Welcome to our newly redesigned newsletter!

What’s inside

- News from our Director
- Spotlight on two of our new fellows
- Creative Corner
- A peek into the classroom of one of our veteran fellows
- Book reviews and teaching strategies
- Beyond Books: a new column by a teacher-librarian
- Coming events to feed your teacher soul

Need a “Brain Spa?”

Read the complete newsletter on our website

WordPlay staff: Liz Harrington, Editor, Carol Mooney, Assistant Editor, Laseanda Wesson, Megan Grint, Elizabeth Taireh, Allison Serceki, Lynne Pantano
Dear Writing Project Community,

I hope you are all having a great start to the new school year. We all mark time more in terms of school years than calendar years, don't we? This isn't a test, just a test run. Liz is working toward moving Wordplay to our website, so that it can be more outward facing and accessible to our community. The work she's doing is amazing. It may take a while for us to get the look and feel right, but we're excited. She is always looking for writers to contribute more content, so consider writing something for upcoming issues of Wordplay that will be on the Writing Project website!

We also have a couple of other upcoming things to be excited about this year. For all current fellows, I'd especially like to invite you to join us in Writing Project II. We're trying out three things this year: 1) We invite all of you to drop into any meeting they can. In the past, we have asked people to commit to coming to every session. But, that's a lot and over a long period of time, so we want to remove that barrier for you. Instead, we're designing stand-alone sessions so that you can feel free to drop in any time and just enjoy being with our community. 2) We are varying the meeting days. A static meeting day (e.g., Wednesdays) might be a barrier for some people who have other Wednesday commitments. So, we're varying the day and time to try to give more options across the year. We even planned a Saturday brunch! 3) All of the meetings are in-person. This was in response to overwhelming advice we got from our advisory board. For those of you who can't make it in person, we're trying to set up an online book club to keep those people connected. We're still figuring out the shape of that.

Read more of Michael's letter here
I'm in my third year teaching writing composition at Irvine Valley College. I'm also involved with the IVC Writing Center, the IVC Student Success Center, and IVC's Dual Enrollment / Early College Program. I also moonlight as a part-time evaluator in the Composition department at Western Governors University. I previously worked as an ESL teacher in South Korea, China, and the United States.

My practice is informed by the ideas of Paulo Freire, who argued that students are often problematically taught they exist outside of the margins of society and that it's the teacher's role to assimilate them. Freire argues that this understanding is an illusion and that students already actively exist within society and are capable of influencing it. At the UCI Writing Project, I wanted to merge these ideas with bell hooks' emphasis on the importance of service. hooks theorizes that with a commitment to service, teachers can ensure that teaching is centered on the needs of students and doesn't function as an exercise in domination.

For my teaching demonstration, I wanted to improve an activity generally known to instructors of composition as peer-review, where students exchange drafts of their work to give and receive feedback. With substantial help from my coach David Shelby, I incorporated the concept of question-based pedagogy into my current practice: Students will choose criteria-based or reader-based questions (this framework was borrowed from Peter Elbow's book Writing With Power) to apply to their drafts. After exchanging drafts, readers will tailor their feedback according to the writer's selected questions. I have found that question-based pedagogy helps students to develop agency in their own writing processes, helps students to understand there is a social dimension to the writing process, and helps students to appreciate the notion of service within the interpersonal dynamic of the classroom.
Coming from a social science background, The Important Book can be adapted and implemented in a variety of ways. It can serve as a beginning of the year activity that helps create community within the classroom by having them create these poems about each other. It can also serve as a content related activity where students create a poem about the “important thing” about a certain topic/content.

The personification activity stood out because it really can be adapted into an SEL activity. Students learning to identify their emotions and expressing those emotions is crucial in their socioemotional development. This activity allows for that, by having students create a personification poem about a certain emotion. Similarly to the “Important Book” activity, this can be adapted to social science content and students can create a personification poem through the perspective of a historical character, etc. This further allows the development of empathy in students, another factor key in socioemotional development.

Learning about these activities, along with the others, has been invaluable in my development as a teacher. I hope to share with others about this great opportunity here at the UCI Summer Writing Institute!
Be My Guest

I brought my
-cutlery
-napkin
-plate

You told me I’d have a seat

But upon arrival, I realized
my seat
is in
the basement.

You never planned for me to sit
with you… so,

My cutlery breaks the window
My napkin wraps my bleeding knuckles as
My plate is dropped

And I leave

(Without your permission).

Megan Grint
I was fortunate enough to participate in the UCI Writing Project the summer after finishing my credential program, and I left that summer empowered and impassioned to see each student find their voice as a writer, see themselves and others through their reading, and feel confident in themselves as communicators. The Summer Institute formulated my core beliefs of honoring my student’s writing and seeing their golden lines in each piece they put to paper. This core belief of honoring students’ writing and treating each piece as an opportunity to see what my students have done well, how they have grown, and as a chance to build their self-confidence has stuck with me for the past seven years since finishing the Summer Institute. Each time I approach one of my students’ pieces of writing, I remind myself to see my students for their golden lines, lines where they glowed, and to look out for where they have grown and could still grow. This approach towards feedback affords me the type of mindset that best celebrates my students while still providing them with actionable steps for improvement.

The Golden Lines/glow and grow strategy is just one of the countless practical strategies that the UCIWP has gifted me as a teacher. But really, it is the mindset and heart that the WP community helped me cultivate that has made the most impact on me as a teacher and in turn on my students. Whenever I feel like I am in the thick of it, with planning, creating agenda slides, answering emails, and grading, I grab the stack of papers and remind myself that this is an opportunity to see how my students are golden and growing, and I feel quite honored by that.
Mo Willems’ Gerald and Piggy books (e.g., Elephants Cannot Dance, Waiting is Not Easy) provide an excellent resource for teachers of young children as a mentor text in teaching the concept of dialogue and expression.

