

# Children & Libraries

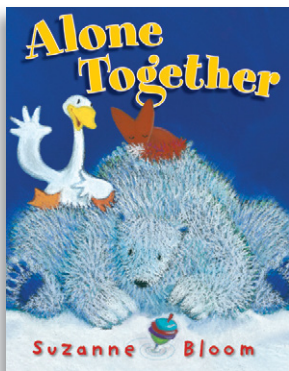
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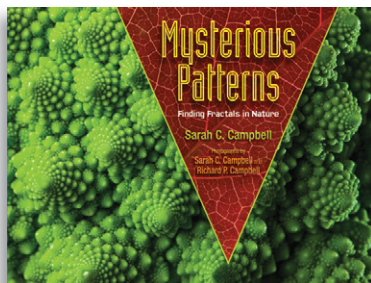


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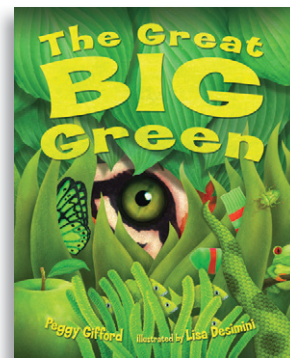
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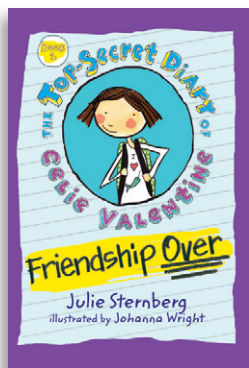
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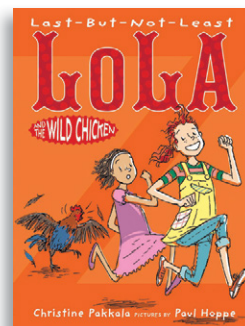


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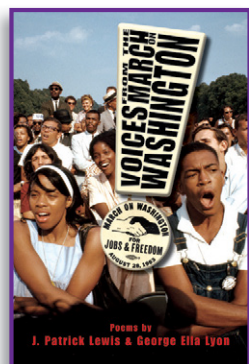


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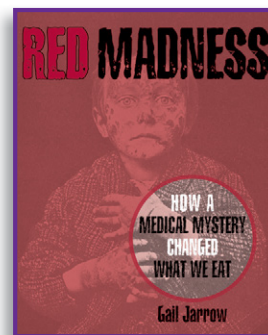
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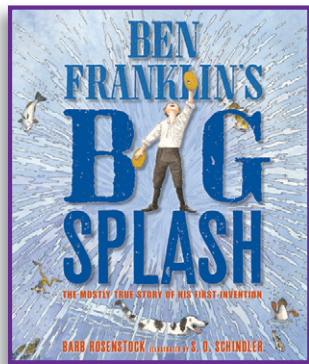
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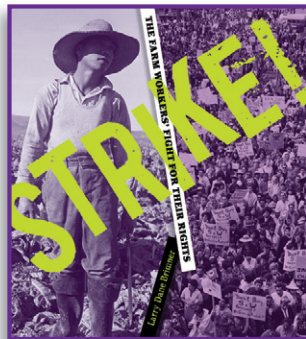
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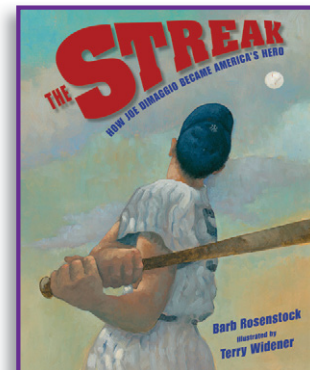
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Photo by Mary Krauss



ON THE COVER: Teen volunteer Tyler at a Dinosaur Dining program at Brown County Library in Green Bay, Wisconsin



## Editor's Note Easy as Pie, Right?

By Sharon Verbeten

Writing a children's book is hard. I know, I've never done it.

I think it's too hard . . . not that I wouldn't like to, though.

I've been witness lately to a few happenings that have made me ponder children's book publishing and how people view it. For the longest time, many outsiders believed it was easy to write a children's book—after all, it's just a few pages and the readers are, after all, *only* children. Even Dr. Seuss's publisher Bennett Cerf dared the master of rhyme to write a book using only 50 words; should be easy, right? Seuss sure showed him!

One of my close friends—after years of toiling at her desk—has not one, but four, children's books coming out in the next two years with three major publishers. She knows how hard it can be to get a book published, yet she was set on traditional publishing. And, very soon, the fruits of her labor will pay off—I hope with many positive reviews, book signings and, ultimately, more book deals. As Martha Stewart might say, "It's a good thing."

On the other hand, I have an acquaintance who wrote, researched publishers, and toiled for years on her non-fiction children's book—frustrated at not being able to find an agent or publisher. Now she's taking it into her own hands, launching a Kickstarter campaign to fund self-publishing her book. Heck, I noticed that even veteran author Laura Numeroff has a crowdfunding campaign for just the same reason.

Which person is more shrewd? Who will reap the greater benefits? That depends, I guess, on what they are trying to achieve. Each has stories to tell, but they choose to get them out there in different ways. Neither one wants to get rich; both probably won't. But each is living the dream she set out to achieve—to entertain and educate children. And they're doing it in the ways that are best for them.

Me? I'm a traditionalist. I do have a bias toward traditionally published books—to me, it means something that the author toiled, researched, worked, and reedited to get the manuscript just right.

And while self-publishing doesn't always achieve what the author sets out for (Fame? Fortune? A face-front display at Barnes & Noble?), I can appreciate those who want to tell a story so true to their heart that they are willing to do anything to see it in print.

No moral of the story here; just a tale of two stories I've recently seen. Both inspirational authors, two ways of doing things. One common goal—tell a compelling story and get it into the hands of as many children as possible.

Not a bad goal indeed. ☺

# Children & Libraries

the journal of the Association for  
Library Service to Children

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# May Hill Arbuthnot Honor Lecture

## Rejoice the Legacy!

Andrea Davis Pinkney



Photo by Christine Simmons

Andrea Davis Pinkney

**Andrea Davis Pinkney** is the New York Times bestselling and award-winning author of many books for children and young adults. She is the recipient of several Coretta Scott King Book Award citations, the Boston Globe/Horn Book Honor Award, and the Parenting Publication Gold Medal. Andrea is Vice President, Executive Editor at Scholastic. She was named one of the "25 Most Influential Black Women in Business" by the Network Journal, and is among "The 25 Most Influential People in Our Children's Lives" cited by Children's Health magazine.

*The May Hill Arbuthnot Honor Lecture was presented May 3, 2014, at the University of Minnesota Children's Literature Research Collections on the university's West Bank Campus.*

Good evening, beautiful people!

I am so happy to be here. Thank you, May Hill Arbuthnot Honor Committee. Thank you to our National Ambassador for Young People's Literature and this year's Newbery medal recipient, the amazing Kate DiCamillo. And a very special thanks to Lisa Von Drasek, curator of the Children's Literature Research Collections of the University of Minnesota Libraries, and her colleagues at Archives and Special Collections at the University of Minnesota. You have worked hard wrangling the many facets of this event. This evening would not be this evening without you.

During the months leading up to tonight, I repeatedly asked myself a very important question: *What does one wear to deliver the May Hill Arbuthnot Honor Lecture?* This is a vital consideration because perceptions are important.

Earrings. Jacket. Skirt. And then the hardest question of all: *What shoes should I put on my feet?* Sneakers are comfortable, but ugly. Snow boots? After all, this is Minnesota. But UGGS don't seem to strike the right Arbuthnot tone. I don't own a pair of Jimmy Choos. And besides, they are too pinchy. So I consulted with my college-bound daughter, who is the creative director of her own style magazine and a fashion blogger.

Chloe advised that I keep it simple. At her suggestion, I settled on my favorite red heels. My ruby slippers, I call them. It may seem a trivial pursuit, but for us girls in the room, shoes *are* important. For this girl, the height of the shoe is even more critical. And speaking of height, here is a secret that is not to leave this room. It's a small detail that wasn't mentioned in tonight's introduction because I don't like a lot of people to know it.

The fact is, I am a mere 4-feet 11-inches tall. I deliberately wore heels this evening to boost me up. I put on these special shoes to give me a lift, thinking

that if I were taller I could somehow better rise to this occasion. But I see now that I could have left my heels back in Brooklyn, New York, where I live.

When I look out at all of you, I realize that I don't need big shoes to get a boost. So many of you folks who work with children and literature understand what it's like when a person feels small and needs a lift. You understand this because as believers in the power of reading and kids, you have what it takes to make a person feel a million feet tall. The very essence of that idea lifts me up very high.

\*\*\*

I'd like to start with a story.

Once, a very long time ago, there was a girl. That girl could not read. That girl could hardly write. Even though that girl would soon enter middle school, she was afraid of books. That girl did not *want* to read. Many people shook their heads.



"Oh, no," said some of the girl's teachers. "She cannot read."

"Oh, no," said the girl's friends. "She can hardly write."

For this child, the prospect of reading was a terror monster, lurking, waiting to gobble her up. Books—so scary. Books—so frightening.

Reading—the worst bogeyman ever, whose claws and paws presented doom.

"Oh, no," said the girl. "I am so afraid. I do not *want* to learn."

People just kept shaking their heads.

"Oh, no, no, no . . ."

Many folks had turned into nonbelievers whenever they talked about this child. And then something wonderful happened.

"Oh, yes!" said the girl's mother and father. "We will find you the *right* books."

The girl and her parents met a librarian at Stedwick Elementary School. This librarian took one look at the girl and, with her parents, went on a mission to find this child books that would appeal to her. The books were simple at first. They were way below this child's grade-level, but they ignited the girl's desire to read. One of her favorites was *Hop on Pop* by Dr. Seuss. To her, *Hop on Pop* wasn't reading. *Hop on Pop* was poetry. It was wordplay. It was singing!

*ALL TALL. We all are tall.*  
*ALL SMALL. We all are small.*  
*ALL BALL. We all play ball.*  
*BALL WALL. Up on a wall.*  
*DAY PLAY. We play all day.*

It was around this time that the girl's mother and father, and the girl, discovered something known as the myth of genius.

The myth of genius is that one must be a genius to read well and to love books. In time, the girl soon learned that a genius is someone who can excel when he or she is given the *right* book.

Now, in addition to my confession of being a mere 4-feet 11-inches tall, there's something else I want to share with you. And this is not a secret. I share this with folks when I feel it can be useful. That girl who could not read or write well; that child who was so afraid of books; that kid who made so many nonbelievers shake their heads saying, "Oh, no, no, no!"

That girl is standing here today.

And I am nodding my head and saying, "Oh, yes! Oh, yeah!"

I'm the luckiest girl in the world because a very special librarian showed me the way. I don't remember her name, but that doesn't matter. She was a Fairy God Librarian. We've all heard of a Fairy Godmother. But here was a Fairy God Librarian. That Fairy God Librarian helped me understand the true meaning of Theodor Geisel's genius:

*ALL TALL. We ALL are tall.*

\* \* \* \* \*

I want to now fast forward to October 2012. My Scholastic friend and colleague, John Mason, Director of Education/Library Marketing for Scholastic's Trade publishing division, emailed me several times urgently saying that he needed to speak to me in person. This was in the midst of Hurricane Sandy. We on the East Coast had limited power and were not able to go to work. Thankfully, my Brooklyn neighborhood had light, heat, and electricity, but I was still forced to stay at home. And those



Andrea's family, the Davises, pictured here circa 1947, ignited the author's appreciation for home-grown storytelling. Andrea's father is the child in the jacket and tie.

emails from John kept coming—*Ping! Ping! Ping! Andrea, I must speak with you. It's urgent!*

I emailed back—*John, our offices are closed. Let's speak as soon as we return to work.*

I then started to worry. *John*, I emailed again. *Is something wrong?*

*John's* reply: *I need to speak to you in person on Monday morning.*

But even though the Scholastic offices would reopen, I was not to be at work that Monday morning due to another engagement. Finally, on Monday afternoon, I got to the office, feeling nervous about speaking to John. I had just come from an event held by the National Center for Learning Disabilities, honoring students who, like me, had struggled in school. Yet despite their struggles with reading and writing, these students had excelled, thanks to committed teachers and parents and Fairy God Librarians who made sure they got the books they needed.

I spent much of that Monday relating to those kids. And as the mother of two brilliant dyslexic children, I had been so deeply moved by the plights and triumphs of the kids I'd just met that I arrived at the office feeling emotionally flooded. I walked into work carrying my salad bar salad, which I had quickly picked up in a rush to meet with John.

When John and I finally got in the same room together, John told me that I'd been invited to deliver the May Hill Arbuthnot Honor Lecture and that the Arbuthnot selection committee needed to know right away if I would accept the invitation. I was sitting down. My salad was still in its plastic box, which was



inside a cellophane bag. I looked at John and blinked. I then did something that was uncharacteristic of me in an office setting—I burst into tears. Poor John Mason! He seemed so excited to tell me the news, and here I was presenting him with a puddle.

John said, “Andrea, what’s in your salad?”

I cried, “Lettuce, John. And turkey.”

John said, “Andrea, you look like you need some protein. Why don’t you start with the turkey, and I’ll come back later.”

John quietly closed my door to leave me alone with my salad bar turkey. At first, I chalked up my reaction to low blood sugar, but quickly realized my tears were a soupy mix of joy and sadness. The great irony of that moment! That I had just come from a room filled with young people for whom reading was a terror monster bogeyman, lurking, waiting to gobble them up. But didn’t, thanks to so many caring people like many of you here tonight. And now I was being invited to deliver a lecture in the name of May Hill Arbuthnot, who, for so many of us, provided a door to reading.

I took John’s suggestion. I ate the turkey first. And I kept crying. Soon, I wasn’t the one doing the crying; the *crying* was doing me. It had overtaken me to such a degree that I was unable to stop.

I was somehow immediately plunged into a kind of time warp, taken back to first, second, and third grade, and to the humiliation of round robin reading that requires each child to decode a passage out loud, in turn. I remember the stammering that I endured, the jagged delivery—“Bro-o-o-th-th-er . . .”

This was compounded by the fact that I was the only African American student in that classroom, and as such, I suffered from a syndrome I’ve come to know as “anxious apartness.”

Thank goodness for my life at home, when, after school, I entered a different world—a world of stories and storytelling. And parents and grandparents and uncles and aunts and cousins who read books that meant so much to them and would come to mean so much to me. And who told stories all the time.

When I turned eight, Mom and Dad, who were always ready to debunk the myth of genius, presented me with a collection of colorful notebooks.

