

Sharing the same book across grades, the entire school or the school district brings together readers and enhances your entire community's culture of literacy. Sometimes known as a "community read," the unifying experience of a shared story engages readers as active participants in a celebration of their love for books.

A community read can also build opportunities for meaningful conversations around significant social issues while bridging various backgrounds, including socioeconomic statuses and potentially decrease book access issues for your readers.

If you are interested in staging a shared read, we suggest you begin with the following approach as a framework, tailoring your event to the specific needs of your community.

**Look Ahead.** A community read takes more advance planning than many PTA events. Give your group several months to work behind the scenes before you announce the initiative, and then factor in the time necessary to execute a successful event. For example, you might begin planning in August for a spring event, or in early spring for the following school year. Of course, the bandwidth of your core group of volunteers and an initial budget will dictate the scope of your event.

**Articulate Your Goals.** Maybe you choose to stage a shared read for the sheer delight of coming together in story. It could be that your community collectively needs to address a weightier topic or hopes to highlight a need or accomplishment with this program. What do you intend to accomplish with this community read? What do you hope will be the event's impact? Articulating your goal will help identify potential partners within your school community and ensure that your decision making throughout the planning process is consistent with the result you hope to accomplish with this event.

**Identify Your Community.** A shared read could mean one book is read by all the third graders in your building or all the third graders in a handful of partnering schools. Or it could mean that one book is read by your whole school, or your whole school district. The scope of your reach may be dictated by your funding but identifying which readers to include in the community read determines several of the next steps you will take. Be sure, as you select your intended audience, that your goals and that audience are mutually compatible.

**Select Your Book.** Your book choice sets the tone for the entire event. As you consider which title to select for your shared read, keep in mind the literacy of your broader community. A picture book, even for older readers, offers broad accessibility through images and limited text that can overcome gaps in reading level or language comprehension.

This is an excellent time to highlight an issue with which your community has been struggling, whether that it be social (racial sensitivity), environmental (stewardship) or cultural (immigration/refugees). A book that supports the social-emotional growth of your readers will likely resonate across a diverse community. If you have a book in mind, be sure the title is reasonably priced and available in the necessary quantities, and, if necessary, multiple languages.

**Plan Your Purchase.** Depending on the scope of your event, you may consider reaching out to the book's publisher about purchasing the title in bulk. Alternatively, a local independent bookstore might be eager to help you place this book order. Even if you can provide a copy of the book for each reader, your public library system will likely appreciate advance notice to ensure that extra copies of the title are available for circulation. Title I schools who qualify for an account may find very reasonably priced titles through [First Book Marketplace](#); consider National PTA's Build a Home Library resource for additional purchasing options.

**Think Deeply as You Plan.** It helps to troubleshoot in advance and think through various scenarios before announcing your event; you may choose to offer Frequently Asked Questions with the announcement. Here's a few questions to ask yourself:

- Will your community read event include community partners (arts or humanities councils, bookstores, your library) or sponsors (local businesses or corporations that connect to your initiative)?
- Other than the book, what additional materials might you need to smoothly execute the event?
- Will you offer pre-reading questions to gauge students' background knowledge?
- Will you use a discussion guide with questions teachers or parents might ask while reading or bookmarks or buttons that promote your PTA?
- Could you connect a guest lecture, a concert, an art exhibition, film screenings or any hands-on workshops for participants?
- How will you market the event?
- What is the schedule, or timeline, for the actual reading portion—one exciting day, a week or a month?
- Will you include a visit with the book's author or illustrator, at the end?
- How will you distribute the title to your readers—send it home from school with students, or keep the books in the classroom?

**Launch!** With the hard work of planning confidently undertaken, it is time to kick off your community read event. Assemble your volunteers, distribute any supplemental materials and your books, and let the reading commence!

## Book Suggestions for a Community Read

If you are looking for suggestions for your community read, here are a few themes to get you started, along with a picture book, early elementary selection, and chapter book for each theme.

### Social

“Thank You, Omu!” by Oge Mora

“Skunk and Badger” by Amy Timberlake and Jon Klassen

“We’re Not from Here” by Geoff Rodkey

### Environmental

“Harlem Grown: How One Big Idea Transformed a Neighborhood” by Tony Hillery and Jessie Hartland

“We Are Water Protectors” by Carole Lindstrom and Michaela Goade

“Strange Birds: A Guide to Ruffling Feathers” by Celia C. Perez

### Cultural

“The Many Colors of Harpreet Singh” by Supriya Kelkar and Alea Marley

“Front Desk” by Kelly Yang

“Other Words for Home” by Jasmine Warga

### Social-emotional Growth

“Strictly No Elephants” by Lisa Mantchev and Taeun Yoo

“Juana and Lucas: Big Problemas” by Juana Medina

“Cardboard Kingdom” by Chad Sell

If you would like to bring parents and caregivers into the event, consider pairing an adult book with its young readers edition, such as “The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind” (Kamkwamba/Mealer) or Trevor Noah’s “Born a Crime” to invite all ages to participate in the conversation.