



The WriteGirl Stuff

By Wendy Werris, *Children's Bookshelf* –

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After establishing a successful creative writing and mentoring program for inner-city girls in Los Angeles in 2001, nonprofit organization **WriteGirl** is preparing to take its publishing division to a broader level of sales and distribution.



Keren Taylor, **WriteGirl**'s founder and executive director, initially saw the company's books—trade paperback anthologies of the high school girls' poetry, essays and short stories—as a showcase for potential members and supporters. "But it quickly became clear," Taylor says, "that the books have a greater potential for sales to teens, parents and women writers than we realized."

WriteGirl has published six anthologies since 2001, each containing selections from about 200 students and mentors. In the *Los Angeles Times*, book review editor David Ulin wrote, "For these girls, writing is a lens, a filter, a way to cut through the nonsense and see the possibilities. The **WriteGirl** books suggest that reports of literacy's death have been greatly exaggerated."

WriteGirl has benefited from its Los Angeles locale. Taylor, a poet, songwriter and freelance writer, has encouraged celebrity mentors and guest speakers to come into the fold. Among those who have supported the program are Diablo Cody, this year's Oscar winner for Best Screenplay; Janet Fitch, Geena Davis and Jill Soloway, who wrote for *Six Feet Under*.



WriteGirl founder Keren Taylor.

The **WriteGirl** program is based on weekly one-on-one mentoring between high school girls and professional women novelists, screenwriters and poets. Creative writing workshops are held monthly, and the students are taught writing and critical analysis skills. **WriteGirl** has a 100% success rate of its student members graduating from high school and enrolling in college.

"Our priority has always been the **WriteGirl** program," Taylor says, "and as such the books haven't received the kind of attention they need to reach our target audiences." Currently the series is sold at **WriteGirl** workshops and readings (they coordinate dozens each year) and book fairs, including the *Los Angeles Times* Festival of Books. The company has participated in the West Hollywood Book Fair for the last several years, and this year they exhibited at BEA.

Taylor, who had no prior publishing experience before putting out the first **WriteGirl** anthology, concedes that this limited distribution makes it difficult to turn a profit and expand her publishing program. The books are available through Small Press Distributors in Berkeley, but **WriteGirl** has yet to maximize what it considers to be its key market—teens, schools and teachers. However, Taylor is currently researching different distributor partnerships, co-publishing ventures and other means of increasing sales.

All six titles have garnered at least one small press literary award, Taylor says, and she hopes for a vibrant future for this collection of books by and for teen writers. "We're certainly on our way," she says, "and I'm proud of what we've achieved so far."