



Island Readers & Writers Newsletter Summer 2023

Issue 16, Volume 2



A Note from Executive Director

At this time of year, IRW reflects on achievements and learnings of the past school year, what went well, what new opportunities and challenges were presented and what we learned. This year, we also asked ourselves and our school partners: what more we can do to support teachers who have endured the disruptions, challenges and aftermath of the pandemic? And most important: how do we help children find joy in the learning process and grow in their confidence and abilities?

It's all about the children! We say that often at IRW, for they are our focus day in and day out. Whether we are reading a new book and thinking about how they might embrace its story and teachings, planning a book-centered experience that expands worlds and makes connections to their everyday life, or engaging them in conversation about a happening or character in a story, children remain at the center of our universe.

For children living in areas where the educational opportunity gap exists, IRW provides valued books and workshops in writing, art and natural sciences and the chance to work closely with a published author or illustrator. These close encounters are often the beginning of extended relationships and correspondence as writings are shared well beyond IRW's visit. Having an adult who is not a child's parent or teacher take an interest in and encourage their potential is empowering, confidence building, and motivating.

Children did amazing book-inspired writing and art this year. Alison Johnson, Director of School Programs and Lisa Herrington, Program Assistant along with authors and illustrators creatively designed over 50 programs with topics ranging from child labor laws, natural science, music and so much more. When we work with children we are mindful of how best to foster and supplement their social, emotional, cognitive and physical development.

Supporting teachers in this holistic approach to education has always been a priority for IRW through our workshops with IRW Site Coordinators—present in each of our 26 schools—and teachers. We also know that there are more children in Maine that need the in-person collaborative learning experiences that IRW provides. In fact, at the request of teachers, we will be hosting a professional development conference titled, **Dear Teacher... A Celebration of Literacy and Rural Education** on October 5 & 6. We have amassed a wonderfully talented group of presenters to lead workshops and intensive learning sessions around three themes: writing & narrative, humanities & interdisciplinary learning, and rural placed-based education.

I hope our 2022 Annual Report gives you a good idea of IRW's achievements and future goals. We have much to celebrate and much still to do. Your continued support is critical to our success.

With gratitude,
Jan Coates

school program statistics

- 2536 Books Given
- 2122 Children Served
- 51 Programs
- 14 Authors/Illustrators

upcoming event

Join Island Readers & Writers on Thursday, August 17, 2023 from 11:00am–1:00pm in Northeast Harbor for a Pop-Up Bookshop! Come meet author Alexandra S.D. Hinrichs & illustrator Jamie Hogan as we celebrate the release of their picture book *The Lobster Lady!* Books from both authors will be available for signing and for purchase; all proceeds support IRW's mission and programs. Look for our orange pop-up tent in the park beside Seaside UCC!

At 2:00pm, we'll move inside the Northeast Harbor Library to make art together inspired by *The Lobster Lady!*

FROM THE CLASSROOM



We know that kids who have self-awareness, empathy, and problem-solving skills will be better equipped in the world, and we believe IRW programming provides avenues of self-exploration that helps kids grow these skills. In 2022 we visited classrooms where students were behind academically and struggling behaviorally. With

the continuation of a teaching shortage, many teachers were exhausted. What could we do to help? What opportunities were there to bring creativity, enrichment, and fun to classrooms?

Art and stories. Through these mediums we delved into character development, made observations of the natural world, and found humor in the unexpected.

We rewrote and remixed Little Golden Books with Matt Myers, inspired by his book *Battle Bunny*—we've never seen middle schoolers engage in an activity so quickly!

Kids wrote poems utilizing "unexpected word choices" with Samara Cole Doyon, author of the book *Magnificent Homespun Brown*; Samara was a new author to IRW's programs this year!

With illustrator Ryan Higgins we analyzed his picture book characters, noticing how he often uses the element of surprise to create characters that leave you rolling on the ground with laughter. Laughter is good medicine and kids' faces were alight with joy.

Lita Judge and her book *The Wisdom of Trees* inspired us to observe closely and keep nature journals that helped us connect science to a sense of place.

We also explored exploding volcanoes with Mary Cerullo and her book *Volcano, Where Fire and Water Meet*. Students at Milbridge Elementary School asked: *Do volcanoes destroy or create?* In debate, kids used their problem solving, research, and interpersonal skills to argue their side.

We often visit schools where there is a lack of art programming, which means one of IRW's goals is to incorporate art as much as possible into our programming. Sometimes we teach basic skills, like knowing that if you can draw shapes, you can draw anything.

But with classically trained artists like Kevin Hawkes, serious techniques can be introduced, and we saw hunger on kids' faces as they soaked up new skills. Wonderful creations came forth in our workshops this past year, and we saw students using art for self-expression.

Fall 2023

Looking towards fall we'll be returning to an in-person 7th Grade Read with Jake Burt and *Greetings From Witness Protection*, and we'll team up to explore the night sky with Jamie Hogan and her book *Skywatcher* as well as The Challenger Learning Center. We'll explore some Maine stories with Alex Hinrichs (*The Lobster Lady*) and Anna Crowley Redding (*Chowder Rules*). Additionally, IRW is pleased to welcome Perry Elementary School as a partner school. Located on Passamaquoddy Bay and, nearby to several IRW partner schools, we see great potential for collaborative programming.

—Alison Johnson, Director of School Programs

I learned my favorite child book was made by an author who lives in Maine.

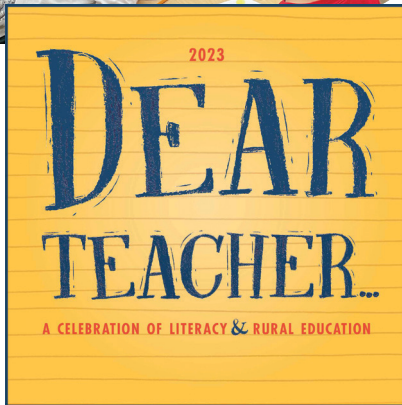
I learned that at any age you can have a dream to be an Author.

—Second grader

Words cannot express the gratitude and appreciation we have for IRW. Each visit that our students and teachers prepare for helps to foster our students' love for reading, while also helping them further develop their creative and critical thinking skills. The opportunity to meet with and have a conversation with the visiting author shows our students that they themselves can also achieve great things in their lives. These unique experiences open up a variety of opportunities, ones our students would not ordinarily experience.

—Chris Crowley, Principal,
Beals Elementary School





Island Readers & Writers rejoiced last year when we were able to return to classrooms and in-person programming, but we quickly realized that for teachers—especially in the rural, mostly small schools we serve—the changes and upheavals were far from over. Our team recognized that the broader issues of schedule interruptions, funding,

and teacher shortages were not ones that we could solve. But what could we do? What could IRW uniquely offer that could bring energy, creativity, community and fun to teachers in rural Maine?

The 2023 Dear Teacher conference, a two-day professional development opportunity for rural Maine educators was envisioned around a small round table in the IRW office by our staff. Reflecting on teacher feedback and all that we had seen and learned, we chose three themes for the conference: writing & narrative, interdisciplinary learning and the humanities, and rural, place-based education.

Our Programming Design

We quickly realized that, through our in-school and community programming, we had a rich network of talented authors, illustrators, and educators to draw on for the conference. Pulling together this list, we contacted our presenters and worked with them individually to help design workshops.

To each presenter we expressed that these workshops were for educators in mostly small schools, and who might be teaching principals, teaching in multigrade classrooms, or who may not have art or music programs in their schools. Each workshop should offer several key takeaways that any teacher could take back to a Pre-K–grade 8 classroom and implement immediately, regardless of budget.

Teachers of All Kinds

When we began brainstorming a name for this conference, we were overcome with options! But in the end, we settled on something that would emphasize that our conference is in response to the teachers who we hear from daily, and a love letter to rural education.

We've used "teacher" in our title in the broadest sense; the conference is open to educators of all kinds. Teachers, principals, school librarians and support staff, as well as student teachers or students enrolled in teaching programs are all welcome to attend.

Our Sponsors

IRW is grateful for the support of the following organizations, who have helped make the Dear Teacher 2023 Conference possible.

Gold:

Maine Humanities Council

Silver:

National Rural Education Association

Bronze:

Bar Harbor Bank & Trust

WERU Community Radio

College of Education and Human Development, University of Maine



Our entire school community is excited to participate in the IRW Dear Teacher Conference gathering this fall. The opportunity to sit alongside an author whose book we read with our children is truly unprecedented in rural schools. The opportunity to connect with other teachers representing island schools and rural communities such as ours sets the playground for rich conversations.

It truly takes a village to raise readers. With the support of IRW, we are able to offer quality professional development to support teacher learning as well.

**—Debbie Jamieson, Ed.D, Principal,
Pembroke Elementary School**



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COMMUNITY PROGRAMMING & OUTREACH

IRW continues to seek ways to reach new audiences and provide meaningful book-based experiences to our communities. We've continued to grow our social media platforms and e-news subscriber lists, as well as add to the wonderful community of volunteer readers for our twice annual Booklist publication.

In 2022, we explored new online programming with our *IRW Presents* series, and welcomed guest speakers such as Maya Williams, Portland Poet Laureate, and Andrew Simon, director of Barn Arts. We also held community programs with authors and illustrators like Melissa Sweet, Annette Cate, and partnered with the Wendell Gilley Museum to hold a Second Annual Beautiful Blackbird Day.

Responding to interest in our community, IRW hosted its first ever program series for homeschooling families in partnership with the Jesup Memorial Library. Participants explored the world of Alexandra S.D. Hinrichs *The Traveling Camera: Lewis Hine and the Fight to End Child Labor*. Sessions included Visual Thinking Strategies discussions with Alison Johnson, IRW Director of School Programs, writing poetry together with Alex, and a photography workshop with local photographer Katherine Emery. The program culminated in an celebratory exhibit of poetry and artwork.

As we look to 2023, we have high hopes for new programs and collaborations, especially with our Mt. Desert Island library partners. We encourage you to stay connected to IRW all year long by making sure you follow us on our Facebook and Instagram platforms, as well as subscribe to our e-newsletter.

—Kelsey Buckley, Director of Communications & Engagement

WELCOME!

IRW is delighted to have two new members joining its Board of Directors. Learn more about them below!



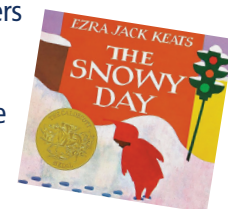
Elizabeth Hodder Corbus

Now that you've joined IRW's Board, what are you most excited for?

I am pleased to be on the board of IRW because reading, children and Maine are three of my favorite things. I look forward to helping in the work we do to strengthen communities, provide wonder and literacy to kids in Maine, and support artists and writers who provide a means for creativity, confidence and hope.

I love how the work of Island Readers & Writers draws on the strengths of rural communities as it provides resources to spark individual and community creativity and love of books. I have so much to learn and am looking forward to supporting IRW's mission of inspiring a passion for reading and learning.

What's one picture book that's special to you? The Snowy Day, by Ezra Jack Keats!



Susan Peck

Now that you've joined IRW's Board, what are you most excited for?

What excites me most about joining IRW's Board is the opportunity to work with the amazing IRW staff and Board members who strive so diligently to bring fantastic author and illustrator programs to island and rural schools in Maine. I love the programs that IRW organizes and implements with the help of many talented authors and illustrators. Believing strongly in the curiosity, imagination, and strength of character that books empower in children, it gives me great honor to be associated with this organization that shares and builds upon these beliefs.

What's one picture book that's special to you? One picture book that is special to me is Blueberries For Sal by Robert McCloskey. I grew up picking blueberries in our Maine field with my mother, and I have continued this tradition with my own children.



A Note from Board President Debra Lay

As we reflect on 2022 and look toward 2023, IRW has much to celebrate. The Purple Crayon Society had a favorable launch in November of 2022 and our membership continues to grow. Named after the classic children's book, *Harold and the Purple Crayon*, our Executive Director, Jan Coates' favorite book, we know that those who establish a legacy with IRW understand that their commitment allows our mission to flourish. Like Harold and all of the amazing adventures his crayon affords him, we too continue to illustrate a future that inspires the hopes and dreams of so many children.

It was also our pleasure this year to welcome two new members to IRW's Board, Elizabeth Hodder Corbus and Susan Peck. I hope you enjoy hearing from them in this report about their plans and dreams for IRW as we look toward our future and continue to grow our Board.

Our Board of Directors continues to operate under the three pillars we designed as part of our Strategic Plan: Visibility, Sustainability, and Bridging. As a way to reinvigorate our work within that plan we partnered with Diane Lebson from Evergreen Philanthropic

Solutions to facilitate a reflective practice during our January planning meeting held at the Portland Harbor Inn. We generated a high degree of feedback when asked: *What does IRW expect of Board members? What can I give/do for IRW as a Board member? What tools/support do I need to maximize my effectiveness as a Board member?* All pertinent questions for a Board with a desire for growth within its membership as well as for the goals we set for our work ahead. Out of that valuable process we continued to focus on aligning the purpose and responsibilities of our Governance Committee to lead the way in developing our Board, to build a Board culture of philanthropy, and to look ahead at future possibilities for our organization. With a diverse and invested Board of Directors, along with loyal donors and long-term friends, IRW is poised for continued success. We're so glad you're on this journey with us!

With gratitude,



Board President

Treasurer's Note

Since inception 16 years ago, with the generous support of individuals and foundations, IRW has remained fiscally strong.

Over the years we have been fortunate that the combination of generous philanthropic support and prudent fiscal oversight has resulted in revenues outpacing expenses, which gave us the opportunity to build a modest reserve for unexpected expenses and/or opportunities.

In 2022, IRW had to draw on these reserves to bridge a short-term gap between anticipated expenses and revenue, a gap resulting from a return to in-person school visits and increases in operating and program expenses. Market changes in our long-term investment fund

at the Maine Community Foundation also contributed to this decline in revenue, as well as not receiving a PPP Loan and forgiveness, as we did in 2021.

The accounting firm of Horton, McFarland & Veysey in Ellsworth has been retained to review our financial records and prepare the 990 Report for 2022. Copies will be available in our office for your review upon request.



Allison Poteet, Treasurer

Financial Summary

Summary Profit & Loss - Fiscal Year 2022 (with 2021 comparison)

	Jan - Dec 2022	Jan - Dec 2021
INCOME		
Grants	162,000	186,676*
Contributions	206,714	245,689
Other (net)	8,917	4,606
Investment Return	(9,346)	10,915
TOTAL	\$368,285	\$447,886
EXPENSE		
Programs	308,949	246,446
Fundraising	55,017	62,546
G&A	72,781	72,961
TOTAL	\$436,747	\$381,953

Summary Balance Sheet (As of July 1, 2023)

ASSETS	
Current Assets	\$300,116
Fixed Assets	\$ 14,923
Long Term Assets	\$ 63,799
TOTAL ASSETS	\$378,838
LIABILITIES & EQUITY	
Total Liabilities	\$ 2,728
Total Equity	\$376,110
Total Liabilities & Equity	\$378,838

* PPP Loan included in grant revenue for 2021



For more detailed financial information, please contact: Jan Coates, Executive Director (jcoates@islandreadersandwriters.org) or Allison Poteet, Treasurer (allisonkupfer@gmail.com)

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Jan Coates

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* Deceased