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Gen Z Champions Youth Literacy: Natasha Agarwal, BelieveNBooks

By Nathalie op de Beeck | Oct 27, 2026



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Converting the page to audio



Natasha Agarwal (r.) distributes books to young readers.

In recent months, PW has heard from several young entrepreneurs whose devotion to literacy began when they were early in their own education. For this series, we spoke with champions of young people's reading and learning to find out how they got started and why they emphasize the importance of books. Our second young entrepreneur is University of Pennsylvania sophomore Natasha Agarwal, who's spent the past five years building a local book drive into a nonprofit organization, BelieveNBooks.

Ordinarily, school projects are small-scale and short-term, but sometimes an enterprising student finds that their project meets a greater community need. That's what happened to Natasha Agarwal, who founded the literacy nonprofit BelieveNBooks in 2021, when she was an eighth grader living near Naples, Fla., and taking online classes during the pandemic.

"I felt like I could go anywhere through a great book, even in a time of intense social isolation," Agarwal said. "But I started to see these news stories about how kids who were lower income could not access Zoom school, and how that was exacerbating reading gaps in Florida." She recognized the "big disconnect" between those with and without access to reading material, and this motivated her to organize a book drive for a local subsidized preschool.



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'Now Hear This': Integrating Audiobooks in the Classroom, Library, and Beyond

PW spoke with a school librarian, a public librarian, and a bookseller who are finding unique ways to integrate audiobooks in their work with young readers.

World Kid Lit Month 2026: All Our Coverage

In honor of the 10th annual World Kid Lit Month, we bring you a series of stories spotlighting international creators past and present, and the connective power of children's books in translation.

Teachers and Librarians Share Tips for 'Genrefying' Your Shelves

We spoke with three teachers/librarians who are organizing their school's collections by genre to make books more discoverable for their students.

The first book drive went so well that the preschool's founder introduced Agarwal to leaders of other education-focused groups, and with this wider support, Agarwal continued asking community members to donate new and gently used books for giveaways. "Our whole premise was 'you might be done with the book, but it can open doors for kids in need,'" she said. Among her contacts was Florida Gulf Coast University, whose service-learning program provided "support with deliveries, storage unit inventory, and some of the more technical things for every drive," she said.

"This summer, our organization distributed our 250,000th book to children in need, reaching 50,000 children across the United States and Africa," Agarwal told *PW*.



Natasha Agarwal.

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opportunities, and they have early workforce demands, so the ability to have relatable role models can support them," Agarwal said. "We do on-the-ground printing and distribution, so there's no high shipping costs associated." She'd like to create a companion volume for countries in South America.

Now a second-year student at the University of Pennsylvania, Agarwal organizes book drives in Philadelphia schools to help children build home libraries. She also partners with education-centered regional organizations including Read by 4th, Tree House Books, Philly Book Bank, and UPenn's Netter Center for Community Partnerships.

BelieveNBooks is an immersive extracurricular activity, and Agarwal also is busy pursuing her college courses. "I think I'm going to major in law and society, but I'm still figuring it out before I declare in the winter," she said. "I'm also interested, of course, in public service, nonprofit work."

Click here to read part one in this series, a profile of Quade Kelley and his organization, Reading Athlete.

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