

Children & Libraries

the journal of the Association for
Library Service to Children

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ALSC

Developing Birth—Kindergarten Collections • Bilingual Books
Library—School Collaboration: A Success Story • Celebrating Día

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Editor's Note Teamwork Forever!

By Sharon Verbeten

Lately, with a 3-year-old, I find myself quoting a lot of preschool programs. My favorite is *Wonder Pets*, a delightful show—depending on how many times you watch it!—featuring an anthropomorphic turtle, duck and guinea

pig. The trio works together to save animals in need. Their mantra? Teamwork forever!

This issue has a bit of that message for librarians—from a story on a successful library/school collaboration to a look at how one library teamed up to create outstanding *Día* programming.

I'm also pleased that *CAL* is continuing to feature three columns from ALSC committees. Our remarkable members have continued to share their research, knowledge and expertise through our pages. Teamwork indeed!

As we enter 2010, *CAL* will begin its eighth year—and there are many stories we haven't shared yet. Are some of them yours or your library's? Please consider dropping me a line to tell me about a successful library program you conducted or to share some research you have been pursuing. ☺



Executive Director's Note Busy-ness as Usual?

By Aimee Strittmatter

It's certainly that time of year where I find myself busier than usual. Despite the 10 feet of snow and subzero weather, people choose December to entertain like nobody's business.

And if you are like me, a low-level "nagging" begins to flit in and out of your consciousness just when you finally get the chance to relax with your cuppa in front of the fire.

There it is, the ALA Midwinter Meeting lurking in a corner of my mind with its sly smile taunting me with, "Did you let your chairs know where their committee rooms are located?" "Do you have a hotel reservation?" "Did you select the right dates when you booked your flight?" "Will members attend the new Speed Networking program on Friday evening?" Despite my worries, somehow it all works out in the end. Thank goodness!

Once past this "small" event, I find my thoughts wandering ahead to the warmer days of spring. It's a time for new endeavors and reawakening!

My springtime favorite is *Día*, which spreads "book joy" by linking children from all languages and cultures with books every day. This issue showcases Hennepin County Library's use of *Día* to successfully connect with their Latino community. *Día* is a wonderful model for engaging your diverse communities and families with the library, literacy and outreach partners. I encourage you to share your *Día* stories with us! ☺

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Library Service to Children

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Mildred L. Batchelder Award Acceptance Speech

Fostering *Moribito*

Arthur A. Levine and Cheryl Klein

Arthur A. Levine Books, an imprint of Scholastic, Inc., was the recipient of the 2009 Mildred L. Batchelder Award for best translated book for *Moribito: Guardian of the Spirit* by Nahoko Uehashi, translated from the Japanese by Cathy Hirano. Arthur A. Levine, publisher, and Cheryl Klein, senior editor, presented their speech together at the ALSC Awards Program on Monday, July 13, 2009, during the ALA Annual Conference in Chicago.

Arthur A. Levine: In 1979, in the Elmont Public Library on the border of Queens, New York, I picked up Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*.

Cheryl Klein: In 1995, in the Mid-Continent Public Library in Grandview, Missouri, I found a book by Robin McKinley: *The Hero and the Crown*.

AL: I took the book home. I read it in four days.

CK: I took the book home. I read it in four hours.

AL: As an Italian Jew, whose childhood was shaped by the ancient stories of my family's past, I loved the rich mythology, the sweeping narratives that fed Maxine Hong Kingston's imagination, and helped form her identity. She was an American, like me, but like me, she drew strength from a place far away.

CK: McKinley's heroine, Aerin, was clumsy like me. And she was awkward in social situations, like me. But she had people who believed in her, and a great dream, and as she worked hard at the things she loved and grew into her own strength—she conquered both a dragon and her own inner demons. Aerin helped me have faith that I could do that too.

AL and CK (in unison): Through her, I had an amazing adventure.

AL: In 1995, as Cheryl read *The Hero and the Crown*, in an apartment in Japan, a writer named Nahoko Uehashi sat down to watch a movie. During the previews, she saw a woman on-screen leading a young child by the hand.

CK: An idea flashed into her mind, a story about a woman warrior protecting a noble boy.

AL: Who was the boy? Who was the woman? Were they related? She wrote their story to find out.

CK: Her heroine was named Balsa.

AL: Her novel, *Seirei no Moribito*—

CK: *Guardian of the Sacred Spirit*—

AL: was published in Japan in 1996.

CK: It was an immediate success, winning several major awards. A sequel followed three years later: *Guardian of the Dark*.

AL: In 2000, I met with Yurika Yoshida of the Japan Foreign Rights Center at the Bologna Book Fair. She represents Nahoko's publisher, and she told me about *Moribito: Guardian of the Spirit*.

In 2001, I met with Yurika at the Bologna Book Fair. She told me about *Moribito: Guardian of the Spirit*.

In 2002, I met with Yurika at the Bologna Book Fair. She told me about *Moribito: Guardian of the Spirit*.

CK: This went on for three more years, but the time was never right.

AL: Partly perhaps because we were working on another big-scale fantasy by a Scottish author, but also because even with the support of an award like this one, publishing translations is hard. You need the right story and characters, with appeal to readers around the world.

CK: And the right translator, who knows how to get that appeal across in English.

AL: A strong translation—faithful to the original but not awkward in sound or flow.

CK: And the right marketing hook, to help the book break through the publishing pack.

AL: In 2006, I met with Yurika at the Bologna Book Fair. She told me about *Moribito: Guardian of the Spirit*. And she said there was a TV adaptation on its way. We have a marketing hook!

CK: We found Cathy Hirano, who translated *The Friends*, a previous winner of the Batchelder Award. We have a translator and translation!

AL: And at last, we acquired the book, whose story and characters we've loved all along.

CK: In 2007, when I received the first

draft of the manuscript, I took it home and read it in—not four hours because an editorial read takes a little longer than that. But I couldn't stop reading once I started. I had that same narrative need as with *The Hero and the Crown*, the same connection to Balsa, the same drive to see what would happen next.

AL: Through Balsa,

CK: through Cathy,

AL: through Nahoko,

AL and CK (in unison): we had an amazing adventure.

AL: This book came together through the readers we are—still seeking the stories that transform our lives and give us strength—

CK: and through knowing there are lovers of translated literature out there, like all of you.

AL: Librarians who will take these books and put them in the hands of twenty-first-century Arthurs and Cheryls,

CK: in small towns in Missouri,

AL: and the suburbs of big cities,

CK: trusting that the words and work

of a Norwegian artist or a Japanese anthropologist might reach far beyond the bounds of race and nationality and gender,

AL: connecting all of us in our common humanity, and strengthening it through that connection.

CK: On behalf of Cathy Hirano, Nahoko Uehashi, and everyone at Scholastic, we thank you again for this wonderful honor.

AL: We know it will help the book to find readers, and to lead them on to more amazing adventures. ☺

~ 2010 ~

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and we want to honor those who have rendered
distinguished service in school librarianship.

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Pura Belpré Author Award Acceptance Speech

The Soul of a Book

Margarita Engle



Photo courtesy of Holt.

*Margarita Engle is the winner of the 2009 Pura Belpré Author Award for *The Surrender Tree: Poems of Cuba's Struggle for Freedom* (Henry Holt). Her acceptance speech was delivered on Sunday, July 12, 2009, during the ALA Annual Conference in Chicago.*

Graças, y gracias a Dios! Thank you, and thank God for libraries that guard the souls of poetry, stories, science, and history. Many prayers flow from the soul of a book. One is that the words will be worthy of the tree that gives its life to make leaves of paper. Perhaps that is why libraries and forests offer the same timeless atmosphere of growth, serenity, and wonder.

For the magical encouragement of this honor for *The Surrender Tree*, I am amazed and profoundly grateful. I wish to express my deepest gratitude to the Pura Belpré Committee, the American Library Association, ALSC, and REFORMA. For transforming mounds of scribbled paper into a finished book, I thank everyone at Henry Holt and Company—above all my brilliant editor Reka Simonsen—along with Robin Tordini, Tim Jones, Laura Godwin, and so many other talented people who worked quietly as a team, without honors. *Graças* to Edel Rodríguez for the powerful cover illustration. *Graças* to the interlibrary loan magicians who made obscure reference books and nineteenth-century diaries appear out of the archaic maze. Special thanks to my family, and above all my husband Curtis, for thirty-one years of love, patience, support, and encouragement. Finally, I would like to add two profound notes of gratitude—first to all the great Latino writers who have gone before me, including so many who wrote without recognition, before the time for honors had arrived. Second, I wish to express my affection for all three of the countries involved in the events that inspired *The Surrender Tree*. I love the United States. I love Cuba. I love Spain.

I owe a debt of gratitude to the literature of Spain. The great Basque poet Miguel de Unamuno wrote about *intrahistoria*—inner history. He said we can learn more about history from the daily lives of ordinary people than from famous names and celebrated events. Imagine an ordinary life that begins with slavery, and turns into decades of war. Imagine choosing between personal safety, and helping the wounded. Wilderness caves become hospitals. Stems, roots, and leaves provide medicine. Imagine choosing to heal the wounds of all soldiers, not just your own side, but both armies, and

civilians as well. Imagine healing your enemies.

Rosa la Bayamesa made these choices. She was just one of many self-taught wilderness nurses, ordinary Cuban women who spent most of the years from 1868 to 1898 hiding in jungles, facing danger, healing both friends and foes. When Teddy Roosevelt and his Rough Riders charged into the chaos, falling to yellow fever and malaria, Rosa healed the Americans too. She was courageous. She was kind. She was humble. She was lost by history.

“Many prayers flow from the soul of a book. One is that the words will be worthy of the tree that gives its life to make leaves of paper.”

I chose to write about Rosa because I admire her. I wrote about her in free verse because her generous spirit offered me the solace of poetic tranquility. I chose to write her story for young people, because they are the future. They are the ones who will imagine courage, no matter how terrifying their circumstances. They will be free to choose kindness, even when history is cruel. They will be able to dream, hope, and act. Like Rosa la Bayamesa, they will be free to prove that the daily life of an ordinary person can be heroic, hour after hour, year after year.

One of Spain's most inspiring poets, Federico García Lorca, wrote, “*Dejaría en este libro toda mi alma*”—“I would leave all my soul in this book.” I hope I have left my entire soul in Rosa's story. The magic of this Pura Belpré Award will help it grow back, so that I can hope to leave it in another book, in peaceful libraries gleaned from peaceful forests.

Thank you, and thank God for libraries!
Graças, y gracias a Dios! ☺

Pura Belpré Illustrator Award Acceptance Speech

An Ongoing Love of Colors and Stories

Yuyi Morales



Photo courtesy of Holt.

Yuyi Morales is the winner of the 2009 Pura Belpré Illustrator Award for *Just in Case* (Roaring Brook). Her acceptance speech was delivered on Sunday, July 12, 2009, during the ALA Annual Conference in Chicago.

At last the day has arrived. This is a Pura Belpré celebration!

But how does anyone get ready for a day like this one? *Por ejemplo*, did you comb your hair? Did you bring a friend? Did you practice your dancing steps? Or did you simply start running so that you could get here just in time?

My mother tells me that as a child she was once invited to a kid's party at the house of the only family in the neighborhood who owned a television. So special was the occasion that my Grandmother dressed my mama in a *china poblana* skirt, the national Mexican outfit. It was made of black *terciopelo* with the picture of an eagle eating a serpent decorated in green, white, and red sequins—the colors and symbol of our flag. But my mother owned no socks. And so at the party she stood the whole time in one corner, too embarrassed by the way her bare ankles announced the truth of her poverty.

I often think of the child that my mother was, and the courage that it takes for some of us to feel ready, or even worthy of an occasion.

A few months ago, while I was preparing my remarks for today, I posted online, on my Facebook page, that I was having a hard time finding the right words for this celebration. What could I say that would truly tell you the honor and the joy that I feel today? I want to thank my *comadres*, *compadres*, and friends for writing and insisting that I stop worrying and simply let my Corazon speak.

And so, I am going to tell you about drawing. Some of my first memories are of late nights in the house of my grandmother—the scary one—and my pregnant mama, bending over the sewing machine—the singing one (both my mama and the machine)—making stuffed animals to sell, and me next to her on a chair drawing on little pieces of paper. For many years my mother kept some of those drawings—the oldest one from when I was two.

Of course, they were all a jumble of

wiggles and squiggles. But already in those imperfect lines dwelled the fascination I still hold for how the simplest of pencil marks, when placed here and there over the paper, magically transform into images. What is even better is that anybody can do it—have you tried? It is only a matter of grabbing your pencil and making a line, and then another one, and perhaps one more, here and there again, and again, and again, until, *Abracadabra!* A drawing is made! I promise to you this is truly how the trick works, because that is how I learned to do it myself.

I am also going to tell you about colors, and that I constantly marvel at their mysterious powers to vibrate according to how you put them together or apart, and how their presence or their absence make a statement.

When I had just arrived from Mexico to the United States fifteen years ago, my husband, my son, and I moved into a little rented apartment of white walls inside a gray building in San Francisco. In those days, the muted hues of my home and the foggy city just couldn't sustain my desires. I so ached for the colors of the sunshine, and the colors of my family, the colors of my language, *rojo*, *amarillo*, *morado*, *verde*, *azul*, *rosa mexicano*, and the colors that would reassure me that purpose existed, and so did happiness, but I simply couldn't find any of it inside my new world.

Then, as my husband began working and earning money, one day I was able to buy my first set of paints and brushes, and over my own dining table I began pouring, and brushing, and dabbing and scrubbing colors into my pencil drawings—often ruining them something terrible, but still trying day after day to grasp the secrets of the paint on the paper. Needless to say, I am still trying. Yet in the process I have found myself surrounded by the colors I've been longing to live with. I couldn't paint or cover my rented walls, but I could choose the colors of my work, and I did it with haste. I haven't stopped since. This probably shows what my friend Rose says, that I am a woman of color—of many colors in fact. Come to my studio now to be

surrounded by hot pink walls, yellow desk, cobalt canvas, red shelves, and multicolored illustrations. You are invited.

Now, I want to say a word about stories, actually three—I love them. I especially love them with grandmothers, skeletons, birthday parties, piñatas, cake, candy, impossible presents, dead people, and Spanish words like *cosquillas*, *loteria*, and *papalote*. I am so grateful that my agent Charlotte Sheedy, my editor Neal Porter, and the Roaring Brook Press family like them too, because where would my stories be without them? Or without Kelly, my big *niño*—I can't believe it has been 15 years since we began learning English together while falling in love with children's books. And without Tim, my beloved *gringo*—Tim, you are a muse when it comes to *historias de amor*.

Indeed, *Just in Case, a Trickster Tale and Spanish Alphabet Book* is yet another story about love, life, the hereafter, and what happens when dead people help you find presents. A word of advice: Don't trust ghosts! If ever they come claiming that they know how to solve your problems, you are being tricked.

But *Just in Case* is also a book about two people who love each other, and who, having been separated, are brought back together against all odds. Is there anyone who doesn't dream of being reunited with a distant love? I know many, many people who do. A lot of them are Mexicans too, and this dream of being once more with the people of our hearts—a spouse, brother, sister, aunt, uncle, grandparent, friend, daughter, son, or anyone who leaves before we do—is so cherished that in my country we have two days of the year when we have a big party and welcome the return of our dead. Can you believe it?

And so we clean our houses, cook the most delicious food, play music on the radio, burn copal incense, and place toys, candy, flowers, and other offerings, *regalos*, on an altar for them. There

“Now, I want to say a word about stories, actually three—I love them. I especially love them with grandmothers, skeletons, birthday parties, piñatas, cake, candy, impossible presents, dead people, and Spanish words like cosquillas, loteria, and papalote.”

is also a glass of water to ease their thirst after the long homecoming journey. Yes, the preparations are extensive. But what wouldn't you do to celebrate the return, even if only for one day, of the ones you love? And what wouldn't anyone do for that opportunity? That is why you shouldn't trust an enamored ghost, I tell you so.

The ancient Aztecs believed that when the dead came back to visit the living, sometimes

they appeared as specks of dust floating in the air, or a feather carried by the breeze, and if they had been warriors killed in battle or mothers who died during childbirth, they arrived as hovering hummingbirds. But most people returned as butterflies. With their hiccupping flutter they signaled that they too were joyful to be here, and that the afterlife was all fine.

I am delighted to be here in the company of you, my friends, my family, my loved ones. And if I were capable of flutter, I would have finally found the right way to show you the honor and the joy that I feel today.

The Pura Belpré Committee confers on me a great *regalo*, a most precious gift—nearly as magnificent as receiving *Bigotes*, a mustache because I have (almost) none, or a *Llave*, a key to open all doors.

Thank you for these presents that are the Pura Belpré Medal and Honor. I promise to take good care of them because, while I receive them with infinite pleasure, I am well aware that they don't belong to me.

The Pura Belpré Award truly belongs to the many, many people with stories inside them—some of these people still *niños* and *niñas* who, sooner than we think, will be offering us their words, drawings, colors, and tales, so that all of us can get together again, and again, and celebrate. 🍻

Call for Referees

To make *Children and Libraries* a truly interactive publication, we're looking for ALSC members to serve as volunteer referees for journal articles. Unsolicited articles and those of a scholarly nature must be submitted to at least two referees to judge the submissions on accuracy, style, impact, importance, and interest. Specialists in particular genres (such as technology, literature, intellectual freedom, programming, and so on) are especially needed.

Referees make recommendations to the editor on whether or not manuscripts should be accepted for publication. Interested librarians should contact *Children and Libraries* Editor Sharon Korbeck Verbeten at CALeditor@yahoo.com for more information on the referee process.

The May Hill Arbuthnot Honor Lecture

The Geography of the Heart

Walter Dean Myers

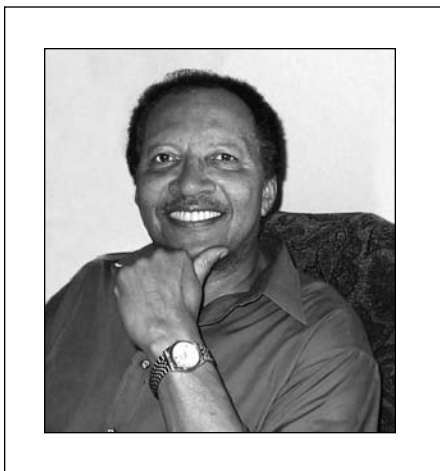


Photo by Dave Rowell.

Walter Dean Myers delivered his Arbuthnot lecture April 18, 2009, at the Children's Defense Fund Haley Farm in Clinton, Tennessee.

It's an honor and privilege to offer this lecture in this place and at this most interesting time in the history of our country. I thank the Arbuthnot Committee for affording me this opportunity.

My life has been, without doubt, one of marked privilege. I've been able to spend most of it doing what I truly love—writing. The returns for my efforts have gone beyond my most ambitious expectations. I've been able to see a great deal of the world and to enjoy the comforts and blessings of my native country. Not the least of my many returns are the relationships I have made and sustained over the years with editors, librarians, teachers, and my fellow writers.

I'm at a point in my career when I'm often being asked by well-intentioned interviewers for a summation of my writing efforts. They phrase the questions nicely. "What do you see as your legacy, Mr. Myers?" or "How would you describe your achievements?" I don't really mind these variations on my epitaph when they come as questions from truly interested parties. What does bother me is that they want an answer far more complex than I'm usually willing to suffer through.

What I do is fairly simple. I write books for the troubled boy I once was, and for the boy who lives within me still. The books that regularly tumble from my head are also fun to work on, but many interviewers are suspect of fun and think they are honoring me by evaluating my work as "serious." Perhaps they are having fun by being so serious. I hope so.

Reading, for as long as I can remember, has always been a good part of my life. My reading habits as a young boy growing up in Harlem, New York, were similar to those of every avid reader. Did I read everything I could get my hands on? Of course I did. Did I read under the desk in school? Certainly. Did I have the flashlight under the covers to finish just one more chapter or one more story before falling asleep? Absolutely.

I can't imagine my life without the books I've enjoyed and the pleasures of read-

ing. As a child I was thrilled with the wonder of language. Now I have grown old with the literature of my life and my soul is richer for the experience.

One of the interesting aspects of being a senior citizen who is both at peace with himself and content with his life is the gift of retrospection. I think back on my life and see, with reasonable clarity, where I have taken the right path and where I've deviated and why. When thinking, in particular, about boys and reading I think it's natural to determine how I came to be a reader.

Although reading is often referred to as a skill, I believe it is actually a creative process for which the mind has to be prepared. When we break the reading process into two broad categories, decoding and ownership, this becomes clearer. Decoding can be viewed as a learned linguistic skill, but "ownership"—that part of reading in which the reader takes the cultural schema of the text into his or her own consciousness—is an act of secondary creation which alters the written material according to the psyche and culture of the person who has successfully done the decoding.

I believe that my reading "mind" was prepared long before I came to my first page of printed material. It began, and I am quite confident of this, in the conversations I had with my foster mom in our tidy Harlem apartment. My mother used to engage me in simple conversations as she did the housework each day. She didn't talk at me, she talked to me and fully expected me to answer her. I remember her asking me what the weather was like and how we should dress if we walked across 125th Street to the market stalls under the train trestle. I would dutifully go to the window, assess the weather, and decide what we should wear.

Sometimes she would ask me what I thought we might see on our crosstown journey and I, pleased to have my opinion heard, would tell her. Would we take the crosstown trolley or walk? If I was asked I knew it meant that Mama had money for the trolley. It was quite all right with her if I made up something

fanciful that we would see or that we might do. She seemed pleased when my ideas stretched the imagination. She was allowing me to be creative.

When I got older, perhaps four, Mama began to tell me about her childhood. Her mother was a German immigrant

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who had married a Native American. Ostracized by her German relatives, my grandmother, a tiny lady with an impossible accent, moved away from her Pennsylvania community to West Virginia. Mama told me stories about her being called a “half breed.” She also told me that some people wouldn’t like me because I was a Negro. And what did I think about that?

Well, I didn’t like it one bit because I was, in my opinion, a very good boy and everybody should have liked me, and I made this very clear to Mama who agreed with me. What this uneducated woman was doing was allowing me to formulate my own thoughts, and to put the words together to express those thoughts and to be creative in whatever manner I could.

I was developing, within the intellectual being I was becoming, the constant possibility of an imagined universe that was both transitory and real. It was transitory in that I could create it for as short or as long a period as I chose, and real in that there were physical and temporal references which I had to constantly reference. I was developing, in short, an intellectual geography based upon the totality of my being, a physical existence in Harlem, the family dynamics as they played out in our railroad apartment, the presence of my parents, their cultural background, and the love that developed within our family structure. I

acquired habits during this period that I still maintain. The most important idea here is that our family structure and the resultant cultural geography, mirrored the larger mainstream culture. We hoped for and worked toward those American goals we thought possible even under the American apartheid of segregation.

It’s important to note that the term “geography” meant to me, at that time, merely an extension of my personal topography and was largely physical. This would change. One day I would come to understand the geography of the heart and its vastly different concepts.

I remember Mama reading to me when I was five. Each day she would do the usual housework which consisted of cleaning anything that needed cleaning, ironing anything that entertained the notion that it could possibly harbor a wrinkle, and putting away everything in its assigned place. Then, for that brief period between housework “done” and supper “started” she would read. Her choice of reading was always the same. True romance, love, heartbreak, jealousy, men as handsome as princes, and women whose bosoms rose and fell breathlessly from page to page. I didn’t understand much about romance but I loved that time with Mama, sitting in our small kitchen, hearing her totally pleasant voice as she read. Did I tell you I was a Mama’s boy? I was.

What I knew about reading was that the print on the page was to be decoded and that Mama and I could do it. And when we did it we could enter the magical world of story. It allowed you to sit on your mother’s lap and lean against her as you recreated the world in your own mind. Interestingly, the concept of intellectual ownership of the text clearly pre-

ceded expertise in decoding. Mama, who had only gone as far as the third grade in the small school in Pennsylvania she had attended, read with a finger moving slowly across the page.

I don’t remember actually learning the decoding process. The vocabulary of those *True Love* and *True Romance* magazines must have been quite limited because I began recognizing printed words by the time I was five. By six, I could read to Mama as she worked, and she would correct the words I didn’t know.

My father, Herbert Dean, did not read. That tragedy wouldn’t catch up with me for decades. I was a Mama’s boy.

In school I learned that I was an American. I learned a version of American history that spoke of pilgrims and how they were kind enough to invite the Indians to dinner at Thanksgiving. Or maybe they just cut out pumpkins or something but, no matter the details, they all sat around after dinner and smoked a peace pipe. They also had turkeys which they did something with—I think they colored them with brown and yellow Crayola crayons, and I don’t think it was the same turkey that they ate but I did understand that turkeys had something to do with me being American. My personal geography was clearly expanding.

I belonged to the Church of the Master, a Presbyterian church on the Western edge of Harlem. Through the church I learned that there were other continents to which we sometimes sent missionaries. Africa was full of black people. At least as many black people as there were in Harlem.

It was through my church that I first traveled around New York City. There was a field trip to Ebbets Field in Brooklyn where the Dodgers played, and I became a lifelong Dodgers fan. There was a trip down to Radio City. We were taken to a synagogue, a Catholic church, Riverside Church, a dance recital, and various museums.

In Bible school (which was really a summer day camp) we learned to make

wallets out of leather and occasionally suffer through lectures by famous Black Americans. The famous black Americans we had to listen to were Josephine Baker, Paul Robeson, and a soft-spoken writer named Langston Hughes.

I didn't like Josephine Baker for two good reasons; the first was that we were dragged out of a basketball game at the church's gym to hear her, and the second was that she sang a song I didn't know and, to make things worse, she sung it in French.

I didn't like Paul Robeson because he also didn't sing anything that I knew.

I didn't like Langston Hughes because I didn't want to sit still in church while he read whatever it was that he was reading that didn't include any real adventures or people being in terrible danger and that might die at any moment the way they might die at the end of the movie serials, and none of the people he wrote about had super powers.

My world, through the church and through my school, was expanding bit by bit despite the fact that my life was solidly centered in Harlem.

Again, my personal geography followed the trend of the dominant culture. I believed I could be like the characters I saw on television. My father worked and had pride in his ability to feed his family, and that pride represented a family value and a sense of purpose. Taking care of one's family colored the soil of the geography we claimed. This was ours. This family. This pride. This hope for a better life. It was intuitive that for me to achieve these things on my own I would have to acquire skills.

School. I arrived with confidence and understanding. I knew exactly what school meant—you had a lot of kids to play with and to tell what to do and to keep in line if they needed it and believe me some of them needed it.

When Miss Dworkin met me in the first grade she quickly discovered that I could read. Mollie Dworkin was a small woman, not quite five feet tall, with shockingly red hair which bobbed as she moved quickly

about the classroom. When the principal of the school, Mary Flynn, found out that one of her first graders tested very well it was suggested that I be moved to the second grade. I was already tall for my age and it was thought that I could handle the harder work. Miss Dworkin agreed that I could probably do second grade work, but she had noted that I had trouble pronouncing words and, after an interview with my mother, kept me in the first grade.

The speech difficulty, I believe, was genetic. When I met my biological siblings years later I discovered we all had the same peculiarity of speech. We all seemed to have the meanings of the words firmly in mind but not the sounds of the words.

“It’s important to note that the term “geography” meant to me, at that time, merely an extension of my personal topography and was largely physical. This would change. One day I would come to understand the geography of the heart and its vastly different concepts.”

Back to the two elements I recognize as reading—decoding the letters or symbols that form words and phrases and the transition from the decoding process to ownership of the text.

Ownership is successful when the reader completely understands the full range of information offered within the text. A scene describing rainfall in the city, for example, is imagined by the reader based on the author's text. The image that the author had will not be exactly the same one the reader recreates because of the differences of their particular experiences and mindsets but, hopefully, it will be close enough so that the reader becomes comfortable with the information offered.

In my conversations at home, I was used to transferring information from one person to another and in the imaginative process involved. In this sense I was “reading ready” and only had to worry about expanding the decoding process.

In many ways, I also had a head start in decoding. By being taken around the city by my church at an early age and being exposed to different cultures, I was comfortable with the new ideas that I would find in books. I had a relatively wide range of intellectual experiences, even at seven, that served me well.

I didn't think of myself as having a specific cultural “geography,” and I wouldn't for years to come. I understood that there were people more privileged than I was, and there were always the starving children of some far off land but I didn't know what the differences were.

The transition from being a reader to being a writer was, for me, quite natural. I liked to read and I liked to be sociable

but I tended to fight a lot in school which limited my social network. The fighting often stemmed from my speech problems. The frustration I felt as I rattled off my ideas to bewildered teachers and fellow students often ended up with me punching someone.

I was frequently admonished for “not playing well with others.” The problem was that the “others” didn't always do what I told them to do. When I'm writing I create my own “others,” calling them “characters,” and I play very well with them. What I had been doing in my head, creating a constantly shifting parallel world, I began to do on paper. The discipline of forming the details that made up a poem or story was one I enjoyed immensely.

So why, I ask myself, are all young boys not as fascinated by books, not as drawn to reading or writing, as I was? My thinking along these lines over the years was not prompted by my need to find an

audience so much as the need to answer questions in a field in which people assume that I should have some degree of expertise. The truth of the matter is that I have little expertise in the field of reading, but like every prolific writer, and I think my ninety or so books put me into that category, I'm not at all short of chutzpah. So I began thinking about the question and, over a long period of time, began to formulate answers.

I began by making the simple declaration that reading is good for human beings. That sounded reasonable to me and so, after giving myself a brief round of applause, I moved rather quickly to a mythical character of my own creation, a young boy named Jeremy.

“My father worked and had pride in his ability to feed his family, and that pride represented a family value and a sense of purpose. Taking care of one’s family colored the soil of the geography we claimed. This was ours. This family. This pride. This hope for a better life. It was intuitive that for me to achieve these things on my own I would have to acquire skills.”

I decided that Jeremy would be a thirteen-year-old African American and that he has proclaimed to the world, and to a harried seventh grade teacher in particular, that he “didn’t want to read no books.” The teacher looks aghast at Jeremy and tries patiently to explain again why Jeremy should be a reader.

Jeremy is my character, my alter ego, my major concern in these troubled times, and I have to understand him. My first consideration is whether or not Jeremy is intellectually capable of reading. I have historical evidence by a group of experts who have studied the subject extensively and who believed that the Jeremys of the world could easily learn to read. Their studies, while not scientific in the strict sense of that word, carried a lot of weight for me because of the capitalistic implications. The Slave Codes of the 1840s expressly prohibited any white person

from teaching a slave to read. This prohibition against teaching the slaves to read is repeated in the codes of Georgia, Mississippi, and Louisiana.

In short, the slave owners realized a need to prevent the slaves from being exposed to reading. These are the slaves that worked from sun up to sun down, who were humbled in the cotton fields and quarries, who were regarded uniformly as little more than animals to be bought and sold. And yet the slave owners must have noted that some were secretly learning to read. If reading was not intellectually available to them, southern legislators would not have had to spend the time passing such laws. What this suggests to me is that Jeremy

and the inner city boys he represents are clearly intellectually capable of reading. When I ask Jeremy directly if he believes reading is good for him, he offers up a reluctant “Yeah.”

If Jeremy is capable of reading, and he believes it’s good for him, why doesn’t he want to read?

I began my query with the declaration that reading was good for human beings. Could it be that Jeremy knows something about reading that I don’t? Does reading, perhaps, cause terminal chicken pox in some students? Is there a side effect I don’t know about?

But during our conversations, held variously on street corners, in schools, and in juvenile detention facilities, I discover something that at first seems rather odd but eventually looms larger and larger in

our relationship. Jeremy and I are using the same words, so that it sounds as if we have a direct communication using a common language. My assumption was that Jeremy and I, because we have come from a similar urban experience, look somewhat alike and identify ourselves as African Americans, that we have a shared congruency in the cultural geography that defines our words. But I discovered that we do not share as much as I thought, and that we are not at all on the same page despite our use of common phrases. Jeremy, in short, has a different human geography than I do.

I am talking about an array of reading experiences that suit the context of my life and Jeremy was responding in the context of both his life and what he knew I expected him to say. As this became clear to me I began to understand that the act of reading meant something different to Jeremy than it did to me. I also began to understand that Jeremy knew a lot more about my world than I did about his.

In my world, books are indisputably good and useful tools. Jeremy understood everything I was saying about reading and also understood the validity of these concepts in my world. He also understood that my world, that is my belief system, was generally accepted in American culture. We who are a part of mainstream American culture, often find ourselves declaring the existence of universal truths on a broad level and extending those truths to the rank of intellectual canons at a higher level. Jeremy knows this even though he might not be able to articulate it. Recognizing my recitation of what I believe to be the universal truths of the day, Jeremy quickly agreed to them.

Jeremy’s agreement came the same way that we all agree to such basic tenets as “exercise is good for health,” and “we need to get enough fiber.” Jeremy has a parallel system of multiple cognitions. There are ideas he believes are valid for me, and other ideas he believes are valid for himself. The competing truths that Jeremy actually uses in his day-to-day life are, to him, more compelling than mine. He has learned to mimic me in ways that the underclass learns what

is expected of them. The subservient panhandler gets more money than the aggressive panhandler. Tourist trades are often built on the ability of people to act in ways they are depicted as acting on brochures. Jeremy has understood some of the differences between his geography and mine and knows how he is expected to act. He also understands fully that when he doesn't act in this manner, he will be viewed as hostile.

What are the differences between my reading experiences and Jeremy's and what do those differences tell us about how to bring the inner city youth to reading?

Reading for me is an extension of the ideational process that I identify as my essential self. "I think, therefore I am," is extended to "my thoughts define me, they are who I am." A book that does not trigger my own thought responses, that does not push me into a new realm of imagination or a reconsidered logic, does not interest me. I do read for pure entertainment, but even that has to have some level of intellectual involvement. As a writer, I live in an imagined world where characters wander in and out of story contexts primarily to expose some idea, some random flight of fancy which holds some fascination for me, at least for the duration of the writing project. The rather mundane notion that I must live in a physical world, must eat, must spend time on the line at my bank, are mere interruptions that I suffer until I get to the real world within my head.

Some of these ideas are a result of my own thinking, and others were taught to me. But they have all been reaffirmed by my life experiences. I have bolstered the quality of my life through reading. I have friends and relatives who enjoy their lives more because they are readers. The *New York Times* has told me that college educated people, presumably readers at some level, make more money than high school drop outs. In short, I am a believer.

Another way of looking at my beliefs is to look at both my physical and cultural geography. I was born in Martinsburg, West Virginia, a scant ten miles from where my great great grandparents

had been held as slaves. I was raised in Harlem, New York, then the Black cultural center of the world. The society I found myself in mirrored the white society in most aspects. Belonging to a fixed society, with its history, culture, and yes, physical terrain, provides continuity for the individual and the basis of personal hope.

The human experience is one of constantly reproducing itself using the skills and values of the past to push forward to a positive future. Societies become great as they replicate that regenerative process over a period of centuries. The American process began with English civilization and continues and is refined on this continent. This is what I had absorbed far before I had analyzed it to the point of being able to say the words. Learning to read and, later, to write, certainly seemed, for me, part of the social reproductive process. The learning methodology, acquiring skills in decoding, comprehension, and judgment of textual material that could be applied to an increasingly wide range of problems, seemed natural because I needed to understand the past and use the already proven skill sets available to move on. I accepted the values of my parents and wanted to bring those values into my own life, into my own space. I hoped, of course, to improve on my family's circumstances by acquiring more education and more profound skills. I have spent a lifetime telling young inner city children they should do the same.

But about thirty or forty years ago, the world's concept of societal geography changed radically. And as societal geography changed, so did personal geography.

The new geography defines our positions in the world not by the usual topographical references but, rather, by the socioeconomic factors which allow us or prevent us from recreating our particular social segments in a positive manner. To say that we live in New York or San Francisco is no longer significant because those geographical references fail utterly to describe where we are in relationship to American culture. It is far more accurate to say that I am in a position that I cannot perpetuate my

family history because there are no jobs available for me to build an economic base or that my family has become so dysfunctional that recreation cannot be positive.

When we approach the individual inner city child to examine his ability to positively reproduce his individual society, we immediately encounter problems. The most obvious problem is the means. The legend of America throughout the world is that it is a geographical area in which work can be used to climb an economic ladder which, by its ascent, enables the individual to participate in the reproduction of his society. As that economic ladder disappears, as jobs disappear in particular for the inner city family, other means must be found to reproduce the society. Lacking other conventional means, the inner city child will sometimes turn to criminal activities, but will most often abandon the attempt. With the loss of clear possibilities of positive reproduction, there is also the loss of hope.

The idea of incrementally learned skills to tackle the reproductive problems of a society worked in 1940 because the skill ladder to success was available to everyone. Today, that idea of success is missing many of the rungs that were there in the forties. A person with fair reading ability could work in a refrigerator factory in 1947.

Today those jobs don't exist in a nationally meaningful way. In 1948, a high school diploma carried a great deal of weight. Today, it has relatively little meaning. Moreover, the gap between the inner city child and the role models of success our country celebrates is so great that there is little incentive for the inner city child to even want to reproduce his own society. When over 65 percent of all African American children are born outside of family situations, we see that this segment of society is not successfully reproducing itself.

What are Jeremy's experiences? Is he surrounded by success models? Does he see his family reading? Are there people among his close associates who have succeeded through education? Quite possibly not, and this is an important

difference. We often think of education as something that occurs in schools or, in the least, mostly in schools. But in the real world, education happens twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. When Jeremy awakes in the morning, his immediate environment tells him something about who he is and what his prospects are. If he has breakfast, that is a lesson. If he does not have breakfast, that, too, is a lesson.

“We who are a part of mainstream American culture, often find ourselves declaring the existence of universal truths on a broad level and extending those truths to the rank of intellectual canons at a higher level.”

If one or both of Jeremy’s parents is employed, the dignity that a job affords is transmitted through the family and becomes part of Jeremy’s understanding. Life assumes a purpose and a direction for the family and suggests a larger plan and an expanded geography which Jeremy can use in his dealings with life. If full employment is not the case, if the dignity of employment and, therefore, self sufficiency is not present, the lesson carries over to Jeremy’s concept of preparing for the future.

When he comes downstairs to start his journey to school and sees young men in his neighborhood who are both jobless and without hope for a future brighter than hanging out on the corner, he internalizes that experience and assigns a reason to it. The reason often assigned is that something about him is unworthy of having that bright future and he experiences the death of hope.

In a recent book, *Game*, I have the coach of Drew, a young basketball player, telling him how he needs to play team ball if he wants to succeed. While my ball-player understands the practicality of the coach’s words, he also understands that there is a level at which he cannot afford to be part of a group concept because the group he most strongly identifies with, his peers in his neighborhood, are seemingly headed for failure.

What has happened to Drew, and to many young people in our inner cities, is that they have been so marginalized that their game plan has evolved in a totally different manner than the one we are trying to impose on them. To be part of a group effort when the group is not doing well doesn’t make sense for Drew or for Jeremy or for the millions of children they represent.

I’m often asked why I write for young people. Over the years I’ve offered up a number of answers as I’ve worked it out in my own head. What I’ve come up with that makes the most sense to me is that my own experiences as a teenager were so intense that I keep coming back to that period of my life to explore and to make sense of in a way that defines who I am today. I’ve used my own experiences to understand the characters I write about. I’ve had a life that mirrors theirs in many aspects but I’ve also been blessed with the ability to closely examine the events in my life and to articulate the parameters of my emotional and intellectual response to those events. I can then draw upon my examined life and my attempts to work out the rationale for who I have become to create believable characters in my novels.

I was considered bright in elementary and middle school. This is important not so much because of what I could accomplish in my early years but rather how the changes in my environment, the invasion of negative factors on my emotional and cultural geography, altered both the perception that I was bright, both my own perception and that of people around me, and my actual academic accomplishments.

When I reached my teens I suffered a series of personal traumas. An uncle who

I admired and who had spent most of his life in jail was finally released, only to be violently murdered shortly afterwards in a Bronx alleyway. He was literally beaten to death.

My foster father lapsed into a major depression after his brother’s death, often sitting in a darkened room for hours upon end without speaking. We had never been well off financially, but now he was sending what little “extra” money we had to a radio evangelist. As a result, I often didn’t have money for school supplies.

My mom, always an alcoholic, responded with a deepening dependence on drugs. It was not unusual to come home and find her lying on the floor in one of the rooms in our railroad flat or to not find her home at all and have a neighbor come to the door to say that she had collapsed in the hallway downstairs or on the sidewalk around the corner.

These are not pretty ideas but they are not unusual in the neighborhood in which I grew up. What they did to me was to occupy my entire being in such a way as to form a constant distraction that could not be ignored. It was like having a jackhammer running constantly in the next apartment. No matter what I was trying to think about or work out, my home situation was always there for me to deal with and to try to deemphasize.

My grades plummeted. I remember being recommended to take a test for the Negro College Fund and being hopelessly confused in trying to fill out the student identification section. What high school was I attending? What borough did I live in? The test started and I left after working on the first page. The brightness had gone. The good student was somehow lost in the *sturm und drang* of his family’s declining fortunes. The angst burden I had developed created a deficit weight in my being, a deficit I had to deal with on a constant basis as so many children do. They do not begin each day at the starting line, but several yards, if not several miles, behind.

The last interesting bit here was the assault on my personal identity. Prior to this period, when I was considered a

“bright” student and enrolled in one of the nation’s leading high schools, I had created an identity for myself consistent with my own aspirations but also consistent with what I understood to be the cultural schema of the majority population.

When I played the role consistent with what I had learned to say about my potential, I was limited only by the willingness to apply myself and the depths of my intellectual abilities. I was also speaking the same language as my teachers and school counselors. But as my grades went down, as I found myself—

other end of the rainbow was fading away. My response was to turn away from my increasingly dysfunctional family to my very functional books.

These were not conscious thoughts following some precise formula. These were my interpretations of reality that I was not even close to understanding at fifteen and that I can recall now only because I am over the pain of those years.

I still understood, as Jeremy understood, what to say when asked if education was good. I still knew the iconic phrases and

exclusion of large segments of our youth on a scale unprecedented in my lifetime, an exclusion that threatens not only the potential of these young people, but their civil rights and the well being and security of the nation.

Jeremy does not have my age or the amount of years I have had to contemplate these problems. But he feels them as deeply as I do and there is a level at which he understands them. They are as potent a factor in his mind, as great an angst burden, as my uncle’s murder and my mom’s alcoholism had been in mine. They are the background noises which interfere with his thoughts as he sits in class, and which cloud his memory of whether the figure before him is a parallelogram or trapezoid. His mind, without the hope of positive social reproduction, searches for the transformative event rather than the incremental path we want him to take. He wants to and needs to transform himself from the excluded being he sees as without hope to the included being that our country so proudly advertises. This is true even when Jeremy doesn’t fully understand the transformative goal he approaches. So he puts aside his books and hopes to become a rapper, or a basketball star, or even to sell drugs. And, knowing that we have turned him away, that the powers-that-be have labeled his very existence as excessive, can we blame him?

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as so many inner city students do—the subject of my teachers’ warnings about my impending doom, I began more and more to look upon the failures in my family and my neighborhood as my true identity models. Yes, the president of the United States is a black man, but the black man who is closest in identity to the inner city child is the one leaning against the bodega entrance with a beer in his hand. As the character in *Game* looks upon the jobless young men in his community, I looked at my father, a janitor, and my cousins who worked as laborers in New York’s garment center as mine. I began to separate the world into a real universe of important and vital people doing the kinds of things I read about in my precious books, and the “other” world which was my threatened reality.

My personal geography was changing. The world I had thought to exist at the

the canon of values, but I was no longer a true believer of those phrases nor did I see myself as having value.

At fifteen, I dropped out of high school. I was found out, made a ward of the state and put back into Stuyvesant. At sixteen, I dropped out again, and on my seventeenth birthday, I joined the Army. The military was a refuge. It was a place where I would be fed on a regular basis but, more important, it was a place in which the shame I felt for having failed in life, for having slipped so far below the predicted successes, was not on display.

What happened to me was personal, but I recognize it when I come across the same traumas in today’s young people. When I talk to young people today about the differences between life as I knew it in the fifties and sixties and life today, I also understand that something else is going on. That something else is the

In 1848, in a speech entitled “What Are the Colored People Doing for Themselves?” the great African American Frederick Douglass said that “unless we . . . set about the work of our regeneration and improvement, we are doomed to drag on in our present miserable and degraded condition for ages.”

I am often asked, challenged if you will, whether or not the marginalization I speak of is not merely an assumptive pose of the inner city child. Are they really on the outskirts of the dominant society or are they actually assuming “victim” status as an excuse for personal failure? The question is fundamental and the answers clearly address the emerging status of the new America.

I tell you today that it is within that regenerative process that hope lies. We

look at our children and we feel that glad expectation that keeps us going despite our setbacks. When that hope is denied us, and it is being taken away in bits and pieces every day, there is only the growing sense of despair that we see more and more in our inner cities.

According to government figures, upward of 60 percent of urban children live in households in which the head of the house does not work a full year. Those who do work a full year, have seen their wages stagnate over the last decade while the cost of living has increased. In 1963, the ratio of fixed housing expenditure throughout the country was the equivalent of one week's salary at minimum wage equaling one month's rent at the lower end of the rental scale. In other words, even at minimum wage, young families could afford apartments and, thereby, a place to raise a family. In 2009, that ratio—minimum wage to minimum housing costs—approached two and a half to one. Barbara Ehrenreich and other sociologists have clearly demonstrated the threat this poses to the traditional lower class family structure.

The opportunities of economic globalization in a world that is divided into the G20 entities and nations approaching stark desperation, is changing the world. We ship those jobs abroad, jobs which at one time represented the ladder poor Americans climbed. Globalization is irreversible and results, considering the world's economic demography, in the very simple idea that to employ or train the full range of our American population, is not a sound economic concept when cheaper labor can be found overseas. The poorest children, often African American and Latino but increasingly Caucasian as well, are simply not needed under this scheme. This damning reality is the beast lurking in our streets, capturing the hearts of our young.

As a teenager growing up in Harlem, I did not and, indeed, could not articulate my self deprecation. I wasn't aware of how much I had devalued myself because I lacked the knowledge range necessary to project a coherent norm. Personal values—identity ranking—can only be accomplished at an intellectual and emotional distance. Reaching a sur-

prising age (whoever thought the world would exist beyond 1984?) has given me that distance.

I speak of the geography of the inner city child. We have talked about the differences in cultural schema, but it is much more difficult to discover our own feelings about our prejudices and our tendency to impose our own values on others as if our values were universal. It's difficult for us to imagine that more than one geography can exist within the same physical location. I came upon this tendency to project my own geography on others in myself a few years ago.

I was working on a biography of Muhammad Ali and came across a phrase in my research that I didn't understand. One accounting of his career said that he was sent to an older fighter, Archie Moore, to learn how to punch. In my mind what fighters did was to punch and all fighters knew how to do it.

I contacted a former professional boxer in Jersey City and asked him about this. Jimmy Dupree invited me to his gym where he now trained young fighters and explained that there were effective and ineffective ways of punching.

"Come into the ring with me," he said. "I'll show you."

Once in the ring, it was clear that he wanted to show me by actually hitting me so I would feel the difference. I suggested that it would be just fine if he merely told me about it, but he was insistent. So he hit me once in the ineffective manner and I held back the tears and the certain knowledge that I was going to develop an ugly bruise. Then he hit me the more effective way, lining up the bones in his arm for maximum effect so that I felt the force of the punch go through my body.

"You should always remember that," he said. "So you can use it if something comes up."

In his world, something might come up where he might be made more effective by lining up his bones and snapping a punch from the shoulder. In my world, the proper response was sniffing on the

way to the police station. I didn't think that punching effectively was going to help me in my world and I'm pretty sure I'm right. But in rethinking Muhammad Ali's biography I came to realize the differences in the mentality of the professional fighter and my own.

How many times had I watched fighters on television and screamed at them to get up from the floor, that they weren't really hurt? How many times had I encouraged them to show more courage? In my personal geographical field, if a blow was really hard, my reaction would be to fall down, to retreat, to run away. And so I created a geography for the fighters I saw which said that they either did not feel pain the way I would have or the punches they were receiving were simply not that hard. I couldn't imagine anyone capable of taking that much pain if the punches were as hard as they looked to be.

What I discovered, of course, was that the punches were as hard as they looked and the damage even more devastating to the human body. The boxers that I studied and interviewed had once been young men in great physical condition, but few had lived beyond middle age and fewer still had survived middle age without serious dementia. How had I not understood this before the interviews? How had I not understood that the fighters themselves knew the damage they were suffering? How could I imagine that they understood their own destruction? When they spoke, they spoke with bravado, the way that inner city children often speak. The fighters said the things they knew we wanted to hear, the way that inner city children paraphrase our well meaning admonitions.

Too many of our children don't think that reading is going to help them escape their predicaments, and they might just be right. When we see how many young men of all races are unemployed or underemployed in our communities, we know that the chances of success are limited. We say, optimistically, that we must attend the possibility of individual achievement. But we must also ask ourselves whether, considering the multiple cognitive states of the inner city student which includes histories of both

failure and exclusion, if our optimistic viewpoint serves a legitimate purpose for the student or only rationalizes our own approach?

“Lastly, I want my books to be portals to not only other books, and to other cultures, but pathways between the unforgiving geography that we are so passively accepting, to the far reaches of every lonely and despairing heart.”

As educators, we want to give each child every advantage we can. We want to bring children to books and reading because we know how handicapped they will be without these important tools. We want to take them out of the confines of their world and bring them to ours.

The first thing we have to do, in my opinion, is to carefully articulate to Jeremy what his world and societal position is and the personal geography he must negotiate. We need to abandon the notion that fairness goes hand-in-hand with self worth and we need to be blunt about it.

“Jeremy, you might not think reading is for you, but you don’t really have a choice. You will either learn to read well, learn to read consistently throughout your life, or you will suffer greatly. You will have to make the choice to enter that part of our culture that seems most foreign to you and most threatening, and learn to cope with it even as you learn to criticize it. And, yes, as things stand now, your efforts might well not be successful. You must understand, as we all must understand, that your position in our universe is no simple matter of personal failure but, rather, an economic, histori-

cal, and social complicity that has to be addressed.”

Jeremy is already thirteen and we need to work with what we have. So we need to design a program for Jeremy that will bring him to the skills he needs. Again, I interpret reading as two separate functions, decoding the text and transferring the information into one’s own mental state to accomplish ownership. While we tend to think of decoding as simply a phonics and defining operation involving letters and sounds within a text, reading is also a cultural decoding. This cultural milieu is often so familiar to the teacher that the decoding aspect of cultural schema is overlooked. What gives reading a positive value if it is beyond the ownership of the individual?

Cultural selection can be crucial when we bring books to young people who have difficulty reading. But I’m adamant in believing that we can’t restrict reading only to books that share a congruency with the reader’s immediate life. We have to stretch the boundaries and increase the reader’s cultural awareness. We need to lay out the boundaries of personal geography in a way that the inner city child, that all of our young people, can understand that geography. And we need to do it in a place and time that will not embarrass the child, but will give that young reader an opportunity to become intimate with character and language and story. We need to find a world we can all live in, a world in which the heart matters more than the marketplace, where our love for our children extends to the point at which the recreating of their social history is as important to us as the recreation of our own.

In defining the human condition I return again and again to my teen years, to the authors I read then—Balzac, Steinbeck, Ibsen, Tolstoy, Gabriela Mistral—to rediscover the emerging geography of my own heart, of my own soul. And when, in my mind, I once again touch those pleasant intellectual and emotional landscapes, I understand the distance between where I am now and where I was then. I also know where I am now and where the children I look to reach are standing along the distant horizon. I see them in the schools, in the streets, in the jails. I

will not surrender my own geography, but I will forever try to embrace other fields, other meadows, other streets and avenues.

I want my readers to come to me, but I am willing to make the journey to where they are. I will appreciate the valleys of their lives, and the mountains. I will swim the rivers of their doubts and traverse the deserts of frustration they must traverse. It is not a fixed place that we must reach, but rather the common geography of the human heart.

What I am trying to do with my books is to bring familiar cultural elements into my stories while at the same time challenging my readers to expand their horizons.

I want to humanize the people I depict. I want to show them struggling, yes. To show them living within their own cultural heritage, yes. But even more I want to show them in the universal striving for love and meaning that we all experience.

I write about young men testing the boundaries of manhood and young women trying to build relationships. I write about young people abandoned as being excessive to the global economy and who have become within the United States not strangers in a strange land, but strangers in the familiar garden they should be calling home.

I need, we need to bring our young people into the fullness of America’s promise and to do that we must rediscover who they are and who we are and be prepared to make the journey with them whatever it takes. We must convince our leaders that it is easier to build strong children than to repair broken adults and, once we convince them of that great truth, we must make them care about it. My conceit is that literature can be a small path along that journey.

Did I tell you I love what I do? Did I tell you that every day I have a creative experience that makes me more than I could imagine ever being? Did I tell you that the boy in me wants to write the stories

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Early Essentials

Developing and Sustaining Birth—Kindergarten Library Collections

ALAN R. BAILEY

Children develop the critical language and early reading skills necessary to enter kindergarten between birth and age five; therefore, reading to infants is essential in boosting brain development and school readiness. Reading aloud to children during these early years provides numerous learning advantages essential to school readiness.

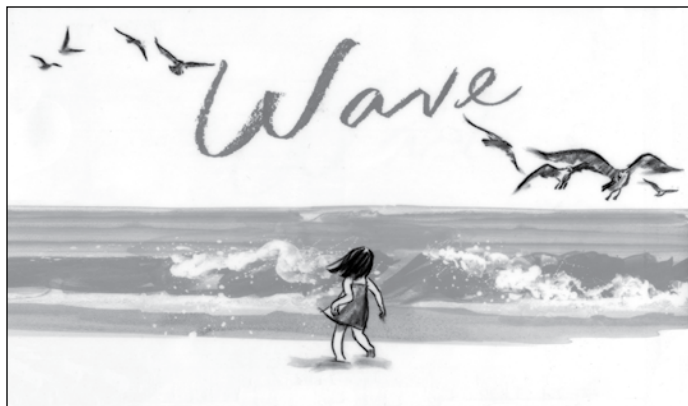
Principal benefits include expressive and receptive language abilities, expanded vocabularies, narrative skills, print awareness, an understanding of written language, awareness of story structure, alphabetic knowledge, and phonological sensitivity. In addition, reading aloud encourages enthusiasm for literacy which develops lifetime reading habits—habits crucial to lifelong literacy.

Even the youngest child enjoys being read to. Listening to adults talk provides a child's initial exposure to vocabulary, which ultimately leads to a love for language. Because reading aloud to children is one of the most important things an adult can do to help children become readers, it's important that educators, parents, and siblings read to them often, preferably daily, and encourage young ones to read along with them.

These significant individuals should demonstrate how much



Alan R. Bailey is Assistant Professor and Education Curriculum Librarian in the Teaching Resources Center at East Carolina University's J.Y. Joyner Library in Greenville, N.C. He is a former school media specialist and currently serves as a member of the 2010 Coretta Scott King Book Awards Jury.



Wave by Suzy Lee (Chronicle, 2008)

they value and enjoy reading by modeling reading behavior. Children need to see influential people in their lives engage in reading often. Such behaviors lay the essential groundwork in young ones for school readiness and lifelong literacy success.

Picture books are essential to meeting the intellectual, developmental, cultural, language, cognitive, creative, communication, and social needs of children ages zero to six. To fully support critical language and early reading skills, lifelong literacy, and early childhood education programs, librarians serving early childhood professionals, parent educators, child advocates, curriculum development specialists, and additional individuals serving young children and their families must develop and sustain strong birth-kindergarten library collections.

The Importance of Picture Books

Picture books for young children primarily consist of detailed illustrations and simple, limited text. The rich illustrations featured on the pages of this genre are as important, if not more important, as the text in conveying the story. Although most picture books are written for children ages birth through eight, more are being published for readers of all ages. Concept

books, wordless picture books, board books, toy and movable books, predictable books, rhymes, and fingerplays represent the rudiments of birth–kindergarten collections.

Concept books are easy-to-read informational picture books that teach a basic concept in an interesting and creative manner. Among the bold illustrations and limited words, concepts like the alphabet, colors, counting, seasons, and opposites are expressed.

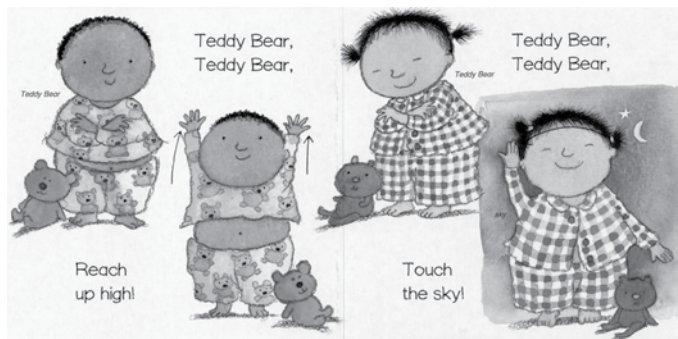
At first glance, Laura Vaccaro Seeger's *One Boy* may appear as a straightforward counting book. But as pages are turned, purposefully positioned die cuts over bright, simple pictures reveal the in-depth relationships shared by text and illustrations. Cleverly written and illustrated, *One Boy* is an engaging delight for young listeners and readers.

Eric Carle's *My Very First Book of Shapes* is considered a classic in this area. The pages of this board book are split horizontally, with standard shapes on the top pages and pictures representing the various shapes on the bottom ones. Readers are challenged to match shapes and pictures by turning pages from either the top or bottom.

More advanced skills like sign language and potty training can be taught with the assistance of books like *Simple Signs* by Cindy Wheeler and *Potty Time* by Parker K. Sawyer. By using illustrations and providing helpful hints, *Simple Signs* teaches basic signs for animals, objects, food, behaviors, and people. Both children and adults will enjoy learning the signs and practicing them again and again. In the movable board book *Potty Time*, featuring Grover and other familiar Muppet characters, the author and illustrator use clear, simple language and bright, colorful illustrations to describe a toilet and its proper use. The last page of this informative book depicts a toilet equipped with a movable handle to emulate flushing.

Wordless picture books tell a story or teach a concept through detailed illustrations without using words. There are fundamental developmental benefits linked with wordless picture books. Young children

- use their imagination (develop creativity skills);
- develop language and thinking skills;



From *Teddy Bear, Teddy Bear* by Annie Kubler. Used with permission from Child's Play International Ltd. © 2004.

- learn sequence skills (stories have a beginning, middle, and end);
- interpret stories in their own way;
- verbalize actions in their own words;
- learn to make judgments;
- discover cause and effect;
- strengthen eye coordination skills; and
- retell the story again and again.

In *Wave* by artist Suzy Lee, a young girl spends a day at the beach with her newfound playmates—five seagulls and the ocean. As she taunts and flirts with the tide, she experiences both the serenity and intensity of waves and receives treasures from the sea.

How a random act of kindness can spark a cycle of good deeds is the lesson learned from Giora Carmi's touching book, *A Circle of Friends*. Additionally, Tana Hoban's *Exactly the Opposite* does not simply teach antonyms like push/pull, hot/cold, and near/far, but also allows the viewer to experience developmental benefits associated with wordless picture books as she examines each detailed photograph.

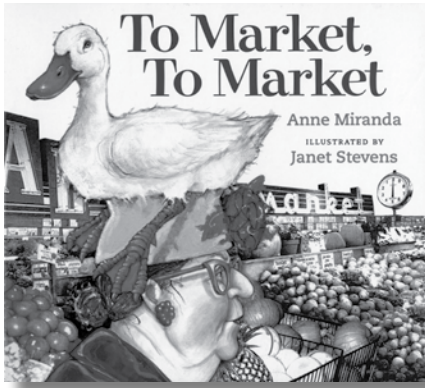
The thick pages associated with **board books** provide handling ease to young hands as they turn pages and hold these books. Although most board books are made of cardboard or cloth over board with stiff, sturdy covers, some are soft and even washable.

Mary Had a Little Lamb, illustrated by Linda Edwards, is an example of a board book equipped with a special feature. This carry-me book contains a handle made especially for little hands so it can easily accompany the child to the grocery store, park, or daycare. Taggies like *If You're Happy and You Know It*, illustrated by Brenda Sexton, feature looped ribbon tags attached to each page. These tags are perfect for turning pages, pulling, or chewing.

A variety of books for young children can be considered **toy and movable books**. These “participation books” are visual, tactile, and three-dimensional works allowing children to peek through holes, lift flaps, touch, feel, pull, and manipulate the objects they discover as each page is turned.

While Fiona Watt's *Tie-a-Bow Book* gives children opportunities to practice tying and untying bows, shoelaces, ribbons, and cords; young hands can manipulate real buttons, snaps, and zippers in Abigail Tabby's board book *Snap! Button! Zip!*

In addition to counting, learning colors, matching pairs, and grouping objects, toddlers will enjoy touching and feeling shiny beetles, crinkly leaves, sticky paint, and shiny hearts in *My First Counting Touch and Feel*. This oversized board book allows



To Market, To Market by Anne Miranda, illus. by Janet Stevens (Harcourt, 2007).

children to explore objects found in the garden, during a traffic jam, at a picnic, and more.

Predictable books can be easily identified by their repeated phrases, rhymes, rhythms, or strong language patterns. Hints of what will happen next in the story are provided as young

listeners and readers eagerly anticipate and guess what is coming next on the basis of the book's patterned structure. One thing always leads to another, helping children learn how stories progress.

An outstanding example is *I Went Walking* by Sue Williams. As the young boy in this story takes a walk, the tail of each animal assists him in the identification process. As the book continues, the phrase "I went walking. What did you see?" is repeated prior to revealing the next animal.

Dad's van goes from being sparkling clean to filled with french fries, ketchup, mud, and more in Lisa Campbell Ernst's cumulative tale *This Is the Van that Dad Cleaned*. The list of mishaps gets longer as each page is turned in this amusing story in rhyme.

Children learn language and strengthen their sense of rhythm by hearing the repetition of identical sounds in words. **Rhymes** help young ones develop phonemic awareness—the ability to segment sounds in spoken word.¹ Traditional rhymes like *Hey Diddle Diddle*, *Baa Baa Black Sheep*, *Little Bo Peep*, and *Humpty Dumpty* are considered nursery rhymes and credited to Mother Goose.

To Market, To Market by Anne Miranda adds an amusing twist to what begins as the traditional rhyme. With each trip to the market, the life of an elderly woman becomes muddled—she returns home with a live trout, spring lamb, milking cow, and other animals in addition to her original purchase, a fat pig. Combined with the colorful, oversized characters by illustrator Janet Stevens, children will enjoy this clever rhyme, time and time again.

In the simple and bright book *Truck Duck* by Michael Rex, animals operate vehicles that rhyme with their names. Crabs, cows, chimps, and cods are humorously depicted driving cabs, plows, blimps, and hogs (motorcycles, of course!).

With the help of many animals, a boy is determined to humor a pig in Linda Ashman's rhyming picture book *Can You Make a Piggy Giggle?* Filled with arm flapping, feet stomping, wriggling like a twirling noodle, and yodeling, this book might be unable to make a piggy giggle, but most children will not only giggle but laugh out loud as well.

Fingerplays are defined as songs, rhymes, games, or poems dramatized by hand, finger, or body motions as they are recited or sung. In addition to developing listening, fine motor, memory, and recall skills, fingerplays teach toddlers to follow directions and concepts, including spatial positioning (i.e., front, back, up, down, next to).

While enjoying the board book *Teddy Bear, Teddy Bear* by Annie Kubler, readers learn and practice sign language as they dramatize this well-known fingerplay. Additional Kubler titles in the Sign and Singalong Series include *Itsy Bitsy Spider*, *Baa Baa Black Sheep*, and *Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star*. In *Clap Your Hands Finger Rhymes* by Sarah Hayes, characters illustrate the actions of more than twenty rhymes.

Picture books are not the sole sources for fingerplays. Interactive collections like *The Lap-Time Song and Play Book*, edited by Jane Yolen, include words, instructions, and musical arrangements for more than fifteen well-known rhymes and finger games. As a special feature, a history of lap songs and each of the rhymes included in this book is provided.

Reading aloud clearly affects kindergarten readiness and life-long literacy; therefore, reading to children is one of the most important things educators, parents, and caregivers can do for them. In the years prior to entering school, a child's foundation for learning and experiencing formal reading instruction is in place; reading to children daily enhances this foundation.

Early exposure to books heavily influences vocabulary knowledge which, in turn, improves reading skills and lifelong literacy. Concept books, wordless picture books, board books,



Inside image from *Wave* © 2008 by Suzy Lee. Used with permission of Chronicle Books, San Francisco. Visit ChronicleBooks.com.

toy and movable books, predictable books, and fingerplays are all forms of picture books designed not only to be enjoyable to young children, but also to meet their intellectual, developmental, cultural, language, cognitive, creative, communication, and social needs. Books cited in this article, in conjunction with the accompanying recommended reading list, provide youth services and curriculum librarians titles essential to developing and sustaining birth-kindergarten collections. ☺

References

1. Lee Galda and Bernice E. Cullinan. *Literature and the Child* (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth/Thompson Learning, 2002): 131.

The Definitive Collection

The following is a representative, but not all-inclusive list, of recommended books to include in a birth-kindergarten collection. You and your library may have your own favorites to add, but this is a great place to start.

Concept Books

- Anno, Mitsumasa. *Anno's Counting Book*. Illus. by the author. HarperCollins, 1975; reissued 1977. 28p.
- Bang, Molly. *Ten, Nine, Eight*. Illus. by the author. Greenwillow, 1983. 24p.
- Carle, Eric. *My Very First Book of Colors*. Illus. by the author. HarperCollins, 1974; reissued Philomel, 2005. 22p.
- . *My Very First Book of Shapes*. Illus. by the author. Philomel, 1974; reissued 2005. 20p.
- Crews, Donald. *Flying*. Illus. by the author. Greenwillow, 1986. 33p.
- Cronin, Doreen. *Click, Clack, Splish, Splash: A Counting Adventure*. Illus. by Betsy Lewin. Atheneum, 2006. 26p.
- Curious George: Before and After*. Based on the characters by Margret and H. A. Rey. Houghton Mifflin, 2006. Unpaged.
- Dodds, Dayle Ann. *The Color Box*. Illus. by Giles Laroche. Little, Brown, 1992. Unpaged.
- Ehlert, Lois. *Eating the Alphabet: Fruits and Vegetables from A to Z*. Illus. by the author. Harcourt, 1989. 34p.
- . *Fish Eyes: A Book You Can Count On*. Illus. by the author. Red Wagon, 2001. 34p.
- Ernst, Lisa Campbell. *The Turn-Around, Upside-Down Alphabet Book*. Illus. by the author. Simon & Schuster, 2004. Unpaged.
- Gillen, Patricia Bellan. *My Signing Book of Numbers*. Illus. by the author. Gallaudet University Press, 1988. 59p.
- Hall, Zoe. *Fall Leaves Fall!* Illus. by Shari Halpern. Scholastic, 2000. Unpaged.
- Hayes, Sarah. *Nine Ducks Nine*. Photos by the author. Candlewick, 2008. Unpaged.
- Hoban, Tana. *26 Letters and 99 Cents*. Photos by the author. Greenwillow, 1987. 32p.
- . *Exactly the Opposite*. Photos by the author. Greenwillow, 1997; reissued 2000. 32p.
- Jones, Christianne C. *Big Red Farm*. Illus. by Todd Ouren. Picture Window, 2007. 24p.
- Kitchen, Bert. *Animal Alphabet*. Illus. by the author. Dial Books, 1984; reissued 1988. 32p.
- Lear, Edward. *Edward Lear's "A" Was Once an Apple Pie*. Retold and illus. by Suse MacDonald. Orchard Books, 2005. Unpaged.
- Lillie, Patricia. *When This Box Is Full*. Photos by Donald Crews. Greenwillow, 1993. Unpaged.
- MacDonald, Suse. *Look Whooo's Counting*. Illus. by the author. Scholastic, 2000. Unpaged.
- Martin, Bill Jr. and John Archambault. *Chicka Chicka Boom Boom*. Illus. by Lois Ehlert. Simon & Schuster, 1989. 36 p.
- Morozumi, Atsuko. *One Gorilla: A Counting Book*. Illus. by the author. Harcourt, 1990. 29p.
- Petty, Colin. *Colors*. Illus. by the author. Barron's Educational Series, 2006. Unpaged.
- Pfister, Marcus. *Rainbow Fish A, B, C*. Illus. by the author. North-South, 2002. Unpaged.
- Rau, Dana Meachen. *Look Down Low*. Illus. by Bernard Adnet. Compass Point, 2002. 24p.
- Roberson, Karla. *My Shoelaces Are Hard to Tie!* Illus. by Vanessa D. Holley. Scholastic, 2004. 32p.
- Sawyer, Parker K. *Potty Time*. Illus. by Christopher Moroney. Random House, 2006. Unpaged.
- Seeger, Laura Vaccaro. *The Hidden Alphabet*. Illus. by the author. Roaring Brook, 2003. Unpaged.
- . *One Boy*. Illus. by the author. Roaring Brook, 2008; reissued 2009. 44p.
- Shannon, George. *Tomorrow's Alphabet*. Photos by Donald Crews. Greenwillow, 1996. 56p.
- Wells, Rosemary. *Max Counts His Chickens*. Illus. by the author. Viking Penguin, 2007. Unpaged.
- Wheeler, Cindy. *Simple Signs*. Illus. by the author. Puffin Books, 1997. 32p.
- Wood, Audrey. *Ten Little Fish*. Illus. by Bruce Robert Wood. Blue Sky, 2004. Unpaged.
- Wormell, Christopher. *Teeth, Tails, & Tentacles: An Animal Counting Book*. Illus. by the author. Running Press, 2004. 66p.

The Definitive Collection (cont.)

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Alborough, Jez. *Hug*. Illus. by the author. Candlewick, 2002. Unpaged.

Banyai, Istvan. *Zoom*. Illus. by the author. Viking, 1995. Unpaged.

Briggs, Raymond. *The Snowman*. Illus. by the author. Random House, 1978; reissued 2002. Unpaged.

Brown, Craig McFarland. *The Patchwork Farmer*. Illus. by the author. Greenwillow, 1989. 24p.

Burke, Tina. *Fly, Little Bird*. Illus. by the author. Kane/Miller, 2006. Unpaged.

Carle, Eric. *Do You Want to Be My Friend?* Illus. by the author. Scholastic, 1997. Unpaged.

Carmi, Giora. *A Circle of Friends*. Illus. by the author. Star Bright, 2003. Unpaged.

Crews, Donald. *Truck*. Illus. by the author. Mulberry, 1988. 32p.

DePaola, Tomie. *Pancakes for Breakfast*. Illus. by the author. Harcourt, 1978. 32p.

Drescher, Henrik. *The Yellow Umbrella*. Illus. by the author. Bradbury, 1987. 36p.

Himler, Ronald. *Dancing Boy*. Illus. by the author. Star Bright, 2005. Unpaged.

Hoban, Tana. *Exactly the Opposite*. Photos by the author. Greenwillow, 1997; reissued 2000. 32p.

Hughes, Shirley. *Up and Up*. Illus. by the author. Lothrop, Lee and Shepard, 1986. 32p.

Keats, Ezra Jack. *Pssst! Doggie*. Illus. by the author. Franklin Watts, 1973. 32p.

Lee, Suzy. *Wave*. Illus. by the author. Chronicle, 2008. Unpaged.

Lehman, Barbara. *Rainstorm*. Illus. by the author. Houghton Mifflin, 2007. 30p.

McCully, Emily Arnold. *First Snow*. Illus.

by the author. HarperCollins, 2004. Unpaged.

Ormerod, Jan. *Moonlight*. Illus. by the author. Frances Lincoln Children's Books, 2004. 32p.

Sis, Peter. *Dinosaur*. Illus. by the author. Greenwillow, 2000. Unpaged.

Tafari, Nancy. *Junglewalk*. Illus. by the author. Greenwillow, 1988. 32p.

Varon, Sara. *Chicken and Cat*. Illus. by the author. Scholastic, 2006. Unpaged.

Vincent, Gabrielle. *Breakfast Time, Ernest and Celestine*. Illus. by the author. Walker, 1990. 16p.

———. *A Day, a Dog*. Illus. by the author. Front Street, 1999. Unpaged.

Weitzman, Jacqueline Preiss. *You Can't Take a Balloon Into the Metropolitan Museum*. Illus. by Robin Preiss-Glasser. Puffin, 2000. 37p.

Wiesner, David. *Free Fall*. Illus. by the author. HarperCollins, 1988; reissued 2008. 32p.

———. *Tuesday*. Illus. by the author. Scholastic, 1998. 32p.

Board Books

Baker, Keith. *Big Fat Hen*. Illus. by the author. Voyager, 1999. Unpaged.

Bang, Molly. *Ten, Nine, Eight*. Illus. by the author. Greenwillow, 1983. 24p.

Bloom, Suzanne. *A Splendid Friend, Indeed*. Illus. by the author. Boyds Mills, 2007. 32p.

Christian, Cheryl. *What Happens Next? Y Ahora, Que Pasara?* Photos by Laura Dwight. Star Bright, 2004. 12p.

———. *Where Does It Go?* Illus. by the author. Star Bright, 2001. 12p.

Crews, Donald. *Inside Freight Train*. Illus. by the author. HarperFestival, 2001. 12p.

Edwards, Linda. *Mary Had a Little Lamb*. Illus. by the author. Music

arranged by Eileen O'Brien. Usborne Books, 2001. Unpaged.

Ehlert, Lois. *Fish Eyes: A Book You Can Count On*. Illus. by the author. Red Wagon, 2001. 34p.

Elmo's Big Word Book. Illus. by Mary Beth Nelson. Photos by John E. Barrett. Random House, 2001. 12p.

Ford, Bernette. *No More Diapers for Ducky!* Illus. by Sam Williams. Boxer Books, 2006. 32p.

Fry, Sondli. *My Busy Day: A First Word Book*. Photos by Ken Karp Photography. Simon Spotlight, 2006. 12p.

Greenfield, Eloise. *I Make Music*. Illus. by Jan Spivey Gilchrist. Black Butterfly, 1991. 12p.

Gunzi, Christiane. *Furry Kittens*. Photos by the author. Barron's, 2005. 10p.

Hru, Dakari. *Tickle Tickle*. Illus. by Ken Wilson-Max. Roaring Brook, 2002. 32p.

Oxenbury, Helen. *Clap Hands*. Illus. by the author. Little Simon, 1999. 10p.

Petty, Colin. *Colors*. Illus. by the author. Barron's, 2006. Unpaged.

Rosen, Michael. *We're Going on a Bear Hunt*. Illus. by Helen Oxenbury. Little Simon, 1997. 34p.

Seuss, Dr. *Wet Pet, Dry Pet, Your Pet, My Pet! A Book of Pettable Pets*. Illus. by the author. Random House, 2005. Unpaged.

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Suen, Anastasia. *Toddler Twos*. Illus. by Winnie Cheon. Lee & Low, 2000. Unpaged.

Tyler, Jenny. *Animal Hide-and-Seek*. Illus. by Stephen Cartwright. Usborne Books, 2003. Unpaged.

Watt, Fiona. *That's Not My Dolly:*

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Her Dress is Too Spotted. Illus. by Rachel Wells. Usborne Books, 2004. Unpaged.

———. *Tie-a-Bow Book.* Illus. by Stephen Cartwright. Usborne Books, 2002. Unpaged.

Weiss, Ellen. *Fruit Salad: A Touch-and-Learn Book.* Illus. by Jason Jourdan. Brighter Minds, 2006. Unpaged.

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Brown, Ruth. *The Tale of Two Mice.* Illus. by the author. Candlewick, 2008. Unpaged.

Carle, Eric. *10 Little Rubber Ducks.* Illus. by the author. HarperCollins, 2005. Unpaged.

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The Viking Invasion

Or How I Learned to Love the Unexpected

YELENA ALEKSEYEVA-POPOVA

No comprehensive library school program is truly comprehensive. They might teach us how to select or review great books, how to use technology, and how to catalog and search. But there are many, *many* things that library school just does not cover. If you were to tell me that you know a librarian who has not had a “They didn’t cover *this* in library school!” moment, I’d have to believe that you are shamelessly lying.

It was in July, about half a year into my first library trainee position, that I found myself staring just such a moment in the face (or, rather, thirty-five faces). I was in the midst of conducting my first large-scale arts and crafts program. Thoughts like “No one ever told me that five-year-olds can’t handle staplers!” and “Why did I ever think that making Viking helmets out of duct



Peter Anastos proudly models his Viking helmet.

tape was a great idea?” raced through my mind. “But why *were* you making Viking helmets out of duct tape?” you might ask. “Ah,” I’d say, “Let’s start in the beginning.”

In the beginning, there was the grand change to our summer reading program. Though the statewide summer reading theme was “Catch the Reading Bug,” our department-wide insectophobia won over, and our theme was “Where in the World?” This affair

was planned as a geographical extravaganza, with a world-map board game and passport-style reading logs. Our major programs were seven “excursions,” one to each of the continents. As the only European in the department, I chose Europe, and, specifically, Ukraine (my native country) as the focus of the program.

Though I could have chosen any other European country, or even a mix, I thought this choice would be a fantastic opportunity to tell some Ukrainian stories and sneak in a few lesser-known facts about my country.

Moreover, I instantly thought of a perfect craft for my program—Ukrainian head wreaths. Made of fake flower garlands and ribbons, they would be an easy, colorful, and fun craft to make.



Gianina Bueti in her Ukrainian wreath.



Yelena Alekseyeva-Popova is a children’s librarian trainee in Chappaqua, New York. She will receive her MLS degree from Long Island University in January 2010.

“But wait!” my inner critic spoke up. “What about the boys?”

“Indeed,” I thought, “I should definitely have a craft that would be more appealing to boys.”

But what would possibly be the equivalent of a girly head wreath and still be Ukrainian-themed? I thought and thought and then, as I was preparing a quick-and-dirty rundown of Ukrainian history, I had a “eureka moment”—Viking helmets! The Vikings (or as they were alternatively called, the Varangians or the Rus), were involved in the founding of the Kievan Rus (the kingdom in the 9th and 10th centuries). Though the exact nature of their involvement is often disputed, the “teaching moment” of Viking helmet-making provided another inducement to going ahead with the project.

The helmets had a fairly easy design (or so I thought). They would be constructed from three to four strips of cardstock covered in duct tape. The first two strips would be stapled into a cross, and then the ends stapled onto a band formed by the third strip; a fourth strip could be used to extend the band. The resulting openings would be covered by triangles of aluminum foil and taped from underneath so the duct-tape-covered framework would be visible.

Thankfully, I had the foresight to cover the strips in duct tape before the program; otherwise, I would probably have ended up with thirty-five duct-tape-covered kids. I also pre-cut the foil triangles.

For weeks leading up to the program, I cut out the strips and covered them with duct tape . . . *ad nauseum*, it seemed.

Finally, the day of the program arrived. Everything was going

swimmingly. The kids loved it all, beginning with learning a few words in Ukrainian right through to my abridged history of Ukraine. They ate the Ukrainian cookies that I baked and listened to the stories. However, when the time came to do the crafts, the surprises began.

I asked, “Who would like to make the flower wreaths?” and most of the boys raised their hands first. “All right,” I thought, “I brought enough for everyone.” I then asked, “Who would like to make a Viking helmet?” and all of the girls raised their hands. I was terribly ashamed that my assumptions about gender-linked craft preferences had been so decisively disproved!

I also had not anticipated that everyone would try to do both crafts at once. I spent the next half-hour running around, helping staple helmets and ribbons, fit wreaths, and tape foil. I am relieved to report that no body parts were stapled in the process and that no one was inappropriately glued to any surface.

Looking back (always the best direction for viewing such events), it was one of the most hectic, yet strangely rewarding, library programs I have presented. Despite the chaos, everyone left content and with both crafts (more or less) completed.

Though library school did not prepare me for it, the lessons I learned from this experience were priceless:

1. When presented with a choice of projects, most children will choose “all of the above.”
2. Be prepared to have your assumptions challenged.
3. Duct tape, foil, and cardstock are perfect materials for making Viking helmets. ☺

THE MAY HILL ARBUTHNOT HONOR LECTURE, continued from page 16

that I wanted desperately to read as a teenager? Did I tell you that the stories I write are my way of merging my own small universe with that of my readers and that this is my way of celebrating this wondrous gift of life?

Lastly, I want my books to be portals to not only other books, and to other cultures, but pathways between the unforgiving geography that we are so passively accepting, to the far reaches of every lonely and despairing heart. I hope to offer the discomforts of conscience, and the pleasures of rediscovering our humanity. In this sweet geography even distant hearts can touch.

I was on a subway in New York when I saw a young girl reading

a book of mine, *Monster*. That's quite a thrill in itself, but after turning a few pages she stopped reading, closed the book, and for a few moments was lost in thought. She had taken my words and ran off with them to her own private place. In that moment all of our boundaries—age, gender, race—had been bridged. If I were dead, it wouldn't have mattered, for on that page, in that rocking train, even mortality had been put aside. How beautiful a moment for a boy from Harlem who loved to read.

I am grateful for booklovers all over the world. I am grateful for those who teach books and reading and who understand now what books can mean and who understood enough about me when I was a boy to bring me to this process. Thank you all for being part of this process. ☺

What's the Big Idea?

Science and Math at the Library for Preschoolers and Kindergarteners

REBECCA RUPP

The children's room at the Bennington (Vermont) Free Library has an interactive graph on the wall. This month, visiting kids (using colorful Post-It notes) are collectively amassing data on favorite pets, variously pasting their names in columns under Dog, Cat, Hamster, Fish, Bird, and—one lonely, but adventurous, soul—Iguana.

Last month's graph charted favorite cookies; others have tallied favorite bugs, average bedtimes, and numbers of people in library-visiting families. In the center of the room, one table holds geoboards and rubber bands for making circles, squares, triangles, and imaginative two-dimensional squiggles; another features jars of buttons and trays of seashells for sorting. Boxes of blocks line the walls, and in a corner stands an empty television case, retrieved by an alert librarian from a throwaway pile, now used by young meteorologists as a homemade weather station.

These are all aspects of the wildly popular "What's the Big Idea?" program, developed under the auspices of librarian Sally Anderson, executive director of the Vermont Center for the Book/Mother Goose Programs, with funding from the National Science Foundation. It aims to provide librarians with techniques and tools for introducing preschool and kindergarten children to science and math through literature.

"Kids love the program, and librarians, parents, and early-childhood educators do too," said Anderson. "What's the Big Idea?" helps librarians expand on the things they already do, incorporating science and math into all kinds of ongoing library programs. And the opportunity to experiment and solve problems on their own is a phenomenal self-esteem builder for kids. The activities are fun, but this is also serious stuff, and the



Books such as Dayle Ann Dodds's *The Shape of Things* and Cathryn Falwell's *Shape Capers* inspire kids to turn their imaginations to shapes, patterns, and symmetry. Here one young investigator experiments with pattern blocks and mirrors.

kids understand that. They're not only playing; they're discovering the rewards of intellectual satisfaction."

Now in its third year, "What's the Big Idea?"—initially tested in libraries across Vermont, upstate New York, Delaware, and Texas—is gaining a foothold nationwide.

"This is changing the way librarians look at the children's room," said Vermont librarian Linda Donigan. "We're now constantly finding new ways to mesh science and math with ongoing library programs and projects."

The heart of the program is picture books, since stories are superb conveyors of memorable messages about science and math. "What's the Big Idea?" co-opts tools librarians have been using all along and shows them how to expand these resources into new and larger fields.

"You read books differently after being exposed to 'What's the Big Idea?'" said librarian Maureen Miller of Lewes, Delaware. "You begin to see math and science connections everywhere."



Rebecca Rupp has a PhD in cell biology and biochemistry and is the author of nearly twenty books, among them both fiction and nonfiction works for children. For the past fifteen years, she has been designing and presenting science programs for children at Vermont public libraries. She is an educational consultant for the Vermont Center for the Book.



How tall is your tower? After reading Seymour Simon's *Let's Try It Out with Towers and Bridges*, which encourages children to explore principles of engineering through play, kids tackle a tower-building project with straws and connectors.

The “big ideas” of the program title literally are big ideas. Based on standards established by state departments of education, the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM), and the National Academy of Sciences (NAS), “What’s the Big Idea?” concentrates on crucial age-appropriate math and science concepts, variously grouped under Numbers and Operations, Patterns and Relationships, Change Over Time, and Geometry and Spatial Sense.

For each of the four topics, the Vermont Center for the Book has amassed an extensive, multifaceted bibliography of children’s picture books, a long list of related projects and activities, suggestions for independent discovery centers, and a selection of recommended resources and manipulatives.

A feature of the program as a whole is its devotion to the principles of scientific and mathematical investigation. The key is personal acts of discovery. “What’s the Big Idea?” emphasizes child-directed, hands-on exploration rather than adult-mediated instruction. Direction is provided in the form of open-ended, curiosity-provoking questions, designed to encourage reflection and promote experimentation: “How could you find out if . . . ?” “What do you think might happen next if . . . ?” Kids are not encouraged simply to explore, but to do so ana-

lytically—to collect and evaluate data, such that they not only discover outcomes, but reveal cause-and-effect relationships and establish proofs.

In Numbers and Operations, kids explore counting, number recognition, one-to-one correspondence, cardinal and ordinal numbers, part-whole relationships, number sentences, set formation, estimation, measurement, data collection, and graphic analysis.

One session, for example, features Ann Tompert’s picture book *Just a Little Bit* (Scholastic, 2000), in which the impossibly mismatched Elephant and Mouse share a seesaw. A host of animal characters pile onto Mouse’s end of the seesaw in an attempt to balance Elephant, among them a giraffe, zebra, lion, crocodile, bear, monkey, and ostrich.

“Every little bit helps,” Elephant trumpets, as he’s lifted into the air when a tiny brown beetle finally tips the scale by landing on the end of Mouse’s nose.

“The kids love all the animals,” Miller said. “Then, after hearing the story, they experiment with a pan balance, testing to see what different objects weigh in comparison to others. Are they heavier, lighter, or the same? How many bottle caps does it take to balance a toy elephant? They love making predictions. And they always go far beyond the things I’ve set out for them. I sometimes ask questions, but I try to let them explore on their own.”

In another instance, kids listened to Rolf Myller’s *How Big Is a Foot?* (Yearling, 1991) in which a foolish apprentice—using his own small foot as a unit of measure—lands in jail for building an extremely undersized bed as a birthday present for the queen.

“It’s a great introduction to nonstandard measurements,” one librarian said. “Kids love to trace their own hands and feet. Everybody made cutout foot- and handprints and used them as tools to measure each other and the library.”

“Ours had a wonderful time figuring out how tall they were in chopsticks or handprints or linking blocks,” another added.

In the second unit, Patterns and Relationships, kids are encouraged to recognize, create, and extend patterns, to identify similarities and differences among objects, to understand behavioral sequences in everyday life (“First I get out of bed in the morning . . . what happens next?”), to follow sequential directions for making simple toys such as paper airplanes and spinners, and to investigate cause and effect, as in the relationship between light and shadow.

One session centers around Trudy Harris’s gorgeously illustrated *Pattern Fish* (Millbrook Press, 2000), which opens with fish striped in a simple alternating A-B pattern—“Yellow-black, yellow-black / A fish swims in the ocean”—and then proceeds to more and more complex patterns in multiple colors, shapes, and sizes. Once kids have learned to identify patterns, they

experiment with making their own, using stickers, linking cubes, paper chains, or colorful foam pattern blocks.

The concepts of same and different are introduced with such picture books as Margarette S. Reid's *The Button Box* (Puffin, 1995), in which an imaginative little boy sorts and re-sorts the buttons in his grandmother's wonderful heirloom button box, and Marthe Jocelyn's *Hannah's Collections* (Tundra Books, 2004), in which Hannah—who collects everything from barrettes and buttons to seashells, Popsicle sticks, feathers, and dolls—sorts her collections into related piles in order to take samples to show at school. (Jocelyn's book is illustrated *I Spy*-style, with an appealing mix of paper collage and color photographs of real objects.)

"Kids here can't get enough of sorting," Miller said. "I keep big containers filled with many different kinds of jar and bottle lids. Somebody's always sorting them—and not just the preschoolers, but older kids too."

Another sorting project involved pasta. Kids listened to a reading of Tomie de Paola's *Strega Nona* (Aladdin, 1979), the much-loved tale of a kindly witch with a magic pasta pot, and then sorted a range of pastas into related groups by size, shape, and color.

"They loved all the different squiggles, tubes, wheels, ruffles, and bow ties," one librarian said.

In the Change Over Time unit, kids explore growth, life cycles, seasons, and weather through books, experiments, and observations of the natural world.

"There are so many aspects to change," Donigan said. "The kids raise frogs from tadpoles and plant different kinds of seeds. Our kids planted beans, then measured them and graphed their growth rates. And, of course, we read *Jack and the Beanstalk*."

Another project featured Jeanne Titherington's *Pumpkin, Pumpkin* (HarperTrophy, 1993), in which a little boy plants a pumpkin seed, grows and harvests a pumpkin, carves a jack-o-lantern, and finally saves the seeds from his pumpkin to plant the next year.

"Our kids hollowed out their own little pumpkins and counted the seeds," one librarian said. "We tried to predict how many seeds would be in each pumpkin and we made a chart recording our results."

"First we read Gail Gibbons's *Monarch Butterfly* (Holiday House, 1991) and Deborah Heiligman's *From Caterpillar to Butterfly* (HarperCollins, 1996)," said Vermont librarian Chris Poggi. "Then we used a Butterfly Life Cycle Kit from Insect Lore (www.insectlore.com) to hatch our own butterflies. The kids followed the whole process, watching the caterpillars eat, grow, spin chrysalises, and then emerge as butterflies. At the end, we had a party to free the butterflies. The kids were awed. It was an incredible experience."

Miller took Change Over Time on the road, setting up shop at a



local farmer's market—“a perfect place to learn about seeds and plants”—where she hosted story hours and scientific inquiries in a historic one-room schoolhouse.

local farmer's market—“a perfect place to learn about seeds and plants”—where she hosted story hours and scientific inquiries in a historic one-room schoolhouse.

In one session she read Ruth Krauss's *The Carrot Seed* (HarperCollins, 2004), illustrated by Crockett Johnson, the story of a determined little boy who tenderly cares for his planted carrot seed even though everyone around him insists that it won't come up. Eventually, however, all his dedication and effort pay off, and, to the amazement of all, he harvests a gigantic carrot.

"After the story, the kids all planted their own carrot seeds," Miller said, "and I sent them home with data sheets to help them keep track of their growing plants."

In the fourth unit, Geometry and Spatial Sense, kids name and compare shapes, experiment with symmetry, make and follow simple maps, and tackle a creative array of building and construction projects. For example, they explore shapes with quilting squares and tangram puzzles, perhaps while reading Deborah Hopkinson's *Sweet Clara and the Freedom Quilt* (Dragonfly Books, 1995), in which a clever quilt serves as a map for escaping slaves, or Ann Tompert's *Grandfather Tang's Story* (Dragonfly Books, 1997), a tangram-based folktale featuring a pair of shape-shifting fox fairies.

"When we studied maps, we read Pat Hutchins's *Rosie's Walk* (Aladdin, 1971) and Gail Hartman's *As the Crow Flies* (Aladdin, 1993)," one librarian said. "Then we passed out treasure maps

and held a treasure hunt in the library.”

“Kids here loved the building and construction projects,” said Donigan.

Recommended books on building include Mary Ann Hoberman’s rhyming *A House Is a House for Me* (Puffin, 2007), which describes many different kinds of homes (“A hill is a house for an ant, an ant / A hive is a home for a bee”); Alice

McLerran’s *Roxaboxen* (HarperCollins, 2004), in which a group of imaginative children build their own town from rocks and boxes; and April Jones Prince’s *Twenty-One Elephants and Still Standing* (Houghton Mifflin, 2005), which describes a challenge to New York’s new Brooklyn Bridge when P. T. Barnum tested its strength with a weighty parade of elephants.

“Building projects were terrific for Family Night programs,” Donigan said. “Different family groups competed to see who could build the strongest or longest bridge or the tallest tower. Dads, grandparents, caregivers all got into the act. It was a wonderful opportunity for families to interact and to learn together.”

Family and community interactions are a highlight of the “What’s the Big Idea?” program, according to Rose Treviño, youth services coordinator for the Houston Public Library system. “All of our children’s librarians have formed community partnerships to expand the ‘What’s the Big Idea?’ program,” Treviño explained. “They work with Head Start programs and with WIC—that’s the Women, Infants, and Children program sponsored by the Texas Department of State Health Services—to provide education about health and nutrition to needy families.”

What about partnerships with scientists?

“There’s interest in that too,” Treviño said. “For example, one of our library regulars, an engineer, has used the concepts of ‘What’s the Big Idea?’ to start a science enrichment program for six- to ten-year-olds.”

“We invited local college students majoring in math and science to teach some of the sessions,” Donigan said. “They had lots of great ideas and had wonderful interactions with the preschoolers.”

Participating librarians agree that “What’s the Big Idea?” is an amazingly versatile program, adaptable to a variety of approaches, teaching styles, and needs.

“It’s a technique,” one librarian said. “Once you’ve learned to think in terms of science and math concepts, examples are everywhere.”

A statistical analysis of the program by the RMC Research Corporation in Denver, Colorado, confirms many of the personal reports and observations of librarians in the field. The implementation of the program, for example, has brought about significant changes in librarian practices over time. Program-trained librarians notably increased incidences of reading math- and science-related books and initiated more math- and science-based hands-on activities. The use of math and science vocabulary increased in participating libraries; more librarians used graphs and charts in day-to-day contexts; and the availability of math- and science-based resources for children and families increased.

Librarians also reported a noticeable increase in the qual-

“What’s the Big Idea?” Kit

Here are some items you can use to create your own math and science kit for your library:

- Thirty sets of Tangrams, plus Tangram pattern cards
- Four sets of wooden blocks (three hundred pieces)
- Straws and connectors (705 pieces)
- Two sets of foam shapes (118 pieces)
- Five laminated U.S. map placemats
- Mirrors for exploring symmetry
- Pattern block stickers
- Twenty-four tapping sticks for rhythmic pattern exercises
- Three button collections
- Three sorting collections
- Two balances
- Two sets of animal cards
- Three sink-and-float collections
- Three sets of linking cubes
- Four patterns and counting collections
- Twenty-four magnifying lenses
- Rain gauge
- Ten student thermometers
- One set of weather stamps
- Ten clipboards
- *Weather Words* by Gail Gibbons
- Three sets of function cards
- Two animal counting collections
- Four sets of math cards
- One bag of counters
- Four sets of dominoes
- One- and three-minute timers
- One bag of pompoms (one hundred)

ity and quantity of questions asked by “What’s the Big Idea?” participants and said that the children tended to spend longer periods of time with the activities and projects. “We’re also seeing more drop-in activity,” Treviño said. “The program appeals to a surprising range of ages. Middle-schoolers come in to use our ‘What’s the Big Idea?’ Discovery Centers.”

Parents, almost unanimously, reported that their children enjoyed the program, and afterwards continued to talk about the experience at home. Most parents felt the hands-on projects were the best part of the sessions; some also mentioned the effective link of books to activities, as well as the positive social aspects of the program.


Reports on the state of American math and science education have been dismal in recent years. Results of the last Program for International Student Assessment showed American teenagers lagging far behind their peers in other industrialized countries in science and math. (In a list of thirty countries, the United States ranked seventeenth in science and twenty-fourth in math.)¹

Similarly, the 2008 Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) showed that American fourth and eighth graders had failed to make any progress over the course of the past decade and continued to score significantly lower on tests than students from Singapore, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Japan.²

Such early education programs as “What’s the Big Idea?” may eventually help reverse this disastrous trend.

“Tell me and I forget; show me and I remember; involve me and I understand,” an old saying goes. “These kids are really involved,” Donigan said. “The kids in ‘What’s the Big Idea?’ begin to see the world in a whole different way.”

Even better, is the comment of one parent. “My daughter loves this program,” she said. “She now thinks of science as fun.”

The Vermont Center for the Book/Mother Goose Programs hopes next to extend “What’s the Big Idea?” to provide science and math enrichment for older children. 

A 196-page instruction manual and a librarian’s kit of math and science manipulatives are available through the Vermont Center for the Book/Mother Goose Programs. For more information, write P.O. Box 423, 136 Main St., Chester, VT 05143; call (802) 875-2751 or (800) 763-2665; or visit www.mothergooseprograms.org.



“Our kids love to watch things grow,” one librarian said. “They loved listening to *Jody’s Beans* by Malachy Doyle and to Ruth Krauss’s *The Carrot Seed*. Then they planted seeds of their own. It’s a great exercise in math too; they measured their growing plants and counted the opening leaves.”

References and Notes

1. Maria Glod, “U.S. Teens Trail Peers Around World on Math-Science Test,” *Washington Post* (Dec. 5, 2007): A07. (For a complete report on the results of the Program for International Student Assessment, see the OECD/PISA website, www.pisa.oecd.org.)
2. National Center for Education Statistics, “Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study,” <http://nces.ed.gov/timss> (accessed July 24, 2009).

The Myth of Equal Access

Bridging the Gap with Diverse Patrons

CARY MELTZER FROSTICK

Photos by Carl Antonucci

It was one of those dark, rainy spring mornings, and I had the house to myself. I switched on the news to keep me company as I emptied out the dishwasher.

Catching the tail-end of a national story about drop-out rates among Hispanics, I turned up the volume as the story focused on a particular youth who had been flunking out of high school. As a means of intervention, he had been placed temporarily in a school that offered a dual-language program. The youth's scores rose dramatically.

When the school felt he was sufficiently out of danger of failing, he was placed back in his former school. Shortly afterwards, his scores began to plummet again.

He eventually gave up and dropped out. There followed a series of "experts" arguing the pros and cons of dual-language immersion programs for English- and Spanish-speaking students. On the one hand, the dual-language program is a valid effort to address the needs of an increasingly at-risk student population. On the other hand, this is America. We speak English here. Immigrants need to learn our language if they want to take full advantage of the privileges that our country has to offer. Can

we really justify the practice of teaching Hispanic students in their native language just so they can graduate? And if we can, shouldn't that same service be offered to other immigrant populations?

The debate was a familiar one to me, albeit in a different setting, and I knew there were no easy answers to the questions being raised. The issues presented in this news story are complex and part of a growing dilemma affecting all government agencies, including public libraries. With the nationwide increase in immigrant populations, as well as the growing disparity between rich and poor, public libraries are finding themselves in the same boat as the rest of the education community. How do you provide everyone in a diverse service area the same level of access to information and education?

As our demographics rapidly change, the American Library Association's guidelines for providing equal access seem increasingly utopian; yet, as managers of children's services, we should be on the front lines of the war being waged over how to provide it. Our primary responsibility is to ensure that today's youth become tomorrow's patrons, but it is the youth who are most likely to be denied access by our outdated library policies.



Cary Meltzer Frostick served as the Children's Room Director of the Utica (N.Y.) Public Library from April 2000 to January 2009. She is now Youth Services Supervisor at the Mary Riley Styles Public Library in Falls Church, Va. She is a member of ALSC's Managing Children's Services Committee.

For the past nine years, I've dealt with this dilemma on a daily basis, and while I've learned the hard way that there are no easy answers, I've discovered that there are steps we can take to bring the myth of equal access closer to reality.

* * *

In April 2000, I left the cozy small town library where I was the children's librarian to head up the youth services department of a much larger urban library in central New York. I knew very little about the library or the city in which I would be working. The director had hired me for my experience doing collaborative programming and outreach.

I arrived for my first day of work on the first day of spring break. Shortly after my arrival, the first of what would be many daycare groups arrived to use the computers. I had expected that there would be many African-American children, but as more and more children arrived (there would be more than three hundred children using the library that day), the three rooms that made up the department were soon awash in a veritable rainbow of skin tones. I heard as many as four different languages being spoken at any given time. How could this library be located just twenty-five miles from the all-white, mostly middle class library that I had just left? Talk about culture shock!

I soon learned that the library was just two doors down from a refugee center. Regularly, groups of new arrivals were given tours of the library by refugee center staff. The tour guide would point out what a wonderful place the library was for their children, and the parents interpreted that as the library being a good place to *leave* their children while they attended their English language and orientation classes at the center.

The children received instruction in English through the English as a Second Language (ESL) program offered by the public schools. Children arriving with their families in the spring would have to wait until the following school year to receive instruction. Many children have learned their first words of English from the library staff.

The neighborhoods surrounding the library housed some of the poorest people in the city, including many of the immigrants. African-Americans occupied most of the housing within walking distance of the library. There was also a growing Hispanic population. A sizable Bosnian population that had immigrated to the city during the conflict between Bosnia, Croatia, and Serbia lived nearby, as did a number of Korean, Vietnamese, and Chinese families.

During my employ there, I would see Afghani, Iraqi, and Iranian families increase in number just before 9/11; Sudanese and Somali families arrive in greater numbers as conflicts escalated in Africa; and a rapidly growing Burmese population.



Aye Maung is proud to receive his library card.

The virtual melting pot that the neighborhoods were turning into was evidenced by the growing number of mixed-race children who showed up in the children's department of the library. Dark-skinned, almond-eyed children spoke fluent Vietnamese, as well as English, and were ostracized by their Caucasian, African American, and Asian schoolmates alike.

Policies and Procedures that Fail

The difficulty of providing equal access and equality of service to such a diverse patronage can seem particularly insurmountable when you work in youth services, but it can seem impossible when you serve children living in poverty. During my first years at the library, many of the children who frequented the department did not even have library cards, and for good reason. Children's library card applications had to be signed by a parent or legal guardian. The adult would have to assume responsibility for any late fees and the cost of any lost or damaged items and provide the necessary proof of address. Furthermore, children were required to be able to write their name before they could obtain their own library card. This is fairly standard for libraries across the country, but here are the stumbling blocks:

- Most of the parents of our regular patrons never came into the library.
- Many children were not always in the care of a parent or legal guardian. We would often encounter children who were in transit from one living situation to another, or in foster care, and their temporary guardians did not want to assume financial responsibility for them.
- Many of the parents did not speak English well and couldn't

read the language at all. They refused to sign their name to something that they could not read and didn't deem a library card important enough to trouble their interpreter with.

- A surprising number of parents who understood why they had to sign the application form refused to do so. They did not want the responsibility of keeping track of the materials that their child checked out from the library.
- If a child's parent was found to be delinquent because of fines associated with late fees or lost items, the child was denied a card until the parent cleared fines on his or her own card.
- Many low-income parents whose cards were delinquent (often because of fines assessed on unreturned materials from when they were teens) were unable to pay their fines and therefore unable to check out materials for their preschoolers.



Catherina uses the computer at Utica Public Library.

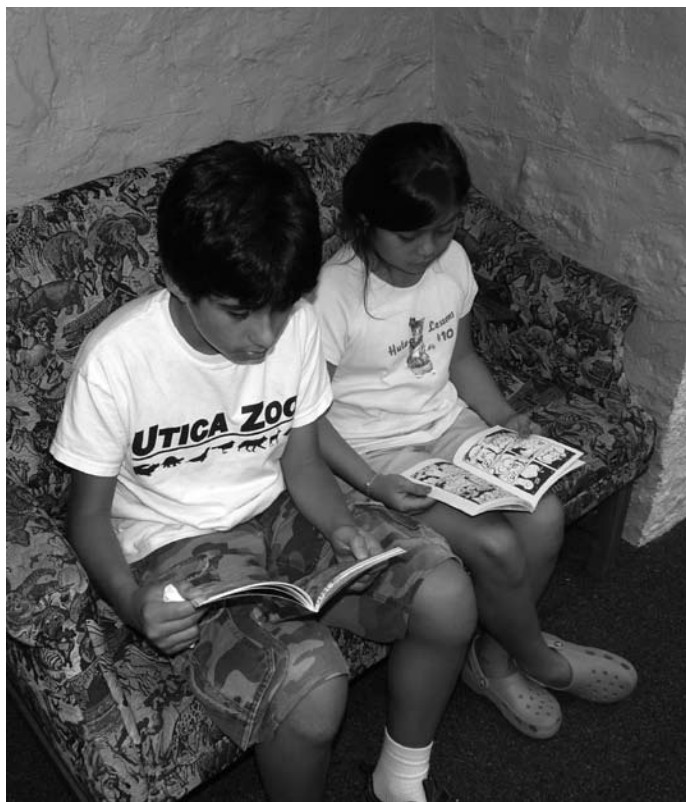
Another example of a fairly standard library policy that can deny access is charging borrower fees for DVDs and videos. In addition to the fees, late return of these items can result in exorbitant daily fines. My library charged a \$5 yearly membership fee for our "video club." Daily late fees were \$2. Only adults ages eighteen and older could purchase the video membership, so only adults could check out the DVDs and videos. The problems inherent in this type of arrangement are obvious:

- The most popular DVDs and videos cost less to purchase than the library-bound picture books that carried a daily fine of ten cents for late return.
- We never saw the parents of most of our regular young patrons. Their parents did not have library cards or ever even enter the building. Our entire DVD and video collection was off limits to these children even if they had a library card of their own.
- The DVDs could have been a wonderful incentive to encourage children to convince their parents to sign a library card application form for them. Once they learned that they couldn't check out the movies on their own card, many children lost interest in getting a card altogether.
- Our best ESL materials for children were in the form of DVDs and videos.

Computer and Internet use policies for public libraries often include limits on time, number of people allowed at a computer, and number of pages printed, and they restrict people from accessing inappropriate material. Library cards are often required for computer use, and there is generally a nominal

fee per page for printing. Monitoring children's Internet use is generally stated to be the responsibility of the parent. My library was no exception, but these restrictions created the following problems:

- Children were allowed thirty minutes per day of computer use for entertainment purposes. However, our limited English speakers might take up most of that time in trying to get the staff to understand where they wanted to go on the computer, and for the staff to find the right site. This also was the case for our many learning disabled kids. Malfunctioning computer equipment frequently gobbled up a considerable portion of that thirty-minute time limit as well.
- The one person, one computer rule was created to prevent groups from blocking pathways, as well as to keep down the noise level. However, it backfired by creating disciplinary problems and more work for the staff. We found that the children were much better than the staff at helping each other on the computers, particularly in the case of the limited English speakers. During particularly busy times, doubling up on the computers could have prevented lengthy wait periods that sent many of our patrons out the door without being served.
- Without a public computer and printer management system, placing limits on printing proved impossible. Our five-print limit was sometimes blatantly ignored, but many times young, inexperienced computer users were not even aware that they were printing or they would think they were printing one page, when in fact they'd sent thirty or more pages to the printer. All of the children claimed ignorance when confronted about abuse of printing privileges, which made for a disciplinary nightmare. Charging children for prints was out



Francisco and Casandra read in the children's room at the Utica Public Library.

of the question in such a poor neighborhood. The children's room was costing the library a fortune in ink cartridges.

- Requiring library cards for computer use would have prevented the majority of our neighborhood kids from accessing this service.
- By far, our biggest problem was “inappropriate” material accessed on the Internet. Our computers were not filtered. Many of our children did not have computers at home. We never saw their parents, so the part of the policy that put responsibility for monitoring computer use on the parents was basically worthless. Defining “inappropriate” proved to be impossible, as each member of the staff had different acceptability levels. Consequently, as different staff members monitored the computers, children received different messages about what they could and could not access while on the Internet. Our attempts to cope were further confounded by the language barrier problem and more permissive cultures of some of our immigrant population.

Behavioral guidelines are always a part of public library policy, and, following the example of many public school districts, zero-tolerance policies are often posted in the children's department. These became a source of constant frustration when dealing with our multicultural mix.

- Foul language was not permitted in the library. Unfortunately, the library staff could only understand foul language spoken in English. It never failed that when we sent one child out of

the library for swearing, he would point to another child and ask why we weren't kicking him out too.

- Our zero-tolerance policy stated that verbal or physical abuse or willful destruction of library property was punishable by immediate and permanent expulsion from the library. Often, when behavior warranted such an action, the staff would avoid it for fear of what might happen to the child once he'd exited the building. Racial tensions ran high in the neighborhoods. Gangs were a problem. If misbehavior involved harassment or was the result of tension between kids from different cultures, those involved often remained in the library, receiving little more than a warning.

These are just a sampling of policies and procedures that were, for the most part, unrestrictive of service at the time of their conception. But as the library community changes, these policies need to be readdressed with equal access and equal service in mind.

Solutions that Work

Granted, the urban environment in which I worked presented special challenges to any attempts being made toward equality of service, and the challenges seemed to be growing on a yearly basis. Often I felt like throwing my hands up in defeat, but there were so many ways in which I was sure we could provide services to our neighborhood kids if I could just convince the right people of the importance of making policy and procedural changes.

One of the immigrant groups that touched me the most was the Somali kids. When they first started coming to the library, they would arrive in large family groups, all children, no parents. Most of the kids would be young, but there were usually one or two older ones in charge. The young ones were wild, uncontrollable. They would be overwhelmed by the riches in the room. So many toys, so many computers, and, *ohhh*, the books! Look at the pictures!

They would race around the room, tossing on the floor whatever item they had just picked up to grab something even more intriguing. Closed doors did not stop them. They had to explore and handle everything. We would frequently find them in our craft storage area stuffing their pockets. They would look up at us with those open, smiling, angelic faces and, no matter how hard we tried to be stern, we would wind up smiling right back. The older children were more sedate. They understood and spoke English better and would attempt to help us control their siblings and relations, but it was often a lost cause.

Many of the young ones remembered little more than the compounds in Kenya where the families had lived while waiting for their opportunity to come to America. There they had had next to nothing and had learned to steal for what they wanted or needed. The older ones had seen family members gunned down in the streets outside their homes in Somalia. As the oldest son still living in the family, a number of the boys had



Computers are popular in the children's room at Utica Public Library.

become heads of their household by the time they were twelve years old. They felt the weight of this responsibility and wanted to do well in this country. Because education is prized here, they were willing and eager to learn, but they had come from a nonprint society. These children, who knew as many as seven different languages, could not read even one of them. Placed in school by age rather than capability, education was an uphill battle for them. These children, more than any others, inspired me to push for changes in library policy that would allow us to help them adapt.

Most people in the community had no idea of who used the children's room, or what went on in it. The children's department staff got into the habit of regularly relating "neighborhood kid" anecdotes to our director, board members, and community leaders whenever we had the opportunity. The stories might be about a particular incident, or a child's family situation, or a group of kids who had just started showing up regularly at the library.

Frequently, my stories involved the Somali kids. They might be funny, sad, or tragic, and often dealt with the reason why many of the neighborhood kids came to the library in the first place (rarely for the books). They proved to be a powerful tool for effecting change.

Over time, the people who heard our stories began to see the role of the library within the community in a whole new light. They began to view us as an important part of the education community, especially for the immigrant and low-income families, and especially where children's services were concerned. Our ability to provide equal access became a priority. How we would go about doing that was still problematic.

Any of the policies that fell under the auspices of the circulation department were my biggest challenge. How do you get library cards into the hands of children whose parents never appear in the library? I wanted to do away with the parent signature. Most, if not all, states automatically hold parents (or legal guardians) financially responsible for their children, at least until the age of sixteen, so the parent signature was not really necessary to guarantee that fines and lost materials would be covered by an adult. However, the head of circulation rightfully pointed out that the parent signature was necessary to verify that all the rest of the information on the form was correct. Then, in a decision that we were totally unaware was being made, the superintendent of the school district suddenly came to my rescue. I learned of it when the school librarians began contacting me complaining about all the problems it was going to create

for them. The superintendent announced that every child in the district had to have a public library card by the third grade, and he put the school librarians in charge of the effort. Of course, this meant that every child in third grade and above had to be issued a card by the end of the school year.

Our circulation department required proof of address before issuing new cards. How was this going to work? It's all a matter of politics. What public library director wants to arouse the ire of the school superintendent? Proof of address would be assumed because the schools, which had addresses on file, would be acting as a go-between. Knowing that the schools would only have limited success in getting the forms returned, it wasn't long before I was able to convince the director to waive the proof of address requirement for children under the age of eighteen altogether. Parent signature would suffice. Now, children could fill out the form at the library under our watchful eye, take it home to get it signed by a parent, then return with it the next day, and *voilà*, they had a library card. What about children whose parents had unpaid fines on their cards? That was waived, too. Children would henceforth be treated like any other person obtaining a new card, innocent until proven guilty.

The other dilemma involved parents who didn't speak English. Translators are extremely expensive, so rarely can a public library foot the bill to have all of its forms translated. I overcame this roadblock by coordinating with the head librarian for the school district to have a letter explaining the responsibilities and privileges of having a public library card, as well as instructions for filling out the form, translated into all the languages represented in the community. The school district paid for the translations, and we were given copies to keep on file for our own use.

Of course, you can't assume that your school district superintendent will see having a public library card as a necessity for his students. You may have to do a lot of courting and convincing. Working with the school system didn't solve all my problems, either, but it went a long way in terms of getting the ball rolling. Changes were being made, and, lo and behold, they did not result in pure chaos at the library. It would take another couple of years, but I was also able to obtain fine-exempt status for children under the age of fourteen. This made it easier for me to convince reluctant parents to get their preschool age children a card.

Barraging my director with anecdotes involving the plight of new young mothers whose own cards were delinquent (to the tune of \$25 or more), yet who desperately wanted to be able to check out material for their preschoolers, eventually resulted in the waiving of the child signature requirement. Children could receive library cards at birth, so new mothers could check out children's materials on their child's card without having to come up with the money to pay off their own.

Removing restrictions on children's access to DVDs and videos was a battle I waged unsuccessfully for nine years, but never gave up on. As you can imagine, by now I wasn't on the best of terms with the head of circulation, and she was determined to hold onto this policy with an iron grip. However, using the argument that the librarian should have the right to waive certain restrictions on materials (children checking out reference materials for homework purposes, for example), I was able to get ESL materials into the hands of newly arrived refugees.

Persistence is key in effecting policy change. You need to come up with a defensible argument, as well as examples of other libraries that have made the change successfully, and then continue to bring the subject up whenever you have an opening. Any time you have a good example of a patron not receiving equal service because of a restrictive policy or procedure, make sure the director is aware of it. Keep a running list of these examples yourself, and don't be shy about brandishing it. The longer the list, the greater the likelihood you'll get noticed.

Whenever you run across a sympathetic patron, encourage him or her to write a letter to the director. It doesn't hurt to give that person the name and address of the board president, either. Boards take notice when patrons go to the trouble to write a letter. Realize that it can take years to accomplish change, and stick to your guns.

I was fortunate in being able to get permission from the director to set computer and behavioral policy for my own department. It had to be approved by the director, of course. It had to be consistent with, but did not have to match exactly, the policies for the library as a whole. Working with the rest of the youth services staff, I was able to put together policy documents that specifically addressed the needs of the children's department. They were written to serve as guidelines for staff and for patrons. In addition, I was given the leeway to add these magic words: "at the discretion of the staff." The clerk could now decide to let

Mohammed sit with Abdi so that he could help his little brother on the computer. The librarian could choose to warn Muhina about his use of the "f" word instead of asking him to leave, because she knew that his father had just walked out on his mother. Amazingly, we did not hear a great deal of "No fair!" from the kids, nor did they try to take advantage. Life went on pretty much as usual in the department, except now the staff could get a better night's sleep.

Allowing the department to work as a team to create the policies so that everyone is equally invested in them is the best approach. However, it is no guarantee. There is no question that giving that kind of discretionary power to the staff in general can lead to abuse. To prevent a stressed-out clerk from overreacting to simple mischief, I did have to change the wording of the documents with regard to restricting a patron's privileges. Any time it was thought that a child's behavior warranted temporary or permanent suspension of a privilege, one of the librarians on staff had to be consulted before punishment was administered.

Advocates for Change

I was fortunate to have a director who knew the plight of the kids we served and who wanted to do what we could, within reason, to help them. My biggest adversaries were the other department heads, who believed in the status quo. The patrons who would most benefit from my changes were not taxpayers—they did not financially contribute to the library, and the existing policies worked just fine for the taxpaying citizens. You've heard the argument before, and it is a valid one, but the community was changing. Fewer and fewer taxpaying citizens were using the library's services. For the immigrants and low-income families, the very people on our doorstep, we could meet a real need by providing valuable literacy services, thereby maintaining the library's viability within the community. To do that, policies and procedures would need to be reviewed and amended to provide equal access and service to our changing patronage.

We in youth services are at the forefront of the changing role of public libraries in this country. The Internet and the Kindle may be robbing us of our traditional clientele, but we still have a vital role to play. Our communities are becoming increasingly diverse. There is a greater disparity between the haves and have-nots. The children using our libraries are the harbingers of a new direction.

They are tomorrow's clientele—or, they are not. Just like that Hispanic youth who dropped out of high school, we will lose our future library patrons if we don't fight for the changes that need to be made to hold on to them. We must make sure that they have equal access to materials that meet their wants and needs. We must make sure that they have equal access to computers and the Internet. We must make sure that they have equal access to our programs. Remember, this is America, and we, as public library youth services managers, must lead the fight to uphold democracy here. ☺

Bilingual Books

For ESL Students . . . and Beyond

DAWN JEFFERS

More than 45 million Hispanics currently live in the United States, making it the second largest Spanish-speaking nation in the world, behind only Mexico.¹

Based on this research, the number of Spanish-speaking and bilingual households in the United States continues to grow each year. In some areas of the country, Spanish surpasses English as the first language of the residents.

With literacy being a factor so critical to success, Raven Tree Press wanted to address the need head-on. By presenting both English and Spanish within the same book, they believe speakers of both languages learn more quickly. It also promotes multicultural awareness, language development, and a learning process important to the global community.

Libraries and schools may soon see a rising need for bilingual materials in this ever-expanding segment of the population. The growth in the Hispanic population plus the increase in their buying power will have a positive effect for bilingual booksellers. English speakers are increasingly looking to add Spanish to their list of known languages, while Spanish speakers are actively acquiring English reading skills as well. Bilingual products add a new and exciting dimension to the reading and listening experience.



Award-winning author **Dawn Jeffers** is publisher of Raven Tree Press, which has focused on producing bilingual picture books for years. For more information, visit www.raventreepress.com.



Photo spread from *Alien Invaders*, illustrations © 2005 Bonnie Leick. Photo courtesy of and used with permission from Raven Tree Press.

Children enjoy books for many reasons. Reading and being read to are ways for children to use their imagination to experience many different cultures and adventures. They can compare themselves to the characters, imagine what they would do in similar situations, and develop problem-solving skills.

Books can inspire children to dream and pursue goals. A good bilingual book features not only good stories and delightful illustrations, but it also will promote multicultural respect and understanding, a winning combination for all involved.

A Case for Bilingual Books

Research indicates that the best time to introduce a new language to a child is from ages 1 to 8.² If the second language is introduced early in life, children will learn it faster and retain it longer.

Being exposed to a second language offers numerous benefits to young children, including an improved ability to communicate, better cognitive development, richer cultural awareness, improved academic performance, superior educational opportunities, and, ultimately, better jobs. Also, the earlier that children are exposed to a second language, the more likely they will be to speak it with native pronunciation.

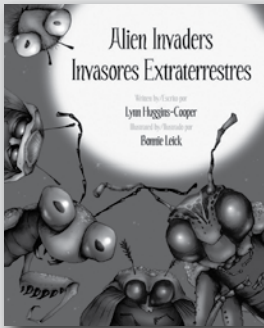
One recent study found that bilingual children learn to read sooner than their single-language counterparts, have increased creative skills, and become proficient problem solvers.³ Another study indicated that bilingual children also performed better on math and verbal sections of standardized tests than single-language children.⁴

Types of Bilingual Books

There are many formats in which to present a bilingual book. Since there are diverse children and learning styles, offering varied materials gives readers options.

Full-Text Translation

With full-text translation, the story is presented fully in English as well as in Spanish. Both texts are placed on the page, usually with an icon separating the two for ease of reading. A different ink color is also commonly used to further distinguish the two languages.



Alien Invaders/Invasores extraterrestres by Lynn Huggins Cooper (Raven Tree Press, 2005).

I heard that aliens were little green men.

Wrong! The alien invaders are here.

Yo he oído que los extraterrestres son hombrecitos verdes.

Nada de eso! Los invasores extraterrestres ya están aquí.

Embedded Text

With the embedded text format, a story is presented primarily in one language, and the second language is sprinkled throughout. But it's not as simple as that. The embedded word is usually first introduced in the primary language and then repeated in the sentence or the same paragraph in the second language.

Once the word is introduced, it can be used again without the repetition. The context of the story and the illustrations are of utmost importance when using embedded text because they aid in making the leap from one language to another.



Tito, the Firefighter/Tito, el bombero by Tim Hoppey (Raven Tree Press, 2005).

Hello. *Hola.*

My name is Tito. I live in East Harlem where almost everyone speaks Spanish.

When my mother sends me to the store for milk and eggs, I ask for *leche y huevos*. I am bilingual. I speak two languages, *inglés* and *español*. If you ask how old I am, I might say eight in English. Or I might say *ocho* in Spanish.

Wordless

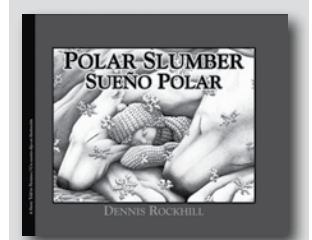
Even a wordless book can be effective in teaching and learn-

ing language. Wordless books and picture books with limited words are both beautiful and educational. They help children develop language and creative-thinking skills that enhance future reading and writing abilities.

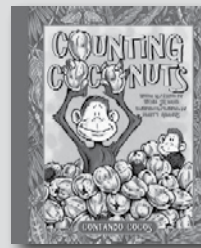
Using wordless picture books, children can be taught that reading follows a left-to-right pattern. They learn that stories generally have a beginning, middle, and end. They also learn to identify details, see cause and effect, make judgments, and draw conclusions. Wordless books offer the flexibility to be narrated in any native language and read at all reading abilities since the stories are told through pictures.

Concept Bilingual

Concept bilingual books take one concept of language—such as counting—and focus strictly on that. *Counting Coconuts/Contando cocos* by Wendi Silvano (Raven Tree Press, 2004) mixes humor and mathematics in a way that makes math concepts stick. For children who are just learning to count in Spanish or English and children learning to count by sets, concept bilingual is a winner. ☺



Polar Slumber/Sueño polar by Dennis Rockhill (Raven Tree Press, 2006).



Counting Coconuts/Contando cocos by Wendi Silvano (Raven Tree Press, 2004).

Deep in the rainforest Monkey was happily counting his coconuts. He had carefully gathered them one by one. He was sure he must have a hundred by now.

"One, two, three, four, five," he began.

1 Uno One

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Se Habla Bilingual?

How Librarians Use Bilingual Books

Here's a look at how some librarians nationwide use bilingual books in their libraries.

Erin Gray, Children's Department Manager, Brentwood Branch, Springfield-Greene County (Mo.) Library

We use them in both regular and bilingual storytimes. Our collections include board books through chapter books and novels for readers.

Favorite titles? Anything from author Susan Middleton Elya.

Adrienne Junius, Youth Services Manager, Spout Springs Branch Library, Hall County (Ga.) Library System

For our general collection, bilingual books are kept in the Spanish section of the children's department. We have everything from board books to Young Adult literature. We do not use bilingual books for storytimes. We do have many children ask for bilingual books, mainly English speakers learning a new language and ESL teachers.

René K. Yaws, Knott's Kids Program Coordinator, Jefferson County (Colo.) Public Library

I use bilingual/Spanish titles in my outreach program called Project Backpack. I visit afterschool care sites and do storytimes (not bilingual) and a craft or science project. I leave a backpack of twenty books for grades K-6. Each site gets two Spanish or bilingual titles (Spanish/English) unless they request more or none. The next month, I pick up the previous month's book pack and leave a new one.

Favorite titles? *Chocolata* by Marisa Nunez and *Sigueme! (una historia de amor que no tiene nada...)* by Jose Campanari.

Martha J. C. Cole, Children's Coordinator, Chesapeake (Va.) Public Library System

We are building collections of books in other languages, with the largest in Spanish right now. There are books in our children's (including board books), young adult, and adult collections. One of our libraries offers storytimes in Spanish.

Erika Burge, Children's Librarian II, Mesquite Library, Phoenix, Arizona

We are in a neighborhood made up primarily of monolingual Spanish speaking parents/adults and

bilingual children. We use bilingual/Spanish books, as well as Spanish songs and fingerplays at storytimes, especially baby storytime. I also use them with Head Start school visits and some school-age programs. The kids also enjoy when I give them the opportunity to read the books to the group.

Favorite titles? *Hairs/Pelitos* by Sandra Cisneros and *No David* by David Shannon.

Nez Albuquerque, Youth Services Librarian, DeKalb County Public Library, Chamblee, Georgia

Our library is located near the largest Latino concentration in our county and serves a large portion of that community. Many of the families coming in our libraries are those where the parents only speak Spanish and the children are becoming bilingual as they learn English in school.

I use bilingual books in my library for all children. Sometimes English-speaking parents like the bilingual books for giving their children exposure to another language, while other times, these books help with bilingual families in which the children understand and are learning English at school but the parents only comprehend the Spanish. There are no specific age groups that I use bilingual books for, since they can be great tools in a family setting as well.

For my bilingual storytimes, I have used bilingual books as well as books for which we have an English version as well as a Spanish translation, and I create a bilingual storytime in this manner. The children and parents alike seem to really appreciate and enjoy the storytime, and are always asking when the next one will take place.

Favorite titles? *Paco and the Giant Chile Plant* by Keith Polette and *My Very Own Room/Mi Propio Cuartito* by Amada Irma Pérez.

Madeline Walton-Hadlock, Youth Services Librarian, Central Selector, Spanish Materials, San Jose (Calif.) Public Library, Alum Rock Branch

Our branch serves 92 thousand residents, many of whom are recent immigrants. More than 80 percent of children in the neighborhood's school district are Latinos, and many speak Spanish at home.

I hold a weekly Spanish storytime for children of all ages and their families and use Spanish language picture books or bilingual books, sticking primarily to Spanish, but adding a sprinkling of English words to help Spanish learners.

Se Habla Bilingual?

How Librarians Use Bilingual Books (*continued*)

I've also used bilingual titles during reader's theater-style events at school assemblies and large class visits. As in English, combining Spanish verbs with their physical actions facilitates learning and keeps kids excited and focused. This year, I adapted a book called *Conejito: A Folktale from Panama* for storytelling events, and children easily went *saltando*, *bailando*, *rodando*, and *huyendo* with me, regardless of their language abilities.

Favorite titles? *Lover Boy/Juanito el Cariñoso* by Lee Merrill Byrd and *The Desert Is My Mother/El desierto es mi madre* by Pat Mora

Polly Ross, Children's Librarian, Mount Pleasant Neighborhood Library, District of Columbia Public Library

We circulate bilingual books and use them with certain groups whose English is very limited. The age group for those groups is mostly children ages 1 to 3 with their parents. The parents mostly speak Spanish only, but some of the children are learning to speak both languages.

Favorite titles? Pat Mora's *Sweet Dreams/Dulces Sueños*, and for Christmas, Virginia Kroll's *Uno, Dos, Tres, Posada!* It's not bilingual in the traditional sense, but it includes enough of both English and Spanish that speakers of either enjoy it and learn a little of the other language.

Gabriela Linik, Spanish Language Programmer, Columbus (Ohio) Metropolitan Library

We use bilingual books for bilingual storytime. Our audience includes both Spanish-speaking and English-speaking children. Bilingual books are especially helpful when the text is written in rhyme. If my audience is all Spanish speaking, I usually limit the stories to the Spanish language. If my audience is all English speaking, I introduce a few Spanish words that are repeated several times during the program. For mixed audiences, I keep a balance and translate every word so both audiences can easily follow the story.

Jackie Padilla, Youth Program Assistant, Orange County Library System, Orlando, Florida

In Central Florida, we have a large population of migrant workers with children who benefit from these

programs, and most of our schools in the district have large ESL classes.

I use bilingual books (English/Spanish) for *Cuentame un Cuento*, a family bilingual storytime for all ages. I also make sure to have several bilingual story displays in the Children's Department throughout the year. We also house bilingual books that include English/Portuguese, English/French, English/Haitian-Creole, and English/Vietnamese.

Favorite authors? Susan Middleton Elya, Pat Mora, and Opal Dunn.

Deborah Gitlitz, Multnomah County Library, Portland, Oregon

When I was at a branch, I used bilingual books for many purposes—in displays, for booktalking, in answers to reference questions, at storytime, and in outreach programs.

Currently, I coordinate and teach a family literacy program designed to help low-literacy parents develop the skills, confidence, and habit of sharing books regularly with their kids. As part of the grant-funded program, I give families copies of the picture books we use in the classes. Right now, I work with families who speak English, Somali, Pashto, Arabic, and Spanish. When I am able to share books in their home languages, parents are generally thrilled. The Spanish-speaking teen parents I work with strongly prefer to read Spanish-language or bilingual books with their children.

I once observed one of our outreach staff demonstrate "reading" a book in Chinese to a group of Head Start parents. She didn't speak or read Chinese, but she demonstrated how she could still decode and tell the story of a picture book that happened to be printed in Chinese. The goal was to bolster the confidence of parents with low literacy skills (or literacy skills in other languages) in sharing books with their children; she explained that the benefits of reading with kids don't depend only on accurately reading the words on the page. I have followed her example and sometimes share books I can't actually read with school, storytime, or family groups.

Favorite titles? *Siesta* by Ginger Foglesong Guy and *Margaret and Margarita* by Lynn Reiser

Latino Outreach

Making *Día* a Fiesta of Family Literacy

MANDEE KUGLIN



The Mexican dance group Kalpulli Ketzal Coatlicue performs authentic Aztec ceremonial dances at Augsburg Park Library at HCL's 2007 *Día*. (Photo courtesy of Hennepin County Library)

I'm a journalism student who loves to read and has some volunteer experience in libraries, so my mom's suggestion to apply for an internship at Hennepin County (Minn.) Library (HCL) seemed like a great way to spend my summer. And my internship gave me a new appreciation for the world of librarians.

I became inspired by how much individuals care about their work and how their passion for the library is reciprocated by library customers and the community. One example of the staff's dedication to public service—Latino outreach via the *El día de los niños/El día de los libros* (Children's Day/Book Day) program—is a model for all libraries across the nation.

The *Día* Initiative

In 2006, Hennepin County reported that Latinos accounted for 5.9 percent of the county's population. The current, estimated Latino population of 66,000 in Hennepin County is expected to double in size by 2030. The Latino community has been in Minnesota for nearly one hundred years, but the influx of new immigrants from Mexico and Central America is creating an entire community of Spanish-speaking customers new to the county and to the public library.¹

El día de los niños/El día de los libros, a national initiative hosted by ALSC, provides the framework for HCL to celebrate Latino culture and literacy for all children each April, supporting HCL's mission and its commitment to welcoming the Latino community to the library.

For nearly a decade, HCL has celebrated *Día* with cultural

events at libraries and in the community to reach out to Latino families. HCL encourages Latino families to come to the library to celebrate Latino culture through culturally relevant events and to learn about the library and how it can help them throughout the year.

A Celebration of Literacy

Emily Watts, senior librarian for Immigrant Resources, supervises HCL's Spanish, Hmong, and Somali outreach liaisons, connecting the immigrant community to all programs. *Día* is a way to connect children, literature, books, and the library, both in libraries and in the community.

"It's a way to celebrate Latino heritage, literacy, and families coming together at the library," said Watts. She said *Día* celebrations at HCL have two goals. The first is to "celebrate the heritage of the community that we see already. We've got libraries that have large Spanish-speaking populations that actively use the library, so this is a way to celebrate and acknowledge the community that is already there."

The second goal of *Día* is outreach. "It's a way to draw new



Mande Kuglin, a student at the University of Minnesota, Duluth, was a communications intern in summer 2009 at Hennepin County (Minn.) Library.

users into the library from the Spanish-speaking community and take advantage of this opportunity by informing them of all the resources the library offers throughout the year,” said Watts. Principal Librarian and former HCL Youth Services Coordinator Gretchen Wronka provided the initial oversight for *Día* celebrations and funding. “For HCL, *Día* has also become an umbrella opportunity to emphasize the joy of books and reading to all families, with a special focus on Latino families,” said Wronka, an ALSC past-president.

One of the library’s most successful *Día* events involves Hopkins schools and HCL; the two entities bring in a Latino artist to the ELL (English Language Learners) program to work with the students on Latino art. At the end of the project, the art is displayed at the library, and a reception is planned for the young artists’ families, friends, and teachers. For many of these families, it is the first time they have been in the library.

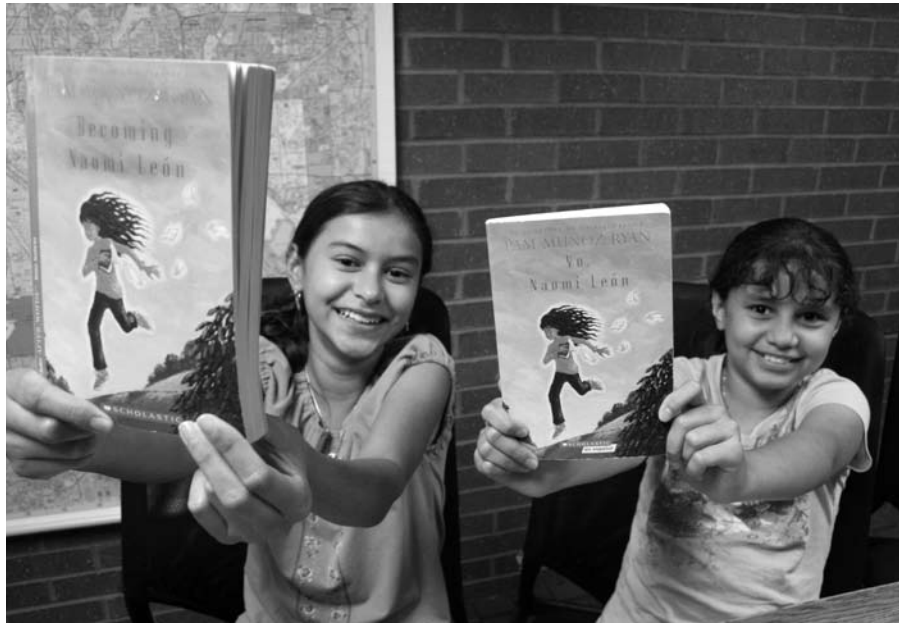
By hosting *Día* programs, HCL can support and encourage Latino parents to read to their children in Spanish to connect reading to love, caring, and family as well as to recognize the importance and value of learning in a family’s home language. This message of literacy and books can be shared in community settings as well. For the past seven years, HCL has partnered with the Church of the Assumption and MIRA (*Modulo De Informacion Recursos y Apoyo*) Latino Resource Center in Richfield, Minnesota, to offer a *Día* celebration that draws more than 450 people each year. This event, usually held the last Saturday morning in April, is a great partnership between the community service providers and HCL. It enables HCL to successfully connect to Latinos through a partner trusted by the community.

Community members have provided positive feedback. “Thank you for fostering reading in children,” one attendee commented. Another attendee said her favorite thing is *Día*’s ability in “gathering so many people together to inform and educate, making this a better and safer community. The more informed we are, the stronger we are.” This feedback helps HCL structure the content of each year’s celebration, ensuring that it is responsive to the needs and wants of the Latino community.

Success through Partnership

Just how does HCL implement the program so successfully?

“We don’t do it alone, we do it in partnership,” said Wronka, “Funders, local library staff, community partners, and the library’s outreach liaisons all work together to create a complete package. We get support from our internal partners as well. The Communications department designs and prints public-



Día events help sisters Briana and Andrea develop a love of reading and books at Oxboro Library. (Photo courtesy of Hennepin County Public Affairs)

ity, IT and Web Services create a Web presence, and Collection Management supplements the Spanish language collections.”

In the past eight years, the Library Foundation of Hennepin County, now united with the Friends of the Minneapolis Public Library, and local Friends of the Library groups have provided funding for the program.

Stu Wilson, executive director of the Library Foundation of Hennepin County, strongly believes in the positive effects events like *Día* have on the community as well as HCL.

“The Library Foundation provides private support to the library, and in particular to programs and services that enhance the library’s core missions. The foundation is proud to support *Día*, and a number of other similar programs, as they broaden and deepen the use of the library by our entire community. That fulfills the mission of both the library and the foundation, and in the process, helps enrich the lives of many, many individuals in our county,” Wilson said.

In 2007, HCL was one of ten recipients of a national ALSC/Target grant to promote and support *Día* programming as well as to expand the library’s Spanish language collection.

“Because of the grant, we were able to have quite a spectacular program,” said Wronka.

Success through Liaisons

Watts believes the generosity of multiple funding sources and partnerships has contributed to the success of *Día*, but she attributes the bulk of *Día*’s success to HCL’s outreach liaisons. Currently, there are four Spanish outreach liaisons, one full-time and three part-time.



A dance performance at the Hennepin County Library's 2005 *Día*. (Photo courtesy of Hennepin County Public Affairs)

"They know what programming works best because they have a connection to, and knowledge of, the library and are also experts on their culture and community," said Watts.

The liaisons, in partnership with local library staff, help select the best times, days, locations, and performers to meet the needs of the target audience.

Marcela Sanchez, HCL's full-time Latino outreach liaison, attributes *Día's* success to commitment from staff and their dedication in finding authentic performers and culturally relevant programs. She also feels consistency plays a big part. The library has consistently offered a schedule of *Día* events each April and May for nearly a decade, and the community now looks forward to the annual events, creating community connections for HCL and strengthening its presence in the minds of the Latino community.

Because of HCL's expanding outreach services to the growing Latino community, library staff were interested in introducing *Día* to the community. Staff also wanted to join libraries across the country who were excited about this ALSC initiative. A grant from the Library Foundation of Hennepin County provided seed money for the first *Día* celebration. The library's Spanish language outreach liaison, the outreach section manager, and staff in local libraries initiated partnerships with community organizations to plan and present the first events. Over the years these community organizations have assumed the leadership role planning the annual celebration, with HCL as one partner.

"We use *Día* as a foundation for parent workshops on the importance of reading with your children, singing and talking in your first language, the language of your heart," said Wronka. "We realized how excited Latino families were to see how the library respected their music, art, and literature, so we continually encourage children to have books, stories, and songs in their first language so that they are better prepared to learn English, because they have a rich vocabulary in the language of their heart."

Celebrating Success

Author Pat Mora, founder of *Día*, believes that *Día* is different from other literacy celebrations.

"*Día* emphasizes daily commitments to the importance of children, linking *all* children to books, languages, and cultures, the importance of children's books that reflect our national diversity, and to parents and families as partners with libraries and schools in the literacy process of sharing book joy. *Día* culminates in annual celebration of these daily commitments across the country on

or near April 30, opportunities to strengthen communities by building partnerships," Mora said.

Although *Día* has its roots in Latino culture, families from other ethnic backgrounds are obviously not excluded or prohibited from attending the events—everyone is welcome.

"We've really emphasized from the beginning that this is a celebration for families," said Wronka.

Watts added that although the library has a "great wealth of information on culture and cultural diversity, the primary focus [of *Día*] is to connect to and celebrate with the Spanish-speaking communities, first and foremost. We make it welcoming and accessible to the entire community, but specifically target the Latino community in our programming choices and our publicity."

HCL's publicity and promotion for *Día* targets Latino families via local Spanish language radio and newspapers as well as community businesses and organizations. Spanish is the prominent language on *Día* posters at the libraries.

"My main goal," Sanchez said, "is to bring Latinos into the library because a lot of Spanish speakers do not know about the resources of the library. It's definitely open to everyone else, and I'm happy to see that we have different people in the audience that speak other languages. Here in HCL, we usually try to make sure that we always bring the fiesta back to literacy through our *Día* events."

Springboard to Stronger Programming

Watts said *Día*'s goal to connect families to HCL and its resources has been very successful.

"The biggest hurdle is getting people to go somewhere they've never been before. Once they've been to the library, people will continue to use it," she said.

HCL's *Día* events are held at locations where there is a large Latino population nearby, and those libraries offer a wealth of services to support Spanish language speakers throughout the year.

According to Watts, *Día* is an opportunity to demonstrate that the library is a welcoming environment for families. "We talk about how glad we are to see them and then talk about the Spanish language storytimes, the Spanish language computer classes, the books, movies, and music in Spanish at the library, and most importantly, we talk about the Spanish-speaking staff that are available to assist with questions to encourage them to see the library as a valuable resource in their lives."

Sanchez said *Día* and other Immigrant Resources programs are complementary.

"Our outreach efforts are family-oriented. We try to make sure that no parent leaves the library without knowing that, at least, library cards are free and that there are materials to learn English."

HCL's World Language Storytime in Spanish is complementary to *Día* programming. The library won a National Association of Counties (NACo) Award for this innovative approach to multicultural literacy, World Languages. Storytimes also are offered in Somali and Hmong.

"The Spanish storytimes are an offshoot of our successful *Día* programs," said Wronka. "*Día* is one component of our outreach to Latinos, and it's an easy umbrella to encompass all kinds of literacy activities under."

Throughout the year, libraries across Hennepin County also offer parent education workshops modeled on ALSC's Every Child Ready to Read @ your library® project.

"It's difficult for many parents who don't speak English fluently to have their children translate for them. They lose some of their authority," said Wronka. "We work with immigrant parents to help them understand that they do know what is best for their children. We ask them to remember the things from their childhood that made it special and to encourage them to pass that on to their children. Our Latino outreach validates people's



Latina mother and daughter Lucia and Alondra celebrate literacy by reading at Oxboro Library. (Photo courtesy of Hennepin County Public Affairs)

"We realized how excited Latino families were to see how the library respected their music, art, and literature, so we continually encourage children to have books, stories, and songs in their first language so that they are better prepared to learn English, because they have a rich vocabulary in the language of their heart."
 —Gretchen Wronka

cultures in a very positive way and then shows those families that they have the skills and expertise to teach their children."

HCL Director Lois Langer Thompson added, "Welcoming the immigrant community to the library through programs like *Día* builds connections for our newest residents as they begin new lives in Hennepin County. Cultural programming allows the library to celebrate and support the immigrant community in all areas of their lives, from early literacy to technology to books and reading."

Día at Your Library

Hennepin County Library is excited to join libraries across the country in celebrating *Día* each year. For libraries with new Latino communities that want to launch *Día* celebrations, the first step, as Watts said, is "to get involved in your communities. It takes someone with a special commitment and an interest and a passion with the Latino community to get connected."

Set a goal of using *Día* events as a springboard to launch new outreach programs or promote existing programs to create new library customers.

“Our goal is to really connect the Spanish-speaking community to the library,” said Watts. “In order to do this, you may need to expand your ideas of programming, scheduling—everything to create a welcoming environment.”

El día de los niños/El día de los libros (Children’s Day/Book Day), known as *Día*, is a celebration EVERY DAY of children, families, and reading that culminates every year on April 30. The celebration emphasizes the importance of advocating literacy for children of all linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

Interested in learning more about *Día* and how you can get a celebration organized in your community?

Visit the *Día* Web site at www.ala.org/dia.

Sanchez suggests that other libraries assign one person to be the coordinator of all events. And, when coordinating those events, it is important to look at all aspects of the performers.

“There are things that are going to work and things that aren’t going to work. A mariachi sounds like a fantastic Mexican folk event, but the mariachis may not interact with the children. They just sing their songs. However, if you bring in a mariachi who is teaching kids how to play the guitar, then that’s different,” said Sanchez. “Seeing how your performers are going to interact with the children and family is very important because this is not just entertainment, it’s also a learning experience.”

“*Día* is an opportunity to connect Latinos to the library and help them understand what role the library can play in their lives,” said Watts. *Día* allows the community to come together in celebration of reading, books, and families, and, of course, the library. ☺

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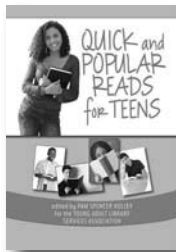
Edited by Jenine Lillian



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One School, One Book

One Successful School—Library Collaboration

JAN BATES AND NANCY R. WEBSTER

When more than 98 percent of a school's parents participate in a family literacy activity for one month, it is a recipe for success! When this school activity spills over into the public library in that community, it becomes a collaborative effort.

This is actually happening in rural tidewater Virginia at Northumberland Elementary School (NES)—the only elementary school for the entire county (which includes approximately seven hundred pre-K through fifth grade students).

NES is a Title I Schoolwide School because more than half of the school population is on free or reduced lunch status, and is served by the Northumberland Public Library (NPL), located a mile away from the school in the same town.

The Northumberland Public Library has worked diligently with NES to achieve a close partnership between the library, the school, the students, and their families. Family literacy activities have been NPL's main collaborative effort for the past five

years, and we are proud of being a presence at many school functions.

One School, One Book

Over the past five years, NES has successfully engaged in a program called One School One Book (OSOB). Each year for one month, all families purchase a preselected book that will be read aloud in the home during OSOB month. Imagine, all families reading the same book at the same time. Literally the whole community is abuzz with the book.

OSOB is part of an already existing program at NES. Several years ago, NES became a Read Aloud Virginia (RAV) School. This program encourages and rewards families for reading aloud at home every night for twenty minutes (including a follow-up discussion time). For details on this parent involvement program, visit www.readaloudva.org. OSOB is held yearly in conjunction with RAV, but it is a wonderful stand-alone activity any school could implement.

Each year, the public library purchases several copies of the OSOB book for lending purposes and for use in the library's Homework Center, an after-school program offered four afternoons a week during the school year by the library and served largely by volunteer mentors. The children who attend the Homework Center are the very children whose parents are sometimes unable to help them with homework because of their work schedules, so it makes perfect sense to have the OSOB book read aloud to these children each afternoon as an extension of their homework assignments. Copies of the OSOB books remain in our collections afterwards, and we continue to see them circulate.



Jan Bates has been a Reading Recovery/ Title I Teacher and Read Aloud Virginia Coordinator for Northumberland Elementary School in Heathsville, Virginia, for the past ten years. Nancy Webster (pictured) has been Children's Librarian and Homework Help Center Coordinator at the Northumberland Public Library in Heathsville, Virginia, for the past five years.

Of course, daily reading is a requirement for Homework Center participants, even when it is not OSOB month. Students are required to spend twenty minutes each afternoon reading either silently or aloud to a mentor after other assignments are complete and before they begin their afternoon board games and social time. This reading time is a homework assignment for each student, but many of the Homework Center students don't have the opportunity to read at home, so the library makes sure that this is always completed at the Homework Center.

During OSOB month, students are encouraged to share the book with their family members. The reading that is done at the Homework Center often prepares the student for this second reading in the home. The library feels this method has helped students who are struggling or reluctant readers, and is another reason for the success rate of OSOB.

OSOB Resources

You may wonder where the books come from and more importantly, who pays for them. NES gets the books from sources like Scholastic, which offer discounts for multiple copies (up to 55 percent, depending on volume). Usually if the publisher is asked, they will offer a generous discount for so many copies. NES has been charged from \$1 to \$3 per book, depending upon the deal.

The school annually buys seven hundred copies of the chosen title. NES fronts the money to buy the books for the students, but that money has always been recouped as students and their families buy their copies. Prizes for weekly trivia question winners are donated by local businesses, making OSOB self-supporting.

Families may donate to an OSOB scholarship fund to provide books to families who request a scholarship book. OSOB donation boxes were placed in the public library and throughout the community. No family has ever been denied the opportunity to participate. Some parents cannot read aloud (because of language or literacy issues, scheduling problems, and so on), volunteer readers come every day to school to read aloud the pages assigned that night to this small group of children, so no one is left out. Volunteers are parents, public library employees, and others who wish to help out.

Some of the most successful books read so far are *Because of Winn-Dixie* by Kate DiCamillo, *Charlotte's Web* by E.B. White, *The Water Horse* by Dick King-Smith, and *It's Raining Pigs and Noodles*, a poetry collection by Jack Prelutsky. Literacy grants are available and OSOB is an appropriate qualifier for many. Local philanthropic and civic organizations often will make a cash donation. NES funds cover the initial order, and somehow the money always works out.

Reading aloud is one of the library's main focuses in terms of elementary-school-aged students. It has long been known that reading aloud to young children encourages them to

become lifelong readers themselves. Modeling this behavior for these young students, especially for those who don't have this activity at home, is imperative.

For this reason, the library is committed to sending the children's librarian or even its director or board members to the school for daily reading sessions for students who miss out at home. The library also offers patrons the OSOB book in other formats, such as audio cassette and CD, when those formats are available. Many families have come to rely on these additional formats to accommodate the daily reading assignments.

Program Results

There are many byproducts of this program besides the obvious one of reading for pleasure. Getting books into homes is a goal of the public school and public library. Not only do these books become part of family libraries, they also encourage families to get other similar books to read aloud at home. Participation figures prove that, apparently, it's working.

Exposing families to different genres is a key element of OSOB. Once they have experienced the program, they are hooked. Varied book selections help families stretch their listening literacy, which has in turn stretched them as independent readers and writers.

NES students have averaged 90 percent (or better) on the Virginia Standards of Learning reading test over the past three years. Scores have steadily improved since implementing a read aloud program at NES. This, combined with other new reading programs, has worked effectively and cohesively to improve standardized student test scores.

In an OSOB evaluation, one NES parent wrote, "For my first-born child, NES did not have any read aloud programs. That child has been a struggling reader all the way through school. However, my second two children both were read to thanks to these programs, and neither of them requires any special reading assistance! This is the only difference for them, and seems to have made the real difference."

Library staff have noticed that parents come in right after the OSOB book has been completed asking for other chapter books



At this year's NES Summer Reading kickoff event, Northumberland Public Library Children's Librarian Nancy Webster explains the summer reading log to NES parents and students.

by the same author or with similar subject matter, which they can read aloud at home. But the biggest and most noticeable change came after reading a poetry collection for OSOB. For the first time in memory, parents came into the library requesting poetry collections to take home and read aloud. This has never happened before! Poetry is usually a genre one must develop a taste for, but it seems that OSOB is cultivating a community of poetry lovers—what a bonus!

What's Next?

The next goal is to find a wonderful biography or other nonfiction book that elementary school families will love to help encourage more nonfiction reading. Imagine the power in this! Another amazing outcome from OSOB is families' enthusiasm for and anticipation of the upcoming book, even if it's a year away. Teachers in school are asked what next year's book will be as well as the staff at the public library. It's a well-kept secret of course, and the suspense is part of the thrill of OSOB.

Parents and even some of the teachers at NES have come to learn that the children's librarian has a small hand in the selection of the next OSOB book. Since OSOB is usually done each February, March at the library not only "comes in like a lion," but has turned into the month that parents and teachers alike come into the library asking about next year's book selection.

Some make suggestions, some drop a hint or two, and some ask outright! It's really exciting to see the community so ecstatic about reading a book together, and it's also kind of fun to be a part of the big secret.

Program Replication

Can any school or public library engage in OSOB? The answer is absolutely—the program can be replicated anywhere.

How does the collaboration begin? First, give this article to your PTA president, local school librarian, school board member, school principal, reading specialist, or other school official.

As an outreach to elementary schools in the community, public libraries could invite the librarians from local elementary schools and their reading specialists to an information session about OSOB. Or start by inviting officers from the PTA—whoever will likely attend.

Talk about the idea with public library boards, at a public school staff meeting, at a school board meeting, or with a local civic or community group (for possible sponsorship and support).

Public libraries could announce a summer family reading project—One Community, One Book, One Month—choose a book, advertise it in the paper, let families preregister in person or online, and start taking book orders a few weeks in advance. You could be up and running by summer. You'll need to make a calendar for that month, and write in pages to read each night till the end of the month and the end of the book.



Reading Recovery Teacher Jan Bates and student Jaheim enjoy this read aloud time together during the Homework Hangout session at the NPL.

“The One School, One Book partnership is like the amazing properties of epoxy glue—two separate parts, each distinct with properties of its own, bond together in astounding strength. This union takes the public school and the public library to new heights, collaborating to build a lasting literate community.”

The Partnership Continues

NES and NPL partner every year for the NES summer reading program using the Collaborative Summer Library Program (CSLP) national theme. Members of the NPL board volunteer to help at the special kickoff event. This event has consisted of a picnic, summer safety program, guest storytellers, ice cream socials, and other fun activities, resulting in as many as four hundred participants.

NES provides students with a summer reading log in their report card envelopes; it must be stamped a minimum of five times by any library nationwide (including school libraries). Reading requirements vary by age and grade level with a minimum number of books required for each age group. This log contains one column for books read *by* the child and one for books read *to* the child.

A summer reading celebration is held in September to honor those who fulfilled their summer reading requirements. As a note of interest, this year we added a “Mathterpieces” component, with math activities that corresponded to the reading task.

The day after school closes for the summer, the library staff starts seeing NES students and their reading logs. The library's summer reading program usually begins within a week or two of school closing, and weekly programs, craft projects, and prizes are the highlights that bring both resident and visiting families through the library's doors.

Northumberland County's location, along the shores of the Chesapeake Bay, results in an influx of vacationers and weekend residents to the area each summer. The high-interest programs, combined with the rewards offered by the school each September, keep the library vibrantly busy for the summer months. Of course, the prizes offered don't hurt, either!

Whatever the draw, the library is delighted to have so many NES students visiting and so many books getting into their hands

during the all-important summer vacation time. Research says that students who do not read during the summer will regress up to a half year in reading level. If you don't use it, you lose it!

The OSOB partnership is like the amazing properties of epoxy glue—two separate parts, each distinct with properties of its own, bond together in astounding strength. This union takes both the public school and the public library to new heights, collaborating to build a lasting literate community. ☺

Jan Bates can be reached at jbates@nucps.net; Nancy Webster can be reached at nwebster@nplva.org. For more information on the program cited above and to inquire about a National OSOB conference coming to Bentonville, Ark., Feb. 15, 2010, visit www.readtothem.org.



Celebrate! ¡Celebremos!

Children's Day/Book Day
El día de los niños/El día de los libros

Día is a celebration EVERY DAY of children, families, and reading that culminates every year on April 30.

The celebration emphasizes the importance of advocating literacy for children of all linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

For more information about Día visit www.ala.org/dia



Flying with the Phoenixes

Avoiding Job Burnout as a Librarian and a Manager

Anitra Steele

One of the benefits of being in a profession with an archival component for more than thirty-five years and working at the same library for more than thirty is that your files can contain some very interesting information, and you can find it.

Such is a cartoon on library-worker burnout I rediscovered recently. The yellowed photocopy of the mimeographed drawing of a frazzle-haired, bespectacled, toothless, hook-handed, and shabbily dressed woman “of a certain age” was labeled “Library Worker Burnout” and contained the following captions:

- Permanent wrinkles from constant smile and deadline pressure
- Hard of hearing from exposure to telephone duty and patron complaints
- Lost teeth in fight over who gets to take break or lunch today
- Ulcer from holding back urge to punch somebody out
- Finger cancer from filing

*Anitra Steele is Children's Services Manager at Mid-Continent Public Library in Independence, Missouri. She is a member of the **ALSC Managing Children's Services Committee**, which also includes Chair Sarah English, Tina Frolund, Cary Meltzer Frostick, Ginny Gustin, Anne Leon, Deanna Romriell, Jennifer Schultz, and Angeliqne D. Simmons.*

- Hair frazzled from bad nerves
- Bad eyesight from deciphering poor handwriting
- Poor posture from bending over desk
- Tacky clothes from twenty-five years of low pay
- Hand lost in photocopy machine
- Tennis shoes to run from patrons

While this cartoon is at least twenty-five years old, many of the causes for staff burnout remain the same—stress, poor working conditions, low pay, constant interruptions, and a lack of job recognition.

So how does a manager recognize and ameliorate burnout? Are there simple things one can do to support, empower, and encourage staff while still getting the job done?

The signs of burnout include changes in attendance, productivity, performance, and attitude. With frontline staff, some of these signs can have far-reaching consequences.

Children who are grouched at for asking a question, mothers who attend a lackluster toddler storytime, and teens who show up for a program only to find it cancelled are less likely to bother with the library in the future. Even in “behind the scenes” staff, burnout can have an impact on library service when books and materials don't get ordered in a timely fashion, websites are not updated, and IT equipment isn't repaired or reliable.

So, what can you do to fly with the phoenixes? Beyond promoting ongoing communication, consider the following strategies.

Job Sharing

Job sharing does not have to be a structured formal process. One manager I knew took on a larger administrative responsibility with the knowledge that her old position would not be filled, so she restructured those duties so that each of her frontline children's staff would be responsible for a small portion of them. One arranged the summer reading program kickoff event, one handled children's book week, and so on. She monitored how they were doing with monthly reports, and the increased leadership opportunities provided the staff with excellent training and résumé material.

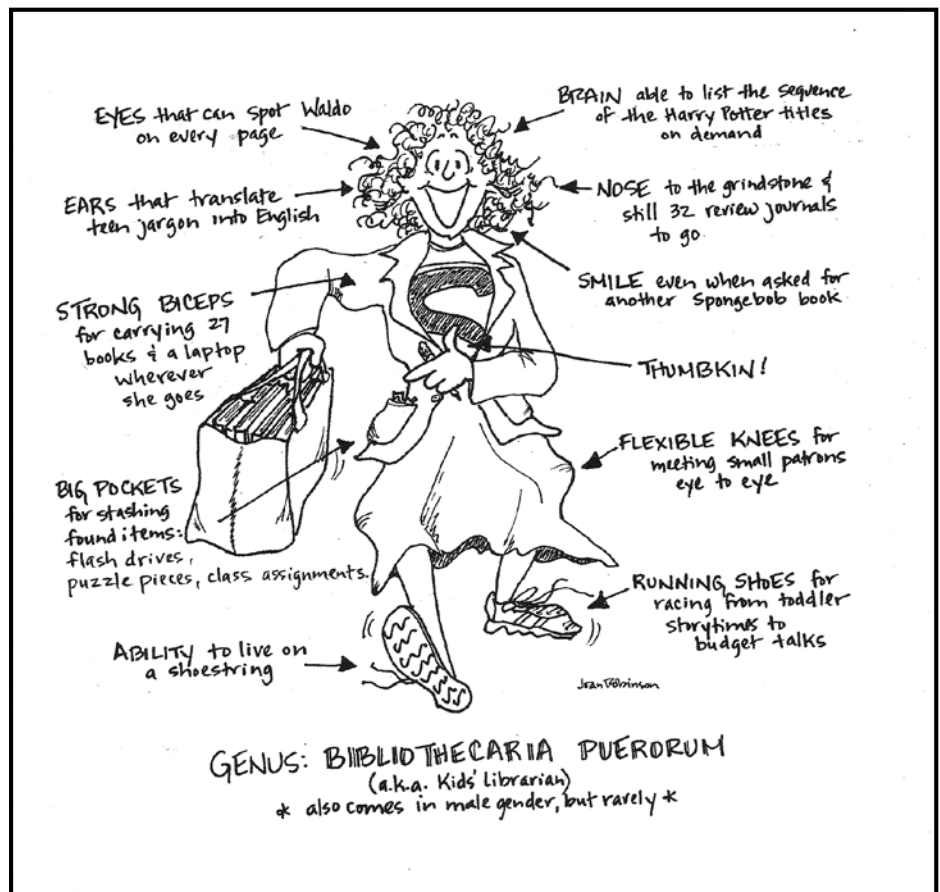
Additionally, encouraging and instituting cross-training for certain activities (such as storytime presenting and book-discussion leading) will allow the designated staffperson some peace of mind that she can take time off and "the show will go on." Soldiering on regardless of a sick child at home or a sick headache at work ultimately does not earn a manager the expected kudos.

Recognition

Recognition, or the lack of it, shows up often as a cause for burnout. The mother complaining that you won't let her "gifted and mature" nine-year-old into the Teen Book Discussion Group doesn't realize you had to fight to establish a teen book group and are still working on attracting teens. As managers, we can recognize good jobs done, good ideas submitted, and good service tendered. Be sure to publicly thank staff, attribute good ideas to their submitters, and place "attaboy" notes in the files of staff you receive compliments on. Let them know you care by hosting annual recognition luncheons or break times, providing certificates of recognition, and nominating excelling staff for system-wide, regional, or state-wide awards.

Mentoring

Mentoring can help fight burnout on two fronts. New librarians are perhaps



Cartoon by Joan Robinson, used with permission of the artist. For permission to reprint, contact joanrob@burlingtontelecom.net.

at a higher risk of burnout than veteran coworkers. One article states this is because idealistic expectations and practice do not often coincide. Pairing a newbie with a seasoned colleague can help cushion the everyday reality of the job for the newbie while providing the seasoned staffperson the opportunity to look at procedures and processes with fresh eyes while explaining them. This can be a great way to reevaluate and update methods.

Continuing Education

Continuing education also is a win-win approach to vanquishing burnout. The profession, knowledge retrieval, and society are all changing rapidly. Creating and promoting opportunities for staff to further their skills and knowledge base with database reference classes, Every Child Ready to Read training, access to ALSC online classes, mock award discussions, and more can reenergize them and increase productivity.

If conference attendance is not in the budget, consider hosting or sending staff to "library camp." Participation on discussion boards, which are educational and free, can help staff put their situations in perspective.

Managers also must be alert to their own burnout potential. It's hard to herd phoenixes if you also are in flames. Remember Mary Poppins was only "practically perfect." Collaborate with colleagues to institute reenergizing activities. Delegate, reprioritize, and just say no if necessary for your own health and well-being.

Redraw that library worker cartoon to reflect her phoenix qualities—and take flight. ☺

Beyond the Book

Literacy in the Digital Age

Christopher Borawski

It goes without saying that children today find themselves sharing, using, and understanding information in ways that were unimaginable just a generation ago. Just as information has been constantly reformatted over time, so has the concept of literacy, and more specifically, information literacy. Now, as the twenty-first century rolls on, information literacy has begun its most recent transformation and, like books and music, it's gone digital.

Not so long ago, librarians and media specialists introduced young people to libraries through bibliographic instruction. All you had to know about were the Dewey Decimal System; author, title, and subject cards; and perhaps how to use *Reader's Guide*. Fast-forward just a few years and suddenly information is available at the stroke of a key or two through an array of databases. Bibliographic instruction now goes beyond the book, broadening to become information literacy. Words like *and*, *or*, and *not* take on a whole new importance in creating successful searches through an ever-widening sea of information.

Now, in the twenty-first century, children use computers and hop online for a multitude of purposes, like socializing, communicating, gaming, researching, and audiovisual enjoyment. To keep up with all this activity, information literacy has itself broadened to become digital literacy.

According to the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Literacy Panel, digital literacy is “using digital technology, communications tools, and/or networks to access, manage, integrate, evaluate, and create information in order to function in a knowledge society.”¹ To put it more simply, to be digitally literate is to be able both to understand and effectively use the various sources of information and communication in the digital world.

At this year's ALA Annual Conference in Chicago, ALA and the Children's Book Council presented the program “Multiple Literacies in the Library,” in which a series of panelists discussed several of the different forms that literacy takes today, including digital literacy. This presentation made it clear that children are being introduced to books and information more and more frequently via mediums other than traditional print. It's becoming increasingly important that children be able to use their listening skills (audio literacy) and their ability to discern information and reach conclusions from illustrations, photos, and so on (visual literacy).² Digital literacy is in some ways a bridge between these two, since one might need to be able to find and download an audio file to his or her MP3 player in order to listen, and since online information is often found with visual links and in visual form. (Have you helped a child use Google Images lately?)



*Christopher Borawski is Senior Librarian and Assistant Branch Manager at the Montgomery County Public Libraries, Silver Spring (Md.) Library. He is the outgoing chair of the **ALSC Children and Technology Committee**, which also includes incoming Chair Amber Creger, Lauren Anduri, Natalie Arthur, Kelley Beeson, Jill Bickford, Jeannie Chen, Gretchen Hams-Casseroti, Patricia Havrin, Allison Kaplan, and Patty Saidenberg.*

Research on digital literacy is still very much in its infancy; however, a 2002 study by the Education Development Center's (EDC) Center for Children and Technology along with Computers for Youth looked at the emergence of digital literacy skills in children from low- and middle-income families. Perhaps not surprisingly, it found that children's fluency in digital literacy was most affected by how frequently they had access to a computer and the Internet, how well their parents used and understood the technology, and the level of related instruction they received from teachers in school.³ This is why it's important for librarians and media specialists to understand the skills that are a part of digital literacy and help children develop and strengthen them.

According to the EDC, digital literacy can be seen as a combination of five different skill areas.⁴

- **The ability to troubleshoot technical difficulties.** Do children know how to

fix problems themselves, and if not, do they know who to ask or where to go for help? Do they simply ignore the problem and try to keep working?

- **The reasons for their computer use.** Do they use it for schoolwork, to play games, to communicate with friends, to do research, or some or all of the above?
- **The ability to use common tools.** This skill ranges from basic techniques like using a mouse or a keyboard, to navigating Windows or other operating systems, to using word processing and other software as well as using basic e-mail services and Internet search engines.
- **Their ability to communicate online.** How widely and completely do they use e-mail, instant messaging, Twitter, Facebook, or the chat function on their favorite game site (i.e. Club Penguin) to talk with their friends and

family? Do they simply send text messages or can they add sound, videos, and photos to their messages?

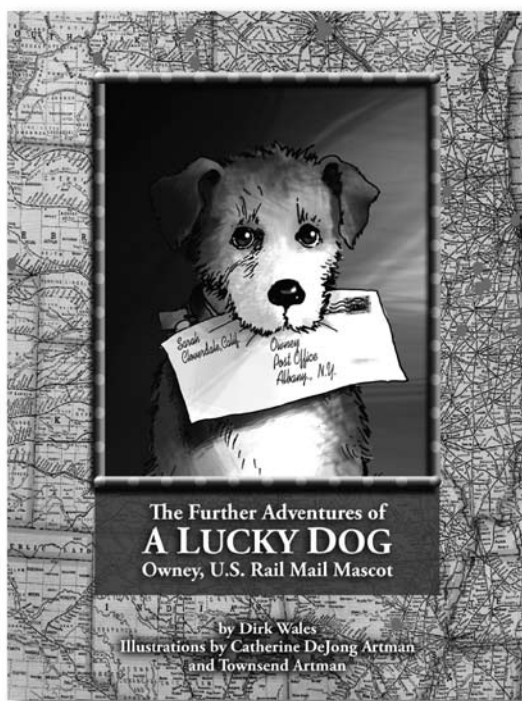
- **Web literacy.** How well do they use the Web to find or browse for information and evaluate what they find for accuracy and reliability? How well are they able to create and share their own material online (blogs, wikis, photos, etc.)?

We as librarians and media specialists are, as always, an important resource in building these digital literacy skills. We need only show parents and teachers how we can help. There are many ways in which these skills might be worked on in your library or media center.

Many libraries offer basic computer skills classes for children, but we can even go beyond that. How about a Web scavenger hunt to teach Web-searching skills or a digital photography workshop? Internet safety, appropriate online behavior, and plagiarism 2.0 (i.e. proper use of online images in school reports) are other areas where libraries can help support digital literacy. ☺

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3. Harouna Ba, William Tally, and Kallen Tsikalas, "Investigating Children's Emerging Digital Literacies," *Journal of Technology, Learning, and Assessment* 1, no. 4 (Aug. 2002), <http://escholarship.bc.edu/jtla/vol1/4/> (accessed July 29, 2009): 13.
4. Ibid, 6-8.



The Further Adventures of A Lucky Dog: Owney, U.S. Rail Mail Mascot

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Little-Known Treasures

Historic Children's Books at the Newberry Library

By Dorothy Stoltz

In the silent, chilly room, a gasp of wonder escapes you as the librarian brings you a 1485 first printed edition of *Aesop's Fables*. You begin to gingerly turn the fragile, 524-year-old pages, hardly believing you are allowed to touch it.

With its binding supported by a special cushion called a "futon," you behold the exquisite 1890 book of illustrations of Ernst Nister in an early "movable picture book" by Cornelia Lechler, *Immer Froh Tagaus, Tagein: Ein Panorama-Bilderbuch, Mit Heiteren Versen, or Always Happy Day Out, Day In: A Panorama Picture Book, With Cheerfulness*. These and other important historic children's books and materials can be found at the Newberry Library in Chicago. ALSC's Special Collections and Bechtel Fellowship Committee set aside time during the ALA Annual Conference in July to explore some of these little-known treasures at the Newberry.

The collection, which houses more than seven hundred years of children's literature, is an invaluable resource for anyone interested in the history of children's books and the changing attitudes toward children and childhood. For example, *Aesop's Fables* was produced as a printed manuscript in 1485, but at the time most children knew Aesop through oral retellings, not through the more adult-focused books.

By 1890, Nister was publishing storybooks to intrigue children by using creative movable techniques and a distinctive illustration style often depicting sentimental beauty. Nister was a well-known printer, publisher, and chromolithographer who specialized in colored toy and pop-up picture books. Peter Newell, an American cartoonist and children's book creator, also used creative devices to make the Victorian children's book more popular. In *Topsy and Turvys* from 1893 (see illustration),

Newell used the delightfully clever trick of having the reader turn the page upside down to reveal a new illustration and a witty retort to the previous text.

Other materials in the collection that provide insight into the interaction between children and books include alphabet-related works throughout history and from around the world. *Tabulae Abcdariae Pueriles* is an alphabet leaf that includes The Lord's Prayer and a table of syllables dated 1544. An original 1923 edition of the famous C. B. Falls' *ABC Book* has beautiful woodcut illustrations of animals to guide children on their journey through their first lessons with the alphabet letters. A Mongolian alphabet book from 1990 contains illustrations ranging from children using computers and other modern devices to images of yurts, reindeer herds, and traditional costumes. It is thought-provoking to view a non-Roman alphabet and reflect on differences and similarities of literacy learning across languages and cultures. The Mongolian script was actually outlawed in the 1940s in favor of Russian Cyrillic, so there may be special significance to this little book.

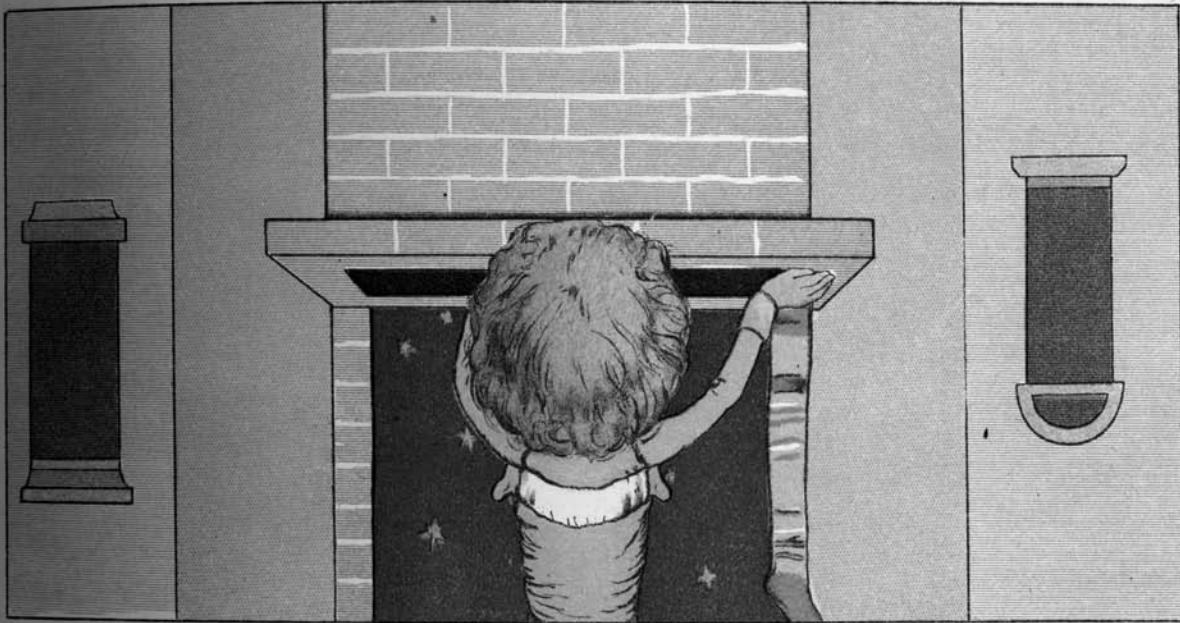
Years before research studies indicated the importance of play in promoting healthy child development and maintaining strong parent-child bonds, H. G. Wells wrote the brilliant *Floor Games*, a 1911 how-to for families to help children develop their imagination and build skills for creativity and problem solving through play. "The jolliest indoor games for boys and girls demand a floor, and the home that has no floor upon which games may be played falls so short of happiness."¹

These gems are just a sampling of the wonderful children's collection at the Newberry Library. The library was founded in 1887 by a bequest of Walter L. Newberry, a Chicago business-



Dorothy Stoltz is Outreach Services Manager at Carroll County Public Library in Westminster, Maryland. She is a member of the **ALSC Special Collections & Bechtel Fellowship Committee**, which also includes Co-Chairs Mary Beth Dunhouse and Nancy J. Johnson, Carol Doll, Christine Jenkins, Marianne Martens, Mary Lois Nicholls, Ellen Ruffin, Janet Weber, and Amanda Williams.

And Santa Claus, with pack, slips down the chimney without knocking.



Before the fire, on Christmas Eve, Miranda hangs her stocking,

10

In *Topsy and Turvys* (1893), Peter Newell used a creative device in which the reader turns the page upside down to reveal a new illustration and witty retort. Printed with permission of the Newberry Library.

man, book collector, and founder of the Young Men's Library Association—not to be confused with John Newbery of the Newbery Medal. It is a leading research institute housing 1.5 million books, five million manuscript pages, and more than 500,000 maps.

The History of Print and the Book Arts collection, where most of the children's

literature is stored, is one of the many strengths of this research library. Another strength is the library staff. We'd like to thank all the staff who assisted before, during, and after our visit, especially Jenny Schwartzberg and John Powell. ↶

Visit our wiki on ALA's website under the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC) division (<http://wikis.ala.org/alsc/>

index.php) and contribute by adding a link to a special collection in children's literature (click on "Special Collections in Children's Literature Wikiography").

References

1. H. G. Wells, *Floor Games* (London: Frank Palmer, 1911), 9.

Competencies Revised

ALSC's Competencies for Librarians Serving Children in Public Libraries document was revised this year by the Education Committee. The revision is available at www.ala.org/alsc. Click on "Education and Careers/Core Competencies" in the left-hand navigation menu. Additionally, for ALSC members only, camera-ready PDFs of the document are available for download and printing. The color and black-and-white PDFs were professionally designed and laid out in a booklet format for easy creation of workshop handouts.

Oral Histories Celebrate ALSC Past

The first two transcriptions of oral history interviews with ALSC movers and shakers went live on the Web in July. Interviews with Dr. Margaret Kimmel and Dr. Ruth Gordon are available to ALSC members on the members-only side of the website at www.ala.org/alsc. Click on "About ALSC/History of ALSC" in the left-hand navigation menu. Researchers who need access to specific transcripts may contact the ALSC office to find out how they may gain access to this historical information.

Transcriptions of oral history interviews with Mimi Kayden and Peggy Sullivan are scheduled to be published online by the 2010 Midwinter Meeting. Additional transcriptions will be added to the Oral History page in the future.

2010 Slate of Candidates

Vice President/President-Elect

Mary Fellows, Upper Hudson Library System, Albany, N.Y.

Marge Loch-Wouters, LaCrosse (Wis.) Public Library.

Board of Directors

Carolyn Brodie, Kent (Ohio) State University

Claudette McLinn, Los Angeles Unified School District

Nina Lindsay, Oakland (Calif.) Public Library

Gene Nelson, Provo (Utah) City Library

Caldecott Committee, 2012

John Peters, New York Public Library
Pabby Arnold, East Baton Rouge Parish Public Library, Baton Rouge, La.

Tony Carmack, Ashburn (Va.) Library

Natalie Arthur, Johnson County Public Library-Franklin (Ind.) Branch

Cathryn Mercier, Simmons College, Boston

Sarah Howard, Daniel Boone Regional Library, Columbia, Mo.

Ellen Fader, Multnomah County Library, Portland, Ore.

April Roy, Kansas City (Mo.) Public Library

Brenda Pruitt-Annisette, Fulton County Schools, Atlanta

Sandy Wee, San Mateo County Library, Millbrae, Calif.

Allison Santos, Princeton (N.J.) Public Library

Carin Bringelson, TeachingBooks.net, Madison, Wis.

Emily Tichenor, Tulsa City-County Library, Tulsa, Okla.

Bradley Debrick, Johnson County Library-Blue Valley Branch, Overland Park, Kan.

Christine Caputo, Free Library of Philadelphia

Kerry Gleason, Wilmington (Del.) Institute Library

Newbery Committee, 2012

Eva Mitnick, Los Angeles Public Library
Laura Amos, Newport News (Va.) Public Lib. Sys.-Grissom Lib.

Stacy Dillon, LREI, New York

Renee McGrath, Nassau Library System, Uniondale, N.Y.

Mary Clark, Greenwich (Conn.) Country Day School

Timothy Capehart, Dayton (Ohio) Metro Library

Tracy Van Dyne, Connetquot Public Library, Bohemia, N.Y.

Lynn Rutan, West Ottawa Public Schools, Holland, Mich.

Sheri Daun-Bedford, Woodridge (Ill.) Public Library

Shilo Pearson, Chicago Public Library
Tessa Michaelson, Ruby M. Sisson

Memorial Library, Pagosa Springs, Colo.

Nancee Dahms-Stinson, Springfield (Mo.)-Greene County Library Dist.

Lisa Eckman, Fresno (Calif.) County Free Library

Bethany Lafferty, Henderson (Nev.) Libraries, Green Valley Branch

Kelley Beeson, Allegheny County Library Association, Pittsburgh

Amanda Williams, Austin (Texas) Public Library

Sibert Committee, 2012

Roxane Bartelt, Kenosha (Wis.) Public Library

Richard Kerper, Millersville (Pa.) University-Sue A. Walker Children's Literature Center

Kathy Jarombek, Perrot Memorial Library, Old Greenwich, Conn.

Melanie Metzger, Lone Star College CyFair Branch Library, Cypress, Texas

Karen MacPherson, Takoma Park Maryland Library

April Mazza, Wayland (Mass.) Free Public Library

Denise Schmidt, San Francisco Public Library

Barbara Silverman, Corpus Christi, Texas

Alene Sternlieb, Fairfax County Public Library, Annandale, Va.

Deborah Taylor, Enoch Pratt Free Library, Baltimore

Wilder Committee, 2013

Jean Hatfield, Wichita (Kan.) Public Library

Amy McClure, Ohio Wesleyan University, Delaware, Ohio

Margaret Tice, New York

Heather McNeil, Deschutes Public Library, Bend, Ore.

Darwin Henderson, University of Cincinnati (Ohio)

Deborah Wright, Grissom Library, Newport News, Va.

2010 ALSC Midwinter Schedule

(as of October 19, 2009)

AASL/ALSC/YALSA Jt. Exec. Committee
Thursday, January 14, 4:30–6 p.m.

AASL/ALSC/YALSA Jt. Intellectual Freedom Committee
Saturday, January 16, 1:30–3:30 p.m.

AASL/ALSC/YALSA Jt. Legislation Committee
Sunday, January 17, 4–5:30 p.m.

AASL/ALSC/YALSA Jt. Membership Reception
Monday, January 18, 6–7:30 p.m.

AASL/ALSC/YALSA Jt. Youth Council Caucus
Monday, January 18, 9–10 a.m.

ALA Youth Media Awards Press Conference
Monday, January 18, 7:30–9 a.m.

All Committee Meetings I and II
Sunday, January 17, 8 a.m.–12 noon

All Discussion Group Meetings I and II
Sunday, January 17, 4–6 p.m.

ALSC Speed Networking
Friday, January 15, 7:30–9 p.m.

ALSC/REFORMA Jt. Executive Committees
Saturday, January 16, 6–7 p.m.

Arbuthnot Honor Lecture (2011)*
Saturday, January 16, 8–10 a.m.

Batchelder Award Committee (2010)*
Friday, January 15, 8 a.m.–12:30 p.m.
Saturday, January 16, 8 a.m.–10 p.m.
Sunday, January 17, 8–10 a.m.

Batchelder Award Committee (2011)
Sunday, January 17, 10:30 a.m.–12:30 p.m.

Belpré Award Committee (2010)*
Friday, January 15, 8 a.m.–12:30 p.m.
Saturday, January 16, 8 a.m.–10 p.m.
Sunday, January 17, 8–10 a.m.

Belpré Award Committee (2011)
Sunday, January 17, 4–6 p.m.

Bill Morris Invitational Seminar*
Friday, January 15, 7 a.m.–4 p.m.

Board of Directors
Saturday, January 16, 2–5:30 p.m.
Monday, January 18, 2–5:30 p.m.

Budget Committee
Sunday, January 17, 10:30 a.m.–12 noon
Monday, January 18, 10:30 a.m.–12 noon

Caldecott Award Committee (2010)*
Friday, January 15, 8 a.m.–10 p.m.
Saturday, January 16, 8 a.m.–10 p.m.
Sunday, January 17, 8–10 a.m.

Caldecott Award Committee (2011)
Saturday, January 16, 4–6 p.m.

Carnegie Award Committee (2010)*
Saturday, January 16, 8 a.m.–10 p.m.
Sunday, January 17, 8–10 a.m.

Carnegie Award Committee (2011)
Sunday, January 17, 4–6 p.m.

Distinguished Service Award*
Sunday, January 17, 8 a.m.–12 noon

Division Leadership
Saturday, January 16, 9:30 a.m.–12 noon

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Thursday, January 14, 6–8 p.m.

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Friday, January 15, 8 a.m.–12:30 p.m.
Saturday, January 16, 8 a.m.–10 p.m.
Sunday, January 17, 8–10 a.m.

Geisel Award Committee (2011)
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Sunday, January 17, 8 a.m.–12 noon and 1:30–5:30 p.m.

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Sunday, January 17, 8 a.m.–12 noon

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Saturday, January 16, 10:30 a.m.–6 p.m.
Sunday, January 17, 1:30–9 p.m.

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Saturday, January 16, 1:30–5:30 p.m. and 8–10 p.m.

Odyssey Award Committee (2010)*
Friday, January 15, 8 a.m.–6 p.m.
Saturday, January 16, 8 a.m.–6 p.m.
Sunday, January 17, 8–10 a.m.

Past Presidents' Breakfast
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Saturday, January 16, 8–9 a.m.

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Monday, January 18, 8–10 p.m.

Wilder Award Committee (2011)*
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Sunday, January 17, 8–10 a.m.

An up-to-date list of meetings is at www.ala.org/alsc. Always consult your *Conference Program Book* and *Supplement* onsite for any late changes.

*Denotes closed meeting

2010 ALSC Preconference

Do you linger over the pages of striking picture books, wondering how to tap their full potential in programs for children? Attend the ALSC Preconference, *Drawn to Delight: How Picture Books Work (and Play) Today*, and learn to look beyond the surface stories. Explore technique and design with art directors, museum educators, and award-winning illustrators Brian Selznick, Jerry Pinkney, Laura Vaccaro Seeger, and Kadir Nelson—to name a few.

Discover the innovative “whole book” storytime model, developed to help children derive meaning from everything picture books offer. Delve into the format's relationship to graphic novels and the international and digital horizons.

Studio demonstrations, hands-on opportunities, and original art door prizes will be part of the mix on Friday, June 25, 8 a.m.–6:30 p.m., at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.

2010 ALSC President's Program

Join us on Monday morning, June 28, during the ALA Annual Conference, for the ALSC Charlemae Rollins President's Program featuring Dr. Patricia K. Kuhl. To help you serve your youngest patrons, Dr. Kuhl will discuss her research and findings on infants' early language and later reading skills.

Dr. Kuhl is internationally recognized for her research on early language and brain development and for studies that show how young children learn. Her work has played a major role in demonstrating how early exposure to language alters the brain. It has implications for critical periods in development, for bilingual education and reading readiness, for developmental disabilities involving language, and for research on computer understanding of speech.

Dr. Kuhl has spoken at the White House, and has appeared on the Discovery Health television series *The Baby Human*, the NOVA series *The Mind*, and “The Power of Ideas” and “The Secret Life of the Brain” on PBS. She also has appeared on major television network news programs and in the *New York Times*, *Time*, and *Newsweek*.

Currently Dr. Kuhl is the Bezos Family Foundation Endowed Chair for Early Childhood Learning, codirector of the University of Washington Institute for Learning and Brain Sciences, director of the University of Washington's NSF Science of Learning Center, and professor of speech and hearing sciences.

2010 ALSC National Institute

Are you looking for a truly intensive and dynamic learning opportunity with a youth services focus? Plan to attend the ALSC National Institute on September 23–25, in Atlanta. Here are just a few of the highlights:

- Meet Ashley Bryan, Carmen Deedy, John McCutcheon, Brian Selznick, and Walter Dean and Christopher Myers.
- Attend exciting and relevant continuing education sessions on children's technology, literature, and programming.
- Enjoy an evening reception at the Center for Puppetry Arts.
- Network with your peers.

The institute will be held at the Emory Conference Center on the campus of Emory University. Specifics regarding registration and programs will be posted on the ALSC website and ALSC-L as plans develop.

Save the Date

The 2010 Arbuthnot Honor Lecture, featuring Kathleen T. Horning, University of Wisconsin–Madison's Cooperative Children's Book Center, will be held on May 13. Riverside County (Calif.) Library System will host the event.

ALSC Board Actions

The following action was voted on electronically by the Board of Directors on the electronic discussion list ALSCBOARD.

VOTED, to approve a resolution honoring long-time ALSC member Effie Lee Morris. (October 2009) ☺

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THE LAST WORD

The Curse of the Children's Librarian

There are probably a number of things we could call "The Curse of the Children's Librarian"—never enough storage space, drippy-nose kisses delivered with love, desks overflowing with puppets. But my personal nominee for the number one Curse of the Children's Librarian is what I affectionately call the "earworm."

Here's how an earworm is born. You sit down at your puppet-busting desk and begin planning the weekly storytime. You select wonderful books with care, hunt down the perfect rhymes find the perfect early literacy moment, and finally turn to music.

"What song shall we sing and play together?" You wonder. And then it comes to you, the perfect addition to complete your storytime: "You Sing a Song." That's it. You love that song.

Merely reading the title brings Ella Jenkins' lovely voice into your head, "*You sing a song, and I'll sing a song. We'll sing a song together. You sing a song and I'll sing a song in warm or wintry weather,*" you begin to hum along and BAM! You've got an earworm!

For the next hour or so, no matter what you do or where you go, you're singing, whistling, or tapping "*You sing a song, and I'll sing a song. We'll sing a song together.*" And unfortunately you have been singing, whistling, and tapping aloud. So not only has this earworm infected *your* brain, it has magically migrated to all coworkers within earshot of your voice.

Soon, the entire back room is singing, whistling, or tapping, "*You sing a song, and I'll sing a song. We'll sing a song together.*"

At first, this seems rather festive, even funny. An hour or so later, the song has lost *all* of its shine. Your coworkers do not seem to be enjoying *singing a song together*. They are beginning to cast you disparaging glares. The back room has definitely filled with *wintry weather*.

Smiling thinly at them, you throw yourself into one task after another attempting to rid the earworm from your head; to no avail. The earworm continues circling your brain around and



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around and around: "*You sing a song and I'll sing a song . . .*"

So you don headphones and shuffle through scores of children's CDs in a last-ditch effort to kill the bloody thing. And finally, you succeed. "*You sing a song and I'll sing a song. We'll sing a song together*" disappears in a flash. "Ahhh . . . mission accomplished."

But here's the "curse" part of children's librarian earworms. There is really only one surefire way to kill an earworm . . . and that is to replace it with a new one.

"*You sing a song and I'll sing a song. We'll sing a song together*" does indeed disappear. But sliding wickedly in to take its place is Raffi's malevolent version of "*The more we get together, together, together, the more we get together the happier we'll be.*"

At first you feel somewhat triumphant, blessed even, not to be *singing a song together* anymore. Then, horror of horrors, you hear yourself singing aloud! Again, you have looped the entire backroom *together, together* with yet another incurable earworm. And they do not seem *happier*. They do not seem *together, together*. You are not their friend. You are bad.

And that is when you must exercise one of the many healing arts in the arsenal of the children's librarian. I recommend baking—either with your own two hands or with the hands of your favorite local baker. Perhaps you cannot kill the earworms you have released, but you can turn the smiles on the faces of your coworkers right-side-up with a few well placed and aromatic baked goods.

And when selecting them, remember—the more sugar, the better. Yes, it may take time or money, but that, too, is just one more Curse of the Children's Librarian. ☺

Susan Anderson-Newham is the Early Learning Supervising Librarian for the Pierce County (Wash.) Library System. Every day she feels blessed to be working with people dedicated to making the world a better place—enduring earworms and all.

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.