

# READ ALOUD

WEST VIRGINIA

## Who is watching you?

By Melody Simpson

I am being watched. More significantly, somebody is listening to me. It has been going on for some time, and occurring on a fairly regular basis. At first I didn't pay too much attention to it, but as time went on, it became more and more apparent. Someone is ... observing me. What should I do? Call the media? Complain to my representatives? Sue the NSA? Fortunately, based on some compelling guidance and advice, I know exactly what to do.

I signed up to become a volunteer reader for another year.

Anyone who regularly reads to an elementary school classroom knows exactly what I'm talking about: children leaning forward, lips parted, mimicking the actions of the characters as I describe them, joining in loudly and joyfully when phrases are repeated. Reminding everyone where we left off last week. Guessing what will happen next. Laughing, gasping, and (for the class I read to last year, who liked all things scary), shivering ....

*(continued on page 2)*

## BUZZ: New Read Aloud video a call to action

By Sara Busse

Although one goal of Read Aloud is to limit screen time, a new video produced by West Virginia State University's Extension Service is creating a buzz about reading aloud across West Virginia.

Lynn Kessler, director of communications and development for RAWV, said the group needed a tool to spread its message. A conversation with West

*(continued on page 4)*

### The love of books on display

Buckhannon-Upshur librarian, Angie Westfall (pictured here with author and storyteller Bill Lepp) is drawing students in to the high school's library by appealing to their interests. Story on page 6.



## Winter 2016

### IN THIS ISSUE

A Message from our Executive Director | Page 2

Dawn Miller ponders reading success | Page 3

Beckley BAM! donates proceeds of sales | Page 4

International Literacy Association recognizes Marion County teacher | Page 5

The Education Alliance promotes community engagement | Page 5

Upshur media specialist awakens library, teen interest | Page 6

Westfall shares Buckhannon-Upshur High's top 10 books of 2015 | Page 8

Nickell grant supports summer program in Greenbrier | Page 7

Read-A-Palooza highlights critical role of reading in all subjects | Page 8

Read Aloud wants to hear your S.T.R.E.A.M. story | Page 8

# Oh, the progress we're making

A new calendar year has just begun but we are mid-year in terms of the school calendar and you will note that once again our newsletter is jam-packed. Our volunteers and partners around the state continue their efforts to encourage a love of reading. As I have noted numerous times, when reading becomes enjoyable, not drudgery, our children read more often and improve their skills.

As Dawn Miller notes in her article (page 3), these efforts appear to be yielding results. The most recent reading scores from the National Association for Educational Progress noted that West Virginia was the *only* state to see an improvement in eighth grade reading! Isn't that nice to see our state lead the nation in a positive way? Equally encouraging is the fact that we are narrowing the gap between our girls and boys. When Read Aloud was "rebooted" in 2008, the gap was 15 points. We have worked hard to make reading a boy-friendly activity and in 2015 girls outscored their male peers by only eight points. Am I implying Read Aloud is *the* reason for this progress? Certainly not! However, our organization, volunteers and donors have played an important *part* in an overall change in attitudes.

In this issue, we have included a snapshot of a few activities around the state that engage children with books and the joy of reading. Much work remains, but I believe we are on the right trajectory. Perhaps it is merely coincidence that reading scores fell as Read Aloud chapters declined from 2000 to 2007 and began inching up as the number of chapters began to increase. Scores do not tell the whole story and they cannot be tied to a single effort. The combination of quality instruction and the engagement of educators, families, businesses, the medical community and civic organizations (in short ALL of us!) is required to make a difference.

We want to know your thoughts, ideas and reading-related activities and we hope you will allow the stories you read in our newsletter and on our website to inspire you. I am optimistic that we can work together to make 2016 even better!

~ *Mary Kay Bond, RAWV Executive Director*

---

## Who is watching

(from page 1)

This is one of the true joys of reading aloud to children, and why I have done this for about 18 years. This, and the chorus of greetings I get when I show up, the hugs that I'm offered. Heck, it's just plain fun! But when I stop to think about what is happening each week, I realize that it is also serious stuff.

We are modeling the joys of reading. We are sharing, not only great stories, but the fact that we *love* great stories, and love to *read* great stories. And this modeling doesn't just happen in classrooms.

Do you have children, or grandchildren? Do they know that you love to read? Do they see you reading? Do you still read aloud to them? I bet if you tried, you could even read aloud a favorite childhood book to your adolescent or teenage child – or try an audiobook in the car while traveling. I have read aloud to seventh graders, and while they don't give you the hugs that elementary school kids give, and usually appear bored, they are listening – trust me, I know, because they have told me.

This is the magic, the simplicity, of Read Aloud. All it takes is good stories, and someone who loves to read being willing to share that love with others. The results are remarkable, and the benefits flow both ways. So ... who is watching you?



Read Aloud  
by the numbers

1,003

New volunteer  
readers trained  
in 2015

# Slow down and consider reading success

By Dawn Miller

Those reading scores from back in October are suggestive, or at least I hope they are.

On the National Assessment of Educational Progress, eighth-grade reading scores went up by three points, a significant amount.

There is no certain cause anyone can point to. Unless the trend continues, we'll all shrug it off as a blip. But maybe it's not a blip. Maybe somebody's hard work is paying off. Maybe this is evidence of a cultural change in schools.

There may be no way to quantify this, but I've been going into at least one school every week for more than two decades, and things seem different over the last six or eight years.

In short, it seems like there is more value on — and respect for — children spending time reading, for both fun and profit.

Back in 2001, when support for the test-and-penalize mentality of the federal No Child Left Behind law was on the rise, schools shifted their priorities as instructed. They ramped up for testing, putting more time and emphasis on preparing students to hit the required mark, at all costs.

Educators know reading skill is important for every other kind of success. But for some reason, too many schools and counties decided to focus on narrow definitions and measurements, particularly reading speed — not comprehension, mind you.

The starkest example of this folly comes from a Read Aloud colleague who was running a little book club half a dozen years ago. It was a special thing, a treat for the middle schoolers involved. They looked forward to it and were motivated to read "The Watsons Go to Birmingham" by Christopher Paul Curtis. All the students in this group stated their reading speed proudly.

And yet after they "read" the climax of the book, the kids came in for their next club meeting, and not one of them could share an event from the story to start the discussion. They were absolutely lost. They had read all the words, but saw nothing. I won't ruin the book for you, but when prompted, the kids asked, "What explosion?"

For some time in the years leading up to this event, a number of my Read Aloud colleagues found themselves increasingly unwelcome in their schools. There were so many demands on the schedule and ugly consequences if scores didn't rise enough, that principals and teachers could not justify having a professionally behaved volunteer come in once a week and simply read an enjoyable story for 20 or 30 minutes.

They didn't have time for children to enjoy the literature they were being exposed to.

They didn't have time to enjoy putting to use the skills they were drilling every day.

I'm happy to say this is what seems to have changed.

Since then, Read Aloud has been in its own rebuilding phase, re-establishing a presence in 29 counties. The state Department of Education launched its own efforts to encourage children and families to read together for fun. I hear the message bounce back to me through other organizations or in check-out lines.

So, I cannot help but wonder, is this year's eighth-grade NAEP score quantifying something real and valuable?

Just four days before those scores were released, author Jacqueline Woodson came to the West Virginia Book Festival in Charleston, and among other things, said, "Children must be encouraged to read slowly. Making kids read fast is the opposite of making kids into writers."

While most kids will not grow up like Woodson to become award-winning poets and novelists, we do want them all to grow up able to express themselves competently in writing — and to be able to read the documents germane to their own livelihood and citizenship.

*(continued on page 4)*



## Books-A-Million supports Read Aloud in Raleigh County

### Reading success

(from page 3)

On September 19, 2015, Books-A-Million in Beckley had a “book fair” to support Read Aloud West Virginia. This was the brainchild of Anne-Marie Johnson, the store’s General Manager and a Raleigh County Read Aloud board member. From noon to 4:00 p.m., customers were asked if they would like 10% of their purchase to be donated to Read Aloud, which resulted in a \$167 donation.



they would like 10% of their purchase to be donated to Read Aloud, which resulted in a \$167 donation.

“Books-A-Million is committed to becoming involved in the communities it serves, and recognizes the critical importance of literacy,” noted Johnson. This is just one of the types of local fundraising it supports. Johnson believes BAM and Read Aloud are a perfect fit of interests, and hopes that an ongoing, state-wide partnership between the two can be developed.

