

00:00.23

Victoria

Oh yeah, I see it.

00:01.70

Gary Gray

Yeah. Alright.

00:02.70

Victoria

Okay, cool.

00:06.35

Victoria

Welcome to Corridor Conversations, the podcast segment of NCTE's Classroom Corridors, sharing expertise and inspiration from elementary teachers and authors.

00:18.55

Victoria

Is that me?

00:19.70

Gary Gray

no that's me

00:21.23

Victoria

Okay.

00:21.21

Gary Gray

ah

00:21.67

Victoria

but again

00:23.64

Gary Gray

Go go go.

00:25.43

Victoria

um Okay. Welcome to Corridor Conversations, the podcast segment of NCTE's Classroom Corridors, sharing expertise and inspiration from elementary teachers and authors.

00:39.73

Victoria

Today, I'm your host, Victoria, and we are talking with Gary R. Gray Jr. from Nova Scotia, Canada, author and educator. Hey Gary, how's it going?

00:50.93

Gary Gray

I am Doing good. It's so funny because we. Just talked about it. is It's weird being on this side.

00:59.35

Victoria

It's flipped today. It's flipped. I'm excited about it.

01:01.18

Gary Gray

It is funny. It's good to see you. How are you doing? Peace.

01:04.92

Victoria

Good, good. I'm doing well. Excited for the beginning of the year and all that. All that brings. And you are back in Canada.

01:11.20

Gary Gray

It's...

01:13.61

Gary Gray

I am. We've been here for... I want to say Four weeks or so we left Singapore We stopped over in Bali which very grateful for because Bali is very close to Singapore um and now we're here and time has been flying i start school next weak orientation.

01:34.22

Gary Gray

back in the classroom Not in the classroom, actually. I was going to say back in the classroom, but not in the classroom. Things have been going well. A little overwhelming, but we are taking it in stride for sure.

01:43.59

Victoria

It's so exciting.

01:44.97

Gary Gray

Yeah.

01:45.09

Victoria

So fun.

01:45.93

Gary Gray

Yeah. Yeah. We're very excited. I think one of the things about being home. is that... that home feeling at least for me. It never goes away. so like though i feel busy and overwhelmed like seeing people that I know uh it always allows me to ground myself and like why i came back so i'm very grateful

02:06.16

Victoria

And it's been a long time since you have lived at home, right?

02:10.16

Gary Gray

Yeah, it's been... 14, 15 years or so. So yeah, very long time. but

02:16.84

Victoria

make sure your family and friends are happy to have you back in the area.

02:20.07

Gary Gray

Yeah, very exciting. Very exciting. I had a very um welcome home moment this morning. Like I went out yesterday. Um, I had to put gas in a car. And then this morning on Facebook, someone's like, I'm getting all these messages. I'm like, what's happening?

02:37.18

Gary Gray

And someone posted a picture on this, like. Nova Scotia Community Board. of like a debit card. And I must have like dropped my debit card.

02:46.89

Gary Gray

So now this morning I'm getting like all these messages from like. random people like family they like did you lose your debit card

02:54.46

Victoria

That's you! That's you!

02:58.36

Gary Gray

So that's my welcome home moment. So hopefully there's no more of those.

03:02.42

Victoria

Well, that's nice. It's good to be known, right?

03:05.12

Gary Gray

Yes.

03:07.14

Victoria

and

03:08.23

Gary Gray

Oh.

03:08.54

Victoria

Hopefully get it back. soon.

03:09.98

Gary Gray

Yeah, it'll be fine. It'll all be fine.

03:13.45

Victoria

Okay, guys. Good.

03:14.63

Gary Gray

it

03:14.80

Victoria

um All right. Well, I have a couple of questions for you, if you don't mind. talking and answering them.

03:21.43

Gary Gray

Please.

03:21.69

Victoria

um We are very excited and proud of your second book that was just published. And so I would love to know. How has becoming an author changed the way that you teach or that you talk about writing with your students?

03:37.56

Gary Gray

it's such it Thank you. by the way. i'm um I am i've now in the phase of like... calling myself an author, calling myself a writer, which is really, really fun.

03:49.22

Gary Gray

I never really considered myself a writer. growing up. or a reader. It's so funny, a long time ago I... went home and I dug up like all of my like report cards from like grade two and grade four and like i I didn't realize, but I was on like learning support.

04:06.80

Victoria

na

04:06.84

Gary Gray

I was getting like lots of small group. A lot of the comments were like, I need to read more. I'm forgetting things in my sentences, et cetera. And here I am now. which is like Very interesting.

04:19.58

Victoria

yeah

04:19.82

Gary Gray

So I love this question because I do believe everyone is a writer everyone can be a writer. But now I can kind of speak. on the inside of the process and not just from like teaching on the outside so One of the things.

04:34.93

Gary Gray

I find most interesting about showing kids. Bye. the writing process is the revision part. um Revision isn't punishment. right it's not um what every uh writer loves but it's something that we go through to get Like.

04:53.30

Gary Gray

to the ending of a story. so One of the things I try my best is to show students that revision is sort of like a metaphor for life.

04:55.49

Victoria

and

05:01.21

Gary Gray

Like we are constantly revising ourselves to be better people or to be better athletes or you know, for kids in the classroom, sometimes it's better gamers or better YouTubers or whatever the case may be. And once they are able to like.

05:16.87

Gary Gray

tap into that part of their brain where it's not just like a punishment. it does allow the revision process to be. a lot more fun. And it also allows me to be a little bit more honest, right?

05:24.91

Victoria

Yeah.

05:27.52

Gary Gray

like i have an editor who you know sometimes tells me that things That's not going to work. um we have to make changes and then sometimes as a writer i also can do the same thing like i can mention these are things that i really feel passionate about.

05:45.00

Gary Gray

but i also need to be able to explain that to my editor so Even though I'm teaching young kids, I feel like it's really important that if they can explain to me why they're doing something in their writing.

05:55.95

Gary Gray

Um, And it's justified. I'm all for it. right i'm all for it i'm not a big uh I'm not a big rule follower Victoria. I don't love a lot of rules, so.

06:09.06

Gary Gray

A lot of my writing is. I write. very poetic i like to play with the words i like to take letters out of certain words. I like to move it around the page.

06:21.25

Gary Gray

And I think that allows the fun to be. to come back into to the writing process when you're able to take something and make it your own. And that's what I try to do with students.

06:31.04

Victoria

Yeah. And I think there are so many students that don't like rules as well. And I...

06:36.33
Gary Gray
Yes.

06:37.19
Victoria
I'm sure that they can see. themselves in you and your work and your trajectory of

06:44.44
Gary Gray
Yeah.

06:44.49
Victoria
being a young, maybe not... not reader or writer. And now, now

06:50.22
Gary Gray
Exactly.

06:51.40
Victoria
today yeah but

06:52.18
Gary Gray
Yeah, exactly. Like I went from kind of like. you know here's the rule and more towards like... Here's what actually happened. Like. when I wrote this

07:02.98
Victoria
Yeah.

07:03.06
Gary Gray
it's it's more true and more useful when you do it that way because sometimes students just Don't do something because they feel like it's hard or they're not sure but when you're able to justify it makes it even more powerful

07:16.03
Victoria
And I think when we when we read a lot of picture books with students in class, most of them don't follow the rules. And so it's, you know, we're we're teaching students.

07:22.98

Gary Gray
Absolutely.

07:26.31

Victoria

Here are these rules or or some of us are teaching here these rules.
This is what writing has to be. And it actually is quite the opposite
of that.

07:31.70

Gary Gray

Mm hmm.

07:34.18

Victoria

some godly

07:34.08

Gary Gray

Absolutely. And that's how you share your voice, right?

07:35.45

Victoria

Yeah.

