

# Creative writing taking roots

Dominique Walker of Bay Shore believes that being a hyphenated American with native American ancestors gives her a special lens on life.

"I'm part Cherokee, Shinnecock, Irish and African-American," said Walker, a 17-year-old senior at Bay Shore High School at a recent student writing conference workshop at her school.

The Ethnic Pen conference emphasized finding creativity in cultural diversity and featured a session with hip-hop performance artist Will Power, who encouraged Walker to write about her deep Long Island roots.

"He found it fascinating that I can trace my family back hundreds and hundreds of years,"



Walker said.

Extra writing assignments generally induce groans among busy students, but at the Ethnic Pen conference, the spontaneous schoolwork elicited lyrics, skits and essays on Latino, Asian, African-American and family themes.

Both budding and fully flowering artists agreed there was literary gold lurking in the Long Island melting pot — especially when students share their backgrounds with each other.

"One of the most important things to get across to students is to broaden their horizons," said keynote speaker Carlos Eire, whose novel, "Waiting for Snow in Havana," won the 2003 National Book Award.

That message resonated with Bay Shore sophomore Matt Roto, 16, who overcame nervousness to write and then perform a rap lyric about "the sounds and smells of my neighborhood."

"We got into a circle and free-



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Above, Frank Ingrasciotta, left, and student Gregory Millan at the "Ethnic Pen" conference at Bay Shore High School; at left, middle school students organize an improvised performance during a workshop given by Terry Muuss.

styled and made sounds," Roto said of the workshop he attended.

Gregory Millan, a 17-year-old junior, found his muse when, fortified by a ziti and salad lunch, Frank Ingrasciotta, 45, an Italian-American dramatist, asked for writing about "your neighborhood, a family member or a family picture."

Millan, a basketball player, speedily penned a monologue explaining the source of his nickname, "Pookie."

"I made the basket at the free-throw line, and right before I got to shoot, my mom shouts, 'Go Pookie Bear — that's mama's baby,'" Millan read, re-creating the embarrassing moment — with nary a blush — before about 20 fellow students sitting on library chairs.

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