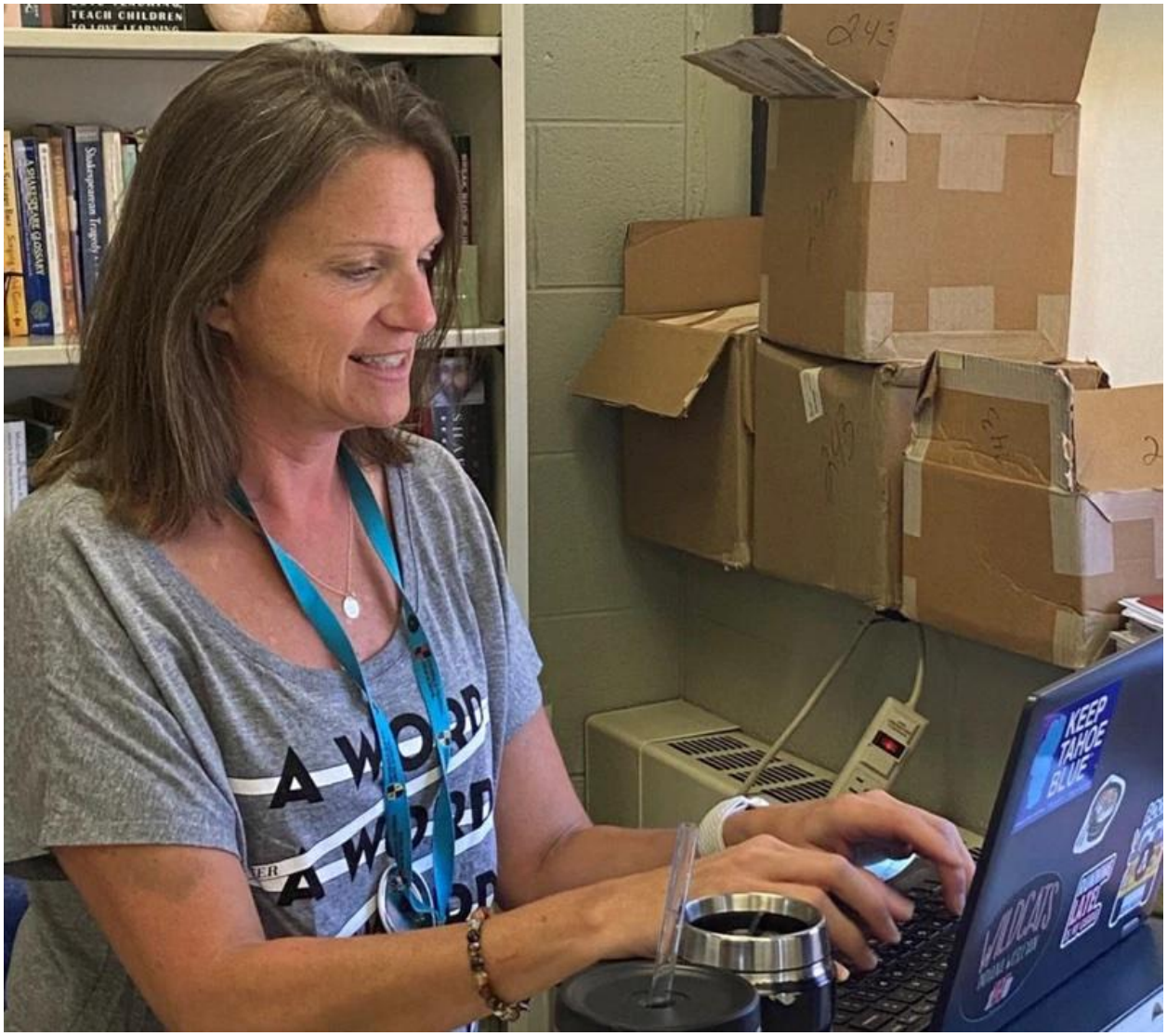
Hinsdale Central English teacher soon-to-be published author of a YA novel



Angelique Burrell, Hinsdale Central English teacher and award-winning Solstice Literary Magazine advisor, is about to be a published author of a young adult novel. (Hinsdale High School Teachers Association)

When Angelique Burrell isn't teaching English and creative writing to her Hinsdale Central students, she's chipping away at an idea that came to her while on a road trip from the Chicago suburbs to Tahoe City seven years ago. Her family makes the trip every summer with their dog in tow, who is unable to fly.

