Greetings

As the new school year gets into full swing, we are once again reminded of the power and importance of community. It's been a busy summer for MWP and we're looking forward to an exciting fall. In this issue, we have reflections and personal writing from some of the many groups we've been working with over the past few months, including our summer institutes and a new partnership between Ramsey Middle School and the Science Museum of MN.

Take a look at the upcoming events for ways to stay connected, from our fall workshop to writing groups in your community. We are excited for what is to come and look forward to seeing you there!
Writing from the Right Place
By Logan Colby
6th grade Math and Language Arts teacher
La Crescent–Hokah School District

MWP knows that growth comes from community. During this summer’s Open Institute — Writing for Social Justice — thirteen students/teachers/instructors spent two weeks developing the trust necessary to allow us to grapple with the uncomfortable truths that underlie issues of race, gender, class, and other constructs of identity and culture. We wrote poems and plays and essays and pieces more difficult to categorize about our names, our roots, our language, our social class, our race, our language, our classrooms, our schools, our students.

And we formed smaller communities. We reorganized into writing groups in which we supported each other’s growth as writers and teachers by listening, by probing, by celebrating. And we reorganized again in our lesson plan and literature review groups and we helped clarify the questions that needed to be asked and we worked together to find answers.

Teaching compels me to live the best version of myself

I have to be honest—this was not easy for me. I am not naturally driven to join in community—left to my own devices, I’d linger at the outskirts. But that’s part of why I left a lucrative career in computing to teach middle school instead. Teaching compels me to live the best version of myself; my students require that I walk my talk.

This, too, MWP knows. It knows that teachers of writing must be writers, and so we wrote, and shared, and listened, and we wrote again.

And it knows that social justice requires activists. We spent an afternoon in the company of young activists and hacktivists who seek to subvert oppression through democratic access to technology. We spent an hour celebrating a guest teacher’s subversion of curriculum so her students can find themselves in the literature of the classroom. We participated in tea parties that pressed us to see through the eyes of the other. We role played within scenarios rooted in injustice so that we could practice standing up to take right action.

I tell my students each year that I believe the best works of literature are the ones that change their readers. By that criteria, this year’s Open Institute was a grand success, for I am changed, and my classroom will be the better for it.
When you look at her you will see a girl/woman who is about 5’0 (5’1 1/2 to be exact)
With straight black hair that reaches her mid-back
But is usually pulled up into a ponytail,
Big almond-shaped brown-colored eyes, a small curved yet wide nose, high cheekbones on a Square face, a wide forehead with wide-set eyes, rather plump lips that are two shades darker Than her yellow-tinged pale skin,
A smile always at the ready because of the upward curves at the end of her lips,
And a slightly defined butt-chin.
She is of average weight without muscular definition.
She is OK to look at—average.
Her clothing style is pretty casual. She doesn’t wear makeup often.
She is Asian.
This is her appearance.

When you look at her, you notice the timidity in her stance.
Her shoulders are slightly hunched,
Despite the fact that she tries to stand up straight.
She keeps her gaze to the ground.
Her relaxed stance moves into a tensed one where she pulls her arms up and twiddles with her fingers. Her eyes dart everywhere and her Breathing Becomes Shallow.
At this moment you can see and sense the timidity and fragility of her state when she is alone.

What you don’t know is that part of her fear of being
Alone
Attributes to the fact that she has been surrounded by her family all her life.
You don’t know that she was pushed into this quietness
Because her teachers told her classmates that she was Asian and Asians are “model students;”
That her classmates should be like her and she didn’t want to disappoint them so
She molded herself into the model minority.
When she walks in a group she walks more confidently,
Either in the middle or at the end of the line,
Away from authoritative eyes.
Her back straightens a little and her arms hang loosely to her sides.
Sometimes, she can be seen with a soft smile as she gazes at people, at her surroundings.
She looks curious when she’s with others.
She emanates kindness and timidity. She is quiet.
This is her in public spaces.
When you talk to her, in a group, she is quiet and listens with wide eyes.
She smiles and nods. She murmurs agreements and makes small sounds to show you that she is listening.
Her body leans toward you and she is easy to read. She is quiet, though. You sense that she has things to say but she lets others speak before her and understands that, Sometimes, She doesn’t need to be heard; Sometimes, she just nods in agreement, as if to say, “That was what I was going to say, too!” What you don’t know about her is that she was taught to be quiet because of her culture and That she was used to so many people talking over her. She felt as though what she had to say would never be good enough because some persons had told her that she was not “good enough.” You don’t know that her teachers often told her she was wrong or her classmates, although they said it as kindly as possible, told her that she didn’t understand the material. So, she remained Quiet. However, when you talk to her, Alone, She is more animated. There is no more politeness in those eyes. In place of the politeness, there is animation. In place of those small murmurs of agreements and small sounds, there are grand gestures and wide smiles—giggles and laughs. She is more willing to share her thoughts. You sense that she is no longer afraid to say what she wants to say. Her quiet ways of listening are still present, but Her presence has grown; There is a certain type of depth within her. This is her with conversations.

