

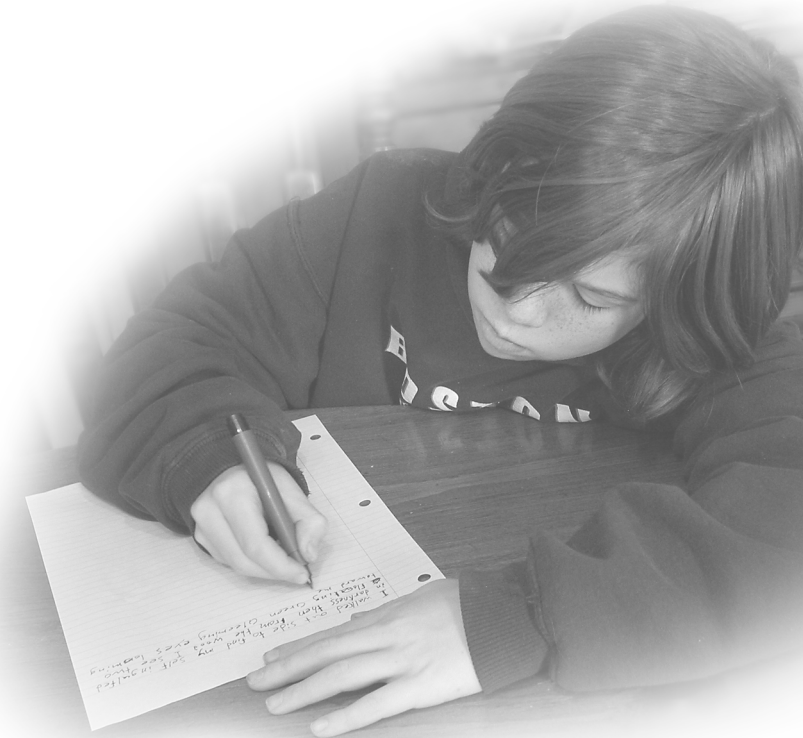
He sits at the table in a baggy Boston Red Sox sweatshirt, staring at the blank sheet of paper before him. A sound from outside makes him look up, but he forces himself to concentrate. He closes his eyes for a moment. Then he opens them and begins to write:

I walked out side to find my self engulfed
in darkness then From the wood I see two
floating green gleaming eyes looming
toward me side-by-side floating up and
down faster and faster then suddenly
the garage light plows over the green
eyes to reveal snarf my little cat
pleeding to get in

The boy who wrote this is Joseph, a ten-year-old fourth grader who also happens to be our youngest son. As we worked on *Teaching the Qualities of Writing* (TQW), we tried to keep Joseph in mind, along with the millions of novice young writers like him in classrooms reflecting diverse languages and cultural backgrounds.

Look back at what Joseph wrote. Surely there are limits to citing your child's writing as an example, but in this case it serves a useful purpose. We admire the rich vocabulary while, as parents, we cringe at the spelling errors, the fragments, the words that should be capitalized. Like most young writers Joseph has distinct strengths and weaknesses that don't cancel one another out.

It's helpful to remember that learning to write, like learning any complex skill, develops over a period of years. Students have already begun the process before they enter your classroom at the start of a new school year; they will continue it long after they leave. You



only join them for a stretch of their journey. At best you bring to your teaching a perspective and language consistent with the teachers they have already had and those they have yet to meet.

We should also remember that writing is not a single skill but a bundle of skills, including encoding meaning, organizing ideas, using details, rereading, revising, using correct spelling and punctuation, etc. Although it may appear that learning to write requires teaching hundreds of things, it's useful to consider discrete skills within a larger framework, which we call the *Qualities of Writing*.

We have committed our professional lives to helping teachers find wiser ways of teaching writing. It is our fervent hope that TQW helps promote our major passion—nurturing teachers and the young writers with whom they work.

John Portolupi Ralph Fletcher