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THE GLOBAL READ ALOUD

A MODERN LITERARY PEN-PAL SYSTEM INDULGING OUR KIDS' LOVE OF LITERATURE

For many decades, teachers have had their students exchange letters with pen pals in far-off cities and countries. Today, letters, or snail mail as it's often called, have become more and more obsolete with the rise of social media, email and other digital tools. Staying connected with the world on a superficial level has also created a gap. Reading and sharing a love of books in classrooms has been on the decline as technology congests more and more areas of our lives. The Global Read Aloud is here to change all that.

Under the auspices of “connecting the world with a book,” the Global Read Aloud is a nonprofit literacy initiative that was created in 2010 by one woman, Pernille Ripp, to inspire and encourage online communication about books between children and students far and wide. It started with nothing more than a big idea and a blog. By utilizing social media and other online platforms in a productive way, the project grew with passion as participants became more involved. Since its inception, more than 4 million students across 80 countries have participated around the world. In 2018, the ninth annual Global Read Aloud ran between October 1st and November 9th, and more than 1.5 million people experienced the joys of having a book read aloud to them.

The concept is simple. Based on specific age groups, a diverse lineup of authors and genres tackle themes of prejudice, equality, death and so much more. The final books are read aloud to children during a set six-week time period, while teachers and students try to make as many global connections as possible using online tools like Skype, Twitter, Flipgrid or WriteAbout.

A weekly schedule is set prior to the start of each year's Global Read Aloud, and once it begins, only chapters or pages set for that specific week are read aloud to the students. Having this schedule known in advance ensures that all participants are on the same page. The sense of teamwork and organization also allows time for in-depth discussions, online conversations and the sharing of ideas between students in other parts of the world through the shared resources.

Early readers this year listened to Elana K. Arnold's book titled *A Boy Called Bat*; upper-elementary level children heard the novel *Amal Unbound* written by Aisha Saeed read aloud; *Refugee*, a story of survival across decades written by author Alan Gratz, was read to middle-school age students, while young adults enjoyed *Love, Hate and Other Filters*, written by author Samira Ahmed. All of these selections address a different aspect of the human condition, stimulating evocative dialogue and questions of genocide, cultural divides, fear, friendship, courage, hope, HOME, heartbreak and struggle. A picture-book author and illustrator study choice for very young children is another interesting addition, which this year saw a series of books written and/or illustrated by Julie Flett and Monique Gray Smith being read aloud.

A unique feature of the Global Read Aloud is that people can suggest books on the website and vote for their favorite contenders for each age group. Throughout the years, classic children's literature such as *The Little Prince* by Antoine de Saint-Exupery, *Tuck Everlasting* by Natalie Babbitt, *Charlotte's Web* by E.B. White, *The Fault in Our Stars* by John Green, *The BFG* by Roald Dahl and many more have been read aloud to children and facilitated by teachers and parents alike. Some authors eagerly make their participation in the project public;

though this is not a requirement, it's a happy bonus! For instance, Elana K. Arnold, author of this year's early readers' choice *A Boy Called Bat*, posted weekly videos to answer questions from students and hosted special Skype visits with certain classrooms.

Further, Aisha Saeed, author of this year's middle school/ junior high book choice *Amal Unbound*, wrote a heartfelt thank-you letter to all participants of the 2018 Global Read Aloud upon its closing on November 10. “You not only helped children glimpse life in another person's shoes,” she wrote, “you helped children feel seen. You honored them. You validated them. You celebrated them. When I got the e-mail from Pernille Ripp that *Amal Unbound* was selected to be part of the (Global Read Aloud) I was humbled and grateful. What a dream as an author (and a former educator!) that my book would be read by your students. But I could never have imagined just how deeply meaningful and personal this experience would be for me. In honoring your children, the scars from my childhood feel healed.”

The Global Read Aloud is a means for classrooms and students all over the world to enjoy listening to books; it allows them to analyze character traits, question themes of controversy and be more critical of how and why the world is the way it is. By talking with and learning from students of other cultures, children are encouraged to understand difficult issues in their own lives and see life through the lens of another. There is no greater sight, nor a more comforting feeling, than witnessing the awe and excitement of a group of children gathered around to listen to an incredible story, silently praying for just one more page. Eyes alight with anticipation, ears pricked for plot twists and humorous descriptions, kids yearn for adventures found only in storybooks.

Ripp, a 7th grade teacher and the founder of the Global Read Aloud, offered HOME Magazine words of wisdom and gratitude on the success of the project from her HOME in Madison, Wisconsin. “For me, this year once again went beyond my wildest dreams. To see children from around the world not just loving a book as it was shared with them but wanting a deeper understanding of the world in the book... When we say that the world is more divided than ever before, I think the (Global Read Aloud) brings me hope. Perhaps if we can continue to willingly find commonality between us and who we deem as others, then we can create a deeper understanding of the world and our place in it.”

“**After all, children are only children once and learning should be an interesting, fun and cooperative process that helps them view the world in a new way and travels with them through to adulthood.**”

Bearing this remarkable concept in mind, Lebanon's education system, while competitive and rigorous in its curriculum and standards for achievement, often overwhelms students with memorization of texts rather than actual comprehension. This is precisely where the Global Read Aloud comes into play. Teachers of all grade levels can learn more about the Global Read Aloud and introduce the concept to their classrooms. It is important to instill a lasting love of reading and global caring in the young people they teach. After all, children are only children once and learning should be an interesting, fun and cooperative process that helps them view the world in a new way and travels with them through to adulthood.

Ready, set, book lovers unite!

HOMIE MAGAZINE

The Soul of Lebanon

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FOR A
BRIGHT
LEBANON
& LEBANESE
OF THE WORLD



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