

Reading. For Life.



**LITERACY**  
N A S S A U

Literacy Matters is a recurring publication of Literacy Nassau, Inc.

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## MEET OUR FREEPORT CO-TEACHERS

(by Janice Collins & Linda Ivans, ESL Teachers)

We are Janice and Linda, co-teachers at the Freeport Memorial Library. Janice, a retired NYC teacher, has been with LN since 2013. She always loved teaching Language Arts and Reading and has taken many classes related to phonemic awareness and reading. She is interested in language acquisition and is determined to teach her 16 month old grandson good grammar and reading skills at an early age.

Having immigrant grandparents has prompted Janice to work with adults. They, like many people in the early 1900's, faced formidable hardships compounded by a language barrier here in New York. Like our students today, they were good people who wanted a better life for themselves and their families. There must have been people to help her grandparents so she is happily extending a hand to others today.

Linda is also a retired school teacher. She taught children with special needs. Now in her 4th year with LN, she always loved teaching and enjoys working with adult learners. Teaching her students to learn English requires patience and repetition.

She enjoys using many "hands on" activities to engage students in her class. Our students who attend evening class have worked a full day. They benefit from a multi-sensory approach to engage and help break up the three hour classes. This assists with teaching grammar, vocabulary, and conversational skills. The students enjoy art, music, food, and role playing. We use

videos, songs, and games to encourage English language development. They enjoy learning about the culture, customs, and history of the United States.

Our students come from many countries and have diverse educational, cultural and economic backgrounds. While they all want to improve their language skills, they each have their own individual goals and reasons for wanting to learn English. We have a very friendly class that helps each other, laughs and talks among themselves. Many of them understand some English but become anxious when they need to reply in English. The students are juggling jobs, families, and the challenges of adjusting to a new culture, yet they arrive ready to learn and we try to do everything we can to help them. As co-teachers, we discuss lessons, materials and ideas a few times per week. Having two perspectives in the classroom allows us to better support our students as they navigate the complexities of a new language. The students are given independent work that we review the following class. We share a Google classroom platform so that we can keep our lessons and materials organized and at our fingertips. During class we always walk around to have them read something back to us so that the students who may be reluctant to speak out in front of a group are heard by us. We share a WhatsApp group wherein they check in with us and sometimes just say hi. One of our students moved to Texas. She has been in touch through WhatsApp and it

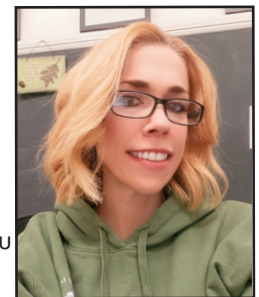
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## FROM THE CORNER OFFICE

Hi everyone,

Spring is a time to shed that which no longer serves you. In the spirit of this, I chopped off all my hair recently. If you've known me for awhile, you know that I've never had short hair, so this was actually kind of a big deal. But as I've gotten older, my hair began changing, thinning in spots, and started to make me feel uncomfortable. I grew anxious at the thought of cutting it: who would I be without my long hair? Eventually, I bit the bullet. And you know what? It feels amazing to shed the old skin and step into my new self.

What can you let go of this spring? What no longer serves you? Be brave about it. A newer, better you is right around the corner.



Karen 😊

## WELCOME ROBERT CASTORA

(submitted by Karen Micciche, Executive Director)

Rob Castora is a payments card professional with 18 years of experience, bringing deep technical expertise across multiple disciplines. His skill set includes desktop support, website design, hobbyist video production, and photography—allowing him to bridge the gap between technology and creative storytelling. He has traveled extensively to industry trade shows, where he has demonstrated point-of-sale (POS) products, showcasing their capabilities and helping clients understand real-world applications.



In addition to his professional background, Rob has a deep love for national parks and a strong passion for nature, preservation, and helping others. He is committed to lifting people up and supporting anyone in need. He is a member of a writers group called Writers Bloc, where he continues to develop his voice and engage in creative expression.

Throughout his career, Rob has actively contributed to Cultural Change Committees at several organizations. He has led volunteer initiatives such as service days at 4-H Camp, supported fundraising efforts for causes including cystic fibrosis and AIDS research, and inspired students through Junior Achievement programs. He also served for multiple years as the Cultural Arts Chairperson for his local PTA. In addition, he played a key role in organizing the DPF 4-H Camp 100th anniversary celebration. He chaired the event, built its website, and curated thousands of photos, videos, and historical artifacts—preserving its legacy and making it accessible for future generations, while giving a voice to countless young people and leaders. Rob is honored to join the board and support the mission of Literacy Nassau.

## FREEPORT CLASS (CONTINUED)

is great that we have helped her make friends here in Freeport.

Angela is a volunteer assisting in our class. She is bilingual and is able to assist when we require a Spanish translation. We are lucky to have her. Sometimes, we have combined our class with Nancy's Freeport evening class for special holidays or celebrations. We have brought both classes together for teacher created language activities about holidays and seasons. The Freeport Library staff is always helpful and we thank them for that! The two classes have gotten to know each other. Seeing the students converse in English is the ultimate testament to their progress and the welcoming atmosphere we've all worked to create.

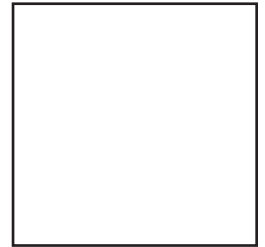


We feel that language isn't just about grammar and syntax; it's about building a community. In addition to improving their English language skills, we hope we are achieving that community building goal. Our students express their appreciation of the time we spend together after every class. They leave the room saying, "Thank you! See you next week."

## WELCOME HELENA RHEIN

(submitted by Helena Rhein, Program Coordinator)

Hi! My name is Helena and I am the new Literacy Program Coordinator at Literacy Nassau. I grew up in Nassau County, in a household that emphasized the importance of strong reading and writing abilities—skills that I continue to carry with me and have allowed me to prosper in all aspects of my life.



I speak three languages: English, Spanish, and Brazilian Portuguese, and I'm currently learning French. Growing up, no one in my family nor any of my friends spoke anything but English; although it was common to hear Spanish, I didn't understand a single word. I took classes in high school, but Spanish didn't interest me. However, during a family vacation in 2015 to Cancun, Mexico, Spanish went from words in a textbook to a real-life skill that I could use to engage with the world around me. It ignited a passion for language learning that I didn't know lived within me—so much so that I decided to minor in Spanish while pursuing my undergraduate degree at University of Delaware, which I eventually changed to my major.

My strong literacy foundation from my upbringing helped me learn to read and write in Spanish. Still, I remember how difficult it was in the beginning. It would take me two days to read through a single page; I filled books with red marks to remember the meanings of words and booked countless appointments with tutors in an effort to get a better grasp on the language. It was like learning how to read again; yet, it didn't feel like hard work since learning Spanish was something that I wanted with all my heart. Without thinking about it, I was investing hours of study time toward my language-learning goals—and that investment had an incredible payout. Towards the end of my senior year, I was offered a spot in the University of Delaware's MA in Spanish Languages, Literatures, and Cultures, by the end of which I had read over 50 novels in Spanish, among them, *Don Quixote*, *100 Years of Solitude*, and *The House of the Spirits*.

While studying Spanish in college, I took it upon myself to learn Brazilian Portuguese as well. This mainly took place in 2020, while stuck inside during the COVID-19 pandemic, using Duolingo. I treated Duolingo like a textbook; it taught me new vocabulary words that I used to write sentences prompted to me within the app. I used this in combination with YouTube, where I watched travel vlogs for listening practice. Today, I consider myself fully fluent in Portuguese and have spoken it while traveling across the world from Brazil, to Portugal—to Ireland, if you can believe that. (Who knew there was a sizable Brazilian population in Ireland?!)

My literacy skills and love for language have led me to pursue a career working with the ESL population, and I am excited to do so as part of the Literacy Nassau team. I look forward to working with a network of volunteers, teachers, and students across Long Island, and continuing to promote literacy and English language learning. I'm a firm believer that anyone can learn to read or write any language as long as they use their study materials in a way that entertains them and keeps them engaged.

# OUR NEXT CHAPTER BOOK CLUB PROGRAM

(submitted by Jenelle Torem, Program Assistant)

## **The Next Chapter Book Club: Building community, confidence, and connection through reading.**

Across libraries, cafes, and cozy corners of Nassau County, something powerful is happening each week. For a wonderful, yet brief time, adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities are gathering to read, laugh, learn, and connect as a part of The Next Chapter Book Club (NCBC), a program dedicated to lifelong reading, authentic inclusion, and joyful community engagement.

NCBC offers adults 18 and older a welcoming space to strengthen their reading skills, build friendships, and grow more comfortable and confident interacting in public spaces. Meetings take place in open, community based locations because the heart of the program is inclusion. Members read together, with the assistance of amazing facilitators, helpful discussions about the stories, share life updates, and practice social skills in real world environments where they are seen, heard, valued, and celebrated.



This Next Chapter Book Club is led by our dedicated facilitators, Stephanie and Trish. They meet weekly at Panera Bread to read and connect with friends in a welcoming environment. We are very grateful to all of our facilitators for their ongoing commitment to this program.

### **A Space where EVERY voice matters**

Each meeting is different, but they tend to start with simple open ended questions that help members warm up and express themselves to establish a level of comfort. When asked what kinds of books they enjoy, the answers range from stories about adventure, mysteries, and stories that make them laugh out loud. One member said they enjoy "books with characters who feel like friends", another member shared that they enjoy "a good mystery that makes you wonder."

These conversations naturally lead to more interesting reflections. When asked what made them smile this week, members mentioned everything from spending time with family, going to work, and looking forward to the book club itself. These small moments reveal something big: NCBC isn't just about reading; it's about belonging.

### **Choosing Stories and Sharing Stories**

Members also love having a say in what the group reads next. When asked what book they would choose, suggestions range from graphic novels to fantasy adventures to classics. Their choices reflect their personalities, interests, and imaginations. They spark lively discussion that help members practice decision making and communication skills.

### **What makes this group special**

Conceivably the most meaningful question asked was: What makes this group special to you? The responses were heartfelt and some surprised the facilitators. Some of them shared their feelings and made comments such as: "It makes me happy.", "I learn new things all the time.", "I like being with my friends."

These simple statements capture the essence of NCBC. It's a place where adults of all reading levels can fully participate, contribute their ideas, and feel supported by friends and facilitators. The group becomes a circle of encouragement; a place where members can cheer on each other, celebrate progress, and share in the joy of reading.

### **A Chapter of Gratitude**

As NCBC continues to grow, so does the impact of its facilitators. They are the storytellers, the organizers, the encouragers, and the steady presence that keeps the club thriving. Many facilitators bring their own supplies, adding personal touches that make the group feel warm and welcoming. Their work reminds us that inclusion isn't passive, it's something we create through intention, compassion, and community.



Thanks to these dedicated volunteers, NCBC becomes more than a book club, it becomes a place where adults with developmental and intellectual disabilities can grow, socialize, and shine. Their care is the quiet force that makes each chapter meaningful. We are always looking to add new members to our Next Chapter Book Clubs. If you know anyone who is interested in joining as a member or facilitator, please have them reach out to Helena at Literacy Nassau. We have a NCBC Tutor Training Workshop for new facilitators at our office on Thursday, June 11th at 6:30pm. Call us at (516) 867-3580 to attend this training.



Our book club members at the Hillside Library.



NCBC Facilitator Rachel with her members at the Great Neck library.



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## **ORTON-GILLINGHAM CLASSROOM EDUCATOR VIRTUAL TRAINING**

This training is for educators teaching in a general education classroom setting.

- The coursework provides teachers with the basic content knowledge of research-based explicit language instruction as well as the delivery of instruction aligned with Orton-Gillingham Principles.

**Dates:** Fridays from 9:00am-4:00pm (EST)  
July 10, 17, 24, 31 and August 7  
Includes practicum in your classroom after completing coursework. 50 lessons; 2x week for 8 months and 5 observations

**Pricing:** \$950 due at registration; \$150 monthly beginning in September until end of practicum

**To request an  
application go to:**

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