



# Communicator

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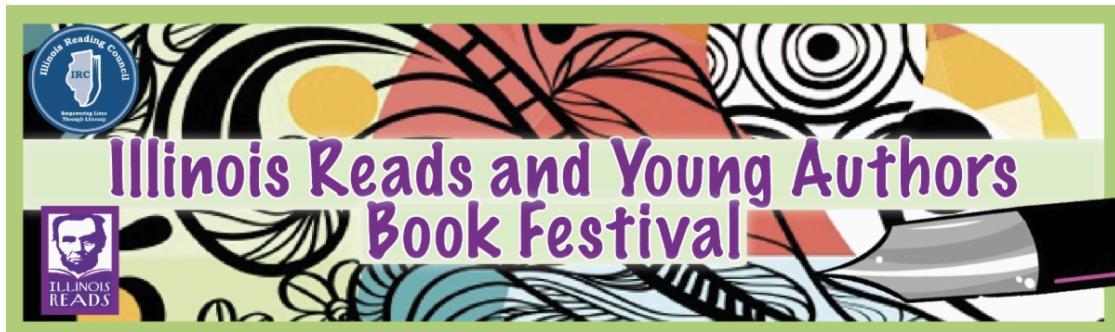
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and follow us on:



***"It's one of the greatest gifts that reading can give a person: easy access to peace inside, even when the world outside is in shambles."***

— Jennifer Williamson



**Illinois Reads and Young Authors Book Festival**  
will be held on Saturday, April 25, 2026  
at Tinley Park High School,  
6111 175th Street, Tinley Park, Illinois

The Illinois Reading Council is excited to share that we will be hosting a new version of the **Illinois Statewide Young Authors Conference** at the Illinois Reads and Young Authors Book Festival.

At the **Illinois Reads and Young Authors Book Festival**, the Illinois Reading Council will be celebrating the written work of students in kindergarten through twelfth grade along with the Illinois Reads Authors. All students in kindergarten through twelfth grade, including those in special programs, are invited to participate. Each spring, schools are encouraged to select their Young Authors who will attend and be celebrated at the Illinois Reads and Young Authors Book Festival.

The **Illinois Reads and Young Authors Book Festival** is a fun and free event for ALL families, students, and book lovers and ALL are invited to attend from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm. During the Book Festival, the Young Authors, chaperones, and other book festival participants will attend sessions led by Illinois Reads Authors from the 2026 Illinois Reads Book List.

During the **Young Authors Celebration**, the Young Authors will be provided a lunch and can meet with an Illinois Reads Author where they can share their book. Young Authors will also receive their Illinois Reads Young Author Certificate and their manuscript will be officially affixed

with the seal as an honored Illinois Reads Young Author. Please note that all schools must provide chaperones who will accompany their Young Authors attending the Illinois Reads and Young Authors Book Festival.

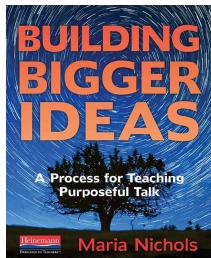
Registration and more information is available at [www.illinoisreadingcouncil.org](http://www.illinoisreadingcouncil.org)!

REGISTRATION IS NOW OPEN!

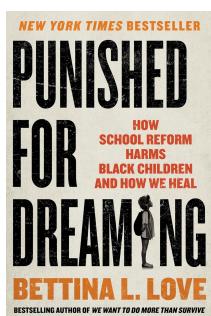
## IRC BOOK CLUB

Join educators from all over the state in the online [Spring 2026 IRC Book Club](#)! Choose one, two, or all three books!

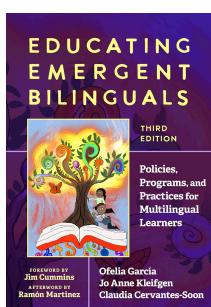
Beginning **March 22**, educators will participate in online discussions over the next seven weeks with the ***Building Bigger Ideas*** book club, the ***Punished for Dreaming*** book club, and/or the ***Educating Emergent Bilinguals*** book club. Participants who complete all assignments will be eligible to receive 15 PD clock hours for each book club.



***Building Bigger Ideas: A Process for Teaching Purposeful Talk*** was written by Maria Nichols. During the book club, participants will be guided beyond teaching students to talk politely about books to teaching them to have meaningful conversations with purposeful talk that serves as a tool for constructing understanding with others.



***Punished for Dreaming: How School Reform Harms Black Children and How We Heal*** was written by Bettina L. Love. During the ***Punished for Dreaming*** book club, participants will delve into the last forty years of educational reform through the lens of 25 Black Americans with a roadmap for transformations for all children at its core.



***Educating Emergent Bilinguals: Policies, Programs, and Practices*** was written by Ofelia García, Jo Anne Kleifgen, and Claudia Cervantes-Soo. During the ***Educating Emergent Bilinguals*** book club, participants will use this widely used textbook that has been expanded to explore the potential of translanguaging and the promises and pitfalls of Artificial Intelligence. It also addresses the harmful role that colonialism and raciolinguistic ideologies play, offering guidance for transforming policies and practices to improve the education of emergent bilinguals.

Register by **March 22, 2026**, to participate in the book club. 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 book is not included.



## WHAT WRITING *THE GREEN LITERACY HANDBOOK* TAUGHT ME ABOUT LITERACY AND THE EARTH

By Jen Cullerton Johnson

When Mary Gove and I began writing *The Green Literacy Handbook* (Cullerton Johnson & Gove, 2025), we wanted to explore how literacy could do more than teach reading and writing skills. We wanted to show how stories can also guide children to think critically about the Earth and their role in caring for it. Out of this work grew the Green Literacy Framework, which helps teachers weave environmental stewardship into everyday literacy practices in K–5 classrooms.

The framework begins with stories. A picture book like *The Great Kapok Tree* (Cherry, 1990) can anchor a reading lesson while also opening conversations in science (ecosystems), social studies (land use), and writing (letters advocating for forests). *One Plastic Bag* (Paul, 2015) encourages students to think critically about waste and community innovation, then respond with their own solutions in writing. Research supports what we've seen in practice: children's books build environmental awareness (Kahn, 2010), and interdisciplinary teaching deepens critical thinking (Beane, 1997).

The Green Literacy Framework also draws on critical literacy. We ask students to consider: *Whose voices are heard? Whose are missing? What actions are possible?* (Luke, 2012). In doing so, reading and writing become tools for noticing systems, questioning assumptions, and imagining change.

For me, writing this book affirmed that literacy and stewardship belong together. Teaching children to read and write through the lens of care for the Earth gives them not only skills, but also confidence, hope, and agency to act.

### References

- Beane, J. A. (1997). *Curriculum integration: Designing the core of democratic education*. Teachers College Press.
- Cherry, L. (1990). *The great Kapok tree: A tale of the Amazon rainforest*. Harcourt Brace.
- Cullerton Johnson, J., & Gove, M. (2025). *The Green Literacy Handbook*. Solution Tree.
- Kahn, R. (2010). *Critical pedagogy, ecoliteracy, and planetary crisis: The ecopedagogy movement*. Peter Lang.
- Luke, A. (2012). Critical literacy: Foundational notes. *Theory Into Practice*, 51(1), 4–11.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00405841.2012.636324>
- Paul, M. (2015). *One plastic bag: Isatou Ceesay and the recycling women of the Gambia*. Millbrook Press.



## MEDIA CENTER'S MANGA MADNESS AT BROOKS MIDDLE SCHOOL

By Alan Holtz

The shelves may look a little emptier, but that's a *good* problem to have!

Our collection of roughly **1000 popular manga copies** (about one copy per every student!) filling all 18 shelves has already seen **32% checked out** in just the first two months of school. That percentage is actually higher because numerous copies have been checked out multiple times.



Thanks to the **IRC's Literacy Support Grants** over the past decade, we've built this amazing collection. Our kids are reading, even without a single booktalk!

#ReadingIsPower #Manga #BrooksMiddleSchool #IRCLiteracyGrant

2026  
IRC CONFERENCE  
March 12-13, 2026  
Springfield, Illinois

ILLINOIS READING COUNCIL  
a full literacy palette

Early registration ends on [February 5th](#) for the [2026 IRC Conference](#). A Full Literacy Palette, on March 12-13, 2026 in Springfield Illinois.

To find out all about the conference and the featured speakers who will be joining us, check out the [2026 Preliminary Program](#) that is online now. Featured speakers include: Wiley Blevins, Lesa Cline-Ransome, Tricia Ebarvia, Loren Long, Bettina L. Love, Pamela A. Mason, Briana Carlson-Morales, Yuyi Morales, Maria Nichols, Marc Tyler Nobleman, Jarrett Pumphrey, Jerome Pumphrey, James Ransome, R. Joseph Rodriguez, Aisha Saeed, Maria Walther, Becky Anderson Wilkins, Rachel Zindler, and the 2026 Illinois Reads Authors.

We hope to see you at the 2026 IRC Conference!

THE ILLINOIS READING COUNCIL  
invites you to join us for the  
57TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE  
March 12-13, 2026 Springfield, Illinois  
a full literacy palette

Featured speakers include

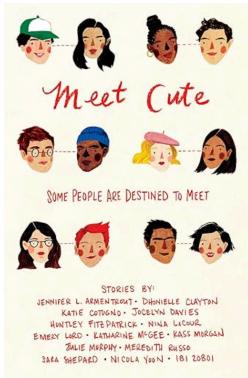
WILEY BLEVINS	LESA CLINE-RANSOME	TRICIA EBARVIA	LOREN LONG
BETTINA L. LOVE	PAMELA A. MASON	BRIANA MORALES	YUYI MORALES
MARIA NICHOLS	MARC TYLER NOBLEMAN	JARRETT PUMPHREY	JEROME PUMPHREY
JAMES E. RANSOME	R. JOSEPH RODRIGUEZ	AISHA SAEED	MARIA WALATHER
BECKY WILKINS	RACHEL ZINDLER	SAMIRA AHMED	ILLINOIS READS AUTHORS - 2026

REGISTRATION AND HOUSING ARE OPEN ONLINE! FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT THE IRC WEBSITE AT [WWW.ILLINOISREADINGCOUNCIL.ORG](http://WWW.ILLINOISREADINGCOUNCIL.ORG)

# Family Literacy Bookshelf

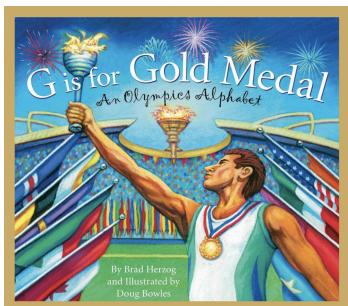
## By Barb Ashton

February, the shortest month of the year, has arrived. Will the groundhog see his shadow? Will America win gold at the Winter Olympics? Who will win the Super Bowl between the Patriots and Seahawks? During February we celebrate African American Heritage Month. We also celebrate Valentine's Day, President's Day, Mardi Gras, Lunar New Year, and the start of spring training for our favorite baseball team.

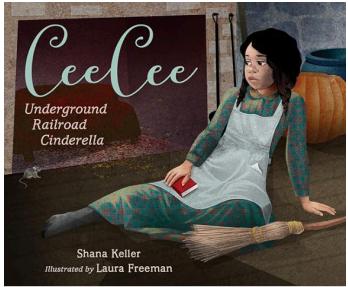


Valentine's Day is fast approaching. To get in the spirit, read [\*\*\*Meet Cute: Countdown to Valentine's Day\*\*\*](#) by Jennifer L. Armentrout and 13 other favorite YA authors. *Meet Cute* is a collection of short stories and tales of how people first meet. Each story is sealed and the reader is to open the seal on day one of February and each following day until Valentine's Day. Some of the authors featured are: "Nina LaCour's piece about two Bay Area girls meeting via a cranky Customer Service Tweet." Sara Shepard's glossy tale about a "magazine intern and a young rock star." Ibi Zoboi's tale is about a girl determined to get out of her small town." There's "Nicola Yoon's imaginative take on break-up and make-up." Each of the other remaining authors' stories contribute to the celebration of Valentine's Day as well. *Meet Cute* is an enjoyable and diverse collection of stories that are romantic, witty, sometimes heartbreaking

and a bit mysterious.



The Winter Olympics will be held in Milan-Cortina Italy. To get in the spirit read [\*\*\*G is for Gold Medal: An Olympics Alphabet\*\*\*](#) by Brad Herzog. The author takes the reader on a journey from the first games that were held in ancient Greece to the more extravagant and spectacular events held in recent Olympic years. Each letter's topic is told in a short rhyming verse. The sidebars included on each letter page give further information about the topic, milestones achieved by the athlete, or additional information on the history of the Olympics. The beautiful illustrations enhance the story and help to bring the actions of the athletes and events of the Olympics to life. *G is for Gold Medal: An Olympics Alphabet* is a fun and informative read to be enjoyed by readers of all ages.



February is African Heritage Month. A new book to share with students/families is [\*\*\*CeeCee: Underground Railroad Cinderella\*\*\*](#) by Shana Keller. CeeCee is a young black girl enslaved by a mean/cruel white family, the Townsends and their two daughters, who own a plantation in Maryland. She is given the task of working and caring for the girls who treat her unkindly. While doing her assigned chores during the girls' reading lessons, CeeCee learns to read, which was prohibited for the enslaved. One day while cleaning, CeeCee comes across a book which she picks up and opens to look at. Mrs.

Townsend sees this and banishes CeeCee to an upstairs attic. She can only come out to do her daily routine. Binty, the family cook, comforts and helps CeeCee during this time. Binty also tells CeeCee about a secret path, the North Star, and the things she will need to do that will allow her to escape. Will CeeCee follow Binty's advice and eventually escape on the path (The Underground Railroad) to freedom and a better life? You'll need to read *CeeCee: Underground Railroad Cinderella* to discover the answer. The digital illustrations of Laura Freeman contrast the wealthy life of the Townsends to the darkness and rough life in the attic, the small plain kitchen, and the path CeeCee needs to follow. *CeeCee* is an exciting and excellent read that mixes fairy tale with historical reality.

February 1: World Hijab Day  
February 2: Groundhog Day  
February 2-6: National School Counselor Week – Be sure to thank your school counselor  
February 4: World Read Aloud Day  
February 6: Winter Olympics Opening Ceremony  
February 8: Super Bowl Sunday  
February 11: National Inventor's Day  
February 12: Abraham Lincoln's Birthday  
February 14: Valentine's Day  
February 16: President's Day  
February 17: Mardi Gras  
February 17: Chinese or Lunar New Year – It is the year of the Horse  
February 22: George Washington's Birthday  
February 27: Polar Bear Day

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## UPCOMING PD EVENTS

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

- **February 3, 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.
- **February 4, 2026:** **IRC Webinar** on Discovering the 2026 Illinois Reads Books with Becky Anderson from 7:00 to 8:00 pm via Zoom Webinar.
- **February 5, 2026:** **Western Illinois Reading Council** will host Love of Literacy Paint Party from 6:00 to 8:00 pm at Art Defined, 306 East Simmons Street, Galesburg, Illinois.
- **February 5, 2026:** **Early registration with discounted prices ends for the 2026 IRC Conference.**
- **February 7, 2026:** **Illini Reading Council** and **Vermilion Valley Reading Council** will co-host Cultivating a Comprehensive Literacy Approach Nurturing Reading Proficiency and Passion with Love and Joy with Cindi Koudelka from 10:30 am to 12:00 pm at the Champaign Public Library, 200 West Green Street, Robertson Room C, Champaign, Illinois.
- **February 9, 2026:** **Illinois Valley Reading Council** will host the Illinois Comprehensive Literacy Plan Webinar Series on Vocabulary from 4:30 to 5:30 pm via Zoom.
- **February 11, 2026:** **Central Illinois Reading Council** will host a Book Chat from 4:00 to 6:00 pm at Our Town Books, 64 E Central Park Plaza, Jacksonville, Illinois. The event will be followed by a CIRC Meeting from 6:00 to 8:00 pm.
- **February 26, 2026:** **Lake Area Reading Council** will host Book Love!: A Book Lover's Event from 5:00 to 7:00 pm at Libertyville Civic Center, 135 W. Church Street, Libertyville, Illinois.
- **February 26, 2026:** **Will County Reading Council** will host How Do We Get More Kiddos Reading? from 5:00 to 8:00 pm at Lewis University, 1 University Pkwy, Romeoville, IL 60446.
- **February 28, 2026:** **East Central-EIU Reading Council** will host the Literacy & Learning Conference with Pat Braun from 8:45 am to 12:20 pm at Eastern Illinois University,

- **March 3, 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.
- **March 3, 2026: Suburban Council of IRA (SCIRA)** will host the Using AI to Strengthen Literacy Instruction Without Losing What Matters with Meghan Hargrave from 4:30 to 6:00 pm via Zoom.
- **March 4, 2026: IRC Webinar** on Verses of Becoming: Poetry as Radical Self-Discovery with Yolanda Sealey-Ruiz from 7:00 to 8:00 pm via Zoom Webinar.
- **March 12-13, 2026: Illinois Reading Council** will host the 57th Annual IRC Conference in Springfield, Illinois. Visit the Conference Webpage to find out more about the Featured Speakers, Registration, and much more!
- **March 16, 2026: Illinois Valley Reading Council** will host the Illinois Comprehensive Literacy Plan Webinar Series on Comprehension from 4:30 to 5:30 pm via Zoom.
- **March 22, 2026: Register for the Winter 2026 IRC Book Club** where participants will read, reflect on, and respond to *Building Bigger Ideas: A Process for Teaching Purposeful Talk* by Maria Nichols and/or *Punished for Dreaming: How School Reform Harms Black Children and How We Heal* by Bettina L. Love and/or *Educating Emergent Bilinguals: Policies, Programs, and Practices for Multilingual Learners* by Ofelia Garcia, Jo Anne Kleifgen, and Claudia Cervantes-Soon.

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

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# 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.

**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!

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[Visit the IRC Website](#)

[Full IRC Events Calendar](#)

[Latest on the IRC Conference](#)

## QUICK LINKS

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:



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