Project Read Update

Project Read: the Adult Literacy Program of the San Francisco Public Library

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A True American Idol

by Vivian Altmann

Eileen using the Project Read Computer Lab

Eileen Brown and I have been working together as a Project Read team for over a year now. We've been making a lot of progress with computer skills like e-mail proficiency and surfing the web to find information that's important to Eileen and her family. But we haven't yet spent a lot of time reading books.

A few months ago, Eileen expressed an interest in seeking out the autobiography of someone whose life and talent she really admires – the singer and actress Fantasia Barrino, who was a winner on the television show *American Idol*.

We got a hold of the book and read a little bit of it together, but Eileen was so interested in reading about Fantasia that she finished the entire book by herself! I'm so proud of her. She was motivated enough to seek out the book and then read it on her own, making Eileen my *American Idol*. I interviewed Eileen about it when she was still on page 148.

Vivian: Tell me about the book you're reading now.
Eileen: It's called *Life Is Not a Fairy Tale* by Fantasia Barrino.

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The views expressed are those of the authors - not necessarily that of Project Read or the San Francisco Public Library.

A True American Idol *continued.*

V: Why did you choose to read this book?
E: It's a true story that anyone can relate to. For example, take any five people in a room and it speaks to all five people. Fantasia talks about day-to-day life experiences that you live through. She talks about one day wanting to be something and how some dreams are not fulfilled.

V: How did you get interested in Fantasia?
E: From watching *American Idol*. There's something about Fantasia that I like. I just can't pinpoint what it is about her that I like so much. She has certain qualities. She's a mother first. It didn't matter to her if her career came first or didn't come at all. She didn't really care about success – it either came to her or it didn't. She speaks a lot about her daughter. Her child comes first.

V: Had you watched *American Idol* from the beginning?
E: Yes, I'm a fan of *American Idol* but I didn't really get into it until Ruben Studdard. Ruben was in the second season. Fantasia's season was the third season in 2004. And I just missed two episodes because my cable was out and it took them two weeks to fix my cable!

V: How did you find out she wrote a book?
E: Ever since she won *American Idol*, I've been following her.

V: How do you get information on Fantasia?
E: I'm on her Fantasia website. On her first music CD it said that she had a website. But it all started from *American Idol*. I went to Google search and typed in Fantasia Barrino. I think she has several websites. She's also on MySpace. And she's also sung with a couple of artists on her record – like Missy Elliot and I think she went on tour with Jamie Foxx.

V: Did you get her book at a bookstore or at the library?
E: I got it from the library.

V: How did you find it in the library?
E: To find the book in the library I went on the Internet. I went to sfpl.org and did a search for the title of the book first. That told me the section it was in and I found it by looking at the numbers on the spine of the book.

V: Why do you relate so much to Fantasia?
E: She talks about the relationship she has to her mother and to her daughter. It's the same as the generation relationships in my family.

V: How does it feel to be reading a book on your own?
E: It's fine. I noticed that when I got to page 148, I drifted from the book a little because I knew what the end of the story was going to be. The book tells the story of the years before she won *American Idol*. Then in the middle she became the *American Idol*, when she was like 17 or 18. Then the rest is her life since then. At first I was reading four or five pages a day, and then I would only read about a half a page or a page when I was on BART. But then I drifted back to it because I really wanted to accomplish finishing the book.

V: What might you be interested in reading next?
E: I was thinking about reading a book about Terrell Owens. I heard about that. He was on the 49ers and I'm a 49ers fan. Now he's on my other team – the Cowboys. And he's messed up on both teams and I want to know why. I like biography and it's got to be on someone I know. I'm not a fiction person. It has to be a true story.

Book Review: *Devil in A Blue Dress* by Shedrick Ferguson, Jr.

I read *Devil In A Blue Dress* by Walter Mosley. It was a good book.

The characters in the book were very good. I like the plot and the story. The writer made the characters very active. They were described rough and exciting. But reading the book it takes a chapter or more to get a good understanding of what is going on.

The movie was good too. That was the first time I read a book first and then watched the movie. The movie was fast. The plot of the movie went quickly, but the characters looked clean and neat. They didn't look scary.

My Grandfather's Story by Paul Far

Russia has a rich history in literature, opera, art, poetry and drama. The Kingdom before the Russian revolution was out of touch with reality and the people. Most of the politicians were telling the Czar that his people were not happy. "We thought very soon something will happen," but the King was busy with his lavish parties and womanizing. He didn't care what his people thought and did not listen to them. The Czar continued doing the same thing.

