Children & LIBRARIES

the journal of the Association for Library Service to Children

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ASSOCIATION FOR LIBRARY SERVICE TO CHILDREN

Understanding Dysgraphia & Dyslexia
Remembering Ezra Jack Keats
A Book Rockets to Space!

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Loren Long, right, author of the Otis picture books, reads one of his books to little Otis, then just seven weeks old. Otis is the grandson of longtime ALSC member Stephanie Bange. Otis' mom, Melanie, is enjoying the story as well.
Photo by Stephanie Bange.

Editor's Note

In Full Blume

By Sharon Verbeten

Meeting a Legend: Editor Sharon Verbeten was thrilled—and a bit nervous—to meet legendary children's author Judy Blume in Chicago at the ALA Annual Conference in June. A once-in-a-lifetime treat!

As I walked into an unassuming hotel restaurant in Chicago during the ALA Annual Conference in June, I had my eyes peeled for a colleague I was meeting. Instead, I spotted an icon.

Quickly glancing to the right, I spot a woman who looks just like Judy Blume, enjoying coffee at a quiet table. Upon finding my tablemates around the corner, I silently squealed, "Is that Judy Blume?"

After a few minutes of "should we or shouldn't we," we decided that the literary icon might not appreciate being interrupted, but she might be honored by the admiration of four librarians.

"Excuse me, we're librarians, and we love you!" That phrase, or something like it, tumbled out of my mouth and she smiled, courteous as ever—telling us that she came to this conference to thank librarians everywhere for their support of her work over many decades. We all chatted collegially until her breakfast soon arrived and were thrilled that she agreed to photos.

A few weeks earlier, I had just watched the documentary of her life on Prime Video. With the current tenor of censorship and challenges surrounding books today, it was eye-opening to hear about the challenges to her books over the years—with many people even challenging her use of the word "menstruation" in *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret*.

As much as we'd like to think times have changed in that regard, they haven't really. People still get upset with books (often without reading them). They still speak of indoctrinating youth through books. They question whether books are appropriate.

Blume's books are often considered some of the most challenged of the twentieth century. Maybe that honor (!!) alone is what has made her so revered by librarians and made her books so evergreen.

Her quote here should be a guiding tenet for all librarians and parents. *"Let children read whatever they want and then talk about it with them. If parents and kids can talk together, we won't have as much censorship because we won't have as much fear."*

Thank you, Judy Blume, for your wisdom, your words, and for graciously allowing four admiring librarians to interrupt your morning. &

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Finding Ezra Jack Keats

In Search of a Children's Book Icon

VIRGINIA MCGEE BUTLER

A watercolor produced during a year in Paris when Jack was adrift after World War II. Ezra Jack Keats Papers, DG0001, Box 141, Folder 16, de Grummond Children's Literature Collection, Special Collections, The University of Southern Mississippi Libraries. Used by permission.

On a mission, I entered the Ezra Jack Keats archives in the de Grummond Children's Literature Collection at the University of Southern Mississippi (USM) in early 2011.

Chosen by the Keats Foundation Executive Director Deborah Pope and the de Grummond Curator Ellen Ruffin to do research for things to include in Viking's fiftieth anniversary edition of Keats' iconic *The Snowy Day*, I searched for items that would be meaningful for an extra eight-page supplement. Soon I found myself yearning to have had the information I was finding when I had taught Keats' books in kindergarten and second grade. So much of his childhood and life presaged the stories he would tell and the art he would create in his picture books. On a deadline, I could not dwell on those treasures. I determined to come back and write a biography for those who still teach and read his classic books.

I returned to de Grummond immediately after I finalized the anniversary project and started with the six archival boxes containing drafts of Keats' unfinished autobiography. Each box contained several drafts of different chapters of his manuscript with the final one on top, dated 1982.

Since his death came in May 1983, I concluded that it was still a work in progress. He told his own stories as he must have told them as a raconteur at a dinner party. Frequently, one story led to another until the chronology got lost. He rearranged and deleted items from one draft to another as writers will do, so I read each draft to be sure I didn't miss a nugget. In one set, he gave all his people fictitious names, but he gave up on that. These drafts gave me a nice framework for starting.

This autobiography, sketches and original art, and memorabilia that ranged from his childhood through his successful career as children's book author and illustrator filled approximately one-hundred-eighty archival boxes. Items ranged from the sentimental to the comical. There were baby shoes, lifelong newspaper clippings, original art, and his friend's gift of Caldecott underwear.

Two large file folder boxes of correspondence held material including a letter from the author Langston Hughes wishing he had grandchildren to whom he could give *The Snowy Day;* a valentine from his current love; business correspondence; responses to Nancy Larrick's criticism in "The All-White World of Children's Books" in *The Saturday Review*; and letters to his niece Bonnie from his dog Jack. The special collections crew at the McCain Library of USM, which houses the de Grummond Collection, saved my chosen work table and kept me supplied with requested material as I put all this information into my computer.

Then I came home to write. This wealth of information needed order, and I began to put it together much like working a jigsaw puzzle. The Keats archives formed the frame and obvious inclusions, but there were omitted sections and tiny missing pieces

Virginia McGee Butler *is a writer and early childhood educator.*

that sent me to additional sources for clarification or completion. Some answers were straight forward and came from logical places. Others were serendipitous and unexpected.

For instance, Keats gave a vivid picture of discovering the Arlington Branch of the Brooklyn Public Library, but the image of the inside was unclear. My husband and I had one free afternoon when we went to New York City for the opening of the Keats exhibit at The Jewish Museum. We took the subway to the library and found that tiny missing piece that fit exactly. My photographer granddaughter, based in Brooklyn, took photographs for the book so readers can see it as well.

At a Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI) conference in Los Angeles, I heard illustrator Bryan Collier begin his keynote by telling about his own childhood when he found Peter, a boy who looked like himself, in the book his mother brought home from the Head Start classes she taught. Probably the two forty-five-minute phone conversations I had with Keats' lifelong friends, Martin and Lillie Pope, and the friendship I formed with Deborah Pope as she attended the yearly Kaigler Book Festival became my most enjoyable research as they filled in personal recollections. More resource locations, both expected and unusual, are listed in the bibliography and the source notes section of *Becoming Ezra Jack Keats.* &

The Tale of Keats and the Locked Library

Excerpted from Becoming Ezra Jack Keats *by Virginia McGee Butler (University Press of Mississippi, 2023); reprinted with permission of the author and publisher.*

In his speeches to various groups and in magazine articles, his personal story came to the forefront. He decided that maybe a publisher would be interested in his autobiography.

Herman Goliob, editor at Atheneum Publishers, responded to this suggestion in a letter dated May 17, 1974:

> *Dear Mr. Keats,*
>
> *Those autobiographical fragments you gave me the other day were moving, disturbing, and evocative. Could I see more of the manuscript, or could you at least give me a notion of what you see as the general shape of the book?*
>
> *Sincerely,*
> *Herman Goliob*

There are no other letters with the editor in his files, but an encouraged Ezra began to write and shared his hope of getting the book published. His autobiography is mentioned in a November 1976 letter from Mrs. Takako Nishinoya, editor at the Kaisei-Sha Publishing Company, "Mrs. Ishitake who has returned from your country had told me that you are now starting for your biography which pleased me very much."

In a January 2, 1981, letter, Beverly Hall, who took the photographs of him over the years and for his selections in *Night,* reflected on fifteen years of memorabilia, including the most intimate: an x-ray of his ankle. Evidently responding to a request related to the autobiography he was attempting, she stressed this would be the most important work he could do this year and volunteered to contribute if he needed someone else's opinion of him.

Early chapters of the autobiography were hard to write, bringing memories drawn from eavesdropping on his parents' arguments, vignettes at family gatherings, and overheard conversations in his community of immigrants.

One night, Ezra began to write an account of a more pleasant but well-remembered incident, relishing every detail of the exciting turning point when he was in junior high school and discovered the Arlington Branch Public Library. He saw himself wandering out of his tenement neighborhood in Brooklyn into other streets with fancy houses and ancient trees and discovering the library at the end of his stroll, nestled in the midst of this elite community with people going in and out. He wanted to see it again to be sure his narrative was right.

Questions from the night's writing about discovering the library inundated his mind and brought him fully awake early the next morning. "Would that library still be there? Would those same houses and overhanging trees still surround it? Would it still have those special steps inside leading up to the art books? Would the long tables be there where he had spread the books to study technique and teach himself to paint?"

The clock said 4:00 AM, much too early to go in search of answers. Daylight came slowly until, finally, he decided the library must be open. Taking the trek down the familiar street, he passed the houses, a bit more worn and not as elaborate as he remembered, until there it was, shadowed by the old trees: the Arlington Branch of the Brooklyn Public Library. Apparently, Ezra had not waited long enough, for the library remained locked. He banged on the door to get attention until someone inside motioned to him and mouthed, "We're not open yet."

Ezra's lifetime dream started in this red brick building with its stone masonry trim, but so much had changed.

continued on page 5

"The Tale of Keats . . ." continued from page 4

His children's books had won awards and been published in sixteen languages. He had traveled the world, but now he really must see inside. Would they still have his old beloved art books? Better yet, would his own books be there?

Taking the trip back to see if his memory was accurate, he was in no mood to be denied entrance. When Ezra saw the librarian signal, "We're closed," he only knocked harder. Finally, she opened a crack in the door. Ezra explained that he was writing about the library, and he needed to see inside.

The librarian let him in. As he looked around, he felt like he was fourteen years old again with the same shelves, the same books, and the same electric fans. He recognized the windows with trees pressing against them as if they were reaching out to grab him.

Ezra saw the familiar stairway with its "Reference Room" riser. Walking up softly, he came to the loft room on one side with the long tables where he had spread the big art books that he couldn't take home. How simple it had seemed to decide that he would become an artist.

Ezra returned to the main floor and crossed to the other side of the library. Another staircase that he didn't remember led to a different loft room. Its riser said, "Children's Room." Maybe by the time he'd discovered the library, he had thought he was too old for these books. Or could it be he had not noticed because no one in his childhood neighborhood knew much about children's books?

Walking up the steps, he thought about his own books. "Would they be there?" He hurried and found the shelves with all his friends—Peter, Louie, Amy, Willie, Clementine, and Archie. Ezra gazed in wonder. He believed his life journey began with the staircase to the art in the reference room and now had circled back to the other staircase with his books featured in the children's room. He was sure the boy Jacob Ezra Katz would have been amazed at the long and winding pathway that had led him to become author Ezra Jack Keats.

Perhaps Ezra hoped that the example of his own journey from poverty to a satisfying and influential career would be inspirational. Whatever his motivation, his premature death left the autobiography unfinished.

From Jacob to Jack, Katz to Keats

The baby born on March 11, 1916, was named Jacob Ezra Katz. That name sometimes brought confusion during his lifetime and afterwards.

My first struggle with what to call the author came long before I wrote *Becoming Ezra Jack Keats*. My article about Keats, "Celebrate Variety," had been accepted by *Highlights for Children*, but editor Kim Griswell had a question.

"Some of the documentation you sent called him 'Ezra' and some called him 'Jack.' Which is it?"

I checked with de Grummond curator Dee Jones, and she showed me Brian Alderson's book *Ezra Jack Keats: Artist and Picture-Book Maker* (Pelican, 1994) that begins, "Ezra Jack Keats, always called Jack."

Jeannine Laughlin-Porter, who had been the Kaigler Book Festival director the year Keats won the University of Southern Mississippi's medallion for his body of work, said, "Oh, we always called him Jack."

I thought I had found my answer until Deborah Pope, daughter of Keats' lifelong friends Martin and Lillie, arrived for the next Kaigler Festival. "He was always Ezra," she said.

The issue would raise its head again with my manuscript readers for the University Press of Mississippi, but I had figured out the answer by this time. He had always been called Ezra at home, but he entered school as Jacob Ezra Katz. Schools as institutions used his first given name of Jacob that was quickly shortened to Jack.

As if his first name was not problem enough, he ran into a different difficulty with his last name. After service in the Army during World War II, he returned to Brooklyn from Tampa and pounded the pavement looking for work. Businesses often had signs, "No Jews hired here." He had his name changed to Ezra Jack Keats, in face of that anti-Semitism, to a name with a less Jewish sound.

He would waffle between the two names for the rest of his life with those introduced to him in familial surroundings most often using "Ezra" and those who met him professionally using "Jack." Ultimately, the name he made for himself as Ezra Jack Keats is immediately recognizable in the children's book world and beyond.

PEER-REVIEWED

Through a Librarian's Eye

Understanding Dysgraphia and Dyslexia

JENNIFER NICHOLSON

When my son was six years old and preparing to start first grade, he was diagnosed with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). By the end of his first year of school, he struggled with handwriting and continued to write several of his letters backward.

When I mentioned my concern at a pediatrician appointment, the doctor advised me that it could be a sign of dysgraphia, which is common among students with ADHD. Dysgraphia? I was aware of dyslexia but never heard of dysgraphia before. I filed that information away and continued working with him on his other ADHD symptoms.

Fast forward four years, after the COVID lockdown and a mix of online and in-person schooling, my son was now in fifth grade, and his handwriting continued to be a struggle, both writing by hand (the act of producing the text) and his handwriting (the text produced). It could take him twenty minutes to put a single word on a worksheet, and continued to write some letters backward, especially "b" and "d."

After one particularly desperate evening of trying to complete homework, I handed him his laptop and told him to type his answers or, better yet, dictate what he wanted to say and then edit. He followed my instructions, and after only thirty minutes, he had completed the assignment's questions, giving detailed answers that used complete sentences and strong vocabulary. He was so proud of himself.

