



Minnesota Writing Project

Winter 2005

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Trekking Beyond the Summer Institute

Once again, the activities of the Minnesota Writing Project have touched the far corners of the world – this time to Antarctica and back! At the 2001 Summer Institute, Steve Smarjesse, MWP teacher consultant, made acquaintance with guest speaker/writer Jude Nutter, who gave a presentation at the Weisman. He was impressed with her knowledge, writing, and experience working with schools as a writer-in-residence. This strong impression led him to write two grants over the years, which have been used to hire Jude at the Osseo Area Learning Center in exciting and innovative programming.

Originally from North Yorkshire, England, Jude Nutter has traveled extensively in Northern Europe, Iceland, and North America, and she homesteaded for ten years on Wrangell Island in Southeast Alaska. She graduated with an MFA in poetry and, since then, has worked with all age groups – from second grade through adult – in a variety of institutions in Minnesota and California.

Nutter has just returned from two months at Palmer Station on the Antarctic Peninsula, where she was a part of the National Science Foundation's Antarctic Writers and Artists Program. The poems inspired by this Antarctic experience will not only make up her fourth collection of poems, but also, have evolved into a special writing curriculum and collaboration.

Through a grant funded by District 279 Foundations, Nutter and Smarjesse developed a special curriculum entitled *Landscapes of the Heart, the Mind, and Antarctica*, which she brought to the Osseo Area Learning Center. During her visit, each student wrote four poems: one on the landscapes of the heart, the home, the journey, and one on the landscapes of Osseo, which will be published in a book to be printed in December. The program also included communication between the students and Nutter during her six-week stay in Antarctica. Her digital photographs and first drafts of some poems were sent to them to peruse and discuss.

The idea of "landscape writing" is based on the philosophical concept that people are part of the landscape. Nutter explains it as "the relationship between inner and external landscape, the relationship between land and heart, between literal experience and how we transform that experience through writing."



Writer Jude Nutter in Antarctica on an NSF creative grant.

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Now Jude is involved with another MWP fellow. Kim Colburn-Lindell '98, '04 (School of Environmental Studies) learned about this exciting collaboration and developed a Wilderness Writing Workshop for her students where Jude will be the guest poet in residence. During a five-day experience students will hike/snowshoe/ski the winter landscapes around northern Minnesota and explore the interplay between the natural landscape and their own internal world. They will write and work on their own poems, stories and essays and discuss how the poems of Robinson Jeffers, Mary Oliver, and the Romantics, and the novels of Mary Shelly and Emily Bronte use landscape to mirror and complicate their own internal lives (and the lives of their the heroes/heroines). Students will create a writing community where they interpret others' work and share their own.

**MWP is pleased to announce that Jude Nutter will be
a guest presenter at our workshop on July 13th.**

See page 7 of this newsletter for more details.

A W i n t e r W a l k

Written by Bob Cudahy at the
2004 Institute.



I have walked through these woods many times.
Alone and with family
I have explored these paths.
I know the trees and bushes and
Rotting logs.

Today it is snowing and
Everything is different, hidden.
Not a gentle Currier and Ives snow,
But a wild, swirling Jack London snow,
Burying everything.

The snow covers me as well,
Collecting in thick piles
On my shoulders,
On my hat,
Coating my glasses,
Making it even more difficult to see.

Ahead, a twisted mass
Is obscured by the deepening drifts.

Is it the old piece of canvas tarp
I've been meaning to haul away?
Is it the sumac bush, its spiky arms
Now forming a frosty dome?

Or is it some winter snow spirit
Casually bending down
To adjust the binding on its snowshoes
Before it rises up and looks my way?

Ideas, Inspiration, Indianapolis: 2004 NWP Meeting

by Muriel Thompson, MWP Director

What images come to mind when you think of Indianapolis? Until last November, I saw only racing cars. Now I see ballrooms filled with Writing Project people discussing programs, sharing ideas, and renewing friendships.

The 2004 National Writing Project Annual Meeting, held in conjunction with the 94th Annual NCTE Convention, took place November 18-20 in Indianapolis. In addition to me, several MWP teacher consultants were in attendance: Bev Alsleben, JeanMarie Burtness, Sandy Hayes, Kirsten Jansen, Ann Mershon, Mary Cathryn Ricker, and Steve Smarjesse.

NWP offered many small group discussion sessions designed to help us refresh our ideas about summer institutes, in-service, and continuity programs. These sessions dealt with strengthening teacher leadership, using site profile data, and enriching in-service. Two of the sessions I attended - Situated Learning and Content Area Professional Development in Reading and Putting on the Administrator's Hat: What Writing Projects Can Do for Schools - were both very relevant to our current work. With sessions offering at least twenty options each, the problem was choosing from an overabundance of great topics.

The general session, always Friday's highlight, brought nearly 1,000 writing project colleagues to the ballroom to hear Executive Director Richard Sterling speak. Sterling centered his address around William Zinsser's classic book *On Writing Well*. He said,

"Our work to improve the craft of writing in Zinsser's terms – learning to use the tools of writing well – for different audiences and purposes, with this increasing array of technology at our students' fingertips, is daunting. And supporting students in overcoming their fears of thinking and of expressing their ideas is as important as ever, if not more so." His address expressed optimism for the future challenges confronting us.

Another highlight of the convention was the CCCC luncheon. I was thrilled to discover that the featured speaker would be Sena Jeter Naslund. Since reading her novel *Ahab's Wife*, I had been recommending it to everyone. She didn't disappoint me.

She told us how she began to think about two great American novels, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *Moby Dick*,

and she realized... neither has important women as characters! Thoughts of protest stirred in her soul, and out came *Ahab's Wife*. In it, she includes a trusted voice, an interracial relationship, religious tolerance, and a different response to trauma. Her female character knows dark depths – but has the courage to create. She wanted it to be a novel of the triumph of the human spirit.

Once again the convention

lived up to its promises. I returned energized with new ideas for MWP, renewed friendships with colleagues from across the country, and many stories to share.

"The sheer dynamism of education – new populations of students, new technologies, new curricula, new and changing assessments – means that the ad hoc nature of professional development – the instant fix – has to go. Professional development must become a central part of the education system; it must be a significant part of every teacher's life; and it must stand as the intellectual center from which instruction and achievement can flourish. And finally, what has to change for all these ideas to become an every day part of the educational landscape, is for teachers to have the time and the resources in their hands, to make their own decisions about how to teach children, and to demonstrate what real accountability means to the children whom they teach. The National Writing Project, first and foremost, will support teachers in every way that we can to become the best professional teachers of those children that they can be."

-Richard Sterling, Director, NWP

MWP participates in NWP Reading Initiative

by Steve Smarjesse

On November 19 members of the Minnesota Writing Project traveled to Indianapolis to attend the National Writing Project Convention. MWP participated in a panel discussion with the few sites around the country that were awarded mini-grants from the NWP National Reading Initiative. Each of the ten Seed Sites was asked to share the following about the grant: plan, goals, progress, challenges, and concerns.

MWP was represented by Steve Smarjesse and Director Muriel Thompson. They reported that the grant funds were used to form a small study group to explore literacy issues in grades 4-12. Some specific topics were shared with the panel: tutoring a student who is not expected to pass the BST in reading; ELL students being given additional reading support within a social studies class; book titles to encourage reading among reluctant middle school boys; helping 11th grade English students read dense texts; and collecting data about the reading practices of alternative students.

One very valuable asset of being involved in this initiative is that NWP panel leaders have formed a listserve of Seed Sites. This vehicle will promote the sharing of valuable professional sources on current issues in literacy and the reading-writing connection.

Membership Has Its Perks!

Minnesota Writing Project membership brought even more perks this year, with all new and renewed members having their names entered in a drawing for a variety of great prizes. Congratulations to the following MWP membership drawing winners!

4th Prize (Subscription to NWP's The Quarterly and The Voice): Don Leathers (Glenville-Emmons)

3rd Prize (Red Balloon bookstore gift certificate): Kathy Dorholt (New York Mills High School)

2nd Prize (Bound to Be Read bookstore gift certificate): Rebecca Hastad (Waubun High School)

1st Prize (Membership to the Loft Literary Center): Benita Otternessq (Jefferson Sr. High School, Alexandria)

For those of you who didn't win, do not despair! In addition to discounts on upcoming workshops, we are developing travel awards for conference presenters. Check out the MWP website (<http://mwp.cla.umn.edu/>) soon for details!

NATIONAL WRITING PROJECT: 30 IDEAS FOR TEACHING WRITING IDEA #13

An exercise like "find a place other than the first sentence where this essay might begin" is valuable because it shows student writers the possibilities that exist in writing. Practice can sometimes turn to play with directions to:

- add five colors
- add one metaphor
- add four action verbs
- add five sensory details.

Another technique of instructor Mark Farrington's: ask students to choose a spot in the story where the main character does something that is crucial to the rest of the story. At that moment, Farrington says, they must make the character do the exact opposite. "Playing at revision can lead to insightful surprises," Farrington says. "When they come, revision doesn't seem like such hard work anymore."

Find 29 more ideas like this one at <http://www.writingproject.org/cs/nwpp/print/nwpr/922>.

Successful Program Slated for Elimination

by NWP Staff, Washington D.C.

National Writing Project (NWP) teachers, students, and supporters are dismayed that the President's FY06 budget request has targeted this successful program for elimination. With 189 university-based sites in all 50 states, Washington, D.C., Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands, the National Writing Project is the only national program to improve the teaching of writing, kindergarten through twelfth grade.

According to data collected by Inverness Research Associates, more than 128,000 educators participated in writing project programs in 2004. In the same year, 99.1% of teacher-participants in NWP summer institutes ranked the program as excellent. National and local research studies demonstrate that the project improves classroom instruction and, as a result, student writing achievement. In one recent study in Mississippi, fourth-grade students of writing project teachers scored significantly higher than their counterparts in matched comparison districts. These findings were consistent over all three years of the study.

A three-year national study of the NWP, conducted by the Academy for Educational Development (AED), concluded that student writing in the classrooms of writing project teachers improved from September to June, with most third- and fourth-graders reaching "adequate" or "strong" achievement in effective persuasive writing.

The timing of the elimination is particularly unfortunate since this year, for the first time, the SAT college placement test will include a mandatory writing test, and the ACT will include a voluntary one. The College Board's National Commission on Writing report, *The Neglected "R,"* states, "The nation's leaders must place writing squarely in the center of the school agenda."

Another Commission report, in which the Business Roundtable surveyed 120 major American corporations, concluded that the ability to write opens doors to professional employment. "Writing is both a 'marker' of high-skill, high-wage, professional work and a 'gatekeeper' with clear equity implications," said Bob Kerrey, president of New School University in New York and chair of the Commission. "People unable to express themselves clearly in writing limit their opportunities for professional, salaried employment. This writing program meets every test the President has imposed in deciding what will be included in his budget. We intend to respectfully make the case to Congress that the taxpayers of America would lose if this program is not continued," he said.

"We will not let America's students, parents, and teachers down," said Richard Sterling, NWP executive director. "Writing is too important to student success to allow this elimination to happen. We will take our case to Congress."

The Minnesota Writing Project will travel to Washington D.C. April 7 - 8 to meet with our legislators and lobby for education. Help us make our case by sending us stories that show how MWP has helped your teaching and your students! Contact Muriel at murielt@umn.edu or 612.625.6323.

congratulations to mary cathryn ricker and sandy hayes!



Congratulations to both Mary Cathryn Ricker and Sandy Hayes who both completed the rigorous process necessary to receive their 2004 National Board Certification as English and Language Arts teachers.



Reading/Writing Connection Workshop Wake-Up

by Alex Mueller

After completing the 2004 MWP Summer Invitational Institute, I was experiencing both exhaustion and exhilaration. I felt completely spent both because of the intensive nature of the three week course and the tremendous amount of writing I had been doing. Yet, I emerged from the last day in which we shared and celebrated our newly discovered teaching, reading, and writing selves with a feeling of confidence and excitement about teaching that I honestly hadn't ever experienced.

But once the fall semester began, the memory of those rich discussions and effective teaching strategies began to fade, and I soon found myself reverting back to old habits that I knew were not healthy for my students and me. I didn't have a good excuse, especially since I had been working as the MWP Teaching Assistant. The resources were all around me!

