

Empowering
Lives
Through
Literacy

Communicator

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SPEND THE TIME NOW, IT WILL SAVE YOU TIME LATER: PROMOTING PERSISTENCE AND PROBLEM SOLVING

By Maria Walther

It's week two of school. In the midst of the getting-ready-for-lunch chaos, Jaxson pulls a note out of his backpack and asks, "Where does this go?" My first response is to point to the bright orange basket labeled Notes for the Teacher. Then, I stop myself. Although showing him the basket would be quicker in the moment, pausing to nudge Jaxson to figure it out will pay off in the long run. So, I offer Jaxson a few quick prompts:

- I bet you can figure this out! Where do *you* think it goes?
- Search for clues around the room. I'll give you a hint—it's orange.
- Did you notice where your friends put their notes? You might try asking one of them.

When Jaxson realizes that I'm not going to do something for him that he can do himself, he starts looking around. In a few seconds he spots the orange basket, pops the paper in it, and after a celebratory elbow bump, we're off to lunch!

The beginning of the school year is packed with moments, like this one, where we can choose to tell or to teach. When we teach, we do the following:

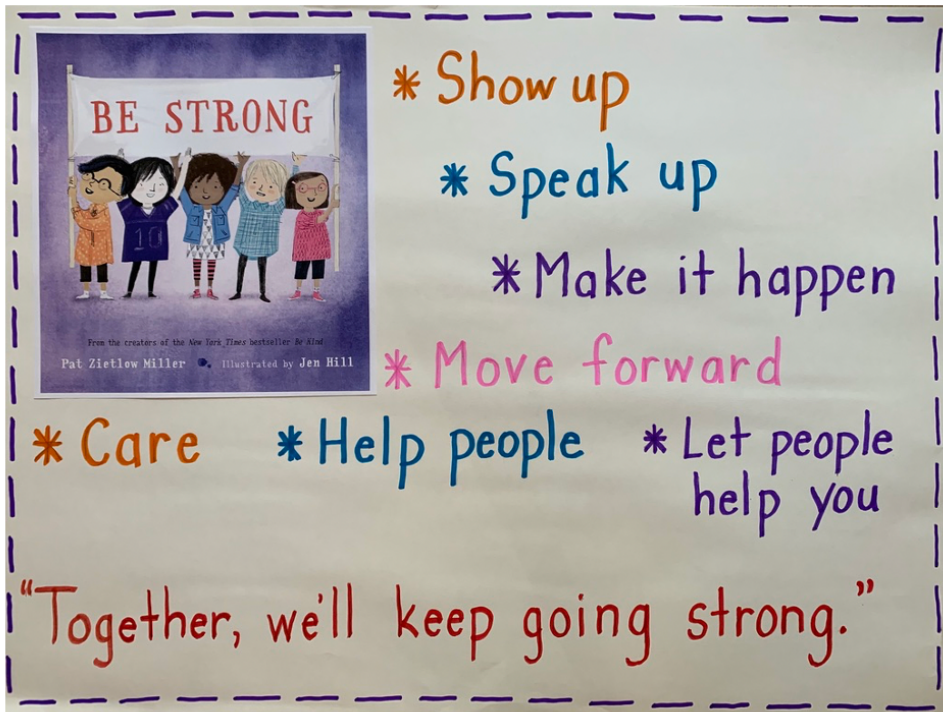
- Build students' agency or their "I can do it myself" mindset
- Promote persistence
- Celebrate problem solving

Along with intentionally using small moments to coach students as they figure things out on their own, we can share picture books featuring characters who persist and solve problems.

Promote Persistence

When she's unable to scale the rock wall in gym class, the narrator of *Be Strong* (Miller, 2021) asks her family, "How can I be strong?" Their answers, which appear on the chart below, guide her to persist. When you notice a student facing a challenge consider stepping back rather than stepping in. Then, once the task is accomplished, offer descriptive feedback or "feedforward" as Peter Johnston calls it with phrases like these:

- I noticed that you kept going even when it was challenging. What was your strategy?
- How did finishing [the task] yourself make you feel?
- You didn't give up! You should be proud of yourself!



