Statement of the Problem:

Do you remember the 3 Rs? They are: reading, writing and arithmetic, and they represent that perfect triumvirate upon which a skills-oriented education is built. Developed during the educational reforms of the 1970s, the 3Rs, for some, are no longer relevant to the 21st century skill set and may have outlived their usefulness. Nevertheless, reading, writing and arithmetic are ubiquitous in our schools. These categories and the pedagogical perspectives they engender still possess great power and continue to be invoked in classrooms, faculty meetings and schools of education across the country. In the spring of 2003, The National Commission on Writing invoked the 3 Rs to call attention to a crisis in our schools. They released a report where they identified what they considered to be the “most neglected R.” Would you like to take a guess which “R” is the forgotten stepchild of the three? It is writing, and according to the Commission, we are facing a writing crisis that spans elementary, middle and high schools as well as colleges, universities and business (National Commission on Writing, 2003). The report notes:

American education will never realize its potential as an engine of opportunity and economic growth until a writing revolution puts language and communication in their proper place in the classroom. Writing is how students connect the dots in their knowledge. Although many models of effective ways to teach writing exist, both the teaching and practice of writing are increasingly shortchanged throughout the school and college years. Writing, always time-consuming for student and teacher, is today hard-pressed in the American classroom. Of the three “Rs,” writing is clearly the most neglected (National Commission on Writing, 2003).

Later, the Commission calls for a “writing revolution,” but beyond calling for this revolution, they provide a blueprint for how “to create and launch a writing revolution (National Commission on Writing, 2003).” Their use of the word “revolution” implies an urgency and a need for immediate, comprehensive and sweeping changes that would “double the amount of time that students spend writing, that would have writing thoughtfully and deliberately incorporated “across the curriculum” (National Commission on Writing, 2003). They are calling for a writing revolution that would have students use “more out of school time for writing and parental review (National Commission on Writing, 2003).”

How well we speak, how well we write play critical roles in our success and mobility during our school years and beyond. So many of us owe so much to our ability to write well, to communicate effectively and clearly; our ability to write well has enabled many of us to get what we want and propelled us forward professionally. For students at Breakthrough, writing is one of the most important skills upon which they will be judged. As our eighth graders and their families begin the application and high school selection process, many of our kids are not writing enough or well enough in order to achieve internalized, sustainable gains that will help them meet these increased literacy demands. Our solutions are short-term at best-heavily edited essays with too much teacher support and guidance. In Because Writing Matters, the authors explain: “in today’s increasingly diverse [and competitive] society, writing is a gateway for success in
academia, the new workplace, and the global economy, as well as for our collective success as a participatory democracy (National Writing Project [NWP] and Nagin, 2006).”

So what exactly is the problem? The National Commission on Writing explains that students can write; that is not the problem. The problem is that “most students cannot write well. At least, they cannot write well enough to meet the demands they face in higher education and the emerging work environment. Basic writing in itself is not the issue; the problem is that most students cannot write with the skill expected of them today (National Commission on Writing, 2003). According to a 2003 report about students’ writing performance across the nation, “31% of eighth graders and 24% of twelfth graders performed at or above the proficient level of writing (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2003). Over two-thirds of middle school students and more than three-fourths of high school students do not possess proficient writing skills (Gallagher, 2006). For Pennsylvania, 30% of our eighth graders scored proficient on the national writing assessment; while only 2% of our eighth graders were at the advanced level which means that 68% of our eighth graders scored at the basic and below basic levels (National Association of Education Progress [NAEP], 2002). We definitely have a problem here.

In Holding On To Good Ideas In A Time Of Bad Ones: Six Literacy Principles Worth Fighting For, Thomas Newkirk writes about how misdirected and counterproductive our literacy efforts are. He explains:

We are missing the big story in literacy development-not that students fail to learn to read and write, but that they soon perceive school literacy as alienating work. Students develop “basic skills” but millions don’t progress from there. As they move through school, studies show, they do less and less reading and writing voluntarily. Boys in particular seem to be given a free pass; there is a virtual conspiracy to allow them to coast by on the assumption that they’re just not naturally good at it or drawn to it. But it's high time to rewrite this sad narrative, to believe that literacy can be made attractive to all students, that it holds the possibility of engagement and pleasure, of creating a distinctive inner theatre of the mind—that it is deeply pleasurable. Any effort to teach analytic or reflective literacy skills, it seems to me, is built on the premise of engagement, for analysis is an unpacking of our reactions and involvement. Without that engagement, there is nothing to unpack—indeed, no reason to read or write in the first place. And a role for pleasure does not preclude a place for challenge and difficulty because we lose interest in routinely easy tasks. (Newkirk, 2009)

If we want students to reach higher levels of writing, they need to be invested, engaged and connected to the topics and to the writing. Without it, writing becomes drudgery, a joyless activity that must be done as quickly as possible with as little investment as possible. Perhaps, this may be the source of the one-draft-and-I-am-done phenomena afflicting so many of our students. We need to figure out how to put the joy, pleasure, fun and student engagement back into the writing that our kids do at school.
Basic writing skills much less below basic skills will not be good enough; these students will drown in a world of increased writing demands. In the fall of 2004, The National Commission on Writing released a report titled, Writing: A Ticket to Work…Or a Ticket Out. A summary of the survey included the following findings: “Writing is a threshold skill for both employment and promotion, particularly for salaried employees. Half the responding companies reported that they take writing into consideration when hiring professional employees. People who cannot write and communicate clearly will not be hired and are unlikely to last long enough to be considered for a promotion. (National Commission on Writing, 2004)” Another respondent explained, “We frequently hold (poor writing) against the applicant since it reflects on care and attention to detail (National Commission on Writing, 2004).” What becomes clear as you go through the report is that writing well not only gets your foot in the door, writing is what keeps you there and allows you to move up professionally. One executive couldn’t have been clearer when he explained: “Writing is integral in nearly every job….You can’t move up without writing skills (National Commission on Writing, 2004).”

If we want more of our students to move up, then we have to make sure that they are equipped with the writing skills that will enable them to write with confidence, clarity, precision and skill. We all should be alarmed and concerned about the 68% majority of Pennsylvania students who scored at basic and below basic levels regarding their writing skills (National Association of Education Progress [NAEP], 2002). These students desperately need well-articulated, research-based interventions that will allow them to catch up and improve. Our population at Breakthrough mirrors these statistics in as much as there is a small cohort of students coming to the program with solid writing skills while the majority of students arrive needing more support and direct instruction in writing.

It’s not enough for our students to be able to just write; they need to be able to write well. My experience at Breakthrough this summer with the 7th and 8th graders and my teachers demonstrated that when the writing process is broken down and taught in manageable steps, when students are taught specific writing strategies and skills and when given the time to learn and practice, students can make impressive gains in their writing during a relatively short window. However, how can long-term gains happen when many middle-school literacy teachers in the School District of Philadelphia have to “squeeze in” writing while dealing with district and administrative pressures to focus on reading-comprehension skills on the PSSA? The constructed writing responses are not part of the overall scores which impact state and federal funding for these schools so teachers have to “squeeze” writing in to an already very packed schedule.

We are facing a writing crisis, and here are some of the reasons:

- Children today receive little opportunity to write. In one recent study in grades one, three and five, only 15% of the school day was spent in any kind of writing activity (NWP and Nagin, 2006)
- Two-thirds of the writing that did occur was word-for-word copying in workbooks (NWP and Nagin, 2006)
- Compositions of a paragraph or more in length are infrequent even at the high school level (NWP and Nagin, 2006)
• Forty percent of twelfth graders report that they are “never” or “hardly ever” assigned a paper of three pages or more in length (National Commission on Writing, 2003)

When looking at these numbers and facts, is it any wonder that most of our eighth graders across the nation and state of Pennsylvania are not able to write at a proficient level? Students are obviously not getting enough time to write much less practice their writing; students need time to play, practice, make mistakes, take risks and experiment with new and wonderful devices and strategies that can add depth, clarity and sophistication to their writing. Time is a huge issue. Writing is a complicated, complex, recursive process where we leave the writing, come back to it, make some changes, reflect and work on it some more. Writing in our schools needs to correspond more closely to the ways in which we write. Teaching writing is hard and demanding work; oftentimes stacks of student writing requiring comments and feedback are too much for many who then simply resort to the maxim less is more when it comes to writing and instruction. Lastly, too often is reading and writing viewed as the domain of literacy and English teachers; we are the ones who carry this heavy load. When in actuality, the business of reading and writing, the business of teaching our students how to write well is the business of all the teachers in the school. It doesn’t take a genius to figure out what happens when a few are expected to shoulder a disproportionate amount of the burden and responsibility.

In Boy Writers: Reclaiming their Voices, Ralph Fletcher writes about the focus on testing and curriculum mandates hurts many of our boy writers; it is likely that this focus has a deleterious effect on our student writers in general, boys and girls alike. He writes: “A writing curriculum so heavily slanted toward test preparation will not encourage kids to develop a love for writing, find their voices, and deeply engage in the craft….Not only are we force-feeding them a kind of writing that is teacher-directed and formulaic, but more important, there’s no payoff—no purpose, no tangible reader, no fun—for the reader who struggles to create such a text (Fletcher, 2006).” He also laments the lack of student choice and student-generated topics so central to generating and sustaining student engagement and investment. “The writer’s notebooks should be a bastion for student choice, but more and more teachers use it as a place where kids practice teacher-directed skills and strategies….Let’s bring choice back to the writing classroom. Just let them write. I don’t know a better first step to create an environment that will engage our boy writers (Fletcher, 2006).”

Student choice figures prominently in this writing curriculum. The curriculum design of this writing program recognizes the realities teachers and schools are dealing with; they cannot simply have a writing program solely focused on student choice and experimentation. Students need to learn how to write; they need to learn how to write better, and this usually happens with explicit instruction on specific writing strategies and conventions. An effective writing program needs to be student directed and student centered, a program where students have choices about their writing, but that isn’t the entire picture. The program needs to simultaneously have opportunities for practice, experimentation and direct instruction that only a teacher can provide; this writing program has both.

Kelly Gallagher, a noted educator, identifies what he considers to be the “top ten writing wrongs in secondary schools (Gallagher, 2006).” Gallagher teaches students in grades nine through
The wrongs he identified are applicable and very relevant to our middle school students in grades 5 through 8. The wrongs most relevant for my purposes are:

1. Students are not doing enough writing (Gallagher, 2006).
2. Writing is sometimes assigned rather than taught (Gallagher, 2006).
3. Below-grade-level writers are asked to write less than others instead of more than others (Gallagher, 2006).
4. Grammar instruction is ineffective or ignored (Gallagher, 2006).
5. Some teachers have little or no knowledge of district and state writing standards (Gallagher, 2006).
6. Writing topics are often mandated with little thought about the prior knowledge and interests of students (Gallagher, 2006).

The problems Gallagher identifies represent a tall order for teachers, administrators and educational policy makers to fill. While intractable, the crisis identified by The National Commission on Writing and The National Writing Project is not a forgone conclusion. We can turn this around; the research, the instructional strategies and research-based best practices that improve writing have been around for years. The problem is not insurmountable; however, much work remains to be done. Nothing remains but for us to roll up our sleeves, dig in our heels and get to work for our students deserve nothing less that our best, most concerted and thoughtful efforts. It is absolutely imperative for us to do a better job teaching writing; in the 21st century writing is quickly becoming as indispensable as the air we all breathe. Ralph Fletcher writes: “Writing is a skill that no student, no citizen, can do without (Fletcher, 2006).” So the questions are simple: What do we do to turn this writing crisis around? How do we do better by our students and move them beyond basic levels of proficiency? What do we have to do in order to create skilled, effective student writers?

**Curriculum Solution:**

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines revolution as “a drastic, far-reaching change in ways of thinking and behaving; a far-reaching, fundamental change in the way of thinking about or visualizing something; a paradigm shift (Merriam Webster, 2010).” A “writing revolution” is needed; we must shift paradigms and radically alter the way we go about teaching writing. The curriculum for Voices of Teens is not a cure all or a panacea for this writing crisis; however, it is an important step in the right direction as it addresses Gallagher’s “Writing Wrongs” identified earlier; furthermore, the curriculum and program provides students with more writing time, more direct instruction along with research-based best practices that have a profound impact on student growth and achievement. The program is student-centered and thrives on student engagement and creativity; there is joy and choice here as students are partners with teachers.

This curriculum represents an attempt to rewrite the “sad narrative” of literacy instruction in our country that Newkirk describes. The Voices of Teens writing program makes writing attractive, engaging and attractive to students. Yes, it is hard work because “good writing isn’t forged by magic or hatched out of thin air. Good writing happens when human beings take particular steps to take control of their sentences, to make their words do what they want them to do (Fletcher, 5).” Good writing takes time, discipline, practice and effort; in short, it is an art. Students are
willing to do the hard work and take the necessary steps towards increasing levels of mastery when they are given more choice and power over their writing, when writing is informed by the natural enthusiasm, curiosity, joy and experimentation that is so natural to many of our students. The Voices of Teens writing program give kids the time, choice, practice and power to transform their writing. Perhaps just as importantly the program works; the final research report from 2009 stated that the Writing Matters: Urban Writers Program had “a strong, positive impact on the majority of participating students in three major ways:

- It improves writing skills (Yost, 2009)
- It helps students understand themselves better (Yost, 2009).
- It provides students with a broader view of other teen’s struggles and the world at large (Yost, 2009).

Additionally, “students made gains from pre-to post-testing in all domains: focus, content, organization and style (Yost, 2009).” The report noted that students experienced moderate gains in their writing; the report explains:

Although we cannot directly attribute the Writing Matters program as solely Responsible for these gains since other curricula at the school also contribute to the writing skills of these students, it is clear that this program in combination with other data described does indeed assist students in the development of their writing skills and the confidence they gain from continuously writing journals, receiving feedback and sharing their writing with others (Yost, 2009).

The “writing wrongs” identified by Gallagher as well as the reports from the National Writers Project and the National Writing Commission informed a great deal of this curriculum. Additionally, so has Marzano’s Nine Instructional Strategies. Marzano and his colleagues conducted a meta-analysis of educational studies about student achievement; the team then identified the nine strategies which most positively impacted student achievement. Seven out of Marzano’s Nine Instructional Strategies have been purposefully incorporated into the Teen Writers curriculum and program; they are:

- Identifying similarities and differences (Marzano, Gaddy and Dean, 2000)
- Reinforcing effort and providing recognition (Marzano, Gaddy and Dean, 2000)
- Homework and practice (Marzano, Gaddy and Dean, 2000)
- Nonlinguistic representations (Marzano, Gaddy and Dean, 2000)
- Cooperative learning (Marzano, Gaddy and Dean, 2000)
- Setting objectives and providing feedback (Marzano, Gaddy and Dean, 2000)
- Questions, cues and advance organizers (Marzano, Gaddy and Dean, 2000)

My work this summer at Breakthrough as a teacher coach with my teachers in the humanities department focused on Marzano’s Nine Instructional Strategies; 7th and 8th students experienced impressive gains regarding their writing production, paragraph structure, organization and their writing content, and this was largely due to the deliberate and consistent way in which teachers incorporated these powerful strategies into their lessons and teaching. The same approach has informed the way that I have organized and created the lesson plans for this curriculum. The
writing program built upon the interests and passions of students is further strengthened by the inclusion of these instructional strategies designed to impact student writing in positive ways.

Time is a precious commodity in schools so much so that fewer and fewer instructional hours are devoted to writing. Finding and creating time for out of school writing is one of the recommendations from the National Commission on Writing; Breakthrough of Greater Philadelphia’s implementation of the Voices of Teens Curriculum in their after school programs represents rich and powerful opportunities for out of school writing that is student driven and student directed. Students regardless of their writing ability would not only be doing more writing; they will be receiving more direct instruction about specific writing strategies and grammar.

Journaling and free writing figure prominently in this writing program as well; the point is to quiet the inner critique that so often halts the writing process and has student writers tripping over their words, held hostage by the paralyzing notion that perfection is the standard for their first attempt. Quieting the inner critique and getting students more comfortable with their writing do wonders for their confidence, motivation and writing production, and with these incremental steps, the foundation for continued growth is set. Peter Elbow writes: “The most effective way I know to improve your writing is to do free writing exercises regularly. At least three times a week. They are sometimes called “automatic writing,” “babbling,” or “jabbering” exercises. The idea is to write for ten minutes. Don’t stop for anything. Go quickly without rushing. Never stop to look back, to cross something out, to wonder how to spell something, to wonder what word or thought to use, or to think about what you are doing. If you can’t think of a word or a spelling, just use a squiggle or else write, “I can’t think of it. Just put down something (Elbow, 1998). Later Elbow explains that the problem is that people try to edit and write at the same time; it is a recipe for continued frustration, and the last thing we want our students feeling is inhibited, self conscious, insecure and constrained when they are writing. Rather students need to be taught when and how to revise and edit; both come well after the first draft and surface revisions.

Too often in classrooms, students are not given enough choice; students are told what to write about-how to write it. The sacrosanct five-paragraph essay is practiced ad nauseum from grades six through twelve until kids simply turn off or tune out. Kelly Gallagher explains in a chapter titled, Beyond Fake Writing, “It has been my experience that students write a whole lot better when they care about what they are writing. I have also found that they are much more likely to care about what they are writing when they are given choice in writing topics (Gallagher, 2006).” Too often kids are doing the reading and writing that really matters to them outside of the classroom, and too often many of our students are not motivated to write. That really shouldn’t be too surprising when we consider the kinds of writing kids have to do at school; the writing is usually teacher directed and performance oriented; this is not a recipe for experimentation and risk taking and student investment. “Choice is where it starts for reluctant writers, and if we want them to warm up to writing, we need to structure our classes so that our students have some say in what they write (Gallagher, 2006).” It is sage advice that is well-heeded in the Voices of Teens writing program; students are given choices regarding their writing. Furthermore, research has consistently shown that students benefit tremendously from curricula where they are writing genre-specific pieces that mirror the reading that they are doing. This mirroring happens
consistently throughout the Voices of Teens Curriculum; students read student-generated examples of poetry, of prose and then write their own genre-specific examples.

The Voices of Teens Curriculum, the lesson plans and program are also aligned with the Pennsylvania Department of Education’s Academic Standards for Writing and Reading; therefore, the writing and learning that students experience within the program will reinforce and support the work that’s already occurring within the schools. This has the potential of creating a repetition and spiraling that is absolutely essential for learning. Additionally, the Voices of Teens: Writers Matter program and curriculum have students exploring “three types of writing or modes (informational, narrative and persuasive) identified by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), Pennsylvania State Standards and the School District of Philadelphia’s curriculum (Vogel, Galbraith, 2008)”. What follows are the PA Writing and Reading Standards that are addressed in the curriculum and lesson plans.

