

## **My Favorite Teaching Day of the Year: The Oregon Writing Festival**

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My favorite teaching day of the school year happens to fall on a Saturday – the first Saturday in May, to be exact. On that day, teachers, authors, and student writers from all across the state gather at Portland State University to celebrate OCTE’s Oregon Writing Festival.

I have had the good fortune to be a Workshop Leader for over ten years , which means I have had the good fortune to attend over ten straight festivals. I have heard more than ten published authors speak to aspiring writers and to hear young authors ask them insightful, perceptive, honest questions. I have taken notes from those lectures and shared them with my students and colleagues in my home school. I have also had the opportunity to work with over 300 writers from grades six through twelve and to bask in their creativity and enthusiasm.

When in grad school at Portland State University, my picture of the ideal classroom was probably similar to yours: 15 or so eager students, breathlessly sharing their ideas, laughing at the wit of their peers (and their instructor!), nodding pensively at a poignant scrap of verse. Of course, our daily jobs seldom match our ideals, but every moment at the Oregon Writing Festival is a moment in teacher-fantasy-land. Workshop sizes are humane, the students ardent and kind, and the learning genuine.

Students feel pretty much the same way. When I talk to them about their experience at OWF, they can’t seem to agree about what part they like best. Some focus on the opportunity to share their writing with peers and get feedback from other writers who really care about writing. Some love the workshops, where they are exposed to new writing strategies and new approaches to familiar ideas. Other students appreciate the chance to make connections and Facebook friendships with students from Portland, La Grande, Medford, Seaside. Bottom line, there is one thing we can all agree on: we wish school could be like this every day.

So it’s November. The days are getting shorter and colder. But when I start to feel all autumnal and gloomy, I simply take a sip of strong coffee from my limited edition 2004 Oregon Writing Festival coffee mug and dream of the first Saturday in May, my favorite teaching day of the school year.