When you speak to her, she stutters and backtracks. Sometimes, she will physically take backward steps to remember what she was thinking or what she was saying. When you speak to her, her emotions are visible on her face, even though the monotony of her voice presents a difficulty of conveying her true emotions. When you speak to her, Her voice is quiet, Tiny some might say. She sounds like a little girl. When she tries to yell, it sounds as if she is merely speaking at a regular voice-level. What you don’t know is that she was put into silence When her family moved around so often that she didn’t know how to make friends. You don’t know that she used to play a game with herself, in middle and high school, like “How long can I go without talking?” and that the longest time she went without talking was three days. You don’t know that she was so scared of judgment. You don’t know that her imagination went so overboard that she expected laughter, disapproving looks, and so on, with whatever she said, causing herself to be numbed in silence. However, when you communicate with her through writing, She is beyond expressive and the words come more easily from her mind to her fingertips. She is not used to portraying herself through speech, you realize. Her way of communication is through her fingertips on a keyboard or when she holds a
I talk of what I have seen through the eyes of “you,”

You sense her struggles with her appearance, her low self-esteem. You begin to understand her self-consciousness with her voice and speaking her own truth. She has always been told that she is stupid, an idiot, a girl that has nothing worthwhile to say, that she is unintelligent and unknowing, ignorant, book-smart, rather than street-smart, lacking of common sense, and everything negative that was directed toward her, like when her classmate asked if he could just call her “A” because her names were difficult to remember and who cares what she’s called because she’s Asian and they all look the same. What you don’t know is that she has been beaten emotionally and mentally through the years, encountering bullies from the beginning of preschool to the end of secondary education. She couldn’t fit in with the “American” people because she looked too Asian and didn’t speak; she couldn’t fit in with the “Asians” because her knowledge of her culture and language was minimal. She always felt insignificant but she never let that stop her. You begin to see that even though she is timid, even through all these experiences, she is always herself, Albeit a bit more reserved. When you get to know her, she can be a little ball of positivity, strength, A ball of hope. You take a different perspective and do not look at what you see but what you know. You think of the different perspectives—Your initial impression, your final judgment of her, her own thinking of herself. You realize that, if you had not changed your perspective and noticed these little things, you may have never known who she truly was—Who she truly is.

You see that this girl—This woman—Is me and that I am also you. I talk of what I have seen through the eyes of “you,” What I would like others to see when they see “her,” who is me. I want people to think more deeply into the why of “Why are you like this?”
Another Story About a Wedding:
featuring Jedda, as told by Juliet

By Juliet Dana
10th and 11th grade History
Marin Academy San Rafael, CA

In college, I fell in love, hard, with the most unusual and wonderful girl I knew. Though it may have surprised my family — it even surprised me a little bit — those feelings were quickly outplaced by my certainty that she was so deeply good as my counterbalance, my partner. We shared an ability, early on, to imagine a long future together. Twelve years later, I still find myself waking up in the early hours before work and catching my breath when I see her asleep next to me, amazed at my luck and the gift of our relationship.

She prizes integrity in herself and others. She keeps her promises, marriage far less important to her than commitment. But I wanted it all, not just marriage but a Wedding: the white dress, clinking glasses, gold sequins, sentimental touches. And it is only recently that I can name this, but it seems what I really wanted was to use our wedding to prove to everyone how happy, and clever, yet normal I was, to banish any doubt or unease they could possibly have about my sophisticated life, marred in their eyes (I thought) by my being so far-from-home and gay.

