

## **Walsh Final Audit of Written Work**

### **Description:**

If someone were to quickly look at the writing I produced in the daily discipline of writing they would notice that it is a long document, single spaced, of writings in paragraph and poetic form as well as some dialogue. Primarily the daily discipline was written in Word Document but at times throughout our weeks in class as well as when I practiced with my own students in class, I switched to write in my DDW notebook. The majority is typed on the computer and I am able to see that the document is 35 pages long with 17,657 words. Each section of writing is dated with the location of where I was writing to take note of the different places I wrote as well as try to find where my writing was “most successful”. The titles are bolded and indicate the type of genre below. All of the work in this document represents writing for the daily discipline of writing only.

There are some pages where I reflected about INSTEP toward the end of the DDW as well as some assignments given to us in Teaching of Reading and Teaching of Writing. My Reader Autobiography draft is in the document as well as my Risk Writing draft. Because we were asked not to edit in the DDW, I copied and pasted both assignments into another document to edit. My writing primarily reflects my practice with short story, novel and poetry writing. I tried to only write in journal form or free write for when I had too much on my mind to focus on fiction or autobiographical writing. I found that the DDW’s purpose was to get me in the habit of writing about things that were completely separate from school, job and stress and to challenge me to write fiction. The pieces of writing I produced in the DDW were around a page in length for each entry unless I was working on poetry. My hand written work would be about 2 full pages of loose leaf at least and I would typically continue a piece I had been working on in the DDW document. For the story I am writing, I have been writing in the DDW to start and then coping and pasting or re writing the handwritten story in a separate document for me to edit and focus on separate form the DDW.

For my commentaries in the evenings, I drafted them into the DDW document and then put them on Moodle so I could have all of my writing for INSTEP in the same place. Sometimes I found that my writing stemmed from in class exercises this summer or continued after reading the nightly readings and participating in the online commentaries. Each night I would post one commentary and one reply on Moodle. Any reply I posted was about two paragraphs in length. I found that at least one if not two people continued a conversation I started which opened up more for me to discuss on the topic with them. I honestly struggled with the Moodle postings at night and felt uncomfortable with this assignment. I felt pressure to start a “conversation worth continuing” which caused me to focus so much on what I wanted to write more than actually reading and thinking and processing. I am assuming that this is just because it was the first time participating in an online commentary. I think that I will feel more comfortable in the spring because I will not only be used to the structure but I will also be excited to communicate with the cohort again.

## **Analysis:**

Autobiographical writing has always been a genre I have been most proud of when sharing my writing. Going into the assignment of doing the DDW, I first said that I wanted to go back to my blog that I kept from when I studied abroad in Galway, Ireland the spring semester of my junior year of college in 2012. I started my blog to keep my family up to date with what I was doing on a daily basis as well as to give a detailed account of my European adventures. I typically wrote my blog right when I got back from weekend trips where I was exhausted from travel and it shows in my writing a lot. I have always wanted to take my blog and rewrite it in the form of short autobiographical stories.

I woke up one morning this past spring, before we were assigned the Daily Disciple of Writing, with a sentence in my head that I had to write down: *"It was 2 am Galway time with a partially smoked cigarette in one hand and a half full Smithwicks in the other"*. This was the first sentence that started my story "The Dive" about when I dived off the Salt Hill diving board during my last week in Ireland. I was so excited and proud of my story that I couldn't wait to write more about other experiences in Ireland but I just couldn't seem to find the time because of my work schedule. I found it extremely ironic that I was feeling the itch to write but needed the guidance that was provided with the daily discipline. The DDW assignment encouraged me to find the time and continue my writing about Ireland. This is what generated my daily writing initially until I realized that I wanted to explore more genres and topics.

I didn't know where to start though with this so I went into a book I have called *162 Things to Write About* which is basically a book full of writing prompts and questions with blank spaces to write in. I flipped through and came across the prompt that stated: "Never underestimate the lives of old men sitting on park benches". This was where I met my character Stan and only planned to write one entry about an old man on a park bench. This prompt has turned into a 12 page single spaced document, which grows rapidly each day. I found that while in class this summer and doing my DDW, I was either continuing my writing of "Park Benches" which is the title for now, or writing in response to what we were discussing or reading for class.

After leaving New York this summer and arriving back in Milwaukee, I continued my daily discipline with the serious intention to continue writing everyday. I have chosen to continue working on "Park Benches", which is really just a temporary title, in hope of it turning into a novel someday. My writing group gave me the confidence to admit previous statement. I shared the very first paragraph that I wrote from "Park Benches", and Christian said to me, "It sounds like you have a novel". He continued to tell me that I had two weeks to finish because it seemed like I had a story that I just needed to get out. I agreed. I felt vulnerable reading the first paragraph to my writing group because I knew that I had other excerpts that might have been better in my opinion but I wanted them to see where I began with my story. I shared the following:

***Never underestimate the lives of old men sitting on park benches.***

*On this particular October evening, Stan sits folded over his crossed arms. As the crisp wind breezes past, he briefly attempts to grab his hat, but the cold temperatures force him to salvage any amount of warmth he still had inside him leaving his head bare. He hadn't the courage to leave this park bench for his home was now empty. This was the only place he found*

