

KNOWLEDGE QUEST



SCHOOL LIBRARY-LED COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

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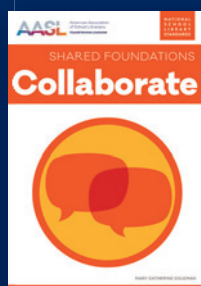
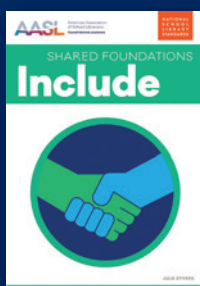
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KQ

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on this issue.



It is important for school librarians to be literacy leaders at their schools.

Opportunity: Strengthening Your School's Reading Community

Kathy Lester, 2022–2023 AASL President | kathylester.lib@gmail.com

The school library is the hub of the school learning community. School librarians support teaching and learning through collaborations with administrators, counselors and social workers, classroom teachers, parents, the public library, and other community organizations. School librarians provide many services, including teaching media literacy skills, providing a safe space for students, supporting STEM and technology integration, providing equitable access to resources, and creating a reading community. Therefore, school librarians have many opportunities to work with both the school community and the wider community to enhance student learning. One important opportunity based on our current educational landscape is the opportunity for school librarians to strengthen the reading community at their schools.

The results of the spring 2022 administration of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) were released in October 2022 and show the largest decline in reading scores since 1990 (NAEP n.d.). About one-third of students in fourth and eighth grades cannot read at even the basic achievement level (Sparks 2022). Policy makers and administrators will be looking for ways to strengthen students' reading achievement. Thus, there is an opportunity for school librarians to work with their school community—

including school administrators, classroom teachers, parents, and community partners—to reverse these negative trends.

It is important for school librarians to be literacy leaders at their schools. The International Reading Association's Literacy Leadership Brief: *The Essential Leadership of School Librarians* identifies three tenets to ensure the literacy leadership role of school librarians: school librarians as collaborators, school librarians as advocates of literacy equity, and school librarians as providers of access (ILA 2022).

School Librarians as Collaborators

It is important for school librarians to collaborate with administrators, classroom teachers, and others to support literacy initiatives at their schools. The AASL position statement "The School Librarian's Role in Reading" (AASL 2020) provides excellent information on reading promotion, instruction, resources, and services developed around the AASL National Standards Shared Foundations. Aligned with the Shared Foundation of Collaborate, the school librarian collaborates to plan and teach inquiry-based lessons that help learners increase reading comprehension. School librarians also collaborate to integrate reading comprehension strategies into library instruction.

Students will read more when they have choice in what they read and when they can find choices that are relevant and interesting to them.

Tammy S. Gruer and Karen M. Perry's article "Yes, School Librarians Teach Reading" in the May/June 2020 issue of *Knowledge Quest* is a must read. Gruer and Perry list key reading skills taught and supported by school librarians beyond providing access to books:

- teaching story structure through sequencing, literacy elements, and parts of a book,
- expanding vocabulary through rhyming, decoding, and keywords, and
- constructing meaning through retelling and summarizing, inference, and character study and visualizing.

Multiple studies (Lance and Kachel 2018) have found that test scores are higher in schools where school librarians plan collaboratively with classroom teachers and specifically spend more time doing the following:

- instructing students, both with classroom teachers and independently,
- planning collaboratively with classroom teachers,
- providing professional development to teachers,
- meeting regularly with the principal,
- serving on key school leadership committees,
- facilitating the use of technology by students and teachers,
- providing technology support to teachers, and
- providing reading incentive programs.

School Librarians as Advocates of Literacy Equity

School librarians support intellectual freedom. They help develop and support administrators with collection development and reconsideration policies. School librarians professionally curate age-relevant, inclusive library collections with resources to support school curricular needs, personal learning, and choice reading.

There are many benefits for learners to having access to a wide range of reading material. The Unite Against Book Bans organization's "Empowered by Reading" 2022 report specifically lists benefits as:

- promoting student achievement,
- enhancing youth wellbeing, and
- contributing to community cohesion.

Promoting Student Achievement

Students will read more when they have choice in what they read and when they can find choices that are relevant and interesting to them. When they read more, their reading skills improve.

Enhancing Youth Wellbeing

Giving students access to books that reflect difficult topics that youth may face allows them to explore struggles in a safe way. It helps students consider different options and perspectives, and think about consequences of decisions.

Contributing to Community Cohesion

Giving students access to a wide variety of books helps foster empathy, tolerance, and connection.

School Librarians as Providers of Access

School librarians advocate for students' regular access to the school library and its resources.

A solution for book deserts (geographical areas where books are difficult to obtain), at least for school-age children, is to make sure that all students have equitable access to school libraries staffed by certified school librarians. The school library and the school librarian are the principal sources of reading materials for most students. This is especially important for

If your school, your district, or your state has literacy teams working to improve reading achievement, it is very important for school librarians to reach out and make sure that school librarians are part of the team.

students from underserved communities, students with inequitable access to resources, and students with reading difficulties.

Literacy Teams

If your school, your district, or your state has literacy teams working to improve reading achievement, it is very important for school librarians to reach out and make sure that school librarians are part of the team. School librarians are experts at building reading communities by collaborating with the entire school community and beyond, by advocating for literacy equity, and by providing access for all students.

School Library Community

In this issue of *Knowledge Quest* focusing on community, it is also important to recognize the opportunities available for school librarians who are members of professional learning networks: their state and national associations. Through the professional communities of professional associations, school librarians can share best practices and ideas around building a strong reading community in their schools, their districts, and their states. We are all stronger when we stand together, support each other, and share ideas.

Kathy Lester, 2022–2023 President of AASL, is a school librarian at East Middle School in Plymouth–Canton Community Schools in Michigan. She is also an ALA Councilor-at-Large and serves on ALA’s Committee on Library Advocacy (COLA). She is active in her state association, the Michigan Association for Media in Education (MAME). She is a past-president of MAME and serves as a co-chair for its Advocacy Committee. Kathy also serves on the advisory council of two Institute of Museum and Library Services Grant Projects: *School Librarian Investigation—Decline or Evolution?* (SLIDE) led by Project Director Debra E. Kachel and Principal Investigator Keith Curry Lance, and *Restoring Urban School Libraries* (RUSL) with Project Director Kafi Kumasi.

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Each of the contributors has taken the challenges we all have faced over the past three years and used them as opportunities to raise the visibility of the school library—and its librarian—within their communities, whatever those communities may be.

Creatively Creating Communities Strengthens Connections

David Bilmes | Bilmesd1@southernct.edu

No school librarian is successful in a vacuum. We can't just sit in our offices (if we have one!) and keep to ourselves. We need to find ways to make connections. We need to create communities of learners, linking up with a wide variety of people.

For most of us, we are the only school librarian in our building. In my twenty-year career, I was always a solo school librarian. In my last position, which lasted six years, I didn't even have the luxury of a library aide. To make connections and create community connections, I often had to think outside of the box.

When I took over a high school position where there was virtually no culture of classroom teachers collaborating with the school librarian, I was desperate for a way to get students and staff into the beautiful space of the library media center. Inspired by a Listening Lunch program I had read about that took place at a Massachusetts high school, I came up with a similar idea: Live at the LMC! After getting permission from my principal, I approached our two performing-arts teachers and asked if they would be willing to work with me to schedule bimonthly performances in the library media center featuring student and staff performers. They loved the idea of giving their students a chance to showcase their talents, and the program was a huge hit. Teachers signed up to bring their classes to the LMC for twenty-minute performances. Student performers included not only instrumentalists and vocalists, but also young people who did poetry recitations and a comedy skit. Several staff members showed off their talents as well, including

The scope of the communities we create is limited only by the scope of our imagination.

a world languages teacher who was a talented mime. The performances drew large crowds of both students and staff into the school library—people who would otherwise rarely come into the space.

Tying into the issue theme "Opportunity for Community," the contributors to this issue of *Knowledge Quest* have shared what they've done in their school libraries to benefit learners and the broader community. As you read their articles, you will see that these librarians were also not afraid to think outside the box. They have demonstrated that we need to expand our concept of what a community is, and seize that new understanding as an opportunity to make our programs more visible as we support learners. Each of the contributors has taken the challenges we all have faced over the past three years and used them as opportunities to raise the visibility of the school library—and its librarian—within their communities, whatever those communities may be. The first Common Belief in the AASL Standards states: "The school library is a unique and essential part of a learning community" (AASL 2018, 11). It's up to us to be creative about who makes up those communities and how we can interact with them.

The content experts for this issue Matt King and Jenna Kammer set the tone with their article about the importance of school library-led community engagement. For example, one way the Missouri Association of School Librarians helped shift the focus on school libraries from one of negativity to positivity was to create an “I Love My Library” contest. Students throughout the state submitted short essays on the topic, with the winners’ school libraries receiving \$250 prizes to buy books. In addition to giving examples of how school libraries have risen to challenges, King and Kammer also provide a list of suggestions on how to strengthen our school libraries by engaging with our communities.

As anyone who has had therapy dogs at their school knows, the eyes of students and staff always light up when animals visit. Stephanie Persson’s students were not only dealing with the effects of the pandemic but also had to deal with gun violence that resulted in a student being shot and killed in one of the school district’s parking lots. After reading Jarrett J. Krosoczka’s autobiographical graphic novel, *Hey, Kiddo*, Persson came up with the idea for a “Healing through Literature, Art, and Goats” program. The program, described in her article, was funded by an AASL Inspire Special Event grant, and got a wide range of staff members involved, including the school counselors, who held small-group discussions with students after reading Krosoczka’s book. The goat visit didn’t turn out exactly as planned, but the program was still a big hit.

Jen Gilbert was also worried about the effects of remote learning and isolation on her students during the pandemic, and, like Persson, she made good use of an ALA grant. Gilbert used the grant to purchase 156 titles—many of which were selected by students—and then met with learners in small groups to discuss the books. The themes of the books served as springboards to other discussions, helping the students regain and relearn the social skills they had struggled with after returning to in-person learning. Her article describes how by using literature focused on compassionate empathy she was able to help her students emotionally.

Nothing engages students more than authentic learning opportunities. Amanda Hurley’s article describes how a collaboration with a math teacher has resulted in a semester-long project with Advanced Geometry students. Hurley, who along with her math teacher colleague Sarah Zehnder, was the 2021 recipient of AASL’s Collaborative School Library Award, also provides a useful list of ways to facilitate collaboration and build relationships with a variety of different communities. The projects Hurley and Zehnder do each year with the Advanced Geometry students get the public library, the local university, and

school district officials involved, connecting all of these communities with their own school.

The scope of the communities we create is limited only by the scope of our imagination. That is evident in Valerie Rupe DiLorenzo’s article, which also features expanding our idea of community far beyond our own school walls. While she describes several student-centered initiatives inside her own school, she also writes about several initiatives involving not only her own students, but students from around her state. A consistent theme of her article is the importance of making sure our community includes not only our students, but also our students’ voices. DiLorenzo describes how she found innovative ways to get her students engaged in taking ownership of their school library.

As we move forward, still trying to recover from the challenges of teaching during a pandemic and with even more challenges ahead, we need to continue to be creative in getting as many stakeholders as possible in our communities involved with our library programs. The more we do so, the more we can raise our positive profile, support our learners, and give us more support going forward. The authors in this issue have shown us the way.

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FEATURE

SCHOOL LIBRARY-LED



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COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



A study conducted in the United Kingdom found that reading, which can be defined as reading for pleasure or reading for empowerment and information, has the potential to reduce loneliness, improve mental health, and increase opportunities for young people (Hilhorst, Lockey, and Speight 2018). Some of the study's findings suggest that regular readers are less lonely, less depressed, and have higher test scores than their peers. In addition, reading can help a person to understand their own (and others') conditions and experiences. The authors concluded that reading should play a central role in addressing the most pressing challenges in society, suggesting that more reading programming should be available within communities.



A reading professor posed a question to the class: "Why do we read?" Discussion followed about the reasons. Do we read to gather information, to learn new things, or for enjoyment? The professor asked the class to watch *Shadowlands*, a movie about C. S. Lewis. In the movie, one character recalled his father saying, "We read to know we are not alone."

The ability to connect students through story has become challenging over the last few years, as so many of us have experienced firsthand. The irony is that, even when surrounded by books that provide connection and solace, many school librarians feel alone and isolated. Teaching through a global pandemic, a rise in book challenges, and navigating newly enacted laws pertaining to school and classroom libraries are additional obstacles school librarians face that compound a feeling of isolation. Though a school librarian may feel alone, librarians are experiencing these problems together. To confront this sense of isolation, school librarians can achieve a positive impact by creating inclusive communities for their students, while also engaging with their own professional communities to increase connection. Even though the last few years have been challenging, this circumstance presents an opportunity to strengthen school libraries.

Although there is no single solution to the problems librarians face today, drawing upon the strategy of school library-led community engagement offers one way to bring positive change to schools. The American Library Association has described community engagement as "the process of working collaboratively with community members—be they library customers, residents, faculty, students or partner organizations—to address issues for the betterment of the community" (ALA n.d.).

Intentional community engagement is a strategy that aligns with the Key Commitment of the Include Shared Foundation in the *National School Library Standards for Learners, School Librarians, and School Libraries*: "Demonstrate an understanding of and commitment to inclusiveness and respect for diversity in the learning community" (AASL 2018, 35).

This issue of *Knowledge Quest* presents several examples of school library-led community engagement when school librarians have implemented innovative projects leading to increased collaboration and community connections. Our feature article provides an overview of ideas and approaches to building community through trying times, using current and past challenges as springboards for building stronger bonds and connections within the school and with other stakeholders.

Engaging the School Community

Engaging with the school community is an important aspect of school librarianship and the Include Shared Foundation (AASL 2018). The following are some solutions school librarians have implemented to increase connection among stakeholders.

Connecting Remotely

School librarians demonstrated their ability to build learning communities during the COVID-19 pandemic. When the pandemic started, school librarians went from in-person classes to at-home learning overnight. Many students stayed at home for the remainder of the year. Yet, school librarians across the country continued to provide opportunities for students to connect and learn, and provided access to books that allowed learners to feel less isolated. School librarians

provided curbside pick-up or carry out to allow students who were at home to have access to books, but also were involved with many collaborative online initiatives to continue services.

Though school librarians were not always included in a school's alternative methods of instruction (AMI) plan, Donna Wake, Helen Hu, and Erin Shaw (2022) explained that school librarians found ways to insert themselves into remote learning whenever they saw an opportunity. School librarians assisted educators by providing resources to support online lessons and encouraged students to continue to read at home by providing e-books and access to platforms where students with Internet access could continue to connect and learn.

School librarians also offered continuity of programming as much as possible. For example, in one elementary school library the daily morning news broadcast, which had always occurred at school, continued virtually during the pandemic. The student broadcast team recorded segments at home and sent them to the school librarian to edit and publish. To provide more students the opportunity to connect with others, learners beyond the broadcast team were asked to contribute by sharing content related to their special interests like cooking, movement, or crafts. In addition, the school library hosted a school-wide reading challenge and set school reading goals. When a milestone on the path to the reading goal was met, a celebration was held. Celebrations included a community viewing event streamed on Facebook Live for the student body when the school librarian and the principals had lunch on the roof together. This event gave students learning at home a chance to see them. Another community event included a virtual pie-eating contest among four staff members who were selected by the

SCHOOL LIBRARY-LED COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

School libraries are the learning hub of the school, serving a wide range of learners who embody a variety of backgrounds and characteristics, including but not limited to age, race, ability, language, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, economic status, and immigration status. School librarians create environments that demonstrate the interconnectedness of these backgrounds and characteristics, and teach why diversity benefits all learners.

A community-engaged school library is connected to the needs of the school and broader community. Library staff members and programming are able to help community members, particularly during challenging times. Library-led community engagement takes many forms. School librarians build connection with their communities by considering opportunities for cooperation and collaboration between:

- the library and the school,
- the library and the community, and
- the school and the community, as well as
- within the intersection of the library with the school and the community.



CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNERS TO CONNECT WITHIN THE LIBRARY AND HAVE A VOICE IN THE FUTURE OF THEIR LIBRARY IS AN IMPORTANT ELEMENT OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT.

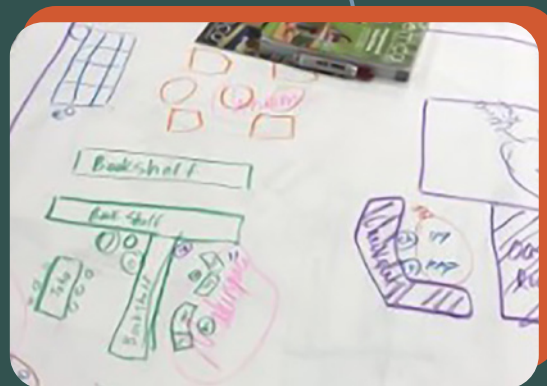


Figure 1. Student plans for the new library space.

students. These are a few examples of how school librarians created innovative ways to connect students with their reading community and library resources.

Student Advisory Board

Creating opportunities for learners to connect within the library and have a voice in the future of their library is an important element of community engagement. The *Developing Inclusive Learners and Citizens Activity Guide* (AASL 2019) suggests that one way to include student voices in library decision-making is to develop a student-led advisory board. At an elementary school in St. Charles, Missouri, fifth-grade students applied and were selected to serve as one-year members of the Library Advisory Board. These students helped shape the library by assisting in the creation of the mission and vision statement for the library. They analyzed the current book collection using Titlewave reports to determine how well it met the needs of the students, and then met with vendors to purchase books to meet those needs. They also designed and created the current layout of the library and then spoke with administration to advocate for funds for library furniture (see figure 1).

The final drawing for the new library space was created by students. Students worked in small groups to make sure the needs of students, teachers, and parents were met in the new design.

Connecting with Other Educators

It is well established that school librarians have more job satisfaction when they feel valued in the workplace, which can occur when there are opportunities for connections and collaboration with other educators (Merga 2019). Collaboration also allows school librarians to build relationships with classroom teachers who can see the value of teaching digital literacies and learn more about the expertise of the school librarian. Supporting the needs of the school community involves identifying teachers' needs and addressing them. For example, using screen recording programs such as Screencastify allows school librarians to create short tutorials to show teachers how to support learners' use of online databases when curriculum-based research projects begin. When collaborating, teachers see the work school librarians do and how the school library plays a pivotal role in student success.

Engaging with the Local Community

Connecting with parents and building community partnerships is important for any school library. In the same elementary school in St. Charles, the school library has hosted several events that parents and community members attended, including Reading Night, STEAM Night, Community Read Aloud, and Career Day.

- Reading Night focused on building a love of reading. School staff created stations around the school, and parents and students participated at these stations. One theme was "Wild About Reading," and all reading activities focused on animals.
- During Career Day parents were invited to teach students about their careers. Occupations included barber, firefighter, dog trainer, and many more.
- The Community Read Aloud focused on community engagement. Area business employees, district administrators, and even the mayor visited the school to share a favorite story.
- For STEAM Night, the focus was on science, technology,

engineering, art, and math. Staff from the Science Center in St. Louis, the Magic House in St. Louis, and the Missouri Botanical Gardens came to the school and presented sessions for students and parents.

Engaging with the Professional Community

School librarians know the importance of building a collection containing books with characters that represent the full spectrum of diversity found across our country. Students should be able to access books with characters that look—or feel—like them, and other books that introduce readers to people learners might not meet in their daily lives. Exposure to this range of experiences increases empathy and understanding. When students discover a book that reflects their lived experience, they also discover that they are not alone in this world.

However, sometimes school librarians meet with resistance when serving *all* readers, and nothing can seem so overwhelming and so lonely as facing a book challenge without the support of a team. Below are a few examples of how school librarians have worked with other school librarians to reduce feelings of isolation when dealing with book challenges.

Connecting School Librarians to Administrators

The American Association of School Librarians (AASL), with Chapters across the nation, has worked to provide support for its membership and other school librarians. In Missouri, for example, the Missouri Association of School Librarians (MASL) created a form to allow librarians who were facing a challenge to request help from other school librarians who had also faced a challenge. In addition,

MASL leadership presented at the Missouri School Boards' Association Annual Conference about how school librarians select books for their collection, a talk that included how librarians use challenge and collection development policies. In addition, members of MASL presented to other school librarians during statewide events, sharing the tools needed for librarians when faced with a challenge.

Sharing the Positives

Discussions among school librarians revealed that they felt that the rise in book challenges was leading others

to talk about school libraries only in the context of book challenges. To share positive stories about the student experience in the school library, MASL created an "I Love My Library" contest for which students from across the state could write about their school library. Hundreds of entries were submitted to highlight what makes their library unique and worthy of the award. A task force read all of the entries and selected one winner from each level: elementary, middle, and high school. The school library of each of the three winning entries received \$250 to choose books to add to their collection (see figure 2). MASL shared these

Figure 2. "I Love My School Library" contest middle school winner 2022. (essay provided by MASL)



Reasons Why I Love My School Library

These are just some of the many reasons why I love our library at Ozark Junior High. The librarians help the students find books of all sorts. We have Fantasy, Action-Adventure, Comic Books/Graphic Novels, Mystery, and so much more. Even if you do not like to read there is at least one book that you would love to read.

The library is also very cosmetic. Each book genre has its own circular bookshelf. Within the circle is flexible seating, there are bean bags, a tall table, and even some bouncy chairs. Chromebooks are also available to use if you are having trouble finding a book.

When I am in the library I feel calm. Being in the library is my personal time to read and be alone and quiet. The way the library is set up it is very easy to get comfortable and really get into the book. I also love how much you can relate to others who have read the book. Books are amazing conversation starters!

To be honest, I didn't really like to read before this year. But so far I have read 22 books in 2021. For me that is a huge improvement from the 5 that I read last year. The librarian's challenges pushed me to read more books, and it definitely helped me. I am more confident in ELA, and I have higher Evaluate scores.

Our school library is free. I love that we have 1,000's of worlds just in our library and they are all free. Anybody can explore, learn, and create using these books. You can go on impossible journeys with people you feel like you've known your whole life. I feel like the library brings the world to us.

I know people that have never left Missouri, so I feel like they can learn about other places and experience other things they haven't. They can even go to other countries across the world if they read the right book. I also know many people who travel a lot, sometimes to other continents. If they need to learn the basics of a new language there are books that teach you how to speak Spanish, Japanese, Chinese, and much more.

My favorite thing about the library is your the boss. At school the students do not get to be the boss very often but in the library you can be! I personally hate being told what to read, and when I get books from the library I feel a sense of empowerment knowing that I can choose on my own.

Overall, I am very blessed to have such an amazing library in my school that allows me to share my ideas, travel to different worlds, meet new people, and be inspired. I am so thankful for our school libraries and librarians.

ENGAGES WITH	THE SCHOOL LIBRARIAN AND THE LIBRARY
SCHOOL	• Work to build a culture of reading within the school • Encourage feelings of belonging through library programming • Include students as decision-makers by creating a student-led advisory board • Curate a collection that represents students' voices and choices • Provide opportunities for students to tell their stories
COMMUNITY	• Provide events for students to connect with community members • Share beyond library walls student-focused stories of the library • Build relationships with stakeholders by inviting them into the library space and by attending community events • Curate a collection that represents community members and their lived experiences • Engage in communities of practice with other school library professionals

Table 1. Opportunities for school librarians and school libraries to engage with their communities.

entries on their social media account <https://twitter.com/MASLOnline>.

Connecting School Librarians with Allies

Faced with a series of book challenges throughout the state of Missouri, school librarians have responded by connecting with one another, thereby creating a sense of community and belonging among school librarians who often work alone in their libraries. To help support their work and their students' right to read, school librarians joined forces with community groups and larger organizations such as the American Civil Liberties Union and the Freedom to Read Foundation. To garner support for school libraries in Missouri, parents, school librarians, and other allies of school libraries created a new group: Missouri Allies of School Librarians. (Learn more at <https://molibraryallies.org>.)

Building Communities of Practice

AASL has established communities of practice where school librarians can go to share knowledge, ask questions, and feel supported. In these

communities, librarians can offer and attend professional development, and network with other librarians about specific topics. There are five communities of practice: 1) digital and technology tools, 2) diversity, equity and inclusion, 3) information literacy instruction, 4) literature and reading promotion and 5) teacher collaboration. (Learn more and join at <https://connect.ala.org/aasl/communities/all-aasl-groups/aasl-communities-of-practice>.)

Looking Forward

We can grow professionally and support our learners by designing library programming that builds communities. Ideally, community engagement provides opportunities for learners to feel more connected to their community while, at the same time, school librarians themselves are building partnerships, expanding connections, and developing supportive networks.

School librarians stand committed to students, families, and classroom teachers, and our resolve has grown stronger. Even with the struggles in recent times, we have built stronger communities to

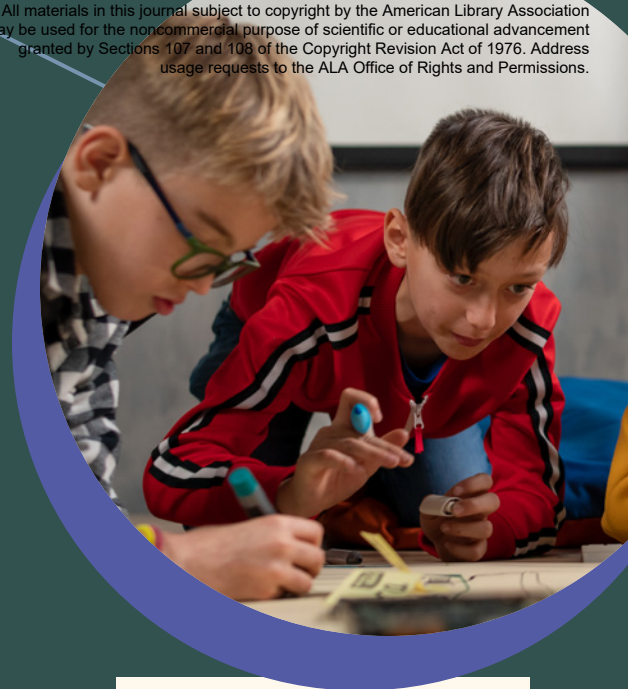
support and encourage one another. School librarians continue to learn from fellow librarians locally and nationally. State and national library associations amplify the voices of school librarians. School librarians are united in their beliefs that students have a right to access reading materials of their choice, and that the work of our profession is essential. Librarians support each other in the process of becoming better librarians.

