

# Children & LIBRARIES

the journal of the  
Association for Library  
Service to Children

Summer 2025  
Vol. 23 | No. 2  
ISSN 1542-9806



Wonder Libraries  
Honoring the Schneider and Newbery Awards  
Supporting Children's Mental Health

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I left with a notebook full of ideas and topics to bring back to work and talk about and try. I heard from some favorite authors. I met super cool colleagues from all over the place. I got to play a little bit in Denver. Overall, it was a really great conference!”

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Nicholas is excited about practicing his early literacy skills!  
Photo courtesy of Elizabeth Gray and Leticia Flores.



## Editor's Note

### An Homage to Books

By Sharon Verbeten

"Books are the homes of the American people."

I saw this quote etched in stone at the Briscoe Western Art Museum during my spring break trip to San Antonio, TX. The venue was a former library; the author of the quote? Ralph Waldo Emerson.



The nineteenth-century American essayist and poet was one of the book world's biggest advocates. Thankfully, today people still read his words and find them relevant.

In 1840, Emerson wrote, "Some books leave us free and some books make us free." It's commentary that still rings powerfully true today—amid the onslaught of book challenges that threaten access to certain books and the freedom to read.

I'm sure, like all of us librarians and defenders of literary freedom, were disconcerted to hear of the attempts to dismantle the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS). And, like all of us, it will remain a waiting game to see the trickle-down effects that will have on our small, medium, large, rural, and city public libraries.

Emerson was a champion of individualism and critical thinking—the kind of mindset our industry needs in times like these. I'd love to hear his elevator pitch to a congressman today!

I was inspired by reading Emerson's words—still standing strong and remaining relevant today; I try to think of them when I'm felled by the negativity or discord in politics today. I think of them daily when I head to my public library to advocate for the necessity of what we do, even as the value of libraries and library workers is being debated.

Books are indeed the homes of the American people—and FOR all American people. Let's keep doing what we do best and continue to be inspired by the words of our forefathers. &

# Children & LIBRARIES

the journal of the  
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Service to Children

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

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# Wonder Libraries

## Twenty Expert Perspectives on What Kids Need Now

ELIZABETH MCCHESNEY

**W**onder Libraries: 20 Expert Perspectives on What Kids Need Now (Neal Schuman-ALA Editions, 2024), edited by Liz McChesney, was recently released; here the author introduces us to four of the contributors to share some of the thinking and research as well as the celebration of library professionals and librarians in the work.

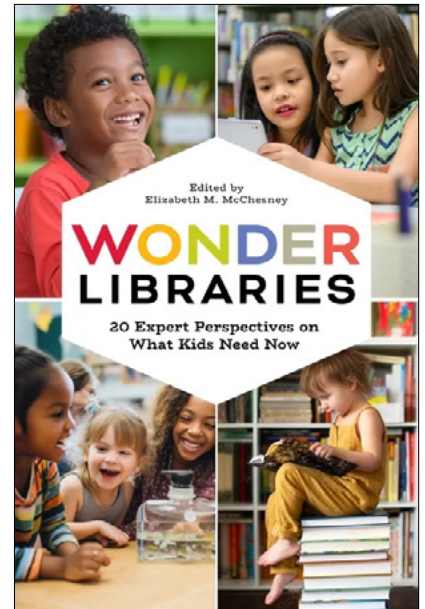
**Why was it important for you in your role outside of libraries to contribute to a book for public library professionals?**

**Dr. Mariana Glusman, Pediatrician and Associate Chair for Compassion and Wellness Initiatives at Lurie Children's Hospital in Chicago. Glusman is also the Medical Director of Reach Out and Read-Illinois:** Liz [McChesney] and I have been friends for a very long time, and together we have seen the importance of connecting children and families to critical resources in communities. I see through my work in communities that the public library is an important place in which relationships are formed with children and families. These relationships are critical to healthy thriving in communities. And because librarians are trusted messengers, they are invaluable partners for medical clinicians and public health providers, in helping promote health and wellness information in the community. At Reach Out and Read, I like to say that the books we give out in clinic to our patients are our vaccine against illiteracy. But they are so much more than that. They help strengthen the relationships between children and the people who love them, *and those relationships* are our

vaccines against the effects of toxic stress so ubiquitously experienced by families these days.

**Daniel Hatcher, Senior Director of Strategic Partnerships for the Alliance for a Healthier Generation, Washington, DC.:** For me, bringing the message of Alliance for a Healthier Generation is pivotal—every mind, everybody, every young person healthy and ready to succeed. Librarians are an essential public health partner. Public libraries that celebrate play, movement, and time in nature become spaces of healing and restoration. The public library is a place of community connection and offers the space for children to come and “just be.” No other place in our communities provides such a unique environment for our children. When literacy champions team up with public health champions and support one another, we deepen the impact on the whole child.

**Dr. Margo Jacquot, owner and Chief Care Officer at The Juniper Center, Park Ridge, IL:** As a clinical psychologist, I experience the impacts of built-up trauma and toxic stress and echo all that Dr. Glusman and Daniel have said. Helping to support library professionals who are on the front lines of working with children who have all experienced some level of trauma given the pandemic and unrest of the last several years, makes eminent sense. Library professionals meet children where they are and help equip you



**Liz McChesney**, with over thirty-five years of experience serving children and families, is a passionate children's advocate, library administrator, and literacy expert. She has earned numerous national awards including the 2024 Library of Congress David M. Rubenstein Award for Excellence in Literacy. She currently serves as a Senior Advisor at the Urban Libraries Council and as a Senior Fellow at the National Summer Learning Association.

with skills and tools to make those interactions successful. That is critical for our kids' well-being and yours.

**Brett Nicholas, Director of Education at the Great Lakes Science Center in Cleveland, OH:** Having served as director of education in both children's museums and science centers, I have seen the impact of library-museum collaboration and partnership. Our missions are similar and working together we can have greater collective impact for our communities. We serve the same kids and families and so sharing what we know and how we think about serving kids is collegial, important, and helps us to evolve our thinking.

*Daniel, picking up on the theme of trusted relationships, tell us more about your work at Alliance for a Healthier Generation and the role you see public libraries playing in promoting healthy kids.*

**Hatcher:** My chapter in *Wonder Libraries* is centered around the joy of nature play. When children are given the space and power to explore, take risks, and play in nature with a trusted adult, it helps regulate a child's nervous system. Nature play provides opportunities to foster protective and supportive factors like physical movement, exercise, positive peer and adult relationships. Libraries should celebrate that the work they do can buffer young people from toxic stress and adverse childhood experiences.

Schools, community organizations, and businesses that promote health should reach out to public libraries to explore collaboration. The chapter concludes with ideas for library staff to implement right now, and I'm particularly thrilled we've included the idea of bringing plants and nature inside and honoring Indigenous wisdom.

*Brett, thinking about play—your chapter is on digital play. We certainly know kids are playing online in libraries and in their life, but can you tell us why you chose to lift this element of how kids play in the book?*

**Nicholas:** We know screens are where a lot of kids' eyeballs and attention are right now. And we also know that kids need to be safe online. Understanding that the safe play kids are doing online is still play gives us some permission to understand online games better. Just like at a physical playground, we work to keep our kids safe and constructive, and digital play is no different—we need to create the environments that will keep kids nurtured, set limits to keep them healthy and let them know that they are loved and supported when they need it.

All the educational research shows that play is the purest form of learning. Just like people frowned when Friedrich Froebel, the nineteenth-century educator who was credited as being the founder of kindergarten, introduced messy sandboxes in the nineteenth century, we frown now at digital play, but it's a twenty-first-century adaptation that—when done well and with adult guidance—can also promote those critical twenty-first-century

skills: creativity, collaboration, communication, and critical thinking—and it allows kids to use the technology in front of them in ways that can help them make sense of the world around them—when we help support them. Giving children the autonomy and safety to play is critical for their emotional well being as well as their agency in learning.

*Dr. Jacquot, you write about being trauma-informed in the public library. How might public library staff view their work through a trauma-advised lens?*

**Jacquot:** You don't have to be a trained psychologist to implement ideas to help children regulate their nervous systems. Starting programs with breathing activities, setting ground rules for behavior and providing ways for children to handle their big feelings are important for not only the children you see, but their families. What a tremendous gift you can give each member of the family by approaching your interactions through empathy and understanding. I hope my contribution gives library staff concrete ways to increase success for all families and staff in the library setting.

*We've been working on this book for a long time. This book is part love letter to library professionals and part call to action to find new ways to deepen and adapt library service given all that children have faced in the last several years. In parting, what would you most like library professionals to know?*

**Glusman:** I've seen for decades the power of community-led literacy efforts and the impact of relationships for children. Now more than ever, it's critical to bring your authentic and true self to your work to help children feel seen, supported, and loved. You have the power to do this every single day.

**Jacquot:** Kids need you now more than ever. When you show them you care, you are offering something that many of them may not have anywhere else in their lives. Your support and interest in them, and your understanding of trauma and toxic stress in their lives can make all the difference for them.

**Nicholas:** I see librarians and library professionals as modeling fun. We know that youth learn best when they are relaxed and having fun, so enjoy your work and find activities that allow you to feel joy, so you can nourish the hearts and minds of the kids you serve. Teaching is a creative act and modeling having fun while learning may open doors for kids who have difficulty in traditional learning environments.

**Hatcher:** Librarians are doing life-saving work. Taking care of your own physical and mental health is essential. If you're struggling, reach out and ask for support. If you need someone to talk to, call or text the 988 lifeline for judgement-free care. Don't forget, you can't bring the best of you without taking care of yourself. &

*For more information on Wonder Libraries: 20 Expert Perspectives on What Kids Need Now, visit <https://alastore.ala.org/wonlib>.*

# What Is Wonderfuzz?

## Poetry Inspires Thimblethoughts, Research, and More

SYLVIA VARDELL AND JANET WONG

**M**ore than ever, we need to teach students to be curious about the world. We want to develop habits of active inquiry, critical thinking, and research. It may seem surprising to suggest that poetry can be helpful here, but it's the perfect form since it's short, focused, and topical.

Over the years, we have discovered that poetry can be paired with so many other things—with stories, with photographs, with art, with music, with games, with movement, and with factual information. It's the ideal tool for making cross-genre connections, for jump-starting discussion, and for encouraging open-ended responses. We particularly love sharing poems and encouraging young readers to respond with questions—questions that can lead to looking things up together.

It can be difficult to evaluate sources and construct logical conclusions when dealing with current events, which is why we advocate that students practice these skills by creating and exploring inviting, lighthearted texts: “wonderfuzz” (fuzzy things they wonder) and “thimblethoughts” (tiny random facts that have personal meaning in their lives). Thinking about wonderfuzz and thimblethoughts gives students discrete and nonthreatening opportunities to hone the critical thinking skills necessary for responsible citizenship. These also provide practical opportunities for guiding students in assessing the accuracy and reliability of various information sources—our librarian superpower.

### For Example

Let's look at one page in our recent collaboration, *Clara's Kooky Compendium of Thimblethoughts and Wonderfuzz*, our poetry anthology-meets-junk-journal, a finalist for the Cybils literary

award. For example, on page 56 young readers will encounter the poem “Vampire-ish” by Linda Jean Thomas as part of a unit on researching animals that Clara and her classmates are pursuing. Read the poem aloud to introduce this unusual creature, the vampire squid, and talk about what they envision and imagine. Share the pink sticky note with three short facts about the vampire squid, the provocative “wonderfuzz” question about how animals know when their food is “expired,” and this featured “thimblethought” with a detail about the eight arms of the vampire squid: “Vampire



**Sylvia M. Vardell** is Professor Emerita in the School of Library and Information Studies at Texas Woman's University where she taught graduate courses in children's and young adult literature for more than

twenty years. Vardell has published extensively, including five books on literature for children as well as over twenty-five book chapters and one hundred journal articles.

**Janet Wong** is a graduate of Yale Law School and a former lawyer. She has written more than forty books for children on a wide variety of subjects, including chess (Alex and the Wednesday Chess Club) and yoga (Twist: Yoga Poems). She is the 2021 winner of the NCTE Excellence in Poetry for Children Award, a lifetime achievement award that is one of the highest honors a children's poet can receive. Together, Vardell and Wong are the creative forces behind Pomelo Books, a publisher whose anthologies feature the work of more than two hundred and fifty poets.

## Sample Thimblethoughts and Sources

Here is a sampling of a few of the hundred “thimblethoughts” from *Clara’s Kooky Compendium of Thimblethoughts and Wonderfuzz*, a week in the life of Clara and her friends and family, at school and at home. These thimblethoughts are random facts tied to specific poems, and here we offer reliable website sources for each of these facts. Each of these interesting facts accompanies poems and drawings on connected themes and topics.

“Zheng Yi Sao (1775–1844) was a woman pirate who led tens of thousands of pirates across Southeast Asia.” (p. 7) | [www.worldhistory.org](http://www.worldhistory.org) (search “Zheng Yi Sao”)

“The word “anthology” comes from the ancient Greek words ‘anthos’ meaning ‘flower’ and ‘-logia’ meaning ‘collection.’ It originally meant a collection of flowers, but now means a collection of poetry, literature, art, or music.” (p. 10) | [www.vocabulary.com](http://www.vocabulary.com) (search “anthology”)

“In the United States, a family consists of 3.13 people on average.” (p. 16) | [www.statista.com](http://www.statista.com) (search “family size”)

“The fingerprints of koalas are similar to the fingerprints of humans.” (p. 24) | [www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/) (search “koala fingerprints”)

“Taking school photos started in 1922. Each photo cost 10 cents or 6 photos for fifty cents!” (p. 33) | <https://freakonomics.com> (search “school photos”)

“A flute made from a vulture’s bones is the world’s oldest musical instrument.” (p. 35) | [www.nationalgeographic.com](http://www.nationalgeographic.com) (search “bone flute”)

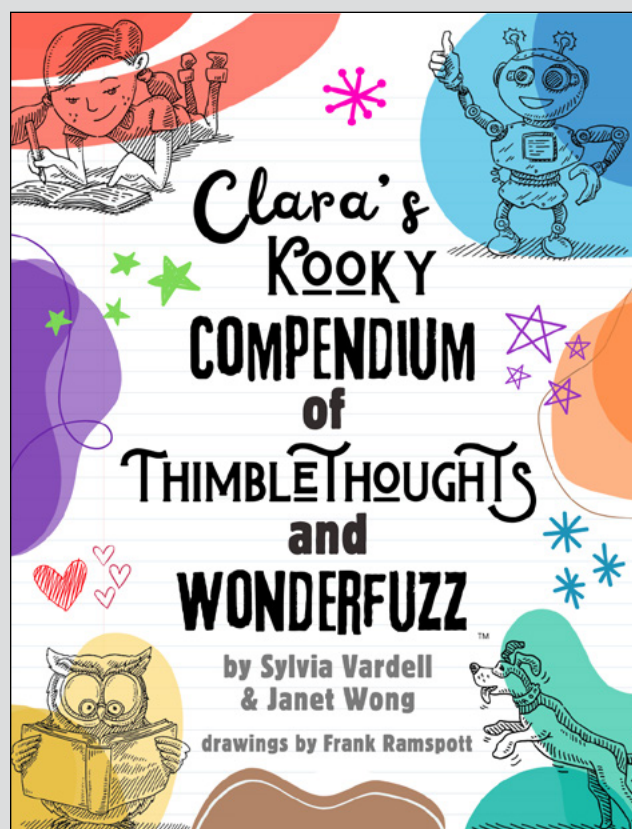
“*Tetris* was the first video game played in space — by Russian astronaut Aleksandr A. Serebrov.” (p. 44) | [www.history.com](http://www.history.com) (search “video game history”)

“A favorite vacation destination in the U.S. is a National Park —and there are 63 to choose from!” (p. 70) | [www.nps.gov](http://www.nps.gov) (search for your favorite park)

“Benjamin Banneker created the first clock made entirely out of wooden pieces (which he hand-carved). It was incredibly precise and worked for decades afterwards!” (p. 80) | [www.black-inventor.com](http://www.black-inventor.com) (search “Benjamin Banneker”)

“Roller coasters are called that because a chain helps the car ROLL up to the top of a hill, but then it is released and the car can COAST down.” (p. 85) | [www.teachengineering.org](http://www.teachengineering.org) (search “roller coaster”)

“A thunderstorm is a rain shower that contains lightning. Scientists estimate that there are nearly



2000 thunderstorms in progress around the world at any moment.” (p. 86) | [www.nssl.noaa.gov](http://www.nssl.noaa.gov) (search “thunderstorm basics”)

“Your feet have about 250,000 sweat glands and when your feet sweat, bacteria eats the sweat and gives off a smell like vinegar. Yuck!” (p. 91) | <https://health.clevelandclinic.org> (search “smelly feet”)

“Static electricity travels at light speed — over 186,000 miles per second.” (p. 100) | [www.britannica.com](http://www.britannica.com) (search “static electricity”)

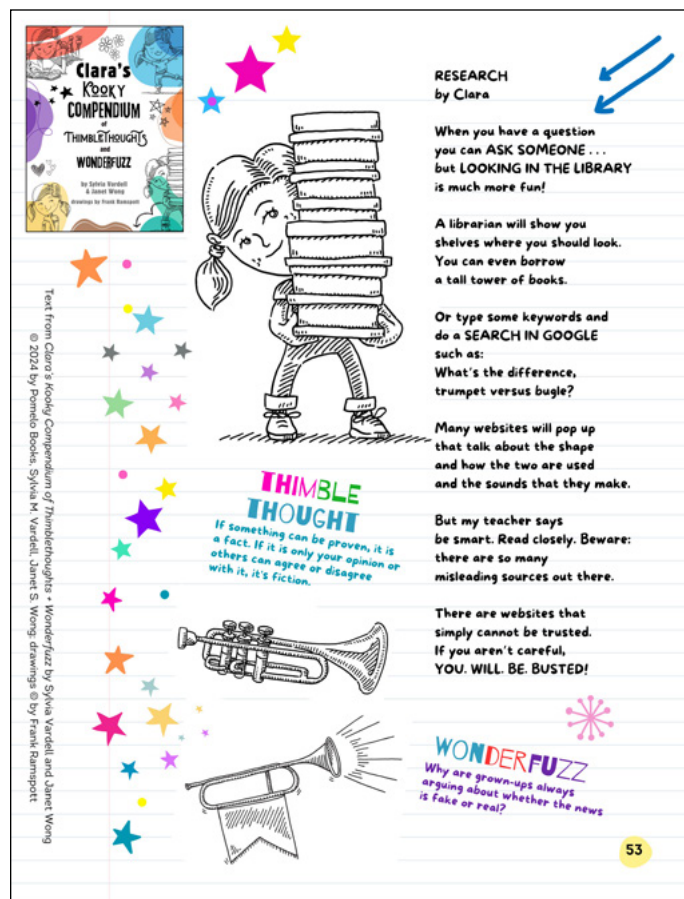
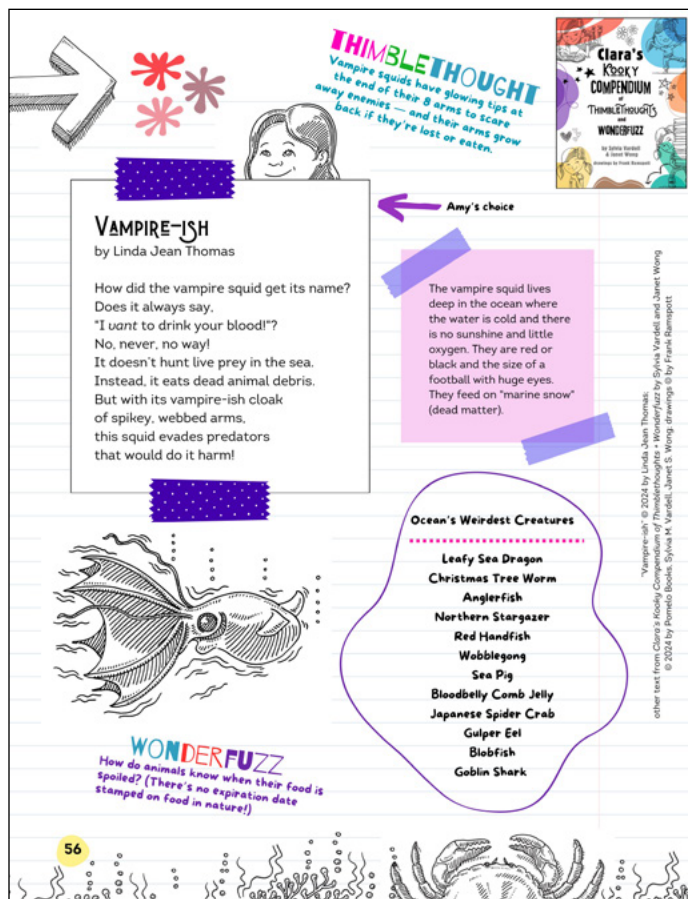
“Most dogs know 165 human words.” (p. 102) | [www.petful.com](http://www.petful.com) (search “words”)

“Paletas look like popsicles, but they’re made using chunks of real fruit, vegetables, and even herbs.” (p. 106) | [www.internationaldessertsblog.com](http://www.internationaldessertsblog.com) (search “paleta”)

“The average pencil can draw a line that’s 35 miles long and write around 45,000 words.” (p. 110) | <https://mainlymuseums.com> (search “pencils”)

“Shooting stars are actually called meteors and move so fast that they glow as they head toward Earth.” (p. 115) | <https://science.nasa.gov> (search “meteors”)





Some of the fun inside pages of art and poetry from Vardell and Wong's clever new title

*squids have glowing tips at the end of their eight arms to scare away enemies — and their arms grow back if they're lost or eaten."*

Introduce the list of "Ocean's Weirdest Creatures" that includes the "wobblegong" and the "sea pig," among others. Then ask children, "What do you want to know more about?" Some might want simply to know more about the vampire squid or the "weirdest ocean creatures," while others might have specific questions, such as "What do sea animals eat?" Lead children in researching answers to some of their questions, helping them learn where to look and how to evaluate those sources. Pro tip: one great place to begin is <https://oceana.org> (search "vampire squid").

## Partner with Poetry

Poetry and research easily go hand in hand. Poems raise questions that naturally steer us to researching answers, learning details, and finding more information. In the accompanying poem, "Research" by "Clara" (Janet Wong), we show young readers

where to begin ("looking in the library") and what to watch for: "Beware: / there are so many misleading sources out there."

## Wondering Every Day

Children are continually filled with wonder about the world around them; we believe that harnessing that natural wonder is the easiest way to teach research and writing skills. After sharing *Clara's Kooky Compendium of Thimblethoughts and Wonderfuzz*, you can offer our new companion book, *My Kooky Compendium of Thimblethoughts and Wonderfuzz*, for the aspiring young writer. It's a kind of "blank journal" designed with child-friendly research and writing prompts to encourage creativity and inquiry for young readers who want to take the next step and nurture their own writing, researching, and questioning. We think it might even rekindle your own curiosity, creativity, and love of research. Let's put a little wonder back into our everyday lives—and learn like kids again. &

# Honoring the Greats

## The Power of the Newbery Medal

STEPHANIE BANGE

The Archie M. Griffin Grand Ballroom at The Ohio State University (OSU) was a-buzz with activity on November 15, 2024, when more than three hundred fifty teachers, librarians, Columbus City School students, and other lovers of children's literature gathered for the Newbery Award Symposium, honoring the first children's book award in the world.

Early attendees that morning perused many of the authors' books for sale in the pop-up Barnes & Noble bookstore. Additionally, they were treated to art displays inspired by the authors' books, created by students from several Columbus City Schools. They included a decorated box-poster-suitcase display and a giant pink heart with words *Box: Henry Brown Mails Himself to Freedom* by Carole Boston Weatherford (2021 Newbery Honor); a "gingerbread" cardboard storefront/town—*Freewater* by Amina Luqman-Dawson (2023 Newbery Medal); photos of boys with new fresh cuts wearing a crown—*Crown* by Derrick Barnes (2018 Newbery Honor); cardboard tennis shoes—*The Crossover* by Kwame Alexander (2015 Newbery Medal); and elevator buttons—*Long Way Down* by Jason Reynolds (2018 Newbery Honor).

The day started with a warm welcome by Dr. Jonda McNair, who introduced OSU College of Education and Human Ecology Dean Don Pope-Davis. He shared OSU's storied history of children's literature dating back to 1955, when Dr. Charlotte Huck came to OSU and established the first graduate program in children's literature in the U.S. She retired in 1986, passing the torch to Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop, famous for her discussion on the importance of "mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors" in children's literature.

This symposium was designed to honor the spirit and scholarship of these two legendary OSU professors. It had been in the planning stages since the fall of 2020, when Pope-Davis tasked McNair to draft a proposal for the college to host a symposium focused on the Newbery Award.

It was my honor to introduce the first keynote speaker of the day, Kwame Alexander, especially since I was a member of the Newbery committee that selected his book *The Crossover*. Alexander brought to the stage with him his new companion, an Emmy Award for Outstanding Young Teen Series, which he received in 2023 as executive producer/writer/showrunner for *The Crossover*.

He charmed the group with his presentation "Where I'm From: Mapping a Writer's Life," and shared his family's history ala *Roots*, shared a letter from a young female fan who challenged him to "write a book with a female heroine," and read from his new book *Black Star*.

Attendees were able to select from three morning breakout sessions. I attended Derrick Barnes' standing room only presentation, where he did a deep dive discussion of how he came to write his book and the importance of both the barbershop and a "fresh cut" in Black communities.

In Luqman-Dawson's keynote speech, the author discussed her emotional journey as a new author, the importance of learning history, and wanting to make sure the history is right.



**Stephanie Bange** is a Children's Literature Consultant in Dayton, OH.





Creative artwork illustrating the history of slavery.

McNair moderated a panel discussion with all five authors, seeking answers to questions from only two authors at a time to keep the program moving. This led to a relaxed, informal time to get to know a little more about how each author felt about their work and the impact of their work.

In an afternoon breakout session, Weatherford focused on the importance of writing your history. One of her first slides summed up why she writes, “Why document slavery? More than ten million people were enslaved in the Americas. Only two hundred four had their narratives published. The marginalized voices of enslaved ancestors deserve to be heard.” She closed with an overview of her new book, *The Doll Test: Choosing Equality*.

The final keynote was probably the most emotional for me. Jason Reynolds perched on a stool on the stage with the mic in his hand and gave an extemporaneous talk and opened by asking for a show of hands of how many taught his book as one about trauma? Many hands were raised. He shook his head and quietly said, “It is about a child.”



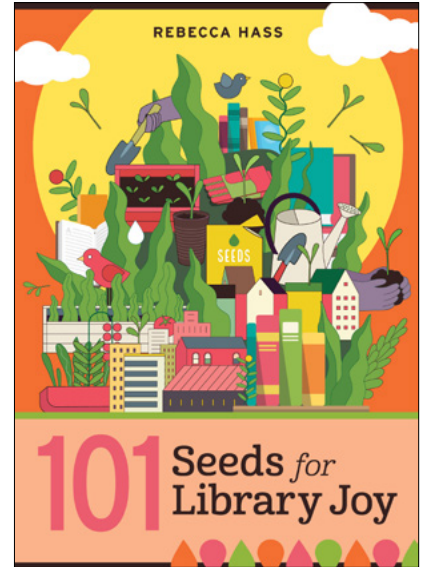
Stephanie Bange with Newbery Award author Kwame Alexander.

He reminded all of the power the Newbery Award has to put that book front and center; it is this awareness that teachers and librarians can leverage to instill a love of reading and lifelong learning in young people. &

# 101 Seeds for Library Joy

## Simple Practices for the Everyday

REBECCA HASS



Every year I pick a word of intention—something to explore and guide, and in 2017, I picked the word “joy.”

Little did I know how the word joy would transform my life. During that year, I started learning about positive psychology, its various techniques and neuroscience. Many of the positive psychology practices I learned aligned with things I value, like the arts, mindfulness, and kindness. All of this became even more important during the pandemic when I started explicitly integrating them into my day-to-day work at Anne Arundel County Public Library in Maryland. It was also during this time that joy began to grow as a global movement through advocates and champions like California librarian and social media library advocate Mychal Threets.

### Why Joy?

Joy has the potential to enhance our wellbeing. The American Psychological Association defines joy as “a feeling of extreme gladness, delight, or exaltation of the spirit arising from a sense of wellbeing or satisfaction.”<sup>1</sup> Library joy is more than a feeling; it is a call to identify and practice a revolution of connection, empowerment, and well-being. What might happen if we had an accessible resource to empower library staff to embrace more joy at work? This was my goal in writing *101 Seeds for Library Joy*.

### Practicing Library Joy

I wanted to offer fun, practical ways to build joy-centering skills through the metaphor of gardening. These joy seeds represent the

real-life joy that library staff plant every day in themselves, their communities, and the world. *101 Seeds for Library Joy* includes practical applications for aspects of library work such as scheduling, communication, and our workspaces. Techniques from the book can be applied in virtual or in-person environments and foster connections with internal and external partners.

I have had the pleasure of presenting “Building Joy-Centric Libraries: An Experiential Approach” workshops virtually and around the nation. My book grew out of these workshops, including participants’ takeaways. Through this work, I want to support library joy in all library spaces—at our desks, tucked in our bags, in library board meetings, and ultimately to inspire joy journeys.

Here are a couple of examples from the book:

- “Start your day with a smile to yourself, a service worker, a stranger, or a coworker.”
- “Reminisce about a book that you’ve enjoyed and why. Post a book recommendation in a workroom or share it with a coworker.”



**Rebecca Hass** is programming and outreach manager for Anne Arundel County (MD) Public Library and author of *101 Seeds for Library Joy* (ALA Editions, 2025).



- “Encourage someone new to libraries today—a library student, a new library user, a new coworker, or new community partner.”

I love seeing people use this little book. One colleague used a joy seed as an opening activity prompt for a team meeting: “Place a memento or souvenir somewhere you will see it when you need a pick-me-up.”<sup>2</sup> Reminiscing about positive memories is a psychological technique to counter stress responses.<sup>3</sup> The facilitator asked each participant to bring something to share at the start of the meeting. She suggested things like a photo or souvenir. I brought the postcard of the Schoodic Peninsula in Acadia, Maine, that inspired this joy seed. My colleague later shared that she felt the opening activity encouraged creative problem solving in the meeting.

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## Joy Matters

Library joy matters, including the joy of library staff and our customers of all ages. This book supports readers as they lean towards their own joy journey. What might happen if we all dial up joy? My hope is that you will be inspired to consider and prioritize your own library joy and supporting the joy around you. &

*For more inspiration for bringing library joy to your work, 101 Seeds for Library Joy is available from ALA Editions.*

Award-winning author Jerry Craft was the headliner of the seventh annual Margret and H.A. Rey Curious George Lecture this past spring at Cambridge (MA) Public Library. Craft is the *New York Times* bestselling author and illustrator of the graphic novels *New Kid*, *Class Act*, and *School Trip*. *New Kid* is the only book in history to win the John Newbery Medal (2020), the Kirkus Prize for Young Readers’ Literature (2019), and the Coretta Scott King Author Award (2020). Proudly posing with Craft are Dr. Maria McCauley, Director of Libraries for the City of Cambridge—and 2025–2026 president-elect of the American Library Association—and her two children, Micha Woo and Grace.



# Kittens, Community, Kids, and Classrooms

## Exploring and Embracing Empathy

MAUREEN F. RUBY

**T**his story is not about a kitten. It's about Randall de Sève's book *This Story Is Not about a Kitten* (Random House, 2022) and how we used it to enhance a school community.

De Sève's story is a captivating and authentic tale of a diverse cast who acted with empathy and compassion to solve a problem. More than fictional elements, de Sève's characters teach readers and listeners about building a culture of belonging.

Belonging, or feeling invited, welcomed, known, accepted, involved, supported, heard, befriended, needed, and loved, as depicted on the Belonging Wheel (Creating Communities of Belonging), is a basic human need.<sup>1</sup> Belonging is at the center of Maslow's hierarchy of human needs, coming after basic physiological and safety needs and preceding esteem and self-actualization.<sup>2</sup> Cultivating a culture of belonging is essential for schools and communities that support children. Without "belongingness," humans are challenged to develop self-esteem and a sense of self-worth and are at-risk for not learning, engaging, and reaching their full potential.

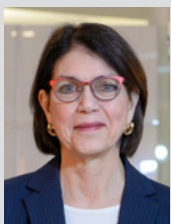
Belonging at school is essential to learning. Without it, students can feel disconnection, lack of motivation, and an inability to

access learning. Part of creating a culture of belonging is understanding, teaching, and encouraging empathy, or being able to put yourself in someone else's shoes.

Parents, teachers, and students in school districts across our nation complete annual surveys on school culture and climate. Survey responses in our elementary school indicated that parents, teachers, and students all agreed that empathy and compassion were areas in need of attention and improvement. Knowing the intricate interrelationship of empathy, compassion, and belonging and the importance of ensuring a culture of belonging to positive student social-emotional and academic well-being, faculty and administrators from Riverfield Elementary in Fairfield County, CT, sought out an ideal children's book for the annual One School, One Book project suitable for teaching about empathy and compassion. The choice was *This Story Is Not about a Kitten*.

### The Logistics

Typically, Riverfield's parent-teacher association (PTA) purchases a copy of the chosen book for each classroom. Each teacher uses



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Author/Illustrator Carson Ellis

the classroom copy when working with the students. Studies, including Clark and Picton's research report on book ownership, literacy engagement, and mental wellbeing, speak to the positive impact of children having their own copies of books in the home environment.<sup>3</sup> Providing a copy of the book for each classroom and also putting a copy in the hands of each student, would not only capitalize on the benefits of individual book ownership, but would be a vehicle to facilitate a home-school partnership, enhance engagement, and transfer learning. How could we make that happen?

Through collaboration with a faculty member at Sacred Heart University in Fairfield, CT, Riverfield secured consultation, professional development, and funding to purchase a copy of the book for each of the 397 students in the school. Consultation and professional development were provided pro-bono and funding for books was provided through an endowment fund. Each book had a bookplate with the individual child's name to reinforce the idea of book ownership. The big reveal of the title was made at the October All-School Meeting. Teachers and administrators shared in reading the book. Next, students learned that during the fall months, their teachers would share lessons in class using the book. Beginning in January, each grade would have a chance to share how they connected to the book by presenting at a grade-level spotlight during an All-School Meeting. Finally, when students learned they would all be receiving a personal copy of the book, the excitement was palpable—and audible!

Parents and caregivers were encouraged to read the book at home with their children. Additionally, the principal and a joint committee of educators and parents developed a plan to engage parents and caregivers. The committee invited all parents and guardians to participate in conversations about our school community and improving the sense of belongingness at the school. The committee set up listening sessions where parents could sign up for an individual (in-person or virtual) session and share their experiences about belonging in our school community. The listening session invitation included a visual of the Belonging Wheel depicting the ten dimensions of belonging and some reflective questions for the adults to consider reflecting on before coming to the listening session. These included:



- What has your child's/family's experience of belonging been like at our school?
- What are your favorite parts of our community?
- What else is important to you as a parent in terms of feeling like you belong to our community and your child feeling like they belong?
- What qualities do you hope your child will demonstrate as they transition to middle school?
- What would you want a family new to our school to experience and feel as they join our community?

To encourage participation, incentives including coffee and a prize raffle were provided; this engaged the school and parent community in a collaborative partnership. Collectively parents and school faculty and staff identified common goals and aspirations for students to achieve during their six-year journey at the school. The faculty also created an action plan to enhance the culture of belonging in the school community for the subsequent school year and beyond, all based on parent input and collaboration of home and school.

The All-School Meeting grade-level showcasing of student connections to the book demonstrated the students' growing understanding of empathy and compassion and their central role in creating a culture of belonging. The third-grade students shared that the last pages of the book "inspired us to think about how we can connect the book to our school. We decided to write our own version." They quoted that at the end of the book de Sève writes:

"This story is not about the child  
who asked, "Could we?"  
or the man who offered some milk,  
or the twins who brought a box,  
or the woman who held the dog  
for the dog's people who listened,  
or the dog who stopped when it  
heard the kitten —

now full-bellied and clean,  
no longer alone, purring happily  
HOME.

This story is about the  
stopping  
and listening  
and holding  
and bringing,  
the offering  
the asking  
and working together  
it takes, sometimes, to get there.”

The students then presented their version, *This Story Is Not about a Student*.

This story is not about the student who said, “I can’t do it!”  
It’s about her friends who encouraged her to keep trying and  
not give up.

This story is not about the student sitting on the bench at recess,  
it’s about the  
other three students who paused their game and asked her to  
join.

This story is not about the student who was going to finish last  
in the mile run.

It’s about the boy who slowed down so they could cross the fin-  
ish line together.

This story is not about the student who raised her hand and  
said the wrong  
answer. It’s about her classmates, who didn’t laugh, but said,  
“Good try.”

The meeting ended with a challenge to the student body to  
think about other examples of how students at our school care  
for others. When reading the book again that week, classes were  
prompted to discuss the following ideas and questions:

- Belonging is feeling like you are an important member of a group. What do you think about that? Your thoughts and feelings matter.
- What qualities or characteristics would describe a person who cares about others and wants you to make sure others feel a sense of belonging?
- What behaviors or actions would you like all students to engage in or do?

At the end of the year, students met with de Sève via Zoom and interviewed her about her book. The university had published a story on the project, which was shared with de Sève. Heart-warmed by the story, she volunteered to meet with the students. Students developed questions for the interview and engaged in a lively conversation about how de Sève got the idea for the story, how long it took to write the book, and what she hoped readers got from her story.

De Sève shared that she was impressed and delighted by our deep work on belonging and by the students themselves. She even suggested that students act as ambassadors for this curriculum, bringing it to other schools in the area and (remotely) afar.

“I love how powerfully *This Story Is Not about a Kitten* impacted your school,” she said, “and that its message really came through. At first, I wasn’t quite sure what I wanted to say with this story. I spent a lot of time writing and rewriting the ending. And then I put it aside for a while. It wasn’t until the pandemic—and one of many (way too) quiet moments at home during lockdown—that I realized that this story, inspired by a real-life kitten rescue in front of my Brooklyn home, was about the importance of community and belonging. We really needed that during COVID—and we always do.”<sup>4</sup> &

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# The Schneider Family Book Award

## Twenty Years (and Counting!) of Celebrating Books about Disabilities

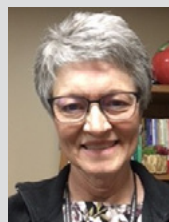
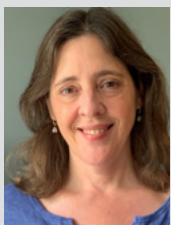
ANGELA CARSTENSEN, MARY-KATE SABLESKI, TRISH BANDRE, SUSAN HESS, CHERYL MALDEN, AND ALYSON BEECHER

For twenty-one years, the American Library Association has recognized the best children's and young adult books about the disability experience with the Schneider Family Book Award. At the ALA Annual Conference in San Diego in June, 2024, a group of creators who had received the Schneider Award over the years came together to reflect on the advances made in writing and publishing books about disabilities for child and adolescent audiences, as well as to examine current and future advancements in accessibility through discussion and dialogue across authors, publishers, and committee members.

Katherine Schneider approached the leadership of ALA over twenty years ago with a vision to create a book award that embodied an artistic expression of the disability experience. For Cheryl Malden, a program officer on the ALA staff at the time, the

challenge of getting such an award up and running was daunting. She did not know where to begin, nor did she know anyone with a disability. But, inspired by Katherine's passion for the award, she persisted. When she first contacted publishers to request books, they sent just a few books they had available that represented the disability experience. Twenty years later, publishers now reach out to her, asking when the jury will be in place, because they have so many books they are sure the jury members will love.

Authors such as Brian Selznick, Jason Reynolds, Chief Justice Sonia Sotomayor, and illustrators including Raúl the Third and Sydney Smith have won the award over the years. The Schneider Award has come a long way since 2004. For decades to come, children will continue to see themselves in outstanding books representing the disability experience. Katherine Schneider had



**Angela Carstensen** is the author of *A Readers' Advisory Guide to Teen Literature* (ALA Editions). A former school librarian, she served on the Schneider Family Book Award committee from 2022–2024. **Mary-Kate Sableski** is a Professor at the University of Dayton in Dayton, Ohio. She served as a member and co-chair of the Schneider Family Book Award committee from 2020–2024. **Trish Bandre** is a Reading Specialist in Salina, KS. She serves as a member and co-chair of the Schneider Family Book Award committee from 2022–present. **Susan Hess** is a retired New York City School Librarian. She serves as a member and co-chair of the Schneider Family Book Award Committee from 2019–present. **Cheryl Malden** is retired Program Officer from the American Library Association. She served as staff liaison to the Schneider Family Book Award from 2004 to 2024. **Alyson Beecher** is a Program Supervisor in Glendale Unified School District, a former Literacy Specialist, and Special Education Teacher and Administrator. She has been a member and past chair of the Schneider Family Book Award committee and is currently the Ex-Officio Advisor to the committee.



Panelists (from left): Natalie Lloyd, Mariama J. Lockington, Karol Ruth Silverstein, Shannon Stocker, Sally J. Pla, Pam Muñoz Ryan, Jenn Bailey, Mika Song, Julie Wilson, and Kelly Gildea.

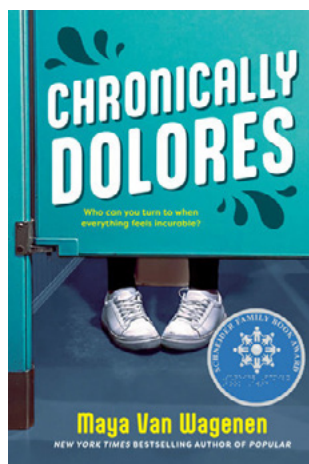
a vision to create this outstanding award, and her legacy will live on due to its incredible impact.

As a blind child growing up in the 1950s and 1960s, Schneider did not have access to realistic and relatable characters to read about, other than reading braille. Today, publishers are embracing stories with disabled characters. Statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention tell us that one in four Americans has a disability. Books do not yet reflect those demographics, nor do authors or illustrators represent people with disabilities. But the field is headed in the right direction.

Schneider is passionate about creating equal access to books for children with all types of disabilities, so that less children experience the lack of access she did as a young blind girl. Great books have been written and published about the disability experience, but if people do not have access to them, in formats they can consume, these books cannot be read by the people who need them most. As publishers release more diverse book formats, including hardcover, paperbacks, e-books, audiobooks, and graphic novels, their books are able to reach more and more readers.

The Schneider Award's processes and criteria shifted over the years to respond to trends in publishing and in broader society. In 2019, the Schneider Family Book Award awarded its first honor awards. The winner of the Schneider Award in each category receives a blue sticker with the Schneider logo on the book, along with a \$5,000 honorarium. The sticker includes the name of the award in Braille. The honor books receive a red sticker with the Schneider logo on the book, also in Braille. In 2021, the committee recognized its first graphic novel, *When Stars Are Scattered* by

Omar Mohamed and Victoria Jamieson as a Middle Grades Honor Book. Graphic novels can often present accessibility issues for blind readers, but with the thoughtful development of a full cast audiobook, this book format is now accessible to more readers.



In addition, at the urging of committee members, publishers have now acquired and published more picture books to reflect the disability experience. It is exciting to have books for young children that reflect issues such as anxiety as a disability, providing more mirrors to readers who need to see their experiences in the books they read. Each year, the committee reflects on what a disability is and what a positive portrayal looks like for modern readers. New books are always arriving that challenge the committee's paradigms of what it means to have a disability and how that fits into the Schneider criteria.

The committee used to receive fewer than one hundred books each year to evaluate, but now receives well over two hundred each year. The growth of the award, and the effect the award has had on getting books into the hands of readers, is truly remarkable.

At the 2024 Annual Conference, creators from across the twenty years of the award came together to celebrate the award and consider the role it will play into the future. Susan Hess, co-chair of the award committee since 2019, Cheryl Malden, ALA program officer and liaison for the Schneider Award, and members of the current Schneider Family Book Award Committee organized and moderated the panel discussion with this all-star lineup of award-winning authors, illustrators, and creators.

Young adult author Mariama J. Lockington won the Schneider Award for Young Adults in 2024 for her book, *Forever Is Now*. A

timely and relevant story for young adults, including characters who navigate anxiety in authentic and relatable ways, this book addresses the intersectionality of race, culture, immigration, gender, and the disability experience. Karol Ruth Silverstein won the Schneider Award for Young Adults in 2020 for *Cursed*, a relatable book about chronic illness, which conveys the realities of living with a chronic illness as a teen with humor and sensitivity.

Pam Muñoz Ryan is a decorated middle grades author, having won numerous awards for her work, including a prestigious Newbery Honor (2016). *Becoming Naomi León* won the Schneider Award for Middle Grades in 2005, and tells the coming-of-age story of a middle school girl dealing with anxiety, change, and identity. Natalie Lloyd won a Schneider Honor for Middle Grades in 2024 for *Hummingbird*, a magical book about a young girl with brittle bone disease. This book is based on Lloyd's own experience living with the disease. Also in 2024, Sally J. Pla won the Schneider Award for Middle Grades for *The Fire, the Water, and Maudie McGinn*, a powerful and moving exploration of an adolescent girl's journey towards acceptance and confidence while she navigates how her autism impacts her daily life.

Shannon Stocker won the Schneider Award in 2023 for Younger Children for *Listen: How Evelyn Glennie, a Deaf Girl, Changed Percussion*, illustrated by Devon Holzwarth. This nonfiction picture book is about the life of Evelyn Glennie, a deaf percussionist. In 2024, Mika Song (illustrator) and Jenn Bailey (author) won the Schneider Award for Younger Children for *Henry, Like Always*. This team also won a Schneider Honor in 2020 for *A Friend for Henry*.



Finally, the panel was lucky to have Kelly Gildea and Julie Wilson, who were involved with the production of the audiobook version of *When Stars Are Scattered* by Victoria Jamieson, Omar Mohamed, and Iman Geddy. The audiobook version of this book increased its accessibility to readers of many abilities and allowed it to win a Schneider Honor for Middle Grades in 2021.

#### Tell us about when you received “the call.” How did it feel to win?

**Natalie Lloyd:** I know most writers probably dream of getting a call from a book award committee, but it was so far out of the realm of possibility for me. So, the day I got the call I thought it was about my car warranty. When I saw the message from the Schneider committee, I just froze. I think the first thing I said was, “Are you sure?”

**Mariama J. Lockington:** Well, I missed the call. I knew that the awards ceremony was coming up because I love to watch it with my family or friends. But I did not expect to get that call, so I was actually making my to-do list for the day, thinking about what errands and cleaning had to be done before the week started. When I called the committee back, and heard the news, I think I went somewhere else for a little bit. I was thrilled, but then I

hung up and continued to talk about what I needed to do for the day. My partner said, “You just won an award!” and then I started crying. I put a lot into this book, and I did not think that it would get this far.

**Karol Ruth Silverstein:** My story is a little different. I did all of the things you are not supposed to do. I read reviews, checked my profiles—I had dreamed of winning the Schneider Award since its inception. The first thing I thought was, “Oh, that’s so cool. They are doing an award for disability stories.” And my second thought was, “I want to win that award.” I had the day and the year when the award would be announced in my calendar. Going into that weekend I was 1000% sure I was not going to win. I was trying to brace myself for the crushing disappointment. So, I was kind of just trying to distract myself and stay off social media that morning. Then the phone rang and I knew that it was them. I just kept saying, “I’m just so happy. I’m just so happy.”

**Shannon Stocker:** All of that completely resonates with me because when you care so much about what you write, and the disability, if there is one award you want, it is the Schneider Family Book Award. That’s what you want. You hope and dream that you will win. I, too, had the date in my calendar and was prepared for crushing disappointment, so much so that I busied myself to clean a bird cage and missed the first call. When the second call came in, I expected that it was somebody trying to sell me something. As soon as I heard “This is the Schneider Family Committee,” I literally screamed and said, “Don’t say another word.” I went and got my husband, my daughter, my son and I put them on speaker. I was sobbing.

**Sally J. Pla:** I was at the dentist when I got the call. I went to the dentist, came out of the dentist, and went about my day because these things just do not happen. And then my editor called me kind of frantically saying, “Would you please return this call?” So, I returned the call and I got the loveliest committee members who were out on the street taking a walk at that point. They were so excited. They said, “We are so excited to tell you that you won the . . .” And, right at that moment, some big fire truck went by and I did not hear what they said I had won. I was too embarrassed to ask, so I just said, “Oh that’s great! Thank you so much!” And then they gave me a clue. “We cannot wait to put a big blue sticker on that beautiful book cover!” And I thought, “Okay, the sticker is blue . . . the sticker is blue.” And off I went to look up which award assigns a blue sticker to its winning books!

**Pam Muñoz Ryan:** I am the one who did not know about the Schneider, but in my defense, it was a really long time ago—the second year of its existence. My friend Brian Selznick and his husband David were at my house. It was a Sunday afternoon, and we were going to go for sushi with all of my family, and I got the call. At first, because he was there, I thought, “Is Brian pranking me?” because I did not know what the Schneider Award was for. But when they told me about the award, I was sort of stunned. I could

not wait to get off the phone so that I could research it. When *he* won the award [for *Wonderstruck* in 2012], I called him and said, “Do you know what you won?” It was really fun, and I am so proud, especially for this book.

**Jenn Bailey:** When *A Friend for Henry* won the honor, I was driving with my mother, my brother, and my uncle to Rhode Island after a long visit with family. So, I missed the call. When the call came in, I was driving, on I-95 on a weekend, in New England. I stopped at a rest stop to get my family Dunkin’ Donuts, and get them out of the car. When they got out of the car, I thought, “I am going to see who called me.” I saw the message saying please call this number back. And I was just shaking so hard, I just managed to hit the right buttons. And when they told me, I think I screamed. I am pretty sure I screamed. But I was in a parking lot with my family. I asked, “Can I tell my family?” The committee said, “Well, just keep it limited. Do not tell a whole lot of people.” So, I followed the rules. I only told those three people in my car, and they bought me a donut. And a coffee, which is like champagne in New England. And then I told the rest of my family that they were going to want to watch this broadcast tomorrow, but I did not tell them why. It was just amazing. I am so grateful that this story was seen, and that it was being boosted. Just so grateful.

**Mika Song:** I don’t remember how it went with *Henry Like Always*, but I will just say that when the librarians call you, you cannot understand what they are saying. Because it sounds like, this is what I picture, fifty librarians in a small room jumping on the tables screaming. They are all so excited to share the news. It is Sunday, I am doing errands, there are people calling, from different numbers, from different states. It is all so very confusing. You guys are wild!

**How did winning the Schneider Award impact who read your book?**

**Shannon Stocker:** This award opens a lot of doors and it makes a lot of things possible that might not have been otherwise. Whether it be becoming a part of the Scholastic world, or having the book printed in another language, or whether one of those opportunities put the book in a library, which puts it in the hands of one child who might not otherwise read it. To me that latter one is the one that makes all the difference in the world, because that is where we want these books to land. We want them to land with the kids who are going to feel seen, and without this award, this

book would not have been seen by as many children. That is just such a huge, huge gift—to know that somebody has the potential of being touched by something that you helped create. It is an incredible feeling.

**Jenn Bailey:** It is phenomenal. I saw *A Friend for Henry* moved from a shelf in a bookstore that was crammed with books on a shelf that said, “Parenting for children with disabilities.” It was moved to the children’s section, into the picturebook section. That is what this book is for. That is what all of these books are for. They are for a child to be able to see themselves. It is really important that in our stories we do not necessarily say that Henry is on the spectrum. We want you to experience Henry. Unfortunately, we are still living in an age where when you say, “This is a book

about a child who is autistic,” a parent will say, “That is not our kid,” and move on. And that is not what we want. We want mirror and window books to make growing up with disabilities a more familiar experience. That is what this award does. It brings books written about characters with disabilities into the mainstream.

**Karol Ruth Silverstein:** My book is sort of a younger YA, so it would have also been appropriate for middle school. However, there are a lot of f-bombs in it. And those are a very important part of the story, but it had its challenges with marketing. There are a lot of school districts that are not going to buy it because of that. But winning the Schneider Award, it is now in every library in the U.S. That

is really something. I grew up going to libraries, so the fact that my book is in every library is really, really thrilling. I always dreamed about putting juvenile arthritis on the map. It is not talked about or championed a lot, yet there was another book published the same year as *Cursed*, and there are at least two more books about the disability of which I am aware. And, juvenile arthritis is unfortunately kind of common. So, this book gave a voice to a diagnosis. Some of the books published about it are sort of pedantic. I really wanted to give the angry, surly, and sarcastic side of getting an arthritis diagnosis a voice. And getting the Schneider Book Award put it in a different stratosphere and that meant that more kids get to read it.

**What prompted you to create a book about characters with a disability?**

**Mariama J. Lockington:** All of my books are about Black girls who live at the crossroads of multiple identities. Sadie is an activist, she’s queer, she’s grown up in an area of Oakland, California, and

*Unfortunately, we are still living in an age where when you say, “This is a book about a child who is autistic,” a parent will say, “That is not our kid,” and move on. And that is not what we want. We want mirror and window books to make growing up with disabilities a more familiar experience. That is what this award does. It brings books written about characters with disabilities into the mainstream.*

—Jenn Bailey



she's also living with anxiety. She cares very much about what is happening in the world and the environment, but when she has a mental health crisis, she has to figure out how to get back to the joy, to the people in her community and find herself again.

I wanted to write a book about anxiety because I was going through a hard moment with my own anxiety and panic disorder. It was 2020. We all know some things that were happening at that point. I was living in Kentucky, and Brionna Taylor had just been murdered. And I was not okay. I am also a poet. Poetry is my core “genre love,” so when I am struggling, I write poetry. I wanted to write a book about a Black girl who gets to be strong, and have a voice, and be passionate about things, but also about a Black girl who gets to fall apart and gets to be messy and gets to make mistakes, and gets to just figure out how she is going to live with her adversities and to face the world as she is—facing it as a Black queer girl in the world with anxiety. I write books that I wish I could have found in the library when growing up. And I think, for my own mental health journey, this type of book would have been really validating to know that I was not alone in some things I was struggling with as a young person.

**Pam Muñoz Ryan:** Many years ago, I was hired to be the director of an early childhood program. One of the formal priorities of the program was inclusion. We coordinated with the school district and early intervention programs. Those three children and that program inspired me to write *Becoming Naomi Leon*.

**Karol Ruth Silverstein:** I want to echo what Mariama said, that writing about a disabled character who gets to be messy, and gets to fall apart, and also gets to be strong was not something that I saw a whole lot of, and that was really important to me.

**Natalie Lloyd:** Olive, the main character in *Hummingbird*, has the same physical disability as I do, called Osteogenesis Imperfecta. I tell kids that it sounds like a magic spell. But it is just a brittle bone disease, my bones break for no reason sometimes. Initially when I started writing this character, I tried to give her an experience I did not actually have, of being on stage. And then one night, I was walking through the kitchen in my house and slipped and fell and broke my femur. So, it was back to square one, therapy and surgeries, and I was in a wheelchair for a long time.

One night I was hanging out with my husband—and he is like Gilbert Blythe, seriously, he is wonderful—and I was so frustrated and I said, “I’m just broken and fragile,” and he said, “Hey, you’re wonderful, you’re not broken. Your bones are fragile. You’re not fragile.” That is when I thought, if I can write about Olive as a person, that is the story that I want to tell. And I am so grateful that the committee saw something in that. The first time a reader came up to me and said, “I have Osteogenesis Imperfecta,” she was shaking the book back and forth in front of me. It is so important that kids get to see that.

**Jenn Bailey:** I also wanted to be able to show people how hard it was for my child, who is on the spectrum, to make a friend, how hard the work was. And to encourage children to be more open to somebody approaching in a way that maybe you are not used to. If

we can just see that experience he was going through in his eyes, his emotions. Henry really thought that he was getting it right every single time. And we know he was not. But that was what was so important to me. That first struggle of trying to find somebody who he could talk to and who would be supportive and to see the inner workings of that for him.

**Shannon Stocker:** I completely relate to what everybody is saying. I wrote about my disability because I was sick for seven years. I spent two of them in a wheelchair, and was given two years to live. I have a disease called Reflex Sympathetic Dystrophy, or Chronic Regional Pain Syndrome. So, for me, it is about the feeling of being less than, or having other people see you as less than, and that is what continues to inform everything that I write from now on.

**Kelly and Julie, can you talk with us about the challenges and opportunities in creating and producing books that readers of all abilities can read?**

**Julie Wilson:** To speak specifically about graphic novel adaptations, when we first start working on a graphic novel adaptation there are so many challenges to think about. We have so many beautiful illustrations that are so core to the story. One of the major things we think about is how do we adapt this for a listening audience that might not be looking at the visual. So, we spend a lot of time thinking about whether there are any minor alterations we can do. Kelly actually directed this for us [*When Stars Are Scattered*] and something that we did that was kind of special to this adaptation was that the narrators actually read off the graphic novel while they were recording. Typically, they read off of a script, but Kelly specifically thought that it was so informative to have those visuals there. And of course, we have a full cast. We need a full cast because that is the only way to distinguish who is speaking and so we spent a lot of time on all those casting decisions as well.

**Kelly Gildea:** I really do love, when we work on graphic novels, to bring the book into the studio with us. So much of that art really informs the performance and inspires the actors in many ways when they look at what is happening. Though our listeners cannot see it, I think what is happening on the page is being honored by those actors. On the post-production side, our editors are creating so many sound effects and sound design that is reflective of the environment and what is going on in every scene. So, you might see some characters laughing in the background, or children crying in the background. We bring those sounds to life in the audiobook. It becomes a three-dimensional world for anyone who is just listening alone.

**How do you see the current state of the field of disability representation in books for young people?**

**Natalie Lloyd:** It is exciting to think, if I were a kid right now, I would have books by all of these writers. Which never would have been possible when I was a kid. I am grateful that Scholastic was excited about my book, and they were conscientious about the cover.

Having a character in a wheelchair on the cover of the book has made so many kids want to read the book. There was a part of me that wondered if kids would notice that this book is about a character with a disability and not want to read it. But what I find is that kids are so empathetic and curious, so the disability on the cover makes them want to pick it up. I cannot imagine being a kid right now and having authors who are making such good books.

**Sally J. Pla:** It is getting stronger all the time. Thank goodness, because it really was not that long ago that you would only see a disabled character in a book if they were a sidekick, or comic relief, as a catalyst for the main character's growth, or to help the main character feel more compassion and empathy. And those were the only places where a disabled kid was seen in a book. And it really was not that long ago. We have come really far, really fast. There are so many wonderful books out there, but still not enough. In every single classroom in America, there is at least one child with a neurodivergence and most likely far more than one. I have teacher friends who 30% of their kids have IEPs.

Disability is the largest minority in America. We just need more books for these kids. We need more books for their classmates. We need more books so that everyone can talk together. It is so much easier to talk together about a story than to talk together about your own personal situation. But personal situations and students' relationships to each other and understanding of one another can be approached through stories. They need to be read and talked about by kids, not just the disabled kids. The disabled kids need these books desperately because they need to see themselves, but all kids need these books. We still have a lot of work to do.

**Mariama J. Lockington:** I think that the Schneider Family Book Award has really helped to publish books about disabilities. The award has brought literature about disabilities to publishers who may not have really thought about disability previously. When a book wins an award, it helps to sell the books, so publishers become more interested in publishing books that can win an award. Thanks to Katherine Schneider, these books are receiving more attention through the award.

**Julie Wilson:** I just wanted to speak for the audiobook industry because I know we have a curtain in front of us sometimes. We are always working in concert with our authors. We have been deeply involved with expanding the diversity of actors that are in our industry. So, while you all are creating stories about people that exist all over the world with all sorts of differences, we are mirroring that in our casting efforts and finding people with

neurodivergence, or autism, or anything that is reflected in the stories you are creating for us.

**Mika Song:** I saw personally because *A Friend for Henry* won the Schneider honor, we were able to do the chapter series. That series is not exactly a picture book, and not exactly a chapter book. It is wonderful that it got recognized so we were able to keep creating books about Henry. When we are making the books, it is like an experiment, because we do not know how it is going to be received. When illustrating *Henry Like Always*, I have always wanted to make a book in black and white, so I used primarily black and white throughout the book, with some washes of color for Henry. The reason I love black and white is because I love comics, and I love Chinese painting and calligraphy. So, I was just so

happy to get to do that, and it was because our first book was recognized by an award committee that I had some freedom to try it out. It turns out that Jenn got an email from a student in high school who was doing a school project working with kids to review books about disabilities. She herself was autistic. She appreciated that we decided to make the pictures to be black and white.

**Jenn Bailey:** She said kids are spending all that energy to decipher the text. To have flashes of color at them at the same time, could shut a lot of neurodivergent kids down. But because of

the washes of colors we chose and the way that we put them in the illustration, she said, "I just felt so supported; I could rest in the illustration and focus on the text of the story."

**Mika Song:** We take that to heart, because that is how we wanted it to be interpreted.

**Karol Ruth Silverstein:** I do not have to search really hard to find stories with disability in them today. And, that is really a pleasure—that I do not have to scrape the bottom of the barrel. I am seeing more intersectionality in books about disability, bringing together different identities beyond disability. I am also seeing disabled joy. There is always going to be a space for diagnosis books. My book is a diagnosis book and it is important. They raise a metaphor for any kind of changes that kids go through, especially from ages 8 to 14. So, they are very important—kind of like coming out books for LGBTQIA+ community.

But we are also seeing some disabled joy, some disabled romance, just kids that have a project and a goal that they are shooting for. *Breathe and Count Back from Ten* (Sylvester, 2022), an honor book from a couple years ago, is about a teen who wants to try out to be a mermaid, and yes, disability is a big part of the story. But it was really the goal that she really had to fight for. I love that we are

broadening out from merely stories about a diagnosis, and that we are seeing different races and cultures and identities all intermingled. I would love to see a Schneider Book Award committee in the near future that has a thousand books to choose from.

**Mariama J. Lockington:** I also think that young people are hungry for stories in general no matter what their identities are, what disabilities they live with. I work with young people as an educator when I am not writing. I think the thing that happens sometimes is that adults decide what kids should read or would be interested in. The compassion lies in presenting books to students and letting them decide what story they are interested in, and letting them read about a young person who they have a lot in common with, and then maybe not in common with. This helps us sow empathy and connection in our community. Something that has changed is that young people are talking more openly about disabilities, more openly about mental health, and they want those stories. I know that there are more stories out there.

**Kelly and Julie, can you talk with us about the challenges and opportunities in producing books accessible to readers of all abilities?**

**Kelly Gildea:** I think the coolest thing about *When Stars Are Scattered* being put into a graphic novel format is that my son at the time was ten, and he was looking over my shoulder because it was 2020 and he was home. He was just fascinated by the visuals, and because of the format of the story, he could not wait to get his hands on it. When we produce the book, we go through all of the text and make sure that everything in the text would make sense to a listener. Nothing is coming out of the blue. Nothing is existing in visuals that we are not adapting for a hearing audience because most of the time they are not looking at the book. Another challenge we faced with this book was trying to use actors with a similar background as the characters in the book. There just were not many in our orbit at the time, and we used a lot of resources to find as many people as we could to reflect the characters.



**Julie Wilson:** We were already getting better at casting across diversities in our choice of actors, but this book added momentum to that effort. We had to dig deeply for people that we should not have to dig deeply for, because it was difficult to locate the representation we needed. I created a casting platform for voiceover actors. Kelly then created a casting department that could help us with all of our casting efforts to find people that accurately represent the characters in the stories. Anyone picking up this book is also seeing names of the actors that are hopefully reflective of those backgrounds, and then they are hearing the voices. And one thing that I always hear from the narrator community, whether it is different sexuality, gender, or neurodiversity, they are saying they never really saw these characters when they were kids. Now, with this book in particular, these are out there and that is something that is really important in our industry.

**What do you think is needed in the current market?**

**Karol Ruth Silverstein:** I would love to see more mentorship and training, and special programs and scholarships aimed at disabled kids, neurodiverse kids, and neurodivergent kids. Because I think we have had that in some of the other underrepresented fields, and they reaped wonderful rewards. In order to get a book deal and win the award you have to really know your path, and you have to write a really good story, and that involves a lot of support and training. I would love to see programs for aspiring authors in middle school, in high school, in college, just to support and build the craft and the confidence of kids in our community. Because that would lead to those one thousand books for the Schneider committee to review someday.

**Shannon Stocker:** I am in complete agreement there. I have noticed that there are a number of awards that are available that call themselves diversity awards that specifically exclude disability, and I would really like to see disability become a part of that conversation and be on that table. &



# Using Reflection

## Culturally Responsive Family Literacy Workshops

ELIZABETH GRAY



Captivated by a book!

*Imagine: family literacy workshops designed and implemented with the values and cultures of the families they serve.*

Many library literacy programs are more flexible and responsive than comparable adult education services bound by curriculum requirements, Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) funding requirements, and more. This article explores how family literacy workshops lean into the strengths of the public library to use traditional adult learning practices, such as reflection, in adaptable and responsive ways to build learning and social outcomes.

Public libraries have been leaders in parent education and early literacy through the Every Child Ready to Read (ECRR) Initiative and other means ([www.earlylit.net](http://www.earlylit.net)). California Library Literacy Services (CLLS), administered by the California State Library, provides state funds for adult literacy programs and related family literacy services.<sup>1</sup> Many libraries using CLLS family literacy funds provide early literacy and family literacy workshops for parents and caregivers.

Our library, in northern California, receives CLLS family literacy funding and provides regular family literacy workshops for parents with low literacy. We use our program funds to advance the public library's goal of helping children succeed in school by supporting parents in their role as their child's first teacher and best advocate.

Through the process of reflection, which we imbed in all aspects of program development, family literacy workshops provide information to families that addresses their specific experience and cultural background. The foundation of effective family literacy training is to support the parents' life experiences and

create learning opportunities from these shared experiences. Adult learning and engagement in their children's education depends on the effectiveness of the workshop in building trusting relationships.<sup>2</sup> In addition to using reflection, the workshop is best when using a trauma-informed approach—specifically addressing safety (emotionally and physically), peer support and mutual self-help, and cultural and gender issues.

To use reflection as a culturally responsive practice in a family literacy workshop, there must be a safe space to share. Key elements of a safe space are having a trained facilitator and using the participants' primary language. A facilitator trained in trauma-informed practices and nurturing parenting practices, in addition to ECRR, handles sensitive situations that may arise. While organizing a workshop, the library team may want to consider how participants are grouped—using their first language means people will be better able to express themselves.

Having a facilitator with the same or similar culture makes it more likely for participants' values and upbringing to be understood and recognized. A safe space means that workshop participants understand ground rules and that the ground rules reflect participants' values and cultures. A culturally responsive approach



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to a program such as family literacy is one that “... involves being attuned to and responsive toward not only the program itself but also its larger cultural context and the lives and experiences of program staff and participants.”<sup>3</sup>

As we built our family literacy programs, we didn’t use the term “culturally responsive” since it is not a well-known term in our library community. I am using it here to summarize the elements that we find best serve the communities we work with. Here is one definition from the Center for the Study of Social Policy:

Culturally responsive programs are those that are designed for a specific population and grounded in that group’s needs, values, and perspectives. To improve their effectiveness . . . programs . . . may be culturally adapted, meaning that some program elements, such as language or example scenarios, are modified to better meet participants’ cultural norms and values.<sup>4</sup>

Three methods keep our family literacy workshops grounded in the culturally responsive approach:

- use of natural language rather than a scripted language,
- use of reflection to welcome participants’ and staff’s life experiences including cultural background,
- and use of a well-trained facilitator to develop peer support within each workshop.

Grants abound with requirements that make it difficult to avoid forms and checklists when registering workshop participants. In our family literacy programs, we use these forms not as scripts but as guides; in this way, we hear authentic stories that better inform us about the information needs of our participants. By encouraging natural conversation over scripts, we bring the program in alignment with the needs of the participants rather than forcing everything to fit pre-determined grant outcomes.

In our workshop, we use reflection about the family, which helps acknowledge the whole person. We pose the question, “What does your family enjoy doing together?” This builds common understanding and can lead to reflections on common struggles. Our family workshops ask participants about what positive challenges they have faced. One parent shared their success in calling the school office about their child’s absence.

Often, once the group starts sharing, they find common struggles related to language, cultural, or economic barriers. For example, participants might share stories about the difficulties they have had arranging a meeting with their child’s teacher, and the group can build community over this common challenge. We find that many institutions are not able to adjust staff work schedules to meet with working parents. Therefore, one of the most impactful adaptations that we make for each program is adjusting the time and day of the workshops to accommodate the values and commitments of the participants.

This use of reflection helps build connections. Our family literacy coordinator Leticia Flores, who has a bachelor’s degree in early childhood education, emphasizes that shared experiences help participants feel safe to speak about their own challenges. When I asked her about the best way to build connections in workshops, she said that even above sharing the same language, she sees people build connections over shared challenges such as navigating their child’s school system or finding a good doctor.

When the group feels comfortable sharing, she brings the focus back to literacy. “What do you remember about your reading experiences when you were a child? What does learning together look like for your family?” These reflection questions are an adult learning technique—reflecting on their learning helps adults access their background knowledge and apply that to new learning.

Evidence-based parenting education practices affirm these positive effects. “Adults have a higher sense of self-direction and motivation when using their life experience to facilitate learning objectives. Adults are more focused on achieving goals when exposed to an environment like their own and that is based on their own family needs and interests.”<sup>5</sup>

Reflection by program managers and staff builds awareness of biases that might affect program development. When planning our family literacy workshops, we are guided by our grant requirements and commitment, yet we also make it a priority to include the following:

- Library staff who facilitate the workshop are from the same cultural background and speak the same language as the participants;
- Library staff who have agency and bring their cultural knowledge to the planning, implementation, and assessment;
- Facilitator(s) who will create a safe space for participants to voice concerns and share their challenges; and ensure that participants will have input on what they want to learn about and how the topic can help them in their daily life.

This extra planning is worth the effort since we see how participants become more engaged.

Building the workshop is an exercise in building a community of support. In the course of the workshop, the group will become a peer group and build relationships and friendships on common goals and challenges. They start to turn to each other for encouragement, help each other get to class, and to problem solve.

The facilitator can be an important part of the peer group by bringing in trusted people from various organizations and building the social capital of the group. In addition, the facilitator will probably communicate with participants outside of the workshop, either to make sure they can make it to class or to follow up and get feedback. We have found that our workshops using reflection and cultural responsiveness result in a group of parents who

want to be involved in more learning opportunities, whether at the library or at other community organizations that offer parenting classes and resources. Some of our participants have realized that they want to start their own family childcare business.

To create a culturally responsive workshop that allows reflection to be used effectively, use reflection as part of program development. The program manager, facilitator, and evaluator might ask themselves or each other, “How might your lived experience impact your view in developing this program?” In practice, our literacy team reflects each year on our effectiveness in reaching our community. We listen to what our participants wanted from the program and ask ourselves if we met that expectation and how we could do better. We reflect on our limitations, our cultural barriers, and our blind spots. As a team, we help each other see what otherwise might be missed. It is often difficult to see your own bias or know what you don’t know.

Used formally and informally, the practice of reflection in our program has shown great results. We see workshop participants returning to our program and other community programs with more agency, confidence, and leadership. We hear from our participants that they want more opportunities for community building, peer learning, and continued education. Family literacy workshops using reflection as a culturally responsive practice can truly achieve the public library’s goal of supporting parents in their role as their child’s first teacher and best advocate. &

### Yolo County Library Literacy Services staff:

- **Areli Duran**, Bachelor of Graphic Design. Areli extends our strategies to Library ESL services and, through her design skills, helps us communicate our core principles.
- **Leticia Flores**, Bachelor of Early Childhood Education, whose work informs this article, forges meaningful connections within the community, provides valuable resources for parents with young children, builds a strong network of support, and fosters a sense of belonging and unity in our community.
- **Becky McMannis**, BA English, provides individualized support to new Literacy participants and maintains data on instructional hours and learner goals.
- **Nancy Pacheco**, MA Sociology, MLIS, incorporated Family Literacy into our Adult literacy program and our first ESL class. Nancy brings her Sociology background to benefit every aspect of Literacy services.

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# Bibliotherapy

## Using Literature to Support Children's Mental Health

ROBIN A. MOELLER AND KIM BECNEL

Natural disaster, perfect storm, doomscrolling, coronapocalypse—these are just a few of the phrases that people, mostly adults, in the United States and around the world have been hearing and using with increased frequency, but especially since the COVID-19 pandemic of early 2020. These words carry with them a sense of danger, urgency, dread, and helplessness that can imbue adults with a sense of great anxiety.

Children are not immune to the feelings of adults in their lives. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has noted that “Children . . . react [to stress], in part, on what they see from the adults around them.”<sup>1</sup> In addition to the general anxiety sensed from adults, Bartlett, Griffin, and Thomson noted that “Children may also worry about their own safety and the safety of their loved ones, how they will get their basic needs met (e.g. food, shelter, clothing) and uncertainties for the future.”<sup>2</sup>

In writing about resources to help support children's emotional well-being during the COVID-19 outbreak, Bartlett, Griffin, and Thomson noted that, “Children tend to rely on their imaginations when they lack adequate information.”<sup>3</sup> Children's engagement with literature allows them to use their imaginations to develop solutions to their problems. The role that children's literature can have in helping children learn to cope,<sup>4</sup> deal with anxiety,<sup>5</sup> and develop resilience<sup>6</sup> has been documented by research. Literature has the ability to mirror a child's own experience while also showing them a window into what is possible and acting as a sliding glass door to empower children to act.<sup>7</sup>

The recent pandemic brought to light and exacerbated the fact that children are grappling with issues of mental health, including anxiety, depression, grief, and anger in staggering numbers.

