

The Missoula Writing Collaborative

ANNUAL REPORT
2021-2022



THE
MISSOULA
Writing
COLLABORATIVE



Missoula is the cherry on top of my ice-cream. Missoula is a sparkle. Missoula is bike paths that twist and turn and dirt bikes on gravel. Missoula is where I can smell the river. Missoula is more than a city, it's a forest, home to fish, birds, foxes, owls, bugs frogs, bats, hawks, eagles, falcons, and herons. Missoula is the clock tower in the middle of town. Missoula is the Big Dipper ice-cream, Splash, Currents. Missoula is the rushing Clark Fork River, Bernice's Bakery, Snow Bowl, and cotton candy sunsets. Missoula is rafting on Brennan's Wave. Missoula is the heart in me. Missoula is the home of Monte. Missoula is landscape covered in mountains and a star-gazer site. Missoula is fresh mountain air on your tired skin. Missoula is a swan outside above the water gracefully gliding but on the inside a lot of frantic pedaling. Missoula is rainbow trout jumping up and down in clear water. Missoula is lemonade stands at the Farmer's Market, Bonner Park, and a rainbow of personalities. Missoula is concerts and music in the park. Missoula is where if you don't like the weather, go indoors, wait five minutes and the weather is different. Missoula is playgrounds. Missoula is rolling down a tall hill getting leaves in my hair. Missoula is jumping off the roof of the chicken coop. Missoula is elk and deer roaming on Mt. Jumbo. Missoula is dragon Hollow and the sounds of kids laughing. Missoula is the M and the L on Jumbo and Sentinel, and the place where I buried my first fish. Missoula is the Maple tree where we buried our dog Missoula is a giant backyard.

Lewis and Clark Elementary, 4th Grades Harper, O'Connor and Jones, MWC Writer Sheryl Noethe



FROM THE DIRECTOR

After the eerie stillness of the pandemic, MWC's poetry in the schools programs came roaring back in classrooms around western Montana in 2021 and 2022. Students hungry to reconnect after the isolation and loneliness of Zoom classes and online learning—an important pivot during the depths of the pandemic—wanted to write about themselves, their lives, and their imaginations. Students wrote poems about identity with lines such as: “I am from history” and “I am from the book/getting stuck in the words.” They wrote odes to the things they treasured: “Ode to Hope” and “Ode to Sun and the Life It Creates.” They also wrote about poetry itself: “Poetry is a place where/you can run/when you have/nowhere to go. Poetry is a river of thoughts/that washes/you away with your imagination.”

MWC introduced two new rural residencies in western Montana schools this year: the Continental Divide Residency and the Clark Fork Creative Writing Residency. The Clark Fork Creative Writing Residency, funded by the Jane S Herman Foundation and pioneered by MWC Writer Sam Dunnington, established creative writing residency programs in Alberton, St. Regis, and Superior Elementary Schools. Sam, who recently completed his MFA in fiction writing at the University of Montana, also taught poetry classes this year at Lincoln and Ovando Elementary. The Continental Divide Residency, funded by the Tykeson Foundation, supported creative writing residencies in the two-room school at Ovando as well as Lincoln and Seeley-Swan Elementary Schools. April Cypher, a fiction writer and teacher who originally hails from Dillon, MT, headed up the new residency at Seeley-Swan Elementary.

During this exciting year, we learned how much creative writing improves literacy—as much as 24 percent—from MWC writer Dana Fitz Gale's doctoral study at Lowell Elementary's fourth-grade classes. When Sheryl Noethe's fourth-grade poets read at Lewis and Clark school, the teacher and principal were amazed at the largest crowd that had ever showed up for the school poetry reading. It lasted two hours! Poet Laureate Mark Gibbons' Rattlesnake class readings were packed with grateful students and parents. At C.S. Porter, students clamored to see Robert Lee on the first hot day of summer, reading poems they had written over eight weeks of a cloudy spring. April Cypher got her poetry start in Drummond and finished up with brand new residency in Seeley-Swan. By far the most far-flung, Sam Olson headed to



Campers at Words With Wings Summer Camp. Photo by Launi Haygood.

Havre at the start and end of his 12-week residency, teaching 5 classes online and adding poems about Hi-Line to our library.

Writers in all schools helped students create poetry posters about their towns to celebrate Poetry Month. From Pablo to Potomac, from Darby to Drummond, students wrote individual poems about their towns. Each class then combined their poems into a group poem. It is wonderful to see these towns from children's perspectives: "Arlee is the sound of grass whistling," "Missoula is the steady line of cars heading to a Griz game on a crisp fall day," "Ronan is where I feel fat in snowpants," and "Lolo is Lewis and Clark not spelling mosquito right over 16 times."

In our five schools on the Confederated Salish-Kootenai Reservation, students worked with

musician and writer Caroline Keys and Metis storyteller and poet Chris la Tray to write poems such as "8 ways to see a tree," "Ode to Dirt bikes," and this by Little Bear: "I used to be a dragon/but now I am a bird." And my favorite line of wisdom from a 4th grader at K. William Harvey: "Living as a bird every morning/I would fly around and think/how life could not be better." Aspen Decker taught Plains sign language and ledger art during the winter months, and our writers helped young students create poems about how the fox got its red color or how the wolf got its howl, illustrating them as ledger art. These illustrations were displayed at an all-reservation reading at the Johnny Arlee Theatre at Salish Kootenai College featuring Heather Cahoon and student readers, several of whose poems had been translated from English to Salish by Aspen Decker.



Writer and MWC instructor April Cypher leads her class on stage for the final Words With Wings Poetry reading. Photo by Launi Haygood.



A Words With Wings summer camper shares her work onstage. Photo by Launi Haygood.

The excitement and enthusiasm for writing and coming together was felt in our Words with Wings summer camp for students ages eight to thirteen and in our Rattlesnake Writing Workshop for teens, expertly organized by Jane McGuire. At WWW, students wrote intensely in classrooms and on the University of Montana campus with Sam Dunnington, Emily Walter, and April Cypher. In the afternoons, students wrote about the Clark Fork River with the Watershed Education Network, wildlife ranging from beavers to macaws with Animal Wonders, insects with the Insectarium, and animal pelts and bird specimens at the Philip Wright Zoological Museum. At the Rattlesnake Writing Workshop, teen writers worked with Free Verse director and writer Nicole Gomez and writer (and our outgoing Vista member) Alyx Chandler. They did ekphrastic writing at the Missoula Art Museum, wrote at the new Missoula Public Library, and explored the lively Missoula downtown. WWW students read their poems at the Montana Book Festival on September 17, 2022.

Adult students took classes from our writers about food writing, poetry, or obituary-creation in our online Writers' Room Classes in November and March, a series of classes whose popularity has grown. In one online class, we had students from Browning, Dixon, Polson, and Missoula! This year, we plan to do more in-person one-day and multi-week classes.

Thank you all for your support, whether it is as a writer, donor, teacher, or student. It has helped us bring the joy of creative writing to so many throughout western Montana. As Sheryl Noethe says, "Poetry saves lives."

Cheers,

CAROLINE PATTERSON
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

MISSION

The board, staff, and writers of the Missoula Writing Collaborative worked hard in 2021 on a new strategic plan. This included retooling our mission statement to read as follows.

The Missoula Writing Collaborative believes that through creative writing, students can express the worlds inside and outside of themselves. We partner with schools and communities to teach the imaginative power of language. We embrace creativity, empowerment, inclusion, and excellence. We believe in the power of words to stir imaginations and awaken creativity. We build communities of hope and compassion through writing. We try to build communities focused on equity, openness, and trust. We are a non-profit organization committed to reaching the underserved in our society.



Staff

Caroline Patterson
Executive Director

Sheryl Noethe
Artistic Director

Jane McGuire
Programs Director

Alyx Chandler
VISTA 2021-2022

Madison McMillion
VISTA 2022-2023

Abby Seethoff
Administrative Assistant

Debby Randall
Bookkeeper

Writers

Cedar Brant
April Cypher

Sam Dunnington

Dana Fitz Gale

Emily Freeman

Mark Gibbons

Caroline Keys

Chris la Tray

Robert Lee

Megan McInerney

Sheryl Noethe

Sam Olson

Julie Stevenson

Emily Walter

McKenzie Watterson

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Dr. JoDean Nicolette

Lois Welch

35 Schools Served

This year our writers taught in 35 schools across western Montana.

Missoula Schools

Chief Charlo Elementary
Franklin Elementary
Jeanette Rankin Elementary
DeSmet Elementary
Hawthorne Elementary
Lewis & Clark Elementary
Lowell Elementary
Paxson Elementary
Rattlesnake Elementary
Russell Russel Elementary
C.S. Porter Middle School
Target Range Elementary
Loyola High School
Seeley-Swan High School
Seeley-Swan Elementary

Rural Schools

Potomac Elementary
Lincoln Elementary
Drummond Elementary
Ovando School
Lolo Elementary
Florence-Carlton Elementary
Stevensville Elementary
Corvallis Elementary
Alberton High School
Alberton Elementary
St. Regis Elementary
Superior Elementary
Darby Elementary
Sunnyside School (Havre)
Clinton Elementary

Schools on the Confederated Salish-Kootenai Reservation

Dixon Elementary
Arlee Elementary

St. Ignatius Elementary
Pablo Elementary

K. William Harvey Elementary

PROGRAMMING

Missoula Residencies

An enthusiastic return to 15 Missoula schools.

Missoula students had a diverse array of MWC writers and teachers in 2022, who helped students create Missoula poetry posters, as well as odes, letter poems, and poems about their souls. MWC Writer and Poet Laureate Mark Gibbons taught at Paxson and Rattlesnake schools, Cedar Brant taught at Lolo Elementary, April Cypher taught at Chief Charlo Elementary. Dana Fitz Gale taught at Lowell and Hawthorne schools, Robert Lee taught at Big Sky High School, C.S. Porter Middle School, and Loyola High School, Megan McInerney taught at DeSmet and Jeanette Rankin Elementary, Sheryl Noethe at Lewis and Clark Elementary. Parents, students, and teachers were overjoyed to participate in the end of year readings—as the crowded gymnasiums attested!



Poet Sheryl Noethe teaches 4th grade students at Lewis & Clark Elementary.

Tribal Residencies

Ledger art and Plains sign language on the Flathead Reservation.

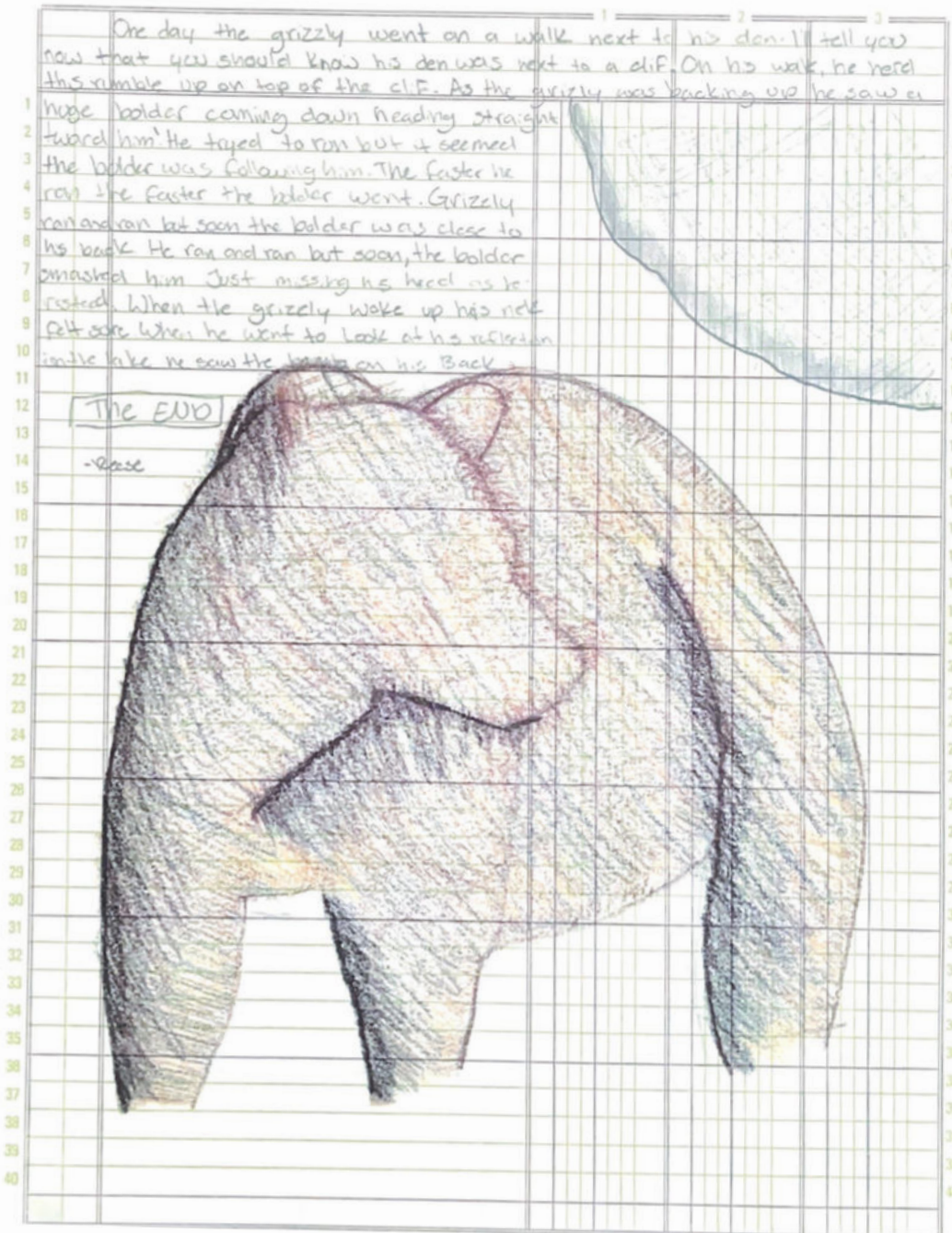
Dixon

STAPLES

How the grizzly got its hump on its back

Reese

Designed By	Initials	Date
Approved By		



In 2022, MWC writers on the Flathead Reservation of the Salish and Kootenai Tribes helped students write letter poems, ledger art poems, and poems about their towns. Caroline Keys taught students in Arlee and Pablo, Chris La Tray worked with students in St. Ignatius and Dixon, and Salish storyteller Aspen Decker taught Plains sign language and ledger art - Plains Indian art that was done on gridded ledger paper that Native Americans used to remember and share knowledge and stories.

MWC Student ledger art and ledger art poems were displayed and celebrated at an all-reservation reading at Salish-Kootenai College on May 3, 2022.

"How The Grizzly Got The Hump On Its Back" ledger art and poetry by Reese, Dixon 4th grader.

Dodge Ball

by Sophia, Pablo Elementary

I remember the sun was shining on a Thursday.
I walked to the car headed to school.
Time flew by and it was time for activity.
I was playing dodgeball.
I was really bad at it
at the time
and was very bad at dodging the balls.
I saw a dodge ball close to the corner of the room.
I went to go get it.
When I turned around I saw
a red ball coming towards my face
super fast!
I felt super scared.
It was like I was in slow motion.
Good thing the ball swerved
in time.
Now I am very aware
of fast things.
I am also better
at catching
now.



Above: Aspen Decker and her daughter teach Plains sign language to students on the Flathead Reservation.
Below: Chris La Tray stands with K. William Harvey Elementary students as they prepare to read their work at a school poetry reading.

Untitled

*by Braylon, 4th grade,
K. William Harvey Elementary*

living as a bird every morning
I would fly around and think
how life could not be better



Rural Residencies

New residencies at 6 rural Montana schools.

This year, with the addition of the Continental Divide Creative Writing Residencies (Lincoln, Ovando, and Seeley-Swan elementary schools) and the Clark Fork Creative Writing Residencies (Alberton, St. Regis, and Superior elementary schools), we added 6 new rural residencies to our roster. Poetry abounded in our rural communities from Darby to Drummond, from Clinton to Florence.

I'll Always Remember

by Abby, Ovando School

You brought me these little worms,
Light brown and slimy,
Curious of what they could be,
You thought you'd bring them to me.

We put them in a hole we dug,
To find them under a shrub the next day.

You gave me your jewelry
That you kept your whole life
Knowing I'll be passing it on day by day,
Still being unknown.

You gave me a blanket
I still cherish today
From age one to fourteen
There's still no change.

Left: A student presents at a school poetry reading at Lolo Elementary.



Words With Wings

Creative writing summer camp for 3rd through 8th graders.

In 2022, 67 campers from Florence, Great Falls, Frenchtown, and Missoula crowded the halls of the Phyllis J. Washington School of Education as they attended MWC's week-long summer camp in July. In the mornings, students wrote odes, "I am" poems, and place poems, writing lines such as "Hellgate Canyon is a passage to the past" and "Morning in Montana/Native plants glisten in the sun/As the blanket of dew gets removed/For the day has started."

