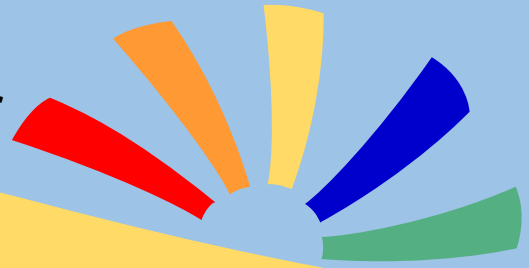


# LitRAG

## Literacy Rotarian Action Group Newsletter

January 2020



### LitRAG Activities - See you in Honolulu!

LitRAG has several events scheduled for the 2020 RI Convention where we can meet, network and collaborate with others interested in education and literacy.

**LitRAG Booth at the House of Friendship:** Our booth has been a terrific place to showcase literacy projects and to network. We will once again have a booth at the Convention - and we need you! Booths must have someone present throughout the Convention. It's a great opportunity to meet Rotarians – and even put your feet up for a few minutes! All you need is a smile and willingness to help!

More information (and a sign-up sheet) to come - but please reserve a couple of hours to help with our booth. Rotary Club and District Projects, Actions Groups and Fellowships will be in the Kalakaua Ballroom on the 4th floor of the Hawaii Convention Center.

**Break-out session: Educating Girls: A Long Range Community Investment.** We were so pleased to learn that LitRAG was selected to

host a break-out session at the Convention. Last year, we hosted a program on Girls' Education that was well received (and had standing room only!) It is an honor to be asked to host this session and build on the conversations begun in Hamburg. Our panel will include distinguished Rotarians actively involved in girls' education and empowerment in Afghanistan, Niger, Guatemala and India. Details as to speakers, time and date to come.

**Annual General Meeting:** All LitRAG members attending the Convention should plan to attend our Annual Meeting. We include a social time in addition to our business meeting. This is an excellent opportunity to learn about our RAG's activities and goals for the coming year. New officers will be announced at this meeting.

See you in Honolulu!



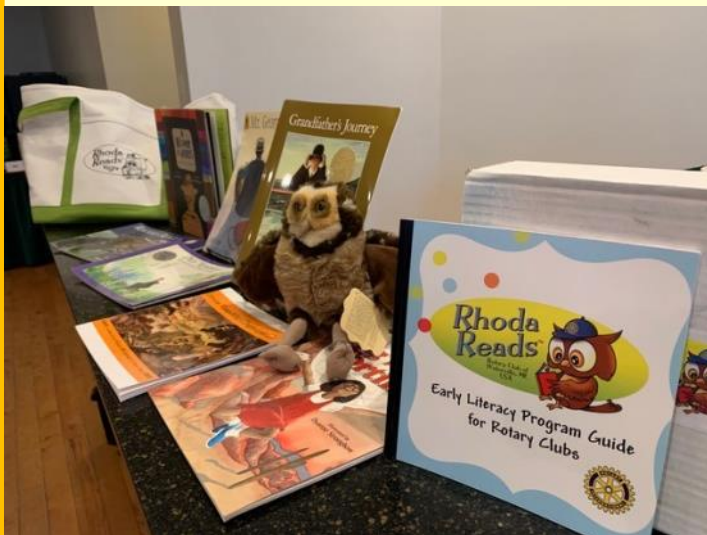
### 2019 Literacy Month Awards Announced

The Committee would like to offer their congratulations to all the clubs who participated in the 2019 LitRAG Literacy Month Contest. Project submissions were received from all over the world - from Rotary and Rotaract Clubs alike. Clearly, Rotarians are actively involved in their communities, addressing local needs and assets to develop strong local literacy networks. Because of the strength of the programs, the decision was made to honor two first place and two second place projects.

#### \$400 LitRAG awards:

**One Book One Dream:** This project was developed to ensure that all boys and girls have access to quality early education development and care. The pre-primary education reading program is designed to promote

and support reading in quiet spaces, enhance comprehension, fluency and speaking, and encourage social skills. Submitted by Felix Stubbs [felixstubbs7020@gmail.com](mailto:felixstubbs7020@gmail.com) (Sophia Rolle, Club President **Nassau (Bahamas) Sunrise Rotary**)



**Above:** Waterville Rotary's Rhoda Reads (- see below).

**Rhoda Reads:** Through this program, Rotarians receive training in early childhood development and strategies for reading to young children. Rotarians are then provided with reading kits and matched with a local child care provider or elementary school classroom where they visit regularly and read with the children. Plans are to expand the resources to include books in French and Spanish. Submitted by Tina Chapman [rhodareads@gmail.com](mailto:rhodareads@gmail.com) (Peter Garrett, Club President **Waterville (Maine, USA) Rotary**)

