

Literacy Conversations: Teens and Authors

by CHRISTIE KAALAND

IMAGINE AN EVENT for 650 teenagers to get together with a dozen of their favorite authors. Imagine that this event allows for these students to hear original backstories, pose star-struck for photos, and be inspired by these authors. Imagine an event where students and authors can share ideas and find inspirations around the art of writing.

This is the literary event known as the Cavalcade of Authors. It began as a way to connect middle school and high school readers with current popular YA authors, and it takes place in southeastern Washington each March. School district librarians plan and host this exciting event, and it has become one of the regions' premier local affairs.

HISTORY

Cavalcade began five years ago as the brainchild of Richland School District middle school librarian, Michelle Lane. As she explains it,

My mother was an elementary school librarian who taught me a love for reading and to treasure my extensive autographed book collection that she had built for me over my childhood years. I want to foster that same love in every student in my school. The only difference is our students get to actually MEET the authors and be mentored by them. I can't imagine the impact that would have had on me as a child (email message to author, March 14, 2012).

This event was established in the Southeast region of Washington known as the Tri-Cities. Although it is quite geographically isolated, this unique area has three large school districts within a ten-mile radius. The Tri-Cities region also has an overwhelming support for libraries, both public and school, and from community and school members alike. Cavalcade of Authors is one of the events that inspires this high level of support.

In 2007, Lane proposed inviting seven authors to her school for a writing workshop for interested readers and writers. She received small grants from the Richland Educa-

tion Foundation and Friends of the Mid-Columbia Libraries, but primarily made this event happen out of sheer will and the belief that it was an idea that could blossom once attendees and the school community witnessed results.

Originally, the event was held at Enterprise Middle School where Lane is the librarian. It has since grown tenfold, from 70 students in 2008 to 650 students in 2012. It has been moved to the local Columbia Basin College and has a more extensive agenda with ever-expanding roles for school librarians. New school superintendent, Dr. Jim Busey, learned of the event shortly after his move to Richland, and it gave him a greater appreciation of the importance of strong school librarians and school library programs—not only for student success in school, but also for personal enjoyment.

This year, four school districts participated in Cavalcade of Authors including one from northern Oregon: Richland, Kennewick, Umatilla (Oregon), and North Franklin School Districts.

HOW CAVALCADE WORKS

In order to ensure the success of this event, an all-out effort is needed by participating districts' school librarians. Of those schools participating, each school librarian voluntarily accepts a role in organizing the event: organizing location, student transportation, equipment for authors, author accommodations, food, sponsorship, advertising, and promotion, among other tasks.

Because local media now report on and promote the event in both newspaper and local television news, sponsorship has exponentially increased. The sponsor page in the brochure for this year's event listed twenty-three sponsors of more than \$100 including a \$5,000 donation from local Mission Support Alliance. Goods and services from local donors include event space, social space (for the evening Author-Librarian Happy Hour event), a discount on hotel accommodations for authors, and other donations.

