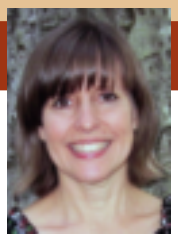
Krystal Bishop



Valerie Hunt

By Beholding We Are Changed

The Apostle Paul believed that spiritual influence is an important factor in transforming lives: "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image" (2 Corinthians 3:18, KJV). Ellen White concurred that lives are transformed through the experience of beholding: "There is a peculiarly close union between the transformed soul and God. . . . It is impossible to find words to describe this union. . . . The Christian sees the Saviour ever before him, and by beholding, he becomes changed into the same image. . . . He bears the signature of God" (*Manuscript Releases*, vol. 9, p. 380). Contemplation of this principle led us to recognize the potential for transformation in classrooms when teachers and students learn through experiences that immerse them in different types of writing. In the discipline of literacy, this is referred to as genre studies.

We invited classroom practitioners to share the impact that genre studies have had upon their professional practice, as well as upon student learning and engagement. In this special issue of the JOURNAL, these classroom teachers welcome readers into their elementary, secondary, or university classrooms. Each article tells a story of students being transformed as readers, writers, and thinkers while participating in a genre study, and of teachers being transformed as they employ these techniques. Although the articles are situated in specific grade-level classrooms, they include principles relevant to teaching the genre at any grade level.

The theme issue begins with "The Genre Study Journey" by Kimberly Lane, who introduces readers to genre studies through the metaphor of a "guided tour." Following are a series of narratives that guide readers through several types of genre studies. "Reading and Writing Memoir With 4th Graders and Teacher Candidates" by Krystal Bishop provides vignettes demonstrating the influence of immersion within the context of genre study in reading and writing workshops.

How does knowing how to write in the genre of persuasion benefit students in their walk with Jesus? This question is explored in "'I Wanna'—The Art of Persuasion" by Sarah Coulter. Following this, Jan Haluska offers advice based on his experience with expository writing: "The Formula Essay Reconsidered," in which he contends that this type of essay accommodates every type of persuasion, giving students a framework for academic writing from elementary through university level.

A 2nd-grade teacher confesses that her obsession for teaching the mechanics of writing reduced her students' efforts to "voiceless strings of words." Wanting to see their "hearts revealed in their writing," Eudora Stephens risked engaging in a different type of teaching and learning. "Setting Students Free With Poetry Writing" demonstrates the process and impact of this genre study.

Leaving the primary grades, the reader journeys to a middle school classroom to observe how students learn to see the world with writing eyes. "Writers Read Differently—Empowering Students to Read Like Writers" by Kelly Cauley Rivinius demonstrates both the process and the product of translating "seeing" into thinking and writing.

The issue next features several articles that describe how teachers support the writing process through their own immersion in writing. "Living Like a Writer—Thinking, Experiencing, and Writing Enthusiastically" by Rebekah Bonjour demonstrates one aspect of living like a writer within the context of reflective reading, thoughtful experiencing, and enthusiastic writing. "If You Can Teach, You Can Write" by Sonia Krumm makes a powerful argument for the influence of teachers as writers at all levels, prekindergarten through university.

Finally, Valerie Hunt writes compellingly of the im-

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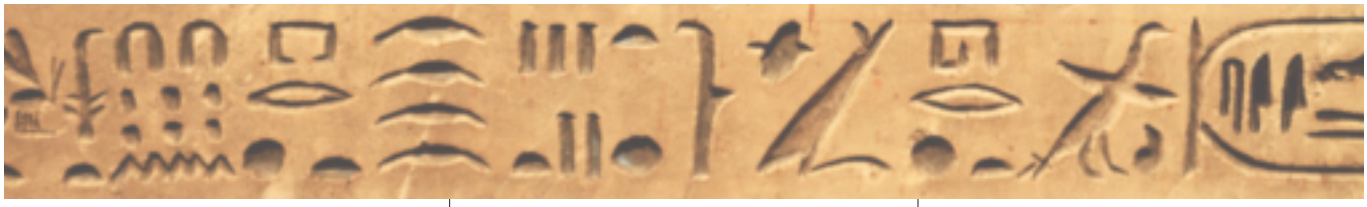

Continued from page 44

of the writing craft across the genres. Numerous books and Internet resources provide specific step-by-step approaches and lessons for picture-guided writing, or teachers can add pictures to writing lessons they have already developed.

Finding images is not difficult. In addition to Internet banks of photographs and illustrations, books, magazines, photographs, television, billboards, even one's own image as reflected in a mirror can be the basis for creative writing.

Pictures Evoke Deep Thinking and Better Writing

A single photograph or drawing can take students through every level of Bloom's taxonomy from basic knowledge about the concrete things they see in the picture to the deeper, more abstract skills of questioning, inferring, synthesizing, and evaluating.

Teachers often ask students to create "word pictures" with their writing. Yet the way writers choose words depends on what they, themselves, see. As Aristotle noted, "The soul can not think without a picture."[10] Unfortunately, if students haven't learned to be visual observers instead of just watchers, they will have nothing to put into words.

When I first learned to read, my basal reader friends Dick, Jane, and Sally advised me to "look" and "see." That advice is just as relevant to writing. When students learn the art of observation through picture-guided writing, they will "look," and "see," and have much more to "write."

A middle-school instructor for more than 20 years who currently teaches 7th and 8th grade at Bowman Hills Seventh-day Adventist School in Cleveland, Tennessee, **Valerie Hunt** *is also a freelance author and illustrator.*

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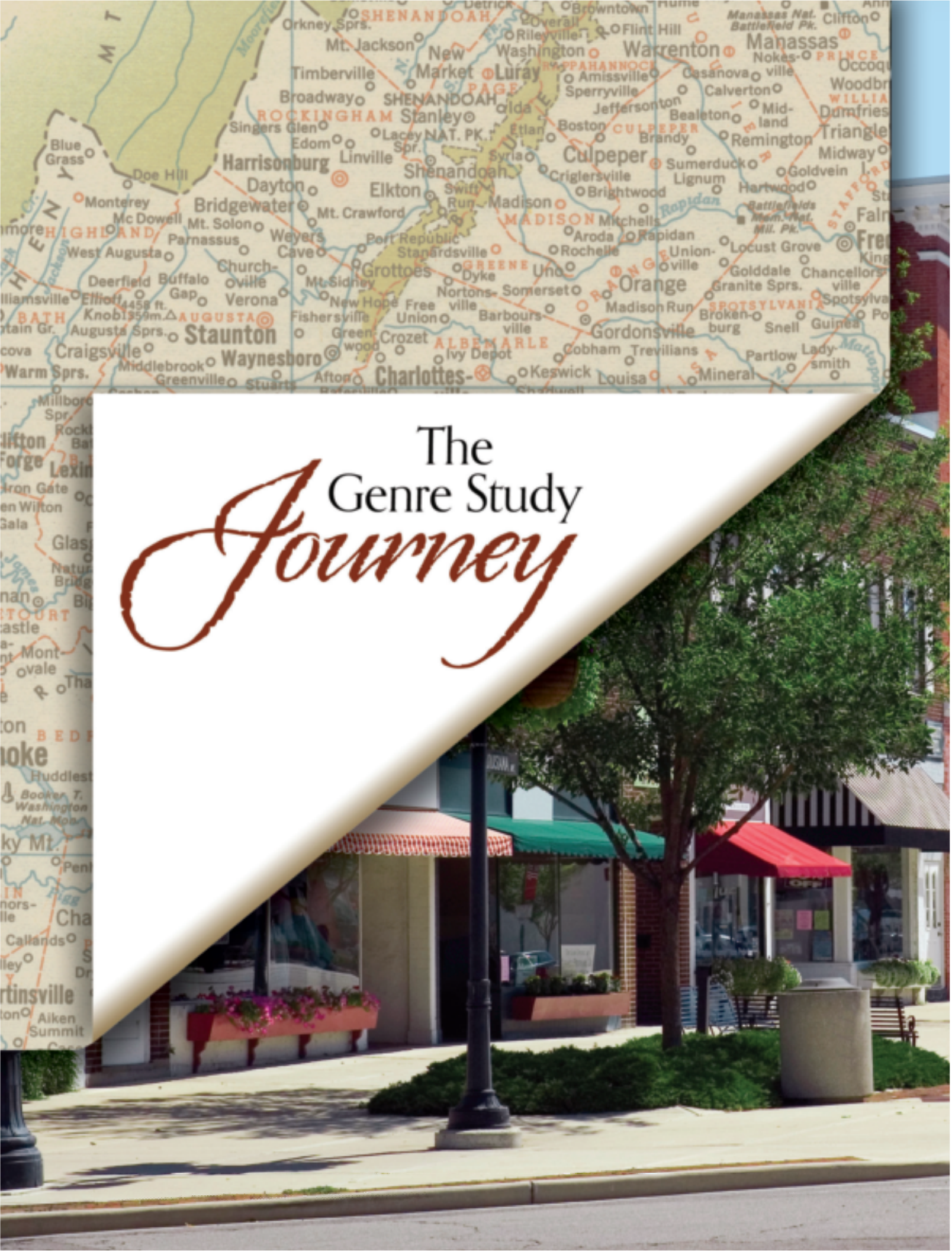
Guest Editorial *continued from page 3*

portance of "Opening Students' Eyes Through Picture-Guided Writing." She contends that illustrations are the "universal blood donor" that will pump life into the teaching of any genre. The benefits of this type of study are legion, as outlined in the article.

It is our hope and prayer that the readers of this themed issue will see the boundless opportunities for transforming every aspect of reading and writing when students are encouraged to learn under the influence of genre studies. And furthermore, it is our wish that readers discover that their own living and teaching are transformed as a result of "beholding" the experiences of teachers who have shared their journeys.—Krystal Bishop and Valerie Hunt.

Krystal Bishop, Ed.D., *the Coordinator for the special issue of the* JOURNAL, *is a Professor of Education at Southern Adventist University in Collegedale, Tennessee. She conducts a genre study in an elementary classroom and with undergraduate students every year; has done personal narrative, memoir, literary nonfiction, and poetry genre studies in multigrade classrooms; and has made presentations at regional and national conferences on genre studies. The editorial staff expresses appreciation for her assistance in preparing the issue.*

Valerie Hunt, B.S., *teaches the 7th and 8th grades at Bowman Hills Seventh-day Adventist School in Cleveland, Tennessee, and is a freelance author and illustrator.*


The
Genre Study
Journey

When my husband and I travel, we are usually in such a hurry to get from Point A to Point B that we take the fastest route possible. Once, however, we found ourselves stuck in a traffic jam and decided to venture off the freeway. Much to my husband's dismay, this choice took us on a lengthy detour. We ended up driving through a little town near Walton's Mountain, Virginia. Several gift shops and restaurants later, we were back on the freeway. We didn't reach our destination as quickly as we had hoped, but every year at Christmas when I hang my shotgun shell ornament from Walton's Mountain on the tree, I fondly remember that unintentional visit. I had traveled that route many times, never realizing what I was missing by not taking time to get better acquainted with my surroundings.

That detour often reminds me of the use of genre study in teaching writing—it requires an intentional detour from the main highway of the language-arts curriculum. Instead of teaching writing by introducing different genres as if they were signs flying by on a freeway, a genre study is like a guided tour through a town with a local guide who knows the unique and hidden treasures of the place. A genre study does take a bit more time, but students who have taken this journey with their teachers become intimately familiar with a genre and eagerly share what they learn. They are also more willing to venture deeply into other genres and to arrive at the ultimate destination of becoming better writers.

What's a Genre Study?

In her book, *Thinking Through Genre,* Heather Lattimer describes a genre study as a deep investigation of a certain genre: biography, poetry, memoirs, essays, editorials, nonfiction, etc.[1] During such a project, students read books, magazine articles, and other samples of that genre. They study different authors' styles and analyze features that are unique to the genre. After this immersion, students write original pieces in that genre using the skills they have acquired. The ultimate goal is for students to develop habits of reading and writing that enable them to master writing in many different genres.

Many teachers have journeyed into genre studies unawares. For instance, do the words "Poetry Unit" sound familiar? Without calling it a genre study of poetry, many teachers have at some point immersed students in the reading of poems, helped them analyze the features of poetry, and encouraged them to write poetry. Those are the basic elements of genre study. This method works well for teaching poetry; in fact, it's hard to imagine teaching poetry any other way. This formula provides a successful model for teaching and exploring all genres from letter writing to nonfiction.

Lattimer recommends four to eight weeks for each genre study.[2] However, not all genres require much time. A genre study of thank-you notes with 1st graders may not take as long as a biography study with 3rd graders or a literary nonfiction study with 6th graders. Of course, genre study is not limited to use at the elementary level.

Packing for the Trip

Taking a genre study journey, like any trip, requires preparation. In *Study Driven*, Katie Wood Ray provides guidance on conducting a genre study. The journey begins with gathering a large number of engaging texts that are representative of the genre and are full of writing craft.[3] Instead of using one or two full-length books as examples, use excerpts from longer books as well as quality children's picture books from the genre. Libraries are full of picture books in nearly every genre from memoir and biographies to persuasive essays and folklore. A variety of genres may also be found in newspapers and magazines.

BY KIMBERLY LANE

Once reading materials have been collected, introduce students to the genre through read-alouds. During this introductory phase of the genre journey, share examples with the students and invite them to search for writing in the given genre to share with the class. Set guidelines and inform students of requirements and deadlines for the study so that they know what you expect and when the assignments are due.[4]

On the Genre Journey

The next phase of the journey is to immerse the class in the collected materials through a variety of reading experiences: read-aloud, reading with a partner, reading homework, and choral readings. Guide students through discussions to discover what topics writers tackle with the particular genre, as well as the work writers must do before they begin writing—observing, questioning, and researching. Help students to look for examples of each writer's craft by asking, "What makes this good writing that readers enjoy?" As students read to answer these questions, they learn to identify works in the genre and to understand the work necessary to write compelling prose.[5]

The next stretch of the journey involves a close study of the genre. With teacher guidance, students compile a list of the features they have noticed during their readings. They look more closely at some of the texts they have already read. These student "findings" become tools the teacher can use to help students differentiate between the specific content of the genre and the writer's craft. Students develop higher-level thinking skills as they analyze, synthesize, and evaluate the readings in order to improve their own writing.[6]

The last stretch of the journey has students writing original pieces in the genre using the knowledge they have gained along the paths they traveled. Students thus develop the skills to write under the influence of the professional authors whose works have inspired them thus far.[7]

Fitting a Genre Journey Into the Curriculum

Because genre studies involve reading and writing, they fit well into any language-arts curriculum. Kindergarten through 6th-grade teachers in the North American Division use the *Pathways* language-arts curriculum, which builds each month's lessons on a theme book. The supplemental reading list provided with each *Pathways* unit contains selected genre-related texts. The Helen Keller unit for the 3rd grade, for example, lists biographies of

Common Literary Genres for *Pathways* Themes

The literary themes associated with the North American Division's *Pathways* curriculum correlate readily with genre studies. Some genres, such as poetry, expository reports, or literary nonfiction could be used with almost any of the themes.

Pathways Theme	Possible Genre Studies
Heroes	Biographies Short stories Plays Humor
My World and Others	Alphabet books Literary nonfiction Travel brochures
Living Things	Question-and-answer books Photo essays Literary nonfiction
Spiritual Journey	Memoirs Essays Innovations on writing the Psalms Parables
Friends and Family	Friendly letters Thank-you notes Invitations Wordless picture books Short stories
Environment	Business letter Opinion editorials Advice writing Feature articles
Personal Feelings and Growth	Memoirs Autobiographies Opinion editorials Advice writing Realistic fiction
Yesterday	Historical fiction Reader's theater Memoirs
Social Issues and Culture	Dramas Contemporary realistic fiction Allegories

other admirable historical figures such as Eleanor Roosevelt, Ronald Reagan, and Louis Braille. Assignments include writing a biography report on a famous person, making a timeline of important events in the students' lives, and maintaining a biography reader's log. Thus, this unit lends itself well to a biography genre study.[8]

Pathways exposes students to several genres and equips them with the reading strategies that they will need in order to navigate different genres. The *Pathways* compilers recognized that students who have been exposed to excellent reading material will become good writers. The month-long immersion pattern of the *Pathways* units makes them readily adaptable to genre studies.

One Success Story

Brandon[9] was a typical 8-year-old in Beth Tucker's 3rd-grade class. He enjoyed sports and treasured his time with friends, but Brandon hated school. When asked which school subject was his favorite, he would grin and say, "Recess." He especially hated reading and writing, and had struggled with these subjects from the time he enrolled in school. No matter how hard he tried, he never seemed to be at the same level as the rest of the class. Beth knew that without intensive intervention, Brandon would probably never enjoy language arts and would not participate more than absolutely necessary.

As the weeks went by, Beth's determination to help Brandon succeed strengthened. She tried appealing to his interests, using non-threatening guided reading, read-alouds, and book talks. She thought she'd tried everything until she discovered genre studies in Lucy Calkins' book *The Art of Teaching Writing*. Calkins' suggestion gave her hope: "We find that when an entire class inquires into a genre, it is life giving. It opens doors and leaves a lot of room for variety and choice, while also allowing the classroom community to inquire deeply into something together."[10]

That was exactly what Beth had been seeking—something to inspire Brandon now and throughout his life. She prepared for her class to embark on a biography genre journey by packing her car's trunk full of biographies from the public library. As Beth hauled the books into the classroom, she was greeted with a chorus of moans and groans. She patiently smiled and piled the books neatly next to the classroom library. Then she turned to the class and announced, "We are changing the way we do Reading Workshop." Scowls and groans were replaced by curious faces and listening ears. As Beth began to introduce the books, her students recognized the names of famous Americans and began asking if they could read the books. Beth was so excited that she and the students dove right into one of the books.

As Beth read several of the books aloud, she stopped to talk about each author's craft. *What kinds of words did he or she use? What is the tone of the book?* The students began to ask questions about the purpose of the book. They discussed how readers have to alter their reading style for different books, and coined their own phrase, "reader's craft."

Each day, Beth immersed her students in quality biographical writing. The students had grand conversations about the books they were reading. Beth found herself stepping back and learning from her students. She was captivated by how well they analyzed the books and how quickly they began to understand how to read them. The students also discovered that the structure differed from book to book.

As the unit progressed, Beth noticed that Brandon became more and more interested in the class conversations. Because the rest of the students were excited about what they were discovering, this aroused his curiosity. Brandon not only became engaged, he actually emerged as the leader of many of the conversations. He asked questions, and together the class investigated the answer. Brandon had found a purpose for reading.

Because he felt encouraged rather than intimidated, Brandon excelled in reading and writing from that unit on. Beth's class studied multiple genres throughout the year, and in each one, Brandon surpassed her expectations. Beth learned that studying the genres helped her students see the connection between reading and writing (author's craft and reader's craft). She discovered that genre study enhanced her language-arts curriculum by giving the students ownership of their work and a sense of pride.[11]

Beth's success story is just one of many! Taking students on a genre journey of reading, analyzing, and producing skillful writing in any genre is a trip worth taking.

The skills and strategies students acquire during this journey will be more than souvenirs that collect dust upon a shelf. They will be scrapbooks of resources that enrich the students' lives and enhance their writing.

