



PEOPLE & BUSINESS

Embracing Our Differences' Reading Day is Tuesday, March 10

By [Scene](#) |

More than 7,500 elementary school students from 60 schools in Sarasota and Manatee counties will celebrate reading and diversity on March 10, through books by authors/illustrators Todd Parr and Patricia Polacco. Embracing Reading Day is the brainchild of Embracing Our Differences, a local non-profit organization that initially launched Embracing Dr. Seuss Reading Day six years ago as part of its year-round educational initiatives.

According to Ben Jewell-Plocher, EOD's education director, readings are scheduled for 440 pre-kindergarten to third-grade classrooms in 60 schools across Sarasota and

Manatee counties. To date, 280 volunteers from the community have signed up to be readers. Over the course of the day, more than 8,200 books, focused on the theme of diversity and inclusion, will be gifted to every participating student and classroom.

” Children begin to internalize messages about power, privilege, cultural and societal norms from a very young age,” says Jewell-Plocher. “Research on prejudice shows that encountering people who are different helps reduce stereotypes. For some children, a book can serve as a first introduction to a world of ‘others.’ Todd Parr and Patricia Polacco are both award-winning authors/illustrators who create heartwarming stories that offer consideration of all people and creatures and encourage conversations about diversity and respect for others.”

In 2019, this reading initiative reached 6,300 students from local elementary schools and provided more 6,500 books for students and classrooms. This massive outreach reflects a collaboration between EOD and the Suncoast Campaign for Grade-Level Reading, a joint effort supported by The Patterson Foundation, the Community Foundation of Sarasota County, United Way Suncoast and an anonymous family foundation. The program’s profound impact earned national honors when the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading recognized it as a “Best Event” at its All-America City Awards Ceremony in 2016.

The books selected for the school readings are:

- Pre-K: ***It’s OK to Be Different* by Todd Parr.** The book spreads a message of acceptance, self-confidence and individuality while celebrating diversity. Sometimes the advice is practical. “It’s okay to need some help... “It’s okay to dream BIG.” Other declarations are more fun. “It’s okay to eat macaroni and cheese in the bathtub.”
- Kindergarten: ***Rechenka’s Eggs* by Patricia Polacco.** Old Babushka, known throughout all of Moskva for her beautifully painted eggs, is preparing her eggs for the Easter festival when she takes in an injured goose. They live happily together until one day when the goose accidentally overturns a basket, breaking all of Babushka’s lovingly crafted eggs. But the next morning Babushka has a

surprise awaiting her in the basket. She cries: “A miracle!” It is one of many in this charmingly told tale of friendship and caring.

- First Grade: ***Welcome Comfort* by Patricia Polacco**. It’s not easy being Welcome Comfort, a foster child always moving from home to home and getting picked on by the kids at school. Even Christmas, the most wondrous time of the year, isn’t so wonderful for Welcome, who has no family, no presents, and no Santa Claus. But when Mr. Hamp, the school custodian, becomes his closest friend, Welcome’s life changes forever.
- Second Grade: ***Chicken Sunday* by Patricia Polacco**. After being initiated into a neighbor’s family by a solemn backyard ceremony, a young Russian American girl and her African American brothers determine to buy their grandma Eula a beautiful Easter hat. But their good intentions are misunderstood, until they discover just the right way to pay for the hat that Eula’s had her eye on. A loving family story woven from the author’s childhood.
- Third Grade: ***Lincoln’s Way* by Patricia Polacco**. Mr. Lincoln, the principal, knows that “Mean Gene” isn’t really bad—he’s just repeating things he’s heard at home. Can he find a way to get through to Eugene and show him that the differences between people are what make them special?

Since 2004, EOD’s outdoor art exhibit, celebrating the theme of “enriching lives through diversity,” showcases the art and words of thousands of artists and writers from around the world, including hundreds of area-based students and educators. Embracing Our Differences’ annual outdoor exhibits are the heart of a year-round program of activities designed to use art as a catalyst to create awareness and promote diversity. **The 2020 exhibit continues through April 5 at Bayfront Park in Sarasota.** *For more information about Embracing Our Differences, call 941-404-5710 or visit www.embracingourdifferences.org.*