

## Rhoda Reads Early Literacy Program Guide for Rotary Clubs

Early literacy is critical to a child's success. Children who begin school with poor reading skills quickly fall behind and struggle to catch up. Kids living in poverty, with few or no books, are especially at risk. Learning to read is a major foundational skill which strongly correlates with both academic and vocational success.

Rotary Clubs can be an integral part of the early development of children throughout the community. In 2013, Rotary Club of Waterville selected early literacy as one of its foundational community priorities, and developed and implemented the Rhoda Reads Early Literacy Program.



### Rhoda Reads

The Rhoda Reads Program is designed especially for Rotarians to engage in the development of our youngest community learners at the most opportune time - when they are 5 years of age and younger. To begin the Rhoda Reads Program, Rotary Club of Waterville collaborated with Educare Central Maine, one of the premiere evidence-based early learning programs in the state of Maine, to develop a training curriculum on early childhood development for Rotarians. Training is provided to interested Rotarians on early childhood development which includes specific techniques to use

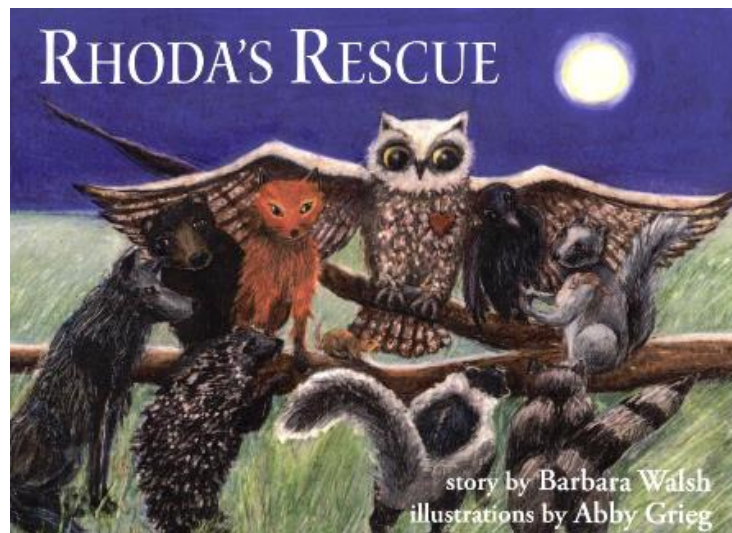
while reading to young children.

Each Rotarian is then equipped with a Rhoda Reads Tool Kit which includes a variety of books (see list below) - chosen specifically for children up to age 5, as well as an adorable stuffed owl named Rhoda (the program mascot).

Preschool Kit Book List	Author
Moo, Baa, La La La!	Sandra Boynton
I Went Walking	Sue Williams
Black & White	Tana Hoban
Baby Faces	DK Publishing
Good Night, Gorilla	Peggy Rathmann
<i>The five books listed above are all baby board books</i>	
The Snowy Day	Ezra Jack Keats
Down to the Sea with Mr. Magee	Chris Van Dusen
Carmine A Little More Red	Melissa Sweet
My Car	Byron Barton
Rhoda's Rescue	Barbara Walsh
Good-Night Owl	Pat Hutchins
Sammy in the Sky	Barbara Walsh
Five Little Monkeys Jumping on the Bed	Eileen Christelow
A Place to Sleep	Holly Meade



Local childcare providers in the Greater Waterville area were invited to participate in the program. Rotarians are matched with a childcare provider and visit regularly to read with the children (typically once a month). Included in the kit is Waterville Rotary Club's very own children's book Rhoda's Rescue which features Rhoda the Owl teaching her furry friends about fellowship and community.



### How to set up a Rhoda Reads Early Literacy Program in your community

1. First, pull together the support and energy of club members. Whether it is your Community Service Committee or a new committee of your club, gather together Rotarians who are excited about engaging the club around literacy.
2. Then, lead your committee in a discussion around the following key considerations:
  - Resources
  - Community Partners

- Training
  - Materials
  - Childcare Providers
  - Media/Program Roll Out
  - On-going support of the program
3. Determine the scope of your program. How many Rotarian-Childcare matches might there be? Budget items may include training session materials, trainer stipend, refreshments, tool kits (we suggest zippered tote bags), a variety of books, stamps to mail out invitations to childcare providers, Rhoda stickers (optional) and Rhoda mascots (optional). A Rotary District grant is a great way to get your program up and running.



4. Find your community partners. Who else in the community is working on literacy issues? Many areas have a community literacy team or a group of community leaders who are working together to address early childhood development and academics. Your local school system is a great place to inquire about what is happening in the community around early literacy.

Other community partners may include parent groups, the library, United Way, the Chamber of Commerce, Literacy Volunteers, Community Action Programs, and local colleges. Find out what is happening in your community around early literacy and let them know about your project as well.

5. Provide training to your Rotarians. Many people probably wonder why training on early literacy is important. "I have kids/grandkids, I know how to read to kids!", but it is important for Rotarians to understand not only why early literacy is critical to educational and vocational success, but how they can more effectively read to very young children.



Rotary Club of Waterville collaborated with Educare Central Maine, one of the premiere evidence-based early learning programs in the state of Maine, to develop a training curriculum on early childhood development for Rotarians. The training included information on brain development, techniques on how to read to young children (pushing in vocabulary, asking questions, repeating books) and what to expect. *A training PowerPoint template is available upon request.*

6. Collect materials for your tool kits.

- Tote bags with zippers work especially well to carry books from place to place.
- Books! For our tool kits, we chose books that were recommended by our local library director specifically for children up to age 5. We also added our own children's book Rhoda's Rescue written by Barbara Walsh, Pulitzer Prize-winning Maine author just for this project.
- Stickers. Kids love them! (We created Rhoda stickers).
- Rhoda the Owl Mascot from Stuffed Safari.  
<http://www.stuffedsafari.com/Osmond-the-Stuffed-Great-Horned-Owl-by-Aurora-p/ar-30535.htm>



7. Reach out to Local Childcare Providers. Send an invitation and registration form to all the childcare providers in your area. Many communities have a Childhood Development Council or similar organization that provides training and resources to all licensed child care providers. Getting

an endorsement from them for your Rhoda Reads Program will increase the likelihood that childcare providers will accept your invitation. They may also be willing to assist by providing the names and addresses of all the childcare providers in the area. Also take advantage of the connections that your Rotarians have with local childcare providers as well.

Sample Letter to Childcare Providers

"Rotary Club of {Your Club} is pleased to let you know about an exciting community project called Rhoda Reads. This is an early literacy program designed especially for

Rotarians to engage in the development of our youngest community learners at the most opportune time - when they are age 5 and younger.

Our Rotarians are available to come to local early childcare settings and spend some time reading with young children. Each participating Rotarian has received training on early childhood development from our partners at {local early childhood expert}. They also each have a Rhoda Reads Tool Kit which includes a variety of books for children up to age 5 and an adorable stuffed owl mascot named Rhoda.

If you are interested in having a Rotarian come read to the children in your childcare facility, please fill out the enclosed form and return it to the address below. If you have any questions about the program, please feel free to contact {your Club's representative for the program}".

#### Sample Registration Form

Ask for the following information on your Rhoda Reads registration form:

Contact Person

Name of Childcare

Physical Address

City/State/Zip

E-Mail

Phone Number

What is the best day of the week for a Rotarian to come visit?

What is the best time of day?

Do you require a background check on the volunteer?

Is there any other information we should know?

As registration forms come in match them with a trained Rotarian. The committee should keep track of the matches. Encourage Rotarians to visit their childcare provider about once a month for 30 minutes.



### Other Considerations

Create a media campaign. Once you have your program underway get some media attention! Invite your local newspaper reporter in to visit one of your reading sessions. Be sure to get written permission from the daycare provider and the parents of the children who attend if any pictures will be taken.

Make sure there is on-going support of the program. Check in with your Rotarians and childcare providers regularly and provide them with assistance as needed. There will be changes over time as Rotarians come into and leave the club, or find that they want to participate for a while and then take a break for a while. Anytime an adult is reading to a child, a significant impact is being made in that child's life.

Finally - celebrate! Once your program has been up and running for a while, celebrate your successes! Report back to your Rotary Club and your community about your achievements.

### Rhoda Reads – It's Elementary!

Rotary Club of Waterville expanded the Rhoda Reads project to include local elementary schools. We created a new tool kit that include books selected especially for children 5-12 years old and included an "older" Rhoda the Owl mascot. Rotarians who prefer to read to children older than preschool age are matched with a local elementary school classroom or afterschool childcare provider.

<u>Elementary Tool Kit Books</u>	<u>Author</u>
Grandfather's Journey	Allen Say
Mr. George Baker	Amy Hest
A River of Words	Jen Bryant
Big Moon Tortilla	Dyanne Strongbow
Everyone Knows What a Dragon Looks Like	Jay Williams
Miss Rumphius	Barbara Cooney
Rhoda's Rescue	Barbara Walsh



Several of the books selected for the Elementary Tool Kit feature an older adult mentoring a young child.

### Rhoda Reads – Book Give-a-Way

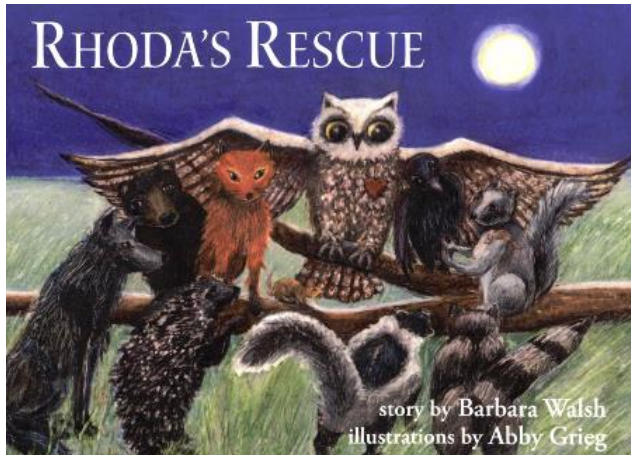
Another way our Rotary Club has supported literacy is through book Give-a-way events. For Read Across America Day, our Rotary Club partnered with the local afterschool program and our local elementary school to give a book to every child. These are the books we selected -

<u>Book Title</u>	<u>Author</u>	<u>Age Range</u>
I Don't Want to be a Frog	Dew Petty	3-7
Ten Rules for Being a Superhero	Deb Pilutti	4-7
Gaston	Kelly DiPucchio	4-8
The 13 Story Treehouse	Andy Griffiths	6-10
Kelsey Green, Reading Queen	Claudia Mills	7-10
Astrotwins	Mark Kelly	8-12
Upside Down Magic	Sarah Mlynowski	8-12
MasterMinds	Gordon Korman	8-12
Fish in a Tree	Lynda Mullaly Hunt	10-14
The Night Parade	Kathryn Tanquary	10-14
Seraphina	Rachel Hartman	12-17





Rhoda's Rescue, written by Maine author Barbara Walsh, and illustrated by Abby Grieg, is dedicated to children who love to learn and read, and to community members who volunteer for the betterment of all.

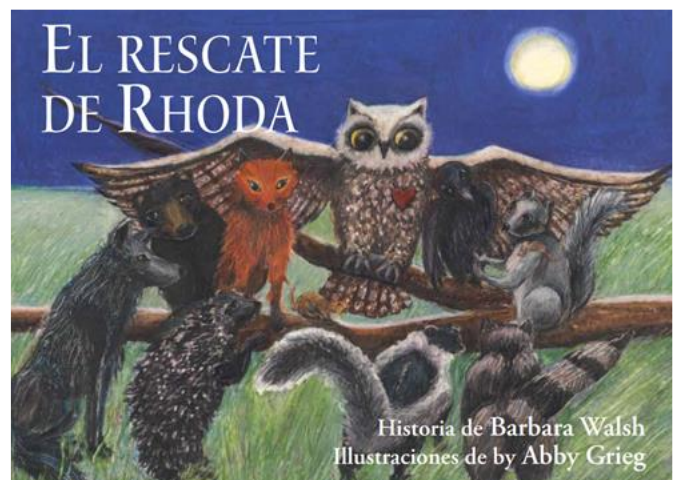
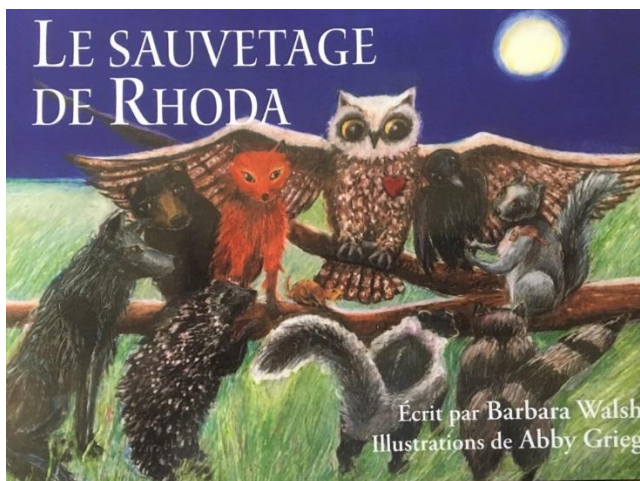


*"In the tallest tree in the forest, in a cozy crook of a branch, lived a wise owl named Rhoda. She had big yellow eyes that glowed in the dark and could spot even the smallest creature scurrying along the woodland floor. With her special owl ears, she could hear the tiniest twig snap or the softest squeal of a miniature mouse".*

- Opening paragraph, Rhoda's Rescue



Rhoda's Rescue is available for purchase through Maine Authors Publishing at [orders@maineauthorspublishing.com](mailto:orders@maineauthorspublishing.com) or 207-594-0091 or by contacting Rotary Club of Waterville (above). Rhoda's Rescue is also available in French – Le sauvetage de Rhoda and Spanish - El Rescate de Rhoda.





For more information about the Rhoda Reads program:

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[RhodaReads@gmail.com](mailto:RhodaReads@gmail.com)