Celebrate Problem Solving

Persistence and problem solving go hand-in-hand. For a book that highlights a child's ability to problem solve, read aloud *Nia and the New Free Library* by Ian Lendler (2021). In this literacy-focused book, when Littletown's library is whisked away by a tornado, Nia cleverly figures out a way to create enough books to warrant a new library. The problems students face in your classroom are not as huge as Nia's, but the same problem-solving process applies. That's why reading books like this will help your students when they run into a snag.

At the end of the day, I notice Kendall having difficulty fitting everything in her backpack. Her eyes are getting teary, as she tries to cram everything in. Seeing this, I walk over and say:

- I notice you are feeling a little frustrated. Let's take a few deep breaths together. Ready? Sniff the flowers (breathe in) and blow out the candles (breathe out).
- Now that you've calmed down, can you think of a different way to solve the problem?

Kendall thinks for a moment. Then, she takes everything out and starts over putting in one item at a time. The bell is just about to ring, but before it does, I make a quick announcement, "Learners, we don't have time now. But tomorrow morning, Kendall is going to show you the secret to fitting everything in your backpack. She's an expert!" Kendall leaves the room beaming.

Picture Books Mentioned

Lendler, I. (2021). *Nia and the new free library*. (M. Pett, Illus.). San Francisco, CA: Chronicle.
 Miller, P. Z. (2021). *Be strong*. (J. Hill, Illus.). New York, NY: Roaring Brook.

Professional References

To learn more about building children's agency, persistence, and ability to problem solve check out any of [Peter Johnston's](#) books.

READING ALOUD FOR CONNECTION AND HOPE

By Julie Hoffman, Ed.D.

The need for connection this school year is critical. Some students felt disconnected the entire 2020-2021 school year. Some students lost their loved ones, felt isolated from their peers, and were not able to build relationships with their teachers. Many of us felt disconnected as well. This year, we get to change that and make personal connection our top priority.

The wonderful thing about a new school year is all the new stuff. You have probably already bought some new, colorful markers and paper. Maybe you have even found some new classroom decor. All of these things represent the excitement, possibilities, and hope of a new school year.

These are exactly the things we need as we transition back into the classroom—excitement, possibilities, and hope. These are exactly the things our students need too. One of the best ways to bring all of this and more is through read-aloud. Have you thought about what books you want to share with your students this school year?

I will be reading the picture book *Your Name is a Song* by Jamilah Thompkins-Bigelow (illus. Luisa Uribe) to my students—my middle school students and my college students. The picture book celebrates the beauty and history of names, that of the main character in the book, and names from all over the world. This is a great beginning-of-the-year-book because it gives students a chance to share their names, to sing their names, and for us to say their names as we learn about each member of the class. Some students may want to look up and share the history and meaning of their names.

Another book that makes a great beginning-of-the-year-book is *Dictionary for a Better World: Poems, Quotes, and Anecdotes from A to Z* by Irene Latham and Charles Waters (illus. Mehrdokht Amini). Each letter of the alphabet is featured with a vital word, poem, quote, and action we can try.

One more picture book that I intend to share with my students is *I Am Every Good Thing* by Derrick Barnes (illus. Gordon C. James). This book is filled with gorgeous colorful illustrations and empowering affirmations like, “I am a sponge, soaking up information, knowledge, and wisdom.” After reading, students can write and share their own affirmations.

How will you build connections with your students this year? What will you be reading with your students? How will you inspire possibilities, excitement, and hope?

BIO: Julie Hoffman, Ed.D. is an Academic Interventionist and English language arts teacher for Springfield Public Schools in Illinois. She is also an adjunct professor in the Teacher Education Program at University of Illinois Springfield. Her research interests include resilience, empowerment, and healing through literacy.

[RE]CONNECTING WITH STUDENTS

By Katie Russell

The last school year looked different for classrooms all across our state. We were teaching in person, remote, hybrid, synchronously, and asynchronously. Most of us had reduced schedules and were forced, at some point, to change how we were teaching with little notice. As we start the new school year, we have students who also weathered these changes with us. Some thrived on remote learning and others did not. Some haven't been in a school building since March 2020. As teachers, we are left wondering how we can make every student feel welcome in our classroom this year and how can we reconnect with students who have been disengaged so long?

