



## Dr. Janet Allen's Plugged in to Reading®

Maine School Gets  
“Plugged-in” to Higher  
Reading Scores

### THE CHALLENGE

Located in a rural farming community in Maine, Caribou Middle School serves approximately 325 students. In 2005, the school, like many others, faced serious problems, including low standardized test scores and disengaged students who refused to read books. According to the Maine Educational Assessment (MEA) standardized test results, only 42 percent of Caribou Middle School's eighth-grade students met the state reading standards that year. Educators were in need of a two-part solution: effective new reading curriculum and professional development support to meet their goals.

Susan White joined the school's leadership team as principal during the 2005–2006 school year. Immediately, White sought a curriculum that could help her teachers provide a well-rounded approach to boost both reading and writing skills.

“Searching for successful reading curriculum for middle school students is not an easy task,” said White. “There aren't many programs available, let alone

programs that actually work. I wanted to find a curriculum that connects reading to writing and provides better novels that students actually want to read.”

### THE SOLUTION

White found what she and the teachers at Caribou Middle School were searching for in Plugged-in to Reading, a literacy program for 4<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grades authored by internationally respected literacy expert and teacher Dr. Janet Allen.

Based on high-interest, authentic literature and complementary nonfiction readings, Plugged-in to Reading gradually moves readers from teacher-directed instruction to peer-supported learning and finally to self-directed learning. Each level of the program comes with resources and materials that guide teachers towards best-practice literary instruction across content areas.

Caribou Middle School began using Plugged-in to Reading and Plugged-in to Nonfiction, a program based totally in authentic nonfiction, in the Spring

# “Since we started using the Plugged-in to Reading program, our students can’t wait to read new novels.”

of 2006. White saw a change in the students’ attitudes immediately.

“It’s great watching not only the students grow and develop, but our teachers as well,” said White. “Since we started using the Plugged-in programs, our students can’t wait to read new novels. And our teachers are more confident in their ability to teach reading and writing. Plugged-in helped give them that confidence.”

The program comes equipped with graphic organizers, vocabulary support, and research resources that allow teachers to customize their teaching plan and effectively introduce novels and nonfiction texts that command the interest of their students.

“Reading text is not always enough for my students,” said Mary Curtis, seventh-grade English Language Arts (ELA) teacher. “That’s why, in my opinion, Plugged-in to Reading works. The program helps students expand their vocabulary and improves comprehension—which leads to the ability and desire to read higher-level material.”

Caribou Middle School was given additional funding to support professional development efforts due to Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) status in accordance with No Child Left Behind (NCLB). This funding has allowed them to build a special relationship with program director Dr. Janet Allen, who is herself a Maine native.

## THE RESULTS

After four years of using Plugged-in, the staff has noted measurable progress made by their students. Not only have the students’ attitudes toward all learning improved, but the number of eighth-grade students passing the Maine Educational Assessment (MEA) has greatly increased.

Teachers and administrators found that students are not only excited to complete class reading assignments, but are taking books out of the library and reading books during their free time. It has also been noted that Plugged-in raises the level and rigor of class discourse—which is something the teachers have not witnessed before.

Perhaps the most tell-

ing sign of success is that students report that they are significantly more confident in their reading ability.

“Before Plugged-in to Reading, students were reluctant to read,” said Curtis. “It was as if they were almost too scared to read because they were afraid of failing.”

Having recognized the increased level of confidence in students, Caribou Middle School used Plugged-in to Reading as a foundation for the school’s first ever school-wide read. The entire school, grades five through eight and special education students, read *The Lightning Thief* by Rick Riordan. Plugged-in to Reading made it possible for all students at various reading levels to read and comprehend the story.

The school celebrated with a theme day. Students and teachers transformed their classrooms into summer cabins with their own unique flags, designed togas, learned about Greek theatre and participated in *The Lightning Thief* trivia.

The theme day is sure to be a fond memory for years to come, and Plugged-in made it possible for students of all reading levels to understand the material. As a result, Caribou Middle School students will continue to improve their reading ability and raise their confidence.

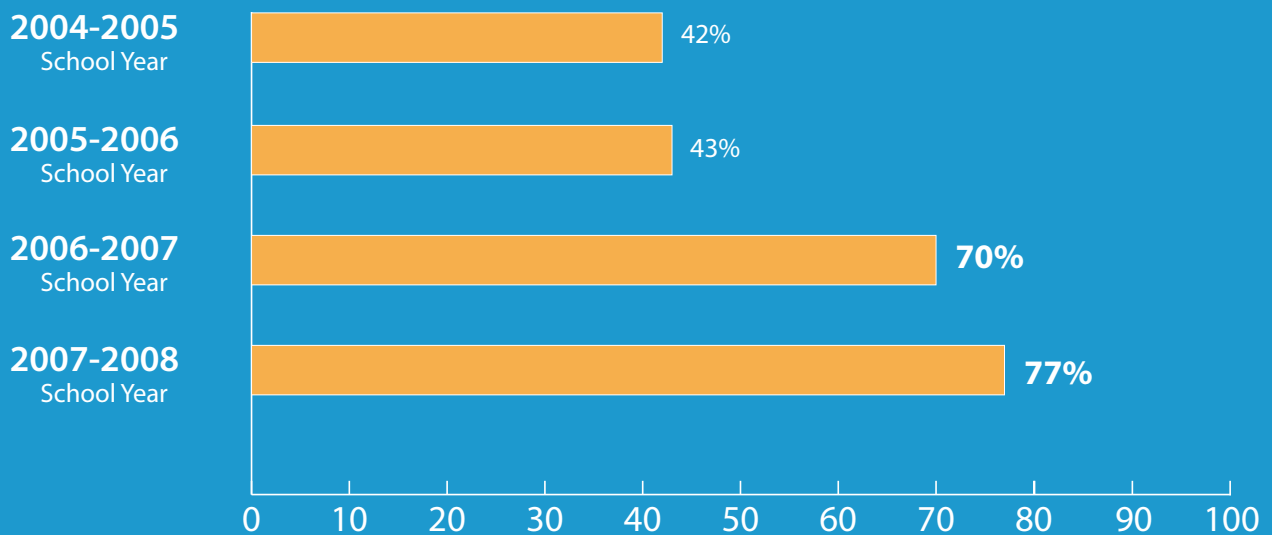
“Plugged-in has revolutionized the way reading and writing is taught



# MAINE EDUCATIONAL ASSESSMENT (MEA) TEST RESULTS:

Since the implementation of Recorded Books' Plugged-in to Reading program at Caribou Middle School in the 2005-2006 school year, the number of students who met or exceeded state standards for the MEA test has greatly increased. See the results for yourself.

KEY: ■ CARIBOU MIDDLE SCHOOL AVERAGE



at our school,” said White. “The program addresses the needs of our most gifted learners, as well as the needs of our struggling learners. The professional development directives given on each page in the Teachers Guide support and encourage teachers to stretch their students’ abilities on top of their own. Our students are readers now. Our teachers are confident about their abilities to effectively teach reading

and writing. Plugged-in to Reading has given them that confidence.”

## WHAT'S NEXT?

After success with the Plugged-in programs, Caribou Middle School’s special education ELA teachers Twyla Learnard and Sue Keaton are working with Dr. Allen to share strategies they have designed especially for their special education students to complement the Plugged-in curriculum.

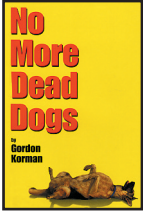
Caribou Middle School plans to continue purchasing more books as their budget allows. Teachers are also planning another school-wide theme day based on the resounding success of the previous one. One potential book for theme day is *The Wanderer* by Sharon Creech, which students will already read as part of Plugged-in.

THIS STORY AND MORE CAN BE FOUND AT:

[www.pluggedintononfiction.com](http://www.pluggedintononfiction.com)

Call 1-800-638-1304 for more information.

# What are authors saying about Plugged-in to Reading?



“No one is close to Dr. Janet Allen when it comes to strategies to motivate kids to read and become lifelong readers. Her approach is straightforward and commonsense, built on the foundation of the literature she loves. Yet she doesn’t get bogged down in the kid-tastes-versus-adult-tastes quagmire. She just flat-out KNOWS what works.”

—**Gordon Korman**, best-selling author of *No More Dead Dogs*, a Level 1 Plugged-in to Reading Core Novel, [www.gordonkorman.com](http://www.gordonkorman.com)



“Approaching literature is often challenging for young readers in the inner city, but I’ve seen many children clearly relax with Recorded Books and actually develop a desire to approach the printed material armed with the head start of an audio introduction.”

—**Walter Dean Myers**, award-winning author of *Monster*, a Level 2 Plugged-in to Reading Core Novel, [www.walterdeanmyers.net](http://www.walterdeanmyers.net)



“As an author, I’m always thinking of ways to break down the barriers between the story I want to tell and the person who will eventually read it. But what about the young person who finds reading itself so frustrating that literature seems to be locked up in some distant tower?”

An audio version of a story is one way to give a young person access to a story. But coupling that audio version with the text is even more powerful in my opinion. Hearing a story is one way to experience it. But nothing compares to the complete and silent communion with an author that reading makes possible.

This year, I had the opportunity to travel to Orlando to meet some of the educators behind Plugged-in to Reading, including Dr. Janet Allen. Dr. Allen impressed me very deeply as someone who champions both good books and good readers. She has an excellent feel for literature and an uncompromising sense of its uses in the classroom. That, coupled with a deep and obviously heartfelt belief that all young people, not just the ones for whom reading is second nature, ought to be able to benefit from good books, makes for a formidable educator.”

—**Matthew Olshan**, author of the critically acclaimed *Finn*, a Level 3 Plugged-in to Reading Core Novel, [www.finnanovel.com](http://www.finnanovel.com)

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