

# Children the journal of the Association for Library Service to Children & Libraries

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# ALSC

Association for Library Service to Children  
50 East Huron Street, Chicago, Illinois 60611

ALSC's First Geisel Award  
Librarians in NOLA • Digital Storytimes • Evaluating Picture Books

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CAL Editor Sharon Verbeten was thrilled to have Ian Falconer sign a copy of *Olivia* for her new baby, Holland.

## Editor's Note Oh, the Places You'll Go!

Sharon Verbeten

I've never been much of a traveler. But working for ALSC has led me to cities I may never have otherwise seen—New Orleans, Boston, and next year, Washington, D.C. and Seattle. I'm eagerly awaiting both destinations.

Even if I don't get to see much of the city, I get a broader appreciation for the cultures and people of the convention cities. That's exactly what happened in New Orleans. I talked with cab drivers, hotel employees, and restaurant workers who all profusely thanked my colleagues and me for coming to the city just months after Hurricane Katrina. And even though I didn't make it into the ravaged areas, it was gratifying to see people working so hard to rebuild their city.

I encourage all conventioners—if you have the time—to venture outside the walls of meetings and seminars to learn a little about the cities and their people. For me, those memories provide the best souvenirs.

I look forward to seeing and meeting more of you in Seattle. I don't drink coffee and I don't especially like rain, but those are just two of the Northwest's clichés I'm hoping to experience out there! ☺



## Executive Director's Note A Year to Celebrate

Diane Foote

It's hard to believe I am about to celebrate one full year in this seat! "Celebrate" is the right word: this year we commemorated ten years of *El día de los niños/El día de los libros* (Children's Day/Book Day) and the Pura Belpré Awards, presented the first Geisel Awards, and launched our shiny new Kids! @ your library® Campaign, all worthy of fanfare.

Not least of our celebration is the share we had in ALA's biggest success story: keeping our commitment to the City of New Orleans by holding the Annual Conference there as planned. Nearly 1,000 revelers attended the Newbery-Caldecott Banquet, and ALSC members raised \$2,050 in the silent auction of original art from this year's award winners to donate to the ALA Hurricane Katrina Library Relief Fund.

Relive the conference again with the Annual Conference 2006 photo gallery in this issue, along with the Batchelder and Geisel acceptance speeches and a piece on the Belpré Awards' tenth anniversary. We hope you'll also enjoy coverage of research on digital storytimes, how to best serve young patrons with Asperger's Syndrome, picture book evaluation, children's magazines, children's library services in Sweden, and more. We'll see you soon in Seattle! ☺

# Children & Libraries

the journal of the Association for  
Library Service to Children

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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 and spotlights significant activities and programs of the Association. (From the journal's "Policies and Procedures" document adopted by the ALSC board, April 2004.)

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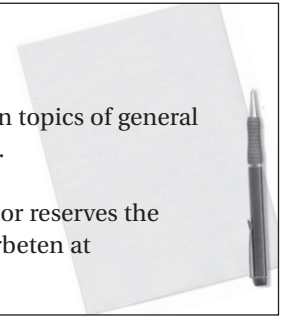


# Letters to the Editor

## Letters Guidelines

*Children and Libraries* welcomes readers to submit letters to the editor on topics of general interest to the profession or as comments on topics covered in our pages.

Letters should be no longer than 350 words and must be signed. The editor reserves the right to edit letters for clarity and space. Send letters to Editor Sharon Verbeten at [CALeditor@yahoo.com](mailto:CALeditor@yahoo.com) or via mail to 820 Spooner Ct., De Pere, WI 54115.



## Thanks for Coming to N'awlins

Thank you to everyone who attended and supported the New Orleans Annual Conference. Everywhere I went throughout the city, I heard shop owners, restaurant workers, and people on the street saying how wonderful it was to have librarians leading other conventions back to New Orleans. I personally had a great time meeting so many people by e-mail and in person. I am proud to be a member of ALA and of ALSC! —*Pabby Arnold, head of children's services, East Baton Rouge (La.) Parish Library*

## Make Sure Program Times Target Audience

I really enjoyed the articles on grandparenting programs ("Old Is New Again," *Children and Libraries*, Spring 2006) but wanted to pass on one hard-earned piece of wisdom to readers.

Several years ago, children's services at the Queens Library had a small grant to present programming for custodial grandparents in some of our branches. We scheduled our programs during the school day, when we thought the audience would be available. There was a good response to the flyers we sent out, but almost no one came!

When we checked back with the branches and with the seniors' groups, we found out that most custodial grandparents were in their fifties or early sixties and were still in the workforce and therefore not available to come to daytime programs. Like most working parents, they were only available on Saturdays and evenings.

If you are inspired to do similar programs, don't make our mistake! Research when your audience can come. Things have changed indeed, and this audience is very grateful and responsive to coping skills programs about child care and school issues, but they're still very busy people.—*Rosanne Cerny, Coordinator of Children's Services, Queens Library, Jamaica, New York*

## Caldecott Clarification

I just finished reading Heather Lane's article ("Don't Judge the Art by Its Medium," *Children and Libraries*, Spring 2006) on computer-generated illustrations and would like to correct one small error.

As a member of the 1996 Caldecott Committee that selected *Officer Buckle and Gloria*, I need to point out that we considered books with a 1995 copyright, so *Bright and Early Thursday Evening* would not have been eligible.

The 1996 title selected by the 1997 Caldecott Committee was *Golem* by David Wisniewski. In all other respects, I enjoyed Heather's intriguing and well-researched point of view.—*Carol Ann Wilson, retired, Westfield (N.J.) Memorial Library*

## Subject Guide Available

Our public library found that our excellent collection of picture books for older readers was not being used. Our staff—in collaboration with our school district—developed a subject guide to the whole collection and distributed it to each of our area's seven elementary schools. Once teachers had a tool to incorporate these books into their curriculum, they began to come and borrow them for their classrooms. If anyone is interested, I would be happy to provide a copy of this annotated bibliography, which we call "Connecting With the Curriculum: A Subject Guide to Picture Books For Older Readers." —*Barbara Buckley, Head of Children's Services, Oceanside (N.Y.) Library*

## Goble Wins Regina Award

Chicago reader Peggy Sullivan recently read a speech by prolific children's book author Paul Goble in *Catholic Library World (CLW)* 76, no. 4. Goble won the 2006 Catholic Library Association's annual Regina Award for continued, distinguished contributions to children's literature. Sullivan found it of great interest and suggested we seek to reprint it in *Children and Libraries*. *CLW*, however, does not grant reprint permission.

Readers interested in reading his acceptance speech—which Goble commented was the first he has done since his Caldecott Medal speech in 1979 for *The Girl Who Loved Wild Horses*—can find *CLW* on EBSCO subscription databases, or back issues of the magazine are available for \$15 plus postage. Visit the Web site at [www.cathla.org](http://www.cathla.org) for more information.



# Batchelder Award Acceptance Speech

## Finding the Value in Learning German

Janna Morishima

My family moved to Baden-Württemberg in Germany when I was in early elementary school. When we moved back to the United States, my father pushed me to take German classes and keep up the language. By the time I graduated from college, I could read German literature fluently, and I remember thinking irritably, “What a useless skill.”

Little did I know how *useful* it would prove to be. When I first started working in publishing four years ago, my dream was to become an editor, but I somehow landed in the art department. I began looking for ways I could ingratiate myself with the editorial directors and soon learned that one thing I could do was to write reader reports on German books for Arthur Levine. I took to this task with great enthusiasm.

One day, I found a new pile of books that Arthur had received from Germany in my inbox. At the top of the pile was a little red novel with no accompanying sell sheet or reviews. I liked the moody cover image of two soldiers riding on horseback through a barren landscape, though, so I took the book home with me and opened it the next day on my way to work on the subway.

Within a few pages, I was immersed in a very different world—rural Württemberg, Germany, late in the year 1811. A young farmhand is wrenched from sleep and hustled into town, where his master drops him in front of a military conscription committee. Just like that, Adam is suddenly a soldier in Napoleon’s army. Not just any army, but the *Grande Armée* that is preparing to march on imperial Russia, an almost unimaginable distance away.

I read this just after the United States invaded Iraq. Thus, the story of a young and naive soldier in a strange land had particular resonance. The sadistic Sergeant Krauter, the deadly heat and dust on the march through the western reaches of Russia, the disappearance of the supply train, the horror and awe as the old city of Moscow goes up in flames—all this had me mesmerized. When the colonel of Adam’s division announces, “Gentlemen! Unless we set off for home immediately, we are lost. It may be too late as it is,” I looked up from the book and realized that not only had I passed my stop in downtown Manhattan, but I was no longer in Manhattan altogether—I was somewhere in Brooklyn. It was at this moment that I thought, “We should publish this book.” Arthur agreed.

It is no coincidence that Josef Holub chose to tell the tale of this poor Napoleonic soldier. Two years ago, I went to visit Holub in the tiny hamlet where he lives in southwest Germany, not far from where I spent my childhood. In fact, though this village is not named in the book, it is the place where *An Innocent Soldier* begins. Holub has been the mayor of this town for some time, and he told me that one of his first decisions as mayor was to organize the village archives. As he sorted through the crumbling records, he came across a certificate mentioning a young man who miraculously returned to the village alive from Napoleon’s campaign in Russia. Although he knew nothing more than the man’s name and a few details about his life thereafter, Holub couldn’t quench his curiosity, so he decided to write a book about him.

I am fairly certain that it wasn’t just curiosity driving Holub; it was also

empathy. Holub was born in 1926 in the Bohemian Forest, an ethnic German in what was soon notoriously known as the Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia. He was only thirteen years old when World War II broke out. He was seventeen when Germany conscripted him into the Wehrmacht. Like Adam, he fought against tenacious Russian soldiers in unfamiliar territory. He too had a sadistic staff sergeant about whom, he told me, he still has the occasional nightmare. And like Adam, he wanted desperately to escape the army, but he was trapped.

More than five decades after World War II ended and young Josef Holub started a new life in West Germany, he published the novel you are honoring with the Batchelder prize. (An inspiring side note for any would-be writers: Holub published his very first novel when he was sixty-seven years old, and *An Innocent Soldier* was his fifth book. He is living proof that it is never too late to try something new.) He told me how happy he is that we are making this book available for American readers, and he was overjoyed when I told him that *An Innocent Soldier* received the Batchelder Award. I know he wishes he could be here to thank you in person, and I wish you could meet him—the memory of his warmth, his smile, his enthusiasm for bringing great and thought-provoking stories to young people has stayed with me ever since my brief meeting with him.

Finally, on behalf of myself, Arthur, the translator Michael Hofmann, and the rest of the team at Arthur A. Levine Books, I want to emphasize how proud *we* are to receive the Batchelder Award and how deeply we appreciate your efforts to raise the profile of children’s books in translation in the United States. 🍷

*Janna Morishima is editor-at-large of Scholastic. She accepted the Batchelder Award on behalf of Arthur A. Levine Books/Scholastic for An Innocent Soldier by Josef Holub. Her acceptance speech was delivered at the American Library Association Annual Conference in New Orleans on June 26, 2006.*

# Geisel Author Award Acceptance Speech

*Cynthia Rylant*

Dear good friends in children's books and libraries, how lovely it is to be a part of the maiden voyage of this significant award, even from a distance of many miles. I am sorry not to be with you here in body today, but with all of you, for many years, I have shared the same spirit you carry, the spirit that loves the innocence and beauty of young children as well as the gracefulness of language and story.

I learned to write for beginning readers from Arnold Lobel, so I must first honor him as I receive this award and say hello to my old friends Frog and Toad. They all taught me how to just say it, but say it with feeling, with a certain drollness and humility, and to leave the reader with love and hope in his heart.



*Cynthia Rylant is the recipient of ALSC's first Theodor Seuss Geisel Award for beginner books for her book *Henry and Mudge* and the *Great Grandpas* (Simon and Schuster, 2005). Her acceptance speech was read at the ALA Annual Conference in New Orleans on June 26, 2006.*

Henry and Mudge have been a part of my own heart for more than twenty years now. I did not know much about life when I began their stories, and I know a lot more today. We have all three grown together over the days and months and years, and we have all three decided we love the same things: a constant and reliable person (or dog) who is our best friend; the excitement of small things like kittens or old shoes or gingersnaps; and a desire for tomorrow.

When I write these books, I find my best self. I am so very blessed to spend time in a world so loving and nurturing as the world of Henry and Mudge. I always feel less alone when I am with them and I smile as I write their stories, and I breathe deeply with warm satisfaction

*Henry and Mudge have been a part of my own heart for more than twenty years now. I did not know much about life when I began their stories, and I know a lot more today. We have all three grown together over the days and months and years.*

when I add the last line, which has often been "Mudge wagged and wagged and wagged." Mudge has a lot to wag about.

I want to thank each of you for what you do for children, which I know is often unseen by others and perhaps even unnoticed by the children themselves. I know that you bring love and concern into your small corners of the library every day, and I know how deeply you care about the integrity of the books you hand to children who will learn about the world, about life, about the human heart in those books. I know you do not take lightly this responsibility, and it has enormous influence that lasts, well, I guess forever. Anything that nourishes our souls lasts forever.

I wish for all of you good stories, steadfast friends, and purpose. I wish for the children with whom you share my books some real faith in life and a belief that they are each necessary in this world and cherished.

Thank you again. ☺

# Geisel Illustrator Award Acceptance Speech

*Suċie Stevenson*



**T**wenty-five years ago, I was a shell fisherman on Cape Cod. I was scratching up mud and clams with my rake, icy seawater overflowing into my rubber boots. I thought, "I need another job." I never thought that someday I would be standing here before you, nice and dry and warm and honored. Now I have the best job in the world, writing and illustrating children's books!

I am thrilled with this award. The very first Theodor Seuss Geisel Award is so exciting. Of course, Dr. Seuss's action-packed drawings influenced me as a child. His funny fish always made me laugh. I tend to draw my characters in motion, too, particularly Mudge's wagging tail, and my aim is always to make children laugh.

Drawing *Henry and Mudge and the Great Grandpas* was fun. I loved drawing all the grandpas in their "skivvies." My own grandpa wore funny striped boxer shorts himself. And I loved Mudge being a "live raft" for all the exhausted swimmers.

I'd like to thank the American Library Association, the Association for Library Service to Children, my publisher Simon and Schuster, my editor Alyssa Eisner, my agent Liza Voges at Kirchoff/Wohlberg, and all the children who are fans of Henry and Mudge. I'd especially like to thank Cynthia Rylant for her beautiful and inspiring writing. Henry and Mudge are living characters to me by now. If Mudge were here, drooling on my foot, I'd give him all the crackers he could eat on this happy day.

I'd like to say to librarians and children everywhere: thank you all for your love of Henry and Mudge. 🐾

*Suċie Stevenson is the recipient of ALSC's first Theodor Seuss Geisel Award for beginner books for illustrating Cynthia Rylant's Henry and Mudge and the Great Grandpas. Her acceptance speech was delivered at the American Library Association Annual Conference in New Orleans on June 26, 2006.*



# The Digital and Traditional Storytimes Research Project

## Using Digitized Picture Books for Preschool Group Storytimes

*Lauren Collen*

Picture books for children are now available in digitized format, and questions arise as to how, when, and by whom these digital books will be used. Librarians, who already evaluate print, audio, and video materials for children, will need to begin evaluating the use of digitized books in programming for young children.

Questions to consider include whether this new computer-based technology can become an accepted educational tool; what, if any, differences might occur when using a digital book versus a traditional book; and whether a new type of group storytime can be created—a digital storytime—and how that can be conducted in a library or preschool setting.

The Digital and Traditional Storytimes Research Project attempts to provide some answers to these questions and is a first look at the differences or similarities that occur when preschool children listen to and view digital picture books from the International Children's Digital Library (ICDL) versus a print copy of the same picture book during group storytime.<sup>1</sup>

On November 20, 2002, ICDL launched a Web site that made hundreds of children's books available online, full-text, for free. This digital library is a five-year research project of the University of Maryland and the Internet Archive, funded through grants from the National Science Foundation and the Institute of Museum and Library Services. It is located online at [www.icdlbooks.org](http://www.icdlbooks.org) or [www.childrensbooks.org](http://www.childrensbooks.org).

To date, ICDL has collected children's books from around the world and currently houses 1,562 books in 37 different

languages.<sup>2</sup> The ultimate goal of ICDL is to host a collection of 10,000 digitized children's books in 100 languages, a virtual Alexandria created just for children.

Picture books are used every day in preschools and libraries during group storytime read-alouds for three- to five-year olds. Now, in addition to the traditional tools of early childhood—toys, games, and books—children have computers. For those of us who work with young children, some of the important questions we face are how to best deploy technology and, in particular for young children, how best to use computers and digital technology to increase learning and literacy during the preschool years.

Research that looks at using books in new formats or in new media is in its infancy. Picture books as e-books (or books on CD-ROM) have interactive components that allow children to deviate from the story sequence by clicking on hyperlinks or hotlinks that activate games, music, or other interactive features. The results of one recent research project suggest that when picture books are either retrofitted as interactive e-books or are "born digital"—coming into existence as interactive electronic books—they are less supportive of learning about story content than traditional picture books.<sup>3</sup> However, the results of another recent research project suggest there is no difference in story memory between the interactive and noninteractive versions of the same picture book.<sup>4</sup>

The books in ICDL are neither born digital nor are they interactive—all of the books on ICDL were first created as traditional, hardcopy books. The only added features on the ICDL Web site are part of the enhanced version of the site, where the pictures can zoom in and out (from smaller to larger format); a "whooshing" sound activates as the zooming occurs. However, there are no interactive or audio functions that accompany the actual presentation of books on the ICDL Web site. The books on ICDL have been reproduced in digital form exactly as they exist in hardcopy form. There is no voice on the ICDL site that reads the book for the viewer, there is no automatic page-turner that advances the book independent of the

*Lauren Collen has a bachelor of fine arts degree in painting from Wayne State University and a master's degree in library and information science from Dominican University; in 2005 she was awarded the C. Berger Entrepreneurial Promise Award. She is a youth services librarian at the Niles (Ill.) Public Library District outside of Chicago, where she does storytelling, creates and conducts programs for babies, preschoolers, and school-age children, and does graphic design and mural displays as the artist for the youth services department. She is at work on her first picture book.*



viewer, and there is no alteration in any form to the books as they exist for the viewer in the nondigital world.

Thus far, it appears that no one has looked at the learning potential for using digitized books, such as those available on ICDL, with young children during group storytimes. The existing storytime research on traditional books supports the proposition that *how* a storytime is conducted affects learning. In a recent article, early literacy specialist William Teale stated that

both new technologies and new applications of existing technologies are providing fresh opportunities for introducing read-alouds into early childhood classrooms and are inviting innovative research efforts that will help us understand how those practices affect young children and their teachers.<sup>5</sup>

Because digital storytimes are new for teachers, librarians, children, and researchers, ICDL chose a qualitative model for this study to extract as much information as possible about the technology and storytimes. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to observe the patterns, themes, and issues that emerge when using digitized books for group storytimes in a library or preschool setting; future research may begin to quantify these similarities and differences.

## The Research Project

A private school in suburban Chicago agreed to allow its four-year-old preschool classes to participate in this research (written parental consent was obtained for all participating children, as well as verbal assent from the children just before the storytime sessions). The 32 children who participated in this study were randomly placed into 2 groups, creating groups of equal size (16 children in each). The children who participated in the study ranged in age from 49 to 62 months. The mean age of the first group was 57.18 months; the mean age for the second group was 56.87 months.

Two age-appropriate picture books from ICDL were chosen for this study; the

same books were obtained from a library in hardcopy, print format. The two books were *Axle the Freeway Cat* (Harper and Row, 1981) and *The Hunterman and the Crocodile: A West African Folktale* (Scholastic, 1997). According to the preschool teachers, these books were not previously known to the children.

*Axle* is a realistic fantasy about a cat that makes a new friend. Axle and his friend, Little Cat, are the only characters in the book, and the plot is a simple one—with Axle fixing Little Cat's car when it breaks and causes a traffic jam. After Axle fixes the car, the two of them take a ride in Little Cat's fancy red car; they share dinner in Axle's home (a broken-down car); and they play some music together.

*That children in the traditional storytimes asked no picture-based questions and children in both digital storytimes did ask picture-based questions suggests that the larger-format presentation of the stories' pictorial components in the digital storytimes may have resulted in an enhanced understanding of the story, based on an enhanced visual experience.*

On the other hand, *Hunterman* is far more complex and originates from a West African folktale. There are seven main characters, one secondary character, and one implied character—the hunterman's wife—who is never seen in the pictures. Some of the main characters travel from one location to another, and the end of the story presents a complete plot twist and introduces the implied character. *Hunterman* is full of assumptions and concerns that each character has about others (whom you can trust and why), and any understanding of the story arises from paying attention to the reciprocal help and hindrances that each character gives the others.

The group storytimes were conducted at the preschool in October 2004 on two separate days in the preschool's library. On each day, both groups of students heard one story, presented either in a digital or traditional format. The first day of the study consisted of two readings of

*Axle the Freeway Cat*. On day two, *The Hunterman and the Crocodile* was read to the children. There were three teachers present during each of the storytimes on both days; however, the teachers were observers and not participants.

On each of the storytime days, I first conducted the digital storytime, and all of the technical equipment was set up and in place when the children entered the preschool's library. Once I completed the digital storytime, I removed the projection screen, laptop, and projector from the reading area, and I conducted the traditional storytimes without any of the technology from the digital storytimes in view of the children. All storytimes were videotaped with two video cameras in

a fixed position. For the traditional storytimes, one video camera was behind me (conducting the storytime) and fixed to record the children; the other video camera was behind the children and was fixed to record me. For the digital storytimes, both video cameras were fixed on either side of the group to record both the children and me.

For the traditional storytimes, the children sat in a semicircle on the floor of the preschool's library, and I sat in a chair at the front of the semicircle, held the picture book with my left hand, and turned the pages with my right hand. I briefly introduced myself, asked the children whether they were ready to hear a story, and introduced the book. I also told the children that they would have time after the story to ask questions and talk about the book.

During the storytime, I faced the children; the picture book was open to each

page as I read the story, and each page spread remained open and faced the children during the entire reading so all the children could see the pictures. I showed the children, in the following order, every component of the complete hardcopy book: front cover, front jacket flap, endpapers, front matter, the story, back matter, end papers, endflap, and back cover. For each of the traditional storytimes, I read expressively and did not stop the reading to talk about the story. After I finished, the children and I discussed the story in detail.

