MEETING DATE: Thursday, November 18, 2010

AGENDA ITEM #: 11 A

ITEM: ELECTION OF 2011 LIBRARY COMMISSION OFFICERS

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

* Commissioners will have the opportunity to nominate additional candidates.
* Commissioners will elect officers of the Library Commission.
ARTICLE VII: OFFICERS

SECTION 1: OFFICERS

The officers of the Commission shall be the Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson and Secretary.

SECTION 2: CHAIRPERSON

The Chairperson shall: (1) preside at all business meetings; (2) set the agenda and review minutes for all meetings in consultation with the Secretary; (3) have general supervision over all Commission business conducted; and; (4) have such other powers and duties as may be assigned to him/her by the Commission.

SECTION 3: VICE-CHAIRPERSON

The Vice-Chairperson shall, in the absence or inability of the Chairperson to act, exercise all the powers and perform all the duties of the Chairperson. He/she shall also have such other powers and shall perform such other duties as may be assigned to him/her by the Commission.

SECTION 4: SECRETARY

The Secretary shall be the County Librarian. He/she will keep the minutes of the meetings of the Commission. In consultation with the Chairperson, he/she shall prepare all agendas. He/she shall distribute all agendas, be custodian of the Commission’s records, keep a register of the contact information of each member, which shall be furnished to the Secretary by each member and, in general, perform all duties incident to the office of Secretary.

SECTION 5: TERM OF OFFICE

The Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson shall serve a term of one year and may succeed themselves for one additional consecutive term. The elective officers shall serve until replacements are elected.

SECTION 6: ELECTION OF OFFICERS

The elective officers of this Commission are the Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson. Both officers shall be annually elected at the November regular meeting. Majority votes of both city and county members present constituting a quorum are required to elect.
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Updated: October 2010
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Updated: October 2010
MEETING DATE: Thursday, November 18, 2010

AGENDA ITEM #: 11 B

ITEM: 2010 ANNUAL REPORT AND 2011 WORK PLAN

The Library Commission will consider the Draft 2010 Annual Report and review and determine the language for the Work Plan and Objectives for 2011. The Commission will be asked to authorize the Chair and Vice-chair to review the final document and authorize that it be sent to the Board of Supervisors.

RECOMMENDED ACTION:
- Commissioners will consider the Draft 2010 Annual Report
- Commissioners will review and determine the language for the 2011 Work Plan and Objectives
- Commissioners will consider authorizing the Chair and Vice-chair to review and finalize the document for the Board of Supervisors
Library Commission 2010 Annual Report and 2011 Work Plan

Activities

- Commissioners:
  - Provided information and reports to Library Friends, foundations, and community library commissions about library activities.
  - Provided information and reports as liaisons to the appointing agencies.
  - Frequently served as board members and officers of Library Friends, foundations, endowments, and community library commissions and are involved in Friends membership recruitment, fundraising activities for community libraries, book sale volunteers, and assist with library programming including: city read programs, the annual Countywide Summer Reading Festival, and youth activities.
  - Promoted the Contra Costa County Library by participating in community parades, informational booths at community festivals and events, attended library programs and fundraising events.
  - Held informational exchange meetings with Community Library Managers.
  - Received reports and updates, discussed and provided significant input on the Library’s major issues and initiatives:
    - Reviewed auditor’s report and the Library’s response to the audit (January 28)
    - Received an update on the Library’s Web 2.0 Library services and system upgrade and the Library’s Snap&Go program that uses QR Codes (January 28)
    - Received a presentation from the Library’s Accessibility Committee (September 23)
  - Advocated for improved library services:
    - During CLA (California Library Association) Day in the District on April 23 and May 7, 2010, Commissioners met with Senators DeSaulnier and Hancock, and Assembly member Buchanan.
    - Wrote letters to the editors and articles to local newspapers about library budget issues, services and activities.
    - Communicated Library concerns and activities to city staff, council members.
  - A By-law Committee of the Library Commission suggested amendments to the current Library Commission By-laws and presented recommendations to the Library Commission on July 22
    - Committee members included: Enholm (District V); Fuller (Martinez); Tumin (Oakley) and Smith (District IV) served as Chair.
    - The suggested By-laws edits are being reviewed by County Counsel.
  - Commissioner Tang (Chair, Concord)
    - Encouraged the Commissioners to attend the 2010 California Library Association’s Day in the District and Legislative Day in Sacramento.
  - Commissioner Poulos (El Cerrito)
    - Supported Friends of the El Cerrito Library through a membership database enhancement and training for new Friends membership chair.
    - Met with El Cerrito City Council member and alternate Library Commissioner re: future of City support for the Library and for the eventual construction of a new community library.
  - Commissioner Panas (El Cerrito, Alternate)
    - Assisted and initiate activities with the Friends of the El Cerrito Library.
  - Commissioner Atkinson (Clayton)
    - Served as President of the Clayton Community Library Foundation.
    - Served as co-chair of two used book sales.
    - Spoke to various community groups to encourage participation in library programs.
    - Supported Clayton’s 3rd City Reads by distributing flyers.
    - Participated in the Clayton 4th of July parade, furnished the truck, and recruited grandchildren to participate.
o Communicated Library concerns and activities to Clayton's City staff and Council members.
o Continued an ongoing campaign to recruit library volunteers.