Kimberly Lane *lives in Collegedale, Tennessee. She taught in the Chesapeake Conference of Seventh-day Adventists for 10 years. She currently substitutes part-time at her daughters' school.*

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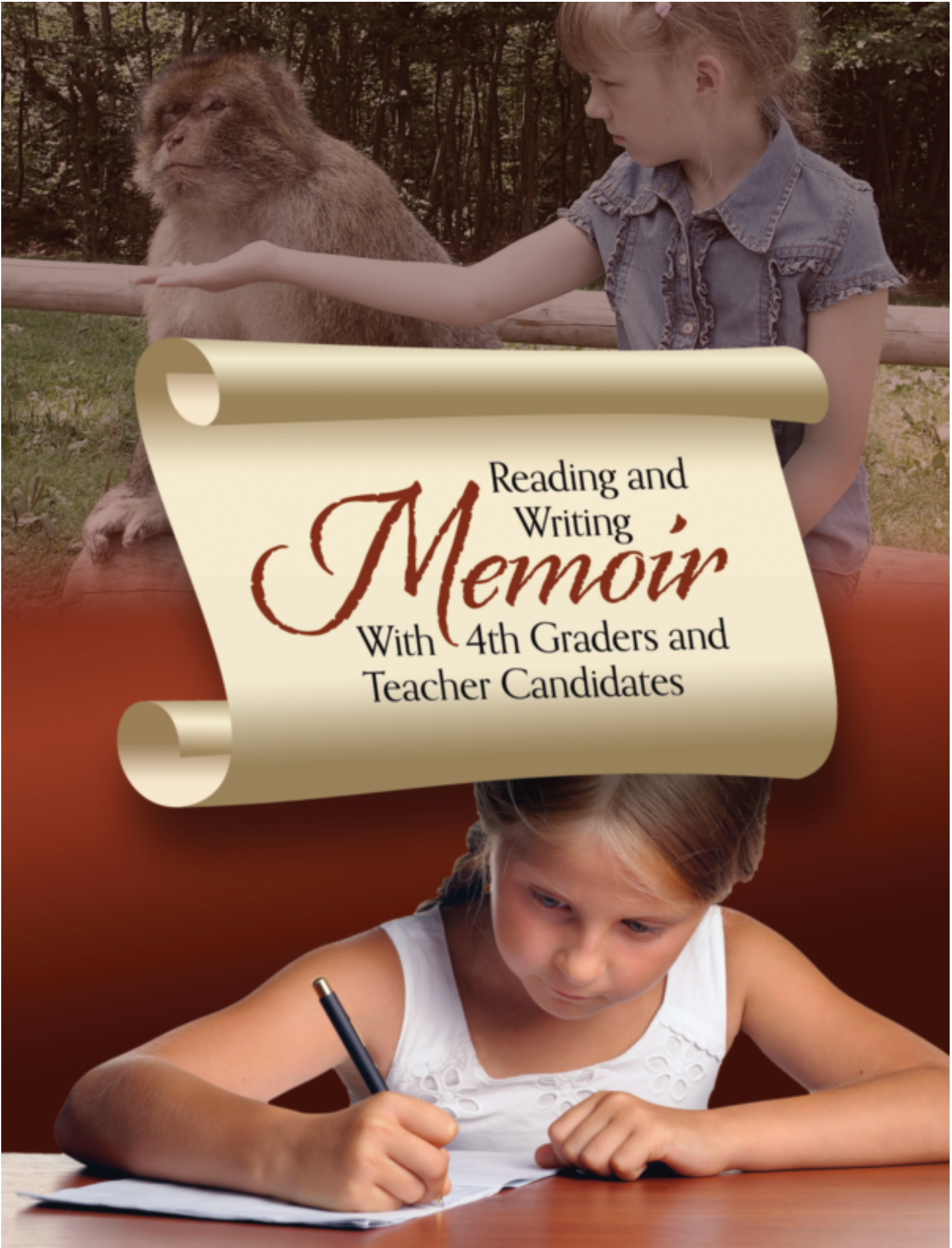
Reading and
Writing
Memoir
With 4th Graders and
Teacher Candidates

"I've never seen them so engaged. I truly saw my students living like readers and writers. It is wonderful to see them so focused. My students were asking to work on their memoirs when it wasn't even class time. You did not just tell, you modeled how. My 4th graders loved spending time with the college students."[1]

These are the reflective comments of 4th-grade teacher Kelly Klein at the conclusion of a four-week reading and writing workshop focused on memoir. Ralph Fletcher's book, *How to Write Your Life Story*,[2] provided the inspiration for this genre study. Fourth graders and teacher-education students explored, side by side, how to read and write memoirs. The classroom teacher—and the university professor who wrote this article—grew professionally through collaborative planning and assessment. I invite JOURNAL readers to view snapshots of this memoir workshop to better understand the impact of immersion in a genre.

The Context

Pathways[3] is the Reading/Language Arts curriculum adopted for use in elementary classrooms throughout the North American Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church (United States, Canada, and Bermuda). This theme-based curriculum includes reading and writing workshops as critical components of instruction and learning. A workshop devoted to memoir correlates with the *Pathways* theme, "Personal Feelings and Growth." Having four weeks of immersion as readers and writers of a genre should positively impact engagement and the quality of reading and writing.

Being a passionate advocate of teacher modeling, I believe that preservice teachers also benefit from demonstration and immersion. I wondered if their understandings of memoir would be enhanced through participation in a genre study. I also wanted to determine the impact of professor modeling on the pedagogical understandings of preservice teachers.

Assumptions of the Workshop Approach

What does it mean to live like a memoir writer? To answer this question, educators must consider the assumptions inherent in the workshop approach to teaching reading and writing:

- honoring both the writing process and the product;
- ensuring prolonged immersion in a genre;
- building and nurturing a community of readers and writers;
- creating a planning and teaching process that is invitational, purposeful, intentional, responsive, and authentic;
- recognizing the generative nature of acquiring knowledge;
- planning for a gradual releasing of responsibility; and
- celebrating the product.[4]

Because I care deeply about inviting students to be readers and writers who are thinkers and who experience changed lives because of reading and writing, I concluded that conducting a genre study would ensure that learning experiences would be engaging, meaningful, and transformative.

Intentional Planning and Preparation

With anticipation, I envisioned both the process and the product of this memoir study. I did not yet know the 4th-grade students, but I was familiar with the features of the genre.

The teacher and I reviewed the 4th-grade language-arts standards, highlighting the ones that would be addressed and assessed, and prepared appropriate materials. It was fun filling a Biography Box, including artifacts that represented my significant memories. I created interview protocols for pre- and post-assessments. Vignettes and excerpts, found in chapter memoirs, were prepared for shared reading experiences. Legal paper (many writers prefer to write drafts on legal paper), memoir pens, and Post-It notes were put in writing folders for each student.

I began gathering resources, such as picture book and chapter memoirs. I searched my online database,[5] using the memoir and personal narrative tags to locate books for this study. After creating a list of recommended memoir titles, I went to the library and checked out those books. I was grateful to find examples of memoirs written by both elementary students and former teacher candidates. I searched the Bible and found that Isaiah 6, Jeremiah 1, and Ezekiel 1 and 2 are examples of memoirs in which young people are called by God. I even considered hymns whose lyrics might be examples (e.g., "I Come to the Garden Alone," "I Love to Tell the Story," and "It Is Well With My Soul").

Next, I purchased 10 Baby Ruth candy bars. I bought a jelly jar, emptied it, and peeled off the label. Throughout the study, I would refer to these items from my life experiences when doing demonstration writing and modeling of my thinking.

I immersed myself in additional study of the memoir genre. I reread *How to Write Your Life Story*, making notes on what to emphasize in mini-lessons and shared reading lessons. I continued to refine my understanding of memoir by rereading Nanci Atwell[6] and Heather Latimer,[7] and collecting quotes about living like a writer of memoir from Jean Little's *Little by Little*,[8] and Jean Fritz' *Homesick: My Own Story.*[9] I collected ex-

BY KRYSTAL BISHOP

cerpts of memoir and personal narratives from *Boy*[10] and *Knots in My Yo-Yo String*.[11] I perused my writer's notebook for examples of memoirs I had written. Finally, I was prepared and with anticipation awaited the first day of the project.

The Product Begins With the Process

To become memoir writers, students need to learn the comprehension strategies that will enable them to engage as readers of this genre and immerse themselves in reading memoirs and personal narratives.

The intended product of this study was a "published" memoir written by each 4th grader and teacher candidate. The process included days of prewriting when the students explored memoir, collected ideas, told meaningful life stories, considered their audience, gleaned writing tips from Ralph Fletcher's book, *How to Write Your Life Story*, and learned to stand on the shoulders of authors who have published memoirs. By creating initial drafts,

the students developed stamina as writers, practiced giving and receiving meaningful feedback, and compared their drafts to their thinking about memoir. The students learned that the purpose of editing is to show respect for those who will read their memoirs. In the publication stage, the students learned to write dedications and "about the author" pages. This process culminated in an author celebration that included peers, teacher candidates who served as writing coaches, family, and friends.

Immersion Through Reading the Genre

In the book *Study Driven,* Katie Wood Ray establishes the premise for effective writing in any genre. "What have you read that is like what you're trying to write?"[12] For 90 minutes a day, four days a week, the elementary students and teacher candidates received guidance in how to read and write memoirs through interactive read-alouds, shared reading, and independent reading. The theme text for shared reading was Fletcher's book, *How to Write Your Life Story*. However, the students and teacher candidates were much more impressed with the large selection of memoirs they could choose to read during buddy reading and independent reading.

Building a Community of Readers and Writers

We were fortunate to have the invaluable gift of time—90 minutes to launch our study of memoir. Every one of those minutes had to be invitational in order to create a new and thriving community of readers and writers. Reading and writing were integrated into the process of collectively generating an understanding of memoir. The schedule included assessment and prewriting activities. Here is the outline of that first day, along with the purposes for each learning experience:

- Biography Box shared with students (Community Building, Prewriting)
- "Let's Get Acquainted" interactive activity (Community Building, Prewriting)
- Interviews conducted by teacher candidates (Assessment, Community Building)
- Storytelling of a published memoir (Motivation, Community Building)
- Read-aloud, *How to Write Your Life Story*, chapter 1 (Generating Understanding)
- Instruction to make and introduce Biography Boxes (Community Building, Prewriting)

Making Teaching Invitational, Intentional, and Authentic

Each reading lesson was crafted to engage students in authentic and invitational purposes related to reading. Objectives for reading instruction included (1) nurturing motivation, (2) teaching and reinforcing reading strategies important for comprehending memoir, (3) engaging students in meaningful talk that revealed their thinking, (4) reading like writers, and (5) applying what they learned when writing their own memoir.

Because we recognized the unlimited potential of combining reading and writing, each 90-minute block included 45 minutes of reading instruction that related directly to the 45 minutes of writing.

Reading instruction included several types of read-alouds. Some allowed participants to experience the aesthetic pleasure of memoir. Others were intentionally interactive, which enabled the students and the teacher candidates to generate theories about memoir. The teacher and teacher candidates modeled comprehension strategies during read-alouds.

Most of the scheduled daily reading and writing mini-lessons were identified or created prior to the study, while others were added in response to the needs of the readers and writers. (See the sidebar on the next page for the list of reading and writing mini-lesson topics.)

Shared reading focused on learning to read like a writer. Independent reading prepared the 4th graders to read memoir with prosody (appropriate expression). The planners and students created a checklist of what good readers do, which was used for reference and after assessment. The 4th graders each assessed the prosody skills of their teacher candidate, who in turn assessed the skills of the 4th graders. Independent reading time included some buddy reading as students focused on the process skills of prewriting and revision.

Writing Workshop mini-lessons included:

- Sharing Biography Boxes (Prewriting)
- What Is a Memoir? (Prewriting)
- Making a List to Find a Memoir (Prewriting)
- Additional Ways to Find a Memoir (Prewriting)
- Telling the Story First (Prewriting)
- Using an Idea Web (Prewriting)
- Determining Audience (Prewriting)
- The Glue: Focus of a Memoir (Prewriting)
- Finding the Right Form (Prewriting)
- Possible Titles (Prewriting)
- Demonstration Drafting (Drafting)
- Writing Like Writers (Drafting)
- Demonstration: Keep the Pen Moving (Drafting)
- What Writers Do When They Get Stuck (Drafting)
- What About the Details? (Drafting/Revision)
- How Can You Show Me Rather Than Tell Me? (Drafting/Revision)
- Good Things I Found in Your Drafts (Revision)
- Hooks and Leads (Revision)
- Spice It Up (Revision)
- I Might Do This (Revision Tools)
- Using an Editing Checklist (Editing)
- Details in the Illustrations (Publishing)
- Parts of Our Book (Publishing)

Titles of reading mini-lessons included:

- Memoir—How Do We Know What It Is?
- "Interviewing" an Author to Learn About Memoir
- Memoir—What Good Readers Do (multiple lessons)
- Prosody Clues Provided by Author
- Choosing a Memoir Structure That Works for Me
- How You [Students] Were Engaged as Readers
- Text-to-Self Connections
- Specific Text-to-Self Connections
- Text-to-World Connections
- Living Differently Because of Memoir
- Questioning the Author
- Detective Clues (Creating Sensory Images)
- Rereading for Deeper Meaning
- Reading Like a Writer of Memoir (multiple lessons focusing on literary craft)

The Generative Nature of Acquiring Knowledge

In the workshop approach, students regularly generate theories and apply them. At times, the mini-lessons were designed to give the teacher opportunities to share her expertise, but more frequently, students worked to generate understandings.

Following is an example of an anchor chart developed after the 4th graders and teacher candidates engaged in buddy reading a published memoir. The topic for this day was reading comprehension, and the focus was *accountable talk*. As they read, I made anecdotal observations about the kind of thinking talk in which I saw them engaging. We used those observations as students generated a theory about the kind of thinking and talking that is a part of reading memoir.

Our Thinking Talk While Reading Memoir

As readers and thinkers, we. . .

- Compared illustrations to text
- Pointed out specifics in the illustrations
- Asked for meanings of words
- Reread for clarity
- Discussed text-to-self connections
- Referred to previous pages to "support" thinking
- Questioned the author
- Shared opinions
- Noticed the colophon (notes on the title page about the way illustrations were created)
- Inferred (purposes and moods of characters, setting, etc.)
- Clarified when something was confusing

"Sometimes we think so much we can't put it [the book] down" (a 4th-grader's statement as the chart was being generated).

Honoring the Gradual Release of Responsibility

Although the gradual release of responsibility[13] is well documented in professional literature, teachers often fail to design units that honor this principle of effective teaching. I wanted to model this principle to teacher candidates as well as to the 4th graders. Keeping this in mind, I crafted lessons in the following sequence: Students (1) observed the expert (demonstration reading and writing), (2) learned with the expert (shared reading and writing), (3) were guided by the expert (guided practice in reading and writing), and (4) worked as the expert (independent reading and writing).[14]

An example of this principle was the mini-lesson for writing a lead, which included shared reading. Fourth graders could not be expected to know how to write effective leads before being introduced to examples written by experts, so they read a number of leads and then identified what each author did well. After reading and defining effective leads, the students practiced writing different leads for their memoirs. This gradual release of responsibility—demonstration, sharing, guided practice, and independent writing—was the structure used in writing workshops throughout the memoir study. The sources for experts were the published memoirs and the demonstration writing in which I modeled my thinking while writing parts of my own memoir.

Celebrating the Product

The teacher candidates, 4th graders, and a host of family and friends waited expectantly for the typed and illustrated mem-

oirs, including a dedication and "About the Author" page, which were distributed to the 4th graders by their teacher candidate coaches. The coaches also had the memoirs they had prepared for publication. Before we celebrated with cake and punch, each 4th grader read an excerpt from his or her memoir. The beaming faces of these young authors were reflected in the interested reactions of their live audience. There was silence, laughter, gasps, clapping—the kinds of reactions published authors appreciate when given the opportunity to share their work with an audience. Letters were presented to young authors whose memoirs would be purchased for use in future memoir studies. These letters outlined specific examples of what each author had done well in crafting his or her memoir. The affirmations, excited voices, photo opportunities; the lively talk as memoirs were passed around for others to see; and the reluctance for the celebration to end all provided compelling evidence that this memoir study had been a success.

The Impact

Assessment revealed some critical questions that must be considered when teaching reading and writing memoir. Do the students and teacher candidates know the characteristics of memoir as a genre? Do they understand the reading strategies that are necessary for comprehending memoir? Are they aware of the writing decisions made by authors when writing a memoir? Can they define what makes a memoir interesting?

The definition for memoir that I had chosen to guide my own thinking and student learning came from Latimer: "We read and write memoir to figure out our own experiences and to connect with the experiences and wisdom of others . . . . A great memoir will cause readers to reflect upon and better understand their own lives and experiences."[14] Survey data collected at the onset of the study revealed that the 4th graders had little or no idea what a memoir was, and the majority of the teacher candidates also had an incomplete understanding of the genre.

Several formative assessments were used throughout the memoir study—anecdotal notes, conferring, monitoring student understandings as anchor charts were created, checklists based on understandings generated by students, observational checklists, editing checklists, and surveys. Reference was frequently made to the language-arts standards to ensure that appropriate standards were being addressed. Assessments were used to plan instruction as well as to measure the effects on student learning.

I conducted pre- and post-surveys to determine whether the study was helpful for the teacher candidates. Prior to the study, their mean score (on a four-point scale) for "How well I understand the workshop approach to teaching" was 2.1. At the conclusion of the study, the mean was 3.71. The mean for "How well I know how to teach memoir to students" increased from 1.37 to 3.28. The pre-study mean for "How beneficial it will be to observe the professor modeling the workshop approach" was 3.87, but at the conclusion, it had risen to 4.00. Clearly, the teacher candidates benefitted from this immersion and demonstration.

I purposefully chose to conduct the memoir study in the classroom of a first-year teacher. I wanted to provide a new teacher with modeling, collaborative planning, and reinforcement for what had been learned in preservice courses. She joined her students in writing a memoir, taught several of the lessons, and participated in collaborative planning and assessment. The comments at the beginning of this article came from the reflective journal that she kept. She concluded her journal with the comment, "A teacher's excitement and interest truly motivates a student to work hard."[15]

Final Reflection

At the end of the memoir study, I reflected on my own learning as well as that of the 4th graders and teacher candidates. My understanding of the writing process, genre studies, memoir, and teaching were strengthened. I recognized things I would do differently. For example, anecdotal observations revealed that 4th graders found it difficult to seamlessly include the text-to-world connections inherent in memoir. I believe that this age group would do better with a study in personal narrative that builds a foundation for memoir studies in 6th to 8th grades. Feedback from teacher candidates reinforced the idea that being vulnerable made me more credible as a university professor. Finally, I have concluded that prolonged immersion in authentic learning provides both teachers and students with a sense of fulfillment and accomplishment.

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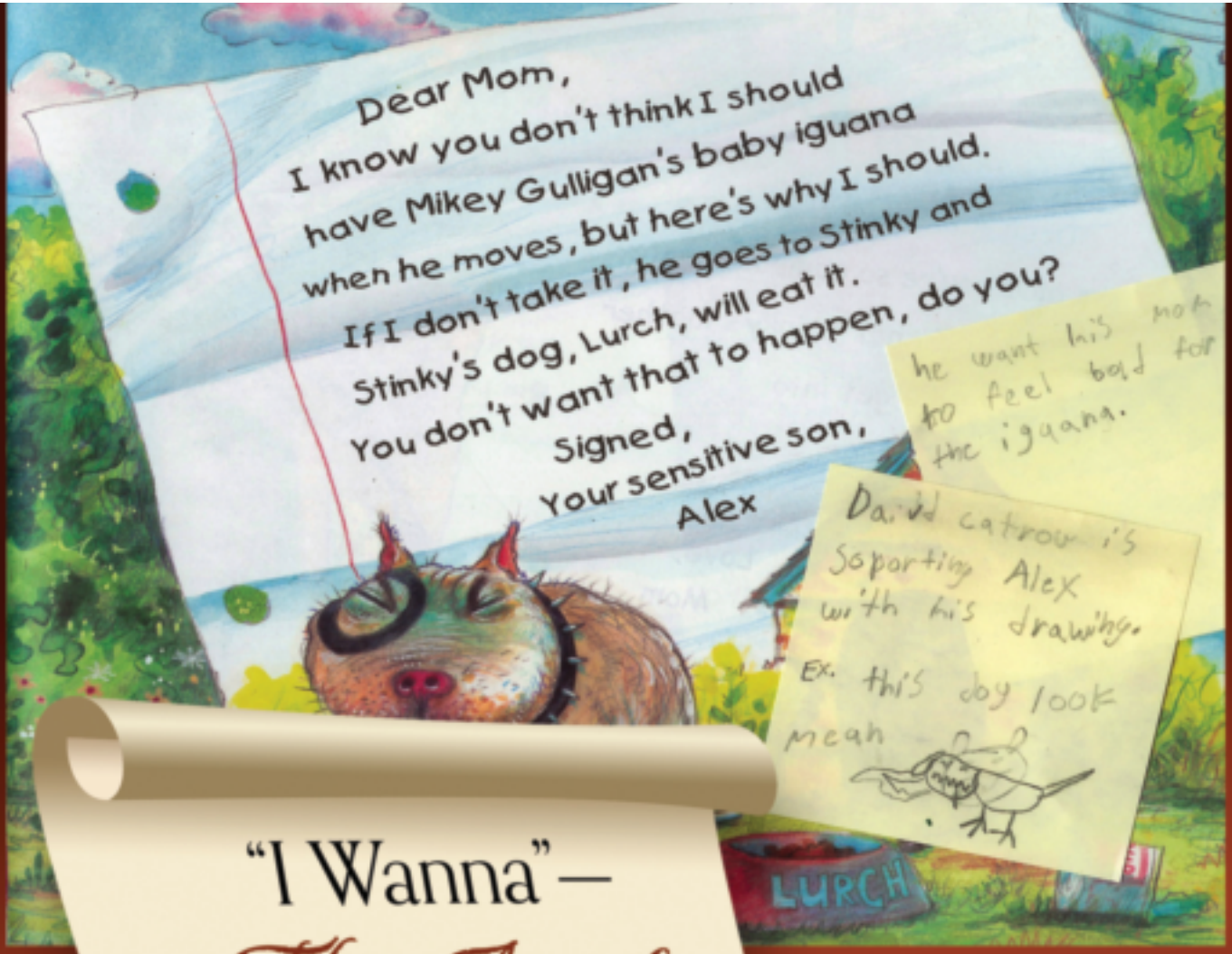


"I Wanna"— The Art of Persuasion

When you read the text above,[1] what do you see? A letter from a boy to his mom? An intriguing children's book? Or how about . . . potential curriculum material? The book *I Wanna Iguana* by Karen Kaufman Orloff has served as the curriculum guide in my 4th- to 8th-grade writing class over the past month. For the first week, we immersed ourselves in persuasive literature such as *The Perfect Pet*; *Thank You, Sarah*; and *My Teacher for President*.[2] Together as a class, we read each of these books, talked about persuasive writing, marked what we noticed (hereafter called "noticings"), and compared texts. I then put copies of *I Wanna Iguana* in my students' hands and told them, "I want to know what you notice in this text."

Energy is high, although students don't quite grasp the journey on which they are about to embark. "Working in pairs, I want you to mark your noticings as you read through the text," I explain. "Remember to consider the idea of persuasive writing." Fifteen minutes later, I have six *I Wanna Iguana* books filled with green Post-It notes. I commend the students on their noticings as we discuss some of the things that they saw the author do in the text. Although I'm excited, I start to panic a bit. *This is great! Now what?*

From Noticings to Teachable Substance

I did have some ideas I wanted to try. During my lesson planning, I had been reading *Study Driven,* and so I knew that it was now time to turn my students' fantastic noticings into curriculum. I consolidated all of the Post-Its into a list. "Wow! *I Wanna Iguana* is full of such great craft," I marveled.

BY SARAH COULTER

The students had noticed things like how the illustrator, David Catrow, supported both sides of the conversation through his artwork. His drawings reflected whatever was being said at that moment. The students also observed that throughout the text, Alex, the main character, was trying to "sweet talk" his mom to get what he wanted. As they made noticings such as those listed above, unbeknownst to them, my students' understanding expanded, and the fog around the idea of persuasive writing began to dissipate.

On one page, a student noted on a Post-It, "The mom doesn't fall for it. And she doesn't even agree with Alex." Studying the text made it clear to the students that Alex was going to have to be persuasive. My students were learning to read like writers. Katie Wood Ray said it well: "If [I] had done all the noticing for [my] students, pointing out the features [I] wanted them to see in the gathered texts, [my] students would have had no reason to learn to notice text features themselves."[3]

At the end of the study, my students wouldn't have been any better off than they were at the beginning because if I had done all the work, the learning would have been applicable only to this unit. Instead, they were developing a new skill—to read like a writer, which meant asking themselves, *What did the writer do to make this work?* And my students helped to generate curriculum that showed them that thinking was an important part of making a writing class work. From this day to the end of the unit, the students' noticings became the focus of our writing sessions together.

To organize the work they had done, I created a master chart of the classes' noticings for the students to insert in their writing logs. It listed the page number of the noticing, the observation made, and a possible lesson to go with it. This chart coincided with a calendar I created for assignments and discussion topics. The students could follow along to see which of their noticings we would focus on each day.

"But Teacher, I Don't Know What to Write"

I wasn't about to fall victim to this, which is the oldest line in the book. So I adopted a preventative strategy—prewriting. Week Two involved *a lot* of prewriting. We created lists of topics like "Things We Would Like to Own" and "Pets We Would Like to Have." Next we copied text from our lists and did five-minute "quick writes." Most of these assignments were done in class. I would model, the students would practice the strategy from the mini-lesson, and we would share. Talk was a significant element of our study as we developed ideas and concepts.

It was important, as well, that students were allowed to make choices and to have time to work on their own. While brainstorming, I remembered the book *Living and Teaching the Writing Workshop*.[4] I had completed many of Kristen Painter's writing invitations. She had some great ideas, but after reviewing them, I realized they didn't fit the needs of my students in the area of persuasive writing. Her ideas did provide inspiration as I continued thinking through how to structure the remainder of the unit.

One night, I sat down and wrote 10 writing invitations on large cards, keeping in mind the persuasive writing curriculum that the students had developed. I then added an example of the writing invitation to the bottom of each card, laminated them, and presented them in class the next day. The writing invitations included, but were not limited to:

1. Create a pro and con list about your topic.

2. Change point of view. Pretend you are someone else considering your topic.

3. Draw a Venn diagram to compare

two opposing opinions on your topic.

The students were to complete those assignments as part of prewriting. While they were able to choose which ones they wanted to complete, the syllabi or writing guide gave them guidelines about how many they needed to complete each week.

The students were writing—and not just when I told them to. Some students would borrow a writing invitation card to complete at home or in their free time during the day. When they had finished, they had pages of ideas ready to weave into their writing. They were primed for success.

Non-Linear Approach

The students also kept writing logs that contributed to the success of the writing project. Each day, they added more information to their logs through note-taking during mini-lessons and book observations. In creating the syllabi for the unit, I borrowed an idea from Katie Wood Ray,[5] who created a study guide that required the students to continually review their writing to reflect on what they had learned thus far.

These reflections kept the students aware of the big picture of the unit. This approach also ensured that I stayed up-to-date on what each student was learning. In one of his reflections, Jason[6] observed, "When we started doing these writing exercises I knew I could write a good book. The steps are: If I get stuck somewhere, I will look back at my notes, and they will help me get unstuck."

The students continually alternated between their new writing and older entries in their writing logs. So, when Week Three arrived, the students had already developed a clear vision of what their book compositions would look like. And as Jason observed, if there was a problem, their logs were right there with all those great ideas. The students' writing logs weren't just a place to store old assignments but became an interactive guide to writing books.

Most of the book plans came together within two days, and by Tuesday or Wednesday, every student was working on his or her first draft with titles such as:

1. *I Want a Four-Wheeler*
2. *Can I Have a Big Sister?*
3. *Can We Go?* and
4. *Dear Mr. President: Giving Wealth to the Poor.*

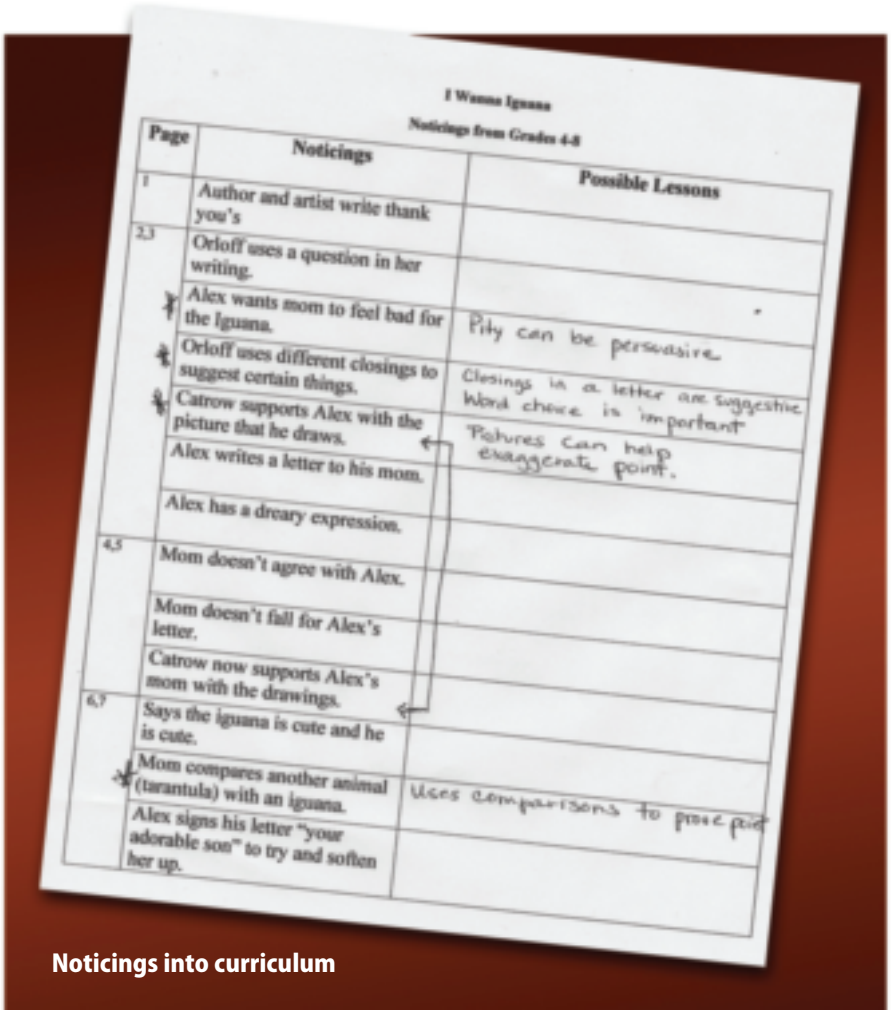
Valuing One Another's Ideas

Mace (4th grade) expressed the concept well when he wrote in a reflection essay at the end of the study, "I enjoyed most how we got to work together and explain what we were thinking about." I continually promoted community in our writing class during each unit of study. Throughout the writing process, I asked students to volunteer some of their work for class revisions. I copied each assignment onto a transparency, displayed it, and let the students offer opinions and advice.

One day, we took an excerpt from Malik's (6th grade) book, *I Want a Four-Wheeler*. Placing it on the overhead, I inquired, "What suggestions do you have for Malik?" Within a few moments, hands were waving in the air, "Add clues to where they are"; "Try a misery attempt like 'Mom, I hurt my foot. Waaahhh! Uh . . . Could I have a four-wheeler?'"; and "Have Mom trip over the spy toy so it's like a distraction before asking for the four-wheeler."

Meanwhile, Malik jotted down notes on a special piece of stationery I had given him. "Is that helpful?" I asked. He excitedly nodded his head, ready to begin working. The talk continued throughout the classroom in subsequent class periods. Some students reacted to each other's ideas, others met with peers and jotted down notes, and still others talked about how to create a more persuasive essay.

I maintained the same atmosphere when I conferred with each student. I asked questions like "What's your favorite part of the essay so far?" and "Which section would you like to improve?" It wasn't my intention to tear apart their writing. They quickly


I Wanna Iguana

Noticings from Grades 4-8

Page	Noticings	Possible Lessons
1	Author and artist write thank you's	
2,3	Orloff uses a question in her writing.	
	Alex wants mom to feel bad for the Iguana.	Pity can be persuasive.
	Orloff uses different closings to suggest certain things.	Closings in a letter are suggestive. Word choice is important
	Catrow supports Alex with the picture that he draws.	Pictures can help exaggerate point.
	Alex writes a letter to his mom.	
	Alex has a dreary expression.	
4,5	Mom doesn't agree with Alex.	
	Mom doesn't fall for Alex's letter.	
	Catrow now supports Alex's mom with the drawings.	
6,7	Says the iguana is cute and he is cute.	
	Mom compares another animal (tarantula) with an iguana.	Uses comparisons to prove point
	Alex signs his letter "your adorable son" to try and soften her up.	

Noticings into curriculum

learned that they could trust me to be supportive.

The writing conferences were mini-conversations that went like this:

Teacher: "Who is your audience?"

Sean: "My mom."

Teacher: "It looks like you want a big sister?"

Sean: "Yep."

Teacher: "Let's look at this another way. How would Mom benefit from you having a big sister?"

Sean: "She wouldn't have to take care of me as much."

Teacher: "OK." (I write his ideas on a Post-It.)

Sean: "She wouldn't have to drive me places."

Teacher: "Good." (I add it to the list.)

At the end of this conversation, Sean had put together a list of things to think about and consider. I encouraged him to use these ideas in his writing, and then moved on to conference with another student. The students appreciated my help because we had worked together. Instead of dictating what Sean needed to do, I guided his thinking by making the list and reviewing things we had learned in class, just as the class had done with Malik.

Making an Impact

With research and time, the teaching of persuasive writing study offers nearly endless possibilities. I continue to be amazed as I see how my students have bought into it. When they do an in-depth study like this, they really get to know and understand the concept being taught. At the conclusion, they have taken ownership and made it real for themselves. But I'll let a few of my students speak for themselves:

Mae (4th grade): "I enjoyed writing my book and coming up with ideas. My absolute favorite was at the presentations."

Haley (5th grade): "Writing a persuasive book is hard, but it pushed us to understand that life is hard."

The enthusiasm displayed by these girls was carried home by others. One student described his book to his mother and shared with her what he was learning at school. She later came to school to describe his excitement about his book. And another student conferred with her mother at home to see what she thought of the book so far.

Now that the learning had extended beyond the classroom walls, I knew it was worth the extra time and effort. It also provided evidence that the students were closer to understanding the writing process and succeeding on their next assignment.

Don't Limit Persuasive Writing to Writing Class

The challenge is to expand persuasive writing across the curriculum, not just at the elementary level, but also as students move into high school and college. This type of unit provides a foundation upon which students can build. While researching genre studies of persuasive writing, I came across

Practicing for presentation

some ways that other teachers are expanding their students' skills of persuasion.

A high school science teacher, Michael Rochow[7] saw panic in the eyes of his students whenever test time rolled around. So he decided to change this by providing an assessment alternative: writing assignments.

Rockow designed various assignments that used persuasive writing. One of the highlighted science assignments asked the students to decide whether Pluto should be a planet. They researched, planned, took notes, and then wrote their arguments.

I would add that, in doing this study, students might first study previous writing assignments in a genre-study format and make noticings about what other students did to create an effective essay. This could be planned in collaboration with the English teacher so that the students better understand the workings of persuasive writing before applying it across the curriculum.

College business teachers have opportunities to conduct a persuasive writing study as well. In *Business Communication Quarterly,*[8] a professor wrote about one of his favorite assignments. Lee Spears developed a project that gets his students involved with non-profit organizations. After collecting data, attending board meetings, and collaborating with the president/manager of the non-profit organization they chose, the students developed solicitation letters and business reports. Spears also had his college students study previous proposals. He brought out the various characteristics of the documents and discussed the students' noticings.

While *I Wanna Iguana* is an excellent place to start with teaching persuasive writing and conducting an in-depth genre study, there are multiple possibilities for teaching persuasive writing across the curriculum and throughout the students' school career.

Changing Gears

After finishing my genre study on persuasive writing, I continued to reflect on the importance of teaching persuasive writing, not just as a teacher but as a Christian teacher. I asked myself: *How is knowing how to write in this genre going to benefit my students in their walk with Jesus?* I thought about the Great Commission and how Jesus told His apostles to "'Therefore go and make disciples of all nations'" (Matthew 28:19, NIV).[9] *That's it!* I thought. When teaching others about Jesus, our testimony has to be persuasive. We have to be able to meet the people where they are, and as Paul so elegantly stated, "I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some" (1 Corinthians 9:22, NIV).

What does that have to do with persuasive writing? *Everything!* Below is a list of guidelines for composing persuasive writing that my students compiled in our initial study. Next to each guideline I've listed just one verse in the Bible that relates to that particular guideline.

When persuading others, you must:

Use comparisons to prove a point (Luke 10:3, KJV— "Behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves").

Think about what the other person thinks is important (John 13:20, NKJV—"'. . . he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me'").[10]

Be real (Luke 18:13, 14, NIV—"'The tax collector stood at a distance. . . and said, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner"'").

Use questions to prove a point (Romans 3:27, NASB—"Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith").[11]

Jesus and His disciples were living billboards, continually seeking others who would believe and give their hearts to Jesus. This study, conducted in a 4th- to 8th-grade classroom, represents only the first step in introducing persuasion to children. The vision must be bigger than this and go beyond the study of picture books. For now doors are open because the students are beginning to understand what it means to sell a point, and in the case of Christian living, to "sell" the gospel's Good News. This unit has the potential of going beyond a textbook exercise and can move into teaching the students how to persuade others to accept Jesus as their Savior and to live according to His will.

