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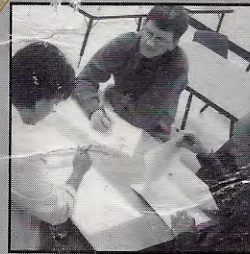
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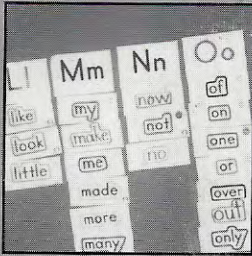
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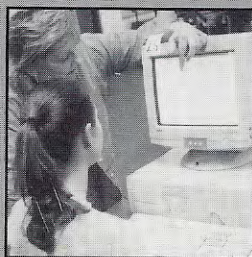
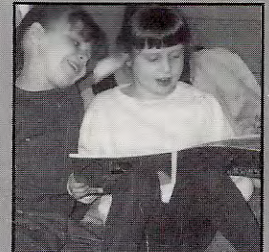
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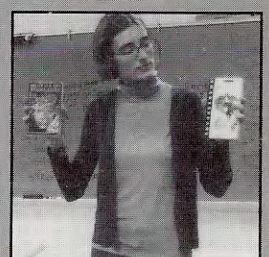
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FEATURED ARTICLES **KAY AUGUSTINE** ON RETHINKING
 STANDARD ENGLISH AND OTHER DIALECTS **GINA DEBLASE** ON THE IMPACT
 OF TESTING ON URBAN ADOLESCENT GIRLS **SUSI LONG** ON FOUR-YEAR-OLDS
 AND AUTHORIZING **MARY WARNER** ON TOLERANCE-BUILDING THROUGH STORIES

INTERVIEWS **SHELLEY HARWAYNE** • **J. PATRICK LEWIS** • **JANET ALLEN**

SHELLEY HARWAYNE: CHAMPION OF THE “LIFETIME GUARANTEE”

S A N D R A S . L I N G O

Shelley Harwayne is the most gifted educator I know.” This is high praise coming from a particularly credible source, Nancie Atwell, author of *In the Middle*. Harwayne’s affiliation with the New York City public schools and her dedication to its children span more than thirty years. She has served as a teacher, staff developer, codirector of the Teachers College Writing Project, principal, and superintendent. Despite her current job title, “Superintendent of District Two,” a district serving 23,000 students in forty elementary and middle schools and four high schools, Harwayne still proudly considers herself a teacher.



In late 1991, Harwayne sent a proposal to the school board of Community School District #2 that outlined her vision of a new school, a school in which “students would apprentice themselves to teachers who were readers, writers, and researchers.” She refused to designate her school by a number, as is customary for New York City public schools; instead, the school was named Manhattan New School. When the school opened the following fall, one hundred and fifty lucky students walked through the copper swinging doors and entered what one alum called the “literacy mansion.”

The century-old red brick building on East Eighty-second Street was a challenge and a blessing. The five-story building had no elevator, and for years operated without a working intercom system. The building had no gymnasium or library, and the bathrooms, cafeteria, drinking fountains, and playground space were inadequate. The school faced the all-too-familiar problem of low budgets; parents were solicited for donations of necessities such as Band-Aids, postage stamps, and photocopy paper.

The blessing of this tall, old building was the ambiance derived from antique stained glass windows and nooks and crannies not common in modern institutional settings. Although the building posed extraordinary challenges, the staff met them with extraordinary adaptations. Visitors to the school who took in the bouquets of flowers, benches, wicker settees, handmade curtains, and baskets brimming with magazines asked, "Could this really be a New York City public school?" Harwayne's answer was a proud "yes."

By 1999, the population of Manhattan New School (MNS) had grown to over 550 children, forty-four percent of whom came from minority backgrounds. About thirty different languages were spoken by MNS students. Harwayne, a child of immigrants, felt privileged to "give back to the children of immigrants what the New York City public schools gave me." She stated, "I want children to lead wide-awake lives and to use their literacies to improve the quality of their lives."

Further, she offered them a "lifetime guarantee" which assured that students wouldn't just learn how to read and write; "They will choose to read and write. Now and forever." Her commitment to this "lifetime guarantee" is evident in all the pedagogical practices she advocates.

As principal of MNS, Harwayne's administrative style was anything but ordinary. In *Going Public* she stated, "I disagree with those textbooks on administration which suggest that the teacher's main area of concern is the classroom and the principal's is the school at large." It was unlikely you'd find Harwayne in her modest office, which was located in an out-of-the way space reclaimed from the medical suite that operated in the school decades ago. Instead, you'd find her with the children, perhaps playing what she described as her most pleasurable role, that of school troubadour.

