A Letter From the Director:

Since the program's very beginnings in 1997, the driving mission of USC ReadersPlus has been to constantly look for innovative ways to expand and strengthen the program to best support our neighborhood teachers and assist struggling students in our five partnering schools. Over the years, we have concentrated our efforts to providing consistent academic assistance to the Family of Five schools. Each semester, these schools have been able to rely on USC ReadersPlus to train and place between 10 and 20 USC students as reading and math tutors at their schools, each student spending at least eight hours per week providing one-on-one assistance and after school programming for children at their schools. These services have not changed and will not change. Rather, we are continually thinking about looking for ways to not only improve what we do, but also to do more.

In this newsletter, you will read about some of these improvements and additions to our program, the most valuable being that of new graduate student staff members. Lauren Carter and Saray Aliabadi -- both of whom come to us with classroom teaching experience -- have been brought into our office to share their experiences and expertise in assisting and supporting our interdisciplinary efforts.

In terms of improvements, Cristina Garcia, our program Math Advocate, was the catalyst for the biggest change—rethinking and revamping our assessment tools. We have made some minor changes to our reading assessments after introducing some new assessment strategies last year, but this year Cristina herself designed brand-new grade-specific math interviews which are directly aligned to grade-level math standards. These new measures will draw a greater amount of information for math mentors to create engaging tutoring sessions around students' individual areas of weakness, and will better enable us to monitor student growth so that we can effectively share this information with classroom teachers. Our pre-test information has already been gathered, and post-test data will be collected beginning Thanksgiving week.

Our most exciting new venture this year was our first ever on-campus Festival which was held in September. Partnering with Project Books and Blankies, USC ReadersPlus introduced participants to fairy and folk tales from around the world and engaged them in related literacy and math activities. A great deal of time and energy was put into this fall event, so thanks go out to all the Readers, Math Mentors, and especially to the Coordinators who made this event a such a great success. We are hoping to make this an annual event!

Finally, this semester marks yet another change in staffing. Jen Rossmeier, who has been USC ReadersPlus Central Coordinator for the past three years and who has created our wonderful program newsletters each semester, will be graduating in December and leaving the Los Angeles area. All of us at JEP and at USC ReadersPlus will miss you, and wish you the best of luck in all your future endeavors.

Peace and Happy Holidays!
Tina

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<th>Welcome New Readers and Math Mentors!</th>
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The International Reading Festival

By: Danielle Schutz

The International Reading Festival was held on Saturday, September 23, 2006. It was sponsored by USC ReadersPLUS and Project Books and Blankies. Project Books and Blankies, a non-profit organization and USC recognized student group, was started by USC student Robyn Strumpf. Robyn began the program to encourage the love of reading and reading success for children who struggle with it as she did.

The fall Reading Festival was centered on folk tales from five different regions around the world: Asia, Africa, Europe, Latin American, and the Middle East. There was also a unit introducing children to quilting and related stories. Each region had a table highlighting folk tales from some of the various countries and lesson plans and activities created by the USC ReadersPlus reading and math mentors. Participating students were given a passport which was stamped as they traveled to each region and completed related activities.

Participants included students involved in the USC ReadersPLUS program from the Family of Five schools, as well as students from Escuela Argentina de Los Angeles which holds classes on the USC campus on Saturdays. The first 80 participants received brand new backpacks with school supplies, donated by Office Depot, and every student received a hardback version of “My First Atlas” courtesy of DK Publishing, as well a second book of their choice from other donations.

A featured book list and links to corresponding lesson plans can be found on our website at www.usc.edu/readersplus.

Casey McAluff (Norwood) reads Adelita, by Tomie DePaola, to a group of students.

Volunteers gather at the Asia region, waiting for students to arrive.

Robyn Strumpf, of Proj. Books & Blankies, with a student and her finished quilt block.
Welcome, To Our New Grad Students: Lauren and Sarvy

Lauren Carter

After growing up in Los Angeles, I went to the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia where I was a double major in Urban Studies and Environmental Studies. I taught first grade for two years in the South Bronx, New York City and received a Master of Science in Teaching. Now I am at USC completing a Master of Public Administration.

Sarvy Aliabadi

Hi, my name is Sarvy Aliabadi and I am currently the Science Content Coordinator here at USC Readers Plus. I grew up in San Diego, California and then went to the University of California, Riverside to complete my bachelors and Masters degrees in environmental science. I am currently a 3rd year Ed.D student. I have worked as an Integrated Coordinated Science teacher at North Hollywood High School and also as a teaching assistant in Environmental Science at UC Riverside and in Sociology of Education at USC.

As the Science Content Coordinator, I have been working on outreach programs focused on the USC Family of Schools. Through a grant from the Weingart Foundation, I am coordinating a collaborative which includes NASA’s and different USC science-affiliated departments. The Science Collaborative provides training workshops for teachers of the USC family of schools in areas related to science. I have really enjoyed the time that I have spent here at USC Readers Plus and hope to continue building a relationship between us and the local schools in the science content area.

I am working as a Math Content Coordinator for Readers Plus. I am working to make sure that all of the math mentors have the resources they need to be effective with their students. My time in the office has been taken up with lesson planning, creating math activities and developing a new monthly meeting for all the readers and mentors to receive extra training and share experiences from their time with their students. I have so far really enjoyed being here with USC Readers and look forward to continue working with all of you!
Author of the Semester:

Read some excerpts of an interview with Artist of the Semester: Tomie DePaola!

Playing hooky in kindergarten

And I said, “When do we learn how to read?” And she said, “Oh, we don’t learn how to read in kindergarten. We learn how to read next year, in first grade.” I said, “Fine! I’ll be back next year.”

And I turned on my heels, and walked right out the door. I opened the big door, went down the stairs and walked all the way home. And when I got home, no one was there. My father, of course, was at work. He was a barber, so he was at the barbershop. My mother was free for the first time in eight years to go shopping by herself, so she was downtown, shopping.

The school called home. They couldn’t find me. There was an uproar, of course. They called the barbershop. My father found my mother. They came racing home, and there I was sitting, holding one of my mother’s books looking at it. You know, “Okay. Maybe if I look at it long enough, it’ll happen.”

My mother was wonderful. My father said, “You deal with this one.” My mother said, “So, you don’t want to go to school?”

I said, “No, I don’t. I’m not going to that kindergarten.” I said, “I’m not going.”

She said, “Well, you know, if you don’t go, you won’t pass. And if you don’t pass, you have to do it again, and you won’t get into first grade if you don’t pass. And so it’ll be a long time before you learn how to read.”

So, I said, “Alright, alright.” So, the next day I went back to kindergarten, but I never really liked kindergarten.

Share these Tomie DePaola books with your students and staffs!

Strega Nona

Big Anthony is large in size and curiosity but short on self-control. When Strega Nona, “grandma witch” of the village, leaves him in charge of her magical pasta pot, he can’t resist trying his own hand at a spell. The small town almost drowns in pasta until Strega Nona returns just in time to reverse the spell and save the day!

The Art Lesson*

Though Tommy’s family values and respects his artwork, the budding artist’s school doesn’t always seem to appreciate it. That is until a special teacher encourages Tommy to follow his own interests.

Those who follow their own passions and persevere (or want to) will find this book affirming!
Preparing future readers

I think that what you have to do for young people to excite them about reading is, number one, you have to read to them. You have to read them books that are too hard for them to read by themselves. That’s what my mother did. You know, at four years old, I couldn’t read Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves, but I’d have her read it over and over to me again. I didn’t know what it was, but “open sesame” to open that cave and make the rock roll away... “Wow!” I was four, and I could say, “Open sesame!” I didn’t know what it was, but it didn’t matter.

And I think that quite often, when children are reluctant readers, it's because they haven't been introduced to stories early enough. Now it's scientific. Now we don’t even have to say it’s philosophical, because there is scientific evidence that the sooner children are read to, the neurons in the brain connect; and that reading aloud is probably the single, most important thing a parent can do - besides feeding their children - and for young children, very young children.

I come from the era, the old-fashioned days, when parents read nursery rhymes to their little babies. You know, “Pat-a-cake, pat-a-cake” or “This little piggy went to market.”

And I found out when I did a big version of the Mother Goose rhymes - I did research... and one of the things they said was the Mother Goose rhymes contain all of the sounds and combination of sounds that we use in English language. And, of course, the sooner children hear all those combinations and even try to say them themselves, that’s how they learn. And if children can be excited about stories, they're going to learn how to read.

* Titles marked with an asterisk can be found in the USC ReadersPlus Library!

Adelita: A Mexican Cinderella Story*

Adelita’s stepmother and stepsisters relegate her to kitchen duties after her father dies, and they don’t let her attend the fiesta. While details change, a kindly servant takes the place of a fairy godmother and a brightly hued shawl replaces the glass slipper; the story is recognizable as a Cinderella variant.

The Legend of the Bluebonnet*

Bluebonnets are the state flower of Texas. How they came to be is an Indian legend from the Comanche tradition. An orphan, She-Who-Is-Alone, is raised by the tribe in a time of drought and famine. Her sacrifice brings the people back into harmony with nature and saves the tribe.
Our tutors come from 29 different majors:

- Accounting
- Art History
- American Studies
- Anthropology
- Broadcast Journalism
- Business Administration
- Creative Writing
- Cinema TV: Critical Studies
- Cinema TV: Screenwriting
- Education
- Electrical Engineering
- Gender Studies
- History
- Health Promotion and Disease Prevention
- International Relations
- Industrial and Systems Engineering
- Kinesiology
- Math
- Music
- Occupational Therapy
- Political Science
- Policy, Planning, and Development
- Public Relations
- Print Journalism
- Psychobiology
- Psychology
- Religion
- Sociology
- Theater

Honorable Mention Goes to Ryan Thompson, who is in his 9th Semester with the program!

Ryan tutors at 32nd Street School, and has tutored at Weemes Elementary during the summer months.
Fall Fun At The Sites

Check out these pictures from fun Fall and Halloween activities at Norwood, Weemes, and 32nd Street!

Students at Norwood participated in a Halloween Doughnut Eating Contest

Victor Castellanos and Blanca Loza compete while Daisy Alvarado looks on.

Ashley Arguello and Miriam Campos battle it out to be the doughnut eating champion!

Here, Temesgen Gebreyesus poses with his pumpkin.

Reader, Irma Escobar created a Halloween Pumpkin Patch for students at Weemes.

The winner, Angie Valencia, was closest with a guess of 605 seeds!

Students at 32nd Street estimated the number of seeds in a pumpkin!
Family of Five Fun

Arturo Arteaga and his student, Yulitza Hernandez work on a math lesson at 32nd Street.

Ferny Chavez plays soccer at 32nd Street during afterschool.

Clatrina Cooper and her student Cindy Vasquez work at Norwood during a session.

Kamara Colson and Miriam Campos, work on math homework during afterschool at Norwood.

Agnes Tang and her student, Laney Arroyo work on a Geography lesson at Weemes.

Students at Foshay ham it up for the camera with their Readers in afterschool.