

# Move, Play, Read!

When the pandemic shut down many libraries in spring 2020, children's librarians had to be creative to fill the void when most in-person programming stopped. In this collection of articles, librarians used everything from outside activities (like storywalks) to motion and movement programs to engage children. See how they helped students move, play, and read!—*Editor*

## Libraries for the Whole Child

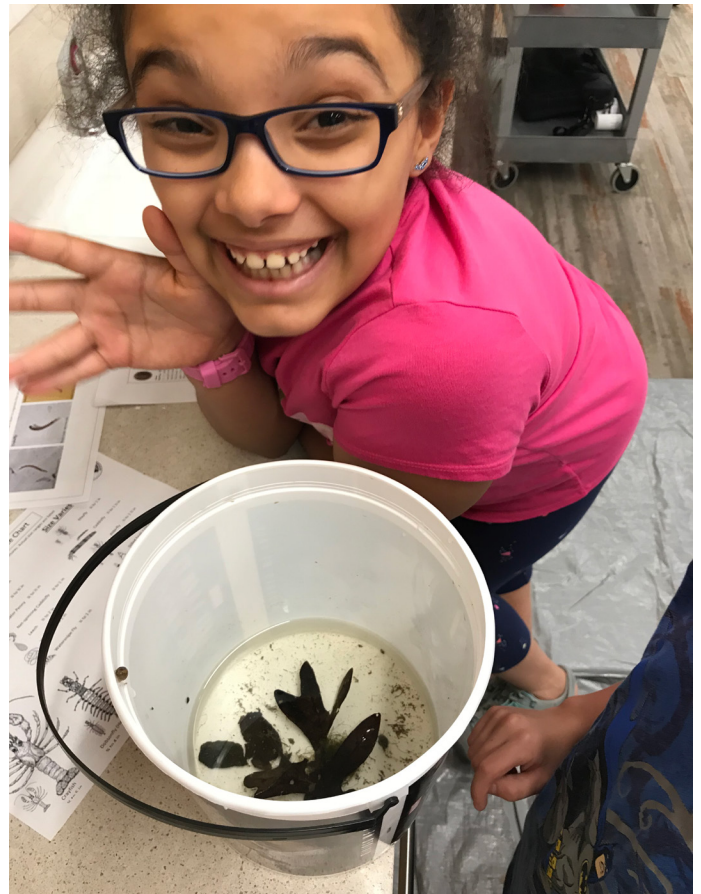
NOAH LENSTRA

*Dr. Noah Lenstra started Let's Move in Libraries in 2016 at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro's School of Education, where he is an Assistant Professor of library and information science. His book Healthy Living at the Library was published in 2020 by Libraries Unlimited.*

Across the decades, physical activity in children's library programming has been a mainstay. *The Evolution of Early Literacy: A History of Best Practices in Storytimes*, published in a previous issue of this journal, points out that, in 1950s Newark, New Jersey, one of the stated outcomes of the library's story hour was "learning dances."<sup>1</sup>

The first edition of *Library Programs: How to Select, Plan and Produce Them*, published by New York public librarians John S. Robotham and Lydia LaFleur in 1976, features an entire section on dance programs. The authors note

sometimes a program demonstrating dances will end with the audience being urged to participate. And dances are held in libraries just to have a dance. That most frequently happens with young adult programs, and it seems to



A child smiles when she sees a snail in a water sample.  
Photo courtesy Kelly Senser, Loudoun County Public Library.

be worldwide. A library in Sweden held a dance as part of a Sunday evening youth program. A German library had 'dancing among the bookshelves.' . . . The Plainfield (N.J.) Public Library held a square dance for children and their parents.<sup>2</sup>

Beyond dancing, public librarians have over the years sought to foster interest in sports and active recreation. Susan Orlean notes in *The Library Book* that in the 1890s, Los Angeles city librarian Tessa Kelso "hoped the library could expand and begin loaning more than books; she pictured a storeroom of tennis racquets, footballs ... 'the whole paraphernalia of healthy, wholesome amusement that is out of the reach of the average boy and girl.'"<sup>3</sup>

What is new is increasing sophistication about how and why to encourage this physical activity in libraries. In an earlier age, we might take a dance break to get out our wiggles; today we have entire books published by the American Library Association focused on how to *Get Your Community Moving* [through] *Physical Literacy Programs for All Ages*, (written by library leader Jenn Carson, featured below); *Connecting*

*Preschoolers with Books through Art, Games, Movement, Music, Playacting, and Props; Creating Playful Storytimes with Yoga and Movement; and Move, Play, Learn: Interactive Storytimes with Music, Movement, and More.*<sup>4</sup> What perhaps was a storytime extra in the past is now increasingly the main event.

With the explosive growth of StoryWalk programs, a worldwide phenomenon started by retired public health educator Anne Ferguson in collaboration with Vermont’s Kellogg-Hubbard Library and the Vermont Bicycle and Pedestrian Coalition in 2007,<sup>5</sup> librarians have increasingly focused their programming energies outside of the library building. Increasing interest in active play spurred by Every Child Ready to Read (ECRR) has further spread these flames.

As part of outdoor summer Anji Play programs at the Madison (WI) Public Library, librarians note, “Another really common play pattern, especially in Anji Play, is leaping, flying off of tall things.”<sup>6</sup> As we continue to take our programs outside during the COVID-19 pandemic, we also strive to incorporate the natural world into programming.

This article sets out to raise awareness of the myriad ways in which children’s librarians support the whole child through programs and collections. Let’s hear from public librarians across North America to stretch our minds about how libraries support healthy child and family development.

One thing we hear throughout *all* of these vignettes is the importance of partnerships. Libraries serve the whole child by working with the whole community. The more you and your staff are out in the community the better able you are to do these types of programs.

*“When the whole family moves together . . . families absorb the idea that libraries are spaces for holistic child and family development.”*

Another related theme focuses on utilizing all available spaces. The first three vignettes focus on programs that take place outdoors. We then hear about a library that merges indoor and outdoor spaces, before we consider what can be done indoors, both inside the library and through outreach programming. The key thing is, “Leave no stone unturned!”

Given the increasing ubiquity of music and movement programming in public libraries, we thought it would be good to look at two different approaches, one from a small town in the Midwest and another from an urban library system on the East Coast that serves half a million residents.

We also hear discussion of this programming as family programming. Given the rapid rise and interest in family



Create the scenery of your family trip to the zoo through yoga!  
Photo courtesy Christy Dyson, Fulton County Library System.

programming in public libraries, it is worth thinking about and discussing the importance of fostering movement and physical literacy not only among children, but also among their caregivers. When the whole family moves together in library programs, whether they be StoryWalk or yoga storytime or kite-flying programs, families absorb the idea that libraries are spaces for holistic child and family development.

Finally, we’ve heard many examples of librarians pivoting and adjusting to the COVID-19 pandemic, struggling and succeeding in engaging and supporting the whole child/family during these difficult times.

In 2016, I started the Let’s Move in Libraries! initiative to fan the flames of this type of programming. The members of our advisory board featured in this article demonstrate some of the myriad ways children’s librarians engage their communities to increase access to lifelong learning opportunities. We invite you to share with us your story at <https://letsmovelibraries.org/share-your-story>.

## References

1. Meagan Albright, Kevin Delecki, and Sarah Hinkle, “The Evolution of Early Literacy.” *Children & Libraries* 7, no. 1 (2009): 14.
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3. Susan Orlean, *The Library Book* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2019): 127.
4. Jenn Carson, *Get Your Community Moving: Physical Literacy Programs for All Ages* (Chicago: ALA Editions, 2018); Julie Dietzel-Glair, *Books in Motion: Connecting Preschoolers with Books through Art, Games, Movement, Music,*



A Gorham family incorporates suggested movements while enjoying the StoryWalk; note this was photographed prior to the outdoor mask mandate in the area.

Photo courtesy Heidi Whelan, Baxter Memorial Library.

