



## The 8th Annual Writing Challenge for Adult Learners in California's Library Literacy Services

March 3, 2009

Dear Adult Learners,

You are invited to join adult learners from across the state in an exciting writing challenge called Writer To Writer. Why participate in the Writer To Writer challenge? This is a chance for you to:

- share your thoughts with others in writing
- become a writer yourself
- relate what you read in the book/story or poem to your own life
- practice writing a letter, so you can write other letters on your own in the future

We hope that you and your tutor will use the Writer To Writer challenge as a part of your regular tutoring session as a way to promote reading for meaning *and* enjoyment, and to practice writing skills.

Please take the time to review the attached materials and then, write a letter to an author whose writing has changed the way you think about life. Your letter is just a friendly note to a favorite author, who can be living or not. Your letter can be short or long and under 500 words.

You can write about a book you have read or an audio-book you have listened to. The letter you turn in can be a story that you have told your tutor as s/he writes down your words or something you have written down yourself. This challenge is for everyone – from beginning to advanced level learners. To participate in the Challenge, please do the following:

- Please read the instructions and complete the entry form.
- Staple the entry form to your letter. (You may want to keep a copy of your letter for yourself!)
- On or before **Friday, July 17, 2009**, mail it to:

**Writer to Writer, c/o California State Library  
ATTN: Andrea Freeland  
P.O. Box 942837  
Sacramento, CA 94237-0001**

Everyone who turns in a letter will receive a certificate of participation from Acting State Librarian Stacey Aldrich. The top three letter-writers in each category that are chosen by a panel of other adult learners from around the state will earn cash prizes, a trip to the Writer to Writer awards ceremony with a family member, their tutor, and literacy staff. The top 30 letter writers will get a chance to see their letters published in a book and on the State Library's website.

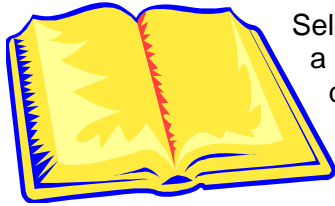
Questions? Please ask the Literacy Program Coordinator at your library.

Sincerely,

Writer to Writer Challenge Committee

## WHERE TO START:

- **Step 1: Choose a Book or Book-on-Tape**



Select a book, a short story or a poem you have recently read or listened to as a book-on-tape. It should be a work that had special meaning for you. How did it make you feel? Did it make you see the world differently after reading or listening to it? If you don't have a book in mind, ask a librarian for reading suggestions based on your interests or ask friends and family for reading recommendations.

- **Step 2: Writing**

In your letter, tell the author how reading or listening to his/her work (name the title) somehow changed your way of thinking about yourself or the world around you. Make a connection between yourself and a character or an event in the story. Did the book mirror your life in some way? What questions did the author force you to ask yourself or others? **Do not summarize the plot of the book!** Why? Because the author wrote the story and already knows what happened. What the author doesn't know is the way the book affected you. Write about you. Be honest, personal, and conversational.



### Tips for Writing Your Letter

- Those who read your letter should be able to hear your *voice*, so when you write, be natural. Use the kinds of words you would use in everyday conversation. **Read your letter aloud.** Listen to how the words and phrases sound. If the language is unclear, then you need to revise.
- Put yourself in the place of the person who will be reading your letter. How would you react? Would it answer all of your questions? Does it deal with all of the key issues?
- Share your letter with your tutor or a friend. Find out if they clearly understood what you wanted to say.
- Revise the letter to make your meaning clear - your first attempt does not have to be the one you turn in.
- For the **Writer to Writer** challenge, the judges want to hear your thoughts in your own words!

- **Step 3: Prepare to send your letter**

Entry Form: Read the instructions on page 2 of the entry form. Staple the completed entry form to your letter. Mail It In: Mail your letter on or before Friday, July 17, 2009 to:

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## READER RESPONSE ACTIVITY

Thinking and feeling are two sides of the same coin. Exploring how and why you respond to a book – either through thoughts or emotions – is a key to understanding yourself. A response to a book can take many forms: it can be a feeling not felt before, a memory that is triggered, or an action taken as a result of reading. It can also be a sudden understanding or insight. The author's words pull the chain on the light bulb inside your head and you think “Aha!”

Identifying your reader response is the first step. The next step is to share it by explaining it, describing it, and putting it into your own words.

**Step One.** Select a book you read or listened to that had special meaning for you.

**Step Two.** On a sheet of paper, draw two columns. Label one “THOUGHTS” and the other “EMOTIONS.” In the first column, list specific details from the book that triggered a new realization or way of thinking about someone or someplace or something. In the second column, list specific details from the book that triggered your emotions.

**Step Three.** Draw conclusions about the information you listed in both columns. What links did you discover between your thoughts and your emotions and the characters or events in the books? What did you learn about yourself after reading the book?

## WRITING A LETTER

Letters are everywhere! There are friendly letters, recommendation letters, resignation letters, reference letters, business letters, thank you letters, cover letters, complaint letters, sales letters, introduction letters, congratulation letters, apology letters, sympathy letters, and a lot more.

For the **Writer to Writer** challenge you will be writing a personal letter, also known as a friendly letter, to the author of your choice. A friendly letter normally has five parts:



1. **The Heading.** This includes the address, line by line, with the date somewhere close by. Skip a line after the heading. The heading can be centered at the top of the page or justified left at the top of the page. If using pre-addressed stationery, just add the date.
2. **The Greeting.** A formal greeting always ends with a comma. The greeting may be formal, beginning with the word "dear" and using the person's given name or relationship, or it may be informal if appropriate. *Formal:* Dear Uncle Jim, Dear Mr. Wilkins, *Informal:* Hi Joe!
3. **The Body.** This includes the message you want to write. Normally in a friendly letter, the beginning of paragraphs is indented. If not indented, be sure to skip a space between paragraphs. Skip a line after the greeting and before the close.
4. **The Close.** This short expression is always a few words on a single line. It ends in a comma (Examples: "Sincerely yours," "From," "With love,"). After the close, skip one to three spaces (two is usual) for the signature line.
5. **The Signature Line.** Type or print your name. The handwritten signature goes above this line and below the close. The signature should be written in blue or black ink. If the letter is quite informal, you may omit the signature line as long as you sign the letter.

## ACTIVITIES

- Take another look at the letter on the first page. Can you find the five parts of a friendly letter? Label them or number them when you find them.
- Start paying attention to the kinds of letters that you receive at home or at work and bring some samples into your tutoring sessions to review together. Critique the letters... Do they use the five parts?

## GREAT BEGINNINGS... OR HOW TO HOOK YOUR READER

In a news story, it's called a "lead." In a novel, it's the prologue. In a TV screenplay, it's the "teaser..."

No matter what you call it, the introduction is one of the most important parts in a piece of writing. If the opening is boring or unfocused, too long or too short, the reader won't bother to read any farther. An effective opening, on the other hand, delivers a one-two punch: It grabs the reader's attention, and it suggests the main idea or theme of the story to follow. In a writing challenge like **Writer to Writer** the opening paragraph of the letter is a critical point that can entice the judges to read on. Here's an excerpt from a letter:

Dear Bette Green,

Some people stay the same after reading a book. But your book tossed my brain all around. The risk you took in writing *The Drowning of Stephen Jones* makes me want to take a risk... change the way I think.

That's why I'm in this facility. I've had trouble changing. Because of books like yours, I now want to speak out against racism and people who hate people without even knowing them...

This letter is surprising twice. First, the use of language catches your attention: "Your book tossed my brain all around." Second, it revealed something private about the writer: "That's why I'm in this facility." That bit of information makes you want to learn more.

Sharing something personal in a letter can be difficult but it can also be a way to draw your reader in. But that's not the only way to deliver the one-two punch. Some other ways to hook the reader's attention include beginning with:

- an anecdote that relates to a character or event in the book
- a before-and-after comparison
- an interest or quality you share with the author or one of the characters in the book
- a question
- a quote
- a fascinating detail about yourself

## ACTIVITY

Practice writing an opening paragraph of a book review using each of the above listed techniques: an anecdote relating to the story, a before-and-after comparison, a quality you share with the author or characters, a question, a quote and/or a fascinating detail about yourself. Which technique is the most effective for you? Which would make the most powerful opening paragraph?

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**Don't forget, your Writer to Writer challenge entries must be postmarked on or before Friday, July 17, 2009.**

## ***Writer to Writer 2009***

***With support from:***

**Bay Area Literacy Network (BALit)**

**California State Library**

**Southern California Library Literacy Network (SCLLN)**

**The California Library Association, Literacy Services Section**

**Northern California Literacy Coalition (NCLC)**



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## WRITER TO WRITER CHALLENGE WINNERS 2008 EXCERPTS

“... After I read your book, *Remember the Ladies – A Story about Abigail Adams* it made me open my eyes and mind to the world. When I read about Abigail Adams it was like looking in the mirror. I saw myself there. She was strong and brave and made hard decisions by herself. I had to make very hard decisions by myself to leave my country, Iraq, with my children. It is very hard to come to a different country when you don’t know the language.

... Women like Abigail Adams help me to hold on to my dreams and not give up. I will be a strong woman, I will educate myself and I will write my stories. My stories will make me alive to my kids and my grandchildren and they will be proud of me.”

**Ferial Hanna** to Chase Ferris author of *Remember the Ladies – A Story about Abigail Adams*

“...My papa is very ill. Your book *On the Banks of Plum Creek* has made me realize how important family really is. Your book has touched my life. I cherish every second with my papa. Before my papa became ill, we spent a lot of time together. His illness is hard to deal with. I struggle with watching his health decline. My family is precious to me like your family is precious to you.

...Now I go to Adult Literacy School to learn to read and write. I am learning what I never learned in school there. My tutors are there to help me succeed. They don’t call us failures here; they call us achievers.”

**Laurie Heber** to Laura Ingalls Wilder author of *On the Banks of Plum Creek*

“...My name is Sandra Galanes. I have read your book, *The Old Man and the Sea*. I didn’t identify myself with the story at the beginning, but while I was reading page after page, my fishing experience came to mind. I started my fishing experience when I moved to a foreign country. There was a different language. My language was Spanish and it was hard for me, because I only know a few words of English. Without the necessary tools, I couldn’t get the bigger fish, for me the “big fish” was “learning English.”

...Fortunately, I learned enough English to take the citizenship test, and I got my U.S. citizenship. Next, I looked for information about classes to get a GED diploma. Now, here I am still fishing for it. Before, I read the book I thought that it will be the big fish, but now I want to continue fishing to get the biggest fish. I would like to go to college after I get the GED diploma. Like Santiago “Hemingway,” with perseverance, confidence and patience we can get the fish we want.”

**Sandra Galanes** to Ernest Hemingway author of *The Old Man and the Sea*

## WRITER TO WRITER CHALLENGE WINNERS 2007 EXCERPTS

“... I have read your book, the *Pursuit of Happiness*. You went through a lot in your life as a child and a young man.

... I started my pursuit of happiness at the age of fifty. When I said, “Enough is enough! I can’t pretend anymore. I need help!” That’s when my journey to be free from illiteracy started. I met this special person that opened my eyes and mind to a whole world of books and writing...

... You never gave up, even when you were faced with a new challenge. When I want to give up I think of my goals and push forward. You saw an opportunity to better your life through business. My opportunity comes when words flow on a piece of paper. My pursuit of happiness will happen when I’m no longer a slave to illiteracy. My millions will come at the end of a pencil when I no longer wear down the eraser before the pencil. Your book inspired me to write a little about myself. By doing so, I am healing from very deep, old wounds. By writing this book you have encouraged a lot of others like me to believe in ourselves.”

**Rudy Borboa** to Chris Gardner, author of *The Pursuit of Happiness*

“... I identified with the main character of your story: “The old man,” not because I am old or a fisherman but like Santiago I have not given up on my desire to reach my goal despite all hardships. Also like Santiago, I have had to wait a long time, be patient and have suffered emotionally and physically while waiting for my “big fish;” My “Big Fish” is a college degree, This is a really “big fish” for a young woman with three children who came to this country at the age of twenty-one not speaking, reading or writing English and with no financial resources. I believe that all of us have some of that “old man” inside them. Most of us have that intense desire bordering sometimes on stubbornness to get “the big fish.” Some will do anything it takes to catch the Big Marlin, others will be happy with a minnow.”

