

“tell me more”

NEW HAMPSHIRE HUMANITIES NEW VOICES PROJECT



NEW HAMPSHIRE
humanities

www.nhhumanities.org/Connections



*Encouraging and Developing the
Voices of English Learners*

Edited by Terry Farish and Carolyn Hutton



NEW HAMPSHIRE
humanities

117 Pleasant Street
Concord, New Hampshire
www.nhhumanities.org

Tell Me More is created by ESL teachers, New Hampshire Humanities
Connections facilitators, writers, and poets to support the
Year of New Voices, a *Connections* reading and writing program.



“Writing saved my life.”

– Juan Felipe Herrera,
21st U.S. Poet Laureate who launched
New Hampshire Humanities’ *Year of New Voices*, 2018

Cover and interior collage art by Linda Graham
www.lindagraham.org

Designed by Rebecca Kinhan

Contents

Introduction to “Tell Me More”	Terry Farish.....	6
1,000 Ways to See: Editing through Conversation	Carolyn Hutton.....	8
Creating Writing Prompts Through Art	Johanna Young.....	10
Form Opens Up What is Possible	Mimi White.....	12
Model and Nurture	Megan Donnelly.....	14
Peer Editing and the Character Sketch: An Exercise in Reading and Writing	Carolyn Hutton.....	16
Writing a Present Moment Experience	Terry Farish.....	18
The Gift of Story: Kneel Down Bread	Louise Wroblewski.....	20
Childhood Memory of Home	Kara Mollano & Alice Gomes.....	22
Collage	Linda Graham.....	24
Where Are You From?	Katherine Towler.....	28
Writing Based on the Reading of <i>The Breadwinner</i> by Deborah Ellis	Susan Bartlett.....	29
Interview	Maria Cristina Rojas.....	32
Connecting Grammar Practice with Stories	Megan Donnelly.....	34
Shihab Means Shooting Star: Prompts from Poetry by Naomi Shihab Nye	Maren Tirabassi.....	36
A Story for a Child	Terry Farish.....	38
On Public Speaking	William Badgley.....	42
Slow Reading	Alice Fogel.....	44
What About Grammar?	Carolyn Hutton.....	47
Bibliography.....		50
Contributors.....		52

Introduction: Tell Me More

Chris Powers, former director of Manchester Adult Learning Center and state mentor for ESOL educators, was the first person I talked to about the idea to bring more writing into *Connections* programs. In culminating events, I told her, after a *Connections* series is over, English learners alongside professional writers will present public readings in New Hampshire communities and we'll call this the *Year of New Voices*. Chris and I had met at Dunkin' Donuts and she was on her way to the gym and I was trying to lay out the vision for writing to understand our lives and understand one another. And she said, simply, This will work. Writing, she said, builds skills in critical thinking, reading comprehension, communication, listening, interpretation of ideas, working on a team, oral presentation. Writing supports adult learners in life and work.

With that clarity, Carolyn Hutton and I began this small book.

Tell Me More, from the start, has been a collaboration among teachers, New Hampshire Humanities *Connections* facilitators, and professional writers. It will continue to invite ongoing collaboration with you online.

The idea behind *Tell Me More* is that it could be a friend to the writing process for teachers, facilitators, and students. It offers prompts, our stories of writing with students, our poems, reflections on how we write and why we write, and a philosophy – that our work is to support students to discover ways to enter their stories, and ways to communicate those stories clearly. Please see Carolyn's essay in this handbook, “What About Grammar?”

The name *New Voices* has two meanings. One is that English learners are our new neighbors in New Hampshire, so in that way students are the new voices in our communities. Also, we are working with new bilingual writers who are bringing the experience of two cultures together as they write in English. Poet Ewa Chrusciel says, “We [bilinguals] write in the third language, a space that shuffles between two different conceptualizations of the world.”

Linguists such as Lera Boroditsky are also showing us how language shapes our thinking. (See bibliography.) Another opportunity in working with English learners is to listen for the third language in students' writing. What can we learn about one another's cultures from bilingual writers?

My own work as a writer shapes my life, including my work with English learners. I love writing more than all human things. I know that the discovery of one's own voice and the craft of using it empowers us to communicate with one another. From a hope to hear new voices and a language that connects us, *Tell Me More* arises.

- Terry Farish



1,000 Ways to See: Editing Through Conversation

Carolyn Hutton

Some time ago a student shared this story (opposite page) about a car accident on a dark road in China. I'd asked him to write about an event that changed his life.

Most of us can think of momentous, life-changing events – a death, a wedding, a divorce, a victory. We want to tell the whole story from beginning to end. Yet, there are so many pieces to the story that we – and our readers – can get lost in the telling. This student's original story began with coming home from a party, the terrible crash in the darkness before the moon rose, the ride on the ambulance, and the hospital visit where family were reunited and unharmed. By the end, we readers were glad the family was okay, but we didn't have any deep feeling about the story one way or another.

We talked about this story. The value of a one-on-one conversation is not so much that a teacher tells a student what is “wrong” or how to “fix” his story, but that the teacher gets to hear more of the story. It is literally a time to say “Tell me more.”

I asked this student what part of the whole story he remembered most. He told me it was the moment when he was lying on the highway looking up at the moon. We talked about how that memory was maybe the heart of his story. A story does not have to include every detail—it does not even need to tell us what will happen in the end.

This writing strategy can be a revelation to students who want to tell the whole truth. Yet, the “truth” just might be contained in all the little moments that make up the bigger story.

To guide students in telling the story of a moment, I often turn to Sue Wheeler and Rebecca Rule, writers of *True Stories: Guides for Writing from your Life*. In what she calls “time-stretch” exercises, Wheeler advises students to go back in time to one moment and remember the sensory details. What did they see? Hear? Smell?

Taste? Touch? What were they thinking about? Who else was there?

I ask students to underline a line or two from their story where there was a strong memory or emotion. Then they go back in time to write, but they use the present and present continuous verb tense, such as “I am lying on the road. There is no sound.” This isn't just grammar practice; it is surprising how powerful verb tense is. The present tense can take you back in unexpected ways.

The new story is often very different from the old one. I love the word revision because it literally means seeing again. My Chinese students tell me there is a saying in China that there are a thousand ways to look at a story. That's a lot of revising, but this approach to changing a story is a shift from the tiresome act of “fixing” what's wrong to imagining the possibility of discovery.

Untitled

Yang Ye

Nobody is talking.
Nobody is moving.

I'm not meaning that all the people are sleeping.

They can't do anything.

Maybe only the moon sees all the accident happen.

It had been a beautiful day. A family include 3 people driving a car in highway. The moon is not circle enough but light enough. However, even though the moon is so light, it still can't work as sun, it can't light the ground, and can't tell the family a car without any light is in front of them.

Nothing happen? No, I just can't feel anything was happened. After a huge sound which mix with the glass break and metal crash. The mind is blank as the voice, the soul is fleeing because of fear.

I wanna ask help, but I can't. I can't speak! The fear like fog surround me, and my voice liked a trapped beast can't escape. I stretch out my hands looks like want to hold or search something. Is I want take my voice back? I'm not sure, but I withdraw my hands. I have to check my hurt first. Fortunately, I'm good. Whereas, I can't move. I can only stay here and wait for help.

The moon is beautiful but cold. The moon is not light enough, but still can through the broken window and shine in my eyes.

So quiet.

Creating Writing Prompts Through Art

Johanna Young

Although our class is not a family literacy class, it sometimes becomes one, particularly in the summer months when children sometimes accompany their parents or grandparents to class.

This summer some of the children have enjoyed adding color to coloring pages I've made. I used one as a writing prompt for one of my beginning level ESOL classes. Most of the students can't read and write in their own languages so we added words and sentences together. I helped to fill in gaps.

Pictured is the coloring page and the beginning of a story. It could also be used as a further writing prompt for a higher-level class.



There once was a big family who lived in a small pink house on the side of a high mountain. Down the mountainside a parrot-green river flowed past the red forest. They were not rich. They were both happy and sad. The mountains were like the mountains of Sudan on a hot summer day...

Form Opens Up What Is Possible

Mimi White

I wrote this poem for my granddaughter Dory on the occasion of her Bat Matzvah, a ceremony in Judaism that marks the passage of a young girl or boy (Bar Mitzvah) into becoming a young adult.

Dory studied Hebrew, learned chanting, and worked on preparing her “haftarah” reading. I met several roadblocks as I attempted to write her words of wisdom. She appeared to be struggling with leaving girlhood behind and entering into the world at large as a more grown-up person. Draft after draft I focused on that struggle. Then I came upon Jane Hirshfield’s poem, “A Blessing for Wedding” and I found the form to contain my words. This is a litany or list poem. The repetition allowed me to begin each line anew. I focused on the season in which this celebration took place. As each line came, I could feel the poem moving into the realm of possibility. What could be new, beautiful and could celebrate Dory’s entering into a new world? When I heard the words talking back to me, I knew I had a poem in my hands. I, too, was moving into a new world. I was at the threshold of what could be possible. I had recently lost my husband, Dory’s grandfather. I shared Dory’s fears of moving on, out of safety, into my own life.

I offer the poem for anyone who is leaving safety or certainty behind and stepping into the unknown—so much is possible when we take that first step.

Use my poem or Jane Hirshfield’s poem as a model and start writing your own list poem. Anything is possible.

On This Day

Mimi White

Today when buds await the fury of bees

Today when deer walk across the field to enter your dream

Today when the owl lifts from its hidden perch, his talons poised, curved, alert

Today when light and heat pry open bundled fists of blossoms

Today when seas rise, swell upon swell

Today when waves break open on the rocks in wild splendor

Today when the earth viewed from space looks small, blue, swirled in white

when drawn boundaries are lost

Today when daffodils push through the cold dirt into the snowy air because

it is time

Today, on this day, when you are surrounded by the love of your family and friends

On this day when you are poised on the edge of becoming

and the hour of abundance is upon you

may you feel peace, may you know happiness

May the light of this season carry you across the threshold into all

that is imaginable and real and with every footstep

may the song of who you are accompany you and bring you joy

after Jane Hirshfield’s “A Blessing for Wedding”



Model and Nurture

Megan Donnelly

“How to Paint a Donkey” by poet Naomi Shihab Nye is a powerful reminder of the damage a teacher can unwittingly inflict on a student. Writing is a creative act, and it’s a challenge, particularly in another language. Students must simultaneously formulate what they want to say and then use correct word order, phrasing, spelling, and punctuation to record it. For these reasons:

Always write with your students.

My teaching partner Elaine and I make a little show out of the process. I announce what the writing task is and then tell Elaine she has to write too. She grumbles aloud, “Ah, come on!” The students laugh at our interplay, but it helps them feel more at ease.

Model the writing process.

When we write, the students see Elaine and me cross things out as we write, pause to think, erase and add words. Sometimes we don’t know what we want to say until we write.

Share writing in class.

We do this in partners.

Don’t overcorrect.

Elaine and I fix or circle errors that impact overall understanding. Errors that occur across student writing can be addressed in a mini-lesson. We also meet individually with students to go over their writing.

Encourage your students.

We write a positive comment at the end of each student’s entry.

**She said the head was too large,
the hooves too small.**

**I could clean my paintbrush
but I couldn’t get rid of that voice.**

**While they watched,
I crumpled him,**

**let his blue body
stain my hand.**

**I cried when he hit the can.
She smiled. I could try again....**

from “How to Paint a Donkey”
by Naomi Shihab Nye

[Full text](#)



Peer Editing & the Character Sketch: An Exercise in Reading and Editing

Carolyn Hutton

Many years ago, I sat with a group of English majors in a small room at UNC-Chapel Hill listening to writer Annie Dillard speak about her work. “If you never write another word in your life,” she said, “read, read, read, read.” I never forgot that moment.

Good reading inspires good writing; readers absorb the rhythms and sounds of language. Good reading inspires good editing, too. If we take time to become deliberately mindful of what makes good writing good, we have insight to offer each other.

For this exercise:

1. Students bring a previous writing prompt describing someone important to them—maybe no more than a page. (If you have only one class period with the students, you can also invite students to draft the character sketch in this class.)
2. The class reads/listens to a character sketch by Annie Dillard about her childhood friend Judy Schoyer. (Using the same process, you can also read a striking character sketch from one of your *Connections* books.)
3. We write/discuss the following questions:
 - a. What do you understand about this girl’s appearance? (2 or 3 things)
 - b. What do you understand about her personality? How do you know this?

At this point, students read their own character sketches. They follow a format like this:

4. Now read a classmate’s character sketch and ask the same questions.
 - a. What can you say about this character’s appearance?

- b. What can you say about this character’s personality? How do you know this?
 - c. Underline your favorite sentence in this character sketch. Why do you like this? (Write one or two sentences.)
In your opinion, what are two things this writer could maybe do to make this character more real to the reader?
5. Using your classmate’s writing as your ONLY guide, draw a picture of his character. Use as many details from the writing as possible!
 6. Editors share their insights (and drawing!) with the writer.

“My friend Judy Schoyer was a thin, messy, shy girl whose thick blond curls lapped over her glasses. Her cheeks, chin, nose, and blue eyes were round; the lenses and frames of her glasses were round, and so were her heavy curls. Her long spine was supple; her legs were long and thin so her knee socks fell down. She did not care if her knee socks fell down. When I first knew her, as my classmate at the Ellis School, she sometimes forgot to comb her hair. She was so shy she tended not to move her head, but only let her eyes rove about. If my mother addressed her, or a teacher, she held her long-legged posture lightly, alert, like a fawn ready to bolt but hoping its camouflage will work a little longer.”

from *An American Childhood* by Annie Dillard



Writing a Present Moment Experience

Terry Farish

Outside our classroom window was a small garden. We needed a break from the classroom one June evening and we went to the garden to see what had bloomed. I offered a simple writing prompt to students before we climbed the stone path that led to tucked-away flowering trees and tiny pond. I asked students to write what they saw. It could be a list. Maybe notice color, scent, sounds, objects, animals. We were mostly gathering words, raw material for a piece of writing. I gathered words, too, and when we came back to our room, we all wrote from the words we had gathered. Here is one that is edited from the first free write.

The Beautiful Garden

Tamara Yailoyan

The garden is decorated like a young woman who is waiting for her lover.
Beautiful flowers, green dress,
fresh smells. Circling overhead
the bird song reminds you very much
of a young time and you think you are in love
again.

I Tamara Yailoyan was born and lived in Armenia..
I am a lawyer.
I married and immigrated to America and live in New Hampshire.
I hope America will be my home.



The Gift of Story: Kneel Down Bread

Louise Wrobleski

In 2015, I spent five weeks as a guest teacher at a Navajo middle school in Page, Arizona, encouraging young Navajo students to write their stories. One of the first to greet me at the school was a woman who had lived her entire life here. "Will you read my writing and help me?" she asked. "I have been writing my stories of growing up here."

She placed a stack of typed-out pages in my hands. I asked her to read aloud a part she felt was well written, most important to her, or a place where she felt stuck. She chose a section about making kneel-down bread with her grandmother.

"Martha, I don't know what kneel-down bread is. Tell me more."

"You don't know what it is? I'll take you to a market to see how it is done."

A field trip to a Navajo market was planned where the making of bread was demonstrated. We joked that I would ask her to "Tell me more" so she would take me to other places in her homeland.

I listened and watched her face. A smile accompanied a memory of picking pinyon nuts as a child; a frown pointed to a sadder memory of boarding school. I read her expressions: smiles, frowns, furrowed brows, laughs, sighs. A change of expression told me this was something she was still thinking about but had not written down.

She initially wrote for her daughter but realized these words enabled her to better understand her own history as well as to

document Navajo life in the 40s, 50s, and 60s. They helped develop her thinking, work out anger, fear, surprise, disappointments; they helped her remember.

Martha talked about watching her grandmother grind the corn to make the bread. She said, "But no one does that anymore. No one kneels down to make it and bake it on the fire. It's baked in ovens now."



Martha, memoirist; Louise Wrobleski, teacher; and Susan, art teacher at Page Middle School where Louise taught writing to the children. They are in Antelope Canyon.

Childhood Memories at Home

Kara Mollano and Alice Gomes

One of our *Connections* book selections for our beginning ESOL class - *When I Was Young in the Mountains* by Cynthia Rylant - really resonated with students and prompted discussions of childhood memories at home with family, friends and pets. (What makes a house a home?) Building on the students' excitement, we introduced a gapped poem activity inspired by the book and an illustration template for students to complete as a final project. All of our students wrote poems and some of the more advanced students wrote narratives of a particular childhood moment. To conclude the program, we organized a "Celebration of Learning," during which students shared their poems with each other and community members.

When students make connections between what they are reading and their lives, they are challenged, then, to find the words to explain their thoughts and feelings about their own experiences. These are great language learning moments and happen throughout *Connections*.



From *When I Was Young in the Mountains* by Cynthia Rylant, illustration by Diane Goode

Here are examples in students' own words:

When I Was Young in Argentina

Gabi

When I was young in the city, I liked to swim in the pool.
When I was young in the city, I ate gnocchi.
When I was young in the city, I played with my friends.
When I was young in the city, I went to the central square.
When I was young in the city, my home was made of concrete.
When I was young in the city, I had a dog.
When I was young in the city, I visited my grandparents.
When I was young in the city, I went to birthday parties.
When I was young in the city, I ate hot dogs with my brothers.
When I was young in the city, I was a happy girl.

When I was 11 years old, I liked to go in the bush with my friends to collect firewood.
When we went we took ropes and stems of banana plants for riding on the hills.
We played a lot and we felt happy. One time, I forgot to go home...."

from "On My Back" by Jamal

Collage

Linda Graham

I have used collage in my artwork as a means to reach levels of understanding that words do not touch, for me anyway. It has helped me recognize and articulate emotions that I might otherwise not acknowledge. Discoveries made from creating a collage can lead to writing.

My process goes like this: I use pieces of mat board, thick card stock, Bristol board, or other paper that will support glue without wrinkling up. I leaf through magazines and rip out pictures that give me pause. I then spend some time cutting out what appealed to me and arranging the pieces to make a composition. I may set a composition and leave it to return to the next day. This is not a defined task but open to the artist's feelings. I use rubber cement to put the pieces down because it allows me a bit of room for error as I may change my mind.

Collage is a non-threatening art form. There are many ways to use it.

- You can focus on a specific subject such as the theme of a book and use magazines that relate. I encouraged a group of students to make their dream house from a big collection of all sorts of home magazines. The results were a great impression of what they valued. For instance, a woman from Kenya, used a sculptural white sofa and staircase with chickens inside the house. A man used a very tight traditional one-story home viewed from the outside, with the garden to one side.

- Another group of students explored seed catalogues to create gardens. They learned words and, also, where to get some of the seeds for plants they wanted to grow. It was a fascinating discussion.

- Collage can also be just colors using tissue paper and diluted white glue. This can be an exploration of color and design. I recently did a workshop where we used masks to collage, adding color pencils, watercolor and crayon resist.



Linda Graham

- You can experiment with painting papers or stamping or printing and cut them. Or you can use some of the multitude of papers we have every day - newspaper, magazines, advertising, wrapping paper.

- Students can create a collage of cut out letters or phrases, or words from magazines- to be glued to another sheet. Poetry comes from this exercise.

- I have used articles from the newspaper. I ask the students not to read but just underline or highlight (with a highlighter I have given them) words that pop out. Just whatever the eye rests on. They create the collage. This also yields poetry and even surprising stories.

Collage has been a rich art form for me. I often use it to focus on a feeling I have that I am not expressing. For instance, I was consumed by a difficult incident with a brother. What was disturbing me? And what was my underlying feeling for him? As I cut pictures and placed them on the board, I could see the relationship we had always shared. The solid ground under some challenging situations resolved in my mind.

If asked to make their dream home, students will have contents or a style we can discuss or write from. If asked to describe a feeling, students will have a representation filled with images to discuss or to write from. Teachers and facilitators can draw on their own background in their various fields, listen to the group to draw out their interests, and use collage to help students make discoveries.

This poem was written by a student responding to Linda's collage prompt in which students clipped single words, phrases and pictures from articles about immigration. Linda's full prompt will be in the "Creativity-based Curriculum Guidebook on Immigration." (See FIESTA in our bibliography.) The student begins by creating the collage on paper stock, first arranging clipped words, phrases, and pictures, then mounting them with rubber cement. The very last step is a five-minute free write using selected words from the collage to incorporate into a poem.

a found poem

Pilar

It was an inseparable community
traveling to a new country
bringing their cultural heritage
and learning a new language.

From Spain they travel
with friends and family
leaving their nation home.
Being an immigrant
now, they are by themselves

using English as a key.
Now they have rights and they can
have the protections granted.
English helped them to achieve
what they really wanted.
be happy!

Pilar: I am a graduate in Business Administration but with an artistic heart, Peruvian born in Lima now based in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. If you have this book in your hands: "Visualize the life that you want for you and make it happen."

Where Are You From?

Katherine Towler

This is a writing exercise I have done with students of all ages, from high school students to senior citizens.

Begin by going back to the earliest place you can remember living, the first house or apartment or situation in your childhood. Or you can choose a special place in your childhood, like the home of a grandparent. Close your eyes and walk through the rooms of this place. Try to recall as many specifics as you can. Now open your eyes and draw a floor plan of the place where you lived or the place you are remembering. This can be difficult if you are going back many years. Do the best you can to recreate the layout. Once you have completed your drawing, write about a specific memory or memories that came back to you as you did this exercise.

Writing Based on the Reading of *The Breadwinner*

Susan Bartlett

Sometimes our best ideas come midstream and we need to jettison the writing exercise we crafted so carefully while preparing for our *Connections* class. So it was for me this past spring while facilitating a book discussion series for Susan Flanagan's all-women advanced ESOL class in Nashua. We read Deborah Ellis's *The Breadwinner*. In this young adult novel, Parvana dresses as a boy so that she can work to support her family. The story is set during the early days of Taliban control in Afghanistan and women and girls are confined to their darkened houses. The writing exercise would hopefully result in a group poem based on a central theme of the book: women's struggle for survival in a society catering exclusively to men.

I often bring poems, songs, and articles related to our topics to class. These short pieces can break up the main reading, add different perspectives, and serve as models for writing. We began our first meeting by reading aloud this excerpt from 13th century Muslim poet, Rumi:

Woman is a Ray of God.
She is not that Earthly Beloved:
She is Creative, not Created.

The text suggests a reverent view of women, a stark contrast to Taliban misogyny. Not necessarily, "Gul," a Muslim student from Turkey warned us. "These English translations of Rumi are Western interpretations," she told us. "They are modern. And leave out many of his thoughts about God. And most Muslims do not think that the Taliban is even Islam." Then followed a lively discussion about women's relative freedom and rights in the different

countries represented by this class: Brazil, China, Mexico, Turkey and Ukraine.

Soon it became clear that these students had strong individual ideas and opinions with many questions to discuss during our reading of the book. For example: Are men and women better suited to certain kinds of work? Are there innate qualities each gender possesses? Or are we socialized to behave in a gendered way? How did dressing like a boy change Parvana? After being a “boy,” could she go back to being a “girl?” How does one act in a crisis when it is impossible to see the whole picture? It started to seem that the writing exercise should evolve from the students’ own lines of inquiry.

While collaborative poetry can be just the right exercise for some groups, others, like this class, need individual time to reflect and write. Finally, the perfect exercise, an unsolved mystery we all questioned presented itself towards the end of the book. A minor character in *The Breadwinner* is a hidden woman who drops gifts from her shuttered window down onto Parvana’s blanket in the marketplace. The author never tells us what happens to this woman, or what her motives could be. We took 20 minutes to write down our own versions of what might be this woman’s story. The results were varied and astonishing.

Here are some short examples:

The woman is “trapped in her house and is begging for help from Parvana,” one student wrote. And another: “She is trying to comfort this girl dressed as a boy that she knew had just lost her father to a Taliban prison.” And, this could be her act of defiance, deadly dangerous in this time of suspicion and punishment.

This last session ended with students proud of their mini stories and eager to read Ellis’s sequels, *Parvana’s Journey* and *Mud City*.

On reading Rumi

“These English translations of Rumi are Western interpretations. They are modern. And leave out many of his thoughts about God.”

“Gul,” a Muslim student from Turkey



Pillow made by women in Afghanistan in an embroidery and literacy [Rubia](#) workshop.

Interview

Maria Cristina Rojas

Terry Farish: Some bilingual speakers speak about creating something new when they add a second language to their native language.

Maria Cristina Rojas: In some ways, yes! Actually, we have words that you don't have in English vocabulary to describe things or actions, or vice versa. There are words in English that are not in Spanish.

T: What are some words in Spanish that aren't in English and vice versa?

M: Here is a video that people are already doing in order to describe the situation. Joanna Rants ["Spanish Words that Don't Exist in English"](#)

T: Thank you! From Joanna Rants' YouTube link I found out that in Swahili, Spanish and Greek, the term "fingers of the feet" is used whereas in English they are "toes." Do you think in both languages when you write?

M: I think in English when I write. But what happens is we expand our vocabulary with a new language and with this we increase cognition.

T: I know you also teach Spanish in New Hampshire.

M: Yes. Students [who speak a second language] perceive life differently. That is one of my reasons for teaching Spanish to American students. I wanted to learn more about it.

T: In *Connections* programs you invite students to write poems. How do you do this?

M: My experience with ESL groups is that you have to be very gentle and positive at the same time. Learning any language for adults is very difficult. Writing a poem with ESL adult students can help to improve confidence. First, pencil and paper. Then, offer something that inspires students' imaginations. Choose a theme obviously for the inspiration. Verses have to come from the heart. All the process is going step by step without pressure. You can surprise yourself to have symmetrical verses that could rhyme between verses, usually having the same number of syllables within them. Thus it is possible to achieve perfect symmetry that you will love.

Connecting Grammar Practice with Stories

Megan Donnelly

The topic of sharing an experience about getting in trouble yields funny stories that are often universal—accidentally starting a fire, stealing something, lying, breaking a window, taking the car out without permission, or being rude to a parent or relative. The narratives reveal a lot about a student’s culture and value systems, and are easy for students to share aloud.

This writing activity comes from Keith Folse’s book *Top 20: Great Grammar for Great Writing*. It is designed to help students write complex sentences, ones with a dependent and an independent clause. I have used this exercise in both my intermediate English language class and at the community college level.

It builds students’ confidence in their writing skills because they begin to develop more complex ideas in writing by crafting sentences that use subordinating conjunctions (during, while, after, as soon as, etc.) and practice using the simple past and past progressive verb tenses.

Here’s the exercise:

Write a paragraph or short essay about something that you did as a child that you were punished for or something that you were praised for. (Only one of the many students who’ve done this exercise chose the latter). Include some of the following information.

- What you did
- Whom you were with and how it happened
- Why you did it
- How you got caught or someone found out
- What kind of punishment or praise you received
- If you ever did it again

Use at least five adverb clauses or adverb phrases in your writing. Exchange your writing with a partner. Review your partner’s paragraph, underlining all the adverb clauses or adverb phrases and checking for their correct use.

Shihab Means Shooting Star: Prompts from poetry by Naomi Shihab Nye

Maren Tirabassi

Naomi Shihab Nye is one of the most accessible poets for any age for reading and discussion and also for writing poetry. A series of questions helps. With only one prompt, there can be competition, comparisons. With many – someone will be inspired by one question to write a poem, someone by another, someone by a third. Still others will answer every question, like a class assignment, and be surprised a poem has grown under their hands.

Question prompts from Shahib Nye's hospitality poem "Red Brocade" (poem opposite page)

What do you say to a stranger?

What do you not say to a stranger? (powerful prompt for new Americans who can experience unkind words)

What do you feed a visitor

What do you give a visitor?

What do you teach a child about strangers?

What makes you busy? (read full poem at link below)

What makes you set your busyness down?

Some other particularly spacious poems of hers:

Because of Libraries we can Say Such Things

So Much Happiness—For Michael

Famous

Kindness

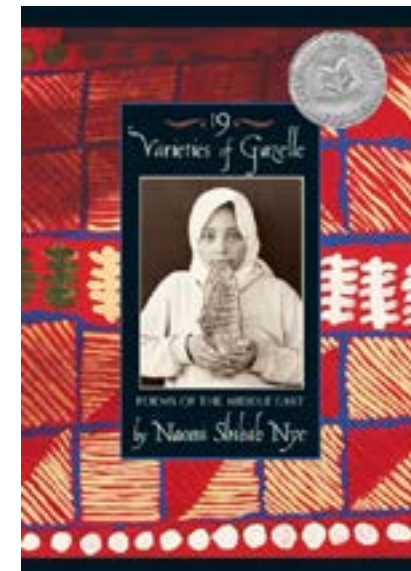
The Yellow Glove (a prose poem)

My Uncle's Favorite Coffee Shop

**The Arabs used to say,
When a stranger appears at your door,
feed him for three days
before asking who he is,
where he's come from,
where he's headed.
That way, he'll have strength
enough to answer.
Or, by then you'll be
such good friends
you don't care.**

from "Red Brocade" by Naomi Shihab Nye

[Full text](#)



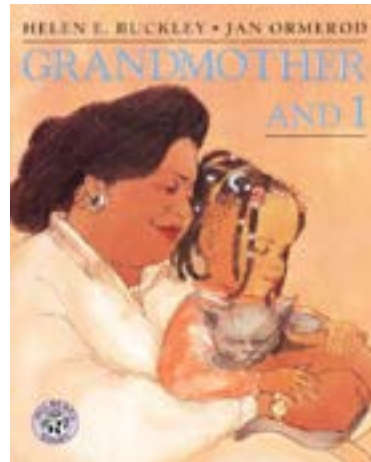
A Story for a Child

Terry Farish

Sometimes thinking of someone to tell a story to helps to find a way to tell it. In writing for a child, the writer might want to pass down a memory to a son or daughter or grandchild. That might lead the writer to imagine certain words or a rhythm that would be fun for the child and the teller. Examples from books used in this prompt are from *Grandmother and I* by Helen Buckley (When my own daughter was little we read this book over and over!) and *Wild Berries* by Julie Flett.

Do a slow reading of *Grandmother and I*. Invite students to read the refrain chorally. Enjoy the language like it's a song. Ask questions to explore the emotion readers feel and language the writer used that created that emotion.

Here is a suggested way to invite students to imagine: Think of a young child in your life, a son or daughter, a niece or a nephew, a grandchild. Doing this, you will also remember yourself as a child. You might stay with yourself as a young child. Imagine seeing the world through this child's eyes. Imagine hearing the world with this child's ears.



Remember the refrain you read from *Grandmother and I*.

*Grandmother and I
are sitting in the big chair rocking.
We rock back and forth, and back and forth.
And Grandmother hums little tunes.
And her shoes make a soft sound on the floor.*

This refrain is repeated four times.

Now, from your young child's point of view, ask, Who is a person very important to me? Do a quick free write about this person, details of what a child might see or hear. For example, here are some of mine about my grandfather:

My grandfather is bald. His bald head has little bristles.

He grew gladiolas and rhubarb.

We ate pie for breakfast.

My mouth puckers eating Grandpa's rhubarb.

He had a glider swing under the white birch tree.

From your free write of details about the beloved character who you've described, create a refrain that could be fun to repeat. In doing the free write, I remembered my grandfather's bristly bald head for the first time since I was a child. I think writing makes you remember. I played with these ideas to make a refrain for a story:

Grandpa and I eat rhubarb pie

out on the glider swing.

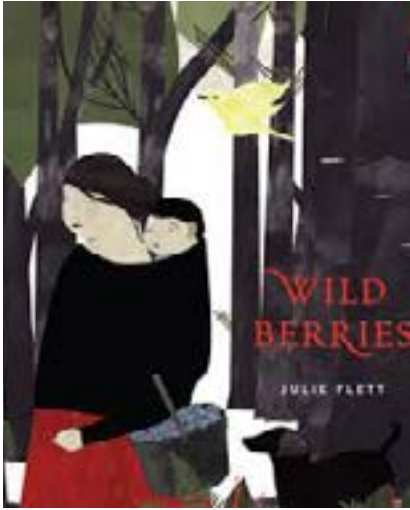
My grandpa's head shines like a light.

My grandpa's the sun and the moon.

If you like, you can build a story with the refrain as your foundation. Imagine three activities the child could do with their beloved character. Now, combine the three moments or activities with the refrains placed before each activity so that the refrain is repeated four times.

You'll see that *Grandmother and I* ends by repeating the last line of the refrain:

make
soft
sounds
on
the
floor.



Variation

Wild Berries by Julie Flett builds with each step of a berry-picking adventure of grandmother and grandson. A difference is that a key word on each page is in both English and the author's native language, Cree, and this becomes the repetition the child can count on. *Wild Berries* offers a model if you'd like to include words from your first language in your story for a child.

*They pick the plumpest berries they can find and
drop them into their
buckets
ofaskikowawa.
Tup, tup.*

from *Wild Berries* in *English and Cree* by Julie Flett

Notice in particular the addition of the gentle sound of berries dropped in the bucket. You could tell a story of your own, building with the details of small actions to complete a task of your beloved character and child.



Linda Graham

On Public Speaking

William Badgley

Although we may think of *Connections* as a reading and writing program, a *Connections* classroom is also a venue for public speaking. Reading aloud occurs there. Telling one's related personal stories occurs there. Giving opinions about issues raised in the *Connections* text occurs there. Thus, the four sessions of the typical *Connections* program are an ideal place to think about the practical aspects of speaking aloud to a group. These sessions are a slightly more intimate place to practice skills that are needed in the larger community-reading venue.

It's great to give students a voice and to help them see that we all have important contributions to make to the human story and dialogue. A written voice is one thing. A spoken voice entails additional skills to successfully communicate. There's nothing mystical about it. Here is a list of skills to practice:

1. Enunciation/Pronunciation – this is a crucial first step if an audience is to understand you.
2. Speed – Speaking too fast can make it difficult for others to understand you.
3. Volume – Be sufficiently loud, and look up so that your voice projects.
4. Eye contact – Perhaps this is not encouraged in your home country.
5. Pausing – When reading, pause appropriately at points of punctuation.
6. Speaking with feeling – Your message and ideas matter; let your listeners feel your emotions.
7. Reading with feeling – If reading a text (e.g., a short story), pay attention to emotion clues in the text. “She whispered fearfully” is different from “she shouted angrily.”
8. Listening – Hear what others have to say so your contribution fits within the context of preceding questions and ideas expressed.
9. Expressing opinions – In the U.S. you are encouraged to give your opinion. Try to clearly explain why you think something is true.

“Everybody has a voice, a story – all of that is good. But unless you are paying attention to the practical aspects of speaking publicly, you have no voice, because no one can hear you.”

William Badgley



Student Marianne Torio speaking at the Currier Museum of Art at New Hampshire Humanities' “Evening with Juan Felipe Herrera”

Slow Reading for the Sake of Small Moments Exploding

Alice B. Fogel

In the four-week class in Keene that I led through *Connections*, I wanted the participants to become more aware of the reader-writer-page triangle and the nearly-infinite number of elements that exist in the cosmos of literature. How much of what “happens” to me as I read depends on my own experience, today or ever; how much comes from the author’s intention and skill; and how much is right here on the page? I wanted them to experience the starry bridge they cross as they read, between an author’s purpose and a reader’s perceptions of self, culture, and meaning. To do this, it seemed important to focus longer on less, slowly exploring short passages and small moments, rather than rocketing through an entire book.

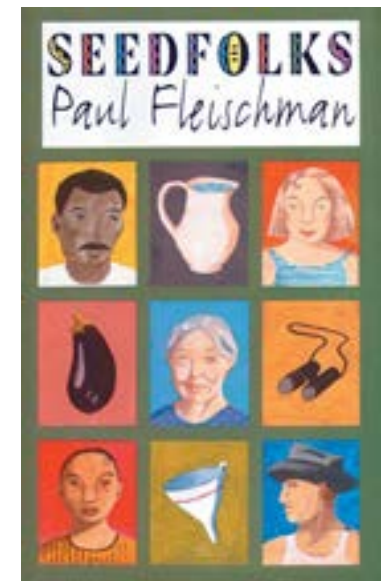
I kept this in mind when, on the first day, I introduced them to *Seedfolks*, Paul Fleischman’s novel about a mid-Western neighborhood of immigrants from all over who gradually come to connect with their new home, with each other, and with their own more full selves, through growing a garden in an empty city lot. We started by “reading” the book’s cover. What does it feel like in the hand? What idea do you get about the book from its description on the back, and what do the pictures on the front have to do with that, or with each other? We lingered over this kind of “guessing”—a process of wondering and predicting that is so integral to reading that many experienced readers don’t even realize they’re carrying on that kind of conversation with pages all the time. The reader’s game of guessing is also foundational to an author’s decisions about how, when, and whether to satisfy or thwart or otherwise manipulate a reader’s expectations. I think there’s a lot of fun and discovery to be had on each side of this creative process, if we slow down enough to appreciate it.

After reading the first chapter, which is all of 3½ pages long, we stopped again. Here are some questions we considered in discussion: What do we know or think we know about this book so far? How do we know it? What do we know about the character, Kim, who narrates this chapter? Some “information” is stated directly, some indirectly. What are some of these pieces? What do you think will happen next? These questions are about a writer’s choices and the structure a story’s ship is built upon.

In the first chapter, Kim plants seeds in the abandoned lot.

Why does she plant the seeds? How do we already understand that doing so makes sense to Kim even if it might not to someone else? How long do you think she’s been planning this? What does she sense is missing in her life, and how might she be imagining this will resolve that problem? What’s her story that isn’t told on the pages but that we might guess? What are your feelings reading about her? What is one of the most interesting or moving things Kim does or says? Why does it affect you the way it does? Is there a story in you that’s behind your response? These questions connect us on a personal, human level to another’s life. They show us that reading makes us feel. Such a personal response (how do I feel about what I’m reading, and what does that say about me?) may lead to a desire to share our own stories, to take them further, to ask our writing to tell us more.

After this kind of discussion, often readers are ready to write. To focus that writing, and keep the thread of the book (or poem, whatever we’ve been exploring) passing through us, I finally ask: What would you guess is the meaningful theme we’ll find in this book? What do you think the author’s purpose was in writing it?



I let them know that we'll keep asking these questions as we go, and we might change our minds as we learn more. But since we've been talking about seeds and gardens, now we already have our own theme—growth—to brainstorm ideas around. Other things that grow: children, hair, trees, wisdom, vocabulary, comfort levels, relationships, love, fear, bread. Having these words on the board will help the readers now become writers growing their own stories from small seeds.

Isn't it amazing that arrangements of words can tell a story that sails through time and distance and difference into our minds and hearts? For me, this wonderful magic is what matters foremost in instilling a love of language and story—not grammar and punctuation. Contemplating both authors' and characters' motivations, feelings, and actions, makes them real, makes them like us. These are some of the gifts of reading and writing: empathy, understanding, and responsibility, toward others and toward ourselves. I am a lover of literature who believes in the power of language and the power in ourselves when we are able to shine language's light on the world around us. Because I want to inspire this self-empowerment and passion in others, I take reading with them slowly, letting the small moments on the page explode into us, and letting the small moments in us explode onto the page.

