

# Children & Libraries

the journal of the Association for  
Library Service to Children

\* COMING NEXT ISSUE:  
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**ALSC**  
Association for Library Service to Children

Dewey... or Don't We?  
Libraries and the Bullying Epidemic  
Serving LGBTQ Patrons

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## Editor's Note

By Sharon Verbeten

If you don't like change, you're probably in the wrong business. Seems like everything we do as librarians is destined to change.

Dewey may be becoming a dinosaur (much like card catalogs). Librarianship is taking us, more and more, *out* of the library. Books are morphing from paper to bytes, and libraries are becoming more like activity centers than bookstores.

Still, change can be good. At least that's what our ALSC membership indicated on a survey we took, asking what you wanted in your association journal. You said you valued the print publication—so we're continuing in that fashion, but you also wanted online. Beginning with the 2014 spring issue, CAL also will be issued digitally via Metapress. In addition, the past 11 volume years will be digitized and available online.

To better serve our readers, we're also increasing our frequency to four times a year—affording us the opportunity to publish more features and attract a greater advertising base.

Contributing to CAL is one of the ways you can help make the publication even more timely and viable. Even though we'll have fewer pages in each issue, we're still planning on including a balanced mix of scholarly research, best practices, interviews, and essays. Your point of view and experiences—whether as a school or public librarian—are welcome. Think about sharing your programming tips (what worked, what didn't), your budget-saving ideas, your experiences as a new (or veteran) librarian. To find out more about writing for us, simply send me an email at [CALeditor@yahoo.com](mailto:CALeditor@yahoo.com) or visit [www.ala.org/alsc](http://www.ala.org/alsc) and search under Communications & Publications.

We also welcome ALSC committee members to get involved in writing short columns on what your committee is focusing on. It's a great way to not only keep members apprised of your committee's work, but it may also pique interest for members who may want to join your group.

This coming year marks my 10<sup>th</sup> year with the publication, and it seems as good a time as any to say thank you for your readership—as well as thank you to those of you who have contributed to CAL, either as a writer, referee, or source. It is a testament to your involvement and interest in CAL that makes it the vital journal it has grown to be. And while change is good, I hope that is one thing that never changes. &

# Children & Libraries

the journal of the Association for  
Library Service to Children

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## Statement of Purpose

*Children and Libraries* is the official journal of ALSC, a division of the American Library Association. The journal primarily serves as a vehicle for continuing education of librarians working with children, which showcases current scholarly research and practice in library service to children and spotlights significant activities and programs of the Association. (From the journal's "Policies and Procedures" document adopted by the ALSC board, April 2004.)

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# Throwing Dewey Overboard

## Dewey Lite: A Model for Nonfiction Reorganization

KIERA PARROTT AND ELISABETH GATTULLO



Kiera Parrott relabeling the non-fiction books into the new Dewey Lite sections.

Melvil Dewey published his decimal classification system in 1876,<sup>1</sup> more than one hundred years before the rise of the modern public library as a “third place,” before coffee shops became *de rigueur* in both chain and boutique bookstores; before the nearly nationwide adoption of the Common Core State Standards. While Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) has held strong in most public libraries since 1876, it was not designed with the developmental needs of children in mind.<sup>2</sup>

Over the last few years, the children’s staff at Darien (CT) Library began questioning whether Dewey’s system was still serving its purpose and whether modern public libraries could better serve children and their caregivers. The answer was a resounding “yes,” and the result was a total rethinking of how children’s books can be arranged for public use. The project that began with picturebooks recently expanded into a full-scale reorganization of the entire children’s nonfiction collection.

The project to rethink the children’s collections at Darien Library began in 2008, under the leadership of the then-Head of Children’s Services Gretchen Caserotti. Fortune smiled upon a major collection project: the library was closing its current location and reopening in a new building; as staff prepared for the move, the library would be closed to the public for roughly six weeks. It was an ideal time to make big changes. After much brainstorming, patron surveys, and staff discussions, the existing picturebook and easy reader sections were transformed into the First Five Years collection.

The new “library-within-the-children’s-library” would target children ages zero to five and their parents and caregivers. Divided into ten distinct sub-sections—(1) Favorites, (2) Concepts, (3) Rhymes and Songs, (4) Growing Up, (5) Nature, (6) Transportation, (7) Celebrations, (8) Stories, (9) Learn-to-Read, and (10) Parents—materials for early literacy and early learning were now in easy-to-browse “chunks” that allowed



**Elisabeth Gattullo** (far left) has been the Children’s Library Collection Development Coordinator at Darien Library (CT) since graduating from Pratt Institute in 2011. She leads storytimes for toddlers, discusses books with tweens, and orders all print, digital, and audio material for the Children’s Library. She blogs monthly for the Association for Library Service to Children and in Fall 2014 she will be presenting about Dewey-Lite at the ALSC National Institute. She can be found on Twitter @LiswithanS. **Kiera Parrott** is the Head of Children’s Services at Darien Library (CT). She has written about and spoken on the subject of collection reorganization at library conferences across the Northeast and is a passionate advocate for patron-centered collections. She was a member of the 2013 Caldecott Medal Committee and currently serves on ALSC’s Managing Children’s Services Committee and the AASL/ALSC/YALSA Taskforce on the Common Core State Standards.

both children and their parents or caregivers to easily find what they wanted. The project quickly proved worthwhile as circulation statistics skyrocketed in the first year. Before the reorganization, in 2007 to 2008, picturebooks and easy readers circulated a total of 18,926 times. Immediately after the First Five Years project was completed, they saw an increase of 81 percent. During 2009–10, the first full year after the reorganization was complete, the First Five Years collection circulated a total of 121,245 times (an increase of more than 500 percent). Parents commented on how much easier it was to search for books, children delighted in the visual browsing afforded by the color-coded spine labels, and books were, almost literally, flying off the shelves.

After the resounding success of the First Five Years project, the next logical step was to look at the collections for children over five. Could we (should we) consider DDC alternatives in the collections for older children? There were legitimate concerns. All of the school libraries in our community use DDC. Would children be confused if the public library did something different? Would parents and grandparents, who have been dutifully navigating DDC for years, feel betrayed? And of course there was Melvil, stoically staring back from the tall, densely-packed shelves of children's nonfiction. Did we dare?

## Planning and Prep

Darien Library is not alone in its quest to modify Dewey in favor of more patron-friendly shelf systems.<sup>3</sup> Several school libraries have taken bold steps to innovate their collections for students and teachers.

At the Ethical Culture Fieldston School in Manhattan, for example, librarians Tali Balas Kaplan, Andrea Dolloff, Sue Gifford, and Jennifer Still-Schiff ditched DDC completely and created their own classification system called Metis. In the Alexander Central Schools in western New York, school librarians Kristie Miller and Christopher Harris also threw Dewey overboard. Their libraries now use a natural language-based classification system.<sup>4</sup>

While contemplating our reorganization, we seriously considered adopting one of the above classification alternatives. We ultimately decided, however, to devise a system somewhere between traditional DDC and a total abandonment of it. The goal was to address what was lacking in Dewey (being difficult to browse, like subjects not always living in the same shelf range, and oddly dated/misogynistic/Eurocentric Dewey numbers) while maintaining what DDC does best—giving a particular item a distinct shelf address and offering layers of specificity within a given subject area. Ultimately, the librarians wanted to provide the community with a collection that was highly browseable, intuitive to navigate, and grouped into subject areas that directly addressed the browsing and searching patterns of children.

*Could we (should we) consider DDC alternatives in the collections for older children? There were legitimate concerns. All of the school libraries in our community use DDC. Would children be confused if the public library did something different? Would parents and grandparents, who have been dutifully navigating DDC for years, feel betrayed? And of course there was Melvil, stoically staring back from the tall, densely-packed shelves of children's nonfiction. Did we dare?*

It was nearly five years after the debut of the picturebook reorganization that a plan for nonfiction was devised. The project, loosely referred to as the Dewey Hybrid Model or "Dewey Lite," began in April 2013 and debuted to the public in September 2013. Dewey Lite called for the existing children's nonfiction collection to be divided into several broad subject areas as the primary level of classification. Within these broad sections, the DDC numbers would remain on the spine labels, thereby serving as the second layer of classification.

How exactly the nonfiction would be divided and what these broad categories would be was the subject of much brainstorming and many mind-mapping sessions. Similar to the process by which the staff devised the plan for the picturebook reorganization back in 2008, the librarians had to consider many factors for nonfiction, including:

- natural subject groupings (such as animals from the 500s coexisting with pets from the 600s);
- subject-area strengths and weaknesses in the existing collection; and
- local interests and curriculum connections.

Since the Dewey Lite project was announced in spring 2013, librarians from across the country have expressed interest in the underlying philosophy as well as the detailed logistics of a major collection reorganization. The following will provide a step-by-step guide through our process.





2 Facts - do we want <sup>light blue</sup> reference to give?

- almanacs
- world records
- encyclopedia
- grammar
- the 400's
- thesaurus

H W Help?

2 Kids - Design purple

2 Create

- craft - plans
- painting - sketches
- drawing - cooking
- architecture - writing
- famous ppl - film
- music - photography
- instruments

2 Animals <sup>green</sup>

- all animals
- including prehistoric
- pets
- farm
- dinosaur
- working animals

2 Poetry <sup>author's name</sup>

2 Kids Poetry <sup>author's name</sup>

2 Sports <sup>red</sup>

All sport books

Major sports ppl

2 Fun <sup>orange</sup>

- jokes
- riddles
- games (indoor/outdoor, class, etc)
- cards
- magic

2 Self <sup>yellow</sup>

- nutrition
- puberty
- friendship
- peer pressure
- diseases
- physical & mental well being - for kids!

2 Places <sup>house</sup>

- geography
- history
- 400's

2 Science (STEM) <sup>green blue</sup>

- 500's
- Some 600's, some 700's
- volcanoes
- natural disasters
- experiments

2 Film cameras versus Digital cameras

## Preparing to Reorganize

Deciding to embark on a reorganization of your nonfiction collection is the first step, and it can be the hardest. But once you've made the decision, you must actually move forward. The more pieces you have in place before you begin, the smoother your transition will be. This is especially true if you are completing a reorganization of your collection while remaining open, as we did.

## Get the Key Players on Board

Before approaching your supervisor or administrators, have your elevator pitch ready. Be prepared to briefly explain what major changes you'd like to undertake, why you feel the reorganization will benefit your patrons, and how you plan to measure your success. In our case, the picturebook reorganization provided a model. We also pointed to the growing trend (and successes) of school libraries experimenting with Dewey alternatives. Having a clear plan, and being able to articulate it, helped us advocate effectively. Luckily, our administration was supportive and provided good feedback for us throughout the process.

## Layout

If your administration and your colleagues are on board, it's time to start thinking logistics. The devil is in the details, as they say, and logistics are all details. How will you identify your new collection?

Patrons should notice your new nonfiction section. It should be intuitive and easy for them to use. Your collection needs identifying characteristics, and you need to know what most of those will be before you start your process. A good way to start is by brainstorming what your ideal nonfiction collection would look like—after you do this, start thinking about what you can realistically accomplish.

Do you have the option of purchasing new shelving units that fit your vision of how the collection will be laid out? If not, are you able to rearrange existing shelving? For some, that is not possible. At Darien Library, our challenge was thinking of ways we could distinguish our new nonfiction arrangement from our previous one while keeping the existing shelving layout.

## Labels and Stickers

Your new collection will need more than a new arrangement. Your books will require new spine labels, which need to be sourced and purchased, and then applied. As anyone who has done a reorganization of any type before knows, the

Table 1. Dewey Lite Classification Scheme

Name of Section	Types of Books	Color of Label
Kids Animals	All books about animals (prehistoric through today), Pets, Farm/Working Animals, Dinosaurs, Animal Habitats	Green
Kids Create	Crafts, Painting/Drawing, Architecture, Art, Famous Artists, Music/Musical Instruments, Plays/Shakespeare, Cooking, Writing, Gardening, Films, Photography, Digital Creation, Fashion	Purple
Kids Facts	Almanacs, World Records, Grammar/Dictionaries/Thesauri, Encyclopedias, General Information	Pink
Kids Fun	Jokes, Riddles/Tongue Twisters, Games (Indoor/Outdoor, Chess/Board) Cards, Magic Tricks, UFOs, Bigfoot, Weird Mysteries, Ghosts, Gnomes/Fairies	Orange
Kids Poetry	All Poetry Books	White
Kids Self	Nutrition, Puberty, Friendships, Peer Pressure, Physical and Mental Well-Being, Occupations, Health, Financial Literacy	Yellow
Kids Sports	All physical activities, Famous Sports Figures Famous Sports Moments, Teams	Blue
Kids STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics)	Science Experiments, Weather/Earth Science, Astronomy/Planets, Biology, Chemistry, Physics Forensics, Natural Disasters, Technology, Robots, Future, Engines, Diseases, Medicine, Inventions	Red
Kids Then & Now	Geography, History, Current Events, Army, Government, Cultures	Sky Blue

physical conversion of the books is definitely the most time-consuming.

Will you identify your books with any other kind of markers besides new spine labels? If you are planning on adding colored labels or any other kinds of identifiers, they will also need to be purchased ahead of time. One of the greatest pieces of advice we got before beginning our own reorganization was from our building supervisor Lois Calka, who advised us to handle the books as few times as possible. The more times you physically deal with each book, the longer your reorganization will take.

## Changing the Collection

Who will carry out the physical conversion of your books? Do you have support staff, or will you be carrying out the project on your own? Is this the kind of job you would trust to an intern or volunteer? The total number of staff involved in the physical process will determine your timetable. It is important to offer your administration and colleagues a set period of time the collection will be in transition. We've found that setting a realistic due date also helps manage expectations and motivate staff to get a project completed. Give yourself more time than you think you will need.

How will you change the records themselves? Some records management companies, like Polaris, offer bulk changes to records at a small fee. Is that an option for your system, or does

your records management system offer a way for you to bulk change your records by yourself? If a bulk change is not an option, you may be looking at the manual change of hundreds, if not thousands, of records. This will add significantly to your planned timetable.

In our library, we also needed to create new location codes. Those needed to be added to the records so that the books' locations would change in our online catalog. In addition, location codes are tied to purchasing funds, so those fund codes also needed to be changed. These changes could not be made on our level, so we needed to meet with the library's accountant and the building supervisor to get these changes worked out before we could purchase new materials.

## Budget

Cost is the logistical piece that ties these all together. How much money do you have in your budget for this project? Is it financially feasible to hire additional staff to help with this project? If not, will you be allowed to pull support for this project from the existing staff? We had the new labels for our collection printed by an independent printing company at a cost of about \$500.

Signage can be as simple as signs you create yourself and laminate or elaborate and professionally designed. What does your budget allow for?

At Darien Library, completing our logistical homework took about three months, at which time we had ten thousand new printed labels, a timetable for our reorganization, a schedule for staff to follow, boxes and boxes of colored stickers, signs for our patrons explaining what was happening in the nonfiction section, library staff that was aware of and supported our project, and a children's staff that was prepped and ready to begin the physical process of reorganizing more than eight thousand books in five hardwood stacks.

## Dewey Lite at Darien Library

The children's room at Darien Library is already divided into two distinct sections—one half contains the First Five Years Collection, as mentioned above, while the other half of holds our Kids Collection, which contains chapter books, middle-grade fiction, graphic novels, biographies, and nonfiction. Nonfiction books in the children's library are identified from other departments by the prefix “Kids” before the Dewey number. It was important to us to keep this prefix consistent, so our various Dewey Lite sections are all preceded by the word “Kids.” For example: Kids Animals.

We decided on the ten sections shown in the table on the previous page, which took in account our collection and the space limitations mentioned before.

## Challenges

The biggest challenge is the outlier—that book that doesn't readily belong in any of your distinct categories. At Darien, we ran into this problem numerous times. For example, there was some debate over where to put books on diseases. Originally, we had decided that anything to do with a child's person should go in the section known as “Self.” Because diseases like diabetes and even cancer could affect our patrons, we thought disease books belonged there.

Then we actually got into the 600s, and ran into myriad issues. What about diseases that no longer affected our patrons, like the plague? Books like *An American Plague* seemed like a better fit for Then & Now, as well as books about historical scourges throughout time. What about books that focused entirely on the science behind the disease? Would these not be a better fit for the STEM section?

Of course, there is no right answer—consider doing whatever you think will make more sense to your patrons and contribute to their ease of use. The important thing is to have a plan. Will you put the book to a vote and have each participating librarian declare where they think the book will go? Should you instead designate one person as the arbitrator? Are you comfortable having different books on the same subject in multiple locations, or does it make more sense to you and your patrons to

have them in one? These are questions that must be answered before you start the physical part of your reorganization, or they will bog down the process entirely.

The other challenge you may face is marketing. How do you convince your patrons that this new way of organizing nonfiction is beneficial? Change is difficult, and a poorly thought-out marketing campaign (or complete lack of one) can sink a reorganization. Although it may seem like putting the cart before the horse to think of how you will market your successful project once it is complete, it is very important. A successful public debut is the key to a well-used, well-received reorganized nonfiction collection.

## Public Debut

When the reorganization has been physically completed, you are almost ready for the public debut and all the bells and whistles that go with it. But before you invite the public to peruse your new collection, invite your fellow staff members. Let all staff who will be working with the public, not just children's staff, know how the collection is organized and how to help patrons find what they need.

Finally, present your staff with talking points so they can present a uniform and positive point of view to the public. Talking points should include simple sentences on

- why you reorganized;
- why the new collection is easier to use and browse; and
- how patrons can use the new collection.

Our plan for the public debut involved a few steps. Each step was designed to help a different part of the public interact with, and hopefully get used to, the collection. To begin with, we hosted collection tours twice a week for our school librarians, members of the Board of Education, and interested adult patrons. As time goes on, tours will be held on an as-requested basis. However, all children's staff will be able to give impromptu tours as needed.

We did extensive outreach with school librarians. Through the hard work of our outreach librarian, we have a good relationship with local school librarians, and we hosted them at a small afternoon soiree.

The most important part of our marketing was to ensure that young users are as comfortable with the new system as possible. We plan on hosting several scavenger hunt programs to help children familiarize themselves with the new layout, while allowing them to explore the collection in a fun, controlled way.

continued on page 33



# Wish “Granted”

## How a Grant Saved Our Summer Reading Program

ERIN WARZALA

*The queue begins innocuously enough—a mother and child station themselves outside of room 205 an hour before the program is about to begin. They’re soon joined by other parents and children, as well as camp leaders with their groups. By the time the doors open, the line trails down the hall, wraps around a corner, fills up a foyer, snakes down two sets of stairs, and spills out of the library’s entrance.*

To say the least, the Summer Reading Program (SRP) at the Wichita Falls (TX) Public Library is immensely popular. While the city boasts a population of more than one hundred thousand and has a local Air Force Base, the city only has a limited number of family-friendly activities.

With the larger metropolitan areas of Dallas and Oklahoma City each two hours away, many Wichita Falls residents flock to the local library for summer entertainment. In fact, library programs that feature a paid performer (such as a musician or magician) can bring in anywhere from two hundred to seven hundred attendees.

### Axed Funding

My colleagues and I strive to make each summer better than the last. However, in late 2011, we learned that funding for library programs in the state would decrease 88 percent in the FY 2012–13 budget.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the Loan Star Library program, which had helped fund our past summer reading programs, had been eliminated. With limited funding, we knew we had to look elsewhere, namely grants, to supplement our summer reading program budget. After researching possible grants, my supervisor suggested the ALSC/BWI Summer Reading Program Grant (which is now the ALSC/Baker & Taylor Summer Reading Program Grant), and I was placed in charge of applying for it.

### Applying for the Grant

The application for the ALSC-BWI Summer Reading Grant was very straightforward. In fact, the hardest part was meeting the December 1 deadline. While we knew our SRP theme (Get a Clue . . . at Your Library), my colleagues and I had to meet several times prior to December to plan and refine our ideas. Suddenly, we found ourselves having to answer questions we normally wouldn’t discuss until after the holidays: What programs were we going to do? How would we allocate the budget if we received the grant? Who was going to be in charge of what?

We decided our main goal was to have enough funding to host a paid performer every week during SRP. In the past, we had always had a big show every week, and it had become something that the community both loved and expected. We didn’t want to decrease the number of performances, so made that our main priority. Among our performers were two animal specialists, two magicians, a juggler, a Ugandan Orphans Choir, a musician who plays polkas, and a lady who does yo-yo tricks.

We wanted to offer themed programming for all ages. One idea was developing a spy camp for children ages ten and under consisting of several stations, such as a laser field station and a



**Erin Warzala** was formerly a Children’s Librarian for the Wichita Falls (TX) Public Library and is currently a Children’s Librarian II for the Allen County Public Library in Fort Wayne, Indiana. She is passionate about early literacy and bringing quality programs to the community.



Tweens and teens learn the ins and outs of crime scene investigation.

decoding station, where the children would complete tasks to become certified “spies.”

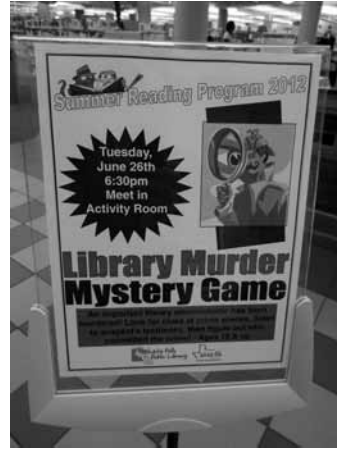
For tweens and teens, we planned to partner with the local police department to offer a forensics program in which teens learned how to dust for fingerprints and how to complete a DNA kit with the help of an ID technician. The teens would then be able to put their newfound forensics skills to the test in a mock crime scene.

Lastly, we planned a murder mystery family night. It was designed for all ages—from very young children all the way to grandparents—so we made sure that the mystery was light enough for young children, but intriguing enough for the adults.

We also planned programming for young patrons with a physical or mental disability. The ALSC/BWI Summer Reading Program Grant “encourages innovative proposals involving children with physical or mental disabilities,” and we wanted to provide special programming for a facet of that community—specifically hearing impaired children.<sup>2</sup>

It was important to us to provide programming to an underserved group in our community; therefore, we chose to offer American Sign Language (ASL) storytimes for hearing-impaired children. Because no one on staff knew ASL fluently, I contacted a local elementary school that provides deaf education classes, and four teachers volunteered to sign during our summer storytimes.

With volunteers on board and programs planned out, I submitted the grant in late November. Because the ALSC/BWI grant is a national grant with only one recipient per year, I figured the odds were against us. Therefore I was very surprised when I got the call in February that we had been selected.



The family murder mystery game had patrons trying to guess who done it.

## Saving Summer Reading

We received the monies from the grant in the spring, just in time for SRP. Since programs in which we hire a performer are the most popular, we used half of the \$3,000 grant for performers. We also gave each deaf education teacher a \$100 honorarium to be donated to a charity of her choice as a thank you for their time. Another \$100 went to purchasing sign language books and DVDs for our collection. The rest of the grant money was split between program supplies, publicity, printed handouts, and SRP prizes.

Thanks to the ALSC/BWI grant, we were able to offer a summer reading program that was not only on par to what we have offered in the past but was actually more popular than past summer programs. Program attendance increased by 41 percent during the 2012 summer reading program, and the library received a lot of local media coverage.

Most importantly, the patrons enjoyed the programs we might not have otherwise been able to offer. Not only were they showing up in record numbers, but they were talking about them weeks after the SRP ended. Even now, a year later, we still get comments from people in the community about the programs that we were able to offer due to the ALSC/BWI Summer Reading Program Grant. ☺

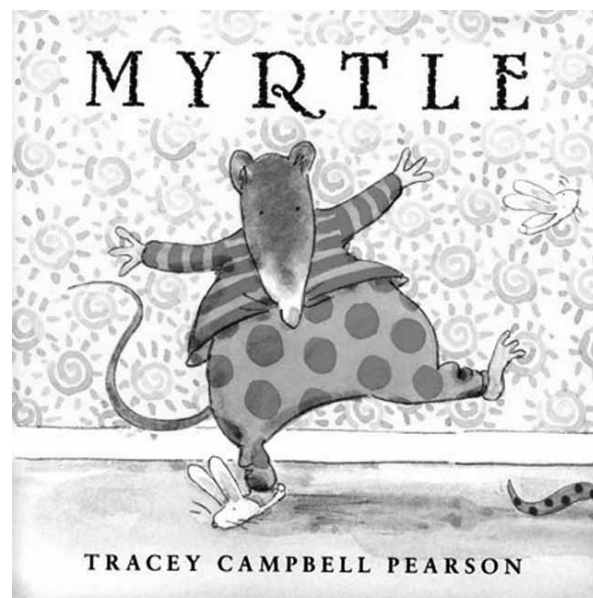
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# Sticks, Stones, and Sneering Tones

## The Librarian's Role in Ending the Bullying Epidemic

BY KIM BECNEL



While bullying behavior has been occurring for a long time in our communities and schools, over the past decade, stories of bullycide in the news have catapulted the issue to the national stage.

