



Connections

Newsletter of the Western Massachusetts Writing Project



Daily Hampshire Gazette photo

Wilma Ortiz named winner of 2005 Pat Hunter Award

Wilma Ortiz, an ELL teacher at Amherst Regional Middle School, was selected as the winner of WMWP's sixth annual Pat Hunter Award. The award was presented at the Best Practices conferences on October 1.

Nominations cited Wilma's leadership of ELL programs, clarity of vision, and unstinting efforts on behalf of ELL students and their families.

Accepting the award, Wilma cited her WMWP colleagues for their "commitment in providing a quality education for all and creating opportunities

for marginalized students."

The Pat Hunter Award is given each year to to "a member of the WMWP community who has contributed substantially to the work of WMWP and who best exemplifies the values that Pat Hunter embodied in her work with teachers and writers." Pat Hunter, a founding co-director of WMWP, died in 1999.

Previous winners of the award are Mary-Ann Palmieri, Bonnie Moriarty, Joanne Wisniewski, Diana Callahan, and Karen Sumaryono.

Family Writing Nights link mothers and sons

By Leslie Skantz-Hodgson

Like characters in Paul Fleischman's novel *Seedfolks*, people of different backgrounds came together to grow – as writers, as students, as mothers, as sons.

The parents who participated in Smith Vocational and Agricultural High School's first Family Writing Nights came from different towns, different stages in life, careers, marital status. Their children are in different vocational shops and have diverse interests. What they had in common was a willingness to spend some quality time together and have an opportunity to blossom as writers. An unexpected element, but one that pleased all involved, was that the participants were all mothers and sons.

After learning about similar events at a National Writing Project Annual Spring Conference, I secured a grant from the Northampton Education Foundation to host three Family Writing Nights at my school. The first program was a two-night event spread out over two weeks

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Don't miss these items!

- SummerWrite program will prepare teachers to lead summer writing camps in their own schools, page 3
- Writing, Teaching, and Technology Conference at UMass on April 7-8 features 16 workshops, page 4
- Sara Barber-Just wins the 2nd WMWP Teachers-as-Writers Contest, page 5
- Making Connections program uses Weblogs to link Athol and Holyoke middle school students, page 6
- WMWP spring and summer calendars offer opportunities for writing and professional development, pages 7-8

Learn more at www.umass.edu/wmwp/

Creative Journeys



Sara Palmer leads a student workshop at Creative Journeys.

Student workshop day brings 150 young writers to UMass

WMWP's second annual Creative Journeys program culminated in a student writing workshop day on January 12. Seven area teachers brought over 150 students to Bartlett Hall at UMass. Author Jeannine Atkins gave a keynote talk, which was followed by two rounds of writing-and-response workshops. The day ended with a public reading of students' writing.

Pamela Howes and Sara Palmer co-facilitated the professional development series that prepared the teachers for the day.

WMWP teacher-consultants featured in *Republican*

The partnership with the *Springfield Republican* is going strong. Since the fall, the project has highlighted the classroom work of WMWP teacher-consultants with emphasis on publishing student writing. The feature normally runs the first Monday of every month in the Education section of the newspaper.

So far this year, the newspaper has featured play writing and puppet theater in Kevin Hodgson's classroom in Southampton; Sara Palmer's use of non-fiction to spark picture book creation in Springfield; Barbara Bradbury's use of cognitive tools to teach reading and writing connections in Holyoke; Chris Herland's ability to tap into the musical interests of his students to inspire writing in Amherst; and Joanne Wiesniewski's use of a computer lab as a place of innovative writing in West Springfield.

If you are doing something in your classroom that you would like to be featured to an audience of more than 100,000 readers, please be sure to contact Technology Liaison Kevin Hodgson via email at dogtrax@crocker.com. Kevin is already thinking of projects for next year.

Family writing at South Hadley middle school

By Pamela Howes

A few years ago, I attended a Family Writing Workshop presentation by Susan Biggs at one of WMWP's student writers' workshops. I took her idea back with me to my school, Michael E. Smith Middle School, and started a tradition. For the last few years, at each Fall Open House, I have extended an invitation to parents to join me and their sons or daughters for an evening of writing.

Following Susan's outline, I begin each workshop by reviewing the writing process and explaining that we'll follow a much abbreviated version of it. The genre is memoir writing, so I take the parents and students on a little memory walk to brainstorm writing ideas. After writing for approximately one half hour, we share our writing and respond to the writing of others. While the parents are often more reluctant than the students to read aloud, once the sharing and responding begin, everyone participates comfortably. A few weeks after the workshop, I give each participant a copy of an anthology of the evening's writing.

The results of the workshops have always been positive. Parents enjoy getting a peek into the writing process that we use in class. They also enjoy spending time with their middle school children, something that becomes increasingly rare during these years of transition. The students are occasionally surprised at the adventures and life stories that their parents share and always seem to enjoy listening to their parents' writing. Finally, I enjoy getting to know my students and their families a little better. It's a positive experience for everyone.

– Family Writing Nights link mothers and sons

• *Continued from page 1*
and began on January 12. The grant was written with a group of 30 in mind, but only 10 people responded. Not long into the first meeting, it was clear that 30 people would not have allowed for the intimate atmosphere that was quickly created, nor would it have given participants ample time to take part in the conversation. It also became clear early on that I had a superlative group. One mother was a member of two writing groups; another had a family ritual in which each member would take turns picking a topic to write about and discuss at a time set aside just for that activity. All of the mothers clearly saw the value in writing and reading and wanted to share their interest with their sons.

Over a casual dinner of pizza, participants were given composition books and were walked through a guided writing exercise to help them “warm up.” Afterward, participants shared what they had written. The writing and the discussion were rich, genuine, entertaining and, for me, instructive. The participants were then given a copy of *Seedfolks* and were assigned homework: they were to read the short book and respond, in writing, to three discussion questions before meeting again on January 26.

At the second meeting, participants returned with praise for the book and an eagerness to share their responses. Because the novel is told in vignettes about a neighborhood that starts a garden in an abandoned lot, the participants discussed their own neighborhoods, gardening and its healing powers, and the metaphors for living that gardening inspires. Then they wrote some more after being given a writing prompt. Again they were asked to share.

Although the invitation was extended to all students and their parents or guardians, those who signed on were ninth- and 10th-grade boys and their mothers. One boy shared how he had lived in Denmark as a child, where his family planted strawberries that

I believe that reducing the anxiety that often surrounds writing is just as valuable as teaching the elements of a formal essay.

they were never able to harvest because they always ripened when the family was back for a visit in the States. He explained that if he had a garden now, he would grow the berries, making sure he was the one who picked and ate them. A mother wrote a moving vignette modeled after those in the book in which she attempted to sort out her feelings toward her mother. Another mother was excited to have been introduced to the book and plans to share it at her Sunday school.

The event was planned as an antidote to the formal, structured MCAS

writing instruction that is taught heavily in the ninth and 10th grades. I believe that reducing the anxiety that often surrounds writing is just as valuable as teaching the elements of a formal essay. Students were assured that the writing would be low-stress: it would not be graded or criticized, and as a result the boys were relaxed. One mother appreciated the safe environment provided for the boys, who were able to share their writing with their peers and adults without fear of ridicule. The mothers enjoyed meeting one another and expressed enthusiasm for seeing each other again. All of us got to hear one another’s “writer’s voice” and learn something from one another.

As a teacher, I was reminded yet again how important it is to ease the pressure on budding writers, something I can easily forget as the date of the MCAS Long Composition test nears. As a mother of three boys I was given the opportunity to observe the relationship between mothers and their adolescent sons. Most importantly of all, the boys have exhibited an ability to plant secure and healthy roots in their school community.

Receive the latest news from WMWP! Send your e-mail to wmwp@english.umass.edu.

SummerWrite series begins March 22

Is SummerWrite right for you? This workshop series will provide training and technical assistance to teachers who wish to offer WMWP-sponsored summer writing camps in their schools or districts. Led by WMWP co-director Mary Farrin, the two sessions will include logistics, curriculum, and the use of technology. Two-person teams, including one WMWP teacher-consultant, are required. School district fee for workshop series: \$350 per two-person team. Approximate weekly stipend for co-leading a SummerWrite camp: \$450 (half-day camp), \$900 (full-day camp). More information and application form (due April 8) available at www.umass.edu/wmwp/.

Conference on Writing, Teaching, and Technology: K-College

How has technology affected writing and the teaching of writing?

Bartlett Hall, University of Massachusetts Amherst

Friday, April 7

12:00 Registration & Coffee

1:00 Opening Plenary Session
Kathleen Yancey, Featured Speaker

2:30 Concurrent Sessions

Evolving Practices for Evaluating and Citing Online Source Materials
Not So "Basic" Writing: A Fusion of Technology and Text in the Classroom
Technological Tools for Re-Sensing Writing
Assigning and Judging Writing in the Digital Age

4:00 Concurrent Sessions

Making Connections: Creating a Virtual Writing Community
Teaching Photographic, Audio, and Video Composition
Teachers as Travel Guides: Surrendering the Role of "Expert"
Changing Literacies

5:30 Reception & Informal Discussion

Saturday, April 8

8:00 Continental Breakfast & Registration

9:00 Concurrent Sessions

Using iMovie to Develop Students as Collaborators in Writing Groups
Shaping a Writing Community for Faculty and Students
If Not Books, Then What: The Future of Publisher-Supplied Tools
K-12 Roundtable Discussion

10:30 Concurrent Sessions

Digital Storytelling: A Cross-Grade Claymation Adventure
Online Essay Assessments (Graded by Humans): Uses, Benefits, Designs
Visual Literacy
Weblogs and the Writing Classroom

12:00 Buffet Luncheon

1:00 Closing Plenary Session
Charles Moran, Featured Speaker

Registration fee: \$80 for both days, \$55 for one day

(fee includes Friday reception, Saturday continental breakfast and lunch)

Download registration form at www.umass.edu/english/WTTConf

Lucky S

A poem by Sara Barber-Just, Amherst

Grandma cries as she holds you in her grip.
You've decided to leave for Vietnam.
It's 1967. You're her lean, sandy-haired, blue-eyed
cocky, 19 years old, and a C student,
not college-bound like your showoff of an older brother.
She's heaped all of her hopes on you, not wanting you to be
angry, bitter, drunk, needing to be dragged out of the house
before he spends his whole paycheck.
Still, she's used to letting go of the men she loves
and of praying they'll survive.
On your last day, she cooks you an elaborate meal
to remind you that you'll always be a Polish boy
and that no matter what *anyone else* says about you,
she'll always love you.

Some guy who's done his duty to Vietnam will
He won't need it anymore and yours looks a little worn.
It's a drab green like the rest of them, black necktie, black
sturdy, buttoned pockets lining the front.
Who knows when it became your lucky shirt?
photographs, rocks, pantyhose, letters; you hold on to them
a comfort in the terrifying nights at the guard post.
There you are, a teenager, stationed on a truck at the
perimeter of the base, your only company the sergeant's dog
a heavy machine gun, radio, set of warning flares, a
dug to jump into when mortars and rocket-fire come.
Two hours on patrol, two off; this post is the most boring
But the lucky shirt sticks to your tanned, sweaty back
and somehow, miraculously, you live another day.

Growing up you never speak to us about the war
the hottest days of the year, "This is a cool day in
Your shirt lies folded haphazardly in the trunk of the car.
I wear it when I have to dress up like Mao Tse Tung.
I need to transform myself from a little girl into a woman.
Otherwise it remains out of sight, tucked away in a drawer
and a few black and white pictures—
you in front of a helicopter, eyes gazing straight ahead.
As kids, we ask you if you ever killed anyone.
It's okay if you did. We can forgive you.

The Vietnam Memorial Wall is traveling across the country
and on the spur of the moment you hear of a local
vets you knew. You rush down to the basement of the
and comb your thinning hair, stopping in front of the wall.
You're not as young or tanned, the mustache is gone.

Shirt

West Regional High School

eyed middle-child,

er brother.

ing you to turn out like your father —
of bars by his teenage sons

es,

meal of kielbasa, pierogies, galumpkis,
y from New Britain
you,

ls you his Army-issued shirt.

ttle worn out.

umbers stamped on the sleeve,

Other guys have things, too —

d on to someone else's shirt,

ost.

four to five miles around the
seven men in the darkness with you,

res, and the holes you've

hit.

astiest part of the job.

ty flesh

lay.

ar, except to joke with us on

n South Vietnam."

in the basement.

e Tung for a school project and

a Communist leader.

with your rusting dog tags

nt ahead.

and you always promise no.

s the country

ocal gathering of vets,

at for your lucky shirt,

of the mirror.

s new,

but you can still button the shirt which is more than a lot of guys you'll see at the American Legion Post that night can say.

Your family waits at home for you, while you enter the shadowy bar,
you who used to take in a 6-pack in an hour,

and hasn't had a drink in over 15 years.

When you come home, you're laughing,

your eyes twinkling and a broad grin spread across your face,

in honor of the family we've never met and probably never will.

You must have loved them.

A few years later, your only son and namesake is at war with heroin.

Just like your mother with her prayers, you pray he'll survive, come home.

You sacrifice everything for him.

You even take to running for an hour each morning on a wounded knee,

restricting your diet so much your stomach starts caving in.

I think you want to suffer and survive — if you can do it, maybe he will too.

But he doesn't.

It's not natural for parents to bury their children —

everyone says it, and watching you I know it's true.

Before his funeral you beg the Catholic church to play

"Desperado" during the service but they refuse to allow secular music.

You're set on it, blaring it through the house the day before, the words echoing from room to room.

Desperado, oh, you ain' t getting' no younger

Your pain and your hunger, they're drivi' you home

And freedom, oh freedom well, that's just some people talkin'

Your prison is walking through this world all alone.

Desperado, why don't you come to your senses?

You been out ridin' fences for so long now

Oh, you're a hard one

But I know that you got your reasons

These things that are pleasin' you

Can hurt you somehow.

We bury Billy just after the 4th of July, a bright, hot day,

with daylilies bumping into each other for room on the side of the road.

You walk up to his coffin, the red velvet enfolding all of him,

looking for a spark of recognition in his bright blue eyes,

but they are clicked shut,

so you gently slide the lucky shirt beside him.

Later, I ask you if you think

your luck has run out, the shirt having failed you after all these years.

Instead you simply say,

This shirt got me through so much and I thought he just might need it,

to help him, wherever he is.

Sara Barber-Just's poem was chosen by a panel of judges as the winner of the second annual **WMWP Teachers as Writers Contest**. The second place winner was Angela Rufo Singer. Her poem "The Sand Blows Softly" is published on the WMWP newsletter site, <http://blogs.writingproject.org/blogwrite60/>.

Building a virtual writing space

By **Kevin Hodgson**

A pilot program to create a virtual writing space for middle school students in Athol and Holyoke wound down at the start of February and was a great success. Students at four middle schools worked with 10 classroom teachers on a variety of technology-based writing lessons and used a platform of four Weblogs to comment and respond to each other's writing.

More than 2,500 pieces of writing were posted on the Weblogs by the approximately 100 students involved. The project was funded by a \$15,000 grant from the National Writing Project, and funding has been assured for a second year. A feature on the program ran on February 15 on WFCR, the local National Public Radio affiliate. You will find a link to that story at the WMWP Weblog newsletter: <http://blogs.writingproject.org/blogwrite60/>.

It is interesting to read some of the writing posted by students, so here are some samples.

On What a Weblog Is

A weblog is a log in which you talk to other people on the web (Internet). The weblog allows you to talk to different people all over the world. You get to describe yourself and what you are like. You give people the chance to get to know you. That is what I think a web log is. – Taniesha

To me a weblog is a communication site. I guess it is good to communicate with new people and learn about where they are from. It helps other schools learn about what different people are like and for them it helps learn what we are like. This thing allows us to communicate with others by signing in with all three of the sites and talking to the different people about

different subjects. All you have to do is click on the button at the top that says Discuss at what ever color team that you want to talk to. – Lindsey

On How Technology Can Connect People

Well, I personally think that technology can do just about anything. It can show others how others live and what types of things they do for fun. For example someone in Athol can do different things for hobbies than people in Holyoke. Or people in Athol can do more or less things there than people in Holyoke. Also I think that technology helps me personally meet new people in a special way. It helps me learn about different people through the Internet. Also technology keeps communicated or in touch with others such as like the people in Athol or in Peck Middle School. Well, that is how I think technology is used. – Amerilees

Technology like computers can help us interact with peoples and kids in far away place by using websites like this one, which we are using to talk with kids and people from Peck school and Athol. — Nate

On What Makes a Community

I think that communities are cool because they all work together on different types of projects. One example is this website. It is so cool that our community has joined together to make a chat room for us kids. It allows us to talk to other kids and have fun. – Steven

My feelings toward a community are that everyone is one big family and in a time of tragedy everyone should come forward and help others. A community should join together and make where they live a better place. — Katie

Wiki, Wiki, Wiki: A collaborative mystery story

Writing is normally such an isolating activity.

But the Writing Project is hoping to change that through the use of a technological tool called a Wiki. A Wiki, which means "quick" in Hawaiian, is a webpage that allows easy editorial access to anyone.

Technology Liaison Kevin Hodgson has created a Wiki site for teacher-writers in the WMWP network. On the site, he has started a mystery story set at the Summer Institute at UMass. Someone has stolen everyone's workshop materials, and the cast of characters runs the gamut from the Luddite teacher who won't touch a computer to

the veteran teacher seeking some new energy from this network of teachers.

To add to the story, follow the simple directions posted right at the site.

You can even view what people have added through the colored fonts used by writers. So far, there are only a handful of entries, but we would love to have 20 or more people contributing to the story.

Who knows how far it will go? The hyperlink and directions can be found through the WMWP Weblog, <http://blogs.writingproject.org/blogwrite60/>.

