

# Children &

the journal of the  
Association for Library  
Service to Children

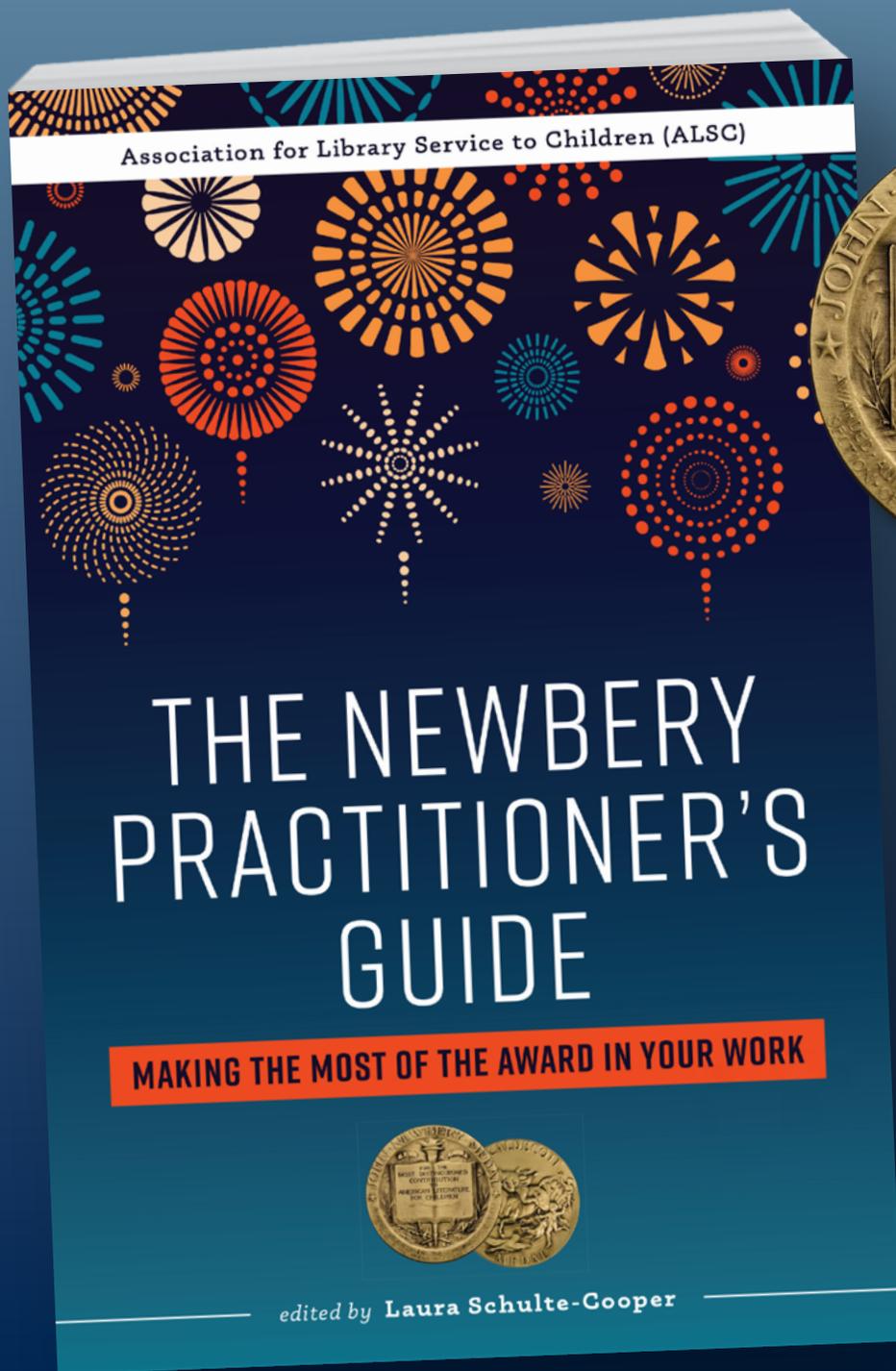
# LIBRARIES

Summer 2024  
Vol. 22 | No. 2  
ISSN 1542-9806



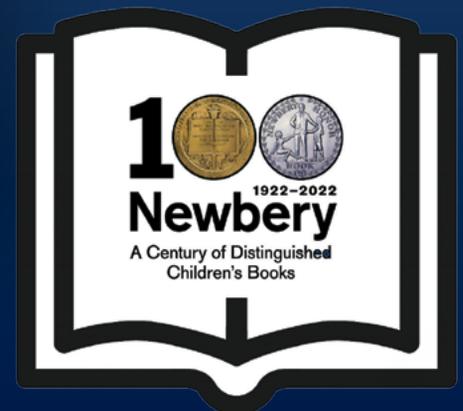
Taking a Library “Expedition”  
Book Leveling Systems  
Couples Who Collaborate: Cheryl and Wade Hudson

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



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

ISBN: 978-0-8389-3827-0



Order your copy at the ALA Store: [alastore.ala.org/Newbery100](https://alastore.ala.org/Newbery100)

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

SUMMER 2024 | VOL. 22 | NO. 2 | ISSN 1542-9806

## notes

- 2** Editor's Note  
Sharon Verbeten

## features

- 3** Expedition Bound!  
*Clever Passport Program Ups Library Visits, Engagement*  
Mary Fellows
- 6** 🌐 Rural Resource  
*The Role of Distance and Community for Families with Toddlers in Rural Areas*  
Eleanor Fisk and Rachel Chazan-Cohen
- 14** Couples who Collaborate  
*Cheryl and Wade Hudson*  
Mary-Kate Sableski
- 18** And the Winner Is . . .  
*Launching a Mock Ezra Jack Keats Award Program*  
Ramona Caponegro, John Scott, and Caroline Ward
- 21** Reading Isn't Easy  
*A Survey on Leveling Systems in US Libraries*  
Kerri L. Williams, Marybeth Kozikowski, and Nicholas Cormier
- 24** Feeling Is First  
*The Golden Rule of Working with Children in Libraries*  
Laura Raphael
- 26** Building Stories  
*National Building Museum Opens Decade-Long Exhibit*
- 27** Little Engines that Could...  
*An Early Literacy Collaboration*  
Constance C. Beecher and Zachary Stier
- 30** Programs and Pen Pals  
*You Never Know Your Library's Reach*  
Sharon Verbeten

## departments

- 32** PUBLIC AWARENESS AND ADVOCACY  
COMMITTEE  
*Going Outside Your Comfort Zone*  
Emily Mroczek
- 34** MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE  
*ALSC Member Profiles*
- 36** MANAGING CHILDREN'S SERVICES  
*Leadership Lessons: The Messages Picture Books Bring Us*  
Brandy Sanchez
- 38** ALSC COMMITTEES: TAKING CARE OF BUSINESS!  
Laura Schulte-Cooper
- 40** THE LAST WORD  
*Stay Amused, Not Annoyed*  
Sharon Verbeten



Dr. Betsy Diamant-Cohen's grandson assists her in presenting a Mother Goose on the Loose session during "Gramp Camp" at the Owings Mills, JCC.

Photo credit: Allegra Marcell, Jewish Community Center of Greater Baltimore.



## Editor's Note

### Playing Dress-Up

By Sharon Verbeten

Remember playing dress-up? We probably all did as a kid; maybe some of your youngest patrons still do so at the library.

It's enticing to play pretend every now and then, and books—our greatest escape—provide a great starting point. What book character would you most like to emulate? To dress up as? I've dressed up as The Cat in the Hat before, as well as Thing One (or was it Thing Two?).

But I've always been drawn to the slightly dark side—not exactly Darth Vader, more Roald Dahl or Neil Gaiman. These days, I'd love to lean into a decadent Willy Wonka (top hat and all!) or a creepy Coraline. Maybe this Halloween!

Lots of schools host dress as your favorite book character day, and I always love to see what people come up with—and just how far they'll go to get the perfect look. My friend Jessica, who used to be one of my regular storytime moms, works at her daughter Rooney's small private school in Green Bay, Wisconsin.

She said, "They don't have an actual librarian, or even a budget for the library, and before I started volunteering, the kids didn't get a chance to use the library. I got it organized. I enjoy it because I want all the kids to get a chance to borrow books. I was amazed when I asked who's been to a public library because not as many kids raised their hands as I thought. I wish everyone took advantage of what libraries have to offer."

Both Jessica and Rooney got into character during Spirit Week—mom dressed up as Arthur, while Rooney dressed up as Waldo. I think they got it spot—or, in Rooney's case, stripes!—on. &



Rooney (Waldo) and her mom Jessica really took to the assignment—Dress Like Your Favorite Book Character!

# Children & LIBRARIES

the journal of the  
Association for Library  
Service to Children

## Editor

Sharon Verbeten, De Pere, Wisconsin

## Editorial Advisory Committee

Jacquie Kociubuk, Co-Chair, Madison, Wisconsin  
Megan Thomas, Co-Chair, Baton Rouge, Louisiana  
Dr. Brittany Adams, Tuscaloosa, Alabama  
Soline Holmes, New Orleans, Louisiana  
Amanda Keen, East Dundee, Illinois  
Sarah Simpson, Columbus, Ohio

## Executive Director

Alena Rivers

## Managing Editor

Laura Schulte-Cooper

## Website

[www.ala.org/alsc](http://www.ala.org/alsc)

## Circulation

*Children and Libraries* (ISSN 1542-9806) is a refereed journal published four times per year by the American Library Association (ALA), 225 N. Michigan Ave., Suite 1300, Chicago, IL 60601. It is the official publication of the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC), a division of ALA. Subscription price: members of ALSC, \$20 per year, included in membership dues; nonmembers, \$50 per year in the US; \$60 in Canada, Mexico, and other countries. Back issues within one year of current issue, \$15 each. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Children and Libraries*, 225 N. Michigan Ave., Suite 1300, Chicago, IL 60601. Members send mailing labels or facsimile to Member Services, 225 N. Michigan Ave., Suite 1300, Chicago, IL 60601. Nonmember subscribers: Subscriptions, orders, changes of address, and inquiries should be sent to *Children and Libraries*, Customer Service—Subscriptions, 225 N. Michigan Ave., Suite 1300, Chicago, IL 60601; 1-800-545-2433, press 5; fax: (312) 944-2641; email: [subscriptions@ala.org](mailto:subscriptions@ala.org).

## Statement of Purpose

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

## Production

ALA Production Services (Tim Clifford and Lauren Ehle)

## Advertising

Bill Spilman, Innovative Media Solutions, 320 W. Chestnut St., PO Box 399, Oneida, IL 61467; 1-877-878-3260 or (309) 483-6467; fax: (309) 483-2371; email: [bill@innovativemediasolutions.com](mailto:bill@innovativemediasolutions.com). The journal accepts advertising for goods or services of interest to the library profession and librarians in service to youth in particular. It encourages advertising that informs readers and provides clear communication between vendor and buyer. The journal adheres to ethical and commonly accepted advertising practices and reserves the right to reject any advertisement not suited to the above purposes or not consistent with the aims and policies of ALA. Acceptance of advertising in the journal does not imply official endorsement by ALA of the products or services advertised.

## Manuscripts

Manuscripts and letters pertaining to editorial content should be sent to Sharon Verbeten, editor, 820 Spooner Ct., De Pere, WI 54115; (920) 339-2740; e-mail: [childrenandlibraries@gmail.com](mailto:childrenandlibraries@gmail.com). Manuscripts will be sent out for review according to the journal's established referee procedures. See [www.ala.org/alsc/publications-resources/cal/author-guidelines](http://www.ala.org/alsc/publications-resources/cal/author-guidelines) for author guidelines. If you are interested in serving as a volunteer referee for manuscripts submitted to *CAL*, contact Editor Sharon Verbeten at [childrenandlibraries@gmail.com](mailto:childrenandlibraries@gmail.com). More information about the referee process is available at [www.ala.org/alsc/publications-resources/cal/referees/referee-process](http://www.ala.org/alsc/publications-resources/cal/referees/referee-process).

## Indexing, Abstracting, and Microfilm

*Children and Libraries* is indexed in *Library and Information Science Abstracts* and in *Library Literature and Information Science*.

*Children and Libraries* is indexed, abstracted, and available in full text through EBSCOhost. For more information, contact EBSCO at 1-800-653-2726.

*Children and Libraries* is also available from ProQuest Information and Learning in one or more of the following ways: online, via the ProQuest information service; microform; CD-ROM; and via database licensing. For more information, call 1-800-521-0600, ext. 2888 or online at [www.proquest.com](http://www.proquest.com).

The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1992.

Copyright © 2024 American Library Association

All materials in this journal subject to copyright by the American Library Association may be photocopied for the noncommercial purpose of scientific or educational advancement granted by Sections 107 and 108 of the Copyright Revision Act of 1976. For other photocopying, reprinting, or translating, address requests to the ALA Office of Rights and Permissions.

# Expedition Bound!

## Clever Passport Program Ups Library Visits, Engagement

MARY FELLOWS



Library Expedition artwork was created by artist Ira Marcks ([www.iramarcks.com](http://www.iramarcks.com)).

**Q:** What builds support for libraries, engages stakeholders, delights users, boosts staff pride, and brings business to local communities?

*A: A library expedition!*

What's a library expedition? At Upper Hudson Library System (UHLS) in Albany, New York, it's a robust, self-guided library tour for users that's wildly popular with families and adults, fun for staff, and engaging for stakeholders.

Our Library Expedition began with a dream to deliver an experience that enticed people to visit all thirty-six library locations in UHLS. We're a cooperative regional library system in upstate New York of twenty-nine independent libraries and their branches, serving 474,000. Staff knew that most residents of our two counties were unaware of the many shared services available to them beyond their library's walls.

While some community libraries are as close together as three miles, others involve ninety minutes of travel to go between them. Few people had visited more than a handful of their closest libraries. With our daily weekday delivery service, patrons had little incentive to seek out far-flung libraries.

So, in 2017, a planning team of library colleagues and system staff set out to design an experience that would:

- Educate users on UHLS and the services available through us
- Showcase each library's uniqueness

- Reinforce the value of nurturing a family/individual library habit
- Build support for libraries in society
- Demonstrate libraries' community support to funders and decision-makers.

To get buy-in from our members, we carefully articulated the value of the Expedition to each library:

- Media exposure through joint marketing
- Potential for increased library use and new users
- A fun public event that attracts positive feedback and boosts staff morale
- Stronger connections to other UHLS libraries for greater collaboration and innovation



**Mary Fellows** is Manager, Youth & Family Services at Upper Hudson Library System in Albany, New York. She is a member of the ALSC Managing Children's Services Committee and a former ALSC President.

**CONGRATULATIONS!**  
Your journey has begun!

**2023 UPPER HUDSON LIBRARY EXPEDITION**  
April 3 - July 31

Welcome to the Expedition! Use this map to plan your Expedition adventures. Road trip to as many of our 36 UHLS libraries as you can. Prizes await you on your explorations!

Check out [uhls.org/expedition](https://uhls.org/expedition) for more information, including what to see (and where to eat!) along the way. On social media? You can follow others on their Expedition journeys and document your own at #Library36er.

Bring this map on your Expedition visits to log your progress and claim prizes!

**Choose your next stop using this map and hit the road.**

At each library, introduce yourself as an Expeditioner. You'll get your map stamped and a prize if you've reached a prize level. Anticipate these goodies:

- 6 Libraries Visited: Vinyl Sticker
- 12 Libraries Visited: Magnetic Bumper Sticker\*
- 24 Libraries Visited: Enamel Pin\*
- 36 Libraries Visited: VIP 36er Gold Library Card.

Already a 2018 36er? You'll get a platinum VIP card!

\*Stop by one of these libraries to claim the prizes on your 12th and 24th visits:

- BETHLEHEM PUBLIC LIBRARY
- BRANKENRICK COMMUNITY LIBRARY
- COLOMBE TOWN LIBRARY
- EAST GREENBUSH COMMUNITY LIBRARY
- TEICH PUBLIC LIBRARY
- WOODBURNVILLE PUBLIC LIBRARY

**Open the map and start your adventure...**

**I/we're an Expedition party of:**

- Number of Adults
- Number of Teens, 13-18
- Number of Children, 0-12

**UPPER HUDSON LIBRARY SYSTEM**  
Together. For Better Libraries.

[www.uhls.org](https://www.uhls.org)



A new team jumped into planning, helped by the lessons learned in the earlier version. Marcks again designed wonderful new graphics that included the beloved Hawaiian shirt-wearing bears from 2018—this time with a baby bear in tow.

By late March 2023, printed materials and prizes based on 2018 participation were on hand. To the gold library card option, we added a VIP platinum card for the uber library-lovers who would become second time 36ers. We also opened a virtual store with print-on-demand Expedition merchandise.

