

# Writers Matter

La Salle University's Urban Writers Program

## Student Writing Contest

This past spring, middle school students participating in the Writers Matter program entered into an essay contest, writing about how they could:

- Remedy social and economic injustice
- Prevent genocide and future holocausts
- Address bullying and cyber-bullying
- End hunger in Philadelphia and the world

The winner, **Taylor Flourney**, focused on hunger in her essay, **I am Hungry to Stop Hunger** (featured below). The contest runners up are featured in pages 3-6 of this newsletter.

### I am Hungry to Stop Hunger

I am hungry for a plate,  
A plate of something more important than food.  
More important than mac & cheese;  
More important than any meal.  
I am hungry for a feeling,  
And that feeling is love.

I am hungry for love,  
I am hungry to stretch my hand and love some-  
one.  
Show a helping hand,  
And don't pull away from me.  
Show me how to touch a person's heart and  
stomach, at the same time!

I am hungry to make a change.  
I don't want to beg for food, but I have to.  
I don't want to go to a soup kitchen, but I need to.  
I want to be able to make my own meals,  
but I can't.  
I want to find a way to stop this situation,  
and I will. *Continued on page 3*

## Runners-Up

**Bevan Pearson**  
*Friends Select School*

**Faith Watterson**  
*Vare Middle School*

**Queen Neal**  
*Parkway Northwest*

**Starr-Laquia Fields**  
*Leeds Middle School*

**Jalil Boswell**  
*Leeds Middle School*

**Anjala Phillips**  
*Roosevelt Middle School*



Taylor Flourney (pictured) is an eighth grade student at Vare Middle School.

## Newsletter - Summer, 2010

### Words from the Director

Welcome to our Summer 2010 newsletter for the Writers Matter program currently completing our sixth year providing innovative writing opportunities for students in the Philadelphia metropolitan areas. The inspiration for Writers Matter came from Erin Gruwell's Freedom Writers Diary program geared for high school students. Impressed with her work, I brought the program to the Philadelphia area schools in 2005 for a younger audience – middle and lower high school students. I was intent on providing unique opportunities for young students to express themselves through the writing process, learn critical writing skills and develop effective personal relationships with peers to allow for more tolerance and appreciation of others. The process of writing provides an effective outlet for these students at a time in their lives when personal expression and having their voices heard is so important. As one student wrote - "Writers Matter has empowered me with the skills to use my inner voice to communicate with others and make my feelings come alive."

This program originated at the Grover Washington Jr. Middle School, in the School District of Philadelphia and culminated with the publication of Voices of Teens: Writers Matter published by the National Middle School Association in 2008. This book celebrated the many successes of the students and resulted in 107 middle school students having their work published.

Research has been conducted every year and results have demonstrated higher achievement in writing and a more student-friendly environment allowing students to freely express themselves and discuss important issues among their peers. Cliques, stereotypes, and racial boundaries within the classrooms began to decrease, as students began to truly see their peers as thinking, feeling people with the same problems and insecurities as they face. Students began to emerge as more confident individuals using their personalities and own unique voice to express themselves through writing.

During the 2009-2010 school years the program underwent many positive changes and a major expansion with the School District of Philadelphia and other schools in the Philadelphia and New Jersey area. Through collaborative efforts with Pamela Brown, Chief Academic Officer, Penny Nixon, Northwest Regional Superintendent and Marco Zani, Principal of *Continued on Page 2*

### Mural Arts and Writers Matter

City of Philadelphia Mural Arts Program and Writers Matter. For more information on Philadelphia Mural Arts, please visit [www.muralarts.org](http://www.muralarts.org).

