

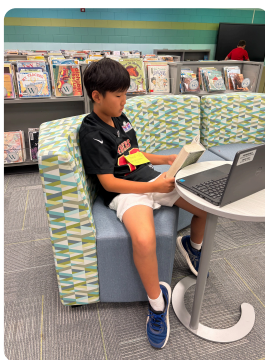


## School Spotlight

# Supporting Curriculum and Cultivating Joyful Readers at Shallowford Falls Elementary

At Shallowford Falls Elementary in Marietta, Georgia, librarian Jennifer Head is dedicated to keeping independent reading and the joy of books at the center of school life. With over a decade of experience as a school librarian—and a background that spans academic, public, and high school teaching—she knows how important it is for children to see themselves as readers from an early age. “It’s really about making sure the kids love libraries—that they trust libraries, that they’re happy in libraries. That’s such an early imprint for them.”

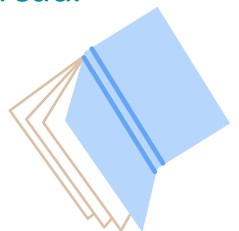
That goal of nurturing lifelong readers inspired Jennifer’s recent impact project through Cobb County’s Teacher Leader Academy. As the district introduced new literacy blocks—dedicated periods for focused reading and writing instruction—Jennifer saw an opportunity to help teachers while protecting student choice. Her solution was to design Beanstack challenges that align with curriculum standards but still allow students to read what they want. In doing so, she created a bridge between structured classroom instruction and independent reading.



“ The joy of reading is an intentional act... Beanstack helps show kids that this is something that we pay attention to. This is our intention: to help you love reading and understand the books that you do choose to read.”

**Jennifer Head**

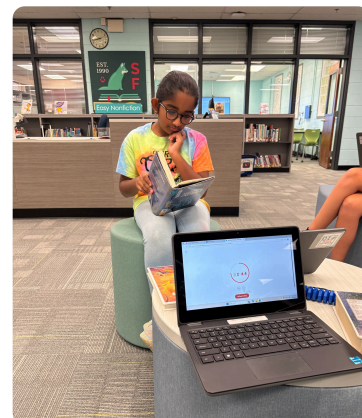
Librarian, Shallowford Falls Elementary School



## Free Choice Reading for ELA Skill Building

Jennifer's challenges validated free choice while reinforcing essential literacy skills.

- **Applying ELA skills to any text:** From Dog Man to chapter books, students analyze setting, theme, vocabulary, and character development in books they love.
- **Building reading stamina:** Long-form reading across days and weeks strengthens attention, memory, and perseverance.
- **Creating lifelong readers:** Valuing student choice fosters reading habits that extend beyond school.



## Creative Reading Challenge Design

The program weaves curriculum content into fun, themed Beanstack badges, supporting academic learning while keeping choice at the center.

- **Curriculum connections:** Badge themes mirror science and social studies units like rocks and minerals, space, or WWII.
- **Student choice first:** Any format counts, from graphic novels to audiobooks.
- **Rewards tied to reading:** Prizes include books, reading swag, or experiences like lunch or games in the library. As Jennifer notes, "The only thing that starts to build intrinsic love of reading is when extrinsic rewards are related to reading."

## Implementation in Action: Three Tips for Success

Jennifer has built systems that make the challenges accessible and sustainable for teachers and students.

- 1. Run a teacher challenge:** This will give staff firsthand experience with logging, streaks, and leaderboards, making it easier to guide students.
- 2. Build early habits:** K–1 families log nightly reading at home, preparing students for curriculum-based challenges by third grade.
- 3. Reinforce habits:** Each new challenge begins with in-class practice. Students read, log minutes, and answer questions.



### Trailblazer Recognition

Over 75% of students participated in logging reading in Beanstack, earning Trailblazer status.



### 1 Million Minutes

In a school of fewer than 600 students, readers logged over one million minutes last year.



### Culture Shift

Independent reading has become essential, with students and teachers valuing it alongside other core literacy practices.

## Looking Ahead

By connecting curriculum standards with independent reading, Jennifer has built a model that supports teachers and empowers students. Her program shows how libraries can protect the joy of reading and validate student choice, while advancing academic goals. Looking ahead, Cobb County plans to expand the model districtwide.