

Empowering
Lives
Through
Literacy

Communicator

1100 Beech Street, Building 8, Suite 2
Normal, IL 61761

Phone: 309-454-1341
Fax: 309-454-3512

Email: irc@illinoisreadingcouncil.org
Web: www.illinoisreadingcouncil.org

 @IllinoisReadingCouncil

 Twitter @ILReadCouncil #ircreads

 [Instagram.com/ilreadcouncil](https://www.instagram.com/ilreadcouncil)

 [Pinterest.com/illinoisreading](https://www.pinterest.com/illinoisreading)

*"How many a man has dated a new era in his
life from the reading of a book."*

~ Henry David Thoreau

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

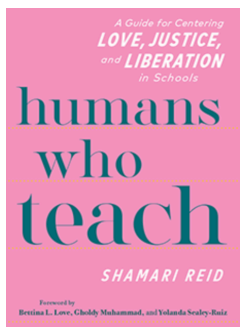
Anderson, Darcie Little Badger, Cozbi A. Cabrera, Dare Coulter, Candace Fleming, Liz Kleinrock, Kass Minor, Ernest Morrell, Adam Peterson, Darius Phelps, Dwayne Reed, Shamari Reid, Dan Santat, Trisha Speed Shaskan, Stephen Shaskan, Amy Stewart, Duncan Tonatiuh, Julia Torres, Alicia D. Williams, Kristin Ziemke, and the 2025 Illinois Reads Authors!

We hope to see you at the 2025 IRC Conference!

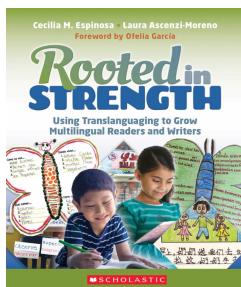
IRC BOOK CLUB

Join educators from all over the state in the online [Winter 2025 IRC Book Club](#)! Choose one, two, or all three books!

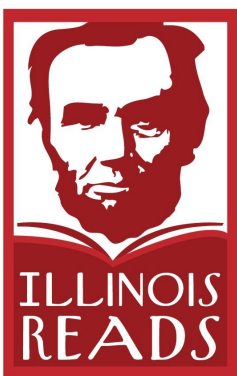
Beginning **January 19**, participants will be reading, reflecting on, and responding in the ***Humans Who Teach*** book club, the ***Rooted in Strength*** book club, and/or the ***Illinois Reads*** book club during the seven-weeks of online discussions. Participants who complete all assignments will be eligible to receive 15 PD clock hours for each book club.



For the [Humans Who Teach: A Guide for Centering Love, Justice, and Liberation in Schools](#) book club, the book was written by Shamari Reid. This book club will be exploring the complicated humanity of those who teach and how within their humanity lies the transformative possibilities for cultivating lives and classrooms characterized by love.



For the [Rooted in Strength: Using Translanguaging to Grow Multilingual Readers and Writers](#) book club, the book was written by Cecilia M. Espinosa and Laura Ascenzi-Moreno. This book club will be demonstrating how our emergent bilingual students who speak two or more languages in their daily lives thrive when they are able to use “translanguaging” to tap the power of their entire linguistic and sociocultural repertoires.



For the [Illinois Reads](#) book club, participants will be selecting books from one of the age bands of the 2025 Illinois Reads list to prepare lesson plans and activities. For Birth to 2nd Grade, participants will select a new book each week for a total of six books; for 3rd to 5th Grade, participants will select three books; for 6th to 8th Grade, participants will select two books; and for 9th to 12th Grade or the Adult age band, participants will select one book.

Register by **January 15, 2025**, 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 book is not included.

REGISTER TODAY!



3rd Annual Mock Caldecott Award 2025 by Laura Beltchenko, IRC PL&D Committee Chair

It's that time again to read and critique your favorite picture books of 2024 to determine the winner of the prestigious Randolph Caldecott Award. Mark your calendars for January 27, 2025, for the announcement of the [ALA Youth Media Awards](#). This is the link to have your class participate in the live on-air broadcast of the award ceremony.

I have been matching the picture books I have been reading, recommended by associations and bloggers I follow, using Caldecott criteria.

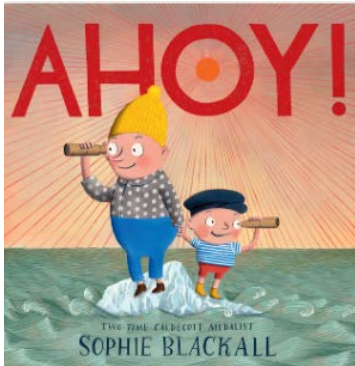
- Excellence of execution in the artistic technique employed
- Excellence of pictorial interpretation of story, theme, or concept
- Appropriateness of style of illustration to the story, theme or concept
- Delineation of plot, theme, characters, setting, mood or information through the pictures
- Excellence of presentation in recognition of a child audience

I also look to those books that have been [past award recipients](#). My own personal criteria include opportunities for read-alouds, as well as implications for social and emotional learning. This year, I found so many selections that gave me a sense of both hope and joy in storytelling through the authorship and the illustrative qualities.

As a reminder, here are the "Terms of Selection" for the Caldecott Medal and Honor from the American Library Association:

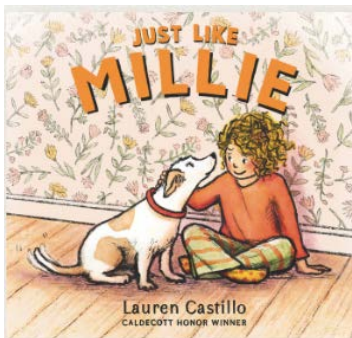
"The Medal shall be awarded annually to the artist of the most distinguished American picture book for children published in English in the United States during the preceding year. There are no limitations as to the character of the picture book except that the illustrations be original work. Honor Books may be named. These shall be books that are also truly distinguished. The Award is restricted to artists who are citizens or residents of the United States."

Here is my list of 10 books with a few honorable mentions that will get you started on your class or school selections for the 2025 winners. The books are listed in no particular order. Enjoy the reading with your students!



[Aho!](#) written and illustrated by Sophie Blackall

What is not to love about Blackall's illustrations and imaginative writing style? This book built around a child's vivid imagination assists in drawing in a parent laden with household chores as her child beckons her to come along on a sea adventure using household objects to outfit the make-believe ship. As you read you find yourself wrapped up in the eye of the storm and becoming a full participant as the story "sails on." Complete with a glossary of nautical terminology, this book expands your sense of wonder and vocabulary!



[Just Like Millie](#) written and illustrated by Lauren Castillo

This is a story that is perfect for use with the social and emotional wellbeing of a child. Placed in an urban setting with a single parent, the little girl is fearful of the outside world, meeting people or making friends in her new neighborhood. The artwork has soft comforting tones that translate to the tender persona of an understanding mother's love. The cadence of the language provides rich emotional descriptions of fears that many children have with being shy. The thoughtful mother provides the resolution and together they go to a shelter to get a dog. This helps the little girl recognize that if Millie, the dog, can make friends in the park, so can she. (Authors [Video discussion](#)).



[Jump for Joy](#) written by Karen Gray Ruelle and illustrations by Hadley Hooper

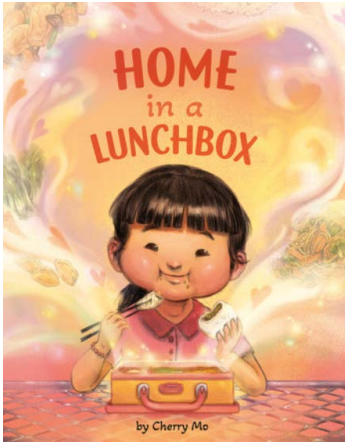
From the moment I opened and started reading this book I had a smile on my face. It is a story of a little girl, Joy, who is longing for a dog and a dog, Jump, that wants to belong to someone. Joy isn't fussy about what kind of dog and this is realized through her concoctions of dogs from materials such as sea shells, naming it Shelby, only to have it wash away in the sea. Jump makes a girl with mud and calls it Patty as he pats the girl into shape, only to have the wind forcefully blow it away. This thoughtful use of materials continues throughout the story and imaginative plot line with a delightful resolution of finding each other in a joyful ending.

