

THANK YOU FOR BEING PART OF THE TEAM!

The Reading Team helps young children become strong readers, writers, listeners, and speakers. We do this by engaging them in a wide range of literacy-nurturing lessons and activities so they can succeed in school and in life. All of our free programs are made possible by the generosity of supporters like you.

Bouncing Back After a Challenging Year

Dear Friends,

This has been a year of struggle for our Reading Team families and our employees, and I know it has been challenging for you as well. But I'm a glass-half-full type, so I'm sharing some bright spots:

We've continued to be there for the children

Whether working in-person in our carefully reconfigured classrooms or in virtual classes, our Literacy Mentors have adapted their lessons. The children have remained engaged. Our volunteer math tutors from Columbia University meet the children online for homework help. And we have adopted digital teaching tools, such as LightSail, a library of more than 6,000 books with built-in literacy assessments, to keep learning fun.

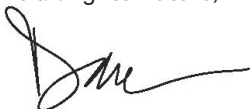
Our children are resilient

When we asked our 5th-graders to write about their experience with COVID-19 as a way of processing the traumatic experience, they too shared examples of the bright side, such as learning to cook and spending more time with their parents. But we have much work to do. Research from Amplify, a K-5 digital literacy company, shows that children demonstrated literacy-related learning losses because of COVID-19 as early as the fall of 2020 with the biggest drop among the youngest children. Particularly concerning were acute losses in phonemic awareness, a strong predictor of reading fluency, among the youngest children.

Our programs are needed more than ever

Pandemic-related learning losses have been most severe in children of color. The Reading Team's location at the heart of Harlem allows us to work directly with children in one of the communities hardest hit by COVID-19. With your help we will continue to do whatever it takes to ensure that the most vulnerable children master the fundamentals of literacy and enjoy future success.

To a brighter future,



Dana Points
Executive Director



When high COVID rates caused us to move to a 100% virtual program last November, 1st graders took home the classroom plants so they could continue to read to them (reading is good for kids and plants!). We are looking forward to resuming in-person lessons on April 5th.



Literacy Mentor Olga Camejo reads with some of her 2nd grade students.

Life As a 5th Grader During the Pandemic

When Reading Team student Briel's charter school in Harlem shut down and her classes moved online she adapted like any tech-savy 11-year-old: She quickly got used to keeping her Chromebook charged and deftly dealt with Wi-Fi glitches. She set up a makeshift desk for herself in her bedroom, resting her computer on a childhood kitchen playset with a shelf. "It is just the right spot for me," she says.

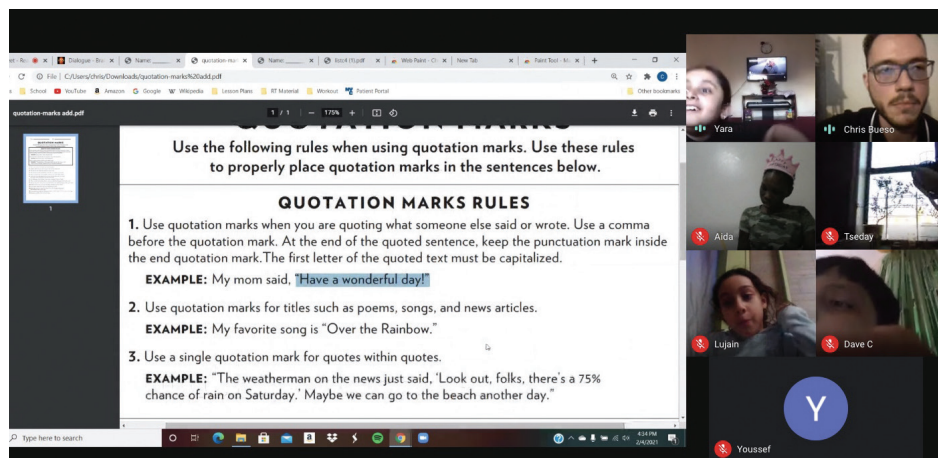
Briel also felt a little relieved. Attending school every day and keeping up with her courses required a lot of her. Sometimes the pressure to be a good student "was too much," she says. With online schooling, she could watch videos that tested reading comprehension and vocabulary; if she didn't understand something, she could press "rewind" until she did. When something was confusing, she liked being able to ask her mother for help. She longed to be able to laugh and play games with her friends in person. (Her mother says she knows when Briel has cabin fever when she doesn't pick up her socks, dry the dishes, or make her bed.)

Briel lives with her mother and younger sister, and her close-knit family prevented her from feeling too isolated. Reading and following the news kept her busy. "I learned not to stay inside too long because your body doesn't make enough Vitamin D," she says. She became more informed about COVID-19's effect, particularly on the homeless population. Briel says her concept of success is to earn money to give to her family and to charities that help homeless people get back on their feet and back into life. She also learned about the Black Lives Matter movement. Her take away from her readings and conversations with



her mother: "You are to be who you are, no matter who you are," she says.

Recently, Briel has started reading aloud to her mom. She enjoys going on an adventure with her mother through a book. In the Reading Team's virtual classroom, her Literacy Mentor Junah Lee provides the individual attention she needs to improve her reading comprehension and leads Briel and her Reading Team friends in learning games. She's looking forward to when they can resume their shared "book club" in person, taking turns reading the same book aloud. Briel has made the honor roll twice this year and received her school's Core Value Award for her kindness to others. Like all of us, she is looking forward to the end of the pandemic when she can see her classmates in person and hug them and her teachers. "I'll say, 'it's good to finally see you all,'" she says.



Reading Team students of all ages have adapted well to the digital classroom. Above, Literacy Mentor Chris Bueso discusses quotation marks with his 3rd graders. Top, Harlem children see themselves in this wonderful mural located on the corner of Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Boulevard and 125th Street near the Reading Team's classroom.

A Sample of Briel's Writing About Her Pandemic Experience

I don't have a diary during this pandemic, but a struggle is that remote learning is harder than being in school. That's because when you are in science and you have to do an experiment you can't. And if you are in class and you have to do an experiment you can.

Board Member Spotlight: Landon Hunter Wickham, Jr.



Born and raised in Harlem, Landon Wickham knew early on that he wanted to give back to his community. His mother worked to help young people in Harlem participate in a workforce development program. His father worked at the antipoverty New York City Mission Society. “My parents valued education and gave me the nurturing, encouragement, and support I needed in order to be an active citizen,” he says.

Wickham attended St. Bernard’s

and the Millbrook School, then graduated from the University of Rochester where he majored in European history and film. He began his career in publishing and later founded an independent publishing, design, and Internet research company. “Reading and writing, he says, formed the base of every step along the way.” Eventually, he became a teacher and he has spent the last 13 years teaching technology to 7th and 8th graders at the Columbia Grammar and Preparatory School.

In his 20s and 30s, Wickham raced bicycles, had his own bike shop in Harlem, and formed a cycling team that engaged young

people in youth development activities promoting cycling and bicycle safety. He believes that self-confidence, self-respect, and dignity are essential for young people to thrive in society and sees his beliefs embodied in the Reading Team. He’s looking forward to post-pandemic days when he can spend more time in our classroom, volunteering with the children and their families. “I am optimistic for the families at the Reading Team. For the last 20 years, this organization has helped many young children change their life trajectory,” he says.



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Let Children Know They Can Count on You

When you join the Reading Team as a recurring donor, you play a critical role in helping our children become strong and enthusiastic readers through our free programs. Your monthly gift ensures a steady income that supports the Reading Team’s budget for books, instructional materials, and Literacy Mentor stipends.

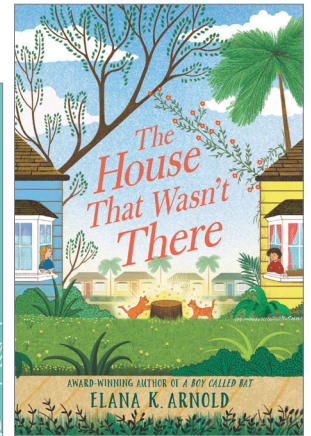
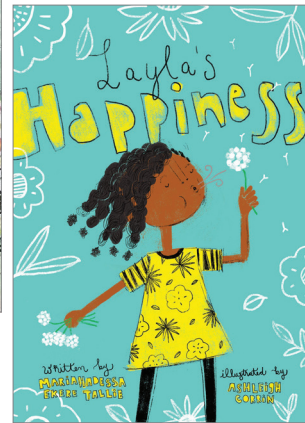
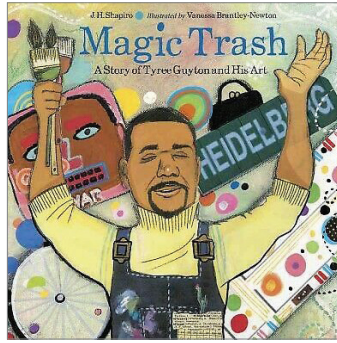
Your generosity allows us to pair young children with our talented Literacy Mentors, skilled teachers who equip them with the skills they need to gain confidence as readers and writers. Our warm, friendly classroom ensures teachers know students, follow their progress, and help them master every step along the road to reading.

