

Writers Matter at La Salle University

Teacher Testimonial

"I've always prided myself in getting my traumatized students to open up and Writers Matter gives me the tools I need to translate those feelings into writing. This program opened up my eyes not only to the world of those openly displaying the effects of trauma, but also to see inside the minds of my quietest students as well. I've never seen a classroom of students as excited to write as they are when we do Writers Matter."

-Danielle Tansit
Logan Elementary School
Grade 4



Letter from the Directors

Welcome to our Fall 2016 newsletter for the Writers Matter program. We are currently completing our eleventh year of providing a unique and innovative opportunity for middle and lower high school students to learn critical writing skills through the use of journal writing as a vehicle for self-expression.

The Writers Matter Program was created in 2005 for middle school adolescent students, grades six through eight, in order to motivate and encourage them to become better writers. In 2008, *Voices of Teens: Writers Matter*, was published by the National Middle School Association. Since this publication, further analysis of the research data and contributions from our Writers Matter teachers contributed to many newly-tested teaching strategies and further understanding of theories related to the teaching of writing and student efficacy. These developments have led to a new book published by Temple University Press in January 2014, by Drs. Yost, Vogel, and Lewinski called *Empowering Young Writers: The Writers Matter Approach*.

Since the inception of the Program, over 13,000 students have participated. This year our program includes 11 schools, 41 teachers and over 2000 students (Grades 3-8).

Student Writing Contest

Each spring we host a Writers Matter Writing Contest to demonstrate how students have learned to use writing to express the things they care most about and help give them a "voice" with which they can discuss their own lives and the issues that are important to them.

The theme this year was, *Dear Mr./Madame President, Lets Make America Great Again*. Since 2016 marks an important election year, students were asked to think about what they hope the the new elected politician would understand about the needs of our country and how to make positive change to the United States of America. We stressed that it is important that the president hears from the students, the future of our country. The students were invited to write a letter, poem, essay or short digital story to the president (cont p. 2)



addressing any of the following:

- What can I do for my country to make it better
- How can I help you understand me
- This is what is important to me (students can pick a topic they are passionate about and write about it)
- This is what I want in a president

The contest was opened to both the middle school students as well as the elementary students. Samples of the students' work, as well as winning entries, are featured throughout this newsletter.

Middle School Contest Winners

GRAND PRIZE: *Under the Flag*

Do you know America?
 How this country has people struggling?
 The family problems?
 The corrupted schools?
 How criminal actions are cries for help?
 This country is still a bud,
 Make it blossom.
 Give education to everyone.
 Make public schools solid as stone.
 Demand supplies for our schools.
 Demand activities.
 Turn down the dial on violence.
 Help everyone and everything!!!
 America is under a huge weight,
 will you provide leverage?
 The city is crying,
 The struggle is now!
 Do you know how hard your citizen's lives are?
 The struggle to stay alive?
 The 4th of July every night?
 Pets on the street?
 Kids without food?
 Weapons being bought by adults as if it's kids buying
 Hot Cheetos from the corner
 store.
 Funerals every day?
 Do you have the broom to sweep the people off the street?
 ... The people need to stop fights at school?
 Every time someone helps somebody it's on the news.
 Would you have that all the time... with NO news?
 Could you promise this Mr. or Madam Future President?
 We have our downs but we also have our ups.
 Our past president has helped us with Health Care, schools, and
 gun violence.
 But someone needs to continue this.
 The positive things are becoming negative.
 From good to worse.
 Will you be able to keep the ups?
 We are one country made from all different types of people.
 This country is already good in it's core,

Contest Winners

MIDDLE

- First place: *Under The Flag* (Wagner)
- Second place: *Can You Believe It?* (Wagner)
- Third place: *Dear Future President* (Southwark)

Honorable Mentions:

- *No More* (Southwark)
- *New President, Old Issues* (Wagner)

ELEMENTARY

- First place: *Dear Madame President* (Hampton Moore)
- Second place: *A Lonely Country* (Lowell)
- Third place: *United WE Stand* (Lowell)

