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Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Writers' Awards:

possible...

Introduction

In 1990, the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund began making substantial grants to accomplished writers with the notion that their passion for the written word could inspire in others new appreciation for literature — and, in turn, nourish the writers' own creative wellsprings.

Since then, the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Writers' Awards have become a signature Fund program. Over a decade, writers of all genres from all regions of the country have had opportunities to share their creative gifts in a number of ways. By connecting with people through affiliations with nonprofit organizations, they have left their mark on individuals and entire communities. Because of the energy they derived from interacting with others and the effects of that on their own writing, many of the writers say they will never again go back to the “old, solitary way” of working.

The Writers' Awards grants made in 2000 conclude the Fund's investment in this program, although the lessons we've learned will continue to influence our work in communities over the next decade. These pages celebrate the accomplishments of the Writers' Awards program. We hope that the discoveries made by the writers, affiliate organizations and program participants provide useful information about the ways artists can enrich community life, and, in the process, continue to produce meaningful and satisfying work.



M. Christine DeVita, President
Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund
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the art of the possible...

Between 1990 and 2000, the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund awarded more than \$9 million to an exceptional group of 92 poets, playwrights, novelists and nonfiction writers. Grant periods of three years have allowed these writers, who each received a total of \$105,000, to devote concentrated periods of time to what they love most: writing. What is unique about the Writers' Awards is the way the program has connected writers to their communities. As part of their awards, these writers have had opportunities to work in partnership with nonprofit organizations of their choosing to share their love of language and the written word with diverse groups of people.

Over the past decade, these writers have conducted workshops, organized performances, mounted exhibits and given readings in settings as varied as schools, churches, public libraries, YMCAs, homeless shelters and hospitals. Their constituencies have included teenagers and the elderly, Vietnam veterans and recent immigrants, ranchers and inner-city gang members, teachers as well as adults just learning to read.

For the writers, these experiences have shed new light on the value of community engagement and the ways in which being connected to people often feeds the creative process. Playwright Ellen McLaughlin, whose affiliation with American Friends Service Committee in New York City, brought Balkan refugees together for a series of dramatic workshops, said, “This experience hasn't just changed my work, it's changed my life. I found out what I care about and what I will put my muscle behind.”

Poet and short story writer Simon Ortiz, whose writing draws from his Native American heritage, echoes the sentiment.

[New light has been shed on the value of community engagement and the ways it can feed the creative process.](#)

Ortiz worked with the Telluride Institute in Colorado to organize residencies for Native American writers and visual artists at reservation schools and public schools with large Native American populations. “Being able to help develop young writers and taking my writer's voice into the community have become part of everything I do.”

Affiliate organizations, which received \$30,000 apiece to help administer writer-run programs, benefited along with program participants. The effects were far-reaching at San Francisco's Glide Memorial Church, well-known for its comprehensive outreach programs and services, during its affiliation with poet June Jordan and her students from University of California, Berkeley. “Many people from Glide's recovery and human service programs were motivated by the poetry sessions to continue their education by completing GED requirements or beginning college,” said Janice Mirikitani, Glide's executive director of programs. “One young woman, whose family had been welfare recipients for five generations, sought and received financial aid for college and, with additional support from Glide, is one semester from graduation. Her goal is to teach poetry at a university and publish her own poems.”

In some cases, working with writers has motivated affiliate organizations to rethink how they operate. A Writers' Award to short story writer and poet Grace Paley created an opportunity for her to reunite with an organization she helped found in 1967, Teachers & Writers Collaborative, which links people from those two professions. “From an organizational and

personal perspective, working with Grace again has provided an inroad to re-examining our beginnings and our mission," said Nancy Shapiro, director of Teachers & Writers Collaborative. "Her commitment to teaching, social justice and a literary career helps us communicate that it is indeed possible to combine all three."

With the rare opportunity to put their writing first for three years, many of the writers discovered a burst of creativity that surprised even them. Kimiko Hahn, during the first two years of her Writers' Award, drafted her first novel and a poetry collection and also completed for publication the manuscript for *Mosquito and Ant*, a collection of poetry. All of this, she says, would have been impossible without the grant. "At the time of my Writers' Award, I was considering teaching an extra course because I needed the income," she said. "This has been incredibly liberating."

For playwright Richard Nelson, the award influenced the kind of work he chose to take on. "It allowed me to pursue work less commercial than I might have otherwise," he recalled. "I produced one work on a vast scale and another involved a complex collaboration; neither might I have attempted without the award."

Almost universally, writers value the legitimacy that a major grant confers, often affecting their faith in themselves as writers. In fact, Sharon Olds, whose poetry has captured national attention

for many years, has said the award helped make her feel like a "real writer." This kind of reassurance, according to poet C.K. Williams, "has a much more telling place in the generation of artistic work than is probably generally perceived."

"It was like opening the second half of my life with a big vote of confidence," said Lydia Davis, who received word of her Writers' Award on the day after her 50th birthday. Davis used her award period to write a series of short stories, essays and experimental prose pieces, and to work on a translation of Proust's *Swann's Way*.

With the right combination of time and financial support, writers are effective ambassadors for the written word.

"The translation was a wonderful opportunity, but it didn't pay anything up front," she added. "The Writers' Award allowed me to do something important to me without having to take on additional teaching — as well as fulfill a desire to become more involved in my community, which before I couldn't have justified, timewise."

For some writers, their affiliations have provided opportunities to give something back to the communities they felt had supported them. Simon Ortiz refers to this as *ayaa-maatse*, an expression from his native Acoma Pueblo language that describes the Native American tradition of using whatever one receives to help some-

one else. For Mississippi novelist Larry Brown, a self-taught writer who worked as a firefighter for 17 years before his first stories were published, it means organizing and leading a series of authors' readings at the Lafayette County and Oxford Public Library in Oxford, Mississippi. "I wanted to find a way to reciprocate for all the time I spent in the library while I was trying to learn to write," he said. According to librarian Dorothy Fitts, he has. "The readings Larry has organized have given the people in this town a chance to sit eye to eye with authors and ask, 'What do you do and how do you do it?' They're learning that they can tell their stories, too."

For the past decade, recipients of Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Writers' Awards have shown how they can connect more effectively to their craft and their communities. Given the right mix of time and financial support, writers become effective ambassadors for the written word, enriching the lives of people they encounter and reinvigorating passion for their own work. Poet Joy Harjo, whose Writers' Award has provided the opportunity to celebrate the musical and oral Native American literary traditions through writing workshops, readings and community gatherings, has said, "This is something I wish any writer — any artist — could experience." 

writer's perspective | David Mura

David Mura is a third-generation Japanese American, the son of parents interned during World War II. Through poetry, essays, and biographical writings, Mura explores the experience of being Asian American, weaving together both personal and political insights. His book of poems, *The Color of Desire*, won the Carl Sandburg Award from the Friends of the Chicago Public Library. Mura's other honors include a National Poetry Series Contest award for his collection, *After We Lost Our Way*; an NEA Literature Fellowship; a Loft-McKnight Award; two Minnesota State Arts Board grants; a Pushcart Prize; and a Discover/The Nation Award.

Mura, who grew up in Chicago, has lived in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area for the last twenty years. He has been actively involved in the Twin Cities cultural community and plays an important role in steering local arts organizations toward a greater commitment to multiculturalism. In 1991, Mura helped to found Asian American Renaissance, a St. Paul-based grassroots organization dedicated to building an Asian American community through the arts.

Mura used the community affiliate portion of his Writers' Award to create

the Writers' Bloc at Asian-American Renaissance. The Writers' Bloc was designed to address what Mura identified as the two major challenges facing Asian American writers in the Twin Cities. The first was isolation: although Asian Americans represented the largest minority group in Minneapolis-St. Paul, Asian American writers often felt overlooked by the mainstream writers' organizations. One of the effects of this isolation was that Asian American high school students seldom saw writers who looked like them. Mura extracted the second challenge from this situation. Without training, young Asian American writers could not go into the community as writing teachers and mentors.

The Writers' Bloc was designed as a two-tiered program, offered annually for three consecutive years. The first set of intensive workshops brought together a diverse group of young Asian American writers to develop writing and teaching skills. These were followed by a second set of workshops in which these writers shared their new skills with Asian American high school students. Each seasonal set of workshops culminated in a public reading for the adult and student writers, *Writers Out Loud*, at a local coffee shop. The Writers' Bloc at Asian American Renaissance



became the catalyst for a new community of writers. These emerging writers represent the many cultural experiences of Asian Americans in the Twin Cities and are continuing to enliven the Twin Cities' literary and educational scene.

David Mura > "The Writers' Award affirmed my decision to function as a writer outside of an academic setting. It's not the choice that many of my contemporaries have made, but it seems to fit the type of writer I am and my relationship to my community. The grant afforded me the time and energy to open up other areas of my writing and to explore other genres. I did a theatrical piece, *After Hours*, with a jazz musician and an actor, both Chinese-American. I worked on a novel and on a book of essays for the

Poets on Poetry series published by University of Michigan Press. Finally, the award made it possible to complete my memoir, *Where the Body Meets Memory: An Odyssey of Race, Sexuality and Identity*, giving me the added time to work on the book and press on through rewrite after rewrite.

"Of course, the award also allowed me to establish the Writers' Bloc program at Asian American Renaissance. For me, the most valuable part of the experience was reading and hearing the voices that make up our Asian American community and being exposed to the diverse concerns and backgrounds of the participants. The Writers' Bloc gave our young mentor-writers the chance to work with established writers and high school students, and to work as a group supporting each other.

"It was so important for the high school students participating in that program to see people who looked like themselves, saying, 'I am an artist. This is the way I define myself. Writing poetry is what I do.' When I was in high school, I didn't want to associate with other Asian Americans. I didn't want to think of myself as Japanese-American, or as a person of color. Later in my life, I felt that to call myself an 'Asian-American writer' was to locate myself in a literary ghetto, that I would enter the world of literature at the back door through an affirmative action program. However, as I went on writing, I discovered that some

of my strongest poems were tied to my Japanese background. They were about the internment camps. They were about my grandparents. They were about my parents, about Hiroshima, and survival after the atomic bomb.

"The Asian American students in the Writers' Bloc wrote about their families, about love, and about imaginative dreams, but they also wrote about cultural conflicts with parents, about school experiences, and acts of self definition. One of the writers, for instance, was a young Hmong woman who had a kidney disease. The elders and her mother had not wanted her to seek out Western medicine treatment, but she had opted to get a

"The Writers' Award has had a ripple effect in the Twin Cities that will go on for years. This is a much more democratic vision of poetry."

kidney transplant. Just writing about her disease was a departure from Hmong tradition. Her courage to do so helped the Hmong students, especially the women, realize the possibilities for themselves. That was true over and over again for the students as they listened to the mentor-writers read and talk about their work.

"The lessons go beyond being a member of a minority group in America. The cultural similarities and divisions within the Asian American community also

became an important element of the program. In the Asian-American community, people tend to identify with their particular national or ethnic group. Someone who grew up in Vietnam believes that he or she has nothing in common with someone who grew up in India. However, we found that, when we came together through the arts, we could say, 'We share some of the same experiences and some of the same mythology. Let's work together.'

"It's wonderful to see that the writers who worked with the Writers' Bloc are still writing. I see them continuing as a presence in the community in many different ways, adding to the variety of voices here in the Twin Cities. The Writers' Award has had a ripple effect that will go on for many years, far beyond whatever I do individually. When you have people writing about their lives and the lives of the people who were excluded from literature before, the result is a much more democratic vision of poetry."

community connection

David Mura | Asian American Renaissance | St. Paul Minnesota

The Writers' Bloc acted as a catalyst. The participating writers realized that writing was something they really wanted to do. Many of the people who were involved have now infused new energy into the Twin Cities literary scene. So many things blossomed out of that encounter. When you plant a seed in a small town like this, it can really flower!

— Marlina Gonzalez, executive director, Asian American Renaissance

My birth certificate says mother's race — Black
Father's race — Chinese

Mah John and white rice. He said, only Chinese men can gamble and he did — my mom lost. Kept a white dragon.

Night visitors. Apparitions. Black ghosts. Relatives. Dark secrets.

She put a hotcomb over the gas flame, straightened my heavily pomped hair, and scorched me.

Lemon cream, tart. Kept me from getting Dark(er). It wasn't the hot sun burning me. "Don't go near the water, you might drown." Why didn't she just teach me how to swim?

— Excerpted from "White Dragons" by Sherry Quan Lee, participant, Writers' Bloc

writer's perspective | June Jordan

Since the 1960s, June Jordan has been a political activist and an eloquent voice for justice and understanding. Her writings, uncompromising and often controversial, insist on the humanity that lies at the heart of the American experience. Jordan's long professional career has produced more than 25 books of poetry, fiction and essays. Her wide-ranging interests have included a collaboration with architect R. Buckminster Fuller on an urban redesign for Harlem; operas, plays, and children's books. Jordan also regularly contributes her columns of political and social observation to *The Progressive* magazine. Her many honors include the PEN Center USA West Freedom-to-Write Award and fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the New York Foundation for the Arts.

Jordan's community affiliation during the period of her Writers' Award was to expand Poetry for the People, an intensive writing program that she founded in 1990. The project is based at the Berkeley campus of the University of California, where Jordan is a professor of African American Literature and Women's Studies. The award allowed Jordan to build the community outreach component of Poetry for the People by

inaugurating a series of poetry workshops at Glide Memorial United Methodist Church. Located in San Francisco's Tenderloin District, Glide Church has a long tradition of serving San Francisco's poor and disenfranchised populations. The church serves over one million free meals annually and offers a full range of services to the people who enter its doors, including AIDS testing and programs for those who need help with substance abuse recovery, adult literacy and job training.

Jordan designed a workshop series and, working closely with church leadership, recruited participants from Glide's diverse social service programs. Led by Jordan and her student teachers from the Berkeley campus, workshop participants explored the mechanics of poetry and learned to exercise and trust their own voices as writers. The workshops motivated several students to complete their high school equivalency exams, and others to take classes at local colleges. On the broader level, student teachers in the Poetry for the People program have since replicated the model, taking its methods and message to greater numbers of people.



June Jordan > "The Writers' Award from the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund did everything for my morale as an artist, although, at the time, the celebrating was pretty quiet. I was two years into my efforts to survive breast cancer, and my first thought was — How can I make the most of this unexpected gift in whatever time I have remaining? The first thing I did was hire an assistant to do research and get things into the computer, so that I could concentrate on what I loved, which is writing. With the help of the grant, I wrote the libretto for the opera, *I Was Looking at the Ceiling and Then I Saw the Sky*. I also worked on a novel, finished all the poems for *Kissing God Good-bye*, and produced an incredible number of essays.

"Equally significant, the award allowed me to realize my long-standing dream to make Poetry for the People socially responsible in a way that other people could see and emulate. Glide Church plays a very important role in the San Francisco community, through its many outreach programs and services. Most of the people recruited for our workshops were already coming to Glide Church because of serious crises they were facing in their personal lives. At first, we had to work hard on building attendance. These people were not used to making commitments, or having other people make commitments to them. We arranged to serve food at each workshop, in order to attract the homeless people who came to the church every day for their meals. The meal was a nice way to make people feel welcome before plunging into the most personal aspects of their lives. It turned out to be a good exchange. We showed up with food every week, rain or shine, and they made a commitment to their own voices.

"There were times when we had as many as a hundred people, diverse in gender, race, age, and ability. We always began by sitting in a big circle and talking about what makes a poem. One week we might discuss metaphors, the next week we might talk about verbs, and so on. It was surprising to discover how many people, even those in the most desperate personal situations, wanted to focus on the most technical aspects of poetry. After the group

discussion, we'd disperse into smaller groups, to talk about the poems they'd written.

"Most of the people in our workshops were older. At first, my student teachers found this daunting; they weren't sure what they could offer people older than their parents. There was some resistance on the other side as well, when the older

"Everyone quickly came to the realization that language has the power to get one heard."

people saw that they would be working with a bunch of kids. However, everyone came quickly to the understanding that, when you learn to write a competent poem, you can use the power of language to express yourself, so that you will be heard. Other people will care, or at least understand. This is an astounding realization. It cuts across class and age and race.

"In our culture there are very few ways to achieve this understanding. It means setting up a community of trust. This became a profound draw for our people at Glide Church. At the end of every workshop we'd have an open mike reading. It required courage for people to stand up and present what they had done. When you have several hundred people hushed because you have come up and taken the microphone, that's amazing.

"My hope was to create something that would catch on across the country. I know that when it comes to community outreach, Glide Church is unique, and Poetry for the People is unique. I also know that there are lots of good people out there, and I hoped they would be emboldened by our success. It has happened just as I had hoped. Our graduating student-mentors have set up Poetry for the People in New Haven and Los Angeles; and Humboldt College has created Poetry for the People North. This award is helping people all over the country recognize the pivotal relationship between the arts and the advancement of any human civilization."

community connection

June Jordan | Glide Memorial Church | San Francisco, California

In my first year as a student teacher, I facilitated a group of eight community members. My group was diverse in terms of gender, race, age, and ability. They all shared one thing; none of them had ever written about their personal experiences.

I remember one student — an elderly gentleman — who brought in a poem full of abstract ideas and meaningless metaphors. The rest of us had no idea to what he was referring. I gave him some guidelines and politely encouraged him to apply them to his next draft. At the next meeting, that poem had become a moving description of his feelings at the hospital bed of his lover, who had died of AIDS. This was not only first time he had written about it, but also the first time he spoke about it. Reading the poem was a turning point.

Some activists take a role, to be the voices for the voiceless. June Jordan gives voice to the poets and artists formerly voiceless. June Jordan is the best example of the brilliance that results from the fusion of poetry, politics, and community activism.

— Junichi Semitsu, student-mentor, University of California-Berkeley

I hold my head up,
prone to walk through any storm
I am proud of me.

— Magnolia Jackson, participant, Poetry for the People, Glide Memorial Church

writer's perspective | Lee Smith

When she was eleven years old, Lee Smith published a hand-lettered newspaper — circulation of twelve copies — filled with observations and commentary on her neighbors in Grundy, Virginia. More than one dozen novels and short story collections later, Smith is still spreading the news with compassion and eloquence, her ear tuned to the colorful cadences of Appalachian storytelling. Her first novel, *The Last Day The Dog Bushes Bloomed*, started as a senior thesis at Hollins College. Smith's novels and short stories have received many awards, including the Award in Literature from the American Academy of Arts and Letters; the Robert Penn Warren Prize for Fiction; two O Henry Awards; the North Carolina Award for Fiction, and the Sir Walter Raleigh Award for her novels *Oral History* and *Fair and Tender Ladies*. Her novels *Saving Grace* and *The Christmas Letters* and a short story collection, *News of the Spirit*, were published during the period of her Writers' Award.

For her community affiliation, Lee Smith elected to work at the Hindman Settlement School. Established in 1902, the Hindman School is located in Knott County, Kentucky, one of the state's poorest and most isolated areas.

The school provides education to people of all ages and also serves as a cultural center where local heritage is preserved and celebrated. Lee Smith was a familiar presence at Hindman, having served for many years as a visiting artist at the school's summer Appalachian Writers Conference.

During the period of the grant, Smith took a sabbatical from university teaching and expanded her residencies at the Hindman School, visiting three times annually. During her visits, she established workshops for adult learners in Hindman's literacy and GED programs. In addition to her classroom work, Smith pursued an active schedule of readings at local schools, churches, and community centers in the Knott County area. Lee Smith's residencies drew national attention to the Hindman School and its programs, with stories on National Public Radio and CBS "Sunday Morning," as well as her own op-ed article for the *New York Times*.

Smith's experience at the Hindman School not only enriched the participants in the class, but became the catalyst for change in her own career. In 1999, she retired from North Carolina State University to devote her time to writing and continued community outreach,



primarily at the Hindman Settlement School, where she now serves on the board of directors.

Lee Smith > "The Writers' Award changed my life in a way that completely surprised me. The timing was perfect. The award came at a point when I was becoming disenchanted with academic life. My graduate students were talking about agents and advances and all those kinds of things, but that's not what writing is about. I decided to take an extended sabbatical. For three years I didn't teach, and the freedom that gave me was just amazing. I did a whole lot of writing and a whole lot of reading. The grant also gave me the chance to evaluate my writing and the notion of career. It gave me enough leisure to reflect a little, which is something I really hadn't had. And, after

reflection, I quit teaching — at least in the traditional sense.

“The residencies I did at the Hindman School turned out to be refreshing in ways I hadn't at all expected. The work took me back to the roots of language, and reminded me all over again how thrilling it is simply to communicate. Working with the men and women in the literacy and GED classes, I saw the empowerment that comes through reading and writing. The experience of

“Working at the Hindman School reminded me again how thrilling it is simply to communicate.”

learning to read and write as an adult is vastly different from the experience of learning to read and write as a small child. It is filled with so many pitfalls, fears, and terror, years of low self-esteem, years of hiding the fact of illiteracy, and being unable to advance in a job or a career. Those of us who learned to read as children can never begin to understand these concerns.

“Until I worked at Hindman, I never truly understood the gulf that exists between the literate and illiterate. People who are illiterate are very isolated. They become fearful and, over time, lose their social skills. I couldn't understand that isolation at first. Many of the students in the

Hindman programs were smart, attractive, fairly young women. However, when they began writing about their lives, I learned that most of them had gotten pregnant at 14 or 15 or 16; they had left school and never returned. Telling their stories became very important.

“Usually in literacy workshops, the participants are so occupied with mastering linguistic skills that they never have a chance to tell their own stories. Most of them don't think that their own lives are important enough to be told. They don't understand that their own language is beautiful, that their own stories really are important. But if the person who is encouraging this process is interested and appreciative, then they just write more and more. I was there to make that possible and to work one-to-one with people who wanted to get their stories down.

“During my residencies, I took each day's writing back to my room, and I typed it up. Whenever possible, I gave a copy to everyone in the group. It was important to see that their writing was *real writing*. One man wrote about how he was illiterate and then got up the nerve to go to classes. Now he's an apostle for learning! There was a woman in the high school equivalency program who was so shy at first that she wouldn't say a thing, and she wouldn't look up from the table. Three years later, she was wearing make-up and fingernail polish, joining every discussion, and suing her ex-husband for child support.

“There was Florida Stone, who was famous in her community for making up songs. For years she had sung about what was happening in her family, in her home, and in her church. She would sing her songs in public, but she didn't know how to read or write. She had never gone to school. Her mother had been sickly, so she had stayed home to take care of the children. Then she was married very young, to an older man who felt a woman didn't need to read and write. She had six children, who all went to school, but it wasn't until her husband's death that she marched down to the adult learning center. When I got to Hindman, she was just dying to write her songs down. We worked together every day. On the last night of my visit, she came in and presented me with twenty songs she had written out. Each one had taken a long time, and she had stayed up all night to finish. It was wonderful.

“I really love the rhythm and dialect and intonation of the mountain language. I grew up around people who were good storytellers, and the first stories I ever heard were people who spoke in the mountain language. Going to Hindman immersed me again in that culture. I had been gone a long time, and it was wonderful to be back with my own roots. Being at Hindman also reminded me how much I love to work with people. Helping these people express themselves in writing for the first time was like watching them fall in love.”

community connection

Lee Smith | Hindman Settlement School | Hindman, Kentucky

I've never seen anything like the impact Lee Smith has had on the students here. Her compassion and willingness to become part of the group, and the confidence she gave them were beautiful to behold. Not one person knew that Lee was a nationally known author; they just knew she was interested in their lives.

— Mike Mullins, executive director, Hindman Settlement School

Last night I sat and watched the clouds go by
I heard whippoorwills call from the mountains so high
I heard the water as it dripped soft and low
Seems like death is a secret nobody knows.

— excerpted from “Last Night,” *A Garden of Songs*, by Florida Stone

I didn't know learning to read would change my life so much. It has made me have more confidence in myself. Before, I even had a fear of going into a public restroom. I had a fear of being embarrassed of someone handing me something to read. I stayed away from places such as banks, post offices and doctors' offices. The first visit to a new doctor was hardest because you had to fill out forms. I always had my wife with me. Now, I'll go anywhere. Also, me and my wife leave notes for each other. Now that's something!

— Connel Polly, adult learner, Hindman Settlement School

writer's perspective | Luis Rodriguez

In his memoir, *Always Running: La Vida Loca, Gang Days in L.A.*, Luis J. Rodriguez demonstrated the redemptive power of writing. Raised in the barrios of Watts and East Los Angeles, Rodriguez's childhood and adolescence were marked by gangs, drugs, and violence. By the time he was 18 years old, Rodriguez had used heroin, fought with guns and knives, and spent time in jail. In the end, he says, it was the discovery of his writer's voice that saved him.

In addition to *Always Running*, Rodriguez has published poetry, children's books, and essays. His writing has been recognized with a Carl Sandburg Award from the Friends of the Chicago Public Library; the PEN West/Josephine Miles Award for Literary Excellence; and a San Francisco State University Poetry Center Book Award. In 1998 he was honored at Kennedy Center with the Hispanic Heritage Award.

Luis Rodriguez has spent the past 25 years encouraging the powers of expression in young people who are struggling with the same disadvantages and dangers that nearly claimed him. In Chicago, where he has lived since 1985, Rodriguez was instrumental in founding Youth Struggling for Survival, an organization

that develops alternatives to gang membership. In 1989, Rodriguez helped to found the Guild Complex, a literary arts and performance center. The Chopin Theater, the Guild's performance space, is located in Wicker Park, a largely Mexican and Puerto Rican community. Considered neutral territory by local gang members, the Chopin Theater serves as a year-round venue for literary readings, workshops, discussions and "open mike" events.

When Rodriguez envisioned a series of workshops for young writers as his Writers' Award community affiliation, it was natural that he would turn to the Guild Complex, where he sits on the board and is the founder of Tia Chucha Press, the center's publishing arm. The Guild Complex and the Chopin Theater offer a safe and supportive environment for young writers to discover their voices. Rodriguez created the Prism Writers Workshop, an eight-week summer program that covered all genres — poetry, fiction, playwriting, nonfiction, and journalism.

More than 70 percent of the young people who enrolled in the Prism Writers Workshop completed the program, a remarkable record given the considerable challenges they faced, including work, parenting, transportation and gang affiliations. At the end of the program,



family, friends and community members were invited to the Chopin Theater for a tearful and exhilarating public performance showcasing the work of the Prism Writers. In addition, some of the young writers' work was included in *Power Lines*, a ten-year anthology of poetry from the Guild Complex.

Luis Rodriguez > "There is a Spanish word — *poderes*. It means "powers" — powers that everyone possesses. Powers of expression, powers of story, powers of being attentive, powers of relationship. When you tap into these powers with writing, you extend your humanity. That's a beautiful concept to bring to young writers. They learn that everything they need to be right in this world is in their own nature.

"Over the years, I had done workshops in all sorts of places: homeless shelters, juvenile facilities, schools, prisons. But I had always thought it would be good to do a workshop that would combine writing with mentoring youth. The Writers' Award made that possible.

"We started the Prism Writers Workshop by approaching all kinds of local organizations and asking them to recommend kids to us—from honor students to drop-outs, homeless kids to wealthy kids, gang kids and non-gang kids. We especially wanted to reach young people who were dealing with violence, addiction, and abuse. Life for young people is very different, even from the life I knew. It's different because there are more dangers—more firepower in the streets, a more pervasive lack of economic means, and what seems to be a stronger

"The Writers' Award provided the most fruitful time of my writing life... I'm most prolific when I'm engaged in the world around me."

cultural push against young people. But the kids themselves aren't that different. They're just as lost and confused — and they have just as much ability to get through it all. Through the Prism Writers Workshop, these kids learned to look at adults in a new way, as elders and mentors who related to them beyond the program level, with an

almost spiritual connection that created a community and even a family.

"I talked with each group about the writer's life, based on my own experience and the experience of other writers. In school, kids learn that writing is all about grammar and spelling and syntax, but I wanted to go beyond that and give the students a sense of the clarity, the purpose, and, most important, the passion that lies behind writing. I told them that becoming a writer meant changing my life, so that I could put everything behind the discipline that writing requires. I wanted them to feel what it's like when writing becomes your destiny.

"The Prism Writers Workshop turned out to be much more successful than we anticipated. I was afraid the kids would get stuck, but they just got better. One of the best parts of the program was watching the students discover their talent. Even though they wanted to write, they had low self-esteem — they were always putting obstacles in front of themselves. As the workshops went on, though, I could see them develop a sense of something inexhaustible within themselves, which will always be there for them if they tap into it and are disciplined about the writing.

"At the end of the workshop series, we held performances in the Chopin Theater. Two hundred people showed up! One girl sang her poem; it was so powerful, really beautiful. Another girl couldn't read her

own work, so she asked someone to read it for her. For the first time, this girl revealed the abuse she was getting at home, bringing words to it that transcended the experience. Another young woman cried as she read her piece about a cousin who had been killed in a drive-by shooting. These are the moments of epiphany, when you hear someone recite a line or a verse that gets close to the truth in a way that no one ever has before.

"As for myself, I can say without equivocation that the Writers' Award provided the most fruitful time of my writing life. Even with all the work I do with youth and the Guild Complex, the award made it possible for me to write like crazy. Over the course of three years, I finished a short story collection, a collection of essays, and a book on how to work with youth and violence. There's definitely a connection. The more fulfilled I am in my social relationships, the more fulfilled I am as a writer. I'm most prolific when I'm really engaged in the world around me. The work I'm doing with young people doesn't just help them, it helps me to be a better writer."

community connection

Luis Rodriguez | Guild Complex | Chicago, Illinois

When young people are given the opportunity to step outside of their environment, the experience can lead to new insights. They become renewed. That is the most exciting effect of our three-year summer workshop, "Writing Through the Prisms of Self and Community." Luis Rodriguez played a critical role in getting these young artists excited about language and life. Through engagement with their peers and mentors, tackling tough issues in their everyday lives, and taking on the discipline of writing with the sense that it is relevant to their future, these remarkable young writers have prepared themselves to make contributions to their communities.

When we created the Prism Writers Workshops our vision included facilitating the emergence of a new generation of passionate and socially engaged writers, whose voices would be heard. So when one of the Prism Workshop writers recently won the Pegasus Players Young Playwrights Festival Award in Chicago, I knew that the vision was well on its way to becoming reality.

— Michael Warr, founding executive director, Guild Complex

In these firm, yielding arms
she rocks me
her clothing rustles
and her sweet scent of
fresh sheets & warm sweaters
rises

What mysteries is she hiding?
in those eyes
which are warm pools of honey

— "A Simple Poem," Hermes Xochitl aka Juan Santana, Prism Writers Workshop participant

What mystery is she hiding?
In that deep melodic
song of a bird
who only sings at
night
in the barest
tree
near
the darkest cave

writer's perspective | Sharon Olds

Sharon Olds has published poetry for the past twenty years that has been praised for its directness, honesty and humanity—and hailed as "Whitmanesque." *Satan Says*, the first of her eight volumes of poems, was the winner of the inaugural San Francisco Poetry Center Award. Her second book, *The Dead and the Living*, was the Lamont Poetry Selection from the Academy of American Poets and the winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award. *The Wellspring*, completed during the tenure of Olds' Writers' Award, has been cited as a Recommended Book by the Poetry Book Society of England. Her most recent book, *Blood, Tin, Straw*, was published in 1999. Olds, who teaches in the Graduate Creative Writing Program at New York University, currently serves as Poet Laureate for New York State.

For the community affiliate portion of her Writers' Award, Olds expanded the writing program she founded at Goldwater Hospital, a 900-bed hospital for the severely physically disabled on New York City's Roosevelt Island. The program brings graduate writing students from New York University to work with Goldwater residents who, overcome by accident or disease, have severely limited means of communication. Some can

"speak" only by laboriously spelling out words with a mouth stick and typewriter, or by waving a laser wand over a light-sensitive computer keyboard.

During the three-year award period, Olds experimented with ways to expand and enhance this program. Each year, six student poets and fiction writers were selected to work with the Goldwater residents. In addition to directing workshops, the student teachers served as tutors, advisors, and writing companions to residents. Despite their limitations, Goldwater residents developed individual and eloquent voices. Annual readings of their work were well attended and received with tremendous enthusiasm.

The Goldwater Hospital affiliation is now a permanent part of the New York University's Creative Writing Program. Fund support made it possible for Sharon Olds and Goldwater Hospital to develop and disseminate newsletters about the program to writers, occupational therapists, and writing programs nationwide. As a result, the Goldwater Hospital program has become not only a literary lifeline for its participants, but a model of literary outreach to an underserved community.



Sharon Olds > "When I found out that my Writers' Award also included a grant for the Goldwater Hospital program, I started sobbing like a baby. Those first few years at Goldwater had taken an unbelievable amount of time — licking envelopes, seeking grants and individual donations, doing benefit readings and, in an impassioned bake-sale way, doing everything we could to keep the program going. The grant from the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund meant that the program would be safe for three years.

"Those of us involved in the writing program at Goldwater have learned that we all have disabilities, but that writing both transcends and addresses them. All I can do is write one poem at a time, in one sitting, very often on buses or trains — wherever an idea comes to me. But for poets living under the most adverse

conditions, the process is more complicated. I think of Vanessa Cole, one of Goldwater's residents. The only movement she has is in one foot, so when she writes, she touches a cardboard chart with her toe, letter by letter, and a transcriber writes it down, and her poems come out like Emily Dickinson.

"The students in the NYU writing program are exceptional people, some of the finest writers in graduate school in this country. Many of them apply for jobs at Goldwater — so many that there aren't enough jobs to go around. Each semester's group of teachers brings a fresh perspective to the hospital. And the teaching goes both ways. When they come to Goldwater, the students meet people who are extremely wise and compassionate and highly developed as emotional and moral beings.

"The award allowed me to increase the time I needed to write. I've entered a pattern of working so that I'll never be ten years behind again"

"The difference between the poems written at Goldwater and the poems written by graduate students in their first semester is that the Goldwater poems have no self-pity. Self-pity, we learn, is a luxury that people can only indulge when they aren't up against the emergency that is life.

"There are such wonderful poems and stories being written in the workshops. The Goldwater writers have taught us, by example, about humor and realism and the ability to live in an unimaginable state of challenge. Accidents and illnesses have paralyzed them, but not in spirit. These are exceptional people of unusual strength; knowing them educates one's vision of human nature. For everyone involved, the work done there is a precious part of life.

"The Writers' Award made me feel like a 'real writer.' It's hard for me to say what I mean by that. I've been writing for so long, why wouldn't I think I was a real writer? But sometimes people who are doing creative work feel a little bit like fakes. The recognition from the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund gave me heart. The award also allowed me to reduce my readings and travel, increasing the amount of time I needed to write and revise poems and to gather them into book form. I was far behind in putting poems together into collections. I had kept up with fundraising for Goldwater better than I had kept up with my own work. During the period of the grant, I wrote many new poems, and I completed the manuscript of a long-delayed book, *The Wellspring*. The grant also gave me time to make preparations for the next collection of poems, *Blood, Tin, Straw*. I've now entered into a pattern of working so that I'll never be ten years behind again.

"Meanwhile, my dream is to see outreach programs like Goldwater in hospitals, prisons, hospices, grammar schools, and high schools. With the help of the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund, we were able to send newsletters to every graduate writing program in the country; we want every one of them to start something like the Goldwater program. Working at Goldwater deepens my sense of the place of the arts in the world — to make art may not be a luxury for an individual or a society, but a necessity."

community connection

Sharon Olds | Goldwater Hospital | New York, New York

From our Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund grant, we have been able to get other support and turn the workshops into a permanent part of the graduate writing program at New York University. The students get such an enormous amount from going in and working with the writers at Goldwater, but the program has also helped raise the consciousness of the larger writing community about what can be done with literary outreach. This program has been an important part of a movement that is now nationwide.

— Melissa Hammerle, director, Creative Writing Programs, New York University

Have you ever seen a beautiful sunset
lingering and when it is about to disappear
it has a soft hint of purple trail behind it
it is like a lingering love affair
passion is only a small part of the whole
picture

— Vanessa Cole, Goldwater Hospital resident

LILA WALLACE-READER'S DIGEST WRITERS' AWARDS RECIPIENTS AND AFFILIATE ORGANIZATIONS • 1990-1999

WALTER ABISH, novelist (1991)
Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art, New York, NY
Conducted annual six-week seminars for students and neighborhood residents that explored the cross-disciplinary uses of language and creativity.

SHERMAN ALEXIE, poet, novelist (1994)
United Indians of All Tribes Foundation, Seattle, WA

Organized the Seattle Native American Writers Outreach Project, which included a series of residencies that paired well-known Native American writers with local writers in readings, performances and writing workshops for Head Start preschoolers, runaways, homeless juveniles and the elderly.

RICHARD BAUSCH, novelist, short story writer (1992)
Loudoun Public Libraries, Leesburg, VA
Presented a series of "Writers' Evenings" in area public libraries.

CHARLES BAXTER, novelist, short story writer (1991)
Washtenaw Council for the Arts, Ann Arbor, MI
Conducted "Forums for Writing," a series of workshops in public libraries in three Michigan counties.

FRANK BIDART, poet (1991)
New England Foundation for the Arts, Cambridge, MA
Gave public readings and conducted discussions throughout New England about the role of poetry and poets in today's world.

SVEN BIRKERTS, essayist (1990)
The Boston Review, Boston, MA
Moderated a series of public talks with well-known writers around contemporary issues such as the rise of new media and the decline of reading.

LARRY BROWN, novelist (1998)
Oxford Public Library, Oxford, MS
Presenting a series of public readings and talks by well-known authors.

LORNA DEE CERVANTES, poet (1995)
Newer West Side Development Corporation, Denver, CO
Presented an annual series of residencies with visiting writers.

DENISE CHAVES, novelist (1999)
PEN American Center, New York, NY
Leading memoir writing and oral history workshops with older adults in Las Cruces, NM.

AMY CLAMPITT, poet (1990)
The Poet's Theater, Cambridge, MA
Led a series of public readings and discussions of her play-in-development, *Mad With Joy*.

LUCILLE CLIFTON, poet (1998)
St. Mary's College, St. Mary's City, Maryland
Conducting an oral history project with elementary school students.

ROBERT COHEN, novelist, short story writer (1990)
Writers in the Schools Program, Houston, TX
Helped train public school teachers to become better writing instructors.

STANLEY CRAWFORD, novelist, nonfiction writer (1999)
PEN American Center, New York, NY
Leading writing workshops and readings at El Museo Cultural in Santa Fe, NM.

ROBERT CREELEY, poet, novelist, playwright (1995)
Just Buffalo Literary Center, Buffalo, NY
Helped high school students develop an electronic poetry magazine available on the World Wide Web.

EDWIDGE DANTICAT, novelist, short story writer (1996)
National Coalition for Haitian Rights, New York, NY

Presented a series of interdisciplinary arts events featuring Haitian and Haitian-American artists.

LYDIA DAVIS, short story writer, translator (1997)
Town of Esopus Port Ewen Public Library, Port Ewen, NY

Promoting local interest in contemporary literature in general, and in the Hudson Valley's literary tradition in particular, through a series of talks by writers from the Hudson Valley region.

THULANI DAVIS, novelist, poet (1996)
New York University, Institute of Afro-American Affairs, New York, NY
Curated a series of symposia that explored the ways in which different cultures define community.

DON DELILLO, novelist (1995)
Alzheimer's Association, Westchester County Chapter, White Plains, NY

Led writing workshops for caregivers of Alzheimer's patients and patients in the early stages of the disease.

JUNOT DIAZ, short story writer (1999)
PEN American Center, New York, NY
Leading writing workshops for immigrant youth in New York City.

W.S. DI PIERO, poet, essayist (1998)
San Francisco Public Library, San Francisco, CA
Conducting a series of readings and talks by Bay Area writers.

MARK DOTY, poet (1999)
PEN American Center, New York, NY
Leading master classes at New York City's Gay and Lesbian Community Center.

BRUCE DUFFY, novelist (1992)
Washington DC Humanities Council, Washington, DC
Coordinated panel discussions with local residents that explored change in several neighborhoods from a historical and contemporary perspective.

CHRISTOPHER DURANG, playwright (1994)
Alcoholism Council Fellowship Center, New York, NY
Led annual playwrighting workshops for adult children of alcoholics where theater pieces, written by workshop participants, were staged with professional actors and presented at area high schools.

ELIZABETH EGLOFF, playwright (1993)
New York Shakespeare Festival, New York, NY
Conducted writing workshops for the chronically ill, including those living with cancer and other life-threatening conditions.

MARIA IRENE FORNES, playwright (1991)
Theater for the New City, New York, NY
Directed three plays by young Hispanic playwrights and conducted workshops for emerging playwrights.

IAN FRAZIER, nonfiction writer (1994)
Church of the Holy Apostles, New York, NY
Provided homeless people with professional guidance in writing about their experiences, which were followed by participants giving readings of their work.

JAMES GALVIN, poet, nonfiction writer (1995)
Writer's Voice of YMCA, Billings, MT
Gave readings for ranchers, environmentalists and other regional citizens' groups in communities in Montana, Wyoming and Colorado.

JOHN ROLFE GARDINER, novelist, short story writer (1993)
Woolly Mammoth Theater, Washington, DC
Presented a series of programs of dramatized short fiction.

JACK GILBERT, poet (1998)
San Francisco Public Library, San Francisco, CA
Coordinating a series of readings and talks by Bay Area writers.

MARY GORDON, novelist (1992)
Elders Share the Arts, Brooklyn, NY
Worked with elderly people in New York City to translate their life stories into creative writing.

PHILIP KAN GOTANDA, playwright (1991)
East West Players, Los Angeles, CA
Helped forge links between contemporary Asian American theaters and other ethnic and minority theater communities through the development of original performance pieces.

JIM GRIMSLEY, novelist, playwright (1997)
Seven Stages Theater, Atlanta, GA
Leading a series of conversations between theatergoers and playwrights.

THOM GUNN, poet, critic (1990)
The Threepenny Review, San Francisco, CA
Curated a series of literary readings in the San Francisco Bay Area.

JESSICA HAGEDORN, poet, novelist, playwright (1994)
Third World Newsreel, New York, NY
Created a series of public forums that explore the theme "Writers and Film" in conjunction with the New York Public Library.

KIMIKO HAHN, poet (1997)
Queens Borough Public Library, Jamaica, NY
Conducting poetry writing workshops for adults that focus on the ideas of assimilation and multiculturalism, two particularly potent themes in Queens, the most ethnically diverse county in the world.

MARK HALLIDAY, poet (1998)
Dairy Barn Southeastern Ohio Cultural Arts Center, Athens, OH
Conducted a series of readings and talks by well-known authors.

RON HANSEN, novelist (1996)
Santa Clara University, San Jose, CA
Conducted writing workshops through the university's Eastside Project for members of San Jose's immigrant communities.

JOY HARJO, poet (1997)
Atlant, Inc., Phoenix, AZ
Directing a series of day-long literary festivals celebrating Native American literature.

bell hooks, nonfiction writer (1994)
New York Shakespeare Festival, New York, NY
Presented an arts education initiative for inner-city youth who have had little exposure to the arts as well as a series of public forums that brought together artists and scholars to discuss political and cultural issues related to the festival's programs.

LAURA JENSEN, poet (1993)
Tacoma Arts Commission, Tacoma, WA
Presented a monthly series of readings and performances called the "Distinguished Poet's Series."

HA JIN, novelist (1999)
PEN American Center, New York, NY
Presenting public programs at libraries, schools and cultural centers in San Francisco, New York, Chicago, St. Louis and other cities.

JUNE JORDAN, poet, essayist (1994)
Glide Memorial Church, San Francisco, CA
Helped graduate writing students from the University of California, Berkeley conduct writing workshops for residents of the city's Tenderloin District who receive an array of social services from the church.

ADRIENNE KENNEDY, playwright (1993)
Creative Writing Workshop Projects, Adrienne Kennedy Society, Cleveland, OH
Conducted residencies with young people from the fifth and sixth grades of Cleveland's magnet school for low-income and minority students.

JAMAICA KINCAID, novelist (1994)
Vermont Reading Project, Chester, VT
Presented several renowned writers to audiences of adult literacy students throughout Vermont.

MAXINE HONG KINGSTON, novelist (1992)
Community of Mindful Living, Berkeley, CA
Led writing workshops and retreats on the themes of war and peace for veterans and others in the San Francisco Bay area.

AUGUST KLEINZAHLER, poet (1991)
Intersection for the Arts, San Francisco, CA
Conducted writing workshops at a transitional housing program run by a veterans organization and for neighborhood schools in the city's Mission District.

VERLYN KLINKENBORG, essayist, historian (1991)
The School of American Research, Santa Fe, NM
Organized a series of public discussions involving scholars and artists from the school and health care professionals working with the local Indian Health Service to explore the history of health care on the reservations and the connections between traditional and western medicine. He also offered a public writing workshop at an Indian Health Service clinic that explored cultural images of the body.

TONY KUSHNER, playwright (1999)
PEN American Center, New York, NY
Leading discussions of the playwriting process with New York City high school and college students.

DAVID LEHMAN, poet, critic (1991)
The Community School of Music and Arts, Ithaca, NY
Developed an annual series of public readings and discussions for both adult and younger audiences.

ADRIAN C. LOUIS, poet, novelist (1995)
Oglala Lakota College, Kyle, SD
Conducted an annual writing program for members of the community that culminated in the publication of participants' writing in the college's literary magazine and a day-long literary festival for the entire tribal community.

HEATHER MCHUGH, poet, essayist (1995)
The Maine Collaborative, Eastport, ME
Conducted an annual residency with the Eastport elementary school in which she taught writing workshops for teachers who, in turn, engaged their students in writing activities.

ELLEN McLAUGHLIN, playwright (1995)
American Friends Service Committee, New York, NY
Led dramatic workshops for refugees from the former Yugoslavia.

ASKOLD MELNYCZUK, novelist, poet (1996)
Boston University, Boston, MA
Developed residencies for professional writers in Boston's public schools.

W.S. MERWIN, poet, essayist (1994)
Environment Hawai'i, Hilo, HI
Planned three conferences for the public about the role of water in Hawaiian culture.

JANE MILLER, poet (1991)
University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ
Worked with graduate writing students through The Poetry Center at the university to present poetry workshops for senior citizens in the Tucson area.

DAVID MURA, poet, memoirist (1994)
Asian American Renaissance, St. Paul, MN
Offered an annual workshop called Writers' Blocs to young people of Asian American heritage to build a sense of community through writing and reading, culminating each year in a reading by all involved participants.

RICHARD NELSON, playwright (1990)
The New York Public Library at Lincoln Center and Lincoln Center Theater, New York, NY
Led a series of public conversations with playwrights on the state of contemporary theater.

FAE MYENNE NG, novelist (1996)
Literacy Assistance Center, New York, NY
Conducted oral history and writing workshops for Chinese immigrants.

SIMON ORTIZ, poet, short story writer (1996)
Telluride Institute, Telluride, CO
Created artists' residencies for Native Americans in urban areas such as Tucson and Denver.

SHARON OLDS, poet (1992)
New York University/Goldwater Hospital Teacher Training, New York, NY
Coordinated workshops with graduate writing students for the severely physically disabled at the hospital.

GRACE PALEY, essayist, poet, short story writer (1997)
Teachers and Writers Collaborative, New York, NY
Leading master classes in poetry for New York City public school teachers.

MICHAEL PALMER, poet, (1991)
The Poetry Center at San Francisco State University, San Francisco, CA
Presented a series of public readings and discussions, co-sponsored by the San Francisco Public Library on the theme of "Literature and Community."

SUZAN-LORI PARKS, playwright (1995)
New York Public Library, New York, NY
Developed an afterschool writing program for seventh and eighth graders in several of the library's Harlem branches.

VICTOR PERERA, nonfiction writer (1991)
Sephardic House, New York, NY
Coordinated a series of symposia exploring topics of interest to the Sephardic community, such as Sephardic ethical literature, poetic tradition, and the Western Sephardic tradition.

PATRICIA POWELL, novelist (1999)
PEN American Center, New York, NY
Leading writing workshops and other activities in Boston, MA, with West Indian immigrants and young people at a local high school.

ISHMAEL REED, novelist, playwright, poet (1997)
Oakland Public Library, Oakland, CA
Conducting discussions of plays and playwriting with adult literacy students and accompanying them to performances of the works they have discussed.

ED ROBERSON, poet (1998)
Good News Home for Women, Flemington, NJ
Conducting a series of writing workshops for recovering addicts at this drug and alcohol rehabilitation facility.

MARILYNNE ROBINSON, novelist, nonfiction writer (1990)
University of Iowa Library, Iowa City, IA
Gave a series of public talks on the importance of historical research to fiction writing.

LUIS RODRIGUEZ, poet, critic (1996)
The Guild Complex, Chicago, IL
Conducted a series of writing workshops for young people.

ANTON SHAMMAS, novelist, poet (1992)
Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services, Dearborn, MI
Invited writers and other artists of Arab decent to conduct residencies for the Detroit area general public.

NTOZAKE SHANGE, playwright, poet, novelist (1992)
Freedom Theater, Philadelphia, PA
Involved audiences in the development of a new work about families of color.

ALAN SHAPIRO, poet (1991)
North Carolina Humanities Council, Raleigh, NC
Presented a series of readings, workshops and discussions throughout North Carolina in which community groups, business organizations, church groups and teachers explored the relationship of poetry to contemporary life.

BAPSI SIDHWA, novelist (1993)
Asia Society, Houston, TX
Coordinated an annual series of four public readings and discussions through the "Indo-Pak Friendship Forum," which was designed to promote greater understanding of the separate cultures and religions of South Asia among segments of this community and the general public.

LESLIE MARMON SILKO, novelist (1991)
Hopi Tribe, Kykotsmovi, AZ
Worked with teachers and students in reservation schools to help link the rich oral tradition of the Hopi culture to the written word.

MONA SIMPSON, novelist (1995)
PEN Center USA West, Los Angeles, CA
Taught writing workshops for emerging writers in the Los Angeles area.

TOM SLEIGH, poet (1992)
Oral History Center, Cambridge, MA
Coordinated writing workshops with homeless people in Boston.

LEE SMITH, novelist, short story writer (1994)
Hindman Settlement School, Hindman, KY
Conducted annual residencies with adult literacy students and their families from which students' work was edited for a series of anthologies and radio broadcast.

GARY SNYDER, poet (1998)
North Columbia Schoolhouse Cultural Center, Nevada City, CA
Presenting a series of talks related to the ecology of Northern California.

SUSAN STEWART, poet (1995)
Free Library of Philadelphia, Philadelphia, PA
Developed a poetry program for adult literacy students that featured three annual readings by visiting poets. She also worked with instructors to develop curricular materials for teaching poetry.

ARTHUR SZE, poet (1997)
Santa Fe Public Library, Santa Fe, NM
Conducting poetry writing workshops for teenagers.

ELLEN BRYANT VOIGT, poet (1998)
Vermont Center for the Book, Chester, VT
Conducting poetry workshops in public schools.

ROSMARIE WALDROP, poet, translator (1998)
Providence Athenaeum, Providence, RI
Presenting a series of readings and talks by poets and translators.

GEOFFREY WARD, nonfiction writer (1993)
New York Society Library, New York, NY
Brought the process of writing biography to a general non-scholarly audience through three annual lectures and discussions at the oldest library in New York City.

ROSANNA WARREN, poet, translator (1993)
Boston University Prison Education Program, Boston, MA
Taught a weekly writing seminar and established an accredited academic course in creative writing.

MAC WELLMAN, playwright (1996)
Brooklyn Academy of Music, Brooklyn, NY
Hosted a series of discussions with playwrights and drama critics.

ROBERTA HILL WHITEMAN, poet (1993)
HONOR, Milwaukee, WI
Presented an annual series of public programs for the Native American and non-Native people in northwestern Wisconsin.

JOHN EDGAR WIDEMAN, nonfiction writer, novelist (1998)
The Learning Tree, Springfield, MA
Conducting master classes for public school teachers.

C.K. WILLIAMS, poet, translator (1992)
Teachers and Writers Collaborative, New York, NY
Worked with New York City public high school teachers to develop a poetry curriculum.

TERRY TEMPEST WILLIAMS, nonfiction writer (1999)
PEN American Center, New York, NY
Leading writing workshops and hosting "Coming Home: Community Conversations and Stories," a program featuring visiting writers at the Grand County Public Library in southern Utah.

TOBIAS WOLFF, novelist, nonfiction writer (1993)
Onondaga County Public Library, Syracuse, NY
Coordinated an annual series of panel discussion involving such writers as Ken Auletta and Carl Bernstein.

C.D. WRIGHT, poet (1992)
Center for Arkansas and Regional Studies, Fayetteville, AK
Created a traveling exhibit and series of public programs paying tribute to Arkansas' literary heritage.

WAKAKO YAMAUCHI, playwright (1994)
Visual Communications, Los Angeles, CA
Conducted film and video workshops with emerging media artists from the Asian Pacific community to promote intergenerational understanding and appreciation for the Asian American immigration experience.