

# How to Unleash a Writer

Again and again, Rene Miles' students wins big. By Lauren McCollum



"Ms. Miles cracked the whip," says Jessica. "She broke me of bad habits. Now I write with my images, but with more direction."

When young Jessica Atkinson won a creative writing gold medal in the prestigious Scholastic Art & Writing Awards this past May, she was flown to New York to accept a \$10,000 prize and meet the press.

Who did Jessica bring with her to The Big Apple? Her teacher Rene Miles, her writing guide since middle school. Miles heads the creative writing program at the Charleston County School of the Arts in South Carolina, where she teaches students from sixth through twelfth grade. "Over the years, they become like my own children," she says.

If the Scholastic Awards are any measure, Miles is one of the most effective writing teachers in the nation. She's been named Gold Apple Teacher three times, an honor given each year to the educator whose students submitted the best work.

What's her secret? The 32-year veteran pushes her students to find their voices through writing calisthenics. "Dance instructors don't tell beginners, 'Express yourself! Jump around!'" she points out. Instead, they lead the class in mastering the fundamentals. "Art is discipline," explains Miles. And clearly, her brand of discipline pays off. □

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