

Podcast 539: From the Mailbag

Episode Transcript

Andrew Pudewa: When you get these glimmers of maturity coming through in the attitude and the writing, you, you just are so happy to...I am so happy to have been a part of it

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: So Andrew, I'm seeing you here, hello, everyone, with a pile of letters on your lap.

Andrew Pudewa: Well, you said we could do Mailbox Monday or whatever day it is today, or whenever this episode comes out.

Julie Walker: From the Mailbag. This episode always comes out on Wednesdays. I don't think we've got anything mailbag.

Andrew Pudewa: Mailbag Wednesday doesn't quite have the alliterative ring to it. I do get a lot of mail from kids, and it's kind of a delight because they watch me on the video, or their parents watch the video, or their teachers will sometimes show the videos in schools. And it's interesting, when you watch a video, you really feel like you have a relationship with that person, more than just reading a book by them. And I think some of these letters they're doing may be in response to an assignment that I give on the video course, but some of them are unsolicited and I get them from all ages of kids, eight years old up to young adults who published a book. And so it's kind of fun. So can I read a couple?

Julie Walker: Please

Andrew Pudewa: So this is,

Dear Mr. Pudewa. Hello, my name is Kelsey. I am 12 years old, and I live in Arizona. Learning is so amazing through your curriculum. I am homeschooled, and it's extremely delightful because I can do so many different things opposed to public school where you cannot choose. I am in seventh grade, which is so exciting, and I think I have learned a lot. Following this curriculum has been incredibly enjoyable. One reason I admire this curriculum is because it teaches all of the dress-ups. Another thing I fancy is how it teaches writing through books. I think this curriculum is cherished because it explains writing really well. I love that it teaches not to use banned words in your papers. That in and of itself makes it 20 times more interesting. I have learned an immense amount, which is way more than I have

learned in any other class. Before I started, I really struggled with using complete sentences, but now they're easy. Learning is amazing, and I think your curriculum makes it even more enjoyable because of all the pictures and stories. One of my enormous goals is to be able to write something and, without thinking, put in dress-ups. Also, I wrote the key word outline for this letter. Sincerely, Kelsey.”

Julie Walker: Aw. Okay

Andrew Pudewa: So, it's sweet. There's awkward bits of it, which is normal for a 12-year-old. A lot of people come up to me, and they'll say, “I'm a little worried about my daughter's writing, my son's writing. We've been using your writing program for a year, and it's kind of, I don't know, awkward.” And of course, my first question is, “How old?” And, “Oh, well, she'll be 12 next month,” or something. Well, think about kids that age—everything about them is kind of awkward. Yeah. So you just smile at it.

But what I've noticed here is that she tuned into two things that are really part of our objectives. One is to provide interesting stories and articles and information so that kids can learn stuff through writing about it and be happy about that.

Julie Walker: Yes. And I'm thinking about these, these source texts that we provided for Structure and Style for Students, and we put a prop on the table for that intrigue, and, and we tried to get kids excited about, “Ooh, I wonder what we're gonna write about today.” And then they learn, “Oh, there's a melting ice cream cone on the table. What are we gonna write about today?”

Andrew Pudewa: The box that moves...

Julie Walker: Yes. Yes. And so to try to give students something interesting to write about was one of our goals.

Andrew Pudewa: One of my favorites was the ship that we had embedded in the ice, and of course, the source texts were Shackleton and...

The other thing I love about what she said is, “One of my goals is to be able to write something and without thinking, put in the dress-ups,” which really does happen. For a while it's like, “Oh, I'm forcing these things in, and it's hard.” And then after a while, “Oh, I just, I just did a which clause. Oh, I just used a strong verb. I didn't even have to think about that.” It became more second nature. So I appreciate this little letter from Kelsey, and I don't know if this was an assignment because it's shorter than the typical five-paragraph one

Julie Walker: But she definitely had some quality adjectives and strong verbs in there. Good job, Kelsey. Good job, Kelsey

Andrew Pudewa: Here is one I don't... Well, sixth grade because he signed it, “Your biggest sixth grade fan.”

Julie Walker: Okay.

Andrew Pudewa: O.H. Initials

Julie Walker: Okay. O.Henry

Andrew Pudewa: Anyway. Well, yeah, it's actually Oliver something. He's from Nebraska, it looks like.

Salutations, Mr. Pudewa. I'm writing on account of my cherished writing assignment because I must. Naturally, I have written several formal letters in my past, such as when I had a pen pal and that time my friend, who is a great companion, and I wrote during the summer. Above others, I've decided to write to you." [So this is definitely in response to an assignment that we give in the SSS course.] "Assuming you have time to read this letter, I would like to share my opinion," topic, "assist you in contemplating my pleasurable experience with your excellent," in parentheses for some reason, "writing curriculum, and if I may, offer you some advice since your work isn't flawlessly quintessential."

Julie Walker: Oh dear. Okay.

Andrew Pudewa: So, he's playing with the vocabulary here. It's cute. "Inside, I think your writing approaches a boring school matter, writing, and makes it interesting and unique. Although some of my friends dislike the curriculum, I secretly enjoy your isolated style of writing." I don't even know what that means.

Julie Walker: Unique thesaurus,

Andrew Pudewa: "I believe that you have attempted to construct a creative environment. Consistently, the *Fix It! Grammar* is formed at the perfect level for a sixth grader and assists me in learning to diagram sentences which express the tale of a lovely friendship.

Julie Walker: I, I don't know what-- I'm just gonna say this for our listeners. If you don't know about our *Fix It! Grammar program*, A, you should, it's wonderful. B, we actually don't diagram, so I don't know what he's talking about.

Andrew Pudewa: But, well, he might have another thing where he has to diagram, or he's heard the idea of diagramming sentences and thinks he's doing that.

Julie Walker: It's a quality adjective or something.

Andrew Pudewa: And then "A Tale of a Lovely Friendship," I'm assuming it's the *Country Mouse*, or it's *Robin Hood*.

Julie Walker: I think it's the Robin Hood one if he's in sixth.

Andrew Pudewa: It's fun. The stories make it exciting, and they make the experience enjoyable, and I like it because it is unique.

During some assignments, I have discovered it difficult to complete them, specifically the fused outline. That would be unit six. But I believe that it's a great thing because mental challenges give me mental growth, which leads to better grades and eventually enrollment at an advanced college." What do these kids think, huh?

Julie Walker: Right

Andrew Pudewa: "Yes, if you ask me, a challenge is essential for nurturing the young mind. Undeniably, it's an acceptable approach to all matters in life. Since my school has started this curriculum, I have found myself frequently writing increasingly better compositions, even if the compositions are difficult to put together.

If I may, I would like to offer some pieces of advice from a student who is currently utilizing your curriculum. First, your jokes are great. Definitely for personal appeal, don't stop the jokes. I think you should continue the IEW program for a while because it is special. I personally think you are a great role model. Inside, whether or not you choose to listen to my advice, I think the curriculum is awesome." He didn't really give me any suggestions for improvement.

Julie Walker: Keep up the jokes and keep writing curriculum. Okay. Check, check, done

Andrew Pudewa: "Since I have shared my opinion, I hope you ponder my thoughts. I have also informed you of my experience. Under the fact that I am just a sixth grader, I think you should also take into consideration that I am an exceptionally skilled writer who enjoys writing. Additionally, I'd also like you to know that I think of you as a great role model because of your keen attributes. Your biggest sixth-grade fan, OH. P.S. My brothers participate in this curriculum too, and they also enjoy it."

Julie Walker: Okay, I want to say something about him being a great writer. So this is a, I say this at, at the beginning of every podcast episode. Our goal is to equip teachers and teaching parents with methods and materials that will aid them in training their students to become confident and competent communicators and thinkers.

This child is obviously confident, so I believe that he will someday be a more competent writer as well.

Andrew Pudewa: He's got some of the characteristics of that age, which is a little bit of repetitiveness, and I understand that because they'll say something and then they'll still be thinking that thing, and they'll want to say it again, trying to say it in a different way, maybe succeeding, maybe not. But that is a characteristic I have noted, and I've also noted that as they grow in maturity, that tends to fade away. They get the fact, "Oh, I already said that. I don't need to say it again in a different way." All right.

Dearest IEW teacher, (and this is from a child named Amelia, and I don't think she says her age in here. But by looking at her signature, it seems like the cursive signature of a pretty

young child. So I would put maybe 10 or under. And it's a long one. Oh, wait, no, it does say, "I'm 11 years old."

Julie Walker: Oh, you nailed it.

Andrew Pudewa: Another sixth grader

I might not read the whole thing 'cause it is kind of long, but, "As I sat for hours writing, I marveled over how much my speech and writing has improved, and not just mine, but my siblings too. My whole family has benefited from your writing class. We love your class and cannot wait to continue learning. Hopefully, I can meet you face to face someday. I want to learn more about you and maybe be just like you someday. I thoroughly enjoy each new video, minus the blank papers and the long hours of puzzling over the right word."

But I love that because it's showing that she's reached this point of maturity where she really does want to find just the right word. And how many of us in writing even a simple thing like an email or an article, you can spend many minutes just looking. And so that's a level of maturity and sensitivity I really appreciate that she's developed.

"When I get too engrossed in IEW, my mama has to pull me away from it because I need to tend to my other responsibilities such as chores, laundry, etc. IEW is definitely my favorite school subject, which is good because I have no choice but to do it."

Julie Walker: That's a good teacher right there.

Andrew Pudewa: And she talks more about her whole family and how many kids they have and, and all this. But there's something when you get these glimmers of maturity coming through in the attitude and the writing, you, you just are so happy to... I am so happy to have been a part of it.

Julie Walker: Yes Wow, you've got several there still, Andrew. I don't know if we're going to have enough time to do it all

Andrew Pudewa: Let me skip then. So this doesn't happen quite as often, but I have had this happen at least half a dozen times, maybe more. I get a book in the mail, and the book usually has a note with it. And so this is Furhaven. Since her name is on the cover, I think I can read it. *Slavery or Freedom: Quest One*, written and illustrated by Abby Cole.

Julie Walker: Oh, wow

Andrew Pudewa: And so I've got the book. It's a genre that I think started kind of with *Wind in the Willows* and expanded through *Redwall*, and now with the *Green Ember* series is firmly entrenched in the mind of so many young people, and that is the talking rodent adventure genre. But it seems that that's what we've got here.

Julie Walker: So do we have rabbits? What do we have? Oh, it's... Is that a rabbit? A squirrel. Looks like a squirrel

Andrew Pudewa: a squirrel.

Yeah, so the back says, “Gus is like any other squirrel. He has a bushy tail, is a little on the chubby side, and loves nuts. But what most don't know about him is his loathing of injustice. It is his desire for righteousness that sends Gus on an adventurous expedition. On his quest, Gus meets Buck, an adventurous hare. Together, they form the League of Gus with plans to free Underrat from the clutches of the rats.” And it goes on. That's the back. Anyway, the letter that came with it is,

“Dear Mr. Pudewa, my name is Abby Cole, and when I was a child, I loved stories of different types but hated writing. We tried many writing courses. None seemed to work. All lacked gratification until we tried IEW.” Yeah, she's got a triple, an SSS decoration.

“For the first time, I understood it. There was a formula for perfect writing. Enjoying writing became, well, enjoyable. With dress-ups and sentence openers, there was a method to the madness. Short sentences made sense while longer sentences gave variety and new life to monotone passages. Quickly, my love for writing has grown as to my appreciation for those who teach it and use it to craft amazing stories. Just five years ago, I would never have considered writing as a career. My mom convinced me that I should submit one of my short stories to *Magnum Opus Magazine*. I wasn't sure, but I submitted anyway. Thinking nothing would happen, I didn't expect anything. Shortly thereafter, I got a reply. My short story was accepted. It shocked me. It surprised me. It astonished me.” She loves this

“For the first time, I was published. A career in writing was possible. Since then, I have published several books and have many more that I plan to publish. IEW is the reason I have gotten to where I am today. Thank you for all you've done with IEW. Here is book one in my series. Hopefully, I will publish many more stories. Thank you for all you've done. I hope you enjoy it. Sincerely, Abby Cole.”

I find it sweet that she says, “When I was a child.”

Julie Walker: Yes.

Andrew Pudewa: I don't know how old she is now. I'm guessing teenage, some level of teenage, but she's got her ideal going. And this isn't the first one. I have received many books from young people who self-published or even did find a publisher to do it for them. So it's kind of fun. I don't honestly necessarily read all of all the books just because there's so much to read

Julie Walker: Yeah, I was just wondering if there was anything in here about the author. Here we go

Andrew Pudewa: This is probably a little long, but I'll just read the opening because we can relate to it so well sitting here in our little room in Bixby.

“Dear Mr. Pudewa, imagine rocky mountains with amazing views, cold, rushing rivers, crystal clear lakes, waterfalls, dense pine tree forests, and rolling hills. Is this what you picture when you envision Oklahoma? According to most people, Oklahoma is just flat and plain. However, if you have explored it even a little bit, you will feel differently. A few beautiful places which fit my description are Beavers Bend State Park, Sulfur, and the Wichita Mountains. I'm Kate, a 16-year-old homeschool girl from Oklahoma. I love painting, animals, and especially hiking because I enjoy exploring new places. Surprisingly, I've been to many amazing places in the country, but some of my favorites are still in Oklahoma.”

I will confess, this was so well done. The descriptions of these places that she wrote about, it really made me want to get out and explore this great state of Oklahoma that I have not really explored all that much. And I think she lived in Guthrie.

Julie Walker: Okay. Oklahoma City area

Andrew Pudewa: Oklahoma City area, I believe. So anyway, the thing that's interesting is: I get a letter from a nine-year-old, a 12-year-old, a 16-year-old, and you just see the development of the maturity and refinement of thought and the tools that we provide for kids when they're younger. Then they get older and, and it just fleshes it out, and it sounds so good.

Julie Walker: Yep. Yep

Andrew Pudewa: So anyway, from the mailbag

Julie Walker: Yep. Thank you, Andrew

Andrew Pudewa: Thank you, Julie

Julie Walker: Thanks so much for joining us. If you enjoyed this episode and want to hear more, please subscribe to our podcast or just visit us each week at IEW.com/podcast. Here you will find our show notes and relevant links. One more thing: would you please rate and review our podcast? This helps other smart listeners like you find us. Thank you.