

Today's date

FINAL

496 words

## **Drawing on region's past to help today's students write better**

By Suzanne Borowicz, Ph.D.

First, the good news: Middle and high school students "comprehend the basics of writing," according to the most recent data from the National Report Card.

The not so good news: Fewer of them are considered "top-performing" writers now as compared to the previous National Report Card in 2002. According to the new data, the percentage of children scoring at or above the basic level increased from 85 percent to 88 percent. "At that level, students show they can use grammar, spelling and punctuation that are accurate enough to communicate to a reader, but there may be mistakes in their work that get in the way of its meaning," says one national news report.

Good writing does not come easy, even for those who enjoy the task. It takes perseverance, consistency and an overwhelming desire to use just the right word or phrase to get your point across to your readers. Writing on demand, as students are called upon to do for standardized tests and final exams, is that much more difficult since it is timed and graded. For some, picking up a pen or sitting down at a computer to write more than one or two sentences is a frustrating and disheartening experience that they put off as long as possible.

It doesn't have to be that way.

Here at the Western New York Writing Project, we organize programs every day to provide teachers with new and creative ideas for writing instruction, and to encourage students of all ages to express themselves through the written word. Research has shown that students with good writing skills do better in school overall.

Our Summer Institute is our cornerstone. For four weeks in July, selected teachers take part in writing groups, inquiry groups, and more on the Canisius College campus. Each participant is required to present a demonstration lesson, which is critiqued by WNYWP staff and fellow SI participants, who believe wholeheartedly in NWP's mission of "teachers teaching teachers." These individuals dedicate their time and talents to becoming more creative and more effective teachers for their students.

Western New York has a rich literary legacy, with writers such as Mark Twain, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Anna Katherine Green, Taylor Caldwell and Joyce Carol Oates once calling the area home. We can also lay claim to Fran Striker, who wrote hundreds of scripts for the original "The Lone Ranger" radio show; Kate Kimball, founder of the longest-running book club in the country, the Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle at the Chautauqua Institution; and Emmy Award-winning television writer Tom Fontana, known for his work on "St. Elsewhere" and "Oz." The region even has a connection to Herman Melville's American classic, "Moby Dick."

Join us as we celebrate the success of these and other local writers by encouraging teachers and students of all ages to, "Write Yourself into Western New York History." Write a poem. Write a short story. Write a letter to a friend. Write every day, and be amazed at the results.

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