

Empowering
Lives
Through
Literacy

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"In the case of good books, the point is not to see how many of them you can get through, but rather how many can get through to you."

~ Mortimer J. Adler

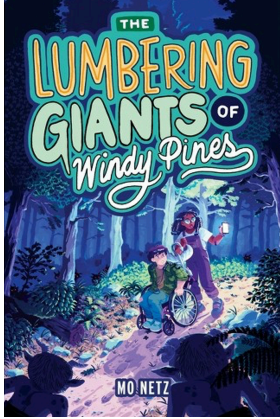
#WhatIAmReading



I am reading *The Lumbering Giants of Windy Pines* by Mo Netz.

~ Diana Wilkie, IRC Treasurer

A Jewish girl who uses a wheelchair faces demons when she and her mom move to a former mining town for work. Because Jerusha (Jerry) has moved



around from one place to another and because of her disability, she finds it difficult to make friends. She prefers to spend time with Paul, her imaginary dragon, who adds much humor to the story. What a great voice of conscience. Mama is secretive about her new job, loggers have been disappearing and Jerry is forbidden to enter the woods. When her mother goes missing, Jerry takes a new friend to find and rescue her from a land full of demons. Scary and creepy! Mo Netz gives us a refreshingly authentic depiction of physical disability while the main character uses her wheelchair in strong and creative ways to solve problems. The author writes from his own personal experience and makes life in a wheelchair just an everyday event, without over-the-top explanations. A heart-warming tale of friendship, family, monsters and magic.

I am reading **PET** by Akwaeke Emezi.

~ Melissa Wheeler, IRC Secretary



This beautiful story follows Jam, a young girl on a daring mission to find and stop the monster that is hurting her friend. A quick read, *PET* makes us consider our notions of good and bad, right and wrong, heroes and villains, and what role beauty has in any of it!

I am reading **Nice Work, Nora November** by Julia London.

~ Carrie Sheridan, IRC Executive Director



Looking for my summer beach read, I found this book and loved it! In the book, Nora November is living a very unhappy life with career and family pressures and suffering from chronic depression. After a near death experience that left her in a coma, Nora realizes how close she came to the end of her life with so many regrets for wishes and dreams left undone. She creates a "Reverse Bucket List" and sets out to do all of the things she never did before she died. Her list includes ordinary aspirations like learning how to cook and cleaning out her late grandpa's garden. But it also includes finding the man she was unexpectedly locked for hours with in a backroom while being held hostage in a corner store holdup . . . the one who got away. It is an uplifting and heartwarming story of second chances and the power of finding out what really makes life worth truly living.

From the University Methods Classroom to the Public School Classroom: Book Chat Magic

By Steven L. Layne

Thanks to an IRC Literacy Support Grant, two of my college students had the opportunity to explore research to practice with their respective fourth- and fifth-grade classes in the fall of 2023 during student teaching. Karsten Baldwin was teaching fourth graders at Moving Everest, a charter school in Chicago while Maggie Bergevin was teaching fifth graders at Lowell Elementary in Wheaton. We decided to take one element of something they had learned about in Reading Methods and put it into direct practice: in this case, book chats.

I wondered what these preservice teachers would come to understand and notice if they were to commit to reading and talking about books with their students on a weekly basis. I am sharing an abbreviated version of our action research here in hopes of encouraging readers to make time in their instructional plans for “chatting up” their students about great books; I would argue that no matter the setting or the students—all children are motivated to read when given access to titles and informed endorsements from their teachers.

