On the previous pages, Paul Butler makes a strong case for what he considers to be the neglected and unfortunately-out-of-favor strategy of imitation as a device for teaching writing. But counter to Butler’s concerns, imitation remains alive and well in corners of the National Writing Project. The examples below, one from a classroom teacher working with students and the other from a site director working with teachers, provide evidence that writing project teachers have not discarded imitation as one tool in their bag of tricks.

Imitation in Progress

SHERRY SWAIN

“The Way to Hear Silence” was composed by teachers participating in Writing as Art and Craft, a year-long series led by Dick Graves in Rankin County, Mississippi. The middle school teachers read the poem “The Way to Gather Sunbeams” by Nancy Wood and analyzed its stylistic devices as a prelude to applying the form to their own content. Teachers worked with partners, composing their sentences, revising for meaning, editing for form, reading aloud to order ideas, and, finally, designing imitation processes for their classrooms.

The Way to Hear Silence

The way to hear silence is spiritually, listening to the depths of your soul, waiting for that place of tranquility.

The way to hear silence is slyly, stealing precious peace from the turmoil of days battered by adversity.

The way to hear silence is cautiously, listening for the sound as it slithers through the darkness of uncertainty.

The way to hear silence is automatically, being still so that the absence of noise becomes your reality.

The way to hear silence is observantly, sensing space beyond the realm of confusion, cradling the soul for eternity.

The way to hear silence is gratefully, ensuring for a moment that it lasts, preserving our sanity.

The way to hear silence is accidentally, coming upon it with surprise, delighted by its deafening reality.

The way to hear silence is motherly, holding the preciousness of the moment for all its worth, feeling the breath of life in all its purity.

The way to hear silence is joyfully, honoring the cacophony of life, celebrating one’s private reverie.

The Way to Gather Sunbeams

BY NANCY WOOD

The way to gather sunbeams is carefully, making sure they do not break or become mere shadows of your uncertainty.

The way to gather sunbeams is hopefully, bending to catch the light between your fingers before storm clouds devour opportunity.

The way to gather sunbeams is crazily, putting them in your pocket if you catch any, laughing at their feeling of mobility.

The way to gather sunbeams is joyfully, keeping step with the dance they do across the earth, drawing you into their world of fragility.

References