



Nominations for Dana Thomas

Media Specialist
Cypress Lake Middle School
Fort Myers, Florida

Nominator:
Gail Rieckhoff
Fort Myers, Florida

1. How long have you known the nominee and how did you come to know him or her?

I have been a co-worker for the past ten years.

2. How has the nominee helped you and/or students at school? For example, did the nominee helped you with a project, recommend resources or collaborate with you to enhance student learning?

Mrs. Thomas has the highest book circulation of any librarian in our county. Last fall during the election, she ran an "Elect Your Favorite Author" campaign that enticed our middle schoolers to read 4 current authors; there were campaign speeches and posters all over campus. Then she managed to be the only school in Lee County to get voting booths in here so the students could vote for the President and their favorite author. Also last year she arranged with the Holocaust Museum of Naples to bring an authentic boxcar to our campus. All grade levels researched the Holocaust, her National Junior Honor Society members built a butterfly garden on campus, all students made butterflies that she shipped to a museum in Texas that was collecting them for their Holocaust Museum, and lastly arranged an Open House for parents and students featuring. A descendant of the Bilski family (from the movie Defiance) who spoke on her father's actions in saving Jews during WWII. She also is coordinator for our One Book, One School. Two years ago we vicariously went to Kenya with Roland Smith's book Thunder Cave; we were divided into tribes and as a culminating activity raised money for an Elephant Orphanage and a local boy's orphanage in Africa (John Halgrim Orphanage). The best part, however, was listening to Roland Smith who gave a keynote speech to all of our students. Last year our One Book, One School offering was Shakespeare's Secret. Our dram department

presented *Much Ado about Nothing* and students learned Shakespeare's sonnets, delved into the lives of Henry VIII and researched conspiracy theories about Shakespeare's play.

3. How has the library, and the nominee in particular, had an impact on students and the learning process?

Students in our school love to read; what better recommendation could you have?

Mrs. Thomas always takes time with individual students to find the right fit with a book. She is running a campaign this week to get students public library cards and even checks out books for students under her name when they are researching for projects like our Social Studies Fair. She has also taught lessons on recycling to sixth graders and was responsible for the school's recycling projects last year.

4. How does the nominee make the school a better place? Please be specific.

We can always count on Mrs. Thomas to have the appropriate books for our projects, to lead us to innovative teaching ideas, and to bring students together with books they will enjoy reading.

5. How has the individual demonstrated leadership in the school community or the profession?

Among her "extra" duties she has been the National Junior Honor Society sponsor, recycling efforts, was School Librarian of the Year for our district last year, has led our One Book, One School efforts for the past 3 years, sponsors dances and creative fundraisers to acquire books for our library (her budget is 0 this year). There's just not enough room to show how she goes above and beyond!

Nominator:
Sandra Archie
Fort Myers, Florida

1. How long have you known the nominee and how did you come to know him or her?

I have worked with Dana Thomas for 16 Wonderful Years at Cupress Lake Middle School where I am the Athletic Director and Physical Education Teacher.

2. How has the nominee helped you and/or students at school? For example, did the nominee help you with a project, recommend resources or collaborate with you to enhance student learning?

Dana Thomas helps to decorate and design our Athletic Banquet every year. She gets flowers and plants donated and helps design beautiful balloon arrangements for the tables. Dana puts in countless hours to assist and support our athletic programs. Her wonderful personality and intellect makes Cypress a wonderful learning experience for all.

3. How has the library, and the nominee in particular, had an impact on students and the learning process?

She encourages and enlightens even the most challenged students.

4. How does the nominee make the school a better place? Please be specific.

The one book one school program continues to be the best in the school district.

5. How has the individual demonstrated leadership in the school community or the profession?

She sponsors the lunch bunch in which she gets the local restaurants to donate lunch for the reading program for the students. She is the NJHS sponsor.

Nominator:
Theresa Bulanda
Fort Myers, Florida

1. How long have you known the nominee and how did you come to know him or her?

I have worked at the school with Mrs. Thomas for the past 11 years. She is not just a colleague, but she has become a very good friend.

2. How has the nominee helped you and/or students at school? For example, did the nominee help you with a project, recommend resources or collaborate with you to enhance student learning?

Mrs. Thomas has become the backbone of cross-curriculum projects at our school. First, 4 years ago she developed a program called 'One Book, One School.' Every spring our entire student body reads 'One book' which is now chosen by a committee. For 2 weeks, the entire school collaborates on this project. We do projects related to the book, performances in the arts and the students thoroughly enjoy the time period. Mrs. Thomas has even arranged for one of the author's of the book to come and speak to the kids, as well. On the last day of 'One book, one school' there is a celebration festival which she always plans for the theme of the book. For example, last year we did Shakespeare's Secret and she had 'Queen Elizabeth' come to speak to the kids. She hid a diamond in the school and gave daily clues on the school news; the kids searched everywhere. There was even a play about the book. The events are all surrounding the book chosen by the committee that Mrs. Thomas leads. It is a wonderful way to end the year and it was all started by Mrs. Thomas.

3. How has the library, and the nominee in particular, had an impact on students and the learning process?

Mrs. Thomas isn't just a librarian at our school. She has made the library an extension of our classroom. I know that if I am working on a project, I can tell her what it is about and she will pull every book that she has relating to that subject. She teaches the kids how to research and helps them search. She spends countless hours planning library projects such as 'Lunch Bunch' which is a student book club. They read a particular book and after they finish, she orders lunch for them to discuss it. She has raised thousands of dollars during our book fairs, by planning elaborate contests between classes and decorating the entire library for the fair. She involves the administrators by having them dress up if we raise a certain amount of money. I would venture to say that the impact that Mrs. Thomas has on our school is greater than any other person here. She goes above and beyond to help everyone.

4. How does the nominee make the school a better place? Please be specific.

There are numerous ways that Mrs. Thomas influences student learning, but one in particular stands out. Last year, Mrs. Thomas wanted the student to learn tolerance, so she asked the staff to help her plan a Holocaust unit. She arranged for a boxcar, that was used to transport Jewish people, to be at our school for 2 weeks. She pulled books from the library about the Holocaust and 3 survivors came to speak to each grade level. The students were amazed by them. Each subject area did a project...Algebra made a Holocaust children's memorial quilt and the math classes measured rice with each grain representing a child murdered. Social studies studied the history of the Holocaust. Language arts made butterflies with poems about tolerance. Mrs. Thomas also planned a Holocaust night and the daughter of a survivor came to speak. During that night she arranged for all of the student work to be on display and invited Jewish people from all the local counties to come. Mrs. Thomas has done many projects that have impacted our school, but this was by far the most profound. It has had a lasting impact on the tolerance level at our school and it left an impact on the staff. It was absolutely amazing and my kids from last year still talk about the projects and the unit!

5. How has the individual demonstrated leadership in the school community or the profession?

Mrs. Thomas not only helps our school, but she helps all of the local libraries. She has a 'library card' drive at the beginning of the year to get students going to the local library. One of the most amazing things to me is her dedication to the students at this school. If a student wants a book that she doesn't have, she will check the local libraries for it. If the students can't get transportation to get the book, she puts them on a list and by the end of the week she has made a trip to that library to pick up the book for that student.

Mrs. Thomas also makes a mental note of the types of books that each student likes to read. When she gets a new book in that she remembers will fit a particular child, she has it delivered to them in the classroom with a note saying, 'I thought that you'd enjoy this one'. It shows just how in tune she is with the students at our school.

She is also in charge of NJHS at our school and each NJHS member adopts a library shelf. They keep it neat, organized and clean throughout the year. NJHS, through Mrs. Thomas, is in charge of our school 'going green'. Through her organization the school recycles everything possible from ink, to boxes, to paper, etc. Even the teacher's lounge lost the styrofoam cups and switched to bringing our own from home.

Last year, Mrs. Thomas organized for our school to 'Vote for President'. The local officials came, she had real voting booths, campaigns were held in the library and the local media came. It was just amazing and once again, although she involved every teacher in the school it was Mrs. Thomas that arranged for the entire event.

I could tell you thousands of stories, projects, activities and curriculum that she has enhanced by involving herself in our classrooms. She is an amazing professional and person; we are blessed to have her!

Nominator:
Lisa Williams
Fort Myers, Florida

1. How long have you known the nominee and how did you come to know him or her?

Dana is our middle school media specialist. I have known her for 12 years.

2. How has the nominee helped you and/or students at school? For example, did the nominee help you with a project, recommend resources or collaborate with you to enhance student learning?

Every time I do a research project Dana will go above and beyond to find materials for my students.

Dana has also instigated/coordinated many huge, successful, learning projects for the school. For example, we do a One School, One Book each year and she is the key to making it the most exciting activity for the students! She also organizes the book fair's and has raised a great amount of money for the library. We also did a school-wide project that incorporated the community and was involved with the Holocaust museum in Naples. It was a life changing experience for our students!

3. How has the library, and the nominee in particular, had an impact on students and the learning process?

We have the highest circulation rate in our library in our district. Increased reading leads to increased learning.

4. How does the nominee make the school a better place? Please be specific.

Dana also makes the school more beautiful which in turn makes the school a better place. She always has current books displayed and the library is always "decked" out! Dana is also an environmentalist. She helped organize a system of recycling that helped decrease the cost and amount of trash in our building.

5. How has the individual demonstrated leadership in the school community or the profession?

Dana is on several committees for the school (One Book, One School), she is also the teacher in charge of the NJHS students.

Nominator:
Angela Amos
Fort Myers Beach, Florida

1. How long have you known the nominee and how did you come to know him or her?

I have worked with Dana Thomas for the past 9 years. She is the Media Specialist at our middle school.

2. How has the nominee helped you and/or students at school? For example, did the nominee help you with a project, recommend resources or collaborate with you to enhance student learning?

Dana is involved in multiple activities at our school. She coordinates a "Lunch Bunch" of students and faculty members, sort of like a book club. These members meet and discuss current young adult literature and create interest and "buzz" in our school about new authors. She also is part of our "One Book, One School" committee. Every year, we select a novel to read as a whole school project. The committee then creates cross-curricular tie-in lessons and activities to support the themes and content of the novel, which all culminates in an end of book fair. One year we were able to have the author himself come and talk with the students. Other years have been a Renaissance Fair and a Nautical themed event, with the Coast Guard bringing out one of their boats, the local HAM radio club bringing out their equipment and allowing student to talk with other HAM operators around the world, and the local sailing school coming to teach students about using sextants to navigate at sea and nautical knot tying.

3. How has the library, and the nominee in particular, had an impact on students and the learning process?

In addition to the activities listed above, she also helped coordinate the visitation of an authentic Holocaust era box car and literary tie in with the novel *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*. She worked to bring in Holocaust survivors to give guest speaker presentation to the entire student body.

She makes sure that all students have access to interesting and engaging books by reading the current literature and listening to student suggestions on which novels are "hot" right now. Our school library consistently has the largest circulation out of all the other middle schools in our district primarily because of Dana's continuous updating of the inventory and working with local libraries to supply, on loan, books that we may not have in our school but that a student has requested. Plus I'm pretty sure she has Barnes and Noble on speed dial for those books she just really wants to provide for our students.

4. How does the nominee make the school a better place? Please be specific.

Her enthusiasm for reading is infectious. She works with local artists to create amazing displays for the media center and our common courtyard school entry. She is our go to guru when we want to create lessons to access multiple learning styles because she will work with teachers to create novel lists that tie in with whatever theme the students may be covering in different classes.

5. How has the individual demonstrated leadership in the school community or the profession?

She has won Media Specialist of the Year from our district. And as stated above, she heads or participates in many school committees where reading and instilling the love of reading is emphasized.

Last year, Dana organized an event where she worked with Lee County voting department, and they brought in the new optical voting machines and the students filled out ballots and voted on their favorite author and who they would choose for President- Obama or McCain.

I could go on and on about all the other interesting and extending activities Dana provides for our students and community, but I must end with this thought... she knows our kids, she knows our community, and she loves what she does. You can't ask for any more than that!

Nominator:
Tina Kouns
Fort Myers, Florida

1. How long have you known the nominee and how did you come to know him or her?

Dana is the media specialist in the school where I teach. I have worked here eight years; she was here before I was.

2. How has the nominee helped you and/or students at school? For example, did the nominee help you with a project, recommend resources or collaborate with you to enhance student learning?

Dana has helped me (and our school) in countless ways.

1. She provided a PowerPoint and presentation on CLERK, which is our school site for research papers. She presented it to each language arts class and helped the students learn sites for research and how to use MLA.

2. During last year's presidential election, Dana set up a mock election for students to vote. She brought in actual poll workers and voting booths from our county. Prior to that, the students campaigned for and voted on favorite authors. All the time, the democratic process was studied and followed.

3. She has led National Junior Honor Society for several years. She developed a huge and on-going recycling project here at CLMS. She is quite the environmentalist. She runs a contest for student to choose each month the teacher whose classrooms is the most earth-friendly through recycling, using less paper, etc. They are involved in countless other projects. Currently the project is Pennies for Peace to raise money to build schools in Pakistan and Afghanistan after reading the Greg Mortensen Three Cups of Tea book.

3. Dana created the "Lunch Bunch," groups of students who read and recommend books to their peers here at school through our newscasts, posters, and classroom speeches.

4. Dana is the driving force behind our big school-wide initiative "One Book One School," in which all students in all grades read the same book at the same time. She creates lesson plans, decorates extravagantly, brings in speakers, and even authors of the books we read. During a study of a Shakespeare related book, she brought in a group of people who travel in character of medieval times. Hence, "Queen Elizabeth" and her entourage came to school and spoke to the students. Another One Book One School pick was Thunder Cave by Roald D. Smith. Dana arranged for him to visit and provide a very inspirational speech about becoming a writer. The book takes place in Africa, so Dana found authentic African garb

for the teacher to Wer during the week. As we studied Africa, we raised money for an orphanage in Kenya. Dana brought in a real boxcar during our Holocaust study. She brought in survivors of the Holocaust. During a study of Afghanistan, ladies came to present the plight of that country and allowed the children to sample food from there. Oh, and, of course, she is wonderful with the children. For a struggling reader, she reads the same library book so she can help him/her understand. If we don't have a book at our school library, she will go to the public library for the child (practically every day after school). This is only the tip of the iceberg. She motivates, teaches, encourages, raises money; there is nothing she won't do for our school to promote reading and understanding.

3. How has the library, and the nominee in particular, had an impact on students and the learning process?

As I stated above, she turns every book into a rich experience for our students. She lets them "live" the book. Her projects touch every student at the school, yet she is able to spend individual time with student to help them find a genre or author that will interest them. Every child at this school knows and loves Mrs. Thomas. So do the teachers!

4. How does the nominee make the school a better place? Please be specific.

Dana turns every book into an experience. She brought in a boxcar and Holocaust survivors as the whole school studied the Holocaust. She orchestrated our participation in a project to create a paper butterfly to memorialize each child that died in the Holocaust. Ours were sent to a museum in Houston which will display all the butterflies from all schools in 2010.

Dana started and maintains our recycling program here at school.

She brought in the author of Thunder Cave as the culmination of our whole school reading his book Elephant Run. Along with that, she set up a fair with different booths representing different aspects of African culture. Our school was divided into African tribes, competing to raise money for African children.

Dana created Shakespearian lesson plans and brought in actors. During elections, the student got to vote using actual polling booths/machines brought in by the county workers.

She is now working on Pennies for Peace with the Honor Society. Inspired by the book three Cups of Tea, they are raising money for schools in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The students grow so much with the community service projects that she heads.

5. How has the individual demonstrated leadership in the school community or the profession?

National Junior Honor Society sponsor, Librarian of the Year this year in Lee County, Student Council sponsor, Lunch Bunch coordinator, One Book One School council. It is endless.

Nominator:
Mara Vertrees
Ft. Myers, Florida

1. How long have you known the nominee and how did you come to know him or her?

I met Ms. Thomas 14 years ago, when I became employed as a teacher at Cypress Lake Middle School.

2. How has the nominee helped you and/or students at school? For example, did the nominee help you with a project, recommend resources or collaborate with you to enhance student learning?

When I was a beginning teacher Ms. Thomas assisted me with instruction of students. I worked with struggling students in a two period block of Social Studies and Language Arts. Ms. Thomas hosted my classes at the library where she provided instruction and assisted them in finding resources. When I wanted to use Folk Tales to introduce new cultures, Ms. Thomas located books and videos that supported this work. As I grew as a teacher Ms. Thomas became an even more important resource helping me plan projects and aiding students in research in books, magazines and on the web. Now I am the Assistant Principal. One of my initiatives was to begin a One Book One School project. This began three years ago. Ms. Thomas was my able assistant the first year, and now leads this project in which literacy learning is integrated across the curriculum. Another way she supports me every day is by creating an inviting, safe environment in the library. There are times when I need a quiet place for a student for a few moments, and Ms. Thomas welcomes these children. She also allows me to bring her a child who is badly in need of a wonderful book. After a few moments of conversation she is always able to place the right book in a child's hands, which often results in better grades, a sudden interest in a new topic or author, and a smile on the face of a student who was feeling lost and blue.

3. How has the library, and the nominee in particular, had an impact on students and the learning process?

Ms. Thomas has impacted student learning through media center projects such as the Lunch Bunch Reading Club for students, the Holocaust study unit which involved community members and the Holocaust Museum, and the Annual Book Fair which is more than a book shop, but each year includes exciting learning themes which introduce students to new books and new authors. Her theme this year, "Brush up on Reading," included posters of masterworks of art exposing students to Van Gogh, Vermeer, DaVinci and others, integrating art history into literature. In 2008, Ms. Thomas contacted the Local Election Board and worked with Social Studies teachers to host a school-wide election using actual voting machines. We were the only school in the county which had access to the new

electronic machines. Ms. Thomas, as leader of NJHS, has created a school-wide recycling project and assisted NJHS students as they taught the entire student population about green themes such as the need to recycle plastic and aluminum drink containers, and hybrid vehicles. Each year our school library has the highest circulation of any Middle School library in the District, despite the fact that we do not have one of the higher student populations. It is Ms. Thomas' constant efforts to bring in new books, highlight books through displays and activities, and make students welcome in the center that keeps the students coming in and the books moving off the shelves. Books in student's hands means learning is happening.

4. How does the nominee make the school a better place? Please be specific.

Ms. Thomas makes this school a better place by making the media center the heart of our school, where students are always welcomed and supported in their search for reading materials. She is committed to students learning how to conduct research and finds ways to help them access current reference materials on-line and from the shelf. She is also a team player, finding ways to use the library to support all faculty in their learning projects.

5. How has the individual demonstrated leadership in the school community or the profession?

Ms. Thomas volunteers each year to sponsor National Junior Honor Society. In this role she is a leader and she works to create leaders. She chairs the One Book/One School committee which involves the entire school, students, faculty, and all subject areas in a book study culminating in a school-wide learning activity. This project requires great leadership skills as three grade levels and five subject areas work together with the arts to enrich the reading experience.

Nominator:
Tamara Hagen
Fort Myers, Florida

1. How long have you known the nominee and how did you come to know him or her?

I first met Dana Thomas when I came to work at Cypress Lake Middle School 7 years ago, as an American History teacher. I began working with her immediately, as I was the Academic Coach for Social Studies, and developed a relationship with her within the context of leading our students through the research process to create projects adhering to National History Day standards. This is a long-term research project, and since that first year that we organized our school's History Fair together, she has become a trusted colleague that I can't imagine working without. Her enthusiasm for what she does actually seems to increase each year, and her creative ideas are endless. I hope to be able to share with you what this special woman does on a daily basis to affect the literacy of our student body.

2. How has the nominee helped you and/or students at school? For example, did the nominee help you with a project, recommend resources or collaborate with you to enhance student learning?

The greatest collaborative project that Dana and I work together on each year is History Fair. She and I discuss the year's theme, and before I've brought my first class to the Media Center for initial research to select topics, she will have carts prepared with all the resources we have available at our school that might fit that year's theme. This year she actually came up with sort of a carousel idea, and she made 6 stations related to the theme of innovation. We cycled students through topics on transportation, human health, technology, space, daily life, etc. It worked fabulously and really got our students thinking about great topics. She also takes the time with each class to review how to get started in early research. She shows them how to cross-reference using an encyclopedia, how to use databases available through our district, as well as how to use credible search engines to navigate responsibly through the internet, to name a few. A team of teachers at our school created something we call C.L.E.R.K. (Cypress Lake Easy Research Kit) that helps students go through the steps of planning a project, researching the information, and preparing a product. Dana has become so skilled with this process that she has created a user-friendly guide for middle schoolers to become confident and critical thinkers while researching. She is constantly recommending different resources for me to share with my students, as she knows I don't have the time to really investigate them myself. Just today, in fact, she spent about a half an hour with me showing me different information she'd found on our county's library site to share with my students. She goes out of her way every week to go the public library and get specific books for any student who is interested!

3. How has the library, and the nominee in particular, had an impact on students and the learning process?

Dana consistently has the highest circulation of any middle school in our county. She knows so much and has read so many of the books in her Media Center, that students just love to come see her and talk about books. She always takes the time to stop and help individual students find just the right book. She works every day to instill a love of learning in our student body. She has secured local business sponsorship to have a "Lunch Bunch" group of kids that come together and have like a reader's circle on 3 different books each month. The kids discuss them, then go out into the student body and recommend books and get other kids excited about them!

4. How does the nominee make the school a better place? Please be specific.

Dana is really the energizer bunny of our school... you just never know what she's going to get going! Not only is she co-sponsor of our National Junior Honor Society, but has also spearheaded our "Go Green" movement. She started a recycling program at our school years ago, even came up with a prototype of a way to better discard of our school lunch trays. She is deeply involved in our school community and despite many obstacles sometimes, always does what's best for students and teachers! You know the day is going to be good when it starts with a smile from Dana and a "let me tell you something I was thinking about...". Her book fairs each year are amazing. Last year, with the presidential election, she piggybacked on that and created a reading campaign where students lobbied for one out of four popular junior authors. We were the only school to have the elections office actually bring a real ballot computer to our school for a mock election, solely because of her efforts.

5. How has the individual demonstrated leadership in the school community or the profession?

Dana has been a leader in our One Book, One School project that we've been doing for the last three years. For one month in the 4th quarter of each year, every student in the school reads the same book. When we read *Thunder Cave*, her Media Center became transformed into Africa, and she even had author Roland Smith come visit our student body. Last year, we read Shakespeare's *Secret*, full of Elizabethan Era history, and she even had a scavenger hunt for the lost necklace in the library. This year already, for her book fair, the theme was "Master the Art of Reading" and the library is covered in classical art! One of the most amazing things, though, was her leadership this past spring with our Holocaust Remembrance Project. Through Dana's efforts, we actually had a Nazi-era boxcar on our campus for two weeks, and the entire student body was involved in creating memorials for the Holocaust that culminated in an amazing night for all of our families. It was an experience our whole school will never forget.