

**By Kaitlin Ugolik : The Herald-Sun  
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DURHAM -- Zak Corsi walked to the podium coolly, introduced himself to the small audience without a hint of nervousness and began reading his poem.

"Can you hear it?"

His voice grew louder and more commanding as he read on past his poem's title, about the "bite-sized pieces of bull----" being fed through "silent propaganda" to "what we now call 'the human race.'" He indicated something very small with his fingers every time he said "the human race."

Corsi's intensity grew, almost yelling as he expressed his frustration with society through more fierce words with a lyrical tone.

When he was done, the audience responded with heavy applause.

Corsi, a junior, is one of 126 students at C.E. Jordan High School to have their work published in an anthology or full-length novel this year. The students gathered in the media center Thursday evening to share in the culminating experience of their creative writing year, presenting excerpts of their work to family and friends, and celebrating their publication.

Over the past three years, Stuart Albright's creative writing classes have published 11 anthologies and seven novels of original work through his publishing company, McKinnon Press. It's all part of his curriculum, which he models after the one he had as a creative writing minor at UNC-Chapel Hill.

"Public recognition for work well done is important for a teenager," Albright said.

The most important aspect of the writing process that gets his students to this publication night, he said, is workshopping.

His students write a 1,000-word story and make copies for each person in the class, and everyone spends several weeks critiquing their peers' work. At the end of the semester, each student chooses one or a few of his or her favorite pieces to submit to the class anthology. All of these books are professionally bound and can be purchased online through their distributor, Lulu.com.

Junior Jordan Fearington contributed to an anthology last semester, called "Sophistochoas", whose contributors were itching for a reunion on Thursday. Fearington was cajoled into taking the class by Albright, who was also his football coach.

"It was so overcrowded I gave my seat up to a girl and sat on a stack of books," Fearington said, but it was worth it. "You get to meet diverse people and hear about their lives. It's cool to see how people open up once they've bonded a little bit."

Albright said diversity is one of his favorite rewards for teaching writing to teenagers.

"I think it really bridges stereotype groups in schools," he said. "A lot of my [football] players take my class, and a lot of AP kids and inner-city Durham kids who don't necessarily take honors or AP-level classes, and the kids learn a lot from each other. They've become very much a family by the time they finish up the class."

Some of his classes have a somber mood and tend to write about death and violence. Others focus more on humor. One student read a poem Thursday that had the audience laughing, while another, a fiercely executed political piece, evoked great applause. Albright stood by, grinning, as each student read his or her work.

Many students have begun taking Albright's Creative Writing I class with plans to move on to Creative Writing II, in which they can write a full-length novel. Two authors were featured at the event Thursday.

Senior Anthony Manenti's novel, "Barely Accepted", focuses on "the essence of being 18."

"It's about being a kid but having to move on to bigger things," he said. "Not wanting to grow up, but having to." The main character represents Manenti as he is now, and interacts with other characters that represent him as a child and as he was two years ago. The title of the book came from his struggle to get into college.

Senior Ashley Ellis's novel, "Blindside", is a dystopian story about "a society that has taken morality to the extreme," she said. The story involves a Sept. 11-type event "but on a wider scale." The two main characters, a girl and her teacher/mentor, are the only ones in the fight against the government.

Ellis plans on writing more novels.

Albright published his own memoir through the publishing company he created, McKinnon Press. When he realized how easy it was to do, he thought it would be a great tool for his students.

"Companies are having to spend billions of dollars training their employees to write," Albright said. "You get the sense that writing isn't taught. Students leave my class and say that when they go off to college and into the work force it really teaches them to get their thoughts down on paper succinctly and clearly."

This has gotten Albright a lot of recognition, but he wants to put the focus on the students, who flock to his class now that they know what it entails. He has 107 students signed up for next year.

"You walk into his class and you know it's going to be different," said sophomore Emily Palmer, who contributed two short stories and to "Why We Throw Stones". "He talks to you not just as a student, but as a friend. Everyone opens up."

When the movie "Freedom Writers" came out last year, some people suggested that Albright had borrowed the idea from the true story about a teacher in California named Erin Gruwell who brings her diverse and troubled students together by having them publish a book.

His response to this is usually, "No, dang it! I've been doing this before Freedom Writers came out."

The students do watch the movie in class, and their response tends to be that their anthologies are better.