Alumni Spotlight: Jasmine Tigolo

USC Readers Plus takes great pride in the students who have served our neighborhood through their work with our program. Many of them make Readers Plus a college career, as it provides them with a wealth of experiences that will serve them not only as USC Readers, but also as they embark on their careers after graduation. Our tutors and program coordinators learn more about themselves, about our neighborhood, and our world as they spend six to twenty hours per week at their assigned schools that surround our university.

Working within neighboring LAUSD schools, our USC tutors and coordinators become aware of the challenges of urban schools and the even larger challenges of operating effectively and efficiently within a large public school district. They realize the struggles of hardworking immigrant families; of children with whom they work who may become the first generation in their families to attend college; and they might even realize that, while these children might have different or greater challenge than themselves, they ultimately all still want to succeed and be happy in life.

Our alumna in the spotlight this Spring is Jasmine Tigolo, who became a USC Reader in 1997, the inaugural year of the program. We are incredibly proud of her for her commitment to education and to our USC neighborhood twenty-one years later, as she is now a classroom teacher at one of our partner sites, Foshay Learning Center.

She says, “I started as a USC Reader in the fall of 1997 at Norwood Elementary, and I also participated in JEP that fall at Foshay Learning Center. I was then majoring in Biology, and although I was doing well in my course work, I didn’t feel completely inspired or driven in my studies. During my junior year, I met with my counselor and was considering dropping out of school because of the lack of motivation. My academic advisor asked what was it that I enjoyed doing here at USC, and I told her that I enjoyed working with children. Participating in JEP and working as a USC Reader was the most fun I had during my undergrad at USC. It was through these programs that I found my passion to work with children.

In 2003, I returned to Foshay and have been teaching there ever since—fourteen years! Currently, I am teaching fifth grade. I am happy to say that I still love working with children and love that the Readers Plus program is still going strong in the neighboring community. It was with Readers Plus that I found my passion and my inspiration to teach. I'm glad the program continues to impact students in my own classroom, throughout Foshay, an throughout our USC community.”

By Jasmine Tigolo, USC alumna, Class of 2001, Introduction by Tina Koneazny, Associate Director of JEP
Class of 2018: Central Staff

Name: Jon Peppin
**Semesters with Readers**\(^\text{Plus}\): 8
**Position:** Coordinator at Weemes Elementary
**Major:** Economics and Accounting
**Minor:** Chinese Language and Culture

**Plans after graduation:** Two years in Teach for America, then applying to law school

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Name: Alyssa Rubio
**Semesters with Readers**\(^\text{Plus}\): 6
**Position:** Central Coordinator
**Major:** Narrative Studies
**Minor:** Folklore and Popular Culture

**What she will miss:** All the people she has come to know over the past three years!

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Name: Lillian Brownfield
**Semesters with Readers**\(^\text{Plus}\): 5
**Position:** Literacy and Math tutor; Assistant Coordinator at Foshay Learning Center
**Major:** Business Administration

**What she will miss:** The kids! She can’t imagine a day without seeing them.

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Name: Claudia Frankel
**Semesters with Readers**\(^\text{Plus}\): 5
**Position:** Coordinator at Norwood Elementary
**Major:** International Relations
**Minor:** Human Rights

**Plans after graduation:** Teach for America in Oakland, teaching secondary social studies
Central Staff Reflections

All Four Years at ReadersPlus

Coming onto campus for my Explore SC weekend, I was introduced to ReadersPlus before my first year even started. As a non-work-study student, job openings were few and far between to say the least. When I saw that the Readers booth said “Non-work-study welcome” and found out it was a job tutoring kids, I felt it was meant to be. After my first week of tutoring, I knew that ReadersPlus was something I would like to be a part of for as long as I was at USC. My first year as a tutor, however, was not quite a smooth transition. I tutored students one-on-one from 8am-10am, Monday through Friday. As such, during these morning sessions, I utilized pre-made lesson plans from the on-site binder which introduced literary concepts to my students. After a few sessions, I could see that I was not fully considering the perspectives of my students towards their own learning process. From there, my lessons centered on the interests of my students. Some lessons that come to mind now include a pop-up animal flip-book that my kindergartner Lindsay and I made together to review vowel sounds, and a cut-out train on its own track that my fifth grader Jaunte created to learn about plot structure in stories. In the end, my one-on-one tutoring sessions became not only more enjoyable, but also more effective.

Ultimately, my time with USC ReadersPlus has helped me to discover my love for teaching. I plan to pursue this passion after graduation by becoming a part of the public-school system as an elementary teacher through Teach for America. I will always be incredibly grateful for all that this program has given me. Now in the last semester of my senior year, my initial impression of ReadersPlus has not weakened in the slightest, as it is the best job I have ever had.

By Jon Peppin, Weemes Elementary Coordinator

What ReadersPlus Has Taught Me

ReadersPlus has been a defining part of my time at USC. I am glad to have found a community like this one, especially being a transfer student who didn’t know her way around school just yet. ReadersPlus gave me the footing I needed to succeed at USC, introducing me to not only amazing and driven people on campus, but inspiring individuals in the surrounding community. I am very fortunate for my exposure to the diverse community in this area through this program.

I first joined ReadersPlus as a reading tutor at John Mack Elementary, tutoring three kids over the course of an academic year. I was glad to continue working with kids while at USC, as I had just come from working a full time position as a summer camp counselor. I had never really worked with kids in an academic setting and was grateful for that opportunity. After tutoring, I was promoted to the Central Coordinator position, which I’ve held for the past two years, giving me even more substantial hard skills that I will be able to use in any of my future endeavors.

ReadersPlus has not only taught me a lot about this community, but also about myself and what I am capable of. I am grateful for the mentorship I have received from all the graduate directors I have worked with--Eric, Krystle, Phebe, and Kiara--and our supervisor Tina. With their guidance and support, I have been able to transform this role into something that I am really proud of, and I am so excited to see what this program will accomplish in the future.

By Alyssa Rubio, Central Coordinator
Class of 2018: Tutors

Name: Farhan Chowdhury  
Semesters with ReadersPlus: 4  
Position: Math and Literacy tutor at 32nd St.  
Major: Chemistry  
Minor: Health Care Studies  
Plans after graduation: Applying to medical school, while conducting research and teaching chemistry at his old high school

Name: Alyssa Poteet  
Semesters with ReadersPlus: 1  
Position: Literacy tutor at Norwood  
Major: Industrial & Systems Engineering  
Minor: Entrepreneurship  
Plans after graduation: Comedy

Name: Tamazin Moffett  
Semesters with ReadersPlus: 2  
Position: Literacy Tutor at Weemes  
Major: Psychology  
Minor: Occupational Science  
What she will miss: Getting to know the children, seeing them grow, and interacting with them weekly

Name: Alfredo Arevalo  
Semesters with ReadersPlus: 4  
Position: Literacy and Math Tutor at Vermont  
Major: English (Creative Writing)  
Minor: Theatre  
What he’ll miss: The energy of the children and hearing them call out his name excitedly
Class of 2018: Tutors

Name: Sofia Ong
Semesters with Readers\textsuperscript{Plus}: 2
Position: Math tutor at Weemes
Major: Psychology
Minor: Occupational Science

Plans after graduation: Working as an Applied Behavioral Analysis Therapist, then getting a Master’s to become a Pediatric Occupational Therapist

Name: Tariq Ahmed
Semesters with Readers\textsuperscript{Plus}: 2
Position: Literacy Tutor at Weemes
Major: International Relations and Global Business

What he will miss: Being a part of students’ educational, mental, and emotional growth; knowing that he can help them develop various skills to become successful in school

Name: Giselle Dominguez
Semesters with Readers\textsuperscript{Plus}: 2
Position: Literacy tutor at Norwood
Major: Psychology

Plans after graduation: Continuing at USC, pursuing a Master’s degree in Postsecondary Administration and Student Affairs

Name: Cindy Ho
Semesters with Readers\textsuperscript{Plus}: 3
Position: Literacy and Math tutor at 32nd St.
Major: Sociology
Minor: Education

What she will miss: Her wonderful and hardworking students!
Welcome New Tutors!

Here are some statistics about our tutors this semester.

**Tutors per Semester**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Semester</th>
<th>Tutors</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2018</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2017</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2017</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2016</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We’ve had an increase in tutors this semester, jumping from 72 to 92, just from last semester alone!

**Total students served in one-on-ones: 194**

We serve students in K-5, but third grade takes the cake with the most students tutored this Spring.

**Students by Grade**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st</td>
<td>30</td>
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<tr>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>50</td>
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<tr>
<td>4th</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Welcome New Tutors!**

**32nd Street**
Mireille Codjia, Sarah Balogun, Haben Gebre, Raynooka Kabir, Olivia Motter, Nina Moore, Monica Cantoran, Jace Faltin, Katlyne Stiles

**Foshay**
Nicholas Ekers, Carolyn Scott, Sydney Horner, Steve Loayza

**Weemes**
Abigail Leung, Aina Ali, Ana Diaz

**Mack**
Cecilia Nguyen, Jolie Qiu, Jose Gonzalez

**Science Center**
Maya Rajani, Marybell Carvente, Zayn Razi

**Norwood**
John Wall, Jaehyung Choi, Chioma Ogbuehi, Emanuel de Gante Carrillo, Alyssa Poteet, Dylan Thomas, Manasi Iyer
**Tutor Reflections**

**Building Rapport with Students**

This semester, I have enjoyed watching not only my students’ reading ability grow, but also their relationship with me and their willingness to learn grow. I think it is so important as a tutor to be someone who your students can look up to. My students are 3rd and 4th graders who would definitely rather be playing outside than reading. However, as we have built a friendship, they have become more excited to read and to learn. With this rapport comes trust, and with trust comes curiosity. My students have become comfortable enough with me to ask questions and to let me know when they are confused about a concept. This makes our sessions together significantly more efficient and helpful for them. A challenge that I encountered this year came right after the Stoneman Douglas High School shooting in February. My students are at the age where they are receptive to news and more aware of the world around them. One of my students actually brought up the shooting to me, told me he was scared, and asked me if I thought that something like that would happen to his school. I tried to reassure him the best that I could, but, the truth is, it is a very real danger that no student should have to worry about. Overall, I hope that these strong relationships that I have built with my students mean that I am someone that they can look up to as a role model. This is something that makes my job so rewarding. I hope that they will have the desire to continue their education for a long time, and to reach their full potential in life.

By Carly Shihadeh, Literacy Tutor at Vermont

**Gauging Students’ Interests**

My experience thus far with ReadersPlus has been a fruitful experience. At times it has been challenging, but it has also been extremely rewarding. One obstacle that I faced early on was differentiating the strengths, weaknesses, and needs of my students. It took me a few sessions with them to gauge what they needed to work on more and how to best help them. Now I have a better understanding of them as individual students and have formed ideas as to what might be most beneficial to them. Something crucial to my work as a tutor has been the ability to get my students engaged in our sessions. My students seem excited and happy to come work with me, and their effort and participation has proven incredibly important in helping them improve. I have done my best to read them and see what gets them most engaged. There have been a few times that they seemed to be losing interest in the lesson, so I added more active or creative activities, which helped bring them back into the lesson.

