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ISI 2016: Memories of Time Spent Together

*Stephanie Duncomb (ISI 2016)
Richfield Dual Language School*

My inspiration for this article comes from a writing prompt that was shared with my cohort during our summer retreat. One of our wise and fearless leaders (I apologize for no longer remembering exactly which one) told us to place one of our hands onto a blank piece of paper in our writing notebooks and trace along its edge with a pen. Once we had finished tracing, we were then instructed to fill the inside of our individual hands with thoughts, ideas, or memories that were related to anything our hands had ever touched or experienced.

At first, this prompt and its unusual format left me feeling hesitant and unsure, my pen taking a few more seconds longer than normal to touch the page. I tentatively wrote down my first idea, which led me to think of a couple more... followed by a few more... followed by several more... until my pace quickened and my hand started to race across my notebook, struggling to keep up with the ideas now flying through my mind. I tried to savor this moment as it



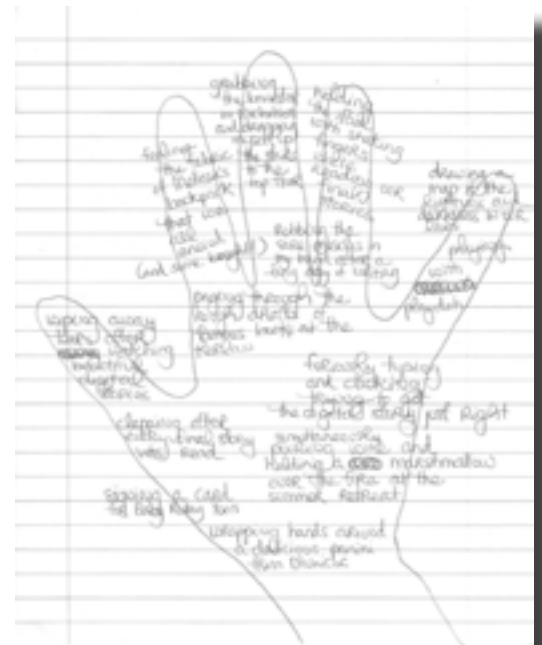
ISI 2016 cohort

was happening because normally I'm rarely able to write without editing every word or turn of phrase in my head before I deem it interesting/funny/relevant/poignant enough to be written down. This time, however, I just tried to fill the hand in front of me with as many ideas as possible. And, wow, did it feel good to just let go and write.

Now, in hopes of recreating the same feelings of freedom and flow, I am going to write in response to the same prompt again, yet this time focus my writing on anything my hands ever touched or experienced during this summer's institute. Let's see if it still works...

- Grabbing the banister in the stairwell of Nicholson Hall and dragging myself up the stairs to the top floor
- Rubbing the sore muscles in my hand after a long day of writing
- Wrapping my hands around a delicious panini from D'Amico
- Holding a marshmallow over the bonfire at the summer retreat (while also trying to not drop my glass of wine!)
- Paging through the rough drafts of books I treasured as a child during our visit to the Kerlan
- Feeling the fabric of Melissa's backpack that we all envied (...and some later bought)
- Drawing a map of the lightness and darkness in our lives during Carleen's demonstration
- Gripping my iPad with shaking fingers while reading my final piece
- Playing with Play-Doh and feeling like a kid again during Melissa's demonstration
- Signing a card for the youngest (and cutest) member of our cohort, Baby Rollag Yoon
- Wiping away tears while listening to raw, emotional stories being read by incredibly talented people who I had the privilege of writing beside this summer

Thank you to all of my fellow cohort members who made it so easy to fill my hand (and my heart) with wonderful memories of our time spent together this summer. To those of you belonging to other cohorts, I realize that you may not recognize many of the references that I included in this list, but I hope that the prompt will inspire you to take a few minutes out of your busy day, dust off your cherished writing notebook, and spend some time tracing, reflecting, and writing.



Stephanie's "hand writing"



Steph Rollag Yoon and baby Simon



Play-Doh creation

FEAR

I am filled with **Fear**

Fear for my family

Fear for my friends

Fear for my neighbors

Fear for my students

Fear for my colleagues

Fear for my classmates

Fear for all people

Fear for our freedom

Fear for society

Fear of the injustice

Fear for the unknown

Fear of the unknown

Fear: when will we ever learn to love everybody for who they are?

Fear: when will we ever learn to love everybody no matter who they are?

Am I filled with **Fear** because of all the hate and injustice in the world today?

What can I do to get rid of **Fear**?

Do I let **Fear** paralyze me?

Do I let **Fear** push me into action?

Do I have the power to take **Fear** away?

What action do I take?

Minnesota students now eligible for Scholastic Writing Awards

Dana Amdahl (ISI 2014)

Albany Senior High School

President of Minnesota Council of Teachers of English

The Minnesota Writing Project is pleased to partner with Scholastic Writing Awards to provide recognition opportunities for student writers and their teachers throughout Minnesota.

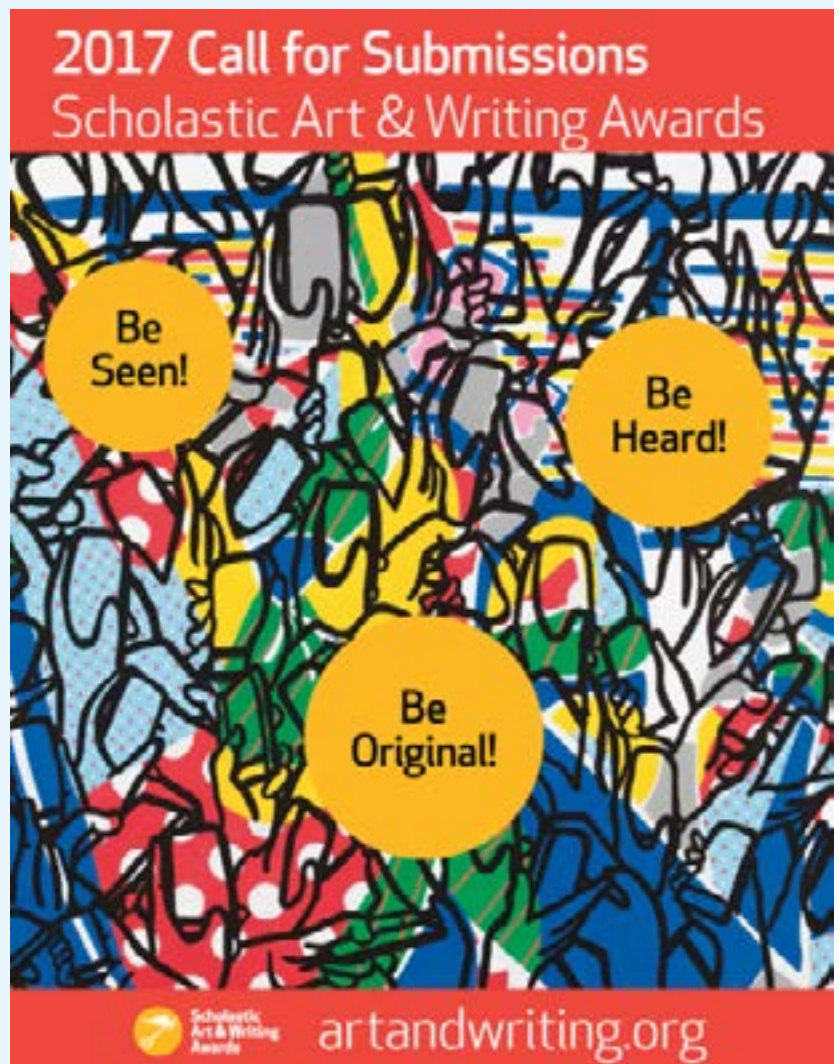
The Scholastic Writing Awards recognize student achievement in the literary arts in eleven categories: critical essay, dramatic script, flash fiction, humor, journalism, novel writing, personal essay and memoir, poetry, science fiction and fantasy, short story, and writing portfolio.

