continue reaching for their great potential.
Opinion

“When Less is More” Can be Harmful and Helpful
By Huy Q. Chung, WP Fellow

Lately, in light of the pandemic, and the many twists and turns it has made many of us do in both our personal and professional lives, we find ourselves ridden with guilt or are dissatisfied that we are not experiencing or capable of providing all that we plan had it not been because of the pandemic. Encouragement such as “less is more,” is often the salve that is rubbed on our bruised egos or to take the sting out of disappointment. How many luncheons or dinner plans have been canceled or how many lesson plans upended? Countless, I’m sure. There are many instances where these words are wise, especially in teaching. When considering what feedback to provide students on their essays, a focus on a few elements per assignment can help both teacher and student focus on what needs to improve. When assigning readings, sometimes a focus on a carefully curated text set of a few can be more powerful than a text set of many. When designing learning experiences for our students, one carefully planned strategy can teach students more than trying to speed through ten. However, as much good it does to embrace minimalist practices, we have to be careful that it does not backfire on us and make the average person think that we do not need to have more funding for education, because as resourceful people we can make do with whatever we get. That may be true, because what teacher has not had to do “more with less?” Yet, it was often not a choice made deliberately. It was just evidence of how creative educators are. The next time you hear “less is more” notice how the two are reversed. To choose to do less is a deliberate choice; but also a choice that needs to be embraced more. The next time you wish you could have done more, given more, or seen more, just remind yourself that we live in moments and even small, short moments can have a big impact.

Poem

“The Fine China You’ll Never Use”
by Megan Grint
(inspired by my family asking why there is no fine china on my wedding registry)

Hey…Can I ask you something?
Don’t tell the others, but…
Have you ever wished you were plastic?

I know, I know, they’re cheap
They have no historical value and they are from the wrong side of the cupboard, but…

I gaze out of this stuffy, confined darkness
we’re in and I see them experiencing lunch
And midnight snacks
And bagels
And laughter
And love
And all while we’re experiencing dust and loneliness.
If we’re so beautiful and so valued as they say,
Why is it we’re never touched?

I have no issue with aging. In fact, I find cracks and chips beautiful since
The imperfections signify you’ve tried.
I mean, I’d rather be shattered into a thousand broken pieces on the floor
As opposed to stuck in this endless nightmare of delicacy.

Perfectly polished porcelain can live forever
When it has nothing to live for.

Special Offer!

December Virtua Literacy Conference Videos Available

https://myemail.constantcontact.com/WordPlay--The-UCI-Writing-Project-s-Newsletter.html?oid=1134239284057&amp;aid=0CwBZz3UUDM
Were you unable to attend the December conference? Did you attend but wish you could revisit some of those amazing sessions? We have you covered!
You now have access to video recordings of some of the sessions from the conference. Click here to request access to the videos.

Staff List:
Liz Harrington, Editor eharring@uci.edu
Carol Mooney, Assistant Editor
Megan Grint, Staff
Lynne Pantano, Staff
Laseanda Wesson, Staff
Allison Serceki, Staff
Liz Taireh, Staff