

BY JULIE WENGER WATSON

calling all authors

Wherefore art thou, young authors? The 2015 Young People's Creative Writing Contest is looking for you! The Tulsa Library's annual literary competition for wordsmiths ages 10-18 offers cash prizes in short story, informal essay, poetry, short play and "comix" categories. Entries are accepted May 1-June 5 and are judged on the basis of content, originality and the quality of expression. This is a great opportunity for aspiring writers to hone their craft and maybe even walk away with some cold, hard cash.

Author Sharon Draper, recipient of this year's Anne V. Zarrow Award for Young Readers' Literature, is the featured speaker at the awards ceremony August 21 in Connor's Cove at the Hardesty Library. This New York Times bestselling author of popular books for children and teens like *Double Dutch* and, most recently, *Stella by Starlight*, will hand out the awards.

Tulsa author Gina Conroy has some tips for young authors who are first putting pen to paper. Conroy, a mother of four school-aged children, wrote *Cherry Blossom Capers*, a collection of four short books set in and around Washington, D.C. Conroy is currently working with her writing partner, Ron Estrada, on *AngelWarz* a novel for middle school-aged kids that she is releasing as a free weekly series distributed like a newsletter through email. The fantasy book is set in Broken Arrow.

Conroy has attended numer-



GINA CONROY SIGNS BOOKS.

Photo Credit: Niki Counce Photography

ous writing conferences and taught many writing courses. She's learned a lot along the way. "When I started writing that first novel, I just wrote," she recalls. "I didn't know there was anything called story structure. I didn't know anything about the mechanics of writing."

Conroy emphasizes that there are four elements to a story: character, setting, plot and scene. "You want to make sure you have all of those." Beginning writers need to keep these elements in mind as they craft their stories. "Basic story structure, in its simplest form, is a beginning, getting to know your character, growth in the middle, and then the big climax and the ending, or resolution."

One mistake that Conroy often sees new writers make, especially when attempting short stories, is to try to get inside the

head of all of their characters. "That's called head hopping, and it's frowned upon," she notes. "Especially in a short story, you should have one character point of view." Conroy suggests that writers imagine their character looking through the eye of a camera or a screen. "Whatever that character sees through the screen is the only thing you can write about because you're in that character's head." The story has to be interpreted through that character's five senses.

Similarly, new authors often give too much back-story rather than grabbing the reader's attention by jumping quickly into the story itself. "You don't want to tell your character's whole life story before the action starts," she explains. It's also important for the story to have some type of conflict, either internal or external, to keep the reader's interest.

"After you set up your hook, you want to have some obstacles and you want to make them progressively harder. Right before the ending, you want your character to overcome that major hurdle to get what they wanted in the beginning or to realize some truths."

According to Conroy, one simple way to improve your writing is to use active, rather than passive, words. "Don't tell me a story; show me the action instead," Conroy explains. "When you use active words, which usually goes along with showing instead of telling, your reader becomes more emotionally connected to the character, becomes more involved."

Conroy believes passion, focus and discipline are all qualities that make a good writer, but "don't get so hung up on being perfect." Rather, just write.

"When I write straight from my heart, without worrying about whether this verb is the right verb or what I should be doing, it comes out so much better than if I agonize over every little thing. Write the story, then go back and edit it."

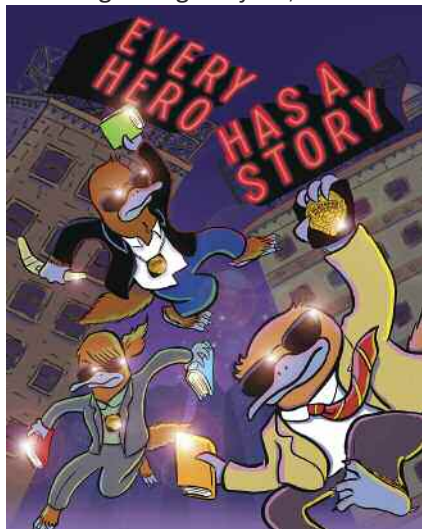
The most important thing is to try. "Have fun with it! Don't be afraid to not win a contest because every time you enter, you'll learn something new and next time it will be better."

For more information on Conroy and her classes, visit www.writerinterrupted.com. For more information on the writing contest, visit www.tulsalibrary.org.

BY MARIANNE STAMBAUGH, YOUTH SERVICES MANAGER, TULSA CITY-COUNTY LIBRARY

library reading program expands to include adults

If you like Super Heroes or want to be one, Tulsa City-County Library is the place to be this summer. Libraries across the county will offer hundreds of programs and activities to keep your kids feeling super and having fun. Beginning May 26, children



up to fifth grade will celebrate “Every Hero Has a Story” with activities about superheroes, community heroes and plenty of storytimes and professional performers. The theme for tweens and teens is “Unmask!” with lots of mask-making, art projects and maker programs.

A Tulsa tradition for more than 30 years, the Summer Reading Program has expanded to include the whole family with rewards for reading. We hope to sign up mom, dad, grandparents and the babysitter for summer reading this year. Children who see their parents or other family members reading are more likely to enjoy reading themselves.

Research shows that when school is out, kids who read — especially on their grade level — keep their skills sharp and prevent the summer slide. There’s no need to nag them to read; just tell them about the great rewards they can earn for reading books.

This year’s program has a bit of a twist and has gone digital. All ages will register online starting at www.tulsalibrary.org/summer.

Going online lets families who are traveling or can’t visit a library still participate. Everyone will need a personal library card to participate, so if you’ve been using one card for the whole family, it’s time for everyone to get one. Cards are free and may be obtained online at www.tulsalibrary.org or at any library location.

Anyone who has Internet access, even from a smart phone, can participate. Once signed up, you can make your own avatar, earn badges and write reviews. Or if you’re more traditional, it’s still okay to just read!

How does it all work?

Go to tulsalibrary.org/summer and choose which program you want to enter: child, teen or adult. Register in a few simple steps and start reading. E-books, audio books or traditional books will all count toward your goal. Here’s your quick guide (below).

Even though we’ve gone digital, we still have reading logs and medals for children. Grab a reading log at the library or print your own from the website. Write

down the titles of the books read is one of the skills that helps strengthen developing reading skills. Kids still like collecting stickers and decorating their reading log with their own superhero design, so the reading log becomes part of the fun.

For the first time, we’re offering a chance to win a pair of Tulsa State Fair Mega Ride Passes. With every library visit, the children earn a sticker to put on their reading logs. When they have collected four stickers, children between kindergarten and fifth grade earn the chance to put their name in this special drawing. Each library location will have a winner.

In addition to these prizes, all children and youth who have registered online and completed the reading goal will be entered into a drawing for more prizes including bicycles, Play Station 4, Xbox 360, and passes to local museums, sporting events and other attractions.

So pull out your library card, put on your cape, and get ready to read and enjoy the rewards of reading together with your kids. See you at the library!

How old are you?	How many books to read for your prize?	What you will earn!
Baby to Fifth grade	8 books Read for fun, anything you want. Read by yourself or let someone read to you.	A gold medal and a book of coupons for free entertainment and food. Value \$70
Completed Fifth grade to 17 Years	6 books Discover a new series, your series, try a play-away or an download an e-book.	A flashlight and a book of coupons for free entertainment and food. Value \$52.00
18 years or older	4 books. Read anything, and let the kids catch you reading!	Coupons for a bagel, dessert pizza and more.

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