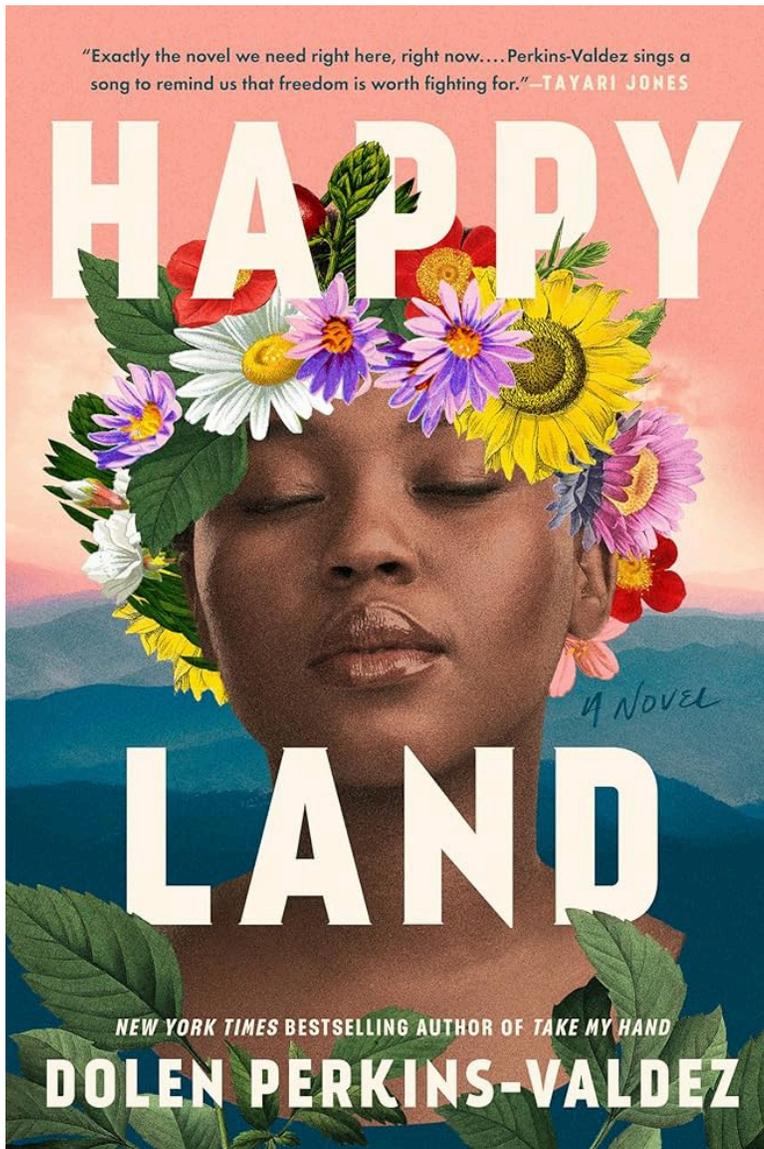


READING ACROSS RHODE ISLAND 2026

PROGRAMMING GUIDE & RESOURCES DIRECTORY

A GUIDE FOR LIBRARIES AND CLASSROOMS



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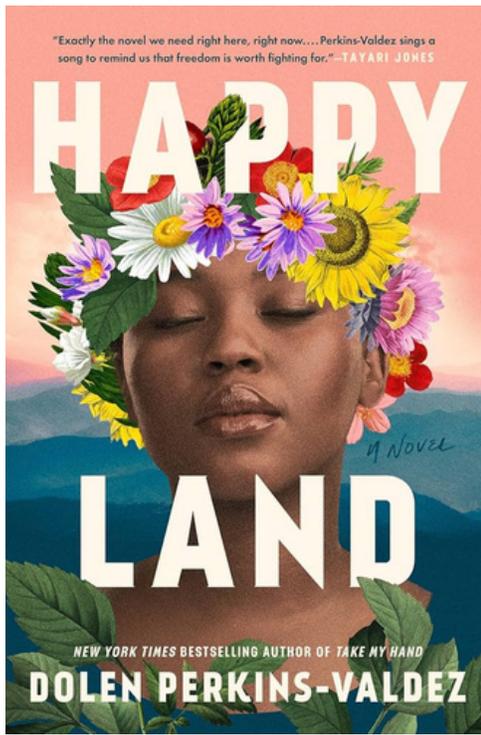
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Happy Land

By Dolen Perkins-Valdez



Reading Across Rhode Island 2025

Programming Guide and Resources Directory



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WELCOME LETTER



Dear Rhode Island Readers,

Welcome to the 2026 Reading Across Rhode Island experience. We are thrilled to invite you to take part in this year's one-book-one-state program, and we have much in store for you to enjoy.

A story like *Happy Land* reminds us that we are a part of something larger than ourselves. Within our family's genealogy, yes, and within culture and community. Our lineage will carry some culture forward, passing it on through traditions and stories, and we will meld that with new traditions and perspectives for our ancestors to come. It is this backward and forward momentum in *Happy Land* that makes it such a great choice for 2026 when people around the state and the country will honor the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. We will look back at stories in these last 250 years, honoring those that came even before, and look to the legacy we wish to impart on the next 250 years.

In honor of history, personal and collective, we are partnering with incredible organizations like the Tomaquag Museum, the Center for Reflective History, and the Langston Hughes Community Poetry Reading. We invite you to connect with our partners to learn more about their stories and share your own family histories with one another. In honor of the land we inhabit, we are highlighting organizations like Farmacy Herbs, URI Master Gardeners, and Grow RI Native Seeds. These organizations, and more, are working throughout the state to empower us to get our hands dirty and connect to our deepest roots. We're also partnering with libraries and bookstores around the state to offer community discussions around *Happy Land* and its many themes.

For our educators, our RARI Education Committee has several resources to help you dig into this text with your students. You have access to a public folder filled with resources. Check out the Family Tree activities to examine the Lovejoy family history and offer your students opportunities to consider their own family's story. You will also find discussion question cards, organized by each section of the book, Google Form reading quizzes, and Venn diagrams allowing students to examine the similarities and differences among the characters. Just as Nikki savored learning about her family history from Mother Rita, perhaps your students would like to interview their own family members. You're in luck! You will find a folder filled with resources for an interview project heavily inspired by StoryCorps. If that's not enough, you will also find a lesson to open up conversation about Langston Hughes' "Our Land." We are so grateful to our Rhode Island teachers for connecting students with this novel and we hope these resources will be helpful.

We can't wait to connect with you this year as we share our unique stories,
Emily Goodman and Maureen Nagle
Programming and Education Committee Chairs



About the Author

Dolen Perkins-Valdez is the New York Times bestselling author of *Take My Hand* (2022), which was awarded an NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Literary Work, a Silver Gavel Award from the American Bar Association, and a Fiction award from the Black Caucus American Library Association, and was long-listed for the Mark Twain American Voice in Literature Award. A three-time nominee for a United States Artists Fellowship, Dolen is widely considered a preeminent chronicler of American historical life.



Also by Perkins-Valdez

- [Take My Hand](#)
- [Balm](#)
- [Wench](#)

Interviews with the Author

- [Dolen Perkins-Valdez on Writing Historical Fiction with Sparse Historical Record](#) (SheWrites)
- [The Kingdom of Happy Land: A Conversation with Dolen Perkins-Valdez](#) (The Rumpus)
- [Highlighting True Stories Through Historical Fiction](#) (Barely South Review)
- [Dolen Perkins-Valdez discusses her new novel 'Happy Land'](#) (NPR)



Discussion Questions

From [Publisher's Guide](#)

1. The author based this novel on the real-life Kingdom of the Happy Land. Prior to reading this novel, what did you know about the Kingdom of the Happy Land? Were you aware that such a kingdom existed?
2. What is the significance of using terms such as kingdom and royalty to describe the land and its people?
3. How would you describe the connection between the kingdomfolk and their land?
4. The attorney informs Nikki that the law is not on their side and it is unlikely that Mother Rita will get the land back. However, Mother Rita doesn't believe that. Why do you think she is so certain?
5. When William returns to Luella and moves into the palace, Luella juggles two husbands and feels powerless. Do you agree with her decision to let William stay? Was there something else she could have done instead?
6. When Mr. Weaver refuses to honor his promise to sell the land back to the Kingdom at the agreed-upon price, Luella decides to purchase only a portion of the land back. How do you feel about her decision? Do you agree with it?
7. Throughout the novel, Nikki wonders about the source of the deep rift between her mother and Mother Rita. Do you think they are able to completely heal their relationship by the end of the book?
8. Nikki feels dissatisfied with nearly every aspect of her life in D.C. and is uncertain about what to do next. How did you feel when Mother Rita gave her the gift of a new life at the end of the book?
9. Do you notice any similarities in the personalities of the Lovejoy and Montgomery women? In particular, what are the similarities and parallels between Nikki and Luella?
10. This novel emphasizes the importance of community, family, and legacy and maintaining our connections with each of them. How is this reflected in the story of the Lovejoy women? Is this applicable to your own life? How?
11. The concepts of land ownership and land loss are central to this story. How do you think the impact of land loss still reverberates through today's society? What might be done to address it?



Sponsored Programs

Librarian Information Session with RI OLIS (virtual)

Thursday, February 12, 10:30 - 11:30

The Rhode Island Office of Library and Information Services will host a virtual session for librarians to learn more about the title and themes, what the Center for the Book has planned for this year's program, and resources to help you go beyond a book discussion. This session will be recorded and will be made available for those who cannot attend live. [Register](#) on the OLIS Calendar.

An Evening with Happy Land - (in-person)

Thursday, February 12, 5:00 - 7:00

Join us at Ocean State Media to connect with fellow educators, librarians, and community leaders through panel talks, vendor tables, and small group discussions - all centered around Happy Land and its inspiring themes. Enjoy dinner, engage with other readers, explore educational resources, and even request free book sets (while supplies last)! [Register](#) with Ocean State Media.

Dolen Perkins-Valdez, Author Event (in-person)

Tuesday, April 14, 6:30

Join us for this in-person author event with Dolen Perkins-Valdez at Salve Regina's Bazarsky Hall. Perkins-Valdez will be in conversation with the Jim Ludes, Executive Director of the Pell Center for International Relations and Public Policy. Meet our partners, and get a book signed by the author. [Save your seat](#) today!

Snowtown Walking Tour & Happy Land Book Discussion (in-person)

Saturday, April 18, 10:30

Celebrate the RARI selection "Happy Land" by Dolen Perkins-Valdez while learning more about Snowtown, a long-lost 19th century neighborhood which once stood at the head of the Providence Cove. Join Kate Wells and Traci Picard, members of the Snowtown Research Team, on a walk to discuss the history of Snowtown - a diverse place of laborers and boarding-houses, entrepreneurs, free Blacks, and immigrants. [Register online](#).

RARI at PechaKuchaPVD (in-person)

Wednesday, June 24, 8:20

Committee members from Reading Across Rhode Island will be providing outreach at the June gathering of [PechaKuchaPVD](#), the (soon to be) longest running PechaKucha storytelling event in the world! The theme is Spill the Tea, in honor of gossip (storytelling), RI 250 with a nod to the time Providence burned tea after the Boston Tea Party. Hear personal stories related to the theme, and visit with RARI members. Registration will be available in April through PechaKuchaPVD's website.

More events may be announced through the year! Be sure to follow Center for the Book on social media, and check ribook.org often to be in the know!



Join a Discussion

Book Store Partner Discussions

In celebration of the paperback release in March, we've partnered with bookstores around the state to host public discussions of Happy Land. Find out more from our book store partners and join in! Look for more book discussions statewide the rest of the year on our [events calendar](#).

Barrington Books - Join our book loving staff for a casual book discussion and light fare.

Charter Books - Joins us for our Charter Chapter Chats book club meeting.

Symposium Books - Join Symposiums Monthly Book Club at Ellie's in Providence.

Wakefield Books - Join Wakefield Books for a gathering to talk about Happy Land.

Open Public Book Discussion

Monday, March 30, 12:00

Join the RARI Programming Chair and RI State Librarian in a lively discussion of Happy Land with state employees and members of the public. Members of the public interested in attending should email [Emily](#).

Host a Discussion

Read to Lead

Share a book and a good conversation with your co-workers today! Read to Lead encourages Rhode Island businesses and other organizations that may not typically be involved with literature programs to start up a workplace book club. If your organization already has an established book club group, we encourage you to join us too! Email kate@ribook.org to get started.

Book Club "Book in a Bag" Reading Kits

Pre-made book kits with 10 copies of the book, the resource guide, and book discussion questions are available for libraries to add to their circulating collections. These kits are publicly available for community groups and private book groups to borrow and hold a discussion with friends, family, or constituents. [Contact your local library today](#) about borrowing a Book Club in a Bag for your discussion group.

LEGO Deep Discussion

Receive a set of LEGO kits designed specifically to facilitate conversation around Happy Land, designed for the Reading Across Rhode Island Program by partners at Carnegie Mellon University. Programming kits include LEGO sets (one for every 3-4 participants), facilitation instructions, and a dedicated discussion guide for use with the completed builds. Learn more about this program. Contact kate@ribook.org to coordinate.



Library Program Ideas

Happy Land: A Collaborative Poetry Celebration for Rhode Island's 250th

Join poet Tina Cane, former RI Poet Laureate and Director RI Writers-in-the-Schools, for a generative poetry workshop celebrates Rhode Island's 250th anniversary by engaging in a unique poetry initiative that blends two powerful inspirations: Walt Whitman's I Hear America Singing and Happy Land. Contact kate@ribook.org to schedule.

URI Master Gardener Presentation

Thanks to a network of trained volunteer educators, the URI Master Gardeners offers educational workshops for libraries and community organizations on a variety of horticultural topics.

Vision Boards

Many characters in the book worked to make their dreams become reality; from those in the kingdom to modern day. Consider hosting a vision board program with patrons after reading and discussing the book. Simple versions of this program can be done with discarded magazines and craft supplies your library already has. Or, bring in a local creative presenter like [Maura White](#), Rhode Island library worker and owner of High Five Yourself and longtime creator of homemade scrapbooks, journals, and vision boards.

Linaments - DIY Craft

Luella and the women of the kingdom of Happy Land made and sold linaments from local plants. A linament is a liquid or lotion made for rubbing on the body to relieve pain, especially one made with oil

Gather ingredients and host a linament making session at your library! Consult with a local pharmacist or herbalist to learn more about how different ingredients interact with our bodies and each other. We've collected some online resources to help get you started.

- [Homemade Herbal Linament Guide](#), and [Basic Herbal Linament Recipe](#)
- Linament Recipes for [Achy Joints](#), or [Sore Muscles](#)

These are just some of the ways you can engage readers outside of book discussions. Let us know what you're planning! We'd love to highlight more creative ideas on social media and in our [online calendar](#).



Connect with a Programming Partner

Center for Reflective History - A new non-profit in Providence, Rhode Island, established by the Civis Foundation to preserve and explore the rich, often overlooked, social histories of significant local buildings.

Stolen Relations - A tribally collaborative project that seeks to illuminate the significance of the enslavement and servitude of Indigenous peoples in American history, as well as their resilience, through the recovery of individual stories. Explore thousands of resources to expand your knowledge and bolster classroom and library discussions. Contact stolenrelations@brown.edu for support and programmatic partnership.

- This project is led in part by Brown University Professor Linford Fisher, whose new book [Stealing America: The Hidden Story of Indigenous Slavery in U.S. History](#) released in April 2026. Look out for programming around the state celebrating its release.

Rhode Island Genealogical Society - A nonprofit educational organization dedicated to the study, preservation, and sharing of Rhode Island family history. With more than 600 members worldwide, RIGS serves researchers, educators, librarians, students, and local history professionals.

The Langston Hughes Community Poetry Reading Series - The Langston Hughes Community Poetry Reading (LHCPR) shares the works of Langston Hughes, specifically, because of the poet's proven ability to scrutinize, illuminate and engage critical thought around prevailing structures and realities.

Rhode Island Black Storytellers - Founded in 1998 to celebrate Black arts and artists in the community, this group of local storytellers offers performances, workshops, cultural, educational and historical programs. . Contact info@ribsfest.org for information about scheduling.

Tomaquag Museum - Rhode Island's only Indigenous Museum. Learn more about Native communities of the Southern Dawnland (Southern New England) from their team of Indigenous educators. Take a visit to the museum, or contact Silvermoon LaRose slarose@tomaquagmuseum.org for information about classes and presentations for your school or library.

Farmacy Herbs - Herbalist shop in Providence offering community classes throughout the year. Class topics can include Herbal 101/Western Herbalism terminology, Native and Medicinal Plants of Rhode Island, hand's on lip balm, tea, tincture, flower essences, cream, topical product and salve-making, growing and harvesting medicinal herbs, regional wildcrafting, and herbs for specific body systems. Reach out to discuss your ideas and schedule an event at farmacyherbinfo@gmail.com

Water Way Farm - Woman-owned farm specializing in natural aromatherapy products, harnessing the power of lavender to improve overall well-being.

GRINS Seed Network - Grow RI Native Seeds is a program offered by a network of public libraries in RI empowering individuals to grow and champion native plants in our backyards and beyond. Visit a participating library to take or return native seeds and keep the network going.



Teaching Happy Land

The Education Committee has put together a wealth of resources to help you as you incorporate Happy Land into your classroom curriculum. Resources can be viewed and downloaded from this public Google Drive folder: [2026 - Happy Land](#)

In this public folder you will find the following structure:

- **Happy Land Family Tree Template:** A family tree of the Lovejoy family to help visualize the characters in the story as well as a blank template to fill in with your own family tree.
- **Subfolder: In the Classroom:**
 - **Subfolder: During Reading:**
 - **Venn Diagrams** to help students consider the various characters in the story.
 - **Reading Questions and Quizzes** designed as cards and Google Forms and organized by each of the three sections in the novel.
 - **Subfolder: Interview Project:** Multiple project for students to spend time with a family member and learn more about the personal history of their own family.
 - **Happy Land: OSM Resources:** Lessons, articles, videos and news stories from our Education Specialists at Ocean State Media connecting to many topics and themes related to the novel: ancestral history, black entrepreneurship, black land ownership, documenting history & storytelling and heirs property.

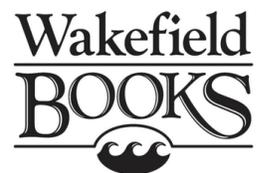
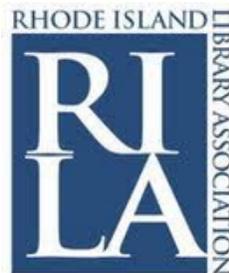
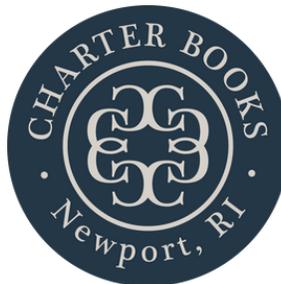
All of these resources are free to use for classrooms, libraries, and book groups. To use, simply "make a copy" for yourself and edit as needed for your students. Enjoy!

SPONSORS

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- Fidelity Investments
- Ocean State Media
- Papitto Opportunity Connection
- Rhode Island Foundation
- Rhode Island Office of Library and Information Services
- Rhode Island Library Association
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- Symposium Books
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Thank you



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RARI COMMITTEE MEMBERS



2025 RARI Programming Committee Members

Emily Goodman: Adult Services Coordinator, Office of Library and Information Services - Chair

Kelly Clifton: Head of Library Community Engagement, Brown University

Caitlin Flynn: Owner/Operator, Thrift n Lift Books

Lynda LaCava: Assistant Youth Services Coordinator, North Providence Union Free Library

Julia Morisi: Academic Affairs Specialist, Salve Regina University

Sydney Treanor: Executive Assistant to the Vice President for Community Engagement, Brown University

Kate Wells: State Librarian, Rhode Island Department of State

2025 RARI Education Committee Members

Maureen Nagle: English Teacher, Moses Brown School - Chair

Meg Adler, Literacy/English Teacher, The Wheeler School

Renee Gilbert: K-12 Education Specialist, Ocean State Media

Danika Hallam: English Teacher, East Providence High School

Michaela McCaughey - Dual Language Kindergarten Teacher, Pawtucket, RI

Shannon McCloud, English Language Arts Teacher Leader, Providence Career and Technical Academy

Suzanne Pickford: English Teacher, Barrington High School

Amanda Scott: Assistant Executive Director, National Education Association Rhode Island

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Reading Across Rhode Island Chair

Amy VanderWeele

Thank you!