



# RIF/FYI

June, 2021

A newsletter for volunteers and supporters of **The Reading Is Fun Program**



*"Once the faintest stirring of hope became possible, the dominion of the plague was ended.....What we learn in time of pestilence: that there are more things to admire in men than to despise." - Camus, The Plague*

*"To have compassion for those who suffer is a human quality which everyone should possess, especially those who have required comfort themselves in the past and have managed to find it in others." - Boccaccio, The Decameron*

*"Callin' out around the world! Are you ready for a brand new beat? Summer's here and the time is right for Dancing In The Street!" - Martha & The Vandellas*

**END OF THE PLAGUE YEAR RECAP:** We made it! It was a tough year all around but we managed to pull together as best we could and provide support and mentorship for the kids of Schenectady during a school year like no other. Thanks to each and every volunteer who worked through the challenges and tribulations that this stupid plague foisted upon us. In the end, we did what we needed to do and worked some magic with whatever tools we had at

hand. We asked the volunteers how they fared and what they used to reach out to the kids, many of whom were at home or some other remote location. Here's a selection of what we heard:

*I used Hoopla, the books in the Rif library, books I brought the student that we both had copies of and books she had. She did not enjoy me reading to her. I also created a document with the list of her sight words. She wanted to do that every week and I truly saw an improvement week over week. – Patrice Hiller*

*I used the Google drive to read books to the student I worked with. It was helpful because he could see the book while I was reading it to him. It was a good experience learning how to use online tools for kids. - Alexis Wisniewski*

*I did use the RIF books on google drive and also Hoopla, which is a phenomenal resource...With my student, what worked best was giving her the books and using the google slide presentations during our meetings. She would look at the books but also the slides when I needed to show her something using the cursor. – Linda Spaulding*

*I also created little books with their sight words for them to use when all else failed and their reading vocabularies did not match what was in printed books. It was a godsend having the library available for all of the times that it was... I feel very gratified that it was, indeed, a good tutoring year. – Sally Magid*

*One thing that worked very well for me was using dry-erase boards in some of my lessons- I sent a board and some dry-erase markers to my student and I had one as well, and it was an easy way to play some "guessing games" with initial consonant and consonant blend identification. – Karen Kowalski*

*I ended up taking photos of each of my books and copying them to my google drive in Slides. I then brought the books to the school, and read the books from my phone with my students. If they misplaced the books or forgot them at home, I shared my screen and had them read from my google drive. – Tina Lee*

*I read to my student and showed him the book at the beginning. When he finally got the books, he had a copy and I had one whenever he would come. – Mary Ann Fiminski*

*I had 2 boys at the same time so I would have needed 3 copies of the books. I read to them initially and then used audiobooks from Hoopla (I had a copy). That worked pretty well...I did get some feedback from my teacher from one of the moms that he liked some of the books that I sent him.– Paul Deltry*

*One of my students liked to use online resources that her teacher recommended...The student would present the material from the site, and at times, would involve my 2nd student...The virtual sessions were not ideal, though I believe the students looked forward to our time together. – Cathy Kuzsman*

*Some of the resources I used meeting with my student: 1. The RIF online library; 2. Hoopla; 3. Pink Cat educational games; 4. Short and long vowel sounds chart included in RIF online resources; 5. Suggestions from online training session and volunteer meetings; i.e., using props, using different voices for characters, and making a sight words book – Georgiann Holm*

*I read to two first grade boys.... one student loves Dr. Seuss. He also likes to read his own books to me... Because of the lack of human intervention this year I tried to give them enough time to just talk to me about whatever they wanted. – Janet Ising*

*What worked - and it turned out to be the most successful - was writing a personalized story, with stick figure drawings! Student comment - "Why do you draw like that?" That cracked me up! He knew it was him right away though! As soon as he read it, he said "Now I'll write a story about you". That led to him saying the story and me writing down what he said and then he would read it back to me. – Martha Longo*

*Mostly I ended up choosing books and making my own power points. That worked pretty well. Hoopla was not available in Clifton Park (we talked about that). I did get a couple of Libby books and an EPIC. She was happy to read to me and that's mostly what we did. I was impressed that she was very fluent with EPIC and would choose books there to read to me. – Wendy Miller*

*I have exclusively used the books that I've taken out of the RIF library. It's worked well because there are so many books from which to choose, I can hold up my book pages to my webcam when I want to specifically point something out to him. And he will hold up his book to make sure we're on the same page.....For me, this has been a wonderful experience, and in many ways, "being" with him has been the highlight of my COVID weeks. – Ricki Shapiro*

*I used books from the RIF library, Saratoga Springs Library, and little books that I had and made for my student. He was in first grade but attended Kindergarten very briefly, so he really benefited from our time together.. His classroom teacher was lovely, talented, dedicated and very supportive of RIF and our time together! – Doris Lazar*

*I did use several Hoopla books, which worked pretty well. I scanned a couple of books and presented them to the students. Several times I scanned books that I had only one copy of, gave that to the student and opened the scanned book so that I could read along with the students. I tried to get books from the RIF library that had 2 copies; that made it much easier... I did feel as if I got to know the kids better than I thought I would.... All in all, not nearly as satisfying as in person, but better than I expected! – Margaret Novak*

*I found that it was easiest to use hard copy books. In some cases I had two copies - one for me and one for Hannah. And in some cases it was more practical to just make a photocopy of books for myself and to mail the book to her....There were distractions due to siblings at home, TV in the background, lack of focus by the student, etc. But those instances were not significantly more frequent than similar issues that have occurred over the years with in-person sessions at the school... Bottom line is while working remotely was a challenge and less effective than in-person I do think it was worthwhile and both beneficial for my student and rewarding for me. – Mary Frye*

*I used RIF Books thru Google Drive. I used both books I had and books we both had. Having duplicate copies worked best for us. The hardest part for me to get used to were the distractions going on in the house. Best part terrific student and teacher. – Sue Crawford*

Thanks, one and all, for your thoughts and comments. While we hope that the coming school year will find us all returning to something more closely resembling our "one-to-one", in-person **RIF** sessions, we thought it important to document what we accomplished during this damn plague year and how we got there. As always, thank you for all you do for the kids of Schenectady!



**BOOK DRIVE AT THE OPEN DOOR:** As you know, the Open Door Bookstore on Jay Street in Schenectady, an old friend of the Reading Is Fun Program – and a great independent bookstore – generously sponsored a book drive for The Reading Is Fun Program during the month of April. We know that many of our volunteers participated. The book drive was so successful that RIF received 97 books for our library – and, ultimately, for the kids themselves!



**LIBRARY NEWS:** The RIF Library, located at the Faith United Methodist Church at 811 North Brandywine Avenue, was opened only on a limited basis every three weeks since February of this year. It wasn't an ideal situation but at least we were able to make our books and games available to the volunteers. Thank you for your patience and understanding.

Thanks also to Ted Vickery at Faith United for working with us during the year to provide us as much access as we could reasonably – and safely – expect. And very special thanks to our Library Coordinator, Mary Crimp-Batzinger for providing “Mobile Library” services for volunteers who couldn't make it to the scheduled sessions. Nothing like meeting in a parking lot and rifling through boxes in a car trunk to arouse the suspicions of the local DEA!

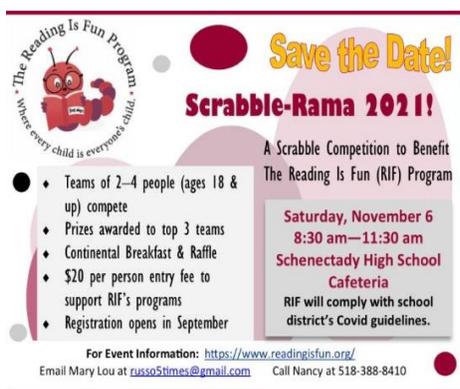
Over the summer, we will have unfettered access to the library (us worker bees, that is) so we can get it spruced up for the fall – refiling those “mobile” volumes, labeling and filing the new books and games we're receiving as a result of the grant from the Broughton Foundation, generally getting things back to “normal”. And, when we do get back to “normal”, the RIF Library cell number is **518-986-3156**. Also, if you haven't done so already, please let Mary know how many books you eventually gave to your students. An estimate is fine. This will help us in planning for the future. A quick email to Mary will suffice, at [readingisfunabc123@gmail.com](mailto:readingisfunabc123@gmail.com).



**RIF IN THE NEWS:** In the June 21 edition of *The Daily Gazette*, an article written by Gazette reporter Maggie Reynolds appeared with this headline: **Group Supports Reading Needs For Schenectady Students; Reading Is Fun Supplements Classroom Instruction**. Focusing on the program's mission and the reasons behind it, the article celebrates the dedication of our volunteers and what we're trying so hard to accomplish, especially in this most recent and most challenging environment. As our Founder and Executive Director Al Magid is quoted as espousing: *“We are very serious about this. We are like missionaries!”* We couldn't agree more. Thanks to volunteer and Gazette reporter Indiana Nash for helping get this piece published – and thanks to volunteer Wanda Fischer for a wonderful follow-up Letter to the Editor

(June 29 edition) in which she says: “I would also encourage others to join in as volunteers. I can assure you that it’s not only great for the students — it’s amazing for the volunteers as well.”

Here’s a link to the article: <https://dailygazette.com/2021/06/21/group-supports-reading-needs-for-schenectady-students/>. If you’d prefer a PDF version, send a request to [RIFLibrary@gmail.com](mailto:RIFLibrary@gmail.com).



**Save the Date!**  
**Scrabble-Rama 2021!**  
A Scrabble Competition to Benefit  
The Reading Is Fun (RIF) Program

- Teams of 2–4 people (ages 18 & up) compete
- Prizes awarded to top 3 teams
- Continental Breakfast & Raffle
- \$20 per person entry fee to support RIF’s programs
- Registration opens in September

**Saturday, November 6**  
**8:30 am—11:30 am**  
**Schenectady High School**  
**Cafeteria**  
RIF will comply with school district’s Covid guidelines.

For Event Information: <https://www.readingisfun.org/>  
Email Mary Lou at [russo5times@gmail.com](mailto:russo5times@gmail.com) Call Nancy at 518-388-8410

**UPDATES ON SCRABBLE-RAMA AND JAMBOREE:** The confirmed date for **SCRABBLE-RAMA** is Saturday, November 6, 2021 between 8:30 to 11:30 a.m. at Schenectady High School. This is a fundraiser to benefit The Reading Is Fun Program. Create a team of 2-4 players. Each team brings their own Scrabble board and tiles. Three games are played and teams compete for 1st, 2nd and 3rd place cash prizes. Continental breakfast is served and chances to win great raffle items can be purchased. Look for more information to be posted on the RIF website: [www.readingisfun.org](http://www.readingisfun.org).

The **GRAND READING JAMBOREE 2022** will be held at Schenectady High School on Saturday, March 26, 2022 from noon until 4 p.m. Please continue to check the website: [www.readingisfun.org](http://www.readingisfun.org) for additional information.

#### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- **Need reimbursement for postage when mailing books to students?** Take a picture of the receipt and send a copy of the receipt to [readingisfunabc123@gmail.com](mailto:readingisfunabc123@gmail.com); or you can mail a physical copy of it to: The Reading Is Fun Program, P.O. Box 9437, Schenectady, NY 12309.
- **Who Do I Contact?** If you need help with anything, the general rule of thumb on who to go to with questions is:
  - Valerie Rivera: [rifvolunteerplacements@gmail.com](mailto:rifvolunteerplacements@gmail.com) for teacher contact & volunteer info;
  - Deb Carey: [mydierks@gmail.com](mailto:mydierks@gmail.com) for ideas on how to work with students;
  - Mary Crimp-Batzinger: [readingisfunabc123@gmail.com](mailto:readingisfunabc123@gmail.com) for book and library assistance.
  - Larry Pierce: [riflibrary@gmail.com](mailto:riflibrary@gmail.com) for technical & computer assistance, and book labels.
- **Schenectady School Calendar:** [check here in the fall!](#)
- Visit RIF’s webpage at [www.readingisfun.org](http://www.readingisfun.org) and follow us on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/ReadingIsFunProgram/>. You can get the most up-to-date information about RIF and share your experiences, tips and best practices as a seasoned or brand-new volunteer.
- If you haven’t done so already, ask to be added to the RIF Volunteers Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1644298179159483>

- Get to know our leadership team and contact them at any time by going to: [www.readingisfun.org/contact-us](http://www.readingisfun.org/contact-us)
- Send us an email at any time with questions or comments to [readingisfunabc123@gmail.com](mailto:readingisfunabc123@gmail.com)

We welcome your feedback about this newsletter. Let us know what kind of information you'd like to see in future editions.

