

# Literacy Leads

Going Public, October 20, 2009  
Karen Haag



Sorry. Truth is the writing your students do will be vastly different if YOU are not their only audience. Students catch the writing bug when they go public and get feedback. I remember the first time the Charlotte Observer editor published a letter I wrote. I couldn't believe that (1) friends and colleagues called and wrote notes to thank me for my comments, (2) my friends at school put notes in my box and stopped me to talk about what it was like to get published in the paper and (3) someone wrote to the Observer Forum the next day and quoted me! I was hooked! For a while, I wrote so frequently that the Observer kept my photo on file. A pretty heady experience this getting published business.

## Publishing Site

Maybe some of your students will catch the writing bug by using the Scholastic site below that was recommended to me. I looked at it, liked it, but haven't tried it. Students simply type their work onto the site and go public! I wonder if some of you will get your students to publish and let me know if it is, in fact, a good site to entice your students to love writing like I do.

<http://teacher.scholastic.com/writeit/readpoem.asp?id=5956&genre=Memoir&Page=1&sortBy=>

Also, visit <http://ncte2008.ning.com/> to join in the discussion about the National Writing Day! And if you haven't done so already, I hope you'll visit the National Gallery of Writing. You can now browse writing submitted to the nearly 2000 local galleries (and growing), and you can submit your own writing to the Gallery. Visit

<http://www.galleryofwriting.org/#> to browse

the various galleries and writing samples. You can submit one piece of writing to as many galleries as you like.

## Writing Marathon

A middle school I'm pleased to be working with declared October 20<sup>th</sup> an all-school writing day. Wouldn't you think that would make the news? I'm talking, the students wrote ALL day, even in PE and other special area classes.

Here are the details. A core of teachers organized and presented the idea of a writing marathon to their colleagues in a staff meeting. Basically, students wrote about anything they pleased that they could share publicly. They wrote for about 15 minutes. They shared. No response was allowed. The idea was to read your work and not compete for "the best writing," but to write knowing that each writer had an immediate audience of peers.

Students moved, too. Several areas were set up to encourage writing. Classical music played in the music room. The library was opened. Students and teachers walked the science trail. Teachers signed up in the office so that they knew the space would be open when they arrived. And, of course, students kept their regular schedule. So, in this school, students moved every 55 minutes to another period, teacher, and writing group.

My first writing marathon was in Reno, Nevada at a Writing Project Director's Retreat. We formed groups. Every one spread out into the city, the only expectations being that we returned at a certain time and that we would write and have a good time. We started about mid morning, most of us in

coffee shops. Then we moved to parks and museums. The locations sometimes affected our writing and I found myself integrating what I saw into what I was writing. Others wrote 15 minutes of a novel at a time and at day's end the story had taken substantial form. From sharing, we heard others' ideas and that sometimes drove what we wrote next.

For a more detailed explanation of marathons, go to the National Writing site: <http://www.nwp.org/cs/public/print/resource/315>

The details and reasons for the details are explained much more fully. You can try a couple hours. You may work with kindergartners. Doesn't matter. If you ask me, can I do xxxxx? My answer will always be, "YES!" Take the risk.

### **A Writing Marathon**

By Karen Haag

An entire middle school  
Came together  
To write  
ALL day!  
Because of teacher leadership  
And the wishes of principal and AP  
EVERY ONE  
Working as a team.

The first question  
of the day:  
What do we write about?  
they asked.  
Any thing!  
"Oh, awesome!"

"I've been wanting  
to write this story  
since 4th grade,  
but I didn't have a chance."  
Now, you get to write all day.  
"Cool!"

A student  
who has not spoken  
in front of his classmates  
spoke today.  
He read his story  
to the excitement  
and the tears of his teacher.

Another  
Wrote music.  
Not lyrics.  
Composed a song.  
Before today,  
no one knew he could.

And hundreds wrote.  
Adults and young adults.  
On the floor of the gym in PE  
Spilling across the floors  
With blankets  
And stuffed animals  
And snacks.

To the sounds of classical music  
Poring forth from the intercom  
To the math class down the hall  
and the music room,  
language arts and science,  
social studies and health...

Outside  
And Inside.

Inside  
And Outside

Forever changed.  
By a day  
Of writing.



Middle school students write on the floor along side their buddies in the Writing Marathon.