



Empowering  
Lives  
Through  
Literacy

# Communicator

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and follow us on:



*"One of the joys of reading is the ability to plug  
into the shared wisdom of mankind."*

~ Ishmael Reed



**Illinois Reads and Young Authors Book Festival  
will be held on Saturday, April 25, 2026**

The Illinois Reading Council is excited to share that we will be hosting a new version of the **Young Authors Conference** at the Illinois Reads Book Festival. We will be celebrating the written work of students in kindergarten through twelfth grade with the Illinois Reads authors as

they share about their books. All students in kindergarten through twelfth grade, including those in special programs, are encouraged to participate.

In the spring, schools are encouraged to select their young authors who will attend and be celebrated at the **Illinois Reads and Young Authors Book Festival**. Registration and guidelines to participate in the Young Authors session will be available on **January 5, 2026**. Please note that space will be limited, so plan to register early!

To find out more, visit [www.illinoisreadingcouncil.org/yac](http://www.illinoisreadingcouncil.org/yac).



## UNLOCKING THE ILLINOIS COMPREHENSIVE LITERACY PLAN: VOCABULARY

By Donna Herman and Deb Augsburger

The importance of vocabulary development, understanding, and practice cannot be understated; wide reading helps develop breadth and depth of vocabulary, which in turn leads to stronger reading. Sadly, constraints of time and curriculum often present challenges as teachers wonder how to get “unstuck” and implement evidence-based practices for strong vocabulary instruction across all academic disciplines. The ICLP definition enables us to think more deeply about vocabulary:

### Vocabulary Overview

Vocabulary encompasses the words used for both oral and written communication. Vocabulary acquisition starts early in life through spoken language interactions and continues to grow throughout different educational stages. Effective vocabulary development involves learning new words, understanding their meanings, uses, and connections to other words. A robust vocabulary is essential for reading comprehension, effective idea expression, and higher-level thinking. It lays the groundwork for building background knowledge and understanding complex texts.<sup>33</sup>

Using the ICLP, we suggest the following examples of explicit and supportive Evidence-Based Instructional practices that help support vocabulary knowledge.

**All grades:**

- Teaching synonyms, antonyms, and homonyms directly and in context.
- Actively teaching Academic and Domain-specific vocabulary, integrating across subjects and texts.
- Avoid teaching vocabulary in isolation, such as weekly lists to memorize, as this minimizes retention and application.
- Moving from writing out or copying definitions to word study approaches that use visuals, examples, and connections with other words to build deep understanding.
- Using new words in varied contexts with student-friendly language, concrete examples, and visuals.
- Using strategies to understand how words have meaning by teaching morphology, grammar, word parts, and syntax. (image 1)

### Early Childhood and Elementary:

- Integrate vocabulary from read-alouds into play centers, writing, and word study, etc.
- Use word meaning games, sorts, and visuals.
- Play with changing word parts to change meaning → If a baker bakes things, a reader reads things, then what would they do if you add -er to these: run, move, lunch, tree?
- Group activities: → Pose and guess: “wax museum” or “mannequin challenge” to show the meaning of words. → Use posters to advertise/illustrate words or → skits using the words in context.
- Pronounce, spell, define, give examples, and compare with non-examples using graphic organizers like the Frayer Model 4-Square.
- Challenge students to find and use the word in real life → document in vocabulary journal.

### Middle & High School

- Use Vocabulary trees for understanding morphology and etymology.
- Vocab Knowledge Rating for student self-evaluation of word knowledge. (image 2)
- Explicitly teach vocabulary using a tool like the Frayer Model. [Teacher Toolkit: Frayer Model](#)
- Essential Words Routine to build content knowledge. For a deeper dive, check out the [EWR middle school](#), *Getting Vocabulary to Stick*, which provides an explicit and structured model for learning vocabulary. ([greatmiddleschools.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/EW\\_TASSP\\_2.20.pdf](https://greatmiddleschools.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/EW_TASSP_2.20.pdf))
- Use Cross-Curricular connections whenever possible, helping students see and make connections.
- Digital tools, journals, and post-its are used as students read, learn, and track new words.

Because of his closeness to Mount St. Helens, he contracted pneumonoultramicroscopicsilicovolcanoconiosis.

### Word Roots

pneumono:	related to the lungs
ultra:	super
micro:	small
scopic:	related to a viewing instrument
silico:	the mineral silicon
volcano:	eruption in the earth from which molten rock, steam, & dust issue
coni (konis):	dust
osis:	referring to a diseased condition

Readence, Bean, and Baldwin 2000

Image 2

## Vocabulary/Knowledge Rating Examples

Word	Know it well	Have seen or heard it	No Clue
rhombus			x
triangle	x		
pentagon		x	
quadrilateral		x	

### Rate Your Words

Rating scale:

1=Words you know and can use correctly.

2=Words you almost know, but the meanings are a bit foggy.

3=Words you think you have seen or heard before maybe from TV, conversations, magazines or in another subject.

4=Words you do not know at all.

Words	1	2	3	4
Atmosphere	Atmosphere		Acid Rain	Troposphere
Troposphere				
Acid Rain				
Water Cycle			Water Cycle	Precipitation
Precipitation				

Images from:  
[https://ksevilla.weebly.com/uploads/5/6/6/5/56651817/vocabulary\\_rating\\_comprehension\\_strategy\\_teaching\\_tools.pdf](https://ksevilla.weebly.com/uploads/5/6/6/5/56651817/vocabulary_rating_comprehension_strategy_teaching_tools.pdf)





# IRC HIGHLIGHT REELS

## **BLENDED READING SUPPORT AT HOMEWOOD-FLOSSMOOR HIGH SCHOOL DRIVES STUDENT GROWTH**

**By Lauren Freeman, Reading Department Lead**

At Homewood-Flossmoor High School, reading instruction is designed to meet the needs of every student. Through a blended service delivery model, trained reading specialists provide explicit, systematic, and targeted support to students who struggle with reading, as well as to those with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) for a specific learning disability in reading.

Students benefit from Tier 2 intervention embedded within core classes through co-teaching with a reading specialist and classroom teacher. During the 2024–2025 school year, 68 of these students were supported through Tier 2 co-taught social science classes. For the 2025–2026 school year, projections show that 72 of these students will continue in Tier 2 reading intervention, while 34 of these students will no longer require these services, a 23% decrease from the previous year. This includes 7 of the students recommended for Tier 3 intervention and 2 students who have withdrawn from HF.

For students requiring more intensive support, Tier 3 intervention offers explicit, systematic, individualized instruction in small groups, tailored to meet their unique reading needs. In 2024–2025, 78 students received Tier 3 services, with 63 of those students supported through an IEP. Looking ahead to 2025–2026, 37 students will remain in Tier 3 intervention, 39 will move to Tier 2, 6 students will exit reading intervention, and 2 students will graduate.

The results are impressive. Students receiving intervention are making significant gains in reading proficiency, enabling them to access grade-level content more effectively, engage with complex texts, and participate confidently in classroom discussions. This success highlights the impact of a model that combines research-based strategies, skilled instruction, and individualized support.

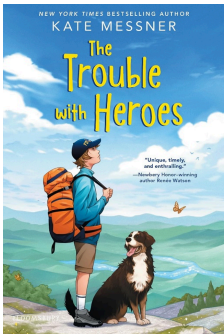
Homewood-Flossmoor High School remains committed to helping all students thrive as readers. By offering both embedded Tier 2 support and targeted Tier 3 instruction, our reading specialists are equipping students with the skills and confidence they need to succeed academically and beyond.

# #WhatIAmReading



I am reading [\*\*The Trouble with Heroes\*\*](#) by Kate Messner.

