Evan Schuchardt (at the lectern), a seventh grader at Rogers Middle School in south St. Louis County, reads his story “Evolution Soap” at UMSL’s third annual Youth Writing Festival.

Enthusiastic young writers hone skills at UMSL. The Youth Writing Festival at the University of Missouri–St. Louis was created in part to inspire a new generation’s enthusiasm for writing. If the participants’ response to an invitation to share their work with 125-plus peers was any indication, the festival was a success. Scores of St. Louis-area middle school students lined up eager to read their writing.

Overseen by the Gateway Writing Project at UMSL, the festival featured a series of morning writing sessions last Thursday with the students and their teachers. During the sessions, students worked to improve their writing skills and style. The event was
capped off with the “Celebration of Writing” where students could recite prose and verse they drafted in the earlier sessions.

“I never met students who were sorry they read, but I have met students who were sorry they didn’t,” Diane Scollay, associate director of the Gateway Writing Project, said before inviting students to the stage.

Participation wasn’t a problem. More than 20 students immediately stood up and took their place in line to read their writing at a lectern overlooking the other festival participants. And that was just the first wave. Even more took to the stage later.

Angie Muse, an eighth grade English teacher at Hazelwood (Missouri) North Middle School, has taken more than a dozen of her students to the festival each year.

“I didn’t think we’d have any students volunteer to read the first year,” Muse said. “So I was surprised at first by everyone jumping up to read. I’m not surprised anymore because the reaction by the students has been the same every year.”

Courtney Nored, an eighth grader at Hoech Middle School in St. Ann, Mo., and Evan Schuchardt, a seventh grader at Rogers Middle School in south St. Louis County, were among the first readers. Both students also were recorded reading their stories for possible inclusion on the Gateway Writing Project’s Web site.

Nored, an aspiring poet interested in gothic literature, read her poem “Over the Edge.”

“I got to learn a lot about verbs and trying to intensify your writing,” she said of her experience at the festival. “I plan on taking that to my poetry.”

Schuchardt, who was excited to visit the UMSL campus as a long-term prospective student, wrote a story titled “Evolution Soap,” which humorously detailed the concept of a 15-second shower.

“I like humor. I love funny movies,” he said. “I got most of my humor from my dad and I got my writing from my mom.”

The Youth Writing Festival also serves as a way for UMSL students to learn. English education students assist with the festival and observe veteran teachers interacting with middle school students. Three students from South Korea also helped, giving
them the opportunity to compare the teaching of writing in American schools to their home country.

The Gateway Writing Project is an affiliate of the National Writing Project.

“Our mutual goal is to improve the teaching of writing in our nation’s schools through extensive research and exemplary instruction,” said Nancy Singer, director of the Gateway Writing Project.

In addition to the Youth Writing Festival, the Gateway Writing Project also promotes literacy by sponsoring events and providing a range of professional development opportunities to area teachers.

More information:
http://www.umsl.edu/~gwp

Short URL: http://blogs.umsl.edu/news/?p=5754

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