Philadelphia Inquirer-Blog

http://www.philly.com/philly/blogs/school_files/What-do-Philly-kids-want-in-a-president.html?mobi=true

Will you bring it out?
 Evil has taken over and we need a hero.
 Will you be Superman?
 We don't need a show-off, flying around for
 the news...
 We need a crime-fighting,
 School building President.
 Are you him or her?
 When the time comes
 We need to know are you fighting the evil?
 We are on the ground will you pick us up?
 The fight cannot be won alone.
 Could you be by our side?
 Good ideas are all over the place,
 Could you bring them together and launch
 them into action?
 We need a head, is it you?
 A fighter?
 A builder?
 A lover of America and it's citizens?
 Could you give us a slice of the American pie,
 A piece of the American dream...
 Mr./Madame President?



SECOND PLACE: *Can you Believe It?*

Can you believe it?
 Schools are failing
 Jobs are fading
 The school district's money is waning
 These problems are problems from the past
 These are problems that we still have
 We need a better education
 To you it's just pocket money
 And it's causing frustration
 Do you think it's funny
 When school budgets are bouncing like bunnies
 We need better textbooks to read
 Better resources to get food for the mouths we
 feed
 It's not getting better
 It's getting worse
 There are teenagers just learning to write, letter by
 letter,

Will you put yourself first?
 I am beginning to wonder
 One can judge another
 Based on a number
 Or like a number of votes
 Just like the amount of likes on an Instagram post
 The future of our education depends on you
 What will you do?
 To get supplies to reach our goal is our main
 priority
 Their care for children is the main minority
 Well, here's something new
 The children matter too.
 What are we like in your point of view?
 Our community really needs to someone to
 commit
 I am putting my trust in you
 For everything around me is unfit
 Can you believe it?

THIRD PLACE: *Dear Future President*

Dear Future President,
 Will you do everything
 You said you would?
 Did you lie about what you said you would do,
 Just to get people to vote for you?
 Will you help homeless people?
 They have nowhere to sleep at night.
 At least build a place for them to sleep.

Schools.
 Somewhere we have to be at everyday,
 And you can't even keep it clean,
 In good conditions,
 Or with new supplies.
 You put a law

That makes us come to school,
 But you can't even make it comfortable.
 Where's the money?

Then what's the point of being president,
 If helping others isn't a reason

HONORABLE MENTION: *No More*

Going outside early so I can stay out longer.
 Having to come inside an hour before
 the street lights come on.
 Never can walk somewhere without someone by
 your side,
 Kids leaving out the house
 not knowing if they're going to see their family
 again dead or alive.
 Moms having to bury their kids,
 Watching TV to only find out another black person
 is dead.

Public schools closing down to build prisons.
 Keeping my eyes wide open like a tiger catching
 it's prey.
 Looking past my friend's shoulders
 making sure nothing came their way.
 Wishing that one day it would all go away.
 Hoping that one day it will all go away.

Looking for someone who could save the day.

Is that you...
 Future president, can you help save the day?
 When we can say "no more..."
 No more rest in peace my bro,
 No more coming home early,
 No more people on the streets.
 When there is "no more" is when we can say...
 You have saved the day.
 Life in Philly is like you're in a prison,
 Always struggling and things getting worse.
 Can never get anywhere if you don't do good.
 Trying to get out,
 Coming from nothing
 Because you have nothing
 Because you lose everything.
 So now you're starting from the bottom all over
 again.

Will you help us Mr. / Madam President?

HONORABLE MENTION: *New President, Old Issues*

I think a lot of issues should be addressed to our future president. But, there are three things I really think are most important. Those are race, bullying, and school funding.

You want us to stay in school? Am I correct? But no one gives the money to have everything we need. There aren't enough supplies and schools are closing down. I want equal education for everyone, and I think everyone should agree. We have homeless people on the streets because they don't have proper education. It isn't fair, to you, to me, or to the future kids that will enroll in school. It's time for a change.