For the digital storytimes, the children sat on the floor of the preschool's library facing a four-by-four-foot projection screen. On a table at the back of the room (approximately twelve feet from the screen) were a laptop computer and a projector. Even though the books on ICDL can be used "live" off the Web site for digital storytimes, ICDL generously made a digital file available to me for each of the books, so that potential telecommunication line problems or ISP interruptions would not interfere with the research. The digital books on ICDL include every component of the hardcopy book; the children in the digital groups were shown the front cover, front jacket flap, endpapers, front matter, the story, back matter, end papers, endflap, and back cover.

There are three different "book readers" available on ICDL: standard, comic book, and spiral. For the study, I used the comic book reader, which initially displays all pages for the picture book in sequential order, similar to a comic strip. When you click on a page in this format, the book is displayed as double-page spreads in exactly the same format as the hardcopy books (see figure 1).

The comic book reader format on ICDL has a zoomable interface, and as I "turned the pages" at the end of each comic strip, the pages did, momentarily, zoom in and out. The "whooshing" sound of the zoomable interface was not activated for the digital storytimes.

Every page of each picture book appears within a "picture" frame that is part of the ICDL interface. These frames, whose predominant color is green, contain the

navigation icons that advance the pages, change page spreads from double to single, change the background color, and enlarge or close the page. For the digital storytimes conducted as a part of this study, both *Axle* and *Hunterman* appeared within the ICDL navigation frames (see figure 2).

Before the digital storytimes began, I briefly introduced myself, asked the children whether they were ready to hear a

story, and explained the computer technology in the following way:

Today, I'm going to read you a book but it's inside my computer. It's a real book, but I have it inside the computer, and we're going to look at it on the screen. You're going to start to see the book, and I'm going to use this [showed handheld wireless mouse]. It's a special clicker I can use to make the pages change.



Figure 1. The comic book reader format

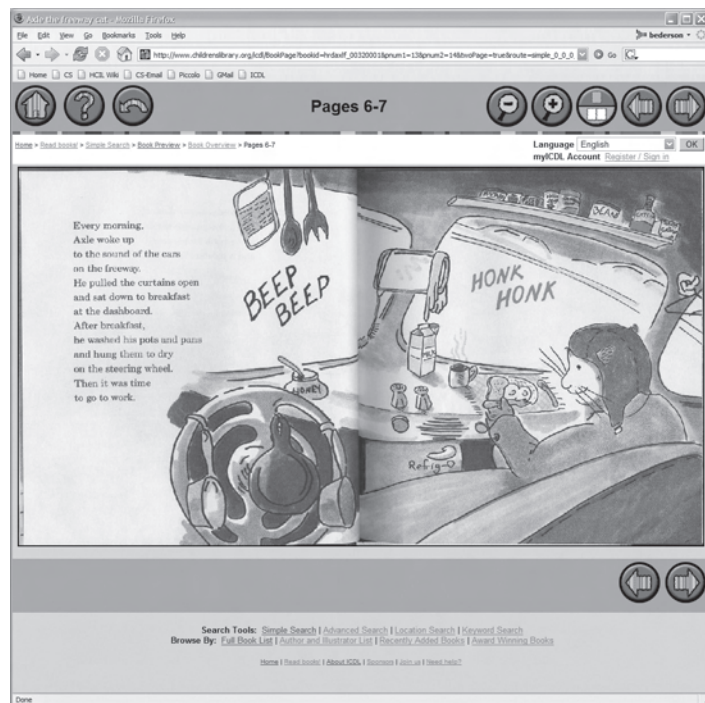


Figure 2. Double-page spread with ICDL navigation icons or "Picture Frame"



When the digital storytimes began, I sat on the floor with the children, facing the screen and used the handheld wireless digital mouse to advance each frame of the digital file to turn the pages of the digital books. During the digital storytimes, I did not face the children or have eye contact with them while reading the story. Because I used the wireless digital mouse, I could sit with the children—and be a part of the audience for the story along with them—and I read the text of the story off the screen while advancing the pages.

For each of the digital storytimes, I read expressively and did not stop the reading to talk about the story. I did not use the hardcopy of the book during the digital storytime nor did I refer to any other written supplemental text. After the storytimes finished, the children and I discussed the story in detail.

## What Happened

After I conducted the storytimes, I reviewed the videotapes and made transcripts that corresponded to the dialogue and behavior of the children during the storytimes. I evaluated and coded the transcripts, looking for movement by the children during the storytimes; talk by the children before, during, and after the storytimes; external noise that occurred during the storytimes; teacher comments, if any, during the storytimes; my questions and comments before, during, and after the storytimes; and the children's questions before, during, and after the storytimes. Table 1 contains the codes used for analyzing the movement and talk during these storytimes.

Questions and statements from both the children and me fell into two different categories: those directly related to the story content that relied completely on information contained in either the pictures or the text; and those related to the story that addressed content or ideas outside of the literal text and pictures, requiring some element of inference or speculative reasoning. This second type of questions and statements, whether by me or by the children, was coded as higher-level questions and statements. Additionally, the higher-level questions

fell into two distinct categories: they were either text-based questions or picture-based questions, and the coding (CQSH/T and CQSH/P) reflects this distinction.

## The Time Factor

For the digital storytimes, *Hunterman* took three seconds longer to tell than the traditional version, and *Axle* took thirty-four seconds longer than the traditional version. In addition, the prestory discussions for the digital storytimes were longer than their traditional counterparts (by approximately one minute in each instance) because the introduction to the digital storytime included a short

discussion of the technology used to tell the story, including showing the children the wireless digital mouse that would be used to advance the pages.

As can be seen in table 2, the actual reading time of the digital stories was consistently slightly longer than for the traditional stories; this slight difference did not appear to have any effect on the attentiveness or distractedness of the children during the storytimes.

## Listener Attentiveness and Movement

Both times I read *Axle*, the total movement of the children during the two types of storytimes differed. There was more

Table 1. Codes for interpreting data

Code	Description
CQS	Child question-story related
CQSH/T	Child question-story related-higher level/text-based
CQSH/P	Child question-story related-higher level/picture-based
CQNS	Child question-not related to story
CSS	Child statement-story related
CSSH	Child statement-story related-higher level
CSNS	Child statement-not related to story
CMID	Child movement-looking at investigator/wireless mouse during "page turn"
CMB	Child movement-looking away from book during traditional reading
CMS	Child movement-looking away from screen during digital reading (but not at investigator)
CMF	Child movement-laying down on floor during story reading
CMC	Child movement-interaction w/another child/children during story reading
CMPL	Child movement-looking at projector/laptop during discussion
IQS	Investigator question-story related
IQSH	Investigator question-story related higher level
IQNS	Investigator question-not related to story
ISS	Investigator statement-story related
ISSH	Investigator statement-story related higher level
ISNS	Investigator statement not related to story
EXTN	External noise-hallway
TSN	Teacher statement-not related to story
TSS	Teacher statement-story related

Table 2. Length of storytime sessions

	<i>Axle the Freeway Cat</i>	
	Digital Storytime Group I	Traditional Storytime Group II
<b>Prestory</b>	1:47.88	57:57
<b>Story</b>	5:01.86	5:35.24
<b>Poststory</b>	9:11.65	9:01.95
<b>Total Time</b>	16:01.39	15:34.76
	<i>The Hunterman and the Crocodile</i>	
	Digital Storytime Group II	Traditional Storytime Group I
<b>Prestory</b>	1:25.25	23.82
<b>Story</b>	7:27.33	7:22.65
<b>Poststory</b>	4:28.89	9:09.13
<b>Total Time</b>	13:23.47	16:55.60

total movement during the digital storytime versus the traditional storytime. However, I observed two different types of movement during the digital storytimes—one type of movement occurred when the children looked away from the screen and toward me when the digital wireless mouse was used to turn the pages. This looking away, which was momentary, did not occur while the story was being read but when I finished reading the text on each page and was in the process of advancing to a new page on the screen. While I turned pages, there was no story reading going on.

The other type of movement I observed—what I would call “fidgety preschooler” movement—included looking away from the screen or the page during the actual reading. There was far more of this type of movement during the traditional storytime than there was during the digital storytime. In fact, as illustrated in figure 3, the movement looking away from the book versus looking away from the screen *during* the reading of *Axle* is more than double during the traditional storytime.

I observed exactly the same difference in attentiveness to the reading during the two *Hunterman* storytimes—when subtracting the momentary glance at me as the digital pages were turned, there was much more movement during the traditional storytime. This movement and attention difference during the *Hunterman* storytimes is illustrated in figure 4.

Except for the momentary glance at me as I turned the digital pages, the children in both of the digital storytimes glanced away from the screen during the actual reading far less frequently (fewer than half the number of times) than the children in both of the traditional storytimes. This suggests that, overall, the children in both of the digital groups demonstrated more attentive story-listening behavior.

### Location of the Reader

In the traditional storytimes, I sat in front of the children in the usual manner for read-aloud storytimes. In the digital storytimes, I sat with the children, rather

than in front of them. The traditional position of storyreader in front of the children required that I turn my eyes away from the children to actually read the text on the pages of the storybook; during the digital storytimes, I faced the screen along with the children and never had to avert my eyes completely away from them—although I was looking at the backs of their heads, I could see that they were attentive to the story. This new position of storyreader sitting with the children did not interfere with the story experience for the children, and the children actually appeared to be more attentive—and far less fidgety—during the digital storytimes.

### Story Understanding

The poststory discussion for each book was intended to encourage the children to ask questions that allowed me to

assess whether they had a basic understanding of the story and its elements. However, the poststory discussions were not intended as formal tests of story memory and thus not a quantitative measure of it. I also asked questions designed to probe specific textual or pictorial components of the stories. Each set of my questions grew out of the actual discussion with each group of children; therefore, I asked different questions and a different number of questions with each group.

### *Axle the Freeway Cat*

During the *Axle* digital storytime, the children sat quietly and attentively for the entire story—there was only one comment made while the story was in progress. After I finished reading the *Axle* story, I closed it on the computer and asked the children whether they liked

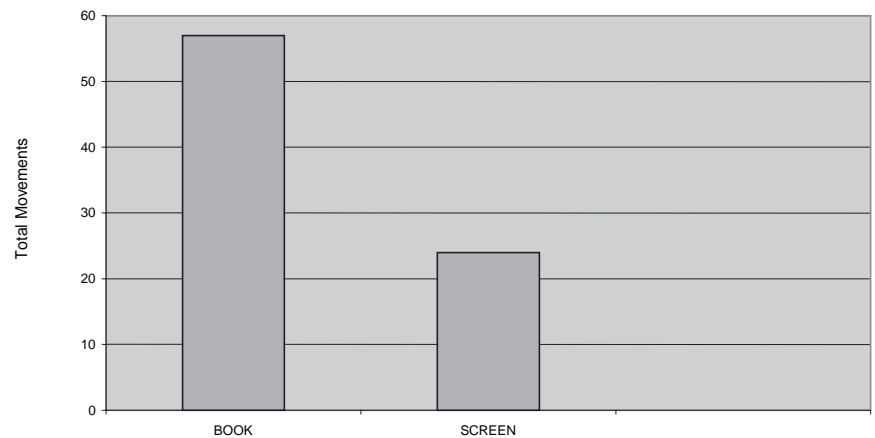


Figure 3. *Axle the Freeway Cat*, looking away from book and screen during storytimes

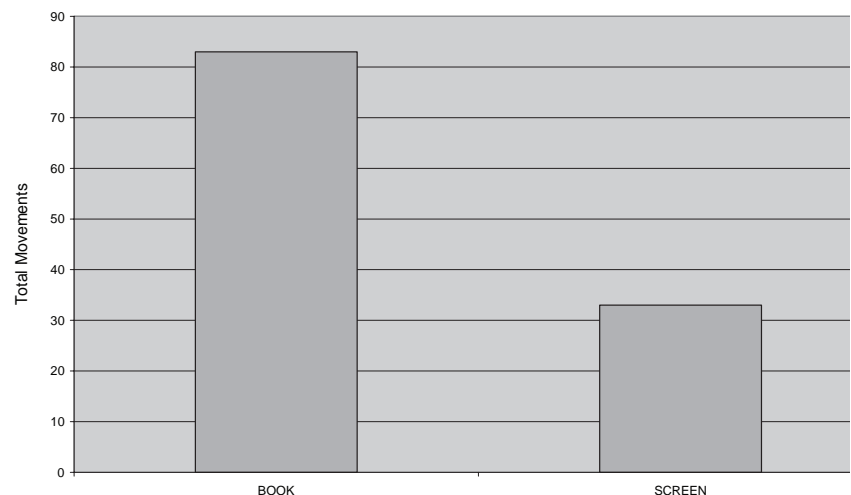


Figure 4. *The Hunterman and the Crocodile*, looking away from book and screen during storytimes

the story (there was a chorus of “yeses” to this question, with one child asking for another story), and I then asked whether they had any questions about the story. The children generated four distinct questions about the story, and talk about these questions threaded its way through the entire poststory discussion. The children asked no questions and made no statements about the navigational picture frame that is part of the ICDL interface.

I coded four questions asked by the children as higher-level—none of them could be definitively answered by looking at the literal text or pictures. Of the four questions, three of them addressed pictorial elements of the story.

The children asked:

- How did this story have a cat that stood on two legs, when most cats are small and square on four legs?
- Where did Axle keep his food?
- How did Axle make his food?

One question addressed a text-based element of the story.

- Why didn't Axle use brakes to stop Little Cat's car from crashing?

I did not attempt to provide direct, specific answers to the children's questions; rather, I encouraged the children to speculate on the answers to the questions, and a lively discussion among the children ensued.

I asked the children seven questions about the story.

- What was Axle's job?
- What was Axle's “best” piece of trash?
- What instrument did Little Cat play?
- Did Little Cat have a name?
- Does Axle have a kitchen?
- Why did Axle have a harmonica?
- Do you think Little Cat likes music, too?

In answering my questions, the children in the digital storytime, as a group, were able to respond with accurate answers.

When the children in the traditional *Axle* group entered the preschool library for their storytime, they asked why there were video cameras. I explained that the cameras were being used so I could remember everything about the storytime when I went home, then I introduced the book. One child said, “I don't even know what the story is.” When the storytime began, most of the children sat quietly and attentively, but one child interrupted my reading once the story began, first stating, “Excuse me, excuse me,” and then asking “Why, why does it not be fixed?”—a question related to the fact that Axle lives in a broken-down car that, according to the text, cannot be fixed. This question—about Axle's car—persisted throughout the discussion of this book. Further along in the storytime, the children made multiple spontaneous utterances.

After the story was completed, I closed the book and, even before I could ask the children whether they liked the story, the child who asked the question about Axle's broken car, immediately asked this question again. This was one of two child-initiated, higher-level questions that continued throughout the poststory discussion. Both of the questions generated by the children were textual in nature; neither question addressed purely pictorial issues.

The children speculated about many possibilities for the answer to the first question about Axle's car; there were thirteen separate ideas generated by the children as to what happened to Axle's car and why it couldn't be fixed. The second higher-level question concerned why Axle helped Little Cat. The children had three speculative answers to this question.

I asked four questions.

- What was Axle's job?
- Did Axle have a kitchen?
- How did he fix his breakfast?

- What was the best piece of trash Axle had found?

In answering my questions, the children in the traditional storytime, as a group, were able to give accurate answers to the questions.

### *The Hunterman and the Crocodile*

During the *Hunterman* digital storytime, there were many comments and moments of spontaneous laughter made by the children during the storytime session. At the end of the storytime, I closed the ICDL book reader on the computer, shut down the projector, asked the children whether they liked the story (many “yeahs”), and asked whether they had any questions about the story. The children asked no questions and made no statements about the navigational picture frame.

The children in this group generated three higher-level questions about the story; two of the questions were text-based.

- Why did the bunny come?
- Are they going to eat the crocodiles?

One question (Why did the bird come?) was based on a completely pictorial component of the story—a bird that is never mentioned in the story, but that appears in the pictures on nine of the double-page spreads.

*The Hunterman and the Crocodile* is a complex story, and the children in this group needed my help to speculate about the answers to their questions. The children were confused about the ultimate outcome of the story, thinking that the hunterman did in fact eat the crocodiles, even though the crocodiles were not eaten in the end.

I asked three questions:

- Does anybody know what the word “clever” means?
- How many crocodiles were in the story?
- Were there pictures of other animals that you noticed?



The children in the digital storytime, as a group, gave accurate answers to my questions.

For the traditional *Hunterman* storytime, the children came into the preschool's library and asked about the video cameras; I explained that the cameras were recording so I could remember everything about the storytime when I went home. As the storytime began, and I was paging through the front matter of the story, one child commented, "That looks scary." One teacher commented, "Oh, nice picture," and a child responded, "Of the crocodile." During the actual reading of the story, the children only made one spontaneous comment. There were no other comments and no spontaneous laughter during this storytime.

At the end of this story, I asked the children whether they liked the story, and there was a chorus of "yeahs!" When asked whether they had any questions about the story, the children responded with five separate high-level questions, all of which were text-based questions (no questions based on purely pictorial elements of the story were generated).

The children asked:

- How could Donso balance the crocodiles on his head?
- Why did the crocodiles eat the man?
- Why didn't the animals take Donso out of the river?
- Why do people like to eat crocodiles?
- How can a talking tree be a talking tree?

The children themselves speculated on many answers to these questions. The final question of the storytime discussion—how can a talking tree be a talking tree?—produced not only a discussion about a textual element of the story, but also a high-level discussion about the difference between fiction and nonfiction.

**Child 1:** How can a talking tree be a talking tree?

**Children:** Yeah! (many voices)

**Child 2:** My dad said nothing on

cartoons and books are not real, but they, but there are things like that, there are trees, there's everything in the books and cartoons.

**Ms. Collen:** So what happens in the story when there's a talking tree? Who has an idea? What's your idea?

**Child 2:** Because they wrote it in the story.

**Ms. Collen:** They wrote it in the story.

**Child 2:** And they're pretend!

**Ms. Collen:** They're pretend. Do you think that if you went to the riverbank a tree would talk to you?

**Children:** No! (many voices)

**Child 2:** It's just make believe!

**Ms. Collen:** It's just make believe.

**Child 1:** I know that it's not . . . I know that it's fiction.

**Ms. Collen:** It's fiction! What a great word to describe make believe!

**Child 2:** What's fiction?

**Ms. Collen:** Fiction is when it's what?

**Child 1:** Pretend.

**Ms. Collen:** Pretend. And nonfiction is what?

**Child 1:** Real!

**Child 2:** Not fiction!

**Ms. Collen:** Real. That's right. That's such a good thing to notice. Such a good thing to notice.

**Child #1:** It's not real, they just wrote it.

I asked three questions during the poststory discussion.

- How many crocodiles did the hunterman have on his head?
- Did you see any other animals?
- Do you think the crocodiles and the hunterman were friends at the end of the story?

In answering my questions, the children in the traditional storytime, as a group, gave accurate answers to the story-related questions. However, this group was also confused about what happened with the crocodiles and the man at the end of the story.

Based on the poststory discussions for all groups, there did not appear to be a difference in story understanding between

the digital and traditional storytimes. The children in both groups engaged in a lively discussion about the stories, generated high-level questions about the stories, and generally answered my questions about the stories. While there was a misunderstanding about the ending of the *Hunterman* story, the children in both the digital and traditional storytimes had the same misunderstanding, suggesting that the story itself—and not the format of the storytime—caused the misunderstanding.

## Impact of Size of Pictures on Story Understanding

The size of the picture books when projected on the screen during the digital storytimes was almost triple the size of their hardcopy counterparts (see table 3).

In the questions generated by the children in the poststory discussions, there was a distinct difference between the types of questions the children asked, depending on whether they attended the digital or traditional storytime. After both of the digital storytimes, the children in both groups asked questions that raised both text-based and picture-based issues about the stories; in the traditional storytimes, children in both groups asked only text-based questions. Table 4 sets forth the number and types of poststory questions asked by the children.

One element—the size of the picture-book illustrations when projected on the screen—may be the reason that the children in both digital groups generated questions that addressed completely visual components of the books; none of the questions asked by the children in the traditional storytimes addressed visual components of the stories.

That children in the traditional storytimes asked no picture-based questions and children in both digital storytimes did ask picture-based questions suggests that the larger-format presentation of the stories' pictorial components in the digital storytimes may have resulted in an enhanced understanding of the story, based on an enhanced visual experience.

## Effect of Interface Icons on Picture Book Experience

In both of the digital storytimes, the predominantly green-colored ICDL icons and navigational frame surrounded the illustrations when they were projected. For both, there was not a single mention by any child of any element of the interface icons or navigational tools before, during, or after the digital storytimes.

The children appeared to understand that the ICDL interface icons and green-colored navigational frame were not a part of the picture book stories, nor did the icons appear to influence or affect the children in their experience of the story during the digital storytimes.

## Technology

When the children entered the preschool's library for the *Axle* digital storytime, they were very interested in the computer and projector and made such comments as, "Your computer's my computer" and "My dad has one just like yours." When the opening screen shot of the comic book reader of *Axle* appeared on the screen, the children responded with ooohs and aahs.

When the children in the *Hunterman* digital group entered the preschool library for their storytime, they also immediately began to make statements about the computer. One child identified the digital, wireless remote as looking like a television remote. As I opened the ICDL book reader on the computer, another child said, "I click, I click, I always click the 'x' and then it goes away." When the opening screen shot of the comic book reader finally appeared on the screen, there were many "wow" comments by the children, and one child said, "There's a hundred stories."

The only children who commented on the video cameras were those in the traditional storytime groups. No children in the digital groups commented on the presence of the cameras; the cameras blended in completely with the other technology components and were "invisible" to the children in both digital groups. The computer technology was familiar

to the children, and they appeared completely comfortable with it.

## The Importance of Digital Storytimes

The digital storytime is a new tool, one that can easily be incorporated into the early childhood learning environment with technology that is readily available; it is estimated that in the United States, there are computers in nearly every preschool.<sup>6</sup>

This study suggests that using digital books for group preschool storytime provides an authentic story experience, one where the children are engaged by the storytelling, are enthralled and visually stimulated by the illustrations, and are able to discuss and deconstruct the story afterward.

Still, some may ask why use a digitized book rather than an actual hardcopy book for preschool storytimes? There are at least four answers to this important question.

First, digital storytimes can be used to incorporate computer technology into the early childhood learning environment in a developmentally appropriate manner. This will benefit preschoolers, by introducing them to learning tools—digital books and computers—that can be accessed in creative ways.

Second, using digital books for preschool storytimes with children may also enhance their understanding of picture

books, particularly with those books where the illustrations carry a significant portion of the meaning of the story. "[T]he essence of the picture book is the way the text and the illustrations relate to each other; this relationship between the two kinds of text—the verbal and the visual texts—is complicated and subtle."<sup>7</sup>

Eliza Dresang, a noted scholar in the field of children's literature, says,

'Reading' no longer means interacting with words on a page alone. In an increasingly graphic environment, words and pictures are merging. . . . The importance of words is not questioned, but the significance of a combined presentation using both words and pictures is heightened in the digital age.<sup>8</sup>

Using a digital book and projecting its pages on a screen that is almost three times the size of the original book, without losing pictorial clarity, can give every child attending the storytime an equal ability to view the pictures and text and can enhance the pictorial experience of the storytime and the children's understanding of the stories. "Since picture storybooks that use interdependent storytelling force the reader to consider both the texts and the illustrations, these works are powerful cultivators of imaginative, creative, and critical thinking skills."<sup>9</sup>

The contemporary picture book exploits the power of pictures in storytelling.

Table 3. Size comparison: hard copy versus digital image

	<i>Axle the Freeway Cat</i>	
	Screen Image	Hard Copy of Book
Double-page Spread Size	3 x 4"	9 x 16"
	<i>The Hunterman and the Crocodile</i>	
	Screen Image	Hard Copy of Book
Double-page Spread Size	3 x 4"	10 x 20"

Table 4. Picture- and text-based questions in digital versus traditional storytimes

	Picture-based Questions	Text-based Questions
<i>Axle-Digital</i>	3	1
<i>Axle-Traditional</i>	0	2
<i>Hunterman-Digital</i>	1	2
<i>Hunterman-Traditional</i>	0	5

Picture books are a synergy of words and pictures, and projecting digital books during group storytimes may be able to enhance what one scientist has referred to as our “powerful genetic biases . . . for visually presented information,” thus deepening understanding of the totality of the story—both words and pictures.<sup>10</sup>

Third, using digital books for children may have special importance for children with learning disabilities and special needs. “Digital versions of books are much better for students with disabilities than books offered in a single mode—print on paper.”<sup>11</sup> The large-size format of the screen of a digital storytime can enhance the experience of group storytimes, and create more opportunities to use picture books with children who have limited visual acuity or other disabilities.

Digital storytimes may be one of those technologies that allow children with special needs access to materials otherwise inaccessible to them. “Technology can be a powerful compensatory tool; with adapted materials, young children with disabilities no longer have to be excluded from activities.”<sup>12</sup> A digital storytime, such as those presented in this research study, is precisely the type of adaptive material that can enhance the early childhood educational experiences of preschoolers with disabilities in either a school or a library setting.

Finally, schools and libraries that provide preschool storytimes for children have limited collections of hardcopy books. Digital storytimes can provide expanded access to materials—bringing books that are out-of-print back into use; bringing rare, antiquarian books back into the world of reading for twenty-first-century children; and bringing books from every part of the world to every and any classroom or library, expanding not only what can be offered as part of a program or curriculum, but also what can be learned about the experiences of other children around the world.

Because so many of the books on ICDL are either bilingual or in languages other than English, digital storytimes can be used to enhance the group storytime experience for children in English Language Learning programs (both

English as a Second Language and bilingual) in this country and abroad; they can provide children from throughout the world with access to books and stories in many different languages.

Digital books, such as those on ICDL, are available to all children, anywhere there is a preschool or library with access to the Internet, and this worldwide access provides an opportunity. “We need to start thinking about how and why we can strive to lead poor and isolated children toward literacy through technology.”<sup>13</sup>

While the issue of providing technology access to children living in poverty around the world is beyond the scope of this research, there are initiatives, such as One Laptop per Child (OLPC), that attempt to bridge the technology access gap ([www.laptop.org](http://www.laptop.org)). Should access such as that envisioned by OLPC become a reality, then digital books, similar to those used in this study from ICDL, may be more readily available to children living in poverty, everywhere in the world.

Picture books are amazing things and, when used by a children’s librarian or preschool teacher, can be an important component of literacy learning and literacy enjoyment during group storytimes in the early years. In her paean to the art, craft, and history of the picture-book form, children’s literature specialist Barbara Bader said,

A picture book is text, illustrations, total design; an item of manufacture and a commercial product; a social, cultural, historical document; and, foremost, an experience for a child. As an art form, it hinges on the interdependence of pictures and words, on the simultaneous display of two facing pages, and on the drama of the turning of the page. On its own terms, its possibilities are limitless.<sup>14</sup>

Those limitless possibilities are not diluted or diffused when picture books are presented in a digitized format for group storytimes. Digitization is a valid and useful tool for presenting preschool picture book storytimes. From what I observed in the behavior of the preschool children in this study, is a new tool that

retains the important quality of drama when the digital pages are turned.

In his milestone work on using computers as learning tools with children, Seymour Papert recalled the initial military use of computers and their subsequent evolution as learning tools; he acknowledges that “[t]ime and the growth of ideas are usually needed before the idea of using a new technology to do something that had never been done before can even be conceived.”<sup>15</sup>

Similarly, the picture book group storytime—now conducted in conjunction with the computer—has evolved into something that could not have been conceived of previously. In work with children, librarians should take every advantage of the collections of a digital library like ICDL. In using digitized books to enhance preschool storytimes, we can “combine the best features of digital communication with the best features of paper-and-print books.”<sup>16</sup> This research suggests that digital picture book storytimes can enhance story understanding, especially that which depends on “reading” the illustrations in a picture book during group storytimes.

In the library or preschool, librarians and teachers use hardcopy picture books, “big books,” storytelling, puppets, flannel-board stories, and draw-and-tell stories every day in their work with the children they serve. Now they can add the computer, projector, and wireless mouse to their bag of tricks, to conduct digital storytimes that will engage, inform, and enhance children’s early literacy experiences. Digital storytimes can be conducted in preschools and libraries everywhere, because digitized books are now available online, full-text, for free, to children throughout the world. ☺

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## Colorado Library Raises \$69,000

The Friends of the Jefferson County (Colo.) Public Library raised more than \$69,000 at its annual Whale of a Used Book Sale. At the event, 86,000 books and other materials were sold. Money raised supports library programs, including the free summer reading clubs for children and teens, the Traveling Children's Library and the Knott's Kids—Discovering the Possibilities program.

The sale also benefits other community nonprofit organizations, which may pick up unsold books at no charge for their own fundraising efforts. This year, six nonprofit agencies received more than eleven hundred free books.

For more information, call the Jefferson County Library Foundation at (303) 275-2240.

# Asperger's Syndrome

## How the Public Library Can Address These Special Needs

Holly Halvorson

*Children are being diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome (AS), an autism spectrum disorder, at a rapidly increasing rate. Some of the characteristics of children with this disorder—difficulty controlling emotions, monotone speech combined with verbosity, problems with interpreting social cues—may be subtle enough to make them appear simply odd or ill-mannered. With increased awareness of this disorder, librarians can learn to recognize signs that a child may have AS and to adjust their interactions with these young patrons. Knowledgeable librarians can also offer invaluable reference service to parents who need help finding reliable, authoritative information about AS.*

*In many ways, a library is the ideal place for children with AS, many of whom love to escape the demands of the social world through books and computers. The children's department can also provide an informal play setting for young children with AS to interact with typically developing children who model appropriate social and communication skills. A librarian who understands the dilemmas faced by children with AS and by their parents, especially in public places, can take steps to make the library a sanctuary for these families.*

Everyone knows something about autism, even if it is only to associate the term with Dustin Hoffman's character in *Rain Man*. But many in the general public—including many librarians—are unaware of AS. Although Hans Asperger first described this disorder in children in 1944 (he called it "autistic psychopathy"), AS was not recognized by the American Psychological Association until 1994.<sup>1</sup>

### What is AS?

Some have referred to the disorder as "high-functioning autism," but others believe these are actually two different disorders with different treatment indications.<sup>2</sup> People with autism have significant impairment in three areas: language and communication, social skills, and stereotypical behaviors. Characteristics of autism are usually apparent within the first three years of life. By contrast, children with AS may appear

to be developing normally until they begin school. They have average to above-average intelligence and may have advanced vocabularies, but they have difficulty understanding speech in social contexts; furthermore, they have trouble reading nonverbal cues such as gestures and facial expressions, so their social behavior is often inappropriate.

Many children with AS tend to experience strong, even painful reactions to sensory stimuli that others may not even notice (for example, a light touch, smells, ambient sounds, and so on). They have trouble with transitions and change (especially trivial changes) and may be obsessed with a particular subject. People with AS display odd behavior because their neurological experience of the world is very different from those without the disorder.<sup>3</sup>

Only in the past few years have parents and professionals become familiar with AS. Although the disorder is getting more attention, it remains challenging for everyone who lives or works with these children. Because it is a new diagnostic category, there is little empirical data documenting effective interventions.<sup>4</sup> With so little hard evidence of what works with AS children, why would public librarians bother to reach out specifically to them and their families? There are several reasons we need to be better prepared to serve children diagnosed with AS:

1. The number of children diagnosed with AS is rapidly increasing, and there is already an avalanche of information about it on the Internet. Parents and teachers need help separating the wheat from the chaff.



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2. The library is the perfect place for children with AS in many ways:

- Two things that often preoccupy them are books and computers. Luke Jackson, an adolescent with AS, says, "Books are my doorways into other worlds. They cheer me when I am upset; they make me laugh, cry and quake with fright."<sup>5</sup> Computers may be considered preferable to people, since they are "logical, consistent, and not prone to moods."<sup>6</sup>
  - For younger children who have been diagnosed with (or are suspected of having) AS, the library offers an informal play setting. The more exposure young children have to typically developing children, the more opportunities they have to gain social and communication skills.<sup>7</sup>
  - Many children with AS are homeschooled at some point, especially if the social difficulties become intolerable. The public library is a valuable resource for homeschooling parents.
3. Parents of children with AS frequently dread going anywhere in public.<sup>8</sup> Their children may fly into a rage at the slightest provocation—an out-of-order automatic door, for example—and then they face the disapproving stares of strangers. Thus, many families of children with AS become isolated to avoid such judgment, which further limits the child's opportunities for social interaction. When library employees show compassion for these families and invite them to participate fully in all the library has to offer, they are modeling inclusiveness for the entire community.
4. Children with AS are at high risk for depression and suicide due to social isolation when they get older.<sup>9</sup> With proper staff training, the library is in a unique position to become a haven to these children—it is a place where they can escape the confusing outside world with a book or a computer game; they can find out everything there is to know about their "pet"

subjects (that is, obsessions); they can practice their social skills in a safe environment; and they can use computers, CD-ROMs, and DVDs to help them learn, since they tend to think visually.<sup>10</sup>

## Welcome to the Children's Department

Many libraries are a bit noisier than they were a generation ago, offering play areas, toys, and computer labs. Still, patrons are expected to follow some basic social proprieties in a library. Some of the behaviors typical of many children with AS make them seem out of place in a library setting. These include verbosity, an inability to read social cues, problems in regulating voice volume, failure to comply with fundamental social standards, and special interests that result in topical obsessions.<sup>11</sup>

Accordingly, librarians who know nothing of the characteristics of AS may find themselves annoyed or alarmed when a child stands too close, avoids eye contact, and says "Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince" repeatedly instead of directly asking them to look up the book. The interaction can become even more unpleasant if the librarian looks up the book only to find that *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* has been checked out.

Some children with AS cannot accept this, perhaps because the expression "checked out" does not make sense to them. Perhaps the child cannot cope with the disappointment of not getting to read the book when he expected to. This frustrated child may yell or cry or throw a tantrum. Because he appears quite old enough to have learned better manners than to demand a book without saying "please" and to understand why it may not be available, the librarian may conclude that he is rude and his sheepish mother is a bad parent.

Obviously, some staff awareness training is in order. This can include in-service training or consultation with local special education teachers and school media specialists who work regularly with children with AS, or even speakers with AS who could share their per-

sonal experiences.<sup>12</sup> If nothing else, staff should be provided with basic information about how children with AS may present themselves.

Not all children who forget their manners at the reference desk have AS, of course (just as not all AS children display this behavior), but we can look for some clues, such as lack of eye contact, stiff and one-sided speaking style, and motor clumsiness. Moreover, our profession requires us to serve all patrons, not just the conventional and polite ones.

Similarly, staff should never assume, based on their personal observations, that a child has AS, but some parents may apologize to the librarian for their child's behavior, explaining, "He's autistic" or "He has Asperger's." This presents an opportunity to assure the parent that her child is as welcome as any other and to ask if there is any way you can help them enjoy their library visits more. In some instances, this will lead to suggestions for additional services or materials, or the parent may eventually feel comfortable enough to ask for an accommodation for her child. This can be as simple as requesting that staff use certain key words and phrases, employed in the home and school setting, that can act as cues.

Remember that parents know what works with their children better than anyone else, and it is in everyone's best interest to be flexible whenever possible. (An example of a simple accommodation from the author's personal experience: The father of a boy with AS, who often played computer games at the library, regularly asked a librarian to tell the son his time was up after he had been there for thirty minutes. Many staff members refused to do so, saying that this was the parent's responsibility. However, an interview with the boy's mother—once she became comfortable speaking to a librarian about her son's disability—revealed that the only way to ensure that the boy would not throw a tantrum was to have an employee, rather than his father, interrupt him. The librarians may not understand this peculiarity, but it has made a big difference to this family, knowing that the staff will accommodate them. It means one less battle between father and son.)

Once librarians are aware that a child has AS, they may be able to modify their own approach to the child according to the situation. Again, the parent is the expert on what works best with the child. The following are rules of thumb for interacting with a child with AS:

1. Say exactly what you mean because children with AS tend to understand things literally. Avoid idioms, sarcasm, and (usually) humor.
2. Misconduct, even a tantrum, can often be averted if a librarian matter-of-factly states that such behavior is against the rules—that the library, just like school, is a place with rules. As Alan Sohn, a school psychologist who works with children with AS, explains, “In the Asperger world, a rule is a rule.”<sup>13</sup>
3. Do not insist on eye contact. Luke Jackson says that when he tries to look someone in the eye, he gets a “horrible burning into [his] soul feeling.”<sup>14</sup>
4. Watch out for signs of emotional distress. Children with AS often revert to immature behaviors when mildly anxious (for example, chewing on clothes, carrying around unusual objects, walking on tiptoe, finger-flicking). Staff should learn to see these reactions as the child's own “strategies for self-regulation,” not problem behavior, so they should neither draw attention to the behavior nor ignore the child if the child approaches the librarian.<sup>15</sup>
5. Sometimes, in a big library, a child can lose track of his parents or another family member. If a child with AS is agitated as he looks for his mother, avoid touching him (for example, patting him on the back or taking his hand), as he may perceive this as a threat.<sup>16</sup>

The best preparation for interacting with a child with AS is to revisit the guidelines for interacting with *all* children:

- Be prepared to spend extra time.
- Get the child's attention, and give yours.

- Listen with your full attention.
- Don't jump to conclusions.
- Acknowledge and accept the child's feelings.
- Respect the child's viewpoint. (For children with AS, this is very different from the typical child's viewpoint; some staff education is necessary to understand how a child with AS may perceive the environment and social interactions.)
- Take the child's level of language development into account.
- Take the child's cognitive level into account.
- Take the child's experiential level into account.

*The very permanence and stability of the library in the community can be a useful aspect of the patron's socialization and education. If a child experiences acceptance, happiness, and success there, it can be a haven for the rest of his life.*

- Describe what you see, hear, and feel. (Don't forget to use precise, literal terms here.)
- Be aware of your tone of voice and body language. (When interacting with children with AS, be calm and low-key.)
- Don't make the child lose face or feel disgraced.
- Don't be too quick to offer an opinion or advice.<sup>17</sup>

It may be advisable to offer individualized library orientation to the family of a child with AS who is unfamiliar with the building, to help decrease the anxiety associated with a new experience. This should include introducing the child to the librarians and to other staff members who may come in contact with the child. Library orientations for people

with AS may take more time than for other patrons, but some may learn their way around quickly if given maps and informational brochures.<sup>18</sup>

## The Reference Interview

Children with AS are similar to others in that they have information needs related to schoolwork. In addition, they may seek out a librarian's assistance more often to find materials related to their favorite subjects (for example, trains, dinosaurs, flags, and so on). Children with AS who have strong language abilities may approach the reference desk to ask for help quite appropriately when they are not stressed. However, according to Laurent and Rubin, even very verbal children may revert to using immature emotional displays instead of appropriate language when angry, fear-

ful, or frustrated.<sup>19</sup> They may close their eyes, run away, or knock things off the desk, for example.

Librarians should be aware that the after-school hours, during which time they are most busy at the reference desk, are often times of high stress for children with AS—they are exhausted from their hours in the socially demanding school environment.<sup>20</sup> Librarians should try to avoid showing any irritation or resentment, which sets a negative example for others nearby, and should strive to listen patiently in order to determine what the child needs. Of course, this is extremely hard for staff members who may be feeling stressed themselves; again, the importance of staff training in serving patrons with AS and other disabilities cannot be overstated.

Children with AS often learn best through visual modes.<sup>21</sup> When responding to a

child's reference question, think beyond the usual resources recommended for homework assistance. Offer illustrated nonfiction books on the subject, then suggest videos, CD-ROMs, and relevant Web sites as well. Szatmari recommends the use of computer-assisted instruction for reading, math, and other academic skills, since it holds the child's attention longer and uses the strengths inherent in AS to facilitate rote learning.<sup>22</sup>

When children with AS need more in-depth help with research, remember that simply telling them may not suffice—use visual aids to guide them and provide written instructions as appropriate. In addition, group instruction may be too distracting, since there are more social implications in such settings.<sup>23</sup> For example, librarians in Indiana often teach groups of children how to access INSPIRE databases for research. When teaching a child with AS how to do this, it may be necessary to provide directions individually, using small, logical, and methodic steps. After going through the procedure in this way, it is helpful to give the child a flowchart illustrating the steps taken. Similarly, librarians offering reference help can often use the opportunity to share study skills that may be helpful for children with AS, such as the use of Venn diagrams or mind maps.

Readers' advisory is another function of the public librarian at the reference desk. Of course, not all children with AS like to read, and many who love books do not comprehend the content but simply love the process of decoding words (or studying the illustrations). Stephen Krashen has asserted that the most effective means of improving reading motivation, skill, and comprehension is through FVR—free, voluntary reading.<sup>24</sup>

Librarians can apply the principle of FVR by giving children with AS books and magazines that they are most likely to read voluntarily: those on the subject of their obsessions. They may then be gradually led to other interests that are somehow related to the favorite subject. Szatmari offers the example of Frankie, who was obsessed with flags, to the consternation of his parents and teachers. They tried without success to limit this

obsession. As time passed, however, he was led to other interests through related topics: his teacher used flags to introduce him to heraldry, from heraldry to castles, and from castles to knights. In this way, Frankie learned quite a bit about medieval history.<sup>25</sup>

Bashe and Kirby suggest that for children with good reading comprehension skills, parents and teachers can use a variety of children's books to generate discussions about thoughts, feelings, and experiences. They recommend such favorites as *Yertl the Turtle*, the Encyclopedia Brown series, and books by Judy Blume, among others, but note that “any well-told story can be explored in terms of perspective taking and point of view, the relationship between what characters mean and what they say, what they think and what they do, and so on” (see appendix for children's books featuring characters who have AS).<sup>26</sup>

## The Computer Lab

When school is not in session, the computer lab at the public library is usually full of children; some of them are working on homework, but many are often there to play games. One child with AS theorizes that others like him may love computer games so much because the player actually controls the characters. In his words, “Life often seems so out of control, probably for most people, so it is good to retreat into a part of life that you can control. . . . It is all very predictable, but not so predictable that it gets boring.”<sup>27</sup> Librarians sometimes lament the proliferation of computer games in our libraries. However, thinking about the games from this viewpoint can help us see the value of them, especially for children with AS, for recreation and even stress relief.

For children with AS, there may be other long-term benefits of spending time in the computer lab. Computers often become one of the child's obsessive interests, and this makes the computer an ideal tool for learning all sorts of academic subjects. In addition, as so many teachers and librarians can attest, children often know more than they themselves do about computer hardware and software.

In some cases it may benefit both the child with AS and the befuddled adult to ask for the child's help with technology problems. Becoming the resident “tech expert” gives the child another opportunity to practice his social skills in a familiar environment, and that role can go a long way toward increasing acceptance among peers.<sup>28</sup> Finally, with guidance from parents and other adults, children may eventually turn an obsession with computers into a useful career.<sup>29</sup>

One final note about the computer lab—unless it is closely supervised by staff, the presence of many game-playing children can create an arcade-like atmosphere, which may, in turn, create opportunities for bullying. Librarians must be alert to this possibility, in the lab and elsewhere. Children with AS are particularly vulnerable to bullying because of their odd behavior. The following are suggestions from a child with AS who has often been a victim of bullying:

- Children with AS may not recognize bullying for what it is, so ask about specific behaviors. Most likely, bullying in the library will be verbal (for example, threats and taunts) rather than physical. If you suspect children are being bullied, ask exactly what words were said to them.
- If children are brave enough to approach you to say they are being bullied, take them seriously.
- Be discreet when talking to children accused of bullying; do not reprimand them loudly in front of others, as this will embarrass the bullied child and may lead to more harassment when adults are not present.
- Look for hidden nooks around the library where bullying may take place, not just the computer lab. Visit these places regularly.
- Make sure your library has a board-approved list of rules of conduct and post it prominently. Refer to this list whenever bullying occurs and do not hesitate to apply the consequences specified for such behavior.<sup>30</sup>



## Programming

For all children, storytimes and other library programs are valued for their educational and recreational benefits, for promoting a love of reading, and for socializing opportunities. It happens that these are frequently listed as priorities by parents of children with AS.<sup>31</sup> However, because of the concerns many AS parents have about their children's behavior in public settings, they do not always take advantage of library programming. Librarians can take steps to help children with AS have positive experiences in these programs.

Many library programs are offered for specific age groups, and these age limits are often strictly enforced. But rigidly adhering to age restrictions can be counterproductive when dealing with children with AS. As already noted, these children often display uneven development—for instance, immature social skills combined with advanced language skills and intellectual development.<sup>32</sup>

For this reason, librarians should provide parents with thorough descriptions of the programs offered and perhaps even invite interested but wary parents to attend one of the programs to help them decide whether it seems developmentally appropriate for their child.

In creating programs for younger children, it is common to follow the same routine every week. Young children love routine, and it is a comfort to them to know that they will begin and end each program with a song (maybe the same “welcome” and “goodbye” song every week), and to anticipate the basic structure (for example, welcome, story, song, story, song, game, goodbye).

For children with AS, structuring the program with clear beginnings and endings and providing a predictable sequence to the activities is even more important.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, Akin and MacKinney suggest that the same themed program, including the same books, be repeated several times in a row with children who have a disorder on the autism spectrum.<sup>34</sup> To help the child prepare for the next activity, the librarian may use simple pictures or flannelboard pieces, similar to activity

schedules used in many classrooms.<sup>35</sup> For example, a picture of a musical note can signal that the group is about to sing a song, and a picture of a TV screen can indicate that a video will be shown.

After children with AS attend a program, if they seem anxious or there are behavior problems, the librarian may discuss concerns with the parents. Often, the parents can explain how to cue their children when necessary in a manner consistent with home or school situations, using specific words or gestures. It may be that their children are not yet ready for that program, or it may simply be a poor match for their interests and temperament.

*One child with AS theorizes that others similar to him may love computer games so much because the player actually controls the characters. In his words, “Life often seems so out of control, probably for most people, so it is good to retreat into a part of life that you can control. . . . It is all very predictable, but not so predictable that it gets boring.”*

With the understanding that some children with AS will never enjoy any group library programs, Safran, Safran, and Ellis suggest that there are some activities that can increase their appeal to such children. Social groups that revolve around the child's special interest (for example, trains, computers, chess) can help motivate them and provide a safe and supported environment for learning to interact with their peers. They may benefit from videos or reader's theater activities.<sup>36</sup>

With elementary-aged children with AS, drawing and singing are often effective. Music can be used in many ways to strengthen typically weak areas for these children: songs that stress movement or physical activity can improve coordination; songs that require passing an object to another child can strengthen social skills; and songs can provide a predictable cue for transitions.<sup>37</sup> Tangible objects

related to themes, such as models or realia, are desirable for promoting concrete experiences and can help all children focus, especially those with AS.<sup>38</sup>

For younger children, being involved in games like “London Bridge” or “Ring Around the Rosy” can teach them to enjoy being close to other children instead of avoiding them.<sup>39</sup> In addition, picture books can be paired with social stories to support social and behavioral goals. A social story is a short story that “describes social situations in terms of relevant cues and . . . defines appropriate responses for children diagnosed with autism.”<sup>40</sup> Many social stories for common situations can be found in pub-

lished collections, or teachers or parents can write them based on a child's unique circumstances. Akin and MacKinney illustrate how this can be applied in a public library storytime program, using the example of *Maisy Drives the Bus*, a picture book, combined with a social story about riding the bus.<sup>41</sup>

When library storytimes are designed with the best interests of children with AS in mind, the resulting programs can be even more appealing to all children. Of course, an additional benefit for everyone is that typical children then have the opportunity to learn empathy and caring by participating in activities with children with special needs.<sup>42</sup>

To promote high attendance at these carefully crafted storytimes, ask the public and private schools in the area to publicize children's programs and services. Note on all publicity that programs

are available to all, and ask for advance notice if special accommodations are needed.<sup>43</sup>

## Meeting the Needs of Parents and Professionals

According to Szatmari, all parents of children diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder ask three questions: What caused the disorder, what can we expect for the future, and what can we do to help?<sup>44</sup> The results of a survey conducted in 2003 showed that mothers of children with AS see the education of themselves and of teachers as a central priority, and they want access to educational, medical, and community resources for their children when they are very young.<sup>45</sup> The public library can and should meet many of these informational needs. The library can start by offering information to help parents understand AS—a disorder unheard of by many until their child was diagnosed—which leads to hope and a sense of control.<sup>46</sup>

Many libraries have a collection of books for parents or teachers located in or near the children's room. Books and other materials about disabilities, including AS, are an important part of this collection. Parents of children with AS (or any disabilities) generally seek two basic types of information: a thorough description of the disability, including typical behaviors and characteristics, and treatment options.<sup>47</sup> Parents of children with AS will likely hear all sorts of theories about the disorder and cures for it, especially considering the amount of "junk science" that can be found on the Internet and elsewhere.

To help guide parents to reliable information, librarians must carefully select material about AS with guidance from those knowledgeable about it. At the Carmel Clay (Ind.) Public Library, potential local contacts for recommending materials include Indiana Resource Center for Autism, AS support groups, the central Indiana chapter of Autism Society of America (ASA), special education cooperatives, and Riley Hospital for Children. The Web sites of many national organizations advocating for those with AS (for example, Online

Asperger Syndrome Information and Support [OASIS], ASA) include links to parent resources. MedlinePlus has an Asperger Syndrome Web page with many resources for parents.<sup>48</sup>

The amount of money available for AS-related materials will determine the scope of the collection. Besides books, libraries should consider providing vertical file materials, periodicals, and audiovisual materials. An early intervention family resource kit is highly recommended to distribute to parents who suspect or who have been told that their young child has a developmental disability. This is especially important for young children with AS, as the early signs of the disability are often discounted by family doctors.<sup>49</sup>

Portway and Johnson emphasize the importance of early recognition to improve the outcomes of children with AS, noting that "the problems of people who have AS and the associated risks cannot be completely ameliorated by appropriate educational interventions . . . , but can be greatly exacerbated by their absence."<sup>50</sup> Feinberg et al. offer suggestions for materials to include with early intervention family resource kits, such as brochures and flyers on early intervention services and the family's legal rights, a developmental milestones checklist, a state resource list from the National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities (known as NICHCY), bibliographies of library materials for parents of children with special needs, and a list of parenting and early childhood programs and resources available at the library.<sup>51</sup> In addition, information can be printed from the Center for Disease Control's Web site related to their Learn the Signs, Act Early campaign, aimed at increasing parents' knowledge of children's development. The campaign offers suggestions to help parents pursue their concerns even when others discount them.<sup>52</sup>

## The Library As Referral Source

In addition to carefully selecting material for a Parent Resource Center, librarians need to be aware of and have readily available referral information for local

agencies that serve children with AS. To facilitate this, establish and regularly update a directory or database with contact information for doctors' offices, First Steps programs, administrators of special education, support groups, private schools, tutors, recreational programs, and other service providers with ties to the AS community. Some of these organizations may supply the library with pamphlets that can be put in a display rack, a "wonderfully inexpensive way of making the library the connecting point" between the family and the resources they may not otherwise find.<sup>53</sup>

## The Library As Meeting Place

The public library can be a logical place for hosting AS support groups and informational programs about AS. In addition, Feinberg et al. suggest several ways that service providers may use the library:

1. consider as an alternative site for provision of services;
2. bring children with AS to a library storytime;
3. assist library staff in designing an adaptation within the library setting;
4. visit the library with the family of a child with AS and help them access its resources; and
5. offer outreach training to library staff to improve service to children with AS.<sup>54</sup>

## Volunteer Opportunities for AS Children

Once library visits have become part of the routine for older children and adolescents with AS, some of them may be happy to serve the library as volunteers. Strengths that are sometimes present in children with AS include stamina, well-developed fine motor skills, enjoyment of chores and keeping busy, good long-term memory, creativity, performing accurate work once the task is learned, enjoyment of reading, and some rote skills in math.<sup>55</sup>

These strengths lend themselves well to volunteer opportunities available in many libraries, such as shelving books, checking that the books on the shelf are in correct Dewey Decimal order, putting DVDs in cases, folding flyers and stuffing envelopes, assisting other children in the computer lab, and so on. Such work can provide children with a sense of accomplishment and valuable practice with following directions and working cooperatively.

The library staff that supervises these volunteers should receive awareness training about AS before working with them. Supervisors must understand that children with AS need to have all expectations very clearly explained, in specific detail.<sup>56</sup> Both written and verbal instructions should be provided, and visual aids may be advisable in some situations. As suggested with other library activities, adults working with children with AS should consult with the children's parents to learn what instructional techniques and cues are familiar to them at home and at school, so that these can be used the same way in the library setting.

## Sensitizing Staff and Community

Along with meeting the informational, recreational, and educational needs of children with AS and their families, the public library has a role to play in promoting awareness of AS among children and adults in the general population. One way to do this is by owning and displaying novels featuring characters with AS. The recent adult bestseller by Mark Haddon, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (Vintage, 2004), has provided many people with their first glimpse into the mind of a young man with AS.

This title was chosen in 2006 for the Carmel Clay Reads communitywide reading program, promoted through press releases, reading group guides, collaboration with the local high school, and library book discussions. Several other lesser-known novels featuring characters with AS have been published since the disorder was first recognized in 1994. Greenwell recommends several such books for children and young

adults, especially Gene Kemp's *Seriously Weird* for those who "want to begin to understand the frustrations of living with an Asperger child."<sup>57</sup> (See appendix for additional reading recommendations.)

AS is a strange, confusing, difficult, and fascinating disorder—some people with AS see it as a gift.<sup>58</sup> But research tells us that children and adolescents with AS are at risk for a life of isolation, depression, and dependence. Parents are certainly the most important advocates for getting the best treatment for their child, and schools are often a primary route to help children with AS learn the skills they need while they are still young. But after the child grows up, finishes school, and moves away from his parents, the public library will still be there to meet many of his needs. McNeil and Johnson declare that "the very permanence and stability of the library in the community can be a useful aspect of the patron's socialization and education."<sup>59</sup> If a child experiences acceptance, happiness, and success there, it can be a haven for the rest of his life. ☺

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# New Orleans: Rebuild It . . . and They Will Come

## ALA Annual Conference 2006

All photos by Sharon Verbeten unless otherwise noted.

### Thoughts on New Orleans from Annual Conference Attendees

As I arrived at the New Orleans Public Library Children's Resource Center with about eighty other yellow-shirted volunteers, I found a woman adding the finishing touches to a lovely, vertical mural on the walls between the windows. I took a few quick photos and noticed that the characters in the mural looked a lot like the Chato cats created by children's book illustrator Susan Guevara.

Turns out, it *was* Guevara hand-painting these two murals herself. She said she had spent two whole days creating these panels, and the results are amazing. What a generous gift for this special neighborhood.—*Sylvia M. Vardell, Texas Woman's University, School of Library & Information Studies*



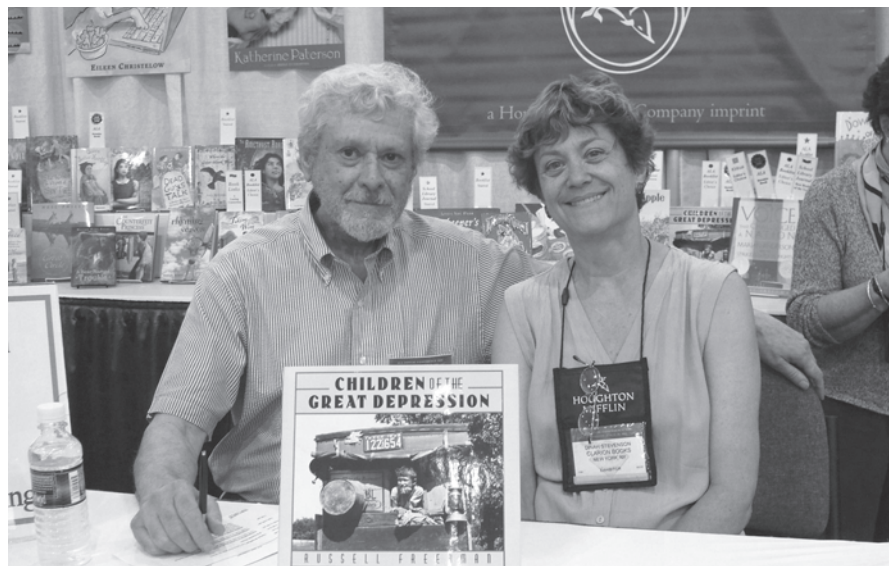
Children's book illustrator Susan Guevara paints a mural at the New Orleans Public Library Children's Resource Center. Photo courtesy of Sylvia Vardell.



Then-ALSC President Ellen Fader, left, beams as she greets Newbery-winning author Lynne Rae Perkins.

The welcome from everyone in New Orleans was amazing. The taxi driver apologized for our wait for a cab, noting that they were short of help in many areas because workers had no housing. A former student of my husband's drove in fifty miles from his FEMA trailer in Mississippi to show us his house, amid many others being worked on. The destruction (outside the main part of town where we were) is no longer as bad as what was shown on TV, but what is amazing is how widespread it is, going on for miles, and how capricious both the destruction and renovation are. The convention area and downtown were in pretty good shape compared to previous visits, with only some boarded-up shops. But the number of people was certainly down. Whether New Orleans will ever be what it was seems still to be a question.—*Sylvia Marantz, retired school librarian, now volunteering at Arlington High School library near Columbus, Ohio*





Acclaimed author Russell Freedman appears at the Clarion Books/Houghton Mifflin booth with his editor, Dinah Stevenson.

I signed up to help with the Habitat project, but due to a clerical error, I was not on the list. Instead, I spent that day with a friend, a roofing contractor, who lives in New Orleans. He and his family have moved seven times since the hurricane, his business has gone belly-up, he's smoking nonstop, and he is experiencing symptoms of post-traumatic stress syndrome. He told me it was a relief to spend time with someone who doesn't want something from him. At the end of the day, I realized that my presence in his life—even for a day—was another way of rebuilding the city.—April Halprin Wayland, poet and novelist, Manhattan Beach, California

*Ed. Note:* Wayland also wrote and sang the following song at a poetry panel held during the convention.

### The City of New Orleans

with apologies to Steve Goodman

*Speaking in the city of New Orleans,  
ALA Conference, Sunday, Morial—  
Caffeine fuels these four bright-eyed writers—  
One poet wishes she were arboreal . . .  
Where the Star Magnolia branches sway  
She wears a writer's French beret  
And thinks about what poem to write for you—  
And when she's stumped (the rhyme's all wrong)  
She finds this city is her song  
Big Easy words cooked in a spicy shrimp stew.*

### CHORUS:

*Good morning ALA, how are you?  
Don't you hear it?—That's a slide trombone.  
Lucky us—we're in the city of New Orleans,  
Where I know you'll find a poem or two of your own.*

Every local person that I shared conversation with expressed their gratitude for the librarians coming to New Orleans. Although I was very busy with meetings, I'm so happy I volunteered on my last day. After riding the bus to the Children's Resource Center, we moved the entire contents of library materials from a school gym behind the center to the newly renovated Carnegie building.

We placed boxes of books on large carts and wheeled them through the school building and across the lawn to the front steps of the library, where a chain of librarians passed boxes from one to another up the steps and into the building. There, a team of other librarians unloaded the boxes and filled the shelves. I felt right at home as I switched from hefting boxes to placing beloved picture books on the new blue shelves.

It was early afternoon when I spotted a young man with a National Public Radio (NPR) hat on, and to my surprise, he walked over to me and asked if I could share my thoughts about ALA and this experience. I think I was bubbling over with happiness because the library was looking just beautiful, and it was great to share this enthusiasm with him.

After every book was in place, our team attended the reopening ceremony. I was most delighted to observe a row of about seven children from a local camp march up the steps of the brand-new library. When they came out, they were all smiling.

I feel sure that the residents will love their new library, and I will love to think about that for a long time.—Jan Watkins, head of youth services, Skokie (Ill.) Public Library

I cannot write about the convention without first writing about New Orleans, a city I'd known before as a tourist and convention-attende—a place I know now as so sad, so harrowing, so disturbing, and so full of the most remarkable and courageous people I've ever met.

People like Pat Austin of the University of New Orleans who spent three days after Katrina in a Baton Rouge motel parking lot in a tiny Toyota with her sister and 11 cats. She lost her house to a levee breach, but she is totally and utterly and passionately committed to her home. Wanting me to bear witness, Pat toured me through New Orleans in that same Toyota. The unsettled feeling I had around the convention center and the French Quarter (with so many places still closed and boarded up) was nothing compared to the feeling I had on that tour.

She pointed out miles and miles of destroyed cars under the highway—a dreadful Katrina automobile graveyard. She next took me through the Ninth Ward, where she had taught years ago. The only analogy I could come up with was being at Nazi concentration camps—the vastness of the devastation really hits home when you are physically seeing it rather than experiencing it in photos or film or in words. Worst of all was the horrible eeriness of emptiness—the sense of the thousands who lived there, the ghosts of a vibrant and busy community, of people who had worked to buy these homes, now uninhabitable.

Remembering New Orleans before, it was hard for me not to notice the difference and so walking from place to place, to event or reception, it was difficult to forget what had happened there only months before. But what I'm coming home with and still processing clearly is not the ALA convention, but New Orleans. I sure hope they can come back; I really do. —*Monica Edinger, The Dalton School, New York City*



Author and illustrator Mo Willems ponders a pigeon puppet after an evening presentation about humor in children's books.



Children's author and illustrator Lane Smith, left, and author Jon Scieszka ham it up during a book signing.



The city was ready and willing to greet convention goers. Photo courtesy of April Halprin Wayland.



A toppled Coast Guard tower. Photo courtesy of April Halprin Wayland.



# InFORMed Reading

## Evaluating and Using Picture Books, Beginning Reader Books, and Illustrated Books

Megan Lambert

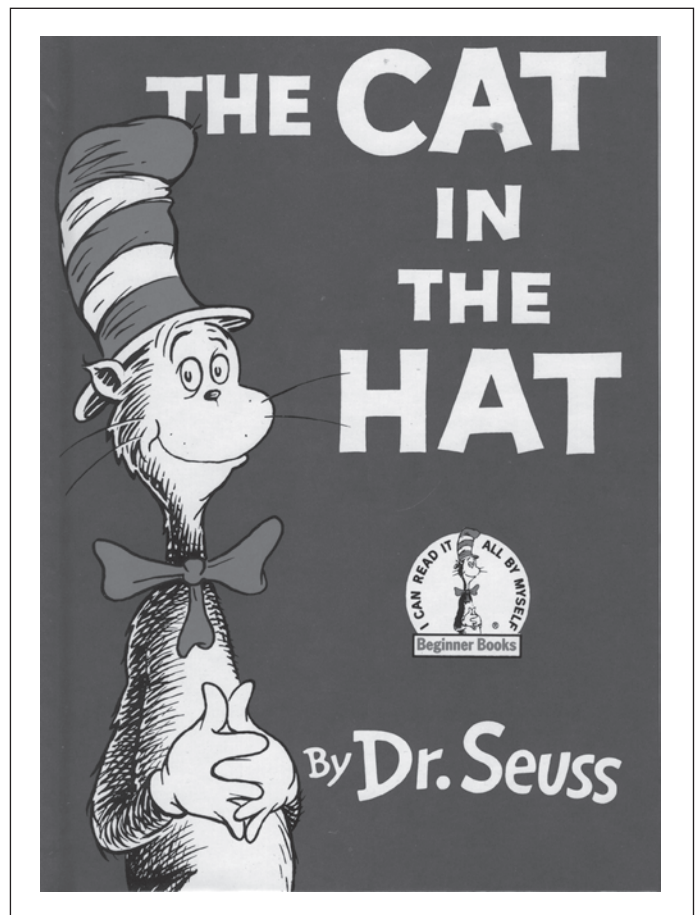
When *The Horn Book Magazine* asked celebrated author Avi to select the book he'd most like to see in the hands of a twenty-second-century child, he chose *The Cat in the Hat* as a "Future Classic." "Since I am primarily a novelist, one might suppose I would choose from the veritable galaxy of star-bright twentieth-century novels to place into the hand of the 2101 child. Truly, there are many of them. But surely our future child will not be reading those novels unless he or she has already become a reader."<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, Dr. Seuss's name is synonymous with learning to read, largely due to the big splash made by that certain hatted feline; before *The Cat in the Hat*, beginning reader books were not-so-much-*Fun with Dick and Jane*, leading John Hersey to comment in a 1954 *Life* magazine article that such titles were populated by "abnormally courteous and unnaturally clean boys and girls. Why should [children] not have pictures that widen rather than narrow the associative richness the children give to the world they illustrate—drawings like those wonderfully imaginative geniuses among children's illustrators—Tenniel, Howard Pyle, Dr. Seuss . . ."<sup>2</sup> Dr. Seuss took up this challenge with *The Cat in the Hat*, and the rest is history.

In recognition of the good doctor's key role in the emergence of the beginning reader book as a new category of children's book, in 2004 the American Library Association (ALA) established the Theodor Seuss Geisel Award,

given annually beginning in 2006 to the author(s) and illustrator(s) of the most distinguished contribution to the body of American children's literature known as beginning reader books published in the United States during the preceding year. The award is to recognize the author(s) and illustrator(s) of a beginning reader book who demonstrate great creativity and imagination in his/her/their literary and artistic achievements to engage children in reading.

"A person's a person no matter how small," Theodor Geisel, a.k.a. Dr. Seuss, would say. "Children want the same things we want: to laugh, to be challenged, to be entertained and delighted." Brilliant, playful and always respectful of children, Dr. Seuss charmed his way into the consciousness of four generations of youngsters and parents. In the process, he helped them to read.<sup>3</sup>



Cover image from *The Cat in the Hat* by Dr. Seuss (Random House, 1957)

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Creating an award for a different category of book begs the question, what makes this category different? This question leads me, and other people who read, use, and write about children's literature to yet more questions including: Can a picture book be a beginning reader book? How is a beginning reader different from an illustrated book? What distinguishes a picture book from an illustrated book?

These questions are important not only for those serving on award committees but also for adults engaging children with books as we consider collection management and organization, reading instruction, storytime programming, and supporting patrons' book selection. We can best address these questions by analyzing the three categories of books already identified (picture, beginning reader, and illustrated) in terms of their different forms and standards of use.

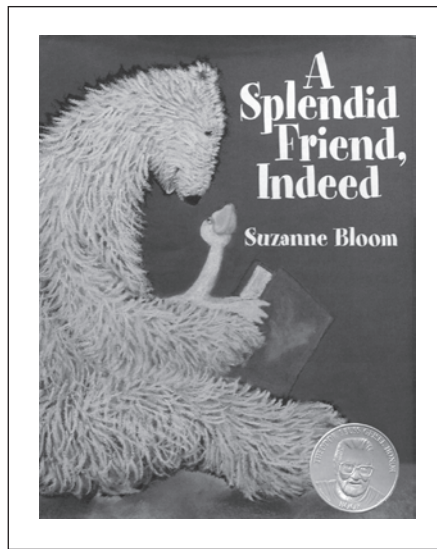
Leaving aside the illustrated book for a moment, one way to think about the differences between picture books and beginning reader books is to think of the standard picture book reading experience including three parties—the **picture book, the reader, and the listener and viewer**—and the standard beginning reader book experience as a reading transaction between **the book and the emergent or newly independent reader**.

The picture book includes words and pictures that are interdependent: words leave spaces for the pictures to step in or vice versa. Therefore, in the triangular relationship noted in the previous paragraph, the reader reads the words out loud and the listener and viewer hears these words while looking at the corresponding images. This creates what British scholar Jane Doonan calls “the composite text”—the merging of the visual and the verbal to create a joint meaning in the mind of the listener and viewer.<sup>4</sup>

This is contrasted with the beginning reader book experience, in which an emergent or new reader independently decodes text with the support of corresponding images. The focus here is on the words and on pictures supporting words; the fact that the reader is decoding text and must look away from the

picture to do so creates a different interaction between word and image—they are not simultaneous partners in making meaning as words and images are in the picture book experience.<sup>5</sup>

This is not to say that children can't get value out of reading picture books independently (when they are able), or that a beginning reader book could not also occupy the triangular relationship. Furthermore, a picture book with controlled text and attention to page opening composition and typography can function as a beginning reader. Indeed,



Cover image from *A Splendid Friend, Indeed* by Suzanne Bloom (Boyd's Mills Press, 2005)

one of the first Geisel Honor Books was a picture book: *A Splendid Friend, Indeed* by Suzanne Bloom.

But by identifying the standard use of these different forms we can better evaluate their merits and better make use of their different potentials. So now let's turn to an exploration of form. T. S. Eliot writes, “When forced to work within a strict framework, the imagination is taxed to its utmost and will produce its richest ideas, given total freedom, the work is likely to sprawl.”<sup>6</sup> In other words, limitations inspire creativity. Regarding the beginning reader book and the picture book as controlled forms allows us to evaluate how writers and authors work within the forms or work against them, and so we must first identify the controls.

In her book *From Cover to Cover*, Kathleen Horning identifies some of the hallmarks of the beginning reader book as:

- the use of sight words and compound words;
- the large size of typeface (eighteen points is standard);
- short sentence length (five words or so are standard);
- short line length in which longer sentences are broken up into more than one line; and
- the frequent use of patterned language including the use of alliteration, assonance, and rhyming.<sup>7</sup>

These hallmarks indicate the controls that are placed on the language of a beginning reader book—all in the service of the intended audience of emergent and newly independent readers. Such controls in a picture book text, while possible, are not a necessary limitation of the picture book form. That is, limiting the sophistication of a picture book text is unnecessary due to the presence of the reader (presumably an adult or an independent child reader) in the triangular relationship previously outlined. One reading of William Steig's sublime picture book texts contrasted with the equally sublime and yet controlled language of Arnold Lobel's *Frog and Toad* books will demonstrate this.

Horning also notes that the placement of illustrations on the page of the beginning reader book as well as the presence of ample white space on all page openings are key to the successful design of this form. White space allows emergent or newly independent readers to rest their eyes, and careful placement of the illustrations in relationship to the text allows for a back-and-forth reference between the words and the corresponding image as the picture supports the decoding and the comprehension of the text.

While the design of page openings in picture books is crucial to a book's success or failure, the same restrictions of form in the beginning reader book do not apply to the picture book. To explore this idea, compare Maurice Sendak's illustra-



tions in the Little Bear series, written by Elsa Minarik, to his pictures in *Where the Wild Things Are*. The former are beginning reader books, and the illustrations that Sendak created for them are carefully placed on the pages with ample white space. These illustrations support the text. The latter title is a picture book, and the pictures do not support the text in this book, they (to borrow Sendak's own word) "quicken" it, and some art bleeds off the page, while other images are contained by air frames, all in support of the visual narrative.<sup>8</sup>

Perhaps the most quoted, succinct stab at defining a picture book comes from Barbara Bader's classic work of children's literature criticism, *American Picture Books from Noah's Ark to the Beast Within*: "the aesthetic success of the picture book hinges on the interdependence of pictures and words, on the simultaneous display of two facing pages, and on the drama of the turning of the page."<sup>9</sup>

It's hard to top that in the muddy task of defining what exactly the picture book is and what it isn't, and for the purposes of this piece, I will focus on Bader's first criterion about the picture book form—unless the picture book is wordless (a topic for a different article addressing the narrative potential of sequential illustration) the picture book is a dance between pictures and words, wherein each is an equal partner.

This is a hard sell in some circles, where the word reigns supreme. Illustrator Marla Frazee once told me about a review of her book with Mary Ann Hoberman, *The Seven Silly Eaters*, which, although positive, failed to recognize the narrative contributions of the art. Hoberman's text never mentions the father in the story, he is solely the creation of Frazee's art, and the story never identifies the protagonist Mrs. Peters as a cellist, though Frazee's pictures cast her in this role; and yet, the review in question chalked these significant narrative contributions up to Hoberman's writing. "The pictures are telling the story too," Frazee said.<sup>10</sup> And indeed they are.

This dance between pictures and words in the picture book form offers read-

ers of picture books in the triangular relationship a particular challenge. The reader is text-focused, after all, showing the pictures to a child or a group while reading the words out loud. In a group, it is doubtful that the reader can see the images as she reads, and with one child she cannot look at the image and read the words simultaneously; the reader therefore might be tempted to succumb to the quick pull of the text from page to page. Meanwhile, the child or group listening to her words is simultaneously viewing the art and merging the visual and the verbal to create the composite texts in

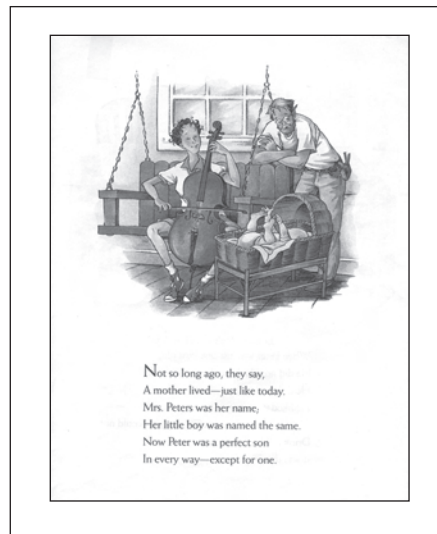


Illustration from *The Seven Silly Eaters* by Mary Ann Hoberman, illustration copyright 1997 by Marla Frazee, reproduced by permission of Harcourt.

their minds. In other words, they are reading pictures as they also attend to the oral reading of the text. This is a more complex, and therefore, a slower process of constructing meaning. I am convinced that this is the root of many "interruptions" during classroom and library circle times and storytimes, or even during readings between an adult and one or just a few children, as children seek to comment on or make sense of what they are seeing and hearing. "Wait! Wait!" "Go back! Go back!" "Read it again!" We've all heard these lines as often as we've said "Once upon a time" and "The end."

This tension between the word-focused reader and the composite text-focused listener-viewer presents the reader with an opportunity to change the dynamic

of the picture book experience from one of reading *to* children to one of reading *with* children, and to make use of the interruptions as evidence of engagement instead of asking children to wait until the end of the verbal narrative to share their comments, ideas, and questions. This is a prime focus of my work at the Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art in storytime, outreach programs, and professional development trainings. It centers on the idea that picture book experiences can move from being performances, presentations, or storytelling and into the realm of facilitated discussion about the interaction of words, images, and design in the picture book form. This means that reading *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* can take twenty minutes instead of five, but the level of engagement is astounding as children are invited to make meaning of verbal and visual narratives.

The museum refers to this interactive method of evaluating and sharing picture books as the Whole Book Approach, which draws upon Abigail Housen and Philip Yenawine's Visual Thinking Strategies and the child-focused discovery methods of the Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education.<sup>11</sup> Its emphasis on a collaborative interpretive process of art and text as opposed to a top-down reading from reader to listener-viewer can be applied to the picture book experience between a single adult and a single child as well. A librarian participating in a Whole Book Approach workshop at the museum once sheepishly commented, "I can't count how many times I've said to my three-year-old 'just let me read the book' when she is flipping backwards through the pages or interrupting the words to say something about the picture."<sup>12</sup> This mother, librarian, book-lover, and avid reader was trying to give her daughter the pleasure of a sustained verbal narrative, but she was doing so with the picture book form in which the verbal component is only half of the story. Ultimately, the Whole Book Approach suggests that there is a big difference between reading a picture book and finishing a picture book—the former includes reading of the images, text, design, and their interplay, and the later is focused primarily on completing a sustained oral reading of text.

On the other hand, the text of an illustrated book, as in a beginning reader book, takes center stage; however, in this form the text is not subject to the controls demanded by an emergent or newly independent reader and can therefore take on the verbal sophistication of a picture book text. Furthermore, an illustrated book's text usually does not leave the same amount of space for narrative images that a picture book demands. Such texts are therefore more descriptive and less dependent upon pictorial "quickening," resulting in pictures for illustrated books that are relegated to a more decorative or illuminating role. They offer visual entrée to the words as asides or as moments of pause to reflect upon the verbal narrative; to make a musical metaphor: they don't act as equal partners in a duet—instead they are backup singers.

The standard reading experience of an illustrated book is one of two parties (the book and the reader), along the lines of the second book experience outlined previously between the book and the emergent or newly independent reader.

This isn't to say that illustrated books cannot or should not be used as read-aloud material. Indeed, none of the ideas I present here are offered in a prescriptive spirit. Instead, this discussion of form and corresponding standard uses seeks to offer up ideas for evaluation and practice in the reading of diverse forms of children's literature.

After all, the goal of all this thinking about children's literature is, in the end, to connect children with literature. Children's literature demands a certain awkward remove from its intended audience: adults write, illustrate, publish, and often buy the books that children read, and adults often read books out loud for children to hear. This is a tremendous power, and it's one that we adults should be eager to give up by encouraging the child's emergent life as an independent reader. As outlined in the discussion about the Whole Book Approach and reading picture books *with* children instead of reading them *to* children, this can happen within the triangular picture book experience by allowing the child

who is listening to the text to become a partner in the reading of the image as he or she constructs the composite text.

Picture books are often identified as the books that teach children to read. Certainly, some picture books can serve this function of the beginning reader book with controlled text and other devices to make decoding and comprehension accessible to new readers. But I think that the primary function of the picture book is to teach children to love books. This may sound a little hokey, but the picture book is the entry point to the world of books in general, while the beginning reader is the entry to independent book experiences. The "I Can Read It Myself" logo featuring the Cat in the Hat, which is placed on the upper-right-hand corner of one beginning reader book imprint, is a marketing device worthy of attention.

Meanwhile, picture books needn't be left behind as the independent reader moves on to longer sustained verbal narrative—their potential as an art form can extend the picture book's place in a reader's life indefinitely. Nor should we throw up our arms and vow to never read an illustrated book, a nonillustrated book, or a beginning reader book out loud again. We should simply be mindful of evaluating the merits of all the possible book experiences as we evaluate the books themselves in all their different forms. ☺

*Portions of this paper were included in the keynote address presented by Megan Lambert at the 2006 Integrated Arts Conference at Plymouth State University titled "Silly, Subversive, Serious Stuff: The Work of Dr. Seuss" and in workshop sessions at the same conference titled, "The Dr. Is In: Dr. Seuss in the Classroom."*

## References and Notes

1. Avi, "Future Classics," *The Horn Book Magazine* 76, no. 6 (Nov. /Dec. 2000): 647.
2. Kathleen T. Horning, *From Cover to Cover: Evaluating and Reviewing Children's Books* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), 122.

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# ¡Celebración!

## The Tenth Anniversary Celebration of the Pura Belpré Award

Sandra Ríos Balderrama

*This presentation was written and presented by Sandra Ríos Balderrama in honor of Oralia Garza de Cortés, Toni Bissessar, and Linda Perkins, on June 25, 2006, at the ALA Annual Conference in New Orleans, Louisiana. It will be published, in part, in REFORMA's Winter 2006 newsletter.*

Let the circle be unbroken. Let the circle get bigger and sway this way and that, and when the circle gets smaller as it sometimes does, let the new generations join it, take it, tug it . . . where they must.

A heartfelt welcome to each of you—I say heartfelt because the founding of this award was the work of the heart. Please allow me to introduce the four courageous hearts—Oralia Garza de Cortés, Toni Bissessar, Linda Perkins, and myself. Please stand and take a bow. Yes!

These hearts are very courageous and *muy vivos*—very much alive and beating, and these hearts, they did not take no for an answer, and these hearts, they did not take no for an alternative, and when they were asked “Why should we do it?” they asked back “How will we do it?” And when they were asked “How will we do it?” they said “Yes is how we will do it!”

When they were asked if this would set a precedent for other groups wanting *their* own award, they paused, and then answered, “Well then, yes. Open the gates!”

When they were asked “How we will find the money?” they answered, “We will start by passing the hat.”

And when someone said “but,” they said “and,” and when someone asked “What if?” they said, “Yes. Yes. Yes . . . ah, yes.”

What if? . . . What if? . . . What if?”

What if there was a book that was written by a Latina that told her story, her view, her memory? Our story, our view, our memory?

What if there was a book that was illustrated by a Latino that painted his picture? Sculpted his memory? Put into collage his view? Our picture, our memory, our view?

Today there is no “what if?” There is you, and you, and you. ¡Presente! Present.

The *if* is here . . . this moment.

Again, a warm welcome to each of you here this day—this day that is a dream come true. And welcome to the great grandmother that is leaning against your right arm. And welcome to the great grandfather whose hat is blocking your view. And welcome to the library children—not yet born—that are giggling and cross-legged to the side of you. And welcome to the aunties, the uncles, the mentors, the good friends who are here and to our special guest—Pura Belpré.

A welcome to the spirit of Pura Belpré!

She is sitting just behind you, just in front of you, just behind me. Do you feel her? Do you see her?

She is east, west, north, south. She is at our center. Pura is here now. Pura was there then.

Pura—a *puertorriqueña* of *mestiza* heritage—an *Africana Latina*, *Latina Africana*, a woman, a librarian, a storyteller, a folklorist, a puppeteer who never forgot her roots, her island Borinquen, her people, her children.

And her name, which means “pure,” reminds us of:

- the purity of clear water purpose;
- the purity of unclouded intent;
- the purity when sweet justice is served;
- the purity of joy when a child is affirmed, validated, and included; and
- the purity of spirit, spirit of service.

Because this award—the Pura Belpré Award—was not born out of competition and not so much even for a place at the table. It was born out of service; *¡Servicio!* It was born out of a love for the communities we are part of, that we come from . . . be it Texas, be it California, be it New York, the Midwest, the Heartland, the

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South, the Northwest, city, country, field, or concrete sidewalk.

It was born because in Austin, Texas, Oralia was being asked by mothers in her community for books that reflected their children, their language, their experiences.

It was born because I needed children's picture books that reflected the Latino children and Latino families who were coming to preschool, bilingual, and evening story hours at the South Berkeley branch of the Berkeley Public Library in California.

Yes, we have our oral tradition, but where? Where were the written stories that would affirm our children's existence? Where were the illustrations that would feast our children's eyes?

We are a visual people. We are an oral people, and we are a literate people, and our hands enjoy the feel, the touch, the texture of the page, of the paper, of a book, of books. . . .

Ah . . . ah . . . Yes. Yes. Yes. What if?

Inclusion creates a circle, and there is power in a circle.

The moon, the sun, the globe, the nest of a bird, the shell of a turtle.

If you are sitting in this audience, then you are in a circle and interdependent upon one another to see that Latino children's literature written by Latino authors and painted by Latino illustrators gets into the hands of the global child:

- in the library;
- in the classroom;
- in the field;
- on the sidewalk;
- on the porch;
- on the playground;
- under a tree;
- under moonlight;

- with a flashlight;
- in her backpack, in his back pocket; and
- with the child, with the child, always . . . *yes!*

You are interdependent upon me, and I upon you. I want to thank you for this interdependency, for how we interweave our roles and our callings—up to this day—the day that we celebrate ten years of the Pura Belpré Award.

Coretta Scott King Award leaders, jury members past and present, and founders—and I see Ms. Henrietta Smith. Although Oralia, Toni, Linda, and I were asked about setting a precedent, we did not set the first. Oh no, no, no. It was you. And without your model in our forefront, where would we be?

Our cultures are interconnected, and the African heritage is a part of who Latinos are. Let no one tell you any different. Thank you for paving a path!

Thank you for providing books with illustrations that had shades of brown and black.

Thank you for your support, encouragement, mentoring, and for simply walking this road on behalf of your *cultura*. Please stand up and take a bow.

To the authors and illustrators of the Pura Belpré Award and Honor Books, dear authors, dear illustrators. Did you know that each of you is a dream come true? Yes, you are! Yes, you are.

You are the tickle and trickle and ferocity of star dust. You are the beam of a full moon upon sleeping, dreaming eyes that were dreaming books, books, and more books . . . written by Latino authors, illustrated by Latino illustrators . . . books that take a place in the world as a story told by one's "own."

*Yes!* We are a global people!

*Yes!* We are a multicultural people!

*Yes!* We want our imaginations and creativity to fly unfettered; however, we

could not open the window until our books were written and illustrated by you. We needed you to paint our stories. We needed you to tell our pictures.

You tell our life. You speak our life. You give our lives expression, meaning, and color.

And the dreamers—Oralia, Toni, Linda, and myself—we bear witness today of how a dream blends into real life.

Authors and illustrators, you are the dream visitors and dream messengers. Please stand up and take a bow.

Publishers, distributors, and vendors, like the little red hen that worked so hard, Oralia, Toni, Linda, and I asked one another, "Who will write the books? Who will illustrate the books and then who will publish and market the books? Who will give the new illustrators and authors a chance?"

Some of you needed us to convince you of the demand. Some of you needed us to tell you about the market. And some of you did not need proof. You went on the knowledge that cannot be quantified but only seen and felt—when you walk the streets, when you go to the laundromat, when you buy your fruit at the local *mercado*. And you did it. . . . Here you are, and here you have been for the last ten years, and I know you will continue to do what is right.

You are the blood that circulates the books here, there, and around the globe. Please stand up and take a bow.

Librarians! Ah, librarians. Your part in the grand circle is sacred beyond words.

You bring equity of access to life. You give diversity meaning. You are the noble profession, the culture keepers and disseminators. You are inclusive. You are nonjudgmental.

You care not if a child who enters the library is a citizen or not. You care not if a child who enters the library is "legal" or not. There is no border—only an open door. You want quality books, and you know quality literature. You respect what you might not understand. You share



the books, display the books, use the books, all year long and all year 'round because we are not a holiday, we are an "everyday!"

And you, more than anyone, understand this. You are the culture keepers. Dreamkeepers.

Please stand and take a bow.

In 1987, I met Oralia at an EMIERT program in San Francisco. She and Louise Zwick presented the program *Children's Materials and Programs Which Work: Hispanic and Asian-American Experiences*. I was so excited, enchanted, and mesmerized that I went up to Oralia and introduced myself to her. We discovered that we were both members of REFORMA and ALSC and that we were both children's librarians, both Latinas, living in two different parts of the country.

In 1989, Oralia and I met at ALA Annual Conference in Dallas to begin to move from conversation to planning. We began to speak seriously about establishing an award that would affirm Latino children by encouraging Latino authors and Latino illustrators to publish. It seemed to us that REFORMA and ALSC might be natural partners with different but complementary expertise.

In 1990, I met with Linda, the newly elected ALSC president-elect and coordinator of Children's Services at the Berkeley Public Library. We met for lunch in a Mexican-American diner in South Berkeley. I asked Linda how she thought ALSC might receive the idea of being a partner with REFORMA in order to establish an award that promoted and affirmed the diversity of Latino culture in children's literature. With Linda's encouragement and knowledge of ALSC and ALA protocols, the feasibility committees began.

In 1993, Toni, Oralia, and I sat on a second-floor balcony at a restaurant right here in New Orleans and as the moon rose in the night sky, we began a list of possible names for this proposed award:

The Cesar Chavez Award? The Vivan Los Niños Award? The Dolores Huerta Award?

We wanted an all-inclusive name that would represent a wide array of cultures within a culture. After many more names were scribbled on a cocktail napkin, after our creativity began to wane, Toni asked, "Oralita, Sandrita, have you ever heard of Pura Belpré?"

Well *mujeres*, let me tell you who she was. She was a librarian, the first Latina librarian of the New York Public Library, a puppeteer, she was *Borinqueña*, a folklorist, a writer, and she believed in library services

*The moon shone brighter. The breezes stopped. Our hearts paused. We found the path that Pura started on in the 1920s, and we began walking.*

to Latino children. I got a chance to know her myself and work with her."

The moon shone brighter. The breezes stopped. Our hearts paused. We found the path that Pura started on in the 1920s, and we began walking. When we notified Linda, she smiled knowingly—for she knew of Pura's books—and thought the proposed name was an excellent and wonderful idea.

In 1994, Oralia and I worked hard into the night at ALA Midwinter Meeting in Los Angeles typing out the very first drafts of the criteria for the selection process, the award process, and for the award itself—\$1,000 each, a plaque, a medal, and a *Celebración* program to accompany the awards. Linda, by then president of ALSC, made "herstory" by appearing before the REFORMA board of directors. Mario Gonzalez was the president of National REFORMA. Oralia and I made appearances before the ALSC board.

In 1996, the first selection jury met. The first award was given in Austin at the

first REFORMA National Conference. In 1998, the first *Celebración* occurred in Washington D.C.

In 1999–2000, Toni, then president of National REFORMA, and Carolyn Ward, president of ALSC, sought to create and fund a medal for the award. Yolanda Bonitch sought photos of Pura Belpré. Beckie Brazell suggested Emanuel Martinez, a sculptor in Colorado who specialized in bronze. Martinez created and cast the medal of Pura Belpré.

In 2000, the first Pura Belpré medal was given to the winning author and winning illustrator. Past winners from 1996

and 1998 were also presented with the medals.

On June 25, 2006, here we are in New Orleans, where the award was named. Today, we celebrate ten years of the Pura Belpré Award.

