



## Michigan Nonprofit Aims to Write a Brighter Future for Teens

by Lisa Diggs  
May 2, 2017

It's hard to think of a time in recent memory that that has been more fraught with verbal conflict than this. Possibly the anonymity of the internet is chiefly to blame. Maybe the culprit is our deeply divided political system here in America. Perhaps fault simply lies with the endless physical and ideological battles being waged around the world on a daily basis. Most likely, they all play a role. Regardless of the catalysts, it seems like we have stopped earnestly speaking and honestly listening to one another. That is where Huntington Woods-based nonprofit, [One Earth Writing](#), comes into play.

The brainchild of author, writing instructor, and public relations expert, Lynne Golodner, One Earth Writing seeks to help diverse groups of tweens and teens explore their similarities through the power of words. While this concept is fairly new for her, Golodner has built her brand on helping individuals and organizations share their stories long before stepping in this new direction—a shift that was spurred by our current climate.

“For several years, I was troubled by the great divide between people in our country and wondering what I could to help heal that divide. As the mother of four kids (three of whom are teens), I realized they didn't see difference; they just saw people,” said Golodner. “So it occurred to me that if I could help teens, as they build their own identities, include the notion that they are similar to peers different from them, perhaps we could create a whole generation of leaders who see more similarity than difference, who are accepting and welcoming of others.”

Having recently celebrated its one-year anniversary, the nonprofit has already worked with more than 1,000 kids in Southeastern Michigan and Saginaw, with plans to expand to West Michigan in 2018.

One Earth Writing commonly works with schools, faith communities, youth groups and religious schools. For institutions with already diverse populations, a writing curricula is available that is designed to focus on identity-building through in-depth creative writing. In the case of more homogenous entities, the nonprofit can bring together students from two isolated organizations for one full-day, or ongoing, writing workshops. Workshops typically begin by reading and discussing a poem, essay, or part of a story on the selected topic of interest. Common topics include food, sports, emotions, ambition, identity and other areas of interest among teens. Participants are then given a writing assignment, to be completed individually or in pairs or groups. The larger group then reconvenes with some students sharing what they've written.

Longer programs might include 2-4 writing opportunities, perhaps deepening one assignment, working revisions, or tackling separate pieces, but all bound by the same theme.

There's also an opportunity for individual students to get involved with the nonprofit through an Ambassadors group. The idea behind that program is for experienced students to continue to grow their own writing skills while



also working with their peers in workshops, thereby also enhancing their leadership skills. For example, some of the Ambassadors are working with refugee youth, to help them record the story of their individual journeys from their own perspectives.

Applications are currently being accepting for the Summer 2017 Ambassadors program. There will be additional opportunities in Fall 2017 and Winter 2018. Ideal Ambassador candidates are students ages 12-17 who love to write and are interested in developing their leadership and writing skills by working within an intimate group of peers representing a variety of races, religions and socioeconomic origins. Students interested in applying can learn more at [www.oneearthwriting.org/Ambassadors](http://www.oneearthwriting.org/Ambassadors).

While still in its infancy, Golodner has big dreams for where her fledgling operation can go, and the impact it can make. Her dream is that the concept can be embraced nationally within five years.

“I hope we have students engaged across the country not only in our programs but in authentic and real friendships because they met on common ground through One Earth Writing,” says Golodner. “I anticipate a robust cadre of instructors in a variety of schools, with dates and districts and programs filling the calendar, while I speak to audiences of educators, politicians and community organizers/activists nationwide about the power of words to bring us together.”

While the organization is already seeing some support from corporations, foundations, and donors, fundraising remains a significant priority. Those interested in helping the program may [volunteer](#), [offer ideas](#), [donate funds](#), or attend an upcoming fundraiser on May 10, 2017, at the [Maple Theater](#) in Bloomfield.

Tickets are \$25 per person and include admission, popcorn and a beverage. \$100 VIP seats are also available and are a tax-deductible donation. The event will celebrate the first graduating class of Ambassadors and include a screening of truly appropriate movie, 2007's *Freedom Writers* starring Hillary Swank and Patrick Dempsey. The film chronicles the story of a young, inexperienced English teacher as she attempts to bring students together in a racially-charged Southern California high school circa 1994. After the viewing, stay tuned for an engaging discussion led by renowned journalists, Laura Berman and Brian Dickerson. [Tickets are available online](#).