[Solar Bear](#) written by Beth Ferry and illustrations by Brendan



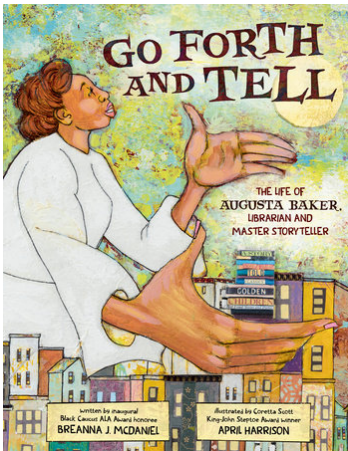
Wenzel

This book with its soft-toned artwork features endangered species represented as ghost-like figures floating among varied habitats. The center of the story dwells on potential extinct creatures and uses words and illustrations that help young children understand that their awareness is required to secure their future. They invite children to understand the human causes of wildlife extinction and encourage them to work together for a better future. The publisher's website has a book trailer as well as a teachers' guide to support the understanding of endangered species and extinction.



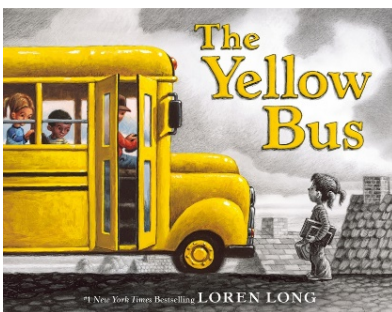
Home in a Lunch Box

written and illustrated by Cherry Mo
This is a story of immigration, and the difficulties children face with language as a barrier to communication. Armed with a few English words and phrases (e.g., hello, thank you, I don't know, toilet) written on her palm, Jun navigates through her school day. Depictions of her life in the U. S. are presented through detailed illustrations that tell the journey of Jun through many school days of embarrassment and misunderstanding. As this wordless picture book evolves, Jun is able to share the customary food of her homeland of Hong Kong with her classmates and it acts as the vehicle to help her make friends. This is Cherry Mo's debut picture book.



Go Forth and Tell: The Life of Augusta Baker, Librarian and Master Storyteller

written by Breanna J. McDaniel and illustrated by April Harrison
I would be remiss if I didn't acknowledge this narrative informational text that speaks to so many of us who admire writers and illustrators conveying stories of notable literary individuals. This story of Augusta Baker gets to the heart of her mission as Harlem public librarian and storyteller. "She noticed that there were hardly any books at the library featuring Black people in respectful, uplifting ways. Thus began her journey of championing books, writers, librarians, and teachers centering on Black stories, educating and inspiring future acclaimed authors like Audre Lorde and James Baldwin along the way." The illustrations are works of art blending with the craftsmanship of the text.



The Yellow Bus

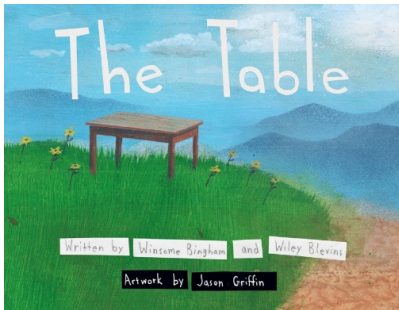
written and illustrated by Loren Long
This book is the tale of a life cycle. At each stage of its life, the Yellow Bus finds worth and joy. The book takes its readers on a journey and how she "...spent her days driving passengers (first school children, then elderly people) from one important place to another. And they filled her with joy." Eventually abandoned under a bridge, the bus becomes a resting spot for unhoused persons. One morning she's towed away and left in a field near a river, where the bus becomes a playground for a herd of goats. When the river floods the valley, fish take up residence. The story illustrated in

grayscale with the vividness of the bright yellow bus provides readers a reason to reflect on the value and joy of each phase of life.



[The Last Stand](#) written by Antwan Eady and illustrations by Jerome Pumphrey and Jarrett Pumphrey
 This story is “A sumptuously illustrated, bittersweet story that at once becomes an ode to and a eulogy for Black American farms.” Determination and grit are the generalizations woven into this story of a family on a mission to keep open the last farm stand that provides nutritious foods to the rural community. The storytelling is coupled with inferred messages in the illustrations of the plight of black farmers. When grandpa Earl becomes too old to carry on the stand, the unnamed boy narrator continues the legacy. As word gets out

that Earl is ailing the community gives back to him with foods prepared with the bounty he generated for them.



