



F·R·I·E·N·D·S

OF NORTH CAROLINA PUBLIC LIBRARIES

Supporting Friends of the Library Statewide

F * R * I * E * N * D * S TALK

March 2026

Dear Friends,

Friends, one (and maybe the only) advantage to our really lousy cold weather is having more time to read. (Can you see me smiling?) And, I have just finished Louise Penny's The Black Wolf, the sequel to The Grey Wolf that came out last year. If you are a mystery reader and have not discovered this Canadian author, you should give her a try. I would recommend reading them in order, however, so you can get the setting and full character development in your mind. These are complex stories with lots of plot twists, and the characters are well formed with diverse personalities. I'm always interested in reading what is happening in their lives and work. One of the reasons for this may be the fact that my maternal grandparents were English Canadians from Ontario. I have traveled in both Ontario and Quebec where Penny's books are set. Now, I want to return....

In news a little closer to home, spring is coming (I hope); and the ground may soon be ready for the installation of our storywalk in Sparta. We have the stands, a responsible volunteer to look after the stands, a first book on order, and a member of our town council who is ready to mark the positions in our town park so that town workers can begin installation. HOORAY! When that happens, I'll send pictures. We've been jealous of those of you who already have and enjoy them. And, I

must thank Judy Hills, newsletter editor, for her guidance in the installation and monitoring processes. Their chapter has two storywalks!

Visiting and assisting chapters by officers and board members is one of the delights of your leadership. You have read articles and seen pictures of Judy visiting several chapters. She has been a valuable resource. I have been invited to visit two others this spring - one in Boonville and the other in Asheboro. The Asheboro chapter has Temple Grandin, the "acclaimed author, inventor, and autism advocate" coming this month. This event is sold out! Please share your special events with us. If we can be of assistance, that's one of the reasons this organization exists!

Yours in Friendship,

Joyce Speas, President





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**2026
DUES
\$35!**

JOIN US THIS YEAR

**It's time to renew!
Join as a Friends group
or as an individual...**

We hope you will join or renew your FONCPL membership! It's more important than ever for FOL's around NC to stand together as advocates and fund raisers for our libraries.

**FIND THE GROUP FORM [HERE](#). FIND THE INDIVIDUAL
FORM [HERE](#).**

AI & Public Library Book Clubs Newsletter by Cindy Shipley

Using AI for Public Library Book Clubs

Using AI for public library book clubs can make discussions richer, more inclusive, and easier to manage while still keeping the human connection at the center. AI tools such as Claude.ai, ChatGPT and Gemini can be a genuinely useful addition to a library book club's toolkit not to replace the richness of human discussion, but to support it. Here are some practical ways libraries are using AI to facilitate vibrant book clubs and discussions:

Discussion Preparation

- Generating discussion questions is one of the most practical uses. You can provide the AI tool a book title, author, and a brief synopsis, then ask for questions at different levels — plot comprehension, thematic analysis, character motivation, and personal reflection. This saves facilitators hours of prep time.
- Background research is another strong use. AI can quickly summarize an author's biography, historical context, literary movement, or critical reception giving facilitators a solid briefing they can share with members before the meeting.



During the Meeting

Some clubs display a tablet or laptop and invite members to ask the AI tool questions in real time for example, looking up a contested historical fact in a historical novel, exploring word origins, or checking whether a film adaptation exists. This keeps the energy going without derailing discussion.

Accessibility Support

AI tools can help generate plain-language summaries for members who have difficulty finishing a book due to time or reading challenges, ensuring they can still participate meaningfully. It can also help translate key themes or passages for members whose first language isn't English.

Programming and Outreach

AI tools can help with crafting promotional blurbs, drafting email reminders, generating social media posts and by asking AI to draft a 200-word recap to share on the library website.

Reader's Advisory

After a book club meeting, AI tools can help members find their next read by suggesting books with similar themes, tone, or structure.

A Few Things to Keep in Mind

Using AI well in this context means staying thoughtful about a few things. AI-generated discussion questions can be generic, so facilitators should review and personalize them for their specific community. AI summaries should supplement reading, not replace it. Library staff should be transparent with book club members when AI tools have been used to prepare materials. Always verify factual information using trusted sources before distributing printed materials.

The best book clubs are built on genuine human connection and the irreplaceable experience of sharing a story. AI works best here as a quiet assistant in the background, not the center of the room.

AI Generated Book Club Discussion Questions by Cindy Shipley

AI Prompt: Generate Book Club discussion questions for *Demon Copperhead* by Barbara Kingsolver

Demon Copperhead — Book Club Discussion Questions

Plot & Character

1. Demon narrates his own story with a sharp, sardonic voice. How does his perspective shape the way you understand the events of his childhood? What does his storytelling style reveal about his character?
2. The novel follows Demon through a series of foster homes and caregivers. Which relationships felt most formative to you, and why? Who, if anyone, truly looked out for him?
3. Demon's artistic talent surfaces throughout the book. How does drawing function as both escape and witness for him? What does it mean that he becomes someone who records his world?
4. Dori and Demon's relationship is one of the emotional cores of the novel. How did you read their bond — as love, mutual destruction, or something more complicated?

Themes

5. Kingsolver draws an explicit parallel between Demon's story and *David Copperfield*. Did knowing that framework change how you read the novel? Were there moments where the 19th-century echoes felt particularly resonant or strained?
6. The opioid crisis is the novel's central subject. How does the book complicate easy narratives of blame — addicts, doctors, pharmaceutical companies, poverty? Who does the novel hold most responsible?

7. Appalachia is rendered with deep specificity. How does place function as character in the novel? Did the book change or challenge any assumptions you brought to it about the region?

8. The foster care system is depicted as frequently failing children like Demon. How did the novel balance systemic critique with the humanity of individual characters within that system?

9. Masculinity — its performance, its costs, its traps — runs through the book. How does Demon navigate expectations about what it means to be a man in his community?

Craft & Context

10. Kingsolver won the Pulitzer Prize for this novel. Do you think the prize was warranted? What do you see as the book's greatest strengths and any of its limitations?

11. How does the novel handle hope? Is it optimistic, tragic, or something in between by the end?

12. If you've read *David Copperfield*, how did the source material enrich your reading? If you haven't, did you feel you were missing anything essential?

Personal Reflection

13. Did the novel shift how you think about addiction — specifically the relationship between trauma, environment, and dependence?

14. Kingsolver has said she wanted to give a voice to a community often spoken about rather than heard from. Did the novel succeed in that goal for you?



MOUs—Update from Two Library Systems

Last month we told you about the library system that was forcing one-sided MOUs on the five libraries in their system. As of the end of February (deadline to sign is 3/31/26), two groups have signed. One group is trying to reconstitute their Board and has asked for an extension on the deadline. Two groups have not signed yet. The largest of the five Friends groups offered the library system an alternative MOU that in their opinion was fair to both sides. The library system attorney reviewed both documents and offered a third option that removed the offensive language from the first option. The new MOU was not perfect, but it was a lot more reasonable than the first one. The Friends have until March 31st to sign the modified agreement.

Friends in the Forsyth County Library System hired an attorney. The biggest sticking point right now is **who owns the books that the public donates**. The library claims they "own" all donated books. This is an interesting assertion. Here are some factors that come into play in this issue.

- 1) Who promotes or markets the opportunity for the public to donate books?
- 2) where are the donations accepted?
- 3) For donations made at the library, does the library sort the books and keep books for their collection and/or to sell online, and/or take books to sell themselves at the library?
- 4) Does the library decide what books to keep for the Friends to sell (e.g., do they cull the books)?
- 5) Does the library box up and store the books for the Friends?
- 6) Is the sale held on library property? If not, if the space for the sale is rented, who pays the cost?
- 7) Do the Friends pay for liability insurance coverage for the sale?
- 8) Who sets up and staffs the sale?
- 9) Who is responsible for the books remaining after the sale? What happens to them?

We hope all Friends groups that do not currently have an MOU with the library or library system that they serve are paying attention to these MOU discussions. You might be next.

Remember to Thank Your Volunteers!

Large and small Friends groups need to remember that most volunteers devote time to Friends because of their passion or interest in reading and libraries. Their dedication and motivation might wane if they feel unappreciated. Your finances might dictate your strategies, but that should not preclude you from making these volunteers feel valued. Here are a few ideas to acknowledge your Friends.

- **Send Personal Thank-You emails.** Sending personalized emails to volunteers is an excellent, low-cost way to let them know you appreciate what they do. Reach out to their supervisor so you can include specifics on how they

rock their job - when it comes to recognition, little details go a long way.

- **Create A Volunteer Yearbook.** Collect pictures from various projects, annual events and holiday parties, and put them together in a volunteer yearbook to celebrate your volunteers' work and highlight special memories.
- **Implement A Kudos System.** Everyone knows that if someone "gives you kudos," they're essentially saying that you've done an excellent job. Work this into the way you interact with volunteers by developing a kudos reward system.
- **Throw A Pizza Party!**

Spread the Good Word About Libraries by Karen Robbins

Advocacy for libraries and librarians is easier the more you know about them and their roles in our communities, particularly with book censorship on the rise. Some states have criminalized librarians for refusing to remove books they believe must stay in their collections. How can we support and encourage them as FOL members? Here are a few key resources for you to learn more and then share with your FOLs.

PBS is now showing two very important independent films about libraries and librarians. Check on the PBS app, under Independent Lens, or online at PBS.org. There you will find the wonderful and moving film *The Librarians*, directed by Kim A. Snyder, which has been showing at many theaters around the country. But if you live in a small town or rural area and weren't able to see it in a theater, now you can catch the film right on your television. It is both moving, and eyeopening. The bravery and commitment of the librarians in the film will amaze you at first. But after you watch the film, I think you will recognize the resilience and strength in your own favorite librarian in your town or county.

PBS also has another film, this time highlighting libraries. *Free for All: The Public Library*, directed by Dawn Logsdon and Lucie Faulknor. This film tells "the story of the quiet revolutionaries who made a simple idea happen". Please take time to immerse yourself in all things library this month. The film captures the important role of libraries as information hubs, community gathering places, and sanctuaries where people can go to read, think, and learn. As library advocates, this film can give you the

words and ideas to talk to others in the community who may not know the treasure that sits right in their own community.

As a part of **Independent Lens**, PBS also has a blog that may interest library fans. "More than Books: 10 Different Ways Libraries Make our Lives Better" by Anthony Ha gives a good summary of some of the many reasons libraries are more important than ever. <<https://www.pbs.org/independentlens/blog/more-than-books-10-different-ways-public-libraries-make-our-lives-better/>> Once again, his words can help us give voice to our advocacy.

Closer to home, familiarize yourself with the website for the [State Library of North Carolina](#). The home page has links for many helpful things:

[Services for Libraries](#)

[NC Libraries](#)

[NC Literary Trails](#)

You can find featured news, programs, services, and information about your own library. There are grant opportunities and much more. For Friends groups who may need some detailed ideas about training new members, click on [Services for Libraries](#), then *Resources for Libraries*, then *Management*. Open the tab for Friends of the Library. There you will find an interactive module for Friends training, information about MOU's, as well as a link to us, the **FONCPL**, and **United for Libraries**.

Go out into the community and advocate for libraries. There is so much to celebrate, inform, support, and share. Spread the good word about libraries.



Grants: Foundation for the Carolinas 2026 Competitive Grant Cycle

How to apply: Step 1: Determine alignment Before applying, please review our grant program investment areas and geographic guidelines. Visit the [Online Grants Center](#) to determine if your work aligns with one or more programs. To see Foundation For the Carolinas most current Competitive Grant Cycle information, [click here](#). **Step 2: Complete the online application** Once you select a grant program, the application will request information about the needs your organization will address, how you will evaluate results and your budget, including other funding sources. For a sample application, [click here](#).

