PENNSYLVANIA WRITING PROJECT

NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 7   NUMBER 3

SPRING 1987

SOME STATISTICS FROM THE NATIONAL WRITING PROJECT

1984-1985 Summary Information

A. Number of classroom teachers participating in National Writing Project summer and school year programs:

1985 Invitational Summer Institute

Elementary School Teachers	904
Junior High School/Middle School Teachers	502
Senior High School Teachers	733
College Teachers	69
Other (Administrators, Parents)	66
TOTAL:	2,274

1984-1985 School Year Inservice Series Programs

Elementary School Teachers	23,099
Secondary School Teachers	24,753
College Teachers	799
Other	430
TOTAL:	49,081

1984-1985 Additional Programs, Summer & School Year

TOTAL:	34,205

Grand Total Number of Teachers Trained, 1984-1985:	85,560

B. Total Cost per Teacher: $78.54

C. Since the 1984-1985 academic year, BAWP has contributed $532,405 in grants to 51 National Writing Project Sites.

NWP Development

Year	Number of NWP Sites	Teachers Trained
1973-1974	1	25
1974-1975	1	266
1975-1976	3	749
1976-1977	14	3,485
1977-1978	41	5,855
1978-1979	69	13,475
1979-1980	77	29,351
1980-1981	83	41,244
1981-1982	94	70,216
1982-1983	116	69,235
1983-1984	137	65,679
1984-1985	143	85,560
1985-1986	161	Not Yet Tallied
1986-1987	(166)	

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NATIONAL WRITING PROJECT SEEKS SPONSORS: YOU

"I believe the National Writing Project has done more for education than any other single program, person or thing."

"I owe the Project a lot!"

These were the words of two of the teachers who joined the National Writing Project as donor members in NWP's first fund drive last year. If you feel the same way, you can join the donor who wrote, with her check, "I can tell you that I have never given money so willingly or with such gratitude."

The Project accomplished a lot with the money. New sites can now receive $15,000 in matching grants to get started and old sites can receive $5,000 in matching funds if they are severely underfunded.

With donor funds, NWP publishes 31 teacher-written accounts of classroom practices and research, supports evaluation of the project to document the positive impact the project has had on improving student writing and the teaching of writing, and supports a network to link project sites across the nation.

To become part of this effort, write your check for $25 to "UC Regents/National Writing Project," and send it to BAY AREA WRITING PROJECT, School of Education, University of California, Berkeley, CA 94720. Your contribution is tax deductible. Your sponsorship is good through September 30, 1987, and entitles you to receive the NWP QUARTERLY, the only professional publication for inservice teachers on the teaching of writing.

As Don Gallehr, Director of the Northern Virginia Writing Project, said, "The problem of writing ability is not going to disappear no matter how good our site becomes. It will be resolved only when the whole nation puts its energy behind this effort . . . All of us, as supporters of the National Writing Project, are at the forefront of this national effort . . . Our checks for $25 make sure NWP stays around long enough to solve this problem."

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NOTES FROM PAWPERS

James Mann, 1984 PAWPer and reading teacher at the Mitchell School in Philadelphia, recently wrote to the *Newsletter*: "When I wrote my position paper during the 1984 Institute I indicated that I was sold on the process approach to writing. Today as I write, I am amazed at how clearly I was able to expound on the steps of the process, but I still find it difficult to teach others how to implement the teaching of writing . . . Nevertheless I am still optimistic and believe that persistence will produce desirable results."

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We recently heard from Virginia Conover, a 1983 Fellow who teaches in the William Penn School District: "Ever since attending the Pennsylvania Writing Project Institute, I have been convinced more than ever that the writing process is the 'way to go'." Why? See Crow Corner.

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NOTES TO PAWPERS

Opportunities exist for teachers to work for the project. We always need people who will develop PAWP's extension book and article resource library for teacher use, and who will help us keep in touch with teachers and report on what they need or do. The possibility exists for internship pay or credit and of course volunteers are always warmly welcome. If you are considering a sabbatical leave, this opportunity may be of special interest to you. Contact Bob Weiss at the office.

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Please send news about yourself to the Project office. We are interested in what you are doing and what is happening in your lives.

For those Fellows whose accomplishments are especially noteworthy, we would like to write features with accompanying photographs. Let us know what is going on and you will be contacted for details and a 3 x 5 black and white glossy photograph.

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REFLECTIONS

by Lucy Calkins

At a restaurant last June a group of teachers from District 28 became so immersed in their discussion about children's writing for a while they forgot to keep their eyes on the clock. Suddenly it was time to return to school. Motioning to the waitress, they asked for the check.

"It's been taken care of," she said and pointed to a man who was walking out the door. "He paid your bill." The man, a pilot, had left his business card and on it he had a note: "It is so good to see teachers who are sharing their work with such energy and passion."

Ours is a lonely profession. As important as it is for children to collaborate well with each other, it is even more important for teachers to collaborate well with each other. We teach behind closed doors, and ironically, this is especially true when we are unsure about our teaching. If we attempt something new and it doesn't immediately go well, we tend to cover up or give up.

How good it would be if we could feel comfortable asking a colleague to observe our classes in order to help identify the underlying problems in them. How good it would be if there were times and places in which we could regularly share student papers, brainstorming ways to respond to them. How good it would be if schools were places where teachers as well as children learn. Seymour Sarason says it well: "The notion that can create conditions which are vital and alive for children when those same conditions do not exist for teachers has no warrant in the history of mankind."

I do not think that when we began talking about the teaching of writing any of us suspected that the writing workshop would challenge not only the norms of classrooms but also of schools. Although we knew all along the importance of structures which helped children work wisely and well together, we are only recently discovering that the writing workshop can also provide structures which help teachers do the same.

In the Katonah-Lewisburg schools, more than 50 teachers meet in small groups after school to write and share their writing. They also meet for morning "coffees" before school and use this time to reflect together about the teaching of writing. In Half Hollow Hills, a network of 20 teachers meet monthly in Lydia Bellino's home. An equally large network of teachers from P.S. 148 in Queens meet for monthly dinner and study meetings in Laurie Pessah's home. This network has also turned a school closet into a resource room, and begun to meet weekly over lunch. Maxine Rose, a kindergarten teacher in District 29, regularly devotes some of her prep-periods to working with her colleagues in their writing workshops. These teachers go out to dinner together once a month and use that time to discuss their teaching. At Lexington School for the Deaf, there is an understanding that any teacher who attends workshops at Teachers College will tape-record them, and other teachers from the school can sign out the tapes. There are networks, also, in Mamaroneck, Tenafly and Brooklyn.

