**Souders Log, Ch. 6, 7 & 8, *Love that Dog,* *The Giver,* and Selected Experience**

***Love That Dog***, by Sharon Creech

Wolf speaks of the importance of mentors and bringing them out into the open. Sharon Creech falls into the category of mentor. She uses words as code. She weaves them into a coded web not unlike Charlottes. She leads Jack into the world of poetry and at first he isn’t aware that he is being invited into the spider’s parlor. He makes his first step and becomes trapped in the world of poetry, discovering the story teller as teacher and mentor.

The story entrances, cajoles, and carries the reader along in an exciting adventure of Jack the poet to be. Jack of beanstalk fame throws out a handful of beans and finds himself confronting a giant who holds many gifts. Jack who throws a few words out in response to a question from his teachers discovers an entry way into the poet’s world. He wonders about a red wheelbarrow and white chickens. In reply he reveals a mud spattered blue car and a mystery he is yet unable to reveal.

Tiger, Tiger burning bright, becomes blue car, blue car shining bright. He is discovering how literary borrowing increases both his understanding and increases his poetic skills. Jack gets nervous about borrowing some lines from poets and his teacher explains he can do that as long as he gives credit to the author who has inspired him.

As Jack’s poetry conversation with his teacher progresses we discover that Jack’s dog was struck and killed by an automobile. This truth is revealed through Jack’s ever improving poetic skills. When Jack’s poem is printed and hanging on the wall he is thrilled. He has even allowed his name to be attached to this shape poem written about his dog.

The poet who inspired Jack to write is invited to Jack’s school. All the students are enthralled by the voice and mannerisms of the poet as he reads his works to the class. He came because Jack had the courage to write him with passion. The story is a grand example of the author mentoring not only the students who read the work, but also gives through example a methodology usable by teachers in the classroom seeking a way to bring poetry alive to their students.

***The Giver***, by Lois Lowry

From the first line we see the craft of the writer teaching and engaging. “It was almost December and Jonas was beginning to be frightened. No. Wrong word Jonas thought.” Ms. Lowry has Jonas reconsidering his choice of words and rethinking after he defines the word in his own mind. This immediate look at the thinking process within Jonas reveals he is intelligent and a thinker. The readers know from the start that Jonas is special not because he is the protagonist, but because he is a thinker and the voice of the story.

Jonas is being raised in a seemingly perfect world. A world where everyone is assigned the perfect job, each person has a specific function, each family member is chosen and placed in the family that will lead them into community perfection. As Jack nears the age of twelve he knows he will be selected for his advanced studies and the job that he will perform throughout the entirety of his life. The author through the setting and the dialog of the characters draws the reader into the belief that this is a perfect world. We are enjoying our cruise through what we perceive is a reliable non-changing world when suddenly we are caught as Jonas was into the possibility that we have been tricked.

Jonas is chosen to be the new Receiver of Memory for the community. This is the most honored of all positions and Jonas has been picked. Fear passes through Jonas. His being picked for this position creates a separation between Jonas and everyone else, even his immediate family. All are astounded that he has been chosen for this and none more than Jonah himself.

The current Receiver of Memory is nearing the end of his life. He must train Jonas to take his place. The training reveals to Jonas the prison the members of his community occupy. The Old Received explains to Jonas that the last person he tried to train for the position of Receiver decided to opt-out and basically had herself destroyed. Jonas realizes that misfits of the community are euthanized. As the old Receiver of memories shares past memories of such things as a sled and snow and excitement Jonas comes to the understanding that his perfect world is not perfect at all, but a kind of hidden hell that the inhabitants are blinded to.

Jonas’ parents have a new child living with them and this child has proven not to be fit for the community. The child must be destroyed. Jonas escapes from his perfect place and kidnaps the soon to be destroyed child and attempts to reach a place far away from this perfect hell. After many weeks of pain and suffering Jonas hears the sound of music and he knows the joy of realness is near.

Lowry uses imaging and language to make this so called utopia seem perfect at first. She then gives the reader an insight into the horrors of what an absolute perfect society could actually mean. The reader realizes the questioning of the norm through intelligent thinking and valid information will open our eyes to the truths that surround us. When we become aware of this knowledge we must make a real decision concerning truths. Do we buy into the false history, society would have us believe, or do we search into the reality of what the past really was and operate from a place of knowledge. Using this knowledge to live a more aware life and know that all that glitters is not gold.

**Selected Experience – Author-Focus**

I have selected option number 1, the Author-Focus. Mem Fox as the author. The article by Mem Fox is, *Notes from the Battlefield,* first published in ‘Language Arts’, Vol. 65 No. 2 Feb. 1988. The text that I am using to show how her life and knowledge connects to her writing life is *Ten Little Fingers and Ten Little Toes,* illustrated by Helen Oxenbury. The copy of the work I read was published by, Harcourt Books, Orlando, FL. 2008.

The first uptake I took from Ms. Fox’s article is found in the following paragraph, “What interests me now is not so much how writers write, but why we write. What drives us to do it in the first place? And then what makes us want to do it well? If I can find the answers to these questions I might dare to ask myself another: what are the implications for teachers of writing?”

This is a question I have asked myself and not just about why I write, but why others write. Also, I have taught high school writing classes and I am expecting to teach this again in classes offered by the public library. As I read deeper into the article Ms. Fox reported that she wrote because writing mattered. She expounded on the importance of writing something that mattered. Quoting again from her article, “I wanted to make a contribution to our thinking, to create a reaction, to cause us all to shift our attitudes somehow, no matter how uncomfortable that shift might be.”

She gives a powerful example of shifting our attitudes in, *Ten Little Fingers and Ten Little Toes.* The opening line written on the bottom right corner of a double page colorful illustration of a bright yellow sky with a fluffy white cloud and large mountains in the background. As your eyes read the page you move down the page to a smaller range of red orange mountains with a small community or town on the crest of the lower mountain range. Moving down the page you see a small lake with a solitary boat and four small islands. Continuing down the page you arrive at the near edge of the lake where two children seem to be gazing across the lake at the far mountain peaks. A scene, any people, anywhere, would see as pleasant, awe inspiring, and located no where in particular on the globe. You are now at the bottom right hand of the page, the layout guiding you from top to bottom, left to right just as you would normally read a page. The line, “There was little baby born far away.” Ms. Fox lets the reader know this little baby is far away from the reader’s home, the reader’s race, the reader’s language, and the reader’s gender. A precious little baby; just like the precious little baby that the reader loves and holds important in her/his life. She shifts the reader from my child to everyone’s child.

Ms. Fox continues in her article the importance of being invested passionately in what you write. She spoke of students who were writing a compulsory assignment writing a pretend letter to pretend parents of pretend students. The letters, she reports, were indifferent. However, these same students collaborated on an article to the local paper in response to a letter to the editor that aroused their passion. This response was not only published with a huge headline it created enough attention that it was talked about on a talk back radio program. Ms. Fox states, “Language develops only when it is used ***for real.***”

Ms. Fox uses universal truth when she titles her story, *Ten Little Fingers and Ten Little toes.* This indisputable fact identifies all the babies around the world. This fact is recognizable by every little child who has had a parent count those little fingers, and those little toes. As we move along in the story we are told that there was another little baby born somewhere else. Now we have two babies born in two totally different locales and the next line continues the poetic prose, “And both of these babies, as everyone knows, had ten little fingers and ten little toes.” I would like to interject here that I read this story three times to my granddaughters and by the third time they were repeating the line with me while they either held up their foot or looked at their hands with fingers spread apart just like in the illustrations.

By the time we have finished reading this book, the illustrations show there have been eight children born. The boys in pink the girls in blue, gender stereotyping by colored clothing is gone. The children are of every race depicted by skin tone and color of either hair or eyes. Stereotyping of race is gone. Now an additional element is added to the story, this element creating a sense of yes, you the reader are directly connected to this story through the birth of your own child. Ms. Fox in her craft of shifting the focus to everyone’s child now comes full circle and returns you the reader to your original home. The readers’ responsibility inherent in the following line … “a sweet little child who was mine, all mine. And this little baby, as everyone knows, has ten little fingers and ten little toes.” Ms. Fox puts this baby in your arms through both illustration and words. You give three kisses to the baby’s nose. This last line uses the magical number of three and the kisses awaken the love between you and your child. This circular journey allows the reader to discover the recognition of all parents, the love they have for their children is an identical twin to the love you have for your child.

The next line in Mem Fox’s article that caught me in the middle of my being is this: “What interests me now is not so much how writers write, but why we write. What drives us to do it in the first place? And then what makes us want to do it well?”

Now I want to undertake to answer that question concerning myself. Ms. Fox’s article awakens in me the need to get back into the battle. The idea of being a deserter which she writes to so boldly grabs me by the throat and puts me back in the battle. The ramifications of her statements awakens in me the desire to write about the wrongs and injustices perpetuated on so many diverse classes. She awakens in me the knowledge that I have a gift and I am going to pursue the refining of that gift. I have been self-silenced for too many years. This class, this reading, this undertaking has already changed my conception of writing it has renewed me.

I have a passion to encourage others to tell their story. The telling of their story could change their viewpoint, or awaken a new self realization which they may have never encountered before. Ms. Fox’s stated desire is to improve her craft and this statement encourages me to do the same. Her manner of writing engages within me the aspiration to write, to write with purpose, to write with expression, and most of all to write because it matters.