

# LIVING

ARTS & PEOPLE

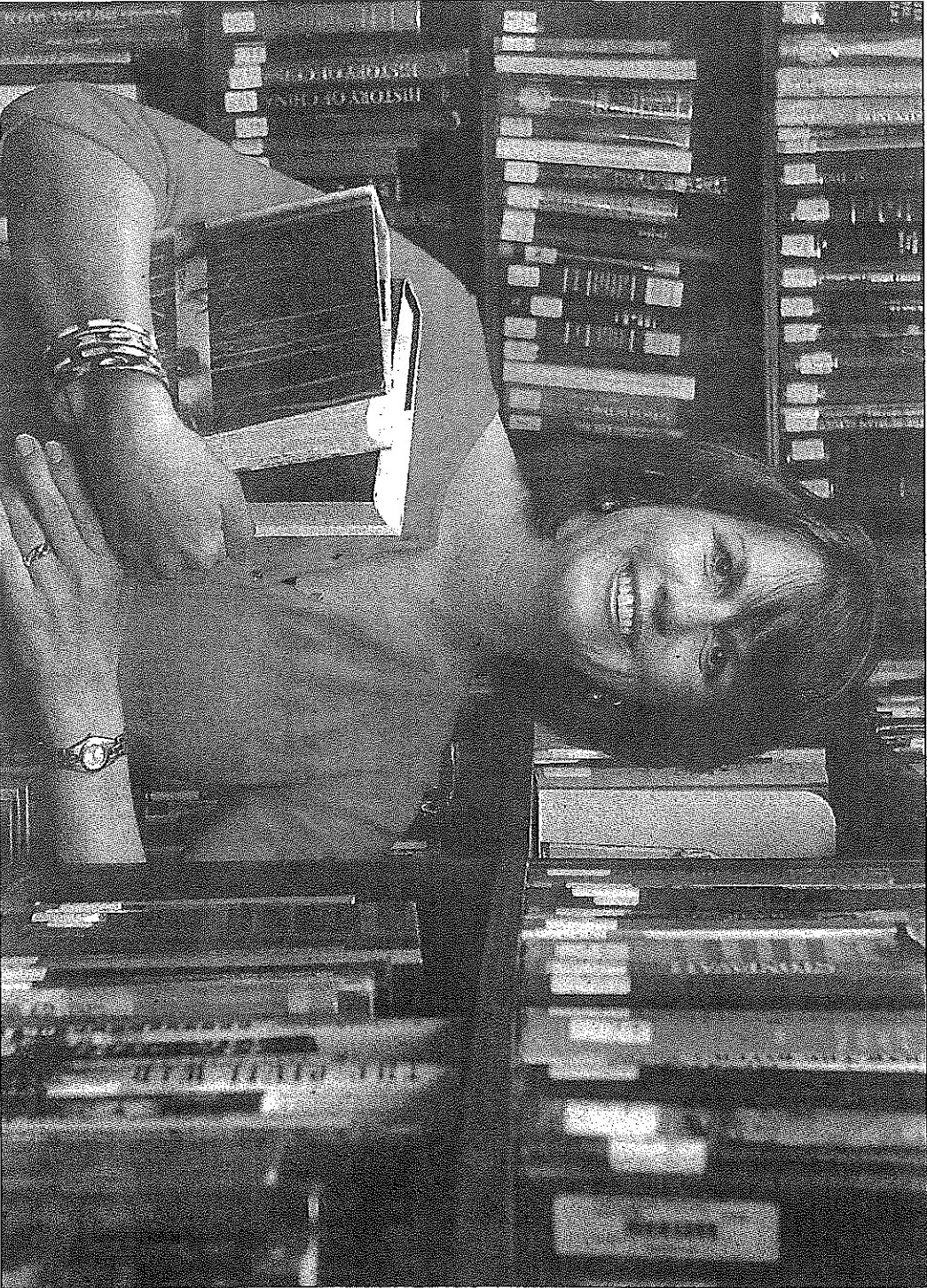
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# D

SUNDAY  
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Best-selling novelist Elizabeth Kostova, seen here in the library of Carolina Day School, will speak Thursday at the school as part of a fundraiser for Carolina Day and the Literary Council of Buncombe County.

