

Newsletter
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Writers Matter

La Salle University - Urban Writing Initiative

Student Poetry

A Whole Different World

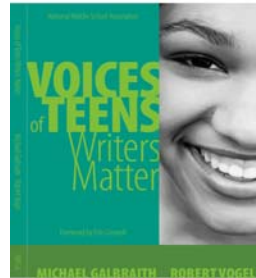
By: Carlos Carmona

I dream of a place,
not one man could
trace.
A place where I don't
belong,
where time never ends.

A blank paper page,
is a background to me.
Not one living soul
is by my side today.

Where you feel
loneliness,
depression, anger and
fright.
Tired and worthless are
the only words in my
mind.

I don't belong here.
I am a special person.
I am a person with great
character.
A whole different world
is where I am today.



About Our Program

For the past two years, under the direction of Dr. Bob Vogel of LaSalle University, Philadelphia, Pa., several teachers in the tri-state area have adapted a program with a fundamentally new approach to teaching students how to write. The Writers Matter program, a part of LaSalle's Urban Writers initiative, attempts to not only increase student's writing abilities, but also to foster a love of writing and creative expression through the use of journalizing.

The concept of the program was developed and pioneered by Erin Gruwell, in her legendary classroom ten plus years ago in California. It attempts to get students to write by allowing them to freely express their thoughts, opinions, and emotions in their journals. The idea worked so well that her students ended up publishing a novel composed of their work, the *Freedom Writers Journal*, which was also eventually made into a movie.

This program focuses on middle school and 9th grade students and is developmentally –oriented to address the specific needs of the younger students. The Writers Matter program was first piloted at Grover Washington Jr. Middle

School, in the school district of Philadelphia. The results and the quality of student work were so amazing, that Michael Galbraith, and Dr. Vogel decided publish their own book, **Voices of Teens: Writers Matter** highlighting student's writing samples and teaching strategies for implementing the program.

With each classroom that uses the Writers Matter program, the results tend to be the same. Students increase their writing skills dramatically and become more motivated to write. They write more frequently, more coherently, and with amazing creativity. Cliques, stereotypes, and racial boundaries within the classrooms are decreased, as students begin to truly see all their peers as thinking, feeling, people with the same problems and insecurities as they face. Each and every student emerges as an individual, with a strong personality, and their own unique voice, which they learn to express through their writing.

The program will be expanding in Fall 2009, serving eight public school in the NW Region of Philadelphia and Archdiocesan schools in the tri-state area.

I write
entirely to
find out what
I'm thinking,
what I'm
looking at,
what I see
and what it
means. What I
want and what I
fear. -Joan
Didion



***“The Un-human Angel” written by Tia Adams
and read at the Please Touch Museum 4/26/09***

She breathes the air, but she
can never see defeat.
She flies, but only when she
is asleep.
This is me, the un-human
angel.
The imperfect sister, the
loving daughter, the future
mother and wife
This is me, the beautiful, un-
human angel
Preparing to spread my wings
for the heavens, to open upon
me
But yet, the storm arrives,
drowning me
Staring at me like I'm the only
fish in the ocean
Yet the ocean is still out of
task
I'm hoping, I'm seeing, I'm
believing –this is me.
The imperfect sister, yet
loving daughter
A powerful, intelligent, young
woman

Waiting to open my wings
and become a beautiful
woman
A reflection of the TIA
before me
Tired of running from
fears
Tired of fearing myself
To fear flying, because I
may fall
Afraid of loving, because
my heart may be broken
Scared of looking,
because I will see a
reflection of me
Afraid of asking, only to
receive a lie
Afraid to open my wings
and live in the sky
Beginning in the morning
and ending at night
This is the start of a brand
new life
The blooming soul
To lay and dream, and
then start to blossom
The arms to hold

A Night to Remember.....

This past April, the Writers Matter program held a special night of celebration and recognition at the Please Touch Museum, in Philadelphia. The event was planned in order to celebrate the success of the students and also to introduce new teachers and schools to the program.

One of the highlights of the night was a riveting speech, by guest speaker, Maria Reyes. Reyes was one of the original “Freedom Writers”, and she spoke about how it completely changed her life. She went on to tell about how she has devoted her career towards continuing to forward the cause in classrooms today.

As moving as Maria’s speech was, the undeniable highlight of the evening was when two of our own students, Yasmeen McPhaul and Tia Adams, shared some of their own poetry.

The girls writing truly revealed exactly what the program is all about. It was compelling, brave, honest, and beautiful. The girls stood proud, as they read their work, and smiled as they heard the clapping and cheering of an audience of educators, and their families. They are two students who have truly found their voice through their writing.

Changing into the most beautiful
un-human creation
The wind and stars surrounding
me
Changing me as I’m dreaming
It is my break through, my
change in life
My becoming, my welcoming, my
ending, my beginning
Changing my dreams into reality
Succeeding, as they burst out of
me
This is me, the un-human angel.
The reflection of the beautiful
angel inside of me

Award Winning Work.....

To incorporate current events into our curriculum, and recognize the major change in our government that took place this year, each of the teachers utilizing the Writers Matter program agreed to have the students write about President Obama being elected into office, and his Inaugural Speech. The students' work was then entered into a contest and the best writers received a reward.

The results were amazing. Each and every one of the essays deserved to be recognized. The students were inspired, thoughtful, and open minded, young men and woman who have so much hope for their lives and their futures.

The winners of the contest were:

1st Place – Jasmine Easley

2nd Place – Amy Ianuzzi and Jasmine Beard

3rd Place – Karen Jones and Carlos Carmona

Honorary Mention

Melissa Kirk, Jewel Lewis and Malik Grey

A sample of the winning essay is seen below and to the right

**“Dreams can be achieved
All we have to do is believe
Whether it is running to beat the clock
Or making your way to the bus stop
No matter the goal, big or small
We rise and we fall
But together with support and the aid
of family and friends
Dreams can be achieved**

To the nation, with this Presidency, a sense of equality and change is coming. When Obama became President, the nation was in awe. He traveled across the whole entire nation guaranteeing everyone that change was imminent; spreading

the word of change that we believe in. Not many people expected Obama to get that far in the race for office, but with a lot of hard work, and support on November 4, 2008, he became President Elect.

At noon on on January 30, 2009, famous composers Yoo Ma, Itzhak Pearlman, Gabriela Montero, and Anthony McGill played the final part of *Air and Simple Gifts*. Barack Obama became President, by stating the oath:

“I Barack Hussein Obama do solemnly swear that I will faithfully execute the office of the President of the United States, and will, to the best of my ability, preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States.”

It was a great day for our nation and also for the world. The Presidency of Barack Obama shows the world that he understands their troubles, and that he wants peace just as much as all of us want it. There will be no more wars, prejudice, or terrorists. What we need is an ‘Era of Peace’.

**As God looked down from the mighty heavens above
And saw all the destruction and mayhem his people had caused
He cried
But that didn’t last long because then he searched for someone
To bring the gleaming light of happiness to his people again
And out of his search he watched Barack Obama become something great
He said in his well beloved voice
That’s good**

Thank you, God bless you, and God bless the United States.

Student Reflections

A Special Thank You To LaSalle's Mentors

One of the most dynamic, influential, and valuable aspects of the Writers Matter Program, are our mentors. A summary of our work, and successes, simply would not be complete without mention of their hard work and dedication.

The mentors for the Writers Matter program are all students at LaSalle University and represent most of the academic departments. What they all have in common is a strong desire to help others, and a dedication to service in their community. Many of the students are from the Leadership and Global Understanding Program, directed by Drs. Allen and Vogel.

The mentors make time in their busy schedules each week to work with the children. Here they spend one-on-one time with the students, editing their writing, giving suggestions, and most importantly, listening to their voices. They form a special bond with the students, and have a huge impact on their lives.

The dedication, kindness, and impact of our mentors is one of the key elements of the program that really helps to bring students a sense of belonging, self worth, and knowing that someone wants to help them, hear them, and truly cares.

Thanks!!!!

- "The Writers Matter journal was a great way to express how we feel and share our thoughts. It helped me to see my real self."
- "I really love this journal. It allowed me to write about whatever I wanted, and it gave me an opportunity to state my own personal thoughts and feelings. I loved being able to just sit down and write whenever I wanted to just get my feelings out. When I had a bad day, I would go home and write. When I had a great day, I would go home and write. When I had an upsetting day, I would go home and write. This is my favorite stress-free class and now writing is my favorite subject."
- " I found a new hobby – writing!"
- "The Writers Matter journal was my favorite project this year. It enabled us to learn while being creative and having fun!!"
- "I liked the Writers Matter journal because it made it easy and fun to learn to write."
- "Before this project it was always analyze someone else's thoughts and writing. For the first time, us kids get to have our own thoughts."
- "I like sharing my writing with other people. I also like hearing what my classmates wrote. You get to know people that you never would have, and you realize they're just like you."

Looking Forward.....

The Writers Matter program started with only one school, and one dynamic teacher. This past year, Grover Washington Middle School was joined by the Amy NW Middle School, Parkway NW High School, Feltonville School for the Arts and Sciences and Paul VI High School

Every one of these schools, their teachers, and their students found success with the program.

This coming school year (2009-2010) the Writers Matter program will be expanding into more classrooms within the School District of Philadelphia and other Diocesan schools.

Special thanks to Pamela Brown, Northwest Regional Superintendent and Marco Zaroni, Principal of the Amy NW School for their support in establishing seven new schools.

For more information on the program contact Dr. Bob Vogel at vogel@lasalle.edu

Or visit our new website (coming soon) writersmatteatlasalle.com

Contributions can be made to the Writers Matters Program at LaSalle University. 1900 West Olney Ave, Philadelphia, Pa. 19141. Attention Dr. Robert Vogel) Or

Make a gift on-line www.lasalle.edu/makeagift. In the comments section, please type "Urban Writing Program: Writers Matter."



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