

Podcast 472: From the Mailbag

Episode Transcript

Andrew Pudewa: If you don't think you're gonna use writing when you're older, if you can speak and write well, you will rise to the top in any situation.

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: Andrew, we get letters. It's really fun to get these letters.

Andrew Pudewa: A lot of letters.

Julie Walker: with

Andrew Pudewa: Some by email. Some with stamps, in the old fashioned way.

Julie Walker: Indeed. And some of them are actually handwritten as well. Wow. How old school? Those are the most endearing ones, are they not?

Andrew Pudewa: And unfortunately I just can't keep up in responding. I have tried, and I go through my folder and I'm thinking, wow, this came back last May, almost a year ago, and I never answered, and then I walk around feeling guilty until I write, “Once upon a time I received a letter from you...”

Julie Walker: Yes, yes.

Andrew Pudewa: But some of them are awfully cute and some of them are really amazing in terms of the transformations that we hear happening in kids and classrooms and families.

Julie Walker: So absolutely gratifying. So I have a little stack, and you have a little stack, and should we just jump in?

Andrew Pudewa: I think people would enjoy hearing. I mean, some of the, I'll start with a humorous one.

Julie Walker: Okay.

Andrew Pudewa: So I don't know the age of this student, but his last name, Quibbleworth “Salutations. I trust this epistle finds you in the pinnacle of grammatical perfection. My name is Jonathan, and I must confess your linguistic prowess has left an indelible mark on my rather impressionable cerebrum. Lectures resplendent with syntactical elegance in semantic

precision are nothing short of pedagogical masterpieces. I must also take a moment to extol the magnificence of your most wondrous mustache. It is a paragon of facial hair, a veritable symphony of follicles that harmonizes with your impeccable sense of style. In my most humble opinion, your mustache deserves its own chapter in the annals of grooming history.

Julie Walker: Wow.

Andrew Pudewa: In conclusion, I eagerly anticipate our next grammatical escapade. May your apostrophes never be misplaced, and your semicolons always be perfectly poised. Yours, most sincerely, Jonathan.

Julie Walker: Wow, Jonathan, that's a mouthful right there.

Andrew Pudewa: Well, it's, it's, it's healing for me because I once got a letter, someone said, with your mustache, you look like Hitler. And that was, that was a hard one, but. I don't know that Jonathan has seen my new expanded facial hair style that I carry around now with a fairly closely shaved very white beard, but people still recognize me in airports.

Julie Walker: they do. They do. And of course this student must have watched your Structure and Style video courses.

Which is great. We have seven years now of torture that you can present to students—actually delight. So I'm sure that Jonathan is looking forward to the next iteration of that video, unless he went all the way up to year two, Level C

Andrew Pudewa: I don't know where he is. Certainly he's got a vocabulary.

Julie Walker: he does. Yes he does.

Andrew Pudewa: a veritable symphony of follicles.

Julie Walker: Yes. Yes. I have a short little note from Crystal who is responding to one of our customer service agents who reached out to her just to make sure everything went as we had hoped, and she replies. “Good afternoon. Thank you for taking the time to send an update email. I have received the main box that I was needing for continuing our daughter's education for *Bible Heroes...*” so she's using one of our theme-based books. No video.

Andrew Pudewa: a young age

Julie Walker: Yeah, at a very young age. Well, and she talks to that. “We are very excited for her to start since she has been watching her older brother and his Structure and Style 1A Eagerly she asked when she was going to be able to start her big kid writing program, to which I replied when she started third grade. To her dismay she has been talking to everyone about how we are keeping her from writing great works. She is six I might add, so we looked into it more and found bible heroes. I'm very much looking forward to this year. Thank you for helping our family.”

Andrew Pudewa: Oh, that's sweet. I've got another one from a student named Elijah. Again, I'm not sure about the age, but it does have a kind of humor.. He sent the rough draft, which had been edited by, I assume his editor. And so the heading on this page says, refined draft,

Julie Walker: Okay.

Andrew Pudewa: and I like that. Refined. "Dear Andrew Pudewa, I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude for creating such an excellent writing program. It is quite easy to follow along, easy enough to do by myself, and doesn't require a single answer like math or science and looks and sounds quite like the real thing when complete. Personally, I enjoy the imaginative styles where I'm free to create a flowing story full of rich detail and enjoyable dialogue. In a report, you have to compile a bunch of facts, get rid of half the facts and try to make it flow like a story."

Julie Walker: So he's more like me, where he likes the creative rather than the just the facts,

Andrew Pudewa: but I really appreciated his understanding of the whole Unit 4/6 process, right? Collect a bunch of facts, get rid of half of them, and try to make it flow.

"I think that I speak for everybody when I say that your jokes and lighthearted approach to teaching certainly makes your curriculum one of the pleasant experiences in a dreary day of school. You certainly have outdone every other curriculum and outshone every other teacher. Now that's an exaggeration. Sincerely, Elijah, but then it says flip. And on the back PS I had to say a bunch of good things about IEW because companies never show their bad reviews.

That came in an envelope with a stamp.

Julie Walker: That's cute. So, as you know, of course, Andrew, we have a school's department that is growing by leaps and bounds, and I have a letter from a school teacher. This is, she was corresponding with her educational consultant. So we have, because schools are unique, they need a maybe a little bit more handholding to figure out what curriculum will be appropriate for that class of kids. And so here's some correspondence that she had with one of our educational consultants.

"Good evening, I spoke with you about IEW for the school where I was teaching several months ago. I used it in my fourth grade class, and I was being assessed as it was my first year with this school. [Always a little bit unnerving to know that you're gonna be assessed right.]

I have also been using *Fix It! Grammar* with my fourth graders. As it turns out, that was the lesson we did when I was being observed. I put the incorrect sentence on the board and listed things they needed to label. We then did it on the board, and my assessor was impressed. She said her ninth graders couldn't do what my fourth graders did that day. She then asked if there was anything else she could see. We had just done our first rough draft of camels. [So this is from 1A.] And I was able to have a student go up front and read her her two paragraph rough

draft. She was hooked. We have been approved to do IEW for the fall in third, fourth, and fifth grade. Would it be possible to speak with you again on the phone? Thanks so much, Gail.

Andrew Pudewa: With our schools clients. We of course, work with a whole variety from, say, the special ed departments of no less than Chicago Public Schools who order every year. We have a lot of classical schools, Christian schools, Catholic schools, charter schools using a classical approach. And of course the hybrid schools. So this is one to our hybrid schools.

Julie Walker: Oh, great.

Andrew Pudewa: Contact Debbi. It's a little bit long, so I'm gonna have to pick a few parts of it. But she said, "This letter's overdue. But as of today, I've met with all but one of my families, so have even more appreciation for IEW to share with you."

Julie Walker: So this is an independent study program, right. Got it.

Andrew Pudewa: "My experience with IEW began several years ago. The elementary age students of one of my families were taking IEW classes offered once a week by some homeschool parents. The students told me about key word outlines and shared their writing samples with me each month, but never seemed very excited about the classes. I was rather ambivalent about the IEW writing program, as it seemed like just another printing program with a different spin."

Andrew Pudewa: Fair enough, What you see...

"Fast forward to last fall. On the recommendation of some friends, one of my families ordered *Structure and Style [for Students]* with the year one streaming option. This family used your program to fidelity." (I love the use of that word, fidelity.) Monthly, they would show me their work samples, the likes I had seen years before. My curiosity was piqued.

As the fifth and seventh grade boys began to tell me how funny Mr. Pudewa was and how much they liked his jokes. Hmm, that was something I hadn't heard before. They told me how they watched the videos four days per week as they proudly showed me their work samples along with fix-it grammar. Students, especially these boys telling me they actually liked writing was new and news to me."

Then I'm gonna skip down a little bit. People who've done our SSS know that in the first lesson I give them a prompt and no help, just cold, and then I throw 'em in a folder. Don't look at them until the end. Give them the same prompt and then they get to compare. So this is, this is very interesting.

"Our last meeting of the year in May of 2024, these three children shared with me the 15-minute writing exercise they did at the beginning and as well at the end of the year. The difference was astonishing and brought me to tears. You bridged a gap that I couldn't. These children born in America spoke Ukrainian as their first language, which their parents are most

comfortable speaking. Try as I might. I didn't know how to help them write really well, but you did.” (and then I'm skipping down a little bit more.)

“It's no surprise that the three American Ukrainian children are all continuing with IW this year. I wasn't sure if it would be considered a full ELA curriculum for high school students, but Debbie showed me the scope and sequence page that has the literature suggestions. Yay!

“Yet, another parent shared with me how happy she was to have the organization of IEW when she first opened the box and saw all the things. She was overwhelmed because of her ADHD and had to close the box. A few days later, she told herself she needed to look at the curriculum again. She began to see how everything was laid out and already organized for her, and suddenly realized that it was not an overwhelming program, but quite the opposite. She wished she'd had this program for her 11th grade son and already graduated daughter but was so happy her seventh grader will learn to write well.”

I think that's somewhat typical of what we hear. People can get a little overwhelmed, but as I said once on a video we used for a while, the hardest thing is just turn it on. Start watching and do it.

Then you get the results.

Julie Walker: Yep. There are several pieces to our *Structure and Style [for Students]* materials. You've got the videos, which it's either streaming or DVDs, you have the teacher's manual, which will help guide you as you're taking your students. And as they're watching the DVDs, Andrew, they're watching you pass out papers. Well, we have all those papers in a three-ring binder that needs to be assembled. So it's actually pretty easy once you just read the instructions. And I actually did a little video, an unboxing video, like this is how you put your binder together. Super easy. So we try to make it easy.

Andrew Pudewa: We try.

Julie Walker: Yep. So I have a much shorter one, but this is also from our school's team and this is to Evan, one of our educational consultants.

“Hi Evan. I must say I am so impressed with the Structure and Style methodology. We're starting the techniques of Unit one and my freshmen are really taking to it. What's more is that we just started the public speaking part today. Read, think, look up, speak. And that part could not have gone any better. Even our special education teachers are shocked. I have never seen public speaking, so elegantly integrated into a writing program before.”

So I, what I love about this is high school. Sometimes we are overlooked when we're talking about high school because maybe it's too easy. We know that's not true, but they do start in unit one where key word outline super easy to do and then have the opportunity to tell it back and then possibly have an opportunity to do public speaking just using their key word outline, which is so, so phenomenal, so enriching, so life-giving to these students to start learning this

skill at a young age. That was from Seth, one of our school teachers that's working with Evan to implement IEW in his school.

Andrew Pudewa: Great. Well, I love to hear stories of high school teachers that immediately see value knowing that their experience using that in their classes is just gonna get better and better and better.

One thing that, another kind of category of correspondence that I receive is from all grownup kids who are now well into adulthood, but did not forget. So here's one from David and it's a short one.

He said, "Hello. I participated in an IEW curriculum about 20 years ago, (so all our old stuff) and, and just wanted to share that it constantly crosses my mind and has since college. I have become a successful engineering professional. I'm regularly complimented on my writing and communication, which I largely attribute to the IEW classes and the teacher I had in grade school.

I don't even remember much of my childhood, but IEW stands out even though I disliked that. It was one of my hardest things at the time. So thank you."

Julie Walker: Aw, that's really sweet.

Andrew Pudewa: And it's funny, I meet young teenage boys who will sometimes say things like, "Why do I have to learn this? I'm gonna be fill in the blank. I'm gonna be an engineer. I'm gonna go in the military, I'm gonna be a plumber. I want to be a computer tech guy." And I always say, even if you don't think you're going to use writing when you're older, if you can speak and write well, you will rise to the top in any situation because it's the best engineer. He stays a good engineer and that's great, but the good engineer who can write and communicate engineering ideas well, he'll rise up into positions of influence and leadership because every situation requires communication to maximize opportunities.

So I love that one. Twenty years ago, and he was probably 10, 11, 12, so now he's pushing 30 at least.

Julie Walker: Yep.

Andrew Pudewa: And I don't remember much of my childhood either, but I'm sure glad IEW stands out for him. And he took the time to do this.

Julie Walker: Yes. So I have a short one. Wow. I have a lot from schools, but this is a public school teacher who teaches at one of our Hillsdale schools. Her name is Laura, and she has started using Gradebook, IEW Gradebook. This is a new app that, it's a web-based app that we make available for teachers using our curriculum, who are needing to provide feedback to typed papers, all the qualifications. IEW.com/gradebook for more information. But here's her testimony.

“I use IEW gradebook to grade final drafts, and I absolutely love it. It has made grading essays so much more streamlined and has simplified things not only in my classroom, but has also freed me up to spend time with my family. It is worth every penny.”

Andrew Pudewa: Oh, that's, that is beautiful to hear.

Julie Walker: That's really one of the reasons why we created this app was for teachers who are overwhelmed with all the grading. We assign a lot, shocker, we assign a lot of writing in IEW because the more you write, the better you'll get at it, provided there's a pathway. And now you have to provide feedback on these papers. How can we help them with that?

Andrew Pudewa: Watching the development of that app product, seeing how teachers can add comments that they want to kind of have on hand, and so to explain something like why there should be a comma there or whatnot, now they can just click and boom, get the explanation for that, write in the feedback they're giving to the students, and I always dreamed of that. And finally, it's come into fruition.

Julie Walker: We love making your dreams come true, Andrew

Andrew Pudewa: Yeah, I do think that for elementary-aged children and maybe even middle school, having them write at least the first draft on paper and maybe then type it in, submit it, get a grade and come back, that's the best way to go. But certainly we've talked before about the reason teachers don't do more writing assignments in schools is because the burden of grading those papers. So. We are trying to help give them more time with their family, a noble undertaking.

So this is one from a mother who is talking about the poetry memorization and the effect that that has had for years in her home. “Today, my 14-year-old daughter received news that her poem placed in the top 10 in the nation in her grade level for Creative Communication’s student poetry contest.”

Julie Walker: Oh wow.

Andrew Pudewa: This is a website, poeticpower.com, and they have been doing this for a long time because one of their little ad teaser things on their website is that Taylor Swift in fifth grade, you think how long ago that was, placed in the top 10 with a poem she wrote,

Julie Walker: Oh, wow.

Andrew Pudewa: and so, yeah.

Julie Walker: Did it ever become a song? I don't know.

Andrew Pudewa: I don't know either, but listeners who have students that do like to write poetry might do well to go to poeticpower.com and they have, I think, three contest periods each year. And they offer prizes and they've given away millions of dollars in prizes over the

past, however long they've been doing this, couple decades it seems. Anyway, continuing the letter.

“She is in a happy daze and I am breathing a satisfied sigh. Back in the fall of 2019, my four daughters and I began using IEW’s *Linguistic Development through Poetry Memorization* program, level one from a free sample.

Since then, we have purchased the full program and continued learning poetry, favorite hymns and scripture passages through daily practice. We are about halfway through level four now, and we would be farther, except that we keep adding poems and hymns of our own choosing to the suggested list.

Julie Walker: Brilliant.

Andrew Pudewa: Just this week we are polishing up “Paul Revere's Ride.” And would you believe it? The 6-year-old can recite the poem right along with our 14-year-old national poetry contest winner.

Julie Walker: Wow. Nice.

Andrew Pudewa: “I am satisfied that the many, many hours my family spent memorizing high quality poetry was time well spent. We will most certainly continue this practice forever if I can manage it. And don't be surprised to hear that our daughters all become published authors and poets. Thank you for helping us get started on our journey of linguistic development. I'll keep recommending your poem to friends and family.”

Julie Walker: Right, and we'll put a link in our show notes to those free lessons. So that you know some more listeners who've not experienced that can get a taste of that as well.

Andrew Pudewa: Can I read the poem?

Julie Walker: Oh, please, yes.

Andrew Pudewa: It's really beautiful and something I, I've been thinking about recently in the last year or so.

Do not call us dead, but passed. Think how tears were shed at the last, when our lives drew to a misty close and our spirits flew and up arose. Do not mock us Mortal man with monsters of the evil clan, with twisted zombies darkened race. We are not those. We are like you. We are no foes. We lived once to do not call us dead, but passed. We have fled and death holds fast, but things though passed may yet return. Death itself shall die in turn, nay. Do not name us dead and gone. There still, we tarry going on. We are not truly dead nor gone. But wait to come till break of dawn now heed this message. You must learn we've only passed and will return.

Julie Walker: Wow, Andrew, that is remarkable.

Andrew Pudewa: I yeah, have read it four or five times and I get teary every time I do. But you know this for me has been kind of the decade of death. So many—both my parents, both my wife's parents, even employees, I've had people I've known that died at an age younger than I have. And then of course, older people. And we do so easily forget about eternity.

And this poignant poem reminds so effectively. I do hope this girl continues to write poems and perhaps will publish a book of them someday. You never know.

Julie Walker: Right. Well, minimally we should get that in our next issue of our *Magnum Opus Magazine* because that is really, truly a great work. Well, I have one more to read for you. I think it is fitting that we're gonna end with a letter from Tracy and it's addressed to Mr. Pudewa.

“This note is for Mr. Andrew as he's referred to in our home. My concentration was interrupted. First by the sound of a giggle, then a chuckle, then full out laughter, snorting laughter. I met him in the hallway as I had left my desk in 10th on refocusing my 15-year-old student child, (another high schooler, right) with a wide smile and cheeks that were rosy and glistening with tears. He asked me to watch part of his *Structure and Style for Students* lesson drawing me into the joy. I just wanted to say thank you, Mr. Andrew. I love what you've done to my child. He often saves writing class for the end of the day because it's fun. It's his own personal reward for getting through the mandatory bits of homeschooling. I hope this note meets you on a day you could use a reminder about why you do what you do.”

Thank you, Tracy.

Andrew Pudewa: I love it.

Julie Walker: No, no. So thank you dear listeners and students of our listeners, we love getting your mail. We read everything. Andrew does, as he said, try to respond, but wow, that pile is growing. And we're just so honored to have you include us on your journey to better listening, speaking, reading, writing, and thinking. 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.