*comfort and solace. The streetlights flicker as a young woman approaches ready for the last bus of the night into town. Her distant glance toward Stan reflected discomfort toward his presence. She filled the void by texting and moving ever so slightly away from the man that caused her such anxieties. Stan begins to shiver slightly and a small sob becomes audible. The young woman looks back toward the park bench, and just as she turns toward him, the bus arrives and she quickly races on, leaving Stan to himself, yet again. If only the bus arrived one moment later, she would have provided Stan with the company he so desired. As the sky grew darker, the absence of his wife was becoming more and more apparent. And yet, something inside him prevented him from getting up and walking home. The park bench represented the moment in time that changed him forever. His wife sat here with him so many years ago not knowing he would be the man to take care of her, love her and give her the life she always desired. But he knew. And now he knows that whatever time he has left will never live up to the time he had with her. It felt like that day was so close to him and the funeral he left this morning never happened.*

I remember sitting at my kitchen table writing this and wanting to know more about Stan. I realized I had the power to get to know him, to create him. I began introducing other characters in the story as well with the intent to have their lives somehow surround the same park bench. The more I create details about the lives of these very different characters, the more I fall in love with them and feel connected to them. As a writer, I feel responsible for continuing their creation and their story. I look forward to sitting down and writing more about Stan, Mo, Caroline, Elizabeth, James, Mark and Ms. S and Mrs. O’Leary. I am finding that I am releasing many of my inner human emotions qualities, hopes and fears into the minds of these characters and for me that is therapeutic. Writing this story opens up a new world for me and I don’t know if I would be where I am with my confidence in writing if it weren’t for my writing experience with INSTEP and my writing group. I learned that my writing takes priority as a writing teacher and I notice that the more recent entries are more focused and passionate. When I started this process, it took a long time for me to start and I felt the urge to edit. I was self-conscious about what I was typing on the page thinking that it wasn’t good enough or what I was supposed to be doing. I can now see that the DDW can be a life changing assignment. Since I have been working on “Park Benches”, my entries become more detailed and intimate. I am able to dig deeper into the individual lives and cause them to intertwine:

*The pain Stan felt in his heart distracted him from his bleeding knees. Stan always could only handle one strike of pain at a time: and this was no different.*

*It was the consistent ringing of the telephone that forced Stan to get up off of the floor. He stumbled over books and furniture dripping blood wherever he stepped.*

*Frantically he questioned, “What do you need?”*

*His neighbor on the other end was just 27 years old and she felt the need to call over to make sure things were alright after hearing such a loud crash.*

*“Oh um hi I just was making sure you were ... um... making sure you were alright. I heard a noise. I am so sorry to bother you.”*

*Feeling guilty for his burst he calmed down a little. It was nice, he thought, to hear the voice of another human being. It had been a while. It was especially nice to hear the voice of a young woman sounding so fragile and so innocent.*

*“Dear its alright”, Stan replied back to her. “I am just having one of those mornings sweet heart I will be just fine”. His tone seemed cheerful now as if relieved in some way.*

*Stan’s heart started to race and he wasn’t sure what to do next with this conversation. He didn’t want the woman on the other end of the line to leave. He needed human contact again. He needed to start redeeming him self for the life he royally screwed up with Marcy. It might not be with a wife, but it could be with a friend.*

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*Mo hung up the phone and started pacing the floor of her apartment. She had plenty of space to do sprints in here due to the lack of furniture. Her adrenaline was building. That combined with the shots of Jameson she just consumed was mixing to create the perfect sense of confidence and energy. She could do this. She could leave now. Collin wouldn’t be home till after work.*

*The thought that slowed her down was the man on the other end of the phone. She had never spoken to him before. She remembered during a long and loud fight that she and Collin were having months prior, an old woman knocked on their door leaving their phone number for emergencies. Mo thought that was strange, especially because of the timing of her arrival. She didn’t even seem to care about heir fighting. She was leaving the number to help herself.*

Mo was my second character whose life intertwines with Stan’s in the excerpt above. I haven’t decided if I ever want my characters to meet and have a legitimate relationship or not. So far they all are just casually passing by each other so that the reader can subtly start to understand how lives pass by each other and no one really notices others due to their own troubles, joys or overall life situations. On the other hand, I want to point out the beauty behind the lives of human beings and how we should never underestimate any lives, especially those that belong to old men on park benches.

### **Reflection:**

It is safe to say that I have changed as a writer since starting my Writer Self Study assignment in June and finishing my Final Audit of Written Work now in August. I have become reflective and confident this summer and am proud to not hesitate anymore when I say that I am a writer. I had an inner desire to write but honestly felt that I lacked topics or inspiration. Now saying this, I regret not reflecting at all my first year teaching. In my Daily Discipline of Writing assignment, which I didn’t know I’d be assigned when writing my writer self study, I wrote a piece called, “What I Didn’t Do” about how I didn’t reflect my first year. My school did not hold me accountable for anything I did. I did not need to turn in unit plans, lesson plans, reflections, or even make comments in Power Teacher about students! I was not

required to comment on students! We had to turn in our final exams after each semester, yes, but I would be willing to put money on the fact that my principle didn't glance at one single correction I gave on my student's essays. If I wanted to, I didn't even have to give students responses about their papers. I could have given a grade and moved on.