By Zayn Razi, Literacy Tutor at Science Center

**A Transfer Student’s Haven**

My time with ReadersPlus has been positive overall and has given me many valuable experiences. I have met other tutors who are cool and interesting people, which is something that I was really looking for at USC. Being a new transfer student, ReadersPlus has given me a niche where I could interact with accomplished individuals and be inspired. It also has given me more purpose at USC and some greater goals in terms of working with students and wanting to improve alongside them. Working with ReadersPlus has provided me with insight on what an inner city school is like and what it means to be an inner city student. Before becoming a tutor at Weemes Elementary, I had never witnessed how an inner city school may function or how the students may be taught. Seeing what it is like first-hand has increased my scope and worldview, acknowledging the different experiences individuals face throughout life.

By Aina Ali, Math Tutor at Weemes
Lesson Plan Spotlights

Visual Equivalent Fractions

The February math lesson plan winner was Sean Bui from Vermont Elementary. Sean wrote a creative lesson plan for his fourth grade student. Together, he and his student read *Piece = Part = Portion* by Scott Gifford before beginning their lesson on equivalent fractions. Afterward, Sean used fraction manipulatives to create one whole, then broke it apart to demonstrate smaller fractions. Together, he and his student created equivalent fractions using specific colored pieces. Sean used the Five Finger Scale (pictured on the right) as a formative assessment to gauge his student’s level of understanding. After understanding the concept, his student practiced this skill by drawing circles and dividing into different pieces. This further explained that different amounts of pieces still equate to 1 whole. Sean did a great job of tackling this concept with different methods: the book, the manipulatives, then the shapes. Sean’s lesson was a great way to provide visual representations of fractions, putting the concept into more concrete terms for his student.

—Sean Bui, Math Tutor at Vermont and Alyssa Rubio, Central Coordinator

Detectives for a Day

Foshay tutor Lizzy Gunn won the literacy lesson plan for April with a fun lesson using detective skills. Her third grader Valerie had a blast with this interactive lesson while still practicing her reading and comprehension skills. Lizzy received help from Valerie’s regular classroom teacher Ms. LaCombe to focus on what she really needed help in: consulting the text for evidence. Lizzy took the teacher’s advice and created a lesson on problem solving and detective work. She began the lesson by introducing what a detective does as a profession, then revealed that they would become detectives for a day. Lizzy handed Valerie a folder with detective materials, such as papers for witnesses, clues, and evidence. Together, they read through *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs* by Jon Scieszka and found clues along the way. Valerie used a magnifying glass to search closely for clues within the story. When finding a witness, clue, or evidence, Valerie noted it on one of the papers in her folder. At the end of the story, Lizzy and Valerie were able to solve the mystery of who was telling the truth: the pigs or the wolf. Valerie very much enjoyed the lesson and was able to take everything from the session home with her, learning a lot from her experience with Lizzy.

By Lizzy Gunn, Literacy Tutor and Alyssa Rubio, Central Coordinator
Spring Events

Extravaganza

Extravaganza is a mid-semester training that aims to provide additional resources and tutoring strategies for Readers Plus tutors. This semester, our training theme was “Behavior Management.” Managing behavior at our school sites is one thing all tutors encounter during their one-on-one sessions. Dr. Kimberly Hirabayashi, an Associate Professor of Clinical Education from the Rossier School of Education, was invited as a guest speaker to discuss strategies in managing behavior when working with K-5 students. Throughout her presentation, Dr. Hirabayashi discussed the effects student motivation has on learning: without making the active choice to engage, persist, and use mental effort when learning, students will often misbehave. Tutors had the opportunity to share common behavioral issues they encounter when working with their students, and received feedback and resolutions for Dr. Hirabayashi. After a Q&A session, tutors engaged in a group activity called “Post (it)-worthy Behavioral Issues,” in which they were given the opportunity to work with tutors from different sites to discuss the most pertinent behavioral issues they have encountered, as well as interventions for each problem that they have found to be most effective. Lastly, there was a “Coordinator’s Corner” in which Site Coordinators served as panelists to discuss some common behavioral issues they have either seen or experienced on-site and how they have found solutions for them. Tutors were then given the opportunity to ask final questions or address any remaining concerns and submitted a training evaluation form as their exit ticket. Extravaganza was overall very successful!

