

**Reading**  
Is Fundamental

# MOTIVATIONAL ACTIVITIES GUIDE

Motivational activities to support planning book celebration events and integrating them in the classroom.



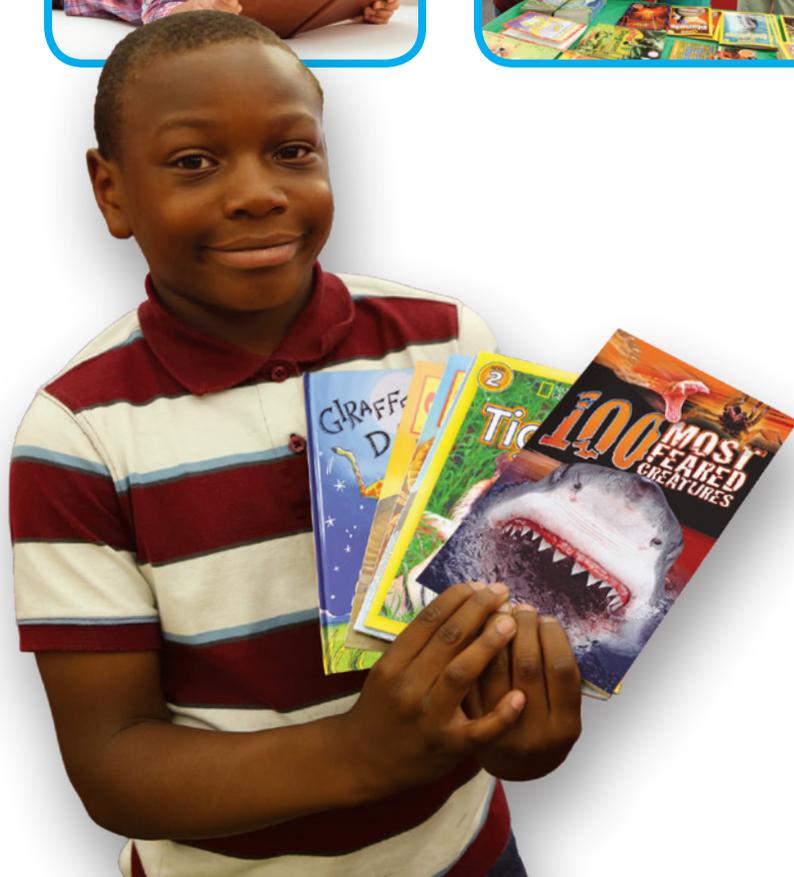
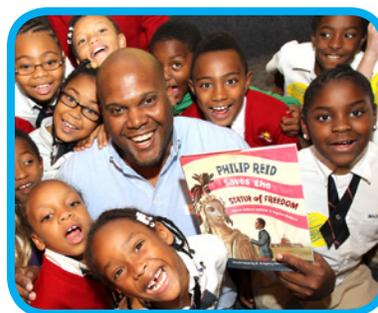
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**Have a question, want to discuss an idea, or need additional information? Please contact us at [literacynetwork@RIF.org](mailto:literacynetwork@RIF.org).**

# INTRODUCTION

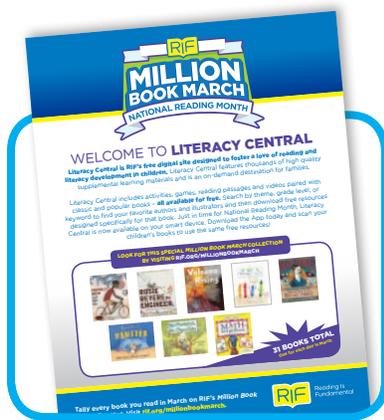
RIF's programs are anchored upon every child receiving a book. The programs are also founded on the need to motivate and engage students with the books they receive. To support your efforts to plan motivational activities for book celebration events and to integrate continually in the classroom, RIF provides a variety of ideas to get you started. In addition, we offer many book related activities and resources on our free, digital site, [Literacy Central](#).



# SECTION 1: GENERAL MOTIVATIONAL STRATEGIES

## Hands-on Activities

Make a book come to life with hands-on activities. The following pages offer examples of engaging activities, and RIF publishes an **interactive literacy calendar** each month that can serve as a source of inspiration for your reading program.



## Reading Campaigns

Motivate young readers with a thematic campaign that ties reading into something fun, interesting and engaging. RIF provides quarterly reading campaign toolkits that can easily be used to create interest among your students and can be found at [rif.org/literacy-network/volunteer](http://rif.org/literacy-network/volunteer). To create even further interest, add a visual to enable children to track their progress in the number of books they read. Track books read in a campaign by student, by classroom, or even by grade. A little competition has a way of creating motivation.



## Guest Readers/Read-alouds

Read-alouds are a go-to activity for RIF book celebration events and to support RIF programs in the classroom. Read our “Tips for Guest Readers” at the end of this guide for help preparing your guest readers for their moment in the spotlight.

# SECTION 2:

# CREATING A THEMED EVENT

One way to heighten excitement about reading is to create an event based on a unifying theme. The different elements of a “theme event” can be put together like building blocks. Some popular themes and related activities are provided below by grade level. Use your imagination to come up with other activities that will inspire your RIF readers to get excited about reading.

We’ve identified seven elements that you can use to help develop a theme for your book celebration event:

- **Special guests** talk to the children about their jobs or hobbies and may read a special story to the children.
- **Decorations** let everyone know that something special is taking place.
- **Costumes** add to the festivity and show children that adults can get excited about books too.
- **Props** give children a chance to manipulate objects related to the theme and are especially useful for kinesthetic learners.
- **Food and Fun:** Make your event a true celebration with food and drinks! Be sure to check with your site about food restrictions such as nuts and sugar. Consider sending children home with a reading-related accessory like a bookmark or pointer finger. You can find downloadable RIF bookmarks on [rif.org/literacy-network](http://rif.org/literacy-network).
- **Hands-on activities** reinforce the connection between reading and fun.
- **Books**, of course, are the most important unifying element. Choose a number of books that relate to your theme—the more, the better. Begin reading these books to the children (or for the older students have them read on their own) a few days before the event to foster anticipation.

If you’re planning a theme event for young readers, RIF’s **Story Samplers** will come in handy! These guides provide you with hands-on activities for books that are linked by a common theme. Each Story Sampler includes featured books and resources to motivate and encourage young readers. Story Samplers can be adapted for a range of ages.

# MOTIVATING PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

## Theme Ideas:

The following are a number of themes incorporated into a book celebration event that have been implemented and proven successful over the many years of this program. Each theme should be supported by related books to tie the celebration reading event together.



**1. Shapes:** Feature books like *Circle, Square, Moose* that help children recognize colors and geometrical shapes and sizes. Have the children cut, draw, and build the shapes. The children can work together to form the shapes with their bodies.

**2. Alphabet:** Divide the children into small groups and give each group a piece of paper with a letter on it. Have the children look at the pictures in their RIF books and find an object that begins with their assigned letter, or simply use an alphabet book such as *Animal Alphabet*. When they find a picture that matches their letter, have the children draw that picture and paste it below the letter. Each group will then include their pages to create a classroom ABC Book.

Use alphabet cookie cutters and dough (such as playdough) to make the children's names.

**3. Circus of Books:** Decorate a room as the Big Top; display posters of clowns, a ringmaster, and acrobats. Have guest readers come dressed as clowns and invite children to listen to stories about the circus, such as *Clifford at the Circus*.

Organize cooperative games and prizes. Have a "clown workshop" for the children. Have volunteers paint the children's faces and help them dress up like clowns. Children can dress up as acrobats and try to walk on a straight black line placed on the floor for their very own high wire act.

Each time children listen to a book, they can add a circus-themed cutout, such as a clown or balloon, to a bulletin board or they can pin an acrobat cutout to a clothesline that's hung across the room.

**4. Grocery Store:** This theme involves family and the community. Set up a grocery store play area and display grocery items and ads. Read aloud from the ads describing the produce the store sells. Then help the children label grocery store items. Did they include all the items in the book *At the Supermarket?*

Children can draw, color, and cut out pictures of food that their parents have purchased.

Guest speakers can include parents who work in the food industry, grocery store managers and workers, restaurant supervisors, and managers and other food service people in the community who then can read a book related to food, restaurants, etc.

**5. Parade of Animals:** Create a classroom wildlife sanctuary. Hang up posters of wild animals and some of the habitats they live in and have children bring in their favorite wild animal stuffed animals.

Read aloud from an animal-themed book such as *Animalia*. Show pictures of the animals and ask the children to name the animal and what it is doing. Then give each child a set of pictures from the story and see if they can match them with the posters and stuffed animals in the room. The children can cut pictures out of magazines to fill in the missing animals. These pictures can be sent home so the parents can read the story and help their children find even more animal pictures to fill in the blanks.

**6. Health, Hygiene and the Human Body:** Highlight the five senses with activities that stimulate each — pass around, or toss in a circle, various textured items; talk about everyone’s favorite foods that taste sweet, salty, sour, or tangy; Play different kinds of music or play a game of guess that sound by filling a small, darkened container with common items or playing recorded sounds of various animals. There are also many themed books to read together, such as *The Magic School Bus Explores the Senses*.

For older students, find a diagram of a system of the human body, such as those in *Ultimate Bodypedia*, and review it together. Then, try to draw the system from memory. Books that address the human body and the senses ground this theme.

## Activity Ideas:

**1. Reading Aloud:** Since very young children will quickly lose interest if they cannot see the pictures in the books, divide the children into small groups of three or four. Ask your guest readers to move their finger under the words as they read so the children can see that words are read from left to right. Encourage the children to participate. Children like to fill in rhymes, chant refrains, make sounds, and act out parts of the story.

**2. Retelling the Story:** After the children have listened to a story several times, give them a way to recreate the story in various ways, such as acting out the story or making it into a puppet show.

**3. Arts and Crafts:** Hand out paintbrushes and watercolors and let the children illustrate a popular book. Children also enjoy making diorama scenes from books and puppets of favorite book characters.

# MOTIVATING ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CHILDREN

## Theme Ideas:

The following are a number of themes incorporated into a book celebration event that have been implemented and proven successful over the many years of this program. Each theme should be supported by related books to tie the celebration reading event together.



**1. Friends and Family:** This theme is all about exploring the important relationships in our lives. Create family trees either from memory or by instructing the children to interview their relatives. Children can also choose to make a mind map of their friends, grouping the people they know from their classes, sports, clubs, and other circles. Students can then perform the same activity for a particular book: create a family tree for the characters in *All-of-a-Kind Family*; or make a mind map that connects the characters in *Big Friends* to show the emotions the two main characters deal with adding a third best friend. Books that relate to family, friendships, and relationships ground this theme.

**2. Around the World:** Pick a country and explore the culture and history of that country. See if students can list all of the neighboring countries, then find the country on a map or globe. Look at art and architecture from the country and play examples of its historical and modern musical contributions. Extra points for wearing your finest Lederhosen or kimono! Each student can be assigned a specific country and read a related book and be prepared to represent that country at the event. For example, if given Cuba, students can read *Marti's Song for Freedom* and discuss Jose Marti's efforts toward Cuba's emancipation from Spanish rule.

**3. Space:** Take a virtual tour of our solar system's eight planets (sorry, Pluto) and beyond using *NASA's interactive website*. Make a model of the solar system or track the Earth's rotation by making sundials from paper plates and other school supplies. Connect physics concepts to the solar system with the book *Gravity* and get discussion ideas on the RIF support materials page for the book.

Flex those creativity muscles by having students design their own planets. Then, take votes for most livable, least livable, and most creative planets. Paired with books on the solar system and you have a book celebration event that is out of this world.

**4. The Environment:** Discuss all the various items that can be recycled and how to recycle them around town — especially those hard to recycle old televisions and fluorescent light bulbs. Books that address the earth, the environment and even perhaps the science behind these efforts all can support this theme.

Then do some recycling of your own by making a “catch it” toy using an old paper towel tube, string, plastic ball with holes or slots (like a Wiffle ball). Get detailed instructions for this idea and others at RIF support materials page for [10 Things I Can Do to Help My World](#).

**5. Animals and Insects:** Kids love drawing animals and bugs. Have everyone draw the same animal from a book, pick their favorite animal, or invent their own animal along with its scientific name. Nothing inspires fantastical animals like the deep sea, so consider looking through [Weird Sea Creatures](#) for ideas.

Present all of the drawings in an art show along with some famous artists’ versions of the same animals, such as [Paul Klee](#).

## Activity Ideas:

**1. Reading Aloud:** Since young children will maintain interest if they are actively participating in the reading of the books, read as a chorus to fill in rhymes, chant refrains, make sounds, and act out parts of the story. Have them reread certain passages in characters’ voices.

**2. Retelling the Story:** After the children have listened to a story several times, give them a way to recreate the story in various ways, such as acting out the story or making it into a puppet show.

**3. Arts and Crafts:** Hand out paintbrushes and watercolors and let the children illustrate a popular book. Children also enjoy making diorama scenes from books and puppets of favorite book characters.

# MOTIVATING MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL YOUTH



## Theme Ideas:

**1. Invention and Innovation:** Create a March Madness style bracket of the most important historical inventions and innovations — as simple as paper or as complex as the X-ray machine. Vote on which ideas to move on to the next round based on presentations made by groups of students assigned to each invention. Assign groups or individuals to read a book related to that invention to convince the others that their invention should move to the next round. For example, use *Electrical Wizard* to support how Tesla's invention of electricity was key to almost all other invention after him.

Have the students work in teams to come up with their own inventions to present to everyone.

**2. Guess Who:** Have students participate in a guessing game with literary characters. Students randomly draw nametags with the names of famous literary characters and you can help coach them into character. Then, have one student ask probing questions to the three “literary characters” in order to determine who the characters are.

**3. Friends and Family:** This theme is all about exploring the important relationships in our lives. Create family trees either from memory or by instructing the student to interview their relatives. Students can also choose to make a **concept map** of their friends, grouping the people they know from their classes, sports, clubs and other circles. Books that address relationships, emotions, family, etc. all serve to support this theme. Students can then perform the same activity for their favorite or a particular book: make a mind map of the four houses of Hogwarts in *Harry Potter* to show how everyone relates to one another; or make a *Hobbit* family tree. Can you show how Bilbo and Frodo are related?

**4. Around the World:** Pick a country and explore the culture and history of that country through books. See if students can list all of the neighboring countries, then find the country on a map or globe. Review various aspects found about that country from its art and architecture to historical and modern musical contributions. Extra points for wearing your finest Lederhosen or kimono!

For older students, have them tie in current events by finding newspaper stories about or from the country. Also discuss historical context of the country — how did they

participate in or how were they affected by colonialism, the World Wars, etc. For example, discuss the impact that China's Cultural Revolution had on everyday life with insights from *Revolution is Not a Dinner Party*.

**5. Arts and Literature:** Have the students create an artistic expression to honor a particular book. The students can write a poem or song retelling the story or draw or paint the mood or literal representation of the book. Or consider rewriting the book as a short story from the perspective of an ancillary character who is observing the original main characters. After all, how would the generally anxious White Rabbit describe the chaos of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*?

### Activity Ideas:

**1. Read on the Radio:** Work with school administration to set up a time where students can read motivational book descriptions or "Why I Like to Read" blurbs over the intercom, on the morning announcements, etc. during National Library Week, Turn off the TV Week, or Reading is Fun Week.

**2. Book Critics:** Ask students to study the reviewing styles of movie critics in the newspaper and imitate their styles in a review of their own, using a favorite book instead of a movie. Ask the students to give it a thumbs up/down or a stars rating. Have the review submitted to the school paper.

**3. That's a Rap!** Retelling a favorite story or responding to it in the form of a rap will tie together a popular art form with students' creative abilities.

**4. Advice Column:** After partially reading a story, have students write an advice column question in the persona of the main character asking for advice on what to do next. For added interest, students who have not read the book may respond with advice, which may humorously differ from the character's actual actions.

**5. Cartooning:** Understanding and enjoying a story at any age is increased through illustrations. Ask students to illustrate a short story that they have read by creating a comic strip of the adventure to share with the class.

**6. Telephone:** Have the oldest group of students construct an original oral story and select representatives to tell the tale to the next age group of kids. Representatives should continue to deliver their rendition of the oral story until all classes have had an opportunity to hear and relay it. Choose a group to write down the story to become a class book. You can then record a live reading of this newly published story and display the video on the school website.

**7. Happy Birthday, Author:** Have a celebration to honor an author or poet. Read some of students' favorite selections and discuss similarities in different novels, poems or themes. Shakespeare, R.L. Stein, or even Shel Silverstein can be fun people to discuss, and students will have a genuine interest in their writings.

**8. Reading Around the World:** Enrich students' knowledge of other cultures by selecting international books for distribution and hosting an "Around the World" celebration. Students, faculty, and parents can organize a fair that includes food, clothing, and music.

# SECTION 3:

## TIPS FOR GUEST READERS AND FAMILIES

Guest readers can help make a RIF book celebration event extra exciting. Share these tips with your guest readers to help them prepare for their moment in the spotlight.

