

Malden Reads Program Kicks Off at the Malden Public Library

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February 12, 2026



Friends, patrons and reading enthusiasts gathered at the Malden Public Library (MPL) on February 9 to show their love of reading and libraries. Excitement was high for the annual Malden Reads kick-off event, with 140 people in attendance for the book-themed activities, delicious refreshments and opportunities to socialize with neighbors.

Now in its 16th year, Malden Reads is a community reading program that spotlights and celebrates the joy of reading. The Malden Public Library launched the program with UMA and MATV, in partnership with city leaders, community groups and local residents. This year, Malden Reads is highlighting the book *Our Missing Hearts* by best-selling author Celeste Ng as the choice for the community to read and participate in related events. Age-appropriate companion books for younger readers and English learners will be announced soon.

A Lively Kick-Off Celebration

The entire community was invited to this highly anticipated kick-off event. Those in attendance enjoyed live music, hands-on crafting, and imagination stations, where attendees could pretend they were taking part in the famed Boston Tea Party.

The featured band was Tale Spin, who performed acoustic protest music, in keeping with the book's themes. From Tale Spin to spinning yarn, attendees learned about Yarn as Protest Art, specifically how fiber arts can be used as tools for peaceful protest and self-expression. Did you know that spies used knitting to hide (and relay) secret messages during the American Revolution? Library employee Phillip Wright held a special event related to this chapter in American history as part of the upcoming 250th activities. He discussed and demonstrated how knitting was instrumental to sharing messages at the time.

Malden Mayor Gary Christenson attended the kick-off event, and he's also scheduled to lead a discussion of *Our Missing Hearts* on March 11.

"Malden Reads brings me back to my childhood, when my mom encouraged me to read anything I could get my hands on. Being able to rediscover that love of reading alongside community groups, fellow city leaders, residents, and the Malden Public Library is what makes me so proud to be part of Malden Reads," said Christenson. "I invite everyone in the community to read the book and join me in exploring its powerful themes of love, resistance and belonging."

Our Missing Hearts is available to borrow from the Malden Public Library, and copies of the book have been donated to the Malden Public Schools and other community organizations.

Attendees also viewed short videos by Malden Revolution's Mark Linehan, showcasing Malden's revolutionary history and highlighting the connections between past and present acts of civic engagement. Malden High School's Love 4 Kids club led arts and crafts projects for all ages, encouraging connection and creativity. The heart-shaped cookie decorating activity was especially popular, with community members laughing and chatting as they participated in this delicious hands-on activity.

"What makes this Malden Reads celebration so special is getting to bring together so many different people in our community to celebrate this amazing book. And in this space, we get to explore themes like revolution, human connection, growth, and change," said Jodie Zalk, Co-Founder and Co-Facilitator of Malden Reads. "These are the sort of events where community is nurtured and promoted and those connections have far reaching impact on who we are and the future we want to create."

"The Malden Reads program is such a beloved, popular annual event, and a great opportunity for the Malden community to gather and read together," said Malden Public Library Director Dora St. Martin. "It's a fun process for our staff – and our Malden Reads partners – to select a book that will appeal to a wide audience, and then plan engaging, interactive activities that everyone will enjoy. We invite and encourage the community to get involved in the program, which is going to be really special this year."

As part of the Malden Reads kick-off festivities, community members strolled through the Library's special art exhibition, showcasing prints by Corita Kent (also known as Sister Mary Corita). Corita, a beloved artist who designed the Love postage stamp in the 1980s, was also well-known for

her passion around social justice issues. Corita's art reflected important messages of peace, social justice, and the power of language, just like in *Our Missing Hearts*.

Upcoming Malden Reads Events

Programming for Malden Reads will run into spring, and will include book discussions, film screenings and other special programs. The event schedule will be available – and regularly updated – on the Library's website: <https://maldenpubliclibrary.org/>.

The Library's events and programming are free and open to the public.

As a private, non-profit corporation, the Library uses a trust – established by local entrepreneur and philanthropist Elisha Converse and his wife Mary Diana – to fund the building's maintenance, renovations, artwork, and books. The trust is overseen by nine local Trustees, who volunteer their time and efforts to fulfill the Converse family's wishes. Thanks to the generous trust fund – as well as donations from individuals, families, and private foundations – the Malden Public Library costs local taxpayers less while providing the same essential services. The Library is located at 36 Salem Street in Malden.