

THE WORD

A Storytelling Sanctuary

**Annual Report
2023**



The Word | A Storytelling Sanctuary

QUICK FACTS

3,150

Artists served,
artist paying
opportunities
created

4,500

Hours of
programming

49

publications from
Editor-Writer
Mentees

Creatives
highlighted to a
reading
audience of

3.2 million

“ Thank you so much for all the work you do at The Word, it's truly inspiring and a reminder why I want to keep doing the work too. ”



WELCOME

IN THIS REPORT

Quick Facts	2
Table of Contents	3
Message from Founder	4
Who We Are	5
Celebrating the Mayor's Award	6
Our Programming	7
Editor-Writer Mentorship	8
[margins.] literary conference	12
#MarginsBookselling	14
2022 BIPOC Bookseller Award	16
Community Engagement	17
Financials	18
Staff & Board	19
Writers' Circle	20
Partners and Supporters	21
How to Support The Word	22

A MESSAGE FROM THE FOUNDER

Dearest Word community,

We reflect on another astounding year at The Word. From just one baby program, our first Editor-Writer Mentorship back in 2017, to five years of programming later, and The Word is honored by a Denver Mayor's Award for Excellence in Arts & Culture. Astonishing.

Getting here has taken much collective vision, patience, scrappiness and care. It has meant believing this work can happen today and making it so. It has been building our home—a place where we make each other whole, where we are known and held. It is not just the folks on this side of The Word that make that a reality; it is all of our participants, community members, and partners. We remind each other that we are each enough, and we make each other more.

We continue to hear and learn together and move forward together. From that learning, we created The Word's single-day, virtual [margins.] conference 2023. We heard our [margins.] attendees who said that we need connection even in the spaces between the biennial [margins.] conference, and we made sure we could build those moments of finding one another even in a virtual space. We created year-round programming to support booksellers who are juggling too many things every day—booksellers really are doing all the things all the time!—to benefit from the more traditional models for connecting with authors and building community around upcoming releases. With a lot of trying, getting stuck, and trying again, we found a way to build programming that responds to bookseller needs rather than asking them to step away from their important work.

We are humbled to continue to receive requests from our community who trust us to find the new paths, who trust us to steward this work. We continue to work everyday to earn that trust anew.

I am especially humbled as well to have been honored with a Livingston Fellowship from the Bonfils-Stanton Foundation in this past year in recognition of the work I have been able to contribute here to The Word. As a Livingston Fellow, I will have the chance to stretch my legs a little after the mad dash that brought The Word from a kooky idea to this tremendous community of builders and seers, and scour for even more possibilities for reaching that ever guiding goal: collective abundance.



As always, thank you to everyone who is part of this vision. If we see it, we can build it. The Word has taught me to trust in that.

To all the more to come! In community,

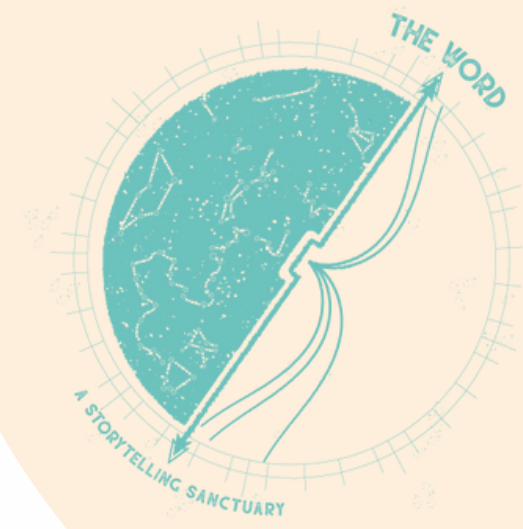
- Viniyanka

Viniyanka Prasad, Executive Director & Founder

WHO WE ARE

The Word | A Storytelling Sanctuary

is a Denver, CO-based, nationally serving literary arts nonprofit.