“Here they are!” my daddy said. Yes, there they were. The beginning of the end of isolation. Stories that I could tell to

my notebooks and not worry about grammar or decoding or classroom round robin in front of other kids who were reading fluently.

Back then, they said, “Children should be seen, and not heard.” That was fine with me. The quieter I was, the more I could see and hear grown-ups saying and doing things they might not have said or done if they’d known all of it was going into one of my notebooks. There were stories at the dinner table, at the picnic table, at the fellowship table after church, where they served doughnuts and coffee.

Here are the kinds of things I observed and heard. Stories often started with: “*Remember that time?*”

My Uncle Rich: “*Remember that time Martin Luther King Jr. came up in here, spent the afternoon at our church? Told us there would be a March on Washington. Happened too. Two-hundred-and-fifty-thousand people. That was some march. I can still see Martin. And I can see your daddy, just a-smiling.*”

My Grandmother Marjorie: “*Remember the night Joe Louis won that boxing championship? We all listened to it on Uncle Jimmy’s radio. Huddled ’round that old static-y thing. Grown men commenced to crying tears of joy at the victory of a black mother’s son.*”

My Cousin John: “*Remember when they integrated the schools? Everything changed after that. Sittin’ in math class next to a white kid. Uh-huh—that was something else, wasn’t it? New books. New pencils. The beginning of a new day.*”

These stories were sweeter than candy, and I devoured them.

Children should be seen and not heard? No problem. I’ll be as quiet as a mouse. Keep on talking, grown-ups; I’ve got it all here in my notebooks. When you’re a child with paper and a pencil, stories stick. The end of the myth of genius was manifesting. Was I genius? No way. Was I becoming a storyteller and a writer?

Yes.

\*\*\*\*

When I was a little girl, my family called me by my middle name—Rae. Add to this, the loving sobriquet, “Rae-dy Roo.”

One day, my Uncle Howard sidled up to me quietly. “Hey, Rae-dy Roo. What you got in that notebook?”

“Nothin’.”

*Children should be seen and not heard? No problem. I’ll be as quiet as a mouse. Keep on talking, grown-ups; I’ve got it all here in my notebooks. When you’re a child with paper and a pencil, stories stick. The end of the myth of genius was manifesting. Was I genius? No way. Was I becoming a storyteller and a writer?*  
Yes.

He looked at me sidelong. “What kinda nothin’?”

“No kinda nothin’!”

It was around this time that I made a quiet confession, but only to myself: *I want to be a writer. Like John Boy on the TV show The Waltons. I want to do what John Boy does. Write about things that happen in my family. Things I see and notice.*

I know many people bemoan television. But for me, TV was part of the path to becoming a writer and a publisher.

Thanks to TV, my quiet confession had a Part Two, which I also confided in no one, for fear that it was unattainable.

*I want to be . . . just like . . . Mary Richards on The Mary Tyler Moore Show. I want to live in a big city. I want to be a career woman. I want my own apartment. I want to have a best friend just like Mary's best friend, Rhoda Morgenstern.*

If I could have ripped off the front of the television and climbed onto Walton's Mountain on Thursday nights and then on Saturdays jumped onto the set of

WJM, the television station where the character Mary Richards worked as a broadcast journalist, I would have done it. Because those were the two dreams that I'd scribbled in my notebook: *I wanted to be a journalist who writes.*

I didn't know any writers or journalists or single career women who lived in big cities with their own apartments, but that's what I wanted to become more than anything. It's ironic that I'm here tonight with all of you in Mary Richards' hometown of Minneapolis.

I'm not sure of it, but looking back, I can't help but wonder if members of my family somehow got ahold of my notebooks and passed them around amongst themselves. Because though I was always hearing stories, and though my parents' home and the homes of my relatives were flooded with books, all of a sudden, Mommy, Daddy, Uncle Howard, Aunt Theodora, and my cousin Larry, who was a newspaper reporter, were pushing even more books on me and talking to me about becoming a writer. They told me that writers are people who read, and that if I were to become a writer, I needed to read. A lot.

I was now about nine years old, and though I'd made many strides in school, the reading terror monster still lurked. If reading well was part of the equation, I felt doomed to failure as a writer. Then, one day, Daddy said, “You gotta know where you came from, little girl.”

And my Uncle Howard said, “Rae-dy Roo, you need a lesson in how our people wrote and read and spoke and expressed what we needed to be said. Because some day, little girl, you will read and write and speak and express what needs to be said.”

\*\*\*\*

My family's acknowledgment of the roots of African American writing and storytelling is something I've grown to call The Fine Black Line.

Ah, yes, The Fine Black Line—the legacy of African American storytelling and the writers who have set the path for African American literature.

**FOUR STARS!**

In Sudan, one small gift changes a girl's destiny.

**THE RED PENCIL**

BY NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR  
**ANDREA DAVIS PINKNEY**  
ILLUSTRATED BY CORETTA SCOTT KING AWARD WINNER  
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Fine—as in, of the utmost quality.

Fine—as in, of the greatest achievement.

Fine—as in, well done.

Line—as in, a lineage. An ongoing tradition. A legacy.

My parents and relatives explained that The Fine Black Line began when, on a dark night, a people were called and taken from Mother Africa to a new place that was unknown, scary, threatening. Their struggle was set forth in stories.

And because black people were forbidden the opportunity to read or write, stories along The Fine Black Line were first told through the rhythms of talking drums, which then became “Follow the Drinking Gourd,” which, over time, moved along The Fine Black Line to abolition to freedom and to a Renaissance set in Harlem.

Soon that Fine Black Line became a pen stroke. Words rendered on pages. Stories read by mothers to their sons and fathers to their daughters, expressing the lineage of a people, and creating a heritage of black writers.

And that Fine Black Line, in a broad, loud stroke of *Here I am!* made its mark with “Wade in the Water” and “We Shall Overcome” and “I Have a Dream.”

And The Fine Black Line of the utmost quality became “Yes we can!”

As a child, The Fine Black Line made perfect sense to me. In addition to being avid readers, my parents were civil rights activists, who spent weekends marching, sometimes with Dr. King himself. But mostly they protested with simple folk, just like themselves, everyday people, walking toward what they hoped would be a better tomorrow. Summer vacations for my sister, my brother, and me, were spent each July at the NAACP Annual Convention and the National Urban League Conference, where we listened to equality speeches by civil rights notables.

While other kids were at the beach or summer camp, we were having “fun in the sun” with the NAACP and National Urban League.

September marked back to school for lots of kids. But for us, it meant traveling to Washington, DC. for the Congressional Black Caucus Conference, a gathering of individuals who addressed the legislative concerns of people of color and presented

them to Congress. The Congressional Black Caucus Conference somehow always seemed to fall on my birthday at the end of September. There were many years I blew out the candles on my birthday cake, then later that very same day, attended a civil rights rally with my family. So, affirming the power of African American writing, oratory, reflection, and call to action are in my blood.

\* \* \* \*

When you're asked to deliver the May Hill Arbuthnot Honor Lecture, you need to provide a title for your speech. After thinking about it, I came up with “Rejoice the Legacy.” As those who work with books and literacy, we have a lot to celebrate. So tonight let's do that. Honey, this is a party. And we are here to make it a joyous occasion.

I heard those words from my mother on my tenth birthday: “Honey, this is a party!” Yes, from my mother who sensed that her child needed further exposure to the literature that existed along The Fine Black Line.

Mommy, who knew. Mommy, a middle school English teacher and the first woman in our family to go to college. Mommy, who saw the eager eyes of her eldest child. Mommy, who stared down the bogeyman terror monster of reading. Mommy, who said to me, “Honey, let's start at the beginning of those who wrote and spoke.”

And so we did. We began with slavery's expression along The Fine Black Line. We started with *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, the autobiography authored by abolitionist and orator Frederick Douglass who faced his own terror monster. For the most part, Frederick taught himself to read and write at a time when it was illegal and dangerous for black people to do

so. There is a passage in Frederick Douglass's autobiography in which Frederick describes his coming to terms with his circumstances and with the nature of slavery, and how learning to read helped him better understand the intolerable institution of enslavement.

In *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, Frederick says simply:

“The more I read, the more I was led . . .”<sup>1</sup>

Think for a moment about the positive power of reading from an enslaved person's point of view—“*The more I read, the more I was led . . .*”

For someone shackled by slavery's weight, words on a page, a narrative, stories in a book, present a kind of Promised Land that welcomes everyone. Once you sink into those words and roll around in them, and let *them* roll around in *you*, that is freedom. And that was the gift I received when Daddy and Mommy and my uncles and cousins brought me along on The Fine Black Line. I was granted the freedom to be and go anyplace I wished. Like Frederick Douglass, *The more I read, the more I was led.*

My family kept leading me to the works of African American authors whose brilliance, whose bold pen strokes, spoke loudly and clearly.

When I was in middle school, Mommy presented me with the works of poets Langston Hughes and Paul Laurence Dunbar and to the writings of Richard Wright. Then one day, something extraordinary happened. I came upon the brilliance of Harlem Renaissance novelist, essayist, and playwright Zora Neale Hurston, a black *woman* writer. And I stumbled upon her essay entitled, "How It Feels to Be Colored Me," which describes her experience of growing up in Eatonville, Florida.

It was as if that very title expressed my entire psychic condition up to that moment. Zora Neale Hurston, whose mother, like my own, quickly shot down the myth of genius. Zora's mother who told young Zora to jump at the sun, to reach for all that is possible.

Yes, there I was, a twelve-year-old African American girl, who had discovered something life-changing: the writings of Zora Neale Hurston—a stroke of beauty, gliding, striving, shouting her truth, along The Fine Black Line. Thanks, in part, to Zora, I had begun to recover from anxious apartness. Thanks to Zora Neale Hurston, this aspiring sixth-grade writer could start to articulate *how it feels to be colored me.*

\* \* \* \*

In preparing this lecture, in coming to learn about the important and incredible contributions of May Hill Arbuthnot and the legacy she has left behind, I could not help but wonder, *What if May Hill Arbuthnot and Zora Neale Hurston, who were contemporaries, ran into each other at a Columbia University alumni party?*<sup>2</sup>

This is plausible. After all, both women were students at Columbia University around the same time. I imagine that when they met up it would all be very comfortable. Very friendly. I'm told that May Hill Arbuthnot was easygoing. Down to earth. Good people. And Zora, well, she was the same way. And brassy, too.

So, there they would be, two women with their fingers on the pulse of literacy. With their hearts in the right place. I don't know if May Hill Arbuthnot and Zora Neale Hurston ever met each other in real life, but for the sake of this fiction I will imagine they did know each other, and that when their paths crossed, it was instant soul sisterhood.

Let us imagine for a moment, they are meeting up right now:

Zora: *Whooo-hooo. Look who's here—May Hill Arbuthnot! Honey, these eyes are glad to see you. Girl, you do look good. Seems like you did something new to your hair, May. Like you went and found yourself some kind of special hair dresser. And those glasses—they're sayin' somethin'. They become you, May.*

May: *Zora Neale Hurston! You look pretty nice yourself. That hat is stunning on you. Beautiful. And your skin. You haven't aged a day, Zora.*

Zora: *Here we are, May, at the Columbia University Alumni Association reunion. Do you come to these things on a regular basis?*

May: *Oh, Zora, I wish I could. I've been fast at work on my textbook, entitled Children and Books. I'm told it's become a classic of higher education and is still to this day used widely in children's literature classes.*

Zora: *Honey, I know that book has kept you busy, and I can relate. I've been all wrapped up in my novel. Don't know if you heard of it. It's called Their Eyes Were Watching God. And get this. Folks tell me Their Eyes Were Watching God is required reading. Isn't that somethin', May? Me, a little brown-sugar colored girl from Eatonville, Florida—required reading!*

May: *I have certainly heard of your novel, Zora. And your plays. And your study of anthropology. We've come a long way since the days when we were both students at Columbia University. Me, earning a master's degree, graduating as part of the class of 1924. You, coming onto campus shortly after that, seeking a degree in anthropology. Hard to believe we never met once at Columbia. Looking back, though, Zora, that was an exciting period . . . I remember like it was yesterday. . . . If I'm not mistaken . . . the first Black History Week was established right around then . . . in . . . 1926?*

Zora: *That's right, May. Black History Week. We were all so proud. That was something. It's Black History Month now. And guess what, May. They got my picture on one of those Black History Month calendars they give out at McDonald's when you buy something called a Happy Meal.*

May: *A Happy Meal, Zora? Really?*

Zora: *Really, May. And let me tell you. I've had one of those burgers and fries in a box. Between you and me and this rug we're standing on, the meal did not make me happy. But the Black History Month calendar with my picture on it did make me smile.*

May: *You deserve a calendar, Zora. You know what? I hear they've got a lecture named after me. A lecture, Zora. The May Hill Arbuthnot Honor Lecture.*

Zora: *You deserve that, May. With all you've done to further the importance of children's literature. Now, let me make sure I'm not mistaken. Did I just read in American Libraries magazine that you were chosen as one of the "100 Most Important Leaders we had for the Twentieth Century"?*



*I'm often asked to speak in underserved communities. And I'm sometimes warned by the organizers that: (1) Not a lot of people will come; (2) This part of town doesn't really read; and (3) We don't really see a lot of them in the library. I've heard these caveats so many times. I call it the "we'd just like to warn you" speech. But this never bothers me because I've learned that books and stories bring people out of their houses. When I arrive at the event, I see people who have indeed come out of their homes because of the power of stories.*

May: *That's right, Zora. Me, May Hill Arbuthnot, a kindergarten teacher from Mason City, Iowa. Zora, I'm surprised our paths never crossed at Columbia University, back in the day. Why do you think that is?*

Zora: *A sign of the times, May. That was a sign of the times.*

And then, the two women would say goodbye. They would express their mutual admiration and affection, as so many of us do at a party: *Hug, kiss. Cheek, cheek. Sweet. Zora and May.*

\* \* \* \*

While May Hill Arbuthnot and Zora Neale Hurston were busily working to foster literacy, there were side-by-side movements to encourage children to read and to express themselves through the written word. The NAACP's children's magazine the *Brownies' Book*, launched by scholar and activist W. E. B. DuBois, was igniting the imaginations of African American children and allowing them to see themselves reflected in stories for young people.

May Hill Arbuthnot's popular Dick and Jane series was turning nonreaders into consumers of words and their power. Reading aloud became an essential tool for reading fluency. In the inaugural May Hill Arbuthnot Honor Lecture, May herself discussed the importance of self-expression through reading out loud. May Hill Arbuthnot spent many years bringing children and books together by way of the spoken word.

\* \* \* \*

By 1980, when I was in high school, I had added Zora Neale Hurston to my list of people who had something that appealed to me. Something I could aspire to. My aspiration list now read as follows:

1. John Boy Walton: Writing about his family life.
2. Zora Neale Hurston: Black woman writer. Creator of "How It Feels to Be Colored Me."
3. Mary Richards: Journalist, career woman. Lives in a big city. Has her own apartment.
4. Mommy and Daddy: Civil rights foot soldiers.

How I was to blend all of these hopes and dreams, I had no clue. Latching first onto Mary Tyler Moore, I decided I would become

a journalist. I enrolled at the Newhouse School for Public Communications, the journalism school at Syracuse University, where my childhood experience of carrying notebooks with me wherever I went was affirmed.

One of the first lessons you learn as a journalist is to have a pocket filled with ideas—to always be on the hunt for story angles and approaches and to be ready to present your ideas at any moment. I also learned that writers write daily, no matter what. One of my professors, whose name was John Keats, after the English poet, explained that real writers write every single day of their lives, even holidays, your birthday, weekends, and when you just don't feel like it. It was explained that if I were to become a true writer, I would need to write when my throat hurts, when my car wouldn't start, when my child is sick, or my dog wets the carpet. Or when I'm tired.

Journalism school also underscored what my family had taught me—writers read. At Syracuse University, I was encouraged to read everything. This included things I like and things I don't. John Keats told me to go out of my comfort zone—to read books that appeal to me least and to learn from that experience. I also discovered that creators of nonfiction must go to the ends of the earth to nail down facts and to conduct full-scale research. Finally, journalism school taught me that each and every one of us has a story to tell and that our individual stories matter.

With that in mind, one day at age nineteen, I sat down, and, on a Smith Corona electric typewriter, I channeled John Boy Walton and Zora Neale Hurston and wrote an opinion piece about growing up in Wilton, Connecticut, where my family was one of two African American families.

As I wrote, I thought of Zora's "How It Feels to Be Colored Me." I crafted the narrative, never thinking it would matter to anyone else *but* me. However, as John Keats advised, when you share your writing, it may touch someone, or help someone, or change someone. And so, on a lark, I yanked the pages out from the spool on the typewriter, folded the bulky stack into a too-tight envelope, and wrote on the front THE NEW YORK TIMES, 229 West 43rd St. New York, NY 10036.

I didn't know anybody at the *New York Times*, so the envelope had no name on it. A week later, I got a call. "Hi, this is so-and-so from the *New York Times*. We received your short story," the



Andrea and Brian are the husband and wife creative team behind award-winning children's books. She writes, he illustrates. Here at home in Clinton Hill, Brooklyn, they have a daughter and son together.

man said. "We'd like to publish it this Sunday." The man then said, "We can only pay you seventy-five dollars."

I said, "Sir, I will pay *you* seventy-five dollars to publish my story in the *New York Times*." When the piece ran, people started to write in about it, others who had experienced *how it feels to be colored me*, and I quickly realized that I was not alone in this feeling.

I graduated from journalism school, and one month later, moved to New York City in search of a job. In true Mary Tyler Moore fashion, I went to the busiest corner of midtown Manhattan and I tossed my beret in the air!

After a series of editing jobs at small trade magazines, I eventually found myself at *Essence* magazine, the leading consumer publication for African American women. I was a senior editor, and I was charged to create an ongoing series of children's book reviews of books by black authors and featuring black characters. Because *Essence* is a magazine for black women, I became obsessed with black women who were writing for young people. There was Virginia Hamilton's plot brilliance. Eloise Greenfield's poetic genius. Patricia C. McKissack's storytelling prowess. Mildred Taylor's authentic narrative voice.

But back then in 1989, after I'd gone through all the books by Virginia Hamilton and Eloise Greenfield and Patricia C. McKissack and Mildred Taylor, and then went on to the canon of black men who were filling the genre—Walter Dean Myers, and the like—I couldn't amply fill the *Essence* magazine children's book section with enough content. For black kids, The Fine Black Line was very faint. Where were the picture-book biographies? Where were popular series for teens? Where were board books for babies? I was hard pressed to find these.

I will never forget the day I received a memo from Susan L. Taylor, the editor in chief of *Essence*, in regards to my responsibility to produce those pages in the magazine. This was before



Left, Caldecott winner, Jerry Pinkney and his wife, author Gloria Jean Pinkney, Andrea's "parents-in-love." Right, Andrea and Brian Pinkney join them in Jerry's art studio.

email, so I got a piece of paper in my in box. The memo said, simply, "Andrea, remember your charge."

That is when I started to nag the man who was then my boyfriend, Brian Pinkney. Brian was beginning his career as a children's book illustrator. Publishers were sending him manuscripts for consideration. I knew nothing of how children's publishing worked, and I would relentlessly bug Brian by saying things like, "Call up your publishers, and tell them we need a commercial series for black girls. Tell them we need picture-book biographies. We need board books for babies. We need contemporary fiction. And has anybody really addressed topics such as skin color in a way that is accessible to young readers?"

Brian grew so sick of me, he one day blurted, "Why don't *you* write the books! And, Andrea, by the way, what you're doing—coming up with ideas for books—is what those children's book editors do. *You* should write books, and *you* should be a children's book editor."

It's a wonder Brian Pinkney ever asked me to marry him because when he made these suggestions, I flicked them away and huffed, "Mary Tyler Moore never wrote a children's book and not once in her career did she work as a children's book editor!"

But I pocketed my pride and started writing picturebook manuscripts about topics that were of special interest to me—biographies about people like Alvin Ailey and Duke Ellington and Ella Fitzgerald. I found great joy in bringing these stories to young readers and have now collaborated with Brian on many books, as well as writing novels and works of narrative nonfiction.

In this process, I've received another wonderful gift. I've been welcomed into what I call my "family-in-love." My *other* family whose passion and commitment for bringing books to children is an unshakable foundation built on the faith that books for all children are important, necessary, and worthy. This "family-in-love" continues to teach me, to guide me, to shine a light on

this path that we now travel together. It is a journey we share as children's book creators.

The power of a black family is a beautiful thing. My “mother-in-love,” Gloria Jean Pinkney, and my “Daddy-Lion father-in-love,” Jerry Pinkney—between them creators of more than one hundred books for children—are among the most beautiful people God put on this planet.

\* \* \* \*

As I was beginning to write books, I had a chance meeting with Willa Perlman, who, at that time, was president and publisher of Simon & Schuster's Children's Books Division. I told her what I'd been telling Brian all those years. That there needs to be a commercial book series for black girls, board books for babies, picture-book biographies, accessible stories about civil rights history. Willa offered me a job soon after that. Again, I was spouting off, but I knew nothing of children's publishing. I had no clue of how one actually made a children's book.

Ironically, the memo from my boss at *Essence*—“Andrea, remember your charge.”—encouraged me to leave *Essence* magazine to accept Willa Perlman's offer to start as an editor at Simon & Schuster, where, with the help of many patient people—among them, Stephanie Owens Lurie who is here tonight—I got help in learning the nuts and bolts of how a children's book is created.

It was around this time that I started to imagine what it might be like to have an entire list of books for African American children. What if I was to take W. E. B. DuBois's example in publishing the *Brownies' Book* magazine for the NAACP and create a branded entity, an entire imprint of children's book titles that featured African American authors and storytelling in a range of formats and genres, for a mix of age groups and reading tastes?

I truly believe that if you build it they will come. My hopes and dreams were starting to build something I couldn't fully articulate or imagine back then. It's strange when I think about it now. Because, as this dream percolated, Lisa Holton, a publishing visionary who I'd never met but had certainly heard of, approached me. She asked if I was familiar with the expression “jump at the sun,” an affirmation Zora Neale Hurston's mother had instilled in her.

That is when the stars aligned, and Lisa, who was heading up Disney Publishing Worldwide, invited me to come to Hyperion Books for Children to work with her in the launching of a new African American imprint called Jump at the Sun.

And jump, I did. Head first. Fast. Eagerly.

Because the Jump at the Sun imprint was the new kid on the block, more than anything, I wanted to find new writers. Where was that *Essence* magazine reader who had something to say to young people? So I dug. And dug. And dug. Into what is known in publishing as “the slush pile,” which is a heap of sealed envelopes averaging twenty thousand pieces of unsolicited mail

publishers receive each year, filled with the manuscripts of aspiring authors eager to get published.

One day, by a miracle of what I call “the glittery hand of God,” a manuscript appeared entitled *A Freak Like Me*, written by a single mother from Pittsburgh whose name is Sharon G. Flake. Sharon had never been published, but dared to send her novel, which was in a very rough form, over the transom. The narrative voice of the main character, thirteen-year-old Maleeka Madison, struck me immediately. Maleeka is a child burdened with the low self-esteem some black girls face when they're darker skinned. So there it was, a modern-day version of Zora's “How It Feels to Be Colored Me.”

Sharon G. Flake's *A Freak Like Me*, which, before publication, we retitled *The Skin I'm In*, launched the Jump at the Sun list. Sharon's debut novel went on to win the Coretta Scott King John Steptoe Award for new talent. Sharon was named a *Publishers Weekly* “Flying Start.” Her book has sold nearly a million copies across many formats, worldwide, has been translated into several languages, and has received inquiries about being optioned for film.

This is a keen reminder that books with black characters are for every reader. I am so thankful to Lisa Holton for allowing me to jump at the sun, and I am grateful to *Essence* editor in chief, Susan L. Taylor, for her memo, “Andrea, remember your charge.”

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I've had wonderful mentors and guides throughout my work. One advised that I must always take the role of a pigeon. A pigeon is a creature that carries the message. For more than a decade, as I was working on my inner pigeon, I was haunted by an idea that would not leave me alone. *How could the story of lynching be told to young people?* It's a horrific topic. It would have to be handled with the utmost care and would require a skilled craftsman. Also, because lynching is a subject that no book for young people would dare approach, the format and execution of such a book would have to be just that—daring, different, out of the box.

I didn't know what the book would be or how the topic could be approached. I only knew that I had an urgent need to present this information to young readers. Having grown up in Connecticut for many years, I was quite familiar with the work of Marilyn Nelson, who was the poet laureate of the state of Connecticut. And one day it struck me—Marilyn Nelson. *She* was the one. In fact, once I was convinced of this, I became obsessed with the notion that Marilyn Nelson was the *only* one who could do justice to this idea. I called Marilyn's agent, Regina Brooks, and asked if she and Marilyn could meet with me in my office at Houghton Mifflin, where I was serving as the children's publisher at that time. I didn't tell Regina why I wanted to meet with them, just that I had a book idea I wanted to discuss in person.

It was the day before Thanksgiving, November 2004. The office was empty. Everyone had left to travel for the holiday.



When Marilyn and Regina came, I quietly, almost whispering, explained that I wanted to publish a book about the subject of lynching for young people. My armpits were sweating when I said it. I realized I had never uttered the idea out loud. And, when I finally did, Marilyn reared back, startled. It was as if I'd thrown a bucket of ice water in her face. When she regained her composure, the three of us sat silently for a moment, thinking about the impact of a book such as this. Then, Marilyn said softly, "I can't. It's too sad a topic."

Though I understood Marilyn's feelings I felt completely dashed. In my mind, this book would not see the light of day if Marilyn Nelson didn't agree to write it.

So we three ladies said our goodbyes, and I went into Thanksgiving feeling forlorn. But, as they say, don't give up five minutes before a miracle happens. Soon after I returned to work, there was email from Marilyn Nelson with a manuscript attached.

Its title was *A Wreath for Emmett Till*, a heroic crown of sonnets that plunges readers into the horror of the 1955 lynching of a fourteen-year-old child on his summer vacation visiting family in Mississippi. At the same time, the book draws parallels to many of today's tragedies, among them terrorism, racism, and injustice. Yet, through the metaphor of a wreath of flowers, rings a hope-bell.

When I received Marilyn's manuscript, I read the sonnets again and again, and I wept. It was perfectly rendered, and it was like nothing I'd ever seen before in a traditional book for young readers. Punctuated by the metaphorical paintings of French fine artist, Philippe Lardy, and published in a distinctive and unusual square format, *A Wreath for Emmett Till* became "the little book that could."

It went on to win a Michael L. Printz Honor Award and a Coretta Scott King Honor medal.

But the real "prizes" were, and are, the letters Marilyn and I receive from middle schoolers and high schoolers, and their teachers and their parents about the book's emotional resonance and its use as a powerful discussion-starter in classrooms. And perhaps most importantly, the book's impact on kids who are reluctant readers but have found a way in through *A Wreath for Emmett Till*. These letters are still coming years later which speaks to the staying power of Marilyn Nelson's poem.

I noticed an uptick in *A Wreath for Emmett Till* fan mail last year, immediately following the case of Trayvon Martin, the teenage boy shot tragically by a security guard. Ironically, young Trayvon's life ended in Sanford, Florida, just fifteen miles from Zora Neale Hurston's hometown of Eatonville, Florida, a tourist stop, celebrated for its African American cultural heritage.

In coming to terms with Trayvon's death, the letters from teenagers about *A Wreath for Emmett Till* speak to the healing

capacity of Marilyn Nelson's poem as it offers a way for kids to scream their frustrations and fears.

Like the meeting up of May Hill Arbuthnot and Zora Neale Hurston, I can't help but wonder: *What if Emmett Till and Trayvon Martin met up today?* Obviously, having been born fifty-four years apart, the two boys could not have been contemporaries, but they were around the same age when their lives ended. If things had turned out differently, I like to believe that Emmett and Trayvon would have somehow been brother-chums, perhaps walking to class together on the campus of Columbia University or one of the historically black colleges or universities. Maybe Morehouse College, an all-male institution that cites its success in preparing young, black, gifted men to change the world.

Yes, I like the thought of that. Trayvon Martin and Emmett Till at Morehouse College. Together, on a path to higher learning and change. And, as college students do on casual days, they'd be dressed comfortably for hours of reading in the library.

Yes, I like the thought of that.

Trayvon and Emmett.

A hoodie. And a hat.

Smart kids. Dressed for their success as they "keep it real" and comfortable for a day of studying for finals.

Again, I ask: *What does one wear to deliver the May Hill Arbuthnot Honor Lecture?*

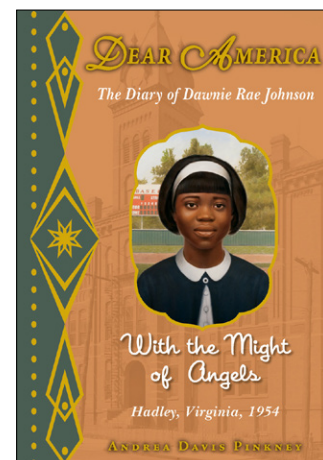
After all, perceptions are important. For better, or for worse. For hoodie or for hat. How many of us judge a book or a kid by its cover?