Other educators often call for advice in starting a network. I am only able to give that advice because I meet weekly with a 'small circle' of educators who are carefully thinking through ways to support ongoing professional development within their own schools and districts. Although our focus has been on the uniqueness of each person's setting, some generalizations about networking have emerged. These are some of them.

—Well intentioned principals sometimes try to establish weekly lunch meetings but when these are imposed from the top, teachers often resent them. The initiation and leadership of a network must come from teachers themselves rather than from an administrator.

—Building principals and other administrators can nevertheless play a crucial role in supporting teacher-initiated networks. For example, it was helpful when Principal Bill Casey gave teachers at P.S. 321 several hundred dollars to spend on food for their meetings. Other principals have allowed networks to meet in their offices or in a room reserved for special occasions. Others have found spaces in the building which could serve as a resource room. Principal Barbara East releases a teacher from her classroom one hour prior to lunch meetings, so that she can set up the food and coffee. Many administrators meet regularly with the network leader.

—In the networks we know best, participating teachers very much want someone to play a leadership role. Participants want to ensure that the meetings are somewhat task-oriented, that they do not become mere social clubs. They want a facilitator who will call the meeting to order, launch the group on activities, and lightly guide the pace and direction of discussions.

—It is probably significant, however, that in each of these networks the leader is uncomfortable with the role of facilitator and especially uncomfortable when colleagues look to her as an expert. "I don't know the answers,"

these leaders tell me, despite the fact that in each instance they have attended years and years of summer institutes.

—An effective way to maintain a leaderless feel in network meetings without sacrificing the pace and productivity is for the group to decide upon predictable timetables and rituals. For example, many networks begin with members sharing recent "learnings." One network begins each month with a teacher sharing tidbits about an author's life, craft and books. In another network, the teachers regularly begin with a few minutes of journal writing, followed by the chance to share these entries in response groups. Sometimes the networks focus on one topic for the entire year; other times they end each meeting by identifying a concern which will become the focus of their next meeting.

—Finally, we sometimes suspect the two most crucial ingredients in a network are laughter and food.

These are exciting times in the teaching of writing. Ideas are fermenting, clusters of teachers are talking together, and somewhere, there is a pilot who cares enough about teaching to treat us to lunch.

Lucy Calkins directs the Teachers College Writing Project at Columbia University.

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Cecelia Evans, 1981 Fellow and editor of this newsletter, was appointed Chapter I Reading Coordinator in the Philadelphia School District #I.

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Virginia Conover, 1983 Fellow and English teacher in the William Penn School District wrote that her school's literary magazine, "Pen and Parchment" received a rank of "excellent" from the National Council of Teachers of English.

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BEATING THE "WRITING SYSTEMS" ON OUR OWN GROUND
by Mary K. Healy

Four years ago when I was still planning the inservice component of the Bay Area Writing Project I wouldn't have written what is to follow. Arguing against the central premises of commercial "writing systems" inservice programs would have seemed beside the point then, a leaching away of emphasis from the central task confronting the Writing Project—that of encouraging as many teachers as possible to examine their own writing processes and to share with each other their successful strategies for encouraging students to develop as thoughtful writers in a variety of situations.

But now, in late 1986, I feel we can no longer ignore the pernicious effects that simplistic approaches to the teaching of writing, packaged as systems and implemented by schools and districts through a series of "training sessions," have had on the profession as a whole and on the work of teachers in the Writing Project in particular.

These simplistic approaches to teaching writing go by many different names; for efficiency I'll refer to them as Generic Writing Systems. Some of these systems are found nation-wide; others are the creations of local entrepreneurs. All share a particularly dangerous characteristic: a total focus on training teachers to teach the construction of particular forms of texts, with careful attention to prescribed and unvarying steps in the creation of such texts, regardless of the classroom context.

In this article I will discuss the characteristics of these Writing Systems as they relate to classroom instruction, evaluation of teachers, and school and district writing assessment. I will then compare the work of Writing Projects with that of "Writing Systems." Finally, I will suggest a method for "beating the systems" which builds on the work already being done around the country by teachers in classroom-based research.

"Writing Systems": The Situation in the Schools

Part of the unsung daily battle of thoughtful writing teachers is dodging the proffered systems for teaching writing which district officials, nervous in the face of growing demands for accountability for literacy, seem intent on bestowing, many times unasked, on writing teachers at all levels. These systems are created with widely varying degrees of thoughtfulness, then packaged and marketed with widely varying degrees of hype, ranging from pitches so lurid as to make a TV used car salesman blanch to understated academic appeals which hint at Ivy League acceptances for those students who, by zealously mastering the system, can develop their writing abilities on an heroic scale. It is important to note that support and justification for the approach taken by the system is rarely, if ever, sought through the publication of articles inviting response in the pages of professional journals. Instead, these systems usually are developed by educational *entrepreneurs* who know just enough about schools to make themselves credible to both administrators and teachers, yet are not at all interested in offering their particular system for professional scrutiny, debate, and verification. Instead, these entrepreneurs are acutely responsive to the general public's cry for instruction in standard English at any cost and for increased amounts of skill-through-drill methodology and use this generalized clamor as the basic rationale for their system.

Once this professionally unverified system is named and packaged, then the system-monger begins door to door work. In the case of schools, the entrepreneur's first choice of door is *not* that of a classroom where a teacher might be encountered. Instead, it's a door "downtown," usually that of the superintendent or the curriculum administrator. The pitch is simple: "Want to raise scores on the QRP writing test? I've got the way to do it. And let me tell you, did this method ever raise the scores in X district! And I'm here to show you how your district can do the same thing."

These systems are not new phenomena. During the years that I was setting up the inservice series offered by the Bay Area Writing Project, our office would get many phone calls from school district administrators or curriculum people like the following: "Last year our teachers had five one hour inservice sessions with Generic Writing System and they really liked it. But we're trying to raise our test scores in writing and need some more inservice. How is your project different from Generic, or are they the same thing?"