Lowell Elementary

K-5

250 students

37% minority enrollment

School Library: 13,000 books

Substantial Classroom Library

Moving Everest

K-8

700 students

99% minority enrollment

No School Library

Limited Classroom Library

What We Did

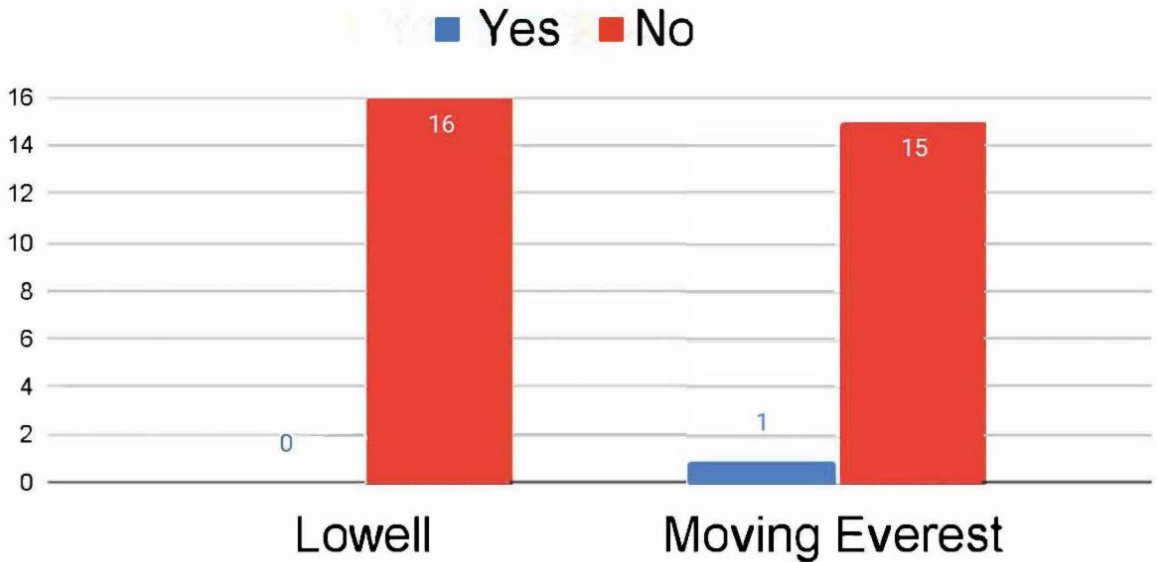
- Purchased 3 copies each of eight different titles for the respective classrooms
- Crossed four genres: historical fiction, realistic fiction, fantasy, nonfiction
- Two books were read and prepped for “chatting” from each of the four genre
- One title was “chatted” weekly for 10 weeks; half of the chats included excerpts

What We Noticed

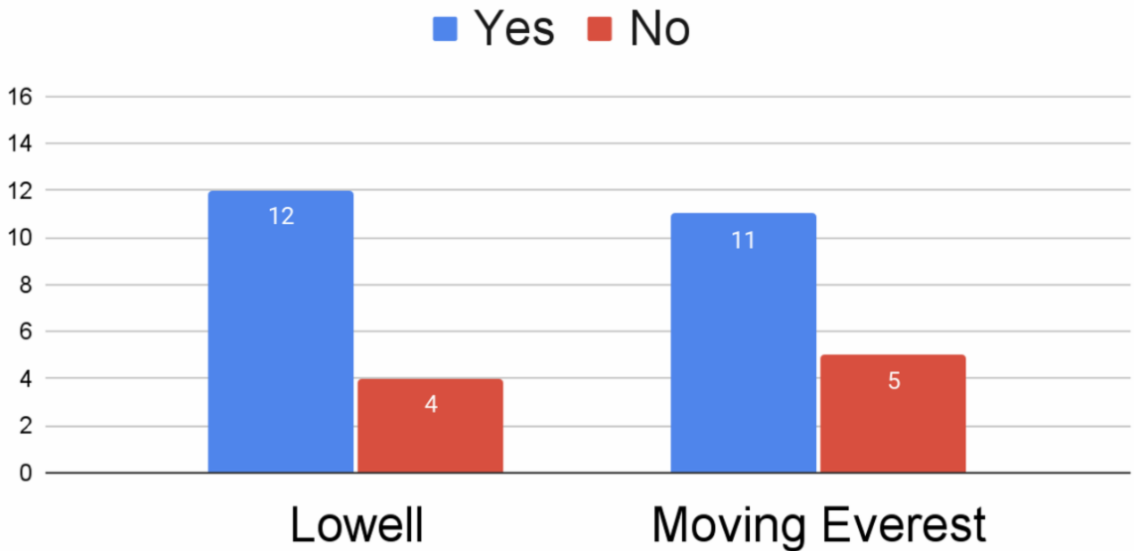
- Circulation of the titles featured in book chats steadily increased in both classrooms and “wait lists” had to be created to meet the demand for quick access
- Tremendous excitement over book chats and increased discussion among kids about what everyone was reading was reported by Cooperating Teachers and Student Teachers
- The inclusion or exclusion of an excerpt from the book as part of the book chat did not appear to have an impact with the students in these classrooms
- Most genres held similar interest for both boys and girls with the exception of nonfiction where the interest of boy readers in these classrooms was notably higher than that of girls.
- Cooperating Teachers told student teachers in video interviews that the book chats in both schools had made a marked difference in the reading climate of their classrooms.

