

Children &

the journal of the
Association for Library
Service to Children

LIBRARIES

Winter 2021
Vol. 19 | No. 4
ISSN 1542-9806



Mindfulness Matters

Wordless Books

COVID's Impact on Programming, Awards

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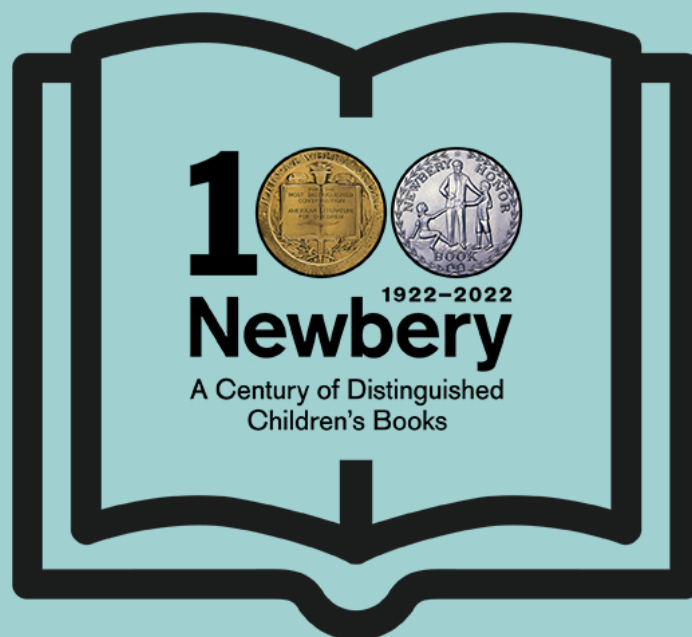


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Editor's Note The Year of Noteworthy Losses

By Sharon Verbeten

Thanks to the pandemic, 2020 will go down as a total blur, a dumpster fire, one big Zoom meeting. But 2021 has its own notorious distinction—the year of unspeakable losses for children's literature.

If it weren't a list of obituaries, it would read as a Who's Who of children's lit greats—Jerry Pinkney, Eric Carle, Floyd Cooper, Gary Paulsen, Lois Ehlert, Beverly Cleary, Patricia Reilly Giff. Their individual contributions have been notable and memorable. But collectively, it has librarians and children's book lovers saddened en masse.

It forces us to recall our favorite books or anecdotes about them. When Cleary died, for example, I marveled at her long life (104!) and the fact that her books are still beloved by children.

And I fondly recall interviewing fellow Milwaukeean Lois Ehlert in 2003, when the Milwaukee Art Museum featured an exhibit of her art. After she graciously walked the exhibit with me, she invited me to visit her lakefront apartment to show me her studio. It was a once-in-a-lifetime treat.

Maybe you sat mesmerized by an award speech by one of these greats. Or you have your fingers crossed—like me!—for a posthumous Caldecott award for the very deserving Cooper.

Whatever your memories, hold them tight and revel in this amazing career we have where we get to interact so intimately with our heroes. &



Melrose (MA) Public Library's bronze Little Reader statue was created by artist Carolyn Wirth in 1999. For more on the library's podcast book club, see page 34.

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the journal of the
Association for Library
Service to Children

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Circulation

Children and Libraries (ISSN 1542-9806) is a refereed journal published four times per year by the American Library Association (ALA), 225 N. Michigan Ave., Suite 1300, Chicago, IL 60601. It is the official publication of the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC), a division of ALA. Subscription price: members of ALSC, \$20 per year, included in membership dues; nonmembers, \$50 per year in the US; \$60 in Canada, Mexico, and other countries. Back issues within one year of current issue, \$15 each. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Children and Libraries*, 225 N. Michigan Ave., Suite 1300, Chicago, IL 60601. Members send mailing labels or facsimile to Member Services, 225 N. Michigan Ave., Suite 1300, Chicago, IL 60601. Nonmember subscribers: Subscriptions, orders, changes of address, and inquiries should be sent to *Children and Libraries*, Customer Service—Subscriptions, 225 N. Michigan Ave., Suite 1300, Chicago, IL 60601; 1-800-545-2433, press 5; fax: (312) 944-2641; email: subscriptions@ala.org.

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Children and Libraries is the official journal of ALSC, a division of the American Library Association. The journal primarily serves as a vehicle for continuing education of librarians working with children, which showcases current scholarly research and practice in library service to children. It also serves as a vehicle for communication to the ALSC membership, spotlighting significant activities and initiatives of the Association. (From the journal's "Policies and Procedures" document adopted by the ALSC board, April 2004, revised, 2014.)

Production

ALA Production Services (Tim Clifford and Lauren Ehle)

Advertising

Bill Spilman, Innovative Media Solutions, 320 W. Chestnut St., PO Box 399, Oneida, IL 61467; 1-877-878-3260 or (309) 483-6467; fax: (309) 483-2371; email: bill@innovativemediasolutions.com. The journal accepts advertising for goods or services of interest to the library profession and librarians in service to youth in particular. It encourages advertising that informs readers and provides clear communication between vendor and buyer. The journal adheres to ethical and commonly accepted advertising practices and reserves the right to reject any advertisement not suited to the above purposes or not consistent with the aims and policies of ALA. Acceptance of advertising in the journal does not imply official endorsement by ALA of the products or services advertised.

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Manuscripts and letters pertaining to editorial content should be sent to Sharon Verbeten, editor, 820 Spooner Ct., De Pere, WI 54115; (920) 339-2740; e-mail: CALeditor@yahoo.com. Manuscripts will be sent out for review according to the journal's established referee procedures. See www.ala.org/alsc/publications-resources/cal/author-guidelines for author guidelines. If you are interested in serving as a volunteer referee for manuscripts submitted to CAL, contact Editor Sharon Verbeten at CALeditor@yahoo.com. More information about the referee process is available at www.ala.org/alsc/publications-resources/cal/referees/referee-process.

Indexing, Abstracting, and Microfilm

Children and Libraries is indexed in *Library and Information Science Abstracts* and in *Library Literature and Information Science*.

Children and Libraries is indexed, abstracted, and available in full text through EBSCOhost. For more information, contact EBSCO at 1-800-653-2726.

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When Caldecott Met COVID

A Most Unique Awards Committee Experience

BRENDA DALES

The 2021 Caldecott/Newbery/Legacy virtual banquet just ended, and I'm a mix of emotions. Normally I'd be all dressed up and in a hotel ballroom, and this year, I would have been sitting with my Caldecott committee colleagues.

But here I am in my comfy chair at home, wearing an embarrassingly old T-shirt and yoga pants. But I'm with my colleagues—and many others—online as we just listened to and viewed the award recipients. And the bonus of viewing this event via livestream is everyone who was logged in was able to read and contribute to the very busy chat.

Illustrator Michaela Goade, winner of the Caldecott Medal for *We Are Water Protectors* written by Carole Lindstrom, stole the show. I could not have been more overwhelmed by her stunning talk and striking appearance against a gauzy and luminescent background. I was entranced.

The impact of the 2021 Caldecott Medal and Honor books will continue, but my participation in the selection of the Medal and Honor books has concluded . . . a journey that began in fall 2019.

November 2019

Ohio weather for a Sunday afternoon in early November was especially pleasant. Warm and sunny, it was just right for preparing my gardens for winter. But when I pulled my phone from my jacket—wait, what was this? A message specifically to me from the American Library Association? With the word “Caldecott” as part of the subject line?

The weather wasn't so warm that I was dazed from the heat. Was this message really an invitation to accept an appointment to the 2021 (Randolph) Caldecott committee? I was astonished to be offered a dream come true—a chance to help select the most distinguished American picture book!

January 2020

Publishers would soon send books for consideration, and I was enthused for the book blitz to begin. I cleared off an entire bookcase and set up a workspace prioritized for picture



Brenda Dales taught children's and young adult literature at Miami University in Ohio for several years and recently transitioned to Professor Emerita to focus more on research and writing. In October 2021 she served on the international jury for the Biennial of Illustration Bratislava to select illustrators of original picture book art for honors and prizes—another event that met virtually for the first time.



books. I met all the committee membership criteria . . . whew! I read and re-read the Caldecott manual on the ALSC website.

Soon the end of January was nearing, which meant travel to the ALA Midwinter Conference. The flight from Ohio to Philadelphia isn't that long, but still I had that "Are we there yet?" impatience. The conference highlight for me was arriving to the room where the members of the 2021 Caldecott Committee convened. I met committee chair Annisha Jeffries and other colleagues. It was an auspicious group, and I knew we would soon be fast friends.

At the Youth Media Awards (YMA) program on Monday morning, I mentally transported myself forward one year. I imagined sitting close to the front of a large auditorium with my fellow Caldecott committee-mates, maybe wearing a customized T-shirt or hat. In the very early hours, the award recipient and honor-winning illustrators would have just received their phone calls with the news, which would then be announced to everyone in the room, and the media. Exhilarating!

February—March 2020

Books slowly began to arrive on my doorstep, and for my own record-keeping, I logged them on a spreadsheet, adding notes and other pertinent data. I visited the public library, browsing

the new children's books. My calendar was marked with dates to submit the monthly recommendations to our chair, and I had taped a list of the Caldecott criteria above my desk. We were off and running! Woohoo!

And then the pandemic took over.

March—June 2020

Around the end of March, COVID shut down much of daily life. Libraries closed. Schools went online. And, of course, publishing was affected. Books stopped arriving.

The pandemic was a game-changer for the Caldecott committee. I can only imagine the behind-the-scenes work our committee chair was enduring. If she ever had any doubts that we would not be able to complete our work, it didn't show. She was calm and in control and led us forward.

We met several times virtually, not to discuss books of course—that would come later—but to review our procedures, ask questions, and also bond with each other. As committee-mates shared, the Zooms helped us solve and work out concerns and provided additional group time to learn Caldecott criteria together. Nevertheless, how would our committee meet at the ALA Conference in June? The answer to that

question was . . . we wouldn't. As we now know, both the Annual Conference and Midwinter Meeting were canceled.

But committee work continued. I experimented with my virtual home "studio" to determine which background was best, completely realizing there were more important concerns. By mid-April, publishers were informed that ALSC award committees would be able to receive digital versions of books. A stopgap, but of course with the understanding that we would be able to hold finished copies of the books in our hands by the end of December, at the latest, for awards consideration.

We did our best to keep up with reading and examining, as well as keeping our own lives safe and sane. Only minor adjustments were necessary to our Caldecott schedule of nominating books we believed worthy of deliberations in January 2021.

June—December 2020

We persevered. We were fortunate to balance families, jobs, and life routines with our committee duties. We continued to nominate books. Zoom meetings fostered our camaraderie, and as committee members agreed, helped us get to know each other better. While committee work was the first order of business, we also were virtual visitors in our colleagues' homes and offices. It was a unique and rare opportunity to build stronger relationships, enhance listening and talking with one another, and grow friendships while focusing on our charge. And, of course, there were financial savings, which could open the process to others in the future.

Slowly, books began to arrive again. The joy in the midst of this difficult and sometimes heartbreaking time, often with dire daily news, was the books themselves. *The books!* The ever-present sense of surprise when the box or mailer showed up. Opening the package was like opening a gift, which indeed it was. The marvel of holding new books, touching dust jackets, feeling the paper, literally paging through the book quickly to enjoy the rapid salvo of images emerging. And if more than one book arrived, repeating that process to a fullness of spirit. And then to slowly savor all, over and again. Delving into the books was a welcome respite, and a safe and captivating place to be.

January 2021

By the first week of January 2021, our committee members were ready to deliberate! We had read, scrutinized, and nominated titles for our discussion list, added sticky notes to certain pages, and kept track of our ideas.

We spent a week in our own environments, inviting our fellow committee members into those environments via Zoom. Each committee member had been assigned specific titles to introduce for daily discussing, sharing, and showing.

My dining room was Caldecott central, the table laden with stacks of delicious books and pages of notes. I appreciated the deliberations schedule. There was time to personally debrief at the end of the day and to prepare for the next day's burst of stellar perspectives and insights shared. At least one committee member appreciated being at home with tea and snacks, dressed comfortably, and not in a hotel!

And at the end of the week, we voted. I can still put myself in the moment I held my breath while the votes were being counted and we revealed the winner and honors.

I probably wasn't the only committee member to feel both elated and relieved, yet also trying to absorb the idea that we had completed our charge.

And then a realization hit me . . . all of the 2021 medal and honor illustrators were women, representing various races and ethnicities, including Goade as the first woman of color and first Indigenous woman to win the prestigious medal.

The next sensational event was informing the winners. We scheduled an evening Zoom meeting. All committee members were on board, and publisher representatives were at the ready. ALSC liaison Jordan Dubin phoned the winners and honorees. Being on the virtual scene to see the reactions of the recipients was priceless.

Viewing the subsequent Youth Media Awards from afar was still breathtaking. Even though my committee companions and I were not in a huge auditorium with excitement rippling from one end of the room to the other, it was still a spirited event. And those of us who could, participated in a private committee afterglow with yet another Zoom.

And now the pandemic Caldecott year was over . . . almost.

June 2021

While the Caldecott/Newbery/Legacy Banquet didn't happen in person, our committee shared an auspicious prelude three days prior to the virtual banquet. During a celebratory Zoom, our chair raised an eloquent toast, complete with sparkling wine. I'll savor this moment forever. &

In addition to the author, the 2021 Caldecott Committee included Chair Annisha Jeffries, Carmen Lynette Boston, Christine D. Caputo, Edith Irene Ching, Alec B. Chunn, Melissa Zymboly Depper, Shannan LaTrece Hicks, Gaye Hinchliff, Hanna Lee, Erin Ford Nguyen, Sarah Okner, Sarah Frances Rodriguez, Mary Schreiber, and Catherine Elizabeth Sorensen.

View the 2021 Newbery-Caldecott-Legacy Virtual Banquet online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kPORSdaxsaE>.

Becoming Mindful

Collaborating to Empower Students and Peacefully Resolve Problems

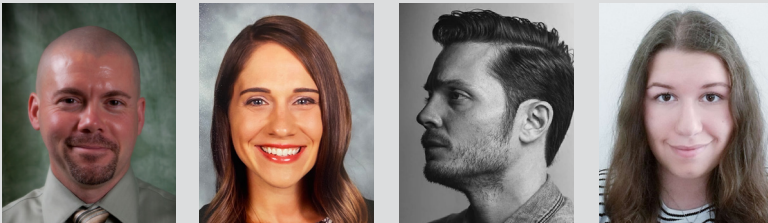
MICHAEL ROZALSKI, ANGELA STEWART, BENJAMIN ANDRUS, AND CHRISTINA INTERLICHIA

As the expectations in schools increase, especially during the COVID pandemic, and more pressure is placed on younger students, more students are experiencing high levels of stress. According to a national survey, “approximately one in every four to five youth in the U.S. meets the criteria for a mental disorder.”¹ Anxiety was found to be the most commonly occurring mental disorder, with approximately thirty-two percent of adolescents meeting the criteria for the disorder.² While not all youth may struggle with mental disorders, every student faces daily stress both in and out of school.

Children may utilize unsuccessful coping strategies to handle stress and challenging situations. Students with disabilities are reported to experience higher levels of stress than their peers and may struggle to find effective coping methods.³ It is important to address the various forms of stress young students may face as it can jeopardize their development

and affect their mental and physical health in adulthood.⁴ Because of the increasing rates of stress and anxiety, most children will benefit from learning constructive tools to cope. Mindfulness is the practice of using posture and activities (e.g., mindful eating) to maintain an acute awareness of our surrounding environment and bodily sensation, while examining both or emotions and thoughts. Mindfulness is not a solution to all the challenges students may face, but it can provide them with safe and positive strategies to respond to stress and anxiety.

The implementation of mindfulness practices can be an opportunity for teachers and librarians to form a collaborative relationship to transform the quality of the classroom or library experience. The coordination and cooperation of these two diverse, but complementary, groups of educators can enhance the classroom environment for students.⁵ In a



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inclusion classroom at Park Road Elementary with Pittsford Central School District, NY. She received her BS in education (childhood with special education) and MS in reading and literacy from SUNY Geneseo. **Benjamin Andrus** is a Social Science Librarian at Binghamton University. He received his MSIS from the University at Albany, and a master’s in public administration and BA in political science, both from Binghamton University. **Christina Interlichia** is a graduate student studying literacy and reading at SUNY Geneseo. She received a BS in early childhood/childhood education from SUNY Geneseo and is pursuing a career in teaching.

classroom environment, these strategies can empower students to regulate and monitor their moods and emotional states.⁶ Adopting mindfulness practices can strengthen the community of a classroom by improving students' interpersonal skills and how they connect with peers. Research has shown that implementing mindfulness can improve relationships, social skills and interactions, and trust and intimacy with peers.⁷

Research indicates that mindfulness can be beneficial to students' mental and emotional health.⁸ When mindfulness-based programs are implemented in schools, students have reported increased social-emotional resilience and decreased school-related stressors.⁹ The coping strategies students gain from mindfulness practices can help them to regulate emotions more effectively in response to stress in school. For instance, mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) teaches participants to “decenter” as they learn to experience their thoughts and emotions without attaching a reaction to them.¹⁰ As roughly a third of students may have an anxiety disorder, introducing mindfulness practices may reduce the anxiety and other symptoms of students struggling with mental disorders. A group of adolescents who participated in a MBSR program reported a reduction in symptoms of anxiety, depression, and improved sleep quality.¹¹ Similar results were found with elementary schoolchildren.¹²

Furthermore, mindfulness training may be especially helpful to students with anxiety disorders, ASD, and ADHD by providing the ability to effectively cope with stressors in the environment.¹³ In another study using an MBSR program that focused on urban youth, the participants were found to experience less hostility and emotional discomfort,¹⁴ highlighting how mindfulness strategies can provide students with the tools to reduce stress and handle emotions constructively.

Mindfulness strategies can equip students with skills that can improve attention and increase cognitive function. After parents and their children (aged nine to twelve) underwent a mindfulness-based intervention, the children were found to have improved attention regulation. Students were found to employ an attention strategy they had learned of focusing on the breath to maintain attention on a targeted object, despite other stimuli present in the environment.¹⁵ These results suggest that introducing mindfulness in classrooms of younger students may help them to focus better and remain on task.



An example of some of the items and signs a Calm Corner could include.

Additionally, a study in Israeli public schools of students similar in age found the longer students participated in a mindfulness-based program, the more effectively they could apply the strategies. Long-term practicing students reported increased positive functioning and the ability to “apply mindfulness-based coping strategies in real-life situations.”¹⁶ The ability to remain focused and to positively function can help students to be more productive and on-task within the classroom. Another study found that after introducing mindfulness strategies (e.g., body relaxation, following the breath, and mind awareness) to children, the participants showed an increase in executive function, such as improved attention and emotion regulation.¹⁷ These results suggest that developing an awareness of mental states through mindfulness can help students to cope with stress or other challenging emotions and focus better on tasks.

What Is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is the practice of focusing on the present moment.¹⁸ It is a commitment to channeling both your mental

and physical being, allowing you to answer two key questions—What are you feeling in your body? and what emotions are you experiencing? We attempt to answer those questions by practicing two actions simultaneously: focused attention and mindful relaxation. Focused attention is the effort to concentrate on the present moment, using breathing as a guide. Mindful relaxation is a conscious effort to open the mind to non-judgmental compassion. We often refer to the skills by the acronym RAIN:

- *Recognize your emotion*
- *Allow the emotion to be present*
- *Investigate the emotion with kindness*
- *Non-identifying with emotion*

Collectively, these practices, influenced by hundreds of years of Eastern traditions, have physiological,¹⁹ mental,²⁰ and emotional benefits.²¹

Because of common misunderstandings, it is also beneficial to know what mindfulness is not—it is not turning off the brain, escaping from reality by avoiding difficult feelings, or practicing religion (although some religious practices do incorporate mindfulness and meditation). In fact, mindfulness requires us to examine our feelings and asks us to focus attention on the relationship between our feelings and actions. We need to understand

- our red flags or triggers;
- what cognitive/emotional signs accompany stress;
- what our thoughts are while under stress; and
- how we cope.

How Can Mindfulness Practice Benefit Teachers and Students?

Approximately 80 percent of school-age youth meet the criteria for a severe mental disorder across their lifetime.²² Research shows that highly stressful environments create deficits in children's working memory, attention, and inhibitory control skills,²³ and mental health issues may also impact academic functioning.²⁴ Although students encounter many barriers to emotional regulation and school success, including lack of self-control, anxiety, experience of trauma, and inability to delay gratification, teachers can introduce mindfulness to provide effective coping mechanisms. Teachers who practice focused attention and mindful relaxation have been shown to improve healthy relationships at school and home, particularly as it relates to social emotional learning.²⁵

Mindfulness helps to boost resilience and positive coping, and also addresses common social and emotional learning goals.

Collaborating to Promote Mindfulness

Creating a peaceful environment has long been a goal for school librarians.²⁶ Changing the physical space within the public-school classroom or in common areas in public libraries is one way in which librarians collaborate to promote a calming environment (e.g., creating a reading rug area). Teachers can also work with librarians to build a collection of children's literature that promotes mindful practices. Times of mindfulness can also be opportunities for librarians to enter the classroom and participate in group reading sessions or co-coordinate engagement in calming activities.

A mindful classroom provides a safe and comfortable environment and requires a focused and thoughtful change in routines. We will outline the general classroom arrangement, including the Calm Corner and describe daily routines and procedures for practicing mindfulness.²⁷

The Calm Corner

Although teachers are typically limited by the physical space and classroom furniture to which they are assigned, a mindful classroom incorporates some standard adjustments. Teachers should create a sense of openness by arranging desks in small working groups, allowing for students to access a variety of seating options (e.g., comfortable cushions, beanbags, yoga mats). Adding other features (e.g., lighting that can be adjusted, lava lamps), background music, and a Calm Corner are also low-cost ways to create a more peaceful and mindful space.

A Calm Corner is a safe space in a classroom that allows students to self-regulate using a variety of tools. The goal is to provide a physical space in the classroom where students can physically check in and out, as needed. It is important to note that the teacher does not send the student to the Calm Corner; when students are feeling anxious or distracted, they choose to go to the space. They also decide how long to stay, after considering the seriousness of the dysregulation they are experiencing. For example, sand timers can be utilized to provide students with time boundaries for using the Calm Corner (i.e., "little problem" uses a five-minute timer, while a "big problem" uses the larger ten-minute timer) and allow them to return to the classroom when they are ready to learn. All Calm Corners should include tactile (e.g., students can be taught to focus their attention on how a lump of clay feels when they hold it in their hands), visual and auditory tools, and be collaboratively created with the students.

Routines and Procedures

A mindful classroom requires a focused and thoughtful change in routines and consistent interaction with quality children's literature.

Mindful Mornings

As students enter class, greet them by name and with soothing background music, e.g., nature sounds from the Calm app or mindfulness videos from GoNoodle (<https://www.gonoodle.com/>). Ask them to practice their mindful breathing as they unpack and get settled at their desks. The teacher uses mindful language, such as “put your mindful body on,” meaning that students are paying attention to the sensations inside of their bodies, while being aware of the space around them.²⁸ As part of this routine, the students will use their personal journals to set an intention for the day, which is a way to bring the students' focus to the moment, and identify two positive self-affirmations.

Morning Meeting with Quality Children's Literature

After all students have arrived, grab their attention for a morning meeting. Students sit in a circle so that they can see one another, perhaps on the classroom's reading rug. A student leads the class in a breathing exercise by counting breaths and modeling the use of the Hoberman ball (a ball connected by joints that can expand and contract with gentle pressure that changes the apparent size of the ball). When using the ball, the student slowly counts aloud and opens the ball as the class inhales and closes the ball as the class exhales. Prompt students with questions to create awareness of movements within a still body, such as “what movements do you notice in your body when you are trying to be totally still? How does your body feel after doing the mindful movements?”

Next, the teacher begins by greeting the student to their left or right with a handshake, high-five, fist bump, pinky shake, elbow bump, silent eye greeting, or another creative greeting. Students should look at each other in the eye when greeting one another around the circle. Next, the teacher reminds students of the expectations of mindful listening, authenticity, and empathy. Use a “talking piece” (i.e., a single object that indicates which student can contribute to the discussion); this helps create consistency to have one student speaking at a time. Everyone else is invited to practice mindful listening to hear the speaker. The teacher poses a question, such as “what are you grateful for this morning?” and passes the talking piece around the circle so that each child may share their response. Allow students to borrow items from the Calm Corner as students share emotions, positive affirmations or personal celebrations, and daily intentions from their journals. Invite students to identify/discuss problems that we need to address as a group and select a class goal for the day.²⁹

Books with Mindfulness Themes

- DiOrio, Rana. *What Does It Mean to Be Present?* Illus. by Eliza Wheeler. SourceBooks, 2010, 32p.
- Gates, Mariam. *Good Morning Yoga: A Pose-by-Pose Wake Up Story*. Illus. by Sarah Jane Hinder. Sounds True, 2016, 36p.
- Goldsaito, Katrina. *The Sound of Silence*. Illus. by Julia Kuo. Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, 2016, 40p.
- Grossman, Laurie and Musumeci's 5th Grade Class. *Master of Mindfulness*. Illus. by the authors. New Harbinger, 2016, 72p.
- Luyken, Corinna. *The Book of Mistakes*. Illus. by the author. Dial, 2017, 56p.
- MacLean, Kerry Lee. *Moody Cow Meditates*. Illus. by the author. Wisdom Publications, 2009, 32p.
- MacLean, Kerry Lee. *Peaceful Pig Meditation*. Illus. by the author. Albert Whitman, 2016, 32p.
- Morelli, Licia. *The Lemonade Hurricane: A Story of Mindfulness and Meditation*. Illus. by Jennifer E. Morris. Tilbury House, 2020, 32p.
- Nance, Andrew Jordan. *Puppy Mind*. Illus. by Jim Durk. Parallax Press, 2016, 32p.
- Rubenstein, Lauren. *Visiting Feelings*. Illus. by Shelly Hehenberger. Magination, 2013, 32p.
- Russo, Brian. *Yoga Bunny*. Illus. by the author. HarperCollins, 2020, 40p.
- Sileo, Frank. *A World of Pausabilities: An Exercise in Mindfulness*. Illus. by Jennifer Zivojin. American Psychological Association, 2017, 32p.
- Silver, Gail. *Anh's Anger*. Illus. by Christiane Kromer. Plum Blossom, 2009, 40p.
- Silver, Gail. *Steps and Stones*. Illus. by Christiane Kromer. Plum Blossom, 2011, 40p.
- Sosin, Deborah. *Charlotte and the Quiet Place*. Illus. by Sara Woolley. Parallax Press, 2015, 40p.
- Stewart, Whitney. *Meditation Is an Open Sky*. Illus. by Sally Rippin. Albert Whitman, 2015, 32p.
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- Zuppari, Sam. *Jack's Worry*. Illus. by the author. Candlewick, 2016, 32p.

After sharing, engage in a whole group activity. This could include reading and discussing one of the books (see the sidebar “Books with Mindfulness Themes” for suggestions), and practicing the students' favorite yoga poses. If a book includes additional materials (e.g., a CD with guided meditations from *Sitting Still Like A Frog*), incorporate the activities into the morning routine to help students approach the day calm and ready to learn. Students can also practice breathing exercises or guided activities from popular apps like Smiling Mind (<https://www.smilingmind.com.au/smiling-mind-app>) and

Stop, Breathe, and Think (<https://www.stopbreathethink.com/kids/>).

The sidebar “Librarian and Teacher Resources” provides additional professional resources and classroom ideas for teachers and librarians. The curation of these resources can be an opportunity for teachers to form stronger relationships with their school librarians. These activities also provide an opportunity for librarians to visit classrooms and interact with students outside of the library setting. Close the morning meeting with a mindful listening activity. It can be fun to find different sounds for the students to listen to, such as bells, rattles, singing bowl, or chime. Students close their eyes and focus their attention on the sound. When students can no longer hear the sound, they raise their hand. Once the entire class has raised their hand, the teacher invites the class to now focus their attention to their own breath. When ready, students open their eyes and transition to the next activity silently and mindfully.

Brain Breaks

Throughout the day, a mindful classroom engages in mindfulness breaks. This allows students to calm their minds and reinforce regular mindfulness practices.³⁰ These breaks give students a chance to check in with their minds and bodies and refocus awareness and attention. For example, in the middle of a math lesson the teacher may ask students to put their pencils down, take a brain break, and take five deep breaths before continuing with the lesson. With a partner, you could pretend to pitch the baseball and swing the bat, complete a wheelbarrow race (e.g., one student does a plank on the floor and the second student carefully grabs the planking student’s ankles and takes small steps forward on their hands). The teacher may also ask the students to individually give themselves a hand massage, listen to a new sound, stand on their tippy toes, look at a new picture, listen to music, describe their thoughts or body sensations in a journal, or walk slowly or backwards with focused attention. Students may be asked to draw a picture to illustrate their mind and emotions in the present moment. Encourage students to engage in a mindful moment when they need a rest.

Problem-Solving: Rethink/Redo

Cultivating mindfulness builds on prior experience noticing and writing about thoughts, feelings, and sensations. When a student engages in behavior that does not align with the class compact agreements, the student can complete a “rethink, redo” self-reflection. The student reflects on the following questions: What happened? What were you feeling? What did you want to happen? Who was hurt? What will you do to

Librarian and Teacher Resources

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repair the connection and make things right? This reflection encourages students to become aware of their inner experience while also focusing attention to their behavior and the impact it has on others in the classroom.

Ending the Day

At the end of the school day, a mindful teacher says goodbye to each student as they walk out the door. The teacher may remind students to take a mindful moment as the day is ending. Once the student leaves the classroom and heads to the bus, the student may take a deep breath and look at the sky or focus on nature. Shift attention away from the school to the new environment. Personal time for rest and recovery is important and healthy. A mindful teacher strives to nurture themselves in the same manner that they support their students.

Conclusions

Mindfulness has positive benefits for both teachers and students. Practicing mindfulness impacts the brain in areas of emotional regulation and attention and provides students with specific skills to improve problem-solving and reduce anxiety. Although integrating mindfulness practices (e.g., daily self-affirmations) and creating physical spaces for a Calm Corner require a shift in language and message, it may provide great benefits in the classroom. Teachers who embrace the opportunity to employ mindfulness may see changes in their own behavior and those of their students. &

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From Off-Screen and Online

Hybrid Programming for Any Situation

JAIME EASTMAN

Prior to the pandemic, play was synonymous with our library. As Fred Rogers said, “It’s the things we play with and the people who help us play that make a great difference in our lives.”¹

As a Family Place Library, we focus on the importance of building connections among caregivers, children, and our community, particularly through play-based experiences. Some programs adapted quickly to virtual (like storytimes), while others took more thought.

Even as we return to a combination of in-person and virtual programming, we have to evaluate which programs work best with community interest, available space, and staff. Even in “normal” business, things like limited staff or construction can necessitate program adaptations. Here’s how we adapted our popular, play-based family playgroup series into a meaningful online equivalent.

Family Place Model

Family Place is a national network of specially designated libraries focused on early literacy and family support. We create welcoming environments with the resources to help families encourage their child’s early learning. Equally important is building connections within the community. Each location includes specially trained staff, resource collections, specially designed spaces, and partnerships with community organizations.²

Family Place libraries also offer targeted programming for babies and toddlers, including the signature Parent Child Workshop, a five-week program that encourages the importance of play. Librarians facilitate and model interactions between children and caregivers, while connecting families with each other and community resource professionals who can help address concerns. The program thrives on natural interaction and connections between participants.

Platform and Structure

First, we identified a platform that provided secure, face-to-face, real-time interactions. Zoom offered the flexibility and features we needed. Registration provided security, while the abilities to mute, spotlight, and otherwise manage audio and video offered additional control. Families could participate with audio and video to their comfort level, but there was space for anonymity as well. The webinar settings allowed us to send reminder emails and set up a one-time registration for



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the entire series, and the recording capabilities allowed us to capture content for future use.

We needed a program outline that kept the key elements of a playgroup but recognized the differences in an online approach. Not everything successful in-person translates online. We identified three key components: a community resource professional providing information and assistance, staff modeling learning strategies with family engagement, and connections among participants. With those elements in mind, we drafted an outline:

1. Welcome song
2. Information from our community resource professional
3. Staff led, hands-on activity
4. Question and answer time
5. Closing rhymes and goodbye song

Planning and Preparation

Planning a virtual playgroup required coordination. To start, we merged the efforts of both Family Place locations in our system into a single, coordinated effort that maximized staff expertise. We coordinated four main components: community resource professionals, library staff, playgroup activities and handouts, and staff resources.

Community Resource Professionals

We started with our existing partners who normally attend in-person playgroup sessions, explaining the goals of our virtual sessions. We asked partners to provide five to ten minutes of content and answer specific questions from families. Working with our schedule, each partner shared their available dates and topic expertise. These preferences were used to assign dates in the final schedule.

Once finalized, each partner provided a brief bio, content to share with families, and three to five sample questions they typically answer. Partners received panelist invitations to the program, which allowed them to join in advance to test any needed technology and review program expectations. In addition, we sent email reminders with additional details prior to each program.

Library Staff

Clearly defined staff roles help our virtual programs run smoothly. We wanted unique, meaningful roles for all participating staff, but also a consistent experience for attending families. We identified three key roles:

Lessons Learned and Next Steps

As with any new program, our virtual playgroups were a learning experience for all involved.

1. **Engage with each other.** This program works best with interaction among all participants. Each staff member contributed to the conversation, whether asking questions, sharing observations, or adding additional thoughts. This back-and-forth dialogue made the program natural and engaging, but also kept any one person from needing to carry the entire conversation.
2. **Ask questions to start the conversation.** Families were hesitant to speak up, but if staff asked questions and modeled conversations, they were more willing to join in. We used questions to describe the activity, share experiences, and get more information from resource professionals.
3. **Model and move.** Lecture-style content didn't work well for families wrangling toddlers. Keep your content short and engaging, with families participating alongside you as much as possible. If families can't participate, include lots of props and engaging visuals to keep things interesting.
4. **Read the room.** It's important to know what's working (or not) with families. Keep an eye on how families are engaging and adjust as needed. If families are tuning out, it's okay to move on to the next activity. If they're struggling to keep up, slow down the pace. Let the families lead where your program goes next.
5. **Experiment and adapt.** Each week, we made slight modifications to pacing, questions, and props based on the feedback from the previous week. Being willing to learn and improve means our programs continue to thrive.

- The program facilitator: Serving as the host of the program, this person provided introductions, narrated the activity, and ensured the program's pacing and flow.
- The activity facilitator: Serving as the primary demonstration for the activity, this person was the spotlight video and feedback during step-by-step instruction.
- The chat facilitator: Serving as a conversational guide, this person passed on questions and encouraged conversation during the program.

Activities

Each session featured an exploration activity, which mimicked the collaborative art exploration area of a typical playgroup while also encouraging families to explore creativity and learning at home. We wanted open-ended activities showcasing simple, at-home options with readily available supplies. We tested each activity before the program to tweak recipes and instructions as needed, and sent families a supply list in advance so they could participate during the program. We also created program handouts with early learning applications, the supply list, and step-by-step instructions. Also included were suggestions to expand the activity, helpful websites, and library resources related to the activity.

Staff Resources

We also created resources for staff hosting the programs. These included PowerPoint presentations to share during the program with speaker notes, notes for describing the activity's steps, and a chat guide to answer frequently asked questions from attendees. These, combined with practice sessions and troubleshooting in advance, ensured all staff knew what to expect during programs.

Program in Practice

Each session ran thirty to forty-five minutes based on the participants' interest and engagement. Families could be on video with library staff, which helped us read the room and adjust pacing. We quickly learned our original program script didn't reflect successful pacing, and made further adjustments based on patron feedback. While we planned to discuss extension after completing the activity, we found it

took longer for families to complete each step. We adjusted to include this information as commentary during the activity's steps, creating more engaging demonstrations and giving families space to work.

We also found families were initially hesitant to ask questions. Instead, our chat facilitator led with a question which prompted families to feel more comfortable asking questions. Since we received most questions via chat, having a facilitator added those questions more naturally into the ongoing conversation and made sure all family concerns were addressed.

After the first week, we added opportunities for families to connect and share by including space at the end of the activity to share their project, creation, or experience. We didn't capture any of these videos to retain patron privacy, but still had the chance for more personalized interactions. As families became more comfortable with the virtual format, more were willing to share in this group setting.

We also wanted to engage families beyond the program, so for each session, we created blog posts featuring highlighted content. These included activity videos, additional resources, and some of the questions and answers discussed. When resource professionals were willing, we also posted their content. After our first session, we revised our filming setup to create more engaging, clear videos available on our YouTube channel. This helped us engage with both attending families and those who might have had other conflicts but still might benefit from the content.

As we move forward, we continue to evaluate our playgroup and other programming using these lessons. Our hybrid programming approach has allowed us to continue engaging families in a variety of settings, extending the reach and impact of the library in our community. &

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The Velcro Effect

Increase Reading Comprehension, Motivation, and Pleasure with Knowledge

LAURA RAPHAEL

Children's librarians are not reading teachers. But supporting children's reading is pretty much number one in our portfolio of professional goals, so it makes sense to learn a little bit more about how humans go about learning how to read.

One surprising thing to realize, when digging into recent cognitive science and education research about reading, is that there are really two aspects of reading that get mixed up in confusing ways.

The first element comes first, naturally—decoding. This is literally learning the “code” that written language represents. In other words, anyone who learns how to read must first figure out what letters and combinations of letters represent what sounds, and how to translate those sounds into words, and words into meaningful messages. It's popularly known as phonics and, reading experts have discovered, is best taught as a series of skills over time by trained educators in a classroom.

As the late (and truly great) librarian and writer Michael Sullivan wrote in a 2014 *Public Libraries* essay, “Learning the

actual process of reading is something [children] will do once . . . and should only take a few years.”¹ In other words, it's finite, and once achieved, something to check off and move on.

Phonics is absolutely crucial in reading, but when you've got it, you've got it. You don't have to keep going back to re-learn its skills.

The second aspect of reading is far larger, more interesting, and excitingly infinite—what happens after children learn the basics of decoding and start understanding and appreciating what the words on a page *mean*.

“But,” as Sullivan continues in the same essay, “gaining vocabulary, grammar, story structure, and background information are processes that go on a lifetime. Make them a priority early and start children on the road to becoming a reader.”²

This is the Shangri-La of reading, and it's important that librarians understand it should always be our larger objective for children's reading.



Laura Raphael, MA, MLIS, started her professional career as a middle school Reading and Language Arts teacher before turning to public libraries. Since 2001, she has worked in public libraries in a variety of capacities, most recently as Children's Services Coordinator for the Tulsa City-County (OK) Library System.

The good news is that we now have a pretty clear idea of what we should be doing to help children become skilled, engaged, and fluent readers.

The even better news is that libraries and librarians are uniquely positioned to be champions of this larger vision of reading.

The answer? The special sauce? The magic bullet? It's right there in what Sullivan wrote, "vocabulary, grammar, story structure, and background information." In other words—knowledge.

Building Knowledge Is Like Velcro

As Natalie Wexler argues in her book *The Knowledge Gap*, and as other education and cognitive science greats such as E. D. Hirsch and Daniel Willingham have shown, reading comprehension is dependent on the background knowledge that a reader brings (or does not bring) to the text.³

When a child does not have much knowledge about a wide variety of topics, they will not be able to understand much about what they are reading. But fill them up with facts and connections about topics like the habitats of golden snub-nosed monkeys and other tree-dwelling creatures, or the impact of building a cross-continental railroad on the nineteenth-century US economy, or how Egyptians mummified their corpses, and suddenly, they are not just understanding what they read, but enjoying it and making additional connections.

Wexler explains, "The more knowledge a child starts with, the more likely she is to acquire yet more knowledge. She'll read more and understand and retain information better, because knowledge, like Velcro, sticks best to other related knowledge."⁴

By increasing children's background knowledge and helping them engage with the rich content of social studies, science, and literature, we create better and stronger readers.

Wexler spent a year observing several elementary classrooms and describes what happens in classrooms that adhere to this idea (and those that do not). In knowledge-based classes, children are excited about learning and are eager to find out, for example, about the strengths of Greek goddesses and gods (enough to have a lively discussion about who should be the "president" of the class—Athena or Poseidon—reinforcing what they had already learned about democracy in Greek civilization), or evaporation, condensation, and the water cycle, or the War of 1812 and our country's complicated history with Great Britain in the early nineteenth century. Scores on reading tests incidentally go up, but more importantly, the complexity and depth of children's reading comprehension skyrocket.

Not-So-Secret Weapons

How do we translate this into solid library practice? After all, while we are educational institutions, we are not schools, and we do not offer systematic, leveled curriculum or daily pedagogical instruction.

But that doesn't mean libraries and librarians don't have a crucial role in helping children build a wide array of background knowledge to support reading comprehension, pleasure, and motivation.

Our first not-so-secret weapon? Our literal collections of knowledge.

Indeed, every day we are surrounded by volumes of knowledge, perfectly packaged for capturing the attention and interest of children and helping them on their way to Velcro-ing even more knowledge for reading success.

More than that, our second not-so-secret weapon is children's librarians. While children's librarians are not traditional classroom teachers, we are adroit and charming hosts at the magnificent, majestic, resplendent party of human knowledge that libraries represent. We know how to gently draw out what interests kids while introducing them to new books (and knowledge) that we intuit they may enjoy.

We share our excitement about this or that really cool book while giving away just enough of the plot or details or glimpse of the pictures to make kids curious and eager to check out what we're selling.

Of course, we have long been ambassadors of reading, but what we don't fully appreciate is that we are also the perfect ambassadors to knowledge-building that makes reading even more pleasurable to kids and will motivate them to become lifelong readers.

A Knowledge Focus

In fall 2019, I became increasingly convinced that a knowledge approach to children's programming and services at my library was a worthy and achievable goal. We were offering a lot of programming "candy"—arts and crafts projects, ninja obstacle courses, Pokemon chases—but not much programming "protein" that would inspire children to learn more about rich topics to help increase their reading comprehension.

As children's services coordinator of a library system with twenty-four branch libraries, I started my quarterly children's meeting by presenting the research about knowledge and reading to the approximately forty children's librarians and paraprofessionals I help train and support. I then gave some sketches of possible programming ideas that would shift us to a stronger, knowledge-first paradigm.



Swinging Easy from the Tree of Knowledge

One of my projects during the pandemic has been working virtually with two of my former storytime kids (and dedicated library users) who have been in virtual school this year. Evan McCartney, eleven, and his sister Elizabeth, seven, demonstrate what happens when you introduce children to the rich knowledge of the world early on.

Their parents have been absolute model parents as teachers from the very beginning, reading to them every day and talking about a wide variety of subjects with increasing sophistication as they grow, so I can't take much credit for their insanely high reading comprehension scores.

Still, I'd like to think I have had a small impact on their reading pleasure, and it has been fun to test out different knowledge-based activities with them over Zoom. So far, we have studied behavioral characteristics of wolves, alongside reading *Old Wolf* by Avi, the effects of global warming, and animal habitats.

The result is those two resting in hammocks during their spring break on a socially distanced camping trip. They were relieved from virtual school for the week, but they still wanted to spend most of their time reading and swaying in hammocks. Isn't that the test of a really dedicated reader?

I emphasized that I wanted to see more programs for school-aged children that would include dynamic explorations of real-world topics and subjects to build background knowledge. I also wanted these programs to connect in significant ways with the books and other sources of knowledge we had in our collection.

For example, I explained, don't just do an arts and crafts program of making elephant hats. To be sure, I had no problem with a program that included elephant hats. (Listen, there are some really cute ones!) However, I wanted them to go further. Perhaps they could also share videos of actual elephants at play, read a description of how elephants form families, and then talk about why the expression "an elephant never forgets" is supported by scientific studies about elephant brains and memory.

You still end up with cute kids in adorable elephant hats, but their knowledge and curiosity about elephants will be exponentially higher—and set them up for deeper reading comprehension when they pick up *The One and Only Ivan* by Katherine Applegate, for example, which features Ruby the baby elephant and her sorrow at being taken from her mother.

Per usual, after I presented this proposal, my amazing colleagues did not disappoint and, within days, they came back with a thousand brilliant, creative, and simply stunning ideas that would focus on knowledge in engaging, kid-magnet ways.

My top two favorites connected popular fiction and stories with deep scientific and historical content—a perfect combination of "candy" and "protein."

Want To Know More About Knowledge and Reading? Start Here!

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First, the Baby Yoda Teaches the Solar System Space Party, which a children's staff person put together in less than a month. While there was a fun origami Yoda craft (of course), there were also knowledge stations about each planet that children were invited to visit and get a stamp in their Solar System Passport. When they collected enough stamps, they could choose a free book—related to space, planets, and, of course, the Star Wars storytelling franchise—to keep.

Next, another children's librarian decided to shift the approach of her popular children's book group in their discussion about *Max and the Midnighters* by Lincoln Peirce. They went deep into medieval history of knights, watching short videos about castle sanitation and different configurations of armor, before discussing the novel.

It was all going so well and then . . . the pandemic!

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I don't even want to tell you all of the wonderful knowledge-based programs we had to start cancelling and then filing in our *Maybe 2022?* binders because it hurts too much to reflect on what could have been.

However, all was not lost. In September 2020, I worked with several children's librarians in my system to launch a knowledge-based children's service to temporarily replace all of those amazing in-person programs. We call it Kids Read Curious World ("Kids Read" is our brand for school-aged programming and services), and it involves a monthly topic, a web page of created and curated resources, and some truly inspiring activities, videos, booklists, and more.

We've explored the topics of archaeology, maps and continents, knights and castles, wolves, space and planets, presidents, bugs, weather, and the wild West.

Sparking Curiosity

There are limitations to what the library and librarians can do to build knowledge in children in a consistent, comprehensive way, of course. For example, we don't have hours every day to spend with children to help them develop a deep knowledge of evolutionary adaptations in animals and characteristics that all invertebrate and vertebrate animals share. But what we can do is give them a book about poison dart frogs.

Or engage them in a program about skunks and other smelly creatures. (Possibly even help them make a skunk hat craft!)

Or use a thousand other ways to spark their curiosity about animal defense mechanisms, which may lead to greater and wider reading that will eventually lead to a broader understanding of the animal kingdom. And when they read novels with animal characters, like *The One and Only Ivan*, the experience will be so much richer because of that understanding.

By sparking these curiosity forays with knowledge, we are opening this big, beautiful, amazing, wonderful universe of ours to children and saying, "Hey, this is all yours!"

Not a bad way to spend our time. &

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Meaning Makers

Leading Book Discussions that Actually Work

ANN HOTTA

A book club where you don't even have to read the book? Sounds odd, but we promote our library's monthly book club for fourth and fifth graders as more of a social club, a place to make new friends.

We don't aim to improve reading comprehension; we don't even require kids to read the book (although that is encouraged!). We simply want kids to experience reading as a fun social activity.

Still, about two-thirds of our one-hour club meeting time is spent discussing the book. (Thanks to the generosity of our Friends of the Berkeley Public Library, we are able to give away copies of each book to our members, which numbers about twelve each year.)

It should go without saying, but we have learned that an engaging discussion actually is fun unto itself. In fact, it's better than simply hanging out. A wide range of personalities can be present and contribute. And over the course of the year, we become a community of inquiry—people who help each other learn.

It wasn't always this way.

Some things we did well from the start. For example, we have always given kids the opportunity to vote from a slate of books that we put together. We include icebreakers and book-related games.¹

Yet every year, as the school year progressed, kids seemed to disengage. Disruptive side conversations kept erupting. By April, kids would be crawling (literally!) on the floor under the tables. For lack of a better explanation, we called it spring fever and dismissed it as something that we couldn't control.

But we were wrong. How did we go from crawling under the table to deep engagement?

The Meaning Makers

An encounter with *The Meaning Makers* by Gordon Wells, emeritus professor of education at the University of California,

Santa Cruz, finally pointed us in the right direction.² In his book, he notes, "Unless students are given opportunities to formulate the sense they make of new topics in their own way, using their own words, an important means of gaining understanding is lost."³

Wells encourages teachers to see their role as collaborators in the learning process. Education is meant to be a process that helps kids create meaning out of their experiences of the world. Although he was talking about the classroom, his research seemed applicable to our book club. I began to understand that crawling under the table was a kid's way of saying that our book discussions' meaningfulness was wearing out as the year progressed. Were there ways we could give kids a bigger role in shaping the discussion?

Open-Ended Discussion Questions

The first step was to set some principles:

- Questions should have an infinite number of right answers.
- Questions should allow kids to be the experts; that is, allow them to talk from their own personal knowledge, opinion, and experiences.
- Avoid questions that appear to simply be testing kids on their recall of the text.

To give you a better idea, here is an example of a question we used in our earlier years. *Out of My Mind* by Sharon Draper is about Melody, a girl with incapacitating cerebral palsy;



no one realizes that she is actually brilliant. Then one day, a device allows her to “speak” for the first time.

Our original question was, “*What is a memory that Melody has of growing up before she was in fifth grade? What do you learn about her from that memory?*”

A better question would have been, “*If you had a friend who reminded you of Melody in some way, what was that person like?*”

The original question is reminiscent of a reading comprehension question from a school test. The discussion leader might even feel an urge to assess the correctness of an answer. The original question does give kids the freedom to choose which memory to talk about, but each memory is associated with a small range of answers that can be considered either correct or not correct/less correct.

Unfortunately, this type of question rewards only those kids who can get a correct answer. In contrast, when questions allow any kid to be as right as any other, kids realize that they cannot fail in a book discussion. This gives them courage and a voice. The improved question still asks kids to think about what they know about Melody without testing them on that knowledge.

Let Go of Control

In the past, we (the adult discussion leaders) never showed our discussion questions to the kids. We sometimes changed the order of the questions in keeping with the flow of the discussion. We sometimes allowed kids to ask their own questions when they naturally arose. Still, our place in control of the discussion was clear.

Now we have learned that letting go of all that control does not result in chaos. We still create a list of questions for initial guidance and perspective.

How has this improved discussion? Kids have more time to think about their answers. Shy kids have an easy way to participate; they can simply choose one of the questions and read

it aloud. And kids actually do ask their own questions, and those questions are very stimulating.

A Discussion of Peers

The Meaning Makers gave us one other crucial insight—adults should resist the urge to comment on every answer to every question.⁴

Adults do this all the time. Imagine this scenario. A teacher asks a question. A student gives an answer. The teacher responds by tacking on a comment that is intended to be supportive, such as “That’s a great answer!”

However, in doing so, adults set themselves up as the hub of the conversation. They become the authorities on whether the answer is good or bad. Our goal for our book club is to have a discussion where everyone feels equal. But in a true discussion of peers, there is, by definition, no one person at the center.

The Role of Adult Facilitators

What *is* the role of the adult discussion leaders? We do want to ensure that everyone has a chance to talk, especially the quieter kids. For this reason, we do call on kids who raise their hands, at least initially.

As the year goes on, however, we encourage the kid who posed the question to take the lead on choosing who will speak next. We have found that kids really do try to be fair, and we never have had a problem with kids only calling on their friends.

We only have two rules governing our meetings—make space for everyone (don’t monopolize the conversation) and connect your comment (or question) to other people’s comments. In other words, don’t go off on unrelated tangents. Our discussions are rich and fun, and we often run out of time.

And I am thankful, truly thankful, to be able to say that kids don’t crawl around under the tables any more. &

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2. Gordon Wells, *The Meaning Makers: Learning to Talk and Talking to Learn*, 2nd edition (Buffalo, NY: Multilingual Matters, 2009). This study (see page 170) is the original source for the statement: “The single most important

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Co-Constructing Stories

Sharing Wordless Picture Books with Preschoolers

ANDREA A. ZEVENBERGEN, ALLI L. ANGELL, NICOLE A. BATTAGLIA, CAROLINE M. KAICHER

“A wordless book doesn’t have the author’s voice—the text—telling the story. Each reader tells it in their own way.”¹

In this quotation, three-time Caldecott Medal recipient David Wiesner vividly describes the opportunity that wordless picture books provide for the reader to create their own story. The term “wordless picture books” is often used to refer to picture books completely without words throughout the set of illustrated pages, and “nearly wordless” is used for picture books presenting only a few written words across the book.

Research on picture books without words has been limited, compared to the vast literature on typical picture books. However, the burgeoning literature suggests that picture books without text may facilitate preschoolers’ emergent literacy skills, including child language production during shared reading, vocabulary, and narrative comprehension.² Wordless picture books may also promote children’s sequential thinking and visual literacy.³

Although wordless picture books are similar to typical picture books in that they strengthen young children’s language and literacy skills, those without text have an added benefit—they are a creative endeavor for parents and children. That is, considerable flexibility in story creation is possible with textless picture books as there are few to no written words to constrain the story.⁴

As emergent literacy researchers, we sought to study the ways parents and preschoolers share wordless books. Our findings may assist libraries’ promotion of wordless picture books to parents and teachers of young children, who tend to shy away from them due to their unfamiliarity.⁵

Wordless picture books have been developed for all ages, young preschoolers to middle-schoolers. William Patrick Martin lists a variety in *Wonderfully Wordless*.⁶ Targeted age level is related to the complexity of the storyline shown in



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the illustrations, themes revealed through the pictures, book length, and the level of detail in the illustrations.

For our study, data were collected from twenty-two adult-child pairs, all of whom resided in upstate New York. For this exploratory small-sample study, families were recruited from childcare centers, preschools, and public libraries. The average age of the children was four years. Child age ranged from three to five years. Eighteen of the adults indicated that their role, related to the child, was that of mother. Three of the adults were grandmothers and one was a father.

Twenty-one of the adults reported their racial/ethnic background as White; one parent described herself as Latina. The average age of the adults was 38.4 years (range 24 to 60 years). Fifty-nine percent of the child participants in the study were female. Seventeen of the children were described by their adult relative as White, three were multiethnic, one was Latina, and one was African American. These demographics are typical for the county in which the study took place, in that approximately 94 percent of county residents in the 2010 census were White.⁷

The adult participants were asked to indicate how often they share wordless picture books with their child and also how often they share typical picture books with the child. Options included “hardly ever,” “once or twice each month,” “once or twice each week,” “several times each week,” “nearly daily,” and “daily.” The most common response (59 percent of sample) for the adults with regard to sharing wordless picture books with their child was “hardly ever.” For frequency of sharing picture books with words with the child, the most common response (55 percent of sample) was “daily.” A Wilcoxon Matched Pairs Test was used to determine if there was a statistically significant difference between the two types of picture books, with regard to the adults’ frequency of sharing the books with their child; the difference was significant, $z = 4.11, p < .001$.

In the study, the adult was first asked to familiarize themselves with a wordless picture book, *Wave*, by Suzy Lee.⁸ This book, which includes forty illustrated pages, has no words other than the title, author name, author dedication, and publisher information. *Wave* depicts a young girl at the beach. This book was selected for the study because the illustrations are pleasing and clear, a possible narrative is evident, and because the setting was considered likely to be familiar to families living close to Lake Erie and other lakes in Western New York. Next, the adult was asked to share *Wave* with their child, and their sharing was videotaped. Last, the adult was interviewed about their experience sharing the book with their child. The interview was also videotaped.

The videotapes of the sharing of *Wave* were transcribed verbatim and coded for instances of particular types of adult and child verbalizations. Each adult verbalization was categorized as information prompt, distancing prompt (which asks the child questions that connect the book to the child’s life),

yes/no question, request for clarification of child’s verbalization, attention motivator (e.g., “Look!,” “Wow!,” “Uh, oh!”), label/explanation, repetition of child verbalization, praise/confirmation, or other (e.g., unrelated comments). Child verbalizations were categorized as: answer, initiation, question, confirmation of adult’s verbalization, repetition of adult verbalization, attention motivator, or other (e.g., unrelated comments, unable to provide response to adult question).

The first author coded all of the transcripts, and the fourth author coded eight of the transcripts (i.e., 36 percent), to show that the transcripts could be coded similarly. Across the categories of coding, the average level of consistency was .95, using intraclass correlation, with a range between .77 and .99. Thus, in our study, we were able to make very similar decisions regarding the categorizations of adult and child verbalizations.⁹

The average length of the book sharing sessions was 6 minutes, 59 seconds, with a range between 3 minutes, 5 seconds and 15 minutes, 45 seconds. Descriptive analyses revealed that the most common types of verbalizations in adults were labels/explanations, with an average of 36.3 labels/explanations when sharing *Wave* with their child. Information prompts were also very common (average = 29.0), as were attention motivators (average = 23.9). Distancing prompts were relatively uncommon (average = 5.0). The most common type of child verbalization was answer (average = 31.4). Child initiations when sharing the picture book without words were frequent as well (average = 12.1). It is important to note that there was considerable variability across families in the frequency of the various types of verbalizations.

The results of the statistical analyses suggest a set of recommendations for use of wordless picture books with young children. The results of this study somewhat parallel the findings from studies of adult-preschooler interactions in the context of typical picture books with words.¹⁰ It is recommended that adults actively encourage children’s verbalizations when sharing a picture book without words. The adult can ask the child questions such as, “What is going on here?,” “What do you think will happen next?,” “What is this called?,” “What did we see at the beach yesterday?,” “How do you think she feels right now?,” and “Why is she running away?” These questions can help the child to practice oral language, develop empathy skills, and make connections between their own life and that of characters in a story.¹¹

Giving the child the opportunity to tell the story with increasing independence can help the child to develop narrative, or storytelling, skills. Adult questions can range from simple (e.g., “What is she doing there?”) to complex (e.g., “What do you think she feels?”). When sharing a textless picture book with a child, a large number of attention motivators such as “Wow!,” “Look!,” or “Oh, my!” may be needed, because the interaction will not have the cadence of typical picture book reading, which is often directed by the story text.

Another recommendation is that adults use repetition and praise/confirmation of children's contributions to the shared storytelling, to encourage the child to talk more. In the current study, adults' use of praise/confirmation (average 10.9) and repetition of children's verbalizations (average 7.7) were both common during the shared reading interaction.

Close examination of the transcripts of the adult-child book sessions revealed that most of the families engaged in a co-constructed story; however, some parents asked relatively few questions and instead used mostly explanations/labels to tell the child a story. The following is an example of a co-constructed story between a parent and a three-year-old child.

Parent: Now what's she doing right there?

Child: Uh blocking back.

Parent: Is she telling it to go away?

Child: Yeah.

Child: She like go away.

Parent: Yeah.

Child: If it just pushing the water.

In the following example, with a child aged five, the parent interprets the pictures with a focus on the protagonist's thoughts, and also includes questions in her book sharing.

Parent: So, she looked at the water and wasn't quite sure.

Parent: The wave came rolling in.

Parent: "Oh no," she thought.

Parent: She wondered if the water was cold or hot.

Parent: She wasn't quite sure.

Parent: What are the birds doing?

Child: They're running.

Across the group of families, we saw highly creative approaches to sharing the wordless book. Some adults chose to situate the child and the adult as characters in the story, referring to the female child in the book as "you" when discussing the book with their child, for example. Some children focused on what might be occurring outside of the illustrations (e.g., the beach being in the child's backyard, the birds flying away to go in a rocket). Adults in the study largely followed their child's interest, allowing the child a key role in the creative co-construction of a story based on the book illustrations.

Following the shared book interaction, the adult was asked a set of interview questions. Three out of the nine questions were analyzed to study the adults' perceptions of sharing a wordless picture book vs. a picture book with words with their child. The three questions were:

- "What did you like best about sharing this book with your child?"
- "Was there anything that occurred during the book interaction that was different from what you expected?"
- "What do you think you did differently with this wordless picture book versus what you would usually do in sharing a picture book with words with your child?"

Major themes regarding the adults' perceptions of the textless picture book vs. picture books with words were derived from the interviews, using the constant comparative method of qualitative data analysis.¹² The process of data analysis began with the first and the third authors independently unitizing the data, identifying small units of meaning in the adults' responses to the three questions. Consensus across the two researchers was then developed on all idea units. Next, the two researchers independently categorized the idea units into potential themes. Consensus was then developed on how the various idea units fit into the proposed thematic categories. Last, the names for the themes were refined.

Eight themes focused on the adults' perceptions of wordless picture books. Each of these themes was included in the interviews of at least 25 percent of the parents. These included:

- "can develop own story"
- "allows imagination/creativity"
- "allows autonomy/choice"
- "facilitates discussion/verbal interaction"
- "interested in child contribution"
- "could relate book to personal life"
- "must rely on pictures more"
- "child wasn't very attentive/interested."

This last theme is important to consider; some children in the shared book interaction asked the parent repeatedly to "just read!" It may be that some children will find sharing of picture books without words unusual and initially more work than they would like.

Overall, however, the results of the interview data suggest that the adults found sharing a wordless picture book with their child a highly creative experience. Two themes that

Table 1. Perceptions of sharing various types of picture books with one's child

Theme	Proportion	Example
Wordless picture book Wave		
Can develop own story	50%	"You have to kind (of) come up with a story."
Allows imagination/creativity	45%	"There's more room to use imagination."
Allows autonomy/choice	45%	"You can deviate and really do whatever you like."
Facilitates discussion/interaction	41%	"You could discuss what was happening in the pictures."
Child wasn't very attentive	32%	"I was sort of having to pull him back to the book."
Must rely on pictures more	27%	"Had to rely on the pictures because the written story as far as the perspective of the author wasn't there."
Interested in child contribution	27%	"I like listening to her take on it, like how she's interpreting it."
Could relate book to personal life	27%	"We could relate it to what we do or what we have seen."
Picture book with words		
Read the words	45%	"When I'm reading the book to him I'm just focused on the words."
Experience is structured	32%	"It's already sort of pre-done."

Note: Proportion refers to the percentage of adults, out of 22, who included reference to the theme in their interview.

focused on adults' perceptions of picture books with words were also derived from the interview data. Each of these themes was included in interviews of at least 30 percent of the adults. These themes were "read the words" and "experience is structured." These results provide suggestion that for many parents, the text is salient when sharing a picture book with words with their child. An illustration of each theme, using the adult study participants' own words, and the proportion of the sample which included each theme in their interview, is included in table 1.

The findings from the interviews provide suggestions for avenues through which library staff may encourage parents to try picture books without words. Notably, 73 percent of the adults in our study indicated that they never or hardly ever shared wordless picture books with their child at home. Key messages to parents and other caregivers could include

- wordless picture books give the child the chance to develop their own story;
- shared storytelling can help develop the child's language skills; and
- picture books without words can help to develop the child's creativity in storytelling.

Library displays and booklists of wordless picture books may help to promote such resources, and they may be well-accepted by diverse language learners and low-literacy adults as well. This is particularly useful in communities in which patrons speak a wide range of languages at home.

Most public libraries do not have the budget or space for extensive picture book collections in many languages; picture books without words can supplement the library's holdings of linguistically-diverse picture books. In her 2016 article in *Children and Libraries*, Jennifer Gibson maintains that open-ended questions posed to the second language learner in the

context of wordless picture books allows the child to respond to the story in their own words and also potentially build confidence in the new language.¹³

Wordless Books in Storytime

Although parents and teachers are target populations for encouraging use of wordless picture books with children, librarians can also use textless picture books with children in storytime. This can normalize their use as librarians provide for parents and caregivers a model of how to encourage children to talk about wordless or nearly wordless picture books.

Sharing books with wordless sequences, such as Eric Carle's *Do You Want to Be My Friend?* Eric Rohmann's *My Friend Rabbit* and Jon Klassen's *This Is Not My Hat* is a good way to ease into using wordless books in storytime. Many of the questioning techniques described above are helpful when reading wordless books in a group setting, especially asking children to describe the action or to predict future events in the story.

Adult or child descriptions of events have the added benefit of ensuring that children who are less skilled at decoding wordless picture books can keep up with the rest of the group. Storytime groups can also reconstruct the events of the book after the last page, which gives children additional practice in constructing a narrative.

Many parents and preschoolers may not be familiar with wordless picture books, but libraries are the perfect context to introduce families to these rich works. Libraries can provide displays, prepare lists, and model sharing these picture books with young children in storytime.

In sharing these books, parents give their children the opportunity to develop their visual literacy, learn new vocabulary, and consider the thoughts and feelings of story characters.

Moreover, the results of this study suggest that creative, joint storytelling between parents and their young children can be facilitated by sharing wordless picture books.

Parents and children can co-construct a story that generally follows the book's illustrations or goes beyond them, connecting the illustrations with the child's life, or even to a rocket ship that could be just off the page. &

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Couples Who Collaborate

Jarrett and Jerome Pumphrey

MARY-KATE SABLESKI

Jarrett Pumphrey and his younger brother Jerome may not be a couple in the traditional sense of the word, but these brothers certainly form a dynamic partnership to create memorable picture books.

Since a young age, the two have been working together to craft stories to engage and entertain readers of all ages. They wrote their first book together as teenagers (*Creepy Things Are Scaring Me*, 2003). With two more picture books to their collaborative credit, including *The Old Truck* (2020) and *The Old Boat* (2021), watch for much more to come from this wonderfully creative duo.

Jarrett, who lives with his wife and two sons, had a successful career as an entrepreneur, where he used his storytelling skills as a creative director at various tech companies. He was the founder and CEO of a company focused on clear, removable orthodontics, where he used his skills to market the product and create a brand for it. He now writes and draws full time from his home.

Jerome's family includes his wife, son, and daughter. He previously worked for The Walt Disney Company as a graphic designer. He studied graphic design at the Art Institute of Austin, and now works from his home.

Q: How did you decide to create books together?

Jarrett: We've actually been writing stories and drawing pictures since we were kids. We went to a school that really encouraged us to work together, even though we were not in the same grade. We got to work on a lot of projects together and then, when we got home, we just kept that going. We



Jarrett and Jerome Pumphrey.
Photos courtesy of Jarrett and Jerome Pumphrey.

worked on our own stories together. Then, one day, when we were in our teens, Jerome came home with a big stack of books on how to get a children's book published.

Jerome: We were already making full stories and drawing our own pictures, so I thought that was the next fun logical thing to do was to make a real book. My mom actually took me to the bookstore, and we bought these books, and I thought, "This looks super easy! You just make this a certain way, and then you send it to publishers." It felt like the doors were wide open.

Jarrett: Our first book did get published back then, by HarperCollins, and they published the text with another illustrator. We had set out to do both jobs, but they wanted a different illustrator. It was still great. We were ecstatic about it, and we had big hopes and dreams for that one particular book. But it didn't necessarily go that way for us; we didn't see the success we had dreamed of. So, we ended up getting jobs. I pursued an entrepreneurial path. Jerome ended up as a graphic designer at Disney and so, then fast forward twenty something years, we wanted to try writing children's books again. That's when we started working on *The Old Truck*. We took our time, and



Mary-Kate Sableski is an Associate 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.

the whole landscape of publishing had changed quite a bit in that time. We decided we needed an agent this time, so we compiled a list of agents who worked with our favorite authors and found one who we hit it off with right away.

Q: Where did you get the idea for *The Old Truck*?

Jerome: I was driving to visit Jarrett, a good three-hour drive. On the drive, I passed so much of Texas, old farms with old tractors, old trucks sitting out in the field. I thought that would be a great idea for a story. I was thinking very visually at the time. I was thinking how the truck doesn't move, and that made it into the book, as the truck actually does not move throughout the whole book. I was thinking how the world has probably changed around these trucks, and that might be a good story.

Jarrett: My head went to the family that owned the truck—what's their story? We got to talking about our own family. We decided we'd make a family that represented us, particularly the women who raised us. The book is very representative of all these very strong women who raised us. They were strong, and persistent, and achieving their goals. We wanted that to be the spirit of the little girl in the book. It's kind of the spirit of that truck, too. That's the story—perseverance, hard work . . . you can make your dreams come true.

Q: Can you describe creating books together?

Jarrett: We share a space in my home studio for a lot of the work that we do. Jerome has his own space at his house as well. We do a lot of printmaking, making stamps for the illustrations in our books on a big workbench, and then we make prints with the stamps. Our process is really a mix of traditional and digital. We try to leverage digital for the efficiency it provides, but without losing the charm and the happy accidents that we might get working traditionally. So, we will scan these prints in, and we'll composite our image digitally. We set rules for ourselves, so we don't make certain

changes or manipulate the prints in any sort of way that we couldn't in the original. We want to avoid losing that charm, which is what we like about these stamps.

When we work on a book, we both do the writing, and we both do the illustrating. But we do individually have our own strengths. I would say Jerome is certainly much stronger at illustrating than I am, and I tend to be more of the editor. When we make a book, it is very much how the two work together, and so I imagine it would be much harder for us, the result would be different if I just worked on words and he just worked on the pictures.



Jerome: We concentrate on what the story is, even thinking of themes, thinking of the nuance that we want to be there, but we really work out what that story is. And, knowing that some will be told with pictures and some will be told with words, there might be a little bit of the voice coming up, like what we think some of the lines may be. But we don't get too into the weeds with that. We really concentrate on the story, and that way we're both able to contribute to that. And then we can hash out some words, and then think through these pictures. And that way, it seems to be pretty seamless.



Jarrett: We are built in sounding boards for one another.

Q: What is it like to share your work with children, especially during a time with limited in-person visits?

Jarrett: We have been very lucky that we got to share our book in two or

three events before the lockdown happened.

Jerome: We did one virtual book festival, which was to an auditorium of kids, whom we didn't really get to interact with, but we got to see their smiling faces and that was cool.

Q: How do you see your work fitting into the #weneeddiversebooks movement?

Books by Jarrett and Jerome Pumphrey

Pumphrey, Jarrett and Jerome. *Creepy Things Are Scaring Me*. Illus. by Rozanne Litzinger. Harper-Collins, 2003. 32 pp.

Pumphrey, Jarrett and Jerome. *The Old Truck*. Norton, 2020. 48pp.

Pumphrey, Jarrett and Jerome. *The Old Boat*. Norton, 2021. 56pp.

Jerome: We wanted the books to feature people that look like us. It's just natural, so that was our approach. The visual voice that we gave to the book is that the pictures include a lot of people of color, and that's important to us.

Jarrett: When we see the books that are celebrated, and even the books that are overlooked, we think about how we want to make books that represent us, not just talking about the

struggle of being black. One of our favorite books growing up was *The Snowy Day* by Ezra Jack Keats. We put a tribute to that book in *The Old Truck*. The bedroom scene in our book was a tribute to the opening spread where Peter wakes up and he sees the snow outside his window. What we love about that work, and what we hope to do in our own work, is just feature a black kid just doing everyday things, enjoying life, being a kid. It doesn't have to be about the struggle of being black. That's how we hope our work adds to that discussion. I think those books are just as important, if not, maybe more important, in my opinion, honestly.

Q: What is next for the two of you?

Jarrett: Our next picture book, *Somewhere in the Bayou*, published by Norton, comes out in spring 2022. It's about some critters that are trying to find their way across a river. They encounter a log that they want to get across, and they see a tail. They're not sure what to make of this tail. The book is about what this tail is attached to, and what ends up happening to them. It's a little different from our previous books, but I think it's a great one. &

Avocado Is More Than Just a Fruit

Debut Author Discusses Journey

Sharon Verbeten

Momoko Abe's journey began in the fruit and vegetable aisle in a supermarket, just like her debut picture book *Avocado Asks* (Orchard, 2020).

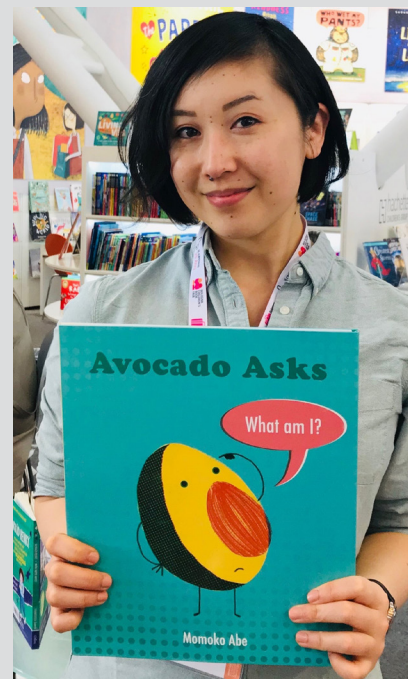
While the story follows one wondering avocado, it turns out to be about more than just a fruit. The book is a story about search for one's own identity and finding peace with it. On her blog, Abe, who grew up in Japan but now lives in London, shared these observations about creating her book.

"My guac-amazing three-year journey with my little avocado began with one simple question that popped into my head while I was doing grocery shopping—is an avocado a fruit or a vegetable? Then I wondered what if an avocado itself doesn't know the answer? That's how I found a seed of the story!"

Abe said she instantly felt a connection to the character in identity crisis. "As a Japanese who lives in UK, I don't feel quite like Japanese nor quite like British. I used to hate this feeling of not knowing where I belong.

"The more global and modern our societies have become, the more fluid and diverse our identities have become, which is, in my opinion, something to celebrate. However, it's a blessing and curse. Complexity comes with complication and confusion. Also, I believe the main issue lies in our tendency to put labels on others and ourselves."

Abe set out to "write a story for all the kids in the modern world where identities are not as simple as they used to be."



Women Who Led the Way!

Notable Picture Book Biographies

Laurie Wallmark

When I was a child, I loved math and science, and I wanted to learn more about the people working in these fields. Were they like me? What were their interests as kids? Did they have an *a-ha* moment in making their discoveries or did it take years of hard work?

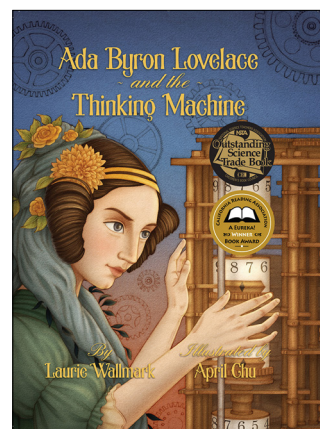
Off I went to my public library to find biographies about the life and accomplishments of these amazing people. One problem—there was only one kids' book about a woman scientist—Marie Curie. As an eight-year-old, I thought, “Did this mean that girls couldn't grow up to be scientists?”

Like many students, I wrote my first biography in fourth grade. It never occurred to me to write about a woman because as I'd learned from my library experience, except for Marie Curie, women couldn't be scientists. I chose to write about George Washington Carver, an African American scientist who discovered hundreds of uses for the peanut and peanut oil.

As an adult, I still love math and science. And I still want to learn about people working in those fields. I don't want today's children to experience what I did—that feeling that maybe I couldn't—or, even worse, shouldn't—be a mathematician or scientist. Children need to see themselves reflected in the books they read about people in STEM. This is especially true for those underrepresented in the field due to their gender, race, nationality, or other marginalizing factor. Children today should understand that STEM discoveries and inventions happen when ideas come from people of different backgrounds.

Because of my experience as a child, when I began to write for children, I chose to concentrate on picture book biographies

about women in STEM. Even in 2015, when my first book, *Ada Byron Lovelace and the Thinking Machine* (Creston Books, 2015; illustrated by April Chu), was published, books for kids about women in STEM were few and far between. The situation is improving, but we have a way to go to catch up. The progress is even slower for books about other underrepresented minorities in these fields.



So how do I choose which women to spotlight? First, I want to highlight the achievements of unsung women—women mathematicians and scientists who aren't familiar to most people. I'm not saying there couldn't be another great book about Marie Curie; I'm just not going to write it.

All the books I've published so far have been about historical women. If I write about a contemporary scientist, I run



Laurie Wallmark is the author of several award-winning STEM picture books about women. This New Jersey writer is a former software engineer and computer science professor.

Recommended STEM Picture Book Biographies

Queen of Physics: How Wu Chien Shiung Helped Unlock the Secrets of the Atom (Sterling, 2019) by Teresa Robeson and Rebecca Huang deservedly won the 2020 Asian/Pacific American Award for Literature Picture Book. As a nuclear physicist, Wu's work on beta decay helped other scientists develop their theories, yet she was bypassed for the Nobel Prize in favor of her male colleagues. This book highlights how she persevered despite the sexism and racism she experienced.

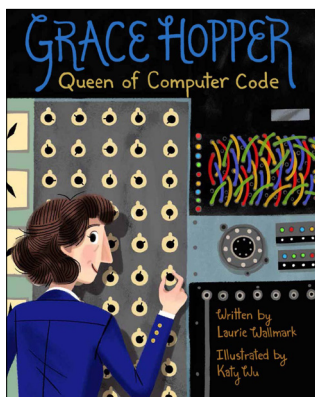
It's hard to explain a mathematician's work in a picture book. I wrote a biography of Emmy Noether, but couldn't find a way to make the math accessible to young readers. Eventually, I put that manuscript aside. Luckily, Helaine Becker figured out how to do it in her book, *Emmy Noether: The Most Important Mathematician You've Never Heard Of* (Kids Can Press, 2020; illustrated by Kari Rust).

Classified: The Secret Career of Mary Golda Ross, Cherokee Aerospace Engineer by Traci Sorell and Natasha Donovan (Sterling Kids, 2019) describes the life and the work of the first Native American woman engineer in the United States. In addition to speaking about her work, the book shows how she modeled Cherokee values such as education, working cooperatively, remaining humble, and helping ensure equal opportunity and education for all.

Margaret and the Moon: How Margaret Hamilton Saved the First Lunar Landing by Dean Robbins and Lucy Knisley (Knopf BFYR, 2017) is aimed at younger children. Computer scientist Margaret Hamilton's foresight saved the Apollo 11 astronauts from crash landing on the Moon. Children reading this story will feel the tension of the event and cheer when the lunar module lands safely. They'll also learn, like Hamilton did, the importance of always having a backup plan.

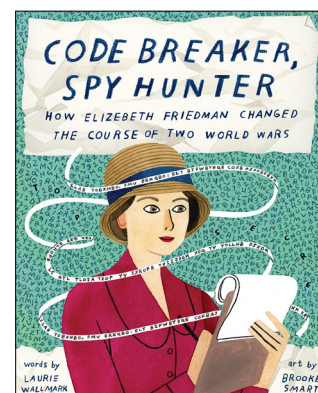
the risk that her greatest achievement could happen after my book is published. I'd hate for a child to read my book and not know, for example, that the subject recently won a Nobel Prize.

I also prefer to write about women who are the first person—not just the first woman—to discover or invent something. In my book, *Grace Hopper: Queen of Computer Code* (Sterling Kids, 2017; illustrated by Katy Wu), I tell how she's the first person, not the first woman, to use words in computer programs instead of ones and zeros.



I think about other questions before choosing my subjects—would children find this person's story interesting? Am I able to explain the science or math in a way that children can understand? Will I be able to find trustworthy source materials?

Picture book biographies are an ideal format for so many different age levels. My earlier books were geared for younger children, but with *Code Breaker, Spy Hunter: How Elizebeth Friedman Changed the Course of Two World Wars* (Abrams Kids, 2021; illustrated by Brooke Smart) I've moved to a longer, more detailed book for kids ready for a greater challenge. *Code Breaker, Spy Hunter* tells the story of the life and achievements of one of the foremost cryptanalysts of the twentieth century.



We all know Rudine Sims Bishop's iconic saying about books serving as windows, mirrors, and sliding doors. We certainly want to encourage children who are underrepresented in STEM, like girls and children of color, by using "mirrors." We also need to show other children, through "windows," that these fields are for anyone. All children can then use their imaginations to go through those "sliding doors" and envision a future where STEM is diverse and inclusive. &

Buzzing with Stories

A Visit with Author, Librarian, Teacher Janice N. Harrington

MOLLY MACRAE



Janice N. Harrington

"If someone listens to you, then your words have value, and you also believe that your lived experience has value."

—Janice N. Harrington

Vernon, Alabama, 1962, before breakfast on a school day

Cast-iron skillets clatter on the woodburning stove. Do you hear them? That's the sound six-year-old Janice loves waking up to. She follows it to the kitchen where her grandmother makes biscuits. Janice watches the sifting and mixing and, while her grandmother works, Janice tells her stories. The one about a dog with a big bone who stops on a bridge and sees another dog with a bone looking back. Then the one about the terrible monster in Rabbit's house (it's a bee).

"I'd tell her stories and she'd ask questions or laugh or 'mm-hm,'" Harrington says. "And sometimes she'd start pounding that dough until flour flew everywhere! My stories literally filled the air, and I loved it!"

Harrington still loves making the flour fly. She writes acclaimed picture books, middle grade fiction, picture book biographies, and award-winning poetry. She's received an NEA Literature Fellowship for Poetry and a Guggenheim Fellowship. She's been a public schoolteacher, children's librarian, professional storyteller, and now she's a professor of creative writing at the University of Illinois. Her love for stories and the human connections they create are the common

threads you can follow like a string of biscuit crumbs from her grandmother's kitchen through all her adventures since then.

Follow that string to the stories Harrington hears her mother tell—stories spun from her mother's memories and told over and over—with Harrington listening every time. Instead of "Goldilocks and the Three Bears," Harrington got, "How I Learned to Drive." She retells a short version like this.

My mother ran over her parents' house with a flatbed truck when she was learning to drive. Or, I should say, when she taught *herself* to drive. Her father bought the truck to haul pine logs and decided to teach his sons to drive it but not his daughter. He simply didn't want his only daughter to get hurt. Well—the idea! Her brothers could learn to drive but she couldn't? *Unbearable!*

So, my mother took matters into her own hands. Every time her father gave a lesson, she tagged along. She watched closely, paid attention, and after a couple of weeks she



Molly MacRae is the author of the *Haunted Yarn Shop Mysteries*; her new book in her *Highland Bookshop Mysteries*, *Argyles and Arsenic*, will publish in March 2022.

decided she was ready. That's how, at fourteen, my mother ran over her parent's house with the flatbed truck.

Her mother, hearing the noise and feeling the shudder, ran out to discover the truck on her front porch and used the words that strike terror into the heart of any teenage girl—"Get that truck down and get it down now or *I'm telling your daddy!*" And, in the distance, it looked like she saw her daddy coming. Well, my mother ground those gears into place, backed that truck off the porch, drove it down the road, turned around, brought it back, and parked it. It's at this point in the story my mother always says, "And I've been drivin' ever since."

That story came back to Harrington when she reached a difficult point in her own life, and she realized the story taught her what she had to do. In life, we always end up somewhere we didn't expect to be, or we come to a complete stop. That's when we get our own driving lessons—we learn to start up again, shift gears, or head in a new direction. By listening to her mother's stories from childhood, through adolescence to adulthood, they've become more than anecdotes to Harrington; they're stories that nurture.

Her first two picture books are personal, poetic, and full of sound pictures as well as energetic illustrations. With *The Chicken Chasing Queen of Lamar County*, you can follow the string of biscuit crumbs back to her grandmother's farm where Janice loved chasing the chickens. They'd flap their wings and run with a *puh-quawkkkkk!* Her grandmother would call out the back door, asking if she was chasing those chickens. "And just like the girl in the book," Harrington says, "I'd lie." In *Going North*, we listen to the rhythm of the tires on a Black family's car carrying them through the segregated south to a new home in Lincoln, Nebraska. In the summer of 1964, Harrington's family made that journey north in search of better jobs and a better life for her and her younger brother and sister.

In Nebraska, she discovered something else budding storytellers need—books. Her father took her to her first library, a tiny Carnegie in Lincoln. The idea that she could walk into a building and walk out with any book she wanted was . . . "there aren't words," she says now, "but let's say magic."

But she wasn't really a reader until fifth grade when she got sick and had to stay in bed. You might imagine her flour-flying complaints when her mother refused to release her from that sickbed. Harrington had a copy of *Jane Eyre* from the library, though, and she stayed put and read it, falling in love with the story and totally identifying with Jane.

"You don't know what's going to save you in life or lead you to your passion," Harrington says. Brontë's classic saved her by giving her powerful information. Not all books are the same. "The light went on," she says. "Oh. Some books are good. I have to find the good ones."

That's how the string of biscuit crumbs led to library school at the University of Iowa and a career of public library service. Ask Harrington why she chose working with children over adults and you'll get the best answer—"Fun!"

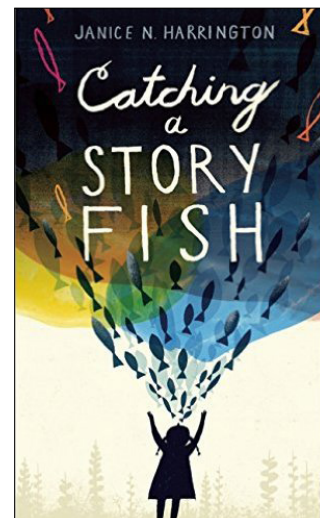
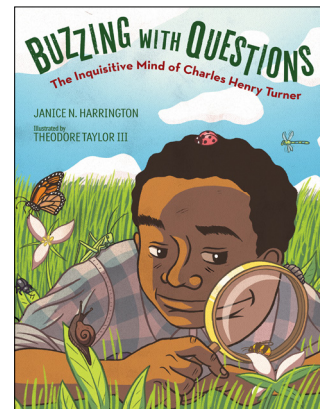
The job used every part of her creativity. That worked for her, and it definitely worked for the children and families she touched for several years at the Urbana (IL) Free Library and for many more years managing the children's department at the Champaign (IL) Public Library. While building the children's literature collections, Harrington read Mildred D. Taylor's inspiring *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, a book that shaped her professional commitment to put diverse books into children's hands.

For Harrington, it was a natural path from loving stories and books to writing them. She started in sixth grade, writing a story that her father submitted to a contest. She won honorable mention and when she received a certificate, she framed it and hung it on the wall. The certificate yellowed over the years, and she says that taught her something about fame. That early writing experience led to her beautiful verse novel *Catching a Storyfish*.

Throughout her life, Harrington has looked for the lessons and the nurturing in stories. She used that technique in her picture book biography *Buzzing with Questions: The Inquisitive Mind of Charles Henry Turner*. The book illustrates how she examines the small stories that make up other people's lives and turns them into joyful, meaningful, flour-flying adventures for her readers.

Harrington believes in mentors—someone who believes in *you* and says yes. In the first and only class in African American literature she's taken, she had an instructor whose opinion she valued, so she gave the instructor her poems. Sheets and sheets of them. The instructor put tick marks next to the poems she liked and handed them back. She gave no explanation for why she liked the ones she did, and none for the ones she didn't, but Harrington lived for the tick marks. The instructor gave her a yes with each one.

"Kids, human beings, need a yes," Harrington says. "That's so important. And all along the way I've had that. The scariest



thing of all is to believe in yourself or to believe that you can succeed.”

For children, some of that belief comes in finding the books that are mirrors as well as windows. Harrington’s books, which feature children and families of color, are among those.

“Today, we have amazing Black children’s authors,” she says. “Christopher Paul Curtis, Nikki Grimes, Jacqueline Woodson, Kwame Alexander, Varian Johnson—the list goes on, but we need more. Not just more stories featuring African Americans,

but books that reflect all of America’s vibrant cultural and religious diversity. When children see themselves in the stories they read, they know their lives have value. It’s the *yes* they need to start telling their own stories. If reading a book or poem I’ve written gets a child to read another book, or to write or tell someone a story, then I’ve done my job as a writer.”

May all children find their voices and fill mornings with the rhythm of biscuits and a haze of flour. May their voices, and the stories they tell, draw the people they love closer, listening to every word. &

Push PLAY on Podcasts

Renée Cogan

Renée Cogan is a Children’s Assistant Librarian at the Melrose (MA) Public Library, a part of the North Boston Library Exchange, and a member of the Kidcast Discussion Group.

At the Melrose (MA) Public Library, our monthly book club for second and third graders was well attended. But when the pandemic hit, we continued virtually, but kids weren’t as engaged. We knew our program, in its original form, didn’t translate well online, so I explored other options to engage young kids in literacy-based programming.

A 2017 *Children and Libraries* article on podcasts inspired me, giving me a roadmap for transforming our book club into a podcast club.¹

Since listening is such an integral part of literacy-based learning, podcasts made sense because most were free, easily accessible, playable on-demand, and many shows covered topics of high interest.

Finding the right content would be key. I used trusted sources, like Kids Listen (kidslisten.org), a grassroots nonprofit dedicated to high-quality audio for kids, and librarian-curated lists. My criteria for selection included shows with local connections, interactive formats, and kid perspectives. Once the episodes were selected, I reached out to some creators and invited them to join our program via Zoom.

We listened to the episodes together and either responded to what we heard or engaged with podcast hosts. Such experiences could not have happened in person, so it opened our minds to stories from near and far.

Each month, we had about a dozen kids attend, making our online program as successful as our in-person book club. Now, as we reopen our libraries, we still encourage families to keep hitting play on podcasts.

My podcast club journey opened my mind, connected me with those in my community and beyond, and encouraged me to listen, learn, and share stories with kids. Not a bad thing during a pandemic!

Reference

1. Kitty Felde and Pamela Rogers, “Now Playing . . . : Using Podcasts and Kidcasts in the Library,” *Children & Libraries* 15, no. 2 (2017): 9–12, <https://doi.org/10.5860/ccl.15n2.09>.

Fostering Executive Function Development in Early Childhood

Betsy Diamant-Cohen and Lisa Sensale Yazdian



Betsy Diamant-Cohen is a children's librarian with a doctorate, trainer, consultant, and author. She enjoys translating research into practical information for children's librarians, designing and offering online courses, and presenting webinars.



Lisa M. Sensale Yazdian, PhD, is an educational psychologist who has been working in public libraries since 2007. She currently oversees youth outreach services at Boone County Public Library in northern Kentucky.

Every Child Ready to Read and Supercharged Storytimes encouraged librarians to intentionally include literacy building activities with developmental tips for parents in their children's programming. Yet the development of executive function skills is as important as having strong early literacy skills by kindergarten entrance; both are essential ingredients for school and life.

Being able to look at one's actions, to evaluate, and use that information to plan involves cognitive flexibility. Remembering the plan when the same situation arises again uses working memory. Self-regulation means following the plan, which often involves thinking before acting and sometimes needing to restrain oneself. Together, cognitive flexibility, working memory, and self-regulation are the main components of executive function, and they are just as important as early literacy skills for predicting smooth and successful school experiences.¹ It is easy to add elements to storytimes and other programs that build executive function skills, and we encourage you to do so. An earlier column addressed Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) in Early Childhood;² this column will expand upon that and provide more useful resources.

Mind in the Making

<https://www.mindinthemaking.org/>

Ellen Galinsky's *Mind in the Making: The Seven Essential Life Skills Every Child Needs* highlights several skills pivotal to achieving success in school and life:³ focus and self-control, perspective taking, communicating, making connections, critical thinking, taking on challenges, and self-directed engaged learning. Executive functions are central to each life skill and are needed for children and adults to successfully manage their attention, emotion, and behavior in pursuit of their goals. The MITM website has wonderful resources including free multilingual tips and activities for putting the science of children's learning into practice.

Skill-Building Book Tips (<https://www.mindinthemaking.org/book-tips>) describe activities tied to specific books adults can use with children while explaining which skills are being built.

Skill-Building Opportunities (<https://www.mindinthemaking.org/skill-building-opportunities>) offer strategies for coping with difficult moments (e.g., diaper changing, preschool aggression). Both sites are searchable by life skill and age with downloadable activity sheets in English and Spanish. MITM also helped develop *Vroom Tips* (<https://bit.ly/3g16koJ>), short videos that show adults how to turn everyday moments into learning moments. Activities can be printed or accessed via a variety of electronic means.

Brain-Building Powerhouses: How Museums and Libraries Can Strengthen Executive Function Life Skills

<https://bit.ly/3j4Yn2a>

Brain-Building Powerhouses: How Museums and Libraries Can Strengthen Executive Function Life Skills examines how libraries and museums are uniquely positioned to build executive function life skills, what they are doing to promote these skills, and calls for an expansion of this work. The report identifies and explains how asset based programming already in place around family engagement, early literacy, play, STEM/STEAM, technology, and community partnerships can be more intentionally designed to support brain development.

Center on the Developing Child

<https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/executive-function/>

The Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University directed by Dr. Jack P. Shonkoff uses research, intervention strategies, and the science of early childhood to encourage development of effective policies and services focused on the earliest years. A free resource library includes guides for activities and games adults can use to support and strengthen children's executive function and self-regulation skills, briefs that explain why these skills are important, working papers, short videos, reports, interactive graphics, "TED-style talks," training modules, and more. https://youtu.be/efCq_vHUMqs

Cookie's Crumby Pictures (<https://bit.ly/2XpNTDS>) These five-minute Sesame Street segments were designed to model executive function skills. For instance, viewers watch Cookie Monster work through problems as characters in spoof movie previews such as *Furry Potter and the Goblet of Cookies*. Like the Motion Picture Association film rating system, every parody is rated, but it's for executive function skills like "TP: For Task Persistence" or "DG: For Delayed Gratification." The

Muppet Fandom Wiki (<https://bit.ly/3iFBYtz>) allows users to search trailers by content and rating.

Tools of the Mind

<https://toolsofthemind.org/>

Tools of the Mind is a research-based program for preschool and kindergarten children designed around self-regulation. Based on Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, it places social interaction, language, and scaffolding at the forefront of cognitive development and highlights the importance of situations that allow children to regulate others and be regulated. Activities and processes designed to help children become intentional and reflective can be used across settings. "Play Plans", for example, allow preschool children to direct and monitor their play by drawing/writing about the dramatic play situation they want to engage in, the role they want to play, and the actions. For a snapshot of Tools of the Mind, listen to National Public Radio (NPR) (<https://n.pr/3xJvEFZ>) and read some commentary from Dr. Deborah Leong, one of the program's creators, and Dr. Adele Diamond, a neuroscientist who researches executive functions.

My Niche Academy

<https://my.nicheacademy.com/MGOL>

Dr. Betsy Diamant-Cohen's course, "Using Library Programs to Build Executive Function Skills with Mother Goose on the Loose," uses five online modules with self-reflection questions and quizzes to cover how executive functions relate to brain development, early relationships, school readiness, self-regulation, working memory, economics, mindfulness, and twenty-first century skills. Research is combined with practical examples about new ways to support the growth of executive function skills in babies and young children through library programs and activities. Video clips of related skill-building activities taking place during library programs are included. &

References

1. Paul L. Morgan et al., "Executive Function Deficits in Kindergarten Predict Repeated Academic Difficulties across Elementary School," *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 46 (2019): 20–32, <https://www.researchgate.net/deref/https%3A%2F%2Fdoi.org%2F10.1016%2Fj.ecresq.2018.06.009>.
2. Shelby Deglan and Anthea Leung, "Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) and Early Childhood," *Children and Libraries* 19, no. 2 (2021): 25–27.
3. Ellen Galinsky, *Mind in the Making: The Seven Essential Life Skills Every Child Needs* (NY: HarperStudio, 2010).

ALSC Member Profiles

Keary Bramwell



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

Philip Espe, Library Associate, DC Public Library, Washington, DC (recipient of the 2021 BIPOC New Member Funding Scholarship)

What is your favorite part about working with youth?

Youth have innate passion, energy, and excitement for the world, and it inspires me to match their zeal. It's exciting to engage with youth as whole persons, listening to their stories, experiences, and dreams for the future.



What is your favorite award-winning title?

As a kid, I couldn't get enough of Jon Scieszka and Lane Smith's *The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales*. Even when I was "too old" to read picture books, I'd grab my copy all the time. As an adult, Matt de la Peña and Christian Robinson's *Last Stop on Market Street* and Jerry Craft's *New Kid* have become foundational to my professional philosophy. By being a good adult to children, I hope to teach children to find joy in their communities, lives, and service like CJ does on that bus. *New Kid* says out loud all the feelings I had as a Filipino-American kid, trying to make sense why I felt out of place in the often primarily white schools I attended when moving around the country in a military family.

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

Outside the library, I perform as a professional orchestral conductor and clarinetist. With some help with DC Public Library's internal program funding, I was able to bring my two careers together. I created a music festival where I conducted and rehearsed with a professional wind octet. One of the programs was a wide open rehearsal, where we encouraged the audience to ask questions. The preschoolers were the best. Their joyous curiosity and their excitement for seeing music come to life is something I will never forget.

What are you most passionate about in Children's Services?

I am passionate about being passionate. I want children to be proud of themselves. I love harnessing the boundless energy of children and showing them how they can make their community a better place. The process of growing up tends to stifle a child's zeal for life. I hope that every child I work with leaves the library feeling a little better about who they are.

Amy Merda, Programming/Outreach Mid-Kid Librarian, Indian Prairie Public Library, Darien, IL

Why did you join ALSC?

To find out about innovative ideas and research that focus on youth services.

What is your favorite part about working with youth?

It is a true joy to work with kids and see them grow over time as they come back to the library. There is a quote from the musical *Hamilton* that talks about planting seeds in a garden we don't get to see, but sometimes we do get to see the garden a little.

What is your favorite award-winning title?

I am a big fan of *Hey, Kiddo* by Jarrett J. Krosoczka. His raw honesty in sharing part of his life story really came through on the page, and the feelings he shared are so relatable. I haven't teared up like that in awhile.

What are you most passionate about in Children's Services?

I love the variety in my job and part of that is hearing about the many interests kids have and what makes them happy. There are a lot of things that kids like and don't like, and I enjoy hearing all about them at the desk and in programs!

Hanna Lee, Youth Services Coordinator, First Regional Library, MS

Why did you join ALSC?

As a person new to working in libraries, I applied for the Emerging Leader program. I was hoping to connect with other library folks nationally, since I didn't know where I was going to end up geographically. I was assigned to ALSC's Emerging Leader project and was so impressed with ALSC staff and members.



What's your best ALSC memory?

At a Midwinter Meeting a few years ago, I was serving on the EDI within ALSC Task Force, and a bunch of us were gathered in the All Committee Meeting, together with the first group of ALSC Equity Fellows. There had been a few discouraging incidents, but we were a group of primarily BIPOC ALSC folks, and it turned into a moment for us to connect and support each other. It was an affirmation of the idea that We Are ALSC; even the newest or most uncertain of us have a role in shaping the present and future of this association, regardless of our history of exclusion, racism, and other challenges.

What is your favorite award-winning title?

One recent book that is so close to my heart is *Me & Mama* by Cozbi A. Cabrera. I have a three-year-old, and the two of us can't get enough of this story of the love between a mama and child. And the illustrations are stunning.

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

My current library system has long prioritized giving books to kids (over tchotkes and swag), and I'm really proud of that. Each year, we spend dedicated funds to buy thousands of new books, across genres, to give to young people throughout our region. This summer, together with partners including local businesses and organizations, we gave away more than seventeen thousand books in northwest Mississippi. I'm glad that we're committed to providing access to an appealing, diverse selection of free books for kids.

What are you most passionate about in Children's Services?

Equitable access for all children. Do our services reach our hardest-to-reach children? Do all of our children see themselves positively reflected in our books, in our programming, and in our staff? Libraries can't solve all of the world's injustices, but I do believe that all of us in Children's Services have a unique opportunity and obligation to advocate on behalf of the young people we serve, inside and outside our buildings. &

Act Boldly!

Working to Combat COVID Slide

Emily Nichols



Emily Nichols is the Associate Director of Children's Services at The New York Public Library. She's a member of the School Age Programs and Services committee of ALSC.

While libraries look cautiously, but optimistically, toward a post-pandemic next chapter, it is important to focus on students and their families grappling with the consequences of nearly two years of isolation, remote schooling, hybrid learning models, and relentless change.

Studies already indicate that COVID slide is real, disproportionately impacting students in high-needs communities.¹ Current forecasts suggest that the impact on children will vary according to geography, local politics, financial resources, the effects of structural racism, and population density. These factors, whose impact and import are already familiar to library leaders in rural, suburban, and urban settings, were thrown into sharp relief—and in many ways aggravated—by the pandemic.

The School Age Programs and Services committee proposes that libraries and librarians—key components of any community's ecosystem of learning—must act boldly to support students and their families in this sensitive period of recovery.

Through ALSC, we have well developed practical competencies, research-based models, and professional tools for serving children and families. We have committed to equity, diversity, and inclusion, and built those actions into our strategic plan. Our members are consciously embracing opportunities for growth for our young patrons, their families, and our services in the wake of the pandemic. Our experience in tackling summer slide and its impact on learning outcomes for school-age children is now expanding to include COVID slide—and we must use every tool in our toolbox.

The moment has come to pitch our ambitious dream projects to address the unprecedented challenges that our communities are facing—dreams like overhauling outreach to welcome historically marginalized audiences (including Spanish-speaking parents), lending technology learning kits, or inviting local artists and scientists to be STEAM mentors to children. Initiatives like these can be offered at scale, in big cities and rural one-room libraries.

As learning loss and COVID slide haven't been felt equally, resources need to be targeted to address structural inequities. At The New York Public Library, we launched a series in fall 2021 with a focus on historically marginalized neighborhoods. These include our in-person NYPL After School program, which offers daily free drop-in homework assistance, STEAM enrichment, and reading engagement activities for elementary school students, and our new program to lend STEAM kits with robotics, educational tools, and more. Both programs are designed specifically to engage communities that have historically had the poorest access to high-quality programs and resources.

Committee co-chair Stephanie Prato reports from the Simsbury Public Library (CT) that staff, understanding that children need the opportunities for learning, engagement, and social interaction that public libraries provide, have acted boldly this past summer and fall to bring back

in-person programs for children and their families. Simsbury Public Library is a midsize suburban library with a charter to serve an area of about twenty-three thousand people.

As Connecticut eased restrictions, the Children's Department piloted the return to in-person programming. Summer 2021 programs were carefully planned to create a safe and comfortable environment, and all events took place outside on the library's lawn. Programs were broken down into multiple sessions so groups were smaller and more spread out. The staff also found ways to minimize shared touch points. In the fall, staff extended in-person opportunities and brought programs back inside, minimizing scheduling disruptions due to weather and allowing for a more diverse range of activities. Fall programs focused on literacy and math skills in a fun, interactive way to help students who may have fallen behind during the pandemic.

"As an instructor of future school and youth services librarians, I will act boldly by highlighting and sharing the bold services of practicing librarians and encouraging them to act boldly themselves. I will support and help them act boldly whenever they need me to," says Valerie Byrd Fort, committee

member and instructor at the School of Information Science, University of South Carolina.

"As a school librarian, I am acting boldly by opening my school library during the summer. My students and parents are able to come in to get books, use technology and learn about our STEM projects," said committee member Cynthia Zervos, who emphasized the importance of access during the ongoing pandemic and expanding services during an uncertain time.

Providing creative, effective, and equitable library services to children is a bold act and vital step toward rebuilding our communities. Large-scale programs to address learning gaps like NYPL After School are essential to helping our children thrive in the coming years. Smaller libraries like Simsbury demonstrate the importance of maintaining flexibility to respond to children's changing circumstances. ALSC members have access to tools, training and experts that were built for this challenge and are working creatively across the country as appropriate to their community. While we have often been forced to be reactive during the pandemic, there is scope now to be proactive in our bold plans for the future. &

References

1. Matthew Boulay and Elizabeth McChesney, "What Will Summer Look Like? Summer Learning Loss and

COVID-19 Learning Gaps" *Children and Libraries* 19, no. 2 (Summer 2021), <https://doi.org/10.5860/cal.E19.2.3>.



YOUR ALSO IMPACT

Did you know **over 57%** of ALSC members say they first learned about ALSC from a friend, colleague or professor?

You have the influence to build our membership and help ALSC continue to be a viable and successful organization of members dedicated to the **betterment of library service to children.**

We encourage our members to recruit at least one other person to join ALSC this year!

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