~ Diana Wilkie, IRC Treasurer



I cannot wait to share this with middle grade readers. Finn faces both physical and mental obstacles as he is challenged to make something right. He must climb all 46 Adirondack mountains over the summer with a drooling dog by his side. We watch him process grief, anger and the healing power of nature. His personal discoveries touched my soul and brought tears to my eyes. Kate balances both humor and sadness with authentic voice. This beautiful book is hard to put into words!

IRC is reading the books from the [\*\*Winter 2026 IRC Book Clubs\*\*](#).

~ Stephanie Benson, IRC Book Club Chair

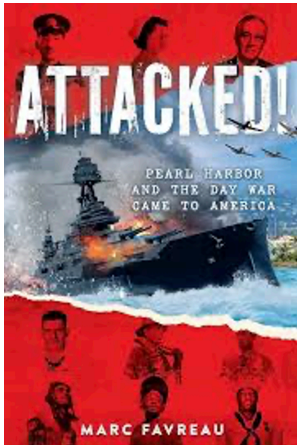


Join educators from all over the state in the online **Winter 2026 IRC Book Club**! Choose one, two, or all three books! Read, reflect on, and respond to [\*\*Building Bigger Ideas: A Process for Teaching Purposeful Talk\*\*](#) by Maria Nichols and/or [\*\*Punished for Dreaming: How School Reform Harms Black Children and How We Heal\*\*](#) by Bettina L. Love and/or [\*\*Educating Emergent Bilinguals: Policies, Programs, and Practices for Multilingual Learners\*\*](#) by Ofelia Garcia, Jo Anne Kleifgen, and Claudia Cervantes-Soon. Participants who complete all assignments will be eligible to receive **15 PD clock hours** for each book club. [Register by January 18, 2026](#), to participate in the book club.

# Family Literacy Bookshelf

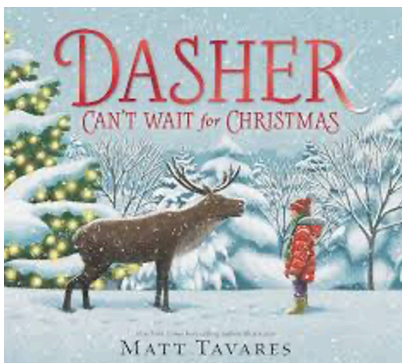
## By Barb Ashton

In December, our thoughts turn to Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanza, and shopping for that special gift for family and friends. December is also **Human Rights Month**, the passage of the Universal Declaration of the Human Rights Document by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948 guaranteeing everyone has basic rights and freedoms regardless of who you are. December is also **Read a New Book Month** which encourages everyone to take time to read a good book, an eBook, graphic novel, an audio book etc. Books also make a nice gift to give or receive.



December 7, 1941 is a day that not only changed history but will always be remembered as "a date which will live in infamy." [\*\*Attacked!: Pearl Harbor and the Day War Came to America\*\*](#) by Marc Favreau is a story of this day told through the eyes of real characters from both sides who were participants on this fateful day. For example there's the young Japanese spy who poses "as a tourist, diplomat, and dishwasher at the officers club" while sending details about Pearl Harbor back to Japan. There's also the Japanese high command and their secret plans to attack Pearl Harbor. Many of the stories are firsthand accounts along with photographs of the men, women, and children who experienced the bombing and tragedy of Pearl Harbor. The creative writing of the author engages the reader as if "they were on the ground" at Pearl Harbor on December 7th. This book is well-researched, action-packed, and an informative narrative that provides a different perspective on Pearl Harbor and America's

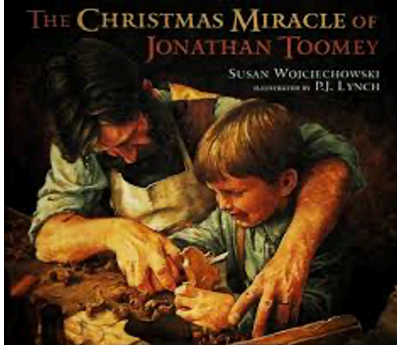
entry into World War II in the Pacific. This is a very readable book for middle grades and Jr High students. The back of the book contains an epilogue on Pearl Harbor and the creation of the Arizona Memorial. There's an extensive timeline of events and a section for further reading, as well as multimedia resources to obtain further information.



