

## READ TO ME THURSDAYS P.S. 207 Bronx, New York

**R**ead to Me Thursdays, a partnership between P.S. 207 and Marble Hill Community Senior Center, benefited second-grade students. Marble Hill seniors were already involved in a monthly sing-a-long with students at a neighborhood preschool. They broadened their community support by becoming reading partners at the elementary school.

The new principal of P.S. 207 wanted to find additional ways to partner with the community. Literacy, Inc. (LINC), a partner with the school, gave a presentation to the senior center to recruit volunteers. Parent leaders of P.S. 207 also helped recruit parent volunteer reading partners. LINC conducted training on reading strategies for the senior and parent volunteers. Teachers then chose 10 second-grade students to participate in Read to Me Thursdays.

The next step was to help the seniors feel comfortable in the classroom designated for the program. On the first day of Read to Me Thursdays, second graders welcomed the volunteers. A group read-aloud and sing-a-long were included to set the tone. Children introduced themselves, sharing their interests and hobbies with their reading partner. At the end of the first day, the second graders escorted the seniors out of the building with a resounding, "Thank you for coming." From that point on, the reading partners met with

their students every Thursday for 90 minutes.

Snacks were always available, and gifts were given on holidays like Valentine's Day. The students hosted a thank-you celebration complete with cake and a poem written by the children for their reading partners.

P.S. 207 decided to start with a small number of volunteers so that they could learn what worked best from the first group of volunteers. They also knew it was vital to develop a clear and concise strategy to show the importance of this collaboration. Senior citizens are a fragile group of people, but are a vital part of the community. They are the foundation of all families—and should be told so repeatedly.

Students learned to respect and love their senior reading partners. They looked forward to their reading time together on Thursdays. Students asked their parents to read to them at home more often. One of the seniors noted, "I can see a difference in the child's reading from when I first started to this point—her reading is so much better." Another person said, "Watching the seniors and second graders reading together is so soothing."

The program will recruit more seniors in September. A partnership with senior citizens can make any program successful.

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