All thirty-six locations had instructions, programming ideas, marketing language, and a supply of prizes. On April 3, we launched Expedition 2023. And the doors blew off.

## Results

By the end of the second week, there had been 3,539 Expedition visits to our libraries. We were thrilled, and a bit concerned. Our initial orders of prizes had been nail-bitingly delayed by supply chain issues, and now we needed to get more of almost everything quickly. This became the theme of the 2023 Expedition: sheer delight at its success—circulation increased by 4.2%—and anxiety about keeping it running smoothly for libraries and Expeditioners.

At its conclusion, Expedition 2023 netted our libraries 41,000 Expedition-related visits. From newborn babies to octogenarians, Expeditioners engaged with libraries, charmed and were charmed by staff, and proved through heartwarming stories how very important libraries are to them.

And were they motivated by the challenge! One Expeditioner said, “When I reached my 36er final library, I was having a medical emergency. The staff called 911 and I was transported to [local hospital]. I made sure I got my stamp before they made the call!”

## Once and Again

A year later, the 2018 Library Expedition launched. Riffing on the well-known “Become a 46er” slogan of the local upstate New York Adirondack Mountain Club, the Expedition’s “Become a 36er” slogan offered a regional flavor. We were fortunate to engage local comic artist/author Ira Marcks to design our graphic pieces. Ira’s eye-catching poster, bumper sticker, map, buttons, pin, sticker and other pieces generated instant interest. His iconic bear duo in their vintage VW van immediately attracted devoted fans!

Participants received a map to be stamped at each library and prizes when they visited five, fifteen, and twenty-five libraries. The prize for visiting all thirty-six, which we offered a bit tongue-in-cheek, was a VIP gold library card. Unlike the Willy Wonka golden ticket, there were no special privileges attached to the card, but it was—surprisingly—nearly as coveted!

More than three thousand people participated in the 2018 Expedition, and 375 people completed it to earn their prized gold card. Before its conclusion, people were petitioning us to do an Expedition again next year. We gently broke the news that no, this was not an annual project. The amount of work and expense precluded that, but we’d do it again “someday.”

In 2022, we decided that “someday” was on the horizon. We were past the worst of the pandemic adjustments. Libraries were working hard to reconnect with their communities, while fun still seemed in short supply. The time was right for another Expedition.

## Expeditions in a Nutshell

Here are some takeaways from our two Expeditions.

- It's a lot of work, but it can pay off 100-fold tangibly and intangibly.
- Exciting graphics make all the difference.
- Add-ons are unlimited (store, games, extra challenges).
- Eager Expeditioners invest and with encouragement become creators (we had a Made By You section on our website).
- The value grows after the Expedition is over (the stories keep coming!).

Think you might want to do an Expedition? Here are some tips:

- Start nine to twelve months in advance.
- Spend the money and hire an artist. The graphics carry it.
- Offer a gold library card for the final reward.
- Assist legislators in Expeditioning to their libraries.
- Plan on having a party!

Staff rose to the challenge. The director of our tiniest library sang a composed-on-the-spot song for Expedition families that included the children's names. Other libraries offered young Expeditioners snacks or stuffed travel companions.

Workers were sometimes run ragged by the hundreds of excited Expeditioners, yet also loved their enthusiasm. Said one staff member, "Seeing so MUCH LOVE for all libraries was fantastic and heartwarming." Another observed, "This program was like having visiting carolers—a bright spot in our day." Others

reported visitors who returned to make donations because they were so impressed with the children's programming.

Library directors saw other benefits. Anita S. Wilson, director of Petersburg Public Library, said, "We had a huge boost in visitors (and statistics). Many folks pleasantly surprised at our wonderful space. The comments and publicity also improved the opinions of town officials and gave more credence to the importance and viability of having a library."

When the Expedition officially concluded on July 31, 918 people had earned a gold or—for second-time 36ers—platinum card. Pleased (and tired) as we were with the Expedition's success, we weren't done.

## Celebrate!

After the 2018 Expedition ended, participants wanted a celebration. We held one nine months later, and three hundred people came. In 2023, more than six hundred legislators, local officials, library lovers, and Expeditioners of all ages came to our September Library Love Fest.

We had music and food, prizes and games, and the rain held off! Each library had a table so party-goers could do a mini-Expedition and reconnect with the staff of their favorite libraries. We leveraged the opportunity for library advocacy—a library value calculator showed families how much libraries save them, and staff from our state library association gathered emails for an advocacy list and discussed libraries' role in freedom of information. Legislators and other elected officials took in the crowds of library supporters and posed for photos. Everyone seems to have a wonderful time. One staff member later reported, "We had folks come in the next day and just rave about how much fun they had at the party!"

## Conclusions

Both Library Expeditions have visibly and enduringly demonstrated how beloved and valued our UHLS libraries are. When an initiative sparks tens of thousands of library visits, creates new library advocates, captures stakeholder attention, delights people of all ages, and reinforces the central role of libraries in their communities, that's a win! &

# Rural Resource

## The Role of Distance and Community for Families with Toddlers in Rural Areas

ELEANOR FISK AND RACHEL CHAZAN-COHEN

**L**ibraries have been a longstanding feature of diverse communities across the United States, including rural ones. Libraries serve an important role, offering books for loan, connections to resources, and programs for children and families across the lifespan.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, in rural areas, libraries provide patrons with reliable internet.<sup>2</sup>

These offerings may be particularly valuable for families with young children who have not yet entered school, since many promote parenting practices that support children's literacy and children's own skills.<sup>3</sup> This study aims to explore the ways rural families use libraries, if these uses vary based upon how far away families live, and potential associations between library use during toddlerhood and child and family outcomes two years later.

Libraries have had a longstanding presence in the United States. Over the course of the 1800s, federal initiatives to store documents increased, libraries supported by taxes and public funding opened in states, and Andrew Carnegie began supporting the building and growth of libraries through his philanthropy.<sup>4</sup> The number of libraries in the US continued to grow across the nineteenth and into the twentieth century, and by 1930, there were more than six thousand libraries in the US, 1,795 of which were Carnegie

Libraries.<sup>5</sup> In addition to traditional brick and mortar libraries, the early 1900s also saw the emergence of bookmobiles traveling to expand the areas that libraries could serve.<sup>6</sup>

Today, there are more than nine thousand libraries nationwide, more than fifteen hundred of which have multiple branches and 549 with bookmobiles, and four thousand of which are located in rural areas.<sup>7</sup> Individuals in the US report visiting the library nearly monthly—on average, 10.5 times per year (as of 2019).<sup>8</sup> Libraries are visited by individuals and families of different ages, incomes, and backgrounds.<sup>9</sup> Importantly, since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, almost all libraries in the US shifted their programming and expanded virtual services.<sup>10</sup> The prevalence and modalities of libraries today make them accessible to people around the country.

### Libraries as a Resource

An extensive research base comprising largely of studies utilizing a variety of qualitative and mixed-methods has examined how libraries are used, both in general and by families; our study will build upon by examining how libraries are used by families with toddlers in the rural US.



**Eleanor Fisk**, PhD, is a Research Associate at James Bell Associates in Arlington, VA, where she works on applied research projects and evaluations of two-generation programs, including home visiting and Early Head Start. She earned her PhD in Human Development and Family Sciences at the University of Connecticut. **Rachel Chazan-Cohen**, PhD, is an Associate Professor and Director of the Early Childhood Program at the University of Connecticut. Throughout her career, working in government and academic settings, Rachel has worked to bridge the worlds of policy, practice, and research.

In addition to loaning books, libraries offer a welcoming and inclusive physical space, internet access (especially needed in rural areas), and activities, programs, and resources for individuals across the lifespan.<sup>11</sup> Libraries offer an extensive array of opportunities beneficial for families with young children, and library staff report recognizing the important job of libraries to engage families, however, family engagement has been found to be lower in rural areas.<sup>12</sup>

Libraries offer targeted programming, conduct story hours, and participate in federal initiatives aiming to promote parent-child reading.<sup>13</sup> Libraries serve an important role in disadvantaged and rural communities, ensuring internet availability, offering programs to connect patrons with resources, making special effort to engage low-income families, and loaning books and entertainment.<sup>14</sup>

One of the most common themes among libraries' offerings is the promotion of shared reading and literacy skills. This is a responsibility that libraries take seriously, with 99 percent of library staff in one study saying it was important or very important for libraries to act as catalysts to inspire a love of reading.<sup>15</sup> Informally, research has found that librarians engage in practices intended to promote literacy skills (e.g., asking questions) during storytimes.<sup>16</sup>

Formally, many libraries across the country have participated in the Every Child Ready to Read (ECRR) national initiative, which provides funding to intentionally support parent-child interactions in public libraries that promote literacy.<sup>17</sup> By exposing children to read stories and promoting family shared reading, libraries serve an important supportive role, given the importance of shared book reading for children's development.<sup>18</sup>

## Rurality

Nearly one in five Americans live in an area recognized as rural (or non-metropolitan/non-urban) by the US Census Bureau.<sup>19</sup> These rural areas make up nearly all (97 percent) of the land areas of the country.<sup>20</sup> Disaggregating urban, suburban, and rural, estimates are that closer to 14 percent of the US population lives in purely rural areas, with a decline in the rural population in recent years.<sup>21</sup> Rural communities tend to be majority white, have lower immigrant populations, and slightly higher poverty rates than urban and suburban areas, and approximately half of residents live close to some or most of their extended family.<sup>22</sup>

Despite challenges associated with living in rural areas, there are notable strengths and important resources to be found as well. Many of the challenges relate to the non-existence of or difficulty accessing material resources and services, such as jobs, public transportation, health care providers, and education.<sup>23</sup> Some have hypothesized that this lack of resources and services may explain lower achievement of students in rural areas.<sup>24</sup>

Despite some difficulties in access, libraries are used for information, social gatherings, internet access, supporting the community, and more.<sup>25</sup> In addition to more material resources and

services, research has shown that non-material resources tend to be prevalent and beneficial in rural areas, including neighborly behavior and social connection.<sup>26</sup> For children in rural areas, positive home/family, school, and neighborhood environments and relationships have been found to promote well-being.<sup>27</sup>

## Child Development

During the toddler years, children experience incredible development, particularly with the emergence of more complex social emotional skills and expanded language and communication skills.<sup>28</sup> Theory provides insight into the importance of considering development in the context of caregivers, whose interactions and conversations with children contribute meaningfully.<sup>29</sup> One particularly important caregiver-child interaction during infancy and toddlerhood is the experience of shared book reading, which has been shown to be positively associated with children's later vocabulary, reading, and even math and socioemotional skills.<sup>30</sup> Per the literature reviewed above, libraries serve an important role in allowing children to engage in shared book reading and in promoting parent-child shared book reading. In this study, we will explore associations between library use during toddlerhood and cognitive stimulation in the home and children's early reading skills two years later.

## The Study

This study aimed to explore how families with young children in the rural US engage with libraries, and how libraries serve as a resource for them. Specifically, we had three research questions.

- What are the different ways that families with young children who live in rural areas report using libraries? Given that libraries are a public and free resource for families with young children and prior work showing substantial use in rural communities,<sup>31</sup> we anticipated that families would take advantage of the programs and resources offered by libraries.
- Does library use vary by distance the family lives from the library? Here, we hypothesized that library use would be lesser for families who live a greater distance from the library, given that rural families already live farther from their nearest library than the average American.<sup>32</sup>
- Are there benefits of library use on the home cognitive stimulation and children's reading skills? It was expected that greater library use (in both frequency and types) would be positively associated with both the home cognitive stimulation and children's reading two years later, given prior research on libraries' role in supporting parent-child shared book reading that is important for children's development.<sup>33</sup>

Data for this study came from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study—Birth Cohort (ECLS-B), a nationally representative study of 10,700 children born in the United States in 2001.<sup>34</sup> To gather participants for the ECLS-B, births were sampled from

ninety-six core primary sampling units across the US. If children died or were adopted before they were nine months old, they were excluded from the sample, as were children whose mothers were younger than fifteen years old.

The ECLS-B followed children from birth to nine months (Wave 1), two years (Wave 2), four years (Wave 3), and kindergarten entry (Wave 4). From birth, the response rate for the initial nine-month wave of data was 74%; and then from that initial nine-month sample, the response rates for the two-year, four-year, and kindergarten waves of data collection were 93%, 91%, and 92%, respectively.

This study used an analytic sample consisting of children who lived in a rural area at age two who had a valid sample weight ( $N = 1,550$ ) and data from Waves 2 and 3. At Wave 2, when children were approximately two years old, the ECLS-B collected information on the distance families lived from a library and their ways of using the library, which we aimed to describe for rural families.

- This rural subsample was 65% white and 96% English-speaking, but saw more diversity in terms of parental education levels (44% with a high school diploma or less), income ( $M = \$43,314$ ,  $SD = \$36,891$ ), and marital status (66% married). On average, families had 2.4 children in the household and 2.1 adults. Approximately half of these rural families lived in the southern US and a quarter in the Midwest, with fewer families from the northeast and west.

## Measures

Parents were asked to respond to questions about their *library use* at Wave 2, when their child was approximately two years old. Parents were asked if, in the past month, they had used the public library to

- borrow books to read aloud to their child
- borrow materials other than books, such as cassettes, CDs, videos, or toys, to share with their child
- get information or materials on a parenting topic or concern, and/or
- take their child to a story hour or program.

For each use, we created a dummy variable indicating if the parent had or had not used the library in each of these ways in the past month (1 = yes, 0 = no). Additionally, we added up the dummy variables to create a count variable representing the total number of ways a family had used the library in the past month ( $M = 0.5$ ,  $SD = 1.0$ , min. = 0, max = 4).

Families were also asked to report the *distance from their home to the closest public library* or bookmobile stop at Wave 2, when children were two. Distances were categorized as less than one mile, one to two miles, three to five miles, six to ten miles, or more than ten miles. Responses were fairly evenly distributed across these categories, ranging from 17% of families living one to two miles

from the closest library to 22% of families living six to ten miles from the closest library.

## Child and Family Outcomes

Children's reading skills were directly assessed at age four with a battery of items sampled from measures such as the English Language Proficiency Assessment for Early Learners and the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test. The reading assessment was intended to test both language and literacy by measuring Basic Skills, Vocabulary, Initial Understanding, Developing Interpretation, and Demonstrating Critical Stance. The ECLS-B study team used item response theory (IRT) procedures so each child received a selection of questions based upon their answers to previous questions, which ensured that children only answered questions that were appropriately difficult for their skill level.<sup>35</sup> The IRT reading scale score is included as an outcome measure in this study.

*Parental stimulation of cognitive development* is one subscale that parents were scored on during the Two Bags task, a parent-child play interaction when children were four years old. The Two Bags task was adopted from the Three Bags task used in the Early Head Start Research and Evaluation Project and the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Study of Early Child Care. It is a semi-structured play interaction between the parent and child in which they received two bags, one with a book and one with Play-Doh and tools, to play with together for ten minutes. The interactions were recorded and coded by trained observers on five scales measuring parents/parenting behavior and three scales measuring the child/child's behavior. The parental stimulation of cognitive development is one of the parent scales intended to assess the extent to which parents engage in effortful teaching appropriate for their child's developmental level. It is scored on a seven-point rating scale ranging from very low (1) to very high (7).

## Child and Family Characteristics

The analyses in this study controlled for child and family characteristics, including dummy indicators for time-invariant child characteristics, including gender (boy, with girl omitted), race/ethnicity (Black, Hispanic, Asian, Native American, other or multi-race, with white omitted), low birth weight, and twin status. Additionally, children's age in months at Wave 2 was included as a control variable. Indicators for time-invariant family characteristics or characteristics measured at Wave 2 included parental education level (less than high school, high school, college, with some college omitted), marital status (married, with unmarried omitted), immigrant (one or more parents were not born in the US), and English as the primary home language (non-English omitted). Continuous variables were included for family income, number of children in the household, and number of adults in the household, all measured at Wave 2. Finally, indicators for the US region in which the family lived at Wave 2 were included (Northeast, Midwest, West, with South omitted).

## Analytic Plan

There was a small amount of missing data within the analytic sample, ranging from 0% (child sex, child age at wave 2, twin status, family income, parental education level, English speaking, region, library uses) to 18% (Two Bags cognitive stimulation). Given that this is an appropriate amount of missing data to impute, and there was no evidence of nonresponse bias,<sup>36</sup> a multiple imputation by chained equations to create twenty complete datasets was conducted. All analyses were conducted in the imputed data and had sampling weights applied to adjust for sampling, nonresponse, and differential attrition.