My grandfather was traveling back and forth to Russia during that time because he had an import and export business with his dad. They were trading with merchants in Baku. My grandfather was not in touch with real people in Russia. He was engaged with wealthy merchants any time he went to Baku. Either he stayed with them or in a nice hotel. Among all those wealthy people was the thought that an uprising would be temporary the Czar would prevail, and then everything would be all right.

After the revolution, my grandfather got in touch with the people who knew. They were confident this situation would pass in a few months, and everything would go back to normal. Russian money started to lose value, but my grandfather and his dad thought the revolution was impossible, so instead of selling, getting rid of all the Russian money, they bought more and more. After a few years all their Russian money was worthless. A couple of years after that my great grandfather died, and at the same time, an uneducated military general, with the help of the English, made a coup and became the Shah of Iran.

After becoming the Shah, he started to get rid of people who were against him. He either killed them or put them in jail. People who saw him said he had scary eyes - no one could look at his eyes. After the Shah became powerful he got greedy and started to gather wealth. One day the Shah was driving out of Tehran and he saw a beautiful, well-groomed and maintained ranch. He asked who the ranch belonged to. The ranch belonged to my grandfather. It was the only thing he had left after losing his Russian investment.

The Shah decided he had to have that ranch. He approached my grandfather, and told him he liked the ranch. When the Shah wanted something no one could say no. My grandfather told the Shah what happened to him. He had a big family and this was the only thing he had left, but the Shah offered him a penny for dollar, and took the ranch over.

My grandfather was left almost with nothing to support himself. Then one day he decided to get rid of the worthless Russian money. He brought it out and burned it. Then he became schizophrenic. I remember when I was about seven years old he used to come visit us. He told me lots of stories about Russia, and took me to the Bazaar, and he showed me how to buy ripe watermelon and Persian melon. When I was older I noticed he was little bit different. When my grandfather was talking about somebody he was the nicest person in the world. The next minute he was the worst person in the world. Later on he got worse and worse, and my parents had a hard time dealing with his problem.

New Start at Walden House
by Alice Triplett

My name is Alice Triplett. I am back in Walden House for the sixth time, but I have only been in FOTEP (Female Offender Treatment and Employment Program) two times. So now that I'm back I really need to do work on myself. I need to pull my awareness up on my new relationship. In my past getting in relationships has not been good for me. I always take the focus off of me and put it all on him. The first time I went to Walden House I got in a relationship with a man who was living in the same house. That did not work out because I wound up leaving that program after being there for 11 months. The last time I was here at FOTEP I got in a relationship it turned out to be bad for me too. I'm here in the program again and I was doing well here. Sometimes it gets very hard for me to be without a man in my life. I get lonely, so I need someone to make me feel good because I don't know how to be alone. I am afraid that it will be hard to find a good man. Sometimes I still have low self-esteem, so I'm still looking for men's validation, positive or negative. I'm just rushing into bad relationships and that is what gets me into trouble all the time. So now that I have talked about my bad relationships, I hope some day I will have a good and healthy relationship.

Living on the Edge
by DeMarcus Johnson

Let me tell you a story about a boy and a pledge.
He's living off the streets, living on the edge.
Remembering about his yesteryears,
Heart pounding with emotions, tearing with fear,
Never stopping to ask himself, "Where do I go from here?'
As his mind works overtime, he starts feeling strange.
He listens to the sound of the winds of change.

Searching for a little inspiration and hope,
He changes his life and learns how to cope.
He is completely open to new ideas,
but it's a tidal wave of fear premiers.
As time moves on, his emotions come clear.
He's a down-to-earth guy with nothing to fear.
He sees a better world wherever he might go,
Because that's the way the winds of change blow.

Realizing all his dreams and ambitions,
He gets a second chance and finds new traditions.
Before he woke up, he didn't have long to live,
But now he has more love and respect to give.
Now his journey continues and his mission is clear.
Like the wind, he asks, "Where do I go from here?"

DeMarcus writing fabulous new things

Technology and Me
by Neil Mills

I first visited Thailand in 1987. There were very few English programs on television at that time. My friend Tony and I would go to the American University library every Thursday and watch a tape of seven days of news sent every week from New York to American University Bangkok. Peter Jennings was the narrator, and that's how we got the news every week from around the world and America. In order to check on how my family were doing and let them know how I was, I would have to travel across Bangkok to the main post office, which had cheaper rates for overseas phone calls. The big change came with computers and Cable News Network (CNN) and British Broadcasting Company (BBC), bringing instant news to Asia.

In 1996, Project Read installed computers and taught the members how to use them. For me, it opens up a new world being able to use the computer to email and check with my hometown's paper and newspapers around the world and in Asia. Computers became very accessible in Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore where I also visited. And little computer shops popped up everywhere and even in the department stores.

My thanks go out to Project Read for teaching me how to use the computer.

