Children & Libraries

the journal of the Association for Library Service to Children

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Association for Library Service to Children

TOYS AND PLAY IN THE LIBRARY

Brian Selznick on Love, Family and His Work

The Power of Collaboration

THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI

SCHOOL OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE

announces

THE **49TH ANNUAL** FAY B. KAIGLER

Children's BOOK Festival

COME CELEBRATE 49 YEARS OF PROMOTING EXCELLENCE IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE WITH **SOUTHERN MISS MEDALLION WINNER**

Jacqueline Woodson

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Michael Cart • George O'Connor • Joyce Sidman
Melissa Sweet • Tim Tingle • Rita Williams-Garcia

In celebration of the 50th anniversary of the de Grummond Collection, we are thrilled to welcome back 2003 Medallion Winner **LOIS LOWRY** as the de Grummond Lecturer.

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THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI

APRIL 6-8, 2016

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Brown Girl Dreaming by Jacqueline Woodson, illustrated by Theresa Evangelista
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ON THE COVER: Playing at the Harford County Public Library in Maryland.
Photo courtesy of Harford County Public Library.

Editor's Note
One Lucky Weekend

By Sharon Verbeten

Once upon an October, a children's librarian in Wisconsin got lucky. *Very, very lucky.*

When you live in Northeast Wisconsin, literary events are often few and far between. Sure, we have libraries and bookstores, but we're not exactly a hotbed of literary activity. But in October, the planets aligned, giving me one whirlwind weekend of pure children's librarian delight.

The Sheboygan Children's Book Festival is an annual weekend event, which brings some of the best names in the business to a small lakeshore town of 50,000. This year, I attended with great enthusiasm, eager to meet greats like author/illustrators Christian Robinson (pictured below), Lita Judge, Liz Garton Scanlon, and Ashley Wolff. My good friend author Miranda Paul was also there debuting her two new and buzzworthy non-fiction picturebooks. And, of course, no good book festival is complete without a few oversized book characters—my daughter especially loved Llama Llama!

Then as if that wasn't enough, the following Monday, Caldecott-winning author/illustrator Brian Selznick began his book tour for *The Marvels* in my hometown of Milwaukee. It was well worth the two-hour drive to see him and experience his MARVEL-ous presentation (you'll feel the same way after you read his Arbuthnot lecture in this issue). And despite having a case of carpal tunnel syndrome (you couldn't miss his Swarovski crystal-studded arm brace), he was most gracious with the more than 200 people who waited in his signing line.

It took me awhile to come down from my high after meeting these "rock star" artists I so admire, respect, and marvel at on a daily basis. I found them all incredibly down to earth and gracious.

I'm sure those of you in more metropolitan areas get these opportunities far more often than I do, and I'm sure you're just as thrilled by them. I know our ALA conferences are ideal for these sort of experiences, but having them closer to home is an added bonus.

Now excuse me while I get back to reading all those autographed copies . . .

See you in Boston! &

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May Hill Arbuthnot Honor Lecture

"Love Is a Dangerous Angel: Thoughts on Queerness and Family in Children's Books"

Brian Selznick

Brian Selznick

Brian Selznick *is the Caldecott Award-winning author of* The Invention of Hugo Cabret. *Born and raised in New Jersey, Selznick graduated from Rhode Island School of Design. In addition to children's book illustration, he designs theater sets and is a professional puppeteer. Among his award-winning work are illustrations for two Sibert Honor Books and a Caldecott Honor Book. He is currently on tour to promote his new book* The Marvels.

The following lecture was delivered May 8, 2015, at the Martin Luther King Junior Memorial Library in Washington, DC.

I'm so honored to be here tonight at the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Public Library. Thank you, Sue McCleaf Nespeca, and to everyone on the Arbuthnot committee, Marybeth Kozikowski, Daniel Meyer, Bina Williams, and Gail Zachariah, who gave me this award about twenty years too soon I think, but I'm incredibly humbled by it and have taken its meaning very seriously.

Thank you to Richard Reyes-Gavilan and Ellen Riordan, thank you to the DC Public Library Foundation Executive Director Linnea Hegarty. Thank you, Scholastic, for your ongoing support, especially Ellie Berger, president of Trade Publishing, who is here today, and I'd like to send a special thank you and hello to our beloved retired director of library and educational marketing at Scholastic John Mason who is here as well.

Hello to Dick Jackson, a former Arbuthnot honoree. I don't know how you got through this. Thank you to our fantastic *current* director of library and educational marketing Lizette Serrano, my editor Tracy Mack, Executive Director of Publicity Charisse Meloto, my friend, writer, and editor David Levithan, and my husband David Serlin for their help in putting this talk together.

Thank you to our sign language interpreters today, Sandra McClure and Jandi Arboleda. And of course, a very special thank you to Wendy Lukehart (youth collections coordinator), who had the crazy idea to bring me here to DC and then spearheaded the wonderful exhibition behind you and all the events this weekend. You've been a wonderful friend and host and I hope I don't disappoint you after all this!

PART 1

These are the opening words of Maurice Sendak's 2003 Arbuthnot Lecture, which many of you may have attended: *"May Hill Arbuthnot's pioneering textbook* Children and Books *was published in 1947, and although I never read the book or met the lady, since the early days of my career, I have always associated her name with a higher standard, a bright enlightenment, and a passionate newly sophisticated view of childhood. So I am very very grateful after fifty-six years for the entwining of our names."*

Maurice Sendak, as many of you may know, has long been my great hero, and he was a dear friend and mentor. For me, one of the most meaningful parts of winning the Caldecott Medal in 2008 was that it meant my name would forever be connected historically to *his* name. He's always been *my higher standard*, *my bright enlightenment*, and now I am deeply honored that my name is once again entwined with his, and with May Hill Arbuthnot's.

With help from the staff at the New York Public Library, I was able to read May Hill Arbuthnot's first foray into Dick and Jane's world, *Fun with Dick and Jane*. The first story she wrote about them, called "Guess," ended with the following lines:

> "Oh, look," said Mother.
> "My family is here.
> My funny, funny family."

I was happy to discover this because I will *also* be talking about families today. *Funny, funny families!*

I then managed to track down and purchase a copy of *Children and Books*, Arbuthnot's "pioneering textbook," which Sendak mentioned. Chapter One of the Introduction to *Children and Books* is broken down into these sections:

- The need for security: material, emotional and spiritual
- The need to belong: to be a part of a group
- The need to love and to be loved
- The need to achieve: to do or be something worthy
- The need to know: intellectual security

- Play: the need for change
- The need for aesthetic satisfaction.

I'll be touching on some of these topics today as well. Let's start with the first one . . .

The need for security: material, emotional, and spiritual.

"One of man's basic drives is to make himself safe, to hang on and endure," writes Arbuthnot in her introduction. *"To be snug and comfortable as life permits. The child's sense of security begins in his mother's and father's arms and extends gradually to include his regular routines, his family, everything that gives him a sense of comfort and well-being."*

I wanted to be an artist from the time I was a kid, my sister wanted to teach kindergarten since she was in kindergarten, and my brother always wanted to be a brain surgeon from the time he was very small, for some reason. We all became what we'd wanted to be with the support of our parents. We were very lucky.

I grew up in East Brunswick, New Jersey, the oldest of three kids. My dad was an accountant who'd dreamed of being an archeologist, but his mother forced him into steadier work to support his young family. He promised himself that his own children would be able to do whatever they wanted, and my parents succeeded at keeping that promise.

I wanted to be an artist from the time I was a kid, my sister wanted to teach kindergarten since she was *in* kindergarten, and my brother always wanted to be a brain surgeon from the time he was very small, for some reason. We all became what we'd wanted to be with the support of our parents. We were very lucky. I discovered my interest in art early, and I was particularly lucky because the public schools in East Brunswick had a fantastic art program. I copied pictures by my favorite artist, Leonardo da Vinci, from art books.

What were my other interests at the time? I liked reading and had a few favorite books, including *Fortunately* and *Arm in Arm* by Remy Charlip, and when I was a little older I fell in love with Mary Norton's *The Borrowers*, about the tiny people who lived secretly beneath the floorboards of a boy's house. I basically thought this was a true story, and I made little furniture for them and left the items around my room as gifts, so they wouldn't be afraid of me. I loved the magician Harry Houdini; I loved *The Wizard of Oz*. In fifth grade I was in my first show, *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*, and soon I'd discovered soundtrack albums and Broadway and found myself sitting up late at night crying as Betty Buckley hit that high note in "Memory" from *Cats*. I loved Boy George and Culture Club.

I also had a secret, which from the list of interests I just provided probably isn't that hard to guess. In sixth grade, I had an autograph book with a page where you were supposed to fill in the names of the best looking boys and girls. I don't remember who the girls might have been but I do remember, to this day, the names Matthew Goodman and Ricky Popolo.

By middle school, it had developed into a strange, formless…secret. I tried my hardest to change my own mind. To convince myself that I liked girls. I thought I was alone. I didn't know that all the things I was interested in, the show tunes, the movies, the music, I didn't know they were often *signifiers*. I didn't even know Boy George was gay! I didn't know ANYONE was gay! I didn't know that Michelangelo or Walt Whitman or Oscar Wilde or my favorite artist, Leonardo da Vinci, was gay. I didn't know Maurice Sendak and Remy Charlip were both gay.

One of my few memories of any representations of homosexuality in the culture when I was a kid, involved a story on the TV news program "60 Minutes." The story ended with a silhouetted image of two men walking hand in hand into the sunset. The TV was always on in our house, and in my memory my mother turned around from the dinner table, saw the image of the two men, and went "Uch." My heart sank.

I've always remembered this as something that made me feel very bad about myself, so I asked my mom about it recently, and she was shocked. To say that she's always been supportive of me and understanding would be an understatement. She's the most non-judgmental person I know, so this memory from my childhood always stood out as an aberration. I was sure she'd have no memory of this, and she didn't. But she was especially shocked because she said she'd always been very accepting of gay people. "Even in the seventies?" I asked. "My two closest friends in *high school* in the fifties were lesbians!" she said. I'd never heard this before.

"Oh yeah," she said. "Sue and LaVerne." They met in high school, went to college together, and were together their entire lives, until LaVerne died about ten years ago. My mom said that everyone whispered about them in school (this was the fifties after all) but my mom said she stood up for them and told people they were her friends.

So my mom and I agreed that she must have said "Uch" to something my father was doing at the table at the time, which must have been much of a surprise, and I'd only interpreted it as being related to the gay men on TV because I'd felt my own shame. Even as a senior in high school, I had trouble identifying with or truly understanding my desires. My private art teacher, Eileen Sutton, was coincidentally moving away at the same time I was leaving for college, and she invited me to her studio. She said I could have any painting as a gift. She was a watercolorist in the tradition of Georgia O'Keeffe, and I soon found a lovely flower painting I wanted. She hesitated then asked me to

pick something else. But no matter what else I looked at, I kept coming back to this flower painting.

Mrs. Sutton kept balking, discouraging me from this picture as much as possible, but finally she relented and let me take it. It wasn't until years later when I found the painting in the back of the closet on a return trip to my mother's home, that I finally saw what had made Mrs. Sutton so squeamish. The painting was actually a giant penis, enveloped in flower petals, but really quite unmistakable. Well, unmistakable to everyone but me, it seems. What I found so interesting about my attraction to the painting back in Mrs. Sutton's studio, was that I really truly only saw the flower, yet there was *something* that led me to that painting. Something I couldn't quite identify.

PART 2

The need to achieve: to do or be something worthy.

Arbuthnot writes, "*Human beings must also have a sense of achievement, of being able to do or be something for which they are respected and loved."* As I said, with my parents' encouragement, I was able to become a professional artist. My first book, *The Houdini Box*, was published in 1991 while I was still working at Eeyore's Books for Children on the Upper West Side.

My boss, Steve Geck, now an editor at Sourcebooks, took me under his wing and really taught me what children's books could be. He and his then-girlfriend/now-wife Diana Blough helped me get my first book published and have been great friends ever since.

That book ended up doing very well for a first book, and soon I left Eeyore's to work full time as a writer and illustrator. My career chugged along slowly for several years, until there was a major turnaround in my work, most significantly marked by Pam Munoz Ryan's *Amelia and Eleanor Go for a Ride*. My editor, Tracy, told me she'd been thinking the book should look like a 1930s movie musical. After a brilliant idea like that, the rest was easy. Around this time, I was hanging out with my friend Michael Mayer. He's a Broadway director (*Hedwig, Spring Awakening*), and we got into a conversation about queerness and our work. Not all of his shows have gay themes or issues, but he very clearly identifies himself as a gay director with a queer sensibility.

He asked me if I thought my work was "queer." I should define my terms here. "Gay" refers to homosexuality itself. Being "gay" is being someone attracted to people of the same sex. "Queer" began its life in this context as a slur, used against gay people, a pejorative name to label someone as different and would be used interchangeably with other slurs. But over time "queer" was appropriated by the very people it was used against, to simultaneously take away the word's sting, while also embracing its ideas of otherness and being an outsider. These qualifications are seen as positive by many people, and over time the use of the word "queer" came to mean any kind of questioning of mainstream society's received rules and wisdom. I'll be using the term in both of its senses: a word to describe a gay person, and a word to describe a sense of otherness.

You can think of it like this: You don't have to be gay to be queer, but it doesn't hurt. So, as I was saying, at the point Michael asked me about the queerness of my books, I still associated the word more with the idea of same-sex attraction and none of my books had any explicitly (or implicitly) gay characters. *Riding Freedom* was about a cross-dressing woman, but she did it out of necessity, not *identity*, as far as we can tell from the historical record. No one in her life seemed to know she was a woman, though after she died, evidence was discovered indicating she may at some point have given birth to a stillborn baby, which means, of course, that *someone* knew she was a woman.

I said *no* to Michael. None of my books were queer in any fashion. Michael nearly laughed in my face. "Your very first book, *The Houdini Box*," he said, "is about a lonely boy with no father whose one desire in the world is to escape from things he's locked inside of. Like closets. And his mentor is an older man whom he idolizes. Sounds pretty queer to me."

I remember bristling at this idea. I said, "The reason Houdini still haunts our collective memory is because *everyone* has something they want to escape from… poverty, loneliness, abuse, *something*. Houdini isn't an idol only to gay people. He's an idol to everyone." I think Michael shrugged his shoulders and said something like "OK, but why were YOU obsessed with him? Why is Victor, the boy in the story, obsessed?"

I couldn't get this conversation out of my mind afterward. Was there something about my own queerness that unconsciously influenced my stories, my interests? These ideas floated around in the back of my mind for a long time, all the while I was working on other books. I made four picturebook biographies, culminating in a book about the poet Walt Whitman. The text, by Barbara Kerley, didn't acknowledge Whitman's homosexuality any more than books about Whitman did from my own childhood.

Rather, her focus was on his work as a nurse during the Civil War. I tried to "queer" the book as much as possible, by emphasizing in the pictures Whitman's otherness, and his desire for men was evoked subtly, but there was a tension for me between the text and the art. I'm proud of the book we made, but it was probably the most difficult book I'd worked on to that point, and when I was done, I needed a rest. I ended up not working for nearly six months. I had come to a wall. I didn't want to do any more picturebook biographies, yet I found myself mostly being offered books in a similar vein. I didn't know what else to do.

It was during this time that I first met Maurice Sendak. He was even coincidentally reading Whitman for the first time when we met. Maurice and I spoke often on the phone, and I'd visit him in Connecticut. I told him of being stuck. He encouraged me to make the book I wanted to make. I worked on that book, the one that would become *The Invention of Hugo Cabret*, for about two and a half years, but it wasn't until after

the book was published that I found out what the story actually had been *about*.

A reader came up to me after a presentation in Pennsylvania and said they loved that the book was about how we create our own families. Hugo, as an orphan, had made a new family for himself, and this reader found that very moving. When I was writing the story, I had known I wanted Hugo to be safe and happy at the end of the book, but it hadn't occurred to me that this was what the entire thing was actually *about*.

