

Children &

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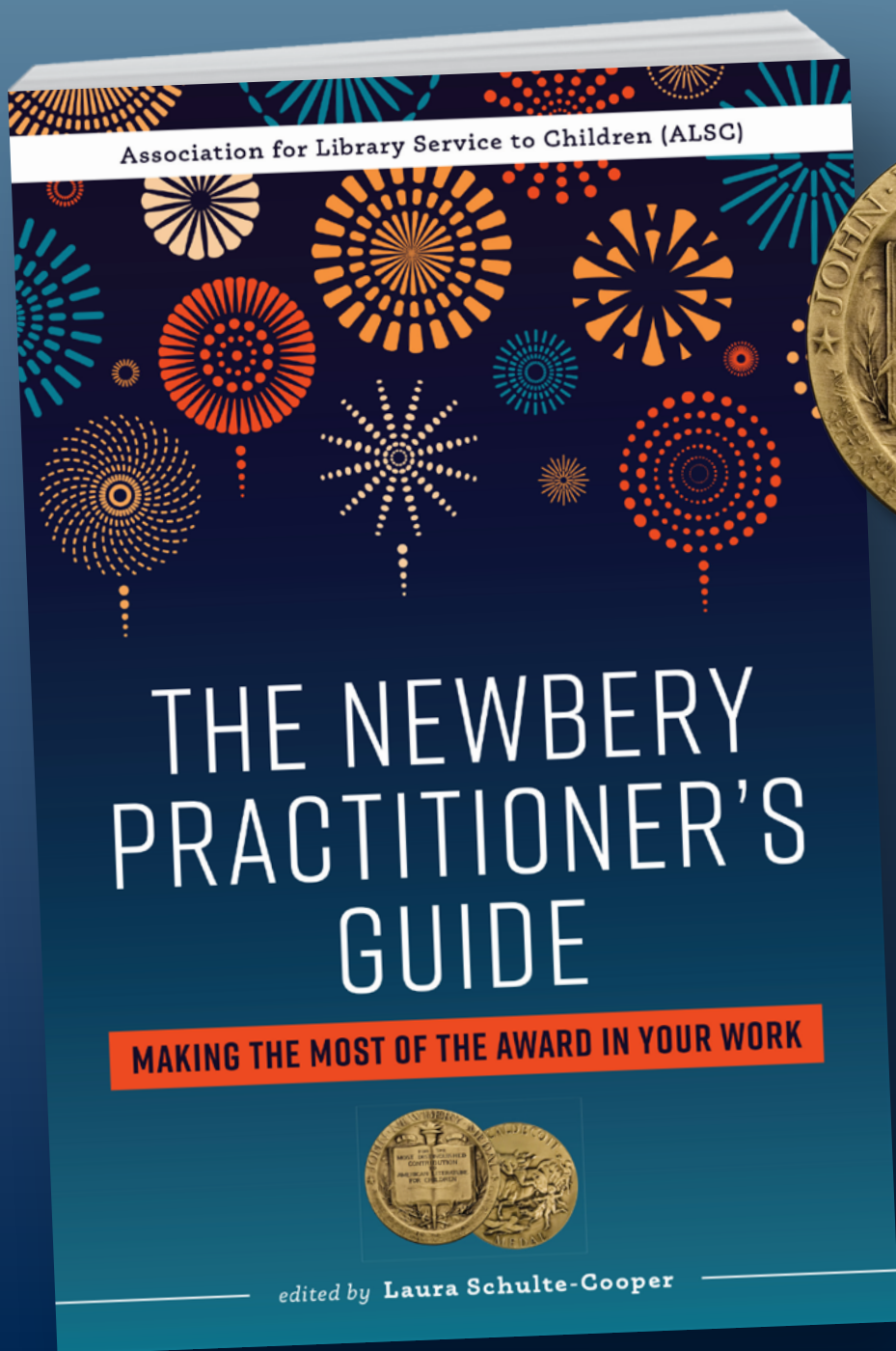
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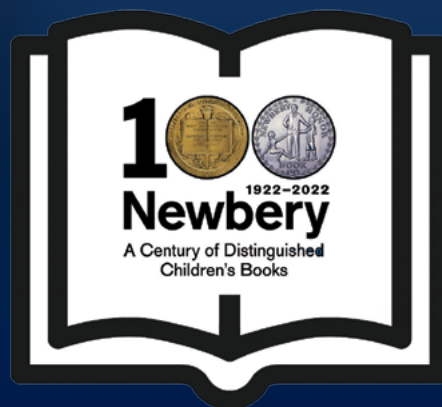
Celebrating April Poetry Month
Makerspace Successes
Hatchlings Serves the Littlest Patrons

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



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

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Two of poetry's biggest advocates are poets/anthologists Sylvia Vardell, left, and Janet Wong. The dynamic duo share their story and passion for poetry on p. 3.

Editor's Note

The Struggle of RA Is Real

By Sharon Verbeten

As a librarian, I love doing readers' advisory (RA). But there are two things about it I struggle with.

The first is that the parent rarely (or never) brings the child along. When asking for books for their child, they often don't know what the child is currently reading, what they like, or what they might like. They might incorrectly judge their reading level. Or, they often say, "They don't like to read."

I always help them, of course, with a probing reference interview designed to better understand the child's reading level and what they might enjoy. Often, I recommend nonfiction for reluctant readers. I feel it's a section parents often overlook because they're just looking for chapter books—or what I have determined they consider "real" books.

That leads me to my second pet peeve: When I recommend graphic novels, 90 percent of the time the parent responds, "They read those all the time. I want them to start reading 'real' books."

That's a tough one to absorb. And it's a fine line to engage with a parent to let them know that graphic novels and comic books ARE, in fact, real books. The engaging format is what is drawing their child in and keeping them reading—and possibly then moving on to more challenging reading once they've gained some confidence and interest.

This is not a surprise to most of you out there, and I know many librarians and children's authors are working to alleviate the stigma (only among parents and, sometimes, teachers) of reading graphic novels.

We probably all love seeing a child walk out with a stack of Wimpy Kid books—when the parent secretly wants them all to be replaced with books they read as a child. But I continue to lavishly praise the child for picking out books they like—and hopefully get the parent on board with a new perspective on kids' favorites.

When the child isn't there it's decidedly harder, but we librarians, as we know, are superheroes, putting the right book in the hands of the right child at the right time.

Now, if we could just get the teachers and parents on board! &



Longtime *CAL* contributor, and author of our Couples Who Collaborate column, Mary-Kate Sableski, right, visited *CAL* editor Sharon Verbeten on a recent trip to Wisconsin. They are pictured at the Manitowoc (WI) Public Library.

Children & LIBRARIES

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Passionate for Poetry

Its Importance in a Post-Pandemic World

SHARON VERBETEN

As National Poetry Month approaches in April, you won't find two better advocates for the genre than Sylvia Vardell and Janet Wong, the duo behind Pomelo Books and both poets in their own right. They are the editors of the new collection called *What Is Hope?* (Pomelo Books, 2023).

Here they graciously share why poetry is their collective passion.

You and Janet ARE Pomelo Books; what is the mission of your company?

We like to say that our focus is “poetry plus.” We founded our small company to put fresh, new poetry for young people out into the world and at the same time include strategies and resources for educators and families for sharing poetry. We try to show them how fun it can be to read a poem out loud together, ham it up, find some props, and talk about the poems and the memories and feelings that pop up. We have added to that model now and enjoy mentoring new poets and helping them launch their poetry into the world too.

This book follows in line of your other “What Is” books; what started this theme?

This actually goes back a bit. We wanted to explore creating books for our youngest readers and listeners, so we started with *Things We Do*, an alphabet book of poems from A to Z with simple poems promoting active words like *ask*, *bend*, *clap*, etc. This ekphrastic collection had poets writing in response to vivid, contemporary photographs full of diverse children in varied contexts. We followed this with *Things We Eat* (foods from A to Z), *Things We Feel* (emotions from A to Z), and *Things We Wear* (clothing from A to Z). It was fun creating a poetry series—a first for us. But then we took a turn and used the same idea—poets writing based on a photo prompt to create a poetry collection for older children, ages 8 and up. We published *What Is a Friend?*, followed by *What Is a Family?* taking each theme in innovative directions. The third book in this series is *What Is Hope?* rooted in many different interpretations of the important theme of hope, so needed at this moment in time.



What Is Hope? by Sylvia Vardell and Janet Wong (Pomelo Books, 2023)

Explain why you donate 100% of the profits from your books to the IBBY Children in Crisis Fund?

We have both been involved in IBBY (the International Board on Books for Young People) for many years, as well as in the United States affiliate, the United States Board on Books for Young People. But in 2023, Sylvia was elected president of IBBY and it felt right to use our resources in support of this excellent organization. The IBBY Children in Crisis funds, in particular, are such a beautiful way of putting books in children's hands in the most difficult circumstances all around the world—like in Ukraine, Turkey, Haiti, Lebanon, and so on. For each of the books in both these series (*Things We . . .* and *What Is . . .*), all profits from the sales go to these IBBY Children in Crisis funds.

“Hope” seems like such a timely title; why did you feel the world needed this book, this message NOW?

We are clearly not the only ones who feel young people are struggling in our post-pandemic world. Teachers are feeling it. Families are experiencing it too. We wanted to inject more positivity and joy into their lives, and poetry can be an ideal way to do that. In just a minute, you can read a short poem out loud and start the day with a positive message or end with a boost and a smile. And in *What Is Hope?* we offer a fun variety of approaches to this theme with poems about butterflies, microscopes, cell phones, emergencies, music, fortune cookies, sports, books, art, pets, and more—so many lenses and examples for experiencing hope.



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

Children's Poetry: Still the Road Less Traveled?

By Sharon Verbeten

In 1995, which seems like more than a lifetime ago, I was a fairly newly minted youth librarian in Milwaukee. And I was a huge fan of children's poetry—especially that by Jack Prelutsky and Paul Janeczko.

But I was distressed that children didn't seem more interested in rhymes and poems—so distressed, in fact, that I penned an article for *School Library Journal* that began, "811 is a lonely number. Sandwiched between the heavily traveled sports and recreation books, and the history/biography aisle . . . children's poetry meekly exists. Here sits a volume of Lear that hasn't circulated since 1980 and the unattractive and often intimidating anthology of "best loved" (by whom?) children's poetry . . .

"Children's poetry especially should be addressed with verve and fun, rather than intimidation. As librarians and teachers, we need to set this pattern. Don't analyze it too much, but rather enjoy it for what it is—a unique presentation of timeless and universal topics. Think of it as psychology without the guilt, songs without the music, art without the illustration."*

* Sharon Korbeck, "Children's Poetry: Journeying Beyond the Road Less Traveled," *School Library Journal*, April 1995, 43–44.

Today, there is a plethora of excellent children's poetry out there—and we have huge advocates in the field, such as Sylvia Vardell and Janet Wong, interviewed here, but also Kwame Alexander—who makes poetry approachable to a younger generation.

Maybe there are college classes now that teach lyrics as poetry—such as the songwriting gems of Taylor Swift and Beyonce, among others.

Today, almost 30 years after I penned those words, I feel that children's poetry has come a long way in terms of approachability, but I feel teachers and librarians still need to do more to advocate for the form. We've all done blackout poetry and spine label poetry—I've even seen these trends pick up on social media.

Maybe we can celebrate and showcase the singers and songwriters of each generation—and label them what they are—poets and auteurs. Once something becomes cool, it takes off; that's my fondest wish for children's poetry.

What is the process of anthologizing? How do you choose the poets and poems?

We've invited friends and favorite poets to collaborate with us, we've held wide open calls for anyone to submit poems, and we've conducted workshops to mentor budding poets. But in each case, we give our poets assigned themes or topics (and sometimes specific photo prompts) and then they send us poems and poem drafts. We sift through them all to try to use each poet's strongest contribution while still ensuring a compelling variety of poems. We wouldn't want twenty butterfly poems, for example. So, it becomes a bit of a juggling act to choose and arrange poems into a collection that works as an engaging whole. At the moment, we're mostly focused on helping new and diverse voices launch into the world of poetry publishing, and it's been so fun and rewarding.

In 1995, I wrote an article for *School Library Journal* about children's poetry, lamenting that "811 is a lonely number." I felt poetry was often overlooked or shunned by children; do you feel that is still the case? How do you think that can be turned around?

We're so glad you're an ally in helping us promote poetry more often and more widely! We have found that children generally enjoy poetry when we read it out loud together and add

motions, props, and participation. Many children start school already knowing nursery rhymes, silly songs, jump rope jingles, and playground chants—not realizing this is the beginning of poetry. They're just not familiar with how poetry looks on the page or how to read it silently. Unfortunately, the 811 section in a library is not always easy to find and often is in need of new, fun, and contemporary poetry books. Honestly, WE adults may be overlooking poetry and thus children aren't looking for it either. That's one reason our books focus on poetry plus—offering adults tips and ideas for sharing poems right alongside the poems themselves.

Poetry is lucky to have such advocates today such as you two and, notably, Kwame Alexander; can poetry survive? Is there hope? (See what I did there?) LOL.

Thank you for your kind words! We are very hopeful about poetry's prospects, and we're grateful for powerhouse advocates like Kwame Alexander. We love seeing new books of poetry published every year and new voices emerging—fresh, diverse perspectives and fun, innovative formats. Have you seen *Animals in Pants* by Suzy Levinson or the graphic novel adaptation of *Garvey's Choice* by Nikki Grimes? So fun! And look for John Schu's new book, *The Poetry Place Is Our Space*, a celebration of poetry, possibility, and the power of creative collaboration. &

Dovey Undaunted

The Social and Cultural Practices of Literacy in Tonya Bolden's Book

EDITH CAMPBELL

Biographies and memoirs, which are the recorded experiences of others, can play a crucial role in formal literacy learning by offering a platform to develop the skills and literacies necessary to build legacies of self-empowerment. By showcasing key events, cultural objects, and social markers in individuals' lives, biographies become mirrors or windows for building character and shaping lives. They can also serve as a lamp illuminating paths for readers to be guided by others.¹

Engaging with biographies can become a transformative experience for the next generation. Reading about significant people, whether aspiring to be a president, a social media influencer, or a construction worker, invites us to explore literacy-in-persons, to inquire about the ways that literacy practices are fundamental to individual and collective histories.

Gardner explains that "the past is instructive for understanding historical practices and the continuity of knowledge and care that should be considered part of the ideological framing of representations of Black people and their experiences in literature for children."² By engaging with texts centered on the lives of Black people, young readers are exposed to the literacy habits and practices that empower those who often face oppression and discrimination. These biographies may mention the books and newspapers the subjects read, or the schools they attended, but they can also convey underlying messages about how they navigated political situations, intonations, and expressions to seize opportunities.

This work aims to demonstrate how biographies for young readers exemplify the social and cultural practices of literacy and their legacies. Biographies and memoirs provide evidence of how literacy skills empowered Black people by enabling them to acquire wealth, maintain relationships, and maneuver through

oppression, discrimination, and injustice. By reading about these lives, readers come to understand that a person's legacy of literacy, the result of their engaged interactions with literacy practices in day-to-day activities, leads to the realization of their potential beyond the constraints imposed by others.³

Validating the legacy of those in whose shadow we stand by examining the text of their life's story can provide young readers with the opportunity to validate their own experiences. The essential question here is: How do middle-grade biographies exemplify the social and cultural practices of literacy, and how do they contribute to the transmission of literacy skills and legacies within the Black community? To address this question, I explore Tonya Bolden's *Dovey Undaunted* (Norton 2021), an exemplary text that provides access to literacy-in-persons.

Literature Review

Literacy is a fluid concept with many definitions. The most relevant one here is that literacy is "a social and cultural practice that individuals enact in relationship to their contexts and communities."⁴ In the literature, we can find concepts that give context for



Edith Campbell is an Associate Librarian in the Cunningham Memorial Library at Indiana State University. She is a member of WeAreKidlit Collective, and Black Cotton Reviewers.

using these middle-grade biographies to trace legacies of literacy. Contemporary pedagogies suggest how these biographies can be used to affirm and connect with students' culture.

Johnson and Cowles' work develops the concept of literacy-in-persons that interprets "how individuals are always forming as literate beings, as they hone their literacy repertoires throughout their lives."⁵ Botelho and Rudman furthers this process of becoming literate, a social practice that requires action.⁶ Textualized examples of lives that convey significant activism and leadership can be found in the autobiographies of Frederick Douglass, Olaudah Equiano, and Maya Angelou.

In the Black community, literacy has historically been held in high esteem because it is regarded as a means to liberation. Reading and writing were skills that few enslaved Black people could develop, as those in control understood that slaves' literacy limited their masters' ability to dominate. Literacy empowered critically thinking humans while also providing the enslaved with the ability to access, store, and create information.

During slavery, Black people recognized that reading and writing were essential to freedom, and they did everything they could to acquire these skills and pass them on to the next generation. During Reconstruction, the demand for education, including access to schools and universities, and for more Black educators, became increasingly urgent.⁷

Gadsden investigated the expectations of older Black members of a rural South Carolina community to contextualize their perceptions toward the literacy development of their descendants.⁸ This work provides insights into one particular group of African Americans and serves as a worthy consideration for the larger community. Some of the participants in the study were among the first generation to be born post-enslavement and articulated the notion that literacy derived its value from its correlation to overcoming struggle and oppression, both for the individual and the community. The participants described literacy as a power tool, a survival skill, and an economic instrument influenced by our personal and communal beliefs. From these conversations, Gadsden developed four dimensions of literacy that, when combined with literacy-in-person, can be applied to trace the social and cultural practices of literacy in middle-grade biographical works.

- **Literacy as Personal and Political Power:** is transformational.
- **Literacy as Survival:** is critical in negotiating in medical, legal, and financial matters, and necessary to 'read a room'—to be able to translate tone, inuendo, gestures, and racial composition.
- **Literacy as School Success and Education:** develops reading, writing, computing skills as well as specific trade skills.
- **Literacy as Legacy:** provides exposure to role models.

In studying literacy in a formal school setting rather than in the community, Gloria Ladson-Billings developed culturally relevant

pedagogy, "that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes."⁹ While the community in South Carolina viewed literacy as a tool necessary for integration, Ladson-Billings sees it as a tool to challenge and change US society. Through cultural sustaining and culturally relevant pedagogies, literacy, reading, and writing expand to encompass dynamic multiliteracies—digital literacy, financial literacy, race literacy, environmental literacy, and more—that are necessary for self-empowerment. Biographies that portray Black lives will make visible the many literacies found in culturally responsive teaching, a pedagogy that stresses the use of story in learning. Biographical stories can function within this framework because they exist as recorded narratives helping readers of all races and ethnicities learn through others.¹⁰

Introducing Tonya Bolden

Tonya Bolden is an African American educator and award-winning author born and raised in New York City. She attended public school in Manhattan until her mother researched how to get Tonya and her sister into a private school.¹¹ Tonya recalls that when growing up, her parents might not meet her requests for candy or gum, but they would indulge her long list of book requests from the school's book sale.

From her parents and her grandmother, she received the message that reading was power. Bolden graduated magna cum laude from Princeton University with a degree in Slavic languages and literature with a Russian focus. She earned an MA in the same fields from Columbia University. Bolden began writing children's books in 1992 and has gone on to win awards that include the Bank Street College of Education Best Book of the Year for *Emancipation Proclamation: Lincoln and the Dawn of Liberty* (Abrams, 2013); NCSS Carter G. Woodson Book Award for *Searching for Sarah Rector: The Richest Black Girl in America* (Abrams, 2014); NCTE Orbis Pictus Award for Outstanding Nonfiction for Children for *M.L.K.: Journey of a King* (Abrams, 2007); and James Madison Book Award and Coretta Scott King Author Honor for *Maritcha: A Nineteenth Century American Girl* (Abrams, 2005). She has twice been an NAACP Image Award Nominee, for *Searching for Sarah Rector: The Richest Black Girl in America* (Abrams, 2014); and *Beautiful Moon: A Child's Prayer* (Abrams, 2014).

As a child, Bolden was not particularly fond of history. She remembers this when she's writing and takes the time to ask from a child's perspective, "What does this have to do with me?" Bolden writes for young readers who do not always see their hopes and dreams in books by making visible the lives of ordinary people. In studying Black lives, Bolden began to understand the lives of her own grandparents, and this provided Bolden with a context for her own life.¹² By viewing the biographies that she writes as literacy-in-person, young people consider how actions and reactions shape lives. The process begins by learning about the person's life, where they grew up, and went to school.

Literacy as Personal and Political Power

Dovey Johnson Roundtree's story, as told by Bolden, is book-ended with the murder case in Washington, DC, in which she defended Raymond Crump Jr., a Black man. This was one of the biggest court cases of her career. As Bolden describes the crime, she presents the individuals involved in the case through their occupations; what kind of work they do. Not only does this relate their class and income level but their degree of literacy and their agency in the community. From the beginning, we are directed to perceive how literacy situates us.

Then, readers learn about Dovey. She was born in Charlotte, NC, on April 17, 1914. Her father died when she was less than a year old, leaving Dovey to live with her mother and her grandparents in one of the city's Black enclaves. Bolden lists the numerous ways the family's matriarch, Grandma Rachel, contributed to the family and community. The literacies she developed leading the choir, taking in laundry, managing the family's limited budget, baking communion bread, helping her husband in his store, and making communion wine would surpass those acquired from her formal education.

Dovey's level of literacy positioned her to refute the single story for Black women in the early twentieth century. She's not remarkable because she's exceptional; her success is hard-earned. Her family was financially challenged, but they were not poor; not lacking in access to resources. Dovey is remarkable because of the actions she took on behalf of her community.

Literacy as School Success and Education

Equating reading, writing, and computing with academic success is a given in the Black community. "Literacy is something Black folks have considered integral to community progress: it is not simply an individual pursuit."¹³

Dovey attended public schools in Charlotte and was encouraged by one of her teachers to attend Spelman College, a historically Black women's college in Atlanta. When one of the families for whom her mother worked as a domestic laborer was transferred to Atlanta, Dovey was able to move with her and attend Spelman.

After several financial setbacks, Dovey required several years to complete her undergraduate degree with a double major in English and Biology. She went on to become a full-time teacher, a member of the US Armed Forces as a member of the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC), a law student at Howard University, a lawyer, and an ordained minister.

Dovey's biography is one that exhibits how ordinary people can build literacy skills necessary to overcome obstacles and do great things as part of everyday life. Bolden most often writes stories such as this that center on everyday people. By asking readers what motivated Dovey to finish college and then identifying the obstacles she had to overcome, it will have the potential to inspire young readers to work to achieve their dreams.

Literacy as Survival

Literacy skills, ways of knowing, have often translated to survival skills incorporating the decoding of semiotics that were embedded throughout daily life. Enslaved African Americans "relied heavily on oral and aural systems of information."¹⁴ Dovey knew that not only her success, but that her survival as a Black woman depended upon her ability to read all the text that surrounded her.

Bolden details that as a child, Dovey read Christian scriptures and *The Book of Knowledge Children's Encyclopedia*. In college, she read Spelman's *The Campus Mirror* and many of the works of Shakespeare, and in her work life, she read codes, manuals, textbooks, and correspondence in her work world.

Dovey developed her reading, writing, and computation skills in the schools and training programs she attended, but her family and community taught her what a Black woman needed to know to survive. The way she learned to read the world was influenced by the systems and structures embedded in her family and her community. The way that

Dovey learned to read the world was through multiple lenses of her race, gender, and class.

It is not often that young people read stories of Black women from this era that express the many literacies necessary to survive. Identifying the socio-political aspect of Dovey's life, of the literacy in her person, enhances young readers' cultural competency. There were lessons that taught her that when she was falsely arrested while in college, the only person who could help her was Mary May Neptune, a white woman, and not the Black socialites with whom she was more familiar.

Not only did Dovey have degrees from institutions of higher learning, but also she could read people and situations in ways that allowed her to carve out her own safe space, speak her own voice, and fight for her community's liberation.

The first time Dovey met Raymond Crump, he was in the DC jail, and had been locked in solitary confinement. Dovey gave him one of her business cards with instructions about what to do if he was in trouble.



“Dovey had picked up quick on the disgust the white prison guards felt for Ray.”¹⁵ She was concerned that Ray might be psychologically and physically abused by those who held him in jail and that this might break Ray. “Ray who years earlier had suffered a bad beating during a holdup. It left him prone to horrible headaches, even blackouts. And Dovey suspected that Ray’s mind was also messed up from alcohol abuse.”¹⁶

Literacy as Legacy

As Gardner reminds us, intentionally connecting young people to their past creates the opportunity to provide them with social and emotional dispositions necessary to navigate racism.¹⁷ Bolden took us back to the community that supported Dovey throughout her life. It began at home with her mother, her Grandma Rachel, and Grandpa Clyde. Eventually, it extended to A. Philip Randolph, Pauli Murray, and Mary McCloud Bethune, who were all members of the Black elite, existing at times as gatekeepers with literacies that were critical not only to Dovey’s success but to that of the community.

Realize how these facets of the Black community are positioned, and the levels of literacy of its members. Consider the assets, attributes, and resources located within its space, and their legacies become apparent.

Dovey’s Grandma Rachel introduced her to Bethune. “Straightaway young Dovey sensed in Bethune something powerful, almost regal. Ebony-skinned and crowned with an enormous feathered hat that matched her silk suit, she spoke in a voice so rich, so cultured, so filled with authority that it held me fast.”¹⁸ Dovey had learned to read not only Bethune’s dress and diction but also the esteem in which she was held by Grandma Rachel. Through implicit lessons in the church, the neighborhood, and the family, Dovey would learn that Black people take care of each other. When she became an attorney, the first thing Dovey did was to commit to free legal services for the National Council of Negro Women, founded by Bethune.

“It was, in my mind, the least I could do by way of paying her back. She’d brought me into an army that for all its discrimination had given me a voice and a role in shaping history.”¹⁹ Her literacies sourced in the community had personal and communal value because it ensured liberation.

Pauli Murray had a strong influence on Dovey becoming an attorney. “As I studied her, watched her quarterback discussions with her Berkeley colleagues, soaked up her cerebrations on the Constitution and the wrongs it could right if properly applied, I felt the power of an intellect that swallowed me up.”²⁰ Dovey had *read* her.

As Gadsden wrote, literacies are “influenced by beliefs converged through family systems, from one generation to the next.”²¹ The stories her grandfather told her stuck with Dovey, as do those

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we all hear from family members. The stories are tools to teach values while setting moral compasses. In having studied the law and in having experienced the de facto law that was enacted upon the Black community, Bolden coalesced the historic information Dovey acquired into her person, the literacy-in-person, that Dovey was becoming. This Dovey was quite capable of the work she knew she had to do.

Conclusions

In *Dovey Undaunted*, Bolden delivers a legacy of hope and possibilities while exposing challenges in ways not often expressed. Dovey, from her humble beginnings, was able to develop a variety of literacies that empowered her to alleviate oppression in her community. Bolden develops a critical space where young readers can consider everyday situations, relationships, and opportunities in ways that are meaningful to them.

Why would Dovey Johnson Roundtree’s life matter to young people? Bolden shines a light on Dovey to align readers with the urgency of meta literacies in ways that matter to the individual and to the community. This story exists as an example of literacy-in-person because Dovey transformed herself and the world around her. Young readers see some of the many ways that reading text is more than engaging with printed words. This can be quite empowering to students who want to develop other literacies. This example from the past suggests continuity in communal values while at the same time allowing for change.

Librarians and educators should include African American biographies in their toolkit of culturally relevant materials. Young readers can begin to consider a variety of ways to access literacies that exist in their communities and can find ways to express their own biographies. &

This work grew from a Charlotte Zietlow Grant the author received in 2013 from Indiana State University.

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REBECCA MILLERJOHN, SUE ABRAHAMSON, AND AMY HOLCOMB



A child and her mom experiment with a laser cutter at Skokie (IL) Public Library.

On an incredibly hot Saturday afternoon in August, a group of ten kids are gathered around a table with Mars Patterson, the current Bubbler Artist in Residence, hands twitching to touch the collection of Instax cameras in front of them. Parents look a little skeptical, but the kids listen carefully to Mars' instructions.

Mars lays out the children's task—she is encouraging kids to look at their environment (the Madison (WI) Public Library's Children's Area) with fresh eyes—to take photos of interesting shapes, lines, colors, and textures that they see. There are enough cameras for some of the parents, too, and so, armed with guidance and equipment, families set off together on a mini adventure.

The result? A beautiful array of color, line, and shadow, depicting everyday objects in completely new ways. "Her photos are so much better than mine!" one parent exclaims. Kids beam with pride, pointing, and explaining each shot earnestly to Mars.

In public libraries, magical moments of discovery, pride, agency, and creativity are happening every day. Sometimes that moment

manifests in an expectant silence as hands and minds are engaged in a task, and at other times, the moment bursts to life as patrons start to open up to librarians and each other as they work.

We've seen it happen, we've told those stories to each other or even managed to snap a photo of the action in real time. Librarians are natural collectors. We collect stories and store them in our memories or maybe in a journal, or photos . . . somewhere? A Google drive? A desktop computer? A great big album on the library iPad? And, of course, attendance numbers.

Yet, when it comes time for a newsletter, quarterly report, presentation to our board, or grant review, we're often left scrambling. Starting from scratch each time to pull together information and documentation so we have enough data to show the impact of our programs. Or, trying to set goals and priorities for the next season of programming, while relying on only anecdotal rememberings of what went well and what didn't from the past cycle.

For several years, the Bubbler [makerspace] at Madison Public Library has been working to create systems of consistent



Rebecca Millerjohn is the youth services librarian with the Bubbler at Madison (WI) Public Library. Her work focuses on hands-on exploratory learning, educator support, research into making & learning assessment and practices, and strategic partnerships. **Amy Holcomb** is the experiential learning supervisor at Skokie (IL) Public Library where she manages three learning spaces: the BOOMbox (STEAM space for youth), the Lab (computer space for youth) and the Studio (makerspace for adults). **Sue Abrahamson** recently retired from Waupaca (WI) Public Library. She is dedicated to

promoting twenty-first century skills.

documentation and genuine assessment of our impact. Systems that would allow us to have evidence-based conversations that support growth or change, as well as streamline how we tell stories to funders, colleagues, patrons, and the public.

For the last eight years, we've been collecting data about our programs. With paper forms, Google surveys, shared photo drives, and even formal research projects with academic partners capturing evidence of critically thinking, innovating, or making connections to each other and the world through making—traditionally hard to measure outcomes, but outcomes that matter to us and our patrons.

But capturing these magical moments isn't like recording attendance numbers and comparing results from year to year. It's about collecting stories over time to find the connecting threads and point to the larger impact of a program or series over time. It's challenging and time consuming. We desperately needed better tools.

But this isn't just about the Bubbler at Madison Public Library. It is about the broader shift in practices of libraries around the country supporting hands-on experiential learning. Whether it is called arts or maker or STEAM, our spaces are busy with patrons looking for ways to learn and create in an environment that is welcoming and low risk. We all need ways to better report the impact of these shifts—and luckily the Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS) agreed, choosing to fund our project in 2021 with a National Leadership Project grant.

To expand our understanding, we recruited two additional partners with strong backgrounds in maker or STEAM programming and spaces, but with dramatically different infrastructures from our own. Waupaca, WI, is a small (population 6,000) but mighty provider of STEM learning in their community in Northern Wisconsin, and Skokie, IL, a bustling Chicago suburb (population 66,000), is a leader in innovative spaces with access to professional maker tools.

Expanding even further, we began with a national survey of fifty libraries to assess technological barriers. We asked about IT departments, obsolete devices, intellectual property, and data management. We learned any toolkit we designed needed to be web-based—as to not be reliant on a specific platform or device (like the Apple store) or on an IT department to manage updates, and ideally it would be open source.

The Observation Deck is a collection of open-source tools for libraries to install directly onto their own servers. We are



Madison (WI) Public Librarian Carissa Christner actively observes and listens to participants at Anji Playdate, an open-ended true play program.

building this using Directus with a custom website interface for the observer and reporting tools.

We also dove deep into what outcomes library staff and patrons found meaningful, building on the Bubbler's own research into hands-on learning outcomes, as well as Skokie's and Waupaca's strategic plans and principles of program design. These outcomes, specific to each institution, allowed us to create frameworks for observation.

In public libraries, magical moments of discovery, pride, agency, and creativity are happening every day. Sometimes that moment manifests in an expectant silence as hands and minds are engaged in a task, and at other times, the moment bursts to life as patrons start to open up to librarians and each other as they work.

Building these frameworks was a major breakthrough in itself and opened up deep conversations within our library teams about what we were already seeing in our programs and spaces. *What do those outcomes look like? Sound like? Where do our biases creep in? And what can we do as facilitators and observers to draw out responses from our patrons to better hear and see what's happening in their brains while they engage?*

Through these conversations, we were able to start building best practices for observation and data collection. When we finally had the prototype for data collection in our pocket to capture photos, record quotes from patrons, and

make notes in real time, the feeling was astounding.

We are now beginning to collect a trove of organized data that shows the impact of our hands-on, experiential programming. We can see which programs seem to most successfully spark agency and ingenuity, and really ask ourselves *why?* What is the



"Mom, look at these!" An excited child uses giant slinky tubes to make a nest during Anji Playdate.

alchemy of a really successful program experience? And how can we recreate that again and again?

We're able to communicate that magic through evidence-based stories. Like when our patrons delighted in making LEGO ziplines, but were also practicing problem solving, iterative design, and building connections with each other—now supported with quotes and photos to showcase their learning and growth.

And it's organized! How amazing to remember a moment and have the evidence from that day at your fingertips with just a couple of mouse clicks or swipes.

As we dive into first round testing, we're only just beginning to understand the opportunities and impact of our toolkit. Every day, we're learning new things, thinking about additional applications, and getting more and more excited for the ways our own libraries can utilize this tool, but also for libraries across the country to put it to use.

In the next six months, we will roll the tool out to three to five additional libraries for continued testing and feedback gathering,



A child and caregiver test and retest this LEGO zipline at the Waupaca (WI) Public Library program in the park.

as we work to perfect both the software development and the observational practices and training. We will be selecting the libraries in Dec/Jan through a short application process to identify a diverse sample of libraries both in size and population.

Looking forward, we have serious questions to consider around the scalability of the tool and the sustainability of the community of librarians using it. We know these magic moments are happening in libraries across the country, and we're excited to provide tools that empower library staff to tell the story and show the impact of the work they do every day.

This spring, the grant team will be tackling the creation of a sustainability and expansion model, working to build out the technical infrastructure of the tool and partnering with the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction and the Public Library Association to explore collaborative options. &

If you are interested in project updates, visit www.madpl.org/libtoolkit.

Imaginations and Imaginary Glass

Building an American Girl Doll Collection for Everyone

AMANDA KEEN

In the late 1990s, my mom took me on the train to downtown Chicago for an experiential birthday. Now nearly three decades from that afternoon at the American Girl store, with my eager eyes staring beyond the glass display at Samantha, I realize that many did not have a similar experience growing up. However, I could not have foreseen that the beloved dolls of my childhood would become a major part of my career as a youth services librarian or be part of a larger trend towards Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) initiatives within public libraries.

After restructuring at the Fox River Valley Public Library District in East Dundee, IL, moved staff to our branch location, Randall Oaks, on the opposite end of the library district in Sept. 2021, our American Girl Doll collection—some of the most popular kits within our Library of Things—became my new collection management responsibility, along with my existing collections areas of board books and beginning readers.

As the third librarian to manage this collection after its debut along with our STEAM kits during May 2018, my overhaul of this beloved collection for our patrons was three-fold:

- moving away from classic dolls to better align with our updated diversity, equity, and inclusion service model by releasing exclusive dolls unique to our library complete with their own stories of overcoming personal challenges,
- transforming our collection into the same eager-eyed experience I had growing up by reducing the imaginary “glass” of any monetary barriers which could inhibit access, and
- making the imaginary “glass” of our display better reflect the ethnicities, interests, and life experiences of those we serve.



American Girl dolls have proven a well-received addition to the Library of Things.

My first reaction was to export our available circulation data to see which dolls were popular and which were not, at each of our locations, and how many dolls we were currently circulating. Given the fact that there would be less than half a dozen on the shelf at our main library at any given time, it didn't occur to either me or my colleagues that we currently owned almost fifty American Girl kits back in 2021; as the only CCS Libraries Consortium member amid twenty-nine northern Illinois libraries to do so.

Our library district currently includes eight culturally and monetarily diverse, as well as widespread, towns and villages, encompassing a service area of over seventy-one thousand patrons



Amanda Keen currently serves as a Youth Services Librarian at the Fox River Valley Public Library District in East Dundee, IL. She holds a Masters of Library and Information Science from Dominican University and a post graduate Certificate in Archives and Cultural Heritage.



(54% White, 37% Hispanic/Latinx and 7% Asian). Since then, I have received questions from colleagues at neighboring libraries regarding our best practices in building and maintaining our collection, and our Library of Things in Youth Services has grown to ninety-eight kits with fifty-four American Girls and Bitty Babies, along with numerous STEAM and Early Learning activities. These kits have circulated 5,421 times since their debut in May 2018, with our American Girl Doll kits circulating just over three thousand times as of July 2023.

The Transition to Equitable Access

Despite my enthusiasm for sharing the uniqueness of our American Girl Doll kits with our community of patrons, I began to realize the shortcomings of purchasing, cataloging, circulating, and maintaining a collection of this complexity and size, not to mention balancing the whiteness of our current collection with our fiscal budget and the options available from toymaker giant Mattel.

From my place behind the reference desk, I began to make a mental note of who was using our library and how I could use library funds to create a greater representation of our community. Combined with our collection's circulation statistics, I could easily see that our Hispanic and Latinx dolls were some of the highest circulating amid our collection, including our new Hispanic

male doll, along with our fitness and technology interest dolls. However, our Asian and Middle Eastern populations who actively use our library were unfortunately not being represented.

Shelf Space Limitations

Aided by these statistics, I realized two additional problems; our collection had a relatively narrow range of offerings when compared to available options by Mattel, and we were running low on available shelf space, especially at our branch. After our restructuring, the manager of our branch informed me that due to limited space, we had to transfer several American Girl Doll kits to our main library.

I pulled six of our lowest circulating dolls, turning our main library and branch collections into a 4:1 ratio, which gave our dolls a new life by providing patrons who are more likely to checkout kits from our Library of Things with greater access, and created significant shelf space at our branch. I also noticed that our collection featured duplicate dolls, and sometimes but not always, these kits included overlapping similarities in their contents, making inventories a challenge to track and maintain due to the frequency of lost or damaged accessories. I quickly realized that our library system only needed a maximum of two of the same doll, one at each location, featuring unique accessories.

Shifts In Circulation

In October, administration and our library board decided to simplify checkout loan periods across most materials types, including our Library of Things, allowing for three weeks with two autorenewals as long as a hold is not placed, with a maximum of three kits per card. While this change was a noticeable improvement in access, it also came with the equally large limitation; that our dolls could only be checked out by FRVPLD cardholders moving forward.

Having several families come in and have the dolls they checked out last week suddenly become inaccessible broke my heart, and I had to create signage and become the point person and professional listening ear to numerous complaints. Yet I saw patron concerns both ways, as many of the patrons who vocalized their complaints were reciprocal borrowers from higher-income neighboring library districts, the intended purpose of this collection remains to serve those who would otherwise not have access to these prohibitively expensive dolls.

The Need for Greater Representation

As I placed our new signage, I realized I could make the largest impact by offering better marketing with interior and exterior labeling of our kits. I had just designed two new exclusive dolls—Mei Lin Wei, an Asian American and her Chocolate Lab Bao, a trained diabetic service dog, who highlights the importance of teamwork; and Amara Ayad, a Muslim American and hijab-wearing fitness enthusiast, who tackles anxiety by practicing mindfulness.

To my surprise, our American Girl Doll kits had never been featured on our social media channels, and I thought this was the perfect time to enlist our new PR staff. As I dressed the dolls for their debut with new cover and inventory labels inspired by the colors of the American Girl logo, our marketing department featured the dolls on our social media channels; posing them to highlight their unique personalities which were accompanied by short bios I wrote to share their personal stories with our patrons. These dolls quickly became ambassadors of our Library of Things collection and were a massive hit which helped fill the immediate need for broader community representation.

Becoming Unstuck

While our original cover labels were lacking the excitement I felt with my first doll, the real problem was that the essential information about our dolls and their contents featured small fonts, inventory labels formatted as paragraphs, and nondescript accessories, all described differently on various labels. In addition, the dolls themselves often outlasted their accessories, and the purchase of replacement accessories was not originally considered. The current system of crossing off lost or damaged accessories in permanent marker looked unprofessional, was inefficient as

both the outside and inside labels needed to be updated, and weakened staff arguments that patrons were responsible for the condition of our kits until their return to the library. Yet addressing these challenges properly was going to take significantly more time than I expected.

Removing the many layers of sticker paper from the outside and inside of our plastic containers took up to thirty minutes to soak, scrape, and remove the existing labels, with the addition of creating and laminating new cover, side and inventory labels. Multiply this process by more than fifty kits, made making necessary updates to our existing collection quite a challenge.

