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Kids exercise their creativity at writing camp

Kate Santich | Sentinel Staff Writer
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Teaching kids the joys and wonders of the written word might seem almost quaint in an era of text-messaging shorthand and languishing public libraries.

But don't tell 9-year-old Tonique Lorick that literature is a dying art form. The Ivey Lane fourth-grader already has written her second novel -- after a debut attempt at age 5.

"I put that one in the mailbox, but I didn't know where to send it," she said. "So I had to take it back out."

Alas, it would take four years to produce her follow-up effort -- a tale of Super Speed Girl and her superhero powers -- at a "writers camp" in downtown Orlando. There, she and 60 other public-school students are unleashing their creative minds for a weeklong adventure in storytelling, drawing, songwriting and poetry.

"A lot of these kids have never gone through the process of storytelling.

They don't know about characters and plot and conflict," said Julia Bessire, the 29-year-old executive director of a burgeoning nonprofit literacy arts program called Page 15, which runs the camp. Each week through July 25, the camp will target a different age group, from first-graders through middle-schoolers.

The effort comes from Bessire, who is volunteering, and the Urban Think! Foundation -- the charitable branch of the independent bookstore near [Lake Eola](#) where the camp takes place. Teachers nominated the kids. Business sponsors covered tuition.

"It's the first thing I think about when I wake up in the morning," said 9-year-old Riley Mitchell, an aspiring scientist.

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