

Illinois Reading Council



Empowering
Lives
Through
Literacy

Communicator

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and follow us on:



"Any book that helps a child to form a habit of reading, to make reading one of his deep and continuing needs, is good for him."

~ Maya Angelou

2026

IRC CONFERENCE

March 12-13, 2026
Springfield, Illinois



ILLINOIS READING COUNCIL
a full literacy palette

The Illinois Reading Council is excited to share that registration and housing are open for the

2026 IRC Conference,

A Full Literacy Palette, March 12-13, 2026 in Springfield, Illinois.

Download the [2026 Preliminary Program](#) to find out all about the conference and the **featured speakers and presenters** that will be joining us this year.

You will also not want to miss the **Wednesday Welcome Reception**, the **Hear the Authors Read Event**, the **Illinois Reads Author Panels**, and over 150 PD Sessions that are being planned.

Program Proposals to present a session are also being accepted until December 15, 2025.

To find out more, visit www.illinoisreadingcouncil.org.



Download the Preliminary
Program



2026 ILLINOIS READS BOOK LIST

The Illinois Reading Council has just released the list of Illinois Reads books for 2026. Illinois Reads is a statewide program that promotes reading for all Illinois citizens. The program features six books in each of the six different age categories by authors and illustrators who have ties to Illinois. The books range from read-to books for infants to books for adult readers. Bookmarks and posters highlighting the Illinois Reads books will be available in early 2026. Order early as supplies are limited!

Birth-4

- *Dirt's Journey* by Sally M. Walker
- *E-I-UFO: Old MacDonald Had a Farm* by Zach von Zonk
- *Hugged by the Night* by Harold Green III
- *Inventions to Count On: A Celebration of Black Inventors: A Picture Book* by Dana Marie Miroballi
- *POP! Goes the Nursery Rhyme* by Betsy Bird

6-8

- *How the Ghost Army Hoodwinked Hitler: The Story of American Artistry and Deception in World War II* by Rebecca Siegel
- *Millie of the Manor: A Graphic Novel* by Karina Evans and illustrated by Andrea Bell
- *Severe and Unusual Weather* by Jessie Ann Foley
- *The Chronicles of Viktor Valentine* by Z.

- *Silly Puppies: Baby's First Giggles* by Heidi Bee Roemer

K-2

- *Emilia's Corte* by Veronica Castillo and illustrated by Juleesa Espinoza
- *Give Back* by Gina Bellisario
- *Piece Out* by Alex Willan
- *Seasons on the Farm* by Chelsea Tornetto
- *Smithy and Me* by Darcy Day Zoells
- *The Scariest Story You've Ever Heard* by Ron Keres

3-5

- *Ava the Monster Slayer: Sleepover Superheroes* by Lisa Maggiore
- *Hulk Teach!* by Jeffrey Brown
- *Rachel Carson's Wonder-Filled World: How the Scientist, Writer, and Nature Lover Changed the Environmental Movement* by Kate Hannigan
- *Rock Paper Incisors: A Skunk and Badger Story* by Amy Timberlake
- *The Curse of Great Winter Academy: Choose Your Own Adventure* by Jessika Fleck
- *The Gift of Freedom: How Harriet Tubman Rescued Her Brothers* by Glennette Tilley Turner

Brewer

- *The Scott Fenwick Diaries: A Novel* by Kristin Nilsen
- *The Song of Orphan's Garden* by Nicole M. Hewitt

9-12

- *American Spirits: The Famous Fox Sisters and the Mysterious Fad that Haunted a Nation* by Barb Rosenstock
- *Before Takeoff* by Adi Alsaid
- *Dream by the Shadows* by Logan Karlie
- *Mae: The Definitive Edition* by Gene Ha
- *Many Voices: Building Erie, The Canal That Changed America* by Laurie Lawlor
- *The Corruption of Hollis Brown* by K. Ancrum

Adult

- *Amity: A Novel* by Nathan Harris
- *Death of the Author: A Novel* by Nnedi Okorafor
- *Fagin the Thief: A Novel* by Allison Epstein
- *Remember You Will Die: A Novel* by Eden Robins
- *The Ex-Girlfriend Murder Club: A Feminist Murder Mystery of Three Women Teaming Up to Solve a Crime and Get Revenge on a Cheating Ex* by Gloria Chao
- *Tractor Wars: John Deere, Henry Ford, International Harvester, and the Birth of Modern Agriculture* by Neil Dahlstrom

The Illinois Reads Program will be featured at the annual **2026 IRC Conference** on March 12-13, 2026 in Springfield. IRC is thrilled to share that 22 of the authors will be attending to share their books during the **Illinois Reads Author Panels**. Conference registration is now open for educators, librarians, and others interested in promoting literacy.

