



Empowering  
Lives  
Through  
Literacy

# Communicator

203 Landmark Drive, Suite B  
Normal, IL 61761

Phone: 309-454-1341  
Fax: 309-454-3512

Email: [irc@illinoisreadingcouncil.org](mailto:irc@illinoisreadingcouncil.org)  
Web: [www.illinoisreadingcouncil.org](http://www.illinoisreadingcouncil.org)

 [@IllinoisReadingCouncil](https://www.facebook.com/IllinoisReadingCouncil)

 Twitter [@ILReadCouncil](https://twitter.com/ILReadCouncil) #ircreads

 [Instagram.com/ilreadcouncil](https://www.instagram.com/ilreadcouncil)

 [Pinterest.com/illinoisreading](https://www.pinterest.com/illinoisreading)

## TOP 5 REASONS TO ATTEND THE 2021 IRC CONFERENCE

By Katie Russell, IRC President Elect



The 53rd Annual IRC Conference, [\*Rockin' Through the Pages\*](#), will be held from October 19-20, 2021 at the Bank of Springfield Center, President Abraham Lincoln Hotel, and the Wyndham Hotel in Springfield, Illinois. The updated preliminary program will be available May 15, 2021, after we finalize the featured speakers and presenters.

Over the years, I have been asked numerous times, "Why do you attend the IRC Conference?" or "Why Should I attend the IRC Conference?" Here are my Top 5 reasons!

### 1. To be with your "Literacy Tribe!"

The #1 reason is always to be with my literacy friends, and by friends I mean everyone at the conference! Donalyn Miller said, "We're all stronger together ... I know sometimes you feel like you're the only voice in your school or in your space who is advocating for things but you are not alone. I mean look around this room, look around this conference, and I hope that gives you some confidence, hope, feeling of solidarity." I couldn't say it any better. Being at a conference filled with people who love reading and love sharing the joy of reading with students is what fills my heart and makes it possible to survive the school year.

### 2. Hear the Authors Read

Truly an event to not be missed! While I'm not sure how many years this event has been going on, as long as I have been coming to conferences, it has been my favorite event. A chance to grab a cup of coffee and a sweet snack while listening to authors read. It never disappoints and provides a rare opportunity to hear authors read from a new book or a work in progress. The authors stay to sign afterwards and it has been known to go into the early morning hours.

### 3. Illinois Reads Authors Speed Dating

A fairly new event to be added to the conference that provides another opportunity to meet authors! This time with local Illinois authors! You choose your author rotation at the door and pick out one of their books! Yummy appetizers (mashed potato bar!) are included! Look for more information in the program but remember to register early and buy your ticket (they will sell out) because you will not want to miss out!

### 4. Meet Literacy Leaders

There are literacy leaders from around the state and country in attendance. I have had the amazing opportunity to listen to and meet my literacy role models, who I follow on social media and whose books are filled with dog-eared pages and sticky notes. They continue to inspire me and shape my practice. I have also had the invaluable opportunity to network with literacy leaders from around the state.

### 5. OVER 200 PD Sessions!

With so many sessions to attend there is something for everyone! It is all of the teachers, librarians, administrators, and other educators who choose to share their wealth of knowledge that make the conference such an incredible experience. I always leave with great ideas that I can implement in my classroom as soon as I return.

## Other highlights of the conference include:

- **IRC Book Club:** Educators from all over the state will be reading, reflecting on, and responding to ***Cultivating Genius*** by Gholdy Muhammad and ***Troublemakers*** by Carla Shalaby. Book Club registration is due by June 15, 2021.
- **Administrators Academy:** In partnership with the Illinois Principals Association, Alison Gordon will be presenting *Understanding and Supporting Instructional Coaching: A Toolkit for Administrators*. Administrator Academy Credit and PD Clock Hours will be available.
- **Preservice Teachers' Pizza Party:** A special time for undergraduate preservice teachers to network and leave with a door prize for their new classrooms.

The Illinois Reading Council is pleased to announce this year's featured speakers:

- Donalyn Miller
- Ibi Zoboi
- Blue Balliett
- Jeffrey Brown
- Debbie Diller
- Lynne Dorfman
- Alison Gordon
- Jacob Grant
- Carol Jago
- Brendan Kiely
- Penny Kittle
- Raúl The Third
- Pernille Ripp
- Jan Richardson
- John Schu
- Matt Tavares
- Lauren Tarshis
- Becky Anderson Wilkins
- 2021 Illinois Reads Authors

---

## IMPLEMENTING A SUMMER BOOK CLUB

By Alaina Weatherford, 3rd and 4th ELA Teacher at Rutland Grade School in Ottawa, IL

Summer is coming, and along with it, the “summer slide” that teachers have come to know and dread. I always get discouraged in August when I assess my readers and realize they did not read anything over the summer. So, three years ago, I decided to implement a fun way to keep our students reading during the summer months. I organized a Summer Book Club.

