

# FALL 2021 READERSPLUS NEWSLETTER

A glimpse into our transition from Virtual to Hybrid Style



## *Graced with Gratitude - Hope Abounds*

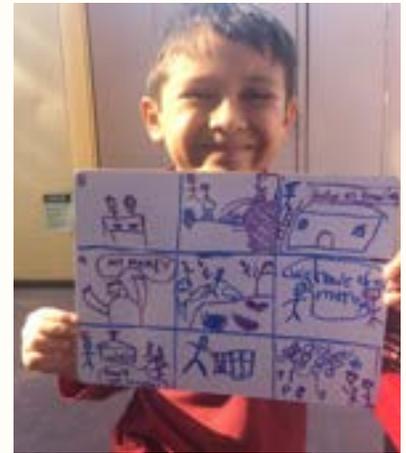
**Tina Koneazny, JEP Associate Director; Administration and Educational Outreach**

Rather than composing yet another article about all of the challenges during another difficult year, I chose to frame this opening article in hope and promise, and with immense gratitude for so many things and people as we wrap up our fall 2021. Semester. It has been an utter joy to be back on campus and to feel that everyday energy of students as they hustle and bustle between classes and college life, all while doing their part wearing masks to stay safe so that we may continue our journey back toward a healthy world.

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I am beyond grateful for our ReadersPlus student staff and leadership, as well as our teachers and parents who have not lost hope, and continue to collectively learn and grow with our K- 5 children as we continue to support them. This will have been the third semester in which we have not hired new tutors to the program, largely due to the challenges of connecting tutors and children virtually through all the changes from full virtual to hybrid. However, I am nothing less than AMAZED and HUMBLLED by the fact that we have over one-third of our spring 2020 cohort still with us and with our neighborhood students. We began with roughly 100 student staff that historic semester when the pandemic erupted, and we are still 37 strong! Nearly 25% of this incredible group have been with us for eight semesters or more (10 students total!) - 6 of those being leadership staff and 4 long-time, dedicated tutors. All but one on the team has been with us since spring 2020 - the only new hire being Nicole Wong-Franklin, our new Graduate Literacy Director who was hired to fill the position as former director graduated last May, and who you will get to know more later in this newsletter.



*Photos above taken early 2020. We look forward to our return to schools Spring 2022!*

All to say - GRATEFUL. And, HOPEFUL. I am eager to hire new tutors this spring to join our team and I know that our tutors are eager to return to in-person tutoring, venturing out into our neighborhood to enter schools once again.

*Yes, spring is a time for hope and growth. Let it begin!*

## Meet the Central Staff



**Tina Koneazny**  
Associate Director



**Stacey Lau**  
Math Director



**Christine Nguyen**  
Central Coordinator



**Nicole Wong-Franklin**  
Literacy Director



# Alumni Spotlight

**By: Emani Glee**

My name is Emani, and I am a natural born reader! I like to think I came into this world crying because I didn't have a book in my hands. Naturally, a career devoted to storytelling was in my future. I initially sought to write for a magazine, but life brought me full circle back to my first love. I have the absolute joy and privilege of working with books everyday! I am currently on the marketing team for the Random House side of Penguin Random House. I still pinch myself to remind myself that I'm not dreaming!



I graduated in May 2016, and I had the honor of working at ReadersPlus for all my six semesters at USC. I am beyond grateful that I found the ReadersPLUS booth at the job fair. I was an avid reader who loved working with children, so I jumped at the opportunity. I hoped the students would learn to love reading as much as me.

I was a reading/math tutor and Assistant Coordinator at Weemes Elementary. Working with ReadersPLUS really reconfirmed my passion to champion diversity in media. The majority of the students I worked with were from marginalized backgrounds, and I remember wanting to make sure my students could identify with the books I used.



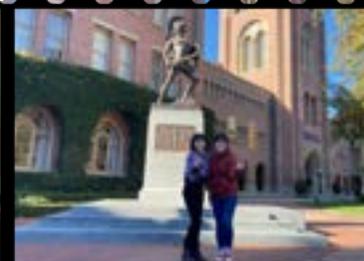
It's important that we are all represented in books, and I'm so happy to now be in a position where I can advocate for diversity in publishing. Looking back, I see how much being an assistant coordinator helped me start to build the foundation of workplace communication. I'm naturally reserved, but as a coordinator I had to talk to school staff and parents often. ReadersPlus helped me come out of my shell which is essential to my current career and adulting in general. I will forever be grateful for my time spent with my students and fellow Readers.



## A NOTE FROM THE MATH DIRECTOR

Stacey Lau

Now this here, the JEP House, is a gem of USC's history". On my way to our Homecoming game tailgate, I overheard a returning USC alumni explain JEP's significance to his friend. Over the past few years, JEP has had to undergo many changes, but it's dedication to the community has never faltered. Prior to the COVID-19 epidemic, Readers Plus sent tutors into schools to mentor students 1-on-1 in either literacy or math. Because of the pandemic, we had to adapt to virtual teaching--relying heavily on the accessibility of online resources. We modified the ways we assess our students and broadened our scope of teaching to better support our students during this difficult transition. Greater emphasis was placed on student's self-efficacy and socio-emotional wellbeing. We added greater nuance to help our students succeed-- ensuring a growth mindset for our students. Amidst calls for greater cultural humility, we've incorporated Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion discussions to help our tutors and leadership staff understand the community around USC better (ex: Where have you seen instances of economic injustice at USC or at your school sites? What are some cross-cultural connections that can be made about the different holidays we celebrate or the stories you read with your student?). While JEP and Readers Plus continue to evolve to address ever changing community-defined needs, our promise to stay committed to service will never change.



## A NOTE FROM THE LITERACY DIRECTOR

Nicole Wong-Franklin

Entering USC as a new graduate student has been exciting and overwhelming at the same time. JEP has created a space where I can learn, explore, and grow with the support of incredible staff, coordinators, and tutors. As change is inevitable during my development as a social worker and human being, I am beyond grateful to have this incredible organization with dedicated, compassionate individuals. At the beginning of this year, I felt intimidated by the idea of entering a brand new campus, and impostor syndrome crept in. There were times when I didn't believe in myself, but the overwhelming support from everyone at JEP has helped me embrace the change and step into my power. My USC journey would not be the same without JEP!

# Meet the Sites

## VERMONT



## MACK



## NORWOOD



## SCIENCE CENTER



## 32ND ST



## 32ND ST



## WEEMES



# Graduating Tutors

## PETER PARK (HE/HIM) FROM 32ND ST



- **First Semester with Readers:** Fall 2018
- **Favorite Memory:** My favorite memory with readers will always be the After-School Program at 32nd. The students had so much energy and it was so much fun interacting with them.
- **Dream Superpower?** I would definitely choose the ability to control time. I think there are endless possibilities when it comes to being able to stop time or go forward/backward in time.
- **Where do you see yourself in 10 years?** I plan on becoming a math teacher and hope to continue empowering students with math knowledge.
- **Favorite quote?** "How lucky I am to have something that makes saying goodbye so hard." - Winnie the Pooh

## VICTORIA GARCIA-LOPEZ FROM WEEMES

- **First Semester with Readers:** Fall 2017
- **Favorite Memory:** One memory that stands out when when one of my students wanted to read to me a page in the book and eventually they started to act like the teacher and mimic how I do our lessons! Even saying "Good job! Keep going". Eventually, I started using this as an activity during my sessions. My students have a blast becoming educators!
- **Dream Superpower?** It would be elemental control. It would be really cool to not just control one element but all of them.
- **Where do you see yourself in 10 years?** I see myself working as a social worker in the local USC community. I grew up in this area and I want to continue giving back! In addition I hope to be traveling on my days off and visiting the national parks!
- **Favorite quote?** "If you don't like your destiny, don't accept it. Instead have the courage to change it the way you want it to be."- N.U



# Teacher Spotlight



**THIS SEMESTER WAS...**

*Helpful. Challenging. Surprising*

**HOW HAS THE TRANSITION BEEN FROM ZOOM TO IN PERSON IN YOUR CLASSROOM?**

*Great. Smooth. Wonderful*

**WHAT ARE SOME EXPECTED AND UNEXPECTED CHALLENGES YOU'VE HAD?**

An expected challenge is getting the students to write. An unexpected challenge is communicating with the parents and keeping them informed regarding the progress of their child. - Mr. Nakama

One expected challenge has been trying to be heard clearly through the mask. An unexpected challenge has been getting the students to exercise and move. - Mrs. Valles

# Teacher Spotlight

## WHAT CHANGES HAVE YOU OBSERVED IN YOUR STUDENTS BEING BACK IN THE CLASSROOM?

The changes I've observed in my students now that they are back in the classroom is that they are more engaged and excited to learn. - Mrs. Valles



## WHAT IS ONE THING THAT WENT WELL FOR YOU AND YOUR STUDENTS THIS SEMESTER?

I feel that the students are happy to be back and that positive energy carries over into learning. - Mr. Nakama

We are having fun! - Ms. Kim

So far everything seems to be going well. We have hit little road bumps but nothing major. - Mrs. Valles

## WHAT IS SOMETHING YOU'VE LEARNED ABOUT YOURSELF OR YOUR STUDENTS FROM THIS SEMESTER?

I learned to be flexible - Ms. Kim

This semester I've learned how much I truly love my job. - Mrs. Valles

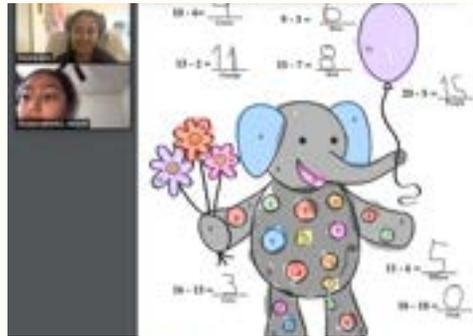
I learned how to be more patient. - Mr. Nakama

# Tutor Spotlight

## CECYLIA SEIN AT WEEMES

"Something that stood out to me was that my student told me that she went to the beach and did math problems in the sand that she came up with herself."

CECYLIA SEIN - TUTOR



## PETER PARK AT 32ND

"Reading is important because it can help you learn how to do new things."

JAAZIEL LOZANO - STUDENT

## ALICIA ADIWIDJAJA AT NORWOOD

"What is that... It looks like it's on fire!" (when a bird with orange/red feathers on its head walked into the frame of the zoo live cam video)

AARON CEJA - STUDENT



## HANNAH RITZ AT 32ND

"My student, Hailey's favorite part of tutoring was all our games!"

HANNAH RITZ - TUTOR

# USC Yogis Return to School Classrooms (virtually)

This fall semester has been exciting as our lessons pivoted from all virtual services, from the last two semesters, to hybrid. It has meant quite a few changes for our USC Yogis team in presenting our Little Yoginis curriculum to our partner schools coupled with the advent of bringing in new yogis for the first time in over a year.



**Students at John Mack Elementary, after school program, Fall 2019**

Despite the changes in staffing and ways of teaching, our curriculum remains the same. All lessons begin with a reading of a children's book that sets the theme for the lesson, engaging students in relaxing breathwork and yoga poses, and ending with a calming meditation/final resting pose.

Our fall cohort consists of four returning Yogis (Rachel Heil, Christine Nguyen, Olivia Stites and Emily Biscardi), along with four brand new instructors (Siwen Xi, Suhas Peelas, Katrina Dang and Karina Patel), all bringing some level of yoga experience to the program. Everyone successfully attended a thorough, virtual training in August to become well-versed in our Little Yoginis curriculum before instruction began.

Another major change has been our shift in presenting ALL lessons during the school day. This semester our teaching reached a total of 10 classes, of approximately 20 students each, for a total of nearly 200 K - 5 children! During both the fall and spring of 2020, our USC Yogis provided all instruction virtually, most of which was after school when students arrived home. This virtual "home" setting, required parents/guardians to be present and became our instruction model leaving only a handful of daytime sessions to be presented in classrooms.

The following is a breakdown of where our ten teams of Yogis provided instruction this semester: one classroom at Birdlee Bright Elementary (one of our JEP partner schools), two teams at 32nd Street USC/Magnet, two at Norwood Elementary, and a whopping five (!) at Alexander Science Center School.



**Students at Norwood Elementary, after school program, Fall 2019**

# Students' Commentary After Participating in Little Yoginis

After a read-aloud of Paperbag Princess by Robert Munch, 5th graders from Mr. Pulido's class at Science Center took away the following lessons:

- "The book was great, and I learned nothing is perfect in life."
- "I learned expensive things [and how you look] doesn't matter."



**Ms. Solomon's 5th grade class, Birdilee Bright, Fall 2021**

Mr. Pulido commented on the ways in which his students have responded to lessons:

"The students have benefited from yoga. Each time they sign off, they share with each other that they feel relaxed and 'jubilant'. The students also encourage each other to try mindfulness before taking tests. They really like the bunny breath and ocean breath. My students look forward to yoga. Thank you for providing mats. They take it more seriously."



**Ms. Solomon's 5th grade class, Birdilee Bright, Fall 2021**

When students were asked how they felt after their final resting pose (Savasana), some responses were:

- "When we did the mindfulness, I felt calm and very relaxed. It helped me calm down for today."
- "Yoga was fun today." - Ruben Ordonez
- "The class was a 20 out of 10."

We are hopeful that Spring 2022 will allow our USC Yogis to return to the schools live and in-person to continue sharing the benefits and joys of yoga with our students the way in which we began.

