Dear Readers,

Poetry is essential to the UCI WP. In our Summer Institute, we begin each morning with a poem to inspire our start. In Writing Project II, one participant brings a poem to share during our afterschool meetings. We pause after all of these readings, touched by the words, sentiment, and power of language. We are often reminded of why we love teaching English. These poems remind us, as poet Alice Osborn shares, “Poetry’s strength lies in its ability to shed a ‘sideways’ light on the world, so the truth sneaks up on you.” Poetry offers us the opportunity to educate our emotions and enhance our imaginations.

And, importantly, April is National Poetry Month. On their website, the founders explain:

Launched by the Academy of American Poets in April 1996, National Poetry Month reminds the public that poets have an integral role to play in our culture and that poetry matters. Over the years, it has become the largest literary celebration in the world, with tens of millions of readers, students, K–12 teachers, librarians, booksellers, literary events

Welcome to the April issue of WordPlay, the newsletter of the UCI Writing Project. We are so pleased by all the messages of support and encouragement we have received regarding the first two issues. Let me begin this letter with a HUGE apology to Jacqueline Matthews, for my having mistaken her last name in our Spotlight on New Fellows column in February. Unfortunately, Constant Contact doesn’t seem to allow me to go back and change it after publication, so I hope that Jacqueline will accept my humble apologies, along with gratitude for a very interesting and thoughtful article.

As our Director, Catherine D’Aoust points out, April is National Poetry Month, and I would like to echo all of her sentiments about the importance of poetry, both for students and for our own self-care. In addition to the resources mentioned by Catherine, I’d like to add American Life in Poetry https://www.americanlifeinpoetry.org/ where you can sign up to have poems by contemporary American authors delivered weekly to your inbox. This site generally spotlights poets who are less well known than those featured in poem-a-day.

In addition to being National Poetry Month,
curators, publishers, families, and—of course—poets, marking poetry’s important place in our lives.

We encourage you to visit their website https://poets.org/national-poetry-month where you will find exciting ways to use poetry within your classroom, to activate poetic expression, and simply to enjoy creative use of language. You also have the opportunity to subscribe to poem-a-day which daily delivers a poem to your email. Also, please consider poetry lovers across the U.S. on April 29 for Poem in Your Pocket to share a favorite poem of yours, either online or in person.

Poetry Month is a special occasion that reminds us of the integral role of poets and poetry in our cultures. It diminishes the emotional Covid challenges by celebrating the expressiveness and charm of language. Poetry is a go-to medicine for crisis; its resurgence during the pandemic confirms its therapeutic qualities.

I strongly prescribe poetry reading and writing for the health of your mind and soul. Enjoy Poetry Month!

Sincerely,
Catherine D’Aoust
Director, UCI Writing Project

April is also the month in which we celebrate Earth Day. With that in mind, this issue presents an article by Jodi Bonk describing the work she and Michael Hubbard are doing in collaboration with CWP and other subject matter projects on creating an environmental justice curriculum. We look forward to hearing more about this as their work progresses.

Other highlights in this issue include an opinion piece by Heather Wolpert Gawron, and a poem by Megan Grint, as well as our other regular features. A special highlight of the Upcoming Events column is an announcement by UCIWP’s own Virginia Nguyen regarding Teaching for Justice: A Spotlight on Teaching Asian American Studies Across the Curriculum, a conference that she has been involved in planning and organizing.

As always, I encourage you all to submit articles, or ideas for articles. Please email me at eharring@uci.edu if you would like to contribute.

With all good wishes for the end of the year.

Liz Harrington, Editor
eharring@uci.edu

Environmental Justice

“Our feelings are our most genuine paths to knowledge.” Audre Lorde
Have you ever been taken aback by nature? Been stopped in your tracks to just look at the stars? Been swallowed up by the grandeur of a crashing waterfall? Been floored by a body of beautiful turquoise water? At many points in our lives we have been in awe of the natural world around us.

Unfortunately, however, with each passing day, it is becoming more and more apparent that our planet needs our help. No matter where we live, we are experiencing weather extremes, environmental hazards impacting our air and water, and drought conditions that carry with them the threat of destroying crops and causing uncontrollable wildfires.

This is why the California Writing Project has taken it upon itself to organize a collaboration across the state. Two teachers were recruited from each of the Writing Project sites to be a part of this quest to bring environmental literacy and justice to California students, with writing, of course, as the anchor. The first meeting was in October in Sacramento where the passion for the environment was definitely at the forefront. I was fortunate enough to be a part of it, along with Michael Hubbard, representing the UCIWP.

The year-long project, which will culminate in May, has already provided many collaborative meetings to discuss ideas, share resources, and cultivate units. With colleagues from across the state, there is an abundance of support and inspiration. Ultimately, the goal is to start a state-wide website to share our efforts, including student artifacts and resources. We want to spread the word of the importance of building knowledge and action. And, just maybe, those awestruck feelings for this big, beautiful world will lead us to the knowledge that we need to save it.

Jodi Bonk

Mark your Calendar
Upcoming events

Conference announcement by Virginia Nguyen
I am excited to announce my dream of a conference rooted in ABAR pedagogy is coming true! In partnership with the University of California, Irvine, we are hosting the first-ever Teaching for Justice Conference with this year's focus, A Spotlight on Teaching Asian American Studies Across the Curriculum.
It is a two-day conference on April 29 and 30, 2022 intended for K-12 teachers and others interested in integrating the principles of Asian American Studies into their professional work.
- Friday, April 29 sessions will be held virtually over zoom and open to educators and other stakeholders nationally
- Saturday, April 30 sessions will be held in person at UC Irvine
The conference is a model of community collaboration and uplifting. We have brought together Asian Americans at all levels: students, K-12 educators, universities, scholars, parents, organizations, government representatives, activists, business owners, authors, historians, and celebrities.

Upcoming events sponsored by the Write Now Teacher Studio
Thursday, Apr. 28  AUWP Scholar Series: Dr. William Schubert  
3 p.m. PDT  
Meeting  
Free to register  
at: https://augusta.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_9o66CGgbZPV3VGK  

Saturday, Apr. 30  An Author Visit with Donalyn Miller  
10 a.m. PST  
Meeting  
Join us for a conversation with Donalyn Miller, co-author of the upcoming book *The Joy of Reading* to be released in early May.  

Wednesday, May 4  EMWP Book Club: Firekeeper's Daughter by Angeline Boulley (YA novel)  
3 p.m. PDT  
Zoom  
Meeting ID: 825 7372 0734  
Passcode: 843399  
One tap mobile:+13017158592,,82573720734*,843399# US (Washington DC)  

Friday, May 6  First Chapter Friday with Andy Myer  
4 p.m. PDT  
Zoom  
Learn more about Andy and his work at https://www.andymyer.com/  

Friday, June 3  First Chapter Friday with Daniel Handler  
4 p.m. PST  
Zoom  
Learn more about Daniel and his work at https://www.danielhandler.com  

Read more about these events  

Reading Corner  
Book Reviews
The 57 Bus by Dashka Slater
Two teens are on the 57 bus, traveling through Oakland, CA. Their lives could not be more different. Sasha is a nonbinary teen and they attend a magnet school. Richard is an African American student with a troubled past who attends a public school. The bus is seemingly the only thing they have in common...until Richard sets Sasha’s skirt on fire.

Told by a local journalist, The 57 Bus is a 100% true story. This nonfiction is a dream for reluctant readers: SHORT chapters, approachable writing, and a compelling crafting of two different lives. This book is meant to be read and is easy to enjoy, despite the serious nature of the book.

Activity Before Reading: Check out the NY Times Article written by the same author. Knowing that this will cover both Sasha and Richard, ask what they think the author might reveal about each one that is not told in the news article or videos. Visit this collection of videos about this event

Liz Taireh

Ghost Boys by Jewell Parker Rhodes
 “[We] can’t undo wrong. [We] can only do our best to make things right.”

Ghost Boys is a short but powerful read, and it is one I hope people of all ages will read. Although it isn’t a perfect novel and there are character tropes I disagree with, it is a good way to ease people into talking about the important subject of police brutality against Black boys and men. Jerome is out playing with a toy gun when two policemen shoot him. Dead, he watches over his family and community as they grieve. Joining him in the afterlife is Emmett Till, the ghost of a young boy brutally murdered in 1955.

I read this in one sitting; it’s a very fast read but it packs a lot of punch. It reminds me a lot of a “lower lexile level” Long Way Down (Jason Reynolds) in terms of the approach and the use of ghosts to move along the story. I think parents and/or teachers looking to discuss this topic with their middle schoolers would find this book very helpful.

Megan Grint

Fry Bread by Kevin Noble Maillard
Author Kevin Noble Maillard and illustrator Juana Martinez-Neal created Fry Bread: A Native American Family Story to honor American Indians’ ability to maintain community and culture despite the challenges they faced throughout indigenous people’s history within the United States. While the text is simple and can be enjoyed and discussed with very young students, there are many underlying historical and ethnic components or lenses woven throughout the text and pictures that allow for deep thinking and discussion among older students. Having older students view the text and illustrations with various lenses to seek deeper meaning may provide a worthwhile endeavor. In the back of the book, a teacher or the students could also use The Author’s Note, which highlights many of these deeper meaning components and nuances within the text. Some of these nuances include indigenous people’s current circumstances
and history, traditions and art, interwoven history with other cultures and ethnicities, differing versions of fry bread across the country, and potential influences and reasons for these variations of fry bread.

Read more
Allison Sercecki

Spotlight on Our New Fellows

Chris Kaino
I am a high school English teacher, and I received my teaching credential from CSUF. After student teaching, I got an immediate job with my student teaching site which also happened to be my alma mater. I taught in Irvine Unified School District both virtually and in person for 3 years. Just this past school year, I began my fourth year of teaching working at a public charter school in south-central LA. The community of learners here is so deserving, and appreciative, of my teaching methodology.

My inquiry question during this past Summer Institute was, “How do we engage and empower students by connecting history and class concepts to their own lives?” I blended many ideas together from Joseph Campbell’s monomyth, mentor haikus and poetry from Japanese internment camps, and our own anecdotal experiences. For many of us, the written and spoken words are the vehicles through which we make sense of the world and of ourselves. This inquiry question helped me to explore the authentic connection students crave between the curriculum and their day-to-day life.

Opinion
Writing Portfolios as Authentic Assessment
Grades are an in-the-moment snapshot of learning. But grades are different from assessments. Grades don’t prove anything; authentic assessments do.

Shouldn’t assessments represent, not an end-of-the-line score, but rather evidence of growth and
learning over time? Shouldn’t assessments also acknowledge the learning to come? Wouldn’t that be more authentic? Learning today, after all, isn’t just about subject knowledge. It’s just as much about process.

How we assess can help us make assessments more authentic and, thus, better prepare students for the world beyond school.

Using writing portfolios as a means to assess a student’s process and product is vital if our goal is more authenticity.

Writing portfolios bring in more student voice and agency while also using reflection as a tool for a student to celebrate how far they’ve come and an acknowledgement of how far they still know they need to journey.

An authentic writing portfolio is a file that is curated by the students themselves. It uses written reflection by students to assess their own work. These portfolios can be for audiences beyond the teacher: the school community, peers, families, etc... Most importantly, I believe portfolios play a part in elevating more student choice and voice in academic writing. And it isn’t just about offering choices of prompts. Creating a writing portfolio is about each student reflecting on their writing and selecting pieces from their repertoire that best represent their goals.

Just think about it: a student writes daily quickwrites, weekly short responses, scripts, summative assessments that go through the entire writing process, speeches, and more. There’s tons for a student to choose from. It is extremely powerful to have students look through their own body of work and select the best pieces that are evidence of their learning. It’s also powerful to have them write or record reflections talking about their own growth. The more a teacher allows the student into the process of curating their own evidence, the more authentic the writing assessment becomes.

Heather Wolpert-Gawron

The Young Writers Program is always evolving. During the pandemic UCIYW, like most sites, pivoted to an online learning format. This worked for the summer program but we saw a need to take it one step further. In an effort to support students who were not getting the writing instruction they needed in the online classroom format, the Young Writing Project became the Virtual Programs for Youth. These online classes allowed students to log in to content-rich writing classes that were engaging, informational, and fun. Even as most districts returned to in-person instruction, parents still felt a need for classes that could help fill the gap left by the pandemic. So for the past two years we have run both fall and winter course options. We will continue to offer online classes this summer, even though most of the Young Writers classes will return to an in-person format at TVT in Irvine and Tustin. If you are interested in being part of the in-person program or if you are interested in teaching virtually, please reach out to Angie Balius at 714-920-5682 for more information.

Angie Balius

Poem

RIP Feeling
(1992-2020)

Numb isn’t Sadness.
They are quite different people.
Numb is survival.
Numb is having a cheerful face but keeping those invited in at bay.
Numb is getting lost.
Numb is protecting others.

She is dried tears on red cheeks… how long have those been there?
Numb is quiet, creeping, careful because she knows she is not normally welcome.
No, Numb is not Sadness.
Numb is far worse
And she knows it.

(Numb is feeling no more)

Megan Grint
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

UCI Writing Project | 401 E Peltason Suite 3100, Irvine, CA 92697

Unsubscribe uciwritingproject@uci.edu
Update Profile | Constant Contact Data Notice
Sent by uciwritingproject@uci.edu in collaboration with

Constant Contact
Try email marketing for free today!