I was shocked by the difference and took this as confirmation that he was struggling with dysgraphia. I knew immediate action was needed to better support him. But when I contacted his school to request that he be evaluated for dysgraphia, school personnel were not familiar with the term. I knew then that as a librarian, an educator, and a mom, I needed to advocate on his behalf while also raising awareness of dysgraphia and its impact on students and their learning process.

What Is Dysgraphia?

Dysgraphia is a neurological disorder or learning disability of written expression and is common among students with ADHD.[1] Students with sloppy or poor handwriting are often mistaken as having dysgraphia, but dysgraphia is much more than just poor handwriting. Symptoms include

- difficulty forming letters;
- awkward or painful holding and gripping of a pencil;
- difficulty articulating thoughts on paper; and
- difficulty forming grammatically correct sentences.

Jennifer Nicholson *worked nine years as a public librarian, but is currently a Media Coordinator in Cabarrus County (NC).*

Dysgraphia is often categorized as acquired dysgraphia (associated with a brain injury) or developmental dysgraphia. Developmental dysgraphia is traditionally broken out into three additional categories—motor dysgraphia, which links fine motor skills and visual perception; spatial dysgraphia, which affects letter spacing; and linguistic dysgraphia, which "impacts the language processing skills required in the writing process."[2]

Dysgraphia is often detrimental to student learning; even in the digital age, handwriting is a critical skill used in everyday life.[3] Handwritten communications, from note-taking to memo writing, remain common, and the process of writing by hand is often used as an effective trick to help with memorization and organizing thoughts. All of this can be frustrating for students with dysgraphia.

While many who work in schools and libraries have a general understanding of dyslexia, many have never heard of dysgraphia. Yet, it is difficult to discuss dysgraphia without talking about dyslexia as well. The symptoms are very similar, and they are both considered language disorders and often mistaken for each other.

What Is Dyslexia?

Dyslexia is a neurological disorder or a learning disability that affects a student's reading ability in the form of phonemic awareness or phonological processing impacting a student's ability to read accurately and fluently.[4]

Symptoms include

- difficulty in identifying the individual sounds in words;
- difficulty with letter recognition, rhyming, and recalling letter sounds; and
- struggles with reading speed and comprehension.

Statistically, diagnoses of dyslexia are made equally across genders. It's also been found that wearing special glasses or using special fonts will not improve the symptoms of dyslexia, despite common misconceptions and myths.[5] Another important statistic to note is that "30 percent of children with dyslexia also have at least a mild form of ADHD."[6] According to *Psychology Today*, "children with ADHD are at a higher than average risk of developing dysgraphia."[7]

Dyslexia vs. Dysgraphia

While dyslexia is protected under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), dysgraphia is not recognized by the American Psychiatric Association (APA) in its *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders 5th Edition* (*DSM-5*). Instead, the *DSM-5* lists problems in writing under the 'specific learning disorder' diagnosis category," which does align with dysgraphia disability.[8] While these disabilities share similarities, and students can have a diagnosis of both, dysgraphia and its interventions are not as commonly known.[9]

Both disorders are recognized as learning disabilities, allowing for students to have special classroom services protected under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).[10] There are no standardized tests or formalized evaluations to diagnose dyslexia or dysgraphia. Rather, diagnosis of either is determined through observations and evaluations conducted at schools or by licensed professionals who specialize in learning disorders. Further, there are no medical treatments for either. School intervention and accommodations are the recommended courses of action to assist students and improve their overall success.

The demographic I work with are very avid readers, but they don't understand that not every child learns the same way. I was trying to explain that we all learn differently. Some of us are auditory, visual, kinesthetic.

What do librarians and educators need to know?

While researching dysgraphia and dyslexia, I discovered two blog articles that offered insightful information. *Storytime Solidarity* features an article by Juana Flores (JF, below), a children's librarian at Brooklyn Public Library Kings Highway Branch, who has dysgraphia. *Pop Goes the Page,* a Cotsen Children's Library blog, features an interview with Marissa Warren (MW, below), a teen services librarian at Princeton Public Library, who has dyslexia.[11]

I interviewed both of them via Zoom to assess what they feel librarians and educators should know about the disabilities.

What do you wish teachers and librarians knew about dysgraphia or dyslexia?

JF: The way I was diagnosed [with dysgraphia], it did not have to do with the penmanship process part. My fine motor skill is fine. It is more of writing coherently and having the mental flow process that is coherent, and a tendency to have grammatical pattern errors. When I'm in meetings, and they put us in groups, it is tormenting to me, as I don't write well on the spot. When I have anxiety, my penmanship becomes worse. I can write legibly [and clearly] when I am relaxed.

[During my undergrad program], before laptops and computers, like in 1989, my professor told me to bring in my typewriter, that I was going to take my exam using it. We get these little angels along the way that help us, and she was an angel in that way. I was taking a remedial course, and I kept repeating it because I couldn't pass the writing test. By having me use my typewriter, she was the one who got me through those courses. As soon as I began taking exams through the computer, that also helped a lot. Through all my experiences, I learned to compensate and adapt.

MW: I think in public libraries . . . in regards to disabilities, yes, we have to be ADA compliant, but there is more that we can do. Consistency is the key. For anybody with any learning difference and ADHD, consistency is key. For a student to go from classroom to classroom and see that consistency is really key makes them feel seen and heard and helps take away the anxiety of 'I'm going into this next classroom and I don't know if this teacher is aware I have this, will be accepting of it, or is going to work with me. But consistency across the board takes so much anxiety away and gives the student the ability to focus that they wouldn't have otherwise.

Does your dyslexia affect your writing?

MW: For me, it is just reading and math. I also have dyscalculia. Letters and numbers are a struggle for me. I went to a school for dyslexia, and I had friends for whom writing was a struggle. For example, for me, I still cannot read an analog clock to this day, and I don't know if I ever will!

What strategies or tools do you use today that help?

JF: Definitely typing information. A lot of things are getting computerized anyways, but still having kids writing is really important. *Grammarly* [a writing assistant that works across platforms to review spelling, grammar, punctuation, and more] has been a blessing and a personal strategy tool that I use. I also have other people proof my writing.

One of my strategies is to not always be forthright with your disability. Only [share information about disability] when it will empower and not disadvantage you in any way.

MW: I do things differently depending on what it is. For example, one day I might handwrite everything out and highlight, so having highlighters available is essential. Especially [having highlighters] in different colors so each color means something different, like the main idea or a detail.

Talk-to-text is brilliant and has been one of the best things invented, in my personal opinion. It's been incredibly helpful. Sometimes I need to just get everything out and this is the easiest way.

Having somebody look over my things [is one strategy]. I am very open about my dyslexia. My co-workers have been very, very gracious about it, and they will [proofread]. Sometimes, I still switch up words, and I want to make sure what I'm trying to say is what I am saying, so [proofing] is very important. Being able to have a designated computer where I can have the fonts set and have the computer set up to my comfort is important. Having hi/lo books that don't look super young are extremely helpful [for students].

Anytime I found a word I didn't know, we wrote that word down, and then our teachers would have us rewrite that word and look up the definition. I actually did this all through high school. Besides the dictionary, another thing that is helpful to people with learning differences, especially in our tech heavy society, is writing letters, which helps with muscle memory. I also found that in college, I hand wrote all of my notes instead of typing.

You mentioned hi/lo books. What about graphic novels?

MW: I am a huge fan of graphic novels. You have to [use] inference and figure out reading between the lines, and that's not an easy skill to learn, but really helpful to have, especially for dyslexia. I may not know what the word is, but I see something going on in the picture and that gives me a clue, whether or not I know the word or will learn it later. Especially for me, I would know that word had something to do with superheroes fighting in that moment, and then when I did learn the definition, it all came together and clicked. I do wish more teachers and librarians saw their value, not just for students with dyslexia, but also for ESL students.

How are we connecting with others? Is it in paper format, or are we connecting via social media with audio and visual posts? Are we offering programs in a space that is wheelchair accessible? Are we offering sensory storytime?

In my experience, my teachers always taught us to be advocates for ourselves. Our parents are advocates, but as we become older, we have to become our own advocate. I think that is really important and hard, especially for kids as it is easy [for some people] to dismiss what kids are saying. [Strategy-wise], letting kids try different things is really key, I think, because we function in such different ways, and we all function so differently that what works for one of us doesn't work for another one. You have to try some of these ridiculous things to see what will click and help you. I think that [need for exploration] is important for teachers, parents, and librarians to understand.

What accommodations or strategies do you feel would be helpful for schools and/or public libraries to use?

JF: Show parents multimedia books or books with different fonts, graphic novels, or what I call doodle books, such as *Diary of a Wimpy Kid, Dork Diaries,* even James Patterson would be great books for kids. For someone with dysgraphia, typing is the key, but they still need to practice writing. For me, my teachers folded a piece of paper up into four columns; each word was in each space; and then I was taught to use my pinkie finger to help with spatial [awareness] and separating my words.

College-ruled paper also helped me, so have kids explore with different paper lines and textures. Taking extra time and using separate testing area accommodations [are helpful]. Ask the teacher what type of exam it will be: multiple choice, fill in, or writing. If the test was multiple choice, I was fine around others. However,

if the test was a writing test, I definitely struggled around others, and I needed my typewriter or computer. Another accommodation that helped was to have someone record answers [oral dictation]. When giving writing prompts or during programming, allow kids to draw!

What about forms we fill out by hand every day, like job applications, library card applications, and medical records? Maybe just having an iPad available to fill out applications or forms could be an accommodation?

JF: At my library, we have a QR code for patrons to send electronically, and then we have the paper submission as well. Most parents submit for students. We have a library lab which is a STEM program, so for this program, we have a form for the hypothesis and a prompt that says you can write or you can draw your observation. We also tell the students that we don't collect these forms, but they will help with the students' experience.

MW: I went to schools that were specifically geared for kids with dyslexia from second grade all the way through high school. In our English classes, we would listen to a book on audio as well as read it. There were definitely times where I just was not tuned in whatsoever. But then there were times where the audiobook really did help; the audio actually clarified it. [That knowledge] built a little building block of confidence. . . . And even in grad school, I would read the book and listen to it on audio. Something about the two inputs that was really helpful. The information kind of stuck a little bit more. Everybody's a different learner.

So in between working at Princeton Public Library and earning my Masters, I was a lead replacement in a public elementary school library for about six months, so I kind of saw that side of the library world, and then the public side of the library world. Audiobooks were definitely really important, and not just for kids with dyslexia, but also for those who were ESL. There wasn't enough funding for more audiobooks, but the kids who were able to check them out found them immensely helpful. The nice thing about it, too, is that listening to audiobooks doesn't necessarily pinpoint you as somebody who might have a learning difference. And that, I think, is also key.

Things have changed. Things are a lot more holistic in classrooms, I think, and a lot more integrated. And that's really key. Part of that is almost, in a way, just owning who you are and how you learn.

Having the things easily accessible in the classroom for students, letting them explore and try different things is really key . . . to help create a safe environment [for the students] and [help them] feel comfortable.

How has dysgraphia or dyslexia influenced your career and library programs?

JF: I just had a parent come in the other day who wanted their child to read classics like Mark Twain, but [the child] was not a motivated reader. The demographic I work with are very avid readers, but they don't understand that not every child learns the same way.

I was trying to explain that we all learn differently. Some of us are auditory, visual, kinesthetic.

Take a moment to look around our library or space and gauge its accessibility for our patrons with disabilities. Will a student who is struggling with reading know where to find a picture or fantasy book? What does the signage look like? Is it all text or are pictures used too? Is the font easy to read?

Before I was a librarian, I worked with individual development . . . and the whole universal design of teaching [learning], while knowing that we all learn differently. I try to incorporate all of those kinds of ways. I use a lot of visuals. We have families from other countries, and English is not their first language. I try to make things more concrete if possible. . . . If I am talking about an apple, I try to have an apple with me to make it more concrete. I use a lot of props, audio, and I really am movement inclined and use music [in my programs].

MW: From day one, I went in knowing that I had such an aversion to libraries [and wondered] how can I make them better, not only for others, but for myself as well. It led me to fighting and advocating and making strides for other disabilities, not just dyslexia.

There is more that I think we can do, like [using] pictographs. I think things that we do for kids can be carried over to teens and even adults and not in a belittling way. I know if there are too many words, you won't read it, so by adding pictures or infographics, people will stop and read a little more.

How are we connecting with others? Is it in paper format, or are we connecting via social media with audio and visual posts? Are we offering programs in a space that is wheelchair accessible? Are we offering sensory storytime?

Font is a big one. Is the font kid-friendly? How can we make fonts more readable? Even in public libraries, we see so many new people every day. [Staff] know obviously these things are connected, but to anyone coming in from the outside, it may not be so obvious. Many of these things are automatically built into what I do, but I even have to stop and reevaluate what I am doing and how I am doing it to see if I am meeting the needs of the people in our community who we tend to forget about. But it is not only [people in] our community that have disabilities, it is also our staff. We need to remember our staff, too!

Conclusion

Flores's and Warren's insights about dysgraphia and dyslexia, respectively, and how they use their experiences to improve libraries for their students and patrons are of benefit to the field of library science as a whole.

Flores said that sometimes we meet angels along the way who help. I think that these two incredible angels inspire others and set an example for advocacy for those with a disability and for disability awareness. As a mom of a child with dysgraphia, I am grateful for the opportunity to speak with each of them and learn more about how I can better support my son in his educational journey.

The methods used by Flores and Warren and the experiences they share offer me, as an educator and a librarian, a way to reconsider how I can better support my students and community. I encourage us all to take a moment to look around our library or space and gauge its accessibility for our patrons with disabilities.

