Children & LIBRARIES

the journal of the Association for Library Service to Children

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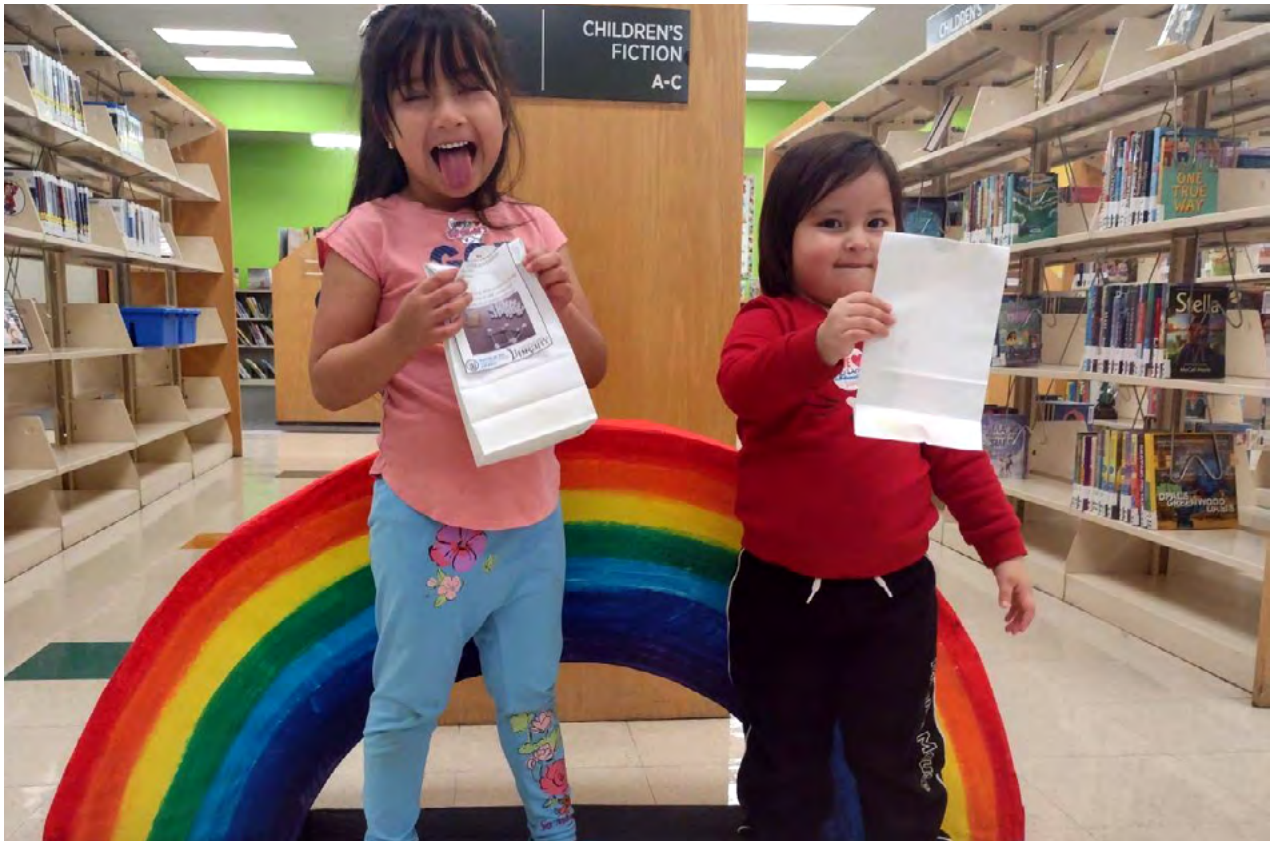

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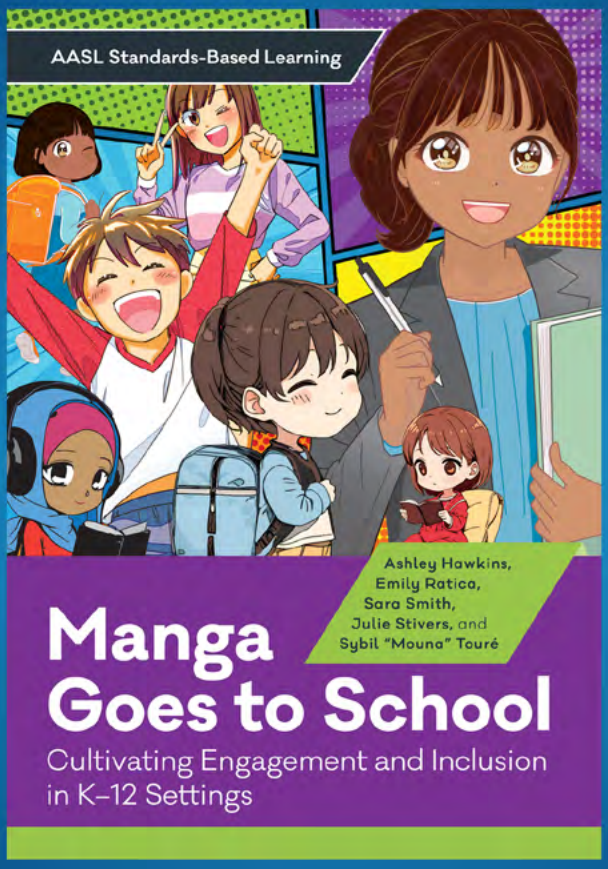

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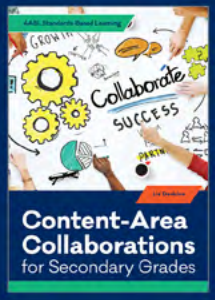

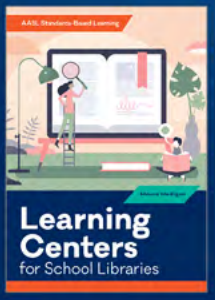

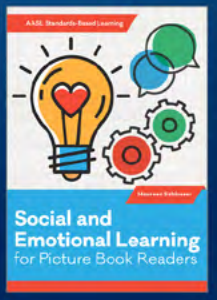

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The end of the rainbow is in the children's area of the Martin Regional Library in Tulsa! These sisters enjoyed attending a 2024 National Take Your Child to the Library Day event. Photo courtesy of Laura Raphael.

Editor's Note

Owl or Ostrich?

By Sharon Verbeten

Full ostrich. That's a phrase I heard while recently listening to a podcast. They were discussing the political climate shortly after the presidential inauguration.

Sometimes it does, indeed, feel like we want to go "full ostrich," burying our heads in the sand in the wake of confusion, distress, and uncertainty. It certainly has been a challenging time period for librarians and educators. We as members of the American Library Association remain staunch defenders of intellectual freedom and "to enhance learning and ensure access to information for all." And, as we know all too well, that's isn't always easy. Or convenient. Or, sadly, sometimes even safe. But I think we all agree that we wouldn't have entered this profession had we not believed in those values so strongly.

I earned my master's in library science in 1991, and the world—as I'd like to recall—was in a different place then. Some of my biggest concerns as a budding librarian (at my first youth services job at Milwaukee Public Library) were which chapter books to book talk, which teen magazines to purchase, and how best to promote programs—in a pre-internet world.

Today, we face book challenges, in-your-face angry patrons, and challenges posed by unhoused and/or mentally ill patrons. Youth librarians no longer just conduct storytimes and visit schools. Sometimes we clean toilets. We try to calm distressed patrons. We posit how librarianship could have changed so much over so little time.

So, yeah, we may want to (or actually do) retreat to our offices and go "full ostrich," if only for a few minutes. But I would argue that it's really time for us to go "full owl"—with eyes wide open, curious amid the darkness we increasingly face.

We are stronger together. We have shattered all stereotypes. We were made for this profession—so let's give it all we've got.

Last issue, I wrote in my editor's note about caring for our mental health; that's still important. But let's remain vigilant and mighty and strong—even in the midst of such change. I'm proud to call myself—and all of you—librarians! &

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Circulation

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Statement of Purpose

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

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Building from the Ground Up

A Path Toward Co-Creation

ALEXANDRIA ABENSHON AND KEVIN KELLEY

Through a co-creative methodology, we have worked to foster a shared sense of ownership and purpose between branch staff and leadership. We utilized a variety of familiar strategies to build a vision for New York Public Library's (NYPL) children's department that centered on patron and branch staff perspectives—including active listening, returning to the vision, and building a community of practice that centers on appreciation.

We spent 2022 and 2023 listening to library patrons and staff to hear what programs and services they needed most. We have myriad ways for our community, patrons, and staff to share and create with us. Our vision incorporates the nuanced lens of the neuroarts (science-backed ways that tell us how the arts impact our brains, bodies, and behaviors). Because this particular lens was new, but the concepts familiar, we leveraged consistent ways to incorporate voices other than our own.

One of the most critical elements to come from our vision work is the Children's Advisory Team, otherwise known as CHAT. CHAT is composed of branch staff members from libraries across the NYPL system, and the staff work in a variety of branches: small, large, busy with babies, busy with older kids.

We worked closely with the team throughout our strategy development, soliciting feedback from members as we worked. This engagement with the advisory team ensured that the vision remained aligned with identified staff needs and perspectives. CHAT continues and members continue to provide their invaluable perspectives on a variety of topics, provide input on projects and initiatives, and remain critical representatives of the branch libraries.

To foster widespread understanding and adoption of the new approach, we implemented a comprehensive communication plan to highlight our work with all of our stakeholders. This included presentations and meetings with senior leadership, library management, and frontline children's staff. We also built opportunities for peer-to-peer networking, and shared resources were utilized to reinforce key messages. We take every opportunity to reinforce our vision by being explicit about how our actions relate to our vision.

Even in our informal meetings, we planned ways to tie our activities and learning back to our focus on authentic relationship building and the way the arts can change us. We used a deck of social skills cards for kids to practice on-the-fly fun relationship-building strategies and talked about the way process art can benefit *all* makers while we made process art ourselves. Every moment is an opportunity to tie your actions back to your message.

But it's not just about professional development or the focus groups. Successfully subverting the top-down approach includes cultivating a community of practice among staff—a community that celebrates, uplifts, and rewards. One of the pillars of our

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community of practice is our seasonal, branch community-sourced storytelling initiative called Illustrate Your Impact.

Everyday Magic

Illustrate Your Impact began in Summer 2022 to celebrate a true return to in-person programming—we reached our "new normal." *We were nervous! Would people come back? Would our programs be full like they were pre-pandemic? What if things weren't the same?*

We asked staff to submit stories and photos of their work that made them smile. And after three summers of Illustrate Your Impact, we now encourage all staff to submit their stories, regardless of what age group they work with. Children's staff are also called to share stories and photos in November and April in an effort to keep highlighting the everyday moments that lead to big memories in our patrons' lives outside of those summer months.

Collective storytelling allows us to share ideas, show appreciation, and bring joy and levity to our work. We celebrate each participant by sending a handwritten note about their first submission that is specific, speaks to what they have shared, and acknowledges their work. This note is accompanied by stickers, erasers, and other small goodies.

Illustrate Your Impact further serves as a regularly updated repository for qualitative data used to inform our reporting and storytelling. Since we began collecting our stories, we have received more than 700 responses from staff highlighting the everyday magic of the library.

Of course, none of this work happens without a healthy dose of reflection on our end. We continue to listen, come back to our core vision and beliefs, and rely on our community of practice to guide our work forward.

Change doesn't happen overnight, and it's rarely easy, but there are a lot of ways to take small steps to incorporate staff voice into your planning and design to garner grassroots support and incorporate new ideas and initiatives.

What resonates with you, and what strategies have you implemented already to build your plans for service? We look forward to hearing the many ways you've built visions and strategies with your community in places where everyday magic occurs—the library. &

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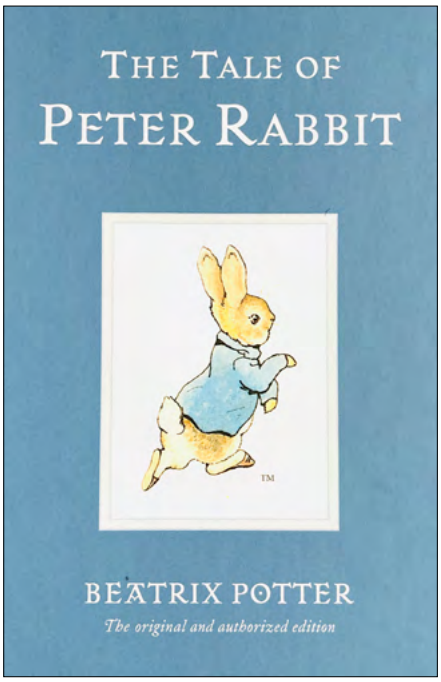

Revisiting Violence in the World of Peter Rabbit

Beatrix Potter's Belief in the Capacity of Children

JESSICA HALE

According to a recent report from the American Library Association's Office for Intellectual Freedom, the number of book titles targeted for censorship has reached the highest documented level in the last twenty years—more than 4,000 unique titles.[1] While many of these books faced scrutiny "for representing the voices and lived experiences of LGBTQIA+ and BIPOC individuals," more than half of the books targeted were found objectionable for other reasons.[2]

New books and classics alike are challenged in an attempt to protect children from images and ideas adults believe to be harmful. One area of particular concern is exposure to violence. The concern is that exposure to violence in books will affect children like other forms of media.

The roots of this line of thinking can be traced back to the mid-1960s, when Albert Bandura first suggested that children learn through modeling. His research showed that if children were exposed to media violence (videos of adults being aggressive toward a doll), those children were more likely to behave aggressively.[3] In subsequent years, it became clear that the harmful effects extended beyond imitation. In 1982, the National Institute of Mental Health released a report analyzing ten years of research on television and behavior. The results of this analysis showed that violence on television may cause children to become desensitized to the suffering of others, more fearful of the world, and more aggressive toward others.[4] Now, it is widely recognized that exposure to media violence can be harmful to children. The National Institute of Justice (NIJ), a component of the US Department of Justice, issued the following statement on September 21, 2016, "Exposure to violence, whether directly or as a bystander can have far-reaching, negative consequences for children."[5] The working definition of "exposure to violence" includes exposure to media violence such as television, movies, music, and video games. While books are not explicitly addressed by the NIJ statement, some researchers believe "books represent one potentially overlooked source of exposure to aggressive content."[6]

In their research, titled, "A Mean Read: Aggression in Adolescent English Literature," Sarah M. Coyne, Mark Callister, Talita Pruett, and David A. Nelson found that aggressive behaviors (verbal, relational, and physical) were present in a significant number of adolescent novels on the *New York Times* bestseller list. Further, some of the books with the highest per page scores for violence were books aimed at children from nine to eleven years old—e.g., *Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince* (2005), *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (2007), by J. K. Rowling; *Camp Rock* (2008) by Lucy Ruggles; and *Raven Rise* (2008) and *Pilgrims of Rayne* (2006) from the Pendragon series by D. J. MacHale. The researchers asserted that as many films are based off books, "the lines between print and electronic media are constantly being blurred."[7] However, while this study clearly demonstrates that

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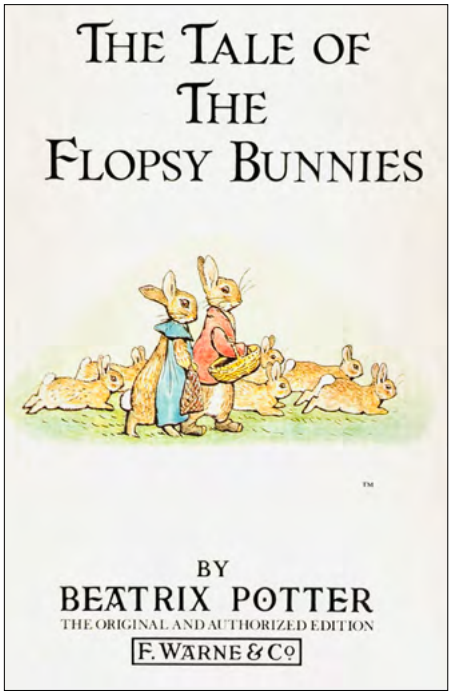
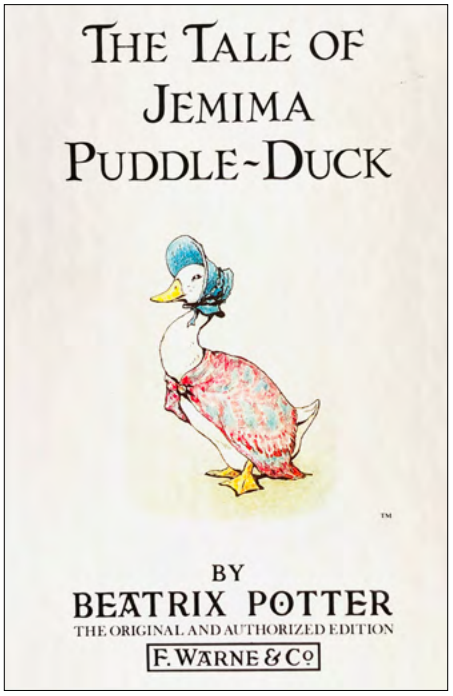




violence is present in children's books, it does not establish that violence in children's books is harmful.