Mem Fox said, "When elementary teachers dream of Paradise, they dream of the Manhattan New School and principals like Shelley Harwayne." Harwayne describes herself as "unconditionally pro-teacher," but she'd also tell you that *she* will always be a teacher. A radio program host launched an interview with Harwayne by saying, "Pretend you're a teacher." "No need to pretend," she responded. Even the students sense her priorities; a child in the kindergarten class of a teacher named Pam once greeted Harwayne with, "Hi, Pam's teacher." As superintendent, she holds monthly meetings with principals to discuss pedagogical, not administrative, issues. In *Education Update*, she is quoted as saying, "On the front burner for me, always, is the struggling child. You could come up with some wonderful programs, but if it does not work for the struggling child, it's not good enough."

When the Manhattan New School opened, Harwayne, the writer, became obsessed with collecting everything to help her document the magic that transpired there. She saved artifacts including notes from parents, students, and teachers, memos, photos, journals, and newspaper clippings. When she began to write about her school, she envisioned one book but eventually discovered that she actually had three. She created what has become known as the Manhattan New School trilogy, three related books about the school: *Going Public*, *Lifetime Guarantees*, and *Writing Through Childhood*. In *Lifetime Guarantees*, she explained that, "The work of shaping these three related volumes has been, like a photographer's journey, using a wide-angle lens in the first volume on school culture, narrowing my focus in this volume to the literacy lessons I have been learning, and then zooming in, in the third book, on the close study of classroom practices."

Ms. Harwayne addressed OCTELA at its October 6 conference, less than a month after the terrorist attacks. She was exhausted by the unspeakable challenges she faced as the superintendent of District #2 which includes four schools in the vicinity of the World Trade Center. She characterized her teachers, some of whom were only in the fourth day of their careers, as heroes who safely evacuated 8,000 students through smoke and ankle-deep soot. She reminded her audience that these heroic teachers of Tribeca were worried about their loved ones who worked in the World Trade Center, but "they were there for the kids, and they held on for the kids." During her presentation,

Harwayne shared writing that had come out of the tragedy, including newspaper articles, messages traced in the layers of dust (the “new canvas”), and letters sent to the students and teachers. The letters that poured in from all over the United States, and even from countries abroad, moved many people in the audience to tears. Despite the poignancy and power of those letters, the writers often apologized for their inadequate writing. Harwayne reminded us that, “We need to let our kids know that writing does help.” In the six months since the attacks, teachers and students have been moved into less than ideal settings. Teachers from one school have had to set up their classrooms four times. Harwayne said that principals remind parents that a school is the people, not the building. She said, “We’ll get back our buildings, but right now we have to make sure we have our community together, the people together.”

Harwayne acknowledges the powerful role teachers play in the aftermath of this tragedy. “I think teachers have this incredible challenge before them. And I think it’s an incredibly wonderful time to be an educator because the kids won’t let us curl up and go under the covers. You’re they’re for *them*, but they lift *your* spirits.”

In a recent phone conversation, Harwayne reported that the last school, one in Battery Park, was finally opened on February 28. Only about half of the students returned, but she hopes the rest will return in the fall. Environmental experts continue to monitor the air and report it is safe. The schools are receiving mental health support. She said, “The crocuses are coming up, the Yankees are playing baseball, spring is in the air, and we are looking forward to normalcy.”

I had the great pleasure and privilege of talking with Shelley Harwayne on October 7, 2002. Her respect for teachers, appreciation of children, and commitment to ensuring “the lifetime guarantee” are evident in her comments.

SANDRA S. LINGO: *In your books you refer to the patchwork quilt your sister made for your daughter. It was made from t-shirts you daughter had worn over seventeen years of life, and you say, “It’s a tradition in our family to begin something new by looking back on what you’ve done before.” When you opened Manhattan New School, what you refer to as “your little schoolhouse,” how did your past influence your vision of the school and literacy learning?*

SHELLEY HARWAYNE: I grew up with friends who were middle class. They all lived in private homes, but I lived in an apartment building. Their parents were college-educated, and mine ran the local dry cleaners. They went to camps in the summer. I spent my childhood in the library. It was what I did in the summer. I became a good reader because I had really big blocks of time in the summer in that library or to go home to sit at the kitchen table with a book and a good salami sandwich on a bialy with an orange soda. I would make up these goals: This summer I’m going to read all the Berlitz self-teachers, and I’m going to learn a new language, or I’m going to read cookbooks and I’m going to learn how to cook, or I’m going to read every book in a series. It’s interesting, I didn’t read fiction when I grew up. When I was an adult, all I read was nonfiction. I read language arts journals, and I read *Newsweek*, and I’d read newspapers. I didn’t read fiction until I met Hindy List, the director of curriculum in my district



Postcards as Teaching Aids

by Allison Wischer

I keep a collection of postcards in my room. Some are from my own trips; many have been given to me by friends and students. The postcards are very helpful when we are reading about a particular place. I regularly pull them out to help students visualize setting.