JOHN FLETCHER/JFLETCHER@CITIZEN-TIMES.COM

**ELIZABETH  
KOSTOVA**

**Age:** 45.  
**Residence:** Asheville.  
**Education:** B.A., British studies, Yale University; M.F.A. in creative writing, University of Michigan.  
**Hobbies:** Reading, gardening, travel.  
**Currently reading:** "The Elegance of the Hedgehog" by Muriel Barbery.  
**Favorite haunt:** Graveyard Fields, for its beauty and variety of environments.  
**Writing desk object:** Portrait of Virginia Woolf.  
**Quote:** "Reading what we think of as the great books for pleasure on a regular basis has become almost an endangered species. That's one reason I love Oprah. ... One of the things that she did was put Anna Karenina' on the New York Times best-seller list, which I think is the most extraordinary thing anyone in television has for a long time."  
**Website:** www.the-swanthieves.com.

# Love of Reading



## Best-selling author Elizabeth Kostova gives literacy and reading a boost here

By Rob Neufeld  
CITIZEN-TIMES COLUMNIST

**W**hen Elizabeth Kostova was a girl, her grandmother Eleanor Stephens, the librarian at Carolina Day School, broke out the Jane Austen when grandchildren visited.

"It is a truth universally acknowledged," her grandmother began, "that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife."

From that hook into "Pride and Prejudice," Kostova went on to absorb all of Austen's output by the time she was 15.

"That sense of 'Oh, goodby!' about a book," Kostova reflected, "stayed with me when I made my first attempts at writing."

Able to imagine her readers when she wrote, Kostova spun that early enthusiasm into her best-selling novels "The Historian" and "The Swan Thieves."

"I have met many people," she said, "who are not necessarily people you would peg as readers with a capital R, who love to read and are adventurous readers and have been transformed by a book."

Kostova recognizes that the evolution of a reading world begins with simple literacy. So she has partnered with the Literacy Council of Buncombe County and Carolina Day School for a fundraiser in the school's auditorium Thursday evening. She'll present stories she's not told before about her life's journey and about people whom she's met who have been transformed or saved by books.

"When I traveled for my first novel," Kostova said, "I went to about 10 countries, including all over the U.S., and people would come up to me and tell me something about what reading had meant to them.

"I was very moved by the stories and started writing

Find a photo gallery of Elizabeth Kostova's recent appearance at Malaprop's online at [CITIZEN-TIMES.com/photo](http://CITIZEN-TIMES.com/photo).

them down. I've been waiting for a while to have some form in which to express them."

Kostova believes that not to allow everyone the gift of reading is to deny them full lives. This is the basis of her support of the literacy council, which reaches out to adults and schoolchildren, and of Carolina Day School, which runs the Key School, a nationally recognized program for teaching students with learning disabilities.

Parents move to Asheville from states away to find help for children deemed hopeless by their home schools, said Sanna Efrid, development director at Carolina Day.

Please see **READ on DS**

## READ: Author prefers 'real' books to e-books

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### Generation to generation

Kostova's life has been changed several times by books. Before Jane Austen, there was Arthur Conan Doyle, read aloud by her father, David Johnson, at the table after dishes were cleared, or on a Saturday evening before a fire.

"Well, Watson, what do you make of it?" Johnson pitched with delight as Holmes laid another piece of evidence before his earnest pal for a match of wits.

"Now," Kostova said, "I read those Conan Doyle stories aloud to my own family."

Reading to children, another activity Kostova deeply advocates, helped her re-find an empowering connection of her own.

"I had a funny moment," she said. "A lot of people asked me when I was on tour for 'The Historian' what were the influences on this book." The names of Henry James, Charles Dickens and Bram Stoker came up frequently. (The legend of Dracula plays a big role in "The Historian.")

"And then one day," Kostova continued, "I sat down after not having looked at Conan Doyle for quite a few years, and I started reading him aloud to one of my children.

"And I suddenly realized: These are the stories that made me write my first novel, stories of a mind that can take all kinds of bits of evidence and re-create what happened and figure it out."

