Nursing home residents, students keep Read Across America event going through video

Books are among the things treasured across generations, which is why no one wanted to see a pandemic end the reading relationship between Mary Endres Elementary School and a Crystal Lake nursing home.

Students across grade levels and residents from The Fountains of Crystal Lake continued their Read Across America Day on March 2 via Google Meet as they did last year interacting and sharing some of their favorite children's literature.

Gina Alessi, community life director at The Fountains, has a daughter at Mary Endres and helped arrange the event where nursing home residents read books to classrooms.

"They love doing it," Alessi said. "They've been talking about it for the past couple of weeks and figuring out which books to read."

Residents used to come in person, and hopefully, will be able to visit again next year. Alessi said the streaming video chats have worked out well in the meantime. Teachers got into the spirit by dressing in costumes of favorite book characters such as the Cat in the Hat.

Classrooms projected the residents on big screens, and they were able to interact with the kids who answered the story readers' questions about the morale of the stories they chose.

This year's books included: "The Dog House," by Jan Thomas; "Everybody Says Meow" by Constance Lombardo; "Toad on the Road" by Stephen Shaskan; and "Penguin Problems" by Jory John.

Margaret Eaheart, a second-grade teacher at Mary Endres, said her students had a great time at the Read Across America event. Student Ben Kong said he loved the stories, while classmate Aerolynn Chanthasene was partial to the "funny" books.

"I like that we got to see the people reading," second-grader Hailey Turner said.

Eaheart said the students were particularly eager to connect with the residents since they sent Valentine's cards to The Fountains residents in February.

"They loved the books and listened so quietly. It was a very special part of our day," Eaheart said.