



At a poetry class led by Ethan Gilsdorf (right) at Grub Street, a nonprofit writing center near the Common, students pore over newspapers in search of words they can cut and paste into poems.

DOWNTOWN

# Portrait of the young bards

A teen workshop has room to write

By Christine Junge  
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Earlier this month at Grub Street Inc.'s headquarters, a visitor merely listening in might never have guessed the ages of the 40 people taking creative writing classes there. They talked about Chekhov and J.D. Salinger. They quoted from the philosopher Nietzsche. At various times they were so quiet that the only sound in the room was pencils scribbling across paper.

Amazingly, all were between 13 and 17 years old.

The Dec. 9 workshop marked the end of the free teen writing program's first year at the nonprofit writing center, near Boston Common at 160 Boylston St. (Grub Street's adult writing classes have been around since 1997.)

"We wanted to give teens who love writing a sense of community," said one of the program's co-founders, Christopher Castellani. "In school, writing might not be cool. Here everyone has an artistic side, so everyone is cool. Or no one

is cool. However you want to look at it."

The program's monthly four-hour workshops include writing exercises, short craft lessons, and time for the teens to read their work aloud. Students sign up ahead of time to focus on a form: memoir, poetry, fiction, or screenplay writing. Exercises and examples revolve around things that teens can relate to, such as the pressure of bullies, relationships, and homework.

Like the students' writing, the workshop itself is a work in progress.

"This first year we really wanted to focus on getting the teens to write a lot while they're here," said Castellani. "Next year, we want to focus on revision." He explained that a handful of kids have been coming back month after month, so he wants to create a group where the same individuals meet to critique each others' work.

East Boston High English teacher Nicole Tabolt brought three of her students because she felt Grub Street fills a hole in many high schools' curriculums.

"I wanted to help them have access to other types of writing," she

said. "We don't always get to do creative writing in my class... because of constraints of having to prepare the students for the MCAS and other standardized tests."

Two of Tabolt's students said the small class size at Grub Street made for a much different experience than high school.

"There was more time to share our work and talk about it," said Julie Brooks, 15. "That helped me gain a better understanding of poetry."

Nicole Alvarez, 14, said another bonus was being surrounded by people with a similar passion — "It was great to be with a bunch of people who like poetry to discuss it with and share ideas."

Sari Boren, a Grub Street teacher, said the teen years are particularly conducive to writing.

"Teenagers are very emotionally raw, but at the same time very protective of themselves. And they're trying to figure out their identity and to understand their place in the world. Through the process of writing, they get a sense of what their lives are about."

The next Grub Street teen workshop will be Jan. 27, 12-4 p.m.

## Who taught YOU to drive?

PETER DEMARCO

# Blocking horns

Nothing triggers gridlock and angst quite like drivers who block intersections. Sometimes the circumstances are beyond the driver's control — a traffic light changes too quickly, or someone cuts the person off. But most often it's the selfish driver who clogs the lane.

You know the type: no matter how badly traffic is backed up in front of them, they dive into the intersection without a care about making it through before the light turns red. Even when the light is yellow, they gun it.

"If you have the temerity to honk at these offenders, they look at you quizzically and shrug as if it's not their fault the intersection is blocked," writes reader Bruce Perry. "This seems to happen in busy areas where drivers may begin to believe they have waited long enough. There may also be an element of retaliation involved because if it happens one way, people coming on the intersecting street seem to feel that it's now their turn to do it, too."

Naturally, the anger level of drivers on the cross street who can't move rises exponentially with each passing light cycle. "That fool in front of me" soon becomes "That stupid jerk in front of me," and far worse.

Still, Ira Gershkoff, coauthor of "The Boston Driver's Handbook: Wild in the Streets," offers a more sympathetic view of intersection blockers.

In the win-or-lose world of Boston driving, if you don't forge

ahead, others surely will, he told me.

