

Empowering
Lives
Through
Literacy

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REGISTRATION IS OPEN FOR IRC CONFERENCE

By the Illinois Reading Council

The [2022 IRC Conference, Literacy in Bloom: Growing Readers and Ideas](#), will be held from March 10-11, 2022 at the Bank of Springfield Center, President Abraham Lincoln Hotel, and the Wyndham Hotel in Springfield, Illinois.

If you haven't registered yet, it isn't too late to register. There is also discounted group registration rates for 10 or more participants. Don't miss this incredible opportunity to see this year's featured speakers:

2022 ILLINOIS READING COUNCIL CONFERENCE
PRELIMINARY PROGRAM



MARCH 10 - 11, 2022
SPRINGFIELD, ILLINOIS

- Blue Balliett
- David Biedrzycki
- Jeffrey Brown
- Joelle Charbonneau
- Sonja Cherry-Paul
- Debbie Diller
- Lynne Dorfman
- Alison Gordon
- Chris Grabenstein
- Jacob Grant
- Carol Jago
- Brendan Kiely

- Donalyn Miller
- Raúl The Third
- Jan Richardson
- Pernille Ripp
- Jason Reynolds
- John Schu
- Brian Selznick
- Lauren Tarshis
- Matt Tavares
- Becky Anderson Wilkins
- Ibi Zoboi
- 2022 Illinois Reads Authors

To find out more, download the Preliminary Program at www.illinoisreadingcouncil.org.

THE SCRIPT FOR STRUGGLING READERS

By Laura St. John, CARA Past President

It's an interesting time to think about struggling *readers* as nearly all students (maybe all of us) are struggling right now, in one way or another, as we enter into another winter in the midst of this continuing pandemic.

In classrooms across Chicago where my drama based reading program, Play In A Book, works with PreK – Grade 6 students, my team notes that the majority of our students in the eleven different schools we currently serve are indeed struggling: physically, socially, and academically. Physically, it's hard to wear a mask and distance all day long. Socially, many of our young friends have forgotten how to engage productively with each other and with us, especially with all the new rules. After spending most of our first semester rebuilding social skills and developing protocols for safety, we just recently dug into our more typical work, which is reading scripts in preparation for performance.

As we entered into the work of reading scripts, we made a decision as a company that *none* of our students were behind and that we would meet all of our students where they needed to be met. Our goal was not to get through the lesson, but rather to find an opportunity for each student to experience success within our lesson. We've had to rethink our definition of success with text work. I'm so grateful that we use scripts as the foundation of our programming, because I've seen, over and over again, the brief terror on a child's face when they see a wall of text; and the relief they experience when they realize that they are only responsible for a few lines of that text, as designated by the character they're playing.

At Play In A Book, we've found that working with text in smaller, easier to digest bits can make a real difference for our students, especially those who are struggling. Even our nonreaders can memorize a line or two and join in the shared telling of a story. Scripts, poems, and graphic novels all break down text into manageable bits and prevent students from getting overwhelmed.

When working within scripts with our youngest, emerging readers we're also practicing an echo read, utilizing distinct voices for each character. This simple technique gets our students tracking and figuring out challenging words that might create a stumbling block when they read on their own. It's become a common and fun way to get started with a script in our 1st grade classrooms.

Another tool we're using regularly in our curriculum is repetition. We perform multiple versions of the same script, starring a new pair or group of students with each reading. Usually, our students who have the greatest command of the text will start, but nearly everyone is eager to get on stage and have a chance to perform. Providing bits of action and a simple costume piece ups engagement even more. As you and your students continue to struggle through these days of new growth and learning, I hope you'll consider scripts as a great tool to use with your struggling readers.

USING AUDIO WORD WALLS TO BUILD ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

By Dominique Byrnes, District Language Coach, Elmwood Park CUSD #401
























Word walls have historically aided students in becoming more familiar with academic vocabulary. When the pandemic started, I struggled with how I could provide structure to pre teaching vocabulary the same way as I would in my small groups in 1st through 5th grades. As an EL teacher, I would use word walls when reviewing vocabulary and concepts. Word walls "jumpstart" student learning and help students become more independent during lessons. Unfortunately, students could no longer walk up to the classroom word wall for assistance, so I needed to figure out how to turn them digital.

After reading the ReadySet Coteach blog, I stumbled upon the idea of audio word walls. This team of teachers found an efficient way for students to have access to concepts ahead of time, while also building a digital collection of terms for students to refer back to. It was wonderful! Right then and there, I started creating word wall collections to use with my students.

