Writing From the Heart: 
Motivating Students to Write with Passion and Voice

LARYSSA GORECKI

Abstract
The focus of this action research report is how teachers can motivate student writing. In seeking authentic engagement from my Grade 11 English class, we read and studied poetry and non-fiction texts by Aboriginal authors that celebrate voice and spirit of culture, and center on themes of Identity & Struggle. Over a six-week period, students participated in a variety of critical and creative exercises and completed four writing tasks. Through analysis of students’ writing, I inductively looked for trends in their responses, namely, the length of writing, use of voice and stylistic features, and a clear thematic approach. The goal was for students to use the writing process as a vehicle for their own expression in order to produce higher quality work. Results indicate stronger and more meaningful engagement, with genuine use of student voice being the center of their compositions.

Introduction
Throughout my teaching experience, I have found it difficult to motivate students to write. My students love to discuss their lives on a daily basis, however, when I ask them to write about their emotions and struggles, they draw a blank and ask me to supply a more specific topic or prompt. In their research, Lensmire & Satanovsky (1998) express concepts of “self-expression” and “celebration of emotion” whereby students are encouraged to articulate dimensions of their lives, feelings and emotions through writing. I wish to encourage students to ‘value their folk cultures’ by providing opportunities for them to write creatively about their backgrounds, in styles that are familiar to them. Through poetry and narrative writing, students can explore the power of individuality and personal experiences, and identify how they may learn to cope with past mistakes or struggles. With this focus, by connecting student writing to the authentic work of Aboriginal authors, I imagined that my students would be able to understand how their own stories could be powerful enough to inspire others to overcome obstacles and find direction in their lives. Furthermore, I wanted to teach my students to use the writing process to express their voices with passion and eloquence. The analysis in this paper focuses on how student voice was developed through the writing process, which involved drawing out ideas, experimenting with vocabulary, editing, and guidance.

In the Grade Eleven Native Studies course I recently taught, I strove to reveal student voice through writing activities by asking students to make connections to the struggles and celebrations of various contemporary Aboriginal authors. By exploring
issues such as discrimination and stereotyping, my class of students, from various cultures and backgrounds, might relate, and, hence, be inspired to share their experiences through their own writing. Christensen (2000) believed that the easiest way to legitimatize a wide range of voices in the classroom is to bring in literature written from diverse linguistic heritages so that students can experience varied voices. Elbow (1998) agreed that encouraging students to write needs to involve them in being part of and truly understanding the emotions, attachments, struggles, and joys that come along with such writing. Thus, inspiring students to write meant asking them to put parts of themselves onto the page. I decided to follow Christensen’s (2009) pedagogy that puts students’ lives at the center. She created writing assignments that “call[ed] students’ memories into the classroom” (p. 4), honoring their heritage and their stories. Christensen’s belief that all students can write and that they each have something important to say resonated with me, since I witness, every day, the struggles faced by my students. I feel that their stories need to be heard and can find expression through an outlet that offers them creativity with language and an opportunity to learn from their own experiences.

Many of my students were hesitant writers and found it difficult to fill a page describing their experiences. As a teacher of writing, I wanted to demonstrate that both writing and searching for voice is a ‘journey of becoming’ (Elbow, 1998; Lensmire & Satanovsky, 1998). I strove to begin these journeys by building a community in the classroom, where students could find freedom to express themselves by identifying with those who have experienced and written about their personal struggles. So we began by studying and discussing texts by North American Aboriginal authors whose candid voices reached out to readers in hopes of building awareness of their culture and identity. Therefore, the question I investigated was: How did participating in a unit where students made connections to Aboriginal poetry and non-fiction influence the way they wrote with voice to reveal their identities and personal stories?

**Literature Review**

Students’ exploration of identity can begin through the analysis of multicultural poems and narratives, which may inspire them to find their own voices. Students then “need teachers who recognize their struggles for voice and help them transform these struggles into occasions for becoming” (Lensmire & Satanovsky, 1998, p. 286).

In her research, Doige (1999) explored effective learning in a multicultural classroom, through the use of stories and plays by First Nations authors as a catalyst for classroom dynamics. In examining Aboriginal poetry and non-fiction around themes of injustice, identity, and marginalization, students connected to and empathized with the authors’ experiences, enough to inspire their own stories. Doige (1999) concluded from her study, that students may express thoughts and feelings that have been evoked by the shared experiences that texts articulated. For example, using reflective writing, poetry, and narrative, students can celebrate their identities, as they “grapple with content in such a way that they come to think and feel differently about themselves and how they fit into
their surrounding worlds” (Doige, 1999, p. 387). Further, when students relate to genres of interest, they may be able to make more meaningful connections. They may “begin to like writing more, to write about things that are important to them, and thus feel a greater connection between writing and themselves” (Elbow, 1998, p. 284).