WMWP Calendar: Summer 2006

Invitational Summer Institute

Tuesday-Friday, July 5-28, 8:30-4. Orientation: June 4, 8:30-2. UMass, Tobin Hall. Led by Diana Callahan and Mary Farrin, this four-week program for K-16 teachers focuses on writing and the teaching of writing. 120 PDPs and 6 graduate credits. Limit 16. Stipend: \$600+. See website for application process.

Teachers as Writers 9

Monday-Friday, July 24-28, 9-4. UMass, Tobin Hall. Led by Lucile Burt, this popular workshop builds on the idea that teachers benefit from working on their own writing and identity as writers. The group will write together in the morning, do private writing midday, and share and respond in the afternoon. 30 PDPs. Limit 20. Fee: \$125.

Professional Writing Retreat

Dates and times to be determined by registrants. For teachers who want to explore questions that arise in their professional lives or publish their best practices, this low-key retreat will provide encouragement, advice, and feedback. Approximate fee: \$75. Submit the form below by April 1 to indicate interest. We will contact you.

Pending Funding

WMWP is awaiting word on National Writing Project and Massachusetts DOE grant applications for the following institutes, each of which will be offered free and provide 60 or more PDPs and optional 3 graduate credits. If you are interested in participating, submit the registration form below to receive application information.

Building ELL Leadership II

Tentative dates: June 27-July 7 plus fall sessions. Springfield. Led by Wilma Ortiz and Karen Sumaryono, this institute will bring together WMWP teacher-consultants and ELL teachers to increase knowledge and leadership skills.

Lenses on Literature Institute

Monday-Friday, July 10-21. UMass. Led by Kristen Iverson and Andrea Griswold, this DOE Content Institute is open to all middle and high school English teachers.

Revitalizing Writing

Monday-Friday, July 10-21. Springfield. Led by Charlotte Lak and others, this institute is open to all K-12 teachers who want to revitalize their classroom practices.

WMWP Program Registration Form

Send this form with the appropriate payment to the address on the back.

Make check payable to University of Massachusetts.

Name: _____

Home Address: _____

City: _____

State: _____ Zip: _____ Phone: _____

Email: _____

School Name: _____

School Phone: _____

Subject(s)/Grade Level(s) Taught: _____

Payment type: Check _____ Purchase Order _____

Register on-line at www.umass.edu/wmwp.

Check the program you wish to register for:

Teachers as Writers Retreat (\$75 deposit)

Single (\$350) Double (\$250)

Roommate preference: _____

Teachers as Writers 9 (\$125)

Professional Writing Retreat (no fee now)

I am interested in applying to the following:

Building ELL Leadership II (pending)

Lenses on Literature Institute (pending)

Revitalizing Writing (pending)

WMWP Calendar: Spring 2006

SummerWrite

Wednesdays, March 22, May 3, 4-7 p.m. UMass, Bartlett Hall. This workshop series will provide training and support to teachers who wish to offer summer writing camps in their schools. Fee: \$350 per two-person team. Approximate weekly stipend for leading SummerWrite camp: \$450 (half-day camp), \$900 (full-day camp). See story, page 3.

Writing, Teaching, and Technology: K-College

Friday-Saturday, April 7-8. UMass, Bartlett Hall. A conference focusing on issues related to the teaching of writing in the com-

puter age. Fee: \$80, or \$55 for one day (includes reception on Friday, continental breakfast and luncheon on Saturday). See full schedule, page 4.

Teachers as Writers Retreat

Friday-Sunday, April 28-30. Jiminy Peak Resort, Hancock. Open to all K-13 teacher-writers, this retreat, led by co-director emerita Diana Callahan, features ample writing time and small response groups in a relaxed environment. Luxury accommodations. Some catered meals, some group-created meals. Fee: \$250 per person (double occupancy), \$350 (single occupancy). Limit 20. Registration deadline (with \$75 non-refundable deposit): April 1.

Writing and Response Group

Saturdays, 9 a.m.-1 p.m., March 4, April 1, May 20. UMass, Bartlett Hall. Open to all K-13 teachers. The group begins with writing time, followed by reading aloud and peer response. All genres are welcome, from the memorandum to the poem. Led by Diana Callahan. Free.

Time to Write

Fridays, 3:30-6 p.m., March 10, April 7, May 19. Kasparian Professional Development Center, Springfield. A similar writing-and-response group for teachers in the Springfield area. Led by Charlotte Lak. Free.

Technology conference, spring writing retreat, summer programs, and more!

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