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## Tulsa-area students leafing through books for 'Reading Tree Challenge'

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Students take on 2 million-book goal in Reading Tree Challenge

By [Tim Stanley](#) Tulsa World | Oct 18, 2017 Updated 14 hrs ago | 1

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Tony Moore, park director of A Gathering Place for Tulsa, reads to third-graders as part of the Field Elementary School on Tuesday. CORY YOUNG/Tulsa World



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Not that she needs any extra incentive to listen to a good story, but Isabella Mar has been even more engaged lately.

“When we read a book it helps grow a leaf on the Reading Tree,” the third-grader explained Tuesday morning, as she and other Eugene Field Elementary students circled around for story time in the school library.

Isabella and her classmates — among thousands of area elementary students participating in the Reading Tree Challenge — added two more leaves to the tree on Tuesday with a little help from some special guests.

Tulsa Public Schools Superintendent Deborah Gist and Tony Moore, park director of A Gathering Place for Tulsa, each read a book to the children.

They also praised the students for taking up the reading challenge — a Gathering Place program encouraging Tulsa-area children to complete 2 million books before the park opens, which is estimated for late spring or early summer 2018.

A Gathering Place for Tulsa, being developed by the George Kaiser Family Foundation, is a \$400 million park that will feature a variety of programs.

“It’s a massive goal, and at first we were like, ‘Is this attainable?’” Moore said of the 2 million-book challenge.

But he is happy to say now that “yes, it is.” Since the challenge kicked off this summer with partner Tulsa City-County Library, almost 400,000 books have been read toward the goal.

Joining TPS in pursuing the goal are eight other area school districts, including Berryhill, Jenks, Glenpool, Broken Arrow, Union, Bixby, Skiatook and Sand Springs.

Eugene Field students are doing their part. So far, readers at the school have logged about 2,000 books toward the challenge goal, school librarian Heather Tiger said.

“The kids are so excited to be part of a community project so close by. A lot of them have seen the construction going on,” she said of the park, which is being developed nearby on nearly 100 acres of Arkansas River waterfront.

Tiger praised the program for the creative way it motivates children to read.

“Read a book and grow leaves on the Reading Tree ... that’s just magical,” she said.

The Reading Tree, as it has become known, is an actual tree. Believed to be the oldest and largest cottonwood on the Gathering Place property, it will serve as the site for the park’s reading programs.

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"We thought it would be fitting for this iconic tree to also be iconic in the sense of representing the fun of reading," Moore said.

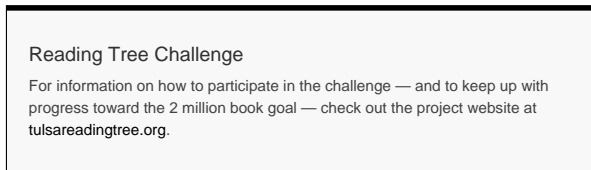
Moore, who had fun reading the book "Camping with Bigfoot" to the students Tuesday, added that the Reading Tree Challenge is the first of many programs to come for A Gathering Place.

"Programming is going to be a major initiative," he said. "And there will be a wide range, from cultural festivals to health and wellness and sports.

"But reading is at the very center. We chose (Reading Tree) to be the first program we go public with because we want to help Tulsa County and Tulsa, with elementary reading levels being a little down."

Although geared toward kindergarten through third grade, the challenge is open to children of all ages. Participating educators and families are provided with activities and resources, and shown how to log completed books online.

Gist, who read the book "Bone Soup" to the children, said afterward: "We're so thrilled to be partnering with A Gathering Place and helping celebrate wonderful things — reading, trees, parks, books and Tulsa."



### Staff Writer Tim Stanley

Stanley is a general assignment reporter and the writer behind the award-winning "World War II Veterans Remember" series & book. Among his other projects is a new series that revisits Oklahoma's infamous 1977 Girl Scout murders case. He lives in Broken Ar



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**William Dusenberry** Oct 18, 2017 11:21am  
It's far easier to be a "good" Christian; and a "good" GOP'er, when one only reads, when one goes shopping. All other reading (in varying degrees) results in a decline in church attendance, and a far less chance, of voting for the GOP -- just because all other members of one's tribe do.

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