Due to bullying, we are losing kids that could be great. Getting bullied is depressing. People are not wanting to speak in class or are acting stupid, so the bully will stop. You don't believe in your full potential, which makes you weigh down on yourself. It basically causes people not to have a voice. You feel misplaced and it gets so bad they want to end their lives. It isn't fair to anyone. It needs to stop.

Race issues are still important. How do people who care for others, but it might depend only on what color their skin is? You call us rude names and kill us. We are people exactly like you. I am experiencing this now. We are scared

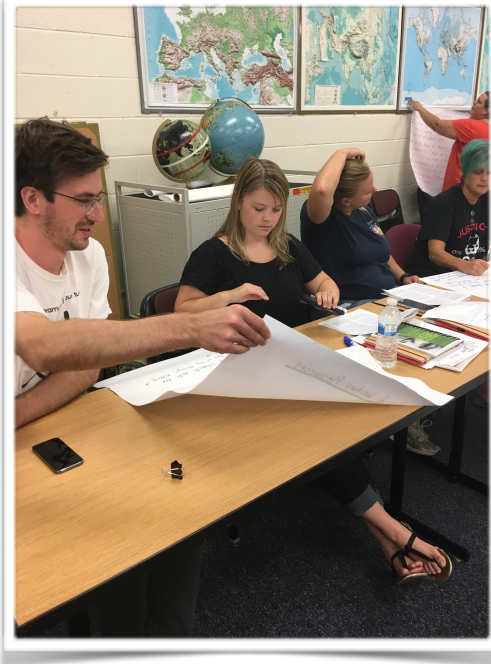


for our lives! You make us live in fear. We need you to help us win this fight.

I know you can't stop people from talking, but you can still help. All we need you to do is fight for us by stopping racial issues and bullying. Also, you need to give schools more money. We need you.

A Enhanced Focus on Professional Development

FIRST ANNUAL WRITING INSTITUTE



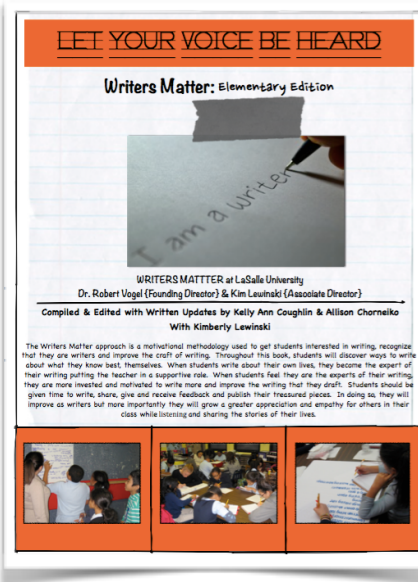
On August 29th we welcomed 18 of our Writers Matter Teachers to the first Writing Institute. The Writers Matter Writing Institute was an opportunity to bring the teachers together before the school year started to talk about writing and more importantly the students. During this one-day workshop, the teachers wrote, read, listened and talked about their own writing, their students' writing, current writing research and the Writers Matter program. The teachers engaged in several activities that they can use with their students such as writing an I am From and We are From poems and working on revision; giving them the perspective of what it is like for the students in their class. They read articles on the importance of teachers being writers as well as what students say they need to be successful writers. The facilitator read a few books aloud to the group to demonstrate how Read Aloud's can be used for inspiration as well as to teach the craft of writing. Finally the teachers received their Writers Matter materials and had an opportunity to meet as a school to discuss what WM will look like this year in their classroom, in their school and as a professional learning community. It was a successful day.

NEW STRUCTURE

In an effort to be responsive to the needs of our teachers and inclusive to all who would like to be a part of the program regardless of other commitments, we have developed a new structure for the program. This new structure will provide us with an opportunity to see Writers Matter in action as well as join in the schools' collegial conversations about writing instruction. The new structure includes meeting at La Salle for four meetings throughout the year to meet together as a larger community and share successes in the classroom, learning that has taken place within your school community and allow us to help each other in areas where teachers still need help. Additionally, each school will set up bi-weekly meetings to share their student writing and a one-page analysis of the drafts with the other teachers in the program. Each piece of writing is followed by a group discussion where questions are asked and further analysis is provided. This form of professional development provides each teacher an opportunity to reflect on their current practices and learn about the methods of their colleagues. The teachers also present various classroom discoveries and lesson plans providing an optimal forum for meaningful and ongoing professional development. Each school will have a designated teacher leader. These leaders will be in charge of planning the bi-weekly meetings, keeping them focused and providing mentoring to the other teachers in the program as they get WM started in the classroom. Finally, the directors will spend more times in the school observing WM lessons being taught in the classroom as well as attending at least one meeting between the larger WM Meetings.

