Emerging Voices

Western Massachusetts Writing Project
Youth Writing Adventure
2016 Anthology

Edited by Justin Eck

English Department
University of Massachusetts Amherst
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Introduction

On March 15, 2016, The Western Massachusetts Writing Project (WMWP) hosted the Youth Writing Adventure for students in grades 4 through 10 in Bartlett Hall on the University of Massachusetts Amherst campus. Students from nine western Massachusetts schools gathered for a day of multi-genre writing workshops led by local teachers and WMWP teacher-consultants.

One aim of this program was to offer multiple opportunities for students and teachers to explore new relationships with writing, and other writers, not only for inspiration and growth, but also for the pure enjoyment of the process. Students cannot develop the interest needed to improve and diversify their writing skills without opportunities for creativity, exploration, and openness. Fostering these opportunities in the classroom is undoubtedly a shared goal among teachers. The Youth Writing Adventure aims to support those goals with a WMWP mission in mind, which is to facilitate collaboration, community, and professional growth among educators.

Students participating in the 2016 Youth Writing Adventure came from the following schools, thanks to the logistical and pedagogical efforts of the teachers listed:

- Amherst Regional Middle School: Michael Lawrence-Riddell*
- Maurice A. Donahue Elementary School, Holyoke: Brigetann Reilly
- John J. Duggan Academy, Springfield: Jamilla Jones*
- Herberg Middle School, Pittsfield: Joellen Catelotti
- Montessori School of Northampton: Marian Parker
- Mohawk Trail Regional School, Shelburne Falls: Andrea Griswold
- Pioneer Valley Chinese Immersion Charter School, Hadley: Rebecca Belarge*
- SABIS International Charter School. Springfield: John Cusick
- Ware Middle School: Jennifer Bean
Teachers whose names are marked with asterisks also presented writing workshops for the students. Additional workshops were presented by the following teachers:

- Heather Brown, Birchland Park Middle School, East Longmeadow
- Deborah Belle, Amherst Regional Middle School
- Jeromie Whalen, Northampton High School

The day began in the auditorium of Bartlett Hall with participants writing into the day before heading to the first round of workshop sessions featuring a range of genres:

- Writing for Change
- Social Justice Poetry
- Flash Fiction
- Songwriting
- Writing Smashed with Action
- Screenwriting

After the first workshop, students enjoyed a fantastic buffet lunch prepared by the award-winning UMass Dining Services, followed by the second round of workshop sessions, in which the same topics were repeated. The day ended with another gathering in the auditorium, where more than a dozen brave and proud students shared their writing with the audience of nearly 200. The excitement and success of the day could be seen on their faces as they departed the auditorium. Students were then given a couple of weeks to finalize their writing for this publication.
Acknowledgements

The *Youth Writing Adventure* would not have been possible without generous donations from community members who believe in the positive impacts opportunities for creative writing can have on students and teachers. Thanks to the University of Massachusetts MinuteFund, we were able to raise over $4,000 to cover costs for this event. We are sincerely grateful for everyone who pitched in to help fund this writing adventure:

Anonymous
Kathryn Accurso
Loretta Alper
Jane Baer-Leighton
Diana Callahan
Jack Czajkowski
Kathryn Daviau
Barbara and John Devlin
Elizabeth Devlin
Karen Diaz
Marian Eck
Ray Eck
Robert and Carol Eck
Amber Engelson
Richard Fanning
Andrea Griswold
Heather Hay
Sue Heavren
Anne Herrington
Kevin Hodgson
Pamela Howes
Alexandra Kennedy
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Renee Newton
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Bruce Penniman
Jane Price
Christopher Rea
Katie Richardson
Beth Ann Rothermel
Stephanie Rotondo
Diana Roy
Elissa Rubinstein
Chris Tolpa-Matuszczak
Jane Urban
Sherrill Willis
Joanne Wisniewski

To the anonymous donor who offered to match donations dollar for dollar during the last two weeks of the MinuteFund Campaign, we are grateful for your generosity and belief in the positive impact this project would have on students and their writing.

Special thanks also go to Bruce Penniman, WMWP Site Director, Kate Litterer, WMWP Office Manager, Stephanie Flaherty, UMass MinuteFund Administrator, and UMass Dining Services; and to the
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English Department and College of Humanities and Fine Arts for their ongoing support of WMWP.

Thanks again to all who helped us fund this exciting program and to all who participated. We look forward to the deepening our new relationships and to more inspiration and growth in writing in the years to come.

Justin Eck, Co-Director for Youth Programs
Western Massachusetts Writing Project
University of Massachusetts Amherst
One learning target for this workshop was for all students to know and understand that they can be change agents using writing to explore societal issues that affect their peers and themselves.

Students first viewed some thought provoking images relating to current social concerns and inequities. After discussing their reactions and thoughts, the class worked together to create a comprehensive definition of social justice.

Next the class discussed how writing can spread awareness and influence change. They listened to the song “If I Ruled the World (Imagine That) (Clean Mix),” by rap & recording artist NAS, then discussed the lyrics and themes.

Afterward, they participated in a guided kinesthetic activity, which facilitator Jamilla Jones referred to as a Walk in Their Shoes, where students walked in a circle around the room as if wearing the heavy shoes of someone they know and then of someone considered to be an agent of change.

Drawing from either the open ended prompts, the topics earlier discussed, or the issues most significant in their lives, the students began writing with the purpose of inspiring positive change in the world.
You’ve Been Betrayed!

Jesleane Alvarez

Maurice A. Donahue Elementary School, Grade 8

People are afraid
To be the same
But in reality
That’s a shame

Making jokes
Bothering others
Because we all have
Different colors

This world
Is full of fakes
Rats and snakes

But you think
You’re the king
Of the game
You’re just really
Afraid to admit
You’ve been
——betrayed

Calling you a snake
Won’t play the game
Such disrespect
Would make me
——a fake

What you’ve done
is out of this world
giving people nightmares
Thinking it’s just a game
And it isn’t fair
You’re just afraid
‘cause you’ve been
——BETRAYED
The Knife and the Paper
Molly Hall
Mohawk Trail Regional School, Grade 8

The knife is a choice
between a right and a wrong.
It’s your decision to choose which it would be:
Life, or death?

No one can even begin to see
the pain we put them through each day,
to see where their
lives have taken.

They can’t seem to think
of the ways they have been following,
leading them and their children
to a dark and dangerous future.

You can hear the rumors
of an army coming
setlers landing,
of a boy and a girl running.

We can’t stop it.
It’s an ongoing train.
One that will lead us to our dooms.

Here, I read you your doom
on a crisp piece of paper,
just fresh from the pocket.
I have won the war.

The rumor of an army does great things.
I have no army,
though you thought I did.
It’s just me alone.

If one of us fall, we all fall.
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But it isn’t how we fall,
it’s how we get up again.

The knife is a choice
between a right and a wrong.
It’s your decision to choose which it would be:
Life, or death?

Carson Burk’s Journal
Luisa Marion-Rouleau
Pioneer Valley Chinese Immersion Charter School, Grade 8

People say Mondays are the worst, but that sometimes isn’t the case. Like in mine. In my opinion, Tuesdays are the most wretched of all the days in a week. That is because it is gym day. For those of you who have pea brains, I’m talking about physical education. Some people are blessed with builds that, with one glance, you can tell they play some sport.

This is the part where other people would tell you some amazing shiny story about how they had an incredible childhood, or about how they lost their parents, but struggled through the hard times, and finally achieved inner peace. Unfortunately, I am not one of those people, and I will not tell you some fake story that leaves you with a puffy heart and happy thoughts. Instead, all I was blessed with was two left feet and a knack for remembering things. But I’m definitely not complaining. Sure, my life could be better, but I know a lot of people have it way worse. I am, however, here to talk about how pathetic my life is. Sorry in advance guys.

My life is boring and, according to Leo Tolstoy, boredom is the desire for desires. So this is me, trying to get past desiring desires, and fulfilling my lifelong dream of becoming a writer. Cheesey, right? I acquired this dream after watching Deathtrap. What am I doing! You must be getting bored too, aren’t you, listening to me prattle on about feelings. No one cares about feelings. Now to the part you actually want to hear!

I go to Fairview High School in Oceanside, Oregon. It’s a small town with population of around 361, and with a median resident age
of 62.9. In the spring and summer, although it is cold in the mornings, by 1:00 the sun is high, and the salt air can be smelt all over town. In the winter, Oceanside’s inhabitants don’t usually do much. My winter consists of me sitting on the couch while watching whatever show I’m into that week, and pigging out in my pajamas.

What about my parents, you ask? Michael and Joni Burks are about as ordinary as me. My mom is the town shrink and my dad is the town dentist (see any similarities there?), each with a private office in Oceanside’s mini version of a downtown. Even their incomes are average. But if you put aside all their ordinariness, they are pretty awesome and I love them.

Back to school. Like any other high school, Fairview has its cliques and groups, just shrunken down to size. Like way down. The entire school only has 100 kids. It’s that large compared to our town size because kids from neighboring small towns travel an extra 20 minutes because God knows why. The head girl at FHS is Lorel Wohrst. Even her name is just warning enough to stay away. On the outside she is a sweet, church-going, cookie-baking, straight-A student. But only a few people have actually seen her true colors. I can say, with confidence, that there is no chance she could change, she was just born evil. She even has two henchmen, Tami and Christa, to do all her dirty work.

Lorel is the girl that all the other girls wish they were. One reason for that, besides the fact that she is admired by all the boys, heterosexual or not, and that she is super wealthy, is because she is dating the captain of the lacrosse team, Dax Lloyd.

Dax Lloyd. Where do I even begin? (1) He is the hottest male, by far, at FHS; (2) he gets almost perfect grades; and (3) he is my longtime crush since the sixth grade, and I’m in tenth grade currently. So that means I have spent five years admiring him from afar, wishing that I was the one who he gave flowers and kisses to. But instead it was Lorel. I don’t even know how she fooled him. He is nice, sweet, and loyal, while she is bloodthirsty, possessive, and ruthless. What Lorel wants, Lorel gets.

So you see, people, my situation is very problematic, seeing as Dax doesn’t even notice me. There was that one time in seventh grade when lent me his eraser, but I’m guessing that’s only because I looked like a frightened chicken. That also happens a lot, me looking like a distressed Gallus gallus domesticus.
There is no way I’d ever have a chance with Dax. I’m OK looking. Brown hair, eyes that look like algae-infested water, pale skin, and freckles splattered across the bridge of my nose. But I don’t have the confidence. In other words, I’m too shy.

That is why I have started this this journal. My confidence is so low that the best I can do is write my feelings down on paper. So, I guess I’ll see you later, alligator!

Yours Truly,
Carson Burks

Court
Hailee Enriquez
Maurice A. Donahue Elementary School, Grade 8

Walking into the courtroom felt nothing like she imagined. She thought it would be more like what she saw on T.V., learned it is nothing like that. Actually, it’s more like the jurors want to go home, and the defendant knows what the outcome will be already. Looking at all of this just gave her more determination and strength to share her story. She wanted to give him what he deserves.

She sat at the table with the District Attorney. “It is just like we practiced,” the DA said, trying to reassure the girl. They called witness after witness until finally calling her name, “Heaven Lee Centeno, please rise and proceed to the stand.”

As she approached the stand, her hands and knees were shaking uncontrollably. It was the day she had been preparing herself for two and a half years. She shared her experience. All the while, the defendant was rolling his eyes, but the jurors were opening their ears. She was rising above her past.

“He raped and abused me the majority of my life. Nobody helped me. Now, I will help myself, no matter what the outcome of today will be, I got myself. I got my own back.”

I AM THE GIRL! THE DEFENDANT IS MY FATHER. YOU ARE THE PERSON WHO NOW KNOWS MY STORY.
I chose to walk in the shoes of my affectionately nicknamed Tiki. Towards the end of her time she suffered from dementia and Alzheimer’s. However, not even those forces could crack her amazing wit and strength.

Firstly, my grandmother was a very strong woman. A stay-at-home mother raising four children in Syracuse, New York. Her goal was to be a good wife. My father describes her in one word: a survivor. Tiki was thought to have a brain tumor, which was eventually proven untrue. She lacked cartilage that separated brain and one of her sinuses. Her health record stretched even beyond just this. Bad knees and no sense of smell to name a few—you could fill a notebook.

As if that wasn’t enough, Tiki still prospered to raise her kids. She took college courses briefly, with and interest in photography, an interest she shared with her husband and would pass to her children. She also did lots of volunteer work. Namely, she would serve on their local election committee annually, and would also frequent PTA meetings, so much so that others would recognize her and her children.

And, as for my walk in her shoes, it would be, no doubt, uncomfortable. No, more than that. Painful, stressful at a few points. But I also feel like it’d be rewarding to see four children, my four children, flourish under my efforts, my tutelage, to go forth and become productive, functioning members of society. I think that’d make me forget the pain I was suffering, if only for a few moments. Walking in my Tiki’s shoes has taught me that you don’t need to be physically strong or even very physically capable to serve as a beacon of strength and inspiration for other people.
Writing to Raise Awareness

Workshop Title:
Happening Yesterday, Happening Today

Facilitator:
Heather Brown, Birchland Park Middle School, East Longmeadow

Students began this workshop by getting into small groups and completing a crossword puzzle that revealed one of the following people: Oscar Grant, Henry Dumas, Amadou Diallo, Sean Bell, Trayvon Martin, Tamir Rice, or Jordan Davis. Upon finishing, each group received an index card with the name of the person found on their puzzle. They taped the cards on the board and were asked if they recognized any of the names or knew what they all had in common—that they were all young black men who were killed by police or security personnel. Then each group received an article about the person named on their card and were asked to take turns reading the article aloud, underline important facts that stand out and circle any strong images. Afterwards they were asked: “What did you learn? What more do you want to know? How does this make us feel?”

Next the students read and analyzed the poems “Forty-One Bullets Off-Broadway” and “Night, for Henry Dumas,” noting and comparing facts, emotions, and images. They were asked: How do these make you feel? Why do you think Aracelis Girmay and Willie Perdomo wrote these poems? Does it change anything? What’s the point?

Before writing their own poems, students were instructed to include at least three facts, three emotions, and three images. This workshop resulted in over a dozen thought-provoking poems, sure to evoke emotion and raise awareness.
“If Only”
Hannah Kochis
Pioneer Valley Chinese Immersion Charter School, Grade 8

If none of this had happened …
If Sean Bell was still alive …
If the police had a heart …
If only …

The night that was to be filled
with laughter, dancing, and joy
was the night of
blood, screams, and fear.

Instead of wedding bells
all we hear is mourning cries.
If they didn’t have to plan a funeral …
If only …


—in Memory of Sean Bell

Ragged Breaths of Air
Julia Himmelstein
Pioneer Valley Chinese Immersion Charter School, Grade 8

Serene surroundings,
leaves and grass twitching at mid noon’s breeze
and sun emitting faint clean rays of light.

Ragged breaths of air,
and the sound of a gun penetrating the flesh of a child.
Red, almost ebony, blood spilled onto the ground.

The eyes left the face, not so human anymore,
then a quicker than slow death.
Night, 2006, November 25th.
Music, dancing, celebrating.
Sean Bell leaving bachelorhood.
Clinking of beer bottles and champagne.
Everyone eager for tomorrow.

Voices
Arguing
Two men unarmed
Guards at doors

4:00 am
The engines of cars
Opened doors
Farewells
Nichole leaves

Leaving behind Sean Bell
unknowingly, lovingly,
Wonderous thoughts for the big day.
Wedding bells

Engines starting
Cars pull up
Dark glossy guns in hands of menacing men
Bell unarmed

Shots fired from a distance
Shots nearer and nearer
Shots going through your soul

Bell never heard his wedding bells
Nichole never wore white
Everything black
Darkness all around
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Mourning
Blood stains

Sneers of pleasure
Glossy black guns in hands
Hot, firing, cooling

Footsteps running to the body
Unconscious
Lying on the floor

Screams of pain
Screams from the white dress
Nichole
Sobbing

There was no sound of wedding bells
Only the faint sound of mourning bells
Ringing in the wind

A.D. 1999
Haley Hollins
SABIS International Charter School, Grade 8

22 years is too young to die
On the afternoon of February 4, 1999,
went to go for something to eat
but then I saw the cops
and knew I was gonna get beat.
What I didn’t know was that they’d pull out their guns
when I went for my pager and mistook it for a gun.
Before I could explain,
they shot me down, 41 times.
41 bullets, 2 dollars, and 4 dimes
was the last thing I saw hit the ground
before my body and before I was gone.
1157 Wheeler Avenue was the street I died on.
Death
Kayla Sit
Pioneer Valley Chinese Immersion Charter School, Grade 8

Sean Bell, so young, so alive, was shot on November 25. Who knew he was going to be whisked away by bullets? Who knew he won’t experience one of the grandest times of his life? Certainly not him.

Death may still be far but for some, it’s already with them, patiently waiting for someone to grasp its hands.

He lived his last breaths of life celebrating bachelorhood, but not his wedding. If only he was able to live to tomorrow, at least happy memories could be made.

The cloud of heaviness would not be there. There would be laughs instead of cries. The church bells could ring with glee and not sorrow. Nicole would wear a white wedding gown, instead of a black mourning dress. She would wait for her groom to embrace her, to kiss her, to say, “yes.”

He was pronounced dead at 4:56 a.m. Family members crowded around him, holding hope, but his last breath was given and their last hope was taken.

Why are people so sure they will live longer? Life can be so unpredictable. You don’t know what will come up, life or death. You never know if there is a next year or a tomorrow.
Stunned
Lianna Wiggall
Montessori School of Northampton, Grade 6

Surprised
Why four men would
Confront one
Four guns one
Victim
Life
Carried up to heaven
Unfair
Why?
Why they would
Kill an innocent man?
Why on this February night?
Sad
Unfair
To do this
So unfair
22
This man 22 years of age
Only two spent in this place
This place we call home
Nothing
Nothing with him
But a pager
And a wallet
Nothing threatening
41 bullets
Took his life
Life wasn’t fully lived yet
Police forgot everything
They learned
To kill
One
One innocent man
Stunned
Tamir Rice
Serenity Perkins
Mohawk Trail Regional School, Grade 8

Fun and games
A BB gun and a spring day
A day at the playground
Having fun
Being young and dumb
Twelve years old
A day at the playground

It all changes
Yelling and police
I reach for my toy
A day at the playground

Two bullets aimed my way
Find their mark
They hit me hard
A day at the playground

I go down
First aid fails
I try to find my toy
A day at the playground

This is the day
That I see the end
No more playing
A day at the playground
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Everything Goes with Black
_A Poem about Tamir Rice_
Lena Lanoue
_Mohawk Trail Regional School, Grade 8_

Everything goes with black.
Blue, orange,
pink, green,
yellow … red.
Red was the color
staining the black boy
shot down
by the blue garbed officer.
A red hole split wide open in the boy’s body
like a tube of “Brilliant Red” paint
smeared onto the palette,
being prepared for the canvas.
The officer did not
kneel to your aid
From fear
Of staining his blue suit.
If you could choose,
would the color of innocence be
black,
or blue?

If I Ruled the World
Kianna Coleman
_Mohawk Trail Regional School, Grade 8_

If I ruled the world …
I would change how police hurt people for no reason
Imagine that.

If I ruled the world …
I would change how Islamic people are considered terrorists
Imagine that.
If I ruled the world …
People would not be judged on anything they do.
Imagine that.

If I ruled the world …
Everyone would have a roof over their heads.
Imagine that.

If I ruled the world …
No one would die from starvation.
Imagine that.
If I ruled the world …
I would not let Donald Trump be president.
Imagine that.

If I ruled the world …
No animal would be mistreated.
Imagine that.

If I ruled the world …
Everyone would be treated the same.
Imagine that.

If I ruled the world …

Never See Again
Matthew Williams
Herberg Middle School, Grade 8

I could feel the pressure through my flesh,
The life in me grow weaker and eventually fade.
The last thoughts passing through my head
Of the family I am forced to leave.
A scuffle gone bad was
All they had said.
Nobody cares even when
The life has left your bones.
The tension in the air,
You could cut it with a knife.
Someone tried to and
Succeeded.
The lover’s eyes I will
Never see again.

Give Me One More Breath
Hannah Wheeler
Herberg Middle School, Grade 7

You look down a barrel of a gun
But it’s more like it looks down at you.

Confusion gnaws at your side.
Memories flood your eyes.

A family torn apart.
A wedding day away.

41 shots, 50, more.
Injustice, anger, worry, please, no more.

12 years old; a future ahead,
no, not now, because he lies there dead.

What about their children? Parents? Or friends?

Why don’t people think before someone’s life comes to an end?
The Better Question is How?
Haley Long
SABIS International Charter School, Grade 8

Why?
I ask why
A better question is how
I see the utter hate
The utter cruelty
How non-human everything is
An innocent trying to go home
An innocent who is assumed criminal
The injustice of it all
Apparently, we don’t know when to stop
We don’t know when to stop this madness
Victims so young
Victims so not old
Victims nonetheless
I despise to watch it unfold
I despise to think about it
But we all do
What if I knew that person?
I would feel even more enraged than I am now
What if I called that person friend?
What if I called that person love?
How would I feel then?
Innocent
Innocent
Innocent
That’s what is repeated in my head
Every single day
There seems to be someone new
Every single day
Hate
Hate
Hate
That’s all there was
That’s all there is
That’s all there could be
I say ‘could’ because
I know that there is hope
I know that there is love
We can learn from our mistakes
A better question is how?

**Trayvon**

*Melinda Rampersad Medwinter*

*Amherst Regional Middle School, Grade 8*

A regular man.
A regular black man.
Just going out to get a snack
Skittles and a soda for my cuz.
My sweet dearest cuz who looks up to me
“I’m just going to the store to get you something
and I will be right back,”
I told his little happy face.

A regular man
A regular black man
I never told him nor my mamma
that I loved them dearly
I never got the chance to

A regular man
A regular black man
It was a cold night
I had my hoodie on to keep me warm
I saw a man, didn’t pay him much mind to him
He was talking to me,
I guessed I must of said something back
cause he looked unhappy.

A regular man
A regular black man
Got a bullet in me,
The man shot me
Cold blooded
In the night, a few blocks from home
He probably didn’t even regret it,
Just left me there in the cold
To die

I was just a regular man
I was just a regular black man.

---

**True Colors**

*Danielle Beason*

*Amherst Regional Middle School, Grade 8*

The sunstroke side an array of reds and greens
While its counterpart’s leaves are still summer green
The frost covered windshields slowly defrosting
You would think it’s April the way it showers
Harvest is among us
Famous apple orchards being put to work
Before harsh weather comes
Trick or treat from house to house
As pleased Halloween screams are heard
Pumpkin season has come
Starbucks is overrun with requests
Of pumpkin spice lattés
Rake, jump, laugh
More leaves falling down
Coats draped over shoulders
Goodbye sandals, ballet flats, and vans
Time to break in the UGGS and Timberlands
Cornucopia table pieces
Fall fever coming to an end
Thanksgiving feast
Relatives old and new
The long lines
And item tugging
Trying to get a good deal
On Black Friday
The weather gets harsher
The heaters get higher
Over working heaters can’t stand it anymore
Spark, flame, blaze
Firefighters to the rescue
As the last leaf falls
The last of them all
Naked trees
The bare branch that catches
The first sign of winter

Cheese
Danielle Beason
Amherst Regional Middle School, Grade 8

Cheese comes from milk
We drink every then and now
But before we get it,
It comes from a cow

The cow spends its day
Eating grass
But before it must grow
With the sun and its gas

You must have thought
That was the end
But you are sadly
Mistaken my friend

The sun fuel trees
This gives us oxygen
To keep us going
As we breathe in
The ideas we put out
As the air goes in
Works in our
Era of inventions

The worldwide connection
We’ve all web
Our social ways
Start to spread

When you get social
Up to date with the ever growing wheel
Then you will
Start to feel

Some feelings will make you
Shout and jump
And some make your heart go
Thump thump

Though all the good things
I said were true
We cannot forget
All the bad too

With feelings come
Anger and greed
Hatred, envy
Selfishness and need

With that come betrayal
From who you thought was a friend
Battles and wars
That seems to have no end

Then people die
Not from old age
Then we see
The mess we have made

Deaths from what’s healthy
The sun poisoning our skin
Or from the chemicals
In the air we breathe in

Though earth is a place
With Yin and Yang
But there are places beyond
We have yet to expand

But humans are
Curious to follow our hearts
That’s what has
Been there from the start
We are unique, we change
As generations come and leave
And to think this deep message I left you
All started with cheese

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Please: Look Away
(But Don’t Ever Blink)

Morgan Brennan
Amherst Regional Middle School, Grade 7

Henry Dumas
was forgotten.
A young black man
in a New York
subway station.
A writer about
The Sugar-coated
Silver-spooned lies
in those
Quicksilver trigger-fingers.
A transit officer shot him.
Blood on the concrete; the kind
You can’t wash out of skin.

Amadou Diallo—
West African
immigrant.
  • Bronx, 1999.
41 shots fired
Before he could speak.
  When you can fire
a “real-life” gun
16 bullets in a blink
There isn’t room,
for 41 accidents.

Oscar Grant was
a california man.
Taser vs.
a police’s gun.
22 years old (2 kids)
Snapped a picture
Before he died.
“Check out my insta,
HE killed a man”
New Year’s Day.
Let’s repeat
our pasts.

Tamir Rice, was
just a child.
12 year old boy
Joking and laughing and
pulling his best friend’s sister’s hair
  • Whole life ahead
With a BB gun
on the playground.
“Here come the officers”
(There for just one)
“Shot by an officer”
(And then there were none)

Sean Bell
was torn apart.
a black man
with 2 kids
and almost
a wife.
("Wedding’s tomorrow, wanna come?")
50 shots
Before a wedding
Not of champagne,
just blood.

So
When you see
The dark skinned kid
In the—
(back row, front row, middle row ... 
It doesn’t matter)
—seat next to you.
Look them in the eye.
(They’re you, can’t you tell?)
And you hear
in everyone else’s stares
“Please, look away.”
But whatever you do next,
don’t blink.
Writing Succinctly

Workshop Title:
The Short Story: Everything You Need in 250 Words or Less

Facilitator:
Deborah A. Belle, Amherst Regional Middle School

How many words does it take to tell a story? Some famous short stories had as few as six words. The goal of this workshop was to identify elements and structures of fiction and apply them to create a flash fiction piece in 250 words or less while practicing the writer’s workshop model.

Upon entering class students received a flash fiction mentor text. They read the story and underlined parts that they thought made the story work well. Student pairs then shared their highlights and referred to the describing words posted on the chalkboard. They categorized their highlights by identifying them as examples of imagery, character, theme, setting, or structure.

Following this introductory activity, students were given some directions and began writing. After spending some time on their own stories, they regrouped in pairs to share their work and exchanged feedback guided by prompts given by Ms. Belle. Before leaving the workshop, students listed three revision ideas on an “exit ticket” and a reminder of what to focus on when they polished their pieces. Many of the students went on to extend their pieces beyond 250 words.
The Chill of the Night

Brogan O’Keefe

Ware Middle School, Grade 5

You feel the chill of the night creep up your back. “Don’t go out on the streets at night,” you hear your mom’s voice saying in your head; but it doesn’t matter, she’s dead. You feel a presence as though someone is standing there, right behind you, staring.

You spin around. A kind looking woman stands there. The street light above her stops flickering. Her pale skin and white-blonde hair are the brightest things on the street.

Through the rain you notice she appears to be completely dry. “Would you like to come in, hon?” she says in her rich voice.

Behind her stood a blue ranch house you hadn’t ever noticed. “I, I… I really shouldn’t, you say. Her soft blue eyes send shooting pain to yours.

“Come on, you can’t stay out here in the rain,” she says in an even richer, more inviting voice.

“Oh well, only for a little bit.” You can’t resist the warmth of her voice.

You step inside. On the hardwood floor, lying a foot away, is your father’s body.

You crouch down next to him. You start bawling. You turn around to ask her why his missing body turned up in her house, but only the empty street is behind you.

Your father’s body is gone and so is the house. It’s just you and the cold, dim, wet street.

You’re too confused to notice the pouring rain, the street lights going out, or the party bus driving over the speed limit, heading down the street, right in your direction, in the dark with no headlights, while you are crouched in the road.
Typical Tuesday
Victoria Thresher
Ware Middle School, Grade 5

It was a typical Tuesday in the cafeteria. The athletes were talking about the upcoming games. The nerds were talking about their clubs and tests. The girly girls were gossiping. The class clowns were making ridiculous jokes.

My friends and me, we’re the athletes. “The Broncos are totally going to win against the Patriots,” I said.
“Yeah, totally,” Natalie, my best friend, agreed.
“No way,” replied Jayden.

We live in Denver. He moved here from Massachusetts. Then, one of the class clowns, Jerry, came up behind me. He was about to pour his strawberry milk on my head, but my reflexes were way too good for that. I turned around and pushed the carton in his face. That’s when it all started.

All of a sudden the food fight broke out. Food went flying everywhere. “Everyone, STOP!” a booming voice called out. It was the principal. Ketchup, peanut butter, jelly, fruit, milk, burgers. Every place in the cafeteria had food. Now THIS was going to get me a detention. “Who started this?” the principal asked. Everyone pointed at me. Then, I found myself in the office. Let me just say, there’s no happy ending to this story.

The End First
Sarah Fitts
Pioneer Valley Chinese Immersion Charter School, Grade 8

And there she was, lying in the middle of the stream. After months of looking, they had finally found her. She had just been lying there in her favorite spot the whole time. They could not believe it. It was like a bomb. Why had they never thought of this? They had been looking for at least three months, and they had not looked in the creek? It was her favorite spot. Then they realized that something was wrong. The girl was clean. They had never given her such a pretty gown.
While they were looking and wondering, they did not notice the mysterious creature lurking around, waiting for the perfect moment to jump out. Lately there had been a lot of eerie things happening in their town. No one knew who it was and they did not realize that they were going to soon find out. This mysterious creature did not have a name. Someone, or something, had told the little guy that he was going to die, so he wanted to do something that he had always wanted to do. He had always wanted to kill people or put spells on them. So that is what he did. He eavesdropped on people, he put spells on them, and he killed them.

A Day in the Life of a Cat Detective

Morgan Kochis
Pioneer Valley Chinese Immersion Charter School, Grade 8

Introduction

Meow! Hi I’m Fluffles, the tabby cat. I live in Pawston Meowsachusetts. I’m not just your typical tabby cat. I do more than just eat, sleep, and shed. I also have a secret identity. I am also Agent F.C. (or Fluffles the Cat) cat detective. Quit laughing! I am one of the most intelligent and highly trained cats out there. I can do anything a silly human can do. Well anyway, I am here to tell you about the most incredible burglaries of all time and how I single handedly caught the thief. Well, sort of caught them.

Chapter 1

It was just a normal day, and I was doing what all cats do. Hacking into computers and doing some online shopping for new investigation stuff. When all of a sudden my hologram watch lit up. “Gasp, it’s the chief,” I said and quickly answered the call.

“Agent F.C., I am calling you to do a huge favor for me. The Pawston Meowseum of Art just received a priceless gem: the Opal Cat’s Eye. It is the only one of its kind and thieves all over the world have already started planning to steal it.”

“That is terrible, chief, but what do you want me to do? I thought I wasn’t trusted around priceless gems after ... you know ... the incident.”
“We may never see the Ocean Blue sapphire again because of you, but I am willing to forgive you if you can keep the Opal Cat’s Eye safe for a full 24 hours. If you let the gem leave the meowseum, there will be severe consequences! So, do we have a deal, agent F.C? Are you up for the job?” said the chief in his raspy cat voice. I stopped myself from answering “yes.” What if I lost the Opal Cat’s Eye? Who knows what the chief would do to me!? I would be kicked out of the agency for sure. Or worse! I gulped and shivered.

“Okay,” I said hesitantly. “I’ll … I’ll do it! Look out criminals, agent F.C is in charge now,” I said a little bit too confidently. “Calm down, Fluffles, don’t get too cocky with yourself. You still have to survive a whole 24 hours without losing yet another priceless gem. Now, get to that meowseum and do the agency well. And remember, your shift doesn’t start until 9:00 p.m. Oh, and remember what I said.” And so, without another word, I was zipping through the streets of Pawston until I finally reached to meowseum.

I was already out of breath. But I couldn’t even think about my breathing issues, because I kept hearing the chief’s voice in my head saying there will be severe consequences! consequences! consequences! I shivered again. Don’t psych yourself out, Fluffles. Remember, you’re the most intelligent cat in the whole world, I thought to myself. So I casually walked into the meowseum, where I was stationed in front of the priceless opal gem. My shift didn’t start for another two hours, so I decided to go to the employees’ lounge and take a nice long cat nap. Wake me when my shift starts. And with that I was out cold. Zzzzzzzzzz.

When I woke up, I checked the Kitty Purry (Katy Perry’s cat version) alarm clock next to the kitty bed I was sleeping in. The clock read 7:00 am. “WHAT? Oh no! It’s already 7:00 am? I slept through my shift? I slept through my shift! Oh no! The Opal Cat’s Eye.” I sprinted as fast as my little cat legs could take me, right down to the podium that was supposed to hold the opal gem. My heart sank right down to the end of my tail. It was gone. The Opal Cat’s Eye was gone. And it was ALL MY FAULT!
Emerging Voices

Claire-voyant
Sage Friedman
Montessori School of Northampton, Grade 6

Sometimes, when I look back on the day, I wish I didn’t find out. Sometimes, I think I’m glad I did. After all, I was just a normal middle school girl. Normal, I told myself. I’m a normal girl. But I wasn’t. I’m not. I am completely not normal. If you think being depended upon to save everyone and everything you’ve ever known is normal, that’s what you can call me. I call it scary.

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Who knew that purple nail polish could be my downfall in life? Of course, maybe I would have found out otherwise. Of course maybe it was meant to happen anyway. But in my personal opinion, it was not going to happen without the nail polish.

It was the second day of seventh grade. And everyone knows that in seventh grade your nails need to be perfect. Especially my nails. So I was repainting my nails with sparkly purple polish, spreading each layer on carefully and smoothly. I was an expert.

Mom yelled at me from downstairs, “Claire, hurry.” I didn’t respond. “You’re going to make me late for work and your brother late for school!” I knew I was but I couldn’t go to school with wet nails.

“I’ll walk! Just go,” I snapped down at her. I knew it was my fault that I had to walk to school in the pouring rain, but I still wasn’t looking forward to it. I heard the garage door closing and I knew that I would be late to school if I didn’t go now. I waved my hands back and forth and walked to the door. No backpack. No nothing. I figured that the teachers would be mad at me for one day, nothing more, no harm done. But the consequences were worse than I imagined.

As I opened the door I started having second thoughts. It was raining so hard that I could barely see five inches through the sheet of grey. The only sound I could hear was the roaring of rain hitting the pavement, and it seemed as though it was coming down not as individual drops but as a whole, like a big monster waiting for the chance to swallow me. I realized that I had no raincoat. I checked my watch. Claire, I scolded myself, just go. It’s not that bad. But to me it
really was that bad. *I could just not go*, I realized. That would work, but Mom would be so mad at me. Still, I didn’t want to appear wet and drippy at school, with my glossy blond hair falling straight and droopy. I knew that my friends might cut me from our table and everyone would say it was strange that the beautiful Claire Sals, the most perfect girl at school (sorry, but it’s true) came in looking hideous. For now, this was my worst fear. Soon, I would look back and think this fear was really, really lame. This was the least of my problems, if only I had known.

I was pondering my decision when the choice was made for me. My cat ran at me. I stepped onto the covered porch and slammed the door. Whatever. No big deal. Except then I saw the worms. I hated worms. I still do. So I screamed when I saw their bodies littering the porch. I looked through the window and saw my cat still trying to climb the door. She was in her crazy mood. I couldn’t go in there, but I didn’t want to go out in the rain. So I stood stalk straight. Then the first strange thing to happen that day happened. The worms all started to move at the same time. For me this was more than enough. But then, something stranger happened. “Claire,” they seemed to whisper, slithering toward me, “Claire.” I was crazy scared. More scared that I had ever been in my whole life. For a second, I was too scared to move. I whimpered. The worms inched closer. And I ran.

As the cold rain first hit my face, the shock didn’t even register in my brain. I needed to get away. I don’t know how long I ran for but I was completely out of breath when I stopped to rest against a brick column. It was raining harder now, so hard I couldn’t see anything except the stones my eye was against. I took a step away from the wall. *This must be what it is like to be blind*, I thought. I put a hand out in front of me. Nothing. I took a step forward. Then another. And then I crashed into a something. A human-like something. I started to apologize, but a cold bony hand gripped my neck. I screamed but the hand muffled my mouth. “Claire,” a raspy voice whispered in my ear. And then the world went dark.

pain. “A hero is dead,” the snow whispers. And then blackness.

When I woke up, I was lying down. I could tell that there were blankets on top of me. Somehow, I couldn’t see. Yet I had this feeling, this feeling that only the people in this place could help me. I didn’t know what that … dream or whatever it was meant, but I was freaked. I needed someone, someone who wouldn’t think I was crazy, someone who knew how I felt. I felt hands on my head. I tried to speak, but my voice hurt. Then all of the sudden, the world was bright again. Who knew that grey could be so light? I felt like my eyes were bursting. Then I suddenly felt like my body was being pushed down as I remembered. I remembered everything, everything that would become my past and my future, but I didn’t know that that was what it had been. What had it meant? Who had died?

Then an old lady appeared in front of me. She said raspily, “Everything will be okay. Everyone clairvoyant feels this way on their first vision.” What was the crazy old lady talking about? “My name is Claire,” I mumbled, “but I don’t know what you’re talking about.” The woman smiled. “You,” she said, raising her eyebrows, “can tell the future. Only you can save the world.”

To be continued …

Vanished
Chloe Grimm
Montessori School of Northampton, Grade 4

The dodge balls felt wet and hard on Rose’s face. Blood dripped from her nose as she blinked back her tears. Her coach pointed to the bench looking angry. She dragged herself to the bench and moaned. She looked to the side and saw a lunch tray. She knew that 20 years ago the school gym used to be the cafeteria. That’s also when the old principal went missing. Rose stared at the old lunch tray. The stain on it was odd. It was like looking in one of those clown mirrors that changes you a little. Then the lights flickered and went out. But they still played dodgeball. It was like they didn’t notice. When the lights came back on, she vanished. And nobody even cared.
It was closing time. Val had been at the county mall talking to her friend about homework. But that was then and this was now.

Val remembered her friend as she ran. She was running and running. She hadn’t felt this way since she played man hunt with the neighborhood kids. But this was different. This time her life was at stake.

She quickly glanced behind her and saw something you only see in nightmares. A black-hooded figure with a deep rumbling breath. There was no face, only a never-ending darkness. As the figure gained on her, she let out an ear splitting scream. She didn’t want to die and wondered what happened if this figure caught her. Val knew; she knew if she was caught she would die. This thought was the motivation Val needed to keep fighting.

She knew this mall better than anyone. She knew the shortcuts and the hiding places to run to. Suddenly she became the quick agile fox she was when she played tennis. Val sped up. She knew exactly where to go. She slid, dove, and ran around shelves, T.V.s and toys. She ran into the dressing room of the general department store. She would lock this outrageous monster in and she would be safe.

Val lured the thing into a large family sized dressing room. It entered slowly, but ominously as the abyss where there should have been a face stared deep into her soul, dissecting her every thought. It knew she would fight, but it didn’t know how.

As it was just far enough into the dressing room, Val propped her hands against the two walls, jumped and kicked with the speed and power of a kangaroo. The figure went flying. It glided through the air and into the other dressing room. Val rushed at the door, adrenaline pumping through her body, like pumping air into a balloon. She grabbed the door, locked it and ran out.

Val thought as she ran. She had locked the figure away from her. She was being bullied at school and now knew she had to lock those people out of her life. Happy, Val began to feel safe when she heard that rumbling breath she knew too well, laughing as it croaked, “Going somewhere?”
The Game
Hailee Enriquez
Maurice A. Donahue Elementary School, Grade 8

It was only 25 minutes before the game. I was getting my volleyball shorts and jersey on. The whole team was down the hall. They were waiting for the bus to come get us to take us to the playoffs. *If we win this, we play the championships against the Peck School*, I thought as the bus was picking us up, and we all begin talking about our nerves. I was not the only one who feels pre-game jitters.

The bus ride was quick, like always. My mind was racing. I didn’t want to mess up. I kept going through previous games in my mind, trying to see how I could improve my game. We walked in. Coach Wyse immediately told us to start warming up. We did our stretches as normal, picked partners, and bumped the ball back and forth. I practiced my serving, considering it is not the best.

As the game began, my mother and sister walked in. *Oh, great!* *More nerves!* I was in the starting six. Selena served, and I got into game mode. We scored a couple of points, but every other point up to half time went to the other team. In the huddle, Coach Wyse told us to not stress, and said, “We got this!” But our hopes were slowly decreasing with every minute.

Then the game got more exciting. We began to catch up slowly. Ana, Shania, and Selena and I were giving the game all we had. Suddenly, the ball came to me and I froze. …

The Mysterious Object
Alejandro Rodriguez
Maurice A. Donahue Elementary School, Grade 8

The teacher found something unusual about the cafeteria. It was quiet. Too quiet. He wondered in his head how this could be, then said, “What’s wrong with this?”

The children were terrified. The looks on their faces looked like something bad had happened. On student exclaimed, “Look at the lunch tray! There is something on there!”
The principal looked right away. He walked towards the lunch tray and spotted a green substance on the tray. It looked like a heart that was beating. But it was green! It kept on moving back and forth, up and down. One of the students fainted. The principal had to check to see if she was alive; she was unconscious. After telling everyone to stay put, he called the FBI.

Instead of the FBI arriving, there were men wearing black suits and fedora hats. The men’s appearance looked alien. Someone wondered if they were really aliens. The men did not give their names, they did not show ID. The principal was too panicked to care. He said, “Help us! There is something fishy happening here!”

The men came right towards the cafeteria to look at the strange substance. They inspected it closely. They said it did not look of this world. “How would you know?” said the principal.

One of the men answered, “I know where this came from. It is from my planet. They teleported it here.” Just as quick as they answered, the two men and the mysterious object teleported with a device out of the cafeteria. In the same instant that they were teleporting, they brainwashed the children and the principal, so that all of them would forget what happened.

They forgot to brainwash the janitor. He called the police right away. The police came and investigated. It turns out that the substance was the core of a faraway planet. The only thing the police and janitor could not figure out was what the substance was made of, why it was brought here, and how the aliens teleported.

Revenge for a Stolen Soul
Alexandria Barnard-Davignon
SABIS International Charter School, Grade 8

Pain coursed through my body as I hit the cold, hard cement. The only other feeling I had, besides pain, was hate. Hate for the Invaders, hate for my family, and hate for myself. Never would I be the same as before, before the Takeover, before the Mind Swipe. All I could do now was hate. I was an empty shell of my former self. There was a cold, empty space where my soul should have been. “Congratulations, Invaders, you have succeeded in turning me into another one of your
mindless robots,” I screamed out loud, at the top of my lungs.

With a painful push I sat up, an inhuman noise escaping from my mouth. After a few, excruciating moments I stood up. I was soon walking slowly, my head reeling. Where I was going, I had no idea. The only thing that I knew was that I wanted to get revenge, revenge for taking my life. Now I was stripped of my life, my humanity, my soul. I wanted to kill the people who did this to me, even if they had given me life. I wanted to watch their dark blood ooze out of their bodies, the life draining from their eyes. I wanted to smell their metallic blood as it makes contact with the air. I wanted to see their lifeless corpses swimming in coppery pools of their own blood. I wanted to get my revenge. With revenge in mind, I now knew where I was going. I then slowly limped, trying to find my way to that place, that awful, wretched place.

I soon came to that place, the awful one. I walked up the creaky steps to the porch. Once I reached the top of the steps I popped open one of the many floorboards and saw that it was still there. By it I mean my gun, my precious, precious gun. The weight of the cold, black handgun brought a wicked smile to my face. I then confidently strode into that place, that home, my home. My limp was suddenly gone, signaling that I was becoming even more of what they had turned me into.

With a sickening smirk I pointed the gun at them, the wicked people. “Hi mom, hi dad. Miss me?” My “mother” shrieked in terror while my dad just stood there, shocked. “Oh my dear, sweet mother, did you miss me? Or did you think that you would never see me again after what YOU did,” I screamed, swinging the gun around. I ignored their cries and their pleas to stop and calm down. “No! No, you don’t have the right to do that after what YOU did,” I seethed.

“Please, please, baby, it was for your own good,” my “mother” cried.

“What? Sending me to the Institute was for MY own good?” I cackled.

“Well, you old hag, you’ll get what is coming to you, you’ll get it all right,” I mumbled to myself while turning around to head out of the old, worn down door. “Oh, and one more thing,” I said while turning around, “enjoy the Underworld.” The force of the blow knocked me off of my feet as I fired the gun. Then, everything soon went black.
Invisible
Isabel Murphy
SABIS International Charter School, Grade 8

Being in the principal’s office would scare normal people. But not me. I’m here at least once a week. But this time, this time was different. The room felt colder, almost dark. I turn my head to the clock behind me. I’ve been here for what seems like ages.

The lights went out, and I was alone in the dark, or so I thought. A glass vase went flying through the room, shattering on the wall. Her desk was cleared with a loud BOOM, making me jump out of my seat. I was lifted out of the chair, and shoved into the door, choking. Gasping for air, I knew I couldn’t have, but for any chance at breath, I reached for my neck to pry whatever was holding me there away. But nothing was.

As the door tried to open, I was dropped, buckling under my own weight down to the floor, coughing my heart out on my hands and knees. The lights flickered back on and everything was back to normal, well almost everything.

The door slammed open, and a crowd of people gathered around the door and gasped. Some wept, some cried right there, some smiled, and some even thought it was a prank. The principal tried to push through the crowd of students and faculty.

“Hey let me through. Go back to class. I can’t see.”

When she made it to the doorway, she finally understood what everyone was looking at. And the sight horrified her.

Don’t Trust Yasmine
Kenyatta Davis
Amherst Regional Middle School, Grade 7

“Chloe ... CHLOE!!!!!!!!” I yelled into the phone.

“Mhm oh hello, Roxy?” Chloe questioned.

“Ugh, finally! Don’t you know how many times I called you? This is like the tenth time!” I exclaimed.

“Wow Roxy, I know, but I was busy” Chloe stated.

I chuckled then stopped. I heard something. “Hold on Chlo, I
think something is in my house.” I put my ear to the door. Then I heard it. I wanted to scream, but I couldn’t, the black ooze was coming into the closet I was hiding in. I couldn’t climb the crate fast enough. It grabbed my foot and pulled me down then everything went black.

I woke up cold. I opened my eyes. It was bright, too bright. I closed my eyes and opened them again. I blinked then the light wasn’t so bright. I rolled over and came face to face with some human type thing that was breathing really heavily into the glass that was surrounding it.

*Ew, ew, ew!* It was just too gross. I got up and looked around. I saw a glass floor and gold walls so shiny I was able to see my own reflection. On the wall were guns and weapons of many sorts. The door opened, and in came this girl who had red eyes and dark purple hair.

“Oh you’re awake,” she chuckled a sort of sinister chuckle.

“What is this place? What are you? Why am I here?” I questioned. I was full of questions, but those seemed like the most important ones.

“Full of questions, are we now?” she chuckled again, then she stopped and stared at me for a while until a tall man with midnight blue hair and eyes walked into the room.

“She’s awake, I see, and talking. That’s good.” His voice was like smooth violet or like a song. As I was daydreaming, I snapped back into reality. He was in my face staring at my eyes. It startled me a little bit that he was staring at me that much. “You know her eyes are a really boring brown while ours are very extraordinary colors. It’s very surprising, I say, very …” He turned to the girl with the dark purple hair, but she wasn’t paying attention. “Stacy … STACY!!!”

Stacy stopped fiddling with a box and looked at him. “What, Luke? What do you want?” Her voice was seeping with venom. I felt very uncomfortable in this situation, and I also really wanted to leave but didn’t even know what to do about it, so I just stood there watching the two.

*Are they dating?* I thought.

“NO, WE ARE NOT DATING!!” Stacy yelled in my direction.

*Oh, snap. She can read my mind. Why do I keep thinking she is just going to get mad at me? But OMG! Luke’s eyes are really blue, it’s surprising.*

“Hey um ... girl, what’s your name?” Luke was looking at me as
he said this.

“M-m-my n-name is R-Roxy.” *Crap, I’m stuttering again.*

“Yes, you are stuttering Roxy. Are you nervous?” This time it was Luke who spoke.

“Can you both read minds or something?” I questioned.

“Yes, we both can read minds,” Stacy spoke.

“So … um, Luke, you heard what I said or more of thought?” I was looking at the floor as I said this.

“Why, of course I heard what you thought, and Stacy will only get mad if you are thinking something bad about her. Other than that she won’t say anything,” Luke explained.

*Wow. Did he really have to explain it like I should’ve already have known it? …*

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**Zandra**

Allison Brau

Amherst Regional Middle School, Grade 7

Melinda pulled her cloak more tightly around her shoulders. The rain pounded around us, soaking our hair. We were standing at the top of a mountain during a thunderstorm. It was a stupid idea, I know, but Melinda loves the rain, and, well, she’s the kind of person that can make the worst of ideas sound like the best ones, with her dare devil smile. We were painting the storm, so that we could “harness the power of it” or, to be more accurate, *Melinda* was painting.

I think that what I was doing could be described as blobbing, and if that isn’t a word, then it should be, if only to describe my gruesome attempt at painting. I think there’s a real name for what we were doing, I vaguely remember Melinda mentioning it, maybe … hud paent? Barva magie? Something like that. Anyway, Melinda offered to teach me. She had decided that harnessing the power of *lightning* would be a great idea, and so here I was. I have to admit that it’s a good idea, but not a good idea to do yourself.

Melinda and I were standing in a cave looking out on the storm, but I was still drenched. I could feel the static in the air, and I was very aware that Melinda could no doubt electrocute me without
batting an eyelash if she had wanted to. Her painting was gorgeous. She managed to use the pouring rain that was dripping onto her painting to her advantage, making the storm on her paper seem even more real and wild. Me, on the other hand, I either had too much water so that the paint ran down the page, or I used to little and the paint clumped together in a brown blob. I am pretty new to this whole magic thing, but I’m pretty sure that isn’t a good excuse for the mess on my paper. I honestly cannot understand how anyone could make something so pretty as Melinda seemed to do easily.

I looked at the sky again, trying to permanently print the image on the inside of my eyelid. Dark storm clouds rose above me, casting shadows on the dimly lit ground. The rain came down so hard that it seemed like it was possessed, and for all I knew, it was. Ineffectively, of course, I tried to draw that into the painting, to entangle it in the paper. Lightning cracked and flashed against the dark sky. I counted the seconds like I had been taught: one Mis- … thunder rumbled. Wow. The heart of the storm was only a half mile away!

“Melinda?” I said, turning to her. “Are you sure this is safe?” I knew I sounded a little like a crybaby, but I didn’t really feel like getting electrocuted today. Maybe another time; but I’m not quite as brave as Melinda. No, that’s a lie. I am nowhere near as tough as Melinda.

“Sure it is … but you know, there are monsters that like to live in places like this,” she said, teasing me.

“Stop it!” I said, shoving her, pretending to sound hurt. “You know I have bad memories involving monsters. One time, a monster attacked me from under my bed. It had red eyes on a pair of antennae, scales, a serpent tail, spikes, ten tentacle-like arms, and I was nothing if not scared. You should have seen me. But you know what I did? I wacked it with a lamp right on its pointy head and it vanished, just like that. Still, I have been scared of monsters ever since.”

“Oh, you!” Melinda said, laughing. “Sometimes you crack me up, Zandra. But there are demons that like caves and thunderstorms, so watch out,” she added, looking serious.

“What!” I said, stricken. I really hope she’s kidding. “When I signed up for the whole shadow stopper—”

“We’re called the Anino Marufi,” Melinda corrected.

“—business they didn’t tell me that I could actually be attacked by a demon!”
“Look. Calm down. Don’t worry. Most of them don’t have enough brains to know whether you are an Anino Marufi or a rock. The rest can’t stay here for more than a few hours. They’re usually nothing to be scared of.” Melinda looked amused.

“That’s easy for you to say!” I said, indignantly. “You’ve been an Anino what’s-it-fi for all of your life! I just got told that my parents are part of this thing a month ago when they were released from their banishing or whatever! I think that I have a reason to be startled!”

“Yeah. You do. But the best way to be less startled is to learn how to defeat all the demons that ever give you the slightest bit of trouble. So let’s see what you have for your painting so far!” Melinda responded, getting a little bit frustrated.

Uh oh. As I was saying before, my painting could definitely NOT shoot lightning or anything. I tried to somewhat subtly move my painting away from her. “I-I’m not quite done?”

“Come on. It can’t be that bad!” Melinda strode over to my painting. “Oh! It’s, um,” she sputtered. “Mine was just like that when I first started?” It was very clear that hers had not been just like that when she first started at all.

“What am I doing wrong?” I asked her, embarrassed. “I don’t understand.”

“Well. I think you should just think of it as more abstract. It carries more of the feel of the storm than what the storm looks like, and that is sometimes more important. If it doesn’t work to add magic to it, then you can just try again.” Melinda grabbed a gnarled twig out of her cloak and started to wave it around. “Look. To be honest, if you add anything to that painting it will probably melt, so let’s just get started. Do what I do.”

“Okay.” I grabbed my own wand and tried to copy her.

She swished her wand in a circle, then pointed it at her painting. “Antända! Do it like this.” Melinda swished her wand again and said, “Antända!” It seemed as if bright gold lightning actually flowed out of her painting and got absorbed into her wand.

I tried to do the same thing. Swishing my wand around and pointing it right at my sorry excuse for a painting, I cried, “Antända!” This time, purple energy shot right out of the paper and streamed into my wand. It was like raw power or something. “Wow.” I never thought that would happen.

Melinda stared. “Okay. I wasn’t expecting that. Now, you can
point your wand at what you want to electrocute, and say: släppa lös!”

I harnessed my energy and pointed my wand at the cave wall. “Släppa lös!” Nothing happened. “Släppa lös!” I said again, getting frustrated. “Why won’t it work? Släppa lös!” Purple, green, red, blue, it all surged out of my wand like a riptide. The electricity slammed into the cave wall and it crashed down on us, the sound of the debris clattering onto the rock floor joining with the thunder outside. The last thing I saw before I blacked out was a crack of lightning charring the ground beside me.

When I awoke, Melinda’s face was swimming above me.

“Where am I?” I said sluggishly.

“You’re in the sick bay, because you got half electrocuted, and a cave collapse on you. No! Don’t get up! Remember? You had a cave collapse on you? You’ll probably be staying here for a while.”

Oh. Yippee. Now I remember. “What about you? Didn’t a cave also collapse on you too?”

“Yes it did, but I had a protection charm on.”

“Why didn’t I ha-”

“But that’s not the point!” Melinda continued excitedly. “What you did last week, that was amazing! I have never ever seen anyone do anything like that!”

“What do you mean? Last week?”

“I forgot to tell you. You’ve been in the sick bay for a week,” Melinda said apologetically.

“Ugh.”

“But you know, that magic you did, well, you might have some potential after all, and I mean it.” Melinda was beaming, and for the first time in a long time, I grinned too.

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**A Party of Demons**

*Nora Mulvehill*

*Montessori School of Northampton, Grade 6*

The party was in full swing when there was a bone-rattling knock at the door. The musicians stopped playing, the dancers stopped waltzing, and the room fell silent. Then a scream rang out in the tense, quavering air.
A stranger stepped into the room, blood dripping from eerily sharp teeth. “You shall complete my … hmm, how do I put this? … little project,” he growled, glaring at Mary. She could feel his hot breath on her cheek. It smelled like rotten animals.

She pressed her back to the wall, feeling for the cold window. She had to get out, escape to the woods. The walls seemed to be pressing around her, the room swirling before her. Mary screamed as all of the party-goers in their gay dresses and tailcoats grew fangs, crouched, turned to monsters.

A dinner plate came whirling over her head, a deadly weapon. She ducked, and it hit the window. Bits of china and glass flew everywhere. Mary squeezed through the hole that the plate had made and sprang out into the cool night air, her dress tearing on the ragged glass.

Mary ran for her life, knowing that every footfall might be her last. The dark line of trees drew closer. She ran faster toward them, her mother’s warnings of dangers within fading with every panicked breath.

*One more step, just one more,* she repeated to herself over and over. She stumbled over roots and logs until finally she felt safe from the monsters.

She sagged against a tree trunk and looked around at the dark woods. An owl hooted. Then Mary realized something very important. She was lost.

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**These Words Will Never Be Erased**

*Hannah D’Alessandro*

*Amherst Regional Middle School, Grade 7*

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I reread my writing and immediately hate it. I desperately try to erase my words, but I rub the paper too fast, and it rips. I feel so annoyed with myself, and my life, and my family. I try to write this down, but my words sound shallow. How can something you love so much be so hard? I rip the page I’ve been working on out of my journal and crumple it up.

If Mama was here she would know exactly how to help me, but Mama is not here. Mama used to listen to my writing. She would tell
me why she loved it; she would tell me why she loved me.

Daddy doesn’t support my writing much. He tells me if I want to make a life for myself, I need to practice some real skills. I tell my brain to stop thinking about Daddy, because I know it will not help me write.

I stop my writing, put my pencil down, and stand up from my desk. I glance around my room, and my eye catches the picture of Mama hanging near my door. My brain starts yelling at me, because I know what to write. I will write about Mama.

Words begin flowing out of my pencil before my conscious mind registers what they are. I write for hours. I write about Mama, and how she died, and why she died, and how I loved her, and on and on until there are no words left.

I stand up from my desk and read my words aloud so Mama can hear, and God can hear, and I can hear. I read so that the words are said. They can’t be taken back. These words will never be erased.
Writing to Be Heard

Workshop Title:
Songwriting in Response to Learning

Facilitator:
Michael Lawrence-Riddell, Amherst Regional Middle School

Throughout history, music has been an incredibly powerful force in the world. Songwriting has been one of the most effective ways for humans to communicate information, ideas, feelings, and stories. Music and other forms of art are valid forms of communicating complex ideas. In fact, clearly communicating complex ideas and themes through music often requires more abstract and complicated thinking than writing an essay, for example.

It was requested that students come to the workshop with an idea of what they might want to write about and were given the following prompts to consider: a book read recently, a scientific concept, a current event or issue receiving media attention, a significant time in history or a historical figure.

In this session, students were exposed to and analyzed music that specifically conveys information about “academic” subjects. The song selections included both well-known recording artists, along with some of Michael Lawrence-Riddell’s independently written and recorded music. After discussing these examples, students had an opportunity to research their topics online. They practiced some prewriting strategies, and then began writing their own song lyrics, with music in mind, as a way to share their own thoughts with the world.
“Me”
Ramona Williams
Pioneer Valley Chinese Immersion Charter School, Grade 8

What am I supposed to do
If I know you and not me?
What am I supposed to do
When everyone is accomplishing everything
And I’ve got nothing to show?

When I look in the mirror
I can’t see the actual me.
Why am I in the mirror?
The girl I don’t want to ever be.

(music starts)

Chorus:

What about me, me, me, me?
If I see a checkbox,
Racial paper,
I’ve got to check off multiple
Or else it doesn’t seem fair.

What about me, me, me, me?
The girl that can’t see right.
Can’t learn write.
The ghetto girl from the South Side.

What about me, me, me, me?
The girl grew up in the suburb life.
The white life was right.
Even looking at my blackish self didn’t feel right.

The art’s the way I see beautiful
But what if it’s been tainted
Change’n
Accord’n to the demographics of my situation?
My name means protecting hands  
But that doesn’t mean the world doesn’t protect me.  
If I’m feel’n oppression  
That doesn’t mean I can talk to anyone.  
Cause trust me, I ain’t feel’n the lov’n

Chorus:

What about me, me, me, me?  
If I see a checkbox,  
Racial paper,  
I’ve got to check off multiple,  
Or else it doesn’t seem fair.

What about me, me, me, me?  
The girl that can’t see right.  
Can’t learn write.  
The ghetto girl from the South Side.

What about me, me, me, me?  
The girl grew up in the suburb life.  
The white life was right.  
Even looking at my blackish self didn’t feel right.

No one expects me to be Asian.  
But I guess that’s just the bi-racial,  
Unprivileged feel’n.

Pink is really sexist, all right.  
But when you mix it with green you get the  
AKA, black queens.  
Who are all still feel’n the pain  
Of the student loan bills.  
For get’n a life  
And out of the ghetto.

I’m an artist, yes  
I paint most of the time  
What I see beautiful in life.
But now, when i look back in time,
I despise seeing
That what I was believ’n
Com’n from my own eyes.

Chorus:

What about me, me, me, me?
If I see a checkbox,
Racial paper,
I’ve got to check off multiple,
Or else it doesn’t seem fair.

What about me, me, me, me?
The girl that can’t see right.
Can’t learn write.
The ghetto girl from the South Side.

What about me, me, me, me?
The girl grew up in the suburb life.
The white life was right.
Even looking at my blackish self didn’t feel right.

If I Ruled the World {rap}
Danielle Plankey
Herberg Middle School, Grade 7

If I ruled the world imagine that everyone was
treated the same but loved for their differences.
Imagine the billionaire living in the house you drive
by on the bus everyday was equal to you.

Everyone had a car
Not stuck wasting their lives away alone at a bar
Friends with everyone’s sons
Put away the violence, put away the guns  
Life’s about fun  
Not always up and on the run  
Be who you are  
Make it and make it far  
Imagine a place you don’t go to bed hungry  
Because some reason about not having enough money  
Everyone has a job  
No need to go out and rob  
Everyone is equal  
History don’t play back like some sort of sequel

If I ruled the world, what a place it would be  
A place for you, a place for me  
A place you could be yourself  
And not be judged by anybody else

Everyone is up on their feet  
No one is living out on the street  
Life is hard  
Trying to play it out, playing out your cards  
Everyone speaks up  
Without getting time or beat up  
Believe in your faith  
Without having any sort of hate  
A place where we can all hold hands and sing  
Marry who you want, marry with a ring  
Outside different races align  
Each and own, one of each kind  
The blood we share it's all the same  
Scars are worn with pride  
Giving thanks to the men and women that died  
So don’t feel no shame  
Life is not a measurement of time  
No one leaves no one behind
We brothers
Brothers of mankind
There is no side
There is nothing to hide
Nothing to deny
No reason to have to cry

If I ruled the world, what a place it would be
A place for for you, a place for me
A place you could be yourself
And not be judged by anybody else

My point to this story
No matter what your age if you forty
Everyone got what you’ve got
Nobody laying deathbed, lying on a cot
You ain’t left to rot
Cause you not good enough for society
Not separated into sororities
Nobody got to hide from me
You don't got to pay a fee
Yo, what a life it would be

If I ruled the world, what a place it would be
A place for for you, a place for me
A place you could be yourself
And not judged by anybody else
If I ruled the world what a place it would be
   A place for for you, a place for me
   A place you could be yourself
   And not judged by anybody else
If I ruled the world, what a place it would be
   A place for for you, a place for me
   A place you could be yourself
   And not judged by anybody else

If I ruled the world, imagine that everyone was
treated the same but loved for their differences.
Imagine the billionaire living in the house you drive
by on the bus everyday was equal to you.

What if I were you and you were me?
   If you ruled the world,
   What would you do?
Writing to Describe

Workshop Title:
Writing Smashed with Action

Facilitator:
Rebecca Belarge, Pioneer Valley Chinese Immersion Charter School

Crash by Jerry Spinelli has an epic food fight filled with amazing verbs. It goes, “Mike took the banana from his tray and smacked me with it. I took the hot dog out of his roll and wiener-whipped him. He grabbed my hot dog and boinked me on the head.”

The goal of this workshop was for students to write action-packed scenes with a focus on using vivid verbs to create funny, serious, dramatic or poignant short stories.

The opening activity introduced examples of vivid verbs as pairs of students walked around the room on a scavenger hunt for the descriptions that matched their two randomly assigned verbs. After the hunt, each team had about ten minutes to collaboratively write a short scene using their vivid verbs to read aloud for the group.

For further inspiration, students read some excerpts of action packed writing from some popular Young Adult Literature authors before beginning the drafting of their own scenes. The workshop concluded with a read-aloud and feedback session.
Hollywood Hurts
Natalie Silverio
Ware Middle School, Grade 5

I was there! Hollywood. My heart pounded as I ran through the streets. SMACK! I hit someone in the shoulder. I thought they were putting their hand down to help me up, but nope. Thwack! They smashed me right in the face. A hand reached down and picked me up by my collar. I suddenly realized this wasn’t the same guy I ran into. That guy was way younger. I was standing in the middle of a bunch of bodyguards! “I’ll take that as a hello,” I said like a mouse.

Just then an awesome man came into sight. Jared Blackfield. That’s right! The famous Jared Blackfield.

“I’m sorry to have knocked you out, dude,” he said sheepishly. “I thought you were trying to hurt me.”

Jared then led me through his gigantic house nearby. I think what he did next was on purpose. He tripped me, but as I fell he grabbed me and said, “Ha ha, you are literally falling for me.” He chuckled.

“You’re putting me under a spell, but I can’t fall for someone this quickly.” He then walked away.

I fell to my knees and sobbed. Suddenly, a loud noise came from the next room. I got up, wiped my tears, and ran. I saw him. Still. Dead still. I jumped down to where he was and twisted my ankle, but didn’t care. “Please don’t make me do CPR!” I shouted. Blood dripped from his mouth. Then he began to speak. “Han, han … Dagobah … Ben!… Ben!!” I rolled my eyes, wondering why he was quoting Star Wars. I picked him up and poked him in the head really hard. He woke up startled.

“You came for me,” he laughed.

“I may or may not have been crying,” I said, blushing.

Jared and I were then escorted to a room down the hallway by the bodyguards. I hoped our time together would never end. But the time had come. Jared hugged me. He looked sad.

“Well, the end has come,” he said sorrowfully.

I took out a piece of paper and wrote my number on it. “Here. Call me.” I went in close to him and kissed him on the cheek. He blushed, left the room and closed the door. I smiled too.
The Football Practice
*Jesse Cygan*
*Ware Middle School, Grade 5*

It was a normal day at football practice until John saw his best friend Mike walk onto the field. John said mean words to Mike because he was unable to make it to practice the day before. He felt that Mike had a dumb reason for not being there. Mike defended himself by chucking many footballs at his best friend. John tried to catch the fast moving footballs, but catching was not his specialty since he was a running back.

Coach Bob ran onto to the field yelling at the two boys as loud as he could. He exclaimed, “If the two of you don’t stop this ridiculous behavior, then I will be forced to alert your parents as soon as practice is over.” This stopped the boys until their fourth drill.

During the fourth drill, John was running up the field to catch a deep pass while Mike was covering him. As the quarterback began the play, John started running while Mike stubbornly stood in his way. John plowed into him, full force, helmet to helmet, and a fight immediately broke out.

Coach Bob sprinted over to break up the fight, before someone really got hurt. He screamed in his loudest voice possible, “I will be telling your parents what you have done today and how you messed up practice big time.” Before Coach Bob walked back to the sidelines, he sadly announced, “And I thought you two were good buddies.”

Fire in the Water
*Noah Speek*
*Pioneer Valley Chinese Immersion Charter School, Grade 8*

Petty officer William Kraiser stood silently at the rail of the Tirpitz, frigid sea spraying into his face, and a chilling breeze whipped past, making him cold to the bone and getting his overcoat quite wet. This was normal to Kraiser, well, except the below freezing temperatures. Why’d it have to be so goddamn cold?! Kraiser had been to many cold places in his naval career, but never anywhere this cold. He sighed, his breath coming out in a cloud of white steam. He
had checked the thermostat earlier this morning and it had been negative ten degrees Fahrenheit. Kraiser swore that if it dropped a degree lower, his breath would just freeze. He could live with the extreme cold, as a combat veteran, he was just glad he wasn’t dead, but it wasn’t the best experience to wake up every morning and have this kind of weather awaiting you. It was the Baltic sea, so what could you expect?

So Kraiser just stood there, watching the waves as Tirpitz churned through the water, crushing glaciers in its path. The mighty warship was the new kid on the block and the pinnacle of German engineering. Her sister ship, Bismarck, was somewhere in the Atlantic right now, sinking British supply ships. Tirpitz’s crew was doing pretty much the same, except with the Russians. At least while he was out here freezing, he could have some comfort in watching some Soviet ships be blown out of the water while he was at it. And get to be on this mighty ship, that was a pro to all this as well.

Kraiser had grown pretty fond of Tirpitz the more time he spent on it. He was almost as fond of the battleship as any pretty looking girl back home in Germany, which he knew sounded a bit weird, but Tirpitz was his and his crewmates, so you had to make do with what you had. And what they had was pretty great. She was a well-made ship, sleek and new, fitted with Germany’s finest naval combat technology, with eight, fifteen-inch guns and some G7a T1 torpedo launchers added for good measure, very feisty. She was bit on the heavy side at 52,600 tonnes when fully equipped and loaded, but was also obedient, handling very well in the choppy waters of the Baltic. Basically, if Tirpitz were the women that the crew referred to her as, boys would be all over her. Kraiser tried to imagine that, but then stopped himself. Damn it, I’ve been at sea to long! He thought, chuckling. You could tell you were going a bit loopy when you started imagining ships as women.

“Enjoying the view, officer?” Kraiser looked over and almost had a heart attack.

“Y-yes sir, skipper!” Kraiser responded to his superior officer, snapping up in a salute. Beside Kraiser was a man who was in his mid-sixties, in full ceremonial outfit, and wearing a tight lipped smile, otherwise known as Admiral Erich Raeder.

“What have you been thinking about out here, something troubling you, officer? Normally, on dreary days like this, men like
you would be sheltering below decks, except those who need to be at their posts, such as you.”

“Yes sir, sorry, sir. I have just been thinking about the ship, sir.” Ack! Time must’ve went by fast! Kraiser had forgotten it was his shift!

“It’s fine. I’ll give this one to you, but next time I’ll have to do something about it. Not that I have anything personally against you, it’s just that I need to maintain discipline. Besides, there hasn’t been a Russian in sight for hours now.” The admiral paused, clearing his throat. “As for the ship, yes, she’s a fine one, isn’t she?” he said while patting the railing.

“Yes sir,” Kraiser responded.

Raeder chuckled, “I take it you're not much of a talker?”

“Yes sir.”

“Well, I’ll be off then. You should get to that post of yours!” The admiral said, walking off towards the command tower. “You’re a good gunner, Kraiser. Wouldn’t want to lose you.”

“Yes sir, thank you, sir.” Kraiser hurried over to the turret where he opened a doorway and took the steps two at a time up to the turret officer’s room, waving to the powder and shell loaders as he went by, who in return gave Kraiser a salute, except for the other petty officers, who promptly waved back. He arrived at the turret officer’s room, opening the door quickly where he was greeted by salutes.

“As you were.” Kraiser sighed, to which the men in the room resumed their work. “How are we doing in here?” the gun commander asked.

“Everything is well, sir,” the gun rammer replied.

“Good,” Kraiser said, crossing his arms behind his back, pacing around the compartment. Life on the Tirpitz had been a little boring lately, and Kraiser had been hoping for some action. He knew it brought the possibility of his death, but what was the purpose of a war if you couldn’t be doing something actively to defend your country or attack another’s? It was an important job all the same, and he still had stayed vigilant throughout the seemingly very long days. The radio suddenly crackled, and Admiral Raeder’s voice came through. “Men, RAF bombers have been spotted in the area by our radar as well as our scout plane. I advise you ready yourself for an attack. For the Fatherland!” And with that, the radio transmission stopped. The crew in the gun compartment sat there in silence for a moment, just staring
dumbfoundedly at the radio. Kraiser the cracked his knuckles, break-
ing the silence.

“All right then, men, LET’S GET THIS PARTY STARTED! FOR THE FATHERLAND!” The crew cheered and got to work.

**Unforeseen**

*Mary Fitts*

*Pioneer Valley Chinese Immersion Charter School, Grade 8*

Standing at the edge if the cliff, Ocard watched her pursuers. She didn’t have anywhere to go, nor did she have material so she could climb down the steep face of the cliff. The only thing she had to protect herself with was her sword.

It was a deep blue sapphire color with the hilt covered in silver. It was one yard long and always hung at her side. She took her sword out of her goblin-made sheath and got ready for the attack.

They came at her harder than she expected. When the blows were swung at her, they brought more power than she could handle. The axes swung at her and cut at her outer flesh, like she was just a piece of meat. She tried to dodge through the axes. The pain of her torn flesh was unbearable. Only two days ago she had been a regular elf that ran a smooth and non-painful life, but now she was living the exact opposite of that.

Even at the disadvantage of five to one, Ocard managed to get on the other side of her pursuers where she would not fall off the cliff. She swung her sword, managing to back up a few of her pursuers before she dashed away as fast as her short legs would carry her. After the pursuers had gotten themselves out of a tangle, they surged after her. Their muscled legs pounded the ground, seeming to make the ground shake.

As Ocard kept running, she felt a jolt of panic run through her as she saw what had been the cause of the booming she had heard earlier. Her pursuers had blasted the bridge she previously crossed when she ran from them, making it so that all six of them were trapped on an island of stone.

She thought desperately for something to do, but all she could come up with was jumping off the island onto the jagged landscape of
rock below. She wouldn’t be able to do anything else in the small amount of time she had. She decided to jump. She would die either way, from her pursuers or the jump, unless the lord would miraculously save her.

She jumped off the island, holding her breath and trying not to think of the rocky ground below her, but the rocky ground never came. She tried to open her eyes or at least move, but she couldn’t. Finally, after a minute had passed, she tried to move again. This time she was able to move.

When she opened her eyes, she was stunned by what she saw. After observing the forest and towering castle in front of her, she stood up on the stone bridge that she had fallen on. Even though the bridge’s ground was smooth, she was still surprised she had not felt the ground when she hit it. She looked around again and saw her pursuers coming across the far side of the bridge.

She dashed towards the castle, not caring if she was trespassing, and noticed an open window. Surprisingly seeing no guards, she jumped off the bridge and leaped for the window sill of the open window. She slipped but caught hold of a vine that was on the side of the castle wall. She looked out the window and saw how high she was. She screeched at how high she was, but now was not the time to think about how high she was. She hopped into the room, which looked to be a parlor, and raced through the room. Spotting a doorway, she dashed through it.

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**Death and Fire, Smoke and Ash**  
*Serik White*  
*Pioneer Valley Chinese Immersion Charter School, Grade 8*

Shadows of those long dead. Whispers of pain, fear, and suffering. But most of all, darkness. Darkness of the soul, and of the night. Restless nights of torment and agony. For only I can hear the secrets of the dead. I don’t seem like much on the outside: white, sunken eyes, dark clothes, black hair. Picture a raven in flight. Sunlight bounces off of those glossy black feathers, a hunter’s eye gleaming at you. That is the color of my hair. My mother used to call me Raven because of that. As far as personality, I’m as dark as the night. If you
could see my soul, you’d get lost in the malevolence. You’d drown in the darkness, gasping for air, feebly reaching out to me as your hands found nothing. And I would stand there and watch, smiling as you choked on inky swirls of hate, as you died slowly. Your corpse would rot there, degrading in the dank prison of my heart, until you would be naught but a memory.

The night is my realm; the dead, my soldiers. Nyx is an empire few have explored, for in it lurk your darkest fears. Ghouls, shambling heaps of degraded flesh and rotten tatters, roam the countryside. Spirits, lawful and chaotic take to the skies, wisps of mist on the horizon. Werewolves, traveling in packs, howling with rage are the rulers of the forest. And the most feared of all, vampires. Able to meld with the general populace by day, at night they transform into translucent ivory horrors, with fangs as long as your longest finger, blood-red eyes, and the ability to fly. Mortals occasionally glimpse us, and turn us into legends. Myths made by mortals are based on truth, if not completely accurate. We are turned into tales by those who have seen us. But the overlords of evil, demons, rarely mentioned, we are the monsters under the bed, the eyes of Hell. Lesser, greater, the Princes. Our enemies, the angels, fight us with armies of light. They seek purification, we seek chaos. They seek to destroy us, and us them. We refuse to let them win. We refuse to die.

I have survived this long, pretending to be a mortal. To most, I'm an orphan, but the Prince of Hell is my sire. I was sent here to eradicate angels. A disciple of death and fire. A sovereign of smoke and ash.

I inherited my father’s powers, and nearly nothing from my mother, just her hair. Years ago, she died on the highway, driving her Honda Civic. Her body was never found, which leads me to suspect my father, come to claim her. Once one passes into death, their soul belongs to the Demon, not the Devil as commonly believed. As one who has traveled the nine realms, and seen countless worlds, not one of them has a sprite named the Devil.

School. My junior year has been uneventful, at least until now. When the new kid walked through the door, halfway through the year, my life was turned upside down. A brilliant halo surrounding his eyes blinded me. Blazing wings unfurled from his back, spreading light across my face. Unbearable warmth, an aura of the divine. An angel. Supposedly the physical embodiment of morality. For all the glory
they seem to own, the lies about them are many. They are supposed to be arbiters, law keepers, and just. The truth, though, is hidden behind walls of lies. Angels are not moral, they are sinners. Law keepers? I think not. However just they may seem, they are biased towards that which they consider good. A mortal flaw.

Brilliant, graceful, but with a dark core. I am part demon, I can see that of people which they cannot sense themselves. Angels are no different. As he enters, I feel a liquid pool in my burning eyes. Turning away from the haloed abomination, I lift my hand to wipe away the tears. Bloody tears. That's another thing I should mention—I cry blood. Fire washes over me, etching scars into my back.

I hate angels.

Nameless
Kaya Sol Perry
Montessori School of Northampton, Grade 5

She raced into the woods, her heart beating wildly. One was after her. As she ran, branches tore at her clothes and mud spattered on her dress. She was running out of air. She slipped on gooey mud and fell into the thorny underbrush. She sucked a breath through her teeth and held it, waiting.

A slender figure floated into view. She was ominously beautiful. And was a witch. She was holding a glowing blue orb in each outstretched palm.

The girl backed against a tree. Hoping, hoping the witch wouldn’t notice the small, horror-stricken girl, covered in mud and scraps of clothing, crouching against the tree. The girl’s heart pounded faster. She shoved her back against the tree so hard, she was sure when she moved away, the tree bark pattern would be imprinted in her back.

Suddenly, it felt as if the oxygen was being dragged down out of the sky, straight into the witch’s orbs. She cackled with glee. The girl felt the tree bend behind her and knew that it had been emptied of oxygen. She started to feel herself drain, and she clawed at her throat in vain. The last thing she saw was the witch’s glowing face, more powerful now. Then the world spiraled and she lost consciousness.
When she next awoke, she was tied very high up in a tree by some old crumbling rope. Wolves were prowling below her, saliva dripping greedily from their jaws. The girl knew that a murderous spell had been cast on them. Normally, they would have just run away. She closed her eyes and wondered if this was just all a very odd dream. She opened her eyes again, scared of what she would see. Suddenly, the rope began to weaken with the girl’s body weight, even though she weighed hardly anything. No, no, this can’t be happening! With a lurch, she plummeted toward the ground, screaming. For an odd moment, possibly the longest moment in her life, she felt herself suspended, as if caught by an invisible harness. She cautiously opened her eyes and saw with astonishment that she was floating in midair!

She had never known who her parents were; she didn’t even have a name. All she knew is that she could fly now. She blasted forward, the wind whistling in her ears. It was an odd sensation, almost like swimming. She looked behind her and saw the witch silhouetted in the window of her house. Taking a deep breath, she turned and flew away. She didn’t know where she was going. Then, she heard a high pitched shriek behind her and knew the witch was after her.

She hoped she would be so lucky as to survive ...

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**The Forest**

*Anna Bania*

*SABIS International Charter School, Grade 8*

Her lungs were begging for air to fill them once again, but she didn’t care. There was nothing in this cold, miserable, and hateful world that could halt her frantic dash. She sprinted past the ominous looking trees that seemed to grab at her shredded clothes with their gnarled, bony limbs and latch onto her pale bruised skin causing shallow, bloody cuts and nicks to appear.

Frequently, she would find herself stumbling over tree roots, fallen branches, or decaying logs with oozing, squirming maggots, insect larva, and phosphorescent fungi. It was getting darker by the second as she saw the sun descend underneath the horizon right
before panic-stricken light blue orbs, shrouding her in nearly complete and utter darkness.

Suddenly, she stopped. There it was in front of her, the very beast that she was failing to escape from. The very monster that was trying to bring about the end of her almost irrelevant existence. Its maw was gaping, revealing rows upon rows of serrated yellow teeth dripping with blood filled saliva. Its fur was mangled and shaggy and, in parts, it was torn out altogether, showing the decomposing flesh. The rest of its body was just as revolting and horrendous as its mouth. Its spine along with every rib in its ribcage was clearly visible, some even poking through its malnourished frame. Then the stench slammed into her like a car. It was like a mixture of vomit, contaminated meats, rotten eggs, and spoiled milk, but the most noticeable part of the smell was the overpowering metallic scent of blood. The abomination seemed to be covered with it. Whether it was the creature’s or one of its unfortunate victim’s, the girl did not know, and frankly she didn’t want to. She had to get out alive.

Cautiously and hesitantly, she began to get away from the thing before it decided what to do with its prey. It took every ounce of strength and willpower that remained in her body to keep her trembling legs from giving way from under her. It growled darkly at her and its piercing stare bore deep into her very being and grazed her terrorized, innocent soul with its crimson eyes, which were a few shades darker than the blood that covered it. A hungry glaze sparked in its eyes as it tensed its lanky putrefied form and it seemed that it enjoyed her distress, and was drawn to her increasing fear. At that moment the girl realized that there was no escape. And then, it pounced. …

The End?
Screenplays can offer a unique way of delivering stories to wide audiences. In this workshop, students first viewed a clip from the popular Batman film, *The Dark Knight*. Next they read the written screenplay of the portion viewed, noting and discussing the structure and particular components such as the narrative descriptions of events in the scene, camera actions, parenthetical notes such as attitude direction for the characters, just to name a few.

Next the students explored Celtx, a screenwriting software program that they used to help guide the format of their own screenplays. Students worked in groups to brainstorm and plan their collaboratively creative scenes.

Since these stories are meant to be seen, students performed their scripts for the all the participants of this writing adventure in the auditorium at the end of the day.
The Case of the Murdered Milk
Hannah D’Alessandro, Emma Nicolaou, Maebh Roe
Amherst Regional Middle School, Grade 7

EXT. KINDERGARTEN RECESS – DAY

DETECTIVE 1, 5 years old, and DETECTIVE 2, 6 years old, are outside at recess, throwing sand at each other. All of a sudden the two hear a scream!

DETECTIVE 1
Oh noes! Somebody scweamed!

DETECTIVE 2
Wun to da cafetewia! Qwicwy!

DETECTIVE 1
But we awen’t detectives! Call 9-1-1!

DETECTIVE 2
We will become detectives when we gwow up! Now wets go!

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. CAFETERIA – DAY

DETECTIVE 1 and DETECTIVE 2 stare at a cup lying on the floor, milk on the tiles. A GIRL WITNESS is next to the milk, crying.

DETECTIVE 1
Cheer up! Dere’s no use cwying over spilled milk.

GIRL WITNESS
B-but it wasn’t spilled! It was mwurdered! Someone pushed me as I was holding it!
DETECTIVE 2
(wide-eyed)
Do you know who it was?

GIRL WITNESS (O.S.)
I bet it was Will! He’s been out to get me ever since I stepped on his pet worm Jewwy!

DETECTIVE 1
Don’t worry! We’ll avenge da miwk! Did you see Will run off anywhere?

GIRL WITNESS
Y-yes! He went to da playroom! Tank oo for helpwing me!

DETECTIVE 2
When dere is milk spilled, we will help to da best of abiwitiesh!

INT. PLAYROOM – DAY

DETECTIVE 1 and DETECTIVE 2 are talking to WILL.

WILL
I didn’t do it, I swear! I was fwamed! Dat girl pwobably spilled it on her own and wanted to get me in twouble! She’s hated me ever since I stepped on her worm, Jewwy!

DETECTIVE 2
But she said the worm was yours! Hmm ... Dis doesn’t match up ...

DETECTIVE 1
Well, let’s go talk to the witness—With Will dis time!
WILL
Okay!

INT. CAFETERIA –DAY

DETECTIVE 1, DETECTIVE 2, and WILL are talking to GIRL WITNESS. She looks sad.

DETECTIVE 1
Did you spill da milk by youwself?
It’s okey if you did.

DETECTIVE 2
Yeah, nobody wants to get in twouble. If you come cwean wight now, you won’t be punished!

GIRL WITNESS
Okay! Yes! I did it! But pwease don’t tell anyone! I don’t want dis to go on my pewmenant wecord! I want to go to Hawvawd!

DETECTIVE 1
It’s okay! Your secwet is shafe with us!
About the Western Massachusetts Writing Project

The Western Massachusetts Writing Project (WMWP) was founded in 1993. The site grew out of an established professional development program begun 20 years earlier by University of Massachusetts English Department faculty and initially funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities. WMWP grew into an informal regional network, hosted as one of the Five College/Public School Partnership programs until becoming a National Writing Project site. Now, as the Western Massachusetts Writing Project, the site is one of nearly 200 in the National Writing Project, with the English Department and the College of Humanities and Fine Arts at the University of Massachusetts Amherst as WMWP’s home base.

Since its founding as a National Writing Project site, WMWP has grown to become a network of hundreds of pre-K through college teachers serving the urban, rural, and suburban areas of Western Massachusetts from the Berkshires to Worcester County through the Invitational Summer Institute, advanced institutes and conferences, professional development programs for area schools, and contracted programs through the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. During a typical school year, over 1,000 teachers participate in WMWP offerings. All programs are based on the National Writing Project researched-based model of “teachers teaching teachers,” shown to be effective in improving student performance and developing teacher leadership.

In addition to teacher programs, WMWP has offered one-, two-, and five-week summer youth writing programs in partnership with the Smith Vocational and Agricultural High School Middle School Enrichment Program, the YMCA of Greater Springfield, the Holyoke Public Schools, the Springfield Armory, and the University of
Massachusetts Amherst. The school-year *Youth Writing Adventure* revives a WMWP tradition of student writing workshops that bring young people to the University of Massachusetts Amherst campus and that result in publication of student writing. All WMWP youth writing programs also have a professional development component for teachers.

For more information about WMWP, please visit our website, [www.umass.edu/wmwp/](http://www.umass.edu/wmwp/) or e-mail [wmwp@english.umass.edu](mailto:wmwp@english.umass.edu).

_Bruce M. Penniman, Site Director_
On March 15, 2016, The Western Massachusetts Writing Project hosted the *Youth Writing Adventure* for students in grades 4-10 in Bartlett Hall on the University of Massachusetts Amherst campus. Students from nine western Massachusetts schools gathered for a day of multi-genre writing workshops led by local teachers and WMWP teacher-consultants. The day ended with a session in the auditorium, where more than a dozen brave and proud students shared their writing with the audience of nearly 200. The excitement and success of the day could be seen on their faces as they departed the auditorium. Students were then given time to finalize their writing, and this publication is the result.

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On the web at www.umass.edu/wmwp