

## A Small Kid Who's Realizing Big Dreams



If you ask Adora Svitak what she wants to be when she grows up, you'll get answers typical of young kids with big dreams—she wants to be a writer, she wants to be a leader. Oh, and, she would also like to help put an end to world hunger. The only difference between Adora and kids with similar aspirations is that, at age 13, Adora is already realizing her dreams. Well, except for one. She wants to be U.S. secretary of education. It may seem like a lofty goal, but she's well on her way to creating an impressive résumé that might actually get her there one day.

In February, Adora was awarded the National Education Association (NEA) Foundation Award for Outstanding Service to Public Education. This prestigious U.S. award, which recognizes a commitment to advancing public education, has previously been awarded to the likes of U.S. President Bill Clinton, equity in education advocate Billie Jean King, and children's television network Sesame Workshop.

The youngest person ever to receive the award, Adora was singled out for her commitment to literacy and for inspiring peers and adults worldwide. "She is not only very gifted, she is a generous, caring, and effective advocate for education," said Harriet Sanford, president and CEO of the NEA Foundation.

Adora was reading at age 2½ and wrote short stories at age 4. She published her first book at age 7. That book, *Flying Fingers: Master the Tools of Learning through the Joy of Writing*, is a collection of adventure stories that includes tips on teaching kids to write. Her second book, *Dancing Fingers*, is a book of poetry and writing inspiration that she cowrote with her older sister Adrianna.

An advocate for educational technology, Adora got her first laptop at age 6, and that sparked her writing career. "Technology has certainly allowed me to reach greater heights," she says.

She uses a computer for all her class work because she attends an online school, the Washington Virtual Academy in Washington state.

"Kids who have access to the Internet have access to learning and 24/7 education. They are not restricted to an hour of class time per subject," she said. "Like education, technology has the potential to become a great democratizer, not a divider."

Adora uses technology to record videos, chat with friends, e-mail, and tweet. And she uses videoconferencing technology to present to students all over the United States. She's reached more than 400 classrooms on topics related to literacy, writing, and making a difference.

She has shared the spotlight with celebrities, such as James Earl Jones at the National Center for Family Literacy's annual convention, and was a Youth Ambassador for both Save the Children and the United Nation's World Food Program.

Perhaps her most famous presentation to date was her TED2010 talk "What Adults Can Learn from Kids." A diminutive figure on the giant stage, Adora wowed the audience with her charm, energetic personality, humorous quips, and gentle chiding of grownups. She comes off like a friendly and tolerant representative of an oft-misunderstood class of humans—kids—telling the adult crowd something that should be obvious but isn't: Adults should learn and take into consideration the wishes of the younger population.

"The way progress happens is that new generations and new eras grow and develop and become better than the previous ones," she said. "It's the reason we're not in the Dark Ages anymore. No matter your position in life, it is imperative to create opportunities for children so we can grow up and blow you away!"

In the end, she received a standing ovation.

—Diana Fingal is senior editor of L&L.

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