As a kid, I was unaware of having queer role models. I distinctly recall a whispered rumor in seventh grade that our trendy new teacher was a lesbian; I remember the excitement of gossip and my mixture of unease and pity that she would somehow have a less-good life than if she could just be straight. Who would choose that? I wanted to be happy, to make my family proud.

And yet, that college girl and I stayed together, from idealism and stubbornness, through ambitious moves, cash-poor nomadism, my horrible first years of teaching — we grew up together through our twenties. In increments too small to notice, I erased my childish concern that a queer life would be second best. I gained comfort with the idea of living in California, putting down roots there with her. But at ten years after first dating, our long-anticipated engagement reignited my fear that everyone else needed convincing about us, about me.

I wanted to declare our love, of course, but I also wanted to convey that I still feel the most whole when I land back in Minnesota, when I smell the trees, feel the crackling dry air of winter, am surrounded by my family's arms again. I hate the competing feelings of disloyalty that come up when I talk about feeling rooted in two places, as if suggesting that my love for my life in California has grown because Minnesota wasn't quite good enough. On the contrary, Minnesota makes so much sense to me. Minnesota holds nearly the entirety of the 101 people on my side of the family guest list. Our wedding
Another Story About a Wedding: 
featuring Jedda, as told by Juliet (continued)

turned into my project to prove that I could have it all: that pockets of California feel like the north woods, that if I planned the just-right details then our families would fit seamlessly together, that my marrying a woman was no threat to the storybook wedding I had fantasized as a little girl, would fit right in the family story and photo albums.

Of course, weddings are complicated family rituals. They seem to invite feelings and opinions from all directions. And, I’ve decided, I think they should. For as much as I tried to eliminate conflict, to polish up my public persona to a gloss, to funnel so much proving into this one rite of passage — I was naïve. I stepped on some toes. I got my own toes stepped on. I made compromises; I spent too much money or not enough money; I dropped some balls. Some people I love couldn’t be with us, for mostly very good reasons. (If any guest’s regrets were due to the gayness of this union, they hid it well.) More importantly, so many people we love were completely with us, putting in the elbow grease that made it a true community affair, adding sparkles that amazed me.

I surprised myself with what ended up feeling important and which moments have become my favorites as I continue to look back on that blur of activity. What started as a project I undertook to make a point wormed its way into my heart where it really belonged: as a collaborative ritual about community. We fashioned a rough-around-the-edges, hilarious, love-filled summer camp of a weekend, a snapshot of the people we are and who we were just then, and an expression of our gratitude to the many people who raised us and shape who we are.

When we wrote our vows, we decided we wanted to capture our active choice to be together and stay together inside the work of our relationship. Instead of framing them as promises, we committed to making choices. “I choose to be your partner…. I choose to celebrate how our strengths and traits complement each other.” That poetry felt honest, in such a way to make space for the unknown and uncontrollable future to come.

I have the choice now to look back on our wedding and see it for exactly how it was. I have the choice, too, to forgive myself for trying so hard to deny the differences that made me want my own unique wedding, one true to the culture I learned growing up in my family in the Midwest, and true also to my wife’s family, as well as honoring our countercultural choice to participate in a rite once forbidden from us. For all my worry and control, we created a wedding that was just so “us.” And in the end, we really had nothing to prove. We had been being ourselves all along.
Connected Learning: Film Festivals and Essays

By Sean Bailey
6th grade Language Arts teacher
Ramsey Middle School, St. Paul

If you've ever spent a moment with a middle schooler, you know that there is a unique and powerful energy that courses through them. An energy that shows up as a need to move, touch, explore, understand, take apart, rebuild, and put voice to everything around them.

Now imagine (and I know many of you have) channelling that energy and passion into a five-paragraph essay that authentically captures not only that wonderful energy, but demonstrates authentic learning and gives voice to that young person.

It’s not easy.
And if I’m going to be real, on a day to day level it’s not possible.
And if I’m going to be real real, I’m not sure I want to take my middle school English Language Arts students down that road anyway.

Instead, I, like most teachers of reading and writing, am on a constant search to make writing more authentic and real for my students.

Enter the Science Museum of Minnesota. The SMM just might be the living embodiment of that middle school energy I described earlier—people get the chance to touch, explore, understand, take apart, rebuild and express their own voice. With the help of the MWP I have the privilege of bringing a little bit of that energy into my classroom this winter.

Besides being an interactive place for people of all ages to learn about science and the world around us, the SMM offers a program called Teen Tech Crew (TTC). TTC is made up of Saint Paul high school students, who are given the opportunity to solve problems using STEM strategies. TTC members take their projects to libraries around Saint Paul. Not only do TTC members teach community members what they learned, but community participants get to walk away with some sort of workable piece of technology or art. In the past, the Teen Tech Crew has taught community members how to make things like light bulb plant terrariums and homemade Gatorade.

This winter, members of the TTC will be bringing their expertise into our 7th grade argument unit at Ramsey Middle School in Saint Paul. Over the summer, the TTC created a curriculum that will teach my middle school students to recognize how oppression and power shows up their communities and the issues that power and oppression creates. Next, both the TTC and I will teach my students how to
Connected Learning: Film Festivals and Essays (continued)

research the issues and possible solutions related to a specific form of oppression or issue facing their community. After we’ve guided my students through using that research to craft an effective argument, the TTC students will use their tech prowess to help my students craft a short public service announcement, music video, or some sort of other short film advocating for change.

Like all good units, we’re going to celebrate our hard work by having our own film festival when the projects are completed.

As the 2017–18 school year transitions from dreamy planning stages to students filling our classrooms, I can’t help but spread my excitement for the potential of the project. I told all of my 7th grade families about the collaboration during our recent open house. I told them about how I can’t wait to see the high schoolers take on the role of elders and facilitators in the classroom. I explained how the project is going to empower students to share their stories, and their communities’ stories, and become advocates. I told them how I can’t wait to see students immersed in digital literacy and using their iPads to not only receive information, but also to process and mold it into their own product. Most of all, I’m excited to de-centralize my role as teacher and become a facilitator, along with the TTC members, of self-driven learning.

And in my flurry of excitement, I also explained that, yes, we’re also going to translate all of our learning and innovation into a solidly written essay.
In Memory of Maureen Mahoney
By Gretchen Hovan
With contributions from members of the 2017 cohort from the seminar on Holocaust and the Meaning of Place

This summer, Merry Meltz and Maureen Mahoney led the first-ever seminar on Holocaust and the Meaning of Place, a satellite seminar of the TOLI Holocaust education program. They designed and crafted a week of work that helped us to think and learn not only about the experience of Jewish people in Europe and Dakota people in Minnesota but also about what it means to be fully human and to recognize that same humanity in all people.

Maureen reminded us at several points that we would find that the right people were in the room: that we all come into each other’s lives when we most need it. When Maureen died unexpectedly, earlier this month, Merry let us know with a message with the subject line “Sad heart.” In response, the group poured out our memories and love for Maureen, the ways that Maureen was in our heart:

Maureen, at once fierce and tender.
Her eyes, smile, determination,
wisdom, laugh.
insight, resourcefulness, encouragement.
Her friendly, sweet, kind spirit,
honoring the spiritual, the sacred feminine,
teaching us to see we aren’t “just” teachers.
An old Irish soul.
A strong, calming, wise steward,
A passionate storyteller!
I admired her strength.
Our time with Maureen is something we will all treasure,
like the numerous dimes we are bound to collect.

During the workshop, Maureen wrote sweet and poignant stories about her grandmother. She talked with Merry about how her grandmother always found dimes, on the ground, never any other coin. In her note to let us know of Maureen’s death, Merry shared that she is saving up those found dimes and encouraged us to save them too, and use them to start donations to the MS society, in Maureen’s name.

Maureen told Merry what a gift the MWP Summer Institute had been to her. That time helped her to get back to her passion for writing, explore her heritage through digital storytelling and set her on a path of professional development which led her and Merry to create the seminar we all attended this past summer. We will be forever grateful for our time with her.
MWP Engages in an Advanced Institute: College, Career, and Community Writers Program (C3WP)
By Stephanie Rollag Yoon

What is C3WP?
The National Writing Project College, Career, and Community Writers Program (C3WP) was developed at National Writing Project (NWP) sites to support the teaching of argument writing in high school classrooms. The work of C3WP honors students’ postsecondary paths in college, careers, and their communities by integrating curricular resources, formative assessment, professional reading, and professional conversations in a professional development framework for teachers. Research from its initial implementation in 22 districts across 10 sites shows that the program has made significant positive impacts on content, structure, stance, and conventions in student writing. As a local Writing Project Site, MWP secured a grant to engage Minnesota educators in an Advanced Institute to implement C3WP in their own districts through the 2017–2018 school year.

Extending our Minnesota Writing Project Community
MWP site leader Erin Mohr is facilitating the implementation of C3WP through an Advanced Institute with 12 teachers from across Minnesota. We kicked off the Advanced Institute with 18 hours of professional development this summer, and will continue to have monthly online and face-to-face meetings for an additional 12 hours throughout the school year.

At our introductory launch during the summer, teachers spent time making sense of the many resources the National Writing Project has put together to support argument writing. Additionally, we built a community of writing educators, supporting our work together across sites. Like other MWP programs, the C3WP Advanced Institute has proven to be an opportunity for educators to engage in discussion and collaboration around teaching writing.

Implementing C3WP in the classroom.
Teachers who are participating in the Advanced Institute bring instructional resources to their classroom and implement formative assessments to inform next steps in instruction. According to the National Writing Project, these resources focus on “reading and analyzing multiple perspectives on important issues, developing strong claims, and effectively using nonfiction texts as evidence.” Similar to other NWP materials, the resources are models that teachers can adjust to meet their own classroom needs. For formative assessment, the program features the Using Sources Tool, which is a resource teachers can use to make decisions about students’ writing, specifically around supporting claims in argument writing.

Sharing Resources
As MWP educators bring these resources to their own classrooms, we look forward to sharing the C3WP resources with other Minnesota educators. For more information on this program, please contact Stephanie at sry@umn.edu.
MWP Project Briefs

Scholastic 2017 Class of National Student Poets: Ben Lee

My experience with the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards has been nothing but positive. Ever since an English teacher introduced me to the awards, I have been participating and submitting work across several genres for three years. I am so grateful that the Scholastic Awards presents the opportunity for young artists and writers to showcase their voices with people around their region and around the country. Not only am I grateful for the chance to share my writing on a national level, but I am also so appreciative that the awards allow teens to read the work of other adolescents in this nation. The Scholastic Art and Writing Awards gave me assurance that my voice matters, and through exposure to the work of other youth poets, the program has also pushed me to better my craft and keep reading poetry. I never thought that I could be a National Student Poet. But the Scholastic Awards, along with my educators, have proved to me that poetry is not only a benefactor in my life but a necessity. Words cannot express how incredibly thankful I am for that realization.

In Memory of Mary Beth Blegen: A Scholarship Donation

In 1991 Mary Beth Blegen, a high school humanities teacher from Worthington, Minnesota, applied and was selected to participate in the first MWP Invitational Summer Institute. After participating that summer, she returned the next two summers to assist with the program. As she grew in recognition as an outstanding educator, she continued to represent our project with pride.

In 1995 she was named Minnesota Teacher of the Year, and in 1996 she gained the honor of National Teacher of the Year. Always willing to offer ideas and inspiration, she was actively involved with MWP until her death.

Mary Beth’s family has given a donation to MWP in her memory. Building on their gift with donations that MWP has received, MWP would like to create a scholarship to encourage other educators outside of the Twin Cities to apply. If you would like to contribute to an MWP scholarship in Mary Beth's honor, you can send it to MWP, 10 Nicholson Hall, 216 Pillsbury Drive SE, Minneapolis, MN 55455.
Upcoming Events

2018 Scholastic Writing Awards
Register YOUR students for the 2018 Scholastic Writing Awards: Registration is open for the 2018 Scholastic Writing Awards from now until December 14, 2017. Register your students at mwp.umn.edu.

26th Annual National Service Learning Conference
The 26th Annual National Service Learning Conference will be taking place in St. Paul March 11–13, 2018! The conference is accepting proposals to present at the conference until October 27th. If you are interested or have questions, email Sarah Bassett-Kim at sbaasett@nylc.org.

MWP Fall Workshop: Teaching Love in an Era of Hate
Join us on Saturday, October 14, 2017: 9:00 am–noon at UROC (Urban Research & Outreach-Engagement Center) in Minneapolis to discuss and share resources related to critical engagement with students about current discourses of hate and fear in our country.
Pay what you can at the door: $5 or $10 (light snacks included)
Certificates for 3 hours of CEUs will be available.
Register at mwp.umn.edu by Friday, October 6, so we can plan accordingly.

MWP Winter Workshop Series
Saturday, January 20, 2018: Setting up the Writing Workshop
Saturday, February 10, 2018: Assessing Writing