

MEDIA CONTACTS

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Embracing Our Differences' Reading Day is Tuesday, March 7

More than 9,270 students from 78 elementary schools and early learning centers in Manatee and Sarasota counties will celebrate reading and diversity through books written and illustrated by diverse authors and illustrators. Embracing Our Differences is partnering with the Suncoast Campaign for Grade-Level Reading to distribute 9,780 books and stimulate conversations about inclusion, kindness and respect in 508 classrooms.

(March 2, 2023) More than 9,270 pre-k through third grade students from 78 elementary schools and early learning centers in Manatee and Sarasota counties will celebrate reading and diversity on March 7, through books written and illustrated by diverse authors and illustrators. For the past ten years, Embracing Our Differences' Reading Day has engaged tens of thousands of elementary school students throughout Sarasota and Manatee counties. The objective has been to show children that reading is fun and important by stimulating student-mentor conversations about inclusion, kindness and respect. In 2022, with the help of more than 100 volunteers, this initiative reached 8,915 students in 484 classrooms from 79 Manatee and Sarasota County classrooms and early learning centers.

According to Ben Jewell-Plocher, EOD's education director, 147 in-person volunteer readings are scheduled for pre-kindergarten to third-grade classrooms across Sarasota and Manatee counties on March 7, with the remaining read alongs

occurring via pre-recorded webisodes featuring community leaders and local teaching artists from Florida Studio Theatre, Sarasota Rising Festival, Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall, Sarasota County Schools and the School District of Manatee County. Over the course of the day, more than 9,780 books, focused on the theme of diversity and inclusion, will be gifted to every participating student and classroom.

“A new book can be a doorway to affirmation and new perspectives,” says Jewell-Plocher. “Our hope is that reading day participants not only recognize themselves in the pages of this year’s titles, but also recognize that what makes an individual ‘different’ is also what makes them beautiful, inside and out.”

This massive outreach reflects a collaboration between Embracing Our Differences, U.S. Charitable Gift Trust and the Suncoast Campaign for Grade-Level Reading, a joint effort supported by The Patterson Foundation, the Community Foundation of Sarasota County and United Way Suncoast. 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.

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 2023 exhibit runs through March 10 at Sarasota’s Bayfront Park. It then will be displayed in North Port’s Butler Park, March 22-April 19, with a grand opening**

event on March 25. *For more information about Embracing Our Differences, call 941-404-5710 or visit www.embracingourdifferences.org.*

About Suncoast Campaign for Grade-Level Reading

The Suncoast Campaign for Grade-Level Reading is a communitywide effort in Manatee and Sarasota counties to help all children, especially those from low-income families, succeed in school and life by ensuring they read on grade level by the end of third grade. For more information, please visit www.gradelevelreadingsuncoast.net.

About Embracing Our Differences

Embracing Our Differences is a nonprofit organization that uses the transformational power of art and education to celebrate and promote the diversity of the human family. It accomplishes this through an annual, large-scale outdoor juried art exhibition and a comprehensive series of educational initiatives, programs and resources designed for teachers and students. Visit www.embracingourdifferences.org.