

# Professional Development for All Teachers

"*Summer of the Skunks: Family Stories Across the Curriculum*," a workshop for K-12 teachers, is Saturday August 2, 2003, at the Ag Center in Jackson. Lead-off presenter will be Wilmoth Foreman, Teacher Consultant of WTWP and author of the chapter book, *Summer of the Skunks*, forthcoming in May from Front Street Press. The day also includes morning coffee and rolls, box lunches from Heavenly Ham, certificates of participation, and eight interactive teaching demonstrations led by Teacher Consultants of WTWP. The workshop is endorsed by twenty West Tennessee systems as an optional day of inservice or a program that may be used for professional development credit. Pre-registration is \$35. After July 25, \$45. Checks payable to UTM. Mail to Office of Extended Campus and Continuing Education, 110 Gooch Hall, UT-Martin, Martin, TN 38238. For complete program and registration, check the WTWP website: [www.utm.edu/wtwp](http://www.utm.edu/wtwp)

Fall semester 2003, Margrethe Ahlschwede, director of WTWP, will teach **English 510, Fiction Writing Workshop**, Monday nights, 5 p.m. on the UT Martin campus. This course may be used as part of the 18 hours of subject-matter specialty in the MS in Education offered through the UT Martin College of Education and Behavioral Studies. It also may count as points toward teacher recertification (check with supervisors of instruction) or as part of the "thirty above" the Master's. For information about admission to graduate studies at UTM, contact the Office of Graduate Studies, 309 Administration Building, UTM, 38238, 731.587.7012. For information about the MS in Education, contact Dr. Bonnie Daniel, coordinator of graduate work, the College of Education and Behavioral Studies, 237 Gooch Hall, UTM, 38238, 731.587.7125.

West Tennessee Writing Project  
 Department of English  
 The University of Tennessee at Martin  
 Martin, TN 38238



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## Something I Never Had Before

Molly Coffman

"Parents just don't care anymore." I've heard this statement, and have probably uttered it, on numerous occasions. However, Cathy Fleischer's book, *Teachers Organizing for Change*, inspired me not to accept this statement as an excuse for apathy in the parental communications department. In her book, Fleischer discusses communities and organizations using a grass roots approach to bring about positive change and then, citing real-life examples, parallels these strategies to ways teachers can involve parents in the education of their children.

While reading the book, idealistic visions of hordes of smiling parents excited about and participating in the work of my classroom danced in my head, but another voice countered, "You can't do any of this stuff! This is for overly aggressive, politically-minded veteran teachers with lots of connections and charisma . . . Not you!"

But then Fleischer calmed my fears with some good advice: Take small

steps. I didn't have to mount a system-wide campaign or have monthly meetings or make thousands of phone calls. I could do what I felt comfortable doing.

A couple years ago I decided to design a family website just for fun. I enjoyed posting pictures and then sending the link to people so that they could see my two beautiful children. I loved reading the comments of those people who signed my guest book, and I felt more connected with family and friends.

What if I designed a class website that shared through photos and writing what was happening in my English class? Parents could see their children in action, read examples of student writing, and stay informed of assignments. I decided to give it a whirl.

At the beginning of the school year, my class website consisted only of a home page on which I introduced myself and discussed some of the activities we would be involved in throughout the semester. On my classroom procedures

sheet that I send home at the beginning of each semester, I included a paragraph about the class website and requested parents send their email addresses to me so that I could notify them when the site was updated. The next day, I eagerly collected the signed procedure sheets, but to my disappointment, not one parent had included his or her email address. Somewhat deflated, I continued with my plans for the site.

By the end of the Anglo-Saxon unit, students had presented movie posters for *Beowulf* and group work on "The Wanderer" and "The Seafarer." I had taken a few pictures with our school library's digital camera and saved them on my classroom computer. Not long after this, students made fantastic literature circle presentations, which I also photographed. After uploading the pictures, I quickly created five custom pages with photos and captions.

I had something to publish, but how would I notify the parents? I certainly didn't want to call each and

*continued on page 2*

# Motivate Kids To Write by Publishing on the Internet

Kristi Sayles

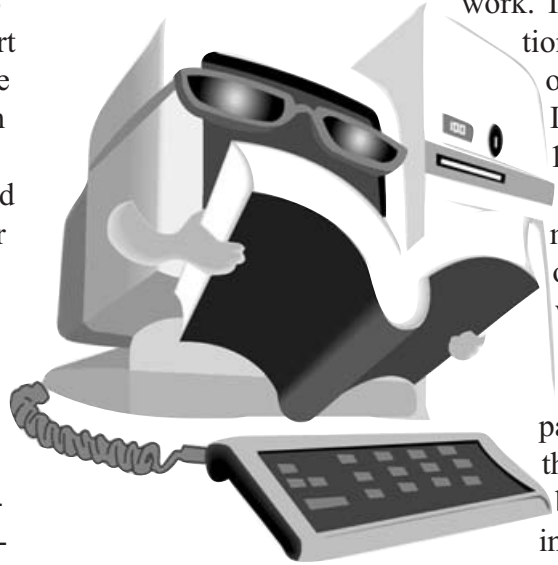
Some kids need that extra push to motivate them to do the type of writing that we expect of them. Creative writings, such as stories and poems, are difficult for some of them, so the reward of such an effort needs to be worth it. I have found the solution. Publish them on the Internet.

Ever since I showed my students that I got their poems published on a web site that accepts submissions from kids, they have been writing like crazy, hoping that I would email their new creations to the publisher. I have had nothing except praise from parents. They are thrilled to be able to pull up and print their child's "masterpieces." Not only that, but now the kids see a reason to use correct grammar and spelling--so they want to learn.

This is my top ten list of writing sites that accept submissions from children:

1. Kid Authors  
<http://www.kidauthors.com/>  
(Printable certificates available)
2. Kid News  
<http://www.kidnews.com/>
3. Kid Lit Poetry Gallery  
<http://www.mgfx.com/kidlit/kids/artlit/poetry/index.htm>
4. Wacky Web Tales  
<http://www.eduplace.com/tales/>
5. Candlelight Stories

- <http://www.candlelightstories.com/defaultnew.asp>
6. Collab-U-Write  
<http://library.thinkquest.org/2626/?tqskip1=1&tqtime=0220>



7. Kid Pub  
<http://www.kidpub.org/kidpub/>
8. Stone Soup  
<http://www.stonesoup.com/>
9. KidsCom  
<http://www.kidscom.com/>

10. Cyber Kids  
<http://www.cyberkids.com/>

An important note: Please check your board policy about publishing student work. This is the information I found about ours: Board Policy IFBHD of 12/2/2002 states, "Student work may be published on web pages only with written consent of the student's parent/guardian or the eligible student before each incident of publication."

*Kristi Sayles, a Teacher Consultant of WTWP, is a second grade teacher at Camden Elementary School. Her website: <http://www.authorsden.com/kristisayles>*

## For Young Writers

The 2003 Tennessee Young Writers' Workshop (TYWW), presented by Humanities Tennessee with support from Austin Peay State University (APSU), will be held July 20-26 at APSU in Clarksville. TYWW is a weeklong, residential workshop for students with an interest in writing who would like the opportunity to explore that interest and to devote time to their work in a unique environment with an outstanding faculty and supportive peers. Students in grades 8-12 are eligible to attend. Tuition is \$600, and scholarships ranging from \$100 to \$600 are available. For more information and to download an application, please visit:  
[www.tn-humanities.org/tywwmain.htm](http://www.tn-humanities.org/tywwmain.htm)

## Wings

Paula Cox

Our idea was simple: Provide an after school club for kids who want to discuss literature and write some of their own. We wanted to make our club fun, relaxed and as stress free as possible. We wanted to open membership up for all children in grades 4 and 5 without restriction, except for number. We believed 20 children would be a manageable number. And lastly, we wanted to base much of what we would do in our group on our scaled down vision of the West Tennessee Writing Project.

Our concerns were valid. Would 20 children from Briarwood School's 270 or so 4th and 5th graders volunteer to be a part of such a group? Could we make this club vital enough to keep them coming back week after week without the shadow of grades and formal accountability looming in their futures? Were we three teachers -- Jenny Miller, Karen Hudson, and I--up to the challenge of keeping this club structured yet unlike any classroom these children had ever been a part of?

And the answer to all those questions is yes. Our WINGS club is now in its second successful year and going strong. Our group is diverse. We have members who are labeled as gifted and some who are labeled as learning disabled. But we all come together under the banner of lovers of the written word. The joy I feel working with these children who volunteer their time to be with others who share their same love of literature is rejuvenating.

WINGS is purposeful in its work, but we hold each meeting in a comfortable environment and we always begin the same way, with snacks. Our food often reflects a theme from the literature we are reading. When our group read *Far North* by Will Hobbs, we shared beef jerky and Popsicles. *The Westing Game* gave us the

opportunity to share Chinese egg rolls and fortune cookies.

In West Tennessee Writing Project style, a WINGS member will share the minutes from the previous meeting, always written in some entertaining way: game show, radio announcer, mystery theatre, etc. Minutes are always followed by a reading from a published book or poem--always read and chosen by a child from the group.

We began our first year with a grant awarded by the Tennessee Reading Association. We used the funds to purchase books and supplies necessary to support the work of our club. This year, our work has been supported by parents (who have gladly supplied snacks) and the West Tennessee Writing Project. We meet four times a month for an hour and a half. We are flexible with what days. Our meetings have included many varied topics from poetry dramatization to literature circle discussion points. We have read and revised our writing, attended a performance of *Fiddler on the Roof*, and toured the campus of a nearby university. Our group is always eager to meet and we never seem to finish our work, but that keeps us eagerly anticipating our next session.

*Paula Cox, associate director of the West Tennessee Writing Project, teaches 5th graders at Camden's Briarwood School. Paula received a WTWP mini-grant to help facilitate this project.*



**"THERE ARE TWO LASTING BEQUESTS WE CAN GIVE OUR CHILDREN. ONE IS ROOTS. THE OTHER IS WINGS"  
-- HODDING CARTER, JR.**

# You Know, I Read It in a Magazine: Student Writing and Art in Print

Lana Taylor Warren

James and Hunter\* sit side-by-side within the circle of warriors, pouring over the stack of poems in front of them.

"Have you scored this one yet?" Hunter wonders which direction to hand the vertical haiku he has just initialed.

"What's it called? Let me look at it," smacks James, holding his strawberry sucker in the air. "Oh yeah, pass it to B-Name."

Beth, who had been pressed down onto a short story, thumbnail in mouth, bursts into laughter.

"Would you quit calling me that, J-Word!" Mrs. Bing and I giggle a little to one another.

These student warriors are scoring the over three-hundred pieces of writing and artwork we received this year for *Watershed 16*, our school's literary magazine. The group of students call themselves The Warriors of the Ink, and I sponsor them, along with Mrs. Sherri Bing, who teaches French and English I across the hall.

Since I founded the club in 2001 with the blessing of Mr. Bill Hampton, the principal of Obion County Central High School, two main goals have predominated our

meetings: write and work on this magazine. The process is simple. First, the students make the posters advertising that we are accepting submissions. We accept poetry, short stories, plays, and art from students, faculty, and staff. As these begin to pour onto my desk, I record the students' names, grades, and titles. According to the instructions we give everyone who submits, this information is printed on a separate page from the actual work itself. I tear that page off and put it into a big binder with all the other cover pages.

When the students come into the meetings on Monday, I have a thick stack of pieces for them to read, look at, and score. We run a refresher course (if some students have shown up after a few weeks' absence) on the scoring rubric we use, then the kids get into a circle and start reading. They each keep up with their own scores on their own paper, where they write the titles and their scores, from one (just awful) to ten (terrific). They initial the bottom of the work in pencil, then pass it on to someone who's not scored it yet. Mrs. Bing and I are busy making sure they all have

something to score, as well as checking that club members who have submitted pieces don't score their own work.

When all the pieces are scored, Mrs. Bing and I get to work, calling out titles and recording the scores that the students call back. Next year, we plan to give each student a photocopy of the list of titles (names covered up), and have them write in the scores on this form. We found it difficult this year to get all the kids' scores, since they lose their papers or don't show up for all the meetings.

As a club, we have several decisions to make. For the cover art, we print a picture of a watershed (the one down the road from my house), so I take many photos, and the students vote on which one they like. Then, we decide what color cardstock we will use for the cover. Last year's was a light blue; we're thinking light brown this time.

We also have to figure out what the minimum average score for published works should be. Since we had fewer pieces last year, we were able to accept all works scored six, or higher. This year, we had to place the cut-off at

*continued on page 5*

# Opportunities for WTWP Teacher Consultants

A second year of **mini-grants** will be available to Teacher Consultants of WTWP for the school year 2003-2004. Grants will be awarded for teacher professional development and/or projects that lead to greater literacy among their students. Successful applicants must complete a one-page application and also must include registration for and be present at the August 2, 2003 WTWP workshop in Jackson for introductions and recognition at lunch. See articles elsewhere in this issue for reports of three mini-grant recipients for the current school year. Application guidelines and further details about the mini-grants 2003-2004 are on the WTWP website: [www.utm.edu/wtwp](http://www.utm.edu/wtwp)

Oct. 24-25, 2003, Teacher Consultants of WTWP will have an opportunity to participate in a **writing retreat** at Paris Landing State Park. Guest facilitator will be Kathleen O'Shaughnessy, middle school teacher and co-director of the National Writing Project of Acadiana in Lafayette, LA. The retreat includes one night's lodging; Friday evening dinner; Saturday breakfast, lunch, and dinner; certificates of participation; t-shirts; and most importantly, time to write. WTWP Teacher Consultant Focal Team: Beth Halbert, Lana Warren, and Molly Coffman. Be watching for flyers to TC's and the WTWP website for registration information: [www.utm.edu/wtwp](http://www.utm.edu/wtwp)

## You Know, I Read it ...

Lana Taylor Warren

*(cont.'d from pg. 4)*

seven. This year's book will be 36 pages, whereas last year's was 30 pages.

I'm expecting to get one-hundred or more copies made of the magazine. A copy will go to each student who is published, as well as to each English teacher who had a student submit (all seven). I will also give one each to Mr. Bill Hampton and to Mrs. Donna Neblett, our Director of Schools. I will keep the remaining thirty or more copies for use as a

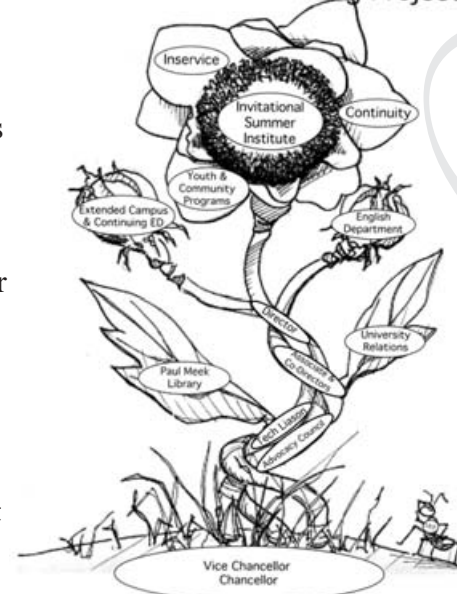
classroom set, which can be used to teach writing by any teacher in the department. That part is exciting to me, as I think student-written works will be more meaningful to study than many of the archaic writers in the textbook.

Back in room six, James is excited because there is so much more artwork in this issue.

"It'll make more people want to read it, I think."

"Yeah," Meagan

West Tennessee Writing Project



adds, "I just can't wait until it's printed!"

Neither can I.

*\* Not necessarily the actual students' names.*

*Lana Taylor Warren, a Teacher Consultant of WTWP, is a twelfth-grade English teacher, Speech and Drama instructor, Yearbook Sponsor, and part-time Warrior Princess at Obion County Central High School. Lana received a WTWP mini-grant to help facilitate this project.*

## Something I Never Had Before

Molly Coffman  
(cont. 'd from front)

every one of them, and sending a note home had already proven to be ineffective. I wrote the website address on the board and told the students I had posted pictures of their presentations.

Over the next couple of days I received a few emails from students and parents commenting on the website. Each time I would save the sender's email address in a group I had created in my hotmail contacts. At first, I only had three parents' addresses, but the encouragement and thanks they had given me was fuel to my fire. It was at this point that I added the most successful page to my website--the assignments page. Each afternoon I would log onto my website and type in the night's homework. This process only took about five minutes. After informing my classes that their assignments would be posted, site "hits" jumped. A few new email addresses trickled in, but student interest escalated.

"I left you a message in the guest book, Mrs. Coffman," one girl chirped in fourth block. "When are you going to post the pictures of our literature circles from yesterday?" a young man asked.

While my students' enthusiasm was encouraging, they were not my

primary audience. My goal was to reach parents. Thankfully, I can report several instances of improved communication with parents. One father came for a conference concerning his son's grades. After we had spoken for a few minutes, I asked him if he knew we had a class website where the daily assignments were posted and where he could see some of the things we had been doing in class. He eagerly wrote down the address and left amiably. His son's grades improved, and a couple weeks later I received a thank you note in my email. Another young lady missed several days because of a complicated illness. After her return her stepfather sent an email commenting on how the website had been very beneficial in keeping up with what was going on in English.

These are two specific cases among several in which my communication with parents was not only improved but was quite pleasant. In the past, most contact with parents put me on the defensive, justifying a grade given or explaining a behavioral referral.