In fact, no definitive research exists that demonstrates that violence in picture books is inherently harmful to children. However, we do know that picture books provide a space for children to "prepare themselves" to be able to face "painful or confusing matters" and even to discuss those ideas with adults.[8] Rather than focusing on shielding children from all instances of violence, the focus should be on how that violence is treated by the authors and illustrators.

An examination of one of the most well-known picture book authors, Beatrix Potter, may help explore this idea further. Her creation, the World of Peter Rabbit, starting with *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* (1902), has been entertaining and delighting children for more than 120 years. The books in this literary universe sell millions of copies each year, have been translated into more than a dozen languages, and have never gone out of print.[9]

Yet, throughout those works, Potter presents both human and animal as capable of deathly violence. Unlike other picture book authors, who write for children as though they exist in "a wonderfully ideal state of innocence,"[10] Potter's works are evidence that she perceived children capable of understanding the complexities of life. In fact, according to Rebecca Luce-Kapler in "The Seeing Eye of Beatrix Potter," Potter's treatment of predator and prey, life and death, is part of what makes her books so memorable.[11]

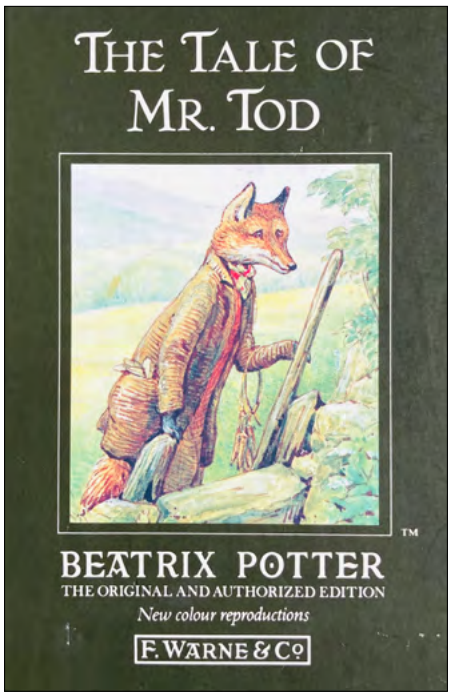
However, Luce-Kapler notes that while Potter doesn't shy away from harsh realities, she does try to soften them.[12] Potter's use of clever interplay between text and image as well as pacing (in addition to humor) make her portrayals of harsh and violent realities more palatable to all readers, young and old alike. While these techniques are employed throughout the texts that compose the World of Peter Rabbit, an exploration of *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*, *The Tale of Squirrel Nutkin, The Tale of Benjamin Bunny, The Tale of Jemima Puddle-Duck*, *The Tale of the Flopsy Bunnies*, and *The Tale of Mr. Tod,* published between 1903 and 1912, provides ample evidence to support this observation.

From the very first, *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* addresses mortal peril rather directly. Just several sentences into the book, Potter introduces the idea that Peter's father had been killed in Mr. McGregor's garden and "put in a pie by Mrs. McGregor."[13] In Potter's first edition (1902), the illustration accompanying the text shows a smiling woman bringing a pie to the table while a baby, a dog, and Mr. McGregor—depicted with a fork and knife in hand—eagerly awaiting her arrival. This scene introduces the complex idea that despite their clothing, and other anthropomorphisms, these characters are animals and exist in a complex relationship with humans. While the happy dinner scene might look familiar to many children, most have not grappled with what, or who, in this case, they are eating. While this illustration was removed by the publisher from the 1903 version, Potter's original inclusion of this scene is an example of her treatment of children as capable of handling the real world in which we both love animals and eat them.

Despite broaching difficult realities, Potter's treatment of this subject is gentle. While the death of Peter's father was probably best described as murder, Potter euphemistically calls this an "accident."[14] In fact, scholar Seth Sicroff made note of Potter's "deliberately bland and aphoristic sentence structure" in his analysis of the scene, citing it as an example of "less is more."[15] Further, Sicroff notes, the pleasant illustration of the rabbit pie is presented prior to the words,[16] moving the story forward and helping the reader gloss over the violence that must have ensued for Peter's father to *become* the pie. A final technique that makes this death more palatable for the reader is that Peter promptly dashes

off to Mr. McGregor's garden despite the fact that this is the very place where his father met his demise. This turn of events suggests the commonplace nature of rabbits in gardens and moves the reader swiftly past any cognitive conflict.

Beyond the beginning allusions to peril, *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*, as a whole, is the tale of a bunny that narrowly escapes death. He is literally an animal running for his life after he steals food from Mr. McGregor's garden and is caught. Mr. McGregor chases Peter with a rake, the purpose of which is surely to stab and maim the bunny, if not explicitly to kill him,[17] and attempts to "put his foot upon Peter" (i.e., stomp him to death).[18] Potter provides illustrations of both narrow escapes, featuring both the rake poised in the air as if to strike[19] and the boot, narrowly missing Peter.[20] The inclusion of these violent realities—man's hunt for animals—illustrates Potter's belief that children are capable of understanding the inherent tension in human–animal relationships.



That said, in these instances as well, Potter lessens the intensity of the violence through a variety of techniques. In the images that depict the rake, the visual distance between Peter (the prey) and Mr. McGregor (the hunter) serves to reduce the intensity of the scene, as though Potter is keeping the reader at a safe distance. The removal of Peter's clothes is yet another technique used; it is a method of reverse anthropomorphism in which Peter becomes less human, as noted by Ruth MacDonald in her work "Why This Is Still 1893: *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* and Beatrix Potter's Manipulations of Time into Timelessness."[21]

Perhaps one of the most intense images in the text, in which Peter appears mere inches from Mr. McGregor's spiked boot, Peter is completely naked. Rather than focus on how "dreadfully frightened" Peter is during this life or death chase, Potter uses "tangential discourse," a technique noted by Carole Scott in her work, "An Unusual Hero; Perspective and Point of View in *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*."[22] In this discourse, the reader is diverted from the intensity of the chase through the inclusion of calming imagery—a robin picking at Peter's missing shoes.[23]

Further, Scott noted the "gentle" language used to describe Mr. McGregor's attempts to murder Peter. For example, when Peter is almost trapped under a sieve, "the narrative voice passes politely and distantly over the scene."[24] Potter uses the alliterative text "Mr. McGregor came up with a sieve, which he intended to pop upon the top of Peter,"[25] rather than language articulating the gardener's murderous intent. Luce-Kapler also noted the clever use of language to soften the moment predator meets prey. When Peter runs into Mr. McGregor, Potter's text is playful and humorous in tone: "Whom should he meet but Mr. McGregor!"[26] While the techniques employed by Potter do not obfuscate the peril in the story, they do temper the experience for readers.

In *The Tale of Squirrel Nutkin*, Potter also addresses death and peril in a direct way. The premise of the story is that the squirrels must ask permission from an owl (Old Brown) to gather nuts on his island. In return, the squirrels offer the owl gifts. These gifts, however, are almost all other animals for Old Brown to eat, including mice,[27] a mole,[28] minnows,[29] beetles,[30] and a "new-laid egg."[31] The squirrels are thus presented as killers, which, as they are omnivores, is scientifically accurate. Old Brown accepts and eats these gifts while trying to ignore Nutkin's deplorable behavior. Nutkin goes too far, and takes "a running jump right onto the head of Old Brown!"[32] Then the owl snatches him up and sets about to eat him. The accompanying image shows Old Brown with a claw pinning Nutkin down by the neck and Nutkin's severed tail in his beak.[33] While Nutkin ultimately escapes, he is traumatized; "he will throw sticks at you, and stamp his feet and scold and shout" should the event be brought up.[34]

Despite the violence and death depicted by Potter, she uses several techniques to make the realistic woodland violence, animal against animal, less frightening. The overall tone of the text is made light through the use of riddles and images like that of Nutkin tickling owl's beak[35] and dancing.[36] Further, as noted by Ruth MacDonald in her work, Potter's use of anthropomorphism is very muted in this text; all of the animals appear unclothed, dehumanizing them.[37] In fact, the only time clothing is referenced, is when Old Brown attacked Nutkin and put him in "*his waistcoat pocket*!"[38]

In this case, the reference to clothing is humorous and distracts from the fact that Nutkin is about to be eaten. The tension and violence of this moment is reduced by Potter through the text, assuring the reader, "This looks like the end of the story; but it isn't."[39] The violence of animals eating animals is downplayed throughout the text as well. We never see the squirrels kill their "gifts," and Owl is never shown eating any of the animal meals he is offered. While the complexity of predator and prey relationships among woodland animals is explored, the reader is not inundated with graphically violent imagery.

In *The Tale of Benjamin Bunny*, the threat of death is also present. Accompanied by his cousin, Benjamin Bunny, Peter Rabbit returns to Mr. McGregor's garden. The two proceed to steal onions, but before they can leave the garden, they come across a cat and are forced to hide in a basket to avoid being killed and eaten. Potter's illustration of this scene depicts the cat staring at the basket opening, where we are told she stayed "for *five hours*"[40] (original emphasis), patiently hunting the rabbits. The two are

saved when Benjamin Bunny's father comes into the garden and viciously attacks the cat, "scratching off a handful of fur" and forcing it into the greenhouse.[41] Although being caught by Mr. McGregor, a human, is a threat, the thrust of the peril and violence Potter shares with children in this story is enacted by animals.

As in her other stories, Potter softens the mortal peril through the interplay of text and image. Rather than show the fear on the bunnies' faces as they hide in the basket, Potter simply presents the image of a cat sitting calmly on a basket. Further, she makes light of the choice to do so stating, "I cannot draw you a picture of Peter and Benjamin underneath the basket, because it was quite dark, and because the smell of onions was fearful; it made Peter Rabbit and little Benjamin cry."[42] She doesn't linger on how the five hours were spent, but rather moves time along quickly, highlighting the change in the sun's position in the sky on the same page,[43] then beginning the next two-page spread with an allusion to the passage of time in the phrase "At length."[44] During Mr. Benjamin Bunny's fight with the cat, Potter also moves the action along swiftly with text, sparing only two sentences to describe the altercation. Further she de-emphasizes the violence by presenting an image right before Mr. Bunny lands "on top of the cat,"[45] rather than the fight itself.

The Tale of Jemima Puddle-Duck chronicles one of Potter's most unsettling animal stories: the perilous story of a would-be mother duck who is almost eaten by a fox. In an attempt to raise her own ducklings, rather than have them taken from her by the farmer's wife, Jemima leaves the farm and encounters a fox that offers to let her stay in his shed to hatch her ducklings. She makes her nest on a "vast quantity of feathers,"[46] oblivious to their origin (ducks previously killed by the fox), and then lays her eggs. Prior to Jemima hatching her eggs, the fox invites Jemima to a "dinner party" and suggests that Jemima gather seasonings for omelets, clearly foreshadowing his plans to eat both her and the eggs (her babies).[47] By chance, Jemima runs into Kep the dog, who, with the help of some puppies, foils the fox's plans. In the process, Jemima's eggs are "gobbled up" by puppies—put more bluntly, her babies are killed. This text addresses the complex reality that eggs are simultaneously desired babies and food for humans as well as wild and domestic animals. While the fox is clearly the predator in this story, so too are the humans and dogs that while "protecting" Jemima, are also eating her eggs.

The eating of poultry babies (eggs) is both conceptually upsetting and commonplace. Perhaps that is why Potter added so much humor to the tale. A child cannot help but see the not-so-subtle signals that the fox plans to eat Jemima and the eggs, including, but not limited to, the "sackful of feathers" in his shed,[48] the sly hungry looks,[49] and his comment that "he loved eggs and ducklings."[50] Potter goes so far as to describe Jemima in the text as "conscientious" while the facing illustration shows her eggs left unattended with a fox.[51]

In this way, Potter reframes this tale as though the reader is in on a joke: Everyone knows but Jemima! Potter also uses clothing to signal when animals are behaving more like animals and less like people, a distinction that makes a difference morally. In her work, Scott noted that Jemima's perception of the fox as a "gentleman" is directly related to his "suit"[52] and that clothing can signal when one is conforming to moral customs.[53] Potter depicts the fox, unclothed, pawing at the eggs,[54] and Jemima without clothing in the scenes following the fox's dinner invitation.

The puppies are never presented in clothing, reducing our conflict about them eating the eggs. A final technique used to make this tale less heavy is the visual distance Potter creates from Jemima at the end of the tale. While she cries "tears on account of those eggs,"[55] Jemima is facing away from the reader, so her pain isn't visible. These techniques render the hard truths presented in the tale much more palatable.

In *The Tale of the Flopsy Bunnies*, the threat of death is heightened as not one, but six of the Flopsy bunnies are imperiled. In this story, the Flopsy bunnies, offspring of Benjamin and Flopsy Bunny, are hungry and in search of food. With their father, they travel to Mr. McGregor's "rubbish heap" in the hopes of finding nourishment.[56] After gorging themselves on discarded lettuce, the bunnies all fall asleep. Mr. McGregor finds the baby bunnies in his trash pile and gleefully gathers them up in a sack to bring to Mrs. McGregor with intentions to "skin them and cut off their heads," eat them, turn them into clothing lining, or sell them.[57] Ultimately, the bunnies are saved by another woodland creature: a mouse. As in *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*, humans are the predominant predatory species in this text. The graphic descriptions of how the bunnies will be killed depict man as a violent species, which is both accurate and disturbing.

As in other texts, Potter's treatment of this perilous situation eases the reader's tension. The order of events and pacing of this story is an important factor. The bunnies have already been saved and are at a "safe distance" from Mr. McGregor when we learn about his plans to kill them and profit from it.[58] This pacing reduces any anticipatory fear because the reader knows the bunnies are unharmed.

Potter's use of clothing in her illustrations are also relevant in this story. The bunnies are naked when abducted by Mr. McGregor signaling that in this moment, they are more animal than human. While Scott suggests in her analysis of their clothing that this is because as children, they "are too little to need them,"[59] this lack of clothing functions to create psychological distance for the reader. Only after the bunnies are safe do we see a snitch of clothing on them—a small blue bow is present on one bunny's neck.[60]

Consistent throughout the tale is the absence of fearful expressions on the faces of the Flopsy bunnies; the reader is presented with obscured views (a result of the sack or the plant in the scene in which the beheading and skinning is discussed[61]). Potter's text also turns attention away from the peril. For example, Mr. McGregor whimsically participates in counting out the bunnies, "One, two, three, four, five, six leetle rabbits!" when they are abducted and again when discussing his happy plan for their demise.[62] Taken together, the graphic murder plot for the bunnies becomes less frightening and more commonplace.

The Tale of Mr. Tod features two predators—a badger and fox, Mr. Tommy Brock and Mr. Tod, respectively. The thrust of the text is the tension between these two predators over resources. Once again, Benjamin Bunny's offspring find themselves in mortal danger when they are kidnapped by the badger, who "did occasionally eat rabbit-pie; but it was only very little young ones occasionally, when other food was really scarce.[63] The badger takes up residence in one of the fox's dens where "rabbit bones and skulls, and chicken's legs and other horrors" are evident and puts the baby bunnies in the oven.[64] Mr. Tod discovers the badger in his home, is enraged, and contemplates killing him, but he "thought better of it"[65] and decides to play a prank on the badger. The two become so engaged in fighting each other that the baby bunnies are able to escape with the help of Peter Rabbit and Benjamin Bunny. This text highlights not only the tentative relationships between herbivores and omnivores, but also the inherently violent and competitive nature of predators (at the expense of baby bunnies).

From the onset, Potter acknowledges that this text is about "two disagreeable people," and in doing, makes clear to the reader these characters will not be the protagonists of the story, but rather the villains.[66] The pacing of the conflict between these two characters also serves to reduce the intensity of the text; how many trips into the room will it take Mr. Tod to finally set up his trap? The result of this protracted prank is that the reader is not afraid of the coming conflict, but rather humorously exasperated by the delay. Further, Potter's inclusions of Mr. Brock's "apoplectic" snores distract from any perception of seriousness. Her use of illustrations is also strategic in that there are almost no images of the bunnies themselves. Throughout their mortal peril the reader has to imagine them in a sack[67] or in the oven.[68] As a result, the readers do not experience fear nor much empathy. The only time all the baby bunnies are actually included in an illustration they are unclothed[69] and thus, appear less human, further reducing the reader's anxiety. Clothing is used as a signal for the fox as well as the badger. Both are depicted mostly clothed throughout the book, suggesting that their human characteristics will outweigh their animal natures.

As is apparent from this analysis, Potter does not shy away from mortal peril. Potter presents both man and animal as capable of violence and includes death as ever-present. In doing so, she is "treating children as if they were really just human beings like the rest of us,"[70] capable of understanding the complexities of life and natural order. Instead of creating a violence-free world for her readers, Potter tempers these harsh realities through the use of pacing and humor, in addition to the clever use of image and text. In doing so, Potter provides a literary place in which children can confront uncomfortable and complex truths. She does not "protect" children, but rather "prepares" them to face difficult truths that are ever-present.

While it is natural to wonder, if, like other forms of media, the violence depicted in children's books may negatively affect children, Potter's works demonstrate that this is not necessarily the case. Rather than focus on the inclusion of violence, if discussions related to challenging and banning books must occur, they should instead explore how violence is treated by the author and illustrator. Further, these dialogues should also address how these stories may help children face some of life's harsh realities. If Potter's enduring popularity is evidence of anything, it is that these stories are worth sharing, even in light of their violent plot lines. &

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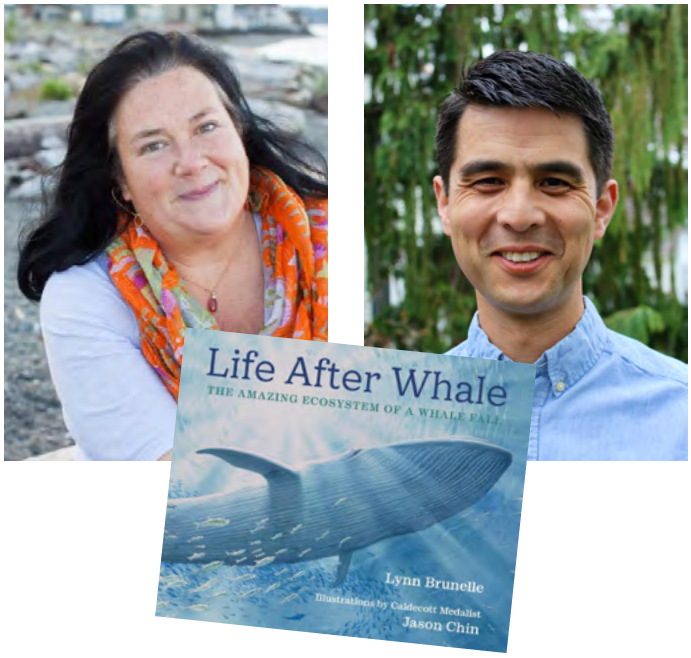
Sharing the Creative Process

Talking with Lynn Brunelle and Jason Chin

TERRELL YOUNG AND BARBARA WARD



Humans have long marveled at the stunning beauty of whales as they move so gracefully through the water and then suddenly breach with a showy splash. But what happens when those awe-inspiring creatures die and fall to the ocean floor? In *Life After Whale: The Amazing Ecosystem of a Whale Fall* (Holiday House, 2024), author Lynn Brunelle and illustrator Jason Chin provide some answers in this year's Sibert Medal-winning book.

Fans of children's literature know that there are certain pairings that result in books that are stunning in every respect. Such a pairing can be seen in the creative partnership between Brunelle and Chin. In their most recent work, *Life After Whale*, Brunelle calls the watercolor and gouache illustrations filled with a wide variety of blues "breathtaking," claiming that Chin's eye-catching artwork "breathed a whole new layer of life" into the book. After briefly introducing readers to an elderly whale, the book follows her to the bottom of the ocean as her remains provide sustenance for a host of living creatures over several decades.

After finishing the manuscript and seeing it in print along with the resplendent illustrations, Brunelle continues to marvel at the wonders of the natural world, something she wants to share with a young audience. "It's kind of the soapbox I've been standing on my whole life, which is, this stuff is amazing. The world is amazing, whether it is cool poetry, artwork, or science. This is really cool. In order to get through kids' defenses, sometimes you just have to make it accessible and fun. I'm always thinking about how we can get this information across in a way that doesn't feel heavy or beat them over the head with it."

Illustrating a picture book about whale fall attracted Chin—whose work has received multiple awards, including the Caldecott Medal and Honor, Sibert Honor, and Orbis Pictus Award—because he considered the topic interesting and "the text is beautiful." He says he has always found ecosystems fascinating and been interested in the way things work and how different things are connected beneath the surface.

This fascination stemmed from growing up as biologists were "transitioning in a big way from just studying the animal in isolation to the animal in its ecosystem. And ideas like predator/prey dynamics were new.

"When I was in high school or in elementary school, if I learned about them, I didn't know they were new," Chin explains. Since he's always interested in new discoveries, he says, "Here was a brand-new ecosystem that I was aware of, but I did not really know anything about. And whales are so fascinating. Just right off the bat, species in isolation. Whales are fascinating. They're also incredibly important ecosystem engineers. And, of course, this whole cycle of life aspect of this book was really interesting. The topic was just so good, so attractive."

Terrell Young *and* ***Barbara Ward*** *are former classroom teachers and university professors. They were colleagues at Washington State University. She later taught classes at The University of New Orleans, and he at Brigham Young University in Utah.*

For both Chin and Brunelle, research is a part of their preliminary work, no matter the topic. Before Brunelle begins writing her books, she says she gathers "everything that I think is amazing, and the book can't hold all of that," which often forces her to make hard decisions about what to include. In this case, although *Life After Whale* focuses on whale fall, Brunelle wanted to "highlight the circle of things. I wanted to get to know this 90-year-old blue whale who lived this cool life and did not die an awful death." The whale's heart just gave out after ninety years, which happens in humans as well.

"That was an interesting thing. How do we handle that? When I told my agent that the whale died, she was, like, 'Ooh.' And I said, 'No, I think it's good because it really is a beginning. It's like the end of one, the beginning of another.'"

This is assisted by Chin's illustrations on that page, which Brunelle says are "so sensitive and beautiful that it doesn't feel jarring because then you learn that there are all these other things that benefit from the whale fall." Brunelle says she had to omit several facts about the blue whale but wanted to provide enough "so that we loved her."

Consequently, she worked hard on paring down the text, asking herself, "What was the key thing?" Adding to her challenges was the fact that whale falls are a "kind of new science. They weren't even discovered until the 1980s because nobody could see down that far."

As part of her preparation before writing the text, Brunelle contacted experts familiar with whale fall. "Talking to the scientists who were the first to discover whale fall and then to the scientists who are studying them now was so interesting because science is changing, and what they're learning is changing. What was hard was trying to find the right information," she explains. This concern was eased somewhat through working with Chin, since he went to Monterey Bay, which was the source of Brunelle's information, and he did all his research there, too.

A stickler for accuracy, Chin "wants to make it visually correct," Brunelle says. "He would pepper me with questions like, 'Well, at fifty, at sixty-thousand feet, what is the anemone that is living on that rib?' And I'm like, 'Well, I don't know.' I called my people at Monterey Bay, and they'd tell me that they didn't know either and would have to look it up. He made it even more accurate. He was better than any copy editor I've ever worked with."

Unfortunately, Chin's trip to Monterey Bay was at the wrong time for blue whales. "The majority of blue whale research that's done in the whole world focuses on the population that migrates north and south off the coast of California, down to the coast about the latitude of Costa Rica. You can see it in the book. But that population is the most studied population of blue whales in the world. Naturally, that's where the blue whale researchers are. Many are in the San Diego area and in Monterey Bay Research Institute," Chin says.

When Brunelle wrote the book, she had envisioned the blue whale being one of those whales, and she had thought of the book being set in Monterey Bay or in that area, in that part of the coast, and actually separately, according to Chin. "That's the conclusion I came to as well. I don't know if it was a conversation we had or someone mentioned that, but I think we independently were envisioning this book taking place there."

Consequently, that's where Chin went for research. There he saw a lot of humpbacks, which was "pretty great. I got a feeling for the ocean, the landscape, and scale, which was important," he says. He also noted some of the other species in the area, including a certain species of seagulls. "There's an image in the book where the whale first dies, and carrion feeders like birds and sharks are coming along. Those birds were birds I saw on that trip." Chin also studied an 85-foot-long blue whale that was mounted outdoors in a research lab in Santa Cruz, which guided him as he drew the whale's bones. According to Chin, only a few blue whale skeletons are on display because their size makes it challenging for museums to house them.

Blue whales aren't Brunelle's only interest. She says she works on several book projects at the same time. Although she always has some writing projects in the works, she keeps herself on a strict schedule. "I write every day. I have my morning tea, and I wander in the garden, and I walk the dogs, and then I sit down, and I break the day up," she said.

Typically, she allows three hours for one project, depending on the project, and three hours for another, working her way through each one with brief stops for walking the dogs, swimming, or even glass fusing, one of her hobbies. All this harks back to her school days when daily schedules included physical education and art as breaks. She says she's "parked right here in my office for most of the day, and I'm just plugging through things. Sometimes, I'm coming up with new ideas, and I might be drawing those, and I might be just sort of getting those down on paper. Other times, I might have a deadline, and so then they structure it that way." Naturally, at times, she's busy responding to an editor's comments. "It's just, it's my job, you know, it's just, it's what I do."

From Teacher to Writer

Brunelle's previous experiences as a teacher have aided her in her writing career. Her first assignment involved working with twenty-eight children in grades four through eight who were labeled behavior problems, removed from the mainstream classroom, and put into another entirely different classroom—hers.

"Honestly, even though two of them were kind of scary, most of them were really bright," she says fondly. Even though others had low expectations for them, sure that they couldn't sequence this, and they couldn't do that, Brunelle didn't find that to be true.

"They were extraordinarily bright and acting out because they didn't want to look stupid, and they just didn't learn in the same

way that we expect most kids to learn, which is, 'I'm going to teach you, and you're going to tell me back.'" She recalls one fifth grade boy who others said didn't know how to sequence a story or the beginning, middle, and end. Brunelle says she "didn't buy it. I watched this kid who was always drawing."

When she approached him about the pictures and asked him to tell her what was going on in these pictures, he absolutely knew how to sequence, but did so visually. For Brunelle, this was an eye-opening, pivotal moment "in terms of understanding education, understanding that kids are curious and that they're vulnerable and sensitive, too. And if you don't meet them halfway, they will act out so that they don't have to suffer socially."

Brunelle is convinced that this experience helped her to be better at communicating difficult concepts. From there, she moved to a regular classroom, teaching English and science, and then art, which she enjoyed because "there's no wrong answer" in an art class. Everything we do in there can back up other things we're learning. And that was fun." After that, she moved to New York and got into publishing, eventually moving to Seattle to write for Bill Nye, The Science Guy, and she has been busily writing books ever since. She believes Nye is a great example of what she tried to do in the classroom because "we were trying to be *Saturday Night Live* meets Mister Wizard. I'm all about if you can make it funny; kids will come away remembering why something was funny, but also remembering the concept, which is key. You want to nurture that curiosity."

Word choice matters to Brunelle, evidenced by some of the child-friendly descriptions such as a four-hundred-pound heart "the size of a golf cart" and vivid words such as "plunges," "drifts and whirls," and "sharks and fishes zip to the scene and begin to nibble," and "bucket loads of slime." The text even imagines that she would be eight stories high if the whale walked. Her writing stems from "the joy and the vividness of the concept itself and the content," according to Brunelle.

"I wanted to really paint the picture with the words. And it's one thing to say something sunk to the bottom, but plunge just brings something new to it, doesn't it? And hagfish, they're so gross and cool, and the whole fact that they secrete so much slime in one go, you know, that it gags the gills of anything that tries to eat it. I mean, how do you get that across? With enthusiasm, joy, and exploration. That's what I'm always trying to shoot for; if somebody reads it, can they feel it? Can they connect with it so that they can close their eyes and see that?"

Editors Credited with Design

Although Brunelle and Chin are avid admirers of each other's work, both credit Holiday House's Jennifer Browne and Neil Porter for the book's overall design. When the manuscript arrived at Chin's house, it was not divided into page breaks. According to Chin, the editor had already stripped them out before sending them on for the artwork.

As with his other projects, Chin worked on *Life After Whale* from a studio in his home, shared with his wife, also an author and illustrator. "That's her desk behind me," he says. "It's a small room in our house, maybe a bit too small, but it works. I have a painting desk here and paint watercolors to my right. I've got my water, brushes, and reference material over here." Chin does his Zoom calls from the desk as well. He also has another desk for writing with all the research material in another room in the house and a writing desk that is separate from the painting and drawing area. Chin proudly points to the main feature of the studio—a special desk that is well worn and once belonged to Chin's mentor, Trina Schart Hyman, a Caldecott Medalist and three-time Caldecott Honor recipient. Chin grew up in her town, and, "When she passed away, her daughter cleaned out her studio and gave me her desk. I've inherited Trina's desk as well as some other stuff, a bin of her old brushes down here, and a huge bottle of ink that I have yet to make a dent in," he says.

As many illustrators do, Chin has his own approach to his drawing projects as he moves from sketch to finished work. First, he says he needs to get to know the manuscript, and, "When I read the text, images come to mind. I think that's the way most of us read and start imagining stuff. The first part is those images that come to mind while reading. There will be a period where I'm just kind of sketching those images out roughly, just really relaxed exploring through drawing. And not with much intention, just to get a feel for what a whale looks like in this case." At that stage, he's also doing visual and factual research if it's a book that he hasn't written, for instance, learning about whale fall, blue whales, and blue whale anatomy. If he has written the book, he's already done much of the research.

For this book, "Some of the first and most important research I did was looking for images of whales, not just whale falls, but blue whales and blue whale anatomy." He also drew images of several blue whale skeletons in the early stages of his illustrations. After that initial phase of "trying just to draw what came to mind when I read the manuscript, I started doing more meticulous drawings of the blue whale skeleton to try and learn the anatomy, learn the proportions, really study it in detail, and memorize what a blue whale looks like."

This was essential since there were so many pictures of the living whale in the book. In addition, there's the decomposition of the whale, where there's the internal anatomy on display. "I had to figure out where I was going to learn that and then do the drawings to learn it. That's kind of the beginning phase. Then, there comes the phase where I start doing storyboards and planning out the book. Before I get into what each page will look like, I start asking the question, 'What's going to go on each page? What's the topic of each page? What will be the subject of the image?' And that gets back to consideration of pagination and page breaks as well as how everything is going to be paced out."

For much of *Life After Whale*, all this was straightforward, according to Chin, but there were a few pages where that wasn't the case. For example, "There's the scene where the whale dies, and I

Interior from *Life After Whale: The Amazing Ecosystem of a Whale Fall by Lynn Brunelle,* illustrated by Jason Chin.

decided, 'Well, this is going to just have one sentence on the page. We're going to have a nice pause here. This is a big transition. We are going to have one sentence: the whale dies, and there's the picture, and then we turn the page. That's an example of paging it out in a really intentional way that wasn't obvious on the first read," he says.

Once the storyboard is finished, Chin works on each individual picture as part of a finished illustration. He also creates a variety of thumbnails. "Sometimes I know right away. I'm confident; I shouldn't say I know right away because it's hard. There's no right or wrong answer. It's not like a fact, but it's more about being confident in the image or the idea for the image."

With that particular illustration, Chin says he knew what he wanted for that image—"a very stark image of the whale with the light streaming down." However, for other images, he had to go through many iterations of trial-and-error thumbnails that were only one inch or two inches in size. When he likes one, he works it up into a larger version and then a larger one. "It goes from small to big. Once I like the full-scale version, I move on to paint it," he says.

Every painting in *Life After Whale* is layered, which is how Chin captures those underwater atmospheric effects. "I had to be really conscious of light and dark values in the painting," he says. Since the book has many blues, Chin had to become "very familiar with the different pigments. For the most part, in those underwater scenes, it was getting the lights and the darks just right to get that ambient effect. For instance, the whale's tail is less sharp and lighter because there is more water between your eye and the whale. I'd just be very careful in my layers as I would add pigment," he explains.

Particularly challenging in the illustrations were scale and visualizing something that's impossible to see because there's no light down in that zone unless you bring artificial light, according to Chin. "But, of course, the reader needs to see it. For it to be a successful book, they need to see something. My approach there was to do limited color in order to make the contrast between those deep, dark scenes."

For example, he holds up the page while the sleeper shark is feeding on the whale. "Then there's all the hagfish, and they're described in the text as pink, which they are. Sometimes, they're brown. Sometimes, depending on the light source you're shining on them, they may look gray because you're deep underwater and have limited light." Since the text described them as pink, they were going to be pink in the book. Because everything else is gray, Chin says he tried to make them not too bright pink. "They appear brighter because they're against that gray."

Neither Brunelle nor Chin is content to rest on their laurels, with Brunelle immersed in various other writing projects and Chin hard at work on a book about hurricanes. Whatever their next publications are, educators will want to add them to their collections. &

Podcasts as Programming

Reaching Busy Parents on Their Time

JESSI BOUCHELLE

During a two-year post-pandemic period (2021 to 2023), the Youth Services Department at the Patchogue-Medford Library in Suffolk County, NY, hosted fourteen parental education programs, both in-person and virtually. Despite offering evening sessions and partnering with the local school district, attendance averaged just five parents per program, and it became clear that the library's efforts were not meeting the modern parenting moment.