The 2026 Illinois Reads Program will also be featured at the **Illinois Reads Book Festival** on April 25, 2026 at National Teachers Academy in Chicago. Readers throughout Illinois are invited to this free event. And, don't miss the 2026 Illinois Reads Sneak Peak planned on December 5, 2026 at Anderson's Bookshops in Downers Grove.

Visit www.illinoisreads.org to find out more about each book and other upcoming Illinois Reads events.

RESOURCES

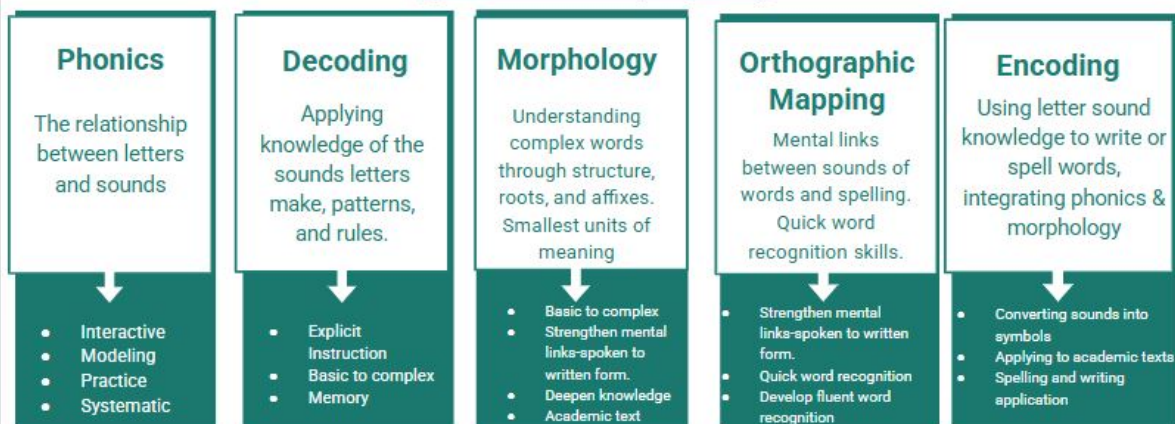
UNLOCKING THE ILLINOIS COMPREHENSIVE LITERACY PLAN: WORD RECOGNITION

By Donna Herman and Deb Augsburger

Words, words, words – the wonder of Word Recognition! Continuing our discussion of the ICLP, Part IV, Word Recognition, we identify the components and skills addressed with explicit and systemic teaching. Word Recognition encompasses five areas that often overlap or may be overlooked. Specifically, Word Recognition includes:

COMPONENTS OF WORD RECOGNITION

<https://www.lahe.net/Documents/IL-Comp-Literacy-Plan-2024.pdf>



D. Herman, 2024 WCRC Webinar

Instructional practices that support word recognition include:

- Use environmental print to increase word knowledge in children's languages in early childhood.
- Read aloud frequently and label the learning environment to boost word awareness.
- Explicitly teach phonics rather than using generic worksheets.
- Avoid guessing words from context/pictures and instead teach phonetic decoding of the word beforehand. Use the context/pictures to confirm comprehension.
- Use decodable books aligned with curriculum for phonics instruction, rather than random selections of texts with unlearned phonics patterns. Vary the types of text used; don't rely solely on decodable books.
- Multi-sensory phonics approaches are most effective when they include kinesthetic as well as visual and auditory components.
- Explicitly teach spelling with phonics instead of random or non-phonics-based instruction.
- Teach decoding and encoding simultaneously; apply word recognition strategies to writing tasks.

- Intentionally teach morphology, emphasizing etymology and phonology of meaningful word parts, as well as word families, rather than isolated instruction of roots and affixes.
- Conduct word study instruction that includes the structure of words (derivational morphology).
- Teach decoding strategies for multisyllabic words that include syllabication and identification of roots and affixes (morphemes).

Definitions

- **Grapheme**-letters that represent sound
 - K-3rd grade
- **Phoneme**-Sounds heard in a word
 - K-3rd grade
- **Morphology**-The study of the internal structure of words
 - 2nd -12th grade
- **Etymology**-the study of the origins (history) of words.
 - 2nd-12 grade
- **Phonology**-the study of the patterns of sounds
 - 2nd-12th grade
- **Derivational morphology**-how words change by adding prefixes/suffixes
 - 1st through 12th grade
- **Affixes**-a word element added to a root/base word
 - 2nd-12th grade

D Herman/D Augsburgur 2024 /ICLP 2024

See resources on the [ISBE](#) website for the ICLP. In the next issue, we will discuss *Fluency* in the ICLP.

