Welcome to our Fall 2013 newsletter for the Writers Matter program. We are currently completing our eighth year of providing a unique and innovative opportunity for middle and lower high school students to learn critical writing skills through the use of journal writing as a vehicle for self-expression. Through writing about their lives, the students find an effective emotional outlet at a time in their lives when personal expression and having their voices heard is so important. Writers Matter is a motivational strategy that encourages students to share personal stories with each other, listen to other voices, and develop effective personal relationships with peers to provide more tolerance and appreciation of others.

The results of research conducted on the Program have consistently demonstrated that Writers Matter fosters more than just improved writing skill development among middle school students. These results include a more nurturing learning environment, stronger teacher-student relationships, and more effective classroom management because of the trusting and mutually respectful relationships that develop between teachers and students.

The Writers Matter Program was created in 2005 for middle school adolescent students, grades six through eight, in order to motivate and encourage them to become better writers. In 2008, I wrote, along with my coauthor, Voices of Teens: Writers Matter, which was published in the same year by the National Middle School Association. Since the inception of the Program, over 8000 students have participated. This year over 1200 students, 17 teachers, and 9 schools are involved in the Program.

Through an analysis of the research data and contributions from our Writers Matter teachers, many newly-tested teaching strategies have been designed and implemented related to the teaching of writing. These developments have led to a new book that will be published by Temple University Press in January 2014, by Drs. Yost, Vogel, and Lewinski called Empowering Young Writers: The Writers Matter Approach.

Dr. Kimberly Lewinski is my newly appointed Associate Director for the Writers Matter Program. I look forward to working with her and for her contributions to move the program forward.

A Renewed Focus on Professional Development

A powerful component of Writers Matter is the professional community developed among the teachers participating in the program. Each month, the teachers in the Writers Matter Program share their student writing and a one-page analysis of the drafts with the other teachers in the program. Each piece of writing is followed by a group discussion where questions are asked and further analysis is provided. This form of professional development provides each teacher an opportunity to reflect on their current practices and learn about the methods of their colleagues. The teachers also present to the group various classroom discoveries and lesson plans providing an optimal forum for meaningful and ongoing professional development. (Continued on page 2)
Books and Other Publications
In 2008 Michael Galbraith, an 8th grade literacy teacher in Philadelphia and I coauthored “Voices of Teens: Writers Matter”, published by the National Middle School Association. This book is an essential component of the professional development sessions implemented for Writers Matter teachers every year. Participating students also receive a copy of the “Student Edition” of the book, which gives them tremendous insight into the program’s focus and helps them to understand their role as fledgling writers and authors. Along with Deb Yost, I wrote an article featuring the Writers Matter program, entitled, “Writing matters to urban middle level students: The Writers Matter program motivates urban youth to write about their lives. It is published in the Middle School Journal, January 2012 issue. www.amle.org.

Writers Matter Mentorship Program and Campus Visits
The Writers Matter program continues to provide La Salle University mentors to many of the participating schools. This past May, Smith Middle School, Wagner Middle School, and AMY Northwest School, visited the La Salle University campus to gain a better understanding of college life in the hope of motivating these students to contemplate pursuing a college education as a future goal, if they work hard and do well in school. This visit included a tour of the campus, meeting with faculty and students, exploring the dormitories, listening to a powerful performance from members of the Philadelphia Youth Poetry Movement and participating in a writing activity.

We are going into our second year of starting an after school program at Wagner Middle school. Mentors from La Salle University meet with the students weekly for an afternoon of writing and support providing a safe space for these students to share their stories and find comfort from their peers.

This past year, one of our newest mentors Youssef Kromah and several members of the Youth Poetry Movement, held assemblies at each of the schools participating in the Writers Matter Program. All of the teachers reported a positive response to the assemblies therefor we intend to continue these assemblies again this year.

Special Thanks
Special thanks go to Dr. Karen Kolsky, Assistant Superintendent, from the School District of Philadelphia (SDP) and to Dr. Penny Nixon Senior Executive Vice President of Education Universal Companies for their relentless support and encouragement for the Writers Matter Program.

