

FVRC SEPTEMBER NEWSLETTER

Find Your People

2026-2027 Board Members

Co-presidents: Camille Lutz and Kristen Walsh, Treasurer: Diana Wilkie, and Secretary: Tracy Beling
Membership Chair: Kristen Walsh and IL Reads Chair: Katina Kastrantas

The FVRC Board has room to expand!

We are looking for a Social Media Chair as well as board members-at-large to help with our events.
Please reach out if interested!

President's Letter

Who are your people? Who do you turn to when a lesson bombs?
Who is your "go-to" after a student finally has that *aha!* moment and the learning makes sense? Which friend always gives the best book recommendations? Who makes you laugh? Who is your shoulder to lean on?

We all have our people. Whether they are at school, at home, a neighbor, your best friend... the list could go on and on! Sometimes we find our people in schools and professional communities, and sometimes we find them between the pages of a book. I am sure you have come to the end of a novel and thought, "Oh man! What am I going to do without that character in my life?!" No?... just me? Either way, our love of reading and teaching has a wonderful way of helping us find our people.



Each year, your FVRC board comes up with a theme, and this year it is—you guessed it—Find Your People! As a council, we hope to provide connections, ideas, laughter, literacy, and community for you, our members. We have created new events and retooled some annual favorites, and we hope you'll find opportunities through FVRC that connect with you and your people.

As usual, I think this newsletter is chock-full of ideas, fun, and events! From our newest event, Reading Roundtable, designed for newer teachers (pre-service through five years), to one of the coolest opportunities I think we have offered—a virtual author event with Jason Reynolds—your FVRC board has been working diligently to create some pretty amazing experiences! Keep reading for our awesome book recommendations and information about upcoming IRC events. And don't forget to check out our Member Spotlight! Mara offers great advice on annotating and shares some of her middle school students' favorite novels. Thank you, Mara!

Also, stop by the Santori Library in Aurora on Saturday, November 14, from 10:00–11:00 a.m. to

help us get books into the hands of students during our annual Illinois Reads/Family Reading Night event, and be on the lookout for information about an upcoming event with Barnes & Noble in Geneva.

Wherever this school year takes you, I hope you continue to find the books that inspire you, the ideas that energize you, and the people who remind you why our work matters.

Inspire Growth,
Camille Lutz
FVRC Co-President

Upcoming FVRV Events-Mark Your Calendars!

- Oct. 15th @ 4:30 pm - Reading Roundtable - Geneva Library
 - Oct. 19th @ 5:30 pm - Board Meeting - Sturdy Shelter, Batavia
 - Nov. 14th @ 10:00 am - Illinois Reads - Santori Library, Aurora
 - Nov. 17th @ 12:30 pm - Bookelicious Presents Jason Reynolds
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FVRC's Newest Event!

Reading Roundtable @Geneva Public Library

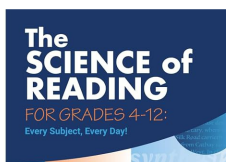
Your FVRC Board would like to encourage pre-service and new teachers to build their professional network, connect with educators from across the Fox Valley area, and ask questions of experienced teachers who have been in the field. If you are a veteran teacher, please reach out to a new teacher in your building and invite them to join us!

If you are a teacher with five years or less in the classroom, please consider stopping by. This event is a wonderful opportunity to meet other educators, share ideas, ask questions, and learn more about the Fox Valley Reading Council and the Illinois Reading Council. It's also a great first step toward getting involved in professional learning and connecting with a literacy community beyond your own school.

Sign up here: <https://FVRCreadingroundtable.eventbrite.com>

Fall Book Talk Recap

Beth Stephens from Anderson's Bookshop shared the newest books that have been published. This is just one of them. Letters from the Witch is a new version of The Jolly Postman complete with large envelopes that contain letters written in poetry. Very clever!



Dr. Kellie Doubek presented a preview of the featured speakers for the 2027 Illinois Reading Conference. Very knowledgeable, she gave fantastic information! This professional book by Katherine McKnight was a favorite. Written for grades 4-12, it is filled with



ready-to-use activities for before, during and after reading. Great organization with skills, strategy, Reading Rope strand, teaching steps, pro tip, look-fors, and a “check out” with a resource for more ideas.

Bookelicious - November 17th

Bookelicious Presents: Jason Reynolds!

Don't miss this exciting opportunity to hear from award-winning author Jason Reynolds! Join the Fox Valley Reading Council for a special Bookelicious Presents virtual author event on November 17, 2026, at 1:30 p.m. ET.

Jason Reynolds is the bestselling and award-winning author of Long Way Down, Ghost, Look Both Ways, and many other beloved books for young readers. This is a wonderful opportunity to bring your students together for an engaging author experience and inspire a love of reading and writing!

FVRC Member Price: \$40

Non-Member Price: \$50

Your registration includes access to the virtual event and a variety of Bookelicious resources, including a Student Activity Guide, Behind the Book bonus content, event recording, and opportunities for classrooms to participate in the live event.

Click here to register! <https://FVRCandJasonReynoldsVirtualEvent.eventbrite.com>

Member Spotlight - Mara Southorn!

What is your name, position, and district you work in:

Mara Southorn, Reading Specialist, Hill Middle School in Indian Prairie School District 204. I teach daily intervention classes for 6th through 8th grade students, and I provide individual and small-group interventions as necessary.



Briefly describe yourself, including personal information:

I'm a fourth-generation teacher - my great-grandmother taught in a one-room schoolhouse in western Nebraska until she got married and had to quit. My grandmother taught elementary school and my mother was a special ed teacher in the 1970s and then a middle school librarian. This is my 23rd year in this position, and I also taught high school English and reading for two years in Colorado.

My husband and I have a 9 year old and a 7 year old, and in the last couple years we have also gotten a dog and a cat. There is always someone running and/or making noise at our house.

What are you reading personally or professionally?

I always have at least three books going at the same time. Professionally, I'm reading Leveled Readers, Leveled Lives by Timothy Shanahan. I just finished Family of Spies by Christine Kuehn, a true story of the author's grandparents who were Nazi spies. For kids, I'm at the very end of The Danger of Small Things by Caryl Lewis, set in a dystopian future where bees no longer exist and the effects of that "small thing" are devastating.

What are some of your students' favorite books?

My students are still big fans of the Wimpy Kid series. They also like the I Survived graphic novels, and several enjoy middle-grade thrillers like The Girl Who Was Supposed to Die and A Good Girl's Guide to Murder.

What strategy or instructional tip do you love and why?

I love annotations! They help students stay engaged with what they are reading and they are also ready for discussion later. Rather than a complicated system, I have had great success with what we call "TQW" - write down Thoughts and Questions and circle unfamiliar and/or important Words.

Why is reading a passion for you?

Reading is so important to me because it provides so many different experiences - with literature, a reader can encounter historical periods, imagine the future, and - to quote Jeff Wilhelm quoting Santayana - have "imaginative rehearsals for living." Informative texts teach us about people and places far beyond our experience, expanding our empathy and helping us understand how the world became what it is. People also need literacy in order to function independently and take care of their people and make positive changes in their lives.

IRC International Projects

Sadly, we need to share that Carol Owles suddenly passed away last month. Carol was a cherished long-time member of the Illinois Reading Council and a dedicated leader on our Board of Directors. Through her work as chair of the IRC International Projects Committee, Carol made a profound impact for the Guatemalan Handicrafts and the Navajo Nation Scholarship and School Supplies Projects.

In her latest message to us on June 26, Carol relayed that she had talked to the Principal and Guidance Counselor at Monument Valley schools. They expressed their gratitude for the school supplies that we have delivered to them in each of the past two years. For them, our efforts have been exceptional help to the students and teachers there. For that reason, Carol wished to continue to meet this need. And her husband, Art, plans to continue this work.

This is the specific list they gave to Carol: backpacks, erasers, highlighters, pencils, post-it notes, spiral notebooks, pens, paper folders, 3-ring binders, 3-hole filler paper, dividers for the binders.

If you would like to donate these items or make a financial contribution, please contact Diana Wilkie directly at 630-615-1904. Your thoughtful gift ensures that the Illinois Reading Council can carry forward the vital initiatives to which Carol devoted so much of her life. She was an extraordinary literacy advocate, a true pillar of our community, and a dear friend who will be deeply missed.

IRC Webinars

The Illinois Reading Council offers webinars monthly through June, 2027. These are for IRC members only and begin at 7:00 p.m. Participants who watch the live or recorded webinars can earn professional development clock hours. So, mark your calendars and register to take part in this convenient, free IRC membership benefit.



Registration will open 3 weeks prior to each webinar.

Check out these upcoming webinars!
October 7, 2026

[Seeing, Hearing, and Valuing our Learners](#)

with Pamela A. Mason

November 4, 2026

[Real Life Revision Strategies](#)

with Barb Rosenstock

IRC Book Clubs Start October 18th!

[Register Today!](#)

Join educators from all over the state in the online Fall 2026 IRC Book Club! Choose one, two, or all three books!



Read, reflect on, and respond to **War Games** by Alan Gratz and/or **Trauma-Responsive Pedagogy** by Arlene Elizabeth Casimir, Courtney N. Baker, Nell K. Duke, and M. Colleen Cruz and/or **Growing Language & Literacy** by Andrea Honigsfeld.

Beginning October 18, educators will participate in online discussions for seven weeks.

In the War Games book club, participants will learn how to hold book clubs with their own middle grade classrooms based on this historical fiction novel about Olympic gold, Nazi gold, and a daring heist during the 1936 Berlin Olympics.

With the Trauma-Responsive Pedagogy book club, participants will be provided an actionable guide that offers research and inclusive frameworks to help create a trauma-responsive classroom with the tools needed to support their students through challenges.

Participants in the Growing Language & Literacy book club will choose between Growing Language & Literacy: Strategies for English Learners that provides K to 8th Grade Teachers with strategies to support EL students' academic language and literacy development based on the TESOL framework of language acquisition OR Growing Language & Literacy: Strategies for Secondary Multilingual Learners that provides secondary 6th to 12th grade teachers practical strategies to support adolescent multilingual learners across all grade levels and content areas.

Register by October 18, 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 the book is not included.

IRC Awards Nominations - Due November 1st

Know a great friend or colleague who deserves to be recognized? IRC has four amazing awards, and one might be just right for someone you know! Look on the IRC website for more information and how to nominate someone for the IRC Hall of Fame Award, IRC Service Award, Barack Obama Library Award, or the Jerry Johns Reading Educator of the Year Award.

2027 Illinois Reading Council Reading Conference!



Join IRC at the 58th Annual IRC Conference from March 11-12, 2027 at the Bank of Springfield Center and President Abraham Lincoln Hotel in Springfield, Illinois.



Interested in Presenting? IRC is accepting Program Proposals for those interested in presenting a session at the 2027 IRC Conference. Proposals must be submitted through the [Online Program Proposal Form](#). The deadline has been extended until December 15th. Please note that space is limited at this time! Take a moment to review the criteria for selection and general information about the IRC Conference including that presenters must register for the conference by February 1, 2027.

Interested in Registering? You can register for the 2027 IRC Conference by returning the [Registration Form by Mail/Fax](#) or through the [Online Conference Registration System](#). Early registration with discounted prices ends on February 5, 2027!

Interested in Volunteering? IRC is looking for volunteers to work at the 2027 IRC Conference in the registration booth, at conference events, and in many other areas. If interested, please take a moment to fill out the [Online Volunteer Form](#) by February 1, 2027. Thank you! Your help is much appreciated!

Wondering about Housing Reservations? The Housing System will be open on October 1st.

Book Reviews

Elementary

Lily-May's Joyful Day by John Schu

John Schu's Lily-May's Joyful Day is a heartwarming celebration of books, reading, and the simple joys that make a day memorable. With warmth and sincerity, Schu invites readers to experience the world through Lily-May's eyes as she discovers how reading can create moments of connection, wonder, and happiness.



At the heart of the story is an important message for anyone who believes in the power of literacy: reading is about more than learning to read, it is about discovering joy, finding yourself in stories, and connecting with others through books. Lily-May's enthusiasm reminds readers that books can become companions, sources of comfort, and invitations to explore new possibilities.

Middle Grade

The Secret Bookstore Sleuth Society by Lindsay Currie

If you are looking for a book that combines mystery, friendship, and a genuine love of reading, Lindsay Currie's *The Secret Bookstore Sleuth Society* is a great choice. This engaging middle-grade mystery invites readers into a world where books are not simply something to read, they are part of the adventure.

Currie creates an intriguing mystery that keeps readers turning pages while introducing characters who are curious, determined, and willing to work together to solve a problem. The bookstore setting adds an especially appealing layer for young readers who already love books, while also offering an inviting entry point for those who may still be discovering their identity as readers.

One of the book's greatest strengths is the way it demonstrates the power of collaboration. The characters rely on one another's ideas, observations, and strengths as they work to unravel the mystery. Their investigation naturally encourages readers to pay attention to details, make connections, ask questions, and think critically.

YA

The Escape Game by Marissa Meyer & Tamara Moss

What happens when a group of young people discovers that the game they are playing is far more

than a game? In *The Escape Game*, Marissa Meyer and Tamara Moss deliver an entertaining, fast-paced mystery that combines puzzles, teamwork, suspense, and plenty of surprises. Readers are invited to follow the characters as they navigate a series of increasingly challenging escape-room puzzles, where careful observation and creative thinking are essential.

The novel's greatest strength is its ability to make readers feel like participants in the story. As the characters encounter clues and challenges, readers are encouraged to solve problems alongside them, make predictions, notice details, and reconsider their assumptions. The pacing keeps the story moving, making this an especially appealing choice for readers who enjoy action and mystery and may be less drawn to traditional, slower-paced novels.

The collaborative nature of the story also provides an excellent opportunity to explore the importance of different perspectives. The characters bring different strengths and ways of thinking to each challenge, demonstrating that sometimes the best solutions emerge when people listen to one another and combine their ideas.

Adult

The Calamity Club by Kathryn Stockett

Kathryn Stockett, author of *The Help*, returns with *The Calamity Club*, a sweeping historical novel set in Oxford, Mississippi, during the Great Depression. At its heart is eleven-year-old Meg Lefleur, an intelligent, spirited girl living in a county orphan asylum and considered one of the “unadoptable” older girls. Her life intersects with Birdie Calhoun, an outspoken young woman who travels to Oxford seeking help for her struggling family, and Charlie, a woman determined to survive despite the circumstances stacked against her.

What makes the novel particularly compelling is the way these women, and Meg, form an unlikely community. Their relationships become a story of resilience, friendship, found family, and women finding ways to exercise agency in a society that offers them very few choices. The novel also provides a window into the economic hardship, social hierarchies, misogyny, and racism of 1930s Mississippi.

The novel invites readers to consider how voice, circumstance, social class, gender, and power shape the choices available to individuals. Meg's perspective is especially interesting because she is a young character navigating circumstances far beyond her control while using humor, intelligence, and storytelling to maintain her sense of self.

At more than 600 pages, this is definitely a commitment. The story takes its time developing its characters and relationships; however, the richly developed characters and increasingly complicated plot make the length worthwhile for readers who enjoy immersive historical fiction.



What Does the Research Say?

A Story of Negotiation and Agency: An Exploration of Power in Click Clack Moo and Contemporary Picture Books

Power relationships, symbols of power, and social injustices may seem like complex concepts for young people to understand. Youngs and Loyd explain how to use picture books to encourage

discussions about these topics to assist in moving the young students to a "social justice mindset." They explain how symbols of power, visual design elements, spatial relationships, and textual features can contribute to the power relationships amongst the characters in the books. They explain how analyzing the picture books with students helps them develop critical literacy skills and encourages them to continue looking at future books through a critical lense. Not only do they explain strategies and tools for use in these discussions, but they also provide a text set for both primary and intermediate readers that explains the relationship and symbols of power in each book.

Youngs, S., & Loyd, S. (2020). A story of negotiation and agency: An exploration of power in *Click Clack Moo* and contemporary picturebooks. *Texas Journal of Literacy Education*, 8(2), 19-49.

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.

Join them for the Annual Fox Trot 5K fundraiser.

<https://www.love-smiles.org/event-details/5th-annual-fox-trot-5k>

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



FVRC IS ONLINE!

 
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Facebook: Fox Valley Reading Council

 illinoisfvrc@gmail.com



Fox Valley Reading Council

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