Over the years, book clubs have become immensely popular in our classroom. During my masters program, my thesis was to implement book clubs and witness the effects they had on motivation to read, comprehension, and critical analysis of text. The results were amazing and I have been a huge proponent of using book clubs ever since. I have even witnessed students create their own book clubs at different points throughout the year. Imagine my delight when I watched three girls get copies of the same book and sit down and decide how many pages they were going to read at home that night. Then, the next day those same girls sat down and discussed what they read...all on their own. My teacher heart leapt for joy! Therefore, I decided to use that excitement the kids felt for book clubs to combat the summer slide.

Our elementary school is a small, rural, K-8 building. I organize the book clubs into grades 3-5 and 6-8. Before we leave for the summer, I talk to the students and try to garner excitement. Then, I send home a letter listing the June books. The students have the month of June to read the book for their grade level. Parents are responsible for acquiring the book for their child unless there is a financial issue. If there is a child who wants to read the book, but money is an issue, our school is great about finding the funds to purchase books for those students. At the end of the month we meet at our town's coffee shop. We meet for about 45 minutes and I try to make the book club meeting as fun and casual as possible. Each student ranks the book on a scale of 1-10. We talk about our favorite parts, favorite characters, and life lessons we learned. Sometimes, I have a small art project that goes along with the book. The kids enjoy it because it's social. It gives them a chance to see their friends over the summer, talk about books, and have a delicious drink. I love it because I know the kids are reading something over the summer.

At the June meeting, I hand out the info for July, including the book we will be reading and the date we will meet. I also post it on our school's social media page in case others want to join. At the July meeting, I hand out the information about the August book. For August, I wait to meet with the kids until the first week of school. I order pizza and the kids discuss the book over lunch. The pizza party is an extra incentive for the students to read that particular book.

Summer Book Club is completely optional. The number of students varies from month to month and year to year. I never dwell on the kids who aren't choosing to participate. Instead, I look at the kids who do participate and focus on the fact that their reading skills will not decline over the summer.

Remember, if you choose to try a summer book club in your school, the possibilities and options are endless! I decided I could sit around and complain that my students weren't reading over the summer, or I could try to do something about it.

---

## FAMILY LITERACY BOOKSHELF

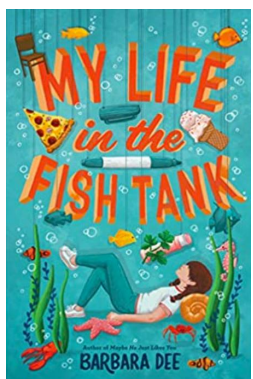
By Barb Ashton, IRC Family Literacy Committee Chair

Spring has arrived after a long and challenging year due to the pandemic. May reminds us to honor our moms on Mother's Day, celebrate Cinco de Mayo, Asian Pacific Heritage, Mental Health Awareness month, and to remember and honor those who have served our country on Memorial Day.



**Parachutes** by Kelly Yang is a novel about immigration, privilege, racism, sexual assault/harassment but is also based on the author's own experiences dealing with these issues as well. Parachutes are teens from wealthy Chinese families who move alone to the United States. These teenagers are dropped off to live in private homes or live alone in exclusive condos. They attend and study at exclusive prep high schools and colleges while their parents remain in China/Asia. The story of Clair and Dani is told in alternating voices. Clair Wang is an 11th grader in Shanghai and is parachuted to California to enroll in an exclusive prep high school. Dani De La Cruz is a Filipina who attends the prep high school and lives with her mother. Since there's extra money to be earned Dani's mom rents out their extra bedroom to Clair. The girls come from different social classes – Clair is wealthy and privileged, while Dani works part time with her mom cleaning houses. Both girls do well academically but become vulnerable to sexual harassment and assault. The girls didn't interact with each

other very often but after having similar experiences, Clair and Dani realize that they will need to support each other in order to overcome their traumatic experiences. *Parachutes* is a book that today's high school and college students can relate to. The book also provides an opportunity for discussion on many current topics.

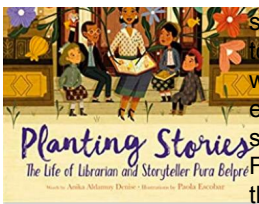


**My Life in the Fish Tank** by Barbara Dee is the story of the Manning family – Mom and Dad, Zinnia, Gabriel, Scarlett, and Aiden – who learn about Gabriel being diagnosed with a mental illness. The story is told from the point of view of 12 year old Zinnia who, along with her siblings, has been told by their parents to keep Gabriel's diagnosis private. This upsets Zinnia because it means she can't talk about it with her best friends or with anyone at school. The Manning family's life changes and we see how each family member deals with their emotional feelings and how the news affects their life. Feeling alone and despairing Zinnia finds solace at school and in science class while studying about crayfish. She spends her lunch period with her science teacher, Ms. Molina, who comforts and supports her. Zinnia also joins a lunch bunch of other students under the guidance of the school counselor. These students are also experiencing difficult times. Through discussions and various activities, Zinnia gains some new friends who show her that it is okay to be dealing with family

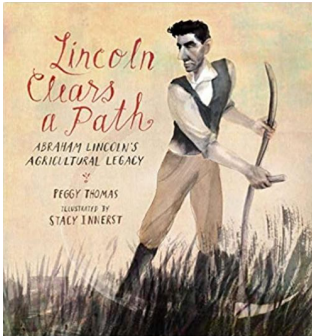
problems or situations. *My Life in the Fish Tank* is not just a book about caring for others but also helps to "de-stigmatize" the concept of mental health. This book is a must read for all middle grade students and a fine addition to all libraries.



