



## North Star of Texas Writing Project

### Greetings, from Terisa Pearce

It is with great pride and pleasure that North Star of Texas Writing Project announces the launch of its newsletter, *The Compass*. The newsletter is a forum to celebrate accomplishments, share ideas, enhance communications, and develop resources. TC's, Audrey Wilson (06) and Donalyn Miller (07), have signed on as editors and publishers of the *The Com-*

*pass*. They welcome all contributions and input. No submission is too small. Send in the wonderful things you are accomplishing in your schools and classrooms. Share your successes and ask questions. Talk about a great book you just read or the funny things that happened with your students. Write a poem. Tell a story. Spread good news and

announcements (personal and professional). The newsletter is a creative way to represent what we are doing as a

**"We only part to meet again. / Change, as ye list, ye winds; my heart shall be / The faithful compass that still points to thee."**  
~John Gay

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### Welcome, 2008 Teaching Fellows!

As the school year winds down, North Star is gearing up for its 6<sup>th</sup> Invitational Summer Institute. Join us in welcoming our new 2008 Invitational Summer Institute Fellows!

*Katie Anderson* 6<sup>th</sup> English Strickland Middle School – Denton

*Gayle Baar* Librarian

Freeman Elementary Carrollton/Farmer Branch

*Maegan Conner* 1<sup>st</sup> Mullendore Elementary Birdville

*Lauren Eppich* 4<sup>th</sup>-Bil. Timberline Elem

Grapevine/Colleyville

*Renae Garrett* 6<sup>th</sup> ELA/SS

Bear Creek Inter.

Keller

*Amanda Goss* 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> Eng. Guyer High School Denton

*Jo Ann Hall* 9<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> Eng. Greenville High School Greenville

*Jacqueline Horton* 4<sup>th</sup> Barksdale Elem

Plano

*Heather Howard* 4<sup>th</sup> Barksdale Elem

Plano

*Leslie Kovac* 2<sup>nd</sup>

Trinity Valley School Private

*Vicki Larson* 12<sup>th</sup> Eng.

Fossil Ridge High School Keller

*Erin Mathews* 9<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> Eng.

Fossil Ridge High School Keller

*Lynn Nguyen* 7<sup>th</sup> Leap/8<sup>th</sup> Eng. Creek Valley Middle Lewisville

*Heather Sims* Resource R/E

Hillwood Middle School Keller

*Gail Stewart* 7<sup>th</sup> LA

Coppell Middle School Coppell

*Sarah Thompson* 4<sup>th</sup> Grace Hurdeman Elem. Birdville

#### NSTWP

##### Leadership

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## Q & A- What is a North Star Leader?

First of all, YOU! In emails, meetings, and conversations, you may hear such titles as "director, leadership team, teacher leader, teacher consultant, teaching fellow," etc. Presented below are a series of questions that may have popped into your mind regarding yourself and the leadership team of NSTWP.

*Who is part of the leadership?*

NWP is an organization that relies on the leadership of all its members. To be part of the leadership team of NSTWP, you do not have to have a special title or position. All TC's are part of the lead-

ership, and the site relies on its TC's to promote growth and keep its members connected.

*How do I participate on the leadership team?*

When those little emails come around announcing a meeting or asking for volunteers, hit the "reply" button and let us know what you would like to be involved in. Attending meetings to help plan upcoming events, facilitating book clubs, sharing lesson ideas or teaching tips to the newsletter, talking to your campus colleagues about your experiences with

NSTWP, presenting your teaching demo during the summer institute all count as leadership activities.

*If I go to a meeting or answer an email, will I always be expected to participate in every event?*

Of course not! Although we would love everyone who is interested to help plan and promote, we realize that you have jobs, families, school, and a life! Even if it's only once a year, your leadership counts tremendously in helping NSTWP continue to reach its goals.

## Author and educator to lead workshop on notebook strategies

Leading the opening invitation this year on June 13th at the Holiday Inn in Denton is *Notebook Know-How's* author, Aimee Buckner.