This Program is generously supported by the PTS Foundation (Pam and Tony Schneider) , Tyler Aaron Bookman Memorial Foundation (Neil and Jill Bookman) and Moses Feldman Family Foundation (Moe and Susan Feldman). A heartfelt thanks to these special individuals for their vision to help those less fortunate then themselves.

Thank You,
Bob Vogel
Founding Director, Writers Matter Program at La Salle University
Professor, Department of Education, La Salle University

First Place Entry - “Who is ME: A Family Tree Poem”
Wagner Middle School

The Roots:
Blood rushes through each body creating another 1940; from Accomac Virginia to Philadelphia
Speaking English
Saying “clean the house”—not ours, but the house of the other.
Hoping for a better life and fair job
Saving childhood memorials

The Trunk:
Generations change like weather
Singing “I made you a fisherman”
Cooking homemade gravy from scratch and making corn cakes
Hearing about abbreviated assassinations: First, MLK then JFK
Being a part of when blacks were not allowed in school with whites… And when they were not able to vote
Hoping to take away the violence and be a better world
Memories of going to a carnival and seeing airplanes fly above for the first time

The Branches and Leaves:
My family tree marched on together
I am Maleka Tate
I now live on Bouvier Street in a house of women:
With my grandmom, aunt , mom, and my sister
I enjoy playing games and making art
When I think about my grandma’s family, I feel proud of my past
In the future, I will teach my own about my family and tell them that our history matters
Just like our writing about it matters, too.
Teacher Testimonial

“Writers Matters has opened the eyes of my students in ways that I could have never imagined. The focus, expression, insight, knowledge, ambition, and motivation to cultivate words and wisdom have been inspiring to me as their teacher. I never imagined growing up that I’d be the one to affect a person’s eternity, but everyday I see a future where I know I made a difference.”

- Erin Lynn Cunningham
  Teacher, Smith School

Israel and Palestinian Territories

In October 2013, Dr. Sami Adwan and I began the professional development for the teachers in both Israel and the Palestinian territories. This year we have 10 participating schools, 12 teachers and over 450 students involved in Writers Matter. We are beginning to implement a pen pal program between the middle school students from both countries to allow them to share stories and hear each other’s personal narratives. Additionally, we held a writing contest for the second straight year and awarded 8 prizes to over 250 submissions. We are looking forward to a great year and with the Middle East Writers Matter.

Student Writing Contest (continued)

Second Place Entry - “Bully, Bully”

Wagner Middle School

Bully, bully, you can’t stop me!
I have dreams and a future you see,
You can’t tell me how to fix my hair,
And I won’t give you my care,
Bully, bully, your words may hurt
But my brain pays no attention.
I’ve had enough of this misery and pain,
So now I have to bring my game.
I’ve paid attention to the saying
“Sticks and stones may break my Bones, but words can never hurt me.”
So now I can stand up with the millions of people and say…

Bully, bully, you can’t stop me
Because I am who I am and you look at me otherwise
I have skin JUST LIKE YOU
With eyes that I can see through

And when I look in the mirror, I see a beautiful girl,
Not what you describe
Your words can be selfish, greedy, ugly, and most of all, annoying!
You might be cool…
For me, some might use nerd which rules!

You hunt me down like a bee,
But all I see is a jealousy.
Bully, bully, you can’t stop me because you are just jealous
And jealousy is not the key
So don’t try to stop me!
Your words make others cry,
But for me I’ll just say sigh.
Bully, bully has someone ever told you
That you’re ugly?
Or that you aren’t cool?
So when you’re an adult, go through your memories. (Continue page 4)
Second Place Entry - “Bully, Bully” (continued from page 3)

Wagner Middle School
My dad was taken by cancer
But you have the dream life
I hope that he watched me while you did what you’ve done
But now, I’m laughing and having fun.
So with these last words, you look through your time
Now, instead of a penny, you may think I’m a dime
I’m the boss of me
And that’s something that you can’t be
I’m the robin in the tree
I’m me and you can’t be
You may try to make me cry
But before the tree dies,
Bully, bully, you CANNOT stop me!

Third Place Entry - “Philly Spoken Word”
Amy NorthWest School
I have realized
I have never seen
This city at it’s best
Scared of tomorrow
No one knows
What will happen next
Young black people
With no education
Black on black crime
Now, worse than segregation
Girls of all ages selling their bodies
To help their families
End up pregnant
And become their own enemies
What’s love got to do with it anymore?
They hit it than quit it
Just walk out the door
Got me convinced
All boys are the same
Lost hope 3 days ago
I don’t think we are ever goanna change
West side, south side
And southwest is “burnin”
We wouldn’t have this problem
If everyone was in school learnin’
Northeast, Northwest
North side and Uptown
Martins dream didn’t
Include his youth to fall down
9-year-old girls running around
Talking like they grown
You cant even spell “gangsta”
So how you “bad to the bone”
I’m tired of drowning
In this generation’s sorrows
I keep waiting, and… waiting
And I just can’t find tomorrow!
I keep hoping for tomorrow
But yesterday keeps showing up in its place
They say Philly is suppose to stick together
But yet they turn against their own race
I was told every generation gets weaker and weaker with
every crime
And it takes time
To defend
What goes on in the youth’s mind

Honorable Mention

“The Right to be Heard”
C.W. Henry Elementary School

Discrimination and prejudice are running wild
As rampant and untamed as a newborn child.
Like a ferocious beast it will not be stopped
Unless a decision is made by someone on top.
Top, top, top, like the president,
To whom good and evil should probably be evident
I hope that this is relevant:
Gays, straights, autistic, and lesbians’ too-
They’re all getting beat until they’re black and blue.
Not just fists and punches, and bullies stealing lunches.
Words.
Splendid characters that illuminate the page
Are being used to take out hate and rage.
It’s hard to believe,
To even conceive,
The things people say and do.
Let me tell you this, from me to you:
It’s real.
It’s there.
Oh yes, it’s true.
Something has to be done.
This disease must be cured.
I’ll do this by speaking up.
I have the right to be heard.

The career I want. I also want everyone to know that I want to do most of it by myself to bet-
ter myself on my own. If people aren’t OK with that, then they can get out of the car because
I’m driving toward success.
**PHILLY SPOKEN WORD**
*Amy NorthWest School*

If your goanna kill your own people
The most you can do is at least
Show a little mercy
And let them REST IN PEACE

Say you love them than mistreat them
And try to fake a broken heart
Say you need them than you leave them
Waste of time from the start

Once mended heart
Now shattered to pieces
And still black on black crime
Intensely increases

Sending nude pictures
For a little attention
This whole generation
Is in need of redemption

Everyone is getting booked
Everyone is having kids
Our hope is across the river
But our ignorance broke the bridge

People ask why am I so
pretty, smart, and single
It’s because I don’t have time
For another broken heart to mingle

No time for these boys
And their silly little games
Seems to me like everyone’s the problem
WELL SOMEONE’S GATTA MAKE A CHANGE

Don’t let your hater’s hold you back
If you want to show something, let it show
And just because you’re in the ghetto
Doesn’t mean you can’t grow

Tired of teens getting pregnant
Then turning around and killing their seed
I guess these young ladies
Just don’t think the same as me

If your woman enough to make the baby
Than your woman enough to raise the baby
And if you don’t like the idea
Than just stay young and be a lady

Something has got to give
More than it can and will take,
Because our generation is dropping Faster,
Than these young ladies can populate

PHILLY’S SUPPOSE TO STICK TOGETHER
INSTEAD, THEY KILL AND HATE EACH OTHER!!

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**“Pursuing Your Dreams”**
*C.W. Henry Elementary School*

**COURAGE** what that word means to me
I will tell you in my little and short story
There once was a girl who lived down the block
And she didn’t even know what courage was about
Wherever she went she was quiet and shy
Until one day when she opened up about one time
She was 12 years old and had plenty of talents
She had many, many dreams but thought life was a challenge
Everyone at school laughed and giggled
When she told them that she had knowledge
Because all they knew her for was all of her talents
At that point she believed that she wasn’t taken serious
And that she was living in a dream that everyone else thought was hilarious
Then came one day she was walking alone and singing to the beat
That she thought of on her on
Then out of the blue she heard something that she thought was inspiring
An old lady she knew told her
“GIRL keep on trying, and your dreams filled with many of your talents including your knowledge will come true”
5 minutes later after she thought about
She knew that the words that were spoken came to her for courage
And since that point she made plenty of changes
She felt brave and successful
She’s not afraid to express herself whether she has
Talents
Knowledge
Or other traits
She Express herself in every different way
So lets go back to the beginning
Courage what that word means to me
C- Change what you want to improve
O- Outstanding at what you do
U- Understood by others
R- Respected by yourself and others to
A- Astonishing
G- Great at your specialties
E- Extra give it something nice
Courage what that word means to you make a new change in your point of view.

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**“Take Charge: Change”**
*Smith Middle School*

Little black boys and girls being degraded because of their race and become what they are accused.
Little black boys and girls that used to run and play in the streets are now walking around the streets: Some with guns in their hands, and others with condoms looking for a fix!
When they were young, their parents had such high hopes, but now their parents are on the verge of taking them out themselves.
Blood cutting blood over drugs and addiction.
Uncles killing nephews!
Brothers killing sisters!
Why?
The only question I have for the dissolving race is why?
Why do we present ourselves so negatively?
So disrespectfully?
Why not make a change starting now, with this generation?
Rather than selling illegal drugs on the corner, do something productive.
Why not finish school and become a pharmacist to sell drugs?
If you wish to deliver a baby, why not become an OB/GYN?
You can deliver them instead of going through the pain and later decide to not take care of them.
Stop letting the media control your minds and change!
They want you to fail!
Which is why we need to rise above!
Insist on change!
We as a whole can change!
You can change what people think of you, of us, if we work together and correct ourselves!
We don’t need to be what they say we are. We need to be successful!
Take charge and change the way the other people think of us.
A kiss without a lip to touch
To a lonely heart ready to die
As her soul wandered towards the dead
Voices traveled through her head
She tried to stay real
Her mind felt unspoken
She hugged the pillow with embrace
Tears rolled down her face
Being hit by her own reality
Scars that cover her voice unheard
Beat down by hateful words
She closes her eyes but her mind is still seeking
No one listens they just keep speaking
Yet she is sweet with poise and grace
She believes that beauty is not found on her face
All people tell her, is that she so pretty
what she can fantasize.

People say she has no confidence, she's chasing her dream and hardly ever stop-
just because she wants to fit in
Picture herself thin
Thick in the waist
Dark brown eyes
Light Brown skin
Amy Northwest
Her Life Was Taken...

My Voice
Wagner Middle School

There are many different ways writing gives me a voice. For example in writ-
ing I can say what I feel and I can say it how I want, some stuff I say in my writing I cant speak it. Meaning I cant like say it, I don’t know why but writing just lets me show my feelings better than I can speak it. Lot of people might say if you can write it you can speak it but that’s not always true.

Writing lets me be myself, it lets me say things that I feel. If I could say everything I write it just wouldn’t be the same. In my writings you can under-
stand what I’m saying or trying to say. I know that writing is a big thing and it can
get people going on or understand better. Writing shows people a different side
of them. If people could speak what they wrote then they wouldn’t get the full
effect of what they wrote.

In my writings it’s like I’m telling a story, a story about things that go on in the
world and in my life as well. When I write I don’t plan things out about like
what I’m going to write about or how I’m going to write it I just go along with the
flow and come up with stuff off the top of my head. I don’t know why I do
that; I just come up with stuff better like that

When I write it’s relaxing, I always feel calm when I write. Your suppose to
be calm every time you write because if your not calm you start to freak out and
become nervous. When you start to freak out and become nervous you don’t
know what to write about and you’ll just be stuck. That’s why I always try to be
calm and relaxed because mind stays focused.

Writing helps people out with everything. It lets people express there
feelings in a different way, people can say what they feel and how they feel just
on a piece of paper. When someone writes something it shows people how they
really feel and why they feel this way. Especially teens because we are at that age
where writing is everything to us and writing matters.