Are you aware of the Pura Belpré Award that is given to Latinx authors and illustrators every year? Who was Pura Belpré? To find out read the book **Planting Stories: The Life of Librarian and Storyteller Pura Belpré** by Anika Aldamuy Denise. Pura Belpré grew up in Puerto Rico listening to the



stories her grandmother told her. While taking a trip to New York as a young adult to celebrate her sister's wedding she decides to stay in New York, where she first worked as a seamstress to earn money to pay for her apartment and other expenses. Seeing an ad for a bilingual assistant at the New York Public Library, she decides to apply for the job since she can speak Spanish, English, and French. Pura got the job and soon started telling the stories she grew up with to the children who came to the library. To make the stories more interesting Pura made puppets to accompany her stories. Noticing that there weren't any Spanish books for children on the shelves, Pura wrote her stories and got them published. Pura also traveled to other branches of libraries and schools reading and telling her stories. *Planting Stories: The Life of Librarian and Storyteller Pura Belpré* is a wonderful and inspiring story. The illustrations and the use of several Spanish words and phrases enhance the story. The back of the book includes an author's note and additional resources for further reading about Pura Belpré. You can also see and hear the author read this biography of Pura Belpré on YouTube.



Springtime in Illinois is planting season for the rural areas of Illinois. Grab the book *Lincoln Clears a Path: Abraham Lincoln's Agricultural Legacy* by Peggy Thomas to read about Lincoln's life as a farmer. This biography focuses on Lincoln's love for the land from the time he was a young boy through his presidency. The support America's farmers gave Lincoln during the Civil War reminded him of his farming days and how he helped to "clear a path" from the wooded area where his family lived and cleared the land into good farm land to plant seeds and grow crops. Keeping this in mind, Lincoln as president wanted to "Clear a Path for America's Future." He proposed legislation that created the U.S. Department of Agriculture, The Homestead Act which granted land to anyone who wanted to take a chance on farming, Land Grant Colleges

that would teach agriculture, and the Pacific Railway Act which granted land to build the railroads. While some of this legislation proved to be good, other parts of the legislation brought pain and suffering to the pioneers and particularly to the Native Americans. The back of the book contains additional historical facts, websites, a select bibliography, along with an author's note. *Lincoln Clears a Path* would make a good addition to your collection of books about Lincoln.

## Looking Ahead

**May is Get Caught Reading Month:** Put a magazine in your tote bag, keep various books in the car to read, or share a book with a friend or grandparent.

**May 3-7: Teacher Appreciation Week** – Hope you receive many expressions of gratitude from your students, families, and PTO.

**May 5: Cinco de Mayo** – Enjoy some tacos or have a family dinner with a Spanish menu.

**May 6: National Nurses Day** – Thank the nurses in your family or your school nurse especially at this time.

**May 9: Mother's Day** – Give your mom or grandmother a phone call or special message today that you love and appreciate all they do for you.

**May 31: Memorial Day** – Thank a Veteran for his/her service and remember all those who gave their life in service to our country.

---

## 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.

### Interactive Resources

#### [Interactive Sites for Education](#)

This free website is a collection of interactive activities for all subjects for grades K-5. These activities are great for hybrid learning and station work. They are categorized for easy access and include a variety of topics.

### Reading Passages Resources

This resource is a free website with articles about current events. The daily news articles also include comprehension and critical thinking questions. There is also background information and resources, including video clips, maps and links.

## Web 2.0 Resources

### [Piclits](#)

This free online tool utilizes photography and keywords to improve literacy skills through writing. There are interactive lessons and lesson plans for teachers utilizing a word bank to teach writing, vocabulary, grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

---

## UPCOMING PD EVENTS

By the Illinois Reading Council

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

- **May 4, 2021: Southern Illinois Reading Council and Lewis and Clark Reading Council** will co-host Literacy as a Tool for Healing and Trauma with Julie Hoffman as part of their Book Talk Tuesday from 6:30 to 7:30 pm via Zoom.
- **May 5, 2021: IRC Webinar** on Making a Case for Reading Joy with Donalyn Miller.
- **May 6, 2021: National Road Reading Council** will host Literature and Art Paint Night with Patricia Braun and Marianne Stremsterfer from 6:00 to 7:30 pm at the Effingham Public Library, 200 N 3rd St, Effingham, Illinois.
- **May 6, 2021: Secondary Reading League (SRL)** will host Author Chat with Jessie Ann Foley from 6:30 to 8:30 pm via Zoom.
- **May 15, 2021: Fox Valley Reading Council** will host How Do I Get More Students Engaged? with Cris Tovani from 9:00 to 11:00 am via Zoom.
- **May 19, 2021: Central Illinois Reading Council** will host the monthly CIRC Book Chats on alternating professional books and literature topics from 7:00 to 8:00 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](mailto:irc@illinoisreadingcouncil.org) or by phone at 309-454-1341.

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

