For Merle Mabry Bowers, my mother,
whose sterling example of love, courage, and strength
continues to shape my life.
—RBS

For Linda and Bill Anderson, my mom and dad,
for being my first and finest teachers,
and for Ellen Stone and Chris Erickson
for bringing themselves into the classroom.
—TR
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This book and the questions that prompted it belong to many people, and we owe all of them special thanks for helping us as we set about sharing this story. Without a doubt, it was the support and assistance of Jim Strickland, our editor and friend, that made this book a reality. Not only is Jim a terrific editor, he is the best cheerleader a writer could have. He and Kathleen Strickland have offered encouragement and assistance every step of the way, and Vicki Kasabian, our production editor, has worked tirelessly to help create a book that will be useful to other teachers.

A special debt is owed the students of Community High School. What an amazing group of young people! At Community, students, faculty, and Dean Judy work together everyday to create a unique and energizing learning environment that stands as an example of what is working in secondary education. To Tracy's students who participated in this project and to Ellen Stone and Chris Erickson who helped make the class possible, we offer our deepest appreciation.

Heartfelt thanks go to Kathleen Rowlands and Jim Mahoney who gave generously of their time to offer both encouragement and suggestions. And, to our colleagues and friends in the Eastern Michigan Writing Project who have shaped our thinking in so many different ways, we offer our own encouragement to remember that the questions we have about our classrooms matter. In this day of political and external pressure facing every local classroom, it is tremendously important to tell our stories about real classrooms, real students, and highly effective practices that make sense.

Finally, to those who know us best—to Michael, Dera, and Justin and to Brian, Sophia, and Ella—thank you all for allowing us to carve out time to grow as teachers. You have our love, appreciation, and gratitude.

Rebecca and Tracy
Continued from p. ii:

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Introduction

I really enjoyed the writing we did in your workshop, but for high school kids, basically I think that stuff’s all whipped cream.
—Anonymous, department chair

The workshop in question, cosponsored by the Eastern Michigan Writing Project and the North Central Association (EMWP/NCA) as a part of a full-day writing session for teachers and principals, provided a quick foray into memoir writing. Together, we read *Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge* by Mem Fox, talked about special memories the story evoked for us, created individual chains of memories, and then each of us chose one memory to work with for a few minutes.

But, we didn’t just jump in. First, we dropped ourselves into the memory by visualizing the episode: who was a part of the event? What sensory images did the memory include? We sketched a rough picture based on the memory and then told the story to an individual seated nearby. In a few cases, the stories were shared with the larger group and we used them, as well as the picture book, to think together about the qualities a memoir might have, drawing on other memoirs of which participants were familiar. And then we wrote: words rapidly flowed onto paper.

As I walked around the room, I observed writers scratching out words to substitute better ones. I noticed loopy lines inserted to move phrases to better locations in fastwrites. I saw writers pausing, thinking, and then lurching forward again with a new burst of energy. The most exciting thing I noted, however, happened after I interrupted the writing to see if anyone was willing to share. In a room filled with strangers an hour earlier, hands went up in all directions as adult writers eagerly shared their stories.

Certainly the brief simulation the participants experienced did not provide for immersion in the genre. It did, however, provide a platform for us to talk about and experience, however briefly, some of the things that support us as writers when we jump into a new genre. We talked about the need to experience the genre so that we could get a sense of its possibilities and its restrictions. Sometimes scaffolding is needed to help us create a mental model of the genre: How is it organized? What about the author’s stance in this type of writing? What about various
Introduction

elements of style? And, sometimes we need interactions with texts or peers to whet our appetites and help us think about the story, message, or information we want to share.

I listened hard to the department chair as he stood before me describing a new approach he had developed and was teaching to others in his district, a more prescriptive approach than the one we had discussed in our workshop, one that privileged organization and mechanics as essential features students should master before concentrating on other elements—like content, voice, and audience. He described how unprepared teachers, and particularly new teachers, are to address the requirements of academic writing, and how the set of principles he had developed could be taken successfully into any genre and guarantee well-organized results.

I listened with a knitted brow, my mind filled with a rush of thoughts, and I struggled with the suggestion that academic writing could be boiled down to such a narrow notion of genre. Genre suggests categories, and in the world of experienced writers, clean-cut categories are hard to find. All writing takes on a persuasive element, and good writing of all types may exhibit deep descriptions, strong voice, and manipulation of conventional rhetorical structures. Some genres blend into others; some open up to numerous subgenres. Even in traditional academic genres like the essay, crisp genre-based definitions have become blurred and variations including multigenre presentations written for traditional purposes are commonplace.

Certainly, I believed in the importance of immersion in and exploration of unfamiliar genres as gateways to understanding their various possibilities, restraints, and conventions. My experience told me, however, that the most important thing of all is having something that needs to be captured in print. When writers have something important to say, they are more apt to care about all those qualities that help a reader understand and appreciate the message. They have a context for the importance of qualities such as clear organization and appropriate mechanics.

Too often, I fear, writing in school fails to account for the crucial need authors have for purpose and relevance, and that without these, writing itself may seem only an academic exercise for young adults, an exercise unworthy of much effort or concern. The disconnect that many students feel for school-sponsored writing reinforces their sense that school-based writing is an academic exercise, one for which learning formulaic patterns for sentence and paragraph placement is what writing is all about. If young adults are to develop writing identities and a sense of the importance of their words, ideas, and opinions, they need more than a formula.

Robert Yagelski (2000) thoughtfully describes how critical it is to help our students understand that their voices matter if we want them to believe that writing has relevance in their lives. There are many in our field who offer visions for how this may be done. Jay Robinson (1998), for example, urges us to create habitable
spaces in schools, spaces where students can experience a connection between
school-sponsored literacy and the discourses that matter in the world. Describing
partnership projects such as the Saginaw River Project, which engaged students from
two high schools in the real work of testing and reporting on water quality, he shares
how such a project created a context for writing that significantly affected a com-

munity. For the students involved, clearly writing mattered because it had a real
purpose, audience, and message, and it offered the possibility of making a difference.
Because it offered these elements, it warranted the time to carefully consider orga-
nization, word choice, and conventions.

Like Yagelski and Robinson, who powerfully describe why purpose and con-
text are so essential for the development of writing that matters, I contend that
before students will be concerned about organization, format, and mechanics they
must first have something to say and a reason to say it. By situating writing in-
struction among conversations focused on things that matter, conversations fueled
by broad reading of fiction and nonfiction literature, students will not only have
something to think about, they will also be more likely to develop ideas they want
and need to share. Unless we have something to say, why worry about organization
and correctness?

The department chair’s concerns for his students were evident, predictable, and
heartfelt. Teachers everywhere recognize that young adults face numerous expec-
tations for writing on demand, he explained, at school, on writing tests to exit high
school, and on writing tasks at work and in college. In his mind, organization and
mechanics were top priorities for these students. After all, writing that is poorly
organized, that does not honor basic constraints of genre, and of expectations for
correctness in spelling, capitalization, and punctuation is apt to be relegated to the
bottom of the heap regardless of the significance of the message intended.

He is not alone in the concerns he voices. Faced with heavy curricular ex-
pectations and testing requirements, many teachers struggle with questions of how
best to approach the teaching of writing. Certainly, the question of how best to
do that was the backdrop to the EMWP/NCA workshop conversation, and it con-
tinues to be important in our ongoing national conversations as well. How do we
most effectively prepare students for the writing tasks they encounter in school
and beyond as they assume their responsibilities and exercise their rights within
a democratic society? How do we do so while helping them see the relevance to
their own lives? How do we do so within an academic framework that is engag-
ing, challenging, and rigorous? How do we create learning spaces and moments
that meet the needs of radically diverse high school students? Can we even teach
writing in any sort of didactic fashion?

“Can we teach writing?” That is the opening question in Donald Murray’s
Write to Learn (1984). He answers his own question: “Yes, but we can’t teach
Introduction

writing in advance of our students writing. Our students do not learn to write, then write . . .” (xiii). Implicit is the understanding that our students learn to write best when they are actually engaged in meaningful writing experiences. This premise has provided a rich focus for professional conversations at the elementary and middle school levels where teachers such as Katie Wood Ray (2004), Regie Routman (1991, 1988), Nancie Atwell (1987, 1998), Donald Graves (1994), and Linda Rief (1992), among others, have described successful workshop environments where students spend the majority of their class time actually doing those things that we value—reading real literature and using that as an inspiration for writing real texts.

Richard Bullock (1998), working with ten teachers from middle and high schools, articulates the features of a high school workshop classroom and identifies many of the obstacles teachers face as they attempt to create workshops for their students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional environments</th>
<th>Workshop environments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The teacher (or school or state) designs and implements the curriculum.</td>
<td>Teacher and students negotiate curriculum, both individually and in groups (within mandated constraints).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students practice skills and memorize facts.</td>
<td>Students actively construct concepts and meanings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content is broken down into discrete, sequential units.</td>
<td>Content is presented whole, in meaningful contexts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoiding mistakes is important.</td>
<td>Taking risks is valued as a sign of learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance on tests is valued highly.</td>
<td>Students are assessed by their performance on meaningful tasks, often through portfolios of their work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers do the evaluating and grading.</td>
<td>Students learn to assess their own learning and progress.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning is expected to be uniform.</td>
<td>Learning is expected to be individual and unique. Evaluation is oriented toward success.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectations are the same for all students, so many students “fail.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Unlike the classroom where structure and format are privileged first, the workshop environments described by Sheridan Blau (2003), John Gaughan (2001), and Kathleen Andrasick (1990) provide an opportunity for students to immerse themselves in literature, using individual and whole group texts as platforms for talking and writing about ideas—big ideas and smaller ideas that are also personally and locally relevant. Then, given opportunities to examine the distinctive
features of the texts being read, students have the opportunity to develop mental models for specific genres. They are afforded the opportunity to ask important questions such as when and why a writer would choose memoir or short story or persuasive essay as the best tool for relaying her message? What features of a particular genre make it the best one for a particular purpose? What are the possibilities inherent in a particular genre choice? What restrictions for shaping the message would it require? In this classroom, genre becomes a tool for a writer’s message and shapes decisions about organization, mechanics, and other rhetorical concerns. In this classroom, writers hold power to make decisions about how their messages will be transmitted.

The publication of *The Neglected R* by the National Commission on Writing in America’s Schools and Colleges (2003) reinforced for the nation the importance of writing in our lives and in our schools. Asserting that “[w]riting today is not a frill for the few, but an essential skill for the many” (11), the report goes on to describe writing as “not simply a way for students to demonstrate what they know . . . [but] a way to help them understand what they know. At best, writing is learning” (13). This important document goes on to report that high school students experience few opportunities to produce thoughtful—and thought filled—papers in a variety of genres written for varying purposes and audiences. The commission urges schools to place writing at the center of the curriculum, to engage students in writing often and in a variety of contexts. It also urges legislators and policy makers to find resources to support teachers in this critical enterprise.

*The Neglected R* is certainly not alone in recognizing the critical place writing holds in supporting students as communicators and thinkers. For many years professional organizations such as the National Council of Teachers of English and the National Writing Project have advocated increasing the amount of instructional time devoted to writing. The recently released *NCTE Beliefs About the Teaching of Writing* (2004, see Appendix A), resulted in eleven broad statements supporting particular practices in relation to the teaching of writing, representing a synthesis of research, K–16. These principles include support for writing process and the teaching of writing through actual writing practice.

Devoting enormous effort to sift through a mountain of reform reports and standards projects, Daniels, Zemelman, and Hyde (1998, 1993) synthesized a list of qualities that have come to be known as characteristics of “best practices” for instruction. These principles call for classrooms that are “student-centered, experiential, reflective, authentic, holistic, social, collaborative, democratic, cognitive, developmental, constructivist, and challenging” (4–5). These authors go on to describe a series of shifts away from certain practices and toward others, including a movement toward experiential, inductive, hands-on learning; more
active learning; more emphasis on higher-order thinking; more choice and more collaborative activity. In addition, this meta-study made recommendations for “six structures that help create Best Practice classrooms,” including use of “integrative units, small group activities, representing-to-learn, classroom workshop, authentic experiences, [and] reflective assessment” (5).

I have had opportunities to ask many teaching colleagues around the country to think about that moment when they first knew they were a reader, that magic time when they were so absorbed in a story that they were living within the pages, experiencing that “moment of unconscious delight” (161–67) described by Margaret Early (1960) as an essential step toward literary appreciation. Without it, she cautions, readers will lack the investment and skill to handle higher levels of literary analysis in meaningful ways. When I ask these same colleagues to describe that moment when they first truly felt they were a writer, many confess that they have no such recollection—that even as adults they do not see themselves as writers. Why would this be?

Perhaps writing, like reading, requires that moment of unconscious delight, that moment when we are so engaged in our message that we are not only willing but excited about investing energy and effort to make it reflect our experience perfectly—to make it just right for a reader. Surely students can have such moments as they work with a variety of genres, but only if the writing itself has meaning and significance. When a high school writer has something to say, word choice, mechanics, sentence structure, and organization have a purpose. When the reading and writing are compelling, a bridge is opened for the teacher to point to ways a writer uses conventions, word choice, and organization as deliberate tools—tools that students can make their own for immediate use to convey their own messages.

That’s what workshop at the high school level is all about—purposeful reading and writing to promote engagement with ideas and to create environments where young writers sculpt their understanding of genre, craft, and skills because they are important to the message they wish to convey. This is an organic approach, one that mirrors the way adult writers approach new and unfamiliar writing tasks. This is understanding the demands of the writing task from the inside, and no prescription can give that intuitive sense of the work.

No Prescriptions Necessary

This book grows from the premise that we don’t need prescriptive approaches and environments to teach writing and that, in fact, such approaches may be at cross-purposes to our long-term goals for writing. In the pages that follow, I will invite the reader to join me as I enter the classroom of a magnificent teacher, Tracy
Introduction

Rosewarne. At a very fundamental level, Tracy and I believe that the qualities of a workshop environment create a more successful pedagogical structure for supporting the growth of adolescent writers than any other model. If students learn to work effectively in a variety of genres selected for varying purposes and audiences, if they understand the power of their own words, and if they sense the responsibilities associated with putting their thoughts and words into the world, surely they will be better prepared for whatever writing demands—including demands of testing—come their way.

As a teacher of preservice students, I have often encountered the question, “Couldn’t someone just show me what writing workshop looks like at high school?” Preservice students frequently raise questions about classroom management and about how teachers manage to fit in everything they are suppose to teach. This book is written with these questions in mind. Its purpose is twofold. The first is to provide a context for understanding the ways an excellent teacher negotiates the very complex demands placed on the high school instructional setting—demands emanating from national and state standards and testing, from local curriculum requirements, and from a teacher’s keen understanding of best practices and strong sense of professional responsibility. The second purpose is to offer a picture of workshop in a diverse, urban, block-scheduled high school classroom. In doing so we examine the ways Tracy honors her core beliefs—the foundation of her workshop even in more teacher-directed units—and by doing so creates relevance, builds relationships, and designs rigorous learning opportunities.

In the following pages, we trace the development of an actual writing workshop by looking closely at the ways in which community and expectations are established; we then turn a sharp lens on two representative units, one focused on exploration of nonfiction genres and the second dedicated to open student choice of reading and writing. In both cases students write in genres and on topics of their own choosing, though in the first unit, the genre choices are limited to nonfiction. In later chapters, we look closely at classroom essentials, like the writer’s notebook. We give details about how Tracy set up her workshop; how she addressed the multitude of curricular requirements that confronted her and her students; and how she wove in essential instruction through mini- and micro-lessons, drawing out for scrutiny essential skills and encouraging students to immediately embed them into their thinking and writing through skills and craft lessons. We document the ways in which the workshop was successful and discuss variations that may be considered.

In particular, we discuss ways in which student attitudes about writing changed and how their proficiency as writers grew. Throughout, we include examples of student writing, instructional plans, and model lessons to support thinking and planning for workshops. Finally, to support the development of
workshop environments in other high school classrooms, we include in an appendix two important classroom tools for copying or modifying. We do not provide a cookie cutter model. Instead, our goal is to open up conversation for sharing multiple visions of successful workshops that support reading and writing at the high school level.

—RBS
Day One, Nonfiction Unit

Students gather in new writing workshop groups for the third meeting of the semester, a class separated from the first two classes by several days due to block scheduling at Tracy’s school. The first week’s two meetings were filled with community, fluency, and confidence building. This week, Tracy will use this new sense of community to advance students into reading and writing nonfiction.

As students settle into desks with cards in hand, opening notebooks and preparing to write, Tracy shares an overhead transparency of the poem “The Butterfly” from I Never Saw Another Butterfly, a heart-rending collection of poetry from children of the Holocaust.

The Butterfly
The last, the very last,
So richly, brightly dazzlingly yellow.
Perhaps if the sun’s tears would sing
against a white stone . . .

Such, such a yellow
Is carried lightly ‘way up high.
It went away I’m sure because it wished to
kiss the world good-bye.

For seven weeks I’ve lived in here,
Penned up inside this ghetto.
But I have found what I love here.
The dandelions call to me
And the white chestnut branches in the court.
Only I never saw another butterfly.
Thematic Focus on Nonfiction

That butterfly was the last one
Butterflies don’t live in here,
in the ghetto.
—Pavel Friedmann (4.6.1943, 39)

With little discussion of the poem, Tracy asks students to open their notebooks to the skills section and take a few minutes to brainstorm ways to respond to a piece of literature. Soon, Tracy rapidly makes a list at the overhead as each student contributes a possible response.

Possibilities for Response
- Write a poem or something creative.
- Make a list of details that come to mind.
- Laugh, cry, or dance.
- Write a narrative or emotional response.
- Create a story of your own that connects.
- Write a poem on the same topic.
- Write whatever on how it pertains to your life.
- Make connections to other things you have read.
- Make connections to things that have happened to you or someone you know.
- Make connections to things happening in the world right now.
- Develop questions.
- Make another poem from words in the original one.
- Draw a picture or create some other type of art.
- Write and/or perform a reaction (drama).
- Create a song and/or perform it.

Students add new possibilities to their individual lists. Tracy rereads “The Butterfly” and reads for the first time “Terezin,” from the same collection.

Terezin
The heaviest wheel rolls across our foreheads
To bury itself deep somewhere inside our memories.
We’ve suffered here more than enough,
Here in this clot of grief and shame,
Wanting a badge of blindness
To be a proof for their own children.
A fourth year of waiting, like standing above a swamp
From which any moment might gush forth a spring.
Meanwhile, the rivers flow another way,
Another way,
Not letting you die, not letting you live.
Crafting Texts That Are True

And the cannons don’t scream and the guns don’t bark
And you don’t see blood here.
Nothing, only silent hunger.
Children steal the bread here and ask and ask
and ask.
And all would wish to sleep, keep silent, and
Just to go to sleep again . . .
The heaviest wheel rolls across our foreheads
To bury itself deep somewhere inside our memories.

— Mif (1944, 17)

It is important that the students hear the power of the words of the poems. It is equally important that they read the words themselves. Tracy asks that they do so and then to respond to the invitation:

Writing Invitation 3
Create a response to either poem or to the combination of the two. Use any of the response possibilities we have generated, or if you choose, create a new one and use that.

As with most responses, the time allotted for Writing Invitation 3 is short—a mere three to five minutes. The varied responses are shared quickly around the room: Abby explores the words “the heaviest wheel” and the line “not letting you die, not letting you live.” She opens up a discussion for the class about the stark imagery in the poems, the sadness and the sense of despair. Celly draws a picture, pencil lines against white paper reflecting the same starkness identified in Abby’s words. Others offer up the beginnings of a song lyric, a connection to a personal feeling, a series of questions.

In their new groups, students are asked to introduce themselves and share one thing that happened over the weekend—an action that acknowledges the need for social sharing and simultaneously gets it out of the way—before creating a communal list of facts they know about the Holocaust, an exercise that draws from and builds on their prior knowledge. Soon, Tracy quickly records their facts on a transparency:

What We Know About the Holocaust
• Jews had to wear the Star of David.
• Bodies were incinerated.
• There was mass genocide of people who were not Aryans.
• gas chambers—showers
• Auschwitz was the largest concentration camp.
• Polish, gypsies, and gays also suffered discrimination.
• ghettos prior to concentration camps
Thematic Focus on Nonfiction

- mass graves
- pogroms
- Hitler was Austrian.
- Nazis
- Medical experiments were conducted on people in the camps.
- six million killed
- Those in the camps had numbers tattooed on their skin.
- Any who opposed the Nazis were also subject to discrimination.

The community list grows, making a wealth of information visible to all.

“Night,” Tracy tells the students, “is my favorite book to read aloud. Its message is not only intense as a story, but it is also an example of powerful writing. As she begins to read, words flow over the class; students relax, swept along with the story. Tracy stops, rereads a series of sentences.

Then he understood. He got out of bed and with automatic movements began to get dressed. Then he went up to the bed where his wife slept and touched her brow with infinite tenderness; she opened her eyes, and it seemed to me that her lips were brushed by a smile. (13)

She asks students to look at the series of sentences: first three words in a simple sentence; then thirteen words in another simple sentence; finally a much longer compound sentence of thirty-five words made up of two sentences, themselves constructed of compound sentences. Students observe how the writer’s craft draws the reader in, how varied sentence structure can open up a scene such as this one and place the reader right in the room with the characters.

Students begin reading silently for ten minutes. Toward the end of that quick timed reading, Tracy moves around the room, noting the page number each student is on. The goal is to complete the novel within a week, so it will be important for students to think about their reading speed and allot sufficient outside reading time each day to finish on schedule. By their next class on Thursday (meeting four), they are to be to page forty-five, and should record two sets of lines that they particularly like. Tracy reminds them of a previous minilesson on MLA citations, and asks them to review and then observe the correct way to cite a passage.

As the class draws to a close, she reviews once again the characteristics of nonfiction literature, explaining that Night is Elie Wiesel’s attempt to recount an important story as accurately as he possibly can. For their own writing, it will be important to think about an important event they can share through a personal story. For their next class, students are asked to complete the following assignment:
Crafting Texts That Are True

Writing Assignment 2: Historical Events
Please write down twenty historical events that have happened since 1930. You may use resources to help you complete this.

The lists will help students begin to focus on an event for their own nonfiction story, one for which they will be able to gather information through interviews and exploration of secondary sources.

### Plans for Day One, Nonfiction Unit (day three of the semester)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Tasks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brainstorm ways of responding and add list to notebook.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:20–12:30</td>
<td>Read &quot;The Butterfly&quot; again and &quot;Terezin.&quot; Writing Invitation 3—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Respond to one or both pieces using one of the possibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>generated or a new one of choice. Share responses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:30–12:45</td>
<td>Brainstorm what we know about the Holocaust.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:45–1:20</td>
<td>Tracy reads aloud from Night. Students discuss effective sentence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>structure from examples in Night.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:20–1:30</td>
<td>Timed silent reading from Night.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:30–1:40</td>
<td>Review of nonfiction. Homework: list of historical events and two</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>citations of favorite passages.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Day Two, Nonfiction Unit
As students enter and find their new groups, Tracy uses overhead transparencies to display a series of newspaper articles from 1937—March 10, May 20, and July 26—tracing the progression of laws in Germany enforcing a ban on Jewish merchants and attempting to purify the Aryan race. After she reads the newspaper articles, the students volunteer responses. The articles are followed by two very