Planning for Repairs

With kits costing anywhere from \$110 to \$250 each, our budget for the collection between our main library and branch location stood at \$2,000 for several years. With continued advocacy, I have been granted additional funding for the 2023-2024 fiscal year, meaning that the many conversations with our Public Services Manager about how to best maintain our collection made a clear difference and have affected how we have handled our American Girl Doll kits since the fall of 2022.

With support from administration and our library board, it was decided that an increased budget would ultimately facilitate an increase in access, rather than the need to impose strict policies that would subject our patrons to a potential financial burden, especially for families who already perceive our kits as being too expensive due to the high potential for loss or damage. With our increased budget our approach remains—replacement accessories will continue to be purchased, and we will recatalog our kits as needed when they cannot, until damage requires the dolls to be withdrawn.

While our kits are checked in by hand by Youth Services staff against their inventory labels each time they are returned, the tiny accessories are, by nature, easily susceptible to loss and damage. For this reason, each quarter, I personally check each of our kits for damage and staff errors. Over time my spreadsheet from my first export of circulation statistics has evolved, becoming color coded—including the date of each kit's last quarterly check, its location, barcode, an image of each accessory within a specific kit, and a notes section for accessories, both lost and those which have been purchased as replacements, since the kit's initial release.

Due to the frequent need for replacements, I often have several American Girl Doll kits under my desk, along with an entire filing cabinet of replacement parts. While most accessories can be replaced, others are only able to be purchased with the initial doll or have since been phased out by Mattel. This requires our library as a best practice to purchase our new dolls with a set of accessories to include within each kit upon its release, along with two replacement sets to hold onto for future needs.

Staffing Demands

Our collection has greatly improved over time, although I always view my work with our American Girl Doll kits as any collection development responsibility—as a constant work in progress—and I’m always looking for new ways to make our collection less of a burden for our staff of two librarians, four library assistants, and three clerks.

One of my next goals is to release a third generation of our American Girl Doll kits that will include:

- Pictorial and written inventories in both English and Spanish with images provided by Mattel, as an experiment to reduce the likelihood of lost accessories, by providing a visual checklist for patrons and staff amid our Spanish speaking community,
- Purchasing a greater number of Bitty Babies, Hispanic and Latinx, male and non-gender conforming, and technology interest dolls to better align with the ages, ethnicities, interests, and life experiences of the patrons who access our collection,

- Providing a choking hazard warning and a zippered mesh pouch for families to place small pieces they don’t wish to be lost or handled inside for safe keeping, and
- Improving the signage of our display to feature age suggestions as advertised by Mattel for both Bitty Baby and American Girl Doll kits.

Although our library and its Library of Things have experienced a great amount of change over the past several years, the future for our American Girl Doll kits—and equally the future of public libraries in moving toward greater EDI efforts—remains bright. With plans to provide greater signage, clearer labeling, and an increased number of inclusive dolls, we will continue to expand access in the coming years to provide the next generation with an improved, yet still eager-eyed experience, where they’ll be able to reach beyond the imaginary “glass” and see themselves amid a more inclusive world. &

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Celebrating Pinoy Representation

An Interview with Filipino Picture Book Authors

STEPHANIE E. MAHAR

This feature celebrates Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Heritage Month in May with a spotlight on four children's picture book authors of the Filipino diaspora, specifically Filipino and Filipino American authors living in the United States. Through an email-based interview with Lynnor Bontigao (LB), Sophia N. Lee (SL), Michelle Sterling (MS), and Dorina Lazo Gilmore-Young (DG), we learn about the experiences that motivate them to create and share their stories for young readers.

How did you become a published author, and did you face any difficulties? The world of publishing has changed a lot over the years, and while we're seeing more diversity in publishing, this hasn't always been the case.

LB: I think it was hard for me in the beginning because I didn't know how to get there. I went to SCBWI conferences in N.J. when I could afford it (time-wise and financially). I met a lot of creative people and was always amazed at their portfolios. I had so much to learn. It wasn't until I listened to Vanessa Brantley-Newton at one of these conferences that she shared her story of not seeing herself in books, her obstacles, and telling us about *We Need Diverse Books* (WNDB). It was like a light bulb moment for me! Why wasn't I drawing characters who looked like me? In the Philippines, from early childhood, my visual references in books, TV, comics, and ads, featured fair-looking models. I thought to break into the US market, that's how I should draw! Vanessa's talk encouraged me to lean into my own roots. I left there knowing that I needed to draw characters who looked like me and the kids in my community. So, I filled my portfolio with diverse kids and personalities. I was really active on social media then. I followed an agent from Andrea Brown Literary Agency. She checked out my profile and was interested in knowing more about me. Eventually,



Sophia Lee at a presentation for her book *Lolo's Sari-Sari Store*.

she couldn't take me as a client but she was so kind to pass me to Caryn Wiseman, a senior agent there, who said she was enamored with my work. We had a phone call and at the end of that call, she offered representation. I feel truly lucky. She has been my agent since 2019. It may seem like my journey was fast because all the opportunities opened up for me since then. But because I always had the dream to illustrate a book from when I was young and woke up every day towards this goal, I like to call my journey "an overnight success thirty years in the making."

We pitched *Sari-Sari Summers* after being rejected for another Filipino-themed picture book. Thankfully, Candlewick Press' editor Melanie Cordova said yes.

SL: It took me a long time to get to the point where I felt ready to explore writing fiction. I was scared to give myself permission to try it, honestly. To begin, I enrolled in a creative writing master's program at the University of the Philippines Diliman, and there, I enrolled in a class focused on writing for young adults.



Stephanie E. Mahar, MLIS, is a Filipina American first-generation PhD candidate in the Language, Literacy, and Technology program at Washington State University, College of Education. She is also the Vice Chair/Chair-Elect of the Washington Library Association's Public Library Division, a book coder for the *Diverse BookFinder*, and the

YALSA Book Awards/Lists Oversight Committee liaison for *Great Graphic Novels for Teens* and *Quick Picks for Reluctant Young Adult Readers*.

That's where I wrote the earliest manuscript for *What Things Mean*. I was incredibly lucky to learn from a wonderful professor, Heidi Eusebio-Abad, and to get great advice and feedback from my writing peers there. Upon the encouragement of Professor Abad, and of writing mentors I had met shortly after as a fiction fellow in the Silliman Writers' Workshop, I entered my manuscript in the Scholastic Asian Book Award, and it won first prize. With it came the incredible opportunity for your manuscript to be evaluated for publication by Scholastic Asia. I still can't believe how everything unfolded for me. I was completely floored when they called my name as the winner; I was completely unprepared. At the same time though, I felt really excited to know that there was a place in the world for stories like mine.

After growing up reading about mostly blonde and blue-eyed heroines, it was empowering to know that a world-renowned publishing house like Scholastic was making space for Filipino stories. I went to the US as an MFA student with the intention of refining my craft and learning more about writing for children and young adults. Not long after that, I found my agent, and with her guidance, we were able to publish my first two picture books with Simon & Schuster.

I realize how lucky I've been; I know that most publishing journeys do not look like mine. I'm grateful to have benefited from many mentors, and to have an agent like mine who is proactively championing BIPOC stories, and an editorial team that's really supportive of stories like mine.

MS: My first story, *When Lola Visits*, was out on submission for a little over seven months before it found a home with HarperCollins. That was a really discouraging time...but I'm so thankful to my agent for championing my story and also to my editor for her vision for the story. They both knew that it was a story that the world needed to hear.

DG: My first published book was *Children of the San Joaquin Valley* published by Poppy Lane Publishing. At the time, I was a newspaper reporter for *The Fresno Bee*. A local publisher commissioned me to write this nonfiction children's book about the kids from many cultures who lived in California's Central San Joaquin Valley.

I always dreamed of publishing children's books. I wrote several manuscripts for fiction books, but received many rejections. Editors and agents would often praise my writing but told me there wasn't a market for the niche multicultural books I was pitching.

After taking a summer course, I ended up pursuing a masters of fine arts degree in Children's Literature from Hollins University. I learned a lot about the craft of writing for children and the business of publishing through that program and the people I met there. My first contract for a fiction picture book came in 2010 from Shen's Books. I published *Cora Cooks Pancit* on a modest royalty rate. Through the years, that book won several awards and has gained momentum selling more than sixty thousand copies to date.

Which aspects of Filipino and/or Filipino American culture does your work portray?

LB: I like illustrating the family dynamics, our traditions, the setting, and food. I like our readers to say, "We had those in our house while I was growing up." *Sari-Sari Summers* is set in the Philippines. At first, this worried me because I thought the readers might not be able to relate. I also had some text in the speech bubbles without translation. It was my invitation to the readers to say them out loud and figure out their meanings by using the visual cues. My kind editor reassured me that it was a good thing.

SL: Families, especially huge extended families, and deep inter-generational relationships are always present, whether I'm consciously centering Filipino culture or not. I come from a pretty close-knit extended family (my mom is one of twelve siblings, and my paternal grandmother is one of eight siblings), and so that always comes out naturally in my stories.

Different aspects of community care are also often featured in my stories; growing up, I benefited from the attention and guidance of so many *titos* and *titas*, *ates* and *kuyas*, *ninongs* and *ninangs*, and *manongs* and *manangs* around me. My days were so rich because I had so many influences modeling what it meant to live meaningfully. I learned about love and care and responsibility from my parents, but I observed my cousins and *titas* as they themselves grew up and developed their sense of style and beauty routines. I understood what it meant to have bigger social circles like *barkadas* from my other cousins and uncles. I learned about Filipino-style courtship and relationships from watching many different family members go through *ligawan*—seeing them falling in love and learning how to be vulnerable around me. I learned that friends could feel like family. Many of the characters that I write about are the same, I think. Their lives are rich because of that Filipino sense of community-making too.

MS: My books portray Filipino families engaging with Filipino and Filipino American culture through cooking and eating



together, passing on of Filipino traditions from one generation to another and creating new ones, such as when Lola and her granddaughter pick kalamansi and make kalamansi pie on the Fourth of July in *When Lola Visits*. I love those scenes because for me, the making of an American custard pie with the Filipino kalamansi represents a coming together of Filipino and American cultures, reflecting many of our experiences growing up as Filipinos in America, as well as in the wider diaspora.

DG: My book *Cora Cooks Pancit* celebrates Filipino food and heritage as well as the history of the Filipino farmworkers in California. My forthcoming book *Kailani's Gift* features a Filipino American girl learning to dance a traditional dance called the Tinikling. That book also celebrates food along with dance and multigenerational relationships so often experienced in Filipino culture.

How does your Filipino heritage shape your storytelling? Does your family history influence your stories, and if so, how?

LB: Absolutely! I want to share more of what I grew up with in my stories. So much of it centers on family. We have so many unique traits, customs, and traditions. But being an immigrant now also plays a part. I remember feeling small and unsure in a new place. I'm sure my parents also have their immigrant stories. Insecurities. Familial bonds. I find myself missing home but at the same time accepting where I am now. I would like to eventually write another story about what all of that means to me.

SL: I navigate the world, both on and off the page, with a Filipino lens. My upbringing definitely influences my storytelling too. I was raised in a middle-class Filipino family, but I understood how much privilege that came with, because it was different from the way my parents were raised. My father's family was comfortable in the province where they lived, but my mom grew up very poor. She was the first one to finish college in her family and it was through her and her siblings' hard work that they were able to uplift everyone else that came after.

Being on the other side of that and having been on the receiving end of so much privilege and grace, I'm always really careful about how I write about the Philippines and how I shape Filipino characters. I have Filipino beta readers, people whose insight I trust, read my work before it goes to my agent or my editor because I want to make sure that I'm being authentic and thoughtful. I want to be certain that I'm not misrepresenting anything or contributing to Western assumptions and stereotypes of what a developing country like the Philippines must be like, just because I'm trying to sell a book in the American publishing market. In spite of its imperfections, I see the Philippines as a beautiful and

joyful place. I see Filipinos back home and everywhere as hard-working, noble, kind, and generous people, and I hope that when I write about us, I am getting that right on the page.

MS: I try to include details in my stories that reflect my family history, and hope that these details help to broaden representation of different Filipino groups in the Philippines. For example, pinakbet makes an appearance in *Maribel's Year* because it's a dish that originated in Ilocos Sur, where my mother's side of the family hails from. In *When Lola Visits*, Lola sings in both Tagalog and Ilocano, both languages spoken on my mother's side of the family.

DG: My dad's family is predominantly Filipino with a mix of Chinese and Polynesian, which is typical of Filipino families. I often draw on my own experiences growing up in the kitchen with my grandparents, aunties, and cousins. Although my books are fiction, they incorporate my own connections with my culture and research about Filipino heritage. I love celebrating the Filipino American experience through my writing.

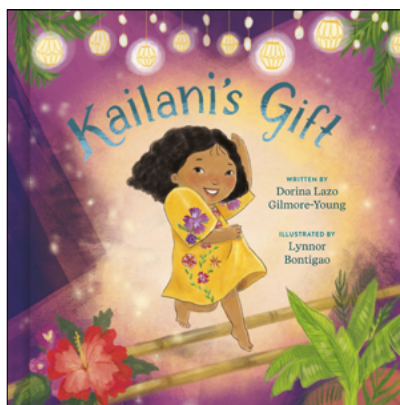
In addition to family themes, food seems to be a common topic. What drove you to include those details?

LB: One of the ways we can connect to our Filipino culture is with food. Family members cooking together becomes a core memory. We seem to capture that kitchen scene in our minds like a snapshot. Aromas take us back to a moment in time. Food is more than a dish on a plate. It is home, love, and childhood. I think that most countries also feel this way about food, so it is a universal way of showing cultures.

SL: Both of my parents are Kapampangan, and that's one of the regions really well-known for their culinary traditions, and so by virtue of that, I'm naturally drawn to food-related stories.

Filipino food takes time—it's stews being simmered over charcoal for hours, it's the kind of flavor that takes a long time to develop. It's also the kind of food that's innovative; I love how we were doing nose-to-tail cooking long before it was considered fashionable.

Another reason why I love featuring Filipino food in my stories is because it's incredibly personal; there are many Filipino dishes that aren't as accessible or as portable as tacos or burgers or even dumplings would be (though admittedly, we have versions of those too). To fully experience Filipino dishes like *sinigang* or *nilaga* or *tinola* for example, along with the different types of *sawsawan* and the rice and the sense of community those meals come with, one would often need to be invited into someone's home. I like that to experience our food is almost always an invitation to



Learn More About the Authors



Lynnor Bontigao is a Philippine-born author-illustrator. *Sari-Sari Summers* is her debut as an author-illustrator. She also illustrated *The World's Best Class Plant* by award-winning authors Liz Garton Scanlon and Audrey Vernick, as well as *You Are Revolutionary* by Cindy Wang Brandt, and *Jack & Agyu* by Fil-Am author Justine Villanueva. Lynnor is the recipient of the 2020 SCBWI Tomie dePaola Professional Development Award, the 2020 Kweli/SCBWI Emerging Voice Award, and the 2021 Kweli Sing the Truth! Mentorship. She lives in New Jersey.



Sophia N. Lee grew up in the Philippines. She wanted to be many things growing up: doctor, teacher, ballerina, ninja, crime-fighting international spy, wizard, time traveler, journalist, and lawyer. She likes to think she can be all these things and more through writing. She is the author of *Soaring Saturdays; What Things Mean*, which won the Grand Prize at the 2014 Scholastic Asian Book Awards; *Holding On*; and *Lolo's Sari-Sari Store*. Sophia received the Ani ng Dangal

Award from the Philippine National Commission for Culture & the Arts for her work in children's literature. She has an MFA in Writing for Children and Young Adults from The New School in New York City and works as a teacher of creative writing.



Michelle Sterling is a children's book author, photographer, and speech-language pathologist living in Orange County, California. *When Lola Visits*, Michelle's first picture book illustrated by Aaron Asis, received four starred reviews, was an ALA Notable Children's Book of the Year, Kirkus Best of the Year, NYPL Best of the Year, Bank Street Best of the Year, Book-Page Best of the Year, and more. Her most recent book, *Maribel's Year*, was illustrated by Sarah Gonzales.



Dorina Lazo Gilmore-Young is a speaker, podcaster, teacher, and mother of three girls, who grew up in a multiracial family. She is the author of *Cora Cooks Pancit*, *Chasing God's Glory*, and her 2024 release *Kailani's Gift* coming in 2024.

be part of one's family. I think that's why I'm constantly trying to recreate that warmth and familiarity in my stories.

MS: Food is one of the lenses through which I see the world; it's such a great connector—an experience that connects one generation to another despite language barriers and age differences. Furthermore, breaking bread around the table together opens up opportunities to bond, laugh together, and share stories with one another.

In what ways do Filipino and Filipino American experiences enrich children's literature?

LB: We open up people's minds when we share our stories. To see books by Filipinos and Filipino-Americans growing in numbers is so inspiring. Our kids will grow up seeing themselves and feeling proud of their heritage. We also let other people learn more about us and I believe when one learns about another culture, it leads to better understanding and appreciation.

SL: There's so much value not just in kids seeing themselves as heroes and central figures in the stories they read, but in being able to be seen fully. I think there's so much to learn and understand from the Philippines' history and why our culture has taken the shape that it has—from the colonizations and the battles for independence, to the way that we as a people assimilate and take in what we can from all these different cultural influences; there's

so much value in preserving and sharing those stories, not just so that we can learn from past mistakes, but also so that we can build a better world for children everywhere.

MS: Readers are able to get to know aspects of Filipino and Filipino American culture in books that they might not encounter otherwise if there's not a sizable Filipino population where they live. Books provide so many insights into different cultures and can serve as springboards for further exploration, discussion, and getting to know other cultures. The unique qualities of Filipino and Filipino American culture can be experienced in books, as well as discovering commonalities with other cultures, leading to the realization that although we are all so different, we have so much in common.

DG: It's important for kids of all backgrounds to learn that the Asian American experience is not a monolith. Filipino culture is one of many Asian experiences. The Filipino American experience is even more nuanced depending on the generation.

Do you have any favorite Filipino crafts or traditions to share with children?

LB: I like the tradition of the Mano Po, a gesture that Nora does on the cover of *Sari-Sari Summers*, where she takes the hand of her lola and places it on her forehead. It is a traditional way of greeting our elders as a sign of respect. It is just so unique to us, I think. My

parents love it when my kids greet them with a kiss, hug, and the Mano Po. It somehow feels extra special.

SL: Storytelling was such a huge part of my childhood—not just the kind we read from books, but also the kind of myth and lore that was much better told in person, voices hushed in some dark corner. It was through my older cousins that I learned about many Filipino mythological creatures—how one became an *aswang* or how one could find a *kapre* smoking outside one’s window, for instance, or how if you drove past Balete street after midnight, you could see the white lady whose soul is tied to the tree that the street is named after. I hope that kind of oral tradition continues—those stories made me even more curious about the world, and also more open to discovering magic and mystery in things that most people would consider ordinary.

MS: During my author visit presentations, I’m especially excited to share about the parol star lanterns in the September spread of *Maribel’s Year*, along with details about how the Philippines has one of the longest holiday seasons in the world.

DG: Our family loves to cook together. We especially love rolling Filipino lumpia (egg rolls) and gathering at the table.

What advice would you give to children’s librarians curating book collections/displays or creating library programs for AAPI Heritage Month?

LB: First of all, thank you to all librarians for what they do! I think they are already doing an amazing job displaying more diverse stories front and center. During AAPI Heritage Month, it may be good to invite more creators to their libraries and perhaps do an activity related to the books whether it’s a craft, game, or recipe. It is also wonderful to see AAPI creators featured at all other times of the year.

SL: I hope that children’s librarians everywhere are able to curate a collection of books that’s reflective of how rich and diverse the world is. Yes, it’s important to have books that function as mirrors which affirm our existence and highlight the value of our stories as they form part of the larger human experience, but libraries also carry the responsibility of having books that open windows into other people’s worlds.

Children, especially, need to read diversely, not just to see common threads within our humanity, but also to celebrate and embrace the things that make us different. I hope more realize that AAPI books are for all children, not just those who identify as AAPI. That’s true for all books that center different facets of diversity. They are there to teach kids empathy, acceptance, and understanding so that they can grow up to be the kind of adults who will help shape the world into a better place.

What’s next for all of you?

LB: I illustrated two picture books (*At the End of the Day* by Lisl H. Detlefsen; *Kailani’s Gift* by Dorina Gilmore-Young) and one early reader series, *Seashell Key* by Lourdes Heuer, coming out in Spring 2024.

SL: I’m in the middle of finishing several manuscripts.

MS: My next picture book comes out in 2025 from Viking and is about a father and son and their journey through the Philippines.

DG: *Kailani’s Gift* will be released in April 2024. I also recently contributed to a cookbook project called *We Cook Filipino* with details here: <https://amzn.to/3MTBTRL>. &

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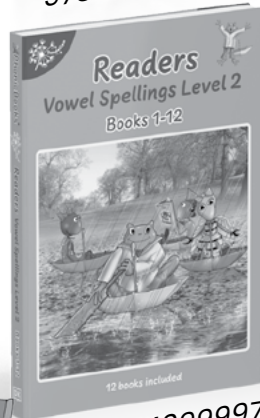
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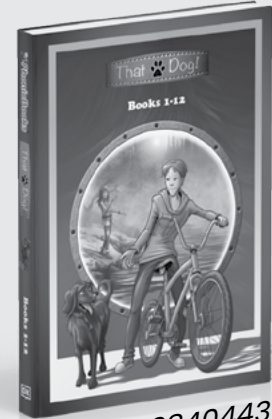


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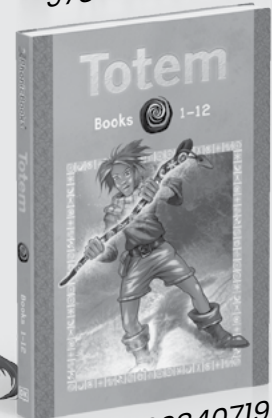
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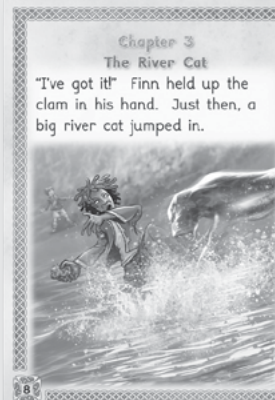
"The new toy has to sit on the bench,"
said Rex.
This annoyed Roy, the cowboy.

3

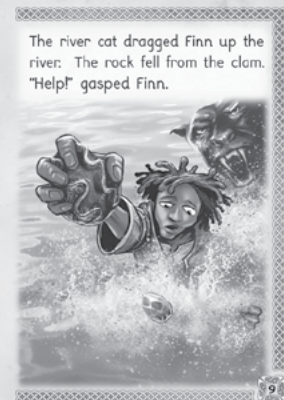


Roy began to spoil the game.
He galloped on his horse.
The toys ran and hid in the chest.

4



8



9

Parenting with Dyslexia

One Father's Creative Approach to Storytime

TALIA GREENE

Parents and caregivers of young children naturally want to set their kids up to succeed academically as best they can. However, how do caregivers who they themselves struggle with a learning disability approach supporting their children's early literacy development?

Despite the fact that 15 to 20% of the population has a language-based learning disability, there is little research on how this condition impacts caregivers while their children develop their language skills.¹ This case study begins to address this lack of research, by focusing on how a father with dyslexia supports his almost three-year-old as she grows up, how his dyslexia affects storytime, and his strategies for overcoming his reading challenges.

Family Introduction

David, Grace, Emilia, and Arthur are a white, English-speaking family living on the West Coast of Canada. They rent a house in a middle-class suburb, with David's sister living in their basement. David works as a coordinator in the school-age care program at a childcare center. Grace is a nurse, working at a senior's home. Three-year-old Emilia and nine-month-old Arthur attend daycare five days a week, usually in the afternoons. They often spend the mornings with their mom, whose shifts tend to start later in the day, and spend the evenings with their dad. They visit their grandparents most weekends, and regularly get babysat by their aunt who lives downstairs.

Emilia enjoys collecting and painting rocks, drumming and singing at daycare, and climbing on the playground. She enjoys books and visits the public library about once a week. Her local library

does not have much for children beyond the books (no toys or kids' games), but Emilia still throws a tantrum when it is time to leave the library. She knows where to find her favorite library books and is allowed to borrow five books at a time.

While not yet able to write letters on her own, she can copy simple shapes onto paper and has a game on her tablet where she traces letters. She can sometimes correctly identify what letter a word starts with based on how it sounds, and occasionally sings parts of the alphabet out of order. She has memorized a few books, and knows when to turn the pages of those books. Books with songs, repetition, and rhymes are especially popular with Emilia.

David or Grace reads to Emilia at least every night before bed. Usually, Emilia wants to read sometime during the day too. David explains, "She actually will bring us books more than we offer them, which is kind of cool. She'll go to her room and come out with a stack of books and ask us to read them. She usually does that once or twice a day." Emilia enjoys storytime with her parents, demonstrating a positive impression of reading and books.

Emilia's father, David, has more than a decade of experience working in childcare and is designing a program for supporting



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young fathers as part of his work. David is a loving and enthusiastic father, but because of his dyslexia, reading aloud to Emilia did not immediately come naturally to him. Over the years, David has developed strategies for dealing with his dyslexia and supporting his daughter's early literacy development in spite of his own challenges.

Methods

David gave signed consent to be recorded and interviewed for this case study. Emilia agreed verbally to my request to watch her play and listen to her storytime. David chose pseudonyms for the four family members.

I spent three hours with the family at their home. Initially, I watched Emilia play, and watched how David and Grace interacted with her and her little brother. I then interviewed David while the whole family spent time together in their living room. At the end of the session, I observed while David read to Emilia, and then Emilia got out more books for her to "read" to David. I took notes and photos while observing the family play, and audio-recorded the interview and reading. The parents shared videos to help enhance my understanding of Emilia's early literacy development. By spending time in the family home, I got a sense of the environment in which they spent most of their time together. While my presence was out of the norm, this method of observation aimed to capture a sense of a typical weekend in the life of this family.

Findings

Dyslexia has complicated David's relationship with reading. He remembers struggling in school, both with reading and math, but had no idea he had a learning disability.

"I actually didn't graduate high school on time," he said. "I found it too overwhelming and I started failing classes... Finally, I was telling someone involved with [my work] and they suggested I should get tested for dyslexia, just telling based on my story." He was later diagnosed with dyslexia, and sought out a program that supported him; he completed high school at 22.

Since his diagnosis, David has felt relieved and empowered. "It was hard when I was younger," he says, "but it's kind of cool now that I know about it and I can figure out ways to overcome it."

Understanding his learning disability helps David take steps to accommodate his learning style. However, he confesses that being a father proved to be a new obstacle for him when it came to reading aloud to his daughter.

He admits, "I was self-conscious to [read with Emilia] at first. Especially if Grace and I read together, just because Grace is a reading master. And I was nervous to read around people...when I was in high school. Once I realized that we could have fun with it, I think it got easier."



David felt the stigma of not being a strong reader, feeling inferior to his wife's reading skills. However, understanding why he struggles to read in ways that others do not, David has learned strategies to combat his learning disability. One such tactic involves adding some creativity to storytime.

He explains, "If I'm reading Emilia a book...sometimes I will change the story if I get lost. [Laughs]. Which is kind of fun. I'll just tell her a different story. I can be pretty imaginative."

David's flexibility and creativity keep Emilia engaged, encouraging her to pay attention to the reading, catching him when he deviates from the story. Another strategy he employs involves him asking Emilia to tell *him* the story instead. David tells me she is good at this, which demonstrates her understanding of how books and stories work. She turns pages periodically and uses the pictures as the basis for her narratives.

Emilia and David's relationship to reading underscores that books are vessels for emotional expression and development, not simply tools for learning to read. Despite the hurdles David faces in reading aloud and Emilia's inability to read altogether, storytime is a way the two can connect.

Emilia's favorite books tend to mirror her life. This attraction to books that reflect a child's own experience is common: "Young children use concepts and experiences from their daily lives to help them make meaning out of story events and settings which would otherwise be quite alien to them. Simultaneously, the children draw on stories to better understand their own existence: it is a two-way process."²

Books help children make sense of the world, and they are therefore most interested in books that relate to their own lives. One of Emilia's favorite books speaks to her desire to see herself and her surroundings in books. She calls the book *Made for Me* by Zach Bush her "Daddy Book" because the illustrations look like her father.³ Most tellingly, she seems to only want her dad to read this book to her, not anyone else. Emilia obviously associates the content of the book with her father, and the act of reading it to her is reserved for him alone. She expresses her love for her father through her storytime requests. This book is David's favorite to read to Emilia.

Discussion

Dyslexia is a neurological condition, affecting people at an even rate of about 15 to 20% across cultures and genders.⁴ It has no effect on intelligence, though ignorance and stigma may negatively affect people with dyslexia.⁵ Many people with dyslexia feel embarrassment or inadequacy because of the lack of cultural understanding surrounding dyslexia.

The International Dyslexia Association reports, "It can be painful and frustrating to struggle with basic reading and writing skills and to be unable to achieve in the eyes of their teachers, classmates, and parents... A sense of failure and inferiority may generalize beyond the classroom and may last into adulthood."⁶

David recalled feeling this sense of inferiority when he first began reading to Emilia. He, fortunately, overcame this nervousness and does not let some stumbling over his words stop him from reading with his kids every day. Other parents and caregivers, especially those with undiagnosed dyslexia, may not feel so confident. Further research should be done to get a better sense of how other dyslexic caregivers approach reading to their children.

While dyslexia is hereditary and therefore a condition that one will have their entire life, proper support and coping skills early on can help those with dyslexia lead a normal, successful life.⁷ Because of the genetic component to dyslexia, the children of people with dyslexia have a 33 to 66% chance of developing the condition compared to 6 to 16% for those without a dyslexic parent.⁸ This highlights the need for more resources for dyslexic caregivers to best help their children thrive in their early literacy development.

In researching this topic, it became clear that there are few easily accessible resources for caregivers with dyslexia. Most searches yielded results about parenting *children* with dyslexia, rather than giving advice for caregivers wanting to support their children's literacy development when they themselves struggle with a learning disability.

Academic literature and scientific studies on parents with dyslexia focused on the genetic component of dyslexia; few examined the tactics caregivers take in coping with their learning disability when reading with their children or teaching their children how to read and write. Many articles address the challenges

children face in school when they have a learning disability, but what happens when those children grow up and want to support their own children to learn to read and write? If dyslexic caregivers struggle to read, they may inadvertently pass along an aversion to reading to their children.

Emilia shows no signs of being behind in her literacy development. In fact, at not-yet three years old, she has already displayed an understanding how letters and words work, she memorizes songs and books, she can make up stories based on the illustrations in a book, and she can sometimes identify which letter a word starts with. There is no evidence that David's dyslexia has hindered Emilia's literacy development. However, because of the genetic component of dyslexia, information and support should be readily available for dyslexic parents who want to ensure their child's successful early childhood development.

While reading aloud to children is valuable for enhancing a child's early literacy development, it is only one of many possible ways for caregivers to prepare their child for reading. Celano and Neuman pinpoint five activities as key practices for early literacy development: singing, talking, reading, writing, and playing.⁹ These five practices work equally well for developing an understanding of language and it is not necessary to force a child to do one they do not like, if there are others that they particularly enjoy.

For caregivers who do not enjoy reading, guided play with their child is equally beneficial. Neuman and Roskos write, "Considerable evidence, in fact, supports the critical role of play, and in particular pretend play, on children's language and emergent literacy in the preschool years."¹⁰ Playing with a child enhances their early literacy in three ways:

- providing settings that promote literacy activity, skills, and strategies
- serving as a language experience that can build connections between oral and written modes of expression
- providing opportunities to teach and learn literacy.¹¹

Giving children many opportunities to practice their early literacy with guidance from adults is what matters most.

David's strategy of asking Emilia to tell him the story as a way of coping with his dyslexia is a clever way to help promote Emilia's early literacy learning, since it encourages an in-depth connection with the book.

Teale writes that giving children a chance to respond to books in various ways helps them better engage with reading and develop a positive association with books: "The greater richness children attach to books, the more likely they are to enhance their love of them and learn from them."¹²

David combines reading and play when he invites Emilia to be the storyteller. In doing so, Emilia practices her language skills, and

demonstrates an understanding of narrative and how books function. This tactic is a fun way of preparing kids for reading and does not require the parent to have strong reading skills.

Reading to children fosters a connection between parent and child; a child's learning depends upon their surroundings and their close relationships with the adults around them, as Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory asserts.¹³ One of the most important factors for a child's success both academically and emotionally is that they "are surrounded by responsive caregivers, family members, teachers, and peers."¹⁴

Storytime with her father teaches Emilia that she has a support system and a parent who cares for her. In fact, Bus argues, "the main incentive for book reading is not the child's reading interest, but the fact that parents are able to create an intimate situation in which parent and child share a book."¹⁵ A child's development depends far more on having strong, intimate relationships with adults than on the speed with which they learn to read. As demonstrated through David and Emilia's shared love of reading *Made for Me* together, stories can be a way for caregivers and children to bond and form strong relationships. By sharing this book about a father and daughter, David communicates to Emilia that he loves her, by far the most important lesson Emilia could learn.

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Recommendations for Libraries

Libraries should consider steps to make their programming more conscious of caregivers with diverse learning needs and literacy competencies. While there may not be enough demand for workshops or support groups for caregivers with dyslexia, librarians should note that reading does not necessarily come easily to everyone. Libraries can include resources on their website giving tips and guidance for caregivers with dyslexia.

Although librarians may be keen to share information with these caregivers, they must first have solid research to share. More research on parenting with dyslexia is necessary to further the dialogue and increase understanding of the challenges these caregivers face. However, even without this research, librarians can reassure caregivers that reading aloud is only one of many possible ways to enhance their child's development.

They should communicate to caregivers that singing, playing, and talking are equally as important for a child's early literacy development as reading and writing. This messaging should be at the forefront of libraries' guidance for all caregivers of young children, since many caregivers likely associate the library exclusively with books. Most of all, librarians should be assuring caregivers that demonstrating to their child that they are loved and valued is the most important thing a caregiver can do. &

It's Never Too Early

Hatchlings Program Reaches Expectant and Newborn Families

CARRIE SANDERS, BETSY DIAMANT-COHEN, DOROTHY STOLTZ,
AND ELAINE CZARNECKI



Just twenty years ago, library programs for babies were rare occurrences, and many librarians were uncomfortable with the idea of presenting programs for children under age three and their caregivers. Now, research regarding the connection between early childhood experiences and brain development is widely known, and as a result, early literacy programming for infants and toddlers is an accepted part of mainstream library offerings.

But why only start there? Research also tells us that a fetus can hear a mother's voice while still in utero, and supports the Every Child Ready to Read (ECRR) practices of talking and singing even before the baby is born. That's why children's librarian Carrie Sanders dreamed about creating a program for expectant parents.

In 2016, Carrie became the youth services coordinator of the Maryland State Library Agency and met Dorothy Stoltz, then director for community engagement at the Carroll County (MD) Public Library. Dorothy suggested that she reach out to Dr. Betsy Diamant-Cohen, another former children's librarian and current consultant and trainer for Mother Goose on the Loose.

In true collaborative style, Carrie and Betsy shared their dreams for children and families over coffee together and when Carrie mentioned her desire to offer a program for expectant parents, Betsy offered to create one. A few years later, funding became available and Dorothy, Carrie, and Betsy began their *Hatchlings* journey.

The first agenda item was to hire someone to evaluate the process every step along the way, to ensure that the program was



Carrie Sanders is the youth services coordinator for the Maryland State Library Agency, where she provides consultation and training to youth services coordinators for all public libraries in the areas of early literacy, STEAM programming, teen services, and family engagement. **Dr. Betsy Diamant-Cohen** is a children's librarian with a doctorate in communications design. Creator of the Mother Goose on the Loose early literacy program, Betsy

has been a passionate supporter of families and very young children for more than thirty years. She received the ALSC Distinguished Service Award in 2022 and co-edits *Children & Libraries' Research Roundup* column. **Dorothy Stoltz** is a professional librarian, author, and Edward de Bono Creative Thinking Methods trainer who has decades of experience in the field of librarianship, programming, outreach, and community engagement. She currently serves as Director of Library Engagement for The de Bono Group and is owner of Waldo Publishers, inspired by the writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson. **Elaine Czarnecki** is a literacy consultant specializing in early literacy and evaluation projects. She has provided consulting, professional development, and evaluation services on a variety of initiatives across the country since first beginning her work with public libraries in 2001.



working and to enable tweaks to be made to parts that needed improvement. Luckily, Elaine Czarnecki, literacy consultant with Resources in Reading and a co-author with Dorothy on the *ECRR Toolkit for Serving Early Childhood Educators*, was available and the four-person *Hatchlings* Steering Committee was formed.

The Steering Committee's original idea morphed into a vision of two programs; one for expectant parents and a follow-up program for parents with newborns. With funding from the Maryland State Department of Education, the Maryland State Library Agency hired Betsy to develop *Mother Goose on the Loose: Hatchlings*, a program that helps parents nurture their babies through playful literacy practices, both before and immediately after birth.

The Program

Mother Goose on the Loose: Hatchlings is a unique offering under the *Mother Goose on the Loose* umbrella. It consists of two separate programs, *Ready to Hatch* (RTH) for expectant parents (single session) and *In the Nest* (ITN) for parents with newborns (series of four workshop sessions).

The *Hatchlings* initiative teaches the importance of developing the daily habits of talking, reading, singing, and bonding with

babies. Both programs, *Ready to Hatch* (RTH) and *In the Nest* (ITN), are designed to:

- Empower parents as their baby's first and most important teacher;
- Establish the roots of early literacy development for expectant and new families through in-person and outreach programming so that ALL families can learn the importance of daily early reading (sharing books), singing, and bonding with their babies;
- Inform and inspire families that literacy begins before birth and continues in the earliest months of life;
- Help parents discover how librarians and library-sponsored early literacy programs can support and engage expectant families and families with newborns throughout their preschool years.

The *Hatchlings* curriculum follows the *Mother Goose on the Loose* format and philosophy, which focuses on the whole child, building upon a foundation of ritual, repetition, music, movement, learning-by-doing, joy, fostering a non-judgmental atmosphere, and play.

Hatchlings integrates important **health and child development** information, including eye and visual development, the

importance of tummy time, and how an infant's brain develops in the early weeks and months of life through verbal and tactile stimulation with caregivers.

Hatchlings highlights **early literacy** information and practices while encouraging talking and singing to the fetus while still in utero. Interacting in this way becomes a habit, and parents learn that ***it is never too early*** to start showing baby the meaning of words through daily singing, talking, and reading.

Hatchlings was intentionally created with delivery instructions for inside the library as well as in community outreach settings. The programs have been piloted and evaluated for three years with selected library systems across the state of Maryland. As of December 2022, *Hatchlings* completed two pilot years with Carroll, Prince George's, Calvert, and Howard County libraries, and concluded its third and final pilot year at the close of 2023. It combines the best of the public library with our early learning community partners, such as health departments, hospitals, pediatricians, early learning councils, high schools, immigration organizations, the faith community, Head Start, and Mommy and Me groups, in its effort to reach families with the important message about daily reading, singing, talking, and bonding with baby.

Focus groups were convened before Pilot 1 began and feedback solicited from Pilots 1 and 2 library facilitators significantly contributed to the establishment and modification of effective practices for content delivery to improve the family experience and to increase the ease and efficacy of facilitator presentation. In addition, the Calvert, Carroll, Howard, and Prince George's County library systems created fresh avenues for community partnership cooperation to better recruit expectant and newborn families. These insights and effective practices helped augment Pilot 3's collaboration efforts.

Pilot Three (2023) created and celebrated a formal collaboration between Maryland libraries and school-based early learning hubs called Judy Centers (named after Judith P. Hoyer, the wife of Congressman Steny Hoyer, for her work enhancing services for low-income families before her untimely death in 1997). Seven additional counties joined the *Hatchlings* initiative via the grant, blending the talent, skills, and dedication of staff in both organizations who love babies—Caroline, Cecil, Harford, Kent, Montgomery, Queen Anne's, and Wicomico counties. Librarians from other Maryland counties (Frederick and St. Mary's), who were not part of the grant, also participated in the most recent *Hatchlings* Facilitator training, and these library systems have found ways to offer the *Hatchlings* program. As of this writing, we are awaiting Pilot 3 statistics. To date, 144 *Hatchlings* programs have been provided across the state serving expectant families and families with newborns. The number of families served more than doubled from Pilot 1 to Pilot 2.

Before *Hatchlings* started, we identified our goals, and at the conclusion of our two pilot years, we were delighted to discover

that we had achieved our objectives. It is especially encouraging that our positive findings have been replicated in the Year Three pilot so far, as well.

Evaluation Plan Outcomes

Outcome 1: Participating **librarians will gain both knowledge and confidence** in providing effective early literacy training for expectant parents (Ready to Hatch) and parents of young infants (In the Nest). **Assessed by:** Survey following training, focus group discussion following workshops

Outcomes 2-6: Focus on **parents gaining knowledge and confidence** in how to support their infant's early literacy development, bond with their infants, and develop daily routines that work for their families to achieve these goals. **Assessed by:** Surveys following workshops and follow-up surveys several months after workshops have taken place

Via surveys and follow-up interviews, parents enthusiastically spoke about the new information they had learned and the new practices they were adopting as a result of attending *Hatchlings*. For example:

Parents' Feedback

Here are some ideas parents told us they said they would use.

- "Read and ask questions even if the baby can't respond. As long as he is hearing, he will be learning at an early age to build his vocabulary."
- "Singing and reading or talking about the books."
- "The inclusion of songs/singing in everyday activities."
- "Singing lullabies or songs in both English and Spanish."
- "Describing daily activities such as birds singing."
- "Reading more to the baby when he arrives."

Data from Ready to Hatch, Pilots 1 and 2

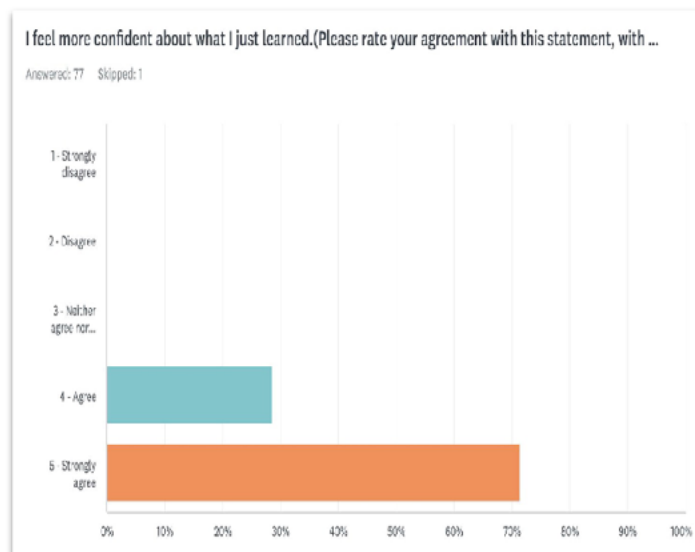
Hatchlings evaluator Elaine Czarnecki compiled the following from her data collection.

Hatchlings, Ready to Hatch is a one-workshop program. Parents are asked to complete an evaluation immediately following their *Ready to Hatch* workshop and a follow-up survey is solicited after their babies are born.

All Pilot 1 and 2 parents (100 percent) surveyed (n=37) agreed that they learned and increased their confidence regarding

Parent Feedback: Areas measured for confidence

- The ability to support my baby's brain development
- How to read aloud and sing to my baby before birth
- How to read (share books) with my baby after birth to support early literacy development
- How to sing, talk, and play with my baby after birth to support early literacy development



supporting their baby's early literacy development (before and after birth) by participating in the *Ready to Hatch* workshop.

Follow-up surveys found that all parents (100 percent) reported using the information from the *Hatchlings* workshop and incorporating early literacy activities into their daily routines with their newborns. Furthermore, all parents (100 percent) stated that the activities had helped them bond with their babies and feel more confident about supporting their new baby's early literacy development.

Data from In the Nest, Pilots 1 and 2

Hatchlings, *In the Nest* is a four-workshop program for parents and their newborns. Parents are asked to complete a workshop evaluation following their first and last sessions. A follow-up survey is also solicited several months after the series is completed.

All parents (100 percent) surveyed (n = 61) agreed that they learned and increased their confidence regarding supporting their baby's early literacy development by participating in the *In the Nest* workshops. Another key finding was that all parents (100 percent) agreed that they planned to make use of library programs and materials with their children in the future.

Follow-up surveys found that all parents (100 percent) reported using the information from the *Hatchlings* workshops and incorporating early literacy activities into their daily routines with their babies. Furthermore, all parents (100 percent) stated that the activities had helped them bond with their babies and that they were doing all the early literacy activities modeled in the workshops frequently to daily with their children.

Challenge to Recruit Families

Participating libraries experienced initial difficulty in reaching families for their *Ready to Hatch* programs. Pilots 1 and 2 designed an enhanced promotion schedule beyond the library's Facebook page, their website, their monthly publication, in-house marketing, and a few key partners. They broadened their promotional reach through a variety of community touchpoints: schools, local early childhood advisory councils, churches, county health and human services departments, Head Start services, Mommy and Me programs, local health networks, local social service board's newsletter, community schools and outreach centers, local YMCA, women's health clinics, Planned Parenthood, local hospital, pediatricians' offices, pregnancy centers, and local multicultural centers.

As with many library programs, once a few families experience and enjoy *Hatchlings*, they tell other families who will be eager to sign up for future programs.

Note: Pilots 1 and 2 helped pave the way to practice patience and perseverance as a keynote to the success of family recruitment. They assessed their collaborations with other agencies, made phone calls, attended meetings, scheduled business lunches, and made a concerted effort to re-energize relationships with already established community partners and jumpstart new partner connections. They devised creative ways to bring awareness and interest about the *Hatchlings* program to expectant and newborn families. Most of all, libraries and other early learning entities together examined how to listen and respond to families, rather than assuming what they need or want.

In addition, feedback from community partners has been positive.

Community Partner Feedback

Carrie Singley, Health Promotion Program Coordinator, Population Health Department | Howard County General Hospital, said, “Not only has this partnership provided an opportunity for our mostly virtual group to meet in-person, but it has also allowed our participants to gain valuable knowledge and skills. The participants are able to familiarize themselves with the library branch as well, which they all enjoy.”

Caren Klein, LCSW-C, Family Options Program, added, “The Hatchling Program is a warmly-presented, research-based program that demonstrates ways for pregnant women to stimulate prenatal and infant brain development through reading, singing, and touch... [it] reinforces the teachings of the Howard County Health Department’s Family OPTIONS program, which

is a program for pregnant and parenting teens and their infants and toddlers.”

The authors would like to thank the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) for their financial support and professional acumen for the *Hatchlings* initiative. Since our initial request for funding to develop a Pilot One (2021) and Pilot Two (2022) project, MSDE has helped us build bridges among librarians, Judy Center staff, and other community partners to better serve expectant parents and newborn families. Special thanks to Cynthia Lessner, Alberta Stokes, and Kaymi Plank, our MSDE inspirational treasures for family engagement, early childhood, and connecting libraries. The unexpected funding for Pilot Three (2023)—with a special collaboration between libraries and Judy Centers—has opened up doorways for a fresh perspective on family engagement, community partnerships, and the mantra “It’s never too early.” &

Why Stickers Are Powerful Magic

The Argument for “Magical, Ephemeral Badges”

LAURA RAPHAEL

My sister runs half-marathons and marathons and will likely train for an ultra-marathon one day. (They might as well call it a *super-duper-whoop-de-doop-doop-you-could-never-do-this* marathon of the master overlords!)

When I asked her before her first big race if she was going to get one of those incredibly annoying “26.2” stickers and put it on her car, she answered something along the lines of, “A thousand and ten percent I will, and just watch me fill up my entire back window with them, you weakling.”

You should know that my sister, master overload marathon runner though she is, is also one of the kindest human beings I have ever known, a selfless mother and teacher with a usual humility not normally seen outside of Buddhist monks. Yet the marathon stickers make her, shall we say, crazy.

After working as a children’s librarian for a few years, I have seen this kind of sticker mania up close.

One of the delightful surprises, in fact, of working with children in libraries is what greedy, gloriously unrepentant bloodsuckers they are for stickers. You can see the same crazy desire for stickers manifesting in the never-ending, almost cult-ish fandom of Taylor Swift.

In my sister’s marathon-sticker case, and all of those other super-annoying, spandex-clad endorphin chasers collecting various numbers for their windshields, these are emblems of their achievements. It is a socially accepted brag, for sure, but also a genuine reminder of their hard work, a representation of their time and dedication to the running arts.



Tulsa City-County Library Children’s Associate Angela Martinez gives a sticker to her storytime regular Ryker.

For children, the meanings are not as direct, but the passion is as real.

At the branch library where I was formerly a youth librarian, we gave children stickers for their library visits during the Summer Reading Program, but also at the end of storytimes, when they get their first library card, and—my favorite—just because.

I’ll never forget giving Kena, 3 or 4 years old, his first sticker. I gave him the choice of putting it on his hand or his shirt, and after deep and thoughtful consideration, he pointed to his shirt. Once it was there, he kept saying, “Is for me? Is for ME???” and then, eyes bright, chest puffed out, looking up at his mother, “Look, Mama, look! Is for ME!”

Stickers are magical for kids for a few reasons. They are something new that changes the look of your shirt or hand; they are a jolt of surprising joy, a wink from the gods. They give kids a psychological boost the way a kicky new haircut or electric-blue heels give me—when I catch a sight of myself in the mirror, wow! Instant tingles.

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

Toolkits: Free Resources that Are Easy to Use

Betsy Diamant-Cohen and Lisa M. Sensale Yazdian



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. **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).

beyond. She currently manages education and engagement efforts at CET (PBS).

Librarians love toolkits! Easy-to-navigate, often with colorful titles or lists linked to other resources, toolkits are becoming more and more popular. Each year, the list of toolkits useful for librarians seems to grow. Although it was hard to pinpoint the best toolkits to feature in this column, the co-authors have chosen some to annotate and provide a list with more for you to explore at the end of the column.

Reimagining School Readiness Toolkit

<https://bayareadiscoverymuseum.org/resources/educator-resources/library-toolkit>

The Bay Area Museum's Reimagining School Readiness Toolkit was developed as part of an IMLS grant. Designed to foster a growth mindset in parents as well as children, librarians around the country are being trained to use the toolkit, which contains a research overview, program planning and reflection sheets, case studies from libraries around the US, bookmarks, math activities, flyers in six languages, Family Conversation Starters posters, social media and text messages, a program survey, talking points for use between libraries and school districts, an activity database, and more.

Interactive Literacy Activities Toolkit

https://ed.psu.edu/sites/default/files/inline-files/ILA%20ToolKit%20FINAL_3.pdf

Designed by The Goodling Institute for Research in Family Literacy, the toolkit provides a brief overview of family literacy, paying special attention to interactive literacy activities (ILA) and their ability to help caregivers and their children learn together. Research on the benefits of ILA is shared and foundational early literacy concepts are defined. The steps for designing ILA are provided along with a template, additional resources, and example plans for in-person, hybrid, take-home, and remote options.

Libraries Transform: Family Engagement Toolkit

<http://ilovelibraries.org/librariestransform/family-engagement-toolkit>

A joint venture between the Public Library Association (PLA) and the American Library Association (ALA)'s Libraries Transform campaign, this toolkit was designed to emphasize how libraries nurture family engagement by

- *Reaching out* to families
- *Raising up* family perspectives
- *Reinforcing* positive actions
- *Relating*, by providing opportunities for families to connect

- *Reimagining* ways to help children and families thrive. Key marketing messages and graphics are provided highlighting different aspects of family engagement (e.g., *Because Family Time Can Narrow the Achievement Gap, Because Community Support Helps Parents Thrive*) along with real examples from the Ideabook: Libraries for Families (<https://www.packard.org/insights/resource/ideabook-libraries-families/>).

BUILDing Supportive Communities with Libraries, Museums, and Early Childhood Systems

https://buildinitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Build_IMLS_ToolkitWEB1.pdf

A collaboration between the BUILD Initiative and the Institute of Museum and Library Services, the guide unpacks how museums, libraries, and early childhood systems can strengthen outcomes for children and families. The document outlines a path for developing or enhancing partnerships and is broken down into three sections: Development of Relationships and Shared Interest; Understanding and Articulating Opportunities for Shared Benefit; Design, Implementation and Assessment of Strategies, and Action Plans. Each section includes discussion questions to help organizations find common ground (e.g., What do we already know about children and families that are not accessing our programs and services?), highlights tools and resources to move individual agencies and collaboratives forward (e.g., a community equity self-assessment), and shares snapshots of success stories from across the country (e.g., Pennsylvania's One Book, Every Young Child Program).

Getting Started with Mindfulness: A Toolkit for Early Childhood Organizations

<https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/2896-getting-started-with-mindfulness-a-toolkit-for-early-childhood-organizations>

Mindful practices are known to have a positive impact on individuals, relationships, and organizational climates. This Zero to Three publication elaborates on these benefits and provides a roadmap for bringing mindfulness into the work environment. The toolkit outlines six steps

- Start with Yourself
- Assess Interest
- Internal Champions
- Create Collective Intentions
- Implement Your Action Plan
- Adapt Your Plan

Additional Toolkits of Interest

- AASL's Open Educational Resources (OER) Toolkit: https://www.ala.org/aasl/sites/ala.org.aasl/files/content/advocacy/tools/docs/OER%20Toolkit_191105.pdf
- AASL's Toolkit for Promoting School Library Programs: https://www.ala.org/aasl/sites/ala.org.aasl/files/content/aaslissues/toolkits/promo/AASL_Toolkit_Promoting_SLP_033016.pdf
- ALSC's Championing Children's Services Toolkit: <https://www.ala.org/everyday-advocacy/speak-out/alsc-championing-childrens-services-toolkit>
- Cultivating the Relationship-Driven Library: A Toolkit: <https://letsmovelibraries.org/toolkit/>
- James Heckman's 13% ROI Research Toolkit: <https://heckmanequation.org/resource/13-roi-toolbox/>
- Junior Maker Librarian Toolkit: https://www.ala.org/alsc/sites/ala.org.alsc/files/content/Juniors%20Librarian%20Toolkit_September_FINAL.pdf
- Maryland Family Engagement Toolkit: <https://marylandfamiliesengage.org/family-engagement-toolkit/>
- The Digital Librarian's Survival Toolkit: <http://www.bunheadwithducttape.com/the-digital-librarians-survival-toolkit.html>
- Pennsylvania's Strategic Storytelling Toolkit for Public Libraries: https://www.powerlibrary.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/PA_StorytellingTOOLKIT.pdf

Every step is accompanied by goal supporting activities and resources, and example cases of how techniques were successfully implemented by others are also included.