What about Grammar?

Carolyn Hutton

If we seek to honor the authentic voice of students, what do we do about grammar mistakes? This is a dilemma facing teachers particularly of English learners. Do we pursue our idea of “perfect writing”? What, indeed, is perfect writing?

Here some philosophical and some practical thoughts about this:

First, the philosophical:

If our primary focus is to find what students lack and to teach toward making up for that lack, we are going to see the gaping errors in their writing. We are going to see that they need to build vocabulary; they need to construct standard-looking sentences.

Of course they do.

But suppose our focus is not on what they lack but on what they bring to this language. Suppose a turn of phrase is particularly Russian or Chinese or Spanish in its feel and structure. Suppose a metaphor or a word is a shining new addition to this language (one of my favorites: “transcribble”). I am not saying we dismiss grammar errors. I am saying, however, that the first thing we do in approaching the work of English learners is to take our pens and circle not what's wrong, but what's right. What is poetic? Funny? Intriguing? Where can you say to the writer “Tell me more?”

This approach to language learning can change our perception of our role as teachers. But maybe the more critical change is what happens with the self-perception of students. What happens to their sense of self confidence if they believe they bring something of value to this language, this place? ESL teacher and scholar Andrea Paquin explores how the Asset Based Community Development model used in city planning (Kretzman and McKnight) “might be translated to a classroom community of English learners. Focusing on student assets rather than deficits, she explains, translates to “instilling a sense of value in a person or a community.” In acknowledging that

student voices, however obscured, are worthy to be heard, we are taking steps to, as Andrea says, “give them power over their own experience.” (see bibliography) This power to choose what to say extends beyond the written page and into the other places of their lives– including the workplace.

...Which brings us to the practical:

If our approach is to first look at what is right with a piece of writing, now we have a goal. How do we as teachers and facilitators help our students to bring out their voices so the beautiful or important things they say are clearly understood?

The best way, though there are always time restraints, is to talk with the writer. When I have these quick conversations, both the writer and I have pencil and paper. In a conversation about a piece full of grammar mistakes I might say, “ I love your story about how you went fishing with your grandfather. Can you tell me about that day?”

Chances are, the writer will give some evocative detail that he did not write. I will say something like, “That’s beautiful. Why don’t you write that before you forget it.” Or, I might write in quotations what the student said. It’s fun to show a student that his words are important enough to quote.

Now the student has more authentic material to work with. At this point, I might turn to an inscrutable sentence and say, “I don’t understand this sentence. Can you tell me what you mean?” Having a conversation is an opportunity to teach a grammar point and bring home the point that awkward grammar can obscure the writer’s good voice.

But what grammar do you work on?

Sometimes when you look at student writing, no matter how noble your intentions are for finding the spark, there are just so many mistakes. I have found, though, there are three kinds of errors that seem to impede understanding most. These have to do with verbs, punctuation and word form.

Using verbs incorrectly (or missing verbs) is often why the sentence isn’t working. Having a conversation about verbs will tell you more about the story. Is the writer talking about something

that happened in the past? Is she trying to express that something happened in the past and is still true – i.e., “He is died.”

Not knowing where or how to break or join sentences is another common error, and yet there is likely a reason for the way a student wrote. If there is a comma splice, the student likely wants two ideas to go together. Once you know this, it is easier to talk about semi-colons and the like.

Finally, having the idea of a word but not its correct form is a common difficulty and it is no help that English has such a hodgepodge of suffixes and prefixes. If a student says “the moon is beauty and cold,” I might say “Beauty is a noun; beautiful is the adjective. Which one do you want to use?” It is important, I think, to ask questions like this because the student may indeed choose to say “The moon is beauty.” So it is... who am I to differ?

As teachers, writers and editors, all of us could go on and on about how to correct student writing. But if we focus on correcting – or better, guiding students to correct – these three elements, we will go a long way toward bringing the student’s voice into focus.

Finally I will say that students at every level have reasons for how they write. They are approaching language in a way that might be enlightening to know about and for that reason, “Tell me more” works as well for grammar as it does for story gathering.



Helpful resources to instruct and inspire

Boroditsky, Lera, (November 2017). Lera Boroditsky TEDWomen 2017: [How language shapes the way we think](#). Cognitive scientist Lera Boroditsky presents her research conducted among people of different cultures and describes their use of language and how it shapes their thinking.

Buckley, H. (2000). *Grandmother and I*. New York: HarperCollins. In this picture book about a grandmother and grandchild, the lullaby of rhythms and repetitions invites the English learner to imagine his own story, as shown by writer Terry Farish in this book.

Chrusciel, Ewa. (2018) "The Third Language," Engage: Connecting People with Ideas. Quarterly of New Hampshire Humanities. Ewa Chrusciel, a bilingual poet writing in both Polish and English, writes about her experience learning English and describes being bilingual as creating something new, a third language.

Ditchfield, Lynn. (2018). [Fiesta: Focus on Immigration Education and Stories Through the Arts](#). Lynn Ditchfield is creating a Guide for work within the field of arts and literacy development with "families and communities of emergent bilinguals." It is called "Creativity-based Curriculum Guidebook on Immigration." Her site includes a vast anthology of immigrant and refugee narratives, reading lists including poetry and children's literature, interviews with writers, and podcasts and films offering historical context on immigrants and refugees.

Ellis, D. (2001). *The Breadwinner*. Toronto: Groundwood Books. *The Breadwinner* is book one in four of the award-winning Breadwinner series about Pravana, a girl growing up in Afghanistan under the Taliban rule. Its themes of courage in the face of adversity provide rich material for class discussion and writing.

Flett, Julie (2014). *Wild Berries*. Vancouver, BC, Canada: Simply Read Books; Bilingual edition. This story in English and Cree about a grandmother and grandson and their ritual of picking berries offers permission to celebrate words from multiple languages.

Folse, K., Solomon, E.V., & Smith-Palinkas, B (2004). *Top 20: Great Grammar for Great Writing*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company. In this valuable teaching resource recommended by ESL teacher Megan Donnelly, grammar skills are reinforced through the context of writing.

Hausmann, Joanna. (Jan 7, 2016). Joanna Rants, ["Spanish Words That Don't Exist in English."](#) In this humorous and imaginative discussion, Joanna Hausmann explores how language reflects the nuances of culture. In Spanish, there are two different words for love.

Herrera, J. F. (2018). *Jabberwalking*. Somerville, Ma.: Candlewick. Here is a zany, joyous guide for writers that includes powerful, short examples of memoir in Herrera's "Jabber Notebook."