COLLECTIVELY, WE

Promote authentic storytelling

from BIPOC, LGBTQIAP2S+, disabled, and neurodiverse communities

Support & connect

writers, publishers, booksellers, and readers

Explore new models

for the literary ecosystem and collective work toward equitable futures

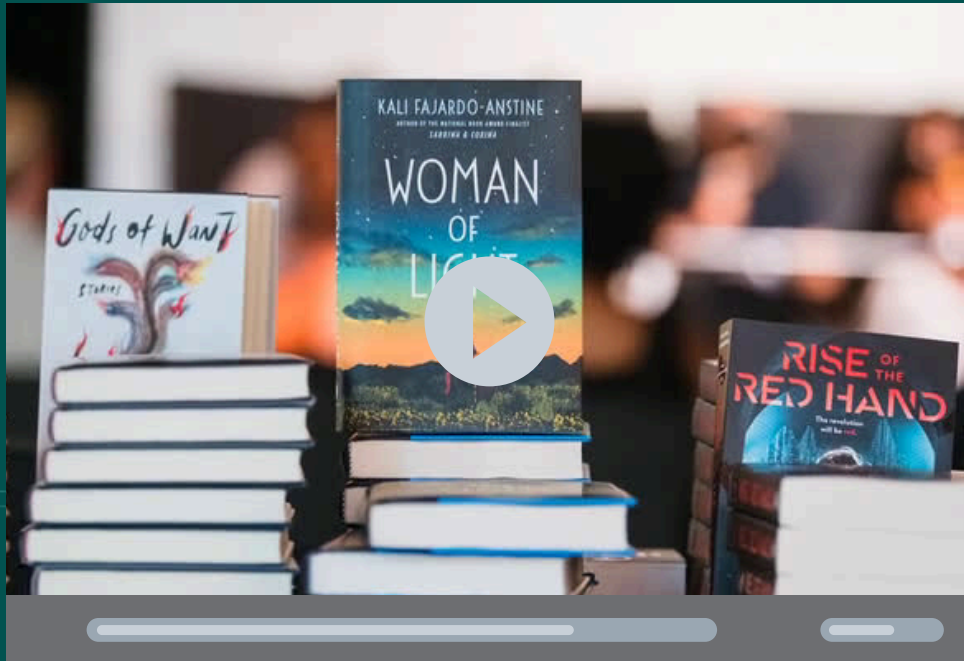
Hold safe space

in community



CELEBRATING

*the Mayor's Award for
Excellence in Arts and Culture*



The Arts and Culture Award for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion is presented to an individual or organization who has a demonstrated track record of integrating an equity practice into their day-to-day operations and programming, and in so doing work to support historically under-resourced communities.

The Word is honored to be among the 2022 honorees.

our programming

The Word creates collective abundance through storytelling by promoting cultural equity and the inclusion in published literature of perspectives from across race, cultural, ethnic, or religious identity; gender identity; sexual orientation; disability; socioeconomic adversity; and personal experiences of adversity or injustice.

Our programming includes:

EDITOR-WRITER MENTORSHIP

A one-of-a-kind opportunity for upcoming writers to work with an experienced acquiring editor in a year-long mentorship.

[MARGINS.] LITERARY CONFERENCE + BOOK FESTIVAL

A biannual space where the dream of an inclusive literary future is made into a reality.

#MARGINSBOOKSELLING

A celebration of booksellers and bookstores, centering BIPOC, LGBTQIAP2S+, disabled, and neurodiverse communities and culminating in a month-long consumer awareness campaign in July that includes an interactive bookstore map featuring 150+ bookstores, curated author events, community-focused workshops, and education sessions.

BIPOC BOOKSELLER AWARD

An annual award and ceremony, the only of its kind in the U.S., celebrating three booksellers whose dedication to indie bookstores and their BIPOC colleagues and communities has positively influenced the industry.

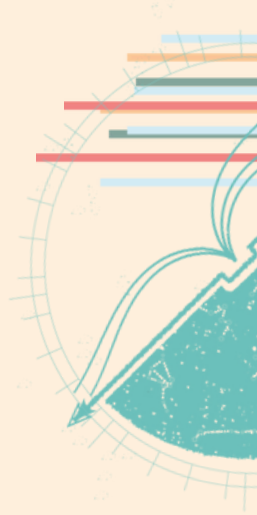
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

We hold safe space and make room for joy, connection and celebrating the beautiful art from our communities in a variety of meet-ups and community events throughout the year.