Will a student who is struggling with reading know where to find a picture or fantasy book? What does the signage look like? Is it all text or are pictures used too? Is the font easy to read? This type of self-assessment is easily done and guides us to accommodations that need to be made and can be offered with little effort on our part. More research, resources, and trainings are needed to help librarians and library staff across the profession better reach and accommodate students and patrons with dysgraphia, dyslexia, and other learning disabilities. &

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Dandelions and Orchids

Finding Picture Books to Support Youth Facing Fear and Anxiety

ROBIN A. MOELLER, KIM E. BECNEL, TIFFINY FRANCIS, MARY HOYLE, AND JULIE NOBLITT

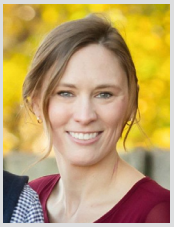
Pediatrician and researcher W. Thomas Boyce described children as falling into two essential camps when it comes to anxiety—they're either dandelions or orchids.[1] Dandelion children, like the plant, are resistant to stress and anxiety and tend to thrive in variable conditions. Orchid children are more sensitive and need additional support and specific skills to flourish in various environments.

Throughout the world, our collective society has been experiencing a state of insecurity, uncertainty, and grief, and millions of children are facing mental health challenges as a result. In this environment, even those resilient dandelion children can benefit from increasing their social and emotional literacy skills and developing coping techniques as levels of stress and anxiety continue to rise.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has stressed that, "Learning to cope with stress in a healthy way will help you, the people you care about, and those around you become more resilient."[2] The organization has also provided a list of healthy ways that children can cope with anxiety which include "having a healthy eating plan," "participating in physical activity," getting enough sleep, and "practicing mindfulness and relaxation techniques."[3] These are practices that both adults and children can learn and adapt into their lives, and research suggests that engaging with picture books can help them do that. In writing about resources to help support children's emotional well-being during the COVID-19 outbreak, Bartlett, Griffin, and Thomson noted that, "Children tend to rely on their imaginations when they lack adequate information."[4] Children's engagement with picture books allows them to use their imaginations to develop solutions to their problems. Research has documented the role that picture books can play in helping children learn to cope,[5] deal with anxiety,[6] and develop resilience.[7] Picture books have the ability to mirror a child's own experience while also showing them a window into what is possible and acting as a sliding glass door to empower children to act.[8]

With this potential in mind, we applied for the Carnegie Whitney Grant sponsored by the American Library Association to develop a web-based bibliography of picture books about dealing with anxiety called *We're All Orchids Now: A Bibliography of Children's*

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Picture Books About Dealing with Anxiety, 2010–2022. Our aim was to identify resources that could provide children with a safe and comfortable way to learn about anxiety, realize they aren't alone in their feelings, and learn how to cope with that anxiety in a healthy way. Children and the adults in their lives need these resources now, and our hope is to connect them with quality, informative picture books at this great time of need and in the future, when additional personal or social stressors arise.

We reviewed 407 picture books published between 2010 and 2022 that had the subject term "anxiety" or related terms such as "worry" and "stress." Of that sample, we determined that 267 books were appropriate for the bibliography. A review, including suggestions for how the book might be used, was developed for each of those books.

In addition to the aforementioned benefits of children's direct engagement with picture books, we feel that librarians, educators, parents, guardians, and counselors can also use picture books to help start conversations about anxiety with children. To help facilitate adults' use of this bibliography, we considered the extent to which each book demonstrated the RULER skills for social emotional learning (SEL).[9] The RULER acronym stands for: **recognizing** emotion in self and others; **understanding** the causes and consequences of emotions; **labeling** emotions accurately; **expressing** emotions appropriately; and **regulating** emotions effectively. Library staff might use this list to find books that incorporate SEL components to include in displays or read-alouds about other themes.

School and public libraries may also find this list helpful as a selection tool when looking for high quality picture books to add to their collections. Library staff may also consider this bibliography useful in helping guide parents to quality picture books for their children. Finally, this list can be helpful for librarians who are in the position to practice non-therapeutic bibliotherapy by providing access to books that may help their patrons at their point of need.

An additional way in which we have attempted to make these reviews helpful to users is that we have classified these books as being either appropriate for preschool-aged children or school-aged children. It is true, however, that many of these books can be used with children of various ages, and even teens and adults. The bibliography can be found at https://mls.appstate.edu/picture-books-about-dealing-anxiety. Libraries and other youth-centered organizations are welcome to link directly to the bibliography as a resource for patrons and clients.

As the CDC has noted, the mental and physical stress being felt by people all over the world due to the COVID-19 outbreak and other events is a public health crisis.[10] While there is no easy solution, children who feel stress can engage with picture books to learn how to deal with their anxiety in a healthy way, thus giving them a toolkit of practices they'll be able to use for the rest of their lives. &

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Finding What's Right

Readers' Advisory for Middle Grades

LOGAN SHEA

As children's librarians continue to support the development of literacy skills to children before and after they begin reading, there is also an ongoing need for librarians and support staff to be properly trained in providing readers' advisory (RA) service.

While storytime and other children's programs may take priority within most children's departments, RA continues to be an integral part of library service. Unfortunately, many RA tools and associated research are focused on adult readers, creating a distinct scarcity of RA material for children. This article will discuss the developmental considerations and interests for school-aged readers (aged 8–12) and give recommendations for providing RA services.

According to readers' advisory expert Joyce G. Saricks, "A successful readers' advisory service is one in which knowledgeable, non-judgmental staff help fiction and non-fiction readers with their leisure-reading needs."[1]

Significant readers' advisory resources are available for adult readers, but RA services for school aged readers are sparser. This expands to Library and Information Studies graduate programs, where many readers' advisory courses exclusively focus on the adult library user.[2] While Saricks outlines that much of readers' advisory training is relevant for both children and adults, the developmental stages, reading interests, available tools, and awareness of popular materials are all potential barriers for providing RA services for middle grade children.

The middle years are commonly considered ages 8 to 12, and consist of many physical, emotional, and cultural milestones. This is understood to be the time when children begin to form strong and complex friendships, grow more independent, and understand multiple perspectives.

Children of this age experience a variety of stressors in their lives, including peer pressure, growing academic challenges, and body changes.[3] During this time, children's literacy skills are also growing, particularly in the areas of textual comprehension, inference skills, the ability to differentiate between factual and opinion-based arguments, and cause and effect.[4]

Within the library profession, early childhood and adolescence are the two primary areas for research on child development and library services. According to Diane Banks and Peggy Thomas, middle childhood has been misunderstood as a time of plateau between the progress of early childhood and before the onset of the teen years. Banks and Thomas continue to rebuke this misconception, outlining the developmental and environmental factors that influence child development and behavior, including entry into formal education, participation in after-school activities, the increasing importance of friendships, and growing independence from caregivers.[5]

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RA Resources to Consider

To provide excellent readers' advisory, an awareness of current popular materials for middle grade readers is essential. Library staff should be keen to learn about what children are reading, playing, and viewing. Beyond library-created book lists and book awards, there are a variety of incredible middle grade resources online. Here are a few suggested ones to try.

Podcasts

- *School Library Journal, The Yarn*: A podcast by an elementary school librarian and an elementary school teacher, this podcast looks at children's literature and includes interviews with authors, illustrators, and other children's literature experts. https://theyarn.slj.com.
- *Literaticast*: Literary agent Jennifer Laughran discusses all things children's publishing and literature and focuses on picture books, middle grade, and young adult novels. Each episode discusses new children's titles as well as other discussions about publishing with invited guests. https://www.jenniferlaughran.com/literaticast.
- *Book Clubs for Kids*: Host Kitty Felde is joined by three students to discuss a favorite new or classic middle grade novel, followed by an interview with the author, and a celebrity reading. An important tool to hear how children are experiencing and enjoying middle grade literature. https://www.bookclubforkids.org/.

Websites or Blogs

- *The Brown Bookshelf*: A blog designed to share and promote the best books written and illustrated by Black creators. https://thebrownbookshelf.com/.
- *KiBooka*: Blog highlighting books written and illustrated by Korean Americans and creators from the Korean diaspora. https://kibooka.com/.
- South Asian Kidlit: Children's book author Darshana Khiani's website highlights South Asian literature and illustrators through blog posts, book reviews, and book lists. https://darshanakhiani.com/southasiankidlit/.
- Latinxs in Kidlit: A website that explores the world of Latinx children's and YA literature. https://latinosinkidlit.com/.

The following recommendations can support children's librarians and library information staff in this endeavor.

Conversation and Personal Connection

Conversation is the primary driver of readers' advisory service. A positive conversation builds a relationship between the child and library staff, allowing staff insight into the daily life and activities of the child. Questions such as, "What are you watching? What do you and your friends talk about? What are you playing together?"[6] provide ample opportunity for children to begin a discussion. While resources such as Novelist Kids and Teens can provide titles and information to librarians, conversations with children about their interests and daily lives are the best way to connect them with books they will enjoy.

Multiple Options and Formats

Research suggests readers respond best to library materials they are allowed to choose[7] and that suggesting multiple options increases the likelihood of readers' advisory success.[8] Graphic novels, comic books, movies, e-books, and audiobooks all serve as effective entry points to reading, and multiple titles in multiple formats should be at the forefront of readers' advisors' minds. Excluding these options may dismiss the unique needs of school-aged children.

Physical, Emotional, and Cultural Milestones

The middle years are a time of distinct physical, emotional, and cultural change. RA professionals should keep in mind this age group's developmental milestones, including growing independence, importance of friendships, body changes, and growing literacy skills, such as increased textual comprehension and inference skills. A focus on the many changes middle years children experience will strengthen both RA conversations and recommendations.

Passive Programming

Creating passive programming specific to middle grade children is a low-stakes way to make readers feel welcome to the library and can serve as an icebreaker for children to interact with library staff. Though not a readers' advisory service, passive programming can increase middle grade engagement and set up your RA service for success.

Enthusiasm

The role of library staff in readers' advisory service is to support library patrons with enjoyable reading material. As such, in the conversation process with children or when young readers select material, their decisions should always be celebrated and met

with enthusiasm.[9] Celebrating children's reading achievements is a great way to encourage child engagement with reading materials and with library staff.

Diverse Options

Middle grade children reflect the spectrum of diversity that exists throughout society. Children's librarians and departments work hard to ensure their collections, displays, and programs reflect this diversity, and it is imperative to have it at the forefront of readers' advisory work as well.

Middle grade children, like all readers, should have their realities reflected to them in literature. In addition to seeing one's own experience, Rudine Sims Bishop states that readers should also have access to diverse books that can serve as windows and sliding glass doors that welcome them and provide insights into worlds other than their own.[10] There are many resources for children's librarians to familiarize themselves with diverse middle grade material[11] as well as research about supporting diverse communities within our libraries.[12] &

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Zoom!

Children's Book Rockets to International Space Station

DEBORAH LEE ROSE

Just like people on Earth, astronauts in orbit love to read. Now *Astronauts Zoom!* is part of that reading. The book was launched to the International Space Station (ISS), with four astronauts on the Dragon Endeavour spacecraft, for Story Time From Space.

After the spacecraft's first launch attempt was scrubbed (with countdown nail-bitingly stopped at two minutes before liftoff), the book rocketed into space on March 2, 2023, on Read Across America Day. In about 120 days in space, the book has orbited more than 57 million miles on the ISS.

The book was submitted for consideration long before its ultimate launch. First I waited eagerly to hear if Story Time From Space had selected it, then when NASA might send it up on a rocket to the ISS, and finally which astronaut would read the book aloud.

Pioneering astronaut Koichi Wakata, the first Japanese astronaut to command the ISS—who is featured in the book (exercising)—was on the International Space Station when the copy of *Astronauts Zoom!* arrived there. His read-aloud of the book in space was videotaped for a free Story Time From Space online resource for libraries and children anywhere in the world.

Birth of the Book

When they were each around five years old, scientist Jessica Meir and engineer Christina Koch began imagining themselves as astronauts, telling their families and teachers their dreams of going into space.

In 2019, both made their dreams come true and made history as the first all-women spacewalking team. Koch has now been selected for the next crewed Artemis mission launch, becoming the first woman who will ever circle the Moon.

Together they spent seven hours and seventeen minutes floating outside the ISS, two hundred and fifty miles above Earth. As they worked on the ISS solar power system, they were zooming through space at 17,500 miles per hour!

The enormity of that speed (needed to keep the space station in orbit) inspired the title for my book *Astronauts Zoom!* (Persnickety Press/WunderMill Books, 2021). But while spacewalks get lots of attention, they're only one part of astronauts' extraordinary STEM work on the ISS.

Deborah Lee Rose *is the internationally published author of nineteen children's books; she has won five national STEM children's book awards, including the DeBary Award for Outstanding Children's Science Books for* Astronauts Zoom!, Scientists Get Dressed, *and* Swoop and Soar. *Her newest picture book about Emperor penguins and climate change,* Penguins Ready to Go, Go, Go!, *will be published in spring 2024. Find free educational guides with activities at www.deborahleerose.com. The Astronauts Zoom! video read-aloud from Story Time From Space is free online at https://storytimefromspace.com/astronauts-zoom/.*

Try these Activities

Here are some space-themed activities to try in your library.

Create a Space Station "Cupola" Area

One of astronauts' favorite areas on the space station to read, take photos, or look down at Earth is in the multi-windowed cupola. Create a reading area in your library with photos of Earth, taken by astronauts from the space station cupola. You can find all kinds of views of Earth from the ISS at the Windows on Earth project. https://www.windowsonearth.org

Make a large cupola backdrop, where kids can take selfies as if they were astronauts on the ISS. *(Hint: Don't show what kids are sitting on, so they look like they're floating.)* Find NASA photo of the ISS cupola at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:STS130_cupola_view1.jpg.

