

# TIME TO RHYME

A LOCAL HIGH SCHOOL TEACHER HELPS SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS WRITE BETTER  
BY USING RHYMING TECHNIQUES

BY THEO KARANTHALIS

Special to The Miami Herald

Barbara Goleman High teacher Todd Rubenstein teaches special education students how to improve their writing skills by using "reality rhyme" and poetry.

Rubenstein said that he teaches students to describe what they see in their minds by drawing them out with exercises that help them express what they feel, smell and see. In turn, the students build self-confidence and continue to build on their strengths.

Rubenstein writes poems under the pen name Todd Edwards, which he says helps him to teach better. Students are able to draw what they see in their minds with words.

"It's helped me to think differently and now I can put what's in my head on paper," said Anthony Jimenez, 16, a special education student at Goleman.

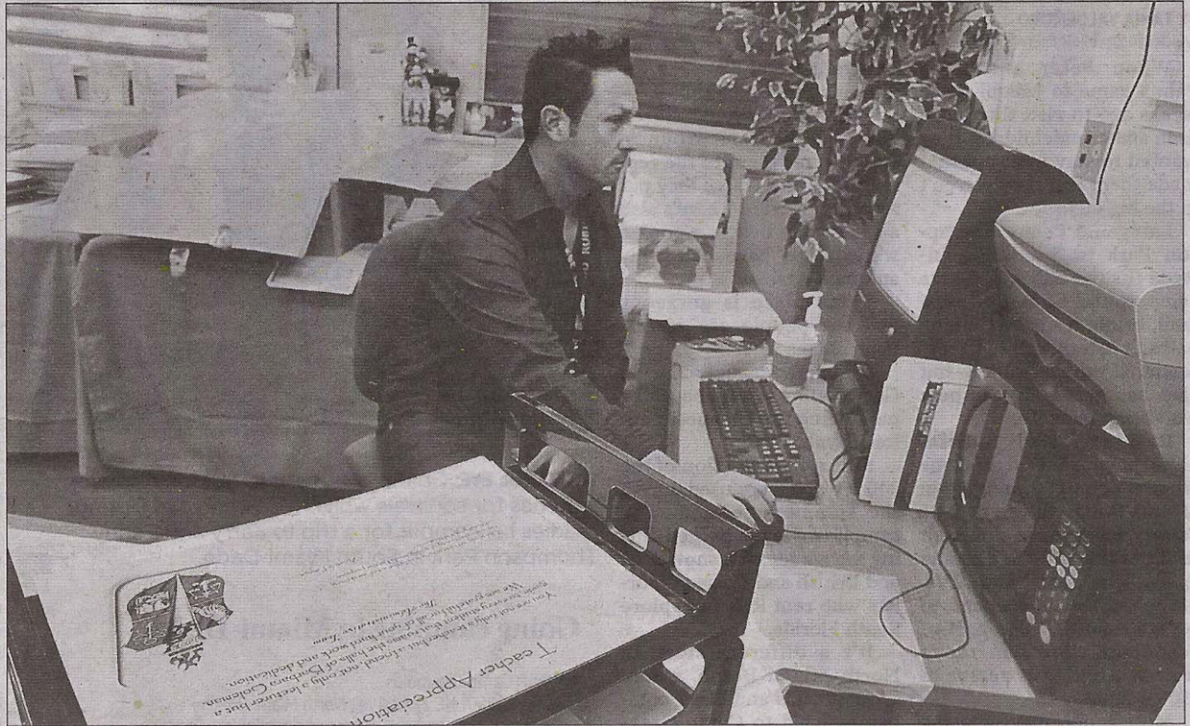
During a visit to his classroom before the end of the school term, Rubenstein propped the door open to his fourth-period class. About 25 students in the hallway jumped up off the floor and came alive.

"If I'm excited, they'll get excited and hopefully achieve great things in life," said Rubenstein, who passionately incorporates his gift for writing into his teaching.

Each student eagerly took his and her seat. When the heavy metal door clanked shut for the last student, it was time to go to work.

Students are taught with what Rubenstein calls reality rhyming, a writing style that creates a story by using one's name and background information.

No two reality rhymes can ever be the same. It's this uniqueness that generates student interest and creativity, according to Rubenstein.



PHOTOS BY DANIEL BOCK/FOR THE MIAMI HERALD

**CREATIVE PROCESS:** Todd Rubenstein is a poet and special education teacher at Goleman High School who has developed new ways to improve his students' writing skills, building self-confidence in the process.

For example, Rubenstein said that the "O" in a poem he wrote about national talk show host Oprah Winfrey goes like this:

"Opulent and enchanting hues of vivacity illuminated this mystical orb on the cherished dawning dated of Jan. 29, 1954," he wrote, referring to Winfrey's birth date.

By using rhyming techniques and word association tools to help students improve their composition skills, the emphasis shifts to creativity and learning, Rubenstein said.

For example, a common mnemonic for remembering conjunctions is FANBOYS, and one could visualize boys holding fans to remember "for, and, nor, but, or, yet,

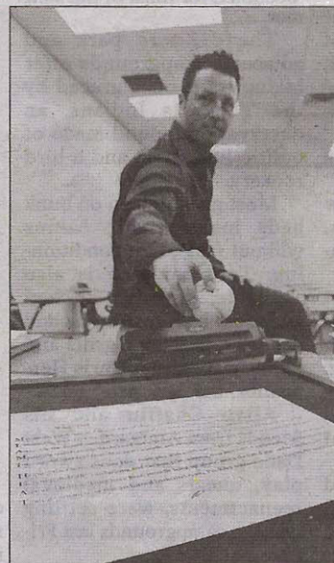
and so."

Naomi Ellenbogen, a teacher of the deaf at Goleman, said motivating special education students is a big challenge.

"Todd's creative and clever and he gets through to his students with his little niche," Ellenbogen said.

Rubenstein said that his students are learning a valuable life skill. Instead of cut-and-paste works turned in at the last minute, his students take time "to create original works that they take ownership of."

"It's in them, each one has the ability to succeed," said Rubenstein of his students. "Some kids just have to jump through more hoops than others."



**'REALITY RHYMING':** Rubenstein is at his desk with two things that have brought him public acclaim: a tennis ball and one of his poems. In addition to being an accomplished tennis player, Rubenstein has branded a style of poetry he calls 'reality rhyming,' which explores individuals' lives by answering, 'If your life was a poem, what would it say?'