



INSPIRE

The Annual Newsletter of the Writers Matter Program



From the Pen of the Director

By Kimberly Lewinski, Ph.D., Director

What a great start to a new year with the Writers Matter Program. In many ways, this year feels like a renewed sense of purpose as we move beyond many of the challenges we faced over the past few years. As we enter our eighteenth 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, we do so with our largest number of schools, teachers and student participants. This year, we welcome 5 new schools and are working with over 80 teachers and 3,000 students.

In just the first two months of the school year, we have had opportunities to come together in person and online to prepare for the new school year. The materials have been delivered, we had our kickoff meeting, new teacher orientation program, teacher leader meeting and a kickoff meeting for our Community Partners initiative (more on that later). In addition to the Community Partners initiative, in this newsletter, we will highlight two new resources that were developed for the program this past year, discover what our Poet-in-Residence Andre has been up to in our schools, hear how we are spreading the word about Writers Matter in publications and presentations, find out what we have been talking about in our professional development sessions and best of all, read the writing of the incredible students that share so much with us through their writing each year.

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

IN THIS ISSUE...

A NEW INITIATIVE BUILDS BRIDGES ACROSS SCHOOLS THROUGH COMMUNITY PARTNERS

INTERDISCIPLINARY RESOURCE FOR CATHOLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS LINKS WRITING WITH FAITH

VOGEL'S NEW BOOK CHALLENGES STUDENTS TO WONDER AND ANSWER QUESTIONS

WRITING CONTEST INSPIRES STUDENTS TO WRITE AND BRING ABOUT CHANGE IN THEIR COMMUNITIES



Writing Contest 2nd Place Winner
-Margarette - Grade 3 - Henry

This digital story can be found on www.writersmatter.org on the Writing Contest page.

Community Partners in Action!

The purpose of the Communities Partner Initiative is to help students build their communication skills and enter the writing process with a peer at a different school. We are building community within the Writers Matter students to help them develop a sense of belonging with peers working on similar work at distinct locations. We are encouraging the teachers to use lessons they are already doing in their classroom (i.e. “I am from”) to share with pen pals.

In addition to the students gaining another audience, working with other teacher(s) is an authentic form of professional development and collaboration. We are asking that the teachers involved attend designated Community Partner meetings to plan goals and objective for their collaborations, commit to sharing 3 writings throughout the year, and then bring the groups together as a means of celebration by doing any of the following: Taking a field trip together, visit each other's school, come to La Salle for a Poetry slam, publish a book together, connect virtually (google classrooms/zoom), or any other way the teachers and students can imagine.

Professional Development and Growth

4 Week Professional Development Course



This summer, we offered a virtual professional development workshop that was well attended by over 36 teachers. The session topics were responsive to the feedback the teachers provided.

We met once a week for 4 weeks. As a learning community, we listened and learned from one another. The topics of our session this year were: Strategies to Make the Most of the Writing Block, sharing the new resource Wondering, collaborative learning, and Writers Matter beyond the classroom. Our final session afforded the teacher an opportunity to collaborate and start imagining our Community Partners initiative for this year.



Events and Presentations



Writing Contest Honorable Mention
- Serenity - Grade 3 - Mitchell -

National Council For Teachers of English

In November 2022, Dr. Kimberly Lewinski presented at the National Council for Teachers of English Conference in Anaheim, CA. Her presentation was titled Writers are Lighters: Preparing Resilient Teachers of Writing in Disruptive Times.

This presentation shared much of what we are doing in the Writers Matter program to help the teachers navigate difficult times while continuing to offer exemplary writing instruction.

Quotes from many of the Writers Matter teachers along with student writing samples were shared and well received by the audience. Many of the participants' questions centered around how they could create a similar learning community in their school settings.

Scholarship Focusing on Hip Hop as Mentor Texts

In the spirit of scholarship, Dr. Kimberly Lewinski and Dr. Trent McLaurin have recently been published in the most recent issue of Language Arts. Their Perspective on Practice discusses how teachers can use hip hop lyrics as a mentor text to engage students through literacy instruction.

[Departments: Perspectives on Practice: Bringing Hip Hop Culture into the Classroom: Hip Hop Lyrics as Mentor Text](https://publicationsncte.org/content/journals/10.58680/la202332601) can be viewed here:

<https://publicationsncte.org/content/journals/10.58680/la202332601>

Writers Matter Ethnographic Study

After the RESET Writers Matter curriculum was introduced for use in schools as they returned after the pandemic closings, the Writers Matter leaders decided to conduct a more formal assessment of the Writers Matter program. During the 2022-2023 school year, Leslie Pugach designed an ethnographic assessment that included interviews with Writers Matter teachers and administrators, classroom observations, school principals, and informal conversations with students.

A detailed analysis yielded ten recommendations, many of which are being implemented for the 2023-2024 school year. Among these recommendations are the new Community Partners initiative, increased visits by Writers Matter leaders to participating schools and classrooms, greater support for Writers Matter team leaders, and an enhanced, teacher-oriented Professional Learning Community. A very popular outcome is a Teacher Resource site, curated by Kelly Ann Coughlin (Moore Elementary School). This easy-to-use site includes classroom-tested lessons generated from Writers Matter prompts, as well as other teacher-tested materials submitted by Writers Matter professionals.



Perspectives of Practice

Bringing Hip Hop Culture into the Classroom: Hip Hop Lyrics as Mentor Text

Trent McLaurin and Kim Lewinski

This Perspective on Practice discusses how teachers can use hip hop lyrics as a mentor text to engage students through literacy instruction.

PENCILS IN GOD'S HAND



A WRITERS MATTER COMPANION TEXT
FOR CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

New Publication Supports Catholic School Teachers

Recognizing that a number of Catholic schools within the Archdiocese of Philadelphia are now actively part of the Writers Matter Program, a group of Catholic school educators, coming from elementary, middle, and high school classrooms, joined Dr. Kimberley Lewinski and Sister Edward Quinn, IHM from the Office of Catholic Education throughout spring 2023 to analyze the Writers Matter curriculum and design age-appropriate lessons inspired by beloved Writers Matter activities to extend writing into Theology classes.

This interdisciplinary approach allows classroom teachers to promote writing across the curriculum, an overarching goal of the Writers Matter approach, and also allow students to make connections to their faith while engaging in interactive writing projects. The committee intends to periodically meet to update the book with new lessons Writers Matter teachers create.

2023 Kick Off Meeting

On September 7th we opened the school year to 36 enthusiastic Writers Matter Teachers. Once again, our institute was held virtually to enable more teachers to attend.

During this abbreviated workshop, we introduced the Communities Partner Initiative, shared the new resources created for the Catholic Schools and the Wondering book, introduced our teachers to Andre, our Poet-in-Residence, and learned ways he can help work with the students in the program,

New initiatives were highlighted, and the teachers were reminded how the Writers Matter program is trauma informed and fits into the Social Emotional Learning competencies they are now required to imbed into the school day. It was great to hear so many of our teachers had already made this connection and are using the program as a school-wide initiative. It was a wonderful event for all who attended and the appreciation and excitement for the support was evident.

Writers Matter Part of Freshman Orientation



Prior to the beginning of the school year, incoming 9th grade students at Pope John Paul II High School in Royersford participated in the school's annual Ready, Set, Go! orientation program which allows students to build community and learn about their upcoming school year. Writers Matter teacher Joseph Rogers, Director of Academic Support at Pope John Paul, guided students in creating a modified "I Am From" poem about their hopes and dreams for the year. After the workshop, Dr. Kimberly Lewinski joined the students who will be participating in Writers Matter for lunch and ice-breaker games.

Engaging Students Through Questioning

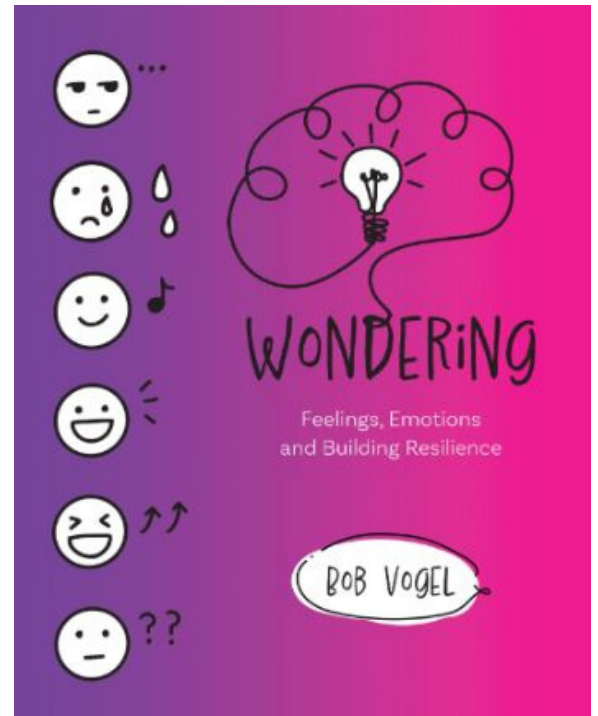
Wondering, a new book by Founding Director Dr. Robert Vogel, collects questions from young school-aged children as they learn to cope with challenging emotions and feelings, understand themselves and others, and navigate the world around them. Children often bottle their emotions, and *Wondering* encourages them to open up and explore what they feel. Designed to help students feel empowered when they listen to their inner voice, *Wondering* gives children concrete answers from their peers and teachers to their emotional questions.

