National Young Readers Week in the midst of a literacy crisis

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This November, the tradition of National Young Readers Week continues in classrooms across the nation. This event, started in 1984 by Pizza Hut, according to the education platform Twinkl, continues today as a way of encouraging young literacy.

From the 9th to the 13th, Young Readers Week is celebrated both in and outside classrooms, as students participate in Pizza Hut's "BOOK IT" program. This incentivises elementary-aged students to read by rewarding them with a free personal pizza.

Outside of the free pizza, every teacher has their own approach to making reading fun for their students with themed events, activities and books.

An alumna of Arkansas State University, Erin Eastman, is a 4th grade literacy teacher at Valley View Intermediate. Eastman said that throughout the year she encouraged young literacy.

"I encourage my students to read independently daily, not just for National Young Readers Week," Eastman said, "One of the best parts of my job as a reading teacher is exposing kids to books they wouldn't normally read on their own, engaging in deep and meaningful conversations about characters and plot lines, and just seeing them come into class each day excited to read a novel with the class,".

Eastman comes from the perspective of an excellent educator, ranked in the top 2% of the state according to K8 News. She was honored as K8 teacher of the month in December 2025, and continues to work hard to better her students.

This work to encourage her students is not only very beneficial but necessary, especially in a time of national literacy crisis. According to The National Literacy Institute, only 31% of 4th graders are reading on grade level or above as of 2024. This number has continued to decrease over the years, down from 2022.

In the actual classroom, this issue continues to show up. Eastman shared her personal struggles as an educator in 2026.

"I definitely see the effects of the literacy crisis in my classroom. A lot of my students are very involved in after-school extracurriculars, which often trumps schoolwork and reading at home," Eastman said, "Of course, we all blame screens too for taking the place of reading and meaningful interactions with adults. Unfortunately, creating daily reading habits isn't something valued by all families,"

This issue with reading becoming de-emphasized is apparent not only in children's reading statistics, but in adults. A staggering 56% of adults in the U.S. read below a 6th-grade reading level, according to the National Literacy Institute. Globally, this puts us scoring below average.

In context, people with low literacy skills are twice as likely to be unemployed, according to the World Literacy Foundation, and also experience worse health outcomes. These factors also contribute to the generational cycle of illiteracy, as parents are often unable to provide resources to encourage their children to read.

For current education majors, this is something to stay aware of and informed about. This issue will continue to affect classrooms across the nation in the following years, unless these efforts are taken seriously.

This National Young Readers Week, you can combat the literacy crisis by encouraging the young people around you to read, and don't forget to pick up a good book for yourself.



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The Cat in the Hat:

Exactly What You Thought It Would Be and Less



ROBYN CANARD

SPECIAL TO THE HERALD

This past Friday, November 6th, Warner Brothers' "The Cat in the Hat" was released in theaters.

With a runtime of 1 hour 47 minutes, "The Cat in the Hat" follows the titular Cat in the Hat, voiced by actor Bill Hader (and animated with the thickness of a typical Pixar mother), as he fights to keep his job at the "Institute for the Institution of Imagination and Inspiration," a fictional "Boss Baby"-esque children's entertainment company filled with similarly gimmicked creatures.

He's tasked, in a heavily sabotaged manner, with cheering up siblings Gabby and Sebastian, voiced by Xochitl Gomez and Tiago Martinez respectfully, who've recently been through a rough move to a different city.

This, of course, is deconstructed into deeper, underlying issues as the three go on a "hero's quest" to retrieve a dangerous magical item called the "Go-Backer," which would allow the user(s) to repeat segments of time. The Cat intended to use this item to undo any accidents or messes caused by his hijinx, but was hijacked by Gabby in an attempt to undo the families' move altogether, before ultimately becoming lost in one of three shenanigan-filled pocket dimensions.

Through this adventure, the kids learn to appreciate what they have and to live in the moment, and The Cat ends up keeping his job and continuing to entertain kids.

My primary gripe with "The Cat in the Hat" is that it's just sort of boring. Despite my personal desire to remain impartial, I went into this movie anticipating something abysmal.

I expected to see the usual "kids pay too much attention to their phones" bit, overuse of immature physical humor, dated references and general lack of touch regarding what today's youth is like and/or enjoys.

And I got exactly that. Though, despite this, I wasn't mad or appalled; I was just bored. I couldn't bring myself to feel anything passionate about this movie, because I, much like how I assume the writers of the movie were, was uninspired by what was presented to me.

There were only two parts of this movie I legitimately enjoyed, and one wasn't technically part of the movie at all. The first was the pre-show, a charming Looney Tunes short titled "Daffy Season" and starring the late Eric Bauza, wherein Daffy Duck competes for attention against Soccer Season.

The second was the movie's primary antagonist, a ginormous dragon-like creature known as the "Something," which in the end (spoiler alert) turns out to be a disfigured, time-warped Thing 2. I found the "Something" to be truly off-putting in concept and effective in execution, which is a great thing to be when you're a body-horror-related monster.

I'll grant this movie one more thing: it had a splendid cast of voice actors; aside from the three previously mentioned, the movie also featured big names like Matt Berry (as Waffles), America Ferrera (as Carmen), Giancarlo Esposito (as Mr. Hoogeboom), Quinta Brunson (as Sherrie from HR), and Bowen Yang (as Gary). This cast did great with what they were given (and I must add, it's very refreshing to see a recently-made movie– especially animated– without Akwafina in it).

In watching this "comedy" movie, I only genuinely laughed seven times (yes, I counted), and two of those times were only because of specific line deliveries and not any intentional gag or joke. Now, I will concede that I am, in fact, not the target audience for this movie but I still can't help but feel cheated on behalf of the kids watching. All I could think of while watching this movie in theatres was the other movies I could've been watching instead, namely the 30th anniversary screening of "Scream" two doors down the hall.

To conclude, "The Cat in the Hat" was lackluster at least, and alright at most. I got exactly what I thought I would and not much more, and ultimately left the theatre mildly disappointed. Rating it on a scale, I give it a 5/10– an average score for an average movie.



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