Language Arts Journal of Michigan

Volume 17
Issue 1 *What's Cool in Your School*

Article 6

2001

Writersitis: A Disease Worth Catching

June Nigg

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/lajm>

Recommended Citation

Nigg, June (2001) "Writersitis: A Disease Worth Catching," *Language Arts Journal of Michigan*: Vol. 17: Iss. 1, Article 6.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.9707/2168-149X.1334>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks@GVSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Language Arts Journal of Michigan by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks@GVSU. For more information, please contact scholarworks@gvsu.edu.

Writersitis: A Disease Worth Catching

June Nigg

For four years now, students at Gobles Elementary School have been coming down with a strange disease. Its main symptom is the urge to write continuously, and it strikes twelve fourth and fifth grade students once a week after school for seventy-five minutes. Officials in the school district aren't concerned, though, because they think this community—the disease is called “Writersitis.” Students named their group “Writersitis” because they say they have a “disease” that compels them to write. The program lasts the entire school year now, but it originally began as a six-week after school academically talented program that I started as the coordinator. After the six-weeks, the students wanted to continue to write in the group, so we just kept going.

Interest is growing in the program, and some teachers have also requested and recommended other students who love to write be included. Because of this, in the future there may have to be an entrance qualifier, such as submitting pieces of writing to be judged. The number of students in the group is limited to twelve in order to make it more manageable for me.

I really didn't have any particular program to pattern my group after, and mostly used my Third Coast Writing Project and teaching experience, as well as several writing and poetry books. One book in particular was Marjorie Frank's, *If You're Trying to Teach Kids How to Write: You've Gotta Have This Book!* (Revised Edition). It contains several writing ideas and student writing projects. I basically

use a writing workshop-style method. In the seventy-five minutes we meet in my classroom each week, we always begin with a small snack voluntarily brought in by parents of group members (Students require this before they'll write!). We then head down to the computer lab, and I give them prompts to get their juices flowing. (They prefer typing on the computer, because they say it is less taxing than writing it out by hand, and they can save their writing and revise/spell check it more easily.) They are free to write anything else if they are not inspired by the five or six ideas I give them. I try to motivate and inspire the students while teaching them new techniques and poetry styles. The students are eager to learn, and sometimes I feel pressured to come up with new ideas each week that they'll enjoy writing about. Their enthusiasm always astounds me, and their faithful appearance each week is pretty amazing. Previous fourth graders, who are now fifth graders, signed up again for a second year. Mrs. Sue Brown, a fifth-grade rotation writing teacher, says “Writersitis students are the ones who can't wait for a writing assignment! I can always tell which students are or have been in the program because I don't have to tell them to begin their writing with an exciting, interesting opening sentence.”

I enter their writing and poetry in as many contests as I can find. Although they haven't had anything published this year, they keep on trying and are not easily discouraged. The school publishes their writing regularly in *The Homelink*, a newsletter that is mailed monthly to all people in the school

district. I also put their writing in *The Advertiser*, a local weekly newspaper. Their writing is published regularly on their own website, called "Writersitis," at home.gobles.org/writersitis. The website offers a writing quote, a brainstorming idea, and writing by the students. Parents like the website because their relatives across the country are able to access the site to read the students' writing.

One year, the "disease" spread to a local restaurant, where we published students' writing on placemats. No one became sick, though, and it was a big hit with their relatives and friends . . . not to mention the business it brought in for the restaurant. All students had their own placemat filled with their writing. We also had a set laminated for the family. This year, the students' work (in the form of colorful posters the students make) will be posted in the school's buses for a week to inspire other students to write. They also plan to make bookmarks with their writing to pass out to the entire school.

Who knows what "germ" of an idea they picked up that will influence their future.

The Writersitis group started a school literary paper in order to not only publish their own writing, but the writing of other students, K-5, not currently in the after school program. They named it "Tiger Writer" after the school's tiger mascot. Writing will be submitted by students and reviewed for publication by the Writersitis group. Each student published receives a Tiger Writer pencil.

Every year, I take the student group to the *Kalamazoo Gazette* in Kalamazoo to explore the possibility of a journalistic career. We receive a tour of the newspaper (while the presses are running), as well as talk to various staff members such as layout/photographers, and meet reporters to ask them questions. Students ask what type of education is required (four years of college), what type of stories reporters write (usually a variety), and what kind of yearly salary reporters receive! (One reporter said it was comparable to a first-year teacher's salary). They also are given facts about the newspaper's founding, circulation, and statistics. At the end of the

tour, they receive a copy of the *Kalamazoo Gazette* "hot off the press." Who knows what "germ" of an idea they picked up that will influence their future.

The group also has their own T-shirt design. It is different each year, as the students design the layout. They all brainstorm ideas, and then vote on the final design and colors they've chosen. It is professionally screen printed at a nearby printer, and the students pay for them.

Former Writersitis students who are now in the middle school continue to showcase their writing through their courses. They still seem to enjoy writing after their elementary experience. When eighth graders were asked about the experience, Jackson Ambs said, "The after school writing program helped me write and express myself more creatively." Nicholas Peters (who actually was the student who coined the word "Writersitis") said, "I think the Writersitis program strengthened my writing ability. It's a great program." Kayla Clement said, "Writersitis helped me learn awesome writing techniques and how to write creative and imaginative stories." Mindy Thorpe agreed and said, "It made me more imaginative, and I could create a better picture for my reader in my writing." Mrs. Joan Lueer, the above students' English teacher, said, "All four of these eighth graders are among this year's better writers. They aren't intimidated by the writing assignments. They all possess an imaginative and creative approach to their writing. They enter work with a positive attitude and strong writing skills."

Current Writersitis students have positive comments about the program. Casey Evert - "I like that we all write together." Persefoni Lauhon - "I like my writing being published on the internet." Roxanne Morris - "I like being given writing prompts and typing my writing on the computer . . . it's faster and my hand doesn't hurt. Spell check and other computer advantages make it easier to correct my paper without re-writing by hand several times!" Kurtis Dickerson - "I like it because I can write more often, and I get to see my friends." Rebecca Drake - "I like it when we're given writing prompts and ideas." Ryan Fox - "I like entering contests and

going on field trips." Abby Pike - "My whole family doesn't write, so I get to write a lot more, and someday I hope to be a published author."

As for me, I enjoy writing myself, and it's very satisfying to me to see students excited about writing. My Writersitis students, past and present, seem to be confident writers and eager to write. "Writersitis" is hopefully a lifelong illness!

Work Cited

Frank, Marjorie. *If You're Trying To Teach Kids How to Write: You've Gotta Have This Book!* Revised Edition. Nashville, TN: Incentive Publication, Inc., 1995.

Resources

Freeman, Marcia S. *Building A Writing Community: A Practical Guide*. Gainesville, FL: Maupin House Publishing, 1995.

Glover, Mary Kenner. *A Garden of Poets: Poetry Writing in the Elementary Classroom*. Urbana IL: National Council of the Teachers of English, 1999.

Kiester, Jane Bell. *Blowing Away the State Writing Assessment Test: Four Steps to Better Scores for Teachers of All Levels*. 2nd Ed.

Gainesville, FL: Maupin House, 2000.

Pope, Alice, Editor. *Children's Writer's & Illustrator's Market: 800 Editors & Art Directors Who Buy Your Writing and Illustrations*. Cincinnati, OH: F&W Publications, 2000.

Contests

Anthology of Poetry, Inc.

P.O. Box 698

148 Sunset Ave.

Asheboro, NC 27204-0698

(910) 626-7762

Contests November and April

Celebration of Young Poets

Creative Communication

90 North 100 East

Logan, Utah 84321

APPENDIX A

Student Writing

Dragons

We were wild, afforded respect.

We helped in work, but never in battle.

We dragons were peaceful, no real threat to you.

We sang in the moonlight,

played with children who loved us so.

Then people feared us, and hunted us for skin.

We fled to secret castles and villages.

There we wait, until you're ready to see us again.

We wait for you.

Emilia Breitenbach

America

I want to be where the earth breaks free

where freedom rings like bells

where a free country is forming

where a single person can be a leader and a helper

where people are not bossed a lot

and where one person can make a difference this place is called America.

Evan White

There's A Place I Go

It's special - there's nothing but forests

The only movement is the wind

The only sound is the crackle of sticks

It is my own place, and nobody knows about it

Nobody can go there because it's inside me.

Jordan Siwula

I Slipped Inside

*I flipped open a book and slipped inside
I turned into a cartoon with my eyes wide open
Imaginary figures floating around in the sky
I blinked once then twice
But the moaning sounds turned into a cry.*

*The pressure of the air was hard and cold
It pushed me back and I fell into my bed
To my surprise I was still there in the domain
But the place was gone and I was standing
Today I will remember that mysterious lane.*

Amber Wioskowski

About the Author

June D. Nigg is a Third Coast Writing Consultant, Region VIII, MCTE Coordinator, teaches fourth grade, and is the Academically Talented Coordinator for Gobles Elementary School.