

Writers Matter

at La Salle University



Autumn 2012 Annual Newsletter

Student Writing Contest

The goal of the 2012 Writers Matter Writing Contest was to demonstrate how students have learned to use the writing process to express the things they care most about. It provided an environment for their voices to be heard and to discuss their own lives and the issues that are important to them. This year's theme asked the students to write about - *What will you do to Change the World?*

Topics included bullying, cyber-bullying and social media, racism, gender issues, skin color, adolescent related ageism, holocaust related topics and Writers Matter themes.

Samples of student writing, including the contest winners and runners-up, will be featured throughout this newsletter.

Writers Matter Goes International

The Writers Matter program in the Middle East, *Writers Matter: Israeli and Palestinian Cultural Narrative Building through Writing*, began in September, 2011, engaging students in the region between the ages of 12-14. It was designed and implemented by Dr. Robert Vogel of La Salle University (USA) and Dr. Sami Adwan, Bethlehem University (West Bank, Israel).

The project is comprised of Israelis, Israeli-Arabs, and Palestinians (from the Palestinian Authority-run schools in Bethlehem) from five schools grades 6th -8th. The program is integrated into the school day as part of the school curriculum and taught by teachers in the school. All teachers are provided instructional materials, books, journals and participate in professional a development program. Teachers are given support on a monthly basis and through email.

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Letter from the Director

Welcome to our Autumn 2012 newsletter for the Writers Matter program. We are now entering our eighth year of providing unique and innovative writing opportunities for students in the Philadelphia region. Through the use of journal writing as a vehicle for self-expression, Writers Matter focuses on personal life journeys and experiences, allowing students' voices to be heard while, at the same time, building essential writing skills that increase students' potential for success in school

Writers Matter was created in 2005 for middle school adolescent students in grades six through eight in order to motivate and encourage them in the writing process. Since the inception of the program, over 6000 students have participated in Writers Matter. This year over 1100 students, 16 teachers and 9 schools are involved in the program. Additionally, we are piloting an afterschool Writers Matter program at Wagner Middle School utilizing university mentors to provide additional writing support.

Each year, Dr. 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 Writers Matter program fosters more than just improved writing skill development among middle school students. The results include a more nurturing learning environment, stronger teacher-student relationships and more effective classroom management due to the trusting and mutually respectful relationships that develop between teachers and students.

A careful analysis of the research data over the past few years has led to a significant increase in professional development sessions for the middle school teachers involved with Writers Matter relating to writing instruction. Much time has been devoted to analyzing student work and examining the effective writing strategies. These sessions were led by Drs. Marjie Allen and Kim Lewinski and established the need for more in-depth strategies for teaching of writing skill. Throughout last year, the Writers Matter teachers implemented many new effective teaching and learning strategies leading to a collection of many new ideas that could be easily implemented in the classroom. These developments have led to new book that is currently being written by Drs. Yost, Vogel and Lewinsky called - *Writers Matter: A Motivational Approach to Writing Instruction for Students in Grades 5-12*. Many of the teachers in the Writers Matter program have contributed to the writing of the book by sharing their successes in the classroom and units of study that have been most successful. In this book, the reader will find many examples of student work from the past few years of the program.

Writers Matter's faculty, both from the university and the middle schools continue to present at national conferences, publish in national journals and provide professional development for teachers. New summer programs are currently being designed for implementation for the summer of 2013. The Israeli/Palestinian Writers Matter continues to grow and its second year began in mid-October, 2012 with seven schools – see details to left and below.

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Letter from the Director

(continued from Page 1)

The Writers Matter program continues to provide La Salle University mentors to many of the participating schools. This past May, four of the middle schools visited La Salle University to gain a better understanding of college life in the hope of motivating these students to pursue a college education as a future goal. This visit included a tour of the campus, meeting with faculty and students, exploring the dormitories and participating in a writing activity. Also this year was our first Poetry Slam, where over 50 students read their work in front of an audience.

Special Thanks

Special thanks go to Penny Nixon, Chief Academic Officer for the School District of Philadelphia (SDP) for her relentless support and encouragement for the Writers Matter program.