Wondering is an interactive experience for children, young adolescents and their families to read and discuss together. This is a perfect gift for parents looking to help their child build emotional intelligence and guide their growing independence. The book also provides a wonderful opportunity for grandparents to develop a deeper understanding of their grandchildren's lives, emotional needs and concerns. *Wondering* can empower children to express themselves and seek concrete solutions to the challenges they face day by day.

Bob's work presents 100 questions asked by roughly 90 students ranging in age from 8 to 14 and the meaningful discourse created through this process. The above gallery is a collection of artwork from students in the Writers Matter program who helped create some of the dialogue within the book.

You can find the book at Amazon - https://www.amazon.com/Wondering-Feelings-Emotions-Building-Resilience/dp/B0C8GTVNQT/ref=sr_1_1?crid=ZMOY4TP2SHQE&keywords=bob+vogel+wondering&qid=1698168556&srefix=%2Caps%2C107&sr=8-1

For a sample reading of the first chapter, [click here](#)



Classroom Chronicles

Andre Saunders, Philly hip-hop artist and Writers Matter's Poet in Residence, helps students find their voice in a year-long program at the S. Weir Mitchell School. He has served as our resident poet and hip-hop artist for the past four years, working directly with our Writers Matter students and teachers. Through his modeling of writing and performance, Andre has helped our students discover the power of their voices while providing opportunities to improve writing and speaking skills. Be sure to check out his page on the Writers Matter website and a story written about a recent experience on the website's "In The News" section.

'Voiceless' concert with Mt. Airy rapper and poet



Andre Saunders teaches students enrolled in the Writers Matter program at Mitchell Elementary School in Southwest Philadelphia.

Posted Thursday, July 13, 2023 12:00 am

Why Student Voices Matter: Voices from Israeli and Israeli Arab Students

by Bob Vogel Ed.D., Founding Director

As a result of the War in Israel, Bob has partnered with Steven Aiello, Director of [Debate for Peace](#), to provide an opportunity for high school students, both Israeli and Israel Arab to create a safe environment to process their thoughts, feelings and challenges experienced since the war broke out on October 7, 2023.

Bob will be facilitating on-going zoom sessions providing strategies for peer discussions and journaling. At this critical time, many of the youth in Israel are experiencing much trauma and uncertainty – they need a community to share feelings.

Students have so much to share about their lives but are rarely encouraged to share what they are thinking. Teachers need to provide authentic opportunities for their students to write about their lives. Students need time to talk and listen to their peers, express feelings, fears, aspirations, opinions, and personal perspectives freely and without judgment. Allowing avenues for self-expression encourages critical thinking and a space to be heard. This is never more needed than in times of struggle, frustration, trauma and feelings of loss of control – when their country is at war. As students experience war in Israel, they need a pathway to share their feelings and for their voices to be heard.

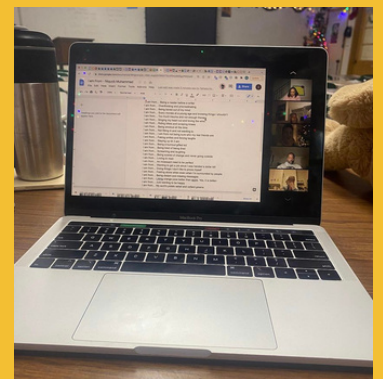
Journaling is one of these pathways that can help articulate and process personal experiences and help students make sense of their lives. Through a structured strategy of journaling, you provide students with an opportunity to create a personal narrative that is about them – one they can own. Through personal writing, sharing and discussion, their lives of lives others take on a new meaning. Writing about one's life is empowering, helps process challenging feelings and emotions and allows for a better understanding of oneself and others.

It is important to develop an atmosphere of trust, confidence and support between you and your students, as well as among the students themselves. Building a safe community is never more important than when students are feeling everything is out of control. Sharing one's personal narrative can be overwhelming for some – so always give students options for not sharing work until they are ready. Give them time, they will eventually want to share and be part of the group. Many times, students allow others to read their work – allowing them to feel safer.



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 DrLewinski for more information.



Student Writing Contest: Playing it Forward

The writing contest this year prompted us to think about inspiring action! We want our students to think about ways that others have helped them, and in return, they helped someone else. The Students were encouraged to submit their entries in any form.

Last year, our Philly sports teams had a lot of success on the field, but we wanted to recognize the success many of them have off the field in helping their communities. Many of our sports stars from Philly teams (and other teams, too) sponsor and are active in programs that give back to their communities.

Students were asked to write about ways to give back to their community and play the role of an engaged and responsible citizen. "Playing It Forward" focused on highlighting someone or something that has made "me a better me" and then how I "played that forward." As an added incentive, we encouraged the student, the class or even a whole school to "DO" something that helps another person or group. It could be reading to younger students, helping at a food bank, design a project to clean up the school, volunteering to talk at a retirement community, etc.; there was no limit. A stipend was provided to help support a community event that helped others.

Here were some ideas they were invited to consider as they wrote and performed their writing.

- Has an act of kindness shown towards me impact me in a positive way and I "played it forward?" For example, if a specific act of kindness by my older sister helped me to gain confidence when I speak up in class, then how can I play that forward to help someone else?
- Have I witnessed how a friend or relative volunteered at a food bank (or anywhere in the community) which motivated me to do something similar?

- How has a favorite sports star's or popular figure's community activism motivated me to get involved--which made "me a better me."
- What ideas do I have to get more involved in my community?
- I may be young, but I can make an impact on others, sometimes something as simple as a smile can help another person. What are some small ways I have helped others?

The most important thing for this year's contest is what the students want to say, what they want others to hear, and how they can make positive change!

Play It Forward, Step It Back

An Honorable Mention by Natalie

– Grade 7 - Henry –

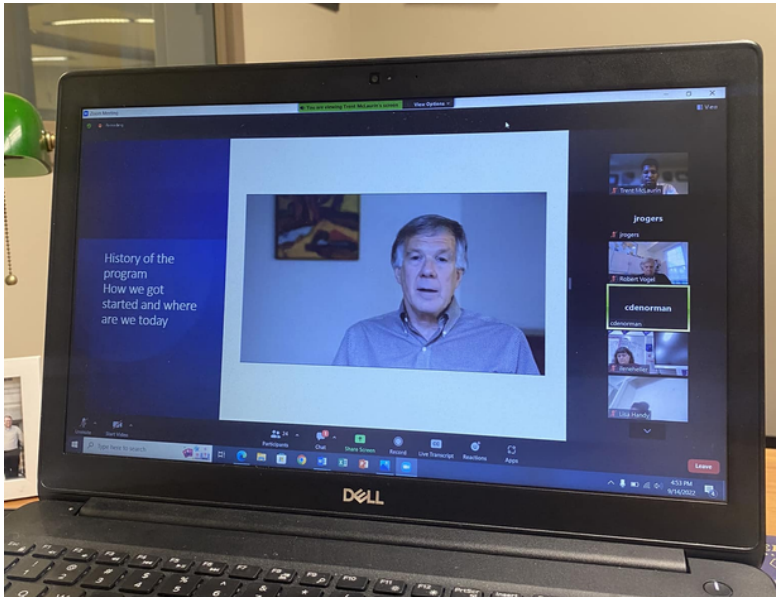
Sometimes one can only learn by observing.
Sometimes it is best to learn from example.

We watch our icons.
We watch the stars.
But what happens
when the goal in mind is too far?

Play it forward,
step it back.
You don't always have to be
on the attack.
Perfection is not always attainable.
So do what you're able; help yourself
to learn.

Play it forward,
step it back.
Dribble your service like a soccer ball.
Sometimes,
it's not one big act that counts.
It's the little things that matter—
make your rounds.

Food drives should drive your motivation
as removing litter
should clean your Headspace.
Sometimes one can only Learn
by observing.
So keep your eye on the ball.



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.

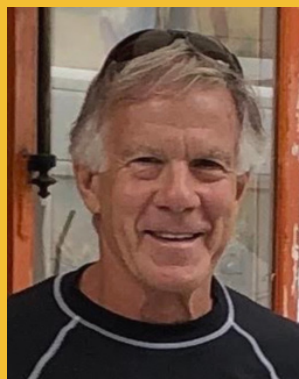
Connect with us!



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