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Friends of the Lake County Public Library

2007 Selections:

- *Into the Forest* by Jean Hegland
- *Never Cry Wolf* by Farley Mowat
- *Flush* by Carl Hiaasen
- *The Great Kapok Tree* by Lynne Cherry

2008 Selections:

- *Shadow Divers* by Robert Kurson
- *The Lightning Thief* by Rick Riordan
- *The Journey of Oliver K. Woodman* by Darcy Pattison

In 2008, Books to Bridge the Region joined with the Northwest Indiana Literacy Coalition and its affiliates to distribute “treasure bags” containing books, discussion guides and bookmarks to every school and library in our 7-county region. We continue our collaboration this year, and we gratefully acknowledge the hard work of our partners in literacy.

The views of the authors are not those of the BOOKS TO BRIDGE THE REGION committee, its funders or participating entities. You are encouraged to read the books first to determine their suitability for your family or organization. Those participating in or attending programs sponsored by BOOKS TO BRIDGE THE REGION or its participating entities agree to hold BOOKS TO BRIDGE THE REGION and such entities harmless from any illness, injury, damages, or other consequences that result from participation or attendance.

“One month in the life of one family. That’s all it was. We had traveled nearly eight thousand miles, passing through in particular but finding something priceless.”

—*The Ride of Our Lives*



3rd Annual
Northwest Indiana
reading event
for all ages!

READING GUIDE

2009 Theme:

Family Matters

Selections for three reading levels:

ADULT — *The Ride of Our Lives*

YOUNG ADULT — *The Watsons*

Go to Birmingham—1963

PICTURE/EASY — *A Day with Wilbur Robinson*



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“If my parents are indeed crazy, where does that leave me?”
— *The Ride of Our Lives*

Introduction

Books to Bridge the Region is a reading initiative for all ages encompassing seven Northwest Indiana counties: Jasper, Lake, LaPorte, Newton, Porter, Pulaski, and Starke.

Books to Bridge the Region is a collaborative effort, is not owned or managed by any one entity and does not intend to replace other area “One Read” programs. On the contrary, **Books to Bridge the Region** encourages participation in all programs that foster reading.

Goals

The goals of **Books to Bridge the Region** are to promote literacy, to create conversations among communities, and to foster critical thinking related to a topic.

Rationale

Books to Bridge the Region uses a themed approach with selections at several reading levels so that families can read together and readers of all ages can enjoy the conversations generated by these books. The books chosen for this year’s theme, “Family Matters,” portray three very different families – the Leonards, the Watsons, and the Robinsons. Each of these families finds a way to laugh, love, and grow together.

The Ride of Our Lives begins when television journalist Mike Leonard decides to combine three generations of his family for an RV trip across America. Mike, his grown children and his aging parents share memories and laughter on the road, and return home with a new sense of hope. *The Watsons Go to Birmingham – 1963* portrays an African-American family in Flint, Michigan. Ten-year-old Kenny tells of the hilarious home life of the Watson family, and a life-changing journey to visit his grandmother in Alabama. *A Day with Wilbur Robinson* introduces the Robinson family and their unusual household, busy with a quest to find Grandfather’s missing false teeth. A visit to Wilbur’s house will always be full of wacky wonders.

The books were selected for their subject matter, writing quality, and reading pleasure. We hope that participants will enjoy the books and find much to discuss with members of their families and communities.

“The next morning, the whole family gathered to wave good-bye, singing ‘Yes, We Have No Bananas,’ just like they always do. I was kind of sad to leave, but I was ready to go home for a while.”

Related Materials

Books about Families:

- A Chair for My Mother* by Vera Williams
- You See a Circus, I See...* by Mike Downs
- Bonjour, Lonnie* by Faith Ringgold
- Dumpling Soup* by Jama Kim Rattigan
- Allergic to My Family* by Liza Ketchum Murrow
- Arthur’s Family Vacation* by Marc Brown
- Moosekitos* by Margie Palatini
- Raisin and Grape* by Tom Amico
- Pictures from Our Vacation* by Lynne Rae Perkins
- Gullible’s Troubles* by Margaret Shannon

Websites related to the Robinson family:

- <http://www.williamjoyce.com/>
- <http://disney.go.com/disneyvideos/animatedfilms/meethebobinsons/>
- <http://www.harperchildrens.com/williamjoyce/homepage.htm>

Discussion Questions

- Wilbur's family is very unique. How is your family unique?
- Which member of Wilbur's family is your favorite? Why?
- The Robinsons have a pillow fight after they find Grandfather's teeth. What are some fun things you and your family do?
- What was your favorite part of the book? Why?
- Have you ever lost anything and asked your family and friends to help you? Did you find it?
- Do you have friends you like to visit? Why?
- What do you like to do with your friends?



“Wilbur and I stayed up late into the night while Uncle Art told hair-raising stories about his adventures in outer space, as the frogs played softly on their violins.”

2009 List of Titles

Adult Selection: Mike Leonard's
The Ride of Our Lives

Young Adult Selection: Christopher Paul Curtis's
The Watsons Go to Birmingham — 1963

Picture Book/ Easy Selection: William Joyce's
A Day with Wilbur Robinson

Schedule of Major Events

Friday, October 2

10:00 a.m. Time Out for Reading — Join thousands across Northwest Indiana, and “Put Your Nose in a Book!” For more information, go to www.nwliteracy.org. (Sponsored by Northwest Indiana Literacy Coalition, Hammond Reads, and other literacy partners.)

Thursday, October 22

2:00-3:00 p.m. Mike Leonard, author of *The Ride of Our Lives*, speaks to readers at Purdue University Calumet's Alumni Hall in the Student Union and Library Building (Hammond).

6:00-7:00 p.m. Author Mike Leonard gives a presentation at the LaPorte County Public Library (LaPorte).

Many area libraries will be hosting book discussions and other Books to Bridge the Region events. Contact your local library for more information, or check the full events calendar at www.books2bridge.org/calendar.htm.

“Dad was doing his best not to explode laughing. Big puffs of smoke were coming out of his nose and mouth as he tried to squeeze his laughs down. Finally he put his head on his arms and leaned against the car's hood and howled.”

—The Watsons Go to Birmingham - 1963

The Ride of Our Lives

by Mike Leonard



The Ride of Our Lives is the humorous yet deeply moving account of NBC journalist Mike Leonard's cross-country odyssey with his eccentric parents, three grown children, and a daughter-in-law. Full of ups and downs, laughs and tears, the month-long journey becomes a much larger tale of hope, persistence, and valuable lessons learned along the way.

A celebration of the ties between parents and children, as well as the unforgettable community of people one can meet across America,

The Ride of Our Lives is an inspiring narrative of self-discovery and self-fulfillment and how one unique family found blessings and simple pleasures on the road called life.

"To be trapped with my parents in a rolling tin can for a whole month would surely come at a cost, especially to my sanity. But this was payback time, and I owed a lot. You can't put a price tag on a happy childhood. It's a gift."

Awards and Reviews

"Well worth the trip." —*Chicago Tribune*

"Often laugh-out-loud funny and sometimes heartbreakingly sad."
—*St. Louis Post-Dispatch*

"Touching, hilarious ... should be required reading in every family."
—*Tom Brokaw*

"Heartfelt and whimsical ... a cross-country trek through life's lessons ... Mike Leonard is a storyteller at heart, and each anecdote punctuates the family's love, struggles, and triumphs. In short, this is one ride worth taking." —*Rocky Mountain News*



About the Author: William Joyce

William Joyce lives in Louisiana with his wife and two children. His observations about his childhood reveal how much it has influenced his work. He says, "I was raised by a congenial horde of southern screwballs. We had artists, bongo players, photographers, opera singers, actors and geologists in our family. Everyone over fifty had dentures, which were always being mixed up or misplaced. We sometimes played shuffleboard with them."

In addition to writing children's books, Joyce has also produced, television shows ("George Shrinks," "Rolie Polie Olie") based on his books, and an animated movie ("Meet the Robinsons").

Activity Ideas

- Wilbur's family eats together, tells stories together and even says goodbye to their guests together. Hold a family game night and do things together.
- Show the movie, "Meet the Robinsons," and hold a book/movie discussion.
- Have an art contest called "My Fun Family." Have kids draw something unique to their family. Display drawings on a bulletin board.
- Have children create their own stories about an imaginative family.
- Create a family reading log.
- Uncle Judlow created a brain augmenter and Cousin Lazlo created an antigravity device. Create an invention of your own and name it.
- Look over the Robinson's family tree and make your own at <http://webcontent.harpercollins.com/text/activities/pdf/0060890983.pdf>.

Author photo and cover art: courtesy HarperCollins Children's.

Text from "A DAY WITH WILBUR ROBINSON" © 1990 by William Joyce, reprinted by permission of HarperCollins Children's.

A Day with Wilbur Robinson

by William Joyce



Each family is odd in its own way, but none is as eccentric as young Wilbur Robinson's. When a friend comes to visit, he and Wilbur spend the day searching for Grandfather Robinson AND his missing false teeth.

Along the way they encounter one wacky relative after another. Uncle Art has his own flying saucer. Cousin Lazlo has an antigravity device.

It's snowing in the east wing. And somebody left the time machine on, so . . . Well, perhaps you'd care to meet the Robinsons and read what happens next!