Put simply, I create a table in Google Slides, put a term in each box, and add a visual. Then, while using the website online-voice-recorder.com, I add in audio of me reading a student-friendly definition for each term. After reviewing the table with my small group of students, they were more equipped to participate in whole group instruction and cooperative learning groups. Anytime they needed further clarification, they could pull up the word wall and click on the audio file to hear me give the definition. Students were thrilled

to have something to refer to independently!

This pandemic practice is now something I use regularly. When I create new word walls, I consider using a short video clip when building the visuals. This “gif” with movement proved to be more beneficial than a static visual. My hope is to eventually have students create their own word walls in order for them to make more personal connections to academic terms. I’m happy to report that this teaching practice is something positive that came out of the pandemic!

Food Webs			
bacteria    	consumer   	producer   	organism    
food web  	fungus  	decomposer   Worm Mushroom Insects Bacteria	  

HELP STRUGGLING READERS BRIDGE THE GAP

By Julie Courson, RTI Specialist, Mt. Zion Grade School

This school year marks the third year of dealing with COVID and my second graders were significantly behind where they should be to start the school year. As a reading specialist, it was my duty to help bridge the gaps.

Curriculum: The first thing I did was to evaluate my curriculum. I decided that mine needed to be updated and fortunately I was able to purchase a new program. What did I look for? I wanted a program that focused on phonics and word patterns. My students were especially weak in these areas and since those are foundational skills, I wanted a curriculum that would immerse them in those skills.

Family Night: Enlisting parental help was high on my list. I invited parents to come and learn what types of activities they could do at home to reinforce what I was doing at school. Each family was given a packet of supplies that included sight word lists, fluency passages, and letter tiles. At the meeting, I went over how to use each item and offered suggestions on games or other ways to practice at home. One important aspect was that nothing take more than 5-10 minutes as I did not want to overwhelm anyone.

Constant Contact with Parents: In addition to family night, I also held individual parent conferences and emailed with families. This wasn't new, but it was a vital component of my plan to keep families involved. It was important to discuss each student and their progress individually.

Word Lists Home: I sent individualized word lists home with students. These were simply words on notecards held together with a ring clip. They were specific to each student and as the student mastered those words, I would send a new list home.

Incentives for Meeting Goals: Something that was new was presenting students with a certificate each time they mastered a word list. This provided them feedback they could share with their regular classroom teacher and also their family. It proved helpful - lots of students would come to class and ask to read a list - they had been practicing at home!

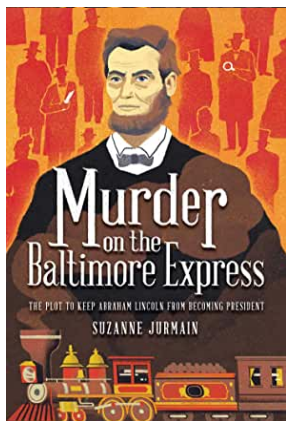
Providing Teachers with Materials: For those students who were in RTI, I provided classroom teachers

with word lists for students; second, it was a way to support my classroom teachers and provide them with materials.

FAMILY LITERACY BOOKSHELF

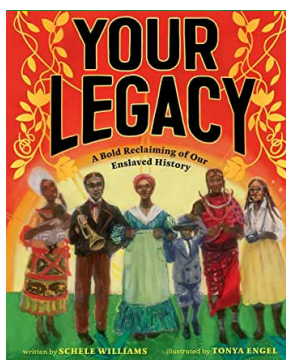
By Barb Ashton, IRC Family Literacy Committee Chair

The shortest month of the year, February, has arrived with snow and cold. Will the groundhog see his shadow? Will America be successful at the Winter Olympics? Will your favorite team win the Super Bowl? February also has Valentine's Day, President's Day, Mardi Gras, Lunar New Year, and the celebration of African American History month.



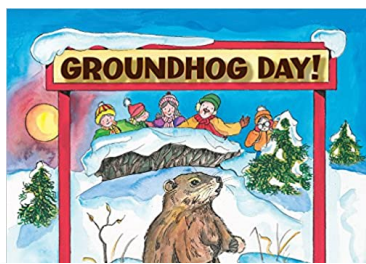
We all know about the life of Abraham Lincoln and certainly his assassination shortly after the beginning of his second term as President. But did you know about the plot to assassinate Lincoln a few days before his inauguration? Read ***Murder on the Baltimore Express: The Plot to Keep Abraham Lincoln from Becoming President*** by Suzanne Jurmain. Lincoln was to be sworn in as President on March 4, 1861 and left Springfield on February 11th. Lincoln planned to travel by train with his family to the Capitol, making stops along the way to give short speeches and shake hands. Although Lincoln had previously received threats on his life, he was unaware of this current threat. This plot to assassinate Lincoln was being planned by a group called the Knights of the Golden Circle. They were a group of pro-slavery confederates who were determined not to let Lincoln take office. Lincoln didn't have the use of the Secret Service or FBI but he did have a group of special people who worked to protect and keep him safe. At one of the Knights meetings an activist (Doreatha Dix) learned

of the latest plot to assassinate Lincoln. She told one of the special protectors about the plot which eventually led to getting help from the famed Allan Pinkerton Detective Agency. Through various spy missions Allan Pinkerton and his detectives came up with a plan to keep Lincoln safe and able to become America's 16th President of the United States. To learn how Pinkerton and his agents foiled the antagonists, got Lincoln away from Baltimore and got him to Washington, D.C. for his inauguration you'll need to read *Murder on the Baltimore Express*. This is a fantastic middle grade read that is engaging and suspenseful, with many twists and turns.

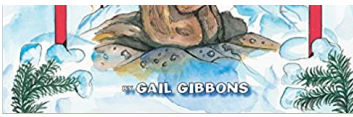


For African American History Month, ***Your Legacy: A Bold Reclaiming of Our Enslaved History*** by Schele Williams is a new book that celebrates and honors today's African American children's ancestors. The story begins when slavers from Europe "arrived on African shores and your ancestors were forcibly taken away." After the long journey and arrival in America and the Caribbean Islands, they were separated and sold, and forced into slavery. Fearing for their lives and forced to do "grueling work" they were proud of their heritage and culture and were determined to survive. Even though they had nothing, they used what they did have, such as love, courage, intellect, strength, ingenuity, grace, and dignity. They also discovered they had one thing in common – MUSIC – which they used while working in the fields and other happy and special occasions. The remainder of the book acquaints the reader with past and current historical

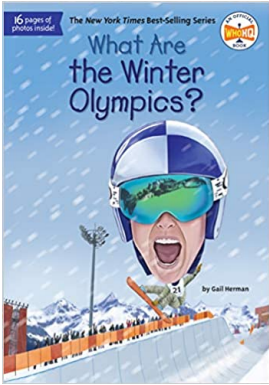
African Americans who over the years used these gifts/talents to contribute to the American way of life through their inventions, discoveries, entertainment, and other accomplishments. The beautiful illustrations capture the emotions and stories of African American history. *Your Legacy: A Bold Reclaiming of Our Enslaved History* is a great book to share with families to help them talk with their children about African American History.



Every year on February 2 people watch the weather report to see if spring will arrive soon or if there will be six more weeks of winter. To learn more about this special day, read ***Groundhog Day!*** by Gail Gibbons. The story begins by telling the history of how long ago people held festivals and religious celebrations in February that celebrated the end of winter and beginning of spring. They cleaned their homes in anticipation of the oncoming spring season. They also watched animals such as the bear, badger, hedgehog, and the



groundhog to see if it saw its shadow. When these people came to America and settled in Pennsylvania they brought this tradition with them. Since the groundhogs lived in this area, the people would watch to see if he saw his shadow and it became a yearly celebration on February 2nd. The second half of the book gives factual information about the groundhog – such as his size, what he eats, how he lives in his burrow, etc. The illustrations are cute and colorful. It is also a good informational book about why we celebrate Groundhog Day. *Groundhog Day!* would make a nice addition to your classroom library. Head over to YouTube to hear the story being read.



This year the world over will be watching the Winter Olympics beginning February 4th. Did you know that the Winter Olympics didn't begin officially until 1924 although the Summer Olympics is much older? ***What Are the Winter Olympics?*** by Gail Herman will help you learn how the winter games got started. The book honors the top athletes, teams, and medal winners as well as the exciting events and disappointments experienced by the athletes. Learn about the athletes who broke or set records along with the new sports that were added over the years. There are several black and white illustrations and photo inserts from previous Winter Olympics. There is a nice timeline at the back of the book about the Olympics. *What Are the Winter Olympics?* Is a good read for anyone interested in the history of the Winter Olympics. So who will soar? Who will win medals? Watch the Winter Games from Beijing, China to find out.

