

High school teachers make Book Fest a lesson in literary inspiration

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When the New Orleans Book Festival at Tulane University takes place March 9-11, New Orleans-area high school teachers and students will be among the literary fans in attendance. Above, Book Festival patrons browse titles in the Tulane bookstore on the uptown campus. (Photo by Rusty Costanza)

Thanks to some area teachers who incorporated last year's New Orleans Book Festival at Tulane University into their classwork, high school students experienced thought-provoking discussions from leading authors, a taste of college life and close encounters with the written word — and they are eager to return for the 2023 fest.

Mark Paul, who teaches Filming and Editing Media at St. Augustine High School in New Orleans, brought a group of five St. Aug students with his colleague, Evan Phillips, an Advanced Placement (AP) English teacher. The students, who received credit for attending, especially enjoyed sessions on politics and current events. The teachers plan to return to the Book Festival with another student group in 2023.

"Today's world moves extremely fast with technology and information at your fingertips," Paul said. "It is so great to see students taking time to step away from their phones and social media, and to use that special time away from technology to read books."

At Patrick F. Taylor Academy in Avondale, Louisiana, Cheryl Bordelon teaches English III, AP Research and AP Seminar. This week she and her colleague Thomas Curran will attend Book Fest with 50 Taylor students from AP classes and literature-related clubs.

"My research students are particularly interested in journalists," Bordelon said. "Our students (also) want to hear David Rubenstein and Bill Gates."

Bordelon said last year, Curran brought a group of Taylor students from his Poetry in America class. "Students had a fantastic experience!" she reported. "(Book Festival co-chair and Tulane professor) Walter Isaacson took time to speak to some of them individually; many had read his work."

And at nearby Jesuit High School, civics teacher Jay Combe offered students extra credit if they attended at least two sessions (with an adult) and wrote a short paper reflecting on their experiences.

Four students took the extra credit last year, including then-junior Joshua Washington, who met Princeton professor Eddie S. Glaude Jr.

"I expect a bigger crowd this year, especially since we just completed a civics unit built around *All the President's Men*. Some of the boys are excited to see Carl Bernstein," Combe said.

He also offered a word to the wise, in the spirit of any New Orleans festival: “There are some big names on the list,” he told the students. “But Book Fest is like Jazz Fest — sometimes the best experiences are on the smaller stages.”

The New Orleans Book Festival at Tulane University, which takes place on the university’s uptown campus March 9-11, is free and open to the public. Find more information on the event including [the schedule](#), on the [Book Festival website](#).



Jesuit High School student Joshua Washington (right) met author Eddie S. Glaude Jr. (left) at the 2022 New Orleans Book Festival at Tulane University thanks to an extra-credit class assignment. (Photo provided by Joshua Washington)