



Songhai

VOLUME XX WINTER 2004

SPiRiT

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Dear Partners in Education:

I am pleased to usher in a new era at Songhai Press Corporation with the return of "The Songhai Spirit." Like you, Songhai Press has seen many changes over the past year, and we are excited to share our news and development with you. This quarterly newsletter is designed to be informative, fun, and—most importantly—useful. In this and upcoming issues you will find important news about developments and trends in education and literacy practices and instruction, as well as fun and practical ideas, tips and tidbits for all citizens of the education community: educators, administrators, students, and parents.



Derrick Gantt
President

This newsletter also serves to keep you informed about our evolution here at Songhai Press, as we continue to respond to the needs of our community by partnering with you to develop literate, fulfilled and productive citizens.

In "The Songhai Spirit" you will meet members of our team—this volume features Robin Arutt, Director of Educational Programs and Services—as well as members of our extended family of educators, children, and families. Also, you can learn more about us on the web at www.songhaipress.com.

I know "The Songhai Spirit" will become one more valuable asset in your education toolbox. As always, we welcome your thoughts, feedback and ideas.

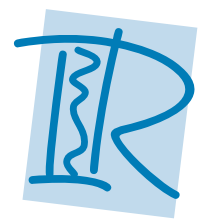
Sincerely,

Derrick Gantt
President

A Writing Revolution

Educators are sounding the alarm. For years, writing was practically ignored as a subject in America's classrooms in favor of reading-focused literacy efforts. Now, throughout schools, colleges and society, the results of that neglect are becoming apparent. In order to better prepare students for successful education and successful lives, educators are calling for nothing less than a writing revolution that will once again make writing a top priority for teachers and students alike.

This shift in educational priorities first began with the 2003 publication of a landmark report, "The Neglected "R", which summarizes the scope of the problem and suggests changes that can be made. The 40-page report was written by the National Commission (*continued inside*)



IN THIS ISSUE:

A Writing Revolution

A national call-to-action for creating literate, articulate citizens.

Around the Family Table

Making writing fun for the whole family.

Get to Know Us

Introducing: Robin Arutt, Director, Educational Programs and Services

Around the Family Table

Make it easy for everyone in the family to write by setting up a small area with the supplies they need to get started.

Depending on the ages of people in your family, you might want to include:

- paper, both lined and unlined. If you have a very young writer, you can get a big-line writing tablet
- pens (buy inexpensive ball point or gel pens in bulk at an office supply store)
- pencils and a pencil sharpener
- erasers
- some colored or glitter pens



— folders for saving any writing that is created

Let your children know how important writing is in your own life by the writing that you do. When you sit down to write, be sure your children are aware of what you're doing. All kinds of writing are important

- writing a grocery list
- composing a note for the teacher or the babysitter
- writing a letter to the editor
- filling out a contract or an application

By watching you, your children will begin to understand that writing is a part of everyday life.

Take a family on an outing to the public library closest to your home or apartment.

Get library cards for everyone. The cards are free if you live in

town, and all you need is proof of residence (for instance, a bill with an address) and another form of identification, like a driver's license.

Ask the



librarian to give your children a tour of the library — showing them where to find books, how to check them out and how to return them.

Before you leave the library, let each child pick out a book he or she would like to take home and read. ■

Get to Know Us

If you've called the office of Songhai Press Corporation, chances are you've encountered Robin Arutt. Although her official title is Director of Educational Programs and Services, Ms. Robin (as students call her) has been involved with almost every aspect of the company's work with students, educators and program development.

For Robin, who is a licensed teacher with specific training in curriculum design and instruction, her work for Songhai Press is exciting. "Too often," Robin said, "there is a rift between those who design curricula and the individuals who teach it. I feel fortunate to have had that classroom experience so that I can help to develop educational experiences that work in a real-life setting."

Robin received her M.Ed. in Curriculum and Instruction from the University of Vermont after receiving BA degrees in Cultural Anthropology from Ithaca College and Studio Art from Cleveland State University. Prior to joining Songhai Press Corporation in 2003, she worked in a variety of educational settings, including public and private schools, a math and reading skills intervention program, museums, and with individual families. *(continued next page)*



Robin Arutt, M.Ed.
Director of Educational Programs

BODY, MIND, SPIRIT

You are a unique person in this world.

Nobody else has your your body, your mind or your spirit, and nobody ever will. Nobody will ever see things exactly the way you see them, so nobody can ever write the story the way you can. That's why it's important for you to write things down. You can tell your story better than anyone.

Get to Know Us (continued from previous page)

The work at Songhai Press is a synergistic fit for Robin, who clearly has goals in education that reach far beyond classroom walls. She explains, "Songhai Press was already publishing great, culturally relevant children's books and empowering students with the Young Publishers Program. The mission is truly in line with why I went into education in the first place. It's based on giving children a sense of ownership, connection and personal pride; to help them discover for themselves what amazing things they can achieve, not only in the classroom, but in the world."

Robin's enthusiasm for the Young Publishers' Program is apparent when she speaks. She is also excited about some new directions for Songhai Press, specifically, professional development. "It sprung directly from teachers' and administrators' requests," she explains. "Teachers have an immense amount to accomplish in very limited time. It is their job to reach every student and cover so many bases, both standards-driven and otherwise. Our partnerships with teachers are based on listening to what they need and then integrating our areas of expertise with what they are doing in the classroom," she said.

When she's not in the Songhai Press office, you might find Robin on long walks with her dog, Wesley. "It's my balance," she says, "I treasure those walks, in any weather!" She also loves music, art, travel and creating handmade books. ■

A Writing Revolution (continued from cover)

on Writing in America's Schools and Colleges, a panel of respected educators, with the help of writing experts.

Here are some of the findings in the report:

- Most fourth grade students spend less than three hours per week writing. That's only about 15 percent of the time they spend watching tv.
- In grades 4, 8 and 12, only half of the students can write on a "basic" level.
- Colleges spend up to \$1 billion annually trying to correct the writing weakness of their incoming students.
- Employers are frustrated by the lack of writing skills of their new employees.

These are stinging indictments, but the report offers hope—a blueprint for putting writing where it belongs, "squarely at the center of the school agenda."

First, the report calls for state and local guidelines which would double the amount of time students spend writing and would require that writing be taught in every grade and in all subjects, not just in English.


Knowing where to put periods and semicolons is important, but writing shouldn't just be about punctuation and mechanics. The report states that "...as students and young adults begin a lifetime of learning, they will find that writing is liberating, satisfying, even joyful... Writing competence builds confidence, which readily turns into creativity and fun..." Those qualities—fun and creativity—are often absent in the writing programs found in many schools.

According to the report, teacher education is critical to helping students become good writers. Many teachers simply lack the training they need to make writing both fun and educational.

The report suggests that teachers

DID YOU KNOW?

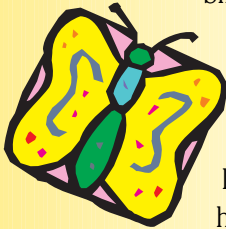
There are more than a million books for young people in the Philadelphia Public Library System (1,240,514, to be exact), and there are almost three million books for adults in the public libraries in Philadelphia (2,971,532).



should be given a number of writing workshops and every learning opportunity available to increase their writing skills and to boost their confidence.

Finally, the Commission formed a new group called A Writing Challenge to the Nation, and gave this group the responsibility of trying to put this writing plan into action. Former Senator Bob Kerrey will lead this Challenge, and it is a task he takes seriously. In a recent issue of the College Board Review, Kerrey wrote. **"We will jeopardize our democracy if our schools do not prepare young men and women to articulate their opinions and ideas clearly and persuasively..."** We believe writing must be encouraged, supported, and continued in our schools and colleges, communities and places of work." According to Kerry and so many others, nothing less than the future of our young people is at stake. ■

**SONGHAI PRESS CORPORATION is a unique
Publishing Company Dedicated to Providing Innovative
Strategies that Foster Children's and
Family Literacy both in the classroom and at home.**



Since 1992, Songhai Press has been at the forefront of developing, producing and marketing culturally relevant reading materials, programs and services for children, families and educators.

We believe that developing a love for reading at an early age translates into a lifelong quest for knowledge. Children should be exposed to literature as early as possible. This exposure should not exclude their own history, culture, heritage or perspective. For this reason, we are proud to present a line of books that children not only should read but also want to read. The books published by Songhai Press are culturally relevant. When children see themselves and role models reflected positively in printed materials, they are more likely to develop a healthy self-esteem.

We look forward to continuing our role as a vital educational resource and partner to everyone concerned with the challenges facing children's and family literacy.

Please know that we remain committed to being your partners in education.

**For more information about Songhai Press Corporation, our Publications
or Educational Programs call 1-877-SONGHAI (766-4424)**

Songhai **SPiRiT**

is published quarterly by
Songhai Press Corporation

Publisher: Derrick Gantt

Editor: Robin Arutt

Contributing Writer: Andrea Fine

Graphic Design: Karen Kappe



SONGHAI PRESS

Songhai Press Corporation

3751 Island Avenue

Suite 101

Philadelphia, PA 19153-3237

1-877-SONGHAI (766-4424)

www.songhaipress.com



SONGHAI PRESS

Songhai Press Corporation

3751 Island Avenue

Suite 101

Philadelphia, PA 19153-3237

