WISCONSIN’S VERY OWN

MADE WITH PRIDE IN

WISCONSIN
Wisconsin’s Very Own: Wisconsinites We Should Know in the Field of Literacy

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About this Column:

This column provides our readers with information about Wisconsin’s movers and shakers in literacy education. Our wonderful state has many dedicated individuals who work in new and innovative ways to bring literacy alive for students of all ages! Through the interviews presented in this column, it is our goal to increase awareness about the amazing programs that Wisconsin’s very own are creating and implementing across the state. Do you know of a Wisconsinite who is making a difference in the literacy lives of students? Send their name and contact information to Jacqueline Witter-Easley, editor, at jeasley@carthage.edu


Wisconsin’s Very Own Katie Eder, age 15, Founder of Kids Tales™, a Nonprofit Writing Program for 8–12 Year Olds!

When Katie Eder was in fifth grade, she broke her arm. She was involved in a variety of sports, so this meant that she was sidelined from her activities for a while. What to do? Recalling her recent thrill of having a story she wrote for her fourth-grade teacher, Mrs. Hildebrandt, bound and published for the first time, Katie decided to enroll in writing classes through the University of Wisconsin-Madison’s Center for Academically Talented Youth under the tutelage of Priscilla Pardini. Katie went on to publish her short stories and earned the National Writing Narrative Competition Award for a book about a boy who found a sock monkey and became inspired to save the rain forests from destruction.

Four years later, in 2014, Katie, a freshman at a public high school in Milwaukee, became aware of the need to provide a way for children in underserved communities to learn how to write so their voices could be heard. She created Kids Tales™, a nonprofit organization, whose mission is “to inspire kids to write by teaching them how to create, compose, and publish their own stories” (About Us, para. 1). During the summer of 2014, Kids Tales™ provided two week-long writing camps for children ages 8 – 12. One year later, Kids Tales™ provided nine summer writing camps, including one held in Colombia due to winning the American Field Service (AFS) Vision in Action Award! In Colombia, Katie and a group of teen volunteers lead a weeklong workshop and guided the children in creating an anthology of their stories, titled Land of Enthusiasm, coming soon on Amazon.com. Next summer, Katie expects to organize fifteen writing camps in Wisconsin, Chicago, and the
Washington, D.C. area. Kids Tales™ is catching on across the nation!

**How Does Kids Tales™ Work?**

Teachers who are interested in providing this program to their students can contact Kids Tales™ at www.kidstaless.org to select a week during the summer when their school could host the writing camp at its location. Katie and/or her volunteer teachers (all high school students) go to the school for one week and work with the elementary students for three-to-four hours each day. They help the students to brainstorm ideas, develop their settings, characters, and plots, and, by the second half of the week, guide them in their revisions. At the end of the week, the students' stories are assembled into an anthology and published on Amazon.com, where they are available for purchase by the public. Students can search for their own names as the authors on Amazon's website. Katie follows up the camps by hosting publishing parties to celebrate the publication of the students' anthology. She brings one copy for each student to the party where they sign each other's books and share the books with their families. Through their participation in Kids Tales™, these elementary students have become published authors!

The children in her summer camps have kept in touch after the camps have ended. They continue to write and often send their stories to Katie for feedback. Katie recalled one boy who attended her Chicago workshop and returned for an additional Chicago workshop because he enjoyed the experience so much. His one difficulty lied in the fact that he did not have a computer at home. Through donations from private organizations, Kids Tales™ was able to purchase a computer for him. Clearly, Katie is focused on her mission and goes to great lengths to provide underserved children with access to the tools they need to continue developing their writing skills.

**How Has Kids Tales™ Enabled Katie To Think About Her Own Writing Skills?**

Katie's favorite genre to write is science fiction, with an emphasis on developing awareness of environmental issues. She plans to major in environmental engineering in college. In fact, like all good writers, Katie is an avid reader. Her favorite author during her pre-teen years was Kimberly Brubaker Bradley and she enjoyed reading her works of historical fiction. Now, she is a fan of biographies. Her favorite biographer is Walter Isaacson, and she just recently finished reading his biography of Steve Jobs. When asked about whom she would like to write about, Katie mentioned Al Gore because of his passion for the environment.

Through her work on developing the writing curriculum for her summer camps, as well as her reflections on her own teaching methods, Katie has learned about the writing process right alongside her own students. Her teaching experience has caused her to "examine the writing process more and break it down. It's made me more aware of my own type of writing" (personal communication, October 3, 2015). For example, when thinking about adding details, she finds herself thinking about the steps she uses to teach her students about developing sensory details. She referred to this as her internal "teacher dialogue".

Katie finds it interesting to see her students solve their writing difficulties, as well as rewarding to witness their development of their stories as the week-long camp progresses. She sees these camps as her opportunity to teach kids how to write, to be more articulate, and to use their own voices to make an impact on society. "Kids need the space, skill, and encouragement to write" (personal communication, October 3, 2015). Kids Tales™ provides all of that and more.

**The Future of Kids Tales™**

Kids Tales has grown from two workshops in the Milwaukee area in 2014 to plans for 15 workshops in several major cities across the nation in 2016! Katie hopes to bring this program to additional cities by spreading the news of Kids Tales™ through friends, former writing camp students, and word of mouth. She plans to apply to various organizations in an effort to fund her travelling to other countries so that she and her volunteer teachers can bring Kids Tales™ to children around the world.

The future of this organization is held safely in the hands of the young volunteers that Katie recruits so that when she graduates from high school and heads
to college, her volunteer staff will be able to lead the organization into the future. To ensure this, Katie has written the curriculum and trained each recruit to use the writing process consistently with all students. Her volunteer staff members are classmates and friends who share her love of writing. They, in turn, will recruit and train volunteers to carry on the program after they've gone on to college, too.

**Want to know more about Katie Eder and Kids Tales™?**

Visit her website at kidstales.org to learn about setting up a summer writing camp at your school. Teachers can explore this site to learn more about Katie and her volunteers, read sample stories written during previous writing camps, buy books published on Amazon.com, and learn about the organization’s mission.

Katie was named by the International Literacy Association as one of their inaugural 30 Under 30 members of the new generation of literacy leaders. You'll find information about Katie and 29 other young movers and shakers in ILA’s September/October 2015 issue of *Literacy Today*.

At age 15, Katie Eder has made quite an impact on the literacy lives of underserved children in Wisconsin, and across the nation. This is only the beginning of Katie’s influence on society. We eagerly await her next move as she enters college and, eventually, her career.

**Reference**