Students wet their feet in the Clark Fork River as they learned about river hydraulics with the Watershed Education Network, they danced with Turning the Wheel dance collective, learned about animals such as geckos, macaws, and beavers with Animal Wonders, and investigated animal pelts and skeletons at the Philip L. Wright Zoological Museum. Students also explored Missoula's past with a scavenger hunt and in poetry at the Moon-Randolph Homestead. Each week concluded with a terrific poetry reading at the Prescott Amphitheater at the base of Mount Sentinel.



Executive director Caroline Patterson and WWC summer campers pause for games in the shade at the historic Moon-Randolph Homestead. 10

Memories

by Solen, 7th grade

The smell of the fresh-baked goods in the morning
The sound of water splashing down from the fountains
The wind making the curtains dance in the night
The noise made by cars zooming by in the street
The mini sailboat gliding across the pond
The children waiting excitedly for their ice cream cone
The carousel spinning, the world passing by
Geese running from the children who chase them

At night golden lights glitter every hour
The world below shrinks as I look down, it gets
smaller and smaller
We stop, atop the Eiffel Tower

Inside a Pencil

by Achillea, 5th grade

Inside a pencil you may think
It is cold, dark and gray. But no,
Inside a pencil there are many
Creations just biding their time until
They can fly free. And these creations
They will fly. They'll fly far and wide
Changing the world as they go.

Each little creation will wear away at the
Pencil. It will be sharpened many times
And have many stories. By the end of its time
It will have lived a full life of creativity and adventure.

Inside a pencil you may think it is cold,
Dark and gray. But no, inside a pencil there
Are many creations that are just biding their
Time until they can fly free.



*Above: A Words With
Wings summer
camper composes
poetry in her camp
journal. Photo by
Launi Haygood.*

Rattlesnake Writing Workshop

Our biggest teen camp yet explored the MAM, library, and more.

Sixteen teenagers attended our 2022 Rattlesnake Writing Workshop, led by writers Nicole Gomez and Alyx Chandler at our largest teen camp to date. Students wrote both fiction and poetry, drawing inspiration from the Missoula Art Museum, Fact and Fiction bookstore, University of Montana campus, and world-renowned Missoula Public Library. The week concluded with a reading and pizza at the Prescott Amphitheater at the base of Mount Sentinel.



Right: A student concentrates on her work at the Missoula Art Museum.

Below: Students respond to each other's work on the University of Montana campus. Photos by Launi Haygood.



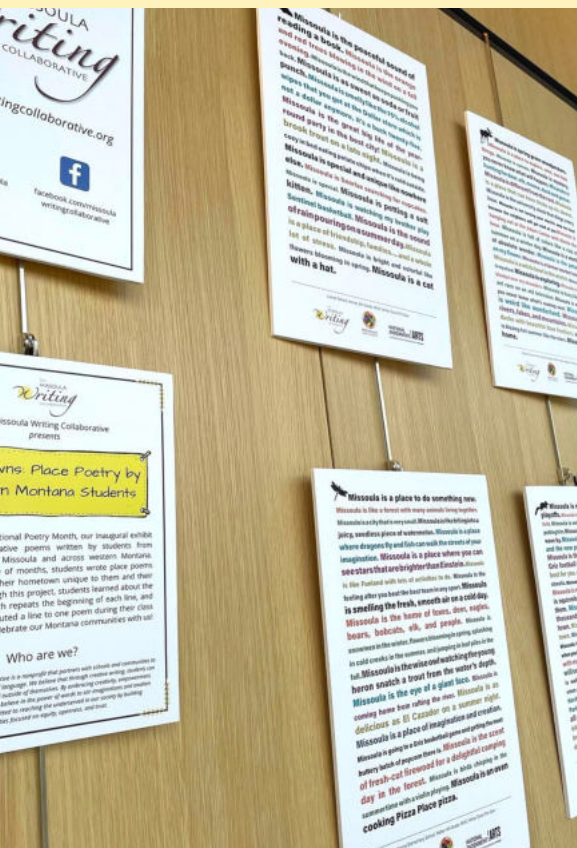
The Writers' Room

Online writing classes for adults covered a variety of topics.

In November and March, MWC writers taught one-day and 4-week classes for adults. It was a special time for MWC writers to work with adult students and for the general public to experience the skill of our MWC teachers. This year, students from Browning to Dixon, from Polson to Missoula participated in Writers' Room classes that covered everything from food writing to obituaries, from memoirs to short stories.

Poetry Month

New residencies at 6 rural Montana schools.



Each year in April, MWC does something special to celebrate Poetry Month, and 2022 was no exception. Big Dipper Ice Cream served up poetry-themed ice cream (The Rocky Road Less Travelled, anyone?) the Montgomery Distillery poured Iambic Gintameters, and The Roxy held a special film screening of *Patterson*. But the highlight was the "Our Towns: Place Poetry by Western Montana Students" exhibits at the Missoula Public Library and the Missoula Art Museum. Both exhibits featured beautifully laid-out place poems from every MWC partner school. The poems are thoughtful, comical, and moving. Readings at each exhibit celebrated the students and the towns they wrote about.

Left: Part of the "Our Towns" exhibit at the Missoula Public Library. Next page: A sampling of Our Towns poems.



Missoula is cars honking and bikes dinging and trains roaring and rivers and brilliant colors and fresh stars. Missoula is the fawn standing under the tree. Missoula is Biga Pizza, the Mustard Seed, the Humane Society. Missoula is a diamond in a mining cave. Missoula is a small cozy house at the edge of the darkening woods. Missoula is the Cherry tree in my yard, my swing-set, a bowl surrounded by mountains and intersected by rivers. Missoula is one big landscape and the horizon up ahead. Missoula is the Bridge by Mary's Mountain Cookies, the University of Montana, The Art Museum, the Natural History Center, Fort Missoula, Mismo Gymnastics, Krispy Kreme Doughnuts. Missoula is a place to learn and make friends and hike. Missoula is where my heart is. Missoula is here you don't have to be shy, you can express all your glory. Missoula is wings going up and down, Dairy Queen, the sun coming out of the cracks of the mountain, a book with a thousand pages. Missoula is home of the Salish. Missoula is a town, a forest, a river but not a city. Missoula is a peaceful place filled with wildlife, Rockin' Rudy's, neighborhood dogs barking. Missoula is gateway to beauty. Missoula is the arcade in the mall. Missoula is maple trees being tapped for syrup. Missoula is Butterfly Herbs and the Bitterroot Flower Shop, an impossible triangle of fun. Missoula is water lilies and Buttercups and the best place to ride your bike. Missoula is a beautiful friend with flowers. Missoula is home.

Lewis and Clark Elementary, 4th Grades Harper, O'Connor and Jones, MWC Writer Sheryl Noethe



Lolo is fishing 'till you think you got the biggest one. Lolo is summer night with stars and the grass on your back with the campfire growing. Lolo is my home. A small home. Lolo is like an eagle with a wingspan of 100 miles. Lolo is crowded in mountains. Lolo is McDonalds after basketball or swimming. Lolo is where the animals run free. Lolo is awesome because I live there and I can smell food. Lolo is a car in the night. Lolo is winter harsh. Lolo is a fire hazard. Lolo is birds chirping nonstop in the winter. Lolo is flickers, nut-hatches, and gold finches. Lolo is Traveler's Rest, where Lewis and Clark stopped twice. Lolo is a peaceful, beautiful place to be. Lolo is a place where you can see raindrops on plants. Lolo is green mountains looking down at the colorful valley below. Lolo is fresh from the garden. Lolo is climbing tall fruit trees that produce the sweetest apples you would ever taste. Lolo is fun like the park. Lolo is like a forest. Lolo is where you can feel a forest and the animals in it. Lolo is the smell of wood dust. Lolo is camping on the Clark Fork River. Lolo is where friendship never ends.

Lolo Elementary, Burrington 4th Grade, MWC Writer Cedar Brant



Arlee is the sound of grass whistling. Arlee is where dogs roam free. Arlee is a humble place. Arlee is basketballs bouncing on the road. Arlee is windy. Arlee is a place with pow pows. Arlee is the smell of buttercups in spring. Arlee is loud. Arlee is horses running on the road. Arlee is the sound of trains. Arlee is dirt. Arlee is the place with the screaming cows. Arlee is full of wonder at night. Arlee is the smell of dried meat. Arlee is the sight of the Running Boy. Arlee is the one chaotic bus. Arlee is sound of dancing at the pow wow.

Arlee Elementary, 5th Grade, MWC Writer Caroline Keys



Potomac is where love is. Potomac is the third town I've lived in. Potomac is rough terrain. Potomac is fish that taste like candy. Potomac is the smell of pancake mornings. Potomac is riding through a meadow with a horse you love so very much. Potomac is where all of us ride four-wheelers. Potomac is the volleyball chant P-O-T-O-M-A-C Potomac! Potomac is moving cows down the pavement. Potomac is cool in a good way. Potomac is great for farming. Potomac is where you can trust people. Potomac is hunting at 4:00 A.M. Potomac is fresh garlic bread. Potomac is cows mooing when they want food. Potomac is chase bear off your porch. Potomac is hunting. Potomac is snowball fights. Potomac is Otter Pops on a hot summer day. Potomac is Cully's soda and ramen. Potomac is my family playing darts in the front yard. Potomac is winter's breath nipping at your neck. Potomac is full of deer. Potomac is a lot of scratchy stickers in your clothes after a long walk in the woods. Potomac is the occasional car driving by. Potomac is weird kids. Potomac is bumpy roads to school. Potomac is warm until it's not. Potomac is the good morning song by the kindergarteners. Potomac is the sound of morning animal calls. Potomac is being able to say "yeah, I've shot a buck er two!" Potomac is gathering with family and friends on the 4th and lighting fireworks. Potomac is tractors growling. Potomac is a small town getting bigger. Potomac is 11 kids in 8th grade.

Potomac Elementary Students and MWC Writer April Cypher



IMPACT

"Empowerment of word, appreciation of social equity, and creative expression are only some of the gifts the Missoula Writing Collaborative poetry extraordinaires teach when children learn how to write and read poetry. They discover how to say the ordinary of life in the most extraordinary of ways. They learn how words are written and spoken and understand words do have consequences and effects on the lives of themselves and others. They learn to pay attention to the details of life and to witness the smallest moments so they can write about them later. They learn to hold thought, treasure feelings, honor emotions, and to love the power of the written word. Students embrace each other's perspectives and creativity. They learn that anyone can be a poet regardless of family backgrounds, color, race, social status, or gender."

–Sharon Jones
Montana Teacher of the Year 2022
4th Grade, Lewis and Clark Elementary



According to a survey of 15 teachers who had a MWC residency in their classroom...

73.3%

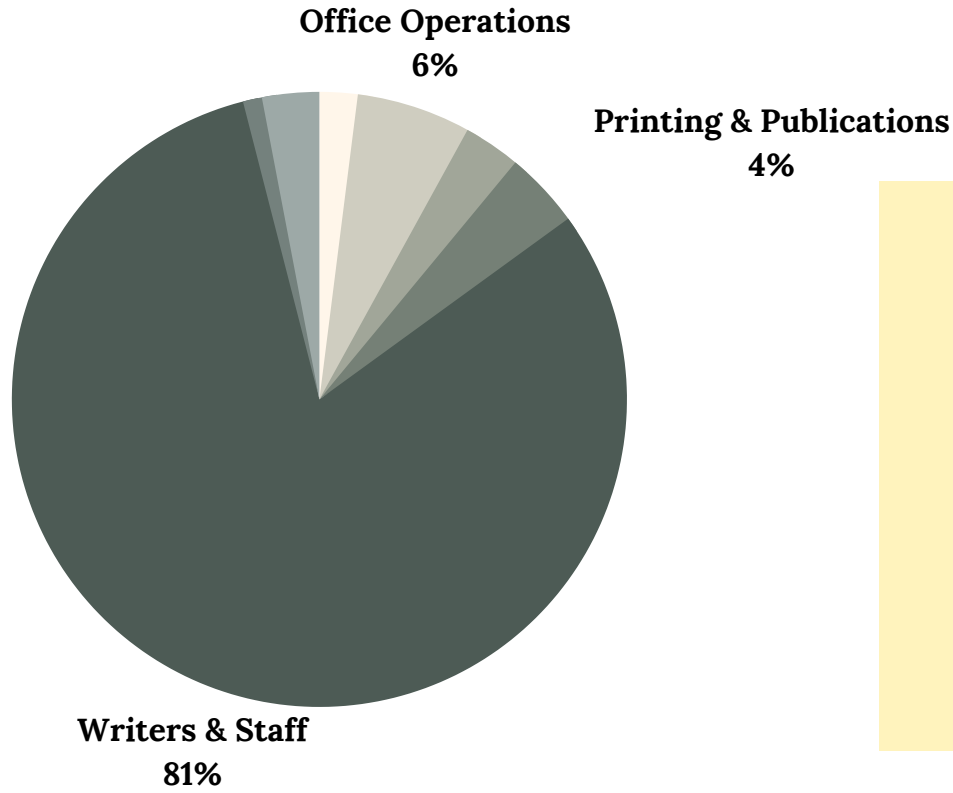
Of respondents said the residency was "outstanding" in contributing to students' knowledge and skills about writing.

93.3%

Of respondents reported they would want a writer-in-residence in their classroom again in the future.

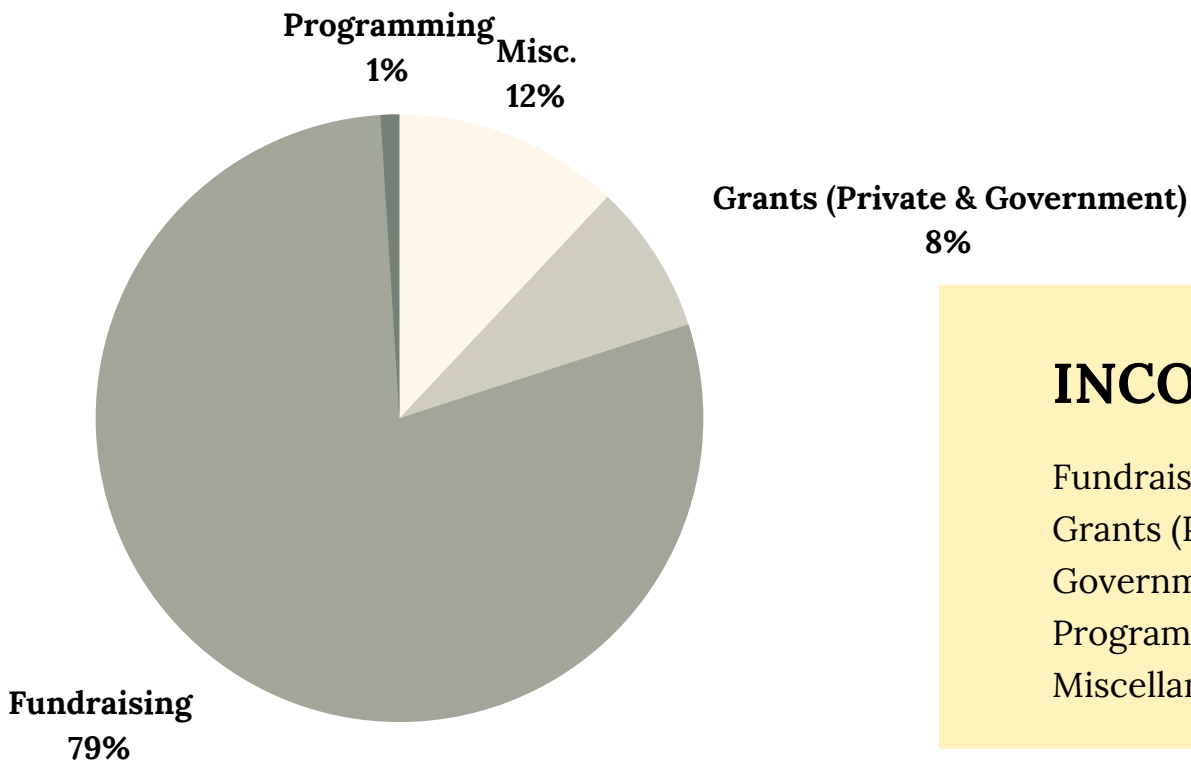
Above: A Words With Wings summer camper presents her work at the final camp poetry reading. Photo by Launi Haygood.

FINANCES



EXPENSES

Programming 2%
Office 6%
Printing and Publications 4%
Writers & Staff 81%
Mileage 3%
Advertising & Marketing 1%
Miscellaneous 3%



INCOME

Fundraising 79%
Grants (Private & Government) 8%
Programming 1%
Miscellaneous 12%

Donors

MWC is thankful for the support of these recent major donors.

James Lee and Pearl Burke
Nancy Cook and Tom Berninghausen
D.A. Davidson

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The Charles Engelhard Foundation
The Gallagher Western Montana Charitable Foundation

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We teach kids to love to
write!