- Playacting, and Props* (Chicago: ALA Editions, 2013); Katie Scherrer, *Stories, Songs, and Stretches!: Creating Playful Storytimes with Yoga and Movement* (Chicago: ALA Editions, 2017); Alyssa Jewell, *Move, Play, Learn: Interactive Storytimes with Music, Movement, and More* (Chicago: ALA Editions, 2019).
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## A COVID-19 StoryWalk

### HEIDI WHELAN

**Heidi Whelan** is Youth Services Librarian at Baxter Memorial Library in Gorham, Maine. She has a bachelor's degree in LIS from the University of Maine at Augusta and is currently enrolled in the MLIS program at Kent State.

"If you build it, they will come" was the thinking behind Baxter Memorial Library's (Gorham, Maine) newest project, *The Maine Birthday Book* StoryWalk.



Family fun on *The Maine Birthday Book* StoryWalk in Gorham, Maine.

Photo courtesy Heidi Whelan, Baxter Memorial Library.

I had wanted to build a StoryWalk for a few years, but the timing was never quite right. During the COVID-19 pandemic, I thought, "If not now, then when?" With businesses, libraries, and schools being closed or operating under strict constraints, now seemed the perfect time to offer a StoryWalk as a way for families to explore early literacy and movement in nature.

StoryWalks are amazing free community resources that foster children's interest in reading, while also encouraging healthy outdoor activities. By spending time together, families strengthen their caregiver-child bond by creating memorable experiences through reading and movement activities.

My goal was to build a permanent StoryWalk with durable signage in a beautiful location. I started by choosing a book, ideally one of interest to families with kids ages toddler to age 10. I chose *The Maine Birthday Book*.

Collaboration was key in completing our StoryWalk. Everyone I approached was enthusiastic and happy to participate. Author Tonya Shevenell gave us digital files of her book to use in our sign design. Cindy Hazelton, director of Gorham Parks and Recreation, oversaw the StoryWalk installation. Shaw Brothers Construction agreed to let us use their nature path and built the sign plates and posts. Library Assistant Jeffrey Knox taught himself InDesign so he could translate my paper designs into digital designs for the sign production. I also

received a grant from the Maine Bicentennial Committee to fund all this work.

At our ribbon-cutting event in September 2020, I saw all the families I've missed since we've switched to digital programming. It was so wonderful to see the families enjoying the StoryWalk. I can't believe I waited so long to build one. It wasn't easy, but it definitely was worth it!

## Go Fly a Kite!

JENN CARSON

*Jenn Carson is a professional yoga teacher and the director of the L.P. Fisher Public Library in Woodstock, New Brunswick, Canada. She is the award-winning author of Get Your Community Moving: Physical Literacy Programs for All Ages and Yoga and Meditation at the Library: A Practical Guide for Librarians. She was a 2019 Library Journal Mover & Shaker for her physical literacy advocacy.*

More than a decade ago, I discovered that communicating and relating with people, especially young children and those with sensory processing issues, was often more productive when done through movement rather than through words.

I began exploring something I later learned was called *physical literacy*, the ability of the body to “read” the environment and interpret symbols and physical or emotional inputs through the sensory system, as opposed to through the symbols and perceived meaning derived from words—either spoken or written. The library became both my training ground and research laboratory for testing out which movement-based, hands-on programs were most effective at reaching audiences that might otherwise be less engaged with more traditional library offerings.

Today I am a well-known author and researcher of all things to do with movement and wellness in a library. I'd like to introduce you to a recent program I implemented at the L.P. Fisher Public Library in Woodstock, New Brunswick, Canada, where I am the director.

I'm always on the lookout for new materials to add to our collections to help support physical literacy, from yoga mats to snowshoes to board games and puzzles that challenge fine-motor skills. So, when my friend Leland Wong-Daugherty, creator of Little Cloud Kites, approached me about the possibility of having some kite programming at the library, a fabulous community partnership was born.

Leland generously donated six organic-cotton, wood-framed kites, complete with quivers (a shoulder bag for carrying the kite) and spools with hemp string. Together we designed a laminated instruction card to include with each kit, and I had it translated into French (we live in a bilingual province). The kite kits were cataloged, and we decided on a three-week



Jenn, left, carries the kites in their quivers while a patron and Leland, right, prepare for an afternoon of flying.

*Photo courtesy Jenn Carson, L.P. Fisher Public Library.*

lending period. Leland built an eye-catching cabinet in which to store them, and he offers free maintenance and repairs.

On June 15, 2019, in the glorious sunshine, we launched a free kite-lending library (<https://www.facebook.com/events/1290785724413726/>). Excited families gathered around the new cabinet while Leland and I expounded on the joys and benefits of kites. The local Dairy Queen donated an ice cream cake, and after a short celebration, we headed outside to a field next to the local river to fly together for a few blissful hours. Community members of all ages and cultural backgrounds, many of whom had never piloted a kite before, joined together in this mindful, mesmerizing practice.

We've continued lending kites during the pandemic (once we re-opened)—we quarantine them for seventy-two hours before putting them back in the cabinet. If creating a kite-lending library isn't an option, you could try hosting a kite-building workshop instead (<https://halifax.bibliocommons.com/events/5c37ac1b7a7bd22a000d2db1>). For more information, visit The American Kitefliers Association at [www.kite.org](http://www.kite.org); free paper patterns are available to download at [www.littlecloudkites.com](http://www.littlecloudkites.com).

## Weaving Nature into Children's Librarianship

KELLY SENSER

*Kelly Senser is a Children's Services Library Assistant for Loudoun County Public Library in northern Virginia. She worked at the National Wildlife Federation for twenty years and has been a certified Virginia Master Naturalist since 2015.*

Three years ago, on the eve of my first anniversary at Loudoun County (VA) Public Library, I received grant funding for a

nature program series I developed. The money allowed for the purchase of binoculars, field guides, and other exploration tools, but the countless moments of childhood discovery that followed would be its lasting reward.

As I hosted monthly events spotlighting local plants and wildlife, I didn't have to rely heavily on teaching or explaining to pave the way for learning about the natural world. Stirring emotions and inviting kids to tune in with their senses prompted investigation, as biologist Rachel Carson suggested.

"Once the emotions have been aroused—a sense of the beautiful, the excitement of the new and the unknown, a feeling of sympathy, pity, admiration, or love—then we wish for knowledge about the object of our emotional response," Carson writes in *The Sense of Wonder*. "Once found, it has lasting meaning."<sup>1</sup>

*I've witnessed many moments of awe through the years. . . . A child turns from tentative to transfixed as he listens to frog and toad calls, proving himself adept at describing the vocalizations.*

I've witnessed many moments of awe through the years. Giggles give way to curiosity about replica animal droppings at a "Whose Scat Is That?" station. A smile grows wide when a snail appears in a creek water sample. A child turns from tentative to transfixed as he listens to frog and toad calls, proving himself adept at describing the vocalizations.

Carson had a prescription for keeping alive this inborn sense of wonder and its accompanying resilience. A child needs "the companionship of at least one adult who can share it, rediscovering with him [*sic*] the joy, excitement, and mystery of the world we live in."<sup>2</sup>

My library colleagues and I count ourselves among these grown-up guides, bolstered by the contributions of peers in our community. Nonprofit leaders and representatives of our county's soil and water conservation district, cooperative extension office, and parks and recreation department have been enthusiastic allies in our efforts to bring nature-based programming to young people. They have shared their knowledge and passion, loaned us education kits, and invited us to their green spaces to bring concepts such as bird-watching, planting for pollinators, and StoryWalk trails to life.

These collaborations are a win-win-win. Partners generate awareness of their efforts on behalf of the environment; families gain access to expertise in the form of enriching content

and new community links; and the library fortifies its role as a network weaver, nurturing people's connections to the natural world.

## References

1. Rachel Carson, *The Sense of Wonder* (Berkeley: CA: The Nature Company, 1965).
2. Carson, *The Sense of Wonder*.

## Storytime and Movement

MICHELLE BENNETT-COPELAND

**Michelle Bennett-Copeland** is the Library Director at the Fayette County Public Library in Georgia. She had previously worked in the Atlanta-Fulton Public Library System for eighteen years. As a Branch Manager there, she received a Community Champion Award, from Adamsville-Collier Heights Business District, for excellent community engagement.

Let's Move in Libraries was a perfect platform for me to combine two things I absolutely love—books and dance. As a former dance instructor, I was excited to see that a vision was created and received by society to show how everything works together.

Dance/exercise/movement is all part of a person's physical and mental health/wellness. To have coordination and balance, you must be active, which will influence/improve one's mental and cognitive development. Cognitive development is needed to be able to think clearly, make decisions, and live a long life.

The objective of the Let's Move in Libraries program we developed at the Fulton County (GA) Public Library is to enhance participants' cognitive development, balance, and coordination.

During the program, participants engaged with a forty-five-minute interactive storytime about dance and exercise. Librarians lead children in a discussion of various types of dance/exercise/yoga, and other physical activities. Participants learned a short dance and fitness routine set to fun music, to better understand the art of dance. Two suggested titles for this program are *Giraffes Can't Dance* by Giles Andreae and *Pete the Cat and the Cool Cat Boogie* by Karen and James Dean.

Outcome measures of this event show that participants not only increased their knowledge of the art of dance, but they also increased their fitness/exercise, self-confidence, assertiveness, and coordination/balance.

In addition, physical health and wellness are now looked upon as something fun to do while simultaneously improving one's health.

## United Way of Greater Atlanta Learning Spaces

CHRISTY DYSON

*Christy Dyson is an Assistant Branch Manager for Fulton County Library System. Originally from Denver, Colorado and a graduate of Clark Atlanta University School of Library and Information Science, she worked as a public services librarian and as the coordinator of teen service programs for the Fayette County (GA) Public Library.*

Learning Spaces is an early learning initiative designed for caregivers, childcare providers, and children from birth to age 5. Through collaboration with local libraries (Georgia's Fulton County Public Libraries) and early childhood professionals, it has been developed to be a preschool program in nontraditional spaces. Benefits for children and families include social interaction, age-appropriate play, and a safe and nurturing environment.

Before COVID-19, and during the major renovations of branches of the Fulton County Libraries, I partnered with learning spaces at several of our library locations that were opened, and offered a yoga storytime called Kidz Flex & Flow. This storytime was tailored to learning spaces' monthly curriculum.

The impact it had on the children and caregivers was awesome! Young children learned yoga by imitating animal poses, colors, seasons, emotions, and objects. Parents and caregivers also got the chance to join in and help their children express themselves through movement and play.

## Libraries for the Whole Child in Maine

DANIELLE FORTIN

*Danielle Fortin is the Teen Services Librarian at the McArthur Public Library in Biddeford, Maine and the Chair of the Youth Services Section for the Maine Library Association.*

What is programming for the whole child? The whole-child approach incorporates all areas of learning and development into one process. It combines literacy, math, science, and other cognitive skill sets into a strategy that helps children make the adjustment from home learning to school.

This isn't just for preschoolers; the whole child approach can be adapted to every growth stage. Instead of focusing on one small aspect of a child's learning, it incorporates a number of skills and methods to benefit the whole child.

I first started using the whole child approach with StoryTimes at my library. I wanted to engage my kids in learning and make it fun. I started small, adding counting games and flannels to my programs, then as I got more confident, I branched out to add science and physical literacy elements like yoga and dancing. Not only were the kids absolutely engaged, but my attendance skyrocketed.

With that success, I began incorporating the whole child approach to all my events and programs, and now when I develop a program, I consider what parts of a child the event will bolster.

My goal is to support as much of that child's life as I possibly can. I bring healthy snacks because children cannot learn if they are hungry. I ask leading questions and encourage children to be experts. I make mistakes and talk about how I am still learning, as mistakes are opportunities. I challenge children to think in different ways and try new things.

This past year, I have attempted to bring this same approach to my virtual events. Prior to COVID, I had started a Dungeons & Dragons club at my library. D&D incorporates math and science into a fantasy adventure where participants get to explore their identity. Since we could no longer meet in person, I investigated the online options for continuing, and through two virtual platforms (Roll20 and Discord), I was able to bring our game to the kids. It gave the kids an outlet that they needed and, in addition to being fun, taught them critical thinking skills, team building, math, and even science. And again, I was rewarded. We successfully played throughout the summer.

I also figured out a way to incorporate cooking literacy into virtual events. One morning, I invited a friend of mine to make mug cakes via Facebook on our library's live stream—thus creating Mug Cake Monday. Now that our library is slowly opening back up, I will be expanding this program into take-home kits so kids can participate and make edible science experiments together.