The postcards also serve as inspiration when we do creative writing. When we discuss imagery, students write descriptions of what they see in the postcards. Then their classmates try to draw the image the writer describes. The writers can compare their classmates’ drawings with the postcards to assess how well they evoked the visual images they intended.

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when I started teaching. She just read books because that's who she was as a human being, and it was inspirational to me. I wanted to be in that cool crowd that could sit and talk about the latest novels by, say, Anne Beattie and Toni Morrison. I just said, well I'm just going to start reading. How could I not? So you make time in your life for fiction. I had time for reading, but I didn't read fiction, and now I do, and kids read fiction a lot, so how could I not? I think that informs my work, because I don't want kids to do anything in school that people in the real world don't do.

Looking back to the time you were a principal, how did you embark on the challenge of writing what has been called the "Manhattan School trilogy," comprised of Going Public, Lifetime Guarantees, and Writing Through Childhood?

There are so many wonderful schools in New York City, and they deserve a lot of attention. I like to write, and so I told the story about one. When I became principal in 1991, I started saving everything. Then I told Heinemann that I was going to write about my experiences in opening a public school in New York City. And they said, just go ahead and write. I worked all year, and on the weekends I jotted things down, and in the summers I wrote and wrote. When I started writing it, I realized that it was huge. I sent the manuscript off to Heinemann. They told me that, in fact, they thought I had two books, and I should figure out how to separate them. I just put all the chapters down on my dining room table, just all these chunks, and tried to figure out if there were two books there that I could live with. The ideas connected to starting the school from scratch and building a supportive community involving parents became the first book, *Going Public*, which is the foundation. The second book, *Lifetime Guarantees*, was about how literacy supported the community and the community supported literacy. It wasn't like you create the setting, then you can teach kids to read and write. In fact, the reading and writing created the community. It went both ways. And the truth was, there were three books, because my obsession with writing became a book unto itself. I was so interested in the teaching of writing, which was my life before Manhattan New School, that I teased out all the writing things and saved them for a separate issue, which became *Writing Through Childhood*.

Was it hard to leave Manhattan New School to become the superintendent of District Two?

It was a hard decision to leave because I was so happy. I miss seeing the same children, parents, and teachers every day. But you evolve in your career. I've never done anything too long. Manhattan New School was the longest that I've ever done any job—eight years.

Are you still closely associated with the Manhattan New School?

The school is still one of my schools. My friends are there, and I know the school well, but I also have thirty-nine other schools to think about. The new principal, Jackie, was actually a parent in the school. She did some of the groundbreaking work in our district in changing the way we teach math and social studies. It only strengthens the school to have new ideas.

Tell me about your role as a superintendent.

This job is incredibly interesting to me. You see the bigger picture and the politics behind schools. We have a very successful district. Someone once told me that becoming superintendent of District Two is like teaching the honors class. You know, because for an urban district, we do very well. We have incredible principals. We have ninety to one hundred languages—every year we count a different amount; our kids come from all over the world. We have an interesting mix. We run from Chinatown to Greenwich village, to the Broadway theater district, to the upper east side . . . it's so amazing, the diversity of it. Some days when I leave a building at lunchtime and I'm walking in this incredible neighborhood, I really have to pinch myself. You know, I'm taking care of those schools.

*Your books are so unusual because they speak to both the teacher and the principal, as well as to parents. I'm not sure that you see a big difference in these roles. Don Graves said that *Going Public* is "must reading for every administrator, teacher, parent, and all who care about public education." What has influenced you to develop an administrative style that looks more like "teacher" than "principal"?*

I didn't see myself as the hierarchical leader. A school shouldn't depend on the principal. In fact, it was the kind of school where I could have traded places with anyone in the building. Every one of those teachers could have led the school, and I could have taught. In

fact, Don Graves teasingly asked me if I read Che Guevara's handbook on guerrilla warfare, because one of the first rules is that everyone should know everyone else's job, because in an instant you may have to change places. I think that applied to the teachers in the buildings, to the safety officer, to the custodian, to the family members. There was a sense that we're all in this together, and that we all are responsible for improving the lives of those kids. I'd like to add that I still think of myself as a teacher, even in the superintendent's role.

