

# READ ALOUD

WEST VIRGINIA

WINTER 2021-22

## Bedtime Book Club carries on Snuggle and Read tradition

By Suzette Lowe

**T**he phrase ‘the book will find the child’ holds true for the partnership of Jackson County Early Explorers and Read Aloud of Jackson County.

Cheryl Miller, a longtime Read Aloud volunteer and force behind the county’s Snuggle and Read program, has seen firsthand how impactful the experience can be for young readers.

“When we were able to have that type of story time, the children picked out the book that appealed to them, one that ‘found’ them that they could take home, along with a blanket provided by Constellium,” she said. “It was so precious seeing that connection.”

It was frustrating not being able to have that family reading time with children and

their parents during the pandemic. Miller, who co-founded Jackson County Early Explorers with Jessica Isner, also saw the hugely popular Early Explorers program for young children struggling to be active during COVID-19.

“One day, I had a preschooler come up to me, out of the blue, and beg me to read him a story,” said Miller. “I knew right then, and Jessica agreed, that we had to do something to meet this need.”

A natural collaboration between the county’s Read Aloud program and Early Explorers was formed, initially with books that were left over from a past Snuggle and Read. These, along with a blanket, would be put in book bags for children to find at the Read, Play, and Grow station at Cedar Lakes.

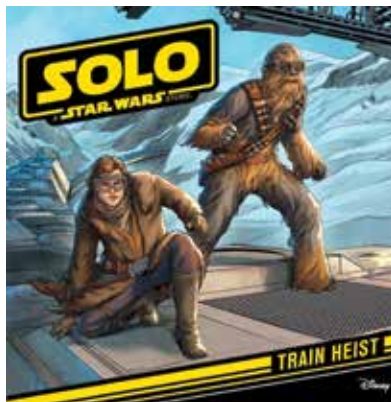
**BEDTIME BOOK CLUB** continues on page 7



A Jackson County student visits the Read, Play, Grow station at Cedar Lakes to get an Early Explorers book bag.

## Read Aloud helped me find my child’s reading key

*Solo: A Star Wars Story – Train Heist*, the book that unlocked independent reading enthusiasm for Jackie Britton’s middle child, who participated in Read Aloud Families, a special distribution effort launched during the COVID shutdown.



By Jackie Britton

**R**eading has been one of my favorite hobbies since I was a child. When I found out that I was pregnant with my first baby, I went to the book store and purchased **The Grinch Who Stole Christmas**, along with several other stacks of children’s books. I dreamed of reading to my kids and watching their imaginations run wild. I dreamed that my children would love reading just as much as I do. Imagine my surprise when that

wasn’t the case with my second son.

My first son took to books like a fish to water. My second son taught himself to read at age four and was addicted to being read stories. By the time he was five and a half, he refused to read. I bought different styles of books to try to tempt him. Countless bribes and different approaches later – nothing. I couldn’t figure him out! We were both frustrated, and I was running out of ideas to engage him.

**READING KEY** continues on page 6

# It's something our people do

I have a prediction: When researchers look back and carefully measure the effects of COVID school disruptions on children's learning and reading proficiency, some stark differences will be hidden within the averages.

It is not difficult to predict that scores will mostly drop, or that low-income families have a harder time for all kinds of reasons. But the effects on reading will be more nuanced. Even among low-income children, those who were read to and tempted with engaging books during these years will weather the time and emerge with better reading skills than those whose reading time was neglected. Even among high-income children, if too much gadget time was allowed to crowd out time enjoying books together, their reading proficiency will suffer.

At all stages of development, children benefit when they are read to, when they choose to read on their own, and when they see important people in their lives read. In short, children must be taught that

reading is something that our people do. In school, for sure, but also in churches, neighborhoods, and families.

Throughout this newsletter you will find West Virginians setting that example and offering opportunities to children:

- On the front, don't miss the Jackson County Chapter collaborating with Jackson County Early Explorers to offer families books and engaging activities to stimulate the early literacy skills of small children.

- Also, a parent wrote to share how Read Aloud Families, a direct-ship distribution method that we established in response to COVID, helped her son to discover books he loves. He had the skills to read before. Now, he is a reader.

- We collaborated with artist Brenda Pinnell (hepcatzddesign.com) to create a new poster, "Read Around West Virginia," a search-and-find map of books set in the Mountain State. Coming to Taylor Books in Charleston and to A New Chapter Bookstore in Lewisburg, the poster invites people of all ages to share their reading adventures.

- Read Aloud has distributed more than 19,500 books to children so far this year, from newborn babies to high school seniors, the most ever in a year.

- While all this was going on, old friend Jennie Fitzkee was featured on *The Kelly Clarkson Show*, and used the opportunity to lift up Read Aloud West Virginia, and all your efforts to help children grow into accomplished readers. As a result, the Dollar General Literacy Foundation gave Read Aloud \$50,000.

Everywhere you look, volunteers and donors are keeping after that daily goal – to motivate a child to read for fun. Read to children. Show them a good example. Let them choose a book to own. Share books you have enjoyed.

The effort doesn't always pay off while you are watching, but it does pay off. And not just in short-term, individual test scores, but for a lifetime.

*Dawn Miller is the executive director of Read Aloud West Virginia*

## Bream Reading Day



Derek Hudson, president of the Kanawha County chapter board, presents an *Elephant and Piggie* book to students at Bream Center for Child Development's Reading Day on Charleston's West Side.



Read Aloud state board member Melody Simpson receives an impromptu hug circle after reading aloud to children at Bream Reading Day.





PHOTO COURTESY OF THE KELLY CLARKSON SHOW, NBCUNIVERSAL SYNDICATION STUDIOS

Jennie Fitzkee, center, is surprised by the announcement of Dollar General's generous donation on *The Kelly Clarkson Show*.

# Dollar General gives \$50,000 in honor of longtime supporter Jennie Fitzkee

By Amanda Schwartz

When *The Kelly Clarkson Show* chose to celebrate preschool teacher Jennie Fitzkee — a West Virginia native and longtime Read Aloud WV supporter — Read Aloud's Executive Director Dawn Miller was asked to video call in to the filming as a surprise.

"Anything for Jennie Fitzkee!" she replied.

Miller was excited to be part of recognizing a dedicated supporter and local literacy champion, but had no idea there was a surprise in store. Both Fitzkee and Miller were shocked and deeply touched by Dollar General's announcement of a \$50,000 gift to Read Aloud in honor of Fitzkee and World Teacher Day.

Fitzkee became involved with Read Aloud in 2012 after the passing of her childhood friend, Read Aloud champion Candy Galyean. Fitzkee (born Jennie Lively Lytton) grew up with Galyean in Huntington, but moved to Groton, Mass., where she has been a preschool teacher for almost 40 years. When her sister sent Galyean's obituary in 2012, Fitzkee saw it suggested donations to Read Aloud West Virginia.

"I thought, 'This has got to be someplace else!'" Fitzkee recalled. "I just can't believe this! I never knew about this wonderful place."

Fitzkee called and spoke with Read Aloud founder and then Executive Director Mary Kay Bond. They had much in common, including an inspiration, Jim Trelease, author of *The Read Aloud Handbook*, first published in 1979.

**The Dollar General Literacy Foundation has donated more than \$203 million to provide funding and resources to support literacy advancement and has helped more than 14.8 million people learn to read.**

Eager to give back to her home state and support her friend's legacy, Fitzkee began collecting books. She and her students and community gathered so many she and husband Steve Fitzkee rented a truck and drove them all the way from Groton, Mass. to Charleston.

After that momentous donation, Fitzkee has continued to support Read Aloud, nurtures readers through her blog "A Teacher's Reflections," and has contributed to this newsletter.

"This gift means so much to us," said Executive Director Dawn Miller. "It is an acknowledgment of the lifelong value of our work to help children develop an intrinsic motivation to read, and it will help Read Aloud to stay strong and flexible, of course."

"But with this gift the Dollar General Literacy Foundation also recognizes the efforts of every volunteer, every teacher, every school coordinator, every principal, every donor — every friend of Read Aloud who has contributed to the effort to help

children discover joy in reading," she said.

"On top of all that, we are touched and honored to still be part of remembering Candy Galyean, who even now plays such an important role in bringing us together in this cause."

