



FALL  
2007

## Rhode Island Writing Project at Rhode Island College

Alumni House, 600 Mount Pleasant Avenue, Providence, RI 02908

(401) 456-8668 ♦ RIWP@ric.edu ♦ www.ric.edu/riwp

### What's New?

#### Monograph on the Presenters' Collaborative Network is in the works ...

"As you know, the Rhode Island Writing Project is a place for educators who want to improve teaching and learning in a world that only seems to value test scores. We are teachers and administrators who want to become agents of change rather than victims of policy." Keith Sanzen's memorable words characterize the Presenters' Collaborative Network. A year ago last summer we were asked by the National Writing Project to contribute to their monograph series with an account of our PCN. Susan Ozbek, Susan VanderDoes, Keith Sanzen and Marjorie Roemer have been writing, and revising, and revising that monograph. We are now in the final stages (or so we hope). A visit from our editor Ann Dobie, Director of the Louisiana State Network of Writing Projects, this October should help us to ready the manuscript for publication this spring.

#### Have you met Dana Henning?



For the last several years, our office has had the services of the irrepressible Jill Usenia. Jill leaves us to accept her first teaching position at North Providence High School. We're glad she's not going too far away, especially since we intend to rely on her expertise when we get into a muddle about budgets, newsletters, etc. And we certainly expect to see her at our teacher events, now as a participant instead of as the person who booked the room, ordered the food, and put together the materials.

New to our office now is Dana Henning. A graduate of Dickinson College and the mother of four, Dana impressed all of us with her calm and poise in our first interview. And she continues to impress. We look forward to an office radiant with her good sense and patience, even if the rest of us clamber in and out creating havoc as we go! Dana is also a professional singer who performs at Emmanuel Church in Newport. Multiple talents seem to be the rule in our office. Now, if we could get Dana and Jill together performing karaoke, that would be something!

#### Don't miss this year's Annual Spring Conference

### March 8, 2008

Featuring Linda Christensen

For questions, or to register, contact the Rhode Island Writing Project at (401) 456-8668 or by e-mail at RIWP@ric.edu. See related information on page 4.

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## What's New? (cont...)

### **Tim Kenney brings technology to the summer institutes ...**

Our new tech liaison is Tim Kenney, a teacher at East Greenwich HS. A former Writing Project fellow in Florida, Tim has joined our Executive Board and has been a very active participant in our Planning for Change institute for two years. This year he, finally, got us participating in the NWP e-anthology, so that we could communicate with participants at the other 189 sites across the country. Tim will join Pam Fracareta in co-leading the Planning for Change institute next summer and he has more plans to bring us all on-line.

### **Margaret Knowlton selected as RIASP's Elementary Principal of the Year 2007**

Margaret Knowlton, principal of Saylesville Elementary School in Lincoln, has been named the 2007 Elementary School Principal of the Year. We know Margaret as an RIWP fellow since 1999, a valued member of our Executive Board, co-facilitator of our Planning for Change Institute and the promoter of Embedded Institutes at both the Halliwell School in North Smithfield and the Saylesville Elementary School in Lincoln in her tenure as principal at each school. Here is what the RIASP website said in awarding her this honor: "Mrs. Knowlton began her career as an elementary school teacher in Pawtucket in 1989. Her first principalship was at Kendall Dean School in North Smithfield in 1997. She transferred to Halliwell Elementary School in 2002. Margaret then assumed the position of Assistant Superintendent in North Smithfield in 2004 before becoming the Curriculum Director in 2005. Later that year, Margaret returned to principalship, taking over at Saylesville Elementary, a post she holds today. Margaret is seen as the driving force in the culture change at Saylesville, 'She is fair and creative...has created a great learning environment by setting high expectations,' says one parent. She is a leader in providing opportunities for staff professional development. One teacher says of Margaret, 'The school has been reborn under her leadership...can't isn't a choice with her.' The superintendent and other central office personnel see her as a true instructional leader. She has implemented numerous programs, mentored new principals, and continues to assist in district wide curriculum initiatives."

### **Congratulations are also in order for ...**

Tracey Whitehead, the new Assistant Principal at Feinstein Middle School in Coventry.

Janice Place, the new English Department Chair at Pilgrim High School.

Maria Rollin, the new English Department Chair at Aldrich Junior High School.

If you have other news to share about RIWP Fellows who are taking on new jobs and responsibilities, please let us know. We like to celebrate!

## A Letter From the Director

Dear Friends,

We keep getting bigger and, I think, better. This year has marked some new activity at our site. A Comprehensive School Reform grant with schools in Burrillville and North Providence gave Dina DeCristofaro a chance to work with teams of teachers in both districts. The Title II grant this year supported Jennifer Cook in work with schools in both Woonsocket and North Providence. Continuing Embedded Institutes at Warwick Vets HS, Central HS, and Aldrich JHS sustained our partnerships in those schools.



So, we've been getting around! We've also been very busy on our home ground. The summer saw our usual Summer Invitational, Planning for Change and Literature Institute for Teachers in session. We also continued a new program started last year, the Literacy Leadership Workshop. Our five Young Writers' groups brought over 80 students K – 12 onto the RIC campus early in July.

The fall looks to be just as busy. The Mentoring Program for teachers in their first three years has begun again this year. The Presenters' Collaborative Network will begin shortly. The summer renewal meeting will feature Denise Patmon of U Mass Boston on the RIC campus on September 21<sup>st</sup>. Follow-up sessions for the Title II program will feature Karen Ernst da Silva offering a workshop, "Making Connections: Reading, Writing, Art and Thinking" (October 12), as well as Barry Lane entertaining and instructing us about "Writing After the End" on November 30<sup>th</sup>.

A Writing Marathon on October 20<sup>th</sup> beckons! Learn about what we're doing. Join us. Add your voice to our plans and join us in sustaining optimism and energy in our work together.

We're easy to find: 401-456-8668, [riwp@ric.edu](mailto:riwp@ric.edu), or [www.ric.edu/riwp](http://www.ric.edu/riwp)

All best wishes for a great year ahead,





**SAVE THE DATE!!**

March 8, 2008

Annual Spring  
Conference

Featuring

LINDA CHRISTENSEN

Linda Christensen is the Director of the Oregon Writing Project and the author of several books, including *Reading, Writing, and Rising Up: Teaching about Social Justice and the Power of the Written Word*. She has also published many articles about literacy and social justice. In 1998, she received the Fred Heschinger Award from the National Writing Project and the U.S. West Outstanding Teacher of the Western U.S. Award. Her current research is directed toward improving the academic confidence of struggling readers and writers.

"I attempt to keep my vision--and hope--alive by participating in critical teaching groups. These groups help me think more carefully about social justice issues inside as well as outside of the classroom, from literacy practices to top-down curricular policies. Our sometimes-heated discussions about articles, books, and curriculum hone my ability to evaluate my work. I carry these voices--and the solidarity of these teachers--like a Greek chorus in my mind. They remind me to question and sometimes to defy those in authority when I'm told to participate in practices that harm children. They nettle me when I fall into easy patterns and point out when I deliver glib answers to difficult problems."

Linda Christensen

For more information contact the RI Writing Project at

(401) 456-8668 or by email at [RIWP@ric.edu](mailto:RIWP@ric.edu)

[www.ric.edu/riwp](http://www.ric.edu/riwp)

## Did You Read About Us in the ProJo?



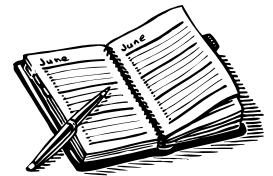
This July, *Providence Journal* staff writer Linda Borg visited the summer Invitational Institute and watched while teachers shared their writing. Here's some of what she observed:

*Reading out loud, Laura Maxwell, an English teacher at Hope High School, says she congratulates her self every day for having the good sense to choose a career in teaching.*

*“We live with one foot in pedagogy and one foot in the changing culture,” she says. “We know Shakespeare and rap. We are our own community — homegrown intellectuals, conciliators, provocateurs. What’s more important than that?”*

*For six weeks, a dozen teachers from around Rhode Island have spent their mornings doing something that educators rarely have a chance to do: spend time as a community sharing their own writing and discussing what practices work best in the classroom.*

## Can You Get Free on a Friday This Fall?



### **October 12—“Picturing Learning: Artists and Writers in the Classroom”**

**Karen Ernst da Silva presents a workshop on connecting visual arts, reading and writing.**

Karen is a consultant, teacher, researcher, and author who lives and works from her home in Shelton, Connecticut. The focus of her work is the connection between literacy and art, in particular how art can be part of the reading and writing process. She shares her work, beliefs, and strategies in experiential workshops to help teachers of all content areas make the links between art and literacy.

### **November 30—“More Ideas for the Writer’s Toolbox”**

**Barry Lane presents a workshop on engaging student writers in unconventional ways.**

Barry Lane is an internationally known author and speaker, who travels the world sharing his unique style of motivating students to become better writers. He is the author and creator of many books and instructional DVDs, including *After the End*, *Reviser’s Toolbox*, and the *Portfolio Sourcebook*, and, most recently, *The Healing Pen*.

**Please contact Dana at the RIWP office if you are interested in attending.**

**Space for each event is limited.**

## PCN

### *Presenter's Collaborative Network*

The first time someone recommended I design a workshop for RIWP's Spring Conference I gasped in response, "I'm not ready; I couldn't." After all, what could other teachers learn from one so insignificant and so shy? At the time, I'd forgotten that without teachers teaching teachers we'd have no Writing Project – that all our combined experiences and reflections bring texture and accessibility to raw pedagogy. I'd also forgotten that the Spring Conference needs a variety of voices and styles in order to work well.

In the end, I did present. With the help of a few teacher-consultant colleagues I designed and refined an idea into a workshop. Thanks to their guidance and support, I gained the courage to present. Some time later, Presenters' Collaborative Network (PCN) came into being. This organization provides would-be presenters with the kind of guidance and support I found so helpful.

Recently, Keith Sanzen and I took over the facilitation of PCN, and we would love your assistance. We want to begin by assuring you that PCN offers more than just a way to hone workshop ideas. Simply stated, during our Saturday mornings together, we regenerate. The presentations and conversations never fail to inspire my classroom practice. Never.

You are invited to share in a morning of warm coffee, new ideas and great discussions with the Presenters' Collaborative Network.

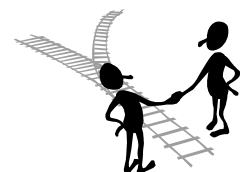
As you know, the Rhode Island Writing Project is a place for educators who want to improve teaching and learning in a world that only seems to value test scores. We are teachers and administrators who want to become agents of change rather than victims of policy. Members of the PCN are alumni of one or more RIWP Summer or Embedded Institutes who would like to offer professional development to host schools or at our Spring Conference. The PCN provides an opportunity for a trial run before presenters "take it on the road." Not interested in presenting? No problem! We are looking for supportive audience members to give constructive feedback. After all, what is a presenter without an audience? So join us for brand new presentations, reflective journaling, and a chance to connect with teachers all across the state.

Please email us and let us know if you would like to be a presenter or an audience member! Everyone is welcome!

Hope to see you soon,

Keith Sanzen  
EnglishGryphon@Juno.com

Susan Friendson  
susansparrow@yahoo.com



Mark your calendars for Saturday mornings 9:00-12:30 at Rhode Island College.

Dates and locations:

September 29<sup>th</sup> – Forman Center

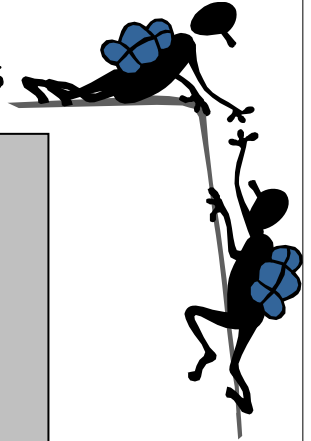
October 27<sup>th</sup> -Honors Lounge (room 255 in Craig Lee)

January 12<sup>th</sup> – Forman Center

February 9<sup>th</sup> – Forman Center

March 8<sup>th</sup> – RIWP Annual Spring Conference

# Support for Beginning Teachers



**Are you in your first three years of teaching?**

**Are you looking for professional development that is tailored to meet your needs?**

**Are you interested in meeting with other beginning teachers in Rhode Island?**

The Rhode Island Writing Project has just the program for you. We invite you to join other beginning teachers (K-12, across content areas) in a supportive, collaborative setting at Rhode Island College. This is an opportunity for you to:

- **Continue your intellectual growth as a teacher**
- **Access resources to support your teaching practice**
- **Engage in dialogue about your teaching experience**

As experienced classroom teachers, we know that preparing to become a teacher is an ongoing process that extends beyond the formal certification program. We believe that opportunities where beginning teachers can talk with each other in a supportive setting are rare and yet essential. For the past seven years, the Rhode Island Writing Project's Mentoring Program has created an open and nurturing environment for beginning teachers to discuss their frustrations and triumphs and to learn from one another.

The Mentoring Program is co-facilitated by Dr. Jennifer Cook, Assistant Professor of English and Secondary Education at R.I.College, and by Alyson Andrews, a second-year teacher at North Kingstown High School.

We will meet ten times throughout the school year at Rhode Island College. All meetings will take place on Saturdays from 9:00 – 12:00 in the Old Alumni House Conference Room.

**This program carries 3 graduate credits in Curriculum or English for \$300.00.**

**The group will meet on the following dates:** (Please note that the first date is an orientation you can still join after that date). For an application please go to our website at [www.ric.edu/riwp](http://www.ric.edu/riwp) or call the office at (401) 456-8668.

August 25, 2007

January 12, 2008

September 22, 2007

February 2, 2008

October 13, 2007

March 8, 2008

November 10, 2007

March 29, 2008

December 1, 2007

April 26, 2008

December 15, 2007

May 3, 2008

## Partnerships in North Providence

### *Comprehensive School Reform and Embedded Institutes*

During the 2006-2007 school year, the North Providence School Department entered into a partnership with the Rhode Island Writing Project (RIWP). Using funds received from a Comprehensive School Reform grant, 20 teachers from Dr. E. A. Ricci Middle School and 21 teachers from North Providence High School participated in Embedded Institutes coordinated by RIWP Co-Director Dina Sechio DeCristofaro. The goal of these on-site programs was for teachers to engage in sustained and effective teacher development in literacy across content areas through journaling, sharing experiences, and collaborative research. The teachers involved met regularly to journal, formed book groups and discussed their professional reading. Teachers participated in a program of cross-visiting in one another's classrooms and RIWP consultants conducted after school seminars and workshops for the participants. During these Institutes, teachers experimented with writing to learn strategies and strategies to improve reading comprehension. They also tried out different types of public writing as alternatives to traditional written assignments. As a result of their experiences, the teachers involved thought it would be valuable to have these strategies gathered all in one place as quick reminders of what they had learned. They wished to share these ideas with other teachers as they planned their collaboration with the Rhode Island Writing Project for the 2007-2008 school year.

This compilation of content area literacy strategies was created in August, 2007. Strategies were selected and shared by the following teachers:

Tara Carlson	Alicia Charpentier
Julie Cook	Dana Gambardella
Michael Gianfrancesco	Tracy Graham
Kim Hardman	Jill Harraka
Lisa Montecalvo	Deana Capaldi Moore
Judith Nahabedian	Deanna Parrillo
Lisa Pasonelli	Shauna Pelletier
Madonna Thompson	Allison Wroblewski

The book consisted of three components: Writing to Learn, Reading Strategies and Public Writing. Some of the strategies included in the compilation were Artifact Exchange, Chalk Talk, Dialogue Journals, Double-Entry Journals, Mirrors and Windows, Admit/Exit Slips, Clustering, Book/Reading Club, Character Sketch, Post-It Response Notes, Bookmarks, It Says, I Say and So, Think-Pair-Share, Character Journal, I-Search Paper, RAFT, Multi-genre Research Project.





## Work from the Summer Institutes

From the Lit Institute...

### Reading Rightness Symbolically in the Great Gatsby

By: Lisa D. Narcisi

I know this title seems dreadfully, horrifically boring. Dear Reader, please stay with me and see if I can possibly salvage something interesting from a topic that almost led me to rip my hair out by the end of the year. Certainly my hair was eleven inches shorter by the time we'd finished. Of course, I'd donated it to Locks of Love, but I digress. By the time I finished teaching the *Great Gatsby* this year, I wanted to cut off all my hair and throw my Honors English students out the window. With the exception of two students, one half of the class complained bitterly all the way through the novel, and the other half sat quasi-silent because they'd self-righteously read the SparkNotes.

Oh, how I wish there was a SparkNotes version of my American Lit class. I'd google Honors American Lit Narcisi West Warwick and a webpage would miraculously explain the key facts about each student, the major themes and motifs that reoccurred over the course of the year, the climax of the class, the tone of each participant, the symbols, and the foreshadowing of the most difficult moments. As Sheridan Blau states, "...the world is a difficult text and we are reading it all the time"(205). My classroom was a difficult text and I am still re-reading it, so I can revise my initial readings and my predictions of how the material will be read in order to make next year's class better.

One thing's for sure - the stereotypical honors student does not easily access the "intellectual generosity and fallibilism," Blau claims is displayed by competent readers. After all, honors students are often know-it-alls who care about their grades and want to be right. As a reformed honors student, I understand that need to be right. How do I reconcile their need to be right with the need to make mistakes in order to interpret and understand literature? Perhaps by honoring my students' questions over their answers, I may begin to reach the state of nirvana I imagine is created in a roomful of teenage competently reading risk-takers. Classroom Nirvana- now that has to be an oxymoron. Nonetheless, there have been moments when my students are willing to ponder, question, and interrogate a text. For example, the question of how courage is defined in *To Kill a Mockingbird* sent the class into a discussion frenzy. Perhaps if I model intellectual courage, generosity and fallibilism, my class will start to understand its value too.

## From the Summer Invitational (A Journal Entry)

By: Laura Maxwell

I love teachers. I can't think of another profession that requires a greater balance of knowledge, empathy, humility, risk-taking, and logistical know-how. Every day I congratulate myself on the good sense that brought me to choose teaching as a career.

As teachers, we live in a constant state of flux because our students and our society are constantly changing. We aren't sticks-in-the-mud because we can't be - our students would never allow that. We live with one foot in pedagogy and the other in the changing culture of our charges. We know the difference between house and techno; we can connect rap to Shakespeare; we can call up episodes of *The Simpsons* and *Sponge Bob Square Pants* for classroom analogy.

We have our fingers on the pulse of a nation. We engage in the world every day that we teach. Talk about international affairs, talk about cross-cultural diplomacy, talk about psychology, business, the environment - we're there. It's all our business. We are our communities' home-grown intellectuals, counselors, town criers, negotiators, conciliators, provocateurs, conscience-prickers. What's more important than that?

## Excerpts from Young Writers...

### Silver Doorknob

By Dahlia Neeman (Grade 8)

A silver doorknob  
So simple and small  
Attached to a door,  
Near an aqua wall  
It twists and it turns  
It shakes as it learns  
Always held by hands  
Only one place it stands.

A silver doorknob  
A passage to a whole new land  
You just turn the smooth knob,  
And it always does as planned  
It holds stories and tales  
And has never seemed to fail  
Yes, all this is a simple and  
small  
Silver doorknob.

### Can the Wind Keep Secrets

By Alexandra Siegel (Grade 9)

Can the wind keep secrets  
As it rustles through the trees  
The stories it hears as it travels  
Coming from the land and the seas  
Does it repeat things to the creek  
As the water slowly flows  
Does it trade messages with the birds  
Learning more as it goes

All the secrets it has whispered  
All the lies that were told  
How much does the wind really know  
How many answers does the wind  
hold?

### Blackberries

By Helen Ferrenti (Grade 9)

Shining like jewels  
Within their box  
Overflowing with richness  
Sparkling and shimmering  
In the afternoon sun  
Tempting  
With juicy ripeness  
Each is a gem to savor  
Each remembered fondly  
Soft as velvet  
Black as raven's wings  
Hanging from bushes  
Many to be seen  
Staining your hands  
Leaving their mark  
So don't try to steal them  
You'll be caught  
Hands full in the blackberry patch

### Thunder Mountain

By Kelly Labossiere (Grade 4)

Errrr!!! The rollercoaster stopped in front of me. I didn't know what to do. I sat in the front seat with my dad on Thunder Mountain. I was about to jump off the rollercoaster when it started. I was so freaked out that I leaned on my dad's shoulder. When we were going up the huge hill, I didn't know what was at the other end. I closed my eyes, and suddenly the world felt like it was faster than the speed of sound! I was going down the hill, but it seemed like flying with my eyes closed. When we were going through a slow turn, it seemed safe so I opened my eyes. It looked like the mountains were moving toward us. The mountains appeared golden with the sun shining its beautiful color on them. So I shot my hands up and screamed. We were going so fast that we couldn't see the people standing in the line! We were coming to a stop where the end of the ride was. Right when I stepped off, I asked my dad, "Do you want to go again with me?" But for some reason he said, "No." Then he asked me if I wanted to go alone and I said, "Yes." I rode Thunder Mountain until it was closing time. I was so tired, I went right to bed when I got back to the hotel room. That night I dreamed that I was riding Thunder Mountain again and again! What an awesome day.

### Ode to Fishing

By Bobby Butler (Grade 6)

Fishing  
I cast out  
The bobber hits  
The water  
I wait  
The bobber  
Bounces up and down  
It goes under  
I yank the line  
I fill with excitement  
Is the fish big or small?  
The fish jumps  
I reel it in  
I catch it  
I fill with joy.

# Fall Writing Marathon

## Saturday, October 20



The Rhode Island Writing Project invites you to its Fall Writing Marathon on Saturday, October 20.

Our Fall Writing Marathon is your chance to take a break for yourself. Come to downtown Providence in mid-autumn to join us for walking, writing, eating, drinking, sharing & talking with one another. This Marathon is not a test of your endurance but rather a reward for your prolonged effort as teachers in our State.

In a Writing Marathon, you wander about the city in a small group, spending an hour or so wherever you think you might like to write (a list of suggestions is below). You share your writing, and then move on to a new spot. Finally, everyone comes together after a few hours to share with the larger group. The structure is loose, leaving room for improvisation and revision. The idea is to combine a sense of community, a sense of place, food, drink, and good writing partners.

Downtown Providence is a good place to inspire our writing and to help us think about the city as community. The schedule for the day will be:

12:30 Convene at the Providence Public Library  
Split into small groups of 2 or 3.

1:00 Begin exploring downtown Providence, spending 30 minutes to an hour at each place, where you should balance uninterrupted writing with sharing and responses limited to a simple "Thank you." Remember to eat and drink along the way! Some suggested sites downtown to visit and inspire writing are:

Ri Ra, Irish pub in Exchange Terrace (below the Marriot Courtyard)  
The Arcade, Weybosset Street  
Providence Open Market at corner of Westminster & Union Sts.  
Cuban Revolution (down Washington St, turn on Aborn St)  
McCormick & Schmick's (in the Biltmore Hotel)  
Union Station Brewery (at Exchange Terrace, below the Marriot Courtyard)  
Border's Café at Providence Place Mall  
Kennedy Plaza (skating rink & park)

3:00 Reconvene at the Public Library to share and wrap-up

3:30 Retire to Trinity Brewpub for post-Marathon refreshment

We're looking forward to this event, and we hope to see you there!



## This Past Year...

### *Technology and the RIWP*

By Tim Kenney

This past year, the RIWP become involved with the NWP's E-anthology for the first time. The e-anthology is a web site hosted by the NWP that allows members of the Summer Institutes from all around the country to meet and discuss ideas, issues and writing in an electronic forum. This past summer, Beverly Paesano and Maria Rollins took the initiative to get this past summer's Institute involved. "A Day in the Life" allowed teachers to read about the day-to-day activities from Institutes from all around the United States by reading the daily logs posted on-line. "Classroom Matters" provided a forum where teachers could share their own concerns about teaching, pose questions to teachers from all around the USA on educational issues, and get feedback for basic classroom practices. Finally "Open Mic" allowed teachers to post their writing in a safe environment while eliciting feedback from a variety of teachers from all around. Thus the e-anthology allowed the experiences found at the RIWP Summer Institute to become a national experience where the commonalities of NWP values and standards are embraced and encouraged. Next year, Beverly and Maria plan on integrating the e-anthology more throughout the entire Institute.

But RIWP is looking for other ways to use technology as well. Ideas include the use of podcasts on the RIWP web site, creating BLOGS and chat rooms for RIWP members to share their ideas and their concerns, and researching web sites that provide user-friendly instruction on how to use technology in a classroom to facilitate the teaching of writing throughout the year. And RIWP is just beginning. Technology is no longer a luxury but an essential component for instruction. In the future, look to see more ideas from RIWP on how to make technology more accessible to us all.

*The RI Writing Project is an affiliate of the David E. Sweet Center for Public Policy at Rhode Island College and the National Writing Project. It is funded in part by the Rhode Island Department of Education.*



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