



Young Readers Initiative

Young Readers One Book South Dakota
Young Readers Festival of Books



Author Kate DiCamillo addresses young readers at South Dakota's inaugural Young Readers Festival of Books in Sioux Falls. She was the author of the 2014 Young Readers One Book South Dakota, which helped launch the SDHC's Young Readers Initiative. Photo by Emily Spartz/Argus Leader (Sioux Falls)

Nomination for the 2015 Helen and Martin Schwartz Prize

The South Dakota Humanities Council *Young Readers Initiative* has developed into a multi-faceted, ongoing project to stop summer reading loss, connect young readers with authors, and foster a love for reading and writing.

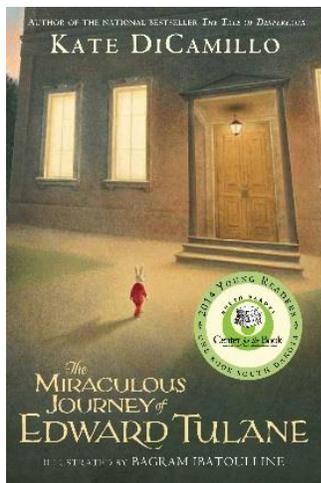
To reach new audiences and target South Dakota's most impressionable demographic—our youth—the South Dakota Humanities Council created the *Young Readers Initiative*. We have a history of humanities programming in schools and libraries to target young people; however, our partners, new and old, felt a sense of urgency to create a culture that embraced reading. This urgency propelled literary

programming to new heights and new audiences. It also established new partnerships, all concentrated on one goal: stopping summer reading loss in South Dakota youth.

Loss of reading skills accumulated during the school year over the summer break, also known as the summer slide, is particularly detrimental to low-income families without home libraries or access to books. Book ownership empowers youth and encourages out-of-school reading.

Through our youth initiative, we have increased the number of educational humanities programs and, more so, the effectiveness of those programs. By putting books into kids' homes, we connect readers with writers and take a unique approach to improving literacy and effectively stopping summer reading loss.

Background – Young Readers One Book and Festival of Books



Since 2003, the South Dakota Humanities Council has sponsored an annual One Book South Dakota program, which provided the template for a similar program for youth. A partnership with independent children's books publisher Candlewick Press helped launch South Dakota's first-ever Young Readers One Book. With guidance from elementary teachers and librarians, we selected *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane* by Kate DiCamillo. Candlewick worked with us to print a special edition, and 3,000 third-graders throughout eastern South Dakota received those books.

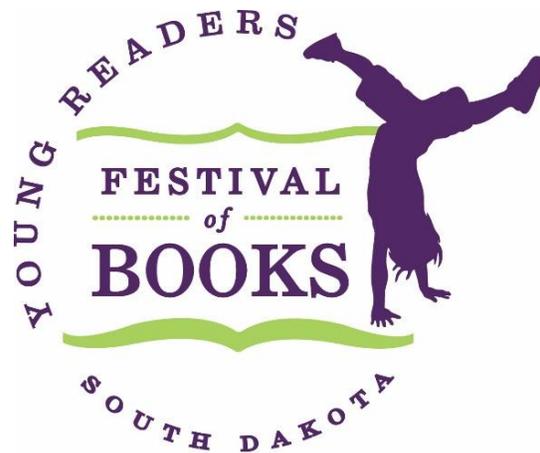
With our One Book South Dakota program, the council requires the One Book author to appear at the South Dakota Festival of Books. We held the same standards for the Young Readers One Book author. While we waited for confirmation of DiCamillo's appearance at the Young Readers Festival of Books, she was named the Library of Congress' 2014-15 National Ambassador for Young People's Literature and won her second Newbery Award. We knew we were fortunate to launch our Young Readers Initiative with her.

With DiCamillo's Festival appearance confirmed, the groundwork was laid for what would become the first-ever South Dakota Young Readers Festival of Books. Then, a

local funding partner suggested we partner with the Children’s Museum of South Dakota. The museum enthusiastically agreed to sponsor and host the events, and the stage was set.

We host the South Dakota Festival of Books in alternating years on opposite sides of the state to encourage participation from as many South Dakotans as possible. In order to maximize the demographics and reach of our Young Readers Initiative, we planned to do the same for those activities. In 2014, we concentrated on communities on the east side of the state, and in 2015, we are reaching those on the west side. This will ensure that all our young people, especially those previously underserved, have access to educational programming.

We are proud of the resources we bring to South Dakota and of the way we leveraged our connections to address a gap and increase youth participation in SDHC programming. For starters, we ensure Young Readers events are free and open to the public. In addition, we present a varied group of presenters to engage and connect our youth.



Joining Kate DiCamillo at the 2014 Young Readers Festival were *New Yorker* cartoonist and children’s book illustrator Harry Bliss; *Hagar the Horrible* cartoonist and *The Monster Who Ate the State* author Chris Browne; and a dozen other dynamic children’s and young adult book authors and illustrators, including Avi and Ashley Wolff. In South Dakota, American Indians are our largest minority group, at 10 percent of the population. We work to include tribal voices throughout our programs, and the Young Readers Festival was no exception. The festival line-up included a slate of Native American presenters—National Humanities Medal winner Virginia Driving Hawk Sneve, Joseph Bruchac, Donald Montileaux, Kevin Locke, and S.D. Nelson.

The 2014 Young Readers Initiative significantly changed the face of our standard program participants. Through the festival and related programs, an estimated 4,000 youth gained unparalleled access to well-known writers, along with books to keep in their homes to read, reread, and share.



Native American artist and presenter Kevin Locke shares the art of the hoop dance with youth during the 2014 Festival of Books events in Brookings at the Children's Museum of South Dakota. Photo by Ashley Wolff.

Our programs exposed area youth to professional authors and illustrators, often for the first time. The initiative created a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for students to connect with others and become inspired to read and write outside of the classroom. Each component furthered a culture of reading—at school, at home, at afterschool programs and in our cultural institutions.

Involvement of new audiences

Young readers have been an underserved audience for the South Dakota Humanities Council and for the humanities fields in general. The lack of available literature in some communities and the resulting disparities in reading scores have articulated the need for humanities programming across all demographics of youth.

While our Festival of Books has always included children's and young adult authors and illustrators in both public presentations and school visits, we always felt we could engage more youth in those activities. The school district partnerships strengthened by this initiative allowed us to reach elementary students and their families directly.

In spring 2014, we gave away 3,961 books to third-graders in 12 communities throughout eastern South Dakota. The next fall, 4,617 students, teachers and librarians attended Young Readers Festival events in Brookings and Sioux Falls. We are pleased with the results of our efforts to engage those who will one day lead our state.



The 2014 Young Readers One Book South Dakota and Young Readers Festival of Books, featuring Young Readers One Book author Kate DiCamillo, carried a far reach in eastern South Dakota.

Unique or far-reaching collaborations

As news of our pilot program spread, many existing and new partners reached out to us to enhance and expand our work. After partnering with us to support book distribution and event attendance for youth in Brookings, First Bank and Trust reached out to each of their branch banks to offer the same opportunities to third-graders in their communities, and seven responded, providing books for students in their districts. South Dakota's First Lady, Linda Daugaard, felt our initiative meshed well with her focus on childhood literacy, and she found funding to support book distribution in four more communities.

The star power affiliated with an author the caliber of Kate DiCamillo reaches far beyond state borders, and SDHC reaped the benefits. National publication *Publisher's Weekly* (<http://bit.ly/10QGAT7>) mentioned DiCamillo's visit to South Dakota- "Earlier this year the South Dakota Humanities Council named *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane* (2006) as the debut selection in its debut Young Readers One Program statewide reading program, which included in the spring the distribution of more than 2,000 special-edition copies of Edward Tulane to third graders in the Sioux Falls and Brookings school districts." The author also used her huge social media presence to share her exploration of the Children's Museum of South Dakota.

As a result of our new programming, we formed stronger relationships with South Dakota educational entities. In 2014, the Sioux Falls School District defined “finding cost-effective ways to encourage summer reading” as an integral initiative for 2014, and they felt our program provided strong support for that work.

“Students were enthusiastic when they received their very own copy of *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane* in May to take home and read over the summer. One Student said ‘This is the best day of my life. No, this is the second best day of my life. The best day is when she comes to visit.’”

- from the Sioux Falls School District Report, fall 2014

Ultimately, we distributed almost 4,000 special edition copies of the 2014 Young Readers One Book, providing students with a tangible tool for learning in their homes. Book ownership empowers youth, and availability of texts encourages out-of-school reading. In addition to the books given to third-graders, SDHC reached other area youth through giveaways and programs at libraries and youth organizations.

These partnerships, giveaways, and activities helped students establish and meet their summer reading goals, and the response we received from schools affirms the importance of humanities programming in our schools.

Capacity-building efforts

One of the most welcome aspects of our Young Readers Initiative was the mobilizing of new demographics, and not just for program attendance. We were able to partner with new funders and with funders from the past at a significantly increased capacity.

First Bank and Trust, a long-time funder, approached SDHC with interest in addressing the needs of young South Dakotans. Educational partners, including the Brookings and Sioux Falls School Districts, who have come to our grants program with needs in the past, became collaborators instead of grantees.

Close collaborations with multiple entities—Brookings and Sioux Falls libraries, school districts and classrooms, First Bank and Trust, the Sioux Falls Area

Community Foundation, the Children’s Museum of South Dakota, the Washington Pavilion, and an all-star line-up of 15 Young Readers authors and illustrators—drew unparalleled attention, funding, and attendance to the Young Readers Festival.

The positive attention and feedback to the first year of this initiative has proven the high level of interest from partners, new and old, in helping us continue our young readers programming long into the future.

Demonstrated sustainability

The existing programmatic structures of the South Dakota Humanities Council embraced Young Readers programming as a natural fit. We had existing structures for One Book programs but never specifically designated the program for youth beyond our youth programming at the annual Festival of Books. The Young Readers Initiative has grown our established relationships and fostered new ones across South Dakota.

Karen Schluessner, a representative from the Rapid City Public School Foundation in Western South Dakota, attended the inaugural Young Readers Festival of Books to observe events and plan for 2015 Young Readers events in western South Dakota. Relationships have been solidified and now, through a partnership with the John T. Vucurevich Foundation, the United Way of the Black Hills, and the Rapid City Public School Foundation, funding of over \$20,000 a year has been secured for a Young Readers Festival of Books in Rapid City for the next three years. As a result of those relationships, SDHC named the 2015 Young Readers One Book, a unique bind in of the first two books in Megan McDonald’s “Stink” series *Stink: Twice as Incredible*.



New partnerships with the Rapid City Public School Foundation, the John T. Vucurevich Foundation and the United Way of the Black Hills are helping to expand the SDHC's Young Readers Initiative.

Both the South Dakota Young Readers Festival of Books and the Young Readers One Book South Dakota are pilot programs created in response to opportunities

defined locally and statewide. Because of the specifically identified needs and readily available partners, these programs will continue and expand.

SDHC sees opportunities for encouraging thousands of young readers and promoting lifelong learning through these programs. Teachers, parents, community members, partners, and school and non-profit administrators share in the excitement generated for these crucial youth opportunities. These activities promote literacy and increase the number of youth involved in our Festival activities. The activities encouraged South Dakota youth to be active readers, lifelong learners, and engaged with humanities disciplines.

May 15, 2014

Dear Sherry and Humanities Council,

I am an elementary librarian at Laura B. Anderson in Sioux Falls. We are a low income school and about 45% of our students are in the English as a Second Language program. I want to thank you for the gift of Edward Tulane books for our 3rd graders.

I wish members of the Council could have seen the children's reactions to the books. One class applauded when I told them about the new book. A little girl hugged the book and said, "I will keep this safe and close to my heart." One little boy said, "I didn't know new books had such a good smell, a smell that is hard to describe but must mean a good story."

So your efforts have been appreciated. I am excited for the fall and the opportunity to take the students to hear Kate DiCamillo.

Thank you again for your kindness and generosity in supporting our students.

Sincerely,



Marilyn Henderson

LBA Librarian.

Impact and Outcomes

The Young Readers Initiative was a huge success. We still hear stories of the impact of books in the hands and homes of South Dakota youth. School-administered pre- and post-tests provided data on the effectiveness of these projects, as well as youth perceptions. We were heartened to receive data we did not expect from the Sioux Falls

School District. After Young Readers events in Sioux Falls there was a six percent increase (103 individuals) in students who had a public library card. The increase in library card ownership shows that students and families are making connections between institutions. Young Readers events gave students meaningful experiences with texts and the cultural and educational institutions that provide them.

We know that increased reading time translates into higher levels of success in almost all academic areas for young people. We expect that unique collaborations not will not only encourage reading through book ownership and availability

but will also encourage authorship through opportunities to hear important and prolific writers discuss their works and techniques.

Multiple opportunities to meet and interact with both authors and their texts translate experiences into education. Unforgettable programs not only boost desire to read but sometimes offer life-altering changes in the way youth view and interact with literary art. Nearly every aspect of youth programming is set up to promote humanities education and enhance the learning experience for young South Dakotans.

In all, 15 authors—Avi, Harry Bliss, Chris Browne, Joseph Bruchac, Kate DiCamillo, Virginia Driving Hawk Sneve, Rebecca Johnson, Marilyn Kratz, Sonia Monzano, Donald Montileaux, S.D. Nelson, Jean Patrick, Tom Roberts, David Volk and Ashley Wolff—spoke, read, and interacted with South Dakota youth, providing a myriad of incredible literary opportunities.

Our *Young Readers Initiative* meets the needs of our youngest and most impressionable population and those who most dearly need educational humanities programs. We are confident that reaching young South Dakotans with high-quality programming will encourage a robust next generation of leaders and advocates for the humanities. South Dakota needs individuals raised in a culture conducive to lifelong

“This is about building a culture that values reading. That’s what makes the difference. It can’t just be the schools. It has to permeate the homes; it has to permeate the culture.”

- Ann Smith, Sioux Falls School District Federal Programs Coordinator

learning in the humanities, and SDHC is proud of our role in our state's cultural infrastructure.

The Young Readers Initiative also fit perfectly with Kate DiCamillo's mission as National Ambassador: "Stories connect us." Reading and discussing a book with classmates, family members and others

provides lasting benefits. As DiCamillo said in a Sioux Falls *Argus Leader* article, "I would love it if families read this together' Reading together creates an 'island of community and safety.' The experience deepens. The characters become part of your lives."



Youth fill the room at the South Dakota Children's Museum at the 2014 Young Readers Festival of Books.. Thousands of children in South Dakota participated in the SDHC Young Readers Initiative, creating excitement for reading and writing in our youth - one young reader at a time.