**PA Academic Standards for Reading:**

- **1.1.8.G** Demonstrate after reading understanding and interpretation of both fiction and nonfiction text
- **1.1.8.H** Demonstrate fluency and comprehension in reading.
- **1.2.8.C** Produce work in at least one literary genre that follows the conventions of the genre
- **1.3.8.A** Read and understand works of literature
- **1.3.8.C** Analyze the effects of various literary devices
- **1.3.8.F** Read and respond to nonfiction and fiction including poetry and drama (PA Standards, 2010)

**PA Academic Standards for Writing:**

- **1.4.8.A** Write short stories, poems and plays
- **1.4.8.B** Write multi-paragraph informational pieces (letters, instructions, essays, interview and articles)
- **1.4.8.C** Write persuasive pieces
- **1.5.8.A** Write with sharp, distinct focus
- **1.5.8.B** Write using well-developed content appropriate for the topic
- **1.5.8.C** Write with controlled and/or subtle organization
- **1.5.8.D** Write with an understanding of the stylistic aspects of composition
- **1.5.8.E** Revise writing after rethinking logic of organization and rechecking central idea, content, paragraph development, level of detail, style, tone and word choice
- **1.5.8.F** Edit writing using the conventions of language
- **1.5.8.G** Present and/or defend written work for publication when appropriate (PA Standards, 2010)

The Voices of Teens Curriculum engages student writers by honoring and respecting the kinds of reading and writing that matters to them. It hooks middle school writers by exploiting the self absorption of their age; the curriculum has students reading writing by other adolescents and writing about themselves. Students are trusted and given choice. Free writing as well as
journaling provides students with opportunities to choose what they want to write about, and this continues to be the case when students peer edit and revise pieces that matter to them. The curriculum also addresses the problem of audience; the audience is comprised of peers and facilitated by the teacher. Students are not writing in a vacuum for a single teacher; they are writing for their peers and for themselves with opportunities to share and publish, and this process more closely resembles the kinds of writing that we as adults do in our lives.

All of this makes the writing incredibly relevant and meaningful. However, without explicit instruction about writing conventions and structure, student writing may never evolve or improve. Their writing production and motivation can improve tremendously, but without deliberate instruction, real gains regarding their writing skills may not happen. For this reason, more teacher-directed lessons about paragraphs and sentence variety are interwoven with lessons dominated by student choice. Student-directed writing about topics that matter to them then operates as the springboard or vehicle for lessons about sentence structure, editing and metaphors. No matter what happens in the class, it is driven by student choice. Because the work is student directed, this leads to greater levels of student engagement and investment especially when the going gets tough. When students are working on pieces that truly matter to them, they are often times more willing to put in the time to edit and improve because they are writing for themselves and for each other. Because the writing matters to the students so does the work of editing, revising and improving. They feel a sense of real ownership.

In this capacity, teachers operate more as a coach or guide-directing and responding to issues that arise in student writing; introducing or further clarifying or enhancing conventions and techniques that are already present in student writing. So in a word, this process is very student-directed and as it should be. Nothing saps the vitality, enthusiasm and energy from student writing faster than the absence of student choice; nothing estranges students faster than a disregard for the writing and reading that matters most to them, and that is important to remember. What our kids read-what they write; it is important to them and by extension it needs to be important to us in as much as it offers us a window into how to hook our students in our classes. By looking at the reading and writing that matters most to our students we can discover bridges to our classrooms that we never knew existed. Does that mean that we endorse, understand or support all student writing and reading? Of course not. Does that mean that we no longer work to give students the tools to critique and evaluate? Absolutely not. All of the writing and reading our students do outside of school may not have applications or uses in the classroom; however, it stands to reason that we can be opening our classrooms up more and creating opportunities for students to bring more of themselves into the classroom. It is our responsibility as teachers to find these bridges to the classroom that affirm the different ways our students express themselves. They live in a rich environment that “matters” to them. We need to find ways to connect their world to writing about this world.

Research about the Voices of Teens program indicated that “the majority of students made clear, positive statements about the impact of the program on their self expression, understanding that others’ plights are similar to their own, articulation of goals and aspirations, enhanced writing skills, coping with anger, developing a deeper, personal understanding and increasing self esteem….The freedom to write about and openly share their painful life experiences appeared to provide an outlet for bottled-up emotions. This release enabled many students to more freely
pursue their goals and provided some students with a method for coping with pent-up anger. A major benefit for a majority of students was hearing their peers’ stories and realizing, perhaps for the first time, that they all share a common bond. For these students, knowing that they are not alone in the world was very comforting. Writing skills also increased in several domains, especially in areas of focus and content (Vogel, Galbraith, 2008).”

All of our students want to be respected and cherished; all want to be actively engaged in their learning. Students want classrooms with spaces and opportunities for them to bring who they are, where they are from and what they love into the classroom. All want to be partners with teachers in teaching and learning. When given the chance, our students surprise us with their ingenuity, creativity, humor and risk taking; we marvel at them. How many times have we as teachers learned some extraordinary detail about a student whom we dismissed or labeled as average; how many times have we been surprised by students who had been previously lackluster in our classes by unexpected depth or insight? How many students have passed through our classes not being known by us? Many of our students possess these gifts; however, their extraordinary talents and creativity are not always recognized because of the structure of our classes and the limitations of our curricula. We are not seeing these gifts; our students don’t have the opportunities to show us who they really are. This curriculum provides student with opportunities to know and be known.

In July, I observed a 7th grade social studies class about gun violence in Philadelphia in my role as the humanities teacher coach at Breakthrough. The teacher hooked students immediately by using a map created by The Philadelphia Inquirer to illustrate where gun violence had occurred in the city during the year 2008. The visual was a powerful means by which to generate student interest and engagement, and the teacher masterfully used the map and class discussion as a bridge to a reading assignment that had students reading an article about the same topic. Immediately, hands went up as students began sharing about how gun violence had impacted their schools, families and neighborhoods. They talked about friends and cousins as the beginnings of stories began to pour out of the students. However, because of the direction the teacher wished to take the class, she redirected the class’ attention to interpreting the data in the map. Her choice to do this made sense, and was consistent with the day’s objective. Nevertheless, in follow up conversations with the teacher, I stressed the importance of creating opportunities for students to share and write their stories. Ultimately, the mini eruption of personal stories and accounts was the students’ attempt to connect and make sense of the violence they witnessed in their lives; they were connecting to the map; they were thinking deeply and critically. Providing students with these kinds of opportunities, deepens and enriches their writing and thinking as the writing process itself becomes a reflective, deliberative process that allows the students to process and understand. Observing this lesson reminded me of the importance of connection and personal revelation, and the writing curriculum allows students to do exactly that in ways that are meaningful to the students.

Our students are no different from Zora Neale Hurston’s unconventional protagonist, Janie. As Janie sits in the darkness with her friend, Phoeby, “Janie [was] full of that oldest human longing—self revelation (Hurston, 1990).” Our students, too, are filled with that desire to reveal themselves, to tell their stories, and it is our responsibility as teachers to allow them to do that. This curriculum allows students to fulfill that fundamental and developmentally-driven impulse
to reveal, explore, connect and learn while building their writing and thinking skills and power to empathize. It allows student voices to be heard, sometimes for the first time.

In *Writing Toward Home*, Georgia Heard writes: “Home is what can be called without effort—so that sometimes we think, oh, that can’t be important. Memories are blueprints of home. A memoir is a home built from those blueprints. Finding home is crucial to the act of writing. Begin there—with what you know (Heard, 1995).” Students do begin there, with home, with what they know, in the first unit in the Voices of Teens curriculum; students write about “where they are from,” “who they are,” and it yields moving writing for all the reasons that Heard notes. The writing program continues to build on those memories, those blueprints that are known with absolute certainty; those memories operate as a secure base from which students explore new conventions, new ideas, new genres and writers. Students develop growing trust in themselves, in their voices and perspectives as writers; through the program they learn to trust each other through the collective work of exploration, growth and revelation.

**Goals:**

- Improve technical writing skills (see specific objectives)
- Learn strategies of peer editing
- Improve confidence in themselves as thinkers and writers
- Expose students to different authors and genres
- Enhance self awareness and better understand themselves and the challenges they face on a deeper level
- Further develop empathy for other students and their situations
- Feel greater sense of connection and commonality; begin to recognize the universality of their experiences (Yost, 2009)

**Objectives:**

- Improve the organization of student writing
- Improve the content of student writing
- Increase the use of more complex grammatical constructions
- Increase the use of poetic conventions
- Improve their sentence structure
- Improve their paragraph structure
- Improve their editing skills
- Improve their self expression
- Increase writing production
- Improve student engagement and interest in writing process
- Teach peer editing (Yost, 2009)

**Vision Statement:**

This writing curriculum provides unique opportunities for young students to express themselves through the writing process, learn critical writing skills and develop effective personal
relationships with peers to allow for more tolerance and appreciation of others. The process of writing provides an effective outlet for these students at a time in their lives when personal expression and having their voices heard is so important. (Vogel, 2010)

**Description of the Students:**

The middle school years are years of enormous transformation. For adolescents everything appears to be changing; every aspect of themselves is in flux-physically, hormonally, emotionally, intellectually, cognitively and spiritually. And as creatures who crave stability-as creatures that gravitate towards the known and expected, humans buck mightily against the inevitability of change; our children and teenagers are no different. The growth and development that adolescents experience during these terrifying, exciting and exasperating years parallels the growth of infants. At no other time during our lives will we be growing, learning and changing with such rapidity. The beauty and magic of these years lie in the challenges, and yes, there’s tremendous magic and possibility in these ages. Middle schoolers are developing and maturing as thinkers and logicians; they are beginning to move from the concrete to the abstract in their thinking, in their reasoning, in their understanding of themselves and the world around them. It is here during this time when teachers can really focus teaching on those emergent, abstract processes that are in the process of becoming. It is during this time that we can remind our students that they can do it with our support-with our modeling-with our encouragement and direction. Middle schoolers are beginning to question habitual forms of thought; they are thinking about their beliefs and why they have them. Nothing is more amazing and beautiful than to watch students experience this realization of their growing and developing intellectual powers and abstract reasoning.

