Children & LIBRARIES

the journal of the Association for Library Service to Children

Spring 2023
Vol. 21 | No. 1
ISSN 1542-9806

alsc
ASSOCIATION FOR LIBRARY SERVICE TO CHILDREN

LGBTQIA+ Representation
Pairing Books and Video Games
Building Home Libraries

alsc
ASSOCIATION FOR LIBRARY SERVICE TO CHILDREN

ALSC Products!

Show off your home within ALA with ALSC swag. Items include: mugs, sweatshirts, totes, and more!

SHOP: https://bit.ly/alsclogogiftshop

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SPRING 2023 | VOL. 21 | NO. 1 | ISSN 1542-9806

Children & LIBRARIES
the journal of the Association for Library Service to Children

Peer-Reviewed Article

notes

features

departments

Photo by fizkes/Shutterstock.com.

Editor's Note

Awards Energy!

By Sharon Verbeten

Five years ago, I penned an editor's note that started: "I'm an awards show junkie." I love all awards shows—the suspense . . . the pomp . . . the circumstance.

That's still true, as I sit here on Grammys night, half-watching, half-writing this note.

And just last week—although I wasn't there in person—I watched the Youth Media Awards livestream with great anticipation (darn, though, my predictions were wrong!).

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

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

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

Now, on to my second favorite thing—the ALA Annual Conference in June, where it's always a delight to see the lines snake around the aisles for author signings. And to see them all dressed up and beaming at the awards dinner.

This June, it's just a short jaunt down the interstate to Chicago for me—so I'm eagerly looking forward to it. Maybe I'll see you there? &

Children & LIBRARIES

the journal of the Association for Library Service to Children

Circulation

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

Statement of Purpose

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

Production

ALA Production Services (Tim Clifford and Lauren Ehle)

Advertising

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

Manuscripts

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

Indexing, Abstracting, and Microfilm

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

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

Children and Libraries is also available from ProQuest Information and Learning in one or more of the following ways: online, via the ProQuest information service; microform; CD-ROM; and via database licensing. For more information, call 1-800-521-0600, ext. 2888 or online at www.proquest.com.

The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1992.

President's Address

Creating Stone Soup Together

AMY KOESTER

As I head into the final months of my term as your 2022–2023 ALSC President, I find myself reflecting on all of the activities that have taken place during my term and all of the gifts fellow members have shared to make them possible. You've got a sampling of those gifts in this and every issue of *Children and Libraries*—articles from colleagues across the ecosystem of library service to children sharing effective practices, exciting ideas, and words of encouragement and support for all of us and the work we do each day. It is never lost on me that ALSC is a member-driven association. Without the talents, time, and commitment of our members, we would have very little to show for ourselves as an association.

One of the responsibilities and privileges of being elected to serve as ALSC President is appointing members to a wide range of committees. That includes the many process committees that do ongoing work around advocacy, continuing education, and organizational support for our division. It also includes our prestigious award and media evaluation committees.

My work with advisory groups to make committee appointments has made it abundantly clear just how many talents, experiences, and opportunities our many members are eager to share for the betterment of our profession. And that's just one of the myriad ways members are involved in ALSC work every day.

There are also members who present at conferences and deliver webinars and online courses; members who mentor newer professionals, be it formally or informally; members who write letters of recommendation and support so that their colleagues may grow through new opportunities; members who share their thoughts for ALSC's strategic planning; and so many more ways members graciously share of themselves.

One of the culminating events of my term will be the annual Charlemae Rollins President's Program, which will be held Monday, June 26, at the ALA Annual Conference in Chicago. For my program, I asked two dedicated members to coordinate a panel on leadership in librarianship. The goal is a conversation that recognizes and inspires all the ways that every library worker serving youth is a leader. You can read more in an article by panel member Dr. Ling Hwey Jeng elsewhere in this issue. Thank you to planning co-chairs Amy Seto Forrester and Paula Holmes for coordinating this upcoming event and for making this article from a fabulous library leader something we can all experience. Thank you for sharing your gifts.

All of this reflection on what ALSC members share every day, and thinking about the leadership aptitude we all have inside us, has got me thinking about one of my favorite folktales—"Stone Soup." I know that the moral of the story is intended to be that it's possible to make and share something wonderful when everyone contributes just a bit—and that moral definitely applies to many aspects of the work of ALSC! But I also find myself thinking about how in the story, there is no chef dictating a recipe, shaping what the soup will turn out to be. Rather, the soup is a collective product of the contributions of all the townspeople.

***Amy Koester**, 2022–2023 president of ALSC, is the Learning Experiences Manager at Skokie (IL) Public Library.*

I'm really liking that metaphor as I reflect on ALSC work. I may have the privilege of serving as your president through June of this year, but I'm not the chef; rather, we're building this soup together, person by person and ingredient by ingredient, none more or less vital than any other. That's how I see our division's work now and into the future: what we ultimately create and share is a product of what we each contribute as we are able, simply because we have that contribution to share.

Let me extend a very big "thank you" to every ALSC member for the contributions you share. Because of each of you, we do good work in ways that would be so much harder (and likely less meaningful) were we to go it alone. Thank you, thank you, thank you, for adding what you can to our cooking pot. Together, we feast. &

ALSC President's Program

Grassroots Leader Librarianship

LING HWEY JENG

I had never thought about being a leader of any sort. Leadership wasn't any part of my aspiration growing up. I come from a working-class family. Both my parents spent their childhoods running between shelters, away from the American airplanes dropping bombs on Japanese military bases in Taiwan. World War II interrupted their elementary education and thrusted them into a life of blue-collar workforce long before they were ready for adulthood. While they cared about their children's education, the necessity to keep our family above the water meant that we the children had no role model for what career we could dream of and how far we could reach for our future.

I finished college out of sheer stubbornness and street smarts, and ended up working in a university library for four years. Even after I followed my spouse to Texas and became an accidental, reluctant immigrant, I thought it was enough to be a mediocre living an ordinary life. Being a new immigrant was hard enough given the tremendous language and cultural barriers.

And then I met an educator in my graduate study who told me with no nonsense that I should either start thinking for myself or forget about everything. Dr. Francis L. Miksa was my advisor and mentor who opened my eyes to a new world of possibilities. It's not good enough to know the answers, he said. It's not good enough to just practice what I had learned in classes. To be useful in my workplace and to the people around me, I must be able to question the status quo and to think outside the box. I also realized, in this learning process, that thinking and questioning weren't always a pleasant thing to do. More often than not, my questions or comments were met with blank stares or quick dismissal. One person even asked me why I didn't behave like all quiet Asians. It took me years to understand myself beyond the stereotype that I was assigned. There is the right way; there is the wrong way; and then there is always Ling Hwey. Most problems in real life do not have easy and clear solutions. The world is not black and white. It's often more realistic to look for the third way in the vast grey area and to consider tradeoffs among all possible options which fits best in a particular context. The same can be said how we see ourselves as library workers taking on leadership roles.

Traditionally, the definition of leadership implies a position of authority with power, occupied by someone who is experienced, with seniority, most likely a charismatic extrovert with commanding voice and physical attractiveness. The common perception also implies a top-down leadership model in which a leader is the helper who knows better than those being helped, who is a problem solver to rescue those with needs, and who has the magic bullet for difficult questions. The leader is in charge. The followers take instructions and wait for their turn to become leaders, one at a time.

I have been the director of Texas Woman's University School of Library and Information Studies since 2004 and was elected 2017–2018 president of Texas Library Association. Both positions are what most would call leadership positions although I have never felt the power of control in either position. What I had felt in these positions instead is a sense of responsibilities for the organization and the people who work with me. The burden of accountability to my superiors and our stakeholders for honesty and integrity is often what keeps me awake at night.

What I, and I suspect many of us, notice in real life is that, in many situations of our daily living, there may be a person in the official position of authority, but there is often an individual (sometimes more than one) in the group who seems to exude influence, serve as the magnet to gather the team members, and help with networking, organizing, nurturing, funding, motivating, or overall giving everyone the strength to move forward together. These individuals don't fit into the traditional top-down leadership

***Ling Hwey Jeng**, PhD, is Professor and Director, School of Library and Information Studies, Texas Woman's University. She served on the governing Council of the American Library Association for nine years and is former President of the Texas Library Association.*

model. They are in fact leaders on the ground who reflect a grassroots model of bottom-up leadership. Unlike the traditional definition of leadership, bottom-up leadership carries three prominent characteristics. The person is competent in a specialty area and has the capacity to exercise their own competencies. The person has strong core values that align with the mission of the group. And the person possesses networking and relationship-development capacity to build trust needed for the group mission.

A person usually earns a top-down leadership position through formal work structure of rewards, seniority, and promotion. Bottom-up leadership however requires self-motivation, caring for others, and passion for the community. Either way, leaders are not born. Leaders are learned. Every one of us can be grassroots leader library workers, whether we are supervisors of library operations or frontline storytellers in youth services.

The first step for us to become leader library workers on the ground is to possess professional knowledge and skills to competently perform library operations and provide services. But more important than that, we become grassroots leaders by developing our leadership capacity and anchoring our professional mission in the community. There is no leadership without community. There is no sense of community without engaging with diverse groups of people outside the library in the community, including the majority of residents who are not library users. We begin with the recognition that we ourselves are full members of the community, with ownership of the community and our vested interest in its success and future. We see our community as having diverse people and entities full of potential assets that can supplement our limited library resources. We discover the best of community history and culture, build community resources with the knowledge, skills, and passion of its members, and facilitate storytelling of community dreams and aspirations. We use information and communication technologies as the backbone infrastructure to facilitate positive changes in our community.[1]

One of the most difficult lessons to learn in bottom-up leadership is that it is about facilitating, not about helping. It is about belonging to our own community, not about helping from outside. And it is about building together using collective resources in the community, not about distributing library resources to others. Grassroots leaders in libraries are not helpers and outside experts providing objective, neutral answers to questions from inquirers in the community. The work of grassroots leaders in libraries is not about performing our library service transactions perfectly. Rather, it is about building long term relationships with one another in the community, being curious about the dreams and aspirations of others, and caring for their well-beings. A true leader also understands that caring for their community begins with caring for their own self. Caring for people with whom we come in contact means taking time, listening and collaborating to design solutions best for specific scenarios and contexts.

The fundamental principle of grassroots leader librarianship is the appreciative inquiry approach to believing that the community is full of individual and institutional assets and values that serve as the basis for continuous, positive, and sustainable community development.[2]

A grassroots leader library worker learns to ask questions that bring out the best of people and build trust. A leader library worker advocates for the whole community, not just those who visit the library. A leader library worker is sensitive to whose voice is missing and creates safe space for marginalized people to have their stories heard. A leader library worker facilitates connections between those with skills, knowledge, and passion, and those with needs, so that members of the community will be able to help each other using local resources right there in the community.

Grassroots leader librarianship is sustainable for the long run when every library leader on the ground practices a sense of personal and social responsibilities. These responsibilities include not only the consistently high quality of our library work but also lifelong continuous improvement in our own professional knowledge and skills, as well as deep commitment to growing the same grassroots leadership among others in the community. Leader library workers measure their accountability not by their service transactions at work but by the outcomes and impact evident in positive changes outside the library in the community.

I invite you to become a leader library worker on the ground to uplift your community. I very much look forward to joining a panel discussing leadership in librarianship as part of the 2023 ALSC Charlemae Rollins President's Program at the ALA Annual Conference on Monday, June 26, 2023, and am grateful for the support made possible through the ALSC endowments. &

References

1. C. L. Perryman and L. H. Jeng, "Changing Models of Library Education to Benefit Rural Communities," *Public Library Quarterly* 39, no. 2 (2019): 102–14.
2. D. L. Cooperrider and D. Whitney, *Appreciative Inquiry: A Positive Revolution in Change* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2005).

PEER-REVIEWED

Beyond the Page

Pairing Children's Literature with Video Games

MATTHEW FARBER AND JAMES A. EREKSON

A patron walks in and asks for the latest *Minecraft* book—luckily a copy was just checked in! Like other media reinforcement books, popular video game books often demand multiple copies and frequent replacements. A satisfied patron might walk out with a target book and a stack of other titles.

But what if the model were flipped, and instead of reinforcing a single franchise, connections among games and books represented the library's wider book and media collection? We introduce recent narrative video games for tweens, encouraging exploration of themes and topical connections between games and the children's literature collection.[1]

In a recent largescale UK National Literacy Trust study (n = 4,626), researchers found that 79 percent of children ages 11 to 16 reported playing video games encouraged them to improve as readers.[2] Playing video games led respondents to read, including game reviews, blogs, books, and fan fiction. Further, 73.1 percent of respondents who reported not enjoying reading stated playing video games helped them to "feel more part of a story than reading a book-based text."[3] For such reluctant readers, can bridges be built between books and games?

In addition to potentially promoting literacy, games can be a safe practice space for children to play with emotions, free from real-world consequences.[4] Distinct from other media forms, video games allow players to have agency over outcomes and vicariously experience consequences of their choices.[5] When games put players in a moral quandary, and when they encounter a similar dilemma in a book, readers' emotions may be primed and ready to bring to the print narrative.

For example, reading about a book character who steals food to survive might engender a sense of pathos. However, when presented with a similar moral quandary in a video game, a wider palette of emotions emerges because the player is participating. In addition to joy and pride, research on video games suggests that players may vicariously feel guilt, shame, and regret—emotions they can bring to similar experiences in reading.[6]

Permission to Feel author Mark Brackett suggests emotional awareness should be the starting point of social and emotional learning (SEL).[7] The Collaborative for Academic Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL), where Brackett serves as a board member, defines SEL as a process through which people "acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities,

Matthew Farber, *EdD, is an associate professor of educational technology at the University of Northern Colorado, where he also co-directs the Gaming SEL Lab. He has been invited to the White House, writes for Edutopia, authored several books and papers, and frequently collaborates with UNESCO MGIEP and Games for Change.* ***James A. Erekson***, *PhD, is Associate Professor of Reading in the University of Northern Colorado School of Teacher Education. He teaches literacy and children's literature courses and publishes nationally on how to reach striving readers.*

manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions."[8]

In many video games, players use digital avatars to "perspective-take." Players may also develop virtual empathy with non-player characters, cooperate in teams, and establish strategies to achieve goals.[9] Some video game experiences are not necessarily "winnable" in the traditional sense but instead come to a resolution, much like the story in a novel does.

For instance, *GRIS* is a puzzle platform video game painted in watercolor, steeped in symbolic metaphor, with game levels mapped to stages of grief. Players overcome obstacles, which can lead to feelings of catharsis. After all, you don't "win" grief, you arrive (hopefully) at acceptance.

Through the media psychology lens, some games offer pure escapist diversions from real life.[10] However, other games—much like books, comics, and movies—have increasingly matured to provide players a rich and nuanced experience. There are contemplative video games. Some can inspire emotions like awe, sadness, tenderness, and compassion. In others, players confront difficult emotions vicariously, such as grief and loss.

In one experimental study, children who experienced sorrow in media showed a similar depth of emotional response as when they remembered personal traumas, but the media experiences came without a rise in anxiety.[11] Games can provide a low-risk context for encountering difficult emotions.

The CASEL SEL Framework takes a systemic approach where SEL is infused throughout children's lives—not just in classrooms and schools. Systemic SEL means that these opportunities should manifest and be reinforced in all settings children inhabit, including home and community.[12] Communities can include online spaces, where learning is self-driven (e.g., fandom, *Minecraft*, YouTube), as well as in-person informal learning environments like museums and libraries. Here is where librarians come in. Children's librarians are well-positioned as learning brokers, where they can facilitate tween patrons to connect their interests to existing opportunities, such as pairing games to books with similar themes.

Children's librarians might recommend pairing books with a hero's journey arc, such as Riordan's *The Lightning Thief* series, for fans of games with similar structures, such as the award-winning emotional game *Journey* (2012). The TED Ed Talk "What Makes a Hero" may also be a useful informational pairing. From *Star Wars* to *The Hunger Games*, this animated talk teaches about a story pattern so often used in movies and books. After reading, playing, and watching, tweens may begin to see themselves as heroes in their own adolescent journeys.

Video games can do more than put players into other people's shoes. As with "impossible field trips,"[13] they can mentally transport players to faraway situations. This article suggests pairing narrative and emotional arcs of books and video games. We also recommend books to pair with games, playing on similarities to encourage children to become more active readers.

Pairing Video Games with Children's Literature

Book pairings with video games are an ideal, yet underutilized, approach to harnessing the interests of child readers.[14] ALSC already recognizes the potential of various book pairings for engaging readers across titles, including fiction to nonfiction pairings,[15] and researchers have found that book-to-book pairings can increase strategic reading and reader engagement.[16] The game titles we discuss here exemplify story-based and atmospheric gaming, where the play is more about experiences, narratives, character development, tone, and setting than about winning or achieving goals in a token economy. These games emphasize multimodal media's evocative, social, and exploratory potential—pleasures of story already recognized in children's literature.[17] Among the earliest titles in story-based gaming to be marketed to tweens, these games' literary aspirations make them strong candidates for pairing with children's books.

***Never Alone* (*Kisima Ingitchuna*) (2014).** In this Peabody Award-winning video game based on an Inupiaq Alaska Native folktale, players control Nuna, a young girl on a hero's journey, and her companion, a mystical arctic fox. A core aspect is "the symbiotic relationship between Nuna and the fox that befriends her."[18] Often, the only way to succeed is to work together. When players do so, "cultural insights" are unlocked, documentary video clips from and about the Iñupiat people.

The symbiotic relationship embodies the importance of collaboration, teamwork, and goal setting, which are SEL competencies. Further, because *Never Alone* is based on a traditional folktale and the creative contributions of an Iñupiaq poet and storyteller, it is prime for pairings with fiction and nonfiction books involving Alaskan native cultures, such as Paula Ikuutaq Rumbolt's *The Legend of Lightning and Thunder* (2013) or Russ Kendall's *Eskimo Boy: Life in an Iñupiaq Eskimo Village* (1992). Pairing tween books with this game's Cultural Insights segments can promote cultural empathy as players and readers perspective-take inside the Iñupiaq village.

***Alba: A Wildlife Adventure* (2021)** is a game with potential to take tween readers on a social and emotional journey. In this winner of *Pocket Gamer*'s Best Apple Arcade Game of 2021, players control Alba, a young girl staying with grandparents on an island off the coast of Spain. On her adventures, she takes photos of wildlife for her in-game journal. Her hero's journey is a quest to persuade island residents to sign a petition. Local politicians want to build a new hotel resort where protected wildlife live. Are prospects of economic gain worth the trade-off of harming ecosystems? Questions like this engage players in ethical decision-making, an important SEL competency. *Alba* might be paired with books that explore similar themes, such as Carl Hiassen's *Hoot* (2002), or Samantha M. Clark's *The Boy, the Boat, and the Beast* (2018), or matched with informational books on Mediterranean and Spanish cultures.

Figure 1. Screenshot of a word with magical properties from *Lost Words*.

These titles are noteworthy for their approach to diversity.[19] Games, like books, can serve as mirrors and windows through which diverse players encounter and enact diversity in gender, race, culture, color, and languages through the game's avatars, environments, and social interactions.[20] Story-based games also represent a breakthrough opportunity for meaning-making through action representation for children. Moreover, they are opportunities to engage children in the library's book collection via similarities in social and emotional themes, and similarities in literary forms such as character, setting, and story grammar. Another narrative game takes these trends a step further by making clear overtures toward books and words as playful objects and putting reading and writing center stage in gameplay.

***Lost Words: Beyond the Page* (2021)** is another game with universal themes that can be paired with tween books. Released to widespread critical acclaim,[21] it is a single-player (or reader) adventure built on the hero's journey and stages of grief. Emotional depth makes the game a powerful experience for learning emotional awareness, empathy, and resilience. The gameplay involves moving back and forth between Izzy's journal and the fantasy world of the novel she is writing.

Words are integral to the game, where she hops from phrase to phrase among lines in her journal, finding keywords to help her make decisions, overcome obstacles, and create more profound meaning as she faces a heartbreaking personal loss. Visual and interactive elements create a purposeful relationship between words and images,[22] as the player journeys with Izzy through eight chapters. Each chapter begins as contemporary realism in her journal and switches to a fantasy world inside Izzy's creative writing project. Players literally and figuratively traverse her story, experiencing what she cares about and how her losses change her.

Lost Words goes further in promoting reading and writing through direct emphasis on words as paths and objects of power. Words are objects and environments in the game, with players literally walking on words in the journaling segments. In the fantasy segments using the game controller to drag the word "rise" over objects (such as megaliths in figure 1) results in the object lifting. The word "hope" illuminates darkness and "break" destroys obstacles. Break and hope are also metaphors for the anger and acceptance stages of grief, respectively.

Lines of handwritten words make up the platform or floor a player must walk across to journey from page to page in Izzy's journal (see figure 2). This harks to the magic of walking into a book Disney animators created in the 1960s when Winnie the Pooh bounced on words, looked at sentences, and moved between pages. Bringing the book to life is a mission creators of *Lost Words* embrace.

In addition to Izzy journaling to find her way in life, both she and her fantasy protagonist gather words as tokens, using them to face obstacles or find the path forward. Both authors of this article are avid readers, and we realize how powerful and unusual it is for a video game environment to build this kind of explicit value for words, sentences, pages, writing, and books—not merely as backgrounds or context but as integral aspects of gameplay.

We suggest pairing *Lost Words* with both realistic and fantasy novels featuring a hero's journey and with stories dealing with

Figure 2. Screenshot of the interactive journal from *Lost Words*.

loss and grief (a book list is provided near the end of the article). Pairings might also include nonfiction books on grieving, or the world myth tales the hero's journey derives from.[23] To explore this potential, we will dive deeper into connections possible when pairing this game to a specific novel.

In ***The Thing About Jellyfish*** by Ali Benjamin (2015), Suzy is still reeling from a difficult breakup with her best friend, Franny, during summer before middle school. Her confusion doubles when she learns Franny has inexplicably drowned on a family vacation to the ocean. As her grief compounds she stops speaking completely, turning all her attention to jellyfish stings as the cause of Franny's death (Franny was a fabulous swimmer, after all).

Her relationships at home and school become fraught and distant. She makes emotional space only for obsessive study of jellyfish stings and a quest to meet the international scientist who knows the most. Alternating chapters between conventional novel style and introspective journal writing, we follow Suzy as her lost words lead her on a journey toward inevitable conflicts, disappointments, and finally to resolutions including rediscovery and new comfort with her voice.

Lost Words Beyond the Page Paired with *The Thing About Jellyfish*

The creators of both *Lost Words: Beyond the Page* and *The Thing About Jellyfish* have purposefully built stories around both the hero's journey archetype and the psychological stages of grieving. Both works use journaling as a window into the main character's mind and heart. Both emphasize young people's feelings of powerlessness and disorientation when losing someone they love. Both emphasize the power of words and language. The specific comparisons we draw below between this game and book are examples suggestive of broad potential for thematic book sets, where a story-based game like *Lost Words* might act as a gateway to books and vice versa. (Spoiler alert for both the game and the book in the following section.)

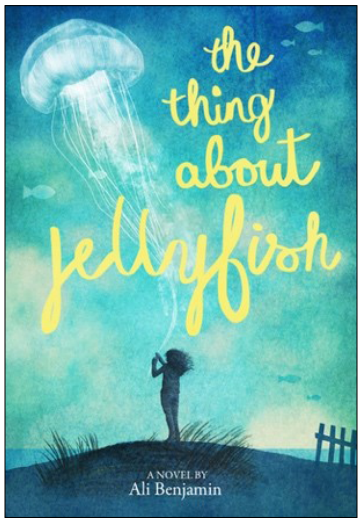
Pairing *Lost Words* with *The Thing About Jellyfish* helps players and readers see how creators treat similar structures and themes in different media. How do storytellers in video games and books help people think and feel as they read and play? *Lost Words* and *The Thing About Jellyfish* share structural and thematic connections. In both works the main character

- loses a loved one;
- journeys through stages of grief via a hero's journey structure; and
- uses words as explicit forms of empowerment and disempowerment.

In *Lost Words*, Izzy loses her grandmother, a mentor and guide for her as a young writer. Starting with a stroke and hospitalization, and progressing toward death, Izzy is forced to come to grips with how aging, illness, and death change her family. She writes the death of the grandmother into her fantasy novel, where her main character is a protégé to the magical

matriarch—this grandmother's passing in the fantasy world mirrors Izzy's loss in the realistic world.

By contrast, Suzy suffers from Franny's rejection, feeling the loss all too common when friendships shift between elementary and middle school. They are still on bad terms when Franny drowns. Suzy struggles with self-doubt as she faces the sudden impossibility of reconciliation with her former friend. What does it mean to lose a childhood best friend, compared to losing an elderly family member to illness and old age? How might readers and players think about death and grieving across these two scenarios? How do everyday conflicts and feelings that already exist between people further complicate the process of grieving?



The psychological journey of grief is fictionalized in *Lost Words* through Izzy's creative writing, a fantasy novel. Her fictional hero suffers a parallel loss to her realistic one, but with dramatic outcomes in the fantasy setting. In *Jellyfish*, the psychological journey plays out in fully formed travel plans Suzy makes to run away to Australia. She is positive her compulsive study of jellyfish will solve Franny's unexplained death, and that traveling to the lab of the world's top jellyfish scientist will bring resolution.

In both works, the hero's journey embodies denial and bargaining stages,[24] where both characters escape the harsh and realistic present into an imagined journey. Each journey plays out in its own way. The hero protagonist of Izzy's novel goes through a series of interactive episodes pursuing a dragon, culminating in a confrontation that ironically does not resolve her loss. In the book, Suzy's elaborate journey is revealed mostly in the journal, where she puzzles together thoughts and feelings that make running away feel like her only option, which also doesn't work out as expected. Each work has its unique way of deconstructing the journey as the characters reach acceptance of grief.

In *Jellyfish*, the thematic use of words begins when Suzy stops talking after Franny's death. She withholds her voice, seeing her failures as problems of misunderstanding words. When she speaks, she feels she makes things worse. Of the two, the book is more literally the story of "lost words." What does it mean that Suzy withholds language and keeps distant from friends, family, and teachers, yet articulates herself so well in her private journal? How and when does she finally dare to use her voice again? In *Lost Words*, when Izzy faces the loss of her mentor the words in her journal literally crumble around her. She simultaneously reaches impasses and character difficulties in her fantasy novel. Throughout her fantasy journey, the hero gathers magic words and puts them in a book to be used when she gets stuck. These single-word puzzles are figures for Izzy's feelings of anger and betrayal. What do words mean to Izzy, and how does her recovery of words and language help her find a path forward? Across the two works we experience two different versions of lost and found words, which create openings for people to consider the impact of each story's way with words.

Video Games as Literature?

Some may treat video games as tween literature. Are they literature? Should we honor them by "reading" them with the same tools we use to discuss books? New modes of media, new forms of storytelling, and new technologies always open paths for artists who believe in the experience of storytelling, its openings for interpretive, evocative, and generative response. We should consider "games as cultural artifacts . . . by showing how games are socially significant and can be analyzed as such."[25]

It's important to note that this same value question was directed in past decades at media we now accept, such as dime novels, movies, children's picturebooks, and comic books. The games we review here are the work of attentive creators who understand both interactive game modalities and narrative. Those involved in children's media can learn much about story-based video games as recent art forms by inviting them into our literary environments.

Major distributors such as Microsoft have done much to help children get wide access to well-known games like *Minecraft*, and book publishers have created a large shelf of popular fiction as well as informational and guidebooks to build on game familiarity. Beyond company-sponsored media reinforcement, authors like Mark Cheverton have published original fiction based in the *Minecraft* world. *Blockopedia* is an informational text based on minerals and ores from the game. Further, many libraries now host *Minecraft* events, seeing the benefit of gaming as part of a larger informational literacy.

Outside the *Minecraft* franchise, HarperCollins publishes a graphic novel and activity-book series called PopularMMOs, which builds its titles on a variety of gaming worlds featured on the popular YouTube channel of the same name. Yet these expansive "transmedia storytelling" traditions may miss thematic connections between games and texts because they build mostly on existing settings and characters from the games.[26] Building on thematic connections, as we discuss here, depends on librarians getting to know the human themes available in narrative games and how these might work with thematic readings of existing children's literature. The ways themes play out across different ensembles of characters and settings offers

gamer-readers a clear opportunity to discuss each work's treatment of themes, and the affordances and constraints of each different form of media.

Story-Based Games in the Work of Children's Librarians

The themes and structures in *Lost Words: Beyond the Page* can support pairing to other tween books with similar elements. The hero's journey and the stages of grief are specific forms we consider when pairing this game with a book. Knowing some themes and structures in *Lost Words*, consider its potential with the following titles, both recent and well-established.

- *The Line Tender,* Kate Allen, 2019
- *The Land of Yesterday,* K.A. Reynolds, 2018
- *The Bone Sparrow,* Zana Fraillon, 2016
- *The Shark Caller,* Dianne Wolfer, 2016.
- *The Shark Caller,* Zillah Bethell, 2021
- *Swallowed by a Secret*, Risa Nyman, 2020
- *Maybe a Fox*, Kathi Appelt and Alison McGhee, 2016
- *Milo: Sticky Notes and Brain Freeze*, Alan Silberberg, 2010
- *The Fourteenth Goldfish,* Jennifer Holm, 2014
- *A Monster Calls*, Patrick Ness and Siobhan Dowd, 2011
- *The Book Thief*, Markus Zusak, 2005

Building a thematic pairing goes beyond noticing simple connections in setting and character. This list of novels was built by considering the narrative arc of *Lost Words* and then searching for books with thematic connections to its treatment of the stages of grief and the hero's journey—both of which were explicitly noted by Rhianna Pratchett, the author of the game. In *The Bone Sparrow*, for example, the journey of a refugee child in a detention center involves doing all he can to forge a friendship with a girl on the other side of the fence, while striving to confront his own grief for his missing father and his family's struggles as refugees. This child's journey and stages of grief can be compared to those of Izzy in *Lost Words*, exploring emotional similarities and comparing affective experiences shared across the two media forms.

Book-Game Pairings in Readers' Advisory and Shelving

Realizing that many children spend much of their free time gaming, readers' advisory is a ripe area in practice for making connections between games and books. To be ready for readers' advisory, children's librarians might play *Lost Words*, *Alba*, and *Never Alone* to discover thematic, structural, and SEL connections to books. Our specific look at themes in *Lost Words* and *The Thing About Jellyfish* is a start at these kinds of connections.

Librarians might ask patrons about themes and emotional experiences they appreciate in books and games or ask directly whether patrons have played story-based games yet. Since the genre is relatively new for children, librarians may be the first to help children learn about a rich new form of story. Gamers who play story-based games may be ready to discuss their themes and structures.

Curated lists of books with connections to games might underpin recommendations across games and books—we provide a start in Table 1. Further, what role might game-to-book pairings take in a library's plans for summer programs or book clubs? Games such as *Lost Words*, *Alba*, and *Never Alone* beg to be displayed alongside books. We imagine book displays where games are shown alongside sets of books, simultaneously promoting both game play and reading.

Collections and Catalog Concerns

What place do story-based games have in the library's collection? Would it take new infrastructure and organization or are resources dedicated to games and gaming? Do librarians search for well-reviewed story-based games as well as the educational games we often see in children's sections? What might circulation look like? Some libraries circulate hard media like cartridges while others purchase licensing agreements or subscriptions.

Further, many cataloging systems allow for Goodreads- or Amazon-like connections among titles ("If you enjoyed this, you might enjoy that") through locally selected subject tags. Subject tagging books so story-based games appear as recommendations (and *vice versa*) would be a way of supporting patrons in moving between the two media forms. Table 1 may be a useful tool in collections and cataloging, illustrating multiple thematic connections between games and books.

Not all librarians have equal access to digital gaming consoles, current computers, and high-speed broadband. Although we encourage librarians to advocate for resources that would put gaming infrastructure in place, the question remains: What about now? Some narrative games, such as *Walden, a game EDU,* are free to play and have been built to be played in the internet browser on bare-bones computers such as Chromebooks—without any installation of software.

If library computers are simply too few or too old to support gaming at the library, there are a host of story-based card and tabletop games that might be paired with books. In addition to the familiar role-playing games such as *Dungeons and Dragons*, games such as *Werewolf*, *La Mancha*, *Love Letter*, and *For the Queen* can be purchased for a library's collection and can prime readers for experiences that bridge games and books. Libraries throughout the nation already host tabletop gaming nights, and making book

Table 1. Themed Pairings of Games and Books

Game	Theme	Book(s)
Lost Words: Beyond the Page (2021)	Grief, hero's journey	*The Thing About Jellyfish,* Ali Benjamin (2015)
Journey (2012)	Hero's journey	*Rescue,* Jennifer A. Nielsen (2021) *Marcus Vega Doesn't Speak Spanish,* Pablo Cartaya (2018)
Alba: A Wildlife Adventure (2021)	Human relationship to nature	*Hello, Universe,* Erin Entrada Kelly (2017) *The Last Bear,* Hannah Gold (2021)
Never Alone (*Kisima Ingitchuna*) (2014)	Interdependence	*A Journey to the Mother of the Sea,* Mâliâraq Vebæk (1999) *The Legend of Lightning and Thunder,* Paula Ikuutaq Rumbolt (2013)
Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild (2017)	Exploration & discovery, resilience & rebuilding	*The Girl Who Circumnavigated Fairyland in a Boat of Her Own Making,* Catherynne M. Valente (2012)
Walden, a game EDU (2022)	Human relationship to nature	*Thoreau: A Sublime Life,* Maximilien Le Roy (2016) *The Story That Cannot Be* Told, J. Kasper Kramer (2020)
Unpacking (2021)	Self-reflection & growth	*The Eleventh Trade,* Alyssa Hollingsworth (2018) *I Can Make This Promise,* Christine Day(2019)
Hades (2018)	Resilience, family	Journey of the Pale Bear, Susan Fletcher (2018) *A Long Walk to Water,* Linda Sue Park (2010)
GRIS (2018)	Grief	*The Line Tender,* Kate Allen (2019)
That Dragon, Cancer (2016)	Loss, grief	*A Monster Calls,* Patrick Ness (2011)
Portal 2 (2011)	Unreliable narrator	*The Westing Game,* Ellin Raskin (1978) *The Magic Thief,* Sarah Prineus (2008) *The False Prince,* Jennifer A. Nielse (2012)
Marvel's Guardians of the Galaxy (2021)	Family & belonging	*Boston Jane,* Jennifer Holm (2001) *The Good Thieves,* Katherine Rundell (2019) *Pine Island Home,* Polly Horvath (2020)

Note: A downloadable PDF version of this table is available at https://drive.google.com/file/d/1J2mlgw0Nh_7U-fZRO0vyYkj66uWsqypU/view?usp=sharing.

connections to the games played at these hosted events would be a perfect opportunity to point gamers to the book collection.

Request Narrative Children's Games

The gaming industry would likely respond if libraries expressed demand for more story-based games. Society already witnessed a large shift around comics, where the explosion of graphic novels for older readers led quickly to demand for and production of children's titles. Libraries have been perfect partners, embracing comics across the collection. This is now an important shift for the game industry, where the children's market has been dominated largely by closed-ended educational games with specific learning outcomes, rather than literary games encouraging open-ended, interpretive, and evocative response.

We ask librarians to contact game developers, letting them know what kinds of narrative themes are likely to dovetail well with the already deep book collection. We also encourage use of professional journals, press releases, and exhibitions at national and regional conferences to emphasize narrative games for children.

"Reading" Beyond the Page

Narrative games are not just about what is on the screen, but also what goes on in the player's mind and heart. Likewise, books are more than what is on the page. Yes, in both a novel and a narrative game, a plot is presented and followed. But do readers/players find openings to decide how to think and feel about where the story goes? Perspective-taking and empathy are important aspects of SEL growth we hope for when people participate in both books and narrative games.

The stages of grief and the hero's journey we discussed between *Lost Words* and *The Thing About Jellyfish* emphasize stories as emotional journeys, where what we feel for Izzy and Suzy is far more important than the most literal reading of what happens on the screen or page. One purpose of reading fiction is to vicariously experience emotions and relationships, to gain insight into the human condition in a wider imagined world. In game play, perspective-taking is scaffolded through the controller and interactive elements, whereas identifying with a novel's protagonist demands an imaginative leap into identification. Game play may be a door to reading for young people ready to perspective-take and feel empathy in games, who would benefit from approaching a book with perspectives and emotions already in their minds and hearts.

Games are new media, and librarians know about patrons' desire for media reinforcement. Children want to read books that build on movies, television, and music they know and love. Connecting books and games is not unlike matching books to movies or television. Yet making those matches thematically instead of by franchise feels like a different kind of recommendation. In this spirit, rather than following only marketed media reinforcements, book-game pairings put librarian knowledge about books (and other media) at the forefront.

Acclaimed narrative games have begun to walk up to the expectations of award-winning literature. Their treatment of human

themes, current issues, and diversity may be unexpected for people who think mainly of the individualistic first-person shooter or addictive phone app when they hear *video game*. As fans of librarians and libraries ourselves, we see a great future where books and narrative games become tandem ways of making meaning and gaining experience. &

References

1. Pamela Groseclose, "Books for Tween Reluctant Readers (Gamers Edition)," *ALSC Blog, Association for Library Service to Children,* July 8, 2021, https://www.alsc.ala.org/blog/2021/07/books-for-tween-gamers/.
2. Irene Picton, Christina Clark, and Tim Judge, "Video Game Playing and Literacy: A Survey of Young People Aged 11 to 16," *National Literacy Trust Research Report* (August 2020), https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED607911.
3. Picton, Clark, and Judge, "Video Game Playing and Literacy," 25.
4. Rachel Kowert, *Video Games and Well-Being* (New York: Springer, 2020).
5. Katherine Isbister, *How Games Move Us: Emotion by Design* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2017).
6. Marianne Habib et al., "Socio-Emotional Context and Adolescents' Decision Making: The Experience of Regret and Relief After Social Comparison," *Journal of Research on Adolescence* 25, no. 1 (2015): 81–91; Matt S. Treeby et al., "Shame, Guilt, and Facial Emotion Processing: Initial Evidence for a Positive Relationship between Guilt-Proneness and Facial Emotion Recognition Ability," *Cognition and Emotion* 30, no. 8 (2016): 1504–11.
7. Marc A. Brackett, *Permission to Feel: Unlocking the Power of Emotions to Help Our Kids, Ourselves, and Our Society Thrive* (New York: Celadon Books, 2019).
8. CASEL, "CASEL's SEL Framework," 2020, https://casel.org/wpcontent/uploads/2020/10/ CASEL-SEL-Framework-10.2020-1.pdf.
9. Jonathan Harth, "Empathy with Non-Player Characters? An Empirical Approach to the Foundations of Human/Non-Human Relationships," *Journal of Virtual Worlds Research* 10, no. 2 (2017), https://doi.org/10.4101/jvwr.v10i2.7272.
10. Richard M. Ryan and Edward L. Deci, *Self-Determination Theory: Basic Psychological Needs in Motivation, Development, and Wellness* (New York: Guilford Press, 2017).
11. Thalia R. Goldstein, "The Pleasure of Unadulterated Sadness: Experiencing Sorrow in Fiction, Nonfiction, and 'In Person,'" *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts* 3, no. 4 (2009): 232–37, https://doi.org/10.1037/a0015343.
12. Joseph L. Mahoney et al., "Systemic Social and Emotional Learning: Promoting Educational Success for all Preschool to High School Students," *American Psychologist* 76, no. 7 (2021): 1128–42, https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000701.
13. Victoria Mendoza, "Three Ways to Use Impossible Field Trips for Elementary," Boclips, September 7, 2018, https://www.boclips.com/blog/3-ways-to-use-impossible-field-trips-in-the-primary-classroom ; Chad Mahood and Michael Hanus, "Role-Playing Video Games and Emotion: How Transportation into the Narrative Mediates the Relationship between Immoral Actions and Feelings of Guilt," *Psychology of Popular Media Culture* 6, no. 1 (2017): 61–73.
14. Matthew Farber, *Gaming SEL: Games as Transformational to Social and Emotional Learning* (New York: Peter Lang, 2021), 97–99.
15. "Mismatched Pairs: Paired Nonfiction and Fiction for Tweens Booklist," American Library Association, January 18, 2017, http://www.ala.org/alsc/publications-resources/book-lists/mismatchedpairs.
16. Keith J. Topping, "Fiction and Non-Fiction Reading and Comprehension in Preferred Books," *Reading Psychology* 36, no. 4 (2015): 350–87, https://doi.org/10.1080/02702711.2013.865692.
17. Perry Nodelman and Mavis Reimer, *The Pleasures of Children's Literature* (London: Longman, 2002); Lawrence R. Sipe, "Picturebooks as Aesthetic Objects," *Literacy Teaching and Learning: An International Journal of Early Reading and Writing* 6, no. 1 (2001): 23–42, https://www.readingrecovery.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/LTL_6.1-Sipe.pdf.
18. Adrienne Massanari, "Never Alone (Kisima Inŋitchuŋa): Possibilities for Participatory Game Design," *Well-Played* 4, no. 3 (2015): 88, https://press.etc.cmu.edu/index.php/product/well-played-vol-4-no-3/.
19. Elizabeth Blair, "Kids Need to See Themselves Reflected in Media. Here are Some Recommendations," December 6, 2021, NPR: Morning Edition, https://www.npr.org/2021/12/26/1062369487/kids-books-tv-video-games-diverse-characters.
20. Rudine Sims Bishop, "Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors," *Perspectives: Choosing and Using Books for the Classroom* 6, no. 3: (1990): ix–xi, https://scenicregional.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Mirrors-Windows-and-Sliding-Glass-Doors.pdf.
21. "Lost Words: Beyond the Page Accolades Trailer," Modus Games, April 8, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7_jcebhAOx0
22. Maria Nikolajeva and Carole Scott, *How Picturebooks Work* (London: Routledge, 2013).
23. Ludmila Zeman's *Gilgamesh* trilogy would be an ideal children's literature connection.
24. Farber, *Gaming SEL*, 1–4.
25. Alayna Cole and Dakoda Barker, *Games As Texts: A Practical Application of Textual Analysis to Games* (Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press, 2020), https://doi.org/10.1201/9780429331329.
26. Becky Herr-Stephenson et al., *T Is for Transmedia: Learning Through Transmedia Play* (Los Angeles and New York: USC Annenberg Innovation Lab and The Joan Ganz Cooney Center at Sesame Workshop), http://www.annenberglab.com/viewresearch/46.

Seeking Oasis in Book Deserts

Building Home Libraries to Create Equity in Book Ownership

ELIZABETH McCHESNEY

Libraries have long promoted book giveaways to increase the love of reading and books. The educational benefits are well documented for increased print and book ownership access. Libraries also leverage programs such as 1000 Books Before Kindergarten and summer learning as popular programs to help families grow home libraries.

Despite these efforts, there are many socioeconomic disparities in which children in this country own books. Espinosa et al. found that children in the highest socioeconomic status have over five times the books in their homes as children in the lowest quartile.[1] A study by van Bergen et al. found that the number of books in the home helps predict early reading abilities, yet these gaps in book ownership persist.[2]

There are pernicious and persistent systemic barriers to children's book ownership. These gaps in where books are found are sometimes called "book deserts"—a geographic area where reading materials are challenging to obtain and was coined by Unite for Literacy.[3] New York University researcher Dr. Susan Neuman points out that book deserts constrain the opportunity to come to school ready to learn.

Librarians, educators, and summer program leaders came ready to learn about this issue at the National Summer Learning Association (NSLA) Annual Conference in October 2022. A panel presentation was convened to learn from successful programs that helped distribute books in summer learning programs. This discussion sparked the idea of a Moonshot Million Project to help program providers serving children who have been historically excluded add books to their programmatic offerings.

Aaron Philip Dworkin, CEO of NSLA, says, "We urge you to join us in this effort to increase the human right of literacy, the love of good books, and exercise the skills needed in the complex act of reading for comprehension and joy. Through this campaign, we can help all children rise. Equitable home libraries filled with beautiful, affirming, and fun books are critical for our kids. We know summer programs can help in this effort and the enormous vision of equity and access for all our youth."

NSLA formed a working group to harness program providers together to think about ways to increase book ownership and distribute books in programs. Since the conference, interested program attendees have met to discuss ways to increase book ownership to youth in their programs and to help get the right books into kids' hands.

The Moonshot Million working group collectively aims to distribute one million books in summer programs in 2023. Here we examine book ownership, look at several successful programs and call out the systemic barriers to owning the right books for a home library many families face.

Elizabeth McChesney *is a career-long Children's Librarian and Youth Services Administrator who serves as a consultant in youth services. She acts as Senior Advisor to several organizations including the National Summer Learning Association, Urban Libraries Council, and Laundry Literacy Coalition. A frequent speaker and writer, she is the author of several books for ALA Editions and is the 2021 recipient of the ALSC Distinguished Service Award.*

The Benefits of Book Ownership

Research continues to grow that ties book ownership to success in reading. A University of Nevada research project shows that having even just twenty books in the home substantially impacts helping children achieve a higher level of education.[4] This research shows that the more books, the greater the educational benefit for the reader. In fact, according to the study, the number of books in the home has as much of an impact on the child's educational attainment as the parent's education levels.[5]

Another study finds that access to print in the home is a strong predictor of reading achievement. This study shows that the home environment strongly predicts socioeconomic status. The study found this was true for children at age ten and again at age 15.[6]

According to a study by the National Literacy Trust, young people who have books of their own are more likely than their non-book-owning counterparts to agree with the statement that they become better at reading the more they read. They are also nearly twice as likely to agree with the statement that reading is "cool."[7]

Similarly, young people who own their books are less likely than those who do not have books of their own to agree with the statements that they prefer to watch TV to reading, that they cannot find things to read that interest them, and that they would be embarrassed if their friends saw them reading.[8]

Access to books in early childhood has been proven to have a persistent impact on vocabulary, background knowledge, and comprehension.[9]

In 2010 Reading Is Fundamental (RIF) conducted a meta-analysis of research studies about access to books and found that giving children access to print materials is associated with positive behavioral, educational, and psychological outcomes.[10]

A review of the research shows the following benefits to books in the home:

- better recognition of sounds and letters
- knowledge of a broader range of vocabulary
- increased listening skills
- a deeper understanding of how stories work
- instrumental tools in helping children learn the basics of reading
- increased enjoyment of books
- increased belief in books as enjoyable
- increased and sustained reading time[11]

Inequitable Access to Books in the Home

Despite the benefits of book ownership to children and many positive and unique delivery systems, book ownership in this country is different for children based on socioeconomic factors. According to Dr. Molly Ness, director of the Coalition for Literacy Equity, many children face systemic barriers to book ownership and live in book deserts.[12]

Moreover, according to Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers, forty-five percent of our nation's children live in neighborhoods that lack public libraries and stores that sell books or in homes where books are an unaffordable or unfamiliar luxury.[13] At the same time, two-thirds of the schools and programs in our nation's lowest-income neighborhoods cannot afford to buy books at retail prices. That means that today, 32.4 million American children go without books—even as study after study has shown that literacy is crucial to success in school, future earning potential, and the ability to contribute to the nation's economy.[14]

Ness says that "In communities that experience high poverty and systemic oppression, books are hard to come by."[15]

Book ownership disparities exist in both urban and rural areas. According to the US Department of Education, 61 percent of families living in high poverty have no books in their homes.[16] This statistic means our nation's children are not all starting school with a level playing field and may not be ready for school.

Successful Book Give-Away Programs

Summer programs offer a rich opportunity to build in a book giveaway program or to offer high quality children's books as prizes or raffles. Building on the idea of using books as a part of summer programs, six successful and inspiring examples of book giveaways in summer programs were highlighted during the NSLA Conference.

The New York Public Library gave away five hundred thousand books during its 2022 summer learning program. The books were given out in person at branch libraries and during outreach events across the city. NYPL Director of Children's Services Lex Abenshon said, "Our goal was to increase both an engagement in reading at the library and a love of book ownership. We saw youth's ability to choose their book as critical in these efforts."

In partnership with the San Francisco Human Rights Commission and the San Francisco Unified School District, the **San Francisco Public Library** (SFPL) created and distributed book bundles to communities experiencing poverty or racial exclusion during their summer 2021 and 2022 program, Summer Stride. The book bundles featured age-appropriate, culturally affirming, and fun books and a unique activity guide to enhancing engagement with the books and culturally uplifting summer learning. Each bundle included a warm invitation to visit their local library and receive

another free book. Moreover, partners take great pride and care in distributing books directly to youth and families.

"We are always better when we work in community and partnership," says SFPL Youth Services Manager Christy Estrovitz. "The Book Bundles allow us to build towards meaningful home libraries through trusted agencies directly serving youth we all want to reach. Together we spread library love and celebrate our youth and families in affirming ways."

Araba Maze, aka Storybook Maze or The Radical Street Librarian, saw the need right outside her Baltimore, MD door and began reading culturally affirming books to youth in her neighborhood. "I was reading to my nieces one day on my stoop in Baltimore, and little kids started gathering around, and I was like, 'Oh, OK, you guys can join us!'" she said. Maze began reading to the kids weekly and became inspired to become a children's librarian. Now she is on a mission to end book deserts in Baltimore by placing book vending machines throughout the community.

As a United Way of Central Maryland Change Maker recipient, Araba works to bring culturally-affirming books to places where children most impacted by systemic barriers are likely to find them. Of the Moonshot Million campaign, Araba said, "Increasing book ownership through summer programs is a brilliant way to build home libraries and for kids to see themselves in books they are inspired to read. This can help with COVID learning loss and summer opportunity gaps."

Google Kids & Family staff set out on a mission to buy books for kids as part of a corporate giving strategy. The staff landed on a project in Chicago, at the Cook County Department of Corrections. An early learning space is being created in the Maximum-Security Division Waiting Room, and to augment this, Google Kids is providing books for families during these visits.

A child and their loved one experiencing detainment can choose a book the child will take home and own. Says Dr. Nneka Jones-Tapia, a clinical psychologist and the head of Justice Initiatives at Chicago Beyond, "Allowing a parent and child to choose a book together not only helps build the child's library, but it helps to break the cycle of trauma we see with families experiencing detainment. These books become physical symbols of family love."

Jane Park, a senior content strategist at Google Kids & Family, adds, "For our team, this is a partnership opportunity we felt advances our values of caring for children and families. Our team has raised funds and purchased books for this project to increase equity and provide children and families with beautiful books during this vulnerable time in their lives."

Dorothy Weintraub, vice president at **Scholastic,** added the commitment of Scholastic to helping children build book-rich home environments. "For 102 years, Scholastic has been committed to helping families develop their home libraries in meaningful ways," Weintraub says. An example of their commitment to building home libraries can be seen in their partnership with the Laundry Literacy Coalition (Too Small to Fail and Laundry Cares Foundation), in which Scholastic provides nearly five thousand books each summer to children participating in laundromat-based summer learning programs.

Mia Harding, chief impact officer at **The Literacy Lab**, says "We believe reading is a human right. Reading is the foundation for educational success and opportunities in life, yet many children are not given the time and skills to build this foundation." Through The Literacy Lab's Leading Men Fellowship, Black and Latino young men of color are placed in participating schools to help implement research-backed reading intervention strategies, model reading aloud, and build more equitable outcomes for youth in historically excluded school communities.

Harding says, "Books which are windows and mirrors are critical for our youth, and allowing kids to choose the book they most want is critical to building a successful home library. Summer programs have a tremendous opportunity to build these rich, at-home collections."

Getting Book Distributions Right

We know that books matter and having a home library has been proven to substantially impact a child's outcomes. However, what are the right books, and how can public libraries co-create collections for distribution with their communities?

Dr. Susan Neuman et al. looked at this along with geospatial mapping of book distribution in the City of Philadelphia in 2021. In this study, she also looked at the right books to include in library or community-led book distribution programs. Her research found that the number of books often superseded the quality and content of books for many program providers.[17]

Additionally, she adds, "Often parents were neither consulted nor asked to serve on selection committees for the books in giveaway programs."[18] Neuman's recommendations include creating focus groups of parents so that different types of books, like decodable books, readers, and biographies that are racially uplifting, will be included in selections for book distributions.

Adds Dr. Molly Ness, "Beautiful picture books, lushly illustrated, may not always be the most welcome book. A decodable book that can help a child to read may be closer to families' goals for reading time and home library development. The important thing is that we respectfully include families in selecting titles."

Lisa Dwyer, director of Strategic Operations for the Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students (GEARS), runs a Mayor's Summer Reading Club throughout greater Atlanta in partnership with the Mayor's Office. A frequent collaborator and partner with her public libraries and other family-oriented programs, Dwyer says,

> Building home libraries of books is essential to our summer program strategy. When families see themselves in books, it

increases the motivation to read and engage with the book, and this is the ultimate goal: to end book deserts and give each child equitable opportunities. In the summer of 2022, we successfully used multi-lingual versions of the book *I'll Build You a Bookcase* (by Jean Ciborowski Fahey) to encourage and celebrate home libraries for our families.[19]

A Children's Author Contributes and Reflects

Author Fahey spent a long career at Harvard Teaching Hospital, where she tested children for reading and learning disabilities. She says, "I saw that children need books to practice language and to have lots of choices each day."

In 2020, she answered an OpenIDEO call for a book to help inspire a love of reading and books in the home. Her book, *I'll Build You a Bookcase* (Lee & Low, 2021), was not only the winning submission but is an inspiring two-generational story of families reading from a home bookcase full of books that grow with the children portrayed on the pages.

"I wrote this story because I wanted a way to reach our tiniest of children," Fahey says. "By reading to them as soon as they are born, no time wasted, we set them on the great journey toward literacy. At the same time, reading strengthens the bonds that allow children to feel safe and loved by the important people in their lives."

The William Penn Foundation has purchased twenty-five thousand books to donate to families with young children. "Talking and reading with children is how we lay the groundwork for strong readers in the future, even when it seems like they are too young to understand. This book seeks to engage children with its emotionally resonant writing and storyline while giving ideas to adults about how to support early language development," says Elliot Weinbaum, program director at William Penn Foundation (https://williampennfoundation.org/). The book is available in English plus four bilingual editions, including Spanish, Mandarin, Arabic, and Vietnamese.

Fahey says, "Building a home library is essential for setting children on a path to life and learning success. Congratulations to the Moonshot Million working group at NSLA for leveraging summer programs as a vehicle for helping so many kids achieve and grow in this way." &

For more information on the Moonshot Million initiative or to join the NSLA working group, contact Liz McChesney at lmcchesney@summerlearning.org or lizmcchesney6712@gmail.com.

References

1. L. Espinosa et al., "Technology in the Home and the Achievement of Young Children, Findings from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study," *Early Education and Development* 17, no. 3 (2006): 421–41.
2. E. van Bergen et al., "Why Are Home Literacy Environments and Children's Reading Skills Associated? What Parental Skills Reveal," *Reading Research Quarterly* 52, no. 2 (2016): 147–60.
3. Unite for Literacy.
4. M. D. R. Evans et al., "Family Scholarly Culture and Educational Success: Books and Schooling in 27 Nations," *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility* 28, no. 2 (June 2010): 171–97, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rssm.2010.01.002.
5. Evans et al., "Family Scholarly Culture and Educational Success: Books and Schooling in 27 Nations."
6. Anne G. Bishop et al., "Prediction of First-Grade Reading Achievement: A Comparison of Fall and Winter Kindergarten Screenings," *Learning Disabilities Quarterly* 26 (2003): 189–200.
7. Christina Clarke and Lizzie Poulton, "Book Ownership and Its Relation to Reading Enjoyment, Attitudes, Behaviour and Attainment: Some Finds from the National Literacy Trust First Annual Survey," report, National Literacy Trust, 2011.
8. Clarke and Poulton, "Book Ownership."
9. Frank Schubert and Rolf Becker, "Social Inequality of Reading Literacy: A Longitudinal Analysis with Cross-Sectional Data of PIRLS 2001 and PISA 2000 Utilizing the Pair Wise Matching Procedure," *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility* 28, no. 1 (2010): 109–33, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rssm.2009.12.007.
10. Yaaccov Petscher, "A Meta-Analysis of the Relationship Between Student Attitudes Towards Reading and Achievement in Reading," *Journal of Research in Reading* 33, no. 4 (2010), https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9817.2009.01418.x.
11. Petscher, "A Meta-Analysis."
12. Dr. Molly Ness, phone interview, October 24, 2022.
13. Randi Weingarten, "Where We Stand: Reading—A Lifelong Love," American Education (Spring 2015), https://www.aft.org/ae/spring2015/wws.
14. Weingarten, "Where We Stand."
15. Ness, phone interview.
16. US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Reading Literacy in the United States: Findings From the IEA Reading Literacy Study* (Washington, DC: 1996).
17. Susan Neuman et al., "Getting Books in Children's Hands: Creating a Citywide Book Distribution Policy Using a Mixed-Methods Geospatial Approach," *American Educational Research Journal* 58, no. 4 (2021): 1–35.
18. Neuman et al., "Getting Books in Children's Hands."
19. Jean Ciborowsky Fahey, "Re: I'll Build You a Bookcase/Article," email to Jean Fahey, November 15, 2022.

The Kids Are Not All Right

Why LGBTQIA+ Representation in Literature Matters

JAYNE WALTERS

Let's start off with a question. How old were you when you read your first book with a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex, or asexual character in it?

Now another question—how did that story end? Probably not well, and that's not uncommon.

Throughout much of history, in literature featuring LGBTQIA+ themes, the character, or characters, does not have a good outcome. These books feature common themes, which often revolve around being assaulted, contemplating or completing suicide, being murdered, dying alone—often of an incurable disease—a woven death shroud of dark conclusions for characters who stray from the straight and cisgender.

Thankfully, when it comes to LGBTQIA+ literature today, we have witnessed marked improvements. Not only are the themes getting better, with more queer joy and more characters whose stories don't revolve around their sexuality or gender identity and expression, but there's also more representation than ever.

Cisgender gay white characters have long dominated LGBTQIA+ literature, and publishers are becoming more inclusive with each day. More, and better, books are hitting the shelves, and this literature is quickly escaping its niche as a category.

Malinda Lo's multiple award-winning *Last Night at the Telegraph Club*, Kyle Lukoff's 2022 Stonewall Children's Award winning *Too Bright to See*, and Leah Johnson's 2021 Stonewall Honoree, *You Should See Me in a Crown* are a few examples of books leaping into mainstream recognition.

At the same time, conservative groups are pressing for more book restrictions and removals than ever before. They compile lengthy lists of hundreds of books to which they object, and share them widely. Anyone looking at those lists out there can see that the focus of the attacks, as always, is on books featuring BIPoC and LGBTQIA+ characters and topics.

Saundra Mitchell is one YA author whose books have been challenged and banned in multiple states this past year. In an October 2022 statement on one set of her books, she wrote,

"Removing us from books, movies, websites, textbooks, documentaries—removing us from schools and libraries—will not erase us. It will only mean that your children, the children of your community, your families, your flesh, who have been so fearsomely, wonderfully made—will suffer the way we did in decades past.

"They will fight, and many will lose, the battle against depression and suicide—not because we're born mentally ill, but because we're made that way by a world that hates us, openly."[1]

***Jayne Walters**, Branch Manager of the West Indianapolis branch of the Indianapolis Public Library (IndyPL), has worked in libraries for over fourteen years. She is the first openly transgender manager in IndyPL's history. She is a contributing author in the upcoming book,* Trans and Gender Diverse Voices in Libraries *(Litwin Books).*

Mitchell is right when she says these efforts "will not erase us." Every day, children all over the country are facing the challenges of not just the everyday goings on of school, but constant threats and attacks on who they are as people. You might be asking, "Is it really that bad?"

It's worse than you might think.

In February 2022, Cathryn Oakley, state legislative director for the Human Rights Campaign, said 2022 was "poised to become the year of the most anti-LGBTQ legislation" in the United States.[2]

She was right, and it looks as though 2023 will be even worse. The constant attacks on the LGBTQIA+ community from the legislative level makes it harder to navigate even everyday life. "Recent political attacks aimed at transgender and nonbinary youth have not only threatened their access to health care, support systems, and affirming spaces at school, they've also negatively impacted their mental health," said Dr. Jonah DeChants.[3] Because of this, it's vital for the mental wellbeing and the very survival of children to be able to find support where they can.

Many factors can account for homelessness of LGBTQIA+ youth, but family conflict is the primary cause, which is disproportionately due to a lack of acceptance by family members of a youth's sexual orientation or gender identity.[4] When they aren't dealing with the onslaught from the government or their family, they face it at school. Unfortunately, it's not just from other students. Fifty-eight percent of students reported hearing homophobic remarks from their teachers or other school staff, and 72.0% of students reported hearing negative remarks about gender expression from teachers or other school staff.[5] These numbers are up from 52.4% and 66.7% respectively in GLSENs 2019 National School Climate Survey.

When comparing 2021 numbers to the 2019 ones, sadly, there has been an increase in negative experiences across the board. One example showed a 20% increase in these negative experiences, with four in five LGBTQIA+ students reporting feeling unsafe in school because of at least one of their actual or perceived personal characteristics compared to six in ten from two years previous.[6]

"Notably, the most common reason that LGBTQ+ students gave for feeling unsafe in school concerned their SOGIE (sexual orientation, gender identity, and/or gender expression) characteristics—68.0% reported that they felt unsafe in school because of one or more of these characteristics."[7]

In addition to being targeted in the ways already mentioned, it's happening on an administrative level as well:

- 29.2 percent had been prevented from using their chosen name or pronouns in their schools
- 27.2 percent had been prevented from using the bathroom that aligned with their gender
- 23.8 percent had been prevented from using the locker room that aligned with their gender
- 20.6 percent had been prevented from wearing clothes deemed "inappropriate" based on gender
- 16.0 percent had been prevented from playing on the sports team that is consistent with their gender[8]

These are based on the lived experiences of LGBTQIA+ youth. News of these experiences, in addition to the climate in which they live, leads to growing concerns and fears from others. Many of these concerns stem from bills introduced in 2022 and with more of them on the horizon for 2023.

- 93 percent of transgender and nonbinary youth said that they have worried about transgender people being denied access to gender-affirming medical care due to state or local laws.
- 83 percent of transgender and nonbinary youth said that they have worried about transgender people being denied the ability to play sports due to state or local laws.
- 91 percent of transgender and nonbinary youth said that they have worried about transgender people being denied access to the bathroom due to state or local laws.[9]

Another point of fear for LGBTQIA+ children and teens is the increase in armed presences protesting queer activities for children, and gun violence in formerly safe queer spaces. Even their everyday school and home lives are fraught.

I've had conversations with youth who actively avoid taking books home with LGBTQIA+ themes because they fear the backlash at home. These are young people who have to hide who they are from their family. One young lady who had opened up to me and talked about a break up with her first girlfriend confessed that she would never come out to her family because she "knows" they'd throw her out. Two years later and she's still hiding her true self and her girlfriend of over a year from her family, with at least two more years until she is able to move out. Fortunately, publishers are doing a better job of making books that feature LGBTQIA+ characters less conspicuous and more universal cover art.

So, what can librarians do to improve this climate? The first step is to establish yourself as a known ally, creating a space where children can feel safe to be themselves.

There are several ways to do this. One of the first and probably the most important ways that you can, as a librarian, is by continuing to purchase LGBTQIA+ literature. Even as groups continue to challenge and ban those books, you must do your part by supporting the authors who write these mirrors and windows for our youth. That tells the publishing houses that there is a need for them, and it forces the ones challenging to do the work themselves.

Shying away from making those purchases out of fear of the challenge or ban is called soft censorship. You are, in effect, doing their dirty work for them when you self-select away from queer literature for children and teens.

Don't label or segregate your LGBTQIA+ material. These are windows, just as much as they are mirrors. The more that children can read and learn about other people and their experiences, or even just see this representation as people who are just living their lives, the better. When the material is separated out and away from all the other material, it's less likely to be picked up by anyone, queer or not.

Labeling is thought by some to be helpful, but it is actually harmful. During an author talk, I received some insight from author Mitchell.

"Labeling books as 'queer' has the advantage of hurting readers three ways," she said. "The first is that it's literally painting a target on queer students who carry those books around, inviting bullying or—considering new legislation in Texas and other states—actual CPS intervention in their home lives. The second is that it implies these books are *only* for queer students, discouraging straight, cisgender students from exploring them—slam that window shut! And the third is the question of who or what defines a 'queer' book? Is having one gay side character enough? Can the leads be queer, but not actively discussing queer topics? It's impossible to cover the spectrum of queer children and teens in literature with a single label, because books are for people—not for categories."[10]

While those labels can make children a target, you can take that same thought process and flip it around for good. A small ally sticker on your laptop, a pride pin on your lanyard, a Safe Space sticker on the door to your classroom, office, or library might be tiny in appearance, but they act as a lighthouse in the dark storm that these children are navigating every day. About half (51.9 percent) had seen at least one Safe Space sticker or poster at their school.[11] It takes very little effort to make a massive impact in a child's life.

In addition to using labels for good, take the harassment that these kids are going through seriously. The GLSEN climate study also stated, "LGBTQ+ Students' Reports of School Staff's Responses to Reports of Harassment and Assault—60.3% reported that the 'Staff Did Nothing/Took No Action and/or Told the Student to Ignore It.'"[12]

A small ally sticker on your laptop, a pride pin on your lanyard, a Safe Space sticker on the door to your classroom, office, or library might be tiny in appearance, but they act as a lighthouse in the dark storm that these children are navigating every day.

It's evident from the surveys that bad news spreads and impacts youth in harmful ways, but it's important to know that word of a supportive teacher/librarian/staff spreads quickly among children as well.

It's apparent that there are going to continue to be targeted attacks on LGBTQIA+ literature and on the rights of these children. Libraries can make fantastic safe havens for many marginalized communities, and I've heard numerous stories from other librarians that libraries welcomed them when other places and people wouldn't.

We can discover new worlds in books, but we can also find ourselves in books. We can discover people who feel the way we do, and find the words for who we are in those pages.

The kids are not all right, but with your help, they could be better. &

References

1. Saundra Mitchell, "Statement on the Challenges Against *All Out, Out Now, Out There*," Making Stuff Up for a Living, October 28, 2022, https://saundramitchell.com/challenge-statements/.
2. Gabriella Borter, "Florida House Approves Bill Limiting School Discussions of LGBTQ Identity," Reuters, February 24, 2022, https://www.reuters.com/world/us/florida-house-vote-bill-limiting-school-discussions-lgbtq-identity-2022-02-24/.
3. "2022 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health," The Trevor Project, 2022, https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2022/.
4. M. H. Morton et al., "Missed Opportunities: LGBTQ Youth Homelessness in America," Voices of Youth Count, Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, 2018, https://voicesofyouthcount.org/brief/lgbtq-youth-homelessness/.
5. J. G. Kosciw, L. Menard, and C. M. Clark, *The 2021 National School Climate Survey* (New York: GLSEN, 2022), https://www.glsen.org/research/2021-national-school-climate-survey.
6. Kosciw, Menard, and Clark, *The 2021 National School Climate Survey.*
7. Kosciw, Menard, and Clark, *The 2021 National School Climate Survey.*
8. Kosciw, Menard, and Clark, *The 2021 National School Climate Survey.*
9. "2022 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health."
10. Saundra Mitchell, personal conversation with the author, February 2022.
11. Kosciw, Menard, and Clark, *The 2021 National School Climate Survey.*
12. Kosciw, Menard, and Clark, *The 2021 National School Climate Survey.*

Checkmates

Teens Mentoring Kids in Florida Chess Club

DIANA PAGANO-DIAZ

What makes a chess club hip? Could it be that watching hours of Netflix's *The Queen's Gambit* made it more popular, or is it simply because of the players and facilitators involved?

At the Miami-Dade Public Library System's South Dade Regional Library, it is more of the latter. The library's weekly Chess Club program has been offered for nearly a decade, but in March 2020 it came to a halt when in-library programming was suspended due to COVID-19. When the club resumed at the beginning of 2022, turnout was lower than it had been in the past. We had a low turnout of about five kids when we started after COVID, but it steadily increased to about fifteen to twenty kids weekly, not including the teen interns.

During this time, I was training and mentoring my teen interns participating in Miami-Dade County's Fit2Lead Internship Program and decided I wanted them to take on a more active role in our programs. Jadon and Hailey, then 16 and 17, unbeknownst to me, were avid chess players. They started playing with the kids during our weekly program. As the weeks went by, we noticed that more and more kids and their parents were coming to play each week. Some were even asking for our interns by name.

As I watched and spoke with Eric Rodriguez (our YA librarian and facilitator of the program), we noticed that the teens made a world of difference in the popularity of the chess club. We eventually had our other interns, Julie, Nyla and Rigel, assist with the program as well. At that moment I did not realize how impactful this intergenerational program would be on our patrons.

As weeks went by, more and more parents were bringing their kids to learn chess. Having the interns play an active role in the teaching and mentoring of the club has made it very successful. Jadon feels like he is contributing to the growth and development of the children. Hailey and Julie feel it has allowed them to come out of their comfort zone and be more sociable. Chess Club has opened new interests for Nyla. At first, she did not find it interesting, but says she feels happy that she is making it fun for the kids. The program is mutually beneficial for both the teens who teach chess as well as the kids who are gaining new game and strategy skills. In addition, both the interns and the kids gain interpersonal skills that will benefit them as they mature and venture out into the world. It's a win-win for everyone involved. &

Diana Pagano-Diaz *has been working for the Miami-Dade Public Library System as a Children's Librarian for more than twenty years. She is currently Assistant Branch Manager at the Kendall Branch Library.*

A New Librarian's Take on ECRR

Best Practices for Evidence-Based Early Literacy Storytimes

KIRSTEN CALDWELL

After finishing graduate school, I was fortunate to begin my career in the youth services department of a public library in northwestern Wisconsin. Since then, I have made it a goal to work towards creating the best storytimes I could by becoming an early literacy specialist.

With this goal in mind, I continuously research early literacy, child development, and Every Child Ready to Read (ECRR) practices and work to implement them in my storytimes.

Early literacy encompasses five major components of language readiness: background knowledge (world knowledge based on their experiences which helps with comprehension), phonological awareness (the ability to hear the smaller sounds in words), print awareness (understanding that print has meaning), letter knowledge, and vocabulary.[1]

Public libraries and their youth librarians, in particular, have a unique opportunity to teach families about early literacy through programming like storytimes. ECRR was started by the Public Library Association (PLA) and the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC) to train librarians to educate parents and caregivers about early literacy, better preparing their children to learn the reading skills they need to succeed in school. The ECRR manual was created in 2004 and has since been updated with the five practices of talking, singing, reading, writing, and playing.[2]

Understanding and incorporating these practices into library storytimes can improve the early literacy skills of the children attending and can help educate the parents on how they can best support their child to become school ready.

Talking

While reading books to the children, it is helpful to ask them questions about what they see on the page, what they think will happen next, or to ask them any open-ended question that relates to the story. This allows them to engage the multiple parts of the brain it takes to understand a question and develop a response. Answering questions will also help build their vocabularies and create greater interactivity in storytime.[3] Responding may take them several seconds, so after asking a question, it is important to wait to continue reading.

Flannel board activities have also become a regular practice in my storytimes because they are great for interactivity, vocabulary building, early numeracy, and more.

In one of my flannel board activities during fall, I made a small squirrel and five leaves of different colors then told the children that the squirrel's acorn was hiding underneath one of the leaves and we needed to help him find it. They helped me describe the colors of the leaves and told me which leaf they thought the acorn was hiding under. After storytime, the kids took turns playing librarian and hiding the acorn and having the other kids guess which leaf the acorn was in.

Another example is a spring-themed storytime. I made six ladybugs that the children counted, followed by a rhyme that they helped recite. The ladybugs fly away one by one in the rhyme, and the kids counted how many were left, which is a great early numeracy skill. They also described the ladybugs by telling me what color each one was.

Kirsten Caldwell *works in youth services at La Crosse County (WI) Library; she blogs for ALSC and has her own blog at earlyliteracylibrarian.com.*

An example of a house that was made with a paper bag and construction paper for a STEAM storytime.

The setup for the STEAM storytime craft, which was making a house from a paper bag.

Many of the kids also wanted to chime in and tell me if they liked bugs or tell me what their favorite color was. These activities are fun and simple ways to improve the children's vocabulary, narrative skills, and early numeracy skills.

Singing

Songs are a great way to interact with the children and break up the storytime in a fun way with new vocabulary, rhythm, and rhyme. Choosing songs that are simple enough for them to join in, but also using words they may not normally use improves their vocabulary while helping them feel included. Simple songs are also a great opportunity to include some sign language, creating a partially bilingual storytime. Putting the words up somewhere for the parents to read also helps because they can sing along and encourage their children to join in. Rhythm and rhyme and using movements with songs are great ways to help a child's brain develop and improve their reading readiness.[4]

Reading

Reading is the simplest of the practices to include in storytime. Choosing books that have great and large illustrations, fun stories that will keep the audience captivated, a variety of vocabulary usage, and repetitive or rhyming language are all great practices to have when planning storytimes. Asking the children who regularly attend storytime what topic they want to read about makes them excited to come and leads to greater interactivity. I also read books that I love because if I love a book, the children can tell and tend to enjoy those readings more.

Writing and Playing

In my opinion, these two practices are the most difficult to incorporate into storytimes. A great way to incorporate playing is to have a scheduled time after storytime where the families can interact and play with toys, bubbles, or a parachute. After storytimes, many of our families let their kids run around and play with one another or go out into the library and do whatever activities we have available to them.

During the last week of storytime, the kids made up something called floor angels, which are "snow angels without the snow and they're better because they aren't cold." I love seeing this creative energy and vocabulary use that comes about by letting them play in the space. Parents also use this time as an opportunity to teach their children new words by describing the toys with adjectives

Felt flannel board activities featured ladybugs, houses, and leaves.

like squishy, bumpy, and soft, and describing the objects by name and color.

At least once a month, I try to incorporate a craft at the end of storytime to practice writing. During my STEAM-themed week, we read the book *If I Built a House* by Chris Van Dusen. At the end of storytime, each child got a brown paper bag, some construction paper, scissors, markers, and a glue stick. They each made their own house; some of them wrote on them or drew some lines, which I think of as pre-writing, and all of the families were discussing what a house needs like windows and doors. Some kids got creative inspiration from the story and made a rocket room or a kitchen that cooked food for them. This improves their fine motor skills and prepares them for writing while also using words that they may not use often in their everyday language.

My Storytimes

I keep the five ECRR2 practices in mind when planning and structuring my storytimes. My goal is to have at least one early literacy tip each week that relates to an activity we are doing or a book we are reading.

For example, in the first storytime of the six-week session, we sang an imitation song called "Teddy Bear, Teddy Bear" that has kids perform actions like touching their toes or finding their noses after I tell them what to do in rhyme form.[5] My early literacy tip was that imitation is one of the earliest forms of interaction for children and it allows them to coordinate actions with another person. It teaches children language by building vocabulary and is good for brain development.[6]

I encouraged the families to play games like this at home and even incorporate language they wouldn't normally use to help develop their children's vocabularies.

Every storytime structure can be a little different and not every practice needs to be incorporated into each storytime. Incorporating all the practices into a storytime session, whether that is six weeks or more, is more easily achieved and helps to improve the early literacy skills of the children and teaches the parents how to improve their children's reading skills at home.

Storytimes are my favorite part of working in youth services because I get to share stories I love, interact with children and their adults, help families improve their awareness of early literacy skills, and assist them in preparing their children for reading and writing in school. Studying early literacy and child development has helped me implement these early literacy practices in my storytimes and with more knowledge and experience, they will continue to improve. &

References

1. Saroj Nadkarni Ghoting and Pamela Martin-Díaz, *Early Literacy Storytimes @ Your Library: Partnering with Caregivers for Success* (Chicago: American Library Association, 2006).
2. "Every Child Ready to Read—Read. Learn. Grow," accessed April 25, 2022, http://everychildreadytoread.org/.
3. Bari Walsh, "The Brain-Changing Power of Conversation," *Harvard Graduate School of Education*, (2018), https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/uk/18/02/brain-changing-power-conversation.
4. Gail Innis, "Music in Early Childhood Has a Direct Link to Reading Readiness," Michigan State University, 2013, https://www.canr.msu.edu/news/music_in_early_childhood_has_a_direct_link_to_reading_readiness.
5. King County Library System, "Teddy Bear, Teddy Bear," accessed March 2, 2022, https://kcls.org/content/teddy-bear-teddy-bear/.
6. University of Washington, "Institute for Learning and Brain Sciences: Learning Modules," accessed Feb. 21, 2022, https://modules.ilabs.uw.edu/learning-modules/.

Storytime Evolved

What is the "New Normal" for Storytimes?

SHAWN D. WALSH

Children's Librarian Kylie Coy is ready to begin her interactive Zoom storytime.

To talk about how storytime has changed as a result of COVID-19, it's important to talk about how it has stayed the same. Talking heads drone on about the "new normal," and I don't think that this is new. The evolution of storytime was already in motion. At most, COVID-19 accelerated it.

Storytime will always be storytime, regardless of whether it's in person or online. However, how successfully that happens is up to you and your colleagues. And that is my story.

As COVID-19 gripped the nation in March 2020, my library in Madison, Ohio—a community of about nineteen thousand people—had to abruptly pivot to video for our storytimes and other programs. As fate would have it, I had requested some video equipment from our Friends group (a major source of funding for programs in our library) that arrived in February 2020. Hastily, I threw things together and following all the guidelines for copyright and fair use, a fellow administrator who was the former children's librarian and I started recording videos for our Facebook Live and YouTube channels, recording fifteen to twenty videos per session. It definitely helped that I had a video production background from a previous job.

We produced Bedtime Storytime that ran every night at 7 p.m. for eight weeks while we had a skeleton crew of mostly administrators working in our library.

By June 2020, it was clear COVID-19 wasn't going away anytime soon, and our children's librarian, Kylie Coy, had families sending her emails and stopping by the drive-through window telling her how much they and their children missed her and missed storytimes.

I would like to believe every library has a much-loved children's librarian like Miss Kylie, but in June 2020, Miss Kylie was not just an adored library employee, but her storytimes represented to these families something comforting and familiar, or conversely, they were reminded by having no storytime of what they were missing due to COVID-19.

The question became how to make things familiar and as close to the same as possible, without being together. Miss Kylie created storytimes in a bag. Her in-person storytimes prior to COVID-19 had a set of songs that were used each week, and often they involved manipulatives as well. Instead of using the same bean bags and shakin' eggs from the box in the storytime room, everyone picked up a bag at the drive-through window of everything they needed for a Miss Kylie storytime, but from home. She even had a vial of bubbles in each bag to take the place of the beloved bubble machine spewing bubbles into the storytime room every week to the delight of children and parents.

Shawn D. Walsh *is the Emerging Services and Technologies librarian for Madison (OH) Public Library. In a post-COVID world, his job has become a combination of marketing manager, technology manager, grant writer, and video executive producer. Working in libraries since 1997, Shawn has a BS/AS in computer information systems with a minor in marketing from Youngstown State University and a Master of Library and Information Science at Kent State University.*

Librarian Shawn Walsh sits on the production side of online storytime. He can handle the technical side of interactive Zoom storytime while another librarian does what she does best.

At this point, it's important to note that Miss Kylie was a devotee of the mid-century children's television show *Romper Room* when she was a child. While the show has been off the air for almost thirty years, this is important because the hostesses often called out names of people they could "see" watching at home, and Kylie remembers that her name was never called, even though she watched every time. And to this day she remembers being disappointed as a child. But now Miss Kylie had the chance to right the injustices done to her by the *Romper Room* via her own storytimes done over Zoom!

In June 2020, Miss Kylie and I were in the storytime room again. Now it was the studio with lights and microphones. This wasn't an ordinary TV studio set-up. This was designed for Miss Kylie because while I or another staff member ran the Zoom, letting people into the room, muting crying children, etc. she still wanted to see all her storytime friends. So, she had her own monitor in front of her with all the kids in their "Zoom boxes." This way she could see her friends and talk to them by name. However, it turned out to be a good and bad thing!

In the early days of the pandemic, we all logged into Zooms early to make sure everything worked and we were ready to go. It didn't take long for parents and a few very smart preschoolers to figure out that if they got logged into Zoom five to ten minutes before class started, Miss Kylie was there and they could talk to her all by themselves. It was private Miss Kylie conversation time, and her friends missed her.

Eventually we started only logging Miss Kylie on three minutes before storytime because longer than that and either preschoolers' stories got very convoluted, or everyone ran out of things to say and sat staring at each other in silence. The three-minute rule continues today, but there is also a three-to-five-minute time at the end of storytime for children to talk to Miss Kylie, especially if they got on Zoom late and the stories and music had already started. Everyone needed time to talk to Miss Kylie!

As summer turned to fall, we created new supply bags. Now they included laminated paper with Velcro animals or other things that the children could put on and take off as part of the rhyme. With each season the supply bags changed, and with each season more people joined the Zoom storytimes with Miss Kylie. By the end of 2020, she had as many children and adults attending her virtual programs as she had the previous year when everything was in person.

During the early part of 2021, she had slightly more people attending her programs than at the same time in 2020 because now people could still attend storytime if one of the kids had a cold or if the roads were yucky. It was about this time Miss Kylie discovered that she had some people attending storytime who never picked up supply bags. Not a lot. Maybe three or four families. It turned out when she contacted them that they didn't live anywhere near the area. They had heard about Miss Kylie from a friend or discovered our program listing online and decided to join her.

As we neared the first anniversary of the pandemic and then the first anniversary of online storytime, Miss Kylie thought she would change up some of her music and activities. While some of her original online storytime participants had ultimately decided online storytime wasn't for them, a new crop of families who had only known Miss Kylie online were growing.

But these little ones were not happy with Miss Kylie's changes. In an in-person storytime, usually the leader can tell when a song

On Equipment

Want to set up a studio for your own virtual programming? Here are some considerations regarding equipment.

Sound. When doing an online storytime or any Zoom event, sound is important because you have no idea what the audience on the other end has available. Multiple microphones provide the best possible sound collection. Setting up the presenter with a lavalier-type microphone with a fuzzy wind screen can make a significant difference in hearing the speech coming from the presenter. Also consider a cardioid microphone, ideal for music both live as well as recorded. Lastly, depending on your setup, you might want to invest in a shotgun style microphone mounted on a camera. This is a directional microphone and can help with the presenter being farther away from the camera. Lastly when you have multiple audio sources having an audio mixer helps you not only listen to the sound but also adjust it to get the best possible output.

Video. While most cameras will work, what may make the difference in your storytime presentation is having a document camera available to the presenter. Instead of holding a book up at a distance from the camera (more accurately simulating an in-person storytime), the presenter can use a document camera allowing the book to take up the entire screen for the participants. If you end up using both a regular video camera and a document camera, you might want to involve some sort of video mixer to easily switch between video feeds.

Lighting. Think about backdrops and lighting. We use a black backdrop so that makes presenters and their props stand out. On video, you are competing with many external distractions, so it's important to draw the audience in. With lighting, most places will use a three-point lighting setup; we have two upper lights shining on the presenter and two lights illuminating the front of the presenter. This brightens things up and removes any shadows.

or story is starting to bomb, but with everyone online, it's a bit harder. Through winter 2021, some of the storytime groups were participating in a rhyme that had a number of animals with it, and the at-home participants had these animals attached to wide Popsicle sticks, and they would wave each animal as it came up.

Sadly, I didn't get to see this happen in person, but another colleague running Miss Kylie's video noticed that on two consecutive weeks, and a few weeks into the new storytimes without this animal rhyme, at the point in the storytime that the animals rhyme should have come, animals on wooden sticks were getting waved in front of the screen like 1960s protest signs. Elephants and other zoo animals were bouncing along while Miss Kylie was reading a completely different story.

As hilarious as an uncoordinated protest lead by two-year-olds over Zoom is, it does illustrate another thing we learned. The person running Zoom is also paying much closer attention to what is happening in front of the cameras of the various attendees. That person's job is to call Miss Kylie's attention to things she may not be seeing because she's reading a book or doing something else. That day the Zoom person called Miss Kylie's attention to the protest happening during her story, and she was able to tell the two girls that she saw their elephants and other animals and yes, she would return to doing the animals rhyme that used the stick animals.

As planning for fall 2021 came around and mask mandates were getting lifted, our library wondered if it was time to return to only in-person storytimes. Several parents and grandparents had talked to Miss Kylie about their concerns that online storytime might stop. For different reasons, this worked really well for their families and in-person would not.

Our decision was to offer both an in-person and an online storytime. Children and their families who hadn't had success with online storytime returned for in-person events; other continued online. And storytime attendance numbers across both formats maintained their pre-pandemic levels or grew slightly.

When the Omicron variant came through in late 2021 and early 2022, all storytimes went back online, until in-person classes resumed in February 2022.

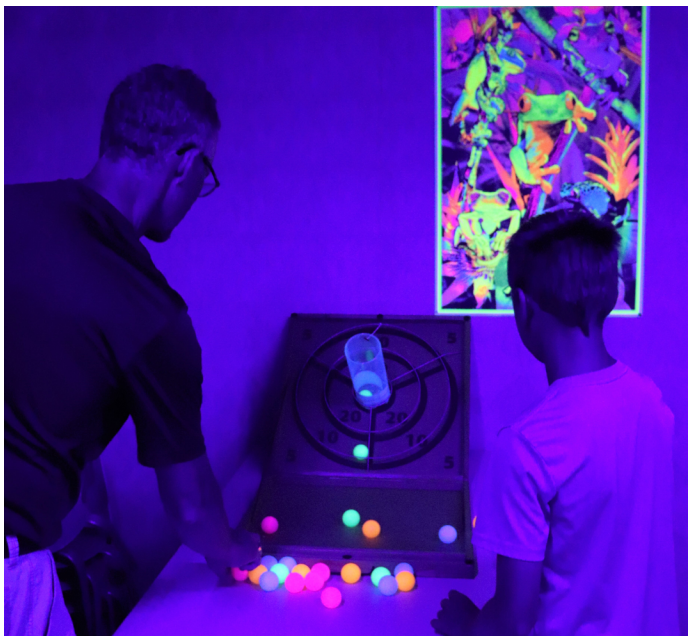
At this point, we now have a permanent studio space and a new storytime room. The pandemic has taught us the importance of concurrent online and in-person programming. And now Miss Kylie is a star both of in-person programs and on TV. She has been asked by one preschooler if she makes a million dollars because she's "on TV." She has had another little one be totally shocked at seeing her from the waist down. She does have legs! On Zoom, Miss Kylie is seated behind a table.

The future continues to be a hybrid situation, but we are seeing more occasions, outside of pandemics, when it would be advantageous to be completely online. Doing what is best to connect with the youngest library patrons is still what storytime is all about. &

Glowing Reviews

Blacklight Bash a Raving Success

SHARON VERBETEN



A skee-ball game using blacklight ping-pong balls was a huge hit, as were blacklight posters decorating the room.

Cue the lights and music! As much as my co-workers joked that I was planning a rave, I was over-the-top excited to plan a Blacklight Bash for tweens at my library last summer. And while it wasn't as crazy as a rave, attendees were raving about how much fun they had!

Pre-pandemic, I visited a local museum that hosted a blacklight exhibit, which was truly immersive and mesmerizing—the posters, the artwork, the lighting, the science all combined into a sensory smorgasbord. If I thought it was cool, I knew tweens would too.

I had also read an article years ago about a blacklight party a librarian in Illinois had created for teens, so I used some of her tips as I planned my event.

Planning Was Key

While I had a list of things I wanted to include with my event—science, crafts, and sensory stations—I first had to determine logistics. My branch of the Brown County Library has a meeting room that holds about sixty people, with two large windows—that would have to be blacked out for the event.

To do so, I first tried painting the large windows black, but that proved too challenging. Then I found some large cardboard, with which I covered the windows and taped the seams, ensuring no light came into the room.

Caveat! I figured it would be fine for just a few days; however, upon removing the cardboard a few days later, I realized the window had cracked—the result of blocking the high sun rays from passing through and heating up the glass. So, be warned if you plan this event in the dog days of summer!

Bay Custom Lighting in Green Bay offered to hang and provide the lights free in exchange for a sign noting their donation. That resulted in about a $200 savings—which was money I was able to spend on supplies. You may also be able to rent the lights or you can also purchase UV lights fairly inexpensively online, but make sure you get enough to illuminate your designated space.

Shopping online for supplies was the fun part! I searched Amazon and other online sites for "blacklight" and "UV" products—such as posters and tapestries (for décor), paint (for rocks, paper, and T-shirts), games (puzzles and balls) and other items (glow bracelets, highlighters, etc.). With the savings from the light expense, I was able to spend just under $200 on supplies—some of which we will likely be able to use again.

There were a few caveats to keep in mind when shopping. Searches for "blacklight" posters led to quite a few images that were inappropriate for a tween program (skulls, marijuana leaves, overtly sexual, etc.), so it took some searching to find the awesome posters I did find—with amazing glowing images (some even flocked with black velvet!) of fish, tree frogs, and sharks. (I had

*CAL Editor **Sharon Verbeten** is Youth Services Manager at the Manitowoc (WI) Public Library. She conducted her blacklight program when she was a children's librarian at Brown County (WI) Library.*

I displayed the book *The Day-Glo Brothers: The True Story of Bob and Joe Switzer's Bright Ideas and Brand-New Colors* by Chris Barton and Tony Persiani, which glowed amazingly under the lights.

attendees enter to take home one of the posters after the event—that was a big hit!)

In addition to the décor, here are a few of the other stations I had at the event:

- Blacklight painting (rocks, T-shirts, optic white paper)
- Skee-ball (our library rents carnival games, and I purchased UV ping-pong balls)
- Lite-Brite (inexpensive and nostalgia-inducing game!)
- Blacklight jigsaw puzzle
- Confession wall (writing notes with highlighter on neon sticky notes let the words glow under the lights)
- A disco ball and laser lights (as well as whale sounds on speakers) to enhance the atmosphere.

To incorporate STEM concepts, I posted signs around the room (printed in yellow highlighter so they were visible under blacklight!) with FAQs about UV light, phosphors, and fluorescence. This helped attendees learn about bee vision (bees have amazing eyesight and can see UV light), tonic water (which has quinine, which reacts under UV light), and the phosphors in highlighters—which caused white carnations to eerily glow (when soaked in highlighter-infused water).

The Afterglow

With any program, there will be wins and fails; overall, the Blacklight Bash was a success; held over two days (from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. each day), we had just under seventy attendees total. While I advertised it as a teen program, most of the kids were upper elementary age and younger. Still, along with their adults, they all commented on how fun it was, and I heard many "oohs" and "ahhs" upon entrance. Seeing their shirts, shorts, shoelaces, and even one mom's neon toenail polish light up was well worth the reactions!

Perhaps the best reaction came from two tween girls, who exclaimed, "This is *sick*!" A compliment, indeed, coming from them!

One fail—other than the aforementioned cracked window!—was the "glow" lemonade. When made with tonic water (which contains quinine), the lemonade should glow—but the combination of lemonade, ice, and tonic water wasn't quite right and didn't work. The lemonade just ended up being a refreshing treat!

So based on attendance and cost, we considered the event a success. And since we're a system of eight libraries, we decided to purchase the blacklights (around $150) for use in future events.

Don't underestimate, however, how much planning such an event will take; I was the sole planner/shopper/organizer, although I did have a few teen volunteers help at the stations. But I probably put in well over five hours in prep (not including the event itself).

The Blacklight Bash was a bit out of the ordinary, but I also found a way to incorporate science and books—the 2010 Sibert Medal-winning book *The Day-Glo Brothers: The True Story of Bob and Joe Switzer's Bright Ideas and Brand-New Colors* by Chris Barton (Charlesbridge, 2009) glows great under the lights!

It was an especially bright way to usher back in-person summer programming after a long two-year hiatus! &

Couples who Collaborate: Jay Albee

MARY-KATE SABLESKI

Jen Breach and J. Anthony—known collectively as Jay Albee—are the LGBTQ+ couple behind the *Riley Reynolds* (2022) book series. Riley is one of the first non-binary characters for young readers (ages 8-12). A fourth grader who lives in a neighborhood in South Philly, Riley navigates their community as any fourth-grader would, with curiosity, adventure, and imagination.

Jay Albee's four books, all published in 2022 by Stone Arch Books, include *Riley Reynolds Slays the Play, Riley Reynolds Rocks the Park, Riley Reynolds Glitterfies the Gala, and Riley Reynolds Crushes Costume Day.*

Q: How did you meet and come to start working on books together?

J. Anthony: We met through the comics industry. I've been making comics since about 2006.

I had a little bit of an online presence, and I attend industry conventions and shows. I think we were Twitter friends first, actually. We had a lot of mutual friends, with similar tastes and similar aesthetics.

Jen: Indie comics is a pretty small industry. People go to the same four conventions every year.

J. Anthony: So, we were bound to run into each other eventually. She bought me a drink in 2012 at a show in Maryland. We became friends, and in 2014, we started dating. We got married in 2018.

Jen: And, we started collaborating in 2020.

J. Anthony: Obviously, we are both creators. A lot of our conversations were creative and kind of around creative things—going to see a movie and then picking it apart for hours afterwards, or sharing books and then talking about the format and the characters and that kind of thing. It was a very gradual thing to start collaborating. It doesn't really feel like there was one decisive moment when we decided to give it a shot. It was more of us being involved in each other's projects, until we got to a point where it made sense to just do it together.

Q: Could you talk a little bit about your process of creating books together?

J. Anthony: Our conversations are almost always in some form or fashion creative or analytical. There are a lot of concepts, or umbrella ideas, or categories that we will put stuff in. Nothing ever really starts from scratch. Riley, for example, we came up with a fourth grader and then we start brainstorming. We think about fourth graders, what was it like being that age? What themes do we keep coming back to when we talk about our childhood,

Mary-Kate Sableski *is an Associate Professor at the University of Dayton in Dayton, Ohio, where she teaches children's literature and literacy methods courses.*

when we talk about you know, an ideal childhood, or what we miss from our childhood, what we enjoyed about our childhood.

Jen: Or what we've observed in fourth graders.

J. Anthony: At its ground level, it's big concepts, big loose themes. It's a pyramid that builds and builds. For example, we loved the idea of a kid in their neighborhood, interacting with their neighborhood. So, then we talk about what goes in that—its neighbors, vendors, the local businesses, the libraries, schools, and classmates. Another layer is the events or moments or struggles. Then it comes time to take all those loose ideas and put them into books. We've done two four-book series (we are in the midst of creating the second), so in those cases we then think about four different things we can do across the books.

Often, we will go out, have lunch and just sit in the restaurant and just "blue sky" it. It helps that we live together, because it's in those random moments that these ideas kind of pop up. At night as we're reading before bed, we come up with new ideas and we can talk about them right then. So then, practically once we have kind of a loose idea, Jen is the drafter to pitch to the editor. She'll write a loose outline with our ideas.

Jen: We got that process from doing writer-for-hire gigs. The editors need a little pitch just about the idea, and then they need a detailed outline of what's going to happen in each chapter. I found that it actually works really well for our projects as well, because we can see the pacing or where there's a hole where not much happens or, characters we haven't fully developed. So, this detailed outline is basically just the culmination of all our conversations, or where our conversations are at that particular moment.

J. Anthony: It's also nice at that stage to have such simple descriptions to compare the books to see where the elements are too similar from book to book or chapter to chapter, for example. From there, we'll flesh out the outline, making sure that the beginning and the end are tight and have an even progression.

Jen: We continue to brainstorm and make sure that the actual words on the page correspond to the base of that pyramid, representing the themes and ideas that we've been chatting through.

J. Anthony: Practically speaking, I'm very much the rambling idea person. I spend a lot of time saying, "How about this?," "How about that?" Jen does the actual writing of the paragraphs and the sentences. She will unpack the outline and write a loose draft, and then I'll go in and basically edit it.

My specific strengths have to do with the sensory experience. I'm a visual artist, so I'm often very conscious of what the characters are doing physically while they're saying something or what's going on in the background, or the momentum. So, once we know what we're writing in general, we will get the meat on the page, and I'll go in and stitch in detail and character.

Jen: He's very good at that part, adding in the little tiny moments of personality, even just in the phrasing or the dialogue. I write the idea of the sentences to get it on the page, and then he's just great at refining the actual voice of the character, and how they move through space, what they're doing with their hands. The actual drafting and redrafting takes the least amount of time in our process. The brainstorming takes a lot of time, then we take a few passes at the outline, but the actual manuscript goes pretty quickly.

J. Anthony: We spend a lot of time trying to figure out what we're trying to say, and then the actual saying of it is pretty straightforward once it happens. With the Riley books, specifically, once it's all written, I do several drafts of the art. There's an illustration at the end of every chapter and because I know the story so well, along with some prompts from the art director, I just have to figure out what to show. I'll do several drafts of sketches and then, the final art is pretty straightforward.

Jen: And I don't do anything at that point! I work on something else.

Q: It sounds like your collaborative process really enriches the projects you work on together.

Jen: Absolutely! I've never enjoyed writing more than since we figured out that we can work together on a project. It's an absolute delight.

J. Anthony: It really is indicative of our relationship in general, which I see as a collaboration in a kind of big abstract way. We're collaborating on living in the same space, we're collaborating financially, we're collaborating on what we want to be doing with our lives or where we want to be living. Ideally, in my mind, a couple at least has some elements of collaboration hopefully, if there's healthy communication.

Q: Can you describe your workspace?

J. Anthony: Well, in the summer it's a little bit different. We have an office upstairs, with two desks on opposite sides of the room. The room is full of books and my art supplies and gets great sunlight. We will spend most of the afternoon up there working independently, but then turning around, and you know, having whatever conversation we need to have.

But in the summer, it's a little too hot up there, so we've been working downstairs on the dining room table. Sometimes we'll both be working on the table, sometimes I'll be in the other room sitting in the chair, scribbling in a notebook or typing on the computer.

Jen: We're pretty flexible about it honestly, like the office is a beautiful space, but it took us really about a year and a half to figure out like how to set it up. I think that's our vibe in general. We just have an idea, set it up, try it, see what works, what doesn't, and then shift it all around.

Q: Which came first, setting up the workspace together, or working on projects together?

J. Anthony: When I moved in with Jen, it took me a long time to feel like it was my space also. It was a turning point for me to set up my desk. For awhile, we had the two separate desks against the windows, and then eventually, we put the desks together, facing each other. That ended up working out pretty well.

Q: How is it different to work with your spouse, as opposed to another author or illustrator?

J. Anthony: For me it is the availability, the constant communication, the opportunity for spontaneity. We can be taking a walk to the grocery store or even be in the grocery store and come up with an idea, like, "What if Riley baked a cake?" That's the biggest difference for me compared to other collaborations.

Being in a relationship, there's vulnerability and I think when collaborating, it takes a certain vulnerability to be able to say to your partner, here's an idea and just put it out there. And then there's vulnerability, depending on the spectrum of feedback you get. Some of it can be painful and some of it can be hurtful or depleting, and between us there's a real faith and understanding that we mean each other no harm, and we respect each other's craft. We can give each other feedback that, with anybody else might take a certain kind of pampering or pushing but with us, we can be a lot more straightforward and direct. I really value that.

Jen: Yeah, that's well said. For me, just practically it's better than collaborations I've had in the past. Usually, it's very much a process in which I write a thing, and I hand it off to somebody who edits the thing, and then somebody else illustrates the thing, and then if I'm lucky, I get to see some pencils or something.

And that's what Riley would have been, as well, if the editor hadn't taken J. Anthony on as the illustrator. We were already collaborating on the writing, but it was under my name, for the first book at least. When J. Anthony came on as the illustrator, we started really co-writing, which is then why we put it under a joint pen name. Because, it was 100 percent a joint effort. Riley would have been that process of writing something, handing it off, and an illustrator working on it. But, because our desks are in the same room, it didn't have to be like that.

Q: What has it been like to share your work with librarians, teachers, and children?

Jen: We shared our work at the 2022 American Library Association Annual Convention in Washington, D.C. We heard some very personal stories from people whose kids are gender non-conforming. There was one little kid who was like vibrating with excitement coming up to the booth. Somebody else in the booth mentioned afterwards that they literally skipped away after we signed the book. We heard from a couple little kids from either themselves, or from their parent, about how important it was for the kid to see themselves reflected in the book.

The book has a glossary in the front, and we heard from one parent that it was really useful for them because a lot of people are nervous to say the right thing. And the glossary kind of helps with familiarity about phrases but also really just prompts people to talk to each other. We also heard from one person that a child who read the book found a way to describe their own gender identity from the book, and to talk about it with their mom. That was, honestly, my biggest wish for the book. So, I guess we can retire now!

Q: How do you see your work contributing to conversations around diversity in children's literature and the need for literature that reflects all people?

Jen: I'm still surprised that this is the first non-binary main character for the age group. I keep expecting someone to say, oh, ten years ago there was another, but there has not been another. So, there's that kind of level of representation to which we have contributed. The other thing that surprises me still is that a publisher was even interested in publishing it.

J. Anthony: It is definitely a dicey time in publishing for books like this, in certain communities in particular.

Jen: Yeah, I expected them to want to change it to queer parents or something like that. Originally, the first book was about banned books. The editor loved the character, but working with the editor and J. Anthony, it became really clear that what I wanted was for this series to be aspirational. I wanted to represent diverse characters, but more so diverse experiences.

A lot of the literature for children around queer identities or gender non-conforming characters contain a lot of trauma, especially in the YA space or even in middle grades. In the picture book space, the goal is typically more towards explaining the terms. So, we wanted to write a story about a gender non-conforming fourth grader that is not about non-conforming at all, Riley is well loved, well supported, and very secure in their identity. Gender rarely

The Pen Name Process

Jen Breach and J. Anthony use the pen name Jay Albee for their collaborative works.

"It just kind of felt inevitable," said Jen. "It's such a co-authored process, and product, and work." J. Anthony added, "It's hard to extricate who's doing what."

"I think that's kind of the power of the joint pen name," said Jen. "It can be confusing for some people, who wonder why there are two photos on the book, but one name. People ask, which one of you is Jay? Which one of you is Albee? And we just say, well, we both are.

"It's complicated, it's all entangled, and I think the pen name honors that."

comes up at all. We just get to use gender neutral pronouns for Riley and that, honestly felt like a huge statement in and of itself to make.

Q: Do you have any advice for other couples who might be interested in collaborating to create books for children?

J. Anthony: The idea of trust and vulnerability is critical. If you don't have that in your everyday life, and in your everyday kind of way of communicating, it might be a little bit more difficult. I don't think we would be able to collaborate if we didn't already have faith in our vocabulary with each other.

It is important to be able to constructively criticize or communicate our needs, or our vision, or ideas or our ambitions, and then, acknowledging and needing each other's help to get there. Also, acknowledging each other's strengths by saying, "I can't do this, and I respect that you can. What are you seeing that I'm not seeing?" And then, respecting that different perspective.

Jen: Also, respecting kind of spontaneity and shifting roles. The roles we described earlier are the default, but sometimes J. Anthony writes the first draft, or the first draft of the first chapter. We are not precious about what is my part and what is his part. So, having either very few boundaries or very clear boundaries in the process are helpful.

Another key part is to remember that the collaboration is about a project. It is important to be able to take critique and use feedback constructively. When your partner says this paragraph doesn't read right, it is not the same as saying you are a bad person.

Q: What's next?

J. Anthony: We are doing two books under another Capstone imprint for DC comics. It's a Supergirl and Batgirl team up series, and we are doing two chapter books in that series. I am not illustrating this time, I am just co-writing. It is a nice change of pace, because I feel like writers often, when they work with artists, they often say I can just make stuff up and then the artist has to deal with it, and it is very true. It's very liberating. We have several picture books and early reader projects in the works, too. &

Upping Your Digital Storytelling Game

Lisa M. Sensale Yazdian and Betsy Diamant-Cohen

***Lisa M. Sensale Yazdian**, PhD, is an educational psychologist with experience supporting birth-adult learners in libraries and beyond. She currently manages education and engagement efforts at CET (PBS). **Betsy Diamant-Cohen** is a children's librarian with a doctorate, an early literacy trainer, consultant, and author. She is known for translating research into practical activities with developmental tips and presenting these via webinars, engaging workshops, and online courses.*

In the spring 2021 issue, we discussed the benefits of Vivian Paley's storytelling practice on language and literacy skills, social emotional development, creativity, and motivation. Traditional storytelling is powerful in its own right, but we would be remiss if we did not also mention the benefits of digital storytelling—the process of using multimedia tools to tell a story. A digital story can be something as simple as narrating a story over a single photo or as complex as a movie with audio and visual effects. Allowing children to use technology to tell stories can generate interest and motivation in content creation, ignite creativity, and support the development of twenty-first century literacy skills. Here's a look at some storytelling tools that can be used to elevate the voices of children and families across settings.

Preschool

Draw and Tell

https://apps.apple.com/us/app/draw-and-tell/id504750621

The Draw and Tell app allows children to create art with digital crayons, colored pencils, or paint. Users can adorn their creations with a selection of patterns, images, letters, and numbers and then record and save a narrative to go with it. Digital coloring sheets are provided for users who may not know what to draw or what story to tell. Narratives can also be recorded and saved.

Sesame Street Storybook Builder

https://pbskids.org/sesame/games/story-book-builder/

This app helps young learners create virtual stories by asking users to choose characters, settings, activities, and feelings from a predetermined set. The text for their adventure is visible on screen and words are highlighted as they are read aloud to the user. The resource is available on the PBS website and through the PBS KIDS Games app.

School Age

Book Creator

https://bookcreator.com/

In this web-based tool, students can create their own books from scratch or work from existing templates (e.g., photobook, newspaper) and themes (e.g., neon, fantasy). The platform allows students to add texts, images, shapes, and audio to their books that can be published online, downloaded as an ePub file, or printed as a PDF. It also allows the text to be read aloud with word highlighting and also read aloud in multiple languages.

Comic Master

http://comicmaster.org.uk/comicmaker/js/main.html

On this website, users are provided with written prompts guiding them through the graphic novel creation process. The project begins with a layout selection and follows with users dragging and dropping backgrounds, characters, speech/thought bubbles, captions, and other images into cells. Finished products can be saved and printed.

MakeBeliefs Comix

https://makebeliefscomix.com/

Users can create comics in multiple languages by dragging and dropping characters, emojis, objects, speech/thought bubbles, words, and backgrounds into comic strip panels. The option to record a voiceover is also available. If users need inspiration, the site provides picture and text prompts as springboards. Pieces can be saved, printed, and emailed to others.

My Storybook

www.mystorybook.com/

This web-based platform walks children through the digital storybook creation process beginning with the cover page. Users can enter a title and description in designated areas and can select scenes, items from different categories (e.g., animals, school), personal images, and people to adorn the cover. Additional pages can be added with a click and text and images can be added to identified spaces. Finished books can be saved to a personal library and printed.

PBS KIDS ScratchJr

https://pbskids.org/learn/scratchjr/

This is a coding app for children ages five to eight, featuring characters from a number of PBS KIDS shows like *Wild Kratts, Nature Cat*, and *Odd Squad*. Children select PBS characters and settings and snap together virtual coding blocks to make their characters move as they create games, tell stories, and solve problems. A facilitator guide and additional resources for hosting a Family and Community Learning (FCL) series around the app (see https://bit.ly/3sTNSEL) exist along with a workshop for educators (see https://bit.ly/3h9w0mE). Reach out to your local PBS station for more information and to inquire about collaboration.

Pic-Lits

https://piclits.com/

On Pic-Lits, stories begin with the selection of a photograph. Users can add meaning to their photo by typing text or dragging and dropping different parts of speech from curated lists. Creations can be saved, printed, emailed, and shared via social media.

Puppet Pals HD

https://apps.apple.com/us/app/puppet-pals-hd/id342076546

Users can select up to eight different characters, including a personal photo, to perform across five different backdrops on a stage. Characters can move, and backgrounds can be changed as a user records their fairy tale that can also be saved.

Storyboard That

www.storyboardthat.com/

Users can craft simple stories using a drag-and-drop interface. Various characters, items, shapes, and infographics can be inserted into an array of scenes. Character features and basic poses can be edited, and text can be added to speech bubbles and objects.

StoryJumper

www.storyjumper.com/

In this web-based platform, children can write a book using a story starter (e.g., *The Monster*, *All About Me*) or craft something completely original. Authors can drag and drop backgrounds and props, design characters, upload photos, and record voiceovers of their text. They can also add sound effects and background music. Co-authors even have the ability to work together on the same book if they are using different computers. When books are finished they can be saved in a private library, shared with friends and family, and made available to a larger network with parental permission. Downloading and printing books comes with a fee.

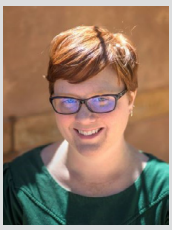
WeVideo

www.wevideo.com/

WeVideo is a web and app-based video creation tool. The free version provides users the ability to export five minutes of video per month, 1 GB of cloud storage, some templates and free music, voice and screen recording, and the option to create podcasts and GIFs. Novice users can create videos by dragging and dropping images into a storyboard template and adding audio. More knowledgeable users can edit in timeline mode which allows for greater customization. The website hosts a number of support materials including a getting started guide, how-to videos, a help center, and a blog for inspiration. &

Social Media as a Means for Everyday Advocacy

Anne Price



Anne Price *is the Children's Librarian at the North Platte (NE) Public Library and is a member of ALSC's Public Awareness and Advocacy Committee.*

Over the past several years, the power of social media to create connections through the pandemic has had both positive and negative impacts. Libraries make use of social media as a marketing tool, a public forum, and as a digital third place for programming and community connection.

Most libraries use social media to communicate the needs of the library and patrons, and as a means to connect with community partners and stakeholders. I've spent the last eight years working in rural and remote libraries in Wyoming, New Mexico, and Nebraska, and each has used social media to their advantage in community engagement.

Many libraries immediately began offering virtual programming to stay connected with their communities during the early days of the pandemic. The Octavia Fellin Public Library (NM) not only transitioned its programming online, but also used its platform to help disseminate press releases and information regarding local mandates as the library had the largest social media following of all the city departments. This shift made social media platforms not just modes for marketing libraries but a digital space in which to offer services that had been suspended in their traditional formats. Libraries occupying virtual spaces offers not only the opportunity for libraries to advocate for their services, but also a space for library supporters and stakeholders to engage in everyday advocacy.

The ALA Social Media Guidelines for Public and Academic Libraries urges tailoring the purpose and scope of a library's social media.[1] Focus should be placed on posts and engagement that deal directly with programs and services offered by the library, as well as identifying the intended audience of the library. Maintaining library-specific social media should follow similar policies for conduct among staff creating content and those engaging with it as would be fitting in the library building. Allowing for public comments increases the feeling of community bonds and can result in information having a farther reach than anticipated. Instituting guidelines for acceptable use and behavior protects library users and staff from abuse.

Social media has offered a way for libraries to better connect with community needs as well as their own. The North Platte (NE) Public Library and Carbon County (WY) Library System have used their Facebook pages to broadcast library needs in terms of donations and volunteer requests. The Carbon County Library System gained enough traction via social media to outfit all eight of its branches with supplies for monthly LEGO clubs. The North Platte Public Library's Friday History Posts highlighting local history collections and stories have brought in community members seeking new resources about the community. In addition to fulfilling library needs, social media is a great way for libraries to engage with community stakeholders and begin a cycle of reciprocity.

The Community for Kids Action Team in Lincoln County (NE) and their Early Childhood Mental Health Committee (ECMHC) have recently begun a partnership with my current library, North Platte Public Library, bringing their parent engagement activities into the library space. In return, the organizations

have used their social media presences to help promote our programming and other services to their audiences.

In October 2022, the library hosted the ECMHC's Play Is the Way parent event. The event's PR and subsequent success was shared not only through the library's social media, but also via the partners, reaching more parents and community members than the library alone.

Social media platforms also offer an instant way to recognize volunteers, summer reading sponsors, and other unseen contributors to library success. Sharing stories and anecdotes from patrons and staff helps showcase the library's impact in the community and potentially garner support for library initiatives that need either funding or man-hours to accomplish.

Some tips to using social media for advocacy:

- **Start collecting stories.** Track, and share, positive interactions with patrons, volunteers, or even among staff.
- **Post photos.** Most social media platforms are driven by visuals; designate a staff member to take photos during programs.
- **Post consistently.** Whether it's marketing upcoming programs or sharing stories, the more consistently you post, the more likely patrons who follow your social media will see your posts.
- **Encourage interaction.** Ask patrons to comment or share posts to help your messaging spread beyond those who directly follow the library.
- **Review your policies.** Look at your library's social media policy to ensure it outlines acceptable behavior from library staff and patrons, as well as the scope and purpose of the library's social media presence. &

Reference

1. American Library Association Intellectual Freedom Committee, "Social Media Guidelines for Public and Academic Libraries," approved June 2018, https://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/socialmediaguidelines.

Index to Advertisers

Member Profiles

Compiled by Sarah Jo Zaharako

Mindy Perry

Susie Isaac

Kristy Kilfoyle

Enjoy these profiles of ALSC members sharing their expertise and skills in school settings.

Mindy Perry, District 65 Dawes Elementary Librarian

What is your favorite part about working in a school setting?

Every day is a new day to collaborate with fellow district librarians, teachers, students, and the community; sharing literature and exploring new ways of learning. School libraries are dynamic places to read, explore, tinker, problem solve, create and think outside the box.

How has your job evolved as a result of the pandemic?

When the pandemic hit and we went to remote learning, many school librarians were concerned about copyright issues surrounding read-alouds posted online. Myself and fellow district librarians virtually met with Kim Hamilton, copyright librarian at Northwestern University to discuss the importance of getting stories and books into the hands of students, but in the safest way possible. Engagement and student attendance via Zoom became a priority while providing read-alouds, e-books, and virtual resources for teachers and students. Being back in person, I try to find the balance between print and virtual resources while welcoming students back into the physical library space.

Describe a library event, program, or outreach initiative that is important to you and why?

Maker Madness is a reading and making initiative. During the pandemic, a virtual Family Maker Madness night was kicked off with a reading of *The Story of Snow* by Jon Nelson. Families broke off into groups and could choose building a sled ramp, designing ice crystals, or performing experiments with ice. Another piece to Maker Madness happens during checkout. If a student checks out one of the twenty-five diverse books tagged as a Maker Madness book, they get a kit with materials to construct things like building a rainbow bridge, making origami stars, or creating a paper plate dragon. Students take the book and kit home to read and complete individually or with their families. Maker STEM bins are also a popular student choice activity because they get to create with their friends in the library after checkout.

Maker Madness is continuously being developed as I grow as a lifelong learner. My first year as a school librarian, I participated in ILEAD USA (Innovated Librarians Explore, Apply, and Discover) where I learned how to respond to patron needs and the idea of makerspaces. I've participated in STEM workshops and curriculum design events hosted by Northwestern's TIILT (Technological Innovations for Inclusive Learning and Teaching) center. Conferences such as AISLE and IdeaCon host STEM sessions where I learned how to use the latest technologies in the library.

What is your favorite book to read aloud?

Dragons Love Tacos by Adam Rubin. It's just so silly and fun to read. The illustrations of the dragons partying make me smile. Plus, who doesn't like tacos?

What do you do to reset during stressful times?

Escaping into a fantasy book always helps. I also need creative and physical outlets to handle stress. I love my Cricut machine for making whatever my brain can dream up. I've also incorporated boxing into my workouts and love it!

What are you most passionate about in school librarianship?

Purchasing books that are windows and mirrors for my students and providing students creative ways to respond to their reading. It fosters problem solving, ingenuity, and teamwork while incorporating STEAM. Multi-disciplinary learning while having fun.

Susie Isaac, Teacher, Cherry Creek (CO) School District

Why did you join ALSC?

I joined ALSC seven years into my school library position when I met another member who was then serving on the Newbery Committee. She encouraged me to form a mock Newbery club. The club had such a positive impact on my school and my career.

What is your favorite part about working in a school setting?

I love the relationships I build with my students. My reader's advisory is fully based on those relationships.

How has your job evolved as a result of the pandemic?

My school district was in the midst of an underfunding crisis in early 2020, and the pandemic only accelerated that. Our superintendent gave the directive to cut nonessential positions, and librarians were the first positions listed in that category. I was told my position would be eliminated three months before I was elected to serve on the 2022 Newbery Committee. Talk about career highs and lows! I had to make the choice between staying in my district and pension program or taking a pay cut elsewhere to continue as a school librarian. I couldn't afford to make the change. As a result, I had to make a mid-career change into a Gifted and Talented Teacher role.

Describe a library event, program, or outreach initiative that is important to you and why?

I love running a Mock Newbery club. Students become so invested in campaigning for the book they feel should win the award, and it creates such an engaged, active reading culture. Whenever possible, I try to connect our club with a person serving on the Newbery Committee, so the students have an opportunity to share their feedback and learn what that experience is like. This past year was my first at my current school, and we had more than forty-five third through fifth graders in the club; many classroom teachers and parents told me they'd never seen such enthusiasm about reading before that year. I use the ALSC Mock Newbery Toolkit: https://www.ala.org/alsc/mock-newbery-toolkit.

What is your favorite book to read aloud?

I love watching the reactions on children's faces when books surprise them or make them think deeply. I love the way Jon Klassen's illustrations in *Sam and Dave Dig a Hole* and *This Is Not My Hat* pull his audience in.

What do you do to reset during stressful times?

I refresh by spending time being active outdoors, either walking, hiking, kayaking, cross-country skiing, or snowshoeing. I'm lucky to live in Colorado, where I can do all of these things frequently.

Kristy Kilfoyle, Canterbury School Director of Libraries, Fort Myers, FL

What is your favorite part about working in a school setting?

I particularly love seeing connections across our curriculum and working with colleagues who are equally psyched about new discoveries. The more I read, learn, and grow, the more I see that everything is connected.

Describe a library event, program, or outreach initiative that is important to you and why?

This past year, my favorite project-based learning initiative was a long unit based on Kate DiCamillo's *The Beatryce Prophecy.* The third graders learned all about life during the Middle Ages, and I tied in nonfiction titles that discussed what that time period was like in different areas of the world. The kids designed their own crest—one that represented who they are—and translated their names into the Viking alphabet using clay and styluses. They also learned about Mansa Musa, the wealthiest man to ever live, and we examined a close up of the map that depicts him.

What is your favorite book to read aloud?

I adore reading *Dory Fantasmagory* by Abby Hanlon. The kids just die over that book. I'm quite proud of my Mrs. Gobble Gracker voice.

What do you do to reset during stressful times?

I take out the paddleboard or go for a walk with the Peloton App. The Outdoor Audio workouts bring me so much joy.

What are you most passionate about in school librarianship?

I'm most passionate about one-on-one interactions with kids. When I get bogged down with the rest, one great conversation with a kid can perk me right up. &

YOUR ALSC **IMPACT**

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

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

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

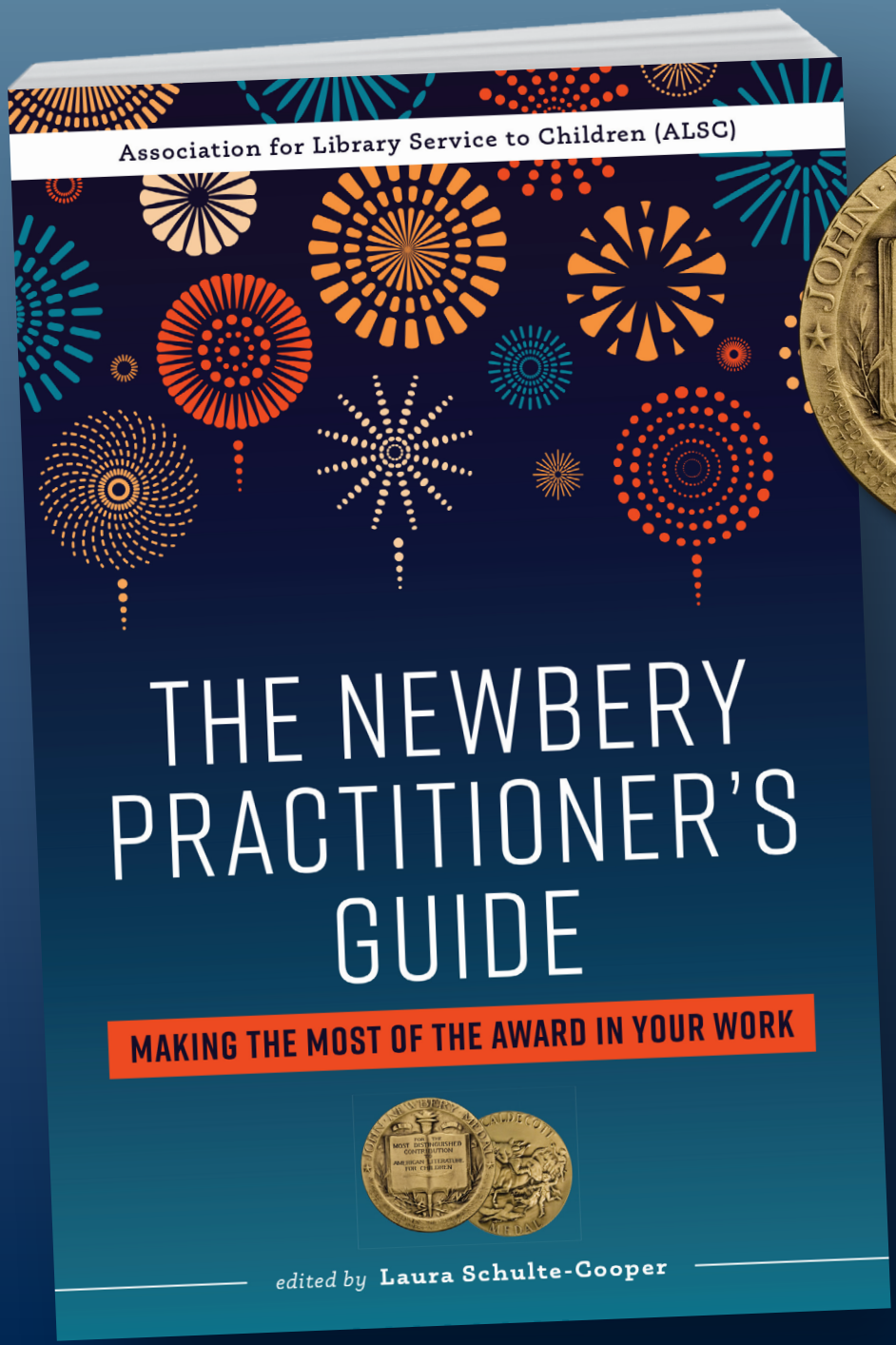
Want to have an even greater impact?

Become a Friend of ALSC at ala.org/alsc/donate

Thank you to our FRIENDS.

friends of alsc

Celebrate a century of the Newbery Medal with this handy guide from ALSC!



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.

ISBN: 978-0-8389-3827-0

100 1922–2022 Newbery
A Century of Distinguished Children's Books

Order your copy at the ALA Store: alastore.ala.org/Newbery100