A Role Reinvented: Branching Out of the Usual and Discovering the Best
By Julia Stock, USU English Major

As the packing of bags ensued, for our usual end of class rush the Thursday before Spring break, Dr. Jessica Rivera-Mueller, my Teaching Writing instructor, began a last-minute announcement. She told us that volunteers were needed to facilitate the 26th annual Young Writers and Artists Fest, a conference for nearly 300 middle school students in Cache Valley. Working to be a future secondary educator in English, this opportunity seemed to jump out at me, and I made a mental note to email my professor.

The day of the Young Writers and Artists Fest arrived, and I found myself sitting down to evaluate the work of three distinct groups of middle school aged writers from schools all around Cache Valley. The room for the event was one of many, over several floors of the Utah State University Conference Center and Inn. In each room, a hostess helped students and their families feel welcome and two responders provided feedback to the students after they read their work. I felt tense at first because I remembered being evaluated in a similar way as the students, but I soon relaxed into the role with the help of my fellow responder and our hostess.

While students and parents weaved their way into the room, the air began to spark with sheer enthusiasm from everyone alike. All the students in attendance had written their pieces on the theme of “The Power of One,” but each piece couldn’t have been more different in their variety and brilliance.

We heard historical narratives, poetry, short stories, personal narratives, fiction and nonfiction; the genres varied widely, anywhere between fantasy and horror. I became amazed at the caliber of writing that these young middle school writers could produce, and it was easy to be positive and enthusiastic in my feedback about their pieces.

Being involved in your community, wherever that be, is an absolute must for those who want to become an integral part of it, like a teacher. I gained a great deal of perspective and a wealth of experience relevant to my chosen field that I wouldn’t trade for anything. I know, if given the opportunity, I will eagerly offer to respond for this event again. I hope to incorporate much of what I learned from this event into my own classes one day soon.