Since 1923, the Awards have recognized and encouraged millions of students, including Truman Capote, Philip Pearlstein, Sylvia Plath, Andy Warhol, and John Updike, who won when they were teens. In more recent years, famous names such as Stephen King, Myla Goldberg, Zac Posen, Lena Dunham, and Richard Linklater have become alumni of the program.

Each work of writing is blindly adjudicated, first locally through the more than 100 affiliates of the Alliance, and then nationally by panels of judges composed of renowned artists, authors, educators and industry experts.

Works are judged on originality, technical skill, and emergence of personal vision or voice.

To learn more about the Scholastic Writing Awards, read the full rules, or register yourself or your students, [click here](#).



Theatre Campers “Take the Stage” at MWP

Ann Thompson (ISI 2007)



Saving the Prince

It was another great summer for the theatre camp Playwrights & Performance offered through the University of Minnesota Youth & Community Programs in conjunction with the Minnesota Writing Project. This was my third summer teaching two sessions of the week-long camp that I created for middle-schoolers.

At the end of each week, room 12 in Nicholson Hall transformed into a mini-theatre where the middle-schoolers performed the play they wrote as a group. Before the performance, they practiced their lines, created sets and props, and brought in simple costumes for the production. The campers were fascinated by my character make-up demonstration as I transformed from a middle-aged woman to an 80-year-old lady in costume.

We’ve been fortunate in having wonderful audiences of parents and Center for Writing faculty members to support these young playwrights and actors!



Rainbow Colors

Minnesota Writing Project
2016 Fall Workshop



Partnering to Explore Social Justice, Art, & Literacy

Featuring Tish Jones, spoken word artist and executive director of TruArtSpeaks.



*October 1, 2016 9 am- 3 pm
Register online at
mwp.umn.edu*

Deadline: Monday, September 26

Audience: Educators across all settings and levels interested in art, literacy, and social justice

When: Saturday, October 1; 9 am - 3 pm

Where: The Minnesota Humanities Center
987 Ivy Ave E, St Paul, MN 55106

Cost: \$50 (Lunch provided; CEUs available)

For more information and to register online visit:
mwp.umn.edu

Announcements & Upcoming Events

Fall Workshop: October 1, 2016

Please mark your calendars for our annual fall workshop, *Partnering to Explore Social Justice, Art, & Literacy*, to be held on Saturday, October 1, 2016. See the brochure [on page 6](#) for more information and [register online](#) by Monday, September 26.

New TCs Offer Guidance and Leadership

This year we have four new teachers who have offered their time and expertise to help advise and lead ongoing activities for the Writing Project. We thank them for their service. If you would like to be involved with the MWP Advisory Board or be a cohort representative, contact us at mwp@umn.edu.

Kate Fullmer – MWP Advisory Board

Kate teaches junior and senior English at Eden Prairie High School. She just completed her doctorate at Hamline University. We welcome her perspective of a teacher working in a large suburban school.



Melissa Toft – MWP Advisory Board

Melissa teaches at Jenny Lind School, a High Priority school in Minneapolis. She has taught second through fifth grade and believes strongly in embedding writing into the curriculum. As she noted, “When we scaffold the writing process it doesn’t matter if they can’t read a grade level book or spell any sight words; what matters is that they can relate their writing to the stories they have read/heard and they get the help they need to tell their own.”



Suzanne Temple and Erin Whitcraft – 2016 Cohort Representatives

Suzanne teaches language arts at Henry Sibley High School in Mendota Heights and is an AVID leader in that initiative. According to her principal, she “is quite simply the exemplar of what a teacher should be.”



Erin teaches at St. Paul Central High School. She adds to the strong cohort of teachers at Central who have participated in our Invitational Summer Institutes.



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