Middle schoolers are pushing for more independence, responsibility and autonomy all the while demanding that the adults in their lives stay close. Who wouldn’t want the added safety and assurance of an air bag for those first, trial runs and crashes? The adults in their lives operate as the supports-as the external scaffolding as they test out different aspects of on-coming adulthood in safe and not-so-safe ways. Failures and disappointments will happen, and these present opportunities for learning and personal growth. They build character, self esteem and resilience. Middle schoolers are more focused on the social; they care deeply about their peers and what their peers think of them. Adults become less important in some ways and more important in others. Middle schoolers are not cute and fuzzy like the younger kids; they don’t possess the maturity and assuredness of some of the older kids. They are awkward, clumsy, abrupt and inappropriate. In short, they are a mess; they are “in medias res.” Middle schoolers are protean, impetuous and inconstant; they are loyal, caring and compassionate. They are self absorbed and selfish. They are raging egoists who care passionately about global warming and world hunger. They will push you away in one moment; only to find them waiting for you with tears streaming down their faces because of a fight with friends or harsh words from a teacher. They are a bewildering mix of contradictions-in this process of becoming.

Their thinking mirrors these fits and starts; middle schoolers aren’t just taking risks socially and emotionally as they begin to explore different types of friendships and relationships. These kids are taking risks intellectually. They are making connections, seeing relationships and discovering questions they never had before. Middle schoolers need the same kind of guidance,
support, encouragement and modeling to negotiate these changing, internal mindscapes that an adult would provide to a middle-school aged child for let’s say advice about a friend. The transformation that happens physically and emotionally also happens cognitively.

During the middle-school years, during adolescence, cognition, abstract thinking and critical thinking grow by leaps and bounds. New research in the area of pediatric neuroscience corroborates this accepted wisdom; through the use of MRI brain scanning machines, scientists are now able to study normal, adolescent brains. What they are finding underscores the possibility and magic inherent with this amazing period in human development. Children’s brains experience brain thickening—“tiny branches of brain cells bloom madly, a process neuroscientists refer to as overproduction or exuberance. Many believe that in such periods of exuberance the brain may be highly receptive to new information or primed to acquire new skills, particularly those related to survival. For years, one of the strongest held beliefs in neuroscience was that this exuberance occurred primarily in early brain development. But Dr. Jay Giedd (a neuroscientist at NIH) had found a burst of exuberance in the teenage brain (Strauch, 2003).” As a result of Giedd’s research, “many neuroscientists have now conceded that the teenage brain is far from finished. Instead, it remains a teeming ball of possibilities, raw material waiting to be synaptically shaped. The teenage brain is not only still incredibly interesting but appears to be still wildly exuberant and receptive (Strauch, 2003).” In order for this type of transformation in thought and ability to happen, it only makes sense that the teenage brain would have to undergo enormous changes in its function and structure. And according to the research, it does.

Exuberance is a word that not only aptly describes what is happening in our middle schoolers’ brains. It’s the perfect word to describe middle schoolers in all their conflicted and extreme glory, and it’s a word that should be remembered as we consider our work with students and their writing. When we consider what we love and what exasperates us most about middle schoolers, it often comes back to their energy, their challenges to our authority, their risk taking and their extremism, and many of these attributes connect back to their boundless exuberance. If middle schoolers are experiencing a blossoming of brain cells that allows them to be more receptive and more engaged to new learning experiences, then a writing program that captures their attention, passion and enthusiasm by having them mine the depths of their lives for meaning and understanding through a critical engagement with the writing process is perfect for them.

Metacognition becomes possible in ways it previously wasn’t as reasoning and abstract though develops; this blossoming of awareness creates tremendous opportunities in the classroom. Our students are questioning the world around them, attempting to figure out their place in it. The cognitive and developmental transformations middle schoolers experience create incredible opportunities with their writing. We need only trust our students and support their growing curiosity, engagement. When working with middle schoolers-when asking them to think more abstractly, instruction and activities should be aligned with their development and learning. Many will not be able to think abstractly without some level of teacher support and modeling. Because of the power of cooperative learning-because of the newfound interest in peers, cooperative activities are a wonderful way to channel that burgeoning desire to socialize, to connect and to chat. They will want to talk, to debate, to challenge so let them within a
classroom context exploring what it means to be a teenager or common themes in poetry written by adolescents.

Exploit their self absorption by having them read and write about themselves, capitalize on their desire to be more self directed by giving them choice in their writing. Trust students by honoring the kinds of reading and writing that matter to them. In many ways a 12 year old is a 12 year old regardless of the year; there continues to be the same universal struggles and hopes, and it is this universality of experience and emotion that will allow them to connect—whether you’re talking about a 12 year old in an affluent suburb, a 12 year old attending a middle school that’s on probation by the state or a 12 year old living one hundred years ago. Engaging activities that ask students to think deeply; to figure out problems; to see the commonalities with peers they originally thought were so very different from them all allow the brain to make more meaningful connections that improve learning. No matter what’s going on with middle schoolers, their brains are still about connectivity so the more opportunities students have to play and explore ideas in varied contexts the more meaningful—the richer their understanding.

Roald Dahl dedicated his book, The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar and Six More, “with affection and sympathy to all young people who are going through that long and difficult metamorphosis when they are no longer children and have not yet become adults (Dahl, ).” This writing program helps young people negotiate the vagaries and joys of that magical and often times bewildering period of adolescence, a time filled with such power and possibility when they have a foot in each world, a time of exuberance and becoming. Through the powerful and fortuitous convergence of brain development, possibility and growth, they emerge from the writing program as deeper writers and thinkers with understandings and connections about themselves and others, ready and eager to continue their rigorous and questioning engagement with the world around them.

**Major Instructional Strategies:**

Cooperative work in a variety of contexts forms the basis of much of this curriculum. Students work together to explore and answer questions; students work collaboratively to edit each other’s work; they work together and help each other with different stages of the writing process. This work helps them encode the concepts because students have been actively engaged in making it meaningful to them. This group work has obvious connections to both Vygotsky and Bandura. Students interact and help one another; Vygotsky asserted that this type of collaborative work created opportunities for real learning. Bandura similarly understood the power of cooperative learning and social interactions. Students explore together; interact with one another and most importantly model strategies. It operates similarly to Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development. More capable students work with those who need support with work that is just beyond their current level of development. Nevertheless with this support these students are operating in their zone of proximal development, and according to Vygotsky this was the place of optimal learning.

Vygotsky believed that teaching should be aimed at developmental processes that are emergent—that are in the process of becoming; therefore, the curriculum’s focus on higher order thinking and synthesis addresses this necessary requirement. However, it is important to point out that
students are not expected to negotiate the abstract parts of this work alone. Explicit direction and modeling; cooperative work as well as work in varied contexts operate as external, concrete supports upon which students can build their understanding.

Information Processing Theory (IPT) asserts that the brain is all about connections. Teaching that is aligned with this reality regarding cognition and student learning is most effective. When students are asked to think deeply and create meaning for themselves, connections are created—synthesis occurs and this aids students with how they encode the material. Learning is largely about memory—about what gets stored and why. The more connections students can make with concepts the stronger their understanding and learning because the concepts have been stored in long-term memory. Throughout the curriculum students are engaged with the material; they play with the writing conventions and strategies. Students play with language itself. And all of this work will ultimately strengthen their understanding and facility with their writing so when they are asked to write—when they are asked to synthesize, students are pulling from a rich and diverse base of referential points and meaning that they actively worked to create themselves.

Students are actively engaged in their learning; students are the problem solvers. Questions are presented. The teacher operates as a facilitator pushing student in their writing and thinking and helping them make connections. However, this work is largely done by the students. This curriculum honors the fact that students are motivated and invested in their learning; they can be trusted to select topics and genres that interest them. When presented with thoughtful and challenging work that engages students in the totality of who they are, students are passionately engaged in the work of solving problems and creating more complex and nuanced understandings of themselves and their world. Disequilibrium is a sign of new learning. Students should welcome this confusion—this disorientation, and teachers should work to create safe and nurturing classrooms where these types of risks and explorations can be taken by students.

Both, Vygotsky and Bandura, are woven throughout the cooperative work, critical thinking and explorations that students will do in the program; Marzano and the nine instructional strategies identified by him and his team play a critical role as well. Within the broader context of the cooperative work, students are working together to identify similarities and differences; they are practicing and experimenting with new conventions; peer conferencing taps into Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development while students benefit from feedback and suggestions from peers and teacher alike. The convergence of Vygotsky, Bandura, Marzano and IPT produces a student-centered classroom high on student engagement and investment all informed by instructional strategies and research-based best practices that most positively impact student growth and teacher efficacy.

**Scope and Sequence:**

1. **Goals**
   - Improve technical writing skills (see specific objectives)
   - Learn strategies of peer editing
   - Improve confidence in themselves as thinkers and writers
   - Enhance self awareness and better understand themselves and the challenges they face on a deeper level

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• Further develop empathy for other students and their situations
• Feel a greater sense of connection and commonality; begin to recognize the
  universality of their experiences
• Expose students to different genres and authors

2. Objectives
• Improve the organization of student writing
• Improve the content of their writing
• Increase the use of more complex grammatical constructions
• Increase the use of poetic conventions
• Improve their sentence structure
• Improve their paragraph structure
• Improve their editing skills
• Improve their self expression
• Increase writing production
• Improve student engagement and interest in writing process
• Teach peer editing

Lesson Plans:

Lesson 1:

Objectives:

• Students will complete pre-program writing samples.
• Students will begin decorating the covers of their idea books and writers’ notebooks

Materials: Writing sample handouts, idea books, writers’ notebooks, markers,
construction paper, magazines, scissors, glue

Time: 60 minute period

PROCEDURE-Lesson 1:

• Explain to the class that they will be doing a writing sample.
• Ask the kids to tell you what they think a writing sample is and why writing samples are
  important to teachers. Have these questions on the board; give the kids some think time
  before asking them to respond; encourage students to write ideas and reactions to the two
  prompts down on paper.
• Have a quick whole-group discussion about the prompts. Explain that writing samples
  help teachers get a sense of where they are with their writing; the writing sample will
  help us gauge your growth as writers and thinkers and help us target our instruction.
  REMIND STUDENTS that this is not a test-that these writing samples will not be

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graded or anything like that. All that we ask is that they try their best—give their best effort.

