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Read a Book, Seed a Mind

SECOND-GRADE CLASSES from 19 schools in New York City are holding read-a-thons during the month of March as part of the third annual TIGER (Together in Getting Everyone Reading) program to promote literacy and connect communities. Each participating class in the program—a collaboration of WCS, New York City Board of Education/Region One, New York Public Library (NYPL), and Literacy, Inc (LINC)—has been provided with a list of recommended reading selected by NYPL. Special festivities will take place on a designated TIGER reading day, during which parents, teens, business leaders, and other community partners are invited to share a book with a class.

The TIGER reading program was launched in 2003, naturally enough, to coincide with the opening of the Tiger Mountain exhibit at the Bronx Zoo. This year's program focuses on butterflies, and will culminate with a visit by 1,000 participating schoolchildren to the zoo's Butterfly Garden and Bug Carousel, which will open to the public in late May. Classes will be encouraged to read butterfly- and animal-themed books.

In addition, WCS is working with gardeners to create butterfly areas in community gardens, part of the newly developed Butterfly Project. "By connecting children to wildlife through reading, and by bringing butterflies to children in their own neighborhoods, we hope to inspire future conservationists," says Charles Vasser, director of Community Affairs for WCS.

A partnership with HarperCollins to promote a new animal-themed I Can Read children's book series (see Bookshelf, page 54), featuring photographs from WCS, furthers the goal of the TIGER reading program to unite public, private, and nonprofit organizations in a literacy support network. "Partnerships such as this bring the assets of a community together around the crucial issue of early literacy," says Vera Weintraub, executive director of LINC. Region One schools hope to make a difference in this critical stage of their pupils' development.

With the commitment of such wide-ranging stakeholders as book publisher, conservation organization, and school district in the education of young students, it certainly seems to take a village—or perhaps a garden—to nurture the kind of growth that flourishes perennially.

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