Aimee Buckner always wanted to be a teacher. Not only does she love school supplies, but she also loves watching children grow intellectually and emotionally. "I enjoy being around children and working with them," she says. "I love learning new things, so as I get to teach science and social studies, I get to learn along with the kids. It's great."

Aimee was born in Arlington Heights, Illinois, and even as a child her future career as a teacher was certain. "My parents even put a blackboard on the wall of my playroom. My Mom was a teacher and I used her old teacher editions and leftover dittos to play school. It's just who I am."

She is the author of [Notebook Know-](#)

**"A writer's notebook gives students a place to write every day...to practice living like a writer."**

[How](#) and the video series [Inside Notebooks](#). "Notebook Know-How was an easy book to write," she says. "It's what I know and what I do. I didn't have to do a lot of extra research just for the book. . . . Also, the old adage we tell kids, 'write what you know' is the same for authors. I write what I know, so that the book becomes an extension of myself and a doorway to a deeper understanding of what I'm already doing in the classroom."

Aimee has taught children in grades three through six and is currently teaching fourth graders at Brookwood Elementary School in Georgia. She speaks at national conferences, including NCTE and IRA, and at literacy conferences in Indiana, New York City, Boston, and throughout Georgia. Her areas of

specialty are reading and writing and she is a regular contributor to the website Choice Literacy. ([stenhouse.com](http://stenhouse.com))

For registration information contact Carol Wickstrom at [carol.wickstrom@unt.edu](mailto:carol.wickstrom@unt.edu). Pre-registration ends April 30th. Group rates available.



## “The Gift” by Joan Curtis

It was a Saturday morning; one of those beautiful end of February days in Texas when all you want to do is be outside. The call came about 10:00. I had been working on my dissertation since about 7:30 and was about to go for a walk, but this call took precedence.

“Joan, Arthur’s not swallowing anymore, and Dan is planning a celebration of his life,” my sister Judy is talking so fast. “He wants something from us, Arthur’s family. You know, something about him from our perspective. Since you’re the writer, I thought you could do it. Is that okay? Will you do that for us?”

I told her I would come up with something, and after assurances of how we would get through this together, I

hung up and began writing. At the moment, the easiest way to tell Arthur’s story was using George Ella Lyons’ *Where I’m From*.

The hours that day run together. I’d write a few lines, cry, read what I had written to Veriena, my dear friend and mentor, cry, write, cry, check with Veriena, cry some more, rewrite, write, cry - all of sudden it was four o’clock.

My brother Arthur died six days later, two days before his sixtieth birthday. I read his poem the next week at a memorial service in the church where we grew up in East Texas. So many people who were there when we were children but had known little of

Arthur the man thanked me for sharing the rest of his life with them. I read it again at the Celebration of his life in his home community of Charlottesville, Virginia. People there, friends deeply grieving because they had lost a dear and much loved friend, thanked me for completing the picture by giving them glimpses of his childhood and early adulthood.

Arthur had been a gift to all of us - a son, a brother, a life-partner, a friend. With a simple piece of writing, we had images of the man we loved - words we could read again and again. We had been given another gift.

*Read an excerpt from Joan’s tribute to her brother on p. 6*

## Take Part in the First Ever NSTWP “I am...” Poem

Remember in the institute the ever popular “Where I’m From” poem we all wrote? Remember the empowering feeling of ownership and surprise you felt at composing a piece of writing that so accurately portrayed who you are?

How exciting would it be if we all came together as the North Star of Texas Writing Project and composed an “I am” poem that demonstrates the leadership activities we engage in continuing the goals and principles of NWP.

To participate, write one line that demonstrates or lists your leadership practices or writing instruction principles that have become part of who you are. We will combine all of our lines and publish the poem in the Summer edition of *The Compass*.

Email your lines to Audrey Wilson at [adwilson@kellerisd.net](mailto:adwilson@kellerisd.net) by June 1st.

For inspiration, see Joan’s poem on p. 6.

