

# Critical Friends Group Coaches Training

## June 2007

The National School Reform Faculty's Arizona Center of Activity will again sponsor a Critical Friends Group Coaches Training this summer in Tucson. The week-long institute will train educators to create and facilitate collaborative professional study groups in their schools and districts. The training focuses on the Critical Friends Group (CFG) model, an effective approach to building professional learning communities that emphasizes careful examination of student work, reflective practice, and collegial collaboration in order to help teachers improve their practice and increase student achievement.

The institute is designed as an experiential training. Over the course of the week, the participants learn and practice protocols used in Critical Friends Groups to examine teacher and student work. Participants experience team-building activities as a way to build trust and connections within the group. They also read and discuss professional texts together. An important goal of the institute is to train participants to become "coaches" of CFGs at their own sites for the upcoming school year. As the week progresses, participants take increasing responsibility for facilitating the group and setting the agenda with the support of highly trained and experienced institute leaders. This emphasis on developing strong facilitation skills distinguishes this training from others and makes it an outstanding experience for educators at all levels of their career.

The Arizona Center of Activity has established a very successful partnership with the Southern Arizona Writing Project (SAWP). We find the work of the National School Reform Faculty and the National Writing Project to be philosophically aligned and mutually beneficial. The NSRF Arizona Center of Activity program helps SAWP to build capacity as it strengthens the facilitative leadership skills of its members. The SAWP participants bring their close connection to classroom practice and skilled insight into literacy and writing to our work.

This summer's Critical Friends Group Coaches Training will take place June 18-22, 2007 in Tucson. Schools and districts are encouraged to send teams of educators to the institute; a discount is available for teams of two or more and for early registration. Early registration deadline is May 1. Additional information on this training, Critical Friends Groups in general, the National School Reform Faculty, and the Arizona Center of Activity can be found at [www.nsrffharmony.org](http://www.nsrffharmony.org) and <http://sawp.web.arizona.edu/CriticalFriends.htm>.

**DATES:** June 18-22, 2007

**TIME:** 8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

**PLACE:** Paulo Freire Freedom School at the Historic Y (University and 5<sup>th</sup> Avenues)

**NATIONAL SPONSOR:** National School Reform Faculty

**LOCAL CO-SPONSORS:** Southern Arizona Writing Project, Tucson Small School Project, and El Pueblo Integral~Teaching & Learning Collaborative

**PRICE:** \$500/participant; discounted rate \$450/participant if attending in teams of 2 or more

**CONTACT:** Eve Rifkin, City High School, 623-7223 x407, [eve@cityhighschool.org](mailto:eve@cityhighschool.org)

**ON-LINE REGISTRATION:** [www.nsrffharmony.org/centers\\_az.html](http://www.nsrffharmony.org/centers_az.html)

# The Southern Arizona Writing Project

**June 4 – July 3, 2007**

**Monday – Thursday 8:30 – 3:30**

**Co-Directors: Roger Shanley, Flory Simon, Erec Toso**

Since 1978, K-University teachers have attended SAWP each summer to work together to become part of a network of Writing Project fellows. Participation in the project offers teachers a change to reinforce and fine tune good teaching of writing, to develop and try new approaches, and to experience professional renewal. We welcome teachers who are eager to demonstrate their best teaching practices, work on their own writing, and share in a supportive and collegial setting.

STIPENDS: 18 scholarships - FULL

CREDIT: 6 credits in English/LRC 597a

LOCATION: Transitional Office Building – 1731 E. 2<sup>nd</sup> St. – UA Campus

*All K-university teachers with three years experience are eligible. Contact: Erec Toso at (520) 621-3436 or netoso@u.arizona.edu*

## National Board Certification

**July 9 – July 13, 2007**

**Monday – Friday 9:00 – 4:00**

**Instructors: Mary Setliff and Ann Guido (with SAWP NBPTS teachers)**

National Board Certification is a professional development experience built on high, rigorous standards that define accomplished teaching. Developed by teachers for teachers, these standards capture the essence of what accomplished teachers should know and be able to do to improve student learning. With these standards as the backdrop, candidates embark upon an intensive, performance-based assessment of their classroom teaching.

### PARTICIPANTS WILL

Learn the five core propositions and how they apply to individual practice

Utilize reflective strategies for teaching

Practice writing descriptive, analytical and reflective genres

Design assignments that best showcase student abilities

Document professional development in effective ways

Learn to write under pressure

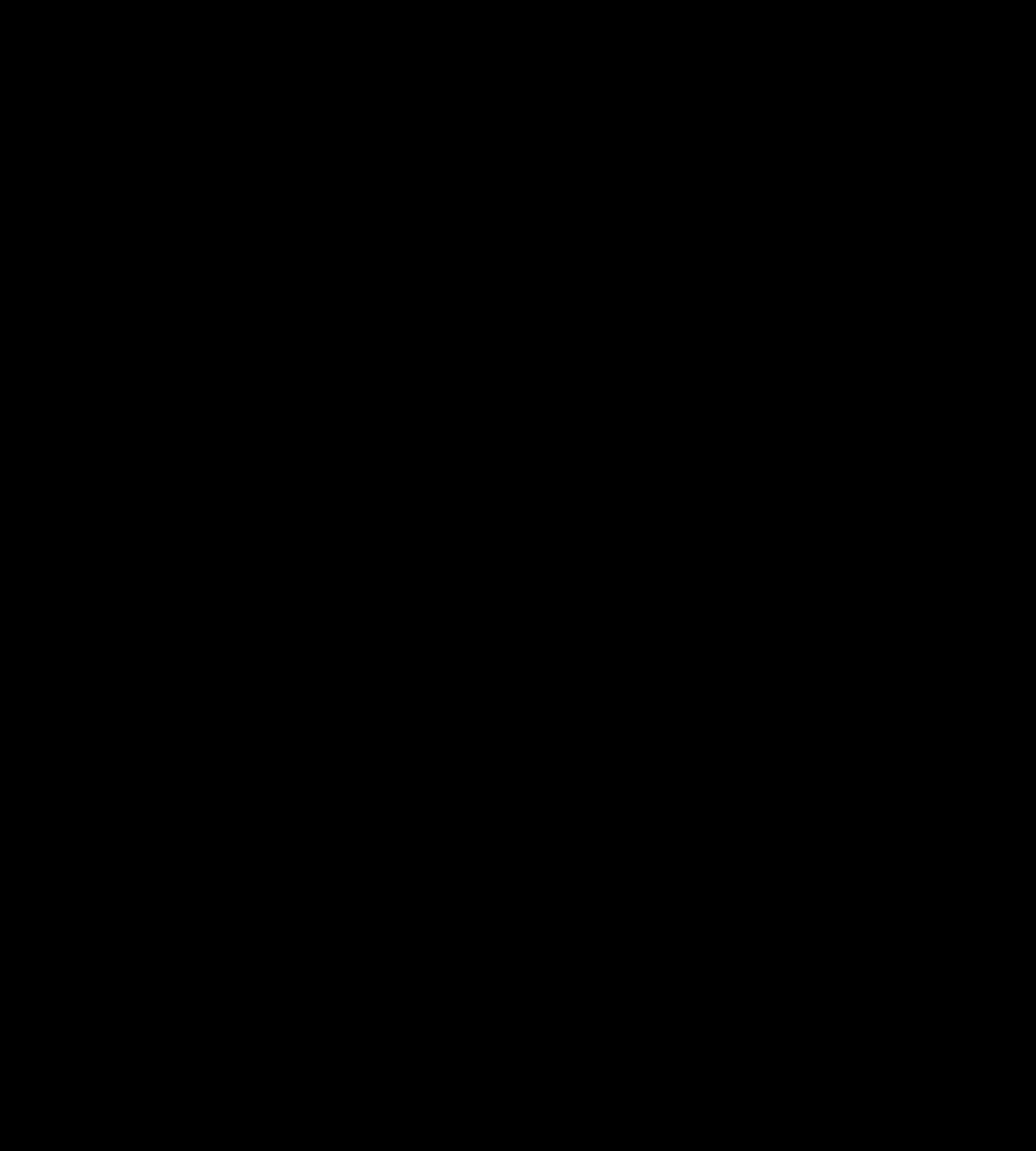
FEE: \$200 for participation in workshop and mentoring group throughout the application process. Checks payable to University of Arizona.

REGISTRATION: Through Southern Arizona Writing Project

LOCATION: Transitional Office Building, 1731 E. 2<sup>nd</sup> St. – UA Campus

ENROLLMENT: 15

*Teachers need to have 3 years of experience to apply for NBPTS  
For more information, email Mary Setliff at aquido@cfsd.k12.az.us*



# Tucson Mayor Bob Walkup Offers Support to *Desert Living Is Different!*

This SAWP-sponsored project offers a terrific opportunity for your students to write and be published in a 100-page environmental guidebook for newcomers to our desert. We are excited that Mayor Walkup has offered his support and help with fundraising through his office.

The project will begin at the start of school this fall; submissions will be collected at the end of October. The guidebook will be ready for publication in March-April; 30,000 copies will be distributed free to newcomers. Subsequently, the guidebook will have its own website, with content available to the public. Subjects to be covered in the guidebook (other topics welcome) include:

Water Wisdom

Use the Desert Sun

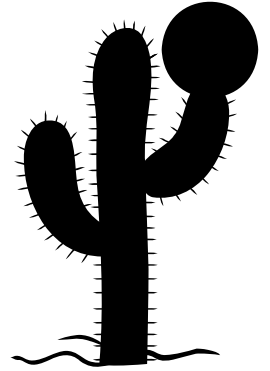
Don't Touch That Cactus!

Monsoons/Lightning: Listen Up!

Light Pollution: Lower Lights at Night!

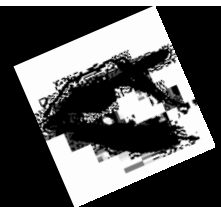
Wildlife Live Here, Too!

Safe Hiking



Student writing formats include essays, narratives, poems, research, short stories, personal anecdotes, plays, future scenarios, cartoons, songs, illustrations, and more. Students whose work is not selected for the guidebook will receive certificates of participation and their work will be uploaded onto their school websites.

Project leaders Kitty Reeve and Kathy Locke have developed sample lessons plans, links and local resources for interested teachers. Please contact Kitty at [kittyreeve@cox.net](mailto:kittyreeve@cox.net) or call her at 520-327-0813 if you are interested in participating in the project and/or for more information.



# New Beginnings Involve Risks

By Jenise Porter

Strong legs...legs you could count on. I wrote those words in the summer of 2004 when, as a SAWP Fellow, I gazed across the room at Antonio de Silva's legs. His legs were muscled in a way that happens when you use your bicycle as your transportation.

I thought of those words, and those legs, again when Kate issued the call for stories about new beginnings. In August of 2005 I joined a beginning runner's training group with the Fleet Feet store here in town. We began with intervals of walking and running—a minute of running with four of walking and built up over time. We met once a week to train together and were on our honor for another run each week. Our goal was the Saguaro 5k in the Rincon Valley in November. The training was fun. Not easy, but fun. I did my extra honor run with Maria and Pat, two women I had not met before. We kept each other encouraged and when one of us didn't feel like running, the other two insisted. We jogged our way through August and September and October, going around in circles at Udall Park and on early morning runs along the Rillito Parkway. We ran along Old Spanish Trail in the rain at the tail end of what the National Weather Service characterized as a tornado. We ran across the University campus one evening and on our second loop around the mall looked up as a trim young woman called out "you girls rock." Girls in this case was a relative term.

In November we completed the Saguaro 5k along with Sally, who began running when she was diagnosed with cancer at age 60 and 84-year old Matthew who always wins in his age category.

In December Pat and Maria and I started the next Fleet Feet training regimen, this time for the Oro Valley half marathon. I knew there was little chance I could complete a 13 mile course but the group kept me going when I would have quit on my own. Our Saturday morning training runs started at 6:00 or 6:30 a.m. sometimes in near freezing temperatures. We worked up from 4 mile runs to 12 miles and on January 28 I finished a 10k at Reid park-the day before my 60<sup>th</sup> birthday. I haven't yet discovered the runner's high that is discussed so often. My high comes about an hour after I've finished a run and I realize that I actually did it. I'm not thinner and my craving for a really good piece of chocolate cake has not gone away. My legs don't look like Antonio's, but they're strong and I can count on them.

I learned (again) some lessons from this experience: Take risks, the same kind of risks we ask children to take everyday of their school lives as they try new things. And take those risks in a group-with people you hope will support you. New beginnings come at all ages.

Oh, and by the way, I finished the Oro Valley Half Marathon in 3 hours and 1 minute. A personal best.

*Jenise, a 2004 SAWP Fellow, is retired from the Maricopa County Library and is currently working on her Doctorate in Language, Reading and Culture at the U of A.*

scorpion had stung her. Someone in our little congregation asked for the story. She obliged.

"One unusually cold night at the beginning of summer," she began as the room got quieter, "I got out of bed to get another blanket."

Grandmother paused, savoring the suspense her story was creating, and slow seconds went by. "A scorpion stung me without warning, delivering a painful, venomous sting from its hiding place."

As the audience gasped, I scoffed to myself. Really! Grandma actually expected some kind of warning from the arachnid? Maybe the decency of a hiss or a rattle? No! No warning whatsoever, and this to her meant, or rather confirmed that the scorpion was an emblem of treachery.

Here she waited, softly shaking the little jar that had been sitting on her lap containing the scorpion in question. Her eyes were on all of our eyes. Suspense continued to fill the room as everyone moved closer. We had heard of this jar. It was true, then! Grandma kept the slight corpse of the critter as a dark relic, floating in rubbing alcohol. Many greedy hands of all sizes stretched towards her, hoping to be the first one to get a hold of the jar. But it was my oldest cousin Seb who got first dibs. A boy and her favorite. Of course.

Grandma went on, "The Lord led his people safely through a wilderness filled with scorpions and told His disciples to trample them." This, grandma explained, showed that His followers would triumph over the venomous attacks of the devil. Her forefinger rocked back and forth, a hook in preaching mode as she talked, her words bouncing hard against the cold marble floor.

"Like the Bible says," she continued, "When the fifth trumpet of Revelation sounds...." By then, I had the jar in my hands. Who would've thought, Grandma getting stung by the one creature she hated most! I couldn't help but think it was nature getting back at her for her bad karma. I brought the jar close to my eyes and my heart sank. Inside of it, an amber colored scorpion was suspended in the clear liquid, a broken leg floating nearby, little beady eyes staring. Poor thing, deprecated by Grandma like this! With all the wickedness and lack of compassion of my years I whispered, "Good job!"

In my eyes it was a martyr.

*Tere and her husband, Dirk, teachers at Civano Middle School in Vail, have been awarded a fellowship from Fund for Teachers. They will spend a month in Chile (where the story above took place) this summer, studying how poetry is taught to children using the poetry of Pablo Neruda, recipient of a Nobel Prize for Literature in 1971.*



## Editor Wants to Hear from PLC's

I was curious to hear from some of this year's PLC participants and included this topic in the call for submissions. Lacking any response I decided to ask one of the members of my PLC (named Javelina PLC after the coffeehouse in which we met!) to submit a piece she shared with us during the year. Sharing our writing in a supportive environment over the course of the year was a highlight for me. I watched with awe as our writing skills were sharpened by writing and talking about our writing. Every meeting began with writing to a prompt and it was just as magical a time as that first hour of the day during Summer Institute. It's amazing to see in how many different directions one prompt can lead, often taking us back to long-ago events that still hold us in their grip.

Writing gives us, and our students, the power to see ourselves in a different light, decide who we are and what is important to us. It helps us understand *why* those events are important to us. Writing to the prompt "Scorpion" one day with her middle-school students Tere Pelaez turned out the story printed below. Read on for an entirely different perspective on scorpions, and think about joining a supportive PLC next year.

*Kate Cusumano*

### Grandma, Snakes, and Scorpions



**By Tere Pelaez**

The afternoon rolled by in slow motion as we sat around in the living room with grandma. The big space, warmed by the roaring fireplace in winter, was everyone's favorite room in our grandparent's house. My three siblings and four cousins would gather there almost every evening, soon after it got too dark to be outside anymore. My Grandma found these gatherings a great chance to bring God into our lives. I remember her that day, a small but rotund woman dressed in black, perched on the edge of her armchair. Behind her, hanging symmetrically on the wall were small, individual pictures of all her grandchildren as babies - everyone but me. Right over her head dangled a reading light, with one bulb, too bare in the lampshade, and too bright, a halo for a saint of sorts. The whole scene made the corner of the living room look like a shrine for Grandma.

Back in my adolescence and in the privacy of my mind, my grandmother's hands had turned into small crippled birds that told stories in mid air. Her crooked forefinger, like a righteous beak, annoyed me when it pointed in my direction as she talked. The rest of her fingers were like wings flapping and grasping invisible things hanging in her stories. Snakes in the Bible, was one of her favorite topics, particularly The Snake, the one that had been banished from the Garden of Eden. To me, it sounded ever so silly, to take the word of God so literally. How could that corn snake that made its way into her garden the summer before, actually be cursed, above all cattle and beast, to slither and eat dust all the days of its life? Its bright orange color and the speed with which it moved made it hard to believe it was, as grandma proposed, an evil outcast. I, for one, was always on the side of that corn snake; I knew it didn't eat dust! She just didn't appreciate it. The intruding snake was a bad omen and made her skin crawl. I knew that to her it was a symbol of the wicked, but still I pestered, "Does the bible *state* that snakes are evil?"

The story that evening was on another topic, though. There was only one other creature on earth that my Grandma hated more than snakes - scorpions. The summer after the snake, a

*(Blues—Continued from p. 9)*

dents got to hear Mamie Smith singing “Crazy Blues,” the first blues recording ever. I wonder if teachers in the 1920’s yearned for the day when they would be able to bring recordings into the classroom with ease. But then, I suppose the old records wouldn’t have been considered texts, and it probably wouldn’t have been considered any sort of literacy event to play “the devil’s music” in class. So although teachers still work within a major technology gap, I suppose some things have improved since then.

I’d like to be clear that I do not blame any one person for the current state of affairs at our school, and I only share this story because I feel certain that there must be other teachers out there whose experiences are similar to, if not more pathetic than, mine. Our subject matter team has been less than proactive about using our available resources to assemble the technological resources we need, and there is much work underway within our school and district to improve infrastructure before we invest in more hardware and software. I am as guilty as many teachers for not always being aware of new hardware and software that is available for educators.

So, I come to this position in SAWP as a teacher curious about and hopeful of the possibility technology holds for enhancing the teaching of writing and literature, and for offering new media and audiences for both student and teacher work. I look forward to all the learning that this year will bring!

*Amethyst has just come onboard to assist Heather meet our growing technological needs. Welcome, Amethyst!*

---

*(Ponderings—Continued from page 3)*

The environment is suddenly charged with the stories that only children can tell. I am transfixed and humbled by their imaginative perceptions of our single writing prompt. Better still, they are showing off great writing techniques. I hear similes, metaphors, and other figurative language tripping off their tongues to the great delight of not just me, but their peers – and they do this without any consciousness of doing it. If they had been forced, the language would never have been so authentic.

When the bell rings, I ask students to bring me their notebooks for safekeeping. More than one asks if it is okay if they keep theirs to continue writing when they have time.

Again, the answer is YES.

*(Lynn leaves her position as editor of THE SAWPER to engage in other pursuits, chief among them pondering her current role as principal. Thanks for your two years as editor!)*

# Crazy Power Point Blues

*By Amethyst Hinton Sainz, SAWP Technology Apprentice*

As the new apprentice to the technology liaison for SAWP, my first assignment is to write this column.

I am writing this on my new MacBook. Actually, it's not my MacBook, it's the English Team's MacBook at the high school where I teach. I'm supposed to be sharing it with the other seven English teachers on my floor should anyone have any immediate media or information technology needs. We don't have a projector yet in my building, since we only had enough soft capital to buy one for the other building. To get a projector to display anything from our laptop, we have to reserve it in advance by checking the calendar on the e-mail conference and then writing to the media clerk over on the other side of campus. Then, we have to hike over there either the afternoon or morning before our lesson to check out (more convenient) the portable projector in shoulder bag or (less convenient) the media cart complete with I-Mac, projector and extension cord (but which must be pushed down the hill, bumpety-bump, bumpety-bump, with me cringing all the way at the wear and tear, praying that the house secretary is at her desk to let me up the elevator).