The key to any successful start of the year is to build relationships with students. Making a personal connection with students helps them feel welcome in our classrooms and builds a sense of community. My favorite activity to learn more about students is circle time. During circle time, students sit or stand in a circle and each have an opportunity to answer a question. Usually an object is passed around and only the person holding the object is speaking. To avoid passing an object, the teacher could direct the students to answer in order and move clockwise or counterclockwise around the circle. Not everyone has to answer; they just pass the object if they don't want to share or say “pass”. Teachers can begin with asking basic get to know you questions (favorite movie, video game, food, color, etc.). Circle time can be used with any grade level and used throughout the year to discuss books, review concepts, or to support social emotional learning.

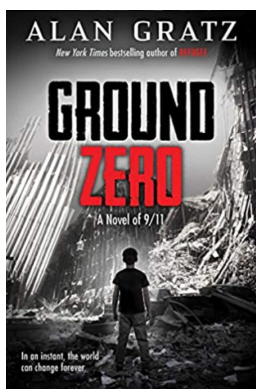
Another activity I use at the beginning of the year to learn about students is having them introduce themselves through Flipgrid. Flipgrid is a technology application that allows students to record a video in response to a question or assignment posted by the teacher. After students post the video, the teacher and other students can respond to it with their own video or written comment. For the past three years, I have had students introduce themselves by saying their name and stating something they would like the class to know about them. It helps me learn student names faster and I can practice pronouncing their names correctly. Last year, I had students record their video at home, without their mask, so we could see their faces! I use Flipgrid for other assignments during the year because it provides students with time to generate a response, reflect, and engage before responding to questions aloud, which makes them more prepared to participate in discussions.

There is always the feeling of pressure to jump right into academics at the beginning of the year. However, spending time to build relationships at the beginning of the school year will pay off throughout the year when students are willing to persevere through challenging concepts because of that relationship.

FAMILY LITERACY BOOKSHELF

By Barb Ashton, IRC Family Literacy Committee Chair

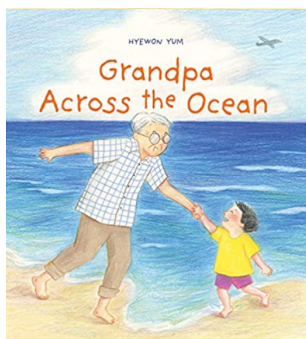
Autumn with its cooler days and mother nature's colorful display is fast approaching. The store shelves are barren as students head back to in-person classes at school. During September we honor our grandparents, celebrate Hispanic Heritage month, and observe the 20th anniversary of 9/11.



Do you remember where you were on September 11, 2001? Most of us do, but the students in our classrooms today weren't even born yet. **Ground Zero** by Alan Gratz captures the reality of the events that occurred on that day in America's history. *Ground Zero* tells two stories in alternating chapters.

Brandon, a 9-year-old boy, goes to work with his father, a chef in the Windows on the World at the World Trade Center, because he's been suspended for getting into trouble at school. When the plane hits the tower, Brandon is caught in the elevator along with several other people. Worried about his father Brandon tries to reach him but can't. Surrounded by fire, smoke, confusion, and terror can Brandon, his father, and the others escape and if they do what will the outside be like? Reshmina's story takes place in modern day Afghanistan. Her family has suffered over the years enduring the violence of the war that the Taliban has engaged in. Although only 11, Reshmina wants to become a teacher, learn English at school, and hopes to move to Kabul. While

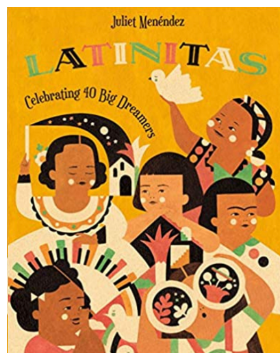
out gathering wood for the stove, Reshmina finds a wounded U.S. soldier and brings him home to give him help for his wounds, knowing that it will put her family and village in danger. Her twin brother, Pagoon, sees the soldier and tells Reshmina that he's going to join the Taliban even though she pleads with him not to leave. Will he make it to the Taliban's outpost and tell about the soldier? You'll need to read *Ground Zero* to find out how Brandon and Reshmina's stories end. *Ground Zero* is a timely read and provides many opportunities for discussion for middle school and up of America's involvement in Afghanistan and the current news coverage of America's departure from Afghanistan. For primary students *Fireboat* would be a good book on 9/11. The new graphic novel *I Survived the Attacks of 9/11* would help your special ed and ESL students read and join in the conversation on 9/11.



