

EDITORIAL BOARD LIAISON COLUMN



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Inclusive Art and Public Library Partnerships

When I first glimpsed the Google folder filled with articles for the March/April issue of *Knowledge Quest*, I knew that I had made the best decision to serve as the editorial board liaison for this issue.

POPPING OPEN THE ARTICLES one by one and seeing the connections the authors made to Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Mathematics (STEAM), with the emphasis on the "A," and the library brought back so many great memories of my time as a school librarian and my time serving as a coordinator in a district where I engaged with 22 other amazing school librarians.

Typically, the liaison article gives the reader an overview of what the issue is going to be about, but in this instance, the guest editors did a robust job providing that overview in the article, "School Librarianship and the 'A' in STEAM." What does that mean for my column? It means that my liaison column will be a little bit different.

I immediately thought of my friend and public librarian, Stacy Allen. Stacy started her career teaching art, switched gears and became a special educator, and switched gears once more to find herself working as a children's librarian at a public library. I felt it would be an amazing connection to reach out to Stacy, a visual artist and writer, share with her what this issue of *Knowledge Quest* was all about and get some of her thoughts on how art and libraries connect. And while Stacy is currently in a public library setting, she has over 25 years in the



"Osprey." Collaborative art project for World Migratory Bird Day shared by Stacy Allen, children's librarian at Calvert Library's North Beach Branch

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world of K-12. Many of the ideas she shared with me would be scalable for putting the "A" in STEAM in our school libraries and connect with the ideas shared by the authors of this issue.

Stacy and I chatted on FaceTime about her new role in the public library and how she is bringing her experience with art and K-12 into her practice, including how she's partnering with local schools in some of her programming to make the library more inclusive.

Library Art League

One of the programs the library is offering that connects to the "A" in STEAM is the *Library Art League*: I immediately thought of the *Justice League* for tween and teen artists. The program is available at several branches of the county library system: Each month, tweens and teens gather to create art based on a theme. Last month, the library connected literacy and art with the theme of creating your own zine. Another project connecting what tweens and teens are clamoring for is creating Japanese manga characters using the chibi style.

School librarians know that manga is incredibly popular, making this art activity quite the draw (no pun intended). These could easily translate into a makerspace activity in the school library or, if the library is open at lunch time, a station where learners could relax, make art around a theme, and be the superheroes of the art and library world.

Adaptive and Inclusive Art

During the final two years that Stacy and I worked together, our offices were housed at an amazing school for learners who had needs that could not be met elsewhere. We developed a school library program, and Stacy and a special educator developed a writing program for learners that was inclusive and adaptive. The program included an "author's chair" where learners could share their work.

It was so loved by the learners and staff alike that Stacy approached her supervisors at the public library to work on a program that would be inclusive and combine art and literature. It's still in the planning stages, but rolling out soon. The central idea is to create a shared experience for everyone who participates: looking at art, making art with materials similar to what the artist used, and having books for checkout on the artist and about art. But most importantly, having the artist's chair, where everyone can share their art and feel welcome and appreciated for their contributions to the art world.

Connections

One of the most amazing things about all the programming happening is that there is a strong partnership among the local schools, the school librarians, and the public library programs that enable everyone to work together to bring the "A" in STEAM from the school library to the public library and to the community. As you explore the articles written for this issue of *Knowledge Quest*, I encourage you to think about ways that you can bring the joy of art, music, writing, and storytelling into your school library and how you can partner with your public libraries—with an inclusive lens for all.