

Young Writers' Conference

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One Saturday in May, 1971, the campus of the University of Minnesota will be the scene of a young writers' conference. Pupils, with their teachers, will join with others to converse, discuss, and write. The theme will be creativity, and the writing will be on-site creative expression.

Because facilities for housing such a meeting are as much related to its success as classroom and school arrangements are to progress in young scholarly pursuits, a compact facility has been tentatively selected: Nolte Center for Continuation Study. The number which may be accommodated will thus be limited by the space available.

At present, plans allow for a teacher with one or two pupils, all of whom have been working with creative writing, to further their study by pooling their experiences and gaining new ones from discussions with authors and teachers. The talk would be interspersed with writing, and the product would be published. A great deal of responsibility for the success of the venture will be placed on the participants.

As for the total number who may constitute the conference, it cannot be large. Neither the nature of the work planned nor the possible facility allow for large groups. Probably a hundred persons, teachers and pupils, would be practical and productive. All contained in one building with rooms for general meetings, or smaller meetings, plus a noon meal, the conference would be appropriately isolated for work. The Museum of Natural History next door might provide a needed change of scene and pace.

A maximum of thirty-three Minnesota communities could be represented by a teacher and two pupils each. A more flexible designation of participants may, and probably will, be used. At present the entire project is only in the projection stage. Further information will be made available through the Minnesota Council of Teachers of English, and later through the Nolte Center for Continuation Study, University of Minnesota.

Some elementary school teachers may not realize that the MCTE has a growing membership and concern for the English

(Language Arts) phase of the education of young children. With so many areas of proficiency adopted by elementary teachers, it is sometimes difficult to choose emphases. Will it be social studies, mathematics, science, English? This next year it is hoped that some will emphasize English, and give considerable thought and time to children's writing, enough to wish to attend the conference. The winter issue of the Minnesota English Journal will be devoted to articles about creative writing for and by children, one source of motivation for teachers to plan especially for a writing emphasis.

It is through the interest in education expressed by the McKnight Family Foundation Fund that funds will be available for publishing the writings accomplished by the children at the conference. Whether or not the articles will be immediate or delayed products has not yet been determined. It is possible that there may be a choice in the matter. However it turns out, the published writings will be created and edited by the writers themselves.

The conference will not be a contest. Every child will have an opportunity to contribute something to the total effort of the conference without relative evaluation. The principle of individual worth and uniqueness will be maintained. The program to be followed will be available in October, 1970. It will show evidences of many freedoms involved in creative writing as well as numerous responsibilities to the readers for whom the writing is meant.

The persons who are serving as the planning committee for the conference are Pat Connors, St. Louis Park Public Schools; Enrica Fish, University of Minnesota; Geraldine Kozberg, St. Paul Public Schools; Nancy Johanson, Macalester College; Norine Odland, University of Minnesota; Ruth Stein, University of Minnesota; Thomas Walton, Ely Public Schools. The chairman is Naomi Chase, University of Minnesota.