The Change
Carnell Annex

I’ve always been scared, shy, and filled with sorrow.
I’ve always thought the bad and the good was just an imagination.
My family and friends try, but I never listen.
I was like a feather, drifting in nothingness, avoiding my friends, family, and love.
I was like a lost soul, filled with sorrow.

But now it’s time to weigh down the feather, and find joy in the soul.
The chain that was binding me has been broken.
I knew that I could make a difference.
Without courage, happiness, and braveness, I wouldn’t have been set free from
the chain that has locked me out of this open world for so long.

Now I’m going to live a life full of hope, peace, and happiness.

Where I’ve Been, Where I’m Going
Carnell Annex

I’ve been stuck drama trying to overcome it
I’ve been around too much bad influence trying to escape it
I’ve been around teenagers thinking they’re cool, smoking and trying to change others
I’ve been the kind of kids always getting bullied just for being smart
I’ve been in my bed sleeping hoping this world can recover from drama
I’ve been around crying everyday from my whole 1st grade class jumping me
I’ve been around coming home everyday with wounds on my body from getting
attacked for no reason
I’ve been around kids with dreams who let words get the best of them
I’ve been around to many haters
I’ve been and still am with a dad trying his best to recover from a stroke
I’ve been and still am with a mom coming home from work everyday with her
feet always hurting

Where I’ve Been, Where I’m Going
Wagner Middle School

As a teen I have faced many difficulties with finding the right friends and decision-
making. I remember when I first entered middle school I was always hyper active
and never really followed directions. My grades were ok but I knew I could do bet-
ter but I never really cared. In my 6th grade year my mother passed away and from
then on I promised myself that I would get good grades because I knew she would
be proud. It’s not always easy to get good grades and get along with my peers. So
to avoid problems I always tried and get along and talk to people I knew I could get
along with also I keep a journal to express my feelings.

Writing to me is a very good way to express my feelings whether they are positive
or negative. When I write in my journal I feel like my journal is my own secret
world. Writing has given me a different voice that I had never had before. I always
had a voice before but since I started writing people were now able to see me in a
different way instead of always loud and mean. People started to see that I’m a nice
person and that’s how I was able to make new friends.

As a teen I know it is good for me to make good choices in order to go to
higher places. When I grow up I want to be a cosmetologist. I also had to let go
my past of physical abuse. My past is not going to stop me from being the best I
can. Letting go of my past has made my teenage life easier and better because now
I look back at my past and see how much I progressed over the years and I can
honestly say I have come out insecure and proud. I am proud of myself for that.
I have changed from always being loud, mean, and insecure but now thanks to
my friends and my journal I learned I have to get through my past in order for me
to have a brighter future. I am going to make my mother proud of a successful
young leader. I am going to a place where I can keep studying and keep going just
like Seff Alfrqui. I am thankful to have all of these outlets that I can count on.

In the end I have been up and down just like any other teenager but all of our
stories are not the same. I’ve have been from being mean to now being as sweet as
I can be. I have learned to have more confidence in myself and to never let my past
weigh me down. I know I can be the best I can be. I am glad have gone through
some of these changes because without them I wouldn’t really know who I am.
“Where I’ve Been Where I’m going”  (continued from page 6)
Carnell Annex

I’ve been around people wanting to be my friend but then turning their back on me
I’ve been around fights happening over very little conflict
Where I’m going...That’s a good question
I’m going to put my name in history
I’m going to feed and protect my family
I’m going to work hard and accomplish my goals
I’m going to change the world
I’m going to get stronger and stronger facing challenges that may come
I’m going to stand up tall and fight for this nation
I’m going to be successful in what I do
I’m going to help others change themselves, and help them become a better person
I’m going to fight for what I believe
I’m going to be a role model for young children
I’m going to let my voice be heard
I’m going to stop all our nations violence
I’m going to one day make this nation join hands
I’m going to make all my friends and family proud of me
I’m going to grow up and have a family of my own
I’m going to help the less fortunate
I’m going to stand tall as the face of this nation
I’m going to be a hero
I’m going to be a hero
Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

