



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)

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## PROVIDING ACCESS TO HIGH QUALITY INCLUSIVE BOOKS AND CONTENT

By Cindi Koudelka, ILA State Coordinator

This is one of my favorite times of the school year ... not because it is getting to the end – that actually makes me sad; but because we simultaneously start thinking about next year. It brings this sense of hope and renewed energy while we dig into teaching ideas we have learned but haven't had a chance to implement, marvel at our students' growth throughout the year, and begin to order new materials for our next group of students. It's when we order those new materials, we need to take the time to reflect deeply about the books and materials we include in our curriculum, bulletin boards, and classroom libraries.

Diversity is one of the latest buzzwords and suggests that educators need to assure that we include diverse materials, but I would argue that isn't enough. Diversity isn't just about having representation present in the space. What we need instead is inclusive materials that recognize and celebrate those "diverse" voices. Our school and classroom libraries need quality texts that validate their experiences, build empathy, and affirm their identities. This inclusivity doesn't end with putting a few random books on the shelves. It must extend into our curricular choices across all content areas. It requires educators working together who understand the needs of their students, think about equitable opportunities, and evaluate the materials to assure the selection of inclusive materials.

One of the first things we can do is to undertake an equity audit. Engaging in an audit allows us to examine:

- The educators' personal philosophies, beliefs, and biases.
- Which groups of students are served/not served well academically by our current practices.
- Whose perspectives are represented/not represented in our materials.
- The connection between the professional learning needs of the teacher and the learning outcomes of the students.

One equity audit that is quite effective comes from the Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium (MAEC) and can be found at their [website](#) along with other helpful resources. Once you have engaged in a purposeful and reflective conversation, it is time to look at your current libraries. There are several tools to help you engage in such work that range from individual checklists to curricular surveys.

- Learning for Justice – [Teaching Diversity tool](#)
- Lee & Low – [one-page audit questionnaire](#)
- The Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and Transformation of Schools – [Culturally Relevant Curriculum Scorecard](#)
- English Learners Success Forum – [English Learner Success Forum](#)

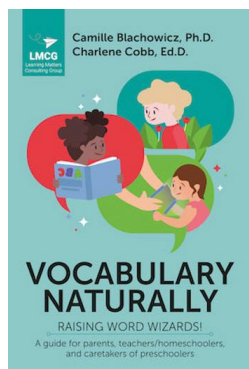
Once you and your team have reflected on the inclusivity of your materials, this is where the fun comes in – it is time to shop! But don't just go to the big box supplier of books or google "diverse books" – check out blogs and websites written by authentic voices to discover titles that represent an array of voices facing a range of experiences. Go to award sites such as Caudill, Bluestem, YALSA, etc. Visit local bookstores and their websites. Of course - talk to your IRC colleagues and come to the conference where you get to author stalk to find high quality materials. Finally, if you are looking for money to afford those books - don't forget to check out some of the scholarship opportunities through IRC, ILA, or other sources

such as Penny Kittle's *Book Love*.

Have a wonderful end to your school year and enjoy your future planning!

## VOCABULARY NATURALLY – IDEAS FOR PARENTS

By Camille Blachowicz and Charlene Cobb



While we celebrate the creative and innovative work of teachers and parents in keeping our kids engaged and learning this year, we want to protect and extend our students' learning gains as they return to school in the fall and beyond. What can we suggest for parents that can be done with a natural approach to vocabulary that is both powerful and easy?

Our book, *Vocabulary Naturally: Raising Word Wizards!* (LMCG/Amazon/Kindle, 2021) shares parent and teacher ideas for low-pressure, high-yield ways to help young learners develop their vocabularies in pleasurable, natural, every-day interactions in which they are **engaged, focused on meaning, and surrounded by language**. Some simple ideas for nice weather that can be extended across the year:

1. **DEEPEN YOUR LANGUAGE** – We suggest that parents (and teachers) move from simple conversations, or *commenting*, to complex conversations, or *elaborations*, during every-day interactions such as being outside. **Commenting:** *Look at all of these flowers! Aren't they pretty? I love seeing flowers, don't you? Elaborating:* *Wow, these flowers are amazing! They are so beautiful. The flowers in front of the tree are called tulips. The flowers behind the tree are called daffodils. Isn't that an interesting word? How many different colors are these tulips? Let's count them.*



2. **PUT LANGUAGE INTO ACTION** with activities that promote vocabulary development. One idea is to take pictures out in your yard, while on a walk, or at a park. Use three or more pictures to create a simple book. This can be printed or left as a digital text. You and your child can write one- and two-word labels for each picture. Older children can write simple sentences. This also helps your child develop an understanding of the sequence of a story (what happens first, in the middle, and at the end). Sharing this book with your child can be a delightful experience!
3. **CONNECT TO ART AND VISUALIZATION** – Use photos (or drawings) to create a gallery of special events and encounters.

### MY GALLERY OF SPECIAL EVENTS



**What is it?**  
A photo of me

**Why is it special?**  
It was the first day I started learning to swim.

**What is it?**

**Why is it special?**

**What is it?**

**What is it?**

Why is it special?

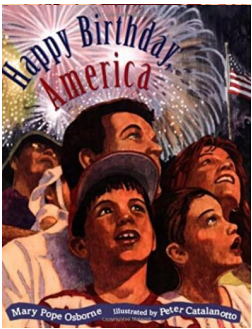
Why is it special?

Children can dictate or write short explanations. At the end of the term they will have a journal of highlights to revisit! For more ideas to share with parents, including answers to questions about phonics, consult our book [Vocabulary Naturally: Raising Word Wizards!](#)

## FAMILY LITERACY BOOKSHELF

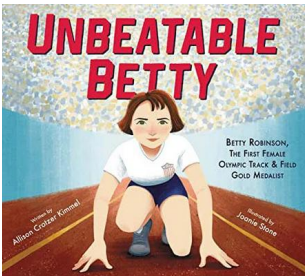
By Barb Ashton, IRC Family Literacy Committee Chair

Welcome to July with its warm sunny days. This month we celebrate the birth of our country on July 4th with fireworks, parades, and family outdoor gatherings. July is also National Parks Month. Have some hot dogs and some ice cream as July is National Picnic, Hot Dog, and Ice Cream Month.



**Happy Birthday, America** by Mary Pope Osborne takes the reader through the eyes of the narrator to any small town in America as three generations of a family come together to celebrate America's birthday. The family enjoys the pet parade, eating popcorn and pizza, viewing the antique cars on display, dancing, face painting, and carnival games. They stop and listen to a local official read the Declaration of Independence. As the sun begins to set the family enjoys a barbecue dinner while listening to a holiday concert. As the last notes of "The Star Spangled Banner" are played, the fireworks begin to light the sky. During the fireworks the young boy/narrator "pretends to blow out the stars on America's birthday cake and whispers Happy Birthday America." The book *Happy Birthday, America* tells of a family enjoying Independence Day but it also incorporates the history of America's birthday. The illustrations enhance

the telling of America's birthday.



This summer all eyes will be focused on Tokyo, Japan as the Summer Olympics will take place during the middle of July. An interesting book to read about an American Olympian is **Unbeatable Betty: Betty Robinson, the First Female Olympic Track and Field Gold Medalist** by Allison Crozter Kimmel. This inspiring biography of Betty begins when she is spotted by the local boys high school coach as she's running to catch a train. The coach invites Betty to join the boys track team since there wasn't any girls track team in the late 1920's. Having won several track meets, Betty becomes a member of the 1928 women's Olympic team, the first year women were allowed to compete in the Olympics.

Betty runs and wins the 100 yard dash by beating the favorite runner by .1 of a second. Thus, she becomes the first female gold medalist at the age of 16. Now famous and continuing to train with an eye on the 1932 Olympics, Betty takes an airplane trip. Her plane crashes. Betty survives, but her one leg is severely shattered and she is told she'll never walk again. Undeterred, Betty endures pain, grueling therapy, and relearns to stand, walk, and run again in less than 5 years. It's now 1936 and Betty earns a spot on the Women's Relay Team. Does Betty win another gold medal? You'll need to read *Unbeatable Betty* to find out. Be sure to read the end note and author's note at the back of the book for additional sources and websites about Betty Robinson. Team this book with **What Are the Summer Olympics?** by Gail Herman to learn more about these games that began in 775 B.C. in ancient Greece.