THE 2023

EDITOR-WRITER MENTORSHIP



our 2023 editor-writer mentees



2023 PICTURE BOOK
TAUNYA ENGLISH



2023 PICTURE BOOK
SHUCHI MEHTA



2023 YOUNG ADULT
ANGELA M. SÁNCHEZ



2023 PICTURE BOOK
DENEEN REYNOLDS-KNOTT



2023 ADULT FICTION
EBONIE LEDBETTER



2023 YOUNG ADULT
BELEN MEDINA



2023 ROMANCE
EDWINA JOE-KAMARA



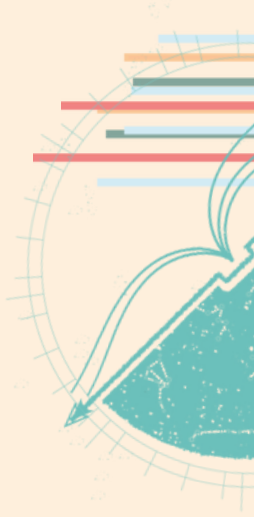
2023 MIDDLE GRADE
SASHA THOMAS

opening new publishing paths



THE 2023

EDITOR-WRITER MENTORSHIP



our 2023 mentors



EILEEN ROTHSCHILD

VP & Associate Publisher Executive Editor
Wednesday Books - St. Martin's Press

2023 Romance Mentor

ERUM KHAN

Editor
Abrams Books

2023 Picture Book Mentor



CAITLIN MCKENNA

Editorial Director of Fiction
Random House

2023 Adult Fiction Mentor

LEE WADE

VP & Publisher
Random House Studio

2023 Picture Book Mentor



WANT CHYI

Editorial Assistant
Penguin Publishing Group

2023 Young Adult Fiction/Nonfiction Mentor

ANDREA SPOONER

VP, Editorial Director of Picture Books
Little, Brown Books for Young Readers

2023 Picture Book Mentor



SAMANTHA GENTRY

Editor
Little, Brown Books for Young Readers

2023 Young Adult Fiction/Nonfiction Mentor

LESLIE CALHOUN

Associate Editor
Ink & Willow (WaterBrook)

2023 Middle Grade Mentor



SIMONE ROBERTS-PAYNE

Assistant Editor
G.P. Putnam's Sons Books for Young Readers

2023 Children's Chapter Book Mentor



[Click Here](#)
or scan below to learn more
about the Editor-Writer
Mentorship Program.

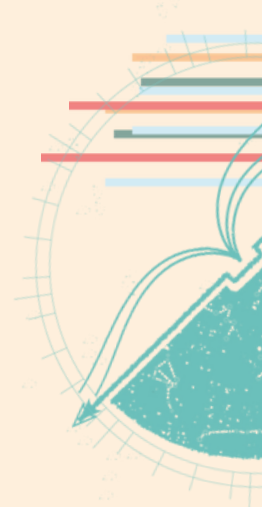




THE EDITOR-WRITER MENTORSHIP

THE WORD'S

mentees



Stefanie Foster Brown

2021 Graduate

My Heart Speaks Kriolu

Simon & Schuster
For Young Readers

On-sale 2025



Shifa Saltagi Safadi

2022 Graduate

Kareem Between

G.P. Putnam's Sons Books
for Young Readers

On-sale Sept. 2024



Alyssa Reynoso-Morris

2020 Graduate

Gloriana, Presente

Christy Ottaviano Books

On-sale July 2024

ARE MAKING WAVES

Since 2017, The Word has been pairing upcoming writers from underrepresented backgrounds with experienced book publishing editors for a year-long mentor experience.

SINCE 2017

60 book deals received by graduates

24 books have been traditionally published

25 books self-published

9 mentees received **agented contracts**

IN 2023

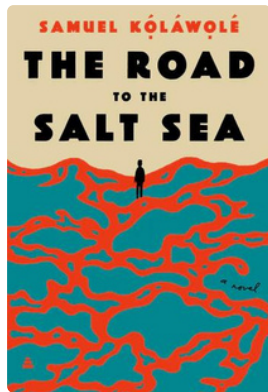
We received **98** applications from **14** countries. **4** publishing houses participated in our program, and **9** editors provided editorial feedback to **9** mentees



THE EDITOR-WRITER MENTORSHIP



creating new avenues
to publication & discovery



Samuel Kóláwólé
2019 Graduate
The Road to the Salt Sea
Amistad
On-sale July 2024



Maleeha Siddiqui
2018 Graduate
Barakah Beats
Scholastic Press
On-sale October 2021

“The Word’s Editor-Mentee Mentorship opportunity has liberated me! It gave me the confidence to know that the best in the industry has recognized the potential in my work.”