I began work on the next book, *Wonderstruck,* and I knew two things to start: that I'd try to tell two different stories with the words and pictures instead of one, like *Hugo*, and that somehow it would also be about creating our own families. This theme suddenly felt deeply central to who I was and how I imagined my own life. It's one of the centerpieces of a gay identity, as I came to understand, but it's something straight people do too…we grow up, we leave our parents' house, and we gather around us a new family of like-minded people, friends, and lovers with whom we move into the future.

Much of the plot of *Wonderstruck* grew out of a documentary my husband, David, and I caught on TV one night. It was called "Through Deaf Eyes," and it was about the history of deaf culture. In the documentary, there was a fascinating interview with a young deaf man. He, like most deaf people, had been born into a hearing family. His family tried to be helpful, but it wasn't until he got to college that he discovered other deaf people and found out that he was part of a long history of deafness, a *history* he didn't inherit from his parents.

I thought to myself that this sounded strikingly like growing up gay in a straight family. Like the deaf young man, it was college—and then when I first moved to New York—where I finally found people like myself, and I discovered my history. That's when I learned about Michelangelo and Whitman and Wilde and DaVinci. I was part of an *astounding* history. One that has changed the world again and again.

But it wasn't an easy road, made even more complicated for me by the fact that the AIDS crisis began in the early eighties, just as I was beginning to understand my sexuality. As for the creation of *Wonderstruck*, I had never thought about the *queerness* of being deaf before. It informed the creation of that book, about two deaf children, fifty years apart, searching for a place in the world.

Later, after my book had been published, I found out the author Andrew Solomon had reached similar conclusions about growing up gay and growing up deaf, which he explored in depth in his astounding non-fiction title *Far from the Tree*. He coined the phrase *"horizontal identities"* to talk about children who are profoundly different from their parents in some fashion.

Most children follow their parents' footsteps. Orthodox Jews raise their children to be Orthodox Jews. Married heterosexuals usually expect their children to grow up and be the same. But people with *horizontal identities* find their personal histories linked to others *outside* of their immediate genetic line or cultural heritage. Of course, gay people don't *have* to tell anyone they're gay. It can be kept a secret and the more time that passes the harder it can become to tell.

My own coming out to my parents was very difficult. I finally found the courage to come out to them when I was in my mid-twenties. As expected, my mom was great from the beginning, telling me she'd always suspected I was gay but she loved me no matter what. My dad was slightly tougher to get through to. He was silent for a long time and then he said, "I guess you want me to say something. Well, I love you, but I want you to promise me three things."

Uh oh. "What?"

"One. I don't want you to flaunt it."

"What does that even mean?"

"I don't want you *acting* gay."

"Have I been acting gay?"

"Two, I don't want anyone else to know."

"Um, that sort of goes against the point of what I'm doing here. I'm going to tell the rest of the family, and our friends will know, too."

"I don't want anyone from work to know."

"Why not? What are you ashamed of?"

"Three. I don't want you bringing anyone home."

This wasn't difficult at the time, as I wasn't seeing anyone, but my sister was on the verge of getting engaged so I said, "If Holly and Ed get married and I'm dating someone, then I can't bring them to the wedding?"

"Absolutely not."

"I don't know if that will really be your choice."

"Then I won't go."

I was still single when Holly and Ed did get married, so it wasn't much of an issue, but within the next few years, my brother had met the girl he was going to marry, and I'd met David, the guy I knew I'd be with for the rest of my life (we got married last September after eighteen years together, but that's another story!).

My dad liked David right away, and we knew that David was going to come to my brother's wedding without my dad causing a fuss. But a few weeks before the event, my dad relayed a message for us. David and I were not allowed to touch each other at my brother's wedding, and if we didn't agree to this, *then* he wasn't going to go. Seems he was having a small case of gay panic when he thought about his partners from work seeing me and David dancing together.

To make a long story short, we agreed, but I told my father that one day he was going to apologize to me and David for asking us to do this reprehensible thing. And within a few weeks after the wedding, after what I can only describe as an *intervention* on the part of the rest of my family, he'd apologized, and it was clear

that by the time he died eleven years ago, he'd come a very long way to fully accepting David and I as a couple who were just as legitimate as Holly and Ed, and Lee and his wife, Sue.

PART 3

The need to belong: to be a part of a group.

May Hill Arbuthnot wrote, *"With our growing consciences of the true functioning of democracy and our new sense of "One World," stories of minority groups or of individual members of such groups becoming loved and respected are increasingly prominent. The plight of loyal Japanese families suddenly transported to wartime camps during World War II is described in* The Moved-Outers *by Florence Crannell. Their problems of readjustment were very hard, and the reader suffers with them. Several books have presented sympathetic pictures of Negro children making their adjustments today. Children reading these stories are bound to have their insight into group problems increased."*

You'll notice this seems to keep the identity of the *reader* Arbuthnot has in mind firmly *outside of* these minority groups. I think the subtext here is that *white* children reading about non-white children will be helped to understand these minorities better. It's sort of like Arbuthnot is imagining that her dear young friends Dick and Jane, those paragons of heterosexual, blonde, white normalcy who my father probably grew up with, will learn *empathy* for those different from themselves—which is a fine goal, but it's also important for the minority children to see *themselves* represented. To be reflected back in a positive manner from the culture they also are a part of.

Because there were no books I knew of with gay people when I was young, there was no chance for me to see myself reflected back, as I've said, to learn that I was not alone. Children tend to accept the world around them as *the way it is*. The world we grow up inside of seems to be the only possible one. For instance, my dad was a Republican, and I grew up unaware that there were actually *other* political parties. I usually don't like to admit this, but the first time I voted, I voted for Ronald Reagan, in 1984. Of course, I don't think I was aware anyone else was running.

My political awakening happened in college, when I fell in with a group of friends who'd all been raised very liberal in New York City. By the time I'd graduated college and was living in New York myself, I was marching in ACT-UP protests holding pictures of Ronald Reagan with blood coming out of his eyes. So that made up for the vote, I thought.

I can't claim to have been an *activist* in the nineties, despite those protest marches and the few ACT-UP meetings I attended. But I was there and I remember what it was like to see dying young men walking slowly down the street and knowing that the government was letting people die and that those most affected had to fight the hardest for recognition and help.

AIDS isn't gone, but the world is dramatically different now. Some young people are coming out in middle school or even earlier. My own high school, a place I couldn't have imagined coming out, now has a Gay Straight Alliance, as do so many other schools across the country. Thinking now about the books I've made, and Michael's question about their queerness, I can see that so many of them have queerness, or otherness, as a theme, like *Hugo*, *Wonderstruck*, and *Riding Freedom*. Some actually touch on homosexuality without addressing it directly, like *Walt Whitman: Words for America* and even *Amelia and Eleanor Go for a Ride* (Eleanor had a girlfriend named Lorena Hickok whose picture I placed on the dresser as she prepares for the evening, but again, it's not discussed).

But now, for the first time, I've written a book without gay characters. That book, *The Marvels*, will be published in the fall by Scholastic. When I finished writing the book, I realized that being gay was not one of the *problems* the characters faced in the story. Being gay is just a natural part of their lives. There are no long coming-out narratives or tortured descriptions of unhappy closeted childhoods. There are plenty of *other* problems they're dealing with, but being gay isn't one of them. The structure of *The Marvels* is different from *Wonderstruck,* but like that book, it also tells two stories, one in words and one in pictures.

The word story takes place in the winter of 1990. Again, not wanting to give too much away, since the book is not published yet, I'll just say that the shadow of the AIDS crisis is cast across a part of the story. And again, the book is not *about* the AIDS crisis, yet the crisis is there, embedded in the time and the place.

One of my struggles during the writing of the book was whether or not I should use the word AIDS in the story, because the word is so *loaded*, so *powerful*. Using it felt like setting off a stick of dynamite. What was important for the plot, the real concern for my main character, was that someone was *dying*. Plot-wise, it didn't really matter what he was dying *from*. But I realized that it would be *dishonest* to not say AIDS, because without the word, young people today would have no way of knowing what it was.

Gay history is almost never taught in school. There are young gay men in their twenties who have never heard of ACT-UP, which I mentioned earlier. And for any of *you* who might find yourselves unsure what ACT-UP is, it's the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power. It was founded by the playwright Larry Kramer and others in 1987 and was instrumental in demanding that the government better handle the vast health crisis facing the gay community and getting drugs developed quickly to fight AIDS. My husband was a member so feel free to ask him about it. And please do further research.

PART 4

"The reason Weetzie Bat hated high school was because no one understood. They didn't even realize where they were living. They didn't care that Marilyn's prints were practically in their backyard at Graumann's; that you could buy

tomahawks and plastic palm tree wallets at Farmer's Market, and the wildest, cheapest cheese and bean and hot dog and pastrami burritos at Oki Dogs; that the waitresses wore skates at the Jetson-style Tiny Naylor's; that there was a fountain that turned tropical soda-pop colors, and a canyon where Jim Morrison and Houdini used to live, and all-night potato knishes at Canter's, and not too far away was Venice, with columns, and canals, even, like the real Venice but maybe cooler because of the surfers. There was no one who cared. Until Dirk."

This is the beginning of *Weetzie Bat*, the ground-breaking young adult novel by Francesca Lia Block. It was published in 1989, at the height of the AIDS crisis, and it became a touchstone for generations of young readers and writers. I loved the gay characters, who existed very matter of factly. . . .

"What were you going to tell me?" Weetzie asked.

"I'm gay," Dirk said.

"Who, what, when, where, how—well, not how," Weetzie said. "It doesn't matter one bit, honey-honey," she said giving him a hug.

Dirk took a swig of his drink. "But you know I'll always love you the best and think you are a beautiful, sexy girl," he said.

"Now we can Duck hunt together," Weetzie said, taking his hand.

A few months ago, after I finished writing and illustrating *The Marvels* and had begun to think about writing this lecture, I decided to reread *Weetzie Bat* for the first time since 1990.

The book really is a little wonder. A punk explosion of joy and sadness, a fairy tale quest for love in a landscape filled with dreams, bubbling and dying, all at the same time. It's fluorescent and romantic and fun and scary.

She met a toothy blonde Surf Duck, who, she learned later, was sleeping with everyone.

She met an Alcoholic Art Duck with a ponytail who talked constantly about his girlfriend who had died. Dirk saw him at an all-boy party kissing all the boys.

Dirk didn't do much better at the parties or bars.

"I just want My Secret Agent Lover Man," Weetzie said to Dirk.

"Love is a dangerous angel," Dirk said.

But what struck me most in rereading it was how clearly the book was about love in the time of AIDS. The specter of the epidemic was everywhere in the book, casting its deadly shadows across the landscape, yet AIDS is never named. Friends die, and love can kill, but the word AIDS itself is never spoken.

This was especially intriguing to me in light of the struggle I had deciding to say the word in *The Marvels*. But AIDS didn't need to be named here because it was everywhere at the time the book was written. Every person reading the book, of any age, would have understood what was going on, what the fear the characters felt was caused by.

Dirk, while hunting for ducks, their term for looking for boyfriends, finds a duck actually named Duck. Dirk and Duck, two beautiful boys, fall in love and soon one of Duck's friends dies. Duck panics. He runs away, but Dirk tracks him down.

"How did you find me?" Duck asked as Dirk led him out of the Stud.

"I don't know," Dirk said.

"I've been so afraid. I've been to all the bars just watching and getting wasted. And I know people are dying everywhere. How can anyone love anyone?"

I wondered what today's teens would make of this. I wonder if, cut off from the context of its time period, these discussions of love and death would read as "merely" symbolic, the natural fear that comes with the idea of falling in love for a teenager (or anyone!). And this made me wonder even more if any of the early reviews talked about the fact that AIDS is never mentioned so I started doing some research.

The only review I could find that even referenced the epidemic was the *Kirkus* review from 1989 that says a character's friend dies of what "must be AIDS." The celebratory *New York Times* review by Betsy Hearne doesn't mention anything about diseases. But I found, archived online, along with the review, a single letter to the editor.

Is Weetzie Bat a Good Role Model?

To the Editor:

Betsy Hearne, in her review of Weetzie Bat, *Francesca Lia Block's "punk, young adult fairy tale," glosses over some very inappropriate scenes, referring to "an ingeniously lyrical narrative" and "a story with sensual characters." The book is recommended for ages 12 and up . . .*

. . . Is Weetzie Bat *a good role model? Scarcely, since in many respects friendship and sexuality are quite distorted. In Ms. Hearne's review, the inappropriateness of the story for 12-year-olds isn't even hinted at. Instead, we are led to believe we will be purchasing a whimsical romp. This book is not a lyrical fantasy, but a glorification of pathological neurotics . . ."*

The author, a librarian named Barbara Nosanchuk from Ithaca, New York, goes on to say a few more rather unkind things about the book, making it clear that she thinks there are other more suitable books for young children.

I began to notice that Ms. Nosanchuk's letter was quoted very often in articles and essays about *Weetzie Bat*. She seemed to have become the voice of everyone who was against the book, and *that*, by extension, seemed to indicate she was the voice of everyone against progress, and queerness, and open-mindedness.

I eventually came across an essay written by Francesca Lia Block herself who stated, *"An irate New York librarian, Barbara Nosanchuk, responded to a positive review of* Weetzie Bat *in* The New York Times *with a letter condemning the*

book as a "glorification of pathological neurotics . . ."

Once I saw that even Francesca Lia Block was quoting the letter, I began thinking more and more about Barbara Nosanchuk. So I started Googling *her*. I quickly came across an article from 2014 talking about a lecture series she and her husband had underwritten for nearly thirty years in honor of their son who drowned when he was a senior in high school, in 1983.

The David Nosanchuk Lecture Series came to an end just last year, right here in Washington, DC, with a final trip sponsored by Barbara and her husband, Jerry. This seemed like a remarkable coincidence, that she sponsored a lecture series that ended in DC, which I discovered while writing a lecture for an ongoing series, that this year would take place *in* DC.

The article said, *"Lecture topics have included AIDS, Russia, civil liberties, freedom of the press, Islam, Iraq, inequality in America, genetic engineering and gender roles, among many others."*

What? Half of these were topics from *Weetzie Bat* that Barbara Nosanchuk seemed to be railing *against* in her letter to the editor! There was obviously a more complicated story here. So I tracked her down. Barbara expressed a certain amount of surprise when she got my email. As a retired librarian she knew my name, though she retired long before *Hugo* was published and hadn't read any of my books.

She seemed guarded at first as I told her about the Arbuthnot lecture and the fact that I planned to talk about *Weetzie Bat* and how I'd come across her letter and the way it's been used over the years. I asked her to answer a few questions via email, and then we had a long follow-up phone conversation.

"Our son David died in a swimming accident shortly before his high school graduation," she wrote me in response to my question about him. *"He was senior class president, planning to go to France on a Rotary Scholarship for a year and then attend Middlebury College. He was interested in ideas and social activism. He loved skiing and cross country running.*

"The lecture series was established to create something good and positive out of such a terrible loss to so many of us. It was a way to honor his memory." Barbara also wrote, *"About ten years ago, I Googled my name and was surprised to see my letter to the editor of the* New York Times Book Review *along with other reviews that referenced my review. There may be no book that receives even 90 percent approval, so I thought that the characterization of me* (by Francesca Lia Block) *as irate was excessive. . . . As a librarian, choosing books for a collection is fun. One needs to complement the curriculum as well as find books for leisure reading."*

But here is where she seemed to get to the heart of the matter. *"When I read* Weetzie Bat *in 1989, I was struck mostly by Weetzie's immaturity and lack of responsible sex. I am a strong believer in the goals of Planned Parenthood and safe sex. In 1989 and now too, teen pregnancy is an important societal problem."*

In our follow-up conversation, Barbara talked about how ironic it is to be a liberal who has been identified as conservative because of that letter. She spoke admiringly of Dirk and Duck and their positive portrayal of a gay couple. She was not gay bashing when she used the phrase "pathological neurotics."

She said she was mostly referencing the *adults* in the book, like Weetzie's parents who obviously still love each other yet can't stand to be near one another. "It is fine for 14 and up," she said, "but the review talked about it for sixth graders." That's what she had the real problem with.

The essay where Francesca Lia Block mentions Barbara Nosanchuk is called "Punk Pixies in the Canyon." It was written in 1992 for *The Los Angeles Times*.

"Maybe my form of pop-magic realism—where there are genies and witches as well as real-life love and loss—makes my books especially appealing to teen-agers or to those of us who still identify with that time of life. In the effort to conquer our fear, we may thrust ourselves alone into a smaller version of that world—a violent concert, a threatening sexual encounter, a riot—and feel that having survived we are more in control of our destiny. Or we may choose to make a family with our friends and face fear together through communication and art."

How could you not love this person? So now, of course, I had to call Francesca Lia Block. She and I had a beautiful conversation on the phone, which was followed up via email, and I was thrilled to tell her how much her books meant to me (I've since read almost all the books in the Weetzie cycle). I told her what I was hoping to discuss about *Weetzie Bat* in my lecture. I asked her about the choice to not use the word AIDS, and this is what she had to say:

"I chose not to use the word AIDS (or heroin or rape, etc.) to maintain the light, timeless fairytale tone of the book. The sense of it being a fairy tale softened it which worked out well when it became a book for young people. But the darkness is still there. I think children and adults in our culture are hungry for the mix of darkness and magic in fairy tales. We have to acknowledge the darkness in order to fully appreciate the magic and we have to believe in the magic in order to manage the darkness."

I don't think I even noticed she hadn't used the word "rape" or "heroin," and her instinct was, of course, correct. We know what is going on in the story, we feel it, and somehow it is more powerful, more . . . mythic . . . because it's not named. It just *is*. I told her the story of Barbara Nosanchuk as well. Francesca was fascinated to learn more about Barbara's life, her son, the lecture series, and the deeper reasoning behind her letter to the editor.

"I didn't write this book for kids or adults or gay people or straight people per se," Francesca told me. *"I wrote it out of love for my friends and family and the world. I wrote it to comfort myself and feel less alone, and to hopefully help my readers feel that way. I feel very lucky when it finds readers who understand it, or who*

feel understood when they see reflections of themselves within the pages . . . I'm glad Charlotte Zolotow had the vision to publish them . . . for the young reader who needed them" she said, *"like, for example, a 12-year-old boy who is gay and feels validated and supported by reading about the gay characters."*

For obvious reasons, I was struck by her image of the 12-year-old gay boy finding himself validated in the pages of her book and thinking once again about how important it is to know our history, to see that we are not alone. I recently found myself in a very long and strange conversation with two young men which made me think about the importance of knowing, and accepting, one's history. I'll call them John and Tom. They were both around 26 years old. John told me that he'd been raised in a religious family and his mother had very nearly rejected him when he first came out. But over time she came to understand that homosexuality wasn't just a "lifestyle choice," that it was part of who her son was. She looked on this as an education, and ultimately she thanked John for helping her.

I then asked John's friend Tom if he was out to *his* parents, and he bristled. "I don't believe in labels like "out" or "gay."

"Oh, OK, cool," I said, "I just mean do your parents know you're gay?"

"But why are you even asking me that? Why is that even a thing?"

"Because we live in a world where it *is* a thing," I said. "People are afraid of telling the truth about who they are." Coming out is important, I said to him, especially in the places where homosexuality is less accepted. Look how it helped John's mom.

I told him that when I was on tour for my book *Wonderstruck*, I made a conscious decision to come out in every presentation in every school that I spoke at. So, in my presentation, when a photograph of (my then boyfriend) David and me during a research trip for the book came up on the screen, I simply said, "This is my boyfriend David and me in Gunflint Lake, Minnesota."

I treated it as if it were perfectly natural. Because it is. Sometimes when I said this, there would be an audible reaction from the kids. I remember a physical ripple moving through the boys at a Catholic school as they all turned to each other to check with their friends to see if they'd heard me right, but I kept talking and because everyone liked me and they liked my books and they wanted to know what else I was saying, I quickly got everyone's attention again.

The talks always continued without a hitch. But no matter how nervous this made me, I knew that each time I talked about David there would be kids in the audience who might be questioning their own sexuality, who had perhaps been told by the adults in their lives and their community that their feelings are sinful and negative and they should fight it or reject it. That's why I was doing what I was doing, for *those* kids, and hopefully, in some small way, to maybe change the minds of others, as well.

Unsurprisingly, Tom sneered and said he thought it was ridiculous I was making such a big deal out of it.

"No," I said, "The point is I *didn't* make a big deal out of it." But I was conscious I was doing it. I tried to make it clear to him that his strength and his pride in himself is very powerful and I really support it but he needs to understand that he is part of a *history*.

That really angered him and made him feel like I was trying to reduce his own experiences. He thought I was calling him ungrateful. I talked to him about my friend David Levithan's work. I told him about his groundbreaking novel *Boy Meets Boy*, which was written about twelve years ago. David had grown tired of the gay characters in books always having to "come out" and deal with their homosexuality as an *issue*. He wanted to read a romance between two boys where the only issue was how they fell in love, same as any two heterosexual teenagers. So he wrote it. He created a fantasy world, an alternative-universe Hoboken, New Jersey, where acceptance of homosexuality is pretty much the norm, and the quarterback is also the homecoming queen, and kids are identified as gay in kindergarten.

There's still some religious intolerance here and there, and there's prejudice for the kids to deal with, but it rang true and yet felt completely liberating at the same time. Then, just last year, David published a book called *Two Boys Kissing*, which is based on the true story of the two gay high school boys who have the official longest kiss in the world in the *Guinness Book of World Records*. *Two Boys Kissing* is a *fictional* version of the story, but these boys exist, and their families and their communities exist, where they were able to fall in love and break up and find support and kiss for thirty-two hours. In a way, it's as if the fantasy world posited in *Boy Meets Boy* came true. But David's most genius move was the narration of the story in *Two Boys Kissing*.

It's narrated by a collective voice, a first person plural that is very rarely employed. In David's book, the collective voice that narrates the story is the generation of gay men who died of AIDS. To them, these two boys, with their love and their acceptance and their record-breaking kiss, are nothing short of miracles. It's a heartbreaking and radical conceit. And it works.

"And you," I said to Tom, "are those boys. You are what everyone's been fighting for." But he didn't listen. The conversation ran in circles for almost an hour and a half, and he seemed only to grow more frustrated.

Finally I told him I had to leave, but before I did I grabbed his hand. I said, "Listen. I like you very much. I think you should be very proud of your strength and your security in who you are." And then I transformed into Deborah Kerr in *Tea and Sympathy*.

"But in the future," I said, "when you think about this conversation—and you will, I hope that you realize I was trying to make you *stronger* by giving you a history. Having a history doesn't take *away* anything from you! It gives you scaffolding. It *builds you up*."

Tom stared at me out of the corner of his eye, as if he was dubious, but he said, "OK," and we managed to say goodbye. It wasn't until I'd taken a long subway ride all the way back to my house that I finally figured out what had been going on. Tom wasn't out to his parents. They didn't know he was gay.

That was the reason he bristled so deeply when I asked him if he was out, and it was why he felt like he had to reject any idea of queerness or labels. By refusing to see himself by a label, as something with an identifiable name and a history, then he had nothing to tell his parents about.

He said his parents supported him, but I think what was left unsaid was the implication that if he was out they might NOT support him. They had some connection to a religious background from what he'd told me, which might have explained it, and Tom said he was also religious too. I felt slightly more prepared to talk to him about religion because just a few weeks before I'd had this conversation, I'd finished reading the Bible.

PART 5

And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.

I read the entire Old and New Testament to prepare for this speech. I'd always wanted to read the Bible, but now I felt compelled, because this book seems to hold the roots to nearly all of the Western world's homophobia. There are only six references to same-sex sex in the entire book, but I wanted to understand the full context.

If you're interested in a fascinating unpacking of how these lines have been *misinterpreted* over the millennia, check out *God and the Gay Christian* by Matthew Vines. It's very thoughtfully constructed by the author, himself a practicing Christian and gay man. There are so many people who have spent their lives reading the Bible, either as believers, or as academics, and I can claim to be neither. What follows are simply *my* thoughts based on my first foray into the book.

Reading the Bible was an amazing experience, overwhelming, maddening, and beautiful. The book was filled with revelations for me, and not just the revelations of Revelations, which were really intense! I could give a whole other lecture on my thoughts regarding the Bible. Do most people even know that there are three entirely different creation stories?

The one I read above comes first, then it's followed *directly* by the one we're more familiar with, where Adam is created to be the keeper of the Garden of Eden, then the animals are created to try to help him until finally God performs the world's first operation and he puts Adam to sleep, takes his rib and makes Eve, his subordinate. Of course, just a few pages *earlier* man and woman had already been created (*after* the animals by the way), and they were equal in the part I read you. But then in the New Testament there's yet another version, and in a way, this one is the most simple and the most beautiful of all. It's John 1:1.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

It all starts with a word. So what is God now? God is how we tell *stories*, and stories are how we poor humans try to understand the world. The Bible is not just the origin story for mankind, whether you believe it is holy, or whether you believe it was written by men and collected over centuries, but it's where stories themselves are rooted for us in the Western tradition. There are many people who say they take the Bible literally, but how do you make sense of the contradictory stories, the different creation myths, the world that begins (in the second version) with two human beings, Adam and Eve, who's only surviving child heads off into a world where he discovers a community of people to live with and marry into. Where did *they* come from?

Were there other Adams and Eves all over the world? I don't hear anyone suggesting that might be the case. Anyway, I think it's clear that no one today can actually live according to the Bible without making a large number of choices regarding what they will and will not do, and what they do and do not believe. It's those choices that define who we are and what groups we identify with. But if we step back slightly, and read the Bible as a collection of stories about what it means to be *human*, about how we struggle to survive, then so much of it begins to really make sense. At least this was the experience I had.

For me, the Bible turned out to be a ravishing book about *failure*. And by that I mean almost everyone in the Bible *fails* to live up to God's demands. People try, and fail, to live according to the rules that have been set up. My friend James Lecesne, an actor, writer, director, and the founder of the Trevor Project (the leading national organization focused on suicide prevention efforts among lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, and other queer youth) talked to me about his feelings regarding the Bible (he was the one who recommended *God and the Gay Christian* to me). He grew up a Roman Catholic and now is a practicing Buddhist. He said that basically it breaks down like this: the God of the Old Testament is outside of us, and the God of the New Testament is inside of us. That is the foundational shift between the two books.

He says, *"I think that what is most striking to me is the fact that as a child I was never much interested in the old Bible stories, because they seemed to me so heteronormative. Nowhere did I find a reflection of a life (and love) I knew existed in my young heart. In those days, no one was talking about homosexuality or how the Bible was against it. But they didn't need to. Exclusion said it all. For me, the Bible (especially the Old Testament) was*

all about the binary of man and woman, and I wasn't so much interested in that.

"I was however totally into Jesus (and the New Testament) because it was (is) essentially about Love, and THAT I understood to my core. I grabbed hold of its message and ran with it. I understood (even without being able to articulate it) that Love would deliver me into the life I knew was waiting for me. And in a miraculous way, it has *delivered me. Because here I am."*

The stories in the Bible and ideas of God have been used for many beautiful things and have helped many people, but they've also been used to justify an endless amount of hatred and violence. This is from the brief filed in the case of Loving V. Virginia:

"In June, 1958, two residents of Virginia, Mildred Jeter, a Negro woman, and Richard Loving, a white man, were married in the District of Columbia pursuant to its laws. Shortly after their marriage, the Lovings returned to Virginia and established their marital abode in Caroline County. At the October Term, 1958, of the Circuit Court of Caroline County, a grand jury issued an indictment charging the Lovings with violating Virginia's ban on interracial marriages. On January 6, 1959, the Lovings pleaded guilty to the charge and were sentenced to one year in jail; however, the trial judge suspended the sentence for a period of twenty-five years on the condition that the Lovings leave the State and not return to Virginia together for twenty-five years.

"He stated in an opinion that: 'Almighty God created the races white, black, yellow, malay and red, and he placed them on separate continents. And, but for the interference with his arrangement, there would be no cause for such marriage. The fact that he separated the races shows that he did not intend for the races to mix.'"

This law fell. And soon, it seems the laws against gay marriage will, too. As we speak tonight, the Supreme Court, just a few blocks from here, is arguing the case, and history stands to be made again. People say they don't believe you can change the definition of marriage, but the definition of marriage has done nothing BUT change over the course of the millennia of human existence. From one man owning many wives, to one man owning *one* wife, to one man and one woman of the same race being seen as equal partners under the law, to one man and one woman of any race being equal partners to two *people* being equal partners.

Now the question is, who gets to decide what a family is? The answer is simple. Families will decide what families are. No family will get to tell another family that they are not a family. We're *all* "funny, funny families," as May Hill Arbuthnot wrote. I mentioned earlier that one of my favorite books as a kid was Mary Norton's *The Borrowers*, about the tiny people living under the floorboards of a boy's house. My friend James Lecesne, (he of the Trevor Project), it turns out, read the book as a child also. *"How essential those books were to me as a little gay,"* he said. *"I'd forgotten how deeply I was enmeshed in that fantasy way back when. And the fact that we were both living in that little sub rosa world must mean something in terms of gay family history."*

I loved the idea that this book was a part of my *gay family history* with James. I loved that I *had* a gay family history. The great fear for the Borrowers is being "seen." They hide away in the shadows, secure in the knowledge that the bigger world is there to provide them with what they need to survive. The people in the big world barely even know Borrowers exist. No character in *The Borrowers* is *gay*, but it turns out that everything about the story is *queer*. And besides, do you remember what ultimately happens to the Borrowers? Do they stay hidden? No. They end up: Afield, Afloat, Aloft, and . . . Avenged!

Sure, God didn't make Adam and Steve. But he didn't need to. We came later, quite naturally, on our own. Homophobic people say that gay people recruit. We don't recruit. We don't need to. We come back, again and again, through heterosexuals who are delivering to the world a great gift, one that was hidden for a long time, one that is targeted and often hated, one that is sometimes the victim of violence and discrimination, but one that can't be extinguished. And guess what we're doing now! We're raising families with kids! Lots of kids! But we're not raising them to be *gay*. We're raising them to be *themselves*. Yes, some of our children will grow up to be gay, but we are raising *a lot* of kids who will grow up to be straight. And we're teaching them all that no matter who they love, it's OK. It's a lesson some heterosexual parents have a harder time learning.

We look for ourselves in the world around us. Our role models are often our mothers and fathers, our siblings, our extended family of aunts, uncles, cousins, friends. But our role models are also the characters in the books we read, the people we see on TV, the stories we hear about in the newspapers.

The playwright and actress Dael Orlandersmith, in her new play "Forever," describes a trip to Paris's most famous cemetery to visit the idols of her life, where she sums it up this way: "All of us have come to be with the people here in Pere Lachaise, who, beyond our parents, helped us give birth to ourselves."

The need to love and to be loved. This was another one of the categories May Hill Arbuthnot identified in her textbook on children's literature. She understood the deep central role that love plays in a child's life, and in the life of the adult the child will grow up to be. This, after all, is what everything comes down to. We want to love, and to be loved. This is what makes sense of everything else.

In the beginning was the word.

The end is a mystery.

And in between, there's love.

Thank you very much. &

Getting Ready for Play!

Toy Collections in Public Libraries

CARLY BASTIANSEN AND JENNIFER WHARTON

Children play with toys from the toy collection at Cuyahoga County Public Library in Ohio.

Looking for a lively way to enhance early literacy services at your library? Hoping to increase circulation, community engagement, and fun in the children's section? Consider adding circulating toys, games, puppets, and puzzles to your children's collection.