- Commissioner Prater (San Ramon)
o Explore needs of Juvenile Hall Library.

- Commissioner Melsch (Walnut Creek)
o Worked on the July opening celebration of the new Walnut Creek Library and volunteered during the opening celebration.
o Worked with the head of the Friends of the Walnut Creek Library to see about a new ballot measure to replace Measure Q, which recently expired, to keep the libraries open 50+ hours a week. Talked with Walnut Creek councilman, Bob Simmons, about the possibility of another ballot measure similar or identical to Measure Q, to fund continuing extra hours for the Walnut Creek libraries.

- Commissioner Hoisington (Lafayette)
o Helped with final plans for opening Lafayette's new library in November 2009.
o Served on the Board of Friends of Lafayette Library and Learning Center.
o Supported programs and activities at Lafayette Library and Learning Center.

- Commissioner Peck (Brentwood)
o Worked with Brentwood community to help plan library expansion.

- Commissioner Bracken (Pleasant Hill)
o Attended City Council meetings when appropriate.
o Volunteered at Friends of Pleasant Hill Library book sales.
o Trained, and is now working as a library volunteer shelver.
o Participated in a Library project as part of the 6th annual Pleasant Hill Community Service Day at the Library.

- Commissioner Brown, Vice-chair (Orinda)
o Ran two Commission meetings.
o Continued to advise Friends groups of need for funding at State level.
o Continued to research the donated books for online and bookshop sales (20-25 hours a week).
o Worked on several letters to express our appreciation of Anne Cain and Cathy Sanford and others who have tightened belts and continued to innovate despite the dollar situation.

- Commissioner Reed – (Friends Council)
o Attended opening of Walnut Creek and Lafayette libraries.
o Visited eight libraries.
o Visited nine book sales at libraries.
o Attended pre-opening ceremony ("Sneak Peek") at the new library at Prewett Park in Antioch (March 13)

- Commissioner Ruehlig – (Antioch)
o Wrote letters to the editor about library issues that were published in various newspapers in the County.

- Commissioner Smith (District IV)
o Wrote to Assembly member Nancy Skinner about the Public Library Foundation.
o Coordinated the CALTAC northern workshop - arranging for the speakers etc. This was the first time a State Senator (Hancock) ever came to speak at such a workshop.
o Arranged for elected leaders to write article for CALTACTICS about why they support libraries (Senators Liu and Wright and Assembly members Treason and Buchanan).
o Along with Commissioner Brown (Orinda), served on the panel that is interviewing the
candidates in round one to replace Anne Cain.
  o Attended CLA (2009) and reported to the Commission during the January 2010 meeting.
  o Participated in Day in the District and met with Senator DeSaulnier, and Assembly member Buchanan and Senator Hancock's staff (above indicated they met with the Senator).