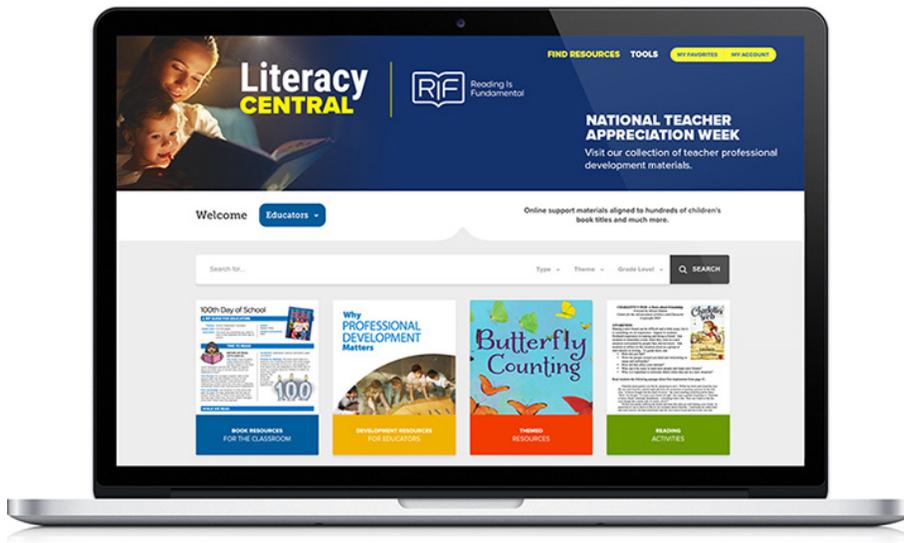
- **Choose a story that can be completed in one sitting.** Be sure to read the book in advance to develop a feel for the book's language and pace.
- **Set the stage by asking a question** that will engage children in the story they are about to hear. It can be a question based on the title of the book, the book cover, or some hint about what may happen in the story that will help younger children anticipate what is about to come.
- **Use showmanship:** Children who have grown up watching TV can be a little hard to reach. Don't be afraid to use showmanship to get the story across. Modulate your voice as you move from character to character or perform a series of pantomimes to convey the story.
- **Timed reading:** Most readings are timed for 15-20 minutes (10 minutes for preschoolers). Anything longer and the children could get restless.
- **Do not rush through the story**, but stop now and then to ask questions, to explain the meaning of an event, or to let children look at the pictures.
- **Use props, costumes, or music** to help the story come alive. Some guest readers have worn crazy hats or dressed up as storybook characters. Another example is when a guest reader came as a mystery reader, wearing a cape and mask, and read from a children's mystery book. At another, a school principal came in the garb of Long John Silver and read excerpts from *Treasure Island*.
- **Make your reading interactive** by holding up a picture book and asking children to explain what is happening or predict what is going to happen. To get children really involved, choose a story in which they can echo a phrase or chime in on a refrain, for example Esphyr Slobodkins' *Caps for Sale*.
- **Make sure to finish:** Children need a sense of closure, so be sure to leave plenty of time to finish the story.

## TIPS FOR PARENTS OF YOUNG READERS

Motivating children to have a love of reading does not stop in the classroom. We encourage you to communicate with your students' parents and provide support and resources to continue the reading journey at home. Below are some tips to support parents of young readers.

- **Talk with your children as you play, shop, or work around the house.** Listen to what they say. Ask questions. When you talk to your children, you are helping them learn to use words.
- **Read to your children.** Try to read to them at the same time every day. Bedtime or before a nap is a good time. Let them choose the story.
- **Let your children see you read.** That is the best way to show them that you think reading is important and that you enjoy it, too.
- **Ask older children to read to younger ones.** The older children will be proud of their skills. The younger children will want to read like their older brothers, sisters, or friends.
- **Go to the library together.** Ask the librarian for help in finding books your children will enjoy. If you don't have a library card, ask for one. With a card, your family can borrow books.
- **Give your children books about their special interests.** Do they like animals, sports, or magic? Surprise them with books or magazines about their favorite interests or activities.
- **Keep books, magazines, and newspapers around your home** so you and your children will always have something to read. Read aloud other things you see during the day. Read street signs, milk cartons, cereal boxes, and signs in store windows.
- **Plan outings for your children.** Children learn from what they see and do. Take them to a park or a parade, or just out for a walk.
- **Say rhymes and poetry or sing songs.** Rhymes and songs are easy for kids to remember, so they can say them and sing them along with the rest of the family. Rhymes also help them learn letter sounds.

- **Tell stories about your family** and stories that you enjoyed when you were a child. Ask grandparents and other family members to tell stories, too. Write down some of these stories and the ones your children tell. Save them to read aloud at another time.
- **Go online.** Remember that children are digital natives and love to explore the vast world of digital platforms that are available to them. RIF's free children's literacy website, **Literacy Central**, provides hours of digital activities for thousands of books. Use the Literacy Central site to discover online resources to support your child's favorite books with activities, puzzles, videos, and much more.



**Have a question, want to discuss an idea, or need additional information? Please contact us at [literacynetwork@RIF.org](mailto:literacynetwork@RIF.org).**

