

Illinois Reading Council



Empowering  
Lives  
Through  
Literacy

# Communicator

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**“One of the greatest gifts adults can give – to their offspring and to their society – is to read to children.”**

~ Carl Sagan

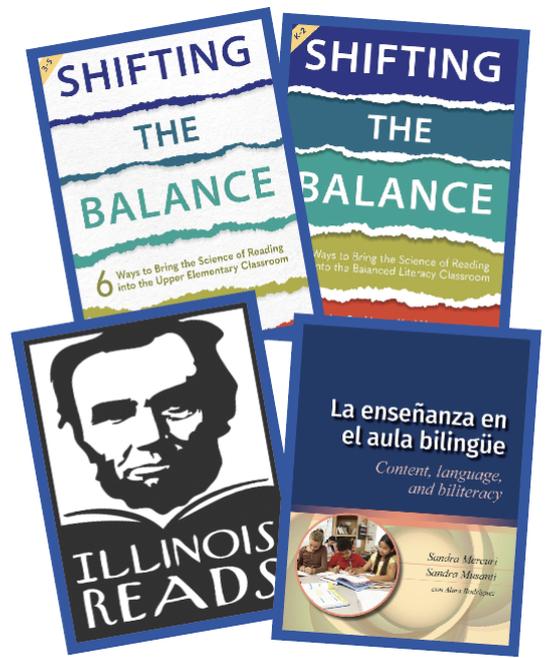
## Winter 2024 IRC Book Club

Join educators from all over the state in the online [Winter 2024 IRC Book Clubs](#)! Choose one, two, or all three book clubs!

Beginning January 21, participants will be reading, reflecting on, and responding in the ***Shifting the Balance*** book club, the ***Illinois Reads*** book club, and/or the ***La enseñanza en el aula bilingüe*** book club during the seven-weeks of online discussions. Participants who complete all assignments will be eligible to receive **15 PD clock hours** for each book club. Please note that all three book clubs will also be repeated during

the Spring 2024 session.

For the ***Shifting the Balance*** book club, participants can choose either the **K-2** or the **3-5** version. ***Shifting the Balance: 6 Ways to Bring the Science of Reading into the Balanced Literacy Classroom (K-2)*** was written by Jan Burkins and Kari Yates and ***Shifting the Balance: 6 Ways to Bring the Science of Reading into the Upper Elementary Classroom (3-5)*** was written by Katie Egan Cunningham, Jan Burkins, and Kari Yates. For the ***Illinois Reads*** book club, participants will be selecting books from one of the age bands of the 2024 Illinois Reads list to prepare lessons plans and activities. For Birth to 2nd Grade, participants will select a new book each week for a total of seven books; for 3rd to 5th Grade, participants will select three books; for 6th to 8th Grade, participants will select two books; and for 9th to 12th Grade or the Adult age band, participants will select one book. For the ***La enseñanza en el aula bilingüe: Content, Language, and Biliteracy*** book club, the book was written in Spanish (and not translated to English) by Sandra Mercuri, Sandra Musanti, and Alma Rodriguez. This book club will be held completely in Spanish and provide a ton of ideas for bilingual teachers.



Register by **January 15, 2024**, to participate in the book clubs. Registration is FREE for IRC Members. The cost for non-members is \$50, which includes IRC membership for one year. **PLEASE NOTE: The cost of the books is not included.**

## Static Stick Decal Contest

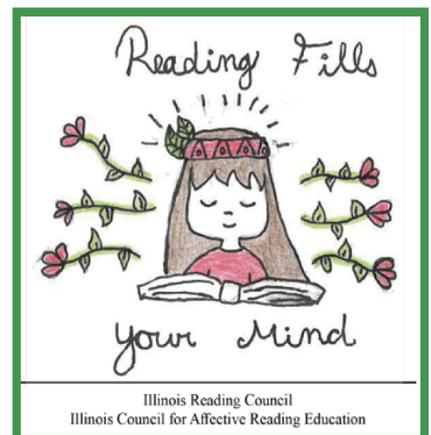
The Illinois Council for Affective Reading Education (ICARE) and the Illinois Reading Council (IRC) invite your students to design the next **Static Stick Decal** that encourages children to read.

