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## Anoka middle school literary magazine snags top award

Article by: ANNA PRATT , Special to the Star Tribune Updated: February 25, 2014 - 1:47 PM

Anoka Middle School for the Arts' literary magazine earned the top rating from a teachers council.

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Sophia Collins has always had a flair for the literary. Her dad gave her a specially bound journal when she was little, and ever since then she has filled notebooks with her take on "what's going on in the world."

So, Collins, a seventh-grader at Anoka Middle School for the Arts, jumped at the chance to get her work published in the school's literary magazine, "The Storm."

Now she can say her work, a poem titled "Two Tornadoes," has appeared in an award-winning publication: The Storm last month snagged the top honor in a literary magazine contest from the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), an Illinois-based professional organization.

The middle school's annual magazine, which originated in 2006, landed the "Highest Award." Two other metro-area publications, from Eastview High School in Apple Valley and St. Paul Academy and Summit School, each received the next level of "Superior."

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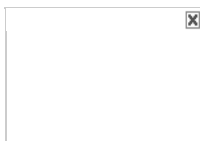
Cover of 'The Storm,' published by Anoka Middle School for the Arts

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Entries are judged state-by-state, and the Highest Award isn't always given out, said Jolanda Dranchak, faculty adviser for the Storm. She is a curriculum integration coordinator at the Anoka school.

Nationwide, only 26 of 373 entries garnered that award for 2013, according to NCTE information.

Besides literary achievement, "production values are important, and the extent of student participation is also considered," the NCTE states.

Dranchak said the school's feat is especially impressive given that many of the writings came from sixth-graders.

In recent years, The Storm has become extremely competitive. Last year, it received more than 200 submissions. Of those, 45 made the cut, and they came from students in each grade level at the school, she said.

Right now, Dranchak is in the process of collecting submissions for the magazine's next issue, which has a Feb. 28 deadline.

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A diverse mix

Jodi Anderson-Wolhaupter, a creative writing teacher at the school, said the magazine is unique for its diverse mix of writing forms that speak to various disciplines and genres.

Besides poems, stories and essays, the issue contains a "mind map," academic writing, a theater script, a musical score and illustrations. A jingle written by an entire class relates to a social studies unit that centers on Mesopotamia.

People got creative with the more traditional writing forms, as well. For example, a "two-voice" poem splices together a couple of speakers to make people "comparatively think about different life conditions," Anderson-Wolhaupter said.

The magazine sends the message that writing doesn't have to be abstract. "There are many ways to be expressive," even through research-based pieces, she said.

The Storm also got high marks because of the level of student involvement, she said.

Student editors work alongside adults to filter through the works submitted. "It's empowering for students to have a voice, to say, 'our judgment matters, we will find our own criticisms about writing,'" Anderson-Wolhaupter said.

That process also shows the students that they can turn to each other for insights. "It reflects the importance of the entire writing process," how work gets refined through feedback, she said.

Although the print journal might seem a bit old-school for some students, "It has a value for them as young writers, seeing their words on the page," she said.

The student voice

As a student editor, eighth-grader Erica Tembreull gained an

appreciation for the sheer amount of work that goes into putting together a publication. It has made her look at magazines and books in a new light, she said.

The process also helped her improve her own writing. "It helped to see other people's work, to see what they did well and then you can put that into your own writing. You can see what mistakes they made and go back to your writing and see what you would change," she said.

For Tembreull, it was also rewarding to see her work in the publication. Her poem "Lost by the Frosted Window," which she co-wrote with Mallory Denzer, is done in the style of a sestina, which involves a complicated pattern of repeating words. The piece is about a woman who has "lost her memory. She's just thinking, looking through her pictures and scrapbooks and remembering different things," she said.

Tyler Eischens, another eighth-grader who served as an editor, enjoyed finding out about what was on students' minds, too. "It was fun to see what other kids worked on during different hours" of the school day, and beyond, he said.

He tried to score pieces based on "the hook, how it entertained you, the meaning behind it," but it wasn't always so simple. Pieces stood out for various reasons.

For example, Lydia Erickson's poem "If Hate Could Be ..." ponders big life questions.

The eighth-grader said it reflects on a fight she had with a friend. The poem was a class assignment, but it helped her sort through her feelings, she said.

She likes poetry because it can be silly or dramatic, rhyme or not. "It's something where you're free. You can choose to do what you want with it," she said.

Language teacher Steven Farrell said students take the magazine opportunity seriously. "They are so excited when they get something in there because they know that a team of adults, not just one teacher, has looked at it and they have all placed a value, not a grade, on their work," he said.

Matt Malette, an art specialist at the school, added that The Storm offers a unique opportunity for students to get feedback on their work from the broader community. It's another avenue "to express themselves and to receive recognition for their efforts," he said.

Although the review process can be painful and confusing at times, it presents "a teachable moment about deadlines and the merit-based world that we live in," he said.

Every year, more students ask about the magazine. As a teacher, it's especially gratifying to see them submitting work they've completed on their own time, he said.

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