## Music, Movement, and More in Ohio

BARBARA SCOTT

*Barbara Scott has been Children's Librarian at Bucyrus Public Library in Ohio for 35 years. She is also Executive Director of Crawford Reads 20, a county-wide initiative. She also directs the Governor's Imagination Library for Crawford County.*

Our Music, Movement, and More program at the Bucyrus (OH) Public Library began as a collaborative effort with the local Help Me Grow organization in Crawford County. We provided space and a literacy component for this program from 2010 to 2013 until funding was lost through Help Me Grow, a

program of the Ohio Department of Health. The woman who ran this program is now my co-teacher.

As the children's librarian, I felt this program was too important to our younger patrons and their families to just let go. Prior to 2013, we offered two sessions per year. But after receiving a United Way grant in 2013, we added a summer session. Our program was a first for the local United Way; until that point, they had not funded an educational program.

Why this program? Music provides emotional release, cultural sharing, physical knowledge, listening skills, cognitive development, appreciation, motor development, self-esteem, strong bond between parent/child, social interaction, and most importantly, pre-literacy skills.

We have since offered three ten-week classes per year (Winter/Spring, Summer, Fall/Winter). In 2015, we added a late afternoon session in addition to our late morning session.

According to evaluations, we serve all income brackets, and we have also had physically/developmentally handicapped children attending our classes.

Families who attend at least seven weeks of the session receive an instrument to take home, courtesy of the United Way, in the hopes they continue the experience of the class at home.

In the past several years, we have expanded our program to include drumming and simple yoga. The balls and buckets for drumming were purchased with a mini grant. We use yoga songs as a cool-down before I end the class with a story and fingerplay, as I have done from the very beginning.

To date, nearly 13,000 people have participated in our programs. As we head into our seventh year with United Way funding, we are looking at doing these programs virtually.

COVID-19 cut short our Winter/Spring 2020 program, and we were unable to hold our Summer 2020 program. We had received a family literacy grant (through the United Way) in 2020 to purchase sound equipment to take the program to the streets at local community celebrations in the county, but due to COVID, the outside programming did not take place. In Fall 2020, we have also started taking the program into preschool classrooms.

## Music and Movement in Maryland

CATHERINE JELLISON

*Catherine Jellison is an Early Literacy Specialist at the Crofton Branch of the Anne Arundel County Public Library in Maryland.*

The Anne Arundel County Public Library serves a community of more than five hundred thousand inhabitants in the

greater Baltimore/DC area in Maryland. Our children's programming is extremely popular.

A relatively recent addition are our Music and Movement sessions, which began in 2015. Previously we had offered evening family storytimes once a month, but since they had become sparsely attended, we were looking for alternatives. We wanted to offer some children's programs in the evenings and on weekends so working parents could participate.

Taking inspiration from other libraries, we created a half-hour long, high-energy program focusing on rhymes, songs, and instruments, and less on books, although we always include a story. We try to find a story that incorporates a lot of movements, or singing, or other interactive elements, and one that can be told with props or flannel pieces is even better. Instruments such as rhythm sticks, shaker eggs, and bells are very useful in this type of programming, as is the ever-popular parachute.

Because we offer this program in the evening, we see whole families attending, often both parents, sometimes even grandparents and older siblings too. Because of the nature of the program, all are able to participate and have a wonderful, shared experience that builds physical literacy in a fun way.

The content varies depending on the presenter. Rebecca Hollerbach, a former music educator and current early literacy specialist at our Discoveries branch, pioneered our Music and Movement programs while at our Deale branch in 2015. Her sessions focus on being "experiential and educational," typically including a cultural song from another country, melodic and rhythmic games and activities, and a "special instrument" that she introduces to the group, explaining what instrument family it is in, and letting everyone try it out (*gently!*).

She finds that including these music education concepts to her programs adds value to the experience for the kids and caregivers too. She noted, "The community impact is enormous. Music programs in schools are often the first thing to go when budget cuts come around, and many families do not have the means to pay for music lessons for their child.

"Being able to introduce preschoolers to music fills my heart in the biggest way. I love that this is something I can offer to our community free of cost at the library." &