Hirshfield, J. (2010). ["A Blessing for Wedding."](#) Tricycle Magazine: Bhuddist Review, 2010. This blessing poem provides a model for Mimi White's poem "On This Day" printed in this book.

Newkirk, T. (2014). *Minds Made for Stories: How We Really Read and Write Informational and Persuasive Texts*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann. Teacher and scholar Tom Newkirk's philosophical text argues that narrative is not the extra writing you do when the important academic writing is done but the foundation for all writing. Narrative, he explains, is how humans think about the world.

Nye, N. S. (2005). *19 Varieties of Gazelle*. New York, NY: Greenwillow Books. Reprint edition. The voice of Naomi Shihab Nye is present in much of our teaching; her poetry is accessible and beautiful. She inspires us to write about what we know, and often she speaks for those who cannot speak.

Olshansky, B. *Picturing Writing: Fostering Literacy Through Art and Image-Making Within the Writing Process*. <http://www.picturingwriting.org/combined.html>. Beth Olshansky, based in Durham, offers workshops for teachers and children using collage and writing to tell their journey story.

Roberts-Raymond, K, Derosiers, D. Paquin, A & Hutton, C. *Moving Away From the Margins: Publication of International Voices as a Tool for Advocacy*. Linville, H. & Whiting, J. eds. *Advocacy in English Language Teaching And Learning*, NY: Routledge, 2019. (forthcoming). This journal contains a series of articles written by ESL teachers and scholars (including a team from UNH). Its premise is that in the face of increasing marginalization of immigrants and their learning, there is great need to advocate for both students and programs that help them. The cited article specifically addresses ways to empower students by giving them ownership of their writing, as referenced by ESL teacher and *Connections* facilitator Carolyn Hutton.

Rule, R. and Wheeler, S. (2000) *True Stories: Guides for Writing from Your Life*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann. Rule and Wheeler's text brilliantly combines inspiration with practice, guiding students to shape life experience into well-told stories.

Rylant, C. (1993). *When I was Young in the Mountains*, illus. by Diane Goode. New York: Puffin Books. Cynthia Rylant's gentle and rhythmic story tells of a childhood in the Appalachian mountains. Her story offers an approachable way into making personal connections to American history and culture; its structure also invites modeling for student work, as we see described by teachers Kara Mollano and Alice Gomes.

Contributors

Bill Badgley has master's degrees in English education and in adult education. His circuitous professional life most recently included a decade of teaching advanced ESL and Citizenship/Civics at the Dover Adult Learning Center – a position he calls the "best job in the world."

Susan Bartlett is a long-time facilitator and previous *Connections* Coordinator. She is currently working on completing a nonfiction book about the unnatural history of mercury contamination of the Sudbury River in Concord, Massachusetts and completing an MLA degree at Harvard. She has two grown children and lives with her husband on a farm with donkeys and lots of peaches and blueberries.

Megan Donnelly is a Certified ESOL Instructor and teaches beginning, intermediate and advanced English language learners at the Portsmouth Adult Education Program and communication skills for ESL students at Great Bay Community College. She writes, "I love my job because I enjoy teaching the English language, with its vast vocabulary and complicated grammar; in the process, I gain so much new information from and greater appreciation for my students."

Terry Farish coordinates New Hampshire Humanities' *Connections* program. She's also a children's book author. Her books include the YA novel in verse, *The Good Braider*, an American Library Association Outstanding Book for the College Bound and Lifelong Learner, the picture book *Luis Paints the World* and other books for children and young adults about contemporary immigrant families.

Alice Fogel is the NH poet laureate. A recipient of a National Endowment for the Arts Individual Artist Fellowship and other awards, her numerous books include *Strange Terrain*, on how to appreciate poetry even if you don't "get" it, and *Interval: Poems Based on Bach's Goldberg Variations*, which won the N. Shaffner Award for Music in Literature and the 2016 NH Literary Award in Poetry. She works one-on-one with learning disabled students at Landmark College in Putney, VT.

Carolyn Hutton is a *Connections* facilitator and adult education instructor and has taught in the ESL and Education departments at the University of New Hampshire. As a co-advisor of a student-run UNH publication called *International Voices* and an advocate for student-led learning, she collaborated on a chapter in TESOL journal *Advocacy in English Language Teaching and Learning*. (forthcoming).

Alice Gomes teaches ESOL at Second Start in Concord, NH. She has collaborated with Second Start teacher Kara Mollano for many years to participate in *Connections* programs and they plan their curriculum around their *Connections* series.

Linda Graham has an M.Ed. in early childhood education and is an artist/educator with experience teaching small children as well as working with their families through literacy programs. Her practice in the arts informs her work in the area of literacy. Linda has maintained an art practice all her life. Collage is one medium she has found especially expressive. She is also a *Connections* facilitator.

Kara Mollano teaches ESOL at Second Start in Concord. She has collaborated with Second Start teacher Alice Gomes for many years to participate in *Connections* programs and they plan their curriculum around their *Connections* series.

Maren Tirabassi loves swimming, quilting, beagles, and science fiction and fantasy conventions. She's published twenty books, is a retired United Church of Christ clergyperson, and her joy is being a *Connections* facilitator for more than ten years.

Katherine Towler is the author of the memoir *The Penny Poet of Portsmouth* and the novels *Snow Island*, *Evening Ferry*, and *Island Light*. She teaches in the Mountainview MFA Program in Writing at Southern New Hampshire University.

Mimi White is a poet living in Rye, New Hampshire. She is the author of four collections, *The World Disguised as This One*, a year in tanka, her most recent. She is currently working in another small form, the sestet, a six-line poem.

The Rev. Johanna Young, deacon, St. John's Episcopal Church, Walpole on Sundays; Lead ELL teacher, Ascentria Care Alliance Service for New Americans, Concord during the week. She is a poet, painter, naturalist, activist.

Louise Wroblewski was site director for the University of New Hampshire Literacy Institute where she listened to and enjoyed her students' stories for more than 20 years.

~ Notes ~



New Hampshire Humanities thanks the following for their generous support of the *Connections* adult literacy program:

Bank of America

Bar Harbor Bank and Trust

The Couch Family Foundation

Getz Charitable Trust, Citizens Bank, N.A., Trustee

Lincoln Financial Group

Merrimack Country Savings Bank Foundation

Ann deNicola Trust, Citizens Bank, N.A., Trustee

Ella F. Anderson Trust, BNY Mellon, N.A., Trustee



“tell me more”

NEW HAMPSHIRE HUMANITIES NEW VOICES PROJECT

www.nhhumanities.org/Connections



NEW HAMPSHIRE
humanities