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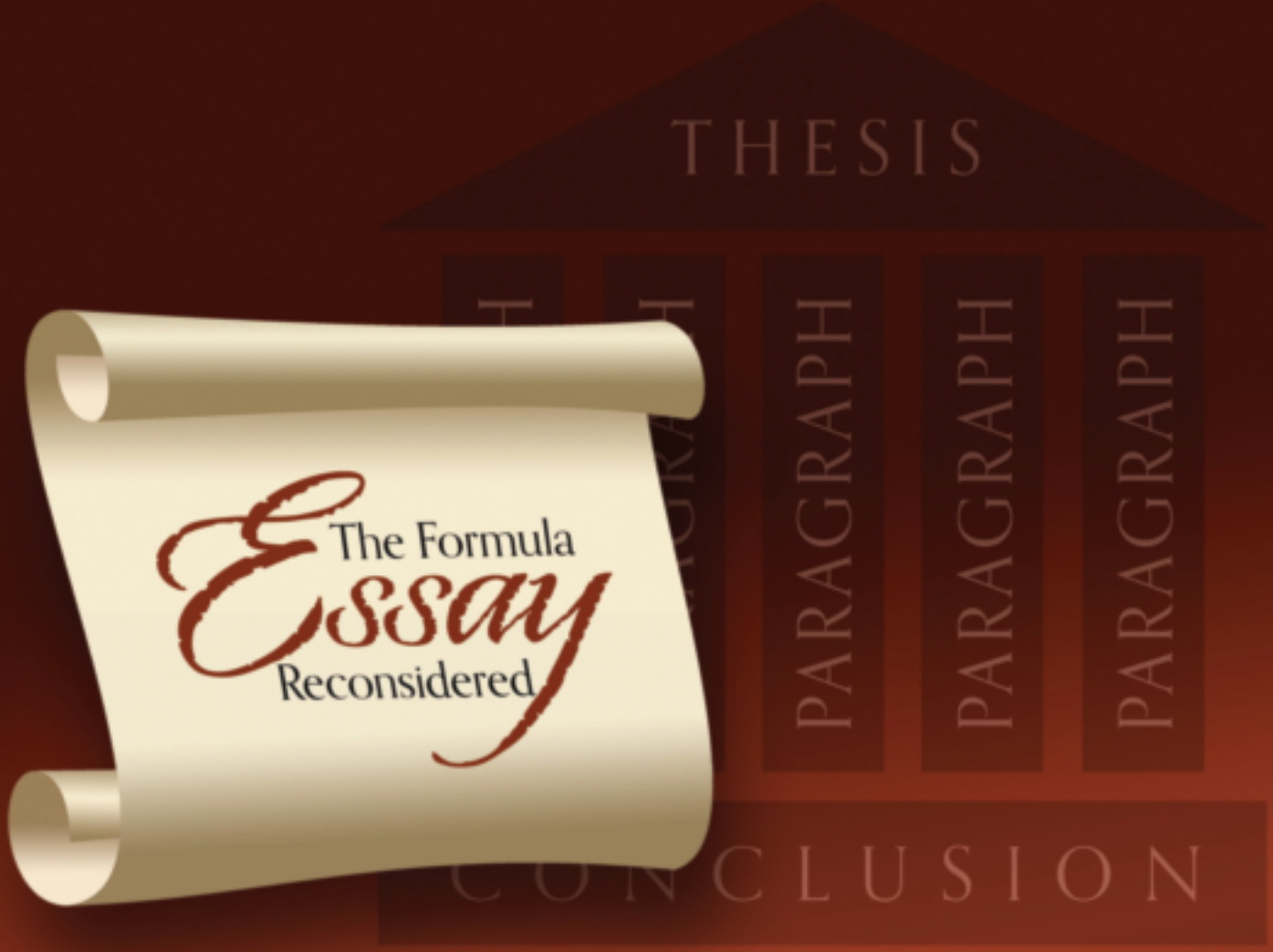

The Formula Essay Reconsidered

Anyone wanting to start an argument among a group of English teachers has only to ask: "How do you folks feel about teaching five-paragraph essays?" Some in the group may smile, but others will be quick to voice disapproval:

"They're artificial."

"They stifle creativity."

"They suppress individual expression."

"They produce lifeless writing."

"They discourage thinking."

Those kinds of accusations and more appeared in the most influential writing-theory book of the 1970s: *Uptaught*, by Ken MacRorie.[1] A single word from that book—"Engfish"—was widely used to denote phony prose from students forced to write mechanically instead of self-expressively. The word seemed to encapsulate everything that was wrong with writing instruction, and one heard it incessantly in those years during presentations at meetings of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), and the Modern Language Association (MLA). With that, the five-paragraph essay was dead, at least officially.

And buried, too, apparently. A quick survey of recent books outlining the history of writing in American schools turns up little or no reference to it. For instance, James A. Berlin's *Rhetoric and Reality: Writing Instruction in American Colleges, 1900-1985* (1987); James J. Murphy's *A Short History of Writing Instruction From Ancient Greece to 20th-Century America* (1990); and editor Maureen Daly Goggin's *Inventing a Discipline: Rhetoric Scholarship in Honor of Richard E. Young* (2000) all omit any mention whatever of the five-paragraph essay. This is particularly surprising since a recent Google search found 4.5 million occurrences of the term online! The majority of hits seemed to be from teachers' essay instructions for their classes. Since the technique is a major feature of writing instruction in America, having historians pretend that it doesn't exist seems, well, strange.

To their credit, a couple of critics since MacRorie actually have been willing to debate the subject. For instance, Bruce Pirie offers the following succinct criticism: "What does a five-paragraph essay teach about writing? It teaches that there are rules, and that those rules take the shape of a preordained form, like a cookie-cutter, into which we can pour ideas and expect them to come out well shaped."[2] Despite the mixed metaphor, one can understand his position, especially when he goes on to discredit such essays as being akin to training wheels on bicycles and paint-by-the-numbers kits.

BY JAN HALUSKA

Formulas Help Learning in Many Fields

Defenders of formula essays, however, can also use metaphors to support their point of view. Consider the analogy of aviation training. Flight instructors teach a formalized system for landing: a standard rectangular pattern featuring power reduction, precise decreases in airspeed, and so on. Weather and traffic conditions make every landing different, so the model can be adjusted here and there each time, just as a student writer might do with a formula essay. If flight instructors taught as some English teachers do, student pilots would have to improvise each approach with no customary structure whatever. The sure result would be clumps of crushed aluminum dotting the neighborhood of every airport in the country. Many practical activities, from golf swings to karate, demand formulaic learning.

So it is with rhetoric. For more than 2,000 years, people patterned their persuasive speaking and writing techniques after Aristotle. In *The Rhetoric,* he acts like a good flight instructor, walking us through the steps of a model argument one might deliver before a court. His structural, objective approach to convincing others went unchallenged for centuries.

Montaigne's Bright Idea

Then in the late 1500s, Michel de Montaigne changed everything with so-called "personal" essays that exposed his subjective outlook rather than applying rigorous logic to the external world of facts. He himself coined the term *essay* from the French word for "attempt" and wrote about his personal thoughts on various aspects of life. Pirie sums up Montaigne's work very accurately using the words of Peter Womack: It was "the cultivated response of a man of taste."[3]

Less often noticed is that Montaigne's innovation was prompted by his fear that he knew too little for authorship. "And then," he wrote, "finding myself entirely unprovided and empty of other material, I proposed myself to myself for argument and subject."[4] In other words, this approach was a way to accommodate his own ignorance and still be able to write. Thus, for the first time, a writer's inner feelings were presented as stand-alone subject matter, whether or not they related in any provable way to objective truth. Of course, Montaigne used historical references and personal anecdotes, but he was interested more in sharing *subjective* reality, the world of a person's interior musings. Thus, his writing could be free-form, like a rambling stroll through the countryside. This brings to mind Samuel Johnson's famous dictionary definition of an essay: "a loose sally of the mind, an irregular, undigested piece."[5]

Nevertheless, Montaigne's sweetly informal style gained instant popularity. James Shapiro even suggests that his writings influenced Shakespeare's soliloquies in *Hamlet.*[6] I find the connection telling, especially since the prince's famously quotable reflection gets him no closer to the decision he needs to make.[7]

Certainly, Montaigne's approach has had enthusiastic imitators ever since. Students are particularly thrilled to have their informal essays published, if only in school literary booklets.

Informal Essays Work Less Well Than Formal Ones in School

But such essays can present grading problems. If a teacher has asked for a frank account of a student's musings, how can an honest attempt receive anything less than an "A"? Some teachers solve that puzzle by applying a fairly narrow grading criteria, evaluating grammar and creative wording while largely ignoring the question of substance apart from emotional display. If the student has shared his or her love for pickles, the teacher can only suggest supposedly more winsome language: "Instead of saying 'I like biting into one,' Tommy, you need to be more creative. Write something like 'As I nip off a pungent piece, the sharp juice wakes up my tongue,' so the reader can get a feeling of the experience." No wonder many students get the idea that good writing simply involves loading a text with a subjective list of adjectives, adverbs, and metaphors.

By contrast, if the assignment emphasizes persuasion through the use of factual material (personal experience, statistics, quotes from experts, etc.), teachers can make an objective assessment of the paper's effectiveness in clarifying and supporting a point of view. Furthermore, standard formulaic paragraphs—topic sentence, explanation, evidence—can help students learn how to write fact-based essays.

Formal Essays—A Historical Overview

Perhaps that emphasis on objectivity is why the formal school essay became so popular in the first place. Jeanne Donovan Sanborn traces its first appearance to a 1909 writing textbook, *Composition: Oral and Written* by Charles Sears Baldwin.[8] Sanborn quotes Baldwin as calling an essay "an exposition by paragraphs of a single controlling idea."[9] That definition invites an objective evaluation of the student's success in arguing for a point of view, whether or not the teacher agrees with it.

Baldwin's model writer was the celebrated Thomas Babington Macaulay, an incisive literary and historical critic who wrote for the *Edinburgh Review* in the early 1800s. Sanborn quotes Baldwin as praising Macaulay for being able "to carry a reader through a definite course of thought to a definite conclusion," and others for writing essays that featured "orderly, logical, definite development by paragraphs."[10] We may note in passing, however, that he does not say "by *five* paragraphs."

Today's Teachers and Students Can Use Them, Too

More to the point, Baldwin's statement illuminates the formal essay's usefulness in helping learners to attain their full educational potential. As a student, I had long recognized that something was missing from my writing. Like Montaigne, I "knew too little for authorship," and so what I really needed was for a teacher to say, "Well, go out and learn enough about something to have a worthwhile opinion regarding it, and then write a firmly grounded account of why that opinion is valid." That would have spurred me toward healthy self-education while it allowed the teacher to judge my essay as to how intelligently I had supported my opinion on the subject.

Without that enabling plan, I had to rely on creative pizzazz rather than substance in my essay tests and term papers. Typically, I would write an epistle that wandered endearingly (I hoped) among the required facts and quotes, then summed up the whole mess with a sufficiently noble-sounding conclusion to ensure a good grade. That would work only with teachers whose expectations were not particularly rigorous, but what else could I do? I had no idea.

The flexibility of an intelligently formulaic essay can accommodate virtually every persuasive need, and I believe that it is likely to produce more actual thinking than ambivalent rambling can do.

Thus, my term papers and test essays for tough teachers went badly until the day my advisor went to the chalkboard and sketched a frontal view of the Parthenon. "The roof is the thesis—what you are trying to prove," he said. "The columns are paragraphs giving explanation and evidence for your idea, and the floor is the conclusion that reaffirms the thesis."

It was as if a flashbulb had gone off in my head. The concept was instantly, joyfully, obvious. So *that* was how you did it! Make your claim, support it in steps with evidence, and then declare victory.

My advisor was certainly wise to avoid calling the model a "five-paragraph essay," thus saving me from fixating on too rigid a structure. After all, what is the sense of insisting on exactly three interior paragraphs? Why couldn't a student's opinion rest solidly on two points—or 20?

Formulaic-style essays thus need a name free of numbers. One teacher uses the term "keyhole essay." I have generally referred to them as "Baconian essays," since their style somewhat resembles the writing of Sir Frances Bacon. Perhaps the best title is simply "a formal essay," and its simplest pattern is as follows:

1. An introductory paragraph/thesis statement asserting an opinion.
2. Several interior paragraphs explaining that opinion, with evidence.
3. A concluding paragraph that reasserts the opinion.

After producing a few of those simple essays, students can begin practicing more audience awareness by adding a refutation to the mix, thereby answering objections by those whose opinions differ.

Addressing a More Serious Objection

Interestingly, some teachers object to having student writers take any kind of stand. "The 'authoritative voice' requires a pretense of uniformity," says Pirie, "a pretense that conceals productive stress and honest ambivalence."[11]

In fact, a little flexibility can accommodate "productive stress" without much trouble. In preparation for writing, the student begins his or her task with an inductive process of gathering and weighing facts to build into a solid opinion. If the facts fall into a pair of incompatible piles, we can ask him or her to decide which pile of evidence seems more compelling and to present that opinion in four steps (but perhaps six paragraphs or more), like this:

1. An introductory paragraph/thesis statement leaning toward idea No. 2.
2. Early paragraph(s): "Admittedly, idea No. 1 is attractive. . . ."
3. Later paragraph(s): "However, idea No. 2 is a slightly better choice because . . . ."
4. A concluding paragraph that either restates the thesis that the second idea is more desirable or perhaps suggests a way of accommodating both to some degree.

Any skilled lawyer or salesperson will recognize the standard "yes, but" technique for answering objections in that model.

The flexibility of an intelligently formulaic essay can accommodate virtually every persuasive need, and I believe that it is likely to produce more actual thinking than ambivalent rambling can do. After all, a student might start out his or her research with one choice as the better option, only to find that the demands of proving the claim with evidence have led him or her to tilt in the opposite direction. What better way is there for the student to develop mental muscle?

Most formula essays can be simple to produce, though, even if they are advanced enough to include a refutation. The writer asserts the opinion, explains it, refutes the opposite view, then re-asserts the opinion. That pattern can help students produce essays that challenge them to think long before they reach college. On page 21, you will find a short one, complete with a refutation, by a 7th grader.

Perhaps that is not a perfect essay, but the young writer clearly understands the rudiments of presenting and defending an idea, and there is not a bit of Engfish in it. I wish that more new college freshmen were as capable as she.

American Pit Bull Terrier

Reader: Someone who fears all pit bulls

Most people think that all American pit bull terriers or "pit bulls," are mean dogs, but I know for a fact that this isn't true. My grandmother owns a pit bull named Bubba, and he is a very sweet dog.

Bubba really is affectionate. He loves being petted and loves for you to scratch his belly and play fetch with him. For instance, I watched my brother play basketball with Bubba one time, and he accidentally dropped the ball on Bubba's back. Instead of getting mad at my brother and attacking him as most people think pit bulls do when they are agitated, Bubba simply looked at my brother, forgave him, and kept on playing.

Admittedly, some pit bulls today are trained for fighting in a sick sport. I saw on a television show called *Animal Precinct* that they are sometimes trained to be vicious creatures and to kill other dogs. They are usually abused and are frequently covered in wounds. This treatment and bad care are what make some pit bulls mean dogs.

Even bad treatment didn't make Bubba a mean dog, though. My grandmother found him lying in a ditch with a rope around his neck. He had broken his leg at some point, and had not had any treatment for it. It had healed wrong, so now Bubba walks on three legs, but he was trained in obedience and was shown a lot of love and care throughout all the years he has lived with my grandparents.

If you love them and take care of them, pit bulls can be very sweet dogs and great companions.[12]

Grading Simplified

"Yes," someone says, "but how does one actually grade such an essay?" The simplest way is by scoring five qualities with perhaps 10 points each.

Unity: Does every part of the essay support the thesis statement? Do any words, sentences, or paragraphs drift off the opinion that the writer is trying to prove to a specific reader?

Support: Does each paragraph contain clear explanation and actual evidence from real life—anecdotal, statistical, etc.?

Organization: Does each point/paragraph come exactly where it should to lead the reader along an effective train of thought? Does every interior paragraph begin with a transition that explains why that point needs to come where it does? ("Next," or "Then we have," or "Lastly" don't do that, since an expository essay is seldom chronological. Phrases like "More importantly," "Even more surprising," or "As a result," give reasons for paragraph placement and are better transitions.) However, we should caution students that transitions are ideas, not words. The above student essay has good organization even though its transitions use none of those recommended phrases.

Style: Is the wording vivid, clear, and above all, succinct?

Mechanics: Are grammar, spelling, and punctuation correct?

Formula essays can be powerful learning tools from grade school through college, making students think more clearly while they learn how to earn high grades in writing assignments across the curriculum. Teachers need to encourage their use.

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12. Katelyn Hassencahl, quoted by permission.

Setting Students Free With Poetry Writing

How can I turn my students on to writing . . . real writing; writing that is vivid; writing that grips the readers and carries them on a breathless journey with the writer? How can I help my students break out of the box into which conventional instruction has inadvertently stuck them; a box in which the constraints of conventions—varied sentence types, accurate punctuation, and spelling—provide neat little boundaries that keep the writing from spilling messily unto the pristine pages?

These questions haunted me daily as I struggled to take my 1st- and 2nd-grade students through the writing process as I then understood it.

In my obsession to have my students write appropriately punctuated sentences of varying lengths and types, in which the subjects agreed with the verbs and the adjectives properly described the nouns, I had reduced their writing to lifeless, voiceless strings of words that lacked power, character, or real meaning. And so I was in a fix. Yes, I wanted them to follow the conventions, but more than anything else, I wanted to see my students' hearts revealed in their writing. I wanted their writing to matter to them and to wider audiences. I wanted to see a rhythmic flow of powerful, colorful sentences coursing through white pages and culminating in a euphoric experience for both reader and writer.

Although I knew what good writing looked like and sounded like, I didn't know how to help my students produce the quality of writing that I desired—writing that pulsated with action and feeling and beautiful language. One day, I shared my frustration with my literacy mentor, Dr. Krystal Bishop of Southern Adventist University in Collegedale, Tennessee. She introduced me to a series of books written by Regie Routman on how to teach 1st and 2nd graders to love writing. Routman maintains that poetry writing is the answer. At first, I was skeptical because except for occasionally reading aloud a poem or two to my students, I hadn't considered poetry as a writing genre, and I didn't feel qualified to teach it. Poetry writing, I thought, would have to wait for a more accomplished teacher in a later grade. What a surprise was in store for my students and me! Routman was about to completely revolutionalize the way I taught writing.

Routman drew me in from the first page of her book, where she wrote: "Poetry writing is the surest, easiest way I know to turn kids on to writing. Kids love it. Teachers love it. It's fun and easy for everyone (including the teacher)."[1] She was referring to free-verse poetry writing. Such poetry does not have to rhyme, and it allows stu-

BY EUDORA STEPHENS

dents the freedom of choice—not just of topic, but of form, layout, spacing, patterns, and even conventions. Because it has few restrictions, students with a range of skills and abilities can write free-verse poetry successfully. When I introduced it into my classroom, I discovered that Routman was correct. My students began to find joy and success in writing. Even the most reluctant writers joined our writing community and discovered that writing was something they could do; more importantly, it was something they *wanted* to do.

The Beginning

I began the unit by showing students poems written by other 1st and 2nd graders from Routman's books, rather than poems composed by accomplished adults. I shared both the rough draft of each poem and the final product. My students reacted positively to the rough drafts with all the mistakes. "We can do that, too!"

Next, I told them that at the end of the unit we would go to the nearby Barnes and Noble Booksellers and share our poems with parents and friends during an event entitled "An Evening of Poetry." I gave the time and date of the event. Knowing that they were writing for a purpose—a performance on a specific date—not only motivated my students to give their best effort every day, but also to patiently go through the process of revising and editing their work for publication. The power of performance is described by Dillingham in these words: "By performing their own stories, students provide an opportunity for parents and community members to see them creating and performing authentic literature while conducting themselves in a professional manner."[2]

On the second day, we engaged in shared writing. My students helped me compose an original poem about things I like. To help them get started, I read aloud several free-verse poems on hobbies, brainstormed about the things I like, made a list, and then wrote this poem from the list:

Things I Like
Warm sunshine on my face
Children playing in the rain
Chocolate-covered lollipops
But there's nothing I like better than
Shopping at the mall!

Rather than gathering the ideas for this poem beforehand, I instead did a "think-aloud" to let students "see" me think and struggle. This made them feel comfortable about offering suggestions and helping me when I got stuck. My students were intrigued by the idea that poets can write about anything, the poem doesn't have to be long, and the lines don't have to rhyme. They felt that the assignment was easy and something they could do. The modeling and think-aloud gave them much-needed insight into the process as well as the confidence to try.

My students eagerly copied the strategies they had seen me use and produced their first poems. I ended this session by having willing students share what they had written. It was an exhilarating experience for all of us! I had discovered the secret of setting students free to write—when you model it, do it together, let them practice, and give them support . . . magic can happen. This experience signaled the birth of a writing teacher—me!

Each succeeding day began with a few selected students sharing poems they had written the day before. Having some students share at the beginning of each class period allowed them to demonstrate how they had incorporated the new learning from each mini-lesson into their poems. A poem didn't have to be completed to be shared. Any demonstration of beautiful language, strong beginnings and endings, or unique shape was an opportunity for sharing and celebration. Students were always excited when they were chosen to present their writing at the beginning of the day's lesson.