*Teaching tip: Try using the poem as a vehicle for literary analysis. Model for students how to write an I am poem from the perspective of a character, then have them try it on their own. After they have done this, have them revisit their own poems to see if they have any new ideas or elements they’d like to add.*



## To Blog or Not to Blog

*What is a blog? And why should I use it?*

A blog is web journal. The term comes from squishing the words "web" and "log" together. People use them online to log their daily activities. Teachers use them to talk about writing instruction and to field new ideas. Students use them on Myspace to express their opinions to their online community.

*But how should they be used in the classroom?*

I use blogs for my student writing groups. I find the web is a place the students feel safe posting their writing because they don't have to come face to face with their readers. In class, we write daily during writing workshop. Sometimes the students have open prompts and other times they are guided with a writing lesson (Like a six room poem). Every other week, students are required to post one of their writing pieces on their blog. I give them the freedom to post whatever kind of writing they want, but I also give them a prompt if they need it. Most of the students will write to the prompt, but a few of them will post amazing things that have

nothing to do with what we are writing in class. It seems that these students are writing at home and just need a place to showcase it! Blogging is great for this!

After students post writing, they are required to post comments (i.e. feedback) for their writing group members. I have asked them to be specific in feedback and give constructive criticism. (Don't just put, "It was good.") This feedback is essentially an electronic conference. (Again, the students feel less stressed about giving productive and honest feedback because they don't have to meet face to face.

Once a semester or so, after students have revised based on their peer e-conferencing, we meet as a group and have a read aloud. Students can read whatever piece they feel is their best and we sit in a circle just like at the Summer Institute! The students love spending the whole day listening to everyone's writing because they think it means they don't have to "work" that day!

I also have the students blog once a month about what they are reading. They just type a small blurb about what

the book is about and how they feel about reading it. This informal book talk is more do-able for them than a book report or a project. I decided to do this because I know I don't like writing a report after I finish a book! Blogging allows students to learn what everyone in class is reading without spending a whole class day doing book talks.

Right now blogging is a plethora of reading on my part. Usually, I am the one who reads and comments on their blogs, but next year... oh next year! Next year, I will put the students in more organized writing groups, and I will discuss how important it is for them to make comments about each other's writing. I will explain to them that I will respond after read-around. I really want the blogging community to become student driven and not teacher driven.

By the techie:  
Colleen Graves



## Young Adult Book Corner by Kerri Harris

### Life As We Knew It by Susan Beth Pfeffer

You are living in rural Pennsylvania. You hear on the news that a meteor is on a collision course to the moon, and it will be visible in the sky at night for all to see. No worries - just a really cool thing to watch on a nice summer evening. You, your family, and all your neighbors have set up lawn chairs in the driveways up and down the street to see this awesome event. But, after the meteor hits, the unexpected occurs: the moon is pushed off its axis and closer to Earth than ever before.

This is what happens to high school sophomore, Miranda, and it begins a long year of worldwide earthquakes, tsunamis, and volcanoes. Food and gas shortages, along with extreme weather changes, come to her small Pennsylvania town. Miranda's voice

begins to turn petulant, angry, and finally resigned, as her family is forced to make tough choices while they consider their increasingly limited options.

This is a very interesting book, although it is rather scary when you think about this relatively small act of nature causing such major differences in our world. The book turns out being a survival adventure, but it is from a girl's perspective - something I found refreshing after reading so many "boy" novels in this genre. Look for the companion novel coming out soon, The Dead and the Gone. This one is based in the Bronx during the same traumatic event. I can't wait to see what kinds of problems the inner-city boy encounters in the apocalyptic world that Susan Pfeffer has created! A word of caution to all potential readers:

Don't  
read  
them



## Donalyn Miller reviews *That Workshop Book*

Book Review: *That Workshop Book: New Systems and Structures for Classrooms, That Read, Write and Think* by Samantha Bennett

When the Language Arts coordinator for our school district bought *That Workshop Book* for every member of the district writing team, my first thought was, "Do I really need another book on teaching writers' workshop?" Five pages into Samantha Bennett's book, the question became, "Where has this book been my whole teaching career?" Bennett, a staff developer for the illustrious Denver Public Education and Business Coalition (the same fine folks who brought Ellin Oliver Keene and Cris Tovani to the world) applies her years of teaching and literacy coaching experiences to the topic of workshop teaching. With this book, Bennett re-connects teachers to the "whys" of workshops, and provides powerful examples of teachers and students as guides to inform our own practices.