In fact, you frequently write about the contributions that John D'Antonio, the school's custodian, made to the education of the children. You recognize him in the acknowledgements for Going Public.

The important thing was to make sure there wasn't an elitist presence, that teachers weren't seen as some elite group, that everyone was there to serve teachers. John was an important member of the community. He loved to take the children on tours of the boiler room, and teach them about that. We found out he was a great writer, and he loved to read to children. He wasn't afraid to share a coffee with us and be one of the guys. I think John represented all the support people for me. And making a wonderful school, you don't do it alone. You don't do it without family members, parents, grandmas, you don't do it without a secretary who's inviting when he or she answers the phone. George Bush visited one of our schools this week, and the custodian came up to me afterwards and was just beaming with pride, and he wanted to know if Bush liked everything, and did the building look good enough. You want that.

It is evident that your teachers were always growing. Don Graves said your school was a "place that heals any sickness an educator might have: Walk in sick and walk out whole." In a letter to the editor, you said that teachers are "decision makers, not technicians." How did you support teachers' professional growth?

I was involved in the Teacher's College Writing Project in New York City. It was a staff development project where we worked in many school districts in New York City, and we researched. Staff developers were out in the schools four days a week, and one day a week they were at the university talking about what they were learning. Opening a school and coming from that setting, I wanted to remember that you don't have to

be at a university to feel scholarly. Teachers can be scholars. How do I have that same sense of research and scholarship when everyday life goes on—head lice and homework and parent complaints and fire drills and report cards? It's a matter of using your time, space, and personnel well, and not walking around frantic. You have to have the attitude that we're here, and aren't we lucky to be together, and everything a kid does is fascinating.

That leads me to ask you about your teachers' three-year role as book reviewers for the quarterly journal, The New Advocate. What did that association do for your school and your teachers, and how did it support that whole idea that you can be scholarly without being in a university?

Yeah, that was a great request. Kathy Short and Dana Fox wrote to me and asked me if I would do the book review column, and, you know, when you're the principal of a building, any opportunity to get free books is hard to turn down! I never used the pronoun "I" when I talked about the school; it was always "we." Not that anyone had time, but I wrote back to them and said, "Well, certainly, I'm not going to write the column alone. If it can be a 'we,' if it can be the teachers and parents together, I'll do it. We'll do the column together." And that's what we did. I think it was great because a lot of teachers got to read books they wouldn't have read, and they wrote, and that's one of those manageable genres. You had to write a little review, and it wasn't scary and it didn't have to go through umpteen drafts. People came out of the woodwork! Parents who were so excited about it helped. Certainly teachers, who I didn't even know were good writers, were thrilled. It was just wonderful, and when that first journal came, and everyone got a copy, it was too exciting!

Manhattan New School didn't use textbooks, workbooks, or basal readers. Your school had its share of what you refer to as "extra-time kids." Yet your school earned high scores on the mandated tests without, as you said, changing your launching pad into a holding tank. How do educators survive and move on in this standards-driven environment?

When I was a kid the report cards used to include recreational reading. We used to think about recreational reading, and I think we forget about that now. We're so tied up in these little trivial tasks about reading. The only important question is this: Are we

teaching in ways that children will choose to see reading as solace and comfort and entertainment and joy? Let's put our minds to getting that initiative going, that kids should be in public libraries, and get books they curl up in bed with, and when you call them to dinner, they can't bear to come, they don't even hear you. I think if those were our goals, we wouldn't worry about those tests, because everyone will pass those tests if they read. The tests would be some annoying little loose ends we have to take care of in April—that is, as long as the tests aren't awful, as long as they're really asking kids to read something and respond to it. I mean, tests that pull apart isolated skills make no sense, because good readers don't even pay attention to these things.

Teachers need to understand how to help a kid become a better reader and a better writer. They have to be able to articulate why they do what they do, that it's not some little activity sheet that they got from some instructional guide. We have to be informed. I pull aside a little kid and say, "Here's what I think's happening in this kid's life and here are some suggestions that will make him grow as a reader, and here's what I'm going to tell his mom what she has to do, and here's what the folks at school have to do—not just the classroom teacher, but all the support people."

The fourth grade test is not just the fourth grade teacher's responsibility. It's how we live their lives in

Teaching MATTERS

Man's Search for Meaning: A Thematic Approach

by Liz Gonda

Night and Star Wars, The Iliad and Life is Beautiful. Teach these together? That's what we do in our Senior World Literature class when we explore the theme, Man's Search for Meaning. My colleagues, Jennifer Manoukian and Jim Tinsley, and I wrote this thematic curriculum to revitalize the course as well as make the content and skill evaluations consistent.

The umbrella theme for the year, Man's Search for Meaning, is broken down into four smaller themes of quest: Alienation, Love and War, Tragedy, and Reintegration. Each quarter we examine one of these themes from the perspectives of different time periods and cultures. The course is also designed to help the students gain deeper understanding of the themes in the context of their own experiences and, at the same time, reinforce the tools they will need to survive college literature and composition courses.

Together, we three teachers created common handouts which elicit a variety of responses (writing responses, book mark activities, film study questions) as well as similar quizzes and exams. We are still free to assign a variety of responses and incorporate other materials to maintain our individual teaching styles, yet we are confident our students are getting consistent teaching of the subject matter.

What follows is a thumbnail sketch of our course, "Man's Search for Meaning." For each common novel and independent reading, there is a corresponding writing assignment, as well as highlighting and annotating of the text. With each film there is a discussion and written response connecting it to other pieces. All responses have potential to be developed for the final paper which is, in essence, a working portfolio.

Summer Reading

- Common novel, as an introduction to the theme of "alienation": Night

First Quarter: Alienation

- Discussion about the "hero and the quest" motif as it applies to Night.
- Film: Star Wars
- Discussion about existentialism and the absurd hero.
- Common reading: several small pieces by Camus, ending with The Stranger.
- Independent reading: Invisible Man, Anthem, The Awakening, Crime and Punishment, Frankenstein, The Metamorphosis, One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, Kaffir Boy, Handmaid's Tale, 1984, July's People.
- Film: Patch Adams.

Second Quarter: Love and War

- Common reading: The Iliad and Slaughterhouse Five
- Independent reading: All Quiet on the Western Front, Catch-22, The English Patient, Exodus, Fallen Angels, A Farewell to Arms, Going after Cacciato, The House of the Spirits, Love in the Time of Cholera, Resistance, The Things They Carried, A Very Long Engagement.
- Films: Gallipoli and Life is Beautiful.

Third Quarter: Tragedy

- Common reading to examine hero through tragedy and tragic flaws: Oedipus Rex, "Ivan Ilyitch," and Macbeth or Hamlet
- Brainstorm thesis statements (i.e., connections between Macbeth and Oedipus Rex, deceptive appearances, ambition, nature and chaos) for paper
- Film: Hamlet (Mel Gibson or Kenneth Branagh) or Macbeth (Roman Polanski).

Fourth Quarter: Reintegration

- Common reading to examine how the hero comes back into society, having been isolated by alienation, tragedy, love, and war: Siddhartha
- Independent Reading: Out of Africa, Cry, The Beloved Country, The God of Small Things, Into the Wild, Nine Stories, One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovitch, Song of Solomon, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, and Into Thin Air.
- Film: Regarding Henry.

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kindergarten and first grade and second grade. It's all the reading tutors and push-in people and the pull-out people and the after-school people. We all have to be on the same page and have a really well articulated belief system for what it takes to help this kid.

In Lifetime Guarantees you say that teachers need to be reminded that, "Reading extension activities are not reading, creating rubrics for reading are not reading, getting ready for reading tests is not reading, talking and writing about your reading and your reading process may be important, but they are not reading." What kinds of instructional practices have you seen in schools that are inauthentic?

If people say it's reading time, that's as simple as it gets; I expect to see people reading. I'm stunned by how much hard work is put into creating things for kids to do during reading time. What they should do is to pick up books that they can read and understand and love—books that inspire them to read more. And for the teacher to be working with the kid in the corner who struggles and coaching him and pushing him to work with small groups as need be, but for the majority of kids I expect to have them reading for an hour. When in their lifetimes will they have an hour to read?

I'm going to use a Yiddish word, *ongepotchkhet*. It means that there's so much going on it's busying, it's dizzying. If someone's living room has too many little collectables, too many chotchkas, you'd say, "Oh, my God! It was so *ongepotchkhet*!" And I think that happens in the teaching reading. I think people have just gone off the deep end. Teachers' heads are spinning. *Am I allowed to do this? Am I supposed to do this? What's guided reading? Are kids ever allowed to read aloud?* So I just think we have to simplify things and have good basic thoughtful courses about what it takes to become an effective reader. These charts of strategies and umpteen lists of things kids should do—well, you know what? If you're a good reader, you do them, and you don't have to talk about them. I'm interested in writing process and reading process, but I don't think children are. I don't think it helps kids to give them a long laundry list of strategies. I think we should be very careful about how much time we spend on this process talk. It's interesting for them to know there are strategies out there and you might want to try them, but it's not like a recipe. I'm so interested, in my new role, particularly, on engagement. When I walk in a room I don't want to see anyone glazed over with these

boring, endless, insufferable, more and more and more lists and lists and lists of strategies. I don't see kids looking up to read these charts that are so beautiful; I think they are more intended for the ladies like me who visit, and that makes me sad. I'm much more interested in pulling in close and listening to good conversation and smart talk and smart thinking, and if kids know how to read, how disruptive is it to keep poking in holes?

In Lifetime Guarantees, you state, "We must strive to keep the teaching of writing simple." Much of your new book, Writing Through Childhood, addresses this goal. Would you talk about that?

At Manhattan New School, I lived with these same children from kindergarten through fifth grade. I took a really long, hard look and watched these same children grow. I tried to figure out when they walked down that graduation aisle, how come they were good writers? What did it take to make them be good writers? And I think that it was because we allowed them to be children. I think one of the mistakes is that we've put this adult template on the teaching of writing. It's the same process issue again. It's very fascinating to read about how Anne Tyler, Toni Morrison, and all these wonderful writers write, but that process is not the same for kids. We can learn from those grownups, but we can't ask children who have only been on the planet seven, eight, nine years to do these very sophisticated things. And I think you read a lot of books on the teaching of writing, and the kids' samples make you think, oh my goodness, I couldn't even write this. How did these kids write this? They're so sophisticated.

I think we drain some of the childlike simplicity of their ideas and their thinking when we ask them, for example, to write their memoir. I mean, I'm going to be fifty-four in a couple weeks, and I'm not ready to write my memoirs. That's a big thing writing about what my life adds up to; I'm not ready to do it yet. I don't ask fifth graders to write their memoirs. I can tap their memories and shape them into a zillion interesting formats that will move an audience, but I'm not ready to ask them to look for big threads in their lives.

If I give kindergarten kids blocks and if I give fourth graders blocks, everyone in the world would expect fourth graders to do incredibly more sophisticated things than first graders. The same has to be true in writing. I just want the teaching of writing to be really appropriate for children, and I expect to be reminded

of the joys of childhood. Even if children aren't having such a good, happy life, there's a way of looking at the world when you're eight that I want to read in young people's writing. I want to see the world from their perspective. I don't want them to sound like grown-ups.

I think this is a precious time in the elementary school, and I want it to be cool to be child-like. I want "childish" to be a positive, not a negative. When we use the word "childish," we think of it as a bad thing: "Oh, he's so childish." Instead, I look at writing, and I say, "It's so childish," in a good way.

We didn't introduce writer's notebooks before third grade in the Manhattan New School. We didn't need to. The K, 1, 2 kids are alive; they notice everything! You come back from lunch and you have spinach in your teeth, they're right there telling you. Getting a writer's notebook in third grade was a rite of passage. The writer's notebook was a way to say to kids, "You have to pay attention to the world. If you notice things, take a moment to jot it down, 'cause that's the grist for your writer's mill."

This tragedy has convinced me even more that we better be preserving their childhood. Look what's happened. They've only gone a short period, a little window of opportunity to be kids, to stay in their pajamas under the covers or curl up on their mothers' laps and be too young to understand what was happening. I don't want to rush them. I've been dealing with health officials lately because of the quality of air issues, and all of them say the same thing: Children are not little adults. Children have different metabolism rates, different respiratory systems. They're different, and we teachers also have to remember that.

You are known by many as "the poetry principal."

I've always cared about poetry. For me, poetry is central. It is one of those genres that we trust. When people celebrate—whether it's a toast for their parents' anniversary or their daughter's wedding, they turn to poetry. You read stories of people who have been in prisoner of war camps and other horrible situations, and when they knew a childhood rhyme or passage from the Bible or a song, it kept them alive, just holding onto this. When we're mourning and sending condolences to people, we turn to poetry. In these past three and a half weeks since the attacks, poetry comforted people. Children chose to write poetry. I

have a thick file of poems sent by friends. Georgia Heard, an old friend, a wonderful writer, and a teacher of poetry, sent me incredible poems that she thought would comfort children.

Manhattan New School is permeated with poetry. Why do you think poetry is such an important component of literacy learning?