The second edition of Every Child Ready to Read (ECRR) intentionally includes play as one of the five fundamental practices for building early literacy skills for all children. The ALSC white paper on the importance of play explains how play "encourages healthy brain development while fostering exploration skills, language skills, social skills, physical skills, and creativity."[1]

In his clinical report for the American Academy of Pediatrics, Kenneth Ginsburg notes that play provides crucial parent-child interaction, and that the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights has even recognized play as a right of every child.[2] Offering toys for public circulation is a fun, inviting, and manageable way to create play opportunities at your library.

Overcoming Barriers to Play

Access to toys and unstructured playtime is not a given for all children. Many contemporary children face significant barriers to the play they need for healthy early childhood development. Recent parenting trends have led many affluent parents to fill

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their children's schedules with structured extracurricular activities, eliminating sufficient time for free play.[3]

Similarly, recent educational trends and legislative standards have led schools—even including preschools—to reduce time for free play in daily schedules, replacing recess and other unstructured time with controlled educational activities.[4]

Especially in urban areas, some parents must limit their children's free and group playtime because of neighborhood safety concerns.[5] Furthermore, poverty leaves many children without access to toys and games, or even opportunities to explore and interact with the world in unstructured play. Additionally, many studies have demonstrated the importance of adult–child interaction for all children's language acquisition and school readiness.

A forthcoming study by Susan B. Neuman suggests that parent–child engagement in playtime may be even more beneficial for children, especially those in lower socioeconomic groups, than the quantity of words spoken.[6] Playtime is significant learning time, and too many barriers stand in the way for disadvantaged children.

Children with disabilities also face many obstacles to enriching playtime, from inaccessible toys, to time-consuming medical and therapy appointments, to persistent stigmas and social exclusion. Exploratory, imaginative, and investigative play are just as important for children with and without disabilities; in fact, some argue that unstructured play is more important for children with disabilities.[7] Furthermore, accessible and adapted toys specifically for children with disabilities are often cost-prohibitive, particularly for families with high medical expenses.

The barriers that keep so many children from accessing play in early childhood point to the necessity of public libraries to provide toys and play experiences without direct cost to the public. Circulating toy collections provides valuable community resources by allowing families, caregivers, and educators to borrow toys for free for specific lending periods.

This free access to toys provides many benefits for all children, especially the opportunity to vary a child's toys to keep pace with ever-changing interests and abilities. Particularly for children with disabilities, library toy collections provide families with opportunities to test large and costly toys before purchasing them, to measure a child's skill mastery with specifically designed toys, and to meet the needs of each child's changing developmental goals.[8]

Not a New Concept

Donna Giannantonio of the USA Toy Library Association board of directors surmises that toy lending libraries began in the United States during the Great Depression. Today, various public and private organizations allow paying members to borrow toys and sometimes offer subsidies for qualifying families. There is an even broader public need for equitable access to toys and play. Public libraries in particular "have a vital role to play in this restoration of play as the prime activity of childhood."[9] Even on a small scale, library toy collections offer crucial and significant early literacy support to the public.

A Snapshot of Public Library Toy Collections

Libraries across the country are already providing toy collections to their communities. In our informal survey of public libraries that currently circulate toys, we found a wide variety of sizes, costs, and collection scopes (see table 1). Most of the twenty-six libraries that responded circulate more than one hundred toys, although a few circulate fewer than twenty toys. While most of these collections began in the last two decades, one was created in 1939. In general, toy collections are designed for children ages birth to five, although some focus on preschool and elementary students as their target audience.

For roughly half of these twenty-six libraries, their initial costs exceeded $1,000. The other half spent less than $1,000 initially, with most of that half spending under $500. Yearly maintenance costs depend on the size of the collection. Most of these libraries spend less than $500 per year to maintain their toy collections, and only two spend more than $1,000 annually. Funding sources for these toy collections include regular library materials budgets, grants, local or private donations, Friends of the Library groups, or library foundations.

Cataloging and circulation procedures for these collections vary widely. Most have established procedures for examining and cleaning returned toys as part of regular collection maintenance. Among library systems with multiple branches, some share collections across branches and through interlibrary loan, while others house toys at only one branch.

While five of these libraries keep all of their toy materials in staff-only areas and provide printed catalogs for public browsing, most of these toy collections are stored on the public floor, usually in mesh or clear hanging bags or clear bins.

Just under half of these twenty-six libraries do not have dedicated staff to manage their toy collections. Staffing for the toy collections at the remaining libraries ranges from volunteers, to general duties for regular staff members, to designated part-time staff members. Most of our respondents do not actively market their collections or only marketed them initially and have relied on collection visibility since. Marketing for the remaining toy collections includes library websites and Facebook pages, printed brochures, newspaper coverage, school field trips, and intentional programming connections.

Material types also vary, ranging from basic and common toys to more unique and advanced materials for play. These libraries circulate baby toys; blocks, including LEGOs; wooden toys; puzzles; puppets; dolls, including Star Wars toys and American Girl dolls; musical instruments; board games; ride-on toys;

Table 1. Library Toy Collection Survey Results

Libraries with a service population larger than 50,000

Toys	Collection started	Initial cost	Yearly cost
100+	2010–2015	$1,000+	Unknown
100+	1990–2010	$1,000+	$1,000+
100+	1970–1990	$1,000+	$500–$1,000
100+	Unknown	$1,000+	$100–$500
100+	1970–1990	$500–$1,000	$1,000+

Libraries with a service population between 20,000 and 50,000

Toys	Collection started	Initial cost	Yearly cost
50–100	2010–2015	$1,000+	$100–$500
<20	2010–2015	$100–$500	-$100
50–100	1990–2010	$1,000+	$500–$1,000
20–50	2010–2015	$100–$500	-$100
100+	1970–1990	$100–$500	$100–$500
50–100	2010–2015	$100–$500	-$100
100+	1970–1990	$1,000+	$100–$500
50–100	Unknown	Unknown	$100–$500
100+	1990–2010	$500–$1,000	$100–$500
100+	1990–2010	$100–$500	$100–$500
<20	Unknown	-$100	-$100

Libraries with a service population between 10,000 and 20,000

Toys	Collection started	Initial cost	Yearly cost
<20	2010–2015	$500–$1,000	-$100
100+	1990–2010	$1,000+	$500–$1,000
100+	1990–2010	$1,000+	$100–$500
20–50	1990–2010	$1,000+	$100–$500

Libraries with service populations under 10,000

Toys	Collection started	Initial cost	Yearly cost
50-100	1939	$1,000+	-$100
20-50	1990–2010	$100–$500	$100–$500
100+	1970–1990	$1,000+	-$100
Unknown	1990–2010	-$100	$100–$500
100+	2010–2015	$1,000+	-$100
50–100	Unknown	-$100	-$100

pretend play toys; electronic toys, including LeapPad tablets; themed kits with books, manipulatives, and sometimes activity guides; and maker kits.

Libraries purchase their toy realia from a variety of vendors, including local stores, online (Amazon or eBay), Oriental Trading, American Girl, Constructive Playthings, Discount School Supply, Environments, Kaplan, Lakeshore Learning, Learning Resources, Learning Shop, Melissa and Doug, Land of Nod, Nova Natural, Acorn Toy Shop, direct sales at conferences, or from companies like Penworthy and Folkmanis.

We were also interested to learn about the particular needs and desired changes of staff working with these toy collections. Our respondents most commonly mentioned more space, more funding, and more marketing as their greatest current needs. Other desires include

- help with cleaning and maintaining toys;
- better procedures for dealing with damage from in-house use;
- more effective cataloging for toys with multiple pieces;
- less demands on staff time;
- better integration of toys with branch play areas and early literacy programming;
- renovations to make the space more inviting;
- more buy-in and support from frontline staff;
- more thorough staff training on the importance of play for early literacy; and
- greater accessibility to reach more children.

The Learning and Sharing Collection

One example of a large and well established toy collection is the Learning and Sharing Collection (LSC) at Harford County Public Library (HCPL) in Maryland. Originally called the Learning and Sharing Center, this pioneering toy collection was created with grant support in 1975 and grew over the decades under the guidance of several dedicated staff members.

Today, this early literacy realia collection contains more than one thousand items, including toys, games, puppets, storytime pals (literacy kits with books and coordinating manipulatives and audio CDs), puzzles, and themed skill-building kits for children ages birth to five. In 2012, the LSC was expanded beyond its long-standing home at the Bel Air Branch to shared circulation at four more of HCPL's eleven branches. At the Bel Air Branch, the LSC also contains sets of picture books for use in the Sharing the Gift program, a volunteer storytime outreach initiative for local preschools and day care centers that was also founded in 1975.

Cataloging for the LSC is organized into eight call numbers for finger puppets, games, hand puppets, music toys, puzzles, storytime pals, toys, and wooden toys.

Certain items are also cataloged with call number subcategories, such as animals, food and cooking, infants, letters and words, motor skills, numbers, people, science, senses, sequencing, storytelling, time, and transportation.

HCPL's Materials Management department allocates funding each fiscal year to cover new and replacement toys and books.

To mark the fortieth anniversary this year, the LSC is relaunching and expanding to all eleven HCPL branches. At early stages, the relaunch plans include

- new branding and marketing, including a shorter and catchier name;
- a complete evaluation and update of the entire collection;
- the creation of new materials selection and retention procedures;
- the addition of new materials focused on skill development and accessibility for children with special needs;
- moving all materials previously stored in staff-only areas onto the public floor;
- intentional integration into the forthcoming early literacy center at the Bel Air Branch;
- more efficient shelving and clearer signage;
- a more robust Web presence, including curated record sets with photos linking to the online catalog, skill-specific information and tutorial videos, and inclusion in HCPL's digital readers' advisory service (Beanstack, offered in partnership with Zoobean); and
- new family workshop programming for early literacy play and skill development using library toys.

Considerations and Best Practices

Even with the wide variety among toy collections, there are fundamental standards to guide libraries in starting and maintaining their collections. First and foremost, we must "understand children's stages of development and what types of play are good for certain ages or stages."[10]

ALSC identifies three basic types of play:

1. object or exploratory play;
2. pretend, imaginative, or dramatic play; and
3. social, physical, or investigative play.[11]

Library toy collections should include materials to support each of these types of play, which are also appropriate for their chosen target ages or developmental stages. It is also important to understand the particular needs of your library's local community when selecting toys, coordinating collection logistics, and designing related marketing and programming.

Also consider how your circulating toys will fit into your system's strategic plan. It's advisable to craft policies for materials selection and retention, to establish scope and standards for purchasing and weeding. In selecting toys for public circulation, Neuman and Roskos recommend looking for "authenticity, utility, and appropriateness."[12] The realia you select should also be safe (as proven by certification under the Consumer Product Safety Improvement Act, provided by vendors), durable, relevant, adaptable to different uses, and accessible to different ability levels. Toys should represent diversity, appeal to multiple senses,[13] and even relate to your special collections.[14]

Toy vendors that cater to early childhood and school markets are more likely than chain stores to offer sturdy, unique, and useful items. Toy collections should be weeded routinely, using the same process as for print material collections, and with special care for safety and cleanliness.

Remember that initial and yearly costs for toy collections are completely flexible and dependent upon general library operating and materials budgets. Starting small, paring down overgrown collections, and remaining small over many years can all be effective ways to provide access to toy and play opportunities for your community. No matter the size of your collection, be thoughtful and intentional about your selection, procedures, policies, storage, and marketing to make the most of your toy investment.

Consider whether you will keep all of your circulating toys on the public floor, or house some or all in staff-only areas. Large or heavy items, such as wooden toys and ride-on vehicles, may be too hazardous to store in public areas. Consider also whether you want your circulating toys to be available for play within the library. If you also provide non-circulating toys for in-house use,

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The USA Toy Library Association

Founded in 1985, the USA Toy Library Association (USA-TLA) provides

- conferences and seminars for toy librarians, child therapists, teachers, and others;
- information and educational materials to help start and operate a toy library, identify and create imaginative toys and play materials, and understand the relationship of play to early childhood development;
- the only online directory of toy-lending programs in the United States; and
- access to the International Toy Library Association (ITLA), a network of eighty countries' toy lending programs and practitioners.

For more information on the USA-TLA, call 847-612-6966 or visit www.usatla.org.

Smart Starts

Creating Meaningful Play Programming

BARI ERICSON

Learning through play.

How many "golden moments" have you had at your library this week?

You know what I mean . . . Dad and Sam discussing how to make their block structure stronger, or Nanny and Emma creating a puppet play intermixing two languages, or Grandma and Parker fitting together puzzle pieces while conversing about words starting with "M."

How can you create an environment at your library to expand the opportunities for these golden moments? By creating intentional, educational play programming at your library.

Enter . . . Smart Starts

Smart Starts, as we call it, is a hands-on, interactive environment where adults help children develop early reading, writing, math, and science skills through fun play activities. Several craft, game, and experiential stations are focused around a weekly topic and designed to engage children ages two to eight.

We developed this program after observing elaborate play spaces at other libraries. While we are not able to devote permanent space, we can provide learning opportunities for our community in a unique, meaningful way. We have come to appreciate being able to offer Smart Starts as a special, changing program rather than have the activities become routine.

One of our primary goals was to provide a richer, more meaningful library experience for our patrons. We sought to provide something beyond the performance of storytimes and more engaging than adults just "watching" the children play. Smart Starts allows adults to play side-by-side with their children, while communicating substantively and enhancing learning experiences.

Setting the Stage

Each Smart Starts program has a theme, developed around an educational goal, which, in turn, supports the local school curriculum and ties into state standards. Examples of themes include measurement and related math concepts, plants for hands-on science, and narrative to promote literacy skills.

Six to eight stations are created for each theme. These vary widely, but often include a science experiment, one or more crafts, practice worksheets, games involving sorting or matching, building or construction play, and related educational toys.

A PowerPoint slideshow is created for each program to display scrolling slides featuring each station. These offer pictures to interest the children in the various activities and hints for adults to interact meaningfully.

Bari Ericson *is Youth Programming Associate at Glen Ellyn (IL) Public Library.*

Extension materials are also made available. These include books and other library resources related to the topic that are ready for check-out. A caregiver tip sheet offers ideas for how to repeat and expand learning activities and concepts at home.

Library patron Elizabeth Warren said, "My children and I love Smart Starts! We enjoy the variety of hands-on activities centered around various themes. They allow my children to participate in activities that engage a variety of senses. I particularly enjoy that I can bring both my one- and three-year-old, and they can both participate. The crafts and take home sheets are a fun way to include my husband in the fun at home."

Starring Roles of the Library Staff

With my background as a preschool teacher and various Internet resources, I am able to cultivate a collection of meaningful activities for each theme. As facilitator, it is my job to gather supplies and promote interest. I also create the PowerPoints, assemble the booklists, and read articles on learning opportunities in each topic area to assist caregivers.

Various individuals lead Smart Starts while it is open. The staff member welcomes patrons as they enter the room and helps get visitors started. We try to have a particularly engaging activity near the door to draw in children who may be hesitant. What preschooler can resist a huge cardboard box to crawl in or "mess-free" finger painting?

The library staff member also models conversation and play behavior to encourage adults to make the most of the experience. A parent may regularly record his or her child's dictated stories after giving it a try in Smart Starts. After I asked a child who was arbitrarily banging instruments, "Can you repeat this pattern?," the adult continued the game. One nanny told me, "I have to make one of these!" after experimenting with our simple shadow box. In this informal setting, staff and patrons develop relationships, adults feel free to ask questions, and children enjoy playing with the librarian.

Critics' Choice

Smart Starts incorporates STEAM concepts as well as early literacy skills, allowing the library to partner with local schools, embracing community and educational initiatives.

Smart Starts is uniquely inclusive. The activities and levels of engagement allow all children to participate, including those with special needs and beginning English language learners. The open format welcomes the entire family, promoting sibling interaction. I once had two teens spend over an hour with their three-year-old cousin exploring ramps. The open nature of Smart Starts also allows for individuals of varied intelligences and diverse learning styles to benefit.

