

Students, staff reflect on another year of Lit Fest

Students explore a variety of genres in writing workshops

by Jesse McCauley

Last Friday, the 14th annual Literary Festival welcomed writers from several genres to engage with seniors enrolled in writing related English courses. The students chose four one-hour long sessions to attend. In total, there were sixteen sessions that focused on topics ranging from songwriting to constructing podcasts.

The festival was put together by English teachers John O'Connor, Sarah Gompers, Carlo Trovato, and Chris Oetter. These teachers all worked together to expose students to a variety of writing styles.

"What we have heard from students over the years is that this is the most valuable day of the year. They get to see what being a professional writer is all about," said John Cadwell, Chair of the English Department.

Senior Kathryn Braeseke appreciated the inside look on professional writing. "I thought it

was a unique experience and it was cool to hear from people who are professionals in so many areas of literature. It was a fun yet educating break in the semester," said Braeseke.

Cadwell also pointed out the personal level of the sessions. Since the day is exclusively for seniors, some sessions were small and interactive.

"I think the sessions with smaller groups were more fun and effective because we got to get through more of the topic. I had a great time overall, and I definitely got to learn from a lot of different and cool people," said senior Matt Stetter.

Stetter attended a session taught by Peter Ferry called Write and Read Your Short, Short Story in 60 Minutes. Ferry, a former English teacher at Lake Forest High School and author of two novels, had the students create their own short stories that he and the rest of the class would analyze.

Senior Michael Kolovos also had a positive experience. "My favorite seminar was Interviewing: Finding the Black Pearl because it was the most interactive and the professor was the most engaging."

In this particular session, Peter Slevin, a writer for The Washington Post, discussed interviewing



Julie Johnson, a retired English teacher, started Lit Fest | English Dept.

techniques and the best ways to get to the heart of a person's story. The students got to interview each other and tried to find something extraordinary. Slevin has interviewed people such as Barack and Michelle Obama, mainly to publish his biography "Michelle Obama: A Life."

However, not all students came out of the day feeling inspired. Many felt disappointed with their sessions.

For example, senior Emma Schwartz loves the idea of Lit Fest, but she doesn't think students take it very seriously.

"I believe all students, including myself, see it as a blow-off day, which lessens the legitimacy of the seminars and makes them that much worse," said Schwartz.

Similarly, senior Alex Bernardo was not thrilled with his sessions. "The sessions felt too long and many

of them were not like how they were advertised in the description," said Bernardo.

Many students felt that the day really depended on the success of the sessions that they chose.

Despite the varying opinions on the sessions, the overarching goal of the day was to expose students to a variety of writing. O'Connor, who has worked on the Literary Festival for all fourteen years, believes this type of exposure is very relevant and that writing infiltrates every possible field of study.

"Our English classes sometimes focus on ancient people such as Shakespeare and Sophocles. We want people to know that writing is an art that is being practiced all around us. Writing is a present tense activity," said O'Connor.

O'Connor has done his own outside writing including book reviews, education essays, poems, radio essays for NPR, and much more. His daughter, Alison O'Connor, was a guest this year. She is a slam poet in a duo called Mascara, who taught a session called Slam It Off: A Poetry Workshop.

"I can't imagine a life without art. I don't think that life without art is a full life," said O'Connor.

Homework and stress

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by Danielle Kurensky

teachers have made homework optional for their students.

One of the Level 4 math teachers, Kyle Ogrodnik, said that requiring every student to have to do every assignment was penalizing students who understand the material.

"Doing it just to get it done kind of defeats the purpose," he said. Mona Kolososki, a Spanish teacher who used to assign nightly homework, has a similar viewpoint.

She assigns less after becoming an advisor and watching the way students struggle to get homework done.

"To watch the stress that they are under, the sleep deprivation and the lack of mindfulness that they put into the work while they are doing it. I just don't see the point if they aren't putting forth a lot of effort and using resources the way teachers hope they would," she said.

Rather, Kolososki hopes students will spend this free time with family and friends.

"My dream would be for every student to have dinner with their family and discussions, to talk about the day and unwind," said Kolososki.

Schools across the country are making similar decisions as more research shows the detrimental effect of homework on students.

A 2014 Stanford University study of 10 high-performing high schools in upper to middle class California found that less than one percent of students said homework was not a stressor.

The same study found that lots of homework was associated with students dropping activities and made students less likely to pursue hobbies.

In response to studies like these, many high schools across the country have implemented occasional homework free weekends throughout the year, especially during times of heightened stress like around college application deadlines.

Almost all students are unanimously behind the idea of having less homework and changing the way homework is assigned.

"Similar to the test policy, I would like if you could only get homework from certain classes on certain nights," said junior Christopher Wood.

Many hope that the discussion about homework will lead to a more comprehensive conversation about students' well-being.

"The homework conversation is hopefully part of a larger conversation about student health," said History teacher, Alexander Klein.

Math Team snags second at competition

Students believe minor mistakes led to loss to Neuqua Valley on home turf

by Mia Sherin

On Wednesday, Nov. 1, the New Trier Math team placed second in a competition at New Trier against four other schools, namely Conant, York, Neuqua Valley, and Walter Payton.

Neuqua Valley came in first place with 312 points, while New Trier placed second with 252 points. Walter Payton was close behind with 223 points.

Overall, the team felt that this competition left them with plenty of room for improvement.

Senior Yamenah Ambreen, who has been on the team since her freshman year, said, "I don't think we lost too badly, but I still felt that we could have done better."

The competitions are broken up into three parts: written, orals, and the candybar competition. The written competition is divided by grade levels, and there are five contestants from each grade.

However, only the top three scores from each grade count in the team's overall score. In addition, the teams are permitted to have an unlimited number of alternates who will also take the written test, but their scores will not play into the final score, no matter how well they perform.

The second competition is the oral competition, in which one student receives questions

and then must present their solutions to a panel of judges.

The candybar competition is the final portion, and although it does not count for the team's final score, it is often the fan favorite. In this competition, the entire team works together to solve 20 problems in 20 minutes. The winning team receives a slew of candy bars and, of course, bragging rights.

When explaining why the candybar competition is her favorite, Ambreen said, "The best way for math nerds to bond is to do math together." She added that the candybar competition can help the team learn to work together.

"You can always tell when the new kids come in. You can see that the sophomores, juniors, and seniors work together really well, but the freshman don't understand what's going on. They are not aware of how the team works yet," said Ambreen.

Junior Brandon Lee has been a member of the math team since his freshman year, and he also agrees that the candybar competition is a great way to bring the team together.

"It is a really great way to bond sometimes there is contention between two answers and what happens is you get freshman and seniors and everybody interacting with each other to figure exactly what the answer is," said Lee.

Neuqua Valley also placed first in the candybar competition, which was a loss that hit the New Trier Math Team right where it hurts.

Both Ambreen and Lee were contestants for their grade level in the written competition. They also

agreed that the team lost many of their points on small errors, such as using parentheses rather than brackets or forgetting a negative sign.

"We did well, and so did our team overall, but several of us made a couple silly mistakes. We usually do really well, so we can see this as an exception," elaborated Lee.

The head coaches of the team are Katherine Linsenmeir and John Carter. While this is Carter's first year as a head coach, this is Linsenmeir's eighth year as a head coach, in addition to 17 years with the team in general.

Although Linsenmeir agreed with her students that they could have performed better, she spoke of students that stood out to her throughout the competition.

Freshman Adrian Calinescu and Alice Hu both received perfect scores on the written portion of the competition, which is extremely impressive for anyone, let alone for two students in their first year on the team.

This competition is considered one of the smaller ones throughout the year.

Over the course of five small competitions, scores are added up and placed against 55 teams in surrounding areas. This will end with one large final competition, and the team feels confident that they can improve by the time this competition rolls around.

Lee said, "We know we can do better and we are going to continue to train, and many of us are confident that by the end of the year we will be getting first."

Debates arise over zoning

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by Claudia Levens

Northfield campus, the already difficult traffic situation would be significantly worsened.

They also worry that this could potentially prove to be a safety risk, putting student lives in danger.

The Avoca school district superintendent also noted that the possible increase in families and children would require that subsequent compensation be provided for the school district to accommodate them.

Opponents also claim that the housing plan goes against the character, culture, and values of a

small village such as Northfield—"the comfortable corner of the North Shore" according to the town's motto.

Additionally, opponents are skeptical of the unsteady nature of rental units such as those proposed for the site.

Town houses tend to be steadier in terms of the ebb and flow of people, though the fact that the units are rental is unappealing to many in the area.

A future vote will determine

whether or not the application is passed on to the architectural committee for an additional vote, after which it would head to the Northfield Village Board.

According to Crain's Chicago Business, a similar vote took place in Northbrook recently which resulted in the rejection of a dense development plan, and follows a trend that seems to be occurring among suburban residents pushing

back against perceived threats to their small town character.

Regardless of the results of the vote, the importance of the situation did not go unnoticed by the attendees at the town meeting. This vote will set a precedent for similar proposals being made at other sites in both Northfield and throughout the North Shore.