– J.H. Ahn
2022 Mentee



Denise Adusei
2019 Graduate
Cesaria Feels the Beat
Roaring Brook Press
On-sale June 2024



Dionna L. Mann
2019 Graduate
Full-Court Drama
Capstone
On-sale 2024

“The Word Mentorship has opened doors that have been closed to me and other writers like myself for many years. I’m eternally grateful for the encouragement and opportunity.”

– Kim Fears
2022 Mentee

[margins.] literary conference

[margins.] is a biannual space where the dream of an inclusive literary future is made into a reality. The conference includes break-out group Q&As with our speakers, one-on-one feedback sessions, free community programming, the presentation of three literary awards, and a public book festival.

At the urging of the community, The Word organized and coordinated a virtual two-day conference during fiscal year 2023 that was to be held at the start of fiscal year 2024.

The virtual conference featured 34 speakers, nearly 100 attendees, and focused on the theme of "Who said that?" The conference explored releasing expectations from literary practices that are not defined to serve our greatest visions.

The conference opened with a virtual community open mic and reading with many in the room acknowledging [margins.] provided them with a safe space to read and share their work publicly for the first time. Session topics included marketing to your community, writing beyond a single genre, and collaboration, and ended with a poetry reading by Alejandro Jimenez

The Word administered 20 scholarships to community members to attend the conference and cultivated a space that was accessible to an expanded audience, with attendees from all over the globe.

We were grounded in each other's presence. We explored expanding paths. We came together to heal, learn, and spark continuing movement.

Scan the QR code to learn more about the [margins.] conference.



“ Such a healing and inspiring weekend, thank you so much for your work! ”

“ *My gratitude for this community is immense. The wonder is that it draws people together who not only might not be heard in mainstream culture, but who might not hear each other either. And in [margins.], we do.* ”

- Shymala Dason, conference participant

SINCE ITS INCEPTION, [MARGINS.]

created **200+**

economic opportunities for artists

served nearly **1,500**

artists, creatives, publishing professionals, readers,
and book lovers through the [margins.] programming

and provided **20,000+** hours of education to

2,000+ individuals which included **professional
development**, tools, and supports

through **20+** community partnerships,

local and national funders, and **countless individuals** who
donated their time, money, and resources to building and
maintaining this program.

SAVE THE DATE:

our next in-person biannual conference + festival will be
September 20-22, 2024 in the Santa Fe Arts District in Denver

m
a
r
g
i
n
s.

MARGINS BOOKSELLING MONTH

SANCTUARY

“ *It’s an incredible community map and a conduit to connecting authors to booksellers and readers.* ”

#MarginsBookselling celebrates booksellers and bookstores, centering BIPOC, LGBTQIAP2S+, disabled, and neurodiverse communities.

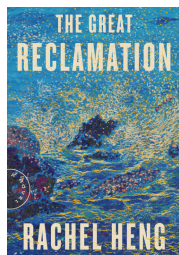
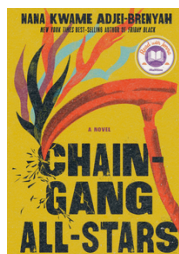
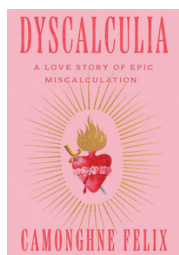
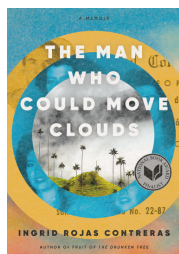
Several new programming offerings launched this year:

- our author publication events which provide authors and booksellers from our communities a safe space for discovery and connection;
- the Joy Ambassador program that features writers from our communities who uplift and promote #MarginsBookselling;
- the #MarginsBookselling newsletter;
- our Book Previews series: a little library for booksellers to discover new books and engage with publishers;
- and expanded supports for booksellers from our core communities.

Ongoing celebrations include:

- an annual consumer awareness campaign during August;
- an interactive bookstore map featuring over 150 bookstores owned and/or managed by the communities we serve;
- bookseller-curated reading lists and recommendations that promote authors from the core communities we serve;
- bookseller spotlights that highlight their work as culture-bearers in the literary ecosystem;
- community-centered workshops and education sessions that explore expanded, sustainable models for the book ecosystem;
- economic opportunities, professional development

and more!