On the surface, this is a perfectly reasonable question for a busy school administrator to ask. But in the beginning I had to bite my tongue not to say in a tone of tortured indignation, "Our project like Generic!!! How can you even think that? The Generic Writing System is based on a

simple-minded, narrow conception of how human beings develop as writers. The system bears no relationship to how anything worthwhile in the world gets written. Generic is formulaic, constricting, and based on false premises about how students develop writing ability. It's like confusing veneer for solid wood. Generic substitutes the superficial arranging of words into a familiar shape for any kind of teasing out of meaning. Generic is not interested in that mind at work making meaning; it's interested in forcing the student to get enough language on a page in a certain pre-determined pattern so that end result may be designated a "composition." And the formula which produced that piece of text can be called up at any time; it's context-free."

However, at that time, I said nothing of the kind. Instead, I generally replied, "Well, the Writing Project is quite different from Generic, actually. Our program involves teachers in exploring the writing approaches demonstrated by our Teacher/Consultants and then applying what they learned from this experience to their own classrooms and student populations." I would then go on to discuss the specifics of the requested inservice, never mentioning Generic again. Somehow, then, it seemed bad form to criticize another's program, no matter how simplistic it seemed. I was intent then on coexisting with other efforts to encourage writing in schools, especially after the long drought in the 50's and 60's when most of the attention in inservice was focused on the teaching of reading.

But I feel quite differently now. For the past three years I've been involved with the preservice component of the Project's work and have come to look at schools from a different angle. I spend a great deal of time in classrooms and in teachers' workrooms in schools during the day now, and I am getting quite concerned about the powerlessness of even the best teachers to combat all the "systems," designed both for pedagogical approaches and for teacher evaluation, imposed on them, usually without consultation, by district and site administrators eager to comply with the perceived public need for increasing amounts of accountability. In elementary schools especially, this accountability often takes the form of check-off systems to monitor students' acquisition of discrete language skills. This type of evaluation follows neatly from the simplistic approach of Writing Systems. Becoming literate, seen through the focus of the System's approach, is indeed a step-by-step progression through a predetermined hierarchy of exercises, divorced from the context of the classroom and the children's lives outside school.

Connections Between "Writing Systems" and Assessment

Lately, I'm seeing more clearly the connections between the types of assessment chosen by the district and the types of inservice programs they select to help them achieve their goals for developing writing ability. For in order to choose an assessment program for a school or district, an administrator must attempt to understand the theory of knowledge in a given field behind the testing program. And, because many administrators are not subject-matter experts, they look to the inservice programs in their districts as ways to explore what it means to learn in a certain area. It follows, then, that if the inservice programs in writing are "quick fix" systems designed to train teachers in a given formula for teaching a certain type of writing, then there is a strong chance that, for expediency's sake if for no other reason, the testing program chosen by the administrator will follow in some way the pattern of the system. And when this is the case, the teacher will be denied the opportunity to raise questions about what it means, intellectually and emotionally, for students of a certain age and developmental level to write anything of meaning to

themselves and others. And surely we have learned through all the research of the last fifteen years that inservice must involve teacher decision-making and, further, that inservice and assessment must flow out of a *larger*, more grounded conception of what we are doing when we teach writing.

Connections Between "Writing Systems and Instruction

One of the additional dangers of using a formulaic Writing System is that it centers the teacher's attention on the *system* to be presented—the mechanics and the sequence of it—and not on the learner's attempt to write something with personal meaning. The mechanics of such systems can be initially tantalizing. They present an orderly progression of exercises, and they usually build in attention to some of the clinical teaching directives for modelling and guided practice. They give teachers plenty to do in the classroom—run off materials, then work step-by-step through the packets with sutdents, emphasizing completion of set tasks. Their very efficiency makes it almost impossible for a teacher to adequately follow the directions of the system *and* still have time to look at individual students' interests and needs.

In addition to focusing teachers' attention on *managing* the system, formulaic writing systems implicitly teach teachers as well as students that there *is* a form—say a composition with a certain number of paragraphs—which can be used in almost any situation as long as the key ingredient—most usually a thesis sentence or topic sentence—is present. If the teacher has had little recent knowledge of the research in composition and little recent experience of personal writing, then the writing systems' message seems to make sense. Thus teachers are placed in the position of learning about a subject area from sources which the profession at large would decry.

The Difference Between a "Writing System" and a Writing Project

The most striking difference lies in the view of the teacher inherent in the approach. The "Writing System" begins, in effect, with a *finished* product—a carefully delineated incremental program by which a composition can be reconstructed. The training session for the system takes teachers through the program, usually accompanied by printed materials to be used by students. These writing systems are very tidy and reassuring; their message to teachers is—we know you're busy. We know you haven't had much course work in teaching writing. And we know you have to teach your students to write so they can be successful in passing the district and state competency tests. Therefore we have worked out a system for you. We'll explain the steps and practice them here. Then all you will have to do in your classroom is use our materials and correct the papers according to the criteria we have set up.

Implicit in this message is a patronizing and debilitating view of what a teacher is and does. The teacher is seen as a manager or as an orchestrator of others' curriculum, not as a thoughtful professional, continually designing lessons to meet current needs. Missing entirely from this picture is the context of the classroom itself—the students in all their individuality of temperament and development and the teachers with all their prior knowledge and experience. Missing is the interplay between a lesson and a specific classroom situation, the one growing out of the other, responsive to it and to all the unpredictable responses which a given lesson evokes. The very art and craft of teaching is lodged in that interplay. And there is no room for it in the delineated series of activities characteristic of a Generic Writing System. Finally, so much of the student writing produced in response to these generic methods is

virtually pointless—no voice is heard in this writing, no mind-at-work revealed, no realistic human purpose behind it (unless the purpose is limited to fulfilling the required assignment).

The Writing Projects (and here I'm not speaking only of the National Writing Project but also of all the other programs—Breadloaf, Vermont, Iowa, etc.—which put the *teacher*, not a *method*, at the center of what they do) are very different. They begin with a teacher, an individual teaching writing in a particular situation. And they base their activities on discovering what these individuals do, both in their classrooms and in their own writing. Out of this sharing of processes and methods comes debate and further investigation; current research is brought in to be discussed and evaluated. Out of all this activity comes the beginning of synthesis, but it's more an individual synthesis and a tentative one too, subject to the trial of classrooms and further writing experience and to continued conversations and experimentation with colleagues who are interested in similar questions of pedagogy and craft.

