

## Teaching the Writing Process with the West Virginia Writing Project Young Writers Contest

*“Good writing doesn’t come naturally, though most people seem to think it does.”* William Zinsser<sup>1</sup>

The Young Writers Contest provides an excellent opportunity for teachers across the curriculum to help all K-12 students learn and practice good writing by teaching their students the writing process that begins with prewriting and drafting, continues with editing and proofreading, and ends with sharing their writing with others, or publishing.

*“Writing is hard work. A clear sentence is no accident. Very few sentences come out right the first time, or even the third time. Remember this in moments of despair. If you think writing is hard, it’s because it is hard.”* William Zinsser

The Young Writers contest gives students a real-world reason to practice the writing process and a real audience to share their writing. Students write the content of their stories in class, but teachers should continue to instruct all through the Young Writers contest by pointing out errors and by holding individual or small group student conferences.

Teachers might wish to help with proofreading with comments such as: “Johnnie, that’s a run-on sentence. You need to fix that and correct the spelling of these two words.” “Sue, this paragraph doesn’t make sense to me. It needs more work.” Of course, teachers **may not** help with the storyline, ideas, or content with such comments as, “I would change the ending to...” or “I think this character should...” Students should be taught to proofread, correct, and revise their stories before writing final copies.

Stories must always be the original work of the students, and stories submitted for county judging should be error free.

This is an example of how Ms. Marilyn Gillenwater, Braxton County Middle School teacher, plans for fifth grade students to take part in the Young Writers contest:

Day 1: Students jot down ideas for characters, setting and plot for their Young Writers stories.

Day 2: Students continue development of characters, setting and plot.

Day 3: Students begin writing their rough drafts.

Days 4 and 5: Students continue working on and developing plots. They begin working on introductory paragraphs and concluding paragraphs or endings for their stories.

Day 6: Students continue reading, improving, and revising their stories.

Day 7: Students write final revisions and make sure all errors are corrected in spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and grammar, unless it is part of the story dialog.

Day 8: Students word-process their final copies.

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<sup>1</sup> Zinsser, W. K. (2006). *On writing well*. NY: HarperCollins Publishers.

Teachers: Your students may also wish to take a writing they have begun much earlier in the year, such as a journal entry, and expand and work on it over time to submit for Young Writers, as long as all work is done in the classroom. This is what successful authors do, so we should encourage our students to do likewise.

*“You learn to write by writing.”* William Zinsser

Student stories that are selected as winners in each county will need to be word processed on a computer because they will be uploaded to Marshall University WebCT by your county’s Young Writer Coordinator. Students’ original work will continue to be mailed to Barbara Holmes at Marshall University Graduate College, as usual.