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DRIVING CHANGE IN LITERACY: ILA'S 2025 GLOBAL 30 UNDER 30 LIST ANNOUNCED

NEWARK, Del. (January 13, 2025) — The International Literacy Association (ILA) revealed its 2025 class of 30 Under 30 literacy leaders—a dynamic group of educators, researchers, nonprofit founders, policy advocates and social innovators driving transformative literacy initiatives across 13 countries.

The ILA 30 Under 30 program, established in 2015, highlights rising leaders who are tackling critical literacy issues and championing equitable access to education. The 2025 cohort includes individuals empowering marginalized communities, advancing media literacy and fostering lifelong learning. They join a network of past honorees including Marley Dias, founder of the #1000BlackGirlBooks campaign, Freshta Karim, founder of Charmaghz mobile library in Afghanistan, and Patrick Harris, humanities teacher in Michigan and founder of Good Trouble Media.

“Literacy is more than a skill; it’s a pathway to opportunity, equity and empowerment,” said ILA Executive Director Nicola Wedderburn. “The young leaders on our 2025 30 Under 30 list exemplify this belief through their groundbreaking work. They are the advocates, educators and innovators redefining what literacy means in an ever-changing world.”

Among the honorees:

- **Pashtana Durrani, 27, Founder of LEARN Afghanistan in Kandahar:** An education activist, Durrani’s organization provides offline learning solutions to students in conflict zones, ensuring education continues even under the most challenging circumstances.
- **Tamara Imali Amatah, 13, Founder of the Student Voice Club in Nairobi, Kenya:** At just 13 years old, Amatah has created platforms that empower peers to lead literacy initiatives, fostering journalism and public speaking skills through collaborative projects.
- **Uchenna Maximus Emelife, 25, Founder of Book O’Clock in Sokoto, Nigeria:** Emelife’s organization promotes African literature through book drives, writing contests and an annual literary festival engaging hundreds of children and young readers.
- **Olha Kravchenko, 27, Head of Ukraine’s Filter Media Literacy Project in Kyiv:** Kravchenko combats misinformation by equipping Ukrainians with critical media literacy skills, especially important knowledge amidst war.
- **Shane Baker, 29, Third-/Fourth-Grade Teacher in Kentucky, United States:** A Milken Educator Award recipient, Baker integrates high-level digital tools such as green screens and coding into project-based learning, fostering critical thinking and creativity among his students.

The full 2025 class features the following changemakers from diverse fields and regions:

- Erica Braunlinger, 24, Fourth-Grade Teacher, Pennsylvania, U.S.

- Vincent Julius Canindo Buenavidez, 25, Professor, Muntinlupa City, Philippines
- Chris Dickerson, 29, Kindergarten Teacher, Tennessee, U.S.
- Kiana Foster-Mauro, 26, Fourth-Grade Teacher, Connecticut, U.S.
- Miguel Garcia-Salas, 29, PhD Candidate, Florida, U.S.
- JulieAnn Hatala, 28, Second-Grade Teacher, Pennsylvania, U.S.
- Muhammad Jahirul Islam, 25, Founder, Ignite Global Foundation, Dhaka, Bangladesh
- Rabiyyatu Jalloh, 28, English Teacher, Pennsylvania, U.S.
- Rachele M. Johnson, 24, PhD Candidate, Florida, U.S.
- Gretel Juhansoo, 22, Cofounder, Media Club Project, Tartu, Estonia
- Josh Lee, 20, Director, EdYouth, Taipei, Taiwan
- Canyon Lohnas, 28, Program Specialist/PhD Student, West Virginia, U.S.
- Zachary Milford, 29, PhD Student, Kentucky, U.S.
- Shanelle Mitchell, 28, Literacy Program Manager, Michigan, U.S.
- Nihira Mugamba, 25, Founder, Black & Educate, Washington, D.C., U.S.
- Rafely Palacios, 27, Second-Grade Spanish Biliteracy Teacher, California, U.S.
- Kezia Asiedua Sanie, 24, Founder, For the Future Ghana, Accra, Ghana
- Anish Shekar, 22, Founder, Emboldening the Youth, New York, U.S., and Overseas Director, Literacy Aid Uganda
- Akarsh Shroff, 24, Founder, YuvaSpark, Bangalore, India
- Anna Takai, 18, Founder, For Every Child an Education, Tokyo, Japan
- Jason Westra-Hall, 29, English/Journalism Teacher, Michigan, U.S.
- Ashley Wilkins, 28, Eighth-Grade ELA Teacher, West Virginia, U.S.
- Breyana Wilson, 22, Pathway Coach, Michigan, U.S.
- Lexi Woodward, 28, Graduate Assistant/PhD Student, Arkansas, U.S.
- Mai W. Zaru, 28, Postdoctoral Researcher, Texas, U.S.

These honorees are recognized in the [January/February/March 2025 issue of *Literacy Today*](#), ILA's member magazine, which features in-depth profiles of their groundbreaking work.

“Our goal is to amplify their voices and support their efforts as they continue shaping the future of literacy,” Wedderburn said. “Through this program, we hope to inspire collaboration, innovation and advocacy that transcends borders and creates lasting impact.”

To explore the accomplishments of the 2025 honorees and learn more about ILA's mission, visit literacyworldwide.org/30under30.

About the International Literacy Association

The International Literacy Association (ILA) is a professional membership organization of literacy educators, researchers and experts spanning 128 countries. For nearly 70 years, ILA has set the standard for how literacy is defined, taught and evaluated, connecting research and practice to improve the quality of literacy learning across the globe. Through its Standards for the Preparation of Literacy Professionals, ILA provides an evidence-based benchmark for the development and evaluation of literacy professional preparation programs. ILA collaborates with partners across the world to develop, gather and disseminate high-quality resources, which include three peer-reviewed and edited journals—The Reading Teacher, Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy and Reading Research Quarterly. Learn more at literacyworldwide.org.

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