After the sharing and celebration of good writing, I would teach a 10-minute mini-lesson followed by shared writing, during which my students and I would construct a poem together using the new strategy from the mini-lesson. After this scaffolding, students would be set free to write a free-verse poem on any topic of interest to them or to revise one of their poems to reflect that day's lesson. I would conference with students as they wrote, noting what they were doing well, offering suggestions, and giving help when they got stuck. Sometimes students needed help expressing an idea, finding the exact verb or adjective, or just getting started on a topic. Each session lasted for an hour.

The Procedures

Following is a list of mini-lessons that I chose to teach after reading Routman's two books[3]:

1. Defining Poetry: After reading and examining several poems written by their peers, students identified the differences between prose and poetry writing (shape, short sentences, conventions, artistic writing, rhythm, etc.). The differences they identified were posted on chart paper and displayed for easy reference throughout the unit.

2. Choosing a Topic: After reading and examining poems, my students and I brainstormed and listed ideas, then posted this chart for easy reference.

3. Length of a Poem: After reading several poems of varying length, we noticed that a poem could range in length from one or two words on a line to two- to five-line stanzas.

4. Rhythm: My students noticed

that although every poem did not have a rhythm or beat, rhythm increases the impact of a poem and can be created by repetition, sentence length, and line breaks.

5. Shape: Students noticed that poems are shaped differently from prose writing and that a poem may take the shape of the idea expressed in the poem.

6. Voice: For this mini-lesson, my students and I played a game. With eyes shut, we tried to identify who was speaking. I explained how the reader can discern the poet's voice from reading the poem. Students identified types of voices such as sad, silly, etc. These were posted on chart paper.

7. Use of Expressive Language—Adjectives and Strong Verbs: We identified exact adjectives and strong verbs in poems we read. We also discussed how writers use their senses to construct beautiful language. A list of exact adjectives and strong verbs was posted on chart paper. Students added to this chart throughout the unit.

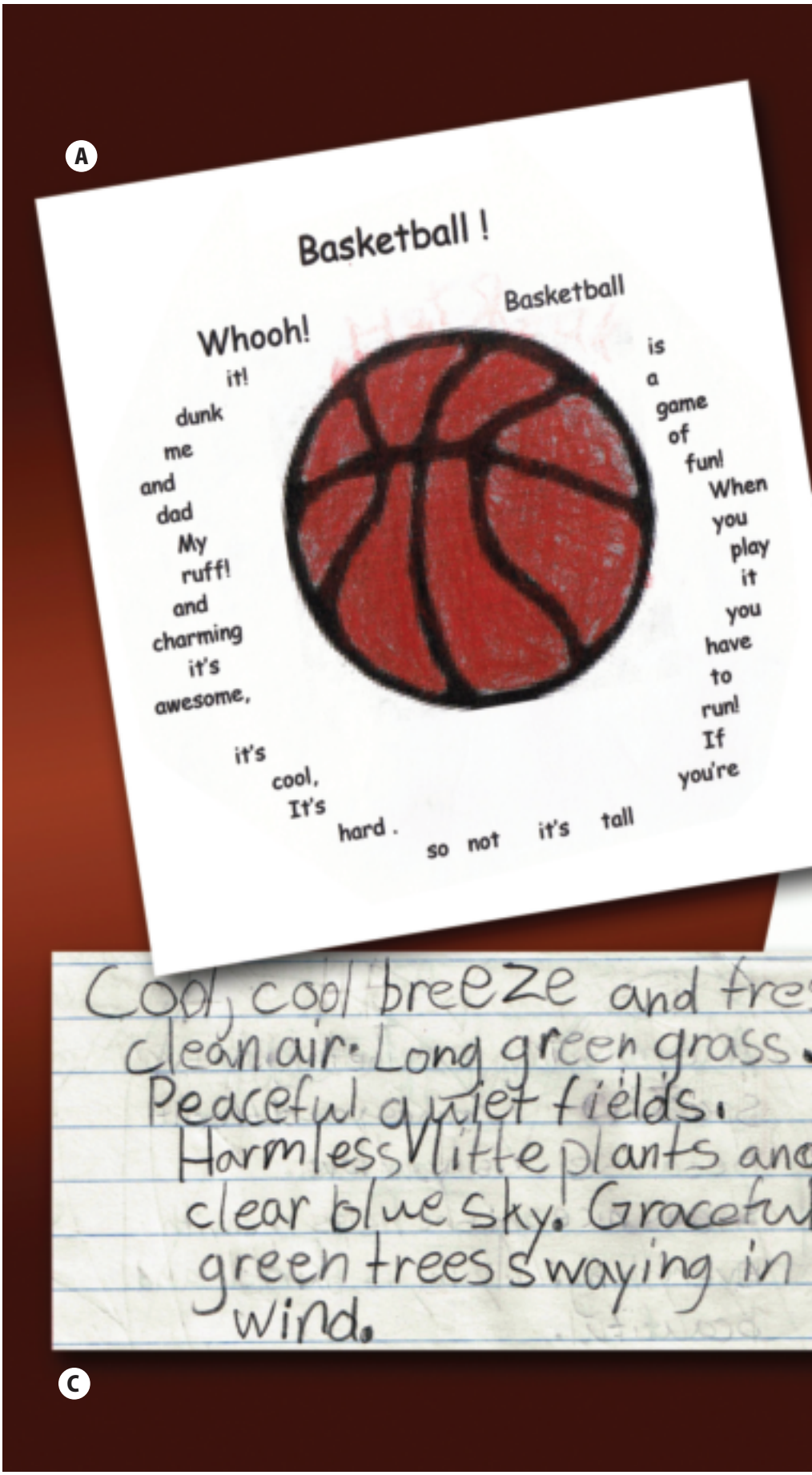
8. Use of Expressive Language—Similes and Metaphors: We identified similes and metaphors in poems we read, and discussed their impact. A list of these was posted on chart paper. Students added to this chart throughout the unit.

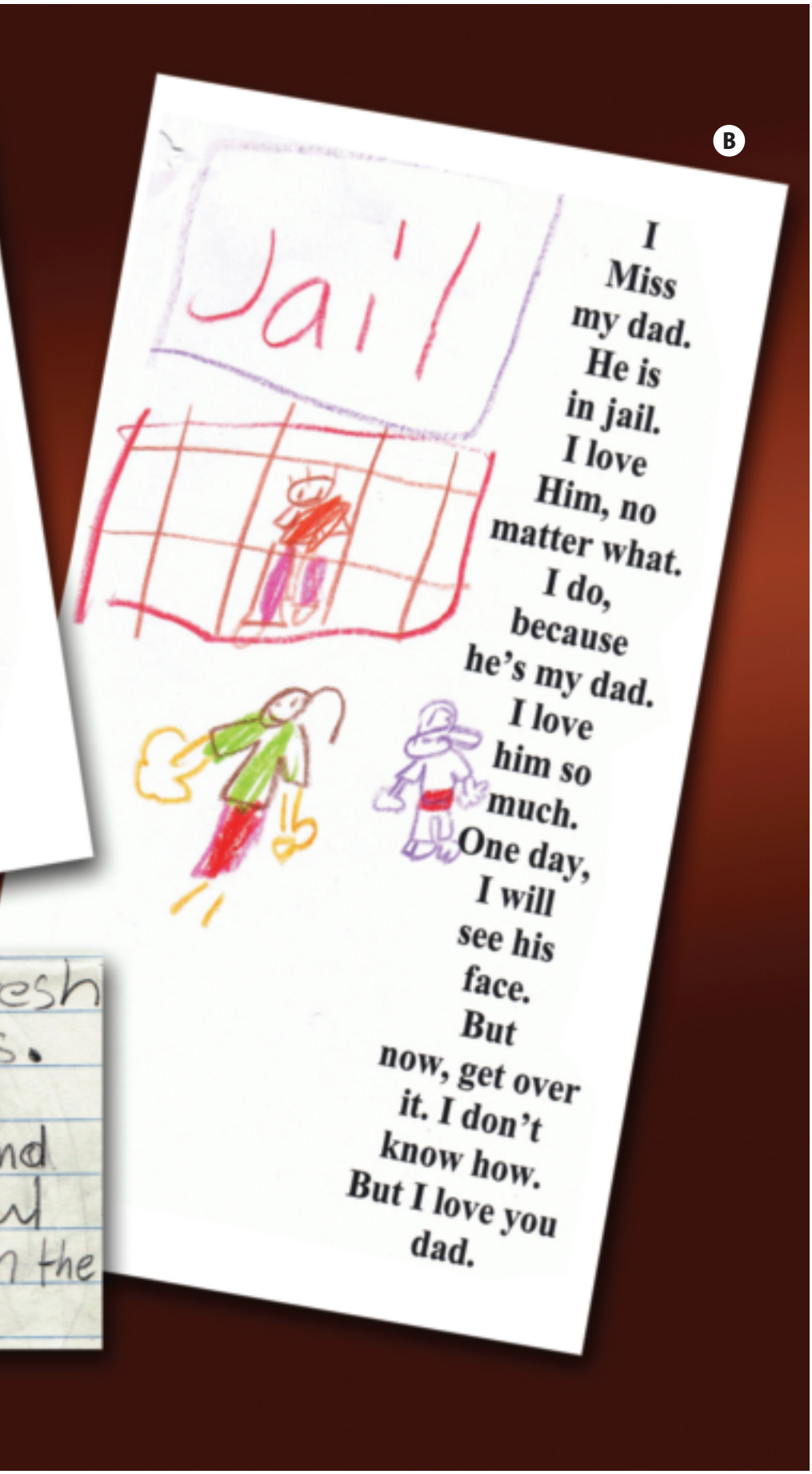
9. Use of Expressive Language—Alliteration and Onomatopoeia: We identified alliteration and onomatopoeia in our poetry reading, and discussed their impact. Illustrations of alliteration and onomatopoeia were posted on chart paper. Students added to this chart throughout the unit.

10. Beginnings and Endings: We identified strong beginnings and endings and discussed what makes a strong beginning and ending. These ideas were recorded on chart paper.

11. Revising and Editing a Poem: Students chose two poems for revising, editing, and publishing. We discussed the importance of revising and editing, and the role of the editor.

12. Publishing Poems: My students and I studied several published poems and identified the various ways to present the final draft (rewriting, typing, artistic illustrations, etc.).





Each mini-lesson began with a read-aloud of poems that highlighted the particular feature of a poem on which we would focus for that day. Students need to see the strategy in use by "real writers." This enables them to "stand on the shoulders" of these authors and use the authors' poems as scaffolds during the writing process. My students were fascinated by the poems of Shel Silverstein, so I used the poem "Lazy Jane"[4] to demonstrate how to shape a poem to reinforce the image of the idea expressed in the poem.

One of my 2nd graders wrote and published Shape Poem A in response to the mini-lesson on that subject.[5]

A 1st grader wrote and published Poem B in response to the lesson on voice.

On the day I taught the first mini-lesson on beautiful language, I took my students outdoors and talked to them about how writers use their senses to construct beautiful language. It was a rewarding experience for all of us. One of my students created Poem C (page 24) outdoors in about 10 minutes. She titled it "Nature."

The Daily Schedule for One Week

10:00 – 10:10 a.m.	Sharing, noticing, and discussing students' poems
10:10 – 10:20 a.m.	Teaching a mini-lesson on some feature of poetry
10:20 – 10:25 a.m.	Brainstorming ideas for poetry writing
10:25 – 10:35 a.m.	Modeling: Using the "think aloud" strategy, I write a poem for the class or do a shared writing.
10:35 – 10:55 a.m.	Independent writing
10:55 – 11:00 a.m.	Sharing and celebrating

The Effect

The experience lasted for six weeks and culminated in the Evening of Poetry so graciously facilitated by Barnes and Noble Booksellers. They carved out a cozy place in their store with

comfortable chairs, microphones, and a small podium for the students. I made a DVD of the event that I use to motivate new writers every year. Since that time (2006), I have taught a four-week unit on poetry every April (National Poetry Month), and my students always present their work to a wider audience. One year, they created individual anthologies of original poems from which they read at our school's annual awards ceremony.

From Poetry to Prose

The purpose of the poetry-writing unit was to transform *all* aspects of my students' writing, not just their poetry. And it did! More importantly, it transformed my approach to teaching writing. It provided me with a structure for teaching *all* writing: modeling, practicing, guiding, supporting, and finally celebrating the writing. This is actually the writers' workshop model, which I have come to embrace as a friend to writing teachers and their students. This model has helped my students and me to continue to experience success every day as we navigate this challenging but important and often neglected component of the language arts.

My students' prose writing is often reflective of the mini-lessons taught in the poetry unit. For example, one of my 2nd graders (who had written poetry with me the year before) wrote the following non-fiction piece about eagles. Since this was writing she cared about, she chose to edit her rough draft using a red pen.

Eagles

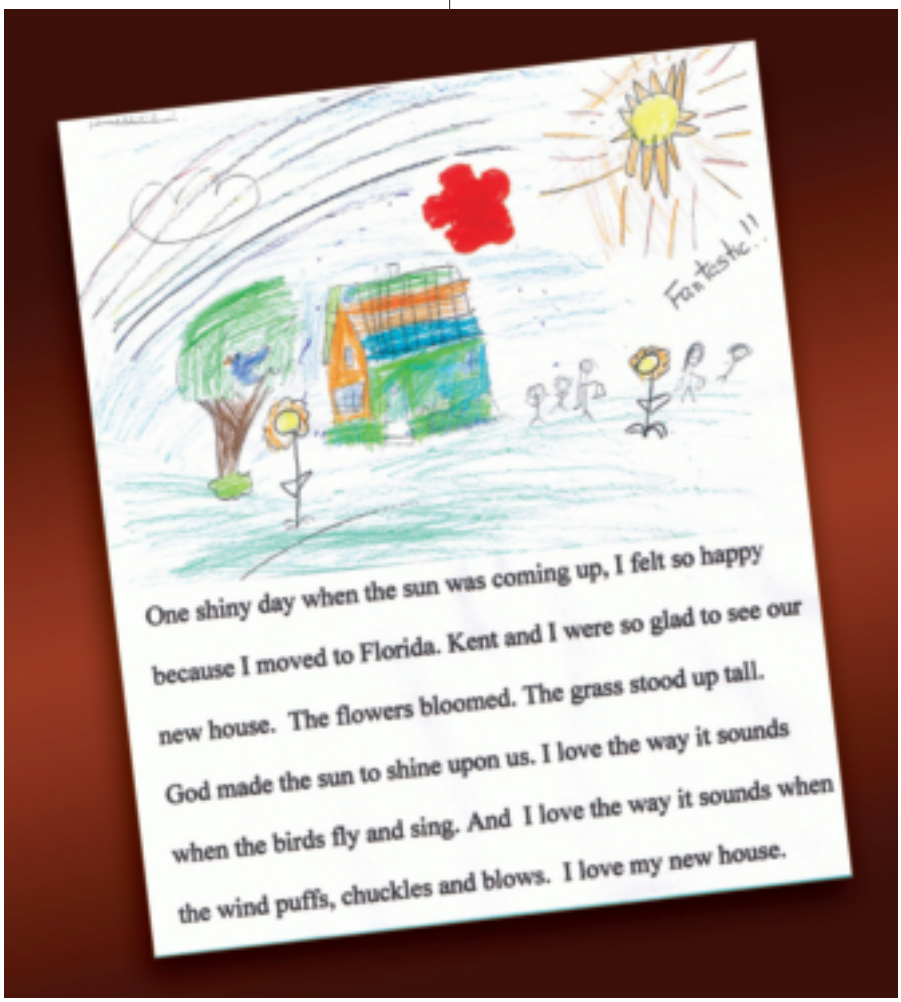
Eagles are smart birds. Wow!

Eagles are like arrows shooting from the sky. They have eyes like targets. They're looking for food.

Amazing! There are different kinds of eagles, like the American eagle and the bald eagle. The eagle watches for its prey to come. Swoop! The eagle gets its prey.

Fun Fact: Did you know that eagles eat rats?

This same 2nd grader composed the narrative piece (below left) and published it in our school's weekly newsletter.



Final Thoughts

"Poetry matters. At the most important moments, when everyone else is silent, poetry rises to speak."[6] In my own struggles to turn students on to writing, I have found that poetry *does* matter. It matters as a way to teach students the elements of descriptive writing; it matters as an outlet for their emotions and questions about life; it matters as a way of enticing even the most reluctant writer to participate in the community of writers; and it matters as a way to get students to care about their writing. Poetry, then, is a key that teachers should use to unlock the writing potential in students and to set them free to write.

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Empowering Students to Read Like Writers

"Yeah, we're pros."

Sprawled over two bucket chairs on our carpet area, Jason and Ellie,[1] two of my 6th graders, were discussing with me a new science assignment that involved critical reading and essay writing. The task would be no problem for them, since they already knew how to approach such an activity, but I wasn't sure how they would respond to the assignment.

However, I had apparently underestimated the culture that had been incubating in my classroom over the past seven months—a culture designed not simply to teach skills and strategies, but also to grow authors and thinkers. The foundation for such an approach involved a culture of talk—the fostering of authentic questioning and identification with real-life writers. In short, we were beginning to see our world through "writers' eyes."

What are writers' eyes? How does one acquire them, and why did I decide to approach learning in this way? An understanding of what is needed for children to assume a literate identity—and the philosophy and components of Authors' Studies that meet this need—may help explain.

Philosophy

Establishing a culture of talk is the initial step in creating a literary community. "Talking and listening to each other" is first among the essential components of active literacy, according to Stephanie Harvey.[2] A culture of talk provides a safe place for students to share ideas as well as an assessment opportunity for the teacher. This assessment, Harvey says, is not the assignment of a score or grade, but rather "the heart of teaching and learning." Assessment requires that we teachers know our students, which will enable us to make intelligent decisions about their needs and our steps to meet those needs.[3] If we don't talk to our students, how can we know what is in their minds?

One of the best ways to know what students are thinking is to listen to the questions they ask. Most teachers have experienced those deadly quiet moments when their questions have

BY KELLY R. CAULEY RIVINIUS

been met with blank stares and shifting bodies. That was my experience, until one day I came across a missive from Frank Serafini that transformed my philosophy and practice of questioning in the classroom. In *Around the Reading Workshop in 180 Days*, Serafini admonishes teachers: "Ask only questions with integrity—honest questions to which you don't know the answers before asking them."[4] It seems so simple, doesn't it? But that short imperative shifted my classroom from being a place where there were just a few right answers to one in which the answers did not matter so much as the journey on which the questions led us.

According to Serafini, "honest questions" fall under several categories: modernist (main idea, setting, character traits), transactional (personal connections, feelings, empathy with character), and sociocultural (attitudes/worldviews, race/gender issues).[5] We can approach questioning in very specific ways, depending upon what we desire our students to glean from the act. In an attempt to get my students thinking—and talking—my most frequent question after a read-aloud or before any discussion turned out to be, "What are your thoughts?"[6] It was amazing to me how my students responded to such an open question. At first, of course, they weren't sure. *What was this teacher doing, asking for their thoughts?* I could hear their uncertainties rumbling. But with much affirmation and continued encouragement, they soon realized I was genuine, and the thoughts, and the questions, began to flow.

I know that my feelings about my students and their contributions are obvious to them. Seeing each child as someone from whom I could learn was an essential step before I could truly appreciate my students' thoughts. When I genuinely enjoy our discussions, they can tell. And they enjoy them as well.

This brings up an important point. A teacher must value his or her students' thoughts before they will value them. Regie Routman says, "Worldwide, the strongest predictor of reading achievement is the quality of student-teacher relations."[7] I know that my feelings about my students and their contributions are obvious to them. Seeing each child as someone from whom I could learn was an essential step before I could truly appreciate my students' thoughts. When I genuinely enjoy our discussions, they can tell. And they enjoy them as well.