At the beginning of the semester, I was worried about making a good impression on parents since I would be teaching honors English for the first time. I

had been told that I would be challenged by parents continually questioning my decisions. Not once during the term did that happen. Maybe this is purely coincidental; maybe not. Either way, the feeling of satisfaction and extra support I had when talking with parents is something I never had before.

At the end of the semester I had eleven parent email addresses. This may not sound like much, but actually it means I had continual contact with at least 26% of my English students' parents. This is something I never had before. I'm not claiming that making a class website is the panacea for parental communications, but I do believe that, at least for me, my class website has opened up channels of communication that were previously dormant. And this is something I never had before.

*Mrs. Coffman's English Website:*  
<http://myweb.ecomplanet.com/ENGL2076>

*Fleischer, Cathy. Teachers Organizing for Change: Making Literacy Learning Everybody's Business. Urbana: NCTE, 2000.*

*Molly Coffman, a co-director of the West Tennessee Writing Project, teaches at Jackson Central Merry High School. Molly received a WTWP mini-grant to help facilitate this project.*

## News of Teacher Consultants of WTWP

Four Teacher Consultants of WTWP have been named teachers of the year:

Debbie Criswell, Dyersburg High School and Dyersburg System Teacher of the Year.

Lana Taylor Warren, Obion County Central High School.

Jane Ingram, Dresden Middle School.

Phyllis Brasher, Greenfield School and the Weakley County System Teacher of the Year.

Marcia Coleman, 8th grade science teacher at West Carroll Junior-Senior High School, has been selected for Summer 2003 Ocean Voyagers, an educational outreach initiative designed for middle school teachers developed in part by the Naval Oceanographic Office. During Fall 2000 Marcia spent 13 days as a Sea Scholar on the USNS BRUCE HEEZEN.

*Summer of the Skunks*, a novel for young readers by Wilmoth Foreman, is forthcoming from Front Street Press in May. Wilmoth will be the lead-off presenter at WTWP's annual workshop, August 2, 2003, at the Ag Center in Jackson. See registration information elsewhere in this issue.



### About WTWP

The West Tennessee Writing Project is a program of professional development for teachers, K-college, housed in the Department of English at the University of Tennessee at Martin. Begun in 1993, WTWP is the only Tennessee site of the National Writing Project (NWP) of the University of California, Berkeley. WTWP is supported by grants from NWP with matching funds from UT-Martin. Additional gift funds support individual programs.

WTWP offers its Teacher Consultants opportunities for professional development and for literacy growth for their students. See announcements in this publication of two such opportunities and for reports of three recipients of WTWP mini-grants to Teacher Consultants.

At the invitation of schools and systems, Teacher Consultants of WTWP provide programs of inservice geared to teacher needs. In addition, WTWP sponsors open workshops on classroom reading and writing strategies. The next such workshop is August 2, 2003, at the Ag Center in Jackson. See program and registration information in this publication.

For more information about WTWP programs of professional development for your school or system, contact a member of the WTWP Advocacy Council: Margrethe Ahlschwede, WTWP director, UT-Martin, [wtpw@utm.edu](mailto:wtpw@utm.edu), 731.587.7290, 731.587.7300, FAX 731.587.7276; Paula Cox, WTWP associate director, Briarwood School, Camden, [coxp@ten-nash.ten.k12.tn.us](mailto:coxp@ten-nash.ten.k12.tn.us); Beth Halbert, WTWP co-director, Mt. Juliet High School, [bhalbert77@yahoo.com](mailto:bhalbert77@yahoo.com), Molly Coffman, WTWP co-director, Jackson Central-Merry High School, [coffmanmolly@hotmail.com](mailto:coffmanmolly@hotmail.com); Diana Griffin, Dresden Elementary; Sheryl Alford, Dresden Middle and WTWP technology liaison; Renee Cooper, Camden Elementary; Doug Cook, visual and theater arts at UT-Martin; Lee Hudson, Dyersburg Intermediate School; Lana Warren, Obion County Central High; and Kelli Ligon, K-5 art, Franklin, art consultant to WTWP.

For updates on programs and projects, and for past issues of *Field Notes* with essays on teaching strategies, see the WTWP website: [www.utm.edu/wtwp](http://www.utm.edu/wtwp)  
National Writing Project site: [www.writingproject.org](http://www.writingproject.org)

*Field Notes* is mailed twice yearly to Teacher Consultants of WTWP and West Tennessee supervisors, principals, and additional educators.  
It is available online at [www.utm.edu/wtwp](http://www.utm.edu/wtwp)