What Kids Had to Say

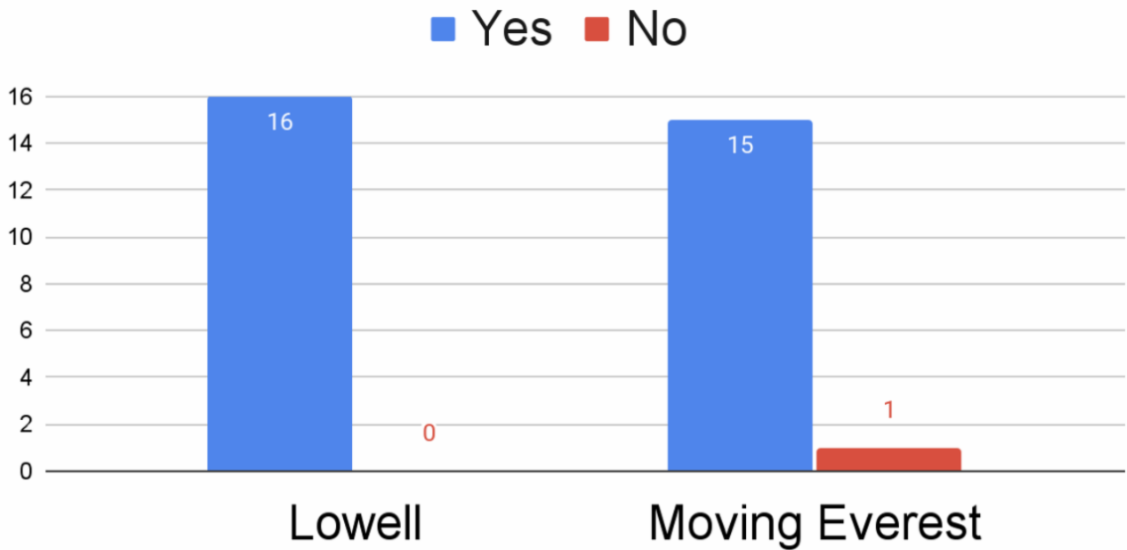
Do you remember a teacher in past school years regularly presenting book chats to you?



Do you think you read more this year than in previous years due to the book chats?



Would you like your future teachers to regularly present book chats to you?



At the end of our research project, the student teachers surveyed several students for the purposes of gathering data. They also interviewed their cooperating teachers and a few students to obtain some qualitative feedback.

In summarizing our goals for this project, and my hope for all teachers, I think fifth grader Oliver Hardy said it best. He was responding to the question: “What did you like best about book chats?” His response mirrored that of many other students, but it definitely came out in his own unique voice. Oliver responded, “MY favorite things about book chats came AFTER the book chat each week because my teacher would pull sticks to see who would get to check out the books first . . . and I ALWAYS wished it was me.”

FROM THE DESK OF THE IRC PRESIDENT

By Melissa Stinnett

Remote Pedagogy: Using Online Platforms and Apps for Instruction

When the Covid-19 pandemic hit and schools across the nation shut down, the question for many elementary school teachers became, “How do I instruct reading for my students remotely?” The Covid-19 pandemic posed a new requirement to the school systems throughout the country with the use of digital solutions in order to ensure the protection of students and teachers against coronavirus.

The Covid-19 pandemic has increased the speed in which new technologies are used to support the development of students’ reading skills. At the turn of the century, literacy expert Donald Leu

(2000) presciently stated, “The very nature of literacy is regularly changing because of new information and communication technologies. We must begin to develop strategies to help each of us keep up with the continually changing definitions of literacy that will exist in our world” (p.763).

The purpose of the study is to explore the pedagogical strategies, including technology, which preservice students implemented when providing literacy instruction during the pandemic. The participants in this study included six pre-service education students experiencing their “block” teaching (the semester prior to student teaching) during the pandemic when many schools closed, and the expectation was for them to teach literacy remotely.

Research Question: *What online platform(s) did you use for instruction during block teaching?*

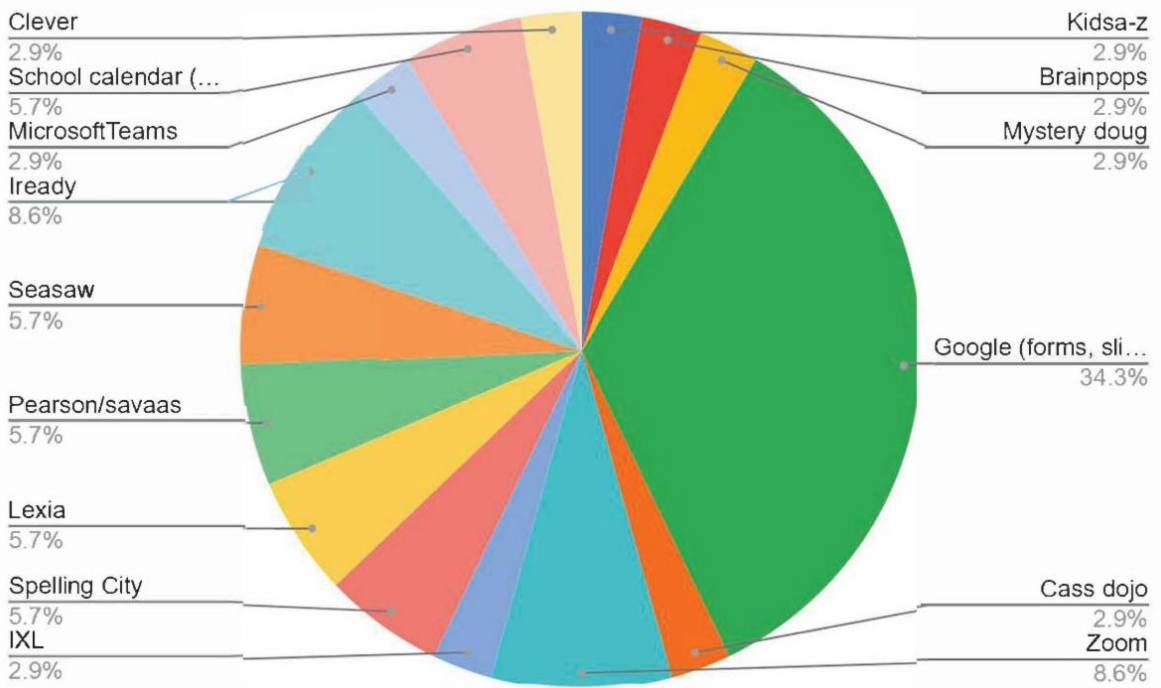
During block teaching the online platforms and educational sites that were used most frequently to least frequently were Google Tools (34.3%) which consisted of a workspace for education purposes, including Google classroom, Google meets, Google assignments, and Google forms. Chromebooks were also highly used. Zoom, (8.6%) a platform used by teachers to teach students virtually, and Iready, a learning assessment website used to test students virtually, were both used the next most frequently (See Chart 1).