1. Accomplishments

- Commissioners:
  - Discussed the County Librarian's retirement and the leadership transition to a new County Librarian and sent a letter to the County Administrator about the qualities needed in a new library director and emphasized the Commission's willingness to assist as appropriate.
    o A Sub-committee of the Commission wrote a letter on behalf of the Commission. Sub-committee members included: Commissioners Tang (Chair, Concord); Brown (Vice-chair, Orinda) and Smith (District IV).
  - Authorized the Chair to send Cathy Sanford, Deputy County Librarian: Support Services, a letter thanking her and her staff for the development and design of the Library's new Website and it's successful launch.
  - Tourd the new Lafayette and Walnut Creek Libraries and held their May and July regularly scheduled Library Commission meetings in these two libraries.
  - Recruited Library volunteers from various citizen groups and organizations.
  - Commissioners agreed to ask for reauthorization of the Commission for another five years.
  - Commissioners agreed to invite the Contra Costa Community College District to appoint a member to the County Library Commission if approved by the Commission's By-laws.
  - Received a presentation on the Library budget (February 18) for fiscal year 2010-2011 and sent a letter of unanimous support of the Library’s budget to the Board of Supervisors.
  - Reviewed the uniform Library Lease and Service Agreement between the County and cities

- Commissioner Shoop (Richmond)
  o Suggested that the poetry anthology that is produced by the Juvenile Detention Facility be distributed to a wide audience, starting with the various Friends entities throughout the County.

- Commissioner Panas (El Cerrito, Alternate)
  o Proposed to the Friends of the El Cerrito Library to paint the El Cerrito Library. Presented the proposal to the Arts & Culture Commission and is working with the City to see if this can be accomplished.
  o Wrote up for the City Council a description of the Library Commission meeting, which Commission Poulos (El Cerrito) was unable to attend.

- Commissioner Prater (San Ramon)
  o Wrote letters to Juvenile Hall officials raising awareness concerning literature being supplied to detainees.

- Commissioner Tang (Chair, Concord)
  o Served as chair person for the Library Commission

- Commissioner Poulos (El Cerrito)
  o Bi-monthly written report to the El Cerrito City Council of county library activities including notes on each Library Commission meeting. Copies distributed to El Cerrito City Assistant Manager, El Cerrito Community Library Manager, president of the Friends of the El Cerrito Library.

- Commissioners Reed (Friends Council)
  o Helped arrange the repair and painting of the Antioch Library parking lot (to be paid for 1/3 County, 1/3 City, 1/3 Friends group).
  o Arranged three meetings for Alan Smith to talk with Friends of Libraries on legislative
advocacy
- Informed all Friends’ Groups about the 28 page “Accessibility report” and encouraged them to consider accessibility in their budget planning for gifts to the libraries
- Prepared a ceremony and skit for a retiring Friends Group President (Antioch)
- Helped Friends groups improve their by-laws
- Provided written book reviews for the Commission

- Commissioner Smith – (District IV)
  - Conducted Board Effectiveness Trainings in Cupertino, Alpine and Butte Counties.
  - Developed and conducted two workshops for the Friends on library advocacy (March).
  - Wrote article for CALTACTICS about the new Walnut Creek Library.
  - Served as Past President and Regional Representative for CALTAC

- Commissioner Brown – (Vice Chair – Orinda)
  - Through letter-writing and concerted action, the PLF and State Library come through the budget (finally) intact.

- Commissioner Bracken – (Pleasant Hill)
  - Arranged a book swap for the 0-5 years age group held at the library with volunteers from the Pleasant Hill Walnut Club.
  - Assisted in a First Five grant for a series of programs to be held at the library.

2. Facilities
- Commissioner Mellon (Walnut Creek), Fuller (Martinez), and Ruehlig (Antioch) worked with their communities on improvements and new library facilities.

3. Attendance/Representation

The 29-member Library Commission is diverse and meets the Board of Supervisors' goal to maintain an ethnic, economic, and geographic balance. A wide range of ages is represented on the Library Commission.

All six meetings in 2010 achieved a quorum and many alternate Commissioners attend meeting in addition to the appointed Commissioner. (attachment - individual Commissioner attendance report.)

4. Training/Certification

- Commissioners
  - Viewed tapes on the Brown Act and Conflict of Interest as required by the Board of Supervisors.
  - Received a presentation on the Brown Act and Better Government Ordinance from Deputy County Counsel Mary Ann Mason (September 23)
  - Attended the County’s Annual Training for County Advisory Bodies
  - Renewed individual membership in CALTAC (California Association of Library Trustees and Commissioners.)
    - attended CALTAC workshops

- Commissioner Tang (Chair, Concord)
  - Encourage the Commissioners to attend California Association of Library Trustees and Commissioners (CALTAC) workshops about Library Leadership Advocacy

- Commissioner Smith (District IV)
  - Attended BayNet workshop in May, and reported to the Library Commission.
  - Attended workshop by Pacific Library Partnership in September and reported to the Commission.

Proposed Work Plan / Objectives for 2011:
Goal 1: Support increased funding for the Library (Commissioner Brown - Orinda, Vice Chair)

- Objectives:
  - (Commissioner Atkinson, Clayton):
    - Promote service provided by the Library during current recession Stress the increased usage by patrons seeking services relating to a job search.
    - Educate the community as to the cuts in Library funding, encourage participation in fundraising activities.
  
  - (Commissioner Meisch, Walnut Creek):
    - Commissioners receive presentations and discussions on how to maintain funding for Libraries, especially funding within individual cities and towns.

  - (Commissioner Brown, Orinda)
    - Continue to advocate at all levels for library funding
    - Promote community awareness of need to garner support for PLF – letter writing – from Friends Members
    - Will make sure local level (Mayor) writes to governor to support PLF

Goal 2: Continued promotion, education, and expansion of Library services within all of the communities, despite economic belt-tightening.

- Objectives:
  - Join/Renew CALTAC memberships for all Commissioners

  - (Commissioner Atkinson, Clayton):
    - Support Library programming, such as City Reads.
    - Speak at council meetings and other community organizations to promote service and recruit volunteers.
    - Encourage community members to take an active part in Friends activities.

  - (Commissioner Peck, Brentwood)
    - Attend the 2011 California Library Association Conference.

  - (Commissioner Panas, El Cerrito, alternate)
    - Write up Commission meeting descriptions when the appointed Commissioner is not able to attend a meeting.

  - (Commissioner Brown, Orinda)
    - Recruit volunteers throughout the community to work with extended Friends’ activities.
    - Continue to support library technological innovations as they occurred.

  - (Commissioner Reed – Friends Council)
    - Review cost and effectiveness of BART book outlets in order to consider putting these automatic “vendors” in major mass(s), selecting place(s) of highest potential circulation. Arrange for an objective study of the short and long range effects of our reduced library hours on community groups, schools, and individuals.

Goal 3: Continue supporting/assisting Friends of the Library groups.

Objectives: (Commissioner Panas, El Cerrito, alternate)
- Continue to work on the El Cerrito Library painting initiative.

Goal 4: Support effective of current library facilities.

- Objectives: (Prater – San Ramon)
  - Provide assistance to new library personnel as Anne Cain retires.
  - Continue to encourage use of newer library facilities in Contra Costa County.
Goal 5: Explore more effective use of specialty libraries such as those associated with Juvenile Hall
- **Objectives:** (Prater – San Ramon)
  - Review books currently available and being read.
  - Make recommendations on new books.

Goal 6: Support the new Contra Costa County Librarian.
- **Objectives:** (Hoisington – Lafayette) & (Commissioner Brown - Orinda, Vice Chair)
  - Help him/her feel welcome.
  - Help him/her learn our methods while staying open to his/her new idea.
  - To serve in whatever way might be most helpful to the interim/new County Librarian

Goal 7: Foster communication and cooperation in among all libraries in the system
- (Hoisington – Lafayette)
  - **Objectives 1:** Encourage all libraries to have volunteer coordinators
  - **Objectives 2:** Reinstall Friends Council to share ideas
  - **Objectives 3:** Support Juvenile Hall and Orin Allen in every way possible.