LaSalle University's Writers Matter program, the City of Philadelphia Mural Arts Program, Philabundance, and the School District of Philadelphia are collaborating on a public art project called "What are you hungry for?". The mission is to create an exceptional work of public art, transforming Philabundance's Hunger Relief Center's wall and creating a public dialogue on hunger. This project is designed to promote social change, empower participants through writing and visual expression, and to grow and hone a collective voice on the topic of hunger. Bob Vogel and nationally recognized artist Meg Saligman have come together to create a cross-disciplinary curriculum through writing and art-making on the theme of hunger. The project will include 21 middle school students who will serve as Writers Matter Scholars in the creation of this dynamic public artwork at Philabundance's Hunger Relief Center.



from Page 1 the AMY Middle School, a partnership was created that included seven schools from the Northwest region of Philadelphia. The seven participating schools are Amy Northwest, Charles W. Henry, Anna L. Lingelbach, Morris E. Leeds, Louis Wagner, Northwest Parkway and E. Vare Middle School. Other schools include DePaul Catholic, Friends-Select, Paul VI High School and The San Miguel School in Camden, N.J. The program involves approximately 900 students at this time.

The teachers from the schools were involved in a year-long professional development program meeting once a month at La Salle University for the purpose of coordinating writing assignments, sharing student work, learning new writing skills to be implemented with the students and to help each other with the many challenges and opportunities presented to teachers on a daily basis. In addition, the teachers communicated electronically to share teaching ideas and developed an engaging professional development community. Professional development also included the following special events:

- Echoes and Reflections Workshop – An award-winning curriculum developed by the Anti-Defamation League, USC Shoah Foundation Institute and Yad Vashem that includes teaching strategies for the complex issues of the Holocaust and Genocide studies. Presentation taught by Randi Boyette, Associate Regional Director, Anti-Defamation League Eastern Pennsylvania/Delaware
- All About Writing and Career Day at La Salle University – Day long program for 120 middle school students that provided an opportunity for them to meet students from other schools and share personal writing with each other. They had the opportunity to make new friends, learn from each other and take a walking tour of La Salle's campus. Students met with Anna Allen, Associate Dean of Students who spoke about attending college and the many opportunities available to them after high school.
- "Writers Matter: Listening to the Voices of Our Neighborhood Teens" - As part of the Explorer Café Series held at La Salle University for faculty and students, this program highlighted how the "Writers Matter" program can be used as a tool for youth empowerment and development. Participating were 20 students and teacher Steve Clark from The DePaul Catholic School in Philadelphia. The students shared written work, personal experiences and most importantly, their dreams for the future.
- Writers Matter hosted two writing contests each with different themes. The first was 'Why College is Important to Me' and the second was "How We Can Work Together to Make the World a Better Place" focusing on social and economic injustice, genocide and future holocausts, bullying and cyber-bullying and ending hunger in Philadelphia and throughout the world.

The Writers Matter program provided La Salle undergraduates the opportunity to serve as tutors and mentors for the middle school students and to help with journal writing and content related writing assignments on a weekly basis. The young writers developed meaningful relationships with the university students and, perhaps for the first time, saw a college future for themselves.

La Salle's Writers Matter program has entered into a new partnership with City of Philadelphia Philadelphia's Mural Arts Program, Philabundance and the School District of Philadelphia to create a mural that will include student writing. This initiative will team with nationally known mural artist, Meg Saligman to design a mural focusing on nutrition and hunger. Twenty students will be selected as "Writers Matter Scholars" to participate as writers and artists and help in the design of the mural. 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. Many thanks to Alan Casnoff, Bill Clark, Marlo DelSordo, Jane Golden, Netanel Eliezer and Meg Saligman for making this initiative a part of the Writers Matter program.

Special thanks to other members of my team, including Marjie Allen, Deb Yost, and Conrad Gleber who have taken a major role in the mentoring, digital storytelling and research. Many thanks to my three La Salle University students, Suzanne Liposky and Shannon Prendergest, mentoring coordinators, and Tom Wingert, Creative Director for Writers Matter.

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 contributors have been supportive and helpful to me with their welcomed suggestions and continuous attention to the vision of the program. **Thank You.**

#### **Bob Vogel**

Director, Writers Matter  
Professor, Department of Education, La Salle University



Give to  
Writers  
Matter

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](http://www.lasalle.edu/makeagift)

In the comments section, please type "Urban Writers Program: Writers Matter"

Writers Matter

July 9, 2010

**UNDER**  
**CONSTRUCTION**  
[www.writersmatteratlasalle.com](http://www.writersmatteratlasalle.com)

The brand new Writers Matter website will be ready for relaunch by the end of Summer, 2010! This website will include brand new tools, resources, and features for students, teachers, and mentors involved with the program.

Special thanks to Ashton Harris and Jim Klein for web design support.

## Student Writing Contest

Within each issue of our bi-annual newsletter, Writers Matter publishes several exemplary stories, poems, and essays written by students in the Philadelphia area participating in Writers Matter curriculum.

This issue, we chose to focus on the winners and runners up of this spring's social justice oriented essay contest. Topic choices included students writing about how they could:

- Remedy social and economic injustice
- Prevent genocide and future holocausts
- Address bullying and cyber-bullying
- End hunger in Philadelphia and the world

Each of the seven middle school students featured in this issue turned in fantastic essays and we would like to congratulate them on their hard work. **Enjoy!**

## I am Hungry to Stop Hunger

*Taylor Floutnoy*

*from Page 1*

I am also trying my best to stop hunger.

I am giving my plate to a person in need of a plate.

Making a person's day a little bit brighter.

Putting a smile on a person's face.

Hearing a person say, "I am full, I am stuffed,  
and I have had enough!"

Let me know that I have done my job!

I am ceasing hunger one plate at a time.

I have barely enough for me, but I need to  
make a difference.

I changed my community by handing out plates of food.

Helping a person in need, and maybe just, maybe  
changing their fate.

Who knows how the world will be if we  
try to help someone.

It won't only change that person, but it will change you.

It will turn you into a whole new person.

A person who will do the right thing  
in a tough situation.

A person who is not afraid to lend a helping hand.

You would be another person changing the world.

The day when you help a person who is hungry,

Could be the day when the world gets stronger.

It could be the day when everything you do will be just  
a little less hard.

When this day comes you will know what to do.

You will help your community, and maybe start to  
change the world.

Once someone sees you helping someone

They would want to help other people too.

This will keep going and going until the whole world  
will help people in need.

This could keep going for generations and generations.

Lives could be changed just by doing a simple thing.

You will know when it is a right time to  
help a person out.

You will get a certain, strange, weird  
feeling in your heart.

You will have a feeling to help  
more and more people out.

**This day will come  
when you are hungry to stop hunger.**



## Bullying

*Queen Neal*

Bullying is a form of abuse and this includes all types of threatening and disruptive behaviors; physical bullying, verbal bullying, indirect bullying, social alienation, intimidation, and cyber bullying. Bullying in any form is never O.K. and needs to be stopped.

According to Martial Arts for Peace, almost 30% of teens in the United States are estimated to be involved in school bullying as either a bully or the target. 30% is too much and that doesn't count the teens that do not speak up. Part of the problem is that the teachers, principals, and other people in charge don't make bullying a big deal. They may have papers hanging up saying "Bullying isn't cool" but that's not enough, what are the posters going to do? Jump off the wall and stop bullying? No.

A majority of kids and teens being bullied have self-esteem issues before or after being bullied and just want to fit in. This is one reason why they don't tell authorities they are being bullied, because they are afraid that if they tell the situation will turn into a big deal ending in total humiliation for the student. No one wants to be known as the kid who gets teased or beat up, so if they can keep it to themselves, which most can, they will. It takes a very strong and confident person to stand up to bullying or tell an authority.

Kids and teens have to become more comfortable at school and talking to authorities. One way to make them more comfortable talking to authorities is by making sure students know that the authorities will take care of the situation in a calm and friendly manner, making sure that only the people involved are told and scolded about the situation, everyone in the school shouldn't be informed about the problem. There should be some type of trust the authorities and the student being bullied have.

Another way to stop bullying is by allowing some type of student government. Students need to

have more of a voice in scholastic situations because they are creative and a lot of the time can think of programs and things for kids their age that people over the age of 18 cannot think of. Who would know how to reach students being bullied more than students themselves? Teachers and principals come off like they are trying to be bossy or annoying when they keep talking about stuff in school, why not let the students take charge and have a "No Bullying Workshop?"

If schools switch from letting adults run everything to sometimes kids and teens running things it will boost the self-esteem of students and help end bullying because students will *Continued on Page 5*



## Making the World a Better Place

Faith Watterson

How can we make the world a better place?  
Were they don't want to change and need their  
space.  
Economic injustice separates us into different  
classes.  
They ignore you as everyone passes  
Where people are paid more depending on where  
they come from  
But if you live in the city you're mostly likely slap-  
ping a drum.  
It's hard for people to take you serious  
They might even think you're crazy or delirious  
Where they skip you over if you have one mistake  
The ones who make it are mostly fake  
Nothing will stop them from judging you  
One head is much better than two  
Two means one big disagreement  
Both sides are vehemently pushing you  
How can we make the world a better place?  
There are even more ways to bully you other than  
to your face.  
Cyber bullying can leave a mark on your soul for  
years  
Sometimes you want to click the off button to your  
ears.  
They prey on the weak  
They'll break you like a priceless antique  
They don't care who you are  
They might not even be that far  
It can make you suffer  
And may make the other person feel a whole lot  
tougher  
Bullying hurts more than you think  
It could cause your self-confidence to shrink  
The only reason they bully is to higher theirs  
As if anyone cares  
It may make you feel worse about yourself  
But think how they feel themselves  
How can we make the world a better place?  
Where people beg for food everyday  
Where they will do anything just to get their way  
Where money is tight  
And people worry throughout the night.  
Many children are starving for something to eat  
Where they rummage through the trash to eat their  
meat.  
No one will help them on the street  
Oh why won't someone give them something to  
eat?  
Where alley cats scurry fast  
They live there, not slow but fast.

## Bullying

Jalil Boswell

Every day thousands of teens wake up afraid to go to school. Bullying is a problem that affects mil-  
lions of students, and it has everyone worried, not just the kids on its receiving end. Yet because  
parents, teachers, and other adults don't always see it, they may not understand how extreme bully-  
ing can get.

Bullying is when a person is picked on over and over again by an individual or group with more  
power, either in terms of physical strength or social standing.

Two of the main reasons people are bullied are because of appearance and social status. Bullies pick  
on the people they think don't fit in, maybe because of how they look, how they act (for example,  
kids who are shy and withdrawn), their race or religion, or because the bullies think their target may  
be gay or lesbian.

Some bullies attack their targets physically, which can mean anything from shoving or tripping to  
punching or hitting, or even sexual assault. Others use psychological control or verbal insults to  
put themselves in charge. For example, people in popular groups or cliques often bully people they  
categorize as different by excluding them or gossiping about them (psychological bullying). They  
may also taunt or tease their targets (verbal bullying).

One of the most painful aspects of bullying is that it is relentless. Most people can take one episode  
of teasing or name calling or being shunned at the mall. However, when it goes on and on, bullying  
can put a person in a state of constant fear.

Guys and girls who are bullied may find their schoolwork and health suffering. Amber began having  
stomach pains and diarrhea and was diagnosed with a digestive condition called irritable bowel  
syndrome as a result of the stress that came from being bullied throughout ninth grade. Mafooz  
spent his afternoons hungry and unable to concentrate in class because he was too afraid to go to the  
school cafeteria at lunchtime.

Studies show that people who are abused by their peers are at risk for mental health problems, such  
as low self-esteem, stress, depression, or anxiety. They may also think about suicide more.  
Bullies are at risk for problems, too. Bullying is violence, and it often leads to more violent behavior  
as the bully grows up. It's estimated that 1 out of 4 elementary-school bullies will have a criminal  
record by the time they are 30. Some teen bullies end up being rejected by their peers and lose  
friendships as they grow older. Bullies may also fail in school and not have the career or relationship  
success that other people enjoy.



