Writers Matter, Where I'm Going and Where I'm From: Preliminary Thoughts

Arguably my proudest moments as a teacher have come from the Writers Matter program. The program is designed so that individual teachers can make instructional decisions about how to best implement the program in their classrooms.

I use the program as a vital addendum to the Writer’s Workshop. I STRONGLY recommend the following format for most of the Writer’s Matter lessons (though sometimes the structure will occur over multiple class periods)

1. First, before the lesson begins, design a piece of your own writing. This will help you immensely. You will better understand the challenges of creating that particular piece of writing, and modeling for the students is IMPERATIVE for helping students understand what they are doing.

2. Present the topic and share your own example (I have included two of the pieces I wrote for my students)

3. Have independent, quiet writing

4. Provide Supportive Sharing of the Students’ Pieces

Some random tips I have found helpful:

1. Our instinct as teachers is to give students ideas when they are stuck. Ultimately, their writing is more powerful if you instead help them find topics that matter to them. Probe, question, respond, but hold back on taking ownership of ideas out of their hands.

2. Be open to different processes: many times, boys may doodle for the first part of a writing session and seem unproductive, but then quickly produce significant, powerful writing. This is not to say that you should be overly-permissive, but I really believe that there are just about as many “writing processes” as there are students. (I believe this is a version of an idea from one of the Writing Workshop greats: Atwell, Fletcher, Calkins (perhaps all of them).

*The second lesson, “Where I’m Going,” is also a nice fit for the last chapter of the Writer’s Matter Book about Dreams and Inspirations.

Some great resources: