

# READERS PLUS

May 2021 | Spring Semester Newsletter



## LET US CELEBRATE

by Tina Koneazny, JEP Associate Director

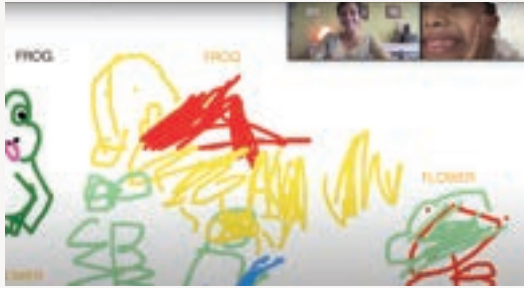
The spring season signifies a time of rebirth as we come out from the darker days of winter. This spring in particular, this sense of rebirth feels even greater than usual as our lives slowly begin to return to normal after a year of darkness during this pandemic. It is, in a very real sense, a time of healing and reawakening for all of us as more and more of us receive vaccinations, as businesses begin to reopen, and as there are more opportunities for us to reconnect with loved ones in person once again. This all brings cause for joy even while we remain cautiously optimistic as we take baby steps back into what seems now like our former lives.

I am thrilled that we are at a point at which all of our graduates - from both 2020 and 2021 - can don their caps and gowns and walk across a stage to receive their diplomas live and in person, with loved ones seated in the same space, to celebrate their amazing accomplishment in receiving a coveted degree from the University of Southern California. I am incredibly proud of all of our graduating Trojans who persevered during these past three unprecedented semesters, and who can now feel the sun on their face at the LA Coliseum as they hold their diplomas in hand.

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We, at JEP, also have a great many student staff and partners that we honored and celebrated on April 21st at our annual Community Service Awards Event which was presented virtually this year. Three of our student staff were recognized:



Tania during a tutoring session with her student, Kevin.

- Tania Apshankar, a USC sophomore and our ReadersPLUS Assistant Coordinator for Vermont Elementary School, received one of two Grace Ford Salvatori Scholarship Awards.
- Daniela Cruz, our 32 nd Street ReadersPLUS Coordinator for the past two years, graduating this May with a progressive degree in Global Health after committing eight semesters to a variety of JEP programs, received the 2021 Barbara Seaver Gardner Award in honor of JEP’s founder and first executive director.
- Cecilia Nguyen, a graduating senior who committed seven semesters with JEP and ReadersPlus (one semester abroad), received the highest student honor of the night with the Extraordinary Community Service Award.



Daniela working with students at 32nd Street during After School Program.



Cecilia coaching a Girls Basketball Team at Normandie Rec. Center in Spring 2018.



Festival of Books Display.

In addition to our incredible students, we have dedicated and generous program partners who were also recognized at the event:

- Our USC Financial Aid Office was awarded the Dornsife Award for Exceptional Service for their commitment to supporting community federal work-study students - more than 50 USC ReadersPLUS students alone each semester! - who earn and grow through serving young learners in our community schools.
- The Ella Fitzgerald Charitable Foundation who in a typical year donates approximately 2000 books to our seven partner schools and their students, in this COVID year donated nearly 8000 books as well as materials such as crayons and pencils, to a grand total of nearly \$15,000 in-kind donations to our program.

Clearly, this pandemic did not keep us down. Our students and program partners rose to the occasion and, in many ways, did more than ever before. The dark year is behind us and, while things are slowly beginning to bloom again, they are blooming. There are brighter days ahead for all of us, and we all made it through together. Let’s celebrate all that we have accomplished and allow more love, light and hope to return to our world in the months to come.

# ALUMNA SPOTLIGHT



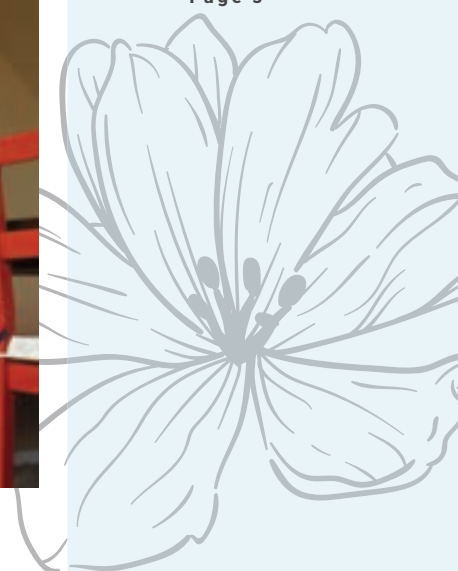
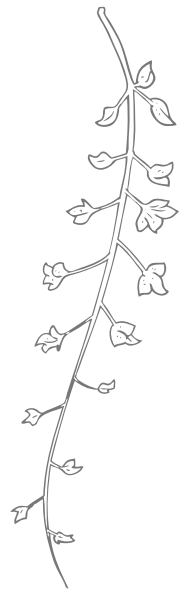
ANGELA VIMUTTINAN

My background and my general nature as someone who likes to help people meant that before I ever stepped foot on the USC campus, I was committed to the idea of being a Reader. (I found out about the program through the school's welcome packet.) From eighth grade on through my senior year in high school, I had spent every summer volunteering at a local elementary school. I did everything from helping to mentor students to distributing new classroom textbooks and organizing closets that hadn't been touched in years. The Readers program seemed like a natural fit for me and a more than worthwhile way to spend my time outside of class.

Over the last couple of years, I've been working as a freelancer editor and a full-time project manager at an editing company that I used to freelance for. Becoming a full-time employee at the company didn't actually turn out all that well though (the hours have been grueling, to say the least), so at the beginning of April, I transitioned back to being just a freelance editor and project manager with the company.



While I'll probably never strike it rich, I do think about a future where I'll be able to connect with JEP again and make some kind of contribution. Through the years, Readers and JEP have continued to be dear to me. I think I was especially lucky since I worked the summers with Readers and thus got to spend time at a lot of different school sites: Foshay, Norwood, Vermont, and Weemes. I've been volunteering at the LA Times Festival of Books ever since it moved to USC, and in 2019 I was stationed at the author green room, so I spent my days right across from the JEP House. I heard that it's gone through renovations, so I'm curious to see what it looks like now.





# We Will Miss You!



## GRADUATE DIRECTOR - ASPEN COLE

It has been a wonderful two years serving as the Literacy Director for ReadersPlus. I've been fortunate to lead a fantastic team of Coordinators, Assistant Coordinators, and Tutors, all of whom truly embody the mission statement of the program and are committed to making a difference in the lives of our students and the community.

One of the most enjoyable parts about working with ReadersPlus has been working with such amazing, passionate, agents of change. Every single person I have interacted with, as part of ReadersPlus and JEP, has been an inspiring advocate for educational equity and I am especially excited about our tutors who have grown into leadership positions throughout the years.

I am eternally grateful to our Central Staff, Tina, Stacey, and Cecilia, who have been the ultimate Dream Team and amazing sources of support as we navigated the transition to remote and distance learning during the pandemic. I am incredibly thankful for having had such a supportive environment to develop my leadership skills as a Director and I am excited to see how ReadersPlus continues to support our students and our community in the future.



## CENTRAL COORDINATOR - CECILIA NGUYEN



This lil funky JEP house, creaky stairs and all, became an extension of my home. It's still hard to believe that just 4 years ago, I came running in with an app in my hand, and now, I'm graduating with memories and friendships for a lifetime. When I'm asked what I'll miss most about ReadersPlus, it's everything, but especially the people. Tina has made ReadersPlus the warmest, most welcoming place on campus, a true home away from home. To work with such amazing people such as Aspen, Stacey, and my fellow coordinators who are all as passionate about education equity as you are really makes the difference. There's never a sense of dread, because we're working with the kind of people who surprise you on your birthdays even over Zoom, send tik toks and youtube videos for serotonin boosts, and celebrate your achievements with pride and zoom party emojis but also cry when you graduate. I'll miss sharing dad jokes with coordinators over zoom and seeing them smile, the aha moments when a student understands a concept, meeting new tutors eating pizza during trainings. It's going to be hard to say goodbye :.)

So thank you, to all the amazing tutors who were also beat by 5th graders at kickball alongside myself, to the coordinators who would swing by after 5 to catch up on all things life or make zoom meetings seem not too long, to my once in a lifetime central staff team for being the highlight and inspiration of my days, to the JEP office staff for welcoming me always, my friends, family who have supported me endlessly, and of course, to the heart of it all--the children and the community for allowing me to crash into your homes and be a part of it.

This isn't farewell, but a promise to carry y'all with me through my journey. I know that no matter what I plan to do, delivering babies in the OR or teaching kids English in Spain, my service memories and experiences at USC will surely shine bright through my sleeve <3



# Farewell Coordinators

## EBONY GONZALEZ - FOSHAY



I feel very lucky to have had the opportunity to work with Readersplus for 3 years and am so sad it's coming to an end soon. When I think of my time as an undergraduate student, I'll always think about Readersplus and all the memories and connections I made as a tutor and assistant coordinator. I got to make friends with so many people who have similar interests and passions to me and learned so much from each and every one of them. I also got to work with amazing students and families who I'll never forget. Whether in-person or remotely, this job never felt like a job to me; tutoring and working with students always energized me and brightened my day. I'm so thankful to have been a part of something so great and will always treasure the experiences I had during my time at JEP!



## JOSE GONZALEZ - MACK



Leaving Readers, and especially due to the nature of being yanked out of Mack to never return because of COVID, is very difficult. I absolutely enjoyed every minute of it, and leave with immense gratitude for all who made it possible. The ability for us to get away from the USC bubble for a few hours everyday, and share smiles and laughs with the future generation was absolutely everything I could have asked for. I'll always be fond of our central staff, coordinators, fellow tutors, site staff, teachers-- and of course, the students. I came into USC semi-thinking of teaching, but a few semesters with Readers convinced me I was willing to (and frankly, born for) working with youth. Mack will always have a special place in my heart, maybe there'll be room for a comeback as a teacher? ☑



# Farewell Coordinators

**ROSA NORIEGA-ROCHA - VERMONT**



I've been at ReadersPlus for 3 semesters, and my best memory I have from ReadersPlus is setting up a pirate scavenger hunt for my student's birthday where I hid clues around the school and had him find them.

As my time comes to an end, I'd like to say thank you to my students: Mario, Daphne, Steven, Arianna, and Marjorie. And a fun fact about me is that my zodiac sign is a Taurus :)



**DANIELA CRUZ - 32ND ST**



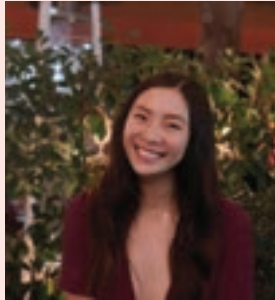
Thank you to the Joint Educational Project and ReadersPlus for giving me the opportunity to serve with you. It has been an honor to take part in the work that we do. Growing up in the community, and wanting to give back during my time at USC, I cannot imagine any better way to have done this. You have provided me the opportunity not only to give back to the place that has seen me grow up but also to learn more from it. During my time with Readers, I have learned so many new skills and life lessons that I will take with me everywhere I go. Thank you to the participating teachers, parents, students, and house staff who are really the heart of our program. Thank you to my team from those who have graduated before me to those who are still with us, for being super supportive and exemplar team players all around. Thank you, Tina for everything that you do and for being so caring and supportive, you have really set a high bar. Most grateful, Daniela



# Seniors Highlight

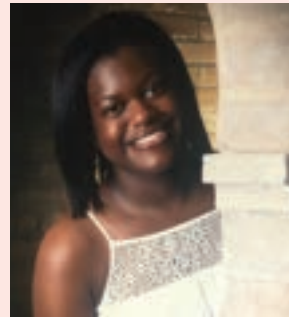


VICKI LI  
32/ND



**Short Reflection:** My favorite memory is when my student made sure that we'll have tutoring session on her birthday because that's the celebration she is looking forward to! I am grateful that I've become a happy memory for her.  
**Shoutouts:** To Daniela!  
**Zodiac Sign:** Scorpio

SARAH BALOGH  
32/ND



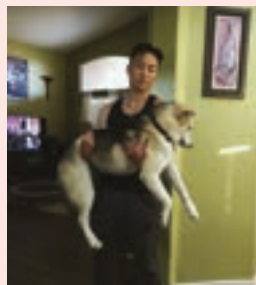
**Fav memory:** Friday after-school program during in person tutoring. I loved yoga time and playing bingo.  
**Shoutouts:** Thanks to Daniela, Cecilia, and Tina, Aspen, and Stacey!  
**Zodiac Sign:** Aquarius

MIREILLE CORDJIA  
32/ND



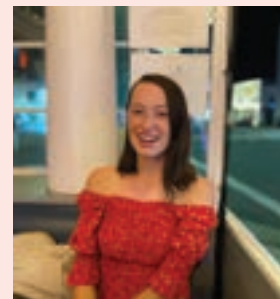
**Semesters at Readers:** 5  
**Shoutouts:** To my 32nd team, Haben, central staff, and my students!  
**Major:** Global Supply Chain Management

RANDY HOANG  
FOSHAY

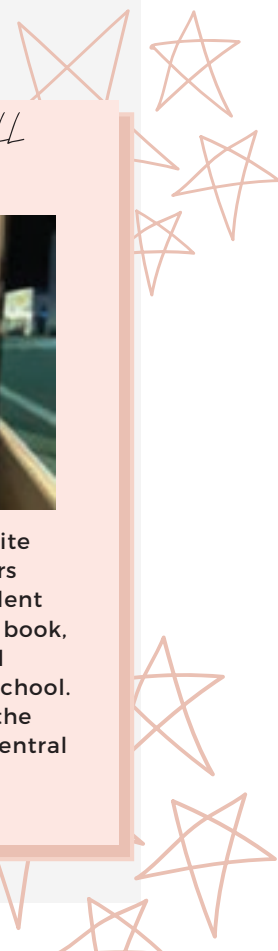


**Short Reflection:** My favorite Readers experience has been working with students from all grade levels and seeing them progress through the semester-- seeing them learn a new topic, their progress, and eventually graduating from ReadersPLUS.  
**Shoutouts:** Thank you to the ReadersPLUS staff!  
**Zodiac Sign:** Aquarius

ERICA WOLL  
MACK



**Fav memory:** My favorite moments from Readers include helping a student finish his first chapter book, making fun crafts, and leading Yoginis after school.  
**Shoutouts:** Shoutout the Mack squad and the central staff!  
**Zodiac Sign:** Virgo





# Seniors Highlight



JULIA STELTER  
NORWOOD

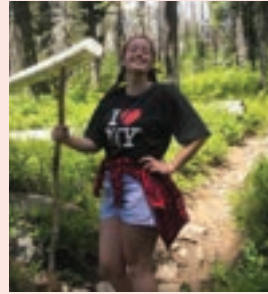


**Short Reflection:** The JEP staff and students can make any day 10 times better. We are a family.

**Shoutouts:** Shoutout to Nisey and Alicia! You guys are the best.

**Zodiac Sign:** Pisces

CAMILA GRASES  
NORWOOD



**Short Reflection:** The best memory I have from Reader's Plus is setting up a pirate scavenger hunt for my student's birthday where I hid clues around the school and had him find them.

**Shoutouts:** Thank you to my students: Mario, Daphne, Steven, Arianna, and Marjorie!

**Zodiac Sign:** Taurus :)

ANDREW CHANTHAVONG  
NORWOOD

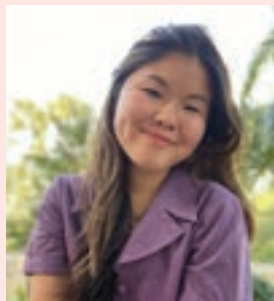


**Short Reflection:** ReadersPlus has been a wonderful experience where I could make a difference in the community while being surrounded by driven, awesome individuals. I will always be thankful for my time with this organization.

**Shoutouts:** My coworkers at Norwood are the best!

**Zodiac Sign:** Scorpio

OLIVIA DANG  
VERMONT

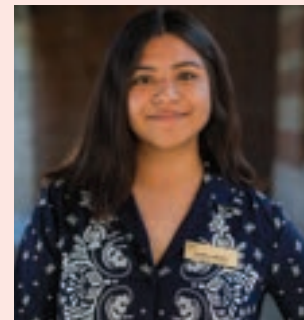


**Short Reflection:** My favorite thing about Readers is being able to see my students' progress both in their school work and self-esteem throughout the semesters I've worked with them!

**Shoutouts:** Thank you Rosa and Tania!

**Zodiac Sign:** Gemini

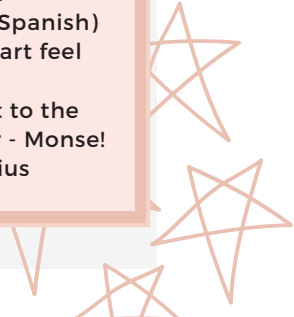
DIANA JIMENEZ  
WEEMES



**Fav memory:** my favorite memory is when my student said "You are the best 'maestra' (teacher in Spanish) ever" - it made my heart feel so full!

**Shoutouts:** Shout out to the best coordinator ever - Monse!

**Zodiac Sign:** Sagittarius







# Seniors Highlight



ZOE BAUTISTA  
WEEMES



**Short Reflection:** ReadersPLUS has been a cornerstone of my college experience, watching my students grow over the years has been so fulfilling.

**Shoutouts:** Thank you Tina, Monse, and Misha! And a special thanks to Stacey Lau!

**Zodiac Sign:** Taurus

NATHAN CAMARILLO  
WEEMES



**Short Reflection:** I have truly enjoyed my ReadersPLUS experience, and frankly a bit sad to leave.

**Shoutouts:** Thank you to the Weemes team, and all the directors I've interacted with!

**Zodiac Sign:** Pisces

JOLIE QIU  
MACK



**Short Reflection:** I think my favorite moments of ReadersPlus is when a student not only understands a difficult concept but starts being excited to do more activities related to that concept.

**Shoutouts:** Shoutout to Jose and the rest of the Mack team!

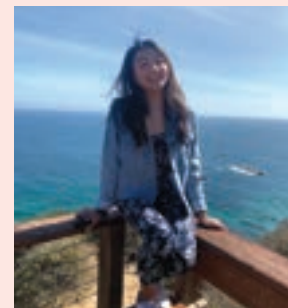
**Zodiac Sign:** Virgo

HABEN GEBRE  
32/WO



**Shoutouts:** Meeting Mireille has been the best thing to come out of my Readers experience. Our older siblings had both gone to USC and were friends and she knew who I was from an Instagram post and approached me at a new tutor training. I love being able to lean on her for support with not only JEP, but in life and have come out of this with a lifelong friend :)

ALLISON AH-QWAH  
32/WO



**Short Reflection:** My favorite memory at Readers will have to be WonderKids. It was a lot of fun engaging in interactive activities with students through a cancer themed curriculum

**Shoutouts:** Shoutout to Daniela!

**Zodiac Sign:** Cancer





# Writing Contest Winners



This year's theme for our annual writing contest was "My Best Day Ever". We had 6 amazing winners, one from each grade, and each received a \$50 gift card to the USC bookstore!

## MONSTER TRUCK

By Charles Clark, Kinder at 32nd St with Ms. Oldacker



Name Charles  
one day my dad  
and mom took me  
for a drive. It  
was a surprise.  
We went to the hot  
wheels drive thru  
and it was so fun

I saw a Blue  
Monster truck and  
it crushed small cars  
under the tires.  
It was a gayt  
day.



## 7TH BIRTHDAY

By Josue Alegria-Rivas, 1st at 32nd St



Hi my name is Josue  
I am 7 years old and I am  
happy to tell you about my  
7th birthday. I had a party  
with my friends and we had  
a cake and we had a lot of  
fun. I was very happy and  
I was very excited. Thank  
you for reading my story.

"Hello, omg, I'm very excited and happy for My son, thank you."





# Writing Contest Winners



## CHOMP CHOMP CHOMP

By Mario Villatoro, 2nd at Weemes with Mrs. Carina Vazquez



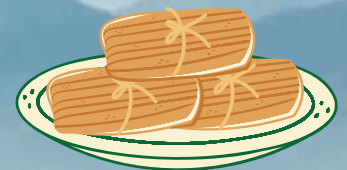
One day I woke up and it was going to be my best day ever. I woke up early to play video games with my dog Luna, my dad, and my sister Victoria. We played Fortnite for 10 hours. Then, for lunch we ate a billion pizzas and Knobby Patties. The pizza was super big, about 10000. The Knobby Patties were also super big about 60,000 feet wide. Both were delicious. We had to take big bites CHOMP CHOMP CHOMP. Me and my dogs took the biggest bites we could. Maybe it was magic or how delicious the pizza was but my dog Luna could now talk. She said hello and asked to go to Hawaii with a shark. We took a shark to Hawaii to visit his family and then he dropped us off at El Salvador where my aunt's family lives. There we found hidden treasure. Once we found Lucky the Leprechaun's treasure we camped in a dragon's cave. A family and friends sleepover. We fell asleep looking at the stars. I woke up in bed. This day hasn't happened yet it was all a dream but one day it will be the best day ever!

"Muchas Gracias por esta noticia me da mucho gusto y gracias a Victoria porque está ayudando a mi hijo mucho."



## MAKING TAMALES ON NYE

By Kim Velasco, 3rd at Vermont with Ms Huan



Kim Velasco

The Day I Went to San Francisco

I spent my best day ever in San Francisco over New Year's weekend. I went with my sister, my baby sister, my mom, and my step dad. We were at a family member's house with my step dad's brother, cousin, and mom. I made tamales with my family member and my step dad's cousin and mom. Making tamales is a family tradition that we do on every holiday except for Halloween. We finished eating, then went to Walmart at midnight and got games, art supplies, and ice cream. The rosca is a type of bread that we eat on Christmas and New Year's. Everybody lines up from smallest to biggest and cuts a piece of the bread. There are a few little dolls inside of the bread and if you get one in your slice, you have to make tamales on the next Christmas and New Year's. I felt happy, loved, and lucky to be with all of my family. We plan to get together again at our house around Easter time. I love my family and I'm grateful for everything they have done for me.



# Writing Contest Winners



## SPEAKING OUT

By Shanel Islam, 4th at 32nd St with Ms. Lanoix



My best day ever

The best day I ever had in my life was when I started speaking out for myself. When people told me something I thought to myself I was wrong I wouldn't speak up. Now when you look at me you see I have a strong opinion. If I could change the times I could speak up for something that was told to me and I thought was wrong I definitely would. When I started speaking out I started to ask more questions which definitely helped me in the future with my studies. Also with just normal communication. When I started to ask questions and answer questions I got help and how to make the math or english or any subject easier. When you think about it, being shy makes life harder for you. At least it made it harder for me in my life personally. In conclusion, my best day ever in my life is when I started to communicate with people. I am writing this paragraph not only for the best day that has ever happened to me in my whole life but to tell people how communicating makes life so much easier, and that people should always speak up to what they think is right.



## BABY SISTER

By Mia Paiz, 32nd USC magnet Ms. Kim

"She is extremely happy and had such a great time writing this essay."



The day that my baby sister was born

January 18th, 2021 was the best day because my baby sister Delail Rose Paiz was born. My baby sister Delail was born prematurely. She was supposed to be born on February 10th and only weighed 4.00 lbs. I had to wait a week to see her because my mom was having a lot of complications and was scared to be in the hospital because of covid. I helped my mom out by feeding her and making bottles.

I had to wait a week to see her and could not go to the hospital because of covid. She came home on the 22nd. When she came home, I was scared to hold her because she was so small. Even though we are ten years apart, I feel super close to her. When I got to hold her, I was so happy. We got to celebrate my dad's birthday because she was born the day before his birthday.

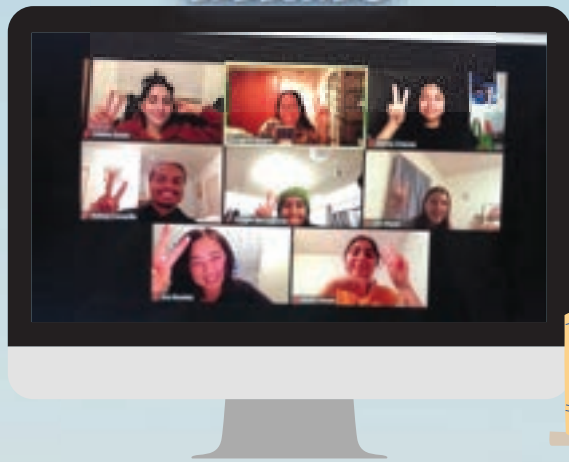
When my baby sister is in her bassinet, she likes it when we put a milky mouse. She would smile and be happy. We also put a little micky mouse teddy bear. We take it everywhere so when she is crying it calms her down. She likes it when we take her a bath and walk her around the house.

When she turned two months we took pictures of her, so when she is older we can have pictures and memories. When she got her two-month shot, she cried a lot because she is very sensitive. So when we have her in our hands we have to be careful.

I can't wait for my sister to get older so I could show her so many new things and go on bike rides. I could teach her many new things and help her learn. I want to teach her how to count and the ABCs.

# Survivor R+ : Pandemic Edition

## WEEMES

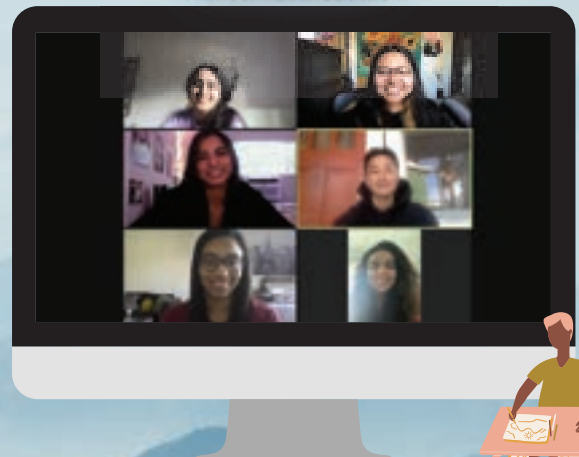


A public library has helped my student and I survive. They have so many amazing books to choose from. Also, incorporating frequent breaks of drawing, show and tell, and games has helped so much - Cecylia Sein.

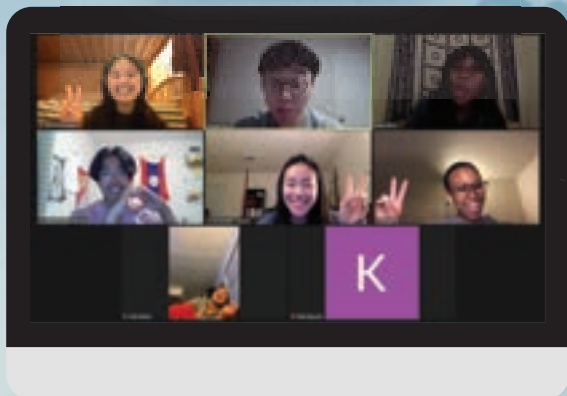


When Aliyah and I need a break from reading comprehension or just looking at a screen, we have drawing time. Aliyah usually draws me and I think it's hilarious and adorable. Drawing just gives us a quick break and then it's fun to show each other our pictures when we finish - Ariella Rabbani

## FOSHAY



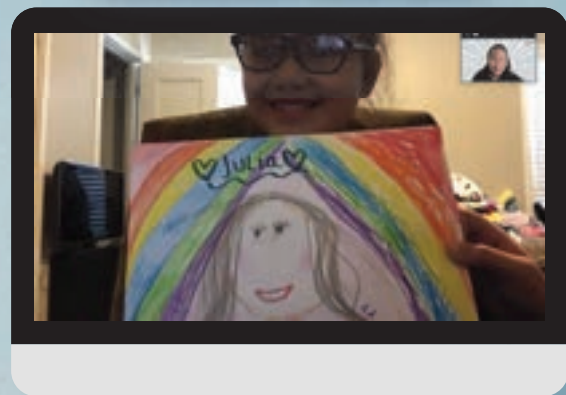
## NORWOOD



Tutors said pets, music; students said "my family", "sports" - Alicia Adiwidjaja



## SCIENCE CENTER

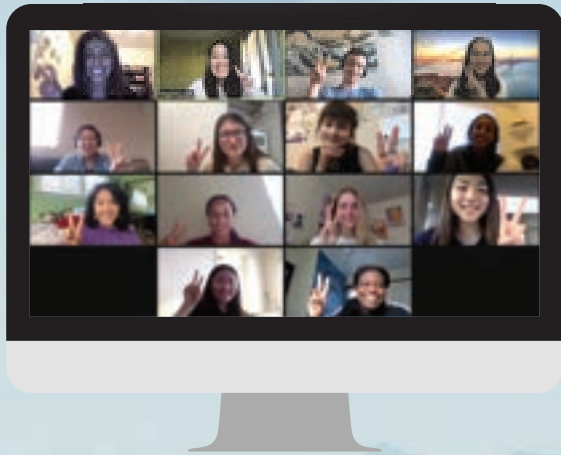


My tutors said: Nat Geo, Uno, and Epic - Beatrice Hahn



# Survivor R+ : Pandemic Edition

## 32ND ST



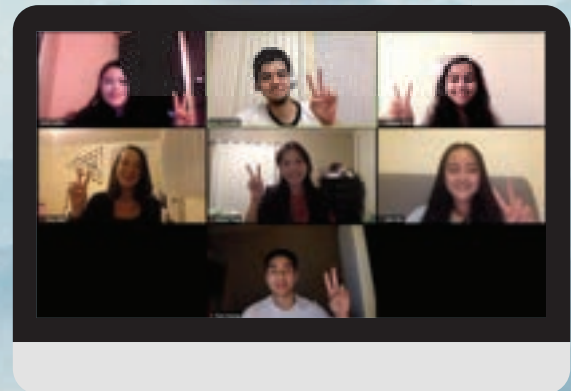
Friends Music Recommendations have made the pandemic SO much more survivable - Gregory Bishop



My student says Netflix, Hulu, Disney Plus, Roku, Amazon Prime, and Youtube all helped him survive the pandemic. Having a computer and wifi also helped because he could play video games like WarHammer - Grace Scheg

N

## MACK



Music! - Jose Gonzalez



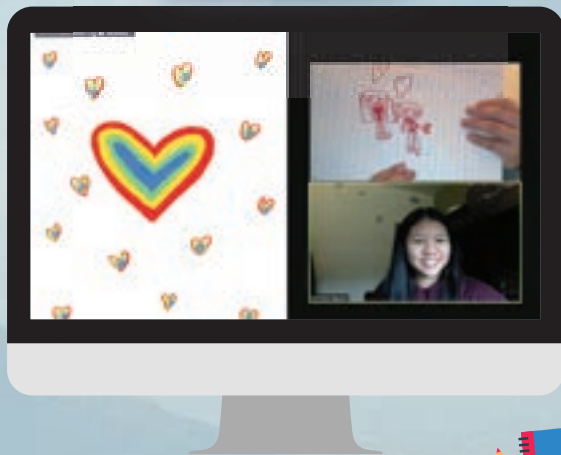
Hanging out with friends virtually (and in-person when possible) - Jolie Qiu



Walks! Even if it's just a short distance or time, they can really go a long way to destress - Tam Hoang



## VERMONT



Drawing activities with my student has been therapeutic and fun! She loves to draw rainbows, animals, and cartoon characters! - Christine Nguyen

Practicing mutual understanding and taking breaks have been helpful for us. It's made us attentive and appreciative while learning. - Luke Pierik

It's been the freedom to create student-centered lessons. I'm enjoying the openness to create with my student instead of forcing them into rigid expectations. - Landin Green

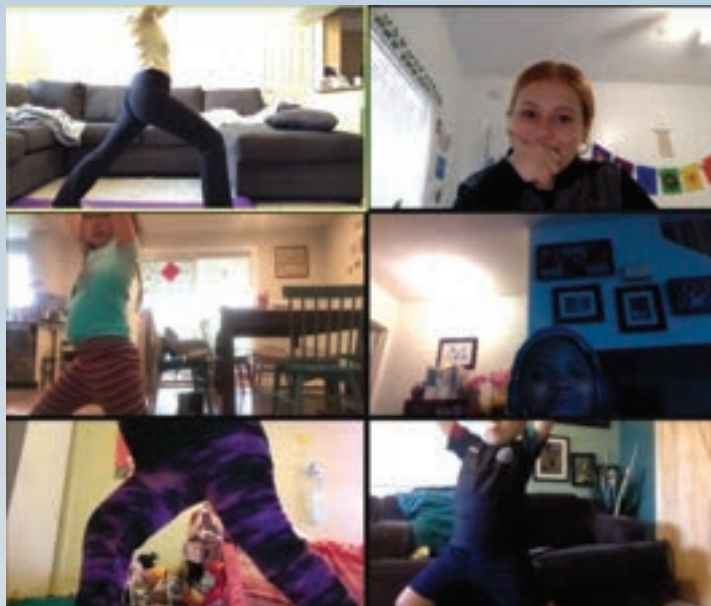
Drawing Together - Gene Yi

Spending time with family has helped tremendously. - Hunter Wilkinson

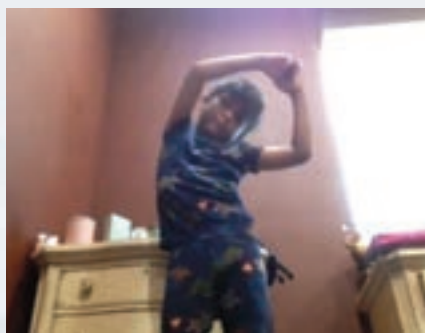


# CALLING EVERYONE FOR KIDS YOGA DAY!

By Christine Nguyen, USC Yogi

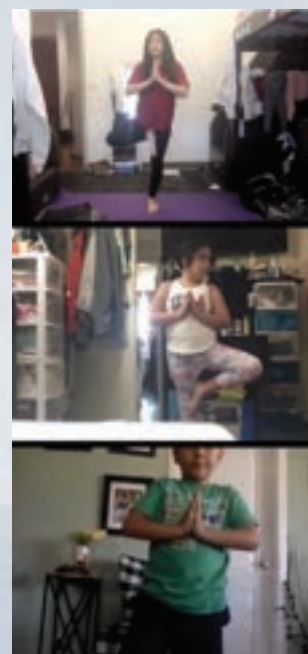


With everything changing in the outside world, at least we had one constant activity that gave us a creative outlet in the midst of a pandemic through Little Yoginis. This semester, our team of 7 yogis presented 9 daytime sessions to approximately 225 K-5 children in their teachers' zoom rooms and offered an additional 44 children in zoom after school sessions from their homes. Our students learned the calming benefits of the ocean breath and joined us in our sun salutations from their homes. For many of these students, it was their first time doing yoga and yet they enjoyed it as much as we did. One student from Team Goddess, one of our daytime sessions, expressed how he felt after our savasana final meditation: "It felt like lightning in my heart, then it spread over my whole body".



In addition to our regular weekly sessions, we celebrated Annual Kids Yoga Day, founded by Teresa Ann Power with two special sessions on Friday, April 9th, connecting children all over the world in mindful breathing and yoga poses. In each of the two zoom rooms, one yogi read Teresa Powers' newest book, The Night Before Kids' Yoga Day, as the kids tried to sit still without being tempted to follow along with the poses in the book. Afterwards, we went through all the poses in the book from the flamingo pose to the tree pose. We had so much fun sharing our practice with the kids, laughing as we collapsed every now and then as we practiced balancing in airplane pose. By the end of the session, some of the kids even asked if they could join more sessions because of how much fun they had.

We were so excited to share our yoga practice with so many students remotely and saw that they reaped the benefits of focus, relaxation, and mindfulness, as is evident in this comment from another student as they reflected on how they felt after their final resting pose: "First my body felt hard, but then it became soft". The lovely smiles and positive feedback from the teachers and parents drew us back every week, excited to share more lessons with them, and we can't wait for next semester to join the kids again!

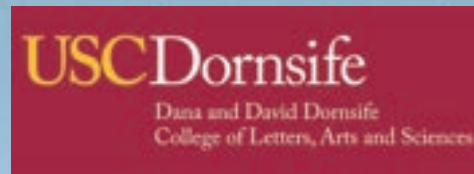


# About Us

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 USC 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.



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