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Book festival boosts close encounters with authors, MS kids

JACKSON, Miss. – The Mississippi Book Festival spreads its footprint beyond the capital city for the first time this year, sending authors into classrooms across the state and kicking off the festival on the Mississippi Coast. A celebration at Pass Books/Cat Island Coffee House will be held on Thursday, August 16 at 6:00 p.m. Well-known writers, participants in the annual festival, will visit public schools and gathering spots in Jackson, Hattiesburg and on the Gulf Coast to connect with young readers on Friday, August 17, 2018.

“We’re thrilled that this year the Mississippi Book Festival is bringing authors into classrooms around the state,” said Margaret McMullan, author and festival board member, who is also the sponsoring the event through the James and Madeleine McMullan Family Foundation. “When students have the opportunity to meet authors, they are often inspired to read and write themselves, which fits perfectly with our foundation’s mission to support initiatives around literacy and education.”

The authors of *Can I Touch Your Hair? Poems of Race, Mistakes, and Friendship* will speak to 1,500 Jackson Public School (JPS) 4th graders in two sessions at Galloway United Methodist Church on Friday, the eve of the 4th annual Mississippi Book Festival at the State Capitol in Jackson. The book by co-authors Irene Latham and Charles Waters explores the intersection between race and childhood friendships. The programs are presented in part by the James and Madeleine McMullan Family Foundation; all students will receive a copy of the book as a gift from the Mississippi Book Festival.

“Jackson Public School District is excited for our schools to participate in the Mississippi Book Festival. It provides our students the opportunity to see, hear and meet nationally acclaimed children’s book authors,” said William Merritt, executive director of federal programs within JPS. “This annual event is truly a phenomenal experience for our students.”

Young adult authors Jo Watson Hackl and Augusta Scattergood will engage with students along the Gulf Coast and at book store events in Pass Christian and Hattiesburg.

Scattergood will talk with Perkinston Elementary students about her new book *Making Friends with Billy Wong*, inspired by true accounts of Chinese immigrants in the American South during the civil rights era. The Stone County Library bought copies of Scattergood's book to donate to each student who attends.

At two Bay St. Louis public schools, Hackl will share insights on her *Smack Dab in the Middle of Maybe*, a youth adventure set in Mississippi, and students will be able to take home copies of the book, compliments of the Mississippi Book Festival and Pass Christian Books in Pass Christian.

The James and Madeleine McMullan Family Fund, Phil Hardin Foundation, Feild Cooperative and Mississippi Humanities Council are partners in bringing these authors and their rich, relevant programs to children in Mississippi public schools.

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