



June 2024 Newsletter

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WCM wrapped up this year's coaching by working on college admissions essays in Ravalli!

2023-2024 Stats

We had another amazing school year! See below the awesome achievements that WCM accomplished, thanks to community members, educators, donors, and students!

- 2,625 students served
 - Across Flathead, Missoula, & Ravalli counties, coaches supported students in grades 4-12.
 - Subjects included government, social studies, language arts, & humanities.
 - For the first time, WCM coached an entire class of English Language Learners!
- 33 teachers partnered
 - 100% of teacher survey respondents reported that they would recommend WCM to fellow educators.
- 15 schools served
 - Flathead: Columbia Falls HS, Edgerton Elementary, Glacier HS, Kalispell MS, Whitefish HS, Whitefish MS
 - Missoula: Big Sky HS, CS Porter MS, Hellgate HS, Sentinel HS, Target Range School
 - Ravalli: Corvallis HS, Hamilton HS, Florence-Carlton HS, Florence-Carlton MS
- Over 1,000 hours donated

- Hundreds of local community members volunteered for 3,148 sessions. That equates to \$15,920 of in-kind labor!
- 15 local businesses partnered
 - Businesses supported literacy in Montana communities by donating for coach appreciation, teacher appreciation, & fundraising.
 - Flathead: Bias Brewing, The Bookshelf, CoverThree, Fleur Bake Shop, Hellroaring Saloon
 - Missoula: Bernice's Bakery, Betty's Divine, Big Creek Coffee Roasters, Clearwater Credit Union, Jen Slayden at Main Street Realty, Le Petit Outre, Meadowsweet Herbs, Orange Street Food Farm, Shakespeare & Company
 - Ravalli: Big Creek Coffee Roasters, Chapter One Bookstore

Our annual report will be available later this summer to review these achievements in more detail.

Thank you to coaches, teachers, and donors for making this amazing impact possible!



Above: Missoula and Ravalli coaches socialize. Below: Flathead coaches enjoy their picnic.

End of Year Picnics

We had a great turn out at both of our volunteer appreciation picnics! We are grateful to have such a compassionate, talented, and committed volunteer force. It was wonderful to see all of our coaches come together to celebrate the great work achieved during the school year.



Consider Borrowing from WCM's Lending Library this Summer

One of the perks of volunteering with WCM is access to our lending library. Our collection includes titles on the craft of writing, Indigenous worldviews, and contemporary YA literature. We also feature a wide array of works by Montana authors, many of which come highly recommended by WCM staff and board members.

You can access our list of titles [here](#).

You can request the use of a title by emailing admin@writingcoachesofmontana.org.

Corporate sponsor: Jen Slayden at Main Street Realty!

Realtor Jen Slayden utilizes a unique system in which she donates a portion of the profit made from each sale to a local nonprofit, allowing the home seller to choose which nonprofit to donate the funds. A recent seller chose WCM! We're grateful for Jen's and the seller's generosity!



Growth Mindset: A Coaches' Blog

Tery Solomon (purple scarf) is a retired teacher and has been a Flathead writing coaching since 2020. Here, she enjoys the Bias Brewing fundraiser with fellow coaches.

Writing: It's Like Eating an Elephant

During the 30 years I taught high school, former students frequently contacted me to tell me that my words had changed their lives (many teachers get these calls) and then “quoted” something I had no memory of saying. It was baffling.

But I know, and I bet you know, how a teacher's offhand remark can stick with you forever.

I know this because in seventh grade—and before I tell you this, please stop and gather seventh grade in your memory: the awkward physical developments, the social drama, the craving to be the star of your life one day and invisible the next...in THAT seventh grade my geography teacher Mr. Fleming asked the class a question, then ignored my raised hand.

When he had no other offers, he leveled a sad look at me and said, “You know, boys don't like girls who have all the answers.” And everyone laughed. So I laughed too. And something in me withered.

I'm sure a week later Mr. Fleming didn't remember.

And then in a high school English class we read Milton's epic poem *Paradise Lost* aloud and Mr. Hutchinson said only *he* could read the part of God because, he said, when we mumbled God's glorious lines, “it hurts my heart”. One day Hutch was out, a sub was in, and the sub said Hutch had left instructions for me to read God's lines. Aloud. And something in me bloomed. I later worked as a writer and then became a teacher because of Hutch.

When I told Hutch this some 30 years later, he smiled and said, “Huh? I did that?” He didn't remember.

My friend Rosemary taught first grade for many years—the grade where kids come out either reading or not. It is an awesome responsibility to touch young lives so profoundly. Rosemary told me that she made sure to say one personal positive thing to each kid every day so each felt seen, heard, respected, loved. It's hard to do that with 15 or 25 kids a day, or in the case of high school teachers, maybe 125, but without those feelings, it's hard for any of us to want to learn.

Please pardon my conceit when I say good teachers are heroes. They are educators, scholars, social workers, psychologists, family counselors, advocates and confessors. They are cheerleaders for kids who may have little support outside of school, for students who don't learn in traditional ways, for every kid navigating speed bumps on the journey through childhood and adolescence. They are overworked heroes.

Writing Coaches are visitors, not teachers, but it's an honor to support the work of great teachers who invite us to work with their students. At the start of each session we're strangers, and most students approach us with some degree of trepidation. But when we start asking genuine questions about their topics, opinions, and experiences, students

blossom. The questions aren't a judgment or a challenge, but part of a real conversation. That conversation alone is a lesson in social skill.

Sometimes students come with drafts that are detailed, polished and clear, and aside from minor questions or suggestions, all I can offer are observations that reward the time and effort they put into their work. Talent is an unearned gift, but hard work is the virtue that brings talent to life, and it is important that we value the difference.

Some students come to our sessions and (avoiding eye-contact) explain they "have a rough draft, but it's still in my head." I have no idea why they haven't created a draft on paper by the deadline, except that I know writing is hard and life happens.

My job as a coach is not to judge but to help, so their mental "draft" becomes our jumping-off place. In 15-20 minutes we can create an outline of what they want to say, organize the topic into a few main points, or make a list of information they still need to gather and—Boom! They now have a model of how to begin, a roadmap to follow. At the end, their looks of relief and possibility (as they look me in the eye) are heartwarming.

When I was teaching, this was something I wanted to do with each and every student, but there was never enough time to do it all. As a writing coach, we can offer students a one-on-one audience, with feedback that models, instructs, encourages, and shows students that their thoughts and words matter. The students matter.

Once, a student explained that writing assignments used to overwhelm her, like a directive to "eat an elephant." I understood the feeling, but she said she had it figured out.

"How do you eat an elephant?" she asked.

I shook my head and shrugged.

She smiled at me. "One bite at a time."

That student is now a teacher. But as a student, she was *my* teacher.

—Tery Solomon



We'll see you in September!

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