

2021 Tulare County Spelling Champion crowned today



Kleema Al-Ghazali, an eighth grader from Live Oak Middle School in Tulare, captured the Tulare County Spelling Championship today in the 37th round of the competition. Kleema won the event by successfully spelling “cataphora.”

This year, the competition was held virtually, attracting 65 participants, grades 4-8, in the preliminary rounds held March 11. The finals, held today, included 19 spellers.

The second place winner was Yong Lee, a seventh-grade student at Sycamore Valley Academy in Visalia. Natalia Morton, a fifth grader from Mission Valley Elementary in Tulare, placed third.

Kleema will compete in the virtual Scripps National Spelling Bee beginning in June thanks to a sponsoring partnership with the *Visalia Times-Delta*. If she advances through the preliminary, quarterfinal, and semifinal virtual rounds, she will compete in the finals in Orlando, Florida, with the top 10-12 spellers in the nation. The *Visalia Times-Delta* is covering the cost of the Tulare County champion’s travel to the National Spelling Bee finals if she advances to the final round. If not, the newspaper will provide the local champion with a travel prize of \$2,000 to use on a family vacation of her choice.

Photo above:

~ Tulare County Superintendent of Schools Tim Hire poses with the 2021 Tulare County Spelling Champion Kleema Al-Ghazali. The spellers in the Spelling Championship competed virtually this year.

Readership project puts books in students' hands at a time they need them most



Readership

Improving lives through the power of books

In the depths of the COVID-19 pandemic last fall when students across California were learning virtually, some learners in five Tulare County districts enthusiastically welcomed some low-tech gifts – books. The books – 30,000 of them – have been distributed to 50 teachers and over 1,900 students through the Readership project, a grant-funded program that launched with a virtual conference for teachers in five pilot districts in September 2020.

The Readership project is a program the Tulare County Office of Education's Central Valley Networked Improvement Community (CVNIC) funded in 2019 by a grant from the California Department of Education. The grant was used to create a literacy program aimed at helping improve student performance on the English Language Arts portions of state assessment tests. Now in its pilot stage, Readership includes teachers from schools in Earlimart School District, Monson-Sultana Joint Union School District, Porterville Unified School District, Woodlake Unified School District, and Woodville Union School District.

In the six months since the Readership project team held its first meeting with teachers from partner school districts, the group has held two additional virtual conferences featuring Penny Kittle, author of *Book Love*; and Anthony Zuiker, creator of the *CSI* television franchise. Mr. Zuiker, who writes social-emotional graphic novels for young people, donated hundreds of his books to participating schools. The project team has also worked with community partners from the Tulare County Sheriff's Office, Porterville Police Department, Woodlake Police Department, and Tulare County Office of Education Foster Youth Services to distribute books to homes in communities served by the grant. The books have also been given to participating schools to help build site and classroom libraries. Additionally, the Readership team has ordered Little Libraries for each school site, a take-one, share-one kiosk for spreading literacy among all students at each school site. Educational Resource Services has also benefitted from the grant and is adding new titles to its own library collection.

During the third meeting of Readership, teachers were able to share some initial data. Project co-directors Jenean Bray and Tammy Milligan of Educational Resource Services shared that 80% of the teachers are now motivated to share book talks with their students each day, and 86% of the students in grades 4-8 said they are connecting to the books being shared. "Initial data collected shows that students are increasing their interest in reading and are motivated when teachers share books



through book talks,” they said. “This is key data because we know that motivation to read leads to increased reading volume, which leads to positive results in achievement. We will have more concrete data once the state tests are administered, but will be examining assessments at school sites to assist teachers in monitoring their school’s data.”

Next year, Readership will hold four meetings featuring teaching tips, current research around literacy, and book talks, plus follow-up coaching focusing on the literacy and social-emotional learning connection. Participating schools will also learn the basics of Improvement Science as the project implements continuous improvement cycles of learning throughout the year.

“The work that the Readership project is doing will be foundational to a future countywide shift in student attitudes toward literacy,” said Tim Hire, Tulare County Superintendent of Schools. “We have much work to do to keep students engaged in reading in their late elementary and middle school years, particularly our English learners and socio-disadvantaged students. The rewards of this work however are greater academic success, and college and career readiness.”

In May, Jenean and Tammy will present the Readership project to leadership at a California Department of Education (CDE) conference. The CDE has also asked the team to create resource videos for its website to help other LEAs as they begin their journeys toward improving literacy on a local level. For more information on Readership, contact Jenean Bray at jenean.bray@tcoe.org, or Tammy Milligan at tammy.milligan@tcoe.org.

