Summary:

This article comments on how the school system is unfair and supports the way that girls write and the topics that they choose, rather than the way that boys write. The gender writing gap has increased and it is even wider between genders than with racial/ethnic groups. The portion titled *Aliens in the Hospital* gives specific examples of how or where the differences in writing are. For example, a study done on second graders found that girls usually write about “primary territory” (home, school, parents, friends) while boys write about “secondary territory or extended territory” (professions, wars, presidents, space). This section also goes on to describe a classroom where students were to imagine they were an animal and write the animal. The differences between the animals that the girls picked differed greatly to those chosen by boys thus showing that girls and boys have distinct ways of interpreting the same thing.

In the article, Thomas Newkirk describes how most of the literature read in classrooms is mainly appealing to girl readers. Boys like to read about topics such as violence, but very few books read are about this topic because many feel that this will encourage students to become violent. On the other hand, the author shows how boys’ writing about violence opens up new perspectives that enable them to make connections between aspects including their social world. Boys and girls speak differently and it is natural that their writing reflects the difference. Boys sense the discrimination that they are faced with and they are discouraged from writing. There are two examples of two different boys that have been affected by this unfairness in the classroom. One boy, Andrew, was discouraged to pursue his passion for writing because at school, he did not write as his teachers wanted him to write. The teacher thought that his writing
was too violent and that he was not meeting the same expectations the other students. What the teacher did not understand was that with his writing, a friend and he were forming a stronger friendship. This article confirms that teachers have taken part in widening the gender gap in student’s writing.

**Quotes:**

“The most serious mistake, it seems to me, is viewing these preferences as pathologies, as anti-social ways of being that must be modified, or, if that is not possible, banned.” (Pg. 300)

-As a teacher one must be open-minded and be aware that differences between males, and females exist. One must do the best one can to makes sure that the needs of all children are being fulfilled. If a teacher takes on a negative attitude about what boys like to write about, or read, then they are only widening the gender gap by being biased toward boys.

“The writing of males can be read as endorsing a whole set of antisocial values: the use of violence to resolve conflict; the lack of empathy for victims of violence; the subordination of women; extreme individualism and competition; and escapism” (pg. 295).

-This quote is an example of how teachers are widening the gender gap in writing. Teachers think the worst about boys writing, but they are writing to please themselves and no one else. Boys are being imaginative and they are not being supported for their imagination. Such themes that boys are using in their writing are themes that are not supported in society and they are not being supported in the classroom. Teachers believe that if boys are writing about such extreme ideas/events, then they are more likely to be bad members of society.

“It is a mistake…to automatically equate boys’ use of violence in writing with any desire to be vicious or sadistic.” (pg. 296)
“Andrew’s and Jon’s stories would fit the familiar pattern-violence, competitive…and, from a teacher’s standpoint, numbingly repetitive. Yet in Andrew’s account, the stories are intensely social…” (pg. 296)

-This quote reflects how differently a teacher and a student (boy) view the writing a boy does, again proving that teachers are the cause of the writing gap that is being created in the classroom. Boys like to write about things that interest them and things that will encourage them to continue writing and encourage their imagination. Teachers are being discouraged about their writing and not given the opportunity to pursue their own creative way of writing. Teachers believe that boys’ stories are being repetitive because they continue to use the same themes, but they use the same themes because that is what interests them and encourages their writing.

“Dyson (1993) has coined the term “social work” to describe the work writing can do to define and bond friendship groups in a classroom. This “work” may not be evident in the writing itself, appearing more in the talk and negotiation (“Can I be in your story?”) that surrounds the writing. In Andrew’s case, seemingly antisocial, violent writing paradoxically performed a positive collaborative function.” (pg. 296)

- This quote can be used to show how male students actually write with one another and help to create their own stories. Andrew and Jon work together to write effective stories in their class even though it may seem as if they are just being “boys” and being violent. This kind of writing gives male students the security in knowing that someone else knows what they are writing and how one another interprets it. At a young age, these two boys work off one another to write. It is not to be famous or be in the most stories, but to understand one another. Even though Andrew keeps killing Jon, as stated earlier, he actually uses Jon in this violent way to make his writing different and, in some way, with Jon. This demonstrates that teachers may overlook boys
working with one another to create writing. If teachers do not keep this mentality that only girls work together, then the faith in boy’s writing having substance will fall short.

“For boys, this language of affiliation will often be coded in the language of violence and assault, so it is essential to read the subtext of the message. While Andrew was repeatedly using his attack sharks to tear “Jon” apart, he was in fact maintaining a channel of friendship.” (pg. 297-298)

- This quote tells us that we must understand that violence will always be thought of violence; something bad and destructing. However, when boys write about violence, we must try to find the underlying message in their writing. This could be something deeper than the writing itself. It could be a message and the boys life or, in this case, about a close relationship with a friend. Andrew tries to keep his friendship going by continuing to show Jon that he cares about him and writing about him in his stories. Without teachers realizing that boy’s writings are trying to send another message other than violence, only makes the gender gap widen. Teachers may stereotype this writing as “boys being boys” and not understand that they are expressing their ideas another way through their writing.

“Another invitation to sincerity that boys may resist is the introspective self-analysis that has become part of the portfolio movement. Boys may perceive the invitation to self-evaluate their development as something less than an open request.” (pg. 299)

- Boys become insincere when it comes to judging themselves in writing. In the article, it says that boys have two options when it is time to evaluate themselves; they can either say they are doing well and seem as if they are sucking up or they can say they do not know which may seem like they do not care at all (Newkirk). Either way, boys are in a lose-lose situation because they are perceived as a “wannabe good kid” or a “who cares kid”. The article states that boys seem to
know this issue among this type of writing and think that this kind of writing only limits them to
what they think they should be writing in regards to the teacher’s expectations. This kind of
thinking amongst teachers only widens the gender gap of writing. Teachers see boys as not
giving true opinion about themselves while boys know the teacher, for whatever reason, will
judge them.