Two weeks ago, giddy with the idea that I might give a PowerPoint lecture on Visual Artists of the Harlem Renaissance that I had updated on "my" MacBook, and that I might deliver the lecture instantly, fluidly, with complete lack of fanfare (which would be the true sign that I was using technology as simply an instructional tool, not pursuing a personal development project), I learned a lesson the hard way about the more "convenient" portable projector. Of course, I learned the lesson about ten minutes before the lecture should have begun.

I had faithfully reserved the projector in advance and tracked down a "white pigtail" adapter from the kindly Info Tech teacher downstairs (the adapter the English team hadn't had the soft capital funds left to buy, even though the Apple Care plan put us over budget anyway). And, of course, I had updated my lecture and made copies of the notes sheets for my students. I had even brainstormed a pocket full of strategies to keep students engaged in active learning throughout the lecture. I was so

proud. And we all know what that means.

I went to hook up my laptop to the projector, and found that the computer-end of the adapter didn't fit. Apparently, the new MacBooks have a different connection than the old iBooks, and of course all but a handful of the laptops on campus are the older iBooks. Who knows how long it would have taken me to track down the right adapter on campus, if it existed. I practically flew down the stairs to my trusty Info Tech teacher (thanks, Hugh!), who did not have a correct adapter, but who did have a bank of iBooks for his classes to use, and who lent me one that I could connect to the projector.

So I went upstairs, hooked my iPod into some speakers a student had left there for another project, and had a student play DJ and locate some 20's women blues singers to play for the class while I transferred my file onto my jump drive and onto the older and slower but perfectly functional laptop. About fifteen minutes into class, I stopped grumbling, took a cleansing breath, and started

my lecture.

Every time something like this happens, I swear that I will stick to texts, the copy machine, the chalkboard and the overhead projector for the rest of the year: technology that is accessible, reliable and fairly convenient. No matter how much planning I manage to do, unforeseen issues always seem to arise anytime I allow myself to be seduced by the idea that maybe, just maybe, this time we can successfully bring some of the promise of the technology that drives my students' days into the classroom, so that they are not walking out of one world and into another when they enter my classroom and take out their earbuds (without me asking, on a good day). The irony of my story, of course, is that a PowerPoint lecture is hardly on the cutting edge of possibility.

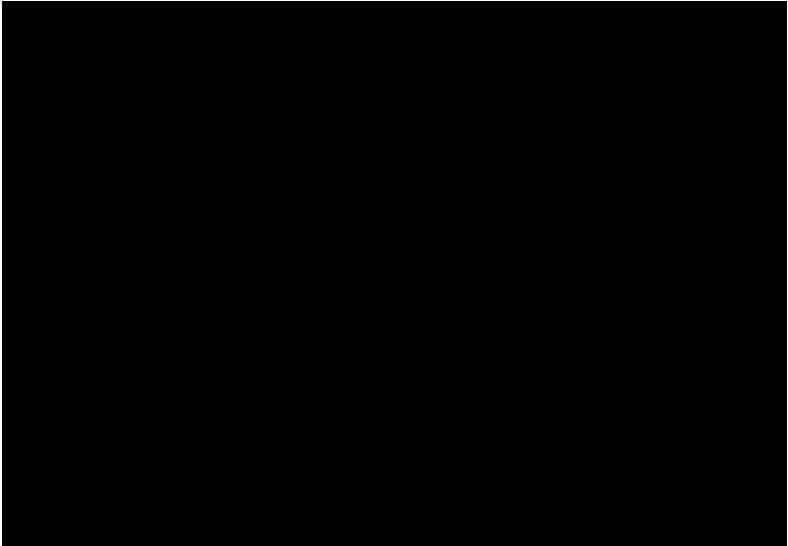
Thank goodness for my iPod and the Harlem Renaissance box set of CD's I had ripped onto it in preparation for another lesson. Probably the biggest breakthrough of the day was my DJ student discovering that I have Red Hot Chili Peppers on my iPod, and that at least my stu-

*(Blues—Continued on page 10)*

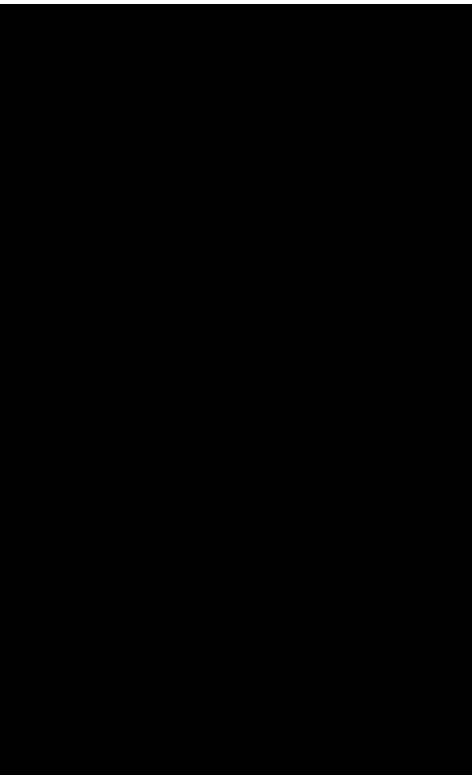
# First Annual Teacher Research Conference a Success

By Sharon Miller

On Saturday, April 28<sup>th</sup>, over seventy educators gathered for the first annual all-Arizona teacher research conference. Keynote speaker, Gerald Campano, spoke on the topic, "*So We Can Remember: On the Labor of Writing and Learning with Immigrant Students*. Campano's students came from many different immigrant and migrant backgrounds, and when he invited them to bring the stories of their families and culture into their writing, profound changes occurred. Through their writing, he demonstrated what happens when you teach with heart and soul, ignoring the clamor for higher test scores and standardized curricula. Dr. Campano, is currently an Assistant Professor of Language Education at Indiana University, Bloomington, and the author of *Immigrant Students and Literacy: Reading, Writing, and Remembering*.