• Explain that we’re doing the writing samples because this year Breakthrough will be working to implement a writing program developed by Dr. Robert Vogel of LaSalle University, Michael Galbraith of Grover Washington Middle School and Dianna Newton, a graduate student at LaSalle and a teacher at Friends Select. These writing samples will help us better figure out how to help you develop as writers and improve on the program. You will also be doing mid-program writing samples as well as writing samples at the end of the program. This is a very exciting collaboration, and we are looking forward to a wonderful year of writing and growth.

• Alright, we’re going to get started with the writing samples; you will have 35 minutes to respond. As I said earlier, do your best; write in paragraphs, and be thoughtful. Remember, this isn’t a test or a quiz; this just helps us get a better sense of where you are at as a writer.

• For students who finish early, please have them check their work and encourage them to write for a bit more.

• Collect the writing samples.

• Several years ago a group of students not unlike you sat in a classroom with their teacher who told them that they were going to participate in a new writing program from LaSalle University. Can you guess where a number of the student pieces ended up? IN THIS BOOK RIGHT HERE!

• This book, Voices of Teens: Writers Matter, is a collection of writing by middle school students here in Philadelphia. We have a class set that you’ll be able to read, discuss; you’ll be inspired by the writing and risk taking that you will see in these pages. It’s important to remember that writers are readers, and we’ll be doing a fair amount of reading in order to build our skills.

• So don’t forget about Voices of Teens. Remember that you really don’t know where this writing can take you or lead you.

• Before we get started with writing, we need to begin setting up two important tools writers use; they may use these tools in different ways, but most use them: idea books and writers’ notebooks.

• For the remainder of our time together, you’re going to get started with decorating the covers of your journals and your writers’ notebooks. Your covers need to include your name, but they should also reveal something about you. Both, your idea books and writers’ notebooks will remain here, and you’ll finish decorating your covers during our next session.

Lesson 2:

Objectives:

• Students will finish decorating the covers of their idea books and writers’ notebooks
• Students will organize their writers’ notebooks

Materials: Idea books, writers’ notebooks, markers, construction paper, magazines, scissors, glue, post its/sticky notes

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Time: 60 minute period

PROCEDURE-Lesson 2:

• Explain to the class that they will continue decorating their idea books and writers’ notebooks; they will have 35 minutes to finish up.
• 5 minute clean up
• Now, we are going to organize your writers’ notebooks which will stay here at school. Your idea books will go back and forth with you; however, we will talk more about them later.
• Have the students number the pages of their binders with at least 220 sheets of paper; this will operate as your writer’s notebook.
• How to organize writer’s notebooks:
  1. Give students sticky notes that will operate as tabs, and use sticky notes to block out different sections (Gallagher, 2006).
  2. Pages 1-3 = Table of Contents; purpose = students keep track of all mini lessons taught so they can find them quickly and easily (Gallagher, 2006).
  3. Pages 4-12 = What Should I Write?= Brainstorming activities and invention strategies for getting started (Gallagher, 2006).
  4. Pages 13-16 = Literary Terms/Poetic Conventions = Place where students write definitions of key terms; if they forget what “irony” or “foreshadowing” means, they can refer back to these pages (Gallagher, 2006).
  5. Pages 17-19 = Spelling Demons = Students track their personal spelling demons (Gallagher, 2006).
  6. Pages 19-45 = Craft Mini Lessons = Reserved for “craft” mini lessons. “Craft” is defined as those things good writers do (writing an effective introduction or combining sentences to gain more rhythm) (Gallagher, 2006).
  7. Pages 46-70 = Editing Mini Lessons = Reserved for “editing” mini lessons. Editing lessons focus on mistakes that writers make (Gallagher, 2006).
  8. Pages 71-170 = Writing = This is the heart of the writer’s notebook; much like the artist’s easel or the hoopster’s gym, this is where writers play with writing (Gallagher, 2006)
  9. Pages 171-220 = Journal

• Explain that these writers’ notebooks will remain in class; that they will be receiving handouts that will have to be put in the appropriate section.
• Ask them to think about their idea books; explain that a number of visual artists carry around sketchbooks with them all the time. Ask: Why do you think they do that? How do these artists use their sketchbooks? Have them consider the similarities between sketchbooks and their idea books? How do they see themselves using their idea books can help them with their writing?
• Just like the visual artists that I described, it will be my expectation that you keep your idea book with you so that if you overhear bits of an interesting conversation, if you see a really compelling character on the street, you can simply jot it down in your idea book. If you see an arresting image that captures your imagination, describe it or if you can cut it out and paste it into your idea book. Your idea books will travel back and forth with you from the after school program, home and back here again; use these little books to note
anything that interests you—anything that you may want to consider developing into a longer piece. These little books will contain some of your seed ideas for writing that you will do.

• Distribute handout with quote from an interview with author, Drew Lamm, that Ralph Fletcher did; focus on the quote.

   I get my ideas from living my life wide-eyed and awake. I sit on the edge of my chair. I pay attention to wherever I am. My writing notebook is with me most always, and I often think I’m a much more interesting person with my notebook than without it because it keeps me alert. With paper at hand, any idea that flies by gets a place to land. Sometimes a line of prose or poetry will bump into me almost as a physical sensation and I know that if I write it down immediately and follow after it, something will be there. Other times I hear a phrase spoken or read a line of poetry that moves my mind into a new place, and suddenly I want to follow these new ideas (Fletcher, 2000).

• Have students underline any part of the quote that strikes them or stands out to them; have students share and then focus on whatever struck you. Make sure you connect what students and you underlined to the habits of effective writers; make sure you emphasize how this quote from a writer can help student use their idea books.

• As you dismiss students, remind them to: move through their days, wide-eyed and awake, with the idea books; remind them to pay attention and jot and sketch down anything that strikes them in their idea books (Fletcher, 2000).

**HW:**

• Take your idea books home with you; take them when you go out and write, list or sketch eight ideas, experiences, thoughts and/or moments you witness or participate in that you think you might want to explore more with your writing. Remember that you can also cut images or phrases out of magazines and newspapers; just make sure you include a note to yourself about where you might want to take this with your writing.

• Distribute copy of the quote about writer’s notebook; students will cut out the quote and glue it to the inside of their idea book as a reminder and inspiration.

**“I Am From” Lesson Plans:**

**Lesson 3:**

**Objectives:** Students will be able to (SWBAT) identify words and phrases from Digable Planets “Where I Am From” that express a sense of place; SWBAT identify powerful lines that strike them. SWBAT identify broad categories the group used in writing the lyrics; categories like: music, what people wear, what people do, descriptions of where they live, family, friends, where people live. This lesson provides students with an example upon which they can base their own “I Am From” pieces; furthermore, this lesson acquaints students with different conventions
and techniques they can and should be encouraged to use and experiment with in their own pieces.


Have students put “Where I’m From” organizers in the “What Should I Write” and the lyrics in the “Craft” sections.

Time: 60 minute period

PROCEDURE-Lesson 3:

• Have Digable Planets’ “I Am From” playing as students enter the room. Let it play until you’re ready to start and then pause it.
• Move on to “I Am From” attribute web; begin an attribute web on the board, model two to three attributes based on where you are from for your students. Distribute webs and have students do their own attribute webs that describe where they are from; tell them they need to come up with at least 10 phrases or words that describe where they are from. Explain to your students that you will be coming back to the attribute web in a little bit.
• Start playing “I Am From” again; tell the kids to listen carefully in order to figure out what the rap is about. Then ask the question: What is the connection or relationship between the rap that was playing as you walked in and this attribute web? Quickly record student responses on the board.
• Explain that over the next several classes we will be looking at this piece as well as other pieces written by students in order to get a sense of the different ways young people approached writing about where they are from because students will be doing the very same thing-writing their own pieces, and these examples will help and inspire them in their writing!
• Distribute “I Am From” Organizer and lyrics.
• Break students down into small groups; have them work together to do the organizer by looking closely at the lyrics and responding to prompts; each student is own recorder. While most prompts will be completed as a group, one prompt asks students to compare and contrast their where they’re from to the place described in the lyrics/rap.
• WHOLE-GROUP DISCUSSION about organizer; record student responses on board.
• Have students highlight any words or phrases in the lyrics that give them a sense of the place that is being described; do this along with the kids. Remind your students to keep sense of place in mind when they write their pieces; tell them to remember all the different ways Digable Planets created a sense of place.
• ASK the class: What kind of attribute web do you think Digable Planets might have created for their rap based on the lyrics? Distribute attribute web.
• Do two attributes on attribute web on board; you can do this with your students, and then have them continue working in small groups on the attribute webs.
• Whole-group discussion about the attribute webs that students created based on the rap.
• Explain to your students that you would like to figure out if we can group some of these attributes together under broader categories that might help them when they are working on their pieces. Do a think a loud where you work through an attribute and connect it
with a category. Remind your students to refer back to the box on the organizer where they listed some helpful categories. Tell them that it might help.

- Discuss these categories as a whole group and then have your students to respond to the following question as an “exit card;” have students write their responses on a 3x5 card:

  **How might these categories help you in writing your own piece?**

- **Idea Book HW**-Have students take out their homework and do a quick pair-share about their list of ideas they recorded in their idea books.

- Ask students to consider: How might your idea book help you when you write your own “I Am From” piece?

**HW:**

- Do your own “I Am From” attribute web; add eight descriptive words and/or phrases.
- Read pages 14-21 in your *Voices of Teens*.
- Based on reading and our work with Digable Planets, have students select one piece that they relate to the most; have student do some kind of writing or create some kind of visual representation that explains the connections. Students can draw a picture, create a Venn diagram; respond in poetry or prose-just as long as they explain how or why they relate to that poem.