[The Table](#) written by Winsome Bingham and Wiley Blevins and illustrations by Jason Griffin
 This book recently came on my radar, and I was immediately moved by the way Jason Griffin's illustrations told a saga of two families and how they used one table to share their stories. The story is told through objects on the table and the hands of the family members. This makes it an especially poignant point of view for storytelling. The setting in Appalachia tells of the coal mine closing and the need for one family to move on. Unable to keep the table, it is left by the road where another family sees the table, brings it home and

cleans it up. They sit around it, eat, work and laugh as did the previous owners. The story has some nostalgic tones and shared hardships as well as small bits of joy that an object, like a table, can unknowingly bring.



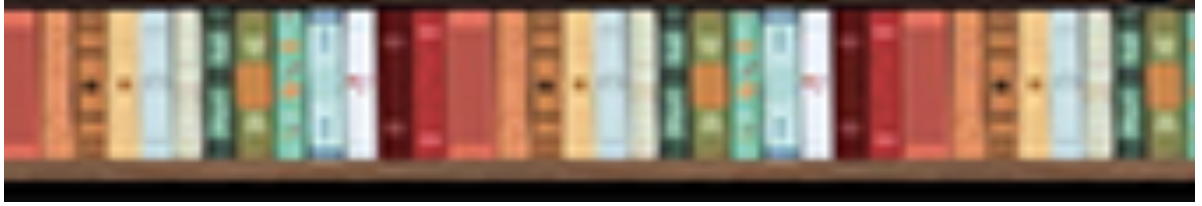
[A Joyful Song: A Naming Story](#) written by Lesléa Newman and illustrations by Susan Gal
 This charming tale captures the joy and excitement of welcoming a young son's Shabbat. The story follows a family of two moms as they walk through their neighborhood toward the synagogue, where they will officially announce the baby's name. The story also highlights the warmth of community and the Jewish tradition. The colorful illustrations add depth and richness to the story, depicting the dynamic diversity of the neighborhood and the love that surrounds the family. This is a loving tale that beautifully celebrates family, faith, and the

bonds that unite.

Books that required an honorable mention:

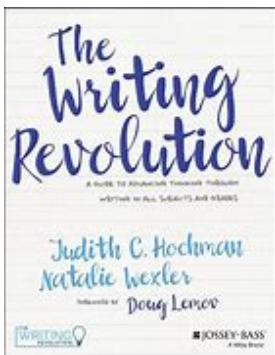
- **[Being Home](#)** written by Traci Sorell and illustrated by Michaela Goade
- **[Partly Cloudy](#)** written and illustrated by Deborah Freedman
- **[Nana in the Country](#)** written and illustrated by Lauren Castillo
- **[Life After Whale: The Amazing Ecosystem of a Whale Fall](#)** written by Lynn Brunelle and illustrated by Jason Chin
- **[The Fastest Drummer: Clap Your Hands for Viola Smith!](#)** written by Dean Robbins and illustrated by Susanna Chapman

#WhatIAmReading



I am reading [*The Writing Revolution: A Guide to Advancing Thinking Through Writing in All Subjects and Grades*](#) by Judith Hochman, Natalie Wexler, and Doug Lemov.

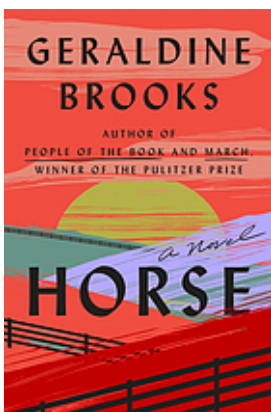
~ Kimberly Hollis, Secondary Reading League President



Writing is thinking. However, our students struggle with written expression and understanding how it can reveal their thinking. *The Writing Revolution* catalogs a system of instruction starting at the sentence level that can strengthen student writing as well as deepen their comprehension of content material. This text gives non-ELA teachers practical ways to support the writing development of their students while raising the rigor of thinking in their classrooms.

I am reading [*Horse*](#) by Geraldine Brooks.

~ Elizabeth Goldsmith-Conley, Illini Reading Council President

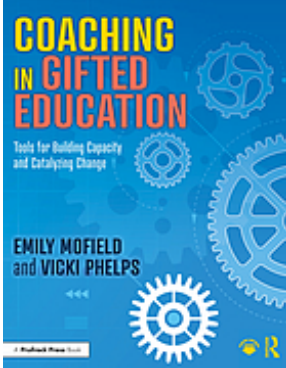


I loved and learned much in reading *Horse* by Geraldine Brooks. It is historical fiction set in three different time periods, 1850's Kentucky, 1950's New York, and 2019 Washington D.C. Through the true story of an amazing racehorse, his skeleton, and the many paintings and photos of him, Brooks tells a lively story which involves themes of racism, love, art, and science.

I am reading [*Coaching in Gifted Education: Tools for Building Capacity and Catalyzing Change*](#) by Emily Mofield and Vicki Phelps.

~ Laura Beltchenko, IRC PL&D Committee Chair

The book, *Coaching in Gifted Education: Tools for Building Capacity and Catalyzing Change* by Emily Mofield and Vicki Phelps, provides a

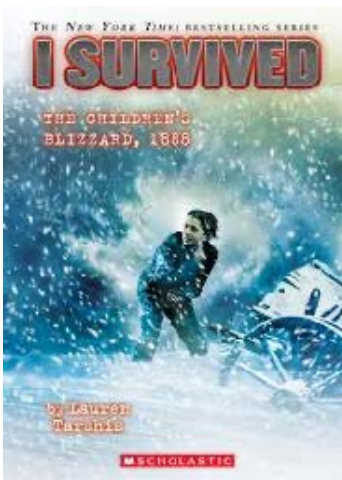


step-by-step instructional coaching model with a host of ways to approach professional learning and lesson development for the advanced learner and how to dialogue with general education teachers. A link is provided to access implementation forms and necessary communication documents to support the coaching model in advanced, accelerated and gifted education.

Family Literacy Bookshelf

By Barb Ashton

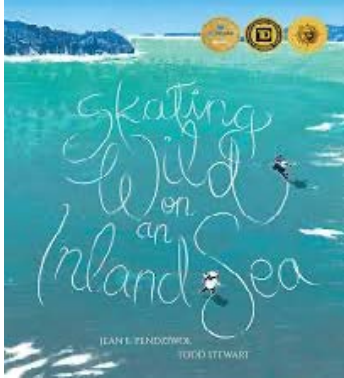
Happy New Year! Welcome to 2025! January is upon us. Take some time as a family to enjoy some outdoor winter activities. January is also a good time to stay indoors and do a puzzle in honor of National Puzzle Month, or have some hot chocolate while reading a good book.



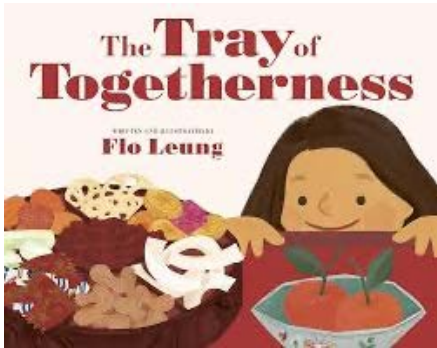
In the book [*I Survived the Children's Blizzard, 1888*](#), Lauren Tarshis takes the reader back in time to pioneer America in what was known as Dakota Territory. This is the story of eleven-year-old John Hale and his family. They've moved from Chicago to what is now South Dakota. Life on the prairie has been challenging for John's family but they're determined to make it. Having endured a frigid winter thus far, it's now January and a break in the weather has allowed the children to return to school. While out for recess John notices a fast approaching snow cloud that means a blizzard is coming. The children rush to get inside the schoolhouse as the snow begins to fall. In the meantime, three men from town come with their horse drawn sleds to rescue the children and teacher. John joins the older boys in one of the sleds but the horse gets spooked and runs wild. Fearing the sled will break the boys jump out. Seeing what appears to be a barn, the boys rush toward it. When they get there, it's only a large haystack. The boys dig a

hole and crawl inside. Trapped for hours, fighting off sleep and later frostbite, will the boys be rescued? Read *I Survived the Children's Blizzard, 1888* to discover the answer. This is another adventure story in the *I Survived* series and will be enjoyed by middle grade students. The back of the book contains additional information about the event and a bibliography for further reading.

