



INSPIRE

The Annual Newsletter of the Writers Matter Program



From the Pen of the Director

By Kimberly Lewinski, Ph.D., Director

This has truly been another extraordinary year for Writers Matter as we continue to work with 50 + teachers and serve over 3,000 students. We are proud to enter our sixteenth year of providing a unique and innovative opportunity for elementary, middle and lower high school students to learn critical writing skills through the use of journal writing as a vehicle for self-expression, even in these extraordinary times.

We are in awe of the work our teachers have been providing their students and our program during these unprecedented times and the new innovation that has come as a response to the ever-changing events surrounding us. One of our most exciting initiative this year is how we are looking at Writers Matter through a trauma-informed lens and working with the teachers in trauma informed ways. In our 10th annual newsletter, you will learn about our newest published book *Society Unmasked: Voices of Teachers and Students in Unprecedented Times*, conferences that were attended, another new curriculum that was created, and how we continued to provide professional development to our teachers in a virtual modality.

Please check us out at www.writersmatter.org to learn more about our program and current offerings.

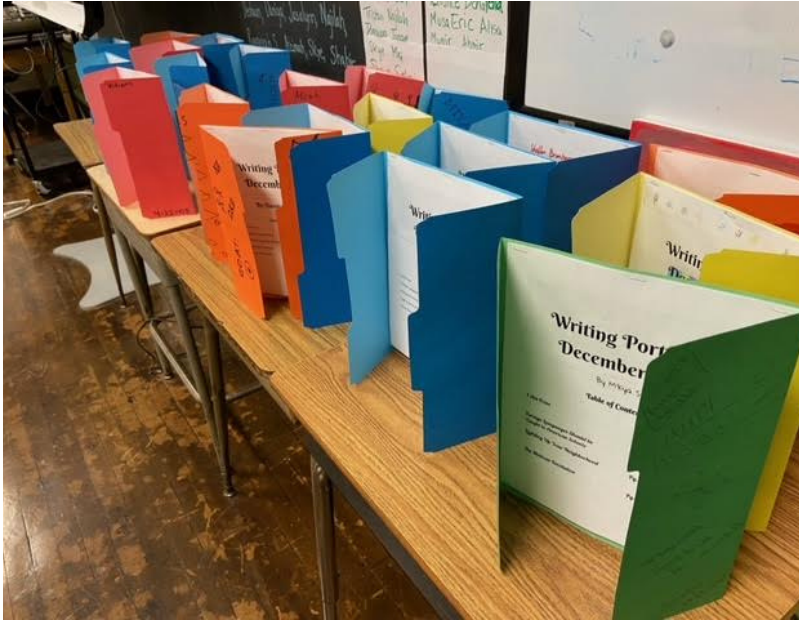
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AND MOVING FORWARD**

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RETURNED IN 2021 WITH A
STEM THEME**

**STUDENTS AND TEACHERS
PARTICIPATE IN UNIQUE
WRITING CONTEST; NEW
BOOK PUBLISHED**



A Trauma-Informed Approach

by Kimberly Lewinski, Ph.D., Director

Writers Matter is an approach not a curriculum. The same can be said about trauma-informed pedagogy. Fortunately, much of what has been a part of the Writers Matter approach is closely aligned with trauma-informed pedagogy. For example, student choice, student empowerment and voice as well as peer support are elements that have always existed in Writers Matter. We have highlighted these approaches that align with trauma-informed pedagogy. The need to highlight and enhance trauma-informed pedagogy within our approach is critical given the unforeseen circumstances we have seen in the past 20+ months.

We have all experience unprecedented events that were outside of our control and had varied affects on our lives. The global pandemic has shifted the way education is delivered, but most importantly it has shaped the way many of our students experience the world. We wanted to make sure we were prepared to meet students where they are while continue to support their growth as writers! We believe that incorporating and being intentional about trauma-informed pedagogy will help us to do just that.

Portfolio Project a Meaningful Experience for Fidler Students

by Laura Seeley, Writers Matter Teacher

In December, as we headed into our winter break, I wanted my 8th grade students to put together a writing portfolio to show how much writing they had done from September to December. I put together individual assignments for each student so that they could choose their best pieces to include and create a cover page with a table of contents. We had worked on four formal essays on a variety of topics and two creative writing pieces, "I Am From" poems and "Light in the World" writing. Almost every student had at least two very good writing pieces to include, and most students included three to four pieces selected from their writing. I am really proud of all of my students' hard work, and almost every student was able to take home a portfolio to show off over Winter Break!