The Research Basis

We've now had a solid fifteen or more years of research on the development of writing abilities. While it is premature to say that there is agreement on "best approaches," certain principles about the teaching of writing have been acknowledged by most researchers in the field. The importance of the responsive context in which one writes, the differences in students' composing processes, the primary role the students' intentions play in their selections of topics and their satisfactory completion of papers, the importance of teacher intervention during the writing process, the relative efficacy of teachers' responses to writing: praise for what has been achieved instead of correction of errors only—all of these factors have been determined as instrumental in developing writing ability and are continually discussed at conferences and in journals and research reports.

Most of these considerations are missing from the Generic Writing Systems, which are presented as a collection of context-free exercises, freely adaptable to a range of developmental levels *and* purposes. More specifically, the following concepts about developing writing ability are generally *missing* in Generic Writing Systems:

1. That writing anything with genuine involvement and commitment is a result of engagement with an idea and a desire to make sense of it oneself and, usually, communicate it to an audience.

2. That the ability to write develops gradually over time in individuals and is an outgrowth of their involvement in other forms of verbal activity: speaking, reading, listening.

3. That, in particular, the interplay between reading and writing, between how others have searched for meaning to make sense of the world and how one proposes to do it oneself, is absolutely crucial to helping students develop the ability to write thoughtfully and originally. This movement back and forth between reading and writing is generally missing in writing systems. No teacher who has had to wade through several class sets of correctly *structured* paragraphs of empty platitudes about nuclear war or the abortion issue, written with no recourse to what has been already exhaustively written or spoken on those issues, can fail to see the limits of the Generic Writing System.

4. That individuals develop highly idiosyncratic writing processes, i.e. some students need solitude to write, others can write in front of the blaring TV or when wearing stereo earphones. Some writers need ongoing interaction with a response partner ("How does this sound now? Is it better?") and others don't want to come near any kind of audience until they're thoroughly satisfied themselves.

Beating the "Writing Systems": A Different Type of Teacher Research.

Most professions hold their members responsible and accountable for their actions. In addition to quality control *within* professions, agencies of the local and federal government, such as the Better Business Bureau and the Federal Drug Administration, have as their charge the protection of citizens from unsafe and unscrupulous services or products. To date, there is no equivalent of the FDA either within or without the educational community. Our only means of bestowing methodological "seals of approval" or their reverse comes from either the dialogue carried out in professional journals or from what is taught in universities and colleges. To date, the "Writing Systems" have slipped through the cracks; neither journals nor courses have focused critically on the systems' faulty premises in ways to significantly stem their proliferation.

I believe that Writing Projects are ideally suited to fill this critical void. Since their beginnings, most Writing Projects have been encouraging their teachers to become involved in investigating questions of interest to them through classroom-based studies. The NWP publishes a series of monographs of this teacher research, and other programs, especially the Breadloaf Writing Program, have research requirements as an integral part of what they do. Most of these investigations have focused on questions arising from the teachers' own writing or from their classroom practice. And this is how it should be, given the nature of the teaching day and the relatively little time teachers have for this research. So many questions continue to arise about teaching writing that teachers' first responsibility is to investigate their own contexts—the interplay between their students' development and their own teaching methods.

However, I would like to suggest an additional area for investigation, that of researching the assumptions and methodology of the more prevalent Writing Systems currently being promoted and comparing what is discovered about the system in question with the research literature currently available. This type of research and analysis lends itself to teamwork among teachers and also to important collaboration between practicing teachers and their university researcher colleagues. I envision a research program of this type to include the following stages:

1. *Involvement:* Once the Writing System has been identified, the team of teachers and researchers would attend and participate in the system's training sessions, noting all aspects of the writing process discussed. The team would meet between sessions to discuss the implications of the events of the training session. They would be attempting to outline the assumptions on which the Writing System was based, as evidenced by what the trainer said and did, by the materials presented, and by the activities demonstrated and suggested for classroom implementation.

2. *Investigation:* Once the training session was complete, the team would then begin by coming to agreement on the central premises of the Writing System presented. Then they would investigate the research literature in the field of written composition, looking particularly for studies which relate to the premises underlying the training they had just undergone. Once they were convinced they had accumulated enough material, they would assign members to write short pieces discussing the implications of specific premises of the training system in relation to what has been established in the field.

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3. *Publication:* The end product of their activity would be to answer the question: Are the premises of the Writing System in congruence with current research and thinking in the field of written composition? The finished papers discussing these issues would be made available to the Writing System's trainers, and to the professional community at large through publication in monographs or professional journals.

Such collaborative investigations could accomplish several important goals. First, they would encourage increased classroom practitioner-university researcher partnerships. Each participant would bring different skills to the investigation and the resulting discussion would be mutually enriching. Second, such collaboration would encourage classroom teachers to take a positive rather than a negative role in determining both the premises on which they will be evaluated as teachers and how their students' writing ability will be assessed. At present, many thoughtful teachers only have recourse to complaint and covert resistance when yet another system is imposed on them. Third, published investigations of this kind could be regulatory models for the profession. The published research would serve as fair warning to educational entrepreneurs that when they attempt to sell teaching and training systems to schools they will be subjected to the same kind of rigorous scrutiny that any new product destined for human consumption receives.

Mary K. Healy is a Co-Director of the Bay Area Writing Project, University of California, Berkeley. She is also Co-Editor of the NCTE journal English Education.

<p style="text-align:center">★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★</p>

FROM THE NATION'S REPORT CARD: NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress)

Teachers of all subject areas must require clear, effective writing from all students. Students should be asked to think about the information, organize their thoughts, and present their messages coherently.

RECENT NAEP DATA TELL US THAT:

1. Most students at grades 4, 8, and 11 can do *minimal* quality work in writing.
   This reflects legitimate accomplishment by America's teachers during the last 50 years.
2. Some can do adequate work in writing, but only on simple tasks that require little organization and elaboration.
3. Very few can write well.
4. Teachers' classroom practices make a difference.

IN 1987, NEW GOALS IN WRITING MUST BE SET IF HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES ARE TO BE ABLE TO MANAGE THEIR LIVES — AND OUR SOCIETY — SUCCESSFULLY.

FINDINGS of the most recent writing assessment show that:

- 80 percent perform at least *minimally* on *informative* writing tasks.
- Only 20-25 percent can write *analytically* (explaining, supporting, comparing, and contrasting).

SUGGESTION: Stress the development of higher-order thinking skills in all areas of the curriculum. Help students develop strategies for thinking about what they write. Respond to the ways in which they organize and present their ideas.

FINDINGS:

- 66 percent of 11th graders perform at least *minimally* on *persuasive* writing tasks.
- Fewer than 30 percent can write *adequate persuasive* papers.

SUGGESTION: Provide many opportunities for students to offer advice, convince others of their point of view, defend their opinions, or argue for a particular course of action.

FINDINGS:

- Most students at all ages perform at least *minimally* on *imaginative* writing tasks.
- Only 18 percent of 11th graders can write *adequate imaginative* pieces (and they do less imaginative writing in the upper grades).

SUGGESTION: Encourage and assign imaginative writing experiences. Ask students to apply their knowledge to new situations in various content areas; e.g., in science, use what they know about human systems to imagine the world of the future. Build upon the vivid imaginations students bring to the early grades.

FINDINGS:

- Black and Hispanic students perform substantially below their White classmates.
- This situation remains constant at all three grade levels.

SUGGESTION: Implement special programs in writing for groups of students with special needs. The focus should be on the coherent presentation of organized ideas about thought-provoking topics.

FINDINGS:

- Better readers are better writers.
- Students with reading materials available in the home write better.
- Students who do homework regularly write better.

SUGGESTION: Encourage reading in the home by all members of the household. Assign written homework regularly.

FINDINGS:

- Attitudes toward writing deteriorate as students move through school.
- Students with positive attitudes write better.

SUGGESTION: Show enthusiasm for the value of writing. Encourage and support student efforts. Provide positive feedback on student papers. React to student ideas, so they know you are reading and responding . . . not just "correcting" their papers.

FINDINGS:

- Students who use writing strategies — planning, revising, editing — write better.
- Only about one-half of students do.

SUGGESTION: Teach writing strategies in depth. Ask students to practice using them on their own to gain control of their written products.

FINDINGS:

- Writing across the curriculum and process-oriented activities are being incorporated into instructional programs across the country.
- Students merely exposed to this instruction do not write better.

SUGGESTION: Process instruction should be accompanied by numerous and rigorous writing assignments. Students must learn to manage what and how they write. Teachers and students need to focus on the clarity of the message.

FINDINGS:

- Students report that teachers comment more frequently on mechanics — spelling, punctuation, and grammar — than they do on ideas and how to express them.

- Students tend to change or fix smaller units of their papers rather than make substantial revisions.

SUGGESTION: Stress — in positive ways — the importance of the content of writing and the quality of the thinking behind it. Give meaningful assignments. Discuss quality and clarity of ideas with students.

SOME OVERALL IMPRESSIONS:

Although home environment continues to be important . . .

Teachers are the most important agents for the improvement of writing — especially at the upper grades.

Negative comments — a focus on errors — will elicit *negative* attitudes about writing.

Teacher emphasis on *mechanics* will generate major attention on *mechanics,* not ideas.

Effective instruction and rigorous practice on using *writing strategies* will help students write better.

Writing lengthy, logical papers *across the curriculum* about the content students are learning will underline the importance of writing.

Enthusiastic reaction to good writing and consistent exposure to examples of good writing will help students value the skill and approach the task with a positive attitude.

News from THE NATION'S REPORT CARD

NAEP will follow this *Writing Report Card* with a special study of writing mechanics used by students in the 1983-84 assessment.

This winter, NAEP will produce an overview of what has been learned from its recent reading, writing, and literacy studies, complete with recommendations for educators and policymakers.

The 1985-86 assessment results in mathematics, reading, computer competence, and science are next on the slate, with reports of those surveys scheduled to appear serially beginning in the fall of 1987.

Preparations are under way to assess students' knowledge in reading, writing, citizenship, and U.S. history during the 1987-88 school year. Objectives booklets for those assessments will also appear beginning in the summer of 1987.

NAEP's technical report on the scaling and technological underpinnings of the current design will be published early in 1987. Please contact our staff for further information regarding these and other materials pertinent to your interests.

A full discussion of the data along with supporting charts may be found in the WRITING REPORT CARD available from NAEP, CN 6710, Princeton, New Jersey 08541-6710. 1-800-223-0267.

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> Nothing goes by luck in composition. It allows of no tricks. The best you can write will be the best you are.
>
> —*Thoreau*

RECIPE FOR A STUDENT WRITERS' WORKSHOP

by Joseph Tortorelli

On March 2, 3, and 4, 1987, we conducted a Young Writers' Workshop for our students at Academy Park High School in Sharon Hill. We used our visiting author program as a vehicle for conducting and financing the workshops. Here is a recipe for a successful workshop:

Ingredients:

1. Dedicated members of the Language Arts Department (at least two)
2. A cooperative, flexible principal and faculty
3. Student writers
4. An aspiring writer who is willing to work for practically nothing

Procedures:

1. Inform your supervisors that you are having a three day writers' workshop during school. Explain that you will need their permission to excuse students from classes for them to attend.

2. Coordinate with the librarian use of a section of the library for the workshops. (I like the library because it is a good setting.)

3. Find an aspiring writer who likes young people and is willing to conduct double period workshops for groups of student writers. (There should be no more than fifteen students per group.)

4. Prepare an application for students to complete. You may use these questions:
   Why do you like to write?
   What kind of writing do you like to do?
   What do you hope to gain as a result of attending the workshop?
   Remember to request necessary roster info for scheduling.

5. Be sure to have students attach to the application a draft of their writing that they are willing to share.

6. Have your colleagues distribute the applications in English class. Remember to set a deadline.

7. Once you have collected the applications and attached drafts, you may either screen the applicants or accept everyone depending on the response. (We accepted the ninety students who applied.)

8. Working with the schools' bell schedules, assign applicants to non-conflicting workshop times. (Be careful! This part is tricky.)

9. Plan on briefly excusing the whole group of writers for an organizational meeting, as well as opening and closing remarks by the visiting writer. (Keep those meetings short — ten to fifteen minutes).

10. Reproduce the submitted drafts so that workshop members have copies of one another's writings. Include a piece by the visiting author. Distribute the packets in folders at the organizational meeting.

11. Prepare for distribution, to the faculty for attendance purposes, lists of students attending the workshops.

12. Distribute through the English teachers congratulatory letters of acceptance with specific general meeting and workshop times to the applicants.

13. Recruit faculty members to monitor the workshops. (Don't mention coverage! Ask if they'd like to sit in.)

14. Once the workshops are complete, distribute Certificates to all participants and extend them an opportunity to publish.

15. Breathe a sigh of relief when all is finished.

The result is a group of students who have identified themselves as writers and who have benefited from the intimate contact with an author.

Joseph A. Tortorelli, who teaches at Academy Park High School in the Southeast Delco School District, was a PAWP Fellow in 1983.

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FREEWRITING
by Patricia A. Kopack

Freewriting seems simple enough—the rules are few. Pick up a pencil and write continually about anything you wish for 10 minutes. Don't put that pencil down!

I've never tried this technique to get words down on paper, to free the mind of mundane commas and nonsensical nothings that mix me up when I'm trying to focus. Don't stop—keep writing! I know that this should be a finished piece—a summary of freewriting, but I'm really trying to follow the basic rule and not stop writing. I like this. I don't feel encumbered and I can see the possibilities in my churning out some good bits and chunks that could be used in a finished piece. Freewriting does just that. It frees the mind yet, redundantly, since I can't stop, I'm really not free. I'm constantly focusing on not being free.

Frantically, without much effort, I'm sticking to the topic. I'm writing and it feels good. I'm saying something too. Freewriting is helping me. Wow! Look at all I've written so far about freewriting and I've really just begun. I don't care if I miss a capital here and there or if I misspell a word because this is freewriting—my writing—just for me.

I know that I need a lot of practice writing. The more I write, the better writer I will become but so many times it's so hard to get started and wow—look—I've written almost three pages and I've really not begun to tell about the merits of freewriting.

I'm a writer who is always in control, revising constantly in midsyllable but in my heart I know that I've lost the vividness that my raw material contained. I sacrificed my creativity and lost the power—the boost—by trying to be perfect grammatically. Every noun has to agree with every verb—that's right but somehow my powerful verbs were brushed over with "izzys and wazzys". They're a lot easier than words that might embarrass me and actually let my audience know how I feel. I'm not ready to share all that's in me. It's risky. They might not accept me out there. It's easier to conform—so what if my writing is boring. The prof will accept it. I'll probably get a "B". What do I need an "A" for? UH OH! I just ended a sentence with a preposition but who cares because remember this is my writing.

I'm shrinking. I don't want to write any more. My arm is moving so rapidly that it's frightening. I want desperately to stop and rehash and cross out and deny myself the luxury of this constant flow—this never-ending carousel ride. Now I know how a river feels—it's constantly moving over rocks through valleys carving out its own identity. Boy—that sounded like a good chunk. Don't stop—don't reflect. I might lose it. I'm starting to feel powerless, like my pencil has taken over my personality and I have no control. Why doesn't my brain stop spitting out this rush of words uninhibited by codes of writing? Can this possibly help me to become a better writer? I can't wait to stop so that I can read what I've written. I must have at least one good idea in all of this gush. Will I be able to find it and elaborate on it to make my point.

Wait! I've already made my point. I've tried something new. I've taken a chance on freewriting. It's a start—an adventure in writing. I want to share this exhilaration with my students. I want them to ride the carousel and flow with the river and feel the power of their own ideas. Freewriting is an all-win situation. As long as my students keep writing they can't go "wronging"! What a way to end, but ten minutes are now . . .

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

I tried the technique of freewriting to summarize Peter Elbow's chapter in "Writing with Power". I know that this technique does not yield good writing in the short run, but I was fascinated to try it.

Patricia Kopack, who teaches third grade at the Penn Valley School in Bucks County, participated in last summer's PAWP course on writing in the content areas.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

WRITING IS GOOD FOR YOU!

In a five-day study of 50 adults, psychologists James Pennebaker and Janice Kiecolt-Glaser told half the subjects to write down their feelings on disturbing life events, and the other half to write about superficial topics. People who bared all on paper showed *strikingly improved immune functions* based on blood tests. Six weeks later, the diary writers maintained their raised immune functions, while the others showed no difference at all.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

SCARLETT AND THE SKEPTIC
by Margaret Hougland

In the fall of 1985, I was transferred to a new school. As in my previous school, I would be teaching the intermediate special education class. My students would be third through fifth graders with learning disabilities or mild retardation.

I began the school year full of hope, excitement, and anticipation. I was eager to meet my new students and put into practice the things I had learned during the summer at the National Capital Area Writing Project.

I had decided to pattern my writing class after the writer's workshop described in *Writing: Teachers & Children at Work* by Donald Graves.

After two weeks of school I was ready to begin. By then I knew my students well enough that I was not surprised at their initial reaction to the writing program.

"I can't write."

"I can't spell."

I tried to sound convincing when I assured them that they could write.

"Yeh, but even if I can write I won't know it cause I can't read."

"Don't worry about it. You'll be able to do this. Trust me."

If they had only known just how uncertain I was that this "experiment" would work, I might have ended up with more than one skeptic.

The first lesson went very well. Everyone made a list of topics and began their first piece of writing. Everyone had something to share. Everyone except The Skeptic. She spent the entire period glaring at me because I wouldn't tell her how to spell words for her rough draft.

I assured myself that there was no problem. It was the first day. She would come around. I was confident the class had been a success.

I was less confident when confronted by The Skeptic's mother shortly after school that very day. Mother had come in to "find out for myself just what kind of teacher wouldn't tell my daughter how to spell words."

Clutching my copy of Graves' book in both hands I tried to explain just what kind of teacher I was and assure her I knew what I was doing. (My thoughts about Mr. Graves were less than charitable that day. After all, he had mentioned some opposition but he never said it would come on the first day.)

The next day and the next my students continued to write and share and write some more. All but The Skeptic. At the beginning of each writing period, she would begin to scowl and maintain it throughout the class period.

I assumed she would begin to write once she'd watched the others go through the process. Surely when she realized that spelling help was available during the editing step she would do as the others had done and jot down her ideas in letters or pictures.

I was wrong. Even after watching the others she refused to make pictures or symbols or write anything on the paper she couldn't spell. I started watching her out of the corner of my eye. At least she was only glaring and scowling when she knew I was watching her.

I could tolerate those looks but on the days she punctuated her scowl with silent tears slowly rolling down her cheeks, I wanted to kick myself for being such a mean and heartless monster.

Her tears aggravated my guilty conscience and would stir up the internal argument I was having about my decision not to give her the spelling of words. She'd cry and I'd hear an inner voice say, "What are you doing anyway? She's right. You aren't being fair. You know she only knows how to spell a dozen or so words. Why don't you just tell her the words? She's in the third grade. She knows that words have correct spellings. No matter how many times you tell her not to worry about spelling she still worries herself to death over it. What kind of monster are you?"

And the monster would argue, "But I can't start telling her the words. If I do I'll just prove that she was right. I'd be telling her that writing is spelling and if she can't spell she can't write. With her learning disability she may never be a great speller but she can write her ideas. I can't let her think she can't write. There are already too many things she thinks she can't do."

I realized I needed to deal with my doubts not only about her but the concerns developing about my other students. I was having a difficult time assessing their progress at all. It was becoming increasingly difficult to resist the teacher reflex to jump in and tell them how to fix their writing.

At the next writing workshop, I wrote not a story but a list of my worries. "T. keeps writing the same story and just changes the names of the characters. F. writes a beginning and a middle but never ends her stories. R. connects every sentence with *then*." When I was finished, every student was on the list.

Was this method really working? They were writing but was their writing getting any better? Except for mechanical changes the rough drafts were almost identical to the final drafts. Where was the revision?

I put the list in a drawer. I was determined to give the program one more week. I titled the paper Scarlett's List. I promised myself I'd be like Scarlett O'Hara and not think about it today.

I worried anyway.

Surprisingly, at the end of the week I discovered that some of the items on my Scarlett List were no longer worries. I had discovered that though the children were not revising between the rough draft and the final draft, they were incorporating the suggestions of the response group into their next stories.

I was relieved as I crossed off some of the worries. I kept the rest, added some more and shut the drawer on the updated list for another week. The following week the same thing happened. Several of my worries had disappeared.

Scarlett's List kept me from pushing the children too hard or telling them how to write. It also served as a reminder of just how long The Skeptic had been on the list.

How long was I going to let this go on? I consoled myself that S. enjoyed the response groups and only looked unhappy when she knew I was watching her. She seemed happy the rest of the day. I began to wonder if the entire situation had just deteriorated into a battle of wills between two stubborn people.

Luckily for my conscience, S. finally solved HER problem of my refusal to tell her how to spell words. One day she pulled out a little scrap of paper. On the paper was written the words "grow," "grade," and "school". She wrote that entire class period. The next day she wrote more and I heard her tell the others, "I'm writing a long story, a real long story."

On the third day she asked to share the following story:

THE DAY IN SCHOOL

I like school. It is very very very very very very fun. It is fun real real real real real real fun. [Then she drew a picture to represent the sentence "Mrs. S. is nice."] and I and I and I and I and I and I [these two words were repeated 43 times] and I grow and I grow and I grow and I grow and I grow and I grow and I grow and I grow and I grow and I grow and I grow and I grow and I got into 3rd grade. The end.

She shared her work and to make certain I had understood her story explained that "Mrs. S. is the teacher I had before I had to have you." Obviously she understood that writing was used to convey a message.

Although no one mentioned the meaningless repetition of *and I* she eliminated them in her final draft. She drew a picture of herself growing and one of herself in the third grade and made a book of her story.

I no longer had on my Scarlett List "S. still refuses to write. Cries at times."

It had taken six weeks.

After her school story she wrote many other stories but but the issue of spelling was not resolved. She felt very uncomfortable experimenting with spelling and would use only the words she knew or those she could find in books. I pretended not to hear her ask the other children how to spell words. Of course, I didn't know why she was asking me to spell words during math class.

Scarlett's List then contained the entry "S. is very concerned with writing long stories. She repeats words to increase the length of the piece." Thanks to Scarlett's List I resisted my impulse to tell her to leave out the extra words.

By Christmas she wrote her first story without the meaningless repetitions.

CHRISTMAS

I like Christmas. It's time for toys. I like and you like to play with friends and it's time for fun and I hope I will meet Santa Clauas.

She satisfied her need for a long story by writing each sentence on a page and drawing a picture for each sentence.

"I have a long pages story."

For two months she concentrated on length sometimes putting only one word on a page so her books had many pages. But during that time she also began to experiment with the kinds of things she was writing. She wrote a game book with dot-to-dot pictures and mazes and written directions. She wrote a play and got her response group to act it out. She wrote several books by teaming up with other classmates and working together.

I quit worrying about her obsession with length as she began to concentrate on making her message understood. She was writing more detail and explaining less in response group.

Gradually her need to spell everything correctly on the rough draft began to diminish. She started using beginning letters to represent words but continued to apologize to the group for her lack of spelling ability.

In March she made wordless picture books that were so detailed and specific that no words were needed. She bragged, "I don't need to spell to make stories." Scarlett's List soon read "S. still won't use words. What if she never tries them again? Do I insist?"

By that time experience should have told me not to worry. I did anyway, needlessly. After several picture books, she began to make drawings and add words as captions or as conversation inside bubbles over the characters' heads.

By May she was off Scarlett's List. She was experimenting freely. She would have preferred to know but not knowing how to spell a word no longer kept her from using it.

This year S. and Scarlett's List are back in my classroom and both are doing well. I often think back and ask myself if I did the right thing. One side of me says that six weeks is too long a time for any child to be unhappy, even if for only one period a day. The other side of me realizes it turned out well and that she enjoys writing and is confident as a writer.

Last week I gave the class an assignment. S. held up her hand as she said "I want to know about spelling."

I held my breath, waiting, hoping. Please. No. Not again this year!

"What I want to know is — Is this the paper that you hafta spell right or can you just say what you gotta say and spell later?"

Maybe six weeks isn't too long if you learn that when you write "you say what you gotta say."

Margaret Hougland, an elementary special education teacher in Charles County, MD, is a teacher-consultant with the National Capital Area Writing Project in Washington, D.C. In 1986 she was recognized by her county as Exemplary Teacher.

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THE WRITER'S PROBLEM

A writer's problem does not change. He himself changes and the world he lives in changes but his problem remains the same. It is always how to write truly and, having found what is true, to project it in such a way that it becomes a part of the experience of the person who reads it.

— Ernest Hemingway

* * * * * *

Victor Borge has an imaginative solution to some problems surrounding the formation of plurals. Borge tells a story about a woman friend of his who's a Portugoose— well, she and her husband are Portuguese. Actually, he used to be a Portugander.

WRITINGS FROM PHILADELPHIA SCHOOLS

Many writing programs in the Philadelphia School District have been influenced by Fellows and disciples of the Pennsylvania Writing Project.

The following pieces were collected from District I schools by Mary Ellen Costello, District I Reading/English Language Arts Supervisor and Co-Director of the 1984 Pennsylvania Writing Project's Philadelphia Institute, and by Cecelia Evans, District I Chapter I Reading Coordinator, Co-Director of the 1982 PAWP Philadelphia Institute, and editor of the *Newsletter*.

SPRING TIME

Spring is nice.
Not like the ice.
Ice is cold.
But, the sun is hot.
And the sunshines in the spring.
The spring sun is warm and nice.
The flowers bloom and green grass grows.
Birds come out in the spring.
All nature comes alive.
Spring is nice.
Twice as nice as Winter!!

> Nicole Walker
> Alain L. Locke
> Elementary School
> Mrs. D. Witherspoon,
> Teacher

* * * * * *

SPRING

I like it, do you?
It's summer, it's fall
It's winter combined.
I like it, do you?
In the day it's almost
As hot as summer itself
And in evening it's just like
An autumn wind.
In the night it's almost
as cold as winter.
I like Spring, do you?

> Raymond D. Murphy
> Grade 2
> Samuel Powel School
> Rhoda Kanevsky,
> Teacher

* * * * * *

BLACK IS BEAUTIFUL

Black is:
  Beautiful!
  Knowledge beyond knowledge.
A future of brotherly love.
  Caring for each other;
Giving all you can to those who need it.
  Opening up the doorway to freedom,
Pride, and respect for yourself.
  Caring enough to admit your mistakes.
Feeling sorrow for those who oppose you
  for the color of your skin
And the kindness of your heart.

> Yvette Jordan
> Grade 9
> Sayre Jr. High School
> Mrs. Gudnitz, Teacher

* * * * * *

A VIOLENT BUT QUIET AMERICA

America—peacefully quiet
  No one around to cause a riot?

Awake! Awake! Listen to the
  Noise and distraction,
    Fighting, killing,
  And much blood spilling.

Stop and listen, America,
  To that part of you that's so peacefully
    Quiet
  With never a sound, America, listen
    And calm us down
  So that we can have
    Peace forever . . .
    and joy.

<div style="text-align:right">

Robyn Williams
Grade 9
Sayre Jr. High School
Mrs. Gudnitz, Teacher

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* * * * * *

AN INTERVIEW WITH EARLE PHILLIPS

Q: What is your hobby?
A: I like writing poetry.

Q: At what age did you begin writing?
A: I was 4 years old.

Q: Do you remember your first poem?
A: No, but I know it was a beauty.

Q: Did you write it for someone special?
A: Yes, how did you know? It was my little girl friend.

Q: Have you had any poems published?
A: I had poems published in newspapers, books, and magazines.

Q: Do you make money writing poetry?
A: Not enough to talk about.

Q: Why do you continue to write?
A: Because I love putting my feelings into poems.

<div style="text-align:right">

Kizzy Wooten
Grade 4
Locke Elementary
  School
Donald Peirce, Teacher

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* * * * * *

I wonder about my mom

I wonder about the stars
at night

They just might glow

They really just might

I wonder about life

I wonder if things are true

I wonder about my family

I wonder about you.

<div style="text-align:right">

Natashia McKissick
Grade 5
Wilson School

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* * * * * *

A PUPPET NAMED HARRIET

I know this girl named Harriet.
She wears men's boots,
And drives in a van
While wearing men's suits.

Harriet, you are so strange!
I don't understand
Why you talk like a woman,
But act like a man.

It must have started
When you began to wrestle.
Being Mrs. Hulk Hogan
Made you something special.

<div style="text-align:right">

Carey Abney
Grade 6
Locke Elementary
  School
Donald Peirce, Teacher

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* * * * * *

"I MIGHT HAVE BEEN"

I might have been rich . . . but I'm not . . . so I make myself happy . . . with whatever I've got . . . I might have been handsome . . . but that's not the case . . . I'm not totally disappointed . . . with this face . . . I might have been brilliant . . . but that's no dice . . . I'm pretty well satisfied . . . in having to think twice . . . I might have been white . . . but that's no sting . . . I needed to be black . . . to do my thing . . . I might have been immortal . . . but I'm probably not . . . so I'll have to get the most . . . out of life . . . with what I've got.

<div style="text-align:right">

Stasia Webster
Grade 9
Sulzberger Jr. High
  School

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* * * * * *

SMOKE MONSTER

Smoke Monster, Smoke Monster!
You foul the air.
You fill our lungs with pure despair.
Smoke Monster, Smoke Monster!
You took my grandfather I loved so dear.

<div style="text-align:right">

Craig Freeman
Grade 5
Belmont School
Mrs. Laura Smith,
  Teacher

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* * * * * *

THE SMOKE MONSTER IS BACK

Don't smoke in bed or you will be dead.
The smoke is white.
The monster is white.
The matches are brown.
The pipe is blue.
The fire is red.
Don't smoke in bed or you will be dead.

<div style="text-align:right">

Quentin Ross
Grade 5
Belmont School
Mrs. Laura Smith,
  Teacher

</div>

The purpose of the *Pennsylvania Writing Project Newsletter* is to link together all teachers of writing in our area. The *Newsletter* features articles on the teaching of writing, information about writing courses, conferences, project meetings, reviews of books, and events relating to the writing process.

We seek articles from all teachers of writing at all grade levels and from anyone else interested in writing and the teaching of writing. All articles will be considered. Please send all articles, questions, and comments to: Robert H. Weiss, Pennsylvania Writing Project, West Chester University, West Chester, PA 19383.

The Pennsylvania Writing Project (PAWP) is an affiliate of the National/Bay Area Writing Project and a training site for the nationally validated New Jersey Writing Project. PAWP was created by the sponsors under grants from the William Penn Foundation and the University of California at Berkeley, with the National Endowment for the Humanities.

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