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Albany High School

Building an effective argument is one of the most important skills for a young writer. At AHS, freshmen develop this skill through an interdisciplinary debate project, and our coaches are an important element of this project.

"We just love you guys!" beams project coordinator and AHS teacher Bob Lent after a daylong debate marathon in which about 150 9th graders have engaged in vigorous debate over issues ranging from outlawing tobacco products to stem cell research to the use of nuclear energy as a source of power.

The writer coaches help students research the issue, then develop a line of argument and rebuttal, working with the teams to sort their research into debate components – an introduction, two strong support sections with evidence and examples, preparation for rebuttal and cross questioning, and

a conclusion. Coaches work with each student to prepare his or her speech or rebuttal section, then meet with the entire group to help them articulate how their argument hung together, and then sit again with individual students to work on their piece of the puzzle.

At the final coaching session, coaches helped individual students polish their final speeches and then worked with the whole team on the delivery of their oral persuasive argument. It was exciting to see some small light bulbs go on as students realized how the parts fit together. We hope this will translate to their own persuasive essay writing down the road.

Coaches attended the real debates in droves, encouraging their teams with smiles and applause.

– Teresa Barnett

Albany Middle School

It seems like time has flown since we began our first coaching sessions in October. After 2,800 coaching sessions, we're getting to know our 8th graders fairly well. We've had incredibly enthusiastic and consistent coaches along with very supportive AMS English teachers who have made our coaching sessions with the 8th graders such a success.

These last two months, the 8th grade students have been working on their I-Search, a research project on a topic of particular interest to the student. They choose their own research topics and then read books, use the Internet, interview experts, conduct on-site observations, and immerse themselves in their topics. The topics are as varied as the students' personalities. It's been a truly gratifying

experience for our coaches to work with most of the same students throughout this creative process and bring them to the final conclusion of their I-Search.

All year long there has been one student who has been very resistant to being coached. The student wouldn't even speak to the various coaches. Finally, last week the AMS site coordinator reluctantly asked one more coach (a newly trained one) if she'd try to work with him. She agreed and not only did the student speak to the coach, but brought a writing paper for her to work with him on! It wasn't a long session with this student, but a real breakthrough. It just goes to show, *there's a writing coach for everyone!*

– Karen Larson

Longfellow Middle School

It's springtime at Longfellow, and poetry is in the air. As the response-to-literature writing assessment loomed, our coaches brushed up on their figurative language and helped the kids get comfortable with such folks as Langston Hughes, Robert Frost, Maya Angelou, and Charles Bukowski. The deepest joy, though, came when the kids wrote their own poems and we were reminded once again that the passion of a middle-school poet can leap tall buildings. In their object-love poems, devotion soared from a glass of milk to an Oreo, from a computer to an iPod, from

mashed potatoes to gravy. Our reward was an invitation to a reading of original poems written by the Spanish-immersion 8th graders. Every kid in the class stepped up to the microphone and delivered his or her poem with confidence and pride. The crowd went wild. A few coaches were so wowed that they offered to compile the poems into a book, which we hope to have ready for the kids by the end of the year. (And how did those love affairs end? Sadly, often badly, as when, for example, the gravy betrayed the potatoes and fell into the arms of the turkey.)

– Annie Stine

CP Academy, Berkeley High School

At Community Partnerships Academy, spring has brought us a new crop of enthusiastic coaches to add to our wonderful team. We've tackled essays ranging from *Oedipus* to *Catcher in the Rye* to *Lord of the Flies*, including critiquing a video project on the latter. In January we had a lively and very well attended coach refresher workshop. I continue to be amazed at the caliber of the comments on the coaching worksheets.

Most inspiring of all, during the recent KPFA radio show about WCC, both CPA English teachers called in with high praise for our coaches and the program as a whole. A few of Ms. Bell's 10th graders had prepared comments for the show but unfortunately there was not enough time for them to be aired.

Students mentioned that their writing coaches give them self-

confidence, and make them feel not only good about their writing but about themselves. What more could we ask? Here are a few excerpts:

"(My coach) made me feel good to have her attention because she is a great writer herself. Because I've been able to work one-on-one with her, I felt confident about sharing my writing with a larger audience. Now I write for my school newspaper, the Berkeley High Jacket."

"I like my writing coach because she makes the hardest things sound so simple and easy. She listens to what I have to say. And she's cool."

"These coaches help me with my grammar, flow, and developing my personal style. This is good because it can be instrumental in a career in sports writing."

– Sahib-Amar Khalsa

King Middle School

Spring semester has been full speed ahead at King since January 20. Though every King team lost a number of fall coaches to foreign travel, family problems, and – especially this year – employment changes, every team gained new coaches. I know King's coaching program is not the only one to have benefited from a renewed spirit of commitment to community in recent months, and I am very grateful.

It's been a pleasure to watch the new coaches get hooked on the work. Some feel intimidated at first, especially since some of the

spring assignments are big and demanding, like the I-Search project and the poetry analysis unit. In addition, I talked a number of new volunteers into giving Ms. Felarca's English Language Learner class a try. I don't think there is a single new coach who hasn't told me how much fun coaching is and how right it feels.

Every teacher has expressed appreciation for having coaches help students hone their I-Search plans and suggest resources. With the newly enlarged ELL team, Ms. Felarca and her students got their wish: more one-on-one time for each English learner.

– Kathleen Hallam

Willard Middle School

Imagery? Personification? Metaphor? Mood? You mean poems don't have to rhyme? Eighth graders at Willard have been working with their coaches to discover their hidden poetic talents and have surprised themselves!

"Clouds holding their breath, watching the sun's funeral"

"Feelings are as instant as coffee"

"Childhood is not thinking twice; just doing it"

"Miss Mary takes me higher than a pilot..."

"I wish I remember jumping backwards off a skyscraper while shooting at bad guys"

"Her hair is like snakes squirming in desert sand"

Ode to My Skateboard: "it is my life; it is my wife";

My Computer: "we are the same; we may take time to respond to commands";

My Pencil: "the Mona Lisa of pencils";

My Tree: "It was tall enough to brush the sky above the city";

My Shoe: "Every scuff came from me";

my iPod, my cell phone, myself and much, much more!

In addition to writing their own poetry, students are reading a wide range of poetry and writing analytical essays which include a description of the poet's literary devices. We LOVE our coaches at Willard—they have coached over 1500 sessions so far this year!

– Jeanine Brown

Media Academy

Thomas, Ginsberg, Neruda, Giovanni roll over! Tenth graders at Media wowed their coaches and fellow students this spring as they performed their epic poems. This assignment drew out students' voices like none before, and it gave coaches an intimate look at their students' lives. The poets spoke of cultural differences, drew stark images of urban life, and recounted rich family histories that took listeners to a Cambodian river, the streets of Guadalajara and a stock car in Oklahoma.

It was hard to tell who was more proud – the students or the coaches. The power of language, stories and courageous performances swept us away and left us wanting more. Between a large coach turnout

and unusually few student absences, Miss Totten-Harris' classroom was packed, and the energy high.

The following week, we site coordinators met with Ms. Totten-Harris to escort a number of Media students – fired up from their epic poem assignment – to the Youth Speaks preliminary poetry slam at the Oakland Art Museum. The Media students *rocked*, receiving high marks from the judges and plenty of love from the crowd. One student said afterwards, "Well, now I *know* I want to do this." Echoing the words of the coaches after the student classroom performances, another asked, "When can we do this again?"

– Clara Sneed and Lisa Awrey