To first describe rural families' uses of libraries, addressing research question one, we calculated percentages of families who had used the library for each purpose in the past month, which are displayed in table 1. We also looked at the average and range of the total number of uses. To understand differences in uses by distance that families lived from the closest library, we reported percentages of families using the library for each purpose within each distance, shown in table 2.

Finally, we examined links between library uses and distances families lived from the closest library with child and parent outcomes first with bivariate correlations and then in a series of regression models controlling for the child and family characteristics described above. The first set of models contained the four library uses as predictors, the second had only the total count of library uses, and a final set of models tested the distance categories as predictors (with less than one mile serving as the omitted group, and differences between other categories examined).

## Descriptive Statistics

The ECLS-B study team asked parents about four uses of libraries:

- borrowing books to read aloud to their child
- borrowing materials other than books, such as cassettes, CDs, videos, or toys, to share with their child

Table 2. Library Uses by Distance Family Lives from Closest Library

	< 1 Mile	1-2 Miles	3-5 Miles	6-10 Miles	> 10 Miles
Borrow Books to Read to Child	19.7	19.6	21.8	17.7	14.5
Borrow Materials Other Than Books	17.3	13.6	16.3	11.8	10.2
Get Info on Parenting Topics	7.4	8.3	9.5	9.7	5.6
Taken Child to Story Hour or Program	10.6	4.5	7.7	7.4	5.9
Total Number of Uses	0.6 (1.0)	0.5 (0.9)	0.6 (1.1)	0.5 (1.0)	0.4 (0.8)

Note: % is displayed for each use, *Mean (Standard Deviation)* is displayed for the total number of uses. All *ns* are rounded to the nearest 50 and decimals to the nearest 0.1 per NCES requirements. SOURCE: US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Birth Cohort (ECLS-B), 9-month, 2-year, and 4-year data collection.

- getting information or materials on a parenting topic or concern, and/or
- taking their child to a story hour or program.

Eighteen percent of families reported using libraries to borrow books, 14% reported borrowing materials other than books, 8% reported getting information, and 7% reported taking their child to a story hour. Of the four possible uses, on average, families living in rural communities reported engaging in less than one ( $M = 0.5$ ,  $SD = 1.0$ ) of them. These results are shown in table 1.

Families were roughly evenly distributed across the categories the ECLS-B created for the distances from homes to the nearest library, as shown in table 2. Eighteen percent lived less than one mile away, 17% lived between one and two miles, 21% lived between three and five miles, 22% lived between six and ten miles, and 21% lived more than ten miles away from their nearest library.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics on variables of interest

	M (SD) or %
Library Use at age 2	
Borrow Books to Read to Child	18.4
Borrow Materials Other Than Books	13.6
Get Info on Parenting Topics	8.1
Taken Child to Story Hour or Program	7.2
Total Number of Uses	0.5 (1.0)
Distance Lived From Library at age 2	
Less Than 1 Mile	18.5
1 to 2 Miles	17.2
3 to 5 Miles	21.2
6 to 10 Miles	22.0
More Than 10 Miles	21.1
Parent and Child Outcomes at age 4	
Two Bags - stimulate cognitive development	4.2 (0.9)
Children's Reading	23.5 (8.8)

Note:  $M = Mean$ ,  $SD = Standard Deviation$ . All *ns* are rounded to the nearest 50 and decimals to the nearest 0.1 per NCES requirements. SOURCE: US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Birth Cohort (ECLS-B), 9-month, 2-year, and 4-year data collection.

## Differences in Library Use by Distance

There were no statistically significant differences in the total number of uses families reported between the distance categories (at  $p < .10$ , those who lived less than 1 mile and those who lived three to five miles had more uses than those who lived more than ten miles).

Across the individual uses, families who lived farther from their nearest library generally endorsed them at lower rates. Those who lived more than ten miles away reported borrowing books (15%), borrowing materials other than books (10%), and getting info on parenting topics (6%) at lower rates than families in any other distance categories. Families who lived less than a mile away had the highest rate of borrowing materials other than books (17%) and taking child to story hour (11%), and the second-highest rate of borrowing books (20%).

Interestingly, families who lived three to five miles from their nearest library reported the highest (borrowing books, 22%) or second-highest (borrowing materials other than books, 16%, getting info on parenting topics, 10%, and taking child to story hour, 8%) rate on all four uses.

## Links Between Library Uses and Child and Parent Outcomes

We first examined bivariate correlations between each of the library uses and count of total uses with children's reading skills and parental stimulation of cognitive development, both assessed when the child was four years old. Each of the individual uses and the count of total number of uses had small, statistically significant, positive correlations with children's reading skills ( $r = 0.07$  to  $r = 0.11$ ,  $ps < .01$ ). Borrowing books ( $r = 0.07$ ), borrowing materials other than books ( $r = 0.09$ ), taking child to story hour ( $r = 0.06$ ), and the count of total number of uses ( $r = 0.09$ ) similarly had small, statistically significant ( $ps < .05$ ), positive correlations with parental stimulation of cognitive development. None of the distance categories were statistically significantly correlated with the child or parent outcomes.

In the regression models, none of the individual uses nor the count of total number of uses were statistically significant predictors of children's reading. There was one difference among the distance categories, with those who lived one to two miles away scoring statistically significantly higher than those who lived less than one mile away ( $B = 2.60$ ,  $SE = 1.19$ ,  $p < .05$ ). There were no statistically significant associations among the library measures and parental stimulation of cognitive development. In all of the models, parental education levels and the number of children in the household were covariates that were statistically significantly associated with both outcomes.

## Discussion

Prior research shows that libraries are a wonderful source of information, activities, and learning materials for rural families.<sup>37</sup> However, in this study, we found that libraries were not

being used widely by rural families with two-year-old children. We also explored relations between families' use of libraries and parental cognitive stimulation in the home and children's reading, given prior research on libraries' role in promoting shared book-reading, something important for children's later literacy development,<sup>38</sup> finding some correlational support.

## Library Use

Libraries offer a host of resources and programs that may be appealing to families with young children. The secondary data utilized in the present study, the ECLS-B, asked families about their engagement with libraries in several ways when their child was two years old, including through borrowing books, borrowing other materials, getting information on parenting topics, and participating in story hours. We found that very few (7%–18%) rural families engaged in each of these activities.

In prior research, most does not disaggregate the target age of library services beyond "early childhood," and when there are age-targeted programs (e.g., story hours), they tend to be for preschool-aged children.<sup>39</sup> It may be that libraries are seen as a resource for families with children who are more actively preparing for school entry (e.g., learning to read), and that families with slightly younger children, toddlers, have different needs for programming or advertising about what libraries have to offer. In one study of library staff, 89% reported having partnerships with early childhood programs, so ensuring that libraries are making mindful connections with programs that serve toddlers may be a step in promoting library use among families with even younger children.<sup>40</sup>

## Does Distance Matter?

This study also explored the role that the distance families live from their nearest library played in their library use and child and family outcomes. Approximately two-thirds of the sample in this study lived three or more miles away from their nearest library, which is farther than the national average of being 2.2 miles from the library, and over 40% lived five or more miles away, which is greater than the national average in rural areas of being 4.9 miles from the library.<sup>41</sup> While generally library use tended to be lower for families who lived farther away, there were no statistically significant differences in library use across distance groups. We did find some indication that families who lived three to five miles away from their nearest library (but not closer) may engage in greater library use than families who live farther away after controlling for child and family characteristics that may also be associated with library use. An area that further research could probe is the transportation options for rural families living varying distances from libraries, and if that impacts their library use.

## Libraries and Family and Child Outcomes

We found small, positive bivariate correlations between library uses when children were 2 years old and the cognitive stimulation

occurring in the home and their reading skills two years later, when they were four years old. These correlations did not maintain their statistical significance in multivariate tests that controlled for child and family characteristics, several of which (e.g., parental education level) were also significantly associated with parental cognitive stimulation and children's early reading skills.

An area for future research exploration may be if there are interactions between parental education levels and library use in promoting young children's development. Given the low levels of library use in this sample, retesting these associations in other populations may shed insight into which library uses during toddlerhood are particularly beneficial for later child and family outcomes, and therefore are important to promote to families. Prior research has also explored more specific, targeted interventions that occur in libraries (such as ECRR) and found benefits,<sup>42</sup> but there is little to no existing work on associations between more general library use and child and family outcomes.

## Limitations

This study is not without limitations. While the data are nationally representative and provide good data on a respectably sized sample of rural families, the data were collected on children born in the US in 2001, more than twenty years ago.

Since then, and particularly post-COVID, libraries have undergone many changes to increase their digital offerings, which has created a new way for families to access libraries in borrowing e-books, and also lessened transportation-related challenges families may have in accessing the library.<sup>43</sup> Regrettably in these data, families were only asked about library use at one discrete timepoint, when their child was two years old, and while we were able to examine longitudinal associations with strong measures of child and family outcomes two years later, we do not have data

on library use over the duration of that time. Future research could consider whether consistent, cumulative library use as something of importance for families with young children.

## Implications

Libraries have the potential to be an incredible resource for rural families with young children.<sup>44</sup> Toddlerhood is a special time of development where children's language skills are blossoming and activities like shared book-reading have benefits for their later skills.<sup>45</sup> This study found low rates of library use among rural families with toddlers, however, which has implications for practice and research. Libraries can conduct outreach targeting families with toddlers (e.g., through partnerships with early childhood programs that serve children younger than preschool), and ensure that their programming is developmentally appropriate for toddlers and that that is clear to families. Research could further examine barriers to accessing libraries in rural areas (e.g., transportation) to identify potential points of intervention and to provide more resources.

While this study focused solely on library use in rural areas, there is also an untapped area to research if/how library use by families with young children differs in urban areas, if barriers to access are similar, and if libraries promote young children's development in the same way. Regardless of geography and urbanicity, libraries remain an important resource for families with young children in the US,<sup>46</sup> and promoting the use of libraries and increasing their accessibility are worthwhile policy priorities. &

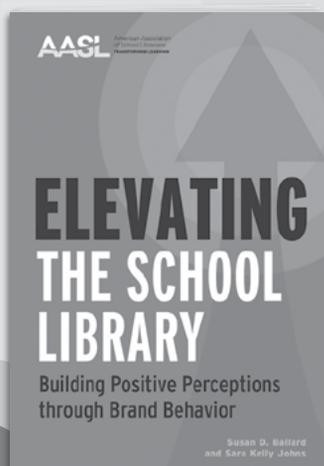
*Author Note: This research was generously supported by a Faculty-Graduate Student Collaboration Grant from the Department of Human Development and Family Sciences at the University of Connecticut.*

## References

1. Hillary Brady and Franky Abbott, "A History of US Public Libraries," Digital Public Library of America, 2015, <https://dp.la/exhibitions/history-us-public-libraries>; Michele Farrell, "A Brief History of National Support for Libraries in the United States," World Library and Information Congress: 78th IFLA General Conference and Assembly, 2012; Institute of Museum and Library Services, "Rural Libraries in America," n.d., <https://www.ims.gov/publications/rural-libraries-america-infographic-overview>; M. Elena Lopez, Margaret Caspe, and Christina Simpson, "Engaging Families in Public Libraries," *Public Library Quarterly* 36, no. 4 (2017): 318–33, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01616846.2017.1354364>.
2. Sharon Strover et al., "The Digital Inclusion Role of Rural Libraries: Social Inequalities Through Space and Place," *Media, Culture & Society* 42, no. 2 (2020): 242–59, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443719853504>.
3. Donna C. Celano, Jillian J. Knapczyk, and Susan B. Neuman, "Public Libraries Harness the Power of Play," *YC Young Children* 73, no. 3 (2018): 68–74.
4. Michael Kevane and William A. Sundstrom, "The Development of Public Libraries in the United States, 1870–1930: A Quantitative Assessment," *Information & Culture* 49, no. 2 (2014): 117–44, <https://doi.org/10.7560/IC49201>; Brady and Abbott; Farrell
5. Brady and Abbott, "A History of US Public Libraries"; Farrell, "A Brief History of National Support."
6. PBS, "A History of the Bookmobile," 2011, <http://archive.pov.org/biblioburro/bookmobile/>.
7. Institute of Museum and Library Services, "Rural Libraries in America."
8. Steve Zalusky, ed., "The State of America's Libraries 2020: A Report from the American Library Association," American

- Library Association, 2020, <https://www.ala.org/news/sites/ala.org.news/files/content/State-of-Americas-Libraries-2020-web.pdf>.
9. Zalusky, "The State of America's Libraries 2020."
  10. Steve Zalusky, ed., "The State of America's Libraries 2021: A Report from the American Library Association," American Library Association, 2021, <https://www.ala.org/news/sites/ala.org.news/files/content/State-of-Americas-Libraries-Report-2021-4-21.pdf>.
  11. Institute of Museum and Library Services, "Rural Libraries in America"; Strover et al., "The Digital Inclusion Role of Rural Libraries"; Zalusky, "The State of America's Libraries 2020"; Zalusky, "The State of America's Libraries 2021."
  12. Brian Real and R. Norman Rose, "Rural Libraries in the United States: Recent Strides, Future Possibilities, and Meeting Community Needs," Office for Information Technology Policy at the American Library Association, 2017, <https://www.ala.org/advocacy/sites/ala.org.advocacy/files/content/pdfs/Rural%20paper%2007-31-2017.pdf>.
  13. Celano, Knapczyk, and Neuman, "Public Libraries Harness the Power of Play"; Kathleen J. Campana et al., "Access, Advocacy, and Impact: How Public Libraries Are Contributing to Educational Equity for Children and Families in Underserved Communities," *Journal of Research in Childhood Education* 36, no. 4 (2022): 561–76, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02568543.2021.2017375>; Institute of Museum and Library Services, "Rural Libraries in America"; Maria Cahill and Erin Ingram, "Extratextual Talk in Public Library Storytime Programs: A Focus on Questions," *Journal of Early Childhood Research* 20, no. 4 (2022): 495–509, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1476718X221098662>; Phil Sirinides, Ryan Fink, and Tesla DuBois, "A Study of Early Learning Services in Museums and Libraries," *Early Childhood Education Journal* 45 (2017): 563–73, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-016-0820-z>.
  14. Institute of Museum and Library Services, "Rural Libraries in America"; Campana et al., "Access, Advocacy, and Impact"; Lopez, Caspe, and Simpson, "Engaging Families in Public Libraries"; Strover et al., "The Digital Inclusion Role of Rural Libraries"; James Turner, "For Rural Communities, It's More than Just a Library," US Department of Agriculture, 2017, <https://www.usda.gov/media/blog/2014/11/03/rural-communities-its-more-just-library>.
  15. Lopez, Caspe, and Simpson, "Engaging Families in Public Libraries."
  16. Cahill and Ingram, "Extratextual Talk."
  17. Celano, Knapczyk, and Neuman, "Public Libraries Harness the Power of Play."
  18. Erica Barnes and Jaime Puccioni, "Shared Book Reading and Preschool Children's Academic Achievement: Evidence from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study—Birth Cohort," *Infant and Child Development* 26, no. 6 (2017): e2035, <https://doi.org/10.1002/icd.2035>; Manuel E. Jimenez et al., "Shared Reading at Age 1 Year and Later Vocabulary: A Gene-Environment Study," *Journal of Pediatrics* 216 (2020): 189–96, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpeds.2019.07.008>; Rotem Schapira and Dorit Aram, "Shared Book Reading at Home and Preschoolers' Socio-emotional Competence," *Early Education and Development* 31, no. 6 (2020): 819–37, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10409289.2019.1692624>.
  19. Michael Ratcliffe et al., "Defining Rural at the US Census Bureau," United States Census Bureau, 2016, <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2016/acs/acsgeo-1.pdf>.
  20. Ratcliffe et al., "Defining Rural."
  21. Kim Parker et al., "What Unites and Divides Urban, Suburban and Rural Communities," Pew Research Center, 2018, <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2018/05/22/what-unites-and-divides-urban-suburban-and-rural-communities/>.
  22. Parker et al., "What Unites and Divides."
  23. Parker et al., "What Unites and Divides."
  24. Portia Miller, Elizabeth Votruba-Drzal, and Rebekah Levine Coley, "Poverty and Academic Achievement Across the Urban to Rural Landscape: Associations with Community Resources and Stressors," *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences* 5, no. 2 (2019): 106–22, <https://doi.org/10.7758/RSF.2019.5.2.06>; National Conference of State Legislatures, "Challenges Facing Rural Communities," 2020, <https://www.ncsl.org/research/agriculture-and-rural-development/challenges-facing-rural-communities.aspx>.
  25. Real and Rose, "Rural Libraries in the United States"; Sirinides, Fink, and DuBois, "A Study of Early Learning Services"; Strover et al., "The Digital Inclusion Role of Rural Libraries"; Turner, "For Rural Communities"; Samsul Farid Samsuddin, Hayrol Azril Mohamed Shaffril, and Ali Fauzi, "Heigh-Ho, Heigh-Ho, To the Rural Libraries We Go!: A Systematic Literature Review," *Library & Information Science Research* 42, no. 1 (2020): 100997, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lisr.2019.100997>.
  26. Ann P. Galloway and Melissa Henry, "Relationships between Social Connectedness and Spirituality and Depression and Perceived Health Status of Rural Residents," *Online Journal of Rural Nursing and Health Care* 14, no. 2 (2014): 43–79, <https://doi.org/10.14574/ojrnhc.v14i2.325>; Maury Nation, Timothy Fortney, and Abraham Wandersman, "Race, Place, and Neighboring: Social Ties Among Neighbors in Urban, Suburban, and Rural Contexts," *Environment and Behavior* 42, no. 5 (2010): 581–96, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013916508328599>.
  27. Lisa A. Newland et al., "Predictors of Children's Subjective Well-Being in Rural Communities of the United States," *Child Indicators Research* 8 (2015): 177–98, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12187-014-9287-x>.
  28. Jack P. Shonkoff and Deborah A. Phillips, *From Neurons to Neighborhood: The Science of Early Childhood Development* (Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 2000).
  29. Urie Bronfenbrenner and Stephen J. Ceci, "Nature-Nuture Reconceptualized in Developmental Perspective: A Bioecological Model," *Psychological Review* 101, no. 4 (1994): 568, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.101.4.568>; Lev S. Vygotsky, *Thought and Language* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1962).
  30. Barnes and Puccioni, "Shared Book Reading"; Jimenez et al., "Shared Reading"; Schapira and Aram, "Shared Book Reading."
  31. Turner, "For Rural Communities."
  32. Institute of Museum and Library Services, "Rural Libraries in America."

