



**Los Angeles Unified School District**

# **Beyond the Bell Branch**



# **IDEAS FOR MOTIVATIONAL ACTIVITIES**

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# Reading Challenges

Reading challenges are a popular way to motivate children to read for fun! Reading challenges are enjoyed by children of all ages and can be used to achieve many goals. They can also be tied easily into your RIF program. This tip sheet is designed to give you grade-appropriate reading challenge ideas.

## Pre-K

Reading challenges for this age group should be used to encourage *family* reading. An example would be to challenge students and their families to spend 15 minutes a day (or one book) reading together. As children this age probably cannot read on their own, having family members or other volunteers read to them should count as reading time. The required daily reading amount and the length of the challenge should be relatively short. The challenge should also be set up so that all children feel successful and no child is publicly embarrassed.

## Grades K-2

As reading skills improve, children can read to themselves and their families, rather than being read to. However, competitive challenges should still be avoided, so that reluctant readers are not embarrassed and further discouraged from developing strong reading skills. Instead, use a visual tracking method that shows the progress of the group as they work toward a collective goal. For example, one RIF school made a paper ring for every book read. These rings were linked together, and within a few months the chain of linked rings was long enough to reach completely around the outside of the school.

## Grades 3-6

Most children can now read on their own. Challenge goals can be measured either by the number of books/pages read or by the amount of time logged reading. The second option allows for more equality between children with differing reading levels. Older children have much longer attention spans, so challenge goals can be set higher, and the challenge can last throughout out the year. Having an end goal, rewarded by a prize or privilege, can keep momentum going.

## Incorporating Reading Challenges into RIF

There are many ways to incorporate reading challenges into your RIF program. Your RIF guidelines require that you involve your students in fun activities that motivate them to read. These motivational activities must be closely associated with your RIF distributions, so that children are excited to take their RIF books home and read them. Reading challenges are an ideal motivational activity. RIF distributions can be scheduled to help launch a challenge, to provide added reading material at the mid-point of the challenge or to celebrate the successful completion of a challenge. Extra RIF books may even be used as prizes for “most successful” and “most improved” challenge participants, as long as they are children who are a part of your RIF program. To assist you, RIF runs a national Community Reading Challenge every spring that encourages children to read and helps to promote community involvement in your RIF program. You will receive a packet of informational to help you plan this fun event.

## Building a “Theme 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.

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

1. **Special guests** talk to the children about their jobs or hobbies and may read a special story to the children.
2. **Decorations** let everyone know that something special is taking place.
3. **Costumes** add to the festivity and show children that the adults can get excited about books, too.
4. **Props** give the children a chance to manipulate objects related to the theme.
5. **Treats**, whether food, drink or little prizes such as stickers or bookmarks, can make the day extra special.
6. **Hands-on activities** reinforce the connection between reading and fun.
7. **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 a few days before the event to foster anticipation.

Some popular themes are listed below. A chart on the back of this page can be used as a planning tool to explore possible activities for various themes. Use your imagination to come up with other activities that will get your RIF kids excited about reading.

- ◆ An Ocean of Books
- ◆ Beach Books
- ◆ BEAR- Be Excited About Reading
- ◆ Bedtime Stories
- ◆ Book Olympics
- ◆ Book-nic (picnic)
- ◆ Books are a Treasure (pirates)
- ◆ Clown Around with Books (circus)
- ◆ Cowboy Tales (the Old West)
- ◆ Flying High with Books (airplanes)
- ◆ Folk & Fairy Tales
- ◆ Food for Thought
- ◆ Go Bananas about Books (monkeys)
- ◆ Go Fishing for Books
- ◆ Grow with Reading (plants, spring)
- ◆ Hats off to Reading
- ◆ If I Could Read to the Animals
- ◆ In the Moo-d for Reading (cows)
- ◆ Jog into Reading (sports)
- ◆ Pig Out on Books
- ◆ Quilting a Story
- ◆ Readasaurus (dinosaurs)
- ◆ Reading and Rhythm
- ◆ Reading and Rocking
- ◆ Reading Around the World
- ◆ Reading is Good for Your Health
- ◆ Reading is Out of this World (space)
- ◆ Ride the Reading Railroad
- ◆ Vote for Your Favorite Book

**Build a “Theme Event” in 7 Simple Steps!**

<b>THEME:</b>	<b>ANIMALS</b>	<b>SPORTS</b>	<b>FOOD</b>
<b>Special Guests</b>			
<b>Decorations</b>			
<b>Costumes</b>			
<b>Props</b>			
<b>Treats</b>			
<b>Activity</b>			
<b>Books</b>			

## **Culturally Appropriate Motivational Activities for Latino Children**

### **Fun With History: Celebrating Latino Holidays**

Independence Day- Different Latin American countries celebrate their independence on different dates. Since several countries celebrate their independence in September, September 15-October 15 is considered national Hispanic Heritage month; look for or plan activities in your community. Read about the various independence efforts. Compare them to 4<sup>th</sup> of July celebrations. Provide the children with maps and flags to color. Hold "Geography Jeopardy" with prizes.

Mother's Day – Different Latin American countries celebrate Mother's Day on different dates. Choose one of the dates; the children can create cards and surprise their mothers.

Día de los Niños (Children's Day)- Several Latin American countries as well as countries all over the world celebrate Children's Day once a year on different dates. The National Latino Children's Institute has declared April 30<sup>th</sup> as the U.S.'s Día de los Niños. Since 1998, cities across the country have held special events on that date. For more information visit the National Latino Children's Institute <http://www.nlci.org/activity/dlnintro.htm>

Cesar Chavez's Birthday- March 31, 1927. You can commemorate Cesar Chavez's birthday by reading to children about his efforts to help farm workers in the U.S. In 2000, California established Cesar Chavez's birthday as a state holiday. California schools celebrate the day by participating in community service projects and activities.

Cinco de Mayo- Your community might be holding children appropriate events that celebrate the occasion. Read a book that tells the story of how on May 5, 1862 the Mexican army won a battle against French troops during the French occupation of Mexico under the reign of Napoleon.

#### **Famous Latinos**

Read about Latinos that have made a difference: politicians (Senator Dennis Chavez, Henry Cisneros, Hon. Lucille Roybal-Allard, New Mexico governor Bill Richardson, Surgeon General Dr. Richard H. Carmona), athletes (Roberto Clemente, Sammy Sosa, Oscar de la Hoya), scientists (Franklin Chang-Diaz, Ellen Ochoa, Luis Alvarez), entertainers (Rita Hayworth, Desi Arnaz, Anthony Quinn, Richie Valens, Rita Moreno), and writers (Ernesto Galarza, Tomas Rivera, Gary Soto). Which current celebrities do they admire? Or not admire? <http://www.hispaniconline.com/hh/timeline/>

#### **Artistic Inspiration**

Read books about artists such as muralist Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo, Pablo Picasso, and Fernando Botero. Discuss book illustrations. Arrange a field trip to an exhibit that features Latino artists or to a mural in the community. You could plan this activity in conjunction with the RIF poster contest; the outing may inspire the young artists. Involve the art teacher. Children could also write about an event in their lives and illustrate it.

#### **Music**

Discuss and read books about different types of music and dances that come from different Latin American countries: Salsa, Merengue, Vallenato, Tejano, Mariachi, and Trío are just a few. Involve the music teacher. If possible, bring different instruments for the children to see and touch (flutes from the Andes). Listen to "The Buena Vista Social Club" or watch the movie. Sing traditional songs with the children.

#### **Family Recipes**

Each child can bring a family recipe to class. Assign children, appetizers, main dishes, side dishes and desserts. Create a class cookbook with the recipes. If possible, children can bring samples. Discuss different types of food from around the world. Read food-related books.

# BRING BOOKS TO LIFE

## FEATURE A COSTUME CHARACTER AT YOUR EVENT

### TIPS FOR FINDING COSTUME CHARACTERS

**Costume Specialists, Inc.** coordinates costumes for many publishers and manages a huge computerized database of popular children's characters. To schedule a costume through Costume Specialists, simply call with an idea of what characters you prefer and a list of specific event dates. Some costumes are booked over a year in advance, so be sure to book early and have a few dates/characters in mind.

Costume Specialists can be reached at 1-800-596-9357 or by fax at 614-464-2114. Direct all inquiries to Mike Howard or Jay Christopher. In most cases, the shipping charge for a costume is \$120. Costume Specialists will accept payment in advance by check or credit card. You may also be invoiced if you provide a purchase order.

A sample of just some of the many costumes available through Costume Specialists:

Bunnica, Corduroy Bear, Curious George, George & Martha, Lyle Lyle Crocodile, Madeline, Maisy, Peter Rabbit, Pippi Longstocking, Raggedy Ann & Andy, Rotten Ralph, Spot, Stellaluna, Stinky Cheese Man, Tacky the Penguin, The Very Hungry Caterpillar, Wild Thing, Winnie The Pooh and many others!

**Scholastic** also has a number of costumes available including Clifford, Franklin, Miss Frizzle and Liz (from the *Magic School Bus*), Dumb Bunny, and the Berenstain Bears. Programs are asked to dry clean the costumes after use and pay for shipping to return the costume to Scholastic. Again, these book early, so be sure to call well in advance of your event. For more information, contact Betsy Jensen at 212-965-7443.

### PLANNING YOUR EVENT

- Many costumes are available free of charge for use by non-profit children's literacy organizations. *However, most do require payment for shipping costs.*
- Consider booking costumes from weekend to weekend so that several sites can split the shipping costs.
- Be sure to call for costume availability as soon as possible.
- Most costumes have height and/or weight requirements. Be sure to ask for this information and plan for an appropriate person to wear the costume.
- The publisher may have "event" kits and program materials (like posters and bookmarks) to support the character's appearance at your event. Some may post ideas or activities that you can print from their Web site. Check with the publisher well in advance for these types of materials to enhance your event.

### MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR SPECIAL GUEST

- Costumed characters may need a special assistant to help handling crowds, reading stories, help seeing little raised hands, and answering questions. This assistance should act as a guide so that they can move safely during the event.
- Be sure to instruct the kind volunteer who has agreed to wear the costume that they must pantomime (as characters don't talk) and be flexible. A love of kids and the ability to work well with them are also essential.
- Be sure to allow the costume wearer a little time to practice and experiment in front of a mirror in full costume. Their actions can bring the character to life!
- Keep in mind that some costumes are heavy. Remind the wearer to drink plenty of water, and be sure to schedule many breaks for them.

## Motivational Activities for Elementary Age Students

Are you looking to get your students excited and motivated about reading? Try out some of these motivational activities at your next distribution. They've been recommended by other RIF programs around the country. Don't forget to check out the *RIF Handbook's* Motivational Activities tab for more great ideas.

- Ask the local grocery store, sometimes the only merchant in rural towns, to provide brown paper bags for your program. The children can decorate the bags with illustrations from their favorite book. The bags can then be returned to the grocery store and used to bag customers' groceries. You can even put an index card inside each bag giving information on your program and how community volunteers can get involved.
- Read [A Hat For Minerva Louise](#) by Janet Morgan Stoeke. Explain that just as Minerva was able to 'create' a hat from many things, the participants will now create a hat of their very own. Provide each child with a sheet of newsprint and masking tape to make his or her own hat - you'll be amazed at the creativity!
- Create a camping themed event! Hold your distribution in the gym and pitch tents. Kids can read in the tents using flashlights to make it more fun! Set up artificial trees to create a woody feel and build a pretend campfire. Children eat s'mores and sing camp songs.
- Hold an evening distribution and combine star gazing and a poetry reading.
- Conduct 100th Day of School Activities - Many schools already celebrate the 100th day, why not have a RIF distribution to add to the fun? Have children make a collection of 100 items and display them on a poster board, say hello in 100 languages, bring in a guest reader who's 100 years old, make 100 cards for local nursing home residents, etc. There are many online resources with more 100th Day activities.
- Do something outrageous to encourage reading. Incentives for reading might include a dare for the principal to spend the night on the roof, shave his/her head or kiss a pig. Another fun motivator is literature trivia: get a dunking machine, put the principal in it, and have kids compete against the principal; the principal gets dunked every time s/he answers a question wrong!
- Create a recipe book or follow a recipe with the children in your program. Allow the children to help cook the recipe. Older children could help write the recipes out for a class cookbook. Or create a few stations around the classroom that correspond with a book that has a food theme (e.g., [If You Give a Mouse a Cookie](#), [Green Eggs and Ham](#) or [La Tortilleria](#)) and make the related food item at the station. Be sure to involve parents – there are some who might not feel comfortable reading but might feel comfortable cooking!
- Music is a great way for kids to get excited about reading and also learn more about their culture. Kids could bring in their favorite albums, (contemporary albums are great though appropriateness is important) and decipher lyrics. Discuss who is the better lyricist, and what makes the difference between just another CD and a really good album. Kids could write their own raps or songs and present at a Poetry Slam.
- Hold a U.S.A. – themed event. Students could come to the distribution dressed in costumes representing a U.S. state. The room can be filled with state flowers or other state symbols. Coordinator(s) can send for free souvenir booklets from each state for participants. Guest readers/storytellers can be invited to tell stories about state history. For example, a site in Kansas brought in a Native American storyteller from the local museum.

- Learn about other eras. Participants can dress up in the styles of the 50's or another decade and bring in photos of parents or grandparents that lived through that era. Storytelling about the era can compliment this activity. Talk about what people did for fun in each era, and read aloud from books that feature that time period. Encourage parents and grandparents to serve as guest speakers.
- A Walk-A-Thon is a great way to raise funds to support your RIF program. Held in conjunction with a book distribution, the theme could be to emphasize both physical and mental fitness.
- **Themed Guest Readers:**
  - “Stop-Drop-Read” - Invite local firefighters to talk about their career and read to the children.
  - “Wild About Reading” - Invite a local wildlife specialist to give an animal talk, read a book about animals, and even bring in some animals—stuffed or real to show to the children!
  - “Get Hooked on Books” - Have a fishing theme and invite a local fisherman to come to school.
- Hold a story treasure hunt. Involve two classes and have each class select a well-known story or folktale. Each class should simplify the plot of their story into a sequence of events that can be written on index cards. Have the children hide the cards throughout the classroom or building and create a treasure map showing the exact location of all of the hidden cards. After the cards are hidden and the maps completed, have the classes exchange maps. The children must find the cards and then, as a whole class, must assemble them in order.
- Host a dinosaur-themed event. Contact a local natural history museum for information about dinosaurs. Invite an expert to share tales about the giant creatures. Decorate the room with giant bones and pictures of dinosaurs. Feature stories about dinosaurs and prehistoric times. For more ideas on this theme, call your Program Specialist for a copy of the RIF Story Sampler, *Dino-Stories*.
- Host an event around archaeology and excavation digs. Read stories about ancient Egypt and other ancient cultures. Host your own dig by burying "finds" in baby pools filled with sand. (Tip: If you choose to bury books, remember to put each book in a resealable bag. You may want to display books on tables and bury other treasures that will not be damaged by the sand.) Invite children to dig for clues to the past in the pools. You may also want to have clues that will complete a puzzle or word game.
- Create an environment around the glitz and glamour of Hollywood. Volunteers can wear sunglasses and feather boas. Decorate the space with posters of books that have been made into movies like *Harriet the Spy*, *Stuart Little*, and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. Read excerpts from the books.
- Decorate the space to look like an airport terminal. Place distribution books in open suitcases around the room instead of on tables. Post departure and arrival times in the "terminal," and give children boarding passes to different destinations. As children move about the room to their destination, guest readers feature a tale about that place.
- Invite children to "fish" for prizes. Have them cast their fishing line behind a screen, and have a volunteer attach a coupon for books and prizes.

Have children make their own postcards by drawing a scene from their favorite book and describing it on the other side. When they finish, affix a stamp to each card. Children can then send their card to a family member or friend.

## Motivational Activities for Older Students

We know it can be challenging to get older students excited and motivated about reading – but it's certainly not impossible! Try out some of these motivational activities at your next distribution. They've been recommended by other RIF programs around the country. Don't forget to check out the *RIF Handbook's* Motivational Activities tab for more great ideas.

- **Reading Challenges** Do something outrageous to encourage reading. Incentives for reading might include a dare for the principal to spend the night on the roof, shave his/her head or kiss a pig. Another fun motivator is literature trivia: get a dunking machine, put the principal in it, and have kids compete against the principal; the principal gets dunked every time s/he answers a question wrong!
- **Destination X** Select a geographic destination and find a selection of books that are set in that area or region. Read a few paragraphs from each book aloud to entice students' interest in the subject. Then conduct a cultural activity related to that place, such as India's Mehndi art or Spain's flamenco dancing. Consider inviting a parent or a travel agent to come in and talk about travel in that region.
- **Crime Scene** Invite a detective or forensic scientist to come in and present what they do to the group. Feature a selection of crime or detective novels.
- **Matchmakers** Create personal ads for a favorite book character and display them for the group to see. Participants should then try to match up each of the characters with one of the other characters. Talk about why they would make a good match. Introduce books about relationships and dating.
- **Scavenger Hunt** Prepare a list of questions using a collection of books as inspiration. Divide the group into teams, and give each team a list of the questions in random order. Teams search the books for clues to help them answer the questions. The team that finishes first AND has the most correct answers wins.
- **Web Scavenger Hunt** See how Web savvy the group is. Create a list of literature-related questions or questions on another interesting topic that can be answered on the Web. You can also find preformatted scavenger hunts on any search engine. The individuals or groups work to find answers to all of the questions the fastest.
- **Book Slams!** Encourage students to find interesting excerpts from books to read aloud. Invite judges (other students or adults) to rate the performance on a scale of 1 -10.
- **Lights! Camera! Action!** Learn more about the world of television and film. Invite a TV producer or director from a local television station or instructors from the Communications or Media departments of a local university to come share the insider's perspective on producing a show. Engage students by having them produce their own public service announcement (PSA) about reading.
- **Breaking News** Become media savvy. Invite a television or newspaper reporter to coach the group about working with the media. Have students practice reporting events from their favorite book.
- **Cliffhanger** Gather interesting excerpts from books where the protagonist is faced with a difficult decision. Read the selection aloud up until the point where the character decides what to do. Poll the group to see what decision they would make. Discuss the possible or actual ramifications of each decision.
- **Journal Making** Make personalized journals to record experiences. Use notebooks and create interesting covers using cloth, cardboard, leather, vinyl, or whatever is available. Decorate the inside pages. Include inspirational quotations or prompts to encourage and inspire reflection.

## Motivating Middle and High School Youth

- ◆ **Read on the Radio-** Contact a local radio station to set up a time where students can read motivational book descriptions or “Why I Like to Read” blurbs on the air during National Library Week, Turn off the TV Week or Reading is Fun Week.
- ◆ **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 kids to give it a thumbs up/down or a stars rating. Have the review submitted to the school paper.
- ◆ **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 kids’ creative abilities.
- ◆ **Dear Abby-** After partially reading a story, have students write a “Dear Abby” letter 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 in Abby’s voice with advice, which may humorously differ from the character’s actual actions.
- ◆ **Cartooning-** Understanding and enjoying a story at any age is increased through illustrations. Ask students to illustrate any short stories they have read by creating a comic strip of the adventure to share with the class.
- ◆ **Telephone-** The oldest group of students constructs an original oral story and selects representatives to tell the tale to the next age group of kids. Representatives continue to deliver their rendition of the oral story until all classes have had an opportunity to hear and relay it. Have the youngest group of children tell the story for video or audio tape to be shared school-wide.
- ◆ **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.
- ◆ **RIF Around the World-** Enrich kids’ 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. The students can do research about different cultures or focus on their own family history.

For more information, please see the Motivational Activities section of the *RIF Handbook*.