
Community

By Mary Soucie, State Librarian

It is hard to believe that it is the start of another year. It seems that I hear people comment more frequently about how fast time is moving. I find myself doing it too. Is it because we are way busier than we used to be or because we don't take the time to connect with the world around us in meaningful ways? Before phones and other devices became such a ubiquitous part of our lives, we talked to people more easily, engaged with other community members, volunteered more consistently, and generally enjoyed the world around us more directly.



Recently, I watched the movie *The Sandlot* with my nieces and nephews. At one point, my niece said something to the effect of "there they are just running around without adults around again". I responded that's how life used to be; head out in the morning and be home before the streetlights came on. We like to refer to those times as much simpler times. In many ways, I think they were less complicated. I definitely think our interactions with other people were deeper, more significant, and more frequent.

I do love the benefits of modern technology. In some ways, it makes it much easier to stay in touch with other people. Send off a quick text, email, or social media message. When we moved to North Dakota, the majority of my and my husband's families still lived in or near Illinois. Having technology to stay connected was a true blessing. During the pandemic, we started weekly video calls with my mom and older sister. Occasionally, other family members would also join in. I was very grateful to be able to connect with family in that way.

We utilize Teams, email, and social media at the State Library as a way to connect with our constituents, which includes the North Dakota library community, state agencies and employees, and all North Dakotans. We are glad that we can utilize technology to make those connections. Nothing beats the opportunity for face-to-face connections though, whether at a conference, a visit to your library, or another event.



While I don't make New Year's Resolutions anymore, I do choose a word to guide me for the year. My word for 2026 is community. I will be focusing on making deeper connections with the people in my world and the world around me. I would love to visit your library, whether I've been there before or not. I want to hear about your successes and challenges, join in on your celebrations, and support you in whatever way that makes sense to you. I will be reaching out via email, snail mail, social media, and phone. I look forward to connecting with the library community in a deeper way this year.



[Bismarck Veterans Memorial Public Library](#) is hosting a Digital Life Skills for New Americans with Bismarck Refugee Career Navigator Leonsya Ngoma on January 13.

Chloe Warg, student worker at the [Enderlin Municipal Library](#), is launching a local Doorstep Delivery service as part of an FCCLA STAR event. Chloe and other helpers will bring library materials to the doors of people in their service area who are physically unable to visit the library.

Over sixty kids submitted LEGO masterpieces for the Fargo Public Library's annual [LEGO Mania Design Contest](#).

[Morton Mandan Public Library](#) and United Tribes Technical College's Intertribal Research & Resource Center have partnered to offer Paper Bag Scientist: STEM Kits for kids in grades 1-5.

January 2026 Beanstack Challenges

Submitted by Tammy Kruger

January 2026 brings two major Beanstack Challenges!

Read with Benny: Winter Reading Challenge January 1-31



This challenge runs January 1 through 31 and **comes with prizes!** The top three performing libraries will receive a gift card, as well as a plushie of Benny the Bean.

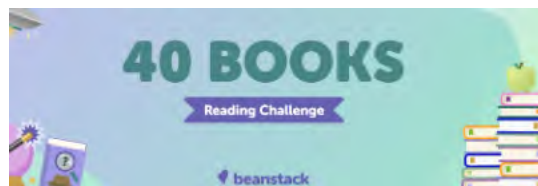
To help level the playing field, since our North Dakota libraries come in all sizes, libraries will compete in the following categories:

1. Most readers registered,
2. Highest completion rate of registered readers, and
3. Most minutes per reader logged.

To Do This Challenge

Participants read minutes and complete activities to check off bingo squares. (The activities are simple. Some examples include reading with a warm drink and finding a cozy place to read.)

40 Books Reading Challenge January 1 - December 31



Explore different genres in this 40 Books (Genre) Reading Challenge. Log your reading in Beanstack and complete activities to earn new badges.

To Do This Challenge

Readers complete 40 books. Out of those 40, at least one will be from each of the following genres: adventure, autobiography or biography, essay, fantasy, graphic novel, historical fiction, mystery, science fiction, short story, and young adult.

This might seem a little daunting for some, but readers have an entire year to complete it!

How to Sign Up

Registering for Beanstack challenges is easy!

- Visit NDSL's home page at library.nd.gov.
- From there, go to the Patrons tab along the top and select Programs. The first program listed is Beanstack.
- Either sign-in or create an account.
- **Read with Benny: Winter Reading Challenge** and **40 Books Reading Challenge** will show on the challenges home page. Select and register for these challenges.
- Start reading and completing activities! (Readers can log the books they have read for *Read with Benny* in *40 Books*, as well. Just remember that *Read with Benny* is by minutes and *40 Books* is by number of books.)



*Disclaimer: Libraries that use their own Beanstack accounts are not eligible for prizes for the *Read with Benny: Winter Reading Challenge*.

Want More Information About Beanstack?

- Check out NDSL Niche Academy: [Using Beanstack for Summer Reading and Beyond](#) webinar and slide deck.
- Visit Beanstack's [Resource Hub](#).
- Explore Beanstack's [Marketing Materials](#).

Upcoming North Dakota State Library Webinars

Happy New Year! Start this year off right with some professional webinars and continuing education. The North Dakota State Library is hosting several webinars this month:

[WordPress Q&A](#)

January 13 (1:00 PM -2:00 PM)

[Copyright: The Not-So-Scary Version](#)

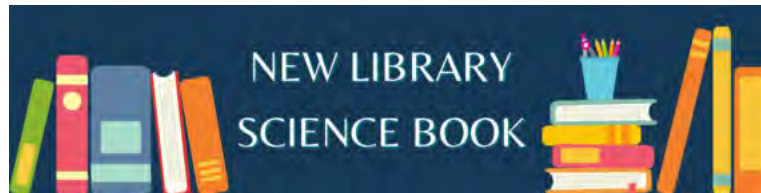
January 21 (2:00 PM - 2:45 PM)

[Public Libraries Survey Walkthrough](#)

January 28 (2:00 PM – 3:00 PM)

To check out all the great webinar opportunities available this month, visit <https://www.library.nd.gov/traininglibraries>. You can also find out about webinars and events from the Events Calendar at <https://www.library.nd.gov/events-calendar>.

[View Upcoming Events](#)

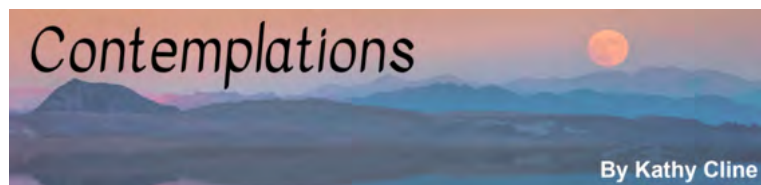


"Library 2035" edited by Sandra Hirsh

"Building on the success and impact of 'Library 2020: Today's Leading Visionaries Describe Tomorrow's Library' by Joseph Janes, 'Library 2035: Imagining the Next Generation of Libraries' updates, expands upon, and broadens the discussions on the future of libraries and the ways in which they transform information services to best serve their communities. 'Library 2035' explores the lessons learned over the past decade and forecasts the opportunities, strengths, and challenges for libraries in the future. Library leaders as well as library and information science students and faculty will find this book particularly meaningful and useful as we grapple with what the future of libraries and the profession will be."



[Reserve This Title](#)



The Relationship Between Handwriting and Reading

I didn't realize there was a calendar day dedicated to handwriting until I began researching this article. According to the National Day Calendar, the Writing Instrument Manufacturers Association established January 23 as National Handwriting Day in 1977 to encourage the use of paper, pencils, and pens. The date was chosen in honor of **John Hancock's birthday**, as he was the first person to sign the Declaration of Independence.

Even though technology has made the writing process and communication faster, handwriting calls for more thought and patience. It forces the body and mind to slow down. Unlike spoken or messages sent via text or email, which can't be taken back, handwriting allows ideas to be erased or revised (National Day Calendar, n.d.). But what does handwriting have to do with reading skills? It turns out, quite a lot.

[Continue Reading](#)



Children's & YA Books That Foster Poverty Awareness

Poverty affects millions of families across the United States, shaping daily life in ways that often go unnoticed. According to [National Today](#), the U.S. ranks second among its peer countries in poverty rates. To bring attention to these ongoing challenges, this month's *Shelf Additions* features books that explore homelessness, economic hardship, and hunger.

While reading a book about poverty may not solve the issue, stories can raise awareness of its difficult challenges, build empathy, and inspire individuals to consider solutions that may alleviate this societal concern.

Title	Age Range	Publication Year
The Invisible	Ages: 3+	2021
Saturday at the Food Pantry	Ages: 3-7	2021
I Know How to Draw an Owl	Ages: 4-7	2024
Old Blue Is My Home	Ages: 4-8	2025
The Little Green Jacket	Ages: 5-7	2020
This is My Bag	Ages: 5-8	2023
I See You	Ages: 5-9	2021
Lulu and the Hunger Monster	Ages: 5-9	2020
Shelter	Ages: 8-12	2021
Free Lunch	Ages: 9-12	2019
Stay	Ages: 9-12	2019
Daisy Woodworm Changes the World	Ages: 9-13	2022
A Duet for Home	Ages: 9-13	2022
Maid For It	Ages: 10-14	2023
Sleeping In My Jeans	Ages: 12-18	2018
Where I Live	Ages: 13+	2018
The Art of Us	Ages: 14-18	2024
Roam	Ages: 14-18	2019
Winterfolk	Ages: 14-18	2018
Find Layla	Ages: 14-18	2020
Road Home	Ages: 14+	2024

Source

Poverty awareness month. National Today. (n.d.). <https://nationaltoday.com/poverty-awareness-month/>

In Other News

Award-winning librarian and "Reading Rainbow" host Mychal Threats will serve as the [2026 National Library Week honorary chair](#). The 68th annual National Library Week theme is "Find Your Joy", which is an invitation for people to explore and discover what sparks joy in them at the library.

[Follett and Mackin](#) Expand to Public Libraries in Wake of Baker & Taylor Shutdown

The next [International Observe the Moon Night](#) will take place on September 19, 2026.

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www.library.nd.gov

To submit content ideas/articles for a future issue of the Flickertale, please contact BreAnne at ndsipa@nd.gov.

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