

Featured Writer Interview with Maggie H.

Maggie H. is an 8th grade student at Ron Russell Middle School in Portland. She enjoys writing by herself, and also in collaboration with her friends. She is currently at work on a story that has grown to 88 pages long, and is also co-writing a graphic novel. Maggie has two step-siblings, two siblings and a cat, Fozzie, who is named after the character Fozzie Bear in *The Muppets*. "I like to imagine him like the bear on TV, with a little hat on his head," she says. Her goal is to graduate college with at least a bachelor's degree and become an author.

Maggie H. participated in a Write Around Portland workshop through Ron Russell's SUN program this fall and will be published in our 51st anthology, *Light to the Edge*.



Interview with Featured Writer Maggie H.

Interviewed by a Write Around volunteer

Your poem, "I Am/I Am Not" was selected to appear in the Write Around Portland anthology. What's it about?

It's about the good things I do, and also some of my flaws I can probably fix. In the poem I say, "I'm creative, but I'm not artistic" and "I'm a human, but I'm not perfect." That kind of thing. I tried to put what my life is actually like into it. Because I know I'm a clumsy person and I'm not perfect when I make things. I mean, I think my stories are good, but they're not great compared to people like Edgar Allan Poe. And that's all right, because there's a group of people who really like my stories and want to read them.

So you have readers!

Yes, and for example, I started working on a story in September and I'm still working on it and it's 88 pages long so far. I actually had an audience that wanted to read it and I said, "OK, you can read the rough draft." And they said, "This is intense, but it's so good."

You were already a writer when you joined the Write Around Portland workshop. Did the experience change anything for you?

Yes, now I can come up with ideas just like that! Sometimes they have us look at a picture and we're not given any text or background, and we make up a story about it. Once, I wrote about a lady who was given an anniversary gift back in the 1800s, and another time, it was about a cowboy in some boy's dream. It can be anything. I come to the workshop and it's like all my ideas are bleeding onto the page. Maybe that image is a little insane, but I mean, my ideas are there, on the page.

Tell me about one of your workshops that was especially memorable.

One time, they asked us to write about the topic, *We don't do that in this house*. I really wanted to imagine some other culture, a strict culture, and what it's like to live in it. So I wrote a poem about a girl who has strict parents

who don't allow her to cuss or have bad manners, and who control her behavior. It was so interesting to go inside another world like that.

When someone reads what you wrote, what do you want their experience to be?

I want their experience to be: Oh! That's great! And I want them to say, "That's intense, but I like that," or, "I really get a picture in my head of that person's life." When I'm writing about the cowboy sitting on his coffee-colored horse, I want people to see him on the edge of a cliff, with a cactus behind him. I want my readers to experience intense moments that intensify. I want that moment to feel like they should care about it.

You said that writing can be intense, and here you are in this workshop with kids you go to school with. What's that been like? Do you feel like you know them in a different way now?

Some of them, oh wow, they are so quiet in class, but their mind is off the hook. I know why they're quiet now! They're crazy with their ideas. Their mind is going somewhere where no person has ever thought before. There's a girl in the workshop, and the details in her stories are so amazing. She's a quiet person in my math class; I never thought that her ideas could be that big. It's so cool to see that in a person.

Would you take another Write Around Portland workshop?

Yes, definitely! I think each year they do something different. So if I joined again, I'd be shown a whole new world of writing. That's pretty cool.

Would you recommend Write Around Portland to other people?

Oh, yes. It feels amazing to enter your creative side and to get the positive input, to hear what people like about your writing. Miss Ruth [our workshop facilitator] gives us a postcard every week with a quote from our writing that she especially liked, like "the deranged cowboy", or "I'm creative, but I'm not artistic". Those were some of mine. It let me know that she thought those phrases were really good. That felt amazing.