



Whittier Union HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

To Achieve and Maintain Excellence...

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Dec. 13, 2023 **CONTACT:** Andrea Garcia **PHONE:** 909-447-2403

Whittier Union Student Debuts Poetry Book during Ribbon-Cutting Honoring Alumni Authors

WHITTIER – On a festive afternoon that saw Whittier High School embracing the wonder of literature, Cardinal junior Julia Rae Rodriguez read selections from her recently-published first book of poetry to a packed library filled with friends, classmates and teachers, the feature presentation during a ribbon-cutting ceremony honoring Whittier High alumni authors on Dec. 6.

Rodriguez joined Whittier High School Alumni Association Board Member Rob West and WHS history teacher Dean Myers to officially unveil a commemorative display case containing books written by Whittier High grads, including former President Richard Nixon, best-selling thriller writer John Saul, and lawyer/author William C. Gordon, whom the library is dedicated to.

After the ribbon-cutting, Rodriguez placed her new book, “Dried Lavender & Sage: Poems as I Grow,” inside the display case, joining the alumni authors. Addressing the audience, Superintendent Dr. Monica Oviedo and Principal Tim Liggett praised Rodriguez for her creativity and dedication, and for opening the door for other students to share their voices.

“This is an amazing honor for me. It’s a dream come true to read in front of my friends and classmates, but I was a little scared. It’s so personal,” Rodriguez said. “I encourage everyone to write down everything they can. I want to see more teenagers in publishing. Thank you so much to my parents for all they’ve done and my English teacher, Maxine Sweeney, for all of her support and advice.”

Sweeney immediately recognized Rodriguez’s writing talent as a freshman and encouraged her to write with purpose and chronicle her feelings as she transitioned from adolescent to adult.

“Julia is an amazing individual,” Sweeney said. “She has really found her strong Latina voice. Julia is exploring her roots and painting a landscape of her adolescence with her words. It’s been wonderful to watch her grow. I’m so proud of her.”

“Dried Lavender & Sage” is published by Skillful & Soulful Press, a bilingual children’s book imprint which was founded by Rodriguez’s mother, Sandra Gonzalez-Mora, with the goal of fostering a love of language and literacy. Rodriguez’s stepfather, Rey Mora, provided illustrations for the book. Rodriguez had previously collaborated with her mother on the book, “Mommy Tell Me Why I Am Radiant.”

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Rodriguez is also an actor who has already starred in two Whittier High musical productions, “Mamma Mia” and “Legally Blonde (The Musical),” and is a member of the Next Level Theater Company in Whittier.

“Julia is an exceptionally talented artist, excellent student and campus leader,” Liggett said. “She is the perfect choice to lead us in the ribbon-cutting, and to promote a discussion on why literature is such an important component in education. We are indebted to the Alumni Association, the estate of Willie Gordon, and Dean Myers for their support in bringing the commemorative display case to the library. This is a great day to be a Cardinal.”

Myers is helping to coordinate a series of events leading up to Whittier High School’s 125th anniversary, to be celebrated during the 2024-25 school year. Myers worked with a local contractor to design and build the display case for the library.

“We put the display case together to honor the great legacy of excellence of Whittier High School authors that have traversed these halls over the decades and to honor our newest author,” Myers said. “Whittier High has a long and storied history. For the anniversary, we want to highlight the many great accomplishments of our esteemed alumni.”

The Whittier High Alumni Association supports the school by promoting its mission and history. The association provides scholarships for students based on donations it collects throughout the year and holds an annual Hall of Fame ceremony to honor its best and brightest.

“What a wonderful day for Whittier High School,” Oviedo said. “Congratulations to Julia for her first book of poetry, and kudos to her for seeking to empower her classmates through the written word. As we look toward a historic anniversary for the school, we can see what a positive impact the school has made on the community, and the future has never looked brighter.”

PHOTO CAPTIONS

WUHS_D_AUTHOR1: Whittier High School junior Julia Rae Rodriguez stands next to a commemorative library display case honoring Cardinal alumnus who have become published authors. After a ribbon-cutting ceremony, Rodriguez added her recently published book of poetry, “Dried Lavender & Sage” to the display case. Rodriguez then conducted a poetry reading for her classmates in the library.

WUHS_D_AUTHOR2: Whittier High School junior Julia Rae Rodriguez and Principal Tim Liggett pose in front of a commemorative library display case that honors Cardinal alumnus who have become published authors, including former President Richard Nixon, best-selling thriller writer John Saul and lawyer/author William C. Gordon, whom the library is dedicated to.

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