I’ve always loved the humanities - loved the nooks and crannies of language, the power of words to express the barely expressible, music, dance, paintings - the images and sounds that change you because you let them or because their grasp is too powerful to ignore. Loving beauty in its many forms is a life-long love, one supported by education of the arts, and guidance into its many mysteries and difficulties. Poetry Out Loud, and my educators and supporters who guided me along its path, were such mentors. Through them I learned to love the soothing syncopation of Langston Hughes, the loving tactlessness of Sharon Olds, and the sheer force of rhyme in three (memorized) pages of “The Cremation of Sam McGee” by Robert Service. My mentors, poets and teachers alike, trained me to look for meaning, to express what I found, and taught me to speak loudly, with confidence in my words and body as I stood on stage. They taught me to access art, to share it, and make new memories in words that had inspired so many others.

Poetry Out Loud gave me crucial life skills that still empower me today - interpretation of a text, memorization, public speaking, and self-confidence. I use these skills in my current work as a PhD student at UC Berkeley; I used them as a MA student at New York University where I won an academic competition; and recently in Berlin where I presented my research to a global audience of my peers. These skills extend outside of academia of course, they help whenever and wherever one must communicate an idea or a need, or present their findings or experience to others to effect change. Learning to effectively use language is the best gift a person can be given, and engaging with the arts is the best form of practice: art clearly enriches our lives, and in our attempts to interpret it, we come away with new understandings of ourselves. We learn to think critically and to explain concepts to others, to synchronize data and present it in such a way that others understand its worth to us. We learn to learn, and to help others learn as well.

I am a better person for having participated in Poetry Out Loud, and am forever grateful for the support I received from my teachers, administrators and those in the Michigan Humanities Council. When we support the education of the arts we give young people a voice with which to express themselves - and we empower them to continue doing so long after they leave the classroom. We give them life-skills, and what’s more, we invite them to become life-long lovers of the poetry, music, and art that makes life worthwhile.
I want to share a story with you that had a profound impact on us as individuals and as a Humanities Council. It was the implementation of Project Roots, an eight-week program that coached incarcerated youth to explore the history of roots music, write lyrics to songs, and conclude with a concert led by Folk musicians from the Arts & Humanities Touring program.

At the completion of the program, I was one of the students special guests, invited to observe the outcome of the eight-week program. About 170 students were in the audience, all waiting to hear the lyrics of the songs composed by their peers along with music created from the young men’s work by Josh White and Robert Jones, both well-known musicians. While many performed or presented their work, the one that collectively told about their fears and challenges was “Eddie’s Choice.”

From the song, one hears these words:

Eddie’s gone tonight at midnight, they’re about to push him out the door. He’s got a sweat shirt, shoes, and blue jeans, a plan and nothing more. This time has to be different. Ain’t gonna be another chance. As he walks about to push him out the door. He’s got a sweat shirt, shoes, and blue jeans, a plan and nothing more. This time has to be different. Ain’t gonna be another chance. As he walks to the bus stop, he meets a gnarled and dusty man. Listen here now, old man, my ride will be here soon. But since I got some time to kill now just try to tell me something new. The old man stares at Eddie. With a gleam in his eye, “Your road ain’t gonna take you nowhere, and I’m gonna tell you why, you know, that ride that’s comin’ for you, you’ve been in that car before, and you might have won some battles, but you’re bound to lose the war.”

I personally can tell you, it was powerful and I was moved by the impact this program had upon these young boys. My experience was not unique. All of us who attended this concert were touched by their creativity and stories... stories of fear, stories of challenges, and stories of what it means to be human.

I want you to know that I’m excited and delighted to be back directing and supporting the Council’s work. I strongly believe I can help make a difference as we continue to impact people’s lives, and provide programs that capture stories like the one I shared with all of you. And please share your stories with me, I love to hear how we have changed, impacted, and touched others in our state.

Contact Jan Fedewa at jfedewa@mihumanities.org or by calling 517-372-7770.

