

Thank goodness girls write

"She who challenges the system will unearth questions that have remained buried beneath the truth..."

From *A Collective Power* by Marci Mazza-Fredley.

As I turned the pages of a small booklet and read poems and stories written by local girls, an unexpected emotion gripped me.

"Who are these girls who write poems that make me cry?" I sniffed, amazed at how deeply their words moved me.

I shouldn't have been surprised because I met some of those talented girls.

"Cause when they open their mouths the words start to dance..."

From *The Shapeshifter* by Maddie Nolen

Vivian Lee Croft founded Girls Write Pittsburgh in 2016.

"I wanted to find a space where we could allow young writers to come in and explore their emotions and improve

their skills," she says.

The first group started in Brookline and there are currently five locations across the city, including the Rainbow Writers group in East Liberty for young LGBTQ+ writers. In addition to the weekly meetings, quarterly workshops give young writers the opportunity to learn, share and explore writing topics under the guidance of mentors. At the end of each fall and spring session, they host readings and publish the girls' poems and stories in *Oeuvre, An Anthology*.

An important part of STEAM education is to allow young people to think, reason and explore for themselves. Girls Write Pittsburgh provides a safe place where girls can write and dream.

At the City of Asylum

When I visited the group that meets at the City of Asylum bookstore on the North Side, Vivian and facilitator, Allie Reznek, sat with two girls around a table in the rear of the store.

"We're going to brainstorm the



City of Asylum

theme of activism today and use the five senses," Allie announced. "What is activism like? What does it taste, feel, smell and sound like?"

It seemed like a heady topic to me, but when Allie set a timer to signal ten minutes of writing time, the two teens jumped to the task. As a cashier's scanner beeped in the background and the aroma of something delicious wafted in

Movies in the Parks

Activities start at 8 pm. Movies start at sundown. All are free!

- How to Train Your Dragon: The Hidden World (PG)**
South Park Amphitheater: July 10 | North Park Boathouse Lawn: July 13
- Bumblebee (PG-13)**
South Park Amphitheater: July 17 | North Park Boathouse Lawn: July 20
- Incredibles 2 (PG)**
South Park Amphitheater: July 24 | North Park Boathouse Lawn: July 27
- Mary Poppins Returns (PG)**
South Park Amphitheater: July 31 | North Park Boathouse Lawn: August 3
- Spider-Man: Into the Spideverse (PG)**
South Park Amphitheater: August 7 | North Park Boathouse Lawn: August 10
- Ralph Breaks the Internet (PG)**
South Park Amphitheater: August 14 | North Park Boathouse Lawn: August 17
- Captain Marvel (PG-13)**
Deer Lakes Park Wagman Observatory: August 21

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from the café area, Mackenzie's fingers tapped her keyboard and Isabella scribbled in a notebook.

For an hour, the group talked, wrote, and shared their poems. I smiled during Isabella's reading when she compared arrogance to "a sulphur egg smell," and marveled at how beautifully Mackenzie wove images of water and drowning women into her poem.

At the Flash Fiction Workshop

Local author and presenter, Jamie Lackey, kept the volume low so the recordings wouldn't disturb patrons outside the Teen Center at the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh-Brookline. She was playing podcasts for workshop participants to hear examples of flash fiction, a popular genre that tells a whole story in 1,000 words or less. Although I could barely hear the tales, the three girls seated around the yellow table listened attentively and responded when Jamie asked what the stories all had in common.

"Now listen as a writer," she instructed, prompting one girl to pull out a purple pen and start jotting in her notebook.

For a writing exercise, Jamie invited each girl to choose one element of a story prompt. The group collectively devised this scenario: an alien (the character) is lost (the problem) in a forest (the setting).

GO.

Two of the girls bent over the table to write in their notebooks, but one girl, who wore a black hoodie pulled over her head, didn't need a table top or paper. With deft fingers, she typed on her cell phone, stopping occasionally to glance at the ceiling, her eyebrows knit together in thought. When time was up, Jamie invited the girls to read.

I loved one story about a "poor little alien" that had "one too many eyeballs looking in different directions."

"Mine's only 200 words," another girl said before reading about her heroine, Penelope, who finds a lost alien and meets her doom in a twist ending.

The girl in the black hoodie shifted nervously and declined to read aloud.

"That's okay," Jamie reassured her. "You don't have to."

Although I didn't get to hear her story, I bet it was as charming and delightful as the others.

"It was essential: How her hands traced their way across the world..."

From *Rain* by Lena Carson ■

Writer Ann K. Howley wishes to thank Kaitlyn Shay, Maddie Nolen, Marci Mazza-Fredley, Lena Carson, Ella Engberg, and Isabella Putorti for making her cry.

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