
The University of Tennessee at Martin

Field Notes

Volume 8, Number 2 • A newsletter for the West Tennessee Writing Project • Spring 2000

I Still Believe in Monsters

Deborah Criswell
is a special education
teacher at Dyersburg
High School and a
Teacher Consultant
of WTWP.

As a young child, many of us were convinced that monsters were real. We heard them when our parents climbed the stairs or a mouse ran under our bed, and we saw them on those dark nights as our bedroom curtains blew in the wind. We believed. Children still believe. They use imagination to create their monsters. Why not use monsters to help students create descriptive stories?

First, I introduced this lesson in my high school special education class at Ripley High School. Since many of the students were non-readers, we began by brainstorming for scary words and writing them on the board. I gave each pair of students play dough and asked them to make a monster. Students created monsters in various shapes, sizes, and colors with no two alike. They then wrote descriptive paragraphs telling about the monsters and shared their writing with the class. I realized how effective the lesson was when one of my shy students thundered, "Mr. Monster, I'm not afraid of you because you are green or mean or have bumps and horns. Get out of my house right now!" Since the lesson worked so well, I decided to try it at various age, grade, and reading levels.

Next, I took this lesson into a tenth grade honors English class. This time no word bank was needed; consequently, I chose to use an alternative approach to starting the lesson. Students listened to an "eerie" Halloween tape and reflected in their journals. I then presented them with play dough and invited them to create monsters.

Although they were somewhat amused at the prospect of playing, soon they were involved. When time was called, they were not ready to quit. Thanks to block-scheduling, time permitted the students to write a rough draft and peer-edit. The next day, all students were anxious to share their final drafts. As I listened to them read, I realized I was

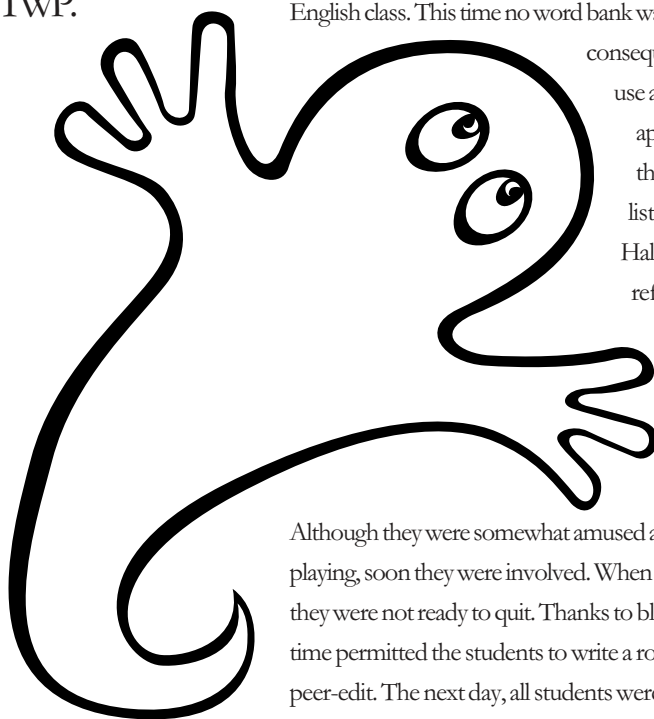
the one needing a word bank just to keep up with the current computer game terminology.

Then I had an opportunity to visit Veronica Fowlkes and her first grade class at Waverly Elementary. It was the perfect time for a monster story—immediately following a Halloween parade. The lesson was effective in this class as well. First, students brainstormed for scary words as Veronica wrote their word bank on the chalkboard. Brainstorming for monster terms was easy with two vampires, a skeleton, and a witch sitting in the classroom. Although she was no monster, Veronica herself was a sight dressed like Cleopatra. Once the word bank was finished, students created monsters. Veronica and I modified the lesson when students finished the monsters. Since the children were so young, we had them orally describe their monsters before writing about them. With only one or two exceptions, these students were also anxious to share about the "bad, creepy monsters" or "the mean, ugly monsters" that like to hide under beds. At the end of the session, the children proudly presented their final copies to me.

Finally, I visited Susie Irons' seventh grade classroom at Waverly Junior High School. Again I found the lesson adaptable to another setting. These students needed no word bank. They made red, one-eyed monsters which hid under beds and large blue monsters wearing macaroni crowns and pretzel limbs which crept up the stairs. They were the most excited of all about creating monsters and the least excited about writing; however, they were willing to write, and many volunteered to read their rough drafts aloud. The students had an additional day to complete the assignment. I could hardly wait to ask Susie about the following day. She laughed and replied, "They revised and rewrote with little complaining. What an accomplishment!"

Making monsters proved to be an effective pre-writing activity for a descriptive writing assignment. As children, most of us believed in monsters. I still do.

Author's note: I want to thank Veronica Fowlkes and Susie Irons, fellow participants of the West Tennessee Writing Project Summer Institute of 1999, for enabling me to grow as an educator by inviting me to visit in their classrooms.



Thinking Like a Writer

Glenda Arant, who has been a co-director of WTWP, teaches language arts at Martin Middle School. This essay is the talk Glenda presented as part of a panel on writing at the annual meeting of the Tennessee Council of Teachers of English, October 2, 1999, Memphis.

The following excerpts are taken from the journal of Sean, one of my eighth grade students.

August 19, 1999

"I would like to go to Australia because I have always wanted to go and because there are many animals there because I like animals. I would take Jake K_____ because me and him are best friends, and we have a lot in common because we are best friends."

... three weeks later ...

September 7, 1999

"Something that I believe in very strongly is not being cruel to animals. I love animals and I don't like when someone hurts them. They are living beings also. They have the right to live as much as we do. They should not be hit or beat; they should be able to live happily. If they are killed for food, that is alright, otherwise they should be left alone. People who hurt for sport should be locked up. It is wrong for people to kill animals for prize."

These excerpts illustrate Sean's growth as a writer the first three weeks of school. Sean is an "above average" student according to his Terra Nova scores, yet he scored only 3 on the TCAP Writing Assessment last year. I want to know what accounts for this deficiency in his academic development and what can be done to correct it.

In response to the current emphasis on block scheduling my school has gone to a modified language arts block curriculum. This simply means that instead of a student having a reading teacher and a language arts teacher, now that student has the same teacher for both subjects—two consecutive periods. This means that Sean is in my reading class and my language arts class.

It also means that for the first time ever, Sean is exposed to many varied writing experiences for two hours every day. Sean and his classmates are learning to write by writing. Every day we read, we write, we share what we have written with each other. Then we write some more—the process goes on.

Inspired by Ralph Fletcher, I set a goal for this new school year, to teach student writers the elements of craft. As I previewed my new language arts textbook, *Writer's Choice*, I was pleased to note that it has been designed to help me become a better writer at the same time that I helped my students. JoAnne Portalupi, wife of Ralph Fletcher and also a colleague of Lucy Calkins, says that "our goal as teachers is not to teach the list of what's good [writing] but to become students of craft who continually ask the question: What is good writing?"

This must be on our mind when we listen to students read their own writing, when we talk about the literature models that accompany our writing, and when we read our own writing. We need to impress upon our students this need for self-evaluation of one's own work.

I am trying to achieve this goal in several ways. Each of my students is keeping a writer's notebook and a journal. The notebook is compartmentalized and contains everything that the student has written for a set period of time. At assessment time, the students select from their portfolios examples of various kinds of writing to meet specific objectives. Students are encouraged to write in different genres and to periodically select pieces for revision.

I want to encourage my students to look upon their writing as art. The elements of the visual arts—content, medium, color, lines, and composition—all contribute to the emotional impact and meaning of a work of art. Likewise, the elements of the

writing craft—content, genre, shades of meaning, sentence structure, and composition—all contribute to "good writing."

Portfolio assessment is authentic assessment. Like Toby Fulwiler in the *Journal Book*, I want to know at what level my students are thinking. Are they making a reading/writing connection between the literature models which I am assigning them and their written responses to those models?

Are they learning to read literature with a writer's eye, observe the world about them with a writer's eye, reflect on past experiences with a writer's eye? Can they think like a writer? Can I? The answers to these queries are to be found in their writers' notebooks and



their journals. Not only can I see Sean's progress as a writer; Sean's mother was able to see her son's improvement when he took his journal home and permitted her to read it.

In the words of Regie Routman *Literacy at the Crossroads*: "If you want to make 'back to basics' a non-issue with parents, move to more meaningful assessment practices." Sean's mother, as many of my parents do, is not content to just know that her son has a 90 in Mrs. Arant's class. She wants to "see" what Sean is learning, producing, thinking, and making judgments about. Most of the administrators in our system, and many of our parents, still view assessment as the test scores on state mandated standardized tests or the summative grade on the student's report card at the end of a grading period. A few enlightened parents and educators, such as Sean's mother, want a more authentic assessment. They are concerned that such summative scores do not reflect the student's attitude or creativity. Neither do they indicate the students' strengths, or weaknesses, as learners, nor their intellectual habits. Such quantitative marks usually do not take into account the individual differences of our students.

Having my students keep both a writer's notebook and a journal allows me to use a more formative method of evaluation. Formative assessment also measures learning; however, its primary goal is to improve learning. The notebook and the journal have begun to initiate a dialogue between my students and their parents, as well as, between these parents and me. I have had numerous phone calls, in-school visits, and impromptu Wal-Mart conferences (which many times are the most productive of all parent-teacher conferences). It is so gratifying to hear, "I like what you are doing for Sean. I can 'see' that he has really made progress."

Again, I defer to the wisdom of Fletcher and Portalupi: "There is no quick 'shake and bake' recipe for making sure that students achieve high scores on proficiency tests." At our first in-service session this past August, I was approached by both my principal and my counselor who demanded, "Mrs. Arant, most of our seventh graders last year scored 2's and 3's on their Terra Nova Writing Assessment. Our goal for this year is to have a majority scoring 4 or better. What can we do about this?"

What I am doing for my students is creating an environment where we can do what writers and thinkers do—engage in sustained writing for authentic purposes on a regular basis. When Ralph Fletcher visited with us for the West Tennessee Writing Project summer institute, he advised us to: Write with your students. Read with your students, and make plenty of time to talk together about the reading and writing that you are doing.

About WTWP

The West Tennessee Writing Project is a program of professional development for teachers who believe in the power of writing as a learning tool and as an approach to implementing standards across the curriculum.

Located in the Department of English at The University of Tennessee at Martin, WTWP is one of 160 sites of the National Writing Project. WTWP was established in March 1993 and currently is the only affiliate site of the National Writing Project in Tennessee.

The purpose of WTWP is to improve writing and writing instruction in our schools. WTWP operates under these principles: writing will improve as writing instruction improves, the best teacher of a teacher is another teacher, and teachers of writing must be writers themselves.

The heart of WTWP is its annual intensive summer writing institutes held on the UT Martin campus for selected West Tennessee teachers, all subject-matter areas, all grades K-12. The institute is offered as a graduate seminar, English 700-701. Application deadline for summer 2000 institute was Feb. 18. Applications for summer 2001 institute will be available from WTWP in January 2001.

WTWP also contracts with area schools and systems for inservice. In the past year, teacher consultants of WTWP have worked with teachers at Glengarry Elementary in Nashville, Weakley County, and at Ridgemoor Elementary in Obion County. If you would like WTWP Teacher Consultants to facilitate interactive programs of professional development for your teachers, contact WTWP.

WTWP is supported by grants from the National Writing Project of the University of California, Berkeley with matching funds from The University of Tennessee at Martin. Support for WTWP workshops in Camden and Jackson and the annual summer institute also comes from the Tennessee Higher Education Commission and the U.S. Education Department under the auspices of the Eisenhower Professional Development Grants Program.

The director of WTWP is Margrethe Ahlschwede, Hardy M. Graham Distinguished Professor in English at UT Martin. Co-directors are Paula Cox, 3rd grade teacher at Camden's Briarwood School, and Mary Lou Marks, librarian at Camden Central High School. WTWP Advisory Council members include the project directors and Pat Johnson, Jackson Trinity Christian Academy; Margie Lowe, Jackson Northeast Middle School; Richard Mann, Jackson South Side High School; and Andrea Russell, Ripley High School. Staff support to WTWP is provided by Judy Sandefer, principal secretary in the Department of English, and Amanda Usery, UT Martin senior accounting major from Franklin.

For further information on inservice or any other aspects of WTWP, write or call:

West Tennessee Writing Project

Department of English

The University of Tennessee at Martin

Martin, TN 38238

Phone: (901) 587-7290

or (901) 587-7300

Fax: (901) 587-7276

E-mail: margahls@utm.edu

WTWP Website:

<http://fmc.utm.edu/~mahlschw/Wtwp0.htm>

or access through UT Martin home page:

www.edu.utm.edu to Academic Programs, scroll down to Special Programs, and to West Tennessee Writing Project

“Writing Our Own Stories” Workshop • Martin • March 25, 2000

“Writing Our Own Stories” is the focus of a Tennessee Writers Alliance sponsored workshop to be held March 25, 2000, in Martin, Tennessee. Margaret Skinner, novelist from Memphis and member of the Tennessee Writers Alliance Advisory Board, will be the featured presenter. In addition to Skinner, Margrethe Ahlschwede, UT Martin English professor, will lead a writing exercise; and Polly Glover will relate journaling experiences.

The workshop will be held at Trinity Presbyterian Church, at the southeast corner of the UT Martin campus. Registration and coffee are at 9 a.m., with the

program beginning at 9:30. Following lunch, which is included in the registration fee, the workshop leaders will read from recent work. The workshop will end with an evaluation exercise at 2:00 p.m.

Registration fee is \$20 for TWA members, \$25 for non-members, and \$12 for students. For more information, contact: Bill Ahlschwede, 131H Humanities, UT Martin, Martin, TN 38238; e-mail: billahls@utm.edu; phone: (901)-587-7300. Pre-register by March 18, or call for space.

Registration Form

Name _____ Check if: TWA member Student

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Enclose fee and send to Writing Workshop, 131H Humanities, The University of Tennessee at Martin, Martin, TN 38238

“S’MORES” S’more Reading, S’more Writing • Camden • April 29, 2000 • For K-8 Teachers

8:30-9:00 Registration and morning food

9:00-10:30 Keynote session with Suellen Alfred, teacher educator at Tennessee Tech and editor of *Tennessee English Journal*

10:30-10:45 Break

10:45-12:00 Concurrent sessions will be led by Martha Freeman, kindergarten, Martin Primary, and Tammy Alexander-Gordon, 3rd grade, McKenzie; Tracy Decker, 6-8th grade, Big Sandy School; and Leeann Sipes, 2nd grade, Dyersburg City Schools.

12:00-1:00 Lunch on site

1:00-2:15 Concurrent sessions will be led by Wanda Chapman, kindergarten, Raymer School, Selmer; Stacey Stewart, Camden Elementary School; and Glenda

Arant, 6-8th grade, Martin Middle School.

2:15-3:00 Wrap up session with Suellen Alfred, followed by evaluations and pick up of certificates

Registration cost is \$10. Make checks payable to WTWP and send, along with name and address of participants, to “S’mores,” Briarwood School, 169 Briarwood St., Camden, TN 38320. For further information about the workshop contact Paula Cox, Briarwood School, e-mail: coxpa@ten-nash.tn.k12.tn.us

***This workshop has been approved for inservice credit by some systems. Please check with your supervisor to verify inservice credit availability.*

Registration Form

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Enclose fee and send to “S’mores,” Briarwood School, 169 Briarwood St., Camden, TN 38320

Teaching Workshop • Jackson • August 12, 2000 • For K-12 Teachers

“Writing and Standards, Doing Two Things at Once” is the theme for the Department of English and West Tennessee Writing Project annual workshop August 12, for K-12 language arts and English teachers.

The workshop will be at The University of Tennessee Agricultural Research Extension, and Public Service Center at 605 Airways Boulevard in Jackson. The workshop begins at 9 a.m. and concludes at 3 p.m.

Lead-off presenter will be Hephzibah Roskelly, teacher educator at the University of North Carolina Greensboro and chief reader for the AP exam. Concur-

rent small group sessions will follow where teacher consultants of WTWP will demonstrate strategies to include more writing in English, language arts, and reading classes. Professor Roskelly will offer additional comments over lunch. After lunch, WTWP teacher consultants will demonstrate how they incorporate writing in classes such as history, biology, and music.

For information on registration, call (901) 587-7080. Twenty-two West Tennessee school systems have endorsed the workshop as an optional day of inservice or for professional development credit. Check with supervisors.

Registration Form

Name _____ Subject _____

Address _____ Grade _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Enclose fee and send to the Office of Extended Campus and Continuing Education, 110 Gooch Hall, UTM, Martin, TN 38238

Field Notes, Spring 2000 Special Insert

Books for Teachers and their Students

Bud, Not Buddy by Christopher Paul Curtis, Delacorte Press, 1999.

This year's Newbery Award winner is *Bud, Not Buddy* by Christopher Paul Curtis. Set during the depression in Flint, Michigan, the book is the story of "Bud, not Buddy" Caldwell's search for his father. In the opening pages, Bud, orphaned at age six, is assigned to yet another foster home and the story proceeds from there. Libraries and librarians come off wonderfully in this story.

The Afterword is particularly instructive for writing teachers and writing students for how it describes the sources for the

Teachers participat-

names of workshop, and his wife, Joanne Portalupi.

Curtis also received the Coretta Scott King Author Award for this young people's novel.

For more about the Newbery award, Caldecott, and other young readers' awards, see the Newbery website: <http://www.ala.org/alsc/newbery.html>

Plainsong by Kent Haruf, Random House, 1999.

Kent Haruf's novel *Plainsong* was nominated for the National Book Award in 1999. Set in Haruf's Holt, Colorado, the book is the story of brothers Ike and Bobby; their dad, Tom Guthrie, a teacher at the local high school; a student at the school, Victoria Roubideaux; and the bachelor farmers who take her in, the McPherson brothers.

Haruf, who teaches at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale, was the guest consultant to WTWP's summer institute in 1998 where he led participants in writing exercises and read from the manuscript of *Plainsong*. Haruf also has spoken on the UT Martin campus as part of the Academic Speakers program.



Mama and Me and the Model T, by Faye Gibbons, illustrated by Ted Rand, Morrow Junior Books, 1999.

On her visit to Martin as the opening presenter at the August 1998 workshop for K-12 teachers, Faye Gibbons talked about the sources for her children's books, including the story behind this story for young readers. Like her other books, this story, too, is set in the Georgia Mountains, and stars the Searcys and the Longs of her earlier book, *Mountain Wedding*

Live Writing: Breathing Life into Your Words by Ralph Fletcher, Avon Books, 1999.

Live Writing says everything a writer and writing teacher needs to know about good writing. At \$4.99 a copy, this book is an inexpensive version of Fletcher's larger, *What A Writer Needs*. As the sub-title says, this book is about "strategies, ideas, and tips to fuel you for a lifetime of writing." Fletcher is known to West Tennessee teachers for his presentations at the August 1999 workshop for K-12 teachers, and his day-long consultation with that summer's intensive writing institute of WTWP.

Master's in education allows 18 hours of subject matter

The master's program in the UT Martin School of Education has been redesigned to allow 18 hours in specialty courses outside of education. Furthermore, all upper division courses from the Department of English can count as points toward teacher recertification (check with supervisors of instruction) or, at the graduate level, as part of the "thirty above" the master's.

For information about admission to graduate studies at UT Martin, contact the Office of Graduate Studies, 309 Administration Building, UT Martin, 38238 or call

(901) 587-7012.

For information about the new master's program, contact the School of Education, 237 Gooch Hall, UT Martin, 38238, (901) 587-7125.

Watch for mailings describing upper division course offerings in English during regular summer session, and in the fall semester, or contact the Department of English at UT Martin, (901) 587-7300, FAX (901) 587-7276 about upper division course offerings.

See other side for upcoming WTWP workshop opportunities.

News of WTWP Teacher Consultants

Leeann Sipes, WTWP teacher consultant and 2nd grade teacher, Dyersburg City Schools, is president of TEAMS, the Tennessee Educators of Aquatic and Marine Science.

Paula Cox, WTWP co-director and 3rd grade teacher at Briarwood Elementary in Camden, has achieved National Board Certification by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. Paula is one of 17 Tennessee teachers certified in 1999 who join the seven Tennessee teachers already so certified.

Judith Russell's article "A Writing Treasure Trove" appears in the latest *Ideas Plus: A Collection of Practical Teaching Ideas: Book 17, 1999*. *Ideas Plus* is published periodically by the National Council of Teachers of English. Judy, a teacher consultant of the West Tennessee Writing Project, teaches at Page Middle School, Franklin.

A guest column " '98 storm didn't just affect Nashville," by **Ed Kent**, teacher consultant of WTWP and history teacher at Henry County High School, Paris, appeared in the April 19, 1999 issue of the *Paris Post-Intelligencer*.

Mary Lou Marks, WTWP co-director and Camden Central High School librarian, **Glenda Arant**, WTWP teacher consultant and Martin Middle School reading teacher, and **Margrethe Ahlschwede**, WTWP director, were presenters

October 2, 1999 at the annual meeting of the Tennessee Council of Teachers of English in Memphis. Their presentation was titled: "Writing: The Key to Reflective Practice." Mary Lou led the teachers in a writing camp and described how writing camps lead to student writing submitted to Camden Central High School's literary magazine; Glenda discussed student writing and portfolio assessment; and Margrethe explained how writing with her students leads to writing for publication.

Betty Warren, WTWP teacher consultant and Halls High School English teacher, has received a grant from the Bank of Ripley for the project "Honoring Halls Citizens of the Present and Past and Celebrating Life at the Turn of the Millennium in Rural Tennessee."

Wilmoth Foreman, WTWP teacher consultant and retired from the Columbia School System, has been accepted into the program for the Master of Fine Arts in Writing for Children at Vermont College. Wilmoth also is writing a weekly column for the Columbia newspaper.

Kristi Sayles, WTWP teacher consultant and first grade teacher at Camden Elementary, is doing free-lance writing for magazines including: Home Business Connection, Cutting Edge Opportunities, Network Marketing, and Executive Update.

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Department of English
The University of Tennessee at Martin
Martin, TN 38238

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