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

New Writers Matter book in the Works

Writers Matter: A Motivational Approach to Writing Instruction for Students in Grades 5-12, by Drs. Vogel, Yost, and Lewinsky

This book describes the Writers Matter approach and a philosophy that offers viable and well-researched methodology for increasing adolescent academic motivation and writing self-efficacy. The book provides teachers and administrators with valuable and practical tools, based on the adolescent literature, and supported by research results from Writers Matter over the past few years. This approach to writing instruction is both supplementary and complementary to traditional English or Language Arts curricula. The approach also meets state and national standards for English (specifically writing) and integrates well with a number of other content areas. Implemented in 14 schools, grades six through nine, the Writers Matter approach currently serves 1100 students per year. The approach has found success in both middle and high school settings. The book is organized into three major sections: 1) Writing Matters to Adolescents; 2) Developing Skills and Confidence through Writers Workshops; 3) Writing, Sharing, and Gaining

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"



First Place Entry - "The Words Written on My Heart to Change the World"
Wagner Middle School

There are words written on the tip of my tongue
yearning to be heard and waiting to be sung
these words that fill my thoughts,
that fills my dreams,
they are starting to uncover the
dark corners inside of us
but as we open our mouths
only silence forever heard.

How can we change the world without violence?

I cry for the people who passed on during the night.
Is life all about killing innocent people?

I, as in we, can change the world
by moving far away from the pain
that we are all going through.

We can change the world
by helping the people get over their fear.

We can change the world
by moving away from the violence.

We all know how it feels to
hear a gunshot every night.

We can change the world by making it
a better place for people and children.

We know how it feels to live on the streets
because of what we feel and read.

What happened to our nation?

What happened to Rosa Parks helping us fight to
change the world?

How could we let violence come between us?

What did we do wrong?

What happened to the world?

We need to change it.

Why are kids afraid to walk home at night because
of the crazy violence going on in this world?

How can we change the world?

We can make a change by gathering people up.

Let people talk about what they went through in life.

The world deserves better so let's get together
And change the world that people are dying in.

We can change the world by sticking together
And making a change for the people and children
who are dying for help.

Let's all change the world for the children.

All we need to do is

stop the violence in this society.

The violence is the conflict

And changing the world is the solution.

This world is coming to an end.

And change the world

For the dying children.

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This program provides a motivational approach for students to write freely about family life, communities, friends, fears, hopes, aspirations and expectations. Students relate to stories and life experiences of other students of the same age both in their own school and in schools in different parts of the region who experience life in a different way. This strategy helps to develop more positive attitudes toward others, learn to more actively listen to different perspectives and help to correct negative images or stereotypes they have developed by nature of living in this area of conflict and hatred.

Palestinians and Israelis have been engaged in a century long struggle that has been described as a protracted and intractable conflict influencing the lives of the children with memories and stories laden with fears, suspicions and lack of trust. These negative feelings are substantiated by the influence of education, family conversations, media and personal experiences as these children are going through a critical time of their personal and cognitive development. Engaging students in structured writing activities about their experience will be a step toward securing a better future for all involved. Currently, the formal border and security arrangements create a great sense of separation and isolation not easily understood by students of this age. It can be damaging to the personal development of such young and impressionable children to experience life with so many boundaries, restrictions, and instabilities.

Grassroots projects such as this provide unique opportunities for peace building in times of political conflict. The voices of these students could eventually create pressure on politicians and others who help shape policy to move forward. Specific Goals and Outcomes are as follows:

- Produce a warm, nurturing classroom climate that enables students to flourish and succeed
- Increase motivation to write and enhance writing skill development
- Encourage the taking of multiple perspectives amongst adolescents, which will break down cultural barriers and “cliques” that are part of the adolescent experience
- Provide a forum for Israelis, Israeli-Arabs, and Palestinians to communicate and develop a mutual respect and tolerance for each other, as well as to emphasize the need to take personal responsibility to help resolve the ongoing conflict.
- Design and implement full day workshops where students from different Palestinian, Israeli/Arab and Israeli schools will be brought together to meet each other and share their writing.

The results of the program will be published in book form in English, Arabic and Hebrew. The program will continue and be expanded during the 2012-2013 school year.

Last June, five students from La Salle University traveled to the Middle East to meet with the students and teachers who had participated in the program. In the future, a delegation from La Salle will travel to Israel and the West Bank to celebrate the culmination of each year's work with the Writers Matter program. Last year's group included Dr. Bob Vogel, his wife Marlyn, senior Lindsay Cicchino, Cindee Crosby ('12), junior Kerrin Garripoli, senior Theresa Glinski, and Tom Wingert ('12).