Neil Mills

Tips For Tutors: Beating Writer's Block

by Randy Weaver

We have all experienced writer's block at various times in our lives. So we can all empathize with adult learners when they tell us that they just couldn't think of anything to write about. Unfortunately, in order to help an adult learner improve his or her writing skills, we really do need a writing sample to begin the process. And it's also true that the best way to become a better writer is to write as much and as often as possible.

Many tutor-learner teams have successfully used journal writing strategies in order to encourage writing, but even learners who have experience writing in personal journals or dialog journals will from time to time need a gentle push to get them rolling.

That's exactly the purpose of *The Write Brain Workbook: 366 Exercises to Liberate Your Writing* by Bonnie Neubauer (2006, Writer's Digest Books). This colorfully illustrated book has writing prompts for each day of the year plus one more for good measure.

Here are just a few examples of the prompts found in this helpful workbook which is available free for tutor-learner teams in the Project Read office.

Far, Far Away: *Think of a person who really bugs or annoys you. Think of a place you'd like to send this person. Then—mentally—send them there! With that in mind, start with: "The post card arrived from…"*

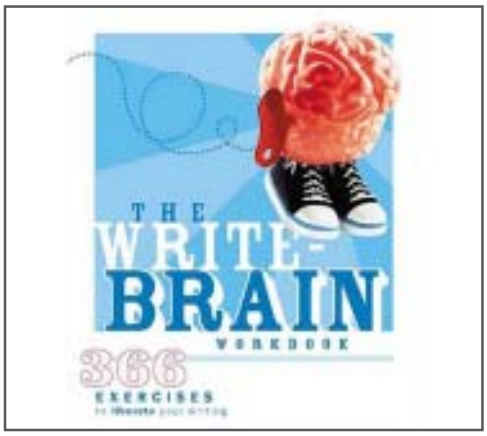
Choices, Choices: *Choose one:*

A. I'd like to be able to fly using my own powers
B. I'd like to be able to make myself invisible

You possess this super power for the story you are about to write. Start with: "It was just a teeny-weeny little lie…"

Snooping: *Think back to a time when you looked someplace that you shouldn't have. Example: looking in the drawer of the nightstand of the people you were babysitting for. Write about this episode, and don't forget to embellish it and tell what you found! Start with: "When I opened…"*

Although some of the 366 writing prompts may not be interesting or engaging to your learner, there is a good chance that you will find a few new and exciting ideas that will help him or her with the process of getting those thoughts down on paper. And you might find some topics you'd like to write about, too!



Tips to Help Your Learner Study for the Driver's Exam

by Heather Ellis

Among the many goals that Project Read learners set, one of the most popular is to pass the written exam in order to get a California Driver's License. There have been several tutor learner teams that have worked toward and accomplished this goal in the past year. If your learner is interested in pursuing this goal, then you may want to read these tips from tutor Steve Blumenthal who helped his learner DeMarcus Johnson get on the road to driving! Recently, DeMarcus successfully passed his written driver's exam.

When you read Steve's tips you will notice that in preparation for achieving this goal many other skills were polished and developed along the way including: comprehension and retention, spelling, writing, critical thinking, sign and symbol reading, and even phonics.

According to Steve, "The two most effective things that DeMarcus did were 1) to practice with sample tests and 2) to study certain sections of the driver's manual until he knew them nearly by heart. An important part of our preparation was the simulating of the actual test-taking environment. For that reason, it was important to have sample tests with 36 questions. DeMarcus and I worked on test-taking skills." Steve said that he encouraged DeMarcus to check his answers starting with the last answer and working backward.

Steve says, "We found the sections of the driver's manual test and read the manual together several times. In addition, DeMarcus read the manual on his own for homework/ practice."

Steve also saw this as a great opportunity to work with his learner on study skills, especially since his learner's motivation was so high. He would ask DeMarcus to read a section of the manual and then repeat it to himself or out loud to him. This post-reading strategy helps with comprehension and retention. He also had DeMarcus write what he had just read. This is a great way to reinforce the material being learned and of course also serves as good writing practice. There is no need to focus on the spelling at this time. The idea is for the learner to be able to retell what was just read.

Steve also explains how they practiced learning and retaining the information while in their tutoring sessions. He says, "I quizzed him repeatedly, both verbally and with practice tests I had written. We drew many pictures as well, which helped DeMarcus translate text into driving situations. Pictures of intersections, curves, solid and broken yellow lines, road signs, etc." According to Steve they also worked on phonics, sight words, and vocabulary. He says, "We practiced distinguishing a hard *c,* as in *corner,* from a soft *c,* as in *center.* He learned many sight words as well, for example, *pedestrians* and *intersections.* The manual was also a great source of new spelling words."

