

My Day at Camp: Young Adult Writing Program

By Debra Citron | June 1, 2016



Autumn Warntjes coaches Caleb Liu (9) of Chandler during Central Arizona Writing Project's Young Adult Writing Program. Photo by Rick D'Elia.

Double [Newbery Award](#) winner [Kate DiCamillo](#) was asked whether she wrote as a child, and if she always wanted to be a writer when she grew up.

“When I was a kid, it never occurred to me that human beings wrote books,” she said. “I just didn’t think it was something that people did. Kids today know that it’s something that they can dream about.”

A big part of the reason kids today can and do dream of being published authors is the excellent writing education available. I attended a session of the [Young Adult Writing Program at Arizona State University](#), and was thrilled by what I saw.

The two-week, half-day “camp” is held on campus, in mercifully cool classrooms (unless there is an on-campus field trip, of which there are several).

The program unfolds like some of the best, high-quality adult writing workshops I’ve attended—a happy mix of good planning and organization; worthwhile information; dynamic professional leadership; responsive, respectful personal interactions; and a comfortable, collaborative atmosphere that elicits participation, focus and creativity.

Three engaging, experienced and very knowledgeable instructors kept 30-plus boys and girls—from grades (entering) three through 12—involved and productive all morning, using a smart combination of whole-group meetings, school-level breakout sessions, multimedia aids, and a working writer/editor guest speaker presentation, along with instruction, discussion, and plenty of timed writing exercises and student read-aloud opportunities.

The camp's lessons are real world, grownup writers' seminar-type training, presented simply, with a bit of fun. The participants get to experiment with multiple genres, literary forms and tools, and story structure models, as well as finding out about ways to earn a living using writing skills.

This is huge, because many book-loving kids who want to write lose interest or actively avoid writing when their teachers are not able to help them to expand their knowledge beyond standard school writing forms, or if inexperienced instructors are critical of their efforts to do so.

So why is this program different? The answer is because it is part of the NWP family. YAWP is the child of CAWP, which is brother to NAWP and SAWP. No, these are not more of Hagrid's long-lost giant relatives. They are acronyms for interrelated organizations dedicated to improving students' writing skills by improving teachers' skills. And many also offer outstanding summer writing experiences for kids.

The [National Writing Project](#) (NWP) is the largest professional development program for the teaching of writing in the country. NWP is the umbrella organization that funds research and provides grants and guidance to smaller, local programs run under the auspices of over 300 universities, which conduct innovative summer training courses for kindergarten through university-level teachers on how to teach kids to write. These educators take their



Kai Fujimoto (9) raises his hand at the Central Arizona Writing Project's Young Adult Writing Program at Arizona State University in Tempe.
Photo by Rick D'Elia.

new, polished and practiced skills back to their classrooms, ready to instruct and inspire students.

The [Central Arizona Writing Project](#), the ASU branch of NWP, has trained the gifted teachers of the YAWP, which is offered at the three ASU campuses: Tempe, West, and Polytechnic. (Tempe has a second camp session beginning Monday, June 20. Contact Tina Norgren at 480-965-3224 if interested.)

Northern and southern Arizona each have a writing project as well, the [Northern Arizona Writing Project](#), based at Northern Arizona University, and the [Southern Arizona Writing Project](#), housed at the University of Arizona, to provide this fantastic teacher training to the rest of the state. SAWP has a kids' program, too.

Oh, to be a kid again! If I were, I would gladly trade all my Harry Potter first editions to go to a camp like YAWP. That would be totally wizard!



Saanvi Devisetty (8) of Chandler works on a writing exercise (describing the taste of something) during the Central Arizona Writing Project's Young Adult Writing Program at ASU. Photo by Rick D'Elia.

Url: <http://www.raisingarizonakids.com/2016/06/my-day-at-camp/>