Goal 8: Continue to advocate for the library within the community.
- (Katherine Bracken, Pleasant Hill)
  - **Objectives 1:** Attend relevant city council meetings
  - **Objectives 2:** Promote library programs, services, needs and volunteer opportunities to local community groups.

Goal 9: Ensure Library Funding is stable during this harsh economic time.
- (Commissioner Tang, Chair, Concord)
  - **Objectives 1:** Continue to promote importance of library and its contributions to the community to ensure support from the community.
  - **Objectives 2:** Continue to work with the Friends of the library groups, cities, private organizations, foundation to ensure continual support as well as funding.
  - **Objectives 3:** Continue to lobby for increased funding for library services from the State as well as private groups.

Goal 10: Education of the El Cerrito City Council and City staff
- (Commissioner Poulos, El Cerrito)
  - **Objective 1:** Organize one or more City Council members with the two library commissioners and a few others into a core library planning group.
  - **Objective 2:** Work on rethinking plans for a new branch with or without a senior center.

Goal 11: Achieve greater cooperation of Friends Council with Library and City government
- **Objective 1:** Try to work with the Friends and their current support for the branch in light of the needs expressed by Elliot Warren re: collections.
- **Objective 2:** Encourage the Friends Council to be a more visible and active support group for a new community library.

Goal 12: Enhanced visibility of Community Library Manager
- **Objective 1:** Try to integrate the Community Library Managers into both of the above goal activities.

Goal 13: Facilitate the wider distribution throughout the County of Library entities’ published materials
- (Commissioner Shoop, Richmond)

Goal 14: Commissioner Smith (District IV) plans to:
- **Objective 1:** Be a CALTAC northern regional representative.
- **Objective 2:** Attend CLA 2010 and report to Commission (January).
- **Objective 3:** Conduct board effectiveness trainings including Sunnyvale (March).
- **Objective 4:** Attend other library workshops and report to the Commission.
- **Objective 4:** Meet with elected officials during CLA Legislative Day in the District and attend Legislative Day in Sacramento
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MEETING DATE: Thursday, November 18, 2010
AGENDA ITEM #: 12 A
ITEM: LIBRARY PUBLICATIONS

RECOMMENDED ACTION:
* Commissioners will consider material created by Library entities and centralizing publication.
AGENDA ITEM PROPOSED BY
RON SHOOP
COMMISSIONAIRE FROM RICHMOND

That the CCC Library website include a page that summarizes publications produced by Library-engendered entities, intended for public use, e.g.:

- Project 2nd Chance testimonials from students
- Publications(s) from the Juvenile Detention Center
- Etc.

Each entry would include contact information – phone #s, links, etc. – for interested parties who would want to acquire copies.

Each producer ('publisher') would be required to preserve non-profit status and not sell for a profit. This is fund-raising and good works. (Suggested donation levels OK?)

Should this idea be implemented, all the Friends bookstores should be informed. (If Friends stores have email, could an alert be generated to them whenever a new item is posted?)

Why do this?
- To promote the programs from which the publications emanate
- Raise funds for the programs
- Encourage the creation of additional publications, enhancing the above cycle

If implemented, this process would have to be promoted:
- Within the Library (library professionals – suggestions?)
- Within the community at large – website home page banner, press releases, media features

This program could be expanded to include publications from other library systems (on a quid pro quo basis?). Cookbooks are frequently published by libraries.
Introduction

The last four months at the Juvenile Hall and Orin Allen Libraries have been busy ones! We scheduled plenty of activities to keep the residents engaged, educated, and informed.

April was National Poetry Month, and to honor the occasion the Libraries hosted a poetry contest at both facilities. 46 residents entered their poetry at Juvenile Hall. The first place winner received a digital camera. We planned an actual assembly at the Boys’ Ranch. 17 residents entered the competition and read their entries out loud to the crowd. The first place winner received an iPod Nano.

We compiled the contest entries into a book of poetry that has quickly become one of the Library’s most valuable assets. It’s been widely distributed and praised, and has even been turned into a fundraising project with the Library Friends groups. I still have some giveaway copies left! If you’d like to request one, please email me at nbagdasar@ccelib.org. First come, first served.

