



Developing the dramatic imagination...

# DEVELOPMENTS

## EDUCATIONAL SCOOP

### NEW JERSEY WRITERS PROJECT UPDATES

#### Coming Soon...(April '05)

##### *Spark Something*

A new New Jersey Writers Project residency brochure! Comprehensive and Provoking

#### New residency offerings

So much to choose from:

- 8-day & 12-day residencies
  - Thematic Basic residencies
- Partial grants available*

#### Fee increase in 2005-2006

Plan now, a Basic 4-day residency will increase to \$1450. *Grant reimbursements will increase as well to \$700.*

#### A Night at the Theatre

Site Coordinators and Host Teachers get a discount to all of Playwrights Theatre's mainstage productions. To join our mailing list call 973/514-1787 X 10 or visit [www.ptnj.org](http://www.ptnj.org) for more information about our season.

The New Jersey Writers Project is a cosponsored program of the New Jersey State Council on the Arts/Department of State. Additional funding has been provided from the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, the Victoria Foundation, the Prudential Foundation, the MCI Foundation, the Henry H. Kessler Foundation, Bank of America, Campbell's Soup Company, Atlantic Mutual Companies, AT&T Wireless, Pfizer, Inc., Wyeth and Novartis Pharmaceuticals.

### Choosing the Writers Project

This year, **The New Jersey Writers Project** will teach 140 residencies in poetry, prose, playwriting and other creative art forms in 109 schools across NJ and counting... as applications are still being accepted. Due to increased marketing efforts, 32 of those residencies are for schools new to the Writers Project.

Schools choose Playwrights Theatre's NJWP for many reasons including its effective and manageable structure, its exceptional teaching artists, and its generous grant awards made possible by its cosponsorship with the New Jersey State Council on the Arts/Department of State (NJSCA).

Keep in mind that choosing Playwrights Theatre's programs also means supporting:

- the employment of over 80 artists a year through its education programs and provides them with professional development, mentoring, administrative support and networking opportunities.
- an educational program whose

priority is to continue increasing resources to artists, schools and communities to build a more literate, connected and creative world.

- a first-class professional theatre company, (honored by NJSCA as a "Major Arts Institution"- an anchor institution contributing vitally to the quality of life in NJ), committed to the advocacy of the creative process in its artistic and educational endeavors.



### Projects That Rocked!

*Schools who qualify for a partial reimbursement grant as a part of their NJWP Basic Residency are required to complete a Final Project as a follow-up to the residency. Here are examples of some of the rewarding projects completed last year:*

At **Lincoln-Hubbard School** in Summit, the 5th graders who participated in a poetry residency

with Robert Carnevale presented their work to their 4th grade peers. The young poets had a chance to shine, and serve as role models to the younger students who will be participating in a poetry residency when they enter 5th grade.

During a Thematic Basic Playwriting Residency with Madelyn Kent, at **Montessori Children's Academy** in Morristown, students in grades 4-6 created fictional characters living in the era of the American Civil War. Students entertained and conveyed a wealth of information to their peers and families during a staged-reading of their monologues and scenes.

**Intervale ES** in Parsippany hosted 4 residencies. As a follow-up to playwriting with Judith Weiner and Greg Holtz, and prose writing with Meredith Sue Willis and Paula Davidoff, teachers led the students in creating a, "Kid's Literary Magazine." They also arranged for their special education students to do a public presentation of their writing at a local Barnes and Noble. And if that wasn't enough, the 2nd and 6th graders created a storybook together which was professionally reproduced with hard-covers and distributed. Amazing!



# A Gift of Writing...

A journey through a special NJWP residency taught by Anndee Hochman

"...it's not just for girls," was one **Cedar Hill Elementary School** boy's conclusion after a recent New Jersey Writers Project (NJWP) poetry residency. The residency teaching artist, author/journalist, Anndee Hochman, was thrilled by the response. "To me, it indicates a realization that feeling is not just for girls, that self-disclosure is not just for girls, that creative, playful language is not just for girls. It's for everyone."

## Making the connection

Cedar Hill ES was so moved by a prose residency with Anndee last year, they decided to bring her back to work with three grade levels. Working in poetry this time, Anndee again turned students inward to write from their own experience, "I wanted them to use what they already know and then stretch it farther - into the realm of the imaginative, the risk-taking, even the silly and the strange. That is the place where powerful, original writing lives." One 4th grader wrote the following poem for his father:

I give you the stripes of a Yankee flag.  
I give you a sweet blueberry from a fresh garden.  
The snowflakes that fall from the sky like mist on an ocean.  
I give you the comfy chair you have always wanted.  
The refreshing taste of a smoothie on a hot summer day.  
The water in the jacuzzi when you feel cold to warm you up.  
I give you the smell of freshly picked blueberries.  
I give you the sight of a mountain range blue with snow and ice.  
I give you a soft person singing to you on a bad day.  
The taste of a blue lollipop.  
The feeling of a warm blanket that just came from the iron.  
I give you the smell of tulips.  
P.S. You are the best dad in the world!!!

## Before the residency

To grow deep-rooted poetry like this, fertile seeds must be planted and carefully

cultivated. Prior to the first day, Anndee met with classroom teachers to discuss goals, exercises and activities, and how to use the residency to supplement curriculum. Specifics were important to Anndee as she crafted her residency plans with the goal of fostering students to feel like competent, comfortable writers.



Poetry is personal expression, which can be frightening for students. Anndee began sessions with activities designed to ease students into the writing process using visual art or music as a stimulus. This produced a comfortable

climate in which students could ask questions and put their emotions to work. As one teacher explained, "Anndee created a safe environment that enabled the students to take risks... (she) showed them that writing poetry is a process that delicately turns ideas and concepts into works of art."

## During the residency

Faced with the possibilities that their ideas could be potential poems, students eagerly engaged in sensory exercises, reflected on their lives, explored simile and metaphor, and saw common things in a new way. "One of the most successful exercises was a personification poem about a feeling, inspired by Naomi Shihab Nye's *Living with Mistakes*. After brainstorming a list of emotions on the board, we wrote a collaborative poem about one of them, imagining how that particular emotion would dress, behave, talk, eat, etc.," Anndee explains. Students composed descriptions such as: "The ocean sounds like glass breaking," "Anger feels like a broken valentine," "Jealousy wears a green

tuxedo," and "Sleep lives at the corner of Good and Night."

After exploring emotions, individuals wrote, and were encouraged to share their poetry in front of the class. Students often balk at the thought of presenting to their peers. They may think, how could anything I have to say be so important? These feelings are elevated when the work to be shared is so personal and heartfelt. Under Anndee's guidance, students—particularly those who struggle with such situations—shined in front of the class. A student described as "having self-esteem problems" found great pride in sharing work; special education students were eager to read aloud. The power of these moments wasn't lost on the parents and administrators visiting the classrooms, some of whom were moved to tears. PTO representative Jeanne Finn said, "Anndee has a beautiful way of stimulating the senses to create feeling within the poetry. Her creativity, calm nature and ability to involve and energize the students made for a dynamic and thought-provoking residency."

Beyond developing literary skills, Cedar Hill students established a strong sense of self and connection with classmates and teachers. "One of the most significant benefits of the week was that Anndee encouraged the students to find their own voice," explained one teacher. "By sharing her experiences, she inspired the students to reflect on their lives and tell about them. She connected the students to one another and built a community of writers." Discovering it was one student's birthday, Anndee led the class through an exercise that resulted in the following:

## The Gift of Green

We give you the gift of green:  
\$160,000 for your college account  
Green eggs and ham for breakfast every day  
An Army-green Corvette as fast as the wind  
An emerald library full of sea-green books  
Fresh-mown grass in Ireland  
A pound of chocolate-mint ice cream every night  
A jar of lucky four-leaf clovers  
Sour lime Skittles at the movies



And a lime slush-puppy  
A verde mansion in Mexico  
A forest-green birthday cake with eleven candles.

### After the residency

At the end of an NJWP program like this, schools complete a final project with writing generated during the artist's visit (also part of the requirements for grant reimbursement). This final project is a presentation by the student authors in or out of the school community. Some have given readings, created video presentations, mounted hallway displays, or published an anthology. Last year, Cedar Hill published one piece of writing from each student and each student received an anthology. This made such an impact on the school that they may do the same final project this year.

**Cedar Hill ES** is a special place and we thank them for hosting Anndee Hochman in three separate classes. As Anndee explained to us, "...it's the kind of residency we all fantasize about: enthusiastic teachers, responsive students, involved parents - and a true commitment of time, money and energy to bring creative writing to nearly half the student body over the course of five weeks."

## A Poetry Lesson...

### Descriptive Details/Imagery

Developed by Diane Lockward, NJWP Teaching Artist

*This activity works well with all age groups. Adjust the length of this exercise to best serve the needs of your students.*

#### 1. Warm-up Activity/Language of an Orange

- Hold up an orange and ask students to quickly write down the first three descriptive words that come to mind.
- Ask what was listed. Most likely, the majority will have "orange," "round," "fruit," or similar words.
- Tell students to describe the orange to someone as if they had never seen one. Start with the outside. As students call out words, list these on the board.
- Move to the inside of the orange and then to the smell and taste.
- Ask students which words they like best and

circle those words. Invariably, these words will be much more interesting and specific than the first three words listed.

• "The best words, not the first words" when writing poetry.

#### 2. Riddle Poem

- Read Riddle Poems without their titles.
- Students guess what the subject is.
- Which details led to the answer?

#### 3. Prompt

- Think of several subjects about which you'd like to write riddle poems. Allow time to brainstorm topics. Ask students not to share their lists with neighbors.
- Each student chooses one topic.
- Use the subject as your title. Then in the poem DO NOT use the word at all.
- Allow 10 minutes for drafting of the poems. Students who finish early may revise or write a second poem. Keep your language fresh and full of details.

#### 4. Examples

Below are examples of poems generated through this lesson. These poems can be used when teaching the lesson.

**Watermelon** (by an elementary school student)

The two of us, standing there  
Green Buddas  
On the fruit stand.  
We eat the smile  
And spit out the teeth.

**The Fox** (by a high school student)

Starts at its own alertness  
Does not sleep completely  
or for long. Sleeps on the run.  
Always has two errands:  
to get where it's going  
and to miss nothing. Knows  
it is prey, yet loves  
the getting away. Has a long,  
bushy, significant tail,  
which it holds out like  
a reason for being. Jumps  
at a whimper somewhere  
under the snow, swerves  
at a single filament  
of the complicated air,  
suggestion of muskrat,  
scratch of falling star.  
Who harkens at the beetle,  
is stopped by the oddness  
of dropped limb, hissing

of grasses, succulent grub.  
Came once, when called, halfway  
across the field. Almost  
forgot what we were, where.  
The two of us, standing there.

## Interview with a teaching artist..

Madelyn Kent has been working as a director, choreographer, and playwright for almost ten years. Her plays have been presented at The Public Theatre and Soho Rep, where she is a founding member of the Writer/Director



Lab. In 2001, she started Shufu Theatre, an experimental theatre company dedicated to creating collaborative works by Japanese housewives living in N.Y. She graduated McGill University and N.Y.U., Tisch School of the Arts, where she won the Goldberg Award for best play.

### What compelled you to be a playwright?

I had grown up dancing and performing as part of a creative arts program at my public school on Long Island. By the time I got to university, all of that had been buried by a good education, and I was on an academic road. I didn't really find my footing until I saw an extraordinary dance piece while at school and was reminded of my adolescence. The next week I auditioned for two plays and by the next year, I had written my first play.

### How long have you been a teaching artist? Why did you decide to teach?

I started teaching in 1994, the year after I graduated, at Playwrights Theatre as an assistant in an after-school program in New-ark. I realized that playwriting - being creative - made me feel more engaged in the world than school ever did, and that I wanted to help students access this and find ways not to lose it.

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### What do you love about being a teaching artist?

I like the moment that they realize that they're responsible for the world that they're creating, that it's not about getting it right for me as the teacher, but getting it right for them as the writer.

### What do you believe is the most valuable attribute you bring to the students that you teach?

I think it is facilitating engagement and independence – encouraging them to care and to be able to do what they can in order to make what they want happen. There are very few opportunities where children are guided in this way – this is your world, your responsibility, make something happen the way you see it.

### What are you currently working on with regards to your own work?

My work has become very process-oriented, probably influenced by the way I teach. Lately my writing has been about levels of identity, and finding the meaning and emotion in the cracks and fissures of language. My last play, "Peninsula," was written originally in Spanish, and then translated into English, preserving the mistakes. I find that in this debris of mistakes, there is a lot that is truthful and vulnerable, which I probably could never get to if I wrote directly in English. Sometimes being articulate can mask a lot.

## An Inside Look...



**Classes for Children,  
Teens and Adults  
at our theatre  
in Madison**

*The perspectives of some of our most loved teachers*

"I teach the longevity of the art form, rather than merely concentrating on the art itself. I try to focus on how the creative process can sustain students throughout their lives. Whether they want to be a teacher, a doctor, a lawyer...all of the creative arts classes at Playwrights Theatre instill self-confidence, compassion and gives students a sense that

they can go out there, achieve their goals and feel good about themselves. --Terry Lee King, *Musical Performance and Performance Lab teacher*



"I believe that what distinguishes PTNJ classes are the standards that the students are held to. The assumption is that while they are not professional actors, the expectation is that they will explore the same process that professionals explore. The students study theater as craft. They learn the process of making theater. How is a script created? What are the specifics of telling a story? What is entailed in the day – to – day rehearsal process? How does one develop the stamina (physical, mental, psychological) to continue the rehearsal process in an effective way?

Students become conscious of group dynamic. They learn how they as an individual contribute to it, as well as learn how to take care of and support the group. Fairly magical stuff in a relatively short span of time." --Michael-David Gordon, *Performance Lab and Teen Acting teacher*

### An Inside Look: A student's perspective

"My husband, my daughter and I take classes at Playwrights Theatre because we get the same quality instruction we would in New York. I have actually stopped going to my acting classes in the city to continue at PTNJ. As an adult, taking a creative arts class is such a great emotional outlet. We are so busy with our lives, that we don't make any time for ourselves. I take private acting lessons and my time is so enjoyable because it is just for me. I took a long break from acting. Taking acting session with Rodney Gilbert has made me feel like I can act again! It has really lifted my

spirits." --Laurie Glenn, *Creative Arts Academy adult student*

**PTNJ offers classes throughout the year including an extensive Summer Theatre Camp.**

### Playwrights Theatre Staff

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