Student Artwork



More Student Work

Second Place Entry - "The Dream Lives On" Henry Middle School

Dr. King once spoke his dream,
It stated, "I have a dream that one day my children
will not be judged by the color of their skin but by
the content of their character."
I, too, have that dream.

I have a dream that I can show people,
That color is not everything
You have to look under the hood.

I have a dream that what my ancestors fought for,
Equality, everyone could have.

People need to understand
Your color or race can make you
No better or worse than anyone else.

I have this dream that
I could just show people
How strong of an impact racism has,
That racism is not just someone saying they
Dislike you because of your race.

It destroys lives,
Keeps them in poverty,
People will try to better themselves,
And their families, and put themselves
In better situations but can't
Because of something as simple as their ethnicity.

Racism leads to many harmful things,
Such as depression, and all types of violence
Even to wars extent.

I have a dream that one of these days
Everyone of every color would hold hands
Around the world and stop racism

Racism has a very strong ripple effect
It doesn't affect just one person
It affects their whole life!

Racism is just that strong
And can start with only one word.

And I have a dream that one day
The ripple affect will stop,
The falling dominos,
That started with one word will be still,
And that all racism will come to a peaceful halt,
And we can all live in harmony and unity.



"Stop Homophobia" Wagner Middle School

When you go to school do you imagine a day of being verbally bullied? For some people this is true. For most people this is exactly what they imagine. This is an every day life for lesbian, gay people, bi-sexual, and trans-sexual. Just about eighty-four percent of LGBT report being verbally harassed (name-calling, threats, etc.) because of their sexual orientation. This kind of bullying can put a permanent affect on someone's life.

Homophobia affects the lives of many people. Also people can be physically bullied because of being LGBT. For example a student from Wyoming was assaulted and brutally tortured also put on a fence to die. Sooner he was hospitalized then after that he later died. According to the National Youth Association 1/3 of LGBT kids commit suicide. Now that you see our statistics you see Homophobia affect the lives of many people.

There are some groups currently working to help with the issue of Homophobia. These groups consist of Safe Schools Coalition, Human Rights Campaign, and PFLAG. Most of these groups are helping to raise awareness. Also they are raising money. Even though there are groups helping there still a lot of work to be done.

Despite the efforts of these groups, there is still a lot of work to be done to help to end Homophobia. The little things make a difference like if you heard people say things like "that's gay" and " he/she should have been come out off the closet" you should tell them to stop and think about what they just said, Another thing you can do is try to be aware yourself, don't feel any hatred for anyone because people are people no matter what shape or size u are.

Over all homophobia is a serious matter and you shouldn't take it for granted. I feel very touched by this topic and I'm glad I got to share this experience with you. Hopefully you will raise awareness and try to stop homophobia yourself.



"Stand Up and Save The World"

Wagner Middle School

Who cares about the different colors of our face or the amount of our race or the purpose of our religion? Yeah...yeah...

I don't.

I don't care about color

I care about being trustworthy

I care about compassion, responsibility
respect and honesty.

So who cares about being different?

That's what makes us, us

Not the same clothes, the same hairstyle

Different means expressing ourselves the way we want.

Judge by the heart, mind and soul.

Judge the inside of the book
not its cover.

I recommend you spend a little time giving out

Your heart and thinking in your mind.

No matter how old you are

you can't waste time.

Making a change is just right.

People live life hard so give your time

A quarter, nickel, penny, or dime

If we respect one another life can be fine.

You should help to shine

You should help to make things alright .

Whether you speak English, French, Chinese, Japanese,

We can make peace in this world.

Together we are one, we own this world.

Call me when you need to get together and

We stand as friends hand and hand.

Ups or downs round and round don't

Make a sound just listen to the pound of the

Heart

Yeah it's mine, about time!

So make a change so make a change.

"Hatred is Blind"

Wagner Middle School

Hatred is blind and carries people away

Hatred is hidden on the corner of everyone's eyes

Hatred fades away everyday and everywhere

but at the same time,

Hatred grows everywhere in every heart.

Hatred starts on the inside but as time goes by it eventually

crawls through to the outside.

We are in a world filled with hatred.

Once hatred is in you, it's hard for it to go away.

The opposite of hatred is not love it's indifference.

Hatred at times is a shadow.

A man's heart filled with hatred is cruel.

Hatred is a poison that kills you slowly.

Hatred is a game that's played by tricky minds.

Hatred eats you on the inside and then seeps out your pores.

If hatred was erased, the Holocaust, the Civil Rights

movement or other events of dispute,

would never have been written.

Hatred leads to violence

Drive away the hate and aim for peace

The world would be a much better place.

"The Girl Down the Street"

C.W. Henry

I met this girl, down the street.

She told me an interesting story.

I wanted to share it with the world

To show life isn't fame and glory.

Well here it goes,

from her point of view.

Put her life in yours.

All the world

should find it very interesting,

for bullying is no fun toy.

"Whenever I look around,

There's never a kid

who wants to be a kid.

There she goes, trying to be her.

But she doesn't fit in.

Nobody likes a "natural girl".

They have long hair

And perfect teeth.

If I don't have a curvy figure,

That means I'm not being me?

All right, so what?

I'm ugly, I'm stupid, I'm wrong.

People just don't seem to see that...

Their words are just making me

strong.

The name-calling

Hair pulling

The hater-guy quotes.

All of it

Well, most of it

Just sinks into my boat.

Mom says, "They are just jealous."

Dad says, "Just ignore."

My friends say,

"That's just plain wrong,"

While I JUST want

to fall through the floor!

Down, down, down, I'd fall.

Giving life a chance.

Humph, that would be something,

To give my dreams a glance.

Oh, wouldn't life be working,

If everybody was perfect?

But since it can't roll that way,

I guess I'm already not worth it.

People stare, people point

Saying horrible things!

I don't even know half the taunters

That make my ears ring.

I never wanted to go to school.

Ever in my life.

No, no, no, NO!

I wish that word

could make things right.

Sure enough, praying helps me,

I do it everyday.

Sometimes, though,

God's too slow

To answer me when I pray.

My family can't even understand,

Not even my little dog.

So most of the time

when I'm depressed,

I pretend the world was lost in a fog.

If there would be an existence

Would God hate me so?

The hurt, the pain, the sorrow,

Instead of shrinking it grows.

Why doesn't anybody ever listen?

All you would find is I.

Me, Myself, and I.

When I actually feel like living,

Instead of being alone until I die.

I don't know why

I was born to this life,

Is it because that I never speak

I'm almost out of sadness.

Sadness that I could explain.

I'll just remember

From January to December[]

That I will always be 'Little ugly

gothic girl'

Most probably for the rest of my

days."

"Fire, from the Perspective of a Mother" De Paul Catholic Middle School

I used to like fire,
before it burned my house down.

I used to like the way it changed
colors, red, orange, yellow.
Like a chameleon.

I used to like the way you and your
family
gathered around, laughing, singing,
talking and having fun.

I used to like fire,
Before it changed my life.

I used to LOVE fire,
the way it danced around in a
circle,
with rocks and sticks cheering it
on.

I used to like fire,
before it took her life.

A couple weeks later,
I found out.

I found out how
she was hurt.

A bully would kick her,
and call her mean names.

That fire was no accident.

To her, it was meant to make her
free

From everything that happened to
her.

She wanted it to be over,
she gave me clues but I never
noticed.

She looked for help but everyone
pushed her aside.

When she lit that fire,
it was meant to look like an ac-
cident.

But she wanted to disappear,
and she did.

Now,
she's gone.



“Stand Up and Save The World”
Wagner Middle School

This is how it was supposed to be
now I don't know what I see.
How did it go from
Red to black and white,
Love to hate and fights,
Free to you caught me,
Hugged to mugged and drugged,
Kissed to I hope he'll miss hitting me with his whips,
hand and hand to
“Man you touch me and it will be man to man?”

“What I want to see is a CHANGE for you and me.
DREAMING TO BELIEVING,
ACCOMPLISHMENT NO LONGER BEING ASTONISHMENT BECAUSE
YOU HAVE ALREADY ACCOMPLISHED IT,
SO YOU'RE USE TO IT.
CHANGE, IT'S IN RANGE,
CHANGE, IT'S IN CHATTER,
CHANGE, IT'S WHAT'S EXPECTED BEYOND THE CLOUDS”

TRAGICALLY this is what others see
I want a cause and effect situation for you and me.
Killing to Dealing,
Failing to no longer being a surprised because you're use to it.
It's all in the bullet to the head,
Skittles and tea,
A bowl with no food,
skin with and without color.
The computer pathetically needing a single click ,
only a single click.

