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FEATURE

10 Joining Forces to Amplify Voice

Sue Kowalski

SUPPORTING ARTICLES

18 Approaching the Storm

Using the Shared Foundations to Grow in the Face of Book Challenges and Attacks on Intellectual Freedom

Juan Rivera

24 Straddling Parallel Tracks

Diversifying Novels in the ELA Curriculum while Facing Book Challenges about Diverse Texts

Lindsay Cesari

30 377 Book Challenges Tracked by ALA in 2019—and the Problem is Growing

Book Banning and Its Adverse Effects on Students

Joshua Spilka

34 Defeating the Censor Within:

How to Hold Your Stand for Youth Access to Literature in the Face of School Book Bans

Ashley Hope Pérez

40 Access

Why we defend this core value

Mitzi Mack

ARTICLES

48 Harnessing the Power of STEM Education

Heidi Barber

54 LibraryDen:

A Tool for Learning about Research and Information Literacy Pedagogy

Melanie Lewis Croft and Anne C. Barnhart

The National Standards represent a road map and habits of mind that can help us, individually and in groups, to undergo growth-oriented inquiry and to face any challenge and growth area.

Approaching the Storm — pg 18



COLUMNS

- 8 **ALA National Poll**
National survey confirms bipartisan support for the freedom to read
- 60 **Research into Practice Column**
School Library Instruction: Does Experience Matter?
David Robinson
- 64 **CBC Column**
Covid Kills Books, Too
Lois Wickstrom

DEPARTMENTS

- 4 **President's Column**
Balancing Beautiful Collections
Jennisen Lucas
- 6 **KQ Editorial Board Liaison Column**
The Issue of Access: Looking Back, Stepping Up, and Moving Forward
Barbara Gabaldón
- 66 **Index to Advertisers**

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KQ

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Well-crafted selection policies serve as a record of the proper ways to develop school library collections as well as guidelines for school librarians to reference when in doubt about whether a resource or book will fit within the collection.

Balancing Beautiful Collections

Jennisen Lucas, 2021–2022 AASL President | jennisenlucas@park6.org

“You love buying books! How hard can it be?” my husband said to me when I sat down at home one night with my computer in my lap to put together a book order. He’s right. I love buying books, but as all of my fellow school librarians know, it isn’t as easy as it sounds. Collection development is both a science and an art. Thankfully, the more we do it, the easier it gets, but having a good policy to follow also helps.

A few years ago when my school district faced a challenge to a book in the library, the district committee that was pulled together to discuss the book was unsure how to handle the process because we had a policy for choosing instructional material but not for choosing library resources. These two types of material have very different uses and purposes, the committee determined, and the same criteria may not apply. There was a lot of discussion about how they would be offended if their child were expected to read the book in question, but if “someone else” chose to read it, wasn’t that different? This led to our school board reviewing and rewriting the selection-development policy for library materials.

Backing up a little, we first need to think about school library collections. These must be general collections of materials, encompassing as many topics, interests, subjects, etc. as possible. Balance of all types of resources is needed: fiction stories of all genres and formats as well as nonfiction of all topics and formats. Yes, we have to ensure that our school curriculum is well represented and that we provide resources that will help our learners extend their thinking about what is

If you are currently working on rewriting your selection policy, or you are just beginning the process of creating one, I recommend starting with ALA’s “Selection & Reconsideration Policy Toolkit for Public, School, and Academic Libraries.”

taught in each class. However, we also need to provide a variety of materials that can spark the interest and imagination of any learner in our school. We need as wide a variety of topics, situations, experiences, characters, formats, and stories as we can afford because our collections should spark a myriad of links between educational thought and the imaginations that visit them. Collection development is not just buying what looks good to us as individuals.

This is where the science of “library science” comes in. Ensuring a balanced collection of materials means looking at a lot of different pieces and making choices based on what is current, relevant, new, necessary, and popular. It means knowing about a lot of different subjects and what the current theories are. Developing and maintaining a balanced, relevant

collection means keeping a finger on the pulse of a variety of youth interests. It means monitoring the number of checkouts, the copyright dates, the projects being assigned in the classrooms, and all changes in standards or curriculums. The art involved is making this look easy.