A favorite winter activity is to go ice skating. [*Skating Wild on an Inland Sea*](#) by Jean E. Pendziwol is a story written in lyrical prose about two children who live near Lake Superior and wake up one morning to frosted windows and "to hear the lake singing and the wind wailing." They hurry and bundle up to venture out into the cold. Carrying their skates they walk along the snow-covered shore noticing the tracks left by the deer, fox, otter, wolf, and other



animals as they head to the inland bay where the “ice is thick and smooth.” Lacing up their skates, stepping onto the ice, and slowly gliding along, the lake begins to sing again. This happens as the ice expands and contracts. As the children glide along, their skate blades make beautiful designs, and they enjoy the beauty of nature around them, and admire the sea creatures that live and swim below the clear patches of ice. The illustrations of Todd Stewart enhance the story and also engage the reader in his beautiful and enjoyable winter story.



Chinese or Lunar New Year is just around the corner. To learn about one of the traditions associated with Chinese/Lunar New Year, read [The Tray of Togetherness](#) by Flo Leung. In this story a little girl (the narrator) and her family are hosting a New Year party to celebrate the Lunar New Year. Grandma arrives at the family’s home and tells the girl about preparing the meal that includes “the lucky sweets” that will be put on the special “Tray of Togetherness.” Each of the treats “symbolizes various good wishes.” Before the tray can be fixed, a family trip to the market to get the ingredients is necessary. Some of the items purchased are tangerines representing gold,

peanuts for a long life, pistachios for happiness, etc. As the family makes the return journey, they give some of these items to friends and neighbors they meet on the way home. Once at home the decorations are put up, the eight special decorated boxes are filled with the items that will be given to the guests. The boxes are placed on the tray along with other traditional foods that will be served. Soon the relatives and guests arrive to celebrate the Lunar New Year with the Tray of Togetherness. The delightful illustrations and the cheerful narration of the little girl combine to make this a story about traditions but also one showing kindness and good wishes to others. The back of the book gives further information about the Tray of Togetherness.

Looking Ahead

January 4: World Braille Day – Celebrating a means of communication for blind people

January 15: Martin Luther King Birthday

January 17: Benjamin Franklin Birthday

January 18: Winnie the Pooh Day – A. A. Milne’s Birthday

January 20: Inauguration Day

January 20: Martin Luther King Day

January 20: Penguin Awareness Day

January 21: Squirrel Appreciation Day

January 29: National Puzzle Day

January 30: Multicultural Children’s Book Day – Now known as [Read Your World Day](#)



UPCOMING PD EVENTS

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

- **January 8, 2025: IRC Webinar on Discovering the 2025 Illinois Reads Books** with **Becky Anderson** from 7:00 to 8:00 pm via Zoom Webinar.
- **January 10, 2025: Prairie Area Reading Council** will host Family Fort Night from 4:45 to 6:45 at the Westmont Public Library, 428 N Cass Ave, Westmont, Illinois.
- **January 14, 2025: Illinois Valley Reading Council** will host a Book Share from 4:30 to 6:30 pm at the Peoria Heights Public Library, 816 E Glen Ave, Peoria Heights, Illinois.
- **January 15, 2025: Illinois Council for Affective Reading Education (ICARE) and IRC** are accepting submissions for the Static Stick Decal Design Contest. Students in grade 4, 5, and 6 are encouraged to create an original design promoting reading. The winning design is printed on static stick decals.
- **January 15, 2025: Illinois Council for Affective Reading Education (ICARE) and IRC** are accepting submissions for the Static Stick Decal Design Contest. Students in grade 4, 5, and 6 are encouraged to create an original design promoting reading. The winning design is printed on static stick decals.
- **January 21, 2025: Will County Reading Council** will host Unlocking the Illinois Comprehensive Literacy Plan-Part III Fluency from 7:00 to 8:00 pm via Zoom.

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

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

Members are encouraged to submit articles at any time to irc@illinoisreadingcouncil.org.

[#WhatIAmReading](#): Share a book that you are reading, in 3 to 4 sentences.

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

[Other Literacy Topics](#):

- 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

Questions? Please feel free to reach out to the Illinois Reading Council by email at irc@illinoisreadingcouncil.org or by phone at 309-454-1341.

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