Kids come to school with poems in their heads from their grandmothers, in whatever language, and with chants and lullabies, so it's a natural entry point for literacy. The rhythmic and predictable text is right there. Everything you want to know about good writing you learn from poetry—the precision of language and being swept away by strong images. So, even when I read prose, I read prose in a smarter way because I've read a lot of poetry. I've developed my own taste as a reader because I read poetry.

You shared your own poetry with your students.

When you're an elementary school principal, it doesn't matter if you're a good writer or not; the kids love it. It's just lovely. You can publish everything you write, and the kids will think you're very smart. The important thing is that these kids are living with someone that demonstrates that, "I'm not doing it because I'm a principal; I'm doing it because I'm a human being."

Your books are filled with your students' breathtaking poetry. What can schools do to foster the love of reading and writing poetry like you did at Manhattan New School?

I think a sure-fire way of making the reading/writing connection is through poetry. If teachers bring in stacks and stacks of anthologies and get kids to search for the ones that move them, kids will say, "I want to write like that poet."

I think school cultures can support poetry by creating a place where it's safe to take risks, a place that's rich in poetic text, that's rich in performance. I think performance is essential, because you have to hear poetry. You edit with your ears, not with your hand. If kids keep writer's notebooks, encourage them to look for poetry-shaped ideas in them, content that would be best delivered in the form of poetry. We couldn't get enough Legos, Duplos, clay into those little hands because they all wanted to build towers, and I think what we put in their hands is very significant. They can take their little fledgling poems and put the words on

those blank magnetic slips and just play with them and move things around. When they play with the words they get it inside them. And then have someone perform their poetry and have children create art in response to it.

What goes wrong? Why don't other schools experience the same success with poetry?

I think one of the reasons people reluctantly teach poetry in schools is because they think they never understood poetry as a student at school. The teacher had the hidden meaning, the symbolism, that it was very technical, and they didn't know how to do it. They were afraid of it. If I were to start a course of study in your school in the teaching of poetry it would begin by pulling teachers together, reading great poems, and talking about what makes poems effective. I think teachers need to try to read and write themselves and then to invite kids in to say, "Look what I tried to do." Teachers have to be fascinated with language, all languages, the sounds of words and their arrangements. It's not mini-lessons. You don't teach poetry by creating mini-lessons. It's a way of life.

How do teachers maintain the big blocks of time you advocate?

In elementary school it seems so much easier, because you're in charge. But there are elementary school teachers who would say, "I'm not in charge. The buzzer goes off, people walk in, they inundate me with curriculum chores." So I think you have to be in the right elementary school to say, "I can create big blocks of time."

I think it's an incredible challenge for the middle school and high school teachers. First, you have to create the kind of kids who will write outside of school, too, who will keep notebooks, because they have to write because life is interesting, and they're afraid they'll forget what they're noticing, and to teach them in ways that they want to pause and say, "Oh, this is what I'm thinking." So I think one way is to create a certain attitude in students that they'll write outside of school. You'll teach many of them to do that forever. Of course, not all of them, but some of them will catch that this is like brushing your teeth. Some people do that before they go to bed; they write. But for others who need more supports and who need to produce products, we're going to have Writing Workshop.

I think you have to chunk your time. You're never

going to write well or care about your writing if it's once a week in a rushed way. I don't think it's true that you have to write every day like in elementary school, but even in high school I think you just have to create blocks of time. You have to say, "We're going to be together for this semester, and during these months we're going to have three-week blocks of time when it's going to be Writing Workshop." You have to remember that teachers who have never written since college, take a two-week summer institute in writing and it changes them, and they only write one piece and they share at the end, and they have a good cry, and they're proud of themselves, and that carries them the next ten years of their teaching life.

In the higher grades, content tends to encroach and erode these big blocks of time. What can teachers do?

In middle school and high school it is essential that the writing teacher works together with the content area teachers. Breathtaking things can be written if the English language arts teacher is working with the science teacher or the social studies teacher. You do get big blocks of time if you're working on the same thing and those teachers are using the same language. They talk about quality writing in the same way—they learn content that feeds into the text they're creating.

If you or I as grownups wanted to write a decent history piece, what would it take? High school kids need the same thing. If someone asked me to write about the World Trade Center tragedy and how it changed the physical landscape, what would I need as a grownup? I'd have to learn the geography and the history of that financial district and how it came to be that someone decided to build those buildings. That means during social studies I'd have to read some books and newspaper articles on the World Trade Center, and I'd have to get on that Internet. You're not going to get a reading/writing connection if kids are reading deadly textbooks. The whole room could feel like a newsroom where everyone's a reporter. Then I'd take my raw material to English class, and the teacher would help me craft it.

