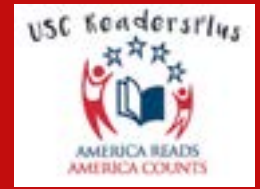


JEP ReadersPLUS FALL '24 NEWSLETTER



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Letter from our Staff Advisor:

As we kick off the 2024-2025 academic year, the USC ReadersPLUS Program is excited to announce a strong start with a dedicated team and a significant enhancement to our training curriculum. We have introduced an updated version of our "Principles of Ethical Community Engagement" training, designed to guide student tutors in strengthening our valued partnerships with partner schools as our program continues to focus on developing literacy in both reading and math. This enhanced training equips our tutors with the tools they need to navigate the complexities of community engagement while fostering meaningful relationships with our neighborhood school staff, students and families.

In response to student feedback, we've made a crucial improvement to our training: the inclusion of concrete, actionable guidance on HOW to engage ethically. We added insightful videos featuring both experienced student tutors and community practitioners. By showcasing the experiences of both peers and professionals, these videos bridge the gap between theory and practice. The training focuses on cultivating essential skills in our students, emphasizing reciprocity, mutual respect, and shared values. Key principles covered include Being Prepared, which highlights the importance of learning assigned schools and neighborhoods before the first visit; Reflecting Critically, which encourages our tutors to question their assumptions and respect diverse perspectives; Building Reciprocity through open communication and active listening; Committing to Action while recognizing the incremental nature of community engaged work; and Pursuing Justice by dedicating ourselves to creating a more equitable society through addressing literacy challenges.

This practical training is designed to equip our tutors with the tools needed to make a significant impact on students; overall educational progress while developing lifelong skills in ethical community engagement. As we move forward this academic year, we are excited about the potential for growth and impact. Our student tutors, armed with these ethical engagement principles and a focus on comprehensive literacy, are poised to make lasting contributions to education and society, both during their time at USC and beyond.



Beth Levinson



ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT



Stacey Lau

From the moment I started researching colleges, I knew I wanted to attend USC because of the array of programs that foster a love for service and community engagement, such as the programs made available by the Joint Educational Project. What I did not know is that I would one day call my coworkers “my second family” and refer to the JEP House as “my home away from home.”

Over the six years I stayed at USC to complete my bachelor’s and master’s degrees, I was dedicated to the USC Readers Plus program and had the unique privilege of serving in every student role possible. In 2016, I started as a math tutor. I loved brainstorming interactive lesson plans so much that I became a double-certified tutor during my second semester. I also worked as Assistant Coordinator and Site Coordinator for the Winning Weemes Team. By the spring of my senior year, I had the chance to join Central Staff as the Central Coordinator. That was the year we restructured our program to include remote placements due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Then, during my two years of graduate school, I worked as the Math Graduate Director. All of my years and experiences with Readers Plus instilled a deep love of learning and teaching.

After leaving USC, I have continued to seek opportunities that allow me to grow as an empathetic leader and educator. I worked at the Los Angeles Regional Food Bank as the Children’s Department Supervisor for nearly two years. While there, I prioritized nutrition education and wellness activities for our staff and the students we serve. Recently, I took time to fulfill a lifelong desire to work as an English Foreign Language teacher in Taiwan. It was an incredible opportunity to share my favorite parts of being Asian American while learning more about Taiwanese culture through my students’ eyes. We had charismatic conversations about which culture has better snacks, giggled profusely while making goo, and practiced positive affirmations and yoga poses. Now that I have returned to the U.S., I am in the process of applying to graduate schools to pursue my Nurse Practitioner degree. This career switch was a decision fueled by the desire to serve and educate that I learned from my time with Readers Plus.

I am beyond grateful for Readers Plus and the amazing friends I have made through JEP. No matter where my career takes me (whether that be a bedside nurse, a professor, or something else entirely), I hope that I can continue to serve with a cheerful heart and emulate some of the key tenets of being a USC Reader: respect, intentionality, support, inclusion, and critical thinking. To the current Readers, thank you for the invaluable time and effort you have dedicated to service! Seeing all the innovative ways our program continues to support students warms my heart. As I reflect on my time with Readers Plus, I am reminded of one of the greatest lessons I learned: “Listen humbly and respond with kindness”. Serve on!

NEW CENTRAL STAFF

Kaylana Kaniaupio



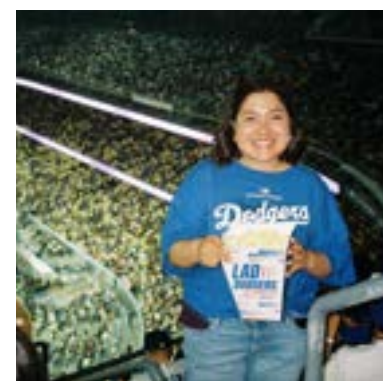
Math Director

Hi everyone! Since I was a coordinator at 32nd St., one of my priorities has always been to create a welcoming environment in our ReadersPLUS space. Coming into this new role as Math Director, one of the first things we did at the end of last Spring was cleaning the Readers Room at the JEP office. Nataly, Britney, and I have been working together to make the office a place where everyone feels welcome, especially tutors. Our intention is to break down the walls between central staff and tutors, which starts by making a physical space where tutors feel like they can come in at any point. This year, we have been regularly keeping snacks for office visitors, a diffuser to make the room smell nice, and updating the chalkboard. We have also been working to acquire more books and manipulatives for tutors to use! If you are reading this, please know that there is always a safe space for you at the Readers Room. <3

Literacy Director

Hi everyone! I first started working with ReadersPlus my first semester at USC, and since then I've had tons of opportunities to grow and learn through my peers. As Literacy Director, I embraced the responsibility of creating a supportive environment for tutors. Together with Kaylana, Britney and I are very committed to creating a welcoming space where tutors feel comfortable sharing their tutoring concerns and we've taken strategic actions to ensure that they receive the support they need. We've brought snacks and fun decorations, spearheaded socials so new tutors and veteran tutors can get to know each other better, and revamped our start-of-semester training to better prepare our tutors for a successful semester of tutoring. One of our main priorities is to promote ethical community engagement and build reciprocity between our USC community and the communities at our local elementary schools. I am very proud of the work we've done this semester, both in central staff and as an organization as a whole; and am excited about our upcoming semester and all the good things to come.

Nataly Lozano





GRADUATING LEADERSHIP

My journey with ReadersPlus began during my sophomore year when I started tutoring at Mack Elementary. I still vividly remember my first cohort of students and the joyful moments we shared through various activities. Without a doubt, being part of ReadersPlus has been the highlight of my college career. The program has provided an incredible opportunity to forge meaningful connections with both the community and families surrounding USC. Now, as a coordinator, I've had the privilege of watching these children grow and develop self-confidence. While I deeply believe in the importance of education, I'm even more passionate about ensuring every child feels confident in themselves. Education forms the foundation of our society, and through ReadersPlus, I've been able to help instill a love of learning in every child we serve.



Alyssa Arana

Foshay Coordinator

FUN MOMENTS IN LEADERSHIP



Readers+ House Cup

This semester's House Cup was packed with exciting challenges, and the points have been tallied! Congrats to Norwood Elementary for taking home the win with 158 pts. Check out some of the amazing challenges they completed below!



Site Highlights



This semester, students across all sites made impressive progress, with many tutors helping them achieve California standards. Tutors also supported after-school programs at some of our schools such as 32nd Street, assisting with homework and more. We're excited to continue this important work next semester!

Mack's Halloween Library for the Holiday!



Norwood Student, Victor Perez, with his Thanksgiving lesson!

Co Site Coordinator David Rios Palomares and tutor Marisol Perez with their students Nicholas Vasquez and Jefferson Gomez at Norwood!



Tutors at 32nd Street After School Program!



32nd Street tutoring session with many manipulatives!

