

Penguin Random House Donates Books to Teen Readers Society for Children and Teens Affected by Fires

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

SANTA MONICA, Calif., December 15, 2020 -- Teen Readers Society today announced that Penguin Random House is providing up to 5,000 of its new books to children and adolescents who have been affected by the recent historic wildfires in the Western United States. The partnership and the book donation are made possible by Penguin Random House's "Author Promotion Campaign" that ran between October 12, 2020, through December 11, 2020.

The 2020 West-Coast fires, the largest in recorded history, have highlighted an unprecedented need for access to books and reading that facilitate learning and a sense of normalcy. The book donation program will prioritize communities that had already been facing economic hardship and disruptions from the COVID-19 pandemic. The specific books donated will be based on age groups, educational needs, and Teen Readers Society's expertise on titles most likely to turn young people into lifelong readers.

[Teen Readers Society](#) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that promotes reading among teens.

"Penguin Random House is honored to join forces with Teen Readers Society to bring our authors' books into the lives of young people who have lost so much in this year's horrific wildfires. We hope these books will not only be a great source of immediate learning and enjoyment but will also become part of their own personal libraries they'll continue to build upon and cherish," said Claire von Schilling, EVP & Dir. Corporate Communications and Social Responsibility.

Phoenix-Talent School District, Phoenix, Oregon

"We are extremely grateful for this program bringing the joy of reading to our students, many of whom are struggling in the aftermath of the wildfires while also navigating the fear imposed by the pandemic. The mission of Teen Readers Society, to help reverse the declining reading rates among teens, is close to my heart. Now, more than ever, in a world inundated with bite-sized chunks of sensationalism, we all are yearning for the simplicity and comfort of disconnecting from daily distractions and engaging with the magic of stories. I am touched by the Teen Reader Society's enthusiasm to connect the students of Phoenix Talent School District with Penguin Random House. This is a gift that our students will benefit from for years to come," said Kelly Fogg-Johnson, Language Arts teacher at Phoenix High School.

San Lorenzo Valley Unified School District, Ben Lomond, Calif.

"We are so appreciative of the generous donation of books being provided to our students. The gift of a book is so much more than the cover and the pages in between. For the 125 students who lost their homes to the CZU fires in the Santa Cruz mountains, these books will provide an opportunity for adventure, mystery, to learn new words, to read to someone else, to begin building their own new personal libraries, and to let their minds and hearts go to a safe place. More importantly, these books will always remind our students that others in the wider community care about them and their learning. Thank you, Penguin Random House and Teen Readers Society," said Andrew Lucia, Director of Human Resources, San Lorenzo Valley Unified School District.

"Teen Readers Society is grateful to have been chosen by Penguin Random House to help the rebuilding process after the fires," said Michael Norris, Teen Readers Society's Co-Founder and Head of

Marketing. "As a long-time resident of Santa Cruz, I witnessed firsthand the devastation and loss this year's fires have caused. We know it takes more than books to rebuild a life, but we believe that the right books can provide the building blocks for a better future for the thousands of young people who lost their homes and most of their possessions."

Overview of 2020 West-Coast Wildfire Season

2020 has been one of the largest and most destructive wildfire seasons in the Western United States. These fires have collectively burned five million acres, making it the largest and most active season in California's historyⁱ. Five of these fires have already been listed among California's 20 largestⁱⁱ and most destructive wildfiresⁱⁱⁱ. The state of Oregon reports this season as being one of the most catastrophic, burning over a million acres and destroying thousands of homes^{iv}, including approximately 3,000 residences in Southern Oregon's Jackson County. Smoke traveled hundreds of miles^v from the source of these fires, clouding the skies with ash and creating unhealthy breathing conditions for the millions of people affected.

The increase of average global temperatures—one of the most insidious features of climate change—has drastically made conditions in the Western United States more susceptible to intense fires such as these^{vi}. In 1974, U.S. firefighters considered a 12,000-acre wildfire to be a "once in a lifetime experience."^{vii} A fire that size is considered small today.

Why Donating Books Matters

Losing a home is a deeply traumatic event with potentially long-lasting consequences, especially for children and young people. Quick and appropriate community support can mitigate the effects of such trauma and reinforce a sense of security and belonging. Making books available to children and teens is an integral part of rebuilding communities and creating a new sense of normalcy. Research indicates that reading can promote deep relaxation comparable to meditation, countering depression, anxiety, and stress^{viii}. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance to rebuild the reading libraries of children and adolescents who have lost so much to fires.

Communities the Partnership Will Serve

1. Phoenix-Talent, Oregon

The Alameda Drive Fire began the night of September 8th in Ashland, Oregon, and struck a well-populated corridor in Southern Oregon. Strong winds pushed flames along two major highways, decimating approximately 2,357 homes, many of which were for senior citizens and low-income Latinx families working locally on farms, with children attending the Phoenix-Talent school district. The Rogue Valley, the community comprising the majority of loss, was already struggling with a shortage of affordable housing. The Oregon Housing and Community Services report's 56% of rental households are considered 'rent-burdened,' meaning they pay between 30-35% of their household income on rent^{ix}. Within the Phoenix-Talent school district, about half are living at the poverty level, and 40-45% are from migrant working families. There is a large Spanish speaking population with English immersion classes offered. Of the 2,429 students in the district, 703 reported losing their home, presenting the largest donation group for this program.

2. San Lorenzo Valley, California

The CZU Lightning Complex (including Warnella Fire) was the 12th most Devastating Wildfire in California history, burning a total of 86,509 acres in Santa Cruz and San Mateo counties for about a month beginning in late August 2020. A total of 1,490 residential and commercial structures were destroyed, including all the historic buildings at Big Basin State Park, and over 140 structures were damaged. There has been an outpouring of support from the community for those who've lost their homes and are struggling to rebuild amid the global COVID-19 pandemic. San Lorenzo Valley Unified school

district reports that over 125 of their students' families have lost their homes to the CZU fire. Hundreds more lack access to basic utilities, such as clean water, electricity, and internet access, as the clean-up and rebuilding process unfolds. The fire and its aftermath have added additional strain to an education system adjusting to remote learning and a student population now scattered throughout the state of California and beyond as families grasp the increasing uncertainty of when and if they will be able to rebuild their homes.

About Penguin Random House LLC

Penguin Random House, the world's largest trade book publisher, is dedicated to its mission of nourishing a universal passion for reading by connecting authors and their writing with readers everywhere. The company, which employs more than 10,000 people globally, was formed on July 1, 2013, by Bertelsmann and Pearson. As of April 1, 2020, Bertelsmann is the full owner of the company. With more than 300 imprints and brands on six continents, Penguin Random House comprises adult and children's fiction and nonfiction print and digital English- and Spanish-language trade books, with publishing businesses in more than 20 countries worldwide. With over 15,000 new titles and more than 600 million print, audio, and eBooks sold annually, Penguin Random House's publishing lists include more than 80 Nobel Prize laureates and hundreds of the world's most widely read authors.

About Teen Readers Society

Teen Readers Society is a non-profit 501(c)(3) public benefit organization working to reverse the decline in reading rates among teenagers. We are teen-driven, creating content that engages readers of all levels and interests on social and community building platforms. We seek to cut across the barriers that have created negative attitudes about reading for teenagers and restore excitement about the pleasures of reading and books. Our vision is to ensure that all children and young people have access to books.

Website: www.teenreaderssociety.org Instagram: @teenreaderssociety

Please visit our [donation page](#) if you wish to support our programs.

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