

Robin Reagler

Biographical Information

Robin Reagler is the Executive Director of Writers in the Schools (WITS) in Houston, TX. Each year WITS serves 20,000 students in grades K-12 with long-term literary programs. Robin not only leads WITS in its Houston endeavors; she also heads the WITS Alliance, a national consortium of over 20 literary arts education groups. Through the alliance, she consults with writers starting new programs in the U.S. and Canada. Robin earned an MFA from the Iowa Writers Workshop and a PhD from the University of Houston's Creative Writing Program. Her poems have been published in *Ploughshares*, *North American Review*, *American Letters & Commentary*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Iowa Review*, and *VOLT*. Her chapbook, *Dear Red Airplane*, was published this year by Seven Kitchens Press.

Campaign Statement

I am honored to be nominated to the AWP Board of Directors. I began attending the annual AWP conference a dozen years ago. For me, the yearly meeting represents a convergence of the various parts of my life. Each year I reconnect with classmates and professors from my undergraduate, MFA, and PhD programs. I catch up with colleagues and former students from schools and programs where I've taught. I meet new people each go-round and enjoy conversations with amazing authors, editors, and educators. These intersecting relationships will serve me well on the AWP Board.

Creating community is what I do every day as Executive Director of Writers in the Schools (WITS). I am proud to have been involved with WITS for the last 20 years and to have witnessed in person the long-term transformational work that we do. I have seen the effects of our program on thousands and thousands of children, many of whom are now adults who truly understand the pleasure and power of reading and writing. I have a deep connection with and investment in WITS, and I believe that my 2 decades of work have helped the organization to stay true to its original mission, but also evolve to face new challenges. This is the energy and vision that I will bring to AWP.

WITS is my job, my career, and my passion. I am proud of what we have accomplished. WITS is ranked the #1 literary arts organization in Texas. We've been named the best summer camp for kids in Houston. But, we never lose sight of what matters. 1523 West Main is not just an office where we run a business; it's a *house* where we grow and plan and dream. We have a backyard where we plant rosemary, a calico cat that sleeps on our porch, and a kitchen where we drink coffee and read our horoscopes. These things make a difference. They remind us that we are a community and that WITS is all about people. AWP is about people, too. It's not just panels, keynote addresses, and plenaries. Our connections and creativity run deeper.

My hope is that in the midst of what many are calling a "creativity crisis," AWP will become a beacon. One of the best ways to do this is to continue our mission of reaching out to diverse writers and engaging in work together that we cannot accomplish alone. This past year I had the pleasure of helping to start a movement to bring poetry to new audiences. Public Poetry was recently named the best reading series in Houston. I believe that the

value of poetry is for everyone. I'm proud to be a member of AWP because it enables writers to be artists, educators, professionals, and activists in a way that makes sense. In addition to my work at WITS in Houston, I also lead the WITS Alliance, a group of 22 similar organizations with the same mission of literary education. Through this project, I assist writers as they create their own programs for young people, sharing my expertise in fundraising, teaching, budgeting, and entrepreneurship. The vision of the WITS Alliance is that one day every child will get the chance to work with a practicing writer in their own school or community.

As you know, Walt Whitman was a traveler at heart, and he never tired of meeting new people. With each new person, he listened carefully, and in listening, he heard amazing stories. As an AWP Board member, I will position myself as a listener in order to help AWP better meet the needs of writers and writing programs. The role of the AWP board is to provide leadership—in a volunteer capacity--to one of the largest literary communities. If elected to this position, I will be ready to serve.