Photo above:

~ Students from Monson-Sultana Joint Union School attend a book giveaway event held last fall. The Readership project has partnered with various community agencies, including the Tulare County Sheriff’s Office, to organize book giveaways to benefit families in communities served by the project.

Registration now open for virtual Support Staff Conference



The annual Tulare County Support Staff Conference is returning this year as a virtual event on May 5. Marlene Moreno, administrative assistant for the county superintendent, shares that the event will feature a keynote presentation by Tom Murray, plus two breakout sessions with nine topics each. The breakout sessions include topics on communication, mental health, family life, and personal organization.

Keynote presenter Tom Murray serves as the Director of Innovation for Future Ready Schools in Washington, D.C. He has testified before the United States Congress and has worked alongside that body, the US Senate, the White House, the US Department of Education and state departments of education, corporations, and school districts throughout the country to implement student-centered learning. A best-selling author, Mr. Murray serves as a regular conference keynote. He was named the 2018 National/Global EdTech Leader of the Year by *EdTech Digest*, the 2017 Education Thought Leader of the Year by Texas Computer Education Association, and one of 20 to Watch by National School Boards Association in 2016. His best-selling book, *Learning Transformed: 8 Keys to Designing Tomorrow's Schools, Today*, co-authored with Eric Sheninger, was released in June 2017. His most recent book, *Personal & Authentic: Designing Learning Experiences that Impact a Lifetime*, was released in October 2019.

For registration information, including an agenda, registration fees, and a list of breakout sessions, visit tcoe.org/support.

Registration now open for virtual Poetry and Prose



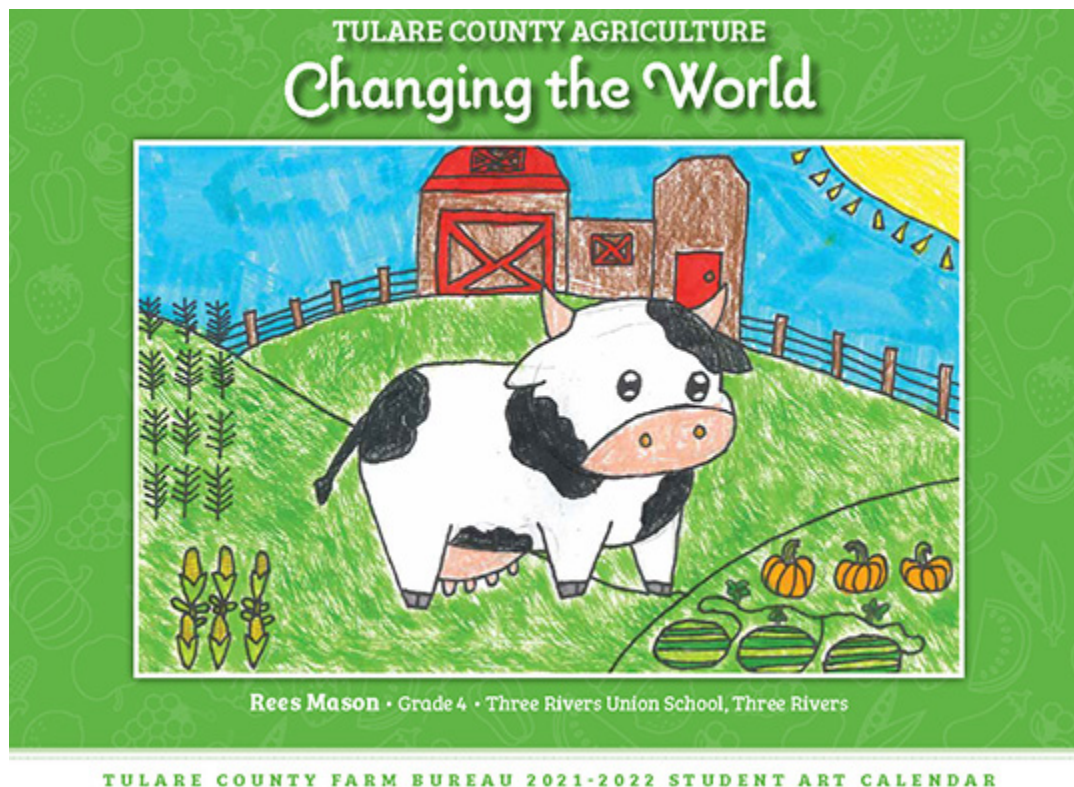
Teachers are invited to register for the 36th Annual Poetry & Prose event. The long-running oral interpretation event will be virtual this year and open to students in grades K-8.

Ninety-minute morning and afternoon sessions are available April 27–30. Teachers can register their schools at pnp.tcoe.org. Once registered, teachers have until April 14 to submit a list of students and their poetry selections to the link on the Poetry & Prose webpage.

During the event, registered students will share their recitations with a judge via Zoom. Following the event, coordinators will mail personalized certificates to each participant's school.

For Poetry & Prose registration information, contact Brook Killingsworth at brookk@tcoe.org.

Annual Tulare County Farm Bureau Student Art Calendar published this week



Tricia Stever Blattler, executive director for the Tulare County Farm Bureau, presented the organization's annual Student Art Calendar to the Tulare County Board of Supervisors yesterday. The annual calendar presentation coincides with National Agriculture Day (March 23) and serves as a colorful reminder of the importance of agriculture in Tulare County.

This year's calendar carries the theme, *Tulare County Agriculture: Changing the World*. Rees Mason, a fourth grader at Three Rivers Union School, created the artwork featured on the cover of the April 2021 to March 2022 calendar. Inside, the calendar features fun facts on various Tulare County seasonal produce, dairy, and meat, along with additional student artwork. The calendar will be distributed to Tulare County teachers beginning this month.

Additional featured artwork includes:

Back Cover

- Jose J. Alvarez IV, Grade 12, Dinuba High School

Monthly Artwork

- Aaron Aguilar, Grade 7, St. Aloysius School, Tulare
- Madison Daniska, Grade 1, Three Rivers Union School
- Esmeralda Dimas, Grade 11, Orosi High School
- Kiera Finnegan, Grade 8, Charter Home School Academy, Visalia
- Ayla Frausto, Grade 11, Orosi High School
- Yasmin Garcia Ibarra, Grade 11, Orosi High School

- Faith Hernandez, Grade 6, St. Aloysius School, Tulare
- Meghan Lucero, Grade 6, Summit Charter Intermediate Academy, Porterville
- Gwyn Mason, Grade 3, Three Rivers Union School
- Itzel Nunez, Grade 5, Houston Elementary School, Visalia
- Crystal Olivas, Grade 12, Oroqui High School
- Iyari Saucedo, Grade 8, Porterville Military Academy

Student projects selected to advance to California Science & Engineering Fair



The annual Tulare County Science & Engineering Fair was held virtually on Saturday, March 13. Students presented their projects to judges via Zoom for a chance to represent Tulare County at the state competition. In congratulating the winners through a video message, Tulare County Superintendent of Schools Tim Hire said, “You should be incredibly proud of the work you put in and the amazing projects you produced. You have exemplified Albert Einstein’s quote, ‘The important thing is to never stop questioning,’ as you practiced the scientific process – even during distance learning!”

The six Tulare County projects selected to advance to the 2021 Virtual California Science & Engineering Fair April 12-13 are:

- *Too Much Fertilizer!* by Jayla Karplus from Three Rivers Union School
- *Calcium Level in Meal Worms* by Eli Lang from Three Rivers Union School
- *Different Destinations: The Influence of Weight on Flight* by Abigail Nesmith from Three Rivers Union School
- *How Long Should You Wash Your Hands?* by Aaliyah Paggi from Three Rivers Union School
- *Reducing Plastic* by Anna Villavicencio from Three Rivers Union School
- *Biotechnology and the Soybean Revolution Take Two: Reestablishing Baselines to Examine GR Soybean Meal on Plant Growth and Environmental Pollution* by Libby Sanders from Sequoia Middle School in Porterville

For a list of all Science & Engineering Fair results, visit tcoe.org/ScienceFair.

Photo above:

~ Jayla Karplus, a student at Three Rivers Union School, developed a project entitled, Too Much Fertilizer!. Jayla's project is among six selected to represent Tulare County at the California Science & Engineering Fair next month.

Distance Learning Resources

- [Arts All Around Us](#)
- [TCOE Learning at Home](#)
- [TCOE's Educational Resource Services Library](#)

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To receive *News Gallery Week*, visit tcoe.org/GetTheGallery, or contact Jennifer Fisher at jenniferf@tcoe.org or (559) 733-6172.