Back at my school, where teachers have always made time for students to enjoy books, the fifth grade reached the point in Woodson’s memoir “Brown Girl Dreaming,” where she describes her Brooklyn teacher back in the 1970s not giving young Jacqueline time to settle the letters into words. “Read faster,” the teacher fussed. But faster is not better, the author makes clear in her book.

At this point, our teacher interjected a reminder to the class, something along the lines of, “See. What am I always telling you? You don’t have to read fast.”

We don’t even measure reading speed anymore, she added to me.

Dawn Miller, the Charleston Gazette’s editorial page editor, can be reached at dawn@wvgazette.com.

*Reprinted with permission from the Charleston Gazette-Mail.*

---

## Video

(from page 1)

Virginia State University extension agent and Summers County Read Aloud coordinator Stacy Ford at the Read Aloud summer conference led to a collaboration between RAWV and WVSU.

“Matt Browning and Megan Sheets in West Virginia State University’s communications and media departments took it and ran. They were such an incredible help to us in creating a tool that we could not have created without them,” Kessler explained.



WEST VIRGINIA STATE  
UNIVERSITY

Extension Service

Browning and Sheets, both graduates of WVSU and self-proclaimed “total book nerds,” described the video as a call to action to recruit volunteer readers.

Browning and Sheets filmed readers in Summers and Kanawha county, as well as “b-roll” footage featuring extension agents in the library and reading to children. The video was an in-kind donation to Read Aloud, and Sheets said it’s the first time they were able to branch out and do work for another entity besides the University.

The video also features an interview with Read Aloud Executive Director Mary Kay Bond.

“She came to our studio on campus, and she’s like a brochure for Read Aloud in person,” Sheets said, laughing. “She was great.”

Browning said the readers and children were very comfortable in front of the camera because they were engrossed in the reading.

“There was one gentleman, he was an absolute hoot!” he said. “The reader had so much fun with those kids, and they were having so much fun, it made it easy.”

# Marion County board member recognized for efforts to promote literacy

What does Amy Merrill, a third grade teacher in Fairmont and a Marion County Read Aloud board member, have in common with 29 other individuals from places like Nigeria, Haiti, Spain, New York, Canada, Nepal, California, and India? The answer is that she, like them, was recognized in September in the International Literacy Association's "30 Under 30" list as an innovative young leader helping to transform literacy world-wide.

The International Literacy Association (ILA) is a global advocacy and membership organization dedicated to advancing literacy for all. Its inaugural "30 Under 30" list represents 13 countries, according to the ILA's press release, with each honoree creating and implementing an initiative that "directly improved the quality of literacy instruction or ... increased access to literacy tools."

In addition to her classroom work, Merrill coaches a Lego robotics team, and helps coordinate projects like keeping "Little Free Libraries" stocked with books, providing large print books to nursing homes, and giving gift bags to children admitted to hospital cancer units. While



she only recently joined the board of Marion County Read Aloud, she is in her third term on the Marion County Reading Council, and is a member of the West Virginia Reading Association Executive Board.

Merrill is humbled by her nomination, but passionate about literacy, which comes through clearly in everything she does. Aletta Moffett, Marion County Read Aloud chapter president, noted that, while she has not yet had the opportunity to work much with Merrill, she is "very impressed with her. I see [her recognition] as a sign of good things to come."

Congratulations, Amy! To read the article in the September/October issue of Literacy Today featuring all 30 honorees, visit [www.literacyworldwide.org/30under30](http://www.literacyworldwide.org/30under30).

---

## Roane County community engagement funded by The Education Alliance

A grant from The Education Alliance enabled Read Aloud WV to host two fall kick-off events designed to engage new community volunteers in the organization's Roane County program.

The funding was provided through the Education Powers Tomorrow campaign, an initiative of the Alliance supported by funding from the Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation. The campaign encourages community members to mentor, read to students or to become involved in local education in various ways.

"We all know the proverb, 'It takes a village to raise a child,' and what an essential role each member of a community has to play in the growth and development of its young people," said Roane County Read Aloud Chair Margaret Goffreda. "The grants provided organizations like ours the connections to promote a greater understanding and support within our community for a stronger education system."



The Education Alliance is a statewide nonprofit organization which operates programs and advances policies to improve achievement by public school students in West Virginia. For more information, visit [www.powereducationwv.com](http://www.powereducationwv.com), or contact the Alliance at 1-866-314-KIDS or [powereducationwv@educationalliance.org](mailto:powereducationwv@educationalliance.org).

