

Show Me ILPC Story Winner

By Krista Lutrick, Kerr High School

“Ye-haw!” said advisor David Knight, as he comes in riled up for the first of the afternoon sessions. “Ye-haw!” he said, as he escorted students by the arm up to the front of the room. He stops. He smiles. And then he grabs for a stack of papers.

Knight teaches broadcast journalism at Lancaster High School and is the Public Information Director for the Lancaster County School District in South Carolina. And he is just one of many speakers at the 2012 Interscholastic League Press Conference at the University of Texas Austin. Here, students from all over the state gather at the university to sit in on sessions in the hopes of hearing advice on how to be better writers.

Knight’s own sessions began at 1 PM on Saturday, April 28. Waggener Hall. Room 101. Story telling that ain’t boring.

“Don’t look down! Look up!” he said as he passed a stack of papers down each row.

“Look up! No cheating!”

The classroom full of students was slightly startled at the words. They weren’t expecting a test.

“Turn the paper over,” Knight said. ““Sarah Clark knows what they think. The smirks. The laughs.””

Knight’s session was over how to make a story interesting to the readers. How to get and write the details. How to break the rules.

He begins by reading a story from *The Kansas City Star*. It's about a girl. A heavy girl who goes out for cheerleading. He starts reading the story and then abruptly stops.

"Look up! No cheating!"

He gives commentary.

"Sometimes we're so wrapped up in the rules the judges give us that we ruin a good beginning," he said. He tells the students listening that to be good writers, they absolutely must break all the rules that English teachers and judges set for them. They have to name the dog. They have to vary sentence length. They must not use colossal words.

Throughout the session, Knight refers back to the story by Eric Adler. He comments on his common simple word choice.

"English teaches will trick you to think that big words will work, but they won't," he said. "If you want to be great writers, break the rules!"

He points out the detail of the images within the piece, especially during the character development. Details. Details. Good writers look for lots for lots of detail.

"Great writers are specific," Knight said. "They give specific detail. Great writers name the dog!"

To be a good writer, reporters must look for the information. They must dig deep. They must not be afraid to ask the questions that need to be asked. Great writers cannot have fear. Knight stresses the importance of reporting the truth to readers. To do so, writers must create a powerful image, which requires them to leave out any censoring of adjectives. Details. Details.

“Naming the dog,” as Knight puts it, means that writers must not be afraid to tell the truth, they must call out the facts and the intensity and impact the facts have on the subjects. Emotion is a big factor. Emotion drives. Writers cannot be afraid to create emotion in their readers. Their job is to tell how the subject felt, but doing so in a way that enables readers to feel the same thing.

“Don’t pass judgment,” he said. Knight warned the students that writers are there for one thing only: to present the facts. No judgment. No prejudice. Just fact written in an enthralling way.

“If you start writing like the movies, people are gonna read your stuff,” he said.

Knight’s session lasted only 45 minutes. He pushed the class to try to understand how to look at words in a new and different way. They not just words on a page. They tell a story. They make connections with the audience and shine light in the world. To connect to readers, writers must break the barrier. They must go beyond where they are expected to. Story telling that ain’t boring.

“I want to change people,” he said. “Isn’t it amazing to know that your writing could change someone? We want people to put shape into this chaos we’re living in.”