

Illinois Reading Council



Empowering
Lives
Through
Literacy

Communicator

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"All that mankind has done, thought, gained or been: it is lying as in magic preservation in the pages of books."

~ Thomas Carlyle

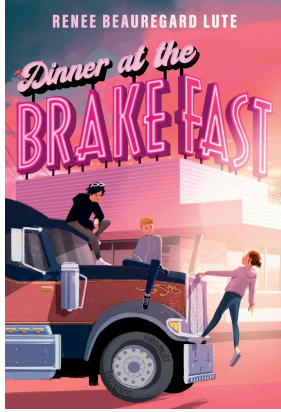
#WhatIAmReading



I am reading [Dinner at the Brake Fast](#) by Renee Beauregard Lute.

~ Diana Wilkie, IRC Treasurer

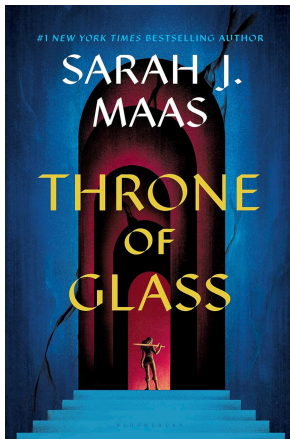
Dinner at the Brake Fast is a middle grade novel that is funny, full of heart and has many surprises. Tacoma Jones loves working at her family diner at the truck stop but tonight she is going to fulfill her dream



of cooking dinner. Then she is saddened to find out her Dad is having another one of his days of depression. Tacoma understands that she cannot make her Dad better but she can steal back his prized photograph that was stolen by his nemesis, the nasty Crocodile Kyle. She will need an accomplice to help her get it back and also plan an amazing dinner to brighten his day. Denver enters the story and each discover the meaning of friendship. A surprise accomplice joins them on road trip escapades. The author explores the heartbreaking reality of living with a depressed parent and the guilt a child may feel. Another character deals with verbal abuse. This is all done with sensitivity and a good balance of humor so it does not feel too heavy. Children will be able to relate to the kids in this story. She brilliantly covered these topics while also filling the story with many hilarious moments – the mysterious voice at the oddity shop, the crazy rooster, the stinky egg. In the end, the children show what joy friends and a passion can bring.

I am reading ***Throne of Glass*** by Sarah J. Maas.

~ Carrie Sheridan, IRC Executive Director



This fantasy YA book series has been recommended to me as a must read by many of my friends and family of all ages. I finally delved into the 1st book and couldn't put it down. *Throne of Glass* is about Celaena Sardothien, a young assassin in a corrupt kingdom with a tyrannical ruler, the King of Adarlan. As the story progresses, Celaena forms unexpected bonds and uncovers a conspiracy. It is a time commitment as there are 8 books in the series and over 5,000 pages. I just finished the 3rd book, *Heir of Fire*, and will be starting the 4th book, *The Assassin's Blade*, very soon. There are differing opinions on the order to read this series and I opted to read the books in publication order as recommended by the author. The author's other series, *Crescent City* and *A Court of Thorns and Roses*, have also been recommended to me and can be a bit spicy according to my daughter. Looking forward to my future reads!

Illinois Reads Pick of the Month is ***Whalefall: A Novel*** by Daniel Kraus.

~ 2024 Illinois Reads Book List for Grades 9-12



Jay Gardiner has given himself a fool's errand—to find the remains of his deceased father in the Pacific Ocean off the coast of Monastery Beach. He knows it's a long shot, but Jay feels it's the only way for him to lift the weight of guilt he has carried since his dad's death by suicide the previous year. The dive begins well enough, but the sudden appearance of a giant squid puts Jay in very real jeopardy, made infinitely worse by the arrival of a sperm whale looking to feed. Suddenly, Jay is caught in the squid's tentacles and drawn into the whale's mouth where he is pulled into the first of its four stomachs. He quickly realizes he has only one hour before his oxygen tanks run out—one hour to defeat his demons and escape the belly of a whale. Suspenseful and cinematic, *Whalefall* is an "astoundingly great" thriller about a young man who has given up on life...only to find a reason to live in the most dangerous and unlikely of places.

