

Creative Writing Camp: A Space to Grow

Two second graders bounce their handmade puppets around, transforming the slick hall of the cafeteria where students gather for pickup into their own little stage. To my left, a girl bends over her journal, furiously scribbling as she is called to head home. In front of me, a camper gestures animatedly to his camp intern, explaining the story he just wrote.

Carpool at Creative Writing Camp is unexpected yet wonderful proof of the magic of camp. It is a bustling time when all of the ideas that have been cooking in campers' heads throughout the day bubble over in a kettle of chatter and excitement— so much excitement that campers barely hear their names being called when their parents arrive. Students become so immersed in their imagined worlds that it takes longer for them to break out of these worlds than to break into them. As the car line grows, there is a temptation to hurry campers along; yet in the midst of so much activity, there is also an invitation to slow down and savor the joys and wonders of the creative process.

In my time as a Creative Writing Camp Intern at The Shlenker School, I observed gifted teachers and writers who believe in that magic place where time slows down and stories float around like forgotten objects, waiting to be discovered. These women and men know how to reach for the first image that appears behind their eyes before logic or practicality threatens to squash their creativity. When you put a piece of paper in front of them, they do not see a white page but a snow monster, trying to gobble its way out from piles of white fluff. When you put a pencil in front of them, they do not see wood and lead but a powerful instrument with the entire world at its tip. The best writers and teachers I have seen create time and space for their students to explore what is on the other side of a simple yet profound request: "Tell me a story." And in turn, they allow their students to open portals to new worlds where together they can celebrate infinite possibilities.

When we get caught up in the busyness of our daily lives, we sometimes forget to leave room for imagination. What Creative Writing Camp provides is a mandatory space to pause. Writers, teachers, students, and interns like me get to participate in a much-needed reprieve from mundane routines and leave feeling refreshed, inspired, and excited. Creative Writing Camp is a momentary stilling of time, a place where time does not just move forward but deepens to create an environment where we can explore, play, and grow.