Welcome to our Summer 2010 newsletter for the Writers Matter program. We are currently completing our seventh year of providing innovative writing opportunities for students in the Philadelphia metropolitan region. Using journal writing as a vehicle for self-expression, this program focuses on personal life journeys and experiences, allowing student’s voices to be heard while, at the same time, building essential writing skills.

In 2005, the Writers Matter program was created for middle school adolescent students in grades six through eight in order to provide them with an innovative and motivational approach to writing development. Over 4500 students have experienced this unique program since that time. During the 2010-2011 school year, 12 schools, 17 teachers, and approximately 1000 students participated in the program. Each year, Deb Yost of La Salle’s Education Department conducts research to evaluate outcomes related to writing, personal, and social skills. The results consistently show that the program fosters more than improved writing skill development among middle school students. The program also:

· Produces a warm, nurturing classroom climate that enables students to flourish and succeed.

· Encourages greater teacher-student relationships and classroom management due to the trusting and mutually respectful relationships that develop between teachers and students.

· Enhances adolescents’ motivation to write, which in turn increases writing skill development.

· Encourages multiple perspective-taking among adolescents, which breaks down cultural barriers and “cliques” that are part of the adolescent experience.

· Enhances deeper metacognition among adolescents, which fosters greater motivation for academic success and pro-social behaviors

· Provides a unique approach for students from different cultures, religions and family structures to find out more commonalities than differences about each other.

· Encourages young adolescents to celebrate their personal voices and be heard by others.

A Renewed Focus on Writing Skill Development
A careful analysis of the research data over the past two years revealed that there was a strong need to focus professional development sessions on writing instruction. As well, our Writers Matter teachers indicated that they had a strong desire to learn more about mentoring texts, revision and editing, teaching of grammar and perspectives on identifying and recognizing errors. Much time was therefore devoted to analyzing student work and examining the strategies mentioned above to enhance student writing during our professional development sessions this year led by Dr. Marjie Allen. As a result of this need for more in-depth teaching of writing skills a new book is currently being written by Deb Yost and me with Marjie Allen and Kim Lewinski, all from La Salle University to address these professional development needs. Many of the teachers in the Writers Matter program will be contributing to the writing of the book by sharing their successes and units of study from the past few years. We are hoping to publish the book by January, 2012. (continued on page 2)
Letter from the Director

Dissemination of the Program to a Broader Audience
Several Writers Matter faculty and teachers presented the program at national and regional professional conferences this year. The National conferences were: The National Middle School Association annual conference in Baltimore, Maryland (Deb Yost, Dianna Newton, and myself) and the Catholic Educators Association in New Orleans, Louisiana (Steve Clark and myself). The regional Conferences featured presentations at Pennsylvania Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development, Hershey, Pa. (Katherine Muc Francesca Cantarini, and myself). Additionally, a special presentation to all Middle School Principals in the School District of Philadelphia occurred in November 2010 at La Salle University (Michael Galbraith, Katherine Muc, and myself).

Books and Other Publications
In 2008 Michael Galbraith, an 8th grade literacy teacher in Philadelphia and I co-authored “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 Middle School Students,” which was accepted for publication in the Middle School Journal, which is published by the National Middle School Association.

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, the Henry School and Wagner Middle 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 and participating in a writing activity.

Special Thanks
Special thanks goes to Penny Nixon, Associate Superintendent of Schools and John W. Frangipani Assistant Superintendent for Middle Schools from the School District of Philadelphia. Their efforts and support have enabled this program to flourish.

This program is generously supported by the PTS Foundation (Pam and Tony Schneider) and the Tyler Aaron Bookman Memorial Foundation (Neil and Jill Bookman). These individuals continue to show great support and encouragement of this program and I personally thank them for their continued commitment and vision.

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

Help Support Writers Matter!
Your continued support will help ensure the current and future success of Writers Matter in Philadelphia schools.

Contributions can be made to the Writers Matter program by sending donations to:
La Salle University attn: Dr. Robert Vogel 1900 West Olney Ave Philadelphia, PA 19141
- or -
Make a gift online at www.lasalle.edu/makeagift
In the comments section, please type “Urban Writers Program: Writers Matter”

Summer 2011 Newsletter - Page 2
Partnership with the Mural Arts Program

As mentioned in the last newsletter, La Salle’s Writers Matter program entered into a partnership with City of Philadelphia Philadelphia’s Mural Arts Program, Philabundance, and the School District of Philadelphia to create a mural that centers on the theme of hunger. Students produced art work and writing focused on the essential question - “What are you Hungry for?” The mural design will incorporate student responses to this essential question. Our group teamed with nationally acclaimed mural artist, Meg Saligman to design a mural focusing on the theme of hunger. Twenty students were selected as “Writers Matter Scholars” to participate in the program. The mural will be constructed on the site of Philabundance, located in the food distribution center of Philadelphia only a few blocks from the sports complex. We are scheduled to have the opening for this mural on Thursday, July 14.

Teacher Testimonial

“The Writers Matter program is revolutionary for our students at Henry. Not only do they learn the academic writing skills needed to prepare for high school, they also get an outlet to have their voices heard. This program creates a culture of camaraderie, trust, and success. These ingredients are key to any 8th grade classroom. When the students feel as if they are heard and understood by both the teachers and their peers, they are much more receptive to the everyday learning involved in the curriculum. Last year alone, all of my 8th grade students scored Advanced or Proficient on the Writing PSSA. Some also stood up to bullies with their poetic pieces, made new friends, and addressed the class at graduation. The Writers Matter program is a win-win for everyone involved. We are thankful to be part of this work with Dr. Vogel and La Salle University.”
- Francesca Cantarini
  Teacher, Henry School

Student Writing Contest (continued)

Second Place Entry - “I am From”

Henry 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 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 were they have woken
I am from where jumps are punks and punks are always flunks
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 when the boys come everybody grabs their gun and runs.
I am from a place that you shall never come.
I am from unwanted faces (continued on page 4)
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 the only education you will get is from the uneducated
I am NOT from a home, only a Nome , 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 scramming love,
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!

A struggle that I face in life is one that I wish I could change. In particular, I am struggling
with my behavior. I wish I could change it, but I’m having trouble doing so. I try to be well
behaved, but I can’t seem to control my temper. Deep down I want to be good, but I just snap
at everybody. I make excellent grades, but I know I won’t be able to get into the college and
high school of my choice due to my behavior. I try to act like I can handle problems myself, but
I know I can’t do all of it by myself. I know I got people to back me up 100%. For instance,
family, friends, teachers are at my beck and call and are there to listen to me.

There are two main teachers I know want to help me, but I just have problems with them in
the process. For instance, both Mr. Lebofsky and Mrs. Mac seem to care. Both want to bring
the best of my potential out of me. I just can’t accept that. One little thing they do or say just
basically makes me attack them. I know they just want to help, but I just push them away like
I do most people. I do not have a problem with people; it’s just that I’m a little antisocial with
others.

Now I don’t want to be that way forever, but it’s not a straight road. There are going to be a
few bumps along the way. For me, my life is planned out already, but getting there is a prob-
lem. For example, everyone wants me to go to Central to be the best I can be. Everyone wants
me to be a doctor even though it’s been my life long dream. Everyone wants me to be this or
do that, but I can’t be everything I’m one person trying to do all this alone, and the strange
ting thing is they don’t see how bad I’m struggling. All they see is a smart little boy, but they don’t
know how hard it is to keep that up. Sometimes I just want to say forget it and just stay home
and go to sleep.

Now I know I sound selfish saying how hard it is for me to get up every day and go to school.
Adults have to get up every day and go to work but I’m pretty sure that they feel the same way
that I do. But I’m going to be what I want to be because this is my life and frankly I make the
decisions. I appreciate the help, but I just prefer if they do it from the sidelines. Now I’m not
just saying that I’m going to sleep, eat, and play video games all day, I’m just saying that I need
a break from all the people in my life trying to tell me what to do and trying to tell me what
to be.

I know they just want me to be successful and to get my behavior together, and I know I might
need help along the way, but mostly I just want to do it by myself. They think I can’t do it by
myself and I can understand that because I’m not focused all the time. But I’m determined to
get where I need to be. I’m determined to be the best I can be, to be successful, and to have
the career I want. I also want everyone to know that I want to do most of it by myself to better
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.
**“Haiti - Buried in the Rubble”**
*Wagner Middle School*

I see people crying, families dying
I see collapsing buildings, I see thieves stealing
I see a mom devastated by the disaster, whole families wiped out by the rubble
I hear screaming coming from the rubble.
I rush to help someone else when I can barely help my self.
I smell the bodies of the deceased, hoping I don’t become one of them
A falling building, I pass by, I felt like I was about to die
I am so scared, I’m breathing toxic air
But then a building fell and I was in the way
Boom boom!
My dead corpse was swept away
But then my ghost creeps
It creeps high and low
And the other dead spirits say hello
I continue my reap thru the dangerous deep sea of rubble
Only dead bodies I see and one looks like me.