Picture Books about Childhood Friendship to Scaffold Social and Emotional Learning

By Kristin Rydholm

Most young children enter the classroom at the beginning of the school year and a topmost concern is “Which of my friends are in my class?” For those children who are new to a school, the concern might shift to, “Who will be my friend?”

Learning strategies to build and maintain a friendship is foundational to establishing a high-functioning and empathetic classroom community. Here to help teachers of young children to engage in classroom discussions centered on relationship-building are 7 recently published picture books (see below). Each book portrays friendship as a continuum where two children engage in a series of activities, events, and problem-solving opportunities.

For reference and goal setting, the following social and emotional learning strands as outlined by [The Collaborative for Academic, Social Emotional Learning \(CASEL\)](#) are represented in each of the picture books that follow.

Social Awareness

- Recognizing strengths in others
- Demonstrating empathy and compassion
- Showing concern for the feelings of others

Relationship skills

- Developing positive relationships
- Practicing teamwork and collaborative problem-solving
- Resolving conflicts constructively

These picture books that feature friendship duos are available for purchase or to check-out at your local library.

[Bookie and Cookie](#) by Blanca Gómez. (2024)

[Built to Last](#), by Minh Lê, illustrated by Dan Santat. (2024)

[Even Better Than Sprinkles: A Story About Best Friends](#) by Linda Skeers, illustrated by Heather Fox. (2024)

[Friends Beyond Measure](#) by Lalena Fisher.

Check out the corresponding [activity guides](#) and [printable activities](#). (2023)

[I Like This, You Like That](#) by Linda Ashman, illustrated by Eve Coy. (2022)

[Silver Linings](#) by Fiona Woodcock. (2023)

Check out the corresponding [activity guides](#).

[Zack and Ike Are Exactly Alike](#) by Suzanne Bloom. (2022)

[Kristin Rydholm](#) received her BA in education from National Louis University and her MS in Reading/Literacy from Bank Street College of Education. She has been a classroom teacher, a school administrator, and has written numerous education articles featuring picture books for Edutopia and the American Library Association’s publication Book Links.

FROM THE DESK OF THE IRC PRESIDENT

By Melissa Stinnett

Funshine Podscool: Homeschooling as Response to Covid-19 Remote Instruction

During the Covid-19 pandemic, nearly 200 countries shut down schools and over 90% of these learners (ranging from early years through higher education) faced some sort of disruption to their education (UNESCO, 2020). Teachers were suddenly expected to teach online without the necessary training (Bozkurt, et al., 2020).

Distance education during the pandemic was seen as an emergency situation with little to no time for the proper training for most educators (Bozkurt, et al., 2020). With the hasty transition into homeschooling, parents were required to take a more active and positive role than ever before in collaboration with their children's educators (Letzel, Pozas, & Besa, 2022).

How did one family turn the pandemic into an opportunity for homeschooling success? Owners of a therapy business, located in a small town in Central Illinois, used their own resources to do just that. With determination and resources from their practice, they made home-schooling a viable option during the emergency pandemic situation for their grandchild and the children of an employee. This article tells the story of how homeschooling came to be for one family.

The Story of Funshine Podscool

Kevin and Sandra own and operate their own counseling service that has been a successful therapy practice for the past 25 years. There are over 35 therapists and several nurse practitioners, employing over 50 people in 3 different locations all in Central Illinois. The demands of the business became greater with the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, as many in the general population struggled with mental health issues.

The therapy practice transitioned to a completely remote experience, whereas both clients and therapists were at home for a therapy session. Creating and maintaining this complete remote experience was something that required a great deal of time and effort on the part of the company's CEO, Lainey. At this time, Lainey had two small children (kindergarten and first grade) who were also being taught via remote instruction and a good deal of at home direction and support were required. Kevin and Sandra wanted to support their CEO in the necessary efforts of focusing on the business, relieving her of any concern about the education of her own two children.

Funshine Podscool was essentially a tutoring situation where homeschooling occurred, and was created in 2020 with the first teacher hired in the autumn of that year. The philosophy of Funshine Podscool was to motivate the students by following their interests, to find appropriate material, and to encourage creativity and a love of learning. The "pod" idea was created because there were several individuals (family members and co-workers) who isolated together in a pod, or group. As a pod, they decided on the following: they would not wear masks, they would not be in public, and they would remain a pod together in the midst of the corona virus outbreak. In total there were three children at the start of the pandemic (grades K, 1, and 3) who needed assistance with online instruction. Later, for the 2022-2023 school year, the participants at Funshine Podscool included the teacher, Alexandra, and the same three students who were now in second grade (Ron), third grade (Luke) and fifth grade (Sam).

They hired Alexandra, a trained teacher with a master's degree in education. In Alexandra's prior experience, she taught a combination of grades, and worked with various grade levels simultaneously, which proved to be very helpful in her work at Funshine Podscool.

Implementation

The physical space in the building where Funshine Podscool was located included one main room for instruction and a few smaller breakout rooms. There were multiple tables, a carpet area, and a class library. The materials included whiteboards, a large screen TV, iPads, cubby holes, a synthesizer keyboard, learning areas with tables, couches, chairs, and art supplies. In addition to its use during lunchtime, the kitchen was used for crafts, and baking projects. There was a dedicated room for design, where the students used recycled materials such as paper boxes, plastic, and towel rolls. At least twice per week, they built things together. Each student had a chrome book and at times, a student used the iPads for filming a movie, and creating movie props for the project.



The teacher followed the philosophy of the Reggio Emilia approach to educating children where the learner possesses rights, is an active constructor of knowledge, and is a social being. She encouraged the role of the child as researcher where he/she studies a topic in-depth then explores, questions, discusses, and hypothesizes (Hewett, 2021). With a focus on following the interest of the child, curriculum was designed using themes and artifacts were displayed. For example, students were interested in learning about Kwanzaa and Hanukkah and other holidays so Alexandra brought in a menorah for discussion and study.

The schedule at Funshine Podscool followed a regular school day where classes met 5 days per week. There was a general schedule, or rather a rhythm, for the order of things. The morning work included the following activities:

- journaling with a writing prompt
- grammar work with the *Easy Grammar Series*
- morning jobs such as pencil sharpening, organizing materials, preparing the daily calendar, tidying the break-out room, washing lunch dishes, and occasionally vacuuming the floor
- morning meeting with calendar time and phonics instruction

With the Funshine Podscool, there were outlets for creativity such as participating in field trips and spending time regularly at the public library where the teacher checked out "a big load of books" and returned what the students were not interested in. Some examples of fieldtrips included going to Homer Lake for a maple syrup demonstration, physical education (P.E.) at the YMCA with other homeschoolers, and bowling for fun. Alexandra liked to supplement the curriculum with outdoor activities, like examining animal tracks at the local nature center.

Results

Many families discovered during school closures the benefits of micro-schools or learning pods, where students gather together in small, multi-age groups, often in private homes, to learn in a more personalized, versatile, and often technology-enabled way (Heuer & Donovan, 2021). Funshine Podscool, one such learning pod, is currently functioning, and there are plans for its continuation. The students appear to be thriving with individual attention and curriculum designed to meet their needs.

In terms of helpful hints when starting such an endeavor, Sandra and Lainey learned that hiring a trained teacher was key. Investing in an individual who teaches and also manages a group of students was crucial. Another helpful hint was to utilize all of the resources available such as other homeschool Facebook pages, local resources like the library, nature centers, and the park. A third helpful hint was to plan for ways to collaborate with others. In the future, perhaps a few of the other learning pods could join forces to collaborate on a particular unit.

