SWWC Service Cooperative presents the 35th Annual

CONFERENCE FOR YOUNG WRITERS



January 5, 2027 (snow date Jan. 6) | For all students in grades 3-8
Held at Southwest Minnesota State University, Marshall, MN

The Young Writers Conference gives students an opportunity to explore their creativity, strengthen writing and communication skills, and discover their unique voice and the power of storytelling.

Through interactive activities and inspiration led by professional authors, experienced teachers, and writing professionals, students participate in engaging, hands-on sessions that explore a variety of writing styles, techniques, and ways to express their ideas. Students are encouraged to think creatively, share their perspectives, and let their imaginations soar.

Southwest Minnesota ARTS Council

CLEAN WATER LAND & LEGACY AMENDMENT

This activity is made possible in part by the voters of Minnesota through a grant from the SW Minnesota Arts Council, thanks to a legislative appropriation from the arts and cultural heritage fund.

Registration

Who can register:

- School teachers register groups of students and their chaperones.
- Parents register their students and themselves.

Online Registration Deadline:
November 24, 2026, at midnight.

SCAN ME

www.swwc.org/yw







SWWC
STUDENT ENRICHMENT

Contact: Andrea Anderson,
Student Enrichment Coordinator

507-537-2257

www.swwc.org/yw

andrea.anderson@swwc.org

CONFERENCE INFORMATION

General Registration

- Available to students in grades 3-8
- Register Online: www.swwc.org/yw
- There are two sections of the registration, the Contact information part and the Registration part.
- All attending students and adults must be registered online.
- There is no student/adult ratio at this time.
- Not required but prefer contact person be an attending adult.

School Participants

- The schools attending are responsible for collecting and entering registrations.
- Prefer schools register all students attending with them.
- If your school is unable to attend at this time, direct parents to the website for access to conference information, giving them the chance to attend on their own.
- School district funding may be available to support teacher and student participation in SWWC enrichment programs through MINNESOTA GIFTED AND TALENTED REVENUE MN Statute § 126C.10 2(b).

Parent Participants

- Parents are allowed to attend on their own as a family.
- An adult must be registered along with the student or note the attending adult with your student.
- If a parent is registering a student who is attending with the school, they must select attending with school and who approved it.
- If a parent misses the school registration deadline, they can still register and attend on their own.
- Check with your school to see if they are participating as a school group.

Registration Fees and Deadlines

Registration Deadline: **November 24, 2026, by midnight**

- $40/per student
- $10/per adult

Payments

- Parent payments are made at the time of registration with a Credit Card. Payments go through WePay.
- Schools can pay with a Credit Card. (optional)
- If a school would like to be billed after the event they
- must contact us, prior to registering, and ask for a billing code.
- There is now a $15 fee for a paper invoice.

Lunch

- Bring your own lunch – no refrigeration is available.
- Campus cafeteria is closed for winter break.
- Check with your school about the sack lunch program.
- Place lunches in containers or coolers and label with school or parent name.

Supplies

- Supplies are provided for students, unless otherwise mentioned in the session description. Supplies are for students only.

Sessions

- The conference features an opening keynote and three hands-on learning sessions for students, each lasting one hour.
- Students select six, grade appropriate, session topics. Using a scheduling program, students are then scheduled into three sessions that best fit the class schedule.
- Select sessions in the order of preference.
- The choices selected by the students DO NOT represent their final schedule.
- A student's final schedule is based on their choice order, session size & session demand; therefore, we cannot guarantee students will be assigned to all requested topics. We do our best to accommodate as many of their selected choices as possible.
- We retain the right to limit the number of students per district in a specific session.
- A session may be canceled or added due to the number of registered students.

Conference Details

- Conference information is available at www.swwc.org/yw
- A few days before the event, or as soon as it is available, the **final schedule** and additional event information will be sent to the provided email on the registration form.
- Please share this information with chaperones/parents.
- Chaperones/parents are responsible for knowing the Conference information and the cancellation policy.
- The designated contact person should pick up the conference packet at the check-in table the morning of the event.

Book Fair - Commuter Lounge (BA Bldg.)

- Paper Pie will run a book fair all day.

Students with Special Needs

- The SWWC Service Cooperative, in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities ACT (ADA), is dedicated to making conference activities accessible to all students. Please contact Andrea for special accommodations by November 24, 2026.

Cancellation and Refund Policy

- To recieve a refund, please submit your cancellation request by the final registration deadline. A $10 service charge per student will be applied.
- After the deadline, no refunds will be processed.
- If a student is unable to attend, please try to send someone in their place and notify us of the change.



507-537-2257 **andrea.anderson@swwc.org** **www.swwc.org/yw**

AGENDA AND KEYNOTE

AGENDA

8:00 am - 9:00 am	Check-In, Refreshments
9:00 am - 9:15 am	Welcome
9:15 am - 9:45 am	Keynote
10:00 am - 11:00 am	Session I
11:00 am - 11:45 am	Lunch
11:45 am - 12:45 pm	Session II
1:00 pm - 2:00 pm	Session III
9:00 am - 2:00 pm	Book Fair (in BA Lobby)

KEYNOTE SPEAKER



Kevin Lovegreen

Award-winning children's author and speaker Kevin Lovegreen has inspired thousands of young readers to discover the joy of reading, writing, and the outdoors. As the creator of the award-winning Lucky Luke's Adventures series, Kevin has published 25 books with many more exciting adventures on the way.

One of Kevin's greatest passions is visiting elementary schools. Having presented at more than 400 schools across the country, he loves bringing stories to life through energetic, interactive presentations that spark a lifelong love of reading. His mission is simple: create a reading frenzy wherever he visits.

Inspired by real-life outdoor experiences, the Lucky Luke's Adventures series follows Lucky Luke, his family, and friends as they embark on exciting hunting, fishing, and outdoor adventures that teach courage, perseverance, teamwork, and love for nature.

Kevin lives in Minnesota with his loving wife, Sue. Together they enjoy spending time with their family, including their two children, Crystal and Luke, and three wonderful grandchildren, Violet, Leland, and George, who continue to inspire new adventures and stories.

To learn more about Kevin, his books, or to schedule a school visit, visit www.KevinLovegreen.com.

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SESSION DESCRIPTIONS

Select sessions appropriate for student's grade level 3-5 or 6-8

A. What's Your Story!
Gr. 3-5

We all have stories to tell. Inspiration is all around us! Learn how to use what happens in your real life to write and illustrate a story. Jenny Baertsch, children's chapter book author of "Junkyard Tough: A 'Tail' of Bravery," will share her own writing journey and help students uncover inspirations to write and illustrate their own books to take home. ***Jenny Baertsch**

B. Broadcasting your Voice: Writing for Radio
Gr. 3-5 & 6-8

From Your Brain to the Broadcast is your chance to turn ideas into real radio magic. In this fun, hands-on session, you'll learn how radio hosts take everyday thoughts and turn them into stories people hear on the air. You'll get to write your own mini news story, just like reporters do, and create a catchy radio ad that grabs listeners' attention. You'll practice sounding like a real broadcaster, learn how your words can paint pictures in people's minds, and see how creativity becomes sound. If you enjoy telling stories, sharing information, or making things fun and exciting, this presentation will show you how your voice can travel from your brain… all the way to the broadcast. Get ready to think big, write boldly, and create something worth hearing. ***Dan Debates**

C. Write & Perform Sketch Comedy
Gr. 3-5 & 6-8

Do you like brainstorming funny ideas with your friends? Keep a notebook of dreams and doodles? Think you might like standing on a stage? Sketch comedy -- short plays and videos designed to be funny -- is probably for you. In this workshop, you'll learn how to develop your comedic tastes, play creativity games, pitch ideas, start a script, and gather your audience. You'll leave with a list of plans -- and maybe even of fellow comedians who want to work together to bring your zany visions to life. ***Jessica Hennen**

D. Reporting the Truth
Gr. 3-5 & 6-8

A Storytelling Challenge! I'll give a simple press conference about an event; someone saving a child from a crazy fire that was started by something. Students will then have the opportunity to ask questions to gather details about the event. Afterward, they will share their own version of the story, either verbally or in writing, using the information they collected. Students will then vote on which presentation is the most accurate, detailed, and interesting. ***JP Lawrence**



E. Painting Pictures with your Words
Gr. 3-6

Each student will need to come prepared with a short personal narrative—one page or less—about a memorable experience. Topics might include My First Hunt, My Best Vacation, or My Best Birthday. Students who are comfortable sharing will read their stories aloud. Then, we'll work together to explore fun, creative ways to bring each story to life by adding descriptive details, emotion, action, and sensory language. The goal: "Painting Pictures with Words." This unique, hands-on writing experience gives students the excitement of working directly with an established author on their own stories. Together, we'll discover how the right words can help readers see, hear, feel, and experience a story—not just read it. Students will leave with new writing skills, greater confidence, and, most importantly, excitement about telling their own stories. ***Kevin Lovegreen**

F. Story Sparks
Gr. 3-5 & 6-8

What makes a story spark in a reader's mind? What draws readers into a story? A good plot and characters, yes, but how we write also makes our writing more interesting. In this session, we will add to and write scenes for our own stories. Come explore how to turn your words into fuel that will make your story fire! ***Erin Makela**

G. Become a Young Detective & Storyteller
Gr. 3-5 & 6-8

Become a Young Detective & Storyteller with The Zoo Man! Do you love mysteries? Do you enjoy using your imagination? Have you ever wanted to write your own story? Join The Zoo Man for an exciting writing adventure based on a REAL crime that happened in Southern Minnesota! Listen to mysterious clues, discover what happened, and then become an author! Together, we will turn the facts of a true crime into an exciting short story filled with mystery and suspense. You don't have to be a great writer to join the fun! All you need is imagination, creativity, and a willingness to share your ideas! Learn how to begin a story, put your thoughts on paper, and turn simple facts into something exciting to read. Everyone gets to contribute as we create ONE AMAZING, ONE-OF-A-KIND TRUE CRIME STORY! Young detectives and future authors, get ready for an unforgettable writing adventure! Every great writer starts with an idea. Maybe your first great story begins here! ***The Zoo Man**

H. Where Stories Begin
Gr. 6-8

Where do stories come from? Sometimes from a person, a place, a strange moment—or a question you can't stop thinking about. Emersyn Park shares how she creates characters, discovers plots, and turns everyday observations into stories. Along the way, you'll learn that you don't have to be a writer to find a story. You just have to be curious enough to notice one. ***Emersyn Park**

SESSION DESCRIPTIONS

Select sessions appropriate for student's grade level 3-5 or 6-8

I. Junk Journaling
Gr. 5-8
Junk journaling is a style of art journaling where you use materials that are usually destined for the trash, like old papers, ticket stubs, magazine clippings, and even candy wrappers – and turning them into a unique journal. A junk journal is a place where you can glue, paint, write, and attach all sorts of things to create a story of your life, your dreams, or anything you imagine! You will have the opportunity to start a junk journal that can serve as scrapbook, a diary, and a treasure chest all mixed into one ***Crystal Reith**

J. Big Book Brainstorm
Gr. 3-5 & 6-8
In this session, it's all about ideas. Bring your ideas for the book (or books!) you've always wanted to write, but haven't been able to get started. We will hold a pitch session, where people can share their ideas for the "big book" to the group in a supportive and encouraging environment. We'll talk about how to forge ahead into the unknown and get started, bounce ideas off of each other and how to generate an "idea pit" to get all of the cool stuff you want to write about out of your head on onto the page. ***Thomas Kingsley Troupe**

K. Gimme 5 (senses)
Gr. 3-5 & 6-8
Writing with Vivid Details to Make Scenes Real. When we write we have a picture in our head of what is happening, and our readers are excited to understand that picture. In this session, we will practice using all five senses (yes, including taste) to describe objects. By the end, you'll practice making your writing more real!
***Julie Walker**

Photos, Videos, & Media
By participating in this event, you are giving SWWC permission to use any audio/video recordings and photographs that are taken during the event.

MEET YOUR PRESENTERS

Jenny Baertsch
Jenny Baertsch is the author and publisher of the children's chapter book "Junkyard Tough: A 'Tail' of Bravery." Since 2021, she has visited over 100 schools and libraries to share her story, inspire young authors and illustrators, and spread this very important message: ANYTHING is possible with hard work and bravery! Jenny and her family live in Winona, where she works as Executive Director of the non-profit Foundation for Winona Area Public Schools. www.BaertschBooks.com



Dan Debates
Dan DeBates is a dedicated media professional and lifelong learner with a passion for communication and education. He holds a Master of Mass Communications from South Dakota State University and a Bachelor's degree in Radio/Television Broadcasting from Southwest Minnesota State University. For the past 14 years, Dan has worked with Marshall Radio, where he continues to bring his voice, creativity, and professionalism to the airwaves. He enjoys all kinds of music and has a strong appreciation for audio quality and the craft of broadcasting. His experiences in media, teaching, and academic work have shaped a growing passion for education. A few things to know about Dan: he values authenticity, clarity, and growth. He believes in the power of education, the importance of mentorship, and the impact of storytelling, whether on the radio, in the classroom, or through meaningful conversations. He is also extremely passionate about classic cars. Connect with Dan on LinkedIn

Jessica Hennen
I am the director of the Creative Writing and Literature programs at SMSU. By training, I'm a fiction writer, but I also practice improv, write and perform sketch comedy, and produce a weekly column of true stories for the Granite Falls Advocate Tribune. I live on a farm with my husband and too many pets (cats, chickens, and a needy dog). www.jessiehennen.com

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MEET YOUR PRESENTERS

JP Lawrence
Jp Lawrence is a reporter for the Minnesota Star Tribune, covering southwest Minnesota. He has worked for the Albany Times Union, the San Antonio Express-News, and Stars and Stripes. He was born in the Philippines and grew up in Redwood Falls, Minnesota. He joined the Army National Guard and deployed to Iraq in 2009. Big Minnesota Timberwolves fan.
www.startribune.com/author/jp-lawrence

Kevin Lovegreen
See Keynote page for bio.
kevin@kevinlovegreen.com

Erin Makela
Erin is the author of Worthy of Trust and Enterprising and Dangerous, the first two books in the That Word Honor series. When writing, Erin always uses multiple colors of pens to keep organized. She loves traveling to the places she writes about, singing sea shanties, and curling up with a good book and a mug of tea.
www.erinmakela.com

The Zoo Man
I'm known across the US as The Zoo Man. I travel with my animal friends educating and entertaining the young and the young at heart. Performing Zoo Man programs is my favorite part of life. I'm also an author of 2 books, The Zoo Man Remembers and True Crimes and Bizarre Stories of Sleepy Eye Minnesota. My book, The Zoo Man Returns is in the works. I am also a Personal trainer for Parkinson's Disease Clients, which keeps me very busy. I keep people active and train them for balance, strength, and flexibility. See more on my Facebook: Zoo Man's Attractions

Emersyn Park
Emersyn Park is a Midwest author who has been telling stories for as long as she can remember. As a child, she wrote one-act plays and short stories, always determined to control how the story ended. Life took her in other directions for a while, but when her two sons grew up and she finally had more time to herself, the stories came rushing back. During the COVID quarantine, Emersyn wrote her debut novel, He Loves Me, She Loves Me Not. She has written a book every year since, proving that sometimes the stories we put off for years are simply waiting for the right time to be told. Today, Emersyn writes family sagas and psychological thrillers filled with complicated characters, unexpected twists, and the little clues that make readers question what they think they know. She loves helping other writers look beneath the surface of their stories, discover the deeper meaning hiding in the work, and use it to make every part of their novel more powerful. www.emersynpark.com

Crystal Reith
Crystal Reith has served as the Cottonwood County 4-H Extension Educator for almost 20 years. She enjoys programming that involves hands-on application and exploration. She has a passion for photography, livestock and baking.

Thomas KingsleyTroupe
Thomas Kingsley Troupe is the author of hundreds of books for young readers. When he's not writing, he enjoys reading, playing video games, and investigating haunted places with his team, the Twin Cities Paranormal Society. When not busy with everything else, he's probably taking a nap or something. Thomas lives in Woodbury, Minnesota with the people he loves best.
www.thomaskingsleytroupe@gmail.com

Julie Walker
Julie Walker is adult-shaped but is more likely than not to make a poop joke. As a speech team coach for SMSU and a Communication Studies professor, Julie loves getting to work with folks to help them build their voices. When she's not teaching or coaching, Julie enjoys reading books, crafting storytelling performances, or chasing after her very naughty dog Luna.



SWWC SERVICE COOPERATIVE



This activity is made possible in part by the voters of Minnesota through a grant from the SW Minnesota Arts Council, thanks to a legislative appropriation from the arts and cultural heritage fund.

OUR PARTNERS

Southwest Minnesota Arts Council
Rapp Strategies
BCI Construction, INC.
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Monogram Foods Loves Kids Foundation
Southwest West Central Service Cooperative
Southwest MN State University

For the full list of partners go to www.swwc.org/foundation

SCAN ME

www.swwc.org/yw



Changes Needed?

Please notify me if your student has aged out, and I will remove you from our contact list. Also, let me know if you have any contact info. changes.

SWWC
STUDENT ENRICHMENT

Contact: Andrea Anderson,
Student Enrichment Coordinator

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