In the seven years since adopting One School, One Book, the families and staff of the Janet Kahn School of Integrated Arts in Albuquerque, New Mexico, have read 12 different books together. Terri Gaussoin, teacher librarian at JKSIA, said the program has had a profound effect on the school.

“We’ve watched as families grow with their readers,” Gaussoin said. “Our youngest kindergarteners who once had the story read to them are now the proud big brother or sister who is reading aloud to their younger siblings. Sometimes as educators we wonder if we’ve had a positive impact on our students and families. I’ve seen through personal parent responses that OSOB absolutely creates positive change.”

As a small but illustrative example, Gaussoin points to the time that a schoolwide reading inspired one student to try something new.

“A few months after reading The Trumpet of the Swan, one of our earliest reads, a former parent came to the library to speak to me,” Gaussoin said. “Her son had been a fifth grader when we began OSOB and he was now a middle school student. The mom wanted to thank me for OSOB and the book we had read. It seemed that after our schoolwide read the son had decided to learn to play the trumpet and was now a successful part of his middle school band!”

Gaussoin said OSOB helps strengthen the JKSIA community, providing an invaluable opportunity to unify the school’s students, staff and families.
“When we read the same book together it gives everyone a common language,” Gaussoin said. “Everyone knows who the characters are and we’re all wondering the same things as we share the stories and talk about what might happen in the next chapter.”

Gaussoin said school organizers keep the titles of upcoming books “very hush hush” in the build-up to the OSOB book announcement. Clues, hints, and posters appear around the school, helping to generate excitement. The school has announced the title in a variety of ways, including through school assemblies, guest performances, and even movie trailers. A recent addition to the school’s OSOB experience is a JKSIA Reads YouTube channel. Teachers and staff record themselves reading book chapters for the students.

“Students love seeing their teachers read aloud and staff readers enjoy their sudden celebrity,” Gaussoin said. “It’s a fun way to encourage reading of the story.”

Gaussoin said daily trivia during morning activities is an especially popular component of the experience for students. Students answer questions based on the previous night’s reading and bring answers to the library. Gaussoin said the trivia questions generate “an excited buzz” and “lots of discussion and finger crossing.”

“There’s nothing quite like watching the parade of students each morning who are coming to the library to turn in their answers for the daily trivia,” Gaussoin said. “From the littlest kindergartener whose teacher helped them sound out their answer to our independent fifth graders, everyone is reading!”

Gaussoin said JKSIA sees itself as “a school of readers” and OSOB has become a key piece of the school’s family literacy tradition.

“Family literacy is supported and bolstered by OSOB,” Gaussoin said. “We’re working hard to strengthen the tradition of family reading. If we can ensure that every family has access to enjoyable, quality books, we’re increasing our chances of success. Every family, every child reading together, that’s our goal -- OSOB helps us get there.”
A former student at Berlin Intermediate School in Berlin, Maryland helped the school celebrate its enthusiasm for the OSOB program and build excitement for future schoolwide reading projects with a striking new mural.

Zach Davis, who now attends Salisbury University, painted a mural this summer that illustrates scenes and themes from the novels Wonder, by R.J. Palacio, and Fish in a Tree, by Lynda Mullaly Hunt, according to an article in The Dispatch newspaper. Berlin Intermediate students read Wonder last year for OSOB, and they read Fish in a Tree this fall for the program. The two-panel mural, which sits in the school’s main hallway, quickly attracted attention from student passers-by when school opened, according to The Dispatch.

Ryan Cowder, principal of Berlin Intermediate, was at a Worcester County Board of Education meeting in May when Davis was honored for his artistic talent. Berlin Intermediate is an arts immersion school, meaning it infuses art into its curriculum to enhance learning. Cowder saw an opportunity and asked Davis to create a mural related to OSOB. Carolyn Mitrecic, reading resource teacher at Berlin Intermediate, brought OSOB to the school last year.

Davis, who studies graphic design and photography, accepted, citing an eagerness to give back to a school system that had inspired him to pursue art. Davis read both Wonder and Fish in a Tree to prepare for the mural and consulted with Cowder to identify scenes that exemplified the books. For Fish in a Tree, Davis chose a scene to highlight the importance of being oneself. For Wonder, Davis highlighted the theme of kindness while depicting the protagonist’s love of space.

“It was an interesting learning experience,” Davis told The Dispatch. “It was incredible to work on it. Art can really send important messages.”

Cowder said he planned to ask Davis to add a panel to the mural each year when a new book was selected for the school. Davis is eager to add more scenes to his work.

“It was incredible to work on it,” Davis said. “I’m excited for what books come next.”

Students and staff created a beautiful, multi-colored display to showcase their Fish in a Tree celebration.

Knowledge is power! Winners of Berlin Intermediate School’s Fish in a Tree trivia competition post with their prizes in front of their school’s book themed mural.

Lynda Mullaly Hunt @LynMullaly... I love this so much! Thank you :). I wish I could teleport in and thank you in person! But I must admit to also being jealous as I have always wanted to be able to read Fish in a Tree in Español 😜

Author Lynda Mullaly Hunt tweeted praise for students who read her book, Fish in a Tree, in both English and Spanish.
Author Spotlight with Asia Citro, Author of Zoey and Sassafras

Asia Citro is a former science educator who writes books that wed her love for science and storytelling. In her Zoey and Sassafras series, a young girl uses science to help injured magical creatures. The first book in the series, Zoey and Sassafras: Dragons and Marshmallows, is a Read to Them Intro Titles selection.

What interests you about writing for younger readers?
I love writing for kids because they have the best imaginations! Zoey and Sassafras is wholeheartedly based on something I would have LOVED to happen to me in elementary school. I mean, can you imagine getting to take care of baby dragons and merhorses in your free time? It would have been the best.

Why do young readers respond so readily to the science education integrated into your stories?
Young children are natural scientists, but the traditional way of teaching science often makes it seem like the only accomplished scientists are adults in white coats squirreled away inside big laboratories. I have my master’s in science education and because of that I really wanted to showcase inquiry (kid-led) science in the books. I think kids really enjoy seeing a capable child-scientist who’s working in the real world -- often with materials they can get their hands on, too!

What has been the most rewarding part of finding an audience with your books?
Oh, every bit of interaction with my readers has been the most rewarding piece of writing for kids -- hands down. Their sweet letters, photos, and artwork are just the very best. It’s so wonderful when any child connects with my books, but it’s exceptionally special when my book is “the one” that inspires a kid to really fall in love with reading.

What was the inspiration for the Zoey and Sassafras series?
There are several threads of inspiration that came together to form the idea for this series. First, my daughter was just venturing into chapter books and I wanted to write a series she'd fall in love with. Second, as a former classroom science teacher, I recognized that chapter books were a perfect venue for showcasing inquiry science. And finally, Zoey does what my daughter and I aspire to do -- help magical creatures. I really think we'd excel at it so if anyone finds any injured magical creatures and would like to send them our way to test out my theory we're ready at any time!

Were you a big reader as a child? Which books most inspired you?
Absolutely. So much so that my parents have many, many stories of having to pry me away from books to play outside, go to school, or go run errands. My natural state of being as a child was with my nose in a book. It's so hard to pick favorite books, but I think probably Judy Blume, Roald Dahl, and Beverly Cleary were three solid inspirations to become an author someday.

What projects are you excited about right now?
Right now I'm gearing up to start writing Zoey and Sassafras #7. I'm also working on finishing up my first picture book, Pigeon Math. I can't wait to share both with you all sometime next year!
Dianna MacPherson, school librarian at Beaverdam E.S. in Beaverdam, Virginia, recently shared with us how her school gave students leadership responsibilities in the OSOB program as part of building excitement for a book reveal.

At Beaverdam Elementary, we focus on leadership by looking for new ways that students can take charge of their own learning. Integrating leadership into OSOB was a natural way to get the students and adults excited while focusing on real-world problem-solving. Students served on committees that included Library Promotions (put up posters and talked up OSOB), Super Secret Actors (acted, did props for kickoff skit) and Display Case Decorators (brainstormed decorations and worked with staff and faculty on items to include).

The OSOB committee of adults wrote the initial kickoff skit for The Lemonade War, by Jacqueline Davies, based loosely off ideas from Read to Them. Student actors were not told the title of the book until the kickoff reveal. They also were sworn to secrecy and told that we would not confirm or deny the titles to any books they guessed. We intentionally selected a variety of students who had not previously been enthusiastic readers to get them more involved and invested in the outcome.

The students on each committee knew that the book had something that went along with competing sales stands. They brainstormed car washes, cookie sales, bake sales, pet grooming parlors, etc. Each group designed and decorated a different set of competing sales areas. There were car wash signs and supplies in the front display cases in the library. There were scout troop cookie sales displays as part of the kickoff skit background. Throughout the halls of the school, signs and hints piqued curiosity and interest.

Finally, on the day of the kickoff, all of the faculty and staff wore yellow. You can just imagine a sea of yellow in the auditorium. Our student actors and stage crew presented their skit about competing cookie sales, ending by saying, “You should synergize and work together. It’s not like it’s a WAR or anything.” That was the cue for one of our teachers to say, “What if it was a war? Instead of a cookie war, it could be…. a lemonade war!” The kids cheered!

Involving the students in the planning and presentation has been simply our BEST idea for boosting excitement and involvement.
Tammy Riggs, Principal
Colonial E.S., Blue Ridge, VA

Daily announcements on the intercom are essential. Daily Facebook posts were a huge part of why ours was such a big hit. We invited parents to post pics of them reading with their children and many of them did and loved it! We also posted pics of teachers and staff members reading the book. In addition, we posted a daily trivia question from the reading from the night before and gave students all day to put their answer in and drew one name out the following day. If their name was drawn out, they received a gift certificate for a free book from our upcoming book fair.

Jennifer Stacy Biggers, Literacy Specialist
Walnut Ridge E.S., Walnut Ridge, AR

One of the most important elements in implementing OSOB is creating an exciting environment from start to finish. We really work hard to not only build the anticipation before the big reveal, but to maintain that level of enthusiasm throughout the reading. From our big reveal of the decorated stage, OSOB t-shirt, and title of the book to our daily drawing of prizes, we try to keep students excited about the book and nightly reading. Students look forward to wearing their OSOB t-shirt on the designated day each week and going to the stage during recess to pick a prize when their name is drawn. As we near the conclusion, they cannot wait to see what we have planned for the culminating activity.

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