**“Life is a Race”**
*Leeds Middle School*

Round and round you go twist and turns around the track of the teenage life. Many dreams ahead of you and all your mistakes you made in the past behind you.
The haters who distract you and make you run off track. You lose your train of thought and are soon in last place. Your family and friends your motivations make you want to try even harder you sprint ahead and feel like a winner again.
When you feel like you’ve had enough and the race is over for you and you feel like giving up look ahead toward your goal, the finish line and you realize that you are worth the try and you are worth being proud of.
You run this race forever until the day you die and when the race comes to an end you’re a winner because you have tried.
Life is a race!

**“Hope”**
*Wagner Middle School*

Hope is different than shame.
Hope means wonder.
Hope means surprise.
Hope does not have a fearful sound. It has an exciting sound like angels singing, "AAAHHHHH." Almost like walking up in the morning hoping something great will happen. Or like being alone and hoping somebody will come to keep you company. Hope makes you feel angry when it doesn’t come through And surprised when it does. It looks like a lost bear cub hoping to see his parents. Hope is dark blue. It as blue as a cloudless blue sky. Hope is like that. Sometimes. When you feel hope, you are happy. Trust and pride keep you company. You are not ANGRY. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Barrack Obama are hope. HOPE Hope is beautiful to me.

**“Sadness Is...”**
*Pennypacker Middle School*

Sadness is fighting with your friends when you know it is wrong.
Sadness is being told you can’t, you wont, it doesn’t matter.
Sadness is seeing someone and knowing they have it better than you.
Sadness is crying every night because you know you may lose your grandmother to her long, long battle.
Sadness is gossip, lies and hurt. Words leave the deepest scars.
Sadness is being out on the streets without a home or anywhere to go.
Sadness is watching the news and seeing people getting shot, arrested or hurt.
Sadness is watching you dad leave you and your mom alone on their own and later someone taking you away from your mom.
Sadness is when you’re the favorite one but now there’s someone else that’s The favorite one. SADNESS IS...
“Problem Child by Three Women”  
_Henry Middle School_

Stop labeling me as the Problem Child.  
All I have asked for was forgiveness. That, and a little respect.  
And, for you to stop.  
Stop judging me on the color of my skin -  
because I’m brown and I go to public school, I’m automatically an idiot?  
Stop judging me on my clothes—because I wear my jeans a little snug, some of my shirts a little low, my hair straightened—but I prefer my Afro.  
Stop judging me on the look in my eye. The look of desperation. If you only knew what I was desperate for. Not a mother or a brother who’s been locked away. Or a dad who’s not here ’cause in a grave he lays. Nor a welfare check to come my way.  
You can make an effort to get me to go, but I’m here to stay.  
I’m not tryin’ make it out the ghetto.  
Let go of the fear that this young black lady might be smarter that you. Cuz you know 2+2 is 4, and you aren’t a whore giving babies away everyday like you a corner store.  
You get a scholarship from the wealthy,  
But you’re a joke to your team.  
So you don’t make it a dream  
Forgetting your purpose and losing your beams.  
For your only education is by the uneducated—and they’re that way because they were hated; by themselves.  
That look of desperation is for someone to listen.  
I would save my last breath to tell you (if it wasn’t already taken from screaming at the top of my lungs)—can you hear me now?  
Do you finally understand who I am?  
I'm not, I am because I’m me.  
I know who I am...  
I turn about me,  
Even though people speak blasphemy everywhere  
I’m many  
A child of two wonderful parents.  
A sister to brothers.  
A grandchild to grands.  
A niece to my aunts and uncles.  
Friends of friends and enemies.  
I’m me.  
I’m not, I am because you can’t make me who I am,  
and if you still don’t understand,  
I am D.N.S.,  
a smart, God gifted and many more child.  
Do you finally understand who I am?  
I am many in one and one in many.  
I AM ME.