07:36.66

Gary Gray

Like I think ah so when I speak to middle school or high school
students and they ask about like, how do I become an author? I said,
the main thing that I feel like. editors and agents and just like
people in general want to hear is like your voice when you try to
sound like someone If you're not.

07:52.75

Gary Gray

or even like another author. um it takes away the authenticity of like
who you are as a person. um if you speak a different language or you
say something a certain way like Try to write it that way because
that's what makes your writing likes stand out from everybody else's.

08:08.66

Victoria

Yeah. Yeah. I love that.

08:09.59

Gary Gray

know Yeah.

08:09.98

Victoria

Thanks for sharing that.

08:11.15

Gary Gray

You're welcome.

08:12.30

Victoria

um I want you to talk a little bit about your writing process. I know that you mentioned that slightly, but what does your specific writing process look like? And have you or do you share that?

08:24.01

Victoria

um with your students, like from idea to published book? What does that look like?

08:28.18

Gary Gray

mm-hmm

08:28.42

Victoria

for you

08:29.23

Gary Gray

It's been so fun. um A lot of my students have seen. everything, right? So like... I mean... Yes. My editors are listening.

08:40.42

Gary Gray

I want to apologize but they're the only people. So like they will see a lot of like. the revisions and what my editor writes and then you also get to see some of the illustrations like i don't typically and probably not supposed to show like the rough drafts of illustrations until they actually are supposed to come out.

09:00.76

Gary Gray

But. the way it impacts students when they are there for the ride.

09:05.38

Victoria

Yeah.

09:05.62

Gary Gray

it completely changes their perspective on. writing. illustrating just uh artistry of creating something. um It takes a long time.

09:16.53

Gary Gray

right you sign a contract in

09:17.31

Victoria

and

09:20.17

Gary Gray

you know 2024 and the book doesn't come out until 2026. right it's a very long time right but to show students that

09:25.78

Victoria

Right.

09:28.48

Gary Gray

the process. is like meticulous and cared for, etc. is really, really powerful. uh what i try i do speak very openly to students about. when I write, I'm a very morning person. so I wake up, I try to run at...

09:45.96

Gary Gray

4 10 in the morning I... Get out. in the dark, you get home and I try to write for at least two to three hours or full school before school starts.

09:57.01

Gary Gray

um And during that time, it's either looking at edits or revising um I try to. not look at emails until like throughout the day.

10:07.35

Gary Gray

And then I usually try to turn off. Um, after like uh dinner time This is during the school year. During the summer it's a little bit more sporadic because I have a little bit more free time.

10:18.11

Gary Gray

um But during the school year, it's very much. running at 410. I usually get back, I change and then... around five o 'clock. right until school time i'm usually like Zoned in trying to figure out what I'm doing for the day And that changes based off of the type of writing that I'm doing whether it's like a picture book or a novel or an essay or whatever the case may be. so

10:40.97

Victoria

Yeah.

10:41.04

Gary Gray

um I'm very Rigid. at times.

10:44.35

Victoria

Okay. We know where to find you at 5 a .m.

10:47.55

Gary Gray

Yes you do.

10:48.81

Victoria

Okay. um Your stories, both of your books are so rooted in your identity and your history individually and your family history. What impact has this had on you as a person sharing your identity like this? And then maybe what impact has this had?

11:06.11

Victoria

um on you as a teacher.

11:08.21

Gary Gray

Yeah, I think. We talked about it briefly. um Like I've been abroad for. 14, 15 years. I write about home.

11:18.72

Gary Gray

um Preston. Uh, about black Nova Scotia history and the people that have been here, the people who are still here.

11:29.29

Gary Gray

um in the writing kind of became like how I processed. Um... Home. i think in a way especially being abroad from a distance and then like close up And now because I'm home, it's like. Kind of tangled.

11:44.02

Gary Gray

together a little bit right so it makes it feel a little bit more intimate which is great But. A lot of that. is rooted in like me wanting to learn more about my people. and leave something eventually when I leave this earth, that other.

11:57.55

Gary Gray

people from my community. Um, from this country from around the world can like look at and be like wow This is a really interesting place. um They have a lot of beautiful people. They have a beautiful community. And it's really, really important to know about. the group of people that are there.

12:14.36

Gary Gray

Um, That's where my best stories come from. when i Try to think of a story. This is in my early stage of writing. When I was trying to think of a story that I already knew or already read,

12:27.52

Gary Gray

and take an idea that I had and try to like kind of making my own, that's when I kind of got. myself in trouble a little bit. just Story didn't feel good. just trying to work around it too much and it just never it never literally never turned out great The stories that...

12:43.76

Gary Gray

I've written sense like spending time have all come. come from sparks of interest from my community and they just literally blow out of me, which is the greatest feeling.

12:58.36

Gary Gray

in the world. um I always use the analogy of like when you're playing a sport and you feel like you can't miss, like you're playing basketball and you just like can't miss, like everything is just working. And that's how it is with writing. When you have an idea, for me at least.

13:15.31

Gary Gray

it just pours out of you things just click and you're moving things around you're adding things in Um, and it makes a story well rooted in who you are as a person. and that alone allows the authenticity of yourself. the fallout on the page, which is.

13:32.96

Gary Gray

very, very special when it happens.

13:35.28

Victoria

Yeah.

13:35.44
Gary Gray
Yeah.

13:36.25
Victoria
Wow, that's awesome. i'm I'm thinking as a teacher and I'm definitely going to use that. that sound bite that you just said and shared.

13:41.59
Gary Gray
Yeah.

13:42.34
Victoria
this year because that...

13:43.35
Gary Gray
Please.

13:44.34
Victoria
I think that's what we all want for our students to feel so comfortable. and um so authentic in their their own writing that I think that it's...

13:53.50
Gary Gray
Mm hmm.

13:54.39
Victoria
powerful to use. your stories and your your books as as mentors for them. um That's what we try to do all year long.

14:01.37
Gary Gray
Yeah. Absolutely. And I and i i never myself. to write i think like right now um i am I mean... It's.

14:12.01
Gary Gray
not shared publicly but like i'm working on a longer story and it's a different process right where you're working on a longer story but picture books are a little bit different um i do find like they're a little bit more intimate um they take a lot of time just like

14:18.25
Victoria

na

14:28.37

Gary Gray

Moving a period, moving a comma, moving a word, moving a sentence, right? and whereas if you have a larger group of texts like you can have a little bit more freedom in how things go.

14:40.91

Gary Gray

Whereas in a picture book, like... every word, every... sentence structure every move everything matters absolutely everything matters and when students have that idea around everything matters that you put on the page it changes your whole perspective on writing and the impact that it can have on other people so I think it works.

15:03.63

Gary Gray

i've seen it work um so i hope that teachers hear the same thing yeah

15:04.95

Victoria

yeah

15:08.86

Victoria

Yeah, that's awesome. um And then one more question for you. What advice would you give for teachers? who are interested in growing their own writing lives.

15:21.30

Gary Gray

um i think i mentioned it before and i i always say this to everybody i do i do believe everyone is a writer. um Whether you, especially with teachers, I think you have to.

15:33.19

Gary Gray

present yourself as a writer for kids to believe they can be a writer. um if you are self-conscious of it, just fake it till you make it. Like I really genuinely believe that students will.

15:47.31

Gary Gray

Take on. everything that you share when it comes to you know what a writer is and how a writer should be if you take on that persona and i think it's really important to do that if a teacher wants to be a writer i think you just have not just have to but you have to read and write as much as possible Um, and i don't think there is like a right time.

16:09.60

Gary Gray

I think, for me, feel like you are waiting for something or a specific time in your life I think that is. I don't want to call it a trap.

16:20.33

Gary Gray

But I do think it kind of. it diminishes the purpose of you getting to the point of wanting to be a writer. um i think it's always a good time to write. You can write about anything and if you feel like you're stuck or you don't have anything to write about.

16:35.46

Gary Gray

You can always think about like who you are as a person. um You can always find someone who... you know, will tell you the truth about your work, right? my writing partner is my wife and she is very honest.

16:47.96

Gary Gray

She is very, very honest. She is my first editor in

16:50.25

Victoria

Okay.

16:52.92

Gary Gray

everything that I write and she is. She's the best partner because she allows. me to get better by being she always gives me you know she'll i always say can you like hamburger it or a little bit can you like give me some really good feedback first and then like let me know what i need to do and then give me some more good feedback but

17:12.52

Victoria

Yeah.

17:14.82

Gary Gray

Yeah, but I do think. finding those people as well is is very, very important. um because it allows you to you know feel comfortable getting feedback.

17:26.64

Gary Gray

um and don't treat your classroom life and your writing life. as like competitors right your classroom is the material um You don't have to

mix both of them if you don't want to.

17:38.96

Gary Gray

And it's okay to go slow.

17:41.69

Victoria

Yeah.

17:41.51

Gary Gray

right It's okay to go slow. to have a more I always say like a more humbling timeline in in what you do. and what you present if you're looking to find an agent or be in the publishing world. It doesn't always happen right away. And you have to be okay with that. um because the writing world is very slow. it's very very slow But I do think there is space.

18:05.04

Gary Gray

for everyone that wants to be a writer. I genuinely believe that.

18:09.24

Victoria

And it's just a matter of getting started, right?

18:11.48

Gary Gray

Absolutely. Absolutely. I always tell people like if you sit and you just I call them like flash drafts if you just sit and you just write quickly about anything.

18:23.40

Gary Gray

you would be so surprised with like yourself. and the amount of things you want to share. Um, And that's all it takes is just getting started. And you do a lot of these flash drafts over and over and over and over again.

18:36.59

Gary Gray

and these little flash drives could turn into picture books they could turn into essays they could turn into novels you just never know where they will go. But. I think it's the point of just like writing and getting your thoughts out.

18:47.95

Gary Gray

that matter. um and sometimes it's just getting started getting

started it's always the hard part it's always a hard part getting started but I do think everyone has that in them.

18:58.27

Victoria

well thank you for sharing that i'm feeling inspired now i need to spend my I need to spend my 5am to 7am writing.

19:00.87

Gary Gray

Good.

19:03.50

Gary Gray

Yeah.

19:03.89

Victoria

I think every day.

19:04.23

Gary Gray

but and it And it doesn't have to be. in the morning it can be absolutely any time and i know that people have

19:07.27

Victoria

okay

19:10.43

Gary Gray

busy lives. Some people are parents. They're working full time jobs. And... like they're cooking, they're cleaning, they're traveling. Um, You can write for five minutes.

19:20.22

Victoria

Yeah.

19:20.31

Gary Gray

right you can write for 10 minutes it doesn't have to be long periods at a time. i think Like most things, once you start. once you do five minutes. That five minutes easily turns into 10 minutes. It happens. every single time.

19:34.80

Gary Gray

And Victoria, you have me. You can message me. We could be writing buddies.

19:38.61

Victoria

Okay.

19:38.97

Gary Gray

I am here for you

19:39.33

Victoria

I mean, I'm excited. Perfect. um well thank you so much gary for answering all those questions i'm excited to have had our podcast flipped this issue because we learned so much from you and are so excited about all the work that you're doing as an author and as a teacher.

19:57.33

Victoria

So thanks so much.

19:57.68

Gary Gray

Thank you. This is so fun. You did an awesome job.

20:01.14

Victoria

Oh thanks.

20:01.37

Gary Gray

You did a really good job. i might If I need a break, I might have to call on you.

20:04.50

Victoria

All right. Sounds good. Sounds good. I'm in.

20:07.93

Gary Gray

Thank you.

20:09.10

Victoria

Thanks.