Many of the families of the students within our classrooms today have grandparents who live in their native country. Some of these students only know their grandparents through pictures, phone calls, text messages, and Facetime. Others may have taken a trip to their grandparents' country. **Grandpa Across the Ocean** by Hyewon Yum is the story of a Korean American boy and his mother's journey across the ocean to visit and spend the summer with his grandfather in Korea. Traveling through the city to grandpa's home the boy sees signs in language he doesn't know or understand and the sights and smells are different. When he meets his grandpa and says "Hi," grandpa bows. Eating the food grandpa prepared is different. The only toy he has is a yellow ball which he kicks in the house and breaks grandpa's flower planter. Grandpa comforts him

and isn't upset or mad, and even gives him a toy car that he had as a child. A change in attitude and a bonding friendship begins. For the remainder of his stay with grandpa, the two of them eat ice cream, go to the beach, watch cartoons on TV together, go shopping to buy a new flowerpot, and even teach each

other some basic words in Korean and English. Soon it's time to return home with the anticipation of hoping to return again next summer. The colored pencil illustrations are bright and colorful. They enhance and express the intergenerational relationship between a grandparent and grandchild. *Grandpa Across the Ocean* would be a nice addition to any library.



Celebrate Hispanic Heritage month by reading ***Latinitas: Celebrating 40 Big Dreamers*** by Juliet Menéndez. This book honors the lives of 40 Hispanic women who hail from countries throughout Latin America and the United States. Each mini biography represents women of different nationalities, economic backgrounds, ethnicity, etc., who followed their dream and tells the journey they took to become successful and influential Latinas. There are women from the fine arts, scientists, astronauts, engineers, authors, athletes, activists, and a Supreme Court Justice. Each mini biography is told within a double page spread accompanied by beautiful hand-painted illustrations. Some of the Latinas featured are iconic and some are unfamiliar but accomplished much to make a difference in the world. *Latinitas* gives an introduction to these women, but also provides a role model or mirror for today's young Latina girls. There are additional resources

to accompany each featured Latina as well as names of other Latina women who made a difference. Head over to YouTube for a virtual event with the author, Juliet Menéndez on how she wrote and illustrated the book. *Latinitas* is a book for all libraries and to share with families.

September Reminders

September: Library Card Sign Up Month

September: Hispanic Heritage Month – [Teaching Central America Week](#) is October 4–10, 2021.

September 8: International Literacy Day

September 11: Patriots Day – In memory of those lost from the terrorist attack on September 11, 2001.

September 12: Grandparents Day – Send a card, text message, or phone call to your grandparents.

September 19: Talk Like a Pirate Day – Arrgh Matey! Grab an eye patch and a bandana to read a pirate book to learn about these interesting characters.

September 26: Johnny Appleseed Day – Enjoy eating an apple or having some apple cider while reading about this American tall tale character and his adventures.

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 Resources

[Teaching Kids News](#)

This online reading comprehension tool provides a relevant news article everyday that is in kid-friendly language and is appropriate for students in grades 2-8. The articles provide discussion and written prompts, as well as curriculum and grammar questions. The articles are archived and organized by topics for easy selection.

Assessment Resources

[Mentimeter](#)

This online tool makes teaching more interactive by letting the students actively participate in lectures by using Mentimeter as a formative assessment tool. The results from the questions are live and anonymous so students and teachers can see the results to questions right away for immediate feedback.

Interactive Resources

[Lino](#)

This digital canvas allows users to create interactive walls with digital post-its for text, images and videos. This collaborative tool can be used for a variety of purposes, including building background,

formative and summative assessment, sorts, brainstorming and many more. This tool works with any device; all that is needed is a web browser.

