Major Essay #3 – Feature Article: “What Makes a Remarkable Teacher?”

PURPOSE AND MISSION:

- To demonstrate stylistic mastery by exploring other than traditional academic genres, this essay will be written in the journalistic genre, the feature article, which we will begin analyzing.
- In many ways, this genre replicates academic writing, in particular, argument, and requires research skills.

Feature articles:
- Begin with a “hook”
  - An exordium
- “Feature writers must be accurate and scrupulously fair….while not every anecdote that presents a person in an unfavorable light must be balanced by a favorable one[,] a one-sided portrayal…is a sin even less pardonable than a shoddy technique.” (GNW 105)
  - Confirmatio – refutatio –
- “The feature story starts with an idea. …Refining and massaging the idea is the outcome of, not the preliminary to, reporting [italics added].” (GNW 99-100)
  - Isn’t the hardest part of an academic research paper narrowing it down?
- “Start your reporting and interviewing with an open mind. In time, and by dint of legwork and research, the story will assume a natural shape.” (GNW 100)
  - Have you ever begun writing an argument then flipped your stance right in the middle of researching or drafting?
- “At first, though, cast your net wide…Because most good feature writers amass a far greater hoard of material for every enterprise than they can use, writing becomes a great winnowing.”  (GNW 100)
  - How often do you wonder how you’ll ever write 7 pages and end up with enough material for 20?
- Peroratio – connects back to the hook, the exordium

TEXTS AND OTHER MEDIA RESOURCES:

1. “The Freedom Writers’ Diary” by Erin Gruwell,
2. The following are posted on class website (Assignments page: under M#3 ).
   a. Erin Gruwell Education Project Website
   b. “Writing for their Lives” (June 2006) (Philadelphia teacher takes his class on a Freedom Writing Journey)
   c. “The Dropout Nation” – Time Magazine (posted on class website, Assignments page )
      i. Related article from that issue:
         1. Jones, “A Teacher’s View: The Human Touch” (a teacher from Shelbyville High)
         2. Rawe, “How Germany Keeps Kids from Dropping Out”
   d. “From Champion to King” – Lennox Lewis, boxer, chess master, mentor, and sponsor of TN chess team
   e. “Time is Ripe for LA School Gardens” – the power of persistence
   f. “Urban Legend-Newark’s New Mayor” – almost too good to be true
   g. “Ken Lay’s Last Evasion” – why some think untimely death was too good for him
3. Course Reader: pp. 1-12, 45-101
4. Rose, “Lives on the Boundary”
5. Rose video with Bill Moyer

(list con’t next page)
6. Additional readings posted on class website (Assignments page: under ME#1 prompt)
   a. “The Vanishing Class;”
   b. “Letters to LA Times in Response to ‘Vanishing Class.’”
   c. “Parents Scarce at Drop-out Forum”
   d. “LA Mayor Sees Drop-out Rate as Civil Rights Issue”

**BACKGROUND:**

Much of what we have read this session has been directly or indirectly concerned with educational reform and pursuing excellence. Yet no matter what changes these texts posited, each emphasized the old-fashioned centrality of the teacher in the life of the student.

For your feature article topic, consider what (you think) constitutes a great teacher. For the body of your article, you can use the experiences and examples provided by/in the list found under resources, as well as your own experiences with extraordinary teachers – both good and bad. In fact, you can go back to your reflections for essay #2 and see what might still be left on the table. You may also try your hand at interviewing someone or “someones” as the basis for this piece.

Additionally, consider the fact that teachers do not exist in vacuums. Recall what Friedrich suggests in “Five Ways of Wisdom” (CR: 229-230; 240-249) or what Frank Dwyer wrote in the Mark Taper Forum playbill for Alfred Uhry’s “Without Walls” (CR: 228a-d)

To what end do we educate? Are we simply filling up minds with information? Or, are we shaping individuals—souls and hearts as well as brains? Perhaps as importantly, how are they shaping us? Are we adapting? Are we helping to create future citizens? Moral beings? Fulfilled individuals? Life-long learners?

So: *Why is your teacher in the classroom?* That is, does your ideal teacher have a particular goal in mind for his/her students and how might this goal influence his/her teaching? For example, if s/he wants to create life-long learners, in what way(s) does her/his behavior affect this goal and the goal shape practice?

**WRITING TASK:** After reviewing and reflecting on the texts and other resources listed above, perhaps interviewing someone(s) to be the focus of or a source for your feature story, modeling the genre requirements of feature news story, have at it.

**TO HELP YOU MAKE SURE YOU STAY TRUE TO THIS GENRE’S REQUIREMENTS:**
Consult your *Guide to News Writing* often.
Refer back to the samples and examples we analyzed together in class.
**TIMELINE AND DUE DATES:**

- Peer review: Draft must be at least 4 pages long, with source citations in place **Tuesday, Aug. 15th**
- Final draft: Due at beginning of class, **Friday, Aug. 18th**

**PAPER FORMAT AND REQUIREMENTS:**

- Your paper must be in the form of a feature magazine article, from 5-7 pages long.
- Be sure to make note of the type of journal/magazine and audience your article would be appropriate for. In fact, you should consider submitting your article for publication. (See CR: 206)
- Although feature articles generally do not have Works Cited pages, please include an MLA formatted Works Cited list for this project as an addendum.
- MLA essay formatting is optional should you chose to format creatively, using computer technology to produce a final product that looks like magazine copy, including illustrations etc. n.b. don’t get so carried away with bells and whistles that you forget form and content
- Finally, *in a journal entry included with your Final Draft*, reflect upon the way(s) "feature writing" differs from academic discourse as shown through your own work as well as samples we have evaluated.