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**TO: Deputy Directors-General
Chief Directors
Head Office and District Directors
Principals and Chairpersons of SGBs**

SUBJECT: INVITATION TO THE 2026 WORLD READ ALOUD DAY CELEBRATIONS

1. The KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education in partnership with Nal'ibali invites Departmental Officials and Stakeholders to pledge to read aloud with schools of their choice during the 2026 World Read Aloud Day Celebration as one of the KZNDOE Literacy Improvement Advocacy Campaigns.

The theme: **"My story, my language"** OR **Xitori ra mina, ririmi ra mina** (Xitsonga).

2. The World Read Aloud Day (WRAD) is a global event that promotes literacy and the pleasure of reading aloud by encouraging everyone, from children to adults, to share stories in schools, libraries and homes.
3. The 2026 WRAD will be commemorated on the 4th of February. Schools are encouraged to observe and celebrate reading across the entire month as February has been declared as the National Reading Month, without compromising teaching and learning time.
4. The Nal'ibali 2026 World Read Aloud Day Special Story is *"A New Friend"*. Officials and Stakeholders are encouraged to visit and to pledge on the Nal'ibali website, [WRAD - Nal'ibali](#), and to send a WhatsApp message *"WRAD or Stories"* to **060 044 2254** to access the story. The WRAD story is available in all South African Official Languages.
5. Education partners interested in participating in the 2026 WRAD Celebration are encouraged to contact District Offices, Circuits or Schools to make the necessary arrangements.
6. Schools are requested to set aside at least 30 minutes for each grade to observe and celebrate the World Read Aloud Day. Schools are encouraged to involve every school community and stakeholders to model the reading culture.
7. Districts are requested to collect and share statistics of all the schools organized and observed the World Read Aloud Day using the attached Reporting Tool. Statistics Report to be submitted to Mavundla TNR at thandananimavundla@yahoo.com on or before Friday the 6th of March 2026

Your pledge and participation in our reading revolution will be very much highly appreciated

Mr GN Ngcobo

Head of Department: KwaZulu-Natal Education

Date: 27/01/2026



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2026 WRAD REPORTING TOOL

Districts	Number of Schools	Number of Learners	Number of Educators	Number of Community Members	Number of NGOs	Grand Total
Amajuba						
Harry Gwala						
Ilembe						
King Cetshwayo						
Pinetown						
Ugu						
Umgungundlovu						
Umkhanyakude						
Umlazi						
Umzinyathi						
Uthukela						
Zululand						



INVITATION TO THE 2026 WORLD READ ALOUD DAY CELEBRATIONS

#NalibaliAndSledWrad2026

World Read Aloud Day

with Nal'ibali

Join us on World Read Aloud Day, 4 February 2026, to share our special story, *A new friend*, with as many children – and adults – as you can!

To create this story, we did things a bit differently. Nal'ibali partnered with SLED (Sign Language Education and Development) to create a story using South Africa's 12th official language, South African Sign Language (SASL)! The SLED team developed the story using SASL and then translated it into various languages.

The story, which has a new, Deaf Nal'ibali character named Thandiwe, was then brought to life with beautiful illustrations by Pico.

Nal'ibali is dedicated to giving children an opportunity to enjoy stories in their first language, so this story is available in all 12 official South African languages!

Prepare to read the story aloud

You will notice that the word "Deaf" is written with a capital "D" in this story. This is because the Deaf community has their own culture, traditions, values, history, humour, art and their own unique language. In South Africa, this language is called South African Sign Language (SASL).

- Get to know the story well enough so that you can retell it or read it aloud with confidence!
- Think about how to bring the story to life.
- Choose a time of day to share the story when your whole family is together.



Before you read the story aloud

- Read the title of the story and discuss the pictures. Ask your children what they think the story is about.
- Ask questions that will help your children think about how we make new friends.

Ideas to talk about: Is it easy or difficult for you to make new friends? What qualities do you look for in a friend? Do you have friends from different cultures? Would you be friends with someone who uses a different language than you do?

While you read the story aloud

- As you read the story, ask your children questions about it. "What do you think will happen next?" is a great question to develop children's prediction skills.
- Talk about the illustrations. Ask, "Who is in this illustration?", "What does this illustration show us?" or "Why is this illustration important to the development of the story?"

Pledge to read aloud together as a family this World Read Aloud Day – and every day. Sign up at www.nalibali.org or WhatsApp the word "WRAD" to 0600 44 22 56.

Each family that signs up will have the opportunity to join Nal'ibali's World Read Aloud Day family-reading journey. You will receive additional stories as well as tips and ideas on how to read with your children throughout the year.



Use this QR code to link to a video of the story, *A new friend*, in South African Sign Language. Visit the SLED website at www.sled.org.za for more information about Deaf literacy and South African Sign Language.

English

A new friend

Story by the SLED team Illustrations by Rico

Hope was very excited. Her class was going on an outing to the nature reserve! The best part was that a class of Deaf children was joining them and Hope couldn't wait to learn some signs. Their teacher had already taught them the sign for "hello".

Hope waved goodbye to her mom as she got on the bus. "Have fun!" her mom called.



Hope sat down next to a girl who was writing in a notebook. "Hello," Hope signed.

The girl smiled broadly and started signing to Hope. Hope shook her head. "Sorry, I don't understand."

Quickly the girl wrote in her notebook, "My name is Thandiwe. What's yours?"

Hope took the notebook and wrote, "I am Hope. I only know how to sign 'hello'."



On the journey to the nature reserve, Thandiwe taught Hope some signs.

At the nature reserve, a teacher from Thandiwe's school came up to Thandiwe and signed very quickly to her. Then the teacher turned to Hope with a huge smile. "Hello, I'm Mrs Tau, Thandiwe's teacher. This is my name sign," she said making a sign in front of her mouth.

"What's a name sign?" asked Hope.

"It is a special sign that is just about you. Your Deaf friends give it to you! My name sign is the sign for a big smile," Mrs Tau replied smiling and showing her name sign again.

Thandiwe looked carefully at Hope, then made the sign for Hope's ponytail.

"Thandiwe's given you a name sign!" Mrs Tau said, signing Hope's name sign again.

Hope copied her and practised her name sign a few times. "I really like my name sign," she said. "It makes me feel special."



Then Mrs Tau called all the children together. "I want you to find a partner and stay together," she said. "We are going on a nature walk. As we walk, look carefully at all the things around you, and please stay with the group!" Then she signed the same message for the Deaf children. Hope took Thandiwe's hand and they were off!



After a while, Mrs Tau stopped and pointed at a huge spider's web sparkling with water droplets. Further along the path she showed them a footprint made by a small buck.

As they reached a big tree, Thandiwe put out an arm to stop Hope. Then she pointed at the ground. Both girls knelt down to have a closer look. "Oh, it's a shongololo," smiled Hope.

"Shongololo," signed Thandiwe nodding her head.

The shongololo curled into a spiral. Then it slowly unwound and walked towards some fallen leaves.



Hope tried to make the sign for shongololo.

Thandiwe helped her place her fingers in the right shape.

Thandiwe stood up and looked around. She patted Hope on the shoulder and pointed around them.

"Oh no! Where are all the others?" said Hope. They had forgotten to stay with the group! Quickly Hope took

Thandiwe's hand and started walking off, but Thandiwe stopped her and pointed in the opposite direction. Then Thandiwe pointed at herself and then tapped the side of her head.

Hope looked confused. Thandiwe took out her notebook, pointed at herself then tapped her head again and wrote "I know".



"Oh, you know which way to go," Hope said looking relieved. Then she followed Thandiwe back along the path.

Soon they reached the place where they had seen the animal footprint. Thandiwe pointed at the footprint. "I know," signed Thandiwe.

Hope nodded and the girls walked on.

Next they reached the spider's web. Thandiwe pointed and signed, "Spider's web."

Hope nodded and the girls walked on.





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Not long after, the girls saw the bus in the parking lot. The rest of the group was standing next to the bus looking worried. Thandiwe and Hope ran up to them. Everyone was very happy to see them, but Mrs Tau did not look happy. She started signing to Thandiwe, and Hope could see that she had been very worried. Hope reached out and touched Mrs Tau's arm.



"Thandiwe is so clever!" said Hope. "She remembered all the things we had seen and easily led us back along the path to the bus. She even taught me a few more signs along the way!"

Mrs Tau smiled and translated for Thandiwe. Thandiwe gave Hope a big hug as everyone got back on the bus.



On the drive home, Hope practised the signs Thandiwe had taught her. Then Hope drew a picture of Thandiwe and herself holding hands. Thandiwe pointed to Hope. "Friends," she signed.

"Friends," signed Hope as she smiled happily at Thandiwe. Today Hope and Thandiwe had both made a very special new friend.

Get story active!

- Talk about what happened in the story. Ask open-ended questions to encourage your children to think and talk about ideas linked to the story, for example, "What is your favourite part of the story?"
- Use the QR code from page 1 to watch the story in South African Sign Language. After watching the video ask, "Do you know any Deaf children?", "Do you think SASL would be easy to learn? Why?", "If you met a Deaf girl like Thandiwe, how would you communicate?"

- Draw a picture of your favourite part of the story.
- Why don't you try acting out this story or a part of it with a group of your friends and family? Use actions, words and voices to make it fun! Try to learn some of the SASL signs used in the story. Remember that when you sign, you must use your hands **and** your face!
- Use cardboard or egg boxes, glue and crayons to make a shongololo. Cut out cardboard circles or the sections of egg boxes. Then glue or string them together to make a shongololo.

Share photos and videos of you and your children enjoying the World Read Aloud Day story and activities on our social media! Use the hashtag: **#NalibaliAndSledWrad2026**.



TheNalibaliChannel



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The Nal'ibali Trust



0600 44 22 54

Nalibali
IT STARTS WITH
A STORY

Nal'ibali (isiXhosa for "here's the story") is a national reading-for-enjoyment campaign.

English