UPCOMING PD EVENTS

By the Illinois Reading Council

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

- **September 1, 2021: IRC Webinar** on Reconsidering “Three R’s”: Reading, Race, and Reckoning with David Stovall from 7:00 to 8:00 pm via Zoom Webinar.
- **September 2, 2021: Illinois Valley Reading Council** will host Effective Tools to Share and Motivate from 4:30 to 6:00 pm at So Chic Boutique, 111 W. Washington Street, Morton, Illinois.
- **September 14, 2021: MID-State Reading Council** will host a Book Talk at 6:30 pm at Gill Street Bar & Grill, 3002 Gill Street, Bloomington, Illinois.
- **September 14, 2021: West Suburban Reading Council** will host Literacy Lessons Learned from COVID-19: Improving Instruction For All Moving Forward (Part I) with Jason Klein from 7:00 to 9:00 pm via Zoom.
- **September 15, 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 Google Meets.
- **September 16, 2021: Northern Illinois Reading Council** will host Building a Strong Reading Foundation – Phonics, Vocabulary, and Fluency with Timothy Rasinski from 6:00 to 7:30 pm via Zoom.
- **September 17, 2021: Illinois Council for Affective Reading Education (ICARE) and SCBWI-IL** are inviting everyone to participate in the virtual [Read Aloud Illinois Day](#). Sign up through September 16th to schedule a 20-minute visit with a SCBWI-IL Author Illustrator. Your classroom will be able to listen to a reading, ask questions, and have a fun virtual visit. All schools will also be entered to win an in-person all-school visit.
- **September 23, 2021: Black Hawk Reading Council** will host EL in the Regular Classroom: Helping Them Grow by Korah Winn Romkey from 6:00 to 7:30 pm at Deere-Wiman House, 1105 8th Street, Moline, Illinois
- **September 23, 2021: Macon County Reading Council** will host Literacy as a Tool for Healing Trauma from 4:00 to 6:00 pm at the Decatur Public Library, Children's Department Conference Room, 130 N. Franklin Street, Decatur, Illinois.
- **September 23, 2021: Chicago Area Reading Association (CARA)** will host the Fall Resilience and Global Read Aloud from 5:30 to 7:30 pm via Zoom.
- **September 23, 2021: Will County Reading Council** will host a Fall Author Visits with Kelly B. Jensen from 7:00 to 8:00 pm via Zoom.
- **September 28, 2021: Prairie Area Reading Council** will host a Global Read Aloud with Pernille Ripp at 6:30 pm via Zoom.
- **October 2, 2021: Illinois Title I Association (ITA)** will host a Literacy Meeting at 8:30 am via Zoom.
- **October 4, 2021: Western Illinois Reading Council** will host the Science of Reading Book Clubs: Uncovering the Logic of English and Choosing and Using Decodable Texts from 4:30 to 5:30 pm at the Galesburg 205 Board Office, 932 Harrison Street, Galesburg, Illinois.
- **October 6, 2021: IRC Webinar** on *When the World Hands you a Curriculum* with Sara K. Ahmed from 7:00 to 8:00 pm via Zoom Webinar.
- **October 19-20, 2021: IRC** will be hosting the 53rd Annual IRC Conference, *Rockin' Through the Pages*, at the Bank of Springfield Center, President Abraham Lincoln Hotel, and the Wyndham

Hotel in Springfield, Illinois. Join IRC as we welcome and plan to learn from many diverse featured speakers who will help teachers, specialists, and administrators from every grade-level and content area.

- **October 24, 2021: IRC Book Club** will read, reflect on, and respond to *Cultivating Genius: An Equity Framework for Culturally and Historically Responsive Literacy* by Gholdy Muhammad and/or *Troublemakers: Lessons in Freedom from Young Children at School* by Carla Shalaby. These seven-week online discussions will present an equity framework that restores excellence in literacy education or a paradigm-shifting look at the typical expectations for children at school. Participants who complete all assignments will be eligible to receive 15 PD clock hours for each book club. Participants who complete one book club during the summer will have the opportunity to participate in the other one during the fall session.

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:

