



GRADUATING COORDINATOR SPOTLIGHT

Interview By Holliane Belford. Written by Ciarra Weaver

Congratulations to Corban Williams, our spotlight coordinator for this semester! Corban is from Columbia, South Carolina. He is a dual Masters student in Real Estate Development and City and Regional Planning. He started with America Reads in 2017 as an Undergraduate student, and graduated in 2020 when the pandemic hit. He then returned to the program in 2021 and became Head Coordinator of America Reads. When he is not busy with school, Corban can be found spending time with his family, hiking, or traveling. He will be graduating this May and plans to pursue a Ph.D and a career in the Real Estate and City Planning industry. Get to know more about Corban through this interview.

Can you tell us why you decided to come to Clemson University? My original Undergraduate plan was to pursue Architecture, and Clemson University happened to be one of the only schools in South Carolina that offered this program. I also heard great things about Clemson from friends and decided to attend.

What does your role as Head Coordinator entail? It entails a lot of support operations for the tutors and the leadership team. I get to read all the students' reports, assist with training, and coordination issues. Sometimes I even step in as a tutor when needed. I aim to provide support for tutors who need assistance to ensure that each tutor is able to feel confident in the work and lessons that they produce!

What has been your favorite part of working with America Reads? The camaraderie and just being able to feel the community with everyone that I work with, and seeing the tutors grow not just as students but as professionals.

How will working with America Reads help you in your future career after graduation? Working with America Reads has allowed me to adopt traits like being able to adapt to new working situations, understanding the role that I play within an organization, new leadership skills, transparency with my team, and being understanding and intentional about everything that I do.

What advice would you give to someone wanting to become a Coordinator for America Reads? As a Coordinator, be honest and open about your needs and when you feel stressed.

Thank you so much, Corban, for being a part of the America Reads Family. We will miss you!

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DIRECTOR SPOTLIGHT

By Ciarra Weaver

This year, we are pleased to do a feature on Dr. Oti, Clemson University's America Reads Program Director.



Could you tell us a bit about yourself?

My name is Oluwaseun Oti. I am a Nigerian literacy advocate with an entrepreneurial spirit. I started a social enterprise called Magical Books in 2009. I set up this organization to promote healthy reading habits and lifelong learning attitudes among children, teenagers, and adults. I came to the US in 2018 to pursue my doctoral studies in Education. I have also had the opportunity of directing Clemson University's America Reads program while also studying, which has been a fantastic experience!

How did you balance being the Program Director, student, and mother?

Wow! That's a tricky question. It's challenging to balance being a Program Director while being a student and mother, mainly because I am passionate about tutoring and leadership. I tried to be as productive as possible during working hours, prioritizing my school work when needed, even if I had to work into the night, and spending quality time with my daughter in the evening. I can't stress the importance of delegation and teamwork!

Even as a Director, you also had opportunities to tutor; what was your favorite part about tutoring?

My favorite thing about tutoring is the opportunity to impact a child's life. I enjoy picking out books every week, planning my lesson, adjusting my lesson if needed, and seeing my students progress during the semester. This semester, I tutored a kindergartener. At the beginning of the semester, she mentioned that she never told her friends about the books she read. By the end of the semester, I was glad she could tell me she was eager to share books she had read with her friends. She also improved in her spelling and writing. This is just one of the joys of tutoring!

What were the biggest challenges of being a Director, and how did you overcome them?

Managing a big team is the biggest challenge of being a Director. I have overcome that challenge by building a stronger bond between every Clemson University's America Reads team member so that everyone feels valued. I have done that by keeping coordination groups small, manageable and having on-site and offline meetings so that teams can interact and learn from each other outside of tutoring.

What are some of the initiatives that you introduced in America Reads?

I started the library supervision program, birthday shout-outs, coordinator-in-training program, bi-weekly meetings, and consultancy meetings. In addition, I introduced America Reads Newsletter and the oral reading accuracy assessment. Furthermore, I created the daily tutor report allowing tutors to share the activities they completed with their students daily, just to name a few.

How would you best describe staying organized if a future Director asked you?

I love to plan things ahead of time. I also keep a to-do list which I start on the weekend. Doing this lets me stay organized and focused on what I must accomplish for the week. This semester, I created a "team to-do list," where I wrote what the team and I needed to achieve for the week and shared it with every leader. It was great because it helped keep the team focused on the week's goals; if I was missing something, a team member could remind me to put that on the list. I also use google calendar to plan where I need to be so that I do not forget to be on-site during library or school supervision days.

You recently presented your dissertation; how does it feel to be Dr. Oti finally?

Yes, I did. It was titled "Supporting Preschoolers' Early Writing through Parent-Teacher Collaboration." It feels surreal! I am glad to have been able to earn that title after all the hard work!

What is the biggest takeaway from the America Reads program after being involved for several years?

The biggest takeaway that I have gleaned from directing this program is that it is crucial to be adaptable and continuously learn about things that will positively impact tutors and students.

What are your plans after America Reads?

I plan to take some time to relax and breathe while continuing to search for new opportunities. In the future, I plan to find a position that will allow me to continue to make an impact on children's lives.

"Seun introduced biweekly meetings for tutors and coordinators. In these meetings, coordinators would have opportunities to discuss concerns with their tutors, and tutors got to ask their coordinators any questions they may have been having. This was implemented in the Fall of 2021 and has continued until now, the Spring of 2023, and has been very effective in allowing coordinators and tutors to establish a relationship with one another." - Ciarra Weaver

"One of my favorite moments with Seun was during a tutoring session in the Fall 2022 semester, where one of my students encountered a challenging moment. Seun came over to offer her help which was remarkable! Not only did Seun help contribute to my student feeling more confident about reading, but she also helped me realize strategies to use during my session with my student." - Tonya Geathers

TUTORS GOING ABOVE AND BEYOND

By Oluwaseun Oti (Ph.D)

This month, we recognize Kiah Peterson and Faith Chevariat for exceeding in tutoring!



Kiah Peterson is a Junior. She is studying Sociology with a major in Social Services and a minor in Spanish. She joined America Reads in August 2022. When asked why she decided to join the America Reads Team, Kiah Peterson stated, "I love children's books! Working with children is one of my favorite things to do, and I especially love reading, so America Reads offered me the best combination of the two!"

We recognize Kiah because she is passionate about her students and she goes above and beyond to ensure they receive the best possible support. She creates engaging hands-on activities for her students. "I think children learn best when they are doing hands-on activities. When my student needs to practice spelling, for instance, I find it is better to play a game that involves fishing for letters or bingo with the correctly spelled word instead of simply writing spelling words. Because of this, I put much work into creating activities to keep my students engaged, along with finding the right books to pique their interest in reading," Kiah says.

This semester, Kiah tutored three students; a kindergartener, a 1st grader, and a 2nd grader. Every week, she checked out good books from the library, prepared three lesson plans, and tutored each of her students. Furthermore, she completed all reports, which included weekly progress reports, daily tutor reports, and assessment evaluation reports.

She was also present at consultancy and bi-weekly meetings. Her meeting participation provided her with tips on supporting her students. For example, by attending the consultancy meeting, Kiah learned that "spelling and writing assessments are the most helpful for spotting reading problems. I applied this to my sessions by evaluating my students' assessments to see how I can help them reach their potential."

Kiah significantly improved her students' spelling, writing, and reading skills by changing her strategy. Her favorite part of working for America Reads has been seeing her students enjoy activities she created. She is filled with joy when her students get excited to see her "because they know we will do something interesting to help them learn. The most satisfying feeling is when my students lose track of time because they are so invested in an activity that I put much thought into."

We are proud of all Kiah has accomplished this semester and glad her hard work paid off. Congratulations!



Faith Chevariat is a Freshman Psychology Major. She joined the America Reads Team in August 2022. Faith joined America Reads because she loves working with children. She creates lesson plans every week, prepare daily, weekly and monthly reports about her students' progress, and attends meetings with the team.

We recognize Faith as a tutor going above and beyond in creating engaging and exceptional activities for her students. These activities include creating personalized storybooks and lesson plans targeting her students' needs and interests. Faith did this "until every session was enjoyable for her students and me." Her innovativeness paid off as her students' interest in reading improved.

For example, one of her students indicated on an assessment that he disliked reading at the beginning of the semester. When he was re-assessed, by the end of the semester, this had changed. He enjoyed reading, reading to someone else, and learning to read. Faith worked hard this semester to build up her student's reading confidence. "As he's gotten more comfortable and confident with reading, he's grown to enjoy it more," Faith says. This particular student also improved his spelling and writing skills.

Faith describes her favorite activity in America Reads as "in-person tutoring...meeting and getting to know all my students was an amazing experience. It also taught me to adapt and improvise when my original plan wasn't exactly working - a skill that I will use often in life."

Congratulations! Faith, you have done incredibly well, and we are proud of all you have accomplished this semester.

STAR TEAM

By Oluwaseun Oti (Ph.D)

This semester, we want to recognize Lynnea Jacobsen and Torien Oglesby as Clemson University's America Reads Star Team. Lynnea served as a Coordinator-in-Training this semester. Her work exemplifies the role of an effective Coordinator.



Lynnea Jacobsen is a Junior at Clemson University studying Elementary Education. She joined the America Reads program as a Freshman, and we are so proud of her work as a coordinator-in-training this semester. Lynnea supervised Torien Oglesby. Her exemplary leadership involved being available for Torien, consistently giving helpful feedback through our communication channel,

Slack, and at the tutoring site. She also reviewed Torien's work promptly and gave positive feedback on his deliverables.

Furthermore, Lynnea clearly described to Torien what he was expected to complete weekly. By clearly communicating expectations, Torien knew what was expected of him. Furthermore, she provided him with different resources and tips for successful tutoring sessions.



On the other hand, Torien, a Junior at Clemson University and an English Major, made Lynnea's job as a coordinator run smoothly by being communicative and teachable. He responded to communication on time and asked questions if he had any challenges completing his task.

In addition, Torien turned in his required deliverables every week and always made the necessary changes when requested. Torien is a dedicated tutor who has been with America Reads since the Fall of 2022. He creates ingenious activities for his student, Oliver, and continues to refine his activities to help him grow.

When not tutoring, he assists on the America Reads Newsletter because he is passionate about Media and Communications. We are so proud of the synergy that Lynnea and Torien exuded this semester. Keep up this great work!

BOOKS THAT OUR STUDENTS ARE LOVING!

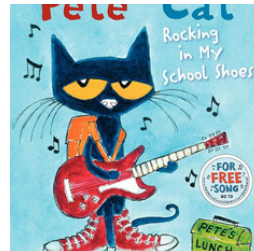
Collated by Torien Oglesby

Kindergarten

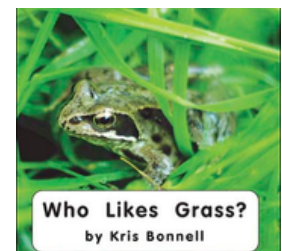
Magic School Bus by Joanna Cole



Pete the Cat by Eric Litwin

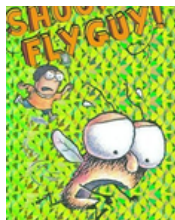


Who Likes Grass by Kris Bensell

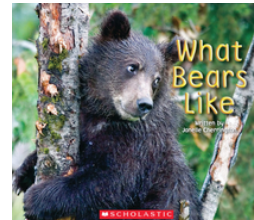


First Grade

Shoo Fly Guy by Tedd Arnold



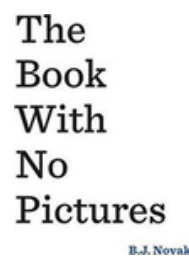
What Bears Like by Janella Cherrington



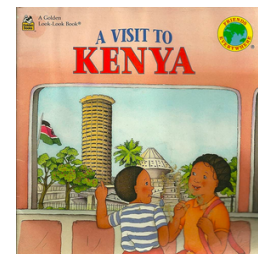
Milk Bottles and Mud Pies by Cindy Farwell



The Book with No Pictures by B.J. Novak



A Visit To Kenya by Mary Packyard and Benrei Huang



The Diary of an 8-bit Warrior by Pirate Council

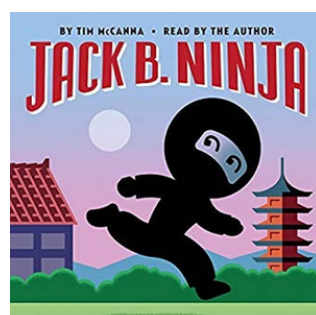


I Want My Hat Back by Jon Klassen



Second Grade and Third Grade

Jack B. Ninja by Tim McCanna and Stephen Savage



Itty Bitty Princess Kitty by Melody Mews



WHY I LOVE AMERICA READS

Compiled by Holliane Belford

In this section, elementary school students share what they love about America Reads.

"I like reading with my tutor."
- Zeke, Kindergarten.

"Reading books and tutoring is so fun! I liked the activity where I hid my Squirtle. Tutoring has helped me read better."
- Gryffin, 1st Grade

"I loved reading the minecraft book."
- Oliver, 1st Grade

"I like America Reads because the tutors are very nice."
- Ayomide, 1st Grade

"Reading together, writing, and reading Pigeon by Mo Willems." -
Ezack, 1st Grade

"I like a dog book. I like my tutor."
- Harper, 2nd Grade

In this section, our America Reads tutors share what they love about America Reads

"I have really enjoyed furthering my relationships with my tutees. I make a positive impact on them, big or small. All of my students have been so bright and eager to learn throughout our sessions. I really love seeing them improve and become more confident in their abilities. My favorite activities so far have been digraphs/blends and creating a story."
- Darien Bowman

"I loved my reading time with Ezack! He really gives his all and is usually engaged. Seeing his growth and positive mindset build this semester has been reassuring. Both my teams at Clemson Elementary and West End Elementary have been great! Knowing that I am making a difference in Ezack's outlook on English Language Arts (ELA) warms my heart."
- Katie Kerce

"I like playing blend games with Harper, like Bingo. She is fun to read dog books with too!"
- Kiah Peterson

WHAT PARENTS ARE SAYING ABOUT AMERICA READS

Compiled by Oluwaseun Oti (Ph.D)

We are so thrilled to have our parents share their thoughts about how America Reads has impacted their children.

"America Reads is a great program that assists kids with tutoring needs free of charge. It has helped my son so much in many ways. Every week, he looks forward to going to America Reads with his tutor (Ms. Kiah). I love how they communicate weekly through progress reports to keep parents engaged and up to date with what my son is learning and accomplishing in the program. It is because of America Reads that Aceyn knows how to read and actually enjoys reading. Thank you, America Reads."
- Aceyn's Parent

"America Reads has been an amazing program for my kindergartener. He has really connected with his tutor, Jayvon, and he looks forward to their time together each week. My son can get frustrated when he has trouble sounding out a word, but I have noticed that his confidence has increased after his time in America Reads. Now, he may take longer to sound out a word, but now he knows he can do it. That is HUGE. We are so grateful for the care and service Jayvon and the America Reads program has shown our family. I can't wait for my 2-year-old to be ready to participate!"
- Zeke's Parent

"We are so grateful for the opportunity Oliver has been given to receive this one-on-one reading and writing help from the America Reads program. This is his second year working with Torien. Oliver looks forward to their time together all week long. He has started writing page after page, has sent letters back and forth with his tutor and is showing enthusiasm for reading and writing. He raves about Torien. Thank you Torien for being such a great support and role model for Oliver."
- Oliver's Parent

"It gave me great pleasure when Tashya was enrolled in the "America Reads" program for primarily two reasons. The program nurtured the quest and proclivity towards learning through books, a habit highly essential in the coming age and world dominated by social media. For a child to appreciate the gain of knowledge and information from books while enhancing their vocabulary as well as creative thinking skills is priceless. Secondly, the program encouraged post-reading discussions and writeups to encourage the students to process the information they have gained and add value to the complete program giving the child a holistic learning experience. I am eager for Tashya to be enrolled in the next semester as well! This is a program any parent would wish their child to be in, no matter what!"
- Tashya's Parent

Do you have a school in the Pickens area that needs tutors who provide one-on-one support to elementary school students in reading and writing during after-school care?

We would love to hear from you. Please send the Director an email at oaina@g.clemson.edu.

THE VALUE OF OUR MEETINGS

By Tonya Geathers and Oluwaseun Oti (Ph.D)

As a Clemson University America Reads Tutor or Prospective Tutor, you might wonder why it is beneficial to attend our bi-weekly or consultancy meetings. In this section, we share with you the purpose of each meeting and how this has benefited our team.

Purpose and Benefits of Bi-weekly Meetings:

The purpose of our bi-weekly meetings is for coordinators to share updates about tutoring with tutors. The semester usually gets busy with school work, so checking in with coordinators bi-weekly, helps tutors stay up-to-date with everything. In past meetings, some of the updates that tutors have

received include discussion of tutoring days left in the semester, upcoming deadlines of deliverables, specific assessments to be completed in upcoming weeks, and clarification of activities.

Furthermore, bi-weekly meetings are an opportunity to share your tutoring experiences and learn from the tutoring experiences of other tutors. You can also discuss concerns about your students or other challenges you are facing.

Through this opportunity to share and learn, you build confidence in your tutoring practice, find support and counsel, and stay motivated throughout the semester. We get it! Tutoring can sometimes be challenging, but with a caring team, you will find the support and motivation you need to be successful.

For example, one of our tutors, Elizabeth Mey, stated, "*Bi-weekly meetings allow me to talk about my tutoring experience, listen to other's stories, and take away information that could be useful to my students.*" Take advantage of these meetings because who understands and gets you better than your fellow tutors? You can better strategize together on practical techniques that will help you thrive as a tutor.

Purpose and Benefits of Consultancy Meetings:

Consultancy Meetings take place once a month. These are strategy meetings that cover student behavioral management, effective tutoring techniques, reading and writing strategies, practical lesson planning techniques, tutor-student relationship management, and the effective use of assessment data. At these meetings, all leaders are present to guide and support you. Sometimes, tutors are broken into smaller groups, with the Director and Co-Director heading one of these groups. Since they are both Doctoral students in the Literacy Field, they can provide best literacy advice that is research and theoretically-driven.

Furthermore, consultancy meetings allow tutors to discuss with the team, progress made with each of their students and receive feedback on how to tackle challenges they face during tutoring sessions. Consultancy meetings also help tutors stay on track, update their students' curricula, and develop strategies for improving their sessions. For example, one of our tutors, Kiah Peterson, shared her takeaway from these meetings, "*From my consultancy meeting, I learned that the spelling and writing assessments are the most helpful for spotting reading problems.*"

In addition, one of our coordinators-in-training, Elizabeth Mey, also shared that, "*During the consultancy meeting, I learned how to pick books that would allow my student to read confidently. I also learned how to support him when he approached a word he didn't know how to read.*"

So next time you wonder why you need to be at any of these meetings, remember that these meetings are beneficial to your tutoring experience at Clemson University's America Reads.

OUR LIBRARY SUPERVISORS' ROCK!

By Sky Springs

Behind the scenes, we have library supervisors working hard to support our tutors and their students in various ways! Library supervisors can be found at our library in Sikes Hall and can be easily contacted through Slack!

What the library has to offer:

The library has many things to offer tutors so they can make the most of their tutoring sessions. We have a ton of books ranging from level A to Z, and of course, they're organized by level for easy pick up! For example, Kiah Peterson notes that, "The library has been helpful for me because the books are split by reading level, so I don't have to sift through hundreds to find books that each of my students can read."

The role of our library supervisors:

Our library supervisors are there to help check in and check out books and materials. If tutors arrive outside of library hours, we have a process that allows them to check out things themselves. The library also has different activities and games for students, ranging from letter sounds and phonics practice. But that's not all, the library also provides the essentials like pens and pencils, crayons, scissors, and notebooks. Each item can be found in a designated area in the library with the help of library supervisors!



Our Tuesday Library Supervisors. From L-R: Ciarra, Anaya, Seun, Anesia, and Elizabeth

Helping with Book and Activity Recommendations:

Library supervisors review students' curricula and assessments so that they can better recommend books and activities specific to each tutor's student. Torien Oglesby, one of our tutors, attest to this help that library supervisors provide by stating, "I have gotten books chosen for me to use in sessions that have helped Oliver read more and get more confident in his reading." Library supervisors also ensure that books recommended align with students' interests, and that these books also serve as "mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors (Bishop, 1990)."

Bringing things to the site:

Our library supervisors are also on-site at the tutoring sessions. When tutors are not able to make it into the library to check out books or materials, library supervisors bring them to the site! They also work as standby tutors in case of a tutor's absence.

Completing other crucial tasks:

Library supervisors also complete other tasks that help with the smooth running of America Reads. Some of them include creating assessment and reassessment packets for tutors, entering assessment results and creating reports based on those results, taking inventory of all books available, and organizing the library to make materials more accessible.

We appreciate the amazing work our library supervisors have done this semester!

PICTURE GALLERY



Tuesday West End Elementary Tutoring Team



Wednesday West End Elementary Tutoring Team



Tuesday Clemson Elementary Tutoring Team



Friday Clemson Elementary Tutoring Team



Consultancy Meeting



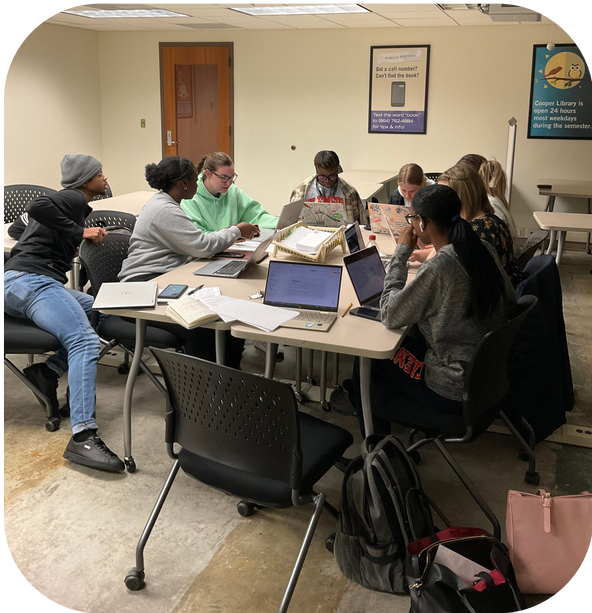
Bonding Time



Tutors at Training



Bonding Time



Consultancy Meeting

Meet the America Reads Newsletter Team



Oluwaseun Oti (Ph.D)
Director and Newsletter Editor



Holliane Belford
Coordinator



Sky Springs
Library Supervisor



Ciarra Weaver
Coordinator



Torien Oglesby
Tutor



Tonya Geathers
Coordinator-in-Training



Anaya Chandler
Library Supervisor

A Message from the Director



Dear Readers,

Welcome to the Clemson University's America Reads 2023 End of the Year Celebration. I am so excited to see children who participated in the program this year, their parents, teachers, principals, and our amiable America Reads team.

This year, we served 55 students; 17 kindergarteners, 20 first graders, 11 second graders, and seven 3rd graders from Clemson Elementary, West End Elementary, and Six Mile Elementary. We have seen children improve their reading confidence, reading interest, writing, and spelling skills over the year, and this has been so great to watch.

I am so proud of each child who participated in our program this year. I am also extremely pleased with our tutors, library supervisors, and coordinators who do their best to ensure every child is provided with the resources and support they need to thrive.

I want to specially thank the Office of the President who has continually invested in our End of the Year Celebration Event. I hope everyone enjoys their time at this event, and I wish you all a happy summer. - Oluwaseun Oti (Ph.D)