

Children &

the journal of the
Association for Library
Service to Children

LIBRARIES

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Storytime Three Ways
Fostering Latinx Culture
The Iconic Louise Seaman Bechtel

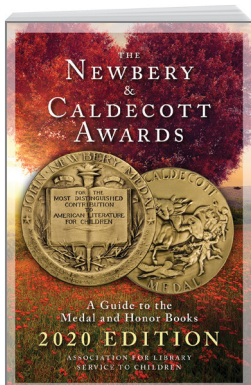
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ON THE COVER: Little Lydia was proud to read a story she wrote herself to librarian Laura Raphael of Tulsa City-County (OK) Library. Here's her story: Once upon a time, there was a beautiful princess. And there was a witch! The king saved her. Then there was a . . . big bad wolf! The king saved her again. And they all lived happily ever after. The End.



Editor's Note

When Everyone Became a Teacher

By Sharon Verbeten

While I've always considered being a children's librarian as being a teacher, I never expected how much impact the word "teacher" would have in spring 2020. With the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic and school closures, many of us became full-time teachers to our own children. And that didn't come without its challenges.

And while schools and teachers did offer online assistance, many parents—like me!—struggled to keep thoughtful and effective learning going every day.

Cooking class? Sure! I can make cupcakes! Science? Buy a tomato plant and watch it grow! Physical education meant a brisk walk around the neighborhood.

Reading, obviously, has been our best subject! We've advanced in our chapter books—a new favorite of my daughter's is *Out of My Mind* by Sharon Draper. And she's also discovered the joy of Playaways—she can listen on the boat during her "on the boat" science class!

But the toughest thing during this pandemic—at least for me—has been dealing with the social isolation, both for myself and for my daughter. Of course, online meetings help us stay in touch—everyone's become a Zoom or Skype expert! But even seeing each other's faces on screen can't replace a high five or a hug.

By the time you read this, here's hoping life as parents, librarians, and teachers will be a bit more back to normal. But it's more likely our lives will be forever changed.

I truly hope that we'll come out of this unprecedented time of crisis and uncertainty with more kindness, compassion, tolerance, and understanding. Wouldn't that be a great silver lining? &



Holland Verbeten along with her vegetable seedlings—part of mom Sharon's attempt at science class during the pandemic!

Children & LIBRARIES

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How Can ALSC Help You in Uncertain Times?

Cecilia McGowan, ALSC President

Now, more than ever, ALSC is here for you. Our member-driven organization relies on your passion and commitment to children, families, and their caregivers. But you rely on us as well. These are hard times as we adjust to the impact of COVID-19. There is no sugarcoating how hard your lives are working from home if you're able to, managing if you're not. How can ALSC serve you through these dark times and sustain you when this crisis is over?

The health of our division depends on our connection to each other. What we have known for an exceptionally long time is that librarians that serve youth are some of the most inventive, flexible, accommodating, passionate, artful, talented, diverse, and collaborative. What makes us strong is our ability to reach out and share our ideas, our challenges, our solutions, and now, our fears and concerns about how we can best serve youth.

Because of the pressures impacting how ALA will hold meetings and conferences in the future, ALSC became proactive in looking at how we could best serve our members when we knew that in-person meetings during the winter event would be severely limited. What spurred this work, however, was a desire to fully engage more members in committee work. What could we do to increase participation when we knew that the majority of our members would have a difficult time attending two conferences a year? In November 2019, the ALSC Executive Committee began the exploration of how we could realign our committees into a hybrid model that would tap into the vast potential of our 4,000+ members. In the process, we would become a more resilient, nimble, and streamlined. The ALSC Board of Directors approved the realignment during their February 20, 2020, online meeting. What does hybrid mean? The committee will engage in online meetings through the year with the hope that most committees will meet in person during the ALA Annual Conference (strongly encouraged, but not required). Book and media committees will continue to have face-to-face meetings, as currently required. We will transition to the new model with the new committee service year on July 1, 2020.

As we all know, Annual Conference has been cancelled due to COVID-19. This doesn't mean that our committees and board will not meet. We will—just not in person! Committees are asked to meet online to complete the work of their service year. Resources for virtual meetings are available on the ALSC website (www.ala.org/alsc) under Committee Resources. We are in the process of setting up our Board of Directors, Membership, and other governance meetings to take place over the next several months. The Membership committee is looking at developing ALSC 101 as an online networking event later this year, and as something to offer going forward to maximize engagement with members and potential members throughout the year. As the schedule firms up, it will be posted to the ALSC Conferences & Events page (www.ala.org/alsc/confevents). Please join us online for our meetings—we need your input! Additionally, staff are working to shift the planned educational content from Annual Conference into online courses and webinars. We are committed to offering quality professional development.

So now I'm turning to you. What are your ideas, your hopes, and your dreams, for making ALSC more inclusive, collaborative, and productive, particularly as we look to the future? Please reach out and let me know your thoughts, and we'll find a way to share them with other members.

Thank you for your membership, and your service to every person, not just youth, be it online or in person. Your work and service matters. And thank you for your support and encouragement. I'm honored to have been your president this year. &



Cecilia McGowan worked for more than thirty years as a Children's Librarian as well as Children and Youth Services Coordinator for several library systems. She is currently a library and garden consultant and avid traveler.

Welcoming to All

Latinx Culture and Programming: Notes from Latinx Librarians

CRISTINA MITRA, EDWIN RODARTE, MARIA ESTRELLA, AND LETTYCIA TERRONES

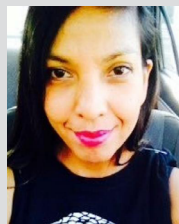
ALSC prioritizes children's services and programming to diverse communities. And while ALSC provides guidelines and tangible resources, children's librarians are still often confronted with not only actualizing library services that support our most vulnerable communities, but also ensuring that our efforts empower our communities and do not result in perpetuating recursive barriers to access.

But what do we mean by diversity exactly? What are the subtexts and intentions informing what we call "diversity"? Why must we resist "diversity" becoming an empty signifier, as Sandra Rios Balderrama's prescient 2000 essay, "This Trend Called Diversity," emphasized. Indeed, what composes the

everyday work of librarians that embraces "the risk, ambiguities, and tension [and] expenditure of their time . . . [when we] put into practice this value called diversity"?

Moreover, how can we ensure that these guidelines and resources bring about vital and meaningful community engagement? How might we attend to specific ways of thinking about diversity without losing sight of how our library service for children can also be capacious in attending to and welcoming all?

This article attempts to answer these important questions by examining what diversity looks like through the lens of



Cristina E. Mitra is the Family Engagement Coordinator for San Francisco Public Library, curating system-wide cultural and STEM programs. She has been an active member of ALSC since 2014, and most recently served on the 2020 Pura Belpré Book Award. **Edwin Rodarte** is the Senior Librarian of Emerging Technologies at the Los Angeles Public Library (LAPL). He leads and oversees technology-related programs and their implementation.

He is part of LAPL's internal Spanish Language Translations committee. He is the current Technology Chair for REFORMA and a co-chair of California Library Association's Latino Services Interest Group. **Maria F. Estrella**, MLIS, is a Dyad Public Services Manager for the Cleveland Public Library Garden Valley and Woodland branches. She has over twenty years of library experience working in an urban library system and was a Children's Librarian and Youth Services Subject Department Librarian for eight years. Maria served on the 2016 ALSC/REFORMA Pura Belpré Book Award Committee, the ALSC 2019 Excellence in Early Learning Digital Media Committee, 2021 Coretta Scott King Book Awards Jury, and is currently the Chair of REFORMA's Children's and Young Adult Services Committee (CAYASC). **Lettycia Terrones** is a doctoral student in Information Sciences and Latina/o Studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, where she researches picturebooks and children's literature by and about Latinx peoples. Lettycia is a student representative of the American Studies Association (ASA), a member of Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social (MALCS), Association for Library Services to Children (ALSC), and REFORMA's Children's & Young Adult Services Committee (CAYASC). She has served on the Ezra Jack Keats Book Award and Pura Belpré Award committees and currently reviews for *The Horn Book Magazine*. She will serve on the Coretta Scott King Awards Jury for the 2020–22 term.

children's library services that center Latinx communities. Cristina Mitra, Edwin Rodarte, and Maria Estrella, librarians in three major public library systems, describe how their libraries are responding to the wide cultural diversity found within Latinx communities by creating tangible and engaging programs for children and families.

Mitra, a member of REFORMA's Children's and Young Adult Services Committee (CAYASC), walks us through her library's empowering Latinx cultural programming. She describes a process for engaging library staff in learning about the geographic, linguistic, and ethnic diversity among Latinx peoples in the Bay Area.

Rodarte of Los Angeles Public Library outlines a new system-wide Spanish-language translation initiative that offers communication support for local branch children's programming. In addition, he reports on the wildly successful Los Angeles Libros Festival, a free, bilingual, family-friendly book festival, which featured many youth literature authors and illustrators.

Estrella, in her role as the chair of REFORMA's Children's and Young Adult Services Committee, describes culturally specific Latinx children's programming that promotes cultural awareness and participation across sectors, from library staff to patrons and the wider community.

"¡VIVA!" at SFPL

Considering the growing population of Latinx communities throughout the United States, many children's librarians might be wondering how to expand on programming that was previously targeted to certain demographics. How might we empower staff of diverse heritages to initiate and offer Latinx programs? What resources are available to support system-wide Latinx programming even if this demographic may not necessarily reflect the majority population of our communities? How do we get staff to step outside our perceived service areas?

San Francisco Public Library (SFPL) has been on a deliberate path to answer these very questions and unite our library system across Latinx cultural programming. One source of pride is ¡VIVA!—an annual celebration of Latino Hispanic heritage, cultures, and traditions. The noun *viva* not only connotes joy and celebration, it literally also means "cheer." These are the very characteristics that we hoped to emanate in our Latinx programming.

¡VIVA! first launched in 2013 with more than fifty system-wide thematic programs for youth and adults. Since then, we have seen the interest and confidence of our librarians increase to include programming in every neighborhood of San Francisco, whether or not a numerically significant Latinx or Spanish-speaking population resides there. Whereas in the past, Latinx-specific programming was conducted

primarily during Latino Heritage Month in branches with primarily Latinx and Spanish-speaking populations, ¡VIVA! now engages the entire San Francisco community. From September through early November, ¡VIVA! sustained a lively citywide extravaganza of almost 150 programs for all ages in every neighborhood in San Francisco, at each of our twenty-eight locations.

The impulse for creating ¡VIVA! emerged from the work of our Community Programs & Partnerships (CPP)—a newer unit within our system instrumental in our ability to advance our cultural programming. A committed staff that includes SFPL's youth services manager and youth services coordinators provide training and technical support to develop and deliver cultural programming at each of our branches. In addition, SFPL has committed to a dedicated budget for every one of our twenty-seven branches and our main library to host one youth ¡VIVA! program. These combined efforts have tripled our ¡VIVA! event offerings since 2013.

The CPP unit oversees the Cultural Awareness Committee, which brings together SFPL's strongest programmers from many different points of service, including those with expertise for affinity groups, which include LGBTQIA focus, service to the African American community, and more. With so many stakeholders at the table, we are able to generate enthusiasm from many angles within our large urban library system.

Additionally, the Youth Services team has taken conscious steps toward inclusion of all staff to learn about culturally authentic Latinx programming. For example, the Youth Services team hosted a training in 2017 with local Bay Area artist Anita de Lucio, whose Día de los Muertos altar programs have been part of SFPL for more than a decade.

To empower staff, she trained thirty-five youth services librarians in how to host a community altar-making workshop with cultural competence. In the past, only three branch locations would typically host Día de los Muertos programs. Anita's training empowered seventeen locations to host a program. In assessing our Latinx cultural competence training, like Anita's workshop, we found our staff eager to offer cultural programs. Empowering them with the skills to do so with confidence, has made all the difference.

As we reflect on the successes of our past, we continually look to the future. What lies ahead for SFPL is a desire to continually expand culturally specific programming, particularly in increased representation of Central American, South American, and Caribbean peoples and cultures. Generally speaking, our librarians are comfortable offering programs rooted in Mexican culture. However, we want our staff and patrons to understand the complexity and diversity within Latinx communities and its diversity in terms of history, language, culture and traditions. ¡VIVA! opens a space for us to build upon our existing strengths in culturally specific programming and make room for all patrons in our community.

Comprehensive Approaches at LAPL

The Los Angeles Public Library (LAPL) serves the largest and most diverse urban population of any library in the nation. As such, its programs have to reflect the diversity in its community. With a population of more than 48 percent Latino and with a Spanish-speaking population of 42.6 percent according to the American Community Survey, services to Latinos and the Spanish-speaking is a priority.²

As such, LAPL has responded to the literacy and information needs of its Latinx communities by creating interconnecting and collaborative efforts across its departments to help promote and expand services.

The first arm of this collaborative vision involved creating an Internal Spanish Language Translations Team. Supported by a bilingual language pay differential, this internal team of librarians are responsible for producing and distributing systemwide Spanish-language translations as well as original content in Spanish. The team fulfills the need to provide high-quality, consistent, and accurate information in the Spanish language to LAPL's library users.

The team is composed of librarians who, like our patrons, identify as Latinx and who come from a variety of cultural, linguistic, and educational backgrounds. The Latinx diversity of the team enriches the often subtle and complex work involved in translation and content production. The Translations Team creates original content in Spanish as well as translates policies, flyers, forms, brochures, webpages, and more for the entire system to ensure standardization and accuracy as well as cultural relevance.

The team also reviews translations and advertisements created by contractors for the library. In this way, the Spanish Language Translations Team helps LAPL reach its Spanish-speaking patrons and fulfill its mission to enrich, educate, and empower every individual in their city's diverse communities.

Spanish-Language Social Media and Content Creation

LAPL has established a dedicated Spanish-language Twitter account to promote and normalize Spanish and bilingual language events at the library. Additionally, staff creates Spanish-language content via quirky and personal blog posts, music playlists, and booklists. This rich social media showcases and distributes new book and material titles and staff picks monthly, both internally and via published content on LAPL's website.

Bilingual Outreach Librarians

Los Angeles is known for its culturally rich and ethnically specific neighborhoods. LAPL's Bilingual Outreach Librarians (BOLs) keep the pulse of these unique and varied

neighborhoods attending to the specific needs of these diverse communities. A team of five dedicated bilingual librarians span the wide geographic service areas of Los Angeles, providing outreach to Spanish-speaking communities via events, programs, and partnerships. Each BOL is assigned to a particular region of the city and works with branch libraries in each of LAPL's regions to better understand and communicate with their local community.

Los Angeles Libros Festival

A recent addition to LAPL's bilingual programming is the LA Libros Festival, a literary festival at the Central Library that celebrates books and culture "*en dos idiomas*." Celebrating oral and written traditions, the festival featured stories and music from Latin America—including México, Guatemala, El Salvador, Cuba, Colombia—and the United States. Through a high-quality interdisciplinary program, the day-long festival created an inclusive cultural space that engaged and inspired current and future generations of bilingual Angelenos. This program was a partnership with organizations such as REFORMA and LA Librería, a local Spanish-language children's bookstore, and included staff from across the library system.

REFORMA's Children in Crisis Project

Opportunities to impact the Los Angeles community come in many ways. Most recently, members of REFORMA's Los Angeles chapter have expanded their work with the Children in Crisis project. As part of both REFORMA and LAPL, I had the privilege to volunteer as an interpreter with Kids in Need of Defense (KIND), helping attorneys communicate with children and teens seeking asylum or immigration assistance, many of whom had been detained at the border. This sort of experience brings such fulfillment and tells the story of the work and impact we can have in our communities if we put our skills and resources to good use. Overall, LAPL strives to reflect and welcome the best of our community.

REFORMA's CAYACS Recommendations for Latinx Children's Programming

From its inception, REFORMA has centered the important role youth librarians play in cultivating lifelong learning opportunities for children, teens, and families. The work of its Children's and Young Adult Services Committee (CAYASC) continues to connect literacy and education to library services that promote cultural awareness and understanding of the ethnic, geographic, and cultural diversity within the Latinx community. María Estrella, chair of CAYASC, offers the following recommendations to provide youth librarians with ideas to successfully facilitate culturally competent programs while building strong alliances in the neighborhoods they serve and instill pride.

Parranda Navideña en la Biblioteca

A *parranda* is a Puerto Rican social event that features traditional holiday music and food during the holiday season. To launch a *parranda*, consider how your public library system could partner with a local traditional music group and cater traditional foods from a neighborhood Puerto Rican restaurant or bakery. Consider where Puerto Rican communities live in proximity to your library and create marketing and outreach materials to promote the *parranda* as a popular family event.

During the event, the library system could informally update families of the various services the library system provides for Spanish-speaking residents, such as a bilingual collection for all ages (book displays), English as a Second Language classes, or a language learning database. It could also provide a safe environment where new residents who fear or mistrust public institutions could connect to the public library as a place that changes people's lives and forms an important foundation for their future success.

Pintar Maravillas

Many established library programs can be made more welcoming and culturally specific. Inspired by the popular Paint Nite events, *Pintar Maravillas* has a Latinx flavor. The program allows young library patrons of any skill level to recreate beautiful paintings inspired by a famous Latinx or Spanish artist, such as Frida Kahlo, Pablo Picasso, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Diego Rivera, Francisco Goya, Salvador Dali, and Fernando Botero. A book display of the famous painters during the event can further spark interest. For the display, consider award-winning picturebooks created by Latinx and African American authors and illustrators such as Yuyi Morales's *Viva Frida* (2014), Javaka Steptoe's *Radiant Child: The Story of Young Artist Jean-Michel Basquiat* (2016), or Duncan Tonatiuh's *Funny Bones: Posada and His Day of the Dead Calaveras* (2015).

References

1. Sandra Ríos-Balderrama, "This Trend Called Diversity," *Library Trends* 49, no. 1 (2000): 194–214.
2. U.S. Census Bureau, 2013–17 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, "Language Spoken At Home," 2017,

Latinx Superhero Showcase

Free Comic Book Day or any day is perfect for introducing young participants to Latinx superheroes, such as White Tiger (Hector Ayala), Firebird (Bonita Juarez), Miss America (America Chavez), and Miles Morales (Spider-Man). Ricardo Padilla and Javier Hernandez, cofounders of the Latino Comics Expo, maintain a content-rich Twitter page (@LatinoComicsExpo) that draws Latinx comics creators, fans, and nonprofit arts, writing, and mentoring organizations such as @DSTLArts (Develop Skills & Transcend Limits through the Arts) around comics and zine-making. The Latino Comics Expo is organizing its 2020 events, with updates listed on their website <http://latinocomicsexpo.com>. Find more inspiration and history about Latinx contributions to comics in literary scholar Frederick Luis Aldama's book, *Latinx Superheroes in Mainstream Comics* (2017).

Bilingual Storytime

Storytime is conducted primarily in English and has bilingual (Spanish/English) nursery rhymes, songs, and books. Children ages five and younger are invited to attend with their caregivers, with sessions usually lasting approximately twenty to twenty-five minutes. Librarians interested in starting this type of program can explore these basic resources:

1. *Diez Deditos and Other Play Rhymes and Action Songs from Latin America* (Puffin, 2002) by Jose-Luis Orozco for traditional songs in Spanish to incorporate into programs.
2. ALSC's Pura Belpré Book Award homepage (www.ala.org/alsc/awardsgrants/bookmedia/belpremedal) for culturally authentic texts in English and Spanish.
3. Digital media such as Canticos Apps (<https://canticosworld.com/apps>), which are a fun way to introduce children to early literacy concepts like numbers and shapes in two languages.
4. *Once Upon a Cuento: Bilingual Storytimes in English and Spanish* (ALA Editions, 2016) by Jamie Campbell Naidoo and Katie Scherrer for an overview of bilingual storytime. &

<https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?g=1600000US0644000&tid=ACST5Y2017.S1601&q=S1601>.

Storytime, Three Ways

From Razzle-Dazzle to Library Giants

LAURA RAPHAEL

Once upon a time, I worked in adult services at my large urban library. I thought about library storytime as most adult services librarians do—which is to say (1) not very often and (2) mostly something done to entertain wiggly kids I rarely interacted with.

I had vague notions that storytimes involved children’s librarians as circus ringmasters of sorts, singing and reading stories and doing skits with puppets. In other words, I had a one-dimensional conception of storytime, or what I’m calling Storytime Number One—a razzle-dazzle good time for children that involves songs and reading books. I also vaguely remembered seeing children’s librarians lugging puppets and craft supplies and, once, a tub of animal crackers, into the storytime room.

But then . . . my whole library world changed, and with it, my understanding of storytime. When my large urban library closed for renovation, I was shuttled off to a small suburban branch library. Two weeks before moving there, I was cheerfully informed that I would be doing baby storytimes.

Of course!, was my first wry reaction. *I’ve been almost exclusively working with adults for ten years, so naturally—babies!*

Fortunately, my philosophy has always been some version of, “blessed are the flexible because they will never get bent out of shape,” so I was game. If babies needed the storytime razzle-dazzle, then I would razzle-dazzle babies! I would get out the books and the puppets and maybe a tub of animal crackers (*do babies eat animal crackers?*) and set about re-creating the kind of storytime I vaguely understood.



Librarian Laura Raphael and her little literary friend Lydia.

Fortunately, I was introduced to a different kind of storytime, which I’ll call Storytime Number Two, by my new temporary manager. She had a background in children’s services, and one of the first things she said was, “You know that storytimes aren’t primarily about the kids, right?”

She quickly informed me that while it was important to connect with children in storytime (thus the puppets, and the songs, and the razzle-dazzle of Storytime Number One), our larger goal as children’s professionals was to teach parents and caregivers to help children develop literacy and language skills.

With her bibliography in hand, I went on a deep dive, starting with ALSC’s Every Child Ready to Read (ECRR) initiative materials and expanding into the incredible world of early literacy enhanced storytimes that my library colleagues had developed over the years.



Laura Raphael earned an MA in English Literature from Northeastern State University as well as an MLIS from the University of Oklahoma. She has worked in public libraries since 2001 in various capacities, most recently as Children’s Services Coordinator for the Tulsa City-County (OK) Library system. Storytime remains one of her favorite professional activities, and she still remembers every word and action to “A Tooty Ta Ta.”

Oh, and then I planned and executed my very first baby storytime! My first attempts at providing early literacy tips were shaky and either too short to be effective or too long to be interesting, but with time, practice, and, most importantly, the guidance of my online early literacy librarian friends, I started to get it.

Sure, my rendition of “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star” would never win a Grammy, but now I knew that storytime wasn’t a performance, and that it was the singing itself that counted—that babies were learning the sounds of the English language, and that, with my help, parents would begin to understand that singing was a foundational part of literacy and how to incorporate songs throughout the day.

I cannot overstate how understanding storytime as a place to demonstrate effective early literacy practice and to share these ideas with parents (Storytime Number Two) completely transformed what I did every Wednesday morning from 10:30 to 11 a.m. during my Central Library exile.

Every week was an opportunity for me to learn more and share what I was learning with the big people in my storytime room.

I incorporated the opening welcome patter of Betsy Diamant-Cohen’s *Mother Goose on the Loose* program and quite a few more of her features—“We hit the floor together, because it’s fun to do!” the drum, the scarves, and “Shoo fly, don’t bother me!”

But furthermore, I knew *why* these elements were great for the growing brains of my babies (it didn’t take long for the babies in my borrowed storytime to become *my* babies in *my* storytime), and I was able to explain so and inspire adults to repeat at home.

Those were heady days, learning new things and trying them out. I read my way through *Storytimes for Everyone!* by Saroj Ghoting and Pamela Martin-Diaz—twice, three times—and was inspired by their insistence that art experiences should be art *experiences*, not Pinterest-ready crafts.

I discovered the blogs *Storytime Katie* and *Abby the Librarian* and fell in love with their creative approaches to reaching adults as well as children. And Jbrary! Oh, Jbrary, how I love thee!

My biggest triumph came toward the middle of my second year at my temporary home. By then, it wasn’t temporary anymore because I had finished my MLIS, had fallen in love with children’s services, and was promoted to a “real” librarian position at the same library, doing preschool storytimes. One of my favorite preschoolers, Lydia, with help from her dedicated mother, “wrote” a book and read it to me. Her mother said that she practiced “reading” to her doll, which she named Miss Laura. (*I am getting teary-eyed just thinking of it. This is*

another thing I did not understand when I was working exclusively with adults all those years—the intense connections you can make, and how heroic and large children’s librarians are in the minds and worlds of our smallest customers.)

I was sure I had crossed over into the great Library Storytime Singularity, combining Storytime Number One (so much fun!) with Storytime Number Two (so important to children’s literacy and adult knowledge).

Of course I was wrong.

Fairy Tales and the Rule of Three

A few years into my children’s librarian journey, I had the opportunity to transition to my library system’s children’s services coordinator position. I was giving up my daily youth librarian duties but replacing it with a systemwide focus of training children’s staff at all twenty-four of our library locations. What excited me most was helping children’s staff understand both storytime theory and practice—in other words, here was my chance to share Storytime Number Two with my colleagues.

If fairy tales have taught us anything, it’s that the best stories have elements of three, so I should have known that a Storytime Number Three was on its way. In this case, it revealed itself to be a tool for systemwide professional growth and staff engagement.

The more I worked with children’s staff, the more I realized that the preparation of storytime itself was an excellent way to grow as library professionals dedicated to children and families.

After all, it had worked for me! Planning storytimes, and trying to make them better, was an essential part of my growth and development as a paraprofessional and then professional children’s librarian when I first started out.

Not only did it make me more aware of library resources, it also sharpened my knowledge of literacy development and theory and allowed me to see the ways public libraries were vital connectors and supporters of early literacy in the community. From my early days with *Mother Goose on the Loose* to my later encounters with such online tools as Daily Vroom and books like *Mind in the Making* and *Thirty Million Words*, I became more accomplished and knowledgeable, and I wanted my staff to have the same experience.

Welcome, Library Giants!

Thus began my embrace of Storytime Number Three, and the opportunity it provided for children’s library staff and librarians under my direction to grow as professionals. Storytime

Number Three allowed me to see that storytime wasn't just about storytime—it was about making staff better, and, in turn, the library's early literacy programs and services better.

Practically speaking, this means that, while I regularly train children's staff (both as a group and one-on-one) and bring in a lot of outside trainers to talk about various children's development topics, the biggest and most important change is that children's staff are turning around and training each other.

Through a frequently updated storytime database and at regular staff meetings, they share their favorite early literacy tips, books, and approaches. They conduct topic-specific staff workshops. They debate early literacy issues and help one another solve common problems.

It is a beautiful thing to see and be a part of, because the razzle-dazzle of Storytime Number One has wonderfully morphed into the engaged and engaging employees of Storytime Number Three.

I think of them as library giants: powerful individuals who regularly make a profound difference in the lives of our families.

They may stay in children's services forever . . . or they may take the skills and passion and autonomy they are developing into management roles in the library. And as engaged as they are, their engagement is also creating engaged communities. In fact, parents and caregivers consistently tell us, through

regular Public Library Association (PLA) Project Outcome surveys and other ways, how much they value our early literacy enhanced storytimes and services.

Storytime Singularity

When I moved into my latest position from the on-the-ground children's librarian job, I gave up the joy of doing a weekly storytime, and I won't lie—there are times I miss it pretty intensely.

But one of the compensating joys is getting to see my colleagues in action during my regular storytime observations. This is where the Storytime Singularity—from razzle-dazzle to early literacy to professional development—is most apparent.

As I observe my children's staff during storytime, I consistently see children having a blast, parents getting solid early literacy support, and staff who know that they are professionals.

In other words, Storytime Number One, Storytime Number Two, and Storytime Number Three became perfectly coordinated and integrated, a very neat trick indeed.

You may have already discovered this amazing trifecta yourself, but if not, I invite all children's staff to do so. Fortunately, you have some of the best tools in your hands right now—the resources of ALSC and its members. &

From the Beautiful to the Bland

Amazing Treasures at the Library of Congress

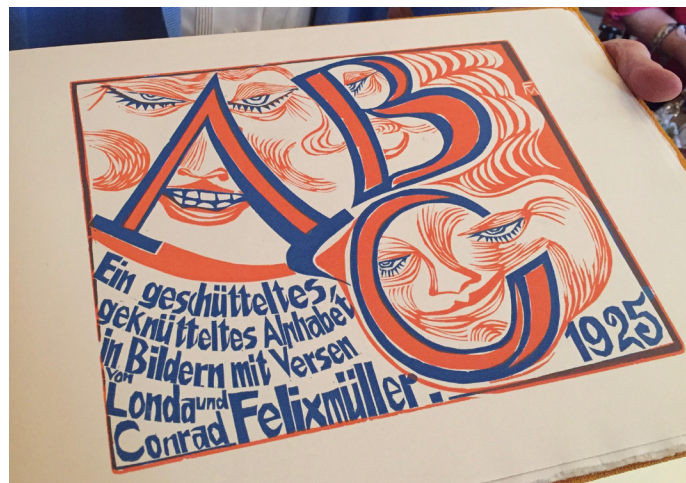
JOYCE LAIOSA AND STEPHANIE BANGE

Organized by ALSC's Special Collections and Bechtel Fellowship Committee, a group of eight guests were treated to a presentation of some of the rare wonders for children at the Library of Congress (LC) while in Washington, DC, for the 2019 American Library Association (ALA) Annual Conference.

Our guide was Dr. Sybille A. Jagusch, chief, Children's Literature Center in the Rare Book and Special Collections Division. She manages the collection of 600,000 children's items, acquires and purchases items for the collection, arranges lectures, plans and executes exhibitions with printed guides in many cases, and is open to sharing (as she did for us) delightful items that were once handled by children from the United States as well as the rest of the world.

Sprinkled throughout our presentation, Jagusch spent time explaining some of the acquisition/collection policy guiding her choices for the collection. The LC holds the premier research book collection of children's literature in this country. In the early days, children's books arrived in an unsystematic fashion, but after the Copyright Law of 1870, children's books have come in a steady stream just like all other books.¹

There are a number of special collections. For example, early children's books are in the Rare Book and Special Collections Division; foreign language books are in other divisions. There are also items such as boxed and board games, sound recordings, maps, original children's book illustrations, books in Braille, books with CDs and other attachments, and books that move and make sounds.²



Title page of *ABC: Ein geschütteltes, geknütteltes Alphabet in Bildern mit Versen* (ABC: A Nonsense Alphabet in Pictures with Verses) by Londa and Conrad Felix Müller (Germany, 1925). All photos taken with permission of the Library of Congress.

What makes the collection so unique is the fact that the collection is not selected. No one evaluates the content of a book. The collection holds everything from the beautiful to the bland, from the redundant to the controversial. All these books together make for a fine tableau of what Americans wrote and drew for their children. It contains all the dreams and hopes and the prejudices of a whole nation.³

“Acquisitions—both gifts and purchases—have become much more meaningful for me. When I select an item now I try to think not only of its research or exhibition value but how I might show it to visitors,” said Jagusch. “People often ask me how I go about finding these special treasures. Dealers send



Joyce Laiosa is the retired Head of Youth and Family Services of Voorheesville (NY) Public Library. She has served in many capacities within ALSC and the New York Library

Association. She is currently a member of the ALSC Bechtel/Special Collections Committee. She also consults on early literacy programming, and has served as an instructor at the University at Albany. After thirty-eight years of working with children's literature in school, public, special, and academic libraries, **Stephanie Bange** decided to semi-retire and do consulting so she could continue to do her two favorite things: read children's books and travel.

their catalogs to us, either the printed or the online version. I read those right away and if there is something of interest I call to reserve it. Then I do my research to see what the Library owns, in what edition, and so on. I also attend book fairs and sometimes visit a dealer's shop. Over the years, I have also accepted a number of book gifts. A rewarding experience."

What we didn't see is the LC's unparalleled secondary collection: the reference books, serials, etc., that researchers consult. The center answers reference questions from individual students, teachers, collectors, publishers, and others who study children's books. Presentations are made for congressional friends, families and constituents, student groups, book discussions clubs, and professional groups.

Her acquisition experiences include donations. One such incident was when James Marshall approached her at work and asked if she would be interested in his original art and book dummies. "Some things come here like that," Jagusch quietly said. As it turned out, he didn't have long to live.

Jagusch began with what is considered the first children's book published, an English/Latin copy of *Orbis Sensualium Pictus: A World of Things Obvious to the Senses: Drawn in Pictures*. Originally published in Latin and German in Nuremberg in 1658, it was quickly translated into English by Charles Hoole about 1660. In the book, the teacher shows the world to the child. It was a religious tool at the time and everything was "directed by God." (Note: The National Council of Teachers of English's Orbis Pictus Award is named after this book.)

The second item we viewed was more of a game than a book. *Oxford Instructor* is a set of ivory disks, each about two inches in diameter, with a letter of the alphabet on the obverse and a carved word and image that correlates with the letter on the reverse. Dating from the late eighteenth century, Jagusch remarked that it was "obviously used by a privileged child."

Next up was a rare "bookcase collection" written in French, housed in a wooden box with a sliding top that was constructed and painted to look like a miniature bookcase. This particular item included a complete set of books: a picture dictionary for an English child who was studying the French language. Its unusual shape made this an obvious choice for preservation to design and build a linen-covered, book-shaped storage box, with a pillow inside to support the top of the sliding top, as it extends over the edge of the box.

The group then admired a stunning "folded book" from the 1820s. When fully opened, this accordion-like book unfolded to show over twenty-five hand-colored illustrations of costume/dress from around the world. It is ironic that when the illustrator designed each costume, he did so without traveling to the countries to do research on their costumes/dress.

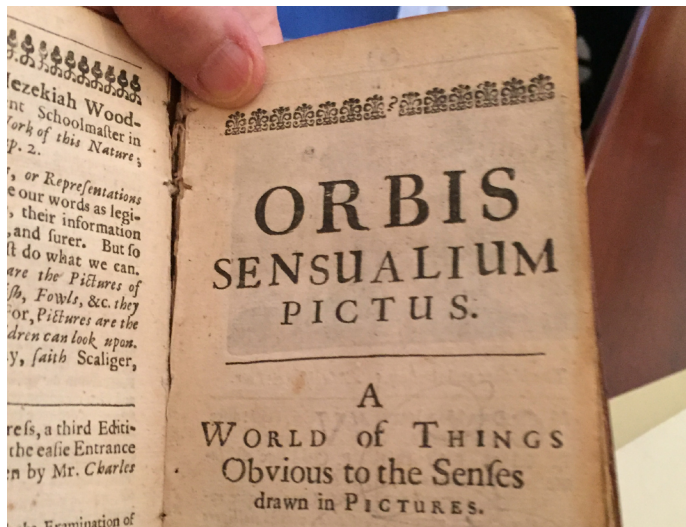
To balance this in the collection, Jagusch showed us a complete family/set of Chinese paper dolls from 1905. They were made in China and demonstrate what authentic Chinese



Book dummy of *Floral Fairies: Adventures of Johnny Jump-up* by Gertrude Robinson and illustrated by Alberta Hall, never published (1907).



Hand-stenciled images of a bird and cuttlefish in an alphabet-type book (Japan, circa 1930).



Title page of *Orbis Sensualium Pictus: A World of Things Obvious to the Senses: Drawn in Pictures* by Johann Amos Comenius, translated by Charles Hoole (London, 1658).

costume/dress looked like at that time. It was intriguing to see each hand-painted paper doll assembled, and each had moveable parts, but the clothing that was also hand-painted had not been cut apart from the printed paper. When asked why this was added to the collection, Dr. Jagusch responded that while the importance of the authentic costume is first, the “whimsical” factor is also important.

We were dazzled to see one of just five remaining copies (numbered and signed) of a book by German Expressionist artist Conrad FelixMüller, *ABC: Ein geschütteltes, geknütteltes Alphabet in Bildern mit Versen (ABC: A Nonsense Alphabet in Pictures with Verses)*. Most of FelixMüller’s work was confiscated by the Nazis and burned or bombed during World War II. This is important for researchers studying the period.

Additional highlights included an undated original watercolor of Peter Rabbit inscribed to Anne Carroll Moore and signed by Beatrix Potter; an oversize Japanese book (circa 1930) of handmade paper that reads from left to right and features handpainted kanji text with intriguing animal illustrations done in stencil; a pristine copy of the German ABC book, *Das Vogel ABC* by Friedrich Wilhelm Kleukens (circa 1920); a mockup book from 1905–10, *Floral Fairies: Adventures of Johnny Jump-up* by Gertrude Robinson and illustrated by Alberta Hall (it is unusual as Hall’s original artwork and Robinson’s typed text were tipped in on top of the pages of another picturebook; *Floral Fairies* was never published); two original illustrations by Alain Gauthier for *Zizou*, *artichaut*, *coquelicot*, *oiseau* (text by Jean Chalon); and two “paper



Box lid made of ivory for the learning game *Oxford Instructor* (undated).

theaters” (a scrolling picture in a box that tells a story), *Panorama of The Visit of Santa Claus to the Happy Children* and *Un Voyage au Fond de la Mer*.

After spending over an hour and a half, the group strongly agreed on two points—the Children’s Literature Center at the Library of Congress is filled with many wondrous, magical treasures and that Dr. Jagusch is one of them. &

References

1. Kathryn Mendenhall, “Serving Those Who Serve Children—Kathryn Mendenhall and Sybille A. Jagusch: A Conversation,” Library of Congress, *Library Services Journal* (Autumn 2010).
2. Mendenhall, “Serving Those Who Serve Children.”
3. Mendenhall, “Serving Those Who Serve Children.”

Couples Who Collaborate

Robbi Behr and Matthew Swanson

MARY-KATE SABLESKI



Robbi Behr and Matthew Swanson

Robbi Behr and Matthew Swanson are the captivating and hilarious married couple behind more than eighty publications, including the middle-grade mystery series *The Real McCoys* (2017), and picture books *Everywhere, Wonder* (2017), *Babies Ruin Everything* (2016), and *Sunrise Summer* (June 2020). Funny from beginning to end, this couple's humor and quick wit contribute to their delightful appeal. The team works together out of the "hayloft" of an old barn on the Eastern Shore of Maryland, where they also share plenty of laughter with their four children.

In addition to being an illustrator and print maker, Robbi runs a commercial salmon fishing operation each summer in Alaska, something she has been learning to do since she was a child.

Matthew is the writer and art director of the team. His self-described "weird little stories," using a "stream-of-consciousness" style of writing, are complemented by Robbi's detail-oriented illustrations that fuse together with the language to produce a rich storytelling experience.

This couple has been collaborating on books since 2006, when they quit their office jobs to pursue a career in creating illustrated books. They are currently working on a new book series called *Cookie Chronicles* (2021), about a boy who takes the advice he reads in fortune cookies way too seriously, as well as planning a cross-country adventure.

Q: How did you two meet?

RB: I think it was freshman year of college. Matthew was in a play, and I was like, "That guy seems so funny and cool."

MS: I wish I'd known this at the time. She didn't tell me. I found out later. *Years* later.

RB: We didn't actually know each other very well in college. It wasn't until a few years after we graduated that we got together.

MS: I was working for our college as an admission officer, and every day after work I would go for a run. I would run around the front side of this building, but on one particular day for no particular reason, I ran around the back side of the building through an unattractive parking lot, and there was Robbi. I



Mary-Kate Sableski is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Teacher Education at the University of Dayton, where she teaches courses in children's literature and literacy methods. Her main areas of research interest include diversity in children's literature and struggling readers.

said, “Hey, I recognize you!” and we did the thing that you do when you went to school with someone, and you’re excited to see each other again in a different context . . . we exchanged email addresses. We then spent a full year writing each other every single day.

RB: After about a year of this, I said, you know, this is weird. You’re now my best friend, and I’ve never actually sat in a room with you before.

MS: So Robbi brazenly invited herself to come visit me one weekend, and we decided that we rather enjoyed one another’s company. Two weeks later, I was meeting her parents, and later that year, I went to Alaska with her family. . . . It was my audition to see if I was even worthy of being a boyfriend, let alone her eventual husband. Somehow, I survived.

RB: I don’t know if you passed the audition or not, but, here you are; so far, nobody else has passed. So I’m stuck with you, I guess.

MS: And we have basically spent 99 percent of our lives together ever since.

Q: How did you decide to make books together?

RB: It was probably two years before we even put it together that Matthew liked to write and I liked to draw. I knew I wanted to go to graduate school for illustration. I was trying to put together a portfolio, and I realized that I’m not very good at coming up with things to draw on my own. Matthew had been writing these weird little stories at night and I thought they were interesting, so I decided to illustrate them.

MS: They were narrative voices that toyed around with an idea. I love voice and I love ideas.

RB: These stories had no plot, no character development, no description, which made them perfect for illustrating. There were so many holes for me to fill.

MS: Nonlinear, sequential meditations on a subject is how we like to describe them. So Robbi decided that she would take my one of my manuscripts and redeem it with her contributions.

RB: I wasn’t trying to *redeem* anything, I just needed something to illustrate. He had written this kind of long series of . . .

MS: Meditations on adolescence.

RB: I started illustrating them as a book. And it ended up being super fun.

MS: What we loved was the idea of the illustration and the language coming together to form a third narrative, so that



Robbi Behr and Matthew Swanson

if you looked at either the illustrations or the language alone, you would be utterly baffled. But if you saw them working together, this third thing would arise that represented the actual narrative of the book.

RB: There were not for children, but they functioned like picturebooks. This was kind of like a big flash moment for us, that we could create picture books for adults. We loved the idea.

MS: We thought our book was so good that it was going to be a best seller. We felt like we had hung the moon, but we didn’t know how to bind books at that point. So, we printed out a single copy and Robbi hand-trimmed all four sides, but we didn’t even know how to put a cover on it. So, we used big binder clips to hold it together.

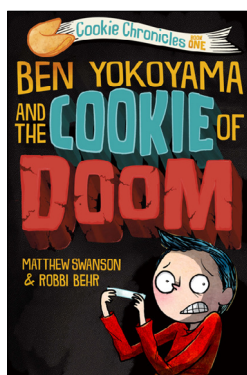
RB: Making the book was so arduous that we only ever made four copies. It is very hard to have a best seller when you only have four copies.

MS: So, flash forward, Robbi goes to graduate school and takes a children’s book illustration class. She asked me to write her a manuscript to illustrate, and that became our book *My Henderson*

Robot (2006), which I still love. Again, no story, no plot.

RB: Making our first children’s book did nothing but further our love of putting our words and pictures together, and our desire to make books together someday.

MS: After graduate school, we got jobs at a design firm. We were making actual money. We bought a house and a dog.



We got a car with windows that went up and down when you pushed a button, and we even bought a couch. We thought we had successfully made it to adulthood. We had all the things we thought we were supposed to want.

RB: But honestly, we weren't happy. Because we knew that what we really wanted was to be making books together.

MS: So we sold our house and quit our jobs and moved to Chestertown, Maryland, where Robbi had grown up. Her parents owned an old barn that her mom used as a pottery studio. We carved out part of the hayloft to make a home where we planned to live for a year.

RB: But that first year turned into two and then five and then eight. During that time, we started two subscription services and were creating about ten books a year.

MS: Our lives were a whirlwind of writing, illustrating, fulfilling orders, going to the post office. We were making stuff constantly.

RB: We were doing all of these small press shows. At one of them, this guy who worked at Disney picked up one of our books and took it to a production meeting.

MS: This gave us the opportunity to connect with a New York editor named Erin Stein, who hired us to make a book in the Super Hero Squad series. We shared our self-published books with her, and she got excited about the prospect of working with us to make a book with our own characters and content. That led to working with her on *Babies Ruin Everything* (2016). And then to *The Real McCoys* (2017) and *Everywhere, Wonder* (2017).

Q: How did self-publishing inform the work you do today?

MS: By doing things on our own terms, making our self-published books and seeing where they led us, we have been able to arrive at this place where we're making middle grade novels with Macmillan and Random House. Which is a place we might never have arrived if we had taken the more the direct route.

RB: And frankly, I don't think we even knew that this where we wanted to be. I mean, at the beginning, we thought we were going to revolutionize the way that adults read books. And we still might. We're not done.

MS: If you had asked me growing up, I didn't even know what a middle grade book was—even as I was reading them.

RB: And you always said that you'd never write a novel. That you couldn't write something that long. Or with such a complicated plot. In our experience, if you follow the scent of creativity, good things happen.

Q: What is the process of creating together?

RB: Well, when we were self-publishing, Matthew would give me a stack of the ten or so manuscripts that he was feeling most excited about. Then I would go through and pick the ones that I liked best. And a lot of times these were written very quickly in a stream of consciousness. So, there's a step where we had to go through and figure out what the book was actually about. Because Matthew often had no idea.

MS: Robbi is always, to this day, my first reader. It is exciting now to have professional editors to work with, and I get to work with some brilliant people. But Robbi is the one who reads my writing first, gives me a gut check, and helps me fix some fundamental problems before I even hand it off to our agent or editor.

It's the greatest gift to have such a smart reader right here in my house. I don't know if all illustrators are as gifted readers as Robbi is, but I suspect I'm pretty lucky to have someone who understands both worlds so well.

RB: Back in the good old days when we were self-publishing, we would literally sit down with the manuscript and read through it together.



MS: We'd break it into spreads, and then we'd talk about each spread and say, what is the text trying to do here? What holes is the text leaving? How can Robbi fill those holes, add something to the narrative? And that was always my favorite part of the process, just talking through ideas.

Q: How do you decide on the illustration style for each book?

MS: Robbi reinvents herself with every single book as she tries to find an illustration style that will best complement each manuscript. It feels like I am collaborating with a different illustrator every time. This constant shifting of gears drives Robbi crazy, and yet she does it of her own choosing.

RB: I start working with the manuscript and I think, you know what? That's not what this book is trying to tell us. It's trying to

be something different. And so I have to come up with something entirely new for the illustrations.

MS: There is a lot of gnashing of teeth.

RB: I think the another thing we do is we keep each other honest. There are places where every writer, every artist, every illustrator decides that something is good *enough*, and then stops trying to make it better.

MS: But because this is our joint creative product and we are both incredibly perfectionistic about it, sometimes I will be perfectionistic on Robbi's behalf in moments when she is feeling lazy or just depleted. And she does the same for me. Sometimes you get so tired and you can't take your own work past a certain level unless you are lovingly encouraged. So, we lovingly encourage each other to be to be as good as possible, and sometimes that means raising our standards for each other in a way that helps the work.

Q: How does your work fit in with the #WeNeedDiverseBooks movement?

RB: When we were self-publishing, I started to realize that all of my characters looked the same. Just drawing them with different hair styles wasn't serving our readership. But the interesting thing is that Matthew, the way that he writes, he doesn't ever describe specifics about the people that he's talking about, so I have a lot of freedom to interpret.

MS: For example, our picture book *Everywhere, Wonder* is about a child's exploration of his world. I never describe the character, or even mention a character in the writing.

RB: So I decided to make the character African American, in part because we hadn't, to that point, made books with characters who didn't look exactly like me. In our new series, *Cookie Chronicles*, the main character is half Japanese. I feel like I can speak to that experience, but ultimately I am American. I think there's an interesting branch of diverse books that is talking about mixed racial experience or mixed heritage experience. I grew up considering myself 100 percent American and often forgetting that I have any attachment or claim to being Japanese. I was the only person in my community who was half white and half Asian. My mom was the only Japanese person in our town. It wasn't until I got to college that people started asking me, "What's your heritage?" I didn't even know what that meant.

MS: We think it's absolutely important and transformative for readers to be able to see themselves in the books they're reading.

Q: What is it like to share your work with children?

RB: It wasn't until we started doing children's books that we started presenting to kids, which is a totally different

Books by Matthew Swanson and Robbi Behr

- *The Real McCoys*. Imprint, 2017. 336p.
- *The Real McCoys: Two's a Crowd*. Imprint, 2018. 336p.
- *The Real McCoys: Wonder Undercover*. Imprint, 2019. 352p.
- *Everywhere, Wonder*. Imprint, 2017. 48p.
- *Babies Ruin Everything*. Imprint, 2016. 40p.
- *Ten Thousand Stories: An Ever-Changing Tale of Tragic Happenings*. Chronicle, 2013. 32p.
- *Super Hero Squad Flips Out! A Mix and Match Book*. LB Kids, 2011. 12p.
- *Sunrise Summer*. Imprint, June 2020. 48p.
- *Cookie Chronicles Book 1: Ben Yokoyama and the Cookie of Doom*. Knopf Books for Young Readers, March 2021. 282p.
- *Cookie Chronicles Book 2: Ben Yokoyama and the Cookie of Endless Waiting*. Knopf Books for Young Readers, March 2021. 282p.

experience than presenting to adults, because kids are honest. Their enthusiasm is full to the top. Kids are always running up to you and hugging you and giving you high fives and telling you how they want to read all of your books. There's nothing better for the soul than visiting an elementary school.

MS: We try to tell them our story, make them familiar and comfortable with us as creators, but then also let them know there are lessons and opportunities in our books to apply to their own creativity, to do their own storytelling.

RB: We are excited about our next project! Our kids go to a Title One school (serving a high-poverty community), and we did a schoolwide book giveaway, where we raised money and we gave each kid one of our books. Then, we did a day long school visit. We went into every classroom, we signed books for the kids, we talked to the kids, we did two presentations.

MS: For a long time, we were just being asked to come present at these very affluent public and private schools. When we went into our local school and we saw the excitement of those kids who wouldn't necessarily . . .

RB: Who have never owed a hardcover book . . .

MS: They said, "Oh my gosh, you gave us a *real* book!" I got shivers because these kids were so excited about this seemingly simple thing that I take for granted, and that my own kids take for granted. So, we've been doing this repeatedly over the last couple of years. We've been raising money to do these giveaways and presentations at various schools throughout our community. But Robbi and I have always had this dream to spend a year out touring the country talking about collaboration and creativity and giving away books.

RB: So we are partnering with the First Book Foundation to spend a year on the road. We purchased a school bus, which we are converting into a tiny home, and we're going to take

our children and do a nationwide tour. We will visit Title One schools in all fifty states and give away, we hope, at least fifty thousand books. We want to bring attention to the incredible disparity in funding for our nation's public schools.

MS: We see our trip as an opportunity to increase awareness of this problem while giving our kids and our followers the ultimate American field trip.

RB: We plan to head out in the fall of 2021. We are starting private fundraising right now, and we are going to do some grassroots fundraising later this spring. &

Libraries = Success

NJ Libraries and Schools Conquer Library Card Sign-Up Month

TIFFANY MCCLARY AND SHARON RAWLINS

Each September, the American Library Association (ALA) and libraries nationwide partner to promote Library Card Sign-Up Month. The goal is to remind community members, parents, students, teachers, and librarians about the importance of owning a library card, which is like a passport to vast book collections, digital resources, hands-on support, and much more.

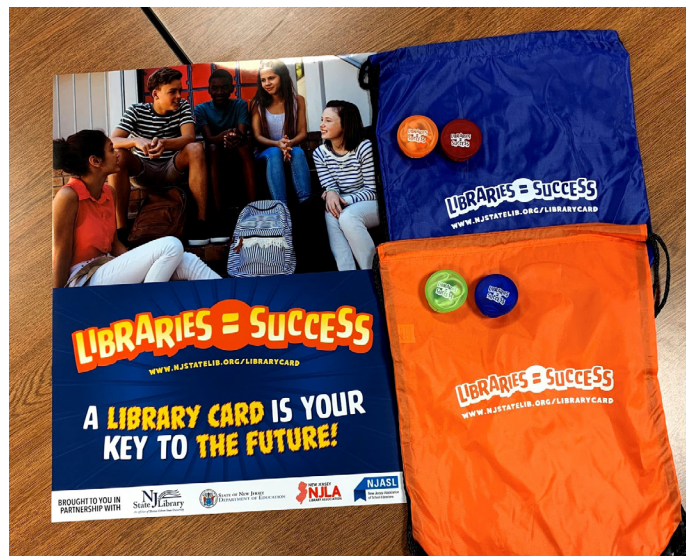
In 2019, staff at New Jersey State Library (NJSL) brainstormed ways to make the event extra special. We decided to create new partnerships and strengthen existing ones, so we collaborated with the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE), the New Jersey Library Association (NJLA), and the New Jersey Association of School Librarians (NJASL) to launch the *Libraries = Success* marketing campaign.

Together, our collaborators surveyed schools and librarians to gauge interest in the campaign; we partnered interested schools with their local community librarians, funded a research database for participants, and offered incentives to students who signed up for a card.

A public library in East Brunswick, New Jersey, took the campaign up a notch by encouraging teachers to sign up for library cards, too. These collaborative efforts resulted in nearly 2,500 new library cardholders in New Jersey. The *Libraries = Success* campaign was a reminder that libraries continue to thrive as we guide students toward academic success.

The Value in Libraries

We've all heard the trope that no one goes to libraries anymore. Many people don't think it's necessary to walk into a



Libraries = Success branded posters were hung in every participating school and library building, and book bags and earbuds were used as giveaway incentives for each student.

library in local communities or on school campuses because laptops and smartphones transmit information to us in seconds from anywhere we are. So, why bother?

As library lovers, we know better. The most compelling argument for public libraries is that we bridge the gap between information overload and patrons, particularly middle-grade students, who need help wading through the muddy waters of the internet. In these times when everyone and everything are vying for students' attentions, we must remind our communities that libraries are an educational support system for students of all ages, as well as key resources for anyone who wants to become more digitally literate.

One of libraries' best attributes is our commitment to providing equity of access. Despite the ubiquity of the internet and technology, some families have little to no financial means to consistently access these ever-changing tools. For students who don't have these resources at home, a free library card is vital to academic success and can be a passport to future economic stability.

Libraries enable students to take advantage of free internet and private workstations, often seven days a week. Additionally,



libraries offer a variety of youth and teen programming on everything from the latest YA book series, to 3D-model printing, to learning a foreign language, as well as summer reading programs that keep their reading skills strong. And no student ever has to navigate alone. At their library, they will always find the guidance and support they need.

ALA and libraries nationwide understand the imperative of promoting library services to people who, according to Pew Research studies, often don't know about all the valuable resources their local libraries offer.¹ This is why the nationwide library community celebrates Library Card Sign-Up Month every September. During this time, library staff join forces with educators to develop new ways to encourage parents, caregivers, and students to sign up for a library card. With a library card, students gain access to not only vast book collections in varied formats, but also a wide range of electronic resources and tools, research support, homework help, multimedia rentals, and more.

The Imperative of Partnerships

Using the slogan, "A library card is the key to your future," the goal for the statewide *Libraries = Success* marketing campaign was to encourage students and parents to make a library card the top item on their school supply list. While all students were encouraged to sign up for a library card, the campaign specifically targeted middle school students, sixth through eighth grades, as they embark on the journey toward becoming independent learners.

The collaboration strategy was to connect school districts to their community libraries, building new relationships and strengthening existing ones. This link between school libraries and local public libraries had a three-pronged effect. School libraries could place emphasis on the importance of libraries and encourage students to actively participate in public library events when they were away from the classroom.

Public libraries helped schools enhance their curricula, bringing teachers and students the latest tools and resources. The biggest benefit, of course, was for the students. These partnerships not only helped improve access to information for students, but they also improved academic growth and fostered a lifetime love of learning.

The collaboration strategy included a three-step approach to meet the goal. First, the NJSL surveyed the New Jersey library community to determine their interest in participating in the campaign. While we planned to pilot the program in a few communities, we decided to offer our incentives to all interested libraries in the state. The NJSL also identified relationships between school and public libraries that already existed and found scheduled back-to-school nights, the perfect events to promote the campaign.



Partners include representatives from the NJ State Library, NJ Library Association, NJ Department of Education, and Clayton Middle School.

When the campaign launched, forty-five public libraries partnered with fifty-one schools to joint-host library programs during September and October. NJSL's next step was to ensure public library staff participated in school-sponsored events, during which time they promoted the *Libraries = Success* campaign and their library's offerings.

Partnership between the school and the public library sends a message of unity. It shows that we both want what's best for the students so that they can succeed in school and in life. By working together, we ensure that they reap the benefits of our collaboration.

For the final step, the NJSL and the NJDOE allocated funding for the campaign. NJDOE funded the one-year provision of the EBSCO databases, Primary Search and Middle Search Plus. Schools were now able to provide students with access to research tools, such as magazines, encyclopedias, biographies, reference books, and images. These tools offered students tremendous access to relevant, timely information for their academic research projects.

During site visits at schools in Hainesport and Clayton, students showed NJSL and NJDOE officials how they used the database, and they explained how it made gaining access to information so much easier than they were used to. Additionally, NJSL funded an incentive giveaway. For the first one hundred students in each community who signed up for a library card, library staff gifted them with earbuds and bookbags. The earbuds were especially prized because, using their library cards, students could access and listen to audio content, for both entertainment and educational purposes.

The Results

From smartphones to tablets to media and other children, students have so much stimuli that pull their attention in many directions, so executing *Libraries = Success* was no easy feat. The NJSL realized that we had to discover multiple ways to engage students in the targeted age group. The East Brunswick Public Library (EBPL) established a seemingly simple, yet effective way to keep the conversation about the importance of libraries going. They engaged their teachers very early in the campaign. As teachers and students returned to school in August, the local public library persuaded ninety-two new teachers in the school district to sign up for library cards.

With the increased amount of support, public librarians leveraged their new relationships with teachers and school librarians to encourage students to use a new, online library card sign-up form. Aaron Pickett, head of youth services at EBPL said, "It was our first ever library card drive for middle schoolers, and now eight hundred more students have cards than on September 1st." Pickett explained the surge of new library cardholders motivated their library to create an entirely new online library card sign-up portal to enable students to apply for library cards online without needing their parent's signature.

This was a radical change from the previous protocol. Pickett said, "Kids now have the option of getting a card entirely without their parent's permission, if that needs to be the case. This policy was mainly crafted with the child's convenience in mind, but we were mindful that children should have a right to access library resources even if their parents did not want them to do so."

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The library found support for their decision from an ALA document called "Access to Library Resources and Services for Minors: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights."² Instead of full service cards, Pickett said the library issues "Children's Provisional" cards, which allow youth under age eighteen to apply for a card in person with either proof of residency (mail in their name) or online with proof of school enrollment (school ID, printout of current schedule, etc.).

The library is working on a way to deliver these cards directly to schools to doubly ensure that the youth is currently enrolled. Parents are notified that their child was issued a library card along with a permission form that, if returned, will allow their child's card to be upgraded to a "full service" card.

Provisional cards need to be renewed yearly (not every three years like regular cards) and are limited to five checkouts at a time. To prevent incurring any financial liabilities, youth with these cards accrue no fines on any items. While lost items will block their cards, they are not sent to a collection agency. "As long as the lost items are eventually returned, their cards are cleared and can be used again," Pickett said.

By the end of the campaign, fifty-four *Libraries = Success* events were held across New Jersey, and 2,459 students signed up for new public library cards. The NJSL and its partners have and continue to ensure that we dispel the myth that technology is forcing libraries into obsolescence. Libraries are thriving and remain vibrant nerve centers of communities across New Jersey. &

Pandemic Publishing

A Selected COVID-19 Bibliography

PATRICIA SARLES

During a global crisis, it seems everything changes on a daily basis, and that includes publishing. With information about COVID-19 being revised just as rapidly, families have been struggling to educate their children on the virus and the pandemic. Scores of authors and publishers are leading the way, promptly publishing digital children's books; here is a list of some of those titles (compiled as of May 7, 2020). Quality varies, since many are self-published, but all are available free online unless otherwise noted (<https://nycdoe.libguides.com/COVID-19ebooks/free>).

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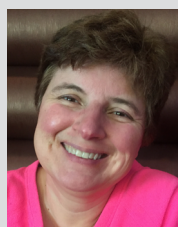
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Patricia Sarles has been an academic librarian, a medical librarian, a public librarian, and a school librarian for the past thirty years, and is now a coordinator of library services for the New York City School Library System. She maintains the Books for Donor Offspring blog, the YA Books for Donor Offspring blog, and the Books for Kids in Gay Families blog.

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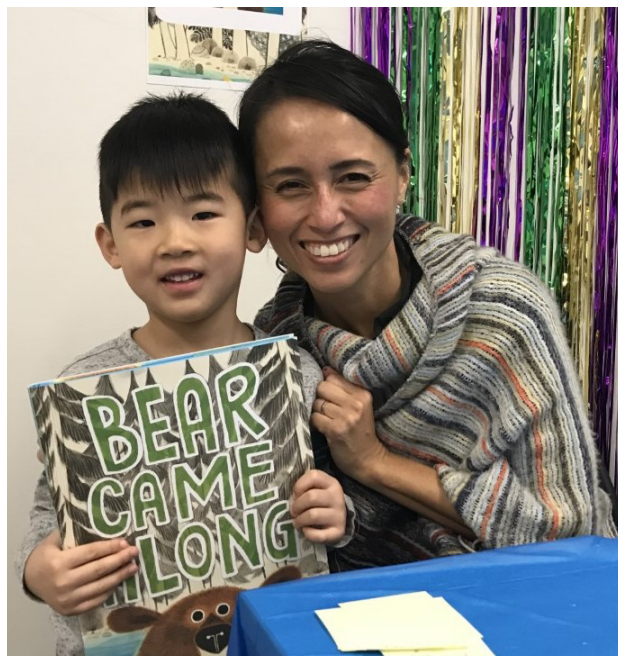
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Marking a Milestone

Hosting a Kindergarten Library Card Party

ANNA SMITHBERGER AND ANN WAHLSTROM



Author LeUyen Pham and Theo at a meet and greet after the presentation.

Take one Caldecott Honor winner and add scores of kindergarteners. Throw in an effort to sign up more library users. Toss in a bunch of enthusiastic volunteers. That's the recipe for Ramsey County (MN) Library's (RCL) recent Kindergarten Library Card Party.

It's a program that has been running since 2008, starting humbly as a partnership between the Friends of the Ramsey County Libraries and the Junior League of St. Paul. The latter, a local women's nonprofit organization focusing on volunteerism, was interested in developing a program where they could put books into the hands of kindergarteners.

After brainstorming how we could collaborate, along with our natural desire to grow library users, we came up with the idea of a Kindergarten Library Card Party.

This year's special guest was Caldecott Honor Winner LeUyen Pham, who said, "When you first approached me about appearing at your party, I wasn't sure I wanted to accept this gig," she said. "People will really come to something like this on a Saturday? I can't believe it!"

As it turned out, we had several hundred attend our 2020 program. In fact, our annual Kindergarten Library Card party has been our most successful endeavor as a youth services team of the past ten years, and we see no end in sight!

The program has evolved and grown. Our January 2019 event featured illustrator Vanessa Brantley-Newton as our special guest. Planning for our 2020 event began as soon as the 2019 event ended.

This year we wanted LeUyen Pham, so we contacted her agent and coordinated the details. While the Friends of the Ramsey County Libraries continue to financially support this program and make it possible, we pay our special guest's speaking and travel fee with money from the Minnesota Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund. (A statewide sales tax revenue fund resulting from a state constitutional amendment to support arts, arts education, and arts access, and to preserve Minnesota's history and cultural heritage.)

We returned to party planning in October 2019, after the bustle of a busy summer reading program. Our service area includes four independent school districts, so each librarian contacted schools to discern the number of kindergarten classes and the average number of students per class. With those numbers compiled, we finalized letters to both parents and teachers and printed the number we needed, as well as addressed and



Anna Smithberger has been a children's librarian for five years. She is currently the Children's Librarian at Ramsey County (MN) Library's New Brighton branch. **Ann Wahlstrom** has been a children's librarian for more than thirteen years. She is currently

Branch Manager at Ramsey County Library and the system's Children's Facilitator.

stamped enough envelopes for each class to return the library card applications to RCL as easily as possible.

By the end of November, we had visited 33 schools and talked to more than 2,400 kindergarteners. We asked that the library card applications be returned by mid-December, and 1,366 applications were returned. Then we sent out the postcard invitations for the party to those who responded.

Behind the Scenes

Concurrently, the children's librarians do more behind-the-scenes work to get ready for the party. First, we contract with our local independent bookstore, The Red Balloon, to sell our guest's books during an author meet and greet. We also design two library-wide scavenger hunts—one for kindergarteners to follow that takes them to important parts of the library, like the reference and circulations desks, and one for their siblings and families to do for fun. Invitations are also extended to our library board and county commissioners to attend and assist with the event; this gives them a chance to meet families and greet constituents, as well as illustrates the wonderful work their libraries are doing.

Even with our ten children's librarians on hand running the event, our library system volunteer coordinator makes sure we have enough volunteers to staff our scavenger hunt stations, and the manager of the library made sure staffing levels could handle the added traffic the party would bring.

When the party opens, participants head to a check-in table in the children's area where a librarian welcomes them and explains the event. We have all the cards at the check-in desk; the child is given the card at the end of the scavenger hunt, where they also receive a free book, purchased with money from our Friends group. At each location on the hunt, the child receives something to build their excitement and help them be great library user—such as a reusable book bag, a library card holder, and a temporary tattoo. They then finish the scavenger hunt where they are congratulated and celebrated by both staff and our library board and/or county commissioners.

After the hunt, Pham gave three presentations (and offered autographs and individual drawings) throughout the day to accommodate the large crowds.

When we wrapped up the party, 239 kindergarteners had received their new library cards, with the remaining 1,127 to be mailed home in the coming weeks.

This event can be scaled to any library's means and needs as long as you have a few things:

- **First, you need time** to make connections and sell the program by visiting classrooms, time to make the cards, and time to actually have the party.



LeUyen Pham and Aaron pose together.



Ramsey County Board of Commissioners Trista MatasCastillo and Victoria Reinhardt pose with kindergartener Laura and her new library card.

- **School buy-in** is especially valuable; having a teacher or school librarian advocate for the program greatly increases successful participation.
- **Funding** can also have a big say in the size and scale of your event. We are fortunate to have funding from both our Friends of the Ramsey County Library and the Minnesota Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund, but you could certainly run this program with any (or no!) dollar amount.
- You also need **something to make the day special**, such as a guest author and presentation. It could also be as simple as a photo booth with a butcher paper background and props.

Beyond issuing library cards to thousands of kindergarteners, what have we gained from this program? Getting a library card and going to the party has become an important milestone for

kids and their families. We consistently hear how excited the kids are to get their own cards and attend a special party.

Also, through our partnership with our schools, we reach families who may never come to the library. Once here, we can introduce the whole family to the library's many resources.

We've also built a community touchstone across our service area so that all our children have this shared experience of being visited by a librarian and being told about the doors a library card can open for them.

Our Kindergarten Library Card Party can be an amazing milestone in a child's school career. Through the hard work of our amazing team, we are reaching children through partnerships with our local schools and making sure all of them have access to the resources their local public libraries can provide. &

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Woman of the Decades

The Legendary Louise Seaman Bechtel

LISA VON DRASEK



Louise Seaman Bechtel in her Vassar graduation picture, 1915 (Baldwin Collection, University of Florida).

When I found out I was awarded ALSC's Bechtel Fellowship to conduct research in the Baldwin Library of Historical Children's Literature at the University of Florida Libraries in Gainesville, I was honored, thrilled, and excited. I was also curious to learn more about the person for whom my fellowship was named.

Louise Seaman Bechtel (1894–1985) (correctly pronounced, I learned, with the emphasis on the first syllable, BECK-tull) headed the first children's book division of a publisher.¹ The Baldwin holds her papers; therefore I had the opportunity to read Bechtel's unpublished memoir, letters, lecture notes, family photos, and even a scrapbook of cards as well as art sent to her by her authors and illustrators. I discovered a woman who, in the words of Professor Kaye Vandergrift of Rutgers University, was an example of "unquestionably strong, dedicated, often highly opinionated women who fought to establish and to preserve service to children in libraries, while developing a national and international presence for their philosophy and practices."²

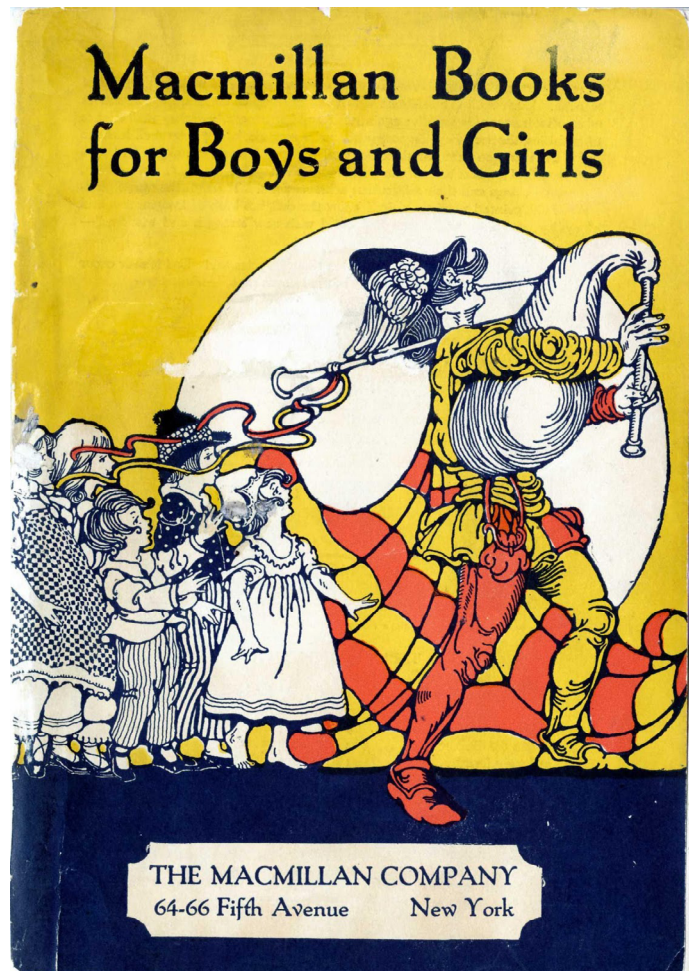
One hundred years ago in 1919, the first children's book department in the United States was established by the Macmillan Company, headed by the then young and unknown editor-in-chief Louise Seaman. In 1928, she married and became Mrs. Edwin Bechtel.³ (I refer to her as Bechtel throughout this essay.) Bechtel was raised in a middle-class home, attending very good public schools (Erasmus High) without any career ambitions as was typical of her gender, economic class, and

cultural norms of the early 1900s. A high school teacher recommended that she attend a private school, Packer Collegiate for her senior year. This experience expanded her horizons and she was encouraged to attend Vassar College.

A member of the class of 1915, Bechtel spent her college years reporting and editing school journals and newspapers, such as the *Vassar Miscellany*. Upon graduation, she was considered unemployable as a journalist because she was a woman.⁴ She finally obtained a teaching position at Miss Glendinning's School in New Haven, Connecticut, during which time she attended graduate classes in history and English at Yale University. After three years, at age twenty-four, she was pushed out of the school by a new headmistress who said, "If you haven't married after two and a half years here, it's time you tried New York."⁵



Lisa Von Drasek is Curator of the Children's Literature Research Collections at University of Minnesota. She is a frequent lecturer on storytelling and folklore, collection development, children's literature, and library services to children. She blogs at Blue Ox Review. Lisa's publications include *Writing Boxes: The Reading/Writing Connection in Libraries*.



Bechtel writes “this tactless dismissal was a shock,” but she used this opportunity to beg for an interview at Macmillan Publishing Company.⁶ Coincidentally she ran into her dear friend Rebecca Lawrence from her *Miscellany* days. Becky, as she was known, was one of two respected manuscript readers at Macmillan, and she recommended Bechtel for a position in the advertising department.

The head of advertising was Scudder Middleton, whom Bechtel described as a famous figure of the twenties, a moody, proud poet, and author of one slim volume.⁷

On Bechtel’s first day at work she recalled that “her boss came in late with a hangover following dinner with Edna St. Vincent Millay the previous evening. When the boss saw Seaman, he roared, ‘What’s THAT? Not another female for this harem of mine! What can I give you to do . . . I know! Read the catalog! No one else ever has done it.’”⁸

To understand the obnoxiousness of the advertising head’s directive, we must consider the magnitude of the task. Macmillan was the largest English language publisher of the time. The catalog was a sales tool of hundreds of titles ranging from fiction to academic texts to philosophy and how-to with the random children’s book embedded in between. Each editorial department was responsible for the titles and advertising department responsible for placement and copy. It would be absurd to think that anyone except a copy editor had read it from cover to cover, including all the previously published titles (the backlist).

And read the catalog she did. Bechtel went to work, reading the catalog, writing copy, and for wicked fun, composed a “Sonnet to the Catalogue.” Her dear friend Becky made sure that the sonnet circulated throughout the company.⁹

The sonnet caught the eye of Macmillan’s president, George Brett, who moved her to the education department of the company for a brief time.¹⁰

“One day, Mr. Brett summoned me and spoke in a sort of despairing irritation of his important new department for ‘juvenile’ books. He had tried a young man there briefly, who was a flop. ‘I suppose that’s a subject on which a woman might know something.’ Swallowing my ire, I replied that my teaching might have prepared me for it.”¹¹

At age 25, Bechtel was an experienced progressive educator, a skilled reporter, a writer of advertising and promotional copy, and a passionate book woman with a demonstrated sense of humor. She was uniquely suited for the task of heading the new Department of Books for Boys and Girls. Bechtel held the position for the next fifteen years. She was given the position but not the title. This was 1919, and women didn’t even have the right to vote yet.

When the tenth anniversary of Macmillan's Children's Department arrived, Brett wrote that he recalled thinking that children's books would benefit from separate editorial supervision. The new department head would require a person who could do editorial, design, marketing, and understand children's teachers and librarians' needs in literature.

"I believe that children's books are perhaps more important than any other kind. Through these books one reaches young minds at the plastic age when moral character is being formed. Hence the importance of their selection and editing cannot be overestimated," he wrote.¹²

Unfortunately, when Brett offered her the position, he added that while she would be the department head, "for the present we shall not make that public, for only men are the head of departments." She would be called editor but had all the responsibilities of a department head of publishing—the list, catalog, and sales.¹³

Another surprise awaited her on her first day at her new desk. As she began to review her inherited list of several hundred titles, she was "casually handed a second job" of trade publicity.¹⁴ That meant writing the copy for the spring and fall trade lists, getting publicity and photos from authors, and releasing news notes on a regular sheet to the papers for all of the adult books. This work included writing press releases, jacket copy, and quotes and comments for periodicals. It wasn't until Macmillan moved to a new office in 1925 that Bechtel was relieved of these duties.

Bechtel's first task was to mine the Macmillan backlist of more than two hundred fifty children's book titles. The majority were dusty classics that included the standard American editions of Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Charles Kingsley's *Water Babies*, Mrs. Molesworth's *The Cuckoo Clock*, as well as Arthur Rackham fairy tales, and present them attractively to children's book buyers.¹⁵ At the same time, she was charged with creating the front list of new titles.

Bechtel wrote that to be a children's book editor meant, "the actual conception of the book by the editor and the difficult pursuit of the right author and artist. Always it means detailed supervision of book-making, knowledge types, often the actual pasting up of the pictures and pages, often not only literary editing of the manuscript but a struggle over each stage of the proof-reading, and certainly all one's own proofs."¹⁶

And to be the marketing director of the lists meant "thinking of new kinds of promotion, seeking ideas . . . being alert to special opportunities of each book, encouraging each selling experience that develops in the field."¹⁷

Unlike the heads of other book departments at Macmillan, "the advertising department wrote no copy for me, nor did they make my catalogues."¹⁸



The Catalogs

Virginia Haviland, who in 1963 became the first specialist in children's literature at the Library of Congress, edited a book of Bechtel's collected writings, *Books in Search of Children*, published on the fiftieth anniversary of the Department of Books for Boys and Girls. She noted in her foreword that Bechtel felt her best "books" were the bound copies of her Macmillan Children's Book Catalogs.¹⁹

Indeed, the catalogs were masterpieces. Bechtel knew her audience. She needed to get the attention of “the trained librarian who has before she opens it prejudices, sympathies, critical opinions . . . the teacher, who may know very little of modern children’s book values, but needs them for definite purposes . . . the bookshop person . . . who knows books as merchandise . . . the parent who approaches it with a very personal point-of-view.”²⁰

Bechtel’s experiences in the advertising and education departments of Macmillan had served her well. The first catalog was released in 1920. She made the best of the backlist by featuring two best-selling authors/illustrators—Padriac Colum, a renowned dramatist, poet, novelist, essayist, biographer, children’s writer, a central figure in the Irish literary renaissance, and acclaimed children’s book illustrator; and Rackham, known for his romantically illustrated fairy tales. Macmillan’s backlist also included Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, illustrated by John Tenniel.

“My own experience in catalog-making has been that of continuous experiment. Catalog Number 1 . . . was a tall thin list, to fit into a salesman’s pocket, also in a big letter envelope mailing. Each became a little book of books.”²⁰

Atypical of the time, the Children’s Department catalogs were not a dry alphabetical listing of titles with publication data. Bechtel understood the importance of grouping titles by category.

An innovator and educator, Bechtel interspersed her own descriptions of the books with pull quotes from classic literature and from educators. She scattered verses of poetry relevant to the titles and embedded positive media review blurbs within title annotations.

To begin the section of school and college stories, she quoted the founding father of progressive education John Dewey: “Growing is not something which is completed in odd moments; it is a continuous leading into the future.”²¹

Bechtel strived to reproduce the beauty of her children’s books within her catalogs by embedding illustrations. In the first catalog, the subject themes were tied together with Rackham illustrations.²²

The first list was so successful that it earned Bechtel a significant raise in the summer of 1920.²³

Each of Bechtel’s catalogs displayed changes as she sought unique ways to communicate the importance of children’s books to a variety of consumers.

Catalog number 2 for the 1921 list also expands into a digest size. The titles are separated into subject areas. It is a lovely volume with a color cover and color plates featuring upcoming titles, some without publication dates (in place

of publication month was the word “preparing”). The color pages were printed in a new French watercolor process.²⁴

There is a table of contents directing the reader to subject areas, including folklore and fairy tales, children’s classics, storybooks for younger children, and literary quotations. Bechtel begins on the inside front cover with an unsigned note on how to select books, “Ages are indicated by each title. Remember that it is better to give a child a book beyond than one beneath its age. Remember that one good book chosen from this list, to be read and re-read is infinitely better than a shelf full of cheap books and magazines.

“Most of the books for younger children are especially good for reading aloud. More reading aloud, to older as well as younger children, will increase their power of concentration and their sense of the beauty of good English. Advice on individual problems will be given gladly by the Juvenile Department, or by local librarians, or by children’s book departments in various stores.”²⁵

I found myself nodding my head as I read and thinking the advice to read aloud is still valid almost a century later. We cannot forget that this catalog was a sales tool; therefore, Bechtel was encouraging buyers to select “good” books. The Macmillan children’s books were a bit pricier at \$1.75 and \$2 than the dime novels and five-cent pulp magazines that were printed on highly acidic wood pulp paper, crammed with sensationalized content.

Looking back, Bechtel’s beginning lists were certainly of the time and steeped in the Western European canon. The new illustrations were heavily influenced by the Art Nouveau movement and the children’s classics by the folkloric Arts and Crafts movement.

By 1931, the catalogs were eagerly received and read. Dr. John Finley, associate editor of the *New York Times* and former New York Commissioner of Education, wrote to Bechtel, “Thank you for your ever-entrancing catalogue. It should help to lead even grown-ups toward, if not into, the kingdom of Heaven. May I have another?”²⁶

And Lewis Gannet wrote in his book column in the (NY) *Herald Tribune*, that the new “J” catalogue from Macmillan was “a picture book in itself; a dangerous book for any impoverished parent to let his children see.”²⁷

Bechtel continued her relationship through the years with Colum, building on *The Adventures of Odysseus*. *The Tale of Troy* (later reissued as *The Children’s Homer*) came out in 1918, with new books every year retellings of myths and legends like *The Children of Odin* and *The Golden Fleece*, and new tales from old sources like *The Boy Who Knew What the Birds Said*, *The Girl Who Sat by the Ashes*, and *The Peep-Show Man*.

“Humor, fantasy, symbolism,” Bechtel wrote, “are part of an ideal way of thinking about the real world.”²⁸

Informational books were equally important to her. Bechtel produced information books like *The Goldsmith of Florence* (1929) by Katharine Gibson, respected art educator from the Cleveland Museum, and *All the Ways of Building—from Karnak to the Empire State* (1933) by Louise Lamprey.

Over the years Bechtel was responsible for many firsts, including *Popo and Fifina* (1932) by Arna Bontemps and Langston Hughes—the first work by an African American author, other than poetry, from a mainstream house; it was illustrated by black cartoonist E. Simms Campbell. “There are no ugly people in Popo and Fifina. Nor does the reader encounter caricatures. Quite noticeably, the characters are described as “black” with appealing physical features. The importance of descriptions that celebrate blackness cannot be underestimated during the period in which the book was published. Many of the pictures of African American children in literature were grotesque and caricatured.”²⁹

Bechtel published every kind of book. Ruth Carroll’s *What Whiskers Did* (1932) may likely have been the first wordless United States picturebook.³⁰ Taking advantage of newer photographic printing technologies, she produced Lewis Hine’s *Men at Work* (1932), the first juvenile photodocumentary.³¹ Bechtel was an internationalist also, importing titles from all around the world that were translated from Russian, German, French, Italian, and Czech.³²

Bechtel produced exquisite gift editions, including a translation of the famous Italian novel, Carlo Collodi’s *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, illustrated by Attilio Mussino (1926).

From 1929 through 1931, Bechtel had edited three consecutive Newbery winners—Eric P. Kelly’s *The Trumpeter of Krakow*, Rachel Field’s *Hitty, Her First Hundred Years*, and Elizabeth Coatsworth’s *The Cat Who Went to Heaven*.³³ These awards would be evidence of her creative editorial vision and understanding of the craft of bookmaking.

Tireless Promoter

Bechtel was a tireless promoter always looking for opportunities spread the word about children’s books. She had speaking engagements with women’s clubs, librarians, homemakers, academics, and booksellers. For example, from October to December 1926, she spoke “at a teachers’ college and a social club in Westchester, Pennsylvania; at PTAs in Massachusetts, New York, and New Jersey; at the Newark Art Museum, the Beaver Hill Country Day School, a New York branch library. ‘This was not a bad schedule,’ she writes in the margin of her itinerary. ‘The worst was when I went to Harrisburg and made four talks in one day.’”³⁴

During her tenure at Macmillan, Bechtel even had a weekly radio show, *The Story Book Lady*, every Monday on WJZ radio in Newark, NJ, in which she promoted Macmillan titles.³⁵

The Intersection of Bookselling, Librarianship, Education

Bechtel’s education was not one that prepared her for work in children’s books, but she had a cohort of experts to consult, including Bertha Mahony of the Bookshop for Boys and Girls in Boston, Anne Carroll Moore of the New York Public Library, Alice Jordan of The Boston Public Library, and the work of Lucy Sprague Mitchell of the Bureau of Educational Experiments (Bank Street) among many others.

These women did not always agree, but they were the respected experts in the field of children’s literature. Their work did intersect—Moore led the charge for children’s services in libraries as well as wrote a critical review column in the *Bookman*.³⁶ Bechtel traveled to Boston for meetings with Mahony and Alice Jordan (Mahony’s mentor) to understand the children’s bookseller’s point of view.

It was well-known that there were disagreements as to the philosophy of what constituted a good book for children. Most notable was the “milk bottle” versus Grimm controversy ignited when Lucy Sprague Mitchell published her *Here and Now Story Book* in 1921.³⁷

“Part manifesto, part model for a new approach to writing for preschoolers, this volume . . . became a hotly debated bestseller upon its publication. Mitchell argued that the fairy tales then favored by librarians confused young children, who naturally craved stories about their own here-and-now world, skyscraper cities and all. Mitchell staked her claim on years of direct observation of children at the Bank Street School. Librarians retorted that literature was an art, not a science.”³⁸

Bechtel was able to straddle both those worlds by publishing beautifully illustrated fairytale classics as well as realistic stories of the everyday, including Mitchell’s *North America: The Land They Live In for the Children who Live There*.³⁹

She continued her relationship with Mitchell and the Writers Lab (the incubator where teachers like Margaret Wise Brown honed their craft) throughout her life. There is a lovely invitation held at the Baldwin Library, dated October 11, 1952: “Could I persuade you to talk to the Writers Laboratory informally, more or less gossipy job talk . . . Isn’t there something from your present job experience or your past—that you would like to spill out and discuss with this group of writers for children?”⁴⁰

There is no better evidence of the intertwining of interests than the 1928 volume of *The Horn Book Magazine* (began as a newsletter from Mahony’s bookshop) which devoted the majority of the issue celebrating Bechtel and her accomplishments as a publisher, including reproducing pages directly from the Macmillan catalog.⁴¹ Mahony was shocked to discover that editors from competing houses “far from viewing the issue as a celebration of community achievement, regarded the issue as little more than unpaid advertising.”⁴²

Trailblazing Women

The 1900s to the early 1920s were heady times for women in the world of children's literature in the United States. The "usual suspects" included:

- **Anne Carroll Moore** (1871–1961). The librarian was appointed to preside over the New York Public Library's Office of Work with Children in 1906 after ten years as the children's specialist in the Pratt Institute Demonstration School.
- **Alice M. Jordan** (1870–1960). Best remembered as a pioneering children's librarian, she began work at the Boston Public Library in 1900 and was made custodian of the Children's Room in 1902.⁴³
- **Bertha Mahony Miller** (1882–1969). Bookseller, critic, and founder of one of the first children's bookstores, Bookshop for Boys and Girls in Boston in 1916 and *The Horn Book Magazine*,⁴⁴ which was started as a newsletter for the shop to "blow the horn" for new children's books recommended for purchase.⁴⁵
- **Lucy Sprague Mitchell** (1878–1967). Founder of The Bureau of Educational Experiments (later Bank Street College of Education) in New York City with her colleague Harriet Johnson. Their purpose was to combine expanding psychological awareness with democratic conceptions of education. Mitchell was also the founder of the "Here and Now" school of children's book publishing.⁴⁶

The Later Years

In 1933, Bechtel broke her pelvis in a horseback riding accident. She worked from her hospital bed during the long and painful recovery. A year later in January 1934, Macmillan announced her resignation.

During her convalescent year, her mentor George P. Brett, Sr. had left his position to his son George P. Brett, Jr., who did not support Louise's vision. One factor was that the Depression caused book sales to drop, especially for beautifully made expensive gift editions. Macmillan was ready for a change.⁴⁷

In her memoir, she writes with a little bitterness that "When I 'retired' in 1934 . . . I bequeathed to Miss Patee a 1934 list almost complete."⁴⁸ It was not a secret to her cohorts that she felt pushed out.

Bechtel's post-Macmillan years were filled with children's literature work; she was very busy on the lecture circuit as a teacher, as a book reviewer for the *New York Herald Tribune*, and as associate editor, and later director, of *Horn Book*.

In 1964 (after years of no contact with the Macmillan children's department), the newly appointed director of the

A Reflection

As I reflect on Louise Seaman Bechtel's work in publishing, I am astounded by each groundbreaking action. The most astonishing to me as a former bookseller was her insistence to George P. Brett that she take a sample case of books and her catalog and personally sell the big New York City bookstores and book buyers at the department stores like Macy's.

She was a miserable failure.

In the 1920s, there were no female book reps. The Scribners' buyer was so appalled that a woman was in the hallway standing with the men that he called her from the line to enter his office. Once inside he did not give her a minute to speak but ordered one copy of every title and bid her to leave. (A typical order would be multiple copies of lead titles.)

The department store buyers would not even see her. This did not deter Bechtel; she wanted to experience how her titles were being sold to the buyers of the nation. She insisted on going on the road by train, visiting cities across the United States like Chicago, Minneapolis, and Nashville.

I leave the reader with the image of Louise Bechtel, almost thirty years old, bobbed hair, stockings and heels standing on a train platform with her sample case, ready to sell her list.⁵⁰

Macmillan children's department, Susan Hirschman, (previously of Harper under Ursula Nordstrom) contacted Bechtel. Hirschman, honoring Bechtel as the elder statesman that she was, journeyed up to Westchester once or twice a year, taking tea, talking books, and the upcoming lists.

Hirschman also sent Bechtel review copies and, for the first time in thirty years, Mr. Winkles Room (as Bechtel's home library was called) held new Macmillan titles. In a phone interview with this author, Hirschman (now retired from a forty-seven-year career in children's book publishing, the last as founder of Greenwillow Books, William Morrow), noted that there were many reasons to reach out to Bechtel, not the least was how poorly treated she had been as one of trailblazers of children's book publishing.

Connecting with Bechtel gave Macmillan an opportunity to reinvigorate and republish essential backlist titles as well as celebrate excellence in children's books.⁴⁹ &

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Beyond the Book

Encouraging Emerging Readers

MARYBETH KOZIKOWSKI AND KERRI WILLIAMS

Emerging reader books (call them early or easy, that's a discussion for another article) have come into their own since the Geisel Award was first presented in 2006 and the success of series like Mo Willems' *Elephant and Piggie*.

But learning to read independently is a daunting challenge—quality books are just one of the tools librarians across the country are employing to help children master this critical milestone and develop a lifelong love of reading. What are libraries doing, *beyond* the book, to help?

Stellar Services

Fostering Readers: Oregon

Library staff and afterschool providers can get free online resources for coaching grades K–3 readers and their caregivers from Fostering Readers (www.fosteringreaders.weebly.com), developed in 2018 by Deborah Gitlitz, Jen Burkart, Kari Kunst, Kelli Scardina, NPC Research, OregonASK, and Washington County Cooperative Library Services.

Fun, research-based literacy activities support the process of learning to read through a wide range of customizable content including how to set up “text tasting” stations, using ants (yes, the insect!) as writing inspiration, and enhancing reading comprehension with recipes.

Caregivers are empowered through tips on what to look for when selecting first books for their child to read as well as easy-to-use language to help with decoding text and illustrations. Project Manager Katie Anderson reports that



One of the very popular theme kits at Center Moriches Free Public Library in New York. Photo courtesy of Kerri Williams Forrester.

Fostering Readers' pilot project survey indicated 44 percent of public library sessions attracted families new to the library. Participating afterschool providers reported that about 70 percent of participating children chose books for their quiet time following Fostering Readers activities—substantially more than expected based on children's prior behavior. One afterschool provider commented, “We had never seen children sit and read for ninety minutes or more during quiet time before.”

Grade Level Reading Project: Denver, CO

In 2015, the Denver School District and Denver Public Library (DPL) partnered to create the Grade Level Reading Project.¹ Its goal was to achieve citywide reading proficiency for students in grades K–3. In response to the school district's articulated need for DPL to focus on the joy of reading and reading motivation for children and families, the library's Grade Level Reading Project Team created a series of action steps to



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meet that need. Project Team member and children’s librarian Amy Seto Forrester says the team began by developing five grade-level reading skills.² While similar to ALA’s Every Child Ready to Read (ECRR) @ your library (www.everychildreadytoread.org) practices, DPL’s five skills (background knowledge, comprehension, decoding, fluency, and reading motivation) support children already reading. These skills provide the framework to support and unify the library’s literacy-based programs, readers’ advisory, and outreach. DPL’s action steps include creating Welcome to Reading kits, which introduce caregivers to excellent, engaging, and diverse books that support new readers. Each kit contains five books, one activity, and one tip sheet in a zippered clear plastic tote, making it quick and easy to check out.

DPL patrons may also request a personalized reading list to build motivation. Seto Forrester adds that staff has created early and transitional book subject headings in the online/local catalog to make it easier for patrons and staff to find books for developing readers.

Team Up to Read: Brooklyn, NY

An interactive public library program series designed for children ages five to nine and their caregivers, Team Up to Read (www.bklynlibrary.org/event-series/team-up-to-read) employs caregiver tips and fun activities to encourage a lifelong love of reading. Created in 2018 by Kimberly Grad, coordinator of school-age services at Brooklyn Public Library, and funded by a grant from the Altman Foundation, Team Up to Read began as a weekend program led by freelance teachers and education students; each of the six sessions includes a read-aloud component and an activity. The curriculum’s strategies, written by Mollie Welsh Kruger of Bank Street College, focus on six themes:

1. Being curious and stopping to ask questions while reading
2. Creating an artistic response to a story
3. Knowing the parts of the story
4. Making connections to stories
5. Strengthening fluency by retelling a story with puppets
6. Exploring nonfiction and poetry.

The strong emotional character experience in Gaia Cornwall’s *Jabari Jumps* (Candlewick, 2017) was used in Team Up to Read to help young readers connect to a story. *Draw!* by Raul Colon (Simon & Schuster, 2014) was chosen to encourage children’s curiosity, to ask questions while reading, and think about who they are as readers. After attending Team Up to Read, parents reported that their children showed huge improvements in their reading skills and that their children enjoyed reading more than ever.³



A caregiver and child enjoy sight word cards. Photo courtesy of Marybeth Kozikowski, Sachem Public Library.

Get Real-ia

A challenging part of serving our emerging readers is engaging them. Learning to read is hard, and sometimes books don’t quite capture a child’s heart or interest. That’s where realia comes in, and many public libraries have come up with inventive ways to reach this underserved population. Most of these items include circulating kits and nontraditional items that can be used in or out of the library.

A little ingenuity and a lot of creativity transforms simple hexagonal porcelain tiles (sold by the sheet at home improvement stores) into an interactive learning game. Decorated with paint or rights-free internet images, sets include story tiles with images from well-known stories like *The Three Little Pigs*. The tiles encourage caregivers and children to retell or create their own stories, helping with story structure and building narratives. A color-themed set with accompanying cards encourages sorting images simply by color or naming objects and grouping them into categories, such as living/nonliving or clothing/food. Rhonda Cunha, early literacy children’s librarian with Stevens Memorial Library (North Andover, MA), adds, “I am writing a guide for caregivers on how to use the story tiles with a child and plan to create additional sets with images of rhyming objects to build phonemic awareness.”

Jennifer Wharton of the Matheson Memorial Library (Elk-horn, WI) creates an early literacy calendar for patrons. Each day of the month has an early literacy challenge focused on the ECRR skills of reading, writing, and talking—all centered around a word of the week. One word was “surprise,” which included challenges such as “play hide and seek” and reading

a recommended book, culminating in an activity to make a surprise gift for a friend or neighbor. This calendar is an easy way for families to practice their literacy skills every day, along with some general tips for parents. Wharton shares her early literacy calendar and a STEM calendar with other libraries, so that they may customize it.

Circulating Kits

Many libraries also circulate items so patrons can practice early literacy at home. As do many libraries, the Matheson Memorial Library circulates Early Literacy Kits that contain emerging reader books, CDs, toys, extension activities, and games centering on a theme.

Classroom-quality educational materials and tips for their use composes Sachem Public Library's (Holbrook, NY) in-demand Learn to Read Kits. Each kit includes a talking sight word board, sight word puzzles, and spiral-bound cards that stress simple sentences or the beginning, middle, and end sounds of words. Sachem purchased materials from Lakeshore Learning Products (www.lakeshorelearning.com), selecting items with limited parts to make kits easier to maintain and streamline the return process. The most significant

items in the kits are teacher guides, which explain the skills each item helps develop.

At the Center Moriches (NY) Free Public Library, themed backpack kits are also circulated to young patrons. The most popular are the Sight Words kits, which are constantly checked out to parents of kindergarteners, our prime emerging reader target. These kits are very popular because they provide an easy way to practice with children at home, but what appeals to the kids? It could definitely be because of the fun early reader books, but let's be real—it's probably the puppets.

Libraries Have a Role

At a storytime in a community park a few years ago, a patron recognized and warmly welcomed our staff. With genuine emotion in her voice, our patron turned to her friends and said, "These ladies taught my son to read!" Well, while not *exactly* the case, her appreciation reinforces the important role librarians have to play in supporting emerging readers and their caregivers. Whether it's as a part of a citywide initiative or flying solo with a program or product our patrons love, we as librarians can help make achieving this milestone easier, creating a new generation of lifelong readers. &

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Incorporating Intellectual Freedom and Information Literacy into Programming

Meagan Albright and Ashley J. Brown



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Raising awareness of intellectual freedom and information literacy is important, and not just during Banned Books Week. Just like sneaking healthy food into a kid's meal, these techniques for incorporating these topics will enrich the work you already do as a librarian without disrupting your programming routine. (Note: see sidebar on the next page for ready-made program ideas).

Here are some tips for incorporating the topic during storytimes.

- Invite a co-storyteller to read a dual point of view story with you to model different points of view during storytime. Example: *Interrupting Chicken and the Elephant of Surprise* by David Ezra Stein.
- Include a display of different versions of the same story and encourage families to compare and contrast the books when reading them at home.
- Tell parents about ALSC's Notable Children's Digital Media lists and talk about trusted online sources. www.ala.org/alsc/awardsgrants/notalists/ncdm.
- Include some of the suggested books below in another storytime. For example, if you are doing a storytime about birds, read Mac Barnett's *Telephone* or include it in your book display.
- Informally chat with parents and caregivers at the end of storytime about choosing books for and with their children. Not every book is for every reader or family, and that's okay.
- Pair fiction books with nonfiction books to offer a choice between reading for knowledge and reading for pleasure.
- Allow children to choose a book that may, on its face, be considered too "difficult" for them to read. Use this opportunity to incorporate literacy by doing a picture walk, which encourages readers to use pictures as clues to understand the story. Begin with looking at the front cover and asking what they think the story will be about. As you flip through the pages, prompt a discussion by using guided questions like, "What is happening in this picture?" and "How do you think the character feels?" Allow children to use their imagination as they narrate the story.
- Sometimes the best way to start a conversation is by defining the topic. Address the adults at storytime and share this definition from ALA: "Information literacy is a set of abilities requiring individuals to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information" (<https://literacy.ala.org/information-literacy>). &

Try These Ready-Made Programs

THEME: Free to Choose

It's important to recognize and respect children's independence and autonomy. While you can apply this concept to any storytime, you may wish to start with a "librarian's favorites" so you will be comfortable, confident, and enjoy reading any of the books the children choose.

Start storytime by saying: "Grown-ups make choices for you every day. Wouldn't it be fun if you were in charge at storytime? You all get to pick what books we read and what songs we sing today!" Make song cards for popular storytime songs and put them on a felt board. Select a volunteer to pick a song from the board, or have children vote. Include a display of several books, briefly tell the children about each of the books, then let them decide which book you will read.

Read: *Reading Makes You Feel Good* by Todd Parr; *This Book Just Ate My Dog!* by Richard Byrne; *We Are in A Book* by Mo Willems.

Alternate Titles: *The Monster at the End of This Book* by Jon Stone; *A Perfectly Messed Up Story* by Patrick McDonnell; *Open Very Carefully: A Book with Bite* by Nick Brown.

Extension Activity: Create a Mad Libs version of a well-known story. Since young children will not be familiar with concepts like verb and adjective, create a color-coded grab bag of words (yellow for verbs, green for adjectives, etc.) for children to randomly select words to complete the Mad Libs.

THEME: Mixed Messages

Play a game of "telephone" and talk about how the word or phrase changed from one person to the next.

Read: *Telephone* by Mac Barnett; *The Monster at the End of This Book* by Jon Stone

Alternate Titles: *Oink-a-Doodle-Moo* by Jeff Czekaj; *Elephant in the Dark* by Mina Javaherbin

Books for Older Children: *The Rumor* by Anushka Ravishankar; *The Blind Men and the Elephant* by Karen Backstein

Extension Activity: Ask children to think about a cat or dog they've met and what they remember about the experience. Have them draw pictures of the animal and compare how different pictures emphasize different characteristics. Read *They All Saw a Cat* by Brendan Wenzel.

THEME: Don't Believe Everything You Hear

Start storytime with an announcement, "Everyone, the sky is falling! Oh, no! What should we do?" Brainstorm ideas with attendees and ask the kids if they believe you. Why or why not?

Read: *Chicken Little* by Rebecca Emberley; *The Wall in the Middle of the Book* by Jon Agee

Alternate Titles: *Monkey: A Trickster Tale from India* by Gerald McDermott; *Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus* by Mo Willems (ask children if their parents would really let the pigeon drive the bus)

Books for Older Children: *The Chinese Emperor's New Clothes* by Ying Compestine; *Tops and Bottoms* by Janet Stevens; *Anansi and the Talking Melon* by Eric Kimmel; *Love and Roast Chicken: A Trickster Tale from the Andes Mountains* by Barbara Knutson

Extension Activity: Select volunteers and act out "See for Yourself" (from *Multicultural Stories to Tell Young Children* by Judy Sierra and Robert Kaminski)

Doing What You Do

Erica Ruscio



Erica Ruscio is the Young Adult Librarian at Ventress Memorial library in Marshfield, MA. She is co-chair of the ALSC Public Awareness & Advocacy Committee.

Earlier this year, ALSC’s Public Awareness Committee published the *Championing Children’s Services* toolkit to help libraries expand their advocacy efforts. It features eight program ideas, each centered around a different “Because Statement.” For instance, the first Because Statement is, “Because child readers become grown-up leaders.” The corresponding program suggests, “Invite your stakeholders to attend the Summer Reading/Learning Program kick-off. They can simply attend the event or you can give them a more active role.”

But what exactly is a stakeholder? You probably have a good idea of who they are—parents, children, teachers, library staff, and volunteers. But what about other stakeholders who have some sort of power to affect change in your community or in your library? When you advocate to these stakeholders—such as library board members, town or city government members, or taxpayers who vote on budget increases—you are advocating up. Essentially, you are sharing what you do and why it is important so that you can get more resources to continue doing what you do.

However, not every public library system is the same, so there is no *one way* for youth services library staff to advocate up. Some public libraries are the only library in a small town. Others are large, urban libraries with multiple branches. A library’s stakeholders and how they’re reached will depend on how a community and its libraries are organized. Here are two example programs from ALSC’s Advocacy and Legislation Committee to get you thinking how your library might apply the ideas in this toolkit, and more generally, how your library might step up its advocacy game.

Because Storytime Is a Key Building Block to School Success

Corresponding program idea: Invite stakeholders to observe or participate in a storytime.

Alexandria, VA, has a population of approximately 150,000 and is located right outside of Washington, DC. Alexandria Library consists of one central library, three branches, a local history branch, and a law library. While the library director answers to the library board, most library funding comes from the city and is determined by the city manager, city council, the vice-mayor, and the mayor.

At the end of January, Diana Price, the Central Library youth services manager, invited the vice-mayor to read a pre-chosen book for a storytime to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the Beatley Central Library building. Several factors made this visit successful. First, the vice-mayor was invited to a specific event, rather than just a general storytime. That gave her a concrete deadline for accepting the invitation, as well as a set date to add to her busy schedule. Moreover, because special events often draw larger crowds, she had a strong incentive for participating. Price says the vice-mayor really enjoyed participating in storytime. “She got to promote herself with a really cute photo op. We loved having her and being

able to show her the benefits of storytime programming, and her photo op also advertised us.”

Because Libraries Are Constantly Evolving

Corresponding program idea: Seek out opportunities to showcase to stakeholders all that you do.

The Illinois Prairie District Public Library is a rural library district that serves 22,000 people with six branches serving eight townships in Woodford County, IL. Some branches serve populations as large as three thousand, while others serve populations as small as four hundred. With the exception of one brand-new building and a renovation in process, the district has aged facilities—converted banks, restaurants, and furniture stores—with limited capabilities.

Despite this challenge, in the past two years the library has rolled out STEAM programming for each branch. Before bringing

the idea to the board of trustees, however, Joel Shoemaker, the library’s director, knew he needed to start small. He says, “Pitching this wild idea to a board of trustees who were very comfortable with the old-school transaction of checking out books and only recently accepted DVDs as a replacement for VHS wasn’t necessarily easy. But we were already making paper crafts. Why not add circuit tape and LEDs?” He approached the board only after some initial success. After seeing photographs of young patrons involved in the initial STEAM programs, as well as local newspaper coverage, and social media coverage by patrons, the board was in favor of requested budgets to support the development of STEAM programs.

What Because Statements might you use to highlight your library’s importance as you connect with community stakeholders this summer? &

Access the Everyday Advocacy toolkit at www.ala.org/everyday-advocacy/speak-out/alsc-championing-childrens-services-toolkit.

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