From 1987 to 2006, there is a road. Do you see it? It is lined with people, and it travels around this room. The road travels out those two doors behind you and back to the year 1920 when Pura Belpré arrived in New York City.

It is a road of time travel and connection. And today we stop on the road to replenish, to nourish ourselves, to offer gratitude to one another, to remember the word "service," and to remember Pura Belpré. Pura Belpré. Pura, Pura, Pura.

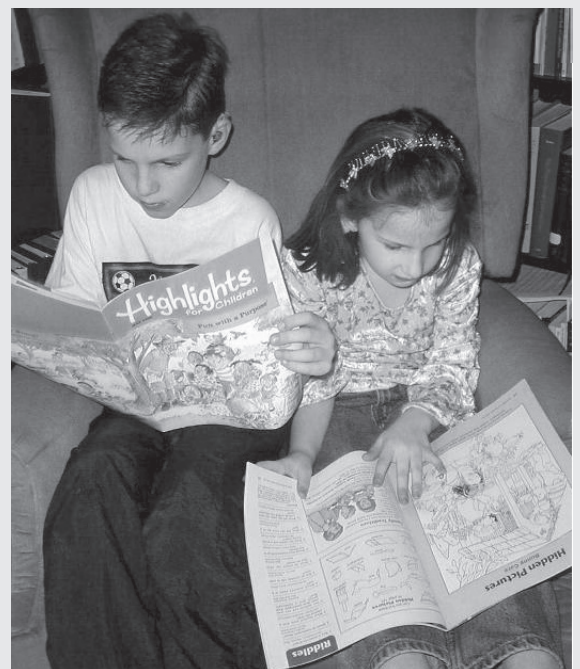
No. No. No. There is no need for *you* to take a bow. Our! Beloved! *Querida! Doña!* Pura Belpré.

It is we who humbly bow to you. ☺

# The Scoop on Children's Magazines



*The following views on children's magazines are based on a presentation at the ALA Annual Conference in New Orleans on June 24, 2006.*



# Children's Magazines and Collection Development

Susan Patron

Magazines for kids pose one of the great conundrums in juvenile collection development in public libraries. Of all the material we provide, magazines are probably the most ephemeral, expensive, flimsy, difficult to shelve, attractive to steal, and inviting to mark up. We could just ignore these magazines, but with an estimated readership of sixty million, we do so at our peril. As with adults, kids enjoy the browsability, informality, topic-focused approach, and glossy look of magazines. A broad collection tells young patrons that the library is responsive to them.

Magazines can be key to converting a blasé reader into an avid one. For passions ranging from scouting to archeology, from oceanography to fashion, and from crafts to pets, there is a kid-friendly magazine (and companion Web site) devoted to the topic, with a noncurricular look and approach. These are fun to read, they fuel readers' interests, and they don't have the stigma of textbooks. That said, some of the best magazines for kids also bolster the school curriculum and provide timely, accessible, and current information on an ever-changing world.

Search engines and databases such as Primary Search and Kids InfoBits, designed for both elementary school libraries and public libraries, provide access to the rich contents of many children's magazines. Primary Search (EBSCO), for example, offers full text for more than sixty popular magazines as well as indexing and abstracts for nearly one hundred magazines.

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Examples of publications covered in Primary Search include: *Appleseeds*, *Boys' Life*, *Cobblestone*, *Cricket*, *Highlights for Children*, *Hopscotch*, *Jack & Jill*, *Ladybug*, *Ranger Rick*, *Science World*, *Spider*, *SuperScience*, *Time for Kids*, and *Turtle*. Kids InfoBits (Gale) is a database developed for beginning researchers in kindergarten through fifth grade. It features a developmentally appropriate, visually graphic interface. The curriculum-related, age-appropriate, full-text content covers geography, current events, the arts, science, health, people, government, history, sports, and more.

How to select magazines kids will flock to the library to read? My survey, "Miles of Magazines," (*School Library Journal* 50, no. 3 [Mar. 2004]: 52–57) provides an annotated list of more than fifty English-language magazines for toddlers through eleven-year-olds.

The list is based on the magazine collection of the children's literature department of the Los Angeles Public Library. This much-used collection varies widely in themes, from health issues to advice columns, from creative writing and art to academic subjects.

Nearly all these publications offer interactivity in the form of puzzles and teasers, and they entice readers to visit wholesome Web sites.

In examining current issues, I found all the signs of repeated handling: pulpy, worn pages; turned-down corners; subscription cards removed; earnest endeavors in pencil and pen to solve puzzles and conquer mazes. For a powerful tool that

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# The Scoop on Children's Magazines

## Why I Love Children's Magazines

Lou Waryncia

I love magazines. I can't remember a time when I didn't love magazines. I loved magazines so much that I began publishing my own when I was in the seventh grade. I wrote, edited, and produced the magazine monthly throughout high school.

It would have been so much easier with a computer. But I started out with carbon paper and a pencil. My grandfather was so impressed with my work that he bought me a mimeograph machine, and I went into mass production. I had a high circulation of thirty-five; it killed me to cease publication when I went off to college.

Those "magazines" were just part of the love affair that I continue to enjoy today. I studied and worked on magazines in college (I even worked in the periodical department of my college library for four years) and have spent the majority of my professional life hopefully perfecting my skills as a magazine editor. Today I'm fortunate enough to guide my "six children," the magazines I oversee for Cobblestone Publishing. I guess you could call me a magazine junkie.

I believe we all love magazines. And I'm here to convince you to love magazines more than ever before. Why? Because even people who don't like to read love magazines.

There are many reasons, probably as many as there are magazines. And that's a good place to start. We love magazines because there is probably one written and designed for just about any interest or taste.

According to the Magazine Publisher's Association, there are currently more than 17,000 magazines published in the United States alone. Twenty years ago, that number was only 2,000. That's almost a 900 percent increase.



*Lou Waryncia is Editorial Director at Cobblestone Publishing, a division of Carus Publishing, publisher of Cobblestone, Cricket, Babybug, and eleven other children's magazines.*

Considering the competition from television, radio, the Internet, and books—and everything else in our increasingly busy lives—the growth in magazines is amazing. Twenty years ago, naysayers predicted the death of magazines. Today, the numbers prove them wrong. And the reason they were wrong is because the magazine industry used what it does best to succeed. It diversified. And that diversity fuels our love of magazines.

There is more variety in magazines for kids today than ever before, and the category is growing. Twenty years ago, my company published only two magazines as separate companies. Today, we publish fourteen as a combined entity. I will give you a rundown of these magazines and why we publish them—and why you should have them in your collection and encourage your customers to read them.

### The Cobblestone-Cricket Connection

In 2000, Cobblestone Publishing and the Cricket Magazine Group joined forces as Carus Publishing. Our similar philosophies and variety of fiction and nonfiction magazines made us a perfect match. Our mission? To provide young people with the highest quality reading material and make it enjoyable, too.

Cobblestone Publishing has produced magazines for young people since 1980. Our philosophy is that nonfiction, whether it deals with history, culture, archeology, or science, should be a combination of fascinating pleasure reading and factual resource material that educates, enlightens, and entertains. Cobblestone's magazines let young people experience the pleasure of reading through an accurate, fascinating, and authoritative resource that's appropriate for the classroom, the home, and ever more so, the library.

The Cricket Magazine Group jumped onto the scene in 1973 with *Cricket* magazine and its emphasis on high-quality literature. The commitment of the magazine's founder, Marianne Carus, was to create a children's magazine that would instill a love of reading in children by presenting lively, witty, cheerful material, always with a sense of humor. That mis-



sion continues today, more than thirty years later.

Seven years later in 1980, and a little farther east in New Hampshire, a road symbolizing the pathway to reading and understanding brought forth *Cobblestone*, the history magazine for young people. Two teachers who were looking for a way to promote reading and history to kids developed the idea. For more than twenty-five years, the magazine has explored all aspects of the American experience, but in more detail than you'll find in most books, and in a much more creative and fun way.

Through the years, *Cobblestone* has covered everything from the obvious—Abraham Lincoln and Gettysburg—to the unheralded and underappreciated—Harlem Renaissance and Transcendentalism. We like to say that *Cobblestone* isn't just *about* American history, but it *is* American history. (Carolyn Yoder, now at *Highlights*, skillfully guided the magazine for thirteen years.)

Through the years, both divisions of our company started to expand. *Ladybug* came to life in 1990 for two- to six-year-olds based on a character in *Cricket*, followed by *Spider* for six- to nine-year-olds in 1994. Both employ the same high-quality literature and illustrations as *Cricket*, but for young readers. They were joined by *Babybug*, a looking and listening magazine to read to the very youngest children, and *Cicada*, which follows the *Cricket* formula but for older kids, ages fourteen and up.

Today, these magazines are affectionately known as the “bug” books. And you can spend your entire childhood enjoying their contents, because they are designed as stepping stones to reading enjoyment from birth to young adulthood.

Marianne Carus wanted to broaden her literary reach and later teamed up with the Smithsonian Institution on three magazines that mix fiction with nonfiction on everything about exploration and discovery. These magazines include *Click* (for ages three to seven), *Ask* (for ages seven through ten), and *Muse* (for

ages nine through fourteen). Once again, the magazines follow a step approach so you can keep on enjoying as you grow.

The Cobblestone line of magazines went through similar growing pains. Expanding its scope on history, we added *Calliope* and *Faces* magazines to our family. *Calliope's* world history focus delves into what life was like for earlier peoples and how those lives are relevant today. *Faces* brings the world of today into view by investigating places and people from around the globe and how their lives affect us. Both magazines give readers a clear understanding of other cultures and foster an appreciation for other times and places.

Learning about how science affects our daily lives is the mission behind our *Odyssey*. *Odyssey* reveals secrets of the world around us through a fascinating blend of information, hands-on activities, interviews, monthly star charts, and Stargazing with Jack Horkheimer, an innovative learning cartoon based on the award-winning PBS television program.

In 1998, Cobblestone Publishing decided it was time that even younger kids got to experience our content, and we launched *AppleSeeds* for children ages seven to ten. *AppleSeeds* utilizes the theme-based approach similar to all Cobblestone publications but is more multidisciplinary, covering history, science, and the arts. *AppleSeeds* grabs readers' interest by employing just the right combination of visuals, text, and curiosity. Its mission is to instill in younger children the love of reading about real things that will be carried on through adulthood.

In 2000, we expanded again by acquiring *Dig* magazine. Originally published by *Archaeology*, *Dig* deals with all things related to archeology, which means all things about the human experience throughout history. We feel the magazine lets kids explore history, science, and the world all with a little dirt, and don't we all like to play in the dirt?

All of the Cobblestone magazines' content is also available online at [www.cobblestoneonline.net](http://www.cobblestoneonline.net). You can search, read, and print any article from the

magazines. You can also use the search function as an index to our content. And starting this fall, we will begin adding the material from the *Cricket* division to this database.

What makes all of our company's magazines attractive is their unbiased and accurate content. Our magazines get produced through the efforts of very dedicated staff members and hundreds of the best writers, illustrators, and editors. We look for quality first. We establish quality and credibility by looking for the best. We work with consulting editors, writers, historians, professors, museum curators, teachers, and others who are noted authorities in their particular field of study. This quality-focused approach has earned our magazines praise and awards from the Parents' Choice Foundation, the Freedoms Foundation, and the Educational Press Association of America. Three of our magazines have won the Golden Lamp Award from the Educational Press Association, naming them outstanding young adult publication of the year.

We also like to partner with people and places to create innovative issues for our readers. We work with the Smithsonian Institute monthly to create *Muse*, *Ask*, and *Click*. We've also partnered with the White House Historical Association, the Getty Center, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Historic Jamestown, Williamsburg, the Peace Corps, and Doctors without Borders (to name only a few) to create issues. Altogether, our magazines offer excellent resources for general reading, research, or projects, or simply to enhance a young person's overall knowledge.

So, why should you as librarians encourage young people to seek out magazines? Well, once again, because people—especially kids—love magazines. Magazines can entice kids in ways that books often can't—through graphics, a variety of topics, and less intimidating content in length and subject matter. Magazines are colorful, accessible, and inviting to readers.

- They provide young people with new and interesting reading material on a regular basis.

- They are cutting edge. The most up-to-date information about just about any topic is found in magazines.
- They motivate kids to read for information often without notice.
- They encourage a regular monthly reading habit through visual imagery and topical appeal.
- They encourage kids to become active, lifelong readers.
- Most of all, magazines make reading (and learning) fun.

*Magazines give us comfort. They fill a need. They are truly like members of our family. They visit us on a regular basis, we get upset if they don't arrive—or arrive hurt or damaged, and they provide us with an outlet for our fantasies and creativity.*

As an editor, I have a lot of editor friends. I asked several of them why we love magazines. One said, "Magazines often become like a family member. We look to them for advice, inspiration, validation, and for companionship. They're a built-in friend, that 'voice' we have almost everything in common with."

Another added:

Magazines allow you to feed your interest in a particular area. People have come to value the voice of a magazine like never before. It's primarily because publishers have targeted their audiences like never before. My goal as an editor is to make the reader anxious for the next issue, to make him or her excited about picking up the magazine. It's important to get that "I can't wait till the next issue arrives" response from your reader.

Editors do that by giving readers what

they want—or what editors want the reader to want. Magazines, in the purist sense, are meant to be predictable. Readers enjoy and want the same things issue after issue. But in reality, magazines are often innovators in the publishing field. They are a reflection of our society and often zero in on the changes that are just around the corner months and years ahead of other media. In fact, TV, books, and even the Internet have borrowed heavily from the creative and visual structures of magazines.

On a practical level, there are other reasons why we love magazines. Magazines have the opportunity to offer more than

one voice, the perspective of many different authors, yet in reality each magazine generally has one voice—that is, the overall formula or tone or mission of the magazine. It's this variety, yet sameness, that keeps us going back month after month to our favorite magazines.

Magazines are also inexpensive, practical, compact, and easy to carry. The cost of most books today equals or surpasses the cost of a single magazine subscription. Generally you get twelve issues of magazine for the same cost as one book.

The combination of information and entertainment also plays into our enjoyment of magazines. They are one of the best ways to keep up on what's going on in the world, or learn or enhance a hobby or interest, or to pass time and relax.

Magazines and libraries have always had a love-hate relationship. But today libraries are becoming increasingly more important to all readers. The library is a

cornerstone for resources, scholarship, and reading. Magazines should be an important part of the library and should be considered an equal to books because they encourage reading.

Magazines also give us comfort. They fill a need. They are truly like members of our family. They visit us on a regular basis, we get upset if they don't arrive—or arrive hurt or damaged, and they provide us with an outlet for our fantasies and creativity.

Earlier, I referred to the magazines I work on as my "children." I know I look after and guide my publications as I would a child. I live and die by the material we publish. I'm crushed when a reader dislikes something we do. I think readers look at magazines somewhat the same.

Noted editor Barry Golson, who launched and edited many magazines, said in one of his editor's notes that magazines should treat readers the same way you treat a buddy. I like that sentiment a lot. I think readers would respond to that in almost every case.

Magazines are often overlooked for the "glory of the book." But magazines offer so many more avenues for readers. There's a diversity of material that keeps readers motivated, entertained, and always learning, all on a regular basis. With so many different types of magazines, there's something for every reader out there. Magazines give you more options.

Magazines can be high class, low class, simply crass, or about crabgrass. They're a reflection of who we are in our ever-changing, diverse society. And they let readers explore every idea under the sun. And that's not a bad place to be as a reader or someone who just wants to kick back with a friend—otherwise known as the magazine.

Thank you for your time. I hope you'll come to love magazines as much as I do. ☺

## Anatomy of a Magazine

Carolyn P. Yoder

Most people associate *Highlights* with the dentist or doctor office, but I'm here to emphasize how *Highlights* is equally at home in a library. My mission is to reveal to you what lies between its covers. This year, *Highlights* celebrates its sixtieth anniversary with more than one billion copies printed.

At sixty, *Highlights* is sometimes seen as a symbol of our country's past, but the magazine combines the past and the present and celebrates the future—kids!

*Highlights* was founded in 1946 by Garry Cleveland Myers, a child psychologist, and his wife, Caroline Clark Myers, an educator who researched literacy and child development.

The magazine's mission is found in every issue. This magazine of wholesome fun is dedicated to helping children grow in basic skills and knowledge, in creativeness, in ability to think and reason, in sensitivity to others, in high ideals, and in worthy ways of living—for children are the world's most important people. Its motto is still the same—fun with a purpose.

The journey through *Highlights* begins in Honesdale, Pennsylvania, where the editorial offices are. Here's how an average issue breaks down—forty-three pages in all; every page is put to good use and has no advertising.

The inside cover highlights the month of the issue and points to things within the magazine. The inside back cover usually is a picture puzzle. The editor of this page said, "This is the page where we can do several activities within one—one illustration for a number of activities."



*Carolyn P. Yoder is Senior Editor of history and world cultures at Highlights for Children magazine. This article is based on a PowerPoint presentation prepared for the ALA Annual Conference in New Orleans.*

The contents page not only lists the contents of the magazine but also breaks down the magazine into three segments—things that are fun to read, things that are fun to do, and fun things to read and see from the readers themselves.

The contents page also designates reading levels—prereading, easy, and advanced. (The target audience of *Highlights* is six- to nine-year-olds and has something for two- to twelve-year-olds.) It also points out items that stress creative thinking, moral values, and if there is an interactive version at [www.highlightskids.com](http://www.highlightskids.com).

### Familiar Faces

As children turn the pages, they'll meet all kinds of people, places, and things. Some are familiar. How can we talk about *Highlights* without talking about Goofus and Gallant? They've been updated throughout the years. The duo contrasts thoughtful, kind, safe, honest behavior with its opposite. Without being told "should," kids can see which behavior is preferable.

The Timbertoes is a feature for beginning readers with short, simple sentences with illustrations that help make meanings clear. The stories emphasize family fun, cooperation, humor, and imagination. The Thinking Page introduces a situation and an accompanying illustration and asks questions, for the most part open-ended ones. Mixed Pages include short activities, jokes, and exercises. And rebus pages are designed for prereaders and beginning readers. A rebus tells a short, satisfying story, often with a humorous conclusion. Concrete nouns, numbers, and pictures are illustrated and repeated throughout the story so that prereaders can help read the story, learning left-to-right and top-to-bottom progression. The rebus also builds word recognition by showing the word next to the picture. For a bilingual rebus the sentence structure is almost the same in each language, allowing the child to figure out the meaning. The very familiar Hidden Pictures page—perhaps the most recognized part of the magazine—is usually the most popular. When I tell people I work on *Highlights*, most people respond, "I love the hidden pictures!"



Editor Chris Clark greets every reader and makes a strong personal connection to them. She usually talks about something in her life—past and present—and how it relates to something in the issue.

The first segment is devoted to fun things to read.

- Poetry, which increases appreciation for the beauty and playfulness of language, shares thoughtful and surprising ways to look at the world, and inspires kids to try their hand at poetry.
- Stories, short and long, for young and old.
- Fiction for younger and advanced readers. Myers said, “A good story captures the interest of the listener or the reader right away. It makes him listen or read almost breathlessly to the end. It has plot, purpose, and suspense.”
- Ask Arizona is a popular story series in which fictitious kids write to a character named Arizona and ask her for advice. In answering their letters,

Arizona usually shares a story about a time when she was in a similar situation, then gives advice based on what she's learned from the experiences.

- Nonfiction articles on many topics including:
  - Science. The science editor said, “We put a high value on articles that show science as a process, articles that follow a scientist or a group of scientists as they try to solve one of nature's mysteries. We also like to publish science articles about animals.” An article might follow researchers who study such animals. The article may tell the adventures of only one day, but information about the animals and the research will arise naturally in the course of the action, so our readers will learn something about both. All articles are reviewed by experts.
  - The arts.
  - History.
  - The world: peoples and customs.

- Sports.
- Adventure. The magazine looks for articles that go beyond the family vacation—articles that have a strong focus, not “we went here and did this” but something that reveals the meaning behind travel or the reason for the adventure.
- Crafts and activities.

The third segment of the magazine is devoted to fun things—contributions from child readers. For example, *Highlights* might ask kids to write or draw their “dream” vehicles and also might ask them to think about the dreams they had that made them laugh out loud. And we always include a page devoted to their writings and artwork.

The magazine also includes letters—general and science-oriented—and their answers. These are answered by Jack Myers, the eldest son of the founders and a scientist at the University of Texas in Austin. He receives about thirty letters per month. ☺

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## CHILDREN'S MAGAZINES AND COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT, continued from page 39

enhances literacy and increases library usage, invest in magazines!

If I had to choose only a dozen titles for preschoolers through fifth grade, assuming the collection would be for a branch library in a diverse city such as Los Angeles, I would include:

*Ask.* Carus/Cricket Magazine Group. How the world works and how discoveries are made. (9 issues, \$32.97; [www.cricketmag.com](http://www.cricketmag.com))

*Calliope: Exploring World History.* Carus/Cobblestone (9 issues, \$29.95; [www.cobblestonepub.com](http://www.cobblestonepub.com))

*ChickaDEE.* Bayard. Animals, peoples, and places. (10 issues, \$33.99; [www.owlkids.com](http://www.owlkids.com))

*CousteauKids.* The Cousteau Society. Cousteau expeditions, sea creatures, and so on. (bimonthly, \$20; [www.cousteaukids.org/dolphinlog/main.html](http://www.cousteaukids.org/dolphinlog/main.html))

*Creative Kids: The National Voice for Kids.* Prufrock Pr. Stories and artwork by and for kids. (4 issues, \$19.95; [www.prufrock.com](http://www.prufrock.com))

*Cricket.* Cricket Magazine Group. Folk tales, fiction, poetry, and so on. (monthly, \$35.97; [www.cricketmag.com](http://www.cricketmag.com))

*Crinkles.* Libraries Unlimited. People, places, and things. (bimonthly, \$30; [www.crinkles.com](http://www.crinkles.com))

*Highlights for Children: Fun with a Purpose.* Highlights for Children. Human

interest, science, culture, history, and so on. (monthly, \$26.04; [www.highlights.com](http://www.highlights.com))

*Kahani: A South Asian Literary Magazine for Children.* Kahani. Stories, science, and so on. (4 issues, \$20; [www.kahani.com](http://www.kahani.com))

*National Geographic Kids.* National Geographic Society. Nature themes. (10 issues, \$15; [www.nationalgeographic.com/ngkids](http://www.nationalgeographic.com/ngkids))

*Ranger Rick.* National Wildlife Federation. Nature themes. (monthly, \$19.95; [www.nwf.org](http://www.nwf.org))

*Zootles.* Wildlife Education Ltd. Animals. (bimonthly, \$19.95; [www.zoobooks.com](http://www.zoobooks.com)) ☺

# Children's Library Services in Sweden

## A Study Visit to the Solna Library

Heather Norquist

In September 2005, I received a grant from the Swedish Institute and the Consulate General of Sweden to study library services to children in Sweden. I was interested in comparing library collections, services, and programming to what we provide where I work in Santa Cruz, California.