The speech bubbles Mo Willems uses help students understand how characters can have back-and-forth dialogue throughout a story, each exchange adding to the story or concept he develops across the text. Early writers exploring the idea of dialogue often benefit from using speech bubbles in their stories, and Willems’ books offer mentor text examples for this concept.

Students can also learn from Willems’ story development across the text (with just dialogue) and how he uses dialogue to move the story along. Additionally, teachers can use this mentor text to help students think about text size and font choices in their writing, thereby discussing an author’s purpose and craft.

Allison Serceki
In a world of constant communication, we have become more and more selfish conversationalists. Murphy tags those without keen listening skills as “conversational narcissists.” As a converted conversational narcissist, I am here to implore you to spread the word on truly listening. The book debunks a lot of what I thought I knew about listening. “Active listening,” though good natured in the beginning, has devolved to simply nodding and smiling and not actually listening. How many times do we, as educators, have to repeat the directions over and over (more so than pre-pandemic) to a sea of blinking, confused eyes attached to smiling, nodding heads?

I would personally take a few chapters from this book (specifically the first few chapters as I feel they are the most appropriate pedagogically for middle and high school students) and have students read and annotate them. I would then use those chapters to launch into a listening lesson for students. Listening to others, the world, and ourselves are all topics within the book that could easily convert to lessons. I would love to utilize this book to teach students to listen to THEMSELVES first. How often do we all turn to distractions when we don’t want to work through hardships? Furthermore, I would utilize this book as a guide to help teach my classes how to actually listen to one another, not just wait for their turn to speak. The book is full of activities and exercises to go through, so the lessons write themselves!

Megan Grint

"It takes awareness, focus, and experience to unearth and understand what is really being communicated. Good listeners are not born that way, they become that way” (69).
More Than a Book Review
Ideas for Your Reading Classroom

High School

Imagine California in the new future. One day, the water is all gone. We are cut off by other states. If people went crazy for toilet paper during the pandemic, what chaos would break out if we ran out of this vital resource? This is *Dry*, by Neal and Jarrod Shusterman.

On [Teachingbooks.net](http://Teachingbooks.net), a database paid for by the state of California, you can find book descriptions, movie trailers, lesson plan ideas, and more. Sign up with your school email to get resources only for teachers. This year, try showing book trailers from this reliable resource.

For *Dry*, show [the book trailer](http://example.com/trailer) before telling the students about the book. Add a writing extension and have students write what they think the summary might be. Or have them read the summary and describe if the trailer enhances or detracts from their desire to read it.

Liz Taireh
Library Resources to Enhance Writing

As a librarian, so many people assume I just know about books. My depth of knowledge is much deeper. My name is Elizabeth Taireh and I work with the 15,000 students of HBUHSD. My mission is to help spark curiosity in students and teachers alike and help to find the answers to those questions.

Controversial issues are often the best…and the worst papers to read. What if there was a place that broke down controversial issues into palatable bites, even providing a timeline of the events? The state of California and the library have you covered! Since 2019, reliable resources have been paid for and provided to students of all levels, in schools and libraries alike.

All districts and public libraries have access to this information. I have provided my district’s website, but your district might have their own. Ask if you have a teacher librarian who can help. If you want more information or don’t have a librarian handy, feel free to contact this passionate librarian.

Following this link, you can go to SIRS Controversial Issues for Middle to High School Students and SIRS Discoverer for our elementary friends or those who struggle with the language of the other database.

Topics include: Book Banning, Homework, Gambling, and more. The possibilities are endless!

Want to get fancy? Check out the writing resources, other databases, and more. These are teacher friendly and student friendly. Happy researching!!
Weekly at 8:00 am OC Writers’ Monday Morning Write-In and OC Writers’ Tuesday Morning Write-In. Bring your WIP to work alongside other writers at Polly’s Pies (Mondays) or High Ground Coffee House, 25522 Marguerite Parkway, #102, Mission Viejo (Tuesdays).

Thursday, October 26 What Works in Secondary Writing Instruction: A Meta-Analysis of Writing Treatments for Students in Grades 6-12 4:00 p.m. (Zoom)

Steve Graham, and other members of the WRITE Center research team, will share a brief overview of the study highlighting specific evidence-based instructional strategies that work for improving student writing. You can register here to receive the link to view the webinar on the date it airs.
In the spirit of the 50th anniversary of the National Writing Project which kicks off this month, Write Across America is on a quest to visit all 50 states on its virtual writing marathon.

Information: [https://studio.nwp.org/events](https://studio.nwp.org/events)

**Coming Events**


Membership Information can be found by following the link.

Tuesday, November 14 Write Across America Stops in Illinois 5:00 p.m.

Thursday, December 7 2023 Annual Literacy Conference: “Healing Hearts, Growing Minds: Creating Just and Equitable Classrooms through Next Generation Literacy Instruction”

In-Person and Virtual Conference Location: UCI Student Center 8:45 a.m.-3:45 p.m. PST

The UCI Writing Project hosts its Annual Literacy Conference for Teachers, Grades K-12 each year in December at the UCI Student Center, bringing together over 500 educators and administrators from Southern California dedicated to improving students as readers and writers.

More Information

Register Here

Information compiled by Lynne Pantano