

**Griots Storytelling Institute**

**Wichita Griots**

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**NABS Annual Report 2017**

The Griots Storytelling Institute (GSI) is a group of storytellers committed to using the ancient art form of storytelling to inspire and enable all youth, especially those from disadvantaged circumstances, to realize their full potential as productive, responsible, and caring citizens.

Since its inception in 1998, GSI has transformed the lives of thousands of students in the Wichita, KS community. GSI presents quality cultural, educational, and thought provoking programs, to enrich the lives of all ages and diverse backgrounds. GSI is also dedicated to the belief that the arts can play an important role in building understanding about inequities, shedding light on social injustice, helping to build a more expansive and inclusive societal mind set, while inspiring young people and their families to reject the current status quo and strive for more equitable change.

GSI’s target audience is currently very specific, focusing on students in K through 12 grades, especially those in disadvantaged or underserved populations. GSI provides programming to more than 15,000 students and adults each year.

**GSI serves our local Wichita community and its youth with the following programs:**

Arts Partners / USD 259 Elementary School Presentations

Working through Arts Partners Wichita, GSI offers a variety of presentations for grade levels K through 12. These presentations integrate storytelling, dancing, drumming, singing, theater, and visual arts into each classroom visit or all-school presentation. These presentations bring prominent historical characters to life with recreations of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I have a dream…” speech, or accounts from the life of Maya Angelou, Booker T. Washington, Mary McLeod Bethune, and former President Barack Obama, and Gordon Parks, to name a few. This is how GSI uses the art of storytelling, combined with images, sound, movement, and language to create a culturally diverse learning environment full of encouragement and inspiration.

*This program is the furthest reaching for GSI, serving up to 12,000-16,000 students annually in the schools and neighborhoods.*

Literary Arts Program

GSI confirms its commitment to engaging young audiences by distributing books through a Literary Arts program at each presentation. During each classroom presentation or general performance, GSI distributes books that are free for-the-taking. This distribution program supports GSI’s mission of helping students enjoy reading and learning outside of the classroom. The goal is to provide books to students so they may eventually build personal libraries in their homes, read on their own, and increase the literacy rate in our community.

*GSI has distributed hundreds of books during 2017.*

Tellabration

Tellabration is an annual day of celebration, held internationally the Saturday before Thanksgiving. On this day, storytellers all across the United States gather in their communities to fellowship and share the art of storytelling. GSI celebrates with local storytellers, consisting of Wichita business people and community leaders, gathering at The Kansas African American Art Museum to share personal stories relating to historical characters, other cultures, values, and the importance of education. These stories are interspersed with cultural singing, dancing, and drumming to create a mini “drama” out of each story. The goal is to engage and inspire young people through this unique art form by bringing the arts, education, and mentoring together all in one place.

*Tellabration averages 125 attendees and participants each year.*

Kwanzaa Cultural Celebration

The Kwanzaa Cultural Celebration brings the community together to learn about the seven principles of Kwanzaa. Although Kwanzaa is a weeklong celebration beginning on December 26 and continuing through January 1, GSI plans one gathering for youth to highlight the seven Kwanzaa principles: 1) Unity, 2) Self-determination, 3) Collective work and responsibility, 4) Cooperative economics, 5) Purpose, 6) Creativity, and 7) Faith. Students are paired with mentors and given the opportunity to interact with adults and learn about principles that influence their lives going forward.

*Kwanzaa Cultural Celebration averages 100 attendees and participants each year.*

Griots Cultural Arts Summer Enrichment Camp

This Camp is the highlight of the year for GSI.

This week-long enrichment camp is offered each summer, during the month of July, to youth from six to 16 years of age. Young people from the Wichita community and surrounding areas have the opportunity to work with adult mentors and experience the art of storytelling. With the rhythmic beat of the drums, and the gathering of the Village Children, Griots Cultural Arts Summer Enrichment Camp has begun!

As GSI visits schools and community organizations in Wichita throughout the year, the invitation is extended to participate in the Cultural Arts Summer Enrichment Camp. Students can pre-register for Camp beginning in March each year. The Camp is held for a full week in July at Urban Preparatory Academy (UPA). Students, ranging from six to 16 years of age, attend sessions from 9am to 5pm daily for five days, with a Stage Production Grand Finale on the sixth day.

During the Camp, students experience art, storytelling, music, poetry, writing, crafting, dance, drama, and drumming. Students are given opportunities to read, write, create, produce, and perform. Sessions are set up in classrooms throughout UPA and students make the rounds to each of the sessions throughout the day. Each session provides a mentor/instructor to work with the students and the results are wonderful. Groups of students learn to sing songs, play instruments, paint on rocks and canvas, write poetry, and tell stories. Storytelling is used in daily lessons and activities to reinforce character traits such as respect, responsibility, integrity, caring, self-discipline, and self-reliance. Civic leaders and volunteers from the community often attend the summer camp to share their personal stories and demonstrate a moral or lesson as the outcome.

This full week of experience and learning comes together on the final night of Camp when all participate in the Grand Finale production. This is the time when students shine and share their newly learned skills with parents and the community. This production includes skits based on current events, topics of politics, racism, diversity, and bullying. All are portrayed by the students reading poetry, singing, dancing, drumming, storytelling, creation of set designs, and the use of technology and projections.

*The Griots Cultural Arts Summer Enrichment Camp hosts between 45 and 72 students each day in July, with 47 mentors and volunteers giving of their time. During the Grand Finale production, 450 friends and family attend the performance, with 50 mentors and volunteers giving of their time.*

**Financial information**

As more youth are reached and become involved in GSI programs, more funding is required to support the organization. GSI is fortunate to partner with the following Corporations, Foundations, and Granting organizations:

 Commerce Bank

 Fidelity Bank

 KCAIC (KS Arts Commission)

 The City of Wichita Cultural Funding program

 The City of Wichita Developing Artist program

 The Fred and Mary Koch Foundation

 Westar Energy

 Wichita Community Foundation

With help from these grantors and sponsors, GSI has increased their budget from $28,000 in 2016 to $43,000 in 2018.

**Community Engagement**

The final part of GSI’s mission is to engage the community. This is accomplished by partnering with local organizations such as The Ulrich Museum at Wichita State University, The Kansas African American Museum, The Wichita Art Museum, The Boys and Girls Club, the Wichita Public Library, Exploration Place, Watermark Book, Arts Partners, and USD-259 School District.

By working with and through all of these partners, GSI has a much better chance of reaching more youth and changing more lives.

All GSI programs are created to enhance the development and character-building skills of today’s youth, with a focus on enabling and motivating them to become life-long learners and have a greater appreciation for the arts.

**Ms. Jean Pouncil-Burton, Executive Director**

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