

GEORGIA ASSOCIATION OF LITERACY ADVOCATES

FOCUS

*A Newsletter of the Georgia
Association of Literacy
Advocates (GALA)*

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Spring 2020

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A Note from the Editor

This issue of GALA *Focus* finds all of us facing a new normal unlike anything we have ever experienced before. With the COVID-19 pandemic and nationwide school closures, we are all hunkering down and trying to acclimate ourselves and our families to the rigors of social distancing. With all of these changes, we are also trying to implement online or virtual learning for our students. The uncertainty of it all only increases the anxiety.

To add to this tragedy, GALA lost one of our luminaries, Dr. Ron Reigner, last month. Dr. Reigner was a former president of GALA. Dr. Dawn Owens submitted a beautifully written memorial to Dr. Reigner, which we have included in this issue.

Despite all of these very real hardships, I hope this issue of *Focus* brings a ray of hope to all of us. In this issue, Katlyne Hill, an educator in DeKalb County, shares ways to manage this new normal as we facilitate authentic virtual literacy learning for our students. Her article is timely and provides helpful advice for educators using online platforms.

Lastly, the newsletter opens with encouraging updates for the DeKalb, Fulton, and Heritage Henry literacy councils. As you will see, our local chapters are continuing to promote literacy throughout the state!

My sincerest best wishes for continued health and safety.

Dr. Robert A. Griffin

GALA *Focus* Editor

Issue at a Glance

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GALA Mission Statement

The Georgia Association of Literacy Advocates (GALA) is a membership organization whose mission is *advancing literacy learning and teaching for all of Georgia.*

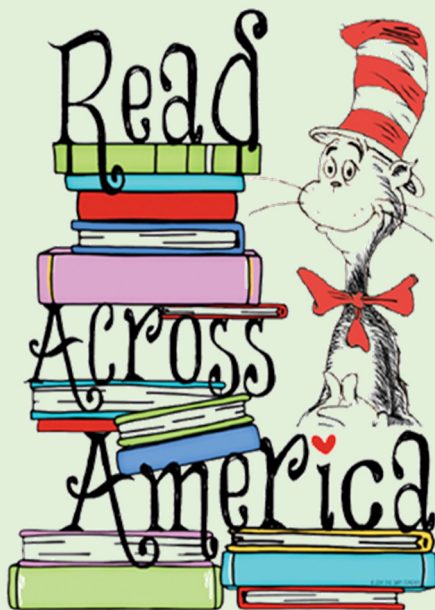
Updates from Local Councils



DeKalb Literacy Council

Celebrating Read Across America

Cedar Grove Elementary School (Ellenwood, GA) had a weeklong Read Across America Celebration! On Monday, March 2, everyone dressed as Cat in the Hat, and the students were immersed in Seuss-themed literacy and technology activities. Tuesday, March 3, was “Curl Up with a Good Book”: students wore pajamas, and parents and Cedar Grove High School students read to every class. Wednesday, March 4, was “Fox in Sox” and science: all classes participated in STEM activities. Thursday, March 4, was Grinchy Green Day, and on Friday, March 5, they celebrated their students’ 25 Book Campaign reading achievements with an assembly and parade.



Instructional highlights included third-grade students utilizing WebQuest to research the history of Dr. Seuss. Students used the information and facts from the program to design informational hot air balloons. Students then completed a pre-writing activity; they read *The Lorax* and worked in collaborative comprehension stations using leveled task cards. The activities culminated in constructed and extended writing responses.

It was an exciting instructional literacy week for all!

For more information about the DeKalb Literacy Council and their exceptional work, please contact Davetta Grigsby at nhgrigsby1@aol.com.

Fulton Literacy Council

The FLC president, Easter White, represented our literacy council at the Fulton County T.H.R.I.V.E. Conference on February 14, 2020, at Banneker High School. The conference had in attendance K–5 teachers from 20 elementary schools. Ms. White shared information at our booth and had over 50 new members sign up to join this worthwhile organization. The FLC Board would like to take this opportunity to welcome each new member! We look forward to the impact you will have on the growth and outreach of FLC. We have also recently partnered with College Park and Parklane Elementary Schools.

