

Leslie Walker

Writers of Promise Writing Contest

The Kennesaw Mountain Writing Project (KMWP) would like to invite you and your students to participate in the 2010 Leslie Walker Writers of Promise Contest in honor of our late friend and inspiring writer.

The contest is open to students in grades 6-12 beginning in February. All entries are due by February 26, 2010.

Winning students will receive cash awards and an invitation to be honored at the Kennesaw Mountain Writing Project's Annual Banquet in early May.

<http://www.rmwp.org> for details.

Kennesaw Mountain Writing Project

To: Teachers in Language Arts, Social Studies, and Sciences, grades 6-12

Your colleagues at the Kennesaw Mountain Writing Project (KMWP) established a contest in 2008 for young writers to honor the memory of our late friend, teacher Leslie Walker. Leslie's special gift was to help even her most reluctant writing students to find their writing "voices." Read about Leslie in the "intro" link.

*Recognize young writers of promise

*Take as little class time as you wish or design a full unit

*Open young minds to see stories and histories in their own communities

*Grade nothing!

2010 Prompt: Trust

Leslie Walker strived to create community in her classroom. This ongoing effort was realized through her dedication to teaching writing to her students.

To continue Leslie's work in 2010, we invite teachers to prompt their students to experiment writing about an occasion in which they needed to put their "trust" in something or someone, and to submit up to twenty of their students' most interesting pieces to our contest. Such writing may not be the most polished, and it may come from students who do not think of themselves as good writers.

Students are encouraged to write about the experience of trusting someone or something. This open-ended topic will serve teachers across the curriculum. Social Studies and History teachers may invite students to write about their trust in particular historical methods, maps, or data sets. Science teachers might ask students to use what they know about certain scientific principles or methods in which trust would be required. Similarly, math teachers may ask the students to write about their trust in a specific mathematic formula or process. The student's voice should be evident throughout the piece. Language Arts or English teachers may use memoir writing to help their students explore the idea of trust through their memories. These are only suggestions and any interpretations of the idea of trust are welcome.

In this annual contest, we ask that students' writings be typed or neatly written in dark ink, up to 1000 words in length, and mostly error-free. We ask that stories be accompanied by letters from the student writers addressed "Dear judges," that (1) will explain how the students know what they do about the object of their trust and (2) give the judges an idea of the history, data, scientific principle, etc. written about (this may be a website, a picture, or anything else that will help the judges connect to the writing).

Contest Submissions:

Submissions are to be mailed to the KMWP at
Leslie Walker Writer of Promise Contest
Kennesaw Mountain Writing Project
Kennesaw State University
1000 Chastain Rd., MC 2701
Kennesaw, GA 30144
or, emailed to KMWP@kennesaw.edu as an attachment, with subject line LW Writers Submission

The new contest will open in February 2010. The deadline to submit entries will be 6 pm on Friday February 26, 2010. Winners will be announced in April. Winning students will receive cash awards and an invitation to be honored at the Kennesaw Mountain Writing Project's annual banquet in early May.

Questions? Email Mandee jjablonski, the contest director, at: ohmandee@aol.com
Visit the contest blog, KMWPLWcontest.blogspot.com

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Note from KMWP Director, Dawn Kirby RE: funding the Contest

KMWP CANNOT use its federal grant funds for student awards. We can ONLY fund many aspects of this contest from your contributions to KMWP's Foundation Account. Please make a contribution so that we may continue this tribute to Leslie and to the students about which she cared so much.

Contact Becky Ramsay at KMWP@kennesaw.edu for the proper form to attach to your check, or just mail it to the address shown above.

Many thanks to all of you who judged our 2008 and 2009 contests, having your students write for this contest, contributing time and/or dollars, and providing leadership for this annual way in which we honor teacher Leslie Walker. We look forward to year three, 2010.

Suggested Ways to Prepare Class for the Leslie Walker Young Writer of Promise Contest

Hypnotism

Make young writers aware of how many different feelings they themselves can feel in short span of time. They will be more open to imagining more from another person's perspective.

Description: Student volunteers tell their thoughts and feelings of a certain moment from their own experience as if it's happening to them in the present moment.

Procedure:

- (1) Pretend to hypnotize a volunteer student: "You are getting sleepy... You are remembering a place at a certain time in your life when you had a strong feeling of eagerness or anxiety . . . Are you there? ... Now, you are in that place. Tell us where you are."
- (2) Moderate as other students pepper the "hypnotized" one with questions about sights, sensations, thoughts, emotions, at that moment.
- (3) Replicate this in small groups.
- (4) This procedure might be repeated after students have done some research, as they become someone else, and are hypnotized to answer similar questions.

