



Empowering
Lives
Through
Literacy

Communicator

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and follow us on:



*"Reading well is one of the great pleasures
that solitude can afford you."*

~ Harold Bloom

ILLINOIS READS
A READING STATE OF MIND

Plan now to attend the

Illinois Reads and Young Authors Book Festival on Saturday, April 25, 2026

at Tinley Park High School,
6111 175th Street, Tinley Park, Illinois

The Illinois Reading Council is excited to share plans for the [Illinois Reads and Young Authors Book Festival!](#) Plan now to bring your families, students, and all book lovers to this fun and free event from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm at Tinley Park High School on **Saturday, April 25, 2026**. At the event, the following Illinois Reads Authors will be leading sessions and sharing their books.



Adi Alsaid
Grades 9-12



K. Ancrum
Grades 9-12



Gina Bellisario
Grades K-2



Betsy Bird
Birth to Age 4



Veronica Castillo
Grades K-2



Gloria Chao
Adult



Neil Dahlstrom
Adult



Darcy Day Zoells
Grades K-2



Juleesa Espinoza
Grades K-2



Jessika Fleck
Grades 3-5



Jessie Ann Foley
Grades 6-8



Harold Green III
Birth to Age 4



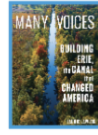
Gene Ha
Grades 9-12



Kate Hannigan
Grades 3-5



Nicole M. Hewitt
Grades 6-8



Laurie Lawlor
Grades 9-12



Lisa Maggiore
Grades 3-5



Dana Marie Miroballi
Birth to Age 4



Kristin Nilsen
Grades 6-8



Heidi Bee Roemer
Birth to Age 4



Rebecca Siegel
Grades 6-8



Zach von Zonk
Birth to Age 4



Alex Willan
Grades K-2

You can bring your books and have them signed! Books will also be available for purchase from Anderson's Bookshops.

At this Book Festival, the Illinois Reading Council will also be celebrating the written work of students in kindergarten through twelfth grade. All students, including those in special programs, are invited to participate. Schools are encouraged to select their Young Authors who will attend and be celebrated at the **Illinois Reads and Young Authors Book Festival**. Registration to be a part of the [Young Authors Celebration](#) is due by April 5th!

To find out more about [Illinois Reads and Young Authors Book Festival](#), visit us online today!

#WhatAmReading



I am reading [People Watching](#) by Hannah Bonam-Young
~ Jennifer Erickson



Open up the gorgeous TLSS cover of Hannah Bonam Young's [People Watching](#) and walk into Baysville, Ontario. Get ready to "meet Milo, our nomadic artist returning home for the first time in a decade at his brother's beckoning, and Prue, our tortured poet who has never fled the nest and is now a caretaker for her beloved mother. This story was inspired by [Hannah's] love for Muskoka, The Beatles, poetry, the sex-lessons trope, and family - both the kind you're born into and the sort you find for yourself." But as an educator, it was Prue's mother/Milo's high school art teacher Julia

Specific learning groups within classrooms and schools are fluid and reflect the diverse makeup of our educational environments. Even though some learner groups, such as students with disabilities or learners with specialized needs, are governed by state and federal law, students can and do demonstrate academic progress when provided with evidence-based instruction along with necessary supports in all seven components of literacy. Knowing the unique needs of our students guides us in adapting our mindset to help students who “get it” differently than others in their classes. Also important to note is the crossover within student groups as we often find students with diverse backgrounds and abilities don’t learn in silos and may have intersecting areas of need for support.

To this end, the table linked ([Reference Chart of Strategies for Considerations of Specific Learning Groups](#)) has a summary of suggested practices and strategies (not exhaustive) for working with specific learner groups across all literacy components. In addition, the ICLP provides resources to help educators navigate instructional strategies, such as those included in the [SLD Project](#), the [Dyslexia Toolkit](#), [Seal of Billiteracy](#), and [Multilingual Learners](#).

We are mindful that issues of equity necessitate additional considerations for learners who may experience poverty, are unhoused, or are impacted by trauma and other social-emotional factors. Remember that schools are part of a community network that includes resources and assets for supporting literacy for all learners. Some of these assets may include park districts, libraries, social service organizations, and places of worship/faith-based groups. These make great partners for project- and asset-based literacy learning.

We have enjoyed providing this series of briefs on the ICLP. Members of IRC can access the full series of articles, and many other resources, in the [IRC Padlet](#) or [IRC Website](#).



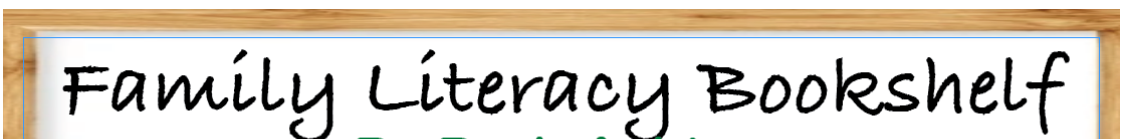
SCHOOL THEME OF BELONGING

By Jennifer Erickson, Alice Gustafson School, Batavia

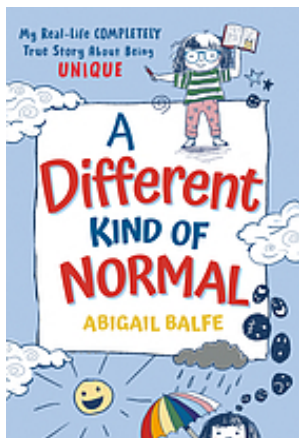
In keeping with our school theme of belonging, each grade level is partnered with a mentor/mentee class.

Our fourth grade class met with our first grade buddies to work on a teamwork collaboration activity. Our mission: build a tower out of marshmallows and spaghetti!

Our students rose to the occasion! Here is a picture of the results of their hard work!

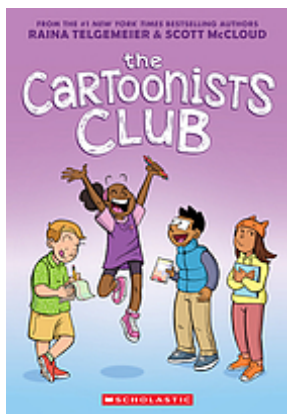


During April we celebrate Easter, National Library Week (www.ala.org/aasl/slm), and National Poetry Month (www.poets.org). April is also Autism Awareness Month, Sexual Assault Month, Humor Month, and the return of the baseball season and other outdoor sports.



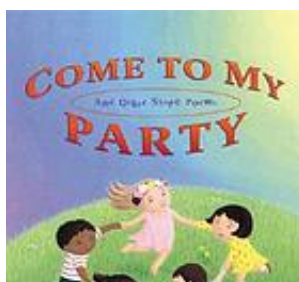
April is Autism Awareness Month. A new book entitled [*A Different Kind of Normal: My Real-Life Completely True Story about Being Unique*](#) by Abigail Balfe is a memoir but also a graphic novel on autism. This is a true story of Abigail's life journey growing up autistic and the challenges she experienced trying to live within a "normal" world. The problem was that she didn't know she was autistic. Abigail takes the reader from childhood to adulthood and various life stages in between, through the challenges she experienced that seemed confusing, scary, funny, and heart-warming, along with feeling different, and out of place, and weird. She even states that classmates and other people called her "Weird." In spite of her struggles, Abigail graduated college, became a stand-up comedian, and an award-winning writer and illustrator. Finally, in her 30s she was diagnosed as being autistic "within the larger context of neurodiversity." With her writing and delightful

illustrations, Abigail gives strategies and a better understanding of autism. The back of the book contains a glossary, suggestions for further reading, and websites to gain further information on autism. *A Different Kind of Normal* is a timely and engaging read for all middle grade and up students, teachers, librarians, parents, anyone who works with students, and others interested in learning more about autism. This is a book to be included in all libraries.



Graphic novels, a relatively new genre, are fun and enjoyable to read. But did you ever wonder what it takes to write a graphic novel? You need to read [*The Cartoonist Club*](#) by Raina Telgemeier and Scott McCloud. This is the story of two middle grade students who come together and decide to write their own graphic novel story. There's Makyla who always has story ideas but can't make them into a story and there's Howard who loves to draw humorous characters but can't come up with story ideas. They are also influenced by a graphic novel series entitled *Battle Princess Kishimoto*. However, they don't know how or where to start. With the assistance and guidance of their school librarian Ms. Fatima they decide to form an after school club called the Cartoonist Club. Soon two new classmates join the club. There's Lynda who is artistic and always drawing in her sketchbook but is also unsure of herself, and Art who loves to make things and

wants to try a new adventure. During club meetings the classmates learn about drawing facial expressions, using body language to create feelings, and various other steps involved in creating comics in addition to the story and words that will be divided into scenes and panels that will eventually become the graphic short story or novel. Editing, copyright, and book production are also addressed. The back of the book includes a short interview with the authors, a glossary, descriptions of comic careers, website suggestions for further reading, and a list of comic and cartoon museums. This book is an enjoyable read and also provides a nice resource for students interested in drawing cartoons.



Poetry appears in many different forms. In the book [*Come to My Party and Other Shape Poems*](#), Heidi Roemer uses concrete or shape poems to describe the topic or theme of the poem. The author follows the seasons and divides the book into four sections/seasons of the year: Spring, Summer, Autumn, and Winter. Each page of the book has beautiful illustrations with a shape poem that tells in detail a specific aspect that pertains to the season. The words of the poem create the shape of the drawing or object. For



example, a jump-rope shape is used to create the jump-rope jingle poem, a fishing pole of words is used to create a poem about fishing, and winter words become a poem about wearing mittens in winter. *Come to My Party* is a fun and enjoyable read for primary students. The colorful illustrations are clever and also enhance the poetry reading. This book makes a nice introduction to writing

concrete poetry at any grade level.

Looking Ahead

- 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 – Theme: Every Life Has Value (Wear Color Blue)
April 4: School Librarian Day – Be sure to thank your school librarian
April 5: Easter – Read a Peter Rabbit book
April 19-25: National Library Week – Theme: Find Your Joy
April 15-21: Money Smart Week – Visit www.moneysmartweek.org or www.chicagofed.org/
April 16: National Librarian Day – Be sure to thank your school and local librarian
April 22: Earth Day – Theme: Our Power Our Planet – Visit www.earthday.org
April 22: Administrative Professional Day/Secretary's Day – Thank your school secretary
April 24: Arbor Day – Go to www.arborday.org for activities on Honoring America's Roots
April 26: National Pretzel Day – Grab some pretzels and read a good book
April 30: Dia Children's Book Day – Go to 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, 2026: IRC Webinar** on Literacy Is Liberation: What Still Matters in Today's Times! with Kimberly N. Parker from 7:00 to 8:00 pm via Zoom Webinar.
- **April 7, 2026: MID-State Reading Council** will host the AI Classroom Monthly Book Club from 4:30 to 5:30 pm at Gill Street Restaurant, 3002B Gill Street, Bloomington, Illinois. Future book clubs will be held on May 5, 2026.
- **April 13, 2026: Illinois Valley Reading Council** will host the Illinois Comprehensive Literacy Plan Webinar Series on Writing from 4:30 to 5:30 pm via Zoom.
- **April 21, 2026: East Central-EIU Reading Council** is planning a "Grown-Up Book Fair" at Warren James Winery in Mattoon! At the event, a book fair will be set up and book talks will be given to get everyone's summer TBR pile stocked and stacked!
- **April 23, 2026: Southern Illinois Reading Council** will host the Spring Celebration from 6:00 to 8:00 pm at the Carbondale Civic Center, 200 S Illinois Ave, Carbondale, Illinois.
- **April 24, 2026: Fox Valley Reading Council** will host Wine, Dine, and Collaborate from 5:30 to 7:00 pm at Up North Wine Tasting Room, 9 N 2nd Street, Geneva, Illinois.
- **April 25, 2026: Illinois Reading Council** will host the Illinois Reads and Young Authors Book

Festival from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm at Tinley Park High School in Tinley Park, Illinois.

- **April 29, 2026: Central Illinois Reading Council** will host a Book Chat from 4:00 to 6:00 pm at Wildflower and Rose, Petersburg, Illinois.
- **April 29, 2026: Secondary Reading League** will host YA Book Talks with Anderson's from 5:30 to 7:00 pm at Anderson's Bookshops, 5112 Main Street, Downers Grove, Illinois.
- **April 30, 2026: Illinois Valley Reading Council** will host an Author Event with Alice B. McGinty from 5:30 to 6:30 pm at the Peoria Heights Public Library, 816 E Glen Ave, Peoria Heights, Illinois.
- **April 30, 2026: MID-State Reading Council** will host Trivia Night from 6:30 to 7:30 pm at BloNo Pizza Company, Vinyl Room, 1304 Cross Creek Dr, Normal, Illinois.
- **April 30, 2026: 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.

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:

- Artificial Intelligence in Education
- Tips for Teaching Writing
- Strategies for Struggling Readers
- Building the Reading and Writing Connection
- 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:

