

Oak View Middle School students sweep top state essay awards, now eligible for national honors

Two students from Oak View Middle School have taken the top state awards in a writing competition sponsored by the Library of Congress and the Florida Center for the Book.

Sixth-graders Oscar Conklin and Elizabeth Nowicki won first and second place, respectively, in the Letters About Literature competition for Florida 4th through 6th graders. They will now go on to represent the state at the national level.



“You should be extremely proud of this accomplishment,” wrote Letters About Literature Program Manager Nancy Murray in her letter of congratulations to the students. “We hope you continue to read and explore and expand your understanding of the world around you.”

Letters About Literature is a reading and writing competition that requires students to read a book, poem or other written work, then write a letter to the author describing the impact of that work on them personally. It was established more than 25 years ago and in that time more than a million students have participated in the competition at both state and national levels.

Conklin and Nowicki are among nine students from Oak View who were selected as state-level finalists in this year’s competition. The other seven students recognized include Isabella Roberts, Sophie Thompson, Caleb Wang, Charlotte Shea, Oliver Markham, Connor Austin and Anna Tomlinson. All are now eligible for the national competition.

The students were encouraged to participate in the competition by their English Language Arts teacher Allison Emery. She says she wanted them to recognize that writing is about more than classwork and passing tests.

“My biggest thing was to get them to see that writing is meant to go other places,” she said. “Writing is not just something for me to grade, it’s also meant to help you grow, to inspire you, and to help you communicate with others.”

Conklin’s essay was a letter to Beeck Jochen, the author of *Boeing: Commercial Aircraft Since 1919*. He chose the book because he’s interested in becoming a pilot and wanted Jochen to know how much the book had inspired him to work even harder to accomplish that goal. Conklin says such inspiration is just one of the benefits of reading.

“Reading can help you learn more about a subject you already know or tell you about a subject you don’t know,” he said. “It can be inspiring and it’s fun. There are multiple purposes for reading, and they’re all good.”

Nowicki wrote her letter to Ivanka Trump, author of *The Trump Card*. She says the book helped her gain confidence about her potential to succeed in business.

“I was thinking about becoming a doctor or lawyer, I never really thought of going into business,” she said. “But after reading the book, I was really inspired to think about other opportunities.”

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Both Conklin and Nowicki are enrolled in Oak View's Center for Advanced Academics and Technology. They are also active in a wide variety of extra-curricular activities. For example, both had projects in this year's Regional Science and Engineering Fair, and Nowicki went on to win an award at the state level. Conklin is also involved with the school's STEM Club, while Nowicki is part of the school's yearbook staff.

"They are role models to their peers," said Emery. "They're determined to do their best and they always put forth their best effort, and I think that's what made them winners."

Principal Kelly Armstrong praised both Emery and her students for the recognition they've brought to the school.

"It's really a boost for all of us," he said. "When you see kids accomplishing things like this, it makes you think 'Things are going to be all right, we're going to be in good hands,' and that really makes it worthwhile."

The Library of Congress is expected to announce the winners of the national Letters About Literature competition in late May or early June.

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