

## From the Author of *Essay Apprentice*

At a district-wide ELA meeting a few years ago, a question was posed to my group: What do we see as the most essential, yet lacking, element of student writing? After a few rumblings from the group, a colleague from another school chimed in: “Well, I would really like to see a focus on tone and voice. My kids are having quite a difficult time grasping these concepts.” Several seconds later, once most of our dropped jaws returned to their appropriate position, I felt compelled to respond. “*Tone and voice?* I have kids who cannot even construct a paragraph in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade!” I didn’t mean to belittle nor dismiss his idea, but if those were the *only* problems of the average student, we English teachers would be on cloud nine!

The reality is that I had 11<sup>th</sup> graders who were still unable to write a paragraph, let alone a five-paragraph essay with appropriate tone and personal voice. All of those students who were not able to construct more than a paragraph had failed our California High School Exit Exam, and now a large handful of these students were in my hands. These kids were facing the fact that they would not receive a diploma if they did not learn to write some semblance of an essay. I pored over books dealing with writing, hoping that I would find a new technique or concept that would “click” with these kids. The concept of the “Writing Process” with which we are so familiar (pre-writing, draft, revising, editing, publishing, reflecting) was not going to help. What do you do for the kids that haven’t even come close to approaching the “pre-writing” step? As I sadly found, ideas for helping *those* kids are meager at best.

After sifting and sorting through book after book, program after program, I had done quite a bit of research. What I found very little of were practical, ready-to-use activities that put this research into practice. I had charts, graphs, statistics, and quotes about good writing programs—what I didn’t have were the materials to teach the skills. Thus, the birth of *Essay Apprentice*. While every method and activity is based upon research, I have gone beyond the research to give you practical materials with which to apply these research-based strategies.