

# Workshop 2

## Making Writing Meaningful

### Overview

Workshop 2 demonstrates how teachers use authentic sources and topics to prompt students to write about things that matter to them—subjects that relate to their lives, relationships, and communities. The topic may be the students themselves—their feelings, emotions, and reactions—or it may involve outside forces that have an impact on their lives.

The teachers who appear in this video use a variety of subjects and approaches to help their students connect to writing—current events, popular music, literature, community issues, social interactions, self-exploration. In addition to classroom segments that illustrate these approaches, the video also features teacher discussions about student engagement and excerpts from an interview with Linda Rief, the author of *Seeking Diversity: Language Arts With Adolescents*.

### Workshop 2 Teachers

The teachers seen in the video program include:

- Jenny Beasley, Grade 6, Meece Middle School, Somerset, Kentucky
- Gloria Hamilton, Grade 8, Crozier Middle School, Inglewood, California
- Vivian Johnson, Grade 8, T.A. Dugger Junior High School, Elizabethton, Tennessee
- Damond Moodie, Grade 8, Roosevelt Middle School, Oakland, California
- Mary Cathryn Ricker, Grade 7, Cleveland Quality Middle School, St. Paul, Minnesota
- Allen Teng, Grade 7, Will Rogers Middle School, Lawndale, California

### Background Reading

Before coming to the workshop session, you should prepare to participate by:

- Reviewing the materials for Workshop 2 provided on the Web site ([www.learner.org/channel/workshops/middlewriting/](http://www.learner.org/channel/workshops/middlewriting/)) including the lesson plans for Damond Moodie and Allen Teng. These plans may be downloaded and printed, along with supporting classroom materials and samples of the students' writing.
- Reading the two articles provided under "Related Reading" on the Workshop 2 Web page and highlighting two or three sections that strike you as particularly useful or insightful, that raise questions in your mind, or that relate to your own practice. Record your responses to the articles in your workshop journal.
- Reviewing the "Key Practices To Observe in Workshop 2," available on the next page and on the Web site.

## Key Practices To Observe in Workshop 2

In this workshop, you will see a number of effective teaching practices intended to make writing meaningful for students. They include the following:

- Teachers strive to create a community of writers, a positive environment (social, emotional, physical) for writing, learning, and thinking in the classroom. Teachers model respect for students and respect for diversity in culture, voices, and ideas. Students are encouraged to have a voice and position in the classroom, and they work together, helping each other develop as writers.
- Students are positive about writing because they are encouraged to write about matters that are relevant and important to their lives and because they can draw on their experiences and knowledge. Teachers do not just present an assignment; they spend ample time establishing a foundation for the writing, making it meaningful to students.
- The teachers use the media, song lyrics, and reading materials to help students think and communicate about important and challenging issues, events, dilemmas, and conditions in their community/culture.
- Student ownership is revealed as a very important component in making writing meaningful. Students choose what they write about and make decisions about their writing. Though the teachers clearly have goals (for example, helping students write a persuasive letter or editorial), they establish a framework in which students can reach the goals in different ways.
- Teachers use a variety of techniques to engage students and convey the importance of writing, for example, reading and talking about samples, modeling writing, using choral responses, enabling students to write to advocate changes they find important, asking stimulating questions, listening carefully, and joining in the applause that celebrates a student writer.
- Students engage in writing-to-learn practices (for example, the “Dear Know-It-All” quick write) that stimulate their thinking about realistic issues, events, and problems and that enable students to express themselves openly about matters relevant to their lives.
- Student inquiry plays an important role in making writing meaningful. Students are encouraged to read and think critically about ideas presented in popular song lyrics, music videos, poetry, and other materials. They are led to inquire into their own experience and into issues and needs in their communities. Teachers clearly strive to promote students’ curiosity and critical thinking—important strategies for making writing meaningful. Students experience that writing is an act of creativity and discovery.

# Facilitator's Outline: Workshop 2

This outline of the Workshop 2 video contains approximate entry points for each section. Use this chart to help identify the pause points in the Watch the Video section. Zero your VCR counter at the Annenberg/CPB logo at the beginning of the tape.

<b>Segment 1</b> (0:00–24:18)	<b>Introduction</b> (beginning at 0:00)	
	<b>In the Classroom</b> (beginning at 5:31) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reporting on current events</li> </ul>	Damond Moodie
	<b>Teacher Discussion</b> (beginning at 16:03) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Finding meaningful subjects</li> </ul>	Jenny Beasley, Vivian Johnson, and Damond Moodie
	<b>In the Classroom</b> (beginning at 19:22) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Choosing writing topics</li> </ul>	Damond Moodie
<b>Segment 2</b> (24:19–37:01)	<b>In the Classroom</b> (beginning at 24:19) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Using popular media</li> </ul>	Allen Teng
	<b>Teacher Discussion</b> (beginning at 32:48) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tapping into student interests</li> </ul>	Gloria Hamilton, Mary Cathryn Ricker, and Allen Teng
	<b>Interview</b> (beginning at 35:51) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Knowing your students</li> </ul>	Linda Rief
<b>Segment 3</b> (37:02–41:57)	<b>In the Classroom</b> (beginning at 37:02) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Student-selected topics</li> </ul>	Jenny Beasley
	<b>Teacher Discussion</b> (beginning at 40:05) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The importance of choice</li> </ul>	Jenny Beasley, Vivian Johnson, and Damond Moodie
<b>Segment 4</b> (41:58–end)	<b>In the Classroom</b> (beginning at 41:58) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Warm-up exercise</li> <li>Personal writing</li> </ul>	Gloria Hamilton Mary Cathryn Ricker
	<b>Interview</b> (beginning at 50:57) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Relating to students as individuals</li> </ul>	Linda Rief
	<b>In the Classroom</b> (beginning at 52:37) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sharing writing</li> </ul>	Vivian Johnson
	<b>Interview</b> (beginning at 54:52) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Writing for real audiences</li> </ul>	Linda Rief

# Workshop Session

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## Discussion and Sharing (15 minutes)

- Most teachers have taught writing units or assignments that are particularly engaging to their students. Share a unit or writing assignment that resonated with your students and reflect on the reasons for its success.
- In the essay “Writing To Think Critically: The Seeds of Social Action” (available on the Workshop 2 Web page under “Related Reading”), Randy Bomer writes:

School, of course, is no more immune to the issues of justice, power, and association than any other human institution. ...My point is that these sorts of topics are just as available in children’s daily experiences as the frost on the windows or their trips to visit relatives. And since they are so close at hand, we make a political decision in helping students develop an attentive lens to notice them—or in failing to do so.

Comment on this statement. Do you agree that teachers should encourage their students to think critically about significant issues they encounter in their daily environment? What issues confront your students? Do your classes discuss these issues and/or write about them? In what context?

## Watch the Video (60 minutes video plus 30 minutes discussion)

Watch the video, stopping at the end of each segment (see the Facilitator’s Outline on the preceding page for help locating the pause points). If you are watching the workshop on your own, use your workshop journal to respond to two or more discussion questions from each of the four segments.

### Segment 1 (0:00-24:18)

[Pause point: After Damond Moodie and his students discuss the power of writing about opinions and feelings.]

- In the workshop introduction, Linda Rief discusses why she begins the school year with personal writing. What kind of writing do your students do at the beginning of the school year? What are your reasons for starting the year in this way?
- Class discussion is an integral part of Damond Moodie’s instruction. What role does discussion serve in helping students become more accomplished writers? How does it relate to the developmental needs of middle-level learners? What strategies help ensure that students are engaged? That the discussion remains productive?
- In the interview about technology, Damond talks about his ambivalence toward using the Internet to gather information. Do you share his reservations? Why or why not? How can teachers help students use the Internet more effectively?

### Segment 2 (24:19-37:01)

[Pause point: After Linda Rief’s interview on the importance of knowing student interests.]

- In the activity “Crossing the Line,” Allen’s students move to one side of the room or the other to signify where they stand on a particular issue. Why is this activity particularly appropriate for middle-level students? What challenges might it present, both for the students and for the teacher? Share an activity you’ve used that involves movement.
- Linda Rief regularly brings in reading material that relates to her students’ interests, and Allen Teng uses the lyrics to popular music to encourage his students to think about important social issues. Share any successful strategies you’ve used to discover and tap into your students’ interests. What were the results of your efforts?

# Workshop Session, cont'd.

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## **Segment 3** (37:02-41:57)

[Pause point: After the teacher discussion on the importance of allowing students to choose their own topics.]

- During the teacher discussion, Jenny Beasley talks about how choosing their own topics makes writing more meaningful for her students. Contrast the benefits of student choice with the advantages of asking students to write on teacher-assigned topics.
- Share a successful writing assignment in which your students chose their own topics.

## **Segment 4** (41:58-end)

[View to end of program.]

- What is your favorite writing warm-up? Describe how it works and what its benefits are for your class.
- Linda Rief discusses how much she enjoys getting to know her students as human beings through their writing. Share an anecdote about how a student's writing has changed your perceptions about him or her or how it has helped you adapt your instruction for this particular student and/or all your students.
- At the conclusion of the video, Linda Rief discusses how writing for real audiences makes student work more meaningful. Do you agree with her viewpoint? What are some ways you have arranged for your students to share their writing with an audience?

## **Going Further** (15 minutes)

- Several of the teachers featured in the workshop video mention the importance of reading materials other than textbooks in helping their students expand beyond their own experiences and find meaningful reasons to write. Share your strategies for obtaining and using reading materials other than textbooks with your students. What are some of the materials you use? Where do you get them? When do your students read them? How do your students respond to these materials (i.e., whole-class or small-group discussion, journals or writer's notebooks, more formal writing assignments, etc.)?

# Before Next Week

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## Homework

- Complete your exploration of the Web pages for Workshop 2—looking at materials, listening to audio files, and/or printing out resources. Record any comments or responses in your workshop journal to share with your colleagues.

## Background Reading for Workshop 3

Before coming to the workshop session, you should prepare to participate by:

- Reviewing the unit plan for Vivian Johnson and the lesson plan for Jack Wilde available on the Web site ([www.learner.org/channel/workshops/middlewriting/](http://www.learner.org/channel/workshops/middlewriting/)). These plans may be downloaded and printed, along with supporting classroom materials and samples of the students' writing.
- Reading the article provided under "Related Reading" on the Workshop 3 Web page and highlighting two or three sections that strike you as particularly useful or insightful, that raise questions in your mind, or that relate to your own practice. Record your responses to the article in your workshop journal.
- Reviewing the "Key Practices To Observe in Workshop 3," available in this guide and on the Web site.
- Choosing a favorite short poem or part of a longer poem and making copies of the text to share with fellow participants at the workshop session.

# Selected Sources for “Making Writing Meaningful”

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Johannessen, Larry R. “Teaching Writing: Motivating Inquiry.” *English Journal* 78.2 (February 1989): 64-67.

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La Bounty, Jan and Patty Reksten. “Inspiring Struggling Writers with Photography.” *Middle School Journal*, 32.5 (May 2001): 13-21.

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