Create a Mission Patch

Every astronaut crew that travels to the ISS designs their mission patch together. All you need are circle templates, or paper plates, for children to draw their own mission patches.

Throw a Pizza Party

Astronauts on the ISS eat all kinds of foods, including floating personal pizzas. You can throw an astronaut pizza party with a make-your-own pizza craft using paper plates, crinkle paper for cheese, and colorful paper cutouts or tissue paper for your favorite toppings. If you have an area that allows for making and heating food, kids can create their pizzas with tortillas, like astronauts do in space—no crumbs to mess up all that space equipment!

Plan an Astronaut Visit

Astronauts speak to library audiences of all ages—in person and even from space! Contact NASA to submit a request, maybe cosponsored with local schools or a civic organization or science center. Visit https://www.nasa.gov/about/speakers/astronautappearances.html.

With "you are there" NASA photos, the book captures a busy day in the life of women and men astronauts, from when they awake in space till they're zipped into their sleeping bags. Young readers and listeners can zoom through space with thirty-eight real astronauts, to learn things like, *How do astronauts stay warm, and cool, on spacewalks? What kinds of science do they investigate? What do they eat? Where do they sleep? Do they ever have fun? What do they see when they look down at Earth? How do they work "upside down?"*

In *Astronauts Zoom!* children (and adults) discover that how astronauts live in space is a lot like on Earth—but different because of microgravity. For example, astronauts must brush their teeth with their mouth closed around the toothbrush, so toothpaste and saliva won't float out into the space station. When astronauts go to bed, it may be totally light outside, because the ISS passes from darkness into sunlight sixteen times in one of our Earth days.

And instead of just lying down and pulling up their covers, astronauts have to zip themselves into bags attached to something, so they won't bang around during their sleep. When they work, or eat, or just look out the windows, they may be "sitting" but have no chairs. Everything astronauts do happens while they're floating!

Astronauts Zoom! includes the first all-women spacewalk team, first African American astronaut on extended space station mission, first Native American man astronaut in space, first European woman to command the ISS, and other pioneering astronauts. No matter their background or nationality, one thing the astronauts all have in common is gazing down and taking photos of Earth through the extra-large windows of the cupola. They see ocean, mountains, rivers, deserts, and millions of city and rural lights at night. Astronauts also see hurricanes, volcanoes, and other huge environmental events. Their photos help scientists and engineers

Fun Fact

When you are showing *Astronauts Zoom!* for story time or to any group, no matter how you turn the book will be correct! There is no upside down on the ISS.

Celebrate World Space Week October 4–10

Celebrate UN-declared World Space Week with people all around the world. Schedule a space themed event, maybe with a live astronaut on Earth, an astronaut on the space station, space educators in your area, or people involved in space related industries near you. You can add your event to WSW's international calendar and download the free poster. For more information, visit www.worldspaceweek.org.

on Earth better understand, and better protect, the planet that astronauts see with their very special space-eye view.

For More Information, Check Out These Resources

- A free educational guide to *Astronauts Zoom!* with Cool Tools Treasure Hunt, Reading Is Fundamental book activities, and author Q & A at RIF Literacy Central are available at https://www.rif.org/literacy-central/book/astronauts-zoom-astronaut-alphabet.
- Story Time From Space video read-aloud of *Astronauts Zoom!* read by astronaut Koichi Wakata on board the International Space Station (https://storytimefromspace.com/astronauts-zoom/).
- Spot the Space Station from Earth. The ISS orbits Earth every ninety minutes. Get alerts when it will be visible from where you are. Visit https://spotthestation.nasa.gov. &

Author Kwame Alexander, winner of the 2015 Newbery Medal for *The Crossover,* invited the members of the 2015 Newbery Award Committee to be his guest at the World Premiere viewing of the film of his book, *The Crossover,* now streaming on Disney+. Eleven of the fifteen members were able to attend the event, which was held in the Hollywood Athletic Club on April 4, 2023. Members were thrilled to meet many of the actors in the production; Alexander served as both showrunner and writer for the series. According to committee member Stephanie Bange, "It was a magical, amazing time to regroup eight years later. The magic is still there." Photo courtesy of Stephanie Bange. Pictured are from left, Stan Steiner, Patrick Gall, Sylvia Tag, Randall Enos, Armin Arethna, Jenny Brown, Kwame Alexander, Abby Johnson, Janet Thompson, Lucinda Whitehurst, Eti Berland, and Stephanie Bange.

Championing Literacy Around the Globe

Highlights from the World Literacy Summit

BETSY DIAMANT-COHEN

Caroline Simuchimba and Betsy Diamant-Cohen posing together at the entrance to Examination Hall.

In April, 2023, I attended the three-day World Literacy Summit at Oxford University in England. Sponsored by the World Literacy Foundation, the Summit brought together leaders from eighty-five countries representing over two-thirds of the world's population, all with a single focus—advocating, championing, and educating on the vital importance of improving literacy levels across the globe.

Presentations included topics of leadership in literacy, new technologies/innovation, literacy programs and goals, funding/sustainable development, girls' literacy, First Nation/mother tongue literacy, learning disabilities, community-based interventions for literacy, early childhood/primary literacy, and more.

The first person I met was Caroline Simuchimba, the executive director of Children Inspired Evolution (CIE) in Zambia. Her organization works with low income communities that have vulnerable children with extremely low literacy levels. Children in these areas lack education partly due to lack of resources, lack of interest and also due to lack of reading materials. CIE's mission is to advocate for equal and inclusive access to education for vulnerable children, orphans, and children with disabilities while ensuring that no child suffers from neglect, violence, and abuse. CIE does awesome work, and Caroline is a real mover and shaker.

Summit presentations were given in rooms throughout the "Examination Hall," a building on Oxford's High Street. Speaking under portraits of old white men in university regalia in large rooms with muraled ceilings was a change from US conference centers!

My presentation was called Mother Goose on the Loose (MGOL): Making a Difference from the Earliest Years.

Starting with the development of early literacy programming in US libraries for babies from birth to age three, I introduced Every Child Ready to Read (ECRR) and spoke about library programming as a vehicle for helping children build all kinds of skills in addition to language and literacy, including social and emotional skills and basic STEM skills. This was followed by examples of the many versions of Mother Goose now being used around the United States.

After a full day of presentations, some of the presenters reconvened at a local pub for an informal happy hour. Through informal conversations, I learned that in Zimbabwe, only 5% of primary school children are fluent in reading. It used to be much higher, but the literacy percentage has plummeted since the 1970s because of the political and economic crisis in the country. I had not realized that politics could have such a devastating effect on literacy levels. On a global level, literacy rates are staggeringly

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.*

Regrouping inside the Sheldonian Theatre once the building had been deemed safe after a mid-morning bomb scare!

low, and except for the people at the summit, it seems that the efforts to increase literacy are inadequate and sporadic.

On the second day, the summit was moved to Sheldonian Theatre, where participants watched predetermined, scheduled presentations and awards given on a stage. We were welcomed by the summit organizers, learned more about the World Literacy Foundation and heard from featured speaker Frank Schulenburg, executive director of Wiki Education (Wikipedia).

A major topic was the World Literacy Award; the top papers were presented to us. They included "Embracing Diglossia in Early Literacy Education in Arabic" and "Co-creating Comprehension: How Child-Led, Localised Edutainment Is Using Mass Media to Improve Early Literacy in Sub-Saharan Africa." Following talks about technology innovations that pave the road to new methods and wider reach, and adult illiteracy and its impact on society, funders spoke with us about corporate/community partnerships that address illiteracy.

Professor Rana Dajane, founder of *We Love Reading,* gave a fascinating presentation that included a documentary film of Asmaa Rashed, a *We Love Reading* Ambassador who had undergone the We Love Reading training and brought together a group of teenage girls to read and share their thoughts about the books. "The Neighborhood Storyteller" was made in a refugee camp in Jordan; it was named Best Human Rights Film at the Toronto International Women Film Festival and was the winner of the Women in Film Award 2022 by the Mountainfilm Festival (it can be viewed on YouTube at https://youtu.be/BadwsWxeoq0_).

The documentary follows Asmaa as she tries to convince the girls' fathers and husbands to allow them to attend a book club at her house rather than remain isolated in their own homes every day. Asmaa is very persuasive, and she succeeds in getting some girls from ages 12 to 16 to attend. We witness how the girls grow in their ability to express themselves and dream about a future due to their exposure to new ideas and conversations with one another.

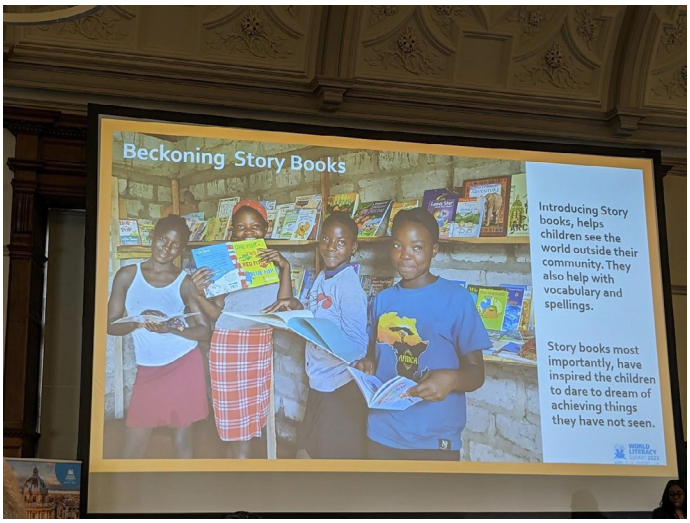
Following the screening, we were introduced to the documentary director and her father. Professor Dajane as interpreted as we video chatted with Asmaa. Seeing the effect that reading and sharing thoughts about books had upon the lives of those girls was uplifting; we all left the theater even more convinced (if that was possible) of the value of literacy.

On the last day, I sat down with Kim Jocelyn Dickson, whose presentation on her book, *The Invisible Toolbox: The Power of Reading to your Child from Birth to Adolescence* (Mango, 2020), focused on the importance of the earliest years for giving children the essential skills they need to prepare them for meeting the world of school to the very best of their ability. She spoke about the importance of parent/child interaction from birth and specifically mentioned the value of nursery rhymes for building critical pre-reading skills and recognizing rhyming words. Her presentation had been just before mine, and it provided a great lead-in to my presentation on MGOL. Her eloquent explanation regarding the need for parents to read to their children, even in utero, (https://theinvisibletoolbox.org/your-baby-wants-to-hear-you/) supported the premise behind MGOL's Hatchlings program for expectant parents.

I read Dickson's book on the plane home, and while she encourages parents to talk, sing, read, and play with their children, she adds another essential on her list of practices for parents to use with children of all ages—cuddle. I believe that reading a book aloud to a child, along with a good cuddle, is a great recommendation, so we had lots to talk about.

Another fascinating presentation was by the Alif Laila Book Bus Society, part of the International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY) in Pakistan. Their mobile libraries include not only vans, buses, and bikes but also camels, yaks, and rickshaws. It's a practical and marvelous way to reach unserved and underserved populations in remote areas.

Two teachers at St. John's Anglican College in Australia, Deborah Wilson and Ronnelle Sanders, spoke about noticing the lack of vocabulary and communication skills in their incoming kindergarten children and decided to do something about it. They created paper keys, color-coded by topics. Written on the keys were questions for parents to ask their children, and reminders to pause and wait for the answer. If relevant, there were prompts on how to continue the conversation. Reading levels jumped



A slide from a presentation about Children Inspired Evolution (CIE) in Zambia.

after the introduction of the keys, and now the two teachers meet weekly to share other literacy expanding ideas.

Monica Figueroa's presentation started with her personal story of arriving in the United States with her parents as illegal immigrants from Mexico. The Texas preschool she attended did not have any books. When "confronted with a pile of books" in elementary school, she and the other immigrant children "simply flipped through the pages."

She wondered how those children reading books with the teacher could actually read them. Eventually, Monica got a reading tutor; twenty years later, her studying paid off and she became a teacher through Teach for America. She traveled back to her old preschool but realized that not much had changed.

"Kids were still struggling, parents were still confused, just as my parents were" because the teachers couldn't speak Spanish and the parents were struggling with English. Monica realized something had to change. She became a kindergarten teacher obsessed with making sure that every child would leave her classroom reading at grade level.

Not only did she meet that goal, but many students left reading at second grade level. Based on that success, Monica pursued a Masters in Entrepreneurship and Leadership at Harvard. Using her experiences as a struggling reader, and as a teacher of struggling readers, combined with what research says should be done, Monica developed Learning Momentos based on her interest in the neuroscience of reading, and the need for family engagement, culturally relevant, and healing centered materials. Learning Momentos is "creating science based tools that support an adult's capacity to nurture a child's full well-being, laying the foundation to be healthy and happy in life" (https://www.learningmomentos.com/about-us).

After attending a session focused on helping students with dyslexia, I overheard the two presenters asking each other where they were from. Mark Stoddart was from Scotland, but Kate McElderry was from the Odyssey School in Maryland. I couldn't resist introducing myself as a fellow Marylander.

As she noticed my name tag, she said, "Taking my children to Mother Goose on the Loose programs at the Canton Library with Miss Gloria were some of our happiest childhood memories." What an unexpected but lovely end to the conference.

Upon returning home, I watched some of the recorded presentations. A track I was unable to see in person but enjoyed watching online was on youth-led programs. On film, I was introduced to Colin Bloom, the now sixteen-year-old founder of *Libraries for Literacy* in South Africa.