\* \* \* \*

Alongside the desire to publish books that present stories not often told, there are many topics that, as an author, I'm eager to write about as well.

One day, my alarm clock went off and I heard a civil rights song in my thoughts: *Woke up this morning with my mind stayed on freedom!* And I remembered my first day of first grade. And integrating my classroom. And my father escorting me to meet my new teacher.

In conjuring this memory, I immediately wondered if school integration might make a good topic for Scholastic's Dear America series.



Thanks to Scholastic Executive Editor Lisa Sandell, I was given the gift of turning that idea into *With the Might of Angels: The Diary of Dawnie Rae Johnson*.

One of my great joys is riding up the escalator at 557 Broadway, the Scholastic headquarters, each morning where I now work as an editor.

I began my career at Scholastic in 1991 as an editor in the magazine group. Today I've been granted the privilege of helping fellow authors bring *their* ideas to fruition. As a book editor, it's my job to hold the flashlight while my authors do the digging.

I have a thousand reasons why I love coming to work each day. I get to be among smart, happy people. But also, there is no other company in the world that I know of where the mission of diversity appears on the carpeting. If you don't believe me, please come visit. You will see that at Scholastic our primary purpose is to offer all children books they love to read. This has been true for more than ninety years. Scholastic has a clear mission statement, part of which says, "We believe in the respect for the diverse groups in our multicultural society."

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I'm often asked to speak in underserved communities. And I'm sometimes warned by the organizers that: (1) Not a lot of people will come; (2) This part of town doesn't really read; and (3) We don't really see a lot of *them* in the library.

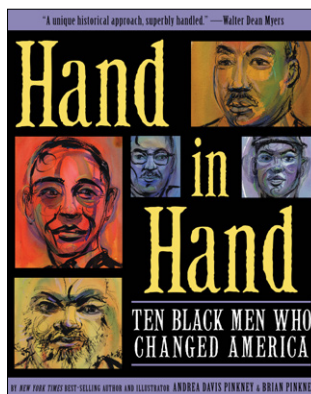
I've heard these caveats so many times. I call it the "we'd just like to warn you" speech. But this never bothers me because I've learned that books and stories bring people out of their houses. When I arrive at the event, I see people who have indeed come out of their homes because of the power of stories.

They come with strollers. And curlers. And wheelchairs. And walkers. And faces and ears and eyes wide open. They're versions of my Uncle Howard. My Aunt Theodora. My cousin Larry.

And there is always the nine-year-old with the notebook. Quiet, afraid to look up. Being seen and not heard. And taking it all in.

Once, at a gathering of this nature, a gentleman presented himself to me at the end of the evening. He let me know quietly that he didn't have the money they were charging to attend the event. He mentioned that he'd recently come out of jail and told me he was working to turn his life around. He confided that he'd grappled earlier that night with a hard decision. As a newly released incarcerated man, he didn't want to break the law, of course. But he couldn't afford to come to the literacy event.

With a mix of shame and longing, he whispered that he'd snuck into the event without purchasing a ticket, but that a book that I'd authored, *Hand In Hand: Ten Black Men Who Changed America*, was one of the books that had drawn him to the evening.



I asked if he had a copy of *Hand In Hand*, and he told me no, that someone had shared the book with him, but that he didn't own one. Also, he couldn't afford to purchase a copy of the book at the sales table of the event, but could I tell him a story from the book.

*Could I tell him a story?* When I reflect on this now, I cannot help but think of May Hill

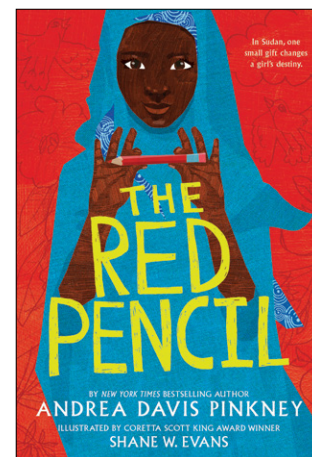
Arbuthnot's insightful pedagogy. In addition to reading, May had a keen understanding that stories, when spoken, bring readers and books together. I turned the man's request to me back onto him, and I asked *him* to tell *me* a story about himself. And he did. He told me that he wanted to write and illustrate children's books. And with great pride he showed me his graphic novel in progress.

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Educators who teach the Montessori method talk about something called "the prepared environment." Let us ask ourselves how we prepare readers to experience books. I believe that in this age of social media we must still, and always, turn to books. Whether delivered on an e-reader or on good old-fashioned printed pages, books have wide arms. They embrace whoever turns to them. That is why, as an author I am now turning my attention to the wide-open arms of global literacy. It is now my hope to connect books and hearts across continents by reaching to Mother Africa, and to her beauty and her plights.

Thus comes the inspiration for my new book entitled *The Red Pencil*, a novel written in verse with illustrations by Shane Evans.

*The Red Pencil* is set in 2004 in Sudan at the beginning of the Darfur genocide. The story focuses on twelve-year-old Amira's deep desire to learn to read against the wishes of her traditional farming family. Then comes war, gunfire, ravage, and change.



In conducting research for *The Red Pencil*, I learned some startling statistics. According to the LitWorld, a global literacy advocacy organization, there are approximately 523 million girls and women worldwide who cannot read or write.<sup>3</sup> This is especially true in developing nations. In Sudan, the illiteracy rate among girls is alarmingly high.

*The Red Pencil's* illustrated vignette poems follow one girl's journey through dreams, grief, and possibility as she works to transcend the wounds of war. Amira's narrative is based on my time spent with Sudanese refugees and men and women relief workers who served in displacement camps. Additionally, the book's central themes are drawn from my travels in Africa, and also inspired from visiting schools there. In *The Red Pencil*, one small gift changes a girl's destiny.

Here is a short excerpt:

When I draw, it's not me doing it.

It's my hand.  
And my twig.  
And my *sparrow*.

My hand  
and my twig  
and my *sparrow*  
make the lines.

My hand  
and my twig  
and my *sparrow*  
do the dance  
on the sand.

I never know  
what my hand  
and my twig  
and my *sparrow*  
will create.

My hand  
holds my twig.

But my twig goes  
on its own.

My *sparrow*—that's what's inside me: *flight*.<sup>4</sup>

This is also a novel about the power of family. In creating its chapters, in reaching to Africa's struggles and beauty, I once again realized that The Fine Black Line connects us all. The Fine Black Line affirms that you are all my family.

You are the legacy.

We are the rescue squad for knowledge poverty.

We are The Fine Black Line—stretching on. And out. And up.  
And through.

From slavery to Selma to Stonewall to Sudan. Stories see us from yesterday to today to tomorrow. Let us celebrate through stories. And storytelling. And story sharing. And story-hearing.

As May Hill Arbuthnot and Zora Neale Hurston might express—  
*hug, kiss. Cheek. Cheek. Sweet reading.*

For all of us who share in this celebration. Let us now rejoice the legacy of writers who have danced and played and sang their words, and affirmed their *right to write* along The Fine Black Literary Line.

Let us rejoice in the lineage, the love of reading that flows through our souls.

We are all May Hill Arbuthnot.

We are all Zora. And Langston. And Virginia. And Paul.

We are all tall.

We can all jump at the sun!

We can all rejoice the legacy!

Thank you. 🌸

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# Confused about Common Core?

## Host a Learning Day at Your Library

MEREDITH LEVINE

**W**hat exactly is Common Core? And why should librarians care about it? Those seem to be the buzzwords of the past few years.

As a library and information science student at Syracuse University specializing in school media, I was aware that Common Core was becoming more relevant with teachers, students, and librarians. And while the Common Core has been referenced more and more in discussions, publications, and conferences, many still wonder about what exactly it means for libraries.

At a recent New York Library Association Conference, I learned so much about the Common Core that I finally understood what it was all about. Inspired, I talked with Fayetteville (NY) Free Library's (FFL) Executive Director Sue Considine about organizing and hosting a Common Core Learning Day for community educators.

We wanted to share what our library has been doing to support the Common Core. As Considine comments, "The FFL's mission is to provide access to ideas and information. Our vision, through providing this access, is to be the community's best resource—to support all of the lives of the community, their aspirations and goals.

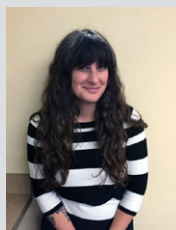
"The Common Core Standards required us, as facilitators of access to resources, to examine how—through our collections, programs, services, and technologies—we can ensure that our teachers, students' and families' needs are met and to help ensure their success in light of these new educational standards. Further, once we determined best strategies to reach our goals in our community, it was our professional responsibility to share what we have learned, where we have failed and to discuss new opportunities with our colleagues. We are all in this together!"

### Organizing the Event

The FFL Common Core Learning Day was held May 31, 2013; attendees included school and public librarians, professors, public library directors, students, and educators from community organizations such as the zoo.

Our knowledgeable speakers were leaders in the library field—Dr. Barbara Stripling, assistant professor of practice at Syracuse University and past president of the American Library Association; Sue Kowalski, Pine Grove Middle School librarian and past president of the New York Library Association Section for School Libraries; and Jim Belair, school library system director at Monroe 2-Orleans BOCES in New York. Margaret Portier, director of Innovative Family Services, and I also presented on what FFL was doing to support teachers, students, and parents. We also had support from the Onondaga County Public Library System.

The first step was to find speakers who would not only be knowledgeable but passionate about their careers, and charismatic enough to keep the attention of an audience for a full day. Using my contacts, I sent out emails to the speakers with dates and a general overview of what we were trying to accomplish. I quickly got three acceptances.



**Meredith Levine** is Director of Family Engagement at the Fayetteville (NY) Free Library and a member of ALSC's School-Age Programs and Services Committee.



FFL's Director of Family Engagement, Meredith Levine, and Director of Innovative Family Services, Margaret Portier, wrap up the day talking about the programs, services, and collections that the FFL has adapted to support teachers, students, and parents with the Common Core.

How can *you* do this? Tap into your resources and your community and network at conferences, and you will be astonished by the experts who can help you create your own event. We found local experts, but if you have trouble getting presenters in person, Skype is a free and easy alternative.

After successfully booking speakers months in advance, we established our goal of helping the community develop a better understanding of the Common Core. We wanted them to leave with action items to implement in their libraries to support students, teachers, and parents.

As a public library, we do not take a stance on the Common Core, but rather provide access to the best resources possible to support the initiative. With our goal set, we constructed an agenda—along with the speakers—to keep the day flowing, fresh, and non-repetitive.

## Marketing the Event

Brenda Shea, FFL's director of marketing and community relations, emailed school librarians and teachers in all of the county districts, as well as public librarians, about the event. She also posted the event on the Syracuse University listserv to attract students, and on the Central NY Library Resources Council website. We also invited educators from other community organizations and reached out to surrounding systems, making this a regional event.

On the invitation, we listed our learning objectives.

- What are the Common Core standards? Why are they important? Why should we care?
- Find out how public librarians can be school librarians' best resource.



FFL Common Core Learning Day attendees from all over upstate New York taking a break from learning and enjoying a great lunch and conversation before the afternoon sessions begin.

- Discover practical ways that school librarians and public librarians can work together.
- What are public libraries and librarians doing now? Hear examples of collection development and programming ideas to support Common Core learning.
- Take part in a facilitated discussion to help put ideas into action.

I kept track of all registrants and attendees in an Excel spreadsheet to record names, titles, employers, and email addresses so we could send supplemental materials after the event.

## Facilitating the Event

The day finally came; we were prepared and excited! The community room was set up, and we had name tags ready for each participant and a hashtag for Twitter users, #FFLCCDay!

Stripling used a PowerPoint presentation and opened with an introduction to Common Core State Standards for libraries and touched on what they are from a national standpoint. Belair spoke on public libraries' involvement in Common Core. Kowalski discussed the school library perspective and how public librarians can support them.

After breakout sessions, Portier and I presented on what the FFL was doing to support Common Core, including our Dewey Hybrid system and STEM programming.

With fifty-five attendees, the event exceeded our expectations, and we believe it went a long way in explaining how libraries play such an important role in supporting the public and community educators in Common Core resources. ↺

To view the FFL speakers' presentations online, visit <http://fflib.org/learn/common-core>.

# Teen Volunteers

## The Good, the Bad, the Ugly (and the Necessary)

MARY GRACYALNY-KRAUSS

If you've ever worked with teen volunteers at your library, you know it can be an incredibly rewarding experience. That said, it has its share of stresses as well. But overall, it's an experience we likely couldn't survive the summer without at Brown County Central Library in Green Bay, Wisconsin.

For our summer reading program (SRP) especially, teens/tweens are essential to having things run smoothly. Our library branch registers about 2,500 kids for the SRP each summer, so keeping sign-ups and programs running smoothly is largely in the hands of capable volunteers. This past summer, I supervised about sixty volunteers—those going into sixth grade and older are eligible.

To recruit volunteers, I begin sending volunteer applications in May to all school library media specialists in our area, and I send applications to teens who previously volunteered. Applications are also available in the library.

Here's a brief rundown of how our teen volunteers are used for our SRP. Children sign up for the program at a table where they later come to report their hours. Teens fill out the forms and give the registrants an SRP game board, a bookmark, and a library events calendar.

When the child reaches at least one of the prize levels, he or she can come back to the library and report to the table, where the volunteer will stamp the game board to signify that the prize was given. The volunteer will also stamp the registration cards kept at the library for statistics purposes at the end of summer. Teens volunteer for two- to three-hour shifts on the table.



Photos by Mary Gracyalny-Krauss

In addition to SRP registration, teen volunteers are also used to help set up and assist with summer programming. The most volunteers we have used for a program is fifteen; those were for our most well-attended programs—this year, it was for our Frozen Fest (featuring costumed Elsa and Anna princesses, which drew about seven hundred fifty attendees) and our Percy Jackson Heroes and Monsters event, which drew about fifty attendees.

Time commitment for the programs can be a bit longer; most may last from two to four hours (including set-up and take-down time).

## Training Volunteers

An important part of my job is training the volunteers; ideally, they should be able to assist patrons at the SRP table without staff help. We offer several trainings before SRP starts and a few just before the second half of the summer session, staggering the days and times to try to accommodate everyone's schedule.



*Mary Gracyalny-Krauss is Library Service Associate with Brown County Central Library in Green Bay, Wisconsin.*





Volunteers Ashley and Diamond share duties at the SRP sign-up table.