**Lesson 4:**

**Objectives:** Students will be able to (SWBAT) identify and define poetic conventions like metaphor, personification, repetition and rhyme in Digable Planets’ “Where I’m From” and in several other selected pieces of student writing. SWBAT identify sensory details that add depth to these pieces. *This lesson acquaints students with different conventions and techniques they can and should be encouraged to use and experiment with in their own pieces; this lesson helps students understand the importance of sensory details and provides a model for how they can incorporate these details into their writing.*

**Materials:** Sensory Detail Organizer, Poetic Conventions-Guided Notes, “Where I’m From” lyrics, “Where I’m From” attribute web, paper, pens, pencils, highlighters, *Voices of Teens: Writers Matter*, Day 1 homework, writer’s notebook and idea book

*Sensory Detail Organizer and Poetic Conventions handouts will go into the “Craft” section of writers’ notebooks.*

**Time:** 60 minute period

**PROCEDURE-Lesson 4:**

- Review main events that happened during Day 3-help and give clues if necessary. Encourage your students to take out handouts to help them remember.
- Have students get out their homework and do a quick pair share about their homework.
• Send students back to the poems that they selected as relating to them the most and have them highlight three of their favorite lines, phrases or expressions in their books.
• Explain that students will be doing a silent web next; explain what they will have to do and then have them do a silent web up on the board where they walk up and write on the board one of their favorite lines, phrases or expressions. You should participate as well, but you should go last.
• Explain that a number of the lines that students selected as powerful have special names; the fancy word is poetic conventions, and knowing more about these conventions can help students in their writing. Some examples of poetic conventions are: metaphor, personification, alliteration, repetition and rhyme. Ask students to raise their hands if they have heard of any of these; ask a couple of students to share what they know. Remind your students that these conventions are not just for poetry—that writers use these conventions in non fiction writing all the time—in essays and letters to make their writing more persuasive and effective. And guess what? So can your students. Tell your students that you will expect them to take some risks in their pieces; try some new things because it’s in the taking of risks, making mistakes and learning that true growth as a writer happens.
• Distribute the Poetic Conventions-Guided Notes. Walk students through definitions and the examples. Then have all students look at two pre-selected pieces. Have them work to identify a second example for each convention on the guided notes.
• Review as a whole group.
• Explain that in addition to poetic conventions, writers use sensory details to add depth to their writing.
• Ask the class: **What do you think sensory details are?** Discuss and then have them list the five senses. Ask: **Why do you think sensory details are so powerful in writing?**
  **What impact might sensory details have on your reader?**
• Distribute sensory detail organizer; do a think aloud for one so that you model for the students how they need to complete it; then have them work on the organizer individually recording three sensory details about where they are from for each of the five senses.
• Have students write an example of a metaphor on a 3x5 card as an “exit pass.” Collect the cards on their way out of class.

**HW:**

• Pick two conventions and experiment with them; write a couple lines of prose or poetry and include the conventions you selected.
• Complete the sensory detail organizer—where you write down two sensory details describing where you are from for each sense.
• Add seven sensory details to your “Where I’m From” attribute web
• Take your idea books home with you; take them when you go out and write, list or sketch four ideas, experiences, thoughts and/or moments you witness or participate in that you think you might want to explore more with your writing. Remember that you can also cut images or phrases out of magazines and newspapers; just make sure you include a note to yourself about where you might want to take this with your writing.

**Lesson 5:**

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Objectives: Students will be able to (SWBAT) use graphic organizers to begin writing their own “I Am From” pieces which can be modeled after an “inspiration” piece from the book. SWBAT incorporate poetic conventions like metaphor, personification, repetition and rhyme as well as sensory details into their pieces. **Require and encourage students to take some risks and to incorporate several of these conventions and sensory elements into their pieces; encourage students to use illustrations if they are so inclined; students may write their pieces in prose rather than poetry if they wish.**


Time: 60 minute period

**PROCEDURE-Lesson 5:**

- Have students get out their attribute webs; have students begin to think of some of the ways that they could use their webs in the writing of their pieces; record their ideas on the board.
- Have them decide if they will pattern their “I Am From” piece after one of the pieces they read or if they will use the one of the titles from the book and write their own piece (copycat assignment) or write their own “I Am From” piece entirely.
- Have students begin writing their own pieces; they will be using their attribute webs as well as their other hw which asked them to select a piece upon which to model their own writing. Have students include the piece that operated as their inspiration/template if they decide to go this route.
- Encourage students to use their idea books if they have something in them that they would like to incorporate into their “I Am From” pieces; this is optional. Students will have multiple seed ideas and sources of inspiration for this writing activity.
- Students will work on their pieces for the remainder of the period. You will check in with students and be available for mini conferences where students need support, feedback, suggestions, praise and encouragement.

**HW:**

- Finish writing your “I Am From” piece; highlight the different conventions you used and experimented with in your piece. Underline the different sensory details you included in your piece.

**Lesson 6:**
Objectives: Students will be able to (SWBAT) understand the importance of free writing. SWBAT write about something that annoys them; this is a free writing activity. SWBAT create a list of “writing territories,” topics from which good writing can develop.

Materials: Writer’s notebook, idea book, Fletcher & Elbow handout about getting started

Have students put their Fletcher & Elbow handout in the “What Do I Write” section of their writers’ notebook.

Time: 60 minute period

PROCEDURE-Lesson 6:

• Collect the “I Am From” hw; explain that class will be returning to these in a period or two.
• Have students work in pairs to respond to the following board prompts; remind the class that every student will be his or her own recorder:
  1. Create your own definition of “free writing.” Make sure you explain what you think it is.
  2. Write several sentences explaining why “free writing and journaling” would be important for writers. How do you think “free writing” and “journaling can help writers?
• Have a whole-group discussion about student responses to prompts.
• Distribute Fletcher & Elbow handout about free writing and getting started. Have students discuss the meaning of the quotes and then ask them to connect their responses to the quotes.
• Explain the Elbow quote a bit more; emphasize the importance of just writing, of not being judgmental or critical. Emphasize the importance of just writing.
• Have students get out their idea books; have them look at the lists and discuss how their idea lists might connect to free writing and journaling. Have a quick discussion about this; make sure that students understand that their idea books and the ideas in them can often be used as “seed ideas” that they can develop further in their writing. Explain that writers do this all the time.
• Remind students about the following quote which should be glued onto the inside cover of their idea books; have students reread the quote:
  
  I get my ideas from living my life wide-eyed and awake. I sit on the edge of my chair. I pay attention to wherever I am. My writing notebook is with me most always, and I often think I’m a much more interesting person with my notebook than without it because it keeps me alert. With paper at hand, any idea that flies by gets a place to land. Sometimes a line of prose or poetry will bump into me almost as a physical sensation and I know that if I write it down immediately and follow after it, something will be there. Other times I hear a phrase spoken or read a line of poetry that moves my mind into a new place, and suddenly I want to follow these new ideas (Fletcher, 2000).
• Have students do a free writing activity about something that annoys them. Remind them to be “wide-eyed and awake” as they do the free writing activity. Give students 25 minutes to write in the journal part of their writers’ notebooks.

• Move on to “writing territories;” explain that each of us has particular topics and experiences that provide rich writing material; create a list of your writing territories and share with class.

• Have students create a list of between 10 to 15 “writing territories” in their writers’ notebooks in the “What Should I Write” section

HW:

• Select one topic from your “writing territories” list and free write about the topic for 25 minutes; have students do this on a loose-leaf sheet of paper with three holes so that they can put hw in writers’ notebooks during the following session. Remind them to just write-no judgment, no corrections-just write.

• Take your idea books home with you; take them when you go out and write, list or sketch four ideas, experiences, thoughts and/or moments you witness or participate in that you think you might want to explore more with your writing. Remember that you can also cut images or phrases out of magazines and newspapers; just make sure you include a note to yourself about where you might want to take this with your writing.

Lesson 7:

Objectives: Students will be able to (SWBAT) identify specific things that they can do in order to create a safe and affirming classroom community. By using the peer-editing checklist, SWBAT identify strengths and areas needing improvement in their “I Am From” piece and work to make effective revisions.

Materials: “I Am From” pieces, peer-editing checklist (which includes STAR- Substitute-Take things out, Add, Rearrange), safe-classroom attribute web, helpful feedback handout, writer’s notebook, idea book (Gallagher, 2006)

Time: 60 minute period

PROCEDURE-Lesson 7:

• Explain the class that they will be providing feedback on each others’ work; tell them that they will be “peer editing.” Put “peer editing” on the board and ask the class to tell you what they think that means. Ask them if any of them ever peer edited before. Explain that before we begin peer editing, it’s important to understand some ground rules for how to give feedback and comment on each other’s work.
• Pass out the helpful feedback handout; have students reflect and record two experiences when they received feedback in a helpful and productive way and then two times when they received feedback in a negative way.
• Have students share with a partner, and then have them work together to create two ground rules for receiving helpful feedback.
• Have a whole-group discussion about their feedback experiences and the ground rules they generated; record the ground rules on the board.
• Break the class down into groups of three or four students; have them create a skit that either follows or violates the ground rules for constructive, helpful feedback.
• Have students perform their skits and then have them respond to the following prompt: What is the relationship between helpful, productive feedback and a safe, affirming classroom environment? Be sure to give your students think time; you can have them respond in writing.
• Discuss this question as a whole-group; move on to discussion about what students can do to create a safe, affirming classroom community. Explain that safety and support will be especially important since students will not only be peer editing each others’ work but will also be reading their work to the class.
• Have students write three things that they can do to create a safe, supportive classroom community that will affirm the work writing and risk taking of students in the class.
• Distribute the peer-editing checklist; do a think aloud which will model for the students how they need to proceed. Work with a first draft that you have written; focus on STAR and model this explicitly. Explain to the class, that before they edit someone else’s work they will first edit their own, and that the editing checklist will help them do both. Have them begin working their way through the checklist. They will work on this for the remainder of the class.
• Collect their pieces with revisions and their editing checklists at the end of class as the “exit pass.”

HW:
• NO HW

Lesson 8:

Objectives: Students will be able to (SWBAT) offer specific, helpful feedback to another student about his/her “I Am From” piece. By using the peer-editing checklist, SWBAT identify strengths and areas needing improvement in another student’s “I Am From” piece. SWBAT work together to create a “group-generated I Am From” piece that incorporates the contributions of each group member and illustrates several poetic conventions and sensory details.

Materials: “I Am From” pieces, peer-editing checklist
Time: 60 minute period
PROCEDURE-Lesson 8:

- Have the class review what you covered during the previous class; redirect their attention to the ground rules for productive, helpful feedback. Ask them to think back to the skits about productive and unproductive feedback.
- Pass out new peer-editing checklists; have students partner up and have them get started; keep eye on the clock—give them about 10 to 15 minutes for first session; circulate and support as needed, and then have the kids switch.
- Have students work on revising their pieces based on the peer conferences they just had. Plan to meet individually with students during this time in a quiet corner of the room.
- Move on to “group-generated I Am From” pieces; have the students work in groups of three or four students.
- Explain that they have all done their own “I Am From” pieces, but now they are going to work together to create a group “I Am From” piece that incorporates elements from their individual pieces. Tell them they will perform this together towards the end of class, and remind them that one person will have to be the recorder so that the group-generated piece can be turned in to you. Remind them to include some of those poetic conventions and sensory details.
- Have groups perform their collaborative pieces. Have audience identify sensory details and poetic conventions. Have audience identify one thing they liked about the performance and/or the piece.
- Collect their individual and group pieces and their editing checklists at the end of class as the “exit pass.” Let kids know that part of next class will be devoted to sharing some of the individual pieces.

HW:

- NO HW

Lesson 9:

Objectives:

- Students will continue sharing their group “I Am From” pieces.
- Students will continue to share their individual “I Am From” pieces.

Materials: “I Am From” pieces
Time: 60 minute period

PROCEDURE-Lesson 9:
• Remind students about strategies they can use to create a safe, supportive environment for others.
• Continue having students share collaborative and individual pieces

**HW:**

• NO HW

**Lesson 10:**

**Objectives:**

• Students will select a moment, feeling or experience from their “I Am From” piece or one of their free writing pieces to expand by “writing smaller.”
• SWBAT “write smaller” by incorporating more details that engage the reader in order to create a more powerful and compelling piece of writing.
• SWBAT write several sentences explaining the importance and power of “writing smaller.”

**Materials:** Writer’s notebook, Fletcher & Gallagher handout about writing smaller, “Writing Smaller” organizer, World Trade Center Handout-2 Versions, *Have students put these handout in the “Craft” section of their writers’ notebook.*

**Time:** 60 minute period

**PROCEDURE-Lesson 10:**

• Distribute Fletcher & Gallagher handout about “writing smaller.” Have students brainstorm what “writing smaller” means.
• Have a whole-group discussion about this; then move on to World Trade Center Handout.
• Have students work to identify similarities and differences between the two versions; have students create a Venn diagram or some other kind of organizer to illustrate the similarities and differences.
• Have students pick the version they think is most compelling-most powerful; have them write several sentences explaining the reasons behind their choice; discuss as a whole-group and then emphasize the importance of details, narrow focus and specificity in writing.
• Model “writing smaller” for students on board; do a think-a-loud; keep example on board.
• Have students select a moment from one of their written pieces that they would like to “write smaller.”
• As exit pass, have students write down the importance of “writing smaller” and the difference it will make in their writing.
HW:

• Have students select another moment that they would like to “write smaller” and then “write it smaller.” Remind students to do this on loose-leaf, three-hole punched paper so that they can put in writers’ notebook during the next session.
• Take idea books; add more ideas to idea books. Be awake; be attentive, and take your idea books wherever you go.

Lesson 11:

Objectives: Students will be able to (SWBAT) select a writing fragment that they will develop further by branching the sentences and varying the sentence structure; these writing fragments can be from their “writing smaller” hw or anything from their journal section. SWBAT vary the structure of their sentences and branch their sentences to add depth and complexity to their writing. SWBAT replace original verbs with stronger, more evocative verbs.

Materials: Writer’s notebook, idea book, “writing smaller” hw, rewriting handout with E.B White quote and anonymous poem, sentence expanding and sentence structure organizer (students will copy your rewrites on organizer)

Class notes and handouts from this lesson will go into the “Craft” section of writer’s notebook.

Time: 60 minute period

PROCEDURE-Lesson 11:

• Today, we are going to be focusing on sentence branching, sentence variety, sentence structure and verbs that pop. Like the “writing smaller” work we did previously, sentence expanding and sentence variety usually happens after that initial draft. This becomes the time to narrow your focus and develop your ideas and how you want to say them while making your writing more interesting and engaging for your reader.
• Distribute rewriting handout with E.B. White quote and anonymous poem about the writing process; discuss briefly who E.B. White is—may focus on books which many kids probably have read.
• Give students some time to read and write down their impressions. Ask the students what advice the quote giving writers; have them consider and discuss the same question when thinking about the poem.
• Emphasize that no writer—even professional writers get it right the first time. They rewrite, revise and rethink; these are important steps in the writing process and absolutely essential for their growth as writers.
Now we are going to look at a first draft I wrote that I am going to rework by expanding my sentences and adding sentence variety, but first let’s describe what we see and write down our initial impressions.

**Have your own writing sample on the board. Make sure you have plenty of subject-verb repetition as well as plenty of simply sentences.**

What do you notice about the writing? What do you think works and why? What is there that keeps the reader wanting to read more? What doesn’t work and why? What’s there that might cause the reader to want to stop reading?

Highlight the repetition of the subject and verbs, the boring verbs and same sentence pattern as drawbacks; make sure that you have some good things in the piece—maybe an interesting topic, a nice metaphor and funny insight.

First, let’s start with adding some verbs that pop! Do think-aloud; have rewrite on board; have students copy rewrite down on organizer. Have students help you come up with more interesting verbs, and do substitutions. Remind students that “substituting” comes from STAR—the acronym that helps them revise and transform their writing.

Have students copy their original writing into the appropriate box.

Now give student some time to rework their writing by adding more interesting verbs that pop; have them work alone. Circulate among the kids and check in with them. Give them about 7 minutes on this; remind them to make sure they write down their changes in the organizer. Have some sharing.

Move onto to modeling sentence branching; explain that there are three places where students can branch a sentence: the beginning, the middle or the end.

a. Have example come from your writing sample on the board.

Example:

*I drove my car to the beach.* (Gallagher, 2006)

______________, *I drove my car to the beach.* (Gallagher, 2006)

*I drove my car, ____________, to the beach.* (Gallagher, 2006)

*I drove my car to the beach, ____________.* (Gallagher, 2006)

- Have students brainstorm possible beginning, middle and end branches to your example sentence (Gallagher, 2006).
- Make sure students record the rewritten sentences branches in the sentence branching section of the organizer.

**FRONT BRANCH:**

1. **Hurriedly**, I drove my car to the beach. (Gallagher, 2006)
2. **Excited**, I drove my car to the beach.
3. **After getting off work**, I drove my car to the beach. (Gallagher, 2006)
4. **With my brother sitting next to me**, I drove my car to the beach. (Gallagher, 2006)

**MIDDLE BRANCH:**
1. I drove my car, **radio blasting**, to the beach. (Gallagher, 2006)
2. I drove my car, **a ’68 Chevy**, to the beach. (Gallagher, 2006)
3. I drove my car, **without a driver’s license**, to the beach. (Gallagher, 2006)

**END BRANCH:**
1. I drove my car to the beach, **hoping to find a good parking spot**. (Gallagher, 2006)
2. I drove my car to the beach, **unaware of the policeman behind me**. (Gallagher, 2006)
3. I drove my car to the beach, **praying the waves would be good**. (Gallagher, 2006)

- Once you have finished modeling the sentence branching, have students work on branching the sentences in their own pieces; they will complete the appropriate section in the organizer. Give them about 10 minutes for this.
- Sentence branching is one way to make your sentences more interesting; another way deals with sentence structure. There are three basic kinds of sentence structure: simple, compound and complex.
- Let’s go back to my original writing. There is one kind of sentence structure primarily in my writing. Which one is it? What is the overall effect of repeating that kind of sentence structure?
- Model writing different kinds of sentence structure. Have students follow along and fill out organizer.
- Then have them begin working to mix up the sentence structure of their writing.

**HW:**
- Have students continue to work on reworking their writing by using sentence branching, verbs that pop and sentence structure.
- Find and/or create your own definition of a paragraph. Identify the parts of a paragraph, and define the different parts.

**Lesson 12:**

**Objectives:** Students will be able to (SWBAT) transform a part from a free writing assignment into a paragraph with a topic sentence. SWBAT develop their writing further by incorporating additional details and more specificity. Students will be expected to incorporate and experiment with writing strategies from the previous lesson: verbs that pop, sentence branching and sentence structure. SWBAT vary the structure of their sentences and branch their sentences to add depth and complexity to their writing. SWBAT replace verbs with stronger, more evocative verbs.
Materials: Writer’s notebook, idea book, Lesson 11 hw, sentence expanding and sentence structure organizer, paragraph structure handout

Time: 60 minute period

PROCEDURE-Lesson 12:

• Have students get out hw; have them do a 5 to 7 minute pair-share about the revisions they made; make sure they show their partner the original; remind the partner that they have to provide some feedback about the changes that were made.
• Collect HW, and then move on to the day’s lesson.
• Today, we are going to work on developing a part from our free writing about something that annoys us into a paragraph. We are going to experiment with sentence branching, sentence variety, sentence structure and verbs that pop in these paragraphs, but before we can get to the writing piece, it will be important to review paragraphs.
• In small groups, work to create a group generated definition for a paragraph and the parts of a paragraph based on your hw; everyone should contribute something to the definitions, and everyone will be his or her own recorder.
• Give students between 5 to 7 minutes for this.
• Have some group sharing, and then distribute the paragraph structure handout.
• Review the definition of a topic sentence; explain how important the topic sentence is to your paragraph—that it provides the structure and operates like a skeleton in a body or a heart in a body. The topic sentence is essential and it must have a strongly, articulated opinion. Your topic sentence will be a place for strong verbs that pop and grab the attention of your reader.
• Have your writing sample about something that annoys you. Read it out loud and then model how you would write a strong topic sentence. Make sure your topic sentence has strong verbs, sentence branching and/or compound or complex sentence structure. You can break this down; write a first draft of the topic sentence and then work on verbs and sentence branching during a second pass.
• Give students time to copy their writing into their handout.
• Have students work to write a topic sentence based on their writing. They will write their topic sentences on their handout.
• With a partner, have students check to make sure that their topic sentence has:
  1. A strong opinion
  2. Strong verbs
  3. Sentence branching OR compound or complex sentence structure
• Give students time to rewrite their topic sentences if necessary.
• Have students write their topic sentences on large cards; don’t have them write their names on the cards.
• Collect the cards; assign a number to several cards and have the kids do a gallery walk. They will have to make notes about each of the topic sentences: what worked as well as suggestions. Give the kids about 10 minutes for this.
• Have a whole-group discussion about the topic sentences that were part of the gallery walk.

