

Local readers are getting into the “Merced Reads” photo drive



By [Beverly Barela](#) On Mar 25, 2021, pp. 1, 9

Show the world how much you value reading when you participate in “Merced Reads”!

Have a loved one or friend shoot your photo with a good book that you’ve read or are reading.

Then email it with your name to:
friendsofmercedcountylibrary@gmail.com .

The deadline for emailing your “Merced Reads” photo is March 26.

Susan Walsh, who is on the Friends of the Merced County Library’s Board of Directors, is the “Merced Reads” mastermind.

Walsh told the Times, “A lot of people do read because the circulation at the library is going up, and I belong to four book clubs. So clearly people are reading.

“So we asked people to take a photo of themselves or others reading.

“We decided to collect pictures of adults reading so we can show people that there are a lot of people reading.

“We have collected 40 pictures so far. Our goal is 100, and our last day to collect them is March 27.

“During National Library Week, which is the week of April 4 through 10, we’re going to put them on the library’s Facebook page and the library’s web page, and other venues.

“Some of the photos will be used on thank-you cards for the Merced County Library staff during National Library Week.”

What is Merced Reads’ connection to Read Woke?

Walsh informed the Times, “It’s important that people get library cards and that adults and children read books.

“The Friends of the Merced County Library, a countywide Friends group, wanted to work with the library to encourage people to read.



Email a photo of yourself reading a book for ‘Merced Reads’ exhibit.

“So the library started a program called Read Woke.

“Cicely Lewis, creator of Read Woke, said, ‘Read Woke is a movement. It is a feeling. It is a form of education. It means learning about others so that you can treat people with respect and dignity no matter their religion, race, creed, or color.’

“The first supporters of this project were the Merced County Library, the Friends of the Merced County Library, United Way of Merced County, Merced City Council member DelRey Shelton and City Manager Stephanie Dietz of the City of Merced. They joined to encourage people to read books from cultures other than their own. Many other partners joined the group.

“Everyone who is a partner in this recognized that we have to work on improving reading levels of students in Merced County that have not substantially changed in decades. We are all committed to make it happen.

“So ‘What can we do as a group?’ was the question. One answer was to celebrate books that represent different parts of our society — poor people, African Americans, Hispanic Americans, and so on.

“We recognized that we see very few people reading.

“And we thought that a poor child wouldn’t want to read about kids who are driven around in limos, so we’re wanting books which represent people in our community.

“We partnered with others and talked about reading books about different segments of our community, and then the MAC came in with the idea of doing crafts related to the books, and they did three crafts. And that’s when we thought what can we do to show people reading?

“And that is how Merced Reads came about.”

How can you get involved in Read Woke?

Community members are invited to diversify their reading experience by joining the Read Woke Challenge from now through May, 2021 through the Merced County Library website.

There are featured books, book discussion and virtual author visits.

Book discussions are held on the second and fourth Thursdays of the month at 2 p.m.

For a Zoom invitation, those interested can email: friendsofmercedcountylibrary@gmail.com .

Walsh told the Times, “From January through May, Read Woke has adopted 10 categories. In January, we read about Immigrant Voices and the Voices of Poverty and Homelessness, and in February we read about African American and Native American Voices, and in March, we are reading about Female Voices.

“On March 25, we are going to do a book discussion about Hispanic American Voices, and we’re going to read a book called The Poet X.

“At 2 p.m., we will have a webinar where we’ll talk about this book, and the person leading the discussion will be Manuel Alvarado, the Director of United Way of Merced County.

“It’s a young adult novel interesting to people of all ages about a Latin American girl growing up in a big city who can only find her voice through writing poetry. Her poems are about her life in the city, and she joins a Poetry Club after school and that’s how she finds her voice. It’s an eye opening and a lovely book.

“On May 4 from 3 to 4 p.m., we are having a virtual visit by author A. R. Hinton on a Zoom webinar.

“Mr. Hinton spent 30 years on death row in Alabama before being exonerated and released. His memoir, ‘The Sun Does Shine: How I Found Life and Freedom on Death Row’, has received national praise and was selected for the Oprah Winfrey Book Club.

“He talks about how difficult it was for him to get out of prison once he was exonerated. He spent years in prison falsely charged.

“All of these books make you think about people whose experiences are not yours.

“In doing this, we just want to encourage people to read.

“In connection with Read Woke, the Merced Multicultural Arts Center put together three crafts. One was about poverty and homelessness, and it was a craft for children on how to make a collage of a bike. It followed the story of a little boy who found some money and he wanted a bike so badly, but his family was so poor that they didn’t have money for food or rent. What did he do with the money? You can find out by reading the story.”