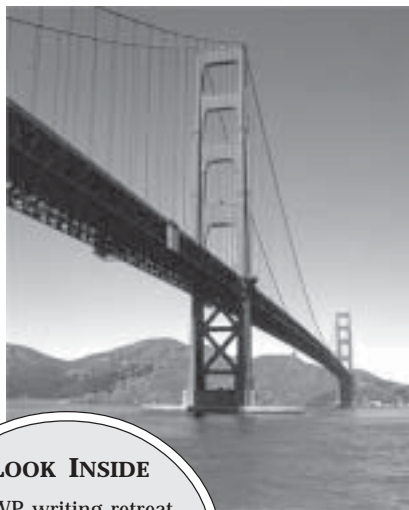




Minnesota Writing Project

Winter 2004

Vol. 13 No. 2



NWP Annual Convention: Celebrating Thirty Years

by Muriel Thompson

Several Minnesota Writing Project fellows responded to the National Writing Project invitation to "Come kick off the Writing Project's 30th anniversary with colleagues from across the country, and pay tribute to three decades of success and the thousands of teachers who made it possible." The Annual Fall Meeting is always held in conjunction with the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) Annual Convention. This past November's conventions in San Francisco were attended by Bev Alsleben, Marsha Besch, Melissa Borgmann, Sandy Hayes, Kirsten Jansen, Mary Cathryn Ricker, Micki St. Sauver, Micheal Thompson, and Muriel Thompson.

In addition to the multitude of NCTE program offerings, the NWP Annual Meeting includes interactive workshop sessions, roundtable discussions, and demonstrations of successful practices conducted by writing project directors, site leaders, and teacher-consultants. All of the choices made it difficult to decide what to attend, not to mention the temptation of sight-seeing and shopping!

Since Marsha and I enjoy the luxury of being "retired," we decided to spend a couple of extra days in the Bay area. We were able to take a bus tour of the city, visit Muir Woods, dine in Sausalito, walk the wharf, and ride the cable cars before we settled down to gather great ideas from NWP workshops.

NWP workshops.

Friday is the official start of the NWP Annual Meeting, with a general session in the morning, followed by three rounds of workshop sessions in the afternoon. An air of excitement filled the meeting hall, with hundreds of representatives from WP sites in attendance. After opening greetings from Director Richard Sterling, Mark St. John (Inverness Research Corporation) shared an overview of the Project's accomplishments, joking that NWP is the longest lasting professional development program in the history of the world — complete with humorous graphics in his presentation. Truly, NWP *has* grown from 14 sites to 175, with all 50 states included. Over 2 million teachers have participated in NWP programs.



NWP Convention attendees enjoy a night out.

Executive Director Sterling indicated that now our focus should be to increase the *depth* and *breadth* of the organization. He identified five important steps towards accomplishing this task: 1) design change with teachers at the center, 2) acknowledge the risks involved in promoting and implementing changes, 3) pay attention to social practices, 4) expect difficulties, 5) assume responsibilities for results.

One special highlight of the morning was the standing ovation for Jim Gray, Founder of the National Writing Project. Then Director Mary Ann Smith introduced Bob Tierney and Patsy Lockhart, of the Bay Area
(continued page 2)

LOOK INSIDE

- MWP writing retreat
- upcoming events
- grammar workshop
- job opportunity
- more!

** OPPORTUNITIES! **

14th -Annual

* Selective Summer Institute *

June 23 - 25, Kick-off Retreat

July 12 - 30, Institute

Nominate a Colleague

Register Yourself

* Open Institute *

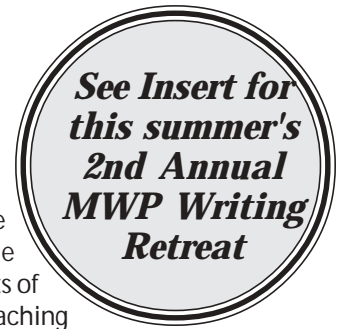
*Middle School Mosaic: Reading & Writing
in the Middle School*

July 19-30

details at <http://mwp.umn.edu>

Reflections from 2003 MWP Summer Writing Retreat

By Kathleen Keating



Hello Mudder, hello Fadder, *We had heaps of fun at MWP Writing Camp!*

Eleven MWP writers met at Mount Olivet Retreat Center for an overnight writing retreat during the June Selective Institute. Breathing the fresh air and reveling in the beauty of the outdoors, we wrote, made new friends, discussed writing and teaching practices, and walked the labyrinth on the grounds of the Retreat Center. At our final session, we packed our metaphorical bags with thoughts of what we would take from writing camp. Some things we took home: shared stories and practical teaching ideas, including Alison McGhee's hints for writing dialogue, and new friends. Refreshed, renewed, and sometimes regaled with laughter, we look forward to meeting again. Next year the retreat will be slightly longer to allow for more writing. We invite YOU to put June 24-25, 2004 on your calendar so you can join us at the Second MWP Writing Retreat.

(continued) WP, who shared reflections on their involvement with NWP. Participating in a 1980 summer institute, Bob, a science teacher, found that putting pen to paper equaled the discovery process, an exercise in logic. He believes that writing facilitates learning and that students retain knowledge longer. One of his most poignant comments was a comparison of life to the writing process. He acknowledged that life doesn't allow us to revise, but if it did, he said that two events in his life he would never change: his marriage and his involvement with the writing project. Patsy Lockhart, a 1984 summer institute participant, thanked Jim Gray for saving one teacher from leaving the classroom. Her demonstration in the summer institute was for her a right of passage. Jim Gray was in her audience. After she completed her lesson, he said, "She did it! I knew it!" Patsy said that moment saved her life, "I met someone inside of me!"

The morning ended appropriately with an invitation from Mary Ann to write quietly for ten minutes, responding to the prompt, "How has the writing project affected me?" As participants turned to one another to share their writings, the hall erupted with voices of passion and laughter. Here are some thoughts gleaned from us:

Muriel: "I learned to trust my own process - to accept that I could teach writing by allowing students to find their own process. When the opportunity to start a site at the University of MN occurred, I was ecstatic! I wanted as many teachers as possible to receive the gift that I had - the supporting network of fellows who give so unselfishly of their talents and wisdom of teaching. The friendships, experience, and knowledge I have gained from these relationships are invaluable."

Marsha: "The Writing Project has provided me the opportunity to grow both personally and professionally. It has provided a nurturing atmosphere to take risks, to learn, and to share ideas with teachers around the state. It has confirmed the importance of writing (and reading) in connecting with others and with myself to discover what I know and what I want to know, to ask questions, to seek answers and to ask some more. MWP has also allowed me to be a part of a national organization that has shaped education in the country with the power of individual teachers joined together."

Upcoming Events

Join us on February 18th at 5pm and treat yourself to a literary Valentine at the Red Balloon Bookshop! Join other teachers and MWP members for a discussion of new literature, led by a Red Balloon employee. Browse the bookstore together and maybe even indulge yourself with a new book and a night of dining on Grand Avenue. No RSVP is necessary.



On April 10, author Lois Lowry will be honored as the recipient of the 2004 Kerlan Award, in recognition of "singular attainments in the creation of children's literature." Lowry has won the Newberry Medal for *Number the Stars* and *The Giver*. More information on the ceremony can be found at the website for the Kerlan Children's Literature Collection at <http://special.lib.umn.edu/clrc>



Robert MacNeil, formerly of the *MacNeil/Lehrer Newshour*, was the kickoff speaker at the 93rd Annual NCTE Convention this past fall. His talk focused on a new two-hour special that will air on PBS this spring, *Do You Speak American?* Study guides will be available for both middle and high school teachers. His speech stressed the idea that our language is (and should be) always undergoing change.





Attendees discuss "grammar matters" at last fall's workshop. Another is scheduled for February 18th.

Grammar Matters Workshop a Great Success - Another Planned

The subject of teaching grammar never seems to die. Now with the revised language arts standards, the need for an MWP workshop on the topic was evident and the strong concern was demonstrated by a quickly filled workshop with a waiting list. On December 8, over 50 educators gathered at the Minnesota Humanities Center in St. Paul to gain strategies for the teaching of grammar. Presenters for the day included Pamela Flash, Associate Director of the Center for Writing, Sheryl Holt, Coordinator for Non-Native Speakers at the U of M, as well as Director Muriel Thompson and Outreach Coordinator Marsha Besch. Evaluations for the workshop were very positive; the

participant responses explained some of what was gained: 1) An updated awareness of grammar in context, an opportunity to dispel myths about upcoming state tests, and a list of new resources; 2) A better understanding of what grammar I should teach. I also realized that I need to stop "copy editing" and give better feedback that forces kids to make changes (and to understand why); 3) How to help my students when correcting their papers: focus on patterns, don't copy edit papers; 4) More information to help me make better decisions about writing. How to focus on

grammar without the rote repetition, prioritizing what to emphasize in writer's workshop, more knowledge about standards and what to expect; 5) A renewed sense of *perspective* about what is worth focusing on in papers; my first *ever* discussion of approaches for working with ESL/ELL – a timely topic!

The workshop will run again February 18th.

Celebrating 30 Years with 30 Ideas that Work

IDEA #4. Help student writers draw rich chunks of writing from an endless sprawl.

Jan Matsuoka describes a revision conference she held with a third grade English language learner named Sandee, who had written about a recent trip. "I told her I wanted her to have more focus," writes Matsuoka. "I could tell she was confused so I made rough sketches representing the events of her trip. I made a small frame out of a piece of paper and placed it down on one of her drawings - a sketch she made of a visit to her grandmother. Focus, I told her, means writing about the memorable details of the visit with your grandmother, not everything else you did on the trip." "Oh, I get it," Sandee smiled, "like just one cartoon, not a whole bunch." Sandee's next draft was more deep than broad.

29 more ideas that work at
www.writingproject.org/cs/nwpp/print/nwpr/922

Congratulations!

Congratulations to Sandy Hayes, MWP Webmaster, who has been named the 2003 recipient of NCTE's Richard Halle Award. This award recognizes outstanding middle level educators from K-16 or educators who are now in mentoring roles.



Teaching Assistant Position Available at Center for Writing & MWP

The Center for Writing (formerly the Center for Interdisciplinary Studies of Writing and the Student Writing Center) is seeking a Teaching Assistant to work primarily with the Minnesota Writing Project. For this position we desire a graduate student with educational licensure who possesses a strong understanding of, and interest in, the teaching of writing K-college. Applicants should also have excellent computer skills (knowledge of PageMaker and Excel). Experience with programming and administering events would be helpful and an interest in grant writing would also be desirable. Pay is salary plus tuition/student benefits depending on percentage. To be considered for the position (50% appointment in the summer; 25% appointment during the school year), the individual must be enrolled in a degree-seeking program at the University of Minnesota. Participating in the Summer Institute carries an opportunity to earn three graduate credits. For more information, please contact Muriel at 612-625-6323 or murielt@umn.edu.

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