

# ALSC Member Profiles

Keary Bramwell



**Keary Bramwell** is School Librarian at Grace Lutheran School in River Forest, Illinois.

## Brian E. Wilson, Children’s Librarian, Evanston (IL) Public Library

**What’s your best ALSC memory?** Being treated so kindly when serving on the ALSC Budget Committee; the other members serving were so patient with me! I also really love the excitement of the Youth Media Awards announcement. Hearing a large group of people say “oooooh” when it has been revealed there are a certain number of honor titles. This is so much fun in-person, but it’s a blast virtually as well.



**What is your favorite book to read aloud?** I love Grace Lin’s *A Big Mooncake for Little Star*, Kevin Henkes’ *Kitten’s First Full Moon*, and any book by the extremely talented Keiko Kasza who knows how to serve up narrative twists and surprises. An underrated book that should be on everyone’s list of great read-alouds is Floyd Cooper’s absolutely terrific *Max and the Tag-Along Moon*.

**What is your favorite part about working with youth?** I love doing story-times. Hearing children laugh at a book or silly song or a puppet show that surprises and delights them makes my day.

**What is your favorite library event, program, or outreach initiative?** For several years, I have run a program called Caldecott Club for first to eighth graders. We meet once a month for three months and examine an easy to understand version of the Caldecott criteria and then the art in four possible contenders. The children vote for their favorites.

**What do you do to reset during stressful times?** I listen to music. That helps me decompress. I like to keep on top of the new stuff but I have to admit, I like digging out my longtime favorites for comfort. Also, reading funny books, watching some favorite funny TV shows. I cherish anything that makes me laugh.

## Michael Kwende, Children’s Librarian, Berkeley (CA) Public Library-Clairemont Branch

**What is your favorite book to read aloud?** As is likely the case with many children’s librarians, I get this question quite often, so often that I created an Instagram account called @storytimegold to keep track of my favorites. So far, I have posted over four hundred titles, among them *Too Tall Houses* by Gianna Marino, *Thank You, Omu!* by Oge Mora, *Jabari Jumps* by Gaia Cornwall, and *Big Mean Mike* by Michelle Knudsen and Scott Magoon.



**What is your favorite part about working with youth?**

Watching children develop deep and meaningful relationships with their libraries. I have had the pleasure of knowing children who were brought to our Baby Rhyme Time and Preschool Story Time programs many of whom I now see regularly in my visits to their preschools and elementary schools. After so many years of cultivating these relationships, I have noticed there is a level of comfort that develops within children that makes coming to the library as natural as going to other familiar and beloved spaces in their lives.

**What do you do to reset during stressful times?** For me, one way to reset from stress is, ironically, built into my work. Interacting with the children during their library visits or my outreach visits to their classrooms reminds me of how fortunate I am to have my profession be a labor of love, which for the most part, does not generate stress.

Outside of work I enjoy walking in nature, weight training, listening to music and creating music, sitting by the ocean, hatha yoga, acupuncture, saunas, napping, and, oh yeah, reading, too!

**What are you most passionate about in children's services?**

Outreach! What good is a public library without a community that uses it? I believe children's librarians should not sit around hoping and waiting for children to enter the doors of our facilities. We should be visiting schools, doing read-alouds, book talks and promoting the programs we offer, getting kids excited about what they can experience when they visit their local public libraries. We should also be at parks, community centers, nursery facilities, shelters, farmer's markets, and any other place we can reach the children and their caregivers.

## Erica Siskind, Children's Librarian, Oakland (CA) Public Library

**What is your favorite book to read aloud?** Right now, it's *The World's Biggest Fart* by Rafael Ordóñez. It's interactive, humorous, and memorable. Because it upends our taboo against farting in public, reading it relieves tension.

**What is your favorite part about working with youth?** Witnessing children's unspoken delight and gratitude is my favorite part of working at the library. For example, when you find the exact book a child was hoping to get, and they clutch it to their chest and smile, or even jump up and down in celebration. Once, after several weekly



conversations resulting in multiple stacks of possible books a regular library patron took home to her grand-nephew, she returned with a photo of him in the middle of his parents' bed, totally absorbed in a book, surrounded by the momentarily-forgotten toys and electronic devices. She was so happy! Because these things happen fairly regularly, I love doing reference and readers advisory on the children's public service desk.

**What is your favorite library event, program, or outreach initiative?**

My favorite outreach initiative is something I haven't done since before COVID—a twice-yearly visit to a local women-and-children's shelter. It is not close enough to our library to walk, and the moms are all working single parents, so their regular visits to the library are a challenge. When I go there, a non-profit organization, Community Education Partnership, treats us all to a meal, and after we eat together, we have storytime. When I first started visiting, the moms seemed to think it was going to be boring and babyish and were reluctant to give up their evening. I planned the most engaging materials I had—participatory books, a portable felt-board, and my favorite sing-alongs. After the first few sessions, there have always been at least a few moms and older kids who know what to expect; they're ready to sing along, and they ask if I brought whatever book they liked best the last time.

**What do you do to reset during stressful times?**

I have a small backyard, but it has plenty of room for a hammock. In the warmer, dryer, more day-lit months of the year, I can plop myself down right after work; on the weekends, I bring a book and have a picnic. Looking up at the sky and swaying gently, listening to bamboo leaves rustling feels replenishing.

**What are you most passionate about in children's services?**

The connection between enjoyment and literacy is what I am most passionate about. When children are delighted with the books (and stories in other formats) they find at the library and also enjoy the experience of finding them, we are linking literacy to joy, which means we are building a lifelong literacy habit. We know that has a high correlation with financial stability and employment, sense of personal competence and achievement, and civic engagement or other forms of participation in the community.

We need to make sure that all the children in our city see the library as their own place, know they are welcome to come back often, and find stories that bring them deep joy.

For me personally, that means making myself available to the public, paying attention to whatever cues they give me so I can let them direct the interaction, practicing a nonjudgmental response, and reading children's literature enough to always have something to suggest.

## Sukalaya Kenworthy, Librarian, Fort Lauderdale, FL

### What's your best ALSC memory?

I was one of the members of the 2021 Newbery Award Committee. We called in to inform the winners of the award results, and everyone had tears in their eyes.



### What is your favorite book to read aloud?

*I'm the Biggest Thing in the Ocean!* by Kevin Sherry. This book is guaranteed to make kids and believe it or not, parents laugh out loud. I really enjoyed the surprise in this book.

**What is your favorite part about working with youth?** They reenergize me with their boundless energy and creativity. I

love listening to their inputs and questions. I create videos with them and teach many different classes including coding. I learn a lot from them and enjoyed the interactions immensely.

**What do you do to reset during stressful times?** Especially during the pandemic, I reset by spending time in my backyard cooking Thai food. I also draw in my iPad and folded origami paper to relax.

**What are you most passionate about in children's services?** I am passionate about getting kids excited about reading and learning new things to enrich their lives. I encourage children to be brave about learning, exploring, and not to be afraid of making mistakes. I often share my background of growing up in Thailand and coming to the United States to study. &

## Jedi Librarians Unite!

What is the first thing you do when you win the Super Bowl or retire from teaching librarianship? Head to Disneyland, of course! And if you are a Star Wars fan, like Sylvia Vardell, professor emerita of Texas Woman's University, you visit the Galaxy's Edge area in Disneyland where the world of Star Wars comes to life. Plus, this year, the Star Wars convention was in Anaheim, too. (Yes, she regularly attends Star Wars conventions!)

What a perfect time to meld her two worlds: librarianship and Star Wars fandom. "I love cosplay, so creating a Jedi Librarian costume was natural for me. When I spotted a library display at the convention, I had to strike a pose. Please forgive me for the "shush" pose, but it was the perfect way to signal "I am a Jedi Librarian!"

Vardell adds, "I do realize, however, that librarians no longer shush patrons and now welcome lively interaction and participation, especially in the libraries of galaxies far, far away!"