FROM THE DESK OF IRC PRESIDENT

Cindi Koudelka

**FINDING JOY, CENTERING OURSELVES,
AND LOOKING AHEAD TOGETHER**

October always feels like a season of balance—between the rush of a new school year and the grounding rhythms of autumn. As educators, readers, and leaders, this is a moment to pause, breathe, and remember why we do this work: to nurture joy, connection, and discovery through literacy.

One of the most powerful ways to stay centered is through storytelling. Getting lost in a good book is more than an escape—it's a way of finding ourselves again. In those pages, we find mirrors of our own experiences and windows into perspectives that expand our empathy. Whether you're reaching for a novel that stirs laughter, a memoir that deepens compassion, or a professional text that inspires growth, let reading be your anchor in the busy days ahead.

I invite you to take this sense of joy and connection beyond your personal reading and join us in community. Our **IRC Book Clubs begin October 19**, offering a space to share conversation, exchange ideas, and deepen our practice together. Read, reflect on, and respond to any (or all) of our selections—*The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood Is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness* by Jonathan Haidt, *Rebellion 1776* by Laurie Halse Anderson, *La Enseñanza en el Aula Bilingüe: Content, Language, and Biliteracy* by Sandra Mercuri, Sandra Musanti, and Alma Rodriguez. These gatherings remind us that literacy is not a solitary act—it's collective, communal, and transformative.

As we look further ahead, mark your calendars for the **IRC Annual Conference, scheduled for March 12–13, 2026, in Springfield**. This event is always a highlight of the year: a chance to connect with nationally recognized speakers, engage in thought-provoking sessions, and leave refreshed with practical tools and renewed inspiration. Attending the conference is not just professional development—it's professional nourishment.

In these next months, I encourage you to embrace both stillness and connection: savor the quiet joy of curling up with a good book, and then step into the vibrant energy of learning alongside your colleagues. Together, we can keep literacy at the heart of our classrooms, our communities, and our lives.

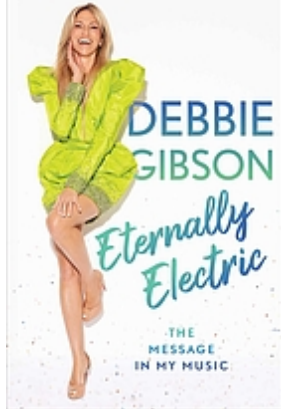
Here's to finding joy, staying centered, and building a future rooted in stories, connection, and hope.

#WhatIAmReading



I am reading [*Eternally Electric: The Message in My Music*](#) by Debbie Gibson.
~ Jennifer Erickson, 4th Grade Teacher

People say I must really believe in my students, but I don't just believe, I know; I know what my kids can do, and each of my students leaves an everlasting handprint on my heart. There's an art to being a great teacher: a teacher is a parent, a therapist, a vision facilitator, "emotional fluffer." We are "on a dual mission with a singular vision...A blend of being present and open to surprises with a pencil sketch of how I want



it to look in the end” as an instructor. That’s the craft of teaching: “What matters is that level of caring and investment we have in each other as human beings.” Debbie Gibson’s new memoir is *Educationally* and *Eternally Electric!*

IRC is reading the books from the [Fall 2025 IRC Book Clubs](#).

~ Stephanie Benson, IRC Book Club Chair



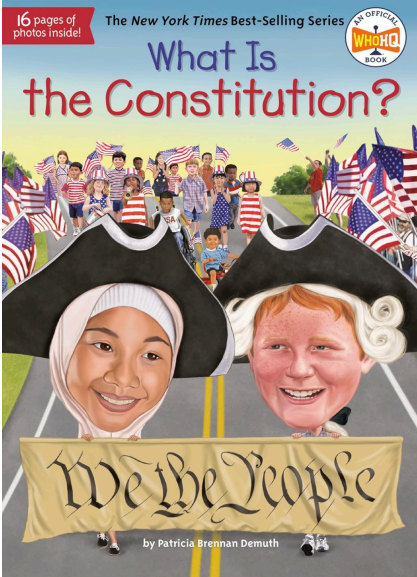
Join educators from all over the state in the online **Fall 2025 IRC Book Club**! Choose one, two, or all three books! Read, reflect on, and respond to [The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood Is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness](#) by Jonathan Haidt and/or [Rebellion 1776](#) by Laurie Halse Anderson and/or [La Enseñanza en el Aula Bilingüe: Content, Language, and Biliteracy](#) by Sandra Mercuri, Sandra Musanti, and Alma Rodriguez. Participants who complete all assignments will be eligible to receive **15 PD clock hours** for each book club. Register by October 15, 2025, to participate in the book club.