As a working parent, I understood that while parents still needed library-sponsored parental education, conventional library programming wasn't working with their packed schedules. To try and reach this busy and subsequently underserved audience, I created the "podcasts as programming" initiative and its first series, *Adventures in Parenting*, designed to deliver valuable educational content to parents in an on-demand format.

The timing for this shift to podcast programming for parents was right. A 2023 Pew Research Study showed 58% of adults ages 30 to 49 were already consuming podcasts, and the pandemic had increased overall digital literacy.[1] By moving parenting resources to a familiar, on-demand audio format, the library could finally connect its valuable educational content with its community. The podcast allowed us to reach parents where they were, when they had the time to listen.

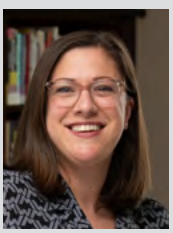
The initiative took shape through three key steps. First, I partnered with reference librarian Erin Clark, who brought both audio engineering experience and a shared perspective as a fellow working mom. Next came the technical setup, which started modestly with recordings taking place in a storage closet before eventually moving into a dedicated studio space.

The final and most crucial step was defining the podcast's true purpose. After an early episode on summer reading fell flat, we realized we needed to shift from thinking like librarians to thinking like parents. Once we began crafting content around the real pressing needs of their parent community, the ideas began flowing naturally through daily conversations with patrons.

The monthly podcast format has maintained many traditional program planning procedures. Episode topics emerged organically in two ways, either from direct community requests, like a back-to-school organization episode, or through partnerships with local organizations, such as an online safety episode.

The team also taps into an often-overlooked resource: the diverse expertise of library staff themselves. From gaming specialists to digital literacy experts, in-house talent provides valuable content while highlighting the library's internal resources. And just like traditional programming, the team works to maintain seasonal relevance for their episodes, timing topics like "Screen Time and Online Wellbeing" for December when families receive new devices, but now delivers this content when and where parents can access it.

While the initiative initially followed traditional programming procedures including contracts, hourly rates, and invoices, it evolved into a more flexible and cost-effective model that maintained familiar planning elements. Without the need to coordinate



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around room availability or patron schedules, experts can record at times that work best for them, including morning sessions that would be impractical for in-person events. Recording length is similarly flexible; when their financial literacy expert had more to share, we simply split the content into two episodes.

To ensure each episode delivers maximum value, we create detailed outlines to guide conversations with experts. These outlines, shared with guests before recording, help keep discussions focused while ensuring all crucial information is covered. This collaborative approach allows experts to provide input while maintaining the episode's educational goals, much like the preparation for traditional library programming but adapted for the podcast format.

The benefits of this podcasting approach have been significant. Unlike traditional lectures, the conversational format engages listeners more effectively, with the podcasters acting as surrogates for their audience rather than positioning themselves as experts. The initiative has expanded the library's reach, allowing them to feature both local community organizations and national experts like the national trade group The Toy Association, a partnership that might have been impractical or too expensive in a traditional setting. The format also enables quick responses to community needs. When invited to speak about teen mental health resources at a middle school parent-teacher association (PTA) meeting, we quickly produced an episode with a local youth mental health organization rather than waiting to organize an in-person event. We then promoted that episode to the PTA as an additional resource on the topic.

Most importantly, the on-demand access means parents can engage with content when and where it works for them, whether that is while doing household chores or waiting at soccer practice, and access information precisely when they need it in their parenting journey.

The Logistics

We have developed efficient production practices to maintain quality and focus. Episodes are kept to thirty to forty-five minutes, skipping typical podcast banter to respect the audience's time constraints. We maintain a structured approach to recording, with co-hosts pre-assigning questions to ensure comprehensive coverage while preserving a natural conversational flow.

For editing, we use Audacity, minimizing post-production work through careful preparation and clear guidelines for guests about personal information sharing. The podcast is hosted on Podbean, which provides both user-friendly publishing tools and valuable analytics—showing that 47% of listeners access episodes via browser downloads and 26% through Apple Podcasts. This data helps us refine our approach to better serve the parent community.

Each episode is supported by carefully crafted supplementary materials and promotion. Resource guides—mirroring traditional in-person program handouts—list authoritative, free, and local resources mentioned during recording, with additional research conducted by staff to provide deeper exploration opportunities. Promotion leverages multiple channels with engaging episode descriptions, social media promotion featuring action-oriented highlights, and direct community outreach.

We distribute QR-coded flyers at PTA events and children's programs, using LinkTree to connect parents directly to relevant content. This comprehensive approach ensures that valuable parenting resources reach their audience effectively, whether through listening or through self-guided learning using the online resource guides.

The initiative's success is clear in the numbers. Since launching in June 2023, *Adventures in Parenting* has released 21 episodes, garnering 758 total downloads, which breaks down to 522 episode downloads and 276 resource guide downloads. This averages 24 listeners per episode, representing a 600% increase over previous in-person attendance.

Popular episodes cover diverse topics critical to modern parenting, from "The Importance of Play" (forty-six downloads) to "Screen Time and Online Well-Being" (thirty-five downloads) and "Teen Mental Health" (thirty-four downloads). Importantly, episodes continue to accumulate downloads over time, demonstrating the enduring value of this on-demand format for busy parents seeking reliable parenting guidance.

Looking ahead, we hope to expand our reach through partnerships with local parent groups, school administrators, and teachers. They are also exploring ways to involve community parents and children in the podcast while maintaining its educational focus. The success of *Adventures in Parenting* has opened possibilities for reaching other underserved populations within the community, including the Hispanic population and young adults. The podcast-as-programming model offers a promising template for connecting with diverse audiences who might not otherwise engage with traditional library services. &

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PEER-REVIEWED

Let's Talk about Diversity

A Content Analysis of School Library Collection Development Policies

ANDREA JAMISON AND EMMA K. MCNAMARA

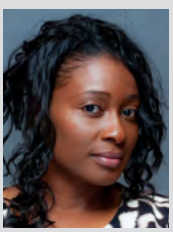
All youth need access to diverse books. Diverse books have personal and communal benefits. Personally, they provide youth with opportunities to see reflections of their own worlds.[1] These reflections, known as mirrors,[2] are affirming and can lead to a greater sense of belonging and self-worth.

Diverse books also serve as a foundation for helping youth develop a love for reading, which can lead to increased comprehension and language development. When youth encounter diverse narratives with relatable cultures and experiences, it leads to greater engagement.[3] Engagement is a precursor to deep thinking, and deep thinking is needed for readers to gain an understanding[4] of complex themes often transmitted through literature.

Diverse books also have communal benefits because they can foster cultural competence and mutual respect between individuals with dissimilar experiences and backgrounds. Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop argues that youth gain a better sense of the world around them through diverse books because books can serve as windows and sliding glass doors into myriad lived experiences. Diverse books also unearth social and political constructs[5] that can foster critical consciousness. Critical consciousness allows youth to understand and then "critique the cultural norms, values, mores, and institutions that produce and maintain social inequities."[6] By interrogating systems of inequity, youth become empowered to "take action" against social injustices. Ultimately, these experiences will prepare students for their adult roles within a democratic society.

Despite expansive conversations about the benefits that diverse books have on youth, BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) communities remain underrepresented in terms of authorship, authenticity, and visibility. According to Sarah Park Dahlen, books featuring diverse characters remain low in comparison to books featuring white characters.[7] Diverse books also have high rates of outsider authorship. Outsider authorship describes a work created by authors whose identities differ from the characters they write about. Outsider authorship can contribute to low publishing opportunities for writers from marginalized communities and can fail to capture the authenticity of diverse experiences in books. Outsider authorship can also lead to misrepresentations of BIPOC characters. The misrepresentation of BIPOC characters in children's books and the lack of authenticity can perpetuate misinformation about specific groups and communities.[8] Visibility is also problematic for diverse communities because diverse narratives are bearing the brunt of censorship challenges. According to Shannon Oltmann, censorship challenges have strategically targeted the voices of diverse communities.[9] Thus, censorship threatens to decrease access to existing books that make the experiences of BIPOC communities visible within library collections.

These issues are germane to school libraries because school libraries provide students with opportunities to encounter a wide collection of children's books. It is through books that students



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learn about the world, including the diversity that exists within it. According to the American Library Association's Library Bill of Rights (ALA), librarians are responsible for providing students with access to a wide range of books representing multiple sides of a topic, viewpoints, people, and experiences.[10] Additionally, school libraries have seen an increase in book removals due to book challenges.[11]

Given the role that school libraries have in exposing youth to children's books and the uptick of school library censorship challenges aimed at banning books representing BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ communities, it is important to examine the extent that collection development policies governing the collections of school libraries address diversity. Such information can illuminate the practices of librarians as it relates to how messages about diverse content are communicated to wider audiences.

Lastly, school collection development policies are significant to this study because the schools and districts meeting the criteria for inclusion are, which recently passed Illinois House Bill 2789.[12] This bill encourages librarians to write policies that align with specific sections of ALA's Library Bill of Rights or that expressly prohibit book banning. By examining collection development policies, the authors can discuss practices meeting this mandate.

As such, this study examined the collection development policies of school districts across nine counties in Illinois to determine the extent, if at all, that manifest messages of diversity exist in policies. The following research questions guided this study:

1. How many school libraries within the sample region have publicly accessible collection development policies?

2. To what extent, if at all, do collection development policies address diversity?

Theoretical Framework

This study was grounded in gatekeeping theory. Gatekeeping was originally coined by Kurt Lewin in 1947 and has been widely applied to the fields of communication, journalism, and sociology.[13] In the field of communication, gatekeeping has been used to explain the process that moves information from one channel to another. Gatekeeping posits that information passes through decision points known as gates. At each gate, decision-makers (gatekeepers) determine if the information gets disseminated to a larger audience.

In library and information science (LIS), gatekeeping has been used to describe the role of librarians as gatekeepers.[14] It has also been used to describe the role of libraries[15] and library policies as gates.[16] Librarians are considered gatekeepers because they make final decisions about the types of information included in library collections. The information included within a library collection is made freely available to library users. When information is not included, it is important to highlight why it is excluded. By doing so, librarians can assess and identify potential patterns of exclusion that may privilege certain types of information. By identifying patterns of exclusion, librarians can work toward greater equity by ensuring that library practices align with library core values.

Collection development policies are considered gates because they are decision points. Collection development policies outline the selection, deselection, and reconsideration criteria for library resources. By using gatekeeping as the lens to examine the data in this study, the researchers can further conversations about how diversity is framed within policies. In other words, we can discuss whether collection development policies act as gates that help librarians make critical decisions about including or excluding diverse content. Given that librarians have an obligation to provide access to resources that reflect the needs, interests, viewpoints, ideas, and experiences of a pluralistic society, we believe that collection development policies should only act to ensure equity of diverse content and not to propagate personal/individual ideologies or values.

Literature Review

Collection development policies are essential to guide a library's collection management practices. They serve as a decision point to help librarians identify which books or information sources should be added to the library's collection. Collection development policies establish the criteria or conditions for excluding books or information sources from a library collection. Lastly, collection development policies inform the public about important collection management decisions and can provide an equitable process for responding to book challenges. According to ALA, "libraries have a responsibility to meet the information needs of everyone in their communities. To do so, they must promote and protect users' intellectual freedom and ensure that the delivery of library services to the community is fair, equitable, and non-discriminatory. This can be achieved only if the library has developed and adopted formal, written library policies and procedures. Written policies are essential because they provide a legal framework for the operations of the library and provide a bulwark against claims that the library or its staff is acting in violation of its mission or the law."[17]

Collection development policies, often considered the cornerstone of collection development, should be well-developed to ensure implementation.[18] Library policies must also conform to the ALA's Library Bill of Rights, which interprets how First Amendment rights apply within library settings. Having a clear and concise collection development policy is essential to ensure ethical library practices and continuity of services across the field of librarianship.[19]

Furthermore, LIS literature highlights a need for librarians to be intentional when creating inclusive library spaces because equity in libraries is a social justice issue librarians must address.[20] Inclusive collection development policies should highlight a library's commitment to diversity by explaining both why and how diversity is achieved and maintained within respective library collections.[21]

Sample

Convenience sampling based on geographic location and proximity to research was used to identify sampled school districts. The principal investigator (PI) is native to Illinois and works in McClean County. Therefore, McClean County and bordering counties met the criteria for inclusion in this study. McClean County is in north central Illinois and is bordered by eight counties. Within these counties, the researchers identified 77 school districts representing approximately 244 public schools: 145 elementary schools, 48 junior high schools, and 51 high schools.

Methods

This study utilized a mixed-methods research design. Both researchers conducted content analyses on sampled school collection development policies to assess the extent to which sampled policies had "manifest" messages of diversity. The principal investigator (PI) performed a similar study on the collection development policies of academic libraries. In that study, the PI examined how collection development policies manifested messages of diversity and the extent that policies aligned with the Library Bill of Rights for Diverse Collections.[22] This study employs a similar methodology.

To conduct the analyses, the researchers used a checklist as a guide. The checklist enabled the researchers to identify and document words and phrases that could denote or account for diversity in each sampled policy. The researchers documented the (presence) of diverse words or phrases and the number of times these words or phrases appeared in the policy (frequency). Qualitative data was also captured by keeping anecdotal records on how diversity manifested in policies as well as any mention of the ALA's Library Bill of Rights.

The PI created the checklist by coding the Library Bill of Rights' Interpretations for Diverse Collections (LBR). By coding the Interpretations, the PI was able to extract a list of words and phrases used to denote and/or describe diversity. These words and phrases became the basis of the checklist; however, an additional category for the term "other" was also listed to accommodate words or phrases outside of the LBR that could also describe or denote diversity.

During the content analysis process, both researchers read each sampled policy thoroughly. Then, using the checklist as a guide, the researchers reread each policy, recording words or phrases (referred to as units) that denoted or accounted for diversity. A check mark indicated the presence of a unit. For units that were present in policies, the number of times the unit occurred within the policy was also documented. For policies manifesting the unit "diversity" itself, an example of how the unit manifested within the policy was documented, along with anecdotal records about where diversity examples were found.

Both researchers conducted independent analyses on sampled policies. Independent analyses were then compared to determine inter-rater reliability (IRR). IRR was measured using simple percent agreement. The researchers analyzed sixteen collection development policies. These policies represented fifty-three schools across sixteen of seventy-seven districts. Fifteen of the policies were district-wide policies. One policy was identified as an individual school policy. The percentage of inter-rater agreements across all policies equaled 96% based on a total of 294 agreements out of 304 possible agreements. Where disagreements did occur, the researchers discussed these disagreements and came to a consensus. Consensus was reached to identify a policy type according to a classification scheme developed during an early study (see appendix A). Consensus was not used to improve interrater reliability.

Data Analysis

Data for this study was analyzed in three parts. For part 1, the PI sought to determine the percentage of schools with collection development policies that were either accessible through the district's website or the website of an individual public school. For this analysis, the PI created a master spreadsheet of all counties that met the criteria for inclusion in this study, along with the districts and number of schools within each district. The PI coded each of the counties and school districts using both colors and numbers. Each county was randomly assigned a color, and each school district within a specific county was identified using both the county's color and its respective district number.

For example, one county was coded as blue. This county has nine school districts (according to the Regional Office of Education): District 1, District 2, District 11, District 6, District 21, District 60, District 69, District 122, and District 140. Therefore, the PI labeled each district as follows: Blue 1; Blue 2; Blue 11; Blue 6; Blue 21; Blue 60; Blue 69; Blue 122; and Blue 140. This type of labeling allowed the researchers to manage the data and match each collection development policy to specific districts or schools within a given district.

The PI recorded the total number of public schools within each district, according to school type (elementary, junior high, or high school). The PI also recorded the number of schools with a collection development policy and the number of schools without a collection development policy. This data was disaggregated and then placed into a table (see appendix B). Additional data was also recorded to identify the number of school districts that had policies and whether collection development policies were district-wide policies that applied to all schools within a district or local school-based policies. When collection development policies were associated with a particular school but were not a district-wide policy, the PI added the first three letters of the school's name behind the district number to distinguish the policy.