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• Review the definition for supporting sentences; work to develop the metaphor you started with when discussing the topic sentence. If the topic sentence is the skeleton, what would the supporting sentences be?
• Return to your topic sentence and your free writing piece. Now what kinds of supporting details and evidence can I add to illustrate and support my assertion/my opinion in my topic sentence?
• Model this process for the students; pull sentences from your free writing piece and use them as the basis for your supporting sentences.
• Once you have modeled this, have students do the same with their writing.

HW:
• Have students develop a paragraph from another writing fragment, writing territory or idea from their idea book.
• Record ideas in your idea book.

Lesson 13:

• MID-SESSION WRITING SAMPLES
• FREE WRITING and JOURNALING

Lesson 14:

Objectives:
• Students will share a piece of their writing with the group.
• Students will do some reflective writing about the program so far.

Materials: Writer’s notebook, idea book

Time: 60 minute period

“Teen Challenges” Lesson Plans

Lesson 15:
Objectives: Students will be able to (SWBAT) complete an attribute web that identifies the teen challenges that impact them in their lives. SWBAT read and select a journal entry from *Voice of Teens* that speaks to a common teen challenge and then create an organizer or visual that shows the similarities between their lives and the lives of the teen authors; the organizer or visual will then be used as a basis for a more in-depth writing assignment.

Materials: *Voice of Teens*, writer’s notebook, idea book, attribute web

Time: 60 minute period

**PROCEDURE-Lesson 15:**

- Have attribute web with “teen challenges” in the center; begin brainstorming “teen challenges” that you faced when you were a teenager; do a couple attributes.
- Then explain to the class that they will be creating an attribute web about teen challenges that impact them. Tell them they need to have at least 10 attributes on their webs.
- Have a whole-group discussion about these teen challenges; create a master list on the board; have students record this master list in their “What Do I Write” section of their writer’s notebook.
- Here are some examples of teen challenges generated by my middle school students that you may want to include on the master list; many of these challenges, your students will generate themselves as these are universal struggles:
  1. Finding where you fit in
  2. Not being respected
  3. Not being taken seriously
  4. Cruelty
  5. People judging you because you’re younger
  6. Figuring out who you are
  7. Peer pressure
  8. Being teased
  9. Rejection
  10. Family
  11. Finding balance
  12. Faking it; pretending to be someone you’re not
  13. Hiding who you are
  14. Competition
  15. Independence
  16. School
  17. Body image
  18. Unrealistic expectations adults have for you
  19. Stereotypes
  20. Money
• From the master list, have students circle the five challenges that impact them most directly.
• Then have students begin reading the “Teen Challenges” chapter in *Voices of Teens*. Have them begin with the example of student writing on p._______ about being criticized for her looks. Then have students read journal entries 27 to 34; tell them that they will be reading the entries in order to find two journal entries deal with one of the five teen challenges that impact them the most.
• Have students share with a partner the similarities between their lives and the journal entries they selected.
• Have students work individually to create a visual that show the similarities between their lives and the lives of the teen authors whose journal entries they selected.

**HW:**

• Respond to the following “think-about-it” questions for the journal entries you selected:
  a. **Have you ever had these kinds of feelings?** (Vogel, Galbraith, 2008)
  b. **What do you do to get through challenging times?** (Vogel, Galbraith, 2008)
  c. **How can your friends help you?** (Vogel, Galbraith, 2008)
  d. **What advice would you offer to the author?** (Vogel, Galbraith, 2008)
• Write two paragraphs about the similarities between you and the authors of the journal entries you selected. Do this on loose-leaf, three-hole punched paper so that it can be put into your writer’s notebook.
• Bring in song lyrics that deal with a teen challenge.
• Record, sketch, list, glue additional seed ideas in your idea book.

**Lesson 16:**

**Objectives:** Students will be able to (SWBAT) identify poetic and literary conventions in song lyrics. SWBAT finish a free writing activity that will have them writing about teen challenges in their lives. SWBAT begin to incorporate poetic and literary conventions into a piece about teen challenges and their lives. Students may choose to model their piece after one of the journal entries in the book, song lyrics or develop the piece entirely on their own.

**Materials:** *Voice of Teens*, writer’s notebook, idea book, attribute web, Lesson 15 hw, song lyrics

**Time:** 60 minute period

**PROCEDURE-Lesson 16:**
• Have students get out their song lyrics; have them highlight and identify at least three poetic and literary conventions in the lyrics. Remind students to refer back to their writer’s notebooks.
• Have students do some sharing about how their song deals with teen challenges.
• Have song lyrics that you share with students, and discuss the conventions and the connections with students.
• Move on to free writing activity where students will write in the journal section of their writers’ notebooks; have students write for 25 minutes about a teen challenge in their life. Remind the class that this is a FREE WRITING assignment; tell them to just write and keep writing without judgment or critique.
• Have students begin experimenting with writing different poetic and literary conventions about their teen challenges; encourage risk taking and experimentation.

HW:

• Begin reworking your free writing. Work to replace weak verbs with stronger verbs; vary your sentence structure and experiment with sentence branching. Do hw on a loose-leaf, three-hole punched sheet of paper so it can be put into writers’ notebooks.

Lesson 17:

Objectives:

• Students will continue working on their “teen challenges” pieces.
• Students will continue revising their pieces using STAR.
• Students will continue to work on incorporating poetic and literary conventions in pieces.
• Students will mini conference with teacher as questions arise.
• Some students will begin sharing their unfinished pieces with the class.

Materials: Voice of Teens, writer’s notebook, idea book, attribute web, Lesson 16 hw, song lyrics

Time: 60 minute period

PROCEDURE-Lesson 17:
• Students should get out their materials and begin working.
• You will float, mini conference with students and check in with students.
• Have the last 15 minutes of class devoted to sharing pieces as is.

**HW:**

• No HW

**Lesson 18:**

Objectives:

• Students will continue working on their “teen challenges” pieces.
• Students will continue revising their pieces using STAR.
• Students will continue to work on incorporating poetic and literary conventions in pieces.
• Students will mini conference with teacher as questions arise.
• Some students will begin working on visual to accompany one of their writing pieces; visual can be an illustration, a collage, a diorama, a digital story, a photograph of a tableau, a comic strip, a poster.

**Materials:** Voice of Teens, writer’s notebook, idea book, attribute web, song lyrics, handout explaining their culminating, visual project, scissors, glue, digital cameras, poster board, paper, construction paper, markers, computers

**Time:** 60 minute period

**PROCEDURE-Lesson 18:**

• Students should get out their materials and begin working.
• You will float, mini conference with students and check in with students.
• For students finished with their “teen challenges” pieces, you will meet with them as a small group in order to explain their culminating project.
• After you have explained the project, have students get started by brainstorming and working to select the piece of writing upon which the project will be based.

**HW:**

• No HW

**Lesson 19:**

Objectives:
• Students will share their finished “teen challenges” pieces.
• Some students will continue working on their culminating project.
• Other students will begin working on visual to accompany one of their writing pieces; visual can be an illustration, a collage, a diorama, a digital story, a photograph of a tableau, a comic strip, a poster.

**Materials:** *Voice of Teens*, writer’s notebook, idea book, attribute web, song lyrics, handout explaining their culminating visual project, scissors, glue, digital cameras, poster board, paper, construction paper, markers, computers

**Time:** 60 minute period

**PROCEDURE-Lesson 19:**

• Students will share their finished pieces.
• For those students who can, they will get out their materials and begin working on their projects.
• You will float and check in with students.
• You will meet with those remaining students who need to have the culminating project explained to them.
• After you have explained the project, have students get started by brainstorming and working to select the piece of writing upon which the project will be based.

**HW:**

• No HW

**Lessons 20, 21 & 22:**

**Objectives:**

• Students will continue working on visual to accompany one of their writing pieces; visual can be an illustration, a collage, a diorama, a digital story, a photograph of a tableau, a comic strip, a poster.
• Students will type up their written pieces.
• Students will revise and peer edit pieces; students will mini conference with teacher.

**Materials:** *Voice of Teens*, writer’s notebook, idea book, attribute web, handout explaining their culminating visual project, scissors, glue, digital cameras, poster board, paper, construction paper, markers, computers

**Time:** 60 minute period

**PROCEDURE-Lessons 20, 21 & 22:**

• Students will continue working on their projects.
• You will float and conference with students as needed.
• Students will type up their written pieces.
• Students will revise and peer edit written pieces and have mini conference with you.

**HW:**

• No HW

**Lesson 23:**

• END-OF-SESSION WRITING SAMPLES
• REFLECTIVE WRITING
• QUESTIONNAIRE

**Lesson 24:**

• Sharing and celebration of student writing and projects.
• Create a gallery walk where parents, BT staff and supporters can talk with students about their work and their projects.
• Selected students will share to student body and visitors.

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