NEW ELEMENTARY SCHOOL BOOK

With the success of Elementary students working with the Writers Matter program we continue to welcome new elementary schools to the program. We are already seeing the positive results of getting students engaged in writing at an earlier age. With lessons learned from last year, two lead teachers, Allison Chorneiko and KellyAnn Coughlin, worked with the Associate Director to develop an elementary version of the writers matter program that was self published and distributed to all the elementary schools this year. It is titled, *Let Your Voice Be Heard*.



EVENTS AND PRESENTATIONS



The Writers Matter Documentary was shown at the New Hope Film Festival this past summer. It was a wonderful event followed by a Q & A with the directors, students and teachers in the Writers Matter program.

The documentary has also been selected for the First Glance Film Festival in Philadelphia. The festival runs from November 11th thru 13th. This wonderful story will awaken viewers to the realities of public education in large city environments, the extraordinary challenges students face each day of their lives and the talent and potential these students possess - all told through personal stories and poetry. You

can view the documentary on the Writers Matter website as well.

In November, the Associate Director Kimberly Lewinski, will present at the National Council for the Teacher of English in Atlanta, GA. Her presentation will focus on the work she has done to support the teachers using the Writers Matter initiative to help middle school students learn critical writing skills through the use of journal writing as a vehicle for self-expression. The title of the presentation is *Changing the Landscape of Writing Research*.

Elementary School Winners

GRAND PRIZE: Dear Madame President

My name is _____ and these are the things that you should change.
 Roses are red
 violets are blue
 these are all new things
 new things for you
 I think of some changes
 I do and I don't
 I do it all day
 but sometimes I won't
 first things first
 you should stop this

if murder was bowling
 I'd hope it's a miss
 one other thing
 is that you should ban
 stealing and robbing
 Man oh man
 some things you should arrest for
 are breaking in and breaking out
 Both are bad
 that's what it's all about
 some other changes
 that you should make

are that you should stop stealing
 it's not so bad
 compared to murdering
 and littering is bad
 It makes me mad
 Give them a punishment
 if they do these things
 that's what I'll do

that's what I'll bring
 these are the things
 that you should ban
 maybe you'll like this
 because I'm your biggest fan.

SECOND PRIZE: *A Lonely Country*

There are bad faces out here,
 I wish I were aware,
 I can help,
 So this country can have better health,

 Gunshots you hear in the air,
 And you wish you weren't there,
 Things some people do in this world are insane,
 And it all stays the same,

 You cry at night,
 Wishing that you could take flight,

 Trying to survive the struggles in life,

But instead you hide,
 on the loneliest ride,

 Killing and fighting on the street,
 You think to yourself, "I am dead meat"
 Nobody seems to care,
 It is everywhere,

 But when you are older,
 It will be all over,
 I will help you,
 Lean on my shoulder when you need to.

UNITED WE STAND-LOWELL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Dear President,
 I'm writing to ask, "please help make our world a better place." Do you know about the Power of Three? We use this at our school, Lowell Elementary, so we remember how we can help one another to make our school a better place.
 Take Care of Yourself ,Take Care of Others, Take Care of your Environment

Dear President,
 If you take care of yourself you are responsible. I help my friends with homework, I am respectful of learning and I don't cheat at school. I take care of my baby brother too.

Dear President,
 When you take care of others you help your friends and family and your community. We need to help poor people and give them food and shelter. And Dear president we need to stop people lying and killing cause it makes their families sad.

Dear President,
 We really gotta take care of the environment like don't litter and recycle. If we don't help the trees we won't have oxygen to breathe, maybe we need to stop driving so many cars? If the water is polluted all the animals will get sick. We need to take care of the earth because this is our planet and our home.



Dear President,

This is our picture quilt it's gonna be **Lowell's Magic Garden, United We Stand.** We don't have any place to grow things so this is a magic garden of ideas and our imagination. It's a place to be safe and play and we made it all together, like UNITED.

We love Philadelphia that's why we want to take care of it.
We know it's hard to make the world a better place but we can all help you, we can do it together!!
Don't be SHY, just TRY.

https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B6gDJcl5ZqY_MnF6ZFZFbGhRTIE/view

Love, from your friends, Aniaya, Kim, Katie, Leslye and Ms. Martin's second grade class.

MENTORSHIP PROGRAM AND CAMPUS VISITS

The Writers Matter program continues to provide La Salle University mentors to many of the participating schools. This past year we invited the Elementary Students from Lowell Elementary that participated in the after school program to join us at La Salle for a day of writing and reflection. This visit included a tour of the campus, meeting with faculty and students and participating in a variety of challenges and writing activity. It was a great day for all involved!

The after school programs have proved to be very successful. It is a great opportunity for students to work with their teachers and La Salle mentors on learning more about themselves and how to face the challenges ahead of them through the vehicle of writing. We are going into our fourth year with an after school program at Wagner Middle school. Mentors from La Salle University meet with the students twice a week for an afternoon of writing and support providing a safe space for these students to share their stories and find comfort from their peers.



Due to the overwhelming success of this program last year, we are continuing the program with Lowell Elementary School and several others hope to begin a program this year as well. These after school programs are a collaboration of Lead teachers at each of the schools, the teacher consultant and La Salle University undergraduate students mentors.



9TH GRADE BRIDGE MENTORING PROGRAM

This pilot program identified thirty graduating middle school students who have been successful in the Writers Matter program and those new to the program that have recently transitioned to high school. Each student has been assigned a university mentor and provided a full range of academic support including writing, math, science, social studies as well as emotional support. Mentors will meet with mentees weekly to maximize student academic success and adjustment to the high school environment. Mentors and mentees have been able

to email, text or FaceTime with each other as well to provide needed support on demand. The major goal of the program is to provide mentoring through 9th and 10th grades before they are eligible to participate in programs such as Philadelphia Futures and College Possible. The program is being supervised by La Salle University professor, Dr. Robert Vogel and assisted by Dr. Allen. A part-time local coordinator (Cody Swan) has been responsible for the daily management of the program, supervising mentors, maintaining records and monitoring communication between the mentors and mentees. The coordinator will also coordinate and manage weekly meetings that will take place in mutually decided locations such as schools, community centers, churches or at La Salle University.

Writer's Matter Abroad

ISRAELI AND PALESTINIAN PROGRAM

The Writers Matter Program continues to grow internationally. Writers Matter: Voices of Teens in the Middle East engages students in the region between the ages of 12-14 from ten schools in grades 6th-8th. This year over 800 students are participating from Israel and the Palestinian Territories and comprised of Israeli Jewish, Israeli Arab and Palestinians living in the Palestinian Territories.

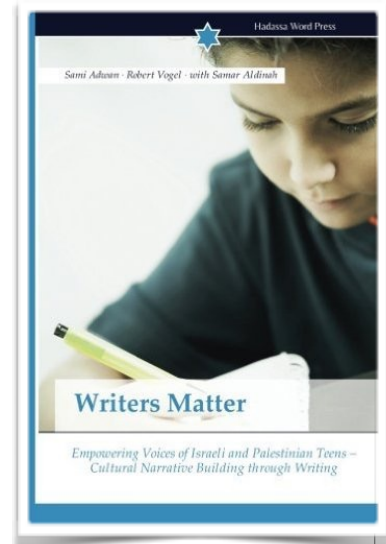
Most recently published a new book capturing the voices of children in Israel and the Palestinian Territories was published by Drs. Vogel and Adwan. The book - **Writers Matter:**

Empowering Voices of Israeli and Palestinian Teens - Cultural Narrative Building through Writing

provides a rare and unique window into the lives of children ages 12 to 14 living in one of the most tense and complicated regions of the world, full of conflict and violence. This book will help your students gain a new understanding of the complexities of the conflict through listening to the voices of those children living through it

every day of their lives.

