

For Immediate Release

Hartford, CT

April 18, 2024

Contact: Linda Torres, (860) 493-1618, lvalentin@sinainc.org

SINA Honors Student Authors

The REACH Young Authors Awards ceremony will be held on Wednesday, May 8, from 3:00 to 5:30 pm, at the Hartford Public Library Park Street Branch @ the Lyric. The event honors local students who have written books similar to book signing events held for professional authors. This third annual event is hosted by SINA (Southside Institutions Neighborhood Alliance), a partnership between Connecticut's Children's, Hartford Hospital, and Trinity College.

Students in grades K through 5 submitted a disability awareness-themed book to the writing contest. There were 94 authors and illustrators who wrote 54 books, from which 29 winning authors and illustrators were selected by members of the REACH committee and employees of Hartford Public Library. Thirteen books were selected for publication. The program evolved as the result of a casual conversation. SINA staff learned of a student who wrote a book and snuck it into a library, where the delighted librarian put it into circulation. This inspired SINA to partner with Hartford Public Library to create this program.

Winners will have their efforts published as real books, printed, and bound by the Hartford Public Schools print shop, with copyrights, International Standard Book Numbers (ISBN), and bar codes. Copies of these winning students' books will be provided to their schools and the Hartford Public Library Park Street Branch @ the Lyric.

All About Blindness is written and illustrated by Mercy Hseezar, a second-grade student at Maria Sanchez Elementary School. This book is centered around the disability of blindness.

Alex is written and illustrated by Viyanakhaa Satish Kumar, a Hartford resident and a first-grade student at Glastonbury East Hartford Magnet School. The book is about a spider who can't understand why Alex doesn't respond to his questions.

A Tale of Two Friends is written by Jennyeliz Fontanez and Wilson Escalante-Morales, and illustrated by Saniyah Feliciano and Daily Velasquez-Garcia. They are fifth graders in the Hispanic Health Council's after-school program at Maria Sanchez School. The book is about how two people became best friends despite each other's differences.

Charlie and the Spelling Bee is written and illustrated by Myah Cruz, a third-grade student at Maria Sanchez Elementary School. This book is about a girl with autism who is adamant about proving that she can achieve her goals.

Charlie's Broken Leg is written by Victor Rojas and Jonathan Velez, and illustrated by Randy Gonzalez and Adrian Jimenez. They are fifth-grade students in the Hispanic Health Council's

after-school program at Maria Sanchez School. The book is about a dog who has to relearn how to walk after his leg is amputated.

Delilah is Dyslexic is written by Aaliyah Lawrence, and illustrated by Jomyra Valentin. Aaliyah is a fifth-grader at Noah Webster Microsociety Magnet School. Jomyra is a Hartford resident and fourth-grader at CREC Academy of Aerospace and Engineering Elementary School. The book is about learning to deal with a disability and standing up for yourself.

Don't Deny It, Defy It! is written by Kaiden Baptiste, and illustrated by Kaiden and Marley Williams. They are fourth-grade students at CREC Ana Grace Academy of the Arts Elementary School. The book is about an individual with a disability finding the person they can connect with.

Fly Bird Fly? is written and illustrated by Olivia Leroux, a fifth grader at CREC Montessori Magnet School. The book is about a one-wing bird who is trying to return to its nest.

Millie and Roofus is written and illustrated by Eliana Rios-Segui, Olivia Starr, and Ava Marques. They are fifth-grade students at CREC Montessori Magnet School. The book is about a girl with epilepsy and her service dog Roofus.

My Voice is written by Nathaniel Redi, and illustrated by Nathaniel, Danino Sgro, Jayce Thelwell, Micah Vernon, Jayvion Butler, and Zackary Perez. They are fourth-grade students at CREC Ana Grace Academy. The book is about overcoming a speech disorder to achieve your dream.

Rainbow Smile is written and illustrated by Anaya Gupta, a winning author for the second year in a row. A Hartford resident, Anaya is a third grader at Betances Learning Lab Elementary School. The book is about the importance of empathy, friendship, and creativity in overcoming challenges like a disability.

Sparkle Sparkles is written and illustrated by Dhyanaa Satish Kumar, a winning author for the third year in a row. A Hartford resident, Dhyanaa is a third grader at Glastonbury East Hartford Magnet School. The book is about a one-legged skeleton named Sparkle who has to deal with a mean bully.

The Cat with Three Legs is written and illustrated by Ashly Tema, and Joniel Navarro Cintron. They are fourth and fifth-grade students in the Hispanic Health Council's after-school program at Maria Sanchez School. The book is about a cat who is determined to be treated as ordinary despite her appearance.

Event hosts will be Nancy Mendez of Hartford Public Library and Linda Torres of SINA. The keynote speaker will be Amanda Russell, author & illustrator of the Karing Kritters series: "Jacob Learns to Fly" and "Jacob Loves Puddles". Amanda lives in Madison, CT. She enjoys visiting schools and libraries as a featured author to read her book to students to help them understand the world of Special Needs and to help boost acceptance in elementary schools.

Student authors will read from and sign their books, which will be professionally printed and bound by the Hartford Print Shop. Each student will receive a certificate and a trophy. Copies of each book will also be on the local author shelf of Hartford Public Library Park Street Branch @ the Lyric, so residents can borrow them.

For more information, contact Linda Torres, (860) 493-1618, lvalentin@sinainc.org