Family Literacy Bookshelf

By Barb Ashton

Autumn has arrived. During October we’re reminded about bullying and hazing prevention, school safety, fire prevention, and family history month. Columbus Day or Indigenous Peoples’ Day and Halloween are also part of October’s calendar of events.

Almost 240 years ago the “Founding Fathers” wrote the Constitution which became the official law of the United States of America. To better understand this document read [What Is the Constitution?](#) by Patricia Brennan Demuth. The author gives the reader an overview of the events and major components within this document. As America grew as a country so did the needs of the people. The author



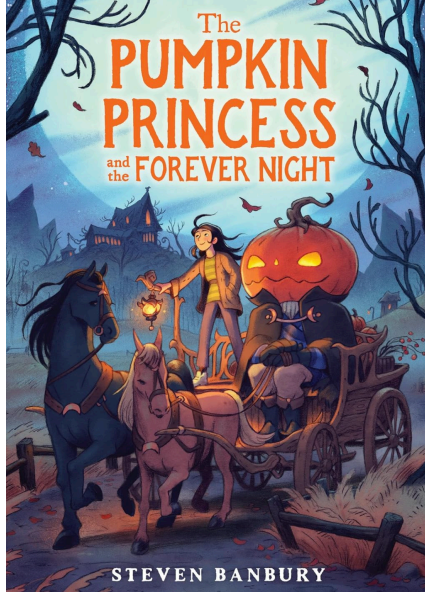
takes the reader through the process of how the Constitution needed to be amended to meet their needs. *What Is the Constitution?* is a nice introduction to a study of the Constitution for middle grade students and up. It provides many opportunities for discussion. Sidebars provide short stories of the historical figures involved with writing the Constitution. Black and white illustrations and photographs enhance the text. This book would also be helpful for your struggling readers and ESL/bilingual students.



In the past, students with disabilities were not accepted in schools as they are today. To learn how change came about read the biographical book [*Fighting For Yes!: The Story of Disability Rights Activist Judith Heumann*](#) by Maryann Cocca-Leffler. This is the story of Judith Heumann who became known as “The Mother” of the disability rights movement. Born in 1947, when she was 18 months old she was struck by polio. The vaccine for polio wasn’t available yet and Judy needed to use a wheelchair. When her mom took her to register for kindergarten the principal refused her from entering the school because she was a “fire hazard.” In those days there were no ramps, or lifts, only stairs, or other provisions for such students. Judy was finally able to attend public school in 4th grade even though students with disabilities were segregated from the rest of the students. When it came time to graduate Judy couldn’t be on stage with the rest of her class but rather in the back where she

couldn’t be seen in her wheelchair. Judy was happiest when she attended Camp Oakhurst – a summer camp for kids with disabilities that had ramps and trails and was totally wheelchair-friendly. Judy continued her education even though it was a struggle. She graduated college and applied for her teaching license but was refused. She won her case in court and fulfilled her dream of teaching students like her. Throughout her adult life, she and other activists worked to change the laws which eventually led to the law now known as the Americans with Disabilities Act. *Fighting For Yes!* is an inspiring and engaging book to read. The lovely illustrations capture the emotions, struggles, and successes Judy endured throughout her life. This is a book for all libraries. The back of the book provides a wealth of further information about Judy Heumann and resources for further reading. *Fighting For Yes!* can also be viewed on YouTube.

Halloween is almost here. Ready for a good spooky tale? Read [*The Pumpkin Princess and the Forever Night*](#) by Steven Banbury. It’s Halloween and thus begins the adventure of a young girl’s journey to the land of the undead and the family she meets on her journey. Eve, the young girl, has been living at an orphanage since her parents died. She has tried to run away several times but always ends up being caught and returned to the orphanage. With more in-depth planning Eve escapes the



orphanage on Halloween night. This time she makes it to the nearby forest, where she starts to hear strange noises and takes cover among the trees. Feeling somewhat scared but somewhat safe she continues her journey. Eve meets up with the fabled Pumpkin King. Impressed by Eve's verve, the Pumpkin King offers to adopt her and make her the Pumpkin Princess of Halloween Valley. This is a hidden land where undead creatures such as vampires, werewolves, and witches, etc., are inhabitants. Eve soon makes friends with Lyla, Viad, Scraggs the Scarecrow, and of course, the Pumpkin King. However, not everyone is pleased to have Eve living with them and they are making plans of their own to take everything from her, as well as her new home. Will Eve overcome her fears and find the home she dreams of? You'll need to read **The Pumpkin Princess and the Forever Night**. This is a delightful Halloween story that includes many typical Halloween tricks and spooky events but also is whimsical, heartwarming and an engaging fall or Halloween read for middle school and older students of all learning abilities. This book would

make a nice addition to your Halloween books.

Looking Ahead

This is the 80th anniversary of the founding of the United Nations. Go to <https://www.un.org>. Click on Celebrating 80 to see all information and video about the United Nations to share with your students and families.

October 5: World Teacher Day

October 5-11: Banned Book Week

October 9: Illinois Great Apple Crunch Day – Check out this [Guide of Activities](#)

October 13: Columbus Day

October 16: National Dictionary Day

October 20: National Day of Writing – Check out this [Toolkit of Writing Activities](#)

October 24: United Nations Day

October 23-31: Red Ribbon Week

October 31: Halloween



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

- **October 2, 2025: Northern Illinois Reading Council** will host Squeeze It In! Making Time for Meaningful Read Aloud Experiences with Maria Walther from 5:30 to 7:30 pm at

- **October 7, 2025: Illinois Valley Reading Council** will host the Illinois Comprehensive Literacy Plan Webinar Series on Phonological Awareness from 4:30 to 5:30 pm via Zoom.
- **October 7, 2025: 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.
- **October 8, 2025: Lake Area Reading Council** will host Game Night & Trivia from 4:30 to 7:30 at the Parched Pug, 1590 S Milwaukee Ave Ste 100, Libertyville, Illinois.
- **October 15, 2025: Central Illinois Reading Council** will host a Book Chat from 4:00 to 6:00 pm at Sly Fox Books, 123 N Springfield St, Virden, Illinois.
- **October 16, 2025: Lewis and Clark Reading Council** will host Barrels and Bru Meet, Greet, & Free PD from 6:30 to 8:30 pm at Barrels and Bru Tap House, 6151 Trace Pkwy Dr, Suite D, Edwardsville, Illinois.
- **October 19, 2025: Summer 2025 IRC Book Clubs** will begin for *The Anxious Generation* book club, the *Rebellion 1776* book club, and/or *La Enseñanza en el Aula Bilingüe* book club.
- **October 23, 2025: Illinois Valley Reading Council** will host Bring Literacy to Life Through Art with Patricia Braun and Marianne Stremsterfer from 5:00 to 6:30 pm at the Peoria County Health Department, Community Room 21, 2116 N Sheridan Rd, Peoria, Illinois.
- **October 23, 2025: Southern Illinois Reading Council** will host AI in the Classroom with Tim Wheeler from 6:30 to 8:00 pm at Murphysboro Middle School, 2125 Spruce Street, Murphysboro, Illinois.
- **October 24, 2025: Secondary Reading League (SRL)** will host the 46th Day of Reading with Dr. Katie McKnight from 9:00 am to 3:00 pm at the Tinley Park Convention Center, 18501 Convention Center Drive, Tinley Park, Illinois.
- **October 25, 2025: Sauk Valley Reading Council** will participate in the Dixon Community Trunk or Treat from 10:00 to 11:30 am at the Dixon Town Square Center in Dixon, Illinois.
- **October 28, 2025: Suburban Council of IRA (SCIRA)** will host Embrace Oracy: Empower All Children with Heidi Marchetti and Mal Keenan from 4:30 to 6:00 pm at National Louis University, 1000 Capitol Drive, Wheeling, Illinois.
- **November 1, 2025: IRC** is accepting submissions for the following awards and grants:
 - **[IRC Service Award](#)**: This award will recognize an outstanding IRC Leader for time, commitment, and service to the Illinois Reading Council.
 - **[IRC Hall of Fame Award](#)**: This award recognizes significant contributions to reading and reading education.
 - **[Barack Obama Library Award](#)**: This award is a classroom library valued at \$1,000, 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.

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:

- Why We Need to Read Banned Books
- Tips for Teaching Writing
- Board Games that Teach Literacy Skills
- Trauma Informed Practices
- 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:

