

MWA Is Seeking Teen Writing Club Leaders!

Interested in giving back to the community and nurturing young writers? The MWA Teen Writing Program is seeking new club leaders around the state. Our teen clubs bring together young writers, typically ages twelve to eighteen, in a supportive, collaborative atmosphere. Club leaders guide teens on the craft of creative writing, encouraging them to explore various genres and techniques and to critique each other. Leaders help teens on various elements of creative writing—crafting vivid prose, developing a story arch, using dialogue, etc. Most importantly, the clubs are *not* writing classes; they provide a platform for teens to build their confidence and make friends.

Limited funds are provided to bring in guest speakers/authors, and teens are invited to submit material for the annual teen anthology; attend the MWA conference and other programs; and participate in local, state, and national writing contests. The MWA partners with local libraries, which host the clubs. Even during the pandemic, clubs have continued to operate, meeting by Zoom.

While MWA welcomes writers to launch new clubs around the state, we are currently looking for new leaders for our Chevy Chase and Annapolis clubs. Shelby SettlesHarper launched the Chevy Chase club three years ago. "We are poets, novelists, song writers, and short story writers," Shelby says of the club. "We support, encourage, and inspire one another ... I've loved seeing each writer's growth, both in their art and as a person."

Her experience is much like that of our other leaders. Three years ago, Henry Caballero took over the club in Gaithersburg, which was launched six years ago. Henry says, "I decided to lead the club as a way of giving back to my community. The writers in the club bring unique perspectives and story ideas. We have fun and share a desire to create and write ... I always leave the club meetings energized with fresh ideas about my own writing."

For five years, Joanne Zaslow has led the club in Odenton. Her club, which was launched seven years ago, has hosted several published authors, contributed to the teen anthology, toured the Poe House and a book printing company, and more. Joanne said she works "to make our club feel like a club, not school, and get input from members."

Christina Lyons launched the club in Germantown seven years ago. She says she has seen hesitant, quiet teens blossom amid the camaraderie of the group. Like Joanne, she encourages the group to operate as a club, rather than as a class, and seeks to provide an inviting space for the teens to share their thoughts, explore new ideas, and test new writing techniques. A new MWA member, Hayley Igarashi, will be taking over the club in the fall.

Neal Gillen, who has been leading the Potomac club for five years, says his young writers "come to the table with vivid imaginations, bold voices, different perspectives from diverse backgrounds, and innate creative skills." He encourages other writers to mentor young people who could follow in their footsteps. "In doing so, you will find in the experience the satisfaction that you have helped others to believe in themselves."

Ruut DeMeo started a new club in Baltimore during the pandemic last fall. "I think the teens and I found solace in being able to log in and share our feelings and words," she says. "Since I've led the group, I've been amazed at the level of excitement and skill that the teens exhibit with their writing ... I always walk away from our sessions feeling energized to keep learning and getting better myself. The teen clubs are a beautiful opportunity to see creativity in motion!"

If you are interested in leading a club, or want to learn more, please send an email to teenwriters@marylandwriters.org.