

## December (Tips for Tutors)

It is December and we as well as our students are busy purchasing gifts, writing out cards, planning dinners and visits from relatives. It is a hectic month. Sometimes it is hard to concentrate and we might see our students' reading and writing slip a bit as they are preoccupied and have other things on their minds. There is a simple gift that we can give our students. I am reminded of a line from a poem titled *Night* by Sara Teasdale, "Look for a lovely thing and you will find it." Maybe we can find that one thing the each student is doing well and show that to him/her.

One of my students is finding great joy in putting her thoughts down in writing. She is very excited to show me what she has written. Yet her sentences are often broken, words spelled incorrectly, punctuation missing, etc. She talks the way she writes. What can I accomplish by taking her through her work and showing her all the mistakes, all the edits that need to be made - nothing. Instead, I scroll through her lines looking for the best one, the line that has the most to say and read it back to her. "I hope I make people happy" or "I can hear my mom busy in the kitchen making food for lunch and dinner." I can tell her that she wrote a lovely thing and she will leave class feeling proud of herself.

We all have the urge to fix things and make them right yet we have a greater impact simply by saying how we feel about something our students do well. In The Art of Teaching Writing, Lucy McCormack Calkins writes, "Why is it so difficult to give a simple human response? I think it is because we try so hard to be helpful we forget to be real. We forget to listen." Perhaps all that's needed this month is just a simple human response. "I just can't stop thinking about what you wrote today. You wrote about wanting to speak better English and hoping that someday you will have a small house of your own. Those are wonderful things to wish for. I am very proud of you." In the spirit of gift giving, think of Sara Teasdale's poem, "Look for a lovely thing and you will find it / It is not far - / It never will be far," and see if you can find a lovely thing in the work of your student. I am sure you will.

My best wishes to all this holiday season.

Works Cited:

1. Rogasky, Barbara. Winter Poems. (Page 29, "Night" by Sara Teasdale). New York: Scholastic, 1994.
2. Calkins, Lucy M. The Art of Teaching Writing. New Hampshire: Heinemann, 1986.

Glenn G. Coats