



Woodstock Community Unit School District 200

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Young Authors winners recognized for storytelling skills

Most 6-year-olds don't know many literary devices yet, but Olson first-grader Jack Nenni sure knows the alphabet. Jack turned those letters into colorful characters who starred in his award-winning Young Authors manuscript.

Jack's book "Letters to Numbers" was one of 10 student works chosen by a judges panel of current and retired educators in the 2024 Woodstock Community Unit School District 200 Young Authors competition.

In the story, the letters were trapped on an island and each selected ways to escape the island with things that represented their letter. For example, the letter A wanted to make an airplane, B wanted a boat, C suggested a canoe, while D wanted to ride a dolphin.

"Jack's manuscript was so creative. It was very apparent that Jack spent a lot of time coming up with all the different ways the letters could get off the island. We had several judges mention how much they enjoyed his story," said Kristen Sauber, a district instructional coach who oversees the Young Authors program.

Jack said he thought of the book concept at home and that his mom encouraged him to keep going with the manuscript even when he got a little tired.

"Some of the letters were hard to come up with ideas for," he said.

Jack said he was also challenged to draw the illustrations for each letter. When he was stuck, his mom would draw a picture that he would try to copy.

In Jack's story, the letters eventually arrived at a new island, but this one was populated with numbers leaving open the possibility of a sequel.

"It might take a little while to write all of the numbers because I think there might be more numbers than letters," he said.

Sauber said judges read 41 student works submitted for district-wide judging by grade level according to provided rubrics measuring creativity, sentence structure and other literary criteria.

"We had a variety of manuscripts — fantasy, realistic fiction, historical fiction, informational, and true stories sharing important people, animals and events in the children's lives. We also had manuscripts submitted in both English and Spanish."

"It was wonderful to see the students finding their voice and sharing stories that are important to them with a larger audience," Sauber said.

The 2024 Young Authors competition winners are as follows:

Jack Nenni, Letters to Numbers
Olson Elementary, Grade 1

Declan Di Guido & Alexander Levato,
Two Swordless Warriors
Westwood Elementary, Grade 4

William J. Triplett, The Night of the
Missing Queen
Verda Dierzen, Kindergarten

Dawsyn Sheahan, The Cheer Pup
Mary Endres Elementary, Grade 1

Declan Burley, Rory the Dog
Prairiewood Elementary, Grade 2

Uriel Jasso-Gonzalez, El Ático
Embrujado
Dean Street Elementary, Grade 3

Maggie Bonham, The Titanic-
Corresponding Story
Greenwood Elementary, Grade: 4

Eric Smith, Tales From the Pizza Guy
Clay Academy, Grade 8

Violet Lovato, World's End
Northwood Middle School, Grade 6

Vivienne Gwaltney, New Days
Creekside Middle School, Grade 6