

ACCESS BOOKS AT YALLWEST 2026



“I came last year and was so excited that Mr. Ipena said I can go again. I love it here. Everyone is so happy and people are so smart and friendly. I try to see every author here even if I don’t know them. I feel like I am on vacation.”

- Cynthia, 8th Grader: Bunche Middle School

April 25 marked a special occasion for many book lovers across the Los Angeles area—and for Access Books, it was no different, as the morning marked the kick-off of the 11th Annual Yallwest Book Festival! As in years past, thanks to incredibly generous donations and volunteers, Access Books had the pleasure of sponsoring a trip this year to the festival for 365 students from 12 middle and high schools across East Los Angeles, the Valley, and Compton.

Buses pulled up to Santa Monica High School by 9:30 am, and all students arrived eager to spend the day meeting authors (close to 60 were in attendance), booksellers, and vendors. By the time our schools checked in and received their complimentary tote bags and lunch funds, the event had well and truly begun. Students who registered for keynote addresses beforehand wasted no time rushing to those presentations before their doors closed.



Students who did not register for talks dispersed to the festival's other highlights, perusing booths and waiting in line for photos with authors. 9th grader Anna, a Yallwest first timer, expressed her appreciation for being able to scan the festival according to her own interests and at her own pace, "I feel really grown up. My friends and I walked around alone. Everyone is so excited and friendly. I was so happy when an author we saw was walking around stopped for a photo. I have read every one of her books." The author just so happened to be Tahereh Mafi, a New York Times- and international-bestselling author of young adult novels. When asked how she discovered Mafi's works, Anna proudly exclaimed she did so through "the school library, the only place I go for books!"

"I had all [field trip] spots taken, but I told students to come in case someone did not show up. We had so many show up that we called a second bus. I was shocked and so happy. This is something the kids look forward to and talk about."

- Mr. Ipena, Bunche Middle School



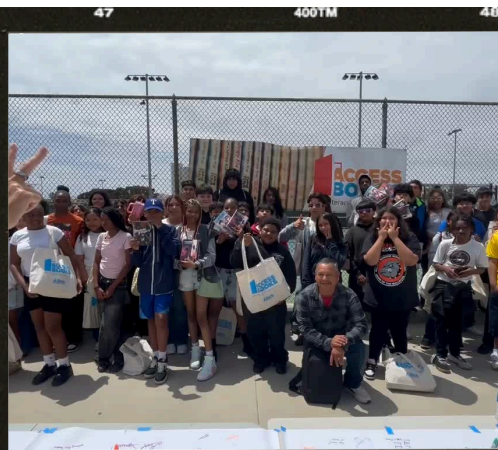
"The authors of a lot of books [Access Books] gave to the library were here today. The kids could not believe that someone who wrote a book on the shelf was here in person. Everything is so organized, and the students feel so welcome. The whole event is special for us."

- Ms. Rodriguez, Laurel St. Elementary School



When lunchtime rolled around, students explored the various food truck options and stalls on campus, made available to them by their distributed lunch funds. Thinking on her lunch and the festival to this point, 8th-grade Janice wisely stated, “What could be better? Books, boba, and friends.”

Meanwhile, East Los Angeles students decided to take advantage of the location and ate their lunch at the beach. 7th grader Vanessa, inspired by all things books and the ocean view, described, “It was so pretty, and the beach is so close. This is my 3rd time I have seen the beach, and it is so amazing. I want to live near the water and come every day. It was really cool that we got to do that, too.”





As the day progressed, all students cycled through a range of emotions. A particular student, Joel, who initially did not want to come on the trip—"I am not a big reader anymore, but my mom made me come"—soon had a change of heart. He explained, "I was excited for the food trucks, but then I really liked listening to the authors when I went to with my friends. Stuart Gibbs was my favorite, and he was here with a group of other authors. They created a story with help from the audience. I am now glad my mom made me come. I want to reread all his stuff." Luckily for him, later in the day, Stuart Gibbs, best-selling author of the hit series *Spy School* and a many-times-over Access Book author-visit star, stopped by the Access Books table for photos with fans.

When the students returned to the buses at the trip's end, they made a final stop at the Access Books table for one last gift: a stack of high-interest books to take home. One student captured the majority of the students' delighted surprise when they exclaimed, "Wow, I was not expecting this!" Another added, ready to dig in, "I'm going to read on the bus all the way back."



Though Yallwest does not charge an entrance fee, an hours-long stay would not be feasible for many local Title I schools and students like the ones Access Books works with. Established transportation via school buses, food vouchers, and free books allows attendees to enjoy the book festivities for longer without worrying about time constraints and affordability. We extend our deepest thanks to the Rise Up Foundation and all our donors who ensured this high-quality literary experience that these young scholars won't forget anytime soon.

THANK YOU