One summer, she kept noticing skid marks on the route.

“I was like, gosh I wonder what caused that one or how that one happened,” said Burrell over the phone. “That was how the idea for the story came to me. What if somebody could see that? What would that be like?”

The idea, now a fully written young adult (YA) novel titled “A Mark in the Road,” is slated to pop up on bookstore shelves on Oct. 3, 2023.

“I started writing it on my phone because I was in the car when the idea came, so the story began in my notes on my iPhone,” said Burrell, who is an award-winning Solstice Literary Magazine adviser.

“It took a while mostly just to find the time to write. With teaching, it absorbs so much of my life that for a while I was like, ‘OK I’ll write in the summer.'' Burrell said.

When she finally started carving out time to write, Jared Friebel, another English teacher at Hinsdale Central, started a writing group for teachers where they shared ideas and exchanged feedback. Most of all said Burrell, the group was a support system for her while she shaped the plot, characters, and conflict based on her jotted-down notes.

“It’s really exciting to see something that was an idea we were just talking about become something tangible,” said Friebel. “And it’s inspiring to see somebody set the time aside and see [their work] all the way through to the point where it’s being published.”

The start-to-finish writing process took about two years for Burrell, who sought out an agent in 2018. And that was after a series of rejections from publishing companies, rewrites, and starting over, she said.

One of the main characters in the novel goes on a road trip with his neighbor who is being forced to move out West before her senior year. Despite his fear of the road, he tags along, Burrell said, and the adventure unravels his ability to see the stories behind the skid marks.

Burrel said she started reading and discussing YA novels as part of a reading class she teaches at Central to connect students with material they can relate to.

“Being around teenagers all day shifted my way of thinking,” she said, noting that the young adult genre was a natural fit for her professional writing career. Burrell has two children in college who also inspired her work.

The 2022-2023 school year is the first year that creative writing is an accredited course for English, and Burrell is one of the teachers at Central.

“It’s been fun because when we’re talking about some of the character development or setting a scene — I can tell them, these are some of my pitfalls or I do this a lot, or these are my crutches when writing and this is how to break free from those,” Burrell explained. “I can relate to the vulnerability of sharing your work with somebody else. You’re giving a piece of yourself to someone to read and give feedback on. It’s a cool connection, like, ‘really, this is what I’m going through right now.’”

Burell said for the longest time, she didn’t think she would do anything with her writing other than it being a mental activity or a hobby.

Less than a year away from the release date, Burrell is working through suggested revisions from her North Carolina-based publisher, Monarch Educational Services. They returned the manuscript with suggestions, but it’s up to her to make the changes, she said.

“I really should have probably given the manuscript back two weeks ago,” Burrell said with a laugh.

The next step is sending out advance reader copies so when the book goes to print, the copies will have reviews listed on them, she said.

“This is way more work than I ever imagined,” she said, adding that just getting something down on paper is sometimes the hardest part.

“It’s work, man — I made it a point to sit down for 20 minutes on Thursday evenings to write. And that’s kind of how I stole time,” she said. “With teaching, you can do it from the moment you wake up to the moment you go to sleep because there’s always something.”

Burrell said her students recently told her that a book they’re reading — “Fleishman Is in Trouble” — was recently adapted into a series for the streaming platform, Hulu.

“I feel like every time I mention a book, my students are like, ‘oh yea we saw the show.’ It’s kind of bizarre,” she said with a laugh. “I was not planning to write a book so that it would be a TV show … but I won’t complain if it does!”