Scan the QR code to visit the map and support #MarginsBookstores



supports
200+
booksellers



and **150+**
bookstores

MARGINS BOOKSELLING MONTH

BY THE



SANCTUARY

Scan the QR code to learn more about our #MarginsBookselling



#MarginsBookselling Month allows us a whole month to celebrate and engage, but we continue to build throughout the year. We **expanded our outreach and programming to include booksellers who are from the communities we serve** even if they don't work for a #MarginsBookselling store.

We **created our #MarginsBookselling Presents** event series (which includes bookseller-focused workshops, bookseller-only author events, education sessions, and opportunities to build community) and launched the **#MarginsBookselling Newsletter**. We continue to update the map throughout the year!



“It was such a dream to be able to be in a room with booksellers who understood everything as a given.”

~ Ingrid Rojas Contreras, Pulitzer Prize nominee, participant in The Word’s inaugural publication event

With only 3-4% of 10,000 independent bookstores in the U.S. being owned/managed by marginalized communities, we have been at work to account for, support, and celebrate all of them. We **continue to support bookstores and add to our map, cataloging over 150 bookstores**, highlighting these stores in our communities all over the U.S. **to reach 3.2 million book lovers.**

Nyshell Lawrence



Socialight Society

Maria Mims



Shop at MATTER

Nikita Imafidon



Raven Bookstore

Candice Huber



Tubby & Coo's

Scan the QR code to learn more about the BIPOC Bookseller Award.



DUENDE-WORD BIPOC BOOKSELLER AWARD

Duende District & The Word founded the annual BIPOC Bookseller Awards to celebrate and uplift BIPOC independent booksellers, whose dedication to indie bookstores and their Black, Indigenous, and POC colleagues and communities, have touched and influenced countless lives. The BIPOC Bookseller Award is celebrated during #MarginsBookselling Month.

All BIPOC who work in U.S. independent bookstores in any capacity are eligible to be nominated for the three categories. Winners are awarded a plaque and monetary prize.



INNOVATION

2022 Innovation Award Winner
Anada Werner

THIS AWARD IS FOR THE BOOKSELLER WHOSE VISION, WHETHER ENTREPRENEURIAL OR PROGRAMMATIC, HAS SHOWN US WHAT THE FUTURE OF THE INDUSTRY SHOULD BE.



ACTIVISM

2022 Activism Award Winner
Pilot Viruet

THIS AWARD IS FOR THE BOOKSELLER WHO GOES ABOVE AND BEYOND TO ADVOCATE FOR BIPOC BOOKSELLERS AND LITERARY REPRESENTATION IN THEIR STORES AND COMMUNITIES.

LEADERSHIP

2022 Leadership Award Winner
Calvin Crosby



THIS AWARD IS FOR THE BOOKSELLER WHO HAS DEDICATED THEIR CAREER TO SUPPORTING, UPLIFTING, AND LEADING BIPOC BOOKSELLERS IN THEIR STORES, COMMUNITIES, REGIONS, AND/OR NATIONALLY, FIGHTING FOR SYSTEMIC CHANGE FOR ALL BIPOC IN THE BOOKSTORE INDUSTRY.

THANK YOU TO OUR 2022 BOOKSELLER JUDGES
MELANIE KNIGHT & DARTRICIA ROLLINS

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROGRAMS

*Serving the community
in-person and virtually*



nearly **700**
individuals attended our
Writing Paths Workshops live



over **500**
attended our virtual
community discussions live



nearly **750**
attended our in-person
community discussions held
throughout Colorado