## Hungry

Starr-Laquia Fields

When you think of hunger you think its just a little rumble in your jungle.

So you just take a jungle tumble to your fridge to handle this.

But what about a kid who cant handle his

I guess no cares?

So u sit back you full you good you got your grub

Wait but do you think of the kid who has to really eat some grubs out the ground or look around for food not assured they can eat again.

Look in to a starving Childs eyes and think just think of all the food you dropped or plopped in to the trash.

When you do your heart will take a gasp you'll want to fall in the grass you think back to the past of all the trash that wasn't trash it was just you being an ignoramus ignoring all the good you could eat

All the berries so sweet

I, me, we, my family

We starve because... of ignorance



## Education and Awareness

Bevan Pearson

Education and awareness are the first vital steps all of the people of the world must take together on the way to a holocaust-free world. It is important for all children, teens, and adults to know how people in other countries are living, what major religions are about, and how they can and should help fellow humans in need. For example, when people know that Sudanese natives in Darfur are being discriminated against and displaced, they are more inclined to take action against the Sudanese government's oppression, or at least take action towards helping the Sudanese refugees. The people of today need to work hard to keep themselves as well-informed as possible about what other countries' governments are doing so that events like the Holocaust will never happen again. This approach towards prevention of conflict has been adopted by Greg Mortenson, founder of the Central Asia Institute and the Pennies for Peace organization, in building schools for the education of children in Pakistan and Afghanistan to give them opportunities and let them know that they can pursue other professions than rebel gang member or suicide bomber (not that those are their only options). It is also important that people (like Americans who think badly of Muslim and Islamic people) in all countries are educated about religions, and don't just form their knowledge basis off of their parents and other people around them. Once each individual is educated about the rest of the world's population, they must be educated about how people in need can be helped, either by donating money, by making people around them aware, or by sending supplies, etc. Regardless of how people help, it is key to remember that they never would think of helping if it weren't for their education about the subject.

The next ideal advances towards a genocide and holocaust-free world are for all people to learn acceptance and for all people to have proper values; if people are aware of a problem happening, the problem still won't get fixed if they don't know that what's happening is wrong, or aren't willing to believe it's really happening. Both of these examples happened in America during the Jewish Holocaust; the American people didn't know the whole story of what Hitler was doing to the Jewish and other people he thought of as "impure" (like the mentally disabled and communists), but many Americans also didn't want to believe the rumors they did hear. If we all don't learn to accept every other person on the planet, then next thing we know, the rejected people will be classified as a separate race, ethnicity, or nationality, and may be given a symbol to represent them as "others". These (classification and symbolization) are the first two stages of Genocide Watch's Eight Stages of Genocide, and are not to be taken lightly. They can eventually escalate and indirectly lead to stages seven and eight: extermination and denial. At my school, everyone is kept far away from participating in any of these eight steps by learning and trying to honor the Quaker Testimonies. The Quaker Testimonies are simplicity, peace, integrity, community, equality, and stewardship. If everyone in the world has values like these, especially peace, community, and equality, no one will ever question whether singling out one group of people is right. In conclusion, it is vital that we all are always open, believing, and accepting towards each type of person; anything short of acceptance has the potential to escalate to genocide.

Response to conflict is the final and most crucial step towards eliminating and preventing genocide; empathy will help people take this step. By empathy, I mean thinking about how you would feel in a situation similar to those you hear about in foreign global conflict. It is crucial to empathize because otherwise people being discriminated against in other countries may seem too distant from your everyday life for you to really care. Empathy should be encouraged in schools so that kids can learn to empathize from a young age. I know that I have learned to empathize through one of my school's summer reading books, *Three Cups of Tea*. This book educated me about children's dire need of schools, teachers, and academic supplies in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and inspired me to donate 50 dollars of my babysitting money towards the author's organization. So clearly, my empathy led me to try to help people in need. Empathy can work the same way for victims of genocide. In conclusion, knowing what's going on, knowing why it's wrong, and finally understanding that although it may be far away, people are suffering this very moment all allow for the outcome of global response to genocide and racial targeting.