Beginning with a foundation of workshop routines, rituals, structures, and systems, Bennett examines the classrooms of six teachers in first through eighth grades whom she coached over one

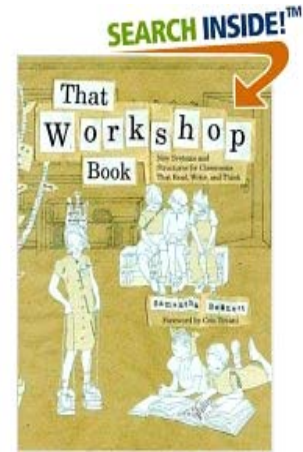
school year. Each teacher's chapter follows the same structure:

a classroom observation e-mail from Bennett to the teacher  
a transcript of one day's workshop: minilesson, worktime, and debrief

teacher thinking and reflection  
student work produced as a result of the lesson observed  
student work from several workshops over time  
students' reflection on who their own reading, writing, thinking, and learning

Bennett's commentary on what she observed

A deft mix of pedagogy and practical advice, this book has much to offer any literacy teacher from novice to veteran. *That Workshop Book* reminds us all that the key to good teaching is our ability to listen to the words and look at the work of our students to determine what they know and what we must teach.



## Keep an eye out and add these events to your calendar!

Here are just a few upcoming events and opportunities to re-energize and reconnect!

Summer Institute-June 10th- July 3 at Denton Guyer High School (TC's are needed for demonstrations! Email Carol Wickstrom if you are interested in sharing your demo.)

Opening Inivitational- June 13th at the Holiday Inn, Denton. See page 2 for information about Aimee Buckner, this year's speaker

TAIR Conference- September TBD

NCTE National Convention- November 20-23 in San Antonio

Writing Retreat- TBD (We need volunteers to help plan and promote!)



From ARTHUR HYATT SCOTT

MARCH 1948 – MARCH 2008

### The Compass

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He was from our mother on an early spring day in March – our mother to whom he always had a special connection and  
From our father who could have delivered him, but didn't – our father whom he would one day talk into paying for a dorm room and correspondence courses for a little sister –  
From our grandfathers who died too early and our grandmothers who proved to be steel magnolias.

He was the California baby with Louisiana roots growing up in East Texas – the third child born, the second child to live –

The younger brother, the older brother, a proverbial middle child who forged his own way in a sometimes dark and lonely world.

He was from wash on Mondays, clotheslines with jean stretchers, and from "Who told you life was fair?" and "If you can't say something nice, don't say anything" –  
From fried oysters, crawfish etoufee, boiled shrimp, and Gumbo, and from thank you notes, everyday sterling silver, and nothing bought on credit.

He was the young child wandering the neighborhood and talking to everyone, the toddler who got in the stranger's car to go to the store –  
The one nicknamed Dennis the Menace, the welcomed little visitor at the table of Kathryn Broyles, and the one everyone called a friend.

He was from picking blackberries for cobblers, Saturdays spent at the movies for six 7-Up bottle caps, and winning numerous prizes during Saturday matinee drawings –  
From deciding with a group of boys to try out for cheerleader and from courage that enabled him to be the only boy who showed up for the competition.

He was from swimming at the country club, hamburgers at the Dari Creme, and playing at golf with Jack Batman and Chal Barnwell –  
From I Love Lucy, Bonanza, and summer days at Camp Tonkawa, and from the Beatles, The Beach Boys, and dances at the Round-Up Club.

He was from "running the bases" in the '63 Falcon on the baseball field and from hours spent on the phone and riding in cars with Charlotte Echols –  
From pledging the fraternity at Texas Tech and from saving Charlemagne from abuse and from bringing home the most wonderful dog for us to love.

He was from days at Baylor University and putting us in shock by choosing a Baptist school and from teaching school in Black neighborhoods of Florida –  
From having his eyes truly opened to the horrors of racism and from giving up beef after working in the slaughter house.