Career Day took place on May 20 at Juvenile Hall. 10 speakers from 8 different organizations talked to the kids about tangible career opportunities available to them upon their release. We received unanimously positive reviews from both the staff and residents; in fact, most of the staff agreed that this was the best Career Day yet. The next Career Day is scheduled for October 13, and it will feature the County’s new Chief Probation Officer Philip Kader.

June saw the start of Contra Costa County Library’s Summer Reading. Teens at the Hall and the Ranch received reading records on which they had to track the amount of time they read. Once they achieved 20 hours of reading, they had to write a 6-word review of any book that they read and turn in the reading record to Library staff. Just for participating in the program, they received a free book and some coupons. We upped the ante at the Hall and awarded the living unit that turned in the most completed entries a pizza party. We also held a local drawing for participants at both facilities for an iPod Shuffle.

Thank you to all of the prize donors, sponsors, and supporters that made these programs possible.

-Nadia Bagdasar, Librarian

Join the Friends of the Library

As many of you may know, the collections at both the JH and OAYRF Libraries are maintained and grown solely by fundraised monies. The Libraries now have a unified Friends group to help them in these efforts. Though the group is still young, it has managed to raise approximately $9,000 by soliciting various community groups and county organizations and through personal donations. The money will go towards purchasing books for the collections.

If you’re looking for an exciting opportunity to make a real difference, I encourage you to join our Friends group. Please email Nadia for more information.
The numbers are in!

I recently compiled the most current statistics for the Juvenile Hall and Orin Allen Libraries and the results were impressive to say the least. I’ll let them speak for themselves:

- At Juvenile Hall, 4,270 items circulate every month (an average of 6 books per week per resident). At OAYRF, 733 items circulate every month (an average of 2 books per week per resident). At initial glance, this might look like a huge difference, but it is not. Juvenile Hall has an average of 180 residents, and the library provides services to them 5 days a week. OAYRF has a maximum of 100 residents, and the library is only open to them 5 hours a week.

- At Juvenile Hall, 80% of residents have 1 or more books checked out at any given time. At OAYRF, 95% of residents have 1 or more books checked out at any given time.

- At Juvenile Hall, an average of 42% of residents have books on hold at any given time. At OAYRF, an average of 26% of residents have books on hold at any given time.

- A total of 1,698 CCC Library cards have been issued to new residents since 2008, and that number only continues to grow.

These numbers are tangible proof that our libraries are making a difference in these kids’ lives.

Artists in Residence Program in its Final Year

This month marks the beginning of the final year of the 3-year Artists in Residence program funded by the federal grant awarded to the Library by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS). We hired three artists this year, each conducting five 1-1/2-hour workshops in the nine classrooms at Mt. McKinley, the school inside Juvenile Hall. The artists currently participating are: Keramet Reiter, creative writing instructor; Damita Brown, poet; and Tim Hancock, visual artist.

At the end of instruction, Library staff, with the help of the Friends of the Library, will start planning the culminating art display that will showcase the work the residents produced in the program. After some discussion and with the agreement of the Community Library Managers throughout the Contra Costa County Libraries, we decided that the public libraries were the perfect venues to display the outstanding work produced by the teens from their communities. Dates are yet to be determined, but we’ll keep you posted. If you’d like to help organize these exhibits, please email Nadia or call 925-957-2704.

Links

Juvenile Hall Library: http://ccclib.org/locations/juvenile.html
Orin Allen Library: http://ccclib.org/locations/orinallen.html
Please visit our Amazon Wish List to purchase something for our collection
If you are interested in working with at-risk teens, become a T3 Volunteer!
October 21, 2010

Dear Ms. Nadia Bagdasarian,

Thank you for publishing a book of poetry written by residents of the Juvenile Hall and Orrin Allen Rehab Ranch. I am always looking for authentic literature for my students to read, and this was perfect. As a middle school language arts teacher, I strive to get my kids thinking about the world they live in, and this publication is a great way to facilitate that.

The letters enclosed were written by some of my students, and they wanted to know if I could pass them on. We only read three poems, so that's why the letters are addressed to only R.O. and C.J.

I hope the residents know that their thoughts are heard and that they matter.

Sincerely,

Holly Ochhipinti
hocchipinti@ouesd.kl2.ca.us
October 20, 2010

Dear Juvenile Hall Librarian,

Reading those kids poems made it sound as if they were dying and only had a few more days to live. They each had their own way of showing that. I think that this makes all kids and teens aware of what it's like and how it feels to be in Juvenile Hall. It really makes you think about how you would feel if you were in their position. It makes me want to research and hear more poems. It makes me interested, and I think the rest of my class is, too.

Some of the poems made it seem as if they were desperate and some were confused. Some even said they'd never be back to what they were before. The thing about these poems is that they make you aware of the voices of kids in Juvenile Hall, and I like that the most.

Sincerely,

A middle school student
Oakley, CA
October 20, 2010

Dear R.O.,

In class, we read your poem, “Hate What You Do.” I loved it because it sounded like you really had learned that you did something wrong, and you knew that once you get out, you want to change. When I read, “Hate What You Do,” I could immediately relate to it. It always helps if you understand why you’re there. And once you tell yourself that you were stealing cars and that it was bad, you’ll start to make changes inside of yourself.

I hope that when you get out, you don’t do something stupid to get back in! I want to know how life goes for you!

From,

A middle school student
Oakley, CA
October 20, 2010

Dear R.O.,

I read your poem and I understand how you feel. Sometimes I feel cramped in one place. But, I have some questions. Do you ever feel alone or scared? I feel that way when I am in a depressing place. Is Juvenile Hall scary? Does it make people crazy or upset at times? I'm a kid that is curious and sometimes I make mistakes but I never want to end up there. Does that place have cells to sleep in and stuff? What's it like to live there?

I have done some stupid stuff in my 12 years of life and I regret all of those mistakes. Sadly, some of the time I make mistakes when I'm trying to make my parents proud. Well, I hope you make it when you get out.

From,

A middle school student
Oakley, CA
October 20, 2010

Dear R.O.,

I thought what you said was very inspiring. It is a shame that you are locked up. You could be the best car salesman in your area. When you get out, I think you will be more wise and not make the same mistakes again.

Good luck to you. I recommend that you enroll in college so you can get a good job.

From,

A middle school student.
Oakley, CA
October 20, 2010

Dear R.O.,

The reason I called you R.O. is because I don’t know your real name. Anyway, about your poem, I really liked it. In your poem, were you trying to say that you understood what you did? That you realize all the bad you did? I find that amazing. It’s not easy to do that.

From,

A middle school student
Oakley, CA
October 20, 2010

Dear C.J.,

Hi, I hope you are doing well and haven’t gone crazy or anything of that nature. If you could possibly explain to me the part in your poem, “...I won’t ever come back,” I would appreciate it. Do you mean that you will turn your life around? I hope so because there are so many things to do instead of crime. If you put some effort into it, perhaps you could become a writer! You are already very talented in writing poems.

Sincerely,

A middle school student
Oakley, CA
October 20, 2010

Dear C.J.,

When I read your poem, "Is it Real?" the first thing I thought was that you wrote down your thoughts, and not just words, about being in jail, how you got there, and why. I'm proud that you've realized you won't go back, but what do you mean? You'll do what you've done before just not get caught? Or quit everything for good and get a good job (though it might be hard), not steal, no drugs, and be your best? That was the only part of the poem I got confused on.

I am also happy that you wrote a poem about your feelings instead of using violence or being depressed. I bet this poem really helped take out the feelings about what happened.

Sorry you're there.

From,

A middle school student
Oakley, CA
Dear C.J.,

We read your poem in class, and I found it inspiring. You know that's what you did so you are saying you won't end up there again. I'm glad you get an education, because you are learning how to survive when you get out.

We also read R.O.'s and E.T.'s but I liked your poem the best.

From,

A middle school student
Oakley, CA