

Podcast 434 Letters from Listeners

Episode Transcript

Andrew Pudewa: When you learn how to do something pretty well and you keep practicing and you keep practicing, as a kid, that skill of, not just writing, but putting the whole thing together, that carries into whatever you do.

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.

Julie Walker: We get letters, Andrew. We do. It's so fun.

Andrew Pudewa: Oh, we are loved.

Julie Walker: It's good to be loved. So, you had suggested, in fact, one of these that I'm going to read was from you saying, “We need to read this on a podcast.” So, I have a few letters from parents and teachers. You have a few letters from students.

Andrew Pudewa: A couple for today.

Julie Walker: Yeah. So, do you want to just kind of go back and forth?

Andrew Pudewa: Sure.

Julie Walker: Alright. Here's the first one, Andrew, and this is the one that you said, “Oh, we've got to get this on a podcast.”

Andrew Pudewa: Okay, let's hear it.

Julie Walker: “Mr. Pudewa, my name is Henry, and I'm currently a senior in high school. I've been using IEW since probably fifth grade or so. Now in eighth grade, one of the assignments you set is a paragraph on book lice.”

Now technically that's in the teacher training course, but he probably had a overambitious teacher wanting to have

Andrew Pudewa: And a lot of teachers do. They pull source text out of the TWSS,

Julie Walker: Exactly. “I never, ever thought that information would come in handy.” The subject line of this email, “Mr. Pudewa, you saved a library unknowingly.”

“Next year I went to a boarding school, St. Lawrence Seminary. I went into their library and I hear the rustling, the tell tale sign of book lice, which I only knew thanks to my paragraph written a few months before. Apparently, they've had that sound for years. No one thought anything of it, especially because the library is barely used. I also found their burrows, one would say, inside some books. I reported it to the administration, and the library was shut down for the rest of the year while they purged through book after book. Many books were

saved, but it took months. None of the students knew why, for we weren't told, but I secretly knew. You saved hundreds of books. Great job. You're a hero." Alright, you got one?

Andrew Pudewa: Well, yes, this is a girl that wrote to me the first time many years ago. I don't remember how many. It says, "Dear Mr. Pudewa, Thank you for all you do. I always appreciate when you take the time to recap in your videos of what we are doing. To show how thankful I am for your teaching, I am including a copy of my very first 12-paragraph super essay."

Julie Walker: Oh my word.

Andrew Pudewa: "It is from SSS2B Lessons 19-21 about Westward Expansion. I love writing because you always make it fun with a joke. My favorite part of writing is finding satisfactory word choices with impenetrable meanings. I enjoy finding words which make my papers amusing to read. Writing is always something I enjoy because there are many aspects to put in my papers and hunt for spots for special types of words. Diligently, I write each day, expeditiously foraging through many words to find the correct one. Since I am sending you a copy of my paper, I would like you to read through it and send me some things that would make it more confounding. Thank you so much. I'm very excited to share this paper with you, as I am very proud of it. It took me approximately three and a half weeks."

Julie Walker: Oh wow.

Andrew Pudewa: "including editing. Although this was such a difficult assignment, I enjoyed doing it. I hope you enjoy reading my paper, and I am excited to hear from you again. I hope I will meet you one day soon." We were hoping, somehow, I would visit this family in California.

Anyway, how old do you think this girl would be? Like a 12 paragraph super essay she's been doing for 3 or 4 years.

Julie Walker: She's in 2B. That's probably 8th grade, 13, probably 13 or 14 years old.

Andrew Pudewa: Yeah. Well, it says, "P. S. I have done IEW since the end of 2nd grade and now I am in 6th, going into 7th." So she's on the young side.

Julie Walker: Yep. Yep. So 12 or 13. Yeah. Well, and that just kind of gives credence to what we've talked about before is the value of doing the Structure and Style approach year after year. That's a phenomenal letter. Okay. I would love to hear just the introductory and concluding paragraphs of the super essay. Super essay is 12 paragraphs.

Andrew Pudewa: so, perfect MLA format there.

Adventure to expand. "Globetrotters who prospect land can be sent all over the world to explore territories that are unknown or are not inhabited. They could be deployed to investigate vast distances across places or simply to familiarize themselves through a small plot of land meant for a small town to be built upon. Men and women who do this work are called surveyors, and they spend days, sometimes months, looking over the land they are surveying. In 1803, America purchased what is now known as the Louisiana Purchase. This land was controlled by others from different countries for many years, and by the time it was handed to Napoleon Bonaparte, he found nothing to do with it. So he sold it to America for a

meager sum. After purchasing this land, people were summoned to traverse new country in what is called the Westward Expansion, a mission on which many men embarked to explore the new land that was brought. The boundaries of the expansion contained a little over a third of America as we know it today.”

Julie Walker: Wow. You know what's so fun about that? I'm literally getting chills with you reading that because I had a part in writing the source text that she used to write her research paper. It's just fun to hear her pull out some fascinating information and Napoleon not having anything to do with it. I'm pretty sure that's not in the original source text.

Andrew Pudewa: Probably, I mean, but kids sometimes add in things they know or parents say things. I think it's cute. He found nothing to do with it, so he sold it. Yeah, and her two essays, the first is on Lewis and Clark and the second is on Sacagawea. So you see then, the full introduction, body, conclusion for the first essay, then the full introduction, body, conclusion for the second essay, and then the super conclusion.

Julie Walker: All right. Let's hear the super conclusion.

Andrew Pudewa: “Two valorous characters in history, Lewis and Clark, known for their investigational journey of the Louisiana Purchase Territory, were strong and courageous through the launching, through the middle, and through the conclusion of their survey. Another character involved in this journey, a translator named Sacagawea was also part of the adventure from the beginning, assisting where needed, and fully involved until the close of the roving. Unforgettably, this team traversed through places then unknown throughout America, land only familiar to certain native tribes living back then. The significance in this is that not all explorers wished to see things unknown and scary due to knowing little to nothing about the animals and plants that surround them. Other explorers feared that the unfamiliar and unidentified species could be dangerous, but this team of historical journeymen did not. Through their bravery, the westward expansion of America paved a path that crossed from one side of the nation all the way to the other side so Americans could move in and expand.”

For a 12 year old?

Julie Walker: Right? No kidding.

Andrew Pudewa: That's pretty, pretty remarkable.

Julie Walker: My husband and I recently visited Astoria, Oregon, which is the end place of their journey. And we got to see the little fort there where it was the first time ever in American history that a woman, Sacagawea, and a Native American, Sacagawea, got to vote of whether or not they were going to stay. So that's also part of the source text, but it was really fun visiting there. We'll put a picture in the show notes so you can see. Okay, I have another one from a mom.

This is from Rebecca. She says, “My family has been using IEW for about seven years, including a couple of years of online classes.” (We have amazing online classes.) “One of my sons is currently a freshman in college. Oh, it's one of these letters. We love getting these letters. He and his classmates were informed last minute of a paper that was due the next day.” Oh, my guess is they were not informed for the first time. I think they were reminded.

But anyway, “my son's classmates had to stay up most of the night writing the paper. But my son said that because of IEW, he was able to get it done. I'm sure you hear these stories all the time of college kids flying through writing assignments, but I wanted to express my gratitude for how your program has changed my family. Writing was such a weakness for us, but you have turned this math science family into a writing family. Thank you.”

Andrew Pudewa: Well, we hope, after having spent an entire hour on that paper, that he did get a decent mark.

Julie Walker: I hope so. Okay. You have another one from students.

Andrew Pudewa: Yeah, so this was a 10th grade girl who handed me a letter that she had written.

Julie Walker: Oh, nice.

Andrew Pudewa: “Although an avid writer, I never enjoyed my writing style. Too many repeated words, the dialogue felt dull, the characters shallow. Although I loved writing, I hated sharing my pages of text. That is, until my 10th grade year [which was just finished for her.] My mother told me that I was going to be taking a writing course to develop my style. That course was IEW. Between the banned words, strong verbs, and -ly adverbs, my writing really came alive. So thank you, Mr. Pudewa.

Julie Walker: Oh, I love that.

Andrew Pudewa: Yeah. And you get the feeling like she was one of those maybe 18-pager types who just would just start writing a story and it would go on and on and, but I find it interesting that just the littlest bit of help in the vocabulary area is huge. And the thing that kind of struck me between both the first one and this one is that kids want to use more and better and interesting words, but they don't have them, they don't necessarily carry them around in their brain or find them easily, but in our system with the checklist and then the list of words and resources that we make available, it's just like a brain expander. And who wouldn't want a brain expander? The kids, they, they really. I love the—I think Ellie put it really well, finding just the right word for just the right thing. And it may or may not be perfect, what an adult would do or an experienced adult, but it's huge growth for them. And that, I think, is one of the most valuable things about the way our checklist operate in the world of kids language.

Julie Walker: Well, and I love that philosophy, Andrew. So much of our society believes that we have to dumb down education because kids don't care. But the truth is, they really want to, as you like to say, appear smarter than they actually are, and then actually become more smart, right?

I have another one, and this is not so much a testimonial. This is more of a great idea for summer. And I love this one because she's talking about the license plate game. And my dad and I used to play the license plate game growing up, but she's got a little IEW twist on this.

So this is from Shannon. She says, “Hello, I just listened to Learning Throughout the Summer podcast and wanted to share one fun activity our family loves. In Texas, most license plates have three letters followed by numbers. While we drive, the children use the three letters to create a phrase, i. e. S C H— several cars hiccup. That's great. With my older children, I

encourage them to use more dress ups than just strong verbs. We have spent more time laughing in the car whenever we use that tool. Another reason I love this game is that it teaches my seven and four year olds nouns and action verbs. And then she says, have a wonderful summer.”

So hopefully, listener, you can employ that and play some license plate games.

Andrew Pudewa: We always used to play the game where you would see a license plate of a state, and then how many states you could collect. Or, the one where you, you'd see a sign with a word and then you would have to see another sign that had the last letter of the word you saw. So if you saw a word that said school, you'd have to find now another sign that said L.

Or, I think we also played it where you'd go through the alphabet. You're looking for a A sign and a B sign and whoever could get to a Z sign. You're pretty much doomed unless there's a zoo.

Julie Walker: Yes. And that was the game that my dad and I played, but they had to be road signs that way the driver could play. Because if you're looking at billboards, then you're probably not paying attention to the road. So, but the license plate game to be able to read personalized plates, to figure out what they're trying to say. That was one of the things.

Andrew Pudewa: I was thinking just recently about word games and verbal games with children and how important that was for us as children and how sad it is now that you've got screens in cars and people are tuning out. But I was trying to teach my grandchildren the game 20 Questions.

And as I was doing that, I thought, this is a tremendously valuable game because it works at many different levels of applying general knowledge and categorization and division, process of elimination, comparison, the thinking skills involved in that fun little verbal game you can play anywhere with anybody are really quite remarkable. And of course, in our system, we're always saying, the key to thinking of stuff to write, whether you're just trying to get a eke out a few ideas or whether you're working on an advanced literary analysis, is the quality of the questions.

So, I think that Game 20 questions should be revived in modern children.

Julie Walker: Yes. I love that idea. We do iSpy a lot with my grandchildren, but I love bringing in 20 Questions to up it a little bit because I think they're ready for that. I have one. This is from one of the moms whose students were in several of our video courses.

Andrew Pudewa: Oh,

Julie Walker: Yes, and so this is a little long, but I love this, and I'm actually secretly hoping we can get them in here because they live local to us to actually have a conversation with them.

She says, “I wanted to share an update on Eli and Caleb.”

Andrew Pudewa: Oh, yes.

Julie Walker: Eli was in our level C class, Caleb was in our level B classes, and also in the speech class.

Andrew Pudewa: And it's so hard to imagine those kids are all five, six years older now,

Julie Walker: I know, I know, we've immortalized them at the age that they were at. Yeah. "Eli just finished his third year at OSU studying biochemistry and molecular biology. And he's working on earning a minor in Russian."

Andrew Pudewa: Oh,

Julie Walker: "He's spending the summer in Stillwater on a research scholarship and anticipates being published as a result of that work. When he graduated from high school in 2021, he scored 35 on the ACT, which earned him a full tuition waiver to OSU." That's amazing, Andrew.

"Caleb graduated from high school last month. He simultaneously earned his associate's degree from Oklahoma Christian, where he graduated summa cum laude. He was ranked 6 of 3, 800 in his class at Epic Charter School. Caleb volunteered to speak at his graduation. He felt that he'd look back on the opportunity and regret it if he turned it down." Now mind you, he was in our speech class.

Andrew Pudewa: He was in our speech class. IPS.

Julie Walker: "After the ceremony, the keynote speaker sought him out to get a selfie and told him he expected great things from him. In his speech, Caleb shared his desire to become a screenwriter. In the fall, he will be begin the cinema and digital media program at ORU."

Boy, we need good writers in cinema, right?

Andrew Pudewa: And,

Julie Walker: "I'm sharing all of this because Everyone at IEW played a role in Eli and Caleb's achievements. They learned to love writing and they cultivated confidence as writers on set each week and at home. I do not believe they would have challenged themselves personally and academically in these ways without IEW. We are grateful for the investment you made in them. We can't wait to see how they will continue to use writing, speech, and debate in the future."

Andrew Pudewa: Oh, that is sweet. Oh, so nice to get an update on those kids.

It is interesting how when you, You learn how to do something pretty well, and you keep practicing, and you keep practicing, as a kid, that skill of persistence, that skill of being diligent in the details, that skill of, not just writing, but putting the whole thing together completing the project, which in some cases is the problem. We had them turn in the packet with the checklist and the final and the rough and the outline and pretty strict on, "sorry, you missed something, do it again.

Julie Walker: Not do the whole thing again.

Andrew Pudewa: No, but fix the thing that needs to be fixed before you turn it back in again, that level of completeness, I guess, is the word I'm looking for. That's just, that carries into

whatever you do, whatever you do, whether it's science or trades or any project. I mean, that's what we love around here, right? Is people who can take a project and run it through and complete and communicate details. I've been thinking a lot about AI in college campus environments and it's just getting more and more where you can tell it to do something and it can just do all the thinking for you, right?

Like the new calculator, I think you just write the problem and it solves it right for you right there. So not that it doesn't have application for people who know their math, the danger is what about the people who don't know how to write and don't know how to do math, and then pretty soon, this technology just is so overwhelmingly tempting and ubiquitously available, you never get the thinking skills.

That's what I fear a little bit. One of the things I hope that people in schools who are using our material find is that the kids have to do it the way they do it. They're writing in class, they're turning in rough drafts, they're marking all those dress ups and openers and topic clinchers and doing it in such a way that they aren't going to be tempted to just ask a robot computer thing to write my paper for me.

Because that would deprive them of that experience that she has articulated, I think, was so valuable for her kids in growing up.

Julie Walker: Exactly. Well, listeners, we love getting letters from you. If you want to send us a letter, you could send it to us at Podcast@IEW.com or you can do snail mail. We love getting mail.

Andrew Pudewa: I get more, most of my letters from kids I get from the mail. One of the assignments in the SSS is to write a five-paragraph letter to someone, and so a lot of these kids are picking me as the object of their assignment. Some are pretty cute, so we'll do it again later.

Julie Walker: All right. Well, thank you, Andrew. Thank you, Andrew.

Andrew Pudewa: Thank you

Julie Walker: Thanks so much for joining us. If you enjoyed this episode and want to hear more, please subscribe to our podcast in iTunes, Stitcher, or Spotify. Or just visit us each week at IEW.com/podcast. Here you can also find show notes and relevant links from today's broadcast. One last thing: would you mind going to iTunes to rate and review our podcast? This really helps other smart, caring listeners like you find us. Thanks so much.