**Alejandrina Roldan** to Ernest Hemmingway, author of *The Old Man and the Sea*

“... When I read your book *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen & Listen So Kids Will Talk*, I was absolutely impressed about how important it is to acknowledge kids’ feelings... It taught me how to deal with my kids’ feelings, to engage their cooperation, to guide their behavior without punishment, to encourage their autonomy, and to praise to help them build their self-esteem.

... I remember that when I was a child my grandmother used to compare me a lot with my cousins, telling me that they were perfect in many ways, and that I needed to learn from them, I used to get really angry at her and I felt worthless and annoyed. I didn’t want to talk to anyone, and I didn’t want to listen either. Now that I have my own children, I know that if I want them to listen, and I want them to talk to me about their feelings, I need to respect them by not comparing them, just like the title of your book said.”

**Lupe Beltran** to Adelene Faber and Elaine Mazlish, authors of *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen & Listen So Kids Will Talk*

## WRITER TO WRITER CHALLENGE WINNERS 2006 EXCERPTS

“...I am very happy to have read your book... It touched home for me. I too am from the South (Louisiana) and am 63 years of age.

...I have heard stories from grand and great-grandparents. I hope this book will help many generations to come. Your book helped me to overcome tremendous odds, set new goals and helped me to realize that there is good and bad in every living thing... I hope this book encourages young people around the world, whatever color, to be proud and to live life with a purpose because of the struggle to get there. I hope you continue to write about your heritage.”

—**Leona Whytus** to Mildred D. Taylor for her book, *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*

“...I am learning to read poetry for the first time in my life. In your book, *Good Poems for Hard Times*, your introduction and the poems you have chosen made me feel better about my life.

The poem by Robert Morgan, *Working in the Rain*, made me remember special times in my life as I was growing up... The small pleasure of walking in the rain or pulling grass or being alone. There is a fondness in these private moments...

...Just as the father in the poem enjoyed making coffee after coming in from the rain, so do I love getting up on cold rainy days and making coffee. It seems to taste better on cold wet days. To get up and smell the coffee and drink in the blackness of the morning gives me courage to face one more sunrise. There are chores to do, jobs waiting and my life moves on.

...Your book has also given me hope that someday, my daughter will write a poem or story about me, remembering me with fondness, for paying child support, the cards and letters I sent, or loving her with all my heart.”

—**Bill J. Douglas** to Garrison Keillor for his book, *Good Poems for Hard Times*

“...This is a wonderful book about a guide for personal freedom and I have reached a wonderful level that was unknown for me previously. While I was reading this fantastic guide to freedom, I felt fascinated because as I read it carefully and paid close attention to every agreement, I could see how every agreement fits into my personal life... I have learned all kinds of ways to heal my emotional wounds. I don't have the emotional disease that I have carried for many years. Now I am not fearful to talk about my emotions... This book has helped me to get to the emotional level I wanted to be a long time ago but I did not know how to reach that level of personal freedom. Thank you very much!”

—**Esperanza Gutierrez** to Don Miguel Ruiz for his book, *The Four Agreements*

## WRITER TO WRITER CHALLENGE WINNERS 2005 EXCERPTS

“...I have just read your great book, *The Old Man and the Sea*. I would have liked to have met your friend Santiago, the old man. I know this is not possible, but your description of him and his experience made him so real to me. As I was reading about Santiago, I tried to put myself in the boat with him, wondering if I would have had the same courage and endurance to hold on to the marlin for so long.

...I have been comparing my life with that of Santiago. From the story, I could tell that Santiago must have loved his wife and missed her so much he had to put her picture away. I too miss my wife who died several years ago. She always delighted in my reading to her. Also in the story, the young boy, Manolin, keeps urging Santiago to continue going out to fish. My children keep telling me to continue with my reading classes...”