Christmas is fast approaching. A delightful book to share with students and families is [\*\*Dasher Can't Wait for Christmas\*\*](#) by Matt Tavares. This is the sequel to the original *Dasher* story. In this story, Dasher can't wait for Christmas to come and to help pull Santa's sleigh. On the night before Christmas Eve Dasher is unable to sleep and decides to leave the North Pole. As she flies through the night she's distracted by some Christmas lights and eventually gets lost. Will Dasher get assistance? Will Dasher make it back to the North Pole in time to help Santa and join the other reindeers to help pull Santa's sleigh? Read *Dasher Can't Wait for Christmas* to find the answer. This is a story that involves the importance of the

North Star, kindness, and the spirit and magic of Christmas. Although the illustrations were created digitally they express lovely snowy winter scenes, realistic characters, and enhance the Christmas spirit. This is a book to be enjoyed by all students, families, and a nice addition to all libraries and classroom collections. You can also view *Dasher Can't Wait for Christmas* on YouTube.

[\*\*The Christmas Miracle of Jonathan Toomey\*\*](#) by Susan Wojciechowski is celebrating its 20th anniversary and is considered a Christmas classic. This is the story of Jonathan



Toomey, who is considered as the best woodcarver in the village. However, the village children call him Mr. Gloomy as he never smiles and is always alone, even when he's working in his workshop. This is due to the loss of his wife and child. Then one winter day, with Christmas coming, the young Widow McDowell and her son, Thomas, come to his shop and request him to carve a Nativity set for them. While watching Jonathan carve the figures they ignore his gruffness and give him suggestions on how the figures should look. To check on the progress of the carvings they visit Jonathan's shop several times. During these visits the Widow McDowell and Thomas start to become friends with Jonathan and he slowly

begins to heal and becomes more personable. On Christmas Day, Jonathan attends Christmas services with Widow McDowell and Thomas, smiling and feeling happy. Later in the day he delivers the finished Nativity set to Thomas and his mom. *The Christmas Miracle of Jonathan Toomey* is a beautiful story of friendship, love, and the miracle of Christmas. The sepia toned watercolor illustrations by P. J. Lynch are realistic and enhance the story. The new anniversary edition has a new cover, an author's note, and a downloadable audio narration by James Earl Jones. This is a book to be added to all libraries and enjoyed by all families and students.

### Looking Ahead

**December 6: St. Nicholas Day**

**December 7: Pearl Harbor Day**

**December 15: Bill of Rights Day** – Guaranteeing the basic rights of all citizens

**December 21: Crossword puzzle Day** – Do a crossword puzzle for fun

**December 21: Winter Solstice** – The shortest day of the year

**December 24: Christmas Eve**

**December 25: Christmas Day**

**December 25: Hanukkah Begins** – Learn to play the Dreidel game

**December 26-January 1: Kwanza** – Learn about the 7 Principles of Kwanza

**December 31: New Year's Eve** – Say Goodbye to 2025



Don't forget to take advantage of some upcoming PD opportunities planned throughout Illinois.

- **December 2, 2025: MID-State Reading Council** will host the **AI Classroom Monthly Book Club** from 4:30 to 5:30 pm at **Gill Street Restaurant, 3002B Gill Street, Bloomington, Illinois**. Future book clubs will be held on **February 3, 2026, March 3, 2026, April 7, 2026, and May 5, 2026**.
- **December 3, 2025: IRC Webinar** on "Redefining" Writing for Greater Equity, Engagement, and Authenticity! with **Shawna Coppola** from 7:00 to 8:00 pm via Zoom



