

The Pen and Paper



Developed by:

Indiana WRITING PROJECT

A local site of the National Writing Project

Hello friends,

Welcome back after a well-deserved break! We took one, too, in case you did not notice! When you returned to school in January, were you filled once again with the possibilities of the new semester? Were you thinking about how you could help each student reach his/her own educational goals and had a plan in mind? Were you excited to see your kids? To us, January is a time of rebirth and renewed effort and dreams for our students. Every year we start January in the fantasy stage as defined by [Harry Wong in *First 10 Days of School*](#). But as the first few weeks pass and stacks of papers to grade climb sky high, preparation is endless, and we have countless other tasks to complete, we enter the survival stage; the fantasy stage is short and the survival stage is real and long, and may last until the end of the year. But we, as teachers, need to move into the impact stage! How can we support our students in positive ways, encourage them to write, and energize ourselves? That is the \$64,000 question. . . but are we the only ones in survival mode. . . are our students also in survival mode? We found our students are in the trenches of survival with us. How do we climb out and move forward with renewed purpose?

As educators, we found that to truly help our students reach their potential, we needed to struggle to get past the demand of state standards to get to Wong's impact level: to know each student, what makes them want to learn, and see through the baggage each student brings with him/her. [Ruth Ayres in *Enticing Hard-To-Reach Writers*](#) tells us, "This is the role of today's teacher. It is not enough to know content. It is not enough to be kind and empathetic. We must be both." Writing stories is powerful! Writing enables each student to work on his/her OWN story and we know there is power in student ownership. When students develop ownership with their writing, motivation to get it right spurs them on. And we discovered that this truth holds true no matter the age of the student!

Through praise, meaningful instruction and modeling, and personal connections with our students, we provide the safety net students need to become risk takers and share personal thoughts and ideas. When our students truly feel we have confidence in them, they start to believe in themselves. Writing with our students demonstrated our struggles, our fears, and our triumphs. It connected us to our students. Creating this connection and exposing our vulnerability is not easy work, but work that is rewarding. Ruth Ayres says,

As you take leaps of faith and make moves to entice kids to write, may you also know there will come a time when "these kids" will almost get the best of you. You might want to quit on that day. Don't do it. Instead, take the time to see their stories. Remember, you have the power to change the course of lives. All children deserve to know that they can write a different version of their stories. Fight the good fight. It might be hard, but it is worth it. Press on brave teacher.

We would like to add, your students will not remember everything you have taught them, but they will remember how you made them feel!

Until next month! "Press on, brave teacher!"

Shirley and Susan

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or

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6th Edition

February 2018

*Our goal is to promote
teachers helping
teachers.*

[Helping Struggling
Writers](#)

[Turning Struggling
Writers into Star
Writers: Planning](#)

Katie Wood Ray shares that an authentic writing assignment involves writing for a real purpose. How about for February, writing Valentine appreciation cards to veterans or to a local nursing home?

Our mentor text of the month is [Thank you, Mr. Falker](#) by [Patricia Polacco](#). Wonderful story to reach struggling students.

You can still sign up to participate in the summer programs offered by Indiana Writing Project. Refer colleagues and administrators!

- ❖ [Nominate a colleague to attend IWP Invitational Leadership Institute!](#)
- ❖ [Sign up to mentor a new IWP fellow on implementing writer's workshop in the classroom.](#)
- ❖ [Attend the week long Open Institute to BEGIN an educational writing journey!](#)