A Letter to Parents

Dear Parent,

It's among a parent's worst nightmares: a child comes home and declares that he or she wants to write a novel in November. You're asking yourself where you went wrong by raising a child who would want to attempt such a foolish feat. After all, the National Novel Writing Month website specifically says that participants aim for quantity, not quality. A rushed and sloppy novel may be the last thing you want to encourage your child to create.

But there are many great reasons to embrace your child's literary leanings (and maybe even give NaNoWriMo a shot yourself!).

Some of the skills novel-writing builds:

- **Fluency**: When writing so swiftly, grammar and spelling may not be the highest priority, but the speed also helps writers to implement style tools naturally. Things like similes, metaphors, archetypes, conveying mood, paragraph structure, and foreshadowing will become second nature.
- **Confidence**: When creating so much text in such a short period of time, kids learn to stop getting in their own way and just dive in. Long writing assignments and essay tests will no longer create groans of dread, simply a smile and laugh at a word-count goal that they know is within their reach.
- **Creativity**: Creating characters, situations, dialogue, and even whole planets from scratch helps kids think, but it also teaches them how to apply their fanciful ideas to a full project.
- **Time Management**: A huge project is broken down into manageable bites. Kids learn how to focus and stay on task without direct supervision. Our progress tools on the site help them to see how far they've progressed and what still needs to be done.

Things to keep in mind to support your child or teen through the month of November:

- **Rest**: Their brains will need sleep in order to process all that they're creating in their novels and to maintain their concentration for the rest of their studies. Kids should also be encouraged to stretch and give aching hands a break on a regular basis.
- **Ergonomics**: Make sure your child has a good work environment with an appropriate chair and keyboard layout. Arrange lighting to eliminate glare on their computer screen to avoid eyestrain and headaches.

- **Prioritize**: Schoolwork and commitments to chores, sports, socializing, and other obligations obviously take top priority. Realistic schedules should be set up to ensure there is adequate time to make word-count goals.

NaNoWriMo has two programs. Our main challenge is hosted at NaNoWriMo.org, where all writers share the goal of writing a 50,000-word novel on any topic they wish. Our second program is the Young Writers Program, designed for K-12 classrooms taking part as a group, and for 12-and-under novelists writing solo. In YWP, the word-count goal is set by the individual.

NaNoWriMo.org and YWP.NaNoWriMo.org both have vibrant, active forums where writers from all over the world gather and support each other in their common goal. Participation in the forums is not required, but most writers who use it find it helpful in maintaining their word count and enthusiasm for the project.

The main site's forums are visible to anyone; the YWP has private forums viewable only by other young participants, teachers, librarians, and NaNoWriMo staff. We encourage you to review the forums and talk with your child about what is and isn't appropriate to post in a public place, and look at the information they plan on including on their profile. If you wish to, you can help them create a special forum environment specifically for them that is appropriate for their goals by creating a custom forum page.

All YWP forums and some of the forums on the main site are all-ages friendly, where strong language and sexual content is forbidden. All other forums are open (though we never allow abusive or pornographic material).

Both sites also have NaNoMail, a private message function that allows participants in the main program and YWP to send messages to fellow authors without divulging their personal email addresses. NaNoMail is built into the Young Writers Program and main NaNoWriMo websites.

Additionally, authors in NaNoWriMo's main program (and not YWP) can elect to receive emails from their Municipal Liaison (the volunteer head of their local chapter). Many areas do not have a Municipal Liaison, but in those that do, the Municipal Liaison will organize a kick-off party, several group-writing sessions in November, and a closing party. These events will take place in all-ages environments such as coffeeshops, restaurants and, occasionally, the Municipal Liaison's home, or the home of another local participant.

Teens should always feel comfortable coming to the events organized by their Municipal Liaison, and parents have a standing invitation to come along as well;

many parents often enjoy themselves as much as their kids. You can always contact your Municipal Liaison should you have any questions about the get-togethers.

That said, Municipal Liaisons are not chaperones. The Municipal Liaison will work to maintain a comfortable environment for everyone present, but the events consist mostly of adults, so the level of conversation may not be appropriate for all teens. We ask all parents to take an active role in either attending NaNoWriMo events with their teen or discussing the event with them afterwards.

Though a novel may seem like a silly off-hours pursuit, many kids and teens are able to get credit for the project in their classes, and many use their National Novel Writing Month participation as part of their college application essay and list of accomplishments.

Plus, it's just monkey-barrel loads of fun.

If you have any questions about National Novel Writing Month and your child or teen, please feel free to get in touch with us at info@nanowrimo.org.

Enthusiastically,

The NaNoWriMo Staff

P.S.: Kids and teens! Want a PDF version of this to print out and take to your parents? We have one here.