It wasn't until the November 30th Reading/Writing Connection workshop at Crosswinds Middle School in Woodbury that I began to wake from my professional development nap. Eva Boehm, President of the Twin Cities Area Reading Council and President-elect of the Minnesota Reading Association began the sessions with a keynote speech on the trends of teaching literacy that charged all of us as we proceeded into morning and afternoon breakout sessions. At Pamela Flash's session on "Reading By Writing," I was reminded that teaching and modeling ways to write author-centered summaries help students better comprehend and critique their readings. Melissa Borgmann's session on "Critical Response into Image Explosion" was the perfect follow up since she provided suggestions for getting students to focus on the details of any kind of text (visual or written) and to develop responses that lead to critical thinking.

Much to my chagrin, I couldn't be everywhere at once, so I missed other sessions on "Managing Secondary Reading & Writing Instruction," "ELL Literacy," "Reading Strategies Needed in All Disciplines," and "Planning a Young Writers' Conference." Based on my discussions with other workshop participants at lunch and during the days following, every one of these sessions would have provided the "wake up" I so desperately needed.



MWP members at Muriel Thompson's house for Movies & Munchies.

MWP Announces First International Fellow

by Melissa Borgmann

We are inspired! We are motivated! We are moving forward in our efforts to bring a teacher from South Africa to Minnesota this summer!

Gathering at MWP Director Muriel Thompson's house on Saturday, February 12th for Movies and Munchies, and some of my slides of South Africa, an idea was born to sponsor our first International Writing Project Fellow: a South African educator who would come, see, and spend a month's time in this part of the world. On the heels of my trip to Jo'burg, Durban, East London, and Cape Town last summer, we are working to sustain the momentum and relationships built in order to further this international collaboration/ effort/ partnership.

With Mary Cathryn Ricker mobilizing fellow board members Joanne Toft, Alex Mueller, Marsha Besch, and co-director Kirsten Jamsen, we have set a fundraising goal to aid in the transportation and living expenses of an International Fellow, as well as provide educational resources and support material for him/her as they return home.

Care to contribute? Host? Entertain? Tempted to be part of this exciting international opportunity? It's an effort worth your time and is greatly appreciated! Contact MWP for details.

Tax-deductible donations are being accepted. Please make checks payable to: University of Minnesota Foundation and identify the Minnesota Writing Project in the memo line.

exciting summer opportunities!

TECHNOLOGY INSTITUTE TECH TOOLS WITH THE WRITE STAFF

June 20 - 24, 2005

Becker Middle School, Becker, MN

Participate in hands-on experiences applying technology tools to written products you can use with your own students. Share your knowledge with colleagues and continue the conversation electronically after the Institute ends. Each electronic tool will be used for writing tasks that can be adapted to your own classroom. There is no registration fee and participants receive free lunch and a \$50 stipend. Graduate credit will be offered at an expense. Enrollment is limited, so sign up early to reserve a spot! Registration details are available at mwp.cla.umn.edu.

WRITING AND THE VISUAL ARTS

Guest Presenter: Jude Nutter

July 13, 2005 9am - 3pm

Gain strategies for using the visual arts as a springboard for writing.

Draw from the strength and inspiration of the art in the Weisman Art Museum and write in the gallery.

Registration details are available at mwp.cla.umn.edu.

READING IN THE CONTENT AREAS

(GRADES 4 - COLLEGE)

July 27, 2005 9am - 3pm

Learn about strategies for integrating reading and writing assignments.

Investigate works, including new offerings.

Registration details are available at mwp.cla.umn.edu.

3RD ANNUAL MWP WRITING RETREAT

June 23- 24, 2005 Mount Olivet Retreat Center

Write for personal and professional purposes, renew acquaintances, enjoy the tranquil setting, and walk the wooded trails. Open to all MWP members, the cost of the retreat (\$75) includes, lodging, meals, and the June 23rd presentation by actor, teacher, and writer Isabell Monk O'Connor. Space is limited, so please register by April 30th. Details are available at mwp.cla.umn.edu.

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