I chose the Solna, Sweden, library for my research project through a friend, Gunilla Nilsson, who works there as a children's librarian. Nilsson was kind enough to offer to share her apartment with me for a week, so I was able to get a feeling for what it's like to live and work as a youth services librarian in Sweden.

### Children's Literature Celebrated

Throughout my two weeks overseas, I was repeatedly impressed by the status children's literature has in Sweden. A picture of author Selma Lagerlöf and an illustration from *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils* (Doubleday, 1907–1911) illustrate the country's 20 krona bill. A Pippi Longstocking ballet was being performed at the Royal Opera House in celebration of the sixtieth anniversary of the book's publication, and author Astrid Lindgren's name came up in conversation more often than that of the king. High-quality films based on Swedish children's books are on television in the evenings, and newborns are presented with the gift of a book on their first visit to the pediatrician.

In their article on children's culture published by the Swedish Institute, Pia Huss and Katta Nordenfalk state, "Many local councilors responsible for the arts consider fairy-tales, nursery rhymes and children's song so crucial to a child's linguistic development that they rank access to literature as a human right to be offered all children, regardless of whether their parents are interested in culture or not."<sup>1</sup>



**Heather Norquist** is Youth Services Librarian at Santa Cruz (Calif.) Public Libraries.



The view of the library from the mall.

On a Monday morning, I met with Nilsson at the Solna *Stadsbibliotek* (Public Library).<sup>2</sup> Solna, a ten-minute subway ride north of Stockholm, is a town of 60,000.

The Solna Library is not a branch of the Stockholm Library but its own entity. Solna has one main library and one branch in the Bergshamra district. The main library is three stories of public space with one floor of staff offices at the top. Swedish architect Per Åstradsson designed the library, and it features typical Swedish décor, including light wood and white walls. One wall is all glass, providing plenty of natural light.

Built in 1964 and remodeled in 1998, the main library adjoins a large shopping mall, Solna Centrum. Its holdings include a collection of 250,000 books, an extensive music CD collection, and fifteen Internet terminals for public use. There are also art display spaces in adjoining rooms throughout the library.<sup>3</sup>

### From the Mall to the Stacks

The children's department on the third floor is accessible via the mall, and there are self-checkout machines at the circulation desk near the entrance. Both children and adults seemed

to be very self-sufficient in using the self-checkout machines, but staff was there to help when needed and to assist with CD checkout.

Library cards can be issued to children at any age, but parents are responsible for fines until children reach eighteen. When kids start school at age seven, there is an organized process in which

teachers give information to librarians, and the teachers get the children's cards. The circulation period is four weeks.

The children's reference librarian's desk is located in the center of the room. There is a meeting room where children's programming takes place, and a separate room for picture books with a circular, soft, comfy seating area where parents

can sit and read with their children. The walls have been decorated by a local artist using images from popular children's books painted on three-dimensional wood relief.

Near the reference desk are two display areas: one with Astrid Lindgren books and one of *En Bok för Alla* (A Book for All) books that can be purchased at the circulation desk.

*En Bok för Alla* is a government-sponsored program that publishes books and makes them available in hardcover for one-third the normal price. A committee of librarians, teachers, and publishers selects the titles, and the author must agree to make the book available at a reduced price.

The shelving is by subject, with areas for picture books (arranged by first letter of the author's last name only), fantasy, detective stories, foreign language books, nonfiction subject areas, audio books, and CDs. The shelving system is the *Sveriges Allmänna Biblioteksförening* (SAB) Classification system, which is similar to the Dewey Decimal System. Swedish libraries are beginning to convert to a new universal classification system based on plain language that's more intuitive to borrowers and designed to help them find books on the shelf more easily. Swedish librarians expect this system will be in place by 2007.

## Online Resources

The children's OPAC (*Barnkatalogen*) is obviously designed with children's best interests in mind.<sup>4</sup> The initial page displays a group of iconic images representing different genres of children's literature: a cat that changes to a dog for "Animals," a princess who turns into a toad for "Adventure," and a bouncing ball for "Sport." When users click on one of these icons, they see a list of twenty-five fiction and nonfiction titles along with a cover image and summary for each book and an age recommendation. Clicking on an individual title brings readers to the library OPAC and holdings information. There is also a clickable alphabet at the top of the screen, which leads to a list of subject terms beginning



The children's reference desk.



A wall of windows lets in plenty of light.



with that letter. This seems like a wonderful tool for new readers who may be unsure of spelling.

The children's OPAC also links to a page where readers can submit reviews, read other reviews, and access best lists. This page also contains links to children's literature Web sites, the online version of *Kamratposten* (a popular children's magazine), and a link to the children's ombudsman, the agency responsible for monitoring the interests and rights of young people.<sup>5</sup>

Children's books are selected by a committee of librarians, and purchased from a centralized private book distributor, *Bibliotekstjänst AB* (BTJ), which provides reviews and catalogs for selectors. They also process and catalog materials and maintain the catalog database used by the public libraries. BTJ's owners are *Svensk Biblioteksörening* (the Swedish Library Association) and KF Media. Their mission is "to actively contribute to a process of learning and reading in society, by way of helping the users to achieve experiences and knowledge, regardless of media or form and independent of time and place."<sup>6</sup> Books are purchased with a rebound, reinforced binding whenever possible.

The youth audio book collection includes 420 titles in several formats. Book and cassette sets—mostly picture books—are shelved together and packaged in a red binder portfolio. The youth collection also includes a selection of Digital Accessible Information System (DAISY) Books. These are actually computer programs that allow the user to navigate the talking book by paragraph, page, chapter, or heading. The user can also slow down or increase the speed of the speaker and repeat and review sentences. This format is especially useful for dyslexic students and children with other visual impairments.<sup>7</sup>

The juvenile video collection includes three hundred titles in VHS and DVD format. There is a large selection of Swedish children's films, as well as Disney and other American movies. Patrons must pay a fee (15 krona, about \$2 in the United States) to check out a video for one week.

Sweden has a growing immigrant population, including political refugees from many different countries. Government programs assist immigrants in the process of becoming integrated, including learning Swedish and gaining job skills. I was impressed by the number of books in many different languages I saw on the shelves in the children's department. Checking the OPAC, I found 7 children's titles in Amharik, 12 in Farsi, 24 in Arabic, 88 in Serbian, 429 in English, and 477 in Finnish, compared to 5,878 children's titles in Swedish.



A display at the library.

Two full-time youth librarians and two part-time assistants staff the children's area. Librarians also work at the reference desk and provide instruction on researching special topics for class visits when arranged two weeks in advance. Groups of teachers can "check out a librarian" by appointment to learn about the latest children's books, get advice on what books to use with their classes, and discuss research strategies for their class projects.

The Solna Library also has a unique position not found in most other libraries, a *Kulturpedagog* (library educator). Nina Nykvist is Solna Library's *Kulturpedagog*.<sup>8</sup> She trained as a preschool teacher and has a strong background in storytelling.

She did a library internship at university and proposed the position that she currently holds. She spends forty hours per week organizing and presenting programs and has no other library duties.

Nykvist is responsible for library programming for children ages two through ten. She presents two programs every day at different locations in Solna and Stockholm. Nykvist brings together books, storytelling, art, movies, and nature. Programs are limited by age group.

An example of a typical program is Nykvist's tree walk program. Children ages five through ten meet her at a local park where they study the trees, learn about the life of a tree, listen to tree tales, and learn how to research more about trees at the library.

Nykvist also performs outreach at preschools. The Solna Library received a grant to visit all of the preschools, give a storytime, and leave a bag of books for the center to keep. Some preschools had no books before this program. The library also presents a weekly film series for young children.

Preschool storytimes at the Solna Library are presented by staff from the *Solna*

*Kulturskola* (cultural school), who come to the library. The cultural school provides free classes to preschool children in such areas as dancing, and also provides after-school art, music, and theater classes for children ages seven to eleven who have paid a small fee.

Cultural school staff consult with librarians in selecting appropriate books for story time. On a Thursday morning, I visited the weekly preschool story time, presented by a trained musician and storyteller who works for the cultural school.<sup>9</sup> Storytimes take place on Thursdays at 10:15, and children must be at least three years old to attend.

On this Thursday, there were fifty-seven people (including ten adults). Because 85 percent of Swedish women return to work after staying home with their child for one year, most of the children came to the library with their daycare center.

The Solna children's room has a separate storytime room. As in all Swedish houses, children remove their shoes when they enter the library. The room was darkened, with a blue curtain behind the storyteller. When it was time to start, she asked the children "What do we do when we start the story time?" One child answered, "Light a candle."

The candle added a nice sense of ritual while the darkened room with light on the storyteller seemed to help the children to focus. She ended the storytime by giving the candle to a child to blow out.

## Library Branches Out

As I was researching library services to children in Sweden, I came across another activity supported by the *En Bok för Alla* enterprise in conjunction with two trade unions. The Read Me a Story, Dad program is offered in ten districts throughout Sweden but not yet in Solna. Through this program, fathers are reim-

bursed for attending meetings at the library during work hours. They meet an author and a literary educator to learn about the linguistic development their child is experiencing and what books are suitable for different age groups. Fathers leave the library with a selection of books for their child to keep, as well as a book for themselves.<sup>10</sup>

I left Solna with a new perspective and many new ideas on providing library services to children. I would especially like to pursue the idea of involving fathers in early literacy, taking storytime out on location, and making the OPAC more user-friendly to younger children.

I was also impressed by how similar my job is to that of Nilsson. Although the social systems we work within are quite different, it was interesting to note how similar our goals, problems, and issues are. We both have dealt with issues of low pay compared to required education, staff cutbacks due to budget changes, and the perception of children's librarians as having a lower status than adult services librarians.

We also shared a love of children's literature, a commitment to literacy, and love of our jobs. My research trip confirmed my love of being a children's librarian and the belief that I would not want to do anything else . . . unless it was in Sweden. ☺

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## Did You Know?

Solna is known for being the home of Sweden's national soccer stadium as well as the world's first national city park, Ekopark. It was also home to the Swedish film industry when Ingmar Bergman was making films in the 1940s through 1960s.

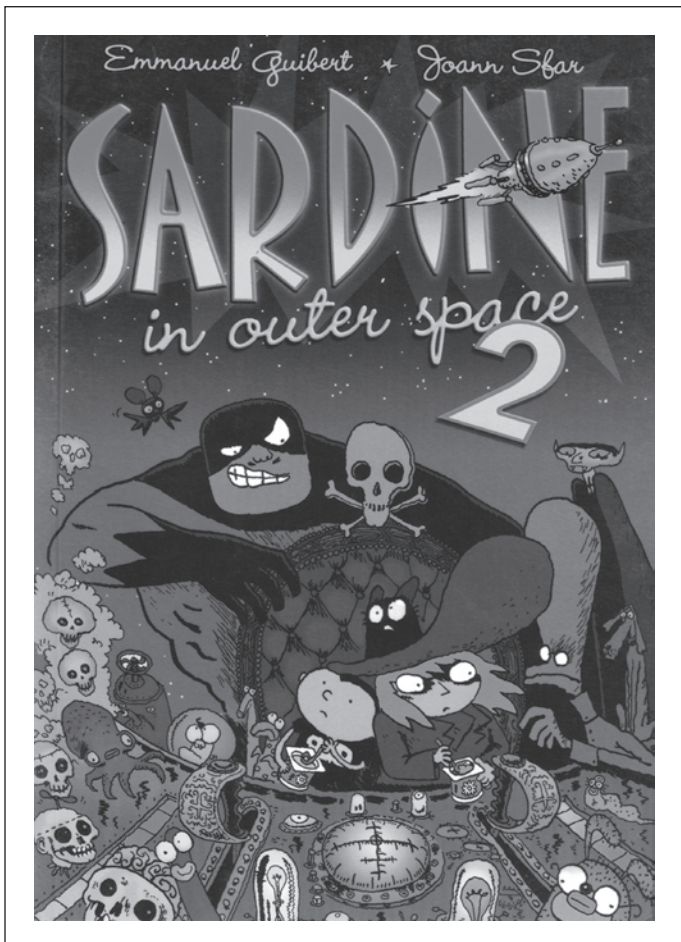
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## Graphic Novels for Children

### Should They Be Considered Literature?

*ALSC Research and Development Committee*



*Sardine in Outer Space 2* by Emmanuel Guibert, illustrated by Joann Sfar (FirstSecond Books, 2006).

What would your first response be if a children's edition of a work by William Shakespeare arrived in your library . . . as a graphic novel? Would you consider it another example of poor reading material or an innovative way to expose children to great literature?

Graphic novels are presented in the same style as comics—with art, dialogue, and narrative captions. The term “graphic novel” refers to a format, not a genre, and although the name suggests fiction, the content is sometimes nonfiction. Young adult librarians have been talking about graphic novels for years, but what about younger readers? Is reading a graphic novel a true reading experience? Should children's librarians encourage their use?

#### What Do We Know?

Graphic novels are growing in popularity, with phenomenal circulation rates.<sup>1</sup> Sales are up, and publishers are creating new graphic novel imprints just for children.<sup>2</sup> Boys show more interest in comics than girls, but this could change with the introduction of graphic novels targeted at girls.<sup>3</sup>

*The 2006–2007 Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC) Research and Development Committee includes Chair Eliza T. Dresang, Crystal Faris, Gaye Hinchliff, Bowie Kotrla, Ya-Ling Lu, Rita J. Smith, and Barbara Silverman, with the assistance of Ruth Clark.*



## New Media

The comic format has been compared with the media format of television and computers. One *Washington Post* writer called the graphic novel “a movie in graphics.”<sup>4</sup> Stephen Krashen considers both graphic novels and movies “new media.”<sup>5</sup> Allyson Lyga calls today’s students “Generation Visual,” who find plain text boring.<sup>6</sup> This might be true

*One educator argues that the graphic novel is not only an alternative to other visual media, but also it is essential for a literate democracy because it allows for real diversity by presenting alternative views.*

for reluctant readers, but for readers who enjoy new media, evidence shows they read more books and read higher-quality books.<sup>7</sup>

Additionally, a review of several media comparison studies led two researchers to conclude that the comic book may be more similar to television in the way it positively affects children’s cognitive growth.<sup>8</sup> Yet, they “doubt that the comic book is a less valuable medium than the book.”<sup>9</sup>

## Essential Alternative?

One educator argues that the graphic novel is not only an alternative to other visual media, it is essential for a literate democracy because it allows for real diversity by presenting alternative views.<sup>10</sup> Another suggests that by teaching the visual literacy of graphic novels, we can provide children with critical skills needed to filter manipulative, multimedia messages.<sup>11</sup>

Introducing comic books into middle school classrooms can provide new perspectives in engaging ways, particularly for students who have difficulties with text. One study of disabled students in Indiana showed their test scores and their motivation to read improved after reading graphic novels.<sup>12</sup> Another researcher used comics to teach mul-

iple meanings of words to twenty-three students, ages eight to ten, with language and learning disabilities. These students learned multiple-meaning words better when comics were used.<sup>13</sup>

Many school librarians and teachers support the use of graphic novels for English-language learners because the pictures aid in comprehension of words and grammar.<sup>14</sup> Children enjoy comic

books, and struggling readers are more likely to read them for pleasure than text-only books.<sup>15</sup>

Pleasure reading is effective in improving vocabulary, spelling, and comprehension for students learning a second language.<sup>16</sup> Colleen MacDonell, a librarian serving international students, agrees that pleasure reading is essential for second-language proficiency and more effective in increasing a student’s vocabulary than memorizing words.<sup>17</sup> While graphic novels have less text than prose books, they do contain more rare words than conversation.<sup>18</sup>

## Fun, Not Easy

Stories share common attributes, including characters, setting, plot, theme, and others. Studying a novel involves the same methods, whether the book is in graphic format or text format.<sup>19</sup> A recent article by Hollis Rudiger in *The Horn Book Magazine* shows how analyzing the pictures reveals the story’s attributes.<sup>20</sup> Robin Brenner, creator of the Web site Sidekicks, said, “Graphic novels don’t work exactly the same way that traditional novels do, but they can be as demanding, creative, intelligent, compelling, and full of story as any book.”<sup>21</sup>

To understand the story, the reader must figure out how both the text and the

images combine into a cohesive whole, involving not only traditional reading skills, but also a new literacy skill that is “vital in interacting with and succeeding in our multimedia world.”<sup>22</sup> Very young children “read” comic books through the visual cues, and even preschoolers are learning the literacy of comics’ visual elements.<sup>23</sup>

## Enhancement, Not Replacement

Reading a graphic novel is not easy, yet children are drawn to them, including reluctant readers.<sup>24</sup> Art Spiegelman considers the comic book a “self-teaching machine.”<sup>25</sup> Although “comic book reading is at least as beneficial as other reading,” we know graphic novels are not here to replace text-based book reading but rather, to enhance it.<sup>26</sup> Comic book readers often move on to more serious reading and have positive attitudes toward reading.<sup>27</sup>

In one junior high school, library use overall dramatically increased, including circulation of noncomic materials, upon the introduction of comics. When children choose books they *like*, they read more. When they read more, their vocabulary improves, and they comprehend, write, and spell better. In fact, just *one* book capturing the interest of an elementary school child can develop a child’s love of reading.<sup>28</sup> Because of their popularity, a graphic novel could likely be the material that motivates a student to want to read.

## What Can We Do about It?

There are several ways we can support children in learning to love reading:

- Foster a child’s joy in reading with support for graphic novels. When a parent or teacher says “That’s not real reading,” know how to respond. Several recent books and numerous journal articles discuss the value and uses of graphic novels.
- Let go of the idea that comics and graphic novels are junk reading. Desmond Tutu said, “Comics fed my love for English and my love for reading.”<sup>29</sup> Comics were certainly not a

poor reading choice for him! Jeff Smith reminds us that comic books are literature. They are read left to right, top to bottom; they have consistent symbols and language, yet the pictures are arranged in panels much like film shots, and they replace most of the prose.<sup>30</sup> The graphic novel is “true reading” and another way we can encourage a child’s love of reading. &

For more examination of the graphic novels for children phenomenon, watch for additional coverage in the Spring 2007 issue of Children and Libraries.

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# New Books

**Gebel, Doris, ed.** *Crossing Boundaries with Children's Books*

**Knowles, Liz and Martha Smith.** *Character Builders: Books and Activities for Character Education*

**Marks, Diana F.** *Children's Book Award Handbook*

**McElmeel, Sharron L.** *Children's Authors and Illustrators Too Good to Miss: Biographical Sketches and Bibliographies*

**Thomas, Rebecca L., and Catherine Barr.** *Popular Series Fiction for Middle School and Teen Readers*

**Treviño, R. Z, ed.** *The Pura Belpré Awards: Celebrating Latino Authors and Illustrators*

## Making the Match

### Readers and Books

Junko Yokota and Kathryn Miller

Finding just the right book for each patron is both one of the biggest challenges and greatest joys of being a librarian. The smile on a child's face while asking, "Where did you *find* this book?" lets us know we are escorting that child toward a lifetime of reading, with he or she unable to imagine a life without the joys of reading as a central part.

Yet what we do is not merely responding to the requests of our patrons, particularly when the patrons are young. There is a responsibility in matching readers to the right materials, which means asking the right questions, eliciting more specific information, and refining the search. As professionals who work with children, there is the added responsibility of nurturing the reading of our young patrons. In doing so, we share our own values and beliefs about what we hope children will read.

*Junko Yokota is a professor of education at National-Louis University. Kathryn Miller is a librarian at National-Louis University. Both are interested in issues related to the roles of school librarians in how to best match readers with books.*

The books reviewed in this issue are organized around such topics as increasing global awareness, developing character through education, finding the "best of the best" that win awards, and learning about authors and illustrators who create the wonderful books we recommend. But we must also keep in mind that popularity matters when it comes to meeting the needs of series readers. A new edition of a read-aloud reference classic reminds us that there are specific criteria for maximizing the too-short time available for engaging children in rich read-aloud experiences. As the popular saying goes, "Too many books, not enough time . . ." These books will help point all of us to making better selections for our children.

**Gebel, Doris, ed.** *Crossing Boundaries with Children's Books*. Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Pr., 2006. 448 pp. \$40 (ISBN 0-8108-5203-9).

This book, third in a series sponsored by the United States Board on Books for Young People, is an updated companion volume to Carl Tomlinson's *Children's Books from Other Countries* (Scarecrow Pr., 1998) and Susan Stan's *The World Through Children's Books* (Scarecrow Pr., 2002). Similar to its predecessors, *Crossing Boundaries'* goal is to introduce books that focus on the world's countries and their cultures.

The book opens with three thought-provoking essays on reading, translating, and publishing international books by

Stephen Roxburgh, Jeffrey Garrett, and Simon Broughton. The book is organized by world regions and subdivided by countries. Nearly seven hundred books from seventy-three different countries are annotated, all published between 2000 and 2004. Most of the annotated books originate outside the United States, but a few are selected from U.S. publications as well.

The third edition includes Author Spotlights, featuring authors with notable accomplishments. Four translator features voice the issues translators face as they help books transcend from one culture to another. Related information such as organizations, institutions, and Web sites are noted at the point of reference. The third section of the book lists awards, organizations, publishers, and resources.

**Knowles, Liz and Martha Smith.** *Character Builders: Books and Activities for Character Education*. Westport, Conn.: Libraries Unlimited, 2006. 156 pp. \$40. (ISBN 1-59158-370-5).

What the world needs now is more people with good character. The authors make the case for character education by listing professional readings that informed and developed their thinking and then suggesting guidelines for how teachers (and librarians) might want to incorporate character building into literature circles or book clubs.



The authors explain how they ultimately chose twelve virtues: empathy, respect, courage, humor, responsibility, perseverance, loyalty, honesty, cooperation, tolerance, citizenship, and forgiveness. For each of these virtues, the authors list related virtues, a definition, what the virtue looks like in action, people who demonstrate that virtue, organizations, related topics for further exploration, discussion questions, and annotated booklists. Salient quotes are sprinkled throughout each chapter. The book is divided primarily into age levels, with a separate section on picture books and another on nonfiction; it also includes Web resources.

Although many of the discussion questions are worded for a one-word response, they can be followed up with probing questions that engage readers to be more explicit and complete in their responses.

**Marks, Diana F.** *Children's Book Award Handbook*. Illustrations by Susanne Frey. Westport, Conn.: Libraries Unlimited, 2006. 424 pp. \$40. (ISBN 1-59158-304-7)

Newbery, Caldecott, and Keats are recognizable award "brand" names to many library users and readers. But who was Newbery, and why is a significant award named after him?

Diana Marks, a teacher of gifted elementary students in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, for more than twenty-five years, answers the "who" question in the *Children's Book Award Handbook*. Not only does Marks answer "who," but also "why" an award was created in this person's honor.

Marks includes a chapter in her handbook for twenty-one of the best-known children's literature awards and their namesakes. Each chapter includes an overview of the award, a biography of the award's namesake, the history and criteria for the award, and of course, a list of books that have earned the award. This informational tool also works as a direct resource for teachers, librarians,

and classroom use. It includes lists of easy-to-do activities for each award and classroom handouts that can be used immediately. The handouts are attractively illustrated by Susanne Frey.

This handbook is well organized and presents a fresh approach for teachers and librarians to incorporate award-winning books into their curriculum. Just as learning about an author leads a reader to want to read more of his or her work, learning about an award is sure to increase the reader's interest in reading award-winning and honor books. The overall goal and result of this handbook is to make readers want to read.

**McElmeel, Sharron L.** *Children's Authors and Illustrators Too Good to Miss: Biographical Sketches and Bibliographies*. Popular Authors Series. Westport, Conn.: Libraries Unlimited, 2004. 264 pp. \$48. (ISBN: 1-59158-027-7)

Have you noticed how kids follow a favorite rock band? They know the words of many songs, study the band's music for meaning, and anxiously await the release of the next album. Readers of children's literature can, and often, follow authors and illustrators in the same way.

McElmeel, winner of the State of Iowa's 1987 Reading Teacher of the Year Award, uses the

philosophy that when young readers learn more about authors and their lives, the readers develop a loyalty to those authors and their books. This loyalty allows the young reader to not only develop a love of reading, but also delve into deeper levels of reading comprehension.

In *Children's Authors and Illustrators Too Good to Miss*, McElmeel brings a select forty-five authors and illustrators to life

with biographies that include hobbies, a picture of the author, a personalized letter from each, a list of book connections that tie the author's life (and aims to tie the reader's interest) into the author's books, and a list of the author or illustrator's books.

Organized alphabetically by last name, McElmeel identified authors and illustrators for this Libraries Unlimited Popular Authors Series book as "up-and-coming authors and illustrators—the authors and illustrators that are too good to miss" (McElmeel, xiii).

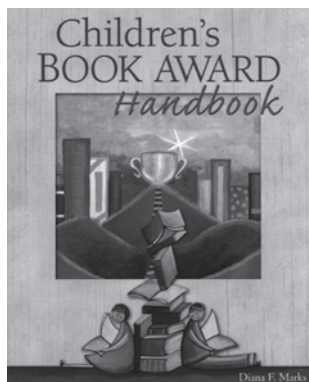
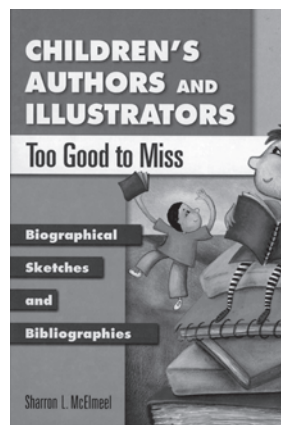
They are the award-winners not only of today, but also the stars of tomorrow. If you are using one of McElmeel's authors in a learning unit or are searching for a great author to introduce in your classroom or library, this is a great book.

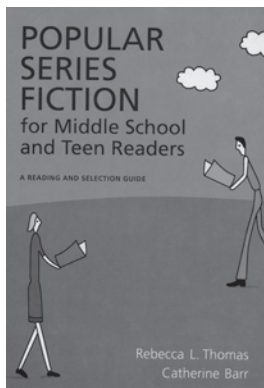
**Thomas, Rebecca L., and Catherine Barr.** *Popular Series Fiction for Middle School and Teen Readers*. Westport, Conn.: Libraries Unlimited, 2005. 528 pp. \$50. (ISBN 1-59158-202-4).

Teens and 'tweens often seem to speak a language of their own. The authors created this guide to help young adult librarians and teachers navigate what's available in series reading for middle school and teen readers.

This guide will help librarians identify new authors, titles, and trends. The authors scoured professional literature, publisher catalogs, and Web sites for new series and additional titles in already well-known series. Each series entry contains bibliographic information on the series, suggested grade levels, an annotation, and whether Accelerated Reader resources are available.

The book contains both an author and a title index, which makes for swift access to series information at a young adult reference desk. This guide will help match what's available in young adult series reading with what young adult readers want to read and will serve as a col-





lection guide for librarians and teachers looking to purchase books or prepare a pathfinder.

This solid resource can be used for several years as a base of

fiction series reading for young adults and the authors conclude the guide with a list of developing series, which, of course, can be researched further using online research skills.

Treviño, R. Z., ed. *The Pura Belpré Awards: Celebrating Latino Authors and Illustrators*. Chicago: ALA, 2006. 96pp. \$35. (ISBN 0-8389-3562-1).

Coinciding with the tenth anniversary of the Pura Belpré awards, this book cel-

## New Edition Now Available

Freeman, Judy. *Books Kids Will Sit Still for 3: A Read-Aloud Guide*. Westport, Conn: Libraries Unlimited, 2006. 936 pp. \$70. (ISBN 1-59158-164-8). This new edition includes seventeen hundred books published since 1995 and many new sections.

brates the many wonderful books honored since the award's inception in 1996. Named in honor of New York Public Library's Puerto Rican-born children's librarian, this award honors her life work of helping highlight important Latino-themed books and helping children find their way to them.

The book begins with a brief biography of Belpré, describing the award's development and giving an overview of the logistics of the award's administration. Part I has year-by-year annotated listings of all award winners by author and illustrator categories, followed by biographical sketches of winners.

Part II is very practical; it offers book-talk texts followed by suggested activities for each book. These activities range from artistic to musical, to other areas of curriculum. The suggested activities are appropriate in various contexts—most can be used in classrooms, school libraries, public libraries, as well as virtually any place where children gather. Web resources are also listed at the end of the book. A twelve-minute DVD is an added bonus. It also includes interviews with the award's founders and winners. Photographs from Pura Belpré's life and career make the name a reality for viewers. ☺

## INFORMED READING, continued from page 34

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6. As quoted in Robert McKee, *Story: Substance, Structure, Style, and the Principles of Screenwriting* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), 133.
7. Chapter 6 of Horning's *From Cover to Cover* examines the beginning reader book.
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10. Unpublished notes from a private conversation with illustrator Marla Frazee, February 2005.
11. Visit [www.vue.org](http://www.vue.org) for more information about this innovative approach to viewing and learning through art.
12. Unpublished notes from a participant's comment during a November 2005 workshop led by Instructor of Children's Literature Programs Megan Lambert, "From Cover to Cover: The Whole Book Approach to Exploring and Using the Picture Book As an Art Form" held at the Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art, Amherst, Mass.

## 2007 Preconference to Focus on Service to the Underserved

The ALSC/Association of Specialized and Cooperative Library Agencies Joint Preconference, "The Underserved 20 Percent: Children, Teens, and Adults with Disabilities," will be held on Friday, June 22, 2007, during Annual Conference in Washington, D.C. Harriet McBryde Johnson, disabilities rights activist, lawyer, and author of *Too Late to Die Young* and *Accidents of Nature*, is the featured keynote speaker. A resource fair and panel discussions on community awareness, staff training, and more will help arm attendees with the information they need to better serve the underserved in their community.

## Alumni Association Honors Horning



alumni association bestowed Centennial Alumnus of the Year awards upon eight distinguished graduates who have made a profound impact on the library community. Among the honorees was ALSC President Kathleen T. Horning, a 1982 SLIS graduate and the current director

To mark the one hundredth anniversary of the school of library and information studies (SLIS) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, the SLIS

of UW-Madison's Cooperative Children's Book Center. Horning is the author of the highly regarded text, *From Cover to Cover: Evaluating and Reviewing Children's Books* and chaired the 1995 Newbery Award Selection committee. She has mentored numerous librarians who have gone on to work in public, academic, school, and special libraries across Wisconsin. Horning was honored at an alumni association luncheon held on September 20.

## Nací para Leer

An updated version of the Spanish-language *Born to Read: How to Raise a Reader* brochure is available. *Nací para Leer: Cómo Criar un Lector* features a rec-

## Board Major Actions

The following actions were voted on by the board on the ALSCBoard electronic discussion list. The month and year of the vote is in parentheses after each action.

VOTED, to cosponsor in name only the Public Library Association (PLA)/Audio Publishers Association (APA) Tea in Washington, D.C., June 23, 2007, and to provide input on the speaker list for this event. **For the record:** Several board members expressed concern that the event is ticketed with a fee to attend. Additionally, some board members have asked for an exploration into whether ALSC needs a policy regarding cosponsorship (in name only) of programs for which the partner organization is charging a registration fee. (August 2006)

VOTED, to add the following to the description of the Maureen Hayes Award Committee:

Function statement: To select annually the recipient of the Maureen Hayes Award, given to an ALSC member library to fund a visit from an author and/or illustrator who will speak to children who have never before had the opportunity to hear a nationally known author or illustrator. To prepare and disseminate to the membership information about the award and about the recipient. Membership: Chair + 4  
Term: Spring, 2 year (August 2006)

VOTED, to change the Maureen Hayes Award ad hoc committee to a standing committee effective at the end of Midwinter Meeting 2008. (August 2006)

VOTED, to cosponsor with PLA "ALPH: The Digital Book as a Social Stage," at Annual Conference 2007. (July 2006)



ommended book list of titles available in Spanish, current early literacy information, and tips for parents on sharing books with babies. The brochure is available in packets of 50 for \$22. The ISBN is 0-8389-8334-0. To order, contact ALA Order Fulfillment at 1-866-746-7252.

Born to Read is an ALSC program designed to help our members encourage parents to read to their baby everyday, beginning at birth. It also is intended to promote greater public awareness of parenting resources available in libraries.

## 2007 Slate of Candidates

### Vice-President/President-Elect

Pat Scales, Greenville, S.C.  
Randall Enos, Ramapo Catskill Library System, Middletown, N.Y.

### Board of Directors

JoAnn Jonas, Chula Vista (Calif.) Public Library  
Tim Wadham, Maricopa County Library District, Phoenix, Ariz.  
Annisha Jeffries, Cleveland Public Library

Mary Fellows, Upper Hudson Library System, Albany, N.Y.

### Caldecott Chair, 2009

Nell Colburn, Multnomah County Library, Portland, Ore.  
Ronald Jobe, Dept. of Language Education, Univ. of British Columbia, Vancouver

### Newbery Chair, 2009

Rose Treviño, Houston Public Library  
Leslie Molnar, Cuyahoga County Public Library, Parma, Ohio

## 2007 ALSC Midwinter Schedule

(as of November 3, 2006)

### AASL/ALSC/YALSA Jt. Exec. Committee

Thursday, January 18, 4:30–6 P.M.

### AASL/ALSC/YALSA Jt. Intellectual Freedom Committee

Sunday, January 21, 4–6 P.M.

### AASL/ALSC/YALSA Jt. Membership Reception

Monday, January 22, 6–7:30 P.M.

### AASL/ALSC/YALSA Jt. Youth Council Caucus

Monday, January 22, 7–10 A.M.

### ALA Youth Media Awards Press Conference

Monday, January 22, 8–9 A.M.

### All Committee Meeting

Sunday, January 21, 8–11:30 A.M.

### All Discussion Group Meeting

Sunday, January 21, 4–6 P.M.

### ALSC/ASCLA Jt. Preconference Planning Committee

Monday, January 22, 1:30–3:30 P.M.

### ALSC/BWI Summer Reading Program Grant Committee\*

Saturday, January 20, 1:30–3:30 P.M.

Sunday, January 21, 8–11:30 A.M.

### Arbuthnot Honor Lecture (2008)\*

Saturday, January 20, 1:30–3:30 P.M.

### Batchelder Award Committee (2007)\*

Friday, January 19, 2–5:30 P.M.

Saturday, January 20, 2–6 P.M. and 8–10 P.M.

Sunday, January 21, 8–10:30 A.M.

### Batchelder Award Committee (2008)

Sunday, January 21, 1:30–3:30 P.M.

### Bechtel Fellowship Committee\*

Sunday, January 21, 1:30–3:30 P.M.

### Belpré Award Committee (2008)

Saturday, January 20, 1:30–5 P.M.

Sunday, January 21, 1:30–5 P.M.

### Board of Directors

Saturday, January 20, 2–5:30 P.M.

Monday, January 22, 2–5:30 P.M.

Tuesday, January 23, 2–5:30 P.M.

### Budget Committee

Sunday, January 21, 4–6 P.M.

Tuesday, January 23, 10:30 A.M.–12:30 P.M.

### Caldecott Award Committee (2007)\*

Friday, January 19, 8 A.M.–12:30 P.M. AND 8–10 P.M.

Saturday, January 20, 8 A.M.–12:30 P.M. and 8–10 P.M.

Sunday, January 21, 8 A.M.–12:30 P.M.

### Caldecott Award Committee (2008)

Saturday, January 20, 4–6 P.M.

### Carnegie Award Committee\*

Saturday, January 20, 9:30 A.M.–12:30 P.M. AND 2–5:30 P.M.

Sunday, January 21, 9 A.M.–12 P.M.

### Distinguished Service Award Committee\*

Saturday, January 20, 10:30 A.M.–3:30 P.M.

### Division Leadership

Saturday, January 20, 9 A.M.–12:30 P.M.

### Executive Committee

Thursday, January 18, 1:30–3:30 P.M.

### Geisel Award Committee (2007)\*

Friday, January 19, 2–4 P.M.

Saturday, January 20, 9–11 A.M.; 2–6 P.M.; AND 8–10 P.M.

Sunday, January 21, 9 A.M.–12 P.M.

**Sibert Chair, 2009**

Carol Phillips, East Brunswick (N.J.) Public Library  
 Cyndi Giorgis, Univ. of Nevada, Las Vegas

**Caldecott Committee, 2009**

Mary Schrader, Oakland (Calif.) Public Library  
 Rachel Payne, Brooklyn (N.Y.) Public Library  
 Susan Erickson, San Bernardino County (Calif.) Library

Lisa Von Drasek, Bank Street College of Education, New York  
 Katie Baxter, Noble and Greenough School, Dedham, Mass.  
 Edward Spicer, Allegan (Mich.) Public Library  
 Cecily Pilzer, Georgetown Day School, Washington, D.C.  
 Terrence Young, West Jefferson High School, Harvey, La.  
 Jamie Campbell Naidoo, Davis College, Univ. of South Carolina, Columbia, S.C.  
 Stephanie Bange, Dayton (Ohio) Metro Library

Patricia Foster, Riverton (Utah) Public Library  
 Yolanda Valentin, Birmingham (Ala.) Public Library  
 Nancy Johnson, Western Washington Univ., Bellingham, Wash.  
 Georgene DeFilippo, Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh

**Newbery Committee, 2009**

Susan Stan, Central Michigan Univ. Library, Mount Pleasant  
 Carolyn Angus, George Stone Center for Children's Books, Claremont (Calif.) Graduate Univ.

**Geisel Award Committee (2008)**

Saturday, January 20, 4–5:30 P.M.

**Great Web Sites for Kids Committee**

Sunday, January 21, 8 A.M.–12:30 P.M.

**Hayes Award Committee\***

Sunday, January 21, 8–10 A.M.

**Newbery Award Committee (2007)\***

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**Nominating Committee\***

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 Monday, January 22, 10:30 A.M.–1:30 P.M.

**Organization & Bylaws Committee**

Saturday, January 20, 1:30–3:30 P.M.

**Past Presidents' Breakfast**

Saturday, January 20, 7:30–9 A.M.

**Penguin Young Readers Group Award Committee\***

Sunday, January 21, 8–10 A.M.

**Priority Group Consultants Meeting**

Saturday, January 20, 8–9 A.M.

**Sagebrush Education Resources Literature Program Grant Committee\***

Saturday, January 20, 1:30–4:30 P.M.  
 Sunday, January 21, 1:30–4:30 P.M.

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 Sunday, January 21, 8 A.M.–12 P.M.

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Sunday, January 21, 1:30–3:30 P.M.

**Storytelling Discussion Group**

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**Wilder Award Committee\***

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For an up-to-date list of ALSC meetings, visit the ALSC Web site at [www.ala.org/alsc](http://www.ala.org/alsc) and click on "Events & Conferences." Always consult your Conference Program Book and Supplement onsite for any last minute changes.

\*Denotes closed meeting.

Michael Sullivan, Weeks Public Library, Greenland, N.H.  
Rose Brock, Coppell (Tex.) Middle School West  
Richie Partington, Sebastopol, Calif.  
Michael O. Tunnell, Brigham Young Univ., Provo, Utah  
Janice Passo, Las Vegas–Clark County (Nev.) Library  
Ellen Ruffin, de Grummond Children's Literature Collection, McCain Library and Archives, Univ. of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg  
Susannah Richards, Storrs, Conn.  
Caitlin Dixon, Schoenbar Junior High School Library, Ketchikan, Alaska  
Nancee Dahms-Stinson, Missouri State Library, Jefferson City  
Julie Tomlianovich, South Central Kansas Library System, South Hutchinson  
Nick Glass, TeachingBooks.net, Madison, Wis.  
Sharon Senser, Oakland (Calif.) Public Library

### Sibert Committee, 2009


Jamie Watson, Harford County Public Library, Belcamp, Md.  
John Stewig, Carthage College, Kenosha, Wis.  
Sylvia Vardell, Texas Woman's Univ., Denton  
Steve Zampino, Ferguson Library, Stamford, Conn.  
Terri Schmitz, The Children's Book Shop, Brookline, Mass.  
Debra Gold, Cuyahoga County Public Library, Parma Heights, Ohio  
Allison Angell, Benicia (Calif.) Public Library  
Julie Bartel, Judge Memorial Catholic High School, Salt Lake City, Utah

## Books for the Holidays

ALSC's Quicklists Consulting Committee recently compiled a list of new books recommended for holiday gift giving, as well as for reading about holidays themselves. The guide features titles suitable for readers from preschool age through eighth grade and includes picture books, novels, fiction, and nonfiction. The full list of titles with brief annotations is at [www.ala.org/alsc](http://www.ala.org/alsc), click on "Resources" and "Book Lists."

## Harley Records Campaign PSA

Singer-storyteller Bill Harley has recorded a media-ready Public Service Announcement (PSA) for ALSC's Kids! @ your library® campaign. The PSA, which promotes use of the library by children

and families, incorporates music from Harley's song "@ your library." Libraries are encouraged to download the free PSA and share it with local radio stations and schools for public address announcements. The PSA and full-length song are at [www.ala.org/kids](http://www.ala.org/kids), click on "Campaign Theme Song." 



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Prepared by Janet Russell

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## Four Americans Nominated for Lindgren Award

American authors Peter Sís, Russell Hoban, Maira Kalman, and Gary Soto have been nominated for the Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award 2007.

One hundred thirty-three candidates from fifty-two countries have been nominated.

The Swedish government founded this international prize in the *Pippi Longstocking* author's name to honor her memory and promote children's literature. The award, of five million Swedish crowns, is the largest for children's literature and the second-largest literature prize in the world.

Proposals were submitted by ninety-four nominating bodies, including the American Library Association, the Children's Book Council, the Library of Congress, and the United States Section of the International Board on Books for Young People among others.

The winner will be announced in March 2007. For more information about the award, visit [www.alma.se](http://www.alma.se).

# THE LAST WORD

## Oh, the Joy of Reference Questions!

Marilyn Sobotincic

After working as a children's librarian for the past sixteen years, I've compiled some categories of patrons based on the wild, wacky, and wonderfully whimsical questions they ask. I'm sure you could add a few examples of your own.

I'll start with the nostalgia category. The question goes something like this, "Miss, I'm looking for a book that I read when I was a little girl."

My mind races back to titles of the 1970s, or maybe the 1960s.

She goes on, "It's a cute little book about a puppy." I interject—minus the eye roll, "Could it be *The Poky Little Puppy*?"

"That's it!" Score one for the librarian.

There also seems to be the "I just don't get it" category. The patron will say, "I'm doing a theme this week for three-year-olds on birds of Ohio." (How interesting, I think. Do they all have feathers and wings?)

The next question puts them squarely into this category. "Are all the picture books about birds in the same place?"

"Not really, we like to put our books in alphabetical order by the author," I reply.

Score none for the librarian.

Next, the clueless category. Need I say more when a person comes to your desk and says, "I don't know the author or the title, and I'm not sure what the book is about."

(All righty now, could you give me a little more information, perhaps the price of the book?)



The patron goes on, "It could be about a cow or a boy or perhaps a cowboy."

"I see . . . want to pick door number one, two, or three?" I feel like the host of a game show.

Of course we've all had the "one volume short of a full set" category. It goes like this. "The title of the book I'm looking for is *My Mom Makes Great Spaghetti*." I respond, "Do you mean *Daddy Makes the Best Spaghetti* by any chance?"

"Right!" Score another for the librarian.

Up next: the messenger category. "My wife sent me in to pick up a book on china."

Not a problem, I pipe up. "The country or the type of dish?"

He replies blankly, "I have no clue."

Without further adieu, I ask for his phone number so I can speak to his wife to continue the patron interview.

Finally, the most unforgettable category is the "this doesn't deserve an answer" category. A diligent mother asks with a straight face, "My son has to do a book report. Can you find him a book? And by the way, he doesn't like to read."

"Certainly." Then I race to the shelf for *Little Women*.

But here's the one inquiry I'll never forget. A teenager asked, "Could you find me a book that has most inspired me? I need to write an essay for my college application about it."

As my head bounced off the desk, I can only wonder why we think no child should be left behind. ☹

*Marilyn Sobotincic* is librarian at the Medina County (Ohio) District Library.

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