

Illinois Reading Council



Empowering  
Lives  
Through  
Literacy

# Communicator

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and follow us on:



***"The journey of a lifetime starts  
with the turning of a page."***

~ Rachel Anders

# 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](#)

**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**

<b>WILEY BLEVINS</b>  WILEY BLEVINS ILLINOIS READING COUNCIL	<b>LESA CLINE-RANSOME</b>  LESA CLINE-RANSOME ILLINOIS READING COUNCIL	<b>TRICIA EBARVIA</b>  TRICIA EBARVIA ILLINOIS READING COUNCIL	<b>LOREN LONG</b>  LOREN LONG ILLINOIS READING COUNCIL
<b>BETTINA L. LOVE</b>  BETTINA L. LOVE ILLINOIS READING COUNCIL	<b>PAMELA A. MASON</b>  PAMELA A. MASON ILLINOIS READING COUNCIL	<b>BRIANA MORALES</b>  BRIANA MORALES ILLINOIS READING COUNCIL	<b>YUYI MORALES</b>  YUYI MORALES ILLINOIS READING COUNCIL
<b>MARIA NICHOLS</b>  MARIA NICHOLS ILLINOIS READING COUNCIL	<b>MARC TYLER NOBLEMAN</b>  MARC TYLER NOBLEMAN ILLINOIS READING COUNCIL	<b>JARRETT PUMPHREY</b>  JARRETT PUMPHREY ILLINOIS READING COUNCIL	<b>JEROME PUMPHREY</b>  JEROME PUMPHREY ILLINOIS READING COUNCIL
<b>JAMES F. RANSOME</b>  JAMES F. RANSOME ILLINOIS READING COUNCIL	<b>R. JOSEPH RUIGUEZ</b>  R. JOSEPH RUIGUEZ ILLINOIS READING COUNCIL	<b>AISHA SAED</b>  AISHA SAED ILLINOIS READING COUNCIL	<b>MARIA WALTHER</b>  MARIA WALTHER ILLINOIS READING COUNCIL
<b>BECKY WILKINS</b>  BECKY WILKINS ILLINOIS READING COUNCIL	<b>RACHEL ZINDLER</b>  RACHEL ZINDLER ILLINOIS READING COUNCIL	<b>SAMIRA AHMED</b>  SAMIRA AHMED ILLINOIS READING COUNCIL	<b>ILLINOIS READS AUTHORS - 2026</b>  ILLINOIS READS ILLINOIS READING COUNCIL

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

# RESOURCES

My young nephew crawled up on my lap, hoping to get a better view of a ceremony, albeit a sombre one, which he tried to make sense of. As he watched and listened to the speaker, he

repeated, "I don't understand, I want to understand." This moment of self-awareness and clarity, for myself, exemplified what many of our students experience as they read to learn and understand. Comprehending text can be complex for many students, and the ICLP outlines instructional practices for grades K-12, including a recommendation for PreK-5. Specifically, all teachers in PreK-5th grade are reminded to plan their read-alouds and model comprehension for students rather than using books at random without a purpose. The ICLP evidence-based instructional practices K-12 include:

## **Background & Texts**

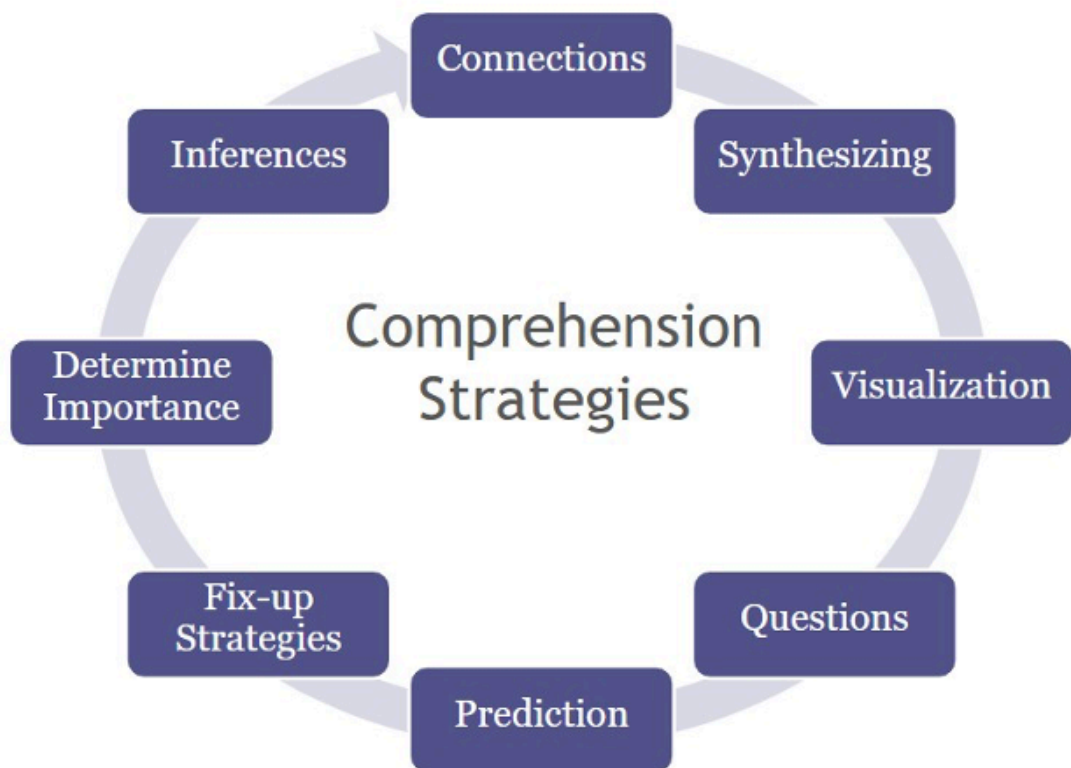
- Build background or content knowledge, reminding us that not all students bring the same experience to learning.
- Providing access to diverse fiction, non-fiction, and culturally affirming books invites all learners to the table.
- Expose students to a variety of texts/difficulties, genres and scaffold instruction to support comprehension rather than reliance on leveled readers or a single type of text for all skills.

## **Explicit Instruction**

- Plan read-alouds with intention and avoid random choices that don't help students connect their learning.
- Model inference and predicting based on text evidence, helping students move from guesses or predictions that are not based on the text.
- Engage students in discussions, exploring topics, and reflective writing to deepen understanding and avoid unstructured classroom discussions that often limit students to surface-level thinking.

## **What About Strategies?**

- Teach specific comprehension strategies such as summarizing, visualizing, and questioning, but be careful not to over-rely on them. The end goal is not to learn each strategy, but to learn how to use the strategies as tools to help us think and comprehend.



Finally,

- *Monitor, monitor, monitor comprehension.* All readers have times when they do not understand, although many read just to get the words right, but not for understanding. Teach students to expect to understand what they read and to pay attention to their own thinking when they read. When students monitor, they are self-aware, recognizing when they do and do not comprehend, and knowing how to fix their understanding.



**IRC HIGHLIGHT REELS**

**EXPEDITIONS AND EXPLORATIONS: WINTER PICTURE BOOKS  
FEATURING YOUNG CHILDREN**

Chill out with this collection of 19 picture books celebrating winter! This *cool* booklist features old favorites and new titles *hot* off the press! All of these books feature young children enjoying winter sights, sounds, and activities associated with colder temperatures.

As a collection, these books can help address numerous early childhood curriculum goals.

**STEM/STEAM:** These books feature artistic and engineering endeavors with ice and snow.

**LITERACY:** These books are fictional stories infused with non-fictional information.

**SEL:** These books feature young children taking risks and problem solving.

**PHYSICAL:** These books can inspire ideas for outdoor play.

**HOME/SCHOOL CONNECTIONS:** The books are linked to WorldCat where teachers and caregivers can check out titles from their local library.

- [\*The Snowy Day\*](#) written and illustrated by Ezra Jack Keats (1962)
- [\*Owl Moon\*](#) written by Jane Yolen and illustrated by John Schoenherr (1987)
- [\*The Jacket I Wear in the Snow\*](#) written by Shirley Neitzel and illustrated by Nancy Winslow Parker (1989)
- [\*Best Friends in the Snow\*](#) written by Angela Shelf Medearis and illustrated by Ken Wilson-Max (2003)
- [\*Winter Friends\*](#) written by Mary Quattlebaum and illustrated by Hiroe Nakata (2005)
- [\*Tracks in the Snow\*](#) written and illustrated by Wong Herbert Yee (2007)
- [\*Over and Under the Snow\*](#) written by Kate Messner and illustrated by Christopher Silas Neal (2011)
- [\*Ladybug Girl and the Big Snow\*](#) written by David Soman and illustrated by Jacky Davis (2013)
- [\*Blizzard\*](#) written and illustrated by John Rocco (2014)
- [\*Andy & Sandy and the First Snow\*](#) written by Tomie dePaola & Jim Lewis and illustrated by Tomie dePaola (2016)
- [\*Into the Snow\*](#) written by Yuki Kaneko and illustrated by Masamitsu Saito (2016)
- [\*Walk and See: Opposites\*](#) written by Rosalind Beardshaw (2018)
- [\*Some Snow is...\*](#) written by Ellen Yeomans and illustrated by Andrea Offermann (2019)
- [\*The Snow Dancer\*](#) written by Addie Boswell and illustrated by Mercè López (2020)
- [\*Lost\*](#) written and illustrated by Sam Usher (2022)
- [\*Just One Flake\*](#) written and illustrated by Travis Jonker (2023)
- [\*Snow Is...\*](#) written by Laura Gehl and illustrated by Sonia Sánchez (2024)
- [\*The Snowball Fight\*](#) written by Beth Ferry and illustrated by Tom Lichtenheld (2025)
- [\*When Winter Comes\*](#) written and illustrated by Ekaterina Trukhan (2025)

### Remote Learning Resources:

- Click [here](#) for Vooks narrated storybook *Over and Under the Snow*.
- Click [here](#) for Ezra Jack Keats Foundation's animated storybook *The Snowy Day*.





# 4TH ANNUAL MOCK CALDECOTT AWARD 2026

## By Laura Beltchenko, IRC PL&D Committee Chair

It's that time again to read and critique your favorite picture books of 2025 to determine the winner of the prestigious Randolph Caldecott Award. Mark your calendars for Monday January 26, 2026, when the ALA Youth Media Awards will be announced. This is the link to the necessary information to have your class participate in the live on-air broadcast of the [award ceremony](#).

In my opinion this has been a banner year for picture books. I have spent hours pondering over books published this year, delighting in their storytelling, and marveling at their artistic finesse and design qualities. I have also investigated the available lists by popular picture book bloggers, numerous periodicals and multiple associations. The public library system in my county was extremely supportive as well. As a reference, I reexamined books that have been [past award recipients](#).

Although not part of the Caldecott criteria, I read the books through the lens of what Louise Rosenblatt, (2005) calls the efferent and aesthetic reading stance. *Efferent reading* is to learn something specific and the type of information that will be the result of reading the book. (These tend to be informational.) *Aesthetic reading* on the other hand is the transaction between the reader and book; reading for pleasure and pure enjoyment as well as the emotional and sensory experience the book may bring to the reader. (These tend to be literary.)

The "Terms of Selection" for the Caldecott Medal and Honor from the American Library Association are as follows:

"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." ALA, 2025

The committee is made up of librarians and other literary experts. Some of the criteria they use:

- Excellence of the execution in the artistic technique the illustrator employed
- Excellence of pictorial interpretation of story, theme or concept
- Appropriateness of style of illustration to the story, theme or concept
- Delineation of plot, theme, characters, setting, mood or information through the pictures
- Excellence of presentation in recognition of a child audience.

The following are my personal favorites. It was difficult to narrow down my choices to just ten, so I have a few honorable mentions. Hopefully, the information provided will get you started on your class or school selections for the 2026 winners. The books are listed in no particular order. Enjoy the reading and admiring the art of the picture book with your students!

Reference: Rosenblatt, L. M. (2005). Making meaning with texts: Selected essays. Heinemann.

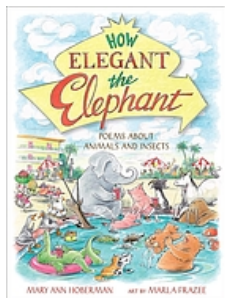
[To See an Owl](#) by Matthew Cordell

This is an endearing tale that follows Janie, a girl who dreams of finding all elusive owl. Encouraged by her patient teacher, she learns that quiet observation on the prairie, at the beach and in the woods as well as her perseverance will help her to spot these hidden creatures. Janie's mother is extremely supportive of her quest to observe an owl



in its habitat. Her patience is rewarded with a magical, long-awaited sighting.

**[How Elegant the Elephant, Poems About Animals and Insects](#)** by Mary Ann Hoberman and illustrated by Marla Frazee.



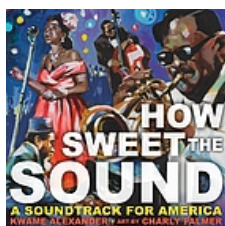
When you read the book introduction to this collection of poems, you will be moved by the body of work of author Mary Ann Hoberman. This collection is a culmination of “fresh and timeless poems” that come to life with the artistry of Marla Frazee. The poems are in alphabetical order which adds an additional spin to the thematic poems that are accompanied with clever artwork. These humorous illustrations bring out the imagery and humor of the life-like animals and insects in the poems.

**[Hurricane](#)** by Jason Chin



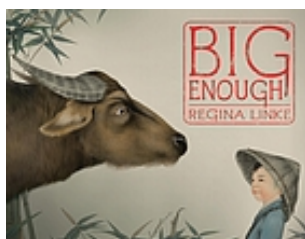
*Hurricane* follows a community on Hatteras Island, North Carolina. As a Category Three storm barrels toward the coast, scientists and residents prepare for the impact. The text and illustrations show how experts gather data to predict and decrease the harm to the region. It also shows how the residents work together as a community to prepare for what is soon to come. *Hurricane* offers an account of disaster preparedness and practical information for students to understand this type of weather.

**[How Sweet the Sound](#)** by Kwame Alexander and illustrated by Charly Palmer



This book provides a timeline celebrating the history and diversity of music shaped by Black Americans. The lyrical text coupled with the vibrant illustrations take the reader on a journey from talking drums and spirituals, to jazz, rock 'n' roll, funk, and rap. The text is descriptive of each era, extending the evolution of musical artistic styles. Song references and inferred artists will beckon you and your students to use popular online music sources to listen to the tunes while pondering the dynamic and powerful double-page spread illustrations.

**[Big Enough](#)** by Regina Linke



The soft, fine-tuned artwork and the encouraging text celebrate positive thinking and perseverance. The story follows young Ah-Fu as he embraces the idea that being “big enough” means being confident and capable. With a vivid imagination that is depicted in the culturally respectful illustrations, Ah-Fu sets out on a journey to bring home an ox while listening to the animals and creatures of the woods for advice. This book offers a message that encourages readers of all ages to believe in a growth mindset.

**Broken** by X. Fang



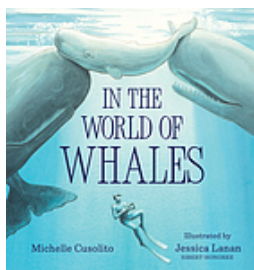
As we continue to ponder books that support emotional intelligence, this book helps students to understand self-awareness and to own up to your mistakes. When Mei Mei teases Mimi the cat, it knocks over his Ama's favorite mug and it breaks into three pieces. Mei Mei learns a few childhood lessons and one in particular is about breaking something that is important to others. The illustrations vividly tell the story drama on their own which makes this a perfect Caldecott nominee.

**Fireworks** by Matthew Burgess and illustrated by Catia Chien



If you like fireworks (as I do) this book is a sensory experience of sight and sound. The vocabulary and the illustrations used visually help you understand what the children are experiencing in their neighborhood. The "Whoop! Weee! and Woohoo!" are examples of the onomatopoeia that describe joy of running through a fire hydrant that has sprung a leak on the "hot steamy sidewalks." As the story continues, we get a sense of summertime warmth through depiction of juicy watermelon, listening to bouncy music and the sounds of "Hiss, Sizzle and Snap" of dinner cooking in the pan. But it is within the rising action that the fireworks begin. The remainder of this superbly illustrated book is the display of fireworks through artful crafting of explosive colors and words to match the sights and sounds. The surprise comes in the center of the book when the gatefold opens to reveal the explosive finale! As the action falls the children head home to nighttime rituals and then listen to the "gentlest within."

**In the World of Whales** by Michelle Cusolito and illustrated by Jessica Lanan



This book encourages students to explore marine life through two "free divers." In a rare experience, the divers witness the birth of a sperm whale and the clan of whales that help it take its first breath. The artwork represents the hues of the underwater existence with soft tones that help you feel that you are looking through the lens of the diver's camera. A gatefold provides a panoramic view of the magnitude of the whale family that work together to nurture the new member of their family.

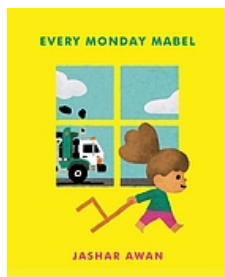
**A Place for Us** by James E. Ransome



This is a wordless picture book, about an unhoused mother and son and what they must do to make life work. The urban setting is depicted through the daily life of the young boy in the story and how his mother does her best to provide for him. There are many double-page spreads that help us see the city they must navigate through including the library where they spend many hours for both schoolwork as well as shelter. Other pages in this truth-filled book depict vignettes that display the episodic daily routines that the mother tries to provide for her child. It is a moving book that needs no words to tell its story.

**Every Monday Mabel** by Jashar Awan





Every Monday, Mabel wakes up early and peeks out her window to make sure she didn't miss the one thing she's been looking forward to the whole week: "the best thing," the garbage truck. She drags her chair down the hallway, cereal bowl in hand and walks past her big sister and Mom and Dad, goes out the door, and waits. The illustrations match the childlike wonder of a garbage truck, and the action lines, alliteration, font, and sound effects help readers understand why the massive machine rumbling to the curb is so special: "Liiiiiift." "Wheeeeeeeeeee." "Gah-dump." "TRASH TUMBLES INTO THE TRUCK!"

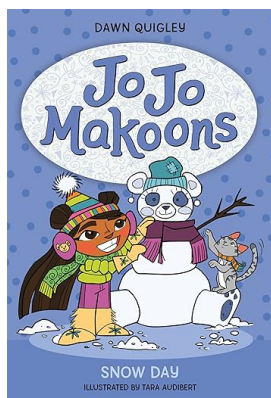
**These books are worthy of adding to your lists of outstanding selections for your Mock Caldecott, 2026**

- [\*\*Don't Trust Fish\*\*](#) by Neil Sharpson and illustrated by Dan Santat
- [\*\*A Gift of Dust: How Saharan Plumes Feed the Planet\*\*](#) by Martha Brockenbrough and illustrated by Juana Martinez-Neal
- [\*\*The History of We\*\*](#) by Nikkolas Smith
- [\*\*The True and Lucky Life of a Turtle\*\*](#) by Sy Montgomery and illustrated by Matt Patterson
- [\*\*Pop! Goes the Nursery Rhyme\*\*](#) by Betsy Bird and illustrated by Andrea Tsurumi
- [\*\*The Hole\*\*](#) by Lindsay Bonilla and illustrated by Brizida Magro
- [\*\*Anything\*\*](#) by Rebecca Stead and illustrated by Gracey Zhang
- [\*\*Our Lake\*\*](#) by Angie Kang
- [\*\*Where the Deer Slip Through\*\*](#) by Katey Howes and illustrated by Beth Krommes
- [\*\*A Book of Maps for You\*\*](#) by Lourdes Heuer and illustrated by Maxwell Eaton III

## Family Literacy Bookshelf

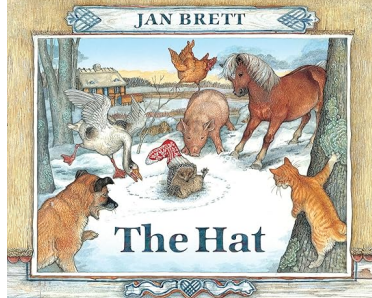
By Barb Ashton

Happy New Year and welcome 2026! January is a great time of the year to enjoy some outdoor winter activities, work on a puzzle in honor of National Puzzle Month, or have some hot chocolate while reading a good book.

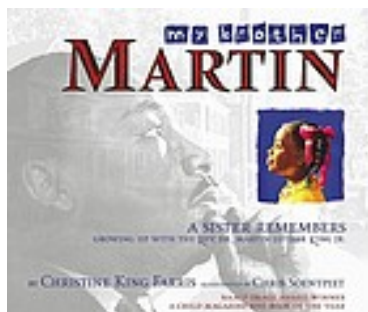


[\*\*Jo Jo Makoons: Snow Day\*\*](#) by Dawn Quigley is a delightful new series for our younger students. Jo Jo Makoons has noticed that the family members she loves most—Mama, Kokum, and even her cat, Mimi—all have their own ways of being healthy. So when Teacher says that their class will be learning about healthy habits, Jo Jo is ready to be *neighborly* by helping everyone around her be healthy too. After a snowstorm shuts down her Ojibwe reservation, Jo Jo uses her big imagination and big personality to help both Elders and classmates alike. Because after all, being healthy means being together!

[\*\*The Hat\*\*](#) by Jan Brett is a delightful book. When Lisa's



woolen stocking flies off the clothesline, Hedgeie finds it and pokes his nose in. He tries to pull it out, but the stocking gets stuck on his prickles and the fun begins. A mother hen comes by, then a noisy goose, a talkative barn cat, a playful farm dog, a mama pig and her piglets, and a pony. They all laugh at Hedgeie, especially when he pretends he's wearing a new hat. But in the end, it is clever Hedgeie who has the last laugh. And where is Lisa when all of this is going on?



[My Brother Martin: A Sister Remembers Growing Up with the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.](#) by Christine King Farris shares the story of how one boyhood experience inspired a movement that would change the world as we know it. Martin Luther King Jr. was a little boy who played jokes, practiced the piano, and made friends without considering race. But growing up in the segregated south of the 1930s taught young Martin a bitter lesson—little white children and little black children were not to play with one another. Martin decided then and there that something had to be done. And so he began the journey that would change the course of American history.

## Looking Ahead

**January 4: World Braille Day** – Celebrating a means of communication for blind people

**January 15: Martin Luther King Birthday**

**January 17: Benjamin Franklin Birthday**

**January 18: Winnie the Pooh Day – A. A. Milne's Birthday**

**January 19: Martin Luther King Day**

**January 20: Penguin Awareness Day**

**January 21: Squirrel Appreciation Day**

**January 29: National Puzzle Day**

**January 30: Multicultural Children's Book Day** – Now known as [Read Your World Day](#)



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

- **January 7, 2026: IRC Webinar** on Being Child Centered in A World That Wants to Center Everything Else with Cornelius Minor from 7:00 to 8:00 pm via Zoom Webinar.
- **January 9, 2026: Fox Valley Reading Council** will host Yoga, Laughter, & Literature: A

Night of Joyful Reading with Pat Braun from 5:30 to 7:00 pm at Persinger Recreational Center, 3507 Kaneville Rd, Geneva, Illinois.

- **January 12, 2026: Illinois Valley Reading Council** will host the Illinois Comprehensive Literacy Plan Webinar Series on Fluency from 4:30 to 5:30 pm via Zoom.
- **January 16, 2026: Prairie Area Reading Council (PARC)** will host Family Fort Night from 4:45 to 6:45 at the Westmont Public Library, 428 N Cass Ave, Westmont, Illinois.
- **January 18, 2026: IRC will begin 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.
- **January 20, 2026: MID-State Reading Council** will host Isn't It Ironic? Humanity Through Digital Literacy and AI with Cindi Koudelka from 6:30 to 7:30 pm at the Bloomington Public Library, 205 E Olive Street, Bloomington, Illinois.
- **January 23, 2026: Secondary Reading League (SRL) and Fox Valley Reading Council** will co-host Trivia Night at 6:30 pm at PAL Joey's, 31 N River Street, Batavia, Illinois.
- **January 27, 2026: Lewis and Clark Reading Council** will host SLD Kellyn Sirach: Fellowship and PD from 6:30 to 8:30 PM. More information will be available soon.
- **January 28, 2026: Chicago Area Reading Council (CARA)** will host Thawing the Reading Freeze: Rekindling Joy for Struggling Readers from 6:30 to 8:00 pm via a virtual event.

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.

**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](mailto:irc@illinoisreadingcouncil.org) or by phone at 309-454-1341.

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