FLC also volunteered at several schools during the Read Across America Celebration. Since the beginning of the 2019–2020 school year, we have logged more than 50 volunteer hours in schools. See the pictures on the page 3 highlighting some of our incredible work.

For more information about the Fulton Literacy Council and their exceptional work, please contact Easter White at easterwhite10@gmail.com.



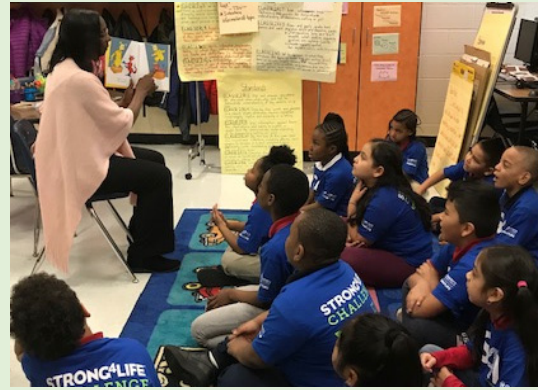
Georgia Journal of Literacy

The *Georgia Journal of Literacy* (GJL) is the biannual, peer-reviewed, open-access academic publication of the Georgia Association of Literacy Advocates (GALA). We publish research- and practitioner-based articles related to language and literacy education at all educational levels. We welcome the voices of all literacy advocates, from literacy scholars /researchers, P–12 teachers and school leaders, and graduate students. Our next issue will be coming out toward the end of April or early May. Articles submitted between now and July will be considered for the upcoming fall 2020 issue.

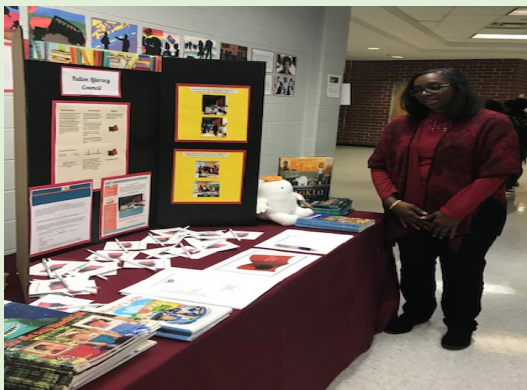
For more information about GJL, please visit our website at digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/gjl or contact the editor, Dr. Shannon Tovey (Howrey), at showrey@kennesaw.edu.



FLC Booth at Read Across America Celebration



FLC Read Aloud, Hamilton Elementary School



FLC Booth at Read Across America Celebration



FLC Member Collaborating with School Media Specialist



Read Across America at College Park Elementary



FLC Members at College Park Elementary School Book Fair



*FLC Member Assisting Children at Book Fair,
Asa G. Hilliard Elementary School*



*FLC Members Reading to Students,
Campbell Elementary School*

Henry Heritage Reading Council

Henry Heritage Going Strong

Henry Heritage Reading Council has had another successful year serving the county teachers and helping local and international projects. We celebrated our 25th year of operation in 2019 and are moving into the next decade with determination to keep some of our yearly traditions while adding new ways to be relevant to the digital world we are now living in.

We had our first meeting in October after everyone was well settled into the new school year. Our speakers were Robin Wilson, English Language Arts Coordinator, and Krystal Richter, Early Learning Coordinator. They were able to let everyone in attendance know the upcoming projects and changes that were going to take place in the county this year and answer any questions our attendees had. We also began to collect for our two projects for the year. We accepted gift cards to go to our Kids in Transition program that serves homeless students in our county, and we collected school supplies to send to the Bethel Mission School in Haiti.



*The Grouchy Ladybug Display,
McDonough Fall Festival of Storytelling*

We entered a decorated pumpkin in the Henry Arts Alliance Parade of Pumpkins for the first time this year. The pumpkins were on display in the lobby of Piedmont Henry, then the county's Performing Arts Center and local libraries and senior centers, and finally the McDonough Library for their Fall Festival of Storytelling. Each pumpkin was decorated using a book theme and accompanied by the book. At the end, the book and pumpkin were raffled off to children at the festival. We used *The Grouchy Ladybug* by Eric Carle for our theme.

In November, we held our annual Community Wide Book Sale. Our council collects donated books and hosts a book sale with all books selling for 25 and 50 cents. All proceeds go toward our Reader of the Year ceremony at the end of each year to recognize our local students' achievements in reading. Families and organizations that would have a hard time purchasing books for their home or organization can easily fill bags and boxes full of books at this price, and all books left over are donated to good causes afterwards.

At our second meeting in November, we invited our Scholastic representative, Lynn O'Hara, to come to speak to our attendees about the classroom libraries all kindergarten through 5th grade classrooms received this school year as part of a literacy initiative that our superintendent began in our district. Teachers had some training on the libraries before school began, but this gave them an opportunity to ask questions about them and hear many ways to use the libraries in their classrooms. She brought books to give away; each attendee left with a half dozen books!

In January, we met to hear Gary Hyppolite, the director of Bethel Mission Outreach, speak to give us an update on the school that his mission operates. Mr. Hyppolite is a Henry County resident but travels to Haiti several times a year to bring school supplies we collect for the school. For our newer members, Mr. Hyppolite gave a little background history, and he shared pictures of the school and children. Our council has sponsored this school as our International Project for many years, and we are always happy to know that whatever we collect goes directly to the school.

We were planning for our annual Reader of the Year Ceremony and being a part of the First Foundation for Childhood Literacy Spring Luncheon when the current pandemic required us to postpone these events until later in the year. We hope we will be able to meet one last time before summer arrives so we can have our annual "Saladbration to Summer Reading," where over salads we share what we are reading or hope to read over the summer. It is always one of our favorite meetings where we get recommendations for our reading pleasure over the summer months.

For more information about the Henry Heritage Reading Council and their exceptional work, please contact Anita Beasley, at acbeasley75@gmail.com.

SPRING INTO READING



In Memory of Dr. Ronald Reigner, Former GALA President

Leaders and members of the Georgia Association of Literacy Advocates (GALA), formerly the Georgia Reading Association (GRA), were saddened by the recent passing of a revered friend, Dr. Ronald Reigner. The association extends sincere appreciation for the contributions of Dr. Reigner, a GRA past president. Dr. Reigner served the organization faithfully in numerous positions during the past 20 years, including GRA President, GRA Executive Committee member, GRA Board of Directors member, GRA committee chair, local council president, and student council sponsor/liaison.

Dr. Reigner's work in the field of literacy was extensive. He was an active member of the International Literacy Association (ILA) and Illinois Reading Association prior to becoming a professor at the University of West Georgia. He represented GRA at ILA conventions and was a respected presenter at many conferences. He served as ILA Special Interest Group Concern for Affect in Reading Education (C.A.R.E.) President and Journal for C.A.R.E. Editor. He was also a member of the review board of the *Georgia Journal of Literacy*. He created and chaired the College of Coastal Georgia Annual Literacy Symposium. Dr. Reigner was instrumental in securing leading reading researchers and authors as conference speakers. He utilized these professional people to present community literacy activities and programs for inner city children and educators. He advanced the work of the Ferst Foundation for Childhood Literacy in Carroll County and Glynn County. Ferst Foundation for Childhood Literacy, now known as Ferst Readers, is an organization that provides free books on a monthly

basis to children from birth to five years of age. He was also a founding member of the Community Action Team for Carroll County.

At conferences, he served as a presenter, chaired and presided over sessions, and often served at the hospitality table, heartily welcoming participants and providing information. Dr. Reigner was a highly renowned professor and an exceedingly qualified presenter who involved many of his students in his professional presentations. He led efforts to structure registration provisions to allow college students to work at conferences to cover registration fees. Dr. Reigner sponsored membership in professional organizations at the national and state levels by paying the full membership fees or paying half the fees for large groups of new members. Dr. Reigner sponsored the initial ILA membership of two current GALA officers. He helped charter and supported local councils.

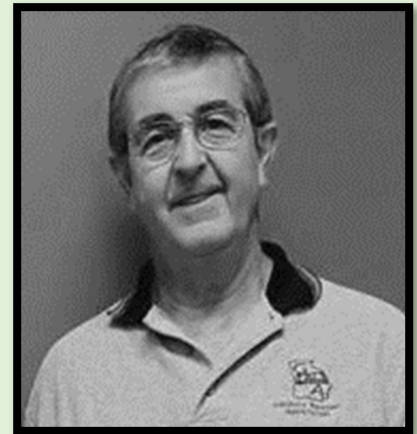
Dr. Reigner was instrumental in promoting literacy by encouraging many colleagues and all of his students to join the ranks of ILA and GALA, submitting articles for publication, remaining current on literacy and reading research, and being an avid reader. He was always equipped with a quick reference list of reasons to belong to his beloved ILA and GALA. He was engaging when he talked of current literacy literature and innovative instruction. Ron was able to provide instantaneously a list of suggested selections, classic and current titles, for professional and personal reading pleasure.

Dr. Ron Reigner possessed the demeanor of a relaxed gentleman in every situation. He was an exemplary listener, thought through issues, offered sound ideas and solutions,

and sought to be inclusive of all participants in professional or social conversations.

Dr. Reigner was an inspiration to family, colleagues, and friends. Even facing the difficult challenges of the last few years, Dr. Reigner was thinking of ways to remain active and to continue to provide dedicated service to GALA. He attended the GALA Summer Leadership Training last July. He made a sizable monetary contribution to ensure the fall 2019 issue of *GALA Focus* was completed this past year, participated in virtual meetings, donated professional and student literature, sought to secure eminent people for intricate positions in the organization, and maintained a positive, encouraging attitude despite facing daily, personal health struggles. Ron provided a shining example of dedicated service and illuminated the path of literacy for all.

Respectfully submitted,
Dr. Dawn Owens



Managing the New Normal: Virtual Literacy Learning

Virtual learning . . . just the mention of those two words can evoke visions of video conferencing, anxieties of a lack of structure and an atmosphere of competition with televisions and gaming systems for the attention of our students. With the announcement of school closings due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we are faced with an unprecedented shift in how we interact with our students. For now, this is our new normal; however, as educators, we have faced challenges before, and we always rise to the occasion of teaching in unconventional ways and succeeding. We will do the same as we manage literacy learning in the wake of current school closings. But how?

As I set up for my video conferencing guided reading session with the “penguins” (My reading groups are named after our favorite animals), here are a few guidelines that I put in place in order to have successful and engaging lessons with my students:

First, establish the norms for every session. Give students and parents expectations for the virtual classroom. You will find that they are mostly the same as what you expect in your everyday classrooms but tailored to the home environment. For example,

- Stay engaged, be respectful, and if you have a question, please raise your hand.
- Students should find a quiet corner or place within their home that is void of distractions, such as televisions, gaming systems, and/or other children. Such distractions can hinder the learning environment. Students cannot turn on any electronics



during a session. If possible, students must find a quiet place in the home so that they are not interrupted. They must stay focused on the task at hand, and the teacher should monitor the students’ facial reactions, to make sure that they are engaged.

These norms are also important for the instructor as well. We cannot foster an engaging environment if we are not actively engaged as well.

Next, have the materials needed for the session (e.g., reading passages, video conferencing link, passwords, etc.) sent to your students and parents at least 12–24 hours prior to the session. In some cases, I require my students to familiarize themselves with the passage we will cover in the next lesson with a fluency exercise or a word scavenger hunt. These measures will cut down on hiccups that may occur on the day of the session and maximize your time together. It will also increase student engagement because they potentially will be better invested and familiar with the passages that they have been given in advanced rather than regarding it as “busy work.”

Finally, make the literacy lesson engaging for the student. How? This is where virtual learning can be just as fun for the teacher as it can be for the student. “The great thing about teaching in a virtual environment is that you have the unique opportunity to individualize your instruction and personalize learning like never before,” says Laurel Beach, an Implementation Success Manager with Apex Learning. You can keep all the elements that make your classroom fun, like brain breaks and peer to peer instruction; but now you can offer a more personalized approach to learning.

With virtual guided reading and literacy centers, you have a captive audience. You will not have to compete with other students, interruptions from co-workers/administration and the numerous distractions that may come with everyday face-to-face classroom instruction. Take the data that you have available to you and focus on areas that you can improve with your students, i.e., phonics, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency. Now is the time to take advantage of the one thing that teachers want so much more of . . . TIME.

Continued →

Featured Article Continued

(continued from page 6)

Virtual learning can be overwhelming because it is something that we may only have used sparingly, if at all, before the COVID-19 outbreak; however, it can be an amazing asset if utilized properly. As with anything in education, virtual learning is not a cookie-cutter strategy or medium of instruction. You must take it and make it work for your students and their learning styles.

Virtual learning cannot replace the face-to-face contact essential to the pedagogy of your P-12 classroom. However, with clearly defined expectations, preparedness, and a high quality of engagement, teachers and students will be able to foster a nurturing environment for educational success.

Katlyne Hill

katlyne_hill@dekalbschoolsga.org

Cedar Grove Elementary, DeKalb County
Submitted on behalf of the DeKalb Literacy Council



Call for Submissions



We need you!

The next issue of *GALA Focus*, the fall edition, will be published in September 2020. We are calling for submissions from literacy advocates (e.g., P-12 teachers, P-12 school leaders, teacher educators, business and community leaders, researchers, etc.) across the state in the following categories:

- News items and announcements related to literacy advocacy or GALA initiatives
- Articles highlighting topics of interest in the field of literacy advocacy (e.g., teaching tips for P-12 literacy educators, perspectives or commentary on trends, informal research summaries, etc.)
- Book reviews for children's and young adult literature
- Resource reviews for textbooks, professional development texts, web sites, etc.
- Congratulatory notes to recognize student literacy achievements or the professional achievements of GALA members (e.g., awards, publications, grants, etc.)

Submissions should be submitted in Microsoft Word format (.doc or .docx) or as a Google Drive document. Please include section headings, if necessary.

Photos, tables, figures, and sidebars are encouraged if they help to illustrate the message of the piece.

Contributors will be notified once their submission is received. The editor reserves the right to modify any material selected for publication to fit the available space or to improve on clarity and style. Authors will be consulted prior to publication if changes are significant and may be given an opportunity to revise their piece if substantial changes or refocusing is required. Articles may also be held for future issues.

Please email your submission to Dr. Robert Griffin, *GALA Focus* editor, at rgriffin@westga.edu by **September 1, 2020**. Please include the words "GALA Focus Submission" in the subject line of your email.



This spring,
hop into a
good book!

Upcoming GALA Dates to Remember
Spring, Summer, and Early Fall 2020

April/May 2020	<i>Georgia Journal of Literacy</i> Spring Issue Published
July 2020	GALA Summer Leadership Summit (Location TBD)
September 1, 2020	Submissions Due for <i>GALA Focus</i> Newsletter Fall Issue
September 2020	<i>GALA Focus</i> Newsletter Fall Issue Published
October 15–18, 2020	International Literacy Association (ILA) Conference, Columbus, OH



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Dr. Robert A. Griffin, Editor
University of West Georgia
1601 Maple Street
Carrollton, Georgia 30118
Office: 678-839-6152
Email: rgriffin@westga.edu