Despite the headlines spotlighting awareness, the research into causes, consequences, and prevention efforts, the number of children who suffer from acts of bullying is still staggering. According to the US Department of Health and Human Services, in 2011, 20 percent of American high school students indicated that they had been bullied on school grounds in the past year, while 16 percent had been victims of cyberbullying.<sup>1</sup>

Corroborating this self-reporting of students, many schools have begun to acknowledge that bullying is a pervasive problem on their campuses, with a full 23 percent reporting that bullying incidents had happened either weekly or daily during the 2009–10 school year.<sup>2</sup>

Not only are we finally coming to terms with the scale of the bullying problem, but we are beginning to truly comprehend its seriousness as well. In the past, educators and even parents have had a tendency to dismiss bullying, especially when it is not physical, as normal childhood behavior or a rite of passage to simply be endured. However, researchers have discovered proof of what many children know to be true—that words can, in fact, be just as painful as sticks and stones.

When acts of bullying cause distress of an emotional or social nature, a child's brain is affected in much the same way as if he or she were physically harmed.<sup>3</sup> And when children suffer acts of bullying—whether physical, emotional, psychological, or social—repeatedly and over prolonged periods of time, the

consequences are serious, including “physiological changes that place the individual at risk of a host of cognitive, physical health, and mental health issues.”<sup>4</sup> Bullied children tend to fall ill more often than their non-bullied counterparts, encounter academic difficulty in school, and suffer from anxiety and depression.<sup>5</sup> They also “fantasize about killing themselves more than non-bullied children, and also attempt to take their life more often than their non-victimized peers.”<sup>6</sup>

The consequences of bullying on the physical and psychological well-being of victims are serious and worthy of attention, to be sure. However, if we narrow our thinking about the bullying problem to only those students who are victimized, it can sometimes be easy to forget that the children who are committing the bullying behaviors are also in need of help. These children, many of whom have been victims of violence or maltreatment or witness to domestic violence in their homes, have a significantly increased risk of substance abuse problems and involvement in violent incidents in adulthood.<sup>7</sup> To complicate matters even further, some children involved in bullying episodes cannot be easily labeled as victim or bully; often classified as bully-victims, these youth suffer from bullying behavior in some contexts and perpetrate it in others.<sup>8</sup>



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All of these children—victims, bullies, and bully-victims—need the adults in their lives to pay attention. We need to intervene when we see trouble, and we need to provide resources and services that help children build healthy relationships and treat each other with the basic respect that all human beings deserve.

## Selecting Accurate, Helpful Books

Public librarians and school media specialists are honestly concerned about bullying in their schools and neighborhoods. Eager to help, we buy countless books on the subject and eagerly create booklists and bookmarks featuring newly acquired titles. However, not all materials are of equal caliber. Some of them provide honest, helpful looks into these types of situations, but others perpetuate harmful stereotypes and offer outdated advice. Librarians must select and recommend titles carefully.

## The Danger of Stereotypes

According to Cary J. Roseth and Anthony Pellegrini, the stereotype of bullies as “oafish and simple minded” and generally disliked by other students paints a distorted picture. In actuality, bullies tend to have well-developed social skills, “discriminat[ing] about whom they target, focusing their victimization on those children who do not fight back and who do not receive support from peers,” and finding that their actions result in “moderate to high levels of social status.”<sup>9</sup> Similarly, in a study of kindergarteners, it was discovered that while victims frequently had few or no friends, bullies tended to be well-regarded members of larger social units.<sup>10</sup>

Picturebooks that reinforce the misleading stereotype of the socially awkward, misunderstood bully are problematic because they imply that the bully’s behavior is provoked either by the victim or by the rejection of his or her peers. One popular picturebook that perpetuates the idea of the misunderstood bully is Alexis O’Neill’s *The Recess Queen*, in which Mean Jean, a true bully on the playground, rules like a tyrant until the day intrepid newcomer Katie Sue asks her to jump rope, an invitation none of the other children had been brave enough to proffer. By book’s end, Mean Jean is no longer the menacing bully now that she has found acceptance and friendship.<sup>11</sup>

Here, as in many of these kinds of tales, a serious problem is remedied with a little bit of kindness extended to the bully. It is certainly true that in some cases, an offer of friendship can draw a lonely or disgruntled child into a community and thus alleviate some social conflict. However, when authors and librarians tell this type of story repeatedly, and to exclusion of other, more realistic bullying narratives, we are sending a message to children that we do not truly understand the gravity or complexity of the social dynamics they face.

On the other hand, librarians should be wary of titles that demonize bullies, opting instead for selections that acknowledge the humanity of everyone involved. Books that identify a child who bullies not as a real person but merely as a nemesis to be defeated dismiss the real and serious problems many of these children face. Research has demonstrated that children who perpetrate bullying behavior often face maltreatment or witness domestic violence in their homes. These youth are in need of assistance if they are to learn to navigate the social world in a healthy way and develop meaningful relationships.<sup>12</sup>

An example of a title with a one-dimensional bully is Geoffrey Hayes’s *Patrick and the Big Bully*. Here, we meet a bear family: dad Leo, mom Irma, and little boy Patrick. Patrick is tasked with going to Ollie’s to buy cookies for lunch, and he must avoid the local bully—given the generic name Big Bear—to complete his task. Big Bear chases Patrick, threatens him, and tries to steal his cookies. The hero of the story, Patrick, successfully defeats the bully in the end, scaring him so badly with a ferocious roar that Big Bear falls backward into the mud, which is the last image readers see of him. A victorious Patrick shares the story with his family over a plate of hard-won cookies. Tales like this one that dehumanize or objectify characters who bully should be used with caution and paired with more compassionate titles.<sup>13</sup>

Avoiding books that portray a bully with too much or too little sympathy is key. One title that gets it right is *Jake’s Best Thumb* by Ilene Cooper. In this title, Jake is teased because he sucks his thumb and no adults seem to understand. Even his teacher simply suggests that he try not to suck his thumb at school instead of dealing with the teasing behavior of the other children, specifically the ringleader, Cliff. Another child, Nell, befriends Jake, admitting that she has a toy that she depends on for comfort, and this confidence makes Jake feel much less alone.

At recess, when Cliff is hanging upside-down from the monkey bars, a piece of a blanket falls out of his pocket, and Jake and Nell immediately recognize it as a piece of his childhood blanket that he keeps in his pocket to rub for comfort. Jake swipes it and begins to tease Cliff, calling him a blankie-rubber. But taking revenge in this way feels wrong to Jake, so he decides to return the blankie to Cliff, who accepts it with relief. Ultimately, a truce is reached and the children come to understand that they all need a little comfort sometimes. In this example, it is the teasing behavior that is branded as bad rather than the bullying child, and the resolution seems both realistic and hopeful.<sup>14</sup>

## Resolutions that Work

In an analysis of picturebooks on bullying, Moulton, Heath, Prater, and Dyches argue that “when selecting books, adults must carefully review the story’s ending and how bullying situations are resolved” because the “story’s core message should align with what adults want children to learn and books should model desired behaviors.”<sup>15</sup> Their study discovered that too many picturebooks end with problematic resolutions,

featuring the victim or an outside force getting revenge on or even with the bully, supplying a fantastical or magical resolution to the problem or having the bully and the victim become fast friends by the final pages.<sup>16</sup>

In *Loudmouth George and the Sixth-Grade Bully*, for example, George is being bullied by a boy named Big Mike. To make the bullying stop, George's friend Harriet helps him to create a fake—and very disgusting—lunch for Big Mike to steal.<sup>17</sup> Even though exacting revenge on a bully is not recommended as a coping or conflict resolution strategy, for it simply extends the cycle of violence,<sup>18</sup> studies have shown that many victims voice a preference for it, probably because “their sense of frustration is so high that their desire to retaliate is prompted by anger and a sense of powerlessness.”<sup>19</sup> Books that feature revenge as a solution to bullying reinforce victims' fantasies that getting even would solve the problem, rather than helping them to imagine alternative strategies that could really work.

In *Don't Be a Bully, Billy: A Cautionary Tale*, title character Billy is a persistent bully, getting away with his bad behavior until he meets new kid Bob. When he steals Bob's ball, Bob's big brother shows up in a UFO and promptly beams Billy aboard. Not surprisingly, considering how he has treated them, all Billy's classmates are glad to see him go.<sup>20</sup> This particular title is an apt example of books depicting magical resolutions to what, for kids, are all too real problems.

Judith Caseley's *Bully* is a typical example of a story that suggests bullies and victims are meant to be best friends, once the pesky bullying situation is ironed out. Here, when asked for advice, Mickey's mother asks him if he's ever “heard the saying, ‘Love thine enemy.’”<sup>21</sup> Mickey follows his Mom's advice and is nice to Jack, and when he shares a story that makes the boy laugh, the two bond and become the best of friends, suggesting that the responsibility for peace-making is the victim's and that if the victim hits upon just the right act of kindness, he or she will be rewarded with the bully's friendship.

*Henry and the Bully* provides another example. The bully, Sam, stops her tyrannical behavior, becoming Henry's friend after Henry goes out of his way to be nice to her.<sup>22</sup> Of course, there is nothing wrong with extending kindness and turning the other cheek. However, when children receive message after message that the way to resolve bullying is for the victim to keep reaching out and meeting scorn or derision with grace and humor, they are learning that it is the victim's responsibility to stop the bullying, which implies that the victim is somehow at fault. They are also being set up for disappointment because submission is linked to prolonged and escalating bullying; in other words, giving the bully what he or she wants will not suddenly cause the bully to come to his or her senses and result in a lifelong friendship, but only ensure that the bullying behavior continues.<sup>23</sup> Though the authors of all of these examples no doubt mean well, these selections send the wrong messages about the way that bullying situations can and should be resolved.

Fortunately, there are some picturebooks currently available that demonstrate healthy and realistic resolution strategies. For example, in Tracey Campbell Pearson's *Myrtle*, the title character is faced with a bully named Frances. Myrtle's aunt helps her to formulate a strategy for dealing with Frances, including telling the bully to stop being rude and then ignoring her, a strategy that Myrtle implements to great effect.<sup>24</sup> Current guidelines by educators and researchers suggest that verbally standing up for oneself and then choosing to disengage from the bully and align with other children is a healthy way to handle a bullying situation.<sup>25</sup> Thus, in this picturebook, the child approaches an adult for help, receives good advice, and then acts on that advice, making this a good selection to share with children.

## Everyone Matters: The Bystander Role

In a recent article, “Bystanders Matter: Associations Between Reinforcing, Defending, and the Frequency of Bullying Behavior in Classrooms,” the authors' research reveals the critical role that bystanders play in the ultimate outcome of bullying situations. The data strongly suggests that “bystanders influence the frequency of bullying” that “provid[es] support for the view of bullying as a group phenomenon.” When bystanders reinforce bullying behavior, the frequency of that behavior increases, whereas when bystanders defend potential bullying targets, the frequency of the behavior lessens.<sup>26</sup> It has also been demonstrated that intervention on the part of a bystander can stop 57 percent of bullying incidents.<sup>27</sup>

A wonderful title for discussing the role of the bystander is Peggy Moss's *Say Something*, in which a young girl is, at first, a passive bystander. Later, once she has experienced bullying herself, she is transformed, actively befriending another girl who has been made a target.<sup>28</sup>

Similarly, Tomie DePaola's *Trouble in the Barkers' Class* and Teresa Bateman's *The Bully Blockers Club*<sup>29</sup> also highlight the power of the bystander by describing situations in which groups of children band together to prevent a bully from harming any one of them. These stories teach students an important and empowering lesson about bullying—that “successful” bullying depends on the approval, either explicit or tacit, of a social group. If that group refuses to allow it, then it cannot take place.

## Chapter Books

The same criteria employed above to evaluate picturebooks can be applied to chapter books and even young adult titles. Essentially, titles that create complicated, relatable characters for both the bully and victim roles are preferable to those that rely on one-dimensional or stereotypical figures. Titles such as *Jake Drake: Bully Buster*, *Beany and the Meany*, and *The Meanest Girl* all feature strong, interesting protagonists encountering bullies who turn out to be not quite as awful as they first appear, sending the positive message that everyone is worth getting to know. Titles like *Max Quigley, Technically*

*Not a Bully* and *Confessions of a Former Bully* are particularly good for offering insight into the perspective of youth who bully others, while *Bystander* focuses on the important role of the bystander, describing the experiences of a boy who initially occupies the role of silent witness, and then, when he tries to take a stand against his bullying friend, is thrust into the role of the victim.<sup>30</sup>

Further, books that portray realistic solutions and outcomes will resonate with readers to a greater degree than offerings that minimize the problem or suggest solutions that readers readily identify as implausible or ineffective. In *The Misfits*, humor, assertiveness, and banding together are the keys to improving the social situation of the four main characters,<sup>31</sup> while in *Cockroach Cooties* two boys first get revenge on a bully by capitalizing on his fear of bugs, but ultimately forge an uneasy peace with him once they learn that a very difficult home life is likely the cause of his bullying behavior.<sup>32</sup> Then, there are titles like classics *Blubber* and *The Hundred Dresses*, in which there is no real happy ending and regret figures more prominently than resolution. All of these selections will ring true for readers and get them thinking and talking about why conflict happens and how it can be prevented or resolved.

## Putting the Books to Work

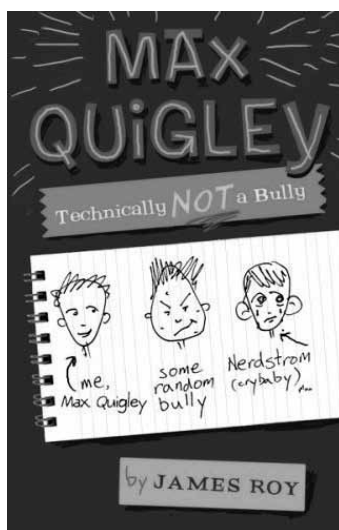
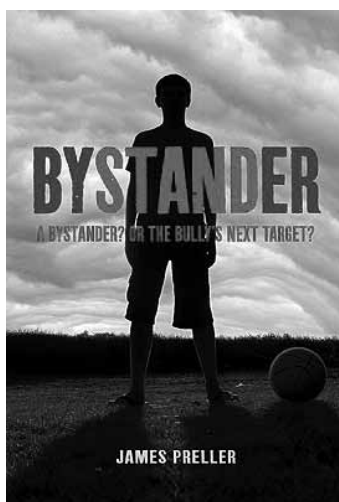
The librarian's job doesn't end when the right books are purchased and processed. The next step is making sure they are put to good and frequent use. Setting a group of bullying-themed titles out in a themed display might help to get them noticed, though, since children may avoid a display of this nature because of possible social stigma, it might be even better to include some of these books in displays on more neutral topics such as friendship, sports, or school stories. Many picturebooks can be shared in a group setting, and novels can be read by classes or book clubs and used to spark group discussions on interpersonal relationships and conflict resolution.

The librarian who knows his or her students and collection very well can also do a world of good by recommending a certain book or two to a child who has expressed concerns about peer harassment or surreptitiously slipping a pointed title into a stack of suggestions for a child the librarian suspects may be involved in a bullying relationship.

## Making the Library a Safe and Welcoming Space

As many of us already know, libraries are often perceived by

children as places of refuge that welcome all. We can capitalize on this perception by ensuring that our spaces are, in reality, the sanctuaries that students imagine them to be. To assist in this effort, psychologist Molly Barrow suggests that librarians "Put in place a new rule of nonviolence and respect to all that establishes the library as a safe destination" and "Make a big sign that declares a nonviolence stance, and hang it up where everyone can see it."<sup>33</sup> The idea is to make explicit and to officially endorse what students feel instinctively: that libraries are safe spaces in which all people are treated with respect.



One library that has done just that is the Sacramento (Calif.) Public Library, winner of the 2012 National Library Week Campaign competition for the best plan implementing the theme "You belong @ your library." The library worked with local LGBT designers to craft public relations pieces designed to welcome the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community into the library. In addition to the public relations campaign, the library offers special programming geared toward this population.<sup>34</sup> By publicly inviting and welcoming a group that is often excluded and marginalized, and whose members experience harassment and bullying to alarming degrees,<sup>35</sup> this library is sending a clear message that the library is a safe harbor where everyone is welcome and valued.

School and public libraries interested in how they can ensure that everyone feels welcome in their spaces—particularly members of the LGBT community—can visit the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network's website ([www.glsen.org/safespace](http://www.glsen.org/safespace)) to access free resources. Stickers and posters that boldly declare a space as safe and inclusive for LGBT students and their allies can be downloaded, printed, and displayed in the library. GLSEN's Safe Space kits also provide useful information on how educators can better support LGBT students, curb bias, and create a climate in which all students can thrive.

Patrons of all ages, but especially children, tend to transfer the feelings of security they associate with the library to the people who work there. Molly Barrow observes that because of this, librarians are sometimes the first adults that troubled students reveal their problems and struggles to. Librarians in schools and public librarians should be aware of this aspect of their roles and prepared for how they will deal with such confessions. As Barrow points out, "in situations that involve abuse, neglect, and molestation, the media specialist must file a report with her administrator and with Child Protection Services."<sup>36</sup> If the problem concerns any type of peer harassment, librarians should be prepared to intervene appropriately to ensure a student's



well-being, whether that means involving school counselors and administration, providing bibliotherapy suggestions, or simply lending an ear.

## Providing Programming and Services

Aside from selecting and promoting strong, accurate titles and making the library into a safe space, librarians can also implement programs and services that encourage healthy behaviors and relationships while minimizing bullying. We can develop a parent/teacher collection of resources, including nonfiction books, DVDs, and resource guides to help teachers and caregivers recognize, prevent, and deal with bullying.

We can also partner with local agencies to offer classes in anger management, parenting, and cybersafety or Internet basics. To get students involved, librarians can participate in initiatives such as No Name Calling Week, an annual event sponsored by GLSEN,<sup>37</sup> start a service club, or introduce a service project asking students to come up with projects to minimize bullying in their schools, and, for the very youngest, simply conduct storytimes with themes such as friendship and sharing.

School media centers are often involved in school-wide anti-bullying efforts, and more public libraries are becoming involved as well. For example, The Ottawa Public Library joined a number of other local agencies in an effort to create activity kits that serve as bullying prevention resources for child care workers and parents.<sup>38</sup> The New York Public Library, which has offered many programs about bullying for adults and children in the past several years, is sponsoring a community service project in which children can help paint an anti-bullying mural at the Melrose Library.<sup>39</sup> In October 2012, The Buffalo and Erie County Public Library system of New York led a host of community organizations in the creation of an anti-bullying campaign that included public relations messages as well as more than thirty programs for citizens to attend.<sup>40</sup> No matter the size of the library or the resources at its disposal, opportunities can be found to offer creative programming and services that will educate the community about how to prevent bullying and how to best deal with the aftermath when it occurs.

School or public librarians interested in combating bullying in their communities should, first and foremost, be careful to select and share appropriate books with children. Ideally, books should depict both the bully and victim as fully fleshed out characters and should portray realistic resolutions to bullying situations. Further, librarians should ensure these titles don't languish on the shelves; they should be booktalked, put on display, and shared in group settings.

In addition to the collection manager, the librarian has the vital role of space-keeper, and we should make sure our libraries are safe and welcoming by decorating in a way that promotes diversity and celebrates difference, posting signs that signal

clear rules for student interaction, and refusing to tolerate any type of peer harassment. For some children, a safe, welcoming place to go for a few minutes in the school day is more important than we'll ever know. As an adult likely to be entrusted with student confidences, the librarian should also spend some time thinking ahead about how he or she will respond to accounts of bullying or peer harassment confided by students and prepare to intervene immediately and appropriately.

Finally, librarians should proactively develop programs and services that educate the community about the signs and consequences of bullying and promote healthy conflict resolution strategies. Librarians who are attentive to the above can be instrumental in creating and sustaining a culture of respect and an environment in which all children can flourish. ☺

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# Portrait of an Artist as a Young Mouse

## Introducing Kids to Art through Books

BY JANE BRESKIN ZALBEN

What does it mean to become an artist? To make a life filled with art? To stay true to yourself whether your work is revered or criticized? To do what has meaning? These are the questions I explored in my latest book *Mousterpiece: A Mouse-Sized Guide to Modern Art*.

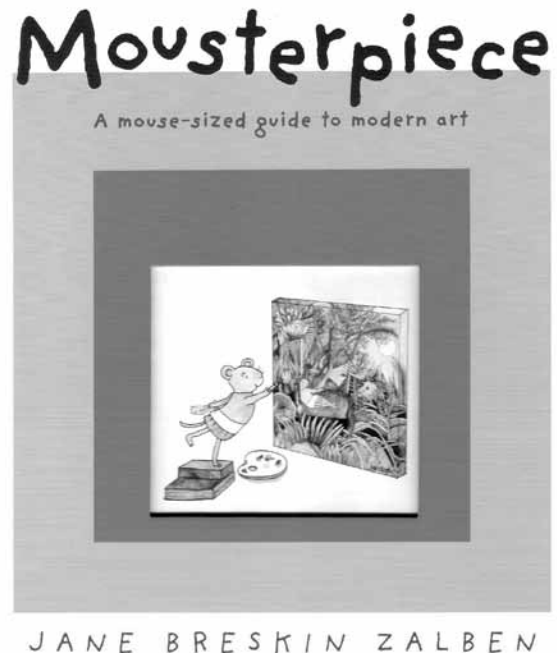
Art has been my life since I was little. It is who I am. It is a huge part of what I live for. And so it is for the mouse, Janson, the heroine of my recent picturebook, who discovers what it is to be a true artist. Her name is in honor of H. W. Janson, whose *History of Art* was “the bible” for every art major in college, questioning, “Why is this art?”

I was once asked, “Why present art for such a young age as you did in your book?” This is my answer: “Why not?” As soon as I could hold a crayon in my hand, I fell in love with drawing. It is a world I could escape to—a world of my own that I could see through my eyes.

My mother was a children’s book librarian later on in her life in a school for children with special needs, but I think she secretly had a passion for art. By the time I was five years old, she took me every weekend from Queens, New York, into “the city” to the Metropolitan Museum of Art for art lessons. I would paint all morning. Downstairs.



**Jane Breskin Zalben** is the author/artist/designer of more than fifty books, including eight middle-grade/young adult novels. Her latest picturebook is *Mousterpiece* (A Neal Porter Book/Roaring Brook Press). Her art has been shown at galleries and museums. She taught Writing, Illustrating and Designing Children’s Books for eighteen years at the School of Visual Arts in Manhattan. She was formerly an art director at Scribner’s. For more information, visit [www.janebreskinzalben.com](http://www.janebreskinzalben.com).



Afterwards, we would have burgers in the cafeteria. On rare occasions, when they still had a Roman pool with massive columns and classical sculptures upstairs, we would have lunch, and I would throw a penny in the pool and make a wish. If it still existed, I know what my wish would be—to become a famous artist. (Who knew many years later I would have a show in a gallery on the second floor for my book *Jabberwocky* there?)

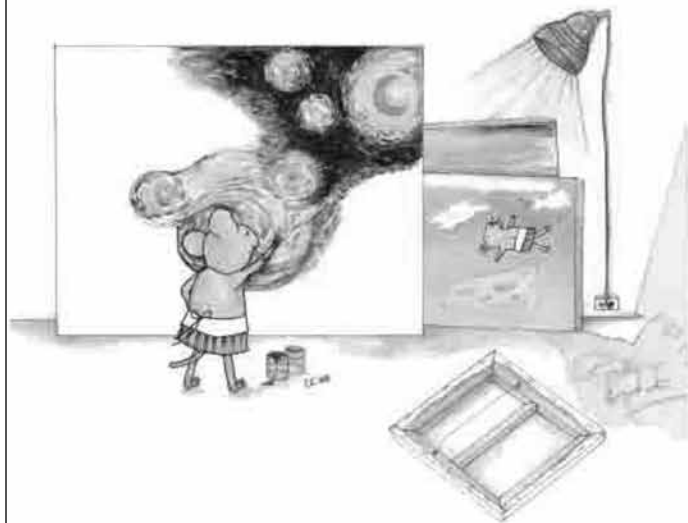
In the afternoon, we would first visit the American wing filled with stuffy old furniture, like the room where Janson resides. Then we’d venture out each week to the other galleries within the building until we made our way to modern art. And my world opened, exactly like the story in the book, to art.

What happens in childhood is an important foundation for a life that is lived. I sometimes wonder if a teacher or parent or that someone who influences or mentors or inspires realizes how potent a moment can become. My first-grade teacher allowed me stay during recess to paint. I guess I was a detail person even then. A perfectionist.

Before the class came back from lunch, she taped my wet painting of a striped bell, still dripping—definitely an homage to the modern artists I had been exposed to—to the front door of our classroom. To this day, I consider that my first one-woman show.

So Janson worked on her pictures  
and left them in an empty room each night,

until one by one the walls were filled with art.  
The more she painted, the happier she became.



Janson is inspired by Vincent van Gogh, Salvador Dali, Chuck Close, and Edvard Munch.

Years followed with more art lessons in basements; a sixth-grade scholarship to Pratt Institute, where I studied linoleum cuts; The Art Student's League at twelve to begin my first portfolio, life drawing nudes (don't ask)! Because I knew I wanted to go to the High School of Music of Art for piano or art, and decided music made my hands sweat when I performed. You had to take a test; I got in!

Instead of my local high school, I traveled three hours a day to Harlem and back, where I learned that I preferred dating musicians and would rather be an artist. (I've saved that for my young adult novels!) So what began as a seminal education in my development as a child now became the basis for an actualized dream—to make something out of nothing, like Janson. To make art.

College was a turning point. My painting teacher, originally a paint chemist, had studied color field theory with Josef Albers. (Notice the cover art of *Mousterpiece*, done like a frame of his squares, and the first spread is done in his style.) My teacher for two-dimensional design was sculptor Richard Serra, and my drawing teacher was Marvin Bileck, the illustrator for the 1964 Caldecott Honor Book *Rain Makes Applesauce*.

I was suddenly exposed to the physicality of children's books—beautiful parchment papers, slip-cased embossed bindings with silk ribbon markers, marbled endpapers, frosted vellum over a bordered title page, ragged eggshell colored pages, typography with all its varied typefaces, even the space between the art and the text—as they say in music—the notes not played. The grace notes. The pauses. My path changed to books. Sideways. Still art.

My second education was working in publishing. My first job was at Dial Press for the editor in chief, Phyllis Fogelman, who had been Ursula Nordstrom's assistant at Harper. Her art director, Atha Tehon, had designed (as a freelancer) many of Maurice Sendak's books and said to me, "I will teach typography. And everything I know."

The first editor on my picturebooks, Susan C. Hirschman, editorial director at Macmillan, had been her other editorial assistant. And so my life in children's books began when I became a book designer at several large houses, working for Anne Beneduce, who became my other editor (as well as Eric Carle's!), and then I ultimately became an art director at Scribner's, which I left to live a life making children and making books.

This is really the condensed answer to the question of "why expose children to art?" Particularly modern art. For me, anything you expose a young child to—music, dance, art, drama, or sports—stays with them for the rest of their lives. But for me personally, art, which seems to be one of the first things to be eliminated in a school system program, is one of the last things that remains in any civilization.

When I visited schools over the decades, I have asked children how many like to do art; most hands jut up in the air, both boys and girls without hesitation. There is a sense of joy in expressing oneself so freely without judgment. Aren't we too often graded, tested, and reviewed from childhood on? So why not have something that is so much fun?



Book party decorated mouse cookies.

I remember being asked to visit a school, and the art teacher said, “I want you teach the children how to make a tree.” Now I could draw trees until the day I die. The crevices, the gnarls, the lyrical limbs. But she had her own ideas—her idea of a tree.

It never worked out. I wanted the children to have freedom of expression. Would Matisse’s tree be like Picasso’s tree? Or any abstract expressionist’s tree? Who is to decide what a tree should be? Would it even look like a tree if some modern artists called it one?



Replicated art from inside the Mousterpiece book onto cookies.

## Images Plus Language

I also want to discuss language in a picturebook. Each word in any picturebook is important. Like a brushstroke in art, like a musical note in a score, like a line in a poem, you work and work until you narrow it down to its bare essence.

Since I also write novels, I felt I wanted the picturebook, like many of my books, to work on two levels—one for the child, and one for the adult. I wanted an arc to the story.

## Art Activities Based on *Mousterpiece*

1. Read the story and show the pictures. Discuss the artists in the back matter. Show the thumbnails of each within the book and what real work inspired it. Show side-by-side. Use a different artist each day or week, focusing on one style and movement.
2. Have the class or group draw, paint, or color and cut out circles, squares, triangles, tiny dots and squiggles, any shapes they choose. Glue to paper.
3. Draw your own mouse character and make original modern art using different materials, such as oil crayons, regular crayons, paint, pastels, oil pastel crayons, colored pencils, or Magic Markers. I have used sand, grass, leaves, petals, fabrics, wool, feathers, bits of herbs and seeds, Windex spray on oil paint, and detergents (baking soda, Comet, vinegar) to add texture. Adult supervision is, of course, necessary if chemicals are used.
4. Hang students’ art on the wall. Have a show in the classroom or library “gallery” with an art opening (including punch served with little cocktail umbrellas, just like Janson). *Note: Do not invite “critics!” Positive reinforcement only!*
5. Roll out long blank paper, newsprint, or canvas for the entire group to work on as one. Have children drip paint on surface to show action painting of Jackson Pollock. *Optional: Cut out stencils and attach ahead of time: a mouse, rabbit, a bear, and so on to have some white space within the painting, like Janson did. Drip around stencil.*
6. Make cookies and “paint” them with icing or sculpt adding: sprinkles, licorice tails, sugar crystals, roasted almond ears, chocolate dot eyes, and so on.
7. Go to the adult section of the library. Use oversized art books to introduce children to art alongside picturebooks about art. Talk about feeling comfortable in museums and galleries and “experiencing” art. I began taking my children as infants. Many museums and libraries are now doing programs in art education centers for young children.



When Janson discovers modern art, she infuses herself as a mouse into each major work of art that I depicted. So children might not necessarily understand that Andy Warhol did a series of soup cans—the parody and riff of placing Janson’s face on one saying, “Campbell’s Cheddar Cheese,” but they laugh at the image along with the adult who might get it on another level. They see Frank Stella’s stripes, and I say simply, “stripes.” He never did a shaped canvas with a mouse. Neither did van Gogh have a mouse in the clouds of his “Starry Night,” or Dali a surrealist mouse floating over cheese, and so on, but it is a way to celebrate art movements with an audience of varied ages.

Everyone smiles and knows about trying to “paint inside the lines,” like a Mondrian, and “dripping paint everywhere outside the lines,” like a Jackson Pollock. Most likely, a young child doesn’t know Kandinsky or Klee or Miro, but they know “squiggles and wiggles,” and maybe they can learn a bit about them from rendition of this art as I did it as if Janson were painting it—through her eyes.

Chuck Close never did his grid portraits of a mouse, nor was Edvard Munch’s *The Scream* a mouse! So making it all referential was another way to expose children to the great artists of the past with simplicity in the text, and a bit of humor tossed in.

The turning point is when the museum closes for renovation and Janson is bereft and must now rely on herself. Will she succeed? And flourish? That is, of course, the eternal question for anyone

in the arts—to create your own distinct voice in the world . . . and will people listen? As an artist you are alone most of the time, isolated, working, so it is always a surprise, even to this little mouse, when she reveals her work—Ta Da!—to the public.

At the end, I have included nonfiction back matter (“Janson’s Favorite Artists”) explaining (as succinctly as one possibly could) the major art movements of the twentieth century in a few sentences (no easy task!). These artists influence our present ones in this new age of installation art, video, and performance pieces where various forms of media and the arts are joined together.

In the end, one librarian told me that *Mousterpiece* is not only about art. She felt it was about doing what you love. Finding your passion. Mine is art . . . and writing. Making children’s books. To wake up, be alone in a room with the process: thinking, dreaming, working—that my joy.

My first book was published exactly forty years ago. It is still fresh for me. I have told friends I would like to die with my head hunched over a drafting table or smashed on my laptop, writing. Hey, what a way to go—making ART or WORDS. It doesn’t get any better. Well, maybe a nice meal. Or music, or comedy or architecture. I guess creating a life that has meaning that maybe a few others will enjoy and appreciate, too.

That is what my little mouse, Janson, discovers. A bit like Jane. 🐭

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### Becoming an Artist

This is a rather unorthodox list on being an artist. But these books are about becoming a sculptor, a painter, a carver, whether you are a mouse or a gorilla or a human, and what it means to exist in the world through your eyes and mind, to be an artist deep in your heart.

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Carle, Eric. *Draw Me a Star*. Illus. by the author. Philomel, 1992. 40p.

Goffstein, M.B. *Goldie the Dollmaker*. Illus. by the author. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969. 55p.

Greenberg, Jan and Sandra Jordan. *Action Jackson*. Illus. by Robert Andrew Parker. A Neal Porter Book/Roaring Brook Press, 2004. 32p.

Guarnaccia, Steven. *The Three Little Pigs: An Architectural Tale*. Illus. by the author. Abrams, 32p. 2010

Johnson, Crockett. *Harold and the Purple Crayon*. Illus. by the author. Harper, 1955. 64p.

Lionni, Leo. *Frederick*. Illus. by the author. Knopf, 1967. 32p.

McDonnell, Patrick. *Art*. Illus. by the author. Little Brown, 2006. 48p.

Steig, William. *Abel’s Island*. Illus. by the author. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1976. 114p.

Walsh, Ellen Stoll. *Mouse Paint*. Illus. by the author. Harcourt, 1989. 32p.



# The Stories We Tell

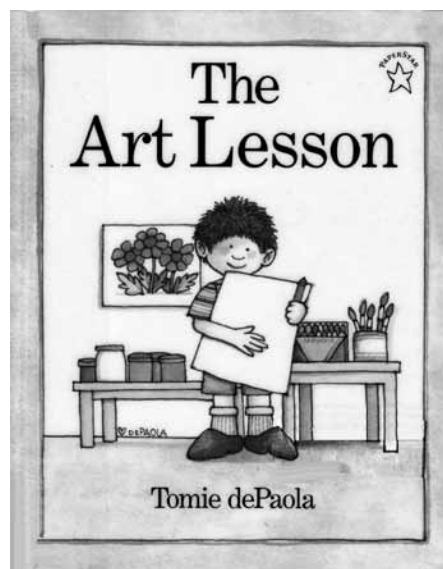
## Learning about Children's Book Authors and Illustrators through Their Memoirs

BY DARCY H. BRADLEY AND NADEAN MEYER

*My grandmother was a strong and special Choctaw woman. Everyone who knew her knew that. In 1915, when my father was almost two years old, the family left Oklahoma. They moved to Pasadena, Texas, to a white wooden house on Strawberry Lane. The first morning in her new home, my grandmother stepped quietly on the front porch to greet the dawn. She never saw the boy who threw the stone that cut her face. It sent her stumbling inside the house, slamming the door behind her. She slid against the surface of the pine door and crumpled in a heap on the floor, sobbing.*

From Tim Tingle,  
*Saltpie: A Choctaw Journey from  
Darkness into Light* (2010)

Children's literature authors and illustrators are known to use their life experiences to tell a variety of stories. Many of these stories are written as memoirs. Most memoirs, such as the excerpt from Tingle's *Saltpie* that introduces this article, relate poignant memories of compelling and instructive events for all readers, yet that are personal and profound to the author. Memoirs often offer accessible writing, relatable topics and experiences, and transformative true stories. They can act as models and mentors for those who want to learn how to showcase their own memories of people, places, and events through writing. Memoirs tell a story through the use of many formats:



picturebooks, narratives, scrapbooks, timelines, photographs, single incidents, short time periods, drawings, or a combination of these and other devices. In short, "Memoir is how we validate our lives"<sup>1</sup> and "a way to figure out who you used to be and how you got where you are."<sup>2</sup>

In 1996, Frank McCourt's bestseller, *Angela's Ashes: A Memoir*, reinvigorated the popularity of memoir for adult readers, which in turn may have influenced the increasing number of trade book memoirs published for children (and young adults) over the past decade. And as shown by the number of award-winning trade books from 2012 listed in the sidebar on the following page, it is evident that memoirs have become popular for younger readers. The intent of this article is to help youth librarians better understand the power and purpose of memoir as expressed by children's authors and illustrators, to offer a selection of high-quality titles for a range of audiences, and to offer ideas for the use of memoir to teachers.

### Incident Memoirs through Picturebooks

In this section, we show a variety of high-quality picturebooks that focus on memorable family incidents. Whether based on happy memories, sad ones, or ones with near tragic



**Darcy H. Bradley** (far left), PhD, is Assistant Professor Literacy Teaching and Learning at Eastern Washington University. She teaches children's literature and literacy courses for current and future teachers. She embeds writing in her courses and enjoys memoir as a genre for reading and writing. **Nadean Meyer** is Learning Resources Librarian at Eastern Washington University. She works with education faculty and students to prepare them for today's K-12 students and their information-rich world. As part of an Eastern Washington University Summer Creative Research Grant 2009-10, they explored the memoirs of children's book authors and illustrators. A WorldCat list of more than two hundred titles called *Children's Book Author/Illustrator's Memoirs* is available at <http://ewu.worldcat.org/profiles/EWU-Center/lists/2963192>.

consequences, all of these picturebooks are relatable to human nature and carry well-crafted life lessons.

While children's literature has frequently contained glimpses of the author/illustrator as a child, the recent influx of picture-book memoirs owes a debt to Cynthia Rylant, whose two books *When I was Young in the Mountains* (1983) and *The Relatives Came* (1986) won Caldecott Honors. In *When I was Young in the Mountains*, Rylant captures the small fears and joys of growing up in the Appalachian Mountains with her grandparents. The spare gentle text, enhanced by Diane Goode's expressionistic earthy-toned paintings, depicts the everyday life of the family.

In *The Relatives Came*, beautifully realized by Stephen Gammell's captivating lively watercolor sketches of people and

places, readers who have been to family reunions will recognize the concept of being glad to visit with relatives for a time but then also being glad to leave.

Other exceptional examples of incident memoirs appear in African American Donald Crews' enduring *Bigmama's* (1991) and *Shortcut* (1992). In these books, Crews fondly remembers summer visits with his family to his Bigmama's (grandmother's) house in concise and engaging storytelling detail. *Bigmama's* captures the excitement of a long train trip from New Jersey to Florida for the annual summer stay and the joy of revisiting the family farm. *Shortcut* relates Crews' and his siblings' narrow escape from being hit by a train when taking a shortcut on the train tracks back to Bigmama's, even though they had been warned not to. Crews' expressionistic paintings of the lush Southern summer landscape and the stair-step Crews' siblings bring readers into these identifiable stories of relatives and narrow escapes.

In *The Christmas Coat: Memories of My Sioux Childhood* (2011), Virginia Driving Hawk Sneve recounts an incident from her childhood on the Rosebud Sioux Reservation in South Dakota. Young Virginia, the daughter of an Episcopalian priest serving the community, learns that patience and obedience are often rewarded. Sneve's family often sacrificed their needs for others. When donated boxes of clothing arrive from "theast" (as the churches back East were known), the family sorts the clothing and prepares for a sharing session where everyone selects what they need and want.

Young Virginia desperately needs a winter coat, and, while she discovers a lovely fur coat just her size in the donated pile, she knows that someone else will select it before her turn arrives. Indeed, her friend, Evelyn, is delighted to find the elegant, warm coat and she wears it proudly until the wet day when the coat shows its rabbit fur nature and stinks up the schoolroom as it dries. Yet again, Virginia is asked to give up the practical coat she received so that Evelyn has a more useful coat; Virginia complies with sadness. Then on Christmas day, the Sneve family opens special boxes sent just to the priest's family for their needs and Virginia receives a plush red coat with a hood that is her dream coat.

The feelings of a caring family, the hard times in the community, and a child wanting something that seems impossible are part of this story. Ellen Beier's realistic soft watercolor and gouache paintings admirably capture the mix of Christmas and Rosebud Sioux traditions Virginia experienced. Many children will identify with Virginia's sense of longing and the unexpected rewards that can come when someone does the right thing, and they will want to discuss similar occurrences in their lives.

Tingle's *Saltpie* is a contemporary memoir about a young Choctaw boy and his blind Mawmaw (grandmother). The epigraph shared in the beginning of this article sets the stage for how "Saltpie" becomes the family word for hurtful things that "sting" in life. Mawmaw as a young mother is hit by a racist neighbor's rock that causes eye damage aggravating an existing

## 2012 Youth Notable Book Award Winners that are Memoirs

Eagle, Adam Fortunate. *Pipestone: My Life in an Indian Boarding School*. Illus./Photos. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, paper, 2010. 116p.

**Young Adult Winner, American Indian Library Association Youth Literature Award, 2012.**

Gantos, Jack. *Dead End in Norvelt*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011. 321p.

**Newbery Award and Notable Children's Book, 2012.**

Kawai'ae'a, Kekauleleanae'ole, Walter Kawai'ae'a, and Luana Kawai'ae'a. *Kohala kuamo'o = Nae'ole's Race to Save a King*. Illus. by Aaron Kawai'ae'a. Honolulu, Hawaii: Ka Papa Ho'opuka 'o Kamehameha, Kamehameha Publishing, 2010. 30p.

**Honor Book Picturebook, American Indian Library Association Youth Literature Award, 2012.**

Say, Allen. *Drawing from Memory*. Illus. by the author. New York: Scholastic, 2011. 63p.

**Sibert Honor Book and Notable Children's Book, 2012.**

Sneve, Virginia Driving Hawk. *The Christmas Coat: Memories of my Sioux Childhood*. Illus. by Ellen Beier. New York: Holiday House, 2011. Unpaged.

**Picturebook Winner, American Indian Library Association Youth Literature Award, 2012.**

Tingle, Tim. *Saltpie: A Choctaw Journey from Darkness into Light*. Illus. by Karen Clarkson. El Paso, TX: Cinco Puntos Press, 2010. Unpaged.

**Honor Picturebook, American Indian Library Association, 2012.**

Young, Ed, and Libby Koponen. *The House Baba Built: An Artist's Childhood in China*. Illus. by the author. New York: Little, Brown, 2011. Unpaged.

**Notable Children's Book, 2012.**

vision defect and, subsequently, blindness. Over three time periods (young Tim with Mawmaw, Mawmaw when she was hurt as a young mother, and Tim grown into a young man when Mawmaw's sight is restored by an eye transplant) the author weaves a rich story of how strong family bonds can begin to overcome racism and bigotry.

Karen Clarkson's realistic paintings prominently feature Mawmaw, Tim and his family, capturing the emotion of the story in warm and vibrant colors. The final three pages of author notes can help adults provide children with both the historic and contemporary sense of American Indian families.

Tingle notes in those pages, "So, who is that boy and why did he throw the stone? Maybe it was a stone of misunderstanding, thrown by a boy who simply didn't know. He didn't know that Indians are Americans, that Indians are modern people, that Indians are friendly neighbors who love their families, their homes, and care about education."<sup>3</sup>

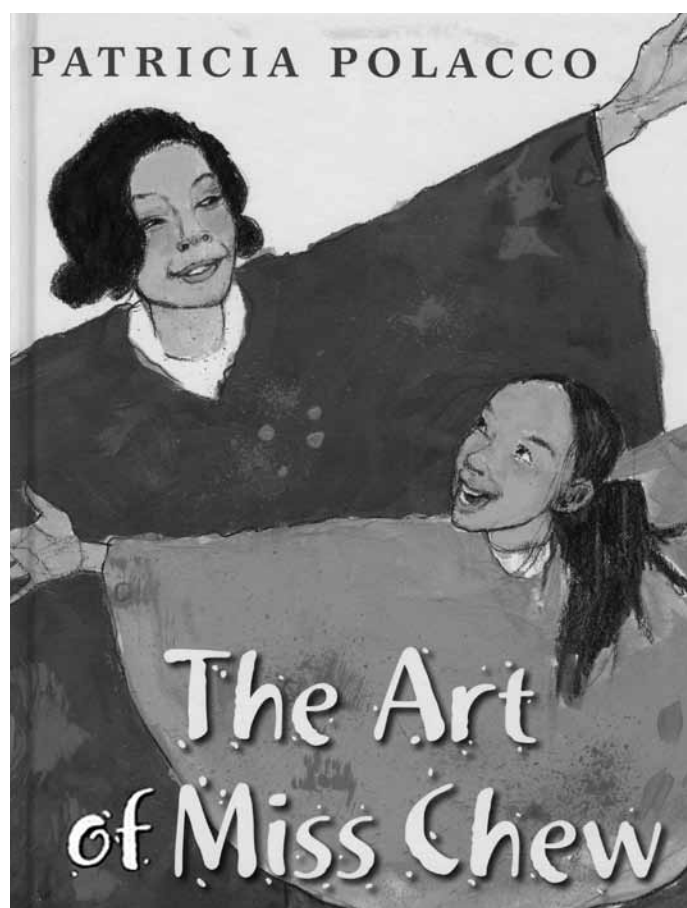
Augmented by scrapbooked black-and-white and color photographs of Tingle's current family and home life in the author notes, readers obtain a personal take on what it means to be an American Indian today. Accessible explanations and family details help students reflect on social conditions and learn cross-cultural understandings.

The picturebooks highlighted above are powerful examples of what Gornick indicates about effective memoirs; the author must transcend listing events of his or her life to create transformative events that speak to others.<sup>4</sup> The above picturebook memoirs transform a specific family history into readable stories for others.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, these well-told/well-written memoirs offer an instructive model to writers of any age for composing an incident memoir.

## Memoirs that Illuminate the Artistry

Although the major American Library Association/Association for Library Service to Children Youth Media Award acceptance speeches (reprinted annually in *Children and Libraries* and *Horn Book*) offer adults a glimpse into the creative processes of authors and illustrators, it is especially powerful when authors/illustrators, with a body of recognized work, write a book about their memories of becoming writers and/or illustrators. Writing for a young audience, authors/illustrators can emphasize the child perspective. The titles in the sidebar represent a range of childhood experiences and memories that the authors and/or illustrators have filtered as adults and relate significant events and people that shaped their particular talents.<sup>6</sup>

Prolific author/illustrator Patricia Polacco writes in an opening note in *The Art of Miss Chew* (2012), "I discovered how much I loved art the summer I spent with my grandmother and father in Michigan. Grandma was an artist; she drew and painted so beautifully! Grandma even told me that I was a natural artist, so I couldn't wait to take Art at school next fall when I got home



to California. I only had one problem left—tests. I just couldn't seem to pass them."<sup>7</sup>

In the ensuing story, Polacco relays how her special talent in art lands her in an art class with students much older than she. But when her beloved teacher Mr. Donovan must leave for his father's funeral in Ireland, a relentless substitute teacher tries to prevent Polacco's art lessons because Polacco can't pass her grade-level tests without having extra time to do so. With the advocacy of Miss Chew (Polacco's art teacher) and the return of Mr. Donovan, Polacco is able to continue to develop her skill at and passion for art and, because of her disability (see *Thank You, Mr. Falker* where Polacco learns that her trouble with reading has to do with undiagnosed dyslexia) she is given extra time to take tests.

Polacco honors her teachers by painting a portrait of Mr. Donovan's father that appears in the art show, where her painting is the only one exhibited by a student younger than a high school student. When Mr. Donovan sees the portrait in the art show, he is moved by Polacco's gift. On the last page of the picturebook, Polacco writes about this experience as "... a defining moment in my young life. I was set on a course to be an artist—it could be no other way. Thanks to the art of the amazing Miss Chew."<sup>8</sup> Although all of us benefit from stories such as Polacco's, children with handicaps and/or special talents especially deserve to know the stories of those who overcame challenges.

A humorous example of a life-changing event memoir is author/illustrator Anthony Browne's sophisticated picture-book *The Shape Game* (2003), which begins, "I was a little boy and didn't know what to expect. It was my mother's idea—that year for her birthday she wanted us all to go somewhere different. It turned out to be a day that changed my life forever."<sup>9</sup>

Browne recounts his family's first visit to an art museum: an unusual and at first unpopular event for his rough-and-tumble dad and brother, and the innovative drawing game his mother creates to hold their attention on the way home. Browne clearly recalls the impact of that first viewing of art in the museum, as well as the game of making random shapes into picture stories—a concept observant readers will uncover in many of his illustrations. Browne dedicates this picturebook to his "brother Michael, who spent hours playing the shape game with me."<sup>10</sup>

On the title page, Browne shows a white cut-out shape of his adult self about to step through an unlocked prison-type door, and on the opening page of this memoir, we see the adult Browne at work on his easel, drawing the portraits of his young self and family as he recounts this memory. Many pictorial sight gags involving high art and Browne's seemingly less sophisticated family offer both subtle and blatant humor for readers of all ages.

More artistic humor comes from beloved picturebook author/illustrator Tomie dePaola's *The Art Lesson* (1989). Here dePaola shares his remembrance about how an art teacher encouraged his drawing when she recognized that young Tomie needed to expand beyond the weekly art assignments limited to using one piece of paper. Unlike Anthony Browne, young Tomie "knew he wanted to be an artist when he grew up. He drew pictures everywhere he went. It was his favorite thing to do."<sup>11</sup> Tomie even drew pictures on his sheets at night, shining a flashlight under the covers. But when he starts kindergarten, there are rules about crayons, paints, paper, and art lessons. A successful negotiation with his art and kindergarten teacher gives Tomie the freedom he needs to keep drawing.

Japanese-American author/illustrator Allen Say, famous for his realistic formal painting style and sensitive bicultural "finding yourself" stories, combines narrative and mixed media in *Drawing From Memory* (2011). In this memoir, Say recalls growing up in Japan during the 1940s and '50s. His mother taught him how to read before he was a kindergartner. As a child, Say devoured comic books and loved to copy the drawings, but his father told him, "I expect you to be a respectable citizen, not an artist, and that means you'll have to earn a living! Artists are lazy and scruffy people—they are not respectable."<sup>12</sup>

But Say found a way to study drawing anyway. When he was accepted to a prestigious middle school far from home, he was allowed to live on his own near his grandmother. Through a bold request, and unbeknownst to his family, he became an apprentice to a renowned master cartoonist Noro Shinpei.

During this secret apprenticeship, Say developed his skills as a cartoonist and had many coming-of-age adventures. Eventually, when Say revealed this other life to his family, they came to accept his calling to art.

The chapter of his life in Japan and young adolescence ends this memoir and along the way the reader has learned something about the cultural aspects for a child growing up in Japan during the mid-twentieth century. Say's overall wish to draw, to have adventures, to be accepted by his family, and to meet girls as he grew older is combined with working with a mentor, developing new friendships, and a chance to experience the life of sketching and drawing—all in the remembrances of Say finding himself and his passion.

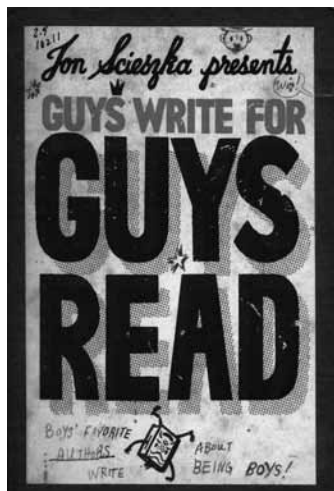
These memoirs offer insights into how an adult shapes a child's remembrance of events, which can be insightful for youth librarians in their own interactions with children. Children who discover these books may feel validated for their wishes and desires to draw or write.

## Series Memoirs

Sometimes publishers create series autobiographies about or by famous people. One such series goes a step further by having popular and highly regarded authors or author/illustrators write about how they got started. *Meet the Author: Autobiographies for Grades 2–5* (Richard C. Owen Publishers) follows a lively thirty-two-page format to introduce more than thirty authors or author/illustrators (for a complete list, visit [www.rcowen.com/MTABkList.htm](http://www.rcowen.com/MTABkList.htm)).

Each short volume contains many color photographs that show the authors in their home environment. The conversational writing tone is similar to being invited into the home of a wonderful new friend. Although called autobiographies, these short "photographic memoirs" offer insights into various memorable events that shaped each author or author/illustrator. Teachers will find these books to be valuable tools for inspiring children as writers and illustrators because of the clear way each author describes his or her creative process in order to craft books. Not surprisingly, many of these authors and/or illustrators reveal themselves as voracious readers or having an early focused curiosity for something in their youth—a powerful message for children.

For example, noted Native American storyteller Joseph Bruchac in *Seeing the Circle* wrote of his youth, "Being a reader led me to writing. I love poems and started memorizing poetry as soon as I could talk. I began writing poems in the second grade, and I've never stopped."<sup>13</sup> Others, such as naturalist and activist author/illustrator Lynne Cherry in *Making a Difference in the World*, described an early interest in nature; "Instead of watching television, I was outside having adventures and writing about them. Under rocks in a stream behind our house I found crayfish and salamanders and identified them from books in the library."<sup>14</sup>



## Memoirs for Older Children

While older children can benefit from reading or hearing and discussing the exceptional picturebooks highlighted in the first part of this article, many will enjoy the memoir recommendations that follow, especially if they are fans of the author's work.

Jon Scieszka's story of growing up in a family of six boys in *Knucklehead: Tall Tales and Mostly True Stories about Growing up Scieszka* describes the all-American suburban neighborhood and nuclear family of the past. The games, tricks, and trials of playing together and finding your own way in a large family and in the world are told in thirty-eight short chapters, well-illustrated with photographs of family members. Over-the-top humor abounds in these tales and gives readers insights into Scieszka's hilarious and entertaining body of writing. Scieszka's father calls the boys "knuckleheads" as in "Stand still and look at the camera, Knuckleheads. Fingers out of noses."<sup>16</sup> The refrain of "knucklehead" links the incidents throughout the book. This memoir presents humorous incidents within a family that provides a sense of belonging, as told through the memories of one child.

Scieszka has found another set of brothers—this time in fellow authors and illustrators—through *Guys Write for Guys Read*. More than ninety famous "guys" tell short, engaging stories, many of which can be called memoirs. Scieszka notes in his foreword that "the problem is that there are a lot of boys who are not all that crazy about reading. Kids know this. Parents know this. Teachers and librarians know this."

He continues, "National statistics from the last twenty-five years show this. . . . So the basic idea of *Guys Read* is to help get boys interested in reading by connecting them with things they will want to read."<sup>17</sup> In truth, however, everyone will enjoy

Yet others, like noted poet Janet Wong in *Before it Wriggles Away*, noted, "When I was a child, I never thought that I would be a poet. I hated poetry! I never imagined that I would be an author. I did not love books."<sup>15</sup>—a reassuring message perhaps for those who are awakening to literacy. Teachers using the writing process in second through fifth grades will find this series invaluable for helping their students see that all writers revise their work. No exceptions. But what each book in this series has in common is for authors to show their creative process—how they work, where they work, when they work, and why they create—in an accessible and honest manner.

Other kinds of memoir "series" that capture famous authors' (dePaola, James Stevenson, and Gary Paulsen) recollections of childhood and adolescence are found and annotated in the sidebar "Author Series of Their Lives." These series are more in keeping with incident and family memoirs.

### Author Series of Their Lives

**dePaola, Tomie. *26 Fairmount Avenue*. Illus. by the author. New York: Putnam, 1999. 56p.**

A series of eight (1999–2009) short chapter picturebooks that depict dePaola growing up in the family home and neighborhood with 26 Fairmount Avenue as the first. *Here We All Are* (2000), *On my Way* (2001), *What a Year!* (2002), *Things Will Never Be the Same* (2003), *I'm Still Scared* (2006), *Why?* (2007), *For the Duration* (2009).

**Paulsen, Gary. *The Beet Fields: Memoirs of a Sixteenth Summer*. New York, Doubleday, 2000. 160p.**

Paulsen collects his remembrances around themes such as the sports of dogsledding (*Woodsong*, 1990) and boating (*Caught by Sea: My Life on Boats*, 2001). He connects the backstories of his popular fiction in *How Angel Peterson Got his Name: And Other Outrageous Tales about Extreme Sports* (2003) and *Guts: The True Stories Behind Hatchet and the Brian Books* (2002). His stories of his dogs are captured in *My Life in Dog Years* (1998). He continues sharing his experiences through adolescence (*The Beet Fields*) and even adult memoirs as well.

**Stevenson, James. *When I Was Nine*. Illus. by the author. New York: Greenwillow, 1986. 32p.**

Stevenson recollects the emotions and small details of childhood with books about things that are fun (*Fun no Fun*, 1994) and wishes (*I Had a Lot of Wishes*, 1995). He remembers family times with *July* (1990) and *Higher on the Door* (1987) and his life during World War II in *Don't You Know There is a War Going On?* (1992).



reading many of these short chapters from a variety of authors who share a variety of memories about growing up.

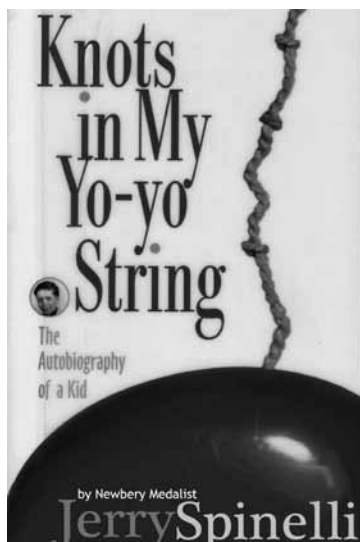
For example, David Shannon shows an original drawing drafted by him at age five that became the inspiration for his endearing *No, David* series. In the first lines in this two-page chapter, Shannon remembers, “I made the original version of *No, David!* when I was about 5 years old. It was just drawings of me doing things I wasn’t supposed to, and the only words in the whole book were ‘no’ and ‘David’—those were the only words I knew how to spell.”<sup>18</sup> Short chapters, entertaining and instructive memories, and accessibly written recollections in both of Scieszka’s books contribute to engaging any reader.

In *The Moon and I*, Newbery medalist Betsy Byars tells a unique tale of her adult writing life in her special place in a cabin. She describes her writing habits and uses her friend, a little visiting snake she names Moon, to explain the steps in her writing process. While telling the story, she offers advice about the writing life in a memorable fashion. For example, in a chapter entitled “The Write Stuff,” she notes how she rates the elements of a story in order of importance: “Characters. Plot. Setting. Good Scraps.

(And most other things—like theme and mood—I don’t think about).”<sup>19</sup>

In *Knots in My Yo-yo String*, Newbery Medalist (and Italian American) Jerry Spinelli reaches into his past to show us the small details and memories that helped him find his voice as a writer for children and young adults. In the last chapter of this book, Spinelli recalls visiting a school in North Dakota, where he was asked this question by a student: “Do you think being a kid helped you to become a writer?”<sup>20</sup> In his mind (and through several pages) he briefly summarizes his past life experiences and recalls as he begins to write his first successful novel, “I started remembering. Remembering when I was twelve, when I lived in the West End, when I went to Stewart Junior High School, when I wanted to be a shortstop, when I rode a bike, when I marveled at the nighttime sky. In my head I replayed moments from my childhood. I mixed memories with imagination, to make fiction, and when I finished I had a book, my fifth novel, my first book about kids.”<sup>21</sup> Spinelli realized he could take days to answer this question. Obviously, his answer is a resounding yes.

The books recommended in this section show readers that



## Enduring Memoirs of Children’s Authors

**Bruchac, Joseph. *Bowman’s Store: A Journey to Myself*. Illus./Photos. New York: Lee & Low, 2001. 315p.**

Joseph’s grandparents’ store was home as well as a source of memories as he learns his Abenaki heritage that his grandfather completely hid because of past discriminations. Joseph shares the unraveling of who he is with incidents and stories

**Cleary, Beverly. *A Girl from Yamhill: A Memoir*. Illus./Photos. New York: Morrow, 1998. 279p.**

Cleary uses her skill with detail and dialogue to recreate her farm family memories. This tale is more somber than her famous fiction but captures her family and her school times with precision. Also sequel *My Own Two Feet: A Memoir* (1995).

**Dahl, Roald. *Boy: Tales of Childhood*. Illus./Photos. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1984. 160p.**

Dahl’s outrageous humor abounds in these details about growing up. While everything seems exaggerated, it also seems real and genuine. Also sequel *Going Solo* (1986) and *More About Boy: Roald Dahl’s Tales from Childhood*. (2009).

**Fritz, Jean. *Homesick: My Own Story*. Illus. by Margot Tones. New York: Dell, 1984. 163p.**

The longing of an expatriate child living abroad come to America on this tale of Fritz growing up in China with her missionary parents. While details are seen as a child, it is the adult who remembers why these emotions are important. Also sequel, *China Homecoming* (1985).

**Gantos, Jack. 2002. *Hole in My Life*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. 199p.**

Gantos recounts his salvation through reading and beginning to write during a prison stint that forces him to find himself and head to college.

**Lowry, Lois. *Looking Back: A Book of Memories*. Illus./Photos. Boston, Mass: Houghton Mifflin, 1998. 181p.**

A scrapbook of vignettes and photographs are grouped around quotations from Lowry’s fiction books.

**Myers, Walter Dean. *Bad Boy: A Memoir*. New York: HarperCollins, 2001. 214p.**


Myers’ retelling of his differences as a young boy who enjoyed reading and his life that surround him in New York’s Harlem.



authors are real people whose lived experiences mirror and repeat as our own. As these authors demonstrate, to write memoirs means to dig deep into memories and transform them into instructive experiences for readers. Additional enduring memoirs for fans of the genre are shown in the sidebar.

## Reading and Sharing Memoirs

For some children and teens, reading a children's book author or illustrator's memoir is a personal connection and a reason to read the author's books. For others, reading or hearing a memoir is an exciting look at the personal life of a favorite author or illustrator or even an inspiration to try writing or drawing themselves. For librarians and teachers, these memoirs offer insight into favorite authors and illustrators with greater depth than the award speeches we enjoy hearing and reading. They also highlight how reflection of one's own childhood and memories result in creative writing and drawing.

Memoir books can enhance the knowledge librarians share with children as they prepare book talks, programs, booklists, and displays. Additionally, one-on-one reader advisory sharing time allows a librarian an opportunity to share a tidbit of the author's life or a hidden gem about the story. It helps to dispel the myth of authors as dead or "not real people." A memoir expands the moment by sharing that person's unique experiences and version of the world. There are many more memoir books to share and certainly more will be written in this powerful method of writing about life. 

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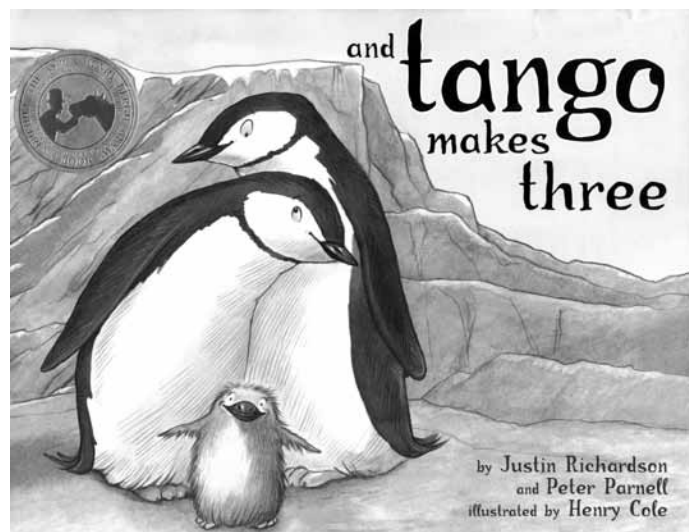
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16. Jon Scieszka, *Knucklehead: Tall Tales & Mostly True Stories about Growing Up Scieszka* (New York, NY: Viking, 2008), 106.
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# And Tango Makes Three

## Introducing Family Diversity to Children

BY JENNIFER HARVEY



In the picturebook *And Tango Makes Three*, authors Justin Richardson and Peter Parnell tell the story of a family of penguins. The work is accessible to even the youngest reader. The family-building adventures of Roy and Silo, two male Chinstrap penguins living in captivity together in a zoo, provide the main action in the story, especially when a baby penguin, Tango, becomes a part of their family. And even though they form a different sort of family as compared to other animal families in the zoo, the text demonstrates that Roy, Silo, and Tango are a valid family. *And Tango Makes Three* shows that adoptive families, even when the adoptive parents share the same gender, are natural family formations.

The idea that natural families come in all sorts of packages—all equally valid if the members are found to be happy and well-functioning—has found disagreement in the arena of public opinion in the United States, as documented by recent movements to ban same-sex marriage.

For example, in 2008, the citizens of California voted to deny committed, same-sex couples the right to marriage. The marriage ban was overturned in court. This ruling was challenged. Eventually the case was heard by the Supreme Court—the 2013 decision of which effectively restored the overturning of the marriage ban. In his arguments before the appellate court, Charles Cooper, an attorney who represented the sponsors of the gay marriage ban in the appeal, advanced the position that the “key reason that marriage has existed at all, in any society, and at any time, is that sexual relationships between men and women naturally produce children.”<sup>1</sup>

That word “naturally” is important in understanding this

concept of family. If the members filling the role of parents are unable to reproduce naturally—biologically—are they a “natural” family? *And Tango Makes Three* does not tackle the difficult question of who should be allowed to marry, but it does suggest that families parented by an adoptive parent or parents are valid and functional, no matter the sex of the parents.

The 2010 Census data tell the story of children being raised in same-sex families. These families occur in all the states that make up the United States. In analyzing the data, the Williams Institute of UCLA’s School of Law has estimated that a quarter of all same-sex households include children under eighteen.<sup>2</sup> This distribution suggests that children are likely to be aware of families where the parents are same-sex. In the event that they do not encounter a family with same-sex parents, they will likely know children raised in families not made up of the child’s biological parents. They will encounter diversity in families.

There are lots of types of families in the world. Children are raised by their biological parents, grandparents, stepparents, same-sex parents, foster parents, adoptive parents, and sometimes by employees in institutions. Since families vary, literature



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that explores types of families can improve the chances of the reader having a healthy response to non-normative family units, whether their own, or the family of an acquaintance. *And Tango Makes Three*, and works like it, can increase the likelihood of compassion for difference, and may shift the focus of concern from the constituents who make up the family unit to an evaluation of the functional health of the family. For this reason, quality juvenile literature, such as *And Tango Makes Three*, should be included in library collections and in school curriculums.

An exploration of the naturalness of non-normative behaviors in individuals has been a common theme in children's literature. An example is Dr. Seuss' *Horton Hatches the Egg*, which will be analyzed in what follows to see how the author utilizes animals to explore non-normative behaviors and families. A more recent work will also be examined. Andy Cutbill's *The Cow That Laid an Egg* will be analyzed to see how the parenting of the adoptive cow compares with the characters of Horton, Roy, and Silo.

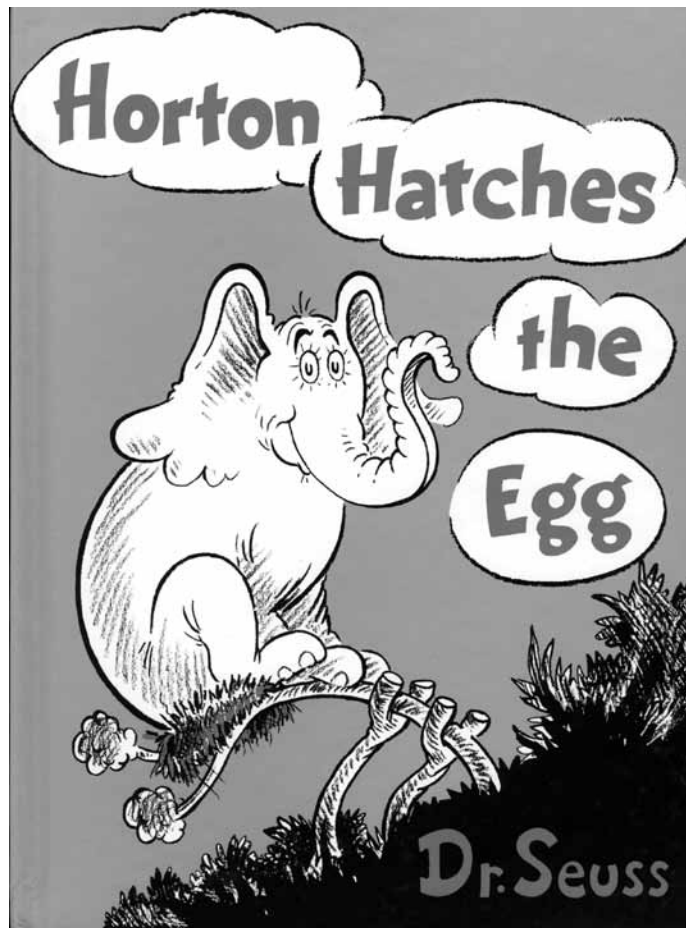
The "purpose" of collecting and teaching these types of texts, beyond satisfying aesthetic values of works like those referenced above, may be to increase tolerance and promote understanding. Reading the work with children may help to decrease bias, reduce bullying, and lead to a better understanding of the nature of healthy, well-functioning families. If *And Tango Makes Three* has a message, it might be phrased this way: families made up of loving members are a source of comfort and happiness.

## Deconstructing *And Tango Makes Three*

The text of *And Tango Makes Three* does not specifically address the sexual activities that occur between bonded heterosexual penguin pairs, the result of which is a fertilized egg. Instead, the text describes the activities of Roy and Silo and demonstrates that these activities also occur between partners in heterosexual penguin groups. Through this association, it is established that the activities are natural for penguin pairs.

The penguins first appear on a double page layout that contains this text: "And in the penguin house there are penguin families."<sup>3</sup> These pages also contain the first set of illustrations for the story about Roy, Silo, and Tango. The images include penguins bowing to each other, swimming together, and walking together. No textual description of the actions is provided. The illustrations speak for themselves to suggest that these common behaviors occur and demonstrate bonding.

The second page of this double spread illustration includes this text: "Every year at the very same time, the girl penguins start noticing the boy penguins. And the boy penguins start noticing the girls. When the right girl and the right boy find each other, they become a couple."<sup>4</sup> The behaviors are suggested to be normal. A pair made up of a male and a female penguin engage in the illustrated activities at a particular time of the year.



Turning the page, we meet Roy and Silo, two male penguins who engage in the same behaviors, at the same time of year. This text defines the pair as different from the other penguins in that they are both "boys" and that they "did everything together."<sup>5</sup> On the facing page are illustrations that are similar to those for the pairs of males and females interacting on the previous page. These illustrations include text that describes bonding activities as things that Roy and Silo do together.

Next, a human observes the behavior and concludes that they must be "in love."<sup>6</sup> The combination of having their paired behavior mirror that of the heterosexual penguin pairs, plus the human's observation that they are a mated pair, conveys the idea that despite their being members of the same sex, their pair bonding is not exceptional. The combination of text and illustrations establishes that the predominant sexuality among the penguins in this exhibit is heterosexual (more apparently opposite sex couples are illustrated), but homosexuality is also present. The text demonstrates that behaviors of all of the partnered penguins are natural—whether same sex or opposite sex—for pairing penguins.

Seeing that the other penguin families make a nest together, Roy and Silo do the same. And, watching the heterosexual penguins, they discover they are different: "But one day Roy and Silo saw that the other couples could do something they could not."<sup>7</sup> The illustrations show Roy and Silo watching the other

penguin pairs standing beside a rock nest, and within each nest there is one baby penguin. On the facing page is this text: "The mama penguin would lay an egg. She and the papa penguin would take turns keeping the egg warm until finally, it would hatch."<sup>8</sup>

Roy and Silo are determined to have their own full home and attempt to hatch an egg-shaped rock. This experiment fails. When the fertilized second egg of another pair is added to their nest by the zookeeper and their hatching efforts are directed at this object, they are rewarded with a baby penguin, just like the other penguins. As before, to establish the naturalness and normalcy of the behaviors of Roy and Silo in hatching the egg, the behavior of the heterosexual pairs is established through a combination of text and images. This is followed by the similar behaviors of Roy and Silo, explained more fully: "Roy and Silo knew just what to do. They moved the egg to the center of their nest. Every day they turned it, so each side stayed warm. Some days Roy sat while Silo went for food. Other days it was Silo's turn to take care of their egg."<sup>9</sup> As a result of their care, Tango hatches.

The naturalness of the family is further demonstrated by the zoo visitors' response to Roy, Silo, and Tango. When Tango is ready, "Roy and Silo took her for a swim, just like all the other penguin families. And all the children who came to the zoo could see Tango and her two fathers playing in the penguin house with the other penguins. 'Hooray, Roy!' 'Hooray, Silo!' 'Welcome, Tango!' they cheered."<sup>10</sup> A supportive human makes it possible for Roy and Silo to have Tango. Human interest in the family from patrons of the zoo helps them to become a special attraction at the zoo.

These pages further expand on the idea that good families may be made up of lots of different combinations of individuals. The adults visiting the penguin exhibit represent different genders, ethnicities, and ages. There are combinations of children with adults that could represent parents of the same sex, single mothers, or children raised by a surrogate parent, such as a grandmother. Ambiguity about gender and family units are evident on the opening pages of the story: "Every day families of all kinds go to visit the animals that live there."<sup>11</sup> The illustrations beside the text are of human families and the humans illustrated may be heterosexual or homosexual, single parents, or adoptive parents. Details of the family units seem to be deliberately ambiguous, but these families, no matter the details of the constituents of the unit, are illustrated as happy and functional, just like Roy, Silo, and Tango.

Finally, the text concludes, "At night the three penguins returned to their nest. There they snuggled together and, like all the other penguins in the penguin house, and all the other animals in the zoo, and all the families in the big city around them, they went to sleep."<sup>12</sup> Comfort, warmth, and affection are the things that make a family, whether penguin, or non-penguin animals, including humans. Families may result from the loving activities of heterosexual pairs. This is perfectly natural. They may also result from the loving activities of homosexual pairs. Again,

this is perfectly natural. While sexual reproduction cannot occur naturally in the homosexual pair relationship, surrogate parenting can be a perfectly natural expression of a loving relationship and a way to enlarge the family group where natural reproduction within the pair is not possible. Happy, healthy home units, no matter the specifics of gender, or if the children become family members via adoption, are what constitute a good and natural family, the book suggests.

## Biology of Homosexuality

So when does a person become homosexual? Justin Richardson (a psychiatrist and a coauthor of *And Tango Makes Three*, as well as *Everything You Never Wanted Your Kids to Know about Sex (But Were Afraid They'd Ask): The Secrets to Surviving Your Child's Sexual Development from Birth to the Teens*) and Mark Schuster propose that genes play a major, but not determinative, role in sexual orientation.<sup>13</sup> Determinative factors may come into play prenatally, or as late, they propose, as the age of four or five.<sup>14</sup>

What will not likely be a factor are television shows with gay characters or picturebooks about homosexual penguins. Familiarity with the idea of homosexuality does not increase the likelihood of being homosexual. It is unlikely that social pressures will force a heterosexually oriented child to become gay.

Even though homosexuality has existed throughout human history and is documented in non-human animal species, members of society may collude to keep information about the existence of homosexuality away from children. There is just something unpleasant and potentially prurient about talking with children about sex, no matter the orientation. But to help children to understand the world they live in, sex is going to come up as a topic of interest. Early education in diversity, including sexual diversity, can result in self-acceptance and in compassion for those who differ from social norms.

## Homosexuality and Children's Knowledge

An informal research project can shed light on children and their knowledge of homosexuality. Janine Schall and Gloria Kauffman collaborated on a research effort that explored literature containing gay and lesbian characters with two groups of readers.<sup>15</sup> Schall, an instructor of teacher education, found that if she included works with gay and lesbian characters in her teacher preparation, most of the students rejected the work as inappropriate for reading with children.