Unfortunately, in today's political climate, many members of the general population appear to have ignored all of this expertise, thought, and effort by searching for anything that offends their personal ideals or sensibilities. The delicate balance is being ignored, and school librarians are perceived as people who just "buy books," possibly according to an agenda. Now a lot of people are out to find materials they personally find offensive and insist on their removal. Removal of materials that had been carefully selected for the collection upsets its balance, which upsets the balance of our learners' education. Of course, removal of materials of interest and value to our learners also upsets us as school librarians.

This reality is why selection policies are vitally important to explain the processes by which we choose the materials for school libraries. Well-crafted selection policies serve as a record of the proper ways to develop school library collections as well as guidelines for school librarians to reference when in doubt about whether a resource or book will fit within the collection. These policies are locally developed to ensure that local input and standards are reflected. When my district rewrote our policy a few years ago, much discussion surrounded everything from whether the school librarian should get to participate in the writing of the policy, to whose role it was to choose the books for the library, and what types of materials should be represented within our collection. Ultimately, I am glad to say, I was included in writing the policy, and school librarians are still the choosers of the materials.

While we were rewriting our selection policy, we also reworked our reconsideration policy to include library books, as they differ from instructional materials in that library books are not assigned to students. Our reconsideration policy follows a few steps: speaking to the school librarian, speaking to the librarian and building principal, and filing a formal request for reconsideration that is reviewed by a standing district committee. The district committee members read the book in question and discuss it in relation to the selection policy to see if the challenged book fits the selection criteria.

If you are currently working on rewriting your selection policy, or you are just beginning the process of creating one, I recommend starting with ALA's "Selection & Reconsideration Policy Toolkit for Public, School, and Academic Libraries." We relied on this heavily for information on background, word choice, and content for my district's policy, and everything I needed was included.

Not only is it time to return to our policies and remind others of the science of our profession, this is also a key time to look toward our art of collection development and school librarianship. For the sake of our learners, we must use the art of persuasion to return the focus to how great school libraries contain something to *inspire* everyone. We must persevere through the current negative discourse and shine light on the wonders that come out of school libraries: the new understandings developed by our learners and the inspiration that a true, open, and honest education in the world can provide. We must remind ourselves and our learners that school libraries transform learning and allow our learners to create their futures.

Recommended Resource:

"Selection & Reconsideration Policy Toolkit for Public, School, and Academic Libraries"
<www.ala.org/tools/challengesupport/selectionpolicytoolkit>

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Whether you work in a diverse community or a majority-white community, in a school with an active Gay-Straight Alliance or a school with no such thing, I hope that one of the values for which you can articulate your stand is access to diverse books.

The Issue of Access: Looking Back, Stepping Up, and Moving Forward

Barbara Gabaldón | gabaldon_ba@aps.edu

I am pleased to present a diverse set of voices on the unpleasant subject of censorship. At the heart of the issue of censorship of books in schools, and of this issue of *Knowledge Quest*, is access to diverse voices.

Our feature article “Joining Forces to Amplify Voice” by high school librarian Sue Kowalski from upstate New York, details her experiences revamping her collection policies to prepare stakeholders to respond to challenges from a position of transparency and communication. She stresses the importance of forming and maintaining collaborative relationships with administrators, organizations, teachers, families, and students, in order to strengthen collection development and foster a culture of literacy and dialogue.

Juan Rivera takes us back in order to move forward. He uses his experience working on AASL’s resource guide on LGBTQ+ materials in school libraries to show how we can apply essential questions based on our National Standards’ Shared Foundations to defend intellectual freedom in the face of book challenges.

Lindsay Cesari gives us insight into an aspect of our school librarian role that is sometimes overlooked: working with classroom teachers to select novels for the curriculum. She describes the challenge of selecting new, more diverse texts for her junior high school, while at the same time defending an existing text. The situation led the selection committee to formalize a

procedure for selecting new texts, a process that they anticipate will bolster their defense of selections from future challenges while also giving learners a choice among several titles.

High school student Josh Spilka contributes an important student perspective on book bans, highlighting both the personal effects on students and the success of students’ organizing efforts to push back against book bans.

