

## A Formal Invitation

In her first edition of *In The Middle*, Nancie Atwell wrote about the periodic "writing invitations" she would post in the classroom: calls for articles for various magazines published by the students, calls that would nudge students to share their experiences and expertise in their writing. There is something more compelling about an invitation, a cachet that a mere assignment doesn't hold.

So, this is a writing invitation for the next edition of *Minnesota English Journal: Student Writing Issue*.

On the next few pages are three kinds of writing we would like to feature in the next issue. With these invitations we hope to continue the multi-layered approach of this issue by publishing creative student models along with context features and reflective responses.

In addition to these three more formal invitations, we still invite your students to come as they are, to continue to submit their surprising, creative, delightful, thoughtful pieces, whatever they are.

Besides inviting your students' writing, we would also like to extend an invitation to anyone who is interested in becoming involved in the publishing of this journal. Please contact us if you would like to write a Teacher Talk piece, if you have an idea for a writing invitation, or if you would like to help with the publishing effort.

A submission form is printed on page 79. Please make a copy for each student's writing you submit.

A few tips for student submissions:

There are space limitations. Shorter pieces are the most publishable. For long class assignments, consider excerpts.

Encourage your poets to think about their spacing, margins, and line breaks. All poems should have titles.

Select the few strongest pieces if you are submitting work from a class assignment.

Word processed submissions are greatly appreciated.

If using writing from this journal as models resulted in some terrific writing, submit it. We would love to publish examples of the power of student models.



**Wonders of Writing** by Chelsey Mundt

*Champlin Park High School, grade 11*

## Invitation #1

**Sandy Nesvig**

*Annunciation School, Minneapolis*

This poem is an excerpt from a multigenre research paper on the Holocaust. Jim had read *The Diary of Anne Frank* and *Night* by Elie Weisel. He also did additional reading and research to gain background information. He decided to take on the identity of a young Jewish boy who is a survivor of the Holocaust. His paper contained information about his topic presented through multiple genres. He included a personal narrative, a poster, a journal entry, a list of concentration camps, a factual article, poetry, a brief autobiography, a map, photographs, and a letter.

This assignment is one that was adapted from Tom Romano, a professor at Ohio's Miami University. Romano has spoken about this approach to research at conferences at Concordia College, Moorhead and the University of Minnesota, Duluth, as well as at the 1998 MCTE Fall Conference. He has also written two books on this subject.

My students were to present information using at least eight different entries consisting of a minimum of five genres. When we began the assignment, we brainstormed methods of communicating ideas, emotions, and information. Students were amazed at how many genres actually exist. I explained or showed examples of genres they are less familiar with. They were encouraged to use the visual arts to make their final project more inviting and attractive. The papers were graded on the information they presented as well as the creativity and quality of the writing.

### Works cited

- Romano, Tom. *Writing with Passion: Life Stories, Multiple Genres*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1995.  
Romano, Tom. *Blending Genre, Altering Style*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2000.

### I Have Lived

Dear God,  
in a world gone mad  
and I have seen  
evil  
unleashed beyond reason or  
understanding  
I was with them,  
feared with them,  
struggled with them.  
And when the killing was finally done  
I had survived  
while millions had died.  
I do not know why.  
I have asked many questions  
for which there are no answers  
And I have even cursed  
my life  
thinking I could not  
endure the pain.  
But a flame inside  
refused to die.  
I could not throw away  
what had been ripped away  
from so many.  
In the end  
I had to choose life.  
I had to struggle to cross  
the bridge between  
the dead and the living.  
I had to forget what I endured.  
I had to rebuild  
what had been destroyed.  
I had to deny death  
another victory.

**Jim Kenny**

*Annunciation School, grade 8*

# Multi-genre: Turning Points

**Mickie St. Sauver**

*Cleveland Middle School, St. Paul*

Up until about six or seven years ago, I never really taught "The Research Paper." I hated to admit that I really didn't know how to teach someone to do one; I couldn't remember anything about footnotes and bibliographies, and I didn't really think that it fit with a writing workshop approach, which seemed to me to focus more on creative writing.

As a combined concern from parents looking ahead to the academic needs of their children and from Central High School telling us that students from Ramsey Junior High were better prepared for research than were our students, I felt my students needed to write a research paper. I used the National History Day theme as the topic for our research, giving students a chance to write for a real audience and perhaps combine their research into presentations involving other media. Though I received many interesting papers on a variety of topics, I still questioned devoting so much time to research method and very little time to writing process. We did do peer editing of leads and conclusions, but getting the rough drafts finished, let alone sharing the drafts, was difficult. The paper seemed very cumbersome to work with, and difficult to assess along the way. Finally, I didn't see students' ownership of the material; I wasn't sure they were doing anything more than regurgitating information they copied.

Three books led me to believe there was a better way: *The Story in History* by Margot Fortunato Galt; *Nonfiction Matters: Reading, Writing, and Research in Grades 3-8* by Stephanie Harvey; and *Writing with Passion: Life Stories, Multiple Genres* by Tom Romano. These three resources lead me to try a multi-genre research paper.

*For a featured section on the multi-genre research paper, we are seeking short, representational extracts, such as the model on the next page, from multi-genre papers written by students of various age levels.*

The excerpts from the multigenre paper that follow were inspired by combining the History Day topic of "Turning Points in History" with our earlier study of the novel *Shizuko's Daughter*. Throughout that book there were significant turning points in Yuki's life that we talked about. We also did time lines of students' lives, so that they were very familiar with the concept of "turning points" before we started the research. At the same time, we frequently touched on the differences and similarities between Japanese and American customs so that their interest was piqued regarding the two cultures. I introduced the History Day paper to them as "Turning Points in Japanese or Japanese-American History." By this time, not only did they know what a turning point was, they also knew what they wanted to know more about — from Sumo wrestling and Ninjas to the Japanese auto industry to Japanese food, education, and fashion. Since World War II was a common turning point in many of their topics, it was easy to break their papers into three phases for research: pre-World War II, World War II, post-World War II.

Since I have tried the multi-genre research papers, I don't think I've ever taught anything more exciting or more rewarding. In addition, this one project can be used to satisfy the middle level standards in Inquiry (finding relevant information); Read, View, and Listen (nonfiction); and Write and Speak (persuasive writing).

But most importantly, it has satisfied my quest to incorporate the writing process into the research paper; it lends itself to formative assessment; and it gets students involved in thinking about their topic in a way that wasn't possible with a traditional research paper.

## Marriage in Japan

**Jeannie Johnson**

*Cleveland Middle School, grade 8*

The bride stands in her beautiful kimono, anxiously awaiting her moment of glory. An arranged marriage is beginning. Little did she know that after World War II marriages would change, that arranged marriages would decrease in occurrence and become almost nonexistent, that love marriages would become more frequent. World War II was a turning point for arranged and love marriages, honeymoons and rules for ceremonies.

April 12, 1936

Dear Sister,

I will be getting married in three days. I've met my future husband, Yeshiko, and we've spent quite a bit of time together. Even so, this is an arranged marriage, matchmaker and all. At first, I didn't want to be married, but mother convinced me and woke me up to the fact that I wasn't a child anymore. I really wish I were. I'm very scared of the outcome of this marriage, but I must go through with it. I must honor the family name as you have with your husband. This letter is your invitation to be with me on my wedding day. Everything must be perfect, and it won't be if you're not there at my wedding. I miss you!

Your sister, Yuki

Love marriages before World War II were almost nonexistent, but today arranged and love marriages have exchanged places. Today, 70% of all marriages in Japan are referred to as "love marriages;" the rest are arranged. A love marriage is when a couple meets independently without the help of a go-between or matchmaker. With love marriages, spouses are usually selected from siblings who work at the same business or go to the same school.

*She looks beautiful in her kimono, doesn't she? This will be a fine ceremony. Shh! It's starting. She's next to her husband now, and the Buddhist priest is blessing them. They have bowed many times and the ceremony is over. It definitely was blessed!*

*I'm so nervous. What if I don't make my husband happy? I will dishonor my family's name. But I do love this man and he is gentle and kind. I love him, and there's no use fighting love and possibility.*

Marriages in Japan have changed a bit since before World War II, but beautiful customs remain significant and delicate to the Japanese.

*This is an excerpt from Jeannie's six-page multi-genre paper on how World War II was a turning point in Japanese marriage customs. Space limitations prevent publication of entire multi-genre papers. For the next issue we invite either excerpts from your students' multi-genre papers or submission of entire papers that we may excerpt as space dictates. As with this excerpt, selected by Jeannie's teacher, Mickie St. Sauver, we would like to illustrate the variety of genre, style, and voice, and give an understanding of the work's general premise or thesis and an explanation of the context of the assignment.*

## Invitation #2

For the 2002 edition of Minnesota English Journal - Student Writing Issue, we would like to feature a section on poetry written in response to literature. The poem may summarize the work or represent a student's more personal response, reflection, or connection to the work. The two poems on page 73, give an effective summary of the works. The two poems on this page represent a more personal response. The editors encourage submissions inspired by any piece of literature -- fiction, nonfiction, drama -- whether from a work read in class or from a work read independently.

Special thanks to Linda Rief and her students for permission to print the two poems below.

Laine's poem was written as a response to her independent reading of the novel, *Speak*, by Laura Halse Anderson.

### Unforgotten

Don't fake your innocence  
Don't deny you're so wrong  
Don't tell me this was an accident  
I can't hear your lying song  
Don't tell me that you're sorry  
You caused me so much pain  
Is it my love or my forgiveness  
That you're still trying to gain?  
Stop that knocking on my broken door  
I'll never let you in  
I'll show you awful things you did  
But where should I begin?  
And clearly I don't want to  
So turn around and go  
Don't dare ask me one more time  
My answer remains

No

**Laine Remignanti**  
Oyster River Middle School, NH

Mike wrote this poem in Life Skills class in response to his teacher Kathy Bonaccorsi reading *Tuesdays with Morrie* by Mitch Albom to the class.

### How Old is Old?

Old is when one admits to not being able  
to throw a ball around anymore.  
It's when your life suddenly slows down  
from a raging river  
to a peaceful stream.  
It is when people visit you more  
than you visit people.  
It's when you look back  
instead of looking forward.  
Old is when everything you look at has an  
explanation.  
It is when you know enough to write a book.  
Old is the soft brick of death waiting  
to hit you.

**Mike Schuster**  
Oyster River Middle School, NH

### The Hobbit

Far, far away in a fantasy land,  
Where the wizards and goblins still roam,  
There was a fine hobbit called Mr. B. Baggins  
Who lived in a hobbit-like home.

His life was quite simple 'til one certain day,  
A party of dwarves "just appeared" as they say.  
They swept in his house and demanded a meal,  
They drank and they ate with incredible zeal.

They spoke of adventure, of plunder and gold,  
Of breathtaking battles and castles of old.  
This all quite perplexed him — befuddled his brain,  
With unmeasured power, he kept his head sane.

By no fault of his own, he was whisked from his 'bubble,'  
That's when he knew he was getting in trouble.  
For this traveling life was like none he had known  
He felt so afraid, so confused, so alone.

They found a dry cave so they lay down to snore,  
But they didn't know 'twas the goblin's front door.  
Sir Bilbo awoke when the goblins came out,  
He saw them coming — he warned with a shout.

The dwarves were still caught, they were roped,  
gagged and taped  
What horrendous peril! But they somehow escaped.  
They struck out once more in the thick clouded wood,  
They just had to make it! I thought that they could.

At long last they made it — the castle of dreams.  
There conquest was over, or that's how it seemed.  
But there was a dragon, who guarded the horde,  
This fierce fiery creature was scared by no sword.

The dragon's life ended, a battle began  
O'er who owned the treasure — the fight did not wane.  
But when it was over, the hobbit then knew  
That there is no limit to what you can do.

**Mikaela Hagen**  
Willow Creek Middle School, Rochester, grade 8

### The Lotus Eaters

Green vines creeping,  
Women weeping over husbands lost.  
Maidens smiling,  
Alluring fingers wave,  
"Everlasting is this home," they say.

Ships navigating magically,  
Sailing slowly to their doom.  
Sweet mouths open like a trap,  
"Everlasting is this isle," they say.

Landing on enchanted earth,  
Men move as if in a dream.  
Long hair flashing like rippling gold,  
Entrancing them away.  
"Everlasting is our love," they say.

Green vines catching,  
Closer they come.  
A panicked cry.  
"This is a trap!"

The men break hurriedly away,  
Glancing back on maidens sweet  
"Everlasting is regret," they say.

**Yvonne Angieri**  
Valley View Middle School, grade 8

## Invitation #3

"Show don't tell." I can't begin to count the number of times I have repeated the phrase in my seventh and eighth grade writing classroom. However, I often wonder if students really know what that means. After all, we "tell" stories, we "tell" about characters, I frequently say, "tell me more," when I want a student to expand on a description. How exactly does one explain the difference?

Barry Lane, at the 1999 fall MTCE conference/workshop, used the "snapshot" metaphor to explain writing with detail. As I listened to him speak I knew exactly how to answer my question. Now, when I give a mini-lesson on "show don't tell," I talk to students about photograph albums. I tell them their writing is like an album full of pictures of a trip they have taken. If they go through the album, merely flipping pages, saying, this is the first day, this is the second day, this is. . ., they are going to bore whoever is looking at their album to tears. However, if they concentrate on one picture, and really look at it close up, and point out all the fascinating detail, they will create interest. They will be "showing not telling."

The following pieces were written as an exercise in creating "snapshots."

**Sandy Nesvig**  
Annunciation School

### Diamonds at Midnight

Fog settled in on the damp docks of the harbor. The shops bobbed in the wind with the waves bouncing up and down. It was drizzling; the tiny droplets pierced my face like needle points.

My dress was torn and stained with mud. My shoes were pinching my feet. It hurt to walk in the windy rain. I pulled my tattered shawl over my shoulders and tied my bonnet to my head to keep my head warm.

I had done it. I had crept into my mother's room and in the dark, pulled the sparkling jewels from her secret, special box, hidden in the drawer. No one would ever know, just me and that slimy two-faced man named Frank Orshunt.

I had met him at midnight. He was so quiet; he came up from behind me. He put his filthy, no good hands on my shoul-

### The Path

The wind blows in my face as I ride over the black tarred path. Sweat drips down my face, all down my body. In my head I keep a beat, which is synchronized with my feet as they pedal my bike at a steady rate. The only thing I hear is the humming sound of the wheels revolving.

I look to my left as I turn in the path. Between an opening in the trees, I see a little pond with a barn on the other side with hay heaped in it. Then I pass a grove of trees, which block my view of the pond. When another opening appears, I see a small head break the surface of the pond. I stare at it for a split second as another grove passes. I think to myself that it is just a beaver or something, and I keep on biking to my beat. As I bike around the bend, there is a long straightaway, so long I cannot see the end of it.

I slow my beat down to conserve energy, but mainly to take a look around. The scenery around the path is very beautiful. It my right I see a couple of small sloping hills covered in corn stalks, each with a single pine tree on top. As I pass it, I look at the corn stalks and notice how they are in lines that fly by as I bike onward, down the path.

**Alex Davis**

Annunciation School, grade 7

*Barry Lane, at the 1999 MCTE fall workshop, shared techniques for creating 'snapshots,' short descriptive writing. For the 2002 issue, we would like to feature short pieces of descriptive writing.*

ders and whispered in my ear like a snake's hiss, "Do you have them?" I shuddered and turned to him. I felt awful, but anyone would do an awful deed if it threatened her life. I handed him the precious diamonds, freshly cut and sparkling. I had to wrap them in a black cloth for fear of someone seeing the shining light.

He was gone, he paid me; not a bad sum either. I am left alone, in the cold and rainy night, soaked to the bone. I shall go now, go home and sleep. I will not sleep well tonight. Not tonight and not for a long time. I will keep thinking about the awful deed I did this night. And I swear, on my life, never will I do such a thing again. However, my life was at stake, and I could not run nor hide. But no one will know, I'll make sure of that.

**Hali Thurber**

Annunciation School, grade 7

## The Magic Camera

### Barry Lane

from *After THE END*

1. Begin by explaining to students that writers have a magic camera that they can point at the world and create snapshots that contain smells and sounds as well as colors and light. Read several examples from literature and discuss why a writer like Laura Ingalls Wilder doesn't just write, "Ma put the kids to bed and did some sewing until they fell asleep."

2. Review some of the things writers can do to dig deeper for details when they stall out. Make sure they remember the power of asking questions to dig up more "specific" detail.

3. Ask students to think of a person they know very well. Then ask them to place that person in the middle of an empty page and then pretend they have a magic camera that can freeze any moment in time since they've know that person. Web-chart at least five or six moments, briefly noting them.

4. Have students pick one moment and write a snapshot of that one moment. (Make sure it's only one moment that student write about.) Create a picture with words of that moment. For example, instead of "Dad took me ice fishing," we have "Dad knelt beside me by the ice hole, his hand in the icy water reaching for the perch that had slipped back in."

5. Ask students to write for twenty minutes or however long it takes to create a snapshot of their person. When finished, students read over what they've written and ask themselves at least two questions that will lead to more detail. Then have them go back and either insert or add this detail to their snapshot.

6. Students share snapshots with a partner or group. The listeners write down questions that grow out of their natural curiosity about the person. The writer adds more detail to the original snapshot.

7. Have students draw a picture of their snapshot, putting in all the detail from their words. Students then add one or two more details from their drawing to their writing.

Additional sources for writing activities:

Lane, Barry. *Reviser's Toolbox*. Shoreham, VT: Discover Writing Press, 1999.

Barry Lane's website: [www.discoverwriting.com](http://www.discoverwriting.com)

### Dancing with the Angels

Darkness covers the white sheets of snow.  
A shadow falls over the night.

I lie awake in bed,  
Half dreaming.

Staring out the frosty windows.

I wish I could be out there right now,

Dancing in the snow.

Prancing.

Making footprints.

Making angels, snow angels.

Dreaming of the real angels all around me.

Glistening.

Shining in the bright falling flakes.

Dancing with the angels.

Spinning round and round

As fast as I can go.

Circling the white treetops.

I'm shining in the snow.

All alone in the darkness,

But overcome by the snow's light.

Dancing with the angels,

The angels of the night.

**Madeline Helling**

Annunciation School, grade 8