National Center on Improving Literacy: Implementation Toolkits

<https://improvingliteracy.org/kit>

The National Center on Improving Literacy offers several literacy foundations and advocacy toolkits: *Advocating for the Literacy Needs of Children, Alphabetic Principle and Phonics, Families and Schools Partnering for Children's Literacy Success, Fluency with Text, Learning About Your Child's Reading Development, Phonological and Phonemic Awareness, Remote Literacy Learning, Self-Advocacy, Supporting Students with Reading Needs, Supporting Your Child's Literacy Development, and Understanding Dyslexia*. Each toolkit is structured around a set of clearly defined learning objectives and includes a wide array of supplemental materials (e.g., videos, research briefs, infographics, teacher and parent resources, workshop guides).

Multilingual Learning Toolkit

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

The resources and strategies provided for working with multilingual learners in PreK-3rd grade in this kit align with four guiding principles

- Young children can acquire and achieve proficiency in more than one language at the same time
- Bilingualism is a strength
- Family partnerships are powerful when two-way communication is used
- Multilingual children benefit from instruction in all of their languages.

User Guides help teachers, administrators/professional development providers, and teacher education faculty set learning priorities and navigate the website. An extensive resource library is provided with videos and documents supporting family engagement, social-emotional health and development, classroom environment, oral language and literacy development, bilingual classrooms, home language development, content learning, assessment, educator capacity, and beyond.

The Basics Community Toolkit

<https://toolkit.thebasics.org/en/community-toolkit>

Inspired by the fact that 80% of brain growth happens in the first three years of life and skill gaps between socio-economic, racial, and ethnic groups become apparent during this period, this toolkit aims to give caregivers and parents tools to give children from every background a more equal start in life. The Basics are “five evidence-based parenting and caregiving principles that encompass much of what experts find is important for children from birth to age three.” Although similar to Every Child Ready to Read (ECRR)’s five practices, training for new caregivers can be offered in the context of these five basic principles:

- Maximize love, manage stress
- Talk, sing, and point
- Count, group, and compare
- Explore through movement and play
- Read and discuss stories.

The toolkit contains presentations, posters, implementation guides, handouts, videos, research, and evaluation.

Cox Campus Educator’s Toolkit

<https://www.coxcampus.org/educators/>

Using a motto of “Literacy and Justice for All,” the Rollins Center for Language and Literacy in Atlanta developed Cox Campus with the belief that “Every child has the right to literacy—the gateway to deciding their own future and making the most difference in the lives of others.” Their Educator’s Toolkit consists of courses, downloadable resources, personalized learning plans, a pre-K roadmap to reading, a YouTube video library, and much more. The free courses are IACET accredited and give completion certificates with continuing education credit hours. Materials for educators focus on children from infancy to grade three and include resources about dual-language learners and trauma-informed practice. The Story Time section provides activities to go along with books such as *Julián Is a Mermaid* by Jessica Love and *Peter’s Chair* by Ezra Jack Keats. In addition to resources for educators, free resources are also provided to families. There is information about healthcare, discussions, a blog, and lists of Zoom events. This website is a gem because of the valuable lessons it offers as well as the wonderful resources it provides for our use with parents and childcare providers.

Toolkit for Trainers

<https://www.webjunction.org/explore-topics/supercharged-storytimes/toolkit.html>

If you’ve read *Supercharged Storytimes: An Early Literacy Planning and Assessment Guide*, you’ll know it utilizes the VIEWS2 systematic study of storytimes to provide a number of ready-to-use planning tools to help librarians plan, present, reflect, and assess their storytimes. Particular attention is paid to self-reflection and peer-to-peer community learning; descriptions give examples of successful ways for storytime presenters to promote family engagement by connecting with parents and caregivers.

In addition to offering free webinars on *Supercharged Storytimes*, Webjunction also has free materials for instructors who will be leading trainings. Available to everyone, this toolkit includes an overview of the course, the syllabus, practitioner learning objectives, course materials and assignments, possible training schedule scenarios, slide decks, scripts, an outline of learning community content, handouts, relevant resources, and more, divided into the six modules. Even if you are not planning on becoming a trainer, this free site contains a plethora of information for anyone wanting to delve deeper into *Supercharged Storytimes* and the concepts behind it. &

Nurturing Summer Wellness

Strategies for Youth Services Librarians and Managers

María Vega



María Vega is an Assistant Manager with the Broward County Library System in Hollywood, FL, and is a member of REFORMA, GNRT, and the ALSC Public Awareness and Advocacy Committee.

Summer brings an influx of visitors and activity to libraries. Librarians face increased programs, outreach, and extra desk duties, while maintaining a high energy and friendly public persona and managing a vibrant and safe library atmosphere.

The intensity of summer programs, extra emotional and physical labor, and increased foot traffic can lead to burnout, heightened stress levels, and exhaustion before June is even over. Summer is the most important time of year for librarians to practice self-care, both in the library and at home. Try some of the wellness tips below and find more from ALA-APA's Importance of Wellness in the Workplace website (<https://ala-apa.org/wellness/>).

Disconnect and sleep well. At home, make sure to get plenty of quality sleep. Unplug and disconnect from screens and technology, especially before bedtime to improve your sleep quality. Create your perfect sleep environment—use light blocking curtains, play white noise, set a comfortable sleep temperature, do anything that makes falling asleep and staying asleep easy for you.

Recharge! Connect socially in person—with friends, family, or a community with similar interests. Take time to do what you love—and if you don't have a hobby, explore and find one. Do what works best for you, such as meditation or exercise. Learn something new or organize something old. Focusing on something novel when you're not at work will give your brain the break it needs to handle the demands of summer reading.

Prioritize yourself by setting clear boundaries. Don't be afraid to say no, so you don't feel overwhelmed at home and at work. Don't take work home with you. One of the ways that librarians motivate themselves is vocational awe—but this also means that librarians tend to feel guilty for taking time off. Put your self-care needs first. For more information on vocational awe, visit the Califa Group Library Consortium's website on Self-Care for Library Workers (califa.org/self-care).

Eat well, stay hydrated, and exercise. The better you care for your body, the better you can manage stressful and high energy situations. Take a day off if you need to, even during Summer Reading. One of the lessons that came out of the pandemic is that it is okay to take a mental health day. Rest if you need to and go back to work stronger.

Take breaks, eat, and stay hydrated. At work, take short breaks throughout the day to stretch and breathe. Make sure to take your allotted breaks and lunch. During these breaks, take a walk to rejuvenate, eat a nutritious meal, and stay hydrated.

Delegate, prioritize, and collaborate. Collaborate with your colleagues both in youth services and library wide. They can be a support network and help foster innovation, problem-solving, camaraderie, and positive morale. Prioritize work, and delegate tasks to volunteers, other departments, or other team

members to share the workload and allow youth services staff to focus on the most essential tasks.

Set small, achievable goals, and celebrate them. Break down big tasks into smaller chunks and celebrate when you complete each chunk. Recognize small registration milestones, the end of the first week, the halfway point, staff birthdays, Fridays, anything that will keep your team motivated and energized.

Seek support if you are feeling burnt-out. Talk to a trusted friend, colleague, or mentor. At work, talk to your supervisor, human resources, or an employee assistance program.

Be kind to yourself. If you make a mistake during an overly stressful time, it's okay. Avoid harsh self-criticism. Know that while summer is stressful, it will end. Focus on what you can control, and prioritize caring for yourself. &

Tips for Managers to Prevent Burnout

Encourage communication and provide support.

Foster a supportive culture where youth services librarians can openly discuss stress, workloads, and well-being, as well as concerns and experiences. Ensure that resources are available to support self-care initiatives. Provide access to wellness programs, counseling services, or flexible scheduling where possible. Lead by example by displaying self-care practices and communicating their importance to the team. Model self-care behaviors to encourage staff to follow suit. Tips and examples can be found in ALA-APA's *Library Worklife* newsletter or by following the example of libraries that won the ALA's Sustainability Roundtable Citation for Wellness in the Workplace.

Value your librarians and make sure they have what they need.

Acknowledge their hard work and contributions and provide positive reinforcement. Celebrate their accomplishments, big and small. Make sure they have adequate resources and help for summer, and if they don't, find support or alternatives. Don't do more with less, or you may end up with less youth services librarians. Start holding conversations well before summer about ideas for restructuring or innovating Summer Reading, especially if your library is experiencing staffing shortages.

Let staff take time off. Ensure librarians have adequate time off and breaks to recharge. Encourage a healthy work-life balance. Encourage staff to take time off to recharge, even during the summer. Allow staff to take vacations with their families during the summer. Consider flexible work schedules or remote work options

when feasible. This can promote work-life balance and increase motivation. Find time to give youth services librarians an "office day" each month during the summer where they can spend the entire day away from the public eye to complete administrative tasks, prepare for upcoming programs, take classes, or just recharge.

Let staff learn and grow. Offer opportunities for learning and career growth. Training, workshops, and educational programs can keep librarians engaged and motivated. Offer professional development programs that focus on stress management, self-care, and mental health. Equip staff with tools to navigate stressful periods. Public Awareness and Advocacy (PAA) member Kimberly White and Broward County Library Community Engagement, for example, host a free Conference on Children's Literature for librarians every September as a way for youth librarians to recharge and reconnect after Summer Reading. The Wellness in the Workplace online class taught by author Bobbi L. Foster through the National Library of Medicine teaches workplace wellness for library staff and managers.

Foster a supportive, flexible, and inclusive work environment that promotes diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Micromanaging is associated with the highest risk of burnout in the workplace. Instead, create a culture that values their contributions, promotes teamwork and collaboration, and provides support when needed. Encourage librarians to bring in new ideas, efficiency, and innovation to Summer Reading. Feeling empowered can increase their sense of ownership and motivation and decrease burnout.

Membership Profiles

Compiled by Aryssa Damron

Jennifer Minehardt, Head of Youth Services, Perrot Memorial Library, Old Greenwich, CT



How has ALSC contributed to your work in libraries?

Being a member of ALSC truly feels like belonging to a larger community. It's been the main source keeping me up to date with current trends nationwide. Serving on various committees has kept me connected, and it's been a truly rewarding experience so far.

What projects are you excited to be working on in ALSC?

I'm currently serving on the ALSC Notable Children's Books Committee and loving it. As the committee members always say, it's the best book club you've ever been in!

What brings you joy in librarianship?

Seeing the kids that come in and interacting with them every day. My favorite program is Baby Storytime. I just love watching the babies grow and learn throughout the programs. I've had so many take their first steps in our programs, and it brings so much joy!

What is your favorite book to share with children?

Dumplings for Lili by Melissa Iwai. The kids absolutely love seeing themselves in all the cultures represented and of course giggle at Lili having to go up and down the stairs every time!

What are you reading right now?

The Probability of Everything by Sarah Everett

Aleezah Rockler, Children's Library Associate, District of Columbia Public Library



How has ALSC contributed to your work in libraries?

I have participated in ALSC by serving on a committee and attending the 2022 ALSC Institute. Through both, I have met a lot of amazing people from all over the country. Each has their own library story. They have helped me gain new insights, get new ideas, and remain excited about a field that, up until 2019, was new to me.

What projects are you excited to be working on in ALSC or your library?

Recently, I was able to have an improv theater company begin doing workshops for adults. It has been a huge success. I am hoping to start teaching improv to the children at my library. There appears to be an interest in this in my community so I am excited to begin planning!

What brings you joy in librarianship?

Having been at my branch for nearly five years, it has been a pleasure to watch many of my regulars get older. Some of them I have known their whole lives. I also enjoy having children come

to my department and share that they enjoyed a book that I recommended.

What is your favorite book to share with children?

I am a big fan of anything by Jan Thomas (especially *Pumpkin Trouble*) and Mo Willems' *There Is a Bird on Your Head*. Also *Rain Makes Applesauce* by Julian Scheer—I still have my copy from when I was five!

What are you reading right now?

I am finishing up Alice Hoffman's latest novel *The Invisible Hour*. &

Why Stickers Are Powerful Magic, continued from page 32

Yet stickers are also ephemeral, and that is part of the magic, too. They go away. They are precious in part because they are not permanent, they will peel away and get stuck on the bottoms of shoes or disappear into the crevices of car seats, never to be seen again. They are paper mandalas, reminders that this, too, shall pass, and to enjoy the sparkly SpongeBob of every moment.

But most importantly, I am convinced that stickers represent the deepest gift an adult can give a child—our love and attention. Unlike their 26.2-mile counterparts, children who receive stickers from a friendly librarian are bragging about not so much an achievement as a relationship. They're thinking, "This means an adult cares enough about me to bestow this magical, ephemeral badge upon me."

"Is for ME?" Kena asks, fingering his special sticker gingerly, touching its edges and marveling at its beauty. I would give him a million more if I could, covering every inch of his two-foot frame to hear that again and again.

Is for me, a simple but powerful reminder of why I do this.

Is for you, an opportunity to connect to children as individuals and honor their personhood.

Powerful magic indeed. &

One Easy Way To Use Stickers for Magical Interactions

For the past few years, the Children's staff at all Tulsa City-County Libraries locations have been using one special kind of sticker to help create magical interactions on National Take Your Child to the Library Day. Every location has a roll of stickers with blank spots where our librarians and others can write a child's name. It's a simple yet effective way to make children feel seen!

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THE LAST WORD

Bringing Conservation to the Next Generations

By Sharon Verbeten



Interior image from *Wild Things* by Hayley and John Rocco, used with permission of G.P. Putnam's and Sons Books for Young Readers, an imprint of Penguin Young Readers.

The Earth is changing faster than it spins. And with climate change affecting all generations, two artists of *this* generation are celebrating the life of British nature lover and documentarian David Attenborough.

Explaining the importance of the global crisis, and our place in it, is no easy task. Husband and wife duo John and Hayley Rocco have taken it on in *Wild Places* (Putnam, 2024), a non-fiction picture book about Attenborough, animals, and the world in which we all inhabit.

As the world's wild places are disappearing, what can the next generation do? This book is a clarion call for all humans to protect the creatures who call Earth home.

Quite simply, it all boils down to what Attenborough says, "If we take care of nature, nature will take care of us."

For more information about the compassionate conservation books and efforts of the Roccas, visit www.meetthewildthings.com.

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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