Voices from the Classroom: I Am From

By M'kya, Grade 8

I am from North Philly
 I am from Germantown
 I am from cookouts and bouncy houses and BBQ music
 I am from somewhere where having thighs is "grown"
 I am from a place where being skinny means you're starving
 I am from Cheesesteaks and Water-ice
 I am from Papi stores and Chinese stores with spanish music
 I am from "they shooting!!" and loud gun fire
 I am from family drama and issues with arguments
 I am from John B. Kelly
 I am from the streets of Philly
 I am from four siblings
 I am from funny friends
 I am from Happy Hollow
 I am from the Philadelphia Zoo
 I am from the Kelly Drive
 I am from Droids and iPhones
 I am from Philly Pretzels
 I am from street noises and bright lights

Events and Presentations

"OUR VOICE MATTERS":

Pre-service Teachers Claim their Identities through Equity-Oriented Writing Instruction



Jamie Marsh, Kim Lewinski & Haley Sigler
2021 NCTE ANNUAL CONVENTION

National Council For Teachers of English Conference

In November 2020, Dr. Kimberly Lewinski presented at that National Council for Teachers of English Conference which was held virtually this year. Her presentation was titled Our Voice Matters: Pre-Service Teachers Claim Their Identities through Equity-Oriented Writing Instruction. In this presentation, Kim highlighted how the Writers Matter community created the RESET curriculum to allow teachers to see how equity-oriented curriculum can be infused into their literacy instruction. This curriculum was both an innovation of lessons for the teachers as well as a form of professional development to help them have a better understanding of trauma-informed practices.

Teacher Leader 4 Week Professional Development Course

This summer, we offered a virtual professional development workshop that was well attended by over 30 teachers. All sessions were related to trauma-informed practices and how it relates to Writers Matter. We also looked at how PA Culturally Relevant and Sustaining Educators (CR-SE) competencies are connected to the WM program.

We met once a week for 4 weeks. As a learning community we listened to one another. We heard about each others' struggles and what they needed to be effective teachers and responsive to their students needs. It was decided in these sessions that a new RESET curriculum was needed to meet the ever-changing needs of the students.

The work from these sessions were used as a springboard for much of the work that we initiated the 2021-22 school year.



Annual Writing Institute

On August 19th, we opened the school year to 38 enthusiastic Writers Matter Teachers for our 6th Annual Writing Institute.

This year, our Institute was held virtually to ensure the safety of everyone involved. During this abbreviated workshop, the teachers were presented with some valuable information about being trauma informed educators by Trent McLaurin and then their colleagues presented to new RESET Curriculum that was created throughout the summer as a response to the May Professional Development Sessions. It was a wonderful event for all who attended and the appreciation and excitement for the support was evident.



Becoming Culturally Competent Educators

In February 2021, Dr. Kimberly Lewinski & Trent McLaurin along with three other Writers Matter teachers, Kelly Ann Coughlin, Carl Jackson, and Aubrey Stewart, presented at the PA Educator Diversity Consortium Conference.

The title of presentation was Culturally Competent Instruction: Action Planning for Culturally Relevant and Sustaining Education. This presentation highlighted the work the teachers had been doing to learn more about implementing the CR-SE competencies into their literacy instruction through the WM program and shared several example lessons for other teachers to see how they too can apply these practices in their literacy instruction.

Voices from the Classroom: A Life as a 6th Grader

by Emajh, 6th Grade

Being a sixth grader is very confusing for some people, like the work is confusing and the people are confusing. You don't know if they are your friends or not. Then when you get the homework it is hard to do. Some sixth graders will act like your friend, but they really are not so you have to be careful with who you're friends with. Peer pressure is also a problem, but there is a way for sixth graders to overcome the peer pressure. Listen to the adults, make good choices and listen to that voice in your head. Finally, if you don't understand your work, just ask for help.



Summer Writing Camp at La Salle University

We were extremely excited to sponsor the Writers Matter Summer Camp in partnership with La Salle University. After going virtual last year, it was great to come together in person to offer this enrichment opportunity to many of the students in the community. Over 60 students attended the three week "Invention Convention" themed camp where they engaged in integrated STEM activities throughout the day. Dr. Kim Lewinski and two Writers Matter teachers, Aubrey Stewart and Tamara Green,

in collaboration with the La Salle Art Museum's Miranda Clark-Binder provided an Art and Social Justice writing experience where the students learned about how art is used as a medium to tell others who they are and also used as a form of social activism. The students learned about these artists and then were inspired to write about and create their own artwork showing how they too can use art (in many forms) to have their voice heard.

Students Participate in Unique Writing Contest

This year, our writing contest focused on capturing the voices of teachers and students who taught and learned during a pandemic. Their written accounts were compiled into a published book. Students and teachers were asked to reflect on all that happened over the past year and a half of pandemic life; the pandemic still had not ended, and people were still fighting for fair and equitable treatment.

The theme of our writing contest was simply “Writing in a Time of a Pandemic.” We wanted the teachers and students to feel free to take this idea and run with it in any way that they felt was needed.

Here were some ideas they were invited to consider as they wrote a letter, poem, essay or short or digital story about life in a pandemic. We stressed that the most important thing for this year’s contest was to share what they wanted to say and what they wanted others to hear!

-What is life like in a pandemic? How is it different from life as you knew it before?

--How has the pandemic impacted you personally or how has it impacted your family or friends? These could be financial, physical, social, etc. impacts.

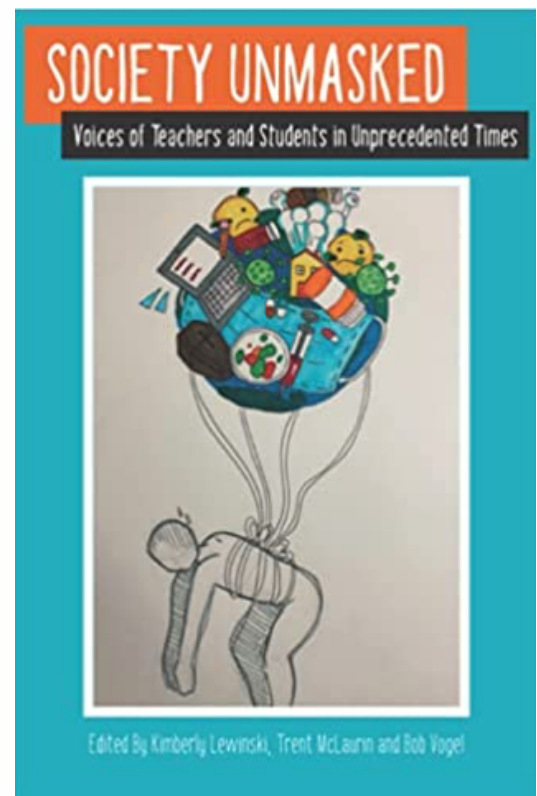
-What is it like wearing a mask? What kind of masks do you wear? Are they literal or figurative masks? How do masks make you feel?

-What did you witness during the Black Lives Matter protests? How did it make you feel? What did it make you think about?

-What did you see or read about the insurrection (invasion) at the Capitol Building in Washington, DC while the Congress was validating the Electoral College votes that made Joe Biden our new president? How did it make you feel? What did it make you think about?

The winners of the contest were published in *Society Unmasked: Voices of Teachers and Students in Unprecedented Times*. You may purchase a copy of the book on amazon

https://www.amazon.com/Society-Unmasked-Teachers-Students-Unprecedented/dp/0578945819/ref=sr_1_1?crid=3QZIETHW0VWBH&keywords=society+unmasked&qid=1641478839&sprefix=society+un%2Caps%2C478&sr=8-1





Poet in Residence Visits Stanton for Workshop

by Andre Saunders, Writers Matter Poet in Residence

This year has been an interesting journey for our Writers Matter projects. In November, we visited E.M. Stanton, which was our first in person school visit since the pandemic began. Previously, activities had been virtual, but the in person feeling and experience is something that cannot be duplicated. During this visit, we celebrated student writing. The students who read demonstrated much courage and spirit. The quality of their personal writing was amazing. I along with my DJ, DJ Will Nasty, also put on a special performance. We just want to inspire and be positive role models for the kids that look up to us.

Due to the current COVID-19 surge, things shut down again. We won't let that stop us as we still want to push our ideas forward so going back virtual seems to be the best option until we can all physically meet again.

