

Illinois Reading Council  
IRC



Empowering  
Lives  
Through  
Literacy

# Communicator

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*"When I see books that I have read on library shelves, it is like running into an old friend ... Like friends, these books have gone into the making of whatever and whoever I am."*

~ Kevin Starr

## FROM THE DESK OF THE IRC PRESIDENT By Julie Hoffman

Greetings IRC Members,

It's the most wonderful time of the year! It's conference month!

Have you registered for the **55th Annual IRC Conference** on March 14th and 15th in Springfield, Illinois? Have you secured lodging? Have you started planning which sessions you will attend? Have you planned to volunteer at the conference? I have, and I am so excited.

You might not know this, but it takes several years and a lot of hard work to plan the conference, starting with securing the dates and locations, inviting speakers, working with vendors for the exhibit hall, reading presentation proposals, and scheduling the sessions, just to name a few of the things that go into hosting a great conference. Fortunately, the Illinois Reading Council is recovering and reviving after Covid-19 initially impacted us, and we are on our way to being a thriving organization once again. We thrive because of your time and energy, as well. Did you know you can volunteer for an hour at our registration table or at our membership booth in the exhibit hall? All of our IRC members add to the conference and you can contribute, too.

You may have heard about the recent release of the *Illinois Comprehensive Literacy Plan*, which includes up-to-date research on how to teach our youngest to read, continuing all the way through how to facilitate all readers toward transformation, activism, and joy. Our **2024 conference theme, "Pillars of Literacy: Skills, Strategies, Joy, and Magic"** is also comprehensive, offering you sessions addressing scientific research about how the brain works when learning to read, sessions on using technology toward literacy, sessions on honoring representation, and ensuring culturally and historically responsive teaching. With such an abundant line-up, you have full agency over your professional development and you can find everything you need to make it a phenomenal conference. I can't wait to see you so we can celebrate together!



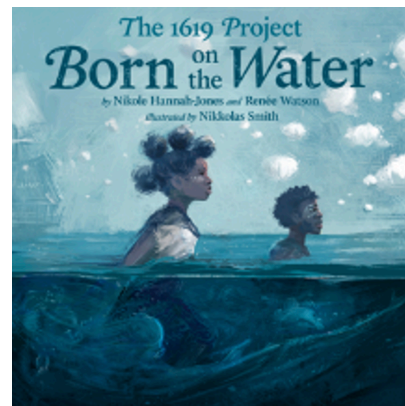
See you in a few weeks!

-Julie Hoffman



**THE 1619 PROJECT: BORN ON THE WATER BY NIKOLE HANNAH-JONES AND RENEE WATSON**  
 By Amy D. Davis, Ph.D., Eastern Illinois University

I read [The 1619 Project](#) by Nikole Hannah-Jones for our university book club. While I enjoyed American History in high school, I don't remember learning about some of the historical events mentioned in the book. Much to my surprise, I stumbled upon the children's book, [The 1619 Project: Born on the Water](#) by Nikole Hannah-Jones and Renée Watson. This book explores the ancestry of those who were stolen and brought to America and sold into the slave trade over 400 years ago.



The story begins with a young African American girl trying to complete an assignment to trace her roots and draw the flag that represents her ancestral land. However, she is only able to count back three generations. She decides to ask her Grandma for help and she shares the family's immigrant story.

It all began 400 years ago in West Central Africa, Ndongo, where their people were taken and brought to America on a ship. In Africa, they were farmers, traders, and craftsmen, and spoke *Kimbundu*. They were joyful and played different instruments and danced to worship and celebrate life. Their people were stolen and kidnapped and forced into the bottom of the evil ship, the *White Lion*, and sailed across the Atlantic Ocean. Over half of the individuals could not survive the long journey and perished on the water.

When the ship landed on the coast of Virginia, American slavery began. They planted tobacco and longed for their lives in Ndongo and relied on each other to survive. As time passed, their people endured and resisted injustices by White people and their legacy lives on through these individuals who became teachers, librarians, scholars, authors, pastors, activists, doctors, counselors, musicians, dancers, poets and many more contributors to America's society.

The story ends with the young girl going to school and drawing a picture of an American flag because this was the country her ancestors built. This is an excellent book to share with students, 4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> grades, for them to understand how slavery began in America but also a tribute to those who helped build what America is today.

I think it is important for students to honor and understand the past, but also be aware of how the past has shaped a group of people who reside on this land. Many students may be able to relate to the situation the young girl faces in the book where she can only trace her ancestry back three generations and this book is for those students. I strongly recommend teachers share this story and illustrations with their students and invite a discussion about the building of what America is today.

# LITERACY SUPPORT GRANTS

## By the Illinois Reading Council

The Illinois Reading Council is accepting [Literacy Support Grant](#) applications for the **2024-2025** school year. Applications are due by **May 1, 2024**.

The application and rubric for scoring, along with more information, can be found on the [IRC Website](#) under Awards and Grants.

Some things to remember when you are submitting your application:

- You must be a member of IRC to apply for a grant.
- It is helpful to read the rubric before/while you complete your application. All grants are scored according to the rubric; a well-written grant will accrue more points, which increases chances of receiving funding.
- If you are submitting a new grant application for a project that was previously funded, please be sure your information is updated. (For example, there is no longer a requirement to submit an article for the IRC newsletter or to present at the conference.)
- You must submit the report following the completion of the project.

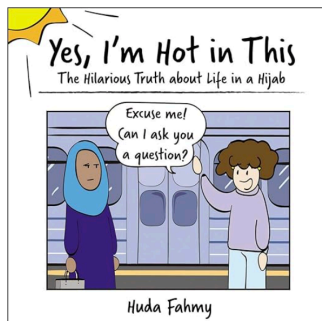
Download the [application](#) and apply by May 1st!

# #WhatIAmReading



I am reading [Yes, I'm Hot in This: The Hilarious Truth about Life in a Hijab](#) by Huda Fahmy.

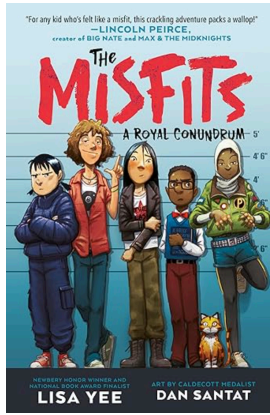
~ Julie Hoffman, IRC President



This comic-style take on being a Muslim-American woman is eye-opening and funny. Huda Fahmy writes (and draws) while she explains correct pronunciation, life in hijab, handling ignorant comments, and just plain being a human in this crazy world. It's a quick and wonderful read!

I am reading [The Misfits #1: A Royal Conundrum](#) by Lisa Yee and illustrated by Dan Santat.

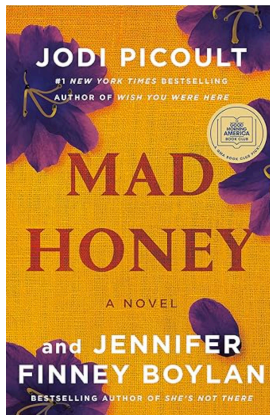
~ Katie Russell, IRC Past President and 6th Grade Special Education Teacher



A middle-grade mystery novel that follows Olive Zang as she finds her place as a new student at a mysterious boarding school. She works with a team of “misfits” to solve the mystery of who is behind the jewel heists. You and your students will love the hilarious language of Lisa Yee paired with Dan Santat’s black-and-white pencil illustrations. I can’t wait for book two!

I am reading *Mad Honey: A Novel* by Jodi Picoult and Jennifer Finney Boylan.

~ Carrie Sheridan, IRC Executive Director



This book tells the life journeys of Olivia McAfee, her son, Asher, and his girlfriend, Lily Campanello. Leaving behind a dark past, Olivia, along with her son, Asher, has started life over in her hometown and they are running her family's beekeeping business. Lily and her mom are also on their own journey to start over as Lily and Asher begin their senior year of high school. *Mad Honey* tells a story full of love and heartbreak. It is very suspenseful as all of their lives unfold, sharing the secrets and risks they have taken to become who they want to be.

## IRC BOOK CLUB

Join educators from all over the state in the online **Spring 2024 IRC Book Club!** Choose one, two, or all three book clubs!

Beginning March 24, participants will be reading, reflecting on, and responding in the *Shifting the Balance* book club, the *Illinois Reads* book club, and/or the *La enseñanza en el aula bilingüe* book club during the seven-weeks of online discussions. Participants who complete all assignments will be eligible to receive **15 PD clock hours** for each book club.

For the *Shifting the Balance* book club, participants can choose either the **K-2** or the **3-5** version. *Shifting the Balance: 6 Ways to Bring the Science of Reading into the Balanced Literacy Classroom (K-2)* was written by Jan Burkins and Kari Yates and *Shifting the Balance: 6 Ways to Bring the Science of Reading into the Upper Elementary Classroom (3-5)* was written by Katie Egan Cunningham, Jan Burkins, and Kari Yates. For the *Illinois Reads* book club,



participants will be selecting books from one of the age bands of the 2024 Illinois Reads list to prepare lessons plans and activities. For Birth to 2nd Grade, participants will select a new book each week for a total of six books; for 3rd to 5th Grade, participants will select three books; for 6th to 8th Grade, participants will select two books; and for 9th to 12th Grade or the Adult age band, participants will select one book. For the *La enseñanza en el aula bilingüe: Content, Language, and Biliteracy* book club, the book was written in Spanish (and not translated to English) by Sandra Mercuri, Sandra Musanti, and Alma Rodriguez. This book club will be held completely in Spanish and provide a ton of ideas for bilingual teachers.

[Register by March 15, 2024](#), to participate in the book clubs. Registration is FREE for IRC Members. The cost for non-members is \$50, which includes IRC membership for one year. **PLEASE NOTE: The cost of the books is not included.**



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

- **March 5, 2024: MID-State Reading Council** will host How to Love Teaching Again Book Club at 4:30 pm at Gill Street Restaurant, 3002B Gill Street, Bloomington, Illinois.
- **March 6, 2024: IRC Webinar on How Science Fiction Writing Helps Adolescents Think Through Social Justice Issues with S.R. Toliver** from 7:00 to 8:00 pm via Zoom Webinar.
- **March 11, 2024: Fox Valley Reading Council** will host The Gift of Story with John Schu from 6:30 to 8:00 pm at Geneva Public Library 227 S 7th St, Geneva, Illinois.
- **March 14-15, 2024: Illinois Reading Council** will host the **55th Annual IRC Conference** in Springfield, Illinois.
- **March 23, 2024: Illini Reading Council and Vermilion Valley Reading Council** will host The Science of Reading: What's All The Hype About? with Amy Davis from 10:00 am to 12:00 pm at the Champaign Public Library, Robeson Room C, 200 W Green St, Champaign, Illinois.
- **March 24, 2024: IRC Book Club** begins for *Shifting the Balance* book club, the *Illinois Reads* book club, and/or the *La enseñanza en el aula bilingüe* book club.

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



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. Creative pictures of you and your book in your favorite reading spot are encouraged.

**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:**

- Books the Kids Loved This Year
- My New Favorite Professional Books and Resources
- Skills and Strategies
- Current Research in Literacy
- 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:



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