Workshop Philosophy Brings Joy to Writing

North Bellmore has transformed itself into a true writing community. From central administrators to kindergartners, everyone has become immersed in Writer’s Workshop, and the district’s investment in this philosophy will benefit young learners for years to come.

“This is a whole new mindset,” Superintendent Marie Testa said. “We intentionally transitioned to a workshop model to elevate thinking, foster creativity and spark joy within our writing community.”

Children improve their skills by emulating best practices of accomplished writers. Students learn how authors successfully use various story elements and literary techniques in three types of writing: narrative, informational and opinion. Every classroom is equipped with mentor texts, provided by Schoolwide’s Writing Fundamentals, which serve as examples of good writing.

When it comes time to write, students are given great liberty to choose topics of their liking. Tillie McNamara, Director of Educational Programs and Staff Development, said writers are more engaged in the process and more willing to explore their own creativities when they have an interest in the subject.

Students follow the writing process by generating ideas, composing a rough draft, editing, revising, creating illustrations and finally publishing their work. They often edit each other’s pieces and give constructive feedback.

“Research shows that this is the most effective way to teach writing,” Ms. McNamara said. “Process writing is the gold standard.”

Kindergarten and first-grade students keep writing folders and students in second grade and up have writer’s notebooks. They personalize their folders and notebooks with words and images that inspire them and spark writing ideas.

“I like to write about things I’ve done and the places I’ve been, and what I like about the books I’ve read,” said Kayla E., a third-grader at Newbridge Road Elementary School.

To make Writer’s Workshop a true community experience, teachers and administrators also keep their own writer’s notebooks. Ms. McNamara explained that for this initiative to be effective, teachers must serve as writing role models by going through the same process as students.

Sharing student exemplars is a powerful teaching tool to show children what is attainable at their grade level.

“I like that my teacher has helped to get us involved in the writing process. I’ve never been that big on writing and Writer’s Workshop has made the process easier and more fun!” — Tara S., sixth grade

“Students are living a writerly life and are experiencing all the challenges and rewards that come with that.” — Isabella O., third grade

Mission Statement

Our mission is to inspire all students to be confident, passionate learners with the courage and skills to lead their lives with integrity, while contributing to our global community with creativity and compassion.

Students share what they like most about Writer’s Workshop:

“I like Writer’s Workshop because we get to make up our own stories. I like to write fiction, about things that happen in my life, and about my favorite things. I just wrote a book about pandas because they are my favorite animal!” — Layna S., second grade

“I like writing non-fiction books because I get to learn about information.” — Derek P., first grade

“I like being able to write and be free to write about what I want. When I write, I can let my feelings out, draw, or write down a memory. I personalized my notebook because it is an important space and is covered with things and people that are important to me.” — Isabela C., fifth grade

“I like that my teacher has helped to get us involved in the writing process. I’ve never been that big on writing and Writer’s Workshop has made the process easier and more fun!” — Tara S., sixth grade

“I like writing stories about things that I am passionate about. Writer’s Workshop showed me ideas other authors are passionate about.” — Isabella O., third grade
**Creating a Writing Community**

North Bellmore teachers received extensive professional development before Writer’s Workshop was implemented, and continue to attend workshops throughout the year. Building principals lead the way by sharing their own experience and expertise. As a long-standing tradition at Park Avenue School, each month Principal Eileen Speidel distributes a book designed to unite the school community in a culture of reading, writing and literary discussion. In June of 2017, she will be distributing her 70th “Principal’s Book of the Month” to each classroom. “I believe that a great book distributed simultaneously to the whole school can have an extraordinary impact on our community and the literacy growth of our students,” Ms. Speidel said.

Martin Avenue Principal Leyna Malone visits classrooms to model best practices. “It makes it very real for the students,” Ms. Malone said about having the writing process modeled and explained. “A professional author doesn’t sit down and write a book in one sitting.”

The district’s instructional coaches, Amanda Licci, Cindy Quinn and Krista Zucker, collaborate with teachers to support the writing initiative. Parents have also been invited into the writing community. Earlier this year, the district hosted a Parent University program, “The Parent’s Guide to Writer’s Workshop.” They learned about the type of writing instruction that children receive and strategies and resources to use at home.

**Mentor Texts Model Good Writing**

Students in each grade study and practice three types of writing: narrative, informational and opinion. Every classroom has its own set of mentor texts that come with the units of study.

These books are effective tools in having students develop their own writing. “My favorite mentor text is ‘An Angel for Solomon Singer’ by Cynthia Rylant,” said Martin Avenue fourth-grader Ava C. “I loved it because it was interesting and a really good story, and it used so much figurative language.”

Newbridge Road first-grader Hailey M. liked “A Rainy Day” because of its use of descriptive words and illustrations.

Karen Buran, a sixth-grade teacher at Newbridge, selects mentor texts “that have heart” to read to her students. She asks them to focus their attention on the writer’s craft, such as the purpose of a book, effective introductions or the use of transitional words. Books like “Saturday and Tea Cakes” by Lester Laminack that highlight numerous literary elements are ideal.

Saw Mill Road Elementary School kindergarten teacher Angela Byrnes reminds her students that readers are writers and writers are readers, so she sees value in the mentor texts. Even at a young age, her students are able to understand and emulate good writing. They look for literary devices used in stories, such as quotes, sounds and illustrations, to incorporate into their own pieces.

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**Living a Writerly Life**

EILEN TOURNOUR, SECOND-GRADE TEACHER
John G. Dinkelkemeyer Elementary School

What’s on your cover? Happy memories: a picture of a sailboat on the ocean and my children at the beach.

What do you like about keeping a writing notebook? It causes me to pause and reflect. Some of it is personal and I keep that to myself but the release is great. It also lets me model writing for my students and show them that I believe in this.

ANDREA FRANK, FOURTH-GRADE TEACHER
Park Avenue Elementary School

What’s on your cover? Pictures of my family and pets, and my interests like flowers and dancing.

What do you like about keeping a writing notebook? It shows that I am being a writer alongside my students. There are no rules. This is very liberating for all of us. And the cover gives it the seal that this is my personal book.

ALIA A., THIRD-GRADE
Newbridge Road Elementary School

What’s on your cover? Neon green, orange and pink tape because my mom says I’m very bright.

What do you write about in your notebook? I write stories about my family, my imagination, my hopes, accomplishments, things that happened to me in life and funny stories.

What do you like about keeping a writing notebook? It’s a way that I can express my feelings through writing.

JEFF ROSOF, PRINCIPAL
Saw Mill Road Elementary School

What’s on your cover? The yin and yang sign to represent the duality of life.

What do you write about in your notebook? I’ve written some short stories, like memories from when I was living in Morocco, or going to Los Angeles and eating at California Pizza Kitchen for the first time.

What do you like about keeping a writing notebook? The writer’s notebook allows me personal creative expression. It’s important to nurture yourself and to make a connection with what we’re doing with the students.

OWEN T., SIXTH-GRADE
Martin Avenue Elementary School

What’s on your cover? A collage of pictures of myself and my interests.

What do you write about in your notebook? I use it to jot down ideas for writing assignments. I write introductions to stories and rough drafts. For a personal narrative about a memory, I wrote about my experience going on the ride El Toro at Great Adventure.

What do you like about keeping a writing notebook? I like that I can express my feelings and try out new types of writing. I can practice new techniques. If I make a mistake, I can just start over.

**Creating a Writing Community**

**Mentor Texts Model Good Writing**
After being immersed in feature articles, students in Kathleen Kee and Lauren Saccone's sixth-grade class chose their own subjects to research. Children used the internet to find new and interesting facts about topics that ranged from the history of Play-Doh to Shirley Temple's rise to fame during the Great Depression. They collected information, organized it, and drafted their own feature articles. Principal Faith Skelos said, “I am delighted to see the excitement and passion that has been generated in the children by their teachers and our new writing program.”

**MARTIN AVENUE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**
After completing the writing units, fifth-graders participated in publishing parties to celebrate the culmination of their own work. Students completed personal narratives and biographies. Completed pieces lined the cafeteria tables and students had the opportunity to read each other’s work and give feedback on the stories.

**NEWBRIDGE ROAD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**
Kindergarten students authored “How-To” books which included titles such as “How to Make Pancakes,” “How to Play Baseball” and “How to Feed a Baby.” Second-graders were excited to share their “All About” books with parents at their culminating writing celebration. Principal Denise Fisher created a mentor text library in her office to serve as a resource for classroom teachers throughout the school. Her wall is lined with more than 350 books separated by genre, author or the literary skills or strategies they best exemplify.

**PARK AVENUE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**
Kindergartners in Mary Cimorelli’s class wrote personal narrative stories by selecting important moments from their young lives, then following the writing process. After publishing their pieces, they then read their stories to fourth-grade buddies in Lauren Pingitore’s class, who listened and gave feedback.

**SAW MILL ROAD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**
Fifth-graders created their own living wax museum as part of their biography unit. After reading biographical books, each student selected a historical figure or living cultural icon to research and write about, such as presidents, athletes, entertainers and authors. They then dressed up as their person and portrayed them for their parents and fellow students.