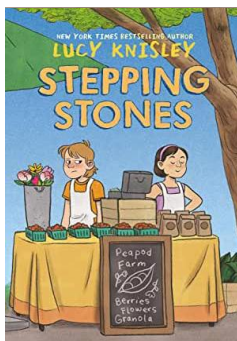


Attending summer camp has long been a summer experience for children of all ages. Are you a "Happy Camper" like Olive and Willow in the graphic novel **Camp (A Click Graphic Novel)** by Kayla Miller? Olive and Willow are besties. They're attending summer camp at Acorn Lake where they share bunk beds in



their assigned cabin. Olive is outgoing, adventurous, adjusts to camp life easily, and makes new friends. However, Willow has a harder time adjusting and misses home, doesn't like the food or trying new activities, and is not making friends. Willow wants Olive by her side all the time. While Olive feels for Willow she has been enjoying the activities with her new friends. This eventually leads to an argument with Willow. She destroys Olive and her new friends' Rube Goldberg machine project and the girls spend the next few days apart. With the assistance of the camp counselors Willow begins to make new friends and joins the new band. The girls eventually "patch things up" and enjoy the remaining days doing various activities with their new friends at Acorn Lake.

*Camp* is a quick read and a fun summer story. It's a story about friendship, one that middle schoolers can relate to. The back of the book has instructions on how to make friendship bracelets and information on Rube Goldberg machines.



***Stepping Stones*** by Lucy Knisley is a graphic novel set in a rural community. It's about Jen and her mom moving from the city to the country after her parents divorce. Mom has a new boyfriend, Walter, and together they are starting a farm. Jen is upset as she doesn't want to leave her friends and her dad, and most of all, is not happy about getting "new step sisters" Andy and Reese who visit every weekend. Adjusting to life on the farm is hard for Jen as she has to feed the chickens and clean the coop along with working at the farmer's market on weekends. Jen also endures verbal abuse from Walter. However, she finds solace in the hayloft in the barn where she writes and draws in her journal. At the farmer's market Jen has a hard time trying to keep up with the customers as she doesn't have a calculator to figure out the purchase and change needed to give the customers. Math isn't Jen's best subject and Andy "Miss Know It All" gets on

Jen's nerves. As time goes on Jen and her step sisters learn to adjust as do her mom and Walter.

*Stepping Stones* is a good mirror/window and door book. It is also timely and relatable for middle grade children – especially those who live on a farm and/or are experiencing a divorce of parents and becoming part of a new blended family.

## Looking Ahead

**July is National Parks Month** – Learn the unique history of some of America's national parks

**July 4: Independence Day** – Happy Birthday America

**July 9: National Sugar Cookie Day** – Read a book while enjoying a sugar cookie

**July 13: Baseball All Star Game** – Read about and cheer for a favorite player

**July 14: Bastille Day** – Learn about this day and enjoy some French treats

**July 23: Summer Olympics Games** – Cheer for USA as the games begin in Tokyo

**July 25: Parents Day** – Give your parents a hug and tell them thank you for all the things they do

**July 26: Aunt and Uncle Day** – Make a card or give them a phone call to show your love

## 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.

### Comprehensive Resources

#### [ReadWorks](#)

This amazing resource provides reading passages on curricular topics at a variety of reading levels, as well as skill-based lesson plans, novel study units, paired texts, and many more resources that are searchable by grade level and Common Core Standard. They even have packets for summer reading.

### Interactive Resources

#### [Flippity](#)

This online resource allows the user to take a Google Spreadsheet of information and turn it into flashcards, a quiz show, a bingo card, a hangman game, mix and match and more. This is a great tool for creating activities that can be used on any device.

## [Comic Master](#)

Comic Master allows you to create your own short graphic novel! With Comic Master you can decide how you want the page or your graphic novel to look, add backgrounds, choose characters and props to appear in your scenes, add dialogue and captions, and much more.

## UPCOMING PD EVENTS

By the Illinois Reading Council

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

- **June 27, 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.
- **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.
- **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.

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

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



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Illinois Reading Council | 203 Landmark Drive, Suite B, Normal, IL 61761

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