

WHAT'S INSIDE

Thirty years ago this spring, the federal government released *A Nation At Risk*, a stinging indictment of the U.S. educational system and a catalyst for the reforms of the last three decades. While some of these reforms were constructive, they also led to the current preoccupation with standardized testing that has too often driven out the kinds of programming—art, music, imaginative writing—that nurtures student passion and creativity.

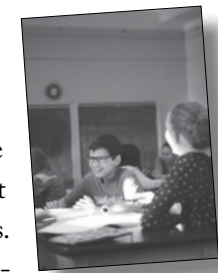
And student passion, research shows time and again, is key to student learning. In a recent piece from Edutopia.org's "Big Thinker" series, the game-based learning scholar Constance Steinkuehler describes a study she conducted on literacy and video games that showed "how learning skyrockets when students are passionate about the subject matter."

"It's kind of stating the obvious," says Steinkuehler, "but we forget it in schools all the time."

The most potent magic in any teaching artist's bag of tricks is a love of writing. Conveying that love to students can do more to ignite a passion for words than centuries of test prep. This issue shows us a few of the countless ways it can be done.

David Stoler starts us off with a lesson that gets texting teenagers excited about an ancient Japanese poetic form; Greg Graham profiles a writing teacher who extols the power of pen and paper; Ruth Wilson offers ideas to help students to define their place in the natural world; Greg Feezell considers the challenges of teaching the slippery concept of voice; Janet Hurley shows us how words can empower young writers; and Dave Morice weighs in with a fabulous comic of student poetry prompts.

Thirty years along, we are still a nation at risk. We will continue to be until we recognize what most kindergarteners know: you learn what you love.



—Susan Karwoska

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front cover: "This is a candid digital image taken in Science class of my friend Milo working with his group on a project."

back cover: "This is a digital image taken in English class of my friend Isabella reading."