Community Read Program
Executive Summary



2008

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Illiteracy is a national crisis that affects everyone, readers and non-readers alike. Although addressing this issue calls for action at the national and state levels, local and community-level involvement is essential. A Community Read (CR) has been tested as an effective way to engage people emotionally and intellectually with the potential of igniting a grassroots action to improve literacy in their own community.

Community Read is a local event in which the whole community participates by reading the same book, preferably one whose topic addresses a social issue, in this case, illiteracy. Small discussion groups are then formed to stimulate dialogue and the exchange of ideas. The purpose of a CR is to generate awareness while creating a unique space for open and sincere discussion, with the hopes of also determining possible solutions and encouraging action. Communities joining together to read and discuss a book will reap the benefits of enhancing community involvement, fostering the exchange of ideas, and instilling a sense of appreciation for both the entertaining and educational aspects of reading.

Beginning a CR with John Corcoran's books *The Teacher who Couldn't Read* and/or *The Bridge to Literacy*, or choosing these books for an established program, offers participants the inspiring story of an illiterate and the necessary steps to take towards a literate America. Communities will be likely to continue reading books together after learning the importance of literacy. *The Teacher* is an easier-to-read, riveting narrative of Corcoran's lifetime of learning and advocacy experiences published originally in 1994. It has been updated and re-released in September 2008 by Kaplan Publishing. *The Bridge*, to be released October 2008, is a more comprehensive examination of problems and solutions as shared by learners, researchers, educators, advocates, service groups and policymakers thereby providing a blueprint for action in communities anywhere.

Community Read Program

The Community Read program will promote literacy awareness, enhance community involvement, and essentially serve as a call to action to work towards creating a literate America. The program may involve groups of people choosing to participate by reading a book throughout the month and holding routine discussion groups or as a classroom reading assignment for students, in which the book will be read and discussed. Possible participating groups include students, libraries, adult literacy providers, K-12 educators, book clubs, social workers, court systems, community service organizations, businesses, churches, neighborhoods, or colleagues. There is a common thread among all of these groups as the epidemic of illiteracy has claimed 43 percent of the adult population, those who read at the basic or below basic levels, according to the National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL 2003).

Having a community read and discuss a book together creates an opportunity to educate, bond, and stimulate. By reading *The Teacher who Couldn't Read* and *The Bridge to Literacy*, both problem awareness and solutions are provided, as well as personal connection. By reading *The Teacher who Couldn't Read*, communities will be exposed to a personal account of the harsh reality of illiteracy in America. John Corcoran's story engages its readers because of his unique insight into the experience of living for forty-eight years without knowing how to read, write or spell. His triumph came at age 48 when he learned how to read and over the next twenty years became a national literacy advocate and spokesperson. Most unbelievable, perhaps, is the fact that Mr. Corcoran has written two books to share his experience of secret illiteracy. *The Bridge to Literacy* is a blueprint to break the cycle of illiteracy in America which also includes Mr. Corcoran's story since learning to read and the experiences of other adult illiterates.

A successful CR program may include students reading *The Teacher* while administrators, educators, and/or policymakers join to read *The Bridge*. Community Read programs can take place over the period of a month for civic or social groups or a semester for students, educators, or new adult readers. However, the duration, frequency, size, and organization of the program varies to best suit the unique needs of the community.

Testimonials

Community Read

Participation was phenomenal. Students could be seen with their eyes fixed on their books as they waited for their rides. The book club was extremely successful.

Renita Allen, James Sprunt Community College, NC

To date, a mere two months later, we are still reaping the benefits of this unique project and from Mr. Corcoran's wealth of knowledge and generosity.

Breta Stroud, Highlands Literacy Council, NC

The Teacher who Couldn't Read

It is truly the best life-story of a learning disabled person that I have read. It is written at a high-interest level and it captures and holds the reader's attention throughout.

John McNichols, Director, National Dyslexia Research Foundation

The Bridge to Literacy

In this thoughtful and powerful book, Bridge to Literacy, John Corcoran lays out the blueprint for what can and must be done. Everyone who really cares about our future and the need for a more literate America should walk the walk with John Corcoran through the pages of this book.

Jim Duffy, Spokesperson for Project Literacy US

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