Description - *Listen to the voices and feelings of Israeli and Palestinian children, as they freely share them with each other. No matter what side of the fence/wall they live, these children often write about anguish, fear, and hopelessness. These challenges are not only rooted in their*



Israel-Palestine Summer Program 2016

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fdTnpz25ics>

worlds of religious and political conflict, but also in everyday problems of communication common within friends and family. The Israeli-Jewish, Israeli-Palestinian/Arab or Palestinian living in the Palestinian Territories, all share an uncertain future and face seemingly insurmountable challenges each day of their lives. However, regardless of geographical location, religion, politics, or personal trauma, they all share one thing in common - they have big dreams for the future. *Writers Matter* motivates students to write about their lives and dreams, learn essential writing skills and help better understand themselves and others. Through engaged learning the children find a new freedom leading to a real sense of "empowerment. The book can be purchased on Amazon.

<https://www.amazon.com/Writers-Matter-Empowering-Palestinian-Narrative/dp/3639794702>

WRITER'S MATTER AT SHANTI BHAVAN

In March of 2016, Dr. Vogel was accompanied by thirteen La Salle University students as they traveled to Bangalore, India while studying various facets of different educational institutions throughout the country. The group had the pleasure of having a three day stay at Shanti Bhavan, a residential K-12 school located outside of the "Silicon Valley" of India, Bangalore. Shanti Bhavan's mission is to "adequately develop the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children of India's "lowest caste" by providing them with a world class education and instilling globally shared values to enable them to aspire to careers and professions of their choice." The students engaged in a three day *Writer's Matter* mini unit that allowed them the opportunity to express their feelings through writing. Below is a poem from one of the seventh grade students.



I Am From

I am from a life that was full of darkness
 From a world I had been separated from a loved one
 Who always brought about my hidden smiles and laughter
 It was my beloved father, who stood beside me like a protective pillar even if I was angry or happy
 He still bared with me like a patient tall mountain
 I am from two different worlds.
 I am from a life full of happiness and love.
 I am from a world where I was afraid of the darkness and feared that I would be taken away by evil spirits.
 I am from a world, attached to friends who blinded my eyes from darkness and fear that later opened my eyes to show beauty and love from the world.
 I am from a world where girls are forced to be at home.

From where we are unable to express ourselves with others.
 But now, I am from a life where I am free as a baby bird, learning the wonderful ways of the new world and free to express myself
 I am from where child labor was practiced
 From where energetic little kids were not given the opportunity to run and skip to school like the other lucky children in the world.
 I am from a world where I feel privileged that I am one among thousands in the world who was lucky enough of being chosen to enter the magical gates in a fairytale
 From where I have found my true family.
 From where my brothers and sisters sit close beside me
 From where my life began.

Consider Giving To Writers Matter

Please consider making a contribution to Writers Matter. Your contribution goes directly towards the purchase of books and writing materials for the students, as well as for after-school programs.

If you are interested in participating in our adopt-a-school program, please contact Bob Vogel. All contributions are tax deductible and La Salle University meets all requirements for a 501C3 organization.

Special Thanks To....

This Program is generously supported by the following lead funders: PTS Foundation (Pam and Tony Schneider), Tyler Aaron Bookman Memorial Foundation (Jill and Neil Bookman); Jeff and Dana Berstein Family Foundation; Drs. Mark Cornfeld and Melissa Cooper and the Moses Feldman Family Foundation (Moe and Susan Feldman).

A heartfelt thanks to these special individuals for their vision to help those less fortunate than themselves.

Thank You.

Bob Vogel
 Founding Director, Writers Matter
 Program at La Salle University
 Professor Emeritus, Department of
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 &
Kimberly Lewinski
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