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The Portage CommuniTEEN Read: An Author's Point of View

When I get asked what I like best about my job as a writer, the answer is always, "Getting to meet my readers." I also know that, as a reader myself, it's enormously exciting to have a chance to meet the author of a book I've enjoyed.

So the CommuniTEEN Read program in Portage, Michigan, means that everybody wins. As a writer, I have a chance to engage with nearly a thousand young people who are my target audience – it's a rare chance for me to hear their opinions, questions, and suggestions about one of my novels. For the readers involved, it's a golden opportunity to discuss a work with its creator and really bring it to life.

My book *Code Name Verity* was the Portage CommuniTEEN Read choice for 2018. It's a tale of friendship, flight, and intrigue set in World War II, with a focus on women's roles during wartime. I've been hugely impressed at how the students of Portage Central and Portage Northern high schools have expanded on my own ideas across the curriculum: exploring themes from my book in art and design; using my plot as a springboard in history to learn more about World War II, flying, and women's wartime service; and bringing to bear their skills in literary interpretation in English.

When the CommuniTEEN organizers invited me to participate in this program, I leaped at the opportunity, and I'm so glad I did. In addition to the rewarding interaction with the students of both Portage high schools, I was impressed with the professional organization and enthusiasm of the CommuniTEEN Committee – my initial points of contact being Olivia Pennebaker, the Teen Services Librarian for the Portage District Library, and Sara Brown, the Teacher Media Specialist for the Portage Central High School library. My accommodation was comfortable and charming, my expenses were taken care of, and I was treated as a VIP.

As well as speaking at both high schools over two days, I gave a public speech at the Kalamazoo Air Zoo. I was delighted at how well-publicized this event was and how smoothly it ran. With close to 200 guests in the audience, it was one of the best-attended public events I have given. The Air Zoo was an appropriate venue for my subject material (World War II flight!) and was also an amazing space to speak in.

I am grateful to the Portage high schools, the Portage District Library, the Bookbug bookstore, and the many donors who made it possible for me to participate in the CommuniTEEN Read program. I hope that it continues to grow from strength to strength.

Elizabeth Wein