### 'Let them read'

"And let them read," petitions the Prayer of St. Augustine, inspiring the name for the statewide Augustine Project that Kostova's event will support.

With a mission to improve the reading and writing skills of low-income children and teens, the project adds schoolchildren with reading difficulties to the adults the Literary Council

### IF YOU GO

**What:** Best-selling novelist Elizabeth Kostova delivers the talk "Read, Write, Discover: The Circle of Literacy." Kostova will share her personal journey of traveling the world, becoming an award-winning author and learning firsthand how literacy opens the door to discovery.

**When:** 8 p.m. Thursday.

**Where:** Upper School auditorium at Carolina Day School, 1345 Hendersonville Road.

**Tickets:** \$20. VIP admission, \$40, also includes a reception with the author beginning 6:30 p.m. To RSVP, contact Sana Efid at 210-9160 or sefid@cdschool.org.

**You should know:** Captain's Bookshelf is selling a signed, numbered limited edition of "The Swan Thieves," bound in garnet cloth and in a slipcase adorned with photos by Amy Blankenship and Ralph Gibson, for \$200 as an additional fundraiser. Only 180 copies will be sold.

**Learn more:** For more of this and other articles about Kostova, visit The Read on WNC at [TheReadonWNC.ning.com](http://TheReadonWNC.ning.com).

already serves.

The Augustine Project involves educational professionals as well as trained volunteer tutors. It relies on long-term, one-on-one instruction.

One fourth-grade boy came to an Augustine Project session in his school with a cannot-do and I-hate-you attitude, project director Becca Loli recounted.

"He would steal things from the other kids and was very disrespectful," she said. "When he met with his tutor the first time, he was very distracted."

"By the third lesson," Loli continued, "he was sitting on the edge of his seat, and he was totally engrossed in it. The people who were watching him in this lesson said it was as if you could see this

little teleprompter in his head saying, 'I'm reading!'"

### The joy of printed pages

One of the stories that Kostova collected in her travels has a legendary feel. Kostova had traveled Eastern Europe with her father and family in the days of the Iron Curtain.

"In societies where reading is hindered politically," she said, "it takes on incredible significance and reminds you how fortunate we are to be allowed to read freely and write freely."

In China, there was a man who worked in a heavily supervised work camp and wanted to learn English to read the great books in that language.

"He had found, he'd somehow stumbled on, a very old Webster's dictionary of the kind that has almost onion skin-thin pages. ... Every day, he would tear one page out of this book, which he kept hidden in his dormitory, and take it concealed in his clothes to his job in the fields.

"When he had a break to go eat his food or relieve himself, he would go into a little stand of trees, take out the page and sit there memorizing every word on it, on both sides. ...

"And then," she added, "he would eat it."

Kostova can't imagine the Chinese dictionary-eater doing that with an e-book. Print books, she feels, retain their unique sacred quality.

"As a lover of books," Kostova said, "I love real books. I love the way they feel, I love the way they smell, I love to have them in my hands. I love the fact that they're artifacts, works of art and pieces of history, and that when you have an actual book, it makes a wonderful gift.

"It doesn't have the same feel if somebody gives you a download."

Rob Neufeld writes the weekly book feature for the Sunday Citizen-Times. He is the author and editor of four books, and the host of the website The Read on WNC. He can be reached at [RNeufeld@charter.net](mailto:RNeufeld@charter.net) and 505-1973.

### BY THE NUMBERS: CHILDREN AND READING

Among children ages 9-17:

28 percent think that looking through postings or comments on social networking sites counts as reading.

39 percent agree with the statement "The information I find online is always correct."

33 percent say they would read more books for fun if they had access to e-books.

66 percent prefer printed books, even if e-books are available.

27 percent read less than one day per week.

Among children ages 6-17:

25 percent have read a book on a digital device.

50 percent say reading books for fun is extremely or very important.

Among parents of children ages 6-17:

89 percent say reading books for fun is extremely or very important.

8 percent count texting as reading.

71 percent wish their child would read more books for fun.

6 percent own a device for reading e-books.

Source: 2010 Kids & Family Reading Report, [scholastic.com/readingreport](http://scholastic.com/readingreport)