Colin is a dual US/South African citizen. He visited South Africa in 2018 when he was twelve. Walking down the aisle of a food store, he noticed that the packaged food had pictures rather than words on the labels. He asked his dad why, and his dad explained that many people in South Africa could not read. So, Colin decided to do something about it!

He researched literacy in South Africa and learned that only 8% of schools have a library,[1] compared to 95% in the US.[2] To raise money to fund a school library in South Africa, he started selling lemonade on the streets of New York with the tagline, "lemonade for literacy, and brownies for books." An avid soccer player, he would explain to people that "learning to read without books is the equivalent to learning to play soccer without a ball."

With the funds he raised, Colin bought books at library sales and found people eager to donate books. He was able to open his first school library in Soweto. Still a teenager, Colin has opened four libraries in South Africa. (To find out more about Libraries for Literacy, visit https://www.channelkindness.org/libraries-for-literacy/.)

These are just a few descriptions of the innovative projects supporting literacy around the world. To learn about more exciting projects, check out the summit website at https://www.worldliteracysummit.org/#DLIB. &

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A Compendium of Jewish Culture

An Interview with Jane Breskin Zalben

SHARON VERBETEN

Photo courtesy of Julie Gribble, KidLit TV

You're an icon in the children's literature world, having written more than fifty books. Why does your latest title, *Beni's Tiny Tales: Around the Year in Jewish Holidays*, feel different from your others? Do you feel closer to it?

I need to answer this in a circuitous way because life often takes indirect paths. I have done many kinds of books and have illustrated and written most of them, but sometimes, I have illustrated other authors, and other times, other artists have illustrated my text.

My first Beni book was *Beni's First Chanukah* about bears and squirrels celebrating and sharing their holiday traditions as we did with our children and friends. It was my ode to all the Christmas trees I never had. All the red-and-green sugar-dusted cookies, wreaths, and pine roping my family would never do. I desperately wanted to spray-paint reindeers on my bedroom window prancing in fake snow and prayed for Santa to arrive, bringing me a Patty Playpal doll. A Jewish child growing up in a non-Jewish world.

Fast forward to my older son asking when he was little as we drove through Main Street of our town lit with glittering bells and candy canes, "Why are there no Chanukah decorations?" And years later, my younger son at five declared, "If I can't have a tree, then I'm going to marry a girl who isn't Jewish so I can have one."

Around that time, the early 1980s, one of my best friends, head of our local library children's room, suggested I write a Chanukah book. She eventually went to be on a Caldecott committee, and observed, "We have nothing really good we can read to young children for a Chanukah story hour." With resistance, and after much urging, I wrote my first religious picture book, starring a bear named Beni.

To cut to the chase, Talmudic discussions went on for six months in the publishing house—how would Jewish people take to anthropomorphic animals? They wanted me to illustrate it with humans. Channeling Beatrix Potter, I said, "Have someone else do it." Everyone responded with a definitive, "No!"

The manuscript was sent to a rabbi, who brought it to the head of a Jewish book club, who asked around. They said, "Make sure it's clear that the different religions have different animals. Separation, even in the animal kingdom? When I was at my drafting table, my son leaned over. "How come the squirrels aren't wearing yarmulkes like Beni?"

"They celebrate Christmas," I answered. "See their tree in the forest."

And he said very seriously, "I didn't know that squirrels aren't Jewish, and bears are. Cute animals are now abundant in Jewish picture books. I've been told, over and over, Beni was the first in mainstream literature.

Sharon Verbeten *is Youth Services Manager at the Manitowoc (WI) Public Library; this is her twenty-first year as editor of* Children and Libraries.

Shavuot

"He gave us this land, a land of milk and honey. Where I now bring the first fruits of the soil."
Deuteronomy 26:9-10

Shavuot is a wheat harvest, called the "Feast of Weeks" or the "Festival of First Fruits," occurring in June. It celebrates the section in the Ten Commandments (a part of the Torah—the first five books of the Bible) where the Torah is given to the people of Israel on Mount Sinai after their freedom from slavery in Egypt. The festival lasts two days. On the second day, the Book of Ruth, one of the five biblical scrolls, is read. Ruth, a convert to Judaism, is welcomed when she returns to the Land of Israel with her mother-in-law, Naomi, after they become widows and lose their wealth. It is a story of love and acceptance, setting a path for her future descendant, King David.

Shavuot is one of the three major pilgrimage festivals, with the other two being Passover and Sukkot. Dairy food is eaten to symbolize how the Torah feeds the mind and milk nourishes the body. Synagogues and homes are decorated with flowers, greens, and fruits.

This holiday is very child-friendly: As the Torah and Ten Commandments show how to live an honorable life, children can learn how to share and act with empathy and kindness.

Art from the story, "Late Night at the Cousins Comedy Club" (Featuring the Playroom Players) from *Beni's Tiny Tales: Around the Year in Jewish Holidays* by Jane Breskin Zalben (Christy Ottaviano Books / Little Brown, 2023)

Why is this book different from all my other books? Because it is a one-of-a-kind treasury that grew from a few tales to ten picture books bound into one thick volume of 144 pages with about one hundred pieces of art and a silk ribbon marker; this compendium has origin history with the meaning of each holiday, new stories, fusion recipes, craft activities, songs with lyrics and music, prayers, a glossary of Yiddish and Hebrew words with pronunciations and definitions, an index.

It has condensed thirty-five hundred approximate years from slavery to freedom to the present day—a "go to" for everything Jewish where everyone can learn about customs in one place—a reference, but fun. A cultural glimpse offering various traditions, including those in other parts of the world. My editor, Christy Ottaviano, said, "Make the stories contemporary, reflecting the times we are living in now." Many things are said on the family tree, and within the stories themselves, without being said.

This Beni book is heartfelt. It goes to the core of who I am.

You mention you worked on this during the pandemic; how did that influence your approach?

The book's concept began at the beginning of the pandemic. My husband turned to me one night at dinner and asked, "What ever happened to Beni's family? What became of all the bears in the series?"

Beni was far from my mind. Time passed with other book projects. For years, I also had been doing large mixed media paintings and showing in galleries and libraries. I stopped doing art for books, and just painted huge modern art canvases, after my mother, a school librarian, died.

Missing family and friends, I went into my studio each morning and created Beni's current family with backstories. It was comforting to disappear into this fictional family, especially when I couldn't see my own. Away from the horrible news we all were experiencing every day. So, I have to admit, it was easier. What a gift to spend each day this way. There were no distractions. Except for a deer appearing in my woods with a baby fawn. Or weird gold mushrooms. Or wondering if I could get toilet paper and yeast. No airplanes. No cars. No commitments to anyone. Now I was in a vacuum.

I like people. Some, I love. But I *love* being alone in a room with words or art. Toward the end of the book, while drawing, I discovered podcasts. So, I wasn't entirely alone. Although the book was a vast undertaking, it gave me purpose. The work is who I am. It makes me feel whole. Complete. I don't like living without it. Period. So definitely, easier. For my personality. Perfect.

With all the discussion in libraries about inclusion and diversity, why is this new book especially important to the canon of Jewish literature?

Through my research, I discovered that Jewish people make up about 0.2% of the population globally, and around 1.7% in the US.[1] But Jewish books are rarely embraced by lists of diversity. Only fairly recently were the Sydney Taylor awards included with the Youth Media Awards announcements. I have quietly won four silver Taylor medals in the past. A Koret Foundation award. Honoree

for the William Allen White Award. I am glad the Association of Jewish Libraries is now part of the American Library Association [award announcements] and can partake, along with others, on such an anticipated day each year.

Now more than ever with the extreme rise of anti-Semitism, maybe we need to rethink, what exactly is diversity? Should Jewish literature be included on those lists? Jewish people are a minute portion of the population, yet often loom large, discriminated against throughout history worldwide.

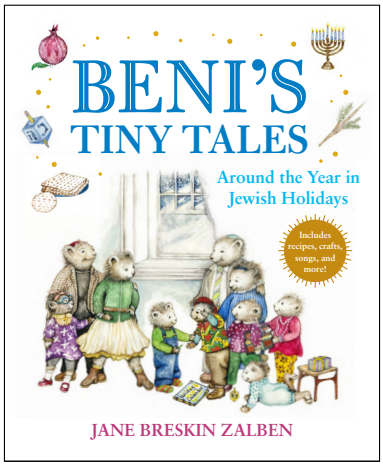
I am first generation. If my mother hadn't migrated with her parents on a boat to America from religious persecution in Poland, me, my children, and their children would not exist. I broke down crying when I was invited to speak to a school in Warsaw in 2003 to students whose grandparents had been Jewish, died in the Holocaust, or were hidden, but they and their parents were no longer of Judaic faith.

My protagonists are Jewish because that is where I am coming from. I've written a bar mitzvah comedy novel with Korean friends in it and their customs, a Black teacher in a predominantly white suburban school, but it is only most recently when I did two picture books on Muslim/Jewish relationships that they were included on lists of diverse books. I always write about all kinds of people. I live in a big world. We all do.

I appreciate the grand reference to "a canon of literature," but I like to think, librarians can, and often expose communities to "the other." There are many "others." Maybe, Beni can be shared to show beliefs and ideas to a population that doesn't have a lot of Jewish people as well, and that individual or class or library hour might see who we are by seeing the love within this one extended family. Which brings us full circle. The more people exposed to Judaism through my children's books, the more we become understood. Familiar. Just as people. Or sometimes, even, as sweet little bears.

It might make a drip in any ocean, but when we are living in a time, again, with hate and censorship, it is only a step away and reminiscent of 1933 in Nazi Germany, the beginning of an impossible time for Jewish people, and then the world at large. When Elie Wiesel won the Nobel Peace Prize, he said, and it has been used over and over in terms of book banning, "We must take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented."[2]

Families are families. They eat together and connect through that very act. Young and old and in-between, share and joke, plant and cook, build and grow, argue and hug, experiencing the challenges and joys that life offers. Families are diverse—emotionally, psychologically, and otherwise.



What's next for you as an author/artist?

I have several manuscripts I am working on. Different types of books. A mystery middle-grade novel. Nothing like Beni. Some in the drawer. Many of them are good. Solid. It's harder to sell a book now because books have fads, even though children don't as readers. There is one I am passionate about—combining the art of my large paintings and my illustrative style. It would be a passion project. I am fascinated by other worlds. Stars. Light. Dreams. We'll see . . .

My new picture book is *Gingerbread Dreidels*, illustrated by Thai Phuong (Charlesbridge/Penguin Random, Fall 2024) about two families of different faiths coming together to celebrate Christmas and Chanukah. Both these holidays will take place on the exact same day in 2024! From day one, I suggested that one of the grandmothers in the book be of a diverse background, an Ethiopian Jew.

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Granting Success

Talk Story as a Community of Practice

TINA CHAN, TIFFANY MALLERY, PATTY SUMIRE MCGOWAN, AND SARAH NGUYỄN

As members of the Asian/Pacific American Library Association (APALA) Family Literacy Focus committee, we manage the Talk Story grant program. We hope this article will prepare you and your organization for Asian American, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander (AANHPI), and American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) storytelling-centered programming. We strive to provide informational and monetary resources for libraries and community organizations to implement culturally competent programming for AANHPI and AIAN communities.

What is Family Literacy? It is

- parents, adults, and youth learning together;
- intergenerational learning and knowledge of reading, writing, and especially of social and cultural histories; and
- youth influenced by the learning attitudes and literacy behaviors demonstrated by adults.

Family literacy programming supports parents, grandparents, and caregivers as a child's first teachers, following the understanding that learning is a lifelong process. Youth and their motivation to learn are influenced by the learning attitudes and literacy behaviors demonstrated by the adults in their homes and communities.[1] Literacy behavior extends beyond print literacy and includes digital, financial, culinary, health, document, information, and media literacies, and more.[2] Talk Story: Sharing Stories, Sharing Culture supports opportunities for adult family members to build their own literacy skills as they strengthen their youth's literacy skills.

What Is Talk Story?

Talk Story: Sharing Stories, Sharing Culture is a family literacy program that reaches out to AANHPI and AIAN families and their intergenerational community members. Talk Story celebrates and affirms Asian, Pacific Islander, and American Indian intersectionality through books, oral traditions, art, and more to provide interactive and enriching experiences.



Tina Chan *is the Reference Services Program Manager and Humanities Librarian at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where she is the liaison to the global languages section and the writing program.* ***Tiffany Mallery*** *is earning her masters of library science at Simmons University.* ***Patty Sumire McGowan*** *is the 2022–2024 APALA Family Literacy Focus Co-Chair and the Cataloger and Metadata Librarian at Borough of Manhattan Community College.* ***Sarah Nguyễn*** *(not pictured) is co-chair of the APALA Family Literacy Focus committee 2022–2023 and a doctoral student at the University of Washington's Information School.*

How to Apply for Talk Story Grants

You may apply for either an APALA grant or an AILA grant, but not to both organizations. Two $500 grants will be offered by each organization. Applications must be received by March 15, 2024.

Please submit a complete and detailed application, including a statement of financial or economic need, narrative describing how the grant addresses community needs and promotes the Talk Story mission, an explanation of how your program empowers AANHPI and/or AIAN communities, and a proposed budget.

Here are some tips for preparing a successful grant application.

- **Demonstrate service gaps**. Example: Joseph P. Addabbo School (Queens, NY) highlighted funding gaps that did not effectively support opportunities for enrichment for their high needs student population, which included 19% ELL (English language learner) students.
- **Address demographics.** The Novi (MI) Public Library intentionally identified their distinct Asian communities.
- **Describe unique programming.** How can you use the funds in a unique way? Example: Springdale (AR) Public Library used their grant money to create their own video and book media based on their existing collection.
- **Get community members involved.** Joseph P. Addabbo School put together an intergenerational reading buddy program.
- **Predict future benefits.** Manoa (HI) Public Library set up community storytelling sessions and recorded them for future viewers.

