



Communications

24525 Hilliard Blvd.
Westlake, OH 44145
440.250.1258
www.wlake.org
bonvissuto@wlake.org

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FROM THE DESK OF SANTA CLAUS

Four years ago, Westlake High School English teacher Sarah Reichert turned a writing lesson into a creative endeavor for her AP Language & Composition students.

WHS seniors spend class time in December impersonating Santa Claus, answering letters from children and grandchildren of staff members. Reichert's 55 students wrote 112 letters as an exercise in understanding audience, persona and purpose.

Before settling in to write their letters from Santa, students discussed a variety of questions from children to "get their story straight." This included questions like:

- How many elves does Santa have? If you were wondering, according to Wordbuilding Stack Exchange, the answer is 85,851 (if you assume 2 billion children, 1 toy each, 364 workdays, 16 hour days, and each elf can make four toys per hour).
- What is the North Pole like?
- What do you feed reindeer?
- How do you make toys?
- Can I ride Rudolph?

In one class, students were writing to three and four year olds in preschool. Reichert helped students decipher student wish lists (which ranged from dinosaurs to Ghostbusters to princess dolls) and craft clever responses. Students typed their letters into templates that read "From the Desk of Santa Claus" with a return address of "The North Pole."

Reichert also offers an option for families who do not participate in the Santa tradition, inviting children to write to a fictional character.

"Last year I had two little girls who wrote to Star Wars characters, and my students had a lot of fun writing back to them as these characters," Reichert said.

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