

Published March 27th, 2024

Miramonte and Campolindo Open Mic sparks connection among teen poets

By Emma Wong



Miramonte sophomore Elise Vansant speaks from her poem, "Oftentimes."

and gifts awarded.

"We planned to hold the mic last year but never made a concrete plan: this year, we were able to organize with a bigger group," Tringe said.

Several staff joined the planning effort, including Miramonte juniors Aya Minn and Olivia Shin, sophomore Kaia Bonham, and Campolindo sophomore Lauren Kawamoto.

The writing contest welcomed submissions from every genre, including poetry, short story, and essay. PAC and Writer's Magazine staff hung up posters around campus and reached out to English teachers, requesting them to judge submissions.

Miramonte instructor Amy Krochmal volunteered as one of four judges. "I was so excited to participate," Krochmal said. "It's an honor, because students often shy away from sharing personal writing with teachers."

In late February, contest submissions closed and Open Mic preparation began. Running a tight schedule, staff secured a wireless mic stand from Miramonte's theater and designed custom T-shirts for contest winners. Meanwhile, contest judges reviewed students' work for a total of 20 submissions.

Olivia Shin is Writer's Magazine's design coordinator, who assisted with publicity leading up to the event. "We did a lot of Zoom and FaceTime calls," Shin said. "We organized tasks, like advertising and shirt designing, on a Google Doc, where our opening speech was also written."

March 1 proved a challenging date. Rain poured in torrents; as staff arrived with tables and pizza, the library's awning provided a safe haven from the storm. With a swim meet running parallel, some student-athletes could not guarantee their attendance.

Despite initial roadblocks, the staff persevered. In the library, a projector displayed quotes from contest submissions and headshots of their authors. Quiet music filled the room while attendees poured in.

Anyone could volunteer to read a two-minute excerpt of a creative work. Miramonte junior Catherine Hu was first in line, reading her poem "ABACADABA," a poem on the theme of magic.

"My agreeing to be the first speaker was a decision I made on impulse-so, initially, I was a bit intimidated," Hu said. "However, the positive atmosphere of the event made it a lot less stressful."

A total of 12 speakers read aloud, including Campolindo sophomore Isabelle Culinco, who read from her meditative piece "Sometimes."

"I found out about the Open Mic in our school's weekly emails," Culinco said. "I wanted to share my poem with others who would appreciate it in a different way than those who didn't write poetry."

Speakers performed their poems, stories, and essays in a variety of ways. Sophomore Yu, drawing from his

"Next up," calls Campolindo senior Laurel Tringe, "reading his slam poetry piece about hip-hop. Vinny Yu!"

It's 6 p.m. at the Miramonte library. Sophomore Yu steps onstage. Taps the mic. Takes a breath-and launches into his performance, a riveting blend of rhythm and rhyme.

On Friday, March 1, Miramonte and Campolindo's writing clubs hosted their first joint Open Mic, spotlighting teen voices and celebrating the joys of creative writing. The mic also announced winners of the Miramonte-Campolindo writing contest.

Two years ago, Tringe-president of Campolindo's Poetry and Creative Writing Club (PAC)-began messaging over social media with Emma Wong, Miramonte junior and leader of its Writer's Magazine club. The two decided to host a cross-school writing contest followed by the Open Mic, where winners of the contest would be announced

experience in public speaking, ran through his slam piece about the birth of hip-hop. Senior Mika Strickler performed her poem, "Reasons for Driving Dangerously on Return Home," in a lilting, near-humorous tone, articulating her thoughts via hand gestures. Junior Aerin Haro utilized her storytelling ability to read an excerpt from a longer piece, "Does True Love Exist?"

Subject matter played a key role in the delivery of each piece: some were science-fiction scenes brimming with action, while others were tender meditations on family relations.

As the evening drew to a close, Tringe and Wong concluded the mic by announcing contest winners. First place was awarded to Campolindo junior Sahana Sarvabhouman for her poem "My Monster; My Love; My Mother." Campolindo senior Nina Damiano won second place for her short story "The Hunter." Miramonte junior Ryan Lee earned third place for his story, "Dove in the Dirt."

First place received not only a T-shirt and Sharetea drink vouchers but also a free class with the local Intuitive Writing Project, headed by founder Elizabeth Perlman, who also attended the Open Mic. "I was overjoyed to be there to support all these incredible writers," Perlman said. "It takes so much courage to tell your story-I applaud everyone brave enough to share their writing."

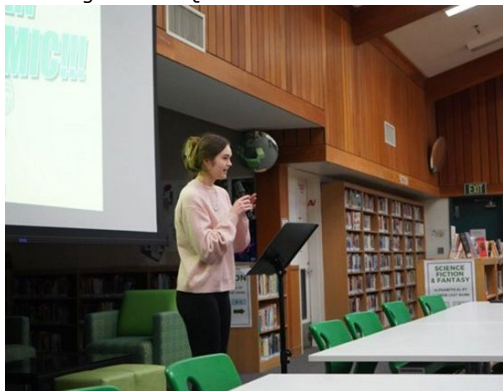
Creative writing holds the power to bridge all borders, and at the Open Mic, sparks of connection were forged between young poets and writers. "I loved hearing everyone's perspectives and thoughts expressed through writing," Culinco said.

Tringe reflected on the performance as "an awesome way to bookend [her] time as president of the PAC." While she graduates this year, Tringe hopes for future collaboration as sophomore Kawamoto takes over the club.

Writing is deeply personal-and although sharing expressive pieces can be nerve-wracking for many students, shared vulnerability creates community. "It sounds cliché, but nobody is judging," Tringe said. "Everyone in a room like the Open Mic understands that we all start somewhere. Often your work is better than you give it credit for!"

"Whether you realize it or not, you already share your mind with others every day, in each of your classes," contest judge and Miramonte English teacher Colleen Williams said. "You'll never regret trying something new by putting yourself out there."

A list of all writing contest submissions, along with video recordings of each performance, can be found by scanning the two QR codes below.



Open Mic participants, including Elizabeth Perlman (right), clap after a speaking performance. Photos Ava Skidgel

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA