

Children & Libraries

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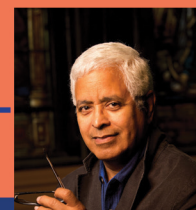
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ON THE COVER: Jenna Nemec-Loise, ALSC board member and head librarian at North Shore Country Day School, really gets into her storytimes! Backing her up is Kathy Irvin, director of the early childhood program and junior kindergarten teacher at the school in Winnetka, IL. Photo by Jay Young.





Editor's Note Awards Always Get Me

By Sharon Verbeten

I'm an awards show junkie. I'm just going to put that out there.

I love watching the Emmy Awards. I have Academy Awards parties. I'll even watch the ESPYs, though I have little interest in sports. I love the suspense . . . the pomp . . . the circumstance. It's little wonder then that I'm just as enthralled when I attend the Youth Media Awards announcements.

For those of you who have attended in person, I know you have felt that rush—it happens most often when a book you love or an author you admire is announced as the winner. If you've been in the room, you have heard the squeals of joy or the gasps of surprise (at times) and witnessed the jumping, cheering, clapping, and sometimes the matching hats and T-shirts of those lucky enough to be on the awards selection committees.

It's an early morning for attendees and an even earlier one for the committee members charged with making that all-important (and, no doubt, ultimately life-changing) phone call to the winners.

The buzz is just contagious. And now for the last few years, thanks to technology, those of you who cannot attend can follow in via live streaming. It's not quite the same as being there, but it may be even better—as you watch with your colleagues at the library or in your jammies in the comfort of your couch!

I hope you, like me, can feel the energy—either in person or vicariously—of these amazing awards. I know many of you participate in mock Newbery and Caldecott voting in your schools and libraries; that's another great way to get involved and gauge interest from those who matter most—the kids!

Now, on to my second favorite thing—stalking (I mean, watching for!) the winners at the ALA Annual Conference in June, where it's always a delight to see the lines snake around the aisles for their signings, and to see them all dressed up and beaming at the awards dinner.

I know I'm blessed and lucky to have the opportunity to witness this all in person—and I wouldn't trade it for the world . . . except maybe for a front-row seat at the Oscars! (Kidding!) ☺

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Dogs and Pigs and Birds, Oh My!

A Bevy of Animals Serve as Partners in Literacy

MARYBETH KOZIKOWSKI

“Living things in the library encourage reading. They certainly provoke questions and conversations with patrons.”

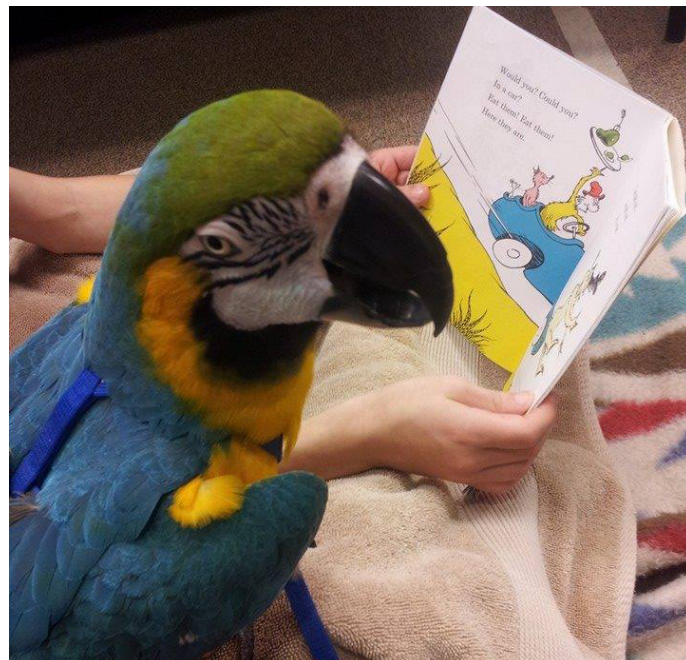
That quote from Kate Capps, children’s librarian and school liaison of the Olathe Indian Creek Library in Kansas, is one that I—and many other librarians—would tend to agree with, based on the number of programs nationwide that encourage kids to read to or with animals.

Animals in school and public libraries are often a regular presence; most have hosted animal programs of one kind or another, and many have resident pets. But how are libraries incorporating creatures that creep, fly, hop, swim, and strut in children’s literacy initiatives? And is there a social or developmental benefit for young library patrons?

Themed displays in support of programs featuring animals or adjacent to a resident pet’s “home” boost circulation and can serve as entry points into literacy. Meredith Richards, librarian at Ohio’s Worthington Libraries said, “The books are often checked out faster than we can keep up with the displays. Usually parents and kids decide together to get the books so they can make the learning experience a family one.”

Programs in which children read to a certified therapy animal are a well-established success story in libraries nationwide. My children’s department has offered Book Time with a Dog since 2001 with dogs trained, certified, and insured through Therapy Dogs International, one of several national organizations that certify therapy animals.

Open to children from grades 1 to 6, our program is intended for children who want to practice their reading aloud skills. But it has additional appeal for young patrons with special needs. One Sachem parent shares, “My daughter’s autism has



Would you, could you, with a bird? Buddy the macaw in action at Red Mountain Library in Mesa, Arizona. Photo courtesy Paws 2 Read, Arizona.

prevented her from participating in many activities her peers enjoy, but Book Time with a Dog suits the needs of children at all functioning levels.”

For librarians interested in starting their own similar program, Ann Sjeka, children’s librarian at Lewiston (NY) Public Library offers this advice: “Library boards, concerned patrons, and reluctant staff may need convincing. Articles, books, and research that support the benefits may go a long way towards alleviating concerns . . . Include solutions to perceived problems.”

More Than Just Canines

Libraries across the country offer opportunities to read to a literal menagerie of certified therapy animals: miniature horses, pot-bellied pigs—even birds. Pam Harrison, supervisory librarian, youth services, Apache Junction (AZ) Public



Marybeth Kozikowski is a Librarian II at Sachem Public Library in Holbrook, New York. She is an ALSC Mentor and currently serving on the Quicklists Consulting Committee.

Library, said, “[Buddy] the macaw actually sits on the thigh of the child as they sit on the floor with their legs straight out. He really seems like he is listening to the story and sometimes moves his head up and down if he gets excited.”

Library critters go on to include the unusual, exotic, and not-necessarily-certified therapy animals. Darwin and Nancy are resident hermit crabs at the New York Public Library’s 53rd Street Library. Lauren Younger, youth services supervising librarian, notes that the crabs’ aquarium home on the children’s reference desk “builds relationships between staff and patrons” and offers visitors “a different type of library experience.”

From the Barnyard

Playing “mother hen”—literally—via hatching programs is generating patron enthusiasm and reinforcing public libraries’ role as education centers.

Ohio’s Worthington Libraries partners with a local farm educational company for its annual egg-hatching project. This year, the library’s hatchlings attracted about 265 daily visitors, and patrons suggested more than fourteen hundred names for the baby chicks.

Librarian Meredith Richards said, “Helping to care for a life besides their own is a new experience for most young children, and, more than anything else, I hope that these programs are helping children develop a sense of empathy.”

Vicky Hays, early literacy librarian and media mentor at the Poudre River Public Library District in Fort Collins, Colorado, incorporates information about animal care with a clever reminder about the importance of early literacy in their chick-hatching program. “We read lots about how to keep the right temperature and humidity level in the incubator, how to keep those new chicks warm, and our manager even read to the incubating eggs because it’s never too early to begin reading,” she said.

Chicks hatched in the spring at Voorheesville (NY) Public Library return as grown chickens during summer programming to reunite with the patrons who watched them come into the world. “Kids and animals—there’s truly an affinity there,” said Gail Brown, manager of youth and family services. Incorporating animals in library literacy initiatives for more than sixteen years, Brown sees the results. “Nothing motivates a child to read more than to have a genuine interest and to self-select books that speak to this interest.”

Reading with Rodents?

In her article, “Literacy Lessons in One Language Arts Sixth-Grade Classroom: The Year of the Guinea Pigs,” educator Barbara J. Radcliffe introduced two guinea pigs into her



A child working with a therapy dog at Sachem Public Library in Holbrook, New York.

classroom in support of her state’s standards-based curriculum.¹ Students researched guinea pig care and wrote persuasive arguments suggesting names for the animals.

Through their interaction with the guinea pigs, Radcliffe’s students moved from reading avoidance to positive reading perceptions. Over the course of the year, children initiated on their own the transition from reading one-on-one to a guinea pig to reading to each other as peers. Radcliffe said, “They learned to take risks and engaged in literacy learning as they practiced strategies and developed their skills in researching, reading, writing, speaking, and listening.”

“No Live Animals” Policy?

If your library wouldn’t consider any of these scenarios, there are creative options to incorporate animals that don’t require live animals or creatures on the premises.

Mutt-i-grees, a national program uniting children and shelter pets to raise awareness of homeless cats and dogs, does not require animals to be present to operate successfully. The program is flourishing in my library’s teen department. Cara Perry, librarian II, teen services, Sachem Public Library in Holbrook, New York, said, “Animals are a big draw, attracting kids we’ve never seen before, and they provide common ground for kids of different ages who wouldn’t normally socialize with each other.”

Perry and the teen services staff created Mutt-i-grees activities that support a variety of kids’ literacy skills from designing and writing posters encouraging animal adoption to composing letters to state and local legislators advocating support for animal shelters. An added bonus? Teens learn how to contact and draft appeals to their elected officials.

Without setting a hoof in the building, goats, cows, and alpacas are inspiring children to read through public libraries' partnerships with Heifer International, a charitable organization whose mission is to help children and families around the world become self-sufficient through donations of livestock and agriculture.

At the Reading (MA) Public Library, Corrine Fisher, head of children's services, titled a recent summer reading club "Kenya Read?" Children earned fake golden coins for books they read, which they then put into large jars to vote for which domestic farm animal to buy for a needy African family (actual funds were then donated through the Friends of the Library). Fisher admitted that while the kids wanted to see the actual animals, "it was terrific to hear the conversations as kids reasoned out which animal they should help buy."

Goshen (IN) Public Library also partnered with Heifer International for an animal-friendly summer reading club that put philanthropy ahead of traditional prizes as reading incentives. Tina Ervin, head of children's services said, "The kids earned votes for whether we sent small, medium, or large animals. . . . We did not give out any of the small prizes that had previous been in our treasure chest . . . many of the kids had really enjoyed that; only one or two (of 867) who participated complained about the lack." (Funds to purchase the donated animals were raised in partnership with local churches and businesses.)

Partnering with Plush

Stuffed animals are active partners in literacy through my library's PetVenture Kits. Young Sachem patrons can take home Midnight the Cat or Barkley the Dog in a small pet carrier that includes a journal for children to write and draw about their shared adventures. The journal stays with the pet's carrier so children can read about the animal's previous outings with other children.

Plush reading pals were included—by special request—in one library renovation. Saroj Ghoting, early childhood literacy consultant in Newfoundland, Pennsylvania, recalled, "We were renovating our library and were having community focus groups on what should be in the library. I had one for children; they said we should have live animals available at the children's desk so they could come up and read together. The best we could do was stuffed animals, but wasn't that a great suggestion?"

For More Information

Here are a few websites to consult for more information on using animals in your library programs.

- Therapy Dogs International, www.tdi-dog.org
- Mutt-i-grees, education.muttigrees.org
- Heifer International, www.heifer.org
- Paws 2 Read, www.paws2read.org
- Animals and Society Institute, www.animalsandsociety.org

More Than Just Cute

It is generally believed that companion animals and pets have a positive influence on human health,² and that reading to a therapy animal encourages children's learning. But as of yet, specific conclusions have not been drawn, and more research is required.³

With libraries emerging as education centers, let's take the lead in exploring the ways animals encourage our youngest patrons to thrive. ☺

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Newbery Medal Novels

What They Reveal about Class Differences and the American Dream

JONATHAN LATHEY

Robert Putnam observed that social class differences, now more than ever, determine the life outcomes of American children.¹ Putnam reported evidence that the American Dream is in crisis for children born into lower-class families—these children have far fewer opportunities for success. This might suggest a loss of a survival narrative for these children.

Moreover, early literacy researchers have documented a “knowledge gap” dividing children from rich and poor families.² This paper explores recent Newbery Medal-winning novels with respect to class differences and their relationship to the American Dream.

Literature, including our best children’s literature, influences how we view the world. In 2012, subject experts and curators at the Library of Congress (LOC) identified eighty-eight books they believed shaped American society.³

Inspection of the LOC list reveals a handful of books written for children. Titles on the list include *Mark, the Match Boy* by Horatio Alger Jr.; *Charlotte’s Web* by E. B. White; *The Cat in the Hat* by Dr. Seuss; and *A Wrinkle in Time* by Madeline L’Engle. The list also identifies three children’s picture books that have shaped America, including *Goodnight Moon* by Margaret Wise Brown.

Of these books for young readers, *Mark, the Match Boy* by Horatio Alger Jr. most closely articulates our traditional understanding of the American Dream.⁴ Alger’s dime novels, popular in the late nineteenth century, portrayed boys and young men who worked their way out of poverty. Moving into

a more respectable position in society required the support and encouragement of a person who had himself improved his own position.

Mark, the twelve-year-old former seller of matches, was assisted by Richard, a former boot black, who adopted the younger boy as his ward. Richard was a young man who read books, saved money, and refrained from drinking and gambling.

Mark, the Match Boy described a process of self-improvement that included a readiness to benefit from such opportunities as were available in a difficult urban environment. Thus, Richard and Mark attended Sunday school where they became friendly with a wealthy merchant who would regularly invite them to dine at his house.

Richard and Mark were exposed to models of socially accepted manners and speech patterns through social interaction and personal relationships with members of this upper-middle-class family. In fact, the thirteen-year-old daughter of the wealthy merchant was attracted to Richard, who had become a successful office worker at a counting house. It



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is important to note that the protagonists in Alger's novels—familiar with the degradations of poverty—sought a sense of self-respect and decency in society, rather than the acquisition of great riches.

Critics have suggested that Alger's books are of "little literary merit."⁵ Recent guides to children's books and handbooks of children's literature make no mention of his work.⁶ However, that this title was selected by the LOC as an influential American book reminds us of our abiding belief in the positive relationship between social and educational opportunities and life outcomes.

In this paper, I explore class differences between middle-class and lower-class protagonists as portrayed in recent Newbery Medal books. Our sample includes ten medal-winning novels published between 2004 and 2015; these titles are listed in table 1.

Three themes emerged that guided the analysis. Themes of survival, the restorative power of narrative, and the importance of knowledge acquisition were suggested by the identification of favorite books by three of our protagonists. As it turned out, these favorite books were titles included in the 2012 LOC list of books that shaped America. Young protagonists in three Newbery Medal winners identified a favorite book that in some way shaped their understanding of the world. The protagonist in *Kira-Kira* admired *The Call of the Wild*; in *The Higher Power of Lucky*, the protagonist read the 1939 *Alcoholics Anonymous* tome; and the protagonist in *When You Reach Me* carried a copy of *A Wrinkle in Time* in her backpack, which, I suggest, anticipates the importance of knowledge acquisition in academic achievement.

These three books that appear on the LOC list—and are admired by three current Newbery protagonists—point to enduring themes, issues, and concerns of American children. Thus, class differences as depicted in our sample of recent Newbery Medal winners are examined in terms of knowledge acquisition and storytelling—and their implications for survival in our changing world.

Theme: Survival

Consider first what our Newbery novels tell us about social and economic survival, particularly in a difficult economic landscape.

For a school assignment, Katie Takeshita in *Kira-Kira* by Cynthia Kadohata (Newbery Medal, 2005) gave her interpretation of *The Call of the Wild*, a story of survival: "Tonight I was supposed to write a book report on *The Call of the Wild*. It was my most favorite book I ever read, so I thought the report

Table 1. Recent Newbery Medal Winners: Protagonists

Year of Win	Title	Author	Protagonist
2016	<i>Last Stop on Market Street</i>	Matt de la Peña	CJ; Grandma
2015	<i>The Crossover</i>	Kwame Alexander	Josh; JB
2014	<i>Flora & Ulysses</i>	Kate DiCamillo	Flora; William Spiver
2012	<i>Dead End in Norvelt</i>	Jack Gantos	Jack; Miss Volker
2011	<i>Moon over Manifest</i>	Clare Vanderpool	Abilene; Shady
2010	<i>When You Reach Me</i>	Rebecca Stead	Miranda; Sal
2009	<i>The Graveyard Book</i>	Neil Gaiman	Nobody Owens (Bod)
2007	<i>The Higher Power of Lucky</i>	Susan Patron	Lucky; Lincoln
2006	<i>Criss Cross</i>	Lynne Rae Perkins	Debbie; Lenny
2005	<i>Kira-Kira</i>	Cynthia Kadohata	Katie; Lynn

would be easy. The question we were supposed to answer in our report was, What is the theme of *The Call of the Wild*?"⁷

Katie concluded that loyalty was the theme, as in being loyal to good people. The theme of survival and loyalty represented a sensitive issue for Katie and her Japanese American parents attempting to survive as workers in the poultry industry in rural Georgia in the 1950s.

Katie described the long hours her parents worked to help buy a modest house and to pay for Katie's older sister's medical bills. Katie observed her mother at work at a poultry processing plant in southern Georgia: "Then she sliced the drumsticks from the thighs and sent the drumsticks down one conveyor belt and the thighs down another. At the exact moment that she finished, another chicken arrived and she cut the legs off it. Over and over. I couldn't see her face, but the faces of the workers I could see were blank, perfectly so."⁸

The fear of ending up as an employee working side by side with lower-class workers was also expressed in *Criss Cross* by Lynne Rae Perkins (Newbery Medal, 2006).⁹ Judging from the music on the radio (The Mamas and the Papas) and the popular literature of the day (*Jonathan Livingston Seagull*), *Criss Cross* was set around 1970. *Criss Cross* has to do with the psychological development of the protagonist Debbie, fourteen, and her friends such as Hector, who was learning to play the guitar and write songs.

Whereas the small town depicted in *Criss Cross* appeared safe and a good place to come of age in a middle-income family, there was an awareness of class differences and their implications for living a full life. Hector's older sister Rowanne articulated these concerns. She was preparing to attend college at the end of the summer, and she had a summer job typing information into a computer, where she was surrounded by young women of the working class. Rowanne was perplexed when she learned that her coworkers accepted this mind-numbing work as normal—as what you do after high school. The young workers talked about their boyfriends and little else. "Because they're basically nice people, they want to include me. They just can't imagine why anyone would read a book of their own free will."¹⁰ The reader of this postmodern novel

might conclude that—beyond a gap in opportunity—a lack of imagination is perceived as characteristic of the working class.

Theme: Power of Narrative

Let us consider next the power of narrative to provide a sense of continuity and purpose for our lives. Our recent Newbery protagonists appeared sophisticated in their developing self-awareness, and this sophistication is reflected in their keen interest in storytelling, song lyrics, and poetry.

Ten-year-old Lucky, the young protagonist in *The Higher Power of Lucky* by Susan Patron, lives with her French guardian in Hard Pan, a small town near the Mojave Desert.¹¹ Lucky eavesdrops on recovering alcoholics and gamblers—she listens carefully to their stories about hitting rock bottom and, in some cases, finding a higher power to restore them to sobriety and health. Lucky carried in her backpack her favorite book—a copy of *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, a reference to the Alcoholics Anonymous materials published in 1939. This fifth-grader came to appreciate the restorative value of shared stories.

Like Lucky, Katie Takeshima in *Kira-Kira* hoped that stories would help her organize her understanding of the world. The Takeshita family had experienced racial prejudice as they moved from place to place seeking work: “I thought of all those stories I had to read for school and the questions the teachers always asked. What is the theme? What does the story mean? Why did the characters act in a certain way? We whizzed by the pretty houses. It seemed that at this moment I was inside a story. This was the story of my life, and I did not know what any of it meant.”¹²

Dead End in Norvelt by Jack Gantos won the Scott O’Dell Award for Historical Fiction as well as the 2012 Newbery Medal.¹³ Young Jack grew up in Norvelt, Pennsylvania, a town created for people of low income by the federal government during the Great Depression. Jack spent the summer of 1962 helping Miss Volker, the county medical examiner, write obituaries for the local newspaper.

Jack’s family had little disposable income. The father, a contractor, drove an old Chevy truck and spent the summer assembling a small army-surplus airplane. His mother attempted, unsuccessfully, to barter for goods with her neighbors. The father talked about moving the family to Florida, where there were better paying jobs.

At the end of the summer, young Jack perceived a change in himself. Like Randall in Richard Russo’s 1986 novel *Mohawk*, Jack was a thoughtful lad who struggled to make sense of life in a small mill town that by the 1960s had lost jobs and a way of life.¹⁴

Typing obituaries, Jack learned the stories of people who had lived in his community. Jack would benefit from the lessons

of life and history as experienced in a small town—and in the end he would be prepared to reject the authority of his father when it was arbitrary or foolish.

What about stories portraying the working poor? Our sample of Newbery literature provides only limited insight into the hardships associated with poverty. The picture book *Last Stop on Market Street*, written by Matt de la Peña, places the reader in the center of urban poverty. A grandmother and her grandson take public transportation after a church service to a community center where they help serve food to the needy. En route, the young protagonist asks, “How come it’s always so dirty over here?” The reader’s attention is drawn to the decay by verse: “Crumbling sidewalks and broken-down doors, graffiti-tagged windows and boarded-up stores.”¹⁶

In his survey of public schools serving the children of the poor, Jonathan Kozol reported on the lack of literature in the lives of the lower class.¹⁷ Kozol found that many schools had no libraries. The instruction in reading too often reflected a narrow curriculum, with emphasis on drill: “Teachers who come into elementary education with some literary background tell me that they sometimes feel they are engaging in a complicated kind of treachery when they are forced repeatedly to excavate a piece of poetry or any other literary work of charm or value to extract examples of official skills that have some testable utility.”¹⁸

Kozol described the lack of inspiration he observed in these classrooms: “In a kindergarten class, the children were chanting consonant sounds when I arrived, then read without emotion from a story in a phonics book that had only a rudimentary story line and no apparent literary qualities but that employed the sounds they were supposed to learn that day. ‘Who can tell me the main characters?’ the teacher asked them after they had come to the conclusion of the story. Three or four children answered this and almost all her questions. Most of the others simply stared at her with faces blank.”¹⁹

Theme: Knowledge Acquisition

In our analysis, recent Newbery literature is clear about the importance of knowledge acquisition in preparing the child for academic learning. This theme is at the heart of the “knowledge gap” between rich and poor students.²⁰

Robert Putnam described in *Our Kids* class-based parenting practices, including the middle-class effort to build cognitive skills in their children. The parents of our recent Newbery protagonists can be seen modeling, encouraging, and cultivating imagination, interest, and the deliberate acquisition of knowledge.

Rebecca Stead’s novel *When You Reach Me* won the Newbery Medal in 2010.²¹ Miranda, the protagonist, is a sixth-grade student in a public school in the Upper West Side of Manhattan in the late 1970s. Miranda perceives herself and her peers, it

seems, as if they were enrolled in a gifted and talented program. Her classroom works as a team on a scale model of a city block; classmate Jay Stringer is a twelve-year-old genius who helps plan the project.

Miranda is intellectually intense, with strong interests, beliefs, and a dedication to learning. She helped her mother prepare for competition on a television show that rewarded quick access to factual information. Members of Miranda's peer group routinely refer to categories, constructs, concepts, and theoretical perspectives, as they entertain imaginative, sometimes unusual, ways of construing events. In a final chapter, her intellectually competitive mother is accepted into law school.

Miranda's favorite book is *A Wrinkle in Time*, the 1963 Newbery Medal winner by Madeleine L'Engle.²² She carries a copy of the book in her backpack, and for Christmas she receives an autographed first edition.

A Wrinkle in Time anticipated the role that knowledge has come to play in the lives of our children. This classic work was published in 1962, a decade before the widespread interest in schooling, academic work, and the acquisition of knowledge.²³ L'Engle's novel, I suggest, forecasts the importance of imagination, interest, strategy, and the deliberate acquisition of knowledge in our knowledge-based economy and a world transformed by the computer.²⁴

The parents of Meg, the protagonist, were scientists conducting original research; Meg showed an early aptitude for mathematics. Conceptual ability was, of course, essential to this story, which entailed traversing the unknown. Meg's parents administered IQ tests to her and her younger brother, and the scores confirmed their suspicion of high intelligence. Meg asked her father about her intelligence quotient. "That I'm not going to tell you," he said. "But it assures me that both you and Charles Wallace will be able to do pretty much whatever you like when you grow up to yourselves. You just wait till Charles Wallace starts to talk. You'll see."²⁵

Child-rearing practices that promote the development of attitudes and skills conducive to school learning—notably vocabulary development—contribute to what Susan B. Neuman calls a "knowledge gap," which presumably underlies an achievement gap, between children of middle-class and poor families.²⁶

Whereas Meg's parents believed that high intelligence, as measured by an IQ test, would assure positive life outcomes, the behavior of our recent Newbery Medal protagonists and their parents is more in line, I would argue, with the results of recent novice-expert differences research.²⁷ Thus, we see a class-based approach to parenting that encourages interests, strategy, and deliberate practice in a quest for ability and talent.

Dedication to the development of talent is evident in *The Crossover* by Kwame Alexander.²⁸ The 2015 Newbery Medal winner, written in rap, is about a pair of African American twins who play basketball. Josh Bell is the talented dribbler, who seeks to follow in his father's professional basketball footsteps. He is a middle-school student who has his sights on elite basketball programs like Duke or North Carolina. His mother is Dr. Bell, the school's assistant principal. Josh takes school seriously. Beyond that, Josh devotes hours to the deliberate practice of basketball skills; he develops his talent under the critical eyes of both his basketball coach and his father.

Thus, our Newbery protagonists are supported in their intellectual curiosity and their quest for knowledge. Lucky wanted to be a biologist; her hero was Charles Darwin. Her best friend, Lincoln, spent hours acquiring the art of knot tying. He joined a knot-tying society and subscribed to a magazine dedicated to knots. Lincoln, also a fifth-grader, could tie beautiful knots after years of practice: "Now she knew that Lincoln was really an artist, who could see the heart of a knot."²⁹

Discussion

Over the past fifty years, beginning with President Lyndon B. Johnson's War on



The Sound of Freedom

• KATHY KACER •

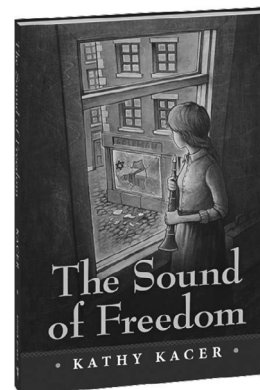
As Jews, Anna and her family must find a way to escape from the growing danger in pre-war Poland.

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Poverty, various state and federal programs have attempted to break the correlation between social class and achievement in the classroom; however, class differences with respect to academic achievement persist. Our award-winning novels were published in the wake of Kozol's 2005 nonfiction book *The Shame of the Nation: The Restoration of Apartheid Schooling in America*. Ten years later, Robert Putnam reminded us again of the role of social class in accounting for differences in school performance.

The implications of class differences in school learning extend into adulthood. The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), based on its survey of the reading habits of American adults, issued a report titled "Reading at Risk."³⁰ The report found that better-educated adults—adults with more knowledge—were much more likely to read fiction than those of a lower economic status. These findings suggest that literary reading plays a greater role in the lives of the well educated. The survey found, for example, a strong correlation between reading literature for pleasure and community participation.

We live in a world transformed by the computer. The rise of the knowledge-based society has made the relationship of survival and knowledge acquisition ever more important.³¹ Those of the so-called creative class are able to capitalize on their prior knowledge and skills to engage in creative work.³² The creative class is characterized by talent, tolerance, and technology; as a group, they are imaginative, mobile, and resourceful.

Our recent Newbery protagonists are aspirants to the creative class. These protagonists are motivated by their passion and interests, though they appear to operate under some stress. Miranda blushed when she was under scrutiny. Jack Gantos, another sixth-grader, had nose bleeds when under pressure. There is a sense of urgency in their application of wit and imagination to their various interests and projects.

As a group, our contemporary Newbery protagonists become more thoughtful with development, and they continue to view imagination as an asset. In fact, they show tolerance toward others who are perhaps a bit different, weird, or strange.

Kate DiCamillo won the 2014 Newbery Medal for her novel *Flora and Ulysses*.³³ Flora is a girl with a strong imagination, a storyteller like her mother, who is a writer. Flora imagines a world with a flying squirrel who can write poetry. Flora's mother characterizes her daughter as follows: "Flora is very lonely. She spends far too much time reading comics. I've tried to break her of her habit, but I'm very busy with my novel writing, and she is alone a lot. I'm worried that it has made her strange."³⁴ Flora befriends the boy next door named William Spiver, who she believes is "truly, profoundly strange."³⁵

By contrast, consider Fern in *Charlotte's Web*, the 1953 Newbery Honor book by E. B. White.³⁶ Fern's mother believed that it was not normal or natural for her daughter to spend so much time engaged in fantasy, listening to the stories of

farm animals. Mrs. Arable was reassured by a visit to old Dr. Dorian. In time, Fern abandoned her rich fantasy life, and she began to grow up. Her interests shifted to her boyfriend Henry and, presumably, to romantic fantasies about the conventional life she and Henry could have together in the America of the 1950s.

On the other side of the knowledge gap, as documented by Susan B. Neuman, are children of the working poor. Kozol found in the typical public school serving children of minority and working-class families a perfunctory interest in knowledge: "Hours that might otherwise have been devoted to instruction are consumed in restless effort to position little chunks of subdivided knowledge in acceptable containers; and the ritual continues often after children are dismissed and teachers are obliged to stay at school until late afternoon in order to compile inventories of the outcomes they have named and, once a year at least, participate in meetings at which every separate inventory must be reconciled and unified into a single statement of collective purpose."³⁷

The parents of the protagonists in recent Newbery Medal winners, including a writer, a school principal, a professional basketball player, a contractor, and a law-school student, promote a culture of achievement, as described by Neuman.³⁸ The early literacy researcher describes the resources that middle-class parents invest in their children—an investment that results in a knowledge gap between children from middle-class and children from low-income families.³⁹

In their approach to child rearing, middle-class parents value imagination over obedience. Middle-class parents show "remarkable intuitive strategies" as they seek to foster the talents and interests of their children.⁴⁰

This remarkable intuition is, of course, based in some interest and knowledge of child development. Imagine what strategies the educated parent might bring, for instance, to the reading of *Goodnight Moon*, which was selected by the LOC as an influential book.⁴¹ A single (or literal) reading of this 1947 picture book would provide the young child with little knowledge.

However, the strategic parent who rereads this book to her child night after night might use the pictures and the rhythm of the text to engage the child in a conversation. Rereading would assure the child about the permanence of the story; rereading would also reassure the child as to the continuity of the attention and interest of the parent. Rereading this bedtime story, the middle-class parent can establish a dialogue of questions and answers that stimulates interest, draws attention to detail, and helps build a foundation of understanding.

An interest in having parents foster learning outside of school coincides with the "excellence movement" in education that emerged in the 1980s. *First Lessons: A Report on Elementary Education in America*, written by former US Secretary of

Education William Bennett, called for empowering parents and promoting their central role in the education of their children.⁴²

The report recognized the importance of knowledge learned outside of school: “We expect—and should expect—parents to engage themselves directly in their children’s education: to read to them if they can, to ask others to read to them if they cannot, to encourage children to read on their own, to meet with teachers, to ensure that homework gets done, to furnish necessary supplies and materials, perhaps above all to convey to their children—not just once, but incessantly—the immense value that they, the parents, assign to a good education.”⁴³

Our sample of recent Newbery protagonists reveals that they are motivated by a desire to avoid the repetitive, unimaginative, and mind-numbing work that they associate with the working poor. Instead, they view the world in terms of possibilities. As a matter of social justice, they may provide service to the poor, as depicted in *Last Stop on Market Street*.

However, consistent with Putnam’s observations in *Our Kids*, the current Newbery protagonists show us little by way of meaningful social interaction or friendship with their peers of the lower or working class.

Older Newbery Medal-winning literature confirms Putnam’s conclusion that there was greater interaction among children across social classes fifty or sixty years ago. For instance, recall *A Wrinkle in Time*, published in 1962. Meg, the protagonist, was joined in her adventure to find her father lost in space by her younger brother and by a fellow student named Calvin O’Keefe.

Whereas Meg’s mother was an educated woman, a scientist who provided her children with a comfortable home, Calvin described his own mother in terms more characteristic of poverty: “In front of the sink stood an unkempt woman with gray hair stringing about her face. Her mouth was open, and Meg could see the toothless gums, and it seemed that she could almost hear her screaming at two small children who were standing by her. Then she grabbed a long wooden spoon from the sink and began whacking one of the children.”⁴⁴ Calvin, who was popular, athletic, and bright, was—despite class differences—welcomed into Meg’s middle-class home.

Lurvy, the hired hand in *Charlotte’s Web*, was likewise welcome at the Arable family dinner table of the 1950s. This attitude of acceptance is in line with Horatio Alger’s understanding of the American Dream in which a family of means welcomes into their home a child who, although poor, shows aptitude and a willingness to work.

Conclusion

Peter F. Drucker saw us becoming a class society unless service workers can achieve income, dignity, and recognition.⁴⁵

In the past thirty years, income disparities have grown, and class is more a determining factor in life outcomes than ever. Robert Putnam recalled more opportunities for children of different social classes to interact, and, accordingly, there were greater opportunities for the child from a poor family to achieve upward mobility in the 1950s.⁴⁶

There is a link between storytelling and survival in times of economic insecurity. In previous generations, the stories of success written to the Alger formula could help fortify those working their way out of poverty. However, in *Our Kids*, Putnam argues that the American Dream is in crisis; the expectation of success may no longer exist as a viable story for children of the poor.

In 2015, Anne Case and Angus Deaton published the findings of their study conducted to identify the cause of the recent increase in the death rate among white working-class Americans. Many had lost the ability to work or suffered chronic pain; many died of suicide or drug abuse. In an interview, Deaton, a Nobel Prize-winning economist, offered the following explanation for the Case-Deaton findings: these individuals, who died in midlife, had “lost the narrative of their lives.”⁴⁷

In the years immediately following World War II, there was respect for the skills and grit of the working class. In Hemingway’s *The Old Man and the Sea*, published in 1952, Santiago, the fisherman, was admired by the boy, his young friend, for his courage, skill, and dedication to craft.⁴⁸ Recent Newbery Medal-winning novels may illuminate the preoccupations of middle-class children and their parents. However, we learn little about the stories that might sustain children from working-class families; lower-class parents and their children are barely visible in recent Newbery literature. ☹

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Bibliotherapy at Its Best

Reading Aloud in a Swedish Hospital

EVA SELIN AND KARIN GRAUBE

This article is a condensed version of a paper presented by the authors at an International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) Conference in August, 2017, in Wroclaw, Poland. All children's names have been changed.

Bringing comfort, reading, and a listening ear can make a big difference. At least, that's what we colleagues at the Queen Silvia Children's Hospital in Sweden have learned working in the hospital's Play Therapy and Library.

Our teams visit and bring stimulation to young patients unable to leave the ward. While we initially pushed book carts in the wards, the loans tended to be few, and the cart was clunky and hard to maneuver. We needed to update our program, so we asked ourselves, "Can we sit by the child for a while and not just stand in the doorway?"

That presented other challenges, such as being outfitted in clean hospital clothing. And since the book cart was far from sterile, the isolated children were closed out from this kind of library service. We decided to phase out the carts and concentrate on books as work material. We would use hospital clothing and antiseptic, according to hospital rules, to visit those children who needed intellectual stimulation the most.

We now offer Reading Club for children ages one to eighteen. The librarian can focus on the child's individual needs and is a follower in this complicit process. We choose books with the child's interest, and the quality of the book, in mind. The reading is naturally paused whenever the listener wants to talk.

The librarians simultaneously study this activity through action research containing transparency, reflection,



Victor didn't like to have his precious Reading Club disturbed.

self-monitoring, and analysis, and we collect spontaneous comments from children and parents. Reading Club is based on the child's perspective, meaning that the librarian will not interrupt the child, nor comment on medical status, but will always listen and follow the child's communication, as stories are told in various ways. An equal relationship is sought. The child can choose to speak or remain silent.

When working with Reading Club, we must be careful and sensitive in every meeting. The child has a right to worthy, meaningful communication. We will not minimize the child or interrupt or moralize. We take every wish seriously.

Would the artful kind of reading be appropriate with this child, letting the text stand uncommented? Or is this a situation that requires more talking in between? What about the pictures? Does the child want to discuss what we see? Congruence and presence are two important words.

We didn't use any promotion, we just started and let the action of reading aloud speak for itself out in the wards. Our different experiences were analyzed, processed, and compared between us. We examined false steps and backlashes,



Eva Selin and Karin Graube worked together from 2011 to 2017 as librarians with Queen Silvia Children's Hospital in Gothenburg, Sweden.



Matthias found Reading Club a nice way to relax. “You never want it to end,” he said.

like for instance, when the librarian sometimes lost the child’s perspective and returned to adult talk by addressing the parent. Reading Club became an experience of moving on to the opened and lively productions of texts and images. Since we already had the library at our hands, there was no extra cost.

Creating Focus in a Child

The descriptions below give stories of different kinds of Reading Clubs, as well as showing how some children—who all happen to be boys—and parents have reacted to the activity.

One little boy, we’ll call him Erik, was just two years old. He was stressed and in pain. The librarian came in and staff members worked at the patient’s side. Erik expressed something with his body language, and the librarian approached, clearly showing the book.

Erik’s eyes were drawn to the book cover illustration. The librarian began reading, showing the illustrations to Erik, and his crying stopped. The librarian completed three books; Erik sat in his bed with his back straight, following along the whole session. His mother was taken by his focus. “He has never been so concentrated before.”

Fostering Parents’ Reading

“Arvid” was two years old. The parents didn’t read to him, to start with. The librarian offered a reading session daily, and Arvid always wanted his parents to do the reading. The librarian chose to stay in the room and listen along with the child.

After a few weeks, the librarian asked, “Shall I come once every week, and just bring some new books for you?” The parents replied that they still wouldn’t read unless the librarian showed up to initiate the activity. So the practice went on

unchanged for a few days longer, when Arvid suddenly accepted the librarian as the reader. His mother commented on the new family habit, “We go through several favorite books with Arvid two or three times every day now.”

“Better when You Came”

Eleven-year-old “Mohammed’s” health was becoming worse; he didn’t have the strength to speak or interact with other people. Since his eyes moved when looking at illustrations, the librarian kept on showing up every day with books. After an acute episode, Mohammed was admitted to the intensive care unit.

The Reading Club continued there, but it was more about being there, holding his hand, and answering his questions.

When Mohammed got stronger, he wanted to explain about his case-history and his development around the diagnosis. The librarian was a natural listener.

Later, when Mohammed returned to the hospital for check-ups, he stayed in the library for several hours talking. When asked about his experiences with Reading Club, he responded, “It was very good. It was better when you came.”

Reading through the Pain

“Simon,” eleven, wanted to express how he imagined scenes in the story. He would also be a critical listener, wanting to give statements about the plot and the lines. “The writer has failed! This doesn’t sound right! Go on!”

Simon and his mother came in to the library sometime after.

“You had such good, varied voices,” Simon said. His mother added, “He loved it when you read. We shall never forget it, never!”

Simon’s librarian recalled, “I was about to enter the room on one particular day. I could identify a situation in there. His mother cried, holding him. He had shaking pain attacks. I was about to back off when she waved me in.”

The mother said, “It might help, we can try!”

“Simon was on his side with tubes on his body,” the librarian tells. “I started reading the book. Staff stood around, working with something on the back of Simon’s body. They went in and out, checking the infusing drip, whispering between them, only using as few words as possible, not to disturb the reading.”

Simon needed continuous breaks in his listening attention, while obviously enduring pain. He would then simply shout out, “Stop!” urging the reader to pause while concentrating on coping. And then: “OK, go on!”

After the episode, Simon said of the reading, “It was good, I wanted to try; maybe it would make me forget the pain.”

Turning a Bad Day Positive

Young “Matthias,” eleven, said, “Reading Club has been a nice way to relax, and you never want it to end. I like the fact that it is someone kind, other than a parent, who reads. The librarians really are devoted to Reading Club, and they sacrifice time and energy. It is a good way to turn a bad day, since it is such fun.”

His mother added, “Reading Club is a fantastic way to escape into the world of fantasy along with an adult who is not your mum or dad. How nice to relax, forgetting the difficulties for a while. Reading Club is one of few positive things here. It’s important to have some cozy moments to look forward to, especially in the long periods of isolation.”

“It has served as inspiration for his own reading. It helped Matthias finding books, and I see a connection according to inspiration. He has become a reader, which he wasn’t before.” Philip Pullman’s work showed up in Matthias’s Reading Club, prompting a correspondence between the patient and the author.

Calming Down Listening

Even when he was anesthetized (and could still hear), sixteen-year-old “Olle” got to listen to books in his room in the intensive care unit. His librarian was able to observe his breathing during the reading, and she witnessed a calming impact. His parent commented, “He likes knowing there is someone here with him. This is very good.”

Conclusion

What happened when we swapped the book carts for the more personal interaction of Reading Club? We wanted to create a



Victor thought, “There is not supposed to be a photographer in here during my moment . . .”

work that consistently aimed for the healthy part within the child. That means we didn’t ask any questions concerning the child’s well-being, like, “How are you today?”

We are now more active, using the books as our consequential work material. In between reading, we discuss thoughts, what the text says, how the book cover looks, colors in design, chapters, and illustrations.

Between 2013 and 2017, 210 children have joined Reading Club. And the work goes on. We are reaching more patients now, in comparison to the book cart years, and the achievement is deeper and more planned.

We’d love to see similar programs offered by other hospital librarians in the future. A children’s hospital is a small and often forgotten place but still a central part of the society. Through Reading Club, life contains the habit of opening books and finding pleasure and excitement. Normal and healthy developments continue and are fueled within the child, whose own practical experience is a literacy factor that they carry with them after leaving the hospital.

Focusing on patients’ and parents’ reactions to this bibliotherapy shows the good that reading can do. It also points out a simple and natural crossover into a new library era, with a deepened and more aimed way of working. 📖

Couples Who Collaborate

James Ransome and Lesa Cline-Ransome

JENNIFER GIBSON

Married couple James Ransome and Lesa Cline-Ransome are a truly prolific pair. They have created a great number of award-winning picture-books together—titles like *Satchel Paige*, *Young Pele*, *Quilt Alphabet*, *Before There Was Mozart*, *Words Set Me Free: The Story of Young Frederick Douglass*, *My Story, My Dance*, and *Light in Darkness*.

While many of their books are biographies of iconic historical figures, the Ransomes have also highlighted untold stories in history, taking care to imagine the lives of individuals with undocumented stories. Their works have received much recognition, with awards ranging from The Bank Street Best Book for the texts *My Story, My Dance* (Simon and Schuster, 2015) and *Just a Lucky So and So* (Holiday House, 2017) to the Coretta Scott King award for illustration in *The Creation* (Holiday House, 1995), and a Coretta Scott King Honor for illustration for *Uncle Jed's Barbershop* (Simon and Schuster, 1994) and, most recently, for *Before She Was Harriet* (Holiday House, 2017).

