

The Pen and Paper



Developed by:

Indiana WRITING PROJECT

A local site of the National Writing Project

Hello all,

Before we started our work this morning on our letter to you, we talked about life experiences. . . a death of a cousin and middle school heartaches. . . which led to the discussion of the importance of writing for us as adults. We noticed students watched us write, and they saw our struggles. They understood that we, the teachers, faced the same challenges as writers. We discovered sharing our writing and our struggles provided the key to our teaching authenticity.

In his book, *A Writer Teaches Writing*, Donald Murray said, "**Teachers should write, first of all, because it is fun. It is a satisfying activity that extends both the brain and the soul. It stimulates the intellect, deepens the experience of living, and is good therapy. Teachers should write so they understand the process of writing from within. They should know the territory intellectually and emotionally how you have to think to write, how you feel when writing. Teachers of writing do not have to be great writers, but they should have frequent and recent experience in writing. If you experience the despair, the joy, the failure, the success, the work, the fun, the drudgery, the surprise of writing you will be able to understand the composing experiences of your students and therefore help them understand how they are learning to write.**"

We found that once the students realized that we shared the writing joys and sorrows, we had a new-found authority in the students' eyes as writing instructors. When we talked about writer's block and how to overcome it, the students knew we had experienced it. When we discussed the fears of sharing a personal narrative publicly, the students realized our feelings paralleled their own. When we used our own writing as a mentor text for revision, the students learned to confer sensitively and tactfully. Students understood we were in the writing trenches with them and became more willing to risk the journey.

With this being said, it is hard to be ready for what your students will share with you when they understand you are a writer, too. We found students will share intensely personal stories with you proving what Murray said about writing being therapeutic. Once we established ourselves as writers and created a safe community of writers, risk taking in not only writing techniques flourished, but in the topics students self-selected. Deeply personal writing choices in subject matter made our students "ache with caring" about the words they committed to paper. Some days, sharing time provided barrels of laughter and on other days the room was so silent students forgot to breathe.

We learned that taking the writing journey was not leading the students, but walking side by side with them, experiencing the writing highs and heartaches with them. The end results were surprising, rewarding, and touching.

Until next month, write on!

Shirley and Susan

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*Our goal is to promote
teachers helping
teachers.*

[Best Practices in
Writing Instruction](#)

[Lucy Calkins: Spin
the Golden Thread
of Writing](#)

[Ruth Ayers on the
Celebration of
Writing](#)



Happy Fall! We recommend trying [Scarecrow](#) by Cynthia Rylant as a mentor text! You will find interesting descriptive phrases and other great craft in this story!



**Time to plan for
2018 summer
training. Check
out the links
below! Sign up
soon!**

- [New and Improved
Invitational Leadership
Institute: Recommend
your fellow teachers NOW](#)
- [Week Long Open Institute:
June 25th to June 29th.
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teaching buddies!](#)