



Reading council chairman to take on stack of books

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Read 'em and weep?

Cynthia Wilson, chairman of the teacher education department at the University of Illinois Springfield and president-elect of the Illinois Reading Council, doesn't see it that way.

She's trying to read every book — other than instructional books — by every author who is speaking at the council's 43rd annual conference in Springfield March 17-19.

Wilson made the commitment to herself, then got a rough idea of how many books that pledge will require her to read.

"Jane Yolen, one of the authors, told me she just published her 300th book this fall," Wilson said.

Of the 13 authors Wilson is attempting to read, one has published more than 50 books and others more than 30.

"How far along am I? Not far enough," she said. "Realistically, am I going to make it? No. Can I get close? I'll know more next week when we do a walk-through for the conference and I have all those books piled up in front of me."

Good authors

Wilson said most of the books are children's books and go fairly quickly, but numbers don't lie. There is a lot of reading in her immediate future.

She's enlisted the help of Nancy Huntley, director of Springfield's Lincoln Library, to gather as many books as possible. She'll start on those Tuesday afternoon.

"I went to the library in Lincoln, Illinois, Saturday and read eight books," she said. "I can't afford to buy them all.

"But I'm enjoying the heck out of it. They're such good authors."

When she reads a book, Wilson often comments on it on a blog she created especially for the conference at <http://literacyoutsidethebox.blogspot.com>. She usually sends a link to the author.

"I get the nicest responses," she said. "T.A. Barron sent me a box of his books and told me to enjoy them."

Wilson previously has met about half of the authors at other conferences.

She got involved in the Bloomington-based literacy council when she came to UIS 10 years ago and served as director of membership development for five years. As president-elect, she's responsible for putting on the conference and will be president of the organization next year.

"Every president-elect has to have a theme, and this year it is 'Literacy Outside the Box,'" she said.

Reading redefined

About 3,000 kindergarten through 12th-grade teachers, pre-service teachers, librarians, home-schoolers, parents and administrators are expected to attend the conference, which is held at the Prairie Capital Convention Center and its nearby hotels.

In addition to the authors, other speakers include writing teachers who also are authors.

There will be an exhibit hall and presentations that include a poetry coffeehouse, a storytelling session, and Barry Lane's Literacy Cabaret, described as a nightclub act for teachers. One evening features a discussion of new books for adults.

"We're doing some different things," Wilson said. "We're looking at how we define reading. We have a speaker from Saudi Arabia who speaks several languages, we're having a Smart Board room and an Apple classroom and an Internet cafe for teachers to make connections.

"I wanted to do the blog to discuss the authors before they come to the conference," she said. "We'd never done that before. There's even a session that links clogging (the dancing) with literacy."

Wilson said she has enjoyed the challenge of reading several hundred books.

"I love to read, so it has been an enjoyment," she said. "You have to be passionate about these authors to invite them as speakers."

Speakers

The children's and young adult authors who will speak at the Illinois Reading Council Conference March 17-19 in Springfield

include:

*Marc Brown, who has written more than 30 books featuring Arthur the Aardvark, who has his own PBS series.

*Jane Yolen, author of 300 books ranging from rhymed picture books and baby board books to middle-grade fiction, poetry and non-fiction for young adults and adults.

*T.A. Barron, who believes every child can be a hero, has written "Where is Grandpa?," "The Hero's Trail: A Guide for a Heroic Life" and others.

*Patrick Carman, contributor to "The 39 Clues" series and author of "The Land of Elyon" and "Atherton."

*M.T. Anderson, author of "The Astonishing Life of Octavian Nothing," "The Suburb Beyond the Stars" and "The Clue of the Linoleum Lederhosen."

*Mordicai Gerstein, whose works range from "The Absolutely Awful Alphabet" to "The Man Who Walked Between the Towers."

*Vaunda Micheaux Nelson, whose works include "Always Gramma," "Juneteenth" and "Bad News for Outlaws."

*John Rocco, author/illustrator who illustrates the covers for the popular "Percy Jackson and the Olympians" series.

*Sara Pennypacker, author of both the "Clementine" series and the "Stuart" series and contributor (four books) to the "Flat Stanley" series.

*Robert Burleigh, this year's Prairie State Award winner and the writer of more than 35 children's books, including historical biographies.

*Rebecca Stead, author of "First Light" and "When You Reach Me."

*Frank Serafini, author of the "Looking Closely" series.

*David Schwartz, who lists "Where In the Wild?" and "If Dogs Were Dinosaurs" among his 50 titles.

*Marion Blumenthal Lazan, concentration camp survivor and co-author of "Four Perfect Pebbles: A Holocaust Story."