### QUALIFICATIONS

- Entries must be from a student in grade 4, 5 or 6 in a school in the state of Illinois.

### GUIDELINES

- Make an original design in the 4-inch square on the back of the [application form](#).
- Invent an original character(s) to include in your design. You may NOT use any published cartoon or comic characters (including



characters such as Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, Super Heroes, Pokémon, etc.) nor any computer-generated art.

- Develop an original saying or slogan.
- Designs are limited to three colors plus black and white.

Complete the [application form](#) and mail it with the design by **January 15, 2023** to:

Illinois Reading Council  
Attn: Static Decal Contest  
1100 Beech Street  
Building 8, Suite 2  
Normal, IL 61761

#### THE STATIC STICK DECAL CONTEST WINNER WILL RECEIVE:

- An autographed book by a well-known children's author.
- An invitation for the winner and his/her parents to be our guests at the Friday Luncheon at the annual Illinois Reading Council Conference. The winner will sit in a place of honor and be introduced during the luncheon.
- 30 Static Stick Decals with the winning design to distribute to classmates.

## 2024 Mock Caldecott Award

### By Laura Beltchenko

It is that time again when book lists begin to appear from librarians and literacy specialists hosting their selections for the Randolph Caldecott Award. For this issue of the *IRC Communicator*, I once again scoured the book lists from the *American School Library Journal*, the [A Fuse Production by Betsy Bird](#), and from [John Schu and Colby Sharp's book lists](#), as well as periodicals and journals, to create my own personal 2024 Mock Caldecott Award List.

My local public library witnessed me sitting on the floor of the children's section combing through piles of books determining those that I felt worthy of mention on my personal top ten list of those books published in 2023. Most of the books I selected appeared on multiple lists; however, I included my own personal criteria which added instructional implications to provide a literacy lesson in addition to respecting the criteria set by the American Library Association. Attributes I added for my selection were: used as a mentor text for writing, an opportunity for a classroom read-aloud to develop a social/emotional lesson or as a recommendation for an advanced young literacy learner who has already broken the literacy decoding milestone to independently read and find joy. Each of these books should be read for the interaction between illustrations with or in some cases without text.

Since the Caldecott Award dates back to 1938, an opportunity to compare and contrast past award recipients with those of more recent years is a lesson in literary analysis. The comparison of artistic styles is an additional approach along with determining how book topics and themes are similar or how they have changed over time, as well as the recognition of diversity and culture. This link is the complete list of 1938 through present [Caldecott Medal and Honor winners](#). As a reminder, here are the "Terms of Selection" for the Caldecott Medal and Honor from the American Library Association:

*"The Medal shall be awarded annually to the artist of the most distinguished American*

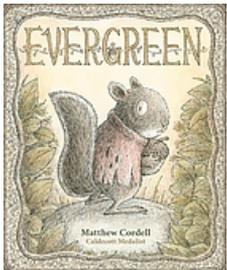
picture book for children published in English in the United States during the preceding year. There are no limitations as to the character of the picture book except that the illustrations be original work. Honor Books may be named. These shall be books that are also truly distinguished. The Award is restricted to artists who are citizens or residents of the United States.”

It is also important to note that in addition to Caldecott and Newbery Awards, which are among the most familiar, there are 18 additional awards that recognize and honor children’s books. This is the link to have your class participate in many of the [ALSC/ALA Mock 2024 Award Elections](#) award categories. Engaging all of our students with quality books as read-alouds or other literacy learning opportunities provides them with reading adventures, exploring historical perspectives as well as finding joy in the written word paired with luminary illustrations that support the story plot, setting, and character development. Mark your calendars for **January 22, 2024** when the winners of the [ALA Youth Media Awards](#) will be announced!

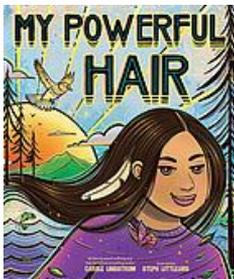
My list of 10 books with a few honorable mentions are listed below. The list will get you started with your class or your school selections for the 2024 winners. The books are linked to World Catalog for a description or you can hopefully find the book at a local library if your school does not have it available. The books are listed in no particular order. Enjoy!