17,000 BOOK PEOPLE
ANNUALLY ACCESS
TOOLS + RESOURCES
BUILT BY THE WORD

THE NUMBERS

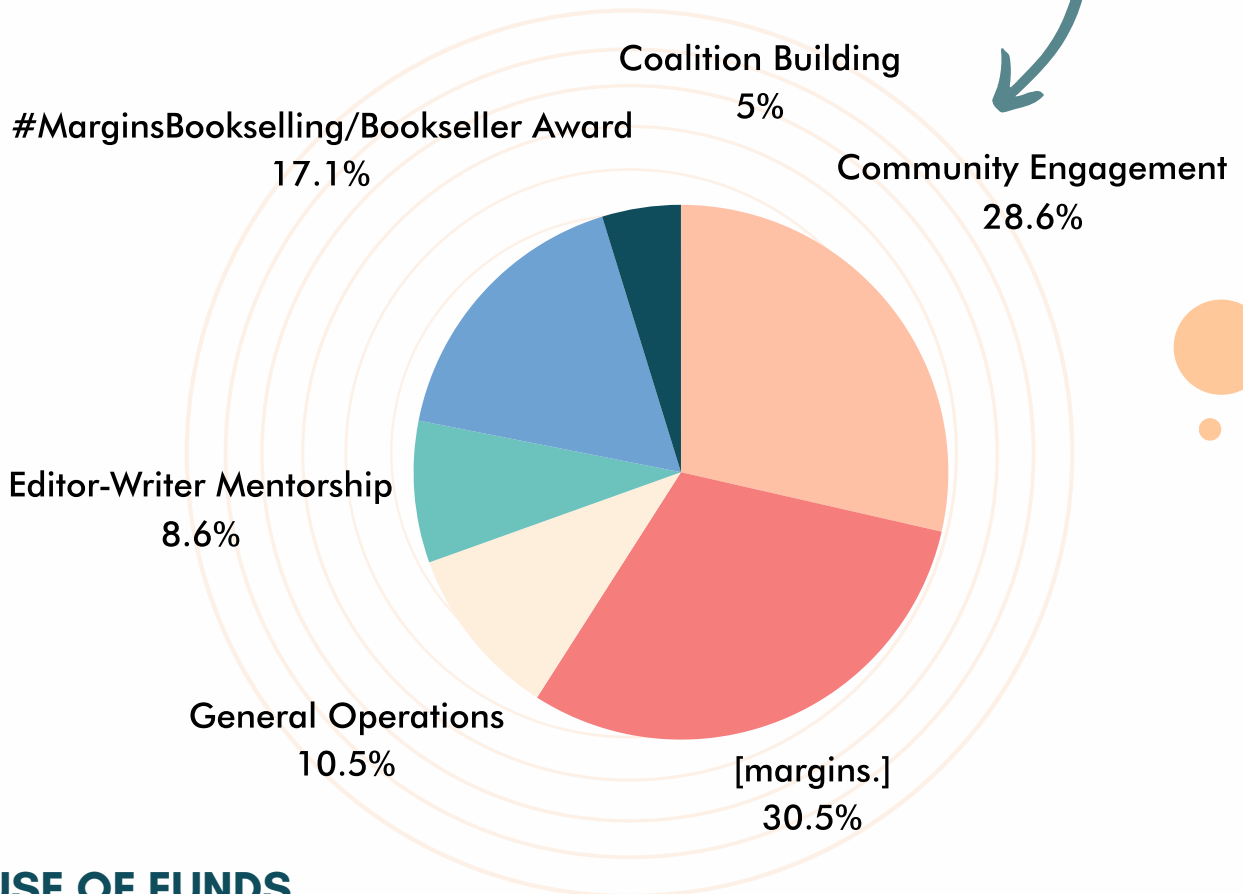
2022-2023

View Form 990

OUR INCOME

Individual Donations	\$ 54,052.71
Corporate Sponsorship	\$ 18,564.39
Grant Funding	\$ 219,100.00
In-kind	\$ 17,678.50
Other Donations	\$ 6,000.00
Other Revenue	\$ 6,021.60
Other	\$ 32.32
Total Income	\$ 321,449.52

HOW WE USED FUNDING



USE OF FUNDS

Total	\$ 367,011.48
Use of prior funds	\$ -45,561.96

Staff

- Aida Lilly, Program Coordinator
- Alyssa Reynoso-Morris, Program Deputy
- Blaire Bridges, Operations Coordinator
- Michelle Malonzo, Chief Operations Officer
- Suzi Q. Smith, [margins.] Director
- Viniyanka Prasad, Executive Director, Founder



Board

- Andrea Giron Mathern
- Bunmi Ishola
- Chris Aguilar-Garcia
- Deidre Dumpson
- Jenna Nishimura
- Liza Bevams
- Manuel Aragon
- Olivia Abtahi

*ambassadors &
advocates*
for **THE WORD**

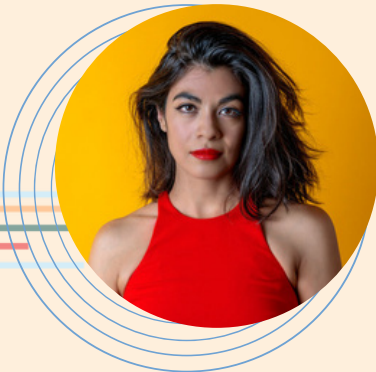


The Word's Writers' Circle ambassadors promote equity in storytelling and are committed to creating sustainable and equitable futures for literary creators, readers, and booksellers that match The Word's mission.



