At York Elementary School in York, Nebraska, levity and fun play a prominent role each year in the *One School, One Book* program. For instance, each time the school kicks off *One School, One Book* with a pep rally, teachers tend to get messy, “which the kids love,” said Elizabeth Kavan, K-5 media specialist for York E.S.

“For *The BFG*, we gave each of the six participating teachers a ‘giant’ name from the book,” Kavan said. “Then they had to stick their face into a pie pan of whipped topping to find the ‘human bean’ (gum). Whoever blew the first ‘human bean’ bubble first was the champion giant.”

The school also pushes lovable creatures to the forefront to help make each book selection more memorable for young readers. York High School has an animal lab, and the school lends creatures to the elementary school to help celebrate *One School, One Book*.

“They have such a wide variety of animals that we have been able to ‘borrow’ a pet that works with our book each year,” Kavan said. “When we read *The Mouse and the Motorcycle*, we had a pet mouse. During *Nim’s Island*, we had a bearded dragon and two turtles. And, this year, during *The BFG*, we got a snake. Each pet has had a connection to the story and the students have a fun time getting to vote on names for...
them. *The BFG* was the hardest connection for us to find. However, we were lucky to find out one of the huge giants, the Fleshlumpeater, was scared of snakes!*

Kavan said the adopted pets and “messy” pep rally are only part of why *One School, One Book* helps inspire an increased sense of community throughout the school.

“Everyone, from the students and teachers to the lunchroom workers and principal feels connected,” Kavan said. “Every day we have staff that greets our students at the doors, but during *One School, One Book*, they greet and throw out trivia questions to kids as they walk in. Sometimes they even have little treats of candy or stickers for kids who answer. When the kids walk through lunch line, our lunch service providers ask them what they are liking about the book so far.”

Kavan said York also enjoys “tremendous support” from its school families, and many parents post images on social media related to family reading during *One School, One Book*. Kavan said the students’ enthusiasm for the program is evident. Before each school day, students in all grades at York walk laps in the school gym. Kavan said during *One School, One Book*, “excited conversations about the reading the night before can be heard on mornings after an especially exciting chapter.”

After five *One School, One Book* selections, older York students have a rich history of common book experiences to draw upon. Kavan said classes sometimes talk about the current *One School, One Book* book in comparison to previous selections. From each book, teachers pull a core theme or lesson to integrate into other class lessons throughout the year. Those lessons resonate,” Kavan said.

“You always do such a good job picking a book that teaches me something,” one fifth-grader told Kavan. “It seems to always be a book that is about kids my age who are dealing with problems. The book is always something that I can connect to.”
Author Spotlight with Peter Brown

Peter Brown is an author and illustrator whose novels The Wild Robot and The Wild Robot Escapes have become Read to Them favorites. His illustrations for Creepy Carrots!, written by Aaron Reynolds, earned him a Caldecott Honor.

What interests you about writing for younger readers?
I like writing for young readers because it forces me to get to the point. I’d never want to bore my readers, so I’m constantly trying tell my stories as efficiently as possible, without using unnecessary words or flowery language. It almost becomes a game: How can I tell this story with as few words as possible? It’s not easy to do, but it’s a great creative challenge and it’s a lot of fun.

In your interactions with young readers, what have you found they most embrace about your books?
I think young readers really connect with my characters. I think they can relate to Mr. Tiger wanting to be wild, and to Liam wanting to take care of those flowers he finds in the city, and even to Roz the robot as she struggles to find her place in the world.

What was the inspiration for The Wild Robot?
One day I drew a picture of a robot in a tree. I don’t know why I drew that picture, but I couldn’t stop thinking about it. I was curious why a robot would be in a tree, or in a forest, or in the wilderness. And before long, I knew I had to write a story about a robot living in the last place you’d expect to find a robot.

What has been the most rewarding part of finding an audience with your books?
Knowing that my stories and characters have, in some small way, helped kids develop a love of reading.

What has been your experience with the Read to Them programs, such as One School, One Book?
I’ve been astonished at how many schools have contacted me because they’re reading The Wild Robot books together as a school. I’ve never participated in a group read like that, but it must be pretty special. I’ve visited a couple of schools after they read The Wild Robot together, and it always seems like the whole school, even the whole community, is excited to see me. It’s a very nice feeling.

Were you a big reader as a child?
Growing up, I spent more time drawing than reading. There are some great drawing books that you can find in almost every library. My school librarian helped me find drawing books like How To Draw 50 Animals, and that really helped me develop my drawing skills.
When I was a little older, I fell in love with writing also, and that’s really when I started reading voraciously … I wanted to study from the masters!

Are there themes or interests that you return to often in your books?
For some reason I’m really interested in wildness: wild animals, wild people, wild places. Human beings are animals, but we don’t feel like it. Humans can be wild, especially when they’re young. And I find a lot of interesting ideas whenever I start thinking about wildness.

What projects are you excited about right now?
I’m in the early stages of working on a couple of picture books that deal with, what else … wildness. One story about a dog who learns he isn’t quite as wild as he thought. The other story is about a boy who learns from his mother that a wild sense of curiosity is totally normal and acceptable.
When Westmore Elementary School in Lombard, Illinois elected to try the One School, One Book program for the first time this year, teachers made sure no students were left out of the schoolwide reading of The Lemonade War.

The school has high-needs classrooms for students with severe and profound disabilities. In those classes, teachers teamed to create tools related to the book selection to help students who are nonverbal or who use assistive technology devices follow the story.

“They did a scaled-down version of the book with their kids,” said Shawna Chambers, assistant principal at Westmore. “They took the big ideas in the book and made interactive storyboards for their kids so they could be part of what was going on and could participate in trivia and participate. Those teachers were like, ‘We want our kids to be a part of this.’ They read parts of it out loud to them and made these custom storyboards so kids could talk about it and understand the main characters and be a part of the conversation around the book. I thought that was really special and an awesome way to be fully inclusive about the whole experience.”

Chambers said Westmore implemented One School, One Book to support the school improvement plan goal in reading comprehension. The school’s teachers have worked instructionally to pursue that goal but also wanted to pursue efforts to build “the overall culture of reading,” Chambers said.

“How do we increase the volume of what they’re reading but also their excitement and enthusiasm and love for reading?” Chambers asked.

The school has limited its homework assignments while pushing independent reading as an after-school focus. Chambers said One School, One Book falls into the school’s emphasis on building that culture, including the program’s focus on involving family members in a child’s reading life. A survey after the program showed overwhelming parental support for One School, One Book and a desire to repeat it. Chambers said parents expressed appreciation for the push to reconnect to reading with their children. They said the program provided a helpful reminder of the pleasure of reading together.

“One reason One School, One Book is really powerful is because it puts this positive social pressure on parents to read with their kids,” Chambers said. “And it gave us a good way to have that conversation about how important it is to continue reading with their kids, even past the point when their kids become independent readers. I think this was a powerful tool for that.”

Chambers said Westmore helped build excitement for its inaugural One School, One Book by giving the school community the opportunity to vote for the book selection, giving them three choices to consider. Trailer-style promos were made for each book, and voting occurred during PTA family reading night. School leaders announced the winning selection at a launch event. Chambers said The Lemonade War was a perfect fit as an introduction to One School, One Book and allowed teachers to integrate other related lessons, including those tied to financial literacy. As part of the program’s culmination, students invented new concepts for candies, complete with advertisements for them. Class winners were featured in a catalogue.

Chambers said Westmore is planning to continue One School, One Book next winter and is excited to build on its first experience.
Read to Them’s statewide reading programs are flourishing in three states and a fourth is prepared to join the party in the fall.

Texas, Arkansas, and Virginia are each reading common books this spring through Read to Them. Virginia kicked off its program on March 1 with Arkansas following on April 12 and Texas on April 15. Together, the statewide efforts will include more than 113,000 students – and thousands more family members, educators and community members.

In its second year, Virginia Reads One Book has quickly found its footing and enjoyed widespread support in Read to Them’s home state. More than 60,000 students participated in this spring’s reading of Sundee T. Frazier’s Cleo Edison Oliver, Playground Millionaire. Virginia also incorporated financial literacy into this year’s program, which was sponsored by the Virginia Bankers Association, the Virginia Council on Economic Education, the Washington Redskins Charitable Foundation, and 10 regional banks across Virginia. You’ll be able to read more about Virginia Reads One Book in RTT’s summer newsletter.

Texas, the first state to implement a statewide common book program through Read to Them, is now in its fifth year of Texas Reads One Book. This spring more than 32,000 students participated in the program, coming together to enjoy Friendship According to Humphrey by Betty G. Birney. The program has become a beloved annual tradition in the state with Dallas Cowboys coach Jason Garrett kicking off the program each year by reading the first chapter of the selected book via video cast.

Arkansas Reads One Book marked its third year this spring and continues to capture the attention of the state’s families. More than 20,000 students read Jean Merrill’s The Toothpaste Millionaire as part of this year’s program. Arkansas implemented the innovative idea of pairing family literacy with financial literacy, partnering with the state’s business community – Economics Arkansas is a lead partner of the initiative – to integrate financial lessons into the program. The effort has been embraced by families, educators, and business partners.

We hope to build on these successes and add more statewide reading efforts throughout the country in the near future. Mississippi will be the next state to introduce a program, Mississippi Reads One Book, in October.

If you’re interested in exploring a statewide reading program with us, please email us at programs@readtothem.org
Meet the Program Coordinators

For our school partners, no one is more important than the Read to Them program coordinators who provide the personalized service that ensures every school’s experience is the best it can be. Deanna Brown, Anne Curry, and Sandy Miller – our “PCs” – are always ready to help, offering information, resources, and advice to schools as they plan and manage their reading together programs.

“They’re the ones who really make it all happen,” says Bruce Coffey, Director of Programs at Read to Them. “They’re the key to making sure schools have successful One School, One Book experiences every time out. They’re ready for every question that comes their way and they make sure every problem gets solved promptly.”

The PCs recently shared what they love best about their work and the Read to Them programs.

Deanna Brown
Deanna has served as program coordinator for nearly two years since she started in the Read to Them offices. She said she joined the organization because she was drawn to its mission and the simplicity of the reading together concept.

“This simple concept has such a huge impact on children, their families and the community as a whole,” she said. “I love being a part of that.”

Deanna said the highlight of her work is working with resource teachers. “I actually had one teacher say, ‘Oh my gosh, I love you!’ when I was able to help her with something. We both laughed about it, but it really is a great feeling knowing that I can make that kind of a difference in someone’s day.”

She said she routinely hears excited stories from schools about the effect the program is having on their students and families.

“It never gets old. So inspiring, so much joy – I love my work and being a part of Read to Them.”

Deanna said she has always loved reading. When her daughter was born, she reveled in the chance to relive her childhood books through her daughter’s eyes as they read aloud together.

“Now that she is 13 and she has developed her own love of reading I can’t wait to hear what she’s reading next and why. She has already decided that she wants to be an elementary school librarian which makes this mama super proud.”

Anne Curry
Like Deanna, Anne has been a part of the our staff for nearly two years. A former public school teacher, she chose to work at Read to Them because she knows the importance of parents and guardians being involved in their child’s education. The highlight of her day when her children were little was giving them a bath and then taking 30 minutes to read stories aloud to them. “What an incredible bonding experience,” Anne said.
Anne appreciates Read to Them’s impact, not just on children, but on the adults in their lives. She said going to a teacher conference or a PTA program can be intimidating for parents and guardians.

Anne enjoys speaking with educators around the country about a program “that is easy to implement, beneficial to the whole community and does not involve testing,” she said. “Educators are so pleased with the simplicity of the concept and the energy it brings to their school.” Often, school leaders are often ready to discuss their next book before they even finish their first read.

“Although there are a million different philosophies for successful education, two basic key needs must be addressed everywhere – literacy and parent involvement. It feels great to know we address both needs well.”

Sandy Miller
Sandy has been a program coordinator at Read to Them since August 2018. She previously spent 18 years teaching at schools in the Richmond area before starting to homeschool her children. She said being a teacher remains “the heart and soul of who I am” and her love of reading aloud has deep roots.

“One of my earliest memories is watching my mother’s mouth move as she read to me,” Sandy said. “Reading has always been a huge part of my personal and professional life. I was always the kid at family functions reading a book in the midst of all the hustle and bustle.”

Sandy notes that working at Read to Them is “the embodiment of who I am as a teacher and parent.” Among the best moments of her experience so far, she points to the reading of Cleo Edison Oliver, Playground Millionaire during the One Richmond, One Book experience. Sandy and her daughter got to bring Cleo’s dog, Barkley, to make an appearance at a school’s kickoff assembly. They dressed “Barkley” in a tooth fairy costume for the event.

As a program coordinator, Sandy appreciates the opportunity to help get books into the hands of children across the country and even overseas. She loves hearing stories and seeing pictures of students participating in the program she helps make happen, saying “seeing students so engaged and excited about reading makes my heart smile.”

“It is amazing to me to think about the number of books we have put into the hands and homes of children all over the world,” she said. “Hopefully they will all grow to love reading as much as I do.”
Tips from the Field

Educators Whose Schools Have Embraced One School, One Book Share Advice From Their Experiences

Carolyn Mitrecic, Reading Resource Teacher, Berlin Intermediate School Berlin, MD

There are so many wonderful titles to choose from through Read to Them. There’s sure to be a book that’s right for your school community. As you plan for your One School, One Book reading celebration think about timing, look for uninterrupted times in the calendar where reading together can be the real focus. Think of ways you can support teachers and the reading journey. Before each book I always gather activities, videos, author information and resources that I can share in addition to the daily book trivia. Share your excitement about the books and give students time to share their reading connections and experiences as well.

Kelly Benadi, Principal R.P. Connor Elementary School Suffern, NY

Involve everyone in the planning process. I think a committee is key. The teachers and I spent months planning the One School, One Book events. We engaged the community by creating a World According to Humphrey scavenger hunt. We were very transparent in our communications. The information that went out was in English and Spanish. We created daily quizzes using Kahootz. The students enjoyed recalling the details from the reading. The quizzes also served as an incentive to keep the students engaged in the nightly reading.

Joanna Botte, Resource Room Teacher Grass Lake Middle School Grass Lake, MI

The key to having a successful Read to Them experience is to stop reading and allow for discussions in either a whole group, a small group or with a partner. If the students don’t have a good opportunity to share their thinking, then the experience will fall flat.

Learn more about our selected titles at: www.readtothem.org/books