33. Celano, Knapczyk, and Neuman, "Public Libraries Harness the Power of Play"; Barnes and Puccioni, "Shared Book Reading"; Jimenez et al., "Shared Reading"; Schapira and Aram, "Shared Book Reading."
34. Kristin Denton Flanagan and Jerry West, "Children Born in 2001: First Results from the Base Year of the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Birth Cohort (ECLS-B) (NCES2005-036)," US Department of Education, 2004.
35. Michelle Najarian et al., "Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Birth Cohort (ECLS-B), Preschool-Kindergarten 2007 Psychometric Report (NCES 2010-009)," NCES, Institute of Education Sciences, US Department of Education, 2010.
36. Najarian et al., "Early Childhood Longitudinal Study."
37. Samsuddin, Shaffril, and Fauzi, "Heigh-Ho"; Real and Rose, "Rural Libraries in the United States"; Sirinides, Fink, and DuBois, "A Study of Early Learning Services"; Strover et al., "The Digital Inclusion Role of Rural Libraries"; Turner, "For Rural Communities."
38. Barnes and Puccioni, "Shared Book Reading"; Celano, Knapczyk, and Neuman, "Public Libraries Harness the Power of Play"; Jimenez et al., "Shared Reading."
39. Cahill and Ingram, "Extratextual Talk"; Campana et al., "Access, Advocacy, and Impact"; Lopez, Caspe, and Simpson, "Engaging Families in Public Libraries"; Strover et al., "The Digital Inclusion Role of Rural Libraries."
40. Lopez, Caspe, and Simpson, "Engaging Families in Public Libraries."
41. Institute of Museum and Library Services, "Rural Libraries in America."
42. Celano, Knapczyk, and Neuman, "Public Libraries Harness the Power of Play."
43. Zalusky, "The State of America's Libraries 2021."
44. Samsuddin, Shaffril, and Fauzi, "Heigh-Ho"; Real and Rose, "Rural Libraries in the United States"; Sirinides, Fink, and DuBois, "A Study of Early Learning Services"; Strover et al., "The Digital Inclusion Role of Rural Libraries"; Turner, "For Rural Communities."
45. Barnes and Puccioni, "Shared Book Reading"; Jimenez et al., "Shared Reading"; Shonkoff and Phillips, *From Neurons to Neighborhood*.
46. Campana et al., "Access, Advocacy, and Impact"; Institute of Museum and Library Services, "Rural Libraries in America"; Nation, Fortney, and Wandersman, "Race, Place, and Neighboring."



## BRANDING ISN'T JUST FOR CELEBRITIES.

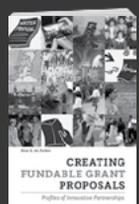
Strengthen your library's draw and influence with stakeholders by developing a brand in alignment with the AASL Standards.

NOW AVAILABLE at the ALA Store at [alastore.ala.org/slbrand](http://alastore.ala.org/slbrand)

CONTACT [editionsmarketing@ala.org](mailto:editionsmarketing@ala.org) for bulk sales information about *Elevating the School Library* and related titles.

ALA  
Editions

AASL American Association of School Librarians  
TRANSFORMING LEARNING



**BROWSE THE NEW SCHOOL LIBRARIES CATALOG** at [alaeditions.org](http://alaeditions.org) for more resources from AASL and ALA Publishing and Media.

# Couples who Collaborate

## Cheryl and Wade Hudson

MARY-KATE SABLESKI

Cheryl and Wade Hudson are the dynamic duo behind Just Us Books, the publishing company they started in 1988. Their collaboration together began when they published *AFRO BETS ABC Book* (1987), after receiving rejection after rejection from major publishing companies citing a lack of interest in books about Black children.

Just Us Books has received numerous accolades and awards over its thirty-five years in business, in recognition of its significant contribution to the publication of diverse books for children. In 2022, the couple was awarded a Carle Honors award from The Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art for their contribution to children's literature.

Cheryl began her career in educational publishing doing textbook design. She employs those skills as the lead editorial and art director for Just Us Books. Cheryl is also a gifted fabric artist, creating quilts reflective of Black history. Wade Hudson has won numerous accolades for his more than four-decade career in children's publishing. He has written over thirty books for children, including picture books, anthologies (co-edited with Cheryl), and poetry.

### Q: How did your collaboration begin?

Cheryl: Just Us Books reflects how we started as "just us," just Wade and myself. We actually met over fifty years ago through mutual friends. It wasn't love at first sight, but it was interest in books at first sight. I was doing some research at the Peabody Museum for a book I was working on. While visiting a friend there, I met Wade, and we just really hit it off. At that time, I was doing art editorial work for an educational publishing company. We started collaborating on projects that included Wade's poetry, and made



Cheryl and Wade Hudson.  
Photo by Stephan Hudson Photography.

use of my graphic design skills. A year later, we got married, and we've been working together ever since.

Wade: When we first met in Boston, and realized we both shared an interest in creating books for children, I came up with an idea for a book about a group of kids. You illustrated it. We didn't do anything with it, but we had the concept. What was the name of it?

Cheryl: *Hometown*.

Wade: *Hometown*, right! We never published it, but I think at the particular time we recognized that there was a need for stories that feature Black youngsters. This was in 1971 or '72. I think that was really the first project that we did together. I used to write poems for Cheryl and put them to music and surprise her.

Cheryl: You called me on the job! I'm supposed to be working, and he writes poetry to me.

Wade: So, I guess that's a collaboration as well.

Cheryl: Right around that time, there was a push in educational publishing to be more inclusive because there were very few, if



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

any, people of color in textbooks. We didn't have children yet, but we knew that there was a need for more stories by more Black authors. At that time, even anthologies didn't include people like Gwendolyn Brooks or Langston Hughes. The stories available at that time were really basically all White stories. Our attempt to remedy the situation was by creating our own stories, most that we never published. About ten years later, when we actually had children, we got even more serious about collaborating on these types of projects.

Wade: Our collaboration, and we've collaborated on a lot of different projects, is really motivated by our desire and our need to make a difference in the world. We are both artistically inclined, and we're very creative, and were creative as children growing up. I think it was fate that the two of us met, having similar sensibilities and similar concerns about the world. We brought our individual experiences being involved in the Civil Rights Movement and what was going on in the 1960s. Those experiences connected the two of us together. Since that first meeting, we've been on a journey that would be incomplete without the two of us being together and collaborating together in so many different ways. In addition to creating books together, I've encouraged Cheryl and her artistic pursuits over the years, and she supported me with my playwriting and other projects that I have done. To boil it down to the essence of it—our relationship has been a really big, giant collaboration.

**Q: Can you tell us about the first book you made together?**

Cheryl: Actually, that first book that we published together with both of our names on as collaborators and editors was an anthology, *In Praise of Our Fathers and Our Mothers: A Black Family Treasury by Outstanding Authors and Artists* (1997). We asked our friends to contribute to this work that praised our fathers and mothers, because there's a lot of negative press about Black families. There was a lot going on during that time in 1996 with the O. J. Simpson trial and responses to that, and absentee fathers and absentee mothers, and the narrative that was prevalent in the news was a negative one, and we said, *wait a minute. This is not really how we grew up.* This is not the reality that we knew. We can praise our fathers and our mothers. That anthology came together by putting together contributions from writers like Joyce Hansen, Walter Dean Myers . . .

Wade: That was really one of the first anthologies of that genre. It brought together a variety of book creators. I'm sure that there were anthologies done before that, but in terms of the focus of the anthology, I think that that was really one of the very first ones to do that.

Cheryl: Right. And Jerry Pinkney, Andrea and Brian Pinkney, as couples who collaborated.

Wade: The cover was a collaboration. Leo and Diane Dillon did the cover.

Cheryl: I think there were forty-eight contributors, also Virginia Hamilton. The book offered a different perspective, and our

perspective was of the legacy, the shoulders that we are built upon.

**Q: It's interesting to trace that book to your more recent books, like *We Rise, We Resist, We Raise Our Voices* (2018), which is similar, but reflects modern issues.**

Wade: *We Rise, We Resist, We Raise Our Voices* was inspired by what was happening during the election season of 2015 and 2016, which threw a lot of us for a loop. So, we started thinking, what could we tell young people about what was going on? It was such a toxic environment, and that still has not changed that much. So many different groups of people were being marginalized in public debates and public forums. We knew that there were a lot of young people and children who were being hurt by the language being thrown out there. We started reading different articles where students in school were being bullied by other students that were using the same kind of language they heard politicians and candidates use in their debates. So, we said, how can we really talk to young people? We reached out to a lot of our friends in the industry who've written books and illustrated books for the demographic that we wanted to talk to, and they were more than happy to be a part of it, so that was how that one started.

**Q: Not only do you collaborate together, but the way you've collaborated with so many other creators throughout your career together, creating these books is really amazing.**

Cheryl: Our entire working relationship has been a collaboration because we do a lot of talking, I mean, you know that's what we do, communicating our thoughts about the political situation, about the artistic world. Even though our tastes are different in some respects, we really are one in terms of our mission, and our desire to tell stories. We want to share stories. So many stories have not been shared. And a lot of literature, so called literature that's been out there for years has been stereotypical, marginalized, apologetic. Not coming from our voices, but people who have written about us. That mission is just really strong. Let's tell our story, and I have to hand it to Wade, he's come up with most of the ideas. He'll start by saying, "You know, that's not right. What can we do about it?" So, a lot of our joint projects have been initiated through a thought or idea from Wade, and then we go back and forth and develop it.

**Q: How do you create books together? What is your process?**

Wade: One thing that we did early on was to establish areas of responsibility. I think that has been really helpful. I have certain responsibilities that are defined. It doesn't mean that we don't work together on those, but in terms of having the primary responsibility for a particular area, that is what I bring to the table, and then what Cheryl decides to do is what she brings to the table, and then we discuss it. Cheryl brings an expertise and experience as an art director. She is the one who works with the artist, and also with the design of the book that we may be working on, and also the editorial process. My responsibility as far as Just Us Books is concerned is the overall operation of the company, but also marketing, sales, and promotion. We also bring in our adult children,

Katura and Stephan. Katura assists with the marketing, sales, and promotion of the books. Stephan helps with the design and layout of the books. We come together in meetings to determine whether something is working, and we'll bring our input, but it's always the job of the person who has a specific area of responsibility to come back and bring other ideas to make it better.

Cheryl: We go through the same processes as the major companies. We just have fewer people involved in it. We have created books where we have sought out an author to write the manuscript. We have created books that have come to us through blind submissions. We have our editorial team, and sometimes outside readers to review the manuscript. If we think it's something that aligns with our publishing policy and budget, we make an offer. If there is something that needs to be worked on or further developed, we work through that process of editing. We follow the same steps that a major company would: marketing on the front end, determining where we're going to try to sell the books, what outlets, reviews, going through sketches, finishes, approvals, finding a printer, doing proofs. All of that is pretty much the same, but we do it as a team, and then we hire, and depend on freelancers as we need them.

Wade: I think what may set us apart from major publishers is that we are always looking to bring a book to life that addresses a need of what's missing in the canon. I'll use our story as an example. We both grew up in the South basically during the late fifties and in the sixties. We did not have the kind of books that are available now. And so we knew the impact of not having books that have characters in them who look like us, of not having the opportunity to read about experiences of people who look like us, and not knowing as much as we needed to know about Black history and Black culture. So we are always looking for books that help to shine a light on the fullness of Black history, Black culture, and Black experiences. We are always looking to see what's missing. What's needed? What do our children, not just Black children, but all children need to know to help, to enlighten them, and to empower them, and to offer us a better opportunity for them to come together as one world?

**Q: How is it different to work with your family member on a book as opposed to another author or illustrator?**

Wade: For me, it really does not, because the project that we are working on is the focus. I try to approach it the same way regardless of who I am working with on it. Now, obviously being married, you know, sometimes personal things may creep in, and you have to deal with that and push it aside, so that you can focus on the project. With each person that you collaborate with it's a different relationship. Even with the anthologies that we did, each contributor was different, and you have to relate to them differently,

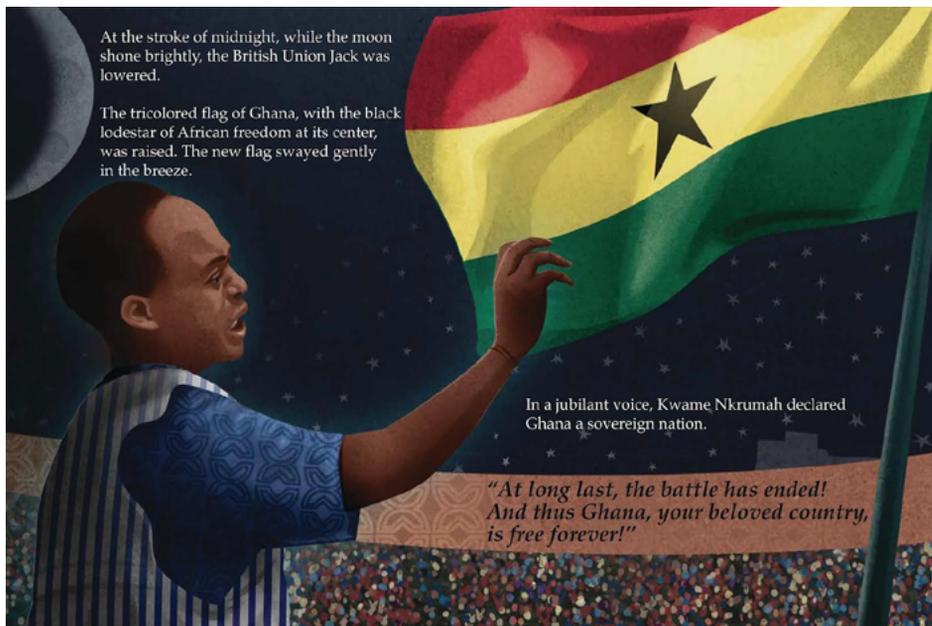


Illustration copyright Laura Freeman, published in *Kwame Nkrumah's Midnight Speech for Independence* by Useni Eugene Perkins, illustrated by Laura Freeman.

because we all have different sensibilities and ways of looking at the world or looking at how our project should be done. So, it's a matter of coming together and finding common ground for the sake of the project itself becoming the best that it can be. Just as teachers work differently with each student, we work differently with each person we collaborate with, including each other.

**Q: What is it like to share your work with children?**

Wade: That has been the blessing of what we do, the opportunity to connect with the students. We like personal engagement. We like to be at an assembly or in a classroom where we can actually connect with students. They are three generations from us, and they are so interested in what it was like for us to grow up in the past. They are full of questions about when we were growing up. To me, young people really are the hope of the future. I am so encouraged and hopeful for a better future, if we can get the adults out of the way.

**Q: A major focus of your work is on contributing more diverse books to the market. Do you have anything else to add about this important element of your work together?**

Cheryl: Last summer, Wade and I were asked to do a lecture at Simmons University. They have a Summer Institute in Children's Literature. Because we are authors, illustrators, graphic designers, editors, and publishers, we know we bring a different perspective. We may be talking about *We Rise, We Resist, We Raise Our Voices* as an anthology, but we also talk about the history of publishing, and how we began in it. We end up doing a lot of talking about the history of institutional publishing, and how we stand on the shoulders of people who came before us in the 1800s, James Russworm and Samuel Cornish, who established *Freedom's Journal*, which was the first African American newspaper in 1827. Wade and I were members of a collaborative group of people in

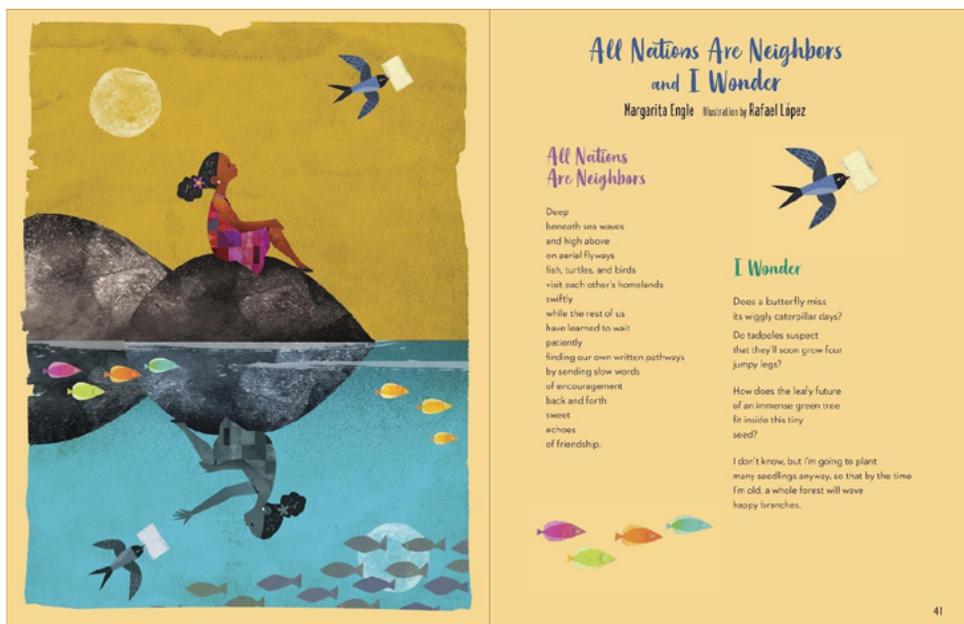


Illustration copyright Rafael Lopez, published in *We Rise, We Resist, We Raise Our Voices*, edited by Wade Hudson and Cheryl Willis Hudson

1988, when we started our company, the Multicultural Publishers Exchange, that was doing the same thing as #weneeddiversebooks aims to do today. So we've been here, and we've been telling our story, but it's either been hidden or erased, or minimized, and we've got to tell that whole story. The same message was being sent during the early seventies, when editors and art departments said, "Well, there are no black illustrators." There were plenty of black illustrations but they were not being hired to illustrate editorials or anything.

Wade: We are often considered pioneers, Cheryl and I. We understand why we would be called that, but we are not the real pioneers. Black people have been fighting to tell their stories since they've been here. They've been fighting to get to define themselves, because too often they were defined by other people. An editorial written in the first Black newspaper, *Freedom's Journal*, said, "We wish to plead our own calls. Too long have others spoken for us about things that concern us dearly." You know, so we are just standing on the shoulders of those who came before us, and the baton would just pass on to us, and it's our leg of the race that must be run. But we are not the first ones to run this race, we're just continuing it. Our focus, to be honest with you, has been more about Black book publishing, but it is just as important to publish books about all people. The Multicultural Publishing Exchange was a multicultural organization, but it didn't last that long, maybe five or six years. #Weneeddiversebooks has expanded this focus to the need for diverse books for everybody.

**Q: Do you have advice for other couples who might be considering collaborating together on either a book or a company?**

Cheryl: Make sure you have your own office space and have plenty of storage space!

Wade: I think it's important that particularly in a couple, a married couple or any couple, it's important to like each other, and that's different from loving each other. You have to like being together. Cheryl and I are together a lot, you know, and if we really didn't like each other, we wouldn't work, and that's different from being in love with each other.

Cheryl: It's important to have fun together. It's important to be on the same page, and to really enjoy what you do. I mean it's a challenge, you know, running a business and being successful in it. The fun part of publishing a book is getting the art and the illustrations together and seeing it in the

bookstore, seeing it in the library, and going on tour. But there's so much other work that goes into running a business and keeping it viable that you don't see when you see the cover of a book, so it's important that you really be committed to your principles and your passion. In terms of advice, you know, working together requires give and take. Liking each other, loving each other is one thing, and sharing the same values in terms of what you're publishing, to children, to the office. It just requires a commitment.

**Q: What else is next for the two of you?**

Cheryl: I am working on a book on African American music. It is a poem about African American spirituals, and I am working with a fantastic illustrator.

Wade: I have three books that are coming out. One is *Invincible Founding Fathers and Mothers of Black America*, a picture book illustrated by E. B. Lewis. You hear people talking about Black America, right? In this book, we sort of show America was formed. We share some of the important events that led up to it, and the important people who helped to shape the founding of Black America. The second book, *The Day My Mother Voted*, will be released in spring 2024, and focuses on the first day that my mother voted in Louisiana for the first time. It's a representational story based on the true story. The third book is a middle grade novel, *The Reckoning*, that will be released in spring 2024. It's a story about a twelve-year-old Black kid in a small town in the South who wants to be a filmmaker. &

# And the Winner Is . . .

## Launching a Mock Ezra Jack Keats Award Program

RAMONA CAPONEGRO, JOHN SCOTT, AND CAROLINE WARD



**A**wards abound in youth literature, and over the past few decades, mock award programs in which students and patrons evaluate books according to award criteria and select their own winners within their communities have become fixtures in school and public libraries.

We have found that the Ezra Jack Keats (EJK) Award readily lends itself to a parallel mock award program. The EJK Award champions “illustrators and writers, early in their careers, who create extraordinary books that reflect our diverse population, the universal experience of childhood and the strength of family and community.” Launched in 1986, the award is administered by the Ezra Jack Keats Foundation (EJKF), in partnership with the de Grummond Children’s Literature Collection at the University of Southern Mississippi. The corresponding Mock EJK Award program also celebrates diverse picture books by early career creators and can be easily adapted to encompass different audiences, goals, and time spans.

Drawing upon the experiences and insights of librarians and educators at Friends School of Baltimore and in Connecticut and New York, the EJKF developed a Mock EJK Award toolkit, available on its website. The toolkit includes background and planning

materials, and upon request, a list of eligible picture books to consider for your Mock EJK Award program. These materials aid enormously in designing your program, and as we’ll demonstrate through the following descriptions of our Mock EJK Award programs, you have ample room to adapt the program to fit your library and community.

### Describe your work with a Mock EJK Award program.

**John:** At Friends School of Baltimore (FSB), I worked in collaboration with educators Frances Morrissey, Diana White, and Andy Hanes to find a book project that would engage readers and particularly get students examining new picture books with a focus on diversity. The EJKF responded with enthusiasm and support, and currently kindergarten and second-grade students participate in the project. My new school, Powhatan Elementary in Baltimore County Public Schools, has participated for the last two years.

**Caroline:** As a public youth librarian, I was inspired to start a Mock EJK Award while serving on the “real” committee, and it was such a fulfilling experience I have continued to conduct mock awards with several local schools. A Mock EJK Award is an ideal



**Ramona Caponegro** is a professor at the University of Alabama’s School of Library and Information Studies, where she teaches courses in youth literature and services. **John Scott** is a public-school librarian in Baltimore County, Maryland. He has served on the Newbery and Caldecott committees. **Caroline Ward** is a past Chair of the Ezra Jack Keats Award Committee. She chaired the 2024 ALSC Children’s Literature Legacy Award.

program for students to encounter the remarkable quality and diversity of picture books and engage in critical thinking skills while experiencing a fun award selection process. This year, I am working with a private school in Westport, Connecticut, where a group of third and fourth graders are participating.

**Ramona:** As a professor of youth literature and now youth services, I held my first Mock EJK Award program in several courses at Eastern Michigan University. Through the program, I was able to include the same sample of diverse picture books in multiple courses, while shifting the focus of the program to fit different courses' objectives. In two classes, university students were able to read and discuss books from our Mock EJK Award program virtually with kindergarten and second grade students at FSB and with second through fifth grade students in a local after school program. Hearing the younger students' insights into the books enriched my students' understandings of picture books and their audiences. This year, I'm including the program in an early childhood literacy materials and story programs course at the University of Alabama.

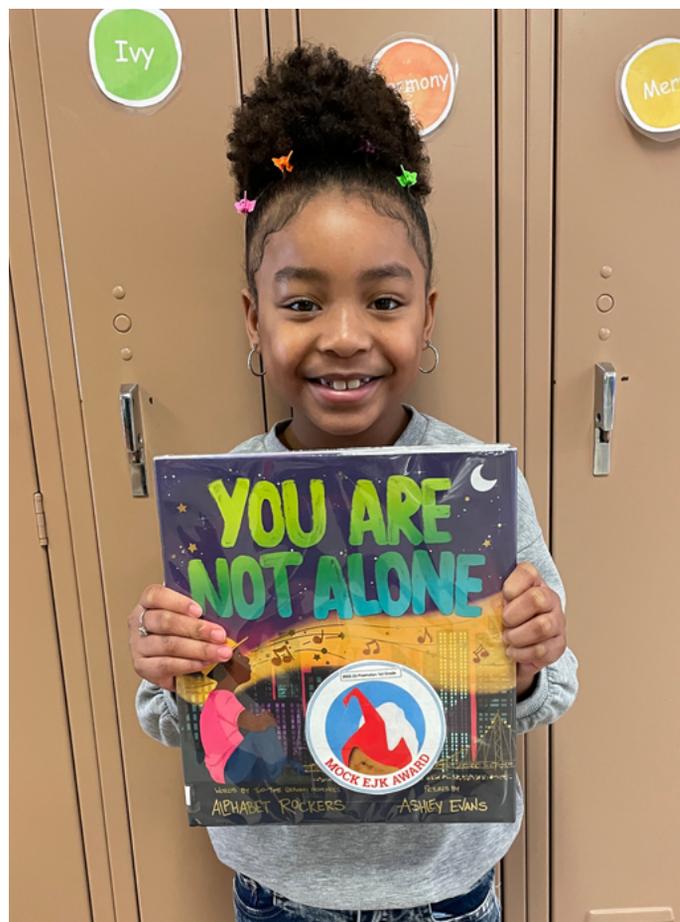
**How long does your Mock EJK Award program run, and how do you plan for it?**

**John:** At FSB, we started the project by learning about Ezra Jack Keats himself, then the award and past winners, before reading and evaluating for the current year. The program ran approximately from October through March. At Powhatan Elementary, the project has followed a similar pattern. Students enjoy being members of the award committee, and the sense of pride at the award ceremony is palpable. For a school librarian, the opportunity to get students actively analyzing text and illustrations in a way that engages critical thinking hits many goals of my curriculum.

**Caroline:** After a school agrees to work on the project, I meet with the media specialists and classroom teachers to plan the timeline and activities. We generally run the program from January through March, typically mirroring the timeline of the "real" committee that announces its winner in early March. We select twelve books from the suggested list of eligible titles offered by the EJKF; we have found that this is an ideal number to be read and evaluated by third and fourth graders during the allotted time. We select a range of art styles and themes; this year's exciting and diverse contenders include a picture book biography of Prince, a graphic-influenced story about a boy working for his father, and a rousing tale set in Armenia.

To familiarize students with the program, we begin with an overview of Keats and his work as an accomplished artist and a well-known creator of beloved children's books. Students are introduced to the award criteria with past EJK Award winners to give a criterion like "Words and Pictures Go Together" a clearer context.

**Ramona:** For different courses, I've run the program in two or six weeks, using fifteen picture books from the list provided by the EJKF. The books are the same in each class simultaneously



Harmony shows her school's pick for their mock EJK award.  
Photo by John Scott.

participating in the program, and I make sure to include the books read by our elementary school partners. Each program begins with an introduction to Keats's work and its reception in the field, an overview of the "real" and Mock EJK Awards, and previous EJK Award winners. Then, depending on the course objectives, we may focus on comparative analysis of the books, drawing from the toolkit's criteria, and/or on creating story times. With the program's flexibility, I can adapt it to fit each class's objectives, while still building community and excitement around an experience shared by multiple classes. My students are always particularly eager to know which books the elementary students selected!

**How do you present the award criteria, and what's your process for sharing and evaluating your selected books?**

**John:** Students work directly off the criteria in the toolkit. We read the books together during library class time and engage in conversation to model critical thinking and book analysis. We use paper ballots and Wixie (a computer application) to help students capture their votes. After months of reading, the narrowing process is a wonderful challenge for students to re-evaluate their voting and to deepen their connection to the criteria.

**Caroline:** The criteria in the toolkit are a great basis for evaluating the books. In working with third and fourth graders, criteria

considered by the “real” committee, such as “originality of language,” are also introduced as students are frequently able to express how a book meets this more sophisticated criteria. In a second meeting, the twelve books are distributed, and we engage in an interactive discussion examining the illustrations, design, and the theme or focus of each book. We review the criteria, and I point out qualities to look for in the books. The books are left with the media specialist or classroom teacher, so the students have time to read each book and engage in further discussion. I often return before the voting to hear how the deliberations are progressing. Ideally, the books are widely available to the students: in the classroom for independent reading and in their library period for more formal reading and discussion. Personal journals, made and decorated by the “judges” and listing each book, have been a helpful way to keep track of their responses.

**Ramona:** We discuss and compare the official award criteria and the Mock criteria in the toolkit before voting with the Mock criteria shared with our elementary student partners. Before and after class discussions, the students read the books and complete any program-related assignments individually or in small groups. The students working directly with the elementary schoolers also participate in shared readings and book discussions with our partners via Zoom or Google Classroom.

#### How do you determine and celebrate your winners?

**John:** We vote in two rounds. First, we narrow down to a short list of seven titles, going back to the criteria and looking at the wide range of books we have read and examined throughout the program. We reread the shortlisted books and discuss them again. Then a final round of voting takes place, and winners (one winner and multiple honor books dictated by the voting results) are announced at our award ceremony. Our winning books are highly circulating titles in the years that follow as students connect closely with the winners and take pride in showing off our medal-wearing titles.



The 2024 Ezra Jack Keats Award winners were Anne Wynter for *Nell Plants a Tree*, illustrated by Daniel Miyares (writer award) and *The Only Way to Make Bread* by Cristina Quintero, illustrated by Sarah Gonzales (illustrator award).

**Caroline:** After the books have had sufficient discussion, the students review their responses to the twelve books one last time, and voting takes place. The “judges” understand that not everyone’s favorite will win and that they can select honor books. Voting is completed on a simple tally sheet, with each student choosing a first, second, and third choice. “We have a winner” is usually announced to great cheers. Schools have invited special guests to attend the award ceremony.

**Ramona:** At the end of the program, we vote via Google Forms, with each student selecting the book they thought best fit the award criteria as the winner. They are also able to select up to three titles as honor books. Once the votes are in from each class (and the partnering elementary school programs if applicable), I share the results, which are met with a great deal of animated discussion. The students are particularly interested in if/how their selections differed from the elementary schoolers’ selections, and it’s incredibly beneficial if the teachers, librarians, and/or university students working with the elementary schoolers can document their evaluation processes, either by recounting group discussions or sharing written/recorded examples of the younger students’ responses to the books. The elementary schoolers are excited to be participating alongside university students in the program and are eager to hear about their selections, too.

While our individual programs differ considerably, they share the essential through line of celebrating diverse books by new picture book creators. Moreover, through our Mock EJK Award programs, our students develop stronger critical thinking and book evaluation skills, as well as a sense of community. They also show a deeper enthusiasm and joy in the process of evaluation and the gift of an incredible picture book. &

*For more information about the Ezra Jack Keats Foundation and the award, visit [www.ejkf.org/about-the-ejk-award/](http://www.ejkf.org/about-the-ejk-award/). For access to Mock EJK toolkits, visit [www.ejkf.org/mock-ejk-award-toolkits/](http://www.ejkf.org/mock-ejk-award-toolkits/).*

# Reading Isn't Easy

## A Survey on Leveling Systems in US Libraries

KERRI L. WILLIAMS, MARYBETH KOZIKOWSKI, NICHOLAS CORMIER

**M**ention the words “Easy Readers” and “Leveling” to any children’s librarian and you are sure to get a breadth of responses—from reverence to revulsion. No two librarians will feel the same way about a system. With this article, we wanted to get a birds-eye view of how children’s librarians across the country felt about leveling: if they do or don’t do it, how they feel about it, and how does it work (or not) for their library.

