



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization



CITY OF IOWA CITY  
UNESCO CITY OF LITERATURE

Member of the UNESCO  
Creative Cities Network  
since 2008

# 10 Things to know about

## **IOWA CITY**

## UNESCO City of Literature

January 2009

## **Cultural Capital**

Iowa City is the cultural capital of Iowa with a population of 63,000. The city has a network of university, grassroots and civic institutions that teach, celebrate, nurture and study great writing.

## **Writer's Workshop**

As the home of the highly acclaimed Writers' Workshop – the world's first Master of Fine Arts degree program in creative writing – Iowa City and the University of Iowa have played a substantial role in how literature, first in America and then around the world, has come to be written. The MFA degree workshop concept has spread to more than 300 hundred American universities and to universities in numerous other countries.

## **Writing Programmes**

Important programmes at the University include the Translation Workshop; the Playwrights Workshop; the Nonfiction Writing Program; the Summer Writing Festival (composed of dozens of workshops for the general public); and the Young Writers' Studio, a summer program for high-school students.

## **Famous Authors**

Since 1955 graduates and faculty of the University of Iowa have won more than 25 Pulitzer Prizes in literature. Authors who have lived and studied in the city include –Kurt Vonnegut Jr., Robert Penn Warren, Robert Lowell, Flannery O'Connor, Rita Dove, Jane Smiley, Robert Hass and John Irving.

## **International Authors**

Over 1000 emerging and established writers from more than 120 countries have been in residence at the University of Iowa's International Writing Program, including such luminaries as Bessie Head, Bei Dao, Luisa Valenzuela, John Banville, and Nobel Prize-winner Orhan Pamuk. Each fall these writers participate in dozens of public events, including readings and panel discussions.

## **Readings through the media**

Among the valuable local institutions is Prairie Lights Books, the 'destination' independent book store which hosts three or more live readings every week. 'Live From Prairie Lights' has been the only ongoing series of live-broadcast literary readings on American radio, and the tradition is now entering a new era through different media.

## **Publishing**

Iowa City is home to 11 literary presses, including one devoted to translation; two publishers devoted to language and literacy materials; and a range of print and online journals, as well as several literary blogs. The highly respected Center for the Book preserves and extends the art of bookmaking.

## **City Libraries**

In 2006, for a population of 63,027, there were 63,713 public library patrons; borrowers as a percentage of population reached 101%! (including residents of neighbouring areas arrogating borrowing privileges for their work in Iowa City). The university's research library is the 18th largest of its kind in the country; its holdings include special literary collections and hundreds of thousands of rare books; and it is the location of many literature-related exhibitions.

## **Literary events**

The various literary institutions sponsor more than 180 literary events a year, and the UI Nonfiction Writing Programme hosts a biennial NonfictionNow Conference, which draws participants from around the world.

## **Literary Walk**

A series of commissioned bronze artworks embedded in the sidewalks downtown, each highlighting the words of an Iowa City writer.