**Big** by Vashti Harrison (author and illustrator)  
Consider the use of this book as a read-aloud for its social and emotional implications. The double-page spreads and the foldout pages used with a purpose make this book a standout.

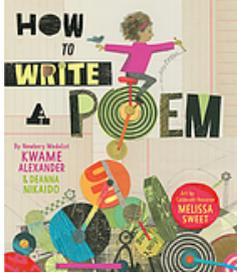


**Evergreen** by Matthew Cordell (author and Illustrator)  
This book is a wonderful opportunity for younger literacy learners to learn how chapters are episodes in plot, setting and character development and how these episodes move the reader through a story and build through rising and falling action.



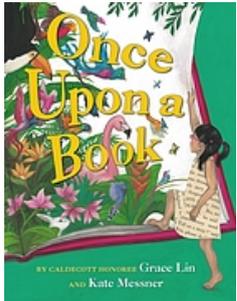
**My Powerful Hair** by Carole Lindstrom and illustrated by Steph Littlebird  
This book uses the topic of hair as a metaphor for strength. Historical perspectives of native/indigenous people are shared through the Authors Note and are an opportunity for an inquiry project in social studies.

**How to Write a Poem** by Kwame Alexander and Deanna Nikaido, Illustrated by Melissa Sweet  
As Kwame shares, “poetry is a neglected genre” so in support of poetry, I had to put this book on my list. Using poetry is a lesson in vocabulary development, imagery and how to use these elements to understand rhythm, rhyme, and structure. Among Melissa’s illustrations is collage, which students can replicate.



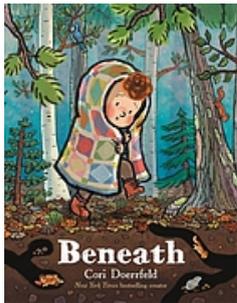
**[Once Upon a Book](#)** by Grace Lin and illustrated by Kate Messner

The illustrations in this metafictional book style have readers at the center of Alice's adventures. She literally blends into each environment she explores and (spoiler alert) a "white rabbit" appears on every page. Opportunities in this book for environmental study and compare and contrast to other stories abound.



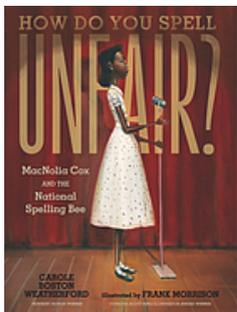
**[Beneath](#)** by Cori Doerrfeld (author and illustrator)

This tenderly written affective story with slight overtones of loss of a loved one creates a parallel structure of things in life that are "beneath." The illustrations show things that the reader can see are going on above and below, underground, and inside, creating an excellent read-aloud. The gradual release of the quilt, (made by Gramma as revealed on the final endpaper), share how this book fits into the "whole book" approach to a read-aloud.



**[How Do You Spell Unfair?: MacNolia Cox and the National Spelling Bee](#)** by Carole Boston Weatherford and illustrated by Frank Morrison

This book shares an example of the teaching of "facing history." The illustrations and words share a story of words and their meanings. It is a study of marginalization and culture, what is fair and unfair in this world. The link to [Facing History and Ourselves](#) shows educators and students how they can "shape a better and more equitable future."



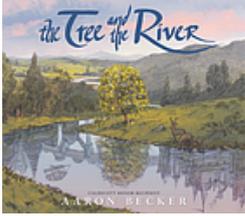
**[Make Way: The Story of Robert McCloskey](#)** by Nancy Schön and Some Very Famous Ducklings

This biographical informational book is a study in how artists reside in the due diligence of observation, as they hone their artistic style and execution of their craft. It is a study in both biography and how one must be persistent and have perseverance to reach a goal. This is an excellent opportunity to share [Make Way for Ducklings](#) with a new era of children and to note how this Caldecott Medal book differs in its illustrative style.

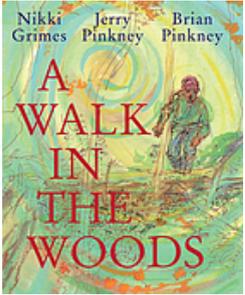


**[The Tree and the River](#)** by Aaron Becker (author and illustrator)

This wordless book is a testament to the stories Aaron Becker tells with his masterful illustrations. Use this book as means to have students write their own story through the perspective of the tree and the many generations of



its existence. It is also a study in the concept of “change” and how an object can go full circle to regenerate itself.



[\*\*A Walk in the Woods\*\*](#) by Nikki Grimes and illustrated by Jerry Pinkney and Brian Pinkney

This comforting book blends the illustrative work of a father and son, award winning Jerry Pinkney and his son Brian. Together with poet Nikki Grimes, they create a story that finishes sketches started by Jerry. “We’d both noticed the rarity of children’s books that feature African American characters engaging with nature, ....” This is a study of theme with poetic engagement.

### Notables:

- [\*\*In Every Life\*\*](#) by Marla Frazee
- [\*\*If I Was A Horse\*\*](#) by Sophie Blackall
- [\*\*An American Story\*\*](#) by Kwame Alexander and illustrated by Dare Coulter
- [\*\*Tomfoolery!: Randolph Caldecott and the rambunctious coming-of-age of children's books\*\*](#) by Michelle Markel, Illustrated by Brian Floca and Barbara McClintock
- [\*\*I'm From\*\*](#) by Gary R. Gray and illustrated by Oge Mora

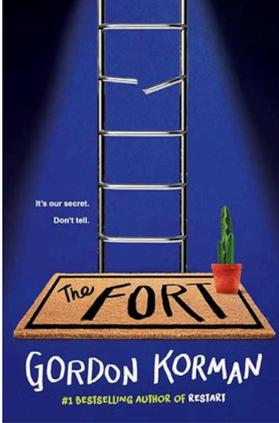
# #WhatAmReading



I am reading [\*\*The Fort\*\*](#) by Gordon Korman.

~ Alaina Weatherford, Starved Rock Reading Council President

The morning after a hurricane rips through their town, 5 boys find a trapdoor in the middle of the woods. They discover an old bomb shelter that includes electricity, food, and a TV with lots of old movies. They decide to keep it a secret from all the other kids and adults in their life, and it becomes their own fun place. But then, one of the boys needs the shelter as a serious refuge from his abusive stepfather. The boys start wondering which secrets they should keep. Gordon Korman does it again, with this amazing novel!



I am reading [Glossary of Terms for Journalists and Other Interested Parties](#) published in the blog on Jennifer Serravallo's website.

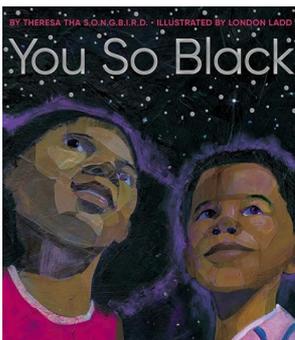
~ Laura Beltchenko, IRC Professional Learning and Development Committee Chair



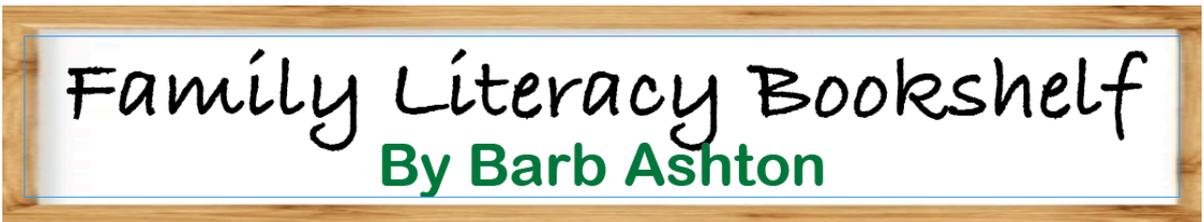
In the blog posting from June 8, 2023, Jennifer Serravallo shares an alphabetized list of *Glossary of Terms for Journalists and Other Interested Parties*. It provides a grounded view of how to interpret literacy terminology that is being used and represented in the media and other publications.

I am reading [You So Black](#) by Theresa tha S.O.N.G.B.I.R.D. and illustrated by London Ladd.

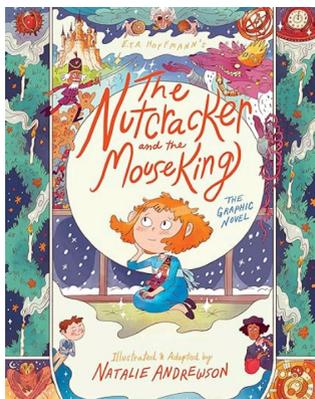
~ Julie Hoffman, IRC President



Theresa tha S.O.N.G.B.I.R.D. rearranged her spoken word poem and brought the words to page. London Ladd illustrated the poem with gorgeous, colorful and powerful images. Through words and images they celebrate humanity and the beauty of Blackness. -Julie Hoffman

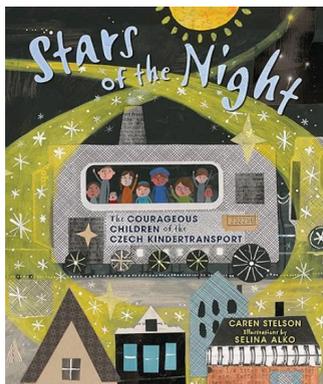


In December, we celebrate Christmas, Hanukkah, or Kwanza. It is also Human Rights Month, commemorating the passage of the Universal Declaration of the Human Rights Document by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948 guaranteeing everyone has basic rights and freedoms regardless of who you are. December is also Read a New Book Month which encourages everyone to take time out from this hectic season to spend some time reading.



The story of *The Nutcracker* is a classic Christmas book that was written by E.T.A. Hoffmann and Alexandre Dumas. The story has been brought to life in a new graphic novel [\*\*The Nutcracker and the Mouse King\*\*](#) illustrated and adapted by Natalie Andrewson. The author brings Marie to life as she is enraptured by the Nutcracker sitting under the Christmas tree. Marie becomes curious about this doll with the kind eyes, rosy cheeks, and friendly appearance. However, at midnight the Nutcracker comes to life within a fairy tale world filled with magic, fierce battles, wicked princesses, along with the ancient curse that can only be broken with the assistance of a true friend. The evil Mouse King threatens Marie's dream. Will she have the strength to defend the Nutcracker no matter what's involved? The characters are brought to life through the use of vivid

colors and revealing facial expressions that make this an enjoyable and easy read for all students.



[\*\*Stars of the Night: The Courageous Children of the Czech Kindertransport\*\*](#) by Caren Stelson and illustrated by Selina Alko is a true story of a perilous time during World War II. With Hitler's rise to power, a courageous British man created the Czech Kindertransport which, along with refugee organizations in Europe, made it possible for thousands of children, mostly Jewish, to be sent to safety in England. The Czech parents never told their child/children the reason for going to England to live with a family they never met. It wasn't till years later after the war ended that the children learned that their parents lost their lives as a result of the holocaust. *Stars of the Night* is written from the viewpoint of the children, and is enhanced by the beautiful acrylic colored pencil collage illustrations that reflect the emotions throughout the book.

There is a terrific resource guide to help teachers and parents discuss this difficult time involving justice, fairness, and genocide. The back of the book contains additional information, a timeline, websites, and bibliography for further reading.



[\*\*The Girl Who Saved Christmas\*\*](#) by Matt Haig and illustrated by Chris Mould is the companion book to *A Boy Called Christmas*. This is the story of a young chimney sweep named Amelia who lives in Victorian London. She writes a letter to Father Christmas asking for help for her seriously ill mother. Little does she know that Father Christmas has trouble with getting things ready for Christmas so he can perform his magic. He cancels Christmas due to tragedy and devastation in Elfhelm (the North Pole). A year has passed and soon it will be Christmas again. Amelia's life has changed as her mother passed away and she's forced to live at a workhouse. When she tries to escape Amelia is sent to live in the basement and her hope dwindles. Meanwhile back at Elfhelm a kind elf and his mother work with Father Christmas, who is determined to bring presents to Amelia and all children around the world. Does Amelia still have a flicker of hope and belief in the magic of Father Christmas? The book is a fun read filled with adventure, interesting characters, joy,

and is a delightful holiday read.

## Looking Ahead

**December 6: St. Nicholas Day**

**December 7: Pearl Harbor Day**

**December 7: Hanukkah begins** – Learn to play the Dreidel game

**December 15: Bill of Rights Day** – Guarantees the basic rights to all citizens

**December 21: Crossword Puzzle Day** – Great for the Winter Solstice – shortest day of year

**December 24: Christmas Eve**

**December 25: Christmas Day**

**December 26-January 1: Kwanza** – Learn about the 7 Principles of Kwanza

**December 31: New Year's Eve** – Say Goodbye to 2023



# UPCOMING PD EVENTS

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

- **December 1-2, 2023: Central Illinois Reading Council** will host the **1/2 Price Book Sale** at the Capital Area Career Center, 2201 Toronto Road, Springfield, Illinois.
- **December 4, 2023: Southern Illinois Reading Council** will host a **Holiday Gathering** from 5:30 to 7:30 pm at Walker's Bluff Tasting Room, 14250 Meridian Rd, Carterville, Illinois.
- **December 5, 2023: MID-State Reading Council** will host **How to Love Teaching Again Book Club** at 4:30 pm at Gill Street Restaurant, 3002B Gill Street, Bloomington, Illinois.
- **December 6, 2023: IRC Webinar** on **Updating Representations of Native Americans in Your Classroom Library** with **Debbie Reese** from 7:00 to 8:00 pm via Zoom Webinar.
- **December 8, 2023: Prairie Area Reading Council** will host the **Illinois Reads Sneak Peek** from 6:00 to 8:00 pm at Anderson's Bookshop, 5112 Main Street, Downers Grove, Illinois.
- **December 9, 2023: National Road Reading Council** will host **Stories with Santa** from 10:00 to 11:00 am at Effingham Public Library, 200 N 3rd St, Effingham, Illinois.
- **December 14, 2023: Sauk Valley Reading Council** will host **Stories with Mrs. Claus** from 2:30 to 4:30 pm at the Dixon Public Library, 221 S. Hennepin Ave, Dixon, Illinois.
- **December 15, 2023: IRC** has extended the deadlines to apply for the following awards and grants:
  - **[Barack Obama Library Award](#)**: This award is a classroom library valued at \$1,000 that is given to a teacher of 5th to 8th grade students each year.

- **[Family Literacy Award](#)**: This award recognizes an IRC member who promotes and supports parent involvement in children's reading.
- **[Jerry Johns Reading Educator of the Year Award](#)**: This award will recognize an outstanding teacher who makes significant contributions in promoting literacy among students, colleagues, and school communities.
- **January 3, 2024: IRC Webinar on Collaborate, Build, Nurture, Reflect: Roadmaps for Learning that Sticks** with **Kass Minor** from 7:00 to 8:00 pm via Zoom Webinar.
- **January 12, 2024: Prairie Area Reading Council** will host **Fort Night** from 4:45 to 6:45 pm at Westmont Public Library, 428 N Cass Ave, Westmont, Illinois.
- **January 15, 2024: IRC** is accepting registrations for the **[Winter 2024 IRC Book Clubs](#)**.
- **January 15, 2024: ICARE** and **IRC** are accepting submissions from students in grade 4, 5, and 6 for the **[Static Stick Decal Contest](#)**.
- **January 16, 2024: Sauk Valley Reading Council** and **Dixon Public Library** will co-host the **Writing with Families Project** from 5:45 to 7:00 pm at the Dixon Public Library, 221 S. Hennepin Ave, Dixon, Illinois. The Writing Group will meeting every Tuesday until February 20, 2024.

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](mailto: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:**

- Why We Need to Read Banned Books
- Tips for Teaching Writing
- Board Games that Teach Literacy Skills
- Literacy Meets STEM
- 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](mailto:irc@illinoisreadingcouncil.org) or by phone at 309-454-1341.

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