What should administrators look for in a literacy classroom?

When I work with brand new teachers, I tell them to always make sure they're asking themselves why they're doing what they're doing. Their reason can't be that it's cute; cute is not a criterion. It can be cute, but

that's not why you do it. I think you can look PC, pedagogically correct. You can have all the right look, you can have the charts and the folders. It's not the look we're after, because it's superficial stuff. You know, Duke Ellington said, "If it sounds good, it is good," and I think that's true about our classrooms.

I remember when I first started doing writing process with principals as a staff developer. A principal asked me for a check list to make sure the teachers were doing it right. I can make all the checklists in the world. It doesn't mean the spirit's there. You gotta really get down and get in close, and if it doesn't sound good, there is something wrong. It comes back to language. Language transforms.

Our job is to make people smarter, teachers and kids. Every minute in a classroom is a professional development opportunity. Teachers can learn to say smart things. You dig deeply, and you have to have a well to draw from. You know, when a kid stumbles over a word when he's reading, what do you say? When that child spends an hour with me today, I expect that child to go home a better reader today. What did I do that puts them in a different ballpark? My mother is eighty-three years old. I ask the teachers, "If I brought her in and asked her to read this book to kids, would she do anything different than you do? She's never been to school, and she's never been trained as a teacher. Would she be doing something else? I would expect that you would be able to do something that supports kids as readers, not just being the nice grandma coming in to read to kids." I know there was a time in our country when the president wanted volunteers. He said everyone would read if we just send in enough volunteers. You can send in all the volunteers you want, but there is a body of information, there is an expertise, and we deserve for people to know that we have something that they don't have. They need us.

What do you think education's greatest challenges are in the 21st century?

I think we have to sustain ourselves as a profession, that we don't give up ourselves, with all this stuff thrown at us. And how are we going to raise kids, not just tolerant kids, but kids who see themselves as privileged when they have diverse kids in their class, and to see second language as a strength, not a weakness? Bill Clinton visited our school last week, and he told the children, "Above all, don't let the terrorists change what's inside you." That was a pretty good message.

I think we have to work really hard to raise a generation of children who are hopeful, who don't live in fear, who feel that this world can be a great peaceful place, and that they have a future that they can look forward to.

Teaching MATTERS

**"A rose by any
other name ..."**
by Maryann West

Think of who you are. Think of what you have tried to become. Now think of ONE WORD that can diminish or destroy you and all of your efforts to BE. Do you recall a time in your middle school years when just that kind of destruction took place? Can you recall the word? My guess is that ONE WORD was a name, one meant to be flung at you and meant to stick like a permanent stain on your being. Because of those memories, and because we know our students are faced with that kind of personal assault too frequently, we might consider dedicating a portion of our reading/writing workshop to the careful study of names and their implications.

Identify your full name. Who named you? Why that name? How do you feel about your name? If you could change it, would you? To what?

In both print and internet resources, students can research the meanings and origins of their names. That research can also be extended to family discussion. Were you named for someone special? Does the meaning fit your personality? If it doesn't, what meaning would you attach to your name to make it fit you and your personality?

There are a number of literary resources to support names and their impact on who bear them. Pieces of novels, poetry, short stories, music lyrics, even scientific articles, lend themselves to the topic of naming. The three resources that have been most profound in my efforts to focus students on names and their effects have been Barbara Kingsolver's poem, "Naming Myself," Mildred Taylor's short novel, *The Friendship*, and the latest novel by James Howe, *The Misfits*.

When people call your name, do they sometimes emphasize or pronounce it differently dependent on their mood? Are you able to determine what they want by how or what they call you?

List all the names you have ever been called. Son. Father. Brother. Teacher. Wimp. Jerk. Loser. Geek. Fag. What is your reaction to those words? How do they make you feel? What names have you called someone else? Mutt? Porker? Stupid? Friend? What was your intent? Was your use of the word powerful? Was it? Really? How? Why?

Discussion. Text talk. Shared writing. Reading Response. Personal connection. Analytical thinking. Awareness. Critical changing.

Is a rose by any other name a rose? According to Kingsolver, according to Taylor's Mr. Tom Bee, and according to the Gang of Five in Howe's insightful and sensitive novel, "Sticks and stones may break our bones, but names will break our spirit."

Remember that ONE WORD? Remember its implication? Maybe that ONE WORD was used to encourage, to build and strengthen your character rather than diminish or destroy you. Maybe we should teach students the difference.

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