For this article, we created a survey on Google Forms consisting of thirteen mostly multiple-choice questions, with write-in options, that we distributed to various librarian-focused Facebook groups and through the ALSC community on ALA Connect.

### The Survey

Some of the questions we asked included:

- What type of public library do you work in?
- Do your local school district/school libraries/reading specialists use a leveling system? If yes, which one?

- What do you level your Easy Reader collection in accordance with?
- How do you shelve your Easy Reader collection?
- If you level your Easy Reader collection in accordance with a different leveling system than your local school district, could you explain why that decision was made?
- What is your opinion on the leveling system your library uses?
- Do you have an opinion on publisher-assigned levels vs. whatever system you use?

Throughout this article, we will discuss the findings of our survey with no judgment and without reservation. Our goal here is not to offer a best practice for you, but to show what libraries are doing around the country and to offer some interesting solutions to say, “This works for one library, could it work for yours?”

As a supplement to the article, we have also created an interactive visualization exploring the data and some of the relationships between the answers given we found most interesting. The result was created using the visual analytics platform



**Kerri L. Williams** is the Head of Reference for the Center Moriches (NY) Free Public Library and a part-time Children’s Librarian at Sachem (NY) Public Library. **Marybeth Kozikowski** is a Children’s Services Librarian at Sachem (NY) Public Library. **Nicholas Cormier** (not pictured) holds a BS in biology from Stony Brook University and has sixteen years clerical experience in public libraries and currently works as a Wetland Biologist specializing in GIS and Spatial Data Science.

Tableau and can be publicly accessed at the following link: <https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/nicholas.cormier6756/viz/ALSCProject/EasyReaderSurveyVisualAnalysis>.

We received 136 responses from across the country. Most came from suburban libraries hailing from the Midwest, Northeast, and West Coast. On the question of leveling systems used: 39% answered that they do not level their collections at all; 24% said their library created their own leveling system (the ingenuity of specific responses is discussed further below); and publisher-assigned levels came in a distant third. This formed our analysis going forward—there have always been arguments about leveling in all its forms; but how are librarians dealing with this issue in normal day-to-day business?

## DIY Leveling

Of the 24% of librarians who created their own leveling system, several respondents shared their inventive leveling criteria when answering the survey question, “What is the opinion on the leveling system your library uses?”

“It’s a simple system with four levels:

- P for pre-readers learning phonics and letters
- 1 for reading simple sentences
- 2 for more complex sentences and longer stories
- 3 for short chapter books as a transition to our junior chapter book collection

There is a lot of variation within each level and we work closely with patrons to find the right books for their child.”

“We assign our own levels to each book, ranging from 1 to 3.

- Level 1: less than twenty words per page, repetitive and rhyming text, simple sentences, large print, lots of illustrations/pictures.
- Level 2: smaller print, more complex sentences, increased variety of text, fewer illustrations/pictures
- Level 3: more complex vocabulary and ideas, dialogue, text with limited illustration/picture support.”

“We are informed by Fountas and Pinnell/Guided Reading, but it’s not exact. We have three levels:

1. Just Getting Started (basic phonics, one to five words per page) loosely F&P/GR – A to C/D
2. Beginning to Read (short sentences, sight words) loosely F&P/GR D to H-ish
3. Reading on Your Own (longer sentences, short chapters) loosely F&P/GRI/J+

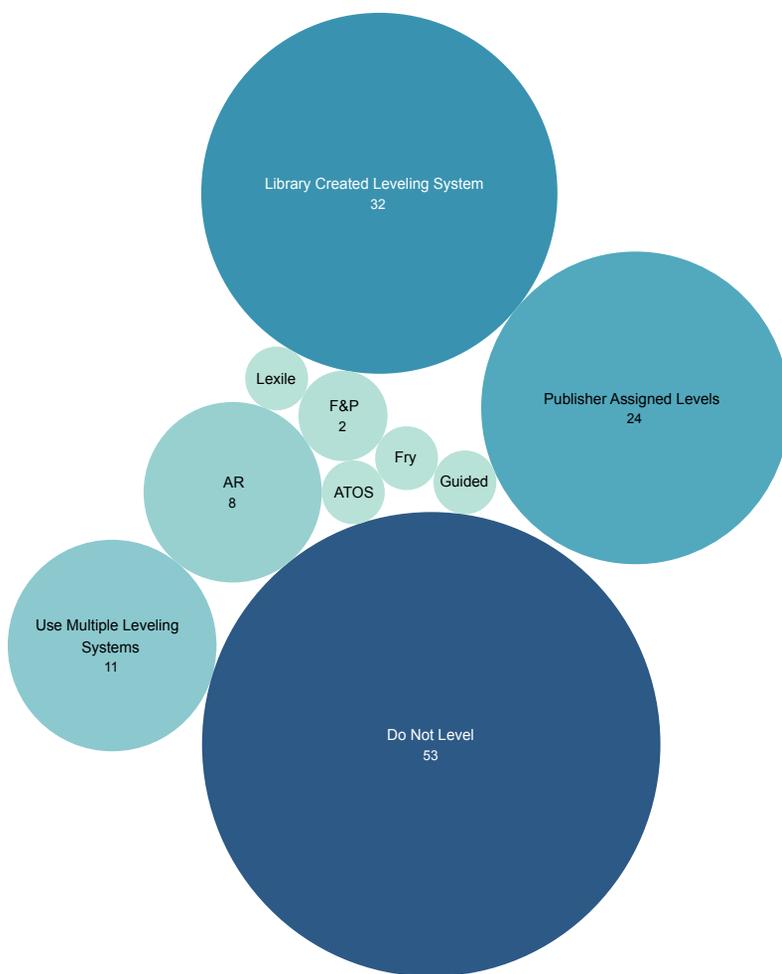


Tableau bubble chart visualizing the number of survey respondents using each of the leveling systems. Larger circle size and darker color value indicate more libraries using the system. Respondents who chose not to answer this question in the survey were not included in the total counts.

We eyeball everything that comes in to make sure it makes sense.”

## Creative Alternatives

Many libraries don’t level their ER collections, usually shelving by author, but do offer creative alternatives for the patron who is following the guidelines set by their local school district. Some shared their alternatives to physically leveling their collections, mostly in response to the question, “If you level your Early/Easy reader collection in accordance with a different leveling system than your local school district, could you explain why that decision was made?”

“Our schools used to do Accelerated Reader (AR), then Lexile, now Fountas and Pinnell (F&P). We tried to keep up with labeling, but gave up. So now we just have lists of our favorite beginning readers, organized by AR/Lexile/F&P level.”

“No leveling system, but small browsing bins of recommended reads based on reading level (early fluent, fluent, etc.)”

### Opinions on Leveling Systems Used

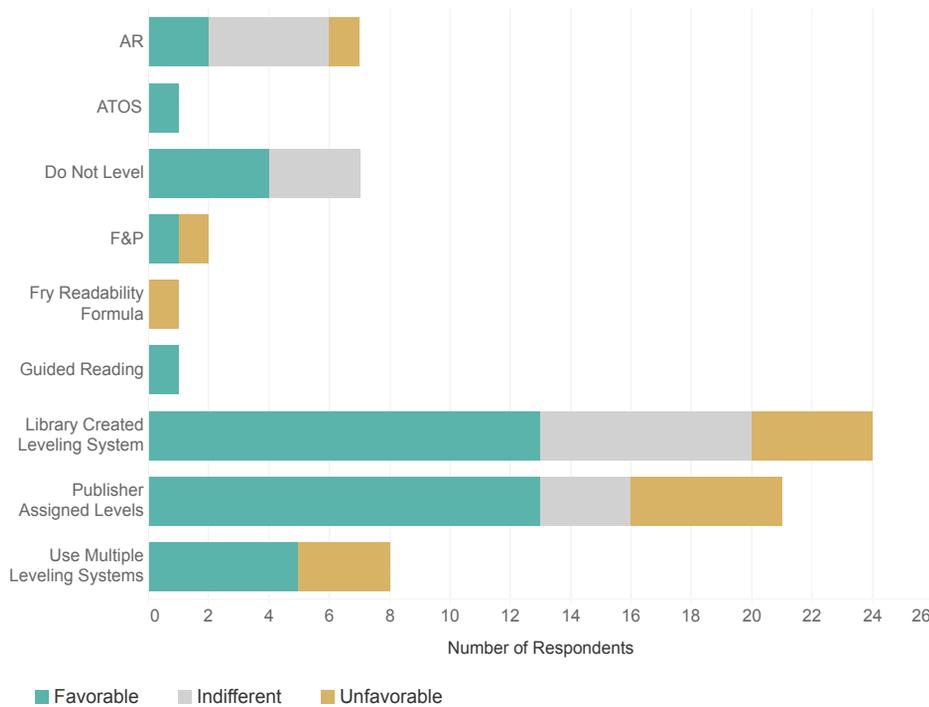


Tableau horizontal bar chart representing the respondents’ opinions of their library’s current leveling system. Respondents who chose not to answer this question in the survey were not included in the total counts.

### Publisher-Assigned Levels

This is an area of interesting nuances. While roughly 18% of respondents level their ER collections by publisher-assigned levels (PALs), those levels are overwhelmingly distrusted by librarians across the board as inconsistent. As one respondent said,

“Having emailed PLENTY of publishers for the criteria they use to file things into the levels they use, I get the feeling that the process is fairly subjective on their end.”

However, of the libraries that level their ERs in accordance with PALs, 54% of those librarians had a favorable view of PALs and how it works for their library and patrons:

“I think shelving only by author in this particular collection makes it harder for parents and children to find the right book for them.”

“It is flawed, but works for our purposes. It’s quick and easy to determine where new books go, and it gives general guidance to caregivers. I sometimes wish the publisher’s levels were more analogous since various level 1s can be very different reading levels. But we just don’t have the time or expertise to reassign them.”

### The Next Big Thing?

The Science of Reading is gaining popularity in the United States.<sup>1</sup> This system is worth watching as any major change in how reading is taught in schools will impact libraries and reader advisory services. As it stands, no two libraries are the same or serve the same people. No two Easy Reader collections should be the same, either. There is one thing all librarians can agree upon, however: our profession has always been one of community and cooperation, trying our best

to make children better readers. &

### Reference

1. Sarah Schwartz, “Which States Have Passed ‘Science of Reading’ Laws? What’s in Them?” *Education Week*, July 20, 2022, <https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/which-states-have-passed-science-of-reading-laws-whats-in-them/2022/07>.

# Feeling Is First

## The Golden Rule of Working with Children in Libraries

LAURA RAPHAEL

**M**y parents were never big talkers when I was growing up. Dad, especially, was a questioner and a listener—an occupational benefit, I suppose, as a clinical child psychologist and family therapist.

He gardened our thoughts and emotions—three daughters, so there was a lot to grow—patiently, tending both the wild brambles and the delicious fruits with the gentle rain of his attention and the loving warmth of his presence.

It did not matter where we were or what we were doing.

On the front porch as the sun set, eating bowls of ice cream: us talking, talking, talking, he and my mother listening, listening, listening.

Taking a walk in the neighborhood, eating dinner as a family, driving in the car: always the same, interested questions and reflective comments.

*Oh, that must have been really scary, huh? . . . What did you think when he said that? . . . What do you plan on doing if that happens? . . . Did I get that right, or is it something else? Tell me . . .*

Underneath the questions, the meaning—you are important. Your feelings matter because you matter. I am interested in you, and I love you.

You cannot fully appreciate or measure the value this kind of quiet acknowledgement gives to growing souls, the strength and power it knits into your very bones—a kind of superpower calcium inoculation that prevents future osteoporosis.



Dr. Robert Clapp, Laura (Clapp) Raphael's father, interacts with a child as part of his role as clinical psychologist for the Children's Medical Center in 1974. (Check out those sideburns!) He was always a patient listener, gardening our thoughts and emotions.

I was thinking about this in the past few months, not just because my father died after a long illness, though, of course, this is what you do when you experience such a great loss—think and remember.

No, I thought about it because of a specific incident my husband and I witnessed outside of a Marble Slab Creamery ice cream store.

A mother told her daughter that she could run through a water fountain with other kids, then immediately called her back. "Nevermind," the mother said. "I changed my mind. We have to pick up Sally, and I don't want you to get wet and we have to go all the way home first and then to pick her up." It was logical, and I felt the mother's three-dimensional parenting chess of the moment, where schedules, tasks, time, and space itself must be carefully examined and calculated to make it all work out.

The girl was upset, but she was controlling it admirably until something even more terrible happened—she dropped her ice-cream cone. "Two-second rule!" the mother cried, desperate. But it was too late. Immediate tears.



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

"It's okay! It's fine to eat!" the mother pleaded. The girl's wailing became louder and more plaintive. "Stop crying! It's really not such a big deal as all this!"

The mother cycled through anger, exasperation, disgust, minimizing. The girl stayed inconsolable. I felt for the mother. I felt for the girl. I felt for the rest of us, an unwilling audience to this one-act tragedy.

And I thought about how my dad would have handled it. Because libraries are my lifeblood, I also thought about what it meant to me as a children's librarian.

The bottom line is that Dad would have tried to acknowledge the child's feelings first. He would have tried to put into words the girl's despair and disappointment, and then he would have listened.

"Wow, this is really terrible, isn't it? You wanted to go play in the water fountain, and then this happened. You really didn't want your ice cream to fall on the ground! Is that right?"

And that is the Golden Rule of working with children in any setting, but especially libraries, where their experience can have such a lasting impact on attitudes toward books, reading, and learning.

You listen first. You reflect. You honor feelings, and you honor children for those feelings.

More than anything, this is what I want the children's staff I train in my library system to understand and to do. Sure, I am an enormous advocate of passing on best early literacy practices and being familiar with great children's literature and how to conduct successful readers' advisory interviews with kids.

But all of that can go in the trash heap if children's librarians don't remember the supreme power of acknowledging a child's feelings in the moment, especially when kids are crying, angry, or showing a thousand other inappropriate behaviors in the library.

"It sounds like you are really sad that storytime is over. We had so much fun, and it's hard to stop, isn't it?"

"Gosh, you are so excited to be in the library, you find yourself running right to the picture books!"

"You really like this doll, don't you? Her hair is so pretty, and I noticed you were rocking her to sleep. You want to take her home, is that it?"

We must set boundaries in libraries for children. It is absolutely our responsibility as caring adults to do so, and I am not advocating a free-for-all, if-it-feels-good approach to the inevitable misbehaviors kids show in libraries. If a child is throwing LEGOs at another child's head, you don't give her more blocks.

But you do give voice to the feeling before giving the rule.

Acknowledging their fear, anger, or excitement is not just a strategy to make the library quiet and calm. It communicates the essence of what my dad expressed. Underneath the comments, the deeper meaning: You are important. Your feelings matter because you matter. I am interested in you.

That's the library I want every child to experience, and that you can create by simply listening. &

*That is the Golden Rule of working with children in any setting, but especially libraries, where their experience can have such a lasting impact on attitudes toward books, reading, and learning. You listen first. You reflect. You honor feelings, and you honor children for those feelings.*

# Building Stories

## National Building Museum Opens Decade-Long Exhibit



**W**hat can you find in children’s books? Quite a lot it seems—so much so that the National Building Museum in Washington, DC, has launched Building Stories, a multigenerational exhibition; the long-term exhibition that will bring kids and adults alike on an immersive exploration of the world of architecture, engineering, construction, and design found in the pages of children’s books.

The exhibit, which will occupy four thousand square feet, will be on display for ten years.

Partnering with curator Leonard Marcus, the nation’s leading expert on children’s literature, and Portland, OR-based exhibition and experiential design studio Plus And Greater Than, Building Stories provides a portal into the wonder of the built environment through the imaginative lens of children’s books.

Designed for a multigenerational audience with special attention paid to children in grades K-3, Building Stories features beloved children’s classics and modern-day offerings from award-winning authors including Sophie Blackall, Ezra Jack Keats, and Květa Pacovská, among many others. Stories such as *Goodnight Moon*, *Winnie-the-Pooh*, *The Snowy Day*, *Eloise*, *The Phantom Tollbooth*, *The Hobbit*, *Rome Antics*, *Harold and the Purple Crayon*, *Last Stop on Market Street*, and *Here We Are*, among hundreds of other titles, help children establish their place in the world, starting with the concept of home, in all its forms.