“ME”  
_De Paul Catholic School_

People say, ”Who are you?”  
Who am I?  
I am a Haitian African American girl,  
living the dreams of my ancestors.  
Plucking cotton off plantations owned by white folks,  
Trying to prove, trying to say I am worth nothing.  
Saying, ”I’m white as day, but you’re dark as night, filled with thieves.”  
But what you don’t understand is I’m black like the oil that makes you rich.  
Black as the sky that lets the stars shine.  
I am me.  
I am a fearless leader, a child of God.  
Even though people speak blasphemy everywhere  
I turn about me,  
I know who I am...  
I’m many  
A child of two wonderful parents.  
A sister to brothers.  
A grandchild to grands.  
A niece to my aunts and uncles.  
Friends of friends and enemies.  
I’m me.  
I’m not, I am because you can’t make me who I am,  
and if you still don’t understand,  
I am D.N.S.,  
a smart, God gifted and many more child.  
Do you finally understand who I am?  
I am many in one and one in many.  
I AM ME.
“This Is The Day”
De Paul Catholic School

I’m going to start by loving my neighbors and pass this down to my kids.

So what can we do to stop racism? We can start to love our neighbors.

He encourages everyone to love their neighbor.

This is not how God wanted man to be, you don’t know that because you only know how to hurt people’s feelings.

What is the meaning of racism if you hate the color of my skin?

You are threatened by me because I’m black and you are Asian.

I know why you are afraid of me because my skin color is not like yours.

Why do you hate me if we never met before?

When did racism start?

They use racism as a powerful weapon to encourage fear and hate into the hearts of people.

They just believe that one nationality is better than the other.

When did this hate against a person’s skin color come from?

Even in jail they have fights about what is your skin color.

Where did man go wrong and start to hate each other?

Sadness is fighting with your friends when you know it is wrong.

Sadness is being told you can’t, you won’t, it doesn’t matter.

Sadness is seeing someone and knowing they have it better than you.

Sadness is crying every night because you know you may lose your grandmother to her long, long battle.

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Sadness is being out on the streets without a home or anywhere to go.

Sadness is watching the news and seeing people getting shot, arrested or hurt.

Sadness is watching you dad leave you and your mom alone on their own and later someone taking you away from your mom.

Sadness is when you’re the favorite one but now there’s someone else that’s The favorite one.

Sadness is...”
Pennypacker Middle School

You push ME
You tease ME
But why…?
Do you hate ME
I ask these questions to myself because I’m scared to ask you why.

Why do you put your anger on ME, so much that tears start to fall. So much that fear starts to call.

What did I do?...
Can’t we just talk it out?
Or that’s old school.
Maybe you don’t wanna talk about it.
Because you think that nobody will open their ears.

Is it something at home?
Maybe you don’t wanna talk about it.
Is that why you come to school with anger and hate.

I wish I knew…
I wish you would tell me…
Maybe we’re too different.
Maybe you think that my life is better than yours.
Trust me its not.

So don’t push ME
So don’t tease ME

Let’s just work it out we’re not kids anymore. We can get through this.

“Racism”
Vare Middle School

Why is there so much racism in the world?
Where did man go wrong and start to hate each other?

All through time different races never mix.

Their gang wars because I’m black your not.

Even in jail they have fights about what is your skin color.

When did this hate against a person’s skin color come from?

They just believe that one nationality is better than the other.

They use racism as a powerful weapon to encourage fear and hate into the hearts of people.

When did racism start?

When you started to make me feel bad about my skin color.

Why did you make me feel so bad?

Why do you hate me if we never met before?

I know why you are afraid of me because my skin color is not like yours.

You are threatened by me because I’m black and you are Asian.

What is the meaning of racism if you hate the color of my skin?

You don’t know that because you only know how to hurt people’s feelings.

This is not how God wanted man to be, he encourages everyone to love their neighbor.

So what can we do to stop racism we can start to love our neighbors.

I’m going start by loving my neighbors and pass this down to my kids.

“.com Generation”
Wagner Middle School

The Internet is the .COMmon thread among us.
The cable wires that connect us.
The signal that goes through us.
The .COMmunication between us.
It is the .NETwork that brings us together.
The .COMmunication between us.
Let’s just work it out we’re not kids anymore. We can get through this.