"If you don't and everyone else does, you may never be seen again. You'll be left behind," he said.

We all know you're not supposed to block an intersection, but what's the exact rule? And does the law allow any leeway?

### The law says

Alas, there's no latitude in this matter, said Lieutenant Jack Albert, traffic commander of the Cambridge Police Department.

For whatever reason, if you don't make it through an intersection before the light turns red, you're breaking the law.

"Once that light turns red and you're in it, you own a \$100 fine. It's just like going through a red light," said Albert.

The tone of Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 89, Section 9, is just as stringent.

"The driver of a motor vehicle shall not cross or enter an intersection which it is unable to proceed through without stopping and thereby blocking vehicles from traveling in a free direction," it reads. "A green light is no defense to blocking the intersection.

The driver must wait another cycle of the signal light, if necessary."

Saying the light was yellow, by the way, won't help you, as you're supposed to stop (not speed up!) when you see yellow unless it's unsafe to brake.

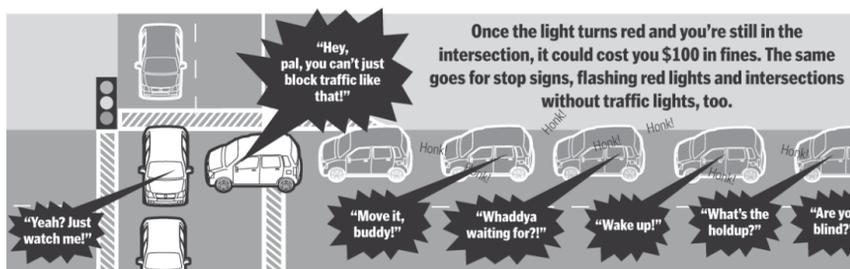
If caught blocking an intersection, you can be charged with either running a red light, running a flashing red light, or running a stop sign, depending on the situation. (The rule applies to intersections without traffic lights, too.) Or police could write you up for blocking an intersection or the simple charge of "gridlock."

The fine is \$100 for the first offense, \$150 thereafter.

And that's not all. Police can also fine you \$200 for stopping in a crosswalk at an intersection.

You could also be ticketed if you fail to stop before crossing a painted "stop line," though in most cases you can creep beyond one if your visibility is impaired.

"You're supposed to come to a complete stop on a stop sign at the stop line," Albert said. "You can inch your way through, and if you can clear the intersection clearly, you do so."



What drives you crazy about local drivers? Is there a traffic rule you've always wondered about, or a pet peeve that never fails to annoy you? Send us a message about it at [cweek@globe.com](mailto:cweek@globe.com). We'll check it out.

*If you are nice to people randomly on the subway, they look at you suspiciously. But carolers? How can people be suspicious of that?*

JOEL SINDELAR

JAMAICA PLAIN

# A 'Caroling Mob' takes to city streets

Singers spread holiday joy in neighborhood

It's not the first place one would expect to find 50 Christmas carolers — the produce section of a Stop and Shop — but that was the whole idea.

Four years ago, Joel Sindelar of Jamaica Plain organized the Boston Caroling Mob, a group of strangers and friends who come together once or twice a year to carol around the streets and stores of Boston. "This feels like my Christmas present to the city," said the 35-year-old graduate of the New England Conservatory.

The carolers tromped around the Hyde Square area of Jamaica Plain last Sunday. They met in the Jackson Square T station, got their photocopied lyrics, and practiced for a few minutes before heading into the street.

They hit the local Stop and Shop, where they serenaded people as they picked out bananas and bagged their groceries. Shoppers clapped and called out holiday greetings as they left.

Later that night, after the carolers sang on Walden Street, an elderly man walked outside and told the group that he usually gets depressed this time of year, but seeing and hearing this large number of carolers made this his best Christmas since he moved to Boston 26 years ago, Sindelar said.

"It seems like every year, a few people are really touched," said Sindelar, a New Hampshire native.

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