



Unnecessarily Beautiful Spaces for Young Minds on Fire

How 826 Valencia, and Dozens of Centers Like It, Got Built—and Why

Edited by

**The International Alliance
of Youth Writing Centers**

Introduction by

Dave Eggers & Amanda Uhle

Impossible, You Say?



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SAN FRANCISCO

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Centers Like It, Got Built—and Why

Edited by

The International Alliance
of Youth Writing Centers

Book designed by

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Kids are used to cinderblock walls, plastic chairs, and industrial wall-to-wall carpet.



So many spaces for kids are designed to *withstand* their presence, as opposed to celebrating it.



Sterile, brutalist learning boxes can suffocate the mind and make a young person feel they are being *contained*, instead of being set free.



If we want to foster creativity and sensitivity in students, we must surround them with unnecessary, even extravagant beauty.



An inspired learning environment sets the imagination on fire and makes a young person feel loved.



This is true: they feel loved, sensing the encompassing affection and respect that went into the creation of that learning space.



And with beauty all around them, they will





want to make beautiful things, too.

—Dave Eggers



Introduction

The story: back in 2002, some friends in San Francisco had an idea for a youth writing and tutoring center. They rented a building for this purpose, only to learn that the address was zoned for retail; they could do their writing and tutoring, sure, but they had to sell something in the front of the building. So they decided to sell pirate supplies, and to decorate the storefront as if it were a real shop for working buccaneers. It was a ludicrous solution to a bizarre problem, and it ended up being the key to everything.

The Pirate Store at 826 Valencia took up about a fourth of the building, which seemed at first a problem—all that real estate just to meet the zoning obligation! But because the store was open to the public all day, every day, it had a galvanizing effect. It brought people in—random people, shoppers, tourists, potential students and donors and tutors. Most nonprofits are more or less closed to the world. This one was unexpectedly open.

Once inside, visitors could see the students hard at work, and they might be more likely to buy a pegleg or puffy shirt. The Pirate Store—a real retail operation with a full-time manager—helped pay the rent, and helped create a bridge with the neighborhood and city, with the most random passersby. The storefront itself became a weird kind of destination. Thousands came every week.

And for the kids who came into 826 Valencia for extra help with their homework, the Pirate Store had an important de-stigmatizing effect. They weren't coming to The Place for Students Falling Behind Academically. They were coming to the Pirate Store, which was an actual pirate store. No stigma at all. And the theme had a powerful effect on kids' imaginations. For reluctant writers, or kids who learned differently, working in such a bizarre and rule-flouting place unleashed their creative sides. The space was loose and weird and welcoming and free, and in such a place, every kid was welcome and free to be loose and weird.

Soon enough, similar groups around the world started opening their own centers, adapting the idea however they saw fit. Some of these centers are within the 826 National network, but most are more loosely affiliated in a new body called

the International Alliance of Youth Writing Centers. The Alliance comprises the Echo Park Time Travel Mart (a convenience store for temporal sojourners), the Mid-Continent Oceanographic Institute (located in Minneapolis, thousands of miles from any sea), England’s absolutely insane and beautiful Grimm & Co, and about forty other learning centers around the world.

Though not all of these locations have retail storefronts, they’re all richly imagined learning environments that, in their creative anarchy, mirror the unhinged worldview and sense of humor unique to kids. Young people’s imaginations are boundless and inherently allergic to rules and logic, and these creative spaces try to respect and emulate that state of mind. If you’re thinking of starting your own center along these lines, here is some advice: find your strangest and funniest friend. Have that strange friend find their funniest and strangest friend. That strangest-friend-of-the-strangest-friend should find the person they find stranger than anyone they know—the person whose ideas are hilarious, but usually downright unworkable and sometimes outright dangerous. That is the person who should concoct your center’s theme and décor.

This book is meant to help you get your own center off the ground. Or your classroom, or corner of the public library, or basement of your church or mosque—wherever you’re trying to allow kids to learn and write, and to love writing and learning. We hope you take some inspiration from these pages.

**—Dave Eggers, co-founder of 826 National
& Amanda Uhle, former executive director of
826michigan and director of the Hawkins Project**

Storefronts

The storefront is how you greet the public. It's a big and weird hello to the logical world. And it tells young people that they are welcome inside, and they are understood.

The best storefronts take their concepts as far as they



possibly can. In life, onstage, and in storefronts, full commitment is always best. The storefront shouldn't be a slight indication toward a theme. It should *fully embody* that theme. It should look to the outside world as if your

spot truly is, say, a 7-Eleven for time travelers. That makes it complete and it makes it fun and it makes our lives, for at least the length that the storefront occupies, a little less boring.



Workspaces

Persian rugs. Chandeliers. Teak tables. Portals. Inoperative puppet theaters. Secret doors and velvet curtains. All of these details are superfluous, utterly unnecessary. But they tell students that they are in a different environment—non-sterile, non-institutional. These workspaces should feel good to be in. They should feel different from school or home, though they should have a certain familiarity and comfort.





Student Publications Displays

These centers are dedicated to elevating and amplifying young voices, and one way we do that is by publishing student work in professional-quality forms. In hundreds of books and magazines, the centers featured in this book have done so—and we hope you will seek out those publications! When young people see their work on display, side by side with books by adult authors, they feel a profound sense of both pride and belonging. They see their work as being worthy of such care and such permanence, and they feel forever validated, the brilliance of their young minds frozen in amber.





Products

If you have a themed storefront, why not create lines of made-up products? It makes a certain sense, it's crucial for your verisimilitude, and it underscores the strangeness of the space your students and visitors have entered. These products should be witty, and should look, at first glance, like real products.

Actually, in most cases, they *are* real products. Customers can enter the Ministry of Stories and purchase a can whose label says A VAGUE SENSE OF UNEASE—which would seem to be a very fake product. But lift it and note its heft. Open it and find candy. This candy was made by actual candy-makers and has only been repurposed within the Ministry's thematic confines, but the effect is complete. The product is not real, but then again, it is real, and can be brought home and made a conversation starter. The products have an array of side effects for your space.



To wit:

- For visitors, they keep the eyes busy. Customers should be able to wander around for an hour, reading the labels, having a chuckle, and getting ever deeper in the imagined world of these real-but-not-real stores.
- The stranger, funnier, and more fully realized these products are, the more likely someone is to buy one. And this helps pay the rent during times good and bad.

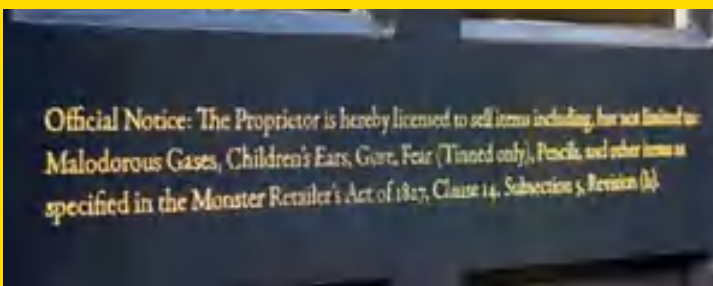
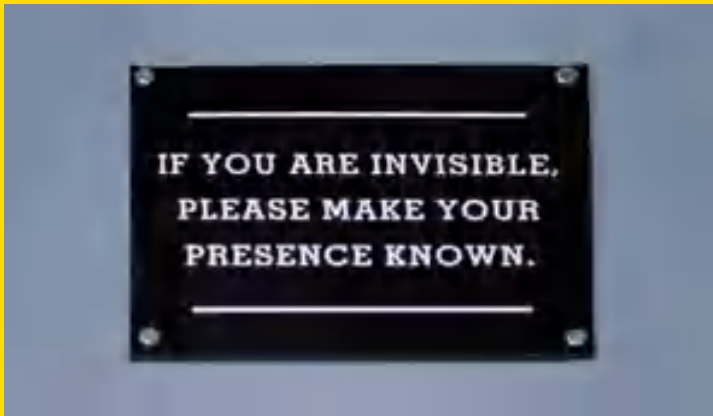
And imagine being a kid walking into a space like this. You've come for tutoring or a school outing, and you're suddenly in the middle of a fully realized faux-retail environment where snot is sold in jars. That is a place that every child deserves to see, and every adult wishes they'd had as a kid.

Often the products in these storefronts actually existed already, but simply work well within the theme. The Detroit Robot Factory sells actual robot-making kits and spark plugs. And the Berättarministeriet in Sweden sells actual manufactured three-eyed glasses.



Signs

There can be no more fun a human can have than creating rude and admonishing signs for stores. These can list overbearing instructions for customers, or they can be related to the theme generally. They are in perfect alignment with a writing center, and they give volunteers, or older students, or staffers, a way to give voice to the constantly annoyed shopkeeper within.



Details

Every detail means you care. And every time a kid, or a visitor of any age, sees you care, then they, and we all, feel good. A beautiful or witty detail delights the mind and strengthens the world and, for a moment or two longer, holds off the robot apocalypse.



The logo for 826 Valencia, featuring the number '826' in a large, bold, serif font above the word 'VALENCIA' in a smaller, all-caps, sans-serif font. The logo is set against a white background that resembles a house-shaped tag.

826
VALENCIA



826 Valencia

Established:
2002

Designer:
Dave Eggers

Area:
2,500 sq. ft.

Address:
826 Valencia St.
San Francisco, CA



San Francisco, CA



(Above) The Pirate Store sells goods for captains, scallywags, and seafarers. (Right) A display of student publications helps to dispel the myth that pirates are illiterate.



Celebrated comics artist Chris Ware created the mural on the building's facade.

How did 826 Valencia get started?

Back in 2001, Dave Eggers and his high school friend Barb Bersche rented a building in the Mission District of San Francisco. The idea was that the building would contain both the offices of McSweeney's, their small publishing company, and a tutoring center for neighborhood kids. The retail zoning required that something be sold in the storefront, so they naturally decided on pirate supplies. Dave did sketches on napkins, and talented local carpenters helped build out the space. It was built on a tight budget, so much of the work was done by volunteers. Dave and Barb did the demo work and painted the walls and installed bookshelves themselves. The chandeliers were all secondhand, bought for ten dollars apiece. The rugs were from Dave's childhood home. Dave wanted the space to feel symphonic with color and texture, so they sought many different woods, fabrics, and paint colors—anything so the space looked homey and weird and anti-institutional. Dave bought a giant steel bagel-boiling vat and transformed it into a treasure-seeking





What a pirate can't plunder, they must purchase.



The Fish Theater is saltwater, high-definition, and has limited obstructed views.

vessel, full of sand and jewels. They put up countless odd signs and features, from periscopes to secret doors. There was even a redwood tree trunk! None of it made perfect sense, and that was the point.

Shortly after the building opened, visionary educator Nínive Calegari came into the project to guide the pedagogical element of 826 Valencia, and since then she and Pirate Store managers such as Yosh Han, Anna Ura, Justin Carder, and Caroline Kangas have improved the space and made it richer and more delightful every year.

How do you want 826 Valencia to impact its visitors?

All three of the 826 Valencia stores are meant to be unnecessarily beautiful. They are enveloping sensory experiences that are immediately arresting, and then reward close viewing. In that way, they seek a rabbit-hole effect. A visitor starts with the big features, the colors and lights and shapes, and then slowly begins to read the tiny signs and handle the oddball products. In this way, the spaces encourage curiosity, play, asking questions, and storytelling. They turn the idea of both a learning center and a storefront on its head. Opportunities for tactile exploration and surprise are great (opening doors, drawers, trapdoors) as they really engage visitors in the space and can also then lead them to start picking up products as well. Please touch!

Who worked on these stores?

Each space was created differently. The original 826 Valencia was done on a small budget with a small group of creators and contractors. When, many years later, the Tenderloin and Mission Bay spaces were being built, Executive Director Bitá Nazarian was able to call on the large-scale building firm BCCI Construction, who donated countless hours and brought incredible professionalism to the projects. (Many large construction firms are willing to do pro bono work! Check it out in your own city.) For the buildings' many beautiful features, we partnered with local artists and craftspeople to produce the various elements of the space. Raven Mahon, for example, created the gorgeous Fog Bank in the Tenderloin Center. Many of these artists had partnered with us in the past or were friends of friends. When making an ask to a partner that we hadn't worked with before, we always started with the mission and clearly scoped the specific ask, emphasizing how working on a creative and weird project is also an engaging ask for folks who may be used to blander spaces or products. Honestly, most of the subcontractor and artist asks stemmed from personal relationships with 826 Valencia and the entire build team, asking everyone to join us in this whimsical and philanthropic endeavor. And because we always aimed to be a good client, we allowed the builders and artists to be as creative as possible, so everyone came out of it with a sense of ownership. ●



Perhaps a knot-tying seminar, a tacking tutorial, or a workshop on fantasy writing.



Informative handbills about pirate-prohibited slang.



Framed signs are classy and show that your business means business.



Lard will always have a home at the Pirate Store.



Look out! Crustaceans beneath trapdoors!



While it looks like a performance from Pirates of Penzance, very likely it's an intriguing bit of math.



If a visitor stands in a certain spot, mops might fall...



... on their head. But an explanation is readily at hand.



Experience what you might look like with a beard...



... or to peer through an almost-real periscope.



A bagel-boiling vat has been converted...



... to a treasure-seeking mini-world full of jewels.



A ladder leads to the world of Captain Blue, a grumpy never-seen publisher.



The shop sells all the essentials.



The original signage was intentionally crude.



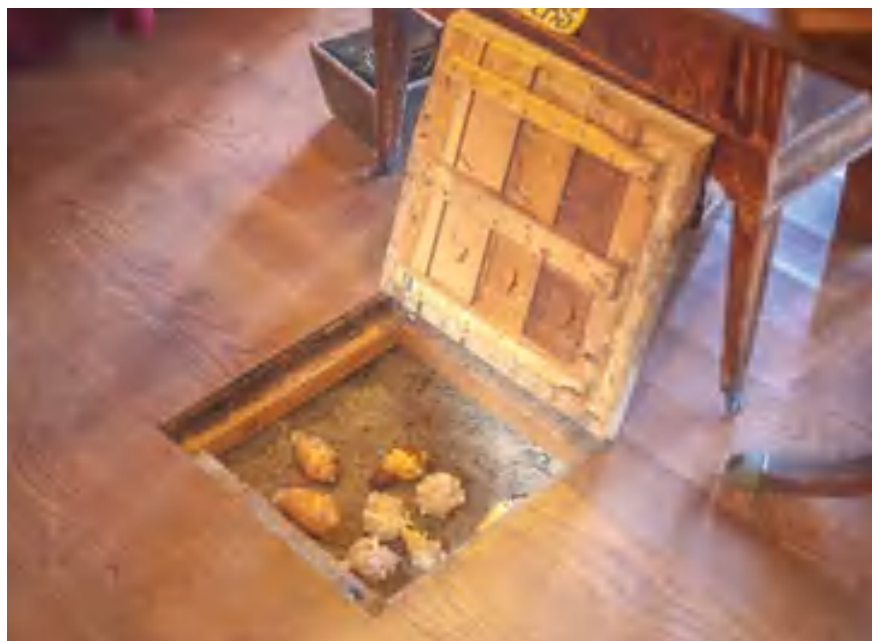
Artist Raven Mahen created this portal to the sea.



Actual peglegs are sold (but not often).



Signs reward close viewing (and put forth unreasonable rules).

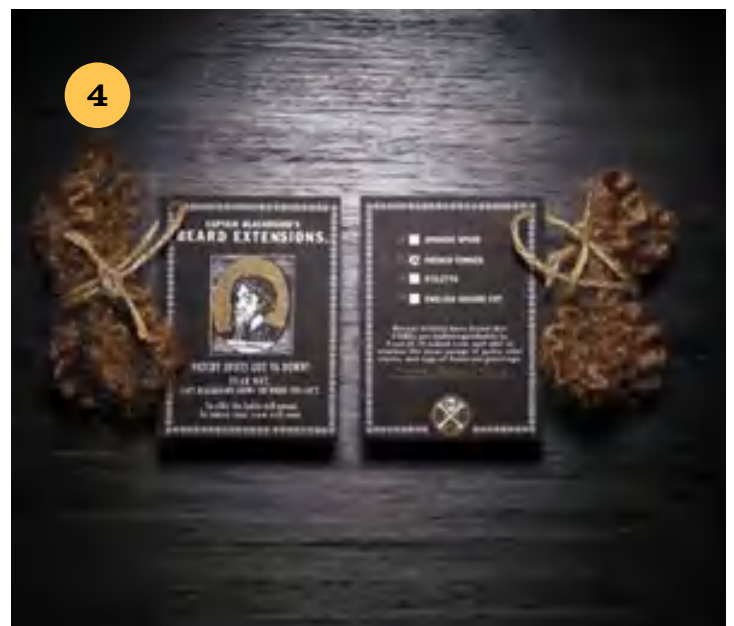
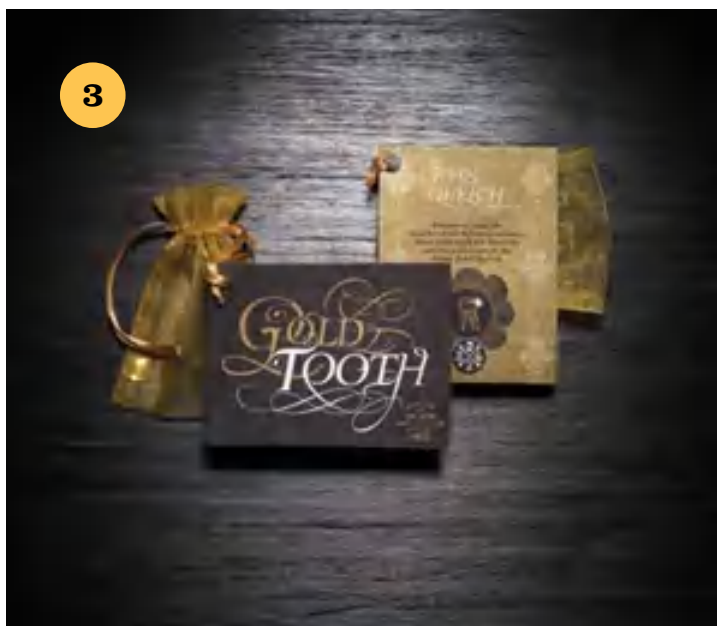
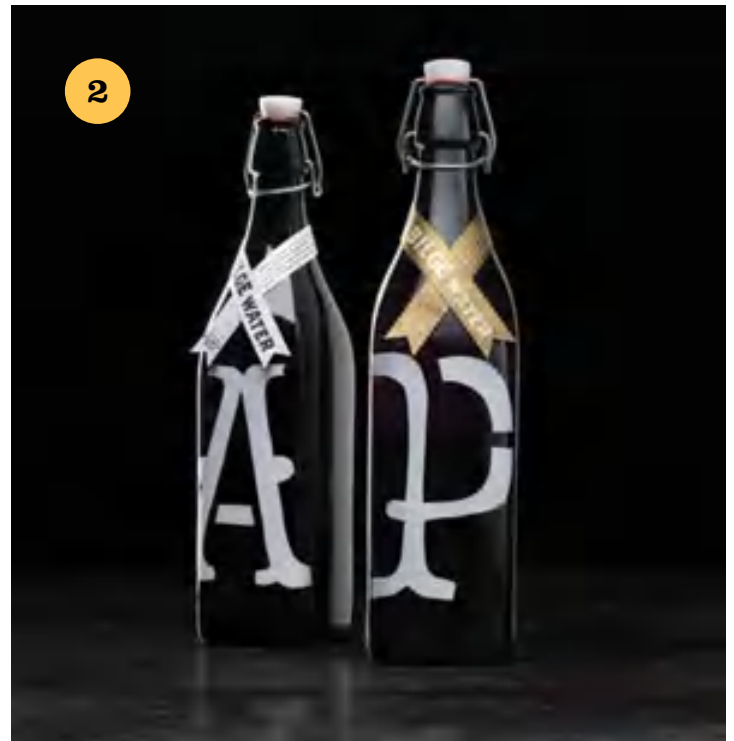
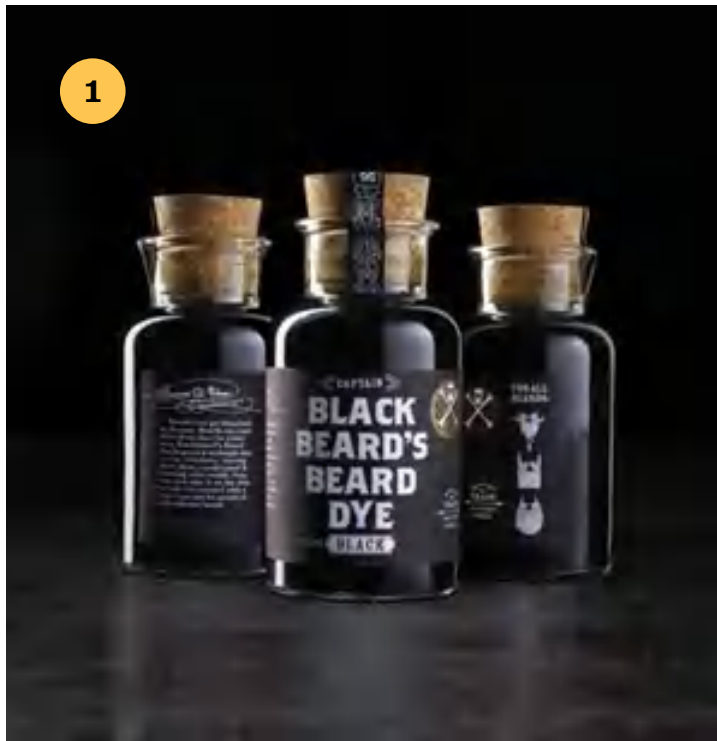


The contents of secret hatches are ever-changing.



Office, a design firm located a few blocks away, took on the creation of a vast array of beautiful and sometimes even practical pirate products. They repurposed simple off-the-shelf jars and cans, designed labels, and glued them on by hand. What results is a profoundly convincing retail environment that confounds and delights—and staves off periodic gangrene for hygiene-phobic buccaneers.





1

BLACKBEARD'S BEARD DYE

Designer and Writer:
Office and 826 Valencia

Beards can get bleached by the sun. Beards can turn white from fear. In either case, Blackbeard's Beard Dye imparts a midnight hue to your whiskers, leaving them shiny, conditioned, and bristling with health. Also suitable for mustaches and mole hair.

2

BILGE WATER

Designer and Writer:
Office and 826 Valencia

Rough ocean water collected from the leaky lower compartments of ships. This Bilge Water is perfect for distilling rum on the open seas or sinking enemy fleets. Not for freshwater creatures.

3

GOLD TOOTH

Designer and Writer:
Office and 826 Valencia

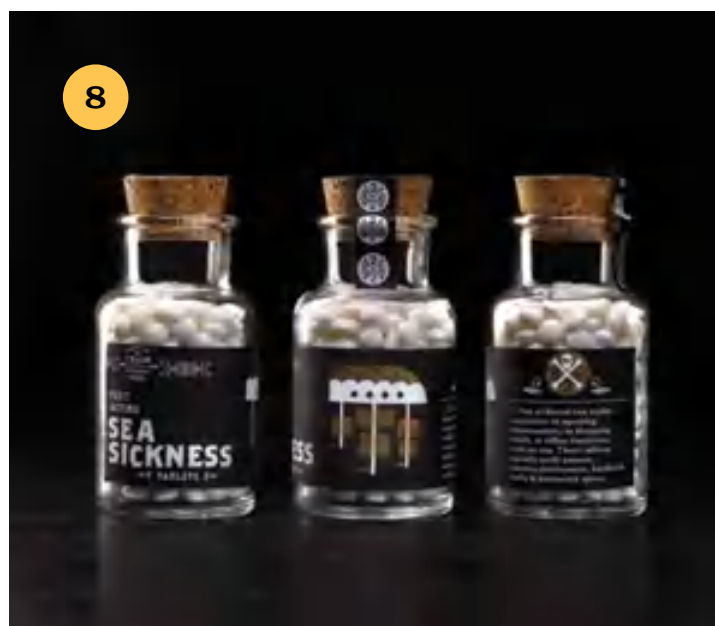
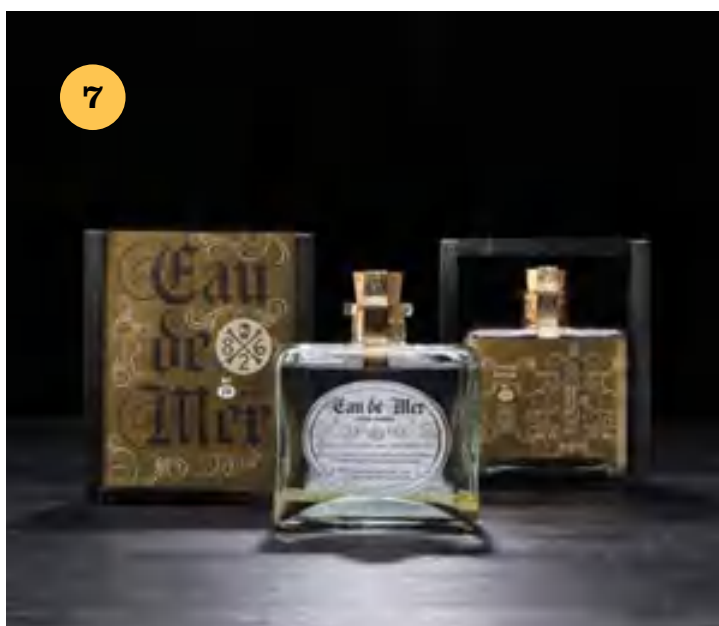
Plundered from the mouths of his defeated enemies, these gold (-colored) teeth are from the private collection of the dread John Quelch.

4

CAPTAIN BLACKBEARD'S BEARD EXTENSIONS

Designer and Writer:
Office and 826 Valencia

The length of a seaman's beard is in many ways the measure of the man. So for those who don't grow facial hair well, fast, or at all, these extensions are lifesavers. Available in many sizes and textures and levels of filthiness.



5

BLACKWATER FEVER

Designer and Writer:
Office and 826 Valencia

Blackwater Fever is always fatal, and no cure has been found. Maybe you should save your money and buy something else, like a small and dangerous motorbike, or a domesticated monkey. On the other hand, maybe these tablets will help. They certainly (probably) won't hurt.

6

SCURVY BEGONE

Designer and Writer:
Office and 826 Valencia

Each capsule contains the power of one entire lime or lemon, to rid you of scurvy. Fairly probable side effects: hirsutism; supernumerary organs; chimerism; sudden onset of fake English accent; boils.

7

EAU DE MER

Designer and Writer:
Office and 826 Valencia

Eau de Mer cologne no. 12 was blended especially *pour homme* (pirates specifically), with water and sediment from our own San Francisco Bay. Each limited-edition bottle includes the following inscription: LOVE IS NOT A ROGUE WAVE TO BE BREACHED. LOVE IS A TURTLE TO BE LURED INTO A ROWBOAT, CLUBBED, QUARTERED, AND DEVoured.

8

SEA SICKNESS TABLETS

Designer and Writer:
Office and 826 Valencia

Fast-acting seasickness tablets quickly quell queasiness, nausea, hardtack-belly, and hammock spins to help keep you on an even keel.

My Fifteenth Dream!

by Kiara

Age 9 • San Francisco, CA

Originally published by 826 Valencia

This book isn't a collection of student writing. The centers in this book have published hundreds of such collections, and this is not one of them. Still, we couldn't resist a few samples of the beautiful and untethered work that comes out of these places.

When I'm fifteen, I want to have either a pet gorilla or a cheetah. The cheetah's name will be Micaila and the gorilla, Skylar.

I want to live in a mansion with a gigantic pool. The gorilla will eat bananas. The cheetah will eat steak and chicken. I would want to train them to protect me. I would also want to train them to let me ride on their backs.

I would want a big jeep to fit my gorilla and cheetah. And the jeep will be blue. My mansion will be covered in blue slime. There will be a room with slime. My room will only have a little slime. And the color of my room will be aqua blue.

And in the backyard, I will have a race in the pool with my pets. And that's my ending!



Established:
2016

Designers:
Gensler, Interstice
Architects, Office,
MKThink, BCCI, and
Jonas Kellner

Area:
5,200 sq. ft.

Address:
180 Golden Gate Ave.
San Francisco, CA

826 VALENCIA TENDERLOIN

826 Valencia: Tenderloin Center

San Francisco, CA





(Opposite) One almost feels underwater as they enter the emporium. (Above) Customers are treated to souvenirs from the travels of King Carl, the royal pufferfish.



The center is walkable from the original location; it's not reachable by boat.

How does this space differ from the original 826 Valencia?

We wanted King Carl's Emporium to feel like you were stepping into an old department store. There isn't much retail in the Tenderloin District, so we wanted to offer a range of daily-use products with a whimsical twist (e.g., lip balm is "Unicorn Horn Polish"). Because the Tenderloin neighborhood is very ethnically diverse, we thought that the theme of a traveling royal pufferfish could include items and experiences from many different cultures around the world. We also honored these populations by putting the motto SET FORTH AND EXPLORE on the windows in eight different languages. When people venture inside, a scavenger hunt nicely provides structure for those who need a little encouragement to explore. While we were creating a storefront that would also serve as reception for our programming, we wanted to positively activate the street and considered greater monitoring and safety. Simple improvements like windows and a whimsical mural increase neighborhood pride and allow passersby to see the students at work. Many people do not know that the Tenderloin is home to over three thousand young people and we wanted to create a joyful and beautiful space for them.



One important takeaway from this book: if at all possible, include a secret door.

How did you gather support for creating this space?

While working with more people is, in some ways, more work, it makes each piece of the project more manageable on a budget. It also engages the community in the space from the beginning. Always focus on the mission and how what you're doing makes a positive impact on the students and community. Treat this ask much like you would any monetary donation: be clear about purpose, explain the opportunity in an inspiring manner, express lots of gratitude all the time, and have excellent follow-through on all tasks to make it easy for people to be involved. Also, engaging passionate pro bono partners ensures one more advocate asking others to be generous as well. Our construction partner asked every subcontractor if they would donate their portion of the project and often the answer was yes. ●



Furthermore: if at all possible, include multiple secret doors.



The Fog Bank allows one to withdraw fog, a common currency in San Francisco.



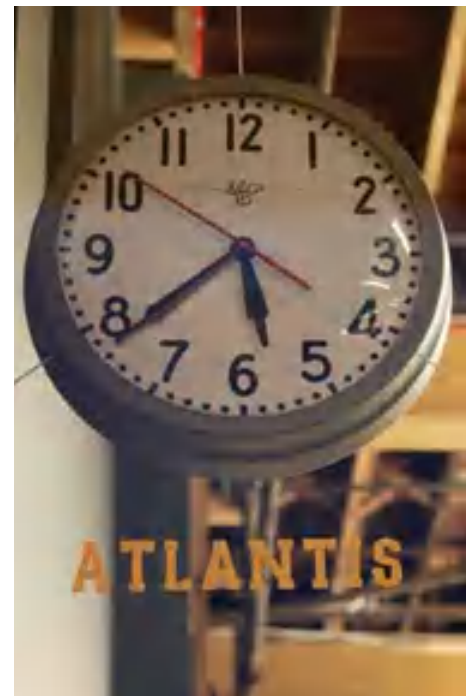
Can you find the human hiding in this photo?



Drawer nameplates honor donors to the center.



Woodland creatures are rare but welcome visitors.



A clock displays the time in Atlantis (which is real).





When asked what the new center in the Tenderloin District needed, one of the students at 826 Valencia suggested a tree fort. Weirdly, the new space actually had an odd little mezzanine, so that was converted into an actual, bona-fide indoor tree fort. Typically, students are allowed to explore it after—and only after—their assignments are completed.



Woodland creatures, ocean-loving monsters, and humans alike love nooks, crannies, and display cases with items of interest.



Indoor tree house, anyone?



All kinds of work, from hard to whimsical and all points in between, happens in settings like this.



Many (even famous) writers have never had the opportunity to read on a large tree stump. Not so for students who come to 826 Valencia: Tenderloin Center.



1

PRETTY GOOD PENCILS

Designer and Writer:
Office and 826 Valencia

No. 2 pencils equipped with inspiring and joyful quotes from 826's own King Carl to help you bust through any writer's block.

2

KEY TO... KEYTAG

Designer and Writer:
Office and 826 Valencia

Finally, we unlocked the keys to the universe, and you can have them too, for a nominal fee. You're welcome.

3

MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE 2.0

Designer and Writer:
Office and 826 Valencia

From lists of demands to distress signals to poems that are too personal to share with the crew, now you don't have to decide which message is most important—send them all! Two gigabytes of USB storage. That equates to roughly one hundred thousand scrolls of parchment, depending on how big you write.

4

STILTS FOR TINY CREATURES

Designer and Writer:
Office and 826 Valencia

Also firewood kindling and non-magic wands. Sold only in pairs. Do not ask to separate. Helmet use advised.



5

GNOME BE-GONE

Designer and Writer:
Office and 826 Valencia

The safest, most foolproof method of ridding your forest or abode of pesky gnomes. For best results, scrunch your left toe and sprinkle Be-Gone dust over your left shoulder while reciting an original limerick.

6

ENCHANTED FOREST FIPPLE FLUTE

Designer and Writer:
Office and 826 Valencia

Let the sweet soprano sounds of the fipple flute recorder take you places. Like the cobblestone streets of a quaint German village. Or the Aegean Sea under moonlight. Or a scary hole inside a dead tree during a thunderstorm. Make beautiful music, my friend.

7

UNICORN HORN POLISH

Designer and Writer:
Office and 826 Valencia

Nourishing balm for that not-overly-shiny shine. Organic, gluten-free, non-GMO, petroleum-free, and cruelty-free. Never tested on unicorns.

8

GIANT SQUID INK PENS

Designer and Writer:
Office and 826 Valencia

Handcrafted in Michigan, these fine writing instruments may or may not contain ink from a Giant Squid.



1310



826 Valencia: Mission Bay Center

Established:
2019

Designers:
WRNS Studio,
BCCI, Office, and
Jonas Kellner

Area:
2,500 sq. ft.

Address:
1310 4th St.
San Francisco, CA



San Francisco, CA



When visitors step into Woodland Creature Outfitters, Ltd., it appears they have actually stepped outside.



Wait, are these students reading outside, in an enchanted wood?

What kind of atmosphere did you want to establish?

The storefront in Mission Bay, Woodland Creature Outfitters, Ltd., feels like you're stepping from the known world into an enchanted forest. The neighborhood is all new construction so we had the challenge of transforming a relatively average city street corner into a magical, organic, and surprising space. It pushed us to think even more creatively—as well as our new landlords and the city!

How did you design the space to reflect its whimsical woodland theme?

We feature some whimsical supplies like Extra Firm Fairy Mattress, which is a pink eraser, Gnome's Best Friend, which is a pet rock, and Lumber Jack Repellant, a nicely scented spray. In the space itself, moss and bark decorate the walls and we have fairy-lit caves where readers can curl up with a book. We have architectural wooden sculptures and a set of mushrooms that serve as telephones—you can whisper secrets into one end and hear them from the other. You have to take this "joke" very seriously, which often lands you in ridiculous conversations, like, if you're walking from a "store" (the sidewalk) into the woods (actually the store), where would you put a welcome mat? In Mission Bay, since the "store" is on the exterior, the vinyl signage had to be posted backward. Obviously, the installers made the mistake of installing the sign "the normal way," and they had to redo it! ●



There can never be too many very small doors.



Murals of woodland settings and the large, dramatic tree turn the writing room into a whimsical forest.



Wooden sculptures of trees and a platform stage add dramatic architecture to the space.



Products displayed among the elaborate wood framework within the center.



The store's signage is designed to rewire how we see the outside world.



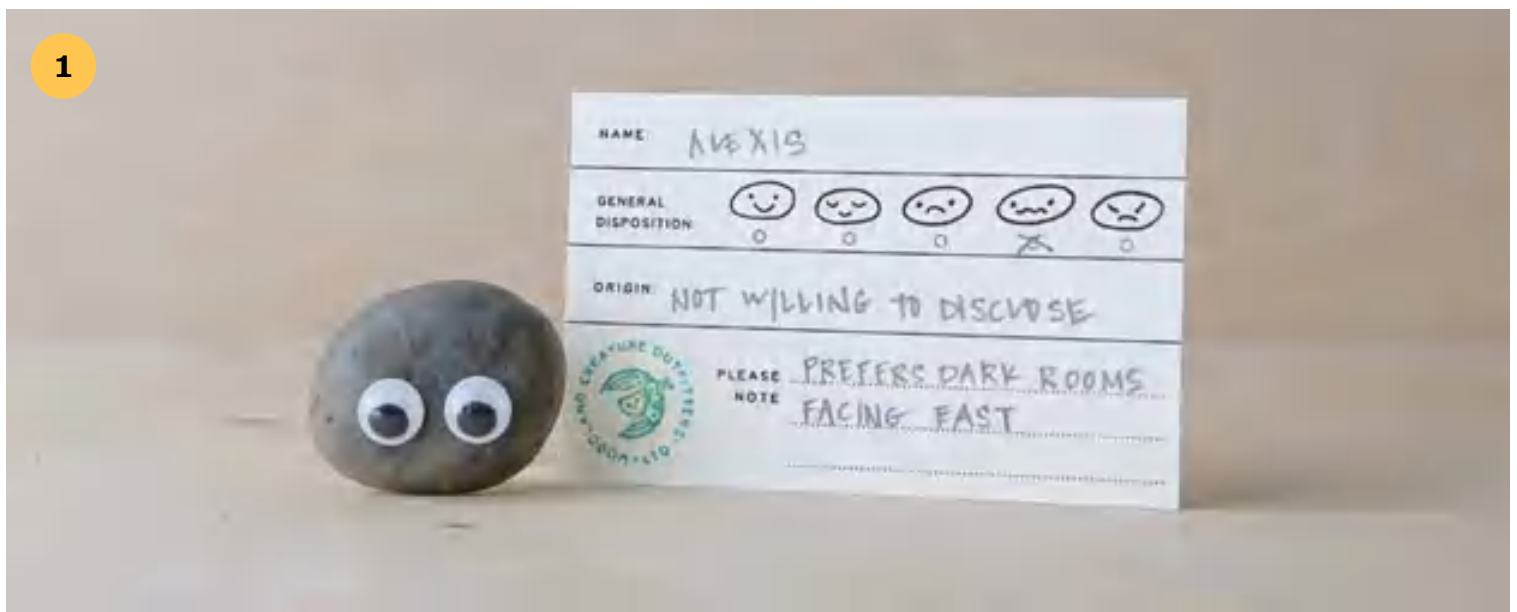
Architect Jonas Kellner worked with WRNS Studio, BCCI Construction Company, and Office to create this radically immersive environment.





Students experiencing the serenity of reading in an enchanted wood, without the hassle of poison ivy.





1

GNOME'S BEST FRIEND

Designer and Writer:
Office and 826 Valencia

The cutest googly-eyed friends you will find anywhere, looking for a new home. Though their personalities vary greatly from box to box, we can vouch for their unparalleled listening skills.

2

LUMBER JACK REPELLENT

Designer and Writer:
Office and 826 Valencia

With a pleasant aroma, you can keep any would-be tree-wrecker at bay and soothe the nooks of your tree-knot home at the same time.

3

BANDANA

Designer and Writer:
Office and 826 Valencia

Whatever you do, don't be caught in the woods without a trusty bandana. Uses include covering your mouth while you cough, your eyes in case you get spooked, and your head from falling leaves and pesky pixies.

4

TINY HOME FOR LITTLE CREATURES

Designer and Writer:
Office and 826 Valencia

Home is where the pocket-sized plant is. After a long day of foraging, pollinating, or potion-making, we guarantee you'll love coming back to this roomy, well-circulated, and wonderfully lit home.

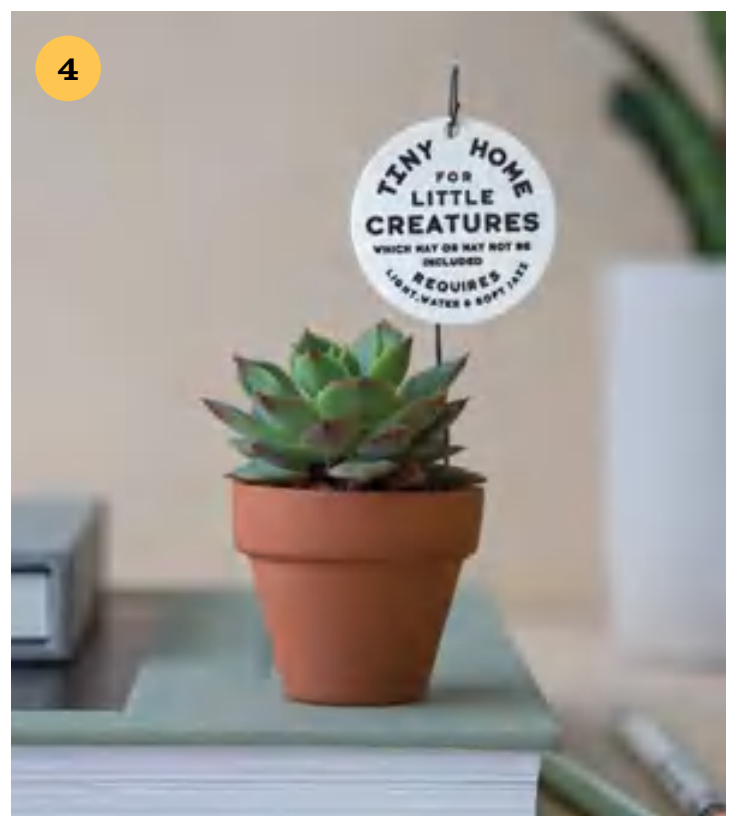
2



3



4





826NYC
EST. 2004

BROOKLYN SUPER

— ALL —
MERCHANDISE
100% CERTIFIED
& AUTHENTIC
SIGNING CARDS
AVAILABLE:
Lantis and Most Other
Lost Continents —
FREE after 11PM

★ ★ ★ SERVING BROOKLYN AND THE GRE

EXCLUSIVE SOURCE FOR
AARDVARK BROS. PRODUCTS

- COSTUMES *DASTARDLY*
- EYEWEAR *'Ever v*
- INVISIBILITY
- INSTRUCTIONAL MANUALS
- SUPERPOWERS: DOMEST

SECRET ALLIANCES WILL BE FORGED
SUPERSONIC SHIPPING TO SELECT UNIVERSES



826NYC



The store was meant to look utilitarian—like a low-cost big-box store.

How did you have the idea for a superhero-themed store?

826NYC was the second 826 chapter, so we wanted to go a very different direction from the Pirate Store at 826 Valencia. We came up with the superhero concept pretty early on, but struggled with it visually until we had the idea to overlay the theme with the imagery of an old hardware store. Not only did that fit in well with what the neighborhood looked like at the time (which is a far cry from what it looks like now), but it gave us a rubric for pretty much everything—the signage, the packaging, and, to a large extent, even the jokes we wrote on the products and posters. This is something we continued to do with many of the subsequent 826 chapters: pick a real-world space and superimpose a non-real theme over it.

We knew next to nothing about comic books or superheroes when we started designing everything, but that worked out well because it kept us from getting too exclusive with the jokes. There were few to no specific references to any existing superheroes or comic brands in our original

product labels, signage, and posters. We trusted our own sense of humor with the tone of the products and decorations, a dry humor that was a bit of an offshoot of the first McSweeney's store. Visually, graphic designer Sam Potts and co-founder Scott Seeley have always been attracted to mid-century design, so there's a lot of that in the packaging. Sam had the idea that the B.S.S. Co. brand would be "generic," which is why it was done in black and white. This also proved to be practical, as we were packaging everything ourselves in those early days, printing the labels on a little inkjet printer. This also spurred the idea of having multiple product lines inspired by real-life brands.

Who worked on bringing the store to life?

This team started with folks from the first McSweeney's store, but grew rapidly, at first made up mostly of young writers and artists, but people from pretty much every walk of life were eventually involved. The writer Sarah Vowell signed on as our board president early on and brought an amazing host of supporters to the table, many of whom



That's not your X-ray vision giving you a peek at what's behind the shelves...



... it's the secret door to the writing lab/superhero training facility.



A superhero's utility belt isn't going to fill itself. Stock up here!



A perfect secret identity for any superhero: a school-aged student.

have gone on to be quite famous. Sam Potts was, of course, hugely integral in the design. At the time, Scott Seeley was the funnel through which the ideas flowed (meaning, for the most part, he was the final edit), but there were a lot of brilliant staff and volunteers along the way who were a part of creating the superhero store. Volunteer help was huge in keeping costs down. For the entire build-out phase, Scott was the only person on anything resembling a payroll.

What should one keep in mind when creating such a space?

The build-out stage is horrible and fantastic at the same time, but it's a great time for everyone involved to bond. Totally exhausted from working long, long, long hours under the pressure of a looming opening deadline with the 2 a.m. task of figuring out how best to build a Cape Testing Machine that makes a cape billow in just the right way is both a surreal and wonderful experience that really brings people together. One thing that's helpful for a project like this is to build a scale model of the space before actually starting construction or buying furniture. This allows you to play around with different ideas—the placement of walls, furniture, interactive items, etc—without spending more than the cost of cardboard, glue, and foamcore. It also allows you to find real-world furnishings and fit a cardboard version of them in a space before purchasing anything. In doing so, there is very little waste, which can be a problem when building and purchasing things with no plan or only a vague idea of what you're going for. ●

1



2



3



4



1

X-RAY VISION

Designer: Sam Potts
Writer: The 826NYC team

An essential requirement for any hero who needs to identify surrounding threats. Applied directly to the eyes, X-Ray Vision allows its wearer to see through buildings, ruses, and nefarious disguises.

2

GRAVITY

Designer: Sam Potts
Writer: The 826NYC team

This can contains graviton, a hypothetical elementary particle that mediates the force of gravity in the framework of quantum field theory. The graviton is massless and, as a second-rank tensor, must have a spin of two. To be used only in gravity-manipulation experiments. If ingested, contact a physician immediately.

3

MUSCLE

Designer: Sam Potts
Writer: The 826NYC team

Even superheroes have days when they need a little extra strength. Grab a one-quart can of all-natural, universally legal Muscle (accept no substitutes!), and get ready to rumble!

4

SPEED OF LIGHT

Designer: Sam Potts
Writer: The 826NYC team

When trouble is near and civilians signal for help, swiftness is of the essence. Speed of Light is a basic necessity for a hero who needs to get to a crime scene as quickly as possible.

5



6



7



8



5

CHAOS

Designer: Sam Potts
Writer: The 826NYC team

To ensure our store caters to a wider clientele, we've started stocking goods for villains in addition to heroes. Bottled chaos is a surefire way to up the ante of any evildoer's plans for anarchy. Or, perhaps a bit of chaos is just what a hero needs to create a heroic diversion.

6

TELEKINESIS

Designer: Sam Potts
Writer: The 826NYC team

Ability of the mind to influence matter or energy without the use of any currently known type of physical means. Potential uses include, but are not limited to: movement of matter, object deformation, influencing events, biological healing, teleportation, and shape-shifting.

7

100% PURE ANTIDOTE

Designer: Sam Potts
Writer: The 826NYC team

Whether you're dealing with the aftermath of a radioactive spider bite or a criminal chemical concoction, this antidote is capable of removing any contracted toxins and setting straight heroes and civilians alike.

8

SURVIVAL WHISTLE

Designer: Sam Potts
Writer: The 826NYC team

This pocket-sized whistle is convenient to carry for safety on the go. Though its tone sounds to a mortal ear like a standard whistle, it emits a specialized tone designed to alert any nearby superheroes.

826LA



**826LA:
Echo Park**

Established:
2004

Designers:
Mac Barnett,
Jon Korn, Stefan
G. Bucher, R. Scott
Mitchell, and Joel
Arquillos

Area:
3,000 sq. ft.

Address:
1714 Sunset Blvd.
Los Angeles, CA



Los Angeles, CA



The shop has everyday items from every time.



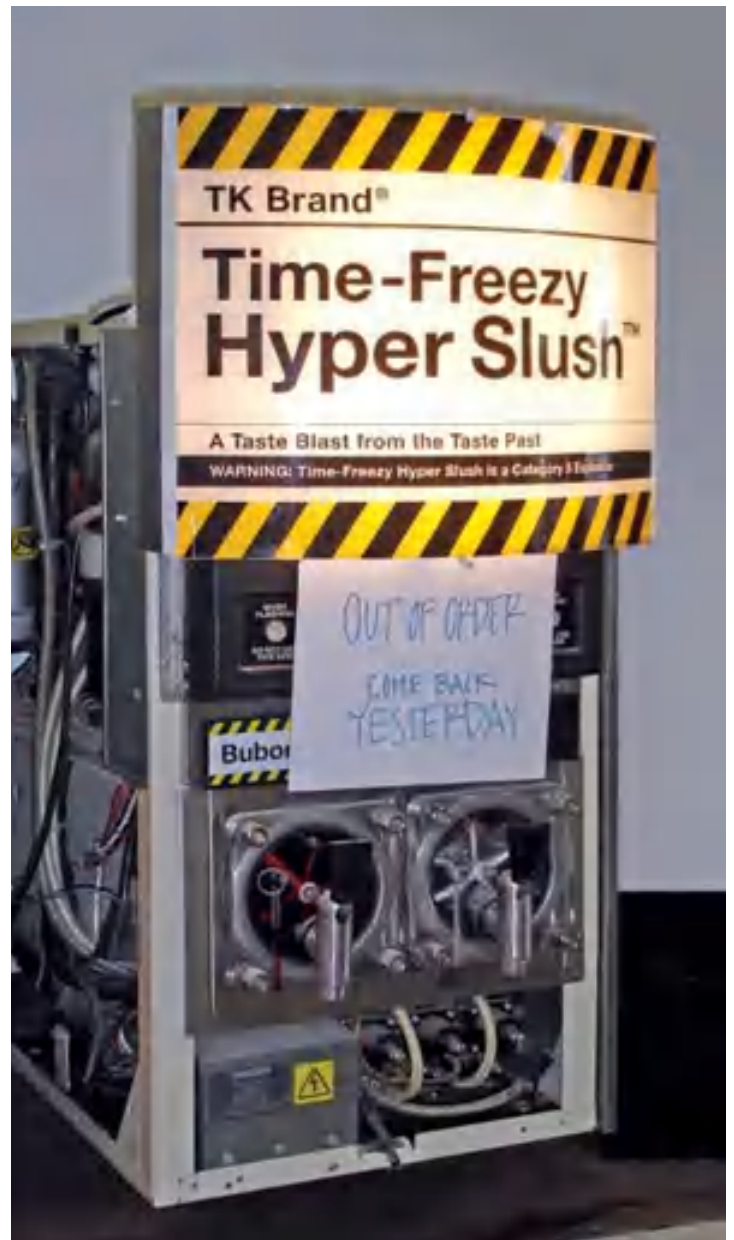
The Employee of the Month wall actually honors the center's major donors.



An LED marquee delivers both spoiler alerts and nostalgia.

What are the spaces at 826LA like?

In LA we have two stores. The original one opened in 2008 as the Echo Park Time Travel Mart, and the second in 2014 as the Mar Vista Time Travel Mart. We refer to our stores as the Time Travel Marts and like to explain that the one in Echo Park is from the 1980s and is a “quickie mart” while the one in Mar Vista is a mercantile store from the turn of the nineteenth century. The original space was conceived of by the writer and former director at 826LA, Mac Barnett. He and his friend John Korn came up with the time travel concept and the first batch of products. They enlisted the designer Stefan Bucher to do all the design. Architect R. Scott Mitchell did the build-out—more or less by himself.



Out of order since June of 2186. We apologize for the inconvenience.



From Primordial Soup to Mammoth Chunks to Robot Milk to TK Brand™ Time Travel Sickness Pills, the EPTTM has it all, from always.



A robot, a caveman, and a wormhole. What could possibly go wrong?



Seeing the pyramids isn't touristy if you go in 591 BCE.

The idea was to create a store similar to stores already in the Echo Park neighborhood. When we first opened there, the immediate neighborhood catered mostly to families, most of them Spanish-speaking, and many who were low-income. The neighborhood had been transitioning for years and a lot of young artists began moving in. There were a lot of dollar stores, food markets, and clothing stores catering to a diverse clientele. In fact, the space we turned into 826LA and the Time Travel Mart had been called Fashion 5 and sold mostly women's clothing. 826LA wanted a space that felt like it was part of the neighborhood with a twist: we'd sell time travel goods for all of the time travelers living across LA. At first, the community thought it was a convenience store and folks would come in asking about calling cards and

cigarettes. Our store clerks were encouraged to dress in blue vests but could also clearly be from a different time period. When folks came in asking what we were, our clerks would stay in character and try to sell Viking Odorant or Mammoth Chunks. The music would also be from different genres and years to create an odd yet interesting environment. The clue that we were not just a mart was between the Robot Milk and the dinosaur-egg refrigerators. Another fridge with "specialties" had books displayed in it written by students from schools all over LA. Behind the books was a window into the writing lab where students could be seen working alongside volunteers. This was intended to make our guests ask what we did back there, which then led to our volunteer recruitment pitch. ●



1

TK BRAND™ EVIL ROBOT MEMORY ERASER

Writers: Mac Barnett, Jon Korn
Designer: Stefan G. Bucher,
 344 Design

Even the best robots go bad. TK Brand™ Evil Robot Memory Eraser restores your robot to the original factory settings.

2

PASTPORT

Writers: Mac Barnett, Jon Korn
Designer: Stefan G. Bucher,
 344 Design

Whether heading to Pangaea or the future Moon Colony, no time traveler would dare go without their Pastport. The only documentation officially recognized by the Intertemporal Travel Commission.

3

SHADE

Writers: Mac Barnett, Jon Korn
Designer: Stefan G. Bucher,
 344 Design

Developed by botanists and dermatologists, Shade is a great way to protect your skin from the harmful rays of the sun. To use Shade, simply travel back in time, bury the bag in fertile soil, then return to the present. Best of all, Shade is all natural.

4

SMITH & SMYTHE PURE ENGLISH CURRY

Writers: Mac Barnett, Jon Korn
Designer: Stefan G. Bucher,
 344 Design

Modern British Science has proved that English Curry, once thought poisonous, is actually safe to consume (albeit in tiny portions).



6

7

5

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5

AH-HA AGRICULTURE

Writers: Mac Barnett, Jon Korn
Designer: Stefan G. Bucher, 344 Design

Ah-Ha Agriculture contains soil and seeds inside an attractive growing tin, and so may be subject to seizure at certain intertemporal custom points.

6

ROBOT MILK

Designer: Stefan G. Bucher, 344 Design

The family-owned Jupiter Farms has been milking robots for nearly seven hundred years and has never allowed any bottle sold to contain a single organic compound. 100 percent lactose- and dairy-free.

7

POWDERED HORSE MILK

Writers: Mac Barnett, Jon Korn
Designer: Stefan G. Bucher, 344 Design

From our yurt to yours, this Mongol favorite is an ideal drink for both seasons. Just add water or horse milk. Recipes included.

8

TK BRAND™ LEECHES

Writers: Mac Barnett, Jon Korn
Designer: Stefan G. Bucher, 344 Design

Our leeches have thousands of years of experience helping to balance the bodily humors, many of them having learned their trade from Hippocrates himself. These tiny doctors will have you feeling better in no time!

I will find wood.
And I will make a boat.
And I will sail.

I don't know poetry.
What is that?
Why do we have to write it?
Poetry is a kind of nothing.
Poetry is like a person or what?
Poetry is food.
Food is poetry.

Wolves like to AH/OOOOOH
They like to eat people
Play guitar softly

This is the Road to Las Vegas

The monster has a lot of eyes and a lot of hair and mouths. The monster is scary. The car is going to crash into him. The car honks but the monster can't hear him. The monster is blocking the way to Las Vegas.

Writings from 826LA

A Miscellany of Student Writing

How do I fly to France with my arms?

Reward:

10,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000
(fake) dollars

Please help. I want to see sights.

Writing is so fun.
Better than eating donuts.
Okay, not always.

Why do I call
you pizza
When your skin
Ain't got pimples
And you look so
young

It feels really cold in
the winter.
The colors are multiple
in LA
The array of color.
Traffic is very annoying.
The city smells of pizza.

We walk at the school and at tutoring.
I run to my house at three minutes. When
I sleep, my ghost flies to the sky.



PURVEYORS OF THE
PAST, PRESENT, & FUTURE

THE MAR V

826LA:
Mar Vista



VISTA TIME TRAVEL MART

Established:
2018

Designer:
ANIMI Design

Area:
2,500 sq. ft.

Address:
12515 Venice Blvd.
Los Angeles, CA



Los Angeles, CA



(Previous) Students and a tutor are all smiles in front of the Mar Vista Time Travel Mart. (Above) A spiral staircase leads to a crow's nest high above the store.



Initial plans included a wormhole, later converted to a portal to the writing lab.



A welcome sight to those unstuck in time.

How did your second location in Los Angeles open?

Our store in Mar Vista opened years later when we moved our writing lab from Venice to Mar Vista in order to be closer to the students we serve and to have an actual storefront and lab visible to the community. Our original space in the SPARC building in Venice was great but we had an upstairs room that was hard to find and you'd never know there was a publishing house there. When we opened the new space, we didn't want to create a whole new concept because it was a bit scary to think we'd need to have an entirely new line of products, so instead, we decided to give our new space the look and feel of something from the late 1800s. The first iteration at Mar Vista was a country-style mercantile store, but we had the space redone two years ago by the design team Animi. They took their inspiration from our original concept but gave it a Harry Potter/Dr. Who spin. We also included a stairwell to the upstairs offices where our cranky publisher, Professor Barnacle, lives. Students who visit our center on field trips never meet Professor Barnacle, only hear their voice and know they live upstairs. For Mar Vista, we really wanted



The importance of young time travelers developing an interest in exploring the textures of their surroundings cannot be overstated.



Be sure to set your robot to PST.



A time traveler anticipates a journey.

something that fit with the neighborhood and found that having more utilitarian products like journals, writing tools, greeting cards, and accessories that could be used by writers would help us engage those who were taken by the idea of the store but who often didn't make purchases. So along with all our gimmicky gifts—like Big Bang in Small Jar, or our Duel Starter, which is one glove in a box—we've started to add products we've designed in partnership with known brands and are carrying a lot of items from companies like Knock Knock, etc.

Who was the team that put the Time Travel Marts together?

Originally it was Mac, John, Stefan, as well as an architect, R. Scott Mitchell, and a large group of volunteers who spent a good few months assembling the store at Echo Park and the lab in Venice. Animi donated their time and ideas and spent a month with their friends and other volunteers painting and redoing our space in Mar Vista, which, all in, we were able to complete for around twenty thousand dollars. In order to keep our stores fresh and interesting, our store(s) manager Carinne Mangold and our designer Rachel Mendelsohn oversee regular meetings of volunteer designers and copywriters to design new products and keep our marketing strong and ever-evolving. ●



What marvels has this time traveler seen that she could share with us? For now, only 826LA knows.



Grimm & Co

Established:
2016

Designer:
Side by Side
Design Studio

**Area (Shop
& Imagination Gym):**
2,309 sq. ft.

**Area
(Teaching Space):**
1,500 sq. ft.

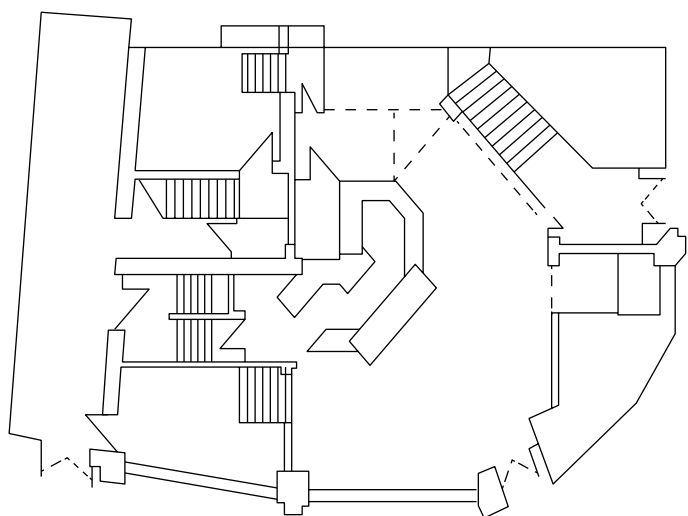
Address:
2 Doncaster Gate
Rotherham,
England



Rotherham, England



The Apothecary to the Magical caters to all manner of magical beings, but also welcomes the odd human to its storefront in Rotherham, England.



Center plans from the notebooks of Graham and Grizelda Grimm.

What is the purpose of the apothecary?

Our inspiration did not come from the fictional world of humans at all. The apothecary primarily provides a fantastical front for the story destination. We wanted to create an immersive theatrical experience for all of our customers and provide excellent customer service for magical beings and the odd human. We created the Apothecary to the Magical, where immortals and beings of the magical persuasion can purchase all their ready-made ingredients and potions—including Extract of Genius; Success Stimulant; and Human Blood, Sweat, and Tears.

How does the writing center differ from the storefront?

This is a place where young people experiencing chaos or disruption in their lives can shake off the experiences that block their imaginations and obstruct learning. By the time young people arrive in our writing center, they're ready



Magical visitors can dull their luster with human disguise kits.

and hungry to engage and they have the license to use their imaginations. We do not provide magic stimulation in our writers' space—just a playful space that's not childish. Our story center provides a range of places to encourage children to be all they can be and imagine themselves as writers—this includes writing bureaus, cushions, desks, canopies, grassed areas—oh, and toilets (we think better on the toilet).

What sparked the idea for this space?

Our whole reason for being began with a foundation of significant research into how to narrow the gap in children and young people's literacies. This determined the framework on which to create our space. We then had the gift of seeing Dave Eggers's TED Talk, which further inspired our model. We sat with our writers and wrote the story that connected the story space to the shop. We undertook significant levels of consultation with the community and essentially with children and young people to develop our theme. The community chose the magical apothecary theme, so we then needed to write the backstory behind it. It is this backstory—the characters, the local connections, and the belief in the story—that allowed us to develop the brand and the detail of Grimm & Co.

How did Grimm & Co come to fruition?

We started with the amazing designers, Dave and Oliver of Side by Side, who helped us to develop our unique brand and design for the center. Their creativity, thought agility, and attention to detail are at the heart of our successful brand. They brought our story to life, lifted the characters from the page, and allowed them to influence every detail and decision; this ensured absolute authenticity and attention to detail. This work also created a thread directly back to the community, who had determined the idea and theme. We rallied around the community to see who wanted—or who could be persuaded—to be involved in the creation of the



The beanstalk is certified organic, grown from locally sourced enchanted beans.

center. We all rolled up our sleeves—this included businesses, volunteers, artists, granddads, grandmas, parents, and student elves. It was a truly collaborative effort, and it was tough. The budget was nowhere near enough to make it work and it took lots of personal sacrifice and complete commitment. Although it took a lot of time in the first instance, the presentations about what we wanted to achieve (with their help) to businesses, business networks, and the local authority sparked interest and curiosity. This, plus lots of additional discussions, led to huge levels of in-kind support and donations from the businesses. The key was to secure the amazing designers and get their commitment to using us as a jaw-dropping showcase for their talents. Side by Side worked with us to hold an exciting cultivation event for businesses which secured lifelong supporters and friends who have enjoyed participating and watching the whole space come to life. We had lots of researched evidence to back up why we were creating a space like this and what we would be doing in this space. We have continued to feed impact info out to all of our supporters and to demonstrate our gratitude with our “corridor of glory” and recognition membership to our “Friends of Grimm” club.

Any future plans for the center?

We’re currently building an immersive theater to take Grimm on the road and into schools. It’s a modular theater that will take over a classroom and the project is called the Inside Story. It includes Graham Grimm and his sister Grizelda. ●



A hidden door in the apothecary's shelves opens to a secret writing space.



A group of students at the threshold of a hidden world of language.



The Imagination Gym wraps students in words and ignites their creativity.



A variety of seating provides magical beings comfortable spaces to create.



Aha! The entrance to the beanstalk slide—in the writing lab, of course.



Literature elevates students as they climb the bookcase to the writing lab.





Polite Notice
Please do not
rest your bottom
on this tree. It is
suffering a seasonal
nausea infection.



(Previous) The Inside-Outside Room caters to individuals who do their best thinking outdoors. (Above) The Writer's Closet shows that any room can be right for writing.



The thought put into each room inspires young writers to revel in the details.



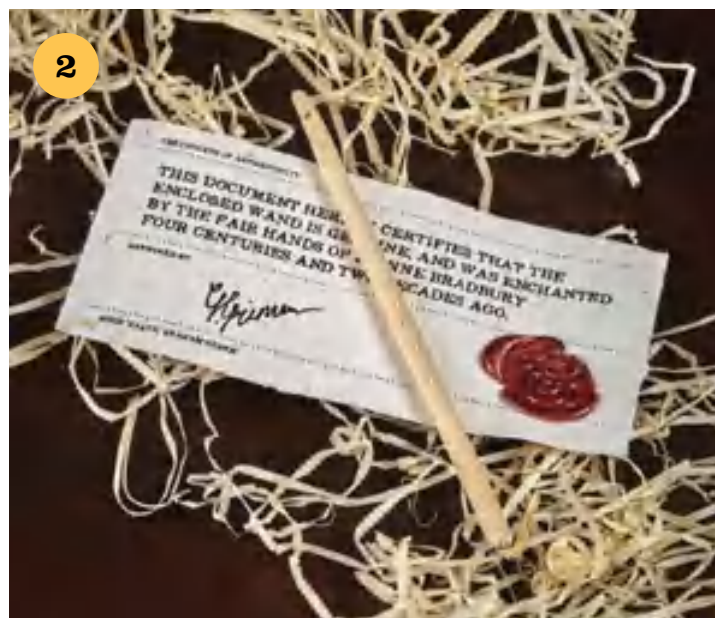
An unconventional writing seat.







(Opposite top left) Mystical and macabre tchotchkes, like preserved eyeballs, decorate Grimm's office space. (Opposite top right) The black market meat cellar stocks tasty, illicit cuts of rare meats. (Opposite bottom left) Bookish elements decorate Grimm & Co, keeping visitors focused on creative storytelling. (Opposite bottom right) Vials of moon dust crust, dried fairy wings, phoenix tears, and other unusual ingredients line the shelves. (Top left) Grimm & Co is devoted to protecting their workers, whether human or monster. (Top right) The shop is kind enough to hold items for its valued customers. (Bottom left) The Imagination Gym's walls are lined with the story of Graham Grimm. (Above) The Magic-o-Meter can quickly determine which breed of magical being you are.



1

DISAPPOINTMENT

Designer: Side by Side
Photographers:
James Brown Photography

Now with 50 percent extra displeasure, Grimm & Co's Disappointment is guaranteed to do exactly what it says on the tin. Made with 75 percent apathy and a hint of fermented frustration. Notes for mortals: tin contains one pair of plain black socks.

2

HANDMADE ADVANCED WANDS

Designer: Side by Side
Photographers:
James Brown Photography

From our beautiful Be Witch'd range comes a selection of 100 percent unique handcrafted wands. Each piece is lovingly produced from natural wood and charmed by our resident enchantress, Rowanna Wells. Wands are available in a range of colored woods and come with a certificate of authenticity.

3

TINNED BEARD

Designer: Side by Side
Photographers:
James Brown Photography

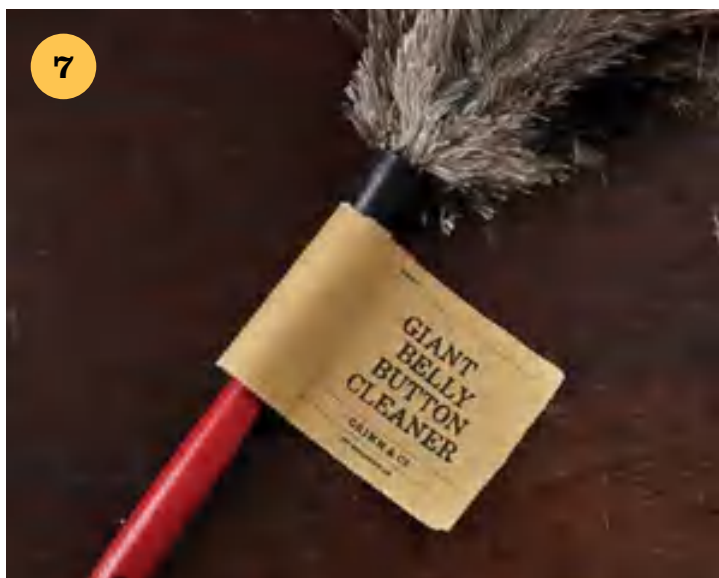
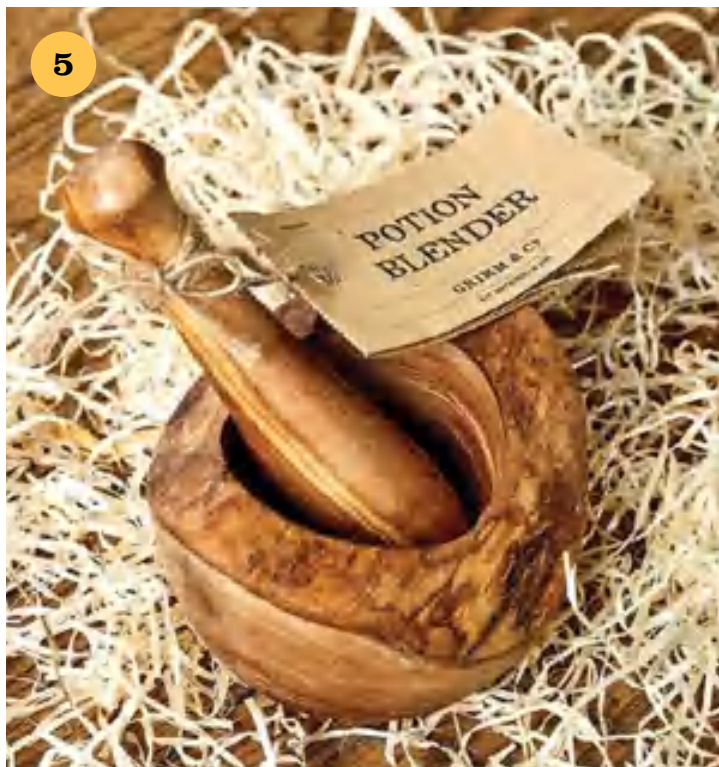
Are you sick of Saint Nick having all the fun over the festive season? Get in on the action with this limited-edition Tinned Beard. Ideal for sorcerers (and other beings) cursed with a baby face, this instant beard has the combined benefits of face-warming and providing a jolly disguise at the same time.

4

CONDENSED ENTHUSIASM

Designer: Side by Side
Photographers:
James Brown Photography

Eternal life getting you down? Inject a little passion and gusto with a dose of Condensed Enthusiasm! Our master sorcerers here at Grimm & Co have conjured up the perfect blend of twinkling eyes and puppies' breath to bring joie de vivre to the darkest corners of your coven.



5

POTION BLENDER

Designer: Side by Side
Photographers:
 James Brown Photography

Be the envy of your coven with our beautiful wooden potion blender. Made from genuine enchanted wood and claw-carved so every item is unique, this product is the only one of its kind recommended by the B.U.M. (British Union of Magicians).

6

FLICKER OF FORTUNE

Designer: Side by Side
Photographers:
 James Brown Photography

Introducing our new Grimm & Tonic range, featuring three distinctly different and tantalizing fragrances for your house, gingerbread or otherwise. Since time began, a flickering flame has beguiled and mesmerized magical and human beings alike.

7

GIANT BELLY BUTTON CLEANER

Designer: Side by Side
Photographers:
 James Brown Photography

Time for a clear-out? Give yourself a good spring clean with this extra-large belly button cleaner. Now with soft and sustainable dodo feathers for a gentle scrub (suitable for all skin types) and an extra-long handle for all those hard-to-reach places. Suitable for both giants and ogres.

8

MOONLIGHT

Designer: Side by Side
Photographers:
 James Brown Photography

For those seeking a gentler glow or wishing to avoid sunburn, Moonlight is an ideal alternative to its more dazzling cousin. Made using hair from moths' wings and a handful of Wensleydale crumbs, this product will add an unearthly shimmer to all it comes into contact with.

I know that...

by Harry

Age 7 • Rotherham, England

Originally published by Grimm & Co

**I know that
Humans
Are fast, strong,
Helpful, careful
And fascinating**



Berättarministeriet

Established:
2011

Designer:
Koncept

Area:
1,614 sq. ft.

Address:
Drottninggatan 120
Stockholm, Sweden



Stockholm, Sweden



From the outside, Berättarministeriet seems like any other shop. But when students step inside, they encounter the otherworldly wonders of an alien supermarket.

What was your intent in creating this space?

The primary effect we want to achieve with our space is to create a secluded world for kids to step into. We want this to be a space that inspires creativity, storytelling, and a sense of safety. All four of our centers have the same setup, with an Alien Supermarket storefront and a publishing house called Berättarministeriet hidden behind it. Before the students come, they receive an invitation to visit Berättarministeriet to assist its writers, who seem to have lost all of their imagination and are in desperate need of the students' help. Upon their visit, the students expect to arrive at a publishing house but are instead greeted by an otherworldly store. This is a creative method to lower their threshold upon entering the publishing world and to signal to the students that it is a safe place to fantasize and come up with new ideas.

What's it like inside?

The interiors of the publishing house and the Alien Supermarket are very different from each other, which is a deliberate approach to enhance the storytelling capacity

of the room. The Alien Supermarket is designed in a cold, almost industrial way with concrete floors, metal shelving, and bright lights. The products, however, are colorful and playful. By greeting the students in the Alien Supermarket, we show them that we take imagination seriously as we start the journey into this unfamiliar place together. The artifacts encourage children to become co-creators of our story as they answer questions such as "Who shops here?" and "What do you do with slime soda?"

Once the children crack the code to the secret door (hidden behind a shelf of canned gravity), they enter the publishing house Berättarministeriet, a room worlds apart from the sterility of the alien shop. This room is covered in soft green carpets and divided into smaller sections by birch arches that stretch from floor to ceiling. The workshop stations are divided by thin, almost transparent curtains and the room is dominated by the group storytelling space at its center. The shift from the steel-framed Alien Supermarket is almost audible as the children enter this calm, soft space that evokes thoughts of nature and the Swedish forest, creating a sense of being grounded and safe.



Canned gravity, three-legged pants, space-shuttle wax, and more.



A best-selling item: glasses for the three-eyed.

A safe space for role-breaking.

The sense of safety we want to create is essential to the storytelling. By having the interior of the publishing house signal calmness and a world different from the school interiors students are used to, we want to create a space where they feel free to be whoever they are and express whatever they want to express. We only identify the children by their first names, written on their name tags, and we don't ask for any information about identities or diagnoses before classes visit us. Very often, we find that children who are known to be "the quiet one" or "the class clown" behave differently in our education center. Here, they feel that they can be whoever they want to be in a room separate from their usual social context. Here the focus is on listening to them tell their stories. It liberates the children to tell both fictional stories and the stories of their own lives, and that is what we want to achieve with our space.

Outer space inspiring inner thought.

Space is our infinite inspiration. When students arrive at our education centers, they first step into our Alien Supermarket, a shop filled with anything you might need as an alien passing through. The shelves are packed with everything from canned gravity to space-shuttle wax, and the three-legged trousers are a hit among customers and children alike. Few people can resist the allure of wondering what lies beyond our own planet, and as far as spurring the imagination goes, space is a powerful theme. The store is colorful and playful and every product was developed with great consideration and attention to detail. For us, making the Alien Supermarket manifest is a way of showing that we take children's imaginations seriously.

One of the reasons we chose space as our theme for the store is because it immediately sets off anyone's imagination, which is what we want for the children. But beyond



Typical reactions upon entering the Alien Supermarket.



Swedish Prime Minister Stefan Löfven visits students at the tutoring center.

Köp nu,
betala i en
annan
dimension

Λ Ω Ω
Ω Ω Ω
Λ Ω Ω



75 :- 2000000000



NU YLEN :- R
humanoiden och
xenomorfen!
BÖN UTAN SOL
E P F



Can you find the secret door?



OBSI HÖRNEN AV





Did you know? Berättarministeriet translates to “Ministry of Narration” in English.



Furthermore, did you know? Alien translates to utomjording in Swedish.

that, space has always been something for humankind’s existential questions to revolve around. The idea of a world beyond our own makes us wonder what life is, what it means to be human, and, if there is life somewhere else, what does that say about us? The questions and values that people project onto space are the foundations of storytelling and are embedded in the core of what we do.

How did this space come to life?

Berättarministeriet is based on collaboration between three sectors: civil society, the public sector, and the private sector. Thanks to that, we have pro bono partners that assist us with everything from communications to prop-making. The concept for our education centers was created in close collaboration with an architecture firm. We combined our love and sense for storytelling with their knack for design and landed on the education centers we have today. We have found that a lot of people are willing to contribute to our cause, so we always make sure to give every supplier and collaborator the whole picture of what we are trying to build and achieve. More often than not, people agree to do special deals or reduced prices for us. It is their way of contributing to a cause they find worthwhile.

Taking care of precious objects.

All of the materials in the space are quite precious. Children are often told to be careful with fragile items, and they spend a large part of their school years surrounded by sturdy, heavy-duty materials meant to endure the wear and tear of kids. By inviting them into our creative space, we give them the trust to take care of it. The kids feel this trust and want to take care of the space. Sure enough, since we started in 2011, very few “precious things” have been broken.

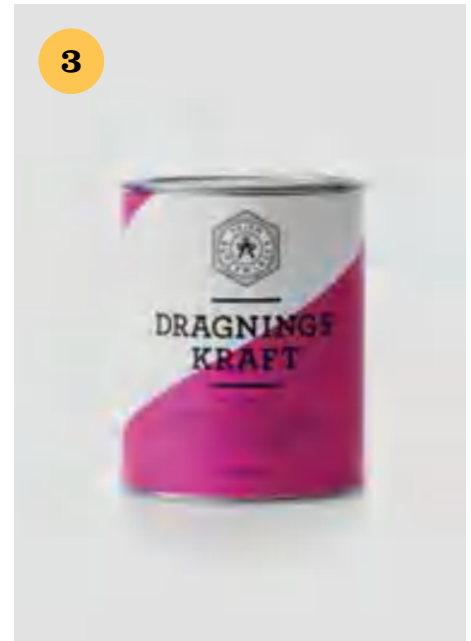
Don’t compromise when it comes to storytelling.

Building a creative space for storytelling is a demanding task, but sticking to the story is essential. In the middle of building, cutting corners can be tempting for a variety of reasons: because it’s cheaper, because it saves time, because it will make someone’s workday easier. In those moments, it is important to keep in mind why and for whom you are building the space. The children are the sharpest critics and they will notice if a handle is fake or if a door looks too much like a prop. Every time they do, it is a breach of trust between the narrator (us) and the audience (them). Every time they find details that create a gap in the story, it’s a sign that someone hasn’t been taking the story seriously. That leads them to ask the justified question, “Why should I?”

There are many examples of when the children have spotted plot holes in our story, such as aptly pointing out that it makes no sense for Editor Schwartz to be wearing a thin trench coat throughout the Scandinavian winter. The editor now owns one winter coat as well as the summer trench coat.

Do be generous with the story!

The wonderful thing with storytelling is that once you get your story straight, it engages any human mind, young or old. We have seen many “aha!” moments in the eyes of builders, electricians, neighbors, and suppliers once they understand what it is we are trying to build. The moment it clicks you can tell that something changes in their approach to the work at hand. Their mindset shifts from doing just another job to being a part of building something bigger. Being part of a bigger story brings out the intrinsic motivation in people, and it’s a powerful tool to involve and engage others. Any extra hour spent to explain your concept to everyone you collaborate with is an hour well spent. ●



1

GREEN TANNING LOTION

Designer: Happy F&B
Writer: Fanny Siltberg

Alien tanning lotion. When applied generously to the outer membrane it creates a lush, long-lasting green complexion. Intergalactically tested.

2

BOTTLED VACUUM

Designer: Happy F&B
Writer: Fanny Siltberg

Vacuum is a popular product that provides total emptiness from everything, a rarity in our stressed cosmos. Vacuum level: less than a thousandth of atmospheric pressure.

3

CANNED GRAVITY

Designer: Happy F&B
Writer: Fanny Siltberg

One of Alien Supermarket's bestsellers. Promises to give an immediate sense of connection to reality. Applied behind the hearing organ when travelling in weightless conditions.

4

ALIEN SUPERMARKET PRODUCT RANGE

Designer: Happy F&B
Writer: Fanny Siltberg

Berättarministeriet's Alien Supermarket stocks any product a wayward alien might need, from Saturnus Soil to Rocket Fuel.



159

ESTD 1818

HOXTON STREET M

~Bespoke and Everyday Items for the Living, Dead or Undead~



The Ministry of Stories

Established:
2010

Designer:
Alistair Hall at
We Made This

Area:
1,200 sq. ft.

Address:
159 Hoxton St.
Hoxton, London
England

MONSTER SUPPLIES

ESTD 1818



MINISTRY OF STORES

~Purveyor of Quality Goods for Monsters of Every Kind~

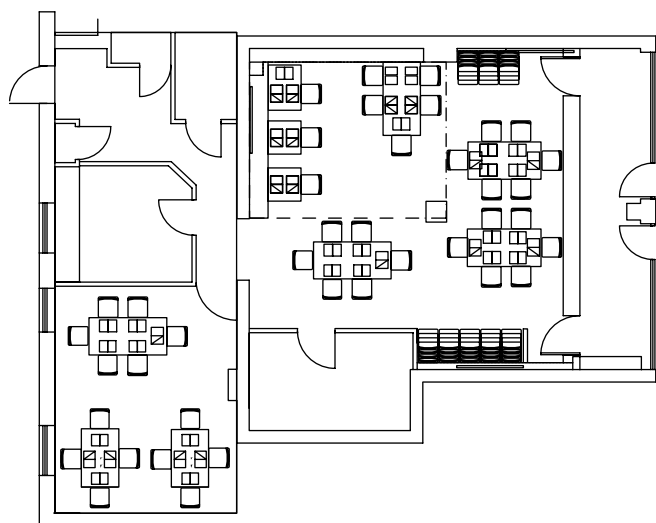
ESS



London, England



Before Hoxton Street Monster Supplies, monsters had to creep out in the dead of night to procure their pharmacological needs.



How did you decide on the storefront?

Prior to deciding on monsters, we narrowed down to three options for our shop theme—a supply store for monsters, a supermarket for extraterrestrials, and a shop for thieves and shoplifters. Though we liked the third option tremendously, we weren't sure we'd be able to convince civic-minded people that it was the right idea for inspiring children. We chose monsters because the idea seemed to engage young people of different ages and both boys and

girls. The process of exploring, finding, and crystallizing our shop theme was great for engaging at first a small and then a much wider group of creative supporters and volunteers. We took Dave Eggers's advice to "follow the weird" as our guiding principle, and, once the theme of monsters took hold, we assiduously followed the weird wherever it took us. As early as possible, we enlisted the imaginations of children in our after-school writing clubs to help develop new product lines and ideas for the space. Throughout the process, we made sure that we stuck to the principles of the story and the rules of the world we created.

What influenced the design of the space?

We looked at local English shops from the Victorian period onward, using both photographs of original shops and also contemporary recreations of old shops. We wanted Hoxton Street Monster Supplies to feel like a local general store, one that had been in place since it opened in 1818 but had recently gone through a bit of refurbishing. Taking our cue from the 826 shops in the USA, we wanted it to be a joke told with a completely straight face. We made the assumption that monsters really did exist and would need to shop for their specific needs, and then we tried to imagine what a shop like that might look like. For the writing workshop spaces, we wanted them to feel warm, engaging, bright, imaginative,



The shop boasts “service with a snarl, since 1818.”



Brave humans, unafraid of monsters, share their work aloud at an after-school writing club.

inspiring, and friendly. They had to be multifunctional, too, easy to reconfigure from a writing space to a presentation space to a tutorial space.

How did you get creative in designing the writing center?

We included a “word wall” where students could come and grab words for inspiration when they were stuck. The word *phosphorescent* has pride of place on the wall as a tribute to one girl who, at one of our very early

story-making workshops, ventured the first line of the story that her class was writing collaboratively as “And so the phosphorescent sun came up...” All the adults in the room were suitably impressed by this vivid opener, until the rest of the class turned to her and, virtually as one, said: “Oh, but you always start a story with that...”

Alongside the word wall, we commissioned illustrator Heather Sloane to do brilliant line drawings that

would stop the spaces from feeling like classrooms while still keeping them clean and bright. We didn’t want the workshop space to influence the children’s writing—it needed to have the feel of a blank page, where any story was possible. At the same time, we included a few nods to our Ministry of Stories identity—strange typewriters, piles of odd books, and jokes to win over the most reluctant of writers.

As a product, our range of “tins of fear” emerged from necessity at the time and they were therefore conceived very much on the hoof. For instance, we realized that we didn’t want the tins just to be empty, so we came up with the idea of commissioning well-known writers to write us a story using the title of each grade of fear as inspiration: “A Vague Sense of Unease” (Laura Dockrill), “The Collywobbles” (Nick Hornby), “The Heebie-Jeebies” (David Nicholls), “Escalating Panic” (Joe Dunthorne), and “Mortal Terror” (Zadie Smith). What we originally devised as a shelf-filler actually became one of our signature products. We wanted all of our products to have a use, not to be just a joke or to create landfill. This creative constraint helped us design products like Fang Floss (garden twine) and Thickest Human Snot (lemon curd).

Halfway through the build we had some test classes in the space and realized we needed to do something to reduce the noise levels in the workshop area. So, we found an industrial carpet supplier who had overstock in some limited patterns and shades. You can imagine that we didn’t have the best choice of colors, but we found a creative solution. We picked a light, neutral gray for the main space, then a series of bright and garish greens for the back room, which we had laid in stripes for a grasslike feeling underfoot and it matched the outdoor illustrations we had there.

We also implemented some IKEA hacks. We did a lot of sawing up and



Students work in the cozy, mellow tutoring room that resides behind the Hoxton Street Monster Supplies storefront.

from Lyn Atelier (and Andrew's own carpentry skills played a massive role in the final build). Alistair has been Art Director since the charity started, created the identities for the shop and the Ministry, and he does 90 percent of the shop design work. The post office space in the store was created by Alison Neighbour, with graphic design by Alistair, supported by students from Central Saint Martins School of Art & Design.

Our incredible team of graphic design volunteers includes Burgess Studio, Becky Chilcott, Ed Cornish (who created various monster guides and books for the store), Jack Noel, Shu Han Lee, Alex Parrott, Andy German, Anthony Gerace, and New North Press (who designed our monster cards). Other creative help has come from Studio Weave (Salt Made from Tears), Tatty Devine (monster

jewelry), the Fox Twins and friends (the Hoxton Street Monster Supplies website), Fiasco Design (the current Ministry website), Manifest London (the original Ministry website), Martin Jackson (copywriting on products), and Reed Words (copywriting on various projects).

We've worked with a whole host of incredibly talented designers and writers and illustrators and spatial designers to create the space and realize the products. The collaboration with children has also been key to testing and developing new products for the shop. They co-wrote the concept for a lost and found Cabinet of Curiosities to go in the shop, designed scavenger hunts, and collaborated on our postal service. We believe in the power of children's ideas and in giving them opportunities to co-design a real imaginary world. ●



1
RANGE OF CHILDREN'S TINNED FEAR

Writer and Designer:
We Made This

The perfect starter kit for mini-monsters, each tin in this range contains sweets and these specially commissioned stories by best-selling children's authors: "The Chills" by Jeremy Strong, "The Night Sweats" by Andy Stanton, "Night Terrors" by Eoin Colfer, "Creeping Dread" by Charlie Higson, and "Alarm" by Meg Rosoff.

2
WEREWOLF BISCUITS

Writer and Designer:
We Made This

Thick, crumbly, melt-in-the-mouth biscuits packed with goodness to support lycanthrope good health and natural defenses. Bursting with flavor, each full moon-shaped biscuit increases vitality and well-being, and helps to maintain a rich, glossy coat.

3
SALT MADE FROM TEARS

Writer and Designer:
We Made This
Concept: Studio Weave

Salt Made from Tears combines centuries-old craft with the freshest human tears which are gently boiled, released into shallow crystallization tanks, then harvested by hand and finally rinsed in brine. Experience the full range of these flavors in this exclusive collection.

4
FAIRY DUST

Writer and Designer:
We Made This

This powder blend has been collected from the wings of several species of pixies and fae. Useful for flight, increased sneakiness, and a shimmering complexion. A little sprinkle goes a long way!

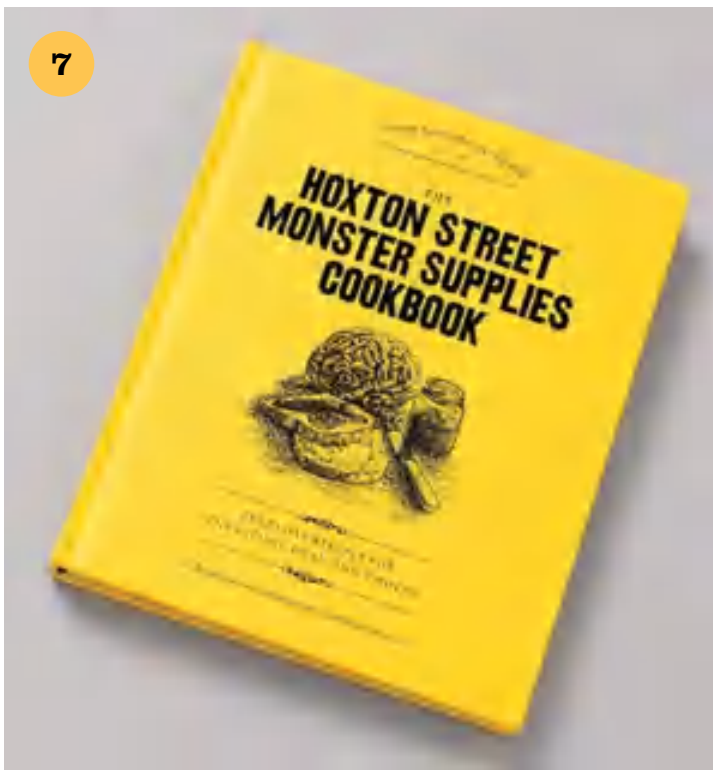
5



6



7



8



5

IMPACTED EARWAX

Writer and Designer:

We Made This

Harvested from humans fed on a strict diet of Tinned Fear, these best-selling Impacted Earwax bars are mouth-watering and magnificent value.

6

BRAIN FOOD

Writer and Designer:

We Made This

Notes for mummies: Made from real bits of brain. Average IQ 145.

Notes for humans: A strawberry-flavored chewy center in a crisp casing and a dusting of sweet strawberry icing sugar.

7

MONSTER SUPPLIES COOKBOOK

Publisher: Octopus Books on

Mitchell Beazley Press

For hundreds of years, the Hoxton Street Monster Supplies shop has been supplying quality goods for the monster community. So whether you're entertaining trolls, hosting a vampire soiree, or expecting zombies round for tea, you can make delicious treats to suit every occasion.

8

FANG FLOSS

Writer and Designer:

We Made This

Our marvelously strong Fang Floss is invaluable in cleaning where traditional sticks and brushes can't reach, removing all common forms of fang matter, including: brains, gore, bones, viscera, entrails, seaweed, toffee, and much more.



RANGE OF TINNED FEAR

Writer and Designer:

We Made This

Collect the original range of Hoxton Street Monster Supplies Tinned Fear and be the envy of every monster on the block.

Each tin contains the precise emotion on the label, prepared in the form of boiled sweets and these specially commissioned stories: "A Vague Sense of Unease" by Laura Dockrill, "The Collywobbles" by Nick Hornby, "The Heebie-Jeebies" by David Nicholls, "Escalating Panic" by Joe Dunthorne, and "Mortal Terror" by Zadie Smith.

Hoxton Street Monster Supplies
ESTD 1818

~ Purveyor of Quality Goods for Monsters of Every Kind ~

TINNED FEAR

ESCALATING PANIC

PREPARED BY
MR JOE DUNTHORNE

Suitable for all instances where one needs to instil a steadily increasing sensation of pure panic. Particularly effective in crowds. Not to be confounded with Mortal Terror.

Hoxton Street Monster Supplies

ESTD 1818

~ Purveyor of Quality Goods for Monsters of Every Kind ~

TINNED FEAR

MORTAL TERROR

PREPARED BY
MADIE SMITH

superior to many milder forms of
ous in instilling an immediate, and
ddly pleasant to taste, marvellously

Hoxton Street Monster Supplies

ESTD 1818

~ Purveyor of Quality Goods for Monsters of Every Kind ~

TINNED FEAR

A VAGUE SENSE OF UNEASE

PREPARED BY
MS LAURA DOCKRILL

Effectively destroys all feelings of ease, creating a rising yet uncertain sense of disquiet. Invaluable for general uses in the home. Guaranteed perfectly pure and genuine.



9

BANSHEE BALLS

Writer and Designer:
We Made This

Made specifically for banshees, these powerful throat sweets will soothe and restore after excessive screeching, howling, moaning, and wailing.

10

BAH! HUMBUGS

Writer and Designer:
We Made This

Feeling unpleasantly happy, perky, and jovial? Just one Bah! Humbug will instantly induce a mood of marvelous misery and melancholy.

11

MOONLIGHT

Writer and Designer:
We Made This

For a quite immediate and singularly effective transformation from human to werewolf. Monstrously clever, this contraption collects sunshine during the day and converts it into the light of a full moon at night.

12

MOONLIGHT (BACK)

Writer and Designer:
We Made This

Waiting a whole month for a full moon can be an inconvenient bore for the modern lycanthrope—but with our moonlight jar you can be a werewolf anytime.



13

ZOMBIE FRESH MINTS

Writer and Designer:
We Made This

Suffering from hideous halitosis after gorging on humans all night? Banish brain-breath with these startlingly strong mints.

14

PETRIFIED MICE

Writer and Designer:
We Made This

Notes for little monsters:
Delicious sugar-coated rodents, frozen quite solid. Perfect for any youngster testing its first set of fangs.

Notes for humans:
A time-honored British sweet treat.

15

TOASTED BONE CHUNKS

Writer and Designer:
We Made This

Notes for ogres:
Grind these bones to make your bread (and other baked goods).

Notes for humans:
Cinder Toffee—a treat loved by children and adults alike.

16

DRAGON TREATS

Writer and Designer:
We Made This

These deliciously hot treats for dragons help to maintain the very hottest fire-breath, and also support healthy teeth, claws, scales, horns, and wings. Salty at first with a late chili heat, they are a delightful alternative to charred humans.



GREATER BOSTON RESEARCH

826 Boston



Established:
2007

Designer:
Daniel Johnson

Area:
1,300 sq. ft.

Address:
3035 Washington St.
Roxbury, MA

826
BOSTON

RESEA

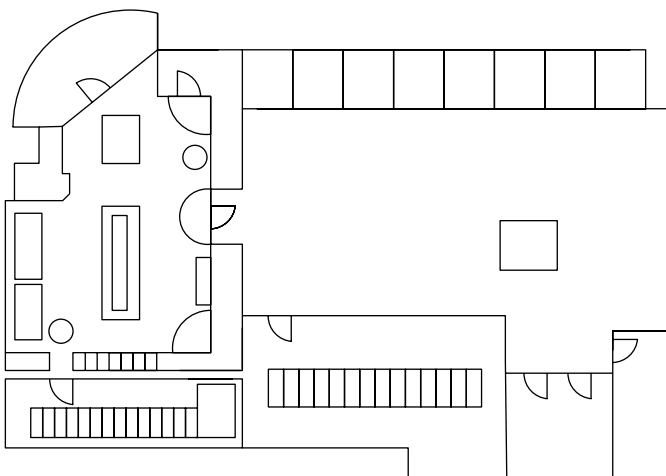
3035

BIGFOOT RESEARCH INSTITUTE
GREATER BOSTON

Roxbury, MA



(Previous) The storefront of 826 Boston features a Bigfoot logo designed by Amanda McCorkle. (Above) Before the Greater Boston Bigfoot Research Institute opened, there was no scientific institution dedicated to the study of cryptozoology.



The floor plan shows the expansive tutoring space hidden behind the storefront.

Where did the idea for your store's theme come from?

Boston is a big research hub for everything from cancer to the human genome and other topics. We talked about that and about what's perhaps been overlooked, what isn't being studied but should be. We came to the Greater Boston Bigfoot Research Institute, the joke being that "Bigfoot" is nestled in between four other words. People who drive past the sign say, "Oh, I thought you were just a research facility," and then they see "Bigfoot" and look in the window and see a nine-foot Bigfoot and eyeballs in jars and leeches and other strange things. You can attract students of a certain age by repelling them, by allowing them to wade into the grotesque.

What inspired the space's design?

Our space was raw. It had been an abandoned auto-body shop that had been gutted and turned into this residential place



A sliding door reveals the tutoring lab.



Students and volunteers conduct a study inside the research institute.



Artist-made products and scientific ephemera commingle in the store.



Serious research facilities must contain small, meticulously labeled bottles.



Yet more evidence of the profound experiments and investigations happening within: overstuffed drawers, venetian blinds, things plugged into other things.

with a space downstairs, so it was kind of a blank canvas. It was in this newer development and it kind of looked like a research space. The idea of the *Wunderkammer*, the wonder cabinet, or the cabinet of curiosities, held a lot of richness for us. Loren Coleman, who was a sociologist-turned-Bigfoot-researcher, actually has a museum up in Portland, Maine. We looked to models like the Mütter Museum in Philadelphia, which is a collection of anatomical and physiological anomalies—Siamese twins in jars and things like that. The Museum of Jurassic Technology in Los Angeles served as inspiration and the Harvard Museum of Natural History was a great partner and ally. Once we settled into the research scene, the Harvard Museum of Natural History started calling and would say, “We’ve got a water buffalo head which is of no scientific value to us. Do you guys want it?”

How did you put together the team that created this space?

We put out a call out through 826 and the word started to get around. People invited friends of friends. We pulled together a really amazing group of folks. We had people from the children’s museum. We had scientists, graphic designers, art students, writers, comedians—kind of a perfect stew of people. We asked everyone who came in how they wanted to be involved. Once we had a team, we really just started spitballing and brainstorming. We didn’t have the money up front to do anything; we were waiting for a grant to come through and had about six months or so to really cook up the idea. We had no money, but a bunch of creative folks and a great blank canvas.

How did you acquire the items that fill your center?

In some cases we called out for things and in others we stumbled upon them. We had a donation letter that we sent out to anyone and everyone. It stated the kinds of things we were looking for—specimens and jars and the like. Our team of twenty to twenty-five people shared that with everyone. We have this data wall that rolls back and hides the tutoring center, and we got a call from a barn door company in Connecticut saying they’d love to donate if we still needed a barn door fixture and they FedExed it to us. I’m sure it was thousands of dollars. Then they came and installed it for us! A friend’s dad had a phone booth in his garage in upstate New York, and we drove a U-Haul truck to pick it up. We didn’t know what we were going to do with it, but once we got it, a woman from the children’s museum, Megan Dickinson, said she thought it should be a climate simulation chamber and that she wanted to work on it. One breakthrough was when we came across a giant art crate. It was huge. It was like nine feet by four feet or something like that. We ended up using it as a data wall in our center, but there’s a local art shipping company called Artex who had these big crates that they build and then dismantle. We contacted them directly and they



What it looks like when a scientist walks away mid-experiment.



A fossilized armadillo specimen, misidentified here as Arvicanthis niloticus.



Porning over pages and pages of research, maybe even about fossilized grass rats.



Blurry photographs, shaky videos, fierce conviction: clues demanding a verdict!



Boston mayor Marty Walsh gives a lecture, very likely on the latest Bigfoot sightings or a new piece of evidence supporting the existence of unicorns.



A fledgling cryptozoologist carefully examining field notes.

donated a bunch of crates, which worked perfectly for our purposes because we had all of these specimens. We ended up building a counter which is raised and really tall so that when people come in, they're looking up at the person behind the counter.

We made a lot of our products. Our team scavenged items like fishing lures to turn into baby giant centipedes. Every week we would do a show-and-tell with the team, and we were broken up into groups to think about the theme, the products, the environment, the graphic design, and the branding. As we grew as an organization, companies started to seek us out and adopt us and do free things for us. The carpenters who did a lot of the work donated their labor. Once you're visible to your community, people come forward and offer help. We all slog through so much mundane stuff, from paying bills to doing homework, and if something is really weird and kind of out there but brilliant, people want to get involved. That's the beautiful thing about 826. ●



1

UNICORN TEARS

Designer and Writer:
Oliver Uberti

One of our rarest products, these organic, ethically obtained unicorn tears serve as a mystical remedy for any ailment that may befall you. May be ingested for internal or nonphysical maladies or applied topically to surface injuries.

2

EXISTENTIALLY DISTRAUGHT WOOD

Designer and Writer:
Oliver Uberti

These days, everyone has distressed barn wood adorning their walls and composing their furniture. Take your home décor to the next level with Existentially Distraught Wood sourced from local enchanted forests.

3

DISAFFECTED WOOD

Designer and Writer:
Oliver Uberti

What fun is there in wood that obediently serves its purpose? These uninspired, rebellious logs are guaranteed to disrespect your authority and resent their obligation to you as their owner.

4

UNICORN BURP

Designer and Writer:
Oliver Uberti

Whimsical, helium-filled gas collected directly from the digestive tracts of our own farm-raised unicorns. Blow this solution through bubble wands for holographic summer fun or ingest it for short-term weightlessness.

6



7



8



5

CONFUSED WOOD

Designer and Writer:
Oliver Uberti

The latest in our line of enchanted woods, Confused Wood is a multi-purpose material that is never quite sure of its purpose. Disclaimer: may attempt to pose as aluminum, cotton, glass, etc.

6

KOALA CONTAINMENT UNIT

Designer and Writer:
Oliver Uberti

On an expedition, don't dare to underestimate the ferocity of a wild koala. These containment units come equipped with all the security precautions necessary for capturing koalas and keeping their feral tendencies at bay.

7

SPORE BUCKET

Designer and Writer:
Oliver Uberti

A containment and transportation vessel capable of holding thousands of single-celled spores, useful in the propagation of both mundane and magical minute species. This aluminum bucket comes equipped with sturdy handles and assured spore protection.

8

FOSSIL BRUSH

Designer and Writer:
Oliver Uberti

This patented fossil brush design uncovers ancient fossils with the utmost care and accuracy. Our semi-soft bristles are able to brush lightly over important artifacts, uncovering information that would otherwise be lost to current civilization.



WordPlay
Cincy

Established:
2012

Designer:
Libby Hunter

Area:
1,900 sq. ft.

Address:
4041 Hamilton Ave.
Cincinnati, OH

SALES • SERVICE
REPAIRS



Cincinnati, OH



Visit WordPlay Cincy to have your vintage typewriter serviced while listening to a young author share their writing.



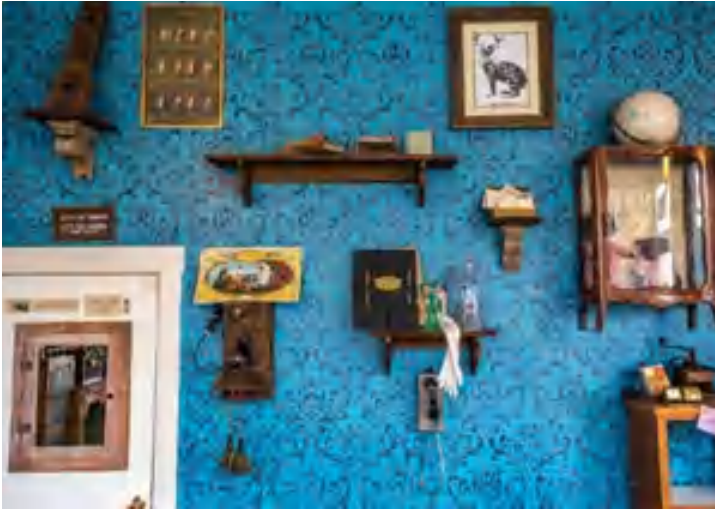
A beacon in Cincinnati for both writers and typists.

What effect were you trying to evoke with this space?

We gave a lot of consideration to the experience we wanted people to have in our space—not just the kids, but our families, volunteers, and guests. It was important that the design would suggest good feelings of home and school, but at the same time wasn't too similar to either one. It was essential that our writing center inspire curiosity; the eclectic collection of historical oddities, lounge-worthy upholstered comfort, old books, and typewriters is meant to be inviting, thought-provoking, and somehow also soothing.

How have you adapted the store and writing center over time?

We had decided on the title of the Urban Legend Institute for our initial store concept, inspired by local history, myth, and storytelling. Much of the first round of furniture and décor came from co-founder Libby Hunter's house; she had recently downsized and needed a place to stash some old family heirlooms. Friends saw the quirky curation of unusual pieces taking shape and started contributing other unique items to the mix. While our store was fully stocked and running for a while, it was tricky to maintain the balance of the store's needs versus programming, and programs won out.



A student with writer's block need only look at the nearest wall for inspiration.



A young author performs at a reading.



The space features sturdy furniture, necessary for supporting creativity and reducing the risk of toppling over when mind-blowing ideas occur.



Looks of joy, awe, and surprise can mean only one thing: student readers.

We needed the space back, which was a valid and convenient way to explain away the fact that we couldn't figure out how to scrape together enough money to pay someone to run the store. At that time, we decided to shift the Urban Legend Institute to focus on our best-selling item, restored vintage typewriters, along with offering cleaning and repair services. Our store is now Urban Legend Typewriters and fits snugly along one wall, while the rest of the room has been reclaimed as our reading lounge. The typewriter business would not exist if it weren't for the generosity of an extraordinary human, our Typewriter Guy, Dr. Richard Polt. A philosophy professor at nearby Xavier University, Richard has been sourcing, restoring, and marketing our typewriters since our first month in existence. We owe so much to his ingenuity, passion for his craft, and dedication to helping our students.



WordPlay Cincy's interior is delicate and ornate, defying the brutalist, cinderblock-and-plastic style of many learning environments.



U

STREET

22 LINES

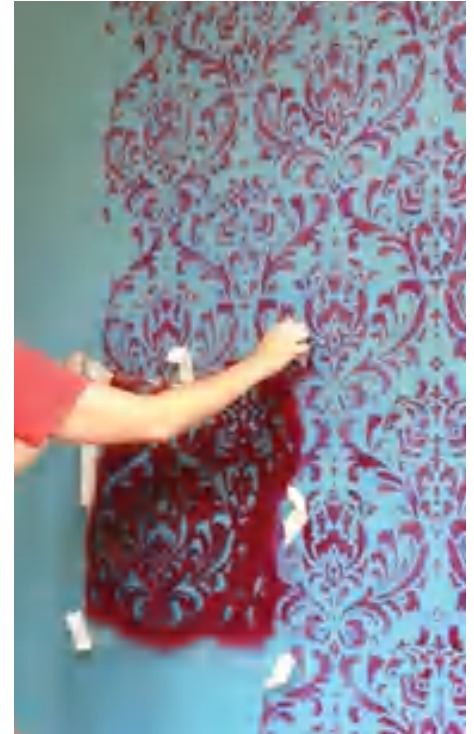
POP

Adventure starts here





Students read on comfortable, sometimes antique, couches and armchairs.



A handmade stencil = an inimitable space.



The length of the space and the bright lighting make WordPlay a perfect place to showcase student work with readings and performances.



How did you put WordPlay Cincy together on a budget?

We pulled a volunteer ideation team together that consists of a few creatives on our initial board of directors, some artist and designer friends, and a few others from various facets of the education realm. During a half-day session, we did a rather sloppy but ultimately very productive brainstorming process about the overall theme that would tie the store and writing center together.

We still don't know how we pulled this together. We don't even recall if we had a line item in our tiny first-year budget for furniture and décor. Friends volunteered to paint the walls and put up shelving. Money was paid out of certain unnamed individuals' pockets to pay for movers to bring heavier items in. One volunteer donated a year's supply of coffee and a coffee pot and the process was caffeinated forever after. It just kept organically evolving. Libby has been known to dumpster-dive (not infrequently); some initial furniture was found on the curb or pulled out of dumpsters; some was scored through a contact in Cincinnati Public Schools when an elementary school was being torn down. Credit is also due to Libby's elementary school librarian, who brought a clawfoot bathtub into the library and put a carpet square inside so the kids could sit in it and read. She always wanted pillows to soften up her reading time in the library tub, and so the WordPlay Reading Tubs were born, full of pillows and featured prominently in the reading lounge. Other pieces were bought on the cheap from the University of Cincinnati's monthly surplus sales, and people have consistently donated items over the years as well. We have big windows facing the street and we get people walking through our doors all the time thinking we're an antique store.



Do you have advice for educators who want to build a space like this?

As for the design of the space, start with the feelings you want the people in your space to feel. Open this up for a bigger conversation including a variety of people from the community you will be working in, especially those you aim to reach through your programs. In terms of the bigger-picture advice on starting a nonprofit youth writing center: be ready to lose your shirt, your sanity, and any hopes for work-life balance. It's brutal in the startup phase, and that can last for a long time. This path isn't for the faint of heart. Keep your humor and your humility front and center. Listen, listen, and listen some more. Our work in the nonprofit sector isn't just "held in the public trust" according to the IRS, it truly belongs to the community. Consider how you might incubate your idea under an existing nonprofit rather than jumping straight into the 501(c)(3) world—knowing full well how hypocritical this advice is (we clung fiercely to our goal of being an independent nonprofit from the get-go), we really have come to believe this. There is tremendous benefit to resource-sharing, mitigating financial and other risks, and growing under the mentorship of a seasoned nonprofit director. ●



Story
FACTORY

Story Factory

Established:
2012

Designers:
Chris Bosse of
LAVA and the
Glue Society

**Area
(Redfern):**
1,614 sq. ft.

**Area
(Parramatta):**
1,130 sq. ft.

Address:
90 George Street
Parramatta NSW
Australia



Parramatta, Australia



Story Factory's second location in Parramatta was designed by the Glue Factory and LAVA, who also designed their original location, the Martian Embassy.

What is this place?

Our goal was to create a space for young people where normal rules don't apply. We wanted a nontraditional space, a world away from the classic classroom, a space that would pluck kids out of their everyday lives. We wanted it to instantly prompt stories, ideas, and freedom of thought. The final design turned an 1830s heritage-listed cottage—formerly a family home, lolly shop, and real estate office (the sign is still on the wall)—into a fluid, continuous space that we call the Dream Lab.

What was the concept behind the design?

The architectural concept was to connect the four separate rooms with a continuous blue splash or ribbon, to awaken imagination with non-linear design. Like a bucket of creativity poured into the space, it flows through the rooms and splashes out onto the street. Spatial continuity is realized with a series of free-flowing timber elements that meander through the space and create seating, shelving, furniture, and lighting. Architect Chris Bosse of LAVA said the design weaves a story through space and time, from early settlement to space travel. It's a continuation of the first Story Factory—the Martian Embassy in inner-city Redfern—stimulating creativity through spatial differentiation. This space is a bit more mature, less childlike. We wanted it to appeal equally to kids and teenagers. For the Glue Society, who helped conceptualize

the space and did the interior design, the core design challenge was creating something that would appeal both to a seven-year-old and a seventeen-year-old. Their initial idea was: *what if you could create a factory that makes dreams?* The idea of a “dream lab” seemed to fuse imagination with experimentation. It also allowed the designers to be inclusive and create a world appealing to all ages and cultural backgrounds.

How did you make the Dream Lab a reality?

When we opened the first Story Factory in 2012, we begged favors from every creative we knew. The Glue Society, a creative agency, was the first to agree to help. They had already worked with Will O'Rourke, a production company, and Chris Bosse, so Glue asked them to help, too. Miraculously, everyone agreed to team up and do everything pro bono. After consulting kids and volunteers, Glue came up with the concept of the Martian Embassy and LAVA brought it to life. It was a harmonious and hardworking team, and everyone fought hard for their creative vision. When we opened the second Story Factory in Parramatta in 2018, we were thrilled that Glue and LAVA again agreed to design it for us. It was a team effort but if anyone was the crazy mastermind, it was Chris Bosse. When we ran out of money for the floor decals that would put splashes of color through the space, he paid for them himself.



The initial idea was: what if you could create a factory that makes dreams?



The challenge was to make the space appeal to both a 7- and a 17-year-old.



The architecture connects separate rooms with a continuous blue current.



The space is filled with sculptures made from discarded technology. Cassette players, old phones, motherboards—all repurposed into odd artifacts from the future.

A museum exhibit titled "THE MARTIAN EMBASSY". The exhibit is housed in a curved, orange-colored structure with a series of parallel, slightly curved wooden slats. In the foreground, a large, polished, orange-colored globe is mounted on a stand. To the right of the globe, a telescope is visible. The background features a dark wall with a framed picture and a blue rectangular object hanging from the ceiling. The overall lighting is warm and focused on the exhibit.

THE MARTIAN EMBASSY





Students pose with their Story Factory creations in the Martian Embassy.



Curved wooden architecture gives this earthly space an otherworldly feeling.

Illuminating imagination.

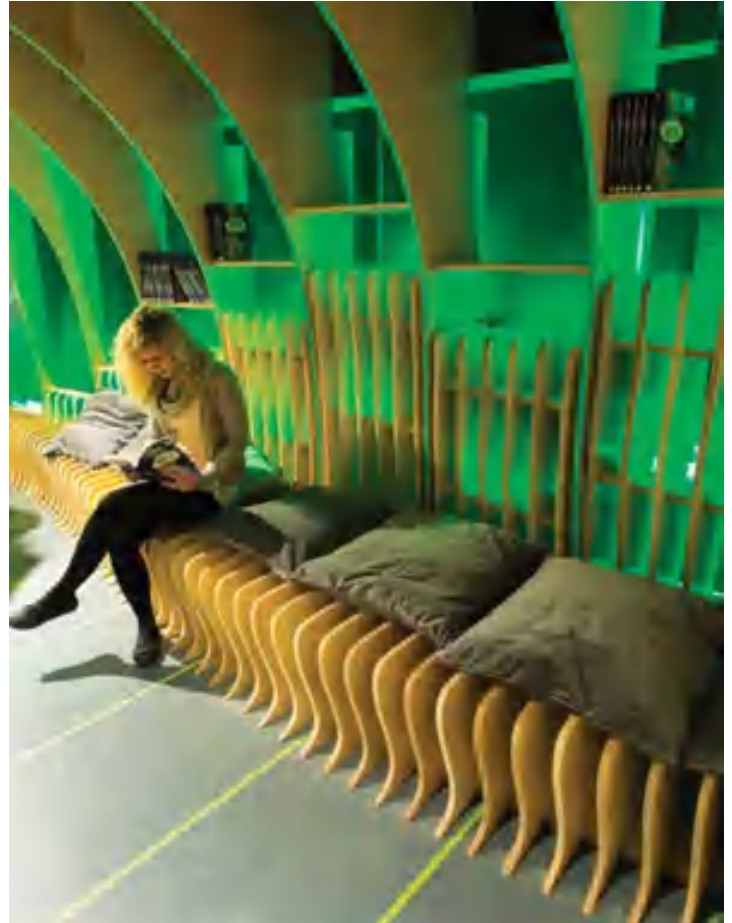
We had to comply with council and heritage regulations while affordably merging the old and new parts of the building—and anything we installed had to be removable at the end of the lease. The pendant lights in the space were designed by the architects and assembled in their office. They also made a space-age chandelier from continuous LED strips, which we hung from fishing line in the workshop roof space. In one room, a blurred-out clock references a concept found among the Indigenous Australian Yolngu people, of “forever time”: the notion that time is not past, present, or future, but always.

A beautiful place like this.

We are taught to think in boxes and straight lines, but the lab breaks these rules and puts curves everywhere. A primary school student said: “I like how the space has curves. You can hug the building.” And she did. Young people’s



An assortment of insect specimens found during intergalactic travels.



The Martian Embassy, in Redfern, Australia, was Story Factory's first location.



The ribbed look was created using low-grade, inexpensive plywood cut into curved shapes.



Curved walls create multiple areas, which allow volunteers, students, and parents to work in different parts of the space at the same time.

responses suggest that the space really does take them out of their everyday lives. Two high school boys, Brody and Jacob, asked to move in so they could write stories every day. Brody said, “This is the coolest building I’ve ever been in. You know my story, I’m in foster care and I usually come to Parramatta to see solicitors or Family and Community Services or to go to court. It’s so good to come to a beautiful place like this, to do something nice.” Some high school girls also loved the space but not for the reason we thought. There’s a big mirror in the bathroom and they reckon it’s “sick for selfies.”

Our staff love running workshops in the space. The curves create multiple areas, which allow volunteers, students, and parents to work in different parts of the space at the same time. The kids respond to the fact that it looks a little like a gallery space, with shelves to showcase sculptures and books. It makes them feel like their writing matters. A teacher from a school in Western Sydney said that the space is really calming and that she would like to build a room like this at home, for her to relax in and read. She even offered to sweep our floor and clean the space just to spend more time in it.

Tangible inspiration.

Initially, the Glue Society wanted to create a suite of large, digital, interactive art walls for young people to play with. Budget prohibited this, which forced Glue into a realization: for kids who are interacting with screens constantly, physical sculptures can be an engaging change. Glue made a series of sculptures from discarded technology. They raided thrift shops, bins, and recycling centers for everything from cassette players to old phones, helmets, and motherboards, repurposing them into strange artifacts from the future. These aren’t sculptures in the look-but-don’t-touch sense. Each one is designed to be played with and explored by kids, with buttons to press and switches to wiggle. The sculptor Tom Sachs was a great inspiration. Like Sachs, Glue wanted to make objects that feel like they have a life and a purpose. The sculptures also serve as interactive story prompts, and have been used in writing workshops by Story Factory staff. ●



1

MELTED ICE

Designer: the Glue Society
Produced by: Will O'Rourke

The essential purity of our Martian polar ice caps has been captured and preserved in liquid form. Okay, okay. It's water in a plastic beaker. But hey, you can still impress your friends with the fact that you are drinking something that's almost identical to our superior Martian water. Almost.

2

GRAVITY (LARGE)

Designer: the Glue Society
Produced by: Will O'Rourke

Surface gravity on Mars is approx. 38.3971884 percent of that on Earth. Which is good news for hippos, bad news for ballerinas. If you are at the ballerina end of the spectrum, and you suddenly feel light-headed, take out this extra-large tin of gravity and keep your feet on the ground. *Nota bene:* this can is empty.

3

MARTIAN CAPE BUDGET VERSION

Designer: the Glue Society
Produced by: Will O'Rourke

Temperatures on Mars vary from about -87°C in winter to -5°C in summer, a bit like New Zealand only colder. To stay toasty, you'll want a patented portable reflective Martian Cape to keep the warm in and the cold out. It also works well in a dust storm. But be warned: this budget silver one is a lot like a space blanket—it doesn't really work.

4

BITE-SIZE OXYGEN

Designer: the Glue Society
Produced by: Will O'Rourke

Mars is a breathtaking planet. For Earthlings, we mean this quite literally. Our atmosphere features only traces of oxygen (not the 20 percent Earth bods are used to). When Martians travel to other planets, these portable miniature parcels of Martian-style O₂ keep us bubbly. Earthlings refer to it as bubble wrap.

Ocean's Treasure

by Jahziel

Age 14 • Parramatta, Australia

Originally published by Story Factory

**Shiny white marble, changing colour in the sun.
Bright star making me feel special.
Swimming off a Cook Island beach. Rarotonga.
And I discovered a white pearl.
I return the pearl to where it belongs. To share its beauty.
I was the chosen one and I felt rich.**



272-1276

The Wicker Park

SECRET AGENT
SUPPLY CO



826CHI

Established:
2005

Designer:
Gensler

Area:
3,200 sq. ft.

Address:
1276 N. Milwaukee Ave.
Chicago, IL



MANAGED BY:
MILWAUKEE AVE.
PROPERTIES LLC
708-870-9368

1278

Chicago, IL



The perfect cover: the Wicker Park Secret Agent Supply Co. looks like a bookstore, but it features a nearly invisible door to spirit young spies to the writing lab.

What are the origins of 826CHI?

The decision to open an 826 chapter in Chicago was based on our relationship with Dave Eggers and a need in the city for student support. We have a lot of under-resourced schools and we wanted to give back to the neighborhood in a way that felt meaningful. We originally opened in 2005 as strictly a tutoring center, but we wove other programs into our repertoire. Early on we had a spy supply storefront called the Boring Store (so as not to raise suspicion about the instruments for espionage sold within), which was designed by Chris Ware. In 2014, we moved across the street from our original location and decided to rebrand. We work with a lot of English-language and young learners, and didn't want confusing language to be a barrier to engagement. We wanted our new space to open up not only physically but linguistically. With feedback and observation, we landed on a new name: the Wicker Park Secret Agent Supply Co.

What is the physical space like?

Our center is located in a turn-of-the-century stone retail space. Between the store and the writing lab, we have a regular door and a secret door. The architecture firm Gensler helped us create a door that's invisible to most eyes and a secret amongst the students, engaging them in

the spy theme. At the back of the store we have a welcome point with information about the space and opportunities in the community. When you enter the writing lab, it's like you're standing at the bottom of a funnel. There's a seating area and a stage for readings, which acts as an active sharing space and a platform where students can share their stories and practice public speaking. Moving up toward the large side of the funnel-shaped room, we have dry-erase boards lining the entire back wall and a publication space with a binding machine and a copy machine. We wanted the space to manifest our mission and to tell a story in its own state. The store theme is present throughout the writing lab, as are students' voices. Student publications live on bookshelves shaped like Morse code and are used for inspiration. There are detailed murals of places all over the world: Paris, Marrakesh, our very own Chicago. The space is interactive—we can move our furniture around to best facilitate the day's work. The space is bright and warm as well; Gensler's industry contacts donated high-quality lights that feel like sunlight.

Who collaborated on creating this space?

Gensler was our biggest partner and created the master plan for everything. Our generous landlord, Lee Stansbury, took



Here we see a young spy gathering intelligence.



Two spies practicing the skill of pretending not to notice one another.



The store theme is present throughout the writing lab, as are students' voices.

the specifics of our design and built it out at no cost. Beyond our amazing staff, a team of around eighty volunteers comes and goes throughout the year. We're lucky to have a number of individuals who follow and believe in our work.

How was the creation of this center funded?

We had a Kickstarter campaign focused on getting the store up and running. We launched a yearlong capital campaign with the goal of attracting donors and a fundraising goal of \$250,000. We had general offering funds that came in to support the program. Individual donors and foundations reached out. Close to half, if not more, of the money that supported the capital campaign came from grants. Thirty percent of the total funding came from grants; some were specific to the move and build-out and the rest were focused on programming. Resource providers for things like furniture can often offer deep discounts or extra stock. That's how we ended up with a lot of the furniture and equipment in our space.

Know that you're not going to get it right the first time. Space is flexible. Our front desk was permanently bolted into the floor, and a year after putting it in, we decided it needed to be in a different spot. You will change and your space will change. Adaptability is essential. ●



Murals of cities such as Marrakesh and Chicago cover the walls of the room.





Gensler, an international design firm, handled the interior design. Because they have relationships with vendors—who sell lighting and flooring, for example—they were able to get discounts on a variety of elements, saving 826CHI a great deal of money while creating a singular working environment.



W*ORT

Established:
2014

Designer:
Walking Chair
Design Studio

Area:
1,076 sq. ft.

Address:
Raiffeisenstraße 18
Lustenau, Austria



Lustenau, Austria



*Lustenau, Austria's W*ORT features the "You May" furniture piece that can be used in nearly limitless ways, as well as decorative mirrored paint splashes.*



Children were consulted on both the design and the programming of the center.

Why W*ORT?

The name for the place partially informed the design. *W*ORT* simply means "word." The star placed after the W is of particular importance for wordplay and represents the possibilities this place can offer. The W symbolizes the questions often asked by children: *Who? How? What? Why?* In German, all of these questions start with the letter W. *ORT* means "space"—so this is a space for all of the questions children are dying to ask. The interior architecture and design for the space were based on this wordplay. Our designers believe strongly that design follows content and that design encompasses ideas, wishes, and attitudes.

A welcoming space for words.

Our primary aim was to create a space where adults can volunteer their time and share their talents with children—a space where working together for the future of the youngest generation is at the core, a space where new ideas and creative projects are always developed and welcome, a space people talk about, are interested in, want to visit, and want to contribute to, an inviting space where those young and old can meet—a space where everyone feels welcome.



*W*ORT simply means "word." The W symbolizes the questions often asked by children: Who? How? What? Why? In German, all of these questions start with the letter W.*



ORT means "space"—so this is a space for all of the questions children are dying to ask. The interior architecture and design for the space were based on this wordplay.

Developing W*ORT: from inspiration to realization.

Our local mayor, Kurt Fischer, is a linguist, a lover of language, and a former teacher. He came across Dave Eggers's TED Talk and immediately understood the importance of supporting children in developing their language skills. He also loved the idea that citizens would be involved on a voluntary basis in helping and supporting the children along the way. So, he thought to himself: *I want one of these centers in my town.* He shared this idea with a couple of people in office and soon got a small group of like-minded people together who traveled to London to visit the writing center Ministry of Stories. Inspired by a workshop at Ministry of Stories, the team decided that they had to act on this idea. They invited artists, teachers, politicians, architects, designers, and people on the administrative side of the council to help them think the concept through and get actively involved in developing a writing center in Lustenau. A small core group of about five people sometimes invited others to help develop the idea further. From an early stage, it was clear that creating and formulating the idea for such a space was possible on a mostly voluntary basis. However, in order to develop the program and recruit volunteers and children, they realized that they needed to employ a manager. Children were also invited for a consultation to inform both the design and the program of the place. So, to summarize—a maniacal mayor, inspired by Dave, managed to bring together lots of impassioned people to develop this space.

How did you create this writing center on a budget?

The core costs of the project were covered through local and regional government funding as well as through our own income. This project was initiated as a public-private partnership and was realized on a small budget. The initial project costs—especially meetings about the if, how, and when of the organization—were mostly covered through voluntary hours. A paid facilitator was brought in to move the process forward. From an early stage, it was clear that the local government would support the project through offering a space rent-free. A disused embroidery business, which had been separated into three parts and used as a garage, wine bar, and gift shop, was identified and rented by the local government from the private owners. The local government then invested in the infrastructure and created a blank canvas. With the input of designers Fidel Peugeot and Karl Emilo Pircher, of Walking Chair Design Studio, the space was transformed through the installation of mirrored ceiling lights and wacky tables and chairs (which they created with their own hands and loaned to us for free).

What is this space like inside?

Our space has a low ceiling and the windows are at children's eye level. This wasn't planned, but is rather a nice side effect of renting an old building. Currently W*ORT is an analog place—we work with pencil and paper, typewriters and



Unusual furniture creates interesting peek holes and hiding places.



*W*ORT houses a functional historic printing press once owned by the mayor.*



Students gain hands-on map-making experience in a workshop.



Hidden within this climbing structure, seating area, playhouse, and hiding space, you'll find the printing press in its off hours.

an old printing press owned by our mayor, which adds an interesting touch to this community and writing center. As part of our corporate identity, the designers created our own font and made wooden printing blocks in it, which children are able to use on the historic printing machine under the guidance of experienced printers. A special surrounding was designed for the printing press, which allows it to be hidden away and protected when not in use. This surrounding doubles as a seating area as well as a playhouse and climbing frame for the children. Using simple cubes which are normally used as seats, they build fortresses, castles, or other hiding spaces on top of this structure almost every day.

The "You May" is a special bit of furniture that invites people of all ages to use it as they please. It's being used as our chief executive's desk, a coffee table, and a climbing frame, all in one. It provides seating with a table as well as areas to stand at the table and interesting peek holes

and hiding places. Two vintage armchairs and a vintage telephone were donated to us by our landlords. They complement the design already in place and add some charm to the clean white, black, and red design. We also have a red electric typewriter to match our corporate design and visitors have given us mechanical typewriters, which the children love. The designers held a workshop with children and the true inspiration behind our corporate identity came from the paint splashes the kids made during that session. We have mirrors on the ceiling in the shape of paint splashes and our logo is also based on this. As opposed to other 826-inspired organizations, we developed the organization and interior design for the space before developing the fictional story that informs the program. We are currently working on the story behind W*ORT, the magical place that was unearthed by an explosion in a secret lab. This is a work in progress! ●



**WRITER'S
BLOCK**



**The
Writer's Block**

Established:
2019

Designer:
Scott Seeley

Area:
5,000 sq. ft.

Address:
519 S. 6th St. Ste. 100
Las Vegas, NV



Las Vegas, NV



The Writer's Block is also the Artificial Bird Sanctuary, so it made sense to have a large birdcage in the middle, for the large artificial birds of the world.



Writer's Block is part of a new building in downtown Las Vegas.

What is the Writer's Block?

The Writer's Block is not an 826 chapter, but we run most of the same free student programs. We serve as Las Vegas's only independent bookstore and Artificial Bird Sanctuary. Our classroom space is called Codex, and the storefront supports its programming. Scott Seeley, who co-founded 826NYC and worked on a number of the 826 storefronts, moved to Las Vegas with the plan of opening a business similar to the 826 chapter. At first, he didn't have a specific theme in mind. He wanted flexibility when it came to exploring products, posters, and signage with Writer's Block—similar to the original McSweeney's store, which had no singular theme. So, the concept for Writer's Block was pretty organic, curating what came naturally.



A tile forest continues the avian theme.



The Writer's Block includes a fully stocked bookstore.



The bookstore includes many cozy spots to encounter new stories.

The design process was almost completely intuitive. And because of the workshop-like nature of the space, we are still able to add to and change it continuously. It's constantly in flux, which was a goal from the get-go. We do have one thematic element that rose to the top: birds. We call ourselves an Artificial Bird Sanctuary and, as such, house hundreds of artificial birds of numerous species in the exposed rafters of the store. These birds can be adopted by our patrons for a reasonable cost. Each bird is one-of-a-kind with a name and an "auto-birdography" that explains their likes, dislikes, and history.

What inspired the space's design?

The interior designs are largely inspired by an inventor's workshop Scott worked at for a number of years, which was in an old barn in the middle of Connecticut. That combined with a mid-century modern theme (which is all over Las Vegas), as well as industrial architecture, namely the work of Mies Van der Rohe and of Mary Blair. Then we brought the outdoors indoors with lots of artificial greenery: trees, flowers, plants, etc. Charles and Ray Eames and their studio were a big influence, particularly their short films. There's a mural that draws a lot of inspiration from Eyvind Earle. Charley Harper is another designer we looked to. Tonally, the old *Reader's Digests* and *The Time Life World Library* books are big. Chris Molnar, a writer that worked on 826NYC, moved out to Vegas to help us design the original location. Chris and Scott wrote and continue to write the lion's share of the signage, product labels, and soon-to-be literary magazine. They decided to be as literal as possible when describing things, which in its own way ended up being kind of funny. This comes a bit from the tone of early educational films of the 1950s to the 1970s. The Writer's Block's look is raw and industrial in style, with exposed wood, cement, and metal. This was done intentionally because it's less expensive, it's more durable, and it looks good even when it's a little dirty. Using materials purely as they were intended to be used works much better than trying to make a material act like something it's not.

Who created the Writer's Block?

Scott had a hand in everything to do with the visual aspects of Writer's Block and anything people might call a "theme" or "concept." His husband, Drew Cohen, is the store's book buyer and handles all of the day-to-day logistics of running that part of the business. Chris Molnar is now back in New York but remains a key player in setting the tone as a creative collaborator and sounding board. The student programming has numerous wonderful staff and volunteers teaching workshops and helping with field trips, in-schools, and the like. We have a close relationship with the University of Las Vegas's writing program and the Black Mountain Institute, a writing fellowship program, which publishes *The Believer*. ●



PICTURE BOOKS

MY PAPI HAS A MOTORCYCLE



EARLY READER
(Ages 4-6)

APPLES
APPLES

Small text on a book cover, possibly a title or author name.

Small text on a book cover, possibly a title or author name.

Small text on a book cover, possibly a title or author name.



Scuola Holden's Fronte del Borgo

Established:
2012

Designers:
Martina Bartazzini
and Far Waste Studio

Area:
710 sq. ft.

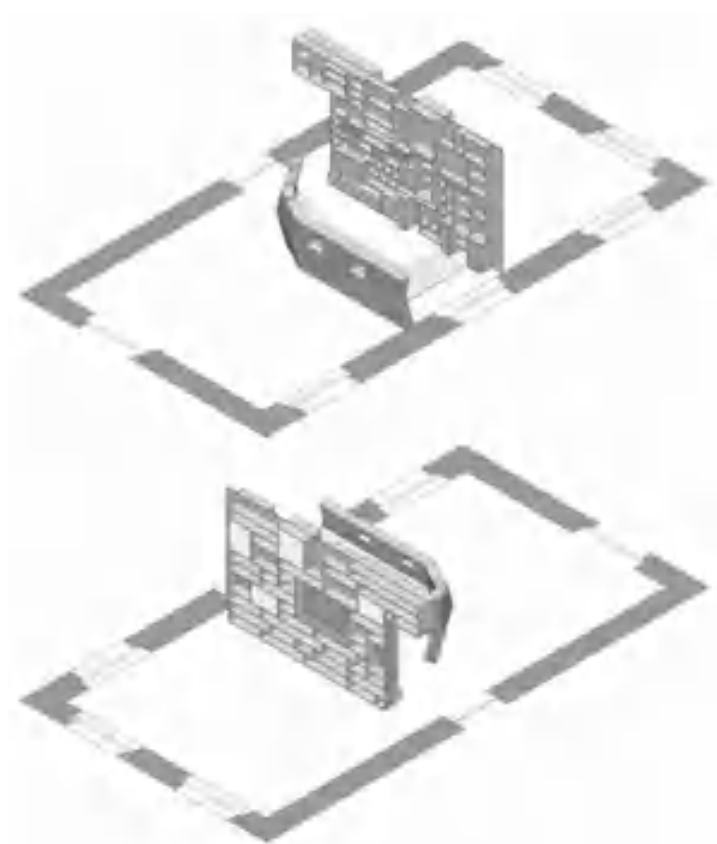
Address:
Piazza Borgo Dora, 49
Torino, Italy



Torino, Italy

What was your intent in creating Fronte del Borgo?

Since 1994, Scuola Holden, a storytelling and creative-writing school situated in Turin, in Northern Italy, has been devoted to a special mission: helping people realize that reading and writing stories is amazing. Still, up until June 2016, kids weren't really included in this inspiring vision. We wanted to inspire wonder, fascination, and curiosity in the same things we would have loved to have found as children: a reliable, locally based center that was part library, part classroom, part ideal book nook. The desire was to create a wonderful and colorful space that would be a place of exchange with the neighborhood. Fronte del Borgo had always been a meeting place available for whoever may need it, with Wi-Fi, comfy armchairs, a mailbox service, and coffee—all for free. But it has since become so much more! With the help of Merende Selvagge and our Holden alumni Domitilla Pirro and Francesco Gallo, who envisioned the whole Fronte del Borgo reboot project and built a wide array of courses that they help teach every day, we turned Fronte del Borgo into a place where kids discover the wonders of stories from within. This is a space where kids can immerse themselves in the beauty of stories and learn to tell their own, a space to daydream by interacting with objects strongly linked to the fantasy world of fiction.



The wall at the center of the space serves as a bookcase full of old mercantile objects on one side and a functional instrument for the laboratories on the other.



The porticoed entrance to Fronte del Borgo offers fun before visitors step inside.

Where did you get ideas for this space?

We took a page from 826 Valencia's Pirate Store. We weren't thinking of one specific fictional work: rather, we considered lots of references, from *Peter Pan* to *Pirates of the Caribbean*, and then asked architect Martina Bertazzini and creative design team Far Waste Studio—Giorgio Ceste, Roberto Varvello, and Davide Carafa—to help us mix these visual references with more of a librarian-bliss, cabinet-of-wonders kind of feel. They ended up designing a galleon ship with a built-in magical book wall, and then added a flying whale as the cherry on top!

How do you make Fronte del Borgo work on a budget?

Fronte del Borgo's biggest windfall was coming into this world under the auspices of Scuola Holden: that's why we're able to teach hundreds of free lessons annually. BMW is one of our sponsors—they were the first external sponsor to believe in this project. We also have a large network of volunteers, all Holden alumni or attending students, who donate their time tutoring kids and hosting summer programs. Sometimes they come just to talk with kids about their favorite achievements, their latest book, an exhibition they have worked on, or a project they are proud of. Thanks to their help, nearly all of the activities we offer are free.

How did you get involved with the International Alliance of Youth Writing Centers?

We arrived at Word Up! Amsterdam in 2018 (and officially joined the International Alliance of Youth Writing Centers) by accident, to be honest! Our fairy godfather was Charles Autheman, of Labo Des Histoires, in Paris, France. A couple of years ago, Charles happened to visit Scuola Holden and accidentally walked into our office. He very quickly proceeded to connect us with Saskia Noordhuis and Merel Nip (of Noordje, in the Netherlands), and, well, the rest is history. Our advice to you? Branch out! Network! Don't rely on fortuitous visits from French *dei ex machina*, like Charles Autheman—they seldom exist! ●



Nooks, crannies, treasures, a galleon ship, and, of course, countless books...



... oh, and a floating whale.



14^{BC}



Noordje

Established:
2007

Designers:
Mariska Mell, Nienke
Bronk, Paola Paez,
Jelle Post, and Saskia
Noordhuis

Area:
1,722 sq. ft.

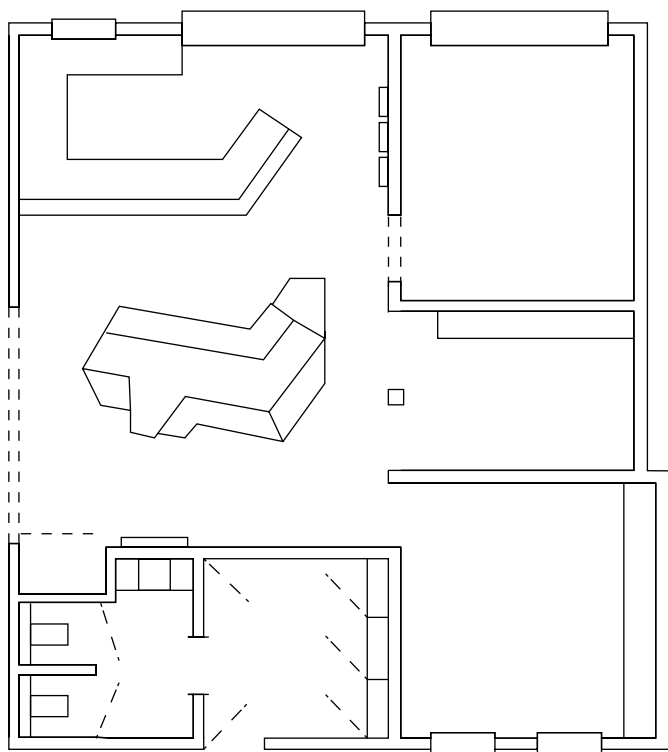
Address:
Zamenhofstraat 14B
Amsterdam, Netherlands



Amsterdam, Netherlands



Located in the old Fire Station Z, Noordje incorporates the building's history into the Kazerne Z, where customers can find supplies for secret agents and superheroes.



Design details of the Z-store stretch onto the ceiling.

How did the store and writing center come together?

Noordje's center was not complete until the Z-store was added. Two years after opening the writing center's doors, the store was finally fully realized. The Z-store is a place where children and visitors can find products belonging to the standard equipment for secret agents and superheroes. The space challenges children and young people to use fantasy and inspires them to write and be creative in other ways. Among the products sold are magnifying glasses, binoculars, and secret notebooks. With the sale of these products, visitors support the activities of Noordje.

Where did the story behind your center come from?

The main inspiration for the Z-store was the building in which we are stationed and the story we created around it. A century ago, the building was a fire station called Fire Station Z; that's why we call it Kazerne Z (Station Z). The story goes that the art and book collection of Grandfather Z (who is the Grandfather of Noordje and who used to be a fireman at the station) disappeared years after the station had been closed. Noordje found out that the attic where the collection used to be stored was empty and gathered all the children in the neighborhood to talk about their new mission: to solve the mystery and to write new stories and make new art for



The perfect location for plotting espionage or saving the world. Or both.



Can you spot the Z hidden in this picture?



Are they spies in disguise? Superhero alter egos? Firefighters on a break? We may never know.



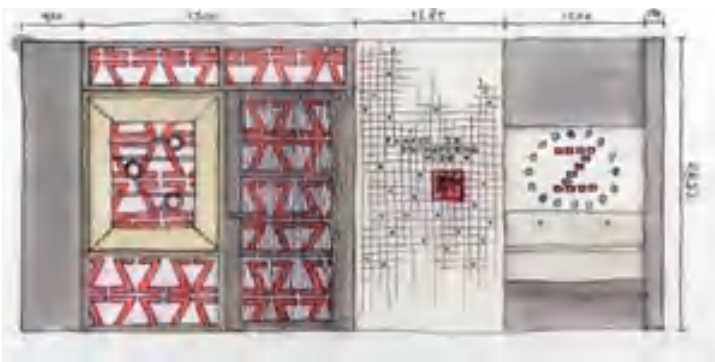
A vibrant, firefighter-themed mural alludes to the history of the space.



A young writer pens a manifesto or perhaps cracks a code.



Noordje has a rich backstory involving Grandfather Z, and the students who come to the center are pulled into the work of mystery-solving.



A sketch of Noordje's entryway.



Tutor and students sift through various clues and mementos.



Dark glasses: a staple for spies and superheroes alike.



An example of Noordje's unique signage.



All children who visit Noordje's writing center become Secret Agent Z, whose mission is to write stories.



Architect Paola Paez designed the interior and guided students in making furniture and a number of products for the store.

the collection. From that moment on, all children who visit Noordje's writing center become Secret Agent Z.

Who was involved in creating this space?

For the creation of the Z-store, we collaborated with various organizations and individuals. A basic construction was set up with the help of architect Paola Paez, who, in exchange for workspace, designed the interior of the store and guided students from the Breitner Academy School of Arts in making furniture and a number of products for the store. Interior designer and volunteer Mariska Mell extended the meaning and concept of the Z-store to products and furnishings. Mariska, graphic designer Jelle Post, and interior designer Nienke Bronk also volunteer at Noordje

and are responsible for the appearance of it all. They were a great team of creators who helped Noordje's director, Saskia Noordhuis, translate and realize the concept of the Z-store. In the beginning, a lot of people didn't understand the concept of a store or why we needed a store at all. The Z team really helped make it concrete, and now it's inseparable from the writing center.

How did you finance Z Store?

Budget and time are always a struggle. Luckily, we were partially funded by the municipality and Stichting DOEN, a foundation in Amsterdam. We were also supported by Dutch Publisher Lebowski and Dave Eggers, who raised money with the sale of his drawings at a signing in Amsterdam. ●

Established:
2010

Designer:
Stoiber &
Associates

Area:
2,900 sq. ft.

Address:
3333 14th St. NW M120
Washington, DC

826
DC

Twoli's ASTOUNDING
MAGIC SUPPLY CO.
ILLUSIONARIUM & DE'LOX HABERDASHERY

DISCOVER

826
DC

ILLUSION
MAGIC
METHODS
APPARIL
GIFTS
WRITING + PUBLISHING
TUTORING
WORKSHOPS

826DC

Washington, DC



Two magicians stand in Tivoli's Astounding Magic Supply Co., ready to make magic happen at 826DC.



826DC is located inside a former theater, the Tivoli, built in 1924.

What was your goal in creating 826DC and Tivoli's Astounding Magic Supply Co.?

We wanted to create a magical space that combined curiosity, wonder, and cleverness, that would transport visitors and stir imagination for all ages. The store lets people experience the 826 brand in an immersive way. In contrast with the previous 826DC store, the Museum of Unnatural History, we really wanted to create a space that was inviting rather than alienating, where the general public could learn about and get involved with 826DC. Tivoli's Astounding Magic Supply became the perfect storefront for that.

How did you dream up the space's design?

We took a lot of inspiration from our first space, the Museum of Unnatural History. We also attended a few magic shows and we spoke with the magician community in DC. We worked with a designer to develop key branding elements (color palette, fonts, etc.) and some of that was inspired by the playfulness of Wes Anderson movies mixed with the classic look of vaudeville-era magician posters.



The Great Book-Binding Studio, where students can self-publish their work, is tucked behind the magic shop.



Tivoli's Astounding Magic Supply Co. carries tools for budding magicians.



All proceeds from the store benefit the writing programs behind this door.



A young illusionist performs the classic “saw a door in half” trick.



“For my next trick, I’ll need a volunteer from the audience...”



Tricks gone wrong and other ephemera line the shelves.



Customers are invited to make student publications disappear (for a small fee).

We wanted to be pretty intentional about the difference between “stage/parlor magic” and “wand magic,” leaning more toward Houdini than Harry Potter. Other sources of inspiration include vintage circus posters, the goofiness of Doug Henning, and the building itself, which is an Italian Renaissance Revival movie theater built in 1924.

Who was included in the team that made this store?

We pulled together a group of volunteers that were involved with the Museum of Unnatural History’s origin and some newly involved volunteers who then collaborated with local artists. We had weekly planning meetings that eventually evolved into working meetings and stayed in touch via email. The group included some artists, some funny writers, and some enthusiastic supporters willing to craft products. Even if folks couldn’t make it to meetings in person, it helped if they could widen our network and connect us with contacts who had the skills we needed for specific projects (woodworking, small construction projects, murals, etc).

How did you outfit the space on a budget?

In terms of furnishing the space, we weren’t above trawling Craigslist every day for shelving and trunk suitcases. It helped that we were able to repurpose parts of the existing

storefront and a few times we also put out calls for donations of specific household items (like playing cards) that we thought volunteers might have on hand. People enjoyed playing a part in the store’s success in small ways like that.

What have you learned in the process of creating Tivoli’s Astounding Magic Supply Co.?

So much of what we learned over time is that we’re selling a concept that really relies on strong branding and the magic of imagination. What we learned from our first location, the Museum of Unnatural History, was that it was a little too esoteric. Folks were like, “Wait—this isn’t a real museum? Things are for sale here?” It did create wonder, but we needed to be a more straightforward store in this second iteration.

An anecdote.

There was a great moment at the Museum of Unnatural History when the program manager at the time, Mike Scalise, was supposed to meet a maintenance person to look at our AC unit at some ungodly hour in the morning. Mike got a call and the guy was like, “I’m here. Where do I meet you?” It turns out the maintenance person went to the actual Museum of Natural History on the National Mall. ●

1



2



3



4



1

STAGE FRIGHT ANTIDOTE

Designer and writer:
826DC

Our brand-new line of Performance Enhancers will take your magic to the next level. Whether it be distraction supplements for your audience or a little extra showmanship power for yourself, beware: snacking on these may result in dropped jaws.

2

TIVOLI'S JUGGLING BALLS

Designer and writer:
826DC

Every magician knows that distraction is the key to deception. These colored balls serve as the perfect diversion for sneaky sleights of hand and are a fun plan B in the case of failed hocus-pocus.

3

THUMB TIP

Manufactured by:
Michel & Greco Magic Props

This realistic removable thumb tip can aid in any illusions requiring faux finger-dismemberment. Shock your audience with stage-tested, entirely safe amputation. Pair with fake blood for showstopping, lifelike results.

4

WHITE GLOVES

Designer and writer:
826DC

A staple for any successful stage magician. Keep your magic wand clean with these sleek, professional gloves that are as white as a rabbit's fur. Now in a comfortable poly-cotton blend.



826
MSP



826 MSP

Established:
2009

Designer:
Gensler

Area:
2,200 sq. ft.

Address:
1915 E. 22nd St.
Minneapolis, MN



Minneapolis, MN

What does 826 MSP offer?

Our center is housed in a complex right off of a busy street in a location with a high population of low-income families. We share the building with a few different businesses. Our space consists of a small office space, our retail store—the Mid-Continent Oceanographic Institute—and our writing lab. The store sells apparel related to the ocean theme, in addition to student publications. Our writing lab has a few different programs. We have field trips focused on storytelling and bookmaking, after-school literacy tutoring, creative-writing activities, and evening workshops on all sorts of topics.

How does your space engage the students who come through it?

We wanted the space to be as engaging as possible. We have a big sea-turtle rug that students climb on and sit on and do their homework on. We have a small door between the store and tutoring space that students (and only students) can use. We have a big outdoor mural of sea creatures, books (which are student publication titles from across 826), and the phrase “once Upon a Time” repeated in various languages. That’s fun for students or even people from the neighborhood to come up and say, “Oh, I recognize my language.” They connect to the center that way. Inclusivity is really important to our center—we also have a small quiet room with prayer space in it because we work with a lot of Muslim students and parents.

How did you stick to a budget while creating this writing center?

A local contractor helped us with the build-out. The architecture firm Gensler was instrumental in our design process and in making our dreams practical. They helped with securing donations for building materials and furniture. We’re a nonprofit with a small budget and there were times when the plan was spending the



Mid-Continent Oceanographic Institute outfits oceanographers who find themselves in the Upper Midwest.



826 MSP has a big sea-turtle rug that students climb on and sit on and do their homework on.



Young authors share ideas to collaboratively write a story during a field trip.



The floor plan, from the architecture firm Gensler, shows the store space in relation to the tutoring space.

money. One thing that helps a lot with cutting costs is to DIY big ideas. For example, the cabinetry in our programming space: we knew we wanted it to be a blue gradient like the different levels of the sea and that it should be mounted to the walls, but getting custom cabinetry like that is incredibly expensive. So, we went to IKEA and painted and mounted all of it ourselves. We also have a porthole window in the space that students love. The original quote for the porthole said it was going to cost us thousands, but with the help of Amazon we were able to DIY it for under a hundred dollars.

What has been the result of implementing the 826 model in this community?

From our beginning ten years ago, we were inspired by 826 National. We were originally branded as Rock Star Supply Co. but we moved from our original location five years back and decided to rebrand for the new space. We thought: “wouldn’t it be funny if there was an ocean lab in landlocked Minnesota?” We gathered info from students and staff, and took considerations of our community into account. How do we make this fun and wacky, but how do we also remain true to our community? The response from our community has been really positive. Many families followed us to our new location after our move and told us that the new space really took our organization to the next level. For students who come into our center for the first time, we give that signature 826 sense of wonder. Kids walk in and say, “Wait—this doesn’t remind me of a school.” It throws off their idea of what an educational space should be like and opens their minds up to creativity and to enjoying learning. ●



Students sit on a giant turtle rug. Note the porthole to the storefront.

The Moooon

by Abdullahi

Grade 7 • Minneapolis, MN

Originally published by 826 MSP

I am a moon because I am big
and popular. I have no company any time
but Earth talks to me. Humans come by
talk to me and play with me

I am fun

and dark

I get mad

and I beat the sun.

I am the moon

everyone wants to

see me move.



Established:
2007

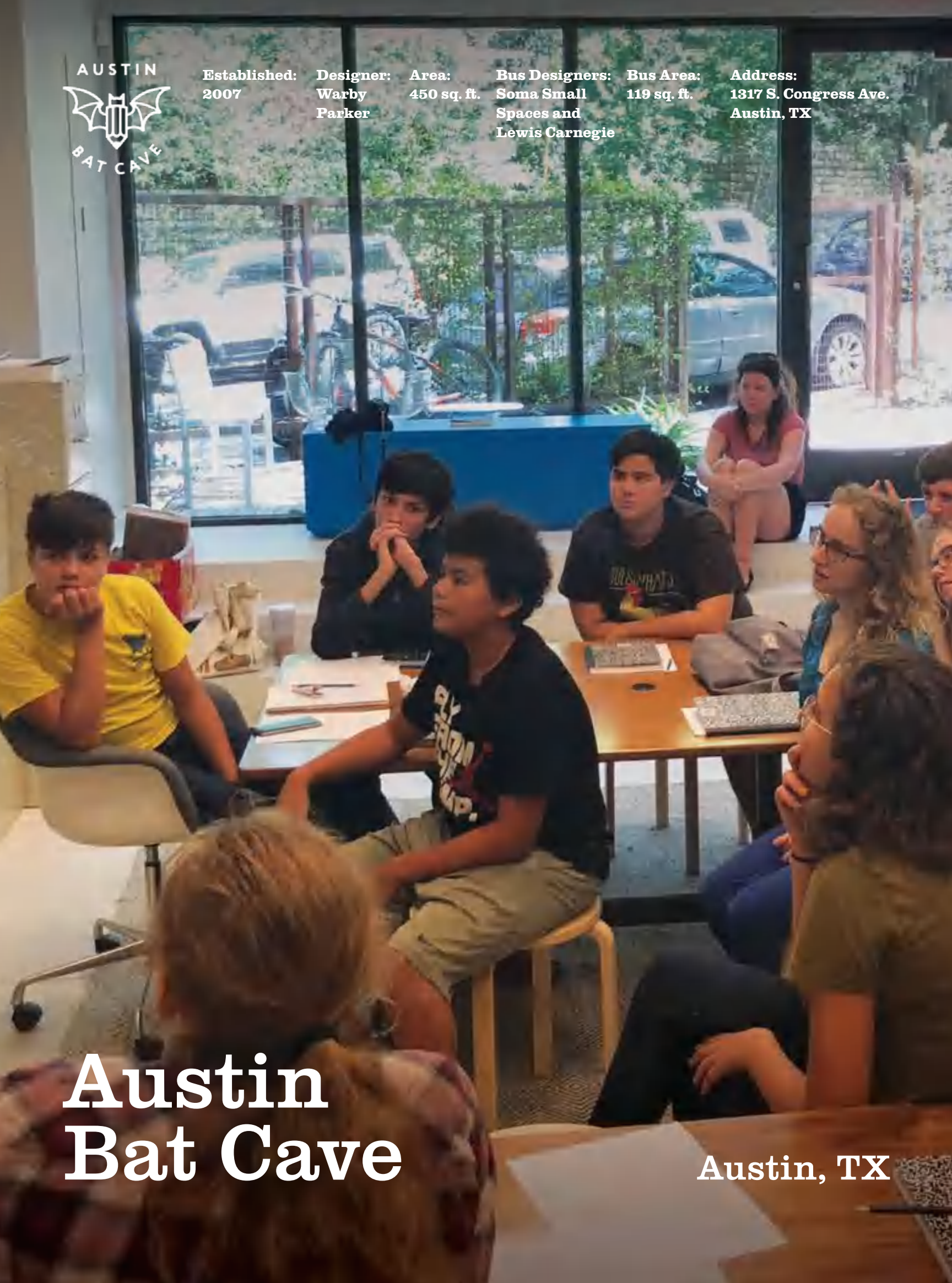
Designer:
Warby
Parker

Area:
450 sq. ft.

Bus Designers:
Soma Small
Spaces and
Lewis Carnegie

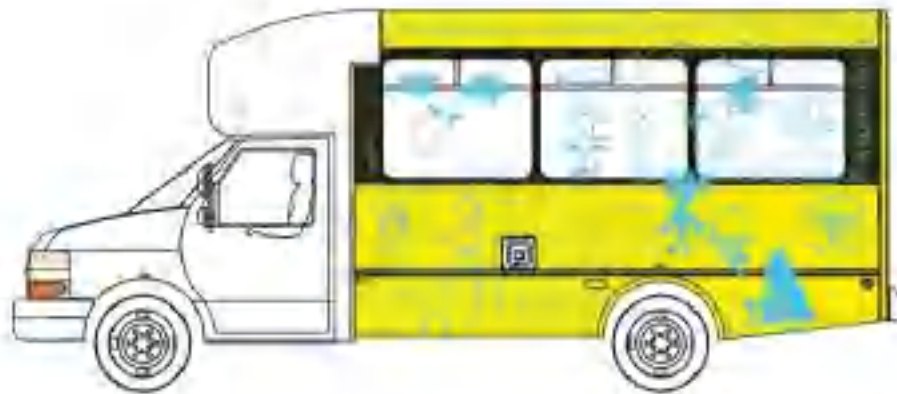
Bus Area:
119 sq. ft.

Address:
1317 S. Congress Ave.
Austin, TX



Austin Bat Cave

Austin, TX



(Previous) Austin is home to the largest urban bat colony in the world, inspiring the theme of Austin Bat Cave. (Above) The Bat Mobile is a classroom that travels.

How did Austin Bat Cave get into the space at Warby Parker?

Austin Bat Cave and Warby Parker have long been buddies, dating back to Warby Parker's Class Trip in 2012, where they drove across the country in a bus-turned-library. When they launched their first brick-and-mortar location in Austin, they reached out to us and asked if we would like to join them in residence. The idea was that the space in the back would be reserved for the Bat Cave, where we could hold writing workshops for kids as well as weekly staff meetings. Warby Parker's Creative Director, Matt Singer, and Senior Brand Manager Ruby Noren collaborated with Austin Bat Cave's team on the design of the classroom. They provided custom frames to display Austin Bat Cave's anthologies over the years and furnished the space with desks and chairs for our workshop. We rearrange the tables and chairs for board meetings and set the room up differently when we host summer camps for kids. We added some of our own flourishes, including a pencil dispenser that takes quarters and pops out a pencil with a quote from a Bat Cave student.

What kinds of programs do you offer?

We typically host weekend workshops and a half a dozen summer camps at our space. This year we partnered with

Speak Piece to host a series of slam poetry and speech-writing workshops for high school students with the goal of engaging and activating young people to write on topics surrounding local and national issues and testifying at city hall in front of the legislature. We have also hosted free weeklong summer writing camps including Post-Apocalyptic, Magical Realism, Podcast Writing, Dungeons & Dragons, Mystery & Thriller, and more.

In 2018, we launched adult writing classes as a way to subsidize and support the free writing programs for kids. Classes are one- or two-day workshops for fifteen students and taught by published authors. In October, Karen Russell taught a master class in fiction on metamorphoses. Students responded to prompts and wrote short pieces during the class, which we collected and Karen edited into a small chapbook that we published.

How has the Austin community reacted to what you're offering?

Austin Bat Cave is a creative community in that we are a resource not only for our young writers but also for the adults in our city. We support the artists in Austin by providing training in education, opportunities for publication, platforms to tell their stories, and a fulfilling way to

give back to students through our engaging and creative programming. Most people say that they love coming back to Austin Bat Cave because we will do whatever it takes to make something happen. Sometimes that means putting together a rock opera at an elementary school or bringing in musicians like Thor Harris and Amanda Palmer to help us put together an album of songs written by kids. Because of the way we nourish and support the creative community in Austin and connect them to our young writers, we're a popular group in this city! Our DIY attitude and dogged determination remind folks of an original Austin energy.

How do you bring in funding to support your programs?

Find creative ways to generate revenue by leveraging your connections. Austin Bat Cave is fortunate in that we are connected by proximity to two amazing MFA programs (University of Texas at Austin's Michener Center and Texas State University). We boast a lot of friendships with and relationships to many of the talented local writers, so we turned that into the adult writing classes to generate a fair bit of revenue. And we always have new writers visiting town! That creative use of space—so long as it remains true to your organization's identity, mission, and values—helps raise your profile in the community and brings in new people to the organization.

The ABC Bat Mobile: transporting students with language.

The rising cost of living in Austin is pushing low-income families away from the urban core and away from access to cultural arts programming such as the Austin Bat Cave. We really want our learning space to reflect the needs of the community it serves. We went to schools to talk with families and get their input. What did they want out of our programming? How could we best serve their needs? We realized that what we needed to do was take the classroom to the students and families. The Bat Mobile lifts the two primary barriers to access for families that we serve: transportation and cost. It serves as a moveable classroom and is outfitted with a book-making station, a library, a study nook, internet access, Chromebooks, desks, and a seating area. We want students to feel not only inspired, but also transported. When students step into our mobile classroom, we want them to feel like they're stepping into a dreamscape. On the outside, it looks like a bus, but we want from the moment they step inside for their expectations to be totally flipped. Less a classroom and more a dreamscape, our bus contains infinite possibilities and inspiration for writing. There are secret compartments. Grass covers one of the walls. Bookshelves run the length of the bus, and students can plop down on a beanbag and read an amazing story. They don't have to leave their neighborhood to find something magical; it lives on their school campus. It comes to them because they're worth the magic.



The inside of the bus was gutted to create the imaginative space it now houses.

Marilyse Figueroa, our mobile program manager, was inspired by Michel Gondry's movie *The Science of Sleep* and his use of recycled materials to create little worlds on the bus (cellophane oceans, cotton-ball clouds, etc). We were also inspired by the 826 model of providing a whimsical entrance to our writing classroom as a way of getting kids excited about the possibilities of our tutoring center. Our wonderful design company, Lewis Carnegie, designed the exterior wrap of the bus. It was really important that we work with people who were familiar with working in and maximizing small spaces. Soma Small Spaces is a husband-and-wife team that transforms Airstreams and RVs into living spaces. We reached out to them to help us build out and design the interior. We don't envision the Bat Mobile as a stationary space, so we expect regular maintenance. To minimize these costs, however, the bus has monthlong residencies at different schools. This way, we can create meaningful long-term relationships with students and keep the mileage to a minimum. We partnered with the Mexic-Arte Museum, whose mission is to enrich and educate the community through the presentation and promotion of traditional and contemporary Mexican and Latinx art and culture. One of our core beliefs is that our community's strength comes from collaboration. Partnerships are crucial, not only in the planning and design but also in the implementation of this idea. ●

DEMN-C



AUSTIN

PAY LAVE

LNT-9583

**FIGHTING
WORDS**

FIGHTING WORDS
THE WRITE TO RIGHT



Fighting Words

RDS

ENT

Established:
2008

Designer:
Grafton
Architects

Area:
2,346 sq. ft.

Address:
12-16 Russell St.
Dublin 1, Ireland

TOUR SECURITY
007 2532714



Dublin, Ireland



(Previous) Students being ushered into the creative learning zone of Fighting Words. (Top left) The bright and cheery writing space includes tables with letters for legs. (Top right) Kids actively engage with tutors in the first steps of starting a new story. (Middle) Students vote on topics, with the opportunity to use their voices in multiple ways at workshops. (Lower left) A bookcase magically pulls away from the wall to reveal a hidden passage to the writer's room. (Lower right) A roomful of excited students participate in a collaborative workshop.



What was the vision for Fighting Words?

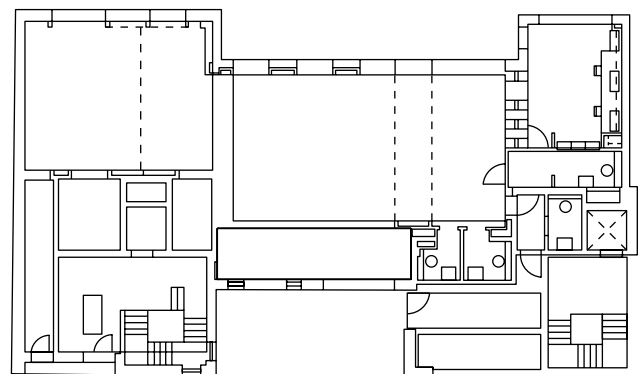
We wanted to create a bright, welcoming atmosphere that was full of color and light to spark imaginations and inspire creativity. Our aim was to create a space where children and young people felt free to try something new, with magical touches (both big and small) that make the center feel special and separate from the everyday.

What inspired this center?

We were inspired by a number of things: a reaction to our surroundings—creating something fresh and bright and unexpected in an older city neighborhood. We were inspired by the colors of the books on our shelves—books from all genres and for all ages. We were inspired by the light that floods the back wall of the center—the light in Ireland is particularly magical. Our back wall is essentially a glass wall of full-length windows and doors to our patio area to let in the light. It changes every day with every season.

Who designed and built the space?

The initial design of the center was by Grafton Architects, an award-winning firm based in Dublin. Grafton provided their design services at a discounted rate. They designed our magic doors (the big and small revolving bookcases which link reception to the main room), our magic wall (with shelves and doors in the shape of the letters F and W), and tables in the shapes of all of the letters of the alphabet. This initial design has been expanded over the years by our volunteer tutor team, who designed our patio garden and painted both our front door and back patio wall. Other services were provided for free or at cost. Some people donated plants and pots for the patio, others helped with painting—Fighting Words supplied the paint and the painters donated their time. What we have learned is that with about four hundred people registered in our database, either someone we know can provide what we need to maintain the center at a low cost or for free, or they know someone else who can. Fighting Words is a place that is deeply valued by our volunteer team, so everyone is always happy to help. The overall effect of the collaborative design is commented on almost daily by the young people and teachers who visit our center. ●



**916
ink**

Established:
2011

Designers:
Kerri Warner, Katie
McCleary, and Angela
Tannehill

Area:
2,985 sq. ft.

Address:
3301 37th Ave
Room 15
Sacramento, CA



916 Ink

Sacramento, CA



By bringing the outside indoors and using whimsical décor to create a wondrous space, imaginations are sparked and curiosity is ignited.



The ever-vigilant Mistah Complaina holds court from a high corner.

What does 916 Ink do to serve Sacramento's community of young writers?

The Imaginarium is a creative writing palace that transports Sacramento youth into creativity. The design of the room balances the need to take youth out of their everyday environment with the need for young writers to simultaneously see themselves within the space. By bringing the outside indoors and using whimsical décor to create a wondrous space, imaginations are sparked and curiosity is ignited. Pictures of youth authors are displayed on the walls alongside inspirational quotes to draw in young writers, allowing them to feel that they belong. The enlarged resin images of well-known authors like Sandra Cisneros and Jaqueline Woodson on the outside of the building show off various cultures and literary genres. This display of representation is an important factor in welcoming youth into the space. Inside, our prompt wall serves the dual purposes of fantasy and relatability. Tangible prompts kept in interesting jars, tins, and suitcases are used to kindle inspiration during writing workshops. The prompt wall is meant for a writer to easily grab an object, something either familiar or foreign, and use it to guide their writing process. The accessibility of the prompts is as important as the accessibility of the location, which was purposely set in South Sacramento

to be central to the low-income families 916 Ink aims to serve.

How does the Imaginarium's structure reflect its purpose?

The layout of the Imaginarium was designed to unfold the 916 Ink method of writing as you walk through it. You begin where imagination is sparked and writing begins, at a large bookcase filled with our library of various objects, images, and books used for writing prompts. Next, a display of framed phrases shows off positive feedback and establishes the guidelines that are expected during the sharing portion of the workshop. A display of vintage typewriters surrounding a sculpture of our fictional publisher, Mistah Complaina, represents the revision stage, while a spread of over one hundred anthologies concludes the tour, just as publishing is the final stage of a 916 Ink workshop.

How did you create this literary-steampunk wonderland and the story behind it?

Inspiration came from a mix of ideas generated by Sacramento artists Kerri Warner and Angela Tannehill and some Pinterest boards shared by 916 Ink's former executive director, Katie McCleary. We knew that we needed one main artist and one creative designer whose collaboration would translate into the design. Since our graphic designer, Angela Tannehill, is also a collagist and visual artist, she was brought in for consultation about our branding and style. Tannehill instantly vibed with our lead artist, Kerri Warner, which aided in bringing the waterfall of ideas to life. A mix of steampunk and literature was decided upon as a theme to send youth down the rabbit hole of whimsy and words. Paper trees stacked on top of piles of books, fluffy clouds in a serene light-blue sky, and other green spaces on the wall were intended to lighten the effect of the steampunk and other hard-edge décor. The idea for our fictional

publisher Mistah Complaina was inspired by 826 Valencia's Mr. Blue, a voice that lives in their attic and serves as the editor for their field trip zine production. For Mistah Complaina, however, we wanted to give him his own life, form, and personality for our own editorial intentions.

Was it difficult to make the Imaginarium work financially?

The Imaginarium came to life after we applied for the Inspire Giving grant through the Sacramento Metro Chamber of Commerce (SMCC), where we landed in the top three. In our presentation, we requested their help and were awarded \$10,000. We were provided a team of small-business owners and various community members who wanted to pitch in. Over the course of a year, we used the money to remodel the space. About \$93,000 of in-kind services and donations were also received to complete the project. However, time and money ran out before the project had been completed, so we applied for another grant available from SMCC geared for arts facilities. This granted us another \$20,000 to completely finish the flooring, add the sculptural paper trees, develop the Writer's Garden, and acquire a wireless projector for all classroom and events needs. Our advice: don't give up on saying, "YES, this is going to work!" over and over again. It's difficult to

pitch a nineteen-hundred-square-foot shut-down school building that hasn't been used for seven years and expect others to see your vision. But if you believe in it, they will too.

Inspiration through art and nature.

While various other local artists took on small projects, like putting together a wall of origami books and assisting with small painting projects, Kerri Warner continued to be the leading force in bringing our Imaginarium to life. She served as lead of the external creative elements for the space as well, including the exterior enlarged resin images of authors and the Writer's Garden, an outdoor extension to the Imaginarium. This outdoor space allows writers to become further inspired by the fresh vegetables growing in the garden, the cool breeze, and the vintage typewriters that serve as décor, among other artistic elements. Warner's contributions to the garden include an oversized mixed-media bee sculpture, a wooden footbridge, and an impressive mixed-media mosaic depicting *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland's* White Rabbit drifting off into his rabbit hole. This captivating piece of art is made up of a collection of tiles, gems, buttons, and vintage teacups, and serves as an attractive centerpiece to the Writer's Garden. ●



916 Ink's writing-prompt wall serves the dual purposes of fantasy and relatability.



(Top left) Décor inspiration came from a mix of ideas generated by local Sacramento artists Kerri Warner and Angela Tannehill. (Bottom right) Books have been transformed into art objects of inspiration. (Bottom left) Metal birdcages overhead house metaphorical ideas, waiting to take flight.



intergalactic
spaceport
& emporium
Tulsa, OK, USA Earth



Tulsa Library
Intergalactic Spaceport & Emporium

Established:
2012

Designer:
Tulsa Library
public relations
team

Area:
1,600 sq. ft.

Address:
400 Civic Center
Tulsa, OK



Tulsa, OK



Canned Gravity is the store's most popular item.

What is the objective of your educational space?

Tulsa City County Library wanted a creative writing center that included a retail space designed to inspire creativity in students. The Intergalactic Spaceport & Emporium (ISE) is a learning center dedicated to supporting students ages six to eighteen with their creative and expository writing skills. We also aim to help teachers inspire their students to write with unusual products selected to inspire out-of-the-box thinking. The most important aspect of the ISE is to encourage and develop creativity in young people through one-to-one homework sessions and group writing workshops. ISE programs are challenging and enjoyable and ultimately strengthen each student's power to express ideas effectively, creatively, and confidently.

How did you go about bringing outer space down to Earth?

The interesting thing about outer space is that we have photos and, of course, astronauts have gone, but the average person will never get to visit. One of the things we really wanted to do was to use every inch of our space: the walls, the ceilings, the floors, so that wherever the student looked, they would be sparked by creativity. The Intergalactic Spaceport & Emporium name itself naturally lends itself to inspiring what the rest of the room would look like. We wanted to create the feeling of being in a spaceship, so we designed around that and got creative with the interpretation of what space would look like. And because the writing center was designed imaginatively, it naturally evokes imagination from those who participate in the program.

Where did the notion of a cosmic theme come from?

We initially did not have a theme. We partnered with the Junior League of Tulsa and asked them to pitch us a few ideas

based on the 826 model. We actually sent a few people from the Junior League to an 826 program; some went to San Francisco and one went to New York, and one woman knew about 826 before she participated in this project with us. So, they pitched us a few ideas based on the whimsical model and the spaceport caught our interest. There was one concept centered around flight and airplanes and we thought that was kind of routine—there wasn't anything special about that. But a spaceport? You won't find that any other place. We thought that was unique enough to capture the attention of both the kids and their parents. We also knew that part of what 826 features is a storefront, and with the space theme there were lots of options for us to bring in that retail component.

Who designed and built this space?

Everything was done in-house for the space, everything you see. Our public relations team of six people served as our design team. We put together some concepts and showed them to the library's leadership and the Junior League of Tulsa and then we actually went about creating the space. We initially were going to have an off-site center, but we realized that we couldn't duplicate the number of people that come to our library at an off-site location. The best thing for us to do was to use the library's natural foot traffic and to make the ISE a feature point in the library. After ordering materials, the whole process was done in about a week's time. The entire public relations team spent a whole week in that space, putting it together and installing everything. It was done over the holidays when a lot of people weren't in the building, so we had the space mostly to ourselves. We painted on a Friday so it had time to dry over the weekend and then the following Monday we started installing everything.

So, for example, the giant mural on the wall—we ordered that and then we installed it, which was actually



The Intergalactic Spaceport & Emporium provides Tulsa with a one-stop shop for your space-faring needs.



The writing center is one small step from the rest of the library.

much more difficult than you might think. We had two people on a ladder, one person on the floor, and one person with a squeegee getting rid of the bubbles. The stars that hang from the ceiling were individually cut by a plastics company that the library has worked with before. They cut out those stars for us—more than three hundred of them—and we went out in the parking lot, spray-painted them, strung each one with fishing line, attached adhesive, and hung them. One person stood on a ladder and there was a chain of people

passing the stars along—string the line, attach the star, hang the star. Then one person at the bottom would point out any areas that needed more stars. We individually did all of the pieces in the space and it was really a team-building exercise for us.

How did you avoid astronomical costs?

Doing everything in-house was instrumental to keeping costs down. We have an incredible team here and access to a lot of inventory. We also have a printing press here, too, so we

were able to use that. For things like the vinyl and the mural, we shopped around the field for good prices and then saved money by installing them ourselves. We used a vendor that we were already familiar with to make the stars. It was really the in-house design and manual labor that helped us stick to a budget. It was a really good decision for us to build the space on-site in the library as well. People who didn't know about the space would just stumble onto the fact that we have this writing center available.

What has been the public's reaction to your writing center?

People love it! We get so many compliments. Mainly, visitors just think it's a beautiful space and it sparks imagination. It's meant to be a creative writing area and it lends itself to that naturally. The parents are grateful; it's difficult to find a space like we have. Similar to what 826 has all around the country, we provide homework help at no cost here at the library. Parents would typically have to pay a tutor for the services they get here and we're just as effective. They really are grateful to have a place to come that is as exciting a space as ours and is also a free service to them.

What items could an aspiring astronaut purchase from your store?

The point of the retail part is to get the students excited about the space and to inspire curiosity and creativity. The Canned Gravity is a favorite because who would think you could actually purchase something intangible? But it's something you will need if you go into outer space. The canned gravity was designed in-house by the PR team, and if we sold nothing else, it would just be the gravity. We have other space-like things like marbles, T-shirts, NASA posters, and socks with a galaxy print of the planets on them. We also have puzzles, games, a miniature wind-up robot, and, of course, books. ●



8-2-6-----
M-I-C-H-I-G-A-N

D-E-T-R-O-I-T--
R-O-B-O-T-----
F-A-C-T-O-R-Y--

Established:
2016

Designers:
Tobey Albright,
Mollie Edgar, and
Amy Sumerton

Area:
1,500 sq. ft.

Address:
1351 Winder St.
Detroit, MI

826michigan: Detroit

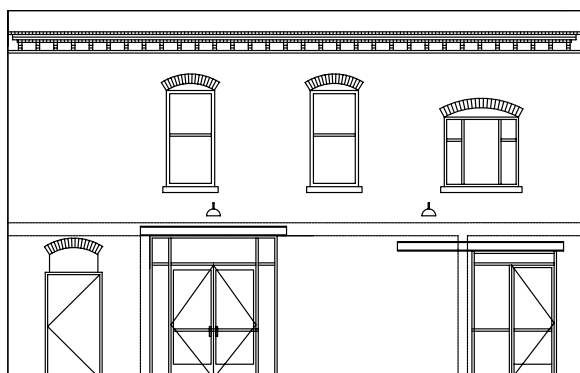
Detroit, MI



The Detroit Robot Factory features a book vending machine. When a lever is pulled, student publications drop down a slide, over a large wheel, and onto the cash register.



A commanding staircase leads from the store to the writing lab.



The center occupies a former slaughterhouse, but now regularly welcomes vegans.

What's the history of 826michigan?

In our original Ann Arbor store, in 2005, we were located in the basement of an industrial complex, and we had the Monster Union, Local 826, which seemed fitting for our location. The space was labyrinthine, with lots of hallways and small rooms. We painted them all differently—teal and light blue stripes in the lab, pink polka dots on the ceiling of the copy room. We had a really cool typographical mural on the main hallway. We also had the Inspiration Room, where students could go if they didn't know what to write about. It was painted lime green and we glued old toys and record covers and all manner of other weird stuff all over the walls. There was a form you could fill out if you wanted to submit an item for the wall. It was a huge hit, but over time—especially if the door was closed for too long—it smelled terrible.

In 2007, we moved to downtown Ann Arbor and decided the monsters were on strike because they didn't want to move, and so there was a robot takeover. The initial idea for the new location was a robot apothecary. We thought the idea of an old-timey robot shop was inherently funny, and it matched the area of town we were in, and some businesses that had previously been in the space. Furthermore, all of our furniture from the original location was mismatched stuff we got at resale shops, so the aesthetic sort of worked.

D-E-T-R-O-I-T-
R-O-B-O-T-
F-A-C-T-O-R-Y-

1352







The Detroit Robot Factory sells student publications as well as whatever supplies a robot may need in order to work at its highest capacity.

The centerpiece was an old glass-and-wood display case from the 1920s which definitely felt like it belonged in an old-time department store or druggist. It had a terrifying, vintage electrical setup with bulbs to illuminate the goods in the case. You can imagine it filled with watches or tinctures or other turn-of-the-century fare, which is why we enjoyed displaying cans of WD-40 and Pennzoil in it. The display case was heavy and cumbersome. It ultimately took up too much of our limited space and we got rid of it to make room and to better fit the more streamlined aesthetic we developed.

In 2016, we opened a second location in Detroit's Eastern Market. The store was small, but with very high ceilings. We opted for a sort of futuristic, *2001* vibe (funny putting those two things next to each other, but it's an aesthetic for sure!)—clean, white, technologically advanced (also funny, because we're not really that tech-savvy). We have a huge book vending machine created by Detroit artist Juan Martinez, and large touch screens. Overall, we looked for inspiration from apothecaries, art museums, *2001*, movie theaters, and other 826 stores. The look and feel of both stores has changed several times over the last few years. ●



An animal-themed robo-bike, constructed by artist Juan Martinez.



The staircase leads to the tutoring center, past the book-delivery waterwheel.



These students get from school to 826michigan via bison-bike.



A parent sees her daughter's writing in a book for the first time.



Student writing is regularly celebrated at book readings.



Book releases are enthusiastic, joyous, and frequent.



A reading is a great place to get your book signed by the student-authors.

**A Note from
an
826michigan
Parent**

My eleven-year-old daughter Lucie and I were in one of our favorite local restaurants. They happened to have a copy of *Where is it Coming From?* [a book of stories written by 826michigan students] in their waiting area. Lucie noticed that one young couple took it with them to their table and were reading and laughing—clearly enjoying the stories. I suggested to Lucie that she go and introduce herself. To my shock, she actually did. They had a great exchange and Lucie showed them the story she had helped write, “The Wondrous Man.”

A while later, our waiter came by and dropped off a note from the couple, who’d left. In the note, they expressed how much they enjoyed the book and were honored to meet one of the authors and to hear about the school. And they’d paid for our meal!

It was a lovely exchange and made Lucie feel very special for being part of something that brings others so much joy.

Love,
Julia



BETTER BOT'S
Exclusive Midwest Distribution of
BETTER BOT'S BRAND PARIS

Ask Us
ABOUT OUR ROBOT RETIRING
and RECYCLING PROGRAM

FULL SERVICE
ROBOT
SUPPLY & REPAIR
While you wait!

ARE YOU PLAYING THE SUMMER GAME @ THE ANN ARBOR DISTRICT LIBRARY? It's the biggest game in town for KIDS, TEENS and ADULTS and it's FREE! ALL SUMMER LONG!

Collect our game codes all over town - the game codes are points - then spend the points on cool library branded stuff and special from Board and Arbor Tea blends by our online shop!

826michigan:
Ann Arbor
& Ypsilanti

Established:
2005

Designers:
Mollie Edgar,
C. Jason DePasquale,
and Amy Sumerton

Area:
1,700 sq. ft.

Address:
115 E. Liberty St.
Ann Arbor, MI



Ann Arbor & Ypsilanti, MI



Ann Arbor's Robot Supply & Repair has a collection of zany robot-related products, from robot cough syrup to additional torque.



Come here if you know (or are) a robot who needs gear grease or extra horsepower.

What were your creative team and budget like?

It changed so much over time! In the early days of the second Ann Arbor and the first Detroit location, we had a small store team of creative types and designers around. At various times Jason DePasquale, Mollie Edgar, Oliver Uberti, and a cast of many, many others were deeply involved. For most of 826michigan's history the primary creative (and every other) force behind the stores in Ann Arbor and Detroit was Program Director Amy Sumerton, who somehow managed to keep tutoring and in-school programs churning along while directing the creation and operation of two retail stores.

Because we never had as much money as we wished for these endeavors, Amy performed her own kind of alchemy, taking everyone's creative ideas and her own and making them come to life on limited funds. (The first robot shop was opened for under five thousand dollars, including furnishings and products!)

How do you want visitors to experience your stores?

The students come first, and one of the stores' primary goals is helping students feel at ease and feel excited about being there. When students enter the Detroit store, they look up to the very high ceiling and the glass walls



Ann Arbor's only authorized seller of Better Bot products.



A humanoid sales representative and his mechanical shift supervisor.



Artist-designed robots fill the storefront.



Bots repaired while you wait.



Students react as they see the book they're published in for the first time.



The shop services models like this 1932 Electro-Tech-Lectronic.



A curtain divides the store space from the tutoring space.



The writing lab offers plenty of space to read, write, or repair a robot.



Robots and student writing fill the space.



These complicated-looking machines help the process of robot repair.



Countless cardboard boxes and industrial tubes have been repurposed as robot costumes over the years.

of the writing lab upstairs. Early on in our renovation of an 1880s produce warehouse in Detroit’s Eastern Market neighborhood, we made a decision to follow our architect’s bold plan to cut an enormous hole in the first-floor ceiling. This gives visitors an immediate sense of the scope of the space and its real purpose—student writing—upstairs. We believe it’s important for a young writer to not just be told that their words and ideas are important, but also to feel that message by entering a bold, grand space and feeling welcome there.

In Ann Arbor, it’s always been the same. There’s a lot of foot traffic on that block of Liberty Street and people walk by constantly. Passersby are very likely to stride down the sidewalk and then stop about halfway past the next storefront and come back. “What is this place, really?” they ask. In a town with a lot of visitors, the store has never stopped catching people every day in the perfect moment of curiosity and openness—which is, of course, how we hope our students will enter the space as well.

The second most common question we receive is usually delivered by a harried person who has little to no interest

in our spiel and wants a quick answer to “Do you repair roombas?” We don’t, in fact, repair robot vacuum cleaners, but we’ve learned there’s a real market for that in Ann Arbor, at least.

What do visitors do in your space?

In Detroit, they can approach the book vending machine and receive a student-written publication. It’s massive, and it gives a sense of gravitas to the very important act of buying a book written by young people.

In Ann Arbor, there’s a five-foot-tall robot sculpture, built by Elaine Reed, which cycles through the photos of dozens of third-grade students who attended a field trip at 826michigan. Every few minutes, the robot repeats pi to about twenty digits. Volunteer in the store long enough and you will memorize that number and cease to hear it. But for first-time visitors, it’s a little jarring and a nice segue into our mission. Anyone can stop the repeating pi by making a donation of cash or coins into the robot, at which point it delivers an electronic burp and, if you’re lucky, the theme from *The Price is Right*. ●



1

JOINT LUBRICANT

Designer: Oliver Uberti
Writers: Oliver Uberti, Amy Sumerton, and C. Jason DePasquale

Squeaks and jerky motion begone! Our joint lubricant is the best on the market for smooth locomotion and will leave any robot running like the latest model.

2

ALL-PURPOSE OIL

Designer: Oliver Uberti
Writers: Oliver Uberti, Amy Sumerton, and C. Jason DePasquale

Nothing feels better than a well-oiled machine. This all-purpose oil is perfect for the resourceful robot—internal combustion will be firing on all cylinders with just a small amount of this high-quality lubricant.

3

HORSEPOWER

Designer: Oliver Uberti
Writers: Oliver Uberti, Amy Sumerton, and C. Jason DePasquale

The ultimate bot operates with strength and speed, and the key to both of those qualities is high horsepower. Feed your machine with our custom horsepower blend for improved qualities and peak performance.

4

ALIGNMENT

Designer: Oliver Uberti
Writers: Oliver Uberti, Amy Sumerton, and C. Jason DePasquale

Frequent maintenance is paramount to a machine's performance. Restoring your robot's wheels and bearings to their ideal relative positions ensures accurate, efficient motion and streamlined task execution. Purchase our Alignment to assure top bot functionality.



5

INERTIA

Designer: Oliver Uberti
Writers: Oliver Uberti, Amy Sumerton, and C. Jason DePasquale

The perfect staying power to keep your resting bot at rest or your working bot at work. Our Inertia is a topical applicant field-tested for absolute adherence to Newton's first law of motion.

6

GEAR GREASE

Designer: Oliver Uberti
Writers: Oliver Uberti, Amy Sumerton, and C. Jason DePasquale

Fluid lubricant designed to grease up a robot's intricate inner workings. Locomotive gears control an android's entire existence—will maintain any bot's most important features by assuring quality performance of its basic components.

7

TORQUE

Designer: Oliver Uberti
Writers: Oliver Uberti, Amy Sumerton, and C. Jason DePasquale

Designed for precise movement, adding torque to your machine ensures accurate on-a-dime twists and turns. Additive torque is a necessity for bots working in tight spaces on tasks that require absolute exactitude.

8

ACCELERATION

Designer: Oliver Uberti
Writers: Oliver Uberti, Amy Sumerton, and C. Jason DePasquale

One hundred percent inorganic fast food for robots. This canned acceleration will have your bot running at top speed for jobs that require expediency. Available in acidic, basic, and balanced flavors for even the pickiest cyborg.

RAWK

Established:
2012

Designers:
Peter Brakeman,
Anne Hensley,
Chafe Hensley,
and Emmy Kastner

Area:
1,545 sq. ft.

Address:
802 S. Westnedge Ave.
Kalamazoo, MI

Read and Write Kalamazoo

Kalamazoo, MI



Students eager to rawk, roll, and/or some combination of the two.



RAWK's storefront sells goods relating to rocks, rock and roll, and writing.

What were your goals in creating Read and Write Kalamazoo?

We wanted to create a space that would pique interest, inspire curiosity, inform collaboration, and that could break down the barriers so many students have that keep them from writing. We were talking about what features our space would have before we really started to work through how we were going to make this writing center happen logistically. Every conversation was punctuated with, "... and we'll have a secret bookshelf door between the storefront and writing center." We started small as an organization, living a nomadic existence moving around in borrowed spaces: our small neighborhood association, libraries, and a temporary home in a shared creative space. Throughout those first six years, the creative space and forever home we dreamt of was our guiding star, and we were always working toward that vision. RAWK was founded on four pillars—joy, creativity, equity, and access. We wanted our programming and space to reflect that with every detail. We envisioned people swarming into the store, desperate to figure out what we were all about and how they could get involved.



Students break down the lyrics of “Like a Rolling Stone” from both a geological and a musical standpoint.

How did you decide on the theme and décor of the space?

We wanted our name to reflect what we do. Once we landed on it and started calling ourselves RAWK, some kind of rock theme seemed most appropriate. We went for it, embracing all things that rock. Since our name is RAWK, we thought it fitting to incorporate themes of music (i.e., RAWK n Roll), and rocks, of course. This led to the intentional mouthful that is the name of our storefront—the Geological and Musicological Survey Co. Imagine a musical hall of fame colliding into a geological survey headquarters and you’ll see our storefront and writing center. There’s a real natural-history-museum-meets-music-hall-of-fame-gift-shop-meets-geological-survey-headquarters vibe throughout the store and in the writing center. Having lived near 826 Valencia and, later, attended the 101 seminar at 826NYC, we were inspired by the many ways visitors and students were encouraged to interact with their respective spaces. We acquired an organ and other instruments that live all over the store. We filled drawers with rocks and minerals and magnifying glasses. We tapped local artists to create fake concert posters to decorate the space with. Even our wallpaper, a collage of old sheet music and geological photos, encourages folks to spend extra time exploring the details.

What were the formative years of RAWK like?

Anne Hensley and Emmy Kastner co-founded RAWK, and for a very long time it was just the two of them writing grants, marketing, designing and implementing programming, and recruiting volunteers to help. It would’ve been wonderful to have launched RAWK fully formed with programs, staff, and a cool home from the very beginning, but our growth was sustainable and strategic as we acquired and developed organizational resources. We formed a board of advisors, then our founding board of directors, then our small part-time staff, all the while slowly growing a volunteer base. Every new person brought a wide array of new skills to the table. Throughout these early years we were able to mine creative ideas and inspiration from our students, our volunteers, and our programs. Our path was unique, and it was by doing the work and defining ourselves as an organization that we discovered who we wanted to be.

We knew that we weren’t always going to be running the organization, so laying a strong foundation of aesthetics from design on through to programming was essential. We set big goals to accomplish before we handed over the reins: free programming, a staff, and a home of our own.

From the beginning, Anne and Emmy, along with Chafe Hensley and Peter Brakeman, were the creative

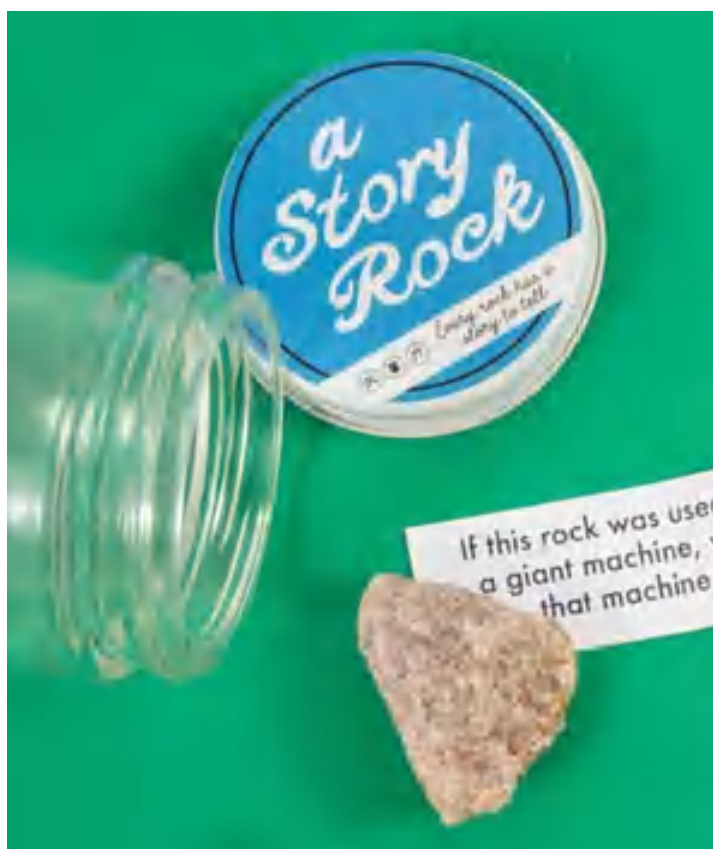


A little bad weather can't keep a good geologist/rock-and-roller down.



RAWK's acronym inspired its theme: rock and roll and geology...

team building the foundation of the organization's creative vision. While laying that groundwork, the design of everything was so important, from our logo to flyers, handouts, and student publications. We always had our eyes on the perfect location in our neighborhood that checked all the boxes—walking distance to schools, near a bus stop, high foot traffic, and beautiful storefront windows. We'd planned a staggered succession, and it was after Anne stepped down that our dream space became available. Emmy, our part-time staff, and our board of directors started piecing together a plan, really tapping into our community to make it happen. From then on it became of bit of a maniacal mastermind situation where Emmy worked as a creative tornado, growing our staff and figuring out how to raise the money for the build-out. Once we had the nest egg from a grant Anne wrote before she left, Emmy started designing merchandise, working with the contractor to design the space from scratch, seeking out décor, and ensuring the full creative vision we'd dreamt of could come to life. The staff and board of directors were actively building the space and raising funds. We enlisted local artists to do things like design our windows and wallpaper, and volunteers to build shelves and put furniture together. Ultimately, it was a team effort. ●



... which led to its storefront, the Geological and Musicological Survey Co.

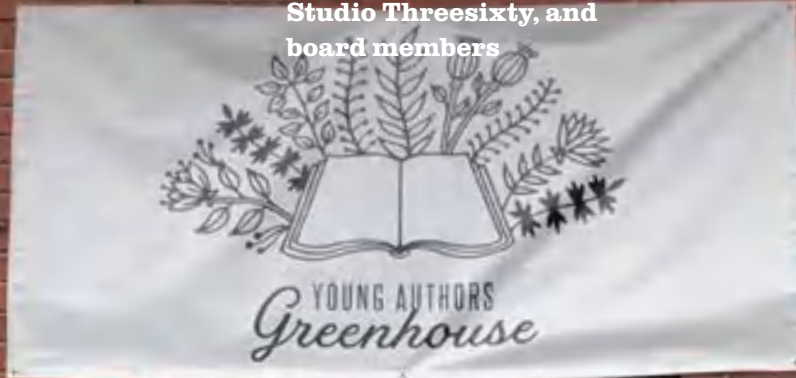


Established:
2017

Designer:
Jonathan Brannon, Lucas
Sweeten of Fresh Start
Builders, Bullhorn Creative,
Meghan Glasper Design,
Studio Threesixty, and
board members

Area:
1,100 sq. ft.

Address:
2509 Portland Ave.
Louisville, KY



Young Authors Greenhouse

Louisville, KY



(Opposite) A young author ready to bloom at the Greenhouse. (Above) The tutoring space is brand-new and ripe with potential.



A bright, open, serene tutoring space, full of warm wood and vibrant colors.

What effect did you want this space to have on its visitors?

We wanted to create an experience that both surprises and delights everyone who walks in. Our store, the Opposite Shop, is owned by fictional twins who inherited the store but disagree about everything. So, they split the store down the middle and have their very individual, very different stores: the Sea Monster Research Supply Store and the Airship Emporium.

We were inspired by Wes Anderson’s aesthetics with a steampunk vibe. But the fun thing is that we, like our students, used writing and imagination to inspire us. We wrote character bios for the twins and then imagined a space that reflected their personalities—left brain vs. right brain, fact vs. fiction, realist vs. dreamer, organized vs. haphazard. Visitors will feel the sparring and playful tension between the twins and the allure to participate in the story and ultimately choose a side. After all, isn’t everyone looking for sea monster research supplies or furnishings to make their airship a home?



Students get musical in a workshop with the help of musicians Tyrone Cotton and Jim James.



Happily, there's an antidote to the canned-gravity products on previous pages.



An actual hot-air-balloon basket resides in the Opposite Shop.

Who worked on bringing this space to life?

Our creative team was put together organically and is ever-changing. We started with our staff (which was only two at the time), a couple of board members, and one of our dedicated volunteers with an eye for design. We probably all seemed slightly maniacal because we'd sit in coffee shops and talk about sea monsters and airships and how our twins could play tricks on each other. We talked to artists, builders, and friends about what we had in mind—really, anyone who would listen. Creating the team and working toward our goal was its own kind of exploration and discovery, and sometimes it felt like we were the twins, pushing and tugging at ideas. We were really lucky to find Fresh Start Builders and Bullhorn Creative, who embraced the zaniness of the project and were always game for our last-minute lightbulb moments!

Do you have any advice for keeping costs low?

We had no idea what to budget, considering the categories of work involved in opening our space! We tried to break it down into manageable pieces. Here's how we cut costs along the way:

Look for affordable décor options from online retailers, at estate sales, at dollar stores, and at flea markets. We worked closely with a volunteer who stages for movies and homes for sale. She understood the vibe we wanted, which was absolutely crucial, and would keep an eye out for our center while hunting items for work. Some of the interactive elements of our space were created by volunteers who understood our vision and who had helpful skills in carpentry, engineering, or artistry. One volunteer had her own interior design company and was instrumental in bringing our space together.

Going-out-of-business sales have low-cost furniture and equipment—but try to be selective.

For merchandise, look for local T-shirt printers or companies that can print designs onto wholesale items.

Have donation bins at events for the organization—we were able to get journals, pens, and other small writing supplies this way.

Make an appeal on social media for local design companies to offer pro bono help making labels, or learn how to use Canva.com.

Find local artists on Instagram that you like and ask them if they'd be interested joining an art consultation committee for your center. And if they feel like they're a part of your community they're more likely to offer pro bono help. ●



Established:
2015

Designers:
Justin Carder and
Tavia Stewart

Area:
2,144 sq. ft.

Address:
2301 Telegraph Ave.
Oakland, CA



Chapter 510 & the Dept. of Make Believe

Oakland, CA



(Opposite) Students take the stage in the writing center. (Above) Painting inspires writing, and vice versa.



An intriguing name and a welcoming sign invite the community into the space.

What's the story behind the Dept. of Make Believe?

We wanted to create a magical portal through which our students and community could pass as they entered our writing center. The theme: a magical bureaucracy. The origin story: it was once a really boring bureaucracy (Bureaucracy A-Z: “Making the Boring More Boring since 2013”) until the workers revolted and marched for “more magic” and then struck a compromise with the city of Oakland to become a magical bureaucracy, thus changing their name to the Dept. of Make Believe and the meaning of the word *paperwork* to publishing books written by youth through Chapter 510. We wanted to inspire people to come in, feel first immersed in the bureaucracy, then see the magic, smile, and say (as they do 99.9 percent of the time), “What is this place?” Most of all, we wanted to create a space where everyone, no matter where you were from or how you identified, whether two or ninety-nine, could be welcomed in, licensed to dream, validated, and seen as the creative and brave humans they are.

How do you build a magical bureaucracy?

We started with the basics of your everyday bureau: boring office furniture, filing cabinets of all shapes and sizes,



"Paperwork" means publishing books at the Department of Make Believe.



The center was inspired by the city's history of resistance and pure magic.



The aesthetic is "dreams of a bureaucrat who has fallen asleep at their desk."

a complex bureau directory, a number-taking system, forms in triplicate. Layered on top of and underneath the boring left over from the previous era is the magic. Furniture filled with sand and figurines to play with, permits to make believe filled out and filed on the ceiling, magical bureaus, weird products to help you dream, and, of course, books written by our students and by authors our kids know and love.

What sources inspired Chapter 510's magic?

Inspiration came from many places, including magical realism in books and film. Absurdism, Fluxus, Dada, and the sincere art of Susan O'Malley were also inspirations, as well as *Harry Potter*, which nails the magical bureaucracy. But Oakland, of course, was the biggest inspiration. We wanted to bring in the magic of our flagship magical

storybook theme park, Fairyland, and our city's history and culture of being anti-establishment, resistant, and pure magic.

Who helped create this store and tutoring center?

The idea was originally hatched by the two co-founders, Janet Heller and Tavia Stewart, in 2014. Like the big bang, it's hard to know the exact moment when we landed on the Dept. of Make Believe, but we were in the midst of our first Chapter 510 fundraising campaign, which was "Make Believe with Us." Soon after, the idea for the DMB was born, and we brought in the amazing local bookstore owner Justin Carder (one of the original creators of 826 Valencia's Pirate Store) to help us with our original design and product line. Justin also helped us organize a design party where we invited one hundred people from our community to ideate

with us for a night. Students, parents, teachers, designers, absurdists, and artists of all kinds worked in small groups to come up with all the things a magical bureaucracy may need. From that list we picked our favorite ideas and launched our first product line and set of interactives. This list still exists with ideas we hope to add in the future, like a set of pneumatic tubes to send wishes and donations into, a phone installation where you call into different bureaus to hear student poetry, and more.

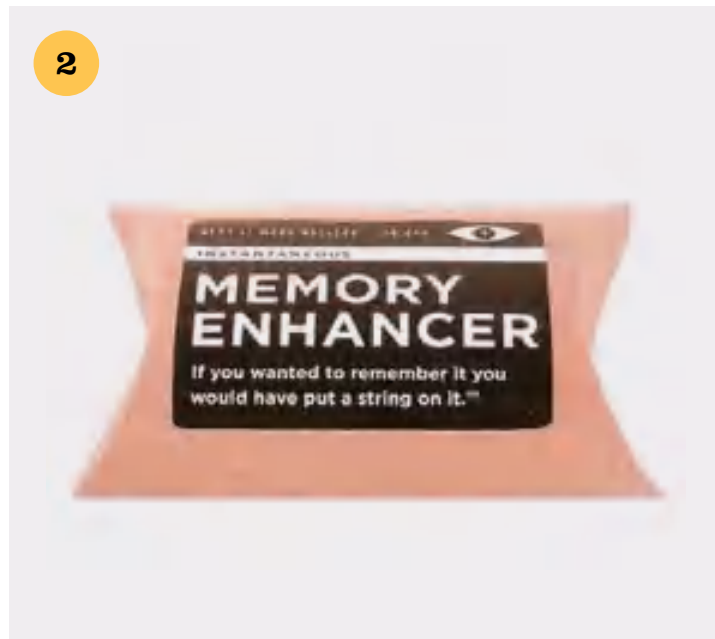
What was your budget for creating this space?

The original store cost us twenty thousand dollars! Not knowing much about building a retail store, we think this is shoestring budget. All of our furniture was donated by a Mercedes dealership upon being bought out. We scored all our old desks, filing cabinets, phones from the '80s, typewriters, and one surreal-looking cactus. Though we had all our clothes and posters professionally printed, all the other products we made in-house. Justin Carder donated endless hours of design work. We leased a printer from a local office-equipment company, bought a case or two of glue sticks, and went to town. We ordered most of

our jars, tubes, and other packaging from Uline, and had many volunteers assemble our products before the launch. In sum: donated furniture + Uline catalogues + glue sticks + a leased printer + a twenty-thousand-dollar small-business loan = a store launch! Unless you are in a high-foot traffic neighborhood, keep your efforts in line with your income, and your expectations around money in check. The upkeep of a retail store is no joke, and selling concept items and shirts does not make it rain Earned Income. But what it does do, and does for us, is create wonder in each kid who enters Chapter 510 for a workshop or field trip, and wonder in those who enter once a month when we are open for Oakland's monthly First Fridays festival. Though we haven't hit our original sales goals, more than 80 percent of our volunteers have come through this portal in one way or another, and it's been a wonderful springboard for the vision of our entire writing center. It's a way to open the door to your community, welcome them in, and show them who you are, what you value, and how they can get involved. Most nonprofits exist only in office buildings and on websites. Having an open door is an amazing way to connect with your community and have them feel included in yours. ●



Chapter 510 scored its 1980s desks, filing cabinets, phones, and typewriters from a defunct Mercedes dealership, bringing this magical bureaucracy to life.



1

MAKE YOUR OWN FOIL HAT

Designer: Justin Carder

This hat is what your skull needs to keep out unwanted communications from ghosts, secret CIA radio stations tuned right at you, subliminal suggestions from in-laws, talking bushes, dogs, and more. Contains one piece of high-quality aluminum foil. Wrap it around your skull for maximum thought retention/deflection and maximum style.

2

MEMORY ENHANCER

Designer: Justin Carder

Each package contains one length of string. When you need to remember some important thing, think really hard about that thing and, while you're thinking about it, tie this string around your finger. Whenever you look at the string, you'll remember whatever it is you wanted to remember in the first place. Probably. It works most of the time.

3

WISH EXTENSION UNITS

Designer: Justin Carder

Fill up these patent-pending wish extension units for maximum wishes next time you go through a tunnel.

Warning: Wishing for more wishes is almost always a risky move. Use with caution.

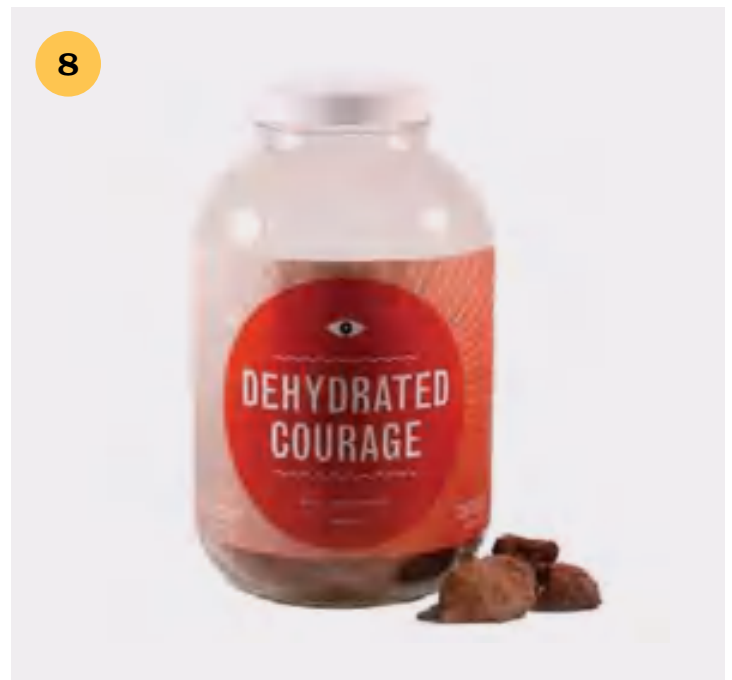
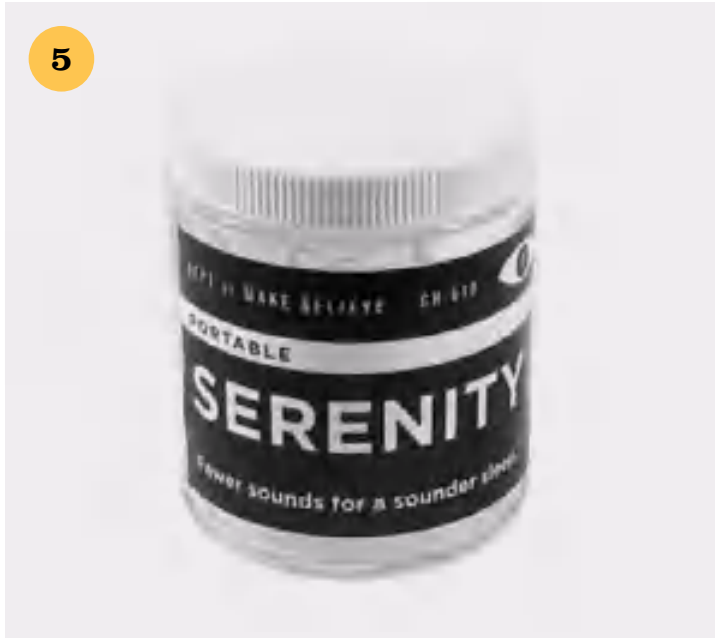
4

INSPIRATION

Designer: Justin Carder

For use in trying to:

- Build a better mousetrap
- Reinvent the wheel
- Build... a mousetrap... on wheels!
- Yes! Mousetrap on wheels!
- Yes! Yes! Yes!
- Someone write that down



5

PORTABLE SERENITY

Designer: Justin Carder

Open up our portable serenity for enough sounds for a sounder sleep.

Note: Portable serenity contains fewer serene sounds than the regular-sized version.

6

PROCRASTINATION

Designer: Justin Carder

Got a big deadline and no inspiration? It is clearly time to clean the house! And organize all those old photos and the sock drawer, of course, and there's all those emails, and shows to catch up on, and...

7

FORT ROOF

Designer: Justin Carder

Things you can do in this fort: you can read books, or watch movies, or make secret plans. You can hide out, space out, scheme, plot, connive, revive, take some you time, spend some time with your cat, meditate, nap, whisper, stage whisper, and more.

8

DEHYDRATED COURAGE

Designer: Justin Carder

In case of crisis, just add water for instant courage. Best of luck to you.



Established:
2010

Designer:
Charles Jones
of ONE to ONE
Design

Area:
4,400 sq. ft.

Address:
1750 St. Bernard Ave.
New Orleans, LA

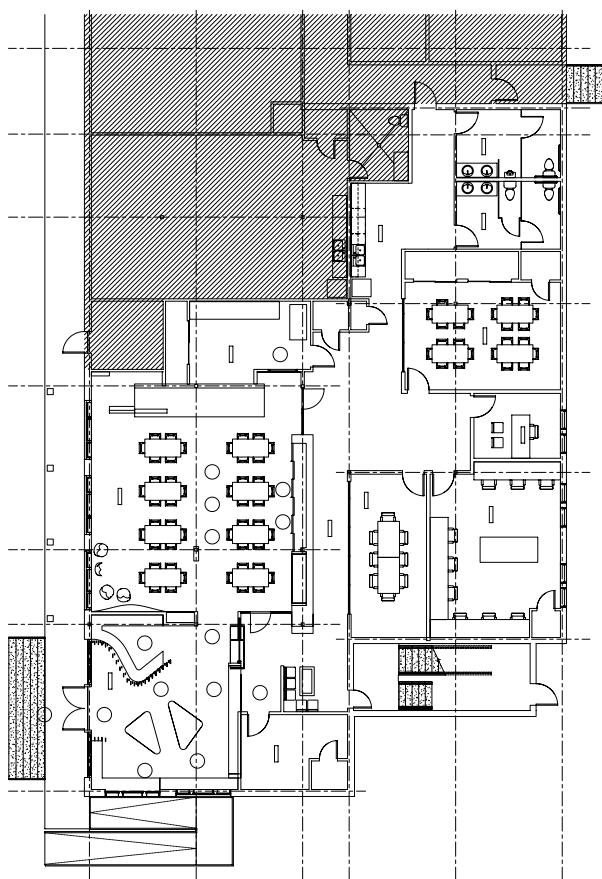
826 New Orleans



New Orleans, LA



The Haunting Supply Co. sells apparel and goods for ghoulish creatures.



Haunted architectural rendering by Charles Jones of ONE to ONE Design.

How did the 826 New Orleans youth writing center come to be?

We were originally a classroom project. We wanted to get students excited about writing and to widen the standard approach to teaching. We recognized the importance of making creative spaces for young people and joined an art collective called Antenna, which had a two-floor location on Main Avenue with a gallery on the top floor and space for our writing center on the main floor. We started programming in that space. For students it wasn't home or school, but a safe space to create. We implemented a big book component in lesson plans and focused on bringing in writers. To our benefit, there was a gallery crawl every second Saturday that brought in a lot of foot traffic and exposed the community to the students' work. The drawback of that location was that we didn't have a storefront. Our front door opened directly into the writing center with no transitory store space, which we wanted to include. We decided to move, rebrand, and join the 826 network. We wanted the benefit of our students being amplified alongside other 826 students across the country. So much of our success is due to our learning from other 826 chapters and being able to share within the network. It's a great community of support, which is essential in making a place like this.

What is your current location like?

When we decided to move, we spent a year developing a

space in Central City that had been abandoned, but it fell through. Then we found a space in the Seventh Ward, a really historic neighborhood where New Orleans culture and a lot of American culture comes from. It was just a field at first, where a low-income housing development was set to be built. The plans included forty-five hundred square feet for retail. We decided to jump on that opportunity and we worked with an architect to optimize the space for our purposes. We asked the developers for a wide staircase leading up to the entry to be welcoming to the community. We also got approval for a full mural around the building, which isn't there yet but will be three stories tall. This location has worked out wonderfully for a lot of reasons; one invaluable feature is that we're really accessible to students. We're central to the city and within a two-mile radius of fourteen public schools. The interior of the space is engaging from the moment students walk into the Haunting Supply Co. To enter our writing center, there's a swinging barn door that we'll eventually convert to a hidden bookcase door. We have two classrooms with chalkboard walls throughout and beautiful paper tree sculptures. The writing lab has a cozy feeling and is filled with dramatic architectural pieces like our stage, bookcases, and interesting seating areas. There's a great dancing ghost mural that stretches from the publishing room into the store that reads "the spirit of publishing."

Where did the idea for the New Orleans Haunting Supply Co. come from?

At our old space, we held a lot of workshops with students to make decisions about the center's future. We wanted to represent our students as best we could; they were involved in the decision to join 826 and they were involved in deciding on a theme for our storefront. We showed them pictures of 826 chapters to give them an idea and they brainstormed concepts to base the store on. We wanted to be relevant to New Orleans, so we kicked around the ideas of Mardi Gras, voodoo, and music, but ghosts resonated with the kids the most, both for storytelling possibilities and the idea of a "spirit" of writing. Our store's products come largely from student workshops as well. Corporeal Dust is a favorite—it lets ghosts interact with the physical realm.

Who was involved in designing and building 826 New Orleans?

Design workshops with students and teachers gave us the most important input about what to do with our space. The architects at ONE to ONE Design were incredible people who did way more than we could have ever possibly dreamed, and our contractor, Perrier Esquerré, was amazing. We had the fortune of working with real estate agent and visionary urban developer Alexandra Stroud, who worked pro bono and helped us understand the process and landscape of creating a space like this.



826 New Orleans is within walking distance for hundreds of students.



An artisanal brick anchor designed to steady fitful sleepers.



Building partnerships with community was integral to creating the space.



Unfinished Business notepads: to-do lists for the afterlife.



To enter the writing center, there's a barn door that will become a hidden bookcase door.



A human and several ghosts show off goods from the Haunting Supply Co.



The theme of ghosts strongly resonated with kids during brainstorming, for the storytelling possibilities, the idea of a "spirit" of writing, and its relevance to New Orleans.

How did you create this center without breaking the bank?

All of our people did things for half-rate or at really low rates. We had a design collective who made all of the haunting supplies and built strong partnerships with artists who were jazzed about what we were creating. We were overambitious with our overall budget and a little too optimistic about money in general, but we adapted when we needed to. Our architects and designers helped us to make a plan B in case we couldn't pull together the

funding we hoped to—it was good to have a backup plan in place so we weren't scrambling at the last minute. One strategy that has been helpful to us is spacing out expensive projects. Tackle all of the bare-bones essentials in the first month or so, then see where money can be allocated for more ambitious projects. At first, we were planning on leaving walls off of the second classroom in our writing lab because our budget was getting thin, but a donor came in and supported us to put in walls and even soundproof the room. ●



Just Buffalo Literary Center



Established: 1975
Mural Designer: Julian Montague

Area: 2,500 sq. ft.

Address: 468 Washington St.
2nd floor
Buffalo, NY

Buffalo, NY



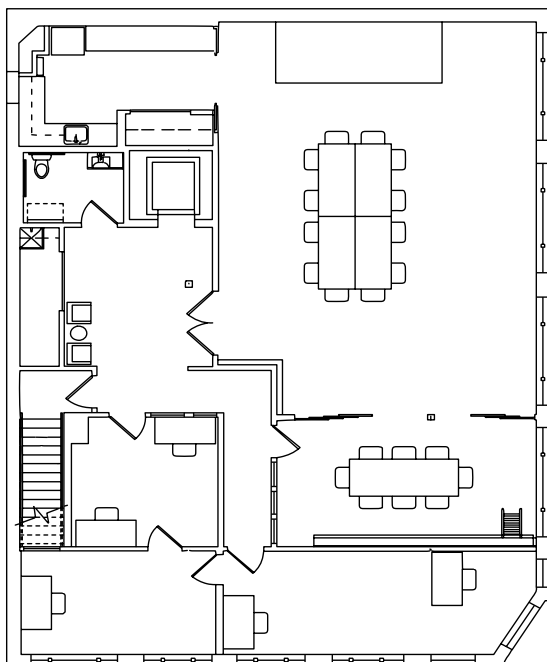
A volunteer leads a comic-book workshop.



Students leave one workshop with a series of handmade zines.



One thing the in-center students really enjoy are the made-to-order poems. Order a poem, and a young writer will compose one.



What is the physical space of the writing center like?

The Just Buffalo Writing Center is located in downtown Buffalo in a big, open room with four large windows. It is filled with an astonishing amount of natural light. It's an inviting, energetic space that offers opportunities in serious play. There are typewriters that act as generative tools, but also as collaborative literary art installations. We invite anyone who enters to interact with them. These percussive machines of joy allow the young writers to slow down and perhaps realize the beauty and messiness that is writing.

What kind of programming does Just Buffalo organize?

The Writing Center is mainly aimed at working with twelve- to eighteen-year-olds, but we also offer adult writing workshops in everything from songwriting to memoir to fiction. We do a lot of in-school writing programs throughout all of Western New York. We are in the process of renovating our space to offer dual programming to cater



This mural was designed by Julian Montague and installed by Yames Moffett.



A Möbius-strip typewriter scroll extends to the ceiling.



Literary events allow Just Buffalo to stay actively engaged with the community.

to a younger elementary audience, as well as more writing opportunities for educators and the larger community. Beyond our educational programming, we also organize a number of literary events to engage and inspire the Western New York community. Our flagship series is BABEL, which invites four of the world's most important authors to Buffalo. We also have a poetry series called Studio, and the Silo City Reading Series, which is a multidisciplinary poetry series that takes place during the summer months inside a 95-year-old, 130-foot-tall grain silo.

How does the center stay afloat?

A large percentage of our funding comes from grants and foundations. Both the county and city support us and we receive many generous donations. We have a grant writer and our executive director who is an absolute mastermind—she has such a positive energy and is a go-getter in the best of ways. Also, the Writing Center wouldn't exist without the community of teaching artists and writers.

Do you have any advice for others who want to create a similar space?

Create it! It's needed. There are not enough of these creative spaces in the world. So often, parents who come through will say, "If only this was around when I was a kid!" Not enough communities have a space that provides opportunities in creative arts and fosters young voices in a serious manner. So my advice is to start a creative space and with lots of love and work; a community will grow out of it that may one day change the world. ●

LA
GRANDE FABBRICA
DELLE PAROLE

La Grande
Fabbrica
delle Parole

b i

Established:
2009

Designers:
Leonardo
Rasulo and
Francesca
Frediani

Area:
1,044 sq. ft.

Address:
Alzaia Naviglio Pavese
1620143 Milan, Italy

blioteca



Milan, Italy



Design elements are the result of workshops with children, like the paper cities that came out of a workshop on Invisible Cities by the Italian writer Italo Calvino.



The hot-air balloon from the center's logo (pictured above) can be recreated using three hula hoops, two coat hangers, one picnic basket, and stretchy fabric.

What were your goals in creating this space?

Writing is a headspace, and we want children to know that it's a beautiful space to inhabit. That was the starting point for us in building our tutoring center. We wanted children to feel comfortable in it, free to sit down their own way, to move from their table and find the perfect place to sit. We wanted them to know from their first step in our center that they could feel free from judgement to create in their own individual way. Our hope is that the space students experience at La Grande Fabbrica delle Parole could become an internal space, something that they bring out of our center and that takes shape within them, a space they can inhabit in their own way every time they open a notebook and write.

How have you funded and decorated this space?

In making this a reality, we had a lot of dreams and not much money, especially at the beginning, so we couldn't call any interior designers or architects. We opened our center in 2009, having fallen in love with 826, and there was no program like that in

Italy. It was a new adventure, but we had a lot of dreams, a lot of volunteers, a lot of creativity, and some paper. We started creating fun and unexpected elements to be disseminated in the space: pieces of cardboard becoming clouds for words hanging from the ceiling, red and yellow pieces of paper becoming wings with stories written on them, a very long plotter roll becoming the support for writing “the infinite story.” Some of them come from Art Attack, a special morning that we organize once a year that has become a tradition for our project. We start with coffee and croissants, we put on some music, we lay paper, scissors, glue, and painting materials on the floor, and away we go, having fun together and creating new decorations for our center. Some other design elements are the result of our workshops with children, like the fantastic paper cities that came out of a workshop on *Invisible Cities* by the Italian writer Italo Calvino. Even when we procured a larger budget, we decided that this way of creating the space was exactly “us” and showed how creativity can transform a piece of paper into a world. That is exactly what writing does, too. Most elements of the space change with time, but there is one thing that has stuck around since 2009: the hot-air balloon made by Mariella, our senior volunteer, which bears our logo and can be recreated easily with the following ingredients: three hula hoops, two metal coat hangers, one small picnic basket, and the textile usually used to cover plants on the terrace when winter comes and you don’t want their roots to freeze.

Another element that we will never change is our mascot: a large red plastic snail made by Cracking Art, a collective of artists quite famous here in Italy, which children love to climb on and ride. This is the snail’s story: our center is on the first floor of a civic space owned by the Municipality of Milan, and there are frequent artist exhibitions there. One day, we were sorting out our center and we saw people transporting enormous colored snails in our courtyard. People seemed to be pretty angry at the snails, too, as they were not so easy to move. This procession of huge colored snails with frustrated people carrying them for the exhibition was such a surreal experience that we decided that La Grande Fabbrica delle Parole couldn’t live without one of those snails. So, we spoke with one of the artists involved (“What’s your name?” we asked him. “Athom,” he answered, which was also pretty surreal). He said he had one snail in his basement that he didn’t use and that he could give it to us. Since then, our snail has become a real part of the activities. Recently, I convinced a boy who needed the attention of his classmates to read a story sitting on the top of the snail. The magic snail is also consulted by children in case of loss of inspiration. So, while our small budget seemed at first to be an obstacle, it has become the reason that we learned how to make things magical. ●



The snail mascot, made by Cracking Art Collective, is a fixture in the space.



Established:
2014

Designer:
Porto delle
Storie staff

Area:
1,614 sq. ft.

Address:
Via Giuseppe Giusti, 50013
Campi Bisenzio
Florence, Italy

Porto delle Storie

Florence, Italy



(Opposite) Student work fills the shelves and climbs the walls. (Above) Students and tutors work and socialize in a vibrant space complete with a café.



Porto delle Storie puts aside childish silliness to make way for teenage absurdity.

What was your goal in creating this space?

Porto delle Storie was still an empty space when we said, “We have to make it a gorgeous place! It can’t be a children’s place; teens can’t stand children’s stuff. They would run away.” We said it over and over again. Porto delle Storie’s first identity is to be a teen’s place where everybody can feel at home, even the ones who hate writing and would rather jump off of a building than pen a story. We have crisps, ice cream, and sodas so they can sit around and chat, doing nothing, as Italian teens love to do! Its second identity is to be a creative space, a workshop where everybody is free to create, writing tales or doing homework without fearing failure in their studies. Everybody should feel free to stand up and read their stories, hang drawings on the wall, or make videos with their mobile phones. That’s why we have books, tables, dictionaries, and a huge blackboard.

Then we said, “Let’s have a ship full of books and stories written by famous writers and by the students. Let’s build a huge ship, as wide as the whole wall. Let’s make it beautiful using secondhand materials, so that it won’t look too posh or childish.” It turned out to be a great idea!

Davide, a thirteen-year-old boy who’s mad about skateboarding, wrote, “Porto delle Storie is beautiful. I like

it because it really looks like a children's place where you can set your fantasy free without feeling stupid or childish!"

What influenced the center's theme and design?

We didn't refer to any proper narrative world for direct inspiration. We often refer to stories that teenagers (and we grown-ups) are very fond of, like *Harry Potter*, Marvel Comics, *Star Wars*, and others, but we wanted Porto delle Storie to be an imaginative new world. It had to be a world different from schools and libraries, which are realities we are familiar with and cooperate with. We wanted to be a place where teens are free to choose the world which inspires them. When students enter our center, we want them to feel the same excitement the astronauts of Apollo 11 felt when they got to the moon.

How many hands did you have building this space?

We enlist everybody we can: writers, teachers, photographers, an architect from Pinterest, a yogini, neighbors, etc. We called people we hadn't spoken to in years and we used social media for outreach. In the summer of 2014, we were a group of ten who started thinking and began creating, cutting wood, making furniture, and painting walls. Everything was made by volunteers.

Where did the finances for this project come from?

The café was built with the money we won in a contest in which we presented our project about a "writing school hidden in a café." A private foundation paid for it, so we didn't have the chance to decide much (otherwise we would have put an Apollo 11 reproduction or a dinosaur in the garden). We had the chance to get a free, fully equipped café and kitchen—not bad at all! We bought all the furniture for the workshop side (tables, chairs, shelves) in secondhand shops. We built the big white ship using secondhand pallets and a retired painter's ladder, which was one of the most important donations we got; it's our main mast, supporting the sails and showing us the right direction. And if things go wrong with Porto delle Storie, we can open a painting firm with the painter's ladder. ●





The Porto delle Storie sits within a coffee shop in the center of town, which makes the space a hub for the community.



Little Green Pig

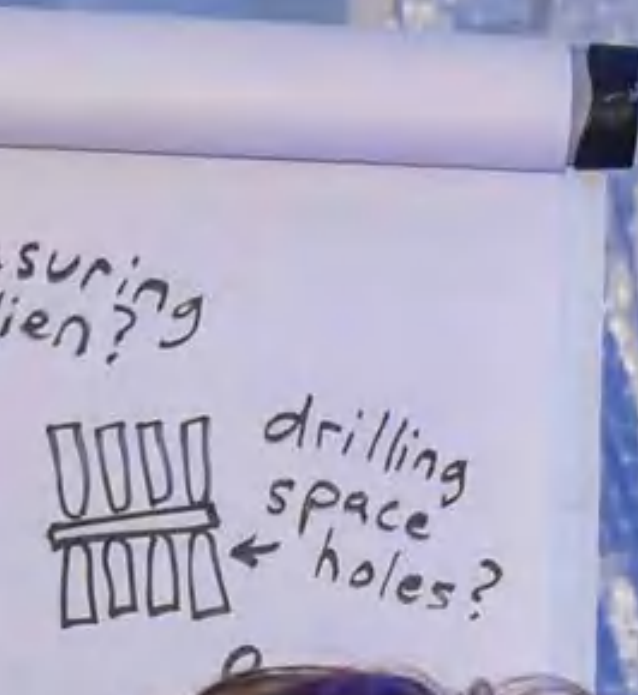
A Pop-Up Tutoring Center

Established:
2012

Designer:
Sherlock
Studio

Area (The Tooth
and Claw Store):
376 sq. ft.

Area
(BrightSTAR):
861 sq. ft.



East Sussex, England



Cardboard boxes and farmyard straw bales suddenly transform a one-month pop-up shop into an unconventional tutoring space.

What's the philosophy behind your writing programs?

We enable children and young people in our city and beyond to experiment with writing in all its forms and to share their work with a wide audience. We prioritize working with children and young people who live or go to school in areas of highest deprivation, or who face challenging circumstances. From anthologies to soap operas, radio shows to films, our projects challenge perceptions of what writing can be and deliver serious outcomes: improved self-confidence, literacy, and communication skills. In collaboration with volunteers, writers, artists, schools, families, and partner organizations, we respond to children's needs and ideas to provide fun, innovative, and excellent learning experiences. Creativity and fun are at the heart of what we do.

Why did you choose to develop pop-up style learning environments?

Unlike many of our incredible sister organizations across the world, we decided not to open a center as we are keen to work across the county in which we are based. Most of our projects have taken place outside classrooms at after-school clubs and in interesting locations including art galleries and a former floating Chinese restaurant. However, we also wanted to create an extra-special experience for children in schools: an out-of-classroom learning opportunity which feels completely different from everyday school life and which they will always remember. This led us to develop our pop-up model which has now run in two primary schools. Popping up is a little chaotic, quite exhausting, and very intense. It's also some of the best work we have ever done and seeing the faces of the children who visited the spaces makes it more than worthwhile: it makes the whole thing magical.



A student explores the unexpected wonders of the Tooth & Claw store.



Unexpected discoveries in the space can lead to unexpected writing. (The hay fever is exactly as expected.)



Both hypoallergenic and highly flammable!



Your gut biome will rise again!



A team of astronauts prepares to operate mission control in this pop-up workshop.

What was the process of developing the first pop-up?

We went to the school we wanted to work in, located in one of the areas of highest deprivation in the UK, and offered the students three different options for their pop-up theme. The one that received the most votes was a Victorian pet supply store for mythical creatures. We delivered our brief to the fantastic design team at Sherlock Studio who came up with brilliant ideas for transforming a disused classroom in the school, all on a tight budget (money which we had raised from local funders specifically for this project—around ten thousand dollars in total). A local author wrote us a lovely backstory about a pet-shop owner living in nineteenth-century Brighton called Martha Tooth, and the Tooth and Claw Store was born.

The moment you enter the Tooth and Claw Store (if you know the special password), you are greeted by the heady scent of hay bales and the sound of unidentifiable growls and grunts all around you. The walls are lined with boxes of strange things to touch, smell, and shake; unicorn shampoo, phoenix treats, and dodo feather cream—filled bottles and jars. The Tooth and Claw Store has been locked up for 150 years and now it's the students' turn to write the next chapter in its story. We worked with all 270 children in the school, all of whom were invited for a two-hour workshop in the space. We had a professional illustrator at each workshop bringing the young writers' ideas to life through beautiful pictures. All sessions were supported by our dedicated volunteer story mentors (who were all in character with job titles like Dragon Trainer and Griffin Groomer) and the feedback we received

from children, teachers, and volunteers was amazing.

What about the second pop-up?

Working with the same designers, we developed BrightSTAR: Brighton Space Training and Research Academy. This time, we were given double the amount of space and raised a bit more money toward materials. A big change this time was that we got the teachers involved from the very beginning, introducing them to the space first so that they could build it into their teaching.

Again, we created a backstory and each child was given a mission. We also increased the interactivity in the room by including things like a star-simulator chamber, audio recordings of real space exploration, and a physical zone where they could jump around. We worked with every child in the school, including the three- and four-year-olds from the nursery, and invited other schools to visit too.

What was the goal for the designs of Tooth and Claw and BrightSTAR?

We sought to create the most believable fictional spaces that we could, to the very best of our ability, budget, and given time frame. Pretty much everyone at Sherlock Studio had input in this project, as we believe in the “many minds” philosophy. We've all been children at some point, so we can all contribute a valid opinion to the design process! We aimed to make these learning environments experiential and immersive, yet ensure that they still left enough to the

imagination. Each space had to look professional but feel comfortable. In both spaces, we considered how the design delivers on each of the five senses. People are influenced by different senses, so it's important the design plays on them all to maximize the concept's reach. For our Tooth and Claw Store, we took inspiration from the *Harry Potter* series, the *Lord of the Rings* series, and pet stores. For BrightSTAR, we looked to real space stations for design ideas!

How did you create these spaces on a budget?

With great imagination and by being brave! Practically, we were heavily reliant on ordering from online retailers. We dove into our own sheds and kitchen cupboards as well as people's recycling boxes for products that we could repurpose. We also made the most of local companies' generosity. For example, we asked for and were given some beauty-product pots from a natural cosmetics store (which are used at Tooth and Claw) and a huge polystyrene ball (which we repurposed as an asteroid for BrightSTAR) from a local set-design company.

Any advice for someone who may want to create a similar space?

Don't try to do too much for the given time frame and budget. It can be difficult, given time frames, but as much as possible, check the robustness and longevity of materials you are proposing to use before you actually use them. Treat everything you see as a potential building material or prop. Any object can become something with just a little imagination! When building, ensure the design is crystal clear and that any volunteers are clear on how to implement the design. What's clear to a designer might not be clear to a volunteer who isn't from a design background. An anecdotal tip: farmyard straw bales plus children equals mess! We really felt for the school cleaners who had to deal with the consequences of our design! ●



Usually, one must be in at least a doctoral program to work with such technical equipment.



A young learner receives his badge to join the BrightSTAR mission.



A young mission specialist makes a startling breakthrough in our understanding of orbital mechanics.



Story Planet

Established:
2011

Designer:
Van Der King
Design Group, Inc.

Area:
1,000 sq. ft.

Address:
269 Gerrard St. E.
Toronto, ON, Canada



Toronto, Canada



The entrance to Story Planet's original location resembles a portal to another world. Always evolving, Story Planet's new store has an outer-space floriculture theme.

What kind of setting were you going for with this space?

We wanted a beautiful, inviting, noninstitutional feel at Story Planet. We wanted our center to be imaginative but not overly decorated so there would be room to breathe creatively in it. Our inspiration actually came from our name, Story Planet.

How did you create a space that inspires participants while also being safe and inclusive?

We have a diverse array of folks who come through our doors. We also wanted the space to be playful—we're actually adding more pieces to the entrance and the store space to give it the feel of an unusual planet inhabited by an alien flower that helps to seed and grow stories.

How many minds did you have working on design?

We had an initial designer help to plan the floors and walls

and then two specific artists working on the smaller design elements. Our space is still evolving. A small group of co-workers who are artists is best—we found, when there are too many people, the vision gets diluted. I think one of the essential things to focus on is that the space needs a coherent, communicable vision that only one or maybe two people design. Once that's in place, others can help execute and build on the design without muddling it.

How did you fund this space?

We got a grant, a discount for our flooring (which was a major part of the design canvas—one of the funniest things is that our floor has become a big part of what people love and are attracted to, and as a result, we constantly have kids and adults lying and sleeping on it!), and our designer donated her time. We pay our artists for their work, too, which is an important part of our philosophy! ●



Story Planet is home to a mysterious alien flower whose seeds grow into stories. The young botanists above are vital to the process.



A space so welcoming that even the floor is beloved.



Students and facilitators collaborate on an otherworldly tale.

1



2



3



4



1

SNACK-SIZED SUPERNOVAS

Designer: Joel Derksen
Writer: Leilah Ambrose

The universe's loss is your mouth's gain.

2

EARTH MOUTH VARIETY PACK

Designer: Joel Derksen
Writer: Leilah Ambrose

Your warp core may fail. Your smile will not.

3

URANIAN PAPER

Designer: Joel Derksen
Writer: Leilah Ambrose

Soft as a molecular cloud, but strong enough to withstand the winds of Uranus.

4

EDIBLE EMOTIONS

Designer: Joel Derksen
Writer: Leilah Ambrose

Delicious, edible emotions for all human occasions.

How To Make a Place Like This: A Guide

1. HOW TO LISTEN FIRST TO THE NEEDS OF STUDENTS, TEACHERS, AND PARENTS

It's so important that you begin your project with complete flexibility and openness. Whatever you think your project will be and what it will do—this will change. It will evolve. So stay flexible and don't over-plan or over-assume. All will change and change again.

The main things you have going for you are enthusiasm, volunteers, and the willingness to help in the grand project of educating young people in the power of the written word.

But you are working with local schools, teachers, parents, and their children. And they have needs that you will not know until you ask.

Let's assume you have a group of dedicated people ready to open a writing center. You have even found a space for your center. You dream up a thousand ideas, perhaps taking inspiration from existing writing centers around the world.

The next step is to start talking to local teachers and parents. You might find that the needs of the local schools differ, slightly or significantly, from the needs you assumed existed. You might find, for example, that teachers are yearning for more help with reading, and are desperate for an army of volunteers just to sit and read with students (this happened with 826DC, for example). You might also find that a local school already has an after-school tutoring program, but that it really needs volunteers. It could be that you combine forces, and bring your volunteers to their existing program.

With feedback from teachers and parents, you'll be far better able to make an immediate impact and get immediate buy-in from local schools and families. The nice byproduct of all this is that you can start quicker. You don't have to dream up a full curriculum. You can fit your program into the grand design of a local school. You can (and should) be in service to the larger project of public education.

This doesn't mean you shouldn't design brand-new projects on your own. You should! But doing so in conversation with the existing network of teachers, parents, and students is key.

And staying flexible is the most

important thing of all. If you think you will open and do X, Y, and Z, and in that order, you will be mistaken. You might find that teachers don't actually need X, students won't sign up for Y, and Z is already being done by another local nonprofit. Be ready to go back to the drawing board, with help from the stakeholders.

Remember that if you tell a local teacher that you have ten volunteers ready to be of service, they will absolutely find a way to make those tutors useful. That's the beauty of going in with openness and flexibility. But if you decide, before talking to teachers, that you and your team are there for one inflexible purpose—teaching haiku to eight-year-olds, for example—you will greatly limit buy-in and impact.

So be ready to shape your services around the genuine articulated needs of the schools you will serve.

2. HOW TO AVOID DUPLICATING SERVICES

This is such a crucial thing. If you are starting in a large city, there is a chance that an organization already exists to do the thing you're hoping to do.

Before you begin, do your research. Find out who's doing what, and on what scale. Then, one of the following scenarios will emerge:

There are no similar organizations.

Obviously this is ideal. You jump in and fill that void.

There is a vaguely similar organization.

Very often you will discover that there is an organization related to youth literacy in your city or town. But usually it will be different in significant ways. Perhaps there's a

group that sends poets into schools. Perhaps there's a bookmaking program for young people.

The key thing to do, right away, is to connect with these groups and assure them that what you're doing is different and is noncompetitive and that you want to be friends. The non-profit world can be a bit competitive because often nonprofits are (or they perceive themselves to be) competing for limited resources.

Be sure you connect, make friends, and plan cooperation or even partnerships (foundations very often love to support partnerships between nonprofits). This can't be overemphasized. You really don't want a longstanding organization thinking you are encroaching blithely on their territory. Go in with respect for those who have come before, and have an open conversation about how you will fit into the nonprofit landscape.

There is a very similar organization.

This is tough. It could be that there's an organization that is pretty similar. Maybe they offer tutoring after school, and they even send tutors into schools. Whatever the overlap, at this point, you have three choices:

- You can shift your focus/limit your services so you don't duplicate services—that is, skip the after-school tutoring and concentrate on publishing projects. Articulating this focus to the existing organization is important so that they know you are not duplicating (if that is a problem).
- You can combine forces. Maybe the existing organization would love an injection of new energy and volunteers.
- There might be room for both of you. Chances are that you're in a city. And if a city has a few hundred thousand students, there is room for not just two literacy

organizations, but a thousand of them. So as long as you connect and communicate with the existing organizations, you can move forward, knowing that teachers and students need all the help they can get.

3. HOW TO SAY YES TO PARTNERSHIPS AND PROGRAMS

When you're starting out, it's helpful—and maybe even necessary—to be open to saying yes. When facing the city you're serving, you must have a radically open posture. Other organizations, teachers, and parents will come to you with ideas and proposals. Being open to these ideas is crucial. Have conversations. Keep the doors open. Keep your head nodding. Any new organization becomes, for many people in your community, a blank canvas, a repository of their hopes. So affirming these good feelings is so important.

It doesn't mean that every proposal will come to fruition. Many won't. But remember that you are new, and you should be flexible, and partnerships can—and very often do—result in a doubling of impact, and bring you in contact with other people, schools, or nonprofits that you otherwise might not know.

There are many woeful tales of new nonprofits that move into a city and are too busy or too distracted to meet with and listen to other organizations. This never ends well. Word gets around that this new organization is aloof, is stuffy, is closed-minded. Remember that the nonprofit world in any city is small, and word travels fast if your attitude is unfriendly. So be open. Partnerships might very well be a significant part of the work you do.

Some examples:

- A local Girls and Boys Club serves one hundred students after school every day, but they don't have enough tutors. You and the Club agree to partner on after-school tutoring. You send tutors to their space and serve their kids. Everyone benefits.
- A nearby shelter for families experiencing homelessness, or families in temporary housing, comes to you. The kids living in the shelter have no enrichment opportunities. Together you design a program where a team of tutors visits the shelter every week, providing homework help and also fun and even therapeutic writing projects.
- A local adult literacy project approaches you. They say that the adults who come to their evening classes often bring their children, but that they don't have services for these kids. Together you design a program where your tutors come to the evening classes, and bring the kids to an adjoining room where you work on their homework and on enrichment projects. Everyone benefits—while the adults learn, the students finish their homework, and the family can go home having received two services at one site.

So remember openness. Remember flexibility. Partnerships can be the lifeblood of what you do.

4. HOW TO CULTIVATE DONOR AND SUPPORTER RELATIONSHIPS

Every person who interacts with your organization has the potential to be

part of your network of supporters, friends, and donors. Start early in assuming that every staff member, not just your development or fundraising people, will take this approach. A customer in your store may have a family foundation whose support would be transformative. An intern may become a major donor in five years, and parents and families can sometimes bring enormous support through community connections, local resources, donations, and more.

With that in mind, every person should be treated with warmth and authenticity. If nothing else, this approach will help your students, volunteers, and staff understand your organization as one of inclusivity and kindness, a place where all feel they belong and are honored. This thinking can be infused into all you do, from social media posts, to how your store staff is trained to greet the public, to how your program staff reply to emails.

At the heart of this relationship-based approach to operating an organization is the idea that the work you're doing is community-centered and thus only succeeds if community members are meaningfully part of it. If you have no connection or relationship with the program officer, firing off an impersonal grant proposal has a small chance of being funded. Even if your grant requests and fundraising letters are well-written and your programs are impactful, these efforts will quickly fall short if you're not starting from a place of real relationships with people. After all, people are the ones who decide to give, whether it's a fifty-dollar personal check or a fifty thousand dollar foundation grant.

As an organization is starting, it's very easy to mistakenly see gifts as transactions, or as a means to an end. To really embrace the relationship-based approach to cultivating donors, it's essential to look away from the sterile spreadsheets which track your prospects and turn toward the individual people who will be your allies in your work.

So handwrite a note to a donor who has made a difference. Remember what inspires them about your work and update them when you have something new they'd enjoy. Send a book, an invitation, a hello. Focus on them: why they have made a change for your work, and what their future gifts could do. Honor preferences they've told you about their interests or disinterests in parts of your work. Accept that an authentic and thoughtful "no" is much more likely to become a gift next year than a transactional "yes." Include donors and potential donors in appropriate and meaningful ways—as you would anyone you respect and care about. Ask what they think. Respond honestly and examine where your program and their interests intersect. People with whom you have these kinds of positive relationships will make gifts at their own level of ability and will be eager to introduce you to more people who can be supportive. Most importantly, they'll return again and again because their interactions with your organization are meaningful and real.

5. HOW TO CREATE AN APPROPRIATELY WEIRD THEME FOR YOUR CENTER

Many of the writing centers around the world have themes. This started with the pirate-themed center at 826 Valencia and has given rise to everything from a Bigfoot Research Institute in Boston to several alien supermarkets in Stockholm. Sometimes these themes involve whimsical storefronts, and sometimes they're simply a general theme that informs the work of that center.

In any case, if you're considering

a theme, we offer herewith some guidelines and suggestions:

Go with aspirational.

In most cases, you'll be serving students of every age, so your theme can't be geared only to the smallest kids. Think of something a middle-schooler will still find interesting, and go with that. The smaller kids will follow. But it doesn't work the other way around. A middle-schooler won't go to a center with a toddler-aged theme.

Avoid corny at all costs.

It might be tempting to think of a "kid" theme, something that you assume kids will like. For example, circuses. This comes up from time to time: why not a circus theme? The catch is, very few kids actually like circuses—not since the 1950s, anyway—and the theme would have been considered corny even then. So think of something truly unusual, truly odd.

Use your sense of humor.

The theme, and everything associated with it, should be funny. Kids appreciate humor. Kids are inherently funny and appreciate the absurd. So respect their intelligence. Make the adults laugh, and the kids will laugh, too.

It doesn't have to make sense.

It's better if it doesn't. Don't think that your theme has to relate to your city or town. If your town is famous for potato farming, your theme should not involve potato farming. The theme should be as far away from potatoes as possible. It should transport the students to another world, not simply echo the things they see every day.

Get help from your strangest friends.

If you are more of an organizer and less of a joke writer, get help from the joke writers. Get help from the weirdest people you know. This is a huge part of your center and its

appeal to both students and volunteers, so it's not something to be done by a committee, or done by someone who is not weird. Find a weird person and ask for their help.

Do not play it safe.

There have been times when themes have been decided by committee. These outcomes have been terrible. You must trust the weird. Come up with a truly weird and memorable theme and stick with it. Don't play it safe. Don't water it down. No one wants a watered-down anything. Think memorable, distinct, risky, and creative. Do not think safe, expected, acceptable, and committee-approved. If your board and staff are not divided on the theme, you are playing it safe.

Explore it with fierce commitment.

Once you've decided on a theme, delve in like a PhD student. If your storefront is a place where beluga whales can buy bandannas—great theme, by the way—then you should have treatises about the right bandannas for beluga whales, and strong opinions about belugas and bandannas. Everything you do should flow from a ridiculous commitment to your bizarre theme. That's where humor comes from, and it will make your site, and the experience for visitors, memorable. Anything less than that will seem bland. Again, find your weird friends and let them loose.

6. HOW TO CREATE PRODUCTS FOR YOUR STOREFRONT

Many of the centers in this network have storefronts, and these storefronts often feature specialized products related to their store themes.

For example, the Ministry of Stories in London features a monster supply store that sells an array of wonderful and weird products. One is a can that advertises itself as A VAGUE SENSE OF UNEASE. There is a box of caramels that has been relabeled to indicate that the caramels are actually boogers.

These products are useful in many ways. First, the centers with storefronts often benefit financially from the sales of these products. Second, if the storefronts are full of funny and odd products, then strangers coming into the stores might stay a bit, get some entertainment, and find themselves donating, volunteering, or telling friends about that great store that sells caramels relabeled as boogers. Third, and perhaps most importantly, the products are fun for the students to see and play with and be inspired by.

When a student comes into a store and sees all these insane handmade products, and all the wit and creativity that went into them, they are inspired. And it sparks their own creativity. There's nothing more inspiring for a young person than being around an inspired adult. That is so important.

Herewith some hints and guidelines for creating products:

Some products will sell, others are more for display.

At the Pirate Store in San Francisco, there are peglegs for sale. These are real, handcrafted peglegs. They are beautifully made. They don't sell very often. But that's okay. They are largely for show, to help create the atmosphere that this is a real pirate supply store. The things that sell are T-shirts, books, and small items. That's okay, too. You need both kinds of products.

Anyone can make a product in an hour.

Go get a blank jar. It's glass and has a cork top and costs two dollars. If you have a store for gnomes and elves, what would a jar like that be used for?

A fairy containment vessel? Okay. Now ask your graphic-designer pal to make a label. Print the label on adhesive paper, peel it off, and put it on the jar. You have a product. You have, in one hour, transformed an empty jar into a Fairy Containment Vessel, which now retails for twelve dollars.

You will need so many products.

To fill even a one-thousand-square-foot space, you will need a stunning amount of products. Go to your local grocery store. Count how many products are on any shelf. Fifty? A hundred? Yikes. It takes a lot of inventory to fill your shelves. So get going, and don't get too precious.

Let your volunteers be part of it.

You need all the help you can get. There's nothing more fun than having a product-making workshop with volunteers (and even students). Get a bunch of raw materials together—jars, cans, random objects—and imagine what all these things could be. Your volunteers are always looking for ways to be creative, and this is about as good as it gets.

Not every product has to be brilliant and forever.

You might make a product that's only kind of funny or sort of clever. That's okay. That's part of it. You have so, so, so much space to fill. You need every idea you can get. Make five of that sort-of good product and put 'em on the shelf. You can rotate them out later.

Not all products will be handmade.

There are products that involve you and your team relabeling existing objects. And then there are those products where you print your logo, or other messages and images, onto shirts, mugs, pens, and other things. There are hundreds of companies that do this work. There's likely one within an hour of wherever you are. Anything you want to print your logo onto, they can do it, and the prices are startlingly affordable. These things will likely

become your best sellers because, by and large, they are actually useful.

Keep it fresh.

Visitors will come to your storefront again and again. When they have friends in town to visit, they will bring them to your storefront. But you have to reward them for revisiting. Change things up. Add new products. New signs. Rearrange things. Add new interactive features. There's nothing sadder than an eternally static storefront! Everyone wants their attention and their loyalty rewarded. Keep it new.

7. HOW TO DESIGN AND DECORATE A WRITING CENTER

Remember, first of all, that you're creating a new space. Something different. You're not trying to re-create what's been done elsewhere a thousand times. Throw away the educational wholesale catalogues. Throw away every playbook and presumption. Any so-called educational piece of furniture should be treated with suspicion. You are trying to zag when they are zigging.

Every time you use an expected form, material, object, color, or even wall covering, you're getting away from your purpose, which is to create as different an experience as you can for the students. The physical space should be so diametrically opposed to whatever institutional atmosphere the students are used to that upon walking inside, they immediately sense a radical shift. They are awakened.

If the schools in your area use cinder blocks, laminate desks, and industrial carpeting, you should consider using materials that stand in contrast to those materials—think of woods, rich fabrics,

unusual metals. Think about how you can make the atmosphere warm, welcoming, and calm.

Calm is a key thing. Most students spend their days under fluorescent lighting in rooms built with cinder blocks. These are not necessarily calming materials. But you need a calm atmosphere where students can concentrate, can be heard, and can feel at home. Consider woods, consider warm colors. Consider couches. Consider area rugs. Consider wallpaper and floor lamps and chandeliers. For every decision, think of making your space very different from anything clinical, industrial, cold, or uninviting.

Think of living rooms. Think of old libraries and castles and rooms that have warmth and mystery. Or look at a space like the Story Factory, that looks like the inside of a whale. Whether you go for a warm, hearth-like feeling or an otherworldly space, you're striving to create a place where students want to be, and where they can feel calm.

Of course you want to engage interior designers, architects, and artists. These are professionals who know how to think through every part of a learning environment. You can and should participate in this process, of course, but finding professional designers to help create your space will save you from a hundred potential mistakes, and will ensure a more thought-through and durable space.

The added advantage of working with a professional interior designer is that very often these folks will have connections with purveyors of furniture, lighting, flooring, and everything else you might need. Many of the 826 centers in the U.S. worked with an international firm named Gensler, and the designers at Gensler were, many times, able to connect us with their suppliers, and thus get the 826 centers helpful discounts on furniture and more.

Most design firms can take a tax write-off for the in-kind donation of

their time. Some firms will already have a set number of hours per year they are committed to donating. If you're dealing with a smaller firm, or even an individual designer, your center might become a showcase project for them. If you are a good client, and give them freedom and encouragement, they might design a gorgeous space that they can use in their own portfolio. This benefits both of you: you receive free or discounted expertise from them and the designer gets a wonderful showpiece for their vision fully executed.

That said, the build-out of your space will be a work in progress for years, if not forever. It need not be perfect before you open. It will change. It will become denser as you add features and furniture, and as your staff and clientele grow. Don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good.

8. HOW TO PUT ON A STUDENT READING AND SIGNING

Let's say you have a new publication and want to celebrate it with a reading. Hurrah! There is nothing better than seeing students stand up and read their work in front of an audience. This is a major part of the work we do—providing the students an authentic outside audience. But here are some key dos and don'ts we've learned over the years:

A little goes a long way.

Early on, we would allow a student to read a four-page story aloud to the audience. This could take up to fifteen minutes. And chances are, no one wants that. The student is nervous and doesn't want to be in front of the microphone that long. And the audience really doesn't need to hear the entire story. What both

parties want is a taste of the student's work. To hear their voice, to see them up there courageously sharing their writing. A minute is a loooong time in that environment.

Choose a shorter piece or poem.

One-page poems are wonderful in this situation. A student gets up, reads the poem, finishes, and everyone applauds. When reading longer than that, trouble is imminent. If the student is reading prose, even one paragraph is often enough to get the idea across. Help the student choose a representative paragraph that highlights their work in an effective way. Maybe even compress different parts of the same essay to create a shorter "best of" version of their longer story.

No pressure.

If a student doesn't want to read aloud, they shouldn't be made to. You are providing voluntary enrichment for the students, so there's no need to nudge them into a place where they're not comfortable.

All willing are welcome.

Any students that want to read, though, should be encouraged to. This is where making each reading short is helpful. You can fit more students, and more voices, into your program. Everyone who wants to get up at the microphone should get a chance.

It's not just about the reading.

Ideally you have a charming emcee—an adult or a student—who can move the event along. And who can ask questions of the student-reader before they read their piece. That's just as interesting, in some cases, as the written work itself. Conversations are fun for the audience and keep the event from becoming an unvaried succession of readings.

Thirty minutes is the sweet spot.

If your program goes over thirty minutes, it's probably getting too

long. There are small kids there, babies, grandparents, volunteers. Everyone is busy and it's after dinner and people need to get home. So try to start and end the program in thirty minutes. Then there's food and beverages and everyone can congratulate the students and start heading home. Leave 'em wanting more—you don't want to create a too-long event that leaves people exhausted.

The student signing is absolutely crucial.

One of the greatest things we can do is have student authors sign the books they're in. It is so wonderful it will knock you down. After the reading, set up a table or two where audience members can visit with the young authors and get their books signed. The kids love it, the parents love it, everyone loves it. And it honors the students in a profound and unparalleled way.

9. HOW TO GET A RENT-FREE SPACE

Most nonprofits, especially those with storefront spaces, will tell you that rent can be a burdensome part of the yearly budget. Very often it's just unavoidable and you have to bite the bullet and pay rent—sometimes at market rates.

But below are some ways that various centers around the world have gotten around, or at least reduced, rent.

Space in schools.

Many writing centers have begun in schools. That is, a given school might set aside a space in which you and your team can operate a writers' room. There are two distinct advantages to this model. First, the rent is free. Second, you're able to serve all

the students in a given school—especially those students who might not come to a separate writing center located outside their school. Forging a partnership with a local school, wherein they see the value in having a roomful of volunteers within their building, can be a fantastic way to begin. You might later get a second, standalone space, but working within a school can be a wonderful way to do the work you're hoping to do, and on a shoestring budget.

Space in new developments.

In many cities, for-profit developers wishing to build new housing have to agree to set aside some of their street-level space for community-benefit organizations. The new 826 Valencia space in Mission Bay is such a place. A developer has built a new apartment building—which will also house dozens of families who formerly experienced homelessness—and as part of this new construction, they set aside part of the street-level retail space for 826 Valencia; 826 has a long lease and the rent is free. We had to do the build-out, but much of that expense was defrayed by charitable contracting companies, electricians, engineers, and architects. If you meet and keep current with real-estate experts in your city and local government, you might hear about a situation where nonprofits can benefit from this kind of set-aside arrangement.

Libraries.

This works well for everyone. Many working families send their children to the local library branch after school. They tell their children to walk from school to the library, and that they will be picked up from the library after the parents finish work. This creates an issue for many libraries, in that they have dozens of kids and not enough staff to supervise all of them. The Williamsburg branch of the Brooklyn Public Library had such a situation back in the early

2000s. Dozens of kids would come after school and would occupy all the computers, playing video games and being not-so-quiet middle-schoolers. The librarians asked 826NYC if they could help. A partnership was forged. The Williamsburg branch gave 826NYC a room in the basement of the building, which 826NYC converted into a beautiful superhero-themed tutoring space. Although at first the middle-schoolers still preferred to play video games, slowly they came to appreciate the advantages of getting all their homework done by 5 p.m., as opposed to procrastinating until 9 p.m. So the tutoring room got full and remains full and thriving to this day. Check with your local library. They might have space for you, whether it's a room or a few tables. As with working inside schools, these are wonderful partnerships. And you get to work with some of the world's best humans: librarians.

Eccentric owner-developers.

Every city has eccentric developers who want their buildings to have the right, or even odd, mix of tenants. Maybe they're community-minded. Maybe they have just that right amount of weirdness where they want a strangely themed storefront as part of their property. But this has worked for many nonprofits in the past. Instead of renting to Domino's or an enterprise that might go belly-up in a year, the landlord might prefer to give a long-term lease at a favorable rate to a nonprofit that will be there for the long haul.

Whatever you do, don't assume that paying market-rate rent is a necessity. Look around. Talk to as many realtors and property owners as you possibly can. Someone will likely have an idea for you. And whatever you do, don't sign a lease that will cripple your ability to operate. Be realistic about your fundraising capabilities, and how much you'll be obligated to raise every month just to cover rent.

10. HOW TO OPEN A WRITERS' ROOM IN A LOCAL SCHOOL

As stated elsewhere, you don't have to have your own standalone space on a busy street. Opening a writers' room in an existing school is a wonderful way to start, or expand, your services.

The first writers' room that 826 Valencia opened was at Everett Middle School, about ten blocks from 826 Valencia's main site. After a few years working together on various projects, the partnership was strong. Soon enough an idea emerged: what if Everett provided 826 with a dedicated room in the school? That way tutors could be on campus and serve every student at Everett, and the school would have a special place dedicated to writing.

The school had a room connected to the school's library. It was being used for storage. So the school and 826 volunteers cleared out the room and renovated it. They added Persian rugs, couches, padded chairs, and even chandeliers. By the time they were done, the room was extremely comfortable, warm, and welcoming. And a little weird, too.

With teachers, 826 designed a number of programs to utilize the room and the tutors who regularly staffed it. Every teacher in the school was able to use the room and its volunteers. Some teachers simply wanted to split their class in half occasionally, sending half the students to the writers' room for writing enrichment (and giving the teacher the chance to work more closely with a smaller group). Another teacher wanted to start a school newspaper, which soon happened (it was called the *Straight-Up News*). There are so many ways to use the

writers' rooms and their tutors; teachers will dream up a thousand projects and plans.

The beautiful thing about a writers' room in a school is that this way, you can work with every student on campus. When you have your own site in another part of town, you're working with students who have chosen to be there (or whose parents have chosen for them to be there). They have in some cases made a pronounced effort to get there. But there are always students—so many of them—who won't or can't come to your space after school. These students, all students, can be reached if you have a constant presence on campus.

And the second beautiful thing is that with a writers' room, you don't have to pay rent. The school gets a room full of dedicated volunteers, and your organization gets a rent-free space. A perfect trade.

Some other info and guidelines:

- Typically, a writers' room takes one staff member to maintain. This staff member will coordinate the volunteers there, and interface with the teachers and administrators at the school.
- These writers' rooms ideally look and feel very different from the rest of the school. They should provide a transformative experience. They should make the students feel like real writers who have entered a special place for serious authors.

11. HOW TO MAKE A FINANCIAL PLAN

Making a budget for a nonprofit, especially a new one, should be really simple. You won't know all the details to start, and that's why a quick sketch is the right way to go.

Ask yourself how much it will cost to accomplish your plans for one year. This is not the time to hope for a miracle or to underestimate. Be reasonable about what you'll have to spend on your staff, your space, and your programs, and come up with an expense number. An example:

EXPENSES

Executive director:

\$50,000 (full-time, all year)

Program staff:

\$20,000 (full-time, beginning half-way through the year)

Payroll, taxes, and insurance:

\$10,000

Rent and utilities:

\$24,000

Books and other printing:

\$7,000

Graphic design and copy editing:

\$3,000

Supplies, postage, etc.:

\$6,000

Total:

\$120,000

This certainly doesn't mean you must spend \$120,000, but it's a guideline for how you'll proceed through the year. It's also common for organizations to make such a plan and then, four months later, change it drastically in one direction or another. That's okay. But it's better to start from somewhere.

Once you know what you'll need, start lining up how you'll get there. Just like above, this is not the time to count on a hope you have that a massive grant will come your way. It might but you'll be in huge trouble if you start out by counting on that. Let's say your four-person board has already

committed to giving five thousand dollars each. You can write a twenty-thousand-dollar line item in your revenue budget in anticipation. Check with them. See if one of them might be able and willing to give twice that. See if anyone is going to back out. You will always have these adjustments. Maybe in addition to the board you have other plans or promises to raise \$80,000 but nothing more. If you're still coming up with less than \$120,000, you will want to somehow reconcile that, by cutting your expenses somehow or marking some funds as TBD as you make more plans. Remember that funding partners always want to see a zero-based budget that shows a thoughtful approach and not much risk. An example:

REVENUE

Board giving:

\$20,000

Pledged ABC Foundation grant:

\$50,000

Pledged XYZ Foundation grant:

\$20,000

Grants TBD:

\$10,000

Crowdfunding campaign:

\$20,000

Total:

\$120,000

You can start the year with a rough sketch like this and soon add columns to show where you're falling short and where you're ahead of your plans. Your actuals can adjust all year long. This budget should stay static. As you become established, these documents will become much more sophisticated and specific, but all you need to start is a broad look at how much you'll need and where you'll get it.

12. HOW TO HANDLE UNWANTED DONATIONS OF DECADES-OLD COMPUTERS

This has happened to just about everyone. You open your center, or announce that you're opening, and the next day, someone drops off eight Commodore 64s from the early 1980s.

You can't use them, of course. But being kind to these donors is crucial. The donors are trying to help. They've seen those computers in their basement for years and when they read about your writing center, a light bulb goes off. They get the Commodore 64s in the car and they drive down to your location and think it's all a great idea.

Handling this in as kind a way as possible is key. Maybe you just take the computers, knowing you will have to give them to your local electronics recycling center. Maybe you gently direct this kind donor to said recycling center. But whatever you do, remember that this donor is trying to help, and think of any way you can to express your gratitude, even if you can't receive their Commodore 64s (actually a decent machine in its time).

This goes for any unwanted donations of physical objects—inappropriate books, old file cabinets, ill-fitting furniture. If you don't want these things, ideally you can discourage someone from bringing these things to your center. But if you can't head them off at the pass, think of ways you can handle the situation without making this warm-hearted would-be donor feel bad about what was a gesture of real kindness.

For many more HOW TO guides, please visit, www.youthwriting.org/how-to-1.

The International Congress of Youth Voices



The International Congress of Youth Voices unites and amplifies the ideas and energy of young people around the world. The Congress's landmark inaugural meeting in August 2018 in San Francisco convened one hundred extraordinary young people with leading activists and authors and resulted in a youth-written manifesto, published by *The Guardian* and read by its global audience.

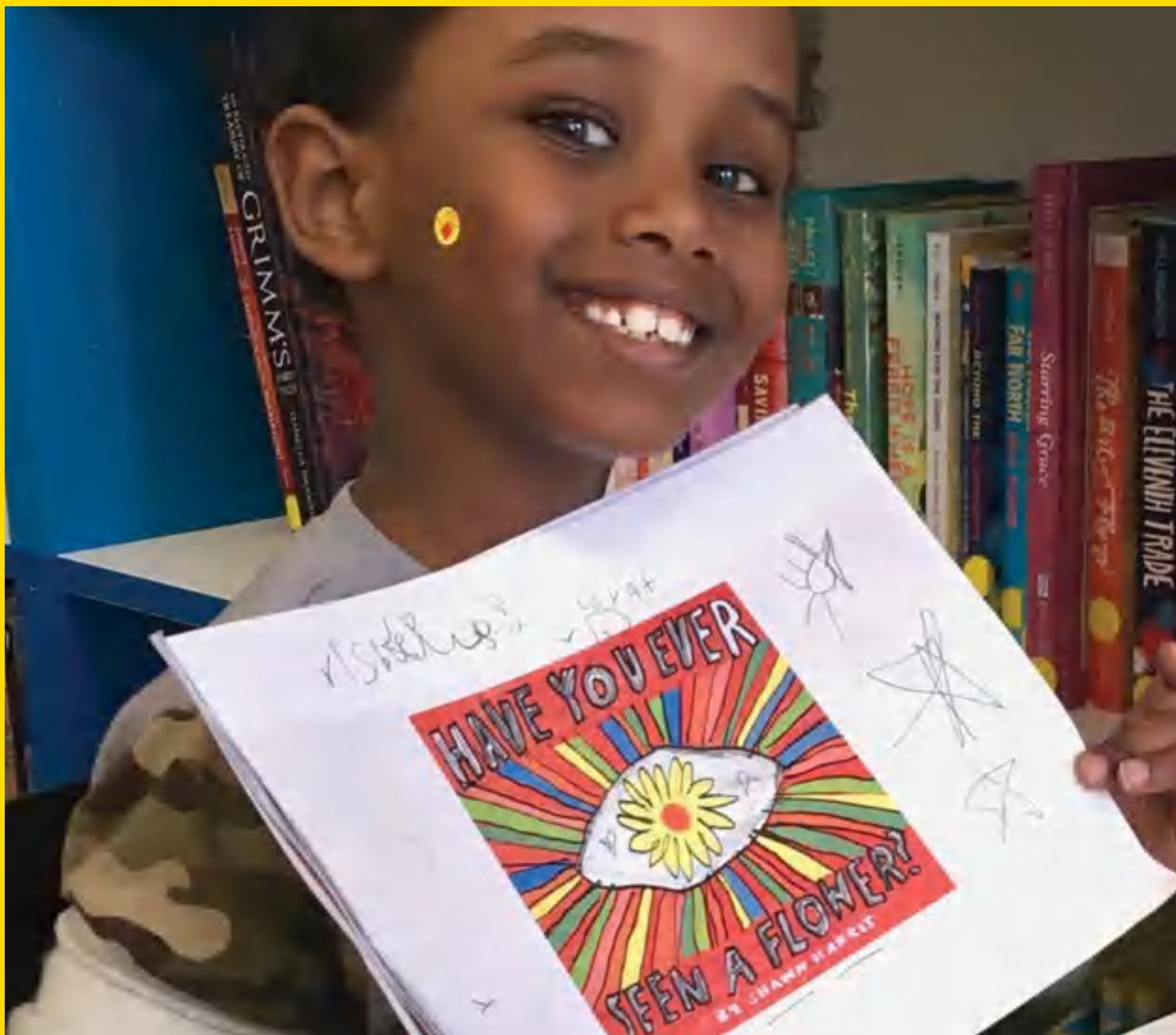
In the year leading up to the second Congress in 2019, a community of young people was formed based on the energy and drive of the delegates to look toward their future and

the world around them. The second Congress took place in San Juan, Puerto Rico in August 2019 and included 120 delegates and five days of programming, collaboration, and activism. This gathering is a unique and powerful education opportunity to foster not only instances of mentorship between adult leaders in the fields of journalism, activism, and media, but also a space for peer-to-peer learning and collaboration.

Visit internationalcongressofyouthvoices.com for more information.



Young Editors Project



The Young Editors Project gives young readers the chance to give actual feedback to the very authors who write for them. If you are a writer for young people, or an editor or publisher working in this space, we will work with you to match your book with a committee of young readers from The International Alliance of Youth Writing Centers.

For example, if you have written or are publishing a chapter book for readers nine to twelve years old, we will find a group of readers from that age group. They will provide notes on the book, at whatever level you wish. Maybe

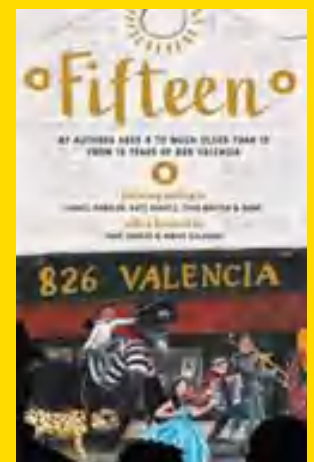
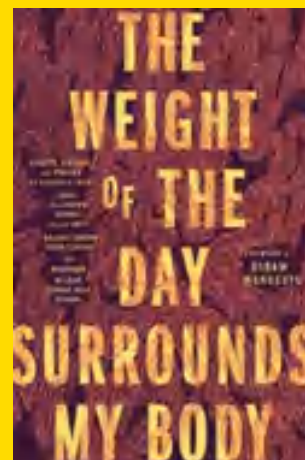
you want to make sure you got the dialogue right for kids that age. Maybe you want to make sure you describe third grade correctly. Maybe you want to make sure your story, which you think is funny, is actually funny. Our student editors will step up and provide you with the answers.

They enjoy being part of the editorial process, and they get invaluable experience. They develop profoundly as student editors, as writers, and they get the thrill of being acknowledged by professional editors.

Visit youngeditorsproject.org to get involved.

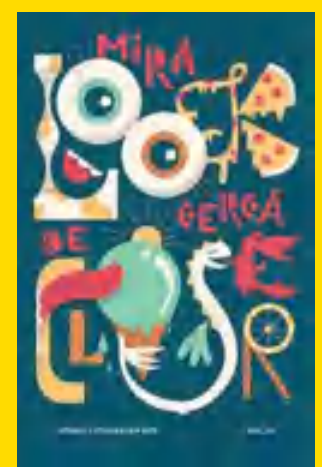
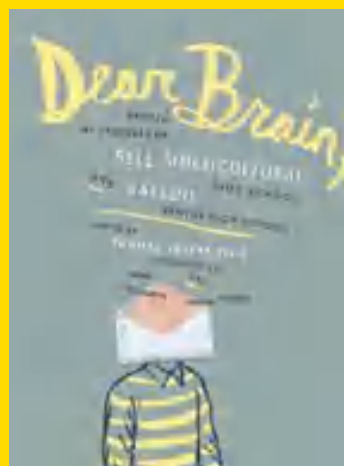
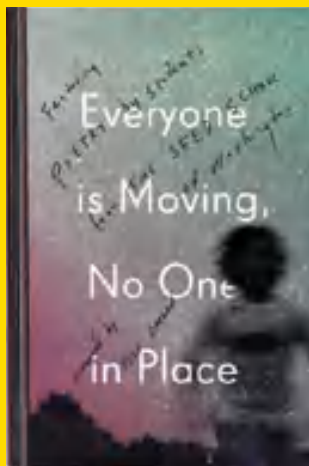
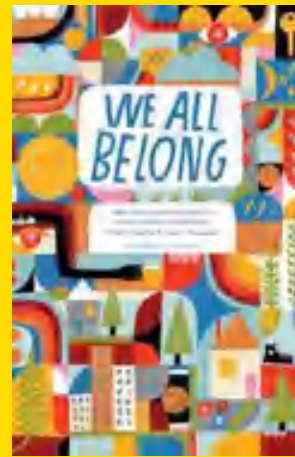


Student Publications



Publishing student work—and publishing it in high-quality formats—is central to the missions of the centers in the International Alliance of Youth Writing Centers. These books, magazines, chapbooks, and zines are all designed and printed with great care, such that they look and feel just like professional publications. This is the best way to honor the student writing within. We believe that student writing deserves this kind of dignity and permanence, for if a book is well made, it's more likely to be read widely, to be kept in perpetuity, to be cherished and passed down to future generations. All the centers approach their publication programs individually, but all with a dedication to bookcraft and beauty.





The International Alliance of Youth Writing Centers



CHAPTER LOCATION

1. 100 Story Building Melbourne, Australia

2. 826 Boston: Greater Boston Bigfoot Research Institute Boston, MA

3. 826CHI: Wicker Park Secret Agent Supply Co..... Chicago, IL

4. 826DC: Tivoli's Astounding Magic Supply Co.. Washington, DC

5. 826 New Orleans: Haunting Supply Co..... New Orleans, LA

6. 826NYC: Brooklyn Superhero Supply Co. Brooklyn, NY

7. 826 Valencia: Woodland Creature Outfitters, Ltd. San Francisco, CA

8. 826 Valencia: King Carl's Emporium San Francisco, CA

9. 826 Valencia: The Pirate Store San Francisco, CA

10. 826LA: Time Travel Mart Los Angeles, CA

11. 826michigan: Robot Supply and Repair..... Detroit & Ann Arbor, MI

12. 826 MSP Minneapolis, MN

13. 916 Ink. Sacramento, CA

14. Austin Bat Cave Austin, TX

15. Berättarministeriet Stockholm, Sweden

16. Bureau of Fearless Ideas Seattle, WA

17. Centro Formazione Supereroi..... Milan, Italy

18. Chapter 510 & the Dept. of Make Believe Oakland, CA

19. CityLit Project..... Baltimore, MD

20. Deep Center..... Savannah, GA

21. Desert Island Supply Co..... Birmingham, AL

22. Fighting Words..... Dublin, Ireland

23. Fronte del Borgo..... Turin, Italy

24. Girls Write Pittsburgh Pittsburgh, PA

25. Grand Rapids Creative Youth Center Grand Rapids, MI

26. Greenville Wordsmiths Greenville, SC

27. Grimm & Co..... Rotherham, England

The International Alliance of Youth Writing Centers is a loose association of over seventy nonprofit organizations, from San Francisco to Martinique, dedicated to fostering and amplifying young voices. We need more partners in Asia and Africa! And South America! And Greenland! Write to us at hello@internationalallianceofyouthwritingcenters.org.



- 28. Intergalactic Spaceport Emporium: Tulsa Library . Tulsa, OK
- 29. Iowa Youth Writing Project Iowa City, IA
- 30. Just Buffalo Literary Center Buffalo, NY
- 31. La Grande Fabbrica delle Parole..... Milan, Italy
- 32. Labo des Histoires..... Paris, France
- 33. Lake Erie Ink..... Cleveland Heights, OH
- 34. Little Green Pig..... Brighton & Hove, England
- 35. Mighty Writers Philadelphia, PA & Camden, NJ
- 36. Noordje..... Amsterdam, Netherlands
- 37. Ordskaelv Copenhagen, Denmark
- 38. Porto delle Storie Florence, Italy
- 39. Proyecto Cientoouno..... Santiago, Chile
- 40. Read and Write Kalamazoo..... Kalamazoo, MI
- 41. Richmond Young Writers Richmond, VA

- 42. Sogur Barnamenningarhus Reykjavik, Iceland
- 43. Story Factory Sydney, Australia
- 44. Story Planet..... Toronto, Canada
- 45. Super Power Agency Edinburgh, Scotland
- 46. The Telling Room..... Portland, ME
- 47. The Writer's Block..... Las Vegas, NV
- 48. VoxPrima Barcelona, Spain
- 49. W*ORT Lustenau, Austria
- 50. Wordplay Cincy..... Cincinnati, OH
- 51. WordWorks!..... Lynchburg, VA
- 52. Writers' Exchange Vancouver, Canada
- 53. Writing the Future Jerusalem, Israel
- 54. Young Authors Greenhouse..... Louisville, KY
- 55. Young Writers Program..... Santa Cruz, CA

Directory

	826 Valencia	San Francisco, CA	826valencia.org
	826 Valencia: Tenderloin Center	San Francisco, CA	826valencia.org
	826 Valencia: Mission Bay Center	San Francisco, CA	826valencia.org
	826NYC	New York City, NY	826nyc.org
826LA	826LA: Echo Park	Los Angeles, CA	826la.org
	826LA: Mar Vista	Los Angeles, CA	826la.org
	Grimm & Co	Rotherham, England	grimmandco.co.uk
	Berättarministeriet	Stockholm, Sweden	berattarministeriet.se
	The Ministry of Stories	London, England	ministryofstories.org
	826 Boston	Roxbury, MA	826boston.org
	WordPlay Cincy	Cincinnati, OH	wordplaycincy.org
	Story Factory	Parramatta, Australia	storyfactory.org.au
	826CHI	Chicago, IL	826chi.org
	W*ORT	Lustenau, Austria	w-ort.at
	The Writer's Block	Las Vegas, NV	thewritersblock.org
	Scuola Holden's Fronte del Borgo	Torino, Italy	scolaholden.it/en/ fronte-del-borgo/













	Noordje	Amsterdam, Netherlands	noordje.nl
	826DC	Washington, DC	826dc.org
	826 MSP	Minneapolis, MN	moi-msp.org
	Austin Bat Cave	Austin, TX	austinbatcave.org
	Fighting Words	Dublin, Ireland	fightingwords.ie
	916 Ink	Sacramento, CA	916ink.org
	Tulsa Library Intergalactic Spaceport & Emporium	Tulsa, OK	spaceportstore. tulsalibrary.org
	826michigan: Detroit	Detroit, MI	826michigan.org
	826michigan: Ann Arbor & Ypsilanti	Ann Arbor, MI	826michigan.org
	Read and Write Kalamazoo	Kalamazoo, MI	readandwritekzoo.org
	Young Authors Greenhouse	Louisville, KY	youngauthorsgreenhouse.org
	Chapter 510 & the Dept. of Make Believe	Oakland, CA	chapter510.org
	826 New Orleans	New Orleans, LA	826neworleans.org
	Just Buffalo Literary Center	Buffalo, NY	justbuffalo.org
	La Grande Fabbrica delle Parole	Milano, Italy	grandefabbrica delleparole.it
	Porto delle Storie	Florence, Italy	portodellestorie.it
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	Story Planet	Toronto, Canada	storyplanet.ca

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Little Green Pig

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Story Planet

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For information about what other youth writing centers are up to all over the world, visit the International Alliance of Youth Writing Centers at youthwriting.org.

For hundreds of lesson plans and writing exercises, visit 826digital.com.

826 National has created books containing a great many thought-provoking and fun writing exercises for young people. Look for *Don't Forget to Write*, featuring fifty creative-writing lesson plans straight from 826 National's writing labs, and *STEM to Story*, which contains writing exercises themed around of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. To learn more, visit 826national.org.

Every kid in the world needs a safe, welcoming, and even weird place to write. That's the theory behind 826 Valencia, a writing and tutoring center started in 2002. That center, with a pirate-themed storefront, inspired similar—and similarly gorgeous and strange—centers around the world, from Chicago to Stockholm to Melbourne. This joyous and boundlessly creative book, filled with stunning photos of the world's most welcoming and wild spaces for young minds, seeks to inspire more communities, schools, and libraries to build their own unnecessarily beautiful centers for young thinkers.