**Below:** LitRAG Vice Chair, Carolyn Johnson (right) presents the LitRAG award to Waterville Rotary's Rhoda Reads.



**\$250 LitRAG awards:**

**Traveling Tales:** Rotarians outfitted a van to drive to neighborhoods in underserved communities to offer a lending library, storytelling hour, community reading program and hands-on projects to children throughout the summer months and on weekends. The program keeps children engaged in reading during school breaks and reinforces Rotary's involvement in the local community. Submitted by Marion Cheney [machaney@comcast.net](mailto:machaney@comcast.net) (Melissa Lesniak, Club President **Dover (New Hampshire, USA) Rotary**) See picture of the lending library below.



**Read Berkeley:** At the end of the school year, Rotarians provide a backpack filled with books to second-graders in Berkeley County to address the lack of books in homes and help prevent the 'summer academic slump' experienced by many students. The project was developed in response to local issues of illiteracy and low literacy in the local community. It is a partnership with local libraries, schools and Rotary. Submitted by Todd Cimino-Johnson [todd.ciminojohnson@gmail.com](mailto:todd.ciminojohnson@gmail.com) (**Martinsburg (West Virginia, USA) Sunrise Rotary**)

**Below:** 2nd grade children with their new books:



## 2019 Literacy Month Awards (continued)

Projects were evaluated based on identification of a local literacy need, impact to beneficiaries, public awareness, direct involvement by Rotarians, and overall effectiveness of the project.

Many thanks to our panel of Rotarians who reviewed each of the applications and selected the projects to recognize. The panel included Sophie Bamwoyeraki (Uganda), Frank Romano (USA) and Linda Landry (Canada).

### Literacy Experts Warn Against Screen Time as the First Generations of 'Digi Kids' Struggling with Literacy



**Above:** By the age of 12 or 13, up to 30 per cent of Australian children's waking hours are spent in front of a screen according to a Longitudinal Study of Australian Children. (Photo by Four Corners)

There are growing fears among literacy education experts that screen time is contributing to a generation of skim readers with poor literacy, who may struggle to gain employment later in life as low-skilled jobs disappear.

Research by the Gonski Institute has shown that up to 30 per cent of Australian children's waking hours are spent in front of a screen and this has a tangible impact on vocabulary and literacy. Excessive screen time makes children more distracted and tired, and less ready to learn.

The [Growing Up Digital Australia study](#) has been described by its authors as a "call to action" on the excessive screen use "pervasively penetrating the classroom". The study leader, Professor Pasi Sahlberg, said while teachers reported that there were benefits to technology in the classroom, most also believed that technology was a huge distracting force in young people.

Many children coming into the classroom today have

had technology devices since infancy and were often handed a device when they were making noise as a young child to amuse them and keep them quiet.

This has implications for how students are engaging in the classroom. They are less likely to give something a try, to explore, discover or be challenged by taking 'risks' and are more passive, expecting the answer to be given to them quickly.

Australian Federal Education Minister Dan Tehan said Australian children should be doing better. "We're flatlining as a nation," he said. "We're not making the progress that we should be making." From 2020 the States of Victoria and Western Australia will introduce mandatory phone bans in all primary and secondary government schools.

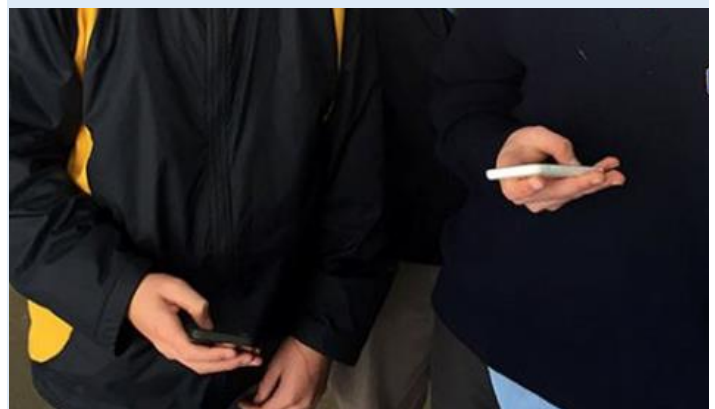
Students will have to switch off their phones and store them in lockers from the start of the school day until the final bell. In case of an emergency, parents or guardians can reach their child by calling the school.

Professor Maryanne Wolf, a cognitive neuro-scientist from the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA), said screen culture is changing the way we read, making the deep reading experienced when consuming a novel far more difficult.

Her research showed that constantly moving between screens and trying to multitask was creating a new, and vastly different, "digital reading brain". "We're left with a more short-circuited brain. The evidence from our eye movement researchers is that skimming is the new normal, and we're becoming browsers and word spotters rather than true readers," she said.

Prof Wolf said that "while multitasking and skim reading affects adults, the change is far more acute in young people who hardly read books in the first place".

There is now a whole academic field known as "[m-Learning](#)" where researchers are exploring the pedagogical and learning advantages of using mobile devices (including phones) in lessons. The use (and non-use) of mobile phones in schools is certainly an issue we need more research on.



## Some Literacy Notes from LitRAG Chairman John Thorne

### If you can read the heading, you can read a novel – but do you?

In another section of this Newsletter you will read comments about rapid reading and screen reading that many young people (and adults) see as normal. Here are some other aspects of that article.

Maryanne Wolf, a neuroscientist and literacy advocate from the US, knows that critical thinking, personal reflection, imagination and empathy all need and are polished through deep reading or slower reading. Continuous distraction from one digital screen to another is a direct threat to imagination, caring for others and reflecting on our own actions. That is indeed serious!



To emphasise the point, if the above research is correct, then those who only screen read and flick from one short topic to another may be compounding their own general anxieties and stress levels with no internal inbuilt support.

That is sad.

There are sensible down-to-earth solutions. We can embrace both use of digital gadgets and deeper reading skills. Maryanne Wolf calls this the development of a “bi-literate reading brain”.

Reading is a learned skill that requires and develops particular neural networks. Different reading platforms encourage the development of different aspects of those networks.

Screen-reading children begin in the pleasures and instant gratification of skimming, clicking and linking – this allows for fast browsing and scanning.

**If the only reading a child or teenager takes part in is screen-reading, then slower deep reading development is short circuited and therefore the growth in the personal areas of empathy, reflection and critical thinking are stunted.**

There are three easy ways to get a youngster to pick up a book, read and enjoy it.

**Firstly** - relax. Change the location. If a parent is anxious about listening to a child read - move. Go to a more friendly spot – maybe another room, the car, outside.

**Secondly** - the core of the reading process is making meaning. Therefore it is okay not to be word perfect and point to words one-by-one. A good prompting question might be: *What would make sense here? The clue for an unknown word is in the rest of the sentence or the picture.*

**Lastly** - let children choose their own books. As adults we rarely read anything we don't love or enjoy; we give uninteresting books away or put them down. Why then do we insist that a child reads a book which they don't necessarily enjoy or like?

Above all, turning pages of a book instils a love of books and the capacity for deep reading. Paper literacy is the full partner of screen reading. The strongest foundation to enable deep reading is to agree to “time-out” from screen reading – turn it off for a set time and revitalise immersive readers. With small children, page turning together is a powerful model for lifelong reading.

Maryanne Wolf suggests “that deep readers are more likely to be more thoughtful members of the community at a time when good citizenship may never have been more important.”

Rotary encourages us ‘to do good in the world’ – deeper reading for all supports that goal.

## LitRAG Office-Bearers

### LitRAG Executive Committee:

- Chair: John Thorne, PRID (Australia)
- Vice Chair: Carolyn Johnson, PDG (USA)
- Secretary: Courtney Doldron, Pres. (Canada)
- Treasurer: Harvey Baxter, Rotarian (USA)

### LitRAG Directors:

- Rodolfo Bianchi, PDG (Guatemala)
- Sylvia Byers, PDG (Australia)
- Chebab Elawar, PDG (USA)
- David Fowler, Past President RIBI (England)
- Shekhar Mehta, PRID (India)
- Anand Seth, Rotarian (USA)
- Courtney Doldron, Rotarian (Canada)

### LitRAG Advisors to the Board:

- Bill Boyd, Past RI President (New Zealand)
- Noraseth Pathmanand, PRID (Thailand)
- William Stumbaugh, Rotarian (Ecuador)

**Website:** [www.litrag.org](http://www.litrag.org)

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/Reading.Rotary/>

**Contact John Thorne or Carolyn Johnson:**  
[info@litrag.org](mailto:info@litrag.org)

**The Literacy Rotarian Action Group** is a recognised Rotarian Action Group and operates in accordance with Rotary International Policy but is not an agency of or controlled by Rotary International. Note: Rotarian Action Groups are a resource to Rotary clubs and districts in their speciality but are not an agency of RI and may not act on behalf of RI as part of all agreements.