

Summer Writing Ideas

Transcript of Episode 373

Julie Walker: Hello, and welcome to the Arts of Language Podcast with Andrew Pudewa, founder of the Institute for Excellence in Writing or as many like to say, “IEW.” My name is Julie Walker, and I’m honored to serve Andrew and IEW as the chief marketing officer. Our goal is to equip teachers and teaching parents with methods and materials, which will aid them in training their students to become confident and competent communicators and thinkers.

So Andrew, I know we have talked about this before, and that is what to do with your students now that they're free for the summer. Should you continue doing any type of writing assignment,

Andrew Pudewa: course not. would you want to burden your students with maintaining their basic skills during a long three month holiday when they could sufficiently allow everything to atrophy, and you could have to just start over in the fall.

Julie Walker: He says with his tongue in cheek. So there's a, there are a few skills that we would recommend continuing, at least touching on so that the kids don't get evaporation syndrome.

Andrew Pudewa: Yeah, well, you know, there's basically your, your knowledge concept, your skills.

Andrew Pudewa: And you're gonna forget stuff if you don't reinforce it periodically.

Andrew Pudewa: And that's just the way things are. I, I don't think that, anyone ever said, Hmm, two and a half or three months of no academics is going to be really good for kids.

That that isn't how Summer came to exist. Obviously, it started out in a time when. People needed kids to help them work. And then at this point, I think it's just, it's a combination of really entrenched tradition and the fact that it would be very hard to find people who wanted to teach in schools if they didn't have that huge benefit of a long paid time out of school.

Julie Walker: Yeah.

Andrew Pudewa: So, you know, we'll say, I don't know if you call it vacation, because I know a lot of teachers who do work during that time. But, uh, you know, for kids it's just, it's never really that. Helpful, and I know a lot of homeschoolers that basically do year round school.

Julie Walker: Yes.

Andrew Pudewa: And there are a few schools here and there that have shifted over to year round school and will take two to three week breaks several times a year, which I think overall is probably better.

But a lot of people, they just start going into. I'm exhausted, finished. I'm not gonna do another day of this.

Andrew Pudewa: Oh, and I know some people that get to that point early April.

Julie Walker: Well, there you go. And so even with our writing system, we kind of wind down with our Unit nine expecting that. Hopefully parents will and teachers will get to that in April or May, but if they don't, guess what? They get to start over again in the fall and

Andrew Pudewa: Yeah, or just keep going through the summer

Julie Walker: that's true.

Andrew Pudewa: or you know, I know some people maybe have their kids in school or they have them in some kind of school, like hybrid program or something, and they look at the summer as a time to really do enrichment.

Julie Walker: Yep

Andrew Pudewa: With academics, right. Along with travel. Mm-hmm. Along with maybe, hopefully a whole lot more time outdoors and all that.

So yeah. So what can people do to retain and even possibly build their writing skills?

Julie Walker: Well, I like to think about the enrichment side of it because I like the idea of it being different than the school year. I like the idea of the, you know, the kids at least tricking them into thinking they're getting a break. And so what kind of writing assignments would be enrichment based? Writing, delight based writing assignments?

And I'm thinking what teacher is going to come up with that type of thing. And you know, we had a few ideas when we talked about this before. Some of them were to start a little writing club, you know, where you get a group of kids together and they meet maybe a couple days a week and you serve refreshments and you just make it a game.

And you just start with either one of our theme-based books and you just do a couple lessons over the course of the summer and it's not a lesson a week, it's just a little bit of playing here and there. And maybe elaborating a little bit more on some of the stylistic techniques.

Andrew Pudewa: Yeah. Especially if you went and did up through unit three.

Julie Walker: Yes.

Andrew Pudewa: that would be, you know, a story writing club. Most kids think they like writing stories better than reports.

Julie Walker: Right.

Andrew Pudewa: Some of them know they don't. But most of them think they do until they get kind of stuck and they don't like their story. Which is why our unit three is so excellent.

Julie Walker: Yep.

Andrew Pudewa: So yeah, story club. I think also, you know, the, the modern world is kind of pointing out to kids that a lot of people will write blog posts about what they're doing or thinking or going on with them. So, you know, that doesn't really, that's not something we ever really talk about, except maybe unit seven, you know, inventive writing, but blog posts are a lot more free form. It's not as though, okay, now you have to have X number of paragraphs with y number of details per that. Another thing is, um, script. You know, writing, writing a video script.

Julie Walker: Right. Doing a little play. Yep.

Andrew Pudewa: I think a lot of kids like to make videos, but they don't necessarily have the experience or the mastery to be able to make a video spontaneously that's going to be that interesting or amusing to anybody.

Julie Walker: Right.

Andrew Pudewa: But they could write a script and practice it up and then make a video, right? And about any number of things, whether it's something they like to do, like cooking or climbing trees. And then they can write it, read it, and then take video clips and make a little., you know, mini movie. It's gonna come out better the more planning there is.

Julie Walker: right, right.

Andrew Pudewa: So we should do sometime a, an actual thing on script writing.

Julie Walker: Okay.

Andrew Pudewa: I'm not sure I would be able to tell people how to do it, but it is kind of a, a different little zone of writing.

Julie Walker: Yeah, the format of it, it would be pretty easy to find a format that you could then, you know, that's what we do structural models that you can then imitate. You know, you need to paint the scene, you need to have the characters identify who they are, what their background is, a little bit. That would be fun.

Andrew Pudewa: So a lot of, uh, people travel.

Julie Walker: yes.

Andrew Pudewa: During the summer and you know, I think travel is helpful because you're seeing and hearing and experiencing things, tasting, smelling. Things that you're not used to. You, you go to a different place and so there's variety.

Julie Walker: right.

Andrew Pudewa: And so that makes it easier to write about because it's new and the impression on your senses is stronger than, you know, you're, you're in the same place day after day.

Julie Walker: Yep.

Andrew Pudewa: So I think. To incorporate travel.

Julie Walker: Well, and let, let me just talk about that a minute because I, I love that idea. You know, I, I love to travel personally, I think, um, and have started traveling a little bit with my grandchildren. But even when the, the, the challenge that I had with my boys growing up is very different than today's parents with their children and traveling. And we didn't have the problem with screens. We didn't. We had the coloring books, we had the conversations, we had the adventures in audio cassette tapes that we played in our car while we were traveling.

Andrew Pudewa: You are old!

Julie Walker: But today, you know, there's my five year old granddaughter and she's in a car or on a plane and she wants to play with the iPad or you know, and, and mom and dad say, no, let's wait until we drop grandma and grandpa off at the airport and then you can play. But how about using that travel time to actually talk about and then write what you just experienced. Now that's a problem for me personally. Now, again, this is my own personal problem, but you might find this problem in your family that I get car sick and so for me to write in a car just does not bode well for anyone. So how about the person that might get carsick be the dictator or the, not the dictator, but you know the person that,

Andrew Pudewa: Yeah. The, the non-car sick person can be the secretary

Julie Walker: Yes. Yes.

Andrew Pudewa: I suppose one of my favorite stories when this was shown to me, I was very impressed. And it was a long time ago, probably 15 years or more. But, um, this mom who'd been teaching our program for a few years to her kids, she had these twin boys, I think they were 11, if I recall, and they went on a trip with their grandparents and took a lot of pictures, as you would expect.

Julie Walker: Yes.

Andrew Pudewa: And so the mom said, well, you could do kind of a unit five style, but just one paragraph. About some of the pictures you took on your trip to Arizona with grandparents,

Julie Walker: yep

Andrew Pudewa: whatever. And, you know, the boys had enough writing, they had the, the confidence and competence to, to do this. And so, uh, they. You know, look at the picture, use the unit five model, what's the central fact? And then, alright, what else is going on? What were you thinking? What were you feeling? What happened before? What happened after? What was

outside the picture? All that stuff that, that becomes a habit of thinking if you stick with it long enough. And then, of course, a clincher that uses two or three keywords from the topic sentence. So you'd have maybe a four. Or five, six maybe sentence captions.

Julie Walker: Yes. Yes. I love that.

Andrew Pudewa: For that picture. And, you know, these boys got going with this, and I don't know who thought of it, but someone thought that they could keep going with this and then make a book for the grandparents.

Julie Walker: I love that idea!

Andrew Pudewa: Um, with the pictures of the trip and the paragraph. You know, short little captioning paragraph for each picture. And I think they ended up with over 50 pictures in paragraphs in a book. And I think they took the trip in the summer and they had the thing ready by Christmas.

Julie Walker: Christmas. Perfect. Love it! Yep.

Andrew Pudewa: So, you know, that's one way that the writing can be reflective. It can be enjoyable and somewhat free. You can still practice the structure and style ideas. And it's a way of sharing and giving.

Julie Walker: Yep. I, there's so many reasons why today, because Yeah. I remember when I first started working with you, I had heard that story, so that's over 15 years ago. Yeah. That, that, that had happened, and we didn't have the technology then that we do now, and so to create a book like that would be super easy.

Andrew Pudewa: Yes, Today. Yeah. I think they had, you know, they, they did have digital camera. And so you could lay it out and put it out and, but now, yes. Um, you could just send it all in and it would be perfect bound with beautiful, glossy pages and only cost you 30 bucks or something.

Julie Walker: That's right. That's right. And, and you could do it either in the child's own writing, printing, or cursive, which I love that idea because then you're preserving an artifact. This is how they used to write at that age, you know, with their own handwriting or just have them narrate to mom or, uh,

Andrew Pudewa: Right. If they're too young to, to write it out, they can narrate. I, um, I think that what was fun was for them to work on it together. And of course, twin boys are gonna be naturally a little bit competitive, so. You know, they probably were. You do this and I'll do this one, and or maybe they said, well, we'll do them. We'll do this together. And then they get to both throw in memories

Julie Walker: And then those ideas would be very silly.

Andrew Pudewa: you know, you know, one of the things I have noticed a difference between being in school and being in the real world. When kids are in school, there's kind of this context like you have to be doing everything all by yourself. have to write your reports all by yourself, otherwise you're not learning as well as you would. But you know, in the real world, we're constantly collaborating. We're constantly tossing ideas back and forth. We're constantly gaining the benefit of the synergy of many people's genius.

Julie Walker: Yes.

Andrew Pudewa: And. So when you look at kids, especially during the summer, why not just make it these group projects and just let go of the expectation that may be a burden on a child that somehow I have to go off and think of everything and do it all by myself and be, you know, back to the world until I finish this horrible writing assignment.

I mean, that just isn't representative of what we do once we finish school, basically.

Julie Walker: Exactly. Yeah, that's very, that's very true. You know, I'm a very collaborative leader. I love to get input from my team and I feel like then, um, I'm kind of, what do you call it, double teaming you. Hey, Andrew, my team said we should do this, and how can you say no to me?

Andrew Pudewa: Oh no. It works well.

Andrew Pudewa: but, so there's that aspect, um, you know, I have seen, and I think it's kind of going away, but I'm always grateful when I receive one, which is like the Christmas letter.

Julie Walker: Yes.

Andrew Pudewa: from the whole family.

Julie Walker: Yes.

Andrew Pudewa: And each person contributes,

Julie Walker: Oh, so mom doesn't write the whole letter. Everybody gets

Andrew Pudewa: Yeah, exactly. Like each member of the family and some of these can get pretty long if there's, you know, 5, 6, 7 kids, whatever. But why not an end of the summer letter,

Julie Walker: I love that.

Andrew Pudewa: rather than, oh, we have to do this with the new year. The other thing that I have come to appreciate more and more are. Letters from kids, especially grandchildren.

Julie Walker: Yes. Yes.

Andrew Pudewa: And as my grandchildren getting a little bit older, you know, I can have a little bit more enjoyment or expectation of a little bit more in depth.

I mean, they love to illustrate all, all the grandchildren. They, they would rather draw pictures, I think, than write letters. But why not both?

Julie Walker: Sure.Sure. Exactly. What is the expression you're quoting? I don't remember who you're quoting, but it, that which is honored is cultivated. Yes. And so I think that's probably why they enjoy drawing pictures for you, because you're honoring their efforts.

Andrew Pudewa: Well, and then I have to write back.

Julie Walker: yes you do.

Andrew Pudewa: that's, but so, you know. That's good. What else? What, what are some other ideas you have thought of for summer writing? I don't know, what would you call it? Maintenance exercise? but

Julie Walker: Well, enrichment is kind of what I was thinking and and what you mentioned it, but just a different spin on that is writing letters and doing maybe, and we do this in the *Structure and Style for Students: Year one, level B* I believe, where you're writing a letter to a business and you're basically saying good things about their restaurant or their store or you know, write a letter of complaint. So how about writing letters of affirmation to places that you have visited. And you know, I think that the owner of that store would just be delighted to get a letter from a 15 year old or a seven year

Andrew Pudewa: Yeah, probably frame it hanging on the wall

Julie Walker: and.

Andrew Pudewa: go there. Again, next summer you see your own letter up on the wall.

Julie Walker: And maybe you got a coupon for a free chicken sandwich if you wrote a letter thanking them for their delicious chicken sandwich, you know, so yeah. I, I, I like that idea. And, and the other thing that I, I did wanna mention, and this almost sounds like bringing school into the summer, but this, this idea, and we talked about the writing club and only going up to unit three, but there are some, some things that we have in our curriculum that are, that are built in games, and I'm thinking about our *Fix-It! Grammar*. You know, maybe you didn't have time to address grammar over the school year. How about grabbing one of our *Fix-It! Grammar* programs and you know, whatever level your students are at, you just read the description. You'll be able to figure it out pretty easily. If you're not sure, just go down a level and let them have fun. And it's like a treasure hunt. Every day they're trying to find the mistakes that are embedded and they have a little checklist and check it off, and then you can turn that into a bigger game where I'm thinking of Dr. Webster, where the students got their little avatars and they

Andrew Pudewa: Oh, and moving up the pathway.

Julie Walker: Yeah, the pathway. He had planets and you know, that that whole idea of just rewarding their efforts, but making what they're doing actually have built in motivation as well.

Andrew Pudewa: Yeah. So another thing that we, we do a little bit of it in some of our video courses

Andrew Pudewa: But I think also fits very nicely with the summer theme is poetry.

Julie Walker: Oh yes.

Andrew Pudewa: And you know, it's, it's a time when memorizing poetry, nature poetry, knowing poems that you can recite when you go somewhere, maybe to summer camp or to visit cousins or some,

Julie Walker: so good

Andrew Pudewa: something where you, you can kind of exercise your poetry muscles a little bit. And of course, poetry by its nature doesn't have to be quite so rigid. Like that's one of the things we do for kind of an off checklist assignment,.

Julie Walker: right

Andrew Pudewa: Like, yeah, don't worry about, you know, stylistic techniques per se, try to imitate this, you know, rhyme scheme or meter or try to work on this theme or memorize this poetry. So, you know, I think that that's a nice thing to incorporate.

Julie Walker: Right, right

Andrew Pudewa: Into summer, as well as, uh, maybe some themes that are summer based themes. Uh, I know one that a lot of people enjoy is kind of the 4th of July, fireworks freedom, travel, picnics, history of the country, Francis Scott Key, writing the, you know, national anthem during the War of 1812, stuff like that.

Julie Walker: *Star Spangled Banner*

Andrew Pudewa: So, That's a theme that would come up in July, which is not part of the normal school year per se

Julie Walker: right. Exactly.

Andrew Pudewa: Um, and then, you know, what are some other things kids do? Maybe they get to go swimming or take swimming lessons

Andrew Pudewa: or picnics. Mm-hmm. Or they've got more time to do cooking. Maybe summer recipe book.

Julie Walker: Yep. Oh, I love that idea. Yep. And you know, sorry, I keep bringing you back to *Structure and Style for Students*, but we actually did some writing lessons on these really ancient recipes of this dried shark that they serve. And, but that was fun too though,

Andrew Pudewa: though. Was that, um, two ?

Julie Walker: Yes, yes.

Andrew Pudewa: Yeah. Um, so, yeah. But you know, I'm thinking, you know, what are some of those extracurricular things that you have time to do with children when they don't have to go to class? You don't feel like you have to be constantly vigilant to get to the next page in the next chapter so that you can finish the book on time. Well, now what are the things that you're doing? In life. And you know, I think one of, and, and I'm very hesitant to say this because I always had this really negative attitude about journaling.

Julie Walker: Yes.

Andrew Pudewa: In this sense of, and, and I think the reason was, my perception of journaling was that you would write down how you feel about various things.

Julie Walker: Right, right.

Andrew Pudewa: And I don't, I mean, I'm a guy, I don't know how I feel about various things and so it, it always just seemed like a dumb thing to me. But now that I'm older, I realize it could have just been a record of what happened.

Julie Walker: yeah.

Andrew Pudewa: And how enjoyable it is to be able to read back.. Uh, just a record of what happened because it activates memories.

Julie Walker: Yep.

Andrew Pudewa: And so I've started a one sentence a day

Julie Walker: Nice

Andrew Pudewa: plan. I've been at it for about a year and a half. And I thought, you know, I thought to myself, okay, I'm not gonna tell how I feel about stuff. I'm just gonna say, here's what happened today. But when I look back and read, oh, a year ago, I read it. I think I remember that now. And I would not have remembered it if I hadn't been able to read it.

Julie Walker: Right.

Andrew Pudewa: So I, I kind of wish I'd started this 50 years ago, you know, when I was a kid.

Julie Walker: Right.

Andrew Pudewa: And just this, anybody could do this one sentence a day. Yeah. About anything that happened during the day. And if you wanted to do more, okay. You could do more.

Julie Walker: right.

Andrew Pudewa: Right. But, uh, that, that's a very, very doable

Julie Walker: Yep.

Andrew Pudewa: Idea. And even if the kids kind of rebel and say, why do I have to. Fact is if they just, if you just all did it together, everyone's going to write their one sentence about today mm-hmm. In their book before we go to bed.

Julie Walker: A little composition

Andrew Pudewa: Yeah. Any kind of book or, you know, I use a Excel spreadsheet,

Julie Walker: there you go.

Andrew Pudewa: But I, I just, I see more value in that now that I'm old.

Julie Walker: Right.

Andrew Pudewa: Than I would have thought it would have,

Julie Walker: yep.

Andrew Pudewa: When I was younger and I really wish I had more records of the things that happened in my life.

Julie Walker: Right.

Andrew Pudewa: And it would be particularly cool to have access to what my children were remembering from the days of their lives

Julie Walker: Sure!

Andrew Pudewa: back when they were kids and teenagers and all that. And you know, as long as it's not when I think the thing that put me off was this diary with the lock and key.

Julie Walker: Right?

Andrew Pudewa: you know, it's gotta be something so special and secret and juicy that you don't wanna know, just like

Julie Walker: right.

Andrew Pudewa: Went to grandpa's house, swam in the pool. It was fun. You know? I mean, even if it's just super mundane.

Julie Walker: Yep. I think that was three sentences. So there you go. You tripled expectations. That's awesome.

Andrew Pudewa: awesome. Actually, I'm not sure any of them were complete sentences, but we won't argue. But again, freeform.

Julie Walker: Yeah, exactly. Well, and I would just say, you know, just what I've been told, and I agree with myself when I say it to myself, when's the best time to plant a tree? 50 years ago

When's the second best time today? Yeah. So yeah. That's,

Andrew Pudewa: buy a bigger tree and plant

Julie Walker: Yeah. Yeah. Buy. So, uh, that actually reminds me of a gift I received from my daughter-in-law last year at Christmas. A subscription to StoryWorth.

Andrew Pudewa: Yeah, I've heard about that. I'm just hoping no one gives me that.

Julie Walker: Well, and so what, every week I get a little prompt, and the very first prompt that I got was, have you ever won anything? And you know, at the beginning, I'm a pretty good starter. I'm not so good. And what I force myself to do now when I get the prompt, The prompt and the prompt that I got this week is, who would you like to thank?

And of course what I had to start with is saying, I'd like to thank the academy because that's so cliché, right? Yeah. But then I just, just made a, a quick keyword outline so that if I decide to revisit it someday, I. Now I can flesh that out and every week I have a little chapter in my book. And that, that's just, that is gratifying.

And so maybe a family Storyworth subscription that you only just do for over the summer and every week you've got a prompt that you work on together collaboratively. And then you've got your, yeah, what did I do over the

Andrew Pudewa: Yeah, I think collaboratively is the key

Andrew Pudewa: Because it's so easy to throw a prompt at a kid and if it doesn't catch, he's dead in the water

Julie Walker: right

Andrew Pudewa: and frustrated and hates it. But if you were to sit around and talk and someone can be the secretary and put the keyword outline on the whiteboard.

Julie Walker: Yep.

Andrew Pudewa: And then you write it out. That's imminently doable.

Julie Walker: Yeah And one, one, the advantage of StoryWorth and why would you pay for a subscription is if you actually finish it and do what they're asking you to do every week you have a 52 chapter book that they will publish for you. That's part of what you get when you get this subscription. So I don't know. I don't know if I'll publish.

Andrew Pudewa: I mean, they'll print it

Julie Walker: They'll print it for you. Yes, exactly. They're not gonna, no one's gonna buy it, that's for sure. But, um, it's been, it's been really fun, especially, you know, as I reflect on my dad and I lost him in the last year, and so just thinking about him and just my, my family and just, you know, wow, Andrew, I'm sounding old because I'm reflecting on my, my legacy and what's that gonna look like.

But I, I think that this whole idea of delight driven, exercises, especially over the summer, I think will keep the students

Andrew Pudewa: Well I think we just have to be a little bit careful about that. Mm-hmm. Because some kids will not ever reach a point of delight.

Julie Walker: this is true.

Andrew Pudewa: And that doesn't mean it isn't worth doing

Julie Walker: exactly.

Andrew Pudewa: So yes, if it becomes delightful, benefit, side benefit, but you know, make a plan, try it, do it all together and there's a chance that, at some point, everyone will look back and say, oh, I'm so glad we did that. Uh, there's also a chance they could say, do we really have to do it? And then you say, yeah, we're just going to

Julie Walker: We're just

Andrew Pudewa: that's what we do.

Julie Walker: That's what we do. And I, you know, the whole, we haven't brought this up, I kind of alluded to this, but whenever you say yes to something, you have to say no to something else, right? So whenever you say yes to this idea of enriching your summer with writing assignments, you're saying no to probably a little bit of screen time, which we know that that's a win-win.

Because we know that that can be healthy for students in their brains, in their souls and in their bodies

Andrew Pudewa: Yeah. You know, one other little thought, uh, I'll just throw out there, because I've heard so many, I've heard so many stories that this was effective and that is, Getting a cool calligraphy set. Oh,

Julie Walker: oh, nice.

Andrew Pudewa: know, a, a pen with the different tips and a little book on how to make different beautiful letters. I think for a lot of kids they hit kind of this sensitive period where they, they think it's pretty cool to write in a beautiful way.

Andrew Pudewa: And that can sometimes take a lot of time. And, and during the school year, time is your commodity. It's like we have to get all this stuff done

Julie Walker: right.

Andrew Pudewa: But in the summer you have more of that commodity, so yeah. What if you did spend half an hour writing one sentence and making it look really beautiful and practicing that?

Julie Walker: Maybe even illuminating the text, right? With a little bit of text. Text, you know? Yeah. That would be really pretty. Well, I hope listener that it's given you at least some food for thought as you plan for a low evaporation level summer.

Andrew Pudewa: Well, and could we invite people to contribute ideas to our Facebook page or to email them into us and we'll post them? Because I think some of the very best ideas come from the people who are. Right there. Yep. In the moment, getting the inspiration [00:29:18] and why not just share that.

Julie Walker: Yep, so we do, every week we post on our website this podcast, but we also post a companion blog post, and so we'll open that up for comments on our blog posts so that people can contribute their ideas of what they could do for writing assignments for the summer. I like it!

Andrew Pudewa: All right.

Julie Walker: Thank you, Andrew.

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