TUTOR SPOTLIGHT

Anna Paulina Castro

32nd Street



My time at ReadersPlus has been both rewarding and fun. I learn a lot from each student I encounter, whether they are students who I meet with regularly or students who I assist with homework during the after-school program. Each one of them emphasizes the importance of our roles as leaders working directly with the community. I consider every session where a student shows improvement to be an outstanding moment, regardless of how small or large the improvement is.

Improvement is improvement!

Ruth Sanchez Mendez

Vermont



During my time in Readers+, I have grow significantly through tutoring and collaboration with other tutors. I am grateful for the support central staff provided and for the amazing team at Vermont. One of my biggest highlights was when one of my students who had been struggling with spelling finally learned to spell his name. It was a very special moment.

Loretta Useselani

Norwood



My time here at Norwood as a tutor has been nothing short of sweet! I love my team and my students, and there's never a dull moment when we're together. One standout moment for me would have to be participating in house cup challenges with my team, like the 'mummy' challenge!

Isabelle Carig

Weemes



Throughout my time at Readers Plus, I am constantly filled with joy as I watch my students smile, grow, and truly engage with the lessons I create for them. I remember a moment when one of my students faced a tough multiplication problem; seeing him use the "9's" trick I taught him, right there on his hands, was a beautiful reminder of the magic that Readers Plus creates. It touches my heart to realize how "fun" and "learning" can come together so beautifully.

TUTOR SPOTLIGHT



Charlotte Hansen

John W. Mack Elementary

Working as a tutor with Readers Plus has been one of the major highlights of my college experience. In fact, it is the reason I have found a sense of community and home in the Los Angeles area. By far, my favorite moments have been seeing my students' excitement to read and learn and grow with each new lesson we do. Readers Plus will always hold a special place in my heart!



Christine Moreno

Science Center

I have been at JEP since the spring of 2023. Since then I have learned so much from my coordinators, site members, and most importantly, my students! It has really been an honor to work at Science Center alongside their amazing faculty. At times I still run into some of my former students from previous semesters and it is always great to chat with them and really witness firsthand the progress that they have made.



Erika Johnson

Vermont

My experience at Readers+ has been both rewarding and inspiring. I'm grateful to be part of the Vermont team, where we collaborate effectively to come up with ideas that support and encourage student progress. Coming from a low-income community on the Eastern Agency of the Navajo Reservation, I understand the importance of opportunities like this. I hope my work is making a meaningful impact both here and back home, encouraging students to pursue higher education, whether at USC or another institution.

Christina Quijas

Norwood



My time tutoring for Readers Plus has been incredibly rewarding. I've had the opportunity to work with students of different grade levels, helping them strengthen their academic abilities. One standout moment was seeing my student, who is a Spanish speaker, gain confidence as they improved their reading in English. Watching my students understand and grow has been the most fulfilling part of this experience!



WORD FIZZ BOXES



Meet Diego Guidot



My name is Diego Guiot, and I am a sophomore in high school. I live in Texas and I am the founder and president of Mexico Aprendiendo, I founded the non-profit in 2022. I am very grateful to be able to contribute to USC's ReadersPLUS program and the children in the Los Angeles area.

Wordfizz is a hands-on literacy kit designed by Mexico Aprendiendo to advance literacy skills among young children. Mexico Aprendiendo will donate these reading kits to USC's ReadersPLUS program.

México Aprendiendo is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization founded by young social entrepreneurs with the goal of enhancing education by supporting underprivileged boys and girls in disadvantaged areas through the distribution of innovative educational tools. Each one of the 500 reading and writing kit that we donated contains:

- One book with 100 frequently used words, with illustrations made with bond paper and covered in special plastic (dimensions: 4.4X6.2 inches)
- 26 large ABC cards with uppercase and lowercase letters to practice writing, made of bond paper and laminated with plastic (dimensions: 4X6 inches).
- 1 glossy sticker made with bond paper (dimensions: 10.7X6 inches).
- 120 small ABC cards with alphabet letters for easy word construction (dimensions: 2x2 inches).