The awards for the $500 grants will be announced in May 2024. For more information, visit https://www.apalaweb.org/talkstorytogether/resources/ *or email familylit@apalaweb.org.*

This program derives from the Hawaiian expression "talk story" that means "to chat informally" or "to shoot the breeze." A linguistic scholar describes it as "a rambling personal experience mixed with folk materials,"[3] while author Maxine Hong Kingston uses the term to describe a Chinese/Chinese-American storytelling style, which is "an oral tradition of history, mythology, genealogy, bedtime stories, and how-to stories that have been passed down through generations, an essential part of family and community life."[4]

In practice, rewarding Talk Story programming has been carried out as a student-senior reading buddy program, partnering with indigenous storytellers and supporting community AANHPI and AIAN businesses and authors.

Some of the past grant recipients have included public libraries, tribal libraries, school libraries, academic libraries, and nonprofit organizations. &

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Couples Who Collaborate

Steve Jenkins and Robin Page

MARY-KATE SABLESKI

Robin Page and Steve Jenkins are the husband and wife/author and illustrator team behind more than forty books for children, well-known and beloved for their clever exploration of the animal world. Sadly, Steve passed away on December 26, 2021.

For lovers of children's literature, he left behind a legacy of creativity, curiosity, and kindness that will be felt for generations to come. Robin shares Steve's commitment to making a difference in the lives of children through the books they created.

Jenkins began his career in New York City, working in advertising and design. He and Page started their own design firm in 1982. Nightly read-aloud sessions with their children led them to use their artistic skills to make books for children.

In his career, Jenkins wrote, illustrated, or art-directed more than eighty books for children, many of those with Page. His books were translated into nineteen different languages and awarded numerous accolades. Their book *What Do You Do With a Tail Like This?* was awarded a Caldecott Honor in 2004.

Jenkins' art was marked by its distinctive collage style, which brought out the personalities and intricate details of the animals he created. He had an insatiable curiosity for science and the animal world, clearly evident throughout each of his stunning books.

Page has illustrated more than twenty-five books for children, many of them in collaboration with her husband.

Page trained as an art designer and illustrator and has illustrated several books of her own including, *A Chicken Followed Me Home* (2015), *Seeds Move!* (2019), and *Shall We Dance?* (2023).

Together, the two impacted the field of children's publishing through their instinctive mix of writing, illustrating, and design skills, as well as their attentiveness to the questions children ask about the animal world. In this interview, Page shares her favorite moments in the work she and Jenkins did together. She offers a poignant tribute to the legacy they built together as a quintessential and enduring couple who collaborate.

Q: How did you and Steve meet?

Robin: We both went to design school in North Carolina. Steve was getting his masters, and I was getting my undergraduate degree. We met while he was working as a teaching assistant in my classes. I finished my program a little early, and Steve wanted to go to New York to work. So, I applied to Cooper Union Design School, was accepted, and we went to New York. Steve worked for a great design firm in New York City. We were doing quite a bit of freelance work on the side, so we decided to start our own design business. We did a lot of designing for the *New York Times* and fashion design companies. Once we had children, and we started reading books to them each night, we decided we wanted to make books for them, and for other children. I had already collected so many children's books because I enjoyed the format.

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.*

From *The Bird Book*: Design by Steve Jenkins and Robin Page; illustrations by Steve Jenkins. Used by permission.

With two small children, Steve decided that working a full-time job and trying to work on picture books was a bit too hectic. He was literally going to work, coming home for supper, and then going back to work. It was too much! So, we moved upstate New York, and we still did not feel far enough away from the business to be able to separate and work on our own projects. On a whim, we visited Boulder (CO), and decided to move here.

It was that year that Steve published *Biggest, Strongest, Fastest* (1997). It was the first successful book, really, and it is still in print today. We were still doing our design business at this time on the side, too. But then, we published *What Do You Do with a Tail Like This?* and we received a royalty check in the mail. We were both so surprised that we could make money from doing this work we enjoyed so much!

We had so much more fun doing books for children than the freelance work, so eventually we stopped doing the design business and started making books exclusively. We enjoyed the independence, and the autonomy to push ourselves on our projects. Since our kids were still young, we also appreciated being able to set our own schedules and goals. So many of the early books came from [our children] Alec and Page's questions as children, so it was work that grew from our family.

Q: What process did you and Steve follow when you created books together?

Robin: When we started, one of us would just have an idea, and we would take it from there. Steve's brain was so amazing, and I would not have been able to do some of the books we did without him. Those books are really his. The books we did together tended to be a little more simple in format and style, as opposed to those we wrote or illustrated separately. We were so comfortable working together on projects in our design business, that it was so easy to go back and forth. It was just easy, in the shared space we created in an old artist's studio in our home, to look over each other's shoulder at our respective desks. We both read each other's copy, and provided feedback. Because our brains worked so differently from one another, we were able to offer other perspectives on what should be included.

We worked together since 1981, so it was just natural for us to work together on a book project. We were very honest with each other. When a couple is also raising children together, it makes the collaboration process work very seamlessly. It was a group effort to do the best that we could, both in raising children and making books.

Since Steve passed away, I have been working to finish *Why Elephants Have Big Ears* (2023). I also had to finish *The Bird Book* (2022) as well as a counting book we were working on together. We also had another idea for a book, called something like, *Run? Don't Run?,* focused on what to do when you see a gorilla, for example, and I've been working on that one, too. Knowing my own weaknesses, and how Steve really complemented them, I

have reached out to my youngest son, Jamie, to help write the new books. He has a talent for writing. I feel comfortable designing, and I am getting more comfortable illustrating, but I am still not very comfortable writing.

Q: It sounds like a future interview will have to take place on this collaboration! How wonderful to have children who share your artistic talents.

Robin: My daughter is a modern dancer. She just had a baby, so I made a little book for him, which I hope to pitch to an editor soon. Yesterday, when I was getting the copy together for the counting book, she and Jamie came over and read through it. Alec, my other son, is a physicist, and is very quiet and very much like Steve. He went to art school initially, but decided to pursue physics as a career. Jamie works with me here in the studio, which has been a delight.

Q: How much editing happened between you and Steve, before sending your manuscripts to editors?

Robin: A lot. For the cut paper that Steve did, there could not be a lot of editing, because of the nature of the art. With my work with digital art, there was more editing. But with the manuscripts, he and I would work back and forth to edit and rewrite. I have a lot of the manuscripts Steve worked on, and the rewriting, comments, and revision can be seen. Our editors are so capable. They see the problems with a child understanding the text, and guide us to make changes, but they never rewrite the text for us. They just bring up the question, or the direction, and make suggestions to help get it right. I am so lucky to continue working with both of our editors, who are phenomenal women, who have been working with Steve and me for a long time.

Q: What was it like for you and Steve to work with other authors?

Robin: Both Steve and I have illustrated for other people. Steve consistently illustrated for three authors or so as an illustrator. In his case, he did not design the book, he just illustrated it, and gave it over to the editors and art directors. Typically, authors and illustrators do not have much contact with one another. For me, having input on the design of the book was critical. When I started with Beach Lane, I just requested that I also design the books I illustrated. All the books I have worked on with other authors, I have also designed them. I just felt that, I have been a designer all my life, so it is more natural for me to control that part of the process.

Q: What opportunities did you and Steve have to share your work with children together?

Robin: We did a lot of work together sharing our books with children. Right before COVID, we were on an international tour. We were in Dubai, which was a fantastic experience. The children, teachers, and librarians were so great. We worked with children from kindergarten all the way up to high school. We did a lot of workshops on cut paper and producing little books with them, and it was so much fun. Steve and I loved working with the people of Dubai, and we were both sad to cut our international tour short. I am trying to continue the work now, via Zoom, in Saudi Arabia, with third, fourth, and fifth graders. Using Zoom is not like being there in person with the children. I cannot share the art with them face to face, and it makes it difficult to really show the full piece. But it is still a rewarding experience to work with the children.

Locally, Steve and I would often go to schools around Boulder. Steve was asked to go to many schools on his own, and often I would just go along with him. When we would go into under-resourced, high-need schools, Steve really struggled with how to best help the children and teachers. Particularly when we would then go to a more affluent school where the students and teachers have everything they need—books, supplies, resources, etc. He struggled with that difference, and what it meant for children, and how to help them have access to resources.

Q: Your books offer so many connections for children who are curious about the animal world. I am sure it was a treat to have you both visit!

Robin: Workshops were particularly fun. We enjoyed giving them a problem, like how many ways do animals solve this problem,

Selected Books by Steve Jenkins and Robin Page

Why Do Elephants Have Big Ears. Little, Brown, 2023. 40p.
The Bird Book. Clarion, 2022. 48p.
The Animal Toolkit: How Animals Use Tools. Clarion, 2022. 32p.
The Shark Book. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2021. 40p.
What Do You Do If You Work at the Zoo? Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2020. 40p.
Look Again. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2019. 32p.
The Frog Book. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2019. 40p.
Who Am I: An Animal Guessing Game. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2018. 32p.
Look at Me! Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2018. 32p.
Flying Frogs and Walking Fish. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016. 32p.
Creature Features. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014. 32p.
My First Day. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013. 32p.
How to Swallow a Pig. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013. 32p.
Sisters & Brothers. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013. 32p.
How to Clean a Hippopotamus. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2010. 32p.
Move! Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2006. 32p.
I See a Kookaburra. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2004. 32p.
What Do You Do with a Tail Like This? Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2003. 32p.

From *Why Do Elephants Have Big Ears?*: Design by Steve Jenkins and Robin Page; illustrations by Robin Page. Used by permission.

and ask them to show us through the art. Steve often talked about that, and how the collage and rough edges of his art can help bring imagination to the situation, and give a different kind of feeling, rather than just looking at a photograph. It puts you in a different place. He enjoyed sharing this experience with children during our school visits.

Q: What was Steve's favorite book he published?

Robin: *The Animal Book* (2013). He worked so hard on it, and it took a really long time. He was proud of it, even when it came back.

Q: And yours?

Robin: While making *Creature Features* (2014), we had pictures of animal portraits all over the wall. Steve really wanted to do animal portraits. People would come through here and describe why they thought the animals looked the way they did all the time. So, Steve's thought was—I know, let's just ask them, why they look the way they do. And, I thought that was great! So, that is my favorite book. I love the concept of it, I love the simple design of it, I love the art of it. It's a great book, that just talks about why animals look the way they do.

Q: Robin, what is next for you?

Robin: Well, I am working on the counting book that Steve and I started together, as well as the *Run? Don't Run?* book I mentioned earlier. A lot of the art that Steve completed for some of the books, such as *Why Elephants Have Big Ears* and the counting book, needed to be redone due to changes in publishers over time, so I am working on redesigning some of his art. It is a mentally difficult task for me to complete. But Steve would have likely redone them anyway, because he probably would have thought he could have done them better now. Honestly!

Through Beach Lane, *Shall We Dance?* (2023) just came out. Though I did not write it, *Sleepy* is the next book I am working on illustrating. I feel like there is a spider book somewhere out there, too, because they are just so interesting. I am also working on compiling some of Steve's infographic books he wrote for younger readers into a larger volume.

Q: Do you have a favorite memory of your work with Steve?

Robin: So many of our ideas came from going out and having a date night. You know how when you are away from the kids, but all you can think about is the kids? So many good ideas came out of that time we had together, talking about our kids and their questions. We also really enjoyed going to schools together. We had the same feeling about wanting to make a difference in the lives of children, particularly those in under-resourced schools. We both always felt the children we met, their questions, their interests, were incredible.

For us, it was always to push the work to the best place it could be. We were two different personalities, but we shared that goal, to get to the best place the book could be by the time it was sent off. That said, it is very difficult to get a book back from a publisher, and not see all the mistakes, and not think you could do that just a little better. Steve and I both always felt that way when books came back in their published format. We were always striving to make the work the best it could be in that moment. &

Thinking Outside the Square

Cultivating Adult and Youth Creativity

By 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**, ALSC's 2022 Distinguished Service Award winner, 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.*

Although we have experienced great advances in scientific and technological knowledge over the decades, research suggests that the pace of innovation is slowing down. Creativity is "the process of having original ideas that have value,"[1] yet a recent article surveying decades worth of data and patents reports that innovative papers and patents in science and technology are becoming less disruptive over time.[2]

Since 1990, children have experienced compelling losses in scores on the Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking (TTCT).[3] In 2010, educational psychologist, Kyung Hee Kim coined the term "creativity crisis" to refer to this steady decline.

Having a creative thought and following it through with action is what has enabled humans to evolve. Without creativity, we would not have vaccines to combat illnesses, we would not have flush toilets, and we would not have libraries with electronic check-out systems. Creativity gives us the ability to face new problems and the courage to envision and try different solutions until we find the right one.

Diminishing creativity is a crisis, but libraries can be champions for its revival. The resources shared in this column unpack creativity, address misconceptions, and share strategies for nurturing creativity in adults and children. We even share some of our favorite picture books on the subject.

Creativity, Education, and Innovation

The Runaway Species: How Human Creativity Remakes the World

bit.ly/41UfauC

David Eagleman and Anthony Brandt's *The Runaway Species: How Human Creativity Remakes the World* uses real examples from the arts and sciences to describe how humans have been able to innovate throughout history.[4] They explain three cognitive operations that facilitate the development of new ideas: bending (taking something original and twisting it out of shape); breaking (taking something completely apart); blending (merging two or more sources). They also describe the importance of having a creative mentality, along with the need to build and rebuild ideas (even if they're already good), generating a lot of options, moving beyond accepted standards, and engaging in risk taking. The book concludes with examples of outside-the-box thinking from business and education.

TEDxTucson George Land

bit.ly/41ND8HA

In this talk, George Land provides an overview of the history of innovation and the importance of creativity. In an effort to understand the origins of creativity, Land and his team administered an Imaginative Thinking test to children to look at their ability to take a problem and come up with new and imaginative solutions. They found that 98% of five-year-olds fell into the "genius" category of creative thinking. When they were tested at age 15, that number dropped to

12%. Only 2% of adults tested fell into that category. Land posits that educating youth to use divergent (imaginative) thinking and convergent (evaluative) thinking at the same time diminishes their ability to be creative because the neurons keep fighting each other and can no longer freely operate as they would in the mind of a five-year-old.

Why Is Creativity Important in Education? | A Conversation with Sir Ken Robinson

bit.ly/3LERcO6

Sir Ken Robinson provides an explanation for why creativity is overlooked in education and highlights the economic imperative for teaching creative thinking in schools. In addition to having a less creative workforce, the world is becoming more complicated, nuanced, and interconnected, and we need to find better ways of living together. Creativity is also needed to help people find their passion and purpose.

Children, Creativity, and the Real Key to Intelligence

bit.ly/427a9hL

Alison Gopnik explores why children seem to be so much more creative than adults in this piece for the Association for Psychological Science (APS) and juxtaposes children's "common-sense learning capacities" with artificial intelligence (AI). Unlike machines, children are abstract thinkers who build "intuitive theories of physics, biology, and math, and of the psychological and social world, too." They are also active learners, who experiment and somehow "find the creative sweet spot between the obvious and the crazy."

Nurturing Creativity

Sir Ken Robinson—Can Creativity Be Taught?

bit.ly/3HmHz4f

Sir Ken Robinson defines creativity and maintains that it's possible to be creative at anything; creativity is not just limited to the arts. He explains that if teaching is about giving people tools, opportunities, and mentoring, then creativity can be taught and assessed. The criteria we use to assess originality and value, however, will differ according to age and subject, but once identified, can become part of a curriculum.

Ten Tips for Cultivating Creativity

bit.ly/3LiKj3w

Michael Resnick, professor of learning and research at MIT Media Lab, shares practical information for cultivating creativity from his book *Lifelong Kindergarten: Cultivating Creativity through Projects, Passion, Peers, and Play*.[5] The premise of his work is that creativity is an iterative process already utilized by our youngest learners. He refers to this process as the Creative Learning Spiral, which consists of five components: imagine, create, play, share, and reflect. Resnick shares ten strategies for helping children through each of the stages: show examples to spark imagination; encourage messing around; provide a wide range of materials (traditional materials and new technologies); embrace all types of making; emphasize the process, not the product; extend time for projects; help children find others to work with; get involved as a collaborator; ask authentic questions; share your own reflections.

Picture Books that Spark Creative Thinking

Journey by Aaron Becker
How to Draw a Happy Cat by Ethan Berlin
There's a Witch in Your Book by Tom Fletcher
Lots of Dots by Craig Frazier
Hey, Bruce! An Interactive Book by Ryan T. Higgins
Harold and the Purple Crayon by Crockett Johnson
Going Places by Paul A. Reynolds and Peter A. Reynolds
It Looked like Spilt Milk by Charles Green Shaw
Solutions for Cold Feet and Other Little Problems by Carey Sookocheff
Press Here by Herve Tullet
The Year We Learned to Fly by Jacqueline Woodson
What Do You Do with an Idea? by Kobi Yamada

The Cure for the Creativity Crisis

bit.ly/41LMXWM

The Cure for the Creativity Crisis provides a brief synopsis of the crisis and identifies three solutions given by Dr. Kyung Hee Kim: cultivating creative climates, nurturing creative attitudes, and developing creative thinking skills. The four creative climates needed for innovation are: soil (diverse resources and experiences), sun (inspiration and encouragement), storm (challenges), and space (freedom to dream). Twenty-seven attitudes (e.g., open-mindedness, curiosity, resilience, goal-setting) have been associated with creativity that help individuals navigate the different climates. Lastly, as Kim explains in her lecture,[6] the creative thinking process involves a set of stages and the use of convergent and divergent thinking as needed.

Five Ways to Boost Creativity on Your Team

bit.ly/3HrAEqj

Five simple strategies for supporting creativity are provided in this Harvard Business Review piece written by design professors: generate a lot of ideas, even if they might seem ridiculous; create a space for failure; provide time for thinking and exploration; look for problems; delay decisions until ideas have been shared and processed. &

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2. Michael Park et al., "Papers and Patents Are Becoming Less Disruptive Over Time," *Nature* 613 (2023): 138–44.
3. Kyung Hee Kim, "The Creativity Crisis: The Decrease in Creative Thinking Scores on the Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking," *Creativity Research Journal* 23, no. 4 (2011): 285–95.
4. David Eagleman and Anthony Brandt, *The Runaway Species: How Human Creativity Remakes the World* (United Kingdom: Catapult, 2017).
5. Michael Resnick, *Lifelong Kindergarten: Cultivating Creativity through Projects, Passion, Peers, and Play* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2017).
6. Kyung Hee Kim, "The 2012 Torrance Lecture: The Creativity Crisis," YouTube, UGA Mary Frances Early College of Education, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=clDZLfwzDok.

Advocating for a Decolonized Thanksgiving

By María Vega

María Vega *is a Youth Services Senior Librarian with the Broward County Library System in Coral Springs, FL, and is a member of REFORMA and the ALSC Public Awareness and Advocacy Committee.*

Thanksgiving is deeply ingrained in North American culture, often associated with family gatherings, delicious food, and expressions of gratitude.

But the history of Thanksgiving is also intertwined with colonialism, oppression, and violence against Indigenous peoples. It is crucial that children's librarians take steps to decolonize Thanksgiving and promote a more accurate and inclusive understanding of the holiday. The lived experiences and ongoing struggles of Indigenous peoples need to be acknowledged and honored.

Decolonizing Thanksgiving means recognizing and centering the perspectives, cultures, and histories of Indigenous peoples. Librarians need to critically examine the myths and narratives that have been perpetuated about the holiday and work to actively dismantle harmful stereotypes and biases in our materials, programs, and displays.

Children's librarians play a vital role in shaping the perspectives and attitudes of young people and have the power to create safe and welcoming spaces for all children in their communities. Here are some specific steps to decolonize Thanksgiving and celebrate Native American culture year-round.

Provide Access to Diverse and Authentic Materials

Librarians need to ensure that collections include a wide range of materials that reflect diverse experiences. Native American peoples should be portrayed as complex, with their own histories, cultures, and perspectives. Look for books that center and empower Native American voices and that celebrate Indigenous cultures and traditions. Include books that acknowledge the violent and complex history of colonization and avoid mythologizing or romanticizing this history.

Books should provide accurate information about the history of Thanksgiving and include the perspectives of Native American peoples. Evaluate collections to remove inaccurate and outdated material and books with stereotypes and caricatures. The American Indian Youth Literature Award and *American Indians in Children's Literature* blog are both outstanding resources for material selection.

Partner with Local Indigenous Communities

Invite Indigenous speakers and educators to share their perspectives, and provide a space for community members to engage in discussions and ask questions. Host storytelling sessions, art programs, or music programs where Indigenous community members share their own stories and traditions around Thanksgiving. This shows children that Native Americans have not disappeared but are valued members of their community.

Reexamine Library Programming and Displays

Take a critical look at programming and displays to ensure that they do not perpetuate harmful stereotypes or myths about Indigenous peoples. Create

inclusive and respectful programming and displays that feature books, artwork, and other resources by Native American creators. Display artwork that reflects Indigenous perspectives and Indigenous cultures in the present. Include Native American authors in book displays and programs year-round, not just in November, and use land acknowledgments in your programs.

Incorporate Native American Songs and Music into Programming

Use both traditional and modern music. NativeRadio.com is an excellent resource for streaming Native American music. Children can learn about the different instruments and styles used in Indigenous cultures or the music can be played as background music to an activity.

Partner with Knowledgeable Organizations

Many museums offer educational materials and resources that can supplement children's learning and promote a deeper understanding of the holiday. The National Museum of the American Indian (Washington, DC) and the Plimoth Patuxet Museums (Plymouth, MA) both offer virtual field trips and crafts centered around Native American Thanksgiving experiences, and the latter has an online game that can be easily converted into a library program. The Abbe Museum in Bar Harbor, ME, has a Thanksgiving True or False game that challenges common Thanksgiving myths that would also make a fun library program.

The Native American Film Festival and the Red Nation International Film Festival showcase and celebrate the work of Native American filmmakers. Short films and documentary winners that are child friendly include *The Thunderbird* by Levi Judson Harris and *Angakusajaujuq—The Shaman's Apprentice* by Zacharias Kunuk. The library could host a Thanksgiving short film festival and encourage children to make their own short films.

There are many activities centered on Native American peoples, from creating thankful collages featuring diverse groups of people to having children design their own Wampum belt after studying traditional belt designs. The American Indian Youth Literature Award and other ALA youth media awards recognize outstanding books by Native authors and illustrators that are perfect for storytimes and programs.

Most importantly, don't limit coverage of Indigenous peoples to only one month a year. Take the time to learn about the festivals and holidays of local Native Americans and incorporate such materials and resources into displays, programs, and activities year-round. &

Membership Profiles

Compiled by Sarah Jo Zaharako

Carrie Banks
Photo by Gregg Richards, Brooklyn Public Library

Eti Berland

Ana-Elba Pavon

Carrie Banks, Supervising Librarian, Inclusive Services at Brooklyn Public Library

How has ALSC contributed to your work in libraries?

ALSC introduced me to colleagues around the country doing work like mine, which has allowed us all to learn from each other and grow. When I started in 1997, there were very few of us. Now there are many more, but still not enough.

What project are you excited to be working on?

I am enjoying rebuilding services after the pandemic. Things have changed so drastically in the disability community that anticipating and responding to the new landscape takes thought. For example, the community meetings I used to attend in person are now virtual. It is much easier to work a room in person than over chat, but it can be done! We did great work during the pandemic and integrating what we learned then into our day-to-day now is critical.

What challenges you in librarianship?

The low expectation for students with disabilities that many people hold. Disabled children and their families have been rejected so many times, we must go out of our way to let them know they are truly welcome at the library. I see my job as countering that narrative, going from family to family to invite them to the library and show them what we can offer them. Another challenge is the censorship of the voices of disabled people and of the BIPOC and LGBTQ communities. Low pay is the third challenge. It is hard to recruit and keep staff.

What brings you joy?

Using American Sign Language or picture communication systems with a child, validating their use outside of school. Helping a student get the services they need. Being told by an autistic middle schooler that he didn't know boys could sew at an adaptive makerspace program. The look on a child's face when I tell them that I have learning disabilities too and I love to read.

What are you looking forward to?

Two upcoming ALA publications—the first is accessibility guidelines for small and rural libraries and the second is the updated guidelines for service to individuals who are incarcerated or detained. Both will address the needs of children and youth.

What is your favorite book(s) to share with children?

Where the Sidewalk Ends by Shel Silverstein. I love humor and the integration of words and pictures. *My Brother Charlie* by Holly Robinson Peete and Ryan Elizabeth Peete. The celebration of the relationship between the Peete twins, one autistic and one neurotypical, makes me grin ear to ear. For teens, *Last Night at the Telegraph Club* by Malinda Lo is just astonishing, heartfelt, and affirming.

Eti Berland, Youth Services School Engagement Librarian, Wilmette (IL) Public Library

Why did you join ALSC?

I previously worked as an academic librarian and wanted to work in youth services. Getting involved in ALSC, from volunteering at the Newbery-Caldecott-Legacy banquet, to joining committees, helped me connect with a community of people passionate about supporting young people and their families and enabled me to make the leap into the unknown that I needed. Most importantly, I have made lifelong friends and mentors through ALSC who help me grow as a librarian.

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

One of my all-time favorite library programs has been our Caldecott Club. While we talk about the art of evaluating picture books, we also explore how stories make us feel, how illustration can transform our understanding of ourselves and our world, and how we can learn to listen and share our perspectives with each other.

I was especially grateful for the opportunity to collaborate on a virtual program with Brian Wilson at Evanston Public Library in the fall of 2021 (along with many other awesome staff members) and experience joy during a challenging time. (By the way, our winner was *Lift* by Minh Lê, illustrated by Dan Santat.)

What brings you joy?

I love collaborating with colleagues, whether across departments or even neighboring libraries, to bring our passion and expertise together to build experiences and services for our community. We dream big to come up with creative projects and then use our practical knowledge to make them a reality. From a virtual Comics Fest to collaborative author visits to community outreach experiences, there is so much we can do together.

I also love making videos celebrating new children's books by twirling around to reveal them. Books really do make me dance with joy, and I hope I bring this energy to my work with kids and families.

How have you seen librarianship evolve as a result of the pandemic?

We learned so many things from the pandemic, and we can apply this knowledge about engagement, resource sharing, collaboration, and accessibility into the future. I have had the opportunity to host several virtual author visits over the past years, which expanded to collaborative visits across our library system. I am currently on the Illinois Libraries Present Programming Committee, which helps plan virtual author visits, including youth authors like Kwame Alexander and Jarrett J. Krosoczka. I'm grateful that virtual visits are still being prioritized as a resource our libraries provide to our communities and beyond.

What is your favorite book(s) to share with children?

How can I choose my favorite star in the sky? I know it's a cliche, but my favorite book is the one that I can share that opens the door for reading for young people, which is part of why I'm so passionate about book access. You never know which book you share can become a child's favorite. Some books I've shared recently are *The Serpent's Secret* by Sayantani DasGupta, *Red Panda & Moon Bear* by Jarod Roselló, and *An American Story* by Kwame Alexander.

Ana-Elba Pavon, Semi-retired/On-Call Librarian, San Francisco Public Library

How has ALSC contributed to your work in libraries?

During my National REFORMA presidency, we celebrated the Pura Belpré Award's tenth anniversary. This led to more open communication between REFORMA and ALSC regarding our mutual initiatives like the Pura Belpré Award and *Dia de los niños*.

What challenges you in librarianship?

Keeping up with all the technology. There is so much to learn and remember. Then it changes!

What project are you excited to be working on?

I am taking an Excel class. As aforementioned, keeping up with all the technology is a challenge. When completed, I will take an exam to be certified in Excel. I am really excited about it because I have rediscovered that I love to learn. One of my co-managers once shared that she had observed that I like to teach, which is true. But I also love to learn new things.

What brings you joy?

Besides Disney? Helping people in the community. I particularly like helping people that I know would not have gotten the service they could have gotten if they hadn't come to me. Just yesterday, I helped a Spanish-speaking patron at the San Francisco Public Library's Main Library. He had already spent time at UC Berkeley and Stanford Libraries and was hoping to find books by a particular author in Spanish that he could borrow. Because I spoke Spanish, this made the interaction much easier. But because of my background in Spanish acquisitions, I was able to fully answer his questions.

What is your favorite book(s) to share with children?

One that comes to mind right now is *Bark, George* by Jules Feiffer. I've been volunteering with Make-A-Wish, and in one of the interviews, the person interviewing asked me to name a favorite book. The first thing that came to mind was *Bark, George*. The next time she interviewed me, she told me that she had purchased the book for her grandchild and that he absolutely loved it! &

Fostering Racial Literacy with Children's Literature

By Grace Enriquez and Detra Price-Dennis

Dr. Grace Enriquez *is a Professor of Language and Literacy at Lesley University in Cambridge, MA. A former English Language Arts teacher and literacy staff developer, she bridges her work with teachers and students with ethnographic and critical research in high-needs urban populations to examine their responses to literacy instruction in school contexts.* ***Dr. Detra Price-Dennis*** *is a Professor of Teaching and Learning in the Department of Teaching and Learning and the Director for Digital Education and Innovation for the College of Education and Human Ecology at The Ohio State University. The authors are the creators of a webinar for ALSC, Fostering Racial Literacy with Children's Literature, that is available on demand https://elearning.ala.org /local/catalog/view/product.php?productid=400.*

The social construction of race in the United States is deeply rooted in our lives and reflected in our K-12 programs, policies, curriculum, and instructional practices. As more challenges are levied at books that reflect the lives and experiences of racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse students, we propose racial literacy as a framework to guide critical conversations in response.

What is Racial Literacy?

Racial literacy is a skill and practice in which individuals inquire about the construction of race and its intersection with social systems and institutions.[1] Children exhibit racial literacy with the ability to "identify, in professionally published and student-generated texts, concepts related to race and racism, and exercise their skills in discussing the complexity of these topics."[2] The goal, then, is for individuals to adopt an anti-racist stance and work toward social equity.

Sealey-Ruiz[3] identifies six components of racial literacy: critical love, critical humility, critical reflection, historical literacy, archaeology of self, and interruption.

These components work in tandem with the following three tenets of racial literacy: question assumptions, engage in critical conversations, and practice reflexivity.

These concepts are united around a deep commitment to decolonizing K-12 literacy instruction to create a foundation for equitable and humanizing learning. Thus, if librarians and educators develop instructional strategies with literature that reflect these ideas, then racial literacy among K-12 children will increase and position everyone to identify, disrupt, and work towards dismantling racist ideologies that circulate in their communities and cause harm in our society.

Why Focus on Racial Literacy with Children's Literature?

Libraries across the country are facing unprecedented political and censorship challenges that seek to curb the availability of books and programs on race (among other markers of identity).[4] Public schools are also being subjected to pending legislation that seek to limit how race can be taught in K-12 classrooms. Policy groups and grassroots organizers have circulated talking points and manifestos about critical race theory, culturally responsive education, equity education, social emotional learning, diversity, equity, and inclusion programs, and LGBTQ+ rights. The common denominator across these topics is the need for librarians and educators to design programs and curriculum and engage in instructional strategies that not only meet the educational needs of their students, but also generate the capacity for them to build critical thinking about power, equity, and justice as civic-minded citizens in our country.

Despite partisan rhetoric circulating to ban discussions about race, there is no denying that race and racism are indelible aspects of all children's lives. Developing racial literacy enables children to inquire into the existence and effects of race, other social constructs, and the institutionalized systems that harness those constructs to affect their lived experiences and representations in US society.[5] Children's literature facilitates racial literacy development in multiple ways, fostering children's abilities to read not just the words on a page, but also the world in which those pages were created and now exist. In doing so, they learn how to question assumptions, perceive the sociocultural contexts around them, and advocate for social equity and change.

To illustrate these points, we share two titles, one picture book and one novel, that exemplify how children's literature can be powerful tools for developing racial literacy with young readers.

The picture book *Beauty Woke* (Versify, 2022), written by NoNieqa Ramos and illustrated by Paola Escobar, can be used with all ages to guide inquiries into racial literacy. Blending the genres of poetry and fairy tale, as well as incorporating both Spanish and English, *Beauty Woke* retells the Sleeping Beauty tale for a modern, culturally diverse, and socially conscious world. In this book, we see Beauty, a Puerto Rican girl of Taino and African descent, shutting down and disengaging with the world not because of a needle prick from a spindle, but from her observations of the racist, discriminatory, and systemically inequitable treatment of Black and brown people around her.

Beauty Woke provides clear examples of the critical love and reflection and the historical literacy needed to develop racial literacy, as Beauty's family and community reawaken her pride in her Boricua heritage through their love and support. In doing so, they facilitate the archaeology of self and interruption processes Beauty undergoes to affirm and celebrate her identity, "Lit with resistance, / imagination, / hope. / Rooted in truth."

To foster readers' racial literacy development, we can ask the following questions while sharing this book:

1. How does *Beauty Woke* serve as a window and mirror of your own intersectional identities?
2. What is the role of community in Beauty's awakening?
3. What does the term "woke" mean, and how is it used in various texts and contexts to discuss issues of racial justice and equity?

Another title that can help facilitate racial literacy development is Varian Johnson's novel *The Parker Inheritance* (Arthur A. Levine Books, 2019), which won a Coretta Scott King Author Honor. Preteen protagonists Candice and Brandon search for a treasure in their Southern town using clues left by Candice's grandmother. With a penchant for puzzles, Candice and Brandon use their literary knowledge and research skills to solve the clues, uncovering the town's secrets and one family's longstanding fight for social justice.

To foster readers' racial literacy development, we can ask the following questions while sharing this book:

1. How do our perceptions of other people impact the ways they are treated in society?
2. In what ways do the characters address issues of systemic racism in their town?
3. How could the characters in this book trace the historical legacy of racism and injustice throughout the history of their community? What would you want to see them do with this information?

Children's Literature as Resources for Racial Literacy Development

These are just two examples of the richness that children's literature provides for fostering racial literacy development with young readers. Other books that may be helpful for this goal should allow us to help children explore the ways characters are dealing with racial literacy and what it means to be in community with other people. In doing so, we can use children's literature to present opportunities to talk about race and racism and ask the necessary questions needed to interrupt and dismantle inequitable practices and policies in society. &

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THE LAST WORD

Passing Early Literacy Skills on to Others

By Stephanie Bange

While working for the Redwood City (CA) Public Library in the 1980s, I became a new mother. I sang songs, chanted Mother Goose rhymes, and recited short poems to my daughter while changing her diaper, nursing and burping her, and waiting in line at the store, knowing these were keys to enjoying the rhythm and rhyme of words, to build vocabulary, and to begin her love of reading.

She was eight weeks old when I first read aloud to her with a book in my lap. We found this experience very satisfying, as she enjoyed our closeness and listened to the words. My husband and I read aloud to both of our daughters as part of our bedtime ritual for years. Needless to say, they loved this time.

ALSC members have a golden opportunity to role model early literacy and to give parents tools.

- ALA Publishing updated ALSC member Betsy Diamant-Cohen's *Mother Goose on the Loose* (*MGOL*) in 2019. *MGOL* incorporates research-based books, rhymes, fingerplays, flannelboard stories, music, dance, and child-parent interaction into dynamic programs that bring whole families into the library. https://www.alastore.ala.org/content/mother-goose-loose-updated.

- Many libraries currently offer Baby Storytimes and MGOL to model reading to young children.

- Find ALSC Quicklist Committee's 2023 Birth-Preschool Summer Reading Booklist here: https://www.ala.org/alsc/sites/ala.org.alsc/files/content/compubs/booklists/summer/ALSC2023-summer-reading-BIRTH-PREK.pdf.

Photo by Stephanie Bange

- In 2015, ALSC launched Babies Need Words Every Day: Talk, Read, Sing, Play, with shareable resources designed to bridge the 30 Million Word Gap by providing parents with proven ways to build their children's literacy skills. http://www.ala.org/alsc/babiesneedwords.

- PLA and ALSC updated Every Child Ready to Read materials in 2010: http://everychildreadytoread.org/.

It is rewarding to see both my daughters as mothers today—reading to their children to instill a love of reading in them. Imagine my joy when watching Loren Long read his book *Otis* (Philomel, 2009) to my seven-week-old grandson, Otis! &

Stephanie Bange *is a longtime ALSC member and retired children's librarian from Ohio.*

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

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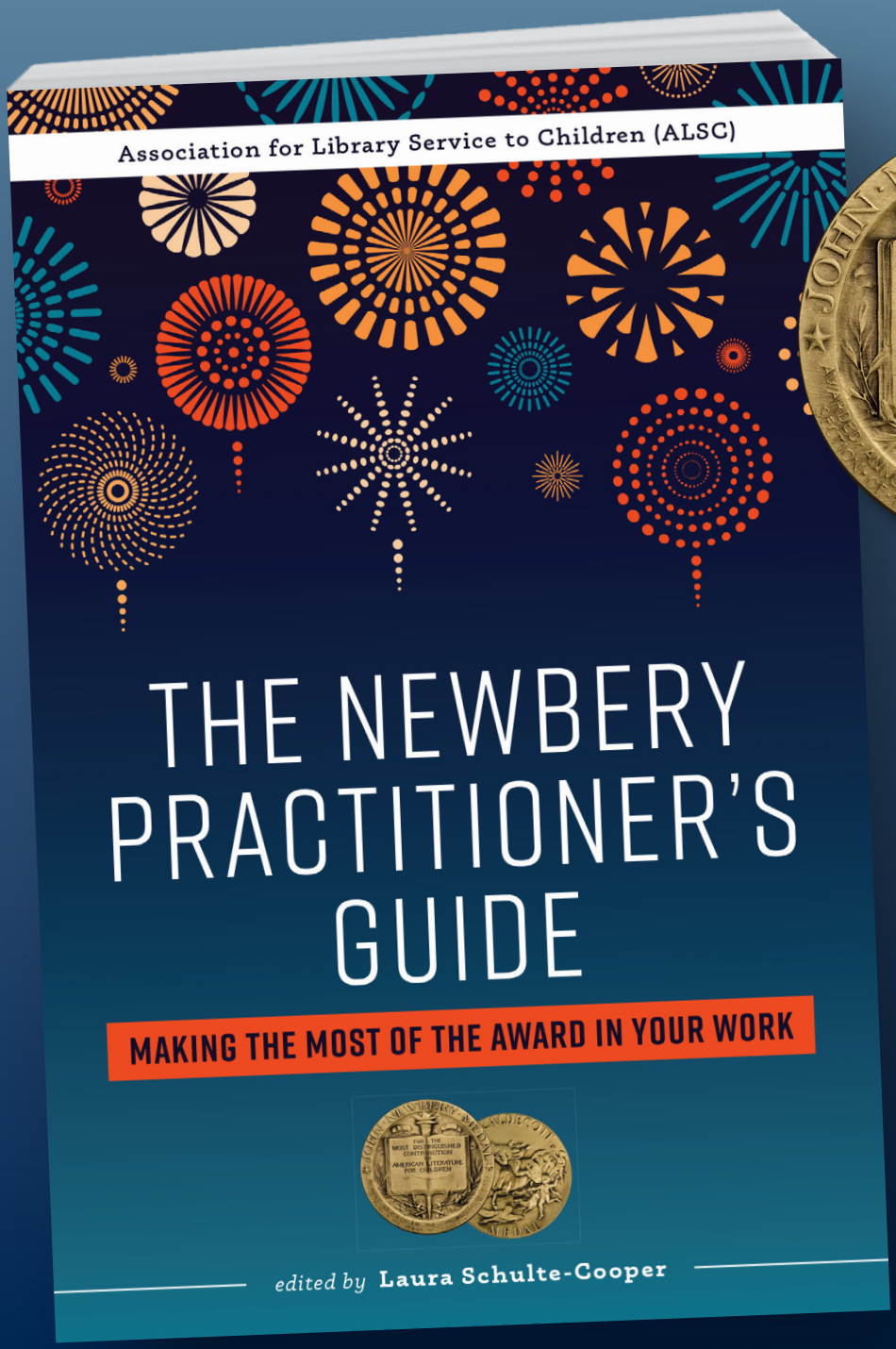

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