Looking Ahead

- February 1: World Hijab Day – Chinese or Lunar New Year – Year of the Tiger
- February 2: Groundhog Day
- February 2: World Read Aloud Day
- February 4: Winter Olympics begin
- February 11: National Inventors Day
- February 12: Abraham Lincoln's Birthday
- February 13: Super Bowl Sunday
- February 14: Valentine's Day
- February 21: Presidents Day
- February 22: George Washington's Birthday
- February 27: Polar Bear Day
- March 1: Mardi Gras

LITERACY LINKS

By the IRC Educational Media Committee

Take a moment to review some of the Literacy Links provided by the IRC Educational Media Committee to help Illinois educators in today's classrooms.

Reading Passage Resources

[Common Lit](#)

Common Lit provides a collection of high quality, free instructional materials to support literacy development for students in grades five through twelve. You will find this site filled with leveled fiction and nonfiction articles that are flexible, research based, and aligned to standards. The resources are created for teachers, by teachers.

Video Resources

[Storyline Online](#)

Storyline Online features accomplished actors and actresses reading some of their favorite children's books. Each story comes with a free Activity Guide and can be viewed on YouTube or SchoolTube. *Rainbow Fish*, *Wilfrid Gordon Macdonald Partridge*, and *To Be a Drum* are just a few of the books available. This resource was developed by The Screen Actors Guild Foundation.

[Storynory](#)

Storynory features a collection of original, fairytale, and classic children's audio stories. Students can follow along with the story as it is read to them, as the text is also included on the site. There are also some great features available that give you the option of downloading the audio to your computer, listening to "catch phrase" explanations, translating text into different languages and more.

UPCOMING PD EVENTS

By the Illinois Reading Council

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

- **February 2, 2022: South Suburban Reading Council** will host an event with Allison Apsey from 6:00 to 7:00 pm via Zoom.
- **February 2, 2022: IRC Webinar** on Discovering the 2022 Illinois Reads Books with Becky Anderson from 7:00 to 8:00 pm via Zoom Webinar.
- **February 3, 2022: Macon County Reading Council** will host Writing in All Classrooms from 4:15 to 6:15 pm at the Decatur Public Library, Children's Department Conference Room, 130 N. Franklin Street, Decatur, Illinois.
- **February 3, 2022: Prairie Area Reading Council** will host a Book Gossip with Kathleen March from Anderson's Bookshops from 6:00 to 7:30 pm via Zoom.
- **February 5, 2022: Black Hawk Reading Council** will host Teaching Tolerance, Learning Justice from 9:30 to 11:30 am via Zoom.
- **February 8, 2022: MID-State Reading Council** will host the next session of The Well-Balanced Teacher Book Study at 4:30 pm at Gill Street Bar & Grill, 3002 Gill Street, Bloomington, Illinois.
- **February 8, 2022: Suburban Council of the IRA (SCIRA)** will host Encouraging Intellectual Curiosity in Young Advanced Reads, Selecting and Using Challenging Children's Literature with Laura Beltchenko from 6:00 to 7:30 pm via Zoom.
- **February 13, 2022: Chicago Area Reading Association (CARA)** will host Social Emotional Learning with Tenesha Hatter, Kenya Edwards, and Laura St. John from 9:30 am to 12:00 pm via Zoom.
- **February 16, 2022: Central Illinois Reading Council** will host the monthly CIRC Book Chats on Black Joy with Melissa Wheeler from 7:00 to 8:00 pm via Zoom.
- **February 24, 2022: Will County Reading Council** will host Literacy with Love, Compassion, Community from 5:00 to 8:00 pm via Zoom.
- **February 25, 2022: College Instructors of Reading Professionals (CIRP)** is accepting applications for Student Conference Stipends for education majors who attend the 2022 IRC Conference..
- **February 26, 2022: East Central-EIU Reading Council and National Road Reading Council** will co-host the Literacy & Learning Conference from 9:00 am to 12:00 pm at Eastern Illinois University, Buzzard Hall, 600 Lincoln Avenue, Charleston, Illinois.
- **February 26, 2022: Western Illinois Reading Council** will host Developing a Love of Literacy from 10:00 am to 12:30 pm via Zoom.

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

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 or by phone at 309-454-1341.

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

