



KUWP Newsletter

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A Short Letter from the Editor

A special thank you to all who made this first issue of our newsletter possible! It was a long time coming from the very first discussion of the creation of this newsletter to its actual publication. Hopefully as you read this first issue, you will see the value of it and will help it continue to grow and flourish.

Our goal is to publish subsequent newsletters on the 15th of June 2011, September 2011, and January 2012. I hope that you will consider submitting an article or idea for one of the following sections of the newsletter:

Classroom Connection – language arts based activities/innovations that you are implementing in your classroom or school; share what is working for you and for your students

Writer's Block – personal/professional writing of any genre that you would like to share; it could be something current or something that you are now ready to share

Announcements – upcoming activities/events that KUWP fellows and friends may be interested in attending

Reader's Corner – share what you are reading; a literary critique of a book or article

KUWP Link – talk about any programs that you have attended as a result of your participation with KUWP for example, conferences, workshops, or special events as a way of sharing what you learned

Literary Resources – share information such as websites, programs, research, and technology that others may also find useful

Digital Writing/Technology – a sharing of resources/lesson plans



Please e-mail all submissions to katbentley@optonline.net.

Writer's Block Death in Suburbia

By Sue Kenney

The lawn stretched
dark and greenish-blue
against the tilting dawn
the crew cut hair of young America
marching over rolling hills
to yet another war

Among the verdant flourish of green
a wreckage of blue and gray feathers
lie scattered like death's confetti
remnants of a grisly struggle
in the trembling light
of newborn morn

The cluster of colorful darts
juts haphazardly from the grass
evidence of the jay's great surprise
when the hawk clenched sharp talons
into its back as it too
was searching for prey

I leave for my morning run
inhaling exhaling the new day air
the deepening richness of dampened earth
of moldering pine needles
of life and of death
with the surety of knowledge
that one day
perhaps today
I too will be taken by great surprise

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The Ground Tipper

By Sue Kenney

"People wish to be settled – only so far as they are unsettled is there any hope for them." - Ralph Waldo Emerson

When I was in the sixth grade at Our Lady of Mercy grammar school, our principal hired the school's first male teacher in its history – Mr. Joseph Pandolfi. We had had lay teachers before; the once inexhaustible population of nuns was starting to wane. All non-clergy teachers were women, usually from the neighborhoods where we lived. Our most exotic instructor up to that point was Mrs. Gaffney, who was from New Orleans and always wore her hair in a French twist. At recess, we tried to emulate her strong southern accent, luxuriating on our a's and twanging our words like so many out of tune guitars.

On the first day of school, my classmates and I lined up tentatively in the playground, waiting for the bell to signal summer's official close. We yanked up our navy blue knee-hi's and whispered nervously to each other. We could see the new teacher in his brown tweed jacket and rumpled green tie, chatting with Sister Anna. Patrice Maguire made jokes about Mr. Pandolfi's short curly hair, something about a Brillo pad, and we collectively prayed that we didn't get him. When life follows a predictable pattern, a certain level of comfort develops. Expectations are low. Anything that disrupts the pattern becomes, well, unsettling.

And it was. Having Joseph Pandolfi for a teacher was the most disruptive, unsettling, frustrating, demanding, exhilarating and challenging educational experience we had, thus far, known. It was also the most gratifying. When we parroted back to him the standard answers from our religious text, he asked, "How do you know?" When we gave him dates and battle locations from the American Revolution and the Civil War, he said, "That's nice. But *why* did these things happen? How were families like yours affected?" We couldn't answer. We could only sit there and ponder. We started out that school year feeling gypped; thinking that Mr. Pandolfi was playing a dirty trick on us. He was asking us questions that seemed unfair, as they had no "set" answers, just when we thought we had reached a point in our young lives when we finally *got it*. It was an uncomfortable feeling, like the ground beneath us was sliding sideways. I can remember snapping at him one day in a most accusatory tone, "We were all happy Catholics until *you* came along."

And we were. But there is the happiness of static familiarity, and there is the happiness of dynamic discovery. We intuited that the expansion of the self and the expansion of the universe are not only interconnected, but mutually dependent.

We began to question everything – why certain groups of people were treated unfairly, why there were so many poor throughout the world, why our sense of reality seemed different than we sometimes perceive it to be. Troubling, yes. Unsettling, definitely. But we ended that school year knowing that we had actually *learned*. We learned that sometimes there is no "right" answer, that certain problems are complex and need to be analyzed at length. We had discerned for the first time what we thought and felt about the world around us. We had learned to think for ourselves, and it was wonderfully empowering.

That year with Mr. Pandolfi taught me to recognize "settling in" as a dangerous thing. We settle into jobs, relationships, ideas, biases, and pre-scripted roles that may be comfortable, but are not necessarily our own. It

is only through questioning our assumed realities that we truly begin to learn. When we stretch our muscles they become sore, but better conditioned. The same holds true for our minds. If we allow education to wash over us as we sit passively in our chairs, the outcome may be adequate – but barely. It is only when the ground tips beneath our feet, causing us to scramble, to dodge, to cling and to let go that our minds become more agile. Worlds open to us, galaxies collide, and hope rises from the rubble.

Now I find myself in the position of the ground tipper. I am the one who vigorously shakes the snow globes of my students' lives. Like Mr. Pandolfi, I want my students to question, to seek and to challenge the universe that has been presented to them. I want them to maneuver thoughtfully through culture; to negotiate, to dance, to leap frog if they have to in order to live purposeful, deliberate lives. I want them to do anything, but settle. There is a certain predilection we have towards the comfortable, the familiar and the normative. It is easier to rest than to struggle; simpler to accept than to question. My job as an educator is not to encourage blind acquiescence to the world as we know it, but to create a sort of ordered chaos – one that upheaves the roots of passive thought and foments new and critical intellectualism.

"Troubling, yes. Unsettling, definitely. But we ended that school year knowing that we had actually learned. We learned that sometimes there is no 'right' answer, that certain problems are complex and need to be analyzed at length"

Announcements

Dane Tabano, KUWP Fellow 2009, is currently writing his thesis for the English Writing Studies masters at Kean and if all goes well with no roadblocks, in May, he will be the first recipient of Kean's English Writing Studies degree.

Teachers Teaching Teachers

By Mark Sutton

The Invitational Summer Institute (ISI) is probably the most intense learning experience I've ever had. For sixteen days in July, I, my co-facilitator Kim Kiefer, and a group of educators from across the state spend at least six hours daily sharing our practice, wrestling with theories and issues related to teaching writing, practicing our own writing, and trying to figure out ways to carry all this knowledge and experience back to our schools.



Kim encourages this link through a workshop the last week of the ISI. She starts it by sharing how she has taken what she has done since becoming one of KUWP's first Teacher-Consultants (TC), which includes offering professional development workshops and creating multiple venues for publishing student writing. I don't have the space to list her actions here, but she has definitely done a lot to promote writing in the Rahway district. She asked the 2010 ISI participants to brainstorm what we would do. Everyone contributed ideas, and most of them involved sharing with other teachers. After some further discussion, someone (I can't remember who) suggested running a symposium in the spring. We all liked the idea.

Six TCs agreed to help plan the event, including representatives from all three ISI groups. We met in September to shape the program, following that with several rounds of email. The TCs decided they wanted to re-create the feeling of the ISI, the energy that comes from finding a space to look closely at our practice and to become a writer. They thought about ways to simulate the different experiences we have in July when we followed the NWP's core philosophy of teachers teaching teachers. We kept that philosophy at the center of our work by making it part of our title: "Teachers Teaching Teachers: A Day of Conversations, Practices, Sharing, Readings, and Writing about Writing in the Classroom."

Once the planning group set their vision and basic parameters for the forum, a call went out for TCs to participate in whatever way they felt comfortable. Several people, again representing all three groups, answered. Here's a taste of what they will share:

- *Interactive presentations on classroom practice.* Several fellows have prepared workshops designed to give participants a chance to learn a teaching practice by applying it and by looking at the theoretical issues that inform the practice. Topics range from engaging resistant writers to cloud computing.
- *Writing marathon and gallery room.* The planning group insisted on space for participants to write and to share artifacts about how they use writing in their classes. We have a room set aside for both.
- *Reading groups.* Two fellows have agreed to select a piece of scholarship on teaching writing and facilitate a discussion of it. The readings will be short, so participants don't have to worry about homework in advance. They just have to come in ready to be part of an open conversation, just like ISI participants do in July.
- *Conversations across the discipline.* To me, one of the most fascinating parts of the ISI is learning how an issue I wrestle with in freshman composition plays out in high, middle, and elementary school. We will create this kind of conversation as a concurrent session. In addition, our lunch will be spent in informal conversations facilitated by KUWP fellows.
- *Synthesis sessions.* We end each day of the ISI in reflection, taking time to pull together the ideas we've discovered, examine them critically, create connections between them, and evaluate their usefulness for our professional lives. The final act of "Teachers Teaching Teachers" will duplicate this experience through synthesis groups facilitated by KUWP fellows.

The planning group is very excited about the possibilities for this day. We look forward to sharing with you and learning what you'll share with us.

"Teachers Teaching Teachers: A Day of Conversations, Practices, Sharing, Readings, and Writing about Writing in the Classroom."

April 2, 2011
 9:00am-3:00pm
 Professional Development hours will be awarded to participants
 To print out the registration form, go to
<http://www.kean.edu/~kuwp/documents/2011-Spring-Event-Registration.pdf>

KUWP Link

Celebrating Writing at Franklin School

By *Kathy Bentley*

As Benjamin Franklin once said, "Either write something worth reading or do something worth writing." Well Franklin Elementary School in Rahway has done both.

The students embarked on a writing journey that began on the National Day on Writing in October.

Students spent many weeks working on various grade level appropriate writing activities focusing on the school's namesake – Benjamin Franklin. Teachers helped students take their work through the writing process of drafting, revising and publishing.

The back of the auditorium at Franklin School was transformed into a Writing Gallery where the finished writing products were proudly displayed from January 14 through January 21 in honor of Benjamin Franklin's

birthday, which was January 17. Many guests visited the gallery including students, parents, district administrators, and community members. Students were encouraged to continue to grow as authors by comments that visitors left in the guest book.



The Choice Book Project: A strategy for helping students love reading

Based on the book *Whisperer* by Donalyn Miller

By *Kim Kiefer Kahn*

The idea for this project was inspired by Donalyn Miller, a middle school teacher and plenary session presenter at the NWP conference in Orlando, Florida. Before she finished her inspiring talk, I snuck out to the Book Desk, purchased a copy of *The Book Whisperer* and began reading. Miller asserts that, "because of the demands of standardized testing in the world of No Child Left Behind... whether students read is not a concern as long as they pass the state test every year." Furthermore, she urges her audience about, "the importance of students becoming readers by allowing them to develop self-identities as readers and by allowing them to step away from the reading choices that are dictated by teachers. Teachers are giving students a fish, year after year but never teaching them to go near the water, much less fish for themselves. After all, Mark Twain reminds us, 'The man who does not read great books is no better than the man who can't.'" Miller references Stephen Krashen's research in *The Power of Reading*, "that we are denying access to the one activity that has proven over and over again to increase language acquisition and competence as communicators: free, voluntary reading. I have observed that my students are more likely to read a book at home than they have started reading at school."

Convinced that Miller's simple strategies could help my students reap the rewards of reading, I tried to envision two things: First, how could I tweak her ideas to work with my high school students and then, could I convince my new supervisor how seven days of reading in class was an effective use of classroom time? I decided that I might be able to head off some administrative concern with a letter to parents explaining the philosophy of the assignment, hoping my enthusiasm may persuade them to encourage their children's reading at home.