According to Christensen (2009), teachers must “locate the curriculum in students’ lives” (p. 4). Indeed, sharing our lives has the potential to give students hope, courage, strategies, and allies as they wrestle with hard times. This means that teachers may wish to find occasions to celebrate their students’ backgrounds and cultures by comparing their histories to the texts being studied, especially with “authors and characters who not only represent students’ roots, but who also provide a window to the world” (Christensen, 2009, p. 6). Lensmire and Satanovsky (1998) claimed that when students are given the opportunity to write about their backgrounds in styles that are familiar to them, their writing and their classroom involvement becomes stronger.

It is important to welcome students’ cultures and previous experiences into the classroom, as it allows them to build a climate of acceptance and a safe-space in which to develop connections to the curriculum being studied. Lensmire and Satanovsky (1998) explained the Romanticist view that, in the “pursuit of individual self-realization” (p. 284), writing should be emotional as students write about their personal stories, and classroom writing practices should create environments where students feel they are able to share their “diverse experiences and meanings” (p. 282) in the styles and expressions that may differ according to their backgrounds. Kittle (2008) attested that emotion is the engine of the intellect and that we write more powerfully when it comes from the center of who we are. When writers are given opportunities to write with unabashed emotion, they write more, they write honestly, and they write with pride. Encouraging such writing invites students to explore their own individuality and observe aspects of their personal growth.

Methods

Participants

This paper follows four student participants on their writing journeys through a unit of study called “Identity & Struggle” in my Contemporary Aboriginal Voices course. The students in my class had diverse ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds. They were sixteen and seventeen years old, of mixed academic ability levels, with some having learning disabilities, and some being English Language Learners. For this study, I selected two female and two male students from my class named Ann, Latanya, Hasam, and Carlos (these are pseudonyms). My challenges lay in in asking them to use writing as a vehicle for their expression, and to increase their word count, as I knew they were reluctant writers. To address these challenges, I attempted to focus the unit around their lives and experiences.
Teaching Innovation

Throughout the unit, students explored various poems and non-fiction by Aboriginal authors and artists to develop an empathetic understanding of how people feel marginalized and struggle with difficult decisions. It was my hope that through a range of writing activities, the students would connect to the themes of identity and struggle and explore their own histories and personal journeys around key moments of conflict. In the following paragraphs, I describe the writing tasks.

Identity poems. I began exploring student voice through poetry. This genre afforded students an opportunity to write with fewer words. I hoped that experimenting with careful and moderate word choice would lead to unique expression.

We began each lesson by reading and discussing the structure and themes of various lyrical poems written by Aboriginal poets as well as two African-American poets. Before embarking on their own Identity poems, the students needed to understand how these poets used particular, evocative language to emphasize their plights and pride. Working from the “inside to outside” (Willinsky, 1990, as cited in Lensmire & Satanovsky, 1998, p. 284), the students could extend from their reading to practice capturing their own personal voices, and describe, through metaphor and imagery, the people, places, and experiences which have shaped them.

I began with two poems, Mystery Girl (Halfe, 2011) and Indian Woman (Armstrong, 1998). The students recognized and highlighted key descriptive words that they deemed powerful. They shared why they found these words appropriate to their understanding of the messages of ‘pride in identity’ that each poet was presenting. I supplemented these poems with a poem used by Christensen (2009) titled, Raised by Women (Ellis, 2009). I wanted the students to see how repetition and language choice built cadence into a poem. In her own evaluations of her lessons, Christensen (2009) looked for “…a repeating line that lays down a heartbeat for the students to follow, delicious details from the writer’s life that could evoke delicious details from my students’ lives, and a rhythm so alive, I want to dance when I read it” (p. 17). I encouraged students to mimic Ellis’ (2009) style in their own verses, and reach for vocabulary that spoke to their heritage. I thought this might ultimately reinforce their personalities in their writing.

