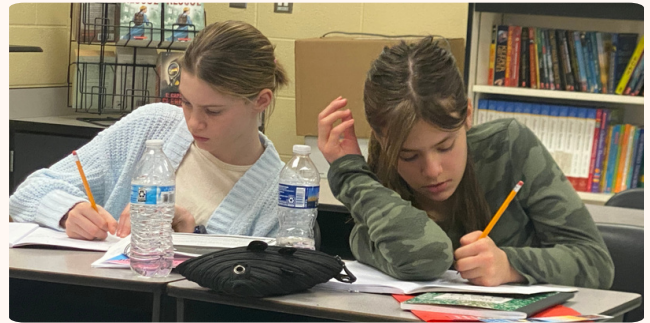

NVWP NEWS

WRITE ON AT SCRIBBLECON

Andrea Yarbough

The hallways of Benton Middle School in Manassas, Virginia, are alive with the sound of children. Footsteps slap against the tile floor as students move into their classrooms. They grab a seat. Pull out a pencil. Begin writing. But they shouldn't be here.

That's because the students entering the classrooms of Benton Middle School are visiting on a Saturday, a day more frequently reserved for sleeping in, watching cartoons, and playing video games, not attending classes with instructors assigning exercises. So what could bring these students (and their parents) out to school on what is usually the most unacademic day of the week? ScribbleCon!



ScribbleCon is a community writing event organized by author and National Writing Project Teacher-Consultant, John Dutton. Now in its second year, ScribbleCon provides students and their families an opportunity to engage in risk-free creative writing, selecting from a range of topics designed to capture the imagination of all who attend.

Dutton conceived of the idea after attending a similar event a few years earlier, one that was sadly lost in the wake of COVID. Together with fellow author, Michael Sensale, Dutton blended the writing elements of the earlier event with annual themed conventions which provide opportunities for like-minded people to come together. From those two ideas, ScribbleCon was born. In February 2023, Dutton, together with an impressive collection of writers, kicked off the inaugural event.

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The 2024 event was even larger than the first with more presenters, more participants, and more topics which ranged from developing ideas for writing to seeking publication.

This year's celebration of writing kicked off with Keynote Speaker Maryel Stone's exploration of Strong Female Characters. As her speech concluded, writers eagerly scurried off to the classrooms where they spent time playing with poetry, experimenting with tone, and discovering new worlds.



But the students weren't the only ones lost in language that day. Their parents were invited to take part in the event as well, enjoying quality time with their children or, in some cases, quality time away from their children as they celebrated themselves as writers for a few peaceful moments.

When asked why he dedicated so much of his personal time to developing and hosting this event, Dutton explained that he "just loves seeing the smiles on participants' faces" and enjoys creating a space where parents can "write alongside their children." And judging from the excitement in the hallways—including on the faces of former students who returned specifically to attend the event—it is clear that Dutton has hit his mark.

Plans are already underway for ScribbleCon 2025. Dutton is actively seeking participants both to host and attend the workshop sessions.

If you would like more information on how you or your students can be part of this great event, contact John Dutton at: SpilledInkVA@gmail.com and include the word "ScribbleCon" in the subject line.