

First Lady Michelle Obama promotes reading

Written by Audrey Fischer, Editor, Library of Congress Information Bulletin
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First Lady Michelle Obama and U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan were special guests at the National Education Association's 13th Annual "Read Across America" Day, held at the Library of Congress on March 2. The event celebrated Dr. Seuss's 106th birthday and kicked off the NEA's national reading-promotion campaign, in which an estimated 45 million educators, parents and students are expected to participate in literacy promotion events nationwide.

"We're honored that the NEA president chose this library to host this important event," said Librarian of Congress James H. Billington. "This building—the Thomas Jefferson Building—is named for a president who loved reading!"

Working with the Library's Center for the Book, the NEA is one of the Library's 80 reading-promotion partners. "President Obama issued a proclamation making this 'Read Across America Day' and you get to be here, in America's library," said NEA President Dennis Van Roekel, addressing nearly 300 Arlington, VA, and District of Columbia elementary school students who came to the Library of Congress for the event.

The gleeful students were entertained by musicians who got them on their feet. But the kids later sat attentively as U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan read the Seuss classic *Horton Hears a Who!* Published more than 50 years ago, the book's message remains timeless: every voice counts, no matter how small.

"The President of the United States reads all the time," declared Obama. "We make sure our girls read every day. They can stay up an extra 30 minutes if they are reading, so you know everyone in our house reads every night."

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Obama read *The Cat in the Hat* to the children, making sure to point out the book's valuable lesson—do not let strangers in the house when parents are not at home, lest mayhem ensue. At the part in the story when the children are asked whether they should confess the outrageous events of the day, Obama paused to advise, "Always tell your mother the truth."

Wearing replicas of the *Cat in the Hat*'s iconic red-and-white stovepipe hat, the children greeted the beloved character himself and two other surprise guests, Thing 1 and Thing 2.

NEA President Van Roekel administered "The Reader's Oath" to the children.

"I promise to read each day and each night. I know that it's key to growing up right ..."

A webcast of the event is available on the Library of Congress website at www.loc.gov/today/cyberlc/feature_wdesc.php?rec=4853.