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LeVar Burton addresses mass shootings while inspiring young readers at Guthrie Green

By Reece Ristau Tulsa World May 20, 2018 Updated May 20, 2018





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Photo gallery: Former Reading Rainbow host LeVar Burton performs public reading of his book at Guthrie Green

May 19, 2018

LeVar Burton was with a camera crew in New York City's Central Park a few years back when news of another mass shooting began to circulate.

Burton, who was filming for his educational children's show "[Reading Rainbow](#)," began to think of how young people would learn about and comprehend such atrocities. That line of thinking led to his penning a book of his own.

"When he was here with us, my friend Fred Rogers, Mr. Rogers, was the voice that always addressed to an audience of children some of the ins and outs of growing up in a world dominated by adults," Burton told a crowd at Guthrie Green on Saturday. "... I thought, 'Well, I don't see anybody stepping into the void,' so I thought I would give it a try."

Burton took the stage Saturday to read his book, "The Rhino Who Swallowed a Storm," to more than 100 children and adults. Some of the sponsors of the free event included Arts Alliance Tulsa, the

Tulsa City-County Library and Magic City Books.

The book introduces Mica Mouse, named after Burton's daughter Michaela, who is afraid of storms. To comfort her, Mica's father reads her a story about a rhinoceros who witnesses a storm that causes death and destruction. The story doesn't shy away from teaching children about senseless tragedy.

"(Rhino's) world was delightful and chock-full of magic, until out of the blue, that magic turned tragic," Burton read aloud. "A storm swept through the valley, turning bright sky into black. A flash flood came raging, no time to react, lost in the thundering, no time for wondering ...

"The storm crashed through his world and tore it apart, and took away everything dear to his heart. Rhino was stunned by the terrible scene. Death and destruction all through the ravine."

In an interview after the reading, Burton drew a connection between the book and mass shootings.

"It's a book that deals with recovery and loss, and in the America in which we live today, I think that we really need to give our children the resiliency to deal with recovery and loss," he said. "It is fait accompli that we are going to continue to have tragedy after tragedy after tragedy after tragedy in America ... "

But the story has an uplifting message: Along the rhino's journey, he meets other animal friends who help him heal. Burton's explanation: "Always look for the helpers."

His presence crossed generational lines, as many young parents who grew up watching "Reading Rainbow," which originally ran from 1983 to 2006, wanted to instill in their children the same fascination with reading that Burton taught them.

Kristen Marangoni brought her three young children, Ila, Elena

and Gianluca, to the reading. Elena loves the “Harry Potter” series. Ila is into princess books.



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“He did not disappoint,” Marangoni said of Burton’s reading. “Right on target.”

Tracy Warren is the manager of the Tulsa library’s literacy, outreach and volunteer services office. She said Burton’s visit is the type of event that can inspire kids to read and write.

“I think it is such a win-win for Tulsa County and for the citizens that live here,” Warren said. “ ... The kids get to hear someone reading their own book, so that in and of itself can be inspirational.”

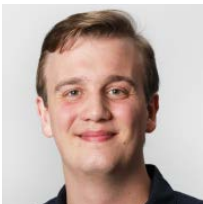
The library’s summer reading program runs May 29-Aug. 4. When children read enough books, they receive coupons for food and entertainment and other prizes. A sign-up form can be found

on the [library's website](#).

Warren said encouraging children to read during summer months can help stave off a “summer slump,” when they’re less engaged. There are less tangible benefits, too.

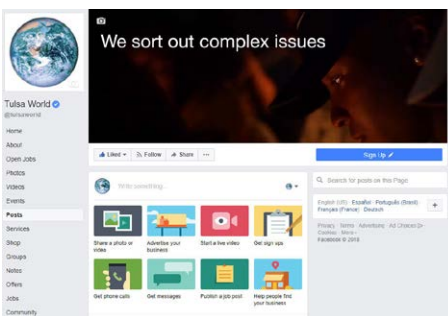
“And of course, a book can take you anywhere, and there’s nothing better than that,” Warren said. “So even if you can’t actually leave your home, you can take a vacation through a book.”

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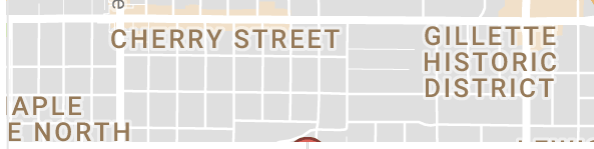
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