

Sample Press Release for Announcement of New Book

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Can Demons and Doppelgängers Help Turn Around California's Low Literacy Rating? One San Jose Middle School Teacher is Determined to Find Out

SAN JOSE, CA (June 18, 2018) - In December 2017, a group of lawyers sued the state of California for the literacy crisis in schools, claiming the state was not satisfying its constitutional responsibility to educate all children. According to the California Department of Education, a whopping 51.4% of students tested did not meet or exceed state English standards. Come November, voters will be faced with electing a Superintendent of Public Schools to turn around California's low literacy rating. Many are asking: what are schools doing about the problem?

"That's not the right question," said Castillero Middle School teacher Chris Knoblauch, author of *Tribute: The Cleaners Series: Book 1*. "The right question is, how are schools going to fund the one-on-one attention required to teach kids to read?"

Knoblauch knows first-hand the challenges teachers are facing, having taught English in elementary and middle schools in San Jose for 16 years.

"If an educator is teaching a full class of 32 kids, the chances to work one-on-one with a student are slim to none," she said. "When I was working on my Master of Arts in Teaching, I gave up my break periods to tutor a student to bring him from pre-kindergarten to a fourth-grade reading level. It took one year of intensive work, starting with letter sound association, then word recognition, building reading visualization connections, and understanding the meaning of words."

Knoblauch became a teacher through the back door. The first in the family, along with her sister, to graduate from college, she earned a B.A. in English Literature and B.S. in Biological Sciences, graduating cum laude. She began working for a chemical company conducting research, and eventually became a product manager for Sun Microsystems, where she was laid off. With all the downsizing in the high-tech industry, she knew it was time to change gears.

Through a program offered by NOVA to recruit teachers for Science, Special Education, and Math, Knoblauch applied to be a Science teacher at Hoover Middle School in downtown San Jose. The school convinced her to use her writing skills to teach English instead, and put her in

charge of a class where 70% of the students spoke something other than English as a primary language.

Knoblauch quickly discovered what she was up against. “With a lack of resources at home like reading books, it’s not uncommon for a student to enter the seventh grade with a second- or third-grade reading level,” she said. “You learn vocabulary by reading. So, to teach in such an environment, you have to read aloud, stopping to discuss each section with the students. They can’t parse the information themselves; they often lack the tools to do so.”

From Hoover, she moved to Almaden, where again many students also spoke English as a second language. The difference, however, was that these students’ parents tended to be high tech workers learning to speak English themselves. The combination of a rich text and vocabulary environment, and the fact that the parents bought books for their kids and took their kids to the library, enabled these fifth-graders to often read at a college level. “They might not grasp the innuendo, but they understand the words,” she said.

For the past two years, she’s taught English at Castillero, a performing arts middle school, where 30% of the students lack the financial resources to invest in home libraries. Frustrated by what she saw as an ongoing problem—a lack of resources, and the kind of one-on-one tutoring she champions—Knoblauch knew something needed to be done.

Her solution was to provide gripping stories that are accessible to kids, so a teacher can work on sentence structure and vocabulary development without the students knowing it. “There aren’t a lot of high-interest/low-readability books for tweens out there,” she said. Which is the reason she wrote her debut novel, *Tribute*.

“I needed something to grab the attention of 12- and 13-year-old kids who don’t have an expanded vocabulary,” she said. “The reading level is third grade, but the interest level is sixth and above. I’ve written enough short stories, and read them in class, to know what grabs the attention of a child. It needs to be something on the edge of believability.”

Tribute, based in San Jose, California, is the story of twelve-year-old Miguel, whose family loses a soul every time his gang member Papa makes promises to Santa Muerte. Miguel’s brother, Juan, is the next target. The resulting paranormal possession attracts demons, doppelgängers, and an ancient soul slayer from the depths of Hell—all of whom must be vanquished if Miguel is to save his family and himself. The book’s Amazon reviews show many adults are also enjoying *Tribute*.

“Miguel is based on a combination of student characteristics I’ve seen in my classroom over the years,” Knoblauch says. “He’s a realistic tween character operating in a harsh urban environment, struggling with the astounding level of poverty facing blue-collar families in San Jose. The addition of cryptids and demons to the story adds to the psychological stress of loss and poverty.”

Knoblauch usually spends summers tutoring students for her Dancing with Words Tutoring business, but this summer she plans to write the second book in her anthology series. “It’s not a *Harry Potter* series,” she said. “More like *Goosebumps*, an anthology series where each book stands on its own with common themes and motifs.”

Released in April on Friday the 13th—for luck, she said—*Tribute* is available in paperback and Kindle editions on Amazon. Readers can find the author online at these locations:

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Related Links:

<https://twitter.com/ChrisKnoblauch>

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