This awakening has resulted in a publication boom for titles on these and related topics, increased public demand for such titles, and a rise in the number of librarians, educators, parents, counselors, caregivers, and other adults seeking guidance on navigating the literature to find the resources that they and the children in their lives need.

Books are one of the most ubiquitous, accessible, and powerful resources available. *Using Literature to Support Children's Mental Health* is an edited volume of essays that explores the intersections and interplay between mental health topics and picture books, chapter books, and graphic novels targeted at children ages birth to twelve. The goal of this collection is to help librarians, educators, counselors, and other adults evaluate, curate, and use books to promote mental and emotional well-being as well as to help children and families cope with mental health challenges.

Some of the chapters touch on challenges that adults in caregiving professions regularly seek resources for, such as books for children dealing with the cancer diagnosis of a relative, illnesses,



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*Mental Health* (Chicago: ALA Editions, 2025).



death, loss, and grief, and include suggested activities that can be paired with these titles to further assist young readers in the grieving and healing process. Adults looking for literature to help children understand, process, and cope with anxiety-provoking situations in their lives will find unique and effective ways to help through fantasy literature. Other chapters of this book focus on particular populations and supply important information and context that will help librarians and teachers better understand and serve these populations.

Certain chapters provide guidance on reaching historically underserved population groups such as Black girls, Muslim children, and young Latin American migrants. Other chapters

describe graphic novels that promote mental and emotional well-being, including those that depict common childhood mental health conditions such as obsessive-compulsive disorder and using children's literature to support the unique needs surrounding autistic mental health.

With conversations about children's mental health come the lessening of stigma and the search for resources to ameliorate identified problems and to stave off new ones. As former public and school librarians, we want this collection of essays to fill a void by laying out the exciting landscape of current children's literature and its potential to educate readers about mental health and promote their mental well-being. &

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# How to Know Every Children's Book in Your Library's Collection

(Hint: You can't. But here's what you can do to get close.)

LAURA RAPHAEL

**B**efore I became a librarian, I thought a librarian's job was to carry an exact catalog in your brain and then robotically spit out precise book titles in response to a customer query.

"Science fiction, character appeal, no spaceships? Ah, I have the perfect book for you: *Klara and the Son* by Kazuo Ishiguro! And it was just re-shelved on Tuesday morning, so let's go get that for you now!"

Yes, I also thought we would know when books were returned and re-shelved. In my mind, librarians were all-powerful and all-knowing! You can't blame me, though: library icon (and action figure!) Nancy Pearl was a librarian in my library system before she trekked to the Northwest and started asking everyone to read the same book.

I was nervous about this impossible task when I started as a paraprofessional baby librarian in the Readers' Library department for adult fiction and nonfiction of our large Central Library. There were so many books! And more were published every day! How could I know all of them?

Fortunately, my very kind colleagues and even kinder manager quickly (and kindly) let me know how ridiculous this was. You can't possibly know everything, and the project of doing so would be like eating an elephant . . . only the elephant keeps growing a trunk, an ear, a leg every other day, because a library's collection is a living organism, changing and growing all the time.

But they did let me in on a secret that has carried me through various roles in the library system, the last twelve years in children's services.

It's not about knowing it all. It's about developing a practice and processes to learn what you can and keep discovering what might match your readers' wants and needs. The attitude is less catalog-in-your-brain than surfing-the-waves-of-the-impossibly-large-ocean.

I humbly offer some of the ways I have tried to surf the wild, wonderful, wily ocean (or eat the ever-growing elephant) of children's titles: past, present, future.

## First, Set Your Attitude

Somehow, even though it's been twenty-four years since I stepped into a public library as an employee, that ideal of the perfect librarian still pops up as an expectation. I'm certain that if I just tried harder, did more, found the secret potion, that I really *would* know most children's books.

So, your first step is to banish this notion from your head space as much as you can! As in life, storytime crafts, and any French pastry I try to make, there is no such thing as perfection in libraries.



**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.





Learning every book in your children's collection is impossible, but it's still fun trying! Here, the Tulsa City-County Library's Children's Associate Kena Hardin reads to her son Wes in her library.

Instead, you need to think about this profession as an everyday opportunity for learning and growth. You may not remember all of the read-alikes for Dav Pilkey's *Dog Man* or most of the Newbery Award winners from the last twenty years, but you will get to the point when you can get close!

Remember that your goal should be a broad awareness of a bunch of different books, genres, and authors, and what kids tend to like, not necessarily a memorized list of specific titles. You are not a computer, spitting out exact information.

## Next, Find Your Resources

Your next task is to cast your net wide for the resources detailing children's books—whether award winners, bestsellers from the past, or ones coming out next month.

This is the fun part!

The easiest place to start is with printed resources (especially if your library subscribes to these) such as *Publishers Weekly*, *Booklist*, *School Library Journal*, and *Horn Book*, which include both handy reviews and articles rounding up top titles in different genres or themes. Check out their back pages, which list the starred titles in that publication. Additionally, "best of the year" round-up articles can be a great place to start.

Don't forget children's book-based blogs, podcasts, publisher newsletters, and even digital galley sites. (To get you started, see "My Favorite Children's Book Resources to Surf" in this article.)

For example, the Book Club for Kids with Kitty Felde podcast is short (about twenty-five minutes per episode), well-edited, and gives you a chance to hear actual kids and their thoughts about specific titles. I have found it to be a good way to get highlights of books kids like without actually reading them myself.

Then . . . ask your colleagues, both in your own library and out in the great world! How do they learn about children's books coming up? How did they learn about past titles? What are their go-to resources to learn more?

Finally, and this is the easiest resource of all because it's right in front of you most days: carts of returned books. Readers—especially kid readers—tell you what they like by what they check out. It's a great way to get a handle on emerging or changing tastes, too. (Suddenly, capybaras are the new "it" animal? What happened to axolotls? And surely we're getting to the end of the number of fairies that are possible

in the world . . . Or are we?)

## Then, Cultivate Your Processes and Create a Plan

Now consider how you will use these resources to cultivate your learning processes, and create a plan that will detail what you can do on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis to increase your knowledge and understanding of children's titles.

Here is an example of one plan.

- **Daily:** Choose one journal issue to open and choose an article or book review that looks most interesting to you to read or skim. Create a file in Word or use a notebook to jot down any notes you might have.
- **Weekly:** By the end of the week, you should have read between three and five articles or reviews from three to five journals. (Or, alternatively, from the same journal.) Look over your notes and add any about connections between the articles or new thoughts that have formed since reading them.
- **Monthly:** Read through your notes. Consider how you might use what you've learned in book talks, programs, or displays.

Another possible plan that is a little less time-consuming:

- **Daily:** Check one post on a blog or episode of a podcast per day to skim.

## My Favorite Children's Book Resources to Surf

Read Aloud Revival (RAR) podcast and website:  
<https://readaloudrevival.com/>

RAR continually has excellent lists of titles for specific purposes or genres. It is also short (about thirty minutes per episode) and features top writers and children's reading specialists.

American Indians in Children's Literature by Dr. Debbie Reese: <https://americanindiansinchildrensliterature.blogspot.com/>

Truly the GOAT of children's book bloggers, Dr. Reese never fails to introduce me to titles I should know about—all while giving her stringent and helpful analysis.

Fuse 8, a *School Library Journal* blog by Betsy Bird: <http://blogs.slj.com/afuse8production/>

Oh wait, another GOAT: Betsy Bird! Every year, I await her Thirty-One Lists in Thirty-One Days end-of-year book lists because they combine her signature wit and intelligence in highlighting books for all different kinds of kid readers. Her blog is more of the same, and I could not recommend it more.

The Open Book blog by Lee & Low: [leeandlow.com/blog/](http://leeandlow.com/blog/)

A great companion to the We Need Diverse Books website (<https://diversebooks.org/>), this blog focuses on race, diversity, education, and children's books—and is well-researched and easy to search.

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

While the Association for Library Service to Children blog doesn't exclusively focus on collections, it's a delightful mix of pieces that often relate to books that children love.

minutes after coming back for lunch. Or institute Magazine Mondays when you read through journals, Wednesday Walks where you listen to podcasts, etc.

- **Keep notes—or not.** Is it super-important to keep notes? It depends! Cognitive science tells us that we tend to remember most what we think about most deeply, so if you're thinking about titles deeply but not taking notes, you'll still likely remember a fair amount. Then again, referring to notes can set up further thinking, so at least consider it!
- **Talk with kids about books as much as you can!** Okay, you are likely already doing this, but set a goal to try to have at least a few more conversations with kids about books than you normally would. Bring up some titles you've learned about—check in with them about what sounds interesting—ask the last great book they read. It all counts!
- **Read a book in ten minutes.** No, seriously, this is possible. Look at the cover. Read the summary and any excerpted book reviews. Read the first few pages, a few in the middle, and the last chapter. It's not the same as reading the entire book, but you get a good idea of the appeal factors and what readers might enjoy about that book.
- **Books are for use, and so are Readers' Advisory tools, so use them!** If your library subscribes to the NoveList database or uses the Bibliocommons catalog product, these are both excellent tools to increase your knowledge and Readers' Advisory skills. Use them!
- **Develop a "back pocket" list of crowd pleasers.** It's not cheating to create a list of children's books you know well that will hit a lot of reading appeals and satisfy many different kinds of readers. I have lists for never-fail storytime picture books, broadly appealing graphic novels, and chapter books that combine adventure, humor, character, and heart. (I'm looking at you, anything ever by Erin Entrada Kelly, and *The Parker Inheritance* by Varian Johnson.)

## And One Last Word

All of this collection thinking came to a head recently for me when I shadowed my library's youth fiction selector in our Collection Management department. I wanted to get a closer look at the process and see if there was an exception to the "no librarian can know it all" myth.

She comes pretty close, but even she admitted that some books slip her notice occasionally, despite her nearly constant eye on everything collections.

That wasn't the big revelation, however. It was in watching her in action as she made her selections—digging into a resource here, quietly analyzing a review there, and in some cases, handling and reviewing the actual book to determine where it would best live in our collection.

- **Weekly:** Choose one or two blog posts or episodes to read or listen to completely.
- **Monthly:** Round up the most interesting ideas, titles, facts, and/or your thoughts related to the articles and podcasts and share in an email to your children's colleagues or in a post on a children's collection social media group.

## A Few Extra Tips!

Want some extra random tips that I've found useful?

- **Set a particular time to focus on your learning.** Say, every morning before you check in the holds cart, or always the fifteen

Was the vocabulary in this title too complex for Beginning Readers; did it belong in Juvenile Fiction instead? This review says one title is for ages 10 to 14 while another pegs it 13+; but it's part of a series, so how did we classify the earlier volumes, Tween or Young Adult? Oops, there were already forty holds on a title she'd only ordered two of; clearly this was going to be more popular than anticipated and she needed to order more to hit our five-to-one holds ratio!

It was fascinating and beautiful to watch: not a robotic catalog-in-brain librarian, but an elegant surfer of resources,

majestically anticipating the waves and minutely adjusting her stance and balance. Or a brilliant dancer, turning and moving to a now-familiar, now-unfamiliar tune, improvising some steps but then relying on her best and most honed routine to end with a flourish.

That is what I aspire to, and what I consider to be the ideal librarian now. You can't know it all, but you can make a concerted and daily effort to be open, to learn your collection widely, and to expand your knowledge in a joyful way. Surf's up! &

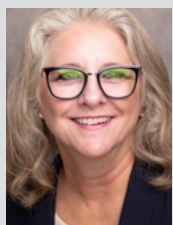


# Child Development Strategies That Work with *ALL* Children

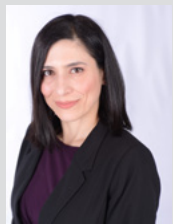
Betsy Diamant-Cohen, Dana Staser, and Lisa Sensale Yazdian



**Betsy Diamant-Cohen** is a children's librarian with a doctorate, an early literacy trainer, consultant, and author. She is known for translating research into practical activities with developmental tips and presenting these via webinars, engaging workshops, and online courses.



**Dana Staser** is a national keynote speaker, conference trainer, and consultant supporting early care and education staff and leaders working with young children aged birth to five. She provides engaging and transformative training/consultation that motivates and encourages participants in the work they do with children and families.



**Lisa M. Sensale Yazdian, Ph.D.** is an educational psychologist with experience supporting birth-adult learners in libraries and beyond. She currently manages education and engagement efforts at CET (PBS).

On November 15, 2024, we attended the Michigan Association for the Education of Young Children Infants and Toddlers Conference. The purpose was to provide a day of inspiration, learning, and networking for early childhood professionals, exploring the latest research, best practices, and innovative strategies for supporting infant and toddler development.

Although the conference was geared for caregivers of infants and toddlers, home-based caregivers, Early Head Start, Early On, Even Start, First Families, and administrators, children's librarians would have felt very comfortable there.

The first session was Finding Joy: Top Tips to Reduce Stress, Increase Your Joy Factor, and Experience the Genuine Happiness You Deserve by Raelene Ostberg, M.Ed. Since COVID, our work has become more stressful, and the library world is recognizing the need for librarians to reduce stress and increase joy; practical strategies such as taking sixty-second "pauses" for yourself—breathing in deeply, listening to music, or sitting quietly to give your body the opportunity to collect itself would be an easy addition to the day while having a great impact on decreasing stress.

At the most recent ALA conference, I attended a session by Becky Hass on the same topic, based on her new ALA Editions book *101 Seeds for Library Joy*. (See her article on p. 10).

One exhibitor that presented was Seedlings Braille Books for Children. This wonderful company uses transparent tape-like material to superimpose Braille over printed text, enabling books to become accessible to blind as well as sighted readers. They even have programs that give away free books, which can be found at <https://www.seedlings.org/free-programs/>.

The discussions, resources, and strategies provided in many presentations were hands-on, easily facilitated, and would be highly effective in a library setting or classroom. Here are some of the key takeaways from the sessions.

- Strong, trusting, and dynamic relationship, increasing sign language, and creating a literacy rich environment increase language and literacy in infants and toddlers. Use pictures or posters with written labels during activities, add sign language to the activity, even one or two words, and provide definitions of words when reading a book.
- Leveraging music and movement activities such as clapping/tapping to a rhythm or marching to a song supports children's learning in all developmental domains including language and literacy. Embedding music and movement throughout any activity increases engagement and supports retention of material. Add hand movements or back and forth verbal responses to activities such as rhyming books.
- Recognizing and matching a child's unique temperament supports children in being successful in learning and flourishing in their environment by decreasing anxiety and increasing confidence, and allows children to risk failure. Be aware of a child's pace in speaking or moving, how a child is willing to try or

needs encouragement or is easily frustrated. In facilitating any activity, attempt to match or support the child's approach to learning.

- Embedding the whole child approach (engaging visual, auditory, reading/writing, and kinesthetic learning) in activities increases the development of the infant/toddler brain and supports learning in all domains. Include movement or other hands-on opportunities during activities such as using props or having children following along with hand motions, narrate your actions while facilitating activities and encourage whole body movement throughout. When children are older, add reading and writing or drawing throughout the activity as well.

The conference sessions presented a slightly different view of literacy and musical activities for children that can supplement what we are already doing in our library programming. It also introduced some new vendors with items that could be valuable additions to children's rooms.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) has affiliates all over the nation that also hold regional conferences. To find if there is an affiliate or a conference in your state, visit <https://www.naeyc.org/get-involved/membership/affiliates>.

In addition, NAEYC holds a national conference every year; this year's conference will be held November 19–22 in Orlando. &

## Message in a Backpack

Message in a Backpack is a one-page resource for families in *Teaching Young Children*, NAEYC's magazine for preschool educators. The purpose of the column is to provide caregivers with practical strategies for supporting learning at home. It can be printed or copied and given to families, but the resource can also be used by librarians to generate early learning tips for storytimes and other programs. Each Message in a Backpack aligns with the *Teaching Young Children* issue theme. Here are some recent topics:

- Tinkering and Making at Home: Tips for Families
- Benefits When Families Speak Their Home Languages
- Ask Hello. How Do You Display Children's Art?
- Asking Questions to Stretch Your Child's Thinking
- Big Words for Little Learners: Building Vocabulary While Reading Together
- Planning a Trip? Encourage Your Child to Help
- Three Powerful Practices for Guiding Children's Behavior
- Building Partnerships with Your Child's Teacher
- Supporting Healthy Eating Habits: Tips for Families
- Encouraging Process Art at Home: Reaping the Benefits of Joy and Making

Find Message in a Backpack at [www.naeyc.org/resources/topics/message-backpack](http://www.naeyc.org/resources/topics/message-backpack).

# Bringing in the Boys

## Great Programming to Attract All

Kathleen McBroom



**Kathleen McBroom** has worked with children in many school and public libraries, and has taught students in grades preschool through graduate level. She is currently the School Library Media Practicum Coordinator with

Wayne State's School of Information Sciences in Detroit.

Children's library programming has seen tremendous growth over the past few decades with a profusion of creative and innovative offerings. Many of those center on and cater to previously overlooked audiences, ranging from indigenous peoples and other marginalized populations to physical, mental, gender, and neuro-divergent individuals. This long overdue emphasis on diversity and inclusion is exhilarating, and hopefully will become a standard component of all future library programming.

These often-ground-breaking presentations have generated considerable excitement in youth library services. But, as every overworked library professional knows, there are not always sufficient resources to go around. Invariably, when promoting new initiatives, some established concerns can be left to tend to themselves. Some librarians have expressed the feeling that one of these areas is programming directed at boys.

This population doesn't always get the recognition it deserves. Luckily, there are a multitude of practical, inexpensive, and alluring programs that can appeal to middle-grade boys. The purpose of this article is to explore themes, practices, and programming that appeal to guys in grades three through eight, in hopes that practitioners will find fresh ideas and renewed inspiration.

Before we go any further, it needs to be emphasized that these suggestions are intended to be inclusionary. Quality programs will attract children regardless of gender. If male attendance at current library events is not up to desired levels, take a look at what's being offered. Many young men may not go near anything featuring mermaids or unicorns, but some institutions assume a need to go way too far in the opposite direction.

Groups of boys may be stereotypically associated with lots of noise, physicality, mess, horseplay, explosions, mayhem, destruction, anarchy—in brief, all kinds of disruptive behaviors that don't align with traditional program offerings. Common myths? Boys won't sit still for storytelling. Boys won't participate in arts and crafts. Boys have no patience for organized, neat, quiet, civilized, contained activities. If any of these beliefs are reflected in programming offerings, stop blaming the audience. Reconsider content and delivery systems. And think about having respect for topics that interest kids in general.

What are some great programming ideas? While there is some data from a couple decades ago indicating that boys are drawn towards tactile experiences, most librarians who work with kids can attest to the popularity of hands-on activities for every audience. Unfortunately, a lot of traditional library programming skews towards sedentary, presentation-mode activities. Many children, regardless of gender, enjoy participatory activities. Tinkering. Experimenting. Rhythm, dance, and movement. Creating. Making. Teamwork. Sleuthing. Problem solving.

## Reach Out to Presenters

Here are affordable program ideas designed for the middle grade audience.

- Bring in local high school athletes (or college and university level players, when available.) Invite them during off-season and request demonstrations of basic techniques. Suggest they bring equipment and let kids try things on (hockey goalie masks, football shoulder pads.) Consider various sports: wrestling, pole vaulting, volleyball, Taekwondo. Suggest they talk about grit, sportsmanship, and teamwork. Local coaches should be able to suggest suitable candidates.
- Tap into local high schools, community colleges, and other educational entities for additional presenters who might be interested in sharing their particular interests (for many kids, there's nothing more exotic than a college student.) There tend to be all kinds of clubs and special interest groups on most campuses. DJs. Musicians and performers. Gamers. Online sports leagues. Photographers. Animators. Competitive LEGO® builders. Theater set-builders and costumers. Again, approaching faculty sponsors could be a first step or soliciting nominations from proud staff parents.
- Consider academic library colleagues at nearby venues who might curate special collections: music genres, comic books, baseball cards, local history curiosities.
- Tap into active hobbies. Does your community have running clubs? Consider outdoor adventure enthusiasts, like white water rafting and hiking guides, or chiropractors and physical therapists who could talk about general conditioning and sports training. Explore possibilities with anachronistic societies and Renaissance faire reenactors, and students and teachers of dance, martial arts, and other personal passions.

## You Have Ideas; Now What?

Here are some tips to getting your program ready to go.

- Screen your presenter in advance. The Comic Book Guy from *The Simpsons* may not be your ideal candidate! Interview, vet, share objectives, and agree on time limits and how questions and answers will be handled well ahead of time.
- Determine any honorariums or fees. Make sure presenters are aware of the library's policies on selling, advertising, or soliciting.
- Offer practice sessions, if feasible, and try to provide as much guidance and support as possible to help presenters be successful (especially first-timers.) Maybe offer to co-present. Suggest they bring along a buddy for support. Suggest incorporating visuals or related artifacts (samples to display or better yet, pass around.)

## Resources for Further Reading

**Amy Brown and Molly Meyers**, "Bringing in the Boys," *Children & Libraries: The Journal of the Association for Library Service to Children* 6 (1): 4-9.  
**Abby Johnson**, "Youth Matters. Nonfiction Programming," *American Libraries* 44 (5) 48, 2013.  
**Leonard Sax**, "The Boy Problem," *School Library Journal* 53(9): 40-43, 2017.

- Depending on budget, consider purchasing materials for quick make-and-take crafts or theme-related snacks. Pull related library materials and have them ready for check-out.
- Try to find new audiences with marketing. Advertise with Boys and Girls Clubs, youth sports leagues, batting cages, bowling alleys, and other local popular venues that attract this age group.
- For existing programming, like book clubs, author talks, and summer reading celebrations, build in boy-oriented and movement-friendly elements. Add some dad jokes and puns to established scripts. Never underestimate the power of having male teachers and librarians lead discussions, and actively recruit dads and other male caregivers to participate.
- Incorporate movement: take a break for a group stretch time, strike a pose, or stand up every time a certain cue word comes up. For contests, invite kids to vote with their feet: instead of raising hands, ask them to stand up and move to one side of the room or the other. Another option: provide each participant with four or five small colorful post-it notes and let them cast votes by walking around and attaching them to posters or pictures, creating instant pictograms. These types of activities may require organizational changes, such as increased staff or additional adult presence, or imposing limits on the numbers of participants (consider offering multiple smaller sessions.)
- Determine site considerations. It's important to allow sufficient room for unencumbered movement, flexible seating for teamwork, and plenty of workspace for hands-on projects. If furniture is a problem, consider working on floor mats. Solicit donations of foldable card tables. If space is an issue, find additional places to spread out. Get creative: the great outdoors. Courtyards. Basements. Gyms. Hallways.
- Concerned about noise? Warning colleagues ahead of time might be one way to mitigate annoyance (and perhaps solicit crowd-control assistance.) Anticipate mess and the need for extended clean-up times (and don't automatically go with plastic products. Consider green options: paper, plant-based, and compostable wipes, sheeting, garbage bags, etc.)
- Don't forget about passive programming. Make sure you're addressing topics that appeal to all audiences in virtual and



real-world book displays. What kinds of books have the most appeal for male audiences? There's a body of research suggesting boys have slight preferences for nonfiction, but seasoned practitioners know that great fiction will always find an audience. Just make a conscious effort to balance book displays with a mix of fiction and nonfiction, various genres, and formats (including audio and graphic offerings.) There's a plethora of established boy-magnet authors and there are always new writers coming along, so be sure to stay up to date with blogs and sites that feature up-and-comers.

- Actively solicit requests and purchase suggestions through interactive bulletin boards and suggestion boxes. Try to expand all information boards to include opportunities for interaction: set up processes where kids can respond to challenges or weigh in with opinions or vote on important issues: who would win in a battle between Goku and Saitama? A yeti and a griffin?

Additional passive programming can involve hands-on interactive activities left out for kids to experiment with on their own. Many kids have lots of access to screen time but relatively limited experience with actual toys and manipulatives (jigsaw puzzles, tangrams, blocks, magnets, etc.). Consider putting these offerings on high-top tables or old dictionary stands if toddlers have proximity to the area. It's inevitable that some of these gaming items will walk off from time to time, but soliciting contributions of gently-used items from staff and community members is an inexpensive way of keeping a ready supply of games on hand.

Taking advantage of local resources and adding hands-on, interactive opportunities are sure ways of energizing library programming for all participants. Hopefully these suggestions will spark interest and renew enthusiasm for practitioners. And, hopefully libraries will see increased numbers in program participants—across audiences. &

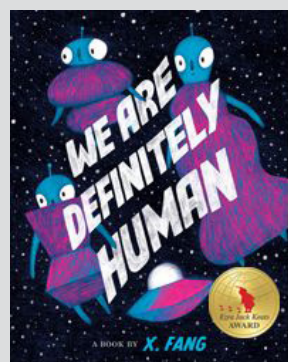
## McDaniel, Fang Win EJK Awards

Earlier this year, the Ezra Jack Keats (EJK) Foundation, in partnership with the de Grummond Children's Literature Collection at the University of Southern Mississippi (USM), announced the 2025 Ezra Jack Keats Award winners and four honor recipients. The annual award celebrates exceptional early career authors and illustrators for portraying the multicultural nature of our world in the spirit of author Ezra Jack Keats.

Breanna J. McDaniel received the 2025 writer award for *Go Forth and Tell: The Life of Augusta Baker, Librarian and Master Storyteller*, illustrated by April Harrison (Dial/Penguin); the 2025 illustration award was given to X. Fang for *We Are Definitely Human* (Tundra/Penguin).

Writer honors went to Antwan Eady for *The Last Stand*, illustrated by Jarrett and Jerome Pumphrey (Knopf) and Carlos Matias for *Emergency Quarters*, illustrated by Gracey Zhang (Katherine Tegen Books, HarperCollins). Illustrator honors went to Kara Kramer for *Ernő Rubik and His Magic Cube*, written by Kerry Aradhya (Peachtree) and Bo Lu for *Bao's Doll*, written by Bo Lu (Abrams).

On winning the writer award, McDaniel said, "During my MA at Simmons University, I completed a project on Ezra Jack Keats and thought I knew all there was to know about him and his work. Imagine my surprise years later, while completing research, for *Go Forth and Tell* when I learned "my Keats" was mentored by "my Augusta Baker!" Wow! I'm immensely humbled and honored to sit at the meeting of these two giants through this award."



On winning the illustrator Award, Fang said, "I am tremendously honored to receive the EJK Award and join its remarkable legacy. My book is about being kind to strangers, who may look or act differently. It's about small caring gestures that can reverberate throughout the galaxy. This book was made possible by the countless acts of kindness shown to me throughout my life. I wish for all young people to experience the same."

*The Ezra Jack Keats Foundation has fostered children's creativity and love of reading since 1964. For more information, visit [www.ejkef.org](http://www.ejkef.org).*

# Failure IS an Option

Amanda Murphy, Chelsea Arnold,  
and Marybeth Kozikowski



**Amanda Murphy** is the Brookfield (OH) Branch Manager of the Warren-Trumbull County Public Library;



**Chelsea Arnold** is the Family Services Coordinator/Manager of the Children's Center at the Central Library of Rochester & Monroe County (NY);



**Marybeth Kozikowski** is a Children's Librarian at Sachem Public Library in Holbrook, NY. They are members of ALSC's Managing Children's Services Committee.

**W**e all experience it. Whether you are just starting out or a twenty-year veteran, a library assistant, librarian, or manager, it's going to happen. Something—a program, a new service—you think will work just doesn't or a difficult situation occurs and doesn't go the way you hoped.

## Program Fails

Imagine: You've planned a fun, fall-themed cookie decorating program for elementary students. Registration for twenty-five seats fills up quickly. You've purchased supplies, made your samples, set up the program, and waited. *No one comes.* While you and the rest of the staff get to enjoy some unexpected sweet treats, you feel like you've failed and wasted money. Could anything have prevented this outcome?

*In this case, there ended up being a big, somewhat last-minute Boy Scout event that day that many of those registered attended. Lessons learned: When registering, ask the adults to call if the child can no longer attend and, when possible, contact those families a couple days prior to remind them of the program.*

Sometimes the reason is out of your control, especially when scheduling programs months in advance. Bad weather keeps families from attending preschool yoga on the town square. Your local school district schedules their Grinchmas event on the same date and time as the library's winter open house or a huge community event takes place on Family Game Night.

Sometimes it's not the outreach storytime you've put together, but rather a group of preschoolers who have ants in their pants, their excitement making it difficult to sit still, and the teachers aren't helping to keep the kids in their listening shapes with their listening ears fastened on tight. Or what seemed to be a fun, age-appropriate craft is too difficult for little hands.

Youth services specializes in programming and outreach. As managers, we strive to show our staff that we have the experience and abilities to successfully run events, even if most of our programming took place in the past. It's important that others see that we have what it takes to get the job done. However, it's equally important that when something fails, we are willing to recognize the issue and learn from the experience. We can also use our past experiences to help our staff navigate situations that may be new to them.

## Budgetary Fails

One of the most challenging aspects of managing a department is budgeting. Many library workers, even managers, don't have a background in accounting or experience in managing a budget. Ask questions, seek guidance from colleagues or training from your administration; there are resources to help you (more on that later).

## Personnel Fails

While managing people frequently provides success, it may lead to seemingly endless failures.

Whether staff is inherited or you've hired them yourself, there's always the possibility that personalities will clash. If it seems like there's an issue between you and an employee, sit back and ask yourself—and answer honestly—where the breakdown in the professional relationship is occurring. Perhaps they are purposefully being obstinate. But it could be that they work best with a different type of management style—and managers need to accommodate that—or the staff member is unclear about their duties and reluctant to ask about them.

There's a difference between telling an employee that something won't work and allowing them the freedom to try and fail. Even if you know you could swoop in and easily prevent a negative outcome, allowing your staff to fail is important. An employee problem-solving on their own may devise an innovative solution. It's essential to create an atmosphere where staff feels safe to ask for help, trusting it will come without judgement or premature intervention.

*Yes, These Fails Actually Happened:*

- *Do not give a child a full bottle of paint in a craft program.*
- *Tying knots? Not a guaranteed child skill.*
- *Omitting the phrase "dress for a mess" in program descriptions leads to angry parents.*

Full staff or one-on-one meetings are an excellent time to discuss plans for the future as well as reflect on what went well and not so well in the previous month. Libraries should welcome staff with

new ideas even if they might not be successful. This may not be the case in all libraries across the U.S., but many of us won't lose our jobs if one of our programs or initiatives doesn't work out as planned. We can afford to take risks, so we have a special obligation to take chances in an effort to bring new ideas to our patrons.

## ALA Resources for Success

Fortunately, ALA has resources to help librarians avoid failure, support professional development and in turn, better serve the community. ALA eLearning (<https://elearning.ala.org/>) describes itself as "the leading global content provider of courses, webinars, and customized eLearning content for library and information workers in all types of libraries and related organizations." Designed to meet evolving learning needs, this resource brings together content from every office and division of ALA in one place. New events are added all the time; search and browse for fee-based eCourses and webinars as well as free events.

At a recent N.Y. State library conference, Sam Helman, president-elect of ALA, offered these encouraging words, "Mistakes are the fastest way of growing." It's reassuring to know that while failure is a fact of life, you have resources to help and plenty of company.

Some of ALA's eLearning topics include:

- *Asking for Help in a Helping Profession*
- *Human Resources Crash Course for Library Managers*
- *Essential Project Management Skills for Library Workers*
- *It's a New Day, So Be a Great New Boss*
- *Budget & Finance &*

# Growing Together

## School Outreach and Advocating for Staff Growth

Anne Price



**Anne Price** is Children's Librarian at the North Platte (NE) Public Library and co-chair of the ALSC Public Awareness and Advocacy Committee.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the children's department at the North Platte (NE) Public Library had four staff members, two full-time and two part-time. Our library serves Lincoln County, with a total service population of around thirty-two thousand.

When I came onboard in late 2021, it had dwindled to just a full-time librarian and a part-time assistant. Programs and participation were still slow to pick up after the height of the pandemic, and at first regaining staff was not an immediate need.

One of my primary goals in my first year at this library was to create partnerships with organizations serving children and caregivers. I began attending the High Plains Early Childhood Collaborative Action Team meetings in 2022 to begin fostering these connections. I became connected with the early learning coordinator for the North Platte Public School District and began visiting the seven preschool classes in the district. Once this outreach began, the need for additional staff became more apparent, and the need continued to grow once outreach visits to the after-school program began as well.

In the 2023-2024 academic year, the library visited all seven preschool classes and all seven after-school program sites for a total of sixty-two outreach programs over the course of the year and five onsite visits to the summer program hosted by the school district. In total, outreach visits had more than two thousand participants and accounted for 126 hours of staff time during the 2023-2024 fiscal year.

Retaining these statistics was helpful to advocate for both the library and for the district's after-school program, which is funded as part of the 21st Century Learning Centers program. The library has completed surveys and letters of support for continued funding of the program, and the program staff have helped the library demonstrate the need for additional staff to support our outreach goals.

City administration was presented with both the numbers of outreach program attendees and employee hours dedicated to outreach programming in the 2023-2024 fiscal year as preliminary discussions for the 2024-2025 fiscal year began. The proposed budget included an additional part-time library associate in the children's department, and, upon approval, the position was hired for in November of 2024.

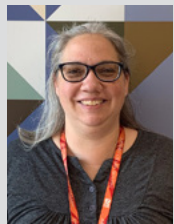
The additional staff has allowed for monthly, instead of quarterly, visits to each after-school site, and the addition of the Head Start center to the preschool outreach schedule. It also freed another staff member's schedule to allow for another in-library preschool storytime session at a time that had been requested by parents and caregivers, furthering our reach and impact inside and outside the library walls.

The success of this advocacy to both school and city administrations is due to both the quantitative impact on library statistics and support from school district staff finding value in the outreach programs and advocating for their continuation and growth. Finding these stakeholders in our community has been one of my greatest successes in my current position, and I look forward to fostering a community of learning for our children and families. &



# ALSC Member Profiles

Melissa Sokol



**Melissa Sokol** is Children's Services Librarian at Wilmington Stroop Branch of Dayton (OH) Metro Library.

Ewa Wojciechowska,  
Youth Services Librarian,  
New Castle (DE) Public Library



## Why do you stay involved with ALSC?

ALSC is full of inspirational library workers who I continuously love working with and learning from. Whenever I meet with committee members, I become even more excited about my own work, as I'm able to speak with other passionate professionals from all over the country. I've also learned how much I enjoy presenting, attending conferences, and sharing ideas with others. I have grown professionally in numerous ways thanks to my time contributing through committees, and I cannot express how incredible the experience has been.

## What challenges you in librarianship?

My focus is on providing better programs and services for underserved families; libraries are uniquely positioned to improve their communities. We cannot and should not endeavor to solve every problem, as it's an impossible task to completely pick up the slack where government services fall off, but there is definitely a whole lot of good we're able to put out into the world.

I love to offer any extra beneficial service I can, which includes for example: mobile vision clinic appointments where children can get a free eye exam and glasses through a partnership with a local organization; free dental health screenings for children with a partnering dental office; free baby formula available for pickup through partnership with the Food Bank of Delaware; free coat giveaways each winter through partnership with Operation Warm; and my own mobile summer book giveaway program in which I visit underserved neighborhoods in our service area to spread library joy. I am always looking for new ways where we can fill in the gaps and meet the needs of our littlest patrons and their families.

## What brings you joy in librarianship?

I feel so much joy whenever I interact with any family at the library. My favorite part of my job is making the library a fun and safe place for children so that they can associate reading and learning as positive activities. Every single time, without fail, if I am having a bad day, it's immediately improved after seeing one of my little patrons.

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

I love to match a child's interests with the book that's perfect for them! I'm especially happy that we now have so many more inclusive books to choose from, so that every child can see themselves in the stories they read. I think it's so important to have protagonists from every culture, background, and ability, because it reflects the truth of the beautifully diverse world that we live in.

### What is your favorite ALSC memory?

I got to attend and present at the ALSC National Institute this past year in Denver; it was such a fun and exciting experience! I really believe that children's librarians are some of the kindest people you'll ever meet, and it was so nice to attend a conference made just for us.

## Cassie Chenoweth, Youth Services Librarian II, Cobb County (GA) Public Library

### How has ALSC contributed to your work in libraries?

ALSC has made me a more thoughtful, intentional librarian. I love learning from other librarians about what they are doing at their library, what works, what doesn't. I've made great relationships through ALSC that are beyond just professional.



### Why do you stay involved with ALSC?

I love the community I have built within ALSC. I love being able to speak the same "children's librarian" language with members. The work ALSC does to support library workers who work with children is exceptional. I wouldn't be where I am in my career without the support of fellow ALSC members.

### What brings you joy in librarianship?

The relationships I've built in the library. I love seeing those same babies week after week in storytime grow into lifelong library lovers. I once had a caregiver tell me what a difference baby storytime has made in her life by introducing her to other caregivers with similar aged children. Storytime isn't just for the littles!

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

Anything by Audrey and Don Wood. One of my favorite books as a kid was *The Little Mouse, the Red Ripe Strawberry, and the Big Hungry Bear*. It's a great read aloud with gorgeous illustrations. Just about all their books are great for storytime! I also love Ryan Higgins's *We Don't Eat Our Classmates*. It's a great twist on the traditional back-to-school books.

### What is your favorite ALSC memory?

At ALSC 101 at ALA Annual in 2019, I won a ticket to the Newbery-Caldecott-Legacy Awards Banquet that night. It was so fun hearing some of my favorite children's authors speak at such an exciting event. Being surrounded by people who love children's literature as much as I do was a feeling I'll never forget!

## Dr. Claudette S. McLinn, ALSC Vice-President/ President-Elect 2024-2025, Executive Director, Center for the Study of Multicultural Children's Literature, Inglewood, CA

### What's your best ALSC memory?

Winning the 2020 ALSC Distinguished Service Award. When 2019-2020 ALSC President Cecilia McGowan announced this award in January 2020 during ALA Midwinter, I was overwhelmed by the warm reception and standing ovation that I received. In June 2020, I gave my acceptance speech during the ALSC Membership Meeting via Zoom due to the pandemic.



### What is your favorite book to read aloud?

*Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak is a favorite because this book brings out the inner child in me as well as in the listener, and I can make great growling sounds. (Smile.) Another favorite book to read aloud is *The Snowy Day* by Ezra Jack Keats. Back in the day, this book was the only book with an African American character that I could buy at any bookstore. The boy, Peter, was an endearing child to whom children could easily relate. As a matter of fact, when I co-owned a children's bookstore, many of the African American parents who shopped there believed that the book's author, Keats, was black.

### What is your favorite part about working with youth?

I worked for the Los Angeles Unified School District, the second largest school district in the country. At the middle school site, I loved teaching library skills to the students and coordinating the book clubs. As a field administrator and supervisor, I loved planning and implementing teacher-librarian and library aide in-service and professional development training.

### What do you do to reset during stressful times?

During stressful times, I meditate, walk, and practice Qigong.

### What are you most passionate about in Children's Services?

My passion is introducing children, parents, and caregivers to multicultural books. Living in my Southern California community, I was exposed to many multicultural groups. I yearned to read books about other cultures as well as books about my own. At the time, there were not many books that I could read about people who looked like me and my friends. And this passion is still with me. &

# ALSC Products!

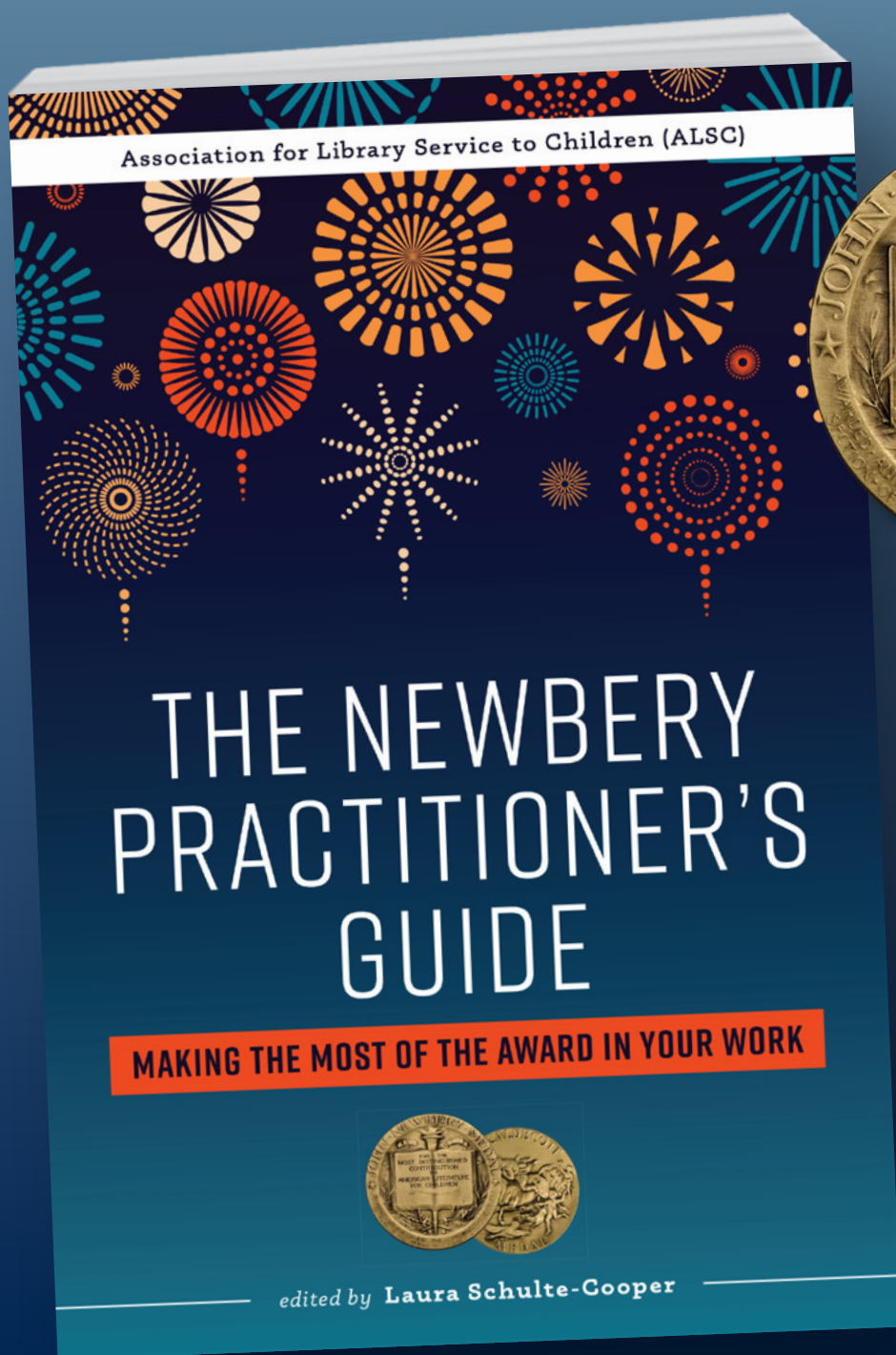
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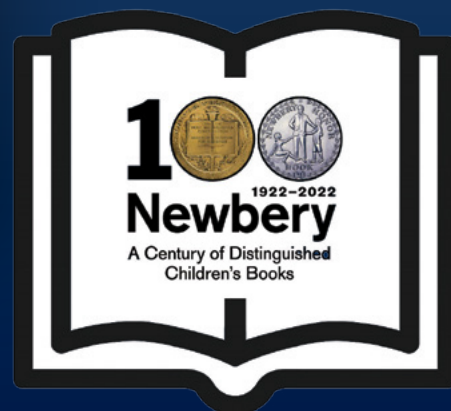


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