In 2019, only 30 percent of Harlem children passed the New York State English Language Arts exam (NYS ELA). Children who do not read fluidly by 4th grade face a higher-than-average risk of depression, are less likely to graduate from high-school, and are more likely to become engaged with the criminal justice system. In short, reading changes everything. The 84 percent of Reading Team children who pass the NYS ELA are on track for college and careers.

Please visit readingteam.org and click on “Donate” to make a gift and to instantly become a beacon of hope for the families in our free program.

What We're Reading Right Now

Nothing fosters a love of reading like sharing a story book with a child. Reading Team Program Director Margaret Banier and Literacy Mentor Vanessa Maldonado share a few of their favorite books for children under age 10. Don't be surprised if young children want to read and reread a favorite book. This is a natural way for them to become more familiar with language and letter sounds.



***Magic Trash*, by T.J. Shapiro (ages 5-8)**

This uplifting picture book biography about Detroit artist Tyree Guyton introduces the use of recycled items in art and has a wonderful theme of helping rebuild a community and discovering the magical power of art.

***Raven: A Trickster Tale from the Pacific Northwest*, by Gerald McDermott (ages 4-8)**

This exploration of a Native American folk tale delves into messages of selflessness and is beautifully illustrated.

***Layla's Happiness*, by Mariahadessa Ekere Tallie (ages 4-8)**

Seven-year-old Layla keeps a "happiness book" and through her eyes children will explore the question of what truly makes you happy.

***Sulwe*, by Lupita Nyong'o (ages 4-8)**

Actress Nyong'o creates a whimsical and heartwarming story to inspire children to see their own unique beauty.

***Make a Joyful Sound*, edited by Deborah Slier Shine (ages 4-10)**

This collection of poems by African-American poets has long had a

place on the Reading Team's shelf because of its universal themes and beautiful language.

***The House that Wasn't There*, by Elana K. Arnold (ages 8-12)**

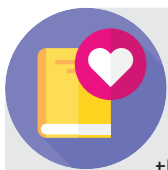
The novel gives a unique twist to relatable situations for children, such as feeling lonely, adjusting to a new environment, and making friends. It features male and female main characters, an added plus.

***Fast Enough: Bessie Springfield's First Ride*, by Joel Christian Gill (ages 4-9)**

Bessie dreams of riding her bike with the boys after school, but they tell her she isn't fast enough in this tale based on the life of the first African American woman to travel solo across the United States on a motorcycle.

***The Great Realization*, by Tomos Roberts (ages 4-8)**

This story of hope and the power to emerge from adversity is a perfect and poetic antidote to the pandemic.



Shopping for books (or anything else)?

Visit smile.amazon.com and enroll the Reading Team as your Amazon Smile charity. Then shop through smile.amazon.com and .5% of every purchase will be donated to the Reading Team. It's an easy way to support us and costs you absolutely nothing.



The Most Important Gift You Will Ever Make

Including the Reading Team in your estate plan is a wonderful way to help safeguard the organization's future, and ensure that your values live on. You can do this by making a bequest or designating the Reading Team as the beneficiary on a life insurance policy or retirement account.

If you have already included the Reading Team in your plans or would like to do so, please contact **Margot Steinberg, Director of Individual Giving** at margot@readingteam.org.

WE NEED YOU MORE THAN EVER

It is easy to make a difference today. We hope you will partner with us at this time as we continue to improve the lives of our community's most important asset, its children.

Please go to readingteam.org and give today!