Community Read Program
Proposal



2008

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Executive Summary

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. (See Appendix II)

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 will be 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.

Community Read Program (Cont'd)

Why read together as a community?

Recent studies done by The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) titled "To Read or Not to Read: a Question of National Consequence" (2007) found:

A. A historical decline in amount of reading for pleasure;
B. declining proficiency in adult readers;
C. strong correlation of frequency of reading for pleasure with better test scores in reading and writing; and,
D. association of greater academic, professional, and civic benefits with high levels of leisure reading and reading comprehension.

http://www.nea.gov/research/ToRead_ExecSum.pdf

Goals for Community Read Program:

1. Promote community involvement, cohesion and development;
2. Broaden and deepen an appreciation for the skill of reading and proactively share this gift with non-readers; and,
3. Foster a sense of discussion, creativity and an exchange of ideas.

To solve any personal or social problem we must be able to articulate it. Through Community Read programs, the community will be able to articulate local issues and needs, come up with possible solutions inspired by information from *The Bridge*, and follow-up with action.

How *The Teacher* and *The Bridge* meet these goals:

1. Create awareness of America's illiteracy epidemic;
2. Involve new adult readers in the community with an intriguing and relatable story; and,
3. Inspire action to improve literacy for all age groups in communities large and small.

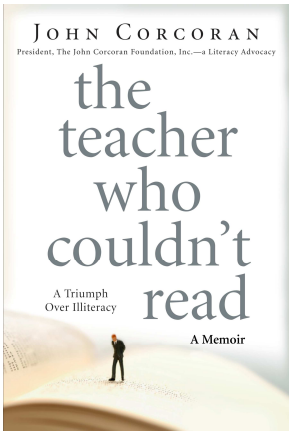
The Teacher Who Couldn't Read

"I'm a university graduate," I began, "with a bachelor's degree in education and business administration and over 90 additional graduate units. I attended school for 35 years, half of them as a professional educator. In acquiring these experiences, I could not read a textbook or write the answer to an essay question. This is the first public acknowledgment that I have ever made, that I have been a functional illiterate for almost 50 years." – John Corcoran 1988

The Teacher Who Couldn't Read is the true story of a high school teacher who triumphed over his illiteracy. This book will give you a profound new appreciation for being able to decipher the words on this or any other page, and will deepen your understanding of the epidemic of illiteracy within our nation's educational system.

Although he graduated from high school and college and went on to become a secondary school teacher, John Corcoran did not learn how to read until he was 48 years old! *The Teacher* is an incredible account of how a smart kid slipped through the system and became a part of it. Corcoran chronicles the clever tactics and schemes of deception he used to survive in a world of literates. But more importantly, this memoir exposes the weaknesses of common teaching strategies and provides practical methods for conquering illiteracy. *The Teacher Who Couldn't Read* will challenge and inspire parents, teachers, schools, and community discussion groups to be sure that no child is left without the ability to read.

2nd Edition Release
September 2, 2008
Kaplan Publishing
www.kaplanpublishing.com



The Bridge to Literacy

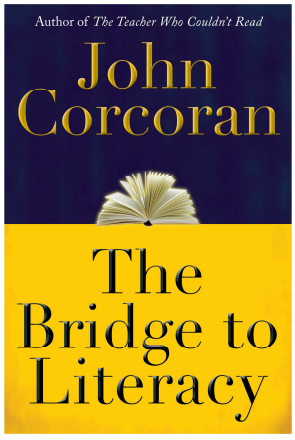
Bridge to Literacy examines the state of crisis of illiteracy in America and shares a vision of hope for children and adults. Teaching *all* children how to read using scientifically proven methods of instruction in the classroom will prevent another generation of failure, while increasing resources for programs for older students, dropouts, and adult learners will eradicate an epidemic that threatens the our economic and social well-being in America.

Bridge to Literacy comes at a critical time as Congress considers the reauthorization of the sweeping federal education reform known as "No Child Left Behind," and the critical "Reading First" component, which provides research-based instruction to emerging learners. With 2014 set as the deadline to close the gap on achievement tests, many school districts have failed to show measurable progress--particularly for underprivileged and minority students. Rather than become discouraged or abandon the education reforms, John Corcoran believes that school districts, teachers, policymakers, parents, and most importantly, institutions of higher education that train teachers must redouble their efforts to commit to the goals of No Child Left Behind.

Through extensive research and in-depth interviews, *Bridge to Literacy* brings together leading researchers, advocates, and literacy champions in both public and private sectors–including in the U.S. and in Canada–who are fighting an overwhelming battle on several fronts, from early childhood detection to adult literacy programs. It shares the moving stories of parents who broke through barriers to provide educational support for their children, and tales of despair and victory as adults struggled to cope with the stigma of illiteracy and emerged into society's dominant culture of the written word.

Pragmatic and data-driven, *Bridge to Literacy* issues an inspiring call to action to realize a vision of literacy in America, with integrated efforts to diagnose difficulties and to teach reading at every age using evidenced- based methods. The prevention and eradication of illiteracy is possible. We have the research and the knowledge. All we need now is the commitment and the will to act.

New Release
October 7, 2008
Kaplan Publishing
www.kaplanpublishing.com



Original Program Model
Literacy Council of Highlands, North Carolina
Breta Stroud

In 2005 I was invited to a workshop on "How to Host a Community Read Project" at the public library in Greensboro, NC. A "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, and forming small groups to discuss the book.

One of Highlands Literacy Council's most dedicated tutors, Beverly Cone, had discovered the book, *The Teacher Who Couldn't Read*. This book was an obvious choice for the Community Read Project. The goal for the Community Read was to get the book in the hands of as many community members as possible and create a "buzz" so that even people who couldn't read would hear about this unique event and book. We also hoped that those who couldn't read would learn of Mr. Corcoran's incredible, inspiring story and would then possibly be able to summon the courage to come into the Literacy Council for our adult literacy services.

We wanted to have Mr. Corcoran come to town and tell his story personally, at as many scheduled events as possible with the hopes that our community residents who could not read would hear about the book, his visit and be able to attend one of his speaking engagements to hear his story firsthand. Planning ensued and finally, a little over a year later, the Community Read was "ON"! The month of September was chosen, with Mr. Corcoran's visit during the last week of that month to be the culmination of the event. To spread the word about the event, there were articles in both local papers, including a book review by local resident.

The Literacy Council had obtained a grant to cover the costs of the Community Read Project from a local women's organization called the Cullasaja Women's Outreach. I spoke to both local Rotary Clubs about the upcoming event. The local Methodist Church took on the Community Read Project as its own, spending the four weeks of September reading the book and coming together to discuss it. Several local book clubs and a ladies exercise class all did the same in September. The teachers at the local K-12 school read the book and met every Tuesday after school. By the end of September close to 200 books had been distributed throughout our small town, and, the "buzz" we wanted was definitely happening!

Over three days, Mr. Corcoran attended a Rotary Club meeting, the Tuesday teacher's meeting, a reception with the Literacy Council Board, a church group brunch, a weekly church dinner, lunch with tutors, Literacy Council programs, and a final community-wide speaking event. At the close of this event and with the help of the entire community of Highlands and thanks to Mr. Corcoran, our Community Read had been a huge success!

Sample Timeline

Planning and organizing participating groups and individuals may take between six months to a year.

Sample Timeline

August	Initial planning: set goals; contact local groups, schools, libraries; begin budgeting process; apply for grants or funding; create list of possible partners
September	Send letters to partners, sponsors, participating groups, and funders
October	Set date; confirm with author; contact local groups; recruit participants; order books
November	Publicity materials, marketing with local newspapers, radio; organize reading guides for each reading level/age group
December	Determine dates/times for discussion groups; assign optional preliminary research, final staff meeting
January	Distribute books Community Read Kick-off!

Marketing/ Publicity

To draw the audience you seek and create awareness about your community-wide read, your community needs to plan and implement an effective promotional campaign.

1. **Determine target audience**, goals for audience size and the best communication methods. Target your efforts to reach specific individuals or groups for participation in the program, as well as a community-wide strategy.