The lack of accountability my first year could be considered lucky to some but I disagree. I would constantly think about how I hold my students to extremely high expectations in my classroom, but at the same time, am held to very low expectations as a teacher at my school. I say this because there are a large handful of teachers who do the very bare minimum. It is not like we get paid anymore for being a good teacher. The best, most hard working, over achieving teachers get paid the same as the teacher who sits at his desk all day and strums on his guitar. This made me sick last year and it also caused me to leave the building at the end of the school year in tears and in anger. The only support I had was from my department head, a 25-year-old fellow graduate of Marquette and good friend. At the end of the year I gave her a thank you card that said, "Life is easier when you have a posse". We were there for each other. If it weren't for her support, what reason would I really have to be a good teacher aside from benefiting my students. Honestly, there were so many days I left my classroom thinking about how little my students care about their future and their education but deep down I know that isn't fully true. I let my frustrations at time take over and prevent me from being the best I could possibly be.

And what does this ramble even have to do with writing and who I am as a writer? I believe that writing will be the guidance and accountability I need. If my school will not hold me accountable I promise myself and my students that I will not let that prevent me from continuing to go above and beyond, even if it goes unnoticed. The fact that my administration will not observe my lessons or ask how I am even doing as a first year teacher will not inhibit me from growing on my own. The Daily Discipline of Writing was a way that I held myself accountable these past two months. I was not perfect with this discipline and I fell behind at times. If I think that I have any right to hold my students accountable then I must hold myself to even high standards in order to be a good teacher. Writing will help me see and think deeper about what I experience and go through everyday as an individual as well as a member of my classroom community.

In my self-study I mentioned, "I know that as a teacher I am supposed to be reflective on my lessons, units and my students and this is something that I struggle with". I knew that this was a struggle at this point. In my DDW, I wrote a story called "What I Didn't Do" where I elaborated even more on this topic and even made excuses about how I didn't want to remember. I remember feeling like I just wanted to go home and lie down and try not to let the day's struggles bother me. I wanted my first year to be over.

*I stare as I sit in my empty classroom, boxes packed, boards clean, exams in process. I regret not writing everything down that I experienced as my first year as a teacher. Perhaps it is because part of me doesn't want to remember. The reality is that this year is too vivid to forget. I didn't want to write about my first day of school where I was scared to death with a smile on my face hopefully wishing that they like me. I didn't want to reflect on my lessons from Night because I felt like I failed them with useless questions and activities. I didn't want to sit down after a day on my feet running from desk to desk trying to help them write introductions and*

*thesis statements. The days were so hard, so long and felt as if I did nothing. I didn't feel it was necessary to write down how it made me feel when Giovanni walked out of the room saying, "This is why every one hates you", or when Jared told me he didn't like me as a teacher. I didn't want to reflect on the moment that my first semester 2B class pushed their test off their desks refusing to take it, yelling at me about how I am unfair. I never wanted to record my emotion and anxiety level after first semester 4B especially the day I had 39 students in the room with only 36 desks. I didn't want to talk about the multiples times Paola got in my face or Evelin gave me a look that tore me a part. I didn't want to think about the amount of Fs I put in the grade book or the lack of homework that was turned in on a daily basis, or the many conversations about how they need to be responsible for their work and their life or it will bite them in the ass. I didn't want to do it.*

*Some days I don't know if I taught them anything. Some days I feel like there have been improvements. I won't know because I didn't write these things down. I didn't keep track. I tried to get through this year in one piece and I survived.*

*Looking around now as they write their final essays in MLA format hopefully providing an abundance of textual evidence from Hamlet and The Crucible, I know that I have accomplished as much as I possibly could this year. I have gained experience in handling a class full of students, I have learned so much this year about planning and curriculum and managements that I will be stronger next year. Most teachers don't get a second chance but I get three with this group of students. I will make sure that the things I didn't do this year I will do for the next two.*

Thank goodness it is over because now that I am over that mountain, I can focus on noticing each student, reflecting about their progress and my own. Writing will make me feel more connected to my thoughts, more connected to my students and more connected to where I want to go as an educator and as a writer. I will never be the teacher across the hall sitting and strumming on my guitar. I will write and reflect for myself, not for my administration or for any accountability I am or am not held to. There have been complaints from other staff members about this accountability issue. I think it stems from the lack of work by others more so than a desire to be reviews. But then again maybe not. Especially as a first year teacher I needed to be observed and reviewed. I needed guidance and support. If I want to move forward as a professional I need to hold myself to my own high standards and with writing I know I will accomplish this goal. Today concludes the last day of my first week back to school and I can already see change. I will write with them and write for them. I will write for myself emotionally and professionally and strive every day to continue the discipline that this assignment started.