Ashley Hope Pérez offers her multifaceted perspective as a YA author and former English teacher from Texas, currently a literature professor and defender of intellectual freedom in Ohio. She highlights the importance of recognizing the new tactics being employed in book banning, as well as the importance of recognizing—and maintaining our resolve against—“soft” censorship, or self-censorship.

Finally, middle school librarian Mitzi Mack of Florida—a hotbed of book challenges and attempts to pass restrictive legislation—reminds us of the foundational importance of access to diverse books, and describes the support available from our local and state organizations as well as from ALA.

If the new wave of book banning hasn’t yet hit your school, district, or state, I hope that this issue of *Knowledge Quest* helps inform you about the trends elsewhere in the country, gives you ideas for showing solidarity against

censorship, and helps you prepare in the event that you and your students face this adversity. Even if you never have to face a material challenge yourself, I hope that you will use the strategy in the Ashley Hope Pérez article of articulating to yourself and others what you stand for. Whether you work in a diverse community or a majority-white community, in a school with an active Gay-Straight Alliance or a school with no such thing, I hope that one of the values for which you can articulate your stand is access to diverse books.

If you have experienced a book challenge or ban, I hope that this *KQ* issue brings you ideas to further strengthen your practice and procedures, and brings you more well-informed allies as well.

And now, it's Friday, so I need to go prep a #FReadom post.

Barbara Gabaldón is a teacher-librarian at Atrisco Heritage Academy High School in Albuquerque, New Mexico. A member of AASL, the selection committee for the Land of Enchantment Book Award, and an ALA Spectrum Scholar (2004), she received her MA in Information Resources and Library Science from the University of Arizona. She is the author of the article "Regard More, Not Regard Less" published in the January/February 2020 issue of *Knowledge Quest*.

National survey confirms bipartisan support for the freedom to read

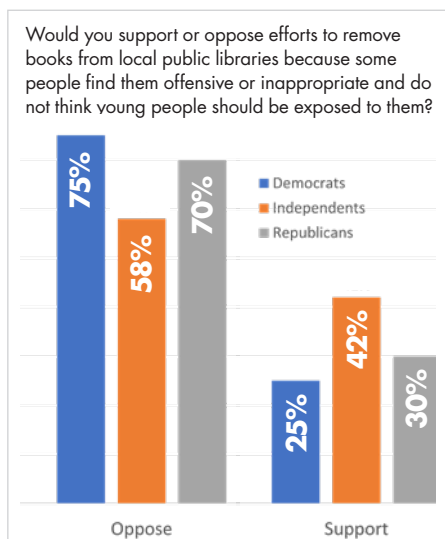
Survey conducted by Hart Research Associates and North Star Opinion Research on behalf of the American Library Association among 1,000 voters and 472 parents of children in public school. The survey was conducted March 1 to 6, 2022, and the sample is demographically and geographically representative of U.S. voters and parents. For more information visit <https://www.ala.org/advocacy/voters-oppose-book-bans-libraries>

A new national poll conducted by Hart Research Associates and North Star Opinion Research on behalf of the American Library Association reports three quarters of parents of public school children (74%) express a high degree of confidence in school librarians to make good decisions about which books to make available to children, and when asked about specific types of books that have been a focus of local debates, large majorities say for each that they should be available in school libraries on an age-appropriate basis.

Key Findings

1) More than seven in 10 voters (71%) oppose efforts to remove books from public libraries, with majorities of voters across party lines opposed.

Figure 1. Strong Opposition to Removing Books from Public Libraries



- By a substantial 42-point margin, voters oppose efforts to have books removed from their local public libraries because some people find them offensive or inappropriate and do not think young people should be exposed to them: 71% oppose, 29% support. Majorities of Democrats (75%), independents (58%), and Republicans (70%) are opposed.
- Parents also oppose efforts to remove books from their local public libraries by a significant 20-point margin: 60% oppose, 40% support. Figure 1.

2) Large majorities oppose book removals in school libraries after hearing arguments from both sides.

- After hearing reasons to both support and oppose efforts to remove books from school libