



Woodstock Community Unit School District 200

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Contact: Kevin Lyons

815.337.3071

District 200 announces Young Authors contest winners

Eighth-grade author Erina Sasaki felt the deadline writing crunch much like the characters on the clock in her debut novel “The Game of Twelve.”

The 12 high school senior characters were based on Erina’s anime-style drawings. They found themselves in a decrepit abandoned mansion from which they had to escape.

“I really wanted to do something with time and time running out so I came up with 12 hours to make it correspond,” the Northwood Middle School student said.

“They have 12 hours to escape, but each hour one of them goes missing and the last person has to escape or else no one will survive, but if they do escape then everyone will survive. It’s really suspenseful.”

During the writing process, Erina realized that she only had two weeks to turn in her manuscript. She received some time management help and encouragement from her mother.

“I had to write a chapter each day. It was really fun imagining all of the possibilities of what they might do or how they would react,” Erina said.

Erina was one of nine Woodstock Community Unit School District 200 students named winners in the District’s 2024-2025 Young Authors Contest. A panel of judges read the 43 submitted manuscripts from students in kindergarten through 8th grade to select the best entries among grade levels.

Kristen Sauber, a D 200 instructional coach who oversees the Young Authors program, said the judges, who included current and former educators as well as community members, said they were impressed with the creativity in the manuscripts.

“We had a wide variety of texts submitted. Students chose to write personal stories, realistic fiction, imaginative fantasy, historical fiction, and how-to books,” Sauber said.

Some of the judges included Woodstock Independent writers Jan Davidio and Caryl Dieksen (also a retired D 200 teacher) and Jaci Krandel, co-chair of the D 200 Education Foundation.

“We feel so lucky to have had so many community members volunteer their time this year to score the students’ books,” Sauber said.

The 2024-2025 Young Authors contest winners are as follows:

Aleah Reinert, *The Shiny Colorful Sled*
Olson Elementary School, grade 2

Ahileny Perez, *The Princess & The Mermaid*
Westwood Elementary School, grade 4

Raeley Kane, *The Sour Pickle*
Verda Dierzen Early Learning Center, kindergarten

Edna Amoo, *The Lazy and the Diligent Girl*
Mary Endres Elementary School, grade 4

Fabian Hernandez, *The Adventures of Berry*
Prairiewood Elementary School, grade:2

Audrey Van Ostrand, *Benji and the Friendly Ghost*
Dean Street Elementary School, grade 4

Bella Jorudd, *The Lonely Little Dandelion*
Greenwood Elementary School, grade 5

Erina Sasaki, *The Game of Twelve*
Northwood Middle School, grade 8

Courtney Schaal, *Smile! You're on Camera*
Creekside Middle School, grade 8