2. **Contact key individuals or groups** in your community:
   - Mayor
   - City Council
   - Literacy Council
   - Elected officials (i.e., state and U.S. representatives/senators)
   - Area business owners
   - Local clergy
   - Media

Personal contact via VIP invitations for community-wide read events is the best way to reach these key individuals or groups.

3. **Create marketing campaign**
   - Newspaper and magazine articles, announcements on television and radio programs, websites, web publicity, public service announcements, letters to the editor
   - Direct mailings, mass emails
   - Word of mouth, telephone, VIP invitations, public speaking engagements
   - Print ads, TV & radio, banners, flyers, bookmarks, posters

4. **Send a press release** announcing the event to your local newspapers, radio stations and television stations at least two to four weeks before the event.

5. **What's best for you** - which methods will work best for your event and your community. Consider your budget, availability, and planning committee resources.

Ideas for partnerships:
Library, Friends of the Library, Municipal government, State/Local Literacy Council, Book store, school, university, church, publisher, printer, radio or TV station, local businesses, or Rotary International clubs.

Foundations that offer literacy grants/ book donations:
- Wishyouwell.com
- Rotary.org
- Proliteracy.org
- Target.com
  - Community
  - Grants
- Dollargeneral.com
  - Community
  - Grant programs

Meetings & Events

One of the most important aspects of the Community Read Program is the discussion groups that take place while reading the book. Participants have a forum in which they can discuss the book and learn from their peers. Book discussion sessions can be organized by each group participating in the event so that meetings cater directly to their scheduling and availability.

Discussion sessions can focus on topics or the chronology of the book. Another option would be to emulate "Literature Circle" guides in which each participant fulfills a different role every week. For example, vocabulary finder, summarizer, illustrator, etc. Discussion groups can range from three to ten people and even have a culminating community-wide meeting. Lectures or panel discussions by literacy advocates, tutors, or adult learners can add depth and expertise to the group discussions.

With advanced planning, during or after the Community Read Program, John Corcoran can visit the community, speak, and/or interact with discussion groups.

Currently, Study Guides for the two books are being created which can be adapted to project length, age levels, and/or special interests of individual groups.

(To be developed)

Testimonials

Community Read Program

Upon contacting Mr. Corcoran directly, he eagerly gave us a substantial discount so we could purchase as many books as possible…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

Mr. Corcoran has inspired me both professionally and personally not only with his perseverance, his intelligence, his vast amount of knowledge, but also his generosity, his welcoming and open personality and his giving heart. 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, North Carolina

The Teacher Who Couldn't Read

John Corcoran has become a champion in the literacy movement in America. He has suffered the pain, humiliation, and consequences of illiteracy. His courage and vision helped him overcome the odds. His is an inspirational story and is must reading for those who believe literacy is a key to America's future.

Jim Duffy
Ex-president of ABC TV Network
Co-founder of Project Literacy U.S.

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 of National Dyslexia Research Foundation

The Bridge to Literacy

Until parents, teachers, and other professionals are taught to watch for the classic warning signs of dyslexia, children will continue to struggle and fall through the cracks in our education system- as John did. As John so clearly documents in this book, many professionals and organizations end up trying to help those with undiagnosed dyslexia- yet very few provide effective solutions.

Susan Barton, Founder
Bright Solutions for Dyslexia

John Corcoran's newest book beckons each of us who recognize literacy skills as a fundamental requirement for human growth and development to determine a way for those many adults and children who have not crossed the Bridge to Literacy to get in step.

M. Therese (Terry) Kelly, B.A., M.L.A
Director and President of New Heights Center,
A practicing Educational Therapist

Contact

John Corcoran Foundation
2289 Valley Road
Oceanside, Ca 92056

For more information…
Call 760.757.4775
Email brehon25@cox.net

www.johncorcoranfoundation.com

Appendix I

John Corcoran Foundation Mission

The John Corcoran Foundation (JCF) is a 501c3 non-profit public benefit corporation which has been established in 1997 by John Corcoran.

