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FVRC WINTER NEWSLETTER

Colors of Literacy

Your 2025-2026 Board

President-Camille Lutz, President-Elect & Membership-Kristen Walsh, Secretary-Katina Kastrantas, Treasurer-Diana Wilkie, Social Media-Ashley Falkos, Past President-Dawn Lutz; Illinois Reads-Katina Kastrantas

President's Letter

Greetings all (one of my sweet students recommended I start the letter like that),

Here we are – January! Did you make any resolutions? If you did, I hope they're still going strong.

Like some of you, I'm sure, I spend the first few days of school working with students on goals for the year. This includes self-reflection, which can be a real struggle for some of them. Many find it much harder to identify their successes than their challenges. After individual reflections, students are encouraged to create a vision for the year. From that vision, they brainstorm a single word that represents their goals.

Your FVRC board consistently reflects on events, communication with members, and partnerships with nonprofit organizations. While we haven't chosen one word to represent our vision, we will be reaching out this spring to gather your ideas for future council events – and maybe some of you



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Geneva Pub



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Our winter newsletter takes a small page from my students' project this week. We've reflected on past events, including the Fall Book Talk and our Illinois Reads/Family Reading event. We've also shared information about a super fun upcoming event with our sister council, SRL, and included some excellent novel reviews in hopes that you'll add a few titles to your classroom library – or enjoy them for your own reading pleasure.

Inspire Growth,
Camille Lutz
FVRC President

Welcome New Members

Sarah Hilb
Donna Kouri
Carolyn Lenc
Jennifer Naster
Rebecca VanDyke





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Event Information

Trivia Night: by SRL & FVRC

Get ready for a night of fun and friendly competition with SRL Trivia Night - test your knowledge and win some cool prizes!

Come join us for a fun-filled evening of ****trivia**** at Pal Joey's Restaurant & Bar. Test your knowledge on a variety of topics while enjoying food and drinks with friends. Test your intellectual mettle over the course of three trivia rounds and come prepared with cash for fun dollar games and our 50/50 raffle.

Get ready to compete, laugh, and maybe even win some awesome prizes! Don't miss out on this exciting event - see you there!

When?

Friday, Jan 23, 2026, 06:30 PM

Where?

Pal Joey's Restaurant & Bar, North River Street, Batavia, IL



Get ready for a night of fun and friendly competition with SRL Trivia Night - test your knowledge and win some cool prizes!

eventbrite.com

IRC Webinars

IRC Webinar Series
All webinars will begin at 7:00 p.m.

IRC will be offering the Webinar Series for members only in 2025-2026. All webinars will begin at 7:00 p.m. Members who watch the live or recorded webinars can earn professional development clock hours. Mark your calendars and register to take part in this convenient, free IRC membership benefit. Members will receive monthly emails with links to register. Nonmembers can join online and email for the registration link.

<p>September 3, 2025 ~ Lindsey Moses Supporting Multilingual Learners: Practical Strategies for Inclusive Language and Literacy Instruction</p> <p>As classrooms become increasingly diverse, educators need effective, research-based strategies to support multilingual learners across content areas. This session offers practical guidance for designing inclusive instruction that promotes language and literacy development as well as academic achievement. Dr. Lindsey Moses will share examples and videos of classroom-tested strategies that foster oral language, reading comprehension, vocabulary development, and writing across the curriculum.</p>	<p>February 4, 2026 ~ Becky Anderson Discovering the 2026 Illinois Reads Books</p> <p>Join Becky Anderson as she presents the Illinois Reads books for 2026. Learn more about the Illinois Reads statewide literacy initiative that promotes reading for all Illinois citizens. Six books in each of the six age bands from Birth to Adult will be shared. A variety of book topics and themes are chosen for each age band, highlighting the work of Illinois Authors.</p>
<p>October 1, 2025 ~ Candace Fleming Nonfiction Fun ... Truly!</p> <p>Can kids write engaging nonfiction? Absolutely! In this fast-paced presentation, two-time Sibert medalist Candace Fleming will share secrets for creating fun and fascinating nonfiction with young writers. Participants will not only discover strategies for effective research and directed inquiry, but they will also leave with reams of tips and ideas to help students create exciting "true stories" rather than dull encyclopedic accounts.</p>	<p>March 4, 2026 ~ Yolanda Sealey-Ruiz Verses of Becoming: Poetry as Radical Self-Discovery</p> <p>In this webinar, Dr. Yolanda Sealey-Ruiz explores poetry as both mirror and doorway—a sacred practice for naming truths, confronting wounds, and reclaiming the fullness of self. Through reading and writing, poetry offers a language for what is often unspeakable, helping educators and students give voice to their lived experiences.</p>
<p>November 5, 2025 ~ Colby Sharp Awesometastic New Books!</p> <p>In this session, Colby will book talk some of his favorite 2025 picture books, chapter books, middle grade novels. Colby is the co-founder of <i>Nerdy Book Club</i>. He co-hosts <i>The Yarn</i> podcast with Terri Janket. Colby co-authored <i>Game Changer! Book Access for All Kids</i> with Donalyn Miller, and he is the editor of <i>The Creativity Project: An Awesometastic Story Collection: A Conversation Guide to Your Classroom Library</i> written with Donalyn Miller, is his latest book.</p>	<p>April 1, 2026 ~ Kimberly N. Parker Literacy Is Liberation: What Still Matters in Today's Times!</p> <p>In this presentation, Dr. Parker will reinforce what continues to matter in our literacy work from her book, <i>Literacy Is Liberation: Working Toward Culturally Relevant Teaching</i>.</p>
<p>December 3, 2025 ~ Shawna Coppola "Redefining" Writing for Greater Equity, Engagement, and Authenticity!</p> <p>Many of the ways we've conceptualized literacy need revising if we are to truly challenge some of the inequities that "live" within our educational system. How might this look when considering how we teach our students to write (i.e., to compose texts)? What paradigm shifts are necessary for ensuring that all of our students see themselves as "writers"?</p>	<p>May 6, 2026 ~ Whitney La Rocca Look Again! Inviting Students and Teachers into Possibilities for Revision</p> <p>What happens when we take another look, with curiosity over judgement, at student writing—and when we invite our students to do the same? In this interactive webinar, we'll examine how reframing revision as discovery can help students make meaningful choices as writers. Join us to reflect on your own feedback practices, learn new ways to support revision through three pathways of support (oral language, illustrations, and written language), and engage students in conversations to elevate their writing.</p>
<p>January 7, 2026 ~ Cornelius Minor Being Child Centered in A World That Wants to Center Everything Else</p> <p>We know the importance of using data to inform instruction and classroom based decision making. And we know that data is not just last year's test score. The most important data points walk into our schools each morning. What children do, how they do it, and what they say in response to our classroom practice is consistent information that we can use when making decisions. In this session, we will explore tools, methods, and practices that enable us to teach powerfully — with what we learn from and about young people at the center.</p>	<p>June 3, 2026 ~ Samira Ahmed and Sara K. Ahmed A Summer of Inquiry & Justice: Build Your Stack & Your Inquiry Journal</p> <p>Dive into "A Summer of Justice," a series of focused on diverse fiction and nonfiction book talks—perfect for read-alouds, classroom shelves, or book clubs—stay for the paired research ideas. We'll also share how your own summer "Inquiry Journal" can serve you as a curious learner, then a mentor to student-led research, reflection, and civic engagement in the fall. You'll leave with a carefully curated list to support your local bookseller, all while gaining renewed inspiration to guide your summer of impactful learning and justice-oriented inquiry.</p>

To register, sign into your IRC Membership Account at www.illinoisreadingcouncil.org

2026

IRC CONFERENCE

March 12-13, 2026
Springfield, Illinois



ILLINOIS READING COUNCIL
a full literacy palette

2026 IRC Conference

The Illinois Reading Council is excited to announce that the 2026 IRC Conference will celebrate a “Full Literacy Palette.” This year’s conference will be held March 12–13, 2026, at the Bank of Springfield Center and the President Abraham Lincoln Hotel in Springfield.

This year’s theme highlights the many dimensions of literacy instruction and the vibrant practices educators bring to their classrooms every day. Conference attendees will have the opportunity to learn from featured speakers and engage in meaningful conversations with colleagues from across the state.

Together, we will explore strategies, research, and classroom applications that strengthen our instructional efficacy and deepen our understanding of literacy across content areas and grade levels.

The IRC Conference is more than professional learning—it is a celebration of our shared commitment to fostering a love of literacy and lifelong learning in ourselves and our students. We look forward to gathering as a community to reflect, collaborate, and leave inspired with new ideas to support readers and writers at every stage of their journey.



Upcoming spring event for your calendar! “Wine, Dine, and Collaborate” on April 24th

Please put our annual teacher appreciation “Wine, Dine, and Collaborate” on April 24, 2026 from 5:30-7 on your calendar! Amy from Up North Wine and Tasting Room at 9 N. Second St. in Geneva



makes an a



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ie on us!

Last year we had three authors join us as pictured. Second from the left is Jacob Grant, front and center is Tom Lichtenheld, and fifth from the left is Carolyn Crimi. What a wonderful treat! Hopefully you can be with us this year. We already have a different mystery author slated to join us!

Clue #1 to our mystery author: HE lives in Geneva, IL.

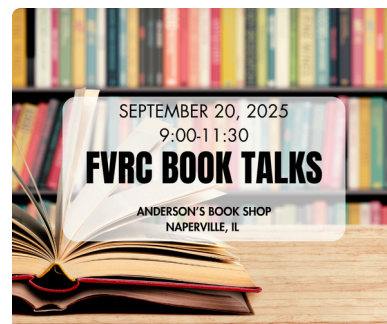
Fall Book Talks Recap

✨ Thanks to all who came out for our weekend Book Talk at Anderson's Bookshop (Naperville, IL) ✨

We spent the morning exploring the newest K–8 reads and professional books that pair perfectly with the Illinois Comprehensive Literacy Plan (ICLP). 📖💡

From heartwarming picture books to can't-put-down middle grade novels—and professional resources packed with ideas—every recommendation left us excited to share fresh stories and strategies with our students.

A huge thank-you to the wonderful team at Anderson's Bookshop for hosting and to the presenters for filling our TBR lists and our hearts. This event proved once again how the right books can spark a lifelong love of reading!



Illinois Reads Event-Recap

Reading offers lasting enjoyment and helps set young readers on a path toward lifelong learning. To underscore the importance of reading at every age and to support Illinois authors FVRC hosts an annual Illinois Reads Event that families can enjoy together.

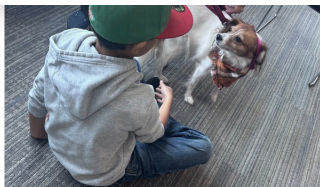
On November 15th, FVRC hosted an Illinois Reads Event once again at Santori Library in Aurora. This year's theme was "Draw like an Illustrator," and the activities were inspired by Illinois Reads books. Children of all ages painted mini canvases derived from the book The Great Lakes by Barb Rosenstock, created comic strips based on the book One Cool Duck by Mike Petrik, and designed a winter bird scene (by using torn up construction paper) based on the book Rare Birds by Jeff Miller. Dawn Lutz, our past-President, read Illinois Reads books to the children, and another station included therapy dogs, which is always a big hit! Before families headed out, they chose an Illinois Reads book, donated by FVRC, to take home. It is always exciting to see returning families come to the event.



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Your FVRC Board and Friends

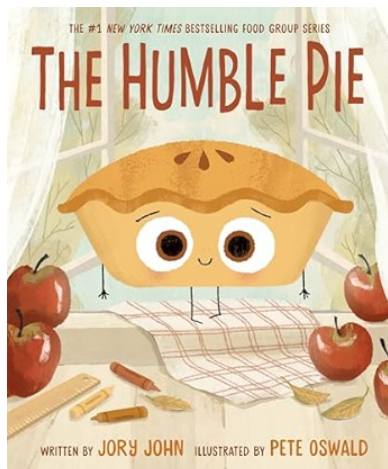


Therapy Dog



Storytime

Book Reviews by our Board



The Humble Pie by Jory John and Illustrated by Pete Oswald

Elementary

Jory John and Pete Oswald—known for their beloved *The Bad Seed* series—serve up another delightful and meaningful story in *The Humble Pie*. True to their signature blend of humor and heart, this picture book offers a flavorful reminder that we all need a slice of humility now and then.

The story follows a boastful young narrator who can't help but brag about his many accomplishments, until a wise parent decides it's time for a "special" dessert: humble pie. What follows is a clever,

lighthearted exploration of pride, perspective, and personal growth. The witty, rhythmic text makes the story fun to read aloud, while Oswald's vibrant illustrations capture the humor and emotion of each moment with expressive detail.

By Kristen Walsh

And Then, Boom! by Lisa Fipps

Elementary/Middled School

Get ready for a story that *explodes* with heart and honesty! This powerful novel in verse follows a boy whose world is turned upside down when his parents split and he's forced to deal with hunger. With Fipps's signature emotional depth and poetic style, readers will connect to the themes of resilience, friendship, and finding your voice when life feels out of control. Perfect for middle-grade readers who loved *Starfish* or *Coyote Ugly*!

By Ashley Falkos



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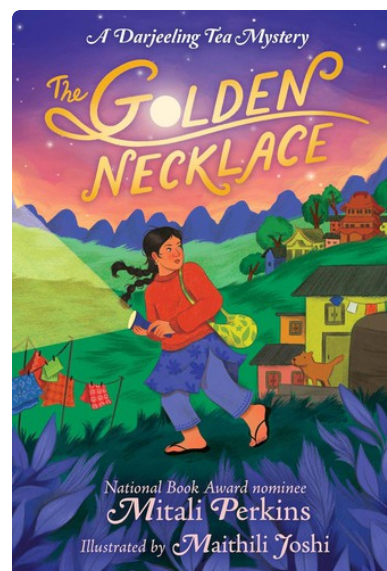
The Golden Necklace by Mitali Perkins

Middle School

National Book Award nominee Mitali Perkins crafts a contemporary chapter-book mystery about a Nepali girl who sets out to solve the disappearance of her Bengali friend's missing jewelry. Set within a tea plantation in Darjeeling, 7-10-year-old readers are transported across the world to a politically and culturally rich setting, following our brave heroine, Sona.

Sona, a 12-year-old Nepali girl, has struck up a friendship with Tara, the niece of the greedy tea plantation manager who has promised Tara's hand in marriage in order to get his hands on her inheritance of precious jewelry. Then Tara's gold jewelry goes missing. The search is on for the culprit, and Sona must use all her wits in order to prove it wasn't her beloved brother, Samiran Daju, who stole it.

By Kristen Walsh



X Marks the Haunt by Lindsay Currie (Illinois author)

Middle School

Because of his mother's job at a local cemetery, twelve-year-old Will Stone has an unusual set of skills. He understands how burial vaults work and why they're necessary, excels at genealogy, and can decipher centuries-old records, which are hardly typical after-school hobbies.

Life at Graceland Cemetery is usually quiet and predictable, but everything changes when a centuries-old crypt key goes missing. Soon, unsettling events begin to unfold: trees wither and the

lake become
eerie myste
putting Will and his friends at risk.



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As the signs grow more ominous, Will realizes the lost key may have unleashed a dark force within the cemetery gates. Teaming up with his friends Stash, Michelle, and Henry, he must rely on his unique knowledge to uncover which restless spirit is behind the haunting and end it for good.

By Kristen Walsh



Rebellion 1776 by Laurie Halse Anderson

Middle School/YA

Fast-paced and full of suspense, *Rebellion* pulls readers into a world where Elsbeth (a spunky 13-year-old girl) proves that courage means standing up. Anderson delivers a gripping story of friendship, bravery, and the power of speaking out against injustice. Perfect for readers who love stories with action, heart, and a message that lingers long after the last page, as Anderson's work usually does.

By Ashley Falkos

The Great Misfortune of Stella Sedgwick by S. Isabelle

Young Adult

Stella Sedgwick is a lost cause. Banished from etiquette lessons and unsure of her future, Stella dreams of a writing career and independence, but 1860s England offers little opportunity beyond marriage or servitude for a sharp-tongued, dark-skinned girl.

When her late mother's former employer summons Stella to London, he tells her of his intention to bequeath one of the family's great estates to her. It's a life-changing inheritance, but one that will precipitate a legal battle that would be easier if Stella were married. With her cousin Olivia by her side, Stella is thrust into London society and must navigate fashion and balls, insults and stares, and a rekindled connection to Nathaniel, her childhood best friend with a rakish reputation.

Beyond the
opportunities



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advice column to guide readers through upper-class pents. As new acquaintances are made and old secrets are uncovered, Stella must decide when to play by the rules, when to break them, and when to let herself follow her heart.

By Kristen Walsh



The River is Waiting by Wally Lamb

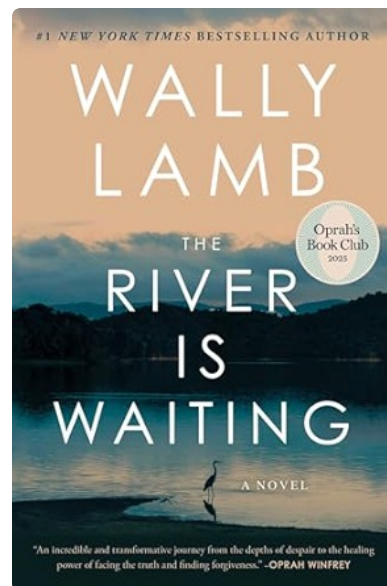
Adult

Wally Lamb's novel *The River Is Waiting* is a powerful exploration of loss, guilt, and redemption. Known for his deep empathy and rich storytelling, Lamb once again captures the complexities of human emotion in a story that lingers long after the final page.

The novel follows Corby Ledbetter, a father whose world collapses after a tragic accident leads to his imprisonment. Drawing on his real-world experience teaching writing in a correctional facility, Lamb paints an authentic, unflinching portrait of life behind bars—where moments of cruelty and compassion coexist. Through Corby's journey, readers confront uncomfortable truths about accountability, forgiveness, and the resilience of the human spirit.

The River Is Waiting is not an easy read as it wrestles with grief, addiction, and justice, but it is a profoundly moving one. This is for readers who appreciate literary fiction that delves into the moral and emotional heart of its characters.

By Kristen Walsh



Fox Valley Reading Council's Literacy Project Partnership with Love Smiles

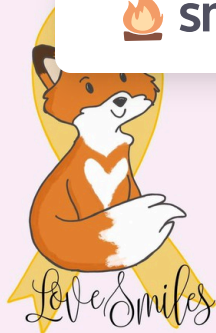
Love Smiles is committed to supporting families affected by pediatric cancer across the country.

We accept donations of any age books. If you would like to donate, contact dianawilkie@aol.com or feel free to bring books to any of our events.



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A BIG thank you goes out to...

Julie Strasser and Sandra Lundgren who donated school supplies and books when they attended our Fall Book Talk. Julie and Sandra, thank you for your support!

**Fox Valley Reading Council**

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