

Highlights

February 2012



of the Minnesota Reading Association, an International Reading Association affiliate

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It Is I Who Must Begin

Presidents Column

A few days ago I came into my struggling readers class with a poem written by Vaclav Havel. Havel was part of the revolution that overthrew the communist government in what is now the Czech Republic. Here is an excerpt from the poem.

It is I who must begin.
Once I begin, once I try –
here and now,
right where I am,
I suddenly discover,
to my surprise, that
I am neither the only one,
nor the first,
nor the most important one
to have set out
upon that road.
Whether all is really lost
or not depends entirely on
whether or not I am lost.



Scott Voss, President



The lesson was simple. We read the poem four times, each time doing something a little different as we read it. One time we read it silently, one time we googled the author, one time we read it aloud, and one time we talked about it with a partner. The purpose of the activity was to present a difficult text to students (one that would pose a challenge to them) and then scaffold various reading strategies. After the fourth time, we discussed the various strategies and how they helped us make meaning of the text, and we wrote them out. At that point, I was ready to move on to our next activity, when a student called out, “Well, don’t we get to talk about the poem?”

It was one of those rare moments in the classroom where the unplanned lesson outshined the planned one. We spent the better part of an hour, scouring the text, talking about its meaning, and most importantly, discussing how its message connects to our own lives.

As I reflect on our organization, the words of the poem and the ensuing discussion come to mind. It is I who must begin. We stand at the start of another new year, looking ahead to our hopes, dreams, and goals for 2012, and sometimes the prospects of what we want to accomplish seem overwhelming. In fact, sometimes the prospects of what we are asked to do and accomplish seem overwhelming. And, in the face of it, we can be paralyzed by our fears or, worse yet, paralyzed by the cynical belief that our efforts don’t matter.



MRA Mission

The Minnesota Reading Association actively promotes lifelong literacy for all citizens. We encourage professional interaction among all organizations involved with literacy and provide resources for exemplary literacy practices and habits.

**Thank you!
for being
an MRA member.**

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Opinions expressed are those of the author and are not necessarily those of:

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Reading Councils



Laura Erickson, author of *Twelve Owls*, at Arrowhead Reading Council's Park Point Solstice evening



Arrowhead Reading Council's co-presidents, Terry Betlewski and Michelle Bowker, reading *Heart of a Samurai* by Margi Preus and *The Evolution of Calpurnia Tate* by Jacqueline Kelly, both Newbery Honor books in 2011 and 2010 respectively.

Reading Councils (cont'd)

Arrowhead Reading Council

contact Terry Betlewski
therese.betlewski@duluth.k12.mn.us

Catching Up

Like other local council memberships, Arrowhead's membership has declined in the past few years, but you'd never know it by the turnouts we've been experiencing at our events.

If 2011 is any indication of positive growth, then 2012 will be beyond our expectations. We began the year with a two-hour presentation of the Daily 5. The presenters had a packed house and it wasn't only the Daily 5 that had larger than normal sessions. The November presentation on Early Onset Mental Illness readers was also well attended. Participants came away with book lists for primary, intermediate, and adult reads of stories that dealt with mental illness. Laura Erickson, Duluth author of *Twelve Owls*, had one of our largest numbers ever for our Park Point Solstice evening. Even the below-zero temperatures couldn't keep them away.

Duluth is fortunate for its size to have so many published authors and Arrowhead is using their talents for events. Margi Preus will be leading our Young Author's Conference in Duluth and will speak at the dinner on March 20. We will be having a silent auction which is always fun.

We are low on snow this year in Duluth and had to cancel the annual John Beargrease event however local author Kelly Rauzi will keep the spirit of the race alive for Arrowhead members. She will share her book *Fearless John: The Legend of John Beargrease* on February 9th at the new Edison North Star Academy.

Jacqueline Kelly, author of *The Evolution of Calpurnia Tate*, will give a talk on April 3, 2012. This event is

held in conjunction with the Duluth Public Library's "One Book, One Community" program. This effort is designed to bring our community together as they read and discuss the same book. Our adult read is *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* and ARC is proud to be featuring its author Rebecca Skloot at the community presentation.

—Barb Boline, Reading Resource
Teacher, Nettleton Elementary

Central Minnesota Reading Council

Contact: Pat Hanson
lphanson@hotmail.com

Dinner with an Author, Featuring Poet Joyce Sidman

TUESDAY, APRIL 24, 2012
6:00 pm (registration 5:30 pm)

Sauk Rapids-Rice Middle School-Community
Room, 901 1st Street, Sauk Rapids-door #1

Joyce was born in Connecticut but now lives in Wayzata, Minnesota. She is widely known for the lively poetry she has written for children.



Joyce Sidman

Her award-winning books include *Dark Emperor* (a Newbery honor book), *Song of the Water Boatman* and *Red Sings from Treetops* (both Caldecott honor books), *Butterfly Eyes* (Cybils Award), and *This Is Just to Say* (Claudia Lewis Poetry Award).

A recent starred review in *School Library Journal* said, "Sidman's ear is keen, capturing many voices. Her skill as a poet accessible to young people is unmatched."

This evening is for students, parents, and educators. Help your child connect with reading by

meeting a renowned author in person. Books will be available for sale and autographing. Meal is catered by Mexican Village Too and includes taco bar, beverages and dessert.

Registration deadline is Tuesday, April 17th, 2012. Cost is \$12 for adults, \$11 for CMRC Members and \$8 for students. Please contact Beth at laudenbachbeth@sartell.k12.mn.us or 320-529-9282 for a registration form or for more information.

Recap of CMRC's January Workshop

On a bright sunny morning on January 28th, Kari Ross uncovered the "treasures of informational text" with an audience including more than forty



Kari Ross

educators at the Blackberry Ridge Country Club in Sartell. Kari connects with listeners by using humor, frank discussion, and an earnestness about raising the success rates of Minnesota readers.

She began her presentation by declaring that learning to read is a life-long pursuit. Even adults utilize new strategies for reading. One example she used was the use of multimediality in the media. Have you ever been challenged by the amount of information on the screen during a CNN broadcast? She pointed out that it is unlikely that this dearth of information will decrease in the future.

CMRC workshop attendants were asked to complete a grid listing the different kinds of informational text they might use in their lives. Results of this grid led to a discussion about how to teach different strategies for

Reading Councils (cont'd)

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comprehending and digesting important information. Websites were shared and the use of technologies such as podcasts to enrich the educational process was suggested.

At the end of the morning session, participants shared comments and questions from the presentation. Everyone left a little richer for the experience.

Minnesota Academy of Reading

Contact: Amy Smith
afsmith@stthomas.edu

M.A.R. honors Dr. Deborah Dillon at annual policy event

JANUARY 11, 2012

The Minnesota Academy of Reading (MAR) hosted their second annual *Policy Issues in Literacy: Implications for*



Dr. Deborah Dillon

Teacher Educators event at Bethel

University. MAR is a special interest council established to bring various groups of reading stakeholders together to discuss and respond to reading practices/policies in Minnesota. In addition to a program of learning about current policy events, and the initiatives Minnesota's professional reading teacher educators are actively creating, implementing, and/or evaluating that impact our work in teacher education, the highlight of the afternoon was honoring Dr. Deborah Dillon, Guy Bond Chair in Reading & Professor of Literacy Education at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, for her contributions in the area of research and leadership at the state and national level.

Karen Balmer, executive director of the Minnesota Board of Teaching (BOT) and Kari Ross, Minnesota Department



Karen Balmer

of Education Reading Specialist, provided policy updates with regard to licensure, legislation and the work of their respective departments. Karen emphasized that the new reading teacher standards are impacting the special education BOT sub-committee licensure standards work. Participants learned that approximately one third of all MN teaching licenses issued each year are to teachers initially licensed in other states. As a result, the MN BOT and educator licensing departments are looking to Minnesota reading teacher educators to provide training for the out-of-state teacher candidates in need of coursework or training to meet all our new reading teacher standards.

Kari Ross shared that reading is a big focus of the new administration at the MN Department of Education. A state literacy team and an advisory group were re-established to study and respond to Reading Well by 3rd grade, which is the 4th point of Governor Dayton's 7-Point Plan for Excellence in Education. These seven points lay the framework for a long-term vision for Pre K-12 education in Minnesota over the coming years. To view the entire plan, visit: <http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/Welcome/OfficeCom/BetterSchBetterMN/index.html>.

According to the 2011 Minnesota Legislative statute 120B.12 READING PROFICIENTLY NO LATER THAN THE END OF GRADE 3, all Minnesota school districts are required to post their K-3 literacy plans on their district website by June 2012. A guiding "checklist" is in the final stages of development which will support districts with this process in addition to MDE's monthly webinars. To view the entire statute, visit: <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/?id=120B.12>

MDE, MRA, and SRIC (Secondary Reading Interest Council) have collaboratively revised and republished the adolescent model secondary plan. The revised plan includes a section on motivation and engagement. This document was designed to serve as an adolescent literacy plan implementation guide for building and district leaders and is available on the MDE Reading Well by 3rd grade and MRA websites. It is important to note that this plan is developmentally specific, not grade-level specific. Finally, Kari shared that Minnesota was recently awarded a race to the top money for early learning programming; this will help our state link preK reading work to the K-3 grade levels.

In addition to these policy updates and subsequent roundtable discussions with reading educators representing dozens of Minnesota's colleges and universities, we had the wonderful opportunity to listen and learn from the 2012 MAR award recipient, Dr. Deborah Dillon.

In the spirit of the event, Dr. Dillon wove a few policy threads throughout her keynote, entitled "Lessons Learned; Thoughts Disclosed,". More importantly,

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Reading Councils (cont'd)

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Dr. Dillon shared with all of us her reflections on lessons "she has learned and continues to learn as a teacher, researcher, and someone who seeks to serve others." Below is a list of the six lessons she shared with her audience:

1. It is good to venture out beyond your comfort zone, even when it doesn't feel so good.
2. Work hard and don't worry if the person next to you doesn't seem to be working as hard as you but still seems to get ahead.
3. There's something to be said about developing focus in your work ... and diversification.
4. Remember who helped you in your life, how they helped you, and pass on whatever good you can to those you encounter.
5. When life gets too comfortable, maybe it is time to shake things up a bit.
6. Never confuse having a career with having a life.

As Dr. Dillon ended her talk the crowd rose to their feet as we applauded and thanked her for her leadership, commitment and spirit of collaboration in an effort to provide our students with the best reading education in the nation.

To conclude the event, participants were asked to reflect on which items they felt were most pressing and what next steps the reading community should take to continue to support the area of reading and beyond.

Eva Boehm, MRA Legislative & Advocacy / MAR Board Member, boeh0056@umn.edu

Southeast Minnesota Reading Council

contact Maurina Rome
m.rome@mnreading.org

Literacy Blitz

MARCH 8, 2011, 4:30 to 6:30 pm

Pinewood Elementary School
1900 Pinewood Road, Rochester, MN

In November 2011, Southeast Reading Council members and guests enjoyed the first SERC "Literacy Blitz." The event was fashioned after the "speed dating" scenario with educators moving from table to table to talk about topics and issues they are most passionate about. Participants shared ideas, gained insight, and enjoyed lively conversations about current issues and topics in literacy and education. Due to the positive response of this event, another Blitz event is being offered in March!

Join us to gather and share ideas and resources to promote family literacy! Featured topics will include:

1. Helping parents understand and avoid summer setback.
2. Year-long reading at home ideas
3. I LOVE TO READ Month ideas
4. P.I.E. NIGHTS (Partners In Education) Family Literacy events

A representative from SELCO (Southeastern Libraries Cooperating) will join us at the Literacy Blitz to talk about Camp Read A Lot!

Camp Read-A-Lot is a summer workshop for practitioners working with children from birth to grade 5. Camp Read-A-Lot offers summertime fun by reading current books that could be used in connection with curriculum. The earlier you register, the earlier you can begin working on your reading list!

FYI: This event is FREE for SERC members and is just \$5 for non-members. Refreshments will be

served. 2 hours of CEUs will be given. For more information about the SERC Family Literacy Blitz or to register, contact Jill at jmmagnuson@live.com.

Southwest Minnesota Reading Council

contact Dr. Cindy Whaley
email whaleyce@mlc-wels.edu

Making Inexpensive Books for Children

Annual Spring Conference

Laura Groebner & Marion Klimmek

THURSDAY, APRIL 12, 2012

Registration 5:00 – 5:30

Meal 5:30 – 6:30

Presentation 6:30 – 7:00

Martin Luther College, New Ulm, MN

Conference participants will have the opportunity to view and construct a variety of books. Materials will be provided to create samples. For info, contact Jill Morgan at jamorgs@hotmail.com. Include SWMRC in the subject line.

Literacy Bags

Create literacy bags that can be sent home for special occasions: birthdays, lost teeth, etc. In the bag, place literature about the topic of the bag along with a writing journal. The bags can be sent home with each child on his birthday or when she loses a tooth. What a great way to foster the importance of reading at home and school!

Motivating the Reader

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 13, 2012,
8:30 AM TO 3:00 PM

New Ulm, MN

Cost: \$60, SWMRC member, \$70, non-member

This one-day workshop will focus on building excitement for the readers in your classroom. The presenter will be Dr. Cindy Whaley, from Martin Luther College. Please join us for a day of professional growth and encouragement. For more info, contact Beth Wolf at tbtwolf@hotmail.com.

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Reading Councils (cont'd)

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1,000 Books Before Kindergarten

This new program is sponsored by the Brown County Early Childhood Initiative (ECI). The goal of the program is simply to encourage children to have been read 1,000 books before they enter kindergarten.

Check out the following websites for other communities and libraries that are supporting 1000 Books before Kindergarten and for more information about the specifics of the program.

<http://www.newulmlibrary.org/webpages/kids.html>

http://www.jaycpl.lib.in.us/library/1000_books_before_kindergarten.htm

<http://goshenpl.lib.in.us/kids/programs-2/1000-books-before-kindergarten/>

<http://www.wellscolibrary.org/1000books.html>

<http://www.fdpl.org/blog/2012/01/1000-books-kindergarten-starts-jan-21>



What are the members of the Southwest Minnesota Reading Council reading right now?

A list of read-alouds, professional books, as well as books we are reading for personal enjoyment:

Read-Alouds

Sweet Dream Pie
My Head is Full of Colors
Brown Bear, Brown Bear
Miss Little's Gift
Flying Solo
The Klipfish Code
Wonderstruck
A Long Way from Chicago

Books for Personal Fun

Sarah's Keys
The Help
The Hunger Games Trilogy
Dog Tag
All the Broken Pieces

Professional Books

Reading Essentials
Teach Like a Champion
Day-to-Day Assessment in the Reading Workshop
Castle in the Classroom
Formative Assessment: Making It Happen in the Classroom
Children's Reading Comprehension and Assessment

R•E•A•D

Submit event details to Maurina Rome by April 15, 2012, in order to have your information included in the upcoming issue of our *Highlights* newsletter.

m.rome@mnreading.org

Secondary Reading Council

contact Cory Stai
cory.stai@isd197.org

Professional Book Club Discussing *The Book Whisperer*

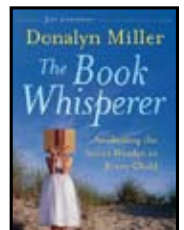
APRIL 17, 2012, 6:00 TO 8:00 PM

Mackin Educational Resources

3505 County Road 42 West

Burnsville, MN

We will be discussing the book *The Book Whisperer: Awaking the Inner Reader in Every Child* by Donalyn Miller and have the opportunity to be



introduced to the facilities, resources, and personnel of Mackin.

SRIC Members-only Event: Popular Teen Novel Discussion and Dinner

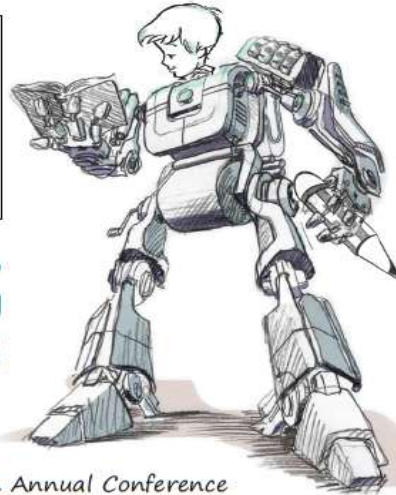
SUNDAY, MAY 13TH, 5:00 PM - 7:00 PM

Chianti Grill

2050 Snelling Ave. N., Roseville, MN 55113

We will be reading two recent, popular works of adolescent fiction to discuss at our final get-together of the year: *Elephant Run* by Roland Smith and *Going Bovine* by Libba Bray. We will be holding the event once again at Chianti Grill in Roseville. We hope you can join us for an informal discussion, networking, and a celebration of another great year of working, teaching, and learning with MRA. An email notice will be sent out to SRIC members as we approach the event asking that you RSVP so that we can make reservations to accommodate all who will be attending. If you have attended previous SRIC-sponsored events and enjoyed the experience, made use of our web or personnel resources, or engaged in networking and sharing with our council, there's no better time to become a member!

SRIC: "You're always glad you came."



TRANSFORMING READERS & WRITERS

Minnesota Reading Association - 2012 Annual Conference

The Minnesota Reading Association invites you:

What: To our annual conference on August 9, 2012

Where: University of Minnesota Continuing Education Conference Center (St. Paul Campus).

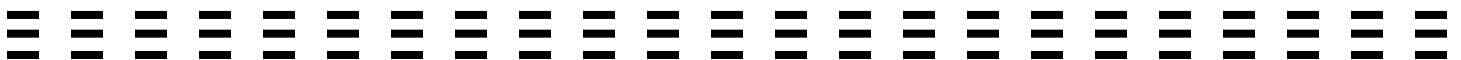
Who: Our keynotes, Chris Crutcher and Ralph Fletcher, (and you)!

Why: To focus on meeting the diverse literacy needs of our students; uncover research that shows how focusing instruction on boys also works for girls; and To renew our outlooks through professional development where teachers teach teachers.

Enjoy continuous beverages, two meals, and a treat in the afternoon.

RSVP: To register, visit www.mnreading.org

QUESTIONS: Contact Jen McCarty Plucker or Jessica Crooker, Conference co-chairs at j.plucker@mnreading.org or j.crooker@mnreading.org



Symposium: Minnesota American Indian Perspectives, Literature, and Lessons

Saturday, February 18th

Schedule

- 9:00-9:30** Registration, continental breakfast, & networking
9:30-10:45 Dawn Quigley
10:45-11:15 Break with vendor displays & resources
11:15-12:30 John Bobolink & Norm Benson

Registration

Price = **Free** to MRA members
\$35.00 for non-members (includes membership to the Minnesota Reading Association and one council)

To Register: www.mnreading.org

Topics

- Understanding Minnesota American Indian Perspectives
Minnesota American Indian Resources and Literature
Model Lessons for Meeting the New 2010 Minnesota English / Language Arts Standards

Location: Tartan High School
828 Greenway Ave., Oakdale, Minn., 55128

Hosted by
SRIC and
TCARC

Featured Speakers



Dawn Quigley is an enrolled member of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians (North Dakota), has worked over 16 years in education, and currently teaches Indian Education and Reading and English in the Forest Lake Public Schools. Along with a passion for reading Native literature, she has also had a number of her own writings published regionally.



John Bobolink is an enrolled member of the Leech Lake Indian Reservation, has worked over twenty years in the field of education, and has been at the Saint Paul Public Schools Indian Education Program for the past ten years.



Norman Benson is an enrolled member of the Three Affiliated Tribes Mandan, Hidatsa, & Arikira, has worked over twenty-nine years in the field of Chemical-use prevention and education, and has been at the Saint Paul Public Schools Indian Education Program for the past fourteen years.

Reading Well by Third Grade

By now, it is likely that you have all heard this phrase. Have you thought about what this initiative can mean for you and your students? As students move through their educational journey, they develop reading knowledge, skills, and habits, while continuing to build their prior knowledge and expand their vocabulary, promoting reading proficiency.

Now is the critical time to change our practices and positively impact student achievement. It is our responsibility as educators to foster and develop reading, both learning to read and applying that knowledge in reading to learn, for all students at every grade level. We can use the "Reading Well by Third Grade" initiative as an opportunity to align instruction to the 2010 ELA standards, to better support current best practices, and to reinforce the need for sustained literacy leadership in the early grades, and beyond. As MRA members, it's a great opportunity to share knowledge and expertise with those around us.

Educators everywhere will agree that reading well by third grade is one of many developmental milestones in a child's educational experience. We would also agree that reading proficiency develops over time, and students of all abilities need sustained and intentional reading instruction throughout their PK-12 schooling in order to be ready for college and the work place. But developing common understanding of what it takes to act on those beliefs across a school or a district is no easy task.

How can you support your colleagues with taking this opportunity to change practice, to reflect on what is not working

for students, and to build common understanding of what it means to be a successful reader at each stage of development?



Kari Ross

Beginning this spring, all school districts in Minnesota will be required to post on their websites a local literacy plan that will ensure all students are reading well by third grade. This requirement is part of legislation passed last summer. Minnesota Statute 120B.12 is not new, but the 2011 revision adds a level of specificity that was lacking in past years.

The Minnesota Department of Education provides monthly information sessions to support districts in creating these plans and offers a variety of research-based resources highlighting current best practices in early literacy and adolescent literacy instruction. But that's not enough. You, too, need to act as literacy leaders and support your district.

We realize developing common understanding across classrooms, grade levels, and schools for how and what students need to be successful readers is a challenging task. But it is necessary and important work. And you, as an MRA member, can take action to use this opportunity to engage in conversation with your building administrator or your district literacy leader about what it will take to ensure all students are reading well by third grade and beyond. Offer to contribute your expertise to developing your local literacy

plan and foster those conversations that create common understandings of what all kids need to be literate and academically successful. It's a great time to be an MRA member. Remember, too, that I am always here to support you. If you need anything, please ask.

For more information contact: Kari Ross, MDE Reading Specialist 651-582-8455 kari.d.ross@state.mn.us

Celebrate Literacy 2012

Each year for the past five years, MRA has proudly recognized the work of dedicated and inspirational members through the "Celebrate Literacy" award which recognizes individuals who have made significant literacy contributions at the local, state, or provincial level.

We will once again gather to recognize nominees and present the MRA Celebrate Literacy Award. It is hoped that the celebration will familiarize the public with literacy activities in the community and call attention to the work that is being done by the schools, Minnesota Reading Association, and the International Reading Association to promote literacy worldwide.

In addition to honoring our Celebrate Literacy nominees, MRA will proudly showcase contributions from the 2012 "Writers are Readers" winners. Students will share their creativity and enthusiasm for writing to entertain or inform other readers.

This year the MRA Celebrate Literacy event will take place on Friday, March 30 at the Maple Grove Community Center.

Questions about Celebrate Literacy can be directed to Julie Scullen at j.scullen@mnreading.org

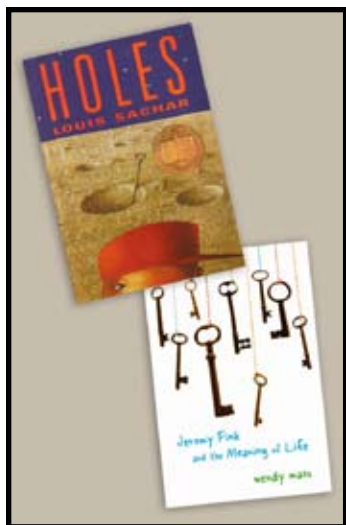
Guys Read

"Research shows that boys are having trouble reading, and that boys are getting worse at reading. No one is quite sure why. Some of the reasons are biological. Some of the reasons are sociological. But the good news is that research also shows that boys will read – if they are given reading that interests them."

-Jon Scieszka (www.guysread.com)

Guys Read is a monthly boys' book club that was started at Westview Elementary School in Apple Valley with 14 boys in 2006. Our goal was, and is, to engage boys in reading by lending them the books and giving them the time and meeting space to read and discuss books with their peers. It is open to any interested fourth or fifth grade boy. The books that are chosen are high interest, inexpensive, and have "boy" appeal. Many are humorous, nonfiction or adventurous.

The books can be read independently, together as a family, or listened to on tape. The only requirement is that it be read prior to coming to the meeting. There is no writing, or any projects or assignments involved. It is meant to be a fun, laid-back time with friends.



We had football players visit to talk about reading with the boys.

We have three excellent male teachers that voluntarily facilitate the before-school club with rich discussions. After meeting and discussing the book, the boys get a snack that is related to the book in some way. When they read *Holes* they got doughnut holes. After reading *Honus and Me* they got a hot dog, which is always a huge hit at 9:00 am!

Sometimes we also invite guest speakers. When they read *The Great Fire* by Jim Murphy, we have local firefighters come and discuss the differences between fires in the 1800's and fires today. When they read *Football Hero* by Tim Green we get a football player to visit.

Sometimes they do something fun and a little silly. For instance; after reading Louis Sachar's *There's a Boy in the Girl's Bathroom* and having a meaningful, deep discussion about bullying, the meeting ended by letting the boys go in the girl's bathroom to see it.

In the fall of 2011, participation in Guys Read book club had

tripled with 40 boys signed up. It is imperative for the success of the program that each boy gets a copy of the book to read. Since they are on a two-year cycle, (fourth and fifth grade boys meet together) eighteen different titles are needed to make the program work.

Thanks to the MRA and the Joe Jubert Memorial Fund we were able to purchase 10 copies of *Holes* by Louis Sachar and 46 copies of *Jeremy Fink and the Meaning of Life* by Wendy Mass.

This is a huge benefit to our Guys Read book club. If we don't have titles to lend out, we have to scramble and borrow them from teachers and libraries from around our district.

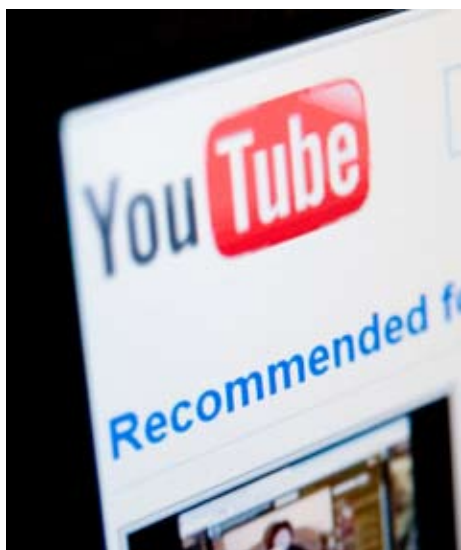
Guys Read Book Club at Westview is truly an example of, "If you build it they will come." We are grateful to MRA and the Joe Jubert Book Club Grant which has enabled us to continue to build the program.

Submitted by Joe Jubert 2011 Grant winners Lori Torseth, Media Specialist and Molly Andersen, Guys Read Director Westview Elementary in Apple Valley, MN.

You Tube Has Changed My Classroom

Over the course of the last five months, I have shifted my classroom to an inquiry-based approach by building my lessons around student generated themes. It has been an exciting and unpredictable ride. Each theme lasts about three weeks and concludes with some type of project where the student must demonstrate their understanding of what we have learned. Many of the project options involve digital tools and gadgets, but not all of them. In one case, we actually set up a project fair to share our research on good old-fashioned display boards. The themes or topics are generated by students and they become a regular part of our classroom discussion. This year, more than usual, I have a considerable amount of “buy-in” and I attribute this largely to an inquiry-based approach to learning.

Here is the thing. Students are choosing some really unusual topics of study, or at least unusual for an English or reading class. And at the outset, I was terrified by the prospect of finding materials that could be used for our activities and discussions. But I discovered a small list of resources that have enabled me to survive even some rather unusual



topic selections. At the top of that list is YouTube.

While I build the course around literacy activities and reading print text, I utilize short video in order to build background knowledge and stimulate interest. Our Space Exploration Unit is a great example. We began with an off-handed discussion one day about whether there might be alien life in our universe. From there, students decided that they would like to do a three-week intensive unit that examined some of the topics related to space exploration. I took that idea and broke it into three subtopics: Week One was dedicated to life on other planets, Week Two looked at our current missions to Mars, and Week Three was devoted to the International Space Station. For each week, I found reading-level-appropriate texts with the help of Scholastic News Online and Infotrac student edition. But the true lifesaver was YouTube.

Basic searches on YouTube brought me to some excellent NOVA (PBS) segments about the dangers of space flight, a TED talk about advancements in space travel, and NASA’s channel where viewers can watch live footage of life on the International Space Station. YouTube allowed me to find video shorts, three to five minutes in length, on specific questions that students generated. Throughout the unit, I would show up with my lesson plan, which would include a reading and a video or two, along with a discussion but, inevitably, someone would pose an interesting question and this might send us in another direction.

Other YouTube break-offs, like TeacherTube and StudentTube are also helpful resources.

Typically, though, there is some overlap (meaning the searches in each produce similar results). The advantage of TeacherTube or StudentTube is that some of the less academic videos are not included in the search results. However, TeacherTube and StudentTube produce smaller results and typically do not include some of the commercially or publicly-produced videos like NOVA, PBS, or NASA Live.



My class has also chosen to study themes like the Holocaust, exercise, and Greek mythology. In each case, I depended heavily on YouTube to find videos for my classes.

This is a departure from traditional video use where teachers historically would show a one- or two-hour video to complement their curriculum. YouTube has enabled many of us to use the visual medium with laser-like specificity to develop background knowledge on various topics, making them more visual, more engaging, and ultimately more accessible.

Utilizing the technology in this way allows teachers to more easily shape their curriculum around the unique interests and talents of their students, thus realizing some of the promises of inquiry-based learning.

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Relate to, Expect from, Scaffold for, Uplift, and Engage the Struggling Readers in Your Content Area Classroom

Jose is a quiet, stylish Latino. His hair is impeccable. His smile warms the room. We learn later in the year that Jose is quiet because he is self-conscious of his accent.

Latricia says it like it is *always*. One never wonders where she stands with Latricia. If her ally, she is loyal always. If her enemy, watch out!

David is 6-feet tall, loves muscle cars, and has a record of in-school suspensions for classroom outbursts.

Anna is painfully shy, rarely smiles, and does not appear to have a peer group with whom she associates.

Mike attends school an average of two days per week and rarely completes his assignments. Phone calls home don't change his attendance record or increase his productivity.

John is a popular football player whose strong ego does not allow him to ask for help.

Pete spends his school day in pull-out special education classes with the exception of one class. For many weeks, his ritual upon entering his general education class is to create a cocoon of pillows in which to hide from his classmates and instructor.

Even with their vastly different characteristics, these students all have something in common.

They are 9th graders who read at the 5th or 6th grade level. In most of these students' classes, they are often one of 38-40 students. Considering their challenging behaviors, it's easy to understand how content area teachers attribute struggling readers' academic failures to reasons other than lack of ability and skills. However, we, their reading teachers, know struggling readers' behaviors are actually barriers

used to masterfully mask the real issue – their frustration with the increasingly difficult demands of school.

We believe struggling readers need to be rescued from their own self-perceptions and hindering behaviors. In our experience as both reading teachers and English/Language Arts teachers, we have tested multiple strategies to break down the barriers of the struggling readers in our large mainstream content area classrooms, so we can help them to believe in their own abilities and develop the skills needed to achieve. In that regard, we offer five principles for supporting struggling readers.

Relate

Never underestimate the power of *relationships*. It is the first principle in our acronym R.E.SC.U.E. for a reason. Relationships are the foundation of trust. Unfortunately, students who struggle in school because of their lack of reading skills often have more than a handful of reasons why they no longer trust teachers. Think of a skill you have learned or would like to learn – downhill skiing or yoga, perhaps. When selecting someone to teach you that skill, you will likely choose a teacher who listens to your concerns, explains it a way you can understand, and encourages you as you move outside your comfort zone. You would also likely choose an instructor who is more focused on your growth than on displaying the knowledge, expertise, and passion she possesses – an instructor who will coach you every step of the way.

Struggling readers need the same type of coaching and supports when attempting to learn new content. Breaking through the barrier with a student like John (our football player) is all about building trust and providing instruction with a coaching approach. He does not want knowledge imparted onto him, nor does he want to feel as if he is being treated differently than his peers because he needs more support. He is, however, receptive to being coached by a teacher who will meet him at his level of understanding and gradually build upon that understanding, all while being attentive to John's concerns, explaining it in a way he understands, and encouraging him to take the next step.

The opportunity to provide struggling readers with coaching and supports starts with building relationships – both on an individual and classroom community level. The key to learning about your students' individual interests is to extract information from them in various ways – not just by sharing aloud in class, but through surveys, drawing, online discussions, and games. Display students' work on the walls of your classroom, create a class play list with a song selection from each student, allow the class to help you arrange and decorate the room for the year. Also, consider taking photographs of students engaging in academic tasks and post them on a bulletin board or in frames. Struggling readers, especially, do not envision themselves as scholars – photographs can be the first step in changing that self-perception.

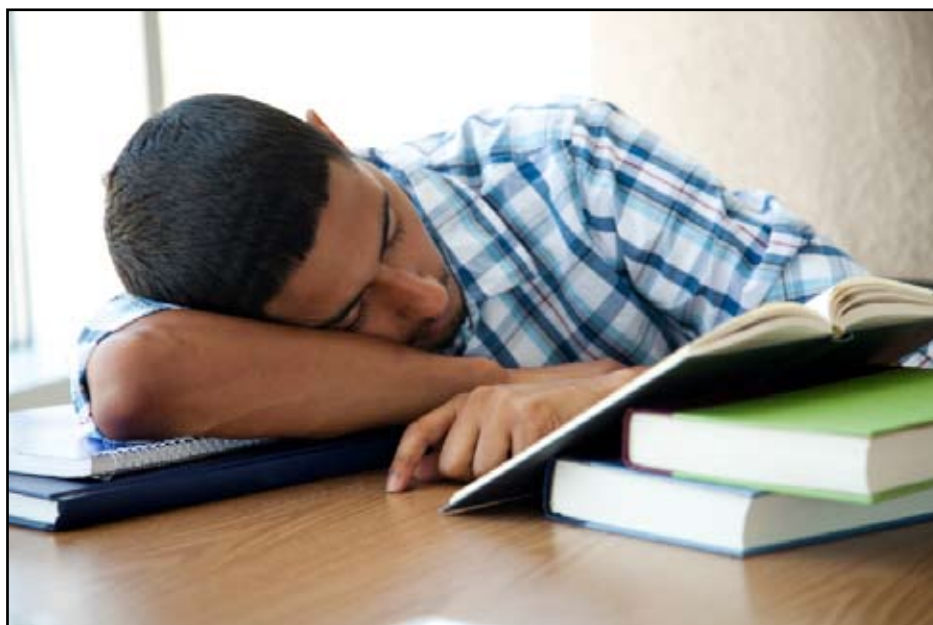
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Content Area Classroom (cont'd)

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Expect great things!

One word we find ourselves cringing at is 'remediation.' This not because we think providing a remedy for students' reading difficulties is a bad thing, but because the connotation that comes with the word typically means slower, lower, and less. Rather, we believe our striving readers need opportunities for accelerated learning, higher expectations, and more intense instruction in order to master grade level standards. One of the most significant lessons we learned was that our course expectations could not be changed, or made easier, for our struggling readers. Thus, the first E in our acronym R.E.S.C.U.E emphasizes that we need to *expect* our striving readers *can* achieve instead of making assumptions that they cannot. So, while the standards, benchmarks, and learning targets remain the same for all students, we, instead, change some of our instructional practices. This means embedding more self-reflection with admit and exit slips – a practice of gathering quick and relevant information from students in writing – and other formative assessment tools to gauge where students are in their mastery of the learning targets. The self-reflection technique allows teachers to shift students from a fixed mindset to a growth or mastery mindset (Dweck, 2006). Sometimes students walk into our classes with an attitude that "Math isn't my thing" or "I've just never understood Science." While a fixed mindset can have detrimental effects for all students, it can crush the chances of students like Latricia or Jose ever succeeding. When Latricia has her mind made up that she *hates* social studies, she is difficult to engage. Jose would rather excuse



himself to check his hair in the restroom mirror than talk with his classmates about the results of the reaction time lab in Science. One way we help our students develop a growth mindset is to liken learning to playing video games. We facilitate discussions with students about playing a video game and trying to master the current level, and they agree that they often feel frustrated. However, they tolerate that frustration because, with every new attempt, they make a enough progress to show improvement. Those small increments of improvement foster the growth mindset. We remind students that the same is true for learning. In our classroom community, we want to embrace frustration, encourage confusion, and ask a lot of questions in an effort to progress. Furthermore, when struggling through a video game level, a gamer does not allow his session to be interrupted. Gamers make their way through the frustration until they reach the sweet spot of mastery. At

that victory point, the game can be stopped, saved, and played later and the emotional roller coaster can start all over again. However, one mistake teachers make with the intention of being supportive is to jump in at the first signs of frustration and fast-forward students to the next level. When we do so, we miss the opportunity to foster new learning. For struggling readers, an environment where they are encouraged to show their confusion and wrestle through the frustration is a welcome change to classes in which they feel they are quizzed and called upon to show they know and understand the content at all times.

Scaffold the learning

Certainly, content area teachers are not expected to assess their readers to the same degree that the reading specialists can, but at a minimum they should know whether or not the students can access the texts they are expected to read. For example, teachers can conduct a quick, whole class CLOZE or MAZE assessment

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Content Area Classroom (cont'd)

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(McKenna & Dougherty Stahl, 2009) with a piece of text they plan to use in class to determine which students can read it at an independent level, who is reading it at an instructional level, and who will be frustrated. The struggling readers in your class will be identified in a hurry. Another way to get a fairly quick read on who may struggle would be to gain access to your students' standardized test data and have your assessment coordinator or literacy coach give you a quick overview. Even with just a few data points, content area teachers are better prepared to provide support to all their students as they move them into, through, and beyond texts which is why SC, for *scaffold*, is the next part of R.E.SC.U.E.

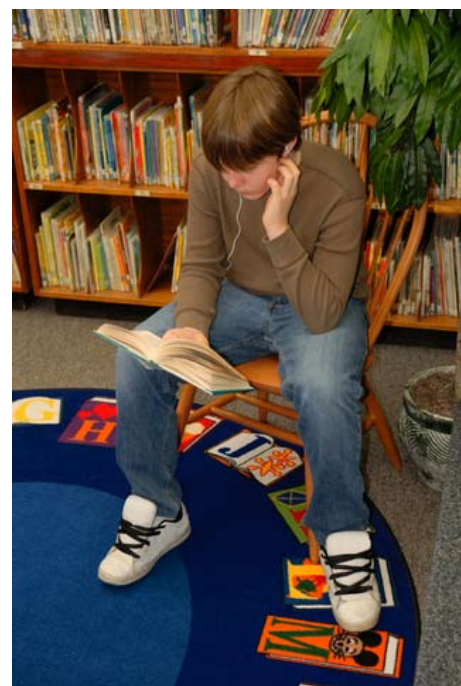
Effective instructors understand the importance of activating background or prior knowledge as a way of guiding students into a text. Prior knowledge acts as velcro for new information—it provides a place for new ideas to stick. However, prior knowledge is a common deficit for our struggling readers and difficulties with comprehension can often be tied to prior knowledge problems (Harvey & Daniels, 2010). As a result, teachers may first have to supply the background knowledge needed (create the velcro surface) before they can venture into the content. Ways to do this include photographs, video clips, collaborative brainstorming, reading a short text, or direct instruction.

In addition to meaningful activities that connect new learning to the known, activities that promote higher-order thinking, dialogue, and debate are important elements for guiding students through and beyond text. For struggling readers, especially, direct instruction, modeling, and ample amounts of practice are a

necessity before students can be expected to attempt them independently. Teachers should make visible their own processes of entering into, through, and beyond texts by thinking aloud. Students like David (our student who would rather spend time in suspension than read aloud in class) will thrive in an environment that allows him to practice new approaches to thinking and learning in the safety of a small group. On the contrary, he will not thrive in an environment that makes his weaknesses visible to others through activities like round-robin reading or "cold" reading followed by a pop-quiz.

Uplift

Investor and author Elizabeth Harrison reminds us that "those who are lifting the world upward and onward are those who encourage more than criticize." Unfortunately, for so many of our struggling readers, any form of feedback teachers give can be misconstrued as criticism, thus defeating its purpose. Therefore, the U in R.E.SC.U.E. is for *uplift*. While listening to Doug Fisher (2011) present recently, he used the phrase, "feed forward." He emphasized the importance that any information we give students should be that which can move them forward in their learning and mastery of the content. Dweck (2008) gives us practical advice regarding the type of messages that can help our students and those which can actually harm their achievement. She warns us against praising students' performance or intelligence. Imagine what Anna (our painfully shy 9th grader) thinks to herself when her classmate is told, "You learned that so quickly!



You're so smart" (p. 174). Anna thinks, "If I don't learn something quickly, I'm not smart" (p. 175). Students need to be praised for their effort, not their performance, and as a result, they will learn how to replicate that effort in order to be successful on future assignments. For example, if Anna knows she will get kudos for working hard, even if it takes her longer, she will persist. If she is asked to reflect on the work she is doing, articulate what is going well and what questions she has, she will barrel through. Along with paying careful attention to our words to move students forward in their learning, we also must celebrate the successes along the way. Daniel Pink (2009), in his book *Drive*, warns us to avoid external rewards as incentives for completing tasks and, instead, encourages us to celebrate goals achieved along the way. He urges us to move from "if, then" rewards to "now, that" rewards. Instead of saying to John, "If you get a good grade on this test, I will email your football coach to let him know"

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Content Area Classroom (cont'd)

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say, "Now that you've worked so hard in class preparing for the test, let's see what you can show." The reward will come in achieving his goal or in his relief knowing if he hasn't mastered the learning targets just yet, he'll get more coaching from his teacher.

Engage

Last, but certainly not least, the final E is for *engage*. Engagement is less about students' interest in the content or how they feel about the lesson, and is more about whether or not they have the confidence to perform tasks associated with the learning (Marzano & Pickering, 2011). This was an important distinction for us as we often thought engagement was synonymous with entertainment or pop culture references. In actuality, students do not have to enjoy reading *Of Mice and Men* in the way they might enjoy watching their favorite reality television show. Rather, they need to recognize the importance of reading it and feel confident in their abilities to achieve mastery of each learning target. This understanding frees us to focus on the content, skills, and instruction to help our students reach their goals. While there are so many strategies we have employed from our own professional study that have effectively engaged



our students, the strategies that seem to have the greatest impact for us include the use of inquiry, digital tools, and opportunities for social interaction with peers. (For additional strategies, we encourage you to read the texts referenced in this section.) "If a student feels this is my question, and I read my selection to answer it, and I have my answer, he owns the reading event. For his own question, he will read deeply, persevere, and gain an elaborated understanding" (Guthrie, 2007, p. 121). When Jose is studying meiosis and mitosis, not only is he somewhat uninterested in the content, the teacher has a hard time assessing his level of engagement because he is so quiet. When, however, given the opportunity to develop his own question "What's the controversy with stem cell research anyway?", and his teacher proceeds to build some background knowledge, Jose is much more engaged. He even came to reading class looking for informational texts on stem cells—a golden opportunity for us to further engage his new interest.

When we allow students to use their digital skills to perform academic tasks, we witness high levels of participation and engagement. We learned quickly that students do not want us entering their digital worlds. Instead, they want to use tools with which they have profound confidence utilizing to show what they know in our content areas. Mike, who has not completed one assignment during this grading period, suddenly turns in a social studies timeline because he is allowed to use animoto.com to create a visual representation of the chronological events with video

clips, images, and music. One English teacher learned Latricia has a gift for design and layout when she was given the opportunity to make a digital collage using glogster.com for her independent reading book instead of writing a book report.

Because our adolescents are social beings, our classroom desks are never arranged in spacious rows. Although tables, rather than desks, would be ideal, that option is not always available. In our case, we experiment with creative ways to cluster 30+ desks in one small classroom in order to promote social interaction around learning. Classroom environments that promote collaboration make it easier to conduct a brief "think, pair, share" or "turn and talk" without the time-consuming task of moving desks to transition in and out of groups. It also was a way we could coax Peter (our caterpillar) out of his cocoon and into collaborative learning. He felt safer in small groups or with a partner than in large group.

Ultimately, we learned our struggling readers achieve when we offer choice, provide relevance to the new learning by linking it to what students have already learned, give control for students' own learning through goal setting, inquiry, and self-reflection, and allow for frequent collaboration.

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TEACHING EDGE SPEAKER SERIES

The Teaching Edge Speaker Series is one you do not want to miss. These cutting-edge sessions offer valuable teaching strategies from a variety of well-known reading professionals. We are very excited to announce the Teaching Edge Speakers for Convention 2012. Some new faces appear and some favorites return in what promises to be our best Teaching Edge series yet.

Monday, April 30

Exemplary Reading and Writing Practices: Raising Achievement and Sustaining Results

— Regie Routman

When Readers Struggle in the Intermediate Grades: Teaching That Works

— Irene Fountas & Gay Su Pinnell

Tuesday, May 1

Teaching Students to Read like Detectives: Evidence, Justification and Discussion

— Doug Fisher & Nancy Frey

Write Like This: Teaching Real-World Writing Through Modeling & Mentor Texts

— Kelly Gallagher

Wednesday, May 2

Powerful English Language Arts Teaching in 21st Century Classrooms

— Ernest Morrell

Interactive Think Aloud Lessons: 10 Surefire Ways to Engage Students and Improve Comprehension

— Lori Oczkus

The Daily 5: Fostering Independent and Enthusiastic Readers

— The 2 Sisters

Thanks to IRA's Publishing Partners, there is a great line-up of Luncheon Speakers this year. Space is limited so early registrations are encouraged to ensure tickets to hear these dynamic speakers. Tickets to Luncheon Speakers are not included in the convention registration.

Monday, April 30 – Noon - Primary Literature Luncheon Speaker:

Peter Reynolds (Simon & Schuster)



Reynolds is the bestselling author and illustrator of *The Dot* and *Ish* and illustrator for the #1 *New York Times* bestseller *Someday* by Alison McGhee.

He is also the illustrator of *Little Boy, Charlie and Kiwi*, the Judy Moody Series, and most recently *I'm Here*. He lives in Dedham, MA where he is co-owner of the Blue Bunny bookstore and co-founder of FableVision, an award-winning children's media developer and book packager. Visit Peter online at www.peterhreynolds.com and at www.fablevision.com.

Tuesday, May 1 — Noon — Young Adult Literature Luncheon Speaker: Jacqueline Woodson (Penguin)



Woodson is the winner of the Margaret A. Edwards Award for lifetime achievement in writing for young adults, is the author

of *The Other Side*, *Coming On Home Soon*, *Peace*, National Book Award finalist *Locomotion*, Newbery Honor winners *After Tupac and D Foster*, *Feathers* and *Show Way*, *Miracle's Boys* (recipient of a Coretta Scott King

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Award and a *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize), and *Hush* (a National Book Award Finalist), among many others. Out in spring 2012, *Beneath a Meth Moon*, is a haunting, but ultimately hopeful story of a young girl's journey on and off crystal meth. Told in Laurel's voice as she looks back at her months of addiction, and interspersed with memories of life before and during Hurricane Katrina, this is a masterly work by one of the finest writers for young adult literature. The story is both unforgettable and beautifully and lyrically told. Jackie is a fantastic speaker and will offer a fresh new take on how to use her books in the classroom.

Wednesday, May 2 – Noon - Book and Author Luncheon Speaker: Christopher Paul Curtis (Random House Publishing)



Curtis has become one of the most important voices in children's literature today. *Bud, Not Buddy* is a staple in classroom curricula and it was the first

book ever to win both the Newbery Medal and the Coretta Scott King Author Award. The companion book, *The Mighty Miss Malone*, will be published in Spring 2012 and is being anxiously awaited by educators. Curtis also won two Newbery Honors for *The Watsons go to Birmingham—1963* and *Elijah of Buxton*.

We'll see you
at IRA!

President's Letter (cont'd)

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Havel, who faced overwhelming odds under a repressive and iron-fisted government knew better, however. His words inspire both the courage to take up our cause, and the wisdom to know that we do not have to do it alone.

As part of our mission, the Minnesota Reading Association hopes to help educators overcome the difficulties they face in their work as literacy professionals. We hope to embolden them to take up the daunting tasks set before them and at the same time to let them know that they do not have to do it without help. We provide a wealth of resources towards those ends.

We provide a broad range of professional development opportunities across the state focused on topics and issues that address the unique demands of our region. This fall CMRC and MAR teamed together for the fall symposium and pulled in over 100 people for a Making Reading Relevant event in Sauk Rapids. Arrowhead just recently completed a Beach Event that drew in over 70 local literacy professionals. SRIC and TCARC, as I write this, are planning an event for February 18th on Native American Perspectives, Literature, and Lessons that is filling up quickly.

Additionally, we have a number of committees working on projects throughout the year. The Legislative Advocacy group stays attuned to state bills that might impact reading instruction. The Celebrate Literacy committee plans our annual event honoring literacy leaders and programs from around our state. This year our Celebrate Literacy Event will be on March 30th, and we hope that you have a chance to join us for that special evening (Maple Grove Community Center, Maple

Grove, MN). We also have a grant committee dedicated to maintaining and awarding about \$4,000 each year in grants to MRA members.

The MRA also provides members with the means to become active as literacy leaders, to take up positions where they can become advocates and ambassadors for literacy on the statewide level. Becoming a part of our leadership council means that you too can help shape and guide our organization into the future.

With so many resources, grants, and opportunities available to members, the tasks before us don't seem as insurmountable. We are grateful that you are part of our organization, and we hope to see you at one of our many events this year.

Scott Voss s.voss@mnreading.org

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