

Empowering
Lives
Through
Literacy

Communicator

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"A book is a gift you can open again and again."

~ Garrison Keillor



Join IRC at the **2025 Illinois Reads Book Festival!**

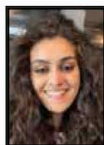
Saturday, April 26, 2025

Midwest Athletic Center

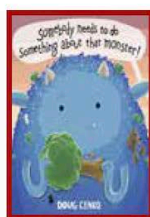
409 Hardin Avenue

Jacksonville, Illinois

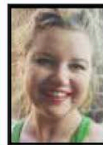
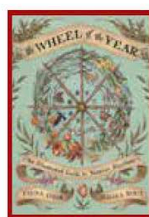
10:00 am – 2:00 pm



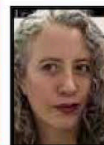
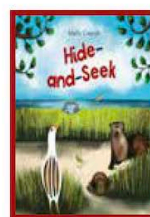
Nadia Ahmed
Grades K-2



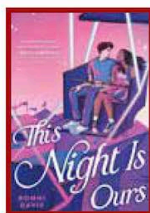
Doug Cenko
Grades K-2



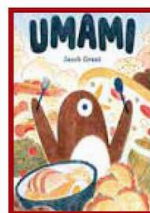
Fiona Cook
Grades 3 to Adult



Molly Cranch
Birth to Age 4



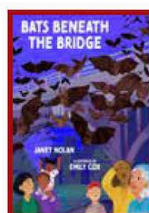
Ronni Davis
Grades 9-12



Jacob Grant
Grades K-2



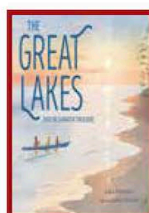
Ray Nadine
Grades 6-8



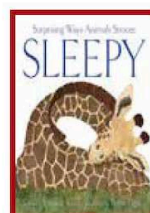
Janet Nolan
Grades K-2



Mike Petrik
Grades 3-5



Barb Rosenstock
Grades 3-5



Jennifer Ward
Birth to Age 4

The tentative schedule includes the **Opening Ceremony** from 10:00 to 10:30 am followed by **Author Read Alouds & Book Talks** from 10:40 to 12:30 pm. From 12:00 to 2:00 pm, there will be time for book signings, NIU Steam and craft activities, and vendors to visit. Food options will also be available to purchase. Bring your books and have them signed at this event! Books will also be available for purchase from Anderson's Bookshops.

This event wouldn't be possible without the support of our volunteers, contributions from our sponsors, and the Illinois Reads Authors who are sharing their time with us. Visit our website at IllinoisReads.org for more information.

Plan now to bring your families, students, and all book lovers to this FUN and FREE event!

FROM THE DESK OF THE IRC PRESIDENT
By Melissa Stinnett

TEACHING ELLs THROUGH CHILDREN's LITERATURE: WAYS TO PROVIDE CULTURALLY RELEVANT INSTRUCTION

Culturally relevant instruction is a kind of teaching that encourages children to choose academic excellence, while at the same time allowing them to maintain a positive identification with their own heritage and background (Ladson-Billings, 1992). In other words, culturally responsive reading instruction bridges the gap between the school and the world of the student. There are several literature-based strategies that capitalize on background knowledge to help with skill development (August & Shanahan, 2006). Such strategies include connecting new vocabulary with ELL's native language using word study activities.

Vocabulary

Children's literature serves as a natural and easy vehicle in which to learn vocabulary. After selecting words to teach, teachers should provide explicit instruction in teaching word meanings (Apthorp, Randel, Cherasaro, Clark, McKeown, & Beck, 2012). As a new book is introduced, teach students new vocabulary and encourage them to use this vocabulary in their speech and storytelling. For example, when introducing the book *Mary Wore Her Red Dress and Henry Wore His Green Sneakers* (Peek, 1998), spend some time introducing the color words in this story by showing pictures: red, green, yellow, blue, brown, purple, orange and pink. After students are comfortable with color words, another level of vocabulary is introduced, the clothes: dress, sneakers, sweater, jeans, pants, shirt, and hat. Then, write the words on the board with the picture next to it to show the correlation between picture and word.

Sorts: Vowel, Concept

Using a piece of quality literature, *The Napping House* by Audrey Wood (2009), two sorts are created for the functions of a sound sort (to learn about vowel sounds) and a concept sort (to associate pictures with words). This activity is best used in grades K-3. Students will enjoy the simple tale about people and animals in the house who are taking a nap and will certainly smile at the comical illustrations as the story unfolds. The text is a series of phrases that build upon one another in cumulative rhyme.





There is a house, a napping house, where everyone is sleeping.
And in that house, there is a bed, a cozy bed in a napping house, where everyone is sleeping.
And on that bed there is a granny, a snoring granny, on a cozy bed, in a napping house, where everyone is sleeping.

After listening to the text, readers can now use a sound board to sort sounds. A sound board focuses on letter-sound features (beginning consonants, digraphs, blends and vowels). For this sound sort, practice of the English vowel sounds (short and long) is helpful to the ELL child as English vowel sounds are quite different from some other languages.

The goals for this lesson are for the students to read the chosen word and to identify the vowel sound in the word. Using the soundboard (below), the students may work in partners to match the word to the correct column according to the vowel sound in the word. The sound board has the image of a bed, grandma, child, and flea. Grouping the students in partners with a native speaker and an ELL would work well here, providing support to the ELL. After students read the words aloud, as a group, talk about the vowel sound in the word: short e, short a, long i, and long e. Then, have volunteers place their word under the correct column on the sound board. After reading the story, display the sound board and talk about the four pictures (bed, grandma, child, and flea) and the vowel sounds that correlate with each picture.

Sound Board for *Napping House*

(Figure 1)

Bed (short e)	grandma (short a)	child (long i)	Flea (long e)
			
Net	Cat	Five	Bee
Egg	Fan	Slide	Knee
Sled	Sack	Bride	Teeth
Bell	Wag	Pipe	Pea
Desk	Satchel	Nine	Key
	Rag		

Using the same story and words, the teacher can transform this to a concept sort by including pictures for all of the terms (net, egg, sled, bell, etc.). Different types of sorts are wonderful ways to explore the intricacies of letters, sounds, and meanings. By using culturally relevant instruction, teachers capitalize on the students' known experiences which empower them intellectually, socially, and emotionally.

References

Apthorp, H., Randel, B./ Cherasaro, T./ Clark, T., McKeown, M., & Beck, I. (2012). Effects of a supplemental vocabulary program on word knowledge and passage comprehension. *Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness*, 5, 160-188. Doi: 10.1080/19345747.2012.660240

August, D., & Shanahan, T. (Eds.). (2006). Developing literacy in second-language learners: A report of the National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc. Available from <http://www.cal.org/projects/archive/natlitpanel.html>

Ladson-Billings, G. (1992). "Culturally relevant teaching: the key to making multicultural education work." In C.A. Grant (Ed.), *Research and multicultural education* (pp. 106-121). London: Falmer Press.

Peek, M. (1998). *Mary Wore Her Red Dress, and Henry Wore His Green Sneakers*. New York: Clarion Books / Ticknor & Fields.

Wood, A. (2009). *The Napping House*. Harcourt Children's Books.

IRC AWARDS AND GRANTS AT THE 2025 IRC CONFERENCE

By the Illinois Reading Council

Barack Obama Library Award

*Ceté Brewton-Wilkin
Douglas Alternative School
Springfield, Illinois*

This award is a classroom library, valued at \$1000, which was created in 2006 through a generous gift to the IRC from (then) Senator Obama. This collection comprises carefully selected literature that is "culturally relevant" for African-American readers and targets students in the middle-school (5th-8th) grade range. Nominations for the next award are due November 1st.

Family Literacy Award

*Sherrie Blackford and Dawn Wiles
Geff CCSD #14
Geff, Illinois*

The IRC Family Literacy Award recognizes an IRC member who promotes and supports parent involvement in children's reading. Nominations for the next award are due November 1st.

Gene Cramer ICARE for Reading Award

*Jennifer Mangayao
Palmer Elementary School
Chicago, Illinois*

The Illinois Council for Affective Reading Education (ICARE) honors an outstanding educator who shows concern for the affective domain of reading and who strives to promote lifelong reading habits among students. Nominations for the next award are due November 1st.

Jerry Johns Reading Educator of the Year Award

*Cindy Gerwin
Winnebago Elementary School
Bloomington, Illinois*

This award recognizes an outstanding teacher who makes contributions in promoting literacy among students, colleagues, and school communities. Nominations for the next award

IRC Hall of Fame Award

*Laura Beltchenko
Libertyville, Illinois*

The IRC Hall of Fame Award recognizes significant contributions to reading or reading education. The award is also given at the annual IRC Conference. Nominations for the next award are due November 1st.

IRC Service Award

*Diana Wilkie
Aurora, Illinois*

The IRC Service Award is awarded to the most deserving individuals for their service to the Illinois Reading Council. The award is given at the annual IRC Conference. Nominations for the next award are due November 1st.

Prairie State Award for Excellence in Children's Writing

Cozbi A. Cabrera

This award recognizes an Illinois Children's or YA author whose body of work demonstrates excellence, engenders a love of literature, and embraces an important part of the mission of the Illinois Reading Council—to promote lifelong literacy. Nominations for the next award are due June 15th.

Static Sticker Decal Contest

*Augie Brandt
St. Libory Grade School, Libory, Illinois*

Students in grade 4, 5, or 6 are encouraged to create an original design promoting reading. The winning design is printed on static stick decals and the winner is invited to the annual IRC Conference to receive their award. Entries must be postmarked no later than January 15.

are due November 1st.



The Illinois Reading Council would also like to congratulate all of the attendees who won one of the **Hall of Councils Raffle Baskets**. These amazing baskets were created by our local and special interest councils. The most popular baskets went to **Northern Illinois Reading Council** and **Central Illinois Reading Council**, which tied for the 1st Place Basket and **MID-State Reading Council** with the 3rd Place Basket. Proceeds from the raffle will fund scholarships for the next conference. IRC is also thrilled to share the following winners for the **Photo Contest** and **QR Code Exhibit Hall Game** along with a few fun pics including the **Graffiti Wall**.

Photo Contest

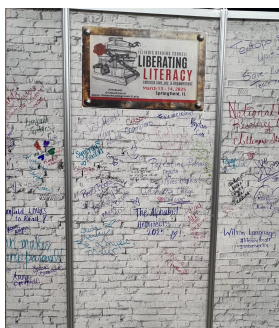
*Jessica Norris
Pekin CHSD #303
Pekin, Illinois*

QR Code Exhibit Hall Game

*Amanda Alderfer
Beecher SD #200U
Beecher, Illinois*

QR Code Exhibit Hall Game

*Robbin Thompson
Massac CUSD #1
Metropolis, Illinois*



The Illinois Reading Council is also accepting grant applications for the following programs.

International Grant: The International Committee of the Illinois Reading Council has created a grant to promote literacy projects internationally. Studies indicate that poverty levels and literacy rates are inversely proportional. By supporting our international community in the areas of literacy, it in turn improves our universal society. The IRC wants to support these efforts. The Grant Application and Guidelines are available online. The maximum amount per grant is \$500. The application deadline is May 1. Grants will be awarded for the next fiscal year from July to June. Awards will be announced by July 15.

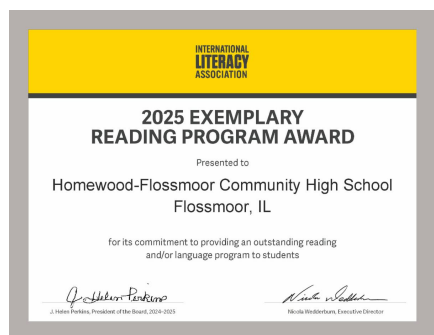
Literacy Support Grant: The Illinois Reading Council will award financial grants to local and special interest councils and individual council members for the purpose of promoting literacy development in the school and community, and/or providing professional development opportunities related to the improvement of reading and writing instruction. If fulfilling one of the above stated purposes requires a joint effort with another school, district, or other agency, letters stating their intended involvement are required from these agencies. The Guidelines and Application Forms are available online. There is no specific amount per grant. The amount awarded for each grant may be less than the amount requested. Application deadline is May 1. Grants will be awarded for the next fiscal year from July to June. Awards will be announced by

The **International Literacy Association (ILA)** has also announced the following awards.



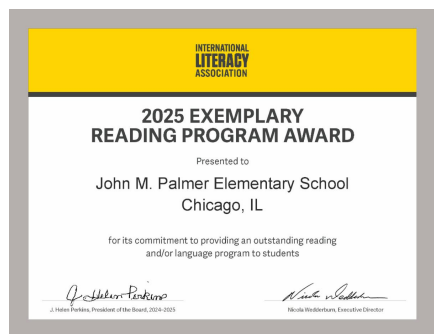
Prairie Area Reading Council

ILA will be awarding **Prairie Area Reading Council** (Year 15) with the ILA Honor Award that recognizes local, student, and special interest chapters that organize and conduct well-rounded programs serving the chapter members, the community, the state/provincial chapter, and the International Literacy Association. The Illinois Reading Council is extremely proud of **Prairie Area Reading Council** as well as the incredible literacy work done by all of our local and special interest councils. Keep up the good work!



Homewood-Flossmoor Community High School

ILA will be awarding **Homewood-Flossmoor Community High School** in Flossmoor, Illinois with the 2025 Exemplary Reading Program Award that recognizes outstanding reading and language arts programs at all grade levels (elementary, middle, and high school). Its purpose is to call the public's attention to outstanding programs in schools throughout North America.



John M. Palmer Elementary School

ILA will also be awarding **John M. Palmer Elementary School** in Chicago, Illinois with the 2025 Exemplary Reading Program Award that recognizes outstanding reading and language arts programs at all grade levels (elementary, middle, and high school). Its purpose is to call the public's attention to outstanding programs in schools throughout North America.

[Click here to find out more about IRC Awards and Grants that are available now!](#)

IRC ELECTION BALLOT
By the Illinois Reading Council

Please join the Illinois Reading Council in welcoming the new state officers to the IRC Board of Directors starting July 1st. Congratulations to:



Jennifer Young,
Vice President of IRC,
who will serve as President-Elect
in 2026-2027 and President in
2027-2028.



Diana Wilkie,
Treasurer of IRC,
who will serve a two-year
term until July 2027.



Amy Davis,
IILA State Coordinator,
who will serve a two-year
term until July 2027.

Special thanks also to the officers who are leaving the board on July 1st. We can't thank them enough for their service. It is greatly appreciated!

In 2026-2027, IRC will be electing the next Vice President, Secretary, and IRC Membership Director. If you have been active in a local council, special interest council, or the IRC Board of Directors, you may qualify for one of these state offices. If you are interested in any of these positions, please complete an application form by **October 1, 2025**. For more information, please email the [IRC Office](#).



April is upon us as we engage with various activities that brighten our spirits. During April we celebrate Easter, [National Library Week](#), and [National Poetry Month](#). April is also Autism Awareness Month, Sexual Assault Month, Humor Month, and the return of the baseball season.

Although March is Music in Education Month, music can be played, listened to, and enjoyed any day of the year. A beautiful book entitled [How Sweet the Sound](#) by **Kwame Alexander** tells about the journey of American music created by numerous African Musicians. The journey begins with the beat of the drums of enslaved Africans who cross the ocean to America. Working the cotton fields, music could be heard as the enslaved people sang folk songs and spirituals to help pass the time. On Freedom Sunday (a day they didn't have to work), dressed in their best clothes, the enslaved people would gather in Congo Square for a



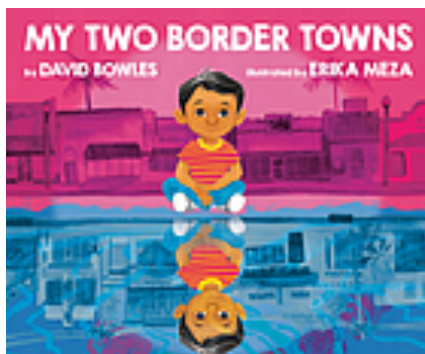
day of eating and dancing to the music created by the musicians. Over time this music became known as the Blues, Jazz, Gospel, Bebop, Doo-wop, and Hip Hop. To introduce the reader to each genre of music the author uses poetic verse sprinkled with alliteration and onomatopoeia to explain the genre. Throughout the book the reader is also introduced to singers and musicians such as Billie Holliday, Louis Armstrong, James Brown, Ella Fitzgerald, Chuck Berry, Whitney Houston, Beyonce, and Kendrick Lamar. The story is enhanced by the use of varying brush strokes and bold colors that help set the mood, emotion, and tone of the music. The back of the book includes additional information about the music and musicians. Grab a copy of **How Sweet the Sound** for your library and to share with your

students.



April is poetry month along with the celebration of earth day. Combining these two, you have the lovely book [Climbing the Volcano: A Journey in Haiku](#) by **Curtis Manley**. This is the story of a little boy and his parents who live in Oregon and decide to spend the day climbing the south side of the Cascade Mountain known as The Twin Sisters. As the family makes their climb to the summit they stop to rest and enjoy the panoramic view while pointing out the animals, terrain, and various forms of nature that live and grow along the trail. Each of these stops is accompanied by a haiku poem explaining their observation. On their way to the

summit, the family will pass through four separate climate zones. After reaching the summit, enjoying the view, resting and preparing for the journey down the mountain, the family returns to their campsite to spend the evening recalling their adventure. The lovely illustrations enhance the adventure and give the reader a feeling of what mountain climbing entails. The back of the book provides a wealth of information about the history and geology of the area/region, hiking facts and tips, along with additional resources, and additional information about Haiku poetry. *Climbing the Volcano: A Journey in Haiku* also provides opportunities for poetry and creative writing, science lessons, class discussions, and more. This is a book that can be enjoyed at all grade levels.



America's southern border and immigration are often a topic of the daily news media. A timely story about immigration, especially for primary students, is the book [My Two Border Towns](#) by **David Bowles**. The story is told from the child's point of view as he and his family live on the border of the United States and Mexico. The little boy and his father rise early every Saturday for their trip to the other side of the border to shop and visit with relatives and friends. While driving his truck along the Rio Grande the father gives the boy a short history lesson of the area. As they cross the bridge and safely pass through the border checkpoint the father and son go about their errands "which

includes a meal at their favorite restaurant, a stop at Tio Mateo's jewelry store, a cold treat from the paletero, picking up medicine at the pharmacy and groceries and supplies from the store." Before heading home their final stop was most important, as they checked in with friends and families living in tents who are seeking asylum, giving them the much needed groceries and supplies they purchased earlier in the day. *My Two Border Towns* is about immigration and border crossings but it's also about "family, community, kindness, empathy, and helping others." This book also provides many opportunities for discussion and would be a good recommendation and resource for parents.

April 1: April Fool's Day – Find a funny joke and share it with someone today
April 2: International Children's Book Day – The Birthday of Hans Christian Andersen
April 2: World Autism Awareness Day – My Positive Autistic Identity – Wear the color blue
April 4: School Librarian Day – Be sure to thank your school librarian
April 6-12: National Library Week – The Theme is: Drawn to the Library
April 15-21: Money Smart Week – www.moneysmartweek.org & www.chicagofed.org/education/educator
April 16: National Librarian Day – Be sure to thank your school and local librarian
April 20: Easter – Read a Peter Rabbit book
April 22: Earth Day – Our Power Our Planet at www.earthday.org
April 23: Administrative Professional Day/Secretary's Day – Thank your school staff
April 25: Arbor Day – Go to www.arborday.org for activities to Celebrating Trees
April 26: National Pretzel Day – Grab some pretzels and read a good book
April 30: Dia Children's Book Day – Visit www.dia.ala.org or www.patmora.com for ideas



UPCOMING PD EVENTS

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

- **April 1, 2025: MID-State Reading Council** will host the Shifting the Balance Book Club from 4:30 to 5:30 pm at Gill Street Restaurant, 3002B Gill Street, Bloomington, Illinois.
- **April 2, 2025: IRC Webinar** on Empowerment Through Storytelling with St. Clair Detrick-Jules from 7:00 to 8:00 pm via Zoom Webinar.
- **April 8, 2025: Central Illinois Reading Council** will host the Let's Taco 'Bout Books from 4:00 to 6:00 pm at Mas Sabores, 321 N. Main Street, Chatham, Illinois.
- **April 9, 2025: Central Illinois Reading Council** will host the Let's Taco 'Bout Books from 4:00 to 6:00 pm at La Fiesta Grande, 2830 Adlai Stevenson Drive, Springfield, Illinois.
- **April 10, 2025: Lewis and Clark Reading Council** will host a Spring Fling from 6:30 to 8:30 pm at June's Breakfast + Patio, 430 S Main Street, Shiloh, Illinois.
- **April 15, 2025: Will County Reading Council** will host Unlocking the Illinois Comprehensive Literacy Plan-Part V Comprehension from 7:00 to 8:00 pm via Zoom.
- **April 17, 2025: MID-State Reading Council** will host Trivia Night from 6:30 to 7:30 pm at Gill Street Restaurant, 3002B Gill Street, Bloomington, Illinois.
- **April 24, 2025: Western Illinois Reading Council** will host Joy: Literature and Paint from 6:00 to 7:00 pm at Galesburg Public Library, 264 W. Main Street, Galesburg, Illinois.

- **April 26, 2025: Illinois Reading Council** will host the **Illinois Reads Book Festival** from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm at the Midwest Athletic Center, 409 Hardin Avenue, Jacksonville, Illinois.
- **April 30, 2025: Secondary Reading League (SRL)** will host YA Book Talks from 5:30 to 6:30 pm at Anderson Bookshops, 5112 Main Street, Downers Grove, Illinois.
- **May 1, 2025: IRC** is accepting applications for the International Literacy Grant and Literacy Support Grants.
- **May 1, 2025: Starved Rock Reading Council** will host the Young Author Celebration from 9:00 am to 3:00 pm at the Grand Bear Lodge, 2643 N State Rte 178, Utica, Illinois.
- **May 2, 2025: Fox Valley Reading Council** will host Wine, Dine, & Collaborate from 5:30 to 7:00 pm at Up North Tasting Room, 9 N 2nd Street, Geneva, Illinois.
- **May 3, 2025: Illini Reading Council** and **Vermilion Valley Reading Council** will host Blended/Flipped: Using Technology to Differentiate Literacy Lessons with Tim Wheeler from 10:30 am to 12:30 pm at Champaign Public Library, Robeson Pavilion Room C, 200 West Green Street, Champaign, Illinois.
- **May 7, 2025: IRC Webinar** on African Conceptualizations of Trauma with Guilaine Kinouani from 7:00 to 8:00 pm via Zoom Webinar.
- **May 20, 2025: Will County Reading Council** will host Unlocking the Illinois Comprehensive Literacy Plan-Part VI Writing from 7:00 to 8:00 pm via Zoom.

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. 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 or by phone at 309-454-1341.

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

