



Olney Friends School

61830 Sandy Ridge Road, Barnesville, OH 43713

March 2012

Dear educators,

I encourage you to invite Jon Watts to visit your school. His programs and performances—indeed, his very presence—will challenge your students to think about who they are, to listen to themselves, and to use writing and music as a tool to express themselves.

In February of this year, Jon came to Olney Friends School to give writing workshops. He worked with twenty students at a time in mixed groups of grades nine through twelve. With his guidance, students wrote and shared original compositions. Jon was an encouraging teacher; he provided specific prompts to help students truly “free write,” letting go of their inner critics and embracing the creative spirit. One student commented, “I hadn’t written that way before. It opened me up, made it easier to write, and I produced things I love.” Another student, who was already a writer, said that her poetry has changed because of Jon’s workshops: “Now I can get out of my head and let the spirit in.” This philosophy has affected my students beyond their writing: “It has helped me be open to more things, not judge myself and others, and be able to speak from the heart.”

In the evening, Jon gave a public performance, attended by all our students and faculty as well as local community members. Four or five student volunteers opened for him by sharing poetry they had written in the morning, evidence of Jon’s ability to nurture young people even in such a short time frame. Jon is a captivating performer. He is a talented guitar player, his words are heartfelt and meaningful, and they are combined in original rhythms. But his music is more than chords, notes, lyrics—its foundation is faith in God and in the goodness of humanity—and so when you let it come in, it is a spiritual experience. The students were also transported by Jon’s performance. When I asked a group of them what it did for them, one smiled and said, “That’s a tough question. It was magical.” They, too, sensed its ineffability. Jon’s music inspires us to be more honest with ourselves and with each other.

If you are a school with a religious heritage, Jon will give your students a compelling example of “having substance behind what you believe,” as one of my students put it. However, he will not alienate anyone, whether of another religious tradition or of none, for he is as interested in listening to who you are and what you believe as he is sharing his own stories. I am also confident that he can work with students of all ages. Whatever type of school you are, your students will benefit from working with Jon Watts.

Sincerely,

Promise Partner