Sandra and Kevin are grateful for the opportunity that they have created for their grandson and the others. Sandra said, "We recognize how privileged we are to be able to pay someone to teach and do this work." Ultimately, everyone seems pleased with how the children are progressing at the Funshine Podschool. By going through this process of conducting homeschooling, they have a whole new appreciation for the profession of teaching. It's not just about delivering content, but keeping the students motivated and engaged.

If you would like to read this article in its entirety, see IRCJ Summer 2024, Vol. 52, no.3.

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Professional Learning and Development Committee

By Laura Beltchenko, Chair

Quality, targeted and meaningful professional learning is what all educators require to stay current in delivery of instructional practice. According to the [International Literacy Association](#) "Beyond research and evidence-based standards; high-quality preparation for future and practicing teachers, leaders, and specialized literacy professionals, *there is a great need for robust and ongoing professional learning.*"2019, p. 4.

With this in mind, the Illinois Reading Council has outstanding professional development consultants who can customize for your district, school, or grade level professional learning in all aspects of literacy development.

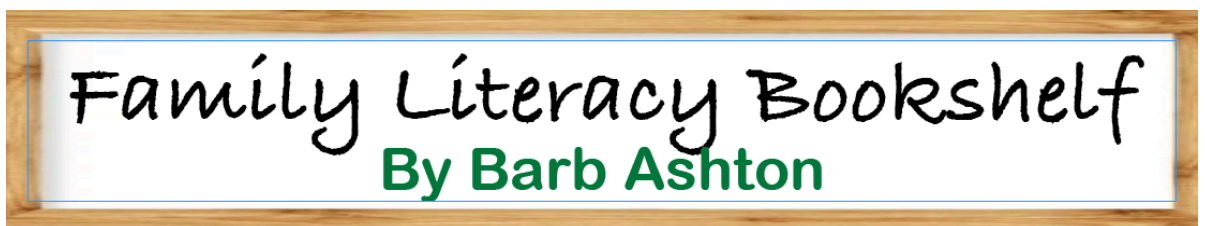
Our literacy professionals are grounded in the [IRC Belief Statements](#). These beliefs are:

- literacy is a fundamental human right.
- literacy is a powerful tool for justice and equity and must be protected as a right for all students.
- in diversity, equity, and inclusion because representation matters.
- in protecting reader's rights, which include access to learning in a variety of methods, access to books, and access to choice.
- in the importance of libraries and librarians.
- in promoting the joy of reading, writing, and the power of story for lifelong learning.
- educators need to be equipped with peer-reviewed, sustainable, research-based practices.
- equitable assessment is a blend of informal and formal measures that informs instruction.
- learners have different strengths and needs, and therefore should have access to peer-reviewed, research-based strategies, methods, and practices within differentiated multi-tiered systems of support.
- educators need access to high quality resources and professional development that prepares them to be flexible and adaptable to best serve their students.
- families are an integral part of children's literacy lives.
- in celebrating creators of children's literature and young adult literature.
- that education is a valued profession, and therefore educators must be trusted and empowered as decision-makers.
- in community, collaborative conversations, and collegiality.

The IRC and the Professional Learning Consulting Services welcome your inquiries for professional learning and development. Please consider the services of IRC. This link will take you directly to the [IRC Professional Learning and Development Webpage](#).