Voices from the Classroom: Dreams

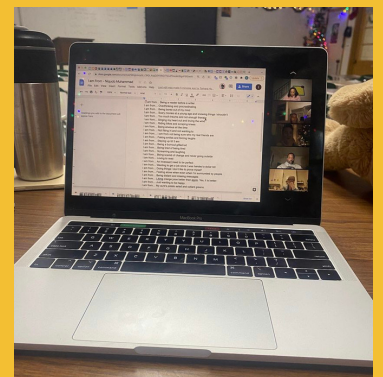
by Allison, Grade 5

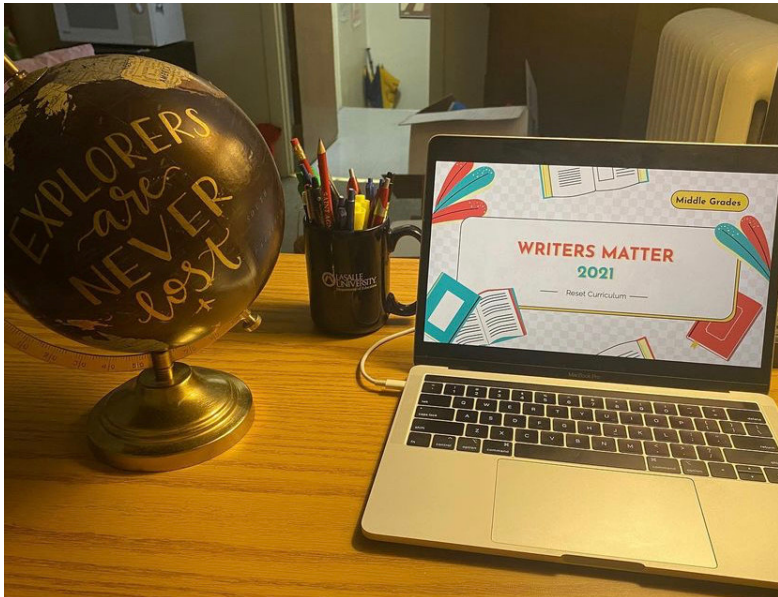
Some dreams are big
Others just small
You've got to choose
You can't have them all
Some come true
Others sadly can not
A few you remember
Most you forgot
Some are important
Others you can live without
For some dreams, you'll have to fight for
But others are on your route
Some last a day
Others last a lifetime
Not only dream at night
But also in the daytime
Some dreams are possible
Others are not
But you have to keep dreaming
Until you reach the top!
Because sometimes it's all you got!

Writers Matter teacher Kelly Ann Coughlin of Moore Elementary School and her 5th grade class read and analyzed Amanda Gorman's poems "The Hill We Climb" and "The Miracle of Morning." They chose a theme that was present in one of Gorman's poems and wrote their own poems inspired by her. The above poem is one of the submissions from this assignment.

Monthly Teacher PD Sessions Continue Online

Writers Matter teachers meet monthly through Zoom to share best practices and student work while also learning about new ideas and activities to try in their classrooms. Dr. Lewinski, Dr. Vogel, and Dr. McLaurin from La Salle University also present on topics relevant to trauma-informed pedagogy, writing across the curriculum, and ways teachers and the program can collaborate with each other. To join our Zoom sessions, please contact Kim Lewinski for more information.





Supporting Writers Matter

Please consider making a contribution to Writers Matter. Your contribution goes directly towards the purchase of books and writing materials for the students, as well as for afterschool programs.

If you are interested in participating in our adopt-a-school program, please contact Bob Vogel. All contributions are tax deductible and La Salle University meets all requirements for a 501C3 organization

Checks can be made out to Writers Matter and mailed to 1900 West Olney Avenue, Box 809 Philadelphia, PA 19141. If you prefer to make a contribution on-line, please go to <https://securelb.imodules.com/s/1206/index.aspx?sid=1206&gid=1&pgid=2660&cid=4565&dids=40>

Special Thanks

This program is generously supported by the following lead funders: PTS Foundation (Pam and Tony Schneider); Berstein Family Foundation (Jeff and Dana Berstein); Kessler Family Foundation (Howard and Michele Kessler); Mari Shaw Charitable Trust; Alan and Debbie Casnoff and Howard and Phyllis Fischer.

A heartfelt thanks to these special individuals for their vision to help those less fortunate than themselves.

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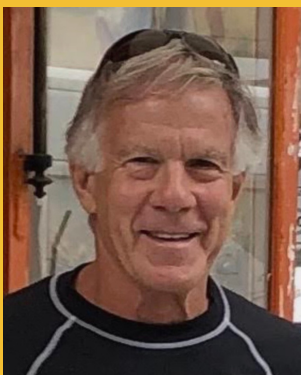
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