

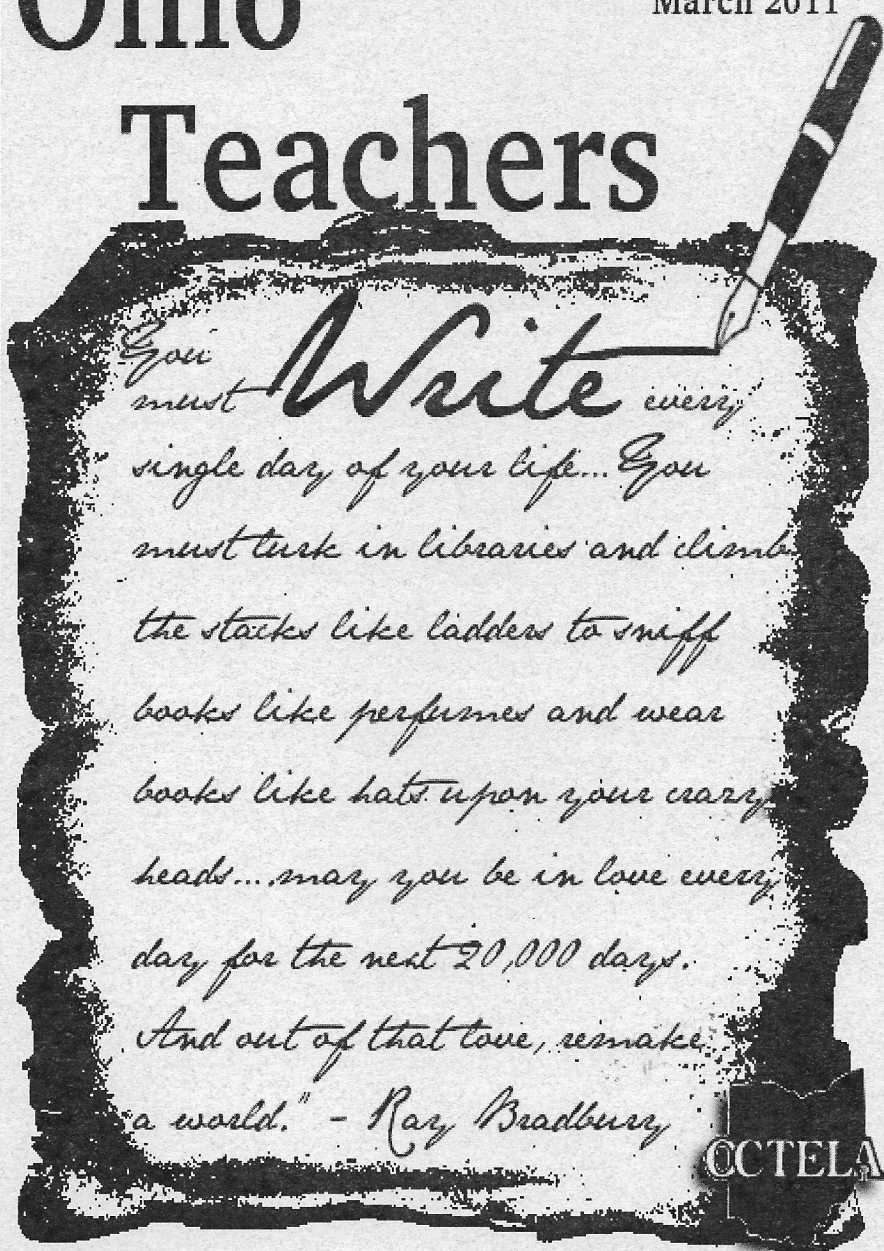
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Teachers



You must Write every single day of your life... You must tuck in libraries and climb the stacks like ladders to sniff books like perfumes and wear books like hats upon your crazy heads... may you be in love every day for the next 20,000 days. And out of that love, remake a world." - Ray Bradbury

OCTELA

Franco-American Alliance by
Sandra Lingo

If Andy Griffith
and Barney Fife
have cousins in Paris
with French accents,
I met them
at a neighborhood police station
one lucky day
when a pickpocket
relieved me of my credit card
(no problem)
and my social security card
(big problem).

I'd been warned by our guide
and my know-it-all husband
to watch my purse
and hide my belongings,
but I was, after all, in Paris
and heading to the Louvre
on the Metro.
And I was emoting quite
fervently to a fellow traveler
when an opportunistic Frenchwoman
wearing a beret and artfully tied scarf
slipped *her* hands into my handbag
as *my* hands worked frantically
above my head
to express my eager anticipation
of seeing
and being seen
by the Mona Lisa.

I realized my loss
and the exact quantity of the thief's gain
mere seconds after she scurried off the
train.

Because of a credit score
my husband wished to maintain
he insisted we report the theft
and get documentation from the police
to protect
my potentially internationally-known ID
numbers.

My husband's French accent was often
mistaken for real
but his vocabulary didn't encompass the
language
of theft and loss and regret.
Our concierge called the police station
in Mayberry, France, I think
to bridge the language gap.
He assured us that communication
would be easy
as the police were fluent *en Anglais*.
Ooh la la.

The police station
flanked by a café and a laundromat
looked like what we might find in a small
town at home:
A shabby door opened to reveal
scuffed linoleum

scuffed linoleum
curling notices tacked to cork
orphaned coffee cups, dirty ashtrays
and dented metal file cabinets contain-
ing
the tools and trappings of bureaucratic
agencies
worldwide.
We could hear the erratic clicking
Of typewriter keys
slow to a stop as the

first *gendarme* noticed our arrival.
He hitched up his pants and nodded to
his *partenaire*,
then they swaggered over and inquired
Cen'est pas un problem?

Well,
the officer and his partner
used up their English at precisely the
same time
as my husband had used up his French.
We reached an impasse:
We needed a piece of paper
but they weren't ready to give one up.
They spoke louder,
as did my husband,
but despite the notion that volume en-
hances
comprehension,
the officers seemed genuinely puzzled
why on earth we were there.
They scratched their heads
and looked down at their feet

and whispered sweet somethings to
each other.
I wished I could translate their agitated
conversation,
but I think I can guess that one said
*They've crashed their car into Notre
Dame*
And the other said
They've lost their child, I think.

When all seemed lost
we heard the tentative English
from a plump grey haired lady we hadn't
noticed
seated on a cracked green vinyl chair.
Can I help?
she offered
as she clutched her pocketbook to her
chest.
*My son lives in America and I have
some of a little English.*
After just a few minutes
this lady set things right
and made Andy and Barney understand
that we needed paper,
not pardons
or high-speed chases,
sharp shooters
or espionage.
They yanked on a file drawer
and conferred as they picked through
folders until they found the
exactly right quadruplicate form.
They returned to their desks

and once more we heard tapping
of hunt-and-peck typing.
And the three of us,
my husband, the French *dame*, and I,
citizens
of the world,
fell into uncomfortable silence.

But this lady had something she
wanted us to know.
She cleared her throat.
We love America,
she said.
We're sad.
We love you.
She looked to the ceiling
as her residual English leaked out from
her shoes.
She made eye contact
and squeezed out a few more words.
It's Cherac and Bush,
she said,
Not . . . not . . .
She wrung her hands as she struggled
for words.
It's Jacques Cherac and George Bush,
not . . . not . . .

Not you and me?
I said.

No, not you and me,
she said, beaming.