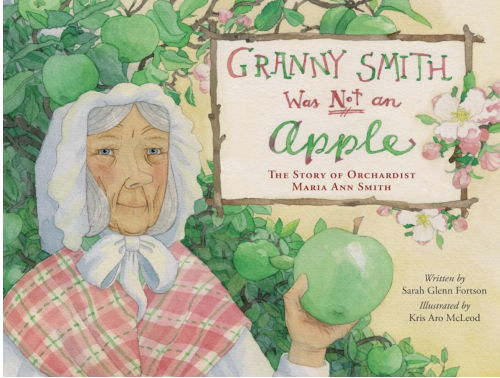
IRC, Literacy Learning Links and Resource Padlet of Teaching and Student Learning Tools

If you are in need of updated literacy articles, new professional books or websites that support your needs without having to pay for the resource then the [IRC Literacy Learning Links and Resource Padlet](#) is where you should click right now! This Padlet has been the effort of IRC Council members around the state who have utilized the materials, websites, and resources to benefit the delivery of instruction for their students. Updates are ongoing and new categories and resources are always being added. If you have a resource to share please complete the Google Form for [Share a Resource](#) and it will be reviewed and posted in the appropriate category on the Padlet.



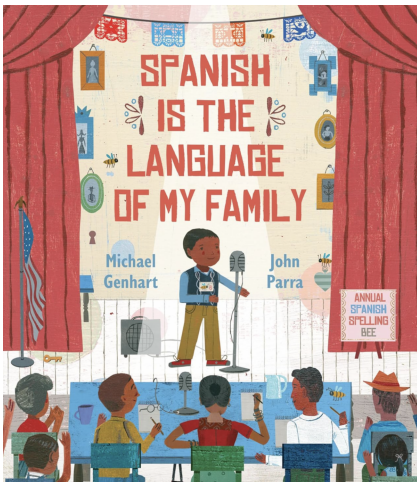
The pleasant days of summer are slowly giving way to the colorful season of autumn. The students have returned to school and the store shelves have transitioned to fall and Halloween decorations. During September we celebrate Labor Day, honor our grandparents, remember and observe 9/11, and celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month.

It's apple picking season. Do you hear the crunch of a shiny green apple known as granny smith? How did



this apple get its name? Read the book [**Granny Smith Was Not an Apple: The Story of Orchardist Marie Ann Smith**](#) by Sarah Glenn Fortson. So who is Granny Smith? Maria Ann Smith was a migrant farmer who worked as an orchardist and a midwife (who were called “Grannies”) in 1800s England. With the advent of the Industrial Revolution Maria was unable to get steady work. So Maria, her husband and children boarded a ship for Australia where it was rumored that experienced workers were needed. The Smiths worked hard, saved money, and eventually bought a house and land to start an apple orchard. While working the land and by accident, Maria developed a new apple that never turns red by

nurturing a seedling in her compost scrap pile. This new apple was named in her honor. The earthtone watercolor illustrations take the reader back in time to the 1800s and help complement the text. Text boxes are interspersed throughout the story explaining related topics. The back of the book includes a timeline of Maria Smith’s life and a note to parents, educators, and caregivers about the impact of British colonization on the Australian Indigenous communities. *Granny Smith Was Not an Apple* would make a nice complement to any Johnny Appleseed book.



It is Hispanic Heritage month. A delightful book to read during this month is [**Spanish Is the Language of My Family**](#) by Michael Genhart. The story is told from the perspective of Manolo, who signs up to compete in his school’s Spanish Spelling Bee. While he knows how to spell several Spanish words, Manolo is not familiar with many of the words on the list he’s given to study. As he studies and practices the words on the list with his abuela (grandmother), Manolo learns about what it was like for his grandmother when she was a girl and she and her classmates were not allowed to speak Spanish at school, even at recess. If they spoke Spanish they’d be punished by being sent home, paddled, and even being discriminated against. Upon hearing these stories Manolo is determined to study and practice even harder for the National Spanish Spelling Bee. This is a lovely book that celebrates family

heritage. It also lends itself to a discussion of other languages students and their families speak. The back of the book contains additional information about prohibiting speaking Spanish in public schools, the National Spanish Spelling Bee, and other related Hispanic resources. There is also a Spanish Alphabet included as well.

It’s the start of the new school year. A new graphic novel to share with your students is [**Blue Stars: Mission One: The Vice Principal Problem: A Graphic Novel**](#) by Kekla Magoon and Cynthia Leitich Smith. This is the story of cousins Riley Halfmoon and Maya Dawn who move to Urbanopolis to live with their grandmother. Riley is outgoing but misses her Muscogee relatives and Maya Dawn misses her parents who are in the military on active duty in Japan. Attending a new school, each girl goes her separate way trying to fit in. Maya joins the Robotics Club and Riley joins the gymnastics team. Feeling more comfortable at school the girls learn of vice principal Balderdash’s penchant for putting students in detention. The girls also learn of the vice principal’s announcement of budget cuts while stating he



award-winning and best-selling authors
KEKLA MAGOON and **CYNTHIA LEITCH SMITH**
illustrated by **MOLLY MURAKAMI**

supports all afterschool programs and the school library, when at the same time he wants the money to build more detention classrooms. As a result the girls join student council and run for 6th grade class president. Their activist grandmother tells them to “Remember, you have a voice.” Realizing what they’re up against, they join forces and combine their ideas to develop a funny adventure to reveal vice principal Balderdash’s plan. *Blue Stars: The Vice Principal Problem* is a graphic novel that addresses many timely topics accompanied by expressive and colorful illustrations, while inspiring the reader to raise their voice to help make the world a better place and to stand up for what is right “because we’re all in this together.” Go to www.bluesrarseries.com for a discussion guide.

Looking Ahead

September is Library Card Sign Up Month

September is Hispanic Heritage Month: Check out the [Teaching Central America Week](#)

September 2: Labor Day – Enjoy a restful day

September 6: National Read A Book Day – Enjoy reading a book

September 8: International Literacy Day

September 8: Grandparents Day – Thank your Grandparents for all they do for you

September 11: Patriots Day – Remember those who lost their lives on this day.

September 19: Talk Like a Pirate Day – Read a pirate book to learn about these characters

September 21: International Peace Day – Be kind and peace loving to others

September 22: Autumn Equinox Fall begins

September 26: Johnny Appleseed Day – Enjoy reading about this American tall tale character



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

- **September 11, 2024: Fox Valley Reading Council** will host a Membership Meeting from 6:00 to 8:00 pm at the St Charles Public Library, 1 S 6th Ave, St Charles, Illinois.
- **September 12, 2024: Lewis and Clark Reading Council** will host An Evening with John Schu from 6:00 to 8:00 pm at Belleville Arena, 2300 W Main Street, Belleville, Illinois.
- **September 12, 2024: Sauk Valley Reading Council** will host Classroom Talk and

Student Engagement from 3:30 to 5:00 pm at the Crystal Cork, 219 W 1st Street, Dixon, Illinois.

- **September 17, 2024: Will County Reading Council** will host Unlocking the Illinois Comprehensive Literacy Plan-Part I Oracy & Phonics from 6:00 to 7:00 pm via Zoom.
- **September 18, 2024: Secondary Reading League (SRL) and Fox Valley Reading Council** will co-host 2024 Illinois Comprehensive Literacy Plan from 4:30 to 6:15 pm at the Kane County ROE, 28 N. 1st St, Geneva, Illinois
- **September 19, 2024: MID-State Reading Council** will host Read S'More Books Talks from 6:30 to 7:30 pm at Gill Street Restaurant, 3002B Gill Street, Bloomington, Illinois.
- **September 24, 2024: Will County Reading Council** will host True Stories for Today's Kids Author Event with Barb Rosenstock from 5:00 to 7:00 pm at Lewis University, De La Salle Hall, One University Parkway, Romeoville, Illinois.
- **September 28, 2024: Fox Valley Reading Council** will host Anderson's Book Talk Event from 9:00 to 11:00 am at Anderson's Bookshops, 123 West Jefferson Avenue, Naperville, 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:

- Current Research in Literacy
- Building the Reading and Writing Connection
- Trauma Informed Practices
- Skill and 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

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:

