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Children & LIBRARIES

the journal of the Association for Library Service to Children

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Author Interviews: Rocco, Acampora, Churnin

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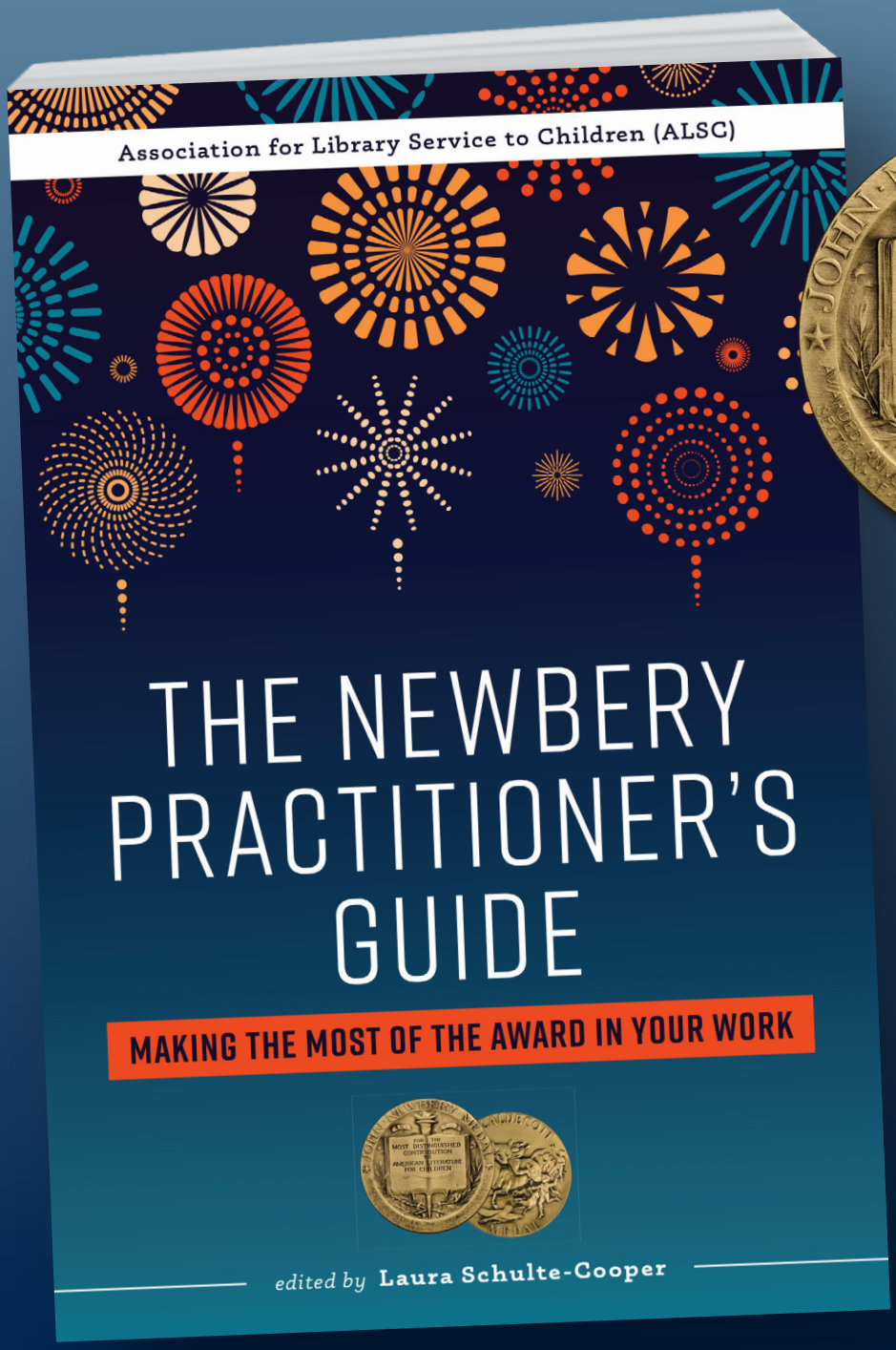

This book digs in and explores where the distinguished award intersects with library work in a range of areas such as collection policy, advocacy, programming, EDI efforts, and censorship. Recognized experts in the fields of library service to youth, children's literature, and education present strategies, guidance, and tips to support practitioners in making the most of the Newbery in their work.

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Erratum

We regret the omission of Grace Lin from the article on p. 24 in the Spring 2022 issue of *Children and Libraries*. Grace is also a member of this exceptional group of author-illustrators who have garnered both Newbery and Caldecott recognition.

She received a 2010 Newbery Honor for *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon* and a 2019 Caldecott Honor for *A Big Mooncake for Little Star*. Congratulations, Grace!

COVER PHOTO: Interior art from How to Send a Hug by Hayley Rocco and John Rocco (Little, Brown, 2022); used with permission of the publisher and authors.

Editor's Note
A Librarian's Bucket List

By Sharon Verbeten

About twenty-five years ago, one of my bucket list goals was to find a job to combine my passion and skills for both writing and library science. That dream came true twenty years ago, when I began as editor of *Children and Libraries*.

Another bucket list item I achieved was visiting the Maurice Sendak archives at the Rosenbach Museum in Philadelphia a few years ago. Sendak was my idol, so seeing his work up close and personal was a dream.

I'm sure as librarians, you all have your bucket list items as well. I still have a few I'm working on—maybe someone will read this and help me out! LOL!

1. **Get Jason Reynolds to visit my library.** His energy and inspiration in every video I've seen is contagious. Plus, it would be really cool to take him to lunch!
2. **Recruit Mac Barnett to do a storytime with me.** His wackiness—combined with mine—would pair well. Now, if he only lived closer to Green Bay!
3. **Learn writing discipline from Dan Santat.** Not only is he an amazing talent with diverse skills, but he's super prolific . . . with multiple much-anticipated titles coming out this year.
4. **Find an agent for my picture book manuscript.** My good friend, author Miranda Paul, inspired me to complete the manuscript. Now it's time for the hard work to begin—finding representation.
5. **Attend the 2022 ALA Annual Conference.** OK, that one's on the calendar, and it will be so great to see everyone in person after a long absence. Maybe I can make some contacts to help me with the four items above. Fingers crossed! &

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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.)

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PEER-REVIEWED

Challenges to Children's Picture Books with LGBTQ Themes

A 30-Year Review

JENNIFER ELAINE STEELE

For more than thirty years, the American Library Association's Office of Intellectual Freedom (OIF) has collected data regarding banned and challenged books in the U.S. Since this record keeping began, books with LGBTQ themes have made up a significant portion of the challenged books listed on the ALA's Top 100 Most Challenged Books of the decade lists[1] and Top 10 Most Challenged Books of the year lists.[2]

Much of the controversy surrounding LGBTQ-themed literature and materials deals with their dissemination to children. In 2006, DePalma and Atkinson wrote how often children are considered to be innocent asexual beings and therefore must be "protected from the dangerous knowledge of homosexuality."[3] Parents and others frequently challenge children's books with LGBTQ themes, claiming they are not suitable for the child's age group. Historically, this has made it difficult for families with LGBTQ members to access these materials. In 1989, Virginia L. Wolf wrote, "Homophobia . . . still keeps most gay families hidden and accounts for the absence of information about them. It also keeps what information there is out of the library, especially the children's room, and makes it difficult to locate through conventional research strategies."[4]

At the time Wolf published her article, children's picture books with LGBTQ themes were just beginning to be published. Three decades later, the genre has grown. However, has public sentiment changed? The author investigated this by reviewing ALA's Top 100 Most Challenged Books of the decade lists for 1990 to 1999, 2000 to 2009, and 2010 to 2019, as well as ALA's Top 10 Most Challenged Books of the year lists from 2001 to 2020.

During the review, the author noted each book appearing on these lists with LGBTQ themes and can be classified in the children's picture book genre. Eleven titles were retrieved from this review. As children's picture books with LGBTQ themes continue to show up on the lists of most challenged books, it is important to look at the stories behind the challenges.

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Heather Has Two Mommies (1989)

One of the first pieces of LGBTQ children's literature to garner broad attention was *Heather Has Two Mommies* by Leslea Newman.[5] The story is about a child, Heather, raised by lesbian women: her biological mother, Jane, who gave birth to her after artificial insemination, and her biological mother's same-sex partner, Kate. The book was listed at number nine on the ALA's Top 100 Most Challenged Books of the 1990 to 1999 decade. It dropped off the list for the 2000 to 2009 decade, but returned at number 87 for the 2010 to 2019 list.

The book's author received numerous letters from concerned parents and other citizens that insisted she was promoting a homosexual agenda. Copies of her books as well as other gay-themed children's books disappeared from public library shelves throughout the 1990s, as censors tried to limit public access to the books.[6]

After her book received such an overwhelming number of censorship attempts, Newman explained her frustrations in *Horn Book Magazine*. "It seems to me that a disproportionate number of parents live in fear of their child reading just one book with a gay character in it, for such exposure will, in these parents' minds, cause their child to grow up to be lesbian or gay. It is usually useless to point out that the vast majority of lesbians and gay men were brought up by heterosexual parents and spent countless hours of their childhood reading books with heterosexual characters . . . I have no problem with parents deciding their child cannot read *Heather Has Two Mommies*. I do have a problem with these same parents deciding that nobody can have access to it-or to any other book, for that matter.[7]

Daddy's Roommate (1990)

Another early children's book to address the subject of homosexuality was *Daddy's Roommate* by Michael Willhoite.[8] The story follows a young boy whose divorced father now lives with his life partner, and the book was awarded a Lambda Literary Award in 1991. The ALA listed *Daddy's Roommate* at number two on their list of Top 100 Most Challenged Books of the 1990 to 1999 decade.

One example of censorship involving both *Daddy's Roommate* and *Heather Has Two Mommies* is the federal court case *Sund v. City of Wichita Falls, Texas* (2000).[9] In this case, city residents, who were members of a church, sought removal of the two books because they disapproved of the books' themes of homosexuality.[10] The Wichita Falls City Council then passed a resolution to restrict access to the books if a petition was able to get three hundred signatures of people asking for the restriction. A different group of citizens then filed suit after copies of the two books were removed from the children's section of the library and placed on a locked shelf in the adult area. The District Court ruled that the city's resolution permitting the removal of the two books improperly delegated governmental authority regarding selection decisions of books carried in the library and prohibited the city from enforcing it.[11]

King & King (2002)

King & King by Stern Nijland and Linda de Haanis is the story of a prince whose mother, the queen, wishes him to marry; however, instead of a princess, he ends up marrying another prince, and the story ends with a kiss between the two new kings.[12] A sequel followed in 2004, titled *King & King & Family*,[13] in which the newlywed kings go on their honeymoon and eventually adopt a child, raising their new daughter as a princess. *King & King* made the ALA's list of Top 10 Most Challenged Books at number nine in 2003 and number eight in 2004. The book was also listed at number 20 on the ALA's Top 100 Most Challenged Books of the 2000 to 2009 decade.

One example of a challenge involving *King & King* occurred in Oklahoma in 2005. That year, seventy-five members of the state's legislature signed a petition for the Oklahoma Metropolitan Library System (OMLS) to force libraries to place the children's book in the adult section. In May 2005, the OMLS Commission voted 10–7 to move "easy, easy-reader, and tween" books containing "sensitive or controversial" themes to an area that could only be accessed by adults.[14] The Commission's decision was implemented in February 2006 as a Family Talk section that contained such controversial content. Further restrictions were added in November 2008, when the Commission added the requirement that such material must be placed at least sixty inches off the ground to be out of the reach of many children.[15]

And Tango Makes Three (2005)

One of the most frequently challenged books is *And Tango Makes Three* by Justin Richardson and Peter Parnell.[16] It's the true story of two male Central Park Zoo penguins, Roy and Silo, who form a couple and after a failed attempt at hatching a rock, end up hatching a true penguin egg and raising a female baby penguin named Tango. According to the ALA, *And Tango Makes Three* was the most challenged book of 2006, 2007, 2008, and 2010 and the second most challenged book of 2009. The book continued to be in the Top 10 Most Challenged Books in 2012, 2014, 2017, and 2019. *And Tango Makes Three* was also listed at number four on the ALA's Top 100 Most Challenged Books of the 2000 to 2009 decade, and at number six for the 2010 to 2019 decade.

One example of librarians having to fight censorship challenges of *And Tango Makes Three* took place in Loudoun County, VA. In 2008, the Loudoun County Public Schools Superintendent removed the book from general circulation at public elementary school libraries on the basis of a parent's complaint. After the parent formally challenged the book, an

advisory committee of principals, librarians, teachers, and parents reviewed the book, deemed it acceptable, and the anonymous parent made an appeal. Another committee of administrators, librarians, and parents reviewed the book and recommended that it remain in the collection. After originally deciding to override the decision of the committees and make the book available only to teachers and parents, the superintendent ended up returning the book to circulation.[17]

Another challenge took place in Ankeny, IA, in 2008. Parents at the local elementary school asked that the book be placed in a restricted section of the library so only parents could check it out. However, the Ankeny school board voted six to one to keep the book in general circulation.[18]

While *And Tango Makes Three* has been challenged many times across the United States, challenges have occurred in other countries as well. In July 2014, Singapore's National Library Board (NLB) announced they would be destroying copies of *And Tango Makes Three* as well as two other LGBTQ children's books. Singapore is a conservative city-state, where gay sex between men is illegal, punishable by up to two years in jail.[19] After an extreme amount of criticism, the NLB ended up overturning the decision to destroy the books. However, they were taken out of the children's section.[20]

Speaking to *The New York Times* in 2005, co-author Richardson, said, "We wrote the book to help parents teach children about same-sex parent families. It's no more an argument in favor of human gay relationships than it is a call for children to swallow their fish whole or sleep on rocks."[21]

Uncle Bobby's Wedding (2008)

Uncle Bobby's Wedding by Sarah S. Brannen is the story of young Chloe,[22] who shares a special bond with her favorite uncle, Uncle Bobby. Uncle Bobby announces that he is marrying his male friend Jamie, and Chloe worries that Uncle Bobby won't have time for her anymore. However, after spending time with Uncle Bobby and Jamie, Chloe ultimately decides that having two uncles is better than one. *Uncle Bobby's Wedding* made the ALA's list of Top 10 Most Challenged Books at number eight in 2008. The book was also listed at number 99 on the ALA's Top 100 Most Challenged Books of the 2010 to 2019 decade.

One example of *Uncle Bobby's Wedding* being challenged occurred in 2012 in the St. Louis suburb of Brentwood, MO. A resident challenged the book's presence in the children's section of the Brentwood Public Library, claiming that its purpose is "to glorify homosexual marriage" and that it could "open the door to library books advocating other interests such as white supremacy or pedophilia."[23] Library Director Vicky Wood refused to remove the book, but invited the complainant to take his grievance to the board, which he did. On Oct. 25, 2012, the library's Board of Trustees voted unanimously to keep *Uncle Bobby's Wedding* in the collection.[24]

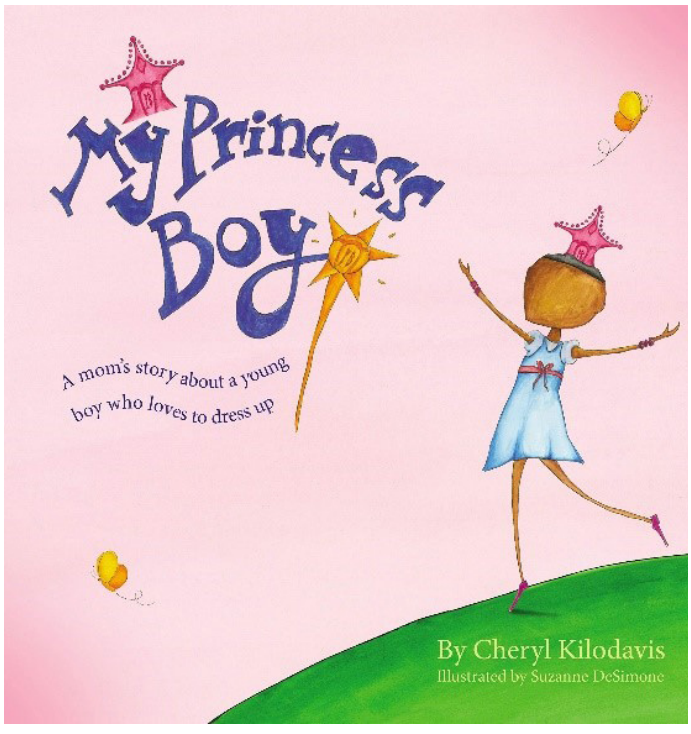
My Princess Boy (2009)

My Princess Boy by Cheryl Kilodavis is the story of a boy who likes "pretty things" and prefers to wear tiaras and "girly dresses."[25] Despite getting a lot of attention for his appearance, the Princess Boy always has the love and support of his family. *My Princess Boy* was listed at number 90 on the ALA's Top 100 Most Challenged Books of the 2010 to 2019 decade.

One example of a challenge of *My Princess Boy* occurred in 2015, when fifty-two citizens in Granbury, TX, challenged the inclusion of the book in Hood County Library's collection. When the library's director, Courtney Kincaid, defended the book's inclusion, objectors took their complaint to the commissioners' court, the county's governing body. The court effectively upheld Kincaid's decision by declining to vote on the matter.[26]

Another controversy occurred later that same year in Minnesota. In October 2015, the principal at Nova Classical Academy in St. Paul, informed parents that the school would be supporting a student who was gender non-conforming. In an email, the principal asked for kindergarten parents to talk with their children about appropriate and respectful conduct when engaging with gender non-conforming identities.

Upon learning that the non-conforming student was in kindergarten, many parents became concerned with the issue of gender identity being imposed onto their young children. Furthermore, several parents became increasingly apprehensive about the inclusion of *My Princess Boy* in the curriculum. There was a significant drop-off in applications and increase in declined offers of enrollment for the 2016–2017 school year. The school later went on to replace *My Princess*

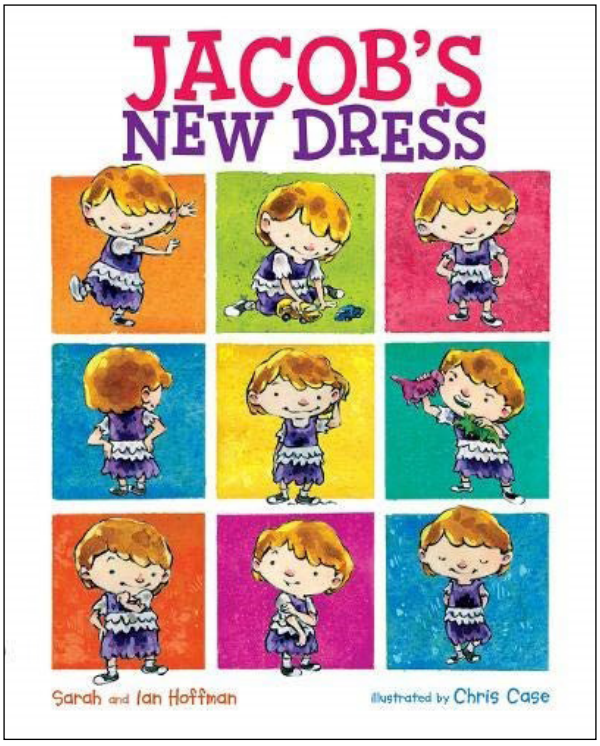


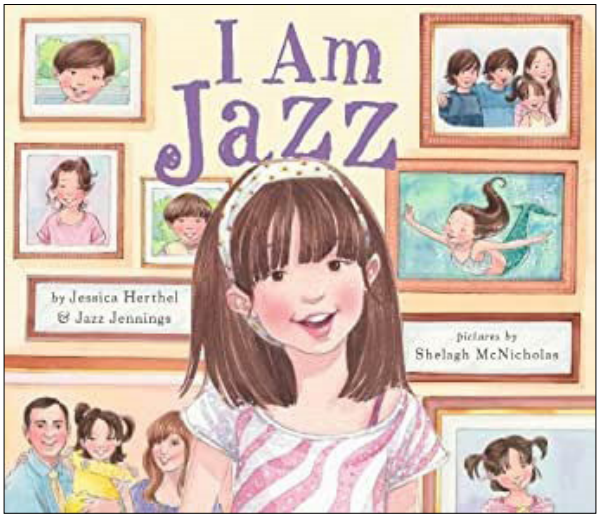
Boy with poems depicting similar themes.[27]

Jacob's New Dress (2014)

Jacob's New Dress by Sarah and Ian Hoffman is the story a boy who loves to play dress-up, where he can be anything he wants to be.[28] Some kids at school say he can't wear "girl" clothes, but Jacob wants to wear a dress to school. The book speaks to the unique challenges faced by boys who don't identify with traditional gender roles. *Jacob's New Dress* was listed at number 72 on the ALA's Top 100 Most Challenged Books of the 2010 to 2019 decade.

One challenge occurred in 2017 in a North Carolina school district when Charlotte-Mecklenburg (NC) Schools removed and replaced a book it had been using in a lesson for first graders to help them recognize harassment and bullying.[29] The NC Values Coalition claimed that *Jacob's New Dress* was "a tool of indoctrination to normalize transgender behavior" and started a petition to stop political correctness.[30] The school removed the book from the lesson and replaced it with Michael Hall's *Red: A Crayon's Story*,[31] a book about a blue crayon with a red label.





This Day in June (2014)

This Day in June by Gayle E. Pitman brings children along to a pride celebration, incorporates historical facts about the LGBTQ movement,[32] and also includes a Note to Parents and Caregivers with information on how to talk to children about sexual orientation and gender identity in age-appropriate ways. The book made the ALA's list of Top 10 Most Challenged Books at number ten in 2018 and was listed at number 42 on the Top 100 Most Challenged Books of the 2010 to 2019 decade.

One example of a challenge involving the book occurred in 2015 at Hood County Library in Granbury, Texas. *This Day in June*, along with *My Princess Boy*, received more than fifty "challenge forms," raising concerns about the two picture books.[33] Courtney Kincaid, the director of the library, said she "moved *This Day in June* to the nonfiction section but declined to remove the books outright."[34] The Hood County library board also voted to keep both books in the library stacks.

I Am Jazz (2014)

Jazz Jennings is a transgender female assigned male at birth. She began to identify as a female at a young age and has since become a well-known advocate for the transgender community. In 2014, she co-authored *I Am Jazz* about her experiences.[35] Since then, she has grown a popular YouTube channel, starred in a reality TV series, and published a memoir, *Being Jazz: My Life as a (Transgender) Teen*.[36] *I Am Jazz* made the ALA's list of Top 10 Most Challenged Books at number three in 2015, number four in 2016, number ten in 2017, and number six in 2019. The book was also listed at number 13 on ALA's list of Top 100 Most Challenged Books for the 2010 to 2019 decade.

One significant challenge took place in 2015, when a reading of *I Am Jazz* was scheduled at the Mount Horeb (WI) Primary Center, a public elementary school. A student had recently transitioned from boy to girl. School staff scheduled the reading to "support gender-variant students and their families."[37] After learning about the event, the Liberty Counsel, a conservative Christian nonprofit headquartered in Florida, threatened to sue the school district. The Liberty Counsel claimed that the school district's decision to read *I Am Jazz* "substitutes the beliefs of the principal and school psychologist for those of parents."[38] Upon threat of a lawsuit, the school district cancelled the scheduled reading.

Two weeks after the originally scheduled event was to take place, members of Mount Horeb High School's Sexuality and Gender Alliance (SAGA), as well as two hundred community supporters, gathered around the school's flagpole to read *I Am Jazz*. Later that week, nearly six hundred people gathered at the area's public library for a reading by co-author Jessica Herthel.[39]

Following the event, the district's school board released a statement that said, "Let the word go forth here and now

that this board will stand united and we will not be intimidated and we will teach tolerance and will be accepting to everyone."[40]

A Day in the Life of Marlon Bundo (2018)

A Day in the Life of Marlon Bundo by Jill Twiss is about a fictional day in the life of the real-life pet rabbit of former Vice President of the United States Mike Pence and details a romance between two male rabbits.[41] It is a loose parody of *Marlon Bundo's A Day in the Life of the Vice President*, another children's book featuring Marlon Bundo written by Charlotte Pence and illustrated by Karen Pence.[42] *A Day in the Life of Marlon Bundo* made the ALA's list of Top 10 Most Challenged Books at number two in 2018 and number three in 2019. The book was also listed at number 19 on the ALA's Top 100 Most Challenged Books of the 2010 to 2019 decade.

One challenge occurred in June 2018 at the Riter C. Hulsey Public Library in Terrell, TX. The book was challenged by a patron who stopped reading the book to her 8-year-old granddaughter when they got to the part about two male bunnies getting married to each other. The patron objected on religious grounds, believing the book "encouraged her granddaughter to accept a lifestyle the Bible called sinful."[43] After a public presentation to the library's advisory board, the board decided to retain the title, citing the Library Bill of Rights and the Freedom to Read statement.

Prince & Knight (2018)

Prince & Knight by Daniel Haack tells the story of a young prince who falls in love with, and later marries, a knight after the two work together to battle a dragon.[44] *Prince & Knight* made the ALA's list of Top 10 Most Challenged Books at number five in 2019. The book was also listed at number 91 on the ALA's Top 100 Most Challenged Books of the 2010 to 2019 decade.

One challenge occurred in 2019 when the Upshur County (WV) Public Library removed the book after a Calvary Chapel Mountain Highlands pastor,met with library officials to voice his opposition to the book.[45] The National Coalition Against Censorship, the ALA OIF, and West Virginia Library Association all urged Upshur County to return the book to circulation.[46] According to the *New York Times,* the book "was temporarily removed from the library, but later returned."[47]

That same year, another challenge took place in Loudoun County, VA. The local school district faced several challenges to pieces of literature that were instated as a component of

a "diverse classroom libraries'' initiative for elementary and high school classrooms. Most challenges centered on the LGBTQ pieces of literature, despite constituting only five percent of designated texts for the program.[48] Specifically, *Heather Has Two Mommies*, *My Princess Boy*, and *Prince & Knight* received the most requests for reconsideration by parents and citizens, according to internal district documents, with *Prince & Knight* having been moved to the school counseling office while under reconsideration.[49]

Censorship is a centuries-old issue in the United States.[50] Since 1990, the ALA's OIF has collected data regarding banned and challenged books in the U.S., with children's picture books featuring LGBTQ themes or depicting LGBTQ families being common targets of these challenges.

Many parents may want to censor information about same-sex parent families from their children, but that will not keep them from coming in contact with children from same-sex parent families. Judith Krug, former director of the ALA's OIF, explained, "We fight to keep these books on the shelves. People who complain about *And Tango Makes Three* really believe that homosexuality is wrong, that it's against God's commandments, that it's harming society. The problem is that these children are growing up in a society where some of their classmates are going to come from same-sex couples.[51]

Too often, adults fixate on the sexual aspect of LGBTQ parents, queer children, and children in LGBTQ families and object to young children learning about sexuality and sexual relationships.[52] However, Gelnaw and Brickley observe, "Learning about a gay/lesbian-headed family is no more about sexuality than learning about a heterosexual-headed family is. Children's interest in family has to do with who loves them—not the sexual life of the family's adults."[53] &

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Storytime Surprise!