Word Fizz Box Social



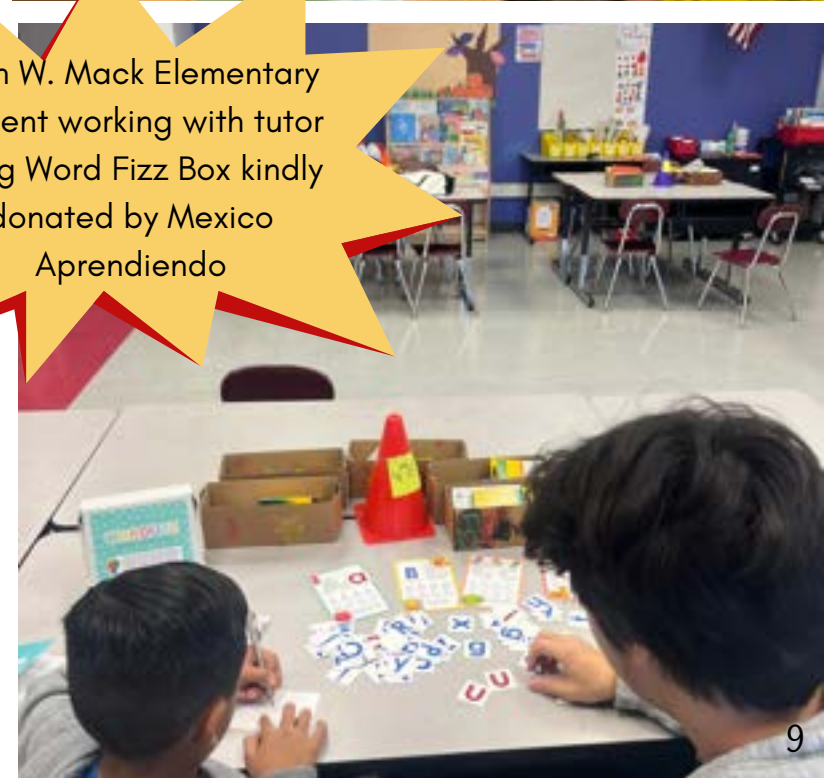
THANK YOU!

A huge thank you to Diego Guiot for his incredibly generous donation to the USC ReadersPLUS program! His contribution made it possible for us to kick off a successful Fizz Box social, where ReadersPLUS staff from all our sites came together to assemble and distribute 119 kits to our partner schools. We are deeply grateful for Diego's commitment to our mission —his support is making a real difference. This initiative is just the beginning, and we're excited to continue the project into the new year, with plans to share even more kits. Thank you again, Diego, for your kindness and generosity!

Students at 32nd Street Elementary working together using their Word Fizz Boxes in their class

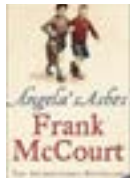


John W. Mack Elementary student working with tutor using Word Fizz Box kindly donated by Mexico Aprendiendo



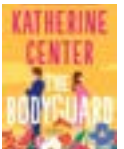
BOOK RECS

Our leadership team loves diving into great reads, and they're excited to share some of their favorite book recommendations with you!



Yvette Castaneda - Angela's Ashes by Frank McCourt

Kaylana Kaniaupio - The Bodyguard by Katherine Center



Eduarda Vivanco - Big Swiss by Jen Beagin



Jeanine Bautista - Severance by Ling Ma



Sophia da Costa - World War Z by Max Brooks



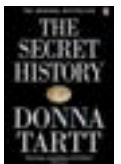
David Rios Palomares - The Color of Law by Richard Rothstein



Myranda Moran - A wild sheep chase by Haruki Murakami



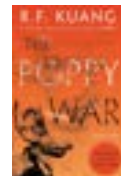
Nataly Lozano - The Secret History by Donna Tartt



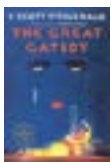
Sarah Hwang - The Silent Patient by Alex Michaelides



Ashley Jung - The Poppy War by R.F. Kuang



Alyssa Arana - The Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald



Maya Benitez - Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen



Ruth Sanchez Mendez - The Body Keeps the Score by Bessel van der Kolk



Bryant Comunidad - Lord of the Flies by William Golding