When I retired several years ago, I never thought I would have the opportunity to return to the Council as Interim Executive Director. The Michigan Humanities Council’s work has and continues to affect me in so many ways. Our programs help me realize how often we touch people’s lives in a positive and thoughtful way. While growing up in a small rural community, I never realized how the humanities was such a part of my family’s everyday life. We struggled, but we never lost sight of who we were or who we hoped to be. We often gathered around the table with each one of us having a designated spot. We didn’t have television so we played games, shared stories about our ancestors, listened to the radio, and often read the same book over and over again. Our life was simple, but meaningful. I believe this experience drew me to the humanities … an understanding of what it means to be human.

Heritage Grants: Exploring the History of All Michigan’s People

Michigan Humanities Council’s new Heritage Grants Program, supported by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, is off to a strong start. Since November, program manager Joe Cialdella and director of grant programs Robbe DiPietro have been busy creating criteria and application questions, fielding inquiries from applicants, talking to people as we traverse the state with our grant workshops and reading more than 20 draft proposals that were submitted on January 30. After awards are made in April, we will turn our attention to assisting grantees with implementation of their projects and making a digital space that will highlight and preserve some of the exciting content created through Heritage Grant projects.

Heritage Grants are intended to fund projects such as oral histories, community conversations, exhibits, and other formats that explore themes of race, ethnicity, and cultural identity from historical perspectives. The goal is to promote a deeper understanding of Michigan’s past by empowering groups whose stories are often not told or remain unseen to share the history of Michigan from their authentic voices.

Interested in applying? The final application deadline is March 16, 2015. Criteria and the application are available on our website.

Any questions should be directed to Joe Cialdella (jcialdella@mihumanities.org).
The 2015-16 Great Michigan Read has been selected and we are thrilled to present “Station Eleven” by Emily St. John Mandel.

“Station Eleven” is a departure from the non-fiction selections of the past several years, but we believe the opportunity for engaging programming and events, the connections to the humanities themes and the opportunities for discussion make it a perfect selection.

The questions raised in this novel will make you think about what it means to be human, why do we fight for survival and the human need to connect, to mark history and to create a future. We think you will love this book as much as we do!

There will be several opportunities over the next year to meet the author, register as one of our partners, present exciting programs and be a part of our new exciting ideas for the Great Michigan Read.

Emily St. John Mandel is the author of four novels, most recently Station Eleven, which was a 2014 National Book Award nominee. She is a staff writer for The Millions, and she lives in New York City with her husband.

“When I first visited the Michigan lakeshore on a book tour in 2010, I liked it so much that I decided I wanted to set my next book there, and I’ve taken every possible opportunity to return to the area since then. I was delighted by the news that Station Eleven had been selected as a Great Michigan Read, and I’m very much looking forward to spending more time in Michigan over the coming year. It’s an honor to have been selected, and I’m deeply grateful.”

~ Emily St. John Mandel

Hometown Teams

This year, you have the opportunity to explore the role of sports in America and to bringing the Smithsonian to your community!

Hometown Teams is a Smithsonian Institution traveling exhibit that explores the critical roles that sports have played in our home towns and in our lives as Americans.

Five rural locations in Michigan will be selected for the tour, which runs from April 2016 - January 2017.

Review our online application before the March 16, 2015 deadline! You have so much to learn, see, and do with a Smithsonian Exhibit!

Poetry Out Loud State Finals

Friday, March 13, 2015

Join us for this incredible event, and listen to the school champions compete for the title of State Champion!

Round 1: 9:00 am
Round 2: 12:30 pm
Poet Performance 2:30 pm
Kinetic Affect
Round 3: 3:00 pm

Dart Auditorium
Lansing Community College
Imagine living in a community without creativity, shared values, thought-provoking conversation and a reason to celebrate. Your tax deductible donation to support Michigan Humanities Council will be used to fund programs, events, grants and continuing the council’s mission to connect people and communities in the state of Michigan. Donate today and be part of preserving and promoting humanities in Michigan - www.michiganhumanities.org

GET INVOLVED ~ SUPPORT MICHIGAN HUMANITIES COUNCIL!

Visit our new website at www.michiganhumanities.org

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Board Meetings are open to the public. Please visit our website for location.

Upcoming dates:
March 19, June 11 and October 15, 2015