By Kiara Damian, Math Director

Writing Contest

USC Readers Plus hosts an annual writing contest, open to all students enrolled in K-5 at any of our seven partner schools. This is a great opportunity for children in the area to practice their writing and creative skills. This year’s theme was “Your Hero” which was addressed in many different ways, from historical figures the students admire, to their loved ones, to fictional superheroes. We are immensely proud of those that chose to participate, and are impressed by the level of effort each student put into their work. Entries were judged based on content, quality of writing, and voice. All contestants received a certificate of participation. There was one winner per grade, each receiving a certificate of achievement and a $50 gift card to the USC Bookstore. Winning essays will be on display at the Readers Plus booth at the annual Festival of Books, taking place on the USC campus April 21-22, 2018.

By Alyssa Rubio, Central Coordinator

Upcoming: Festival of Books

USC Dornsife has once again generously provided Readers Plus a booth at the LA Times Festival of Books to represent the College and JEP at the University Park campus April 21-22. This year, the LA Times has partnered with JEP to expand our booth located in McCarthy Quad (Booth #570) in the Children’s Area of the Festival, and will provide copies of the “Reading by 9” guide for parents to help support their children’s literacy. Both days of the Festival, our Readers Plus and JEP student staff will be interacting with those coming through as they read aloud books connected to our Writing Contest theme. Student essays from the contest will be displayed for festival-goers to enjoy, while our student staff engages children in hands-on reading and math activities connected to the read-alouds. In addition to the take-aways created, children who attend any of our JEP partner schools will receive free books donated by the Ella Fitzgerald Foundation, DK Books, and Cascade Pass, Inc. and tote bags to carry their goodies. Come check us out!

1st grade winner, Jayden Orozco
2nd grade winner, Julie Pinto
WonderKids

This spring, the USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center collaborated with WonderKids in designing a Cancer Education Initiative focused on the science and biology of cancer for local first through third grade students.

- The Oncology unit introduced the fundamentals of science governing cancer and presentations by guest speakers Dr. W. Martin Kast, USC/Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center cancer researcher; and Gina LaBeaud, Liz Dunn, Aili Vinso, Keck School of Medicine researchers and students.

- The Genetics unit demonstrated to students how genetics and cancer are closely interlinked. The curriculum first introduced a lesson on DNA structure and evolved into a DNA extraction. Guest speakers included: Anupam Singh, Molecular and Computational Biology Department & Cancer education researcher and specialist; Celja Uebel, Molecular and Computational Biology Department researcher; and Jill Patel and Sejal Mehta, WorldMed participants.

- The Biotechnology unit introduced students to the technologies used in cancer prevention, diagnosis, and treatment. Cancer Education instructors engaged students in different activities, such as a cancer removal surgery simulation and another showing the difference between healthy and cancer cells. Guest speakers included: Santosh Peddi, USC School of Pharmacy research student; Cecily Pulver, USC’s Integrative and Evolutionary Biology department research student; and Valerie Thomas, Molecular and Computational Biology Department research student.

- The Nutrition unit taught students that the prevention of many diseases, including cancer, is through a healthy living of eating well and exercising. This unit featured guest speakers Lisa Welter, USC Bridge Institute cancer researcher; and Alya Fadil, Krupa Shah, Vanti Baronia, and Shervin Shahsavari, all WorldMed participants.