Effective learning thus involves both a skilled instructor and a student with a healthy literary self-concept. Developing such a community requires a comprehensive instruction strategy.[8] At the core of this community is a forum for "opportunities for discussing literature and other texts."[9]

An atmosphere of talk leads to authentic questioning. This questioning, fostered and furthered through genuine discussion, prompts thinking autonomy and greater learner independence, earmarks of the Optimal Learning Model based upon Don Holdaway's developmental and social-learning principles.[10]

What Is an Author's Study?

I am a terrible fiction writer. That is why, a couple of years ago, I picked up a book called *Teaching Writing With Picture Books as Models*[11] in an attempt to teach this genre with which I had not had much personal success. As we read and analyzed the author's craft, as evidenced through his or her picture books, I noticed that my students were reading more deeply. I had not anticipated a change in my students' *reading* as a result of studying an author's *writing*. They were also discussing the author's craft with one another and talking more deeply! Unfortunately, I began implementing this reading stance late in the semester, and the school year ended before I was able to pursue it fully.

As I reflected on the experience that summer, I came across Katie Wood Ray's ideas on using writing techniques and writers' actual thoughts about their own writing as the basis for creating a writing curriculum[12]—in other words, reading like a writer. The idea of authors' studies to identify with and promote deeper thinking appealed to me. Our first author's study the following year was quite organic in its inception. Having casually introduced Gary Paulsen and used his *Hatchet*[13] as a shared reading to kick off the year, I referred to him and his work quite nonchalantly whenever I learned something new about or from him. There was nothing strategic in my approach, except that many of my students enjoyed Paulsen's *Hatchet* so much that they searched for more of his works. As they read other books by Paulsen, they shared with me tidbits they had gleaned about him as a person and as an author. And they began to trace his habits as a writer.

"Gary Paulsen writes a lot about nature," commented Derek one day. "And a lot of the things he writes about are based on what happened to him." (Derek had been diagnosed a year earlier as having SLD—Special Learning Disability.)

"I noticed he uses one-word paragraphs sometimes—just one word on a line by itself," I mused. "Why do you think he does that?"

"I think it's for emphasis, to make it stand out more," Derek responded.

"Hmm, so you could do that in your writing, too," I observed.

Derek nodded.

Thus began the first of our experiences with authors' studies. When we study authors and their craft, our writing foci gen-

erate organically from our observations and curiosities about the authors and their works.[14] This is teaching through inquiry. As we ask questions about the authors and about one another and seek to understand, we think more critically about what we read.[15]

How to Implement

How do we implement a process that changes the way students view literacy? While I do not presume to be an authority on the subject, I want to share what has worked well for me and my students.

1. *Draw out students' interest in the authors they will be studying.* About a week before I'm ready to introduce our next author, I casually leave his or her books lying around—on my desk, at our easel, and on the table at the front of the room. When students come up to my desk to talk or to ask a question, it is natural for them to notice a new book and pick it up, perusing it while they wait for their turn to speak. "You got new books!" they say, or "Who's June Ray Wood?" (one of the authors in our studies). I have a bulletin board dedicated to our current author, with biographic information as well as covers of and excerpts from his or her books (a similar bulletin board is dedicated to our classroom authors).

Before we begin reading our current author's work, I create a simple banner on the bulletin board: "Introducing E. L. Konigsburg," for example. There follows either the expected "Who's E. L. Konigsburg?" or "Oh, yes. I think I read something by her!" When the latter occurs, I ask the student to introduce the author to the class. Students get excited when they are recognized as someone with "inside information."

2. *Introduce the author.* After a week of casual exposure to our new author, I gather my students around me in our carpeted area and officially introduce him or her. I may display and refer to the books the students have noticed on my desk or throughout the room. I may say, "Many of you have been asking me, 'Who's [author]?' Well, today, we're going to get to know her a little better."

Next comes a read-aloud of a carefully selected book or other piece of writing by that author. I read only a few pages, just enough to pique their curiosity. Then each student chooses a partner, and they get to know the author better by exploring his or her Website. This is a way to help students realize that authors are real people—with their own growing-up experiences, family vacations, adventures, pets, etc.—and that much of the inspiration and incidents an author uses in his or her writing comes from life experiences. Thus, students come to understand that writing is not so much "magical" as personal experience reflected in a certain form. Such a view removes some of the mystery from the writing process.

3. *Read aloud.* Following this introduction of the author, we gather on the carpet for a read-aloud from the book or piece I used the first day. I ask the students to bring their notebooks so they can jot down anything they notice about the author—language style, preferences, etc.—from what I read. After the read-aloud, I ask, "What did you notice?" We may create an anchor chart to which we add every time we observe something new. But mostly we discuss the author.

Another option is to read a poem a day. When we studied Paul Fleischman, I used his *Joyful Noise*[16] and *I Am Phoenix,*[17] both poetry volumes, from which we read antiphonally and analyzed one poem each class period. I asked the students to quietly read through the poem by themselves, circling any new words (we later used these words to practice context clues for unknown vocabulary). After we read the poem aloud several times, we talked about possible interpretations, as well as the author's thoughts and intentions behind such usage and/or perspective. Such an exercise helps in building comprehension, fluency, and skills.

4. *Conduct a focus lesson.* After the read-aloud, I teach a short focus lesson (about 10-15 minutes) on a reading or writing element or strategy, such as how story structure reveals a character's personality. Students practice this strategy with their partners for about 5-10 minutes. Depending upon the nature of the excerpt, we may read from our shared text, watching for the author's patterns we have noticed in our read-aloud, and listening for ways to use our focus lesson in the day's reading. At other times, I encourage the students to practice these strategies in their independent reading, helping them to see comparisons or contrasts between our current author and the author of their book.

Benefits

Studying an author's writing from the observation/inquiry perspective teaches the reader-writer about that author's method and expression.

By this point, I do not even have to go through the process of explaining how to read like a writer. In everything from read-alouds to shared readings to literature circle discussions, my students have internalized this stance so deeply that it has become their default mode. They can't help it; their writers' eyes influence how they read and speak.

Using authors' studies to guide the reading-writing workshop and as the basis for curriculum makes it possible for all students to be successful. I have witnessed children who, like Derek, struggled with various learning difficulties, drawn in naturally to the discussions and observations of authors and their styles. Why is this so? They are not expected to know the answer, but simply invited to question. Sometimes, in the course of our inquiry, we find the answers; at other times, we decide there are no answers. Instead, our questions may lead us to more questions. And that's OK. Asking authentic questions, searching for answers, and understanding that sometimes there may be no answers are essential earmarks of an authentic learning environment.

Our questions may lead us to more questions. And that's OK. Asking authentic questions, searching for answers, and understanding that sometimes there may be no answers are essential earmarks of an authentic learning environment.

Determining *why* an author included a particular element, chose a specific word, or created a character's reaction helps the reader to understand that writers have specific criteria for making these decisions. As the reader begins to understand the need to base decisions upon a desired criterion, he or she can transfer that understanding to his or her own writing—"Why did you choose this word? Why are you creating a character with that flaw?" I have asked many times. And, after observing and speculating on the reasons why published authors arrive at a decision, my students are better able to articulate the reasons for their own decisions.[18] The process is not only a crucial reading skill, but also a way to empower students to make wise choices.

"It's Literacy!"

"Is this writing or reading?" Malike, settling onto the carpet with her notebook and pencil, asked one day.

"It's literacy!" Elizabeth exclaimed.

I smiled. It's true: Authors' studies blur lines between subjects. Instead of separate entities, reading, writing, speaking, listening, intake, and understanding together become literacy, a way of thinking, of living—seeing with a writer's eyes.

"Yeah, we're pros." Jason and Ellie stated this so naturally, so confidently that I would have believed them even if I hadn't been their teacher. But I was their teacher, and I knew that they told the truth. For all practical purposes, they *were* pros—at sharing their ideas, at fostering of questions, at living the literate life, at seeing the world with writers' eyes. And, best of all, they knew it.

Sample Author's Study

Week 1*

Casual Author Introduction

- Display copies of various books by your chosen author as well as other books you deem appropriate for your students' ages and development levels.
- Create a banner ("Please meet . . . [author]!"), and display it on the bulletin board that you have dedicated to authors' studies.
- If you wish, casually mention your own reading of one or more of the author's works ("I was reading [book] last night, and I came across a thought I found interesting . . .").

Week 2

Day 1

Formal Author Introduction

- Gather students for the first read-aloud or shared poetry reading.
- Introduce the author and his or her work ("This is a book by one of my favorite authors—you may have heard me mention [his/her] work last week . . . [Give a brief introduction.]").
- Provide each student with a copy of the first poem. (You can progress through the book sequentially or choose poems based on your students' interest.)
- Allow several minutes for students to read the poem and to circle any unfamiliar words, then discuss these words to provide comprehension scaffolding.
- Read the first poem antiphonally. (Each day, I and a student read the left and right columns all the way through in order to model good fluency and pacing. Originally, I had to urge students to volunteer, but soon they competed to be the "model reader." Even students who struggled with fluency volunteered, and I scheduled them far enough ahead of time so that they could adequately prepare through re-reading, practice of unknown words, etc.)
- Discuss possible interpretations of the poem. ("What are your thoughts on this piece? What jumps out at you? What do we know about [author] from reading [his/her] poetry?")
- Guide students to the author's official Website to learn more about him or her as a person and an author.
- Ask students to choose a quote from one of the author's poems that they might be helpful in their own writing. (As a partner on their assignments, use your computer to print pic-

tures of the author and covers of his or her books, adding them to the "author's bulletin board" under the banner "Please meet . . . [author]!").

• As students complete their typed mini-posters of the author's writing advice, help them to display their work.

Day 2

Shared Reading Introduction

• Gather students for the second poetry antiphonal reading, continuing with the book or using another of the author's works.

• Follow with a discussion of this poem as in Day 1. ("What are your thoughts? Do you notice anything [author] did in this poem that [he/she] also did in the poem from yesterday? What can we tell about [author] from this poem today?" Add to your class's author anchor chart if you choose to use one.)

• Teach a mini-lesson on using text features (cover, back matter, illustrations) to predict a book's content before reading.

• Use the book to practice the mini-lesson strategy.

• Begin a shared reading of chapter one of the book. (Make sure each student has a copy of the book.)

• Follow up with a discussion of the first chapter, remembering to invite questioning and inquiry. ("What are your thoughts? What are you unsure about? What questions do you have for this character? What questions do you have for [author]? What do you think of [author's] writing choices in this chapter? Is there a similarity between [his/her] style here and [his/her] style in the poetry we've read so far?" Also, be sure to follow up on your strategy lesson by helping students to validate or correct the predictions they made. It may be helpful to use a "turn-and-talk" approach, assigning small-group discussion, followed by whole-group sharing.)

• Begin independent reading, using the author's books you or your students have chosen. You may also encourage your students to choose books by other authors, inviting them to apply the strategy they learned during the mini-lesson.

• You may want to give your students an individual assignment to check their understanding of the earlier strategy taught. (Recall, however, that your goal is to create "wide-awake readers" who see the world with *writers'* eyes. It is difficult to do this if their eyes are sleepy and drooping from an excess of busy work.)

Days 3 and 4

• Continue the schedule as outlined above: read-aloud/antiphonal reading, strategy mini-lesson, shared reading, independent reading. (You may want to work with guided reading groups during independent reading time.)

Weeks 3 to 5

Digging Into Author's Study

• Follow the schedule you have designed for your author's study. (I have found a predictable schedule is important for most students—and their teachers!—especially when trying something new.)

• Your students should keep their own notes—from poetry readings, shared readings, and discussions—about their observations of the author's writing craft, which may provide material for a culminating project at the end of your study. (I have used posters and PowerPoint as media for my students to share their thoughts on what they have learned.)

• Celebrate what you and your students have learned with a Celebration Day.

• Rejoice—breathe deeply and smile, knowing you have begun the journey.

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* Authors' Studies units can vary from several weeks to an entire school year, depending on the available time and source materials. For my 6th graders, I found that a four- to nine-week period worked most successfully.

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3. Ibid, p. 37.

4. Frank Serafini and Suzette Serafini-Youngs, *Around the Reading Workshop in 180 Days: A Month-by-Month Guide to Effective Instruction* (Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 2006), p. 126.

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6. Just think of the possibilities this question holds for your worship time with students! My greatest joy in this journey has been the depth of discussion, of insights on Jesus and His Word, birthed from this simple question. Try it for your next worship or Bible class.

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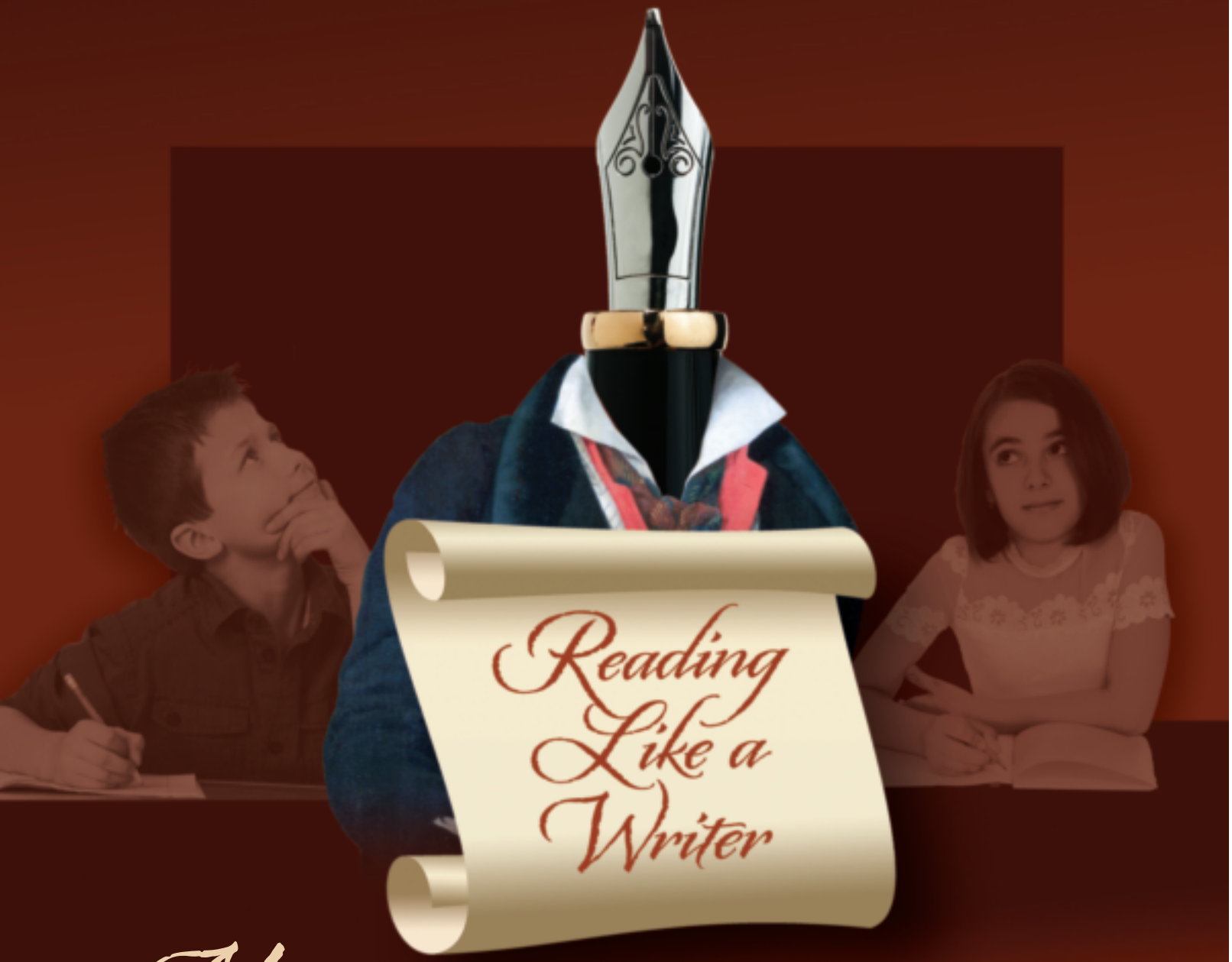

Reading Like a Writer

Thinking, Experiencing, and Writing Enthusiastically

Many parts of the Bible, the best-selling book of all time, were written down by men called scribes. Their role was to record, word for word, the orally expressed thoughts of other men whom we traditionally think of as the "real authors" of the books. After having taken quite a few essay examinations, I can empathize with these scribes because I've experienced the aching and sometimes even swollen hands that can come from too much hurried writing.

And yet, I do not think that these scribes worked harder than men such as Paul or Jeremiah. The difference between these two groups of "writers" is that one group did all the thinking. Although God provided the inspiration and the ideas, the authors had to find the right words. This activity of the mind is the true reason why we credit this group with the traditional title of "author." You see, real writers are thinkers.

There was a time when education emphasized rote memorization and repetition. Now, best-practices research stresses teaching students to think. Unfortunately, at a time when ideas are zooming through cyberspace, it is difficult to teach students to slow down and think. However, there is hope. One of

BY REBEKAH BONJOUR

the methods that has been shown to be most effective in teaching students to think is *teacher modeling*. In order to teach students to think, teachers must, themselves, be thinkers. Since writers must be thinkers, it seems when teaching writing, teachers must also teach thinking. And to teach writing well, the teacher must model the whole process.

To model writing, one must also live like a writer and a thinker. This fact brings us to an important question: How do writers live? To be a writer, one must reflectively read, thoughtfully experience, and enthusiastically write.

Reflective Reading

One example of the importance of reflective reading may be found in the writings of Gary Paulsen, author of several Newbery Honor books, such as *Hatchet* and *Dogsong*.[1] Paulsen admits, in the introduction to *Shelf Life*,[2] to becoming an avid reader at an early age. A book handed to him by a librarian apparently inspired him, and he subsequently spent many hours in his basement reading book after book; and even today, he has not stopped reading.

Reading is enabling. If a student (or teacher) fails to read, it will be difficult for him or her to write well. Authors, including young authors, must develop a repertoire of writing skills that will draw the readers' eyes and ears to the page.

As they reflect on the variety of techniques used by other writers, authors must be intentional in making decisions about which ones to use in order to engage readers. Simply hearing the verbal expression of a language does not enable a person to grasp all the nuances and richness of language. To write well, an author must understand proper grammar and the concept of formal versus informal language.

Preparing to teach, I read as much as I can. I read newspapers, magazines, children's books, and adult literature. I read stories of the imagination as well as information. I read poetry and the lyrics to music. I look for patterns and unfamiliar words. I find the Bible to be a fascinating display of the amazingly diverse styles of different authors who shared a common purpose in writing.

Thoughtful Experiencing

Reading is important, but an author who only reads and fails to get out and live life richly is not likely to write engaging literature. The life of author Gary Paulsen provides an excellent illustration of this point. By looking at the kinds of books he writes, one can see that he does not just enjoy reading; he is a passionate outdoorsman. How could an author write thrilling survival tales of human beings battling the elements if he or she had not experienced the struggle to survive? Paulsen definitely had such experiences. In fact, he participated in the famous 1,200-mile dogsled race, the Iditarod, not once, but twice! How could such experiences not influence his writing, making it more breathtaking and real for the reader?

To be certain, not all teachers are ready to sign up for the Iditarod. However, each of us has unique opportunities to experience life in ways that others may not. For example, I enjoy reading different genres that highlight other cultures. This helps me to learn about them in an interesting way, rather than consulting a list of habits and ways of life for a specific culture. In a story, a culture comes alive, and something that may not have seemed very attractive becomes more appealing as I experience it vicariously.

Because I want to encourage students to explore the world around them and to try new things, I try new things. I free rock climb, although I am afraid of heights. I jet ski, although I cannot swim well. I travel to other countries and try combinations of foods that make me gag just from the sound of them. One of these reasons I do these things is that I desire to model to my students the importance of stepping out of their comfort zone and doing something new. For some of them, this may be as simple as talking to the child who sits next to them in class, but it will still be a new experience. In order to write well, you must live well, and I want my students to really live.

Enthusiastic Writing

It may sound simplistic to say that in order to write well, one must write enthusiastically, but it is an important point. Ask any published author, and he or she will describe writing for hours every day. Writing requires discipline. As the age-old adage says, "Practice makes perfect"—or in modern-day terms, "Practice makes permanent."

But it's not enough to just tell students that they need to write. Students need to learn how writers acquire ideas. They need to know what authors do when they have writer's block or experience other difficulties in the writing process. Many writers keep some type of notebook to record the events of their lives, or in the world around them. These events can furnish ideas for writing. Notebooks also are a good place to record the details that enrich one's writing. Most authors use their notebooks as a safe place to reflect on what they have read and experienced.

But journaling in a notebook is not the only type of writing that writers do. Every song lyric or work of literature had to start somewhere. This is another significant use of a writing notebook. It is here that many writers simply doodle, make sketches and charts, or draft stories or poems.

Journaling and sketching are only the beginning of the writing process. Writers often reread the notebook, looking for ideas that have potential among the sketches, ideas, and doodles. Then the labor begins. And labor it is. Revising and editing are key components of writing. When the topic deals with something the author cares about, he or she is willing, even eager, to return to the work again and again. The author looks for ways to make the writing better through crafting, editing, and presentation techniques.

Realistically, as a teacher, I am not likely to write for hours on a daily basis. However, I can model for my students the process required to produce quality writing. I can show them the problems that I am having with a poem I am trying to write. I can describe my thinking as I try to find ways to solve the problem. To write, I must work hard, and they must see my work as well as understand the thinking behind the work. I cannot expect my students to be motivated to do something that I am not willing to do.

The best-selling book of all time teaches me that Jesus, the Master Teacher, was my example. Jesus lived the life that He expects me to live. He does not ask me to go through anything that He did not willingly go through Himself. If I follow His example when I teach writing, I must set a goal—to live like a writer—and model for my students how to achieve important goals. I am an imperfect person, and I will make mistakes. But, praying for God's help, I will do my best to motivate my students to write and think as I model reflective reading, thoughtful experiencing, and enthusiastic writing. ✎

At the time this article was written, **Rebekah Bonjour** *was a senior elementary education major at Southern Adventist University in Collegedale, Tennessee. She has been working with Kids Kamp, an after-school care ministry of the Collegedale Seventh-day Adventist Church, for the past several years and greatly enjoys her time with children. Rebekah still eagerly anticipates her first year in a classroom of her own.*

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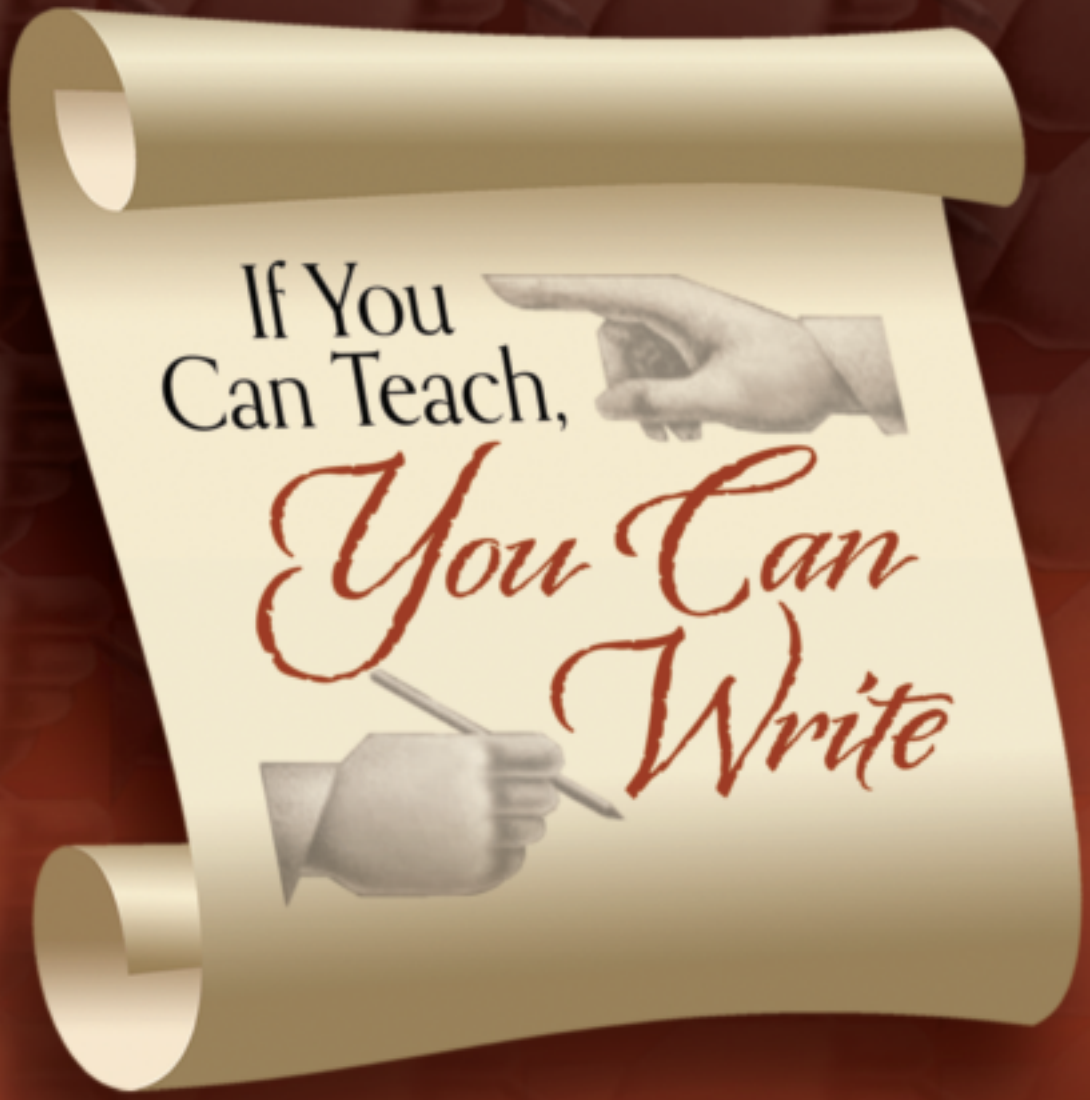

At the beginning of my teaching career, I attended an in-service workshop. After a session of sharing our teaching experiences, the trainer said to me, "Your experience could be very valuable to others. Please, write down what you've shared, and bring it back tomorrow." I couldn't imagine how my experiences, which seemed so simple, could help others, but nevertheless I obediently wrote a passionate account of what had been achieved with the little ones in my class. A few months later, the article was published in an education journal edited by the workshop coordinator. This experience opened the door to the world of formal written communication for me. Since then, many other doors have opened to a career possibility I had not envisioned.

Twenty years later, I find it hard to distinguish between the experiences of a writer and those of a teacher. I write because I am a teacher. Writing is a natural consequence of teaching. In the field of education, as well as in other sciences, knowledge is built on what others have researched and by accumulating experiences that enrich, change, and improve education. Therefore, written communication is essential within the field of education.

Not all teachers have been motivated to write, but I believe that the basic skills required of any teacher are sufficient for him or her to master the art of writing. I believe that there are six fundamental reasons for encouraging teachers to develop their writing skills:

1. Writing is an active form of reflection about teaching and learning. It is not the same to think about one's actions as to both think *and write* about them. Writing requires reflexive thinking processes that are deeper, more systematic, and metacognitive.

BY SONIA KRUMM

2. Writing is motivation for innovation. When the teacher can share his or her experiences with others, the adventure of testing theories and trying new approaches takes on a deeper meaning.

3. When a teacher writes, he or she models for students the importance of writing. In many ways, a teacher who writes shows his or her students the value of written communication and encourages them to produce their own writing. A teacher who writes will be more inclined to produce students who write.

4. Written documents become part of the teacher's professional record. For those who write fairly regularly, written work provides an account of their thoughts and professional growth as well as a useful tool for self-assessment.

5. Writing promotes collegiality. The loneliness of the classroom can sometimes wear teachers out. However, for those who write and publish, the classroom has no limits. They will find colleagues from many parts of the world who empathize with their point of view and with whom they can exchange ideas and obtain feedback. Ludwig Wittgenstein wrote, "The limits of language mean the limits of my world."[1]

6. Writing enables the author to become more comfortable communicating his or her worldview. A Christian writer will find that writing provides an opportunity to testify of lifestyle, faith, and interpretation of the world, as well as what is happening within the framework of that worldview.

In reality, for a teacher, writing is linked to the need to share and belong. But in a world overflowing with ephemeral experiences, the wish to belong may seem utopian. However, written work still retains a great deal of credibility. Books and articles published in periodicals or electronic journals are effective ways to share our ideas and beliefs. In this sense, writing can be a way of sharing and belonging.

That's why each time I admiringly and respectfully read colleagues' publications, I am encouraging them to share what they do, so that their ideas do not die in the classroom, and so their students feel that they are part of their teacher's success.

A final reason for a teacher to write is Francis Bacon's excellent claim: "Reading maketh a full man, conference a ready man, and writing an exact man."[2]

From an early age, students should be encouraged to do creative writing. During my years of preschool teaching, I enjoyed reading the simple yet creative writing of my students. If teachers encourage their students to branch out into different writing genres, by the time these young people enroll in college, they will be able to express their ideas clearly, precisely, and aesthetically.

THE WRITING PATH FOR TEACHERS

How to Develop Writing Skills

Reading is a writer's source. Many people have a rich inner world, but lack the ability to express it through writing. Reading provides prime material—thoughts—for reflecting and developing one's own ideas, but it also suggests models or writing styles.

An effective way of increasing writing skills is to enroll in writing workshops, which are frequently offered during school vacations. Teachers can also enroll in online writing courses.

Writing skills can also be developed through the activities of daily life, such as:

- Write letters. Start developing the habit of writing short daily Facebook messages or e-mails; or, if you do not use the Internet, write short notes or letters.
- Write a brief news or feature article for your school newsletter or a short devotional.
- Write an article for The Journal of Adventist Education.
- Compose curriculum material for one of your classes, or write an article in your area of expertise.
- Write a children's story based on a childhood experience.
- Read aloud what you have written, and ask a colleague to provide constructive feedback.

Encourage Students to Write

From an early age, students should be encouraged to do creative writing. During my years of preschool teaching, I enjoyed reading the simple yet creative writing of my students. If teachers encourage their students to branch out into different writing genres, by the time these young people enroll in college, they will be able to express their ideas clearly, precisely, and aesthetically.

Reasons why teachers should motivate their students to write:

- Writing helps them organize their thoughts. They think more effectively when they write.
- Writing is an instrumental ability that improves performance in all subject areas.
- Writing allows students to express their feelings, emotions, and beliefs in a more private way than oral expression allows.
- Writing prepares students for research tasks later on, as well as projects that require written reports.

Strategies for Promoting Writing

Here are a few ideas for increasing student writing at all levels:

Preschool Level

• **Expose children to many kinds of literature.** Every day, make time in the school day to leisurely enjoy stories, tales, riddles, tongue twisters, poems, and other types of children's literature. Showing the book, its illustrations and titles, and presenting the author will prime children to writing.

• **Introduce children to the oral version of the genres they have been reading and writing.** Record these compositions and read them to the children so that they can value their own and others' work.

• **Have the students compose stories by drawing pictures in sequence or by cutting out pictures and sticking them in order on a strip of paper.** They can add the words they are able to write, and you can help them complete the story.

• **Compose group stories based on objects taken out of a box,** arranging the items to create a coherent plot.

Primary Level

• **Search for ways to encourage students to write creatively.** Offer starter ideas like these: "What would have happened if. . . ?" "What would this place be like if. . .?" "The strangest dream I've ever had. . . ."

• **Have students reflect on what they've done today.** "In five lines or less, tell what you have learned today." This daily exercise of self-reflection and synthesis has helped whole classes to improve noticeably in a variety of subject areas.

• **Encourage students to write using all five senses and the arts.** Offer a starter statement like "A mint candy makes me think of. . . ." or have them describe their reaction to music or write a story based on a painting.

• **Choose a Bible verse and write an opposite meaning.** This will help to understand the implications of a decision. For example, if they wrote Ruth 1:16[3] with its opposite meaning, it would

say this: "Don't urge me to follow you or go with you. Where you go, I won't go, and where you stay, I won't stay. Your people will not be my people, and your God will not be my God." What would have become of Ruth if she had responded that way? How would this have changed Naomi's life? And Boaz's life?

• **Show students the pragmatic usefulness of writing.** Write the recipes for the students' favorite foods and compile a class recipe book. Write down interesting facts, news and jokes in a class journal. Write requests, thank-you notes, invitations, and letters to children in other places. Keep a personal diary. Compose the plot and dialogue for a video that will be produced by the class.

• **Show the beauty of poetry.** Stimulate the joy of poetic expression by selecting poems that are simple and appropriate, so that the children can make simple changes, such as replacing words, adding a stanza, or changing the ending.

Box 1: Advice for Writing a Simple Article

- Choose a topic.
- Identify the readers/audience.
- Plan each section carefully. Search for supporting documentation.
- Write down brief, precise, and simple objectives before beginning to write the article.
- Once the necessary information has been gathered, organize the article in a logical order.
- Develop conclusions for the article.
- Make an outline of the contents before writing the article in order to ensure thematic unity, logical progression, and coherence.
- Use brief sentences. Express only one idea per sentence.
- Give the main idea at the beginning of each paragraph. Include only those secondary ideas that are necessary to support the main idea.
- Reinforce the main idea with a conclusion at the end.
- Avoid using indefinite adjectives such as *some, many*, etc.
- Achieve a balance between brevity and clarity.
- Use strong nouns and active verbs.
- Use bold type, italics, and underlining for emphasis.

Secondary Level

For teenagers, writing can be a means of expression and an escape from personal conflicts. Here are some topics to get them started:

• **Write about what you like and what you don't like.**

• **Write about your dreams.** Where do you see yourself in 10 years' time? How do you think you can make a difference in your community?

• **Write your autobiography and self-portrait.** "Who is [John]? "A journey deep inside [Cynthia]." "Unpublished biography of [Andrew]."

• **Modernize Bible stories.** "Lot chooses to live in the big city"; "Daniel enrolls in a public school"; "A traveler who is mugged and left for dead is rescued by a foreigner (Good Samaritan)."

• **Change the ending.** Cain decides to exchange vegetables for a lamb from his brother Abel. Esther doesn't have the courage to go before the king. Nehemiah returns to the palace soon after the rebuilding of Jerusalem begins. The rich young man goes back to see Jesus one night, together with Nicodemus.

• **Do in-depth research.** Have students choose a character from the Bible or from history and research the personal information and contributions of that person. They can present their research in the form of a brief biography.

University Level

The challenge for this level is to help students polish their writing to achieve a marked improvement in the quality and variety of language used, and in expressing ideas in complete paragraphs with internal coherence. They should also be able to produce a good synthesis of content, and most important, develop the ability to write a summary or critical evaluation of another writer's thoughts.

Some simple exercises can be assigned at the beginning of a course, and then at the end, to compare the student's progress.

• **"Write about your worldview."** Stimulus questions: "Who am I? Where do I come from? Where am I going? What is my mission in life? What problems are there, and what is the solution to them?"

• **"Express your feelings, thoughts and suggestions about the course."** Questions to answer: "What are your expectations of this course? What has had an impact on you? Have the assignments changed your way of thinking about a topic? What issues didn't you understand?"

• **Teach students to write a brief essay.** Often, when university teachers make such assignments, the students have not yet

Box 2: Examples of Vital/Essential Questions

- Are human beings really free?
- Which is better, to live with questions, or to live with the wrong answers?
- What is justice?
- Are justice and mercy contradictory?
- Is education essential to be successful in life?
- How much power does heredity have in a person's destiny?
- What does true forgiveness imply?
- Does forgiveness mean reconciliation?
- Does history really repeat itself?
- Where does perception end and reality begin?
- Do we control our destiny?
- What is happiness?
- Are there absolutes?
- Can we lose and win at the same time?
- Is there really something original?
- Are leaders born or made?
- When is it easier to trust God—when things go well or when things go wrong?
- Are some stereotypes accurate?
- What does it mean to be good?
- How do we learn?

developed the necessary skills. It is important to guide the students so that they know how to do the project, and to have them make successive revisions and corrections until the essay has the required format and content. (See Box 1[4] for suggested steps for doing this.)

• **Encourage students to read chapters of books and to write a critical review.** To get them started, supply a list of questions like these: "Do you agree with the author? Why or why not? Which of his or her ideas do you support? Which ones do you reject, and why? What arguments can you give to oppose or support the author's ideas? Can you find another bibliographical source that supports your point of view?"

• **Create open-ended questions that will elicit varied answers, and have the students write their responses.** (See examples in Box 2.[5])

Final Thoughts

We may not all think of ourselves as writers, but we can develop more effective ways to engage our students in the world of writing. We can also motivate our colleagues and staff to write and share their expertise.

My final advice is to *give writing a try*. Don't be afraid of making mistakes. A favorite teacher of mine often used to say that "We learn by ruining."[6] Horace said it well: "Often you must turn your stylus to erase, if you hope to write anything worth a second reading."[6] This said, paper, pencil, and eraser (or I-Pad) in hand, I encourage you to travel through the world of the written word!

To paraphrase the wise Solomon who said, "A word aptly *written* is like apples of gold in settings of silver" (Proverbs 25:11).