- **December 4, 2025: Southern Illinois Reading Council** will host the SIRC Holiday Celebration from 6:00 to 8:00 pm at Alongi's, 18 W Main Street, DuQuoin, Illinois.
- **December 5, 2025: Prairie Area Reading Council (PARC)** will host the Illinois Reads Sneak Peak from 6:00 to 8:00 pm at Anderson's Bookshops, 5112 Main Street, Downers Grove, Illinois.
- **December 6, 2025: Illini Reading Council** and **Vermilion Valley Reading Council** will co-host Technology to Create Innovative Learning Experiences from 10:30 am to 12:00 pm at the Champaign Public Library, 200 West Green Street, Robertson Room C, Champaign, Illinois.
- **December 11, 2025: Sauk Valley Reading Council** will host Stories with Mrs. Claus at the Dixon Public Library, 221 S Hennepin Ave, Dixon, Illinois.
- **January 7, 2026: IRC Webinar** on Being Child Centered in A World That Wants to Center Everything Else with Cornelius Minor from 7:00 to 8:00 pm via Zoom Webinar.
- **January 9, 2026: Fox Valley Reading Council** will host Literature and Laughter Yoga: Breathe In, Breathe Out with Pat Braun from 5:30 to 7:00 pm. More information will be available soon.
- **January 12, 2026: Illinois Valley Reading Council** will host the Illinois Comprehensive Literacy Plan Webinar Series on Fluency from 4:30 to 5:30 pm via Zoom.
- **January 16, 2026: Prairie Area Reading Council (PARC)** will host Family Fort Night from 4:45 to 6:45 at the Westmont Public Library, 428 N Cass Ave, Westmont, Illinois.
- **January 18, 2026: IRC** will hold the **Winter 2026 IRC Book Club** where participants will read, reflect on, and respond to ***Building Bigger Ideas: A Process for Teaching Purposeful Talk*** by Maria Nichols and/or ***Punished for Dreaming: How School Reform Harms Black Children and How We Heal*** by Bettina L. Love and/or ***Educating Emergent Bilinguals: Policies, Programs, and Practices for Multilingual Learners*** by Ofelia Garcia, Jo Anne Kleifgen, and Claudia Cervantes-Soon.
- **January 20, 2026: MID-State Reading Council** will host Isn't It Ironical? Humanity Through Digital Literacy and AI with Cindi Koudelka from 6:30 to 7:30 pm at the Bloomington Public Library, 205 E Olive Street, Bloomington, Illinois.
- **January 23, 2026: Secondary Reading League (SRL)** and **Fox Valley Reading Council** will co-host Trivia Night at 6:30 pm at PAL Joey's, 31 N River Street, Batavia, Illinois.
- **January 27, 2026: Lewis and Clark Reading Council** will host SLD Kellyn Sirach: Fellowship and PD from 6:30 to 8:30 PM. More information will be available soon.

To view the full **IRC Events Calendar**, please visit the [IRC Website](#).



# CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

Members are encouraged to submit articles at any time to [irc@illinoisreadingcouncil.org](mailto:irc@illinoisreadingcouncil.org).

**#WhatIAmReading:** Share a book that you are reading, in 3 to 4 sentences.

**IRC Highlight Reels:** Share snapshots of successes in your classrooms in 100 to 300 words. Remember no success is too big or too small to share and pictures welcomed!

**Other Literacy Topics:**

- Artificial Intelligence in Education
- Tips for Teaching Writing
- Strategies for Struggling Readers
- Building the Reading and Writing Connection
- And any other literacy topics that interests you!

Thank you for helping to inspire your fellow educators! Posts will be shared on social media too!

## QUICK LINKS

Visit the IRC Website

Full IRC Events Calendar

Latest on the IRC Conference

Available IRC Awards and Grants

Bring IRC PD to your School District

Learn more about the Illinois Reads Program

Questions? Please feel free to reach out to the Illinois Reading Council by email at [irc@illinoisreadingcouncil.org](mailto:irc@illinoisreadingcouncil.org) or by phone at 309-454-1341.

See what's also happening on our social media sites:



