

Ellison Grant Reflection  
Graham Elementary Library-Gretchen King

INTRO:

During the 2023-2024 school year, we had more than 50 students identified as multilingual, representing more than 20 different languages ranging from Spanish and Russian to Tagalog, Punjabi, and Lingala. At the time, the library had less than 10 bilingual books, all of which were Spanish picture books. This lack of diverse books led me to find ways to help meet the needs of our ever-growing diverse families.

DESCRIPTION:

Thanks to the Ellison Foundation Grant, I was able to add over 130 books. These books included biographies, graphic novels, audiobooks, picture books, and chapter books. I chose biographies highlighting important figures like the first African American Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm or interesting record breakers like Fauja Singh the oldest person to run a marathon (Fig 1). Students gravitate toward graphic novels, but I was intentional in adding some diverse and award-winning title such as Asian Pacific Island American Award book *Mabuhay!* (Fig 2). We added a handful of audiobooks like *A Duet for Home*, one of our Elementary Battle of the Books titles. This provided more ways to access the titles for students who wanted to participate in our competition, but may be struggling readers (Fig 3). I added over 50 picture books ranging in topics like religious holidays, family traditions, importance of names, and cooking. *A Hundred Thousand Welcomes* shows what hospitality looks like and the word “welcome” in 12 different languages (Fig 4). I also added over 35 chapter books, the majority of which were large print additions. These books featured a wide range of BIPOC authors, as well as, diverse and modern characters. I also purchased a few popular titles like *Dork Diaries* in large print editions. The large print books physically look similar to their traditional counterparts, so students don’t have to feel self-conscious (Fig 5-7).

STRENGTH:

During the 2024-2025 school year, the books purchased through the Ellison Foundation Grant had a total of 303 checkouts. This feels like a success because students are finding good books. The addition of more inclusive books featuring a wide range of characters from various backgrounds and cultures makes our library more relevant. Students can find themselves reflected in the stories on our shelves or can learn about others who may experience things differently than themselves. The picture books were some of the easiest books to showcase in our story time area, above the shelves, or in collection tubs. Over 75% of our new picture books were checked out at least once. Many of them going home with some of our youngest students (K-1), where they are sharing them with their families. One Native American student chose *Why We Dance* because they were participating in a local Powwow over the weekend. This student shared that their mother was making a jingle dress for the competition. Our popular titles in large print were also a big hit with some of the biggest circulation among the purchased books. Transitional grades (2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup>) have students with a wide range of reading abilities. The large print books meant that some of the students were able to tackle a “bigger” book due to the white space and larger font.

### CHALLENGES:

Our district is rapidly growing and our 19<sup>th</sup> elementary school opened this fall. Due to the proximity of this new school, over 150 students were no longer within our school's boundaries. Graham Elementary went from a population of 610 to 440. This year we have 27 multilingual students speaking 10 different languages. While the number of students served is smaller than last year, the overall percentage of our population is roughly the same. The need for books in languages other than English is important. Through the Ellison Foundation Grant, 8 beginner language picture books were purchased covering Punjabi, Hindi, Filipino, Ukrainian, Russian, German, Italian, and Persian (Fig 8). Although our number of students being served is smaller, these are still some of languages spoken by our multilingual students. Unfortunately, due to other ongoing projects like a district curriculum adoption, the language books were not processed in time to be put out for circulation. Thankfully, that just means there are new books to highlight for next year!

### CONCLUSION:

Graham Elementary Library is fortunate to have been selected for the Ellison Foundation Grant. These extra funds have had a tangible impact on our students: high quality books that better meet the needs, interests, and experiences of our student population. By putting more books in student hands, they are gaining more exposure and hopefully a deeper understanding of the larger world around them.

### FIGURES:



Fig 1. Two featured Biographies

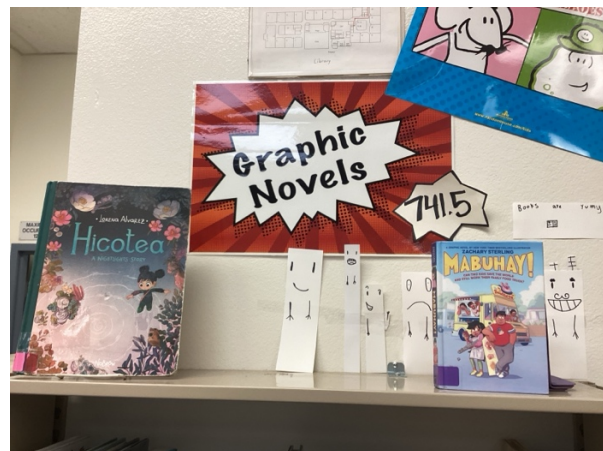


Fig 2. Graphic Novels

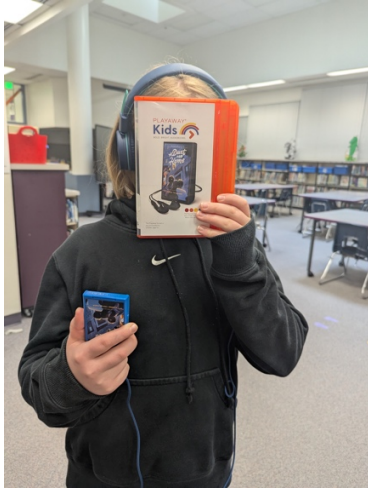


Fig 3. Audiobooks



Fig 4. Picture book sample

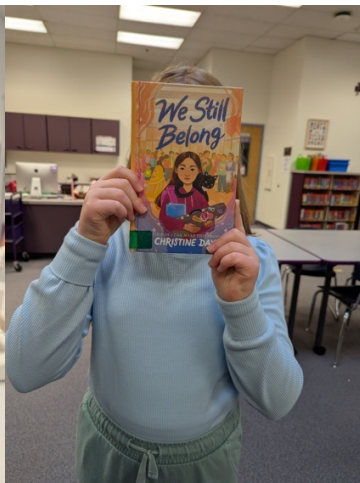


Fig 5-7. Large print next to traditional, BIPOC chapter book, and display of new chapter books



Fig 8. Language books waiting to be processed