Even though the last few years have been especially challenging, we have opportunities to strengthen our school libraries. How? Ideas are below and in table 1.

Reaching out. Invite students to join a library advisory board. Host an event and invite parents to attend. Reach out to the community to participate. Get valuable input on stakeholders' priorities while showcasing the library and its programs.

Building professional connections. Connect with other librarians by becoming active in your state and the national associations. Attend professional development sessions

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and continue to grow in the profession. Join an AASL Community of Practice. Our organizations are strong because we have active members who support them.

Becoming an advocate. Use multiple avenues—face-to-face, in print, and online—to share what you are doing in your library. Let others know how valuable the work of the school librarian is. Librarians need to be the ones who shape the narrative.



Matt King is a K–5 school librarian. An ALA and AASL member, he is cochair of the AASL Member Engagement

Committee, member of the AASL Practice Committee, and a 2019 ALA Emerging Leader. Matt coauthored the 2021 research paper “Strategies for Successful School Librarian and Teacher Collaboration” published in *School Library Research*, and contributed a vignette to the book *Core Values in School Librarianship* (ALA 2018, Judi Moreillon, ed.).

When school librarians engage with their community, not only do they build connections and become an advocate for school libraries and for learners, they remove their own sense of isolation, and empower their voices and the voices of other stakeholders. The result is a better tomorrow for our learners and ourselves.



Jenna Kammer, PhD, is an associate professor and a program coordinator at the University of Central

Missouri. A member of AASL, she and Denise Moreland were awarded a 2020 AASL Research grant for “School and Public Library Collaboration: A Phenomenology of Working Together.” Jenna has written for *Knowledge Quest*, *School Library Research*, *School Library Connection*, *School Libraries Worldwide*, and the *Journal of Research on Libraries and Young Adults*. She coedited the book *Digital Literacy in the Disciplines* (Stylus 2021) and is active in the Missouri Association of School Librarians.

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HEALING THROUGH LITERATURE, ART, AND GOATS

Stephanie G. Persson

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For many students, whether they want to admit it or not, school is a welcoming place. They get to see their friends, partake in extracurricular activities, step into leadership positions that build confidence and organizational skills, and support one another. They often even have fun. However, when the 2021–2022 school year began, the anxiety and loneliness that many students had felt while quarantined for the previous year and half followed them. Masks were still mandated, and the threat of catching COVID-19 had many students keeping their distance from others. Contact tracing had everyone in the building recounting where they'd been and with whom they had been in contact. Furthering the anxiety and isolation was the ban on clubs meeting in person, live theater and musical performances being relegated to streaming only, and cancellation of many traditional school events.

This scenario probably sounds very familiar, and I know that my school district was not alone in these measures, nor were my students alone in the struggles they were feeling socially and in regard to their health. However, the students in my school also held the burden that is becoming too common in many places: deadly violence. In

the third week of December 2021, a student from my school was shot in the parking lot of one of the district's high schools after a sporting event. He was declared dead at the scene. That was the second gun incident for my school district since the start of the school year. My school is an urban Title I school in which 76.4 percent of the students are eligible for free and reduced meals, and 81.3 percent of the 1,700 students identify as BIPOC. Trauma from the pandemic and shootings was another weight added to the heavy load the students and staff were already carrying.

As an adult I felt numb at times as I tried to process what was happening around me, but I knew the students were struggling even more. Unfortunately, I didn't know how to help students outside of listening to them when they needed an ear. Additional school counselors were made available at the school, but many students did as I had done, grieved briefly—and then pushed on as classes resumed and deadlines loomed. Their stress, anxiety, and worries—even more amplified—were hidden behind brave faces.

Inspiration for Action

In January 2021 I read *Hey, Kiddo* by Jarrett Krosoczka. I connected

on so many levels with this graphic novel memoir, and I knew that it would speak to my students, as well. I was even more certain after watching some of Krosoczka's TED Talks in which he shared how art and "[his] imagination saved [his] life" (Krosoczka 2012). Krosoczka not only wrote *Hey, Kiddo*, but he illustrated it, as well. I knew the healing impact a book could have when a reader connected with characters, events, or themes. How could I combine literature and art for the students to provide them with a safe outlet for their own healing? Slowly, different ideas started to weave themselves together as the "Healing through Literature, Art, and Goats" event was born. I searched for grants to fund the event and found the AASL Inspire Special Events Grant. Through the grant awarded to us, one hundred copies of the book, traditional lined journals, graphic novel-formatted journals, and boxed sets of colored pencils could be purchased, and a local farm that had baby goats for therapy and yoga sessions was contacted. The \$2,000 grant covered the cost for all aspects of the event.

My high school houses the district's arts magnet school, and since the Inspire Grant proposal had an art focus, I reached out to the director of the magnet program. I shared my

ideas for working with the magnet classes to connect with students to participate in what would eventually become a multilayered event. The program was voluntary, and we ended up with approximately eighty students choosing to participate. Originally, I had purchased materials for one hundred students, and not reaching that goal was disappointing, but I had to remind myself that students were focused on preparations for spring art exhibits. The event was also a way to rebuild relationships between the magnet classes, in which a majority of our students participate, and the school library after almost two years of COVID quarantine and social distancing.

The premise behind the grant was for students to know they weren't alone and to provide them with outlets for healing. Even if students hadn't experienced broken homes due to drugs and alcoholism as Krosoczka had, the feelings of not being able to control a situation, loss, and anxiety were felt by so many at our school, especially after events of the previous year. The graphic novel format removed a literacy barrier and made the book accessible to students at many reading levels throughout the school.

Moving Ahead

Before the books were delivered, I met virtually with the digital art, 2D art, photography, and creative writing classes to talk about the event and the book. In my book talk I shared that it was a memoir of growing up in a family of addictions and how art was a refuge for the author throughout his youth and teenage years. I then showed Krosoczka's TED Talk "How a Boy Became an Artist." The feedback on the connection of the TED Talk to the event was enthusiastic, and one teacher commented on her

appreciation for its connection to art and her class.

Once the books were delivered to students, small-group sessions with counselors were scheduled to take place two weeks out, allowing students time to read the book. Copies of the book were supplied to the school counselors, as well. "Bibliotherapy is the act of reading to heal emotionally and support positive mental health... [B]ibliotherapy can foster the psychological and emotional safety that our young readers need, creating human connection and belonging where there was once isolation and loneliness" (Sansbury and Bongiorno 2020). The goal of the small groups was to provide students a safe place to discuss the emotional story and to process feelings and personal connections that arose from their reading. Students would be encouraged to remove their stoic masks and reflect on and express what they've been feeling in recent months. Unfortunately, because of the timing of the award for the grant and other unforeseeable scheduling conflicts, the small groups were pushed to approximately six weeks out to occur after state testing.

One of the small groups met in a classroom. The others used the school library during different class blocks. In the small groups, school counselors began the conversations with students about events in the book. From there, the conversations branched out into personal connections articulated by the school counselors and students. The school counselors helped students talk about how they were coping with anxieties driven by the pandemic, the death of the classmate, and the state testing they just finished. Students shared personal stories that paralleled events in the book, such as absentee parents, divorce, and the effects of

drugs and alcohol on individuals and their families.

The small groups also helped students see the strong allies that school counselors can be. Often, students recognize school counselors as experts in scheduling and preparing for graduation, but a great number of students don't realize the other supports that school counselors can offer. The collaboration between the school library and the school counseling department helped reinforce that we educators and other professional staff are a community of adults that care deeply for the students. I truly believe in the often-quoted African proverb, "It takes a village to raise a child."

Hey, Kiddo is one of many books that have been challenged recently in various districts. However, from my perspective the conversations that stemmed from *Hey, Kiddo* reaffirmed the need to have books that represent all people available for student choice in the school library. These stories can be healing, and sometimes they are the only place where students can find refuge and connections to what can seem at times to be a very lonely and isolating world. The We Need Diverse Books organization recognizes that "diverse books... make a child feel seen. They teach empathy and resilience. They even save lives" (2022). When we returned this year, one student who participated last year but had seemed to remain distant throughout, stopped me to ask if we were doing another event this year. He asked to participate if we do. Sometimes in education we don't realize the impact we have until months or years later—if at all.

Continuing the Impact

Because the grant also provided funding for the purchase of colored pencils, and lined and graphic novel-formatted journals, these were given

to the students who participated in the event. We wanted them to have outlets for their creativity through words and art. Because materials were purchased for one hundred students and the participation numbers were lower, a *Hey, Kiddo* display has been in our makerspace this year. A copy of the book, the extra blank journals, and watercoloring supplies purchased through a school library fundraiser have been available to all students in the school. Students keep the journals. Some students have created small watercolor paintings and left them

to share with others. Starry nights, name graffiti, and exaggerated faces depicting an array of emotions are just a few of the original works they've shared.

The grant also included a school visit with goats. The goat visit was scheduled to be the final part of the event. Why? Literature has shown "that interaction between patient and animal prepares a ground to boost self-confidence in the patient, alleviate the symptoms, and improve the quality of life. Short-term contacts or looking after animals in

long-run (horse, cat, birds, small animals) alleviate a large number of diseases" (Ines Pandzic, cited in Tahan et al. 2022). The idea of animal therapy was not new to me. In fact, just before schools closed for the pandemic in 2020, my family and I had adopted a dog from a shelter. The backstory: Back when I was still in the classroom and feeling overwhelmed and stressed, I spent time with a colleague's dogs. I realized how much petting them and talking to them helped me reduce my stress level. The summer before, I had heard about one of the

**THE COLLABORATION BETWEEN
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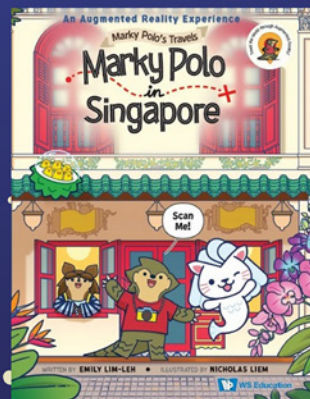
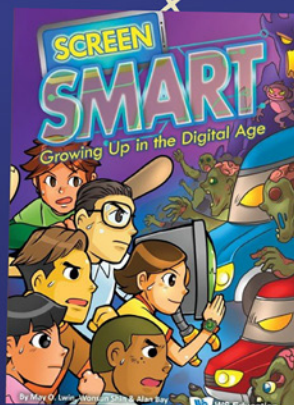
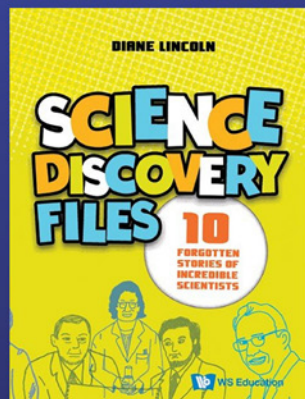
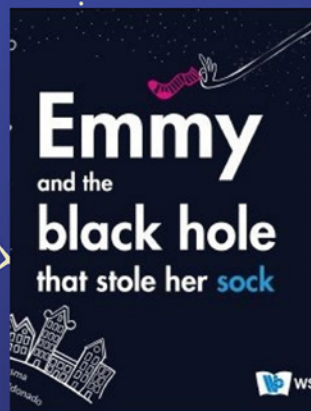
WE WANTED THEM TO HAVE OUTLETS FOR THEIR CREATIVITY THROUGH WORDS AND ART.

public libraries in a neighboring town sponsoring a “painting with goats” event for social-emotional learning. Inspired by my own experiences and by the public library program, I decided to incorporate an additional element in the event.

I think, for many students, it was the idea of sitting with and petting baby goats that

originally drew them to participate in the event. After all, little goats are absolutely adorable. Unfortunately, on the day the goats were originally scheduled to visit the school, I got bad news from the farm. Because of a family emergency, they were going to have to cancel the visit and refund all money. Students and teachers were very disappointed, so after a lot of searching for other therapy animal programs, I found The Barnyard Foundation established in our area

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by an active-duty military family. Our area has a very large military population, so supporting this foundation, its military family, and its local farm was a perfect solution. This change of plan delayed the animal portion of the event by several weeks as we had to schedule around state testing and the farm's already full schedule.

The event was worth the wait! The Barnyard Foundation brought rabbits, a miniature horse and donkey, an alpaca, a llama, ducks, and several goats. All students who participated in the event were provided passes for a specific 30-minute time slot to spend time with the animals. In addition to the participating students, the entire faculty was invited to attend if they had a planning period during the visit. The special-needs students in the self-contained classroom were

also invited, as was the district's library supervisor, Ramonia Lynch. Ms. Lynch and approximately twenty-five teachers and school counselors were able to join us, some bringing a few additional students they thought would benefit from the time with the animals.

The graphic novel had received a lot of praise from students, but the animals definitely stole the show. Students were able to sit and hold the rabbits. They brushed, braided, and added bows to the horse's and donkey's manes and tails. Even the teachers enjoyed bedazzling the animals. Our building is not a quiet place. Visitors are constantly coming and going; students are filming for class inside and outside the building; and, on this day, animals took over the rotary greens in the parking lot. Still, despite the constant flow and noise of people, there was an overwhelming calm and peacefulness among the students while they were

with the animals. Students of all grade levels, social groups, and ability levels sat side by side with staff to pet and groom the different animals. We were one community healing together.



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Woodside High School in

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where she sponsors a book club and the Key

Club. An ALA and AASL member, she received

an Inspire Special Event Grant from AASL for

the social-emotional, literature, and arts event

discussed in this article. Her article "Reaching

All Readers" was published by Teacher

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Empathetic Conversation in the School Library



Jen Gilbert

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As a recipient of an ALA Libraries Transforming Communities: Focus on Small and Rural Communities grant, our school was fortunate to receive funds to purchase books for a special program. My librarian partner, Kendra Waddell, and I ran “Book Bites” during lunchtime. The aim of this program was to provide a platform for students to engage in meaningful conversations about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their lives and relationships, as well as to explore themes of compassionate empathy.

One of the most challenging aspects of the pandemic was the limited ability to gather socially and connect with others in person. This was especially difficult for many of our students, who were isolated and disconnected from others in our rural community. To address this issue, we designed a project that focused on creating spaces for engagement and conversation, using literature as a lens to explore the human experience. In essence, students were invited to bring their lunches to the school library (it usually isn’t used as a place to eat) to join us in conversations. We would weave in books we had in the library, but it was not at all necessary for them to have read the books before the conversations.

As we focused on using literature as a lens to explore the human experience, we tried to delve into themes of loss and gain, hope and fear, connection and loneliness. These conversations provided a safe and supportive environment for students to share their experiences, thoughts, and feelings about the pandemic and its impact on their lives.

We selected social and emotional learning titles and titles with a focus on diversity. We also met with members of a group of middle and high school students with a special interest in school library activities who are known as our Library Liaisons. We looked at award lists but also encouraged these students

to explore their own interests to come up with a list of titles they felt appropriate for the project. We and the students came up with a total of 156 titles, which we bought—all new to our collection. We then carefully selected titles to highlight at each lunch meeting and invited a few students to read some titles ahead of time so that they could share or book talk a title for us to get the conversation going. It really was a very simple strategy to put into effect. We made sure we started each conversation about a book that we knew had elements of empathy in situations that we could speak to and that were accessible and relevant enough for our students to have thoughts about. Although Kendra and I got the conversation going, we really let students take it where they wanted it to go. We had a book truck on hand full of other books we’d purchased, so that we could recommend other reading when it felt right. However, many times the conversation turned to participants’ lives, which was absolutely fine. Wonderful, really. To highlight our new acquisitions, after conversations we moved these books to front-facing displays and also featured some of the titles in digital signage in multiple places in our school.

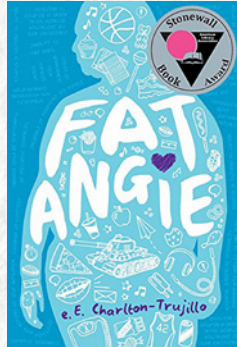
As we focused on using literature as a lens to explore the human

Reading List

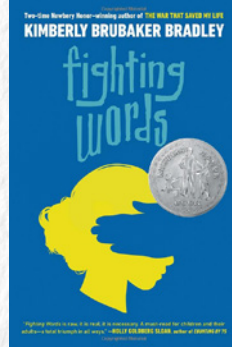
Some of our favorites that got us talking



Clap When You Land
by Elizabeth Acevedo



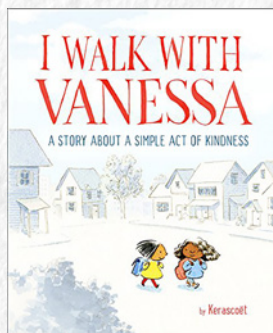
Fat Angie
by E. E. Charlton-Trujillo



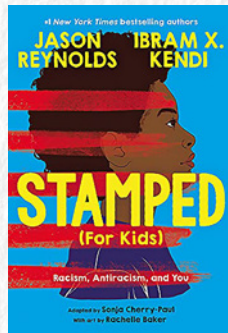
Fighting Words
by Kimberly Brubaker
Bradley



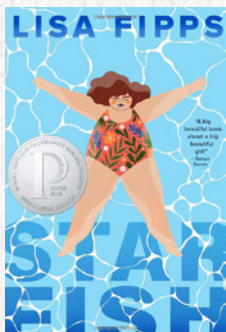
Free Lunch
by Rex Ogle



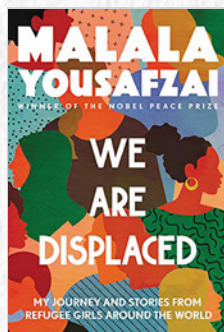
*I Walk with Vanessa: A
Story About a Simple
Act of Kindness*
by Kerascoët



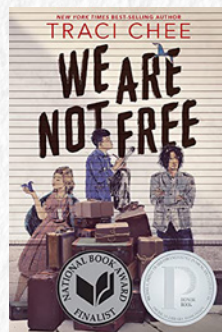
*Stamped (For Kids): Racism,
Antiracism, and You*
by Jason Reynolds and Ibram
X. Kendi, adapted by Sonja
Cherry-Paul



Starfish
by Lisa Fipps



*We Are Displaced: My
Journey and Stories
from Refugee Girls
around the World*
by Malala Yousafzai



We Are Not Free
by Traci Chee

experience, we tried to delve into themes of loss and gain, hope and fear, connection and loneliness. These conversations provided a safe and supportive environment for students to share their experiences, thoughts, and feelings about the pandemic and its impact on their lives. One of the first texts we used to do this was *Fighting Words* by Kimberly Brubaker Bradley. I love this book because it made me reconsider some of the assumptions I make as a teacher when interacting with students. It was easy to cherry-pick a few of the interactions character Della, a ten-year-old girl in the foster care system, has with her teacher and read them aloud. Even without reading the whole book, it didn't take long for students to draw connections and see how Della's teacher's insistence on the family tree assignment was hurtful to her because of her personal circumstances. Della is a great character to empathize with. You learn from the first page that she just got an ampersand tattoo on her wrist, and that fact alone (remember, she's ten) could have filled the rest of our time in Book Bites—so much to consider about why someone so young might feel so strongly about needing that symbol on her body, what it says about her situation that she was able to get it at all, and how she was treated by peers and adults in her life when they saw what she had done.

Remember, all this thought-provoking conversation happened over a lunch period while students were eating. They were happy to come and participate in these events, in part because this was still a time when they would otherwise be sitting in an assigned seat in the lunchroom. They were very aware of the social ramifications that had resulted from the pandemic, and we let them know that a goal of our time together was to let them practice having

conversations in ways they might not have been able to for a while. Conversations didn't stay large-group for the entire time. After we introduced some material and got wheels turning, things eventually evolved into more-intimate talking at tables. While the ALA Libraries Transforming Communities grant is often used with great effect by public libraries to support a single event and single conversation, in a school library our vision was to try for multiple smaller conversations that promoted connection and support, and also served as an opportunity to practice and develop social skills. The pandemic presented many challenges in terms of communication, as people were required to distance and mask to protect themselves and others. As a result, many children lost the

ability to pick up on social cues and communicate effectively with others (Günindi 2022). By engaging in conversations about these topics, we were able to help students practice and develop social skills that had been damaged by nearly a full year of isolation.

Overall, our community conversations program was a valuable resource for students. We ended up hosting eight conversations with an average of twelve to fifteen participants at each Book Bites meeting. Since we have both middle and high school students in our building, both populations attended, but didn't mingle, as their lunch times didn't overlap. More middle schoolers participated, almost twice as many, in fact. Attendance was always open to all students, but we found some students were more

engaged than others, with about half of the attendees returning every time. We hope that the program provided a much-needed outlet for connection and support during a time of unprecedented uncertainty and stress. By focusing on themes of compassionate empathy, we were able to create a sense of belonging and solidarity, helping to heal some of the wounds inflicted by the pandemic.

We are grateful to the American Library Association for providing the grant that made this program possible. Without their support, we would not have been able to provide this valuable resource to our school community. We hope that our program can serve as a model for other schools and organizations looking to engage in similar conversations and promote social skills and compassionate empathy.

By focusing on themes of compassionate empathy, we were able to create a sense of belonging and solidarity, helping to heal some of the wounds inflicted by the pandemic.



Jen Gilbert is a school librarian at Eminence (KY) Independent Schools. A member of AASL and the AASL

Member Engagement committee, Jen also serves as president of the Kentucky Association of School Librarians and is KASL chapter delegate to AASL Chapter Assembly.

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Small Interactions Can Nurture Impactful Collaborations



Amanda Hurley

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What do the following have in common: a smile, an invite to join a professional development session, a note in a mailbox, small talk in the teacher's lounge?

The answer: They are all ways, individually or collectively, you can build authentic collaborative partnerships in your school building. A combination of these activities is what started a professional dialogue between high school math teacher Sarah Zehnder and me, a high school librarian. Fast-forward eight years, and now we have planned and collaborated on about ten projects each school year. This approach to teaching and supporting learners led, in part, to our being named the recipients of the 2021 AASL Collaborative School Library Award!

The most comprehensive collaboration Sarah Zehnder and I implement each year tasks her Advanced Geometry students to research, plan, and design a renovation project for the school library. It is a semester-long project that can be completed individually or in pairs. The goal is for students to analyze the needs of the current school library, identify ways to improve its space and services for the twenty-first century, design a realistic renovation plan, create a scaled drawing of the renovation, and pitch their project to an

audience of their peers, teachers, librarians, administrators, and district personnel. This project is an authentic assignment as Henry Clay High School plans to incorporate many of the students' ideas into the upcoming school library renovation currently included in our district's facilities improvement plan. While Sarah and I have incorporated this project into geometry classes over the past eight years, each year it looks a little different as we modify assignments and experiences to make the project stronger. Indeed, this year a second geometry teacher, Michelle Samet, has joined our collaboration and is having her students take part too.

Our Process

The Library Renovation Project is a joint collaboration from beginning to end. As a school librarian, I sit at the table with these teachers in late December as we review our reflections from the last implementation, revamp individual lessons, set due dates, clarify who is responsible for which pieces of the project, and give input about expectations for students and grades. While the classroom teachers serve as the discipline experts for all things mathematics-related, the rest of the activities are a joint effort to design learning experiences to scaffold the

students' learning to best facilitate the inquiry process.

As the school librarian, I am the one designing the learning activities within the library and reaching out to other experts in our district as needed. For example, this year we decided to replace our usual Hour of Code activities in early January with an exploration of a 3D software application that students could potentially use later in the semester to design a scaled drawing of their project. In deciding between a couple different programs, I reached out to a district digital learning coach to brainstorm which might be the best fit for our activity. Once we narrowed it down to a couple of options, we looped in Sarah to explore the pros and cons of each and collectively opted to use a program called SketchUp.

Next, I found a tutorial to teach the basics of the program and set up an assignment within the learning management system for Sarah's students to complete. On the day of the lesson, students met in the library, and Sarah and I both explained why we were in the school library, the objectives and specific outcomes for the day, and worked with students to complete the activity (see figure 1). Introduction of a design software package has been a great addition to



Figure 1. Learner working with SketchUp application.



Figure 2. One of my slides linked to renovation resources.

the project and is definitely already on our reflection list to keep as an activity in the future.

To stimulate the students' curiosity about the library renovation, this year I designed a Kahoot! game that students will play to learn about how and when the library is used throughout the year. Previously, I had designed a survey for students asking them their perception of how many people use the library, ways they think the space is used, the number of items housed physically in the space, and more. The modification to move from an individual static assignment to a more interactive one proved effective because the presentation of the library's data became engaging and personalized.

After completing the Kahoot! game and learning about how and when the library is used, students completed a bingo game in small groups. For this activity, together Sarah and I designed a bingo board with activities for students to complete in the library. While many of the activities can be done, achieving a completed bingo row isn't possible. Our current 5,000-square-foot space simply isn't

designed for the changing needs of our learners. The activity is designed to show students that, while lots of things can be done in our current space, the renovation and addition of an additional 5,000 square feet is an opportunity to better equip the space to be more flexible, more suited to collaboration, and more inviting overall.

To facilitate students' exploration of resources for the Renovation Project, I designed interactive Google Slides that students can click on to view a variety of floor plans, technology options, furniture, and other elements of the renovation. (See example in figure 2.) This resource has allowed students to have access to the materials both at home and at school.

As students progress through the project, we involve community members to provide additional perspective. For example, students toured the Jessamine County Public Library, a building that was renovated in 2016. Employees discussed with students how the facility changed with the additional square footage to better meet the

needs of their patrons and shared specific ideas on what they wish they had done differently. Next, students visited the William T. Young Library on the Lexington campus of the University of Kentucky. There students not only paid attention to the architecture and layout of the building, they also got a sense of how an academic library caters to the needs of patrons. During both of these experiences, students were expected to take pictures and notes on accessibility, flow/layout of the various spaces, available technology, and types of assistance and services provided by the libraries, and then determine which elements should be included in the future Henry Clay High School Library renovation. Learners were also expected to articulate the reasons behind their proposed changes.

For each step of the inquiry process, the classroom teachers and I work together but have delineated tasks to complete. For the field trip to other libraries, Sarah completes the paperwork for the district and obtains approval; both classroom teachers collect the money from

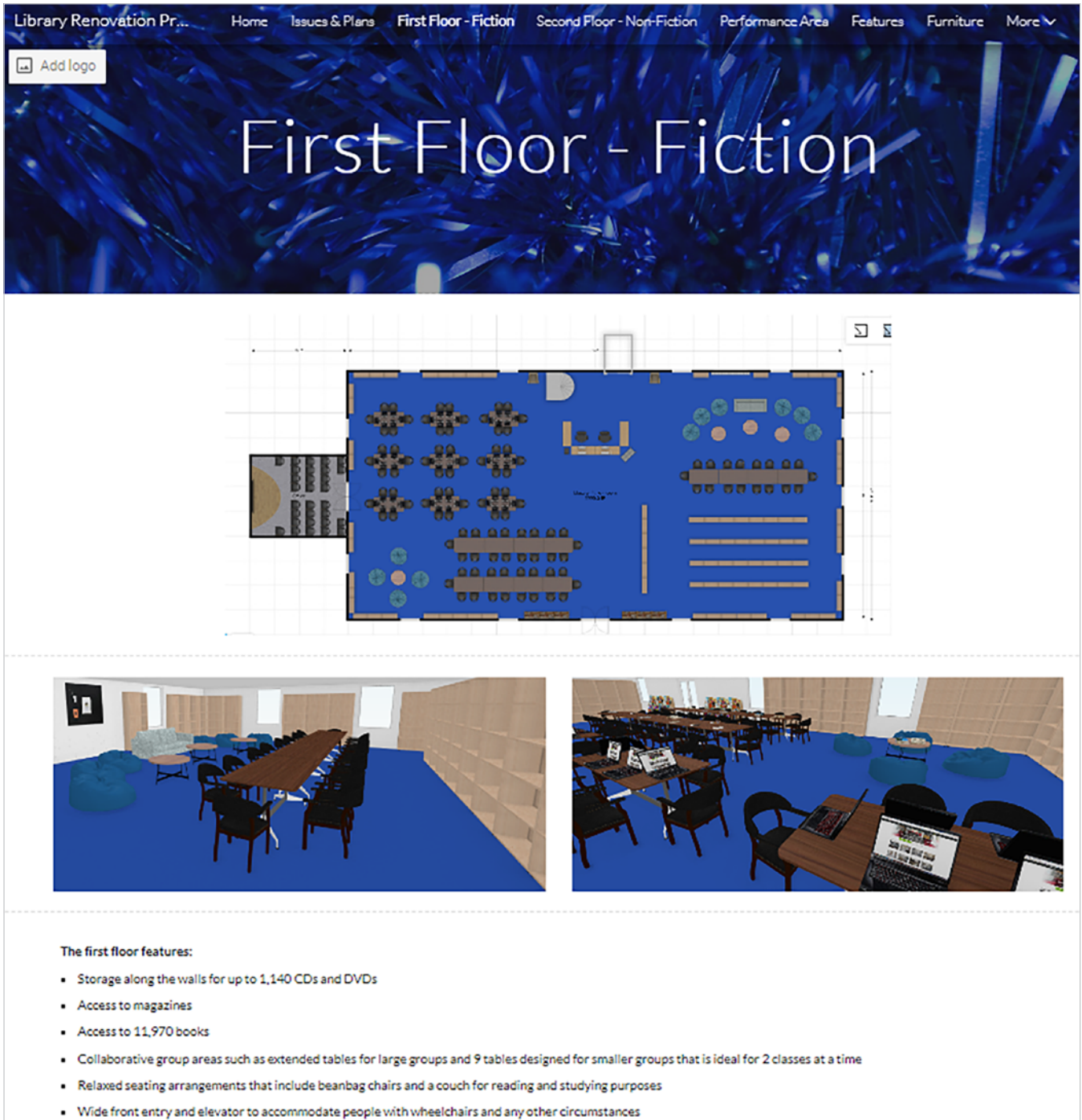


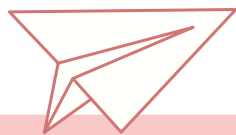
Figure 3. Example of webpage from student's final project.

students and turn it in to the bookkeeper, while I coordinate logistics with the libraries we plan to visit. On the day of the field trip, all three of us supervise students on separate buses, work with the

drivers to ensure we get where we are going, and interact with students throughout the day.

Students have complete flexibility and autonomy in designing their final

product. Students can create websites (see figure 3), Minecraft simulations, scaled models, Google Slide presentations, or a product in any other format they choose. Using the Guided Inquiry Design framework



What made this project—and others—work so well was the collaboration. It's when we as teachers and librarians work alongside each other and bring our diverse skill sets together that we make learning engaging, authentic, and comprehensive.

described by Leslie Maniotes and others (Kuhlthau, Maniotes, and Caspari 2012), as learners work their way through the project they complete a needs assessment, research technology and current trends of libraries, embed the geometry skills they've learned throughout the year, and apply Common Core mathematical practices to make a realistic renovation proposal.

Once our school library has undergone its renovation, I fully expect Sarah and I will pick a new emphasis for this project. The meshing of mathematical concepts and real-life problem-solving is a great way to show students authentic implications of their learning.

Collaboration Is Key

What made this project—and others—work so well was the collaboration. It's when we as teachers and librarians work alongside each other and bring our diverse skill sets together that we make learning engaging, authentic, and comprehensive. For more information on our collaborative projects, access the slide deck for our

2019 AASL National Conference concurrent session “Engaged²: Ongoing Math and Library Collaboration at the Secondary Level.” The link to our presentation is <http://bit.ly/aaslmath>.

Partnerships like the one Sarah and I share can be cultivated in your building, too. It takes time, opportunity, and shared experiences. It doesn't happen instantaneously. Give yourself and the other educators in your building time to warm up to your ideas and support. I've been a librarian in my building for seventeen years now, and there are still teachers who opt not to collaborate. That's okay. Plant the seeds with anyone and everyone in your building, nurture your professional relationships over time in a variety of ways, and watch what develops in your learning community.

So where should you start? First recognize there's no single way to initiate collaboration. It can be done in a number of ways!

Pitch an activity or idea to a classroom teacher. Inspiration for collaborative ideas can come from anywhere: Twitter, conferences,

reading blogs or professional journals, even commercials or those “ah-ha!” moments while running errands. Don't feel like every activity or idea has to be fleshed out before you share it. That's the beauty of collaboration!

Co-plan a unit with a classroom teacher. Librarians are a great resource for all teachers in every discipline. Curating a variety of potential resources, recommending apps, sites, or other technology to enhance student engagement and learning, identifying subject-area experts outside of the school, coordinating cross-discipline research, and helping draft rubrics are some of the ways that school librarians can foster collaboration in the planning process and provide support.

Design instructional activities to scaffold a project and then offer to teach or co-teach. Whether it's teaching a single portion of a class or facilitating the learning for multiple days, stepping up to lead or co-lead in a classroom (or library) establishes that you are a teacher. Sometimes a lesson taught in a new space (the

library as opposed to the classroom) can energize a class or project. Your helping to craft instructional activities can help a classroom teacher see their content or lesson through another perspective as well as take something off their plate—a blessing most teachers will appreciate.

Chaperone field trips. While this doesn't rank anywhere near my top 100 things to do, colleagues find it a blessing to have another educator on the trip. These shared experiences often strengthen our professional relationship and often lead to conversations that ultimately give me ideas on how to work alongside the classroom teacher in the future. Field trips are also opportunities to get to know the students better. This is especially helpful in a high school situation where I don't have consistent and routine interaction with all the students.

Attend or facilitate professional development focused on collaboration. A district-led book study for school librarians using the book *Guided Inquiry Design: A Framework for Inquiry in Your School* by Carol C. Kuhlthau, Leslie K. Maniotes, and Ann K. Caspari prompted me to be more intentional about collaboration in my school. The book provided research-

based methodologies and practical guidance for implementation of the inquiry process in classrooms using a whole-team approach, regardless of discipline or area of study. From there, I led professional development on Guided Inquiry Design in my building and structured the PD to be informative and practical. Attending or facilitating the professional development for teachers in your building allows time for you to brainstorm and work alongside teachers to authentically involve you in their planning and learning processes. They better understand how you can support them and that you are interested in being included in any lesson, project, or whole unit they'll allow.

Moving Forward

Collaboration isn't always easy. Not every teacher will respond to the professional development invitation you extend or allow you to co-teach in their classroom. However, continually sharing ways you can support your colleagues conveys both your willingness to help and eagerness to partner with them. No matter how small or great the collaboration, school librarians are powerful resources to help create authentic and engaging learning experiences for all students.



Amanda Hurley, a National Board Certified Teacher, is library media specialist at Henry Clay High School in Lexington,

Kentucky. A member of AASL, she served on the Association's School Library Event Promotion Committee 2020–2022. She received the 2022 Carol J. Parris Mentoring Award from the Kentucky Library Association, and served as 2017–2018 president of the Kentucky Association of School Librarians. She and math teacher Sarah Zehnder received the 2021 AASL Collaborative School Library Award.

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Partnerships like the one Sarah and I share can be cultivated in your building, too. It takes time, opportunity, and shared experiences.



ARTICLE

“

INCLUDE

”

THEIR
VOICES

“

Valerie Rupe DiLorenzo
vdiorenzo@rumseyhall.org



Students' ideas and thoughts matter. Though I created school library programs and projects for years that centered around students' needs as I perceived them, I had not intentionally asked students for their input until I had an epiphany at "The Future of Social Media Education," a Connecticut Association of Independent Schools' (CAIS) workshop in Middlebury, Connecticut, a few years ago. This workshop changed the way I run the library at Rumsey Hall, an independent, co-ed junior boarding (fifth through ninth grades) and day school (pre-K through ninth grade) in Washington Depot, Connecticut. At the workshop Laura Tierney, founder and CEO of The Social Institute, talked about the importance of including students in the decision-making process of planning and implementing the programs we create. It sounds so simple. Since Tierney's workshop, I now always think about how to incorporate students' voices and ideas throughout programs. The examples below provide a variety of ways that students have enhanced programming at Rumsey and beyond.

Casual Conversations about Social Media Group

After Tierney's workshop, I invited interested eighth-grade students

While conversing with one another, students discovered that they all had different life experiences. They also had varied feelings about and comfort levels with social media. Having a space to talk about these platforms helped with their understanding of others' views as well as their own.

to take part in a new program "Casual Conversations about Social Media" during Monday lunches. No marketing was needed beyond one announcement; enough students were intrigued enough to participate. The goal was to provide a safe space where students could share their perspectives on social media. They could discuss, ask questions about, and become more knowledgeable about platforms that seemed to be taking over so much of their lives. Participants agreed to be open-minded, non-judgmental, and supportive.

An interesting mix of eight students joined: international, domestic, boarding, and day students. They committed to meeting through the end of the 2019 school year (about six weeks). I wanted to keep it informal and hoped students would take ownership of the conversations. I quickly found that I needed to bring a topic to talk about each week; otherwise, the boarding students mostly wanted to talk about extending the Wi-Fi hours later into the evening. This program format was new to students, too, so it was fine that each week I brought something to get the conversations going and keep them focused on a specific topic related to social media. At the time, TikTok was taking off in the U.S., so that was one of our topics for a lively discussion. Articles that discuss bizarre caricatures, hoaxes, and urban legends, such as John Herrman's article "Momo Is as Real as We've Made Her," inspired good conversations as well.

Through these discussions, I discovered that helping students become more media literate should become an essential part of education at Rumsey Hall. While conversing with one another, students discovered that they all had different life experiences. They also had varied feelings about and comfort levels with social media. Having a

space to talk about these platforms helped with their understanding of others' views as well as their own. To this day, through our advisory program as well as in parts of the academic curriculum, we discuss social media topics and media literacy. The Casual Conversations about Social Media program added some variety to eighth-grade students' lunchtime experience and primed them for the following year: their final one at Rumsey where they could serve as leaders of the school. This experiment showed them the benefits of volunteering for programs and that their voices mattered. Some became elected senior committee members during their ninth-grade year, helping to shape school events and decisions. As a result of this brief program, I knew that including students in conversations would remain a key component of what I do in education.

Collaborative Project for State Award Nominees

When the pandemic hit in March 2020, schools clamored for ways to connect students and communities. Rae Anne Locke, another Connecticut library media specialist reached out after viewing a video I made (with Rumsey faculty members' voices) that shared a couple of our state book award nominee lists. After some back and forth e-mails, Rae Anne and I thought it would be fun to have our fourth- and fifth-grade students create a promotional video to share with our school communities the 2021 Connecticut Nutmeg Award nominees in the "Elementary" category. Each student used a template in Google Slides to write and record a thirty-second audio clip for one of the fifteen nominated books. The students worked independently and never met in person or virtually during the creation of the videos. Since we were all teaching and learning virtually,

students met via Zoom or Google Meet with their respective librarians to learn about the program and ask questions before creating their videos.

The students were so excited about the project and wanted to meet each other. Some of my students suggested having a glamorous (virtual) reveal party to enjoy the video together synchronously. What a fabulous and fun idea! We all got dressed up, (some wearing pearls, fancy dresses, and/or blazers with ties), and had a Zoom reveal party where students could finally talk to one another. Here was a student-generated idea that brought joy, fun, and connection at a time when all of us really needed it. Think back to conditions in May 2020 and then view the video at bit.ly/2021NutmegElementary. Students' enthusiastic voices brought incredible energy and excitement to the launching of books for this state book program at our respective schools during a period when we didn't have much to celebrate.

Library Prefect (Student Volunteer) Program 2020

During the fall of 2020, though we had countless plans in place, no one knew what the school year would look like. Would there be a library prefect program at Rumsey Hall where the library was designated as the school's surge space? The library space was used as a classroom for in-person students when their teacher was in quarantine because of Covid-19, yet that instructor could still teach via Zoom to students both on site and at a distance. Therefore, no traditional library programs took place in the library that school year, but I adopted the theme "Beyond the Library's Walls" and was excited to see how the year unfolded.

Before the school year even started, I had a student who would be attending

school in person reach out to see if she could be a library prefect again. Shortly thereafter, another said that since she would be a distance learner, she was sorry that she could not be a prefect. I responded that I could still have distance learners as library prefects, especially eager and engaged students like her. Having taught her for library and information literacy sessions during fifth grade, I knew she would make an outstanding prefect, even at a distance. Right at the beginning of the year, she voluntarily created an excellent tutorial from a student's perspective that showed how to upload work to Google Classroom. When I saw her completed tutorial, I jokingly responded, "When did you get your MLS?" That tutorial was extremely helpful to Rumsey students, parents, and teachers alike, proving that students' ideas and work have far-reaching effects.

Without my ever making formal announcements, a handful of other students continued to reach out through the year to join the library prefect team, resulting in one of the most successful library prefect programs ever. Though meeting times were problematic with some students literally in other parts of the world, we did meet occasionally over Zoom to plan, organize, and complete a plethora of projects. We kept track of our projects using Jamboard (see figures 1 and 2).

Each project had a student manager who would come up with ideas, guide others, and keep them on track. Students were an essential part of the library's relevance and effectiveness for the entire Rumsey community (including alumni, grandparents, and special friends) during that unforgettable year when the physical library served as a surge space.

Inspired by his volunteering in Rumsey's library, one library prefect (who was a distance learner at the

TEAM:
Ryan
Veronica
Serena
Claire
Isabella
Melissa
Yeejune
WE HAD A GREAT, PRODUCTIVE YEAR!!!

Spring '21 COMPLETED PROJECTS
(Next panel lists Fall & Spring Projects!)

Mr. Craig, our new Head of School, has already visited our library. He loves our favorite lines white birch tree!!!

nErDCampCT Jr: Rumsey students were a HUGE part of this pilot program's success!!!

Favorite Lines from Book Fest '21 Books

BLOSSOMS-- Ryan fixed fav sentences spreadsheet; Melissa/Claire/Yeejune cut out &/or hung blossoms; Melissa wrote fav lines for all distance learners & alums that submitted

Summer Reading Planning team: Mrs. Mandl, Mrs. McGrew, Ms. Cooper, Mrs. Saxe, Mr. Mandl, Mrs. DiLorenzo, Oliver A, Ryan Z, Veronica A, Alice X, Jami H, Fiona S, Hezzy B, Mr. Brenner

Earth Day- Project Managers: Isabella and Claire: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1X_pp9p6w4tEa3ddH80WAKo0JAk8tCq/view?usp=sharing

2021 Nutmeg Book Award Voting! Project Manager: Ryan

2021 Nutmeg ELEMENTARY Voting Form

Session Title	Session Dates	Author(s)	Student Moderator	Teacher Moderator
"Let's Discuss, Listen, and Share"	Grades K-2	Veronica Sullivan	Veronica A	Veronica A
"Nature's Book"	Grades 3-4	Deborah Freedman & Laura Rusk	Veronica A	Veronica A
"The Last Straw"	Grades 5-6	James Bond	Veronica A	Veronica A
"Lemon is Not the Only Fruit"	Grades 7-12	Laurie R. King	Veronica A	Veronica A

Session Title
Session Dates
Author(s)
Student Moderator
Teacher Moderator

Session 1
"What's Happening?"
Grades K-2
Linda Barabasi
Student Moderator: Claire
Teacher Moderator: Ryan

Session 2
"What's a Corp?"
Grades 3-4
Frank Rourke
Student Moderator: Claire
Teacher Moderator: Ryan

Session 3
"Add Me Another!"
Grades 5-6
Frank Rourke
Student Moderator: Claire
Teacher Moderator: Ryan

Session 4
"Creating Characters"
Grades 7-12
Frank Rourke
Student Moderator: Claire
Teacher Moderator: Ryan

Figure 1. Library Prefect projects completed during spring 2021.

Fall & Winter Completed Projects '20 - '21

Book Club Video complete 4/1/21!
Project Manager--Serena
<https://bit.ly/BookFest21PhotosQuotes>

Rumsey Hall Book Clubs 2021

Veronica created Book Fest '21 Intro video for faculty/staff

Snowflakes for Snowstorm of Reading completed Winter Term: Project Manager: Melissa

Nursery Rhymes for Rumsey's Kindies & Pre-Primes
Project Manager: Ryan
All recordings due by Friday, October 30th
Part of Global Read Aloud '20
Illustrator study--Juana Martinez-Neal

How TO UPLOAD WORK TO GOOGLE CLASSROOM
Created by Veronica A. '24
September 2020
Project Manager: Veronica

Summer Reading Tree completed Fall '20, Project Manager: Melissa

Made mini books for IIRD Form _Flight of the Puffin_ read aloud.

Maybe Mrs. D will add Stamped and The Rent Collector, though those clubs reach beyond library prefects

Figure 2. Library Prefect projects completed during the 2020-2021 fall and winter terms.

time) from Shanghai, China, created a community service program in Yunnan. His family had created a bridge in that province long before Ryan was born, so he felt a familial pull to that place. He set up a Zoom meeting with me to solicit my ideas. After much thought about how he could give back to a community in China, Ryan embarked on an elementary school library renovation program. He knew that it could be much more child-friendly since the current space had row after row of sterile metal shelving much taller than the children at the school. He asked if I would reach out to my

librarian colleagues to share images of their libraries. As a result, he received photos with suggestions, guidance, and documentation from eight different elementary schools in Connecticut and Rhode Island. He assembled the photos into a presentation and met with the head of the elementary school in Yunnan. With his family's support, he spearheaded and saw the completion of the school's library renovation. Giving students the confidence and opportunity to share their voices led to incredible creations, connections, and programs.

Learning from these successful experiences, I continued to include students' ideas throughout my work as a librarian. While attending a Connecticut Association of School Librarians (CASL) monthly meeting, I learned that the board was looking for volunteers to work on the 2021 nErDCampCT program. (The nErDCamp events focus on literacy and use the Edcamp unconference model for their structure.) CASL board members were searching for someone to help organize and create the first ever nErDCampCT Jr. program for children and teens. Remembering how amazing

nErDCampCT Jr. 2021



nErDCampCT 2020 had been, I quickly said, "I'd like to do that. Can we involve students in the planning, too?" The answer, of course, was "Yes!" Could nErDCampCT Jr. have been organized without student involvement? Sure. Might it have been easier to create without their involvement? Perhaps. Would it have been better without their involvement? Definitely not!

Melissa Thom, then VP and now president of CASL, and I worked together to recruit students from throughout Connecticut to create the nErDCampCT Jr. program. We reached out to librarians across the state hoping to acquire a diverse team. It was a challenging time of year to recruit students to volunteer for a program that was new and rather unknown. Many students were just returning to in-person classes for the first time in a year. Other students were still online. We ended up with a nErDCampCT Jr. team that ranged from fourth-graders through high school students. We met in the evening on Zoom to accommodate a variety of schedules. Though most team members were in Connecticut, we had one fifth-grader from Minnesota, and some Rumsey students logging in from China.

The nErDCampCT Jr. team, which also included author Deborah Freedman, held several brainstorming sessions during which we gathered students' ideas and even artwork for this new program. The adult nErDCampCT team, under the leadership of Barbara Johnson, Melissa Thom, Jenny Lussier, and Katie Gordon, had already gathered

a wide array of interested authors and illustrators who wanted to take part in the first-ever nErDCampCT Jr. event. The Jr. team, therefore, had to create the schedule for the two-day event to be held in June. Student members of the Jr. team were thoroughly engaged in the whole process; they even wrote the draft of the e-mail used to reach out to authors to find out their availability and propose title sessions.

Authors, illustrators, librarians, and teachers commented on how professional our student moderators were. Of course they were professional. They are young, bright reader leaders.

Sometimes serendipitous events occur that end up helping to create something marvelous. Toward the end of the nErDCampCT Jr. planning process, a friend reached out to see if I had any summer projects for her daughter who was finishing her sophomore year of high school. Since nErDCampCT Jr. was just around the corner, maybe her daughter would like to be part of it? After having an hour-long Zoom session with Julia (a student at Westover School in Middlebury, Connecticut), I knew we had found another special student to be on our Jr. team. Out of that first conversation with Julia, an additional session was born from a comment she made: "I Like to Read the Endings First. How Do You Read?" Again, simply listening to students generates

great ideas. This session that Julia moderated with authors was highly engaging and thought-provoking for all in attendance.

Final preparations for nErDCampCT Jr. required student facilitators to research their authors and illustrators so they could introduce and moderate their sessions. Authors, illustrators, librarians, and teachers commented on how professional our student moderators were. Of course they were professional. They are young, bright reader leaders.

One of these reader (and writer) leaders, seventh-grader Veronica, stated about the nErDCampCT Jr. experience: "nErDCampCT Jr. was a great opportunity for all of us students passionate about reading and creativity. Moderating the sessions and meeting authors was especially thrilling for me as I aspire to be a writer one day too. Mrs. DiLorenzo had told me about the adult nErDCampCT prior to the creation of the Jr. version, and I remember really wanting to attend; now I could!" Truly, giving students the opportunity to share their voices through nErDCampCT Jr. has been a highlight of my life as a librarian. More importantly, it has enriched students' lives.

Question Formulation Technique

Later in the summer, while attending Harvard Graduate School of Education's "Teaching Students to Ask Their Own Questions: Best Practices in the Question Formulation Technique" online workshop, I had to create a lesson using this technique. Though I was not sure if I could get participants for a Question Formulation Technique (QFT) session during the summer, I had a feeling that some library prefects would be happy to participate. Never letting me down, a couple of them made it to the live Zoom session. Three other library

prefects watched the recording and shared their questions afterward. An administrator and a teacher attended the session also. The question focus for the session was “improve the culture of reading in the Upper School [at Rumsey Hall].”

Students’ questions and comments generated during the QFT live and asynchronous sessions helped drive the library program for the 2021–2022 academic year at Rumsey Hall. Jami, one of the student attendees at a scheduled face-to-face session, shared the question: “Why is reading not preferred over games?” This prompted us to focus on the ever-present quest for ways to get students to enjoy reading more. A Free Book Friday cart had already been a part of the Lower School for years to make books as accessible as possible at no cost to learners. Why not create one for Upper School, too? Therefore, a newly acquired cart (free from a local thrift shop) was decorated by Rumsey’s National Junior Art Honor Society members. It was easily filled with fantastic high-interest donations, and this Free Book Friday cart has been rolled out to the library’s main entrance ever since. Additionally, since library prefects, teachers, and administrators agreed it is important to encourage reading in any way that we can, the IRB (Independent Reading Book) program (which had fallen by the wayside years before) was reinstated in the Upper School.

After working our way through the QFT sessions, another student attendee at a face-to-face session Yeejune remarked, “Choice is important. I like mysteries.” In the fall while attending a session on genre-fying a fiction collection at AASL’s 2021 National Conference in Salt Lake City, I made a connection back to Yeejune’s comment. I knew that it was time to genre-fy Rumsey’s Upper School fiction section. That

way, students who like a particular genre, such as Yeejune, could easily find many book options within their genre of choice. Once the collection had been genre-fied, students, of course, created a video to introduce this major organizational change to the rest of the Rumsey community.

Conclusion

Time and again, students’ input and participation improves a library’s reach. Programs are more enticing for students when librarians include learners’ perspectives. The interest level for students improves drastically when their peers announce programs and/or create promotional items to share what is happening in the school library. As school librarians, it is our job to do everything we can to pull students into our libraries and programs. We do our best to help everyone find pleasure in reading, find success in researching, create in our makerspaces, and do so much more. I will continue to listen to and include students’ voices wherever I can because I know that programs are more successful and meaningful with student involvement. Though some of us are young at heart, librarians are not the age of our students. Students’ perspectives and life experiences are different from ours. We do our research, but we are not young people. Students’ voices make library programs better and give learners a sense of ownership of the library and its programs. Let’s make sure we continue to include them.

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Valerie Rupe

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Resources of Interest

“Teaching Students to Ask Their Own Questions: Best Practices in the Question Formulation Technique.” Workshop presented by Harvard Graduate School of Education. <www.gse.harvard.edu/ppe/program/teaching-students-ask-their-own-questions-best-practices-question-formulation-technique>

“We’re on a Mission to Fuel Students’ Health, Happiness, and Future Success.” Gamified online learning platform focused on social media literacy presented by The Social Institute. <thesocialinstitute.com/about>

ARTICLE

IMPROVING CATALOG SEARCH SKILLS THROUGH QUEST-BASED ACTIVITY IN THE LIBRARY

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As school librarians, we enthusiastically teach many lessons, but at our library we actually dreaded the annual stale and boring library orientation and catalog search lesson. Located in the Lakes Region of New Hampshire, our school library serves two small schools both located in the same building: a middle school of 110 students in grades six through eight, and a high school of 150 students in grades nine through twelve. Our collection is not separated by school. We collaborate with teachers at all grade levels within our building, and we often help the elementary school librarian in the building across the street as well.

At the beginning of every school year, we would welcome classes of students in the library so that they could see how the facility was organized. We would present how to access and search the catalog to retrieve resources for projects or for pleasure reading. Next, we would walk through the process of checking out books. This activity is unfortunately familiar to many school librarians (Mulch 2014). With this library orientation, we would check off the box on our to-do list for the AASL Standards' Curate Shared Foundation Learner Competency IV.A.2, which refers to identifying sources of information (AASL 2018). However we would do it again the following year with the same students, and most of them did not remember

this lesson, thereby demonstrating that they had not actually developed the competency.

We didn't feel satisfied that our students had actually learned anything, and we certainly didn't learn anything about them. We might do reinforcement of catalog search skills with individual students, but we did not visit classrooms to assess whether our students had learned the skills we wanted them to know. We didn't feel as though we had demonstrated the Curate Shared Foundation's School Librarian Competency IV.A.2, which refers to designing opportunities for learners to explore possible information sources. Furthermore, we did not learn anything about our students' reading preferences and interests, making it more difficult to provide appropriate reader's advisory services to assist the readers select their next fiction title to read, similar to the reference services provided for nonfiction titles (May et al. 2000). We decided it was time for a change.

Quest-Based Learning

We adopted a quest-based approach to teaching catalog skills and getting to learn more about our students' reading interests. Quest-based activities are meaningful and can be quite engaging, not to mention entertaining and stimulating (Snelson 2022). They provide choice and differentiate the learning

experience, as well as multiple pathways to get to the end goals (Farber 2018). Quest-based activities present the opportunity for students to open learning pathways based on the choices that they make (Isaacs 2017), individualizing the learning.

During this activity, students explored our catalog as well as several tools to find a next read. They developed information-location skills, and they provided us with suggestions to add to our collection. Students practiced Curate Learner Competency IV.A. 2, but also were able to practice Curate competencies IV.C.2 and IV.C.3 by accessing crowdsourced sites, and comparing and contrasting information from a crowdsourced site with information from a commercial database. Students also practiced Explore Learner Competency V.A.1 as they read widely. For our part, we learned about our students' reading habits and interests, and compiled an extensive list of books to add to our consideration file.

We created a game-like environment in which students had a main task to complete, along with the possibility of completing side tasks. Their main task was to provide book suggestions for one of a royal family's members to purchase before their upcoming trip to the seasonal palace, where there are no book stores, Internet is unreliable, and shipping is nonexistent.

We didn't feel satisfied that our students had actually learned anything, and we certainly didn't learn anything about them.



Our Process and Project

We built a Google Form that guided students through the quest. Each section of the Google Form corresponded to a different activity for the quest and contained both instruction and questions students needed to answer. Students would complete one section and—depending on choices they made—would be directed to a new section. Each section focused on one specific aspect of a database or website for students to explore. In this way, students experienced multiple ways of locating books, while

providing us with a great selection of titles for books we didn't already have.

We created our own illustrations. We peppered them throughout the quest, much to students' delight and snickering. (A sample of our artistic prowess is in figure 1!) No one was indifferent to the images, and many students tried the other paths so they could see our handiwork. The quest featured eight different fictional characters: the Queen, the King Consort, and their six children. All of them, aside from the Queen and Sixth Child, had specific genres of books they were interested in. The

Queen, an avid reader, likes all books, while Sixth Child, a non-reader, doesn't know what he likes. These characters allowed students to pick the genre of books they wanted to explore.

Having selected a character, all students examined NoveList Plus, a database that provides reader's advisory recommendations and reviews to librarians (EBSCO 2022). Students looked at a genre of books they enjoyed. They examined the definition of their genre and determined whether they agreed or disagreed with how NoveList Plus explained their book genre. They then located titles in their selected



Figure 1. Characters in the quest.



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genres that they had not read. However, before learners worked independently, we modeled how we would approach and complete this task. We then circulated to work with students at their individual paces, and students were encouraged to continue ahead while we assisted other students. An overview of the characters and the work flow during the activity is in figure 2.

With that introduction section of the Google Form completed, students then had a choice. They could continue exploring NoveList Plus for additional information on books in the genre they had identified in the introduction section. Students taking this path found a book they had recently read within that genre. They examined professional reviews about their book, before identifying read-alikes. After reading summaries of those read-alikes, they justified whether or not they would recommend them to their character. We had rich conversations with students about using the opinions of others to inform one's own choices.

They could also take the second path, which was looking at Goodreads, a crowd-sourced reading advisory tool (Goodreads 2022). Students on this path first looked up a book they had recently read. Students then examined the descriptions of those

specific books on Goodreads and reviewed the ratings. They read a five-star review and a one-star review before being asked to comment on whether they agreed or disagreed with what they read, and why. Some students were offended by the ratings. One student noted that their book had a 4.10: "243,275 people have rated this book. Would think it would be closer to a 5 star rating than a 4.10. This is one of the best books (if not the best book) I've ever read." They then surveyed suggested titles related to their book as recommended by the Goodreads algorithm. We had rich discussions with students about the power of crowds to rate a book and the design of algorithms. We took the opportunity to review how averages worked. Many students who took this path were thrilled to learn about Goodreads, and one student indicated later that they had independently started leaving reviews of books they were reading.

Each path also contained a side quest that students were free to complete or ignore. For NoveList Plus, they were asked to judge a book by its cover, while the side quest for Goodreads asked them to find the highest-rated book that was suggested by Goodreads's algorithm and determine, after looking at the reviews, if they would feel comfortable

recommending this book to their character. Students also had the opportunity to attempt the other path before completing a side quest.

What We Learned Following Our First Quest-Based Activity

As a trial, we first performed this activity with students in ninth grade in September 2021. Twenty-nine students participated, and they identified thirteen books that were not in the library collection. We promptly purchased these. The feedback the ninth-graders provided during the evaluation of this activity helped us refine the form. We eliminated redundant questions, and transformed some of the short-answer questions into multiple-choice questions to standardize our analysis.

We showed students they could look at the elementary school's catalog to find more books. Students indicated they didn't know they could still check out books from the elementary school by requesting them from their librarian—great for those who read behind grade level or have younger interests. Many enjoyed finishing a series they had started in elementary school, or being able to read a choice novel that was both interesting and accessible during in-class reading time. They also weren't aware that they could suggest

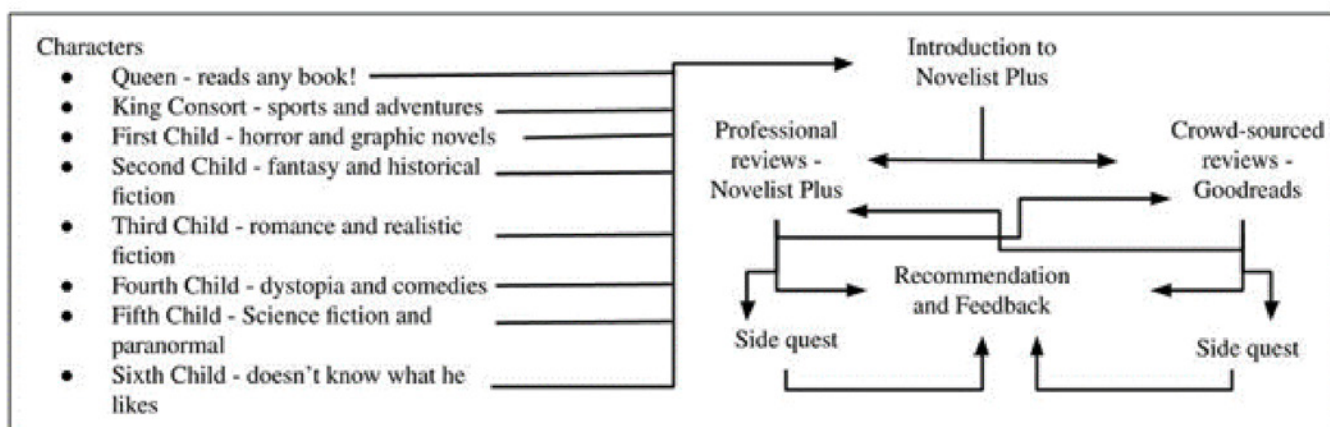


Figure 2. Quest characters and introduction work flow.

More importantly, however, the activity allowed us to build a list of books students were interested in but that were not part of the library collection. We purchased most of those books and were able to present them during subsequent book talks. Students were ecstatic when they realized that their input was valued and had led to our purchasing titles they had suggested.



books for us to purchase. One student reported: "I enjoyed looking at books again because it lit my fire that can only be fed with books!"

The Google Form asked them to search for a book they recently read, and many students indicated that their most recently read book was the obligatory assigned summer reading. We were dismayed to learn this as we circulated throughout the room and engaged with students. Many students noted they did not have the time to read, while others expressed a lack of interest in reading for pleasure. Some could not remember a book they read before that assigned title.

Our Second Attempt Went Much Better

Armed with this feedback, in January 2022 we improved our Google Form. We made it shorter by removing redundant questions. We provided more choices and differentiated paths to completion. We created more illustrations. We then presented our much-improved

quest-based activity to all our middle school students, and eighty-six participated. In our experience as school librarians, middle-schoolers tend to read more than elementary or high school students. Why? They have better reading abilities than elementary students, and more time than high school students because middle-schoolers are too young to drive and have jobs.

The revised form worked well to collect accurate data. Instructions were included in every section of the Google Form explicitly identifying

how to successfully complete the section. We were surprised that 31.5 percent of our students were into realistic fiction, with horror a distant second at 19.6 percent. Our realistic fiction collection was aged and fragmented into different subsets that were not easily accessible for students. Based on this data we increased purchases in this area throughout the year to add more items of interest to learners. Of the 158 NoveList read-alikes students identified, 52 were already in the collection, 96 were not, and 10 were too vaguely described to identify. Surprisingly for us, only two of the 158 books students identified were duplicates. Students identified 63 Goodreads read-alikes, and recommended 53 titles. Of those, 35 were not in the collection, but 18 already were. Overall, this activity yielded 131 recommended book purchases (see table 1).

After participating in this activity, 52 percent of students mentioned that they were able to find new books to read. Students noted: "I learned more about books that I might want to read, and I am not a huge reader so it was nice to find books I would actually read and have a say in it," and that "it was fun and you got to explore new books that you probably wouldn't see otherwise." Many students reported that recommending books to be purchased by the library was really motivating!

	NOVELIST PLUS	GOODREADS	TOTAL
READ-ALIKES RECOMMENDED	158	53	211
ALREADY IN THE COLLECTION	52	18	70
NOT IN THE COLLECTION	96	35	131
DESCRIPTION TOO VAGUE TO IDENTIFY	10	0	10
DUPLICATES	2	0	2

Table 1. Read-alikes recommended by students.

How We Knew We Were Successful

Quest-based learning activities are effective if they demonstrate that the learning goal has been achieved (Snelson 2022). We received confirmation that our learning goal of teaching learners how to find books for pleasure reading had been achieved when, months later, students still came to the library with book titles from NoveList Plus and Goodreads that they had located by themselves. A minority of them did not take the next step of looking at our catalog to determine if we had the books, but we were thrilled to see that they were using some of the skills we had taught them. In subsequent lessons we did emphasize the important link between discovering interesting books and finding out if they were available.

After performing this activity with several classes, we realized we could improve two major elements. First, only one of our four classroom teachers truly engaged with the activity. A second started the activity but did not complete it. The other two promptly disappeared once we had taken charge of their students. Going forward, we will encourage

teachers to do the activity with us, and to circulate among their students to learn more about learners' reading interests. We recognized that we—librarians and classroom teachers—need to use consistent language when talking about and locating books. After all, we're trying to connect students to reading material, but we're also trying to connect teachers with what their students like to read!

Second, we used two class periods for this activity, but it would be more beneficial to spread it out over four days while using only half the class period instead of the whole time. This change would allow students more time to focus on the activity and explore recommended books. Many students reported that they needed more time: "I really like thinking deeply about my books, so I fell behind." This would also allow students who want to go back and take another path time to explore.

What We Learned

For us, this quest-based learning activity addressed several issues. First we taught students how to access the catalog and determine if books are available in our library—and

they demonstrated they could use the skills. Second, it allowed us to integrate reader advisory tools that students previously did not know existed. More importantly, however, the activity allowed us to build a list of books students were interested in but that were not part of the library collection. We purchased most of those books and were able to present them during subsequent book talks. Students were ecstatic when they realized that their input was valued and had led to our purchasing titles they had suggested. And we now have a much more robust school library collection with books our students are interested in checking out and reading! If you want to see our form, e-mail us, and we will be happy to share it with you.

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Etienne Vallée is Director of Technology for Moultonborough (NH) School District. He serves as membership chair for

the New Hampshire School Library Media Association. In 2020 his article "Electronic Books in New Hampshire School Libraries" was published in *Current Studies in Librarianship*. His forthcoming "State of Digital Books in New Hampshire School Libraries Following the Pandemic" will be published this year by the same journal.



Salma wouldn't be the successful picture book character she is today if it wasn't for the school librarians who made space for me in their classrooms.

The Picture Book That Made It Despite the Pandemic

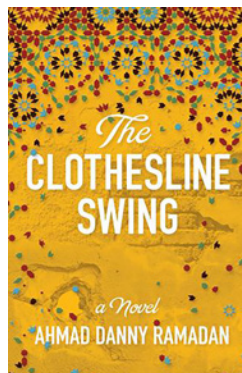
Danny Ramadan

hello@dannyramadan.com

In December 2019 all I wanted for Christmas was a successful release of my then-upcoming children's picture book: *Salma the Syrian Chef*.

It had been a minute since I'd written for children. Back in the Middle East, before I became a Syrian refugee in Lebanon, then a newcomer to Canada, I wrote a weekly series of comics for a children's magazine. I enjoyed the work, which differed greatly from the rest of my writing. I had a cartoonish image in my mind of how my writing streamed into two personas: a reporter on the region's civil wars and uprisings during the day, and a fun-loving children's author at night. Very Clark Kent, minus the underwear over pants thing.

I had abandoned writing for children the way I'd abandoned the region. I came to Canada with a focus on becoming a writer of literary fiction.



I called home and garnered an offer to return to children's writing.

The picture book, which tells the adventure of Salma and Mama, a Syrian refugee family arriving in Canada and missing home back in Syria, received buzz months before it was due to be released in March 2020 by Annick Press. Book tours were being scheduled; festival events were organized; school visits were

My first novel, *The Clothesline Swing*, became a slow-burner of a success over the years. Gradually, I gained a name in the new country

lining up; and a keynote speech or two across North America were planned.

Then, *Salma the Syrian Chef* was released the same week Canada announced a full lockdown due to COVID-19. During the first weeks of my book hitting the shelves, I watched as festivals were canceled, flights were grounded, events fell apart, and schools shut down. On top of the fears that the pandemic brought about the health of my family and me, I watched as the next big thing in my career deflated.

I was devastated. Famed for my overzealous emotional speeches, I told my husband that I was watching as my little Salma faded away in the world that betrayed her. My good man tried his best not to roll his eyes. He failed.

Weeks after the release, I sat in my pajamas at home playing a video game when I received an e-mail from a school librarian. "Hey, I don't know if you do this type of thing," the e-mail read, "but I am wondering if you'd be open to coming for a virtual school visit. We have moved our school activities to Zoom, and all the children are zooming in from home. Maybe you can join us for an hour or so, read from *Salma the Syrian Chef*, and answer some questions."

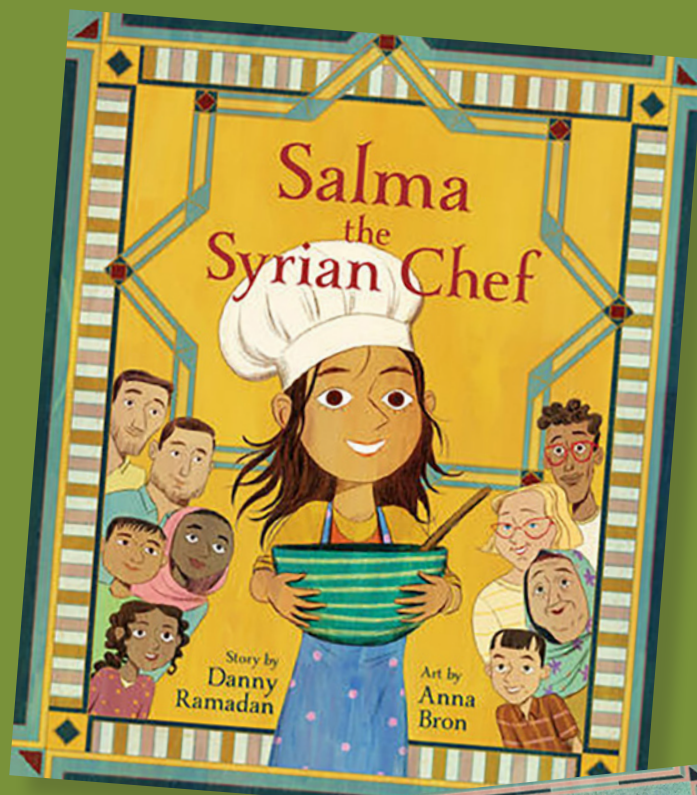
I stared at the e-mail, unsure what to say. I'd previously done readings from my novels to an adult audience. I had never done a virtual reading, nor a reading from a children's book. I also knew myself. I know how to write for a child, create a self-assured character with agency, offer an array of emotions, and allow the story to shine through the lenses of my morals and values. I don't know how to talk to a child or engage them enough to listen to me. Not in person, let alone over Zoom.

"Just be a clown," my good husband said. "You have this juvenile sense of humor anyways. I am sure you will do fine." I wasn't sure that that was a compliment.

A couple of days later, I sat across from my laptop, its camera brought up to my eye level with multiple books underneath it. I smiled when the school librarian introduced me to the students, and then I offered the prepared presentation I'd worked on for a night or two.

"I am Syrian-Canadian," I told the kids. "That means that I have two homes. One right here in Canada, and the other in a place far away called Damascus."

"If you want to visit Damascus from Vancouver, you will have to cross all of Canada," I explained, "then cross



the ocean, then fly from Europe to Africa, then find the small part of Asia, until you are in Syria.

"That's so far away," one of the students said. "Do you want to see my dog?"

I giggled. The teacher quickly muted all the students on the call. "Yes. I would love to see your dog in a minute. Let me tell you more about Syria first."

I read the book and then answered the students' questions. They ranged from simple things like "What's Salma's favorite color?" to more-complicated things like "Why didn't Salma's father join them in Canada from Syria?" The hour passed quickly, and by the end of it I was so joyful I could have burst into laughter. The children's engagement with my little Salma was like an

antidote for my devastation over the possibilities for my book.

"Thank you for coming," the school librarian said. "I know all the children really love Salma and appreciate getting to meet you in real life."

"Thank you for having me." I truthfully was grateful. "This has been the best thing to happen since the start of the pandemic."

Over the next months, school librarians reached out in great numbers. Every invitation resulted in two or three more invites. The educators needed an hour of their day filled with a special guest, and the children loved Salma and were engaged with my presentation even when it was virtual. My material grew. I added a bit about what it means to be a refugee, included a

segment about universal languages understood across differences, and talked about how Salma handles her difficult emotions. The presentation became lively and wonderful.

Salma wouldn't be the successful picture book character she is today if it wasn't for the school librarians who made space for me in their classrooms. Virtual events gave educators in small towns across North America the ability to book me for an hour without worrying about airfares and hotel reservations. It's a little miracle that I get to be Clark Kent again: writing hard-hitting literary fiction about the queer Syrian refugee experience during the day and writing more fun adventures of my charming little Salma at night.

I will leave it up to you to decide which one of these two personas is my favorite.

Danny Ramadan is an award-winning Syrian-Canadian author, activist, and public speaker. His work as an activist has helped provide safe passage for dozens of Syrian LGBTQ+ refugees to Canada. He is the author of two novels for adults, *The Clothesline Swing* (Nightwood Editions 2017) and *The Foghorn Echoes* (Penguin Random House Canada 2022), and a forthcoming memoir *Crooked Teeth* (Penguin Random House 2024). Danny lives in Vancouver, British Columbia.

Salma's adventures continue in Salma Makes a Home, the first title in an early chapter book series also written by Danny Ramadan and illustrated by Anna Bron, which will be released in May 2023 by Annick Press.

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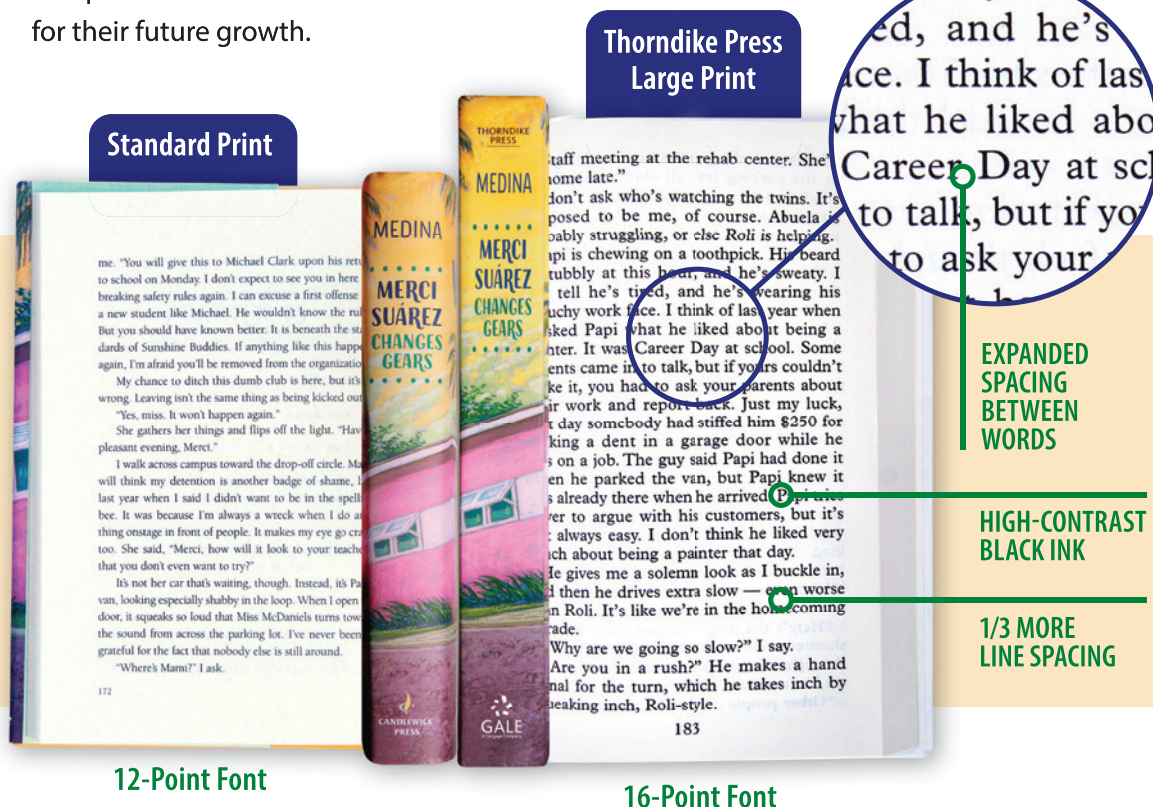
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