In the final stages of preparing for the test, Steve says, "When it seemed that DeMarcus knew the material, we went to the DMV website on the computer at Project Read to schedule his exam. When it came time for the test, we scheduled that day's tutoring session at the DMV instead. I quizzed him on the way to the DMV. It helped him relax to know that someone who was rooting for him was right there."

Congratulations to a team that worked extremely hard and accomplished a very important goal that is shared by other learners at Project Read.

Driver's Test Resources by Brian

Driver's Test Print Outs

We have photocopies of several complete Regular Driver Class C tests available to you in the computer lab. Many people have found them most helpful.

DMV Website

The CA DMV website ***(www.dmv.ca.gov)*** is a little hard to navigate but has lots of helpful information including up to date versions of the driver handbooks, a very handy interactive guide called *Driving Knowledge Tutorial,* and samples of the regular, commercial, and motorcycle written tests. It currently has 5 sample mini-tests of 10 questions each for the Class C License. You can get to the sample tests directly at ***www.dmv.ca.gov/pubs/interactive/tdrive/exam.htm*** or from the center link on the Project Read Learning Lab Links page (on all of our lab computers or by going to ***www.projectreadsf.org*** and clicking on "**Learning Lab Links**" near the bottom).

Listen Up

The DMV offers several alternative ways to take the written test including an audio test where it is played from a cassette tape and a person-to-person version where the examiner asks the questions aloud. Vroom!

Learner Accomplishments

The clothing company begun by **Mario St. Rose** over 2 years ago is going strong. Mario believes that the tutoring he received at Project Read has helped him grow and made it possible for him to achieve his goal of starting the Forrio Clothing Company – www.forrioclothing.com. Mario hopes that the success of his company will someday enable him to give something back to the many people who have helped him along the way.

Dayana Salazar recently received her California state certification as a phlebotomist - that is, someone who draws blood and handles medical specimens. She was offered and accepted a job at California Pacific Medical Center. Dayana is specializing in pediatric patients. She has also successfully completed another semester at City College, and she passed her organic chemistry course.

Thank you

☺ John Gildersleeve and Mary Hilton for leading the Wednesday Night Readers meetings. ☺ Friends of the San Francisco Public Library for their generous support. ☺ Tutor contacts Vivian Altmann, Renee Feldman, Susan Fink, JoAnn Lopez, Terri Ryan, Bruce Suehiro, and Mary Hilton for providing invaluable support to the staff and fellow tutors.

2007 Writer to Writer Challenge for Adult Learners

Leona Whytus

Once again this year, the California State Library (along with the Bay Area Literacy Network and the Southern California Library Literacy Network) is sponsoring the Writer to Writer Challenge for adult learners in library-based literacy programs in California.

The Writer to Writer Challenge is simple; adult learners are asked to write a letter to the author of a book they have read, or listened to, which has really inspired them. Last Year, Project Read's Leona Whytus came in first place for the letter she wrote to Mildred D. Taylor author of *Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry* which Leona read as a member of the Wednesday Night Readers Book Club.

The State Library has even provided a very helpful collection of writing exercises for tutor-learner teams to use in preparation for submitting a letter to the Writer to Writer Challenge. This packet of information even includes examples of winning letters from previous years. These materials, along with the official Writer to Writer entry forms, are available in the Project Read office and on our website – ***www.projectreadsf.org***. We will also be happy to mail packets of these materials to tutor-learner teams who cannot pick up a hard copy or access the electronic version of the forms.

The deadline for submitting your letters is **June 30, 2007**. Happy writing!

Save This Date: Thursday, June 7, 2007, 6 - 8 p.m.

Annual Project Read Tutor-Learner Recognition

Project Read's learners, tutors, family members, and community supporters are invited to attend this annual event which will feature:

- Inspirational words from Project Read learners and tutors
- Delicious food, tutor service awards, guest speakers
- Fine music by guitarist/songwriter Alexis Harte
- Enjoyable socializing with your fellow learners and tutors

At this year's recognition event, we would like to encourage both tutors and learners to think about how your life has changed since becoming involved with Project Read. Please write a brief (one page or less) description about a positive experience you have had as a tutor or a learner. If you like, you may share what you have written during the program that evening. Here are just a few ideas that tutors and learners might consider writing about.

What was it like for you when you first started at Project Read, and how is it different now?
In what ways has your learner or tutor made a difference in your life?
What have you learned from working with your adult learner or volunteer tutor?

Please send your submissions, electronically if possible to Richard Le in the Project Read office by **May 18, 2007.** You may also bring him a floppy disk or hard copy. You will be receiving more information about this event as the date approaches, but for now please make plans to join us on Thursday, June 7th at the Main Library from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m.

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