AWP 2024 EVENT OUTLINE

EVENT TITLE: On the Frontlines/School Matters: K-12 Teachers Writing the Classroom

Event Description: At a time when public educators are increasingly under political pressure, panelists will explore what it means to portray complex truths, dispel myths, and talk honestly about how to stay creative within top-down school systems as they find form and language for their experience with youth in the classroom. This multiracial and geographically diverse panel centers writers, editors and activists who put their K-12 classroom experience in conversation with their writing across multiple genres.

EVENT CATEGORY: Multiple Literary Genres Craft & Criticism

Event Organizer & Moderator
Mahru Elahi:
Mahru Elahi is a VONA alum, a Hedgebrook Writer-in-Residence and a finalist for the Allegra Johnson Prize. Her poetry and nonfiction prose has appeared in journals including Fireweed and the museum of americana: a literary review, in MUTHA and Hyphen magazines, and has been anthologized in Let Me Tell You Where I've Been: New Writing by Women of the Iranian Diaspora (University of Arkansas) and Days I Moved Through Ordinary Sounds: The Teachers of WritersCorps in Poetry and Prose (City Lights Foundation). An MFA student at Antioch University Los Angeles, Mahru lives in Oakland, CA with her son.

Event Participants
Matthew E. Henry:
Matthew E. Henry (MEH) is a veteran high school English teacher and the author of three full-length collections of poetry and three chapbooks, including the Colored page and Teaching While Black. He is editor-in-chief of The Weight Journal and an associate poetry editor at Pidgeonholes and The Rise Up Review.

Davon Loeb:
Davon Loeb is the author of the memoir The In-Betweens. He earned an MFA in creative writing from Rutgers University-Camden. Davon is an assistant features editor at The Rumpus. His work is featured at The Sun Magazine, Joyland Magazine, Catapult, Ploughshares, and elsewhere.

Brittany Rogers:
Brittany Rogers is a poet, writer, high school teacher, and lifelong Detroiter. She is Editor-In-Chief of Muzzle Magazine and co-host of VS Podcast. She has work published in Four Way Review, Underbelly, Mississippi Review, The Metro Times, Oprah Daily, and Lambda Literary.

Marguerite Sheffer:
Maggie Sheffer is a former K12 educator with work in Asimov’s Science Fiction, Epiphany, The Dread Machine, Cast of Wonders, The Pinch, and The Adroit Journal, where she is a 2023 Veasna So Scholar. Maggie co-founded Third Lantern Lit, a New Orleans writing collective.

Agenda
Saturday, February 10, 12:10-1:25pm
12:10-12:20pm (10) Housekeeping and Opening Remarks
12:20-12:55 (35) Introductions and Initial Remarks
12:55-1:15pm (20) Panel Discussion
1:15-1:25pm (10) Q & A

Opening Remarks and Housekeeping Announcements
Good afternoon, and welcome to “On the Frontlines/School Matters: K-12 Teachers Writing the Classroom.” I’m Mahru Elahi, the moderator.

A few reminders before we begin:
• For those needing or wishing to follow along to a written text, please let the moderator of the panel, (identify moderator), know, and a printed copy will be delivered to you.
• Please make sure that spaces marked for wheelchairs remain clear of chairs or other barriers.
• Treat service animals as working animals and do not attempt to distract or pet them.
• Be aware of those with chemical sensitivities and refrain from wearing scented products.
• Please be aware that your fellow attendees may have invisible disabilities. Do not question anyone’s use of an accommodation while at the conference, including for chairs reserved for those with disabilities.

Before we jump in, and to get a sense of the audience, we’re going to engage in an informal show of hands. (We can’t just talk at you-all. We need something interactive as part of an initial assessment of our audience, so that we can try and co-construct this space together, right?)

Please raise your hand if...
  ● you are currently a full-time teacher in grades K-12
  ● you were formerly a full-time teacher in grades K-12
  ● you have an MFA or are in an MFA program, and are thinking of becoming a teacher in grades K-12

As we all know (I think I am preaching to the choir here): K-12 teachers are essential workers. We are on the frontlines of the current struggle for our American democracy. The members of this panel envision writing as not just an individual radical act, but as a collective tool of truth telling and resistance. This panel represents teachers who are cultural workers, award winning writers, editors, and advocates for kids. We traveled here (or Zoomed) from Detroit, New Jersey, Massachusetts, New Orleans and Oakland.

Two of us are not able to be here in-person because the expectations of our work in K-12 classrooms means that we find it challenging to take time off in the middle of winter, smack dab between the December 2023 holiday break and Spring Break 2024. It’s in honor of our work with youth and our identity as writers that I’ve organized this panel and I thank our audience so much for being here.

To get us started, will you each introduce yourselves and share one challenge and one joy you derive from writing into the classroom?

**Moderator Questions**
1) What are the challenges and joys of writing into the K-12 classroom experience? 
2) How is your classroom teaching in conversation with your literary work? 
3) How does your teaching experience influence your ability to / approach to creating community amongst writers? 
4) Classroom work vs. creative work is often posed as a binary, but K-12 classrooms are some of the most innovative and creative places around. Yet the classroom conditions, often situated within rigid and contested educational systems, don’t always allow for that generative space to evolve. How do you sit in that tension? How do you balance or negotiate that space? How do we stay creative and encourage our students to be creative? 
5) Do your students read your work? Do your students know you are a rockstar? 
6) Where does your teacher-identity vibe with your artist-identity and where do they clash or push up against each other?