Those used somewhat frequently (5.7%) were Pearson/Savaas, Seesaw, School calendar, and Spelling City. Pearson/Savaas gives teachers digital access to customize instructions, upload content, and monitor student progress. Seesaw allows teachers and students to record and share what is happening inside of the classroom, School calendar is a tool that is used for teachers to stay organized with lesson plans, while Spelling City is an interactive word game app designed to help students learn spelling.

A number of platforms used less frequently (2.9%) included Microsoft Teams and Class Dojo. ClassDojo is a technology platform that allows teachers, students, and parents to communicate virtually. Clever contains multiple home pages found on its site and is available to the students daily.

Other tools used at the less frequent (2.9%) level include Mystery Doug, Brain Pop, Kids a-z, IXL, Prodigy, Lexia, Epic, and ABCya. Mystery Doug is an educational site that allows students to watch videos and participate in learning activities. BrainPOP allows students to partake in interactive, educational videos and games on a variety of subjects. Kids a-z, an online learning portal, allows students to have access to their class learning materials, and it also allows teachers easy access to assist and manage the students virtually. IXL is a learning site that allows students to work on individual learning gaps. Block teachers used other online learning platforms and games such as Prodigy, Lexia, Epic, and ABCya.

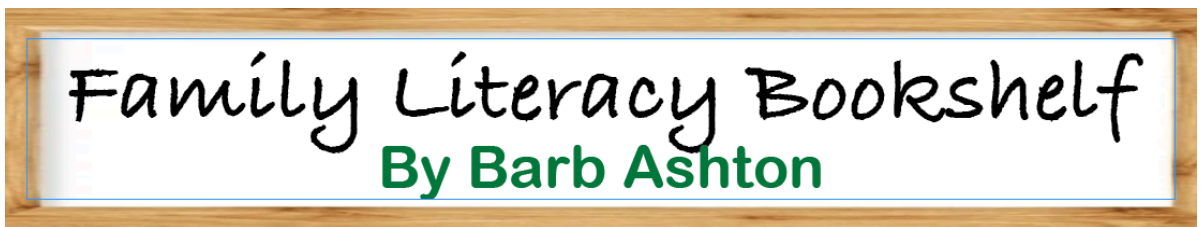
Chart 1: Online Platforms



In post-pandemic times, teacher education programs and practicing teachers can both benefit from using online instructional experiences as the stepping-stone to better equip teachers to have the necessary skills and knowledge to conduct successful instruction online.

References:

Leu, D.J., (2000). Exploring Literacy on the Internet: Our Children's Future: Changing the focus of literacy and literacy instruction. *The Reading Teacher*, Vol 53 No. 5, pp. 424-429.



Summer and July have officially arrived with warm sunny days. This month we celebrate July 4th with parades, family gatherings, and fireworks. July is also National Parks Month. This month the Summer Olympics will be held in Paris France. Major League Baseball All Star Game is also played during July. Grab a hot dog and some ice cream as July is National Picnic, Hot Dog, and Ice Cream Month.

The Summer Olympics will be held in Paris, France which is home to the Eiffel Tower and other landmarks that will be featured as part of the coverage of the 2024 Games. ***The Timekeepers: Eiffel Tower Emergency*** by S J King is a delightful introduction to historical fiction, adventure, and Paris. The Timekeepers is a secret organization of kids whose job is to keep history relevant. The villain called DeLay is about to ruin the Opening of the Eiffel Tower. When the hands on the

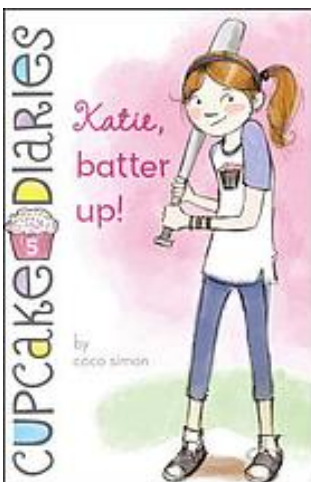


Timekeepers special spin backwards they know that DeLay is about to cause havoc. The Timekeepers are sent back in time to the 1889 World's Fair and the unveiling of the Eiffel Tower. In the meantime the Timekeepers meet Mr. Gustave Eiffel who tells them the blueprints for the "Topping Out" of the Eiffel Tower have been stolen. Thus begins the Timekeepers adventure through Paris as they try to capture DeLay and recover the blueprints. Will they be successful? You'll need to read *The Timekeepers Eiffel Tower Emergency* to discover the answer. Delightful black and white illustrations make the reader feel as if they are part of the adventure. The back of the book contains additional information about the Eiffel Tower, a timeline, glossary, a quiz, as well as helping younger children learn about someone who helped shape the world.



America celebrates its Independence on July 4th after defeating England in the Revolutionary War. *I Survived the American Revolution, 1776* by Lauren Tarshis, and adapted by Georgia Ball into a graphic novel, tells the story of eleven year old Nathaniel (Nate) Fox. Nate lives with his father (a ship's captain) as his mother has died from smallpox. He enjoys being a ship's boy on his father's ship until the day his father is washed overboard during a terrible storm at sea. Nate has no other family except for an uncle (STORCH) who is a strong loyalist to England. Nate goes to live with STORCH and his enslaved family. STORCH is abusive to Nate but he gets kindness and comfort from the enslaved mother (Eliza) and her son Theo. One day while playing with Theo, Theo's handmade toy hits STORCH in the back. Nate takes the blame but to avoid STORCH'S abusiveness, Nate runs away at night and heads to where several ships are docked. The ship leaves port and heads to New York,

where Nate and the crew are greeted by the Revolutionary War. Nate leaves the ship and meets up with an old friend (Paul) of his father who has joined the American army. Nate goes with Paul to the American encampment. When the British eventually attack the encampment, Nate is forced into battle with very little battle skills. This book is an excellent addition to all libraries and for your reluctant and ESL readers. Head over to www.laurentarshis.com for a wealth of activities to accompany the novel. You can also view the book on YouTube.



Do cupcakes and softball make a winning combination? Meet Katie and her friends in the graphic novel *Cupcake Diaries Katie, Batter Up!* by Coco Simon. In this delightful summer read Katie and her friends are members of the cupcake club. They are known for making delicious cupcakes for various occasions and Cupcake Friday. All of Katie's cupcake club members have other extracurricular activities besides making cupcakes. Katie wants to have an extracurricular activity but isn't very good in gym class, sports, or music. Katie is the subject of bullying and is not always wanted on teams in gym class. She also expresses her feelings in a diary at the end of each chapter. Katie's friends invite her to come with them to their basketball, soccer, and softball practices and she makes the softball team. As Katie gains more confidence she realizes "that doing what you love always makes the batter sweeter." The bright and colorful graphic illustrations enhance the story and engage the reader.

Looking Ahead

July 4: Independence Day – Happy Birthday America

July 9: National Sugar Cookie Day – Read a book while enjoying a sugar cookie
July 7: Shark Week – Do a Google search to learn more about sharks
July 14: Bastille Day – Learn about this day and enjoy some French treats
July 16: Baseball All Star Game – Read about and cheer for a favorite player
July 20: National Ice Cream Soda Day – Have a soda while reading an Illinois Reads Book
July 26: Summer Olympics 2024 – Let the Games Begin in Paris, France – Go USA
July 26: Aunt and Uncle Day – Make a card or give them a phone call to show your love
July 28: Parents Day – Thank your parents for all the things they do



UPCOMING PD EVENTS

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

- **August 9, 2024: Jacob Grant**, Illinois Reads author of *No Fair!*, will be in the Secretary of State Tent from 10:00 am to 12:00 pm at the Illinois State Fair in Springfield, Illinois.
- **August 10, 2024: Candace Fleming and Eric Rohmann**, Illinois Reads authors of *Mine!*, will be in the Secretary of State Tent from 10:00 am to 12:00 pm at the Illinois State Fair in Springfield, Illinois.
- **August 10, 2024: Kate Hannigan**, Illinois Reads author of *Josephine and Her Dishwashing Machine*, will be in the Secretary of State Tent from 1:00 to 3:00 pm at the Illinois State Fair in Springfield, Illinois.
- **August 11, 2024: Darcy Day Zoells**, Illinois Reads author of *The New Bicycle*, will be in the Secretary of State Tent from 10:00 am to 12:00 pm at the Illinois State Fair in Springfield, Illinois.
- **August 11, 2024: Claudia Guadalupe Martinez**, Illinois Reads author of *Not a Monster*, will be in the Secretary of State Tent from 1:00 to 3:00 pm at the Illinois State Fair in Springfield, Illinois.
- **August 12, 2024: Mary Winn Heider**, Illinois Reads author of *The Stupendous Switcheroo: New Powers Every 24 Hours*, will be in the Secretary of State Tent from 10:00 am to 12:00 pm at the Illinois State Fair in Springfield, Illinois.
- **August 13, 2024: Dwayne Reed**, Illinois Reads author of *Simon B. Rymin'*, will be in the Secretary of State Tent from 10:00 am to 12:00 pm at the Illinois State Fair in Springfield, Illinois.
- **August 14, 2024: Adi Alsaïd**, Illinois Reads author of *The Bravest Warrior in Nefaria*, will be in the Secretary of State Tent from 10:00 am to 12:00 pm at the Illinois State Fair in Springfield, Illinois.
- **August 15, 2024: Tom Watson**, Illinois Reads author of *Stick Dog*, will be in the

Secretary of State Tent from 10:00 am to 12:00 pm at the Illinois State Fair in Springfield, Illinois.

- **August 16, 2024:** **Bob Raczka**, Illinois Reads author of ***You Are A Story***, will be in the Secretary of State Tent from 10:00 am to 12:00 pm at the Illinois State Fair in Springfield, Illinois.
- **August 17, 2024:** **Reese Eschmann**, Illinois Reads author of ***Etta Invincible***, will be in the Secretary of State Tent from 10:00 am to 12:00 pm at the Illinois State Fair in Springfield, Illinois.
- **August 17, 2024:** **Jean Reidy**, Illinois Reads author of ***A Book About You and All the World Too***, will be in the Secretary of State Tent from 1:00 to 3:00 pm at the Illinois State Fair in Springfield, Illinois.
- **August 18, 2024:** **John Sullivan**, Illinois Reads author of ***Ethan and the Strays***, will be in the Secretary of State Tent from 10:00 am to 12:00 pm at the Illinois State Fair in Springfield, Illinois.
- **August 18, 2024:** **Ruth Spiro**, Illinois Reads author of ***How to Explain Coding to a Grown-Up***, will be in the Secretary of State Tent from 1:00 to 3:00 pm at the Illinois State Fair in Springfield, Illinois.

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.

#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:

- Tips for Teaching Writing
- Board Games that Teach Literacy Skills
- Trauma Informed Practices
- Strategies for Struggling Readers
- 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!

Visit the IRC Website

QUICK LINKS

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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:

