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2009 Winter Writing Retreat

“Being a poet is about articulating your humanness,” stated Darrell Bourque, professor emeritus at the University of Louisiana – Lafayette and poet laureate



for Louisiana, as he opened the Winter Writing Retreat at the Solomon Episcopal Center in Laranger, LA, Saturday, January 31, 2009. To an audience of LSU Writing Project teacher-consultants, Bourque read a variety of poems written by contemporary and time-honored poets, immersing participants in the language of poetry as they developed a word bank for poem-sketching. After discussion of the rhetoric of poetry – diction, line, sentence, trope, sound, and argument, Bourque sent participants writing first

draft free verse poems, inspired by their personal experiences. With each writing prompt – personal photographs, works of artists, personal works of art, favorite lines of poems, film – the participants’ poems transcended from “the merely personal to the deeply personal” as they explored their roots of family life, culture, and binding ties of humanity.

With the picturesque setting, enthusiastic participants who felt comfortable with the idea of writing, and ample opportunity, it was an occasion for teachers to write! Because there is no one way to teach writing, participants took back to their classrooms the knowledge gained through Bourque’s method of “awakening the poetry from within” and placed it among their tried and true methods of relating to students.

<http://lsuwritingproject.org/Winterretreat2009/Winterretreat2009.htm>

Cynthia Edmonston Hosts “First Thursdays”

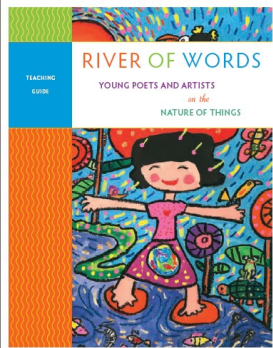
“First Thursdays” are normally held at La Carreta’s Restaurant on Government St. in Baton Rouge, LA at 4:00 PM on the first Thursday of the month from September—May and open to all LSU Writing Project TCs. Cynthia Edmonston began hosting First Thursdays as a response to TCs wanting ways to stay connected. They wanted informal gatherings that could serve as a discussion forum and trouble-shooting session for implementing new writing strategies and techniques in their classrooms, and

to reflect on their own writing practices. Attendance has ebbed and flowed, but everyone attending walks away with things to add to their teacher toolbox. If you’re planning to come, bring a writing pad, student work, books enjoyed by students that lead to activities, ideas you are trying to develop, new activities you are excited about, or problems you’d like help in solving.

<http://lsuwritingproject.org/firstthursdays.htm>



"Wobble Goggles" AKA Scott Durbin from *The Imagination Movers* performs in front of audiences of eager youngsters. His goggles allow him to see things from a variety of perspectives.



"Helping children explore their own creativity and express their thoughts on the environment"

What Ever Happened to . . . Scott Durbin

What happens when four regular guys like you and me think big? They create something like *The Imagination Movers*. Scott Durbin an LSU Writing Project Teacher Consultant of 1998 is one of those guys. Scott along with three life-long friends and neighbors, Rich, Dave, and Smitty created a kids show that would combine the spirit of TV shows like Mr. Rogers and Captain Kangaroo with rock and roll energy in

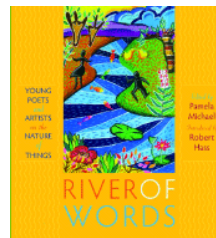
2003. With a stick to it attitude of doing a little something each day, the group began to self-produce CDs and DVDs. Their early work was broadcast through Louisiana Public Broadcasting. Then in 2005 Disney discovered them in the Kids Tent at the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival. Now they are in their second season as part of Playhouse Disney Show. They run a business offering

their imaginations to solve problems. Their comedy is fast paced and the pre-school music is catchy, but not irritating to the parents. They write and perform all the songs. All this because Scott wanted a show with strong male models for children and provide positive messages about teamwork, respect and creative problem solving. Scott Durbin is living his dream. How many of you can say the same?

Free, Free, Free From Connie McDonald and Milkweed

The word Free always gets a teacher's attention. Click on the link below for one of the best kid tested, tried and true, easily accessible resources to teach children to write poetry. http://www.milkweed.org/images/stories/guides/teaching_guide_ROW.pdf Connie McDonald, English teacher at LSU Lab School in Baton Rouge, along with Harriet Maher of Lafayette created an Educator's Guide, a collection of strategies and lesson plans (about 10) for teaching

poetry to children to accompany the recently published book by Pamela Michael and Robert Haas *River of Words: Young Poets and Artists on the Nature of Things*— a collection of poems culled from winners of the yearly contests. Connie (Teacher of the Year by the River of Words Project in 2006) and Harriet over the years



have had an extraordinary number of students named as finalists in the River of Words poetry contest. Because of their winning streak, Milkweed Publishers approached them to compile an educator's guide to accompany the book. Connie and Harriet gave unrestricted access to their teacher's filing cabinet. The guide is organized with brief rationale, lists of materials, and use of a variety of resources. It's complete with student samples and worksheets.

Dues Help Support LSU Writing Project Functions



Financial support of the LSU Writing Project helps to further its mission. Supporting the LSU WP with a yearly dues donation of \$10.00 helps to build a treasury that defers the cost of many activities

not covered through grants. One of these functions is the annual convocation for the summer invitational institute. Other activities supported in the past have been to pay stipends, to purchase re-

freshments for quarterly meetings, to send cards and flowers. Send your dues to Sara Sims, PO Box 3468, Paradis, LA 70080. Make checks payable to Writing Project Teacher Consultants.

Kid Picks for Children 8–12 by Joan Robbins



I am astonished at the number of series for children today, but here is another one that you will want to include in your classroom library as a read-for-action-loving-children grades 4-8. The books appeals to both boys and girls — Percy Jackson and the Olympians Series written by Rick Riordan. The first book of the series is ***The Lightning Thief***. The main character Percy Jackson is a wisecrack-

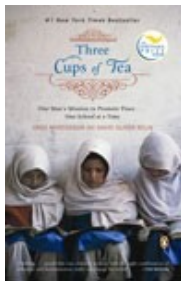
ing 12-year-old with ADHD and dyslexia who is kicked out of one school after another. Disaster seems to follow him. When his math teacher tries to kill him, his mother sends him to summer camp for demigods on Long Island where he discovers the Greek gods are alive, well, and still causing mayhem in modern-day America. Percy learns that his father is Poseidon and discovers new talents because of his genes. Percy is accused of stealing Zeus's master lightning bolt, and he must prove his innocence. Together with his friends, a satyr and another demigod daughter of Athena, Percy sets

out on a quest across the United States to find the real thief and prevent war between the gods. This book offers nonstop adventure and terrific exposure to Greek mythology.

Once you have read this one, you'll want to read the rest of the series. Although this is a series, each book is complete within itself and can stand alone. I suggest you read them in order because it is nice to witness the growth in the characters. **#2 *The Sea of Monsters*, #3 *The Titan's Curse*, #4 *The Battle of the Labyrinth*, #5 *The Last Olympian*** being released May 12, 2009.

A Non-fiction Read for All Ages

Three Cups of Tea by Greg Mortenson is written for three different age groups—adult, young readers, picture book (*Listen to the Wind*). Greg Mortenson wandered lost and alone, after a failed attempt to



climb the K2 mountain. People of an impoverished village took him in and nursed him back to health. Mortenson made a promise to return

and build a school. He launched one of the most remarkable humanitarian campaigns of our time. *Three Cups of Tea* traces Mortenson's decade-long odyssey to build schools, especially for girls, throughout the region that gave birth to the Taliban and sanctuary to Al Qaeda. He wages war with the causes of terrorism - poverty and ignorance - by providing both girls and

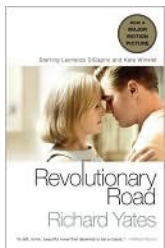


boys a nonextremist education. Mortenson survived a kidnapping, death threats, and separations from his family. Mortenson has built fifty-five schools serving Pakistan and Afghanistan providing hope to tens of thousands of children—proof that one passionately dedicated person can change the world.



