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Invest in a Storyteller, Inspire a Child.

Highlights Foundation



highlightsfoundation.org

    @highlightsfound

The Highlights Foundation positively impacts children by amplifying the voices of storytellers who inform, educate, and inspire children to become their best selves.

Since 1985, we’ve provided education, support, and encouragement for writers and illustrators through workshops, courses, and retreats. Our community includes authors, illustrators, editors, art directors, publishing professionals, agents, academics, and others who bring story to kids.

3,400+
STORYTELLERS
SERVED PER
YEAR

90+
PROGRAMS
PER YEAR

175
STORYTELLERS
FUNDED
THROUGH
SCHOLARSHIPS,
PARTNERSHIPS,
AND GRANTS
IN 2023

**75%
Growth**
IN GRANTS
AND
DONATIONS
SINCE 2019



CHILDREN
INSPIRED
BY OUR
STORYTELLERS
WORLDWIDE

Investing in Storytellers to Inspire Kids

A while back, we asked our community to share examples of how their work inspires kids. One of my favorite responses was from Debbi Michiko Florence.

Debbi attended her first Highlights Foundation workshop in 2014. More than 25 books later, she’s now on our faculty, and an active member of our community. She writes, teaches, supports, and is also doing amazing work to amplify the voices of storytellers.

When we asked for a specific example of a kid who was impacted by one of her books, Debbi told us about a piece of reader mail.

She said:

“The very first reader mail I received for *Jasmine Toguchi, Mochi Queen* is framed on my wall to remind me that no matter what reviewers say, I write for these young readers.

According to her teacher, an Asian American third grader had zero interest in reading or writing, but after she read *Mochi Queen*, she started reading—and decided she wanted to be a writer. At the end of third grade, she wrote and illustrated *Jasmine Toguchi, Baking Queen* (Book 5), and with the help of her teacher, made copies for all the third grade classes (and for me).

Sometimes I have to pinch myself that there are actual readers out there reading and enjoying my books. This is a dream come true.”

I love this story because...well...how could I not?



DEBBI MICHIKO FLORENCE TEACHING IN THE BARN

But also, it encapsulates the heart of what we do at the Highlights Foundation.

Yes, we support and invest in storytellers. Yes, it’s amazing to see those storytellers flourish every day—creative breakthroughs, transformative moments, book deals, and more.

But the payoff never happens at the Highlights Foundation itself.

The true payoff happens later, in the hearts and minds of kids who are inspired by the stories we tell.

Story makes a difference for kids. That’s why we’re here, and that’s why your support means so much.

Sincerely,

George Brown
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR





“Do Something With It”

When Crystal Allen received a scholarship and attended her first workshop with the Highlights Foundation in 2005, she tried to thank Kent (our founder) when she met him. He appreciated the sentiment, but was more concerned with how she’d use her scholarship to inspire kids. He responded simply: “Do something with it.”

And that she did.

Now she’s the author of more than seven books for children, and teaches on our faculty. She paid it forward with this donation to our scholarship fund in 2019.

Get Involved



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Scholarships

an Investment in Storytellers

Since the earliest days of the Highlights Foundation, we’ve offered scholarships for writers and illustrators to attend our workshops and retreats. It’s a tenet of the work we do here.

While the program has certainly grown and evolved—we provided 58 scholarships valued at over \$75,000 in 2023—the focus on our mission remains: **to positively impact children by amplifying the voices of storytellers who inform, educate, and inspire children to become their best selves.**



A Scholarship Inspires Confidence in a Writer’s Journey

“My scholarship in 2018 had a huge impact on me. The most valuable gift that the Highlights Foundation gave me was confidence. I can still recall a moment on the first day when I was quietly wondering if I had been selfish to come here. I pictured my husband halfway across the country, juggling both kids for the weekend, while I spent the weekend chasing this “silly” dream. At that exact moment, Leslie Helakoski said, “I want you all to know that you are exactly where you

are meant to be.” She told us that no matter where we were on our writing journey, we were there for a reason. Though I know she was speaking to the entire group, I felt like she was speaking directly to me. I had to choke back tears of relief. I [have released] my first two traditionally published children’s books with more on the way, and it wouldn’t have happened without the experience I had at Highlights.”

CHELSEA TORNETTO

Your support puts Highlights Foundation programs within reach for storytellers, and their stories within reach for kids.

Types of Scholarships

- Tuition for a Workshop (in Person or Online)
- Tuition for a Whole Novel Workshop
- Personal Retreats
- Some Travel Stipends Available

Scholarship Criteria

- Seriousness of Purpose
- Talent
- Financial Need

Support Scholarships at the Highlights Foundation



Donate to Our General Scholarship Fund

Your support, in any amount, directly influences the number of awards that the Highlights Foundation is able to provide in a given year.



Support a Special Scholarship

Does one of our special scholarships already serve a purpose you’d like to support? All of our existing funds accept donations to increase their impact and ensure their longevity.



Establish a Special Scholarship

Options start at \$1,500 per year with a minimum commitment of five years, and can be endowed. Our team will work with you to design a scholarship that fulfills your goals to support storytellers and inspire kids.



Corporate & Organizational Giving

Options are available for businesses, organizations, and groups who align with our mission. Inquire to discuss a customized plan.

Support Scholarships via Our Word Garden

Looking for a fun way to support our scholarship program? Add a rock to our Word Garden! Your donation supports our General Scholarship Fund, and your chosen word will be etched on a rock in our garden. Choose your favorite, or a word that honors a loved one. Rocks are sourced from the creek bed on our campus.



Cabin Sponsorship

As with everything we do at the Highlights Foundation, cabin sponsorships serve our mission. They support a scholarship in full annually for the duration of the sponsorship, and offset cabin upkeep and improvements. They also support and amplify Voices who will inspire the next generation of children and young adults through story.

See our website for examples, and contact us for more details about cabin sponsorship.

Cabin Sponsorship:

- Brings new Voices to the Highlights Foundation via scholarships
- Amplifies Voices and stories to create inspiring spaces around our campus



Floyd Cooper's Legacy at the Highlights Foundation: A Scholarship, and Cooper's Cottage

The Highlights Foundation dedicated a scholarship and cabin in honor of Floyd Cooper in 2019. We didn't know it at the time, but those would come to honor his memory. He donated art and memorabilia to use in the cabin before his untimely death in 2021. One of Floyd's publishers (The Lerner Publishing Group) now helps support the Floyd Cooper Scholarship through cabin sponsorship.

The 2023 Floyd Cooper Scholarship recipient Jennifer Mack-Watkins recounted seeing his connection to children firsthand in her application:

"My true passion is building spaces for children to use their imaginations, and it guides much of my work. It is through books that I can best reach and inspire this audience, sparking in them the [type of] creativity that is central to my life. I witnessed this same spark when Floyd Cooper visited a small bookstore in Hoboken, NJ. On that day, I was so amazed by his connection to the children, and his passion for sharing his artistic practice with them."

Floyd was an amazing friend and mentor to many. His stories still reach children across the world today and so, too, do the stories born by those he helped along the way.



RENÉE WATSON

Personal Retreater Finds Inspiring Serendipity During Her Stay

"Here I was, in the Renée Watson Cottage, working on a play that's in conversation with the Harlem Renaissance, and there was Langston Hughes looking back at me, and a playbill for *A Raisin in the Sun* on the wall. Here I was leaning into material from my dissertation, which was titled *Where are you from?* And there, at the cabin's entrance, is an excerpt from Renée's poem, with the question, "*Where you from?*" staring back at me. Was this magic, or meant to be? I'll never know. But what I do know is that the Highlights Foundation holds space for exactly this kind of inspiring serendipity in the carefully curated spaces throughout the property."

— NIMISHA LADVA

Sponsor a Cabin Starting at \$15,000 for a 3-Year Sponsorship

Your Sponsorship:

- Funds one (or more) scholarships, valued at \$1,500 annually
- Offsets cabin upkeep and upgrade costs
- Generally supports the Highlights Foundation

Support Our Essential Conversations

What are Essential Conversations at the Highlights Foundation?

Essential Conversations are a subset of Highlights Foundation programming, developed with the goal of providing resources, support, and empowerment for children’s literature changemakers and innovators who work to bring representation, authentic narratives, and human-centered stories to kids in a myriad of ways.

They include:

- In-community retreats and workshops that offer reserved and respected spaces for affinity and connected care, growth, and collaboration
- Professional development opportunities that are open to all to gather and do the anti-racist and -bias work that challenges patterns in the children’s publishing industry



A Storyteller Reflects on Time Spent in-Community

“Here, every minute of the time we had together was something I could and would want to be a part of, and again, that was something so refreshing to experience as an individual and a writer.”

In-Community Experiences Have Included:

- Latinx Voices Retreat
 - Writing the Rainbow
 - Writing About Mental Health
 - Amplify Black Stories
 - Black Creators Retreat
- Jewish Symposium
 - Asian American Retreat
 - Muslim Storytellers Fellowship
 - Native Creatives’ Retreat
 - Writing Stories to Empower Through Trauma

Professional Development Experiences Have Included:

- Disrupting Youth Literature
 - Responsible Representation in Children’s Books
 - Writing from the Outside In
 - Viewing Children’s Books Through an Intersectional Lens
- Anti-Racist Writing Workshop Training
 - Cultural Competency
 - Empowering Readers and Reader Choice

Support Essential Conversations at the Highlights Foundation Through Sponsorship

Your support ensures their availability now and in the future.

	Support \$1,500	Serve \$5,000	Strengthen \$10,000	Sustain \$25,000	Full Program Sponsorship Varies
Participants Funded	1	3	5	15	All
Sponsor Recognition	●	●	●	●	Flagship Sponsor
Podcast Sponsorship		●	●	●	●
#HFGather Sponsorship			●	●	●
Downloadable Resource Sponsorship				●	●

Support Equity & Inclusion Initiatives at the Highlights Foundation

Your support, in any amount, helps us increase access to Highlights Foundation Essential Conversations programming. It provides resources, professional development, and mentorship for storytellers and others who are passionate about improving representation and promoting diversity in the children’s publishing industry. Consider a one-time donation, or we can put together a customized sponsorship plan to meet your goals.

Alum Revamps K-8 Book Program in Her Community after Her Organization Sponsored Viewing Children’s Books Through an Intersectional Lens

“We shifted the way that our Building Home Libraries project determines the books that we give out. We interacted with multiple community members to have a diverse perspective of books that are being selected each year. The change to the process, and the outcomes of the books that were selected in the past year, were really due to this workshop.”



RYANNE JENNINGS
President and CEO of the Wayne County Community Foundation

General Support of the Highlights Foundation

Children are the world's most important people, and books and stories play a huge role in shaping their worldview. Therefore, everyone who brings story to kids plays a role in building our future. We take that responsibility seriously, and are honored to do this work with our community.

Help Where It's Needed Most

Your gifts to help “where it's needed most” do a little bit of everything at the Highlights Foundation: support our scholarships, offset operating costs, pay for crucial infrastructure improvements, and more.

Community Projects

Some improvement projects happen when our community comes together and meets a need. For example, in 2023, we raised enough funds to install new rocking chairs across campus. It was special because countless ideas, connections, and stories are born in those rocking chairs every day—they support storytellers in their journey toward inspiring kids.

Building & Improvement Projects

When the Highlights Foundation undertakes a project to improve our campus facilities, donor support and grants play a critical role. An example was our shift to primary solar energy in 2019. We have ambitious intentions to make our organization and retreat center more functional, sustainable, and accessible for all. These plans and projects are undertaken thoughtfully, to ensure that the Highlights Foundation can persist now and in the future.

Planned Giving

We are honored when someone chooses to leave a legacy gift in support of the Highlights Foundation and our mission. If you're interested in creating a named or endowed scholarship, or including the Highlights Foundation in your estate planning, we would love to meet at your convenience.

“I met so many wonderful people there who were supportive. I just had a wonderful time. I remember the workshops that I went to—and I took it in, and nothing felt as though it was too much. It all came in nice doses. And then I could go back to that porch and that rocking chair and take more in. And I went home like I could begin again.”

DARIA PEOPLES



History of the Highlights Foundation

The Highlights Foundation began in 1985, with the goal of improving the quality of books for children through craft workshops for writers and illustrators.

As the organization has evolved, so has its mission. Today, the Highlights Foundation positively impacts children by amplifying the voices of storytellers who inform, educate, and inspire children to become their best selves. We live this mission daily by supporting writers and artists across the globe who bring story to kids, with opportunities to hone their craft, learn more about navigating the publishing industry, and build community.

The very first Highlights Foundation program was a weeklong “summer camp” for children’s book authors and illustrators at the Chautauqua Institute in New York. Aspiring and established writers, mentors, and publishing industry professionals gathered for inspirational keynotes, mentorship sessions, and discussions on craft. The result was magical—and a community of authors and illustrators was born.

Those attendees (and others from subsequent workshops and programs) have gone on to write and illustrate countless stories that inspire kids today, including award-winning titles and groundbreaking projects. Some attendees are even on our faculty and staff now, supporting, inspiring, and mentoring the next generation of artists who will create books that help children see themselves and understand the world around them.

Today, the Highlights Foundation hosts programs and retreats year-round online and in person at our own rural retreat center in Pennsylvania, on the traditional lands of the Lenape people.



Our Mission:

**To positively
impact children by
amplifying the voices
of storytellers who
inform, educate,
and inspire children
to become their
best selves.**

Supporting Storytellers Since 1985



1985

The first workshop of what would become the Highlights Foundation was held at the Chautauqua Institute.



2019

We renewed our mission, vision, and values.



2000

The first workshop was held at the location of our current campus, on the porch of the farmhouse built by the founders of *Highlights for Children*.



2020

The Highlights Foundation held our first-ever online class.



2000

Construction of our cabins began around 2000, and was completed in waves.



2021

The Highlights Foundation completed our shift to primary solar energy.



2011

Construction of the Barn at Boyds Mills (the main gathering place for the Highlights Foundation campus) was completed in 2011.



Today

The Highlights Foundation continues our mission to positively impact children by amplifying the voices of storytellers who inform, educate, and inspire children to become their best selves.



2012

We built our Lodge in 2012 to add additional capacity and meeting space to the Highlights Foundation campus.

Learn More
and **Support** the
Highlights Foundation



www.highlightsfoundation.org
570-253-1192