“We are ecstatic to open Building Stories to the public after many years of planning,” said Aileen Fuchs, president and executive director of the National Building Museum. “Building Stories celebrates the impact that children’s literature has had on all of us, and how it has helped us find our place in the world. Like books do, we hope the exhibition will transport visitors to new places and spark curiosity and thoughtful conversation about the built environment and how we can all be agents of change for a more sustainable and equitable future.”

In the exhibition, visitors will encounter familiar classics and new favorites through hands-on activities, media installations, sketching, reading, and building stories of their own. Award-winning author/illustrators David Macaulay and Oliver Jeffers have collaborated with the Museum to create original environments within the exhibition.

Macaulay’s space will offer insight into his creative process and allow visitors to better understand the worlds created in books, while Jeffers’ concluding installation encourages us all to engage in making the world a better place.

For more information about the museum, visit [www.nbm.org](http://www.nbm.org). &

# Little Engines that Could...

## An Early Literacy Collaboration

CONSTANCE C. BEECHER AND ZACHARY STIER

**E**ricson Public Library resides in Boone, IA, the county seat of a mostly rural Midwest state. It has a history of railroading and mining and draws visitors to enjoy a scenic and historic train ride, so Little Engines seemed like the perfect name for our library's project, designed to enhance and support early literacy in the community. To increase our impact, we sought to do both a library and community-based project.

The purpose of Little Engines was to implement and evaluate an innovative education approach to support parents and/or caregivers to create literacy-rich environments for their preschool-aged children. Our larger goal was to increase family engagement by partnering with community organizations and preschools to make connections between kindergarten readiness for children and learning opportunities at the library and in the community. The project included an evaluation component, and we approached it through the lens of an ecological developmental framework (e.g., Bronfenbrenner's ecological model).<sup>1</sup>

Bronfenbrenner says children develop within environments where they are influenced by interactions with their closest



caregivers. In turn, community contexts like values, material resources, and access to educational opportunities influence their caregivers.

We know that to support early literacy, children need to be immersed in a reading culture. That is, families need to provide books and reading interactions on a regular basis and not just as an occasional event.<sup>2</sup> We expect to see a positive impact on a child's early learning when we increase opportunities for families to engage in literacy outside of the school and library.

Specifically, we designed Little Engines based on principles of developmentally appropriate practice as the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) recommends.<sup>3</sup> Primarily, play and meaningful engagement are the engines that drive young children's development and learning.

According to NAEYC, "Play develops young children's symbolic and imaginative thinking, peer relationships, language."<sup>4</sup> Therefore, our format includes information on engagement for



**Dr. Constance Beecher** is Associate Professor of Literacy and Family Wellbeing State Specialist, Iowa State University. Her research endeavors revolve around the creation, evaluation, and dissemination of innovative language and literacy education programs tailored for parents, teachers, and caregivers in diverse community settings. **Dr. Zachary Stier** has been the director of Children's Services at Ericson Public Library in Boone, IA, since 2011. He was project director for NASA@My Library, is the Project Director for the library's equity project Activating Community Voices, and Co-Project Director for the library's piloted mobilized family engagement program, Little Engines. He recently became an independent consultant for the Space Science Institute. He is also owner of Mr. Z and Company, a consultancy firm for educators and librarians.



parents and caregivers, as well as learning kits on common early childhood topics with quality books and activities.

Our original plan—pre-pandemic—was to create Little Engines as an in-person library program. We planned to have community partners, such as the naturalist from the county conservation board, come to the library to record a video about their view of family engagement, read a book to a preschool group, and lead the group in a learning activity related to the book and their topic. Then each registered family would take home a copy of the book, instructions, and an activity to do at home. This program was supported through our county Extension and Outreach office (connected to the land-grant university). We did one in-person event before nationwide shutdowns took place in 2020.

Consequently our pivot to using technology afforded us more reach and a more innovative program. We turned to the reading tracking app Beanstack. Our partners created their own videos—one discussing family engagement and one demonstrating a book and activity. We created book bags to go with each topic, which were listed as badges on Beanstack, where we created a digital library of nine topics that included learning through

- nature
- social emotional development
- books
- play
- mindfulness
- similarities and differences
- mental health
- STEM
- active learning.

Here is an example a Boone County naturalist created. In the first video, the naturalist discusses the family engagement questions. For the second video, they discussed the life cycle of butterflies. They provided two activities for families—a coffee filter butterfly craft and an activity discussing the life cycle of a butterfly by using food such as gummies, crackers, chocolate chips (these demonstrate the egg), bananas, licorice (for the larva), round crackers (chrysalis), cheese slices, and carrots (for the body). Check out both videos by scanning the QR codes below.



Scan the above QR code to access video 1.



Scan the above QR code to access video 2.

When a parent clicks on a badge, they have access to the videos. They watch the first video about engagement, then the second video with the book and activity. Then they complete the activity(ies) as instructed in the second video.

To recruit families, we partnered with a local preschool that helped families register, distributed the book bags, and collected the evaluations. For the first round, we had nine families. Families had all the resources and materials to complete each activity in their book bags, plus hints on reading interactively. Participants earned badges by completing the three tasks for each topic. Families also earned badges by logging their reading each week. On Beanstack, patrons automatically have access to the data on badges and reading minutes completed.

On average, participants completed five activities (ranging from three to eight). Seven out of nine adults said the activities helped them increase their engagement with their child and that they planned to continue that path. Eight out of nine said the activities helped increase their conversations with their child, and two indicated they sought out additional resources at the library.

Three participants indicated the books and strategies about emotions were helpful for dealing with their child’s “big feelings.” Four discussed the positive interactions and communication they had with their child by doing the activities together. The total number of reading minutes logged was 8,277.

We keep track of the number of reading minutes participants logged compared to how many activity badges they earned. Although we did not do a statistical analysis due to the number of participants, the graph shows families who completed more activity badges also logged more reading minutes.

As one parent said, “Usually, we just . . . read the book [at home]. Then the book’s done, and we don’t dive into it more. With this program, there’s definitely a purpose through it and what we needed to do, which, as a parent, it’s hard to just come up with things to do sometimes. It was very nice to be like, “Okay, you just have to be able to read this and you kind of figure out. Even with my husband, it also helped him because he doesn’t do the same line of work as I do. I think it helped him a lot to be able to have these specific questions to ask versus having to make it up.”

In a comparable way that a home meal kit can help families eat healthier by giving them all the ingredients and the instructions to prepare dinner, we gave families a reading kit with developmentally appropriate books, activities, and the instructions to

complete them. Recalling our bioecological framework,<sup>5</sup> removing barriers and adding resources for busy families can lead to more positive interactions between caring adults and children.

This was a small “proof of concept” project, and we plan to seek funding for a larger pilot and to share a toolkit for other libraries to create their own Beanstack challenge engagement program.

In the end, we started with a small vision to elevate and expand early learning activities to children and families through a combination of in-person and virtual programming. We have since developed a mobilized literacy program where families have the option to participate at their convenience. &

## References

1. Urie Bronfenbrenner, *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1979).
2. Suzanne E. Mol and Adriana G. Bus, “To Read or Not to Read: A Meta-Analysis of Print Exposure from Infancy to Early Adulthood,” *Psychological Bulletin* 137, no. 2 (2011).
3. Carol Copple et al., eds, *Developmentally Appropriate Practice: Focus on Infants and Toddlers* (Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2013).
4. Copple et al., *Developmentally Appropriate Practice*.
5. Bronfenbrenner, *The Ecology of Human Development*.

# Programs and Pen Pals

## You Never Know Your Library's Reach

SHARON VERBETEN

This is a story of a pandemic, a program, and the pen pal that followed. In short, you never know your library's reach—who will see or hear about your programs.

This a true story of a fortuitous long-distance friendship—one spawned out of a pandemic pivot that has reaped great rewards.

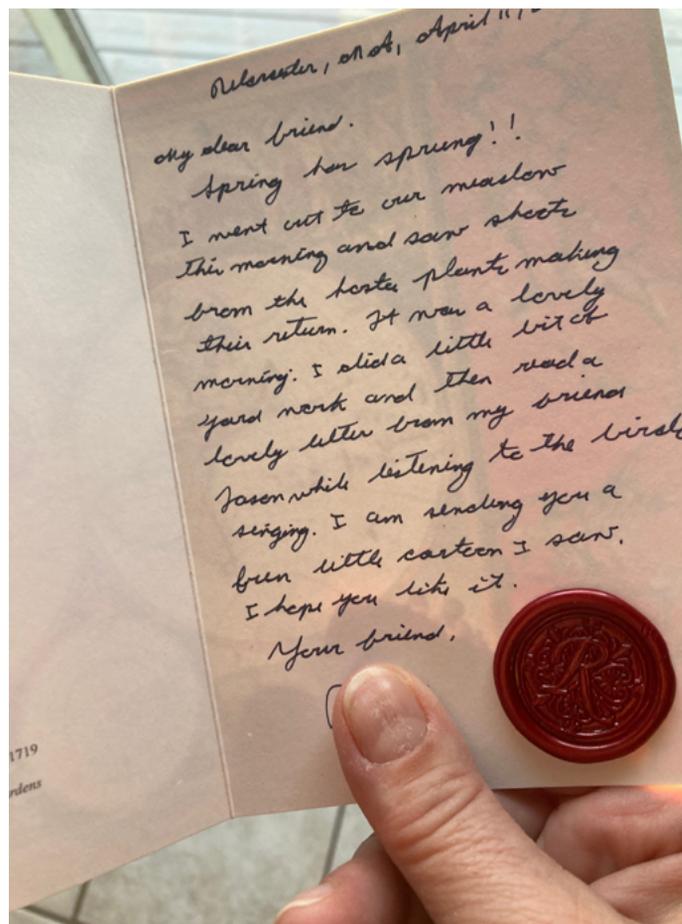
In 2020, when, as we all know, libraries had to reinvent methods to reach our patrons, I recorded a video about the lost art of letter writing. It's a topic I've always been interested in—I had an international pen pal when I was younger—but was more so during lockdown.

I was passionate about putting pen to paper, letting emotions slowly take form in cursive loops. It didn't matter whether the medium was lined school paper, fancy linen notecards or postcards—the pandemic was the perfect time to resurrect this form of communication.

Ironically, it was a video missive, posted on YouTube, that sparked a far-away viewer to do just that—and write me a letter.

### Thousands of Miles by Mail

YouTube can be the Wild West of videos, and it can be challenging to find exactly what you want. And when you're a librarian posting during the pandemic, you wonder if your video has gone into Internet ether.



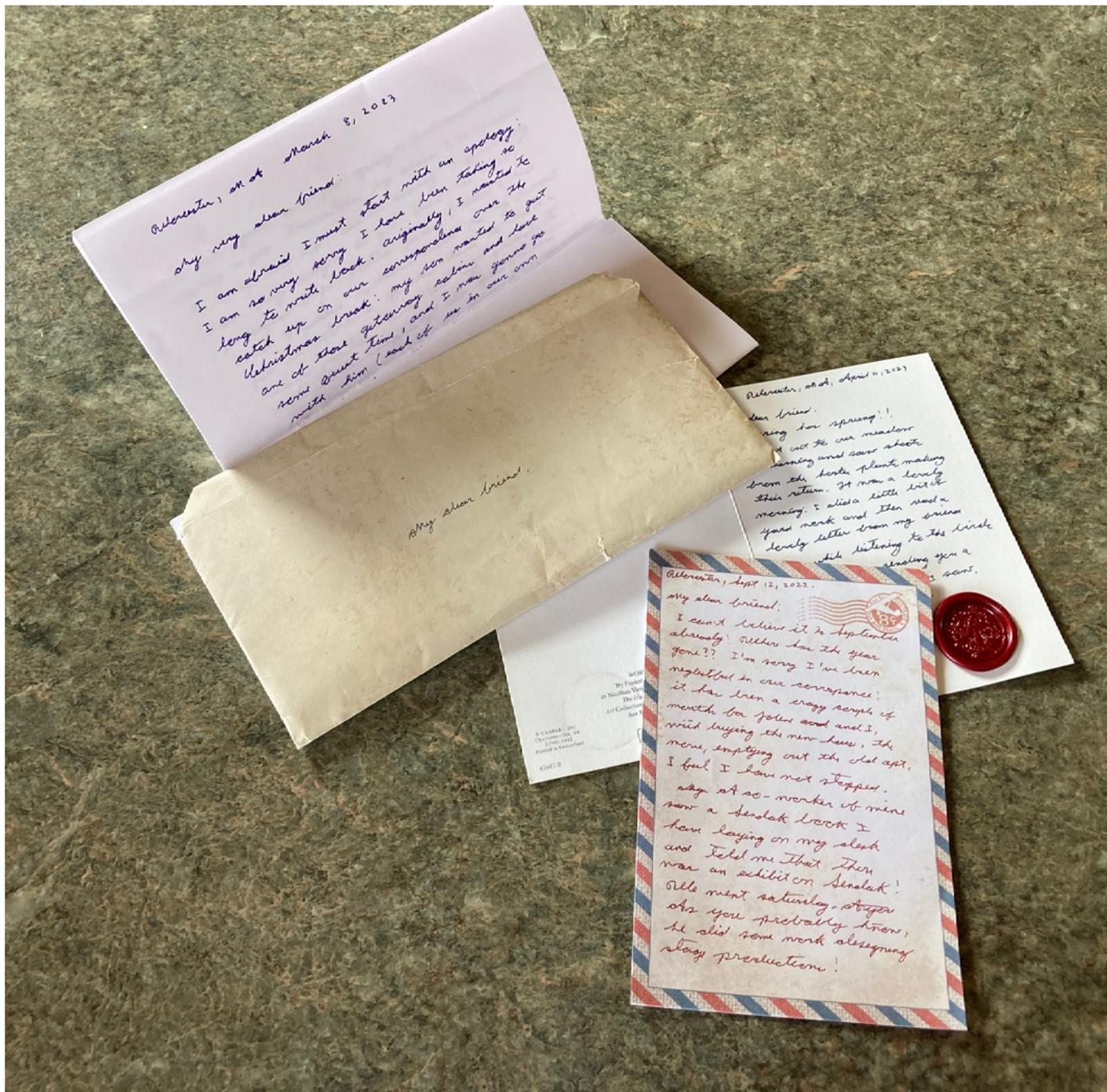
Somehow, a man on the East Coast—whom I'll call Roman to preserve his privacy—saw my video and wrote me a letter, which he addressed to my library. He thanked me for posting that important message about the importance of the written word, something he shared so much that he decided to let me know.

I responded in kind, surprised that my video taped in Wisconsin had had such a far reach.

We continued to correspond by snail mail—and our correspondence and long-distance friendship has lasted for four years now. He's shared stories about his family and about what books he's currently reading; I've shared about my hobbies—when I told him



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



I collected vintage Valentines, my next letter included a few! I've sent him thrifed treasures as well.

While we now follow each other on Instagram, we've never asked for phone numbers or emails—the charm of this correspondence is in the small things. His sometimes-indecipherable handwriting. The way he addresses the letters to “Sharon Verbeten, archivist” (which I am not!). The way he starts his letters with, “My dear friend” and seals them with a wax “R” stamp.

In this age of technology, social media, texts, and emojis, I'm always thrilled to find a new letter from Roman in my mailbox.

And despite our busy lives, we do try to send letters every few months.

My even bigger thrill is that my little library video did what I had hoped—inspire at least one person to revive this sadly old-fashioned method of communication. I just didn't think it would have come from someone nearly one-thousand miles away. &

*Editor's note: While I had hoped to share my video with you, dear readers, I have been unable to locate it online—into the internet ether, I suppose.*

# Going Outside Your Comfort Zone

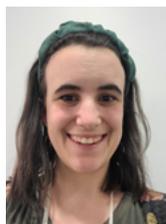
Emily Mroczek

**Emily Mroczek** is Youth Services Librarian, Arlington Heights (IL) Memorial Library and co-chair of ALSC's Public Awareness and Advocacy Committee

**T**he ALSC Public Awareness and Advocacy Committee is calling on ALSC membership to take part in our 2024 ALSC Advocacy Challenge. Because advocacy starts with YOU!

This year, we challenge you to reach out to someone outside of your typical network.

Identify one person outside your library who shares library values like inclusion, freedom to read, equity, etc. Maybe they're an educator, counselor, religious leader, organizer, or advocate. It can be someone you already know or someone you don't know yet. Talk about ALSC, about librarianship, make a connection. Here are some examples from our committee members.



**Emily Mroczek, Youth Services Librarian, Arlington Heights (IL) Memorial Library and co-chair of ALSC Public Awareness and Advocacy Committee**

I started my advocacy challenge by emailing people in adjacent fields that I thought could benefit from library services. After not receiving much response, I changed gears and decided to foster connections at my children's preschool.

I brought brochures about 1000 Books Before Kindergarten and talked up storytime during preschool pickup. To my surprise, many of my fellow parents were not big library users. I told them about all the services and even attended a program with a few of them. It's safe to say, I recruited a few new library users for a library I don't even work at. Advocacy can be anywhere, at any time!



**Sarah Jo Zaharako, Youth Services Librarian, Wilmette (IL) Public Library and co-chair of ALSC Public Awareness and Advocacy Committee**

Discouraged by low attendance at a series I created for parents and educators, I decided to package the content and offer the program as outreach and professional development. I worked with my library's preschool liaison, who already had a relationship with many local educators, and offered to present at staff meetings. A few schools accepted, and I presented to full rooms of teachers, social workers, and administrators. After several months, the district PTA contacted me requesting to partner on the program in order to build community amongst parents and caregivers! I knew I had created a program that was relevant to our community—I just needed to get out of the library to connect with them.



### Soline Holmes, Librarian, Academy of the Sacred Heart, New Orleans

Wanting to highlight the role of libraries in my school and in our local community, this past year, I continued to build on my partnership with the New Orleans Opera. Two years ago, I reached out to their education director when a colleague sent me an email about the Opera starting a children's storytime program. Without any direct connection to the Opera, from that email that I sent, I became one of their featured storytime readers; the Opera has used our auditorium for auditions; and my students got to go on a backstage tour of the Opera's scene shop. (The pictures of them holding prop swords and a giant Styrofoam pumpkin were priceless!) Through maintaining this partnership, our students and their families have received free tickets to Student Night, and my third and fourth grade students were treated to a visit by world-renowned conductor Elizabeth Askren. We are also in discussions about archiving some primary source Creole sheet music. Partnerships such as these allow me to bring more resources and educational opportunities to my young patrons . . . and they also make my job even more enjoyable!



### Anne Price, Children's Librarian, North Platte (NE) Public Library

North Platte, Nebraska, is on the precipice of a lot of growth, both economically and population-wise, with groundbreaking on a new meat packing facility and industrial rail park beginning in 2024. As a result, many of our new patrons happen to be immigrants, which has presented library staff with language barriers and other challenges in connecting people with the resources they need.

I reached out to TinaMaria Fernandez at Hope Esperanza, a non-profit that aims to help immigrant families transition and find a sense of community in North Platte. We've been engaged in informal discussions about how the library can adapt some of its services to better meet the needs of this growing demographic. &

*Now it's your turn! Make a connection, then share your experience with us by e-mailing your story, in 50-100 words, to [alscpaa@gmail.com](mailto:alscpaa@gmail.com).*

# ALSC Member Profiles

### Brianne Mintz, Children's Librarian, Springfield (NJ) Free Public Library

**What prompted you to join ALSC?** I love the sense of community as well as the amazing opportunities ALSC offers to grow in my professional journey. I love learning from such a diverse community of children's librarians!

**What made you want to be a children's librarian?** I've been an avid reader all my life, and I've loved books since I was a little girl, but because of my dyslexia and dyscalculia, I had no idea what I wanted to do in regards to my career, and to be frank, I never thought I would earn more than my high school diploma. I thought a bachelor's degree was beyond my capabilities. But after completing high school, I decided to further my education at a community college. While it was a little rocky to start... after two years, I decided to go for it and work up to my Bachelor's degree. I eventually graduated with a degree in English literature and writing with a minor in psychology. I was so proud of myself, and I started to really think about what kind of career path I wanted to pursue, and what a career as a dyslexic individual would look like. When my Grandma mentioned our local library was looking for circulation clerks, I thought it sounded like a wonderful position. That job changed my career trajectory and my entire life. Within a few weeks, I was asked to cover the children's department while they were looking to hire a new librarian. After a while, a reference supervisor recommended I look into getting an MLIS. It was almost like a fire was lit within me. I finally found a career that allowed me to combine my passion for literature and children, while making an impact on young lives and showing them that even if you're dyslexic or neurodivergent, you can do anything you set your mind to. I find it so rewarding to help children discover their love of reading and learning, and this continues to inspire me to create engaging and unique programs while fostering a welcoming and inclusive environment for all children who visit.



**What project are you excited to be working on?** I have been giving a lot of talks and webinars about dyslexia in public libraries, and I love when I get opportunities to speak to librarians and professionals about how we can better serve this community. I hope to begin a Dyslexic Librarian's Alliance to provide a safe, welcoming space for dyslexic librarians to have a community where they can connect, share experiences, and receive support.

**What is your favorite book(s) to share with children?** One of my all-time favorite children's books is Andrea Beaty's *Aaron Slater, Illustrator*. I love to share that book because I think every child needs to hear that what makes you different is what informs who you are and is what makes you so special. I also love to share books by Mo Willems, Ryan Higgins, and Jory John because they know how to create funny, loveable characters that can deliver stories about kindness, love, acceptance, while still being approachable for kids.

## Sarah Clarke, Head of Children's Services, Great Neck (NY) Library

**What prompted you to join ALSC?** I joined when I started in library school at my professor's suggestion. I wanted to dive right into process committees and get networking with other librarians right away!



**What made you want to be a children's librarian?** I actually had no interest in becoming a children's librarian at first; I wanted to be an archivist. I started working as a page in a local library during my undergrad degree, and the children's librarian there was so influential that she convinced me to change my whole career path. I loved the storytimes, the displays, and of course seeing the wheels turn in the kids' heads as they learned new things.

**What project are you excited to be working on?** I'm serving on my first award committee (2025 Geisel) this year; I'm so excited to start reading and getting to know my fellow committee members.

**What has been your favorite part of serving in ALSC?** I was part of the pilot Early and Family Literacy Committee, which was really fun to start from almost scratch. I also really loved serving on Quicklists; I had to read so much to stay up to date.

**What is your favorite book(s) to share with children?** My go-to book for storytimes is *The Watermelon Seed* by Greg Pizzoli. It's

so fun to act out and seeing the relief when the little crocodile burps is just so funny!

## Ashley Bressingham, Librarian II/Children's Room Assistant Supervisor, New Rochelle (NY) Public Library



**What made you want to be a children's librarian?** I basically grew up in my hometown library. In high school, I was a page in the children's room there. I was a voracious reader with a thirst for learning and a love of books. While I worked on obtaining my MLS, I had the opportunity to work at a few public libraries, and I fell in love with working in a children's room.

**What project are you excited to be working on at work or in ALSC?** I'm currently serving as Co-Chair of the Membership Committee and am excited to work on reviewing and revamping the ALSC Mentoring Program. I did the program three times—twice as a mentee and once as a mentor—and think it has a lot of positive benefits for those in our profession.

**What is your favorite book(s) to share with children?** Two of my personal favorites are *Echo* by Pam Muñoz Ryan and the Making Friends series by Kristen Gudsnuik. &

# Leadership Lessons

## The Messages Picture Books

### Bring Us

Brandy Sanchez



**Brandy Sanchez** is a librarian, certified leadership coach, and founder of the SoulFire Collective, an organization dedicated to the inclusive, sustainable leadership of library directors and managers. She has devoted her twenty-year

career to learning and development, first as the Continuing Education Consultant for the Missouri State Library and then as a Public Services Librarian and Technology Instruction Coordinator for the Daniel Boone Regional Library, Columbia (MO). Her recent work includes a collaboration with the Center for Trauma Informed Innovation to design library-specific training on trauma-informed supervision.

I have worked in youth services for most of my twenty-year career as a librarian. During this time, I have had the privilege of serving on the 2010 Caldecott, 2017 Newbery, and 2021 Sibert Award Selection Committees.

I sincerely appreciate my fellow committee members who inspired me with their love of children's literature and their passion for bringing stories to life for young people everywhere.

Throughout our deliberations, my colleagues demonstrated the power of genuine empathy, active listening, and a growth mindset. I utilize these skills daily in my current work as a leadership coach for library directors and managers.

While I no longer work on the front lines of youth services, I still have a deep-rooted love of children's literature, particularly picture books. They are incredibly effective at taking complex concepts and making them accessible to all ages through illustration. When captivating artwork is combined with moving language, the result is a rich emotional experience for the reader.

To illustrate, I'd like to suggest three thought-provoking picture books that offer an unexpected lesson in library leadership. With each children's title, I will also recommend an adult book with a corresponding theme. I hope you find these titles as insightful as I did.

*What Feelings Do When No One's Looking* by Tina Oziewicz, illustrated by Aleksandra Zajac, translated from the Polish by Jennifer Croft (Elsewhere Editions, 2022)

In this quiet book, each emotion is represented by an almost Seuss-like creature simply going about their day. The gentle lines and soft edges create a sense of calm and safety, a requirement for curiously investigating difficult feelings like anger and anxiety. The poignant ending reminds us that this multitude of emotions lives within each person.

Emotional intelligence is the central leadership lesson in this book. This is our ability to identify, understand, and consciously act on our feelings. It is directly connected to our ability to self-regulate and empathize with others.

A leader with high levels of emotional intelligence is capable of helping others productively manage and express their own feelings. This is essential when building trust, navigating conflict, or problem-solving as a team.

**Corresponding adult title:** *Permission to Feel: Unlocking the Power of Emotions to Help Our Kids, Ourselves, and Our Society Thrive* by Marc A. Brackett (Celadon Books, 2019)

Dr. Brackett is the founding director of the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence and the lead developer of RULER, an evidence-based approach to social and emotional learning that has been adopted by thousands of schools worldwide.

His book outlines the RULER framework and offers practical ideas for reducing problematic behaviors in the classroom as well as levels of stress and burnout among educators. His teachings easily translate to managing teams and workplace dynamics within libraries of all kinds.

*What Do You Do with an Idea?* by Kobi Yamada, illustrated by Mae Besom (Compendium Kids, 2013)

Have you ever had an idea that you couldn't let go of? At first, you dismiss it, but it keeps popping up. Then you say, "Later, after I'm done with <fill in the blank>." Finally, the tension becomes so great that you must take action.

In this inspiring book, we meet a child who comes face-to-face with an idea that takes the shape of a golden-crowned egg. As the idea comes closer to hatching, the monochromatic illustrations become more and more colorful and fantastical. In the end, the idea is given wings and allowed to soar.

As an adult, what do you do when you've got a dozen or more golden ideas? Write them down. Keep track of them in your Notes app, start a Google Doc, or jot them down in a journal.

Recording your ideas does not require that you act on them. Instead, use this as a way to enhance your creativity. Then, as you begin to notice recurring themes, you can intentionally choose to act on the ideas that resonate with you the most.

**Corresponding adult title:** *Start Right Where You Are: How Little Changes Can Make A Big Difference for Overwhelmed Procrastinators, Frustrated Overachievers, and Recovering Perfectionists* by Sam Bennett (New World Library, 2016)

Bennett is an improv and theater actor turned time management guru. Her book is broken up into short, manageable chapters that can be read in five minutes or less. Her many insights and ideas will inspire you to take action by making small changes in the way you prioritize your work and organize your time. She also runs a helpful Facebook Group, Secrets of Highly Productive People.

*After the Fall: How Humpty Dumpty Got Back up Again* by Dan Santat (Roaring Brook Press, 2017)

Have you ever had a book show up in your life at the exact moment you needed it? That's how I describe my relationship with this book.

It was 2020, and I was at the height of my professional burnout. The back cover read, "Life begins when you get back up." I was hooked and pulled the book off the reshelving cart.

Five minutes later, I was a total mess. I was standing at the children's desk with tears streaming down my cheeks and snot dampening my face mask.

This book is about trauma and loss, but also hope and healing. Through his illustrations, Santat communicates the fear and grief we all feel after adverse, life-changing circumstances. At the time, I equated it with the pandemic.

But, slowly—ever-so-slowly—Humpty begins to find his courage. He adapts, grows, and evolves into an entirely new way of being. The final illustrations are absolutely triumphant!

For me, the leadership lesson is simple. We are not our circumstances. We are not what has happened to us. We are defined by how we choose to respond. Despite our cracks and bruises, our strength and courage are still there, just below the surface.

**Corresponding adult title:** *Trauma Stewardship: An Everyday Guide to Caring for Self While Caring for Others* by Laura van Dernoot Lipsky (Berrett-Koehler, 2009)

It is an unfortunate reality that the nature of our work puts library staff at risk of experiencing primary or vicarious trauma. Lipsky, a long-time social worker, helps readers identify the most common trauma responses and offers a framework to find healing through reflections, writing exercises, and daily practices. The book's subject is lightened by cartoons punctuated throughout. This is a must-read for those library leaders wanting a more trauma-informed approach when supporting their teams or serving at-risk groups within their communities. &

# ALSC Committees: Taking Care of Business!

ALSC committees move the work of our division forward through their expertise, creativity, commitment, and hard work. We are so grateful for all our committees and working groups for all they do!

We don't have space here to acknowledge them all but enjoy these photos of various award selection committees from LibLearnX

in Baltimore this past January. After a year of reading, listening, discussing, and deliberating, these members came together in January, chose their 2024 winners, and had the opportunity to celebrate and gather for photos during the Youth Media Awards press conference.



Members of the Batchelder committee displaying their award and honor books and modeling their awesome and apropos t-shirts featuring speech bubbles that contain the word "read" in multiple languages.



Geisel committee members, complete with fox ears, pose with their 2024 winners.



Members of the Pura Belpré committee and David López (third from left), REFORMA president.



Members of the Caldecott committee show off the newly minted 2024 medal and honor books.



Odyssey committee members are all smiles following the award announcements.



Sibert committee members presenting the most distinguished informational books for children published in 2023!



Members of the Legacy committee applaud as their 2024 Legacy Award winner—Pam Muñoz Ryan—is announced.



Newbery committee members stand to be recognized during the press conference.



Odyssey committee members donned their headphones for the announcement of their winners.



The 2024 YMA presenters, representing ALA, American Indian Library Association, Asian/Pacific American Librarians Association, Association of Jewish Libraries (rep not pictured here), Coretta Scott King Book Awards Round Table, Young Adult Library Services Association, REFORMA, and ALSC (our President Dr. Jonda C. McNair at far right!) did a wonderful job!



Members of the Pura Belpré committee are recognized by colleagues during the press conference.

# THE LAST WORD

## Stay Amused, Not Annoyed

Sharon Verbeten

**E**ver been on the *It's a Small World* ride at Disney World? It's one of my favorites...even when, as it did a few years ago, it stops near the end of the ride for about thirty minutes.

Most of the riders were not apprehensive—obviously nothing bad could happen at the Happiest Place on Earth, right? So, we sat back, looked around at all the colorful signs that bid us goodbye in many different languages...and listened (and sang along) to the ride's saccharine theme song on repeat. *Ad nauseum*. When we finally lurched ahead again, we never wanted to hear that song again.

Sure, it was inconvenient. Unexpected. But my takeaway from the ill-fated ride, however, was one of amusement rather than annoyance. That's a good lesson to keep in our back pocket as librarians.

Sometimes our programs can go off the rails, stopping us in our tracks. *Uncertain*.

Sometimes, our departments are chaotic to the point of stress overload. *Overwhelmed*.

Sometimes, patrons can be, well, beyond difficult. *Sigh*.

Sometimes, we have to deal with things *we never imagined could ever happen in a library*. *Mind. Blown*.

So many things can happen to cause us to get annoyed and apprehensive during the course of our day. Maybe that's partially a symptom moving out of a pandemic.



Still, like many before us, we persist. Just like on that ride . . . we're here because we want to be. We love the thrill and, let's face it, even the unexpected. We keep coming back despite some setbacks.

Let's try to stay amused in the face of annoyance. Or maybe even sing a verse of "It's a Small World"—quietly or out loud!—when stressed. Who knows? It could just make our libraries the happiest places on Earth (or at least runners up!).

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

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



# YOUR ALSO IMPACT

Did you know **over 57%** of ALSC members say they first learned about ALSC from a friend, colleague or professor?

**You** have the influence to build our membership and help ALSC continue to be a viable and successful organization of members dedicated to the **betterment of library service to children.**

We encourage our members to recruit at least one other person to join ALSC this year!

**Want to have an even greater impact?  
Become a Friend of ALSC at [ala.org/alsc/donate](http://ala.org/alsc/donate)**

**Thank you to our FRIENDS.**



# alsc national institute

DENVER, CO  SEPTEMBER 19-21, 2024

*Standing Up for Stories*

**Join children's librarians, library administrators, educators, and others from across the country for ALSC's 2024 National Institute!**

Come for the **professional development** (two days packed with education programs, keynotes, and more) and stay for the **professional connections**.

Learn with your colleagues, connect with your friends, and **renew your joy and passion** for library service to children and families!



[BIT.LY/ALSC-NATL  
-INSTITUTE-REG](https://bit.ly/alsc-natl-institute-reg)

**Registration opens April 1.**

**Register by July 2 to receive Early Bird rates!**