Sadness is when you’re the favorite one but now there’s someone else that’s The favorite one.

Summer 2011 Newsletter - Page 7
“Sunrise”
Leeds Middle School

I woke up this morning in my own bed
the same place I woke up before
but something was special about today
I have noticed
As I opened up the door
The birds were singing in the trees
The air was nice and sweet
With the smell of the flowers in the air
The traffic even had a special beat
The neighbor’s yelling ‘hi’ to me
was such a welcome sound
I answered back, went out the door
to enjoy the sun white lying down
To my surprise it felt so good
it took my breath away
I stayed and enjoyed the wonder
of a special no-work day.

“The Bitter Truth!”
Leeds Middle School

You say one thing
Yet you mean another
You try to be up front
While hiding beneath a cover
Why are you so selfish?
And why so ignorant?
What exactly does love mean to you
Or should I say, meant?
I’ve never known someone so fake
Someone who can’t speak the truth
Someone so terribly insecure
Someone so curt, someone like you
Why did you have to be like this?
You started off quite fine
You would always say how much you care
I guess that was just another “LIE”
I just sit around and remember
Of how much I used to enjoy your name
And how I so dearly loved
to play your little game
But now finally I know
That you aren’t at all what I thought
And it’s a shame, because I really liked you a lot.

“Life”
Leeds Middle School

Love, hate is what we see.
Kids are dropping out of school with no place to be.
People are stuck with nowhere to go.
When it comes to drugs kids try to say no.
All around kids my age are dying.
Some kids parents are nowhere to be found.
Kids are trying to strive to meet their goals.
But they keep falling down in the big dark hole of life.
This is the way of life I finally see.
I am grateful that none of this happened to me.

“A Voice”
Henry Middle School

I have a voice.
I am rarely allowed to use this voice.
This book has allowed me to reclaim this voice.
This voice I have is often hushed by opposing views.
But not for long because when they turn their backs I let the whole world loose.
This voice is quiet, this voice is loud, this voice is very proud.
This voice is truth and never a lie.
This voice retaliates when haters despise.
This voice is soothing, this voice is angry.
This voice is letting itself be known.
THIS VOICE IS MINE.
My voice is here and will never go.
My voice is here and I’m not afraid to let it show.
My voice is strong and beautiful, bright and overwhelming.
My voice has caused other people’s eyes to start tearing.
My voice is of passion, pride, and glory.
My voice tells MY story.
A story of sadness, hope, and love, blowing kisses to angels above.
My voice creates change.
My voice is to speak.
My voice is exciting and never bleak.
My voice is tired of staying quiet, it’s been this way far too long.
The longer and longer she stays quiet, the louder her voice grows.

“Family Matters”
Henry Middle School

I feel left out.
You guys think I can handle myself, but I can’t.
I just can’t.
I’ve been struggling with this for a while now,
but I guess it has to finally come out.
Guys, I love you, but…
Now it’s getting harder.
I’ve been through fights and…I need your help.
My grades are fallin’ and I can’t catch them.
I finally know why.
Out of everyone, I was the normal one.
I was the smart one.
I never got complaints from the teacher.
I never was in trouble.
Mom, Dad – I love you guys.
I know you guys love me.
But, don’t let me fall.
Because if I do I wouldn’t be able to get back up.
Catch me before it’s too late.

Untitled
De Paul Catholic School

The tears that fall from my eyes represent the pain and hurt that I feel.
The emotions that I feel are sometimes confused
I don’t know whether to cry, or smile.
I don’t know whether I should be mad or be happy.
I cry anyway.
I let it all out.
And then, I write.

“Life”
Leeds Middle School

I woke up this morning in my own bed
the same place I woke up before
but something was special about today
I have noticed
As I opened up the door
The birds were singing in the trees
The air was nice and sweet
With the smell of the flowers in the air
The traffic even had a special beat
The neighbor’s yelling ‘hi’ to me
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“The Bitter Truth!”
Leeds Middle School

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Yet you mean another
You try to be up front
While hiding beneath a cover
Why are you so selfish?
And why so ignorant?
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Or should I say, meant?
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I never got complaints from the teacher.
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Mom, Dad – I love you guys.
I know you guys love me.
But, don’t let me fall.
Because if I do I wouldn’t be able to get back up.
Catch me before it’s too late.