



STEM Read Draws Hundreds of Young Readers to NIU

BY CARL NELSON | APR 11, 2017



LISTEN: LAUREN TARSHIS IS INTERVIEWED
BY CARL NELSON, NORTHERN PUBLIC RADIO, WNJI

Author Lauren Tarshis visits with some of the 800 students who participated in the Stem Read event.



The floor of the NIU Convocation Center was filled with 800 kids, from third through eighth grade, along with more than 100 teachers and parents. Gillian King-Cargile, Director of STEM Read at Northern Illinois University explained the theme:

"Today we are running 'I Survived: The STEM Read Experience.' This is one of the field trips that we do in the spring and the fall to get kids excited about reading

and learning. We always do a narrative challenge based on a book, and it has STEM concepts throughout the day, that escalate along with the storyline of the book. The capstone activity is a meeting with the author of the book."

Lauren Tarshis is the award-winning author and editor of the "I Survived" series. It wasn't by chance that her series was selected as the focus of the event.

"Any time we've asked for suggestions, people have been clamoring for 'I Survived,'" King-Cargile said. "It's so popular, the stories hit so many emotional levels. It's really great for reluctant readers; teachers and librarians love it. The kids, as you can see, are going crazy for it. Everyone said 'you've gotta do it', and we were able to work with our partners Follett and Scholastic and bring Lauren Tarshis here and we're just really excited about what we've been able to pull together with her."

Tarshis summarized the "I Survived" series this way:

"It's a series that takes iconic historical events, including natural disasters and it tells those stories through the eyes of a child, a fictional child who went through the event."

Along with a keynote speech from Tarshis and a chance to meet her face-to-face, the event also featured talks from NIU professors, and themed challenges—all based on plot elements in the "I Survived series." Even as the author of the series, Tarshis was surprised with the level of creativity in putting this event together

"They're actually working at a very high level,

teaching kids about economic scarcity during disasters, teaching them about insurance," she said, "and the kids are very absorbed—but I'm very curious because they also—one of the things I talked about in my Hurricane Katrina book, a tiny detail was, how in a hurricane in many cases, it lets the snakes come out. So they actually have someone upstairs from the midwest museum. So I'm very eager to go check that out."

The STEM Read events have become quite popular, with the "I Survived" event including more than twenty schools, from as far away as Bloomington.

"People are really excited to find out about what we're doing. Most of our field trips sell out within about twelve hours. We don't do a lot of advertisements just because so many people sign up so quickly. So it's really exciting to see the reaction of the teachers and also the kids," King-Cargile said. "When the authors come in, sometimes it's like a rock star is coming in. They get out on their seats, they start screaming. So I love to see the authors meet the kids, and the experts meet the kids. We've had scientists come in and the kids get really excited about that."