Kauffman taught fourth and fifth graders. Schall and Kauffman decided to try working with children to explore issues such as prejudice and identity. Given the nature of the restrictions on what could be taught in the school ("homosexuality is still a taboo issue in most schools"<sup>16</sup>), the teachers gave the students the option of opting out of reading the books. About one-sixth

of the students opted out (the total students were twenty-nine; five opted out).<sup>17</sup>

In exploring the students' knowledge of what the word "gay" means, they found students had heard other children called "gay," and that they interpreted it as an insult "because of. . . dress, personality, or just being different."<sup>18</sup> The students reached consensus that calling someone gay is intended to make them feel badly and that such bullying tactics are appropriately discussed in school.<sup>19</sup>

What the adults learned from the children is that the children wanted to know about the truth of being gay. "Children demanded to know the truth about growing up, feeling attached to each other, and living a normal life. They wanted to understand the variety of relationships found within families of divorce, single families, and now gay and lesbian families."<sup>20</sup>

Additionally, they learned that the students struggled with the idea that the characters appeared to live normal lives despite the difference in their families.<sup>21</sup> The students also grappled with the need to belong. One student shared this: "It would be normal for a son to want to visit his dad even if his dad had a male roommate." He continued, sharing his experience with a friend of divorced parents and how his friend "had two mothers but all his friends deserted him. But when I went to his house, I kind of felt like him."<sup>22</sup>

In discussing the experiment further, the authors report that even though they began the discussion as a name calling issue, the children took the conversation in the direction of families and belonging.<sup>23</sup> The children:

reminded us that the curriculum needed to be child-centered, which meant that we should introduce these books throughout the school year in terms of family and belonging. The children taught us that we didn't need to approach 'gay and lesbian' as an issue or topic separated from the regular curriculum as we did in this experience. They emphasized that gay and lesbian issues would naturally integrate into those of family, identity, stereotyping, survival, relationships, a sense of belonging, or discrimination.<sup>24</sup>

The children taught the adults that homosexuality is a family and identity issue.

## Homosexuality in Picturebooks

*And Tango Makes Three* is a picturebook and, therefore, accessible to beginning readers. Various cultural critics have expressed concern that the content of entertainments such as books, television, and video games can harm children (for example, Postman's *The Disappearance of Childhood*,<sup>25</sup> or Wertham's *Seduction of the Innocent*)<sup>26</sup>. This view suggests that children are too young to encounter and understand certain ideas.

Patrick Shannon, in considering whether media can harm children, reviewed the works of various media critics concerned with children's early exposure to *adult* ideas. He concludes that even the youngest of children are selective in their attention to media messages and construct meanings rather than simply receiving a single intended understanding.<sup>27</sup> Richardson and Schuster, in addressing this fear, describe children this way:

Thanks to their concrete thinking style, young children learning for the first time about homosexuality take comments about gay people literally and don't abstract to ideas about people having sex. So, you can discuss homosexuality with your children without having to worry that you are talking about sex with them sooner than you want to. In fact, you don't have to wait beyond preschool to tell your children about gay and lesbian people.<sup>28</sup>

This echoes the insights Schall and Kauffman report from their study with children.<sup>29</sup>

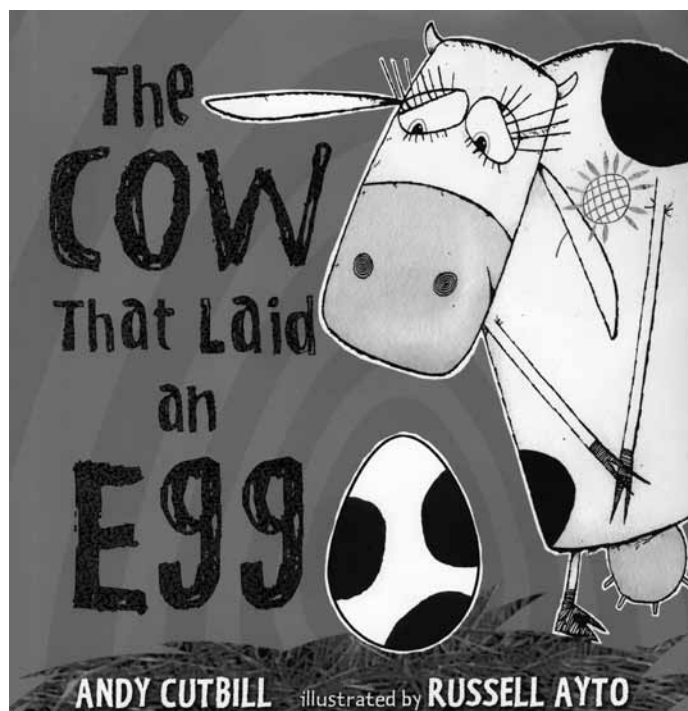
Even if introducing sexual diversity to the young is recommended, talking with kids about sex, even in terms of family and individuality, is scary. Richardson and Schuster state,

If we are going to talk honestly about your child's orientation, there is one thing we have to acknowledge. It's probably fair to say that most parents want their children to be heterosexual. That's understandable. Most parents want their children to have lives free of hardship, and although heterosexuality has never been a guarantee of happiness, it is true that gay youth have to face some difficulties that their straight friends never will.<sup>30</sup>

Boys and girls are likely to know from a very young age if they differ from their perception of gender norms. This knowledge does not have to be painful. Children may experience their nonconformity to their perceived gender role with anxiety, glee, or something in between. As they enter more public spaces and persist in non-normative gender behaviors, they may begin to undervalue themselves. In addition, harassment, name-calling, bullying, and violence are likely to result from their peers, unless they and their peers learn to understand and value non-normative behaviors.

Juvenile literature and picturebooks are one of the methods by which children receive instruction about the world around them. In examining the purposes of picturebooks, Ellen Handler Spitz says: "After all, the overriding agenda for a picturebook is to please and to comfort, as well as to instruct. These books, most often read at bedtime or to calm children when they need it, should generally not introduce messages so unsettling as to belie this ulterior purpose."<sup>31</sup>

The message of *And Tango Makes Three*, that families come in all sorts of forms, each of which is natural when the members of the family are happy and well-functioning, surely meets the purposes identified by Spitz. The final image of the work, the penguin family cuddling together in the setting sun, combined



with the text that describes the return of Roy, Silo, and Tango to the nest, as just one family of many in the penguin house, and one family in a zoo filled with families, and one family in a city of families, creates the desired bedtime comfort.

## Adoptive Families in Picturebooks

*Horton Hatches the Egg* addresses the theme of happy families existing that do not include the biological parent. *Horton* does not use the forecasting that *Tango* uses to establish family normalcy. Instead, it uses exaggerated illustrations to establish the situation as out of the norm.

The story begins with a mother bird, Mayzie, complaining that she is bored with hatching her egg. She persuades Horton, an elephant who just happens to pass by, to sit on the egg. She misleads him and says that she will not be gone long. Absurd and unnatural as it may be, Horton figures out how to sit on the egg safely. Much time passes as Horton patiently sits on the egg. Seasons change. The other animals ridicule him saying, "Look! Horton the Elephant's up in a tree!" They taunted. They teased him. They yelled, 'How absurd!' 'Old Horton the Elephant thinks he's a bird!'"<sup>32</sup> Horton's response to the taunting is the response of the good parent. No matter how he is personally harmed, he will not fail in his responsibility to the adopted egg.

Next hunters come and threaten his life. Again, he puts the needs of the egg before his own. Realizing the freakishness of what they have found and its potential to entertain human audiences, the hunters capture Horton, the tree, and his egg and transport him to New York, where he is sold to a circus. He travels through many cities and eventually is near where

Mayzie, the mother of the egg, has been vacationing. She attends the circus, and recognizes Horton. At that very moment, the egg hatches. "'My egg!'" shouted Horton. "My EGG! WHY, IT'S HATCHING!"<sup>33</sup> Mayzie, now that the work is done, claims the egg, nest, and tree. But out of the egg is born a creature with ears, tail, and trunk just like Horton's.

The story is resolved when the happy twosome are shipped by the humans back to their home where they can live happily "one hundred per cent."<sup>34</sup>

*Horton* is radical in its message and could be read as suggesting that happy, functional families may involve combinations of parents and children where the biological parent is not the best suited for the offspring. It is subject to criticism by a number of divergent groups for reasons other than its generous definition of family (the portrayal of Mayzie, the violence of the hunters, the giving away of offspring, for example). Despite these criticisms, this work has been popular with the buying public. The message is less directly conveyed than in *Tango*. It is more entertaining than moralizing, when compared to *Tango*. It does potentially spread the same message: happy and well-functioning families, no matter the particulars of the members of the family, are natural. It is also frequently in library collections.

*The Cow That Laid an Egg* by Andy Cutbill, a contemporary work to *And Tango Makes Three*, is similar to *Horton* in that it deals with interspecies adoption. In this story, chickens hatch "a cunning plan"<sup>35</sup> and sneak one of their eggs under Marjorie, a cow, as she sleeps so that when she awakes she might feel special. The other cows, whose specialties tend toward bicycle riding and handstands, accuse Marjorie of not laying the egg. "'Prove it,' said the chickens."<sup>36</sup>

Marjorie patiently sits on the egg until one morning it hatches. When "a small, brown, feathery bundle" exits the egg shell, the cows claim victory.<sup>37</sup> Clearly Marjorie's egg was from chickens. But when the chick moos, Marjorie and the reader know it is really her baby.

This story is similar to *Horton*. However, instead of the chick resembling its adoptive parent as the chick does in *Horton*, it speaks the natural language of its surrogate mother and is therefore recognized as legitimately hers. There is no attempt to sell the idea that Marjorie is normal in this work. She is clearly quite different, at least in her skill sets, from the other cows on the farm.

Like *Horton* and *Tango*, it is a story of a surrogate parent taking on the challenge of raising a baby cow/chicken. Though it is contemporary to *Tango*, it has not received the critical attention (either in reviews or the media) that *Tango* has received. The final illustration is on a pink background with a cut-out heart through which the reader can see Marjorie cradle her cow/chicken baby in her front legs, gaze with Madonna-like adoration at the wee one, and see hearts float around the two. Clearly Marjorie has found happiness with her child and the "child" has found a loving family.



Neither *Horton* nor *The Cow That Laid the Egg* deals explicitly with any form of sexual expression. The children in the Schall and Kauffman study<sup>38</sup> discussed earlier would perhaps see these works as succeeding in framing the issue in child-friendly terms as one of identity and family, not homosexuality or sex. Marjorie, Horton, Roy, Silo, and Tango demonstrate that happiness and meeting the basic needs of life are the necessary elements for measuring the naturalness of families. Happy, functional families, no matter the details of the individuals making up the family, are ideal.

*And Tango Makes Three* explores the nature of family. It suggests that happy, loving combinations of adult-aged and child-aged individuals define a normal family, no matter if the adults are the biological parents of the offspring or adoptive parents. *And Tango Makes Three* has this theme in common with *Horton Hatches the Egg* and *The Cow That Laid the Egg*. Of course, it goes even further than either of those two works that deal with the validity of families via adoption because it also suggests that same-sex parents can be valid adoptive parents.

In their informal study of children's reactions to homosexual characters, Schall and Kauffman conclude that elementary school-aged children are interested in all types of families, whether the family is touched by divorce, or headed by a single parent or by two parents of the same gender.<sup>39</sup> Though they framed the conversation about gay characters in terms of a name-calling issue, what they found was that the children saw it more as an identity issue.

While *Tango*, as a picturebook, would not necessarily be the type of reading that would interest this age group of children, they seem to suggest that homosexual characters have a place in their reading and can build empathy and decrease bullying behaviors.

Richardson and Schuster address homosexuality and the very young and suggest that it is safe to talk with young children about same-sex parents because they will not abstract to sexuality.<sup>40</sup> Talking with children about homosexual persons is not the same as talking to them about sexual activities, any more so than is the case if the parents are heterosexual. In addition, familiarity with the idea of homosexuality as a way of life will not increase the likelihood that a given child will be homosexual. Instead, other factors will come into play that will set the child's sexual identity, perhaps as early as four or five years of age. The benefit of sharing information about characters raised by homosexual parents may be that the child learns tolerance for persons who differ or avoids the alienation that may accompany the appearance of being different.

The ubiquity of the distribution of same-sex households in the United States—as documented in the census of 2010 and analyzed by the Williams Institute—suggests that children will know homosexuals through their own family, neighborhood, school, or community. Educating children about the presence of members of society who are homosexual can enhance empathy.

*And Tango Makes Three* is a well-crafted picturebook. The messages it conveys to its readers may prepare the child for a diverse world that will likely include homosexuality, whether as a personal expression of their sexuality, or through social interactions with others. This exposure may increase their compassion for persons who differ from them or in their self-regard if they perceive that they differ.

It follows a tradition of children's books in addressing diversity and expanding compassion, as exemplified by the characters Horton and Marjorie. Functional families, no matter the particulars of the members of the family, are natural. *And Tango Makes Three* conveys this important message and should find a place in library collections and the school curriculum. ☺

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## THROWING DEWEY OVERBOARD, continued from page 7

### Measuring Success

Although it is still too early to measure our long-range success, a key part of our planning process was to identify metrics to compare and contrast the two systems.

Our goal is not simply to increase nonfiction circulation, although an overall increase in nonfiction circulation was expected. We were also interested in broadening the types of nonfiction read by children. We hoped that the reorganization would increase discoverability and encourage children to check out and read a greater and richer variety of informational books.

Here is a look at our tracking metrics (all measured before and after implementation of Dewey Lite):


- total circulation of nonfiction books
- circulation of specific Dewey ranges
- circulation percentages of fiction versus nonfiction

In addition to hard statistics, we also conducted user surveys (in house and via email) to gather patron feedback, from both children and adults, on the new system's ease of use.

### Looking Forward

Melvil Dewey devised his decimal classification system during a time when children under age fourteen were still discouraged from using public libraries. It was not until Anne Carroll Moore opened the children's library of the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn that children were welcomed into the public library and viewed as part of the wider community of library patrons.<sup>5</sup>

Unfortunately, collections for children have remained largely static in the intervening 137 years . . . until quite recently, that is.

Efforts to rethink and reorganize nonfiction for children reflect the importance of creating collections with user experience at the forefront. Our project was guided by the ways in which education and learning are evolving in the twenty-first century. We hope Dewey Lite will help bridge the gap between the debut of DDC in 1876 and the way children search for and use informational texts today and into the future. 

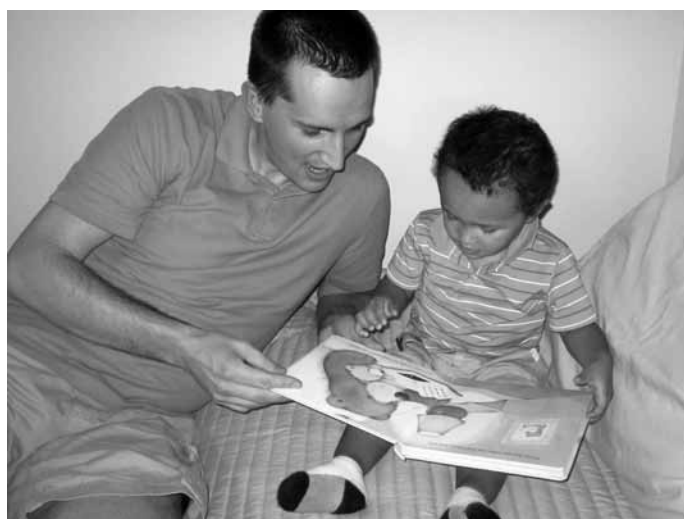
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# Over the Rainbow and Under the Radar

## Library Services and Programs to LGBTQ Families

BY JAMIE CAMPBELL NAIDOO



A gay father shares a book about a single dad with his two-year-old son.

Look around your children's department and take stock of the caregivers and children attending your storytimes and other library programs. How many of these children come from single parent homes? How many have a household where grandparents, aunts, or uncles are the caregivers? Do any of these children have two moms, two dads, or a single caregiver that identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (LGBTQ)?

Chances are you are familiar with the “regulars” who attend your storytime programs and have an idea of which children have a single parent, are raised by an extended family caregiver such as an aunt or grandparent, or who are internationally adopted. But which children have caregivers that are LGBTQ or identify as LGBTQ themselves? These children live in families whose identity is often invisible to librarians.

If the public library is meant to be the heart of the community and provide inclusive library services and collections representative of the local population, it is important for children's librarians to serve the informational and recreational needs of children and caregivers in LGBTQ families. But, how can you adequately serve a population whose presence may not be readily noticeable in the library? If the presence of LGBTQ families with children is observable in the library, how can you serve them when you live in a community that is socially conservative or not accepting of LGBTQ caregivers?

As part of a larger study funded by the American Library Association's Office of Diversity, the author of this article conducted an examination of library services to children and their LGBTQ caregivers to determine how US public libraries

are serving this population. Specifically, areas of the United States with the largest concentration of same-sex couples with children where the main focus of the study as it was believed these areas would most likely have public libraries with strong collections, services, and programs for this population. This article provides a brief background of the study, relates the key findings, and provides practical suggestions for children's librarians seeking to build collections, programs, and services inclusive of LGBTQ families, regardless of their community location and size.

More than 110,000 same-sex couples are raising children in almost every county (96 percent) in the United States, with the greatest number of lesbian and gay caregivers living in areas of the country with relatively low numbers of same-sex couples and LGBTQ singles without children.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, according to recent reports, approximately 2 million children are raised in LGBTQ families that most often live in rural areas of Mississippi, Wyoming, South Dakota, Alaska, Alabama, South Carolina, and Louisiana, or in metropolitan areas such as San Antonio, Texas; Bergen-Passaic, New Jersey; Memphis, Tennessee;



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Newark, New Jersey; Nassau-Suffolk, New York; Norfolk-Virginia Beach-Newport News, Virginia; and Orange County, California.<sup>2</sup> Using this information as a convenient sample, a total of eleven states and twenty metropolitan areas in the United States were identified to examine in terms of how their public libraries were serving LGBTQ families with children.

Within each individual metropolitan area, the public libraries operating within the jurisdictions were identified and their collections were analyzed, using their online catalogs, to discern library holdings of LGBTQ picture books and parenting books. From each library system serving the metropolitan areas, the public library with the largest holdings of materials was selected, as it was determined that libraries with major collections of LGBTQ children's titles and parenting books would most likely be serving LGBTQ caregivers and children, particularly if the collections were developed to reflect the demographics of the local community served by the library. The result of this selection process was a purposive sample of thirty-nine public libraries.

The director of each of these libraries was asked to complete a fifteen-minute phone interview and questionnaire regarding the library's collections, services, and programs for LGBTQ parents and their children as well as the perceived importance and need for serving this population. In some instances the children's librarian participated in the interview rather than the director. The response rate was 77 percent, with thirty libraries responding to the phone questionnaire. The subsequent section shares some of the major findings from these conversations.

## Children's Programming for LGBTQ Families

Some LGBTQ families and their children take advantage of public library services, collections, and programs in their communities though the types and quantity of these services varies greatly from system to system. According to the librarians surveyed, almost half (47.4 percent) work in public libraries that serve fifty or more children in LGBTQ families, and approximately 40 percent work in libraries that serve one hundred or more LGBTQ caregivers with children. While many of the librarians were interested in reaching out to LGBTQ families, they found it difficult to identify these families and did not want to risk offending anyone by insinuating that they were LGBTQ. As a result, most librarians found ways to be inclusive of LGBTQ families in children's programming rather than hosting specific library programs for LGBTQ caregivers and their children.

At least once a year, 46 percent of the librarians surveyed include LGBTQ picturebooks in general children's programming and services, while 7 percent plan library programs specifically for LGBTQ families and children. Many of the librarians use family composition books such as Todd Parr's *The Family Book* in their programs on a regular basis as a way to be inclusive of all types of families, including LGBTQ ones.

Of those librarians that did include LGBTQ content in their children's programming, few received any negative feedback from caregivers. One librarian noted that she received little resistance to the use of LGBTQ picturebooks in storytimes, but stated that a gay couple approached her after one of her programs and asked that she not include books with mothers since their child did not have a mother. This response seems contrary to the common perception that heterosexual caregivers take issue with LGBTQ content in children's story programs and will be the ones complaining about program content.

Unfortunately, not all of the librarians created inclusive programming for children in LGBTQ families or saw the importance of developing such programs. One children's librarian equated the use of LGBTQ picturebooks in programming to bibliotherapy, stating, "We use only books with merit in our programs and don't participate in bibliotherapy, which would include same-sex picturebooks."

In this instance, the librarian felt that children's books with LGBTQ content were not of merit and that the use of them in story programs would serve a therapeutic benefit rather than creating a culture of understanding and inclusion for children in all types of families.

A librarian in a different system indicated strong bias against serving LGBTQ caregivers and their children with any types of programs or materials. He acknowledged that the library did not want to serve the LGBTQ population, commenting, "We serve developmentally disabled, handicapped, mentally disabled adults with services and materials but not this group [LGBTQ caregivers with children], not in [X] library system. We don't have *that* here."

Seemingly, if a LGBTQ caregiver and her/his child entered this library, the head librarian would not provide any type of services for them since the library is already serving and providing programs for different underserved populations. Additionally, the librarian's emphasis that they don't serve "that" population also suggests that LGBTQ families would not encounter a welcoming library environment.

## Other Services to LGBTQ Caregivers and Their Children

The study also highlighted other types of services that were developed and offered to LGBTQ caregivers and their children ranging from bibliographies of recommended resources to book discussion groups. Approximately one-third (36 percent) of the libraries provide bibliographies (either print or online) of recommended LGBTQ picturebooks and 17 percent of the libraries provide bibliographies of recommended parenting books specifically for LGBTQ caregivers.

Of the libraries that provided print bibliographies, these were often held at the children's services desk among a display of other bibliographies or placed in the parenting section along

with other bibliographies of interest to all caregivers. A few of the libraries (less than 15 percent) include LGBTQ parenting books in general bibliographies of parenting books. A similar number of librarians (14 percent) acknowledged that they offered book discussion groups for LGBTQ caregivers, which met at infrequent intervals.

Additionally, 18 percent of the librarians indicated that they offer other types of programs or services to LGBTQ caregivers and children. These included an outreach program to agencies specializing in LGBTQ adoptions, services as part of local Gay Pride celebrations in the city, and a library-operated educational TV station with a transgender host covering a variety of topics of interest to all members of the community.

While most of the libraries surveyed did not offer services for this population of caregivers and children, approximately half (52 percent) of librarians indicated that they were satisfied with the level of services provided to LGBTQ families and saw little need for improvement. This information suggests that many of these librarians might need sensitivity training to better understand the needs of children and caregivers in LGBTQ families.

## Arrangement and Labeling of LGBTQ Parenting and Children's Books

One of the major services that libraries can offer children and caregivers in LGBTQ families is access to children's books and parenting titles that represent their experiences and family composition. Access is often determined by how materials are labeled in the library's catalog and physically arranged on the shelf. If patrons need a title but are unable to locate it, then its presence in the collection is superfluous.

According to the librarians surveyed, most library collections of LGBTQ children's books are interfiled alongside other children's books to increase access to these materials. However, many of these books include spine labels that identify their LGBTQ content, either in the form of rainbow flags or pink triangles.

While these labels make the titles easily recognizable, they also can be problematic, as they take away from the patrons' right to privacy. A rainbow flag or pink triangle indicates to everyone that a child or caregiver is accessing a book with LGBTQ content. Labels can also send strong social messages to library patrons. One librarian indicated that their library uses the label "Broken Homes" on their LGBTQ picture books. This label clearly conveys to children and caregivers, however, that this particular library believes that something is wrong or "broken" with LGBTQ families.

Similar to the LGBTQ children's books, most of the librarians interviewed indicated that they file LGBTQ parenting books alongside general parenting books for ease of access. However in two specific instances, librarians placed LGBTQ parenting books



Two-year-old Cayden and his dad share books, including Todd Parr's *The Daddy Book*.

in separate sections. One librarian noted, "We interfile these books [LGBTQ parenting titles] with parenting books on illnesses such as Tourette's, Asperger's, etc." This public library is sending a strong message that they believe someone in LGBTQ families has an illness, expressly the LGBTQ caregiver.

Another librarian in a separate system stated that LGBTQ parenting books were "circulated from the library office to keep them from being stolen." Again, this placement is problematic as it is an invasion of privacy. Many LGBTQ parents may not be open about their sexuality and are not likely to approach a librarian to ask for access to parenting books representing their families.

The aforementioned placements have been problematic for decades as various censors have tried to limit the access of children and the general public to books with LGBTQ content. In some of these instances, librarians or library boards have bent under pressure and relocated books behind services desks or placed them in special sections. Restricting access to materials violates fundamental principles of intellectual freedom and limits the opportunity for all children and all parents to learn about children and parents in LGBTQ families. This was most recently addressed in the lawsuit against Davis School District in Utah when Patricia Polacco's gay-themed picturebook *In Our Mothers' House* (Philomel, 2009) was



### Informational and Recreational Needs of Children and Caregivers in LGBTQ Families

- Access to developmentally appropriate, high-quality print and digital materials, fiction and nonfiction, that represent LGBTQ topics. These same materials should also normalize the experiences of LGBTQ families.
- Access to current, accurate information about local organizations serving LGBTQ families.
- Inclusive language in library programs that embrace LGBTQ families.
- Opportunities to learn about the accomplishments of LGBTQ individuals via library displays, collections, and programs.
- Privacy in the form of confidentiality in patron records and discretion when helping LGBTQ family members locate materials
- Ability to locate LGBTQ materials within the library's catalog and collections.
- Welcoming, safe library environments where they can explore their educational and recreational needs. This environment should be free of homophobic attitudes and practices, and include displays and posters that represent all types of family diversity.

### Considerations for Planning Subversive Family Storytimes Inclusive of All Families

- Change pronouns while reading a book with androgynous animal characters.
- Change character names to become androgynous: Jaime, Rene, Michele, Mel, Pat, Chris, and so on.
- Use terms such as "parent" or "caregiver" instead of "mother" or "father."
- Use books with single parents.
- Share books with ambiguous family constructs: multiple fathers, mother and aunt caregivers, and so on.
- Share "gender bending" books from all genres.
- Invite "out of the box" guest speakers: male nurses, female firefighters, and so on.
- Start a book and allow children to write or tell their own ending, inserting their own personal experiences.

placed in a restricted area in the school library media center because of its content.<sup>3</sup>

## Practical Implications and Recommendations

The results of the study suggest that some librarians in areas of the United States with large concentrations of LGBTQ families with children are working hard to serve their local populations while other librarians need more assistance in reaching out to their LGBTQ communities. While the focus of the study were libraries in large metropolitan areas, the need for serving LGBTQ children and families is present in *every* county of the United States, particularly in the rural and suburban areas of socially conservative states where many LGBTQ families reside.

The remainder of this article provides recommendations on planning programs and developing collections that will be welcoming to children and caregivers in LGBTQ families. Consideration is also given to librarians in socially conservative communities that want to reach this population but need to provide services that are over the rainbow in terms of inclusiveness but under the radar of potential censors. The goal of all these suggestions and recommendations is to meet the informational and recreational needs of children and caregivers in LGBTQ families. Figure 1 provides a brief overview of some of these needs.

## Subversive Family Storytimes

One of the best ways to serve children and caregivers in LGBTQ families is to provide story programs that are inclusive of all types of families. Many of the librarians surveyed in the study above indicated that they did not want to single out LGBTQ families for fear of embarrassing them or creating programs that were perceived as only being for a specific segment of the populations.

Inclusive family storytimes are a great way to help all children and caregivers learn about and respect others in our culturally pluralistic society. These storytimes can include individual titles about specific types of families or family composition books that introduce family diversity. In addition, with a little ingenuity, children's librarians can find ways to subvert the traditional heterosexual notion of family and normative view of gender to be inclusive of LGBTQ families in these programs. Slight modifications can be made to the narrative of texts or to accompanying storytime activities to allow opportunities for children and caregivers to see reflections of LGBTQ families.

Similarly, books that reflect same-sex friendships or gender-bending characters can be used in the programs to help normalize the experiences of LGBTQ children. For example, Daniel Kirk's *Ten Things I Love About You* describes how two male animal friends (a pig and a rabbit) share the many things they love about each other. While the book may not be intended to show a gay relationship, it does open a window for children and caregivers to see a positive example of a same-sex friendship and normalizes the idea of same-sex relationships based upon love. Books such as this are not gay-themed but are gay-friendly and useful for subverting the traditional notion of relationships.

Figure 2 (previous page) provides a few suggestions for planning subversive family storytimes.

## Programming and Community Partnerships

Partnerships with community organizations directly or indirectly serving LGBTQ families with children are another great way to reach out to this population. Some of the librarians interviewed indicated that their greatest successes in terms of programs inclusive of LGBTQ families were those held in conjunction with larger events, such as adoption workshops, family film series, Gay Pride events, family picnics, local city festivals, and PFLAG (Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) events. Programs ranged from book discussion groups to read-alouds to crafts projects inclusive of all types of family diversity.

Through partnerships with local organizations serving LGBTQ families, librarians are able to reach “invisible” audiences that they may not readily recognize in the library. At the same time, partnering with organizations that serve all types of families, including LGBTQ families, allows over the rainbow library programming to LGBTQ families that is under the radar.

For librarians in communities where specialized programs to children and caregivers in LGBTQ families is possible,

the following two examples provide ideas for successful outreach programs. In May 2011, the Office of Children's Services at the San Francisco Public Library partnered with the Communication Studies Department at San Francisco State University to offer a “Dragons & Dresses & Ducklings—Oh My!” program that integrated eight LGBTQ children's books with performance arts and highlighted diverse gender expressions and family compositions.

Similarly, as part of the 2012 National Library Week's You Belong @ Your Library campaign, the Sacramento (CA) Public Library hosted a Rainbow Family Egg Hunt and LGBTQ storytime where children searched for rainbow eggs and then listened to LGBTQ children's books representing two moms, two dads, and diverse families. Both of these programs were met with success and held either in conjunction with a larger event or in partnership with a community organization, thereby increasing the effectiveness of the program in reaching LGBTQ families.

## Developing LGBTQ Children's Collections

Well-chosen children's books can celebrate the diversity within the LGBTQ community and normalize experiences of children and caregivers in LGBTQ families. At first glance, there may not appear to be many children's books with LGBTQ topics

### Selected Resources for Developing Programs and Collections for LGBTQ Families

- “Building Rainbow Families.” Lynne Maxwell. *Library Journal* 133, no. 6 (April 2008): 54–57.
- “Gay-Themed Picture Books for Children.” Created by Patricia Sarles, <http://booksforkidsingayfamilies.blogspot.com>.
- “I’m Here, I’m Queer. What the Hell Do I Read?” Created by Lee Wind, [www.leewind.org](http://www.leewind.org).
- Lambda Literary Awards. Administered by the Lambda Literary Foundation, [www.lambdaliterary.org/awards](http://www.lambdaliterary.org/awards).
- “Learn to Include Teacher’s Manual: Teaching and Learning About Diverse Families in a Primary School Setting.” Written by Vicki Harding, [www.hotkey.net.au/~learn\\_to\\_include/pdf/revised%20manual%20Sept%202005.pdf](http://www.hotkey.net.au/~learn_to_include/pdf/revised%20manual%20Sept%202005.pdf).
- *Pink Parenting* magazine, [www.pink-parenting.com](http://www.pink-parenting.com).
- “Rainbow Books: GLBTQ Books for Children and Teens.” Created by the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Round Table and the Social Responsibilities Round Table of the American Library Association, <http://glbtrt.ala.org/rainbowbooks>.
- Rainbow Families Council, <http://rainbowfamilies.org.au>.
- *Rainbow Family Collections: Selecting and Using Children’s Books with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Content*. Jamie Campbell Naidoo. Libraries Unlimited, 2012, 260p.
- *Rainbow Rumpus*. Online literary magazine for children, [www.rainbowrumpus.org](http://www.rainbowrumpus.org).
- “Steps You Can Take as a Librarian.” Created by Welcoming Schools, [www.welcomingschools.org/pages/steps-you-can-take-as-a-librarian](http://www.welcomingschools.org/pages/steps-you-can-take-as-a-librarian).
- Stonewall Book Award: Mike Morgan and Larry Romans Children’s and Young Adult Literature Award. Administered by the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Round Table of the American Library Association, [www.ala.org/glbtrt/award](http://www.ala.org/glbtrt/award).

and themes available. However, more than three hundred titles are available for children ages birth to eleven with more books appearing each year.

Thanks to self-publishing and print-on-demand systems, a menagerie of fiction and informational titles for children has appeared almost overnight, representing various levels of quality.

Some librarians may not feel qualified or comfortable selecting LGBTQ children's books. Fortunately, many resources are available including recommended bibliographies, checklists for evaluating LGBTQ children's literature, awards for LGBTQ children's literature, and suggestions for using LGBTQ children's books in library programs. Figure 3 provides a selected

list of these resources that librarians should find useful and Figure 4 gives a list of recommended LGBTQ children's titles that normalize the experiences of children and caregivers in LGBTQ families.

Among the LGBTQ children's books available to libraries are specific titles with anti-gay themes. One question that arose during the study relates to whether or not anti-gay books should be included in a library collection. Although none of the librarians admitted that he/she would purchase anti-gay children's books for their collections, the question of how to balance opposing viewpoints on homosexuality did arise, particularly for libraries situated in socially conservative areas.

### Selected Recommended LGBTQ Children's Books

Children's books that represent children and caregivers in LGBTQ families as ordinary families are preferable for library programs and collections. These families need books that are not issue driven. Rather, the books should just happen to include characters and families that indentify as LGBTQ. The selected titles below embody this sentiment and are appropriate for children eleven and under. Books with an \* are appropriate for subversive family storytimes because of their ambiguous treatment of gender nonconformity or family composition.

#### Board Books

Moreno Velo, Lucía. *Manu se va a la cama/Manu's Bedtime*. Illustrated by Javier Termenón Delgado. Translation by Gwyneth Box. Topka, 2006. 14p. (All three titles in this series are recommended.)

Newman, Lesléa. *Daddy, Papa, and Me*. Illustrated by Carol Thompson. Tricycle Press, 2009. 20p.

Newman, Lesléa. *Mommy, Mama, and Me*. Illustrated by Carol Thompson. Tricycle Press, 2009. 20p.

#### Picturebooks

Bey-Clarke, Monica and Cheril Clarke. *Keesha & Her Two Moms Go Swimming*. Illustrated by Aiswarya Mukherjee. My Family!/Dodi Press, 2010. 30p.

Kasza, Keiko. *A Mother for Choco*. Penguin Putnam, 1992. 32p.\*

Kemp, Anna. *Dogs Don't Do Ballet*. Illustrated by Sara Ogilvie. Simon & Schuster, 2010. 32p.\*

Levine, Arthur A. *Monday is One Day*. Illustrated by Julian Hector. Scholastic, 2011. 32p.

Lindenbaum, Pija. *Mini Mia and Her Darling Uncle*. Translation by Elisabeth Kallick Dyssegaard. R&S Book (Distributed by Farrar, Straus and Giroux), 2007. 40p.

Meyers, Susan. *Everywhere Babies*. Illustrated by Marla Frazee. Harcourt, 2001. 32p.\*

Newman, Lesléa. *Donovan's Big Day*. Illustrated by Mike Dutton. Tricycle Press, 2011. 32p.

Oelschlager, Vanita. *A Tale of Two Daddies*. Illustrated by Kristin Blackwood and Mike Blanc. VanitaBooks, 2010. 42p.

Oelschlager, Vanita. *A Tale of Two Mommies*. Illustrated by Mike Blanc. VanitaBooks, 2011. 40p.

Piñón, Berta. *Las cosas que le gustan a Fran*. Illustrated by Antonia Santolaya Ruiz-Clavijo. Hotelpapel Ediciones, 2007. 32p.

Williams, Vera B. *Three Days on a River in a Red Canoe*. William Morrow and Company, 1981. 32p.\*

#### Novels

Agell, Charlotte. *The Accidental Adventures of India McAllister*. Holt, 2010. 152p.

Burch, Christian. *The Manny Files*. Atheneum, 2006. 296p.

Federle, Tim. *Better Nate Than Ever*. Simon & Schuster, 2013. 288p.

Ignatow, Amy. *The Popularity Papers: Research for the Social Improvement and General Betterment of Lydia Goldblatt and Julie Graham-Chang*. Amulet Book/Abrams, 2010. 206p. (All the titles in this series are recommended)

Urban, Linda. *The Center of Everything*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013. 208p.

#### Informational

Kay, Verla. *Rough, Tough Charley*. Illustrated by Adam Gustavson. Tricycle Press, 2007. 32p.\*

Krakow, Kari. *The Harvey Milk Story*. Illustrated by David Gardner. Two Lives Publishing, 2001. 32p.

Kuklin, Susan. *Families*. Hyperion, 2006. 40p.

Parr, Todd. *The Family Book*. Little, Brown, 2003. 32p.

Parr, Todd. *It's Okay to be Different*. Little, Brown, 2001. 32p.

What is the alternative to providing a gay-friendly book in the collection or during a library program? Should titles that equate homosexuality to pedophilia or as being sinful—such as Deborah Phrihoda's *Mommy, Why Are They Holding Hands?*, Richard Cohen's *Alfie's Home*, Amber Dee Parker's *God Made Dad and Mom*, or Shelia Butt's *Does God Love Michael's Two Daddies?*—be circulated in the library?

Librarians wanting to provide children's books with alternative views on LGBTQ families do not need to purchase titles that demean, demoralize, or suggest the dissolution of gay families. Rather, they only need to turn to the overwhelmingly heterosexual body of children's literature and select titles with heterosexual caregivers.

The opposite of a gay-friendly book is not an anti-gay book; it is a heterosexual-friendly book, which currently prevails in children's library collections. Additional information on this topic is available in the recent Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC) blog post entitled "Anti-Gay Books and Your Library."<sup>4</sup>

As community demographics shift and non-traditional families become more visible in counties across the United States, the library can be poised to offer services, programs, and collections that provide opportunities for children and caregivers in all types of families to see affirming representations of themselves. Those libraries situated in communities with LGBTQ families have an equal responsibility to serve these patrons but may find it difficult to identify children and caregivers in LGBTQ families or may be faced with opposition in socially conservative communities. This examination of public libraries in communities with large concentrations of LGBTQ families with children highlights some of the successes and concerns that librarians face when serving this demographic. At the same time, the study provides insight into how best to reach out to

these families by providing services that are over the rainbow in terms of inclusiveness but under the radar of potential censors. Hopefully, some of the suggestions will help you better serve the invisible "regulars" in your children's department while embracing the spectrum of families in your community. ☺

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1. This figure does not account for single lesbian or gay caregivers or bisexual or transgender caregivers or couples; The Williams Institute, "As Overall Percentage of Same-Sex Couples Raising Children Declines, Those Adopting Almost Doubles—Significant Diversity among Lesbian and Gay Families," <http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/press/press-releases/as-overall-percentage-of-same-sex-couples-raising-children-declines-those-adopting-almost-doubles-significant-diversity-among-lesbian-and-gay-families> (accessed July 20, 2013); Urban Institute, "Gay and Lesbian Families in the Census: Couples with Children," [www.urban.org/publications/900626.html](http://www.urban.org/publications/900626.html) (accessed July 20, 2013).
2. Movement Advancement Project, Family Equality Council and Center for American Progress, "All Children Matter: How Legal and Social Inequalities Hurt LGBT Families," [www.lgbtmap.org/all-children-matter-full-report](http://www.lgbtmap.org/all-children-matter-full-report) (accessed July 20, 2013); Gary J. Gates and Jason Ost. *The Gay and Lesbian Atlas* (Washington, DC: Urban Institute Press, 2004).
3. Beverley Goldberg, "Utah Suit Restores Access to In Our Mothers' House," *American Libraries*, March 6, 2013, [www.americanlibrariesmagazine.org/article/utah-suit-restores-access-our-mothers%E2%80%99-house](http://www.americanlibrariesmagazine.org/article/utah-suit-restores-access-our-mothers%E2%80%99-house) (accessed July 20, 2013).
4. ALSC Intellectual Freedom Committee, "Anti-Gay Books and Your Library," ALSC Blog, Feb. 16, 2013, [www.alsc.org/blog/2013/02/anti-gay-books-and-your-library](http://www.alsc.org/blog/2013/02/anti-gay-books-and-your-library) (accessed July 20, 2013).

# Playgrounds for the Mind

## Invention Conventions and STEM in the Library

ROXANNE MYERS SPENCER AND JEANINE HUSS



The authors show college students' invention posters to children participating in the Summer Camp sponsored by the Center for Gifted Studies at Western Kentucky University.

**L**ibraries are perfect places for children to discover, dream, create, and invent in a relaxed setting. They are ideal environments for supplementing formal learning. With recent media attention paid to American students' low performance in STEM subjects—science, technology, engineering, and math—librarians are investigating and inventing new program ideas to engage children in exploring these topics. Invention conventions provide exciting STEM programming opportunities for all types of libraries.

For librarians interested in hosting an invention convention, some background information is helpful. Invention conventions share some similarities with science fairs, but their goals differ. Science fairs focus on investigations; in an invention convention, students design and make tools to solve problems. Some examples of devices created in invention conventions include child seats that fit in shopping carts, tapeless wrapping paper, and a new type of candy bar.<sup>1</sup> Holding an invention convention is an excellent way to build interest in STEM subjects and to invite the community into the library's playground for the mind.

Invention conventions offer opportunities for outreach and partnerships in the larger community. Recruiting local partners to become involved will expand opportunities to engage the larger population by collaborating with organizations interested in STEM education, such as cooperative extension agencies, manufacturers, local medical providers, and utility companies. Outreach to the community may build future partnerships, such as volunteers, financial support, guest speakers, and other resources.

Before hosting an invention convention, here are some ways to build interest in STEM resources in the library.

### Providing an Environment for STEM Exploration

In a recent article featured on the Programming Librarian website, Cheryl Heid says, "Science education in the United States lags behind other countries, and it's in our best interest to get kids interested in science so we don't fall even further behind. What better place than a library to help provide learning, literacy, and real-world experiences?"<sup>2</sup>



**Roxanne Myers Spencer** (far left) is Associate Professor and Coordinator of the Educational Resources Center, Western Kentucky University Libraries in Bowling Green. **Dr. Jeanine Huss** is Associate Professor, School of Teacher Education, College of Education and Behavioral Sciences at Western Kentucky University.



The emphasis on STEM subjects and evolving curriculum reforms in American schools provides perfect opportunities for librarians to collaborate with teachers and other community professionals in STEM fields. Science and mathematics teachers are expert STEM library partners. They can create interdisciplinary lessons and projects at the library, creating a collaborative environment for families and the larger community. Updated library offerings in the STEM subjects are becoming very popular, including topical book clubs, events, and competitions.

Ways to incorporate STEM concepts into the library include creating space for a hands-on learning environment, where patrons can use the latest technology devices, conducting labs with a science librarian, and bringing in exhibits from local science museums. This integrates traditional library materials and programming with elements from museums and other cultural institutions.

Design software and games will attract children who want to build and create models and inventions. Examples of popular kid-friendly programs include Kid CAD, Jr. Architect, Google SketchUp, Bob the Builder Can-Do Zoo Game, and Tonka Construction. Using iPads or other tablets loaded with creativity apps and games makes exploring STEM topics fun. Multimedia and print resources provide information and inspiration for exploring new ideas and for seeking solutions to problems.

Many resources are available to the novice librarian to help plan invention conventions or other activities to bring more STEM-related programming activities to the library (see sidebar).

Houghton Mifflin's Education Place hosts an Invention Convention section, which provides this overview:

Fostering the development of important science skills is an ongoing challenge. Students should have opportunities to solve problems, think creatively, experiment, and work with data throughout the school year. The Invention Convention is an event that gives students an opportunity to demonstrate these skills independently as they invent a new product or process.<sup>3</sup>

Invention conventions provide opportunities for libraries to apply STEM ideas and foster outreach and partnerships. Invention conventions showcase ingenuity, design, creativity, and problem-solving activities. Children examine their everyday environment, identify an interesting situation that needs modification, and, using scientific and engineering practices, create a tool to help fix it. Libraries can also alternate hosting invention conventions with traditional science fairs to provide variety in science and engineering programs.

Library staff can search the following keywords to help plan their community's invention convention: serendipitous inventions, accidental discoveries, inventions, inventors, invention convention, and inventors' convention.

Once the library is ready to host an invention convention, the next step is to build interest in participation throughout the community.

## Quick Tips for Invention Conventions

- **Matching Inventions.** To generate interest in serendipitous discoveries, ask patrons to match "accidental" inventions such as microwaves, saccharin, Slinky, Play-Doh, Super Glue, Teflon, Bakelite, pacemaker, Velcro, X-rays, penicillin, dynamite, quinine, and insulin to their inventors and eras. Serendipitous inventions will spark patrons' curiosity.
- **STEM and STEAM.** Ideas for STEM draw from the fine arts as well (often referred to as STEAM). View Leonardo da Vinci's journals to inspire budding artists and inventors. Explore Cubist or Abstract Expressionist art to make connections to mathematical concepts helping children to view the world through different lenses. Fibonacci numbers and their prevalence in nature are another way to connect art and math.

## Build Pre-Program Excitement

Pre-program sessions pique patron interest in participating in the invention convention. Inviting guest speakers with expertise in a STEM area, or contacting relevant local businesses for on-site tours, make the library active partners in the process. Nonfiction booktalks can generate interest in an invention convention program. A local college or electronics store may be willing to display new devices for a technology "petting zoo" program, which may inspire ideas for inventions. Titles on inventors and inventions can be fertile ground for brainstorming sessions for the preliminary invention convention.

Library patrons may want to brainstorm further by researching online using sites such as Google Patent Search for current/past inventions. Using the keyword searches suggested above, students will find a variety of resources to get their creative ideas flowing. Among many good resources are the Shoreline (Washington) School District Invention Convention Information handout, the Invent America website, and the US Patent Office i-CREATM Curriculum. Scholastic has a blog on brainstorming for kids and competitions where children invent their own toys (see additional links in the sidebar).

## Using Scientific Methods

Invention convention projects are based on sound scientific principles. By including the use of scientific methods, libraries create an ideal environment for community members to participate and to think critically about their roles as responsible citizens and designers of the future. Participants in the invention convention follow recognized steps in the scientific process for their projects: observing, measuring, classifying, inferring, predicting, experimenting, and communicating.<sup>4</sup>

An alternative that aligns well with the new Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) is the engineering design process, which reflects the emphasis currently given to engineering information and skills taught in schools. The engineering design process, appropriate for upper elementary, middle, or high school, allows students to follow steps used by engineers to create new products. The NASA Engineering Design Challenge identifies the steps of the engineering design process as an eight-step process.<sup>5</sup>

1. Identify the problem
2. Identify criteria and constraints
3. Brainstorm possible solutions
4. Generate ideas
5. Explore possibilities
6. Select an approach
7. Build a model or prototype
8. Refine the design

For less formal learning environments or younger learners, *Engineering is Elementary*,<sup>6</sup> describes the engineering design process in these five steps—(1) ask, (2) imagine, (3) plan, (4) create, and (5) improve.

To encourage critical thinking skills, participants should consider the ethics of inventions. Many inventions, such as the atomic bomb, dynamite, DDT, and medicines using poisons (such as quinine and digitalis) raise challenging ethical questions. Challenge children to consider the complexities of scientific discoveries—for example, using the illustration of Alfred Nobel, who was both the founder of the Nobel Prize and the creator of dynamite. Understanding the benefits and consequences of inventions on society is an important aspect of an invention convention. Children should be encouraged to think about their design projects in a larger context and to articulate possible pros and cons of their inventions.

## Invention Convention Focus

To encourage collaboration and keep the program manageable, especially for first-time events, librarians can invite science teachers or local professionals in the sciences to help determine the parameters of the invention convention. Among the questions to answer while planning a first invention convention are:

- Are specific STEM or STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics) subjects emphasized? If so, collaborating with local teachers or professionals can strengthen the program.
- What kinds of materials will the library provide to students?
- What are limits on the number of participants due to space or budgetary considerations?

## Developing Local Partnerships

Putting on a science fair or invention convention requires coordinated efforts and outreach within communities. By partnering with community groups or businesses with a vested interest in STEM, libraries can benefit through financial support, resources, or even volunteers at events.

Libraries often ask local businesses to support library programming with financial or material donations. Tap into the expertise within the local community to bring knowledgeable professionals into the library to support the invention convention with teachable moments.

- Is there a high school science club willing to work with younger children on their explorations and design elements?
- Can the library organize field trips to local industries to build interest through pre-program events?
- Do local industries have engineers or scientists in various fields on-site who may be able to share knowledge, bring project models, or donate materials?

Many businesses welcome the chance to display their innovative products to students. Take advantage of local and regional design, engineering, or manufacturing firms' marketing or outreach efforts to bring real-world design and inventions into the library.

As collaborations and partnerships develop, begin involving the community to engage the community before the event.

- Will there be a nominal fee charged for participation or materials? Can the library solicit support from local businesses or grants?
- Will the invention convention have a particular theme, such as ways to repurpose materials or creating new household gadgets?

If considering a themed approach, here are some ideas for topics, some of which have links to resources in the appended sidebar. Perhaps children could develop an invention to reduce a person's ecological footprint. Students can view PBS videos on *Loop Scoops* to understand more about the effects of several processes (garbage, electronic devices, magazines, and more) on the environment and come up with creative recycling and repurposing solutions. Three websites that are useful for planning this type of program offer ideas on how to reduce our ecological footprint and include quizzes for children and adults. These quizzes help children and adults understand how their behavior affects the earth's health.

The Environmental Protection Agency offers a free unit called the Planet Protectors Club Kit that provides posters, activities, and information on how to reduce, reuse, and recycle.

This encourages children to explore natural resources used in the life cycles and waste processes of a variety of products. Children can learn more about how to effectively manage and reduce waste using composting and incineration facilities.

Another example of program parameters might be to ask children to delineate the cradle-to-grave steps in manufacturing their invention and to explain how the process could be more earth-friendly. Guidelines might require the invention to use batteries, electricity, motors, or recycled materials.

As librarians build on initial successes, and learn from early mistakes, the invention convention model can be used more flexibly, or, depending on the community, may thrive on changing the annual theme and focus of the program.

## Setting the Stage

Because planning an invention convention requires a good deal of preparation, coordinated efforts among those involved will keep things running smoothly. Allow adequate lead-time to generate interest in the local media and within the community to build excitement and involvement. The librarian and relevant staff or volunteers need time to gather supplies, promote the invention convention, and develop programming goals. Allow at least six to eight weeks to plan, promote, and prepare the library setting. Create a planning calendar of at least two months' lead-time to consider the needs of putting on an invention convention:

- **Expert panel.** Line up local or regional members of the medical, scientific, manufacturing, or engineering community as possible judges and presenters to excite student interest in inventing.
- **Sponsors.** Approach local or regional medical, scientific, manufacturing, or engineering companies to ask for sponsorship for prizes or awards for “best of” categories.
- **Publicity.** Prepare press releases for local media and update the library's website, newsletter, and social networking sites to build interest and involvement.
- **Gathering recycled resources.** Visit a local recycling center and spread the word to families to clean and keep items they would usually recycle.
- **Registration.** Without a sign-up procedure, in person or online, you risk having too few or too many participants for the invention convention, causing chaos in space and material needs.
- **Recruit staff and volunteers.** Devise simple, clear criteria and tasks for volunteers, from set-up to clean-up, registration to judging. Always have at least one or two responsible teens or adults available as back-up in case of illness or schedule conflicts.

- **Invite retired professionals.** Local retirees generally enjoy the chance to participate as judges, volunteers, and experts, fostering an intergenerational environment.
- **Teachable moments.** If there is a community college or university nearby, tap the science and art faculty to help explain design concepts in pre-programming meetings with students.

Involving library staff, maintaining detailed, easily accessible plans, and keeping everyone informed of updates and changes go a long way to developing and implementing a successful invention convention.

## Space and Traffic Flow

A major consideration in hosting an invention convention is floor space and traffic flow. Enthusiasm is contagious, and children and their families will be excited about showing off their design projects. Planning for this may be a topic for a staff meeting to coordinate different responsibilities, as space may be limited and furniture moved to accommodate the event.

Think about traffic patterns in the library:

- Are there moveable display cases, tables and chairs, or soft furnishings used for usual library activities that would impede the smooth flow of people moving through a series of exhibits?
- Are there easily portable folding seats available for people to take a short break, as needed?
- Is the library providing refreshments? Setting wastebaskets and recycling bins around the exhibit area will simplify cleanup after the event.
- Consider playing light classical or ambient music in the background to create a sense of calm amid the excitement of the event.
- Does the library have space to exhibit inventions safely? Think about using display cases, tops of juvenile shelving, or areas surrounding the Circulation or Information Desks.

Library staff and volunteers are invaluable to plan adequate space and materials. Involvement helps build buy-in inside and outside the library—as long as there is a point person to coordinate these activities.

## Other Places to Help Children Create

Camp Invention and Club Invention provide opportunities to children for further exploration of the problem solving and design processes so vital to STEM critical thinking skills. Invent Now offers these programs in many communities in the United

States for first through sixth graders. Students take recycled or old items from their homes and create a new item, while also learning ideas themed around problem solving. Toshiba and the National Science Teachers Association (NSTA) sponsor Exploravision, an invention competition for elementary and middle school students. There are sample lesson plans on this website to help in creating new technologies and thinking about the consequences of the technologies. DaVinci Kids Art and Science Workshops provide science adventure and exploratory art and inventions summer camps for children in a hands-on environment.

Another event, similar to an invention convention, but perhaps more complex to run, would be to host a Rube Goldberg event. Rube Goldberg gained notoriety by taking very simple tools around the kitchen or home to make a formerly easy task very complicated. Rube Goldberg competitions encourage critical thinking and problem solving through engineering and physics. The Rube Goldberg Machine Content website encourages students to use common everyday items in new ways, incorporating humor into a series of chain-reaction steps, to accomplish a simple task. This online competition is for middle school students, and there is a national competition for high school and college students.

There are other activities and events springing up across the country to encourage children's involvements in STEM activities. Makerspaces, FabLabs,<sup>7</sup> and other community spaces are increasingly popular places for children and young adults to learn, create, and enjoy discovery and invention.

Giving STEM a more prominent place in the library supports national efforts to build children's skills and encourage creative exploration of ideas within a science framework. Librarians are in excellent positions to create and foster opportunities for collaboration between libraries, schools, businesses, and industries, which benefit the larger community. They can create an atmosphere of creativity, exploration, and excitement about STEM topics by tapping into local networks, mining information online, and exchanging ideas with colleagues at conferences. These collaborations help lay the foundation for future discoveries and inventions by America's youth.

As emphasis on STEM skills increases, more and more organizations and industries are creating partnerships and opportunities to help students to think critically, explore, design, create,

## Supplemental Reading

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invent, and apply problem-solving skills to challenges facing our planet today—and into the future. 🌱

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# Calling All Science Explorers!

## Targeting Tweens with STEM

TERRY ANN LAWLER

“. . .The United States actually ranks twenty-seventh in the world in terms of the proportion of our college students that graduate with degrees in science and engineering and math.”<sup>1</sup>

Libraries in post digital 2.0 are constantly trying to compete with Twitter, Tumblr, Facebook, and other social media to gain attention. In addition, librarians are labored to find programs that are easy and frugal. We want programs that are worth our time and energy and that of our customers’—experiences that our users will get the most out of, regardless of age or socioeconomic status.

We are also cognizant, however, of doing things that are economically prudent examples of our budget. Schools are in similar situations, with increasing pressure on teachers to bring up test scores and get into performing plus zones. All the while they are losing budget funding, closing school libraries, and crunching more than forty students into a classroom.

Added to this, states and the federal government alike are in flux with regards to how classrooms should be run, how money should be spent in schools, and what role the Common Core and other initiatives should play.

As we support our communities, savvy librarians are looking for ways to team with schools; combining our offerings compatibly to create partnerships that make sense for our students and customers. One way we already do this is through selection of the books on our shelves. Another is through our web components like databases and e-book clubs. We enhance both with mutually beneficial programming.



Building a rod and pulley.

Science programs at the library, for example, reinforce the scientific method and scientific intention and strengthen student concepts such as math, language arts, and reading comprehension. As an added bonus, they do this while being fun for students and caregivers.

Science programs are relatively inexpensive to design and run and have a high satisfaction rate among participants and presenters. They can meet state educational standards on several levels and can match initiatives like the Common Core. Science programs can be targeted to any age level from preschool through high school and give kids an opportunity to work cooperatively with children at other age and skill levels. This inter-activity builds confidence and proficiency.

Science programs teach kids to work independently as well as with a group, predicting what will happen and testing out ideas. Children can be empowered to create something entirely new, well above and beyond the outlined experiment. This kind of work allows children to develop their reasoning skills, self-esteem, and prediction abilities. Experiments allow children to learn how to document and follow direction



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independently. They also learn precise data collection, calculation, and theory development. These skills are critical if we as a nation are to compete globally in the science and technology fields when our tweens grow up and become gainfully employed.<sup>2</sup> STEM-related (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) jobs are projected to grow at nearly twice the rate of non-STEM jobs in the decade between 2008 and 2018.<sup>3</sup>

You can involve your local scientific community (college professors, science teachers, local businesses) by inviting them to present at your library on different topics, or you can present the programs yourself. You can also host a science fair and show off your tweens' work to the community. Regardless, you will find that science experiments are fun, popular, easy to do, and richly rewarding.

### Running a Partnered Program

Several years ago at our small neighborhood branch, we had a large home-schooled population who attended storytimes and teen programming. To connect with and serve this population better, I researched several library programs and brainstormed different types of connections including parent/child book clubs, early literacy workshops, and more.

The decision to hold science experiment programs was based upon the lack of availability of science programming in the local community centers and after-school programs. Research has shown that children who attend after-school programs are more likely to exhibit positive developmental outcomes and do better in school.<sup>4</sup> I wanted to help my community by giving kids an opportunity to participate in after-school learning using STEM, and I hoped to attract new patrons.

My model was to hold one program per month from January through August and reevaluate at the beginning of the school year. The idea was, as yet, untested in our community, so a monthly program model seemed prudent. In addition, we were concerned about finding enough presenters to fill all of the program slots. Our target audience was tweens, customarily ages eight to twelve. This age range is ideal for beginning an introductory program series because children are able to sit classroom style and participate as well as manipulate smaller items utilizing fine motor skills and maintain use of scissors and glue with little supervision.

I sought out speakers from outside the library to minimize impact on staff and give the children an opportunity to connect with local science leaders, thereby enhancing their awareness of our collegiate system. Each year, Arizona State University (ASU) publishes a Speakers Bureau in which all professors, associates, and staff list their names and on which subjects they are willing to speak outside the university. I sent emails to those in the science department, outlining who I was and what our library would like to do. I invited them each to come and do a science program for the series.

Table 1. Sample Program Schedule

Name	Program	Month	Contact Info
Library Staff	Intro/scientific method	January	Library Staff
Monica E.	Gravity	February	mxxxxr@asu.edu
Mike B.	Birds/Ecology	March	mxxxxr@asu.edu
Yury S.	Mummies	April	yxxxxs@asu.edu
Shane J.	Lasers & LEDs	May	sxxxxn@asu.edu

Several recipients responded almost immediately. In addition, the head of the science department and editor of the *ASU Science and Research Magazine* invited me to their campus for a meeting. Everyone who had received an email and wished to participate was present.

The college faculty was very enthusiastic and offered to help in any way they could. Many had never been asked to do programs for younger children and were very excited about the opportunity. Some were unable to participate as presenters, but offered to help in other ways, such as loaning equipment or emailing projects to me so that my staff could run an in-house program.

We talked about what the library needed, the ages of our target audience, and what, specifically, the university could offer. In a very short time, we were able to come up with a plan for the next seven months with several professors and their graduate students signed up to each present for a month.

As the children's librarian, I felt it was important to set the stage for our participants by running the first program myself. I wanted to make sure the children and caregivers knew what was expected of them.

During that first program, I introduced the scientific method to participants and created simple notebooks for each participating child with explanations of the scientific method (so they could refer back to it during subsequent programs), blank tables for recording results from experiments, and blank paper for taking notes. I also handed out copies of that month's experiment so participants could continue learning off site. I encouraged them to try other aspects of the experiment at home. See table 1 for a sample program schedule.

### Measuring Success

After several months of programming, we evaluated our program through customer and presenter surveys. Our results were very successful. Depending on the month and presentation, participation varied from six to thirty children. Though the presenters sometimes had difficulty bringing their subject to grade-school level, they made real connections with the kids. Children loved

that they were encouraged to participate and experiment on their own as well as discuss facets of the experiments as a group.

Children and parents alike found the program to be fun, entertaining, and educational. They particularly enjoyed getting to know local college professors. Quotes from our participant surveys included:

- “I loved working with the library’s children. They were so eager to learn!”
- “Thank you so much for having this wonderful program. We have been searching for an educational outlet for our son and this is the perfect match.”
- “My daughter has tried to duplicate every experiment at home. You have created a new interest in science for her.”
- “I hope you do this again next year, I had a great time!”
- “There should definitely be more science programs like this.”

## Running an In-House Program

After the success with the guest presenters, I decided to continue the program in-house for the following summer, switching to weekly frequency. The new program model included a librarian doing a short presentation of the topic including videos, PowerPoint presentations, and links to our databases. There was also a short introduction to the scientific method at each program.

I again created simple notebooks for the kids to record their experiments. After the introduction, the librarian launched into a brief description and discussion of the scientific concept involved in the experiment. The children made predictions for the experiment as a group, which were written on a board. After this, the children followed along with the instructor to complete the experiment. Children could work alone or in groups and could work ahead if they were able to follow the printed instructions. Once the experiment was near completion, the instructor would again ask the children for predictions. Children then tested out their work and discussed what happened with the instructor and each other.

I based many of our experiments on the book *How Science Works* by Judith Hann, PBS’s Fetch! with Ruff Ruffman website, and Bill Nye’s Home Demos website. I took the lead and planned experiments and gathered materials, assigning experiment days to our librarian assistants who had volunteered to help. Once our librarian assistants were comfortable with the process, they began planning and gathering their own materials.

Being very concerned about costs, we primarily used recycled materials donated by staff for many of the experiments, and our Friends group paid for the few items that we could not get

donated or that needed to be new. I planned and implemented three months of programming (thirteen programs) with supplies for more than 450 participants for less than \$100. We advertised our programs as “green,” due to the percentage of recycled materials used.

Over the summer, we had the maximum number of participants (forty) in almost every program. Even after the school year began, the programs averaged twenty to thirty attendees.

Many children followed along with the presenter during the experiments; however some worked ahead and surprised themselves with their own ingenuity. For example, when we made skydivers out of recycled plastic bags, string, and paper clips, children tested three different material weights to see which one floated best and farthest.

Several children created triple-decker skydivers or tried launching them from various heights to see if the trajectory would change. They also tried launching in front of the air duct when the air conditioner turned on to see if the airflow changed the length of time in flight.

When an experiment failed (and they sometimes do!), instead of being upset or defeated, the children were excited to figure out how they could make it work, some even coming back on later dates with their parents to report their findings to the instructor.

When running an in-house program, it’s important for the instructor to practice the program plan from start to finish at least a week before the presentation date. It is also important to anticipate some of the questions kids might have as well as planning ahead for components that might be difficult. Encourage older children who are working ahead to help younger children who are struggling. This helps kids to learn to work together as well as strengthening the concepts.

## A Sample Experiment Program Plan

A basic one-hour library science experiment program outline will consist of an overview of the scientific method (five minutes), introduction to the concept (five minutes), predictions and questions (five to ten minutes), the experiment (ten to thirty minutes), discussion (five minutes), possible reexamining or retooling to find different results (five minutes), and wrap-up (five minutes).

### Mummies Program

One program that was a big hit for us was mummies! Here is what we did.

**Supplies needed:** Laptop and projector, toilet paper, disposable drinking cups, apples, lemon juice, water, shallow bowls, salt, baking soda, and rulers.

After introducing the scientific method, we talked about what a mummy is, where mummies have been found in the world, and how they can be mummified both naturally (in wet boggy soil) and ritually (as in Egypt). We gave the children descriptions of the process that ancient Egyptians used to mummify their dead and why they used mummification. We talked about decay and bacteria and how bodies decompose (the kids loved it).

*Magic Mixture Apple Dunk*

Each child received three apple slices. Each table held a shallow bowl of water and a small cup of lemon juice. The kids put one slice in the water, dipped one in the lemon juice, and removed it and left the third slice alone. We discussed what might happen to each slice. Would they all be the same at the end of our class or different? Why?

*Mummy Video*

We showed a video ([www.ancientegypt.co.uk/mummies/home.html](http://www.ancientegypt.co.uk/mummies/home.html)) that offered a great overview of the mummification process.

*Mummy Race Activity*

The kids teamed up in groups of two, and we gave each duo a roll of toilet paper. One child was to “mummify” the other. We awarded the kids for fastest mummy, most creative mummy, and best covered mummy; winners were given paper towel roll trophies.

*Mummified Fruit Activity*

*One was prepared in advance for discussion purposes.*

Visit [www.unmuseum.org/exmum.htm](http://www.unmuseum.org/exmum.htm) for reference. Each child got two disposable drinking cups and two apple slices. We reminded the children that a body is mummified by removing most of the moisture so it is difficult for bacteria to thrive inside it and cause decay. The Egyptians did this by covering the body with natron, a desiccant that occurs in nature. Desiccants remove water from any material they touch.

We asked the kids to predict what would happen when we mummified an apple in one cup and left the other apple in the open. Children discussed and then examined the previously mummified apple. They started the experiment in the library by measuring their apples and recording in their notebooks and then covering one with a salt and baking soda mixture while leaving the second uncovered in a cup (it takes one week to mummify an apple slice this way).

At this time, the kids were directed back to their fruit slices from the beginning of class. We talked about decomposition, oxygen, and the breakdown of biological materials. Many children came back a week later to show off their mummified apple slices. Some even brought back the rotten ones.

**Table 2. Science Standard Articulated by Grade Level—Grade 3**

<b>Concept 1:</b> Observations, Questions, and Hypotheses Observe, ask questions, and make predictions.
PO 1. Formulate relevant questions about the properties of objects, organisms, and events of the environment using observations and prior knowledge. (See M03-S2C1-01)
PO 2. Predict the results of an investigation based on observed patterns, not random guessing.

Other programs that worked well for us included:

- rockets made from recycled soda bottles, straws, and clay;
- catapults made from recycled paper towel tubes, plastic spoons, and shoe boxes;
- kaleidoscopes made from recycled paper towel tubes, paper cups, and markers;
- windsocks made from magazines and crepe paper;
- hot-air balloons made from tissue paper, string, and tea-light candles; and
- s’mores solar oven made from pizza boxes and aluminum foil.

**Making the Grades**

President Obama has made STEM education a priority in his Educate to Innovate initiative. His “administration stands committed to providing students at every level with the skills they need to excel in the high-paid, highly-rewarding fields of science, technology, engineering, and math.”<sup>5</sup>

You may wish to enhance your science programming by aligning to your state’s science curriculum standards. You can locate your local science standards quickly and easily on your state’s Department of Education website or with an Internet search. There you’ll find an explanation of the standards, as well as tips on how they should be taught in the classroom.

You can match several standards in each of your programs. By doing so, you enhance the learning of your participants as well as create a higher level of respectability for your program. As you look at your state’s standards for each grade level, you will notice several common themes that may help your program achieve standards for several grade levels at once. See table 2 for an example of a State Standard.

To incorporate this standard, start with an introduction to the scientific method, the concept related to the day’s program, and guide the discussion about the topic. You might then allow the children to lead the discussion, supplementing with

questions and guiding them when they get off topic. You can then have the children state their predictions regarding the day's experiment—standard achieved in five minutes or less.

Many predesigned science experiment programs online already meet several science standards. For example, the Fetch! with Ruff Ruffman programs from PBS have a table in the resource section of the website highlighting standards met for each experiment. Most experiments meet at least three to five different standards for several grade levels.

In addition to established standards, the multistate Common Core initiative is even now being integrated into state standards across the nation. This initiative matches the Obama administration's commitment to raise educational standards.<sup>6</sup>

The Common Core standards are an attempt to bring all schools under an umbrella of standards "to provide a clear and consistent framework to prepare our children for college and the workforce."<sup>7</sup> This includes a push to bring nonfiction, or informational, books into the forefront of our nation's classrooms.

You may already have elements of the Common Core within your programming. If not, you can help your students achieve these higher standards by combining your print and electronic resources for use in your programming. Some examples include:

- Themed booklists of nonfiction books and lists of library databases related to your science topic. You can display these along with your book displays.
- Real-life relationships from your program to the world. For example, you can show short videos and online encyclopedia

articles on the Wright brothers when you do a program about paper airplanes and wind resistance.

- Relate your project to current events by searching for news articles or recent world happenings. For example, create a time line of flight from da Vinci to Felix Baumgartner, space-diving man.
- Create online library resource guides containing links posted on your website, including links to local resources and community members.
- Create a fast facts brochure on your theme and either post it on your website or print it for your students.

Science programming in the library can be a very rewarding experience for staff and tweens. Free, ready-made programs are widely available online and in print. Many of the materials you will need are easy to find, inexpensive, and "green."

Children enjoy participating in programs in which they are encouraged to find their own way and allowed to express themselves. Science programming can connect you with your community, bridging you to local businesses, colleges, and new resources. Parents are particularly enthusiastic about free educational resources for their children and may even ask for experiments they can do at home to continue the lesson.

Science programming can be tied in with your schools' standards, creating an added level of credibility to your programming. It is easy to partner with schools and teachers to create opportunities for students to participate in multiple ways. You will find that once you begin science programming, the sky's the limit! ☺

## Great Books and Websites on Science Experiments

- **Doctor Mad Science:** [www.doctormadscience.com](http://www.doctormadscience.com). Funny science photos and simple experiments that are very cheap. This website also includes videos and really well-done "how to" sections.
- **Explorabox:** [www.explorabox.org](http://www.explorabox.org). Videos, supply lists, and cool experiments like bending water all make this a great site for anyone starting out with science in the library. You can also purchase ready-made kits.
- **National Geographic Kids:** <http://kids.nationalgeographic.com/kids/activities/funscience>. A picture-based website with really cool experiments with a high "wow" factor.
- **Science Buddies:** [www.sciencebuddies.org](http://www.sciencebuddies.org). With ideas and guides and a place to ask an expert, this is a go-to site.
- **Science Made Simple:** [www.sciencemadesimple.com](http://www.sciencemadesimple.com). Hundreds of science fair experiments from the easy to the very complicated.
- **Smart First Graders:** [www.smartfirstgraders.com/science-experiments-for-kids.html](http://www.smartfirstgraders.com/science-experiments-for-kids.html). Don't be afraid to start a program for really young kids! There are lots of fun, hands-on experiments that are accessible to younger children.
- **Weird Science Kids:** [www.weirdsciencekids.com](http://www.weirdsciencekids.com). Printable logs, videos, and demonstrations make this a great site to share with your kids.
- Richard Hammond. **Super Science Lab**. DK. 2009. 96p. Fun and accessible. Tons of very simple experiments.
- Robin Kerrod and Sharon Ann Holgate. **The Way Science Works: Discover the Secrets of Science with Exciting Accessible Experiments**. DK Publishing. 2002. 160p. Easy-to-use and easy-to-read, kids will want to check this out themselves.
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## Things to Remember

For a smoothly run program:

- have an in-house backup plan if a presenter cancels;
- have supplies at the ready (including a few extras!);
- promote the event at schools, with local science teachers, and through local media;
- be prepared to turn away kids who may be too young or disruptive;
- be prepared to help instructors who may not have worked with children;
- work with teachers to offer kids extra credit in school;
- go slowly so kids can follow along and allow participants to work ahead if they want to;
- find videos and websites to share on your topic;
- don't worry if the experiment doesn't work the way it is supposed to—kids will still learn; and
- try the experiment a few days beforehand to work out kinks.

## *Children and Libraries* goes quarterly, adds digital format

Beginning with Volume 12/Spring 2014, *Children and Libraries* (CAL) will be issued quarterly and delivered in print and electronically. These modifications are in response to results of a 2011-2012 communications survey in which ALSC members expressed a preference for a quarterly journal, published digitally as well as in print.

CAL will issue in Spring (March), Summer (June), Fall (September), and Winter (December). Digital delivery will be through e-publishing host Metapress (<http://www.metapress.com/>). CAL volumes 1-11 will be digitized and available online as well. Stay tuned to [www.ala.org/alsc](http://www.ala.org/alsc) for details as they develop.

### More Communications Updates

The inaugural issue of *Everyday Advocacy Matters* was released on October 2. This quarterly electronic newsletter complements the Everyday Advocacy website ([www.ala.org/everyday-advocacy](http://www.ala.org/everyday-advocacy)), extending its resources with targeted, timely, and fun content. Each issue includes:

- From the Editor. A lighthearted welcome to each issue from the Everyday Advocacy Member Content Editor.
- Everyday Advocacy Spotlight. The "Awesome Advocate

Profile" and a seasonal feature to help focus your advocacy efforts (coming January 2014).

- News You Can Use. Reports, data, and stories to help you make the case for libraries in your community.
- Get Inspired! A "Savvy Success Story" feature highlighting the work of ALSC members just like you!
- Calendar. Key dates for learning, sharing, and making a difference through advocacy.
- Resources. Links to the Everyday Advocacy website for more tips, tools, and techniques for success!

This e-newsletter, released in January, April, July, and October, is delivered to ALSC members with an email address on file and their ALA Communications Preferences set to accept occasional information of interest from ALA. To review/update your preferences, log in as a member on the ALA site and select "Communications Preferences."

Beginning in 2014, *ALSC Matters!*, our online newsletter, will come out in February, May, August, and November. With three quarterly publications on tap in 2014, ALSC will deliver news, resources, and entertainment to members each and every month of the year.

# My First Time

## First-Timers Share Their Maiden Voyages to ALA Annual Conference

**C**hildren and Libraries Editor Sharon Verbeten corralled some first-time attendees (a few of them close friends!) to share their experiences attending their first ALA Annual Conference, joining her this past June in Chicago.

*Among them were two professionals, one paraprofessional/MLIS student, and one newly minted children's author. Enjoy their stories as you perhaps plan your own maiden voyage to an ALA event in the future!*

### Book Signings, Vendors . . . Oh My!

By Shawn D. Walsh

*Shawn D. Walsh is the emerging services and technologies librarian for Madison (OH) Public Library. Working in libraries since 1997, he was most recently the senior technology analyst for the Northeast Ohio Regional Library System. Shawn has a BS/AS in computer information systems from Youngstown State University and is pursuing a MLIS at Kent State University.*

Even though this was my first ALA conference, I have been doing technology work in libraries for sixteen years. I had visions of meeting with vendors, reconnecting with librarian friends, and salivating over new library technologies.

Instead, I had the TSA getting befuddled by my carry-on luggage having a top hat in it, getting into a ribbon collecting contest with the coworker whom I was traveling with, and discovering how many librarians used their conference-issued tote bag to carry their stuff around as they visited Chicago sites on their downtime! And furthermore, nothing prepared me, even the warning of my travel companion, for the “running of the librarians” that occurred when the exhibits opened.



Shawn Walsh gets into the spirit of the evening at the Newbery-Caldecott-Wilder Banquet.

