

Exciting Young People into Reading: A Multicultural Approach



In collaboration with **Timothy Sullivan**, Library Media Specialist at Bulkeley High School, **Nella Szilagy**, Librarian at Wethersfield High School, and young adult author **Susan Nadathur**, we propose a state-wide initiative to get Connecticut young people excited about reading. And what better way to get them excited than to provide quality literature that focuses on diversity.

Program Objectives:

- To promote a love of literature and inspire young people to become readers and writers
- To encourage diverse points of view through multicultural literature
- To provide books that are relevant to young people's experiences in the world today
- To engage vulnerable and hard to reach young people in society, developing confidence, self-esteem, and relationships with peers through reading

Proposed Activities:

- **School Visits** during which young adult author Susan Nadathur will share stories and poems written by young people and established writers from diverse cultures. She will then engage in multimedia activities related to a select list of multicultural books.
- **Guest Visits** from distinguished invited speakers, such as the honorable mayor **Pedro Segarra**, who will be encouraged to share his success story of growing up in Puerto Rico to becoming the mayor of the city of Hartford, among other esteemed guests
- **Video Sharing** between high school students from la Escuela Leonides Morales Rodriguez in Lajas, Puerto Rico, and students from Wethersfield and Bulkeley High Schools. Students will share (in both Spanish and English) what it is like to grow up on the island, in the city of Hartford, and in one of Hartford's suburbs as well as ideas on the books they've read, the music they listen to, and the goals they have for their lives.
- **Exchange visits** between students in Hartford, Wethersfield, and Puerto Rico (rewarded to those who are identified as top readers in a multicultural reading challenge)

Sample Assembly Activities:

- Multimedia presentations on American youth culture (to include African-American, Asian-American, Latin American, Native American and others)
- How music comes alive in literature and samples of music from various cultures
- How reading can help us to look beyond ourselves by seeing others more clearly
- How a good book can help us to dream, to scream, and to heal

Sample Multicultural Young Adult Books:

- *American Eyes: New Asian-American Short Stories for Young Adults* (Holt, 1994)
- *An Island Like You* (Puffin, 1996)
- *Cool Salsa: Bilingual Poems on Growing up Latino in the United States* (Fawcett Juniper, 1994) and *Red Hot Salsa: Being Young & Latino in the U.S.* (Henry Holt, 2005)
- *Dante's Kiss* (Azahar Books, 2014)
- *Moccasin Thunder: American Indian Stories for Today* (Harper Collins, 2005)
- *The First Part Last* (Simon & Schuster, 2010)

Our Financial Goals and Challenges:

- That all speakers be provided with the appropriate honorariums
- That all participating students be provided with one free book relevant to their ethnic and/or cultural background (to include religious, socio-economic, and sexual diversity)
- That a collection of children's and young adult books (new and used) be donated and shipped to schools in Puerto Rico who have scant or non-existent library resources
- That part of the travel costs associated with cultural exchange visits be supplemented beyond what students are able to raise from their own fund-raising activities

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