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## Holiday Reading Challenge motivates Covington's young readers to improve their reading skills

Nov 27th, 2021 · 0 Comment

If past participation is any indication of the voracious appetite and competitive spirit of Covington's young readers and pre-readers, then it's not a stretch to say that there was a robust "game on" declared when the 2021 Mayor's Holiday Reading Challenge kicked off this past Sunday.

And there are big prizes at stake.

Last year, by the end of the 2020 Mayor's Holiday Reading Challenge, 720 young readers had read 5.3 million words in nearly 7,800 books and had participated in more than 18,100 skill-building games through the Read Ready Covington literary initiative's free apps.

"It was stunning how engaged those students were in improving their reading skills," Covington Mayor Joe Meyer said. "This reading challenge produces the exact energy that Read Ready Covington strives to foster."

This year's challenge runs until Dec. 31. It's open to all Covington children Pre-K through third grade who are enrolled in the CleverKidsUniversity (ages 2 to 5) and Footsteps2Brilliance (ages 5 to 8) bilingual apps. The challenge is offered through Read Ready Covington, or RRC.

"With sustained active participation, we hope kiddos develop deep literacy practices and strong learning habits that lead them to more opportunities and a really hopeful vision of their future," said Mary Kay Connolly, the City's director of Early Literacy Initiatives who coordinates RRC.

Five grand-prize winners will emerge from this year's challenge – one from each grade level — based on the amount of time they spend on literacy apps, reading the books, and completing the comprehension and skill-building exercises. They'll each receive a new iPad and a prize package that includes games, storybooks, activities, and treats — all valued at \$500. The three highest-participating classes and their teachers will also receive a surprise reward from the City.

In addition, each week throughout the challenge, a raffle winner will be selected from the pool of students who are averaging at least 15 minutes a day, five days a week, using Footsteps2Brilliance or CleverKidsUniversity. Families are reminded that each child is to use their own account and must upload all activity to the internet by Sunday of each week to be eligible.

Ultimately, Connolly said, the key to reading success – and overall school success – is a "community" of readers.

"We want many more Covington children to master grade-level reading by end of third grade," Connolly said. "This will not happen without all of us working together to make literacy a high community value."

Connolly said local businesses can help that effort by displaying reading challenge signs, encouraging employees to read with children, and donating toward items for prize baskets.

RRC's foundation is the use of bilingual apps provided free for Covington parents that provide activities and reading exercises for kids and help parents introduce reading skills to their young children.

RRC also organizes literacy events in housing communities, solicits donations of books to give out, and has installed several sets of metal signs around Covington displaying letters of the alphabet that are "collected" by young children as part of a literacy scavenger hunt. Stop by the public library or City Hall to pick up the companion "Passport" booklet that also includes maps to all 5 A-Z Word Walks.

*City of Covington*



(Photo from Read Ready Covington)