“I AM FROM”
Logan Middle School

I am from...I don’t know where I am from.
I am from dumfounded, blank faces, and whiteout friends.
I am from, where the word “FAITH” is replaced with hate
Where the loving houses - are only burned down crisis.
I am from where the light of day - is only a dream because the light is afraid of the days
that Belong to dark.
I am from “LOVE”...wait, hold up
Love is only in a fantasy
My life is way under, below the low grounds of Christianity.
I am from where a walk to the store is only a walk to hell, they have open doors.
I am from Logan , valley, way past reality
The word LIFE will have you shaking; I can tell your body is quaking
I am from black, far away from a whack
I am from where dress down will have you shot to the ground.
I am from where virginity is only in the past, because once you have laid too fast,
You can’t turn around and walk back!
I am from, a sister that tries and a brother that would rather hide,
I am from a dad that drinks, when he should be paying for his daughter to think.
I am from an upside down smile, a backward crowd
I am from low lives and bye byes, broke up fears and unwanted tears
I am from where school is a place that you don’t want to face.
I am from where hearts are broken and also a token, far away from where they have woken
I am from where jumps are punks and punks are always flanks
I am from where mace will always meet your face - when you turn around to a fight that
might be your last night.
I am from where the boys come - everybody grabs their gun and runs.
I am from a place that you shall never come.
I am from unwanted faces
I am from words that hurt and hurting from words
I am from hand-me-down’s, sometimes that can’t be hand-me no more.
I am from if you hustle and bustle you will always make the flow.
I am from where school is a place that you don’t want to face.
I am from the only education you will get is from the uneducated
I am from NOT from a home, not from a home, something close to be but not without my peeps.
I am loyal only to the foil of my bones.
I pray only to the voice above, but I lay to the voice of a scramping love.
I am from hope, but the more I spoke of this hope the more hope will not be spoken.
I am from tricks that lead to lies and lies that lead to crimes.
Crimes that lead to your hands grinding -behind the cold mental bars of a jail cell.
I am from a place called hell!

“The Cracks In Between”
Wagner Middle School

The cracks in between used to be wide
The cracks in between are strong
All the rumbles and little pieces of rocks
Symbolize the obstacles I went through
The cracks in between never hide the secrets
and the lies that stand between
The cracks in between go deep into
The heart of life
The cracks in between tell it all from
Not having a father, to people in my
Family not going to college
The cracks in between are the smoke from the lungs, they are the heart and soul
from
The ancestors that come before
The cracks in between show how I’ve
Changed, it shows passion and desire
The cracks in between show the courage and how
It’s used
The cracks in between show the belief,
The love, the grandparents, the great grandparents,
Mother’s, father’s, the children
The cracks in between show the pain, the hurt, the bruises, the abuse
The cracks in between show that you matter
It shows that your voice matter’s,
The cracks in between tell a story, a
Story about being together
About being a family
The cracks in between tell the story of the life of one.

“The Change”
Carnell Annex

I’ve always have been scared, shy, and filled with sorrow.
I’ve always thought the bad and the good was just an imagination.
My family and friends try, but I never listen.
I was like a feather, drifting in nothingness, avoiding my friends, family, and love.
I was like a lost soul, filled with sorrow.
But now it’s time to weigh down the feather, and find joy in the soul.
The chain that was binding me has been broken.
I knew that I could make a difference.
Without courage, happiness, and braveness, I wouldn’t have been set free
from the chain that has locked me out of this open world for so long.

“Untitled”
West Bank

I want to admit something. In the past, we were very rich; we had two cars and
whenever I asked for something, my folks gave it to me immediately. But now we
have become much less rich, because we were hit by the evil eye. But this doesn’t
mean that we have become poor. Thank Allah, we still have everything and we ask
for anything, my folks give it to us. That is to say, we are middle class, just like
many others.

I wish to be successful in life. Thank you.
I have written this poem:
He hides away from sight,
He speaks only when he smiles.
I see you under thee moonlight,
I see you in the early rays of the day.
My body is becoming bigger and taller
Like a planted seed growing every day.
My body has grown
Like a man who is showing off.
There are kids who are rich.
There are kids who are poor orphans.
There are kids who are rich.
There are boys and girls who are hungry.