The YSU English Festival has a long history in the Valley, and we invite you to become part of its ongoing history.

The English Festival is a unique annual program reaching out to approximately 3,000 junior and senior high school students from Mahoning, Trumbull, and Columbiana counties in Ohio, and Mercer and Lawrence counties in Pennsylvania.

Though the English Festival occurs in the spring, its effects are felt throughout the year. Each fall nearly 200 middle and high schools in the greater Youngstown area receive invitations to bring students to the YSU English Festival. To attend, students read seven books, and teachers monitor their reading progress throughout the year.

If you decide to attend, you agree to do some work:

To be invited (or to be an alternate), you make a commitment to read all the Festival books for your grade level by late February. The list is available on the back of this brochure.

From those who make such a commitment, your teacher will choose up to 35 student participants if you’re a 10th–12th grader, and up to 30 student participants if you’re a 7th–9th grader, and several alternates.

Registration for each day of the Festival is limited to approximately 1,000 students. There is a non-refundable registration fee of $8 per student ($10 if out of district).

Your teacher will quiz you to be sure that you’ve read the Festival books, that you will attend all your scheduled sessions.

When you register, you will be expected to sign a statement that you have read the Festival Booklist. Some of these sessions are intended for faculty, teachers, librarians, and parents.

Any infractions of these rules will be reported to your principal.

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Your teacher will quiz you to be sure that you’ve read the books. Most Festival activities rely on the books; you have to read them to participate.

When you register, you will be expected to sign a statement that you have read the Festival books, that you will conform to the Festival’s policy on acceptable behavior, and that you will attend all your scheduled sessions.

Any infractions of these rules will be reported to your principal.

The Festival Activities

At the Festival, you will follow a prearranged schedule called a “track.” Please read the descriptions of the various Festival activities.

Along with all other participants, you will hear the featured author-lecturer and have a break for lunch.

As you’ll see, most of the activities test your knowledge about the books, so it’s vital that you read all of them thoroughly and well.

Visiting Lecturers. Faculty or administrators from other universities often lead special sessions at the Festival on topics dealing with concerns about writing or reading or on topics deriving from the Festival Booklist. Some of these sessions are intended for faculty, teachers, librarians, and parents.

Impromptu Writing Contests. These contests are held on the day of the Festival. You are allowed fifty minutes to deal with a topic that is given to you at the beginning of the session.

You are limited not only in time but also in how much you can write. You are allowed to write only on the front and back of one sheet of paper. You may not bring notes or paper to the competition.

Topics may require you to explain, criticize, compare, or argue points of plot, characterization, theme, setting, etc., in various Festival books, or they may require you to describe situations beyond the stories—for example, to create a conversation between two characters from different Festival books.

Writing Games. In Writing Games, you work with other students on a task that necessitates pooling your understanding of a book or books on the Festival Booklist and responding imaginatively, according to rules given to you at the beginning of the session.

Writing Games reward not only reading and writing skills but also ingenuity and the ability to cooperate.

For example, one Writing Game might ask teams to develop promotional campaigns for books they have read. To do that, each team would have to prepare a slide presentation to book sellers, describing its book, a marketing slogan, a newspaper ad for it, etc.

The results are judged on the basis of how imaginative the projects are and how skillfully the teams followed instructions while working within a strict time limit.

Journalism Workshop. Journalists introduce you to journalistic interviewing techniques by having you participate in a “press conference” with the Thomas and Carol Gay Memorial Lecturer, the James A. Houck Memorial Lecturer, or another noted writer, and then having you write up the interview for publication. Entries are judged anonymously.

Renga Riot. These sessions are led by creative writers. In these, you work with a team of students to write a poem that you will share with the group. These poems are judged on the spot, prizes are distributed immediately and winners are announced at the Awards Ceremony.

Not-So-Trivial Pursuit. Teams of students compete in an exciting, challenging game that tests your memory and attention to detail by requiring you to answer extremely specific questions about characters, events, locations, names, and who knows what in Festival books. Prizes are distributed immediately, and winners are announced at the Awards Ceremony.

Writing Labs. Festival Writing Labs encourage learning about writing through a group activity writing task based on the Festival Booklist. The labs are conducted by university and high school faculty working together and are noncompetitive.

This year’s festival

Selections from Pennsylvania.

Columbiana counties in Ohio, and Mercer and Lawrence counties. (YSU English Festival activities in Pennsylvania.)

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Writing Games reward not only reading and writing skills but also ingenuity and the ability to cooperate.

For example, one Writing Game might ask teams to develop promotional campaigns for books they have read. To do that, each team would have to prepare a brief presentation to book sellers, describing its book, a marketing slogan, a newspaper ad for it, etc.

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