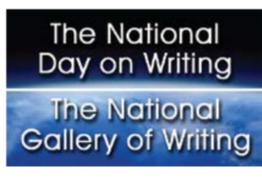


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by Lorna Collier

Get Ready for The National Day on Writing

It's Almost October—Do You Know Where Your Submission for the National Gallery Is?



The National Gallery is open to all who wish to contribute any form of expression that is important to them—emails, essays, eulogies, text messages, videos, poems, scrapbook entries, and so on.

Last fall, NCTE decided it was time to make space in the calendar for a new National Day—one which would celebrate and spotlight one of humankind's most central and important activities—writing.

“There are already a number of national and local days or celebrations of reading and we thought it was high time to have writing held in equal esteem,” says Jeff Williams, chair of the new National Day on Writing subcommittee of the NCTE Executive Committee.

The response—from the public, from corporations, from academia, and even from legislators—has been enthusiastic, and is expected to continue to grow as the Day on Writing, set for October 20, nears.

“It has really blossomed,” says Barbara Cambridge, director of NCTE’s Washington, DC, office. Cambridge has been working to persuade Congress to pass a resolution officially recognizing the National Day on Writing; she has received enthusiastic support from legislators and expects it to pass soon.

Early on, the National Day on Writing attracted the sponsorship of the Verizon Foundation, the philanthropic arm of Verizon Communications. (The Foundation is also responsible for Thinkfinity, the consortium of online educational partners which includes the ReadWriteThink.org site.)

The Day on Writing has also attracted numerous corporate and nonprofit partners, including Google Docs, the Newseum, USA Today, the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), the National Center for Family Literacy (NCFL), the National Council of Social Studies (NCSS), the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM), and the National Science Teachers Association (NSTA). (See a complete list of partners at http://www.galleryofwriting.org/about_national_partners.php.)

These groups and many others plan to promote writing by having people submit their work (*one work per person per gallery*) to a new, digital National Gallery of Writing (www.galleryofwriting.org), created by NCTE, which will open its virtual doors on October 20 and stay open at least through May 2010.

The National Gallery of Writing

The National Gallery is open to all who wish to contribute any form of expression that is important to them (emails, essays, eulogies, text messages, videos, poems, scrapbook entries, and so on).

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National Day on Writing *Continued from page 6*

The Gallery contains three areas:

- the NCTE gallery,
- galleries of writings organized by the national partners (13 as of this writing); and
- local partner galleries, organized by schools (elementary through college), classes, civic groups, cities, clubs, families, interest groups, or people who seek writing of a particular theme or genre.

As of this writing, over 600 local partner galleries are open for submissions, each with its own description and criteria. For example, there are galleries seeking “poems with a slight taste of humor,” memoirs from merchant mariners, multimodal writing, writing concerning gay issues, writing created by toddlers and preschoolers, writing that expresses despair, and writing that expresses love of libraries (“bookjoy”).

Goals for the National Day and the National Gallery

The diversity of the galleries is a reflection of the organizers’ goal to represent any and all types of writing that people do in America today.

“Long term, we are hoping that this focus allows us to learn more about the ways Americans write—for what purposes, in what forms, and for what audiences,” says Jeff Williams.

Other goals of the National Day on Writing include: **To show the importance and pervasiveness of writing in almost every American’s daily life.**

“I think people tend to think of writing as something that authors do, as something school kids do, or something that’s done at work,” says Doug Hesse, NCTE member and Director of the Writing Program at Denver University. People often don’t realize, says Hesse, that the other types of writing they do—such as social media (Facebook, Twitter, instant messages), journaling, scrapbooking, writing family histories—are also “real writing.”

“Having one day where you intentionally seek this whole range of writing and you put it out there in a gallery—that is a really powerful way to remind people that writing is something that you do in all sorts of ways and places,” says Hesse.

Indeed, the National Gallery of Writing is an attempt, says Jeff Williams, “to build a living, changing virtual gallery that captures what Americans are doing as writers. Not only the formal or school-based writings such as reports, essays or reflections but more personal writings such as eulogies, poems, lists, emails, text messages, and blogs . . . supporting the notion that writing is a quintessential 21st century skill.”

To fuel more writing and writing-related activities.

“I’m already seeing people planning readings, events, putting together local anthologies [for the National Day on Writing],” says Hesse.

“We’ve talked here in Denver about having some readings or some silly writing contests: ‘Here are some odd photos we found: write captions for them and we’ll give an award for the funniest.’ That might be something we produce a short YouTube video about that can go into the mix.”

Google Docs is planning to advertise the Day on Writing on its homepage and blog, and to encourage members to write pieces to submit to Google Docs’ gallery space, says Andrew Chang, Google Docs marketing manager.

At the time of this writing, the Washington DC-based Newseum was planning to send out an email blast to teachers in August, hoping to receive student submissions on several topics, said Barbara McCormack, senior education manager. The first topic is the importance of the First Amendment.

“Our plan is to wait and see what kind of response we get to our First Amendment theme before creating any type of schedule,” McCormack says. “Also, something may happen in the news” which may prompt a more timely topic for students to write about.

In tiny Augusta, Arkansas (population 2,600), the community has been working for several years on a city-wide literacy project (see story, p. 7). In August, organizers began creating a digital portfolio showcasing some of the work that has been done, along with videotaped reflections from the creators and public about its importance. Samples from the portfolio will be submitted to the gallery and members who have been involved will be invited to attend the National Day on Writing kickoff in Washington, DC.

Meanwhile, in Manhattan, *The New Yorker* magazine will host a gala event both celebrating the Day on Writing as well as awarding the Norman Mailer Creative Nonfiction Writing Awards.

To foster support for teacher training in writing practices.

By focusing on writing, “we can broaden support for quality professional development for teachers regarding writing,” says Williams. Some school districts, due to No Child Left Behind’s lack of emphasis on writing, have eliminated or downplayed this type of professional development in recent years.

To increase awareness of rhetorical principles central to writing.

Cambridge points out that the writing submission form for the National Gallery includes a section asking writers why this piece of writing is important to them, and asking them to identify the purpose and audience for the writing.

“Those are two rhetorical principles a person needs to be aware of when writing—so the way we have structured it supports thinking about those very important elements in any writing task,” says Cambridge.

In the long term, the gallery creators hope to see it used by teachers, researchers, and the general public.

Teachers, for example, can pull writing examples from students in other parts of the country to show their classrooms (“a school-aged student in Maine will be able to see the types and qualities of a writer in Hawaii,” says Williams), as well as to see what other teachers are submitting.

Or, they may find examples of workplace writing—memos, reports, lists—that they can share with students as examples of the type of writing students might be doing someday.

Students “already communicate and write more than at any other time in the history of our educational system,” says Williams. He hopes the gallery “will allow the student the opportunity to see the writing of others and be inspired to try new things or begin to see themselves as writers who want to contribute their own writing to the larger global community.”

Capturing What It Means to Write

Meanwhile, the general public can dip into the gallery’s writing well for inspiration, comfort, amusement—everything that good writing provides.

“We are attempting to capture and collect this thing called writing so that we can lift it up, turn it about, and examine the scope and breadth of what it means to write,” says Williams.

Moreover, having a day that celebrates writing “helps the public to value it and to see writing as a necessary element in our society. We hope members of the public will be inspired to write more or differently after seeing the depth and scope of the writing collected in the National Gallery.”

Lorna Collier is a freelance writer and author based in northern Illinois.

How to Get Involved

- Submit your own writing and/or have your students submit their own works (one piece per person per gallery). Visit the National Gallery for more information: <http://www.galleryofwriting.org>
- Think about hosting your own gallery as a “curator.” Organize your classroom, your grade, your school or even your school district to create a local gallery on the National Gallery site.
- Get the word out about the National Day on Writing and the National Gallery!

Take a look at what some others have done:

Local Gallery Curator Steve Peacock of Point Pleasant, New Jersey, invited people to submit writings to the Sandstorm Gallery, a gallery intended to “showcase the talents of creative writers, poets, and other lovers of language from the Jersey Shore region.”

The curator of the “Natural Pennsylvania” Local Partner Gallery posted a blog invitation for writings focused on the natural beauty and resources of that state.

Members of the Lowcountry Writing Project (Charleston, SC) used their website to propose a student writing contest and a writing marathon and invite people to volunteer.



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