

National Writing Project

30

Ideas for Teaching Writing

30 Ideas for Teaching Writing

Teaching students to write well is one of the most challenging tasks in education. Writing itself is complex, often disorderly, and frequently frustrating. When teachers compare notes and approaches, they invariably conclude that they need more than a fixed or single approach to teach writing, particularly if they are to address the needs of all students.

Since 1974, more than two million teachers have enriched their writing classrooms by participating in National Writing Project (NWP) programs. NWP summer institutes and school-year workshops are among the only places where teachers can develop as writers and writing teachers.

The NWP believes that teachers are professionals who have important knowledge to share. The ideas presented here come from the classrooms of 32 writing project teachers and are intended to help students become more proficient writers and take more pleasure in writing. These ideas originated as full-length articles in NWP publications and are available online at www.writingproject.org

To find a writing project site near you, visit www.writingproject.org email nwp@writingproject.org, or call our national office at 510-642-0963.

Use the shared events of students' lives to inspire writing.

DEBBIE ROTKOW, a co-director of the **Coastal Georgia Writing Project**, makes use of the real-life circumstances of her first grade students to help them compose writing that, in Frank Smith's words, is "natural and purposeful."

When a child comes to school with a fresh haircut or a tattered book bag, these events can inspire a poem. When Michael rode his bike without training wheels for the first time, this occasion provided a worthwhile topic to write about. A new baby in a family, a lost tooth, and the death of one student's father were the playful or serious inspirations for student writing.

Says Rotkow: "Our classroom reverberated with the stories of our lives as we wrote, talked, and reflected about who we were, what we did, what we thought, and how we thought about it. We became a community."

ROTKOW, DEBBIE. "Two or Three Things I Know For Sure About Helping Students Write the Stories of Their Lives." *The Quarterly* (25) 4.

2

Establish an email dialogue between students from different schools who are reading the same book.

When high school teacher **KAREN MURAR** and college instructor **ELAINE WARE**, teacher-consultants with the **Western Pennsylvania Writing Project**, discovered students were scheduled to read the August Wilson play *Fences* at the same time, they set up email communication between students to allow some “teacherless talk” about the text.

Rather than typical teacher-led discussion, the project fostered independent conversation between students. Formal classroom discussion of the play did not occur until students had completed all email correspondence. Though teachers were not involved in student online dialogues, the conversations evidenced the same reading strategies promoted in teacher-led discussion, including predication, clarification, interpretation, and others.

Use writing to improve relations among students.

DIANE WAFF, co-director of the **Philadelphia Writing Project**, taught in an urban school where boys outnumbered girls four to one in her classroom. The situation left girls feeling overwhelmed, according to Waff, and their “voices faded into the background, overpowered by more aggressive male voices.”

Determined not to ignore this unhealthy situation, Waff urged students to face the problem head-on, asking them to write about gender-based problems in their journals. She then introduced literature that considered relationships between the sexes, focusing on themes of romance, love, and marriage. Students wrote in response to works as diverse as de Maupassant’s “The Necklace” and Dean Myers’s *Motown and DiDi*.

In the beginning there was a great dissonance between male and female responses. According to Waff, “Girls focused on feelings; boys focused on sex, money, and the fleeting nature of romantic attachment.” But as the students continued to write about and discuss their honest feelings, they began to notice that they had similar ideas on many issues. “By confronting these gender-based problems directly,” says Waff, “the effect was to improve the lives of individual students and the social well-being of the wider school community.”

WAFF, DIANE. 1995. “Romance in the Classroom: Inviting Discourse on Gender and Power.” *The Quarterly* (17) 2.

4

Help student writers draw rich chunks of writing from endless sprawl.

JAN MATSUOKA, a teacher-consultant with the **Bay Area Writing Project** (California), describes a revision conference she held with a third grade English language learner named Sandee, who had written about a recent trip to Los Angeles.

“I told her I wanted her story to have more focus,” writes Matsuoka. “I could tell she was confused so I made rough sketches representing the events of her trip. I made a small frame out of a piece of paper and placed it down on one of her drawings—a sketch she had made of a visit with her grandmother.”

“Focus, I told her, means writing about the memorable details of the visit with your grandmother, not everything else you did on the trip.”

“‘Oh, I get it,’ Sandee smiled, ‘like just one cartoon, not a whole bunch.’”

Sandee’s next draft was more deep than broad.

Work with words relevant to students' lives to help them build vocabulary.

EILEEN SIMMONS, a teacher-consultant with the **Oklahoma State University Writing Project**, knows that the more relevant new words are to students' lives, the more likely they are to take hold.

In her high school classroom, she uses a form of the children's ABC book as a community-building project. For each letter of the alphabet, the students find an appropriately descriptive word for themselves. Students elaborate on the word by writing sentences and creating an illustration. In the process, they make extensive use of the dictionary and thesaurus.

One student describes her personality as sometimes 'caustic,' illustrating the word with a photograph of a burning car in a war zone. Her caption explains that she understands the hurt her 'burning' sarcastic remarks can generate.

6

Help students analyze text by asking them to imagine dialogue between authors.

JOHN LEVINE, a teacher-consultant with the **Bay Area Writing Project** (California), helps his college freshmen integrate the ideas of several writers into a single analytical essay by asking them to create a dialogue among those writers.

He tells his students, for instance, “imagine you are the moderator of a panel discussion on the topic these writers are discussing. Consider the three writers and construct a dialogue among the four ‘voices’ (the three essayists plus you).”

Levine tells students to format the dialogue as though it were a script. The essay follows from this preparation.

Spotlight language and use group brainstorming to help students create poetry.

The following is a group poem created by second grade students of **MICHELLE FLEER**, a teacher-consultant with the **Dakota Writing Project** (South Dakota).

Underwater

*Crabs crawl patiently along the ocean floor
searching for prey.*

*Fish soundlessly weave their way through
slippery seaweed*

*Whales whisper to others as they slide
through the salty water.*

*And silent waves wash into a dark cave
where an octopus is sleeping.*

Fleer helped her students get started by finding a familiar topic. (In this case her students had been studying sea life.) She asked them to brainstorm language related to the sea, allowing them time to list appropriate nouns, verbs, and adjectives. The students then used these words to create phrases and used the phrases to produce the poem itself.

As a group, students put together words in ways Fleer didn't believe many of them could have done if they were working on their own, and after creating several group poems, some students felt confident enough to work alone.

8

Ask students to reflect on and write about their writing.

DOUGLAS JAMES JOYCE, a teacher-consultant with the **Denver Writing Project**, makes use of what he calls “metawriting” in his college writing classes. He sees metawriting (writing about writing) as a way to help students reduce errors in their academic prose.

Joyce explains one metawriting strategy: After reading each essay, he selects one error that occurs frequently in a student’s work and points out each instance in which the error is made. He instructs the student to write a one-page essay, comparing and contrasting three sources that provide guidance on the established use of that particular convention, making sure a variety of sources are available.

“I want the student to dig into the topic as deeply as necessary, to come away with a thorough understanding of the how and why of the usage, and to understand any debate that may surround the particular usage.”

JOYCE, DOUGLAS JAMES. 2002. “On the Use of Metawriting to Learn Grammar and Mechanics.” *The Quarterly* (24) 4.

Ease into writing workshops by presenting yourself as a model.

GLORIANNE BRADSHAW, a teacher-consultant with the **Red River Valley Writing Project** (North Dakota), decided to make use of experiences from her own life when teaching her first-graders how to write.

For example, on an overhead transparency she shows a sketch of herself stirring cookie batter while on vacation. She writes the phrase ‘made cookies’ under the sketch. Then she asks students to help her write a sentence about this. She writes the words *who*, *where*, and *when*. Using these words as prompts, she and the students construct the sentence, “I made cookies in the kitchen in the morning.”

Next, each student returns to the sketch he or she has made of a summer vacation activity and, with her help, answers the same questions answered for Bradshaw’s drawing. Then she asks them, “Tell me more. Do the cookies have chocolate chips? Does the pizza have pepperoni?” These facts lead to other sentences.

Rather than taking away creativity, Bradshaw believes this kind of structure gives students a helpful format for creativity.

10

Get students to focus on their writing by holding off on grading.

STEPHANIE WILDER found that the grades she gave her high school students were getting in the way of their progress. The weaker students stopped trying. Other students relied on grades as the only standard by which they judged their own work.

“I decided to postpone my grading until the portfolios, which contained a selection of student work, were complete,” Wilder says. She continued to comment on papers, encourage revision, and urge students to meet with her for conferences. But she waited to grade the papers.

It took a while for students to stop leafing to the ends of their papers in search of a grade, and there was some grumbling from students who had always received excellent grades. But she believes that because she was less quick to judge their work, students were better able to evaluate their efforts themselves.

WILDER, STEPHANIE. 1997. “Pruning Too Early: The Thorny Issue of Grading Student Writing.” *The Quarterly* (19) 4.

Use casual talk about students' lives to generate writing.

ERIN (PIRNOT) CICCONE, teacher-consultant with the **Pennsylvania Writing and Literature Project**, found a way to make more productive the “Monday morning gab fest” she used as a warm-up with her fifth grade students. She conceived of “Headline News.” As students entered the classroom on Monday mornings, they wrote personal headlines about their weekends and posted them on the bulletin board. A headline might read “Fifth-Grader Stranded at Movie Theatre” or “Girl Takes on Responsibility as Mother’s Helper.”

After the headlines had been posted, students had a chance to guess the stories behind them. The writers then told the stories behind their headlines. As each student had only three minutes to talk, they needed to make decisions about what was important and to clarify details as they proceeded. They began to rely on suspense and “purposeful ambiguity” to hold listeners’ interest.

On Tuesday, students committed their stories to writing. Because of the “Headline News” experience, Ciccone’s students have been able to generate writing that is focused, detailed, and well ordered.

Give students a chance to write to an audience for real purpose.

PATRICIA A. SLAGLE, high school teacher and teacher-consultant with the **Louisville Writing Project** (Kentucky), understands the difference between writing for a hypothetical purpose and writing to an audience for real purpose. She illustrates the difference by contrasting two assignments.

She began with: “Imagine you are the drama critic for your local newspaper. Write a review of an imaginary production of the play we have just finished studying in class.” This prompt asks students to assume the contrived role of a professional writer and drama critic. They must adapt to a voice that is not theirs and pretend to have knowledge they do not have.

Slagle developed a more effective alternative: “Write a letter to the director of your local theater company in which you present arguments for producing the play that we have just finished studying in class.” This prompt, Slagle says, allows the writer her own voice, building into her argument concrete references to personal experience. “Of course,” adds Slagle, “this prompt would constitute authentic writing only for those students who, in fact, would like to see the play produced.”

Practice and play with revision techniques.

MARK FARRINGTON, college instructor and teacher-consultant with the **Northern Virginia Writing Project**, believes teaching revision sometimes means practicing techniques of revision. An exercise like “find a place other than the first sentence where this essay might begin” is valuable because it shows student writers the possibilities that exist in writing.

For Farrington’s students, practice can sometime turn to play with directions to:

- add five colors
- add four action verbs
- add one metaphor
- add five sensory details.

In his college fiction writing class, Farrington asks students to choose a spot in the story where the main character does something that is crucial to the rest of the story. At that moment, Farrington says, they must make the character do the exact opposite.

“Playing at revision can lead to insightful surprises,” Farrington says. “When they come, revision doesn’t seem such hard work anymore.”

Pair students with adult reading/writing buddies.

BERNADETTE LAMBERT, teacher-consultant with the **Kennesaw Mountain Writing Project** (Georgia), wondered what would happen if she had her sixth grade students pair with an adult family member to read a book. She asked the students about the kinds of books they wanted to read (mysteries, adventure, ghost stories) and the adults about the kinds of books they wanted to read with the young people (character-building values, multiculturalism, no ghost stories). Using these suggestions for direction, Lambert developed a list of 30 books. From this list, each student-adult pair chose one. They committed themselves to read and discuss the book and write separate reviews.

Most of the students, says Lambert, were proud to share a piece of writing done by their adult reading buddy. Several admitted that they had never before had this level of intellectual conversation with an adult family member.

Teach “tension” to move students beyond fluency.

SUZANNE LINEBARGER, a co-director of the **Northern California Writing Project**, recognized that one element lacking from many of her students’ stories was tension. One day, in front of the class, she demonstrated tension with a rubber band. Looped over her finger, the rubber band merely dangled. “However,” she told the students, “when I stretch it out and point it (not at a student), the rubber band suddenly becomes more interesting. It’s the tension, the potential energy, that rivets your attention. It’s the same in writing.”

Linebarger revised a generic writing prompt to add an element of tension. The initial prompt read, “Think of a friend who is special to you. Write about something your friend has done for you, you have done for your friend, or you have done together.”

Linebarger didn’t want responses that settled for “my best friend was really good to me,” so “during the rewrite session we talked about how hard it is to stay friends when met with a challenge. Students talked about times they had let their friends down or times their friends had let them down, and how they had managed to stay friends in spite of their problems. In other words, we talked about some tense situations that found their way into their writing.”

Encourage descriptive writing by focusing on the sounds of words.

RAY SKJELBRED, middle school teacher at Marin Country Day School, wants his seventh grade students to listen to language. He wants to begin to train their ears by asking them to make lists of wonderful sounding words. “This is strictly a listening game,” says Skjelbred. “They shouldn’t write *lunch* just because they’re hungry.” When the collective list is assembled, Skjelbred asks students to make sentences from some of the words they’ve collected. They may use their own words, borrow from other contributors, add other words as necessary, and change word forms.

Among the words on one student’s list: *tumble*, *detergent*, *sift*, *bubble*, *syllable*, *creep*, *erupt*, and *volcano*. The student writes:

- *A man loads his laundry into the tumbling washer; the detergent sifting through the bubbling water.*
- *The syllables creep through her teeth.*
- *The fog erupts like a volcano in the dust.*

“Unexpected words can go together, creating amazing images,” says Skjelbred.

Require written response to peers' writing.

KATHLEEN O'SHAUGHNESSY, a co-director of the **National Writing Project of Acadiana** (Louisiana), asks her middle school students to respond to each others' writing on Post-it Notes. Students attach their comments to a piece of writing under consideration.

"I've found that when I require a written response on a Post-it instead of merely allowing students to respond verbally, the responders take their duties more seriously and, with practice, the quality of their remarks improves." One student wrote:

While I was reading your piece, I felt like I was riding a roller coaster. It started out kinda slow, but you could tell there was something exciting coming up. But then it moved real fast and stopped all of a sudden. I almost needed to read it again the way you ride a roller coaster over again because it goes too fast.

Says O'Shaughnessy, "This response is certainly more useful to the writer than the usual 'I think you could, like, add some more details, you know?' that I often overheard in response meetings."

Make writing reflection tangible.

ANNA COLLINS TREST, director of the **South Mississippi Writing Project**, finds she can lead upper elementary school students to better understand the concept of “reflection” if she anchors the discussion in the concrete and helps students establish categories for their reflective responses.

She decided to use mirrors to teach the reflective process. Each student had one. As the students gazed at their own reflections, she asked this question: “What can you think about while looking in the mirror at your own reflection?” As they answered, she categorized each response:

I think I’m a queen—pretending/imagining

I look at my cavities—examining/observing

I think I’m having a bad hair day—forming opinions

What will I look like when I am old?—questioning

My hair is parted in the middle—describing

I’m thinking about when I broke my nose—remembering

I think I look better than my brother—comparing

Everything on my face looks sad today—expressing emotion.

Trest talked with students about the categories and invited them to give personal examples of each. Then she asked them to look in the mirrors again, reflect on their images, and write.

“Elementary students are literal in their thinking,” Trest says, “but that doesn’t mean they can’t be creative.”

Make grammar instruction dynamic.

PHILIP IRELAND, teacher-consultant with the **San Marcos Writing Project** (California), believes in active learning. One of his strategies has been to take his seventh-graders on a “preposition walk” around the school campus. Walking in pairs, they tell each other what they are doing:

I’m stepping *off the grass*.

I’m talking *to my friend*.

“Students soon discover that everything they do contains prepositional phrases. I walk among my students prompting answers,” Ireland explains.

“I’m crawling *under the tennis net*,” Amanda proclaims from her hands and knees. “The prepositional phrase is *under the net*.”

“The preposition?” I ask.

“*Under*.”

20

Ask students to experiment with sentence length.

KIM STAFFORD, director of the **Oregon Writing Project at Lewis and Clark College**, wants his students to discard old notions that sentences should be a certain length. He explains to his students that a writer's command of long and short sentences makes for a "more pliable" writing repertoire. He describes the exercise he uses to help students experiment with sentence length.

"I invite writers to compose a sentence that goes on for at least a page—and no fair cheating with a semicolon. Just use 'and' when you have to, or a dash, or make a list, and keep it going." After years of being told not to, they take pleasure in writing the greatest run-on sentences they can.

"Then we shake out our writing hands, take a blank page, and write from the upper left to the lower right corner again, but this time letting no sentence be longer than four words, but every sentence must have a subject and a verb."

Stafford compares the first style of sentence construction to a river and the second to a drum. "Writers need both," he says. "Rivers have long rhythms. Drums roll."

Help students ask questions about their writing.

JONI CHANCER, teacher-consultant of the **South Coast Writing Project** (California), has paid a lot of attention to the type of questions she wants her upper elementary students to consider as they re-examine their writing, reflecting on pieces they may make part of their portfolios. Here are some of the questions:

Why did I write this piece? Where did I get my ideas?

Who is the audience and how did it affect this piece?

What skills did I work on in this piece?

Was this piece easy or difficult to write? Why?

What parts did I rework? What were my revisions?

Did I try something new?

What skills did I work on in this piece?

What elements of writer's craft enhanced my story?

What might I change?

Did something I read influence my writing?

What did I learn or what did I expect the reader to learn?

Where will I go from here? Will I publish it? Share it? Expand it? Toss it? File it?

Chancer cautions that these questions should not be considered a “reflection checklist,” rather they are questions that seem to be addressed frequently when writers tell the story of a particular piece.

CHANCER, JONI. 2001. “The Teacher’s Role in Portfolio Assessment.” In *The Whole Story: Teachers Talk About Portfolios*, edited by Mary Ann Smith and Jane Juska. Berkeley, California: National Writing Project.

Challenge students to find active verbs.

NANCY LILLY, co-director of the **Greater New Orleans Writing Project**, wanted her fourth and fifth grade students to breathe life into their nonfiction writing. She thought the student who wrote this paragraph could do better:

The jaguar is the biggest and strongest cat in the rainforest. The jaguar's jaw is strong enough to crush a turtle's shell. Jaguars also have very powerful legs for leaping from branch to branch to chase prey.

Building on an idea from Stephanie Harvey (*Nonfiction Matters*, Stenhouse, 1998) Lilly introduced the concept of “nouns as stuff” and verbs as “what stuff does.”

In a brainstorming session related to the students’ study of the rain forest, the class supplied the following assistance to the writer:

| Stuff/Nouns | What Stuff Does/Verbs |
|--------------------|------------------------------|
| jaguar | leaps, pounces |
| jaguar's legs | pump |
| jaguar's teeth | crush |
| jaguar's mouth | devours |

This was just the help the writer needed to create the following revised paragraph:

As the sun disappears from the heart of the forest, the jaguar leaps through the underbrush, pumping its powerful legs. It spies a gharial gliding down the river. The jungle cat pounces, crushing the turtle with his teeth, devouring the reptile with pleasure.

LILLY, NANCY. “Dead or Alive: How Will Your Students’ Nonfiction Writing Arrive?” *The Quarterly* (25) 4.

Require students to make a persuasive written argument in support of a final grade.

For a final exam, **SARAH LORENZ**, a teacher-consultant with the **Eastern Michigan Writing Project**, asks her high school students to make a written argument for the grade they think they should receive. Drawing on work they have done over the semester, students make a case for how much they have learned in the writing class.

“The key to convincing me,” says Lorenz, “is the use of detail. They can’t simply say they have improved as writers—they have to give examples and even quote their own writing...They can’t just say something was helpful—they have to tell me why they thought it was important, how their thinking changed, or how they applied this learning to everyday life.”

24

Ground writing in social issues important to students.

JEAN HICKS, director, and **TIM JOHNSON**, a co-director, both of the **Louisville Writing Project** (Kentucky), have developed a way to help high school students create brief, effective dramas about issues in their lives. The class, working in groups, decides on a theme such as jealousy, sibling rivalry, competition, or teen drinking. Each group develops a scene illustrating an aspect of this chosen theme.

Considering the theme of sibling rivalry, for instance, students identify possible scenes with topics such as “I Had It First” (competing for family resources) and “Calling in the Troops” (tattling). Students then set up the circumstances and characters.

Hicks and Johnson give each of the “characters” a different color packet of Post-it Notes. Each student develops and posts dialogue for his or her character. As the scene emerges, Post-its can be added, moved, and deleted. They remind students of the conventions of drama such as conflict and resolution. Scenes, when acted out, are limited to 10 minutes.

“It’s not so much about the genre or the product as it is about creating a culture that supports the thinking and learning of writers,” write Hicks and Johnson.

Encourage the “framing device” as an aid to cohesion in writing.

ROMANA HILLEBRAND, a teacher-consultant with the **Northwest Inland Writing Project** (Idaho), asks her university students to find a literary or historical reference or a personal narrative that can provide a fresh way into and out of their writing, surrounding it much like a window frame surrounds a glass pane.

Hillebrand provides this example:

A student in her research class wrote a paper on the relationship between humans and plants, beginning with a reference to the nursery rhyme, ‘Ring around the rosy, a pocket full of posies...’ She explained the rhymes as originating with the practice of masking the stench of death with flowers during the Black Plague. The student finished the paper with the sentence, “Without plants, life on Earth would cease to exist as we know it; ashes, ashes we all fall down.”

Hillebrand concludes that linking the introduction and the conclusion helps unify a paper and satisfy the reader.

Use real world examples to reinforce writing conventions.

SUZANNE CHERRY, director of the **Swamp Fox Writing Project** (South Carolina), has her own way of dramatizing the comma splice error. She brings to class two pieces of wire, the last inch of each exposed. She tells her college students “We need to join these pieces of wire together right now if we are to be able to watch our favorite TV show. What can we do? We could use some tape, but that would probably be a mistake as the puppy could easily eat through the connection. By splicing the wires in this way, we are creating a fire hazard.”

A better connection, the students usually suggest, would be to use one of those electrical connectors that look like pen caps.

“Now,” Cherry says (often to the accompaniment of multiple groans), “let’s turn these wires into sentences. If we simply splice them together with a comma, the equivalent of a piece of tape, we create a weak connection, or a comma splice error. What then would be the grammatical equivalent of the electrical connector? Think conjunction—*and*, *but*, *or*. Or try a semicolon. All of these show relationships between sentences in a way that the comma, a device for taping clauses together in a slapdash manner, does not.”

“I’ve been teaching writing for many years,” Cherry says. “And I now realize the more able we are to relate the concepts of writing to ‘real world’ experience, the more successful we will be.”

CHERRY, SUZANNE. 2004. “Keeping the Comma Splice Queen Happy.” *The Voice* (9) 1.

Think like a football coach.

In addition to his work as a high school teacher of writing, **DAN HOLT**, a co-director of the **Third Coast Writing Project** (Michigan), spent 20 years coaching football. While doing the latter, he learned quite a bit about doing the former. Here is some of what he found out:

The writing teacher can't stay on the sidelines. “When I modeled for my players, they knew what I wanted them to do.” The same involvement, he says, is required to successfully teach writing.

Like the coach, the writing teacher should praise strong performance rather than focus on the negative. Statements such as “Wow, that was a killer block,” or “That paragraph was tight” will turn “butterball” ninth-grade boys into varsity linemen and insecure adolescents into aspiring poets.

The writing teacher should apply the KISS theory: Keep it simple stupid. Holt explains for a freshman quarterback, audibles (on-field commands) are best used with care until a player has reached a higher skill level. In writing class, a student who has never written a poem needs to start with small verse forms such as a cinquain or haiku.

Practice and routine are important both for football players and for writing students, but football players and writers also need the “adrenaline rush” of the big game and the final draft.

HOLT, DAN. 1999. “What Coaching Football Taught Me About Teaching Writing.” *The Voice* (4) 3.

Allow classroom writing to take a page from yearbook writing.

High school teacher **JON APPLEBY** noticed that when yearbooks fell into students' hands "my curriculum got dropped in a heartbeat for spirited words scribbled over photos." Appleby wondered, "How can I make my classroom as fascinating and consuming as the yearbook?"

Here are some ideas that yearbook writing inspired:

Take pictures, put them on the bulletin boards, and have students write captions for them. Then design small descriptive writing assignments using the photographs of events such as the prom and homecoming. Afterwards, ask students to choose quotes from things they have read that represent what they feel and think and put them on the walls.

Check in about students' lives. Recognize achievements and individuals the way that yearbook writers direct attention to each other. Ask students to write down memories and simply, joyfully share them. As yearbook writing usually does, insist on a sense of tomorrow.

Use home language on the road to Standard English.

EILEEN KENNEDY, special education teacher at Medger Evers College, works with native speakers of Caribbean Creole who are preparing to teach in New York City. Sometimes she encourages these students to draft writing in their native Creole. The additional challenge becomes to re-draft this writing, rendered in patois, into Standard English.

She finds that narratives involving immigrant Caribbean natives in unfamiliar situations—buying a refrigerator, for instance—lead to inspired writing. In addition, some students expressed their thoughts more proficiently in Standard English after drafting in their vernaculars.

30

Introduce multigenre writing in the context of community service.

JIM WILCOX, teacher-consultant with the **Oklahoma Writing Project**, requires his college students to volunteer at a local facility that serves the community, any place from the Special Olympics to a burn unit. Over the course of their tenure with the organization, students write in a number of genres: an objective report that describes the appearance and activity of the facility, a personal interview/profile, an evaluation essay that requires students to set up criteria by which to assess this kind of organization, an investigative report that includes information from a second source, and a letter to the editor of a campus newspaper or other publication.

Wilcox says, “Besides improving their researching skills, students learn that their community is indeed full of problems and frustrations. They also learn that their own talents and time are valuable assets in solving some of the world’s problems—one life at a time.”

© 2003 by the **NATIONAL WRITING PROJECT**
All rights reserved
Reprinted 2004

Compiled and edited by **ART PETERSON**.
Designed by **KAREN KARTEN**.

3: “Romance in the Classroom: Inviting Discourse on Gender and Power” by Diane Waff is reprinted from *The Voice of the Philadelphia Writing Project* (3)
1. Copyright © Winter 1994.

11: “A Place for Talk in Writers’ Workshop” by Erin (Pirnot) Ciccone is reprinted from *The Pennsylvania Writing and Literature Project Newsletter* (21)
2. Copyright © 2000.

12: A version of “Getting Real: Can a Writing Prompt Be Authentic?” by Patricia Slagle first appeared in *The Louisville Writing Project Network News*.

20: “Sentence as River and as Drum” by Kim Stafford is reprinted from *The Muses Among Us: Eloquent Listening and Other Pleasures of the Writer’s Craft*. University of Georgia Press: Athens, Georgia. Copyright © 2003 by Kim Stafford. All rights reserved.

30: “The Spirit of Volunteerism in English Composition” by Jim Wilcox is reprinted from *Write Angles III: Still More Strategies for Teaching Composition*. Copyright © 2002 by the Oklahoma Department of Education.

Get great ideas for teaching writing all year long.

Become a regular reader of *The*



TT04

Written for teachers by teachers, each issue of *The Quarterly* brings you a collection of thoughtful and practical articles on writing and the teaching of writing.

For just \$20, you'll receive:

- **Four issues of *The Quarterly***
- **Four issues of *The Voice***

To order, visit www.writingproject.org/Publications or call (510) 642-0963.



NATIONAL WRITING PROJECT

University of California
2105 Bancroft Way #1042
Berkeley, California 94720-1042

tel 510.642.0963

fax 510.642.4545

nwp@writingproject.org

www.writingproject.org