Mission: *The mission of the John Corcoran Foundation, Inc. is to facilitate the prevention and eradication of illiteracy in adults and children across America, through public awareness, creation and dissemination of resources, and training and mentoring through existing literacy organizations and educational programs.*

Vision: To help create a society in which each individual has the basic skills necessary to become successful in all aspects of life including education, work and community service. The Foundation is actively working to make that vision a reality through its many activities and programs. Most notably, JCF is an approved Supplemental Service Provider for literacy in the states of Colorado and California and to date has achieved significant success providing tutoring programs to students of all ages in need of specialized assistance to improve reading skills.

History

In 1997, John Corcoran formalized his literacy visions and, along with a diversified group of individual business and professional people, founded the John Corcoran Foundation, Inc. The Foundation began as a think tank to generate ideas to create public awareness and evolved into a provider of tutoring and teacher training. To this day JCF has trained over 300 tutors and tutored over 2000 students.

JCF serves as a **call to action** with a proven model to help children and adults learn to read. There is no greater threat to the economic and social welfare of this country and the world than illiteracy. It widens the gaps between haves and have-nots and impedes the ability of people, especially of different languages and cultures, to understand each other. Literacy promotes equality, opportunity, responsibility; it leads to healthier, more cohesive families. Literacy isn't a magic pill for all society's ills, but illiteracy is a caustic acid that eats away at everything. That's why we must persist on this journey, no matter how long or difficult. We cannot give up—ever.

Our Values & Beliefs

- America is a global, proactive model for universal literacy.
- Improving and developing literacy skills and values is a lifelong process.
- It is never too late to learn to read, write, comprehend, and spell, or to improve skills.
- It is as important to teach an adult how to read as it to teach a child how to read.
- The key to teaching everyone to read, write comprehend, and spell is proper instruction.
- The key to proper instruction is properly trained teachers.
- Phonemic awareness and systematic, explicit phonetic instruction are critical components of teaching reading.
- The only cure to illiteracy is learning how to read.
- Literacy skills are predictors of our economic, social and personal well-being.
- Imparting basic skills empowers the individual more effectively than accommodation.
- The integrity of the individual learner must be valued.
- Promoting literacy is our essential duty and investment in America's future. Teaching children and adults to read, write comprehend, and spell is prudent and economically expedient. It is also an act of love.

Appendix II

James Sprunt Community College
Basic Skills Book Club
Renita D. Allen
rallen@jamessprunt.edu
910-296-2467

A. Description of Project *(purpose)*

The purpose of this project was to spark a renewed interest in reading, expose students to individuals and topics in literature that they are unaware of, initiate a feeling of community within the classroom through reading, discussing, and analyzing the literature.

B. Plan of activities *(action plan)*

In January 2008, Basic Skills staff met to choose the literature for the book club and begin familiarizing themselves with the content. The book chosen was **The Teacher Who Couldn't Read, by John Corcoran**. During the month of February, the book club was advertised to students through fliers that were placed in each classroom. Books were ordered from the author. Instructors received information on how to use "Literature Circles" in their classes as a way to facilitate discussion and participation. The Book club began in May at the beginning of the Summer Semester. Each student received a personal paperback copy of the book. Time was devoted each week to discuss a chapter(s) of the book and do activities surrounding the related topics of the book. Instructors used a variety of instructional techniques to broaden the students' level of understanding of the material (Video, Oral Reports, Audio Tapes, Vocabulary Building, Pop-Quizzes, and Role Playing).

C. Results or success *(measurable numbers, effectiveness)*

70 students completed the reading of the book. Overall success was seen in our ABE/GED class that meets on campus as every student progressed a level during June testing. Students were eager to turn in homework assignments and made good grades on them. 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.

D. Final Costs *(vs. budget, unexpected expenses)*

Our budget, based on a grant, was $1000. $1000 was not enough to purchase all the books needed for each student. Upon contacting Mr. Corcoran directly, he eagerly gave us a substantial discount so we could purchase as many books as we could. 108 books were purchased with the $1000. An additional 85 books were purchased at a cost of $855.60 (purchased from regular BSP Budget) for a total spent on the Basic Skills Book Club of $1855.60.

E. Evaluation *(What would you plan/do differently next time?)*

Next time I would allow about 2 months for the book club. The instructors and students felt a little pressured to get the book read in about a month. I would also have the celebration already planned. It has been hard to fit it in during the summer.