



Dear Texas Library Colleagues,

I am very pleased to introduce *Know Your Neighbor: Cultivating Communities of Compassion*, the 2019 theme for Read Across Texas, a project of the Texas Center for the Book. We intend for this exciting project, which suggests four profoundly moving books in each of four genres, to provide the basis for a series of community conversations about how to encourage civility, compassion, and stronger communities.

We hear much nowadays about the divisions in our society that keep people from coming together and interacting as neighbors and fellow citizens. Libraries are key elements of a social infrastructure that provide a valuable place for social engagement and interaction. The titles we are encouraging communities to read in this year's statewide reading program explore ideas of how to overcome our divisions and connect with our neighbors on a sustaining, human level.

I have read all four books and I can personally recommend all of them. *Tattoos on the Heart* by Father Gregory Boyle is a sometimes hilarious and sometimes heartbreaking memoir of his work helping gang members in Los Angeles to gain employable skills—and the best book on compassion I've ever read. *A Man Called Ove* by Fredrik Bachman is a heartwarming and funny story about how people are so much more than our first impressions. *The Strange*, a graphic novel by Jérôme Ruiller, uses animal-like figures to explore the plight of strangers in a strange land. And *Dreamers* by Yuyi Morales is an award-winning picture book in which an immigrant mother and her son find a welcoming and enriching place in their local public library.

I hope you will consider participating in *Know Your Neighbor: Cultivating Communities of Compassion* to use these books to bring your community together in a discussion of our shared values as Texans and Americans. Our Center for the Book Coordinator Rebekah Manley will be providing book sets, made possible by our Friends of Libraries & Archives of Texas, to as many libraries as possible as well as a toolkit including questions that you can use to spark quality discussions. Please visit www.tsl.texas.gov/readacrosstexas to apply for books and peruse the resources.

Thank you for what you already do to cultivate compassionate communities. I look forward to hearing your success stories as you participate in this worthwhile program.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mark Smith".

Mark Smith
State Librarian

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