For three cuddly weeks this fall, 20,000 readers in the Irving (Texas) School District embraced Humphrey, the lovable hamster at the center of Betty Birney’s charming novel The World According to Humphrey. As part of their One District, One Book campaign, every elementary school student in the district received a copy of the novel and followed a shared schedule to read the book together with their families. A myriad of events reinforced the reading and spurred widespread excitement about the book and the act of shared reading, as did a spirited social media campaign highlighting the many ways schools and families engaged with the book. Humphrey himself made appearances in various forms, delighting students, and Birney also delivered a video message to her new readers, saying, “I am so grateful to share Humphrey with all of you.”

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North Shore Elementary School in St. Petersburg, Florida, launched its One School, One Book program in November with a noble evening devoted to stories. Despite record-high temperatures that topped 90 degrees, more than 300 students and parents attended the kickoff event, which featured free dinner, free books, raffle prizes, and a lively “Readers’ Theater” presentation from 4th and 5th graders illustrating the importance of reading aloud to children. Teachers dressed as favorite “star” characters from literature. The night, dubbed “A Knight of Reading with the Stars” in a bow to North Shore’s mascot, the Knights, finished with the fitting and magical scene of parents and their children settled on blankets beneath the stars, collectively captivated as they read by flashlight.
AUTHOR SPOTLIGHT

R.J. Palacio, author of Wonder

For 20 years, R.J. Palacio worked as an art director and book jacket designer, creating the covers for countless well-known fiction and nonfiction titles. She long harbored a dream to write her own book, but she struggled to find the time. Then, one day at an ice cream parlor, she and her children sat next to a little girl with a severe facial deformity. When one of her children began to cry, Palacio fled in fear of embarrassing the little girl. She was soon furious with herself for not engaging with the girl and showing her kids there was nothing to be afraid of. That night, she found the inspiration to finally start to write. The resulting novel, Wonder, is the unforgettable tale of August Pullman, a boy born with a severely deformed face who is attempting to navigate 5th grade. The book has struck a chord with millions of readers worldwide, becoming a hugely popular read for its humor, heart, and complex, sympathetic characters. Some readers even celebrate Auggie’s birthday. Palacio has taken advantage of the novel’s profound success to ask readers to take the pledge to “choose kind,” producing a certificate that students and teachers can print and sign and post on classroom walls. If they are faced with a situation like the one she faced in the ice cream parlor, Palacio hopes they will remember Auggie and find a way to be compassionate and friendly.

EDUCATOR SPOTLIGHT

Becky LaBolle, James R. Wood Elementary School

Becky LaBolle, a Title One Reading Specialist in Somonauk, Illinois, had been searching in vain for a fun way to promote family unity and reading to her students. When she learned of One School, One Book, she knew she had discovered the solution. She introduced the concept to her K-4 school last year with The World According to Humphrey, which was a hit with children and parents, culminating with a Family Night that featured trivia, a scavenger hunt, “hamster” games, and a group read of the first chapter of the next book in the Humphrey series. The book not only was a rousing success with the school’s families but also led to LaBolle’s own family—despite her aversion to rodents—adopting a new pet hamster named Humphrey. LaBolle has since spread the gospel of family literacy, reaching out to reading specialists and other educators at sister schools and school districts and twice giving presentations at a countywide Teacher Institute Day. “I can’t say enough about the beauty of One School, One Book,” she said.

Quotable

“As the students were arriving at school this morning, many were holding and reading their book. Everyone was talking about it. My heart is full to see everyone so excited about reading together as a school.”

— Martha Lewis, librarian, County Line Elementary, New Braunfels, Texas, after the start of her school’s One School, One Book program.
THE RIGHT BOOK FOR EVERY FAMILY

Three Different Categories

Picking the right book is certainly a tricky first step. What title is right for parents with limited reading experience? If you’re reading two or three titles in a year, variety is better. That’s why we’ve now arranged our titles into three categories so you can tailor each reading experience to achieve your respective needs.

Intro Titles

These books are shorter—90 to 120 pages—and can be read in two weeks. They are especially well suited to schools looking for a less intimidating book to introduce to a less experienced parent population. A mix of classics and contemporary, these titles will reliably engage and enrich. Sample titles: My Father’s Dragon; Keena Ford and the Second-Grade Mix-Up; The Chocolate Touch; Nim’s Island.

Sweet Spot Titles

The bread and butter of One School, One Book, these books can be enjoyed by a broad range of K-5 students. Ranging from 150 to 225 pages, usually read in three or four weeks, with a great variety of protagonists, settings, and themes, these books are marked by high quality, stimulating prose, and engaging characters and scenarios. Sample titles: The World According to Humphrey; Charlie and the Chocolate Factory; Charlotte’s Web; Charlie Bumpers vs. The Teacher of the Year.

Tweener Titles

These titles are a little richer, a little longer, a little more complicated. Often cresting 200 pages, usually read over four weeks. Chosen by both elementary schools and middle schools, they are more demanding thematically and can spark deeper, richer conversations. Sample titles: Wonder; Rules; The Phantom Tollbooth; The Homework Machine; The One and Only Ivan.

Learn more about Read to Them’s selected titles at www.readtothem.org/book/.