Seriously, I loved meeting people, old friends and new, at the conference. I saw a bunch of librarians from my home state of Ohio whom I never seem to see even though we work and live only about an hour apart. With all the thousands of people at ALA, I hadn't really counted on making new friends or contacts. I made new friends standing in lines. I made new friends through my colleague who has been to a number of ALA conferences. I even made what my colleague called a bus friend—someone you meet on the conference bus and start talking to and ultimately exchange business cards with.

I spent most of my time in the exhibits. I was talking to vendors and taking pictures of cool new equipment I want for my library. I looked at book and DVD vending machines and equipment to lend laptops and e-readers. I found things you could attach to bookshelf end caps to make each a LEGO board. I just happened to find the 501st legion (Star Wars Reenactors) at a book vendor booth. I took a picture with them to send to my wife and best friend who both love Star Wars as much as I do.

I stood in line with my colleague who had to get books signed by Tom Angleberger and Scott Seeger and even got some things signed myself. I had a moment of shock when I came face-to-face with the book I had written a chapter for at a vendor booth.

I realized conclusively that this book I contributed to exists in the wild and not just on my shelf at home!

My colleague, and traveling companion, was at ALA to finish her committee work with the Caldecott Medal 75th Anniversary Task Force. As it seems in most library-related things, that meant when they needed some extra help, I was happily drafted. So not only was it my first ALA, but my first Newbery-Caldecott banquet. I was told I had to wear a top hat because this was an especially glamorous event this year. I felt like I was attending the library Oscars or something. The whole banquet experience was amazing. I even got to use some of my geek knowledge to help people use Twitter on their phones for the first time so they could see the tweeted out answers to the Caldecott Bingo game.

I would love to return to another ALA conference. This was so different from my experiences attending PLA or Computers in Libraries conferences. Unfortunately, I know an opportunity to

attend again will only happen if it's a financial possibility for my library, as it was this year. After meeting so many people and hearing about their ALA experience,s which almost always included committee work, now I want to serve on a committee. It seems like a lot of fun and a great way to meet librarians from across the country.

I have few regrets about this conference other than it seemed like the time went amazingly fast. Even though I missed a friend's Emerging Leaders poster session because the conference buses passed me twice waiting on the corner, it made a great story to tell. There were tons more sessions I wanted to attend than I had time for. I wish I could have spent more time doing tourist things in Chicago, but I'm lucky I could be gone for as long as I did.

I returned to my library with so many ideas to try and new experiences to share that I may have overwhelmed my director and other colleagues. Oh well, nothing really new about that!

## Children's Author Gains Valuable Connections

By Miranda Paul

*Miranda Paul is a freelance writer and children's book author from Green Bay, Wisconsin. She has written more than sixty short stories and interactive early readers for digital app companies, and her nonfiction and poetry for kids has been published in children's magazines. She is the founder of RateYourStory.org and the author of two picturebooks forthcoming in 2015: One Plastic Bag (Millbrook Press/Lerner Publishing)and Water is Water (Neal Porter Books/Roaring Brook Press).*

As a fairly new children's book author, I didn't know what to expect when I signed up to attend the 2013 ALA Annual Conference in Chicago. During online registration, the website asked me to list my "company" or "organization." I wasn't going to list my publishers because I'm not actually employed by them, nor were they mandating or endorsing my travel to the conference. But if I was required to put something in the company name, it occurred to me that attending as an individual must be rare. If going to ALA alone was unusual, would a big event for librarians even be worthwhile for me?

I asked a few author friends if they'd ever attended. To my surprise, a few said they've been attending on and off for years. Some began gushing about past experiences. Their repeated attendance and general enthusiasm was all the referral I probably needed, but the additional buzz surrounding the 75th anniversary of the Caldecott and the close-to-home location lured me to a point where, who was I kidding? I was in.

As it turns out, actually getting to conference events provided the weekend's biggest adventures. Traffic jams, George Lucas's concurrent downtown wedding, and having to play



Miranda Paul, left, enjoyed meeting one of her children's book colleagues Laura Vaccaro Seeger at ALA.

emergency subway hero for an epileptic passenger thwarted my attempts at arriving on time. Perhaps Chicago was simply preparing me for the tortoise-like pace of exhibit hall traffic, the hundred-events-all-happening-at-the-same-time flurry, or autograph lines that stretched toward oblivion.

Joking and complaining aside, here's why I'll attend the next conference in a heartbeat—everyone was focused on great books, the children who need them, and how to get those books into those children's hands.

At several writing retreats and conferences, I've noticed that "getting published" or even "industry news" might dominate conversation or fuel attendees' motivation. While the particulars of selling and promoting one's own books are valid topics, they're generally inwardly-focused.

At ALA, however, the librarians, teens, editors, and authors I spoke with were vibrant and passionate about books, literacy,

imagination, and possibility. From the chatter on the conference bus to the online reviewers zipping around collecting advanced reading copies, to speakers at the Caldecott/Newbery/Wilder Banquet, the enthusiasm of making and sharing great books with young readers was electric.

I asked one college student who had scored nearly one hundred free books how many she would actually read and review. “All of them,” she assured me—and I believe her.

I think Katherine Applegate’s award acceptance speech punctuated this outwardly-focused mind-set in the way she described children’s books and children themselves. In her speech, she said something to the effects of, “What makes children . . . better people than the rest of us is that, despite everything, they’re buoyant, unrepentant optimists.” She exalted the librarians in the room as well, reminding us all that “Every time you find the right, the necessary, book for a child—a book about sadness overcome, unfairness battled, hearts mended—you perform the best kind of magic.”

As children’s book authors, my colleagues and I strive to write those right, necessary books for kids. It can be a lonely business, as I was reminded when I first signed up to attend as a rare “individual.” But that notion fizzled quickly when I got to meet one of my editors in person for the first time, and again when I was greeted like an old friend by a librarian I had met just an hour earlier, and yet again each time I connected with another author or reader. The exhibit hall, crazy as it seemed, filled me with a sense of community and reassurance that children’s books, especially picturebooks, are alive and well.

Over the course of a weekend, ALA challenged my idea of the “isolated writer.” I came home inspired. There’s not some small group out there cheering on the future of kids’ books, but a massive force of library magicians performing the best kind of magic in the world: getting amazing books into the hands—and hearts—of children.

For me, that’s all the reason I need to return.

## Deals Make First-Time Trip Doable

By Karin Adams

*Karin Adams is a Librarian at Racine (WI) Public Library.*

As a recent MLIS graduate from UW-Milwaukee and in my first full-time, professional librarian job at the Racine Public Library (RPL), I was certainly excited for my first ALA conference experience, both personally and professionally. I had heard many great things about the conference from past and current coworkers, and since the conference was held in Chicago this year, a mere hour from Racine, I made it a priority to attend.

RPL is part of the greater Lakeshores Library System, which provided bus transportation to the exhibits on Saturday. Our library director offered transportation paid by the library for any employee interested in attending.

Additionally, Racine uses the OverDrive system for digital device check-outs. We received an email from OverDrive offering a link to a free exhibit-only pass for the ALA Annual Conference; you just had to preregister using their link. These two offers made it possible for me to attend the conference for a day.

I have to admit, I did not do much prep-work for this convention. I knew how I was getting there, and I knew there would a



Karin Adams shows off some of her “swag” from ALA.

lot to see, making it a tiring day, but I did not research the floor map or author signing times beforehand. Basically, I really did not know what I was walking into.

The bus transportation was great; we were dropped off at the convention center, given a meeting time and place, and set free. I met up with past coworkers immediately and hit the floor running. We began in the aisles of children’s book publishers, because that was our professional interest, and it was by far the busiest area.

As I started down the first aisle, I was overwhelmed by the amount of books, bookmarks, bags, and other swag being handed out/grabbed. I, unfortunately, became loaded down by free advanced copies of books pretty quickly since I just took everything that came my way—big mistake, as I was only about five booths

into the day! After slowing down a bit and paying more attention to what was being given out, we spent the next couple hours getting through the booths before breaking for lunch.

Over a lunch break, we scoured the exhibit information, scoping out what booths we wanted to get to and what authors we’d like to meet and greet. The afternoon was much more time-focused as we traveled from the adult/technology area to certain author signings. Even with our little bit of “pre-scheduling,” I ended up missing some of the key authors I would have liked to meet, including Lois Lowry, Veronica Roth, and Susan Beth Pfeffer.

I didn't realize that Roth was a ticket-only author signing, and the lines at the other two authors were so long, they had to cut them off before their scheduled time limit, so I missed out. I did, however, get to meet Cece Bell, Leonard Marcus, Helen Frost, and Sarah Dessen, who were all delightful. I also stopped by a few interesting tech booths, gathered plenty of good information, and made some notable contacts for the future.

It was a long day of library excitement. My favorite part by far was meeting/seeing the authors of some of my favorite

books. But I also gathered some book club ideas for the upcoming school year and programming ideas for adults and children and learned about some vendors our library may use in the future.

I have definitely learned my lesson and will research the authors and exhibit information before attending this conference again! I would also like the chance to spend more than one day at the conference, attend some of the workshops or banquets, and not feel so rushed to see everything in just one day.

## Five Tips from a First-Timer

By Rebecca Phillips

*Rebecca Phillips is a paraprofessional working in the Brown County Public Library system in Green Bay, Wisconsin, for the past twelve years. She will graduate in December with her MLIS degree from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.*

Attending ALA Annual Conference was a personal goal I set for myself last year. It was such a richly rewarding experience that I can't wait to share my top five lessons learned as a first-timer.

**1. Be Thrifty.** I'm entirely certain had the conference been a plane ride away instead of a train ride, no amount of magical persuasive powers could have outmatched the power of the library pocketbook. Noting that thin pocketbook, I set out to spend frugally—a concept not entirely foreign to me as a student. Saving a bundle with student registration and a scholarship, I also had a colleague of mine ask a former colleague of hers to see if anyone she knew wouldn't mind a roommate. I was lucky enough to find three librarians who were willing to share their space with a stranger.

**2. Be Up for Anything.** Rooming with strangers was an adventure waiting to happen. When I arrived in Chicago, I was pleased to meet three fabulous ladies who were happy to show me the conference ropes. Was I surprised when those ropes led me to an underground librarian dance party? Absolutely, but I put on my dancing shoes and said, "Let's go." If I hadn't, I would have missed Holly Black, Libba Bray, and Paolo Bacigalupi—all who were dancing the night away with us. My roomies did warn me, though, that first-timers rarely get to see this side of ALA, which simultaneously made me feel privileged and guilty. My motto? Dance parties for everyone!

**3. Try to Control Yourself.** At breakfast the next day, my roommates tried to advise me to use discretion in the exhibit hall. Having no idea what I was in for, I took their advice like a novice, "Yeah. Uh-huh. No problem." Big problem! When 9 a.m. hit, I entered the exhibit hall for the first time. By 10:15 a.m., my arms were loaded with thirty pounds of books and swag. I couldn't stop



Rebecca Phillips with just some of the many book galleys and advanced reading copies she shipped home.

myself. FREE books. Free-get-them-before-the-general-public-books! I challenge anyone to remain reasonable and "discretionary" in the face of such wonder. It was then I discovered the real lesson: The United States Postal Service. Of course, I didn't get far enough in the exhibit hall that first time to see that there was a USPS right there in the hall, so I shipped (expensively) my first box FedEx. After that, I shipped the next three (eek!) USPS.

**4. Pick a Program Already.** I was overwhelmed by the amount of programs and thankful I used the online conference scheduler to weed some out. However, when I arrived I received a big thick book full of the programs, and I began second-guessing my choices. I knew I couldn't make a bad choice though, and if I did, I could always get up and go to something else. I learned about emerging technologies in New York and homeless assistance in San Francisco. The best session was an open committee meeting discussing book award selection.

New life goal: get on a committee!

**5: Attend a Banquet . . . Even if You're Crashing It.** As a student, and on the aforementioned tight budget, I elected not to purchase a ticket to the Newbery-Caldecott Banquet. Well, imagine my surprise when I learned after the dinner, ALSC opened up the event to those who wanted to listen to the speeches—for free! Attending may have been the single best thing I did at ALA. It was like being among library royalty, even more so because of the 75th anniversary Caldecott celebration. Serendipitously, I sat next to the same professor for whom I had just completed a juvenile literature class that dealt heavily with children's book awards. What a unique experience to be able to discuss the speeches and selections in real time, both of us commenting on the authors and books. For a first-time attendee, it was simply an amazing experience.

As fall approaches and the crazy summer influx ebbs, I hope to pitch new program ideas (book club in a bar? Yes, please!) and reconnect with vendors. I know that my library can expand and enhance their services through the knowledge I've acquired. Now to get out there and make it happen! 🐾



# Everyday Advocacy

## The Many Seasons of Advocacy

### A Calendar of Ideas for Championing Libraries in Your Community

JENNA NEMEC-LOISE

*Everyday Advocacy empowers ALSC members to embrace their roles as library advocates by focusing on their daily efforts to serve youth and families. Each lighthearted column features easy-to-implement strategies and techniques for asserting the transformative power of libraries both within communities and beyond them. Contact the ALSC Advocacy and Legislation Committee with comments and ideas for future topics.*

As you scurry away the last of the Thanksgiving leftovers and get ready to tackle your next holiday to-do list, I'm counting on your festive spirit while I challenge you to a friendly game of word association. That's the one where I say a word, and then you say the first thing that pops into your head. Ready?

Winter.

I'll use my imagination and guess you said snow.

If the glorious white stuff falls where you live, I'll bet you also thought about mittens, boots, and steaming mugs of hot chocolate (with lots of marshmallows, I hope!).

If not, perhaps you still pictured that jolly fellow at the North Pole who's most certainly making his list and checking it twice right about now.

Let's try another word: Spring.

Did you say flowers? Or maybe it was rain showers, chirping birds, green grass, warmer temperatures, and that lovely notion of a break.

Were we to follow suit with the words "summer" and "fall," I predict your associations would come just as easily.

But if I switched up the game and said "advocacy" instead, I'm pretty sure I'd get radio silence and your furrowed brow.

Well, don't worry. I'm not about to let you sit back quietly while Mother Nature has all the fun! Here's what I'm thinking:

What if we extended our Everyday Advocacy efforts—those great things we're already doing to champion libraries in our daily work with youth and families—into a seasonal approach that capitalizes on the ready-made opportunities built into the year?

It's not as crazy or as complicated as it sounds. The seasons themselves are fun and familiar, right? So use them as a framework for your 2014 advocacy efforts. In no time, Everyday Advocacy will come as naturally as winter, spring, summer, and fall.

Time to play word association, advocacy edition!



**Jenna Nemec-Loise** is a relationship architect, community builder, teen advocate, and early childhood specialist living in Chicago. She is Member Content Editor of the ALSC Everyday Advocacy Website and Everyday Advocacy Matters electronic newsletter and a current member of the ALSC Advocacy and Legislation Committee. Please send ideas for future Everyday Advocacy columns to Jenna at [everyday-advocacy@hotmail.com](mailto:everyday-advocacy@hotmail.com).

## Winter

- **Library impact statements (December).** As you talk with parents and caregivers about holiday plans and traditions, ask if they'd also be willing to share personal stories about how the library has made a difference in their lives. A diverse collection of impact statements can help you make a powerful case for your library at the local, state, or national level.
- **ALA Midwinter Meeting (January 24–28, 2014).** If you'll be in Philadelphia, stop by the ALSC All Committee Meeting on Sunday morning to hear the latest from the association's eight child advocacy committees. Why not get involved by filling out a volunteer form while you're there? (Visit the ALSC Committee page at [www.ala.org/alsc/aboutalsc/coms](http://www.ala.org/alsc/aboutalsc/coms) for more details.)
- **Love Your Library Month (February).** Don't let Cupid steal the show! Throughout February, invite children, families, and community stakeholders to create special valentines expressing their love for your library. Hearts are sure to melt when you share these tokens with library administrators or local policy makers.

## Spring

- **Teen Tech Week (March 9–15, 2014).** Wait, isn't this a YALSA thing? You bet it is! Connect with your colleagues serving teens to find out how they're advocating for the critical role of libraries as technology educators. Check out the YALSA blog ([yalsa.ala.org/blog](http://yalsa.ala.org/blog)) for new ideas to adapt in your work with the younger set. Joint programming ideas, anyone?
- **El día de los niños/El día de los libros (April 30).** Coordinate a neighborhood event for Children's Day/Book Day, an annual celebration advocating literacy for all children, regardless of linguistic or cultural background. Snap up this opportunity to cultivate partnerships with local schools, businesses, and community organizations. (Visit the Día page at [dia.ala.org](http://dia.ala.org) for more details.)
- **National Library Legislative Day (May).** Bring your voice to Washington, D.C., for this annual advocacy event! After a day of briefing, you'll attend meetings on Capitol Hill with staff members of US Senators and Representatives willing to hear your input on key pieces of legislation affecting your local library.

## Summer

- **Summer Reading Program (June and July).** Children's librarians shine throughout the year, but we positively dazzle during the summer. Show off all the amazing ways you enrich the lives of youth and families by inviting library administra-

tors and board members (or maybe even your alderman and the mayor) to see you in action during a program or event. Make a lasting impression by sending handwritten thank-you notes to your visitors.

- **District Days (August).** While policymakers are back in their home districts, invite them to the library to see firsthand all the ways you're working to improve outcomes for youth and families. This is a great time for policymakers to hear testimony from their constituents, but don't forget to share those impact statements and valentines you collected during the winter, too!

## Fall

- **Library Card Sign-Up Month (September).** As the new school year starts, arrange visits to classrooms and faculty or PTA meetings to build excitement about the benefits of library card ownership. Connecting with kids, parents, and teachers does more than get everyone a library card—it sets a positive tone for the year ahead and creates a fun association between you and the library.
- **Character parade (October).** Instead of a standard Halloween party, host a fall parade of children's book characters! Ask families to dress as their favorites, making sure each child and adult has a copy of “his” or “her” title to complete the ensemble. Wrangle a colleague to take photos and collect signed release forms so you can literally create a picture of your library for stakeholders.
- **Gratitude wall (November).** In honor of Thanksgiving, designate a Gratitude Wall in your children's area. Pass out sticky notes and colored pencils so kids and adults can write down all the reasons they're thankful for the library and post them on the wall. As 2015 budgets are being finalized, this simple project is a powerful way to advocate the role of libraries in building strong communities.

So this all sounds pretty fun and doable, doesn't it? Of course, many of these ideas are hardly original. In fact, I'll bet you're already incorporating some of them into your current work with youth and families. (See how awesome you are?)

As you look ahead to 2014, visit the ALSC Everyday Advocacy Website at [www.ala.org/everyday-advocacy](http://www.ala.org/everyday-advocacy) for even more ways to learn, share, and make a difference in your library community.

And while I'm sure you'd much rather have visions of sugar-plums dancing in your head during the holidays, I still hope you'll keep this in mind:

’Tis the season for advocacy—all year long! 🍂

## ALSC Board Actions

The ALSC Board of Directors occasionally holds online Board meetings via ALA Connect at <http://connect.ala.org/node/64109>. Notifications of online meetings are announced in advance on the [ALSCBOARD@ala.org](mailto:ALSCBOARD@ala.org) electronic discussion list. Below are recent actions taken by the board.

Approved, the Emerging Leaders proposal—Count It Up: Advocating for Access with the Youth Library Services Calculator. (September 2013)

Approved, providing a letter of support for the Space Science Institute in their bid to the National Science Foundation for support to coordinate a national conference about STEM programming in libraries. (September 2013)

Selected, Robyn Mutnick as nominee to represent ALSC/ALA on the USBBY Board. (September 2013)

## Save the Date

The 2014 Arbuthnot Honor Lecture, to be delivered by author Andrea Davis Pinkney, vice president and editor at large of Scholastic's Trade Books, will be held on Saturday, May 3, and hosted by University of Minnesota Children's Literature Research Collections. Ticket information will be posted at [www.ala.org/alsc](http://www.ala.org/alsc) in early 2014.

## Gold Sponsors Support Banquet

Many thanks to the 2013 Newbery/Caldecott/Wilder Banquet Gold Sponsors.

HarperCollins Children's Books  
Little, Brown Books for Young Readers

## Notification of Proposed Bylaw Change

At the 2013 Annual Conference, the ALSC Board accepted recommended language (additions/changes in bold) from the Organization and Bylaws Committee, regarding Bylaw V, Sec. 3, to appear on the spring 2014 ALSC Ballot for member vote:

In the event that the office of president becomes vacant, the vice-president shall become president and shall continue to fulfill the duties of the vice-president until the results of the next election are certified. In the event that the office of vice-president becomes vacant, the Board of Directors shall elect from among its members in the second or third year of service a person to assume the responsibilities of vice-president and succeed to the presidency. In the event that the office of fiscal officer becomes vacant,

the Board of Directors shall elect from among its members in the second or third year of service a person to assume the responsibilities of fiscal officer for the remainder of the three-year term. **In the event that the office of ALA/ALSC councilor becomes vacant, the Board of Directors shall elect from among its members in the second or third year of service a person to assume the responsibilities of ALA/ALSC councilor for the remainder of the three-year term. Due to the unique nature of the position, the New-to-ALSC director shall be excluded from eligibility for interim appointments.**

Ballots will go out to members in March 2014.

## 2014 Slate of Candidates

Looking for the slate for next spring's election? Find it online at: <http://www.ala.org/alsc/aboutalsc/governance/election>.

In order to dedicate more space in *Children and Libraries* to substantive and relevant articles, the ALSC News section is being reduced. News from the division, as always, is still available through *ALSC Matters!*, ALSC blog, and other timely modes of delivery. ☺

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## Grant Money to Support Literacy Projects, Research

The Dollar General Literacy Foundation has awarded a Youth Literacy grant in the amount of \$246,806 to ALSC and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA). ALSC and YALSA will use the grant to support three important initiatives, El día de los niños/El día de los libros (Children's Day/Book Day), Teen Read Week™, and summer reading for teens.

“The El día de los niños/El día de los libros (Children's Day/Book Day) initiative is committed to introducing families to community resources that provide opportunities for learning through multiple literacies,” said Starr Latronica, ALSC president. “The Dollar General Literacy Foundation's continued support of this initiative is invaluable to libraries across the country.”

“Summer reading and Teen Read Week™ are valuable tools used by libraries all over the country to support teen literacy efforts,” said YALSA President Shannon Peterson. “YALSA is thrilled to have the Dollar General Literacy Foundation continuing to support these important efforts.”

ALSC and the Public Library Association (PLA) have received

a three-year National Leadership Project Grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS). The \$499,741 grant will be used to support “Bringing Home Early Literacy: Determining the Impact of Library Programming on Parent Behavior,” a research project that will examine how early literacy programming offered by public libraries affects parent behavior and engagement during their children's most formative years.

Objectives of this project are to further establish and advance the valuable role of public libraries as partners in early literacy and community learning and to provide critically needed research on the impact of parent/caregiver intervention in young children's reading success.

The project will use the Every Child Ready to Read® @ your library® Second Edition (ECRR2) as the parent education model to study. Because ECRR2 promotes a common set of goals and program content for libraries, use of this model will ensure consistency in the study. Susan Neuman, EdD, a professor specializing in early literacy development at the University of Michigan and at New York University, will lead the research throughout the three years.

# THE LAST WORD

## Wonderful Anarchy. . . Or, the Rewards of Being a Librarian

Marybeth C. Kozikowski

Inspiration strikes in the most unlikely places. It happened in the middle of “Keyboarding Kids,” my program for fourth- and fifth-graders. This is the third time my department has offered it, and I thought all the details had been ironed out. But working with children, as we all know, reveals something new and unexpected no matter how many times we have offered a program before.

Each week is carefully planned, but we were ahead of schedule one day, and I needed to fill the last few minutes. I also wanted the kids’ last impression of the class to be positive enough to make them want to come back the next week. I improvised and declared the last few minutes as free play, directing the kids to choose the game or practice lesson they liked the most from the current or past week’s session. Some chose the previous week’s penguin game, others stayed with games from the current session. A few others opened Microsoft Word. I soon noticed the children who were in Word were playing with font sizes and colors, not really focusing on keyboarding. *How do I get them back?*

Inspiration came when I offered one Word-playing girl a typing challenge: “Can you type this word made up from keys we’ve already learned?” Words like: dad, less, flash. It worked. Not only did she type “d-a-d,” but several other children were

listening and joined in. “I did it! Give me another word,” one said. As I wracked my brain for more words, they typed. And I felt that unmistakable tingle of a great idea. The next day, I

revised the program master plan to include a typing challenge at the end of each session.

What I’m left with is a renewed appreciation for the wonderful anarchy that is often part of the creative process and a love for the children who challenge us, as librarians, to be more responsive and flexible: Our reward is inspiration.

And what could be more satisfying than to be inspired in one’s work? It’s the daily revelation of something new and exciting—the thrill of feeling

the tingle of a great idea—that makes librarianship a fascinating, rewarding profession.



**Marybeth Kozikowski** is a children's librarian at Sachem Public Library in Holbrook, New York.

Got a great, lighthearted essay? A funny story about children and libraries? Books and babies? Pets and picture books? A not-so-serious look at the world of children’s librarianship? Send your Last Word to Sharon Verbeten at [CALeditor@yahoo.com](mailto:CALeditor@yahoo.com).