

Opportunities with Literacy (OWL) Fest

Project Report

2023 OWL Fest



Opportunities
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Governor's Early Literacy Foundation was honored and grateful to partner with the Tennessee Department of Education to present Opportunities with Literacy – OWL Fest, a curated bookstore and shopping experience for 29 priority schools across Tennessee in September 2023. OWL Fest was designed to support students enrolled at priority schools by building their home libraries and fostering their motivation to read. Each school had a one-day event during which PreK-5th grade classes came to the OWL Fest “bookstore” to select from a broad collection of high-quality, high-interest, grade-appropriate titles. Each student selected six books to take home, completely free to them and their school. Each teacher was given the opportunity to order additional free resources, including a 50-book class library, magazine subscriptions, and more.



With
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OWL Fest’s design is based on literacy research. Only 40% of Tennessee 3rd graders read proficiently, which ranges from 22-38% in priority schools. A two-decade long study found that the presence of a home library increases children’s academic success, vocabulary development, attention, and job attainment. Children with as few as 25 books in the home complete an average of two more years of schooling than those with no books. Additionally, research from the Scholastic Kids & Family Reading Report™: 8th Edition shows most children (93%) are more likely to finish reading books that they have picked out themselves and that those are often their favorite books (92%), demonstrating that the student-selection feature of OWL Fest is critical to inspiring reading motivation.



Literacy
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OWL Fest was implemented over the span of three weeks, enabling strong press and volunteer engagement, as well as resource efficiency. The initiative was met with incredible support and enthusiasm from students, teachers, school/district leaders, and the community at large. It exemplified the power of books to inspire critical thinking and energize curious exploration.



“The OWL Fest Project was a great success! Seeing the students glow and excitement of selecting books and realizing that they could keep them was the highlight of my day and very heartwarming!”

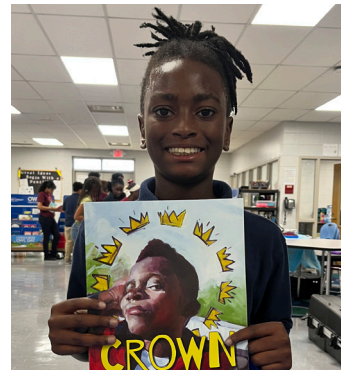
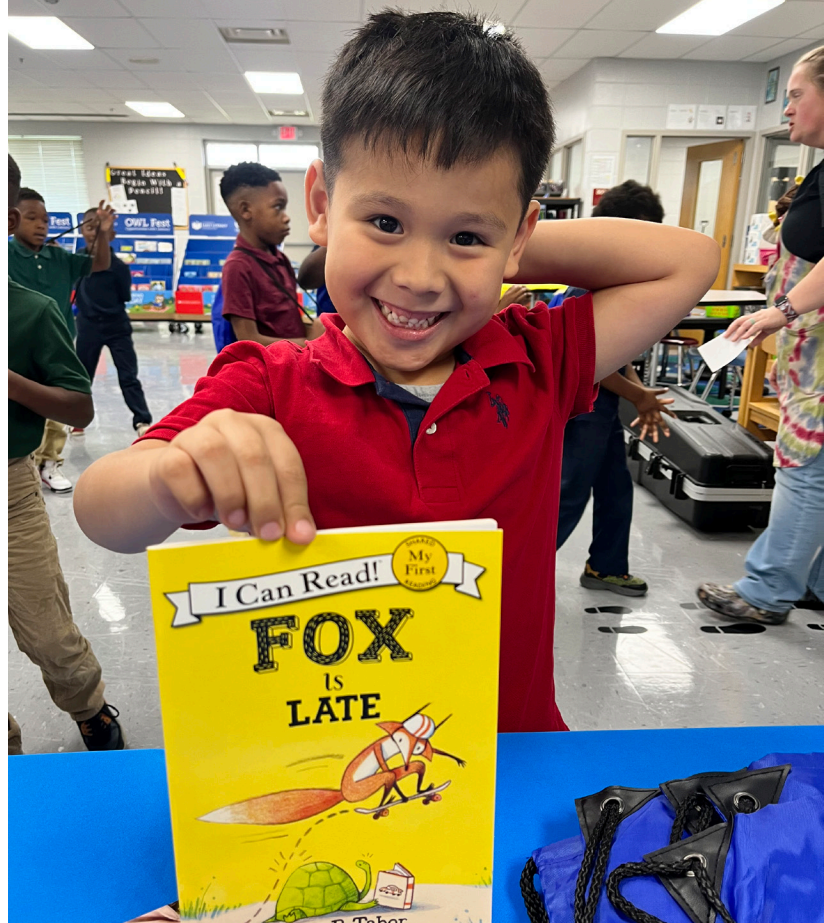
Penny Tubbs

West TN Regional Director of School Improvement



“While the statistical facts of OWL Fest can be calculated, the social impact is nearly immeasurable. The look of excitement when each child received their book set was filled with appreciation and pride. Almost as significant was the impact that the classroom sets had on teachers. This project and the gift of books and literacy will leave a lasting impression across the state for years in the future.”

Jake Bynum
Weakley County Mayor



“I couldn’t afford to purchase a set of books for my class lesson on the Titanic, and all of my students were able to get that book for free at OWL Fest.”

Teacher
Tennessee Priority School

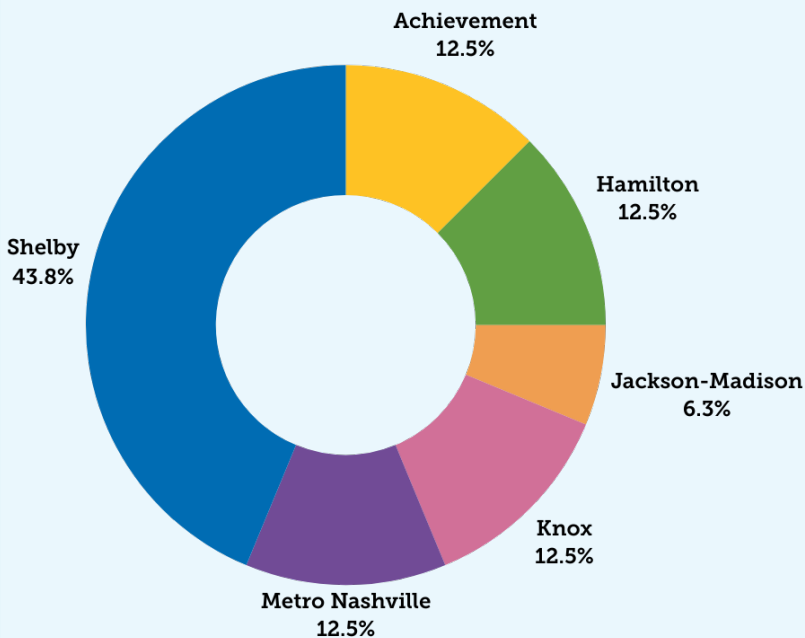




By the Numbers



30 Priority Schools



54,198 Books Selected by Children

Top 3 Titles Selected:

- 1 What If You Had Animal Teeth?
- 2 Pete the Cat Goes Camping
- 3 Fly Guy Presents: Dogs

506 Educators Served

- 486 classroom libraries (50 books each; total of **24,300 books** for Pre-K-5th grade students in their classrooms)
- **1,518 Phonics kits** (each teacher receiving three sets)

9,078 Students Served

- 709 Pre-K
- 1,343 Kindergarten
- 1,399 1st Grade
- 1,480 2nd Grade
- 1,307 3rd Grade
- 1,400 4th Grade
- 1,440 5th Grade

“Research from the Kids & Family Reading Report tells us that more than half of kids (52%) say they like attending events that involve reading at their school or in their community, making OWL Fest an important part of the reading journey for the students of Tennessee.”

Amanda Alexander
Chief Academic Officer at Scholastic



Community Involvement

Press Involvement

- 3,834 press release views
- 1,174 click throughs
- 298 total pickups
- 166.8M total potential audience

Community Involvement

- 117 volunteers
- 37 organizations who sent volunteers

"Seeing the excitement on the faces of the children was amazing. They couldn't believe they could pick out six books to keep and not have to pay. It is a reminder that little things to some, are big things to a child."

Marianne Dunavant

Ford BlueOval City Community Relations

Volunteer Engagement





Thank you TDOE!

Governor's Early Literacy Foundation is deeply grateful to the Tennessee Department of Education for the support and partnership around OWL Fest. This innovative program brought high-quality books and literacy resources to the schools and students who needed them most. OWL Fest inspired students and involved adults alike, demonstrating how foundation literacy – and the motivation to read – is to academic success. As a high-impact, low-cost program, OWL Fest proved its value for Tennessee schools. Governor's Early Literacy Foundation and our partners look forward to the opportunity to implement and expand OWL Fest in the future, with the aim to make it an annual program.

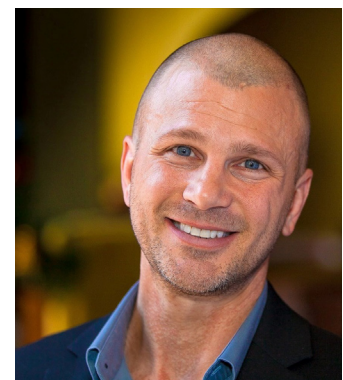
“Teaching children how to read, and how to read well, is one of the most important things we can do to set them up for success in their education, in college and career, and in life. Thanks to our partners at GELF, students across the state have access to free books through OWL Fest to help them become strong readers.”

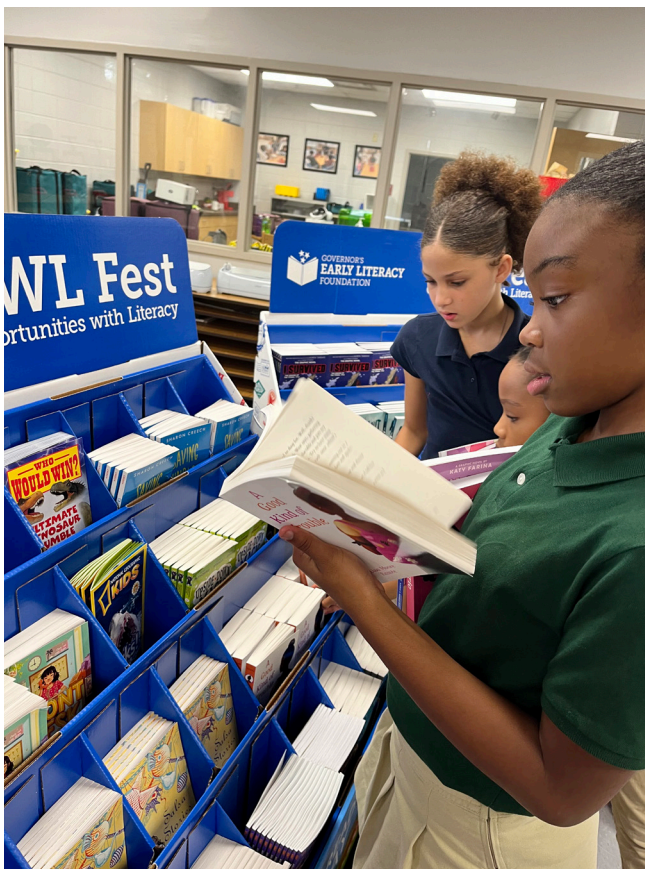
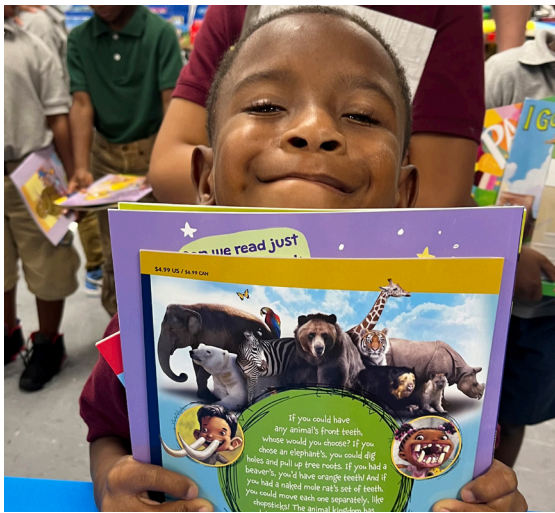
Lizzette Reynolds
Commissioner of Education



“Through OWL Fest, we are bringing a book shopping experience, without the cost barrier, to students who may not have this kind of opportunity. We want to give students the freedom to choose their books, call them their own, and get excited about reading.”

James Pond
President, Governor's Early Literacy Foundation





"I've never had six books before."

5th Grade Student
Green Magnet School

Some MSCS students get a jump on literacy with free books



Memphis-Shelby County Schools held 'Opportunities With Literacy,' or Owl Fest, at Georgian Hills Elementary Thursday.



“The school really enjoyed the OWL Fest. A lot of teachers would love this to become an annual event.”

Kristen Lockhurst

Instructional Specialist, Bellshire Design Center Elementary

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