time to get to the meat of the story. They thought the title hooked the reader. They disagreed as to whether to widen the lens and to spend more time on my conclusion. They asked me to put in a couple of words that cemented the concept of place, and they wondered if I should—and then they cringed when they realized they had used that dreaded word—add the assumption that all Whites were members of the same club,—and they wanted the word "club" to appear with quotation marks. When they finished I told them that I had held my breath as they read because I had never written anything like this piece and I wondered what readers would think of me as they read. Their reading and discussion had helped me learn from my own writing. I talked about someone using the word "should." We talked about a simple change in phrasing, something like asking if I had consid-

ered introducing the concept of white privilege as a club. That took away the "should" and pushed my thinking, and how that subtle shift made a difference in the way I heard the feedback.

After modeling a feedback session, I turn them loose to listen to each other in small groups. I do not join these groups, not wanting my teacher voice to interfere with their own learning. I reserve the right to overhear them, and sometimes issue a time-out when I hear something that needs to be restated. In an early session, a student stated that the middle section of a peer's writing was "boring," and I asked the group to think about feedback that would be more actionable for the writer. They wrestled with it for a few minutes, and then were able to say that as readers the first few sentences provided good information and they were

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White Privilege DNA

Peggy Silva, New Hampshire

I thought I knew what I didn't know. In discussions about issues of race and equity, I put my dislaimer out on the table--as a white, upper-middle class teacher who lives in a Brigadoon of privilege, I am uber-aware of all that doesn't touch me in my daily teaching life. Or so I thought. Recently, however, I have been made aware of a starting gate I didn't even know I occupied. I am a white woman—and that one fact allows others to assume the DNA of my beliefs. No other markers are needed.

I entered a small mall food court restaurant at the same time as another woman. The hostess sat us at adjoining tables and the other woman asked me to keep an eye on her shopping bags while she used the restroom. When she returned we fell into that idle conversation of strangers. She was visiting her second home in Florida, here from Dallas for a few days of shopping and sailing. I was visiting Sarasota as a school consultant. Her sister was an educator, she said, and had recently returned to a middle school classroom. Her sister's story, she said, finally had a happy ending. She had once been the head of a strong Federal pre-school program in the Southwest, but the Blacks had wanted the position for themselves, and had made her life hell--suing her left and right for things like supposedly not saying 'good morning' as she passed them in the hall. Finally, she quit and let them have the job.

I had sent no signals that we were of the same mind. We were in a mall food court. I had on jeans shorts and a plain white tee shirt. The only thing we had in common at that moment was that we were sitting side by side and that we were both white. We had said nothing as a prologue to her story. We were two strangers at a 'pass the salt' level of conversation. I said nothing. Our waitress brought our two lunches and we turned to our food.

Fast forward to the check-out counter of my local market. Two acquaintances and I were praising the day—a glorious end of summer afternoon. I remarked that it was

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White Privilege DNA
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such different weather than in Sarasota, the city I had just returned from. One asked what I thought of that city, and I praised the beaches and damned the heat. The second woman asked whether the Mexicans had started creeping in yet, although she supposed they were all over Florida by now. Her question and her tone did not signal that she was crossing a boundary, and my lack of a response did nothing to enlighten her. It was my turn at the cashier, so I was distracted as I said that I was struck by the diversity I saw in the schools—but by then I was blocking another customer and it was awkward to continue to stand in that spot. I waved and left the store.

My skin, not my being, allowed these conversations to happen. The initiators assumed a shared belief and a shared bias based on skin color, not words or actions. These two tiny moments allowed me a small sliver of seeing. Each incident forced me to see a little bit more of how much I do not understand about white privilege—and forced me to question the sound of my own silence. ■

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Using Protocols with Students. . .
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ready to move on. As readers, they did not need the second and third paragraphs of this piece to understand the writer's point of view. They could see immediately that that was more helpful to the writer than the word "boring."

After the first two weeks of Writing Workshop, my presence as teacher fades as we become fellow writers striving to improve our work. ■

The Writing Workshop Feedback Protocol can be found on our website, www.nsrfharmony.org, in our protocol section.

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Center of Activity: Florida
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Center, together with Collier County Public Schools, The Education Foundation of Collier County, the Naples Children and Education Foundation, the Immokalee Foundation, and the Community Foundation of Collier County, are collaborating in a broad effort to improve student achievement and child well-being in Collier County.

This effort is multi-faceted and includes intensive work in Immokalee elementary schools, an executive doctoral program for district administrators, improved access to health and dental care for low-income children, and increasing the availability of quality preschool education for Immokalee children. Immokalee is one of the poorest communities in the nation, with close to 40% of its population living below the poverty line. Since 1997, investigations by the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW), the FBI and the U.S. Justice Department have prosecuted six slavery cases in Florida's produce fields - freeing over a thousand workers held against their will.

The work of the Florida Center of Activity is profoundly satisfying for all of us. It is also intense and difficult work fraught with disappointment and constant struggle. Indeed, all of us in the NSRF know something about how hard it is to do authentic work in real contexts. That is the one thing that separates us from so many others who have joined the collaboration bandwagon in recent years.

And for those of you reading this at the 12th Annual NSRF Winter Meeting, all of us here at the Florida Center of Activity welcome you to Florida! We know that as we engage each other in thoughtful and challenging conversations, we will all be smarter, stronger, and more courageous than we were when we arrived. ■

For more information about the work of the NSRF Florida Center of Activity visit www.coe.ufl.edu/centers/lastinger/index.html
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