

Illinois Reading Council



Empowering  
Lives  
Through  
Literacy

# Communicator

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*"Books and ideas are the most effective  
weapons against intolerance and ignorance."*

~ Lyndon B. Johnson



**ILLINOIS READS**  
**A READING STATE OF MIND**

The Illinois Reading Council is excited to share that the **2025 Illinois Reads Book List** is now available on [StoryGraph](#).

StoryGraph is a social cataloging platform for books. The challenges aim to promote reading, help users explore the books and authors, track reading progress, and connect with others reading the same books.

Special thanks go to Ryan Franklin from the Illinois State Library for creating the Reading Challenge for Illinois Reads.

Join the challenge today at the link below and please feel free to share with other readers!

JOIN THE CHALLENGE

# THE LAND OF LINCOLN'S LIT LOUNGE OF LOVE:

The [Illinois Council for Affective Reading Education \(ICARE\)](#) is thrilled to announce our new **Vlog series: Land of Lincoln's Lit Lounge of Love.**

Each month, award winning author **Sarah Aronson** (*Abzuglutely: Battling, Bellowing Bella Abzug, Just Like Rube Goldberg, Brand New Bubbe, The Wish List* series) will interview other Illinois authors and illustrators.

This month she interviewed **Candace Fleming**, the amazing author of over 50 books, and past Illinois Prairie State author of the year. Candace shares insights into her writing, talks about her recent Sibert award winner *Enigma Girls*, and gives a sneak peak of her two newest books: *Is It Real: The Loch Ness Monster* and *Death in the Jungle*.

[Click here](#) for the January installment and join us back in the Lit Lounge next month.

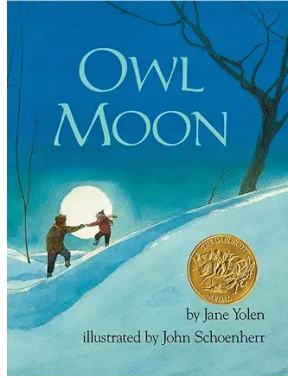


## Themed Books in the Snowy Woods by April Dykes, Empowering Writers

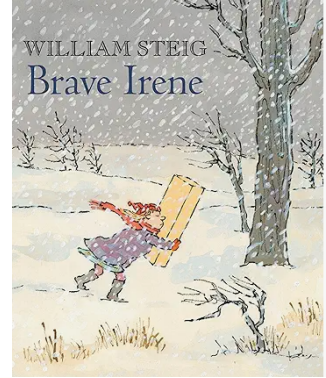
As a member, I have enjoyed the newsletters and information that is shared. I would like to recommend the following books for their timely settings in the snowy woods. The books are great examples of an author's use of elaborative detail to truly activate a reader's five senses!



**The Snow Bear**  
by Miriam Moss



**Owl Moon**  
by Jane Yolen



**Brave Irene**  
by William Steig



# 2025 IRC CONFERENCE

March 13-14, 2025  
Springfield, Illinois



ILLINOIS READING COUNCIL  
**LIBERATING LITERACY**  
Embrace Love, Joy, & Empowerment

Early registration ends on **February 5th** for the [2025 IRC Conference](#), Liberating Literacy: Embrace Love, Joy, & Empowerment, on March 13-14, 2025 in Springfield, Illinois.

To find out all about the conference and the featured speakers who will be joining us, check out the [2025 Preliminary Program](#) that is available online now. Featured speakers include: Laurie Halse Anderson, Darcie Little Badger, Cozbi A. Cabrera, Dare Coulter, Candace Fleming, Liz Kleinrock, Kass Minor, Ernest Morrell, Adam Peterson, Darius Phelps, Dwayne Reed, Shamari Reid, Dan Santat, Trisha Speed Shaskan, Stephen Shaskan, Amy Stewart, Duncan Tonatiuh, Julia Torres, Alicia D. Williams, Kristin Ziemke, and the 2025 Illinois Reads Authors!

We hope to see you at the 2025 IRC Conference!

**The Illinois Reading Council**  
invites you to join us for the 56th Annual Conference



**ILLINOIS READING COUNCIL  
LIBERATING LITERACY**  
Embrace Love, Joy, & Empowerment

**March 13-14, 2025 Springfield, Illinois**


**Illinois Reads Author Panels**

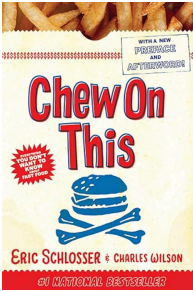
Interested in presenting? Visit [www.illinoisreadingcouncil.org](http://www.illinoisreadingcouncil.org) by September 1st!



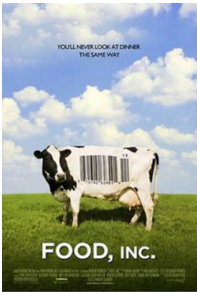
# IRC HIGHLIGHT REELS

## Empowered Learners: Investigating the Food Industry by Brandon Barr, Mark Twain Elementary School

### Teaching Real-World Relevance in Chicago



At Mark Twain Elementary, located on the Southwest Side of Chicago, my students are surrounded by densely populated neighborhoods, Midway Airport, factories, and the Stevenson Expressway. Many have limited knowledge of rural life, farming, or the origins of their food. This makes it critical for them to explore how the food they enjoy—like Takis and fast food—is sourced and its broader implications.



In a recent unit with my sixth graders, students developed their critical thinking skills by analyzing nonfiction texts through a carefully designed skill sheet aligned to Common Core State Standards for sixth grade. They examined excerpts from [Chew on This](#) and watched the documentary [Food, Inc.](#), making connections between the texts and real-world issues while articulating their insights in meaningful ways through expository writing.

### Developing Key Academic Skills

Throughout the unit, students honed critical reading, evidence-based writing, and outlining skills. Using the skill sheet, students identified the author's POV on problems and reflected on how authors support their arguments with textual evidence.

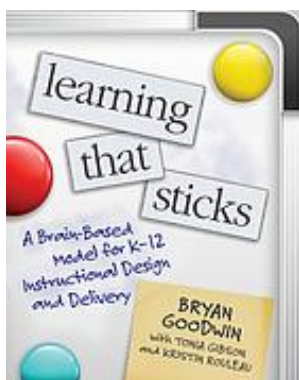


# #WhatAmReading



I am reading [\*\*Learning That Sticks: A Brain-Based Model for K-12 Instructional Design and Delivery\*\*](#) by Bryan Goodwin, Tonia Gibson, and Kristin Rouleau.

~ Jennifer Erickson, Elementary Teacher, Alice Gustafson School, Batavia SD #101



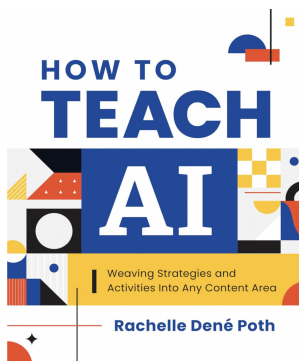
Efficient teachers cover content, “the equivalent of waterskiing over something we could easily scuba dive into.” However, if we impart information without sparking curiosity, efficiency becomes the thief of the wonder of discovery, which is the heartbeat of learning.

“Intellectual curiosity—the need to explore, answer questions, and encounter new experiences—is the best companion to learning.” Encouraging students to ask their own questions is an invitation “to experience the joy of chasing their own intellectual horizons.” As educators, “our aim is precisely to help students connect knowledge and skills together to better understand the world around them and take informed action that creates positive outcomes for themselves and others.” Teachers “are in the business of helping students turn information into memories, and we hope what we teach students in

our classrooms today sticks with them tomorrow and far into the future.”

I am reading [\*\*How To Teach AI: Weaving Strategies and Activities into Any Content Area\*\*](#) by Rachelle Dené Poth.

~ Elaine J. Roberts, Ph.D., Educator and Leadership/Instructional Coach

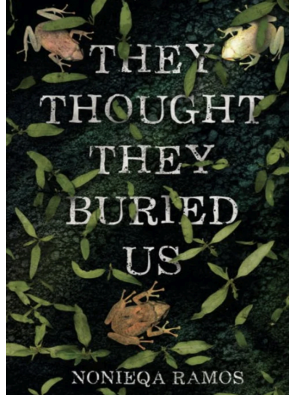


Rachelle Dené Poth's book *How to Teach AI* is full of practical insights, guidelines, recommendations, and activities from the perspective of a classroom teacher. Dr. Poth includes links to lesson plans and resources. This could be a great book for a PLC, grade-level, or schoolwide book study. You will mark many a page with sticky tabs to get to the things you want to refer to and use again and again.

I am reading [\*\*They Thought They Buried Us\*\*](#) by Nonieqa Ramos.

~ Elvira Pichardo, Assistant Professor, Lewis University

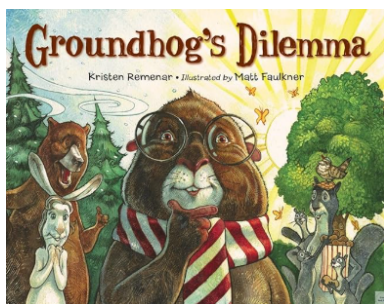
In today's age of censorship and banned books, institutions have the



power to rewrite history and silence and negate stories. In her young adult novel, *They Thought They Buried Us*, Nonieqa Ramos uses horror to explore the legacy of institutionalized racism and its impact on generational trauma through the relationship of the main character, Yuiza, with her mother and Tia's, her classmates and teachers, and other minority students. This book starts with Yuiza's acceptance into the prestigious institution, *Our Lady of Perpetual Mercy*, as a scholarship student. Her relationship with her mother who suffers from mental illness, her still-fresh trauma from the death of her undocumented father, and her familial relationships and cultural background ground and foment her efforts to fight the institution that seeks to bury her. The book continues to explore race and trauma in schools, how access to resources creates access to institutional power, and how history, when silenced and erased, tends to repeat itself. Yuiza's familiarity with horror, as a budding horror director, allows her to see and fight against racism and oppression, finding strength in her identities, her community, and her family, including using her dreams to connect the past to her present.

## Family Literacy Bookshelf By Barb Ashton

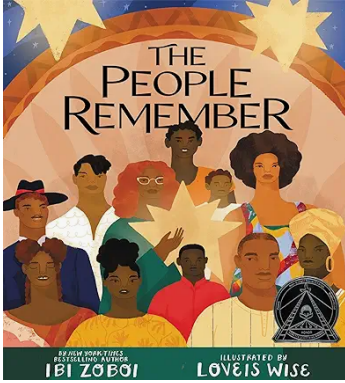
February has arrived. Will the groundhog see his shadow? Who will win the Super Bowl between the Chiefs and Eagles? February also lets us celebrate Valentine's Day, President's Day, Mardi Gras, the observance of African American History Month, and the start of spring training for our favorite baseball team.



On February 2nd people often watch the weather report with some intensity to find out if the groundhog sees his shadow or not when he emerges from his burrow, indicating if there are six more weeks of winter or an early spring. An enjoyable book to read about this weather tradition is [\*Groundhog's Dilemma\*](#) by Kristen Remenar. Groundhog has a problem as he knows that no matter what the prediction is, half of his forest animal friends will be happy and the other half of them will be upset or grumpy. He tells them that he "doesn't make the weather but just reports it." In anticipation for the next

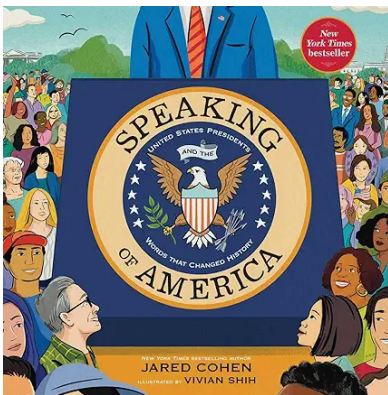
Groundhog's Day Groundhog's forest friends over the year give him things to bribe and convince him to do what they want. In the end Groundhog decides "who he is and tells it like he sees it." He also realizes that you cannot please everyone all the time. *Groundhog's Dilemma* is a story about friendship and honesty and also provides for discussion on what you would do in a similar situation. Enhanced by the adorable and humorous illustrations, *Groundhog's Dilemma* makes for an enjoyable read-aloud for preschoolers to primary students on Groundhog's Day.

February is African American History Month. A great book to share with students and families is [\*The People Remember: A Kwanzaa Holiday Book for Kids\*](#) by Ibi Zoboi. Told in poetic verse, the author takes the reader on a journey that begins in



Africa as the reader follows the ancestors through the history of the black people being captives sold and sent across the ocean on slave ships to America. The journey continues through slavery, the Civil War, Reconstruction, the Great Migration, the Civil Rights Movement, and the present-day Black Lives Matter Movement. The seven principles of Kwanzaa are also interwoven within the narrative. As each section of the narrative ends, the author highlights one of the principles of Kwanzaa and the recurring refrain “The People Remember.” *The People Remember* is not just about the history of triumphs and struggles but also the contributions African Americans have made in business, entertainment, science, inventions, activism, and politics. The illustrations are vibrant and help the reader understand the experiences of the African American people. This book belongs in

all libraries and provides many opportunities for family and classroom discussion. You can hear the author read the story on YouTube. The back of the book provides additional information in the Author’s Note, detailed timeline of events, and suggestions for further reading.



In honor of President’s Day a new book to read is [\*Speaking of America: United States Presidents and the Words That Changed History\*](#) by Jared Cohen. This book includes America’s presidents from George Washington to Joe Biden and the words they’ve spoken that have inspired, encouraged, explained, asserted, and defined their actions throughout various situations in America’s history. Each president is featured in a two-page spread that features a quote, the time period they served, and how their words had a purpose and made a difference. There’s also a box entitled “Did You Know” that gives fun facts about each president. The author’s writing is engaging and helps the reader understand the major facts, events, and historical significance of every presidency. Colorful

illustrations help to bring the story of each president alive. While there have been many biographies about America’s presidents, *Speaking of America* presents a different perspective with each president’s famous quote, the power of their words, and some interesting facts about them. The back of the book has a timeline of additional information about the presidents. There’s also information on how to be a speech writer and speech making. *Speaking of America* makes a nice addition for all libraries.

## Looking Ahead

**February 1: World Hijab Day**

**February 2: Groundhog Day**

**February 3-7: National School Counselor Week** – Remember to thank your school counselor

**February 5: World Read Aloud Day**

**February 9: Super Bowl Sunday**

**February 11: National Inventor’s Day**

**February 12: Abraham Lincoln’s Birthday**

**February 14: Valentine’s Day**

**February 17: President’s Day**

**February 22: George Washington’s Birthday**

**February 27: Polar Bear Day**



# UPCOMING PD EVENTS

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

- **February 3, 2025: West Suburban Reading Council** will host Isn't it Ironic? Nurturing Humanity Through Digital Literacy and AI with Cindi Koudelka from 6:00 to 7:30 pm via Zoom.
- **February 4, 2025: MID-State Reading Council** will host the Shifting the Balance Book Club from 4:30 to 5:30 pm at Gill Street Restaurant, 3002B Gill Street, Bloomington, Illinois.
- **February 4, 2025: Suburban Council of IRA (SCIRA)** will host AI Literacy: Understanding the Basics and Its Role in Education with Donna Wakefield from 4:30 to 6:00 pm at National Louis University, 1000 Capitol Drive, Wheeling, Illinois.
- **February 5, 2025: IRC Webinar on Applying the Science of Reading in Vocabulary to Build Comprehension and Engagement** with Elfrieda H. Hiebert from 7:00 to 8:00 pm via Zoom Webinar.
- **February 8, 2025: Fox Valley Reading Council and Secondary Reading League** will co-host How to Write a Story About Anything with Adi Alsaid from 9:00 to 11:30 am at the Kane County Regional Office of Education, 28 North 1st Street Geneva, Illinois.
- **February 11, 2025: Will County Reading Council** will host Unlocking the Illinois Comprehensive Literacy Plan-Part IV Vocabulary from 7:00 to 8:00 pm via Zoom.
- **February 18, 2025: Central Illinois Reading** will host the Loving Literature and Savoring Sweets from 4:00 to 6:00 pm at Bunn Gourmet, 2941 Plaza Dr, Springfield, Illinois.
- **February 19, 2025: Central Illinois Reading** will host the Loving Literature and Savoring Sweets from 4:00 to 6:00 pm at Mockingbird Cafe, 129 S John St, Rochester, Illinois.
- **February 22, 2025: Illini Reading Council and Vermilion Valley Reading Council** will host The Power of Story for Healing from Trauma with Julie Hoffman from 10:30 am to 12:30 pm at the Champaign Library, 200 W. Green Street, Champaign, Illinois.
- **February 22, 2025: Anderson's Bookshops** is sponsoring the [23rd Annual Children's Literature Breakfast](#). Enjoy a morning of KidLit book love while listening to featured speakers, David Shannon, Jewell Parker Rhodes, Carole Lindstrom, and Gale Galligan. Other highlights include breakfast with local authors, raffles, goodie bags, book talks, and a pop-up bookshop and book signings.
- **February 24, 2025: Illinois Valley Reading Council** will host Cultivating a Comprehensive Literacy Approach: Nurturing Reading Proficiency and Passion with Cindi Koudelka in Peoria, Illinois.
- **February 27, 2025: Will County Reading** will host Not This, But That: Keys to Unlocking



the ICLP from 5:00 to 8:00 pm at Lewis University, Academic Center, One University Parkway, Romeoville, Illinois.

- **February 27, 2025: Northern Illinois Reading Council** will host Digging Deeper into the Teaching of Reading Fluency – The Fluency Development Lesson with Dr. Tim Rasinski via Zoom from 6:00 to 8:00 pm.
- **March 13-14, 2025: Illinois Reading Council** will host the **2025 IRC Conference, Liberating Literacy: Embrace Love, Joy, & Empowerment**, in Springfield, Illinois.

To view the full **IRC Events Calendar**, please visit the [IRC Website](#).



**APPLY TODAY**

**APPLY TODAY**  
for the  
**Library of Congress  
2025 Literacy Awards!**

Apply at: [www.loc.gov/literacy](http://www.loc.gov/literacy)  
by **February 18, 2025**  
**11:59pm ET**

Non-profit organizations, educational institutions, Indian tribes and tribal organizations, and projects created or sponsored by local, regional or national governments with successful literacy initiatives are eligible to apply.

[literacyawards@loc.gov](mailto:literacyawards@loc.gov)

**LITERACY AWARDS**  
**LIBRARY OF CONGRESS**

## **IRC ELECTION BALLOT**

By the Illinois Reading Council

The **Illinois Reading Council Election Ballot** opened on January 15, 2025. IRC Members received an email with a direct link to the online ballot provided by Balloteer, Inc. The email also contained a **Voter ID Number** and **Password**.

This will be your opportunity to vote for the **Vice President** of IRC, to become President-Elect in 2026-2027 and President in 2027-2028, **Treasurer** of IRC, who will serve until July 2027, and the **ILA State Coordinator**, who will serve until July 2027. The election will run from January 15, 2025 until February 15, 2025.



# CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

Members are encouraged to submit articles at any time to [irc@illinoisreadingcouncil.org](mailto:irc@illinoisreadingcouncil.org).

**#WhatIAmReading**: Share a book that you are reading, in 3 to 4 sentences.

**IRC Highlight Reels**: Share snapshots of successes in your classrooms in 100 to 300 words. Remember no success is too big or too small to share and pictures welcomed!

**Other Literacy Topics**:

- Tips for Teaching Writing
- Literacy Meets STEAM
- Building the Reading and Writing Connection
- Why We Need to
- And any other literacy topics that interests you!

Thank you for helping to inspire your fellow educators! Posts will be shared on social media too!

## QUICK LINKS

[Visit the IRC Website](#)

[Full IRC Events Calendar](#)

[Latest on the IRC Conference](#)

[Available IRC Awards and Grants](#)

[Bring IRC PD to your School District](#)

[Learn more about the Illinois Reads Program](#)

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