Over the past 28 years, the Dollar General Literacy Foundation has donated more than \$203 million to provide funding and resources to support literacy advancement and has helped more than 14.8 million individuals learn to read. In both 2020 and 2021, they granted funds to Read Aloud to support shipments of self-chosen books to low-income children across the Mountain state, keeping them reading through the pandemic and beyond.

Dollar General's co-founder, J.L. Turner, was functionally illiterate and never completed a formal education. In 1993, J.L.'s grandson, Cal Turner, Jr., founded the Dollar General Literacy Foundation to honor him and support others' educational journeys.

Dollar General and the Dollar General Literacy Foundation's \$4.5 million investment to help students, teachers, and nonprofit organizations working to support and improve youth literacy across the country includes more than \$3 million in youth literacy grants from the Dollar General Literacy Foundation and a new \$1.45 million partnership with education nonprofit Donors Choose.

**To watch the announcement and Fitzkee's heartwarming reaction, visit [readaloudwv.org/kelly](https://readaloudwv.org/kelly)**

# Ten to try: Read Around West Virginia

We converted our usual in-person spring fundraising event Read-A-Palooza to a COVID-safe poster to both raise money and serve the mission. The Read Around West Virginia poster features books set in or written by authors from the Mountain State alongside our 31 sponsors, listed at right. A celebration of West Virginia literacy, culture, and art, the poster was hand-drawn by Charleston-based artist Brenda Pinnell of HepCat Design.

*This Ten to Try includes a sample of children's books featured in the poster, and why we think they're great.*



## The Star Fisher

By Laurence Yep

Ages 8 and up

Set in Clarksburg in 1927, fifteen-year-old Chinese-American protagonist Joan Lee, shares an emotionally complex story of prejudice and the immigrant experience in Appalachia, weaving a traditional Chinese myth about the half-bird, half-human starfisher throughout.

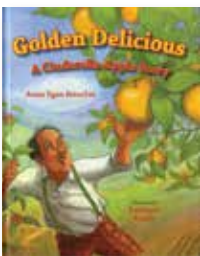


## Counting on Katherine: How Katherine Johnson Put Astronauts on the Moon

Written by Helaine Becker, illustrated by Dow Phumiruk

Ages 5 and up

The true story of Katherine Johnson, a Black mathematician and White Sulphur Springs native, and how she went from a curious, gifted student to a prominent contributor to the NASA space race, saving lives and making history with her calculations.

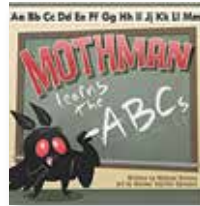


## Golden Delicious: A Cinderella Apple Story

Written by Anna Egan Smucker, illustrated by Kathleen Kemly

Ages 4 and up

The true story of how a Clay County farmer – Anderson Mullins – discovers a tree of Golden Delicious apples on his farm and collaborates with the Missouri-based Stark brothers to make them a staple of the apple world.

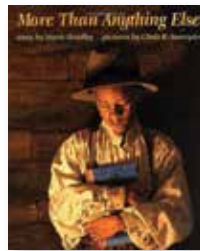


## Mothman Learns the ABCs

Written by Michael Schang, illustrated by Danner Seyffer-Sprague

Ages 0 and up

An ABC book starring West Virginia's most famous cryptid, Mothman, who travels the Mountain State on a quest for knowledge.



## More Than Anything Else

Written by Marie Bradby, illustrated by Chris K. Soentpiet

Ages 8 and up

A fictional account of nine-year-old Booker T. Washington living in a West Virginia settlement after emancipation, working in the salt works, and longing to learn to read.

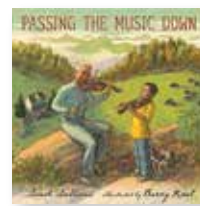


## The Boys Start the War

By Phyllis Reynolds Naylor

Ages 8 and up

A prank war between the four Hatford boys and the three Malloy girls is started when the Hatfords attempt to antagonize their unwanted new neighbors into leaving West Virginia and returning to Ohio.



## Passing the Music Down

Written by Sarah Sullivan, illustrated by Barry Root

Ages 5 and up

A tale told in lyrical free verse and inspired by the lives of renowned fiddlers Melvin Wine and Jake Krack, this book follows a young boy who learns from an old-time fiddle player, joining a tradition of passing the music down.





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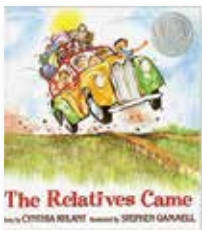


### **Up Molasses Mountain**

By Julie Baker

*Ages 10 and up*

Set in Clay, WV in 1953, two young narrators tell the story of a divided mining town. Elizabeth, whose father and brother are opposed on unionization, and her classmate Clarence, who is shunned for his cleft-palate, face turmoil and heartache together, weaving a narrative of empowering friendship amongst adversity.



### **The Relatives Came**

Written by Cynthia Rylant, illustrated by Stephen Gammell

*Ages 2 and up*

In a time when big family get-togethers are much rarer than they used to be, who wouldn't enjoy this sunny story about a long and boisterous visit from the relatives?



### **Venola the Vegetarian**

By Cheryl Ware

*Ages 8 and up*

Seventh grader Venola Cutright isn't afraid of a challenge. In a world where hotdog eating contests are the norm, she decides to become a vegetarian, attempting to convert her family, friends, and the unsmiling cafeteria lady along the way.

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# Energy Express has always held a special spot in my heart

By Bob Johnson

Energy Express has always held a special spot in my heart. Several years ago, the local WVU Extension agent told me about the need for Read Aloud volunteers during the six-weeks-long reading and nutrition program (with two meals served daily) held during summers. The whole process clicked with me. Since I am a part-time teacher, my summers were free. Why not volunteer to read with kids?

My first opportunity coincidentally came at my alma mater elementary school. I had spent grades one through eight there. Yes, that dates me, but I fondly and clearly remember the teachers who had taken the effort to read aloud with my classes. There was a warmth in those classrooms, where teachers said, in effect: "I have a beautiful story that I want to share with you." In my mind's eye, that is effective instruction.

Over the summers since my first readings, I have subsequently been able to read in three more locations in four sessions with Energy Express. I often use the classic stories of Seuss, since each one holds a nugget of morality which students need to hear from an adult. Sometimes, the readings are supplied by the Energy Express site. While that is convenient, there is no time to rehearse the reading selection, one of my personal rules of reading aloud. Sitting with students is the expectation of many Energy Express locations, but I prefer reading while standing at a music stand or other platform at a convenient height, so my old eyes can



Bob Johnson reads to Energy Express students at Cherry River Elementary in Nicholas County.

easily focus on the reading. It is also the only way I have found to ensure that inflection is heard, and gestures, body language, and expressions are easily seen by listeners.

Energy Express and Read Aloud WV share some common goals: 1) Get valuable books into the hands of students, and/or 2) into the ears of listeners by reading aloud. I am privileged to know the directors of both programs. Mark Swiger heads Energy Express with West Virginia University, while Dawn Miller is at the helm of Read Aloud WV. Both leaders have only one thing in mind, which is

reaching readers at many grade levels with enriching opportunities that expand interest in books.

Adult volunteers are an essential part of both reading efforts. Please consider sharing your reading skills with students at every opportunity.

***Bob Johnson is a member of the Read Aloud WV of Nicholas County Chapter Board and teaches in a Save the Children US, after-school program at Cherry River Elementary School in Richwood***

**To learn more about Energy Express, go to: [extension.wvu.edu/youth-family/youth-education/energy-express](https://extension.wvu.edu/youth-family/youth-education/energy-express)  
To learn about volunteering as a Read Aloud WV Classroom Reader, visit [readaloudwv.org/volunteer-readers](https://readaloudwv.org/volunteer-readers)**

READING KEY continued from page 1)

I stumbled across Read Aloud West Virginia's Read Aloud Families and I was cautiously optimistic. I knew my oldest and youngest children would adore it. What would my middle son think? I knew he was a going to be a good reader, but the problem was how to motivate him to care.

The first order form came, and all three of my children were excited. They picked their books, and my middle child shocked me. He picked a Star Wars book. He has never seen the movies or shown any interest in Star Wars at all. I was so skeptical. I asked if he was certain he wanted that one and read a

few other book descriptions to him.

No. He was positive he wanted that one.

The day the first shipment arrived, the three kids crowded around me and squealed over their new books. My oldest ran off to begin his, and I read my youngest child's book to her and my middle son. Afterward, I watched what he would do with his new book. He curled up in a chair and began flipping through the pages.

After a little while, he started from the beginning and began to read quietly. I joined him and we took turns reading pages and continued to do the same with those first few book deliveries. Soon he was able to

read them all on his own.

Every time there was a Star Wars book on the form, he would choose it. He began to choose other genres I would have never expected. The variety of the books on the order form was wonderful. He always found something to look forward to and having good experiences with these books has changed his attitude about new story lines.

Read Aloud West Virginia helped me find the key to turn my son from the most reluctant reader into an enthusiast.

Now he is engaged during Book Tastings and can't wait for library day at school. I am so grateful!





## The better to express myself, my dears

Ginny Dixon, president of the Upshur County chapter board, reads aloud in a clear mask to students of Mrs. Hissam's third grade class at Rock Cave Elementary School. The clear mask helps students to see her expressions.

BOOK CLUB continued from page 1)

"With our mission and knowing how popular Early Explorers past book bag distributions were," said Janet McCauley, president of the local Read Aloud board, "it was a win-win partnership."

McCauley said the concern that children would not get 'their' book was quickly dispelled.

"The very first child who picked up a packet said 'oh that's just what I wanted', so we knew we'd done our job," she said.

But still for Miller there was something missing.

"I had another child come up and grab me by the legs and beg for a story," she said. "It hurt my heart that I couldn't do that."

Miller said she couldn't get the idea of children not getting their bedtime story out of her mind.

"In this pandemic, we forget that children are hurting and feeling stressed," she said. "They need a time to settle down and feel loved and safe."

That child hungering for a story planted the seed for Bedtime Book Club.

Each Monday at 6 pm, Miller posts a story time on Facebook. It can be accessed

at any time by going on to the Jackson County Early Explorers or Read Aloud Jackson County page.

"First we get the wiggles out, then settle down for three stories," Miller said.

The "Story Lady" as Miller has been dubbed, has already gotten a large following, including a grumpy cat who comes out of hiding every time he hears her voice.

Knowing that children look forward to each week's story means so much to Miller.

"I had a little girl come up to me just to share how much she loved the little duck story I read the other night," she said.

McCauley said parents have also expressed their appreciation for the efforts of both Early Explorers and Read Aloud.

"They tell us that their children are hurrying in from outside play to read their books," she said. "Several have said they hear their children singing or reciting phrases from their favorite stories."

For Miller and McCauley, that's what it's all about, connecting children to books and instilling a love that can last a lifetime.

***Suzette Lowe serves on the Read Aloud of Jackson County board***



A Jackson County student examines the contents of her Early Explorers book bag.

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## NIP credits available

Get them before they're gone! Read Aloud West Virginia has received Neighborhood Investment Program (NIP) Tax Credits to distribute to eligible donors on a first-come, first-served basis. NIP credits are administered by the state to encourage donations to local nonprofits.

For example, a donation of \$1,000 qualifies for up to \$500 in NIP credits off of West Virginia personal income or corporate net income taxes. That means donors can have a \$1,000 impact for a bottom-line cost of only \$500.

The maximum tax credit allowed in any one year is \$100,000. Donors cannot reduce their total state tax bill by more than 50%, but they have five years to use their credits. If you have any questions, contact Read Aloud headquarters at (304) 345-5212.

To give, you can mail a check to Read Aloud with the slip below or visit [readaloudwv.org](http://readaloudwv.org) to make a secure donation through Square. Please note that mailing a check is preferred, as there are no fees associated with your donation and Read Aloud receives the full amount to put towards programs.



## Read Aloud selected as Dutch Miller Subaru's Share the Love Event Hometown Charity

From Nov. 18 to Jan. 3, Dutch Miller Subaru will donate to Read Aloud WV for each new purchased or leased vehicle and each service visit costing over \$5. The only rule is that customers must select Read Aloud as their designated charity when checking out. Please help us spread the word.



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