## Bullying

Queen Neal

from Page 3 be talking and relating with other students. This will also help students feel less alone in the school.

Students have to know that bullying can always get worse. There should be bullying programs for entire schools educating people about bullying and all the different types. A lot of kids don't know they are being bullied because they think the only type of bullying is physical. Being bullied could be someone walking past you everyday and making fun of you. Students have to be educated on what bullying is so these disruptive behaviors can end.

## Writers Matter

July 9, 2010





## Mentoring at La Salle

La Salle students have the opportunity to become mentors for the Writers Matter Program in two ways: as volunteers through the University Ministry and Service at La Salle and as a service learning experience in the Introductory Leadership and Global Understanding course. Many of the students have never before been inside an urban school and some of them are graduates of schools much like these. For each, it is a unique learning experience. Being role models for younger students is exciting and even more exciting is the opportunity to nurture the talents and passions of these students. Building relationships with students whose lives may be significantly different from their own, La Salle, mentors come to understand the significant commonalities they share with each other.



## Ending Hunger in Philadelphia and the World

Anjala Phillips

Ending hunger in Philadelphia let alone the world is one of many goals set in life for me. I believe no child or adult should go to sleep with an empty stomach. Would you allow your child, sister, or brother to sleep on an empty stomach and not be angry or upset? Well just to let you know, there are billions of people in the world starving and even more billions of people dying because of starvation. To let you get a close estimate of the number of people in the United States that are starving, there are more than 49.1 million Americans alone. In 2008, one in seven struggled to get enough to eat, which was the highest total in 14 years.

Now with every problem there is a solution. There are programs such as “food stamps” that soften the impact of an economic recession. There is an anti-hunger group that points to the huge increase of the preceding year when 36.2 million people had trouble getting enough food and one third of them occasionally went hungry. There is a “Child Nutrition” program that helps the starving children around the U.S and the world. There are thousands of programs that help starving people in your neighborhood and around the world. My personal favorite is the website (The Hunger Site.com), which tells how you can help out and how they are solving this issue.

There are plenty of facts that may lead you to action. Teens alone have millions deaths each year because of anorexia and bulimia. About 25,000 people die everyday from hunger or hunger related causes according to the United Nations. The problem isn't that we don't have enough food; it's just that the majority of the hungry people are trapped in severe poverty. They lack money to buy enough food to nourish themselves. Being constantly malnourished, they become weaker and often sick. With this problem, it makes it increasingly harder to work, which then makes them even poorer and hungrier. This downward spiral often continues until death for them and their families. At this moment, there are more than 1.2 billion hungry people in the world.

About 14.6 percent of the United States households, equal to 49.1 million people, “had difficulty obtaining food for all their members due to a lack of resources.” During 2008 that statistic went up to 3.5 percentage points from 2007. When 11.1 percent of households were classified as food insecure. And about 5.7 percent of households or 17.3 million people had “very low food security,” meaning some members of the household had to eat less. This is an unfortunate event to have less food and more family members that are hungry. Research shows that food runs short in those households for a few day in seven of eight months out of a year.

“An opportunity here for the country to make a major commitment to end childhood hunger by 2015” is an Obama Administration goal. In the meantime, we local Philadelphians work hard on preparing food for the hungry. There is a “Child Nutrition” program across the world that costs about 24 billion dollars a year, is overdue for renewal, but Congress isn't expected to act too soon.

The administration backs \$1 billion, but hasn't found offsetting cuts at USDA to pay for it. The number of Americans receiving food stamps assistance soars above 36 million. This sets a new sad record. I plan to make a change as soon as I'm old enough. And to know, that there are billions of hungry people in the whole world, and there are billions more dying because of starvation, that is enough of a reason for me to start sharing with the needy, why not you?

Writers Matter

July 9, 2010