"I'd like you to meet the Robinsons. Wilbur Robinson is my best friend, and his house is the greatest place to visit."

Awards and Reviews

Critic's Choice Award (*Publisher's Weekly*)

Good Books Prize
(Richland County Public Library, SC)

"A charming, new-fangled, old-fashioned book." —*The New York Times*

"Weirdly wonderful ... This guy has a vision all his own." —*ALA Booklist*

"Joyce is arguably the most original talent working in the children's-book field today. Who else could have created a family as endearingly wacky as the Robinsons? Joyce's style as an artist is as exuberantly zany and distinctive as his writer's imagination. Buy two copies, one for the kids and one for yourself." —*Los Angeles Times*



About the Author: Mike Leonard

Mike Leonard is a television journalist who has worked for "The Today Show" for almost 30 years. His stories about everyday life are his trademark due to the unique, creative way he pulls together his pieces.

He also works alongside his family in Picture Show Films. This production company is digital video only and has done many critically-acclaimed television shows along with other projects, including fund-raising videos and corporate training.

Leonard lives in Illinois with his wife. They have four grown children and three grandchildren.

NOTE: Mike Leonard will participate in 2009 Books to Bridge the Region events! See the Schedule of Major Events in this reading guide for dates, times and locations.

Activity Ideas

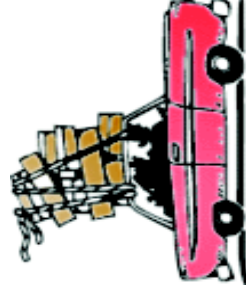
- Host a geo-caching program. (Visit www.geocaching.com for details.)
- Sponsor or attend a scrapbooking activity.
- Schools/libraries can sponsor a day trip program and talk about various activities available in your area for families to experience together.
- Rent an RV for a day and conduct a book discussion in it, or contact an RV dealership and ask about holding a *Ride of Our Lives* discussion in one of the vehicles!
- Jack has lots of good stories. Host a storytelling contest or competition between generations.
- Start recording your own family history! Host or attend a genealogy workshop.

Author photo and cover art: Courtesy Random House/Ballantine Books. Text from THE RIDE OF OUR LIVES, © 2006 by Mike Leonard; reprinted by permission of Random House.

Discussion Questions

- Mike Leonard was inspired to take his journey because of the advancing age of his parents and the increasingly adult responsibilities of his children. What made this a good time for the family members to reconnect?
- Did you watch the “Ride of Our Lives” video series on PBS? Which did you enjoy most, the book or the series? Why?
- Why do you think Jack and Marge have enjoyed such a solid marriage? Do their personality differences create a balance or do they simply enjoy being off-balance?
- How valuable was the journey to the Leonard children who participated — sons Matt and Brendan, daughter Kerry and daughter-in-law Margarita? Can you picture them taking a similar journey with their own parents and children some day?
- Mike indicates that there are many untold stories in his parents’ past — his mother’s relationship with her father, the death of Jack and Marge’s first child. Does the journey in some way help Mike find out more about these dark places in his family’s history?
- Do you identify more with Marge’s pessimism or her husband’s optimism? Which seems to be a more realistic outlook? A more desirable outlook?
- Mike tells us that he fears the passage of time. His children joke about his obsession with fitness. Does he seem like a “driven” personality?
- Mike Leonard has made a career out of observing, filming and writing about small moments in life. Do you think his observations have anything to teach us?
- The book ends with a new addition to the family. Does this give you a sense that when once journey ends, another begins? Do you feel inspired to take your own family journey?

“I was lucky. My childhood family package had it all: four boys, a nutty mother, a jovial dad, a live-in grandmother who never ratted us out...”



*“Eighteen hours in a car
can age a kid forty years.”*

Related Materials

Books about Families:

- Bud, Not Buddy* by Christopher Paul Curtis
- Love Among the Walnuts* by Jean Ferris
- Diary of a Wimpy Kid* by Jeff Kinney
- The 39 Clues: The First Clue* by Rick Riordan
- Running Out of Time* by Margaret Peterson Haddix
- A Long Way from Chicago* by Richard Peck
- Titanic Crossing* by Barbara Williams
- Granddaddy’s Gift* by Margaree King Mitchell
- A Friendship for Today* by Pat McKissack
- The Gold Cadillac* by Mildred Taylor
- One Whole and Perfect Day* by Judith Clarke
- Walking to the Bus-Rider Blues* by Harriet Gillem Robinet

Websites and resources for the Watsons:

- <http://www.nobodybutcurtis.com>
- <http://www.bookrags.com/studyguide-watson-birmingham-1963/>
- <http://www.webenglishteacher.com/curtis.html>
- <http://www.randomhouse.com/features/christopherrpaulcurtis/>

Discussion Questions

- Some kids in Kenny's school make fun of him because he's smarter than most and because of his "lazy" eye. Then they pick on Rufus because of his clothes and his Southern accent. How does the teasing affect each of the two boys? How does it feel to be made fun of?
- Byron often seems like a mean kid, and sometimes he acts as though he hates Kenny. How do you know that he has deeper, nicer feelings than those? Why do you think Byron hides his feelings of love and tenderness?
- If you have brothers and sisters, do you ever fight? What do you fight about? Do you think there will ever be a time when you don't fight?
- Why did Byron vomit after hitting the bird?
- Even though the topic is very serious, there is a lot of humor in this book. Find the scene you think is funniest and read it aloud to a friend.
- Does Byron deserve to be teased while being punished?
- How do the events in Birmingham change members of the Watson family, especially Kenny? Have you read or heard about similar events that have taken place recently?
- How would you help Byron free his lips when they become stuck to the "Brown Bomber's" side-view mirror?
- Why would Mrs. Henry, Kenny's teacher, set Kenny up as an example for other kids to emulate? How does that affect any friendships Kenny might have with students in his school?
- What qualities do you look for in a best friend? Why was it hard for Kenny to make friends? What advice would you give him about being a good friend?

"All the Weird Watsons had real good imaginations but none of us was ready for what came out of the door of that house."

"My parents have never had a problem exposing their flaws and laughing at their mistakes. Growing up in that kind of environment gave me strength."

Related Materials

Books about Families:

- Buffalo Soldier* by Chris Bohjalian
- The Center of Everything* by Laura Moriarty
- The Color of Water* by James McBride
- Digging to America* by Anne Tyler
- The Film Club* by David Gilmore
- The Glass Castle* by Jeanette Walls
- The God of Animals* by Aryn Kyle
- Heart in the Right Place* by Carolyn Jourdan
- The Rich Part of Life* by Jim Kokoris
- Run* by Ann Patchett
- The Space Between Before and After* by Jean Reynolds Page
- The Stone Diaries* by Carol Shields

Websites related to Leonard family adventures:

- <http://mikeleonard.pictureshowfilms.com>
- <http://www.pictureshowfilms.com>
- <http://rideofourlives.com>

2009 Young Adult Selection:

The Watsons Go to Birmingham — 1963

by Christopher Paul Curtis



Kenny's family is known in Flint, Michigan, as the Weird Watsons, for lots of good reasons. But Kenny does well in school and tries to meet his hard-working parents' expectations.

After a string of misdeeds, Mr. and Mrs. Watson decide that tough guy, older brother Byron must be removed from the bad influences of the city and his gang. They feel that his grandmother and a different way of life in Birmingham might make him appreciate what he has. But an unexpected event makes Kenny see his family in a new light.

About the Author: Christopher Paul Curtis



During a 13-year stint at the Fisher Body Plant #1 in Flint, Michigan, Christopher Paul Curtis began writing to get some relief from the factory noise. He was also pursuing a college degree at the same time. Eventually, he took an entire year off to write.

The Watsons Go to Birmingham — 1963 was originally composed in longhand in the Windsor Public Library Children's Room. Curtis cites his family as great influences of his writing, so it makes sense that his son typed the first drafts of *Watsons* into their home computer.

Curtis lives in Windsor, Ontario, Canada with his wife and two children.

Activity Ideas

- Explore the music that was popular in 1963, especially in the African-American community. Find recordings or lyrics for the songs mentioned in *Watsons*. What does the music tell you about the times?
- Have kids gather photos and mementos from a family vacation. Supply the materials for a scrapbooking project.
- Create a timeline from 1963 to today. Track important events and the progress our nation has made in civil rights.
- Host a program on traveling, including topics like cool places to visit in Indiana and different types of transportation. Encourage participants to tell stories about the places they've been.
- Plan a civil rights program and discuss events in 1963 Birmingham.
- Host a 1960s party or fashion show.

*Author photo and cover art: Courtesy Random House/Yeurling.
Text from THE WATSONS GO TO BIRMINGHAM—1963, © 1995 by
Christopher Paul Curtis; reprinted by permission of Random House.*

Awards and Reviews

Land of Enchantment 2000 Children's Book Award
(*New Mexico Library Association*)

Jane Addams Children's Book Award
(*Women's International League for Peace and Freedom*)

YALSA Popular Paperbacks Prize
(*Young Adult Library Services Association*)

"This story is really about the strength of family love and endurance. Ribald humor, sly sibling digs, and a totally believable child's view of the world will make this book an instant hit." —*School Library Journal*

*"I loved when Dad talked to me like I was grown-up.
I didn't really understand half the junk he was saying,
but it sure did feel good to be talked to like that!"*