Other Personnel include:

- Head of URM K-12 Cancer Education Program: Dr. W. Martin Kast
- STEM Programs Manager of USC Joint Educational Project: Dieuwertje Kast
- Cancer Education Specialist: Anupam Singh
- Cancer Education Instructors: Alex Stella, Evan Lum, Angeline Pan, Surbi Bansil

By Anupam Singh, W. Martin Kast, and Dieuwertje Kast

Turn the Page

“Turn the Page” is a book study session presented once a week during afterschool. It introduces our first through third grade students to various styles of literature. After hearing the book of choice read aloud by a ReadersPlus tutor, students engage in discussions about the story before writing a reflective response and drawing an illustration inspired by the story in their Turn the Page journals donated through the generous support of Francis Carey, a USC undergrad and Junior Associate. Some questions that have been used as prompts during Turn the Page include but are not limited to: What was your favorite part of the story? Who was your favorite character of the story? Was there a lesson you learned from the story? What was it? If you were a character in the book, is there anything you would have done differently that might have changed the story? These questions enable students to practice their reading comprehension and writing skills.

By Phebe Chew, Literacy Director
Afterschool Programs

Little Yuginis: The Practice

Little Yuginis has been a treat for both students and tutors in ReadersPlus. The students are granted the opportunity to work out the stresses of the week through various yoga poses, while tutors catch a glimpse of this rare sight—the kids resting upon their mats as if they were calmly floating on clouds. This semester, Little Yuginis was led on Thursdays at both Vermont and 32nd Street schools, right before the excitement and anticipation that comes with Fridays and weekends. Students benefitted from being able to stretch out and shake out that anxious energy. As college students, tutors also benefitted from the calming yoga practice, allowing us a break from our busy schedules. There have been many moments where aligning in mountain pose alongside the kids and focusing on my breath has allowed me to alleviate my own tensions. Even when we are not doing the poses, the soothing music, controlled energy, and soft atmosphere of the room are enough to help massage our minds. After the books are read aloud to frame the yoga lessons, the children are encouraged to take the lessons they learn—messages about self-love, respect for others, and finding overall peace among the chaos of life—and to infuse it into their lives inside and outside the classroom. It provides them, and us, with something we can use to help us not just on Yoga Thursdays, but every day.

By Alfredo Arevalo, Math and Literacy Tutor at Vermont

Looking Ahead: USC Yogis

Thanks to Dornsife Advancement, Little Yuginis has a new friend—Teresa Powers! Teresa is a USC Alumna, experienced yoga teacher and practitioner, children’s author of The ABCs of Yoga for Kids, and founder of World Yoga Power, which is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization whose mission is to make the life-changing practice of yoga accessible to anyone, regardless of age, location or finances. Teresa recently made a generous donation that will allow USC ReadersPlus to expand upon the Little Yuginis curriculum. Beginning this fall, a cohort of USC students (USC Yogis!) will be recruited and trained to teach at our partner schools so that more of our neighborhood children can benefit from yoga practice. In addition to her financial donation, Teresa shared her time with us the first two weeks of April, as she co-taught two lessons alongside me at Vermont Elementary, in recognition of Kids’ Yoga Day. These lessons introduced children and tutors to themes of contentment, caring for others, and practicing mindful breath when life gets difficult. We read The Rhino who Swallowed a Storm by LeVar Burton and Susan Schaefer Bernardo, and Stand Tall, Molly Lou Melon by Patty Lovell and David Catrow. The themes in these books are lessons from which we all can benefit, and we are grateful to have the opportunity share these lessons more widely through Teresa’s support.

—Tina Koneazny, Associate Director of JEP and Creator of Little Yuginis
About Us

USC ReadersPlus is an “America Reads/America Counts” literacy and math tutoring program housed within the USC Dana and David Dornsife College of Letters, Arts, and Sciences. In 1997, President Clinton launched legislation that would provide additional work-study money to colleges and universities with the condition that a large portion of it go to one-on-one literacy programs for children grade K-6. The JEP version of America Reads was the first in the nation to begin working under these guidelines, launching in May 19, 1997. In May of 1999, America Counts was added to include math education and it was at this time that the USC Readers program was changed to USC ReadersPlus.

The Program is administered by the Joint Educational Project and funded in part through the USC Good Neighbor’s Campaign with the support of the USC Financial Aid Office. Our tutors work with seven of the “Family of Schools” surrounding USC.