To teach metaphor, I asked students to take turns reading the poem I am a Canadian (Redbird, 1998) aloud, then asked them to create a list of the people, places, animals and natural wonders with which they connected. This was to help them begin to design their own metaphors and similes. Finally, I asked the students to make a list of the words and phrases that they recalled were spoken to them while growing up, either in English or in their own language or dialect. They could later use these words to colour their poems with pieces of their unique selves. Drawing from Christensen’s (2009) exemplars, the students structured their Identity poems by beginning their stanzas with “I was raised by…” statements. I also asked them to add “I am…” statements, similar to those in Mystery Girl (Halfe, 2011). I evaluated the poems mainly for style (see
Appendix A). What I was looking for, ideally, was categorized under the “Communication” element of my scoring criteria; namely, how students used language to express themselves. I encouraged students to attempt to define themselves as creatively as possible, using words that Elbow (1998) considered to have “resonance” (p. 282-283) and “juice” (p. 286), while “captur[ing] the sound of an individual on the page” (p. 287).

Text-to-self reflection. The next step was to develop a small writing activity around a poem called Fences (Mercredi, 2001). We connected the metaphor of a fence to the restrictions or obstacles faced by Aboriginal people over the years, such as stereotyping, and explored this theme further in poems such as Indian Enough (Akiwenzie-Damm, 2011). Finally, I asked students to write a reflection wherein they compared these experiences to the obstacles they faced today. Prompts, such as the following, got them started:

• What type of fences do you face each day?
• How many fences have been built for you not to cross, and which have you built for yourself?
• Which fence presents the biggest challenge to you at the present time?

Several students connected extremely well to this activity, perhaps because they were given an outlet to express some of their complicated emotions. I conferenced with students who were having difficulty getting started. Through this reflective activity, we bridged the poetry unit with a starting point to our narrative essays on personal struggle (see Appendix B).

Exercises on vivid language. In order for students to become comfortable using vivid language in their writing, we read descriptive texts, such as The Stone Eater (Akiwenzie-Damm, 2012), and I asked students to highlight the imagery, make lists of powerful words, and create synonyms. Then I encouraged students to use these words in their own writing.

Next, I asked students to write a descriptive paragraph about the character they planned to include in their essays. I encouraged them to describe physical features, actions, voices, and any other idiosyncrasies to add flavour to their stories (see Appendix C).

Personal narrative essay. The culminating activity for this unit was a personal narrative essay. To encourage students to write about a difficult personal decision from which an important lesson was learned, it was necessary to explore even more difficult experiences. These we found in texts, such as An Uncertain Journey on a Jagged Road (Shapwaykeesic, 2011) and Walk to Morning (Boyden, 2011). The issues described in these personal accounts were not unlike what my students had experienced. The issues included depression, attempted suicide, arrest, unemployment, learning disabilities, and dropping out of school. As a class, we discussed what we felt were the purpose and audience of these texts. We discussed whether the authors expressed themselves effectively, and how their stories could elicit empathy from a reader.

These activities gave the students insight into how writing can give authors an
outlet to share pain and celebrate recovery, and an opportunity for the writer’s and reader’s personal growth. I asked students to think about a critical incident in their lives that resulted in a personal discovery about life, relationships, or people. Some students volunteered to share a personal story, which helped to create a climate of trust in the classroom. Students brainstormed their ideas on paper. I conferenced with each individual in order to help him or her identify a significant experience, and to work through the details of when it happened, who was involved, and what lesson he or she learned. Subsequently, I asked students to begin writing, without boundaries, and encouraged them to choose their words and express themselves according to their wills, without feeling confined. Students wrote informally, colloquially, and descriptively. I asked them to work with powerful words, namely vivid adjectives and verbs, in order to portray resonating images, situations, and emotions. I continued conferencing with students, encouraging them to describe the lessons they had learned from their experiences, or how the experiences had changed them.

Data Collection and Analysis

I kept reflective notes of my teaching. I counted the number of words in students’ writing to determine the amount of writing that they had done. This was important to me because these students had previously written only a few words or sentences and I wanted to see if this new approach motivated and supported them to write more. I also analyzed students’ writing for patterns in the following:

1. Elements of expression (e.g. voice and stylistic features) in both the poem and narrative essay
2. Thematic approach in the narrative essay

I observed students writing each day during class, and assessed their rough drafts regularly while engaged in individual conferencing. When students submitted a first draft of their poems to me, I provided descriptive feedback by underlining potentially effective words or phrases, asking students to elaborate or alter them, and offering suggestions and examples. Students revised and submitted a final draft for a formal evaluation with their rough work attached. Similarly, during the narrative essay writing process, I provided verbal feedback on the students’ rough work, after which they each participated in peer editing. Upon submission of their final draft, the students attached any process work, including any brainstorming, their responses to class activities, their descriptive paragraphs about a character in their essays, and the drafts that their peers had edited.

I provided a rubric with marking criteria and expectations for the Identity poems and narrative essays. For the poems, I assessed their writing by looking for patterns in figurative devices, such as how much figurative language was used and which type (e.g. simile or metaphor), and whether students experimented with phrasing, rhyme, and vivid word choice. I also evaluated whether the poem was formatted into stanzas, each with its own idea and creative details and, if I could hear the sound of their voices through the writing. I evaluated such criteria using a particular set of scoring criteria (see Appendix
A). For the narrative essays, students received full marks for retelling a memorable event in a well-organized, logical, and clearly articulated manner, with smoothly connected ideas, a high level of creative language that add depth to their descriptions, clear themes and evidence that they had learned from their experiences (see Appendix D).

Results

Length of writing

In the span of two weeks, students had created drafts far exceeding their expected word counts. In previous writing activities at the beginning of the semester, the students struggled to fill a page. Therefore, I was pleasantly surprised by the amount that they wrote in response to this new approach. The following table tracks their progress:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Approximate Word Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Beginning of Semester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(In-Class Writing Activities)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hasam</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latanya</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlos</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ann</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During the revision stages, Hasam, an English Language Learner, exclaimed, “I didn’t think I could write even one full page … but look”. Then, holding up two typed pages triumphantly, he continued, “and I’m not even done yet!” At the beginning of the assignment, Ann admitted, “This is challenging, Miss,” referring to how she found it difficult to express her feelings around bereavement on paper. However, after creating a character profile on her deceased cousin using a long list of adjectives, as well as recalling the most special moments they had shared, both big and small, she ended up submitting a nine-page tribute to him.

Elements of Expression

My students were proud of their backgrounds and cultures. I observed, however, that when asked to write about how they self-identified, they would write using generic phrases or remained vague in their descriptions. After exploring and emulating vivid language techniques and the candid use of voice in the various poems, the students formed their own verses using playful and vibrant expressions. I was pleasantly surprised by the quality of work that was being produced during this unit. From dynamic word play to vibrant imagery, the students rigorously filled blank pages with striking self-portraits. For example, in his poem, Hasam took his ordinary statements about love and loyalty and created fierce images using figurative language. In his original reflective response, he...
stated, “I sometimes think of leaving the ones I love and go get lost in the world but I always remember that they love me and they might get hurt.” In the structured identity poem, his voice rang through more vividly, when he wrote, “I am an MMA Fighter / knocking out my enemies / I am as strong as the Babylon lion / Scaring away those who hurt my family.”

Similarly, Latanya’s descriptive writing about herself was straightforward: “I self-identify as a young Canadian and a Jamaican by asking my parents my background and learning about my culture and what traditional foods we eat, holidays, special days, etc.” However, when writing her poem, Latanya expressed her identity by utilizing specific details from her culture and forming them into rhythmic verses, similar to the cadence of her native dialect. For example, she wrote:

I was raised by oxtail cooking
Stewed peas
Curry goat
Makin’
Wake up everyday to cooked food
Young boy lookin’
Typa Dad.

Carlos originally described himself as: “… a young, respectful teen. My background is Ecuadorian but that has nothing to do with my personality.” In his poem, I encouraged him to use words from his native language, such as Madre and Malcreado, to more clearly express his uniqueness. During the writing process, Latanya had expressed some difficulty in finding the right things to say, but, with patience and practice, she strategized, “I’m reading [the poems], rethinking, and choosing new words!” (see Appendices E and F for Carlos and Latanya’s complete poems).

I also witnessed great improvement in how the students expressed themselves in their narrative writing. The Fences (Mercredi, 2001) exercise was most effective for generating ideas for the students’ essays. For example, Hasam wrote: “Everyone has his own fences in life, some he puts for himself, some others do. My fences are rules of respect and trust. The strongest fence I have and I want to get over is time.” After practicing with vivid vocabulary, Hasam’s words became more powerful, an element under “Communication” which earned him a Level 4 on the scoring rubric: “10 years ago my life changed all of a sudden after the bloody, unnecessary war on my country, a war that caused the loss of strong men, leaving behind widows and orphans, war that promised peace and evolution but left destruction and dilapidation that is still there today. Ten years later.”

Similarly, Carlos’ initial response on struggle was straightforward: “My personal fence is going by the rules.” However, when experimenting with figurative language, Carlos’ idea became more intense. For example, he began his narrative with a simple, yet effective simile: “I wasn’t expecting to be living my life like a jungle.” Ann began her writing by listing a set of vague character traits for her cousin: “caring, smart, funny,
loving, independent, sensitive, and different.” However, after working her to lengthen her sentences through explicit description, she was able to bring her cousin to life on the page:

I had never seen him laugh so hard, his smile was so big I could see his gums and his eyes got so small all I could see was lines. He held his stomach and leaned forward and fell to the floor while I was just there looking at him laughing even harder because his laugh was so funny to me, as if he was screaming while catching his breath.

**Thematic Approach**

In the spirit of Kittle’s work (2008), I strove to have my students write from the heart about a pivotal experience in their lives. I wanted them to become engaged in writing by exploring a time that mattered to them, and from which they had learned a crucial lesson. This would serve as the main theme around which students would find purpose for their narratives. I wanted to convince them that their unique story is worth sharing with the world, in hopes that they would give me something ‘real’ and would be motivated to write.

I was touched by my students’ writing and had to pause and reflect on the myriad of physical and emotional battles described in their writing. The highlighted themes included broken relationships, loss of a loved one, the hardships of immigration, and learning from mistakes. Ann and Latanya spoke about their identities and struggles by describing their emotional ordeals and how they each experienced grief. For example, Ann wrote: “My life feels incomplete. A piece of my heart has been ripped out so suddenly … I wish I could see him one last time. I learned that you really never know what you have until it is gone, and I wish it didn’t have to happen like this.”

Hasam wrote about his experience of emigrating from a war-torn country. In his descriptions, he searched his past and found value in his coming-of-age journey, as shown in this example: “Before writing this essay, I’ve never thought of my life and how I got here. I’ve gone through a lot with my family, struggles, stresses, met new people, and learned lots of lessons; all of this gave me the strength to become responsible and mature enough to get to where I am today.”

Finally, Carlos recognized a purpose for his writing when he realized the dire consequences of an error made in poor judgment. In his conclusion, he discovered the meaning of obligation and atonement: “This was the worst experience of my life, but lessons were learned and now I know better …. If I want to go outside after 8pm or even before 8am I have to be with my mom … “Become a criminal, and you’re not my son anymore.” These words were my mom’s first and final warning to me” (see Appendix G for Carlos’ complete essay).

It was obvious that the students were significantly affected by their experiences. The themes around which students wrote were clear, honest and thought provoking, and their powerful connections to their experiences were unmistakable.
Quality of Writing

I gave all four students’ writing a Level 4 (the highest score) because of the lengthy descriptions they produced and the clear sense of voice they revealed therein. It was apparent to me that the in-class writing exercises had benefited the students, in that their once ordinary or abstract phrases evolved into evocative and brilliant prose. Moreover, through exploring the lessons learned from their personal narratives and crafting them with meaning, they had developed a clearer insight into humanity. Although grammatical conventions or organization may not have improved much, the depth of thought and amount of detail in their writing did. Students used language features such as imagery and vivid verbs to take their writing from the superficial to the sincere. Due to this improvement, students increased their overall achievement levels, which, in turn, motivated them to continue to work hard on their writing.

Conclusion

The students presented their unique selves when given opportunities to write without parameters. I wanted to expose students to texts that celebrate voice and spirit of culture. Therefore, by reading and analyzing various elements of Aboriginal poetry and non-fiction, the students could understand how writers express their pride and resilience, and how they explored aspects of their identities through language and form.

In working on Identity poems, formatted around various lyrical poems, students created verses full of their own language and history, gave their poems flavour, and revealed their individualism. Their poems welcomed diverse experiences and meanings to be expressed on the page, in “languages and styles of expression from people of different backgrounds” (Lensmire & Satanovsky, 1998, p. 282).

While actively writing, the students became connected to the world of self-analysis through expression. They were pushed to “excavate and reflect on their personal experiences” and become part of “literature and society” (Christensen, 2000, p. 8). By practicing with figurative language, as well as finding freedom in diction choices such as jargon and dialect, students were able to glean an individual style. While searching for the right phrase or the best word, students were in fact honing their own voices, producing pages of their own histories, and writing with authenticity. This is a part of the Romantic tradition, since it is reached through the celebration of emotion, and begins with the “organic and natural” (Lensmire & Satanovsky, 1998, p. 282).

Not only were students creating meaningful pieces of writing, they remained motivated during the entire process. For instance, one morning before class, Carlos admitted that he was going to skip my class that day, but remembered that he still needed to revise his narrative essay. He remained focused on his work for the entire period, stopped to ask questions on phrasing, and stayed into his lunchtime to complete this essay to his satisfaction.
In sharing their personal struggles through narrative writing, the students witnessed their growth and maturity, and could come to accept the many disturbing events that shape human lives. More importantly, the students were able to trace their learning from these significant moments, enough to capture the positive essence of their experience, told in their own voices. Such is the engagement I was seeking from my students, and I believe that they became much stronger, much more willing, writers in the process.

I look forward to teaching this course again. By making connections with various authors and their stories, I think that classroom communities may find avenues for authentic discussions around themes of identity and struggle. Students should be afforded personal recognition when considering the need for cultural recognition and for addressing one’s feelings: their stories matter. I recommend that teachers who find it challenging to motivate students to write, need to express to their students that there is no right way to tell their stories, for they can simply start with one word or a line of a poem. If students begin with a sentence or two, or simply with the lesson they have learned through their journeys, then this can serve as a starting point from which they may further explore their ideas. Some students in my class were initially intimidated by the writing assignments and found it challenging to relate to the more intense themes of loss or personal injury in the Aboriginal texts. I would encourage teachers to broaden some of their topics of writing in order for students to feel more comfortable and self-confident about even the smallest issues they have faced. When teachers give students a sense of purpose for their writing, and provide adequate feedback to help them edit their work, they can help them see the valuable role they play in their own education.

References

Christensen, L. (2000). Reading, writing, and rising up: Teaching about social justice and the power of the written word. Wisconsin: Rethinking Schools Ltd.


**Author Biography**

Laryssa has been teaching English for ten years. She is passionate about writing and engaging students in classroom literacy. She recently completed her Masters in Education degree in Curriculum, Teaching, and Learning at OISE and is excited about her new role as a mom.
Appendix A

Identity Poem Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Level 1 (50-59%)</th>
<th>Level 2 (60-69%)</th>
<th>Level 3 (70-79%)</th>
<th>Level 4 (80-100%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication (15 marks)</td>
<td>Many details are not in a logical or expected order. There is little sense that the writing is organized</td>
<td>Some details are not in a logical or expected order, and this distracts the reader</td>
<td>Details are placed in a logical order, but the way in which they are presented/introduced sometimes makes the writing less interesting</td>
<td>Details are placed in a logical order and the way they are presented effectively keeps the interest of the reader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization/sequence and word choice (e.g. use of stylistic features: imagery, mood, poetic devices)</td>
<td>Most of the words in your poem are common. It needs more specific nouns and verbs. Many lines have unneeded words.</td>
<td>Your poem has a few interesting words. It also has a lot of vague, common words that could be stronger. Some parts have extra, unneeded words</td>
<td>Your poem has many interesting words with only a few vague ones. Some parts of the poem have extra unneeded words, making it seem wordy</td>
<td>Every word in your poem is carefully selected. Words that carry lots of interest are used. Extra words are avoided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing is evocative.</td>
<td>Most of the poem’s ideas are pretty unclear. You don’t have any images the reader can see.</td>
<td>You have only a few images in your poem. The ideas are vague and unclear.</td>
<td>You use some specific images, but there are several places that lack strong images or ideas.</td>
<td>You do an outstanding job using specific ideas that evoke images in your readers’ minds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative thinking skills</td>
<td>You use creative thinking skills (in planning and writing) with a very limited degree of effectiveness</td>
<td>You use creative thinking skills (in planning and writing) with a limited degree of effectiveness</td>
<td>You use creative thinking skills (in planning and writing) with some degree of effectiveness</td>
<td>You use creative thinking skills (in planning and writing) with a very high degree of effectiveness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B

Carlo’s Reflection

Fences are just another word for boundaries, something that won’t let you cross or go beyond what’s given. The “fence” I will never cross is not respecting my mom. I will never disobey, hit, swear, etc. at my mom. If that boundary was ever crossed I wouldn’t feel me, I would be in so much shame to behave that way to my mom. There are a couple fences I did for myself, to not get in trouble with the cops, go to class more often, and try to avoid fights with my brother. The biggest fence I’m facing right now is obeying my conditions with the law. It’s hard for me because all my friends go out and I have to be stuck at home, because I’m not allowed out.

Appendix C

Hasam’s Description

As a young boy I loved watching my father cleaning the big fish he brought home. He always started with belly slicing, and then he chopped the head and tail. My father then cleaned it with hot water, scratched the skin off and prepared it for cooking by rubbing it with salt and spices that he prepares himself. He always whispered, “One day you will do this yourself.”
Appendix D

Personal Narrative Essay Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thinking/Inquiry 25 marks</th>
<th>Level 4</th>
<th>Level 3</th>
<th>Level 2</th>
<th>Level 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The theme/message is clear and easy to interpret.</td>
<td>The theme/message is considerably clear.</td>
<td>The theme/message is somewhat clear.</td>
<td>The theme/message is unclear.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unmistakable voice conveyed through personal observations, passion, belief, and/or desire, making your connection to the piece evident.</td>
<td>Writer’s voice is effectively conveyed. Considerable connection to the piece is evident most of the time.</td>
<td>Writer’s voice is somewhat developed. Connection to the piece is scattered.</td>
<td>Writer’s voice is limited. Writer has no connection to the piece.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The essay is open, honest, and thought provoking.</td>
<td>Most of the essay is considerably open and honest.</td>
<td>Some parts of the essay are somewhat open and honest.</td>
<td>Writing seems forced and unnatural.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication 15 marks</td>
<td>Well organized, logical, and clearly articulated; connects ideas smoothly.</td>
<td>Organized, logical, and clearly articulated; transitions often connect ideas smoothly.</td>
<td>Somewhat organized, logical, and clearly articulated; some transitions used to connect ideas.</td>
<td>Not organized or clear; transitions are not used to connect ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High level of figurative language adds spice to the writing.</td>
<td>Figurative language adds some spice to the writing.</td>
<td>Some use of figurative language.</td>
<td>Little to no use of figurative language.</td>
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</tbody>
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Appendix E

I Was Raised By Poem
By: Latanya

I was raised by
Waking up every morning
Going to church
Every Sunday and Tuesday
‘’Get Chyo ass up every Sunday morning!‘’
Typa mom.

Money asking
‘’Does Money Grown on Trees?’’
Typa mom
Dress shirt Sunday high-waisted skirt
‘’Praise the Lord’’ church
Choir-singing
Typa mom.

Hot comb
Sitting, Crying
Hair-doin
Hairstylist
Typa mom.

I was raised by oxtail-cooking
Stewed peas,
Curry goat
Makin’
Wake up everyday to cooked food
Young boy lookin
Typa Dad

Music beats
Bumpin waking my sister, brother
And I every morning
Loud music
‘’Jah Rasta fariye’’
Kinda Dad
I was raised by Jamaican parents.
Appendix F

My life
by: Carlos

I am who I am,
From the Ecuadorians thoughts
to the Canadian shots.

I was raised by a feisty squirrel,
Demanding, aggressive and
“What’s mine is mine.”

I was raised by a boss.

I was raised by my life, my main source, my dependant tool:
Someone I can’t live without –
Strongest female I know:
Madre
Black hair like a chalkboard,
Brown eyes like a dog’s luscious fur,
Strong mentally, physically,
Just like a horse.

I am what I want to be.

I was raised by an expectation:
Smart
Funny
Millionaire
“Malcreado”.

I was raised by my mom,
A wise woman in my eyes.
I am what she wants me to be and what
I want to be.
Appendix G

Carlos’ essay

A Journey To My New Lifestyle

Today on November 6th, 2013. I wasn't expecting to be living my life like a jungle. Conditions and restrictions are applied in my daily life now. One condition I am having a difficult time with is that I am not allowed to see my best friend for about 18 months because of my actions. That is like saying I can’t see my mom without it being illegal.

One day somewhere around early February at 6:00pm my friend and I were in Vaughn bored with nothing to do…. *Boom*… suddenly two fierce males approach four teenage boys. A lanky black-haired Spanish guy known as “Stackz” shouts with a switchblade held out towards his stomach, “Ups your shit quick!”

“I don't have anything b, please,” the young 16-year-old boy replied in shock. A couple minutes pass by and nothing has been given up. Me, with no patience left, I buckle up my fist and say, “Give me your fucking shit!”

Finally, the boy hands me his black iPhone 4, a pack of cigarettes, and a Nokia phone. Ready to leave I yell, “Lets cut, lets cut!”

We start making a move and my boy knocks one to the ground, he passes out. I push one to get him out of my way and the other boy bolts. We begin running away like we just witnessed a murder. Stackz and I finally make a left and go down a staircase behind a community center. We are at least 10 minutes away from the scene. Stackz with no breath says, “Yo dawg, we need to cut and make it home.”

“Yeah come, let’s grab a taxi.”

Stackz and I start heading towards the street for a taxi. Peeking our heads out, everything is clear. A couple steps we take and then…. *Whoop* *Whoop*. My heart rises to my throat. We turn around and there is a bright white light coming from a car. We could not see anything.

“Come towards the car with your hands up!”

The officer yells with his gun pointed towards my chest. Walking slowly with such hesitation, we get to the car and a stiff grip is pressed against me and next thing you know, my left side of my face is smashed onto the front hood of the police car.

“We’re fucked,” Stackz whispers.

Police officer grabs us and tosses us into his car. Finally after thirty minutes of investigating they take us to the station. Crazy thoughts are running through my head like: Shit man, what I just get my self into? Is my mom really going to back me up with this?

We get to the station. “Get out the car, put your hands on your head and spread your feet!” an officered yells.

One step out the car and I start shaking like crazy. It is freezing – almost felt like I was in Alaska. Naked. A police officer searches me then tells me to sit on the bench and wait. At this point, Stackz and I are separated, and they take him to another room. A female police officer sits beside me and reads my rights.

After that she looks at me and says,

“We’re going to have to do a Level 3 search.”

I pause, and with so much anger in me I reply,

” Are you fucking serious?”

“Yes,” she answers politely.

A level three search is where they take you to little room with no windows, just a door and four walls, and they search you from head to toe, naked. It was the worst experience because not only did I have to go naked, I also had to do it in front of two guys.
Following that the officer escorted me to a jail sale. It was the first time I had ever been in one and there was nothing. I thought there was going to be a TV, a fridge and a shower but all there was, was a toilet with no toilet paper, and a concrete lump in the corner used as a bed. The following day around 4:00 am an officer opened the door and asked me,

“Would you like to talk to your mom?”

“Yes please,” I replied.

Once I got into the room with my mom and I seen her crying I got so mad with myself. I sat down beside her and the first thing I said was,

“I’m sorry, mom.”

She didn't say a thing. The officer came in and asked my mom and I,

“Would you like to speak to a lawyer?”

“Yes” my mom said.

The officer stepped out the room and the phone rang. The lawyer was talking to my mom, and I could not understand what they were talking about, but I knew it was bad because my mom continued to cry. After a couple minutes passed the only thing my mom said was,

“Don't make a statement and I’ll see you in court tomorrow.”

She left right after that and the officer took me back to the cage. The next morning around 9:00 am they took Stackz and me to court.

“It’s free up time!” I yelled.

Once we entered the court they put us into a little box that had windows covering the area and a lawyer. The judge was talking and to me it sounded like a foreign language because I did not understand a word he said. The lawyer turned his head and said,

“Don't say anything, a by with the judge and you'll be let go.”

Towards the ending of the dispute the judge told me to stand and asked for my name.

“Carlos,” I stated.

The judge told my mom to step forward.

“Yes I will,” my mom replied.

“A bail of $300 and an 8:00 pm till 8:00 am curfew will be given for the release of Carlos. Would you still like to be the assured person of Carlos?”

“Yes I will,” my mom hissed.

I was surprised. After that, the judge set me free and then I went to the back, got my stuff and I was set free.

Worst experience of my life, but lessons were learned and now I know better. When I was in there it’s basically like you don’t have control of your own body. They tell you when to eat, drink, when you can have free time. You’re literally caged up like an animal. The worst part is, it just gets worse from there and on. After all that, you’re going to have at least a year of probation. Probation is conditions and certain things you cannot do unless the person that bailed you out is in eyesight. If I want to go outside after 8:00 or even before 8:00 am I have to be with my mom or else, if the police talk to me and I am out they can take me in because I am breaching, which is another charge. “Become a criminal, and you’re not my son anymore.” These words were my mom’s first and final warning to me.