

SOUTH SIDE WEEKLY

ARTS, CULTURE, & POLITICS ★ SOUTHSIDeweekly.com



ARTS CULTURE POLITICS MORE

Info Get Involved Support Us Subscribe Archive 🔍



VEGGIE FEST CHICAGO 2019

INTERNATIONAL FOOD COURT, LIVE MUSIC, VEGETARIAN FOOD DEMOS, AND MORE!

www.VeggieFestChicago.com/festival

AUGUST 10 & 11 11am-8pm



EDUCATION | LIT ISSUE 2019

Back of the Yards Students Declare #MyHoodMyHeadline

Say It Loud, an online magazine written and produced by third graders at Chavez Elementary School, serves to include young writers' perspectives about important issues and people in their community

Get the South Side Weekly in your inbox





Lizzie Smith

How loud can words on a page be? In *Back of the Yards*, the words written by local young people rang in the ears of the entire neighborhood. A group of third-graders at Chavez Elementary School, led by their teachers Lindsay Singer and Ashley McCall, created the first issue of an online magazine titled *Say It Loud, or Dilo Fuerte*.

Under the line #MyHoodMyHeadline, the students covered stories about *Back of the Yards* that are often overshadowed by media outlets that only report on the violence in their neighborhood. They included interviews with local community figures, poetry, and even book reviews.

Each year, Singer’s social studies class and McCall’s English Language Arts class collaborate for their final unit plan, an “inquiry-based unit” that, according to Singer, is meant to answer the question: what is an activist?

The unit kicks off at the end of April, and community leaders are invited to speak to the class. Students are then allowed to choose how they’d like to address any social justice issue that they learned about in the unit, like access to clean water or disability rights.

Throughout these exercises, both Singer and McCall noticed that their students had a gift for storytelling, and decided to use it in service of lifting up the untold stories of the neighborhood.

Get the South Side Weekly in your inbox

Email



the newspapers covering their neighborhoods and noticed it was mostly about violence and crime.”

Singer and McCall proposed the idea to create a magazine, and the students voted in favor of it. Then, according to McCall, “students were given templates for writing and worked in groups determined by their topics and genre to discuss ideas.” McCall emphasized the importance of students having control over the story they wanted to tell, which was made possible due to the support that they were given throughout the writing process.

Many students chose to write pieces in genres that allowed their personal perspectives and concerns to be heard most clearly. Each entry gives insight into their budding writing voices: one student did an interview with their [principal](#), and another poetically described the flowers in their [neighborhood](#). As you scroll through each entry, a sense of pride in their neighborhood rings off the page.

One of the students, Mario Quiterio, interviewed “two future fifth graders [about] what social justice means to them.”

He believed his writing was important because “we are having a lot of issues around the world and they need to stop.” While some students like Quiterio wrote interviews, others like Monzerath Sanchez used their work to inform the audience about topics that affect them personally.

Get the South Side Weekly in your inbox

Email



Throughout the production of the magazine, students were responsible for more than just their writing. So, although Monzareth was one of the writers, her favorite part of creating the magazine was “choosing pictures to match the writing pieces.”

“Students took photos for the magazine, created posters for their presentation, made calls for donations to get the paper published, edited their papers, drew the cover of the magazine and designed t-shirts. They were a major part of the process,” Singer said.

Singer and McCall taught their students that telling a story includes more than just writing the words: it involves shaping every aspect of how those words are put into the world. Singer would repeatedly say to students, “Voice is a source of power. If you don’t use your voice, someone will put words in your mouth and tell your story for you.”

The paper’s name, McCall shared, comes from the James Brown song “Say It Loud — I’m Black and I’m proud.” James Brown’s confidence and unflinching belief in his identity resonated with the students in rooms 306 and 307 of Chavez Elementary School. They decided to adopt the lyric as their magazine name: it is their mission to change the dominant narratives of violence and destruction in Back of The Yards to one of “real stories about the Back of The Yards,” as Quiterio stated.

So who heard their voices? After the magazine was created, students invited their peers, family members,

Get the South Side Weekly in your inbox

Email



had interviewed. [The Gate](#), a local newspaper in Back of The Yards, also came to cover the event. The Chicago Public Schools [shared a post on Facebook](#) linked to the online magazine. Quiterio and Sanchez were also invited to speak about the magazine on [The Jam TV Show](#), which will be aired later this week.

More than anyone, though, students wanted the attention of people who live in their neighborhood. “We wrote it for people in Back of the Yards,” Quiterio said. Monzareth wanted parents to read it “because they could use their social media to spread awareness about the magazine.” The publishing party was filled with parents and people from Back of the Yards watching students put on performances and use their voices to share their writing. The teachers of 306 and 307 simply “gave [them] the space to talk and write about the things they care about,” Singer said.

The magazine also challenged expectations regarding what third-grade students can write about. People who read the magazine online initially assumed that the writers were in sixth grade because of the seriousness of some of the issues they reported on, such as policing and border control.

“As an elementary teacher, lower elementary doesn’t get enough shine for their social justice work, but we should allow them to engage authentically with the world,” McCall said. “But when you give them the tools, they can do pretty much anything.”

That thing, as Quiterio put it, is to “say things loud so

Get the South Side Weekly in your inbox

Email



Brittaneé Rolle is a high school writing teacher on the South Side of Chicago. She believes one day the South Side will be known for having amazing young writers.

The Weekly is a volunteer-run nonprofit written for and about the South Side of Chicago. Our work is made possible through donations from our readers. If you enjoyed this article, please consider making a one-time or recurring donation. [Donate today.](#)

Leave a reply

Your email address will not be published. Required fields are marked *

Comment

Name *

Email *

Get the South Side Weekly in your inbox

Email



Save my name, email, and website in this browser for the next time I comment.

POST COMMENT

Yes, add me to your mailing list.

[CONTACT](#)

[DISTRIBUTION](#)

[ADVERTISING](#)

[CONTRIBUTE](#)

[CHICAGO WEEKLY ARCHIVES](#)

Get the South Side Weekly in your inbox



Email →



© 2019 South Side Weekly

Get the South Side Weekly in your inbox

Email →