Solving the Puzzle of Distracted Adults

ANN HOTTA

It's not hard to find library staff complaining about distracted adults at storytime. Still, as a person who began her library career before the invention of the personal computer, I can say that being distracted is nothing new. It has simply become more convenient and obvious.

Regardless, I acknowledge the struggle. We make rules and announce them intently. This sometimes leads to confrontations or shaming. Public relations can suffer. Or perhaps we hear that we are to be more "engaging." But what is this supposed to mean? Wear a funny hat? Slip on a banana peel? With all due respect, many of us don't feel comfortable being clowns. And storytime should be about the stories, not us.

Happily, there is a simple way to get adults (and kids) to pay more attention. While it's not 100 percent effective—nothing is—it involves no embarrassment, either to audience members or to ourselves.

What's the secret? Inject elements of surprise into your storytime.

Think of the best storytime books—they all have elements of surprise built into them. If you think of your storytime as one big overarching story, you will already have a feel for when those elements of surprise need to appear.

Just as in those stories, it is not necessary to be surprising at every single moment. Simply by inserting it now and then, either by plan or when needed, you encourage everyone, young and old, to re-engage. The human mind is naturally curious and you can use that to your advantage.

Here are some practical ways to incorporate elements of surprise into your storytime.

The Storytime Apron

I wear an apron with large pockets at every storytime. Before each storytime, I insert one or more carefully chosen objects that relate to a story or a theme (if I have one). For example, if my storytime is about the joys of eating vegetables, I might have a carrot in my pocket. Finger puppets or small toys also work well; the object doesn't have to be real.

My apron has three pockets—red, blue, and green, and before pulling out the object, I announce which color pocket it will come from to heighten the suspense and the focus. It makes a strong impression; one day, a baby who came regularly to my storytime blurted out "pocket, pocket" at the sight of my apron. Those were the first words I ever heard her speak.

If you do this ritual every week, children learn to look forward to the surprise. While adults may only be mildly curious about the pocket itself, they learn to anticipate the pleasure that it gives their children. They want to pay attention to you so that they can experience this surprise with their children.

If you don't have an apron, a special box or bag can also work. I like the apron, though, because I don't have to fumble around

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for anything; the pocket is right there at my hip. Also, because I come out wearing the apron, curiosity is aroused right from the start of storytime.

Flannel Boards

Who introduced the first flannel board to storytime? I have no idea. Yet, even though countless forms of flashy media have been invented since then, flannel boards still haven't lost their effectiveness. They are portable, versatile, and inexpensive. I made my own board in about fifteen minutes by gluing a piece of light blue flannel to an artist's canvas board. You can print out images and glue flannel on the back to quickly and easily make the pieces stick to the board.

Flannel board pieces move around. That in and of itself catches attention. But in addition, most flannel board stories and rhymes contain small surprises. The Shape Story from Littlestorybug.com is a personal favorite.[1] You can find lots and lots of flannel board ideas at Flannel Friday.[2]

Flannel board games draw even more attention because the outcome is unpredictable. For example, the sock game challenges children to recognize matching pairs. Sock-shaped pieces are pulled out of a "dryer" one at a time.[3] For babies and toddlers, I simplify it to just three pairs. I even composed a song to sing when a match is made. You can find it on the Association for Children's Librarians website.[4]

Little Cat is a game that you can adapt in many ways.[5] A tiny cat piece is hidden under different hats. This game is a big hit with everyone. I have several versions: a dog hiding under cogs, a carrot under those same hats, and a car under stars. A special edition version with a bird hiding behind library cards (glued onto different-colored pieces of felt so they stick to the board) is great for library card sign up month.

The Song Cube

If a storytime audience doesn't have a core of regular attendees, I stick with standard, familiar songs. For most adults nowadays, music is for listening to; participatory singing does not come naturally. If you sing a song they don't already know, then maybe for them it is even a good opportunity to check messages.

Behold the song cube, a 4-1/2-inch foam dice cube.[6] A clear pocket on each side enables you to customize it. I chose six very familiar songs and wrote the name of each song onto a card that I inserted into a pocket. When it's time to sing a story, I let fate have its way. I pull out the song cube and toss it into the middle of the floor. Whatever song comes up is what we sing. The attention-grabbing power is awesome. Even adults can't help but watch the cube as it rolls to a stop.

Once you have snagged attention momentarily, you have a chance to get everyone singing. All my songs include movements: clapping, rowing, twinkling fingers, and more. These movements naturally cause adults to put away their phones so as not to drop them. You don't even have to ask. Having done that, you have made it so that it takes more effort to pull the phones out again than it is to pay attention to you.

You can select your own song favorites, but mine are *Twinkle Twinkle Little Star, Bingo, Row Row Row Your Boat, Head Shoulders Knees and Toes*, and *The Bear Went Over the Mountain* (less familiar but very catchy). The sixth song is a counting song that I made up; it uses the tune of *Clementine*. The lyrics are "1 and 2 and 3 and 4 . . . " and so on, so people can handle it.

Stories

Of course, stories should be the heart of every storytime. A surprise ending, a funny rhyme, suspense, a plot twist—these are elements of any good story, and you should be looking for these elements in the stories you select.

Humorous stories are inherently surprising. Be aware, though, that humor is age-sensitive. What toddlers think is surprising and funny is different from what second graders find to be so. There are very few books that all ages find to be funny to the same degree, so know your audience.

Books that have a surprise on each spread are especially good for those audiences that are having trouble staying focused on you. While you don't want all your storytime books to be like this, having one on hand for every storytime is another way to keep the surprises coming. &

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PEER-REVIEWED

Tiny Hands, Big Impact

Play's Role in Early Literacy

HOLLY SHORTRIDGE

For babies and toddlers, play is a source of joy, a serious job to be done and a way of making sense of the world around them. To see young children at play is to observe the hands-on learning that will enable them to participate in society and live fulfilling lives, due in no small part to the effect of play in early literacy acquisition.

The academic literature indicates there is a positive correlation between play experiences and early literacy development for babies and toddlers. Therefore, engaging play opportunities should be incorporated for this group at the library, which serves as an accessible space for families and an invaluable resource for early literacy learning.

Supporting babies, toddlers, and their families within library services to a quality standard requires an understanding of their needs, including the vital need to play. Literacy is recognized as beginning from birth,[1] and as the brain creates more synapses in the first two years of life than at any other time,[2] this is a crucial period in children's development that deserves particular attention.

This review begins by defining play for babies and toddlers, followed by an exploration of the connection between play and early literacy. It then examines the literature surrounding the library as a play space, and the current perspectives of the value and role of play in libraries, particularly regarding early literacy.

Finally, this review looks at recent play-based initiatives in library curriculum planning, evaluating their overall impact and success in terms of early literacy development. Through synthesizing and analyzing the relevant literature and showcasing the success of library play initiatives, this review aims to promote the excellent work that is already taking place and advocate for the continued and advancing inclusion of play in all library services for the early literacy benefit of babies and toddlers.

Literature Search Methodology

The review of the literature began with the formulation and refining of primary and secondary questions. The primary question was, *"How can play be incorporated into library services to support early literacy development for babies and toddlers?"* followed by secondary questions:

"What does play look like for babies and toddlers?"

"What is the connection between play and early literacy development?"

"What is the role of play in the library?"

"What library play-literacy initiatives for babies and toddlers currently exist? Are these successful and why/why not?"

A search strategy was then devised based on each of these questions, identifying keywords and phrases and then searching using databases, journals, Google Scholar, and a university library's discovery tool that allowed for the searching of multiple databases, journals, and other sources. The sources were screened for relevance, reliability, and usefulness, and resources deemed irrelevant or inapplicable were discarded. This search was limited to English-language publications. The ancestry approach[3] was applied throughout the search,

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so when highly relevant articles were discovered, their reference lists were examined for additional related articles.

Play Behaviors of Babies and Toddlers

Play has been long understood by researchers as the way babies and toddlers (children aged 0 to 3) navigate their understanding of the world, how they learn, explore, experiment, and develop cognitively.[4] According to renowned child psychologist Lev Vygotsky, play is the "leading source of development in the preschool years" and allows babies and toddlers to learn through experiences.[5] Play for babies (children aged 0 to 12 months) begins with sensorimotor action schemes such as mouthing and banging, and gradually progresses to include more controlled and coordinated actions.[6]

Babies primarily engage in "exploratory play," exploring the world using their senses of touch, sight, smell, hearing, and taste, and, as their physical coordination advances, babies start to introduce objects into their play.[7] Exploratory play typically begins around three months old and allows babies to access factual information about objects or concepts, promoting curiosity and stimulating crucial neural connections.[8]

This sensory information-gathering for babies is just as valuable to development as later, more imaginative types of play.[9] Babies enjoy spending time with their parents and caregivers and benefit from an active adult role in their play. Supportive, responsive interactions with adults in games such as "peekaboo" help babies to focus their attention and use their working memory and self-control skills.[10]

Toddlers (children aged 12 to 36 months) are beginning to walk and talk and are taking strides in their physical and cognitive development. While toddlers still engage in exploratory play, they are now developing the capacity for simple imaginary play, which includes pretending, imagining, creating, and taking on the roles of others.[11]

From around twelve months old, toddlers begin to demonstrate forms of functional play: using an object for its intended purpose as learned from watching others, such as drinking from a cup or pushing a toy car on the floor.[12] Functionally exploring objects is a precursor to symbolic play, which develops at around eighteen months, in which objects embody new meanings in play, for example, a toddler playing with a block and pretending it is a car.[13]

Play and Early Literacy Development

For babies and toddlers, play and literacy are often entwined, and research supports a relationship between play and language development.[14] Literacy encompasses many skills essential to a successful life, as it is the basis for children's ability to communicate, read, think, listen, write, and socialize effectively.[15] Literacy development begins at birth and links to language development.[16] In fact, infants are tuned into language sounds even before birth and are born primed for language learning.[17]

For babies and toddlers, literacy learning is not dependent on formal instruction and does not include actually reading or writing. In fact, pushing babies or toddlers to achieve the action of reading or writing is not developmentally appropriate.[18] Babies and toddlers acquire literacy skills through the daily exploration of words, sounds, and language, through which they build an understanding of how people use various forms of communication to share meaning.[19] Through their daily experiences, babies and toddlers encounter opportunities to develop literacy skills, mainly through hearing language spoken around them.[20] Therefore, it is essential to expose babies and toddlers to public library spaces where there are abundant opportunities to engage in meaningful and literature-rich activities. Such activities can help them develop the skills and attitudes that will lead them to become successful readers and writers and build a foundation to help them succeed in later life.

Just as there are many different ways in which babies and toddlers play, there are many different ways in which play influences literacy. Four emerging literacy skills that develop during the baby and toddler years are representational knowledge, concepts about symbols, book handling, and identification of environmental symbols, all of which can develop through play.[21] As language is based on patterns, activities that include patterning and visual discrimination, such as block play, reinforce pre-reading skills in a way that is appropriate and fun for babies and toddlers.[22]

A 2007 study found that the distribution of blocks and encouraging block playtime was associated with higher language and vocabulary comprehension scores (as determined by the number of words and sentences a child understands) in toddlers age 16 to 30 months.[23] As parents in this study were given a list of suggestions of how they could play with their child and the blocks, the authors believe this activity was able to foster early literacy through giving the young children a socially and cognitively stimulating constructive play opportunity conducive to literacy learning.

Symbolic play is also closely linked to literacy development, as both share representational and communicative qualities. When children use abstract signifiers to convey meaning, like speaking into a block as if it were a telephone, they understand that one thing can represent another, an important step in literacy development as it directly supports the understanding that abstract symbols, such as words on a page, have meaning.[24]

A study of the relationship between play, gesture, and spoken language in children ages 18 to 31 months found that symbolic play is positively associated with gesture use, which in turn is positively associated with language knowledge.[25] Another study found that for children ages 6 to 18 months, the age by which they begin engaging in single-object play correlates strongly with the age of later-emerging symbolic and vocal outputs.[26] The symbolic play context also promotes

communicative exchange between parents and infants, a predictor of language growth in early childhood.[27]

Adult interactive roles are pivotal in play and literacy development for babies and toddlers, as they provide opportunities for speech and vocabulary expansion, and motivate babies and toddlers to explore language, as reciprocal interactions strengthen the neural connections in the child's brain that support the development of communication.[28] This connection between play, literacy, and the role of adults within play for babies and toddlers is one that easily lends itself to further examination within a library setting. Unlike preschools, where children must separate from their parents and caregivers, a library setting provides babies, toddlers, and their parents and caregivers with the chance to interact together within an educational and literacy-rich environment.

The Library as a Play-Space

The role of the library has evolved to become more than just a quiet repository for books, and many libraries now welcome the clamour and clatter of young children playing, understanding that the library has a significant role to play in early literacy and child development. Libraries supporting play for children is not a recent concept, and there is a long history of including recreational activities in libraries as both an educational tool and a way of bringing in patrons, from puzzle contests in the 1930s to video game collections today.[29]

Libraries are an everyday space that can transform daily experiences into high-quality learning and engagement opportunities, enhanced by the incorporation of play. A recent study of the use of Play-and-Learn spaces in libraries found that having a dedicated space to play promoted the kinds of targeted interactions between adults and children that support language, literacy, and STEM skills, suggesting that the library, as an accessible space, has the potential to address the achievement gaps between lower and higher-income children through the provision of play spaces.[30]

For babies and toddlers, the availability of appropriate library services to enhance early literacy is considered crucial by the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions' (IFLA). In its Guidelines for Library Services to Babies and Toddlers, IFLA acknowledges the significant impact that a child's environment has on their development of pre-reading skills and advocates for access to free public libraries for children under three as necessary to the enhancement of literacy in later life.[31] ALSC and the Public Library Association's (PLA) Every Child Ready to Read (ECRR) initiative also emphasizes that play is a valid and valuable component of early literacy learning by including play in its five components to build literacy, alongside talk, read, write, and sing.[32]

As libraries are an important educational environment where babies, toddlers, and their parents and caregivers can play and learn together, they have a unique opportunity to provide babies and toddlers with literacy-rich activities and also to share the value of play with parents and caregivers and explain the research-based link between play and early literacy.

Many researchers agree on the role of play in the library, and the value of play-based early literacy learning. Knoll affirms that young children, and babies, in particular, are just developing their reading skills and should be invited as "do-ers" in the library, presented with opportunities to engage intellectually through the avenue of play.[33] Rankin and Brock contend that library practitioners should provide young children with opportunities to play imaginatively in the library and that it is vital for early years librarians to create programming which allows for optimum learning opportunities for young children to contextualise early literacy through active play experiences.[34]

Payne agrees that play enhances early literacy in babies and toddlers and should be a core concept within library programs, maintaining that librarians can help inform parents and caregivers that the best way to promote early literacy is to connect and speak to their baby or toddler during playtime.[35] As parents and caregivers are the most significant adults in babies and toddlers' lives, how they respond to and engage with their children influences language development during the early years.[36]

Play-based programs for babies and toddlers at the library can assist parents and caregivers in understanding the direct link between play and early literacy and language, and encourage at-home practices that foster emerging literacy development. Ralli and Payne state that libraries have an essential role when it comes to promoting play through parent and caregiver engagement, finding that while adult interactions with babies and toddlers play a vital role in early literacy development, many parents and caregivers are unsure of how to engage with their babies for optimal literacy learning.[37] Through providing information on how to interact with babies and toddlers to encourage early literacy development and modeling these engaging behaviors, librarians can assist parents and caregivers in gaining the skills and understanding of play that they can apply at home.

Payne provides an example of a simple, one-minute play interaction between an 18-month-old child and a librarian during a play program where the child is stacking blocks, and the librarian communicates with them, using words relating to the child's actions such as "I like how you're stacking the blocks."[38] Through speaking with the child during play, the librarian gives them new vocabulary or reinforces already familiar words. This form of librarian-child interaction helps to model interactions for parents and caregivers and promotes early language and literacy learning for babies and toddlers through social play experiences with toys.

Aside from creating a play space and engaging families, it is also essential that the library provides adequate play materials suitable for babies and toddlers. Bastiansen and Wharton assert that the provision of toys and playtime for children in

the library is an enjoyable way to support early literacy. In their paper, they claim that as the public library is a free, safe, and accessible space for families, it often provides the sole access a child has to toys and unstructured playtime, especially for low-income families, and may be the only way parents and caregivers can access information regarding the role of play in child development.[39]

Knoll similarly argues that as many babies come from impoverished learning environments, for them the library is one of the few places where they can experience complex play elements such as toys, games, puppets, and other tools of exploration.[40] McCleaf Nespeca emphasizes the importance of toys in library programming for young children and urges librarians to incorporate periods of block and brick play into library programming due to the correlation between constructive play and early literacy skills.[41]

Babies and toddlers being able to play within the library is a matter of inclusion and community development, in addition to being a positive force in early literacy development, which is strengthened further through programs and services that are directly targeted towards understanding and meeting the needs of babies, toddlers, and their families.

Studies in Practice

Many libraries are embracing play as part of their mission to support babies, toddlers, and their families on their literacy journey. Below are descriptions of a variety of different library programs and services identified in the literature that incorporate play for children under three, looking at the types of play included, their influence in relation to early literacy development, and overall impact in the community.

Evaluation

All of these programs have an emphasis on parent and caregiver involvement and education. For library programming with young children, parent and caregiver supervision is necessary. However, these programs also provide families with instructional support on how to further their own play practice at home for early literacy, which led to positive feedback from families who had gained new ways to play and interact with their children, along with a better understanding of how these practices influenced early literacy development.

Informal home literacy activities have a positive effect on children's learning,[42] and programs such as Baltimore County Public Library's *Storyville,* which made resource materials for parents and caregivers and themed take-home kits available for checkout,[43] help promote continued play-based literacy learning at home. In the *Baby Builder's Club*, parents and caregivers were provided with a handout about the seven stages of block play, detailing what young children do and learn with blocks and how adults can support their play. The librarian provided further information about how block play stimulates the brain, which encouraged parents to interact more with their children and even experiment with creating their own block games.[44]

Racing to Read used tip sheets with ideas for play and engagement to accompany the toys in order to showcase the variety of ways children might play with them and explain the skills they are building while doing so.[45] Similarly, in the *Big Brooklyn Playdate,* signs were posted at each activity station to provide tips to parents and caregivers about things to say and ways to interact, and librarians and child development experts would be on hand to answer questions.[46] Having this kind of expert help and guidance during playtime helps parents and caregivers to feel supported and understand that play is a rich learning activity and promotes the quality interactions that develop literacy and language.

As many families may have limited access to toys at home, programs such as *Friendship & Fun with Little Ones,* which have an emphasis on making toys out of convenient household materials such as cardboard boxes, along with teaching families about how to use these toys at home, help make sure that play is accessible to all families.[47]

Free play, rather than structured task setting, is associated with more favorable child-parent interactions and language use[48] and opens up rich opportunities for symbolic play behaviors in toddlers.[49] Most programs had at least one free/unstructured play component. All of the programs had a vocabulary-building element, due to the rich language opportunities provided through verbal adult-child interaction and modeling of language. Vocabulary is a cognitive foundation of both reading accuracy and reading comprehension, as the more words children know, the more effectively they will be able to begin decoding print once they begin learning to read.[50] Providing a language-rich play environment for babies and toddlers allows them to expand their vocabulary through exposure to new words and strengthening of familiar ones.

Young children also acquire a rich vocabulary through music and movement play, as exposure to rhymes, and playing rhyme-action games familiarizes young children with sound patterns and syllables.[51]

In *Baby Bounce and Rhyme*, babies and toddlers were exposed to the sound patterns of different nursery rhymes and given musical toys to play.[52] As this program was for babies, the participants were too young to move their bodies in controlled and deliberate ways, and their bodies were manipulated by their parents and caregivers to follow the actions in the songs.[53] Hedemark and Lindberg argue that the role of the body in learning is valuable as physical motions are used to characterize the literacy practice taking place during library literacy sessions with babies and that the professional objective of the librarian is to contribute to early literacy by educating parents and caregivers on how to stimulate this development.[54]

In *Baby Bounce and Rhyme,* the babies' bodies became part of the play experience, and they were able to engage with the nursery rhymes as an interactive literacy experience. *Mother Goose on the Loose* is similarly designed to incorporate actions through interactive rhymes and movement games and provides time for babies and toddlers to bond with their parents and caregivers through pleasurable physical interactions such as hugs and knee bounces.[55] Through the use of musical sounds and patterns, these programs encourage language use and help babies and toddlers to develop an awareness of sound patterns and syllables, a necessary precursor to phonological awareness, a key early literacy skill.[56]

A significant positive impact that these programs had on the community was that they brought more families into the library. *Baby Bounce and Rhyme* led to an increase in library use and membership,[57] and Baltimore County Public Library found that after opening *Storyville* there was a surge in circulation and borrowing of library materials for young children and growth in patron numbers, with many new families visiting the library for the first time.[58] Encouraging families with young children to visit the library through the inclusion of play experiences means that more babies and toddlers are able to engage with the library space, materials, and resources, setting them up for a lifetime of literacy learning.

Although there is much literature regarding library play programs, this review found no empirical research conducted regarding the long-term benefits of such programs for young children and families and their effects on literacy development. This absence of research is likely due to the complications inherent in collecting empirical data about babies and toddlers in library settings, especially for long-term studies that would require a control group. Further research into this area could enhance understanding of how libraries impact early literacy learning through programming and services dedicated to babies and toddlers.

Conclusion

The library has a long-standing role as a place to play and an obligation to serve the community by providing opportunities that engage even the youngest of patrons and set them up for future success. It is observable from the available literature that incorporating play in library services opens up myriad literacy and language learning opportunities to young children during their most formative years, and that play programs are an enjoyable way for babies, toddlers, and their families to bond. Such programs bring new families into the library, encourage them to engage with library materials, and provide them with the knowledge of how to create quality at-home literacy practices. &

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A Supportive Solution for Caregivers

Computer Work and Play Stations

PATTY CONWAY

In January 2022, an innovative work station became an undisputed sensation on social media. The Computer Work and Play Stations at the Fairfield Area Library, part of the Henrico County (VA) Public Library (HCPL), struck a chord with parents of young children who have struggled to balance work and childcare during the pandemic.

The stations went viral after Ali Faruk, policy director for Families Forward Virginia, tweeted a photo of the workstations saying he had never seen anything like them before. Media attention was swift and widespread, covered by national and international print and broadcast outlets.

To be sure, the stations are not stand-ins for childcare, but are designed to help caregivers of small children use the computer efficiently at the library.

Our belief is that parents and caregivers should not have to arrange childcare to visit their library. Libraries are for everyone, and that includes adults who care for small children; that means meeting both the adult and child's different and ever-changing information and learning needs. These supportive furniture pieces help people who already frequent the library have a better experience, which can help facilitate learning, working, and using the library.

Patty Conway *is Community Relations Coordinator of Henrico County (VA) Public Library.*

HCPL serves a diverse and growing suburban county that surrounds the city of Richmond on three sides. The Computer Work and Play Stations at the Fairfield Area Library, which opened in 2019 in the historically Black Fairfield District of Henrico, were designed years before the pandemic radically altered the landscape of work and childcare. They were conceptualized by Library Director Barbara Weedman in response to a problem she had seen throughout her career as a librarian—how to help parents of small children get work done with their little ones in tow.

Librarians everywhere have seen this—parents or caregivers placing a car seat on the floor behind or next to their seat, turning away from their work every thirty seconds to make sure all is well; parking their stroller behind them and obstructing foot traffic or trying to get a computer on the end of the row so that the path remains clear; bouncing their little one on their knee and typing with one hand. There is no good solution.

In 2017, as the new library was being planned, Weedman envisioned an adult-sized computer desk located in the children's area with a comfortable play enclosure right next to it, so a caregiver could work while their little one could play.

As part of the design process, architects held community input sessions to determine how patrons used the existing library, looking for ideas for the new facility. Participants were also asked about ways the current, older library fell short in meeting their needs.

We were stunned the day a library desk went viral. Photo courtesy TMC Furniture by Chris Cunningham Photography.

Participants of all ages expressed their desire that the new library would support young people learning. It was clear that supporting young people and families would need to be integral to the building's design.

This further motivated Weedman to share her concept for an adult-sized computer desk in the children's area of the library with an adjacent, comfortable play enclosure. She discussed the idea at planning meetings, and designer Shannon Wray of Quinn Evans Architects sought a furniture-build solution.

TMC Furniture, a Michigan-based manufacturer of custom and retail wood furniture solutions, worked with Wray and the team to design the stations, which are made from wood with rounded edges and a durable finish, featuring a vinyl cushion at the base of the enclosure and developmentally appropriate interactive panels surrounding, colored with plant based and nontoxic dyes.

The carrels were made to be easily wiped down and sanitized, and to withstand frequent in-depth cleanings. Youth Services Coordinator Rick Samuelson advised on the selection and content of the interactive play panels, which were designed to support early literacy skills and inclusivity, and suggested the addition of low-height inset mirrors to encourage tummy time for infants.

On the library's opening day, a mother with an infant sat down at a station to use the computer and placed her baby in the carrel, without having received any direction from staff. The design was immediately intuitive.

Despite some pandemic-related service interruptions, stations' design and the popularity of the new, family-friendly building resulted in a slow and steady growth in usage. Demand is managed like other public computers, via a registration system that allows one two-hour session per user. Staff can extend this time if needed and resources are available.

To ensure the stations remain clean, they were designed to be easily wiped down. Even before the pandemic, creating something easy-to-clean was important as it was intended for use by babies and toddlers. Maintenance staff regularly clean the stations each day, wipes are available to patrons, and deep cleaning and sanitizing is performed every night. This is true of all areas of the library.

The design tapped into parents' experiences during the pandemic, struggling to balance childcare and work. And TMC Furniture has fielded inquiries about purchasing the retail version of this custom product from as far away as Japan and the Netherlands.

We have found that these stations are just another way libraries can support our users—they're an innovative piece of infrastructure that helps meet information needs and makes our spaces more accessible and accommodating to caregivers of small children. &

Peace, Patience, and Remote Learning

An Origami Lesson

JENNIFER VARGO

After a full year of remote education, most students have experienced some form of online or hybrid learning. Those who enrolled in Adjunct Lecturer Linda Diekman's Summer 2021 iSchool course (Information Books and Resources for Youth) at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, were immersed in learning to locate, evaluate, and select factual print and nonprint materials for youth while being cognizant of the children's intellectual, emotional, social, and physical needs. Developing thoughtful and intentional lessons to better connect with and support each and every youth is imperative in lesson planning, especially during a world pandemic.

Diekman assigned a Do-It-Yourself (DIY) project certain to heighten higher regard for nonfiction. She invited students to engage in an activity that required strict adherence to step-by-step instructions. She instructed students to channel their inner child or recruit a child or children to help on this project.

Students could choose from DIY arts and crafts, recipes, or resources that presented directions along with the reward of completion. They were to journal their process, assess the results, and present a final critique, taking into consideration any circumstances that helped or hindered the process.

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Maddie with her origami

Students were asked to take into account:

- What factors were considered? Which were omitted, ignored, or assumed?
- What was the target age group?
- Were the instructions and visuals age-appropriate or considerate of ability levels?
- Was the ability to acquire materials acknowledged?
- How did the lesson address backgrounds, interest levels, manual dexterity, patience, attention span, and special needs or accommodations?

For my project, I created origami with my eleven-year-old niece Maddie, and it was an absolute delight! I requested her assistance with my class, and she graciously agreed to participate.

Maddie asked thoughtful questions about assignment requirements and expectations. A year of remote learning allowed her insight into this activity. She wondered if we were to choose a project that presented challenges or gaps in the instructions. Were we to choose something simple that everyone could finish successfully?

Maddie's hybrid year of fifth grade enabled her to expertly explain how choosing a simple project might be a little bit boring, whereas choosing something more challenging could potentially have a number of glitches or omissions in the

directions and prove to be frustrating. She launched into a number of scenarios from her recent school year.

She shared the pros and cons of following all sorts of instructions, including written, visual, video, or in any combination, and told me that we were likely to experience some challenging frustrations. Maddie explained that following a video tutorial can often be frustrating and that the ability to pause or rewind may or may not be helpful.

She had also learned that videos use jump cuts to speed up the directions and often assume prior knowledge or ability. Some videos include distracting music or verbal instructions that don't match the visual. A well-planned video that uses highlighters for emphasis could make the experience enjoyable. Maddie was already anticipating the many glitches that could present themselves during our shared online DIY learning experience.

We agreed to do the project via Zoom. I offered to find appropriate projects and asked Maddie to share her insight. Maddie, however, wanted to search for her own DIY project. We decided on easy origami since it required simple supplies and did not make a mess.

Maddie chose one turtle and two sets of crane origami directions. I immediately discovered that she had previous origami experience. Maddie commented that even adults can find it challenging to follow origami instructions. She was up for the challenge!

The online origami instructions were colorful visuals with short written descriptions of each step. Maddie began with the turtle project, but before starting, she practiced reviewing folding an origami box that she had learned previously. While warming up, Maddie said she had made this project "over and over and over again."

During the process, we learned that we needed to turn our virtual backgrounds off. Maddie adjusted her webcam to better view her hands demonstrating the folding process. She started the origami turtle with its first two folds, held up her progress, and pointed out steps confirming that I was keeping pace with her. Maddie became dissatisfied with the turtle instructions and, after fifteen minutes, switched to the crane.

The instructions for the crane, however, were confusing to both of us. After approximately twenty minutes, Maddie deduced that the instructions were most likely translated from another language because of the awkward English. Maddie then demonstrated using Google Translate, pointing out its potential for inaccuracies.

Maddie shared that she was feeling frustrated with the crane directions. While she did not appear frustrated, she frequently commented that origami requires patience, something she felt she didn't possess. After a brief break, we lost our Internet connection and rescheduled to meet the next day.

On our second meeting, Maddie held up her project and reviewed the steps completed the previous day. She made sure that I was caught up to her. She was doing such a great job with following the directions that I asked her if she practiced finishing the project. Maddie promised me that she had not practiced folding a crane before our second meeting.

Both of us acknowledged that neither set of directions was independently sufficient to finish the crane.

Maddie proposed navigating between both sets of directions, since she had selected them anticipating their potential to fill gaps.

On one set of directions, the dash lines were quite faint and easy to miss. Maddie continuously compared both sets of directions. All three DIY directions required previous knowledge of paper folding, including creasing skills and familiarity with terms such as "reverse fold." Although Maddie expressed her frustration, she persevered, determined to complete a crane.

Maddie summarized her experiences after both sessions. She took a few minutes to quickly reflect on her process.

"I have found that when I was making a crane from origami paper, I found two direction papers for cranes, and I thought we could do both papers and find better or worse results having high hopes for both of the directions. Once we started, it went downhill. We tried one of the papers at the start, and there were twelve steps; when we got to step four, we were confused since the paper and visuals didn't make sense . . . I still had to figure out a few things by looking at the very *faint creases on the photos and then even looking at the words and visuals I couldn't understand what the paper wanted me to do . . .*

"I didn't do very well completing the origami with the instructions and was unhappy with the lack of important details. The lack of important details hindered the process, like when we were trying to find out how to get to one place, when the visuals and instructions were pointing us in the wrong direction . . . we had to have a lot of patience since some steps were frustrating and made no sense, and we only had to improvise a little bit." &

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Stand Still in the Moment

A Chat with Author Paul Acampora

ARYSSA DAMRON

"A lot of it was informed by being locked in the house for a year and watching the world suffer and watching young people look around going, this isn't fair," author Paul Acampora tells me when we pick up the phone to chat about his newest book, *In Honor of Broken Things* (Penguin 2022).

In a moving tale of friendship in spite of tough circumstances, Acampora weaves three eighth graders together through the power of clay. Yes, clay, as in, pottery.

Oscar, Riley, and Noah, three middle schoolers going through three different adjustments, meet in an Introduction to Clay class that brings them together just when they need each other most and challenges their assumptions about brokenness and art.

Oscar, a star football player who just lost his younger sister to cancer, struggles with a new injury. New schools are tough for everyone, especially Riley, whose middle school angst is exacerbated by her mother's decision to move them back to her hometown after a robbery at her workplace. The trio is completed by Noah, a homeschooled kid experiencing public school for the first time while dealing with the emotional debris of his parent's separation. Pulled together even when one of them tries to pull away, these friends find that together—through art, communication, and sometimes with the help of a priest—they can make it through the tough stuff that life throws at them.

The book, which started as a comedy, quickly became a chance for Acampora's characters to "stand still in the moment" they are in and experience their feelings and their grief and their emotions.

The use of three points of views in this novel provides a unique opportunity for the reader to explore three very different

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experiences—something Acampora said he had to be persuaded to try by his editor. After agreeing to write his first draft from multiple points of view, each character became a voice that he could no longer relegate to the sidelines.

"It started as a story about a kid who has to take art and then finds out that he's good at it and what that means in his circle of friends. It's not cool," says Acampora. So, he looked for the pain in this character, and the side characters he used in this multi point-of-view novel, but then the pandemic happened.

"The world changed very quickly, and I thought all right, well, I don't really have to hurt anybody, the whole world is kind of hurting right now. So how do you address that? I think the way to address that is number one, you surround yourself with people who care, but then your reaction to that typically is get away from me, you weirdo. And so how do you force people to stay together?" The school story provides a prime setting.

By the end, as so many of us discovered during the pandemic, Oscar needed the people around him who cared more than ever. Art became an outlet for each of the three protagonists, and ultimately the thing that bonded them, but their friendship existed beyond the kiln.

"Go make something," Acampora says, thinking about how his characters and his readers can step away from the pain and the grief and the stress of the day. "Go play a musical instrument, go do art, write, make a snowman. There's a song about that! Go make something and get your head out of that place. Art is that thing for so many people."

The excellent teacher featured in this book was, like so many great teachers in books, inspired by a teacher Acampora knew, who taught pottery and told him about a student who found himself taking to the medium quite swimmingly, surprising himself. That, Acampora reiterated, makes the story feel authentic, but also reminds us of the dangers of the arts being cut in school.

When schools went remote, arts instruction was often dropped entirely, and arts programs are often the first cut at schools when the budget gets tight. Where then, is the chance for students to express themselves and try new forms of art if not in music class and art class and around the pottery wheel?

The pandemic will impact literature for years and years to come, and it will not always be so clear as a book about shutdowns and masks and toilet paper shortages. It will also appear subtly in books about the ways that we cope with loss and change around us, and how we "stand still in the moment" and experience the world around us.

"Those tools that we give ourselves and our children to be better really matter in this past year," Acampora said. "I thought it was really important for me personally to think about how do we get better, and the answer, sometimes is we don't. That scar will always be there, so how do you deal with that and as it works out, I think the answer is much the same as in this story—surround yourself with people who love you and care about you and pick you up, and then make something." &

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A Book's Long Journey

How Librarians Aided One Author's Award-Winning Research

PATRICIA SARLES

Nancy Churnin
Photo by Kim Leeson

Nancy Churnin's Dear Mr. Dickens *won this year's National Jewish Book Award and was named a Sydney Taylor Honor Book. Here she recalls her journey researching the book—and how librarians were pivotal to her research. Here, in her own words, Churnin shares her story from research to publication.*

I am very grateful to librarians for making my book possible. I was in my local library in Plano, Texas, doing research on another topic when my mind drifted to Charles Dickens—one of my favorite writers—and I stumbled on one or two sentences in an article that opened a magical door.

The sentences were about how a Jewish woman, Eliza Davis, had written to Dickens to tell him how hurtful and harmful his portrait of Fagin in *Oliver Twist* was to Jewish people and how she had ultimately succeeded in changing his perspective and his heart. Well, now I had to see the entire correspondence and get more context for these sentences. But where could I find the letters?

Patricia Sarles *is the Coordinator of Library Services for Brooklyn and Staten Island for the New York City School Library System. In her spare time, she researches donor offspring characters in children's and young adult literature and is the founder, curator, and editor of the blogs, Books for Donor Offspring and YA Books for Donor Offspring.*

I looked and looked and came up with nothing. I talked to my librarian about it. She started researching and told me that there were two copies of the complete correspondence in the United States and one of those copies was at the University of North Texas rare books collection, just forty minutes away from me!

I called the University of North Texas, where another kind librarian put me in touch with a professor who had donated the book of their correspondence to the library. He became a mentor and friend in this journey and the librarian at University of North Texas copied and emailed copies of all the letters for me.

Librarians were essential to this story's journey as were the three professors that helped me make sure each detail was correct. But the real story begins many years before I came across the article that propelled the story.

I fell in love with Dickens' novels when I was little. My mother, who had always been an enthusiastic supporter of anything I read, shook her head when she saw me reading Dickens. She asked, a bit sharply, how I could read a writer who created Fagin, an ugly Jewish stereotype, in *Oliver Twist*. My mother had lost family in the Holocaust—a grandmother, uncles, aunts, cousins she never met in Bialystok, Poland, when the Nazis marched through their village. She'd experienced anti-semitism growing up in the Bronx during World War II, too.

She knew the power of stereotypes to shape attitudes and spur ugly actions. For the first time, she disapproved of what I was reading. But I couldn't stop reading Dickens—he was

such a great writer. I wished I could have written him a letter, asking how someone with so much compassion for everyone else could write such hurtful things about my people, the Jewish people.

When I discovered Eliza's story as an adult in 2013, it was surreal. She had written the letter I had dreamed of writing. Not only that, her letters showed he did have a great heart—a heart with the capacity to grow and change much as his Scrooge in *A Christmas Carol* did.

This book has been like a miracle for my mother and me. When it was finally printed and I could put it in her hands, she read it over and over. "This is so important," she murmured. And she looked up and smiled. All the years of pain, of her heart hurting as she thought of this person so many admired hurting the Jewish people, began to fade. Thanks to *Dear Mr. Dickens*, she knew that this person she'd thought of as cold and cruel was someone who could learn and grow and do better.

My mother is a retired teacher, and all her life she has believed in the power of helping children learn and grow and do better. As she read and reread the book, I saw her face soften as if remembering a more innocent time when she truly believed that people were good at heart.

Dear Mr. Dickens reminds us that it's never too late to learn and grow and do better. Charles Dickens ended up being a "mensch" as we say in Yiddish, who spoke up for Jewish people and changed the hearts of his readers. Best of all, once he changed, Eliza forgave him as we should always forgive when people make amends. Like Eliza, my mother forgave Dickens. And here's the beautiful thing about forgiveness. It heals the person who forgives. I will be grateful always for getting the chance to see *Dear Mr. Dickens* heal my mother's heart. &

A Chat with Author Nancy Churnin

You were an English major at Harvard University. You said you chose that major because you noticed that the English classes had the most books at the campus bookstore. How did that decision prepare you for a career in writing books for young people? The more I read, and thought analytically about what I read, the more I picked up on patterns that crystallized, ultimately, into the hero's quest that guides and inspires me today. I had three professors that taught very different genres: one focused on epic poetry, one a child psychologist, and one who examined the Holocaust through the lens of what became one of my favorite books, *The Last of the Just* by Andre Schwarz-Bart. What did all three have in common? From myth to real life to historical fiction, the heroes and heroines in the books I read in their courses began with a goal, a journey to achieve that goal through seemingly insurmountable odds, and the realization of that goal in a way that leaves the seeker and the world forever changed for the better. My books may be short—as picture book biographies are—I am always seeking that pattern.

When I struggle with a project, I also take comfort knowing that the writing of every book is a hero's quest, as I start with a goal, face a journey to achieve that goal with sometimes seemingly insurmountable odds, and the realization of that goal—the finished book—resulting, I hope, in changing the world for the better. When I present to kids, I encourage them to think of themselves as heroes and heroines in their journeys, and remind them that no worthy goal is insurmountable if you persevere.

Picture book biographies are trending right now. How did you fall into this genre? My first picture book biography came about because of a friendship and a promise. After writing an article for *The Dallas Morning News* about a local production about deaf baseball player William Hoy, I received an email from a deaf reader in Ohio, who said he followed everything anyone wrote about Hoy and shared his frustration that more people didn't know about this Deaf hero. I promised to help him by writing a picture book about Hoy that would get the kids to write to the National Baseball Hall of Fame and demand recognition for him. That's how the very long journey of my first book, *The William Hoy Story,* began.

Because I had no idea how challenging it would be, that first book took from 2003, when I made the promise, to 2016 when it was finally published. But instead of getting discouraged from the mountains of rejections I accumulated along the way, I fell in love with writing picture books! When I saw the joy that this book brought to kids and adults, I knew I had to shine a light on more heroes that the kids might otherwise not know. It's my dream that the reading experience doesn't end on the final page. I want to encourage kids to dream their dreams and figure out how they can make them come true.

What's a typical day for you? I work every day, but just as I let my heart guide my projects, I let my heart guide whether I work on one or more projects from one day to another. It's not just a matter of feelings; sometimes it's trusting your instincts as to whether you know your way through a particular story or if it needs to simmer and settle longer.

Ordering Take-Out

Establishing Best Practices for Take-Home Crafts and Kits

KATHERINE CHASE

Child sketching the design for a tin ornament

In the past, take-home crafts were seen as a bonus service. During the pandemic, they became an expected offering. That's true even now, when in-person events are becoming possible again.

However, there are not many accepted guidelines for creating and distributing take-home crafts. As I've worked to provide consistent, high-quality take-home kits, I've come up with a list of best practices about what projects to choose and how to execute them. I share them here as a starting place for your own discussion of best practices as take-home kits become a permanent fixture in libraries. These guidelines address general methods for producing successful take-home kits. Specific crafts and skills are outside my scope, but I will recommend sources for these ideas.

Offer Something Extra

Make sure your kits include something patrons won't find just anywhere. Simple take-home craft kits for our youngest patrons are sometimes little more than a coloring page or cut-out construction paper shapes. This is completely appropriate for this age group, since very young children are easy to please, and parents are looking for easy activities to do at home.

For kids older than five, though, I recommend including an item in your kits that makes them a little more special. Some examples:

- A small tin in a mini diorama kit
- A battery-operated tea light in a paper lantern kit
- A jar and label to decorate in a kit for folded stars

These are things parents may not have at home, but that you will be able to obtain in bulk for a modest price. My most frequent sources are large online retailers, especially those that offer frequent discounts and loyalty programs.

Don't Ask the Patron to Spend a Lot of Money

Anything you need them to supply should already be in the house, or available at the grocery store.

When you create a take-home kit, keep in mind what you are asking the patron to provide. I make it a point never to require

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anything more than these standard items: scissors, white glue, and markers, either water soluble or permanent.

If you have it in your budget, consider a yearly giveaway of standard craft materials that patrons can use on your craft kits and anything else they choose throughout the year. It could include the above items with the addition of watercolor paints and a pad of paper.

Make Sure the Skills Required Are Appropriate

Take-home kits are for fun and, although they can involve some time or challenge, they should not feel impossible.

Some kits may involve nothing more than a little gluing or coloring, especially for younger ages. We did an insect mobile for summer where kids colored in eight different insects, and then tied string to the insects and the mobile frame, probably with parental help. The kit combined a familiar skill, coloring, with something more challenging that might require an adult.

For older groups, presenting a bit of a challenge can add interest to a take-home kit. Kumihimo braiding discs made out of cardboard have been popular with us. These may already be familiar to some patrons, but will introduce a new skill to others.

It's always a judgment call how complex to make a kit. I've presented kits that I've felt later may have asked too much of patrons, but there is usually a range of ways a kit can be used that allows wiggle room for the user to get creative.

Last spring, I created a coffee filter flower kit that involved coloring the coffee filter and then putting it in a small cup of water so that capillary action would draw the water up the filter and spread the color. This process was a little fussy, and I worried that it would be too complicated. But I knew that as long as the filters got colored and then got wet somehow, the same effect would be achieved—one way or the other, the kits were likely to be used effectively. I try not to make kits that can only be used in one way that's complicated to convey in a set of instructions; otherwise, the kit will be useless if the patron doesn't understand or can't make it work.

Don't Reinvent the Wheel

Make ample use of resources that will guide you in creating projects, and recycle your ideas with new themes.

Bird puppet

Mini sensory bottle

Pinterest is a tried-and-true resource for crafts of all kinds, but it isn't without its problems. Links can lead you to content that's not what you need, or even go to outdated or missing content.

Pinterest can also become overwhelming when you're just looking for the one project you need. Develop a few additional sources of library- or child-oriented sites with vetted ideas. I also recommend keeping your own Pinterest board of ideas you like for future reference.

Once you have a good idea, don't give it up. Crafts can be reused over and over again by changing themes or details. Since offering a winter scene mini diorama in a tin, I've continued a seasonal theme with a summer garden tin and a Halloween haunted house tin. Instead of finding this repetitive, patrons enjoy building a collection of tins.

Alternatively, one supply can provide inspiration for multiple kits. I've used Kumihimo discs in the past at Valentine's Day for "love" or "anti-love" bracelets. I could use them again with another theme. Coffee filter "watercolors" worked for both spring flowers and Halloween bats. If you find that woven pony bead animals are a popular kit, you can create a new one for each month of the year. If one idea or supply is worth using once, it's probably worth using again in a different way.

Keep Trends in Mind

Crafts begin hot and gradually become tired. Make sure to catch them while they're still popular, or reinterpret them to make them fresh.

Finding ideas for our take-home kits online has a major advantage for tween and teen librarians; we can catch trends on the rise and engage our patrons with the newest thing. Of course, some trends don't translate well to a take-home craft. Acrylic paint pouring, for example, is one I would be reluctant to recreate for my patrons.

Trends also rise and fall in a predictable pattern. I began offering tween slime crafts a little too late, and they never took off for us. For a younger age group, though, slime has become a perennial favorite; it's transcended the trend cycle and become timeless.

For an older age group, giving older trends a twist can be a great way to re-engage teens. Miniature versions of childhood favorites, like a sensory bottle pendant, can inspire nostalgia in kids too "grown up" for old childhood favorites.

Get Creative with the Form

Consider options like hybrid in person/passive programming, and additional types of kits.

In summer 2021, our library made a quick pivot from all virtual programming to outdoor in-person events. I had a summer of take-home crafts ready to go, but nothing ready for in person. We decided to do these crafts in person and then put out anything left over as previously planned. This ended up giving us the best of both worlds. We were able to do outdoor programming easily because the kits were pre-packaged (the only problem we encountered: a project that involved tissue paper squares that quickly got carried away by the wind). We also offered our take-home kits as planned.

Creating a hybrid program allowed us a great deal of flexibility, and we've carried on this practice. At a smaller branch library, no one showing up to a tween/teen program is not uncommon. Having the whole thing convertible into a take-home offering saves librarians from wasted effort.

Once you're in the groove of producing take-home kits on a regular basis, consider branching out. In addition to regular take-home kits, our library also offers seasonal cross stitch kits for beginners, complete with embroidery floss and needle.

Manage Your Budget and Establish Value

If most of your projects are inexpensive, you can make room in your budget for a few seasonal splurges throughout the year.

At our branch, most take-home kits cost less than three dollars per patron, with the bulk falling between one and two dollars. A few kits a year will cost nothing above our normal operating budget because we use supplies we already have. Most will involve the purchase of some supplies from our Friends budget. A few times a year we will spend more per patron for a kit related to a holiday, summer reading, or just because. Over the course of a year, the aim is to balance these costs appropriately.

Take into consideration the price differential between your supply choices. Is it better to buy a tiny ball of yarn for each kit or buy two huge balls of yarn and make smaller balls out of them? I've personally agonized over this very decision before concluding that rolling my own homely balls of yarn saves too much money to ignore, even though the individual tiny balls are more aesthetically pleasing.

Make sure that your library recognizes the value of this service to your patrons.

Every library seems to record passive programs differently. Hopefully your library recognizes that take-home kits involve substantial work from staff and have a positive impact on patrons' library experience.

Don't Expect Too Much of Yourself

Your users will likely love what you offer them, and if something doesn't work out the way you wanted it to, there's always another chance to get it right.

Creating take-home kits is an enormous amount of work. Get as much help as possible in getting inspiration and executing the program. Teen volunteers can help prep and test-drive kits.

Give yourself as much lead time as possible to plan and create kits; some ideas will not work out as planned. There will even be kits you make and distribute that you will see as failures.

I was very excited about a foam stamp kit for tweens, but when demonstrating the kit with a family, I saw that transferring the patterns did not work as I'd thought it would. We made it work in person, but I anticipated that at home the kits would be nearly useless. I felt awful that I was sending home a less than ideal kit. The stamp kit was not as popular as others I did at the same time, but I did hear from some families that they enjoyed it and didn't have any problem.

This experience reminded me that patrons are (almost) always slower to judge than we are. If we put our best effort into something, it's rare that it will completely fail. Every instance of things not working out as planned is a lesson learned for the next time. And with take-home crafts, we know there will always be a next time. Take-home crafts are here to stay, and deciding on your library's own set of best practices will help produce the best results possible. &

Are DVDs Dinosaurs?

The Impact, and Inequities, of Streaming

YESICA HURD

When the main branch of the San Francisco Public Library (SFPL) re-opened in August 2020 after being shuttered to the public for six months, it launched a soft reopening with *SFPL To Go*. Patrons could return materials and put holds on physical items at the branch's entrance, but the public health order prohibited the public from entering the building; this restriction would not be lifted until May 2021.

At first, the main branch received all returns that had accumulated during the closure for a system of twenty-seven branches and a bookmobile. Two media formats, DVDs and Blu-rays—belong to a floating collection. With only two locations open, the main branch was inundated with these returns.

Before the pandemic, DVDs and Blu-rays were one of the highest circulating materials in the children's department. At the end of 2018-2019, the main branch owned 4,613 items; after reopening, that collection ballooned to 5,638.

Because of the overflow, in the main library's children's section, Blu-rays were being shelved into sections that were reserved for showcasing picture books; those tops were now crowded with a seemingly endless number (a 6.1% increase in Blu-ray). The check-outs, however, were significantly less than DVDs. In November 2018, 430 Blu-rays moved off of our shelves, while in November 2021, only 276 were checked-out.

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Overall, DVD production and consumption has had a steep decline over the years due to paid streaming services. According to the Motion Picture Association, in 2020, "The digital market increased by 33 percent compared to 2019, while the physical market decreased by 26 percent."[1]

Subscription services continue to increase while physical purchases decline. These national trends can be observed at our main branch as well. In November 2018, juvenile fiction DVDs had a circulation of 1,692 at the main, compared to November 2021, which had a circulation of 753.

Paid streaming service content is not a new phenomenon, with the advent of Netflix in 2007. However, in the library world, free streaming for the public was only made available in the last ten years.

At least at our library, consumption of DVDs and Blu-rays has decreased with the demand of digital content viewing, including free sites such as YouTube. SFPL's e-video usage (adult and children's content) on Kanopy, Hoopla, and Alexander Street Press, was 27,505 in November 2018, compared to 61,829 in November 2021. This shows that e-video usage of SFPL's streaming platforms have more than doubled after the pandemic re-opening.

What does this mean for our current DVD and Blu-rays—have they gone the way of VHS and cassette tapes? Should we rethink the amount of space we reserve for this material?

Just last year, Douglas Crane wrote in *Public Libraries Online*, "Based on checkouts, demand for DVDs across North American libraries has dropped."[2] Based on Crane's informal

survey of library directors across the country, most systems have seen a downward trend.

SFPL retains a robust DVD and Blu-ray collection for patrons who are unable to stream content. However, the proliferation of streaming technologies exacerbates existing inequalities. Certain shows and movies are only available to view through a paid streaming platform. For example, *El Deafo*, based on Cece Bell's Newbery Honor graphic novel, is only available on Apple+, *Stinky and Dirty* based on Kate McMullan's picture books can only be viewed on Amazon Prime, and *A Shaun the Sheep Movie: Farmageddon* is available only on Netflix.

As library professionals, we could advocate that paid streaming services be available for free for library patrons—perhaps on a check-out model, much like e-books are managed.

Carefully considering how the proliferation of streaming services affects use of library materials will help us to usher in the next stage in offering AV materials. &

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Game On!

Authors, Fans Face Off in Innovative Experiment

Sharon Verbeten

Authors have total recall of *everything* in their books, right? Or would an avid fan kick their butt in a trivia match? This ingenious concept—conceived in the early days of the pandemic by three-time National Book Award finalist Steve Sheinkin and Stacey Rattner, librarian at Castleton Elementary School in upstate New York—was only supposed to be a temporary virtual offering.

"A lot of people were trying to think of ways to help teachers," said Sheinkin, whose book *Fallout: Spies, Superbombs, and the Ultimate Cold War Showdown* received a 2022 Sibert Honor.

"I thought we'd just do one and see how it goes," he added. "By the end of (2020), I thought that was it."

But hosts Sheinkin and Rattner have now recorded more than seventy episodes—found on YouTube—featuring middle-grade authors like Jason Reynolds and Kate DiCamillo squaring off with mega fans.

When Sheinkin wondered how he could reach out during the pandemic, he thought, "The one asset I have is these authors."

Sheinkin and Rattner write the questions—"That was the most time-consuming part of it," he admitted. And the authors and fans have not been hard to find.

Stacey Rattner and Steve Sheinkin on one of their Author Fan Face-Offs.

"We've been making this up as we go along," Sheinkin admitted.

The ten-minute segments feature the humbled authors, casual in their homes, adorable kids and zany sound effects, and—spoiler alert!—you never know which authors will stumble on facts they've written.

Sheinkin himself got in on the fun. Watch episode #57 to see him take on an eighth-grade superfan of his book *Bomb: The Race to Build—and Steal—the World's Most Dangerous Weapon.*

Rattner said, "It's so great to give this opportunity to the kids—like it is a once in a lifetime and unforgettable experience for them. Here they are with their favorite author, basically alone (with Steve and I looking on) for fifteen minutes. How awesome is that?

"And on top of that, they know the book better! There are episodes where the author has been so humbled by the experience and so kind to the fans, that I get emotional.

"The kids are so great. One fan wrote to me saying it was 'one of the best experiences I've ever had.'" &

Couples Who Collaborate

John and Hayley Rocco

MARY-KATE SABLESKI

John and Hayley Rocco

In their solo careers, John and Hayley Rocco are no strangers to the children's book world. Their latest adventure found this couple putting their heads together to create *How to Send a Hug* (Little, Brown, 2022). The Roccos, who live in Rhode Island with a plethora of pets, are enthusiastic about this first collaborative work, which shares the joys of sending a letter through the mail.

As evidenced by her numerous pets, Hayley is an animal enthusiast. She has a passion for animal photography. In elementary school, she wrote a book called, *My Pets Dead and Alive*, reflecting her love for animals, and a hint at her future career, from a very young age. Her work as a children's book publicist gave her the opportunity to work with many well-known children's author and illustrators, and also led her to meeting John at a publicity event.

John is an accomplished children's book author and illustrator. *Blackout* (2011) won a Caldecott Honor, *How We Got to the Moon* (2020) won a Sibert Honor, as just a few examples of the numerous accolades and awards his collective work has earned. He collaborated with several other authors to illustrate books over the years, including Katherine and John Paterson (*The Flint Heart,* 2011), Rick Riordan (*Percy Jackson* series), and Susan Choi (*Camp Tiger*, 2019).

Q: How did you meet . . . and then decide to work on a book together?

John: Well, Hayley spent fifteen years working as a publicist in the children's publishing arena. We met at a children's book function, and long story short, we fell in love.

Hayley: During the pandemic, I was working at the Girl Scouts doing marketing and communication. I was working from home, so that cut out a lot of the traveling time. I didn't really have excuses anymore as to why I couldn't sit down and focus on writing. So, John really nudged me, because I was spending time writing a lot of letters, which is something I love to do. So, he said, you need to get that book done about writing a letter.

John: We had maybe four or five projects that we were working on over the years, and one of them was this book called *To Write a Letter*. Hayley was sitting down at least once a week just writing letters, writing letters to people all the time. Sometimes she'd get some back, but she would just keep writing letters to people. And I said, that's the book we need to be working on right now.

Hayley: We hope to inspire kids to see the magic in what it is to write and receive letters. I was looking at a text from my uncle, who had been going through my grandmother's stuff, and he found this letter from my great grandfather to my grandma at two years old, which said, "This is your first letter from your grandfather." It was very sweet and sentimental. It's a letter that stayed with her, her whole life. There's something to having those memories and carrying them with you.

John: No one prints out emails and texts and puts them in a shoebox. For me, this book really got solidified when Hayley

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wrote the letter to the reader, which is in the very back of the book, explaining how the letters and cards she received and wrote become these connections to her family and to her friends. She cherishes them, and she can pull them out and look at them, and have these memories. It's not the same when you get a Facebook notification from three years ago, reminding you that [you] were at that café, and you had that croissant, and you wanted to show everybody how delicious it looked. It's beautiful when I see Hayley pull out these boxes of letters, which she does quite often, and revisits these memories.

Hayley: The cool thing about writing letters during the pandemic was [that] a lot more people started writing in return. I was getting letters, because people knew I liked receiving letters. They described how nice it was to just sit, and be able to read or work on that little side project. Having that little bit of history of this time from different people's lives that I get to treasure is kind of cool.

John: I think letter writing is becoming a lost art, really. Children today sometimes don't even learn how to write in cursive anymore. They move on to the computer or the tablet so quickly.

Hayley: But how excited are they when they receive a letter?

John: Right, because the mailbox has become this place where you get bills and ads, nothing else. It used to be this exciting thing to go to the mailbox and wonder what might be in there.

Hayley: In a letter, you get a real message. That's kind of how the book moved from being about writing a letter, to asking, what are you actually doing when you're writing a letter? You're sending a piece of yourself, and the love that you feel for that person.

John: That's the hug.

Q: The illustrations look quite different from your past work, John. How did you create them?

John: The endpapers come from the two of us spending a day, just having fun drawing some images.

Hayley: I got to illustrate those, too! That was just us goofing around together.

John: We kind of came up with this concept, about halfway through the project, where the letter is actually a hug being sent through the mail. When the letter is put in an envelope, it is like putting it in a jacket . . .

Hayley: You are keeping it warm by putting it in a "jacket," or an envelope.

John: . . . and it's going on a long journey. And, while the main character is waiting for the letter to arrive at its destination, she does a lot of thinking.

Hayley: She's imagining what journeys her hugs are going on and how they're getting to where they need to go. We did some research on all the different routes and ways that you can receive mail. There's only one mail delivery that is still using donkeys, and that is in Havasupai Falls, AZ. I am from Arizona, and I actually used to go hiking to the Havasupai Falls, which is off of the Grand Canyon. We would see the mail delivery donkeys coming down the canyon. It is very cool!

John: There's something magical about sending and receiving a letter to feel connected.

Hayley: In the illustration showing all of the people receiving their letters, we incorporated actual letters from people in our lives, which we think is really special.

Q: Can you describe the process you use as you work together to create a book?

Hayley: It's very give and take. I can kind of see where he's going with his sketches. We really play off each other's work. I'll write something and ask him, how does this feel? And we tweak it back and forth that way.

John: When I make books on my own, and I write and illustrate them, I have a certain freedom, because I can tweak the text and the images simultaneously. That allows me to make the best products that I can make. When I'm illustrating someone else's text, whom I may or may not know, the manuscript is set in stone. So, doing this with Hayley was the best of both worlds. First, I didn't have to write the text, which is the more challenging part for me. Second, she's right here in the house, so I can ask, what if we did this, and she can say, I want to change the text here, what if we had this in the picture. It's even better than doing books on my own.

Hayley: I often start out by writing too much, so seeing his images helps me cut and edit, based on where he was going with the illustrations.

John: We went through quite a few drafts before we took it to our publisher, and they had some suggestions. We were able to respond to those suggestions together, which was so much better than when I have to do that on my own.

Hayley: We could look at it from a different angle together. Originally, we weren't going to include any of the digital communication pieces, which actually is very important to today, and to the book itself. Adding that made it a better book.

John: We've both known other couples who create books together, like Leo and Diane Dillon, who actually worked on paintings together, but in separate studios on the top and bottom floor of their house.

Hayley: And Ted and Betsy Lewin, who were such a magical couple.

John: So, we had mentors who could mirror how it would be for us to write books and illustrate books together.

Hayley: Who doesn't want to work with their best friend? It's fun!

John: Right now, I think we have probably five other project ideas that we're working on. I think there is a theme to the books that we create together. They are grounded in in a sense of nostalgia, but also things that we need in our lives today that we're losing touch with.

Q: Do you have a shared space, or do you work separately?

John: Well, Hayley writes all over. I think with writing, you can do that very easily. She has a writing studio on the top floor and then across from it, I have my studio.

Hayley: Sometimes I'll work in the kitchen to give John space upstairs to work on his other projects.

John: We live in a in a very old three-story farmhouse. It was built in the 1850s, and so I think the top floor used to be an attic. It is now a writing studio and an art studio.

Q: Can you talk about your plans to share your book with children?

Hayley: The idea would be to work with kids on writing letters, and what it means to share a hug. We'd like to ask them, "How do you want to deliver your hug? Imagine that person opening that letter and what they might feel." We think it would be really fun to do some letter writing workshops with kids.

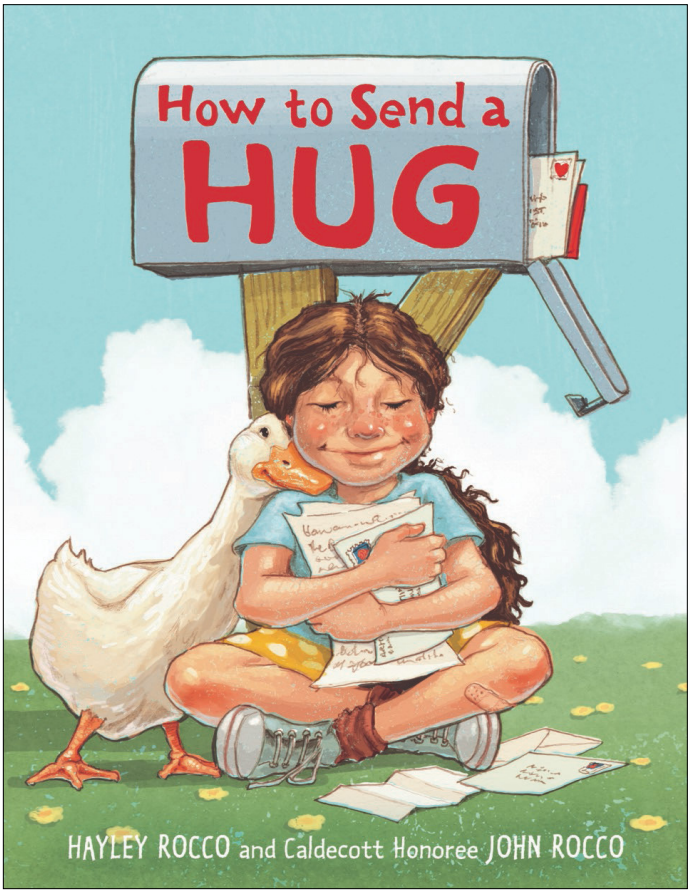
John: I think this is the first time in history that we have a generation of kids that learned how to use Zoom before they learned how to write.

Hayley: Right, so we're hoping we can ignite some excitement, in the kind of old fashioned, but very relevant and important practice, of writing letters.

Q: How do you see your work contributing to conversations about diversity?

John: If you look at most of my books, it's very difficult to determine the character's skin color, for example. In *Blackout,* I created characters that reflected the reality of Brooklyn, so with many different types of people. I try to create characters so that kids can identify with, and say to themselves, that's me.

Hayley: We think it is very important to make sure everyone's represented in the books they read, and the books we create. We hope our work is supportive and uplifting to people of all backgrounds. In *How to Send a Hug*, we tried to reflect as many types of families as we can, particularly in that illustration showing people receiving all of their letters.



Q: Any advice for any other couples who might decide to work on a book together?

John: Make sure you are best friends first. That helps us.

Hayley: It can be a little tough when you when you are really focused on what you want in a book. But, trust each other, and remember that your partner's perspective is important.

John: I think I can be a bit of a bulldozer at times. Hayley has a more graceful way of presenting an idea, so I have to keep myself in check, sometimes, to not be a bull in a china shop.

Hayley: But, that helps me, too, with organizing ideas. I think finding each other's strengths and using them to complement each other helps. Communication is key, and making sure that you are patient and understanding, and are willing to listen. That's all anyone needs, right?

John: Stay excited about it, because it's kind of an amazing thing when two people who are married or couples or whatever, can work on a project together and bring it out into the world. It's emotional, it's unusual and it's a blast.

Hayley: We're so fortunate that we get to do this for a living. We can be sitting at the beach having a glass of wine, and talk about our ideas. It's a dream come true! &

The Power of Story

Using Personal Anecdotes to Counter Challenges

Melissa Sokol

Melissa Sokol *is a Children's Services Librarian for Dayton (OH) Metro Library and is a member of ALSC's Public Awareness and Advocacy Committee.*

> *At my high school library, I have a student who became an avid reader after I recommended* Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe *by Benjamin Saenz to him. He returned soon after checking it out to tell me that this was the first time ever that he completely related to a character as a gay Hispanic teenager. This book ignited his passion for reading, and he devoured my recommendations from then on. He couldn't wait to tell me the day he found out there was going to be a sequel. He reminded me once a week to make sure I ordered it for the library.*
>
> *Imagine my complete and utter delight when I got my hands on an ARC of* Aristotle and Dante Dive into the Waters of the World *a full month before it was going to be released. The next day, I surprised him with the copy—and I had to pull him out of class because he burst into tears at the excitement of being able to read it so much earlier than he expected. It is life-changing to be able to see yourself in the characters and stories that you read. I am honored to be able to give that to my students.*
>
> High School Librarian in Dayton, Ohio

That personal anecdote shows that books, quite possibly, can change and even save someone's life; that's the power of libraries. We as librarians know that well, but over the past year, many school and public libraries have seen an intense increase in the number of book challenges to their collections.

According to ALA's Office for Intellectual Freedom from Sept. 1 to Dec. 1, 2021, there were more than three hundred thirty distinct book challenges.[1] That number is greater than the number of book challenges in the entire 2020/2021 school year.

Several state legislatures are considering bills that would supersede material selection processes already in place for school and public libraries. Iowa is considering a bill where teachers and librarians could be charged with a crime if they hand a book to a child that the parent deems pornographic.

An informal assessment shows that most of the books being challenged or removed from libraries are written by black authors addressing racism in our current society or are books affirming the perspective and experiences of people who identify as LGBTQIA+.

Often, it is a very vocal minority requesting that these books be removed or made illegal to hand to students. As librarians that strive to uphold the Library Bill of Rights, we believe that most parents and patrons support everyone's freedom to read. Parents or caregivers have the power to determine which books are appropriate for their children. That shouldn't be determined by any one individual for all the children in a particular school or city.

It's crucial that libraries rally our supporters to speak up and counter these attempts at censorship, whether that be at school board meetings or by writing to state and federal representatives when bills challenging current collection development standards are introduced.

Using Personal Anecdotes

One of the most effective tools in doing this is the use of the personal anecdote. How did a book about or by a marginalized section of our society touch a child's life? How did it make them feel seen or experience true empathy for another person's story? These stories can help our stakeholders go from citizens who believe in the abstract idea of a person's freedom to read to an emotionally attached advocate. I asked members of the Public Awareness and Advocacy Committee as well as other colleagues I have met through my twelve years of librarianship to share some sample stories. Hopefully these examples will remind you of stories of your own, but feel free to use some of these in your attempts to gain local support.

My daughter's partner has a son who loves to wear nail polish and always admires the glittery tops he sees when they go shopping. I found a copy of Sparkle Boy *by Leslea Newman and gave it to my daughter to share with him. When I talked to my daughter shortly after, she told me that this was his favorite book because it is the first one in which he had truly seen himself in the story. A year later, the son has worn out that first copy, but still loves it so much they have had to replace it.*

Retired Children's Librarian in Ohio

I did a preschool story time with the book Goin' Someplace Special *by Patricia C. McKissack and talked with the children about segregation. A white mom came up to me a week or so later and mentioned how much she appreciated the story and how they had read and discussed the book many times. They have cousins who are mixed race, and this was an important discussion for them to have as a family. They were unsure how to even talk about this with their white children. This book gave them an important opportunity to talk about social justice and their family values.*

Children's Librarian in the Suburbs of Seattle

There was a challenge to Drama *by Raina Telgemeier in an elementary school. Before the challenge even came up, a fourth-grade boy approached me with the book in his hands. He was very cautious that no one would overhear and spoke in a whisper. He thanked me for the book and was hoping there might be another book with "someone like me" in it.*

School Librarian in Pennsylvania &

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ALSC Member Profiles

Keary Bramwell

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

Every year, ALSC offers a mentoring program. Here's a look at some of the latest participants.

Maeve Brewer, Children's Services Manager, Frankfort Community (IN) Public Library

What drew you to ALSC in the first place? I first learned about ALSC when I started working as an early literacy programming assistant. It looked like a great place to find resources and connect with others who work with children.

What is your favorite part about working with youth? There are so many great things, but if I have to pick one, I would say that it is talking to them.

What is your favorite book to read aloud? *Llama Llama Red Pajama* by Anna Dewdney.

What is your favorite award-winning title and why? The one that has been stuck in my mind for a while now is *The Crossover* by Kwame Alexander. This book is alive with action and emotion. For me, the words seem to move on the page and push you, or pull you, along with them. Alexander tackles tough topics that kids can relate to, and he does it through poetry.

What is your favorite library event, program, or outreach initiative and why? Pre-COVID, our library did an event called Read, Play, Grow that is based on Every Child Ready to Read and S.T.E.A.M. for ages 18 months to 5 years, but older siblings, and younger ones as well, were welcome. It started with storytime, then broke out into stations that were set up in different areas of the meeting room and ended with a group gross motor activity. I love that we were getting families to engage and play together.

What are you most passionate about in Children's Services? Reaching out to our underserved population. If I could have it all, I would create more outreach programs to be able to service the children out in the community. If we can't get them to come to us, then we need to go to them.

Mary R. Voors, ALSC Blog manager; Retired Children's Services Manager, Allen County (IN) Public Library

What drew you to ALSC in the first place? My first supervisor in Children's Services spoke highly of the networking, growth, and

educational opportunities. Because I respected her and her opinion, I joined both ALA and ALSC. This decision absolutely enhanced the trajectory of my career.

What's your best ALSC memory? Receiving a letter early in my career asking me to serve on the Newbery committee. I was so very honored, nervous, overwhelmed, and frightened at the prospect of being part of such an esteemed group of people. (Frankly, my first thought was that maybe I had gotten the letter in error.) I accepted the invitation and began a wild, yearlong journey involving reading, thinking about books, more reading, taking notes about books, and – always – figuring out how I could make more time for reading.

Why did you want to be a mentor/mentee? I retired from a long-term position (which I loved!) as the manager of a large Children's Services department in 2020. I felt this opportunity would be a great way to continue to grow and learn, as well as a way to give back some of what I've learned and experienced in my career.

What is your favorite part about working with youth? I appreciate the creativity and desire to learn experientially which is exhibited by kids—particularly the very young. Child-directed learning can open the door for such a wide variety of programming, reader's advisory, and discussion opportunities, especially when librarians can focus more on "process" rather than "product" as they work with kids.

What is your favorite book to read aloud? My hands-down favorite is *Duck! Rabbit!*, written by Amy Krouse Rosenthal and illustrated by Tom Lichtenheld. I love the message that there's always more than one way to look at an issue. The fact that it is perfect as a title to be read by two voices, the humor, and the bold illustrations are other positive attributes.

What is your favorite award-winning title and why? I served on the Newbery committee which selected *New Kid* by Jerry Craft as the winning title. I am so proud of this historic selection not only because it is a distinguished contribution to American literature but also because it was the first graphic novel selected in the history of the Newbery Award, helping to demonstrate to many parents and teachers that reading graphic novels is *really* reading. I love not only the content of *New Kid* but also the fact that it is a book that opens the door to reading for so many kids.

What is your favorite library event, program, or outreach initiative and why? I have always loved coordinating or participating in Mock YMA (Youth Media Award) discussions and elections. They never fail to be awesome opportunities to learn about great new children's books and to discuss them with other children's literature aficionados.

What are you most passionate about in Children's Services? I am passionate about being a strong advocate for children. Modeling this advocacy makes it easier for others involved in children's work to become advocates for kids themselves.

Krissy Warrenger, Youth Services Librarian, Derby Neck Library (CT)

What drew you to ALSC in the first place? Like most people, I've felt a little adrift these past couple years, and I've been yearning for connections personally and professionally. Joining ALSC and other ALA and local librarian communities has certainly helped with this.

Why did you want to be a mentor/mentee? Shifting from part-time staff to a full-time manager during a pandemic has been so daunting. I was hoping to meet someone with more experience who could help me find my footing and share their wisdom and experience with me.

What is your favorite part about working with youth? The fact that my job is based around connecting youth with media and experiences that enrich their lives. I love the feeling of knowing that I have brought some joy into a young patron's day, whether it's by sharing a great book with them, helping them finally complete that challenging assignment at school, teaching a new favorite fingerplay or song, or beating them silly in a game of Magic: The Gathering. And let's not forget the face every kid makes—no matter how old—when you combine vinegar and baking soda!

What is your favorite book to read aloud? *This Jazz Man* by Karen Ehrhardt and illustrated by R.G. Roth. It's an absolute joy of a book where little ones can be encouraged to count, sing, and clap along. I've even developed a method to incorporate numbers in American Sign Language with it!

What is your favorite library event, program, or outreach initiative and why? We actually just started a new program/outreach initiative at our library using Twitch. My assistant and I play video games, sometimes with patrons, and stream the action live. I love it not just because it's immensely fun, but it also provides so many different ways for patrons to interact and create connections, whether it's by actually participating, engaging with the chat, or just watching. &

Obstacles and Opportunities

Inclusive Programming Goes Virtual

Valerie Byrd Fort, Nicole Cooke, and Liz Hartnett

According to a Public Library Association survey, in the spring of 2020, 99 percent of public libraries reported closing their doors, and schools stood vacant.[1] Virtual connections became critical, and librarians faced a raft of both obstacles and opportunities. Children's librarians across the country rose to the challenge and created innovative solutions. As we cautiously return to in-person programming, many recognize the value of retaining the effective practices we developed in the midst of a crisis.

School librarians responded to closures, facilitating the shift to online instruction and keeping the school community engaged with innovative and educational programming. In Texas, middle school librarian Amanda Jones live-streamed virtual field trips on the library's Facebook page, starting with "visiting" Versailles and exploring destinations like Nepal and Tanzania. Her Journey with Jones project has gone on to include explorations of a range of curricular topics and historical periods, enriching and enlivening the virtual classroom.[2]

Public libraries nimbly transformed children's services, moving storytimes, sing-alongs, and crafting sessions online via virtual tools. By deliberately developing inclusive programming, public libraries have worked to counter the disproportional impact the pandemic is having on communities of color and marginalized groups. The Richland Library in Columbia, SC, developed its Dinner Table Talks blog[3] to support families addressing racial justice issues.

As the pandemic hit at the University of South Carolina, Dr. Nicole Cooke, the Augusta Baker Endowed Chair for the School of Information Science, was already hosting virtual lectures and discussions for students and professionals, including the Augusta Baker Diversity Lecture series.[4] As this type of online connection became more and more essential in all educational settings, the team began to consider how to provide similar programming for children. That is when AB Kids came to be.

In fall 2021, Cooke and Valerie Byrd Fort from the South Carolina Center for Community Literacy introduced *The Augusta Baker Storytelling Experience: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Programming for Children of All Ages* (AB Kids). This series is part of the Augusta Baker Endowed Chair programming at the University of South Carolina (USC).[5]

Valerie Byrd Fort *is Instructor and Coordinator for Cocky's Reading Express School of Information Science, University of South Carolina;* ***Dr. Nicole Cooke*** *is Augusta Baker Endowed Chair and Associate Professor, School of Information Science, University of South Carolina; and* ***Dr. Liz Hartnett*** *is Program Coordinator, South Carolina Center for Community Literacy, University of South Carolina.*

The series is named in honor of Augusta Braxton Baker, a beloved children's librarian and storyteller who made South Carolina her home after a 37-year career at the New York Public Library. The first African American Coordinator of Children's Services within the New York Public Library system, she worked tirelessly throughout her career to diversify the genre of children's literature and to make books for children and young adults more reflective of the young people who read them. Baker served as USC's storyteller-in-residence for fourteen years from 1980 to 1994.

In each kid-friendly session of the AB Kids program, experts talked about diversity, equity, and inclusion at a level appropriate for children and their classroom teachers and caregivers. These were morning sessions, lasting thirty to forty-five minutes, and our audience included children of all ages, some watching and participating live and others viewing the recorded sessions.[6] Speakers from around the country contributed their time and talents, sharing readings, songs, and stories geared toward helping kids and young people understand and appreciate differences.

Serious work to be sure, but our presenters made these sessions seriously fun! Sing-alongs and stories imparted gentle messages that demystified gender diversity, celebrated Black childhood, and explored ideas like allyship and privilege in an accessible and engaging way. A sense of belonging is essential to healthy development. AB Kids seeks to build connections for children, to enlarge their circle of friends, and to provide meaningful, joyful interaction in these isolating times.

As with any debut program, we learned some things the hard way. For example, 9 a.m. on the East Coast sounds like a great idea, but it makes it very difficult for West Coast participants and speakers to participate. We have to plan for a wider audience, given the potential reach of virtual programming.

The AB Kids team looks forward to offering more programs next fall, focusing on a range of diversity-related issues. &

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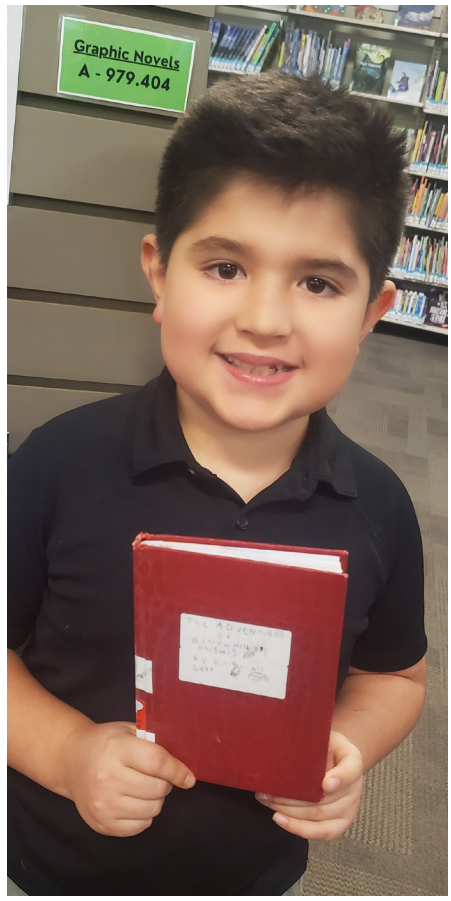
THE LAST WORD

Boy's Debut Novel Sneak Goes Viral

Madisyn Steiner

Eight-year-old Dillon Helbig has loved writing his own stories for as long as he can remember, so he used the journal his grandma gave him to create an epic, action-packed holiday story, and within days, he filled eighty-eight pages full of vibrant, colorful illustrations.

He was so proud, he wanted the whole world to see—what better way than to get his book on library shelves! So, on a visit to Ada Community Library's Lake Hazel branch in Boise, Dillon secretly snuck his book, *The Adventures of Dillon's Crismis, by Dillon His Self*, onto the shelves in the youth section. When asked by a local TV reporter about his method, Dillon replied, "I always [*sic*] be sneaky."

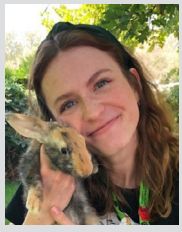


Soon after, Dillon told his family that his book was now available for check-out at the library. But when his family looked on the shelves, it wasn't where Dillon placed it. So, Dillon's mom asked the library to search for it.

Lake Hazel librarians were so impressed with the work of literature, finding it fit all the criteria necessary, that they chose to officially catalog Dillon's work for their collection. And while his book may never qualify for a Newbery Medal, Dillon got something even better—a 2021 Whoodini Award for Best Young Novelist, awarded by library staff.

Dillon's story quickly went viral—being featured nationally and even globally; he's heard from readers all around the world anxious to read his book.

With only one copy, the wait list is several years' long . . . guess Dillon better keep writing; his fan base is growing! &



Madisyn Steiner *is Marketing and Communications Specialist at the Ada Community Library in Boise, ID.*

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

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