(Project-minus three days) Friday—I announce our first "library trip" and we walk across the hallway to our Academic Success Center. Students are instructed that there is only one requirement for this project: that they choose any book, but it must be one that they really want to read. ~The first thing I noticed is how excited some students are that "any book" counts, as long as their parent approves it.~Their daily assignment is to read 40 minutes outside of class.

Day 1—Monday—Students begin asking what happens when/if they finish their books before next Wednesday. ~I ask them to keep a log of the books they read in a separate spot in their notebooks. Our librarian begins hosting students in the library during each lunch period to check out new books for our project---her excitement inspires both the students, and me.

Day 2—Tuesday—A few students have already completed their books—about two to three in each class. They ask for more. I realize I need to visually represent how much they are reading and I dash over to the librarian for some post-it charts and cover the front chalkboard—one for each period with the headline: **Period 2(etc.)—Books We've Read.**

Then I list the title, author and the first name of the student completing the book. With this, I realize it will now become a competition of sorts. I am a bit leery of class rivalries since my goal is to create readers, not page turners, but the evidence of the students' participation becomes an important motivator for them.

Day 3 –Wednesday—My 9th Period class is my only non-Honors class and today they have surpassed the Honors classes in number of books read. I have a conversation with one student who did not read either *assigned* novel (*Mockingbird* or *Mice and Men*) this year.

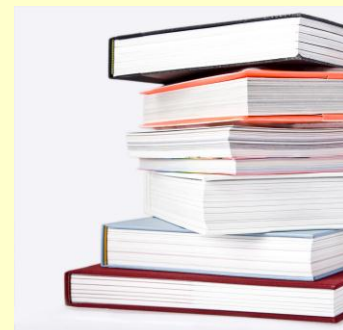
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Her class average is a 43. She is engrossed in a *Bluford High* series book. I ask if it's good and she replies, "Yes...I am almost done...see?" I ask her if she has read the series before and she replies "No." I ask her when she last completed reading a whole book—she replies, "I don't know, maybe sixth grade?" Another ninth period student tells me how she keeps score for her mom's bowling team each week and explains how last night she was trying to keep score and keep reading at the same time because her book was so good. By the time she reached class today, she completed it. Since last Friday, she has read three books in the "Drama High" series. ~I realize during our conversation that for many of my students, the high interest YA books that our librarian has ordered is the key factor in the success of this project.

Day 4—Thursday—Students assess the charts of each class's standings as soon as they arrive...I hear things like—"Oh, they're ahead of us?!?" ~I notice that the students who are returning books to the library have begun to look closely at the titles their classmates have read to get recommendations. ~What's interesting is that some of the Honors students are not reading at home. I can tell this because of how far they've read in their books as I circulate through the room. I handle this by simply reminding the class that the homework is to read for at least 40 minutes at home each night. ~Ironically, a few students who rarely do homework are enthusiastically reading, while some "A" students are not reading at home. ~One of my 2nd Period students is reading Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*. When he chose it, I told him it may make him re-evaluate his favorite meal. ~When he arrived this morning he looks at me and shakes his head—I am at first concerned until I hear his comments—"Ms. Kiefer this book is *crazy*...I can't believe it..." He walks into the classroom, takes his seat and goes back to the world of slaughterhouses. As 9th period arrived, a crowd of about seven students gathered around their list at the front of the room. ~Then the additions begin—one, two, three, four. ~The most poignant success for today is with a student, whose reputation precedes her as a poorly motivated learner. She chose a 600 page *Twilight* series book to read. ~When she selected it last Friday, other students in the class teased her that she'd be reading it next year...today they, literally, applauded her. ~(I had been checking in with her to see how it was going and noticed on Monday that she was already 200 pages in—I think, in part, spurred by the challenge.) I take her aside privately at the end of class and tell her how impressed I am with her ability to rise to the challenge of reading amidst peer pressure. ~It is the best moment we've shared in the classroom all year.

Day 5—Friday—Student Reflections --Today, at the one week mark, I ask students to complete a reflection on what the project has helped them achieve, if they are reading each night, and would they want to do this again and, if so, why? Of the 77 students who reflected on the unit there is only one with **negative feedback**: "I do like reading in class but doing it every day for the whole period makes me tired and makes me not want to read. I don't like being told to read for a certain amount of time."(LC) **Positive feedback**: "I think the idea of reading in class has actually improved my will to read as far as school work. Initially I didn't take the time seriously, but after I started to take advantage of the time being given, I really began to enjoy, not only the book but the time being spent in my English class. I have even found myself checking the time and hoping for a little more time so I would be able to finish the chapter.:(AG) "Reading in class has been an enjoyable experience. It's made me realize how relaxing reading can be. As long as I have the right book for me, reading is fun and also good for the mind....I personally don't read very often at all, but this may kick start my love of reading once again." During **Period 9**, my non-Honors class, a student, who is repeating English II, told me the following at the start of class: "Ms. Kiefer, I finished my book and you know what? This is the first book I have ever read on my own in my whole life. The first one ever. Thank you Ms. Kiefer." The following reflection is from the student who was teased by her classmates because she was infamous for never doing homework or school work of any kind: "I think that silent reading has helped me a lot because it showed me that reading can help me go a long way in life. And it's not to be fun and exciting, it's something that should be taken serious. Also I feel that I need to start getten(sic) back in school and getting good grades. Another thing I feel good that I actually took my time and read. I've never really read a book unless I had to but this was something that was optional and I enjoyed reading two books within two weeks. Also Ms. Kiefer I feel that you've helped to like reading and try to start doing more of it so I can actually make it somewhere in life..."



Day 6—Monday—As a class we review the culminating project procedure for the end of this week. ~On Thursday, students are expected to come to class with a written script for a 30 second commercial. They may choose whichever book, or books, they will advertise.

Story continues on page 6

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Friday we will meet in the school TV Studio for our presentation filming—students have the option to opt out of having their presentation broadcast on the school news. ~Before I leave school on Friday, I stop to thank our librarian, who patiently helps groups of my students select and check-out books at all times of the day. It is clear that without her support, this project could not succeed. The librarian tells me that I have created a movement. The growing number of students coming into the library in the last week has not just been my students, but many of their friends from other classes as well.

Day 7—Tuesday –Six students ask to go to the library for another book. Although some students have read many books, many students are still on their first book. ~In those cases the books they are reading are either longer, or have more complex stories or diction: (Period 2) *The DaVinci Code* (Brown), *The Jungle* (Lewis), *Brisinger* (Paolini), *P.S. I Love You* (Ahern), *You Don't Know Me* (Klass), *Exposure* (Peet), *In These Girls Hope is a Muscle* (Blais), *The Last Templar* (Khoury). (Period 3) *The Glass Castle* (Walls).~Two of my highest achieving students are taking their time on the pleasure books. My hunch is that they are not doing too much reading at home and that they see this as an opportunity to get caught up with other schoolwork.

Progress and Projects

Day 9 and 10—Thursday and Friday, with the ever-cheerful support of our Broadcasting teacher, we filmed our 30 second spots/commercials. ~In the next two weeks these commercials are played during the morning news to sparkling reviews by their peers.



Final Statistics

Period 2 (21 students) 20 students have completed 42 books.

Period 3 (17 students) 15 students have completed 27 books.

Period 8 (18 students) 10 students have completed 30 books.

Period 9 (21 students) 20 students have completed 47 books.

The Next Step

Unfortunately not everyone finished a book in the time allotted. Nor did the Choice Book Project evolve into a panacea for student interest in the next book in our curriculum, *The Great Gatsby*; however, as the weeks have progressed, I see an increase in the free reading books that students are carrying to class, even among my Honors students who

were comparatively slow in their reading. According to our librarian, students who were not comfortable or acquainted with the library are now frequent users, so after testing season, I will try this strategy again, with a few tweaks and changes.

Optimistic as it may be, I like to think I make a difference in the lives of my students with each lesson and each new concept. Reading is nothing new, but to many students an enthusiasm for reading is a landmark for the rest of their lives. As a teacher, that's what I hope I offer, and Miller agrees.