**Frequently Asked Questions**

**What is the organization’s mission?**

James River Writers (JRW) is a non-profit organization whose mission is to build community by connecting and inspiring writers and all those in central Virginia with a love for the written word.

**How did JRW start?**

We began in 2003 when a group of area authors sought to address the needs of writers and literary fans in central Virginia by hosting Richmond’s first writing conference. Since then, we have grown into a multifaceted organization of over 500 members that serves as the region’s literary hub and a welcoming home for anyone who loves the written word. Our many programs inspire people of all ages to find their voices and connect with other word lovers. For those already writing, no matter the genre, we help them improve their craft.

A number of local writers have become published authors with the help of JRW. Many have signed with literary agents they have met through our conference or other events, and still others have independently published their works with knowledge and industry insight gleaned from our programming. Even more have found encouragement on their writing journeys from our supportive community. Some James River Writers members with writing success stories include Meg Medina, Karen A. Chase, Robin Farmer, Rebekah L. Pierce, Kris Spisak, Virginia Pye, and Julie Valerie, among many others. JRW plays a key role in expanding our region’s literary landscape and in adding a vital dimension to Richmond’s cultural life.

**How does JRW work?**

With a dedicated board and small staff, JRW serves the Richmond region by

* Building a community of members to celebrate, share information, and network.
* Providing monthly panels to help writers learn the craft and business of writing.
* Offering hands-on instruction through Master Classes taught by industry experts.
* Hosting a top-notch annual conference that brings nationally recognized writers, editors, and agents to our region.
* Inspiring writers of all ages to enter contests and find their voices.
* Sharing information on all things literary in our region with our free e–newsletters.

**What does JRW do?**

**James River Writers Conference**

The annual JRW Conference is our organization’s signature event, and our most meaningful contribution to the literary arts in our region. Well-respected within the publishing industry, the JRW Conference adds to Richmond’s national profile as a city of great creative depth and integrity and therefore a desirable place to live. Starting with our first conference in 2003, we have invited luminaries from the literary world to share their wisdom about writing and publishing in Richmond for two decades and counting. In 2020 and 2021, we hosted virtual conferences due to the pandemic, but we were back in person in 2022 for our 20th anniversary. Known for its inspiring, collegial atmosphere, the conference offers Master Classes, several plenary sessions, an engaging writing-based game show panel, appointments with literary agents, hands-on intensives, and a full array of panels on topics from the common challenges of structuring a novel to how to manage a writer’s taxes.

Our past presenters have been highly regarded editors and agents from the major literary agencies and publishing houses in the country, as well as prize-winning authors in every genre. These have included Kwame Alexander, Kathi Appelt, David Baldacci, Claudia Emerson, Jane Friedman, Hugh Howey, Edward P. Jones, Meg Medina, Ellen Oh, Linda Sue Park, Tom Robbins, Margot Lee Shetterly, Adriana Trigiani, Jeannette Walls, and Jacqueline Woodson. Feedback from both attendees and our presenters has been consistently excellent.

David Henry Sterry and Arielle Eckstut, the Book Doctors, shared: “The James River Writers Conference is the best run, most organized conference we've ever done.  And we go all over the country doing them.  But more than that, everyone is just so nice. . . .  Plus they have great speakers, wonderful agents, editors and writers who come in, and a fantastic sense of a writing community that helps, encourages and supports each other, instead of being snarky and bitchy and uber-competitive.”

**The Writing Show**

Launched in 2005, The Writing Show has become a popular ongoing series that brings together writing professionals to share their knowledge of the craft and business of writing. In February of 2015, it moved to Firehouse Theatre, but during the pandemic in 2020 and 2021, it was delivered virtually via Zoom. In 2023 the show moved to the Visual Arts Center of Richmond as part of an ongoing partnership. Over the years, the show has moved from the last Thursday of the month, to the last Wednesday, and now the last Tuesday. It is usually offered eight or nine months a year, depending on other programming. Its success has inspired a copycat program in South Carolina through the Hub City Writers Project. Topics have included writing for young adults, memoir, book trailers, trends in publishing, and advice from agents.

**Master Classes**

JRW offered our first Master Classes as pre-conference workshops in 2010 and has expanded on this offering over the years. Master Classes give attendees the chance to experience hands-on learning from expert teachers in a small classroom setting. Topics have included advice from New York agents on query letters, editing, and social media platforms.

**Thursday Night Writes!**

Started in 2015, this program was originally known as Writers Farmhouse was a weekly opportunity to jump in with other writers and commit to work. Both aspiring and established writers came to a local Urban Farmhouse cafe to get words on the page, garner feedback and encouragement from peers, and set a weekly writing goal. Writers Farmhouse was discontinued in 2020 due to the pandemic and returned in 2023 as Thursday Night Writes! It now alternates in-person and virtual meetings.

**Writers Wednesday**

[Held on the second Wednesday of every month, Writers Wednesday](http://www.jamesriverwriters.org/what-we-do/programs/writers-wednesdays) is a casual meet and greet for writers of all experience levels and genres. It’s a great way to ease into the literary scene, network, and mingle with professionals and first-timers alike. When in-person, it’s held at a Richmond restaurant or brewery (Capital Alehouse, Ardent Craft Ales, Hardywood West). Writers Wednesday moved to Zoom in April 2020 and has both virtual and in-person meetings as of 2022.

**Contests** **& Awards**

James River Writers is committed to providing opportunities and encouragement to writers of all ages and at all stages of their careers. To that end, we offer three major contests on a rotating annual basis in conjunction with *Richmond* magazine, and an annual regional award. Begun in 2014, the Best Self-published Novel Contest acknowledges and celebrates the growing indie publishing industry. Our oldest contest, the Best Unpublished Novel Contest has usually attracted more than 70 submissions per cycle, a testament to the untapped literary vivacity of the region. The Shann Palmer Poetry Contest honors an exceptional area poet and was judged by Richmond’s first Poet Laureate in 2021. In addition, the annual Emyl Jenkins Award celebrates an individual and/or organization furthering the arts by connecting writers and readers in central Virginia. In 2022, JRW became a media partner with the Virginia Screenwriters Forum for a screenwriting contest.

**Membership**

We work hard to keep program costs low and to build a network of writing enthusiasts who support and celebrate each other. We offer tiered packages ranging from our individual membership (monthly members-only newsletter, great discounts on our programs, and benefits with area merchants) to all-inclusive (one-year membership that includes all of our program offerings). We also offer a Writing Show membership that includes access to all Writing Shows for the year.