The University of Tennessee at Martin

What WTWP Means to Me
By Shannon Tolene

My name is Shannon Tolene, and I am currently a junior English teacher at McEwen High School. I attended the WTWP Summer Institute in 2003. I needed WTWP desperately when I applied. I had reached that point in my teaching career when the naysayers and negative teachers were really weighing me down. I loved that the TCs were positive and upbeat about English and being creative. I needed to learn new ways to address writing in the classroom and I got tons. I walked away with ideas to try and new contacts to get in touch with if my ideas ran short or I needed new advice.

I consider myself a stronger teacher now because I am certain that I can make a difference, if only in my own classroom one student at a time. I may have assessments like the TCAP writing test to deal with, but my true measure as a teacher has nothing to do with my TVAAS scores or my students’ scores on tests. My reward comes when students tell me they are better prepared for their next class, college courses, or work because of something they learned in my class. I have recommended WTWP to many colleagues. I would love to be more involved with WTWP and NWP, but two small children prevent me from being as active as I was early on. I still try to attend in-service at UT Martin, bring my students to sponsored events, and promote what I have learned whenever I can.
"You can’t pick up a phone and call the future and tell them about our times. You have to pick up a piece of paper.”

Also, when Mom gave you a card, she never just signed it. Mom wrote a message. She would sign, “Here’s to many more,” or “Let’s have a big time,” or “A little older, a little better.” She made you feel special with the thought she put into what she wrote, and the ten dollars with the card didn’t hurt either.

Mom passed away in July of 2009 at the spry age of 90. Now those messages and letters are her legacy. They are her own words in her own handwriting, and they are precious.

As we went through her things, we found a drawer full of cards and stationery. There were birthday cards, anniversary cards, get well, and get better. She had “Cheer up!” cards, and “It’s a new baby!” cards. The drawer was packed. It was my honor to take them all home with me.

The theme of Writing on Water this year was letter writing. We wrote and Continue to pass on a love of writing to my children and Online Studies at 731-881-7082 or online: http://www. utm.edu/departments/cece/youthwriting/writingreg.php

The birds are chirping, people are chattering quietly as they walk past, bees buzz as they move from flower to flower. Are you at the park, botanical garden or the lake? Guess again! It is the 6th Annual West Tennessee Writing Project’s Young Writers Camp. The students love to go outside and sit amongst the beautiful grounds of the quad at UT Martin. Last year, the middle school group was able to utilize one of the computer labs on campus and publish thrilling “You Choose the Ending” stories. The lower elementary group learned how famous children’s book writers come up with their fantastic ideas, by studying “An Author a Day!” This year will be no different, as we prepare for a week of creative writing that produces budding storytellers and poets!

Camp will be held June 21-25 in Gooch Hall on the campus of UT Martin. Each day from 9:1-p.m., students will be led by teacher consultants of WTW through writing exercises that enhance the skills students already possess. Writing groups, writing partners and teachers are valuable resources available to help create outstanding pieces published in an anthology the students take home on Friday. “Friends and Family” day is held on Friday from 12-1 p.m. and allows for parents and friends to come and hear what the students have been working on each day. We have even had students perform Readers’ Theater plays that they have written! If you know of a child that would enjoy a fun week of writing, sharing, and time with friends then this is an opportunity not to be missed!

New this year: students in grades 3-12 will now be able to take part in this exciting writing experience. Shannon Lyon from Olson County Central High School and Greg Barclay from South Fulton High School have taken on the responsibility of directing high school students who wish to carry their writing further than the classroom.

For more information, contact the Office of Extended Campus and Online Studies at 731-881-7082 or online: http://www. utm.edu/departments/cece/youthwriting/writingreg.php

The Great Letter Writer

By Lee Hudson

My grandmother, Mary McDonald, believed in the power of writing. Two of her three children lived around Shelby County, while she lived in the Hopewell Community, a suburb of Yorkville, in rural Gibson County.

Instead of picking up the phone, Mom, as we called her, wrote a letter to them and everybody else, because Mom would not call you if your number was long distance. Since only about five people in our whole family lived close to her, she was an avid letter writer. She would write about the weather or how someone in the community had stopped by to see her. She would update you on her plants or maybe a stray animal or two. She would let you know about her activities at church and her many social functions. With Mom, the news was endless.

School. During this time, I have come to realize the importance of incorporating writing across the curriculum. Whenever possible, my students use the written word to express their progress towards mastery of skills. From journaling in the morning to creating word problems in math class to assuming the role of experts in Social Studies, my students are given opportunities to articulate their own ideas.

Writing is an excellent way to cultivate higher order thinking skills. While striving to prepare my students to compete in a global society, it is crucial that we foster a desire to think critically. I have also learned about the adaptability of writing. Whether ideas were originally implemented in Kindergarten or high school, a few adjustments allow compliancy with fourth grade curriculum.

I am appreciative of the opportunity to be a part of this community of writers. The ideas I have gained from other teacher consultants have shaped who I am as a writer and a teacher of writing. In the years to come, I will continue to pass on a love of writing to my students.

Professional Development at its BEST

By Krisy Dowden

The West Tennessee Writing Project is the most effective professional development I have received throughout my teaching tenure. I have implemented many ideas that were gained from my participation in two summer institutes. My students have and will continue to benefit from these experiences. I have gained confidence in my own writing, which has been reflected in my presentation of writing to my students. I enjoy teaching writing much more now that I have material from other teacher consultants that I know has been proven successful in their classrooms.

I am currently in my fifth year of teaching fourth grade at Union City Elementary School. During this time, I have come to realize the importance of incorporating writing across the curriculum. Whenever possible, my students use the written word to express their progress towards mastery of skills. From journaling in the morning to creating word problems in math class to assuming the role of experts in Social Studies, my students are given opportunities to articulate their own ideas.

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Young Writers Camp: An Experience of Fun, Friends, and Fabulous Writing

By Brittan Sutherland and Greg Barclay

Every year passionate educators give up because they are not receiving the support and training they need in order to be successful in their classrooms.

schools can turn to as a resource to retain new teachers and teach veteran teachers new strategies for writing across the curriculum. Retaining new teachers is a real problem that costs schools quite a bit of money. Every year the teaching profession loses passionate educators that give up because they are not receiving the support and training they need in order to be successful in their classrooms.

During the morning session, the three sites shared presentations that could be adapted to meet the needs of teachers across the grade levels. Genre writing, using technology to cultivate writing ideas, and writing in the content areas were the topics presented. In the afternoon, the TCs wrote about and discussed their experiences during their first year of teaching. From these conversations, a list was developed of what new teachers need in order to feel more confident and supported. There were also round table discussions with TCs from each site sharing ideas about how the TNWP Network can work to best meet the needs of teachers in Tennessee. While it was a long day of travel for most TCs, it was energy and well spent. Jenny Brandon, one of the presenters from the West Tennessee Writing Project, said, “I was eye-opening to see the talent and commitment of the teacher consultants from across the state of Tennessee.” The Continuity Conference generated many great ideas about how to build on the strengths of each writing project site and how shared strengths can be shared with teachers—new and veteran. The TNWP Network is an incredible opportunity for the writing projects in Tennessee to deepen their impact on teachers across the state.