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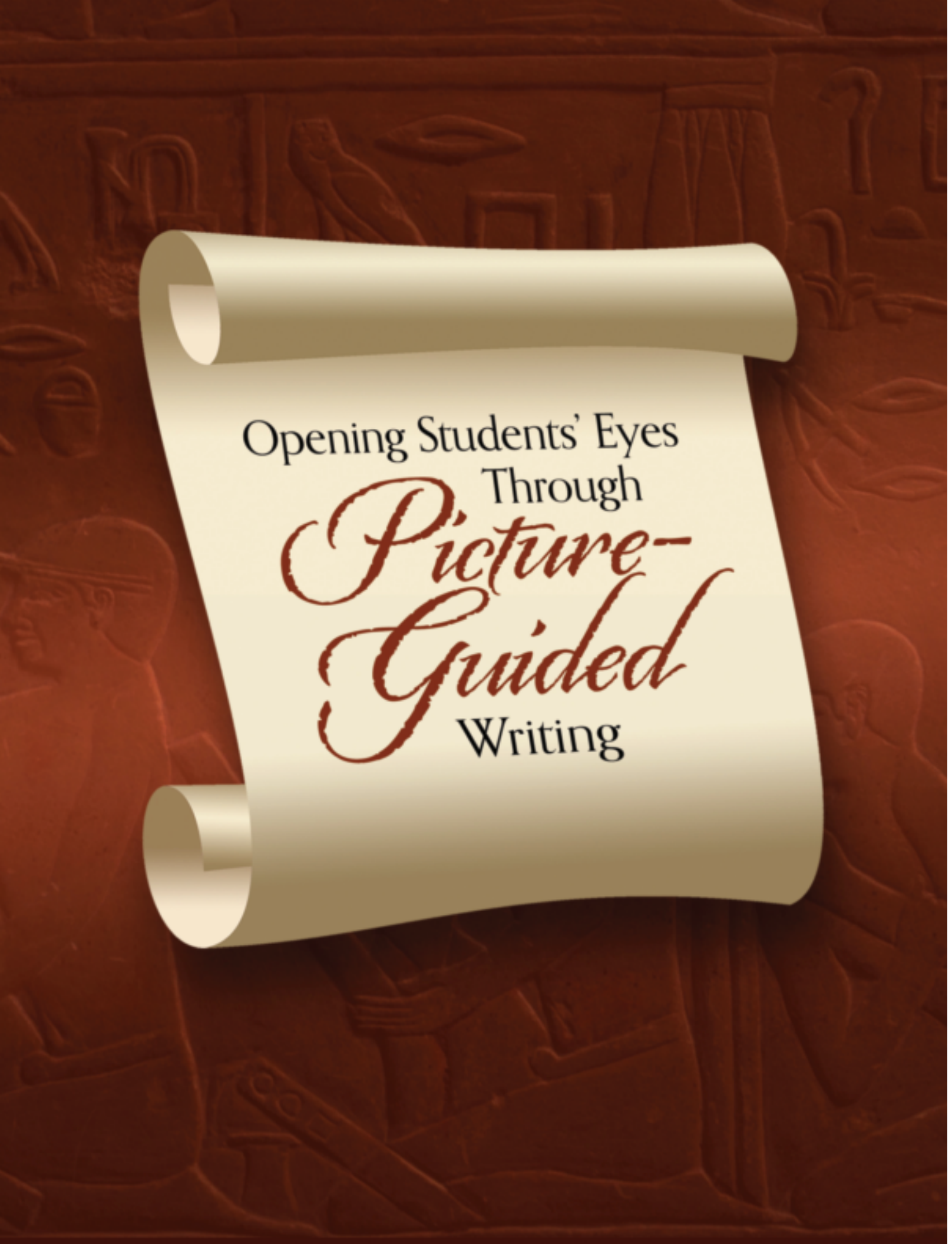

Opening Students' Eyes
Through
Picture-Guided
Writing

"All of us are watchers—of television, of time clocks, of traffic on the freeway—but few are observers. Everyone is looking. Not many are seeing."

—Peter M. Leschak[1]

Before people wrote with letters and words, they wrote with pictures. Taking bits of charcoal from a fire, men drew tales of harrowing hunts on cave walls. Egyptians recorded elaborate burial procedures in colorful hieroglyphics. Written language is historically "picture based."

Even though Jesus, the Master Teacher, did not have printed visual images to show His listeners, He knew the power of imagery and used it frequently in His teaching. When Jesus told the parable of the sower, His words became connected to that image. The next time the listeners spotted a farmer sowing seed, they recalled the lesson He had taught.

The universality of visual images allows them to be tools for improving writing instruction at any grade level, in any subject, and in any language. Like "universal blood donors," pictures pump life into the teaching of any writing genre: descriptive, narrative, poetic, persuasive, etc. The picture resources for teaching writing are rich, varied, and easily acquired—ranging from historical or stock photographs to picture books and student-created artwork.

Strategies for Teaching Descriptive Writing

Students enjoy talking about what they see. When teaching descriptive writing, I like to tap into that natural desire by sharing a visual image with students and inviting them to write their observations about it. Sometimes I have them do guided writing, asking them to write how the image makes them feel or to describe its physical attributes. Other times, I leave the writing assignment unstructured: I simply display the image and ask my students to "write about it." After they write their observations, I allow time for sharing. By listening to what others have written, students discover that one visual image can be viewed from numerous perspectives and can evoke a variety of thoughts. Sometimes my students' descriptive efforts are merely jotted in a journal. At other times, they draft, craft, and revise these vignettes to publishable quality.

Because they are "visual stories," pictures make effective tools for teaching narrative writing. One of my fa-

BY VALERIE HUNT

vorite narrative writing assignments involves asking each student to find an old or unusual family photo—especially one showing people who are unfamiliar to the student. Like detectives, students investigate the photo and then write a family tale describing what they have learned. The writing becomes authentic as they understand that they are helping to preserve their family's history.

Photos and Persuasive Essays

Students have opinions on all sorts of subjects. But most of them have difficulty anchoring those opinions with factual evidence and supporting details. A thought-provoking photo offers a fresh way for students to practice the skill of persuasive essay writing.

"Picture This," an activity from the Oakland Museum of California, makes students into documentary photographers. They begin by studying Dorothea Lange's historical photographs of subjects such as Japanese-Americans interred during World War II, which speak volumes about the emotions that motivated people to work for change. After viewing a number of these historical photographs and becoming familiar with basic photographic composition, students choose a current issue of importance to them. Using digital cameras, they take photos and write informational flyers designed to persuade others to act. These flyers provide real-life application and purpose for the persuasive essay assignment.[2]

Pictures—Tools for Honing Writing Craft

Writing can be like painting with words. Beth Olshansky teaches students to paint word pictures by helping them turn works of art into artistic words. She begins by transforming young authors into artists. After producing a portfolio during art class, students "learn to 'read' their own images. They write about what they see in their artwork, often drawing rich, descriptive language from the colors, textures, rhythms, and shapes appearing within their own images."[3] In artists'/writers' workshops with her students, Olshansky coaches them as they write and illustrate materials for publication. She uses her students' artwork as inspiration in teaching them to use vivid verbs, figurative language, and rhythm in their writing, which opens up endless possibilities for teaching writing craft.[4]

Many students struggle to grasp the idea that writing well does not necessarily mean crowding more words into a sentence. They don't understand that "laboring the point kills the point of laboring."[5] Writing captions for photos offers students the opportunity to practice the skill of writing more by writing less. They learn to synthesize information and pare it down to the essentials.

Before technology offered the option of projecting a single image for the whole class to view, I used to cut off the captions from interesting newspaper and magazine photos. I discussed with my students the importance of effi-

Picture-Guided Writing Resources

Opening students' eyes through picture-guided writing needn't be time consuming or difficult. Instead of having to generate new lesson plans, teachers can utilize resources and activities available on the Internet:

School District 51 Mesa County Valley

http://www.mesa.k12.co.us/2003/Students/VisualLiteracyActivities.cfm

Teacher Judy Harrington provides links to several visual literacy activities and picture resources.

Eduscapes

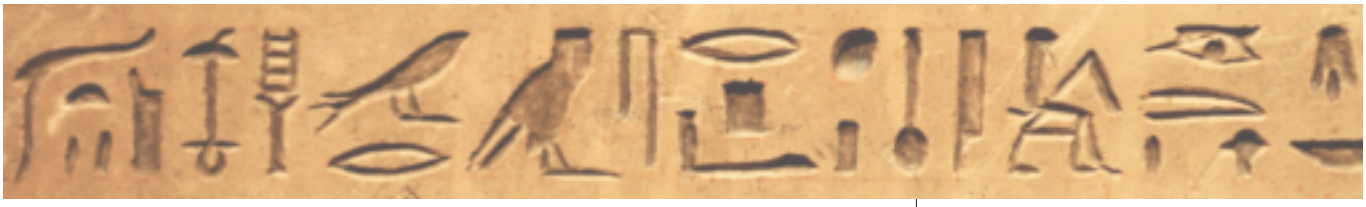
http://eduscapes.com/sessions/digital/activity1.htm

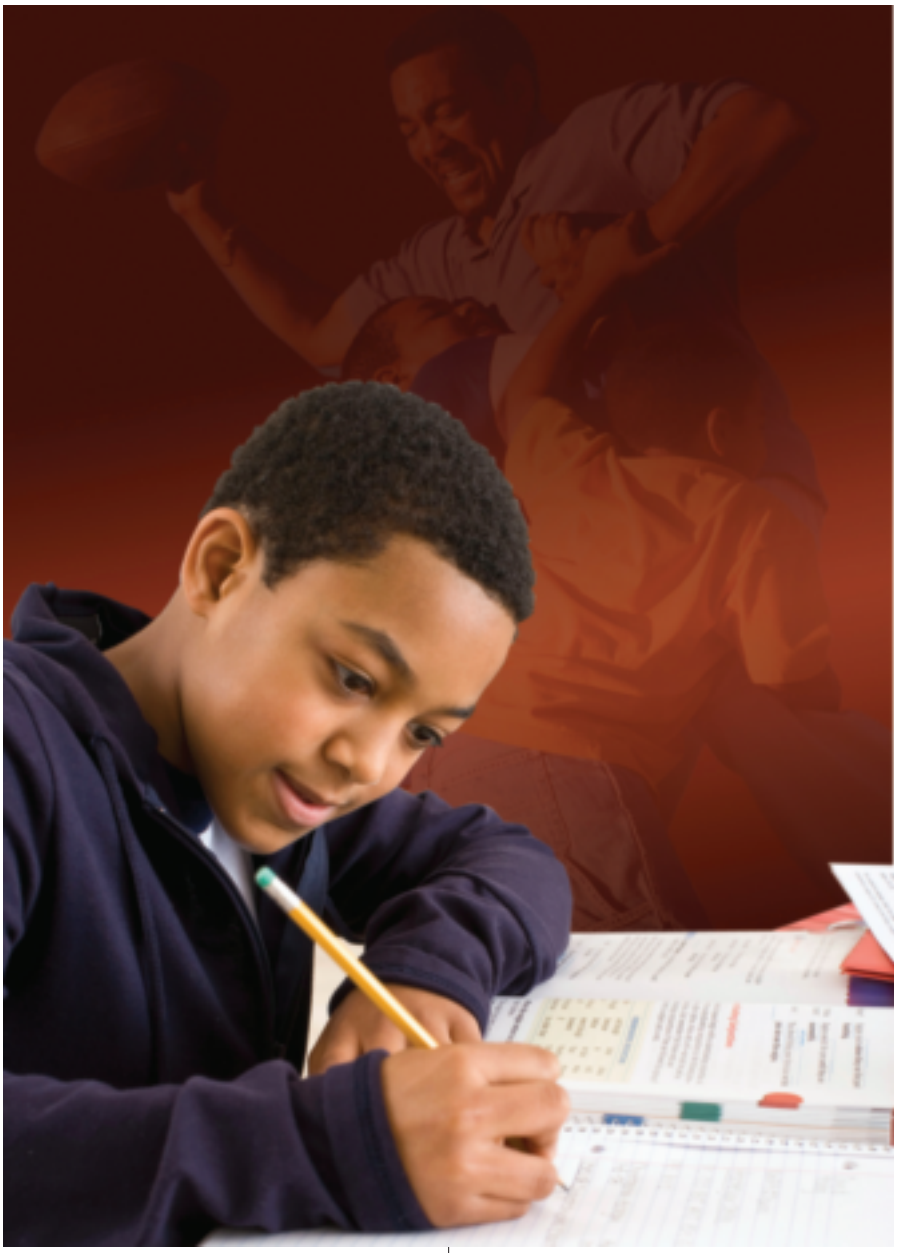
Annette Lamb offers several Web-based photo resources and activities.

Frank W. Baker

http://www.frankwbaker.com/vis_lit.htm

Frank W. Baker defines visual literacy, and offers readings, standards, lesson plans, and resources for finding photos.





cient, effective word choices that succinctly capture the story of an image. I presented each of them with a photo, minus the caption, and asked them to compose their own captions. Later, I displayed the photos and read the student-composed captions along with the originals, to see if students could pick out the original caption. The students learned when one of their well-written captions was chosen over the original.

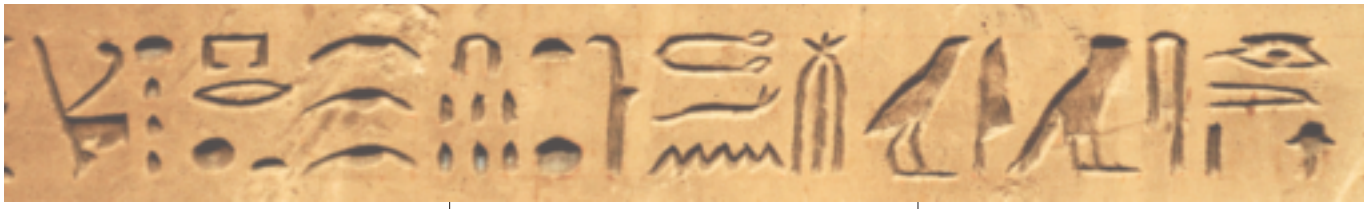
Images provide excellent lessons in comparison and contrast. "The sooner students begin to notice similarities, the sooner their writing will become more interesting."[6] Differences are often easier to pick out than similarities, yet it is similarities that provide two of the most powerful writing tools—simile and metaphor. After students have practiced looking for similarities in pairs of photos or in other visual images, they will be able to effectively compare subjects with few common denominators to produce fresh, vivid metaphors.

In my experience, one of the best ways to teach students the skill of bringing characters to life is to start with real characters—photos of people. For a recent journal assignment, I showed my students photographs of five women and asked them to characterize them. After they wrote, the students could hardly wait to share. Instead of pulling characters out of thin air, the students had visual clues for their characterizations.[7]

Studying the work of author/illustrator Marla Frazee in books such as *The Seven Silly Eaters* and *Roller Coaster* made me aware of how much time illustrators, like writers, must spend bringing a book's characters to life.[8] Recognizing that illustrators put that kind of effort into visualizing characters in a picture book, I decided that student authors could improve their characterization skills by studying illustrations in a picture book they hadn't seen before and writing about the characters before reading the story. In addition, they can imagine and create possible dialogue between characters pictured in an illustration.

Using Pictures to Teach Across the Curriculum

Using pictures to launch students into writing projects need not be limited to language arts class. Writing is



one strategy people use to think their way into a subject and begin to make it their own. Students can thus practice writing across the curriculum.

Visual images help people relate and connect with distant times and places. Even the most vivid verbal description of the Eiffel Tower or an Elizabethan costume doesn't provide as much information as a picture or illustration. After seeing photos of prairies in the midwestern United States, I am able to create more meaningful pictures in my mind when I read Laura Ingalls Wilder's books.

Historical photographs are windows into the past that allow students to expand their horizons beyond the memorization of facts and dates into the everyday struggles of real human beings like themselves. When teaching about any period in history, a good way to begin is to have your students study photographs or illustrations. They can then write formally or informally about what they observe, feel, and infer, which will make them feel more connection to the subject.

Science depends on careful observation and written records. Writing about the similarities they find between pictures of species in the same order or genus helps students to develop an understanding of common characteristics used in classification before they read about them.

One of my favorite classroom worship or Bible activities is a visual object-lesson assignment. After I put a variety of objects and photographs/drawings in a bag, each student selects one. After being given thinking time, each student composes a spiritual object lesson based on his or her object.

Even in physical education class, visual images and writing can enhance learning. Students who examine a series of photographs or illustrations of a person correctly executing a skill and then write a "how-to" essay will improve their language skills as well as the correct way to perform a physical technique.

Pictures Cross Language Barriers

Images open doors to struggling readers and English language learners who suffer writing anxiety. In a 1994 study, university students in an English as a second language class showed marked improvement with the use of picture-guided writing. The pictures provided contextual clues and evoked deep thought. The students said that the pictures kept them from being overly concerned about grammatical forms because they were focusing intensely on the content of the pictures. Because they were not focusing on form, the students wrote more freely and felt more comfortable trying to express their thoughts in a non-native language.[9]

Picture-guided writing is just as effective with emergent writers learning to express themselves in the written form of their native tongue. Kindergarten students eagerly write about pictures, especially their own drawings.

Pictures Are Everywhere

Versatility is the beauty of picture-guided writing. A teacher of any subject or grade level can use this approach to teach practically any aspect

Continued on page 46

Good news! The steady growth of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and its institutions has created a demand for qualified personnel who can support its worldwide mission with their talents and education.

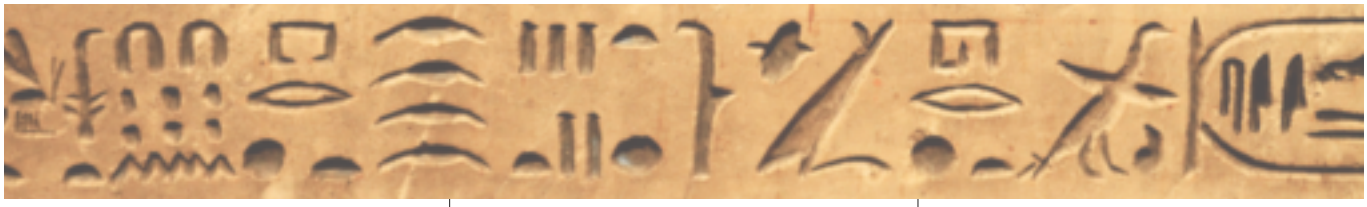
In response to this need, the General Conference has launched the Adventist Professionals' Network (APN)—an electronic global registry of Adventists who hold a college or university degree in any field and have an email address. APN assists Adventist institutions and agencies in locating candidates for positions in areas such as teaching, ministry, health care, management, administration, and research as well as consultants and personnel for mission service.

Once registered, APN members can find job opportunites in Adventist organizations, join one of many Adventist professional associations, and network with thousands of Adventist professionals around the world. Members are protected from solicitations and unwanted mail.

Enter your professional information directly in the APN secure website, free!

http://apn.adventist.org

Encourage other degreed Adventists to join APN and enjoy its many benefits.
For questions and comments on APN, contact us through apn@gc.adventist.org



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of the writing craft across the genres. Numerous books and Internet resources provide specific step-by-step approaches and lessons for picture-guided writing, or teachers can add pictures to writing lessons they have already developed.

Finding images is not difficult. In addition to Internet banks of photographs and illustrations, books, magazines, photographs, television, billboards, even one's own image as reflected in a mirror can be the basis for creative writing.

Pictures Evoke Deep Thinking and Better Writing

A single photograph or drawing can take students through every level of Bloom's taxonomy from basic knowledge about the concrete things they see in the picture to the deeper, more abstract skills of questioning, inferring, synthesizing, and evaluating.

Teachers often ask students to create "word pictures" with their writing. Yet the way writers choose words depends on what they, themselves, see. As Aristotle noted, "The soul can not think without a picture."[10] Unfortunately, if students haven't learned to be visual observers instead of just watchers, they will have nothing to put into words.

When I first learned to read, my basal reader friends Dick, Jane, and Sally advised me to "look" and "see." That advice is just as relevant to writing. When students learn the art of observation through picture-guided writing, they will "look," and "see," and have much more to "write."

A middle-school instructor for more than 20 years who currently teaches 7th and 8th grade at Bowman Hills Seventh-day Adventist School in Cleveland, Tennessee, **Valerie Hunt** *is also a freelance author and illustrator.*

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Guest Editorial *continued from page 3*

portance of "Opening Students' Eyes Through Picture-Guided Writing." She contends that illustrations are the "universal blood donor" that will pump life into the teaching of any genre. The benefits of this type of study are legion, as outlined in the article.

It is our hope and prayer that the readers of this themed issue will see the boundless opportunities for transforming every aspect of reading and writing when students are encouraged to learn under the influence of genre studies. And furthermore, it is our wish that readers discover that their own living and teaching are transformed as a result of "beholding" the experiences of teachers who have shared their journeys.—Krystal Bishop and Valerie Hunt.

Krystal Bishop, Ed.D., *the Coordinator for the special issue of the* JOURNAL, *is a Professor of Education at Southern Adventist University in Collegedale, Tennessee. She conducts a genre study in an elementary classroom and with undergraduate students every year; has done personal narrative, memoir, literary nonfiction, and poetry genre studies in multigrade classrooms; and has made presentations at regional and national conferences on genre studies. The editorial staff expresses appreciation for her assistance in preparing the issue.*

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