# Library wake up: a makeover draws in teens

By Nikki Moses

It was lonely in Buckhannon-Upshur High School's library when Angie Westfall became the media specialist there. Few students were dropping in and fewer were checking out books. "How can I change this?" she wondered.

Westfall began by talking with students and listening carefully to their answers. She partnered with the West Virginia Library Commission. She culled library shelves of outdated books and began replacing them with volumes popular with teens. She decided to think like a marketer and she made visiting the library fun. At the end of her first year, a remarkable total of 1,340 books had been checked out.

## West Virginia Library Commission

Angie Westfall is quick to say that she could not have done this alone. The staff of the Library Commission consulted with her on pulling outdated books from the shelves, and they established an interlibrary loan system.

And what happened to the old books? Westfall, students and faculty worked together to build Christmas "book trees." One was six feet tall and was built with more than 1,000 volumes. Artistic students took the most battered and created book art from them. Old magazines became decorative snowflakes.

"We up-cycled," she said. "The students loved it."

## Theme of the Month

Westfall uses a theme every month to pique student interest. October's theme centered on murder, mayhem and mystery. November's themes included hunting and fishing, cooking, family and politics. She uses props like stuffed bear heads to create interest, and she displays pertinent literature prominently.

"I try to get students in, and I ask them what they are interested in. Then I say, 'I have a book about that.'"

## Thinking like a marketer

Westfall and other teachers create displays in the library, and she puts magazines in wall racks at the back so they are highly visible and so that students have to walk through the library. She displays books

in key spots "like Wal-Mart displays things on the shelves' end caps," she explained.

Her library might be the only one in the state where, during October, it looked like a crime scene. She used tape to create the outline of a body; students streamed in to pose and take "selfies." Another time she had funny glasses, mustaches and hats for another round of selfies.

"Kids come in, and then they bring their friends," she said.

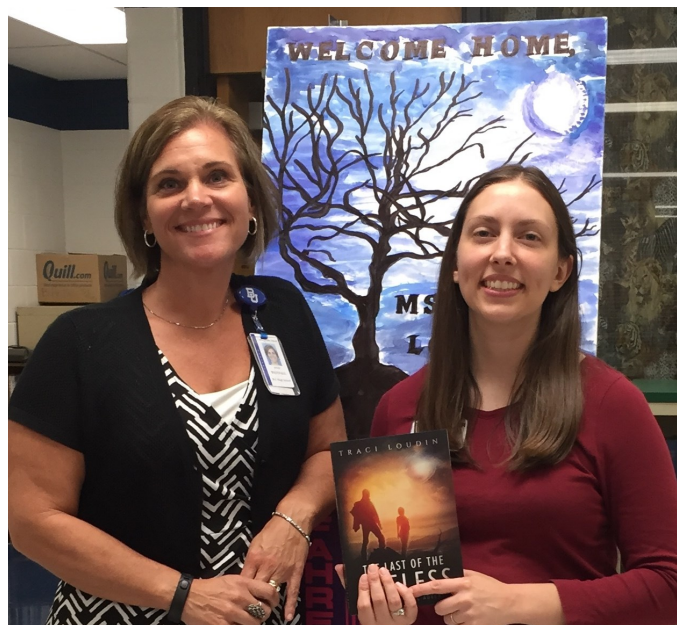
## Wait. There's more!

West Virginia authors Bill Lepp and Traci Loudin presented workshops in the library. Any interested student was welcome to attend.

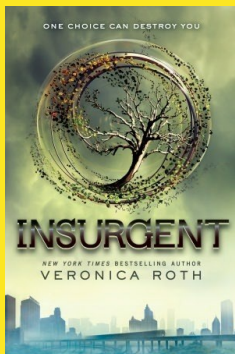
Angie takes her students to nearby Wesleyan College so they can experience and become comfortable with a college library. She alerts the public library that students are working on particular projects so they can prepare.

And always there is her listening ear. "Why do you come to the library? What do you like about it?" she asks."

She summarized, "If I can get them in, maybe I can get a book in their hands."



