

NEWSLETTER

WINTER 2026

VOL. 3



WRITING INVITATION

It is often at the start of a new year when people take an inventory of themselves, including their emotional well-being. Rebecca Solnit, in her article "[The Mother of All Questions](#)," explores what she argues is the most often asked question in pop psychology: are you happy? In her article she critiques this narrow focus as the main goal for western culture.

- *Answer the question:* are you happy? If not, evaluate what other values are more important to you than happiness.
- *Narrate a story from your past* that epitomizes your definition of happiness.
- *Ask a different question:* In your opinion, what is the most important question? Write a fictional story in which a character attempts to answer an even more important question.

WHAT WE'RE READING

Backman, *My Friends*

Curiosity. Connection. Creativity.

The perfect balance of these tenets throughout *My Friends* created a sense of nostalgia that stayed with me like a much-appreciated companion throughout the entire read. In a time of division and distraction, this book reminded me to embrace the nuance of being human, and to look for the through lines that tie our stories together.



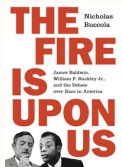
Leibowitz, *How to Winter*

After living above the Arctic Circle where the sun doesn't shine for two months, Leibowitz uses behavioral and psychological research to debunk the belief of winter-onset depression and instead challenges her readers to develop a "wintertime mindset," embracing the season as full of delights and wonders. These strategies teach us not only about braving the gray, cold months, but also how to weather the dark and difficult times in our own lives.



Buccola, *The Fire Is Upon Us*

This Fall, Buccola visited GVSU and helped students to understand our current political conflicts as a continuation of the debate between James Baldwin and conservative pundit William Buckley. I (Lindsay) loved this book because it showed how each man's political beliefs grew from his personal family experiences.



LMWP'S GOING SOCIAL IN 2026!

- KIM BOLT

BACKGROUND:

At the NCTE conference, Lindsay Ellis, Patti Mapes (19) and I attended a roundtable session with different regional leaders and directors from the National Writing Project. In one of the breakout sessions, Patti and I sat at a table and listened to the * Writing Project showcase their connection and promotion of their regional group through social media. Pictures and text and daily posts excited and overwhelmed us at the same time. Patti and I both agreed we would love to have a greater presence on social media but needed to respect our current capacity and appreciate that as Rome wasn't built in a day, so a regular social media presence is grown slowly and steadily. (cont on p. 2)

UPCOMING EVENTS

Write Out (Thursday, Feb 19th)

Bring a friend from school and a notebook to a bar in GR to write to a prompt, have a beer, and catch up with fellow TCs.

MRA Annual Convention (Mar 6-8)

Located in Lansing, MI, this year's theme is "Engaging Minds and Literacy for all." Look for a post on our Facebook page in late February to connect with other LMWP attendees.

JustWrite Competition (Mar 14)

Jessie Belote ('25) is hosting an interscholastic creative writing program for grades 6-12 at Duncan Lake Middle School. Author Gary Schmidt will be making a special appearance! Contact Jessie for more information (belotej@calschools.org).

Festival of Faith and Writing (Apr 16-18)

Hosted by Calvin University, hear nationally recognized authors discuss their craft. *Note:* people of diverse beliefs and religious practices are welcome, and attending together is more fun.

Invitational Summer Institute! (June 15-26)

Help us recruit curious, fun-loving, committed teachers to be summer fellows!

<https://www.gvsu.edu/lmwp/summer-institute-2026-27.htm>

DIRECTOR'S NOTE:

MODES OF REFLECTION

- LINDSAY ELLIS

Can an understanding of modes help us to journal and reflect with more fluency? Though we may struggle to find time to write in a journal, all of us would probably testify that it's helpful. Might those pretty journals that we just unwrapped during the holidays get more use if we consciously moved through the modes from narrating what happened, describing how it made us feel, evaluating our priorities, and planning for future action? My 2026 New Year's commitment is to reflect in this way more often.

What's the difference between a genre and a mode? Genres are recognizable whole-text types that evolve in recurring social situations. (Your mother just called to ask whether you've completed your holiday gift *thank you notes*.) Modes are sub-types of discourse like narration, description, definition, explanation, and argumentation. The Common Core State Standards for writing are organized by simplifying the list of modes to three: narration, exposition, and argumentation.

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LMWP GOING SOCIAL (CONT.)

- BOLT

WHAT TO EXPECT:

Beginning in 2026, we will be first and foremost offering a writing invitation every week because...well, we're writers. "Write with us Wednesday" will offer invitations that will range from silly to serious, and may ask us to write anything from lists to paragraphs. The goal is to keep us writing, together, in community.

The first Friday of the month (starting in February) will highlight an LMWP educator in our "Teacher Feature." Here we'll be celebrating fellow LMWP colleagues, learn more about who they are and get inspired by what they are doing in the classroom. In this way we hope to build familiarity across the 20+ years of TCs.

HOW YOU CAN PARTICIPATE:

- **suggest:** As we begin this new adventure, we'd love and welcome ideas! Any writing invitations or teacher features you want to suggest will be considered (and please feel free to suggest yourself!).
- **post:** let our weekly posts be the start of a conversation. We'd love to hear from you; the best way to build community is by conversing with each other.
- **advertise:** spread the word that the LMWP is on social media. Ask your fellow TCs if they are following us on Facebook. Better yet, tell non TCs to follow us in hopes that they might learn more about the Project and perhaps want to become a TC at our LMWP ISI this summer.

REMINDERS:

Stay tuned for updates about

- the **Write Out** (Thursday, Feb 19th) and
- the **Invitational Summer Institute** (June 15-26) to share with your friends and colleagues. An **Advanced Institute** will be sometime during the second week (the week beginning June 22nd). Stay tuned!

LISTENING ARGUMENTATION

- LINDSAY ELLIS

While the Common Core uses exposition as an umbrella category for description, definition, and explanation, I think it's helpful to teach students about these distinct modes with more specificity, and to teach an understanding of genre distinct from modes. A whole-text genre like a *newspaper editorial* might contain several modes. Editorials are often most persuasive when they include narrative anecdotes or explanations of data to support argumentative claims and reasoning.

As a teacher of pre-service teachers, I assign a lot of reflective writing. During apprenticeship and student teaching, novices need to process *what the heck just happened* after many school days. *Narrating* experience only gets one so far along the learning continuum, however. *Defining* an observed phenomenon at school reassures novices that they are joining a long conversation among educators, i.e. that what just happened to them has happened to others, been named with a conceptual term, and theorized within a complex system of causes and effects. This sense-making is inherently grounding.

As we become fluent in moving through the modes, advanced reflective writers can *evaluate* which concepts are most useful in *defining* aspects of *narrative* experience. This is invaluable work.

When we teach reflective writing as a conscious movement through specific modes of discourse (narrating, describing, defining, evaluating, and planning, for example), we are teaching humans how to make better sense of their complicated lives. Would you like to join me in this endeavor?

I'm working on an article about modes in reflective writing for use in my own teacher education classes, and I would like to present on modes of reflection at NCTE 2026 in Philadelphia (Nov 19-22).

- If you would like to contribute a journal entry about a school day, I would love to see it.
- If you would like to teach your students how to reflect by narrating, describing, defining, evaluating, and planning, I'm happy to provide a two-page explanation of these modes that you can plug into an assignment.
- If you are interested in trying this out in your classroom and presenting with me at NCTE, email me by January 12th (ellisl@gvsu.edu). There's less fear and more fun going to a conference as a group. Let's go team LMWP!

"[L]iterature is, among other things, the record of people caught inside historical moments for which their conceptual vocabularies are, in elemental ways, gaspingly inadequate – and trying to transform that vertiginous inadequacy into monuments of form, beauty, sorrow, compassion."

–Pete Coviello, the chair of English at the University of Illinois-Chicago.
<https://engl.uic.edu/#letter-from-pete-coviello-head-of-department>