Adult Pick by Elaine Ardeneaux

Revolutionary Road by Richard Yates is my favorite adult read this month. I want to see the movie, but I wanted to read the book first. The book takes place in Connecticut in 1955. April



and Frank Wheeler move to the suburbs and feel trapped. Don't we all feel that way at some point in our lives? We start looking for odd ways to express ourselves. April gets the idea that if they move to Europe, all of their problems will be solved. She will work and he will find himself. Unfortunately,

as Emerson once said, "Our giant goes with us wherever we go." Moving will not make us happier if we at our core are unhappy. If you like to get into the heads of characters and like psychology, I would strongly suggest this book. Now I am ready to see the movie.



The young adult *Twilight* series by Stephenie Meyer is a must. The books are a bit too romantic for my liking, but the kids love them.

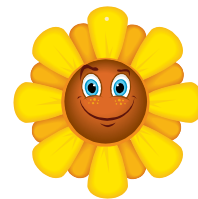
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Mark Your Calendars for Upcoming Events

Deadline for getting in applications for the **Invitational Summer Institute is Thursday, March 5, 2009**. The institute uses the NWP's professional development model. Each year distinguished local teachers attend the five week institute. The institute offers six graduate level credit hours from LSU. Participants will learn about the writing process, write, read research, learn from others experiences, and prepare presentations.

For more information about how to become part of this experience, [click here](#). [PDF](#)



Director: Dr. Thomasine Mencer Locations: LSU Lab School
Dates: June 8 - July 2, 2009 E-mail: tmence@lsu.edu

Save the Date! **Saturday, April 25, 2009**

The St. Charles Parish Teacher Consultants along with the St. Charles Parish Reading Council is hosting a reading and writing showcase.

8:30 AM - 12:00 PM

Destrehan High School, #1 Wildcat Lane, Destrehan, Louisiana. [Get Directions](#)

The reading and writing showcase will be a mini-conference of ideas and activities for reading and writing across grade levels (grades 2-12). Librarians will also be available to spotlight popular book titles and discuss ways to integrate literature into all subjects.

Deadline for submitting writings to **Louisiana Writes is Friday, May 15, 2009**.

LSU Writing Project is a supporter of **Louisiana Writes**, the young writers contest, sponsored by the Louisiana Writing Project. Click on the links below to find out more information about this annual writing contest.

Contest Guidelines -- [Word document](#), [PDF file](#)

Entry Form -- [Word document](#), [PDF file](#)

Become Involved

Darrell Bourque is working with the Louisiana Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Committee (headed by David Madden of LSU, Secretary of State Jay Dardenne and State of Louisiana Archivist Florent Hardy) to create learning programs and activities throughout 2009 in Louisiana schools. If you can help in this effort, he would appreciate your assistance. Darrell Bourque can be contacted through the University of Louisiana.

One of the problems facing writing projects across the country is keeping members informed. The problem begins when people move and don't updated their new contact information. This holds very true for the LSU Writing Project. Hurricane Katrina had a devastating impact on its members with little way of tracking all the changes that occurred because of it. Efforts are being made to get an updated directory. **We need your help.** Please help by forwarding this newsletter to other LSU Teacher Consultants and have them email their contact information to jrobbins@lsuwritingproject.org.

If you haven't been to the LSU Writing Project web site in the past few months, you might want to go there. <http://lsuwritingproject.org> The web site has a new look and new pages. One page that is in the making is the resource page. We'd like this page to come from you, "Books to have in your classroom library" and "Picture books to teach skills." Email that information to jrobbins@lsuwritingproject.org Identify yourself, tell the name of the book, the author, the genre, the age group it is appropriate for, a brief synopsis of 50 words or less. They will go up on the web as soon as they come in. **Become involved. Share your expertise.**