Above: Deborah Green, Gerry Pionessa, Heather Melton, and Kinsey McKinney prepare to open registration



Thirty-one educators from all grade levels and a variety of schools offered concurrent sessions related to teacher research initiatives in their classrooms or districts. Additionally, fifteen teacher researchers displayed their work through posters illustrating their studies. Most of the presenters were from the SAWP Teacher Research and Inquiry Institute and the Sunnyside Unified School District Career Ladder program. Others came from public and charter schools in the Tucson area and beyond. Evaluations from all sessions were overwhelmingly positive.

The conference title and theme, *Voices in the Village: Teacher Researchers Share Their Stories*, is taken from the words of Lawrence Stenhouse, who declared that too much research is published to the world, and not enough to the village. This is our effort to raise our voices in our own village and promote an awareness of the value of teacher research in reforming education. We're looking forward to an even bigger conference next year.

Left: Gerald Campano shares his student stories

# Who Am I? Who Are You?

By **Stephanie Navarro**

All we hear is "The land of the free and opportunity"  
But when I look, that's not what I really see  
That's not how you treat my family or me  
You don't know how it feels to not be free

You have everything, a good home and good life  
You even have with you your loving wife  
But look at me, look at my house  
I have nothing compared to you, not even a spouse

They say, "All men are created equal." Is it true?  
It really all depends on you  
Where you are in the world and what you do.  
Help us out, we need a clue, we want to be just like  
you.

What can we do so that can apply to us?  
Give us a chance, let us all discuss  
We will do everything. And we will do it without a fuss.  
For us to survive this is a must.

People talk about being equal "*One Nation* under God"  
But don't you find it a little strange and odd,  
That when they tell you illegal immigration is wrong, you  
nod  
But when it comes down to it, you're nothing more than  
a fraud.

Whatever bad thing they tell you about us, you agree  
But for your company you always come to me  
I work for you and get minimum wage, isn't it crazy?  
Nothing is really what it appears to be.

All I am saying is I want to be just like you.  
Because you have everything, you really do.  
All I need is a chance; I promise I won't let you down.  
So, please let me try on your crown.

*Note: This poem was written through the imagined  
perspective of an illegal immigrant.*

**Y W**  
**o r**  
**u i**  
**n t**  
**g e**  
**r s**

"You Don't  
Understand!"

By **Adrianna Lagunas**

Immigrants try their best,  
To give their kids their all  
And nothing less.

So don't take away their dignity,  
This is their free opportunity.

You don't see the kids crying all night,  
Because their MOMMY is. . .  
No longer in sight.

"YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND,"  
What we feel inside,  
When being put away,  
Is always in the back of our minds.

Why don't we have a chance, just like  
you?  
To be able to do what we want to do?

# Young Authors Debate and Write About Immigration and the Border

By Deborah Dimmett

Middle school students from the Tucson area met on April 21 to discuss, debate, and write about immigration and border issues. Writing and Campaigning for Social Justice on the Border brought together students from four different schools who used the workshop as an opportunity to write and share their ideas with local, state, and US legislators.

The workshop began with an inquiry into what is a border and what purpose it serves. This was followed by a lively simulation of a Tucson Town Hall meeting where participants debated perspectives from five different groups: illegal immigrants in the U.S., employers hiring illegal immigrants, U.S. citizens against illegal immigration, legal immigrants and citizens of the U.S., and citizens with family living in Mexico. In the end, the young authors' written reflections illustrate that they believe there should be humane contingencies to receive undocumented workers who are only trying to improve their lot in life.

*Read two of their poems on the opposing page.*



# New Beginnings: Translating Senior Year

By Roger Shanley

Senior English thrills me each year in August, shining-faced near adults ready to maximize their final year in high school. Fast forward to December and then April, and notice stress lines and distant looks. Perhaps new texts and varied writings might shift this trend to energizing the entire senior year. Here are some ideas that I hope will provide some new beginnings for my teaching and my students' learning.

In a discussion with other teachers working with seniors, I thought of the focusing concept of translation. Three texts surfaced as I thought of books that might bring students to thoughts about this concept and its far-reaching implications in their lives. *Interpreter of Maladies* by Jhumpa Lahiri, a superb collection of short stories and the winner of the Pulitzer Prize, provides readers with the implications of translation and its pivotal place in survival as well as interpersonal fantasies. I'm hoping exposure to Indian culture and customs opens students to diverse cultures and subjects. Merging this text with another powerful tale like the narrative in *Bel Canto* by Ann Patchett could have fascinating results. Based on a real-life hostage situation in Central America, the plot merges the power of opera with the shifting dynamic of power in hostage situations. In the center is an interpreter, communicating among the stakeholders in the conflict. Add a writing opportunity in which students are encouraged to develop narratives from news stories, as explained by the author Ann Patchett on her website, and the reading-writing connections comes

to life. At some point, I hope to introduce these twelfth-graders to *Zero at the Bone: Rewriting Life After a Snakebite* by Erec Toso, our own director of the writing project. His recollections of a near-fatal rattlesnake bite translate his past, present, and future interpretations of his life-shattering event. I envision students selecting their own life events of impact and considering or mirroring Erec's craft in their own tales. I am hoping to add additional texts like *Capirotada: A Nogales Memoir* by Alberto Rios. I am inclined to think seniors will appreciate this autobiographical retelling of life in Nogales, Arizona and Rios' path to his current status as renowned teacher and poet at Arizona State University.

Hopefully these new beginnings will spur new connections and student involvement. I encourage all readers to add to my beginnings by contacting me at [Roger.Shanley@tusd1.org](mailto:Roger.Shanley@tusd1.org) with suggestions of other texts and writing opportunities. To a new school year for 2007-2008 and superb new beginnings for us all!



# Educational Summit with Gabrielle Giffords

By Jenise Porter

Members of the SAWP board asked if I would write about the March 10 Educational Summit held by Representative Gabrielle Giffords regarding reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. It's pretty easy to do. I can tell you, if you have not already heard or read about it, that the Rincon High School Little Theatre was full to overflowing. I can tell you that only one of the official testifiers had anything positive to say about the law and most of the others suggested that NCLB should be scrapped altogether. I could tell you that I sat with Roger Shanley, SAWP board member and outstanding high school teacher, who had prepared a thorough packet of information for Giffords. And I could tell you that each of us in attendance had an opportunity to complete a comment form which became part of the public record of the Summit and that I received a thank you letter from Representative Giffords for taking the time to attend and comment at the Summit.

None of that description conveys the excitement of being part of democracy in action. Twenty years ago when I was active on the California public policy committee of the American Association of University Women, we learned that each personal letter or phone call to a state legislator represented 1200 people who had not called or written. I take that information very seriously and continue to write or telephone my elected representatives an average of twice a month. Now with email and action alerts from just about any organization you can think of, staying in touch with my legisla-

tors is very easy. I seldom click on the form letter without taking out large chunks and rewriting in my own words, trying to relate the issue to my own experience. It was that personal experience which made the testimony at the Giffords' Summit so powerful. These were real stories told by teachers and parents about children they know and love.

The point of this report is not so much to tell you about the Educational Summit or how the audience felt about it, but more about asking that you write to Representative Giffords, or Grijalva, or whoever represents the district in which you live. Write or call, not only for yourself, but also for those hundreds of other people who share your opinion but have not yet expressed them.

It is easy, at least for me, to fall into the cynical belief that I can't save the world, I can't influence policy, that it is truly hopeless. And then I remind myself that if I don't participate in the democratic process, I don't have the right to complain about how things are going.

*Jenise, a 2004 SAWP Fellow, is retired from the Maricopa County Library and is currently working on her Doctorate in Language, Reading and Culture at the University of Arizona.*

# More Ponderings

By Lynn Cuffari

"For every question you ask me, the answer is 'yes,'" I tell the sixth grade students. "And, if you want to write in purple, or red, or upside down, or in a circle, you may," I add. The buzz of voices stops. This always happens when I introduce a writing prompt.

A hand shoots up.

"Can I..."

"Yes."

"Is it okay if...?"

"Yes. Furthermore, if you want to write a poem, a song, a true story, or just make one up that takes place a million years from now, on Mars, or under a tree, that is perfectly alright. Also, if you start writing to the prompt, but all of a sudden change direction, that is fine with me!"

I meet their quizzical expressions. "We are going to write for twenty minutes, and then I will take volunteers for author's chair. Those who wish to read will share; those who don't can just listen for today."

The tension that existed a few moments earlier when I introduced the writing lesson is completely diffused. I grab my writer's notebook and we all begin. (I have found that it is very important that I write with the students. This puts us on equal ground and shows them that I truly believe in what I have asked them to do.)

Today, I do not fill my own blank pages with words that fit the prompt, but instead reflect on what I observe about the students as they write. I thank God that our teachers invite me once in a while to lead a writing workshop with their students. It allows the principal I am to be a teacher still, it forces me to write in my own journal, and it excites me beyond description to witness students engaged in learning while writing.

I have discovered through many years of experience (and a lot of professional development) that the best way to teach writing is to simply offer students time to write. I initially take away the traditional barriers to writing such as whether the words have to be in ink or pencil, in cursive or print, single spaced or double spaced. I may direct the young scribes to compose a dialogue or write in third person (if we have been studying this), but often I let them just write if only to discover how wonderful it is to have a place to put all those thoughts that roam randomly around their heads with seemingly no place to go. Most of all, I take away the fear that they will be judged for their words.

The time for judging – grading – is later in the process. Perhaps one of their notebook entries will become a story starter for the more formal narrative or expository essay they will focus on in English class. There will also be time later to correct the spelling, check for verb agreement, and punch up the adjectives. There will be scheduled class time for editing and revision, for second, third, and final drafts.

Only once in twenty minutes do I feel the need to interject quietly: "Even when you think you might be done, write more. What you write when you feel you have nothing left to write will be your best." It always is. The words flow freely and the mood is magical. Not one student is a discipline problem. I want to bottle the creative tranquility and take it back to my own desk in the office.

About a minute before I need to refocus the group, I say, "Find a good place to put a period on your thoughts." And then, "Who would like to read first?"

Multiple hands jettison into the air.

*(Ponderings—Continued on page 10)*

*(Beginning Again—Continued from page 1)*

my own. I am an Irish-German-American Jew, and my students are mostly Mexican-American Catholics. This is a warm, proud culture about which I knew little. I now speak a bit of Spanish and find it such fun to go into a Mexican restaurant, know the various foods, and order in that language.

How incredibly fortunate I am! Not only is

my U of A colleague now teaching just down the hallway, but I have begun again when many are retiring.

*AnnaMay Stern currently teaches Freshman and Junior English at Douglas High School in Douglas, Arizona. She and her husband, Stan, live in Bisbee, which they love because it is definitely not a "cookie-cutter" town!*

## Director's Disk

By Erec Toso

### *Of Running Waters and the Power of Change*

On Easter weekend I backpacked into Aravaipa Canyon. I had not been into the canyon since the floods last summer and was expecting massive change. I saw more than I had imagined possible. The flood devastation was apparent in the scoured meander and in centuries-old cottonwoods wedged between canyon walls forty feet above the stream. Where there had been a deciduous jungle there were now only gravel bars and boulders. Trees lie on their sides, all bark ground off, wood bleaching in the sun. The view has opened up and light is everywhere.

Still the stream lives on. New growth has begun. The river thrives and the cycles continue. I saw as many species of birds as I have ever seen, though fewer overall numbers.

It is spring and regeneration is everywhere. New sprouts are already pushing up through the freshly deposited soil. Willows, in particular, are sending up shoots out of downed trunks.

I saw that Raul Grijalva has stated that the No Child Left Behind Act must be either

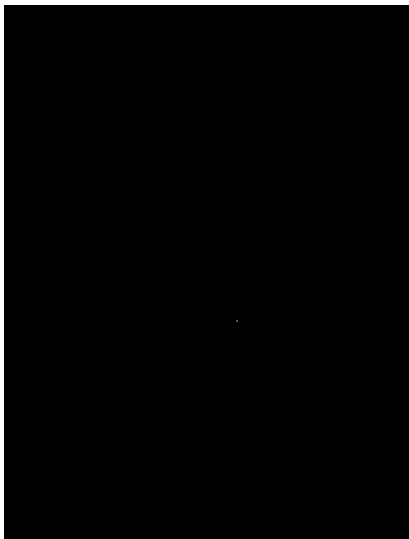
scrapped or fundamentally overhauled. His town hall meeting showed his interest in supporting change. I am heartened by his stance. The cycles of change continue, even in the world of politics.

While the stream changes are natural, the education changes are political. We have some say over the cycles of teaching. Let's operate on the assumption that spring is here and that regeneration will come from our efforts to improve the teaching of writing. New students arrive at the door every year. We can provide an environment for them to learn to think and to express their thoughts.

A new round of literacy may be taking shape as we help push it along.

Thanks to all for your hard work and belief in the powers of moving waters and active minds.

*Erec's newly released book, Zero at the Bone: Rewriting Life after a Snakebite, can be found at the University of Arizona Bookstore.*



## Beginning Again at 65

By AnnaMay Stern

Three years ago this month I was sitting in an English class at U of A South next to a young man who was finishing required coursework in that subject. It had been an exciting two semesters in Ceci Lewis's classes with some of the same students. We had gotten to know one another well enough that they felt comfortable asking if I planned to continue as a part-timer at the local college. "Probably," I responded. Suddenly, my young colleague (who was observing at his alma mater, Douglas High School), said, "If it's okay with you, I'm giving your name to the principal tomorrow." Frankly, to me it seemed highly doubtful any district would want to hire a 65-year-old.

That August, for the first time in twenty years, I was teaching at the high school level! Close Chicago friends thought I had gone around the proverbial bend, and I must admit those twenty years have made quite a difference. Terminology has changed, technology has changed, students have changed, and there are now clearly defined state standards to be met. Yet, isn't change over that number of years only to be expected?

Change for me has been a welcome challenge. It is much too easy to continue to teach the same way. It's comfortable. The past three years have been fulfilling but often uncomfortable ones. I now know that there is so much I do not know and that I want to continue at the high school level. I am fortunate to be in a district that values professional development for its teachers. I believe – no, I know – that I have learned more in the past three years about teaching than ever before. I have learned about differentiating instruction, how to carefully craft a lesson plan, implement it, and then assess it. I have learned that one should look at the assessment before ever thinking about the lesson plan and learned techniques such as "Four Corners" to get students up and out of their seats. New strategies have taught me how to make students more responsible. I have also learned to use "Excuse me, you just said that in front of a little old lady." It works!

One of my biggest joys is that I teach in a culture other than

*(Beginning Again—Continued on page 2)*