



Embassy of the United States of America

Public Affairs Office

PRESS RELEASE

Freetown

October 31, 2011

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Visiting U.S. Writers and Local Artists Mix Poetry, Music, and Storytelling

American poet Jenny Brown and fiction author James O'Brien conducted a series of creative-writing workshops at the United States Embassy in Freetown from October 24-28. They shared ideas and experiences with writing groups such as PEN-Sierra Leone, the Falui Poets Society and the Sentinel English Language Program (SELI), as well as other local arts organizations. Participants discussed writing techniques, word choice, characterization, and the use of concrete details to convey abstract ideas. Workshop exercises focused on organizing ideas in response to writing prompts and critiquing each other's writing.

The program concluded with live readings of poetry and stories hosted by U.S. Ambassador Michael S. Owen at his residence on October 28. The readings were interspersed with musical performances by the John B Jazz Band and Groovy Colors, as well as standup comedy by Mohamed Bobson Kamara.

This eclectic mix of genres and styles provided an entertaining cross-section of the arts as practiced in both the United States and Sierra Leone. Members of audience included fellow artists and writers, as well as academics, educators, and youth leaders. Ambassador Owen said at the opening of the program that "By bringing together persons from different cultures and age groups, to share their very different perspectives and skills, we believe that we can increase mutual understanding... [T]he United States is proud to sponsor these activities, as a means of supporting the arts in Sierra Leone – and, I hope, as a means of encouraging others to do likewise."

Jenny Browne and James O'Brien's visit to Sierra Leone was sponsored by the U.S. Department of State through the University of Iowa's International Writing Program (IWP). Over the past several years, the IWP has brought together more than 1,000 rising and established literary stars from 120 countries to explore the creative writing process. Authors, screenwriters, journalists, and other IWP participants benefit from the rich literary heritage and resources of Iowa City, a UNESCO City of Literature.

For more information, please see <http://exchanges.state.gov/cultural/iwp.html>.