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To the Teacher

The rewards of Writing

Effective teacher direction, motivation, and encouragement are essential in cultivating successful writers in your English classes. Because most students will not volunteer to write essays, you need to do more than merely assign topics to be written about. You can generate enthusiasm for the rewards of writing by letting students know that you are genuinely interested in what they have to say. For their part, they must make every effort to be interesting writers. One of the best ways to accomplish this is for them to "write as they are," using their own experiences and perceptions. The composition activities in this book, designed for middle- and senior-high-school students of all abilities, invite students to use their sensory data, their memories, ideas, thoughts, opinions, and imaginations.

By the time students reach middle and high school, they have had a considerable amount of experience in life. They have lived for years in the vital environment of the family. They have gained and lost friends; they are finding out what truth, deceit, love, lies, and loyalty are all about; they have been in school for many years interacting with many adults and peers; they have favorite subjects which have stimulated their thinking and imagination; they are involved in and committed to sports; they have passionate hobbies; they are devoted to their friends; they are taking an active interest in the opposite sex; they are becoming more aware of their own individual selves at the same time that they are confronting the problems and demands of the larger society they were shielded from in childhood; they are beginning to wonder about some of the profound questions of life that adults grapple with; they are experiencing joys, problems, conflicts, and feelings of many kinds. All in all, they come into the English class with a large store of thoughts, feelings, observations, opinions, and experiences. They have to be encouraged to use these experiences in their writing. You might play upon this theme often, because if students lack anything, they lack the sure knowledge that their thoughts and experiences are of value.

While you are reinforcing the importance of experience in their writing, you might tell them about the realities of your situation—that you have 150 students in five classes and, as a result, you are a distracted audience in a very demanding job. Students should know that they will, in a sense, be vying for the attention of you, the reader, the audience of one. Which papers will you pick up and read first? Why? Because of their appearance? Because of the titles? Because of an interesting opening paragraph? Because of a

certain stylistic effect? *Students have to realize that writing is not only self-expression, but communication directed at an audience.* Getting that audience's attention is an essential part of the communication process.

At the beginning of the school year, I tell my students that I will always try to create writing topics that interest me as well as them. In this way I will be curious to read what each student has to say. I tell them that arresting titles will determine which papers I read first, and also that the amount of interest generated by the opening sentence or paragraph will influence my feeling about what is to follow.

Essentially, I tell my students that there are two tasks in writing effectively. The first is to write from experience whenever possible, to trust one's sensory data, to have confidence in what one really knows. The second task is to be aware of the audience—in this case, the teacher who has a great deal to read and comparatively little time to do it in. This awareness should help motivate students to employ various techniques to ensure that the teacher will take an interest in the composition. Thus, on the one hand, students explore their worlds in order to find the materials for compositions. On the other hand, the students must project the material they choose from themselves to others in ways that will attract a reader's attention.

You, the curious teacher and reader, can make a considerable difference in the success of your writing program. You should be clear about what you want from students, create topics of interest for both you and your students, motivate them to be confident about using their hard-earned experience, and read the compositions as an interested party who will write a personal remark to each student, as well as correct and grade them.

It is my hope that the varied topics in this book will spark the process of writing and communication. The book is reproducible so that you can easily make photocopies of assignments and distribute them, thus saving the time required to write an assignment on the board and ensuring that each student has an accurate copy of the complete assignment.

—*August Franza*

The Life of an Artist

The life of an artist is very appealing because it permits individual expression. If you had your way, what kind of an artist would you like to be? Write an essay describing your possible achievements and what success would come of them.

Drunk Driving

Describe the efforts—or lack of efforts—of your school and community regarding the issue of driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

Smile, These Are the Best Years of Your Life

Often, teenagers are told that their teen years are the best years of their lives. They are usually told this when the expression on their face or their behavior says just the opposite. Based on your own experience, support or reject this observation.

Self-Expression in My House

What's self-expression like in your house? Do people say what has to be said, no holds barred? Is everybody restrained and genteel? Is there a happy medium? Describe what it's like in your house.

Is TV Responsible for the Rise in Violence?

Take a stand on this controversial question, based on your own experience watching TV. Write a letter to your congressperson and give him or her your point-blank view of this question. Defend your position to him or her.