For part 2 of the data analysis, the researchers analyzed content analysis data by looking at the specific units that manifested in policies and how those units manifested. This data was tabulated in several different ways. First, the researchers tabulated presence and frequency. To tabulate by presence, the researcher

Table 1. Classification of Policy Types

Policy	TP	TF	PIFP	Policy Type
Orange 14 LS	10	16	60%	High Presence—Low Frequency
Purple 3 ULH	5	6	20%	Low Presence—Low Frequency
Yellow 52 WIL	4	4	0	Low Presence—No Change
Orange 5	3	4	33%	Low Presence—Low Frequency
Gray 2	2	2	0	Low Presence—No Change
Orange 87	2	2	0	Low Presence—No Change
Red 438	2	2	0	Low Presence—No Change
Red 232	2	2	0	Low Presence—No Change
Red 230	2	2	0	Low Presence—No Change
Red 6	2	2	0	Low Presence—No Change
Yellow 703	1	2	100%	Low Presence—Same
Yellow 309	2	2	0	Low Presence—No Change
Yellow 303	2	2	0	Low Presence—No Change
Yellow 75	2	2	0	Low Presence—No Change
Red 5	1	1	0	Low—Presence No Change
Gray 92	0	0	0	No Presence

counted the number of different units that appeared in policies. The sum of these numbers equated to the total presence (TP) of units. To tabulate frequency, the researchers counted the number of times each of the different units appeared in the policy. The sum of these numbers became the total frequency (TF) of all units manifested in policies.

The researchers then ordered policies according to the total presence of units to determine which policies had the highest presence of units versus those with the lowest presence of units. Policies were then ranked according to the total units manifested, which factors in the TF of all the units present. The researchers then calculated the percentage of increase in frequency over units present in policies (PIFP). To accomplish this, the researchers divided the difference between presence and frequency by the total number of units present. The percentage of increase over frequency allowed the researchers to classify each policy based on five distinct types of policies (see appendix A). This data helped the researchers answer the second research question from a quantitative perspective.

Table 1 organizes the collection development policies by total frequency of diversity units present in policies and shows the percent of increase in frequency over presence for each policy. The table also classifies each policy as a specific type.

For part 3 of the data analysis, researchers examined anecdotal records from each policy to determine how the unit "diversity" manifested in each policy. The researchers studied each example of how the term "diversity" was used to identify themes or trends that emerged from the data. First, each researcher made notes and comments about each example in isolation. Both researchers are knowledgeable about equity, diversity, and inclusion and were able to make initial assessments of their observations based on professional and personal experiences. After making independent observations, the researchers compared notes and discussed commonalities between initial impressions. From these conversations, the researchers were able to identify and agree upon themes present within the data. This data enabled the researchers to answer the second research question from a qualitative perspective.

Table 2 shows the collection development policies that manifested the term diversity or a variation of the term, along with an example of how the term manifested in the policy. Out of sixteen policies, four had manifest language of diversity. Twelve policies did not mention diversity or any language from the checklist (see sample in appendix C).

Results

Lack of Transparency

Out of nine counties with 77 school districts representing 244 schools, 16 collection development policies were publicly available via a school or school district's website. This sample ($N = 16$) represents approximately 53 (or 21%) of the schools across nine counties. However, the researchers cannot rule out the fact that more schools within this sample area may have collection development policies. From this study, the researchers only conclude that, at the time of this study, collection development policies were not publicly available on either the district or individual schools' websites for the remaining 61 districts, which represent approximately 191 schools.

Two Additional Policy Types

The researchers were able to identify two additional types of policies during this study: a "no presence" policy and a "low presence, low frequency" policy. We define "no presence" policies as policies that do not manifest any diversity units and should be identified as a type of policy. A "no presence" policy was evidenced by policy Gray 92. The Gray County has seven school districts, representing sixteen schools. District 92 within the county is a single school district governing one elementary school. Within this policy, none of the checklist units were present. Nor were there other terms in the policy related to diversity, equity, inclusion, or access.

We define "low presence—low frequency" as policies that manifest a lower presence of diversity units, and the overall increase in frequency over the unit present is less than 100%. This policy type was noted in Orange 5. Policy Orange 5 represents a district-wide collection development policy for approximately sixteen schools. Within this policy, the following diversity units did manifest: diverse book awards, diversity, disability, and different voices. The unit for "diverse book awards" was given a frequency count of two because the policy names specific diverse book awards. Therefore, this policy has a total presence of three and an overall frequency of four. The increase in frequency is less than 100% of the terms present, which means that while the policy does manifest diverse language, only a small percentage of that language is repeated throughout the policy. In these types of

Table 2. Policy Samples with Diversity

Policy	# of Times Diversity Manifests in Policy	Example of How Diversity Manifests in Policy
Purple, District 3	1	"For further information on library selection policies in general, please see the following ALA documents: ▪ Evaluating Library Collections ▪ *Diversity* in Collection Development"
Red, District 5	1	". . . is dedicated to building collections that provide the greatest impact on literacy, learning, teaching, and research and offer *diversity* of content."
Orange, District 14	4	"*Diversity*: Emphasis is placed on collecting resources which accurately and respectively represent *diversity* in culture, ethnicity, race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, ability, citizenship status, country of origin and more. It is crucial resources reflect the *diversity* of experiences within a given identity and represent intersectional identities." ". . . by providing access to quality information and literature from *diverse* resources."
Orange, District 5	1	▪ "For further information on library selection policies in general, please see the following ALA documents: ▪ Evaluating Library Collections ▪ *Diversity* in Collection Development ▪ "Library Bill of Rights." American Library Association. Web. 11 Apr. 2012. ▪ Jacobson, Frances. "Uni High Library—Collection Development." University

policies, diversity language is not embedded or given significant space within the policy. Lack of embeddedness can signify that diversity is either siloed within certain sections within policies or not meaningful because there is no real emphasis on the language.[23]

Themes

Based on the data from this study, the following themes were noted:

1. *Lack of specificity:* The term "diversity" in this sample ($N = 16$) of collection development policies was not always defined. Within this study, one policy (Orange 14) defined "what diversity means" as it pertains to collection development. Diversity is a broad term that can be used in multiple ways and can have different meanings. In the context of equity, diversity, inclusion, and access (EDIA), the term "diversity" should always point to people (their ideas, experiences, abilities, identities, backgrounds, etc.). Diversity should always be specified within policies to distinguish when the term represents diversity in book format, diversity of topics, or diversity of genre.

2. *General district-wide policies:* Schools in this sample often use district-wide policies to outline collection procedures. Approximately nine (57%) of the policies sampled were the exact same and posted to websites across multiple districts. These policies manifested a lower presence of diversity units and no frequency increase over the units present. Therefore, these policies lacked specificity in terms of defining diversity, and the importance of diversity was not imbued throughout the policy. While district policies can ensure continuity of library service across all the schools within the district, these nine policies didn't address diversity in a meaningful way. Nor did they outline specific procedures for acquiring diverse content or ensuring inclusivity within collections.

   Data from this study does not provide insight into why school districts may opt to use district-wide policies. District administrators may want to ensure continuity in messaging regarding library services and use. These types of policies may also be convenient for districts given that they can be copied from one district to the next. However, the researchers noticed a trend regarding district-wide policies in this study. These policies had not been updated within the last five years, and some had references to outdated versions of the LBR. District administrators should consider the implication of copying existing policies without verifying the policy information and without ensuring that the copied policy represents the unique needs of their students.

3. *Reference to ALA:* Of the four policies that manifested the term "diversity," two of the four policies referenced or provided direct links to ALA's Library Bill of Rights for Diversity in Collection Development. While the numbers here are low, the researchers believe that this data is indicative of a positive direction for future policy development. Illinois recently passed Illinois House Bill 2789, which encourages librarians to write policies that either align with specific sections of the Library Bill of Rights or that expressly prohibit book banning. One policy provided a direct link to ALA's website. Another policy referenced ALA in the policy's bibliography section.

Implication for Policy Development

ALA identifies diversity as a core value. Therefore, collection development policies should reflect this value. By articulating meaningful messages of diversity in collection development policies, librarians can reinforce the importance of diversity and apprise users of a library's intentional commitment to equity.

These policies can also send strong messages to censors that diversity within library collections undergirds the mission of the school, the district, the school library, and the broader field of librarianship. Empirical studies analyzing how school libraries address diversity through policy are scant. Therefore, this study illuminates the policy practices of sampled libraries and can intensify discussions about actionable ways to make library collections more inclusive. As such, the authors make the following recommendations for writing school collection development policies:

1. *School library or district-wide collection development policies should create collection development policies that clearly articulate a commitment to diversity and the curation of books that reflect both social and cultural pluralism*. Since policies serve as guides for selecting library books and other resources, librarians should ensure that messages of diversity in policies are clear. Diversity is a broad and complex term that describes many different experiences. To capture the vastness of these experiences, librarians should create policies that are specific and that identify groups that are included within their collection. Therefore, policies should use terminology to name the specific groups that are represented in their collections. Such policy specificity can serve as a compass to help librarians select books that represent the populations most impacted by diversity inequities.

2. *School library or district-wide collection development policies should make sure that collection development policies are easily located on their respective websites*. Transparency is important for both defending selection decisions and for ensuring professional accountability. In this study, the researchers posit that absent publicly available policies, it is impossible to determine whether policies act as gates. Most policies examined in this study did not act as gates for diverse content because only some policies addressed diversity in a way that would guide the selection practices of diverse content. Given that collection development policies provide guidelines for building library collections that are fair, equitable, and under library standards, policies should detail procedures for selecting diverse materials. Systems of inequities thrive when information is not scrutinized. By making policy information available to the larger community, librarians can reinforce messages of diversity and practices that align with core values of librarianship as articulated by ALA. Transparency also creates accountability.

3. *School library or district-wide collection development policies should directly reference the current iteration of the ALA Library Bill of Rights or Interpretations*. School library or district-wide collection development policies should also provide links and additional references to the ALA Bill of Rights to underscore the message of intellectual freedom and the importance of inclusivity. This information should be updated frequently to ensure that "links" direct patrons to current iterations of the LBR.

4. *School library or district-wide collection development policies should increase the frequency or number of times diverse language appears in policies*. Language used to draft diversity statements should be reiterated throughout the entire collection development policy to emphasize the value of diversity in all aspects of selection decisions. &

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Appendix A

Five Policy Types	
High Presence—Low Frequency	Policies fell within either of the groups that manifested a high presence of checklist and IBOR units. However, the overall increase in frequency over the number of units present increased by less than (<) 100% of the total unit presence.
Low Presence—High Frequency	Policies fell within either of the groups that manifested a low presence of checklist and IBOR units. However, the overall increase in frequency over the number of units present increased by more than (>) 100% of the total unit presence.
High Presence—High Frequency	Policies fell within one of the two groups that manifested a high presence of checklist and IBOR units. This category also describes policies where the overall increase in frequency over the amount of units present increased (>) by 100%.
Low Presence—No Change	Policies fell within either of the groups that manifested a lower presence of checklist and IBOR units. However, there was no (0) increase in frequency over the amount of units present.
Low Presence—Same	Policies had a low presence of checklist and IBOR units. However, the overall increase in frequency over the amount of unit presence was equal to (=) or 100% of the total unit presence.

Appendix B. Districts with Policies vs. Districts Where Policies Were Not Located

County	# of School Districts	# of DWPL	# of DWPNL	Total # of Schools	# of SWP	% of SWP
Orange	9	3	6	50	33	53%
Green	2	0	2	8	0	0
Red	12	5	7	24	8	33%
Yellow	18	5	13	52	8	15%
Blue	9	0	9	23	0	0
Gray	7	2	5	16	3	18%
Purple	14	1	13	53	1	1%
Pink	2	0	2	7	0	0
Brown	4	0	4	11	0	0
Totals	77	16	61	244	53	21%

Appendix C. Sample (Unedited) District Without Diverse Language

Policy 13: Yellow, 703

Media Policy

The ultimate responsibility for the selection of media resides with the Board of Education. The Board and the Administration delegate the actual selection of materials to the professional staff whose training qualified them to perform this function. A parent/guardian has the right to evaluate the media materials his/her child is using. However, no parent/guardian has the right to determine materials that will be used by other children. If materials are being used in a classroom that a parent/guardian formally objects to, accommodations may be made.

It is our purpose to provide a rich environment that will foster in each child, a lifelong desire to learn. Materials selected for use should include, but not limited to, the following:

- Materials that are an integral part of the instructional program.
- Materials that are appropriate for the learning level and understanding of students.
- Materials that reflect the interests and needs of the students and faculty.
- Materials representing a wide range of literary and artistic values.
- Materials presenting as many opinions as possible on issues of contemporary concern so that students have opportunities to analyze varying points of view and to learn to think critically.
- Video materials with a rating other than "G" will require a permission slip signed by parent/guardian prior to showing in grades K–6.
- Video materials from sources other than the IMC video collection will be recorded by title and rating with the Principal prior to showing.

A Focus on Summer

National Summer Book Award Initiated at NSLA Summit

ELIZABETH MCCHESNEY

Author Chanel Miller (r) receives the 2024 National Summer Book Award from Elizabeth McChesney at the 2024 Summit of the National Summer Learning Association.

The setting: a glittering ballroom holding twelve hundred people all gathered to think, learn, work, and grow together around the issues related to providing equitable access in the summertime.

The event: The Library and Literacy Professional Learning Community (PLC) awarded the inaugural National Summer Book Award at the National Summer Learning Association (NSLA) Annual Summit. The NSLA is the nation's only non-profit laser-focused on increasing access to summer programs. It works to ensure all of America's students, regardless of background, income, or zip code, can access and benefit from a high-quality summer learning experience every year.

The NSLA Summit convenes cross-sector leaders, program providers, and funders, including about one hundred public library leaders nationwide. NSLA holds space for library leaders looking to work on deepening access and equity in their summer program, align to quality indicators for program success, lift youth voices, develop partnerships, and also work to help advocate for libraries in the "big tent" of summer learning.

The Library and Literacy PLC, a community that meets monthly to workshop ideas, hear from trainers, and work on projects to contribute to library-related issues, is a testament to the power of collective effort. This year, we expanded our reach to provide information to summer program providers outside of libraries about beautiful and culturally affirming literature they might include for youth in summer programs such as camps and special interest programs. In service of this idea, we created a National Summer Book Award, modeled after the ALA Youth Media Awards, a symbol of our commitment to excellence in literature for youth.

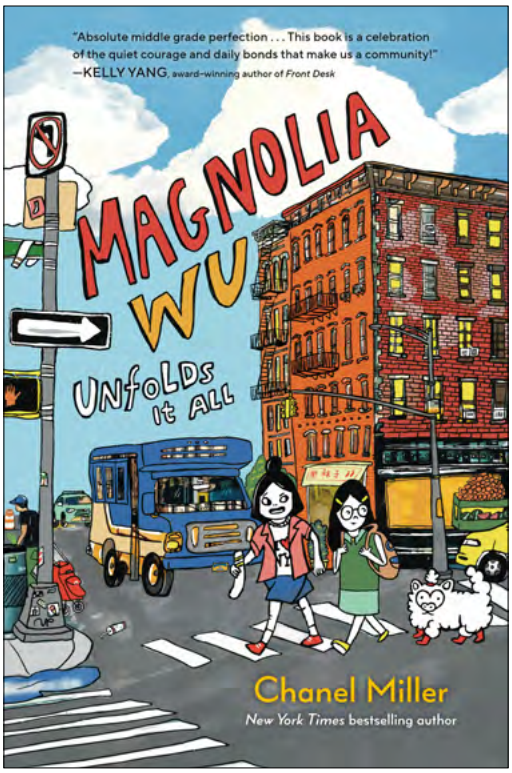
This idea was inspired by several of the PLC members sitting together at the ALA Annual Conference in 2024 for the Coretta Scott King Book Awards Roundtable Breakfast, where we were inspired by the power and richness of the awards ceremony. With consent and enthusiasm from NSLA leadership, we convened immediately to begin the process. We created and voted on criteria that lifted the values of NSLA, including equity and access, persistence and resilience, and the joy and power of interest-driven

***Liz McChesney**, with over thirty-five years of experience serving children and families, is a passionate children's advocate, library administrator, and literacy expert. She has earned numerous national awards including the 2024 Library of Congress David M. Rubenstein Award for Excellence in Literacy. She currently serves as a Senior Advisor at the Urban Libraries Council and a Senior Fellow at the National Summer Learning Association.* Wonder Libraries: 20 Expert Opinions on What Kids Need Now *(Neal Schuman-ALA Editions, 2024), edited by Liz McChesney, was recently released.*

learning. This emphasis on interest-driven learning is a key aspect of the National Summer Book Award, as we know that when children are engaged and interested in every aspect of what they are learning, including reading, the learning experience is more meaningful and impactful. Additional criteria for consideration included a book published within the last four years and available in print so programs could easily access copies of it.

A working segment of our PLC stepped forward as a selection committee and quickly established criteria for consideration that were voted on by the larger community. The committee members include Becca Boland, Christy Estrovitz, Erin Gambrell, Liz McChesney, Jenny Song, Leana Pulu, and Jen Woo.

The criteria include literary quality, relevance and themes, age appropriateness, originality, illustrations where applicable, cultural and social awareness, educational value, reader engagement, and impact and professional reviews.



Twenty-two books were considered, read, and voted upon, and in September of 2024, our committee chose *Magnolia Wu Unfolds It All* by Chanel Miller, published by Penguin Random House in 2024. The book also received a Newbery Honor this year. Magnolia Wu has pinned every lost sock from the laundromat her parents owned in New York City onto a bulletin board in hopes of finding the missing owners, but no one ever notices the socks, not even Magnolia. But when a new friend—Iris—moves from California to New York one summer, the new friends set out across the city to solve the mystery of each of the missing socks and, in doing so, ask a million questions; they stay determined and encounter new people and unimaginable experiences. With each new meeting, Magnolia learns more about herself and her community, and most importantly, she learns important lessons that include errors are just creative acts and that just below the surface of a person, there are endless unexpected layers and stories, pain and longing and dreams. This book exemplifies the best of summer learning, friendship, and resilience.

Back at that historic ballroom, Miller accepted the award to a standing ovation from program leaders, funders, educators, and out-of-school time leaders. "Being surrounded by educators and librarians fuels me to keep writing," said Miller. "I have witnessed their unwavering focus and clarity of purpose when it comes to expanding the hearts and minds of children. Thank you for this honor and for showing me the warmest side of humanity."

"This book offers a tremendous opportunity for children attending thousands of summer programs across the United States," added Aaron Dworkin, CEO of the NSLA. "The establishment of the National Summer Book Award is a significant milestone in our mission to increase access to high-quality summer learning experiences. We are delighted to institutionalize an annual book for youth which all programs can include in their summer offerings. This is a significant contribution to the organization from the Library and Literacy PLC, and we are so grateful for Chanel Miller and the world of Magnolia Wu for helping us build empathetic, funny, and kind summer readers. This award is a testament to the power of literature to inspire and educate our youth, and we look forward to the impact it will have on summer learning programs across the nation."

For more information on joining the Library and Literacy PLC at the NSLA or to be considered for the National Summer Book Selection Committee, please contact Liz McChesney at Liz@laundrycares.org. &

Couples who Collaborate

Jessixa and Aaron Bagley

MARY-KATE SABLESKI

Couples who collaborate to create children's books together offer fascinating and inspiring lessons for collaboration in its many forms. Jessixa and Aaron are a creative, dynamic couple and the creators of several books for children, including the middle grade graphic novel, *Duel* (2023). They live together in Seattle, WA, with their son.

Jessixa grew up in Portland, OR, and attended the University of Washington and the Cornish College of the Arts, where she met Aaron. She has a background in comics, fine art, and illustration, and received many awards and accolades over her career for that work. But a particular love and passion for creating picture books brought her to her current pursuits. She creates books as a solo author and illustrator, illustrates for other writers, and, of course, creates books with her husband.

Aaron also attended the Cornish College of the Arts, where he met Jessixa in a comics class. His illustrations have been featured in multiple outlets, including *Illustoria Magazine*. His first picture book *Vincent Comes Home* (2018) was also the first collaboration for the couple.

Q: How did you meet, and begin working on books together?

Jessixa: We met as undergraduate students at Cornish College of the Arts in Seattle. We spent a lot of time in comics class getting to know each other. We did not do much collaborating then. After we graduated, we started drawing together. In those early days, we created collaborative drawings, like little bits like here and there. We just kept at it, and then we were doing it more seriously without realizing it. Someone asked us to do a show based on a drawing they saw that we did together. So, we did a little gallery show with just all of our drawings. And, he proposed to me at the show.

Aaron: I did! When we were hanging the show, there was a spot in the gallery, that was kind of weird. We didn't know what to do with it, so I said, "I have an idea." The next night, when we were there installing, I said, "All right, turn around," and then I asked her to turn back around, and I was on one knee, with a cupcake and a button with a ring drawn on it. We didn't have any money to buy rings at that time.

Jessixa: It was the sweetest thing.

Aaron: Jewelry of any kind at that point was so out of our purview. We had bought the button maker together, so I thought, a button will work! It was one of the first things we bought together.

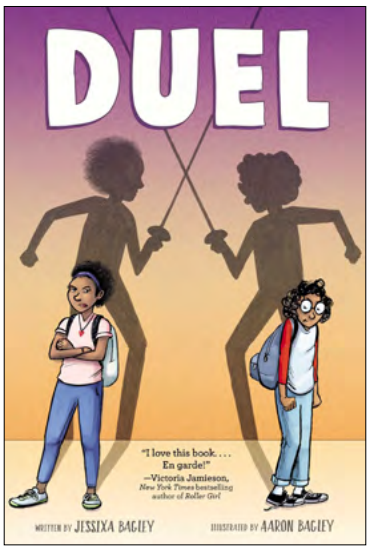
Jessixa: That, and a pencil sharpener.

Aaron: Oh yeah, that's right!

Jessixa: It was fun. We called the show *Duet*. We did several shows like this—they were not narratives, but we sometimes picked a theme for all of the drawings to follow.

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

Aaron: These shows led us to make five little mini comics, all based on this mythology we created about my parents' house that's been in the family for three generations. The house is really old and cool, and we just made stories up about the big black walnut tree in the yard, or some strange man that lives in the basement and sends marbles up the air shafts to a kid that lives there. Just all kinds of weird stuff.



Jessixa: We also wrote a comic about a robot that learns to love. That was very early on. We were having fun. But we had a very natural desire to try to do this on a next level, a professional level in some form. So, after I sold my first picture book, we met with my editor for that book, Neal Porter. It was my first time meeting him, and Aaron was with me. Immediately, Neal asked us if we ever considered making a book together. He told us he really loves working with couples, and particularly married couples. We were so stunned! I still had not even officially published my first book!

Aaron: I mean, I did show him my artwork when we met. I showed him some of my little mini comics. I just show my work to people naturally. It is a nice icebreaker conversation. That conversation with Neal really planted a seed from the very beginning for us to think about making books together.

Jessixa: The first few ideas we tried, Neal did not take. Part of an editor's job is saying no to things, and if he had not said no, then we might not have gotten to our first picture book together. *Vincent Comes Home* was based off of a story that Aaron was writing for one of his little mini comics. Neal suggested he try to turn it into a picture book.

At first, Aaron was trying to do it on his own. As we talked about the book and shared ideas, I just kind of fell into working on it with him. Neal thought it was great! We had no qualms, because at that point we had been doing collaborative illustration for so long together. We knew it would look like one person illustrated it and would not feel disjointed. Fast forward to many years later… I had been doing picture books. Aaron had been doing a lot of illustration work, and he really loves working collaboratively with people. So, continuing our collaboration was always something very normal and natural.

When I got the idea for *Duel*, I thought I could write and illustrate it myself. But, like I always say to kids when I do school visits, "Would you want to spend three hundred pages just drawing your sister?" It was more challenging than I thought. So, I immediately asked Aaron if he thought he would want to illustrate it. We had been working on other graphic novel ideas for years, so this was a nice transition from doing smaller things to doing a whole book, and then for us to really get an opportunity to lean into one side each, him illustrating and me writing, instead of it being completely collaborative, which we had normally done before.

Q: Can you tell us about your process?

Aaron: Well, for *Vincent Comes Home*, we would trade back and forth with the writing a lot with that one. We relied on Neal a lot then, too, since it was our first book together. And now, our process for writing is usually like Jessixa sits at the computer, and then I lay down somewhere and I tell her things, and she writes things based on that. And we just go back and forth.

Jessixa: We actually do a lot of writing together for a lot of different projects, whether it is stuff for our son's school, or other projects. We spend a lot of time talking back and forth about our ideas, and then we sort of weave it together. He offers some ideas, I offer some ideas, and we merge and tweak them. I may write something, and I will ask him to read it, he makes some changes.

Our process is very much taking the best things that we say, and turning it into something that makes sense. When we collaborate on illustrations, we do not usually change each other's work much. We just add to it with some things we draw together. That process is more organic. We just let each other do what their strengths are with the illustrations. When he draws something, I want his intent to come through, so I really do not want to change it.

Aaron: I love collaborating like this because one has to relinquish a sense of ego. Something else comes through when there is not that competition of who did what part, and so a better product emerges. When we create together, I never feel like, I have to do this so that people will see that I did. I never feel like that.

Jessixa: For our graphic novels, like the one we are working on now, I am doing the writing, and Aaron is illustrating. It is funny, because then, when we see the full thing finished, it is not that I think that I did the illustrations, but I just feel like they are also mine. And Aaron says the same about the writing. We trust each other completely. I trust his choices always—he has impeccable taste. He is a phenomenal artist. I know when I do something he is going to treat it with care and consideration, and bring his talent to it like nobody else can.

Aaron: That is why working on *Duel* together was so different. Everything to that point had been very collaborative. Getting the manuscript for *Duel* from Jessixa was a new experience for me. And now, we are working on our third graphic novel, and it is great. I will illustrate anything she writes, because everything she writes is so good. It could be like the most mundane thing I would think, oh, this is going to be fun!

Q: How much revision and editing happens before your books even get to an official editor?

Jessixa: We are both very lucky because not everybody that makes books has a partner that also makes books. We understand the value of one another's work, and what needs to go into it. Because Aaron and I are doing the same things, even when it is a project that I am just doing by myself, I can trust him with giving thoughtful editing advice. When we work collaboratively together, the editing is super fluid. We share advice back and forth on each other's work. When we make our graphic novels, there is a very clear line. I am the author, and typically, I would be thousands of miles away from the illustrator. I am not supposed to have input. But I spent many years as a child reading the *Highlights* magazine feature in which there is something different across two pictures, so apparently, I am very good at spotting things that are not the same. I notice when there is not consistency across the illustrations. And so that does become an issue. It can be awkward because I am not sending him this over an email and just hitting send, and then I get to go about my day. I have to actually watch his discomfort when I point these things out to him.

Aaron: When you are drawing 330 pages, to get it right every single time, and you think it is all accurate, the continuity is perfect...it never is. Particularly in the coloring process, that is when these inconsistencies are really apparent. It can be a little tricky to do the changes at that point. It is meticulous. I will leave mistakes in because it feels good. It feels human.

Jessixa: He teases me because there is a mistake in *Duel*, but he will not tell me what it is. I always want to fix every inconsistency, but sometimes we do not see them until the editors say it is too late to correct then. We like to tell that to kids, too, because they love looking for the mistakes and telling us when they find them.

Q: How is it different to work with a family member as compared to another author or illustrator?

Jessixa: It is so much fun to get to work with Aaron. Because we have easy access to each other, the process can be more fluid. Good changes and revelations that affect aspects of the story emerge, because we are right here. But it is not just a proximity thing. It is also because I really know him, and I trust him. The number one thing that people say when they find out that we are married is, "I could never make a book with my husband." We have just been doing this so long. We are really okay with working through those sorts of things. And I think when you illustrate for somebody else, if it is somebody that you do not know, you are not sure exactly like what is going to be okay. I am a little apprehensive, because there is always the question of whether they will like it. But I never feel that with you.

Aaron: I have not illustrated a picture book for anyone else, or, a graphic novel for anyone else. I have done freelance work, so working with clients that you do not necessarily know, I think you have to generalize a little more, putting your strengths in front of them. It is a little bit like getting to know someone, a new friend almost. And the more that you get to know them, the more you know how to work with them. The things they do not care about, the things they do. I feel like I am always seeking to impress them, and I am always trying to impress Jessixa in anything I do. I want her to be impressed with either writing, or ideas, or illustrations, and it is the same with someone else, but on a different level.

Q: How do you see your books working to be inclusive of diverse perspectives, backgrounds, and identities?

Jessixa: When I was growing up, I did not see myself in books. The only books that resonated with me were books where the animals were characters, because it was just about their experiences and their feelings. I could connect to that. I did not feel outside of that world.

Now that we are making books with people in them, it is very natural for us to want to be sure that we are showing many different experiences, types of people, body sizes and ethnicities, because that is the world. That is not us trying to pretend a diverse world exists. These are kids' actual experiences.

Aaron: I think representation with knowledge of someone else's experience, but not overstepping your boundary. I included a character in our next graphic novel that uses a wheelchair. I did not add anything in there that was about using a wheelchair. I just put him in one. Across the entire book, I had to include him in all these scenes, where a person in a wheelchair might face challenges. So, instead of having Jessixa rewrite the story, I just approached it as though he was a person for whom I had to make accommodations. That gave me a perspective on how it would be if I had this character over to my apartment. We have stairs. It is one and a half flights up the stairs, so I could not have him over unless we figured something out. We would have to figure something out. And that's how I approached it in the book. But I also did not use it to further the story. It was just to have this person in there, as he would be in the real world.

Jessixa: This conversation about being inclusive and adding diversity to books is inherently problematic because it is coming from a perspective that we need to put people in these books. But everybody already exists in the world. If you look at it from that perspective, it can feel like there is a "normal," which means there is a "not normal."

All of us are normal. All of us are in the world, and all of us should be in books. I enjoy creating stories about the experiences kids have day to day. I do not want it to always be about pain, or othering, or trauma. Every kid has these feelings of isolation, or grief, or loneliness, or feeling different, or wanting to fit in. Those are universal truths that we all have the right to feel.

Q: What is next for you?

Jessixa: We are almost finished with the second graphic novel, called *Dear Jackie*. It is a separate story from *Duel*.

Aaron: It is a middle grade graphic novel. It stands alone, and is not connected to *Duel*. It is about a middle schooler and her best friend who are starting off in middle school, and they have to go separate ways. They end up traversing middle school in these new social groups, and there are a lot of social expectations. The

main character is trying to navigate these new social expectations without her best friend helping her along the way. To try to make an effort to fit in, she invents a secret admirer and starts sending herself love letters.

Jessixa: What could go wrong, right? I am just finishing up the edits on my own middle grade graphic novel called *Jazzy the Witch*, and it is the first of two books right now. It is for slightly younger middle grade readers. And, we are working on our third graphic novel together right now.

Q: Do you have any advice for other couples who might be considering working together to create books?

Jessixa: We have never been asked that.

Aaron: I think it is important to find a way that works for the both of you. When we write together, it is conversational. Find what is going to support your process, and then don't judge it. It definitely takes a lot of respect. Respect the thing that the other person does, and leave your ego at the door. You can really ruin a project when someone takes over the process.

Jessixa: Trust, and allowing each other's strengths to shine through. Find a process that is unique to your communication style. And yes, try not to let your own personal agenda or personal ego get in the way. And, on the other side, if it is not working, for example you are either not getting credit or your voice is being squashed, then get out. Go and do it on your own. Collaborating with your spouse is not for everybody. But as long as both people agree that they are trying to make the work the best it can be, then it will come from a healthy place. &

A Primer on Primers

How Children Were Taught to Read, 1800 to 1950

CAROLINE WARD

Children have been taught to read by every method and by no method—and it would puzzle the wisest to tell exactly how a child does learn to read our anomalous mother tongue.
—William Swinton, *Swinton's Primer*, 1883

Blending my professional interest in beginning readers with the opportunity to spend a month at the Baldwin Collection of Historical Children's Literature at the Smathers Library, University of Florida, Gainesville, I chose to examine the collection's extensive holdings of primers and other books designed to help children learn to read.

I selected 1800 as a starting point as the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries witnessed the beginnings of a changed attitude toward children, their literature, and methods of learning to read. A number of enlightened philosophies would influence how children were taught to read into the next century.

One such influencer was philosopher John Locke (1632–1704) who introduced what was then considered a revolutionary approach to teaching children in his treatise *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693). DeVries calls Locke "the spiritual father of children's books. . . . Locke proclaimed that Children should be treated as rational creatures. . . . They should be allowed liberties and freedom suitable to their ages. . . . They must not be hindered from being children."[1]

In the early American colonies, publications from England were primarily what was available to American children, but at the same time the new nation was undergoing a patriotic fervor. One proponent was Noah Webster (1758–1843) who, according to Virginia Haviland, in *Yankee Doodle's Literary Sampler*, produced *The American Spelling Book* (1783) because "as an educator he was unhappy with children's books which revealed an English rather than an American Culture—and spelling. . . . His work is an example of love of country and pride in a young nation along with a certain antipathy towards England."[2]

Even with a more enlightened view of how children should be treated and educated, and a new national spirit, a Puritan ethic still dominated instruction. *The New England Primer*, probably published in Boston around 1690, is attributed to Benjamin Harris, a rabid anti-Catholic who moved to Boston from London. According to J. H. Plumb in *Early Children's Books and Their Illustration*, "It went into thousands of American homes where for generations it was, next to the Bible, probably the book most frequently given to children."[3]

In *Beauties of the New England Primer* (1824), the publisher acknowledges that "the New England Primer of latter times having become almost useless, if not quite obsolete . . . the Publisher has made a selection . . . hoping it will be acceptable to the children of the present day."[4]

Yet the influence of this seminal book is such that the contents of *Beauties* still includes the original hymns, prayers, and an

Caroline Ward *served as ALSC President in 2000 and chaired the inaugural 2006 Theodor Seuss Geisel Award. In 2020, she spent a month researching this article on a Bechtel Fellowship at the Baldwin Collection of Historical Children's Literature at the Smathers Library, University of Florida, Gainesville.*

The Uncle's Present: A New Battledoor (Philadelphia: Jacob Johnson, 1810).

account of the martyrdom of John Rodgers. While secular material sometimes appears in early readers and primers, generally there is a strong moral code and a work ethic apparent; for example, *The Young Child's ABC, or, First Book* contains this cautionary verse: "He who in learning takes pride, In Coach and six may chance to ride, While ev'ry stupid dunce will be, Condeme'd to servile drudgery."[5]

Battledores and Chapbooks

For parents looking for inexpensive books, battledores and chapbooks were popular into the early 1800s. *The Uncle's Present: A New Battledoor* (1810) is a fine example of this type of early learning tool. Printed on card stock, it has a simple two-page fold opening with a flap, with alphabet and numbers on the front. The flap entices the reader in with encouragement "Read & Be Wise" and "Come Read and Learn."[6] It contains no religious teaching and the alphabet is illustrated with "Cries of London," street vendor calls that would have been familiar, at least to English children.

Another type of street literature was the chapbook, often sold by peddlers who traveled the countryside peddling many items including small inexpensive books. Bertha Mahony Miller in *Illustrators of Children's Books, 1744–1945* describes chapbooks as "anecdotes to the heavy puritan influence . . . they were more lighthearted, cheaply made, often crudely illustrated and many contained popular ballads, songs, and stories."[7]

The Boy's Picture Book (1843), a humorous poem that does not take itself too seriously, claims "this penny book, of little things, though small and cheap, instruction brings."[8] Another chapbook, *New ABC* (1805) ends with a humorous, slightly bawdy rhyme: "Round about, round about Maggotty pye; my father loves good ale and so do I."[9] For many of these early publications, the publisher might also be the printer and even the bookseller, and so many also advertise. The chapbook *Apple Pie* (1825) includes the bookseller's advertisement: "This cost one cent, at Jansen's store, where you can buy a number more."[10]

The Women as Educators

Primers abound with the names of often unidentified mothers and aunts such as *Aunt Mary's Primer* (1851), implying that the teaching of reading was often the purview of the mother or another female adult. Two real women writers who emphasized the role of the mother in pedagogical instruction and whose influence carried over well into the nineteenth century were Anna Letitia Barbauld and Ellenor Fenn, the latter of whom often went by the pseudonym Mrs. Lovechild. Barbauld's *Lessons for Children* (1778) urges children "to explore the animal, vegetable, and mineral worlds around them."[11] Already a respected author and poet when she wrote these stories, they are filled with familiar childhood scenes and activities and devoid of religious content. According to Zipes in *The Norton Anthology of Children's Literature*, Barbauld's new approach helped to change the direction of children's literature, and she is credited with developing the first formalized program of reading instruction for children.[12]

Similarly, Mrs. Lovechild's *The Mother's Assistant, or, Infant School Primer* (1843) contains lively verse such as "Now run away, my little boys, and march and jump and play; You have been studying long enough, so run away and play."[13] Her most popular reading primer *Cobwebs to Catch Flies* (1783) went through multiple editions in both Britain and America until the 1870s. She also created toys and games that encouraged mothers to teach their children themselves. In *The Cambridge Companion to Children's Literature*, editor Andrea Immel writes that through Lovechild's games, we can "recognize her as an early advocate of child-centered teaching strategies. The games emphasize conversation and the child's own world; they encourage the mother to answer the child's questions and to spontaneously teach when the child is interested in learning."[14]

Unfortunately, not all books written by women were as open-minded. *Mama's Lessons for Her Little Boys and Girls* (1829) has a lofty ideal of "endeavoring to form sentences, and dialogues suited to their comprehension." However, the dialogue between "mamma" and her son is loaded with pious thoughts. And when the boy asks his mother, "why does the sun set in different places depending on the season?" she informs him, "that God makes it so."[15]

The Evolution of Nineteenth-Century Primers

Numerous primers published in the 1800s conform to a similar format to include the alphabet, simple phrases, pronunciations, and short stories that get progressively more difficult—often with new vocabulary introduced prior to the story so the reader can practice the words. Prefaces often hint at the educational philosophy being touted. Some even include notes for parents, and many exhibit a surprisingly modern sensitivity. The preface of *The Illustrated Primer; or Child's First Book* (1857) states, "The objects to be aimed at in a primer are simplicity and effectiveness. It is necessary, not only to catch the eye and engage the mind, of the learner, but to win him, by natural and easy steps, toward the mysteries of language."[16]

At the conclusion of this primer, three stories about an elephant, lion, and camel suggest a growing interest in natural history. Generally, the primers of the nineteenth century offered an idealized view of childhood. Almost all the characters are white middle or upper class; poor people are often depicted in lowly work such as tenant farmers. While girls are represented, images of boys predominate. Fathers are almost exclusively engaged in outdoor activities, while mothers are depicted in traditional homemaker roles. Rarely do people of color appear, and when they do, they are usually servants.

The content of *Osgood's American First Reader* (1870) is typical with bucolic stories about farm, home, and play. A didactic lesson about lying does creep in ("Do not lie my son"[17]) and another where a girl prays that God will protect her. This moral focus is very much evident in the publications of the American Sunday School Union. According to the rare book department of the Free Library of Philadelphia, "This non-sectarian missionary society founded in 1824 was one of the most prolific publishers of juvenile literature in nineteenth-century America."[18]

One such publication, full of religious and pious sentiments, is *Pictures of John and George* (1832), which features a story where a girl gives pennies to a man with a wooden leg who is unable to work. This portrayal of the disabled is typical of the period; they tended to be pitied or are used as examples of charity.

Phonics versus Whole Language

The debate between the benefits of a phonics approach and a whole-language approach in the teaching of reading is not just a twentieth-century dilemma—conflicting theories competed through the nineteenth century as well. In Goold Brown's *The Child's First Book* (1825), the author notes, "it is quite useless to put a child reading till he can spell and pronounce without aid, the syllables and words he must meet with."[19]

Aunt Mary's Primer (1851) takes an opposite approach by suggesting "spelling lessons may be taught at a more advanced age, but it will be found that a young child will learn to read much more quickly if they be dispensed with in the primer."[20] And to cover all bases, George Stillman Hillard in *The Primer, or, First Reader* (1864) claims "this primer will be found fitted for those teachers who adopt the word-method, as well as those who prefer the phonic method, and for those who first teach the names of the letters."[21]

Progressive Thinking

In 1837, German educator Friedrich Froebel introduced the groundbreaking concept of the kindergarten, or Garden of Children. Called the "Father of the Kindergarten," Froebel labeled his approach to education as "self-activity." This idea allowed the child to be led by his own interests and to freely explore them. The teacher's role, therefore, was to be a guide rather than lecturer. He insisted that improvement of infant education was a vital preliminary to comprehensive educational and social reform.

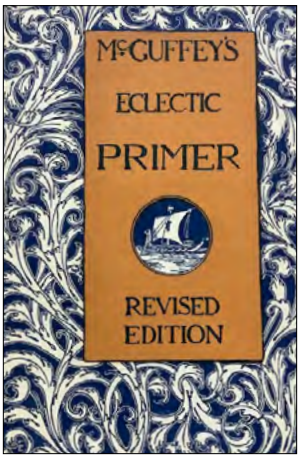
By the late nineteenth century, Froebel's theories had been embraced by many in the United States, including John Dewey in his experimental school at the University of Chicago.[22] In *Royal Gifts for the Kindergarten* (1897), Frances Post van Norstrand aims to put forward the principles of Froebel's methods. While song and play are an essential feature of Froebel's theory of kindergarten, "The Nursery" section contains the usual alphabet and simple rhymes, but with a freer, more playful tone than many primers (for example, the following rhyme: "Vat hat two easy words, no doubt, but, if the hat falls in the vat, Then who can get it out?") Though a temperance alphabet in the nursery section seems an odd choice: "A stands for alcohol, a fluid of fire, which often brings death to the seller and buyer."[23]

Norstrand, assisted by Mrs. Alice H. Putnam, *Royal Gifts for the Kindergarten: A Manual for SelfInstruction in Friedrich Froebel's Principles of Education Together with a Collection of Songs, Games, and Poems for the Home, the Kindergarten, and the Primary School* (Chicago: George F. Cram, 1887).

The Textbook Movement

The series that would have a profound effect on the teaching of reading throughout the nineteenth century were the enormously successful readers first published by William H. McGuffey in 1836. The preface from a 1901 edition of *The New McGuffey First Reader* reads, "This first reader may be used in the teaching of reading by any of the methods in common use; but it is especially adapted to the phonic method."[24] Writing scrip was taught along with learning to read; in the first reader, "slate work" offers the reader a chance to practice penmanship. The early editions include the basics of grammar and spelling as well as short stories, poems, and prayers; the language has a rote feeling.

"The enormous popularity and enduring nature of these books can be directly linked to aggressive marketing by the publisher, especially in the South and the West, and the greatly expanding



William Holmes McGuffey, *The New McGuffey First Reader, Uniform Title: First Eclectic Reader* (New York: American Book Co., 1901).

'Common School Movement' that created a huge market for school books."[25] "As times changed, so did the content. More immigrants came to the country and brought with them a wider variety of religions and ethnic groups. By 1879, the McGuffey books were nonsectarian, but the texts still offered examples of family values and morality."[26]

Toward the middle of the nineteenth century, other entrepreneurial publishers like The American Book Company entered the expanding market for textbooks intended to teach reading.

Their *New Education Readers: A Synthetic and Phonic Word Method* (1900) was in the phonics corner of the teaching reading debate. The preface proclaims, "The plan of teaching reading as presented in this book is based on a thorough knowledge of phonics."[27] As schools of education developed and the profession of teaching became more formalized, books to teach reading were often written by educators. Additionally, an education expert frequently gave an introduction, perhaps to vet or lend an air of authority to the text. In *Friends to Make* (1928), the lead author worked for the St. Louis Public Schools; the two additional authors are affiliated with New York University.

Illustration in Books for Beginning Readers

Aunt Mavor's Little Library, The Pretty Name Alphabet (London: G. Routledge & Co., Farrington St., n.d.).

The earliest primers examined at the Baldwin Collection were almost exclusively illustrated with woodcuts, the cheapest method of the day. When color appears, it was probably added by hand, often carrying an extra charge. The cover of *The Pretty Name Alphabet* (n.d.), proclaims, "sixpence, or with the plates coloured, one shilling."[28]

An interesting example of a hand illustrated book is Bolles' *The Illustrated ABC: With Original Engravings* (1854). It has an amateur appearance with color crudely spread across the image, not necessarily within the lines. Most artists worked anonymously before 1850; for example, an early book, *Primer; or a Child's First Book* (1844), notes that the book is "embellished with numerous and attractive illustrations"[29] all without naming the artist.

As the nineteenth century progressed, engravings became more refined, but there is still little color, and even into the mid-nineteenth century artists are not individually mentioned. Book illustration transformed over the latter half of the nineteenth century as developing technology made the mass production of colored prints more efficient and affordable. It ushered in what is considered the golden age of children's book illustration centered around picture books illustrated by Walter Crane, Randolph Caldecott, and Kate Greenaway.

Steps to Reading by Nellie Dale (George Philip & Son Limited, 1895).

Some illustrations from this movement found their way into beginning readers. *Warne's Alphabet and Word Book: With Coloured Pictures* (1876), with its bright and colorful pictures, must have been a welcome change from the typical early reader, yet in the copy viewed, the illustrator is still not given credit, and the content focuses on children's good behavior. One refreshing example of a reader illustrated by Walter Crane is *Steps to Reading* by Nellie Dale (1895). It was part of a series, The Dale Method of Teaching Reading, that offered seven readers with accompanying teacher's handbooks. Instead of the dreary morality that marks many of the primers of the time, Crane's colorful, whimsical pictures depict lively children participating in imaginative play as they learn the alphabet and simple first letters.

The Twentieth Century

McGuffey's phonics-based primers dominated American primary education from the middle of the nineteenth until the early twentieth century. But some educators and social scientists began to believe that McGuffey's moralizing texts were too complex for young readers, and they argued for a simpler approach, one that used a carefully limited vocabulary and story lines that were more relevant to the lives of contemporary children.[30]

Out of this movement emerged the best known and possibly the most controversial series published in the early twentieth century. *Dick and Jane: Basic Pre-Primer* (1936), the first in the series, was created by educator Williams S. Gray and former teacher and reading consultant Zerna Sharp, who believed in the "whole word" (or look-see) method whereby students recognized whole words and connected them to the stories suggested by the pictures. They featured short, simple sentences accompanied by idealized images of a white middle-class American family. "Its popularity in the grade schools through the 1930s and 1940s rivaled that of *The New England Primer* and the McGuffey readers in their times."[31]

Educational publishers continued to dominate the material designed to help children learn to read. Even as late as 1936, the *Children's Catalog* contains only two books designated as stand-alone (not part of a series) readers. A few titles break out of the textbook mold, such as McNair's *Seaside and Wayside No. 1* (1901). The preface states, "These are not offered as natural science textbooks but rather as a contribution to the idea that facts of permanent value may be made known."[32] *Who Knows: A Little Primer* (1937) was one of the few readers examined with recognizable illustrators, Berta and Elmer Hader. While part of a textbook series, The Child Development Readers, the text of *Who Knows* is limited but more interesting as it is mostly a guessing game that offers some incentive to keep reading.

While American children were doggedly learning to read with Dick and Jane, certain educators were examining ways in which children acquired language and literacy. One of the these was Lucy Sprague Mitchell, founder and chair of New York's Bank Street School. According to Leonard Marcus in *Golden Legacy*, Sprague had "worked tirelessly toward a systematic understanding of the stages of language development during the first seven years of life."[33] In her *Here and Now Story Book* (1921), Mitchell states in the preface, "Stories must begin with the familiar and the immediate. . . . But also stories must lead children out from the familiar and immediate, for that is the method of both education and art."[34]

She put her theories to practice when she collaborated with Margaret Wise Brown to create a series of readers for D.C. Heath. In *Farm and City* (1944), while the illustrations depict traditional family images, there is repetition and more natural sounding sentences in the text.

Even with the above examples, by the 1940s there was still a paucity of enticing beginning readers that could spark children's excitement to read. With a few exceptions, the process of learning to read appeared to be firmly entrenched in the classroom, but all that was about to change. With newly created children's departments in public libraries starting at the turn of the century, the establishment of specialized children's departments in publishing houses and perhaps, most important, a growing concern about national literacy, the world of books for beginning readers was about to experience a radical transformation.

With newly created children's departments in public libraries starting at the turn of the century, the establishment of specialized children's departments in publishing houses and perhaps, most important, a growing concern about national literacy, the world of books for beginning readers was about to experience a radical transformation.

In 1957, just a few years after the scope of this research, onto the pages of beginning readers marched a certain Cat soon to be followed by a Little Bear. Together these two characters and their corresponding publishing houses—Random House and HarperCollins—would begin to dramatically change the options for beginning reader books. &

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ALSC Member Profiles

Linda L. Ernst, King County (WA) Library System Children's Librarian, Retired

Editor's Note: ALSC is sad to report the loss of our colleague Linda Ernst in early 2025. In her honor, we are printing the profile she wrote last year.

Why do you stay involved with ALSC?

I retired at the end of 2019 due to health issues—my kidneys were failing, and I needed a transplant. Then in 2020, COVID-19 arrived, putting everything and everyone on hold.

Despite these challenges, I had ALSC commitments to uphold, so like everyone else, I transitioned to Zoom meetings. I completed my term on the ALSC Board and filled out my volunteer form to see what opportunities lay ahead. Committee work provided me with purpose and connected me with people who cared for each other during a time of isolation. Staying involved kept my mind engaged as I attended webinars and meetings.

After receiving a new kidney in February 2022, I continued to support those on the front lines as libraries faced growing challenges. With over forty years of experience, I believe I can help newcomers in the field and contribute to the work necessary for our organization to thrive, while also offering background knowledge of ALSC's history. Yes, after nearly forty-two years, I am retired, but there will always be a place in my life for ALSC.

What brings you joy in librarianship?

I especially love connecting the perfect book with a child or adult, processing both new and old titles, mentoring others in children's services, promoting early literacy, empowering parents, and, of course, storytimes. Attending an ALA and ALSC conference, webinar, or Zoom meeting is another highlight, as I get to learn, grow, and connect with incredible individuals. Even in retirement, I can still share my passion for books and these joys with others, which always brightens my day.

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

That is like asking me for my favorite chocolate—I love them all! Just kidding, but after more than forty years in the field, I have so many titles I hold dear. A few of my favorites include *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* by Bill Martin, *The Baby BeeBee Bird* by Diane Massie, and *Round Trip* by Ann Jonas. Regarding chapter books, I love *The Westing Game* by Ellen Raskin and *The Secret Garden* by Frances Hodgson Burnett. While my go-to titles are often older ones, they remain tried and true.

What are you reading right now?

