

Readapalooza

*Orchard Hills School
Milford, Connecticut*

For one week in the middle of each year, students at Orchard Hills School recharge their batteries and lift their energy level by celebrating reading and writing with Readapalooza. During this week, students, teachers, and parents engage in activities that range from themed lunches and dressing up as storybook characters to visits from local authors and the publishing of students' written work.

To kick off Readapalooza, a parent volunteer dresses up as a popular storybook character and greets children as they get off the bus, visits the cafeteria at lunch, and reads to the younger grades. Each day of the week has its own theme, such as Storybook Character Day, Poetry, Biography, Creative Writing, and Favorite Book/Character Day. Some school lunches relate to a book, such as spaghetti served in honor of the book *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs*. Local authors and illustrators visit to share their published work and tell the struggles involved with being a writer or artist—often the same struggles the students themselves face. Students read and write poetry in class, and at some point during the week the public librarian visits to discuss using library resources and obtaining a library card. Each classroom decorates a bulletin board with the class's favorite book. Because Orchard Hills School has an in-house publishing center, published student work is used to create sequencing activities for each class. The stories are cut into strips, with one sentence on each, and placed in a bag. Students take these sentence strips and try to reassemble the original story.

A parent unable to volunteer at the school during the day started Readapalooza eight years ago, and since then the PTA has worked with the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) to implement it annually. Parents plan most of the weeklong event, while school staff provides some ideas and plans classroom extensions based on the themes chosen. Two reading consultants, the media specialist, the principal, and anyone else interested in Readapalooza round out the planning committee. The PTA provides funding for the event, most of which is spent on the costume for the parent volunteer and the outside speakers. It also publicizes the event through the school newsletter, fliers, meetings, and word of mouth.

Orchard Hills School continues its Readapalooza program each year because it “is a novel way to support a love for reading and writing.” Parents have lots of opportunities to become involved with the event, from planning or reading at home to coming into the school to read a book to their child. As one parent explained, “I enjoyed Readapalooza, because I saw how excited the kids got about reading.”

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