

WITS HQ Creative Writing Summer Camp

Unlock your imagination this summer at WITS HQ: Creative Writing Summer Camp! Join us for an inspiring week filled with exploration, creativity, and the joy of storytelling. Students will learn from publishing professionals, published authors, and one another. Whether you're a budding novelist, a poet at heart, or someone who loves to explore new worlds through words, WITS HQ promises to be a transformative experience.

What We Offer:

- **Diverse Writing Workshops:** From crafting compelling characters to exploring the magic of poetry and delving into the realms of fiction and nonfiction, our workshops are designed to ignite campers' creativity and hone their writing skills.
- **Expert Guidance:** Learn from experienced instructors who are passionate about nurturing young writers. They'll provide personalized feedback and guidance to help campers grow as writers.
- **Engaging Activities:** Enjoy writing games and collaborative projects that will inspire your creativity and expand your literary horizons.
- **Community of Writers:** Connect with like-minded peers who share your love for storytelling. Participate in peer critiques, share your work, and build lasting friendships in a supportive environment.
- **Guest Speakers:** Gain insights from guest authors and industry professionals who will share their experiences and offer advice on pursuing a career in writing.

Details:

- **Dates:** July 27th through July 30th, 2026, 12 p.m. to 5 p.m.
- **Location:** 1540 Lincoln Avenue, Pasadena, CA, 91103
- **Ages:** Middle and High School students (Grades 6-12)
- **Cost:** Free!

Instructors:

Campers will be taught by guest authors and the Red Hen Press staff.

Primary instructors include:

Piper Gourley: WITS HQ COORDINATOR/ASSOCIATE EDITOR (piper.gourley@redhen.org)

Piper Gourley serves as Red Hen's Administrative and Events Coordinator. They received an MFA and Fellowship in Creative Writing from Chapman University and a BFA in Creative Writing from the University of Houston, where they won the Bryan Lawrence Prize for Nonfiction and the Provost Prize for Creative Writing. They have been awarded with multiple publications, fellowships, and literary awards, and are overjoyed to be working in an environment filled with other book nerds. They live in Los Angeles with a cat named Poe, who likes to eat books.

Kate Gale: RED HEN PRESS FOUNDER/POETRY AND PUBLISHING INSTRUCTOR

Dr. Kate Gale is Publisher, Co-Founder, and Managing Editor of Red Hen Press and the Editor of the Los Angeles Review. She teaches Poetry at Chapman University. She is the author of seven books of poetry, including THE LONELIEST GIRL, THE GOLDBLOCKS ZONE, and ECHO LIGHT. Her debut novel, UNDER A NEON SUN, debuted in April 2024. Her memoir, SWIMMING THE MILKY WAY, is forthcoming with Zando.

Tobi Harper Petrie: DEPUTY/MARKETING DIRECTOR AND ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Tobi Harper Petrie is Deputy and Marketing Director of Red Hen Press, Founder and Editor of Quill (a queer publishing series of Red Hen), Publisher of the Los Angeles Review, and Instructor in the UCLA Extension Writers' Program for Publishing and Editing. Tobi serves on the Board of Directors of Lambda Literary and the Los Angeles Dysautonomia Network, and on the planning committee for LitFest in the Dena. As a genderqueer and neurodivergent speaker, event curator, literary warrior, nonprofit administrator, editor, and tech wiz, Tobi serves local Los Angeles and national communities.

Assisting staff include:

Monica Fernandez (Media Director) and Samantha Diaz (Media Coordinator): Insights into Book Marketing and Social Media

Mark Cull (Artistic Director): Insights into Book/Cover Design

Guest authors will be confirmed in coming weeks and shared on our website:

<https://redhen.org/witshq/>

The full list of possible Red Hen Press staff that may interact with campers can be found on the Red Hen Press website: <https://redhen.org/staff-and-board/>

Curriculum

Topics that will be covered throughout the course of the camp include:

POETRY

- **What is Poetry?**
 - Unpacking the age-old question: what is poetry, and can *anything* be poetry?
 - What makes poetry different from other forms of writing
- **Exploring Different Forms of Poetry**
 - Introduction to various forms of poetry (haiku, sonnet, free verse, limerick, etc.)
 - Examples and discussions on the structure and characteristics of each form
- **Techniques for Effective Poetry**
 - Imagery, metaphor, simile, rhythm, and rhyme

- Examples and exercises to practice using these techniques
- **Exploring Themes in Poetry**
 - Discussion on common themes in poetry (love, nature, identity, etc.)
 - Team-building games or creative writing challenges
- **Crafting Your Own Poems**
 - Mentorship with an established Red Hen poet
 - Individual writing time with prompts provided
 - Encouragement to experiment with different forms and techniques
- **Peer Review and Feedback**
 - Small group sessions for participants to share their poems
 - Constructive feedback and encouragement from peers and instructors
- **Final Sharing**
 - Participants have the opportunity to share their favorite poem from the day

FICTION

What defines fiction?

- **Exploring Fiction Genres**
 - Introduction to different genres (fantasy, mystery, science fiction, etc.)
 - Examples and discussions on the characteristics and conventions of each genre
- **Writing Exercise: Creating Memorable Characters**
 - Guided activity focusing on character development
 - Emphasis on creating characters with depth and personality
 - Collaborative writing prompt:
 - Group decides on traits of a character that they will all incorporate into a short fiction piece
- **Building Plot and Setting**
 - **Crafting Compelling Plots**
 - Introduction to story structure (beginning, middle, end)
 - Techniques for developing a strong plot with conflict and resolution
 - **Creating Vivid Settings**
 - Importance of setting in storytelling
 - Writing exercises to describe and evoke different settings
- **Writing Your Own Story**
 - Individual writing time with structured guidance from RHP staff and/or a Red Hen fiction author
 - Encouragement to experiment with different genres and elements of fiction
- **Peer Review and Feedback**
 - Small group sessions for participants to share excerpts of their stories
 - Constructive feedback and encouragement from peers and instructors
- **Final Sharing**
 - Participants have the opportunity to read a brief excerpt from their favorite scene or story

CREATIVE NONFICTION

Beyond the school essay: What makes creative nonfiction so important?

- **Understanding Creative Nonfiction**
 - Definition and examples of creative nonfiction (personal essays, memoirs, narrative journalism)
 - Why does creative nonfiction matter? How does it help us understand each other?
 - Discussions on blending factual accuracy with creative storytelling
- **Writing Exercise: Crafting Your Personal Narrative**
 - Guided activity focusing on personal storytelling
 - Emphasis on introspection and connecting personal experiences with broader themes
- **Techniques for Effective Creative Nonfiction**
 - Using descriptive language, dialogue, and narrative structure
 - Examples and exercises to practice these techniques
- **Exploring Themes in Creative Nonfiction**
 - Discussion on common themes (identity, family, resilience, etc.)
 - Writing prompts to explore personal and universal themes through creative nonfiction
- **Writing Your Own Essay or Memoir**
 - Individual writing time with prompts provided
 - Encouragement to explore different aspects of personal narrative and storytelling techniques
 - A mix of fun and generative prompts to choose from to ensure every participant feels comfortable with what they're writing
- **Peer Review and Feedback**
 - Small group sessions for participants to share excerpts of their essays or memoirs (if desired)
 - Constructive feedback and encouragement from peers and instructors
- **Final Sharing**
 - Participants have the opportunity to read a brief excerpt from their favorite piece

THE PUBLISHING INDUSTRY

How does a book come to life?

- **Overview of the Publishing Industry**
 - Introduction to the roles involved in book publishing (authors, editors, designers, marketers, etc.)
 - Discussion on the importance of each role in bringing a book alive
- **Understanding the Publishing Process**
 - A tour of the full publishing press to talk about the stage each book goes through
- **Writing Exercise: Brainstorming A Book Idea**

- Gives campers a chance to get into the mindset of an author planning their next book
- Guided activity to brainstorm book ideas and develop a concept
- Emphasis on identifying genre, target audience, and themes
- **Editing A Manuscript**
 - Our editors will talk about the importance of editing for clarity, coherence, and style
 - Editing exercises to practice giving constructive feedback
- **Book Design and Layout**
 - Basics of book formatting, cover design, and typography
 - Introduction to software tools for designing book covers and interiors
 - Campers get to design their own book cover
- **Publishing Options and Marketing Strategies**
 - Tobi Harper Petrie and Monica Fernandez will talk about the fun of book marketing
 - Strategies for marketing and promoting a book, including social media, book signings, and author platforms
 - Campers can test out the equipment from our upcoming podcast and get a sneak peek at the studio
- **Closing Ceremony and Celebration**
 - Participants share their favorite insights from the camp and reflect on their experience, opportunities to read
 - Participants receive a chapbook with their work and the work of other campers

Additional Activities Throughout the Camp

- **Guest Speaker Sessions:**
 - Visits from local authors and writing professionals
 - Q&A sessions with guest speakers about their writing process
- **Creative Challenges:**
 - Daily writing prompts and challenges to spark creativity
- **Group Activities:**
 - Collaborative writing exercises
 - Storytelling games and improvisation

Goals of the Camp

- **Skill Development:** Improve writing skills across various genres and forms.
- **Creativity:** Encourage imaginative thinking and creative expression.
- **Community:** Foster a supportive environment for sharing and constructive feedback.
- **Inspiration:** Provide exposure to diverse writing styles and professional writers.

By the end of the camp, students will have developed a portfolio of their work, gained confidence in their writing abilities, and formed lasting connections with peers who share their passion for storytelling.

* lunch is not included in our programming; snacks are provided by Red Hen Press. Please ensure allergies are accurate on permissions forms.