Mind Reading

Teach students to ask the kinds of questions that actors ask to "get into" different characters' minds.

Description: In pairs, or in front of the class, one student ("A") will prepare another ("B") to re-enact a recent real - life encounter with a stranger, someone that neither student knows well. (This stranger might have been a teacher, a server or salesperson, a student on campus from a different grade. The "encounter" may have been no more than passing each other.) The twist is that "A" will be playing the stranger, and "B" will be playing "A." To act the parts well, both actors will need to "get into" the minds of the characters that they're playing.

Procedure:

- (1) Let "B" ask "A" some questions to get into the perspective of "A" at the time of that encounter: "How has your day been so far? What's on your mind as you approach the other person? What do you notice about the other person at first glance? Do you acknowledge the stranger, or ignore the stranger? How do you feel about that?" Ask any other questions that come to mind.

(2) Then, let "B" ask the same questions, and more, to "A" in the role of the stranger: "What's your name? Do you have a family? Are you comfortable in this place? Are you feeling upbeat or tired? Why? What do you want right now? What is your impression of the teenager approaching you?" Make up any details that can't be answered by observation.

(3) This exercise in role-playing may result in a slow-motion performance of the encounter, with each actor giving a play-by-play account of what's going on inside each character.

(4) Follow-up question: Has the "stranger" stereotyped the teenager in any way? Has the teen writer stereotyped the "stranger" in any way? How can "A" get beyond the stereotype?

(5) Write from the point of view of the stranger.

Interview: Avoiding some Hurtful Blunders

Told to interview a grandparent or anyone else, students are likely to make some common blunders that might hurt someone's feelings. For example, they may take notes, giving the impression that the story is less interesting than getting something juicy for a school assignment. They may show utter ignorance of the subject's time and place and background, offending the subject. In the pursuit of something singular and exciting, they may fail to sense what the subject considers to be most interesting and valuable.

Description: The teacher or a volunteer plays the role of a real-life grandparent, and responds to students' questions.

Procedure:

(1) Ask students to think how a grandparent or other elder might have mixed feelings about being interviewed. Should the elder be told up front that this is for a school project? Should the interviewer make notes or a recording? What will the elder be most eager to share? What might hurt the elder's feelings?

(2) A volunteer, preferably an adult or very mature student, takes on the role of a real-life grandparent. Students are allowed to ask questions.

(3) From time to time, the teacher should take "time out" to discuss what's happening. Are the questions eliciting long answers, or only short factual ones? Has anyone asked a question that was in some way insensitive? A common error is for the young interviewer to miss clues that the speaker is very interested in being asked about a certain topic (e.g., a sibling, a certain achievement, a time of trouble, a parent), and to miss opportunities for follow-up questions.

(4) After this exercise, discuss how all the information can enhance the story of a simple single event, as background and context.

(5) Give students time to contact an elder and to conduct the interview.

(6) Optional: Ask students to provide a written report on the interview for sharing.

- (7) Have students write a piece about a moment or an experience from the perspective of the elder, using imagination to fill in missing details of sensation, feeling, and thought.

Photographs

Students practice suspending judgement while they observe details in a photograph, and then practice empathizing with the subject of the photo.

Concrete full - class procedure:

Show the students pictures and have them write about what they see as a class. Or, post pictures with comment pages around the room, and invite students to walk around the room and adding observations to the comment sheets. Small groups could then write group pieces based on the class comments.

Alternative procedure:

(1) Show students a photograph of someone (perhaps a child) from an earlier time. Let students observe what's there before they make any judgments or inferences.

(2) Now, actually "get into" the moment that the picture was taken. Ask one student to pose as the character in the photograph, and ask another to be the photographer. In a "fishbowl," let students and teacher ask questions of both "actors." What seems to be happening at the moment of this picture? Are there other people present off-camera? What has probably been happening in the minutes leading up to this? What was the photographer trying to do with this pose? Why this particular setting, this particular pose, and particular second? What is the person in the photograph looking at -- the photographer, or something else? What is the person in the photograph thinking about -- the photographer, the picture, the people who might see the picture, or something else?

(3) Assign students to follow the same procedure of observation followed by re-enactment with a photograph of their own choosing.

(4) Have them write from the perspective of the person before, during, or after the picture was shot.

Research

Combine any of the activities listed above with research into the events, styles, music of the other person's time or background.

Present tense

Let students recount anecdotes as they naturally do. Some will speak in present tense, but most will use past tense. Consider how to re-tell one story more effectively by taking out such transition phrases as, "and then we went" and "the next day." To do so, the storyteller must begin the story very close to the center of the event. But how will the storyteller give necessary background? One technique is to add details in the present

progressive. Example: "I see Miss Grendel approach. She has been my teacher for two of my three years in elementary school. Just a month ago, she said I was like one of her own children. But now, she's angry."

Leslie Walker's Own Publications

Leslie's own writing tells of the pleasures and pitfalls of getting students to consider their own lives in context of a broader community of place and time.

- Walker, Leslie. "I Belong to this Place: Claiming a Neighborhood Landmark." *Writing America: Classroom Literacy and Public Engagement*. Sarah Robbins and Mimi Dyer, Editors. New York: Teachers' College Press, 2005.
- . "Re-envisioning the Writing Classroom." *Teachers' Writing Groups: Collaborative Inquiry and Reflection for Professional Growth*. Sarah Robbins, George Seaman, Kathleen Blake Yancey, and Dede Yow, editors. Kennesaw, GA: Kennesaw State University Press, 2006.

Leslie's Recommended Readings about Place

- Cisneros, Sandra. *The House on Mango Street*. New York: Vintage Books, 1989.

Leslie's initial attempt to use this book as a jumping-off point for her students to write went badly. She reflected, "I believe the resistance I received from the beginning was due to a connection with the text my students sensed. . . . A need for a sense of place is a common value that cuts across all cultures. . . . It was threatening to my students to write about something personal, when they are used to regurgitating the formulaic three-pronged thesis. . . ." Leslie wrote, later, "I've read *The House on Mango Street* with a number of classes in the years since the first time. Fortunately, my classroom's become a more comfortable community: the room is more clearly "our" space instead of just "mine."

Wheatley, N., and Rawlins, D. *My Place*. New York: Kane/Miller.

Leslie used this book to introduce her students to the notion that a person's character can be shaped by place. She writes: The Australian writer presents the history of the Botany Bay region of Australia through the voices and drawings of fictional children. The one constant in the text is a fig tree that stands the test of time as 200 years pass by. Landmarks change, people change, but the tree remains. . . . Each young voice begins his or her story with "This is my place," yet the final voice makes a powerful change to this assertion, claiming instead that "I belong to this place."

Dear Student Writer,

The judges who will compare your work to others' pieces want to make their choices based on quality, not any other factor. Please **erase your name and erase the names of your teacher and school** from your paper.

Instead, fill in answers on this page.

What is your full name? _____

Address _____ (zip code) _____

Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

Title of work: _____

Tell us the name of the teacher who assigned this writing: _____

Tell us the name of your school: _____

Tell us your grade level: _____

I grant the Kennesaw Mountain Writing Project one-time publication rights for the literary work listed above. I understand that this work may be published in a chapbook (with a publication run of under 500 copies) and in electronic form. I further understand that I will retain copyright of my material for future publication. I understand that this piece of writing will not be returned.

Parent's Signature _____ Date: _____

Your teacher wants to send your piece to us because your writing already shows ability, insight, and imagination. We thank you for creating this work, and we will notify you and your teacher in April if it has been selected from all the other good pieces for special recognition.

W. Scott Smoot
Director of the Leslie Walker Memorial Writing Contest
scott@smootpage.com

From: Kennesaw Mountain Writing Project (KMWP)

To: Teachers submitting class work to our Leslie Walker Memorial Writing Contest

Dear Teacher,

Your colleagues at the Kennesaw Mountain Writing Project are always interested in teachers' reflections on their own classroom practices. As you prepare to send us up to twenty pieces for the Leslie Walker Memorial "Young Writers of Promise" contest, we ask you to include this page as a cover letter.

Please help us to understand how you presented our open-ended writing prompt to your class by addressing some or all of these questions as they apply to you:

- How long did your class spend in preparing for this assignment, and how long did they spend in writing it? Are these impromptu pieces, or was there any peer review or revision involved?
- Did any of the suggestions posted on the contest page at our web site (KMWP.org) help you to prepare your class for writing, or did you take an approach of your own to present the idea of writing about place?

Teacher's Name _____

School _____

Contact Information:

phone _____

email _____

postal address _____