—**Arthur Noble** to Ernest Hemingway, author of *The Old Man and the Sea*

“...The main thing that affected me in the book was how people treated the monster. He was trying to do good. His face was ugly but his heart wasn't ugly. People took the way he looked – the ugliness of his face – and made him think he was an ugly person. He wanted to be good and was looking for a friend. The monster was like a baby. He didn't ask to be here. He had the mind of a child. The people didn't know the monster. They tried to destroy him. He asked why. Just like in my life, I ask why. Why do I have to fight to get respect? Is it the color of my skin? Is it because I didn't know how to read? I always felt like I was ugly. Am I a monster? Since the time I was born until now – I'm 63 years old – I didn't know how to read. Now I'm learning how to read books and papers...”

—**Christine Bailey** to Mary Shelley, author of *Frankenstein*

“...When I read your book *Life Is So Good* in one of my classes, I realize that even though we were different ages we had something in common.

...When you went back to school you were in your nineties. It worked out for you to go back to school because you were able to share your knowledge about wars and what you knew with other students in your class. They listened to you even though you were in your nineties. I'm glad that I went back to school, to learn how to read, spell, and write better in my forties...”

**Bruce Larson** to George Dawson, author of *Life is Good*

## WRITER TO WRITER CHALLENGE WINNERS 2004 EXCERPTS

“...In the very beginning of your book, *Rosa Parks Young Rebel*, I knew Rosa was brave when she picked up a brick and scared off a white bully who was teasing her little brother. I didn’t know how brave until later in her life she refused to give up her seat on a bus to a white person. When she did that she was heroic.

...I have a learning disability which makes reaching my goal of finishing college difficult but I am inspired by Rosa’s determination not to give up no matter how long it takes. Rosa wanted so much to finish her schooling and she had almost reached her goal when she had to put herself on hold to care for her family. It makes me wonder if I would be willing to sacrifice my dream as Rosa did—I hope so.

—**Kenyatta Russell** to Kathleen Kudlinki for her book, *Rosa Parks Young Rebel*

“...I remember as I was growing up going to weddings and wondering if I would ever get married. ‘What woman would want a man who couldn’t read?’ This was my thinking. One day as I went to look for work at the cannery with my friend, who would have thought that I would find the love of my life? Like someone once wrote ‘Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.’ Her beauty was in my eyes from the first moment I laid eyes on her, I didn’t need a second or third look. When the time came (one year later) that I thought of asking her to marry me a thousand thoughts ran through my mind. But at the end I sat with her and said ‘I have something to tell you before we get married.’ My heart was pounding and my blood was rising. She asked, ‘What is wrong?’ As I looked at her I took a deep breath and said, ‘I can’t read or spell.’ Just like Portia in your play who did not care whether Bassanio was wealthy or not, Victoria did not care about me not knowing how to read or spell. Her words were ‘we will work on the problem.’

...Your story has reminded me of the love I once had and that I must go on living life to the full. I have a passion for poetry so I write to you these few words:

**Words** are the thought of a writer  
**Written** full of wisdom and knowledge  
**Words** that awaken the mind  
**Transforming** the life of another”

—**Raymond Moreno** to William Shakespeare for his book, *The Merchant of Venice*

“...So the following tale is being told to you in hopes to prevent it from vanishing and to help others overcome their problems...

...45 years ago in San Francisco, there was a little girl who fell behind in her studies. She was so shy that her favorite spot was in the back of the class. After a few years of being told she was lazy and was not applying herself, the discovery was made that she needed glasses. It was hard for her to catch up with her studies, so the little girl was always behind and hated school more and more with each passing day. This old attitude affected her whole life until one day she discovered Project Read. She was assigned a tutor and to this day she continues to struggle to learn all the things she missed in the previous 45 years. Learning was not enough for her. She is now giving back by helping others who need to catch up with their studies.

...Thanks to you, I am learning the techniques of storytelling. Your book, *The Gift of Story*, has encouraged me to go and seek out opportunities to refine my own style of bringing the past back to life. “

—**Donna Jones** to Dr. Clarissa Estes for her book, *The Gift of Story*