

# BookPALS' lively sessions inspire kids to love reading

According to *Becoming a Nation of Readers: The Report of the Commission on Reading*, "Reading aloud to children is the single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading." Unfortunately, many families can't find the time to read together. To help compensate for this, performers from the Screen Actors Guild Foundation are putting their talents to use while helping students get excited about reading.

Thanks to BookPALS (Performing Artists for Literacy in Schools), professional actors, broadcasters, theater students and trained community volunteers read aloud weekly to children through the school year. Actors bring stories to life, become animated, enthusiastic role models for literacy, and encourage children to fall in love with books.

Since beginning in Los Angeles in 1993, BookPALS has become one of the fastest-growing literacy programs in the country. The Arizona BookPALS branch has more than 60 readers at 35 schools in the Phoenix metro area and Tucson.

BookPALS also donates books to build classroom libraries and staffs the Washington School District's Gardner's Story Box, a telephone storyline.



**Carol Peck**  
Guest  
columnist

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"We have a special Book Pal who visits our class every Friday," said Yavapai Elementary teacher Marilyn Zolondek. "When the door opens and Rosie Witcher appears, the children cheer. Witcher reads and acts out stories with our students. You can hear a pin drop punctuated by laughter and sometimes gasps. Her sessions are always engaging, entertaining and enthralling."

BookPALS features many programs, all with the single result of improving literacy for children.

"I feel honored to administer a program that excites and impacts so many students without costing the schools any money," said coordinator Ellen Dean.

"The program also delights our dedicated volunteers most of whom are performing artists. They love seeing students excited about the books they read aloud to them and as actors, they get a chance to practice their craft using different dialects and voices. It's a win-win for everyone."

Want to become a Book Pal? Contact Ellen Dean at 602-750-2923 or [cdean112@cox.net](mailto:cdean112@cox.net).

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*Carol Peck is president and CEO of the Rodel Foundation of Arizona. Her columns appear every other Sunday. Post your questions and comments on her blog at [azcentral.com/members/Blog/DrPeck](http://azcentral.com/members/Blog/DrPeck) or send them to [rodel@rodelfoundations.org](mailto:rodel@rodelfoundations.org).*