



Frequently Asked Questions

What is Power of the Pen?

Power of the Pen is a non-profit educational organization. Its home office is in Richfield, Ohio—in the Akron/Cleveland corridor of northeast Ohio. The program was founded in 1987 by Lorraine B. Merrill, then a middle school teacher of language arts, who was subsequently designated as a Christa McAuliffe Fellow and a recipient of an Ohio Teacher of the Year award. The program was incorporated in 1989 as a 501(c)3. Its Board of Trustees includes distinguished representatives from business, industry, the professions, the media, and the field of education.

What is the cost for a school to enroll?

In the current school year (2006-2007), a school pays \$325 for the enrollment of both the Seventh and Eighth Grade levels, and \$250 for the enrollment of a single (either) grade level. This fee covers participation in both District and Regional events. It does not cover State fees, because it is not known at the outset of the season which schools will qualify for State. If a school wishes to use Power of the Pen's copyrighted materials in the classroom but not participate in competitive tournament season, the cost for Membership-Only is \$75.

What does Power of the Pen do?

Power of the Pen is committed to improving the teaching and mastery of writing skills at the Middle School level (7th and 8th grades). It does this through a three-track program. First, Power of the Pen is a conduit for the dissemination of information and materials within the educational community that contribute to more effective application of classroom resources to the teaching of writing. Second, it publishes student work that (a) provides appropriate, and meaningful recognition for student efforts of exceptional interest; and (b) serves as exemplars—as “models of excellence”—crafted by writers within the student audience's peer group. The third track is perhaps the most distinctive part of the program: Power of the Pen encourages the formation of academic writing teams at the Middle School level that compete in Statewide interscholastic writing tournaments.

What other services does it offer?

When funding is available, Power of the Pen provides five- to six- hour workshops which not only better prepare teachers for holistic evaluation but also provide intervention strategies for common writing weaknesses at the middle school level.

Power of the Pen acts as a liaison between teachers so that veteran schools can share their experiences and expertise with schools in search of good approaches to the art of written expression.

Do others find that it works?

There are now a little over 1,800 schools—public, private, parochial, and special—in the State of Ohio which offer a 7th grade and/or an 8th grade course of instruction in language Arts (English). Of these, 500 are enrolled in Power of the Pen.

What are the essential features of these interscholastic writing tournaments?

- **INTERSCHOLASTIC COMPETITION:** Using many features which make interscholastic athletics so appealing among young students, Power of the Pen takes what is normally regarded as a private activity—writing—and turns it into a competitive team effort. In so doing, it shares many things in common with track, tennis and wrestling.

- **IMPROMPTU WRITING:** The writing at the tournaments is in response to prompts not known in advance. This feature helps insure that the students' efforts are authentic.
- **CREATIVE WRITING:** Many programs are designed to develop the student's mastery of expository writing skills. Power of the Pen is not one of them. The emphasis, in Power of the Pen, is upon creative writing skills. The prompts are carefully crafted to require the imaginative use of skills that should be found in every creative writer's toolbox.
- **HOLISTIC EVALUATION:** Evaluation of student work in a Power of the Pen tournament is determined by a "judgment of the whole" approach. Does the piece work when considered in its totality? Mechanics—spelling, punctuation, etc—are assigned only secondary significance.
- **INSTANT RESULTS:** Thanks to the application of computer technology, student writers can write, teacher-judges can judge, meaningful results can be made known, and awards can be issued in the space of one 8:00 A.M.-to-3:00 P.M. school day. There's no waiting until next year when the kids—or the teachers—have moved to some other school building in order to find out what happened this year. And not only are the results known, they are accompanied by copies of everything each student wrote together with their evaluations by teacher-judges representing at least three different schools per contestant.
- **MEANINGFUL RECOGNITION:** Power of the Pen assigns a significant portion of the resources at its disposal to providing meaningful awards—be they trophies, medallions, journals, or savings bonds—in sufficiently large number to provide as much recognition as practical, but in sufficiently small numbers so as not to dilute the quality of that recognition.
- **PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE:** Power of the Pen expects excellence from its student and teacher participants. In that same spirit, it sets high expectations for itself. The program is committed to the on-going task of self-improvement. What it does, it attempts to do as well as possible.

Upon enrollment what instructional materials does a school receive?

- **COACH'S MANUAL:** Power of the Pen provides a manual for Writing Team Coaches updated annually. This publication is a comprehensive and detailed discussion (120 pages) of all aspects of the program: Preparation and Practice; Fees; Participating in the Tournament (Judging, Gridding, Scoring, Awards); the Current Season (Events and Staffing); Governance; Forms; Rules; and a master "Check Off" Reminder Sheet.
- **BOOK OF WINNERS:** An annual publication in which the best writings produced at all the tournaments during the preceding season are collected and organized. These are coupled with the prompts that evoked them.
- **SET OF CURRENT RULES AND REGULATIONS:** Governing the conduct of the program.
- **DIRECTORY OF POWER OF THE PEN COACHES IN THE STATE OF OHIO:** Including mailing and e-mail addresses.
- **INTERNET ACCESS TO THE COACH'S PORTAL:** Houses electronic versions of all essential materials for Writing Team Coaches in a secured, readily accessed location (www.powerofthepen.org).

What Foundations supported the program initially and thereby enabled its phenomenal growth?

- The Martha Holden Jennings Foundation
- The George Gund Foundation
- The Cleveland Foundation
- The Knight Foundation
- The Nord Family Foundation
- The GAR Foundation
- The Stark County Foundation

What are the benefits of Power of the Pen to students, teachers, and the community at large?

For Students:

- Empowerment in writing at an early age
- Evokes self-confidence
- Brings together excellent writers throughout the State and in so doing creates- and instills- a sense of community among these academically gifted students
- Inspires a love for both writing and reading

- Identifies, challenges, and rewards gifted creative minds
- Provides support and structure for disciplined writing under severe time constraints (a superb “practice run” for proficiency tests). Even students who do not win awards grow measurably in their abilities to think quickly, formulate ideas, and express them in a timed environment.
- Provides an opportunity for student work to be published and read by a statewide audience of peers.
- Helps Language Arts, as a content subject, become alive and exciting.

For Teachers:

- Assists Teachers in nurturing the art of written expression.
- Provides instructional materials that show instead of tell students what good writing is all about.
- Elevates the English Teacher to the status of “Coach”. In the eyes of the student body, they assume some of the importance of a team sport coach in the athletics department.
- Helps teachers to prepare for proficiency tests in writing through a wide variety of prompts and models.
- Fills a hole in the curriculum for the development of creative writing and critical thinking.
- Puts teachers in touch with other teachers throughout the State by means of a network that promotes the sharing of ideas and lesson plans.
- In increasingly larger numbers, provides the opportunity for the English teacher to receive the recognition and additional compensation from his/her school district or institution in the form of a writing team coach’s supplemental contract.
- Power of the Pen provides workshops and training for Writing Team coaches; also provides an array of publications and materials that may be ordered in addition to the basic enrollment materials.
- Power of the Pen provides meaningful public recognition for its writing team coaches as well as its student writers.
- Power of the Pen enjoys an excellent reputation throughout the academic community, and it provides meaningful assistance and support for deserving teachers and administrators engaged in job searches both in and out of State.
- Power of the Pen provides teachers’ orientation at all of its events, and can be reached at any time (24/7) during the academic season by its teacher/coaches for advice and guidance.

For the Community:

Writing is as rich a skill – in its contribution to the arts—as music, painting, dance, and sculpture. If schools did not offer programs in instrumental music, or dramatics, it is doubtful that there would be a community symphony orchestra or a community theater to energize the cultural life of our cities and towns.

It is the same with writing. Journalists, columnists, editors, novelists– and yes, even communications assistants for large corporations all owe their voices to early educational experiences.

Writing is an empowerment that leads ultimately to a strong community.