## Top 10 Books of 2015 at Buckhannon-Upshur High School



1. **Insurgent** by Veronica Roth
2. **Asylum** by Madeleine Roux
3. **Catching Fire** by Suzanne Collins
4. **Lone Survivor** by Marcus Luttrell
5. **Looking for Alaska/An Abundance of Katherines** by John Green
6. **We Should Hang Out Sometime** by Josh Sundquist
7. **The Zom-B Chronicles** by Darren Shan
8. **The Death Cure** by James Dashner
9. **Eragon** by Christopher Paolini
10. **Quarantine: The Loners** by Lex Thomas

## Nickell Foundation supports summer reading in Greenbrier

A \$5,000 grant from the Mary B. Nickell Foundation brings Read Aloud one step closer to full funding of a summer reading initiative in Greenbrier County.

The pilot program is modeled after a longitudinal study by literacy researchers Richard Allington and Anne McGill-Franzen. The University of Tennessee education professors found that providing self-selected books for summer reading was as beneficial to reading achievement as summer school. Read Aloud will work with the Greenbrier County Campaign for Grade Level Reading to implement the program at Crichton Elementary.

“These funds, along with a grant of \$3,000 from Greenbrier County’s Hollowell Foundation, bring us much closer to our goal of \$10,000 for full implementation in all grades at the school,” said Lynn Kessler, Communications and Development Director for Read Aloud. “We’re extremely grateful to both the Nickell and Hollowell Foundations for their votes of confidence in this project.”

The Mary B. Nickell Foundation administers funds entrusted to it for the promotion of the arts and for educational purposes to encourage the development and appreciation of the arts and for the promotion of the happiness and well-being of the community centered in and around Greenbrier County.



### It's all about the books!

Media specialist Angie Westfall has created a community centered around books in her library at Buckhannon-Upshur High School. Author workshops, engaging displays and even selfie photo stations pique the interest and curiosity of the kids, who have checked out more and more books under her tenure.

In keeping with the theme of community, Westfall charges late fees of canned goods instead of money for overdue books. The food items are then donated to local food banks and organizations who serve the area’s hungry.

*Page 6: Westfall poses with WV native Tracy Loudin in front of a “Welcome Home” sign made for the author’s workshop visit.*

*Left (this page): A creative upcycling endeavor. Faculty and students worked together to turn outdated books into a festive literary holiday book tree.*



NON-PROFIT ORG.  
U.S. POSTAGE PAID  
PERMIT NO. 2879  
CHAS., WV 25301

## Read-A-Palooza fundraiser set for March 7 at Paterno's

Read-A-Palooza, Read Aloud West Virginia's sole annual fundraising event, will be March 7, 2016 from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. at Paterno's at the Park in Charleston.

The event features a silent auction, food and beverages, and offers a happy hour feel. It's an evening for adults to come together to support Read Aloud's mission to keep books in the hands and on the minds of West Virginia's children.

The theme for this year's event is **S.T.R.E.A.M.: Reading runs through it**. Reading is not just the foundation of all knowledge. It is a skill that grows and goes with us—supporting our understanding of science, technology, engineering, arts, math and beyond. Reading is the stream that moves a child successfully through his or her education and life.

Test scores recorded by the National Center for Education Statistics show that children from homes with 100 or more books score better on tests in all subjects, usually outpacing their peers from homes with ten or fewer books by *40 or more points* per subject.

Reading, indeed, runs through it. We hope you will join us to celebrate and learn more about what Read Aloud is doing to build a community of life-long readers in West Virginia.

Early bird tickets are \$30 or \$35 after February 25, 2016.

How did reading boost your life experiences  
or career in S.T.E.A.M.?

Share your story with us!

**#mySTREAMstory**

### About our contributors

**Sara Busse** is a long-time Charleston resident and community volunteer. Her work at Trinity's Table has earned her recognition as a 2016 YWCA Woman of Achievement.

**Dawn Miller** is the Gazette Editorial Page Editor for the Charleston Gazette-Mail, volunteer reader and an advisory Read Aloud board member.

**Melody Simpson** is an attorney at Bowles Rice LLP, a volunteer reader and member of the Read Aloud board and newsletter committee.

**Nikki Moses** is the former editor of the Read Aloud newsletter and a board member. She is an active volunteer in the Charleston community.

## Contact Us

P.O. Box 1784  
Charleston, WV 25326

(304) 345-5212

[www.readaloudwestvirginia.com](http://www.readaloudwestvirginia.com)

[readaloud@frontier.com](mailto:readaloud@frontier.com)