We have been able to use the Smart Starts program as outreach to underserved and non-patrons within our community. Our school liaison has arranged special sessions with at-risk preschool groups, allowing us to welcome many refugee and recent immigrant families into our building who may not otherwise have ventured in. It was fun to witness refugee parents from Myanmar experience glue sticks and watercolor painting for the first time. Additional connections have been made with parent groups within the community.

When we make an effort to seek out those who have been previously unreached or underserved, we give them heightened visibility and significance. The library becomes valuable to those new individuals as well as gaining greater appreciation from the community at large.

Anne Weinland Mulhearn, local Newcomers organizer, said, "Smart Starts at GEPL has been the Glen Ellyn Newcomers Moms + Tots group favorite activity. The stations encompass a variety of learning activities that children of all ages find fun, exciting, and interactive. I love watching the children spread out into different activities, participate, and share. You can tell the kids get a lot out of the activities and the parents enjoy the time with their children."

Production Costs: Time and Money

Admittedly, Smart Starts has required a large amount of time to develop the themes and related activities. However, this could be divided between staff members. For example, one person could be assigned science experiments and another craft. The actual execution of the program takes very little time commitment. Staff only need be available to interact with patrons and re-stock supplies.

Smart Starts is extremely inexpensive for the number of community members reached. For example, we spent only $300 over a four-week period, where we had twenty-nine sessions and hosted more than twelve hundred participants. To reduce costs, you could ask for donations of educational toys, shop for supplies at second-hand and dollar stores, and ask colleagues to help collect recyclable materials.

It would be easy to adapt the Smart Starts concept to a smaller scale or for outreach. A different activity could be set up each week on a table within the department. Learning through play activities could be taken on the road to local schools, park district, church, or community events. We plan to use a small version of Smart Starts at sidewalk sales and farmers' markets in our community next summer.

Once planned, Smart Starts events may be repeated every year. A four-year-old experiences the stations far differently than he or she did as a three-year-old. My only comment about a repeated program was an excited, "I remember this!" Library patron Cynthia Ellis commented, "My son has been enjoying Smart Starts for three years. It gives him ample opportunities to

'grow into' the various center-activities. It has also inspired us to explore some of these topics more on our own."

Over the past three years, we have experimented with the schedule of Smart Starts. We began it on trial, offering each event for two hours every other Monday afternoon. Positive patron response led us to offer Smart Starts as a Wednesday morning alternative within the weekly storytime session. We have since expanded the schedule to be a separate series of programs, alternating with storytime sessions. We hold six weeks of storytimes, take a week break, and then offer four weeks of Smart Starts, working around holidays and school breaks.

During each week, Smart Starts is open as a drop-in program for sixty- to ninety-minute segments over the course of three days. This includes three mornings, two afternoons, and an evening. Outside groups are added at alternate times within the three-day window.

Determining the schedule for any new event can be tricky. But once this type of program is set up, it is advantageous to have it open at various times to allow for maximum use. As always, cater to your library community and adjust your times based on what proves best for your patrons.

Rave Reviews

The reaction to Smart Starts has been extremely positive. Caregivers are delighted that such an enriching program is not only available at the library, but free. Many patrons intentionally add Smart Starts to their calendar, making sure to come each week. They invite neighbors and arrange to meet friends at the program. Dad John Witte observed, "The chance to interact with other kids in a learning environment is valuable both for the kids and the parents." Several outside groups have scheduled repeat sessions and prompted other organizations to make similar arrangements. We have been delighted to connect with many previous non-users.

As libraries, we want to prepare our youngest patrons for a constantly changing future that will necessitate lifelong learning. Renowned (and oft-cited) educator O. Fred Donaldson reminds us that, "Children learn as they play. Most importantly, in play children learn how to learn."[1]

By offering programs such as Smart Starts, we can equip our children for a life of learning by providing an inclusive play environment that promotes adult interaction and reaches out to the underserved. &

References

1. Anne Burke, *Ready to Learn: Using Play to Build Literacy Skills in Young Learners* (Markham, Ontario: Pembroke, 2010).

On Martha Stewart's Library Shelf

Bibliography prepared by "Eel Bennett Napkins"

Poet and anthologist Lee Bennett Hopkins has written and edited numerous award-winning books for children and young adults, as well as professional texts and curriculum materials. He has taught elementary school and served as a consultant to school systems throughout the country and now lives in Florida.

Imagine if lifestyle maven Martha Stewart had more than just cookbooks and dwelling magazines on her bookshelf; what if she had children's books? With apologies to the authors, her favorite books might look something like this:

- *Anne of Green Peas*
- *Beauty and the Beef*
- *Clifford, the Big Red Hot Dog*
- *The Day the Microwave Quit*
- *Encyclopedia Brown Gravy*
- *Harold and the Purple Eggplant*
- *Skippyjon Peanut Butter Jones*
- *Snow White and Her Seven-Up*
- *Stuart Little Debbie Cupcakes*
- *The Three Little Pigs in a Blanket*

A tasty selection indeed!

The Young Engineers Project

One Library's Collaboration to Foster Fun and Literacy

SHAWN D. WALSH AND MELANIE A. LYTTLE

Young Engineer Campbell works on a WeDo construction at the Cleveland Botanical Gardens.

It started with a phone call from Jovette Hiltunen, director of Teaching and Learning at the Lake County Educational Service Center in Painesville, Ohio, in the fall of 2012, and, unfortunately, it appears to have ended when the money ran out from the grant in the summer of 2014. However, it was an amazing experience, and the kids we worked with touched our hearts. We are so proud of our young engineers.

The Grant Call

Hiltunen called the library after she had been referred to us by Angela Smith, the assistant superintendent of Madison (Ohio) Local Schools, the district in which our library is located. They were working on applying for grant funds disbursed by the Ohio Department of Education. These came from money allocated by the state legislature to be given to school districts doing creative things to help students in danger of not passing the Third Grade Reading Guarantee. Preference would be given to applications that had schools partnering with community entities to help these at-risk students. The public library seemed like a good potential partner.

Hiltunen and Shawn Walsh, the emerging services and technologies librarian, but also the face of the library with the schools, talked about various possibilities. The school wanted to concentrate on helping the students gain proficiency and competency with informational texts. Eventually the two arrived at using LEGOs and STEM concepts to support the students' work with these informational texts. The library's part of the grant would focus on LEGOs.

As a result of this first phone call, Walsh and two other members of the staff at Madison Public Library began their own self-guided crash course in contemporary educational jargon before things went any further. Thank goodness for the Ohio Department of Education website.

For Library Director Nancy Currie to sign off on this potential partnership, Walsh had to clarify what the library was doing as part of the grant and why they were doing it. Things needed to be very clearly spelled out. Enter Head of Public Services Melanie Lyttle, who very quickly reacquainted herself with where education had gone since she got her bachelor's degree in elementary education almost fifteen years earlier. And as it

Shawn D. Walsh *is the Emerging Services and Technologies Librarian and* ***Melanie A. Lyttle*** *is Head of Public Services at Madison (OH) Public Library.*

turned out, she would play a sizable support role in the grant program.

Before going too much further, it's important to know the critical terms and ideas that shaped this whole grant process.

Third Grade Reading Guarantee

This is a component of the new education standards the state of Ohio included when they adopted the Common Core State Standards. It puts an emphasis on the ability to read in the early grades and favors rigorous intervention at that time if it appears a child is not reading on grade level. At the end of third grade, if a child is not reading at grade level as determined through standardized testing, he or she can be retained in third grade until the test is passed.

Staying in third grade another year comes with a battery of reading-based requirements and activities designed to get the child where he or she should be academically. Not all states have adopted this as part of Common Core, but Ohio did. This was going to be very important in the 2013-2014 school year when the Third Grade Reading Guarantee would be enforced for the first time.

Informational Text

These are generally non-fiction texts, except when they are not. In extremely broad terms, it is non-fiction minus folktales, fairy tales, and a bunch of the things in the 800s of the Dewey Decimal System. But for the purposes of this article and how it was dealt with in the grant, informational texts were things that talked about STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math).

Pre-Literacy Skills

Skills that are present in the Every Child Ready to Read program come back to "haunt" children who are reading below grade level. Without pre-literacy skills solidly in place, it is hard for children to read on their own.

The Grant Is Approved

With research done and many planning meetings completed, the Madison Local School District, in partnership with Lake County Educational Service Center and Madison Public Library, received a grant from the Ohio Department of Education for approximately $100,000, of which about $25,000 was for the materials and staff associated with the program and the library. Several components to the grant included teacher in-service and new materials for classroom teachers. The parts that concerned the library were the tutoring that children would receive at the school, transportation from the schools to the library, and LEGO-based activities at the library.

The library pushed LEGOs as a concrete way to reinforce STEM readings for several reasons. LEGOs were extremely popular in the area, and the library already had a successful LEGO Club. This group, conceived of and run by middle school student Wyatt Vernyi, had children ages five and up bringing their LEGO creations to the library once a month to meet with other enthusiasts to play with and discuss their creations.

The library also had a history of unsuccessful "educational programs," so LEGOs fit the criteria of something that could be educational but appeared to be simply play and fun. The library also had carved its niche in the community as a place for messy, hands-on experiences for children, so LEGOs fit with that image.

The grant paid for the purchase of two different types of LEGOs to be used in the program. There were LEGO Simple Machines and WeDo Construction sets, enough for all the children to work in pairs. It also paid for the staff time of Walsh, Lyttle, and Courtney Davisson, a library page and freshman education major at a local college, to run this program two days a week for an hour each day.

Originally Lyttle and public services assistant Kylie Coy each served as the program helper one day a week while Walsh and Davisson worked the two days. Halfway through the program, staffing schedules were switched. Lyttle took on a second LEGO day and Coy shifted her focus to working with middle school students after school.

This grant from the state offered a unique opportunity to close to seventy-five first, second, and third grade children who were identified in the two area schools as in danger of failing the Third Grade Reading Guarantee. Once a week after the school day ended, they stayed at school for a snack and approximately forty-five minutes of intensive group tutoring from current teachers in the district. They used texts during these sessions that included words that were used later at the library.

Walsh and Lyttle created a vocabulary list of STEM terms that the children would be exposed to while working on their LEGO projects. The idea was to use the "correct" words during their construction time, not simpler synonyms. After tutoring, the students were bussed from the school to the public library where they would work for about forty-five minutes constructing different machines with LEGOs. Then they were bussed from the library to their homes. One elementary school came on Mondays. Another school came on Tuesdays.

On LEGO Days

Walsh, Lyttle, and Davisson met the bus at the library and lead a long single-file line through the library to the program room where the LEGOs were. Coats, book bags, and assorted sundries

were deposited in the same place every week, and each child was to sit facing his or her assigned partner.

This was always an adventure because absenteeism seemed constant. We don't think we had a week the whole year where everyone in the group was there. Partners could be temporary if permanent partners were absent. Once everyone was partnered, seated, and quiet, which sometimes seemed to take an extraordinary amount of time, directions for the afternoon were given and work commenced.

Each group had a teacher or teachers from their respective elementary school at the library during the LEGO program. We really enjoyed getting to work with Cynthia Paparizos and Vickie Smith of North Elementary School and Dianna Misich of South Elementary School. These teachers were there every week with their respective school's students, handling discipline, sickness, bathroom visits, parent pick-up confusion, bus drama, and any number of other things, which allowed us to concentrate solely on the children and their projects. They also circulated through the room as we did, helping partners when they got stuck working on their constructions.

The first thing we did with the students on their first day was a LEGO partner exercise. One person had a small construction built of five or six bricks. The other student had to recreate that construction without seeing it. Asking questions, using descriptive words, and cooperating were all part of that first day. This laid the foundation for what the students would be doing for the rest of the year.

Young Engineers Timothy and Samuel pose with some of the LEGO constructions they brought to the library's display at the Cleveland Botanical Gardens.

The first few months, the students used the Simple Machine kits. These DUPLO-sized blocks came with perspective drawing diagrams to help the students properly create their construction. First, the students needed to get out all the pieces they would need for their construction. When that was approved by an adult, they could begin building.

After they were done building, they took it to Walsh for approval. If it was identical to the diagram, the students were done (sort of). If they were the first pair done, that was exciting. The entire room was halted while the pair stood before their classmates and were congratulated for their speed and accuracy. Then the pair took a bow. Once that was done, they were allowed to roam the room finding other pairs of students they could help. But their hands had to be in their pockets or behind their backs. They could only help with their words, not their hands.

The last half of the school year the students used the WeDo Construction kits. These kits used LEGOs and had detailed step-by-step exploded diagrams. Student pairs worked on their own advancing through the at least twenty-five steps necessary to create the constructions. Then these constructions were brought to Walsh.

However, WeDo sets are basic robotics sets. So not only did all the LEGO pieces have to be correctly placed, but when hooked to the computer, it had to operate correctly. As with the DUPLO projects, the first group to correctly complete their construction got to bow in front of the rest of the group. However, they did not then immediately start helping other groups with their words. Instead they were given some type of additional task to reconfigure their construction in some way to get it to operate differently when hooked up to the computer. It usually took at least two, sometimes three, sessions for the entire group to finish their initial constructions and have them operate correctly. But, they were so proud when everything worked!

What We Observed

Over the seven months that we worked with these students, we saw a lot of growth. We also saw a lot of triumphs and meltdowns as well. It was amazing to watch "our kids" grow.

It was a mystery to us for a long time what the proper educational term was for what we knew the LEGOs were doing to help the students. We knew it was helping, but what was the word? It was pre-reading skills. Many of these students had challenges in sequencing as well as discerning minor differences in the diagrams and the blocks. In broad terms, these related back to the Narrative Skills and Print Awareness concepts of Every Child Ready to Read (ECRR) 1.

"Close is good enough" was a common behavior with the partners building their constructions. Getting them to be able to see how the piece they chose and the one in the diagram were different could be quite a challenge at times. Slowing down to count the studs—the proper name for the "bumps" on a LEGO brick—to make sure it was the correct sized piece was a tough skill to learn.

Working with partners could sometimes be a challenge, especially when one partner was bossy or one was passive and inert. When we started the WeDo kits, it became abundantly obvious the challenges many of these students had with sequencing. To follow each step completely and in order was a problem.

This was especially problematic when it turned out it was in the early steps of a project that they made a mistake and that was why their construction did not work properly. However, by the end of the students' time with us, many of them had grown so much from when they started. It was amazing and heartwarming to witness.

The Program Ends

In mid-May 2014, the Young Engineers graduated. Their families were invited to the library for pizza, cookies, and a ceremony. The assistant superintendent was there to recognize each of the students with a certificate and goody bag, all provided by the grant, and the students' families and classmates could see how far they had come. We couldn't stop smiling, and neither could our library director who also was on hand to see the culmination of this program. The school principals, tutors from the school, and lots of grandparents came to see these kids get their paperwork that said they were a "Certified Young Engineer."

Some of the students had one more thing to do after the Young Engineers program was over. Cleveland Botanical Gardens hosted a sculpture display by LEGO artist Sean Kinney for several months during the summer. They invited local organizations that had LEGO Clubs to come and do a display during that time and be available to answer questions. Four Young Engineers, the most talented in the two groups, were asked to join the library's existing LEGO Club members on their display day.

Through the remainder of the summer of 2014, there was hope both on the part of the library and the school district that there was a way to find the money to continue the Young Engineers program another year. While that hasn't happened yet for a full school year, the Young Engineers program does live on in the Madison community.

Moving Forward

In summer 2015, Madison Local Schools and Madison Public Library teamed up for a weeklong Young Engineers camp. This time, ten first-grade students and ten second-grade students spent an hour and a half each day for a week getting intensive reading tutoring followed by an hour and a half of work with both the DUPLO simple machines and the LEGO WeDo robotics kits. Students worked on their sequencing and visual discernment skills. Tremendous progress could be seen in the short span of a week.

For the 2015–16 school year, the Young Engineers model has been reimagined with the help of a grant from Better World Books. Walsh and Lyttle as well as some additional Madison Public Library staff are taking the DUPLOs and LEGOs on the road to Madison Latchkey, after-school care provided at the two Madison Local Schools' elementary buildings, and East End YMCA in Madison.

During the school year, children at these two facilities will receive hands-on learning with different STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math) concepts. Focusing on enrichment and broadening the experiences of the more than one hundred fifty students served through these two programs, the library brings its style of educational programs to children whose parents are working and may not as easily provide these experiences themselves.

The Benefits

Obviously the students in the original program learned things as a result of the tutoring and time spent learning the concepts presented through the LEGO projects. The teachers got an opportunity to see some of these students in a different light than in the classroom. It was more often than not that the challenging child of the classroom was the successful LEGO constructor of the library, and conversely, some of the docile, quiet children of the classroom were most challenging when working with their partners and a box of LEGOs.

For us at the library, we know we now have almost seventy-five children who have positive memories associated with the library, and after this school year it will be well over two hundred. Even more than that, each member of the library staff grew a little bit as a person from the experience with the original grant.

Davisson got real-world experiences to begin to develop classroom management skills that will serve her well in her own classroom in a few years. Lyttle grew in her ability to visualize, use diagrams, and construct things; whereas before, she claimed that "wasn't her thing." Walsh got to see without a doubt that he could be more than the IT guy. He could lead a group of children and adults and teach them about STEM and also help the children learn to read better. &

Creating Literacy Fairs

How Collaboration Helps Early Literacy Goals

JANINA GOODWIN

Early literacy, outreach, and community partnerships are three constant initiatives of many public libraries. And the Youth Services department of the Pueblo City-County (CO) Library District (PCCLD) is no exception.

A few years ago, PCCLD hired an early literacy librarian to focus on early child development and pre-literacy skills, in the hopes of helping the district achieve such goals. This librarian identified a need, conveying the message that early literacy is a daily activity that can naturally and easily fit into a family's life. She then worked with the Youth Services team to develop a Literacy Fair at PCCLD, beginning a very active and fruitful partnership with the Junior League (JL) of Pueblo.

While the librarian who began this program no longer works for PCCLD, the literacy fairs continue each year with new activities and new eager participants. The budget for such a program has always been minimal, and in 2015 it is estimated to cost no more than $500; that varies greatly due to reusable supplies. Purchases have included one-time items that many libraries may already have such as an easel, water/sensory table, blocks, as well as consumable supplies such as Play-Doh and markers. The first year, the Literacy Fair was held at our largest location, Rawlings Public Library. Currently, events are being held annually at each location.

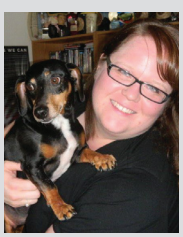
Literacy Fairs

At the Literacy Fair, families can explore "stations" together, trying activities that are easy to replicate at home. The goal is to educate parents about the Every Child Ready to Read (ECRR) I early literacy skills of print motivation, print awareness, letter knowledge, vocabulary, phonological awareness, and narrative skills. These skills are developed through the five identified ECRR II practices of reading, writing, talking, singing, and playing.

At these stations, parents learn about and experience the ease and importance of these literacy-rich activities. As we know, a parent might feel overwhelmed by early literacy terms and definitions, but the Literacy Fair demonstrates fun activities that parents can easily replicate, making early literacy an accessible concept.

Previous early literacy fairs have included such activities as:

- **Making finger puppets.** Creating and playing with finger puppets encourages communication and storytelling, which improves narrative skills and vocabulary.
- **Creating pasta necklaces.** The act of stringing beads or pasta helps with fine motor skills critical for writing and also enhances sequencing, patterns, and hand-eye coordination.
- **Playing in sensory bins.** Colorful shredded paper is available for digging and playing with utensils, hunting for items



Janina Goodwin *is Rawlings Library Manager at the Pueblo City-County (CO) Library District.*

(toys, letter blocks, etc.), an activity that improves motor skills, vocabulary, and letter awareness.

- **Enjoying a music station.** Shaker making supplies, scarves, neckties, and streamers are available for play to accompanying background music. This activity helps children hear sounds, slow down their speech, and just have a fun bonding time with their adults.

- **Playing a rhyming game.** Matching rhyming pictures or items helps improve phonological skills and vocabulary. This activity station provides ideas for parents to easily adapt this concept while grocery shopping, driving, or just in their daily lives at home.

Signs, posters, brochures, and other guiding documents are available at each station to engage parents and children, but the most effective way of passing along information about literacy-rich activities is talking.

Because the Literacy Fair could have become a labor-intensive program, requiring the entire Youth Services department, we reached out to the Pueblo's JL.

Junior League of Pueblo

The JL mission and vision aligned perfectly with the library's goals. The JL is an organization of women committed to promoting voluntarism, developing the potential of women, and improving the community through the effective action and leadership of trained volunteers. Its purpose is exclusively educational and charitable.

The JL of Pueblo is a recognized leader in the community, committed to fulfilling the need of the child. Volunteers nurture the individual, advocate for the rights of the child, and strive to empower the children of Pueblo to reach their full potential.

Through the spirit of voluntarism, community improvement, and fulfilling the needs of children, JL provided twenty volunteers for our first Literacy Fair in 2012. They provided at least two volunteers per station, plus additional volunteers to be present for the duration of the event. Additionally, JL donated a book for every child who attended the event. They brought a variety of books on multiple reading levels so every child, including younger and older siblings, could select a book to take home.

JL's partnership with PCCLD for this first Literacy Fair laid the groundwork for future projects. In 2013 and 2014, JL supported Literacy Fairs at four PCCLD locations with several volunteers and a free book for every child. And at each Literacy Fair, the JL volunteers have learned the details of their station and passed along the information to parents and families, enthusiastically encouraging them to participate in the activities and learn fun and simple ways to prepare the children's brains for reading.

Due to the addition of three new libraries to the PCCLD system, the schedule for the Literacy Fairs was too challenging on staff schedules and had to be adjusted. Instead of concentrating the events into one month, as was the original schedule, we now provide them over several months. Unfortunately, along with this change, JL has not continued with this partnership. PCCLD hopes to find a way, again, to work with JL on future Literacy Fairs.

Partnering for Pueblo's Youth

This relationship is not only about the Literacy Fairs. JL provides several child-focused events throughout the year and has invited the library to participate to promote the library and its literacy initiatives.

Every January, JL hosts Kids in the Kitchen, an event focused on healthy habits. PCCLD hosts a booth to promote the library as a resource for learning about healthy cooking, exercise, and, of course, to promote the idea that exploration of books and information is a healthy activity.

In the spring, JL provides Fit for Fun in the Pueblo Mall, where kids can try Zumba, jump rope, hula hooping, and other physical activities. Again, the library is provided a booth to promote the library as a resource.

In 2014, JL hosted Touch a Truck, an event where kids explore large vehicles, and more than four thousand people attended. PCCLD provided a large literacy station at the event. JL partnered with other local service clubs to provide free books to every child who attended, and the library provided more books, play opportunities, and several literacy-rich activities.

Additionally, the library brought small cars/trucks, building blocks, cardboard tubes, ramps, and fun supplies to create courses for "driving."

This was an ideal opportunity to promote the library as a place for Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) learning, where children in the community can explore ideas behind mapping, engineering, building, and various principles of speed and gravity.

Partnering for the Future

PCCLD has found an excellent friendship with the JL of Pueblo. These women enthusiastically interact with children and families as they live their mission and vision and help the library accomplish its own goals of reaching as many people as possible in the community, conveying the messages of early literacy and library use. &

What the Public Librarian Wishes the School Librarian Knew

JUDY T. NELSON AND JANET INGRAHAM DWYER

When it comes to serving children and teens, schools and public libraries share a mission—to support them and help them succeed. How we each carry this out differs widely, but when we work together, all our families and children have the support and encouragement they need to be successful both in school and in life.

Schools serve specific audiences (children from kindergarten through grade 12). Some school districts may also have pre-kindergarten classes that feed into their K–12 systems. Public libraries are tasked more broadly with serving everybody in their community, from babies to senior citizens.

In serving these distinct but overlapping audiences, schools and public libraries can collaborate and partner in many ways to support kids and families, from homework and reading support to providing value-added subscription research databases, programs, and even professional development.

Collaboration involves all levels of school districts and the public libraries, from administrators to classroom staff and librarians. Administrators engage with fellow administrators and commit to a level of interaction. School superintendents and public library directors lead the way by meeting and sharing their common interests.

A school superintendent who believes the local public library is a partner in education enables the school librarian to reach out during school hours and invite the public librarian into the school to share access to students. The public library director who believes the local school is a partner in education can smooth the way: removing barriers to the development of educator library cards with special borrowing privileges for teachers, establishing fine forgiveness strategies, and setting up other services to support students to enhance teachers' access to library resources.

When administrators partner to identify their common interests and appropriate strategies to meet these interests, librarians are empowered to work together without worrying about whether or not their districts or libraries are on board.

With this in mind, the AASL/ALSC/YALSA Interdivisional Committee on School-Public Library Cooperation offers this top ten list of items public librarians wish their school library counterparts knew about the nature of being a public librarian today. We hope this will lead to improved collaboration that impacts positive outcomes for kids and families.

1. **We want to work with you.** Let's meet and talk about how we can support each other. We know it's not our role to implement curriculum or directly meet learning standards, so collaborate and help us align our knowledge and resources to what your students need.

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When we know what you and your students need, we can support you and your teachers as they assign work. We can share the types of resources we have access to, so you are better able to direct your students to not only the resources they use at school, but also valuable supplemental resources that support their assignments.

2. **Our facilities are open after school hours.** We're not competing with you! Instead, we're here to complement your work. Public libraries typically have later hours than school libraries, may be open evenings and on weekends, and are open all summer long.

3. **Public libraries have free Wi-Fi and computers for students who may not have technology in their homes.** Students can search the Web and use software to do their homework as well as practice using a mouse and keyboard to develop the skills they may need to take computerized standardized assessments.

4. **Public librarians are educators but not certified teachers, and we do recognize the difference.** We offer students support through homework help centers, assistance with their assignments, summer reading/learning programs that address the summer slide, after-school informal STEM programming, technology access and education, and more.

5. **Public libraries are gold mines of informational and literary texts: books, magazines, DVDs, audiobooks, and electronic resources.** Collection size and borrowing privileges may vary, but many of us have access to still more texts through system-wide catalogs, consortium arrangements, and interlibrary loan.

   Because we serve everyone in our community, our collections have broader ranges than your school library is allowed to have. That means your students who may be reading either above or below grade level can find a wider selection of texts of interest at the public library.

   Encourage your teachers to share assignment alerts to help us prepare for materials and topics your students will ask for. Public librarians can then plan services and make book selection decisions with better awareness of upcoming demand.

6. **In this era of kindergarten readiness, public libraries are incubators for early literacy.** Many children's librarians offer basic early literacy education for parents and caregivers, thanks to the PLA/ALSC's Every Child Ready to Read @ your library initiative and other early literacy resources and frameworks.

   Early experiences in literacy-rich, supportive environments are a far better alternative than later intervention to address reading and learning deficits. The public library can be a literacy lifeline for families whose children are not enrolled in preschool and an important supplement for families whose children are in preschool.

7. **Public librarians provide stepping stones to career readiness.** We engage middle school and high school students through volunteer opportunities and leadership opportunities, such as teen advisory boards (TABs) that help plan library programs and advise on decoration and use of the teen space.

   Public librarians may have access to subscription career-development resources. We may also partner with you on career exploration programming or provide volunteer opportunities to support the fulfillment of community service hours that many school districts require for graduation. We may have part-time jobs available for high school students to gain meaningful work experiences and earn cash.

8. **We can share professional development opportunities.** Perhaps we can submit joint grant applications? Let's consider providing reciprocal continuing education opportunities, hosting joint in-service days, or just setting a time to meet together with the public library's youth services staff and your school district's media center staff.

9. **By working together, we can both expand our reach to parents and caregivers by disseminating information for one another.** As community information centers, public libraries can distribute school information to the community at large, hold school board meetings in our meeting rooms, reach parents of incoming students (and even future parents), and connect with the business community, which may not be aware of what the school district is working on or currently providing.

   The school library can directly communicate with parents of students to inform them of upcoming programs and services at their public libraries, especially regarding summer programs and services.

10. **Public librarians can use lots of support and help from you to increase their awareness of day-to-day realities at your school,** such as instructional practice, budget, aggregate test scores and other important data, and more. What can you share with us about at-risk populations, languages spoken, or any special situations with the kids in your school?

    Help us understand your students' needs. Share school district data that can help with public library planning including graduation rates, reading scores, school enrollment trends, and so on. All this data will enable the public library to perform a needs assessment to discover gaps in their resources and supports for students, families, and educators.

Our communities will be better served if we talk and work together, and they expect us to cooperate. We can't wait to connect with you!

What the School Librarian Wishes the Public Librarian Knew

DAVID C. SAIA

School and public librarians have commonalities that unite us in our work. Among them are the love of books and kids, a strong service ethic, and a desire to help kids grow and achieve. However, our daily lives can be something of a mystery, and by exploring them, we can hopefully get a better understanding of one another.

Here is our top ten list of items the elementary school librarian wishes the public librarian knew about the nature of being a school librarian today. We hope this will lead to improved collaboration that impacts positive outcomes for kids and families.

1. **School librarians can help you translate the jargon.** We can keep you informed about events, assignments, and other news from the school. We live in both the library and the school worlds and can be a bridge for you.

2. **Please understand that it might take us a while to get back to you.** Many school libraries are one-person operations because schools have suffered from cutbacks just like public libraries. In schools, the library is one of the first places cuts are made because it is often viewed as "non-essential" (and we are always trying to change that perception). This means the librarian is often alone for long periods of the day, especially at the elementary level, with no one else to shelve books, work the circulation desk, or even answer the phones. That said, e-mail and telephone are still probably the best ways to reach us.

3. **Please don't be put off by short, succinct replies.** There is no time for wordsmithing! Many school librarians might only get one planning period a day (if that), and most of us have little time to attend to e-mail. The phone may be better for quick check-ins, and the hour after school lets out may be the best time to try calling. School librarians who appear to be non-responsive or hard to reach aren't trying to avoid you, so please be patient and be creative in communicating.

4. **Nothing happens without the approval of the building principal.** Whether we're sending fliers home about the public library's fantastic summer reading program or scheduling a visit to the public library, the principal has the final say on what goes on in a school. She or he will want to know about our collaborations. Sometimes this delays our action because we have to wait for approval to proceed.

5. **The school librarian often gets no more notice than you do when it comes to research projects.** You see it when it happens: All the books on US states suddenly get checked out, or resources on other topics vanish. Then you find out groups of students are doing research for a project, and you think, "If only I had some advanced notice!"

   This happens to school librarians, too. We try to anticipate what's going on in classrooms, and we work as hard as we can to reach out to our colleagues in the classroom. But sometimes things still slip past us.

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6. **Things can change without notice in schools.** Research projects come and go depending on curricular changes and teacher staffing. If the books you bought in response to a previous school project don't get taken out this year, it could be because the teacher who gave out that assignment has retired or changed grade levels, or something similar.

7. **School librarians are participants in the larger world of education reform.** Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS)? Race to the Top? No Child Left Behind? Data Teams? The programs seem to change with the office holders at state and federal levels.

   What isn't changing is that schools and educators are under the microscope to improve the quality of education. As educational partners with classroom teachers, school librarians are part of this reform and in many cases have to comply with state and federal teacher evaluation programs and standards. But as these reforms are often politically based, today's practices may be abandoned next year.

   Lastly, the Common Core is good for libraries. Yes, it's hard to ignore the controversy and debate over the CCLS, nor should we. However, with its emphasis on student research, there is definitely a place at the table for librarians.

8. In smaller school districts, **the librarian usually does her or his own collection development.** Any resources or insights you have into new titles to add to the collection are welcome!

9. One of the most important things we can do is **work on simple ways to become advocates for one another's programs.** Both our worlds are marked by competition for resources and are always at risk for cutbacks. Together, we can flex our political muscles in a productive way.

10. **We really believe in what you do** and are continually impressed by the quality of the programming and services at public libraries! From summer reading, to helping families get library cards, to databases, the myriad offerings from public libraries are amazing, especially considering the limited budgets available. Thank you for all you do!

GETTING READY FOR PLAY!, continued from page 16

such as kitchen play items or puzzles, be prepared for sorting challenges when these materials mix together.

Remember also to create and maintain a digital space for your toy collection. Library websites can be particularly useful for offering information about how to use different types of toys for developing particular skills in early childhood. Programs can serve this purpose as well, so consider how best to connect programming with your toy collection. Whether you promote your circulating toys in your existing programs or create entirely new programs to highlight your toy collection, always focus on unstructured free play opportunities and parent–child engagement.

Finally, advocate for your toy collection and for the importance of providing access to toys and playtime for all children. As children's library professionals, "We need to communicate to parents, library staff, and community leaders the value of play in young children's lives."[15] Public library toy collections are a fun and valuable way to support early literacy for every child.

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PEER-REVIEWED

Little Free Libraries

A Call for Research into the Tiny Book Depositories

MARIANNE SNOW

One day, as I was leaving my favorite local bookstore, I noticed an odd structure rising out of the sidewalk. Resembling a large birdhouse, it was decorated with bottle caps and contained a small collection of books. Glancing down, I noticed a small sign bearing the name "Little Free Library," and, since it was cute, I took a picture of the structure and went about my business. I didn't think much about this brief encounter until a few days later when I noticed a similar construction in front of a bank. By now, I was intrigued and Googled the name as soon as I got home. As it turns out, these small book depositories are cropping up all over in all fifty states and across six continents.[1]

Through the Little Free Library website, I soon discovered the brief and fascinating history of what is, in fact, a worldwide movement.[2] According to the organization's description, Little Free Libraries (LFLs) are "'take a book, return a book' gathering place[s] where neighbors share their favorite literature and stories."[3] The movement began in 2009 when Todd Bol of Hudson, Wisconsin, created a miniature one-room schoolhouse to honor his mother, a retired teacher.

Inspired by book-lending movements such as the rise of public libraries in the early twentieth century, Wisconsin librarian Lutie Stearns' traveling libraries, and book-sharing in coffee shops and other community spaces, Bol erected the structure in his front yard, placed reading materials inside, and attached a sign that read "FREE BOOKS." Soon he was building more libraries and giving them away, eventually turning the project into a nonprofit in 2012. The idea caught on rapidly, and by January 2015, there were an estimated 25,000 LFLs around the globe with thousands more in the works.

In this article, I explore the nature of LFLs. What is their purpose? What kinds of issues or problems do they claim to address? Then, since the LFL movement is a new phenomenon and as yet untouched by scholars, I will suggest directions for future research on this topic. Given the widespread presence of LFLs in many countries, I argue that this movement is worthy of attention.

Libraries, Access to Books, and Social Exclusion

When it comes to obtaining reading materials, many children and families encounter challenges, such as the inability to afford children's books or other literacy materials.[4] While a seemingly logical solution to this problem is checking out books for free at a local public library, these families might face additional difficulties. One major hindrance is the relative lack of resources at many public and school libraries serving low-income neighborhoods. Although libraries have long branded themselves as great equalizers, in that they make literacy materials and other sources of information available for anyone and everyone,[5] studies have indicated that this claim is not necessarily true. Ensuring that all libraries, regardless of the populations they serve, have equal resources does not guarantee a "level playing field" for families of varying income levels.[6] Rather, libraries in low-income areas should provide families and children with *more* resources—more

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funding, books, computers, better-trained librarians, etc.—than their counterparts in more affluent neighborhoods.[7]

Another obstacle low-income families often face at libraries is social exclusion,[8] or difficulty accessing these institutions due to their "lack of cultural and educational capital … and power."[9] For example, children and families possessing less cultural and educational capital may feel alienated because they feel that only well-educated people use libraries, they do not know how to use a library, or they "feel stupid" asking questions.[10] Additionally, many immigrants affected by poverty—another oft-marginalized group[11]—come from cultures where socializing in public places is the norm and therefore may feel uncomfortable with the enforced silence and language barriers at public libraries in the United States.[12] Schools serving high-poverty areas, meanwhile, are also not equipped to provide their students with ideal library services, since they may have fewer resources than schools serving more affluent communities.[13]

Simply put, for various reasons, public and school libraries aren't reaching some children and families. Fortunately, many libraries and library advocates are making efforts to address excluded community members' needs more effectively,[14] and advocates assert that LFLs are an effective strategy for confronting these issues. On their website, the Little Free Library organization states that their mission is "to promote literacy and the love of reading by building free book exchanges worldwide" and "to build a sense of community as we share skills, creativity, and wisdom across generations."[15] In my city, LFLs sponsored by a community literacy initiative claim the following benefits:[16]

- LFLs are open twenty-four hours per day and require no library card—features that might attract people who feel unwelcome or uncomfortable in public or school libraries.
- The absence of due dates for returning books allows people to keep books longer and actually finish them.
- LFLs can be erected almost anywhere, meaning that communities that are underserved or not served by established libraries can have easier access to larger amounts of reading materials.

Furthermore, Bol recently started a Kickstarter campaign to raise money to install LFLs in "book deserts"—areas where people lack access to libraries and may not be able to afford books.[17]

According to these sources, Little Free Libraries can provide a solution to the problems of inadequate resources and social exclusion in libraries—they are created and managed by people they serve, they are free and open, and they are not attached to any formal institution that might be off-putting to children and families in marginalized communities. Given LFLs' popularity and their wonderful alleged benefits, it seems that they would be a welcome relief in socially excluded communities, right?

Further Questions

Not so fast—we must still answer many questions to determine whether LFLs actually serve their purpose. For instance, two years ago a reporter for the *Spokesman-Review* in Spokane, Washington, wondered whether anyone other than already avid readers would actually visit and use an LFL,[18] and thus far, no research exists that investigates questions like his. Right now, the topic of Little Free Libraries is an untouched issue, waiting to be explored. Therefore, I encourage scholars, librarians, teachers, and community members to conduct their own research on these fascinating little book boxes. We can consider questions such as:

- Where are LFLs typically located? Are they more often located in affluent neighborhoods, communities affected by poverty, urban centers, suburbs, rural areas?
- How often do books circulate in LFLs, and who is borrowing and lending books?
- Which age levels do the books in LFLs typically target—children, teenagers, adults?
- Which genres of children's and young adult books are most common in the libraries?
- How diverse are the books found in the libraries? Are the books culturally relevant? In other words, do they reflect the cultures represented where they are located?

Pursuing these questions using a variety of research methods and theoretical stances will ideally yield rich data on the effectiveness of LFLs. Also, community members can perform more casual research in their own neighborhoods by observing how local LFLs are being used, conducting interviews with LFL stewards and patrons to learn more about their experiences utilizing the libraries; regularly recording the numbers, genres, and cultural diversity of the books people deposit and borrow; and studying the locations of libraries to determine their proximity to culturally and socioeconomically diverse communities.

During the past few months, I've utilized these methods to start investigating the LFLs in my city more closely, and while several stewards—including some school and public librarians—I've interviewed maintain they're "amazing," "an excellent idea," and "encourag[e] kids to read," my observations of local LFLs don't always back up these claims. For example, most of the LFLs in my area are in very affluent areas; contain children's books that mostly depict white, affluent characters; and don't seem to be used very often. Are these LFLs really reaching

The Lutie Stearns Connection

Founder of the Wisconsin Free Library Commission, Lutie Stearns helped create fourteen hundred traveling libraries in Wisconsin between 1896 and 1914.* Each traveling library—a strong trunk housing about thirty books of various genres that would appeal to diverse readers†—brought reading materials to isolated communities, work camps, hospitals, and orphanages, and many collections contained books in foreign languages spoken in the state, like Norwegian, Yiddish, German, and Polish.‡ This successful book-sharing system led to the establishment of many public libraries across Wisconsin.§

* Christine Pawley, "Advocate for Access: Lutie Stearns and the Traveling Libraries of the Wisconsin Free Library Commission, 1895–1914," *Libraries & Culture* 35, no. 3 (2000): 441.
† Stuart Stotts, "A Thousand Little Libraries: Lutie Stearns, The Johnny Appleseed of Books," *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 90, no. 2 (2006): 42.
‡ Pawley, "Advocate for Access," 441.
§ Stotts, "A Thousand Little Libraries," 46–47.

everyone in my community? And what about LFLs in other communities, both in the United States and around the world?

If we continue to observe and investigate LFLs in various locations and discover that they are, for the most part, achieving their intended purpose of reaching marginalized children and families, then we can continue to promote these resources and encourage their dissemination not only in the United States but also in communities around the world. On the other hand, if we perchance find that LFLs don't really make reading materials more accessible to people who feel socially excluded, then the Little Free Library non-profit organization and supporters can use research data to address any concerns and make LFLs more effective. Overall, if we want Little Free Libraries to be successful, we need to systematically assess their viability on a larger scale—so let's get started.

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"Too Long, Didn't Read"

The Research behind Prescriptions for Literacy

S. BRYCE KOZLA

> *"Children need to hear a thousand stories before they learn to read."*
>
> —Mem Fox[1]

This quote is the basis for the 1,000 Books Before Kindergarten program, a reading club started by Sandy Krost at Bremen (IN) Public Library. Libraries across the nation are leaping to write grants and start programs of their own. Online discussion lists are bursting with questions about the research behind children hearing one thousand stories before kindergarten.

Last year, I wrote a blog post full of research that librarians can use to justify their community's need for a 1,000 Books Before Kindergarten program, and it's still one of my most viewed entries. None of the research is the study that proves children should hear one thousand stories.

This is because this study does not exist. The above quote is simply a prescription for literacy.

Prescriptions for literacy are based on recommendations for literacy practices, implied by findings of scientifically-based reading research (SBRR). This means that the actual prescription is removed enough from its scientific origin to be misunderstood and occasionally appropriated. For instance, Fox's quote is based on research implications from Anne van Kleeck.[2] However, these findings also highlight the importance of print and phonological awareness as well as letter naming and writing in addition to story structure in order to be reading-ready when school starts. While exposure to stories is an important piece, it's definitely just one slice of the complex task of literacy engagement and acquisition.

When we don't know where our prescriptions come from, it opens doors to other issues. Slavin mentions three ways that published scientific research can reach possibly harmful conclusions:

- **Cherry picking:** Highlighting the desired conclusions and downplaying the rest, or omitting the rest completely, is a misleading trick that some literacy programs use to sell their products.

- **Bottom fishing:** After research has been completed, an evaluator may make comparisons that were originally unintended. Rather than taking a subset of a group and comparing them to the group as a whole, they might compare only to the best performing members of the experimental group to the worst performers of the control group.

- **Pre-post studies:** Some studies may lack a control group in favor of tests or surveys before and after the study. Any gains made on the posttest are assumed to be attributed to the experiment. It's not feasible to suggest that children, who learn every day, would make zero gains without the experiment.[3]

Though it's understandable that researchers always hope for the best possible outcome, misleading conclusions do happen. And if prescriptions are removed enough from the research, it's nearly impossible to trace.

S. Bryce Kozla *is the Youth Services Librarian at Washington County Cooperative Library Services in Oregon. Bryce blogs about her GIF-fueled adventures in youth services at http://brycedontplay.blogspot.com. You can read her unsolicited life comments by following @PLSanders on Twitter.*

This happened recently to librarians Amy Commers and Melissa Depper when searching for the origin of the following quote from Fox's *Reading Magic*: "Experts in literacy and child development have discovered that if children know eight nursery rhymes by heart by the time they're four years old, they're usually among the best readers by the time they're eight."[4]

After in-depth literature reviews on their blogs that rival any I've seen, they concluded that it was most likely based on implications from a 1987 study by Maclean, Bryant, and Bradley. The research focused on the knowledge of five nursery rhymes and the development of phonological skills between the ages of three and five. While the actual implications may sound less spectacular than the quote, it was a breakthrough in its time: the relationship among nursery rhyme knowledge, phonological skills, and reading was significant across all IQs and socio-economic backgrounds.[5] It was definitely a major find for unlocking the keys to effective early literacy instruction, though there was no implication of future reading success.

Nursery rhymes definitely have merit as a useful early literacy tool. What makes them so powerful is their practice and play with phonemic components like onset and rime, alliteration, repetition, and elongating syllables. Nursery rhymes are also widely known in some socioeconomic classes, so they become a source of bonding.

Conversely, some households are not familiar with nursery rhymes. In that case, songs, street rhymes, chants, and clapping games are a worthy replacement[6] especially if that means it becomes a shared experience for the family: "Parents seeking a collaborative approach during activities reported increased exposure to home literacy and numeracy activities than families with less collaborative involvement."[7]

There are many ways to learn and practice the oral language you learn in Euro-American nursery rhymes. How powerful it is to know that the songs and games a parent plays at home can help their children get reading ready!

An increasing importance has been placed on early literacy at the national level. The National Early Literacy Panel report, a 2008 publication, outlined best practices for early literacy providers. Standards are already being set for accountability in preschool settings, changing the ways providers approach instruction. Informing literacy learning with SBRR is crucial, but there are concerns about unclear implementations of the Common Core Standards in early literacy spaces. While emphasizing explicit instruction in language, literacy, and math, some worry that the time spent on play-based learning, motor development, and other equally crucial skills will fall to the wayside.[8] Many of these concerns arise from the fear that administrators and policymakers will not fully read the Common Core Standards and rely on a "Too Long; Didn't Read" version, with a few easiest-to-implement prescriptions for literacy underscored over all others.

Unencumbered by national instruction prescriptions, libraries can provide a creative and welcoming environment for emotional growth and literacy to thrive. Libraries can also help families build home environments associated with positive reading outcomes: regular reading aloud, encouragement and opportunity to read, ready availability of books, an attitude that promotes reading as a fun activity, and frequent conversations.[9]

These recommendations may not come with the apparent "literacy guarantee" that prescriptions do, but they position libraries as a leader in equipping families with the tools they need to raise readers. Literacy can be a gift to families from the public library, and we can promote it as the complex science that it is.

Mem Fox may seem to be a "repeat offender" when it comes to prescribing literacy practices, yet she is far from the only party to do so. It's also completely understandable. We live in an age of sound bites, and it is way too tempting to rely on them when we have so few hours in the day.

As practitioners, however, we deserve to be empowered by quenching our thirst for knowledge. We need the "behind-the-scenes DVD commentary" of literacy while we share quick tips and interact with our library families.

We are trusted as the literacy experts of our community! Prescriptions (and even "commandments," adding a moral fabric to literacy) strip us of the necessary "why" that helps us make deliberate decisions with our patrons.

Want to get started with some great resources for the research behind your favorite prescriptions for literacy? If you haven't yet, please read the Every Child Ready to Read literature review in its entirety: www.everychildreadytoread.org/project-history%09/literature-review-2010. Then, check out Melissa's "Research Link: [Some Sources]" at http://melissa.depperfamily.net/blog/?p=5575. Special thanks to her and to Amy at www.catchthepossibilities.com for starting this conversation.

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Sharing Food Literacy. In October, the children's picturebook *Farmer Will Allen and the Growing Table* was read by children in thirty countries in seventeen time zones as part of an initiative from the Points of Light Foundation. The Read Across the Globe event was an effort to break the Guinness World Record for the most children being read to by an adult in a twenty-four-hour period. The current world record is 238,620, and the goal was to set the new record at 300,000. The book, written by Jacqueline Briggs Martin, is a biographical story about the former basketball star and urban farmer who founded Growing Power in Milwaukee to provide healthy food for his community and inspired a global movement. The book, published by Readers to Eaters, has also been selected for 2016 Read On Wisconsin, administered by Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC) in Madison.

Pictured here, left to right, are Neil Bush, Chair of Points of Light and Barbara Bush Houston Literacy Foundation, Readers to Eaters Publisher Philip Lee, and Read Across the Globe Coordinator Della Jones.

Finding Fresh Starts

JENNA NEMEC-LOISE

If you're of a certain age like I am, surely you remember one of the most dashing and debonair gents in all of television history: Ricardo Montalbán's Mr. Roarke from *Fantasy Island*. (*Just Google "Smiles, everyone! Smiles!" You know you want to.)*

Were you looking for a change? Mr. Roarke was your guy. For seven exciting seasons in the late 1970s and early '80s, he welcomed hopeful guests to a tropical paradise where possibilities were endless and fresh starts abounded. It's no wonder the show was crazy popular. Who wouldn't love an adventure like that?

And man, did Mr. Roarke have connections! He could make things happen and get stuff done. Never mind that things didn't always turn out the way his guests expected. Finding fresh starts was Mr. Roarke's specialty, and he always delivered.

So maybe we can't really visit an idyllic getaway and ask Ricardo Montalbán to grant us our library wishes. But that doesn't mean we can't create our own brand of magic in 2016. Instead of making one-time New Year's resolutions to step up our Everyday Advocacy efforts, let's look for ways to make fresh starts throughout the year. After all, we're children's librarians. There's a little Mr. Roarke in all of us.

Fresh Starts throughout the Year

Whether you're a newly minted Everyday Advocate looking to dip your toes or an experienced professional who wants to amp things up, here are five ways to make a fresh Everyday Advocacy start at any point during the year:

1. **Think seasonally.** I'm talking beyond winter, spring, summer, and fall. How about academic year "seasons" like back-to-school, science fair, and standardized testing? These are great times to dust off your elevator speeches (yes, you should have more than one) and let stakeholders know how your public or school library improves outcomes for students.

2. **Capitalize on celebrations.** As you're thinking seasonally, don't forget about annual celebrations like Summer Learning Day, Children's Book Week, and Maker Month. Can you think of better times to plan awesome programs that not only showcase the value your library brings to youth and families but also create opportunities to share talking points with community members? (Nope, I can't either.)

Jenna Nemec-Loise *is Member Content Editor, ALSC Everyday Advocacy Website and Electronic Newsletter. Everyday Advocacy empowers ALSC members to embrace their roles as library advocates by focusing on their daily efforts to serve youth and families. Each lighthearted column features easy-to-implement strategies and techniques for asserting the transformative power of libraries both within communities and beyond them. Contact Jenna Nemec-Loise at everyday-advocacy@hotmail.com with comments and ideas for future topics.*

3. **Aim for moments, not momentous occasions.** No need to wait for National Library Legislative Day or a visit from the mayor to make your case. Everyday Advocacy can happen anytime, anywhere. An informal conversation with a parent in the stacks or a chance meeting with a school board member at the coffee shop can be just as impactful as something you've scheduled. Be ready.

4. **Focus on starting points.** As you're snapping up those anytime moments, remember that Everyday Advocacy is an ongoing effort. Saying, "Let's talk about next steps" and asking, "Where do we go from here?" are solid strategies that let administrators, policy makers, and other stakeholders know the conversation is just getting started. There's truth in that old adage: You reap what you sow.

5. **Look toward tomorrow, but embrace today.** It's never too late to get into the Everyday Advocacy groove. Maybe you missed out on an opportunity earlier in the week, month, or year, but the next hour or even the next minute can mean a chance to turn things around. A phone call, an e-mail, or a quick sit-down with a co-worker can make all the difference in your attitude and approach. Do it now.

The Everyday Advocacy Challenge

Looking for a concrete way to activate your inner Everyday Advocate and motivate your colleagues to do the same? Then volunteer to participate in one of our next Everyday Advocacy Challenge (EAC) cohorts!

We're seeking groups of ten to fifteen participants to take one of the quarterly eight-week challenges we've got planned for 2016. Here's the scoop on what we'll be asking of you:

- **Commit** to completing eight consecutive Take Action Tuesday challenges on a designated theme;
- **Collaborate** with your EAC cohort over the eight-week period, sharing successes and troubleshooting issues via e-mail and online sharing tools;
- **Write** a post for the ALSC blog about your EAC experience; and
- **Nominate** a colleague to participate in the next EAC.

Just fill out the form on the Everyday Advocacy website (http://ow.ly/RUwIh), and we'll be in touch with all the details. Trust me—there's no easier or more fun way to make a fresh start this year!

"Welcome to Everyday Advocacy!"

Sure, it'd be great to have Mr. Roarke at our beck and call, making sure everything turns out awesome for us as we take our next steps toward Everyday Advocacy. He may have ruled Fantasy Island with an unsurpassed charm and grace, but it turns out we don't actually need him here in Library Land. We can make our own fresh starts anytime. The choice is ours. We just have to make it.

That won't stop me from channeling Mr. Roarke one last time, though, as I leave you with these (sort of) iconic words:

"My dear Everyday Advocates. I am Jenna Nemec-Loise, your host. Welcome to Everyday Advocacy!"

More than Just Kids

Sharing Literacy Messages with Caregivers Outside of Storytime

MELISSA DEPPER

When Every Child Ready to Read (ECRR) was first released, part of the conversation in libraries was all about recognizing and owning the idea that storytimes were and are early learning experiences and could be excellent forums for sharing literacy messaging with parents and caregivers.

That has now become a standard concept, and storytime literacy messages are a frequent best practice. Today, the conversation about early learning includes discovering next steps and new ways of incorporating early literacy information into programs and services.

This is an exciting process because as children's librarians know, we don't reach all the families in our communities through our storytimes. We don't even reach all our library-using families through our storytimes! Storytime remains a keystone service for public libraries, yet the more we can spread our early literacy support beyond storytimes, the more children we can help get ready to read.

In addition to storytime, librarians serve families and communities in many other ways: through reference questions, readers' advisory, collections, children's spaces, programming, technology, and print and social media content. Each of these areas provides diverse opportunities for interacting with families and for sharing information and encouragement about early literacy support.

How can we recognize and take full advantage of these opportunities? We can start with a program plan, a child's actions, and a book.

Start with a Program Plan

Our programs for our youngest patrons—from Block Parties to Playdates to Toddler Drive-Ins to Messy Art Cafes—all offer the same sorts of springboards for early literacy messages as do storytimes. At my library, we pair a literacy message with a storytime activity, to help caregivers make the connection between what children do and what children learn. After we sing "Itsy Bitsy Spider," for instance, we might talk about how some songs are little stories that help children learn how stories work and build comprehension skills.

Look for those connections in our other programs as well, and look for opportunities to share those ideas with the caregivers. Those opportunities might include printed tabletop cards at activity stations, a handout to take home, or a planned verbal message to the group before storytime begins.

Melissa Depper *is the storytime supervisor for the Arapahoe Library District in Colorado, where she works primarily with early childhood programs and services and leads a team of fifteen storytime providers. She serves on the ALSC/PLA Every Child Ready to Read Oversight Committee, is on Twitter @MelissaZD, and starts every week off right with baby storytime.*

In an art program, we could say, "Talking about how paint, glue, and other art materials feel and how they act when we use them are great ways to help build your child's vocabulary, by introducing new words in a hands-on context. The bigger a child's vocabulary, the more words they will recognize on the page when they start to read."

Start with a Child's Actions

When we walk through our libraries, what do we see? Is a child putting some puzzles together or arranging alphabet letters on a magnet board? Many libraries have added small or large spaces for play to their children's areas. A child's actions as he plays offer a chance to talk with the child and engage the grown-ups in conversation.

At a puzzle table, we might say, "I love watching your child working with the puzzle. I can just see her thinking so hard about how to fit the pieces. When kids work with shapes like that, they are building the same skills they will use later to recognize the different shapes of the alphabet. Thanks for coming to the library to play today!"

Another powerful version of this strategy is to start with a caregiver's actions. If we see a grandmother and grandchild reading together, when they are done with the book, we could say, "I really enjoyed overhearing you as you shared that story. We love seeing readers together at the library! Every book a child hears helps him get ready to read. You're doing a great job."

Or if we see a mother waiting while her toddler looks for just the right book, we can mention, "You are such a superstar for being so patient while she chooses. We know that kids are extra engaged in books that they select themselves, and that keeps them motivated about reading. Sometimes it's hard to wait but you are doing a great thing."

Start with a Book

Last but not least, start with a book. I encourage this technique with newer staff who may be less confident about talking about early literacy practices in programs or playtime. They are almost always very confident about sharing their love of books!

Whether we help families find books on the shelf or engage in a reader's advisory interview, books are a wonderful way to help us share encouraging messages about getting ready to read. When we are talking about a favorite title, we can say, "I love *Rhyming Dust Bunnies* because of all the silly rhymes. Learning how rhymes work is one of the ways kids get ready to sound out words when they read. Books like this are perfect for that."

Keep building on the great work you do in storytimes and look for opportunities in programs, in library spaces, and in the stacks to bring even more early literacy messages and support to families. &

Index to Advertisers

THE LAST WORD

Putting the ROAR in Reading

Edwina Walker Amorosa

I want to enthusiastically ROAR and share a success story I have had with two of my grandchildren. Meet avid readers Nella, age nine, and Sameena, almost nine.

When Nella moved to Texas last summer and was concerned about losing contact, I suggested we form a book club. Along with Sameena, we dubbed it ROAR, for Rockin' Outrageous Awesome Reading! From the first word to the last, we experienced the joy of reading together via Skype, FaceTime, and conference calls. Here is a quick look at our book club.

A great name. It was derived from the *Judy Moody* series, where Judy shouts "Roar" whenever something great happens. Nella and Sam jubilantly created the acronym. Book discussions begin and end with a ROAR!

A cool uniform. We designed visors, with "ROAR" embroidered on them, to wear at our book discussions.

A note-taking system. I initially provided questions, and soon the girls began to formulate open-ended questions of their own and began to take notes—in a separate journal, marginal notes *in* the book *(gasp!),* or colorful notes on their Kindles.

A timetable. In summer 2014, when Nella moved to Texas, we began the club. We discuss books when ready, which seems to be seasonal. They find time for pleasure reading and take a book wherever they go, read before bedtime, and, of course, bring one over when they come to Gramma's house.

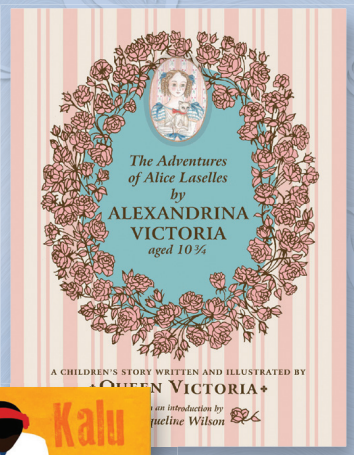
Whether a hardcover, paperback, or e-book. We all agree that the best part is that we are reading together. ROAR!

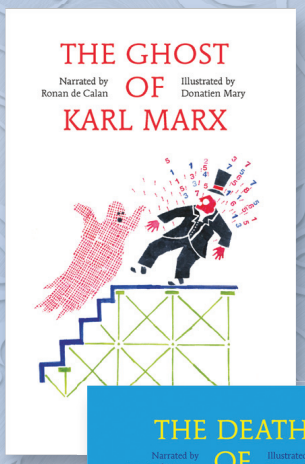
Edwina Walker Amorosa *is a life-long reader who now finds joy in providing every opportunity to pass on the pleasure of reading to her eight grandchildren. Professionally, she is a book indexer; formerly, an elementary school library director, journal editor/reviewer, and high school and university English and reading teacher/instructor.*

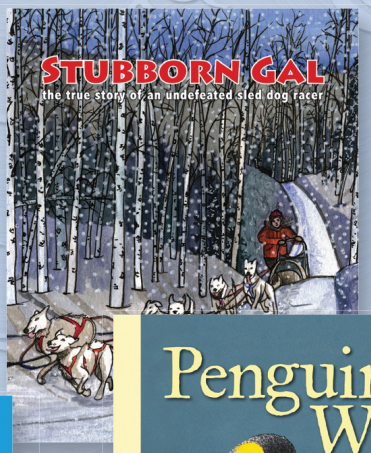
Got a great, lighthearted essay? A funny story about children and libraries? Books and babies? Pets and picture books? A not-so-serious look at the world of children's librarianship? Send your Last Word to Sharon Verbeten at CALeditor@yahoo.com.

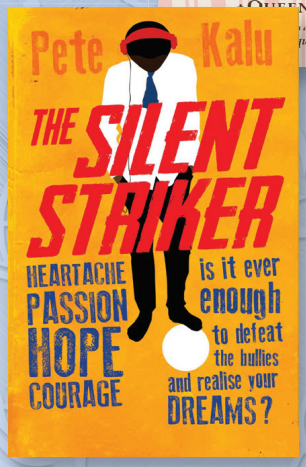
BOOKS FOR YOUNG READERS

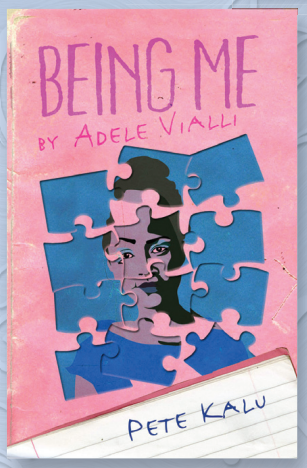
from Victorian England to the Dog Races of Alaska

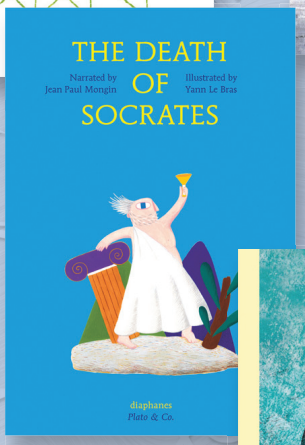


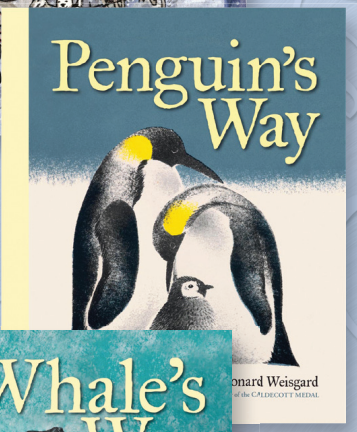


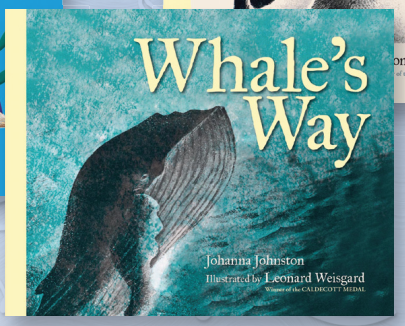












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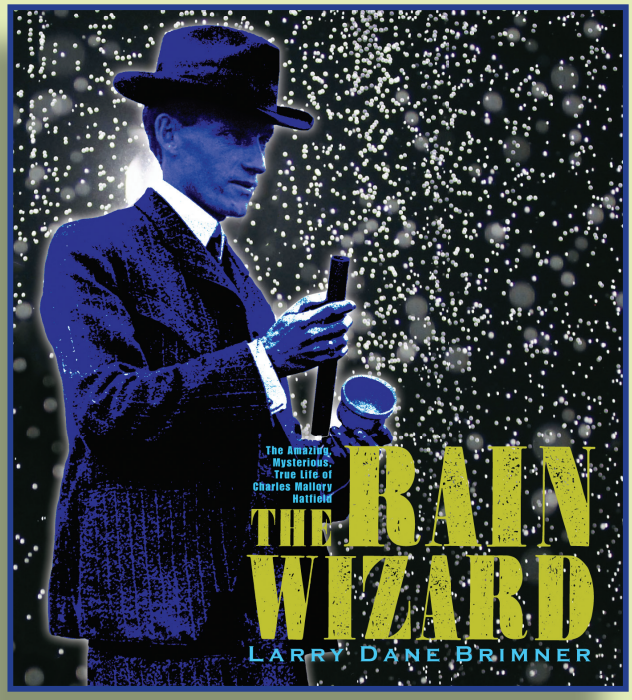

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