Honestly, I expected to be reading a lot of adult books in retirement, but I keep finding myself drawn back to my favorite genre—children's literature. I just finished *The Frindle Files* by Andrew Clements, illustrated by Brian Selznick. *Frindle* was always a favorite of mine, and this work published after Clements' passing is truly a gift. The endnotes and Selznick's message enhance the story and connect *Frindle* to the digital age.

I also recently enjoyed Katherine Applegate's *Wishtree*. The characters are believable and the story of nature and people communicating and finding common ground is both insightful and engaging.

What is your favorite ALSC or ALA memory?

I remember meeting Robert McCloskey and having him autograph *Make Way for Ducklings* at my very first ALA Conference. There was also the moment I received a phone call asking if I would consider adding my name to the Caldecott Committee selection ballot, knowing I had to be voted in. Serving on ALSC committees that pushed me out of my comfort zone was another highlight; the members collaborated to navigate challenges together.

One particularly memorable experience was telling then-ALSC President Jane Marino that Dr. T. Berry Brazelton would be the speaker at her President's Program.

Ultimately, my strongest memory is of the people who share my passion for library services to children. Their commitment to staying current and recognizing the importance of libraries in today's world truly embodies what ALSC represents.

Mary Schreiber, Branch Manager, Cuyahoga County (OH) Public Library

How has ALSC contributed to your work in libraries?

Over a decade ago, I applied for a materials selection position at my library system. It was the first time Cuyahoga County Public Library (CCPL) hired a selector that would focus exclusively on youth materials (birth through eighteen). At the time I was a children's librarian, and I had served on the ALSC Intellectual Freedom Committee, was serving on the Theodor Geisel Award Committee and had attended the Bill Morris Seminar on book evaluation (highly recommend applying for this biennial seminar). Having these experiences, I like to think, provided me with an edge during the interview process, so did having made connections with publishers and collection development librarians from attending ALA conferences.

Now that I'm in a new role as the manager of the CCPL Brooklyn Branch, I feel my work with ALSC has contributed to the skills I need to both lead and mentor a team of library staff.

What challenges you in librarianship?

One of the things that challenges and excites me about librarianship is the work being done so that the community feels seen and welcome at the library. As a materials selector, I worked hard to find books that reflected my communities as well as introduce them to people and experiences that were different from their own. It was important then, as it is now, to listen to young readers when they tell you what they want to read—and observe how they use the materials in the library. This passion led to co-authoring a book published by Bloomsbury Libraries Unlimited called *Curating Community Collections: A Holistic Approach to Diverse Collection Development*.

Working more directly with kids and families now means that I get to be a part of recommending titles to them again. I am extremely lucky to have a youth services team, from the children's and teen librarians to the children's assistants, who are very responsive to the community they serve.

From making sure the programming offered is inclusive to thoughtfully picking out books for the StoryWalk, they want our kids to know the CCPL Brooklyn Branch is their library. It is incredibly rewarding to be a part of that team and to have systemwide support for meeting challenges related to equitable access to the library.

What brings you joy in librarianship?

Whether a children's librarian, materials selector, or branch manager, the thing that continues to bring me joy is getting books into the hands of children, families, and educators in the community. Recently, a dad asked if it was okay to ask for recommendations for his daughter. After saying "Yes that is what we are here for" (and a favorite part of the job), father, daughter, and I spent some time exploring the nonfiction for Weird but True read-a-likes. It was such a delight to see this second grader take ownership of her reading tastes, including wanting to see the cover before deciding, and dad let her make the decisions. He just held out his hands to carry the ten or so books she picked out including several that had magic or gross in the title.

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

I love to recommend books like *The War That Saved My Life* by Kimberly Brubaker Bradley and *We Are Water Protectors* by Carole Lindstrom. Having served on the ALSC award committees that honored these books, it is so much fun to share that experience along with the books with kids.

I also tend to be the librarian whose memory of books they've read goes right out the window when they get asked for a recommendation. So, I love just walking the stacks and recommending books from the ones that catch my eye—and giving kids a chance to see the face out titles too. Many a kid has seen a cover that looks interesting and decided to take it home while we are browsing!

What are you reading right now?

I have a passion for learning through children's nonfiction books and just finished *Up, Up, Ever Up! Junko Tabei A Life in the Mountains* by Anita Yasuda, about the first woman who reached the top of Mount Everest and was a force for protecting the ecosystem of the mountains. I've also started *Red Bird Danced* by Dawn Quigley. I really enjoyed her Jo Jo Makoons chapter book series and this middle grade novel in verse is drawing me in to a present-day story told through the eyes of two Native kids.

What is your favorite ALSC or ALA memory?

I attended ALSC National Institute in Denver this past September. It wasn't my first ALSC Institute, but it springs to mind because it was the first time my colleague and co-presenter attended. Seeing things through her eyes made the experience even more enjoyable for me. It was great to connect with library friends from all over the country and to help a children's librarian from home realize she was among peers who feel the same way she does about children's services work made for an energizing few days.

ALSC National Institute was my first experience with ALSC and ALA conferences. I was enamored with all the youth centered librarians in attendance, meeting some of my favorite authors, and learning from my peers. After that Institute in Pittsburgh in 2006, I was appointed to my first ALSC committee and, closing in on twenty years later, I am still an active member and love the enthusiasm the newest members of ALSC bring to the division.

Beatriz Barreca, Librarian II, Head of Children and Teen Services, Okeechobee Blvd Branch Library, Palm Beach County (FL) Library System

How has ALSC contributed to your work in libraries?

My first job as a full-fledged librarian was in the Research and Reference department working with adults. During that time, receiving the *Children and Libraries* journal helped me stay up to date on programming trends, professional development topics, and challenges that Youth Services, public and school libraries across the country are facing. Access to the journal has been a way to ensure I was professionally prepared when I went back to Youth Services.

What project are you excited to be working on?

I am looking into promoting physical literacy as a way to bring together the sensory activities and rhythm and movement programs I implement for sensory-seeking children ages five and under.

What challenges you in librarianship?

Ensuring the role libraries play in society is safeguarded.

What brings you joy in librarianship?

I introduced the children at my new branch to my biweekly Sensory Circle Time program several months ago. The kids have picked up the American Sign Language songs we are using fairly quickly. It is incredible to see the little ones develop new skills.

What are you looking forward to?

Building strong and meaningful relationships with my library members, and guiding the efforts of my team providing them with the tools they need to ensure services guided by respectful interactions focused on maintaining inclusion and diversity standards.

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

Dreamers by Yuyi Morales.

What are you reading right now?

Currently, I have these titles on my nightstand: *Maus* by Art Spiegelman, *Pick the Lock* by A. S. King, and *That Librarian: The Fight Against Book Banning in America* by Amanda Jones.

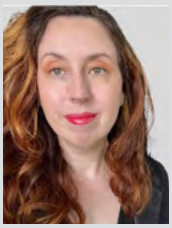
What is your favorite ALSC or ALA memory?

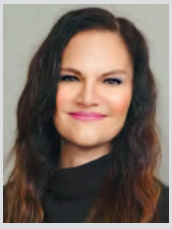
I participated in a workshop to discuss the book *Ask, Listen, Empower: Grounding Your Library Work in Community Engagement* by Mary Davis Fournier and Sarah Ostman. It changed the way I approach community services and the interactions with our members. We should meet our members where they are at, and understand that they are the experts when it comes to their needs. We should be asking them how we can help them, what we can do for them from a place of genuine humbleness without pretending to be saviors and having all the answers. &

Cooking up Library Advocacy

SEFLIN Libraries Step up Campaign

Meagan Albright, Rachel Perry Taylor, and Brock Peoples





Meagan Albright *is the manager of youth services for Cambridge (MA) Public Library. She has authored articles on literacy and library services for notable library associations and serves on several national committees, including ALSC's Early and Family Literacy committee and Public Awareness and Advocacy Committee. She previously chaired the Southeast Florida Library Information Network's Library Advocacy Committee.*

Rachel Perry Taylor *is director of library resource sharing at Southeast Florida Library Information Network (SEFLIN, Inc.); she facilitates resource sharing and consortia services for a service area of more than 6 million patrons.*

Brock Peoples *is SEFLIN's executive director. He advocates for the interests of SEFLIN members at the local, state, and federal levels, and remains committed to promoting the value of libraries.*

The Southeast Florida Library Information Network (SEFLIN) Advocacy Committee is composed of library staff from around the region, representing many different types of libraries. Each year, the committee compiles a list of current legislators, sets appointments for face-to-face meetings on or around Library Day in the Florida Capitol, prepares customized reports regarding important library budget items up for appropriation, meets with as many legislators as possible for allyship and awareness, raises the visibility of emerging library contributions in Florida communities, and lobbies for continued support of libraries.

This year, we sought out a partner of a different and critical group for the sake of advocacy—library patrons. Our goal was to discover which library services were most meaningful to our communities and to elevate the realities of how libraries impact everyday lives and benefit their communities.

A Good Recipe Is Timeless

In 2023, the committee identified the need to develop an awareness campaign that would let us bring the voices of our patrons to the state capital. When researching and searching for advocacy inspiration, we discovered Libraries Step Up—a collaboration between Outagamie Waupaca Library System (OWLS) and other library systems—which included a toolkit of plug-and-play and customizable communications resources for library advocacy. Their marketing coordinator kindly and enthusiastically granted us permission to borrow their look/logo for our own campaign! This resource is available to you, too, and it is a good place to get started: https://graphics.owlsweb.org/content/libraries-step-advocacy.

Our Unique Spice Blend

We developed Libraries Step Up, a collaboration between the SEFLIN Advocacy Committee and Southeast Florida libraries, to draw attention to the importance of the library to our communities. We selected a diverse range of libraries—including academic, public, and special—in total nine libraries across the region received toolkits containing materials to encourage patrons to respond to the prompt, "I love my library because . . . "

Postcards with patron responses were collected from libraries, the responses were recorded into a spreadsheet, and tags were assigned to each entry. This process yielded an insightful report regarding libraries' impact on their communities, highlighting multiple reasons patrons value their libraries, including cost benefit, safe spaces, self-improvement, studying, a sense of community, lifelong learning, a plethora of resources and, of course, amazing customer service.

One patron noted, "I bring my two-year-old to storytime once a week, and she works on early literacy skills and social skills. Very important as a stay at home mom to have this resource!" Holding the cards in your hands and seeing the

careful and thoughtful handwritten notes makes the patrons' stories very real. Read the full report: https://bit.ly/4dPwMgU.

Active Ingredients

Brock Peoples, SEFLIN executive director, brought the physical postcards, along with copies of the report, to their meetings with state representatives. He said, "The notes were exceptionally well received. All thanked us for providing evidentiary support of how libraries impact their communities . . . [legislators] were keen to note their support for our budget line—as well as the State Aide line."

The initiative was so well-received that Peoples, along with Jorge Perez (the incoming Florida Library Association president), traveled to Washington, DC, to participate in Voices for Libraries, which featured library advocates from every state, and to meet with members of congress about the importance of libraries and the need for support.

The Tasting Menu

SEFLIN presented their findings, along with process documentation showing how other libraries can replicate Libraries Step Up, at Florida International University Libraries Peer Review and Research symposium in a presentation titled "An Absolute Necessity: A Patron's Story." View the presentation: https://bit.ly/4cLWEco.

Up for Seconds

Based on the success of the campaign, SEFLIN will repeat and expand the initiative in 2024–2025. The Library Advocacy committee has designed fun coloring pages to provide young children and their families an opportunity to participate in advocacy for their library. Also, SEFLIN has allocated increased funding in 2024–2025 to enable more members of the committee to travel to Tallahassee and to Washington, DC, to amplify the voices of our communities and demonstrate the tangible impact our libraries make in US citizens' lives. &

How to Make Kids Like You: One Big Way (and Three Super Simple Tricks)

Laura Raphael

How do you "make" kids like you? *Like, really, really like you?*

I love asking my children's staff this question, and I'm always fascinated to hear the answers, which both vary and fall in predictable line.

Invariably, what seasoned children's librarians say is that the one big way to get kids to like you is obvious but necessary: you treat them like people who matter. You ask them questions and then really listen to their answers. You pay attention to what they like and don't like. You match your emotional tone to theirs.

This can look different for different kids, of course, but in general, if a child is hiding behind their parent's legs, you don't yell, "Hello! What is YOUR name?" Conversely, if a child starts talking about aliens, don't clam up!

Treating kids like full human beings (which they are) is an absolute must, so put that attitude in place first.

Then use these three simple tricks, and kids will be your biggest fans:

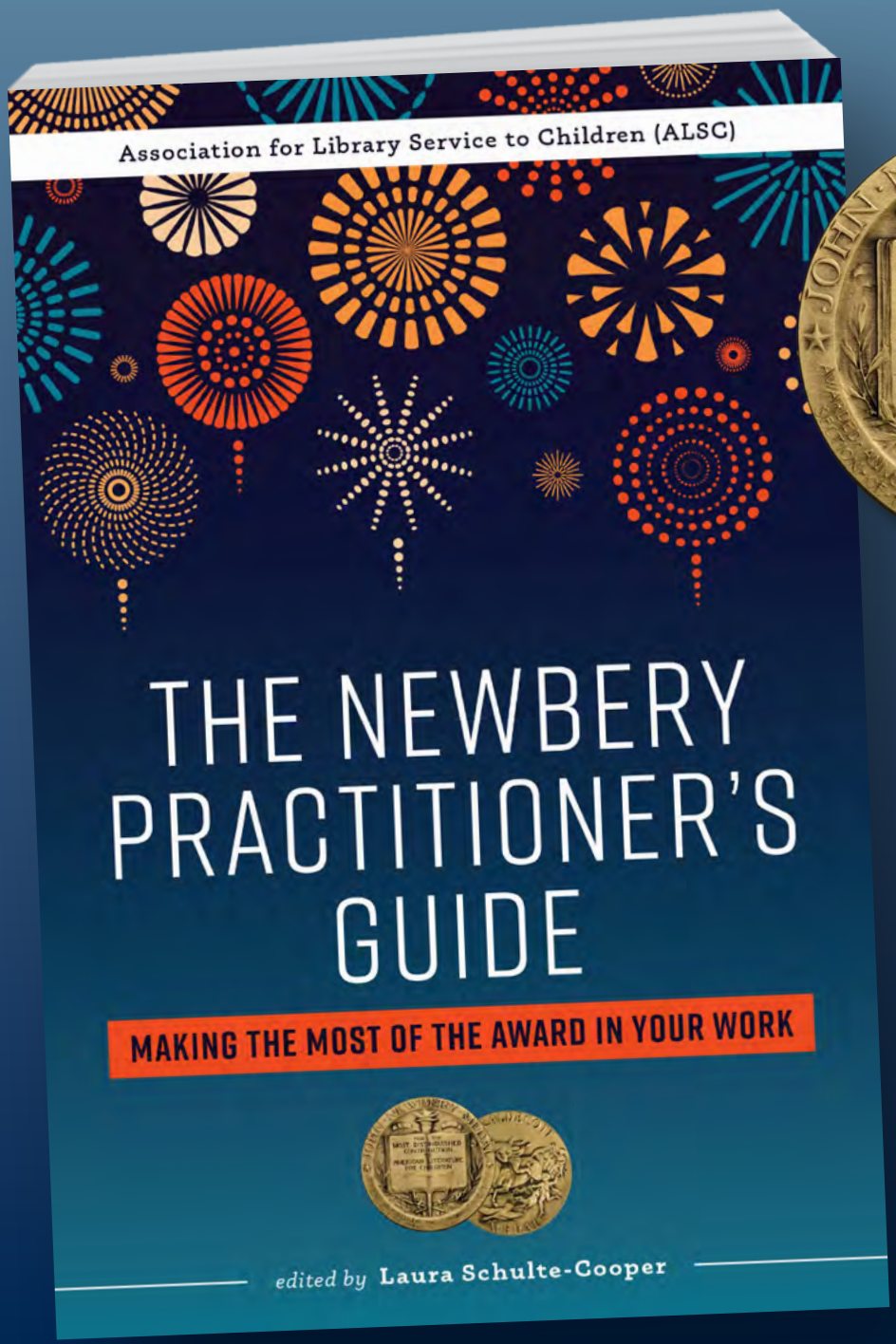
1. **Comment on their shoes.** Honestly, this works for kids AND many adults because shoes can say a lot about a person! It can be something as simple as a descriptive, "Wow, there are little purple stripes that go from here to here" to a more complimentary, "What I would give for such sparkly shoes!"

2. **Ask the magic question: "Do you have a pet?"** (Follow-up, if the answer is no: "What kind of pet would you want if you could have a pet?") Our connection to animals—real and imagined—runs deep.

3. **Offer a sticker or hand stamp.** Simple magic, every time. My favorite moments were at outreach events or even just out at dinner near my library, when a little one recognized me. Zip, zap, zop, I'd pull out the stamp and ink pad from my purse and my new friends went away with a smile and a star on their hands.

***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.*

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



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

ISBN: 978-0-8389-3827-0

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