

## **CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF WRITING AND NATIONAL WRITING PROJECT REPRESENTED AT NATIONAL ESSAY CONTEST**

A committee of eight "distinguished citizens" from around the country went to Washington in late April to choose 150 finalist essays from a representative offering of essays written by elementary school children nationwide as part of the U.S. Department of Education's celebration of the 200th anniversary of the U.S. Constitution. Melanie Sperling, one of the eight judges, represented U.C. Berkeley's Center for the Study of Writing and the National Writing Project. Other judges were June V. Scobee, widow of Astronaut Francis R. (Dick) Scobee and Chairperson for the Challenger Center Foundation; Alan Fraker, Chair of the College Board Examination Committee on Advanced Placement; Vicki Stenger, grade two teacher at Laurel Ridge Elementary School in Fairfax, Virginia; Daniel Merenda, Executive Director of the National School Volunteer Program; Richard Rodriguez, writer and journalist; Wladyslaw Pleszczynski, Managing Editor of *The American Spectator*; and Jhoon Rhee, businessman and educator.

The essay project, entitled "What the Constitution Means to Me and to Our Country," invited all elementary schools to participate--public; private; Department of Defense, Department of Interior and Department of State schools; and schools in the territories. Students were to write an essay on the Constitution, the intent of the project being both to afford an opportunity for children to study the Constitution as history and to afford them an opportunity to practice and to refine their writing skills.

The essays were grouped into four grade clusters, one and two, three and four, five and six, and seven and eight. The eight judges spent one day in a holistic reading that resulted in the selection of the 150 essays deemed to be representative of the nation across schools and across grade levels. The 150 essays will be assembled and printed in a book.