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CONTACT: Valerie Rupp, Publicity Coordinator  
623-930-3527

**Photo Caption:**

Ironwood High School English teacher David Ellis makes good on a dare from colleague Steve Richards after the success of Ironwood Reads. – Photo by Melanie Edens

## **Ironwood Reads Book Discussion Attracts More Than 400 Students Prompting a Visit from “Marilyn”**

**Glendale, Ariz.** – Promoting teen literacy is so vital to Ironwood High School English teacher, football and basketball coach, David Ellis that he recently threw dignity aside, replaced it with an iconic white gown, and taught all of his classes dressed as Marilyn Monroe.

Mr. Ellis’s special appearance was the culmination of this semester’s successful “Ironwood Reads” book discussion event, a partnership between Ironwood High School and the Glendale Public Library, created to promote student reading.

The brainchild of English department chair and wrestling coach, Steve Richard, the event encourages students to select and read books, and then gather for one evening of simultaneous student-led book discussions.

This semester more than 400 students participated - - a magic number for Mr. Richard, who had challenged his colleague, Mr. Ellis, to dress as Marilyn if at least that many students participated. In all, 410 students rose to the challenge with an evening that included 43 discussion groups.

Books ran the gamut from classics to bestsellers, literary fiction, non-fiction and biographies. Some of the titles discussed included *Ender’s Game* by Orson Scott Card, *Fight Club* by Chuck Palahniuk, *The Count of Monte Cristo* by Alexandre Dumas, and *Freakonomics* by Steven D. Levitt and Stephen J. Dubner.

“What makes Ironwood Reads successful is that it is student led,” said Mr. Richard. “When you put the book in the student’s hand and then step away, magic happens.”

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## IRONWOOD READS

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Students volunteer to be discussion leaders, choose their own books and secure a teacher or librarian sponsor for guidance. Librarians from the Glendale Main Library, Merideth Jenson-Benjamin, Kearsten LaBrozzi and Melanie Edens, served as adult sponsors and promoted the event through the library's teen services department.

"I can't begin to describe the excitement of hundreds of teens reading and discussing books because they want to," said librarian Melanie Edens. "Partnering with Ironwood Reads is one of the most rewarding collaborations I've been involved in."

Ironwood High School librarian, Chris Kuczka, supplied many of the books with the support of her student group "The Breakfast Club." In addition to meeting monthly for breakfast and a book discussion, student members raised money to buy copies of the books for Ironwood Reads.

Other departments and students also got in the act, including members of the school's student-run business, *The Special Blend*, who were on hand to serve coffee. Culinary Arts students helped with the refreshments, the Ironwood Booster Club supplied pizza for student leaders, and almost every Ironwood teacher offered extra credit to participating students.

Last year Mr. Ellis issued his own challenge to Mr. Richard. When the event attracted over 300 students, Mr. Richard found himself on the campus quad, in front of a huge student crowd, having his moustache and beard shaved by a professional barber.

Mr. Richard says the next Ironwood Reads is scheduled for this October. "We already have some titles and student leaders ready to commit for the fall event."

For more information on Glendale libraries' teen programs, [www.glendaleaz.com/library](http://www.glendaleaz.com/library). For additional information on Ironwood High School, visit [www.peoriaud.k12.az.us](http://www.peoriaud.k12.az.us).

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