The trainings run between half an hour and an hour long depending on how many teens show up (and if they have been trained before; we do have a fair amount of repeat volunteers).

In addition to instructing them on how the SRP works (both children's and teen sign-ups), I go over general rules. It's important to lay out the rules early so the teens are aware of the expectations. Those cover everything from library behavior (no swearing, and so on), dress code (wear what you would wear to school not what you would wear to the beach), and common courtesy, especially regarding use of cell phones and tablets (which we allow volunteers to have on their shifts). We do have a guide I give the volunteers during the training for each of the SRP programs. I keep this at the desk in case they have any questions and they are, of course, encouraged to ask us if any issues arise. I give them a volunteer guide also that lays out the general rules, hours, and the phone number to reach us if they can't come in to work, as well as general information about the end of the year party.

Training also includes a reminder to call in if they aren't going to make it for a scheduled shift. We try to emphasize that although they are volunteers, they should treat their commitment as they would a job—be polite and approachable, don't be late, and call if you will be late/absent.

As volunteer coordinator, I do my best to learn all the volunteers' names immediately and greet them with their name whenever I see them. I want them to feel important, welcomed, and most of all, appreciated. And I try to check in with each of them at every shift, to make sure the SRP table has sufficient supplies, see if they have any questions, and make sure they aren't looking for something to do.

Occasionally, the table is slow, and a volunteer may get a bit bored, even if they do have something to read or work on. If this is the case, I try to have something on hand for this situation. For example, all our prizes (like restaurant coupons) are numbered, so I have the volunteers number these since it saves me time at the end of the summer for statistics.



Volunteer Tyler takes his role as "chef" very seriously at a Dino Dining play day/food literacy event.

Other projects our volunteers help with are cleaning preschool toys, alphabetizing registration cards, working on craft projects (such as making die-cuts), or preparing items for upcoming programs. Some volunteers have been eager to help in any way; others (who may have been urged to volunteer by their parents) are simply passing time to get volunteer hours (which may be required by their school).

## Thanking Volunteers

At the end of summer, we hold a party to thank the volunteers. We often host a pizza party since it is fairly easy to accommodate for allergies. We provide pizza and soda as well as leftover prizes from the teen program, particularly restaurant coupons. Each table setting receives at least one coupon.

Volunteers can enter their names for several door prizes, such as messenger bags, books, T-shirts, movie coupons, and gift cards. In addition to the drawings, each volunteer who attends gets to choose a prize off a table as a thank-you gift.

The party also includes a performance by a selected performer; we also arrange to have the performer present a workshop for the volunteers after lunch. Last year, we featured a comedy improv group; this year, two former professional clowns presented Science of the Circus, along the lines of the Fizz, Boom, Read SRP theme. Both programs were hits with the teens who stayed around for the workshop. It's important to us that the teens feel appreciated and rewarded for their hard work, and this is a small way to show our gratitude.

Getting a solid base of teen volunteers each summer can be challenging, but reach out to the local schools and the teens you see regularly. Once you get a solid rotation of teens, having them assist you with regular library tasks or the summer reading program can relieve stress and work for you.

Most of them want to help and given the chance, many will go the extra mile. Encourage them, make them feel appreciated, and you will find they return again and again. ☺

# Reading and “Gamification”

## Joining Guilds, Earning Badges, and Leveling Up

MARIANNE MARTENS

Starting with examples of early gamified transmedia books such as Patrick Carman’s *Skeleton Creek* series (launched in 2009) and Scholastic’s *The 39 Clues* series (first published in 2011) and continuing with a look at several book apps and recent books for tweens, this paper explores how “gamification” has entered the realm of books and reading for young people.

This convergence of reading and game playing enabled by new digital formats raises concerns and misperceptions among adults. In a recent series of interviews in a library in Southern California, several parents expressed surprise that apps found on the iPad could be anything *but* games.<sup>1</sup> For these parents, print books provide an educational experience, while iPads and similar devices are viewed as being strictly for entertainment. While children might be more eager than their parents to gravitate toward digital devices, as Sonia Livingstone and Kirsten Drotner write, “Children’s agency in relation to media is not always publicly welcomed. On the contrary, often this is precisely what gives rise to adult concerns. Examples include contemporary conflicts with teachers and other adults of authority over time spent texting or gaming.”<sup>2</sup>

In general, compared to gaming, which resides in the realm of entertainment, print books for young people are a form of entertainment deeply entrenched in values associated with reading and learning, and are therefore considered as having significantly more of what French philosopher Pierre Bourdieu calls “cultural capital.”<sup>3</sup>

Since the mass introduction of television in the 1950s, continuing through the age of the personal computer, and then since April 3, 2010, when the first iPad was released, “screen time” has been something parents and caregivers have been warned against.

Screen time has been blamed for violent behavior, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and now, studies in both scholarly and mass media sources, from the American Academy of Pediatrics to the *Chicago Tribune*,<sup>4</sup> have found evidence that too much screen time contributes to childhood obesity. However, despite the risks, multiple research shows that children’s interaction with enhanced digital books (including book apps and enhanced e-books) supports early literacy development and diverse learning styles.<sup>5</sup>



**Marianne Martens** is assistant professor at Kent State University’s School of Library and Information Science. She has a background in children’s publishing, is a member of ALSC’s Children and Technology Committee, and serves on the Littleelit Advisory Board. You can read more about her work at [mariannemartens.org](http://mariannemartens.org) and she can be reached at [mmarten3@kent.edu](mailto:mmarten3@kent.edu).

The multimodality of these formats incorporate text, visual elements, sound, and interaction, which together support what Cahill and McGill-Franzen describe as “transliteracy development”—the ability to read, write, and interact across multiple media platforms. Yet others, such as Meyers, Zaminpaima, and Frederico have found that the absence of longitudinal studies on such learning means that the actual impact of reading on these devices remains largely unknown.

Meanwhile, these new formats are on the rise. According to a 2012 report by Shuler, Levine, and Ree,<sup>6</sup> apps for young people in the iTunes store went from zero available in June 2008 to nearly 700,000 in 2012. Of those apps, more than 80 percent in the “education” category target children, and 72 percent of those target preschoolers.

In December 2013, *Forbes* magazine reported that the number of apps in the iTunes Store had reached 1,000,000, with an average of 25,000 to 30,000 added monthly.<sup>7</sup>

Some are helping navigate the digital terrain. Lisa Guernsey’s 2012 book *Screen Time: How Electronic Media—From Baby Videos to Educational Software—Affects Your Young Child* speaks calmly and rationally about this phenomenon that (understandably) instills panic in parents, educators, and caregivers of young children.<sup>8</sup>

Others, such as blogger Carisa Kliver, founder of *The Digital Media Diet* (<http://digitalmediadiet.com>) and *Digital Storytime* (<http://digital-storytime.com>) and Cen Campbell, founder of *Little eLit* (<http://littleelit.com>), highlight some of the benefits of quality digital media for young people, and provide resources on how to select and use them.

In the case of books for young people, technology blurs the line between “books” and “games,” as demonstrated in the books and apps explored in this paper. In recent years, the publishing industry has struggled—first with closing independent bookstores and now with declining superstores, starting with the demise of Borders in 2011.

Digital formats are seen as new profit centers. New ideologies on digital reading, encouraged by publishers and authors, argue that the best way to motivate readers—especially reluctant readers—is to blur lines between books and games. The largest transnational publishers, who can afford to produce innovative formats, are lauding electronic formats and interactive books as ways to create readers out of children raised on gaming, who might prefer technology to printed books.

Carman, author of several multiplatform books including the Skeleton Creek series and the Dark Eden app, argues, “Mixing media is a way to bring kids back to books,” and describes his hybrid creation as a form of “book evangelism”<sup>9</sup> that attracts children to reading. Rick Richter, former president of Simon & Schuster and current digital media consultant, described a key advantage with digital formats as appealing “to non-bookworms, such as computer and gaming geeks.”<sup>10</sup>

*New ideologies on digital reading, encouraged by publishers and authors, argue that the best way to motivate readers—especially reluctant readers—is to blur lines between books and games. The largest transnational publishers, who can afford to produce innovative formats, are lauding electronic formats and interactive books as ways to create readers out of children raised on gaming, who might prefer technology to printed books.*

According to a marketing director interviewed in 2011, a key goal in creating multiplatform books, which are books that must be read across multiple media platforms, was to attract those children who were more interested in gaming than in reading.<sup>11</sup>

This marketer imagined children’s reading as taking part in a digital media landscape strewn with computers, tablets, cell phones, television, and even print. Publishers have made significant financial investments in digital formats, and there is an assumption on the part of the publishers that young people enjoy—and even expect—these multiplatform/transmedia formats, especially as e-book use is on the rise.

According to the Pew Internet and the American Life Project, in January 2014, three in ten Americans read an e-book in the preceding year and half owned an e-reading device.<sup>12</sup> This is a significant increase from the last report of May 2011, in which 12 percent of adults [over 18] in the United States owned an e-book reader.<sup>13</sup>

nificant increase from the last report of May 2011, in which 12 percent of adults [over 18] in the United States owned an e-book reader.<sup>13</sup>

## Gamification Explained

Game researchers Sebastian Deterding, Dan Dixon, Rilla Khaled, and Lennart Nacke describe “gamification” as the “idea of using game design elements in non-game contexts to motivate and increase user activity and retention.”<sup>14</sup> Writing about interaction design and digital marketing, they describe how “vendors now offer ‘gamification’ as a software service layer of reward and reputation systems with points, badges, levels and leader boards.”<sup>15</sup>

Technology enables the use of gamification to motivate people in different spheres: from business, to fitness, to charity, to education, and now also to reading. For example, “Recyclebank” ([www.recyclebank.com](http://www.recyclebank.com)) uses gamification to get people to recycle, and the Fitocracy app ([www.fitocracy.com](http://www.fitocracy.com)) motivates





Figure 1. Clicking on the profile of CobraDark48<sup>20</sup> leads to his or her shield, badges, and medals.

users to go to the gym by having them earn points and beat quests. In education, the type of “digital game-based learning,” identified by Marc Prensky in 2001,<sup>16</sup> has been experimented with and adopted by many in the K–12 curriculum.

## Gamified Books

Arguably, connecting children’s reading experience to play is not a new concept, and there are many examples of game elements in print books, such as in Edward Packard’s Choose Your Own Adventure series published in the 1980s and 1990s. Movable books, including pop-ups, are hybrid formats that elegantly fuse educational elements with play.

In 1989, Carolyn S. Brodie and Jim Thomas described print movable books as coming in “a variety of formats. . . . Many librarians, educators, and authors have extolled their unique features as well as their educational and entertainment values.”<sup>17</sup> Arguably the authors could have been writing about book apps. Indeed, you could think of printed pop-up books as an early version of the book app, combining educational elements in a very entertaining package.

Now technology allows book producers to borrow elements from video game design, and create literary products that approximate games. Two such pioneering series for tweens, both published by Scholastic, include Patrick Carman’s *Skeleton*

*Creek* series and *The 39 Clues* series (by assorted authors), influenced other books, series, and book apps that followed. *Skeleton Creek* (grades 6 and up) uses a dual-narration framework in which one author, Ryan, narrates via a print journal (i.e., the books), and the other, Sarah, uses “vlogs” (video blogs) to communicate her portion of the story.

Carman has a background in advertising, technology, and game design. In *Skeleton Creek*, gamification refers to the game-like design of the series, the interplay of the text and the videos, and the opportunities for readers to extend the story online on the “character’s” social media pages (created by the author). Beyond the *Skeleton Creek* franchise, readers participate by making their own YouTube parody videos, such as *Skeleton Creek: The Ending Pt.1*, which mimics the hand-held camera-feel of Sarah’s vlogs.<sup>18</sup>

Scholastic’s *The 39 Clues* (grades 4 to 7), first published in 2008, is a multiplatform book series consisting of eleven books in the first series, an integrated website, collector cards, and now also a book app. By blending the books, the integrated website, and collector cards with gaming elements such as badges and competitions (including cash prizes), this series employs more sophisticated gamification than *Skeleton Creek*.

The website implores readers to: “JOIN NOW to start your hunt for the 39 Clues. Create an account, discover which branch of the Cahill family YOU belong to, play missions, and explore the

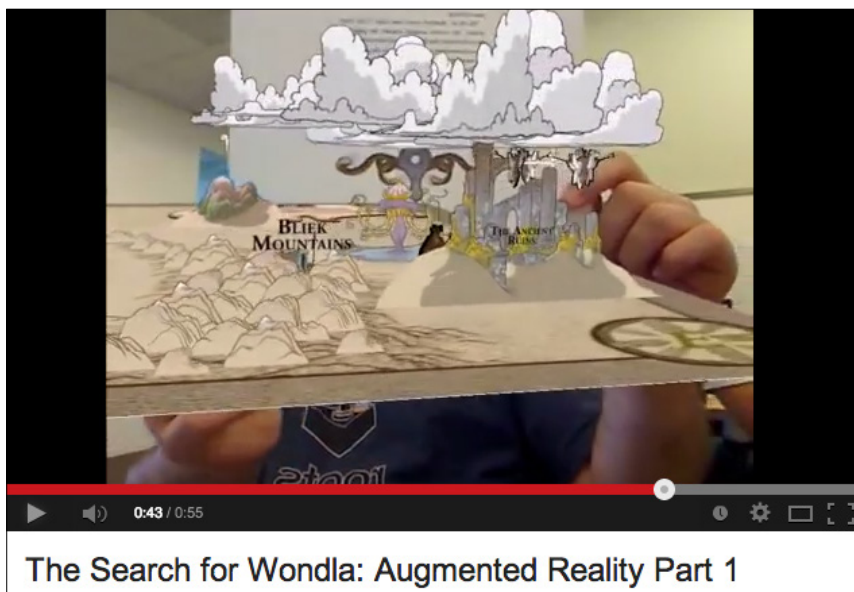


Figure 2. World building with Wondla's Augmented Reality

website to see if you can be the first to find the Clues.”<sup>19</sup> There is an additional interactive component on which readers can post to each other and share “secret” information. In addition to sharing information about *The 39 Clues*, members also post user-generated role-playing games; belong to “branches” (much like the “guilds” of online games); and display crests, badges, and medals as earned for their participation, as in the example in figure 1.

On publication of the first book in the series, Scholastic even offered more than \$100,000 in prizes. To win the prize money, readers had to invest in cards to get clues. Buying more cards resulted in getting more clues, which in turn increased participants' odds of winning.

Augmented reality is a game-like device used since 2013 by Guinness in its popular reference books. By downloading an app and scanning QR codes, readers get a 3-D visual experience. To see a demonstration of *Guinness Book of World Records'* augmented reality, see the book trailer here: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=eYE9W3qSIRo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eYE9W3qSIRo).

Augmented reality has also been used in fiction, as in Tony DiTerlizzi's *Wondla* series for children (grades 5 to 8), published by Simon & Schuster. Using a webcam, readers can hold the print book up to the camera to reveal 3-D maps of the world created in the series. The website for the book also has links to a game available for purchase, and free online activities. Figure 2 shows a screenshot of what augmented reality looks like in this book.

## Marketing Playfully

In these new book formats, gamification extends from book-based content, across integrated websites and apps, into related products such as collector cards. The structures supporting

these products are gamified as well, as marketing plans become part of the story line, connect to the series' world building, and use digital media to play with readers. In the past, publishers directed marketing efforts, and authors promoted their books via tours and school visits.

However, with technological innovations in social media, marketing becomes a collaborative, community effort between marketers, authors, and readers. Authors such as Carman embody multiple roles multitasking as author, producer, and marketer of their work.

Marketing efforts around *The 39 Clues* focused on play as well. The publisher's staff had the idea of extending the story by creating an ancillary mystery character. A man in a trench coat started appearing in the background in videos and then suddenly showed up in person on Peter Lerangis's tour stops.

In creating such interactive character extensions, the publisher playfully blended fiction with reality as people became book characters, and book characters came to life. The collaborative community marketing effort, involving publishers' marketing staff, authors, and the participating young readers, explicates the new configuration of the field, in which game-like elements play a major role.

## New Means of Production

Digital reading moves book production into new dimensions rooted in the gaming industry, and requiring game developers, or, in the case of *Skeleton Creek*, a casting agent to help find an actor to embody the online character of Sarah. Book apps borrow even more from the world of gaming. Mary Kay Carson's *Bats! Furry Fliers of the Night* (2012) was built with 3-D software, generally used for game design, by Unity.<sup>21</sup> In addition, apps require a production team that includes artists and writers, but also software developers, game developers, and coders, which leads to apps' close connection to the world of games.

## Challenges Faced by Book Apps

The eventual success or demise of book apps depends on several factors. While there are many high quality apps for young people, finding them in venues like the App Store can be overwhelming. Unlike reviewing a physical picture book prior to purchase, where the content is obvious, relying on short previews in the App Store can mislead, providing only minimal details about the products. Information about in-app purchases or in-product advertising (which can be expected to appear in free apps, but also sometimes in apps sold) is obscured.

While users can and should critically read reviews and award sites for more information, it is also important to note that even

well-reviewed award winners might contain in-app purchase requirements or advertising that allow users only to read or play up to a certain point without additional fees.

One parent, Allison Pomenta, described “a famous piano-playing app that makes my child [either pay or] watch video ads in order to earn coins that will allow him to download new songs to play.”<sup>22</sup>

One reason for gamified in-app purchases and in-app advertising, is that app developers have not yet figured out how to monetize apps. As Beth Bacon writes, app pricing sometimes begins at “free” or low-cost. To get all features in a free or “light” version requires additional payment, “but the price is often low, because customers expect that cost to be pretty close to free.”<sup>23</sup>

Game elements within apps that are successful are those that enhance—not distract—from the story. The highly acclaimed app PopOut! The Tale of Peter Rabbit, developed by Loud Crow Interactive, was named a Kirkus Top Book App of 2010; it features Beatrix Potter’s original illustrations, is easy to navigate, and includes digital features that closely approximate a physical pop-up book.<sup>24</sup>

But as Junko Yokota has pointed out, the app includes a distracting interactive feature in which children are supposed to drag leaves and squash blackberries as the story is read. The squashing activity does not enhance the story, but rather becomes a distraction.<sup>25</sup>

A similar feature exists in another award-winning app, Dragon Brush by Small Planet Digital.<sup>26</sup> This story, that includes in-app art activity, has a distracting effect that readers can make Bing-Wen, the main character, jump up and down across a spread as the story is read.

Yet what is considered distracting for one audience is perfect for another. Jennifer Hopwood, a librarian and mother of a reluctant reader (and former member of the ALSC Children and Technology Committee), describes the success she had motivating her son to read with transmedia stories, as they provided extension stories of his favorite video game, TV, or movie characters.<sup>27</sup> Barbara Klipper has written about how iPads and apps can be successful with children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and other disabilities.<sup>28</sup>

There is much confusion among parents and caregivers about what apps are; many associate print books with education and apps with gaming, and this confusion is heightened among lower-income families. In a 2013 report, Common Sense Media identified a new form of digital divide, which they call an “app gap.” They found that “even among families who do own a mobile device, lower-income parents are less likely than higher-income ones to have downloaded educational apps for their children.”<sup>29</sup> In part, this is because of lower levels of device ownership, but it is also because lower-income parents are less likely to be familiar with apps.

## Gamified Readers

Ian Bogost, a game designer and professor of interactive computing at Georgia Institute of Technology, describes “compulsion” as a key element of gamification, requiring the player (or reader in this case) to keep coming back—to the book, to the videos, or to the website, which transforms the reader into a commodity resource for the publisher, and creates a direct link to consumption and commodification of readers and the reading experience. Bogost dismisses gamification, arguing that it is little more than a fad promoted by marketers. Instead, he suggests “the term ‘exploitationware’ as a more accurate name for gamification’s true purpose.”<sup>30</sup> As publishers incorporate gamification, one potential risk is that imagination becomes secondary to commerce as readers compulsively return to books, to videos, to websites.

Because of assumptions about books being embedded with educational elements, reading belongs to what Bourdieu calls an inalienable cultural field, and books are considered as belonging to a higher form of engagement than other forms of media for young people, such as games or television. Yet digital technologies enable a blurring of forms.

While publishers might be seduced by the idea that gamification of children’s literature motivates children to read (and subsequently motivates someone to buy them books), gaming fails with young readers when they become “winners” or “losers.”<sup>31</sup> “Losing” at reading becomes demotivating to poor readers, and even “winning” is problematic for proficient readers as reading stops when the awards and points stop.

Game researcher Scott Nicholson argues the key is for readers to establish an internal motivation to do an activity (in this case, reading), because otherwise there is no way out of the rewards cycle. In order to stress the positive and motivational aspects that gaming can provide in arenas like reading and education, Nicholson describes the need for *meaningful* games: “the integration of *user-centered* game design elements into non-game contexts.”<sup>32</sup>

According to Nicholson, it is important to emphasize play and minimize points, as points or badges eventually demotivate players. Instead of tallying up points on a leaderboard, creating a system of reader winners and losers, the “user-centered designer must ask: How does this benefit the user?”<sup>33</sup> In order to motivate readers, gamification must be meaningful to the user, and to do so, Nicholson emphasizes a need for “playification” rather than “gamification.”

Technology extends these game-like elements into stories. As consumers of digital content, or as selectors of such for young people, it is important to be aware of content versus marketing. The case of *The 39 Clues* represents an example of how young readers can potentially be commoditized via gamification. The series has been successful, in part because it features strong titles written by the best-selling authors, such as Rick Riordan, author of other series books for children, including the Percy Jackson series.



While The 39 Clues series presents effective use of gamification by entertaining readers with engaging stories by top-notch authors, a fun website, and collector cards, in the case of gamified books for young people, there is a delicate balance between imagination and commerce. If such products lean too far toward commerce, readers are commoditized, as the books become more about consuming points, badges, or collector cards than about reading. This, in turn, divides those who are able to participate in the series (i.e., those with access to books, a computer, Internet, and collector cards), from those who are not.

Arguably, while readers of The Skeleton Creek series must also have Internet access to “read” the books, more room is left for the imagination, as evidenced by Carman’s participatory Facebook pages, on which readers share their own speculations about solving the creepy mystery of the dredge and by creating their own parody videos of the series.


Within the corporate structures of multiplatform books such as Skeleton Creek and The 39 Clues, imaginative elements are provided for the readers on multiple media platforms. However, young readers still find creative ways to repurpose content, by writing fan fiction, by posting Skeleton Creek parody videos on YouTube, and by using social media to extend the story experience in a collaborative community of fans. As such, when technology intersects with books and the imagination, the true imaginative process occurs outside of the corporate realm.

At this point, as more books in digital formats emerge each year, publishers are in a uniquely challenging position. Kate Wilson, managing director of Nosy Crow in the United Kingdom, points out that books are “directly competing with media and other games. We do not want reading to be the most boring thing a child can do on a phone or a tablet,”<sup>34</sup> which essentially means that to have successful products, publishers are increasingly expected to incorporate gaming elements into books for digital platforms.

Increasingly, publishers are committing to enhanced formats, but young readers are not necessarily adopting them at the levels that publishers might like yet. Perhaps the first generation of young people raised on multiplatform books, transmedia products, and book apps will feel differently about the convergence of books and technology. In some cases, the content is very similar as books go from print to digital formats, but new digital containers and multimodal platforms lead to a different reading experience.

Instead of comparing digital formats to print, perhaps these new electronic formats should be considered separate entities, leaving room for print to coexist. For now, one negative aspect of gamified reading is that it can easily lead to commodification of readers and the reading experience, turning an experience otherwise loaded with imaginative possibilities into an endless quest for rewards.

But a positive aspect of meaningful gamification is that the best interactive, multimodal reading experiences merge reading

with play, which in turn can motivate readers, including reluctant readers or readers with different abilities. 

For more information, read the *New York Times* article “All the World’s a Game, and Business Is a Player.” Gamification is embedded into the article: <http://bit.ly/CAL-NYTimes>.

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# Keyboarding Kids

## Skill Building in the Public Library

MARYBETH KOZIKOWSKI

One of our library's programs, Keyboarding Kids, started a few years ago in hopes that the library could fill the gap when schools do not or cannot offer programs to provide children with the skills they need for personal and academic success.

I knew keyboarding was one of those skills. Over the past year, several parents inquired if we offered computer keyboarding instruction for children; the local school district only teaches it at the high school level. And our department statistics noted increased use of our public computers by upper elementary students to type reports and homework. Opportunity was knocking!

I posted a request to a national children's and YA librarian discussion list asking for input if anyone had conducted a similar class for fourth and fifth graders. No responses. Not one. I figured either I was onto something or this was the worst idea I had ever had.

Undaunted, I sought help from my library's teen department, which had previously offered computer keyboarding for sixth to ninth graders. They shared their program plans; they used *Mavis Beacon Teaches Typing Platinum 25th Anniversary Edition* software.

I next enlisted the help of our IT staff, who demonstrated how to utilize the software's "import your own text" feature to create custom lessons limited to the keys, letters, and words I specified. Thanks to the willingness of coworkers to share their expertise and faith in the idea, Keyboarding Kids finally got the green light from my department head.



We did it!

Our first program was initially offered as three forty-five-minute sessions, but it was soon evident that we needed an additional session. We cover all the letters of the alphabet and a few basic punctuation keys, but there isn't enough time to teach numbers.

Registration is limited to fourth and fifth graders. Online research in several journals suggested that the hands of children younger than those in upper elementary grades are generally too small to comfortably span a full-sized keyboard; motor skills and eye-hand coordination are still developing as well.

Keyboarding Kids is conducted on our public computers in the center of our program room. While we have twelve computers, registration is limited to ten children to keep two computers available for patron use. A librarian keeps the program on track time-wise and talks with the children—encouraging them, reinforcing home keys, and helping them navigate between Microsoft Word and *Mavis Beacon*. I have found that the kids catch on pretty quickly. Ideally another staff member assists during the program, helping keep the children focused and answering their questions.

At the end of each session, children receive a handout recapping the keys they learned that day, a chart showing home keys and proper hand placement, and a list of words to practice typing at home (if they have a keyboard available).

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Full-word typing game



Single-letter typing game



Practicing new keys



The "cover your hands" challenge

At the end of the last session, children receive a certificate of completion; on the back is a list of recommended *Mavis Beacon* games and instructions on how to access the same practice lessons and games used in the program.

Since its inception in 2011, Keyboarding Kids has been offered eight times and working with the children has produced significant improvements.

To encourage children to look at the screen rather than the keyboard, their hands are covered with a felt rectangle or piece of paper while they are typing. To hold children's attention during the last five minutes of the program, they open Microsoft Word and type words I call out, made up of only the letters and keys they have learned so far. In the most recent session, it was pure magic when the children started calling out their own challenge words!

Keyboarding Kids is not a costly program; the software costs about \$300 (\$30 per license for ten computers). Printing costs for handouts and completion certificates is minimal. The

program is usually scheduled once a week after school but has also been very successful offered on consecutive days in a single week when school is not in session.

At the end of our 2013 session, parents and children completed a survey. Among the responses were:

- "I did not know what to expect, but I did enjoy learning the correct key positions."
- "This class was really helpful for my daughter. If I could change anything, I would make the class one hour long and maybe add a week or two."
- "Maybe some more advanced sessions after the beginner session."
- "I thought the instruction was right on pace, and introducing the home keys was great."

Keyboarding Kids fills an important skill gap in a way that's fun for children, demonstrates library responsiveness to our community, is cost-effective, and once established, is easy to run. ☺

# Celebrating Thirty Years of Professional Development

## Bound to Stay Bound Scholarship Recipients Look Back

COURTNEY JONES

Since 1985, the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC) and the Bound to Stay Bound (BTSB) books foundation provided eighty-six aspiring children's librarians with the means to pursue their education and professional development. In addition to thirty years awarding scholarships, 2015 will also mark BTSB's 95th year in business.

Bound to Stay Bound (established in 1920 as New Method Book Bindery), a third-generation, family-owned business, pre-binds book covers, making books durable specifically for use in the library or classroom.

The BTSB foundation, created in 1985 by then president Robert E. Sibert and current BTSB president Robert L. Sibert, sought to encourage children's librarianship, in keeping with its mission to "support the informational needs of society," and champion education.

"We looked around and admired the Melcher scholarships," says Robert L. Sibert, "what they were doing seemed like a really good long term way to strengthen the profession of children's librarians, and that's what we wanted to do. Focus on things that would build up over the years."

BTSB reached out to the sponsor of the Frederic G. Melcher scholarship, ALSC, then under the direction of Susan Roman, to form the Bound to Stay Bound Scholarship. In the beginning, there was only one recipient each year.



New Method Book Bindery, 1923

The very first was Megan McDonald, who went on to become the acclaimed author behind the Judy Moody series. "I would not have been able to attend library school at the University of Pittsburgh, where I studied and mentored with such 'greats' as Maggie Kimmel, Blanche Woolls, and Amy Kellman, were it not for the first-ever Bound to Stay Bound scholarship," says McDonald. "I'm still grateful after all these years."

Next year, the thirtieth class of recipients will be awarded \$7,500 each toward their tuition. The ALSC office reached out to other previous BTSB scholarship winners to explore the reasons they pursued librarianship, what they learned as students, and their current careers. The collective response provided a positive, insightful snapshot of children's librarianship. Like McDonald, the recipients reflected on their time in library school, while expressing great enthusiasm for the evolution of their profession, and gratitude for BTSB's support.

## Where Are They Now?

The backgrounds and trajectories of recipients vary widely. In 1986, the second-ever BTSB scholarship went to Sadako

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Kashiwagi, a Japanese American internment camp survivor. Kashiwagi recalls watching in horror as her father burned his Japanese language books before the family was relocated to “camp.” Her time in the camp’s donated library eased some of the difficulty.

“When we were incarcerated during World War II, the library really helped,” she recalls. “Books enabled me to be free. They were there. Thank goodness they were there.” After a career working in special education, with encouragement from her brother and husband, both librarians, Kashiwagi worked toward her library degree in her fifties. Now retired and in her eighties, Kashiwagi recalls fondly her time in the San Francisco library system working with preschool-aged children, dressing up as a train conductor in her father’s overalls during storytime, and imparting respect for the written word to children. As she distinctly remembers telling one young patron, “books, they are your friends.”

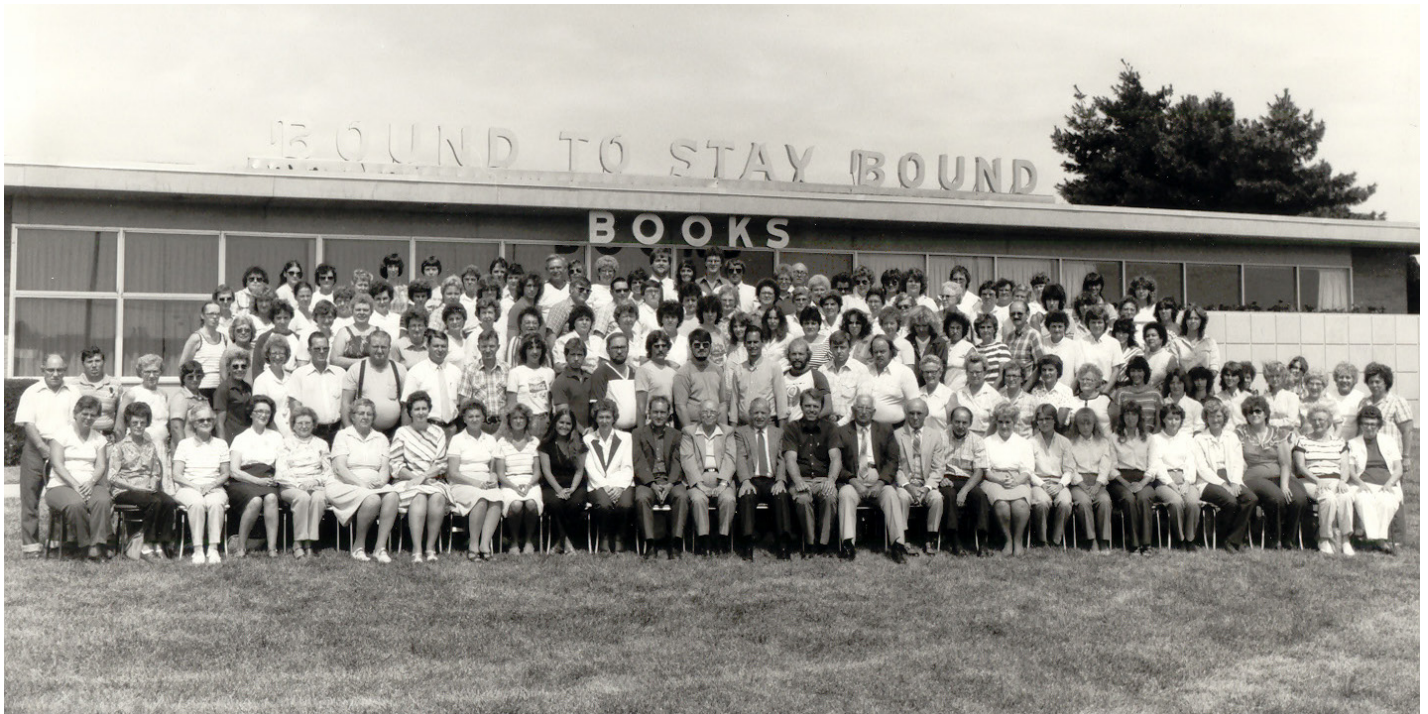
Eventually, the award was expanded to include two recipients in 1990, three recipients in 2000, and as of 2003, four recipients, annually. “Every year we would see the people that were being awarded the scholarship, but we’d also see some of the other people who’d applied who didn’t get the scholarships,” explains Sibert. “There were so many other good candidates out there. That’s one reason we wanted to expand it over the years—to get more people into the field.”

Some previous winners began their library career while in high school, some even younger. For Maggie Bannen (2009 recipient), it was a family affair. “My mother is a librarian. I would earn my allowance by alphabetizing catalogue cards, shelving books, and cleaning her library.” Bannen, currently a youth services librarian with the Johnson County Library system in

Kansas, takes professional pride in the work she does in service to children. “In the wake of *Every Child Ready to Read*, we don’t just settle for putting together a great storytime for children. Now, we’re working on ways to communicate to adults how parents and caregivers can enhance those early literacy skills at home.” Her experience in library school, in addition to former coworkers and library conferences, has provided her with a network of fellow children’s services librarians to continue collaborating. “I have come to believe that children’s librarians are, in point of fact, regular librarians with an extra—and very awesome—skill set. We’re librarians, plus.”

While in school, recipients have found their graduate degree a crucial launching pad for a rewarding, career-long learning curve. Kristin Edstrom (2009 recipient) now works at the University Branch of The Seattle Public Library as a children’s librarian. “The audience I work with is broad. I do storytimes for families, preschoolers, and children on the autism spectrum. My library school education helped me most with an understanding of the guiding principles behind libraries and librarianship: democracy, intellectual freedom, access.” Edstrom’s broad audience includes homeless youth and adult patrons.

“My studies in library school, coupled with hands-on experience, continue to broaden the depth and scope of the services I provide,” says Evan Bush (2008 recipient). “The contacts I made in library school have been invaluable.” Bush now serves as assistant director of children’s services, collection development, and outreach services for the Piedmont Regional Library System in Georgia. “Children’s services are the core of library services and the key to creating future library users. Working with children is extremely creative and satisfying. It provides continuous opportunities to ignite a child’s imagination, to inspire them, making lasting, positive impressions.”



Bound to Stay Bound Books employees outside the BSB facility in 1985.



Making those “lasting, positive impressions” as soon as possible with young patrons has become the ideal for many BTSB scholars. Early childhood literacy is the field of choice for a number of recipients. “My primary focus of the last five to seven years has been early childhood services, working with very young children—babies through preschoolers—and their families, providing literacy-based storytimes, family programs, and parent education,” says Melissa Depper (1993 recipient). “Studying children’s services broadly, preschoolers through teens, gave me a great foundation and solid context for thinking of early childhood as a distinct service population.” Depper’s passion for working with a very young service population lead to her current position with Arapahoe Library District in Colorado as an early literacy specialist. Similarly, Jessica Kerlin (2007 recipient) has made a fulfilling career working with preschool-aged and younger children as branch manager of the Bay Village Branch in the Cuyahoga County Public Library System. “Some of the most rewarding aspects of my work have been helping families understand the principles of early literacy and have fun together through facilitating engaging early childhood storytimes at the library! When toddlers would light up hearing a familiar nursery rhyme they learned in storytime or bring their grown-ups a book to borrow with such joy—it really feels good!”

### Changes of Profession and Professional Evolution

Other recipients have gone on to find careers in different fields, or positions that orbit the library world. Still, they draw on their schooling and experience in the library setting. Janice Wall (1993 recipient), a library consultant for the Idaho Commission for Libraries, works mainly with librarians and trustees, however she sometimes finds herself in front of daunting audiences. Thanks to her work with children, it’s not a problem. “Testifying in front of a legislative committee does not intimidate me, because I’ve had two-year-olds as an audience!” As far as how the profession has changed, Wall concluded, “What I see is an outward turning, not trying to sell what the library already has, but trying to assess and meet the needs of the community.”

Though she’s found herself out of librarianship, Barbara Mendoza (1987 recipient) served six years as an academic librarian, and later, a reference librarian, and went on to become an art history professor. Mendoza, who recently enjoyed a children’s literature course and still keeps abreast of the profession, reflects on her time in the library fondly, “I absolutely loved my library assistant job at the children’s desk, and I wanted to continue working and growing professionally in that area.” Unfortunately, landing a youth services position was not in the cards for her.

While many recipients mentioned technological advancements and the impact of the Internet as major agents of change in the library world, Bush cited the decline in resources and fiscal support as an across the board shift over the course of his career. “The most obvious change I have witnessed is the continual decrease in funding,” notes Bush.

As a result, the relationship between patron and librarians has shifted as libraries explore new ways to draw people in, or go to them. “The role is slowly shifting away from the reference desk and more towards programming and outreach,” says Edstrom. “I have also seen a number of interesting innovations in terms of redefining the image of the library by meeting people where they are at with small pop-up libraries and micro libraries pulled by bikes. It also seems like libraries are beginning to collect more user-created content so patrons are being seen as more than just content consumers.” Edstrom is currently hard at work creating sensory storytime programs with her colleagues, and also acts as a rider with Seattle Public Library’s Books on Bikes program.

While new to the field, some of this year’s winners have already observed the progressive, creative nature of the library, and by extension, the expanding role of children’s librarians. “I have yet to live life as an official librarian, but I can say I am noticing a change in children’s librarianship in particular,” says Sylvia Aguiñaga, a 2014 BTSB scholarship recipient, special project volunteer with the Los Angeles Public Library, and program coordinator for DIYgirls.org. “I think it’s at a point of transition. This transition is in our hands. We have a duty to be cultivators of creative minds. We are guides for the next generation of innovators.” Aguiñaga’s fellow 2014 BTSB scholarship winner, Callen Taylor—a teacher librarian at Visitacion Valley Middle School in San Francisco—similarly marked the changes of the library’s function. “Now I see school libraries as the tech center, the place to hang out, the teacher collaboration area, and a safe place for students to be. I take my kids to get books, make terrariums, see bubble magicians, and meet authors. The library is a community.”

“The evolution of the library has been fast and furious over the last ten years, which makes our jobs even more exciting and hopefully furthers the impact we can ultimately have on our customers,” remarks Kerlin. “We have seen nontraditional users entering the library for the first time, as well as technology playing an increasing role in how we reach and serve our communities through our collection and connected learning. We have seen increased opportunities to collaborate with civic organizations to help see people through a time of great financial need. I am looking forward to being part of the future of libraries, which have become dynamic, thriving community centers—truly places to connect and exchange ideas.”

### Bridging the Gap, Nudging the World

Ultimately, the true motivator for children’s librarians is the promise they see in the young people they work with. “I want to cultivate a place where the youth of today will prepare for jobs that don’t even exist yet,” says Lisa Jordan (2012 recipient). “To encourage their passions, help guide them to finding information and books that are relevant to their interests, to help them learn twenty-first-century skills in this ever more globalized world, and most of all to inspire children to reach their full potential.” Such focused passion and interest is a must for librarians working with young patrons, and those with the

## Eight Questions with Megan McDonald

Acclaimed writer and former librarian Megan McDonald was the first BTSB scholarship recipient. Here's what she had to say about her time among the stacks, and her career as a children's author.

### 1. Why did you want to become a librarian?

Before I was a writer, I was a reader. Reading saved my life. I wanted to do that for others. There is nothing more important and gratifying than connecting a child with a good book.

### 2. Why did you want to work with children?

Children are curious and eager, sharp and observant and honest and sensitive. They are some of the smartest, funniest people I know.

### 3. How has your past study of children's library services benefitted you as a writer?

Being a children's librarian taught me everything I know about kids and books and storytelling. That's how I found my storyteller's voice. My first book, *Is This a House for Hermit Crab*, grew out of a tale I told aloud at preschool storytime as a librarian.

### 4. What's the last good children's book you've read?

I just finished *The Paperboy*, by Vince Vawter—a first novel with one of the strongest voices I've known in children's literature. Before that it was *West of the Moon*, by Margie Preus. What a storyteller.

### 5. What has been the most rewarding part of your career so far?

Even though my work as a librarian was very different from my life as a writer, my hope is the same: to make a child into a reader. As readers, we yearn for connection—to get lost in a story, to see ourselves again for the first time, to be moved. Universally, I think we all feel a need that a good book can fill.

The most rewarding part of being a writer has been young readers' responses to my Judy Moody and Stink



books. A young reader, Max, wrote to me recently and said, "I just read your *Judy Moody Was in a Bad Mood*. I want to live in that book."

What could be better than that?

### 6. How long were you a librarian, and what populations were you working with?

I've been working in libraries since I was fifteen. I worked professionally as a children's librarian in public libraries for nearly twenty years. Settings included large city libraries from The Carnegie in Pittsburgh to Minneapolis Public Library and small-town communities from Williamsburg, Virginia, to Mr. Rogers's hometown of Latrobe, Pennsylvania. As a children's librarian, I worked in outreach settings from homeless shelters to health clinics to programs for teen mothers.

### 7. How do you feel about the work librarians do?

They are unsung heroes and heroines, all.

### 8. What was your favorite book to check out from the library as a kid?

*Harriet the Spy* (from the public library), and *Virginia Dare*, *Mystery Girl* (from my school library). I checked the book out so many times my librarian had to ask me to give someone else a chance.

desire should be able to reach their goal. However, the rising cost of higher education makes the dream fiscally unreachable for some. Many are flocking toward reasonable and timely online programs. For the foreseeable future, Sibert sees BTSB continuing to aid deserving applicants, whether or not they attend online or at a brick-and-mortar institution. "There are a lot of people who can't just give up their life for a couple years and go to graduate school. You're seeing a lot of online institutions as options for people," says Sibert. "I imagine changes to the BTSB scholarship will come as we try to make it affordable enough so people can do it." Gaining skills and awareness while

in school opens doors to the wide world of children's librarianship. "My MLS gave me the ethical training to be a full participant in the profession," notes Caitlin Augusta (1999 recipient).

Upon announcement, winners receive a congratulatory phone call directly from Sibert. "The pressure is on!" he jokes. "You are expected to do great things, and go into the field and really make an impact, and be a role model for more people to follow after you." BTSB scholarship winners often go on to become invested leaders in their field. As Depper sees it, "we're nudging the trajectory of the world, one child at a time." 🐘

# Hooray for Research

## A Glimpse at an Early Literacy Project

J. ELIZABETH MILLS, IVETTE BAYO URBAN, KATHLEEN CAMPANA, AND JUDY T. NELSON

**H**ave you ever been asked for research that establishes the value of storytimes? Or asked to demonstrate that storytimes or other early literacy work support reading readiness efforts? Are you being asked to validate how you do storytimes or what you include in your storytimes? If any of this sounds familiar, you are not alone.

For more than ten years, public libraries have been declaring that by sharing early literacy concepts with parents and caregivers and incorporating quality techniques into early literacy programs, including storytimes, there is a positive impact on the reading readiness of children who attend library programs. However, until now there has been very little research to assess this effectiveness.

And in today's outcome-driven world, everyone wants to be able to claim their work is demonstrating best practices and is based on research that establishes its worth.

In 2009, guided by Dr. Eliza T. Dresang, the iSchool at University of Washington, embarked on a project called VIEWS (Valuable Initiatives in Early Learning that Work Successfully). This project used the Every Child Ready to Read® (ECRR) model with six early literacy skills: (1) phonological awareness, (2) letter knowledge, (3) narrative skills, (4) vocabulary, (5) print awareness, and (6) print motivation. That original Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) planning grant morphed into the research grant VIEWS2. Now librarians can reap the benefits of research measuring early literacy behaviors in children who attend public library programs.

The study has completed two years of data collection in a quasi-experimental model. Forty libraries across Washington State were randomly selected from small, medium, and large library systems. Year one uncovered a correlation between the early literacy concepts the librarians exhibited during their

Stay up-to-date on Project VIEWS2 at University of Washington's Digital Youth website, [digitallyouth.ischool.uw.edu](http://digitallyouth.ischool.uw.edu). Or via Twitter @UW\_VIEWS2, or Facebook /VIEWS2. To see some of the information right now, go to <http://everychildreadytoread.ning.com>.

storytime and the early literacy behaviors demonstrated by the children who attended. This relationship means that VIEWS2 discovered that storytimes affect literacy development. During year two the participating libraries were randomly divided into experimental and control groups. The training for the experimental librarians focused on phonological awareness and alphabetic knowledge—two early literacy principles shown by prior research to be strong predictors of later reading readiness.

They were also given the observational tools used by the researchers and encouraged to use them as planning tools. Additionally, increasing storytime interactivity and dialogic reading provided frameworks for incorporating these principles. Meanwhile, the control group conducted business as usual. Results from year two demonstrated that when librarians used these tools for planning, more early literacy behaviors were observed in their storytimes.

What we know: Purposeful focus on early literacy concepts makes a difference in storytimes and in children's early literacy behaviors.

What does this mean for us? One study participant said, "This study tells us what concepts we need to focus on and if we concentrate on them with intent, we can improve what we are doing, which could make a big difference. It also tells us that what we do makes an impact on early literacy and validates what we are doing. It helps us to become leaders in children's early literacy in our communities."

What's next? The research team has released the project website ([views2.ischool.uw.edu](http://views2.ischool.uw.edu)) so visit the site and read more about the project, take a look at the planning tools, and watch training videos filmed by librarians in the study. The research team is also preparing the in-depth publication detailing the complete study and results. ☺

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# The Gift of Advocacy

## Turning Passive Support into Educated Action

JENNA NEMEC-LOISE

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

If you were in Las Vegas for the 2014 ALA Annual Conference, I'll bet those 112 degree temperatures didn't have you thinking too much about the winter holidays. Swimming pools, frozen treats, and the bliss of convention center AC, maybe. But Hanukkah, Christmas, and Kwanzaa? Probably not.

Leave it to a square peg like me, though, to find Christmas in July at the joint meeting of ALA's Advocacy Coordinating Group and Committee on Library Advocacy. That's where ALA Office of Library Advocacy Director Marci Merola gave me the best present ever—a definition. Here it is: Advocacy is turning passive support into educated action. (I know! It really sets your toes a-tingle, doesn't it?)

Think about what that means for us as Everyday Advocates. Doubtless we go the distance every day to make a difference for children and libraries. We wake, we rise, we do, and that's awesome.



But when it comes to being Everyday Advocates for each other, let's be honest. How often do we say we support our AASL, ALSC, and YALSA colleagues compared with how often we actually do something that shows it?

Let's change that this holiday season. Put advocacy on your gift list. In ink, even. Quicker than you can say, "Ho, ho, ho!" you'll be more popular than the jolly guy in the red suit.

### From Passive Support to Educated Action

Since last fall, I've focused this column around simple, effective ways you can advocate for your library, your library services to children, and yourself. Taking things a step further to advocate for our professional association colleagues can seem scary, but it doesn't have to be.

Here's how to use the five tenets of Everyday Advocacy to turn your passive support into educated action.

#### 1. Be Informed

My seventh-grade teacher, Sister Berna, was fond of saying, "Think before you act." Her heart would swell with pride if



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she heard me telling you now how a little homework can go a long way.

Get your finger on the pulse of issues affecting our colleagues serving youth. Check out the latest issues of AASL's *Knowledge Quest* and YALSA's *Journal of Research on Libraries and Young Adults*. Spot trends in school and public libraries by following the association blogs. Find out how you can get involved with your state library association.

Better still, have a great conversation with a school library or teen services colleague. There's no more direct way to find out what's most important, relevant, and immediate to him or her. Ask to hear his stories. Listen to her concerns. Be the person who wants to know what many others don't.

## 2. Engage with Your Community

Once you've boned up on the current issues affecting our colleagues, get out there and mingle.

Attend a school board meeting and stay afterward to talk with parents, teachers, and administrators about the state of school libraries in the district. Subscribe to a YALSA electronic discussion list and dive headfirst into no-nonsense conversations about the latest topics affecting teens and teen librarians.

Feeling a little more adventurous? Nab a few colleagues and take a trip to the alderman's office together. Introduce yourselves to staff members and tell them you're interested in improving outcomes for community youth. Let your faces be the ones policymakers remember when library issues come up at city council meetings.

## 3. Speak Out

If you're nervous about any aspect of turning your passive support into educated action, I'm guessing it's this one. Speaking out publicly can feel daunting, but trust me, it's really empowering, too. Remember, you're the expert here. You know better than anyone why it's important to effect lasting change for our colleagues and the youth they serve.

Start small and work your way up as your confidence grows (and it will). Write a letter to the editor of the local newspaper listing all the ways school librarians shape twenty-first-century learning. Follow @yalsa on Twitter to get involved in Thunderclaps that spread the word about the importance of library services to teens.

When you're ready for the whole shebang, join colleagues in Washington, DC, for National Library Legislative Day on the first Tuesday in May. There's nothing more exhilarating than passionate advocates uniting their voices for a common purpose. Be loud. Be proud. Show 'em what you've got!

## 4. Get Inspired

Naturally, I hope you'll always turn to the ALSC Everyday Advocacy website whenever you need a little inspiration. But I can't resist this chance to brag about another rich advocacy resource: the AASL/ALSC/YALSA Interdivisional Committee on School/Public Library Cooperation (SPLC).

Throughout 2015, follow the AASL, ALSC, and YALSA blogs for quarterly SPLC posts filled with ready-to-go ideas for reaching across ALA's youth divisions. We're powerhouses on our own, but collaboration is key to crafting core messages and taking educated action. Advocates, assemble!

## 5. Share Your Advocacy Story

You've flexed your Everyday Advocacy muscles. You've turned your passive support of colleagues into educated action on their behalf. Now it's time to tell the rest of us all about it.

Share your successes and challenges at a staff meeting, networking event, or conference. Write a brief feature for an upcoming issue of the *Everyday Advocacy Matters* e-newsletter. Author an article with a colleague for publication in a division journal.

Helping others strengthen their skills is another important part of the Everyday Advocacy equation. Be generous with your wisdom, and your colleagues will surely return the favor.

## Deck the Halls with Ad-vo-ca-cy

The hard part's over, folks. We already know what our colleagues across ALA's three youth divisions want this holiday season. It's not a bunch of stuff in shiny boxes with fancy bows. But our time and effort invested in meaningful action on the issues that matter most to them? Ding-ding-ding! Now there's a gift that's always a winner (and no malls or gift receipts required). 🎁

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# Investing in Early Childhood

## What's the ROI?

COMPILED BY TESS PRENDERGAST AND BETSY DIAMANT-COHEN

**R**esearch shows that investment in early childhood is essential not just for the well-being of our children, but for society as a whole. Several important studies have pointed out the economic and social benefits when investments are made in early childhood programs and services.

The links below lead to some key research that supports this notion. These resources may help children's library practitioners to advocate for sustained or improved early childhood focused programs, services, and collections.

### Bernanke's Speech on Early Childhood Education

<http://bit.ly/CAL-bernanke>

This speech was given at the 2012 Children's Defense Fund National Conference, Cincinnati, Ohio, July 24, 2012 (text and video)

In this brief speech, former Federal Reserve Chair Ben Bernanke referred to studies of brain research and the importance of the experiences in the earliest years as a "key source of economic growth and rising income."

Citing research that also shows benefits of lower rates of poverty, higher earnings, and greater job satisfaction, Bernanke added that the, "inflation-adjusted annual rates of return on the funds dedicated to these [early childhood] programs [is] estimated to reach 10 percent or higher."

This quick and easy read provides resources and facts to cite when explaining the importance of funding early childhood programs at the library and elsewhere.

### Heckman's Early Childhood Investment Formula


<http://bit.ly/CAL-heckman>

For the visual learner, Nobel Laureate and University of Chicago Economics Professor James Heckman provides a simple formula of "Invest + Develop + Sustain = Gain" to explain why investing in early childhood is of utmost importance.

On his website, a color-coded chart simplifies this message while retaining the sense of urgency for early childhood professionals and others to help spread it. This visual alone could be used in presentations to funders, Friends groups, and boards of directors to help rationalize early childhood focused library services in all communities. This site also provides links to the complete study that led to this formula's creation as well as the research summary.

### First Five Years Fund Poll Report

<http://bit.ly/CAL-FFY>

The results of a poll taken by the First Five Years Fund in 2014 shows that 71 percent of US voters (Republicans, Democrats, and Independents) support investing in early education. Most voters want political leaders to do more to improve kindergarten readiness, and 70 percent support federal funding to help increase access to high-quality early childhood programs for lower-income families. 



# Children and Libraries

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Prepared by Susan E. Storch

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The graphic features a light blue background with stylized green plants at the bottom. On the left, a boy is lying on a large open book. In the center, a circular logo contains a sunburst with a book and the text "El día de los niños / El día de los libros • Children's Day • April 30 • Book Day". To the right, a girl and a boy are sitting on a large open book. The word "Día!" is written in large, orange, hand-drawn letters. Below it, "Diversity in Action" is written in blue, hand-drawn letters. A central text block reads: "Día is a nationally recognized initiative that emphasizes the importance of literacy for all children from all backgrounds." A blue circular callout on the right says: "Learn more about Día, find programs near you, and download FREE resources for your own program at [dia.ala.org](http://dia.ala.org)." At the bottom left are the logos for ALSC (Association for Library Service to Children) and DOLLAR GENERAL LITERACY FOUNDATION. At the bottom right is a paragraph of text: "The Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC), a division of the American Library Association (ALA), is the national home of the Día celebration. To learn more about ALSC please visit [www.ala.org/alsc](http://www.ala.org/alsc). The Día celebration is supported in large part through funding from the Everyone Reads @ your library grant; awarded to ALSC by the Dollar General Literacy Foundation."

# THE LAST WORD

## Let's Get This Potty Started!

Jenna Nemeć-Loise

Here's how you know you've really made an impression on a toddler: He shows you his brand-new Spider-Man underpants...while he's still wearing them.

Everett was a few months shy of three on the day he visited the library to announce his newly minted status as a potty-trained kid. He just couldn't wait. Barely making it through the Children's Room door, Everett took one look at me and declared with all the pride his little self could muster, "Miss Jenna, I'm a big boy!"

Then he promptly dropped his drawers to prove it.

There I am at my desk, having a routine chat with one of our security officers, when suddenly a toddler is beaming at me from across the room, pants around his ankles.

We couldn't help but chuckle and avert our eyes. (I mean, really, where are you supposed to look in a situation like this?) A few seconds later, Everett's nanny walked in, sized up the situation, and joined our chorus of awkward giggles as she pulled up his jeans.

This was definitely not what Everett had planned. This was his Big Moment, and the grown-ups were ruining it for him. He put his hands on his hips, twisted his freckled features into a grimace, and shouted, "WHAT ARE YOU LAUGHING AT?"

Touché, Everett. Touché.

I love telling this story, but not for the reasons you might think.

Sure, it's funny and sweet in that uncomfortable sort of way. The real nugget, though? Everett wanted to share the biggest achievement of his young life with a special someone who helped him get there—Miss Jenna, his neighborhood librarian.

After all, I was the one who helped him find the potty books he was so eager to read. I listened with rapt attention as he recounted in great detail his family's trip to Target for an Elmo potty that flushed. I crossed my fingers when he headed for the library bathroom and high-fived him when he came out.

I was Miss Jenna, the friend and champion who helped Everett get his potty started.

In case you're wondering, all was quickly forgiven that day after the initial shock wore off. Everett and I had a nice talk about superhero undergarments and

the merits of a diaperless existence. I think we even managed to rustle up a Spider-Man book or two by way of celebration.

Maybe there's already an Everett in your library life, or maybe you've yet to meet him. Either way, keep this in mind when he shows you his unmentionables.

For this one child, you are magic and unicorns and rainbows. You've made all the difference for him, so be honored and take the credit for a job well done.

And Spider-Man? Your Everett might need him, but you sure don't. You're a librarian, and that makes you amazing indeed. ✂

*Maybe there's already an Everett in your library life, or maybe you've yet to meet him. Either way, keep this in mind when he shows you his unmentionables.*

*Jenna Nemeć-Loise is a relationship architect, community builder, teen advocate, and early learning specialist living in Chicago. She is Member Content Editor of the ALSC Everyday Advocacy Website and e-newsletter and Chairperson of the AASL/ALSC/YALSA Interdivisional Committee on School/Public Library Cooperation. Contact her at everyday-advocacy@hotmail.com and find her on Twitter (@ALAJenna).*

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





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