DANNY CAINE

"I'm so grateful for the Word's advocacy, education, and numerous efforts to uplift and support book people from historically marginalized backgrounds. I only hope that their work turns into a widespread movement to correct historical wrongs within the book industry and beyond."



INGRID ROJAS CONTRERAS

"The Word is doing the labor that matters most — uplifting BIPOC booksellers and giving the floor to authors and writers who are writing from the margins. What happens when the margin takes centerstage? I feel a new literature and culture emerges, one that can define and tell of what has gone ignored or untold before."



R.O. KWON

"Marginalized writers often hear the message that there isn't an audience or market for our books. In a world and industry that can have trouble seeing us, The Word is helping change this. The Word provides a place for the stories of writers across a multitude of identities, and for the readers who need and want these stories. [...] The Word is working toward a more equitable writing and publishing ecosystem. Three cheers for The Word!"

*To learn more about The Word's Writers' Circle or
how to join, email us at info@thewordfordiversity.org*



Thank you

TO ALL OF THE PARTNERS WHOSE SUPPORT
HELPED US EXPAND OUR IMPACT AND
MISSION IN 2023.

Art Students League of Denver	Helianthus Books
American Booksellers Association	Jaipur Literary Festival
Asian American Writers Workshop	Jamie Tan
ARC-Southeast	Kundiman
Bel Canto Books	Libro.fm
Biennial of the Americas	Lighthouse Writers Workshop
Books Are Magic	Little, Brown Books for Young Readers
Bookshop	Loyalty Bookstore
Bonfils Stanton	Melville House
Boulder Museum of Contemporary Arts	National Endowment for the Arts
Bradford Literary	Odom Media Management
Brain Lair Books	One World
Charis Circle and Charis Books	Pantheon Books
Chinook Fund	PEN America
Chronicle Books	Penguin Random House
City & County of Denver	Plume
Colorado Creative Industries	RedLine Contemporary Art Center
Colorado Humanities	Reese's Book Club
Colorado Trust Foundation	River Dog Books
Community First Foundation	Riverhead Books
Creative Strategies for Change	Rose Community Foundation
Denver Arts & Venues	Sacred Voices
Denver Film	SHOP at MATTER
Denver Foundation	Slam Nuba
Denver Public Library	Source Booksellers
Doubleday Books	The Dial Press
Dutton Books	The King's English Bookstore
Duende District	Tiny Reparations
Edelweiss+	Townie Books
Fuse Literary	Tubby & Co's
Gallt & Zacker Literary Agency	27th Letter Books

HOW TO SUPPORT

MAKE YOUR GIFT TODAY!

There are many of ways to help us build:

Make a gift now

Support the community in flourishing in 2024 and beyond.



Join our Sustaining Circle

Our monthly donor giving circle provides vital year round support for the organization (and in turn we gift you with special giveaways and discounts!)

Shop our Reading Lists on Bookshop.org

Your book purchases can support the storytellers who are published and the ones who are fighting to be.

Become a Joy Ambassador

Joy Ambassadors are authors who have demonstrated a commitment to centering joy, have multitudes of experience in their writing, and who help spotlight and raise energy for the #MarginsBookselling Month celebrations.

Read and learn more

about the values that guide our equity work. This is how we reimagine the literary ecosystem.

Get in touch with us.

MAILING ADDRESS

The Word, A Storytelling Sanctuary, Inc.
757 East 20th Avenue
Suite 370-335
Denver, Colorado 80205

VISIT US:

www.thewordfordiversity.org

*Thank you for all
your care and
support!*



THEWORDFORDIVERSITY.ORG

The Word, A Storytelling Sanctuary, Inc.
is a 501(c)(3) public charity organization.
Donations to The Word are tax deductible.

Copyright 2024. The Word, A Storytelling Sanctuary, Inc. All rights reserved.