Children from Around the State Write at the Zoo
in a University of Oklahoma Sponsored Event

(Norman, Okla.) – The Oklahoma City Zoo was filled with excitement on Thursday, not from the animals, although they are exciting in themselves. This excitement came from 144 children along with their parents and teachers who participated in a Writing Safari at the Zoo. The event organized by the Oklahoma Writing Project in the Jeannine Rainbolt College of Education at the University of Oklahoma in partnership with the Oklahoma City Zoo is an annual event for elementary school students in Oklahoma.

Writing Safari at the Zoo is a writing marathon, a day of writing during which the environment becomes the prompt. The children moved through “classrooms,” each taught by an Oklahoma Writing Project teacher. The classrooms were set up at spots in the zoo where children could get a close look at the animals. In each classroom the children learned about a different writing genre as they wrote about the animals they saw. This year the children wrote while viewing bears, tigers, gorillas, and enjoying the Children’s Petting Zoo.

The Oklahoma Writing Project supports teachers in using research-based best practices for teaching writing. “Current research indicates children need to understand the writing process and learn how to use it to write in all curriculum areas,” said Dr. Priscilla Griffith, director of the Oklahoma Writing Project and a professor in the Jeannine Rainbolt College of Education.

“During the safari, students used writing process stages—prewriting to drafting with some even having a chance to revise and edit—to craft their writing,” said Audra Plummer, the project’s co-director for teacher in-service programs. “Of course the children had a chance to enjoy the publishing stage—sharing what they wrote with their peers,” Plummer added. Students wrote poetry, opinion pieces, and even their own animal nursery rhyme.

According to Mrs. Tonya Pember, a teacher from Red Oak Elementary School in Moore, who participated with her students, “Oklahoma Writing Project, the finest professional development in Oklahoma, has extended their expertise and instruction with the Zoo Writing Safari. The event empowers teachers and imparts the love of writing to students.”

The Oklahoma Writing Project is part of the National Writing Project’s network of educators working together to improve the teaching of writing in the nation’s schools and in other settings. “Our focus is on developing the leadership, programs, and research needed for teachers to help students become successful writers and learners,” said Griffith. Oklahoma Writing Project has been part of the OU Norman campus since 1978. The program provides outreach to schools through high-quality professional development programs for teachers in a variety of disciplines and at all levels, from childhood through university as well as community events for children such as the Writing Safari.
Lori Newmark, a teacher in Moore Public Schools, leads a discussion about bear to engage the children in a prewriting activity before they compose their opinion essays during the Oklahoma Writing Project’s Writing Safari at the Zoo.

Tamee Daniel, a 3rd grade teacher at Dale Elementary School in Dale, helps children write animal nursery rhymes at the Oklahoma Writing Project’s Writing Safari at the Zoo.