This latest collaboration, *Before She Was Harriet*, a cyclical biography of Harriet Tubman in verse, illustrated with lavish watercolors, also received four-starred reviews from top industry publications. According to Lesa, the book was a “true collaboration” throughout. Additionally, writer Lesa and illustrator James work on individual projects, such as James’ recent title *Be a King: Martin Luther King Jr.’s Dream and You*, written by Carole Boston Weatherford. With their children’s book careers moving at warp speed, James and Lisa took the time to talk about their creative processes, the impact of their books, and what they like to do for downtime.



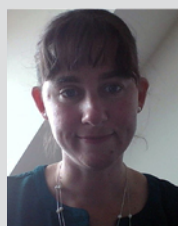
Photos courtesy of James Ransome and Lesa Cline-Ransome.

How did you two meet?

Lesa: James and I met while we were both students at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, New York. We were at a Purple Rain party, featuring all Prince music, and he asked me to dance.

You have collaborated on many books. Do you have a favorite collaboration project?

Lesa: Each book is special in its own way, but our most recent project, *Before She Was Harriet*, is particularly special because it was one of the few projects where it was a true collaboration. Typically, our collaboration begins and ends with the brainstorming phase. We come up with an idea we’d like to work on together, then I begin the research, start writing, work with the editor, and one to three years later, James begins illustrating. But with *Harriet*, James came up with the idea, we discussed it in depth, we both did research, and together we discussed the writing and the artwork. I even selected the cover piece.



Freelance illustrator **Jennifer Gibson** is the Information and Archives Specialist at Keuka College in Keuka Park, New York.

You both have also collaborated on book projects with other writers and illustrators. How is it different when your collaborator is a spouse?

Lesa: For me, the best part about having a spouse as a collaborator is having someone to bounce ideas off of. I read multiple drafts of my manuscript to James to get feedback, so by the time he begins illustrating, he has a very good sense of the characters and plot. In addition, as he is illustrating, he will ask for my input as well.

James: What's great about working with Lesa is I get to hear the story years before I begin illustrating the text. This gives me time to toss around ideas, which usually means a better book. And if I'm really lucky, I can convince her to include a line for an image I want to illustrate. Here is something I never share with Lesa—one small thing that brings me lots of joy is finding books, online articles, or any small item that will aid Lesa in her writing. Sometimes it's just ordering books for her research that makes me feel like I'm a part of her process.

Where has your book research taken you? (literally and/or figuratively)

Lesa: One of the most interesting things I have found about writing is that whatever you think you are going to write about, the research almost always takes your writing to a different place if you let it. I have begun a project planning to write a biography about one person and end up writing about an entirely different person. More often what happens is that I find a nugget of information that sends me off in another direction and becomes the inspiration for another project.

James, your watercolor work is breathtaking—tell us a little about your methods. Do you work with live models or photographs?

James: Thanks for the comments on my watercolors. Yes, I do work from photos. What I enjoy most about watercolors is the rich colors that you can get, especially when you glaze one thin layer over another. I also use the white of the paper to help make the colors richer. But no matter what the medium is, I think it's my compositions that make the pictures interesting.

James, you have spoken on the importance of mentorship and about how wonderful Jerry Pinkney has been as a mentor to you. What are some of the biggest lessons you have learned from him as applied to your own work?

James: I can't say enough about Jerry Pinkney as a man and an artist. The time he gave me is invaluable. There were so many lessons I gathered from the years of visiting his studio. Some

of the most important lessons I learned were how to study and learn from reference photos, the importance of drawing, and how to use color.

James, you've done fine art and mural projects as well as illustration. How do you approach these projects differently? Is there really a division between fine art and illustration?

James: My approach to my studio arts work is very different from my illustration practice. With my studio arts work, I often start without knowing where I'm going. I will place colors on the canvas and look at them over a long period of time—weeks or months before I add the next layer. My illustrations are planned out and they work best when I can envision what the final will look like.

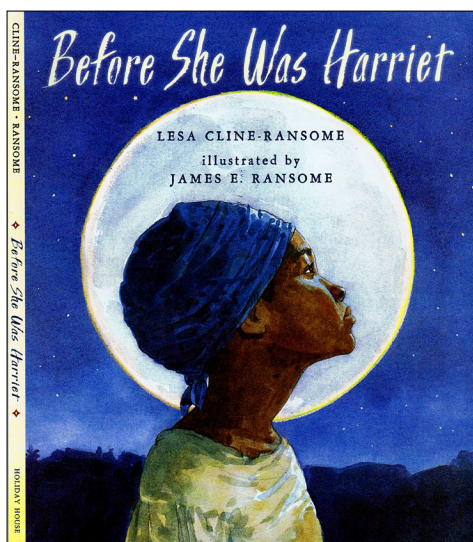
Lesa, on your blog (<https://lclineransome.wordpress.com/>) you write about the flip-side of fears, of using your fears for a positive outcome, like better writing in the long run. It sounds like something many writers can relate to. Can you tell us more about this technique you have of turning fears into strengths?

Lesa: I'm not sure that using fear as a positive is the best technique, but for me the constant fear that I will never sell another book makes me work harder. It makes me read a lot, do extra research, take my time with writing, force others to listen to it, and wait for feedback. I would say that some of the best writers I know are fairly humble about their work, always striving to know more, read more, and grow as a writer. I will be more afraid when the fear disappears.

Lesa, you have written in your blog that "since childhood, Harriet was my hero. Courageous, rebellious, fierce, she was everything the anxiety-ridden, fearful me wanted to be." What was it like to write about Harriet Tubman?

Lesa: Often in my books, I am looking for a quality in the character or subject that I connect to that allows me to write from a more authentic place. With Harriet, I didn't need to dig too deep to find that connection when I discovered her strong attachment to her parents and how their faith in her fueled her dreams. She was someone whom I had idolized for so long that I almost felt as if I knew her. With other subjects, I was getting to know them as my research began, like the start of a newfound friendship, where you are searching for common connections.

Lesa, your path through different types of writing careers, such as journalism, has led you to the more creative work of writing for children's literature. What are some



considerations in writing for children that you may not have needed to think about when you were writing for adults?

Lesa: Writing for children is so much more enjoyable than writing for adults. When I am writing for children, obviously I need to keep it brief—which doesn't mean that I get to do less research. It just means that I have to sift through that research much more carefully to pull out only the most intriguing parts. I am also looking for the defining moments in childhood that had an impact on the lives they led as adults. By narrowing my focus, it helps to keep the book concise and makes for a much more interesting story.

Lesa and James, you have written and illustrated books about many known historical figures, but you also tell the stories of unknown individuals, such as enslaved people who faced enormous challenges to get an education (in *Light in the Darkness* and *Freedom's School*). How did you approach telling their stories?

Lesa: As a child, I didn't have enough opportunity to read the stories of historical people of color beyond a very select few. According to the history textbooks in my classroom, there were only three or four African-Americans who ever went on to achieve success. My books are an attempt to fill in the gaps, provide context, and to offer a broader picture of the history and contributions of people of color and to show that heroism comes in many forms.

People impact history by leading hundreds out of slavery or leading a civil rights movement, but it can also be quieter acts of resistance like reading, teaching in secret, or walking miles to school to receive an education.

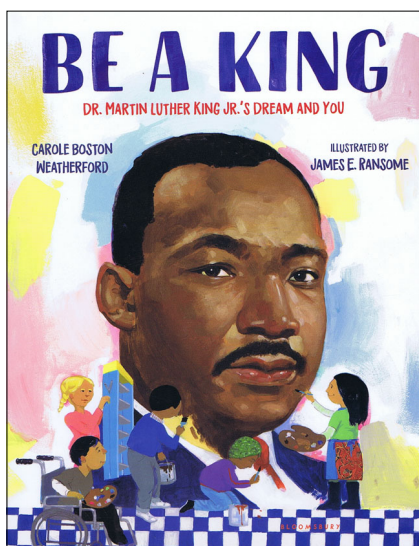
James: The only thing that I might add is that I try to inject dignity and respect into each of my illustrations, and that is

the approach I take with all of my subjects, but especially ones that depict slavery.

Books can be launching pads for some difficult conversations about historical events such as slavery and oppression.

Once a book is published, it is a starting point for more discussion by teachers, librarians, students, and any readers. Have you been part of or witness to these conversations?

Lesa: I believe each book is the start of a conversation. So whether or not those conversations take place at school, home, or on a playground, books have the power to ignite thought, introspection, reflection, empathy, engagement, action, and most importantly, discussion. I do think it is important as an author to have the opportunity to engage with teachers and librarians around difficult topics so that the conversation can continue with students in a way that is productive and informed.



You are both very prolific. What do you like to do for downtime when you are not creating award-winning books?

Lesa: I love football Sundays, long walks, game nights with girlfriends, spending time with my kids and family, my women's political group, book group, the Sunday *New York Times*, and, of course, devouring book after book after book.

James: Well, I'm a big football fan, so during the season you can find me near a TV. I don't have a lot of free downtime. That's why I'm prolific. Time with family is usually how I spend time after dinner. Lesa and I have a few shows we watch, and often when the kids are at home they join us. I also enjoy visiting museums and art galleries. From time to time, I'll listen to a book on tape, and jazz music is playing nonstop while I'm in the studio. And if I have my phone in my hand, I'm playing chess. ♞

A Space for Boys and Books

Guys Read Book Clubs

KRISTEN NICHOLS-BESEL, CASSANDRA SCHARBER, DAVID G. O'BRIEN, AND DEBORAH R. DILLON

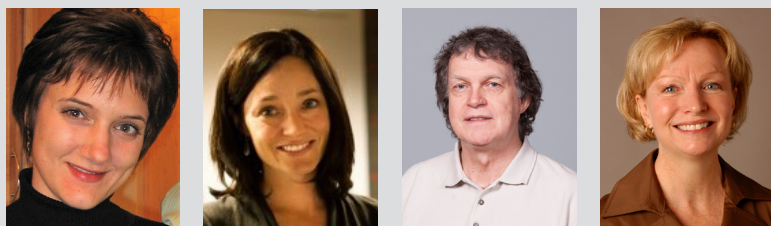
The well-documented gender achievement gap continues to receive popular as well as scholarly attention.¹ Fueling this attention are international and national test scores that continue to illustrate that boys, regardless of age, income, race, or ethnicity, trail girls in reading assessments.²

While we acknowledge that there is a gender gap in reading achievement between males and females, we remain unconvinced that gender is the only factor; gender is a social and cultural construction, and these considerations must be included in understanding this phenomenon.³ We were extended a unique opportunity to experience and evaluate a literacy initiative that was created in response to the perceived “crisis” in boys’ literacy—Guys Read book clubs.⁴ This article offers an inside glimpse into the out-of-school world of boys and books, which can inform in-school reading practices for both boys and girls.

Literature Review

Guys Read (GR) is a web-based literacy initiative (www.guysread.com) designed by children’s author and former national ambassador for children’s literature Jon Scieszka to help boys find reading material of interest to them. GR was designed to raise public awareness of the concerns surrounding boys’ literacy.

Based on Scieszka’s vision for GR, Hennepin County Library (HCL) offers a GR program that includes book clubs geared for boys in grades four through six facilitated by males of various ages in which the participants read books chosen by librarians and facilitators. Founded in 2004, HCL’s GR program continues to grow in popularity. In summer 2016, seventeen libraries in the system offered GR book clubs.⁵ In addition, HCL also offers mixed-gender book clubs and genre-based mixed-gender book clubs.⁶



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In summer 2006, university researchers partnered with HCL staff to evaluate the effectiveness of their summer GR book club program. Over that summer, the clubs met weekly at seventeen different library sites. The purpose of this study was to document what clientele the program attracted; what the book clubs looked like in action; when and how the book clubs operated in particular settings; and the impact of the program on boys' attitudes, perspectives about themselves as readers, and reading practices.⁷

In contrast to the evaluation study's macro perspective, the study shared in this article offers a deeper microanalysis of book-club activities in two different programs in an effort to understand the complexity and success of these boys-only clubs within the HCL system.

Book Clubs

Both schools and community libraries share a common goal of encouraging voluntary reading. Deborah Appleman and Jeffrey D. Wilhelm suggest that, for young people, book clubs can help foster pleasurable reading,⁸ an activity that is often missing in school contexts. Appleman notes that book clubs help children "negotiate the border[s] between school-sponsored reading and adult reading in hopes of increasing out-of-school reading."⁹

In the most recent *Handbook of Reading Research*, the authors advocate for the first time in the handbook's history that "after school [is] a domain of reading research and practice . . . Out-of-school programs and organizations [including libraries] . . . sometimes complement, sometimes extend, and sometimes diverge from understandings of and ways of participating around texts typically promoted through formal education systems."¹⁰ However, the empirical research on out-of-school book clubs geared toward younger readers is limited,¹¹ and the research on library-based book clubs for youth is scarce. One notable highlight in the research is a study by Alvermann et al. that focused on four adolescent Read and Talk clubs (R&T) situated in a public library.¹² These authors were interested in exploring how the young adults negotiated social and literacy practices within the institution of a public library. The discourse of these book clubs was found to be communal, with the adult book club leaders and adolescents creating and negotiating together literacy, institutional, and societal discourses within the context of the library-situated book clubs. The space of the library turned out to be important to how these R&T clubs functioned and the freedom they afforded the book club participants. The researchers concluded that the library "afforded a relatively safe niche in which both adolescents and adults felt free to experiment with alternative ways of doing discussion" and "a climate of acceptance . . . in which adolescents who liked to read could experience both the welcoming of other readers like themselves and the shutting out of those who would taunt them for being avid readers."¹³

The research presented in this paper corroborates and extends Alvermann et al.'s findings as well as provides insights for supporting in-school book discussions.¹⁴ Our study of fourth through sixth grade GR library book clubs illustrates the power of an accepting space for boys to be excited about reading.

Methods

Theoretical Perspectives

This interpretive case study is grounded in the theoretical concept of third space and utilizes critical discourse analysis to understand more deeply the practices and discourses employed within two GR book clubs.¹⁵

We adopt the theory of third space as defined by Moje et al. for use in literacy education contexts: "Our ultimate goal is to work toward third space that brings the texts framed by everyday discourses and knowledges into classrooms in ways that challenge, destabilize, and, ultimately, expand the literacy practices that are typically valued in school and in the everyday world."¹⁶ In light of this definition, the GR book clubs at HCL are viewed as a third space where boys meet in an institution (the library) to participate in a school activity (discussing literature) but with books picked for their enjoyment to read during the summer (vacation and not school), with no assessments and no girls.

In envisioning third space, Moje et al. examine "funds of knowledge and discourse" available to the middle-school students in their study.¹⁷ They grouped these funds into four categories: family, community, peer groups, and popular culture. We were also interested in examining funds of knowledge and discourses, and after our analysis, our categories include institution (school and library), peer groups, and GR book clubs. We focus on the GR book clubs as a third space in which two main discourses intersect (institution and peer group) to form the third discourse (GR book club). To analyze our data for evidence of institutional (school and library) discourse, peer-group discourse, and GR discourse, we used critical discourse analysis.¹⁸

From a sociocultural perspective,¹⁹ literacy development needs to be understood as occurring within and shaped by social contexts in which participants acquire and use social practices and literacies. In other words, the physical context, book club members, and the texts work together to co-construct the GR book club spaces. Critical discourse analysis allows researchers to understand more clearly the connections and relationships among language in use, identity, and power in situated contexts.

Gee offers the "thinking device" of discourses to help researchers and educators understand how they work in social settings in order to create and sustain identities and power relations: "Discourses are ways of combining and integrating language, actions, and interactions . . . to enact

a particular sort of socially recognizable identity.”²⁰ For this study, Gee’s concept of discourse was used as an analysis tool in order to help the researchers uncover and better understand what was at play in GR book club discussions. Our goal was to better understand how book club participants and facilitators drew from, used, and were affected by multiple discourses occurring within the book club discussions held at community libraries.

Participants and Settings

In this study, participants included boys in grades four through six who were attending the GR book clubs and the facilitators who were leading the GR book clubs at two library sites, Plumb and Sugar Grove (pseudonyms used at libraries’ request), during summer 2006.

Plumb Library is located in a suburb of Minneapolis. At this library, thirteen to fourteen upper elementary school boys met three times for an hour each time, and discussions were led by a male high-school student named Peter, who had former experience facilitating book clubs at the library. For each meeting, a different book focused the discussion; the books included *The Lost Years of Merlin* by T. A. Barron, *Gregor and the Prophecy of Bane* by Suzanne Collins, and *Chew on This: Everything You Don’t Want to Know about Fast Food* by Eric Schlosser and Charles Wilson.

Sugar Grove Library is nestled in a community that serves a middle- to upper-class first-ring suburb of Minneapolis. The GR book club at this library met five times during the summer. Seven to twelve boys participated in each of the book-club meetings facilitated by Frank, a middle-aged male librarian and veteran facilitator of adult and adolescent book clubs; this was his first time facilitating a book club for elementary-aged children. At each of the five meetings, Frank selected a different book, including *Midnight for Charlie Bone* by Jenny Nimmo, *Truckers* by Terry Pratchett, *The Gadget* by Paul Zindel, *The Lost Years of Merlin* by T. A. Barron, and *The Last Book in the Universe* by Rodman Philbrick.

Data Sources

Several sources of data, collected during the evaluation of the GR program at HCL, were used in this analysis.²¹ Boys were asked to complete online surveys and participate in two focus groups. Additionally, some boys were interviewed, and several book clubs were observed by members of the evaluation team. All book-club meetings, focus groups, and interviews were recorded and transcribed. Additionally, the researchers took notes during their observations of the book-club meetings. The researchers’ notes supplemented with the transcriptions of the book-club meetings constitute field notes.

Specifically for this article, we worked with a sample of data that was collected at Plumb and Sugar Grove Libraries. For

each book club, we analyzed field notes from one randomly chosen book-club meeting, pre- and post-club focus groups conducted with book-club members, interviews with individual boys, and interviews with each book club facilitator. The field notes are the primary data source considered in this analysis. We used the focus group and interview data as secondary data to support and/or complicate what we observed in the field-note data.

Analysis

To analyze our field notes, transcripts of interviews, and transcripts of focus groups, we used critical discourse analysis.²² On the first read-through, the researchers focused on the field notes, each marking events, interactions, and discussions of interest. Then we shared our observations and read through the notes for the second time together, marking instances of discourses.

This second collective visit through the data was recursive so that we made sure our ideas and interpretations were, for the most part, aligned. Three discourses emerged during our second meeting: institution (school and library), peer group (social), and GR book club. Our third and fourth read-throughs, both collective and individual, solidified the presence of these three main discourses, which we use in our case descriptions.

Case Studies of Two HCL GR Programs

Plumb Library Book-Club Discussion

At the second of three meetings of the book discussion at Plumb Library, Peter had the boys introduce themselves and share their favorite movie. All thirteen boys were seated around a large table in the library meeting room. The doors were closed, so the room—large, windowless, and framed with posters about reading—became a space removed from the main library; the table was loaded with snacks, and the boys were constantly eating.

Before beginning the discussion, Peter told the boys the three club rules: “Don’t make fun of each other. Don’t interrupt. Say something positive about the book before saying something negative.” Then he explained the format for discussing *Gregor and the Prophecy of Bane*: He passed around a bucket of questions that he and the librarian had created; each boy drew out a question, read it, and had the first chance to respond; then the other boys had the opportunity to respond. The discussion lasted for about an hour.

Institutional Discourse

The dominant discourse at this meeting was institutional. The book club was held in the library, an institution traditionally recognized as a quiet space. Taking into consideration

that the facilitator chose the reading material, the format and questions for the discussion, and the rules for this club, Peter seemed to become a teacher, and the meeting room at the library became a school classroom.

Even though the boys were told that they did not need to raise their hands, and even though the questions were read by the other boys, most raised their hands to answer the questions, waited for Peter to acknowledge them, and then gave their answers to Peter. Rarely did they acknowledge other boys' answers to the same questions.

In addition, there was very little verbal interaction between boys. For example, in the middle of the hour when one of the boys read the question, "If you were going on an adventure, what would you bring?" many boys raised their hands. When they were acknowledged by Peter, one boy talked about bringing weapons and another talked about bringing a spotlight. There was no back and forth between the boys; each gave his answer directly to Peter.

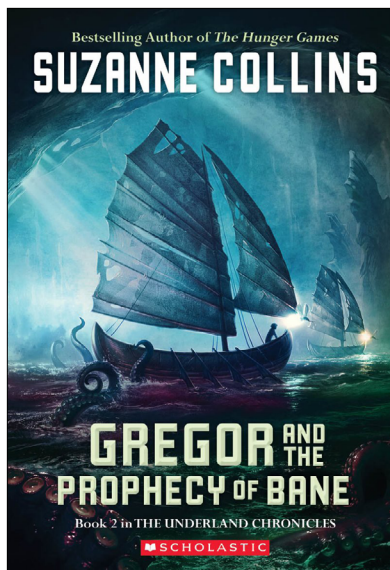
Though Peter viewed himself as a mentor who kept things organized and encouraged reading, he recognized that the boys saw him in the role of teacher (facilitator interview), and he did take on that identity. He responded to the boys by calling on them and replying to their answers with verbal feedback, such as "OK," "You're right," and "That about covers it." In addition, at various points in the discussion, he used teacher moves to stop the side conversations that had taken over the book discussion: he raised his voice to ask a question and to get everyone's attention; he responded to an "off-task" conversation by saying, "Anyway, back to the question"; and he started calling on boys who had not volunteered.

While the boys participated in the institutional discourse by accepting Peter as the teacher and raising their hands to speak like they do in school, they also resisted this discourse. When asked, "Did you learn anything from this book?" most of the boys said no, and others did not respond at all.

Learn is a term associated with school, and while the book club did have a schoolish tone, the boys knew that it was not school and that they were not required to learn. In addition, during the post-club focus-group discussion, one boy mentioned that he thought "they would have more discussions" during the book club; another boy was surprised that they had a bucket of questions: "I thought that it would be just comments, like random comments, what you liked, what you didn't like, that stuff." These boys indicated that they enjoyed being in the book club but were a bit dissatisfied with the discussions.

Peer Discourse

Though the institutional discourse dominated the GR book-club discussions, a peer discourse was also evident. Most importantly, the presence of food created a social atmosphere that could not be suppressed. Even when all the boys appeared to be paying attention, the noises and activity around the snacks interrupted the institutional discourse.



Many times during the discussion, the boys were not quietly paying attention. Instead, they engaged in side conversations—some about the book and others about topics unrelated to the book. In fact, during the hour-long discussion, the researcher noted at least five instances of multiple side conversations occurring at once during this discussion. The boys also occasionally told stories from their lives in response to the questions, and these stories were acceptable in this setting.

Book-Club Discourse

On rare but notable occasions, discussion occurred in which the boys conversed with one another as a large group about the book without constant direction and feedback from the facilitator. For instance, in recalling a section of the book where the protagonist confronts a giant cockroach, the boys discussed in depth whether or not they would be scared of this cockroach.

In another instance, one boy added to another boy's answer to a question. These instances were few and far between during the hour-long discussion, but they seem to be what the boys remember. In a post-club interview, one boy said the best thing about the club was, "We got to, like, discuss the book." Another said, "I liked how we discussed so that I knew how other people thought about the book" (boy interviews).

Sugar Grove Library Book-Club Discussion

The Sugar Grove GR book club met in the afternoons five times over the summer. The transcript analyzed for this manuscript consisted of the field notes taken during the club's fourth book discussion focused on *The Lost Years of Merlin*. Seven boys attended this discussion, which lasted forty-five minutes.

The club met in one of the library's meeting rooms. "Guys Read" police tape covered the entrance to the room, and the door was propped open prior to the discussion. The meeting room was bright with no windows, and "READ" posters lined the pale blue walls. Fluffy chairs were arranged in a horseshoe, and there was an LCD projector on a table toward the U of it. Another table held drink boxes and a bowl full of snacks.

When the boys arrived for the discussion, they greeted each other and beelined for the snack bowl.

Similar to all of Sugar Grove's discussions, this discussion was filled with facilitator-created activities. The book club began with a question from the facilitator, Frank: "Who liked the book?" After a few responses, Frank turned down the lights and projected the author's website onto the wall. The boys and Frank worked together on a quiz about Barron's books.

Frank asked a few other questions about the book, and there were some responses and conversations that occurred. Next, Frank showed the boys a map of constellations and started telling a story from Greek mythology because he believed the author got his ideas from mythology. Then, after showing boys how to locate texts in the library using the online catalog, Frank segued into a preview of the book to be discussed at the next meeting, *The Last Book in the Universe*.

The boys orally generated a list of books to consider saving as "the last book in the universe." After several votes on which book to save, a book collection of *Garfield* comics ended up as the winner. Frank closed with a plug for signing up for GR in the fall and complimented the boys on their "smarts with Greek things." Frank high-fived each boy at the end of the discussion.

Institutional Discourse

The institutional discourse of school and library permeated this book-club discussion. Physically, the book club was held within a library, so simply by entering the building, the discourse of institution was invoked. There was an attempt to break down the institutional discourse of the space, though, by hosting the book club in a private meeting room with doors to physically and symbolically shut out the library as institution.

In analyzing the field notes for this discussion, we identified that institutional discourses are taken up by both boys and facilitator throughout the discussion. The moment the book club got underway, boys responded to Frank's questions by raising their hands and waiting to be called on. This hand raising was noted explicitly four times in the field notes. In addition, Frank asked all the questions about the book, similar to what one sees in school with traditional teacher-driven text discussions. The boys responded to the questions, but they rarely responded to each other's responses. Furthermore, the book club discussion and associated activities were facilitator created and implemented, which again is reminiscent of traditional school structures and norms.

Although institutional discourses were omnipresent during this book-club meeting, they were overlapped with peer and/or book-club discourses. For example, immediately after the "quiz" activity, Frank asked a question about the book: "What do you think of the hawk? Were you bummed when it dies?" He then projected a map of the imaginary land featured in the book on the wall. He asked the boys if floating across the sea on kelp is believable (something that happened in the book). In response, two of the boys said, "It's a book."

We think this moment is interesting because Frank is clearly situated in the role of teacher, asking the questions, trying to get the boys to think deeply about the believability of the book. However, despite Frank's efforts, the boys seemed to reject the second question for its "schoolness," for its violation of the discourse model they as young boys in a book club hold:

"Books don't have to be believable/real, duh." The boys challenge Frank's authority in this moment, which is more typical in a book-club setting where members are on more equal footing than in a traditional school setting.

It is also interesting how Frank chose to frame his questions throughout the discussion. For example, Frank asked, "What did you think of the hawk? Were you bummed when it dies?" If this question were asked in a traditional school-based book discussion, a teacher question would be something like, "What were your responses to the hawk as a character? What did the hawk's death symbolize in the story?" In the GR book club, Frank chose to use you as a personal pronoun and the word bummed. These words are those used with friends, with buddies.

Frank also focused on eliciting opinion and emotion from the boys rather than factual information and literary critique. And although the structure of this moment appears to have a school foundation, the language with which Frank and the boys chose to "do" this conversation are more reminiscent of peer and book-club discourses.

So, the underlying setting and activities at Sugar Grove were infused with institution, but the ways in which Frank and the boys moved and existed in this book-club space—through their subtle invocation and use of social and book-club discourses—disrupted the prominence and power of the underlying institutional discourses of school and library.

Peer Discourse

Although not as dominant as the institutional discourses, the peer discourses are what sets this book club apart, what makes it "Guys Read." In his interview, Frank explained, "it makes sense to have just a group of guys together. We talk



about different stuff [than female and mixed-gender clubs]; basically the same stuff that adult guys talk about together, actually, just with smaller words. That never seems to change.”

The peer discourses present in this book-club discussion are reflected in both the boys’ and Frank’s language. The boys laughed and seemed excited and engaged during this meeting—talking was not quiet as is usual in schools and libraries. The boys also bonded over the snacks, and there was constant side chatter about the status of the snacks (what is left) in addition to many individual trips to the snack bowl by book-club participants. Food is frequently noted in the observation notes and seems to be a powerful element boys are able to draw upon as a peer discourse during the book club—munching on chips while talking about books with a bunch of guys does not feel very much like school.

As noted previously, Frank used informal slang words and phrases in his role as book-club facilitator. At the end of this observation, Frank announced a teacher-like compliment to the boys as they were leaving: “Very impressed with your smarts with Greek things.” Teachers do compliment their students, but this does not feel like a teacher comment due to its discourse—“Your smarts with Greek things”—and the fact Frank coupled the compliment with a high five.

In addition, Frank is a joke teller and a talented noise maker (e.g., the bugle noise in the transcript), which makes him seem at times like “one of the guys.” Elliot said in an individual interview that his favorite part about being in the book club was “being with Frank.” Again, the peer discourses present during this GR book-club discussion appear to inject an informal peer tone to the book-club discussions, making them not so much like school.

Book-Club Discourse

In the Sugar Grove transcript, there are five separate moments labeled as book-club discourses or as “moving toward book-club discourses.” For example, at the very beginning of the discussion, Frank asked the boys if they liked the book and shared that he “was not hot on it.”

In response, one boy said, “I don’t know why. I liked it.” This single statement was marked as “moving toward book-club discourse” because the boy challenged Frank’s authority opinion. Another moment of book-club discourse occurred when the boys and Frank had a conversation about a particular battle scene in the text. This one-minute moment was a conversation rather than a question/answer session that was sprinkled with laughter, jokes, and storytelling. The moment was over when Frank closed down the storytelling with a teacher-move by loudly demanding, “Attention!”

The instances of book-club discourse in the Sugar Grove book club are brief, but the boys’ increased enthusiasm during these moments suggests their preference for this type of discussion.

Summary of Plumb and Sugar Grove GR Book Clubs

Though the GR book-club discussions at Plumb and Sugar Grove had different facilitators who led with different activities, the institutional discourse dominated at both sites. Because the book clubs met in the library (an institution), and because the focus of the book clubs was on discussing books (a school activity), the facilitators took on a teacher role and the boys responded to them as teachers.

However, at both book clubs, the infusion of peer, or social, discourse within the book-club meetings disrupted or challenged the institutional setting and norms for these book-club discussions. The disruptions of the institutional discourse with the peer discourse created space for the GR book-club discourse; these instances of book-club discourse were sparse but present, more so at Sugar Grove but also at Plumb. The use of language by both boys and facilitators and the presence of food was what seemed to undercut or resist the institutional discourse of setting and discussion formats and create space for the GR book-club discourse.

Discussion and Implications

Despite the dominant discourse being institutional at the book clubs, there were tensions between and across all three discourses (institutional, peer, and GR book club). The tensions between institutional and peer discourses created the space for the GR book-club discourse. The facilitators mentioned on more than one occasion that the book club “isn’t school,” but their words and actions and the boys’ actions and reactions often positioned the facilitators in the role of teacher. In the discussions, the facilitators made all the decisions for what would occur—they picked the book, they designed the questions, and they determined the format for the discussions and/or activities that would take place.

The boys responded by frequently raising their hands to answer questions, staying in their seats most of the time, and generally taking a passive stance during the discussions. It makes sense that boys would draw upon institutional discourses in this setting due to the fact that the discussions took place in the library, and they were there to discuss books.

However, throughout all of these activities, the boys ate a lot of food. The food was present immediately when they walked in the room, a symbol of the social discourse and not the institution. In addition, many side conversations happened throughout the discussions, something that is considered off-task behavior in most classrooms.

The institutional discourse and the peer discourse operated separately in the GR book clubs. During these moments in the discussion, the boys talked to and with each other. They stopped relying on the facilitator as teacher. These moments of third space seem to be what is desirable for book-club discussions in that they are focused on the book and enjoyable

for all participants. Two boys offered these anecdotes about their experiences in the GR program at HCL:

You know how in school they have AR [Accelerated Reader] classes? Guys Reading is better. Because when you're reading in school, you can't have fun, you have to sit down and read a book, and if you say one word, the teacher's like, "Quiet down, read it in your head."

I wanted more meetings because there were only five, and I wanted seventy billion.

Based on our analysis, it is clear that most boys who participated in these GR clubs liked them,²³ which will encourage further reading in and out of school.

Research shows that young people understand the difference between "serious reading, the reading that seems to count in school, and reading for pleasure."²⁴ The investigation of GR at HCL helps inform and extend research on gender and literacy practices, contributing to research on outside-of-school book clubs and also suggesting ways to encourage this third space in schools. Through juxtaposing "serious reading" and "reading for pleasure," in-school book clubs can be spaces for students and books to thrive together.²⁵

These authentic book clubs don't just happen, but, thankfully, research provides suggestions for creating such book clubs.²⁶ Smith suggests three themes that adult book-club discussants value: the social aspect, equality among members, and a spirit of cooperation.²⁷ In the GR book clubs, the social element was encouraged via the snacks, and it was evident in the boys' side conversations during the facilitated book discussions. Cooperation occurred very few times during these two observations, and it was in the form of building responses to facilitator questions together. The equality among members was not evident—the facilitators at both sites were clearly in charge of the discussions, and the boys had no input into the text selection or how time was spent in the book club. If the facilitator would take on a less dominant teacher role and the boys would be empowered with a more active role in the book club, we believe that the GR book club would become a more powerful third space instead of a space where institutionalized book discussions that contain only moments of third space take place.

Based on our research of the GR book clubs, we see positive implications for creating "third space" book clubs in school that utilize the themes of a social aspect, equality, and cooperation. These would be student-led book discussions with students choosing the texts and the questions for discussion. We acknowledge that literature circles can create a useful structure for student-led discussions, but third space book clubs include less structure to give students a sense of autonomy to discuss what they want to discuss.

The social aspect is encouraged by having students from the same class choose their books and form a group. Though

some of the conversations the students discuss during their book clubs may seem to be off topic, the opportunity to socialize around and about a book nurtures readers and draws them in. Cooperation is likely to occur because all students in the group have the opportunity to contribute and are equal members of the group. Equality among members happens by having students share the responsibility of bringing questions to consider and leading discussion. Of course, to be successful, this type of discussion must be modeled. Given the opportunity, though, students will discuss books together and enjoy doing so. We saw it happen.


Update

In October 2017, we learned that HCL will discontinue its GR program, as well as other gendered book clubs, by the summer of 2018. Bernie Farrell, youth services coordinator at HCL, said,

When we started the Guys Read program back in 2004, gender issues weren't being talked about or understood in the same way they are now. Part of the purpose of Guys Read was to welcome boys and help them feel comfortable as readers. Your research showed us that we didn't quite meet that goal, as 70 percent of participants liked to read before participating and 40 percent had attended book clubs before.

We learned a lot about best practices for book clubs through participating in the Guys Read research and in our subsequent work on improving quality in all our programming for kids and youth. However, we ultimately did not reach boys who were struggling with reading. I think that this is an area where we can still grow.

As we continue to develop, my goal is that we foster all those elements that made Guys Read book clubs successful:

- Kids identifying reading as a social activity
- Kids experiencing a wide range of facilitation styles and benefiting from experienced facilitators who bring more depth to the experience
- Kids finding more books to read and trying new books
- Kids reading more for pleasure and interest.²⁸ 

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Private vs. Public

Entrepreneurial Library Services for Children in China

JON JABLONSKI

At 8:30 on a cold November Sunday morning in 2014, I met Echo Liu in southern Beijing, an hour's drive away, far from the renovated alleyways and Forbidden City of the city center.

Echo and a handful of helpers were busy preparing her children's library, a library that she owns and operates as a private business, for a 9 a.m. storytime and craft activity that would feature a foreign visitor.

The Baby Cube Children's Library is in a two-story round building. The library fills the first floor's approximately three thousand square feet, and it is filled with white curved bookshelves packed with board books, picture books, storybooks, and chapter books. Child-sized furniture surrounds a central adult-sized round booth with an egg-shaped, subtly-lit dome over it. There is a low stage, with a twenty-foot screen and digital projector. There is a circulation desk with a barcode scanner.

Baby Cube is a private membership library, with annual dues of about \$200 operating in a city of 20 million people that has exactly eight public libraries.¹ Similarly populated, the

greater Los Angeles metro area has more than two hundred public libraries.²

Echo opened the Baby Cube in 2009 in a smaller space. Today, she subsidizes it with another business—a successful children's publishing house located conveniently on the second floor of her jaunty building. As part of her market research and as a service to the community, she has compiled a directory of more than 1,700 of these private children's libraries in cities large and small all over China.³

When we spoke in 2015, she was on track to publish more than 170 titles by year's end. In 2017, she planned to open an office in Vancouver, Canada.

The phenomenon of private membership libraries is not unique. In fact, public libraries as we know them can be considered to be descended from rental libraries that traded in popular reading in Victorian England.⁴ However, private subscription libraries for children are virtually unknown in North America. The only comparable institution is the Books and Me Library, a Silicon Valley-based picture book library



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that caters to the language needs of area children born to Chinese parents.

This article describes common traits and unique aspects of private children's libraries in China based on five visits to China, taking in more than thirty-five libraries in eight cities between 2011 and 2017. These visits included discussions with owners and staff, storytimes, and question-and-answer sessions with parents and grandparents.

Background

Baby Cube is one of China's oldest private children's libraries. Many of the earliest have already closed their doors. Small businesses come and go quickly in China, and these libraries are no different. I first learned of the libraries in 2011 while teaching library school in the Yangze River city of Wuhan.

Tricia Wang, a sociologist from UC San Diego at the time, introduced me to Meng Fanyong, who led us by city bus to two libraries on a sweltering spring afternoon. Before leaving Wuhan, I visited Meng at his soon-to-open mother's book bar and lending library. All three of these libraries asked for advice on how to maximize revenues, choose relevant books, inspire parents to read to their children, and motivate those same children to be independent readers. In 2014, these were many of the same questions that I received while interviewing library owners and parents.

All three of those Wuhan libraries are now closed, replaced by at least six others I know to be operating now in Wuhan. Today, Meng has relocated to Beijing, married, had a daughter, and moved his parents to the city. After working at a state-owned children's publishing house and a Big Data analytics startup, he recently started his own company. In the seven years since we first met, he has remained a close collaborator: arranging visits, sharing his contacts, and patiently sharing his life story through our language barrier. With four other advocates, we have founded ReadingEverywhere.org to provide a framework for working with this community of children's library entrepreneurs.

The phenomenon of these libraries operating as businesses is about twelve years old in China, but little has been written about them. A trade magazine identifies the House of Aesop's Fables as the first membership children's library in China, opened by a Taiwanese investor in 2006.⁵

They appear as a minor category of private libraries in a 2013 article that describes charity libraries and book corners donated to rural schools as the dominant model of private libraries in China.⁶ Privately run children's libraries in China have also been briefly mentioned in *Publisher's Weekly* in the context of the children's book industry,⁷ and they have been mentioned in relation to the political troubles of a non-profit providing library services to rural children.⁸



Participants in an early-morning storytime and parental Q&A listen to Echo Liu, owner of Beijing's Baby Cube Library and children's publishing house, respond to one of the author's points.

Some suggest that the concept has been imported from Japan. The first "bunko," as they are known there, may have been opened in the house of a children's book author in 1906, and bunkos may have numbered about four thousand in the mid-2000s,⁹ yet they appear only briefly in the English language library literature, first in an IFLA presentation,¹⁰ later in a brief survey,¹¹ and finally in a longer study regarding their operation.¹²

The standard model for the libraries is that a family pays between 600 and 1800 RMB (between \$100 and \$300 US) per year for book borrowing privileges. Every other service you would expect from an American public library is on offer—book clubs for young parents, mid-morning storytimes for preschool children, after school homework help, and weekend craft activities.

Just as in the United States, many libraries do not limit themselves to book-centric activities. Libraries also offer local and overnight field trips, birthday parties, and cooking classes. At a library above a northern Beijing mall, not far from the Bird's Nest Olympic Stadium, my visit was cut short by a singing class taking over the room. Quite a few library operators subsidize their operations with these sorts of activities, or they share space with a loose-knit collection of child-centric businesses: art teachers, music teachers, English schools, and librarians cooperatively operating spaces.

Recent Historical Context

The generation of parents currently in their late twenties and early thirties were born shortly after China imposed its one child policy. One year earlier, China had opened its markets to the outside world, starting a period of rapid economic growth. Their parents, the grandparents who I met accompanying their preschool-aged grandchildren to workday storytimes, suffered very real deprivations, and often physical

violence, during the Cultural Revolution. If these grandparents were originally urbanites, there is a good chance that they were sent to the countryside for reeducation at some point in their teens and twenties.

The effects of the Cultural Revolution are subtle for today's generation of parents. Most young Chinese parents have only ever known China as the rapidly developing and urbanizing economic powerhouse that Americans see in the news. However, recreational reading in China often carries with it lingering stigma created by Cultural Revolution. People over the age of fifty lived through a period when most literature other than a Little Red Book was strictly forbidden. If you've read the book or seen the movie *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, the prohibition on books and literature is not exaggerated.

This rapid cultural change plays out differently for every family. Some grandparents are scolded for disciplining children too harshly (and of course, some for spoiling them). Sometimes it is the grandmother scolding her professional daughter for allowing too much screen time or putting too much pressure on young children in the form of weekend English lessons or extra math tutoring designed to improve standardized test scores, which are crucial for college admission for the vast majority of the population that cannot afford to send their children overseas.

During one question-and-answer period in the northern Beijing suburb of Changping, one grandmother sat up and applauded when I suggested that reading time in the household should apply equally to everyone. The notion that children grow into independent readers by emulating the adults in their lives struck a tone in the room, and I made sure to incorporate the answer into subsequent presentations. Sometimes the older generation offers a surprisingly progressive view. The father of a Western Beijing library owner beamed with pride when I asked him about his daughter's business, saying how great it was that she manages a business that provides such an enriching environment for the children of the local neighborhood.

Library Operations and Environments

About thirty children, parents, and grandparents showed up that morning at Baby Cube to hear a story about why there's no cat in the Chinese zodiac (the rat tricked him) and to make soap in the shapes of zodiac animals (which was the craft activity that kept the kids occupied while the strange foreign visitor talked with their parents).

Weekends are the busiest days at the libraries, with Sundays the busiest days. Saturdays are workdays for many Chinese parents, and many children over the age of seven spend the day at English, piano, calligraphy, computer, and of course test preparation classes, so traffic in the libraries is a bit lower.



The author reads *Stinky Poop* to members of Li Na's Little Leaves children's library in Shanghai.

Even knowing this, I was surprised by the large audience and the logistics of the setup. The storyteller used a headset microphone, a scanned version of the book was projected on the screen, and the storytime started with a call-and-response that told me the kids were familiar with the format. This was the ninth library of my 2014 visit, and while each had been different, this was the first that had arranged such a detailed program.

Weekdays have a pattern not unlike the children's room of an American public library—preschool children in the mornings, more on days with a storytime. After the post-lunch nap, kindergartners arrive with aunts or grandpa in tow. In most two-parent Chinese households, especially those of the college educated, who are the primary users of these libraries, both parents work and a retired relative provides the bulk of child care. As the afternoon wears on, there is a slow trickle of primary school students—but few older than ten. After-school activities, mostly academic, dominate for the young-adult demographic and result in what everyone agrees is an underdeveloped YA book market.

The librarians themselves tend to be parents. Some left careers connected to early childhood development to open their libraries. Others left private-sector jobs in information technology, human resources, and insurance. Eighty percent of the librarians I met are women, and quite a few of these are mothers who decided to open their own businesses rather than return to their jobs after their legally-mandated ninety-eight day (longer in some jurisdictions) paid maternity leaves.

Almost every single person who shared their financial status with me reported that their library operates off of family

surplus income. Naturally, some families have more surplus than others, and at times I sensed some tension when I asked about how the library has affected family life for the librarian. Like Baby Cube, other libraries operate alongside businesses that subsidize library operations. For example, Nanchang's Century Library is the first floor retail tenant of its parent company—a children's publishing house that owns the thirty-story high-rise building in which both reside.

The Century Library also distinguishes itself with its extensive operating hours—seven days a week until 8:30 p.m. Moreover, this was the only library I visited with a cafe or teashop on the premises.

During our interview, I was offered cappuccino repeatedly until my translator Klaus gently whispered to me that they really wanted me to try the coffee. Coffee in China is generally dreadful, but this was excellent. Klaus, whose day job is translating for the German technicians repairing 100RMB banknote printing presses, rightly observed that the tea and coffee were exceptionally inexpensive—about one-third the cost of Starbucks—and were probably a loss leader encouraging parents to linger as their kids browsed the bookshelves.

Many of the libraries are on the upper floors of apartment buildings, many of which have retail tenants on the first few floors or immediately outside the gates of the walled compounds so prevalent in urban China. Most of the remaining libraries that I visited inhabited those lower-floor retail spaces. Three were in townhouses. One standout is Wuhan's Eastern Mom's Picture Book Gallery, which in 2014 was operating on the top floor of a brand new four-story bookstore on new shopping and entertainment street, reminiscent of a mid-1990s flagship Border's or Barnes and Noble.

However, large bookstores are in trouble in China as well as in the United States. Revisiting in early 2017, the bookstore now has much more space devoted to gifts and handicrafts, and the library has downsized into a different space that now markets itself as a village story center, concentrating on parenting skills.

I found two not-for-profit libraries and a network of volunteer-run libraries sponsored by a private foundation in Shanghai. The Edelweiss Library is well inside the walls of its suburban Beijing housing compound, on a floor designed to be a communal space. The founder of the library is a minor district official and demanded a children's library and a senior center be included in the master plan for the community.

The Firefly Library in Shanghai is in a vintage French Concession townhouse. Firefly is run by a cadre of two

hundred volunteers and a single paid employee (although that position was vacant when I visited).

Firefly, divided equally between Chinese- and English-language books, was started with the private funds of two women—one foreign, one Chinese—who were no longer involved with the day-to-day operation. My informant, a new mother who is considering her post-maternity leave options, reported that the library is financially stable but is challenged logistically by its volunteer model.

The Smiling Library, founded by a group of mountaineering friends, has been donating money, books, and teacher training in rural areas for more than a decade and recently moved into urban areas. Two full-time employees in Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan Province, have trained the residents of twenty-two housing compounds to run libraries for local children.

All of the libraries are challenged. Qualified employees are hard to find. Library employees, frequently referred to as teachers, tend to be recent college graduates from a variety of fields outside of librarianship. I have yet to find any sort of children's librarianship training in Chinese library schools, and my students at Wuhan University reported that courses were unheard of.

Librarians report struggling to keep children interested in the services for more than a few months. Some libraries are located in shoddily constructed buildings that are not aging well. Poorly insulated windows and concrete walls lead to condensation, staining, and mold. Several of the owners visibly blanched when discussing revenues. More than one woman hinted that her husband was tired of her expensive "hobby."

In 2011, all three of the original librarians I met asked me to return with business advice. In 2014, one of my standard questions was to ask

what sorts of assistance might help the libraries. Most asked for advice on how to expand membership and increase profit. Reinterviewing four library owners in 2015, sustainable business models and increasing revenues were still on all of their minds. One librarian, after losing a business partner, was developing a plan to apply for financial assistance from the district government. By 2017, that library had merged with a private kindergarten—an industry that is exploding in China due to limited spaces in public kindergartens, which children attend for three years. Echo readily admits that Baby Cube the publishing house subsidizes Baby Cube the library—calling the library "a gift for my daughter." The other two librarians who I reinterviewed in 2015 struggle to make ends meet.

Are the Chinese waiting for their own Andrew Carnegie? Someone who can make a paradigm-changing donation and spur governments to invest in community library services?

In 2014 and 2015, the one library owner who shared no financial concerns admitted to being independently wealthy. When asked, he denied that his library was a community service. “I just find it interesting,” he told me, insisting that it was a social experiment enabled by his considerable personal wealth. When I revisited that city in 2017, his library was closed.

The industry appears to be growing but remains unstable. These librarians believe that modern, developed societies need libraries, and if the government is not going to provide the service, entrepreneurs will. In 2014, a bookstore manager reported meeting a number of people at the Shanghai China International Children’s Book Fair who were opening libraries. At that same fair a year later, by a show of hands, most of the one hundred or so attendees at a presentation worked at, or planned to open, a children’s library.

At the Century Library, I spent about four hours with head librarian Sasha and an assistant on a Sunday evening, capped off with a crowd of fifty adults for a storytime and Q&A session. Here in particular, people pressed me for information. “What do you think of this place?” (*Answer: Better than the children’s section of most of the American public libraries I have visited.*)

“What are the best books for teaching our children English?” (*Answer: You should be concentrating on reading as much as possible—read whatever you have access to and whatever holds your child’s interest.*)

“Are these books as good as the ones you have in America?” (*Answer: Many of these books are the SAME as the ones we have in America.*)

The new and growing Chinese middle class has a huge vested interest in making sure their kids get into college. Providing developmental advantages and personal enrichment to their children is the dominant topic of conversation in interview sessions, in Q&A sessions, at lunch, and in all of my other interactions with parents and librarians. China is home to extremely high-stakes high school and college entrance examinations.

Admission to one of Beijing or Shanghai’s elite public high schools virtually guarantees entrance to an elite university—whether one is the child of a party official or a cab driver. All large cities have such tiered high school systems and are filled with commercial enterprises offering children after-school and weekend lessons in math, science, and English—all with the goal of beating the entrance examinations.

Some of the parents chafe against this system, and many of the librarians join them in arguing that the picture book libraries are there to offer an alternative to the entrance exam/childhood development industrial complex. One librarian pointed to the local kindergarten visible from her library’s window and angrily denounced the rigid classroom discipline and

rote memorization imposed on even the youngest students. For these parents and librarians, the libraries are a sanctuary for unstructured play, self-directed exploration, and one-on-one parent-child bonding. In multiple venues, I found posters describing Jane Nelson’s Positive Discipline parenting style. Two of the people I have met are organizing parenting workshops, and even a line of products, based on these tenets. Positive Discipline is popular with Chinese parents because, they tell me, it offers a “middle way” that aligns nicely with the ideas of a resurgent Confucianism.

Future Prospects

This is not a stable industry. All three of the Wuhan libraries I visited in 2011 were closed by 2014. The most successful libraries are subsidized by other businesses or otherwise act as not-for-profits. Librarians report that they struggle to stay open. They have high member turnover as children turn ten and get involved preparing for the high school entrance exam. They have a hard time finding employees who can engage children and parents.

On the other hand, there continue to be new private libraries everywhere I look. Chains and franchises offer economies of scale and logistical expertise. An investment fund that specializes in educational ventures is investigating the industry. Echo reports being approached to open more Baby Cubes.

In 2017, a cellphone app similar to Yelp showed at least ten libraries in every city I searched. Some people believe that city governments will contract out neighborhood library services to those who already have experience in the space. Already, the Capitol Library, Beijing’s public municipal library, offers training workshops for the city’s private librarians.

It is very possible that the picture book libraries are an intermediate stage just like subscription libraries were in the West. Are the Chinese waiting for their own Andrew Carnegie? Someone who can make a paradigm-changing donation and spur governments to invest in community library services? District governments—most comparable to New York’s borough governments—are already experimenting with library services, and in October 2017, I explored several branch libraries in the city of Suzhou that were similar to American neighborhood libraries.

Whether private libraries persist or not, the entrepreneurial children’s librarians of China have created a vibrant ecosystem of library services. Even with their struggles, it has been easy to identify people who are successfully sustaining their libraries, paying living wages to their employees, regularly offering creative programming to their users, and constantly thinking about how to better help their parents and children.

I have to admit that before meeting these librarians, I assumed that general library services for children could only survive as

a government-supported service. If the private libraries fade away in favor of government libraries, will that be a gain or a loss for librarianship? If they persist as the Communist Party continues China's transition to a market economy, what other assumptions about libraries will need to be questioned? What lessons can we learn from the Chinese about running our own libraries? ↻

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Fostering Eco-Literacy

One Library's Take on Environmental Learning

SHELIA SULLIVAN

Last year, through a Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) Grant for \$28,000 from the South Carolina State Library, the Georgetown County Library sparked a shift in the thinking of local young people by involving them in informal science learning activities. The funding proposal centered on technological approaches to ecological studies. The result was the multifaceted Twenty-First-Century Skills for Eco-Literacy project.

This originated from the basic idea of purchasing eco nature backpacks that could be checked out by families to explore the natural environment. The backpacks would contain binoculars, specimen jars and tweezers, scoop nets, backyard field guides, journals, and more. Although geared for backyards and neighborhoods, they could be easily expanded and repurposed for field trips to interactive environmental sites throughout our county and beyond.

Partnering with a number of nature-based agencies and nonprofit groups, we involved middle school and high school students in excursions including forest, marshland, river, and ocean locations. Students visited the Center for the Birds of Prey, the Waccamaw National Wildlife Refuge, the Winyah Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve, and other similar sites. Such places featured field studies, wet labs, scientific demonstrations, expert-led discussions, and other approaches related to South Carolina Science Standards. Scientific staff from these facilities visited our branch libraries for follow-up presentations.

During these ecological field trips, the teen explorers created original digital video productions. Expert filming depended

on learning new skills in videotaping workshops that were scheduled for the students before the field trips. Our public services librarian, who has a background in broadcast journalism, taught these classes.

The teens learned how to use digital video gear, including cameras, lights, green screens, and editing equipment. Interviewing techniques—such as asking questions skillfully and considering answers—were part of the training. The students produced six short films based on their experiences “out in the wild.” These films remain available on the Georgetown County Library’s YouTube channel (www.youtube.com/user/GeorgetownCountyLibr/videos). During the course of the project, the films were viewed more than two thousand times.

Our public library staff creatively wove the eco-literacy idea into our teen technology program at each of our branch libraries. Our teen tech librarian had come to work for us from the video and board game industries, so he had the appropriate expertise for this work. He and his assistant fashioned ecology-themed escape rooms with puzzles and other challenges.



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Custom-made kits included a three-digit locked box, a directional lock, a word lock, a key lock, a flash drive, a UV flashlight, an invisible ink pen, and more. Youngsters also navigated their way through eco-related kits such as “The Swamp,” “It’s a Jungle in Here,” and “Weather Wizard.” They likewise became engaged in game design camps and in a game board design club to create actual games about environmental topics. In so doing, they experienced the twenty-first-century skills of collaboration and team building, problem solving and critical thinking, communication and inference abilities, and inquiry-based learning.

As background support, we purchased ecology books for each branch to enhance our science collections, nature backpacks, and teen technology centers.

Minecraft was expanded at each of our libraries. Kids were able to communicate and collaborate through our multiplayer server. Multiplayer technology encourages teamwork and pulls together diverse youth. The young people worked together to create a new world: reshaping the best of the old into a wondrous novel environment. We also supported their efforts by purchasing a series of related Minecraft books.

The LSTA grant allowed us to expand our current LEGO League Club and establish LEGOs at each of our rural libraries. We incorporated ecology-based LEGO field kits into learning experiences such as “Animal Allies” and “Trash Trek.” We also purchased LEGO robot Mindstorm EV3 brains. We conducted LEGO robotic workshops at each of our libraries with emphasis on building and programming robots.

Bring on the Drones!

What kid—or adult for that matter!—doesn’t love a drone? That component was enhanced by an effective collaboration between the Georgetown County Library and the Georgetown County Emergency Operations Center. We offered workshops presenting information about rules and regulations that govern the ownership and operation of drones. The Emergency Operations Center manager also explained and demonstrated the benefits of drone technology in Georgetown County. He demonstrated how such equipment could be essential during natural disasters like hurricanes, forest fires, and floods.



These curious students study an insect.

We acquired an industry-standard DJI Phantom 4 drone as a demonstration model and for actual use during future times of crisis. We also purchased LEGO Flybrix kits so kids and parents could experience the excitement of building and flying smaller drones.

About 800 diverse students were stimulated by this STEM project. Our population of 51 percent white and 42 percent black was mirrored in overall youth participation. Although a smaller contingent at 6 percent countywide, our Hispanic audience was nevertheless especially active in all programming.

We are, of course, continuing many of the activities, even after the grant period. During one robotic workshop, a ten-year old girl exclaimed, “I am so good at this! Who knew?”

Another student said, “Oh, my gosh; you are combining LEGOs with drones? This is the BEST EVER!” Another trumpeted, “I am so going to be a nature reporter. Is that a thing?”

One eighth grader on the way to the Sewee Shell Mound Interpretive Trail even proclaimed, “I don’t know where we are, exactly, but I like it here!” That’s certainly the quintessence of scientific learning! 🐛

ECRR Outside the Library

Providing Meaningful Family-Focused Community Outreach

Kathleen Campana, J. Elizabeth Mills, and Dr. Michelle H. Martin



Kathleen Campana is a Lecturer at Kent State University's School of Information and a PhD Candidate at University of Washington's Information School. Her research focuses on understanding the learning that occurs for children and youth in informal learning environments and how the environment influences their learning. **J. Elizabeth Mills** is a PhD Candidate at the University of Washington iSchool. She has a background in children's book publishing, both as an editor and as an author. She recently worked as a researcher on Project VIEWS2, a study of early literacy outcomes in public library storytimes. **Dr. Michelle H. Martin** is the Beverly Cleary Endowed Professor for Children and Youth Services in the Information School at the University of Washington and from 2011 to 2016 was the inaugural Augusta Baker Endowed Chair in Childhood Literacy at the University of South Carolina.

Do you want to reach and support ALL families in your community, especially those who are underserved, but feel like you are not reaching them through your in-house programs and services?

Have you tried moving your programs and services out to community locations to reach these families where they are? In Project LOCAL (Library Outreach as a Community Anchor in Learning), an Institute of Museum and Library Services-funded National Leadership planning grant, we found that by moving programs out into the community and adapting them for particular settings, libraries are reaching families in many underserved communities.

Through interviews and focus groups as part of Project LOCAL, we learned that active, staff-led outreach programs are crucial for reaching families in underserved communities and helping to support learning for the entire family. In fact, these active programs can serve as natural environments for the five Every Child Ready to Read (ECRR) practices: talking, reading, singing, playing, and writing. Examples of such programs include the following:

- Storytimes at community day cares
- Summer reading/learning programs at summer meal sites, parks, and other community locations
- Prime Time Family Reading Time
- Learning/literacy-focused programs in housing developments
- School-based storytime/library programs.

In these programs, librarians are incorporating a mixture of the ECRR practices into programs for both older and younger children. This is important because all children, not just those aged 0–5, can benefit from exposure to and interactions with talking, singing, reading, playing, and writing.

In addition to reaching children of all ages in underserved communities, many of these programs enable libraries to reach parents and caregivers as well, providing opportunities for libraries to model how to encourage and support learning for the children in their care. By reaching out to these parents and caregivers where they are to provide support and education on their child's learning, libraries can address the multiple barriers many of these communities face that prevent them from taking advantage of resources that would help them understand how best to support their child.

During our research, it also became apparent that libraries are not doing this work alone. Most of the time, libraries are utilizing partnerships with community organizations. These partnerships serve a variety of purposes, such as helping the library connect with families or helping with

development and delivery of the programs. Libraries often lead these partnership efforts, bringing together multiple organizations in the community, demonstrating that they are an important part of the childhood learning community.

Outreach at Your Library

So what does outreach look like for your library? Are you reaching the families you want to reach? Do you want to increase these efforts, or are you just getting started? Many of the libraries we spoke with moved through four common phases (though not always in this order):

1. **ENGAGE** with communities and their needs. Many libraries are doing this through a variety of methods:
 - a. Surveys
 - b. Focus groups
 - c. Casual conversations
 - d. Census, educational, and other community-based statistics
2. **CULTIVATE** partnerships. Some libraries are building new partnerships to reach their communities; others are leveraging existing partnerships but in different ways.
3. **PROVIDE** programs. Many librarians are offering innovative and unusual programs out in the community by identifying a community location, developing a structure for the program, and taking note of what is needed for the program.
 - a. Often the library will take the lead role by fully developing the program, working with their partners to determine locations, and determining the role each partner will play.
4. **REFLECT** on the programs. Though many libraries are not formally evaluating their outreach programs, they still use the following ways to understand the effectiveness of their work:
 - a. Trends in attendance numbers
 - b. Conversations with families and partners
 - c. Quick surveys

Figure 1 offers a preliminary visualization of how we see the phases in outreach production fitting together. The final phase of Project LOCAL includes a national survey, and we will continue to adapt this model as we analyze the data

that emerges from this survey to deepen our understanding of how libraries are reaching outside of their walls to offer programs and services to families in underserved communities.

Outreach and Advocacy

In addition to reaching children and families in underserved communities, these programs can have other benefits. When you talk, sing, read, play, and write to encourage learning and skill-building, you also provide opportunities to expose your community partners to the importance of these practices, helping them understand ways that they can encourage learning for children who interact with their organization.

Furthermore, the work can demonstrate to the partners how the library brings expertise to their services and to the community as a whole. This may help open up advocacy opportunities to strengthen and extend these partnerships by finding ways to collaborate around ECRR-driven programs and to provide ECRR training to their organization.

Building and extending partnerships around learning for children and families plays a crucial role in community life and the civic good of each partner involved. This work can empower the library to bring partners together and provide opportunities for the organizations to engage in co-learning, sharing their own institutional knowledge and working together to build new knowledge around learning for children and families.

The process of creating a web of partners allows the library to establish itself as a community anchor, committed to providing a strong layer of support that encourages learning for ALL children and their families in and outside of library walls.

So as you think about moving your programs and services out into the community and adapting them to where they are, keep in mind the powerful impact this work can have for the children, families, and partners involved; the position of the library in the community; and ultimately the community as a whole. ↻



Figure 1. Preliminary Model of Outreach Production

Advocating for Children's Rights

Tess Prendergast, Betsy Diamant-Cohen, and Annette Y. Goldsmith



Tess Prendergast, PhD, is a Canadian children's librarian, researcher, and educator. Her most recent scholarly research explores early literacy in the lives of children with disabilities with a focus on the role of children's librarians. She works as a children's librarian in Vancouver, British Columbia, and teaches youth services courses at two post-secondary library education programs.

Betsy Diamant-Cohen is an early literacy trainer and Executive Director of Mother Goose on the Loose, Baltimore. **Annette Y. Goldsmith** is a lecturer at the University of Washington Information School who teaches online from her home in Los Angeles.

Although the American Library Association and the Association for Library Service to Children are international organizations, meaning they welcome members from around the world, our scope tends to be North American in practice. While communities and funding structures in North American libraries are different (rural vs. urban for example), children's librarians often share similar outlooks on children and childhood in general.

However, while most ALSC members work within the cultural context of North American society, it is also important to understand the state of childhood on a more global scale. One way this can be accomplished is by taking a children's rights approach. The following annotated links (many shortened through TinyUrl.com) and print resources are meant as an introduction to children's rights for those working in public and school libraries around the world.

Web Links

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

www.unicef.org/crc/

This is UNICEF's main page of links about children's rights and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. In addition to other human rights documents, this convention specifically and explicitly outlines the rights of children to "special care and attention" due to their vulnerability and dependence on adults for their well-being. It is important for all adults who work with children to see to the children's well-being through these enshrined rights and to determine ways to work towards ensuring all of their rights are protected no matter where they live in the world.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child Cartoons

<https://tinyurl.com/unicef-crc-cartoons> (on UNICEF site)

<https://tinyurl.com/youtube-crc-cartoons> (on YouTube)

This collection of thirty-two short animated films (each about thirty seconds long) presents visual interpretations of many of the Convention on the Rights of the Child articles. Teachers can use these videos as conversation starters about children's rights in their classrooms, while librarians may wish to use them to help incorporate children's rights themes into programming for school-age groups.

Humanium

www.humanium.org/en/

This is the English-language version of the international development organization called Humanium. Founded in Geneva in 2008, Humanium exists to help advance the cause of children's rights on a global scale. They sponsor children in specific countries who need support to meet their basic needs and to access education, among other development activities. The website includes a tab labeled "Situation in Countries" that informs readers about how children's rights are protected (or not) in countries around the world. Even rich countries have many areas of children's rights that need improvement.

Malala Fund

www.malala.org/malalas-story

Nobel Peace Prize winner Malala Yousafzai is a young activist for girls' (and all children's) right to education. As a young teen, she was an outspoken activist for girls' education in Pakistan. At fifteen, she was shot in the head and critically injured on her school bus by the Taliban. She has emerged as one of the world's most resonant voices on girls' rights to education within the children's rights movement. Her story is inspirational and accessible to even very young children who will see a role model in Malala's story of hope and determination.

Children's Human Rights: An Interdisciplinary Introduction

<https://tinyurl.com/children-s-rights-coursera>

For those who wish to delve deeper into the topic, this is a free course about children's rights, delivered over Coursera. The topics include international standards and monitoring systems, the history of children's rights in the context of human rights, interdisciplinary children's rights studies, juvenile justice, violence against children, children's right to participation, and children's rights and global health. Students in library degree or diploma programs can use this resource to integrate knowledge gained into their assignments, group projects, and theses.

I Have the Right to Be a Child

<https://tinyurl.com/youtube-serres> (book on YouTube)

<https://tinyurl.com/serres-discussion-guide> (worksheet)

<https://groundwoodbooks.com/the-rights-of-the-child/> (Sheila Barry blog post)

The first link is a video version of Alain Serres's acclaimed 2012 book from Groundwood titled *I Have the Right to Be a Child* (translated into English from the French by Helen Mixer). The story is a reworking of some children's rights, told in the voice of a child, with riveting illustrations. This book should be included in all public and school library collections. The second link is to a worksheet produced by Phoenix Yard Books, designed to help upper primary and lower secondary school teachers and librarians use fiction to teach human rights. It includes information regarding the Convention on the Rights of the Child, questions for discussion, follow-up activities, and other useful resources.

The third link is a blog post from Sheila Barry, the late publisher of Groundwood, in which she ponders a world in which some children's rights to their own names are not yet a guarantee. She concludes with this beautiful statement that we think bears repeating for all of us working with children today.

So when I indulge in one of my frequent fantasies about how things would be different around this planet if I were supreme ruler of the universe, I don't stop at picturing all the world's children entering light-filled classrooms staffed by well-trained teachers who read to them every day no mat-

ter how old they are. I also picture groups of children being given a copy of this book along with an assurance that the adults they encounter, both in school and outside, will work as hard as they can every day of their lives to deliver on the hopeful promises it contains.¹

Additional Resources**UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in Child Friendly Language**

www.unicef.org/rightsite/files/uncrcchildfriendlylanguage.pdf (poster)

This colorful poster presents all of the articles of the convention in accessible, plain language directed at children to help them understand their rights. It would be a useful tool for classroom and program discussions with groups of children about their rights.

Celebrate National Child Day: Teaching about Children's Rights

<https://tinyurl.com/national-child-day>

This is a great collection of other free online resources to help teach children about their rights. It includes links to information about the rights of indigenous youth and the rights of people with disabilities.

While Americans and Canadians may assume that our children's rights are already being protected due to our "rich country" status, examining children's rights further tells a different story. The United States has signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child but has yet to ratify the treaty—the only member of the United Nations that has not done so.² And even though Canada has ratified the Convention, the rights of all Canadian children, particularly Indigenous children, are far from secure.

As children's library workers, our awareness of the movement to advance children's rights in the developing world can help our relatively privileged communities learn about global children's rights. Additionally, by learning about the state of children's rights in our own countries, we can also work towards ensuring that all children's rights are protected around the world. ↻

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1. Sheila Barry, "The Rights of the Child," Groundwood, May 21, 2013, <https://www.groundwoodbooks.com/the-rights-of-the-child/>.
2. Amy Rothschild, "Is America Holding Out on Protecting Children's Rights?" *The Atlantic*, May 2, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2017/05/holding-out-on-childrens-rights/524652/>.

The Importance of Understanding the Difference

Karlyn Spevacek



Karlyn Spevacek is a member of the ALSC Advocacy and Legislation Committee and serves as a Youth Services Librarian for the Timberland Regional Library in Washington State.

This column by the ALSC Advocacy and Legislation Committee replaces the Everyday Advocacy column written by Jenna Nemec-Loise. This committee is focused on empowering and supporting advocacy and legislation efforts on behalf of libraries, children, and families!

To say I was terrified of advocating and lobbying is an understatement. Before joining the ALSC Advocacy and Legislation Committee in 2016, I didn't understand the difference between advocacy and lobbying. I assumed they were one in the same. This is not true! Understanding this difference will help library advocates become more comfortable and successful in their efforts.

So, what is the difference?

The simple difference is this: Advocacy is supplying policymakers with information that demonstrates your library's value. Lobbying is asking policymakers to vote a specific way in support of libraries.

Anyone and everyone can become an advocate. Advocacy is about educating policymakers on issues that affect the lives of people at the local, state, and national levels. By making our voices loud and clear and sharing our library stories, policymakers are empowered to find impactful solutions to problems we are constantly facing, like budget cuts.

Lobbying, on the other hand, is about influencing a vote in legislation. It's making a specific ask of policymakers to support or oppose a bill that has been introduced to legislation.

A common misconception is that library employees are not allowed to engage in advocacy because employees of a nonprofit or government organization are prohibited from lobbying. But don't be fooled—advocating is not lobbying.

Feel empowered to share your stories and engage with your policy-making stakeholders to help them understand the library's value in children's and families' lives. This isn't about keeping our jobs. This is about providing children and families with the best support and library services we can possibly give.

While we CAN advocate on work time, we CANNOT lobby on work time. While on the clock, we cannot make a specific ask of legislators to vote one way or another.

However, this should never stop us from lobbying on our own time. Advocacy and lobbying, although different, complement each other. Our advocacy efforts will have a better chance to reach their full potential if we take the extra step to lobby and make specific asks of policymakers. They need each other to truly flourish. To be most effective, we should consistently advocate the value of libraries and lobby to make specific asks of our policymakers. Let's make them well aware of the positive impact we make on society and the necessity of our institutions!

Here are a few examples of advocacy activities vs. lobbying activities.¹

Advocacy

- Contacting your representative of Congress to explain how children and families were positively impacted by a federally funded grant, such as the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) and the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA).
- Educating your member of Congress about the effects of a policy on the children and families in your community.
- Inviting city council members to your library to show them specific services and programs for children and families, demonstrating their value and worth.
- Asking your volunteers, Friends of the Library organization, and/or library foundation to speak on your behalf to your stakeholders and policymakers.

Lobbying

- Asking your member of Congress to vote for, against, or amend a specific bill that has been introduced to legislation. For example, asking your Congressman to support the Museum and Library Services Act of 2017 that would reauthorize IMLS. This is statute MLSA (S. 2271).
- Emailing your friends, family, and acquaintances and urging them to contact their members of Congress in support of or against a piece of introduced legislation.

- Preparing materials or organizing events in support of lobbying activities, such as writing elevator speeches that ask policymakers to support or oppose a piece of legislation.
- Attending your state’s Library Legislative Day.

There’s a lot you can do to get started:

- Everyday Advocacy has made library advocacy work simple, fun, and empowering.² Become an Everyday Advocate today and start making advocacy part of your daily work.
- Subscribe to ALA’s District Dispatch (www.districtdispatch.org). This will give up-to-date information on national-level library policy, such as MLSA (S. 2271), from ALA’s Washington office. District Dispatch conveniently lays out the actions you can take to contact your legislators and congressmen about important library policy. This is lobbying made quick and simple for all.

Lastly, the ALSC Advocacy and Legislation Committee will be presenting at the 2018 ALSC National Institute this September in Cincinnati, Ohio. We hope to meet you in person and discuss all things advocacy and legislation. Go forth, fellow advocates, and lobby your hearts out! 🗣️

References

1. Adapted from YALSA’s 2017 Advocacy Toolkit: <http://www.ala.org/yalsa/sites/ala.org.yalsa/files/content/2017%20Advocacy%20Toolkit.pdf>.
2. “Everyday Advocacy,” American Library Association, accessed March 20, 2018, <http://www.ala.org/everyday-advocacy/>.

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2018

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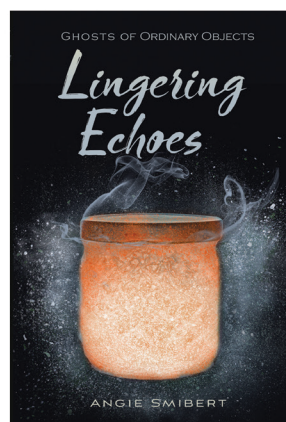
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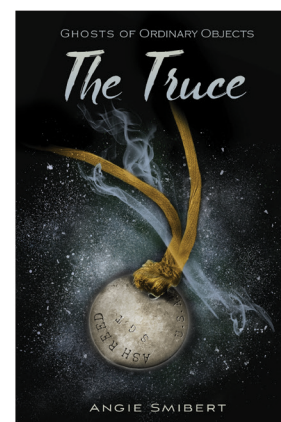
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