

# Summer Writing Series Adds Advocacy Program For Teens

By ALLISON DUNNE • MAY 11, 2018



There is a new program in the lineup for the [Hudson Valley Writing Project's summer writing workshops](#). The aim is to support young people as they write about and advocate for issues that matter to them.

The new program is called "Rise Up and Write," which the Hudson Valley Writing Project will offer at the State University of New York at New Paltz one week in July. It is the vision of New Paltz Middle School teacher Valerie Hughes, who will co-teach the program. She wants the students to have a lot

of influence and to follow their interests and passions while exposing them to different issues and means of representation. Hughes says giving purpose to writing and student voice is important.

“We have a decent range of students. We have 13-through 17-year olds, and that can be significant,” Hughes says. “So we want to honor injustices that they perceive on a micro level, maybe in their schools or in their families but also then we’re anticipating that we’re going to have a lot of very politically engaged older teenagers and who see things on a greater scale. So want to honor the direction that they want to go in.”

Hughes says adolescents have an acute awareness of the injustices around them and she wants them to feel empowered to combat them, through a number of writing formats.

“We are going to try to write across different genres, introduce poetry and spoken word, letter writing, personal narrative, things as simple as a well-crafted social media posting or how to create an effective message on a bumper sticker or a button that you put on your backpack and kind of being a little bit more flexible with what constitutes writing,” says Hughes.

Tom Meyer is director of the Hudson Valley Writing Project. He believes writing plays a role in civic engagement and speaks about the student activism after the Parkland, Florida school shooting.

“I personally was very moved, like many, by what happened at Marjory Stoneman Douglas. And I happened to attend a rally in Florida where a young woman who went to school there and who lost some of her friends, and she’s speaking at a rally with a bullhorn. And in her hand you can see a speech that she put together very thoughtfully,” Meyer says. “And so I see it starting by figuring out what their interested in and what they want to make different and why. I’m hoping that we’ll introduce them to some writers and

movers and shakers who are engaged in trying to make things different so that they can hear a little bit about some of the strategies that those people use both in their process of developing their ideas but also in putting their ideas out.”

Meyer says the participants in “Rise Up and Write” can take a seat at the community table before turning 18.

“Of course it’s going to be incredibly important for young people to vote when they’re eligible to vote, but there’s a lot they can do to engage in our community before, during and after voting,” says Meyer.

The hope is that the program will help writers develop their voice, access their power and gain the confidence to share their work. Once the weeklong course is finished, Hughes sees the idea continuing in some form.

“So a small thing that we do in this week could somehow seep into classrooms throughout the Hudson Valley, I think that’s a natural progression because we all share our ideas,” says Hughes.

“Rise Up and Write” is partially funded by a grant from the Maya Gold Foundation. Maya Gold was a 15-year-old New Paltz High School student who took her life in October of 2015 and a student of Hughes’.

“She leaves this legacy of being really civic-minded and socially engaged at a young age,” Hughes says. “So while they fund a lot of different programs for youth, I feel this program really aligns to her life and her legacy.”

“Rise Up and Write” runs July 16-20. It is intended for students aged 13-17. Tuition is \$195 and scholarships are available.

URL: <http://www.wamc.org/post/summer-writing-series-adds-advocacy-program-teens>