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**CREATIVE WRITING ALUM RETURNS AS AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR**

**Former Power of the Pen middle school competitor Jasmine Warga  
to meet state finalists at Otterbein University May 12-13**

NORTH CANTON, OH — April 25, 2022 — Once a 7<sup>th</sup> grade creative writing tournament competitor for Wyoming Middle School in the Cincinnati area, Newbery Honor author Jasmine Warga will return for book signings and a panel discussion at the 2022 State Tournament, which will take place May 12-13 at Otterbein University in Westerville.

“I’m so honored and so excited to be invited back all these years later,” enthuses Warga, “and celebrate the power of writing and the power of stories with all of the competitors.”

The culmination of district and regional tournaments throughout Ohio from January through March, Power of the Pen’s State Tournament includes not only the competition, but also a guest author who supports and encourages tournament participants while showing the practical application of their efforts.

Warga has gone from middle school creative writing competitor to author of novels for that same middle grade and young adult audience, including *Other Words for Home* and *The Shape of Thunder*. “I think Power of the Pen is such a special organization in its support of young writers,” she says, “and I’m delighted to get to be part of it this spring.”

In addition to one-on-ones and book signings, the alum-turned-author will lead a panel discussion with a noteworthy twist on Friday afternoon. Several Power of the Pen state qualifiers will join Jasmine Warga on stage to talk about the power of creative writing.

Jasmine Warga will also present the Power of the Pen Promising Young Talent Award to a student writer who shows promise as a future novelist. Additional award presenters are Rebecca Brown Asmo, executive director of Ohio Humanities; George Bilgere, poet and professor at John Carroll University, and members of the Frank and Lorraine Merrill family.

Power of the Pen, a North Canton nonprofit and one of Ohio’s largest educational enhancement programs, seeks to positively impact academic achievement of the state’s middle schoolers by helping young people find and develop a creative voice uniquely their own.

“Writing helps students become better prepared for any future endeavor,” explains Power of the Pen Executive Director Barb Tschantz. “It doesn’t have to be a career that’s creative by nature. Though we concentrate on creative writing, students learn communications and leadership skills that can apply to everything from professional services to tech.”

Each year, qualifying writers from sixteen district tournaments (usually the top fifty percent) advance to the eight regional events. At least twenty percent of those students move on to the state tournament. Competitions consist of three extemporaneous rounds of creative writing tasks, each in response to an open-ended prompt. The State Tournament features an additional fourth round for finalists. Judges evaluate the students' work to identify the winners who will be recognized in an awards ceremony.

Tschantz describes Power of the Pen's vision as "blending innovative teacher training with interscholastic writing competitions to measure and reward the art of written expression as a life skill."

*Power of the Pen is Ohio's original interscholastic creative writing program for middle schools. Seventh- and eighth-grade students in Ohio compete in a series of district, regional and state competitions by writing creative responses using provided prompts. The 501(c)(3) organization was founded in 1986 by the late Lorraine B. Merrill and has since become one of the state's largest educational enhancement programs. About 3,000 students participate in tournaments each year, while in-class supporting materials are provided for nearly 300 middle schools in Ohio. Support for the 2021-2022 academic year has been provided by Ohio Humanities, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the federal American Rescue Plan Act of 2021. For more information, visit [powerofthepen.org](http://powerofthepen.org).*

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Photo from the author's website, <http://jasminewarga.com/about>