Grant Program Name	2026 Grant Cycle Dates	Contact
Margaret C. Woodson Foundation	January 5 – February 2	Alex Russell arussell@fftc.org
The Cole Foundation	Q1: January 12 – February 6 Q2: April 6 – May 1 Q3: July 13 – August 7 Q4: October 12 – November 6	Nicole Fote nfote@fftc.org
Community Foundation of Richmond County	Q1: January 12 – February 6 Q2: April 6 – May 1 Q3: July 13 – August 7 Q4: October 12 – November 6	Nicole Fote nfote@fftc.org
The Longleaf Fund	January 13 – February 26	Ayanna Wakefield Lutin awlutin@fftc.org
Cherokee County Community Foundation	March 2 – March 27	Nia Scarboro nscarboro@fftc.org
Iredell County Community Foundation	March 2 – March 27	Nia Scarboro nscarboro@fftc.org
Stanly County Community Foundation	April 6 – May 1	Nia Scarboro nscarboro@fftc.org
Lincoln County Community Foundation	May 4 – May 29	Nia Scarboro nscarboro@fftc.org
Lancaster County Community Foundation	June 1 – June 26	Nia Scarboro nscarboro@fftc.org
Union County Community Foundation	July 6 – July 31	Nia Scarboro nscarboro@fftc.org
York County Community Foundation	July 6 – July 31	Nia Scarboro nscarboro@fftc.org
Salisbury-Rowan Community Foundation	July 24 – August 21	Alex Russell arussell@fftc.org
Lexington Area Community Foundation	July 31 – August 28	Alex Russell arussell@fftc.org
Cleveland County Community Foundation	August 3 – August 28	Nia Scarboro nscarboro@fftc.org
Cabarrus County Community Foundation	August 31 – September 25	Nia Scarboro nscarboro@fftc.org

A Good Example of an FOL Announcement of New Board Members

The Friends of Swansboro Library held officer elections for president and treasurer at the December 20th general meeting. Outgoing president, Paula Patselas and treasurer, Jay Whelan and the Friends membership are pleased to announce Pam Ruff as the new president and Karen Woolston as the new treasurer for the 2026 through 2027 term. Both Pam and Karen are outstanding leaders and well prepared to take the reins of the president and treasurer roles. Judy Fitzpatrick will remain on the Board as Vice President and Deborah Ruzicka will continue as Secretary and she also serves as the book sale coordinator. Together, the foursome of Friends leadership brings many talents, creative ideas contemporary vision and people skills to the group.

The central mission of the all-volunteer nonprofit Friends organization is to support the Swansboro Library through fundraising and collaborative efforts to help fund programs, special events, technical needs and more which often require funding which is be-

yond the budget. The Friends maintain a strong working relationship with Swansboro Library branch manager Stephanie Edwards and the entire staff in large part to promote the wide scope of programs and services provided by the library for the community.

Currently, our greatest strength in highlighting and encouraging community engagement with the many services of the library is through Friends networking directly with the Swansboro area community through our very popular bi-monthly used book sales, growing the Friends membership, interactions with local businesses, social media and presence at local events.

The next used book sale will be held on Saturday March 14th, 9am -1pm at the Swansboro Library. Purchases are by donation only, cards and cash are accepted. Come visit and meet the new president Pam Ruff and new treasurer Karen Woolston.



Letter Writing—A Lost Art

Remember the Pen Pals program you might have experienced as a youth? Well, there is a resurgence of this program intended to get us off our devices and connect with one another. Another advantage is using cursive writing. Cursive writing offers significant cognitive, physical, and educational benefits, including enhanced brain development, improved fine motor skills, and increased writing speed. It boosts memory and neural connectivity by engaging both brain hemispheres, aids in reading and spelling by strengthening muscle memory, and helps eliminate letter reversals. It is also considered a calming, artistic skill that boosts focus. You can use all those phrases to help promote this program. Here are some ideas.

Friends could host a weekly, bi-monthly, or monthly letter writing café. Provide coffee, drinks, and snacks. Have on hand some pretty stationery, colored, pens, stamps, interesting things to insert into the envelopes (e.g., book marks, uplifting quotes, stickers, etc.). All the participants have to do is to show up with an address or two. Or if they don't have someone to connect with, the Friends could talk to a local assisted living facility to see if they would provide the name and a few details about a needy resident who might enjoy receiving mail. The participants complete the letters and the Friends mail them at the end of the session.

Another way to do this is to **set up a letter writing station at the library** with some inspirational material displayed. You could provide the stationery and other items to add to the envelope. You could have a

sealed box into which the patron puts the completed letter. A Friends collects these once a week, puts on a postage stamp, and mails the letters. [Click here](#) for more information. [Click here](#) for an example.

And guess what: **April is National Letter Writing month!** A perfect time to start such a program.

Worldwide Library Pen Pal Connections

Join the Worldwide Library Pen Pal Connections Facebook group! Scan here to join the group!

You will:

- Learn the FAQs on how to get started
- Speak with folks experienced in establishing a program
- And connect with other libraries around the world to start your own pen pal program!

ARE YOU INTERESTED IN BUILDING LIBRARY CONNECTIONS THROUGH "SNAIL MAIL" RATHER THAN EMAIL?
HAVE YOU BEEN WANTING TO START A PEN PAL PROGRAM WITH ANOTHER LIBRARY, BUT YOU DON'T KNOW WHERE TO START?



Home Library Ideas

If you are a Friend of a library, you undoubtedly love books and reading. You probably also have a home library. With spring on the horizon, perhaps now is the time for a library makeover. Southern Living had an article on this topic recently. Here are a few tips from it.

- Make it moody with handsome colors and rich textures
- Fill shelves thoughtfully. Intersperse books with tasteful curated items.
- Carve out a reading nook
- Indulge your sense of whimsy
- Spring for drama—be bold!
- Showcase treasured finds
- Choose a pattern or theme
- Introduce a loud hue
- Redefine the space.

And don't forget to use repurposed books!

[Click here](#) to see photos. If you do a newsletter, why not invite your members to send in photos of their home library? Or have a before/after contest?



Puzzle Competitions

Hosting competitions can serve a number of purposes: increase foot traffic at library, be a fundraiser, gain new members, or just for fun. There are many ways to possibly win a puzzle competition: first to finish, last to finish, most pieces in place within a certain time. The latest fad is speed puzzling: how fast can a team finish a certain size puzzle. The interesting part is that the teams don't have to be in the same place or even be working at the same time. The competition can take place at all libraries in a system and then times compared to choose the winners.

There can be age categories with the puzzles being different for each age group. **How might Friends get involved?**





**Friends of North Carolina
Public Libraries**

Helping Friends Build Resilience

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Newsletter Editor--Judy Hills

Grants & Awards Coordinator—Billie Lawson

Advocacy Coordinator—Karen Robbins

Membership Coordinator—Vacant

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CALENDAR

All material for the newsletter is due to editor [Judy Hills](#) by the 25th of each month.

[Click here](#) for the 2026 Calendar of National Events—use these to plan your activities.

FONCPL Board Zoom Meetings 10 AM quarterly

Here are a few dates of note:

MARCH

3/1 Zero Discrimination Day

Mar 1-7 Return the Borrowed Book Week, Teen Tech Week

3/2 Read Across America Day

3/2 Dr. Seuss Day

3/4 National Grammar Day

3/6 National Day of Unplugging

3/6 Employee Appreciation Day

3/6 World Day of Prayer

3/14 Genealogy Day

3/8 Start of Daylight Savings Time

3/9 Barbie's Birthday

3/12 National Girl Scout Day

3/14 Pi day

3/16 Freedom of Information Day

3/17 St. Patrick's Day

3/19 Let's Laugh Day

3/19 International Read to Me Day

3/20 Spring equinox

3/20 Won't you be my neighbor day (Mr. Rogers)

3/21 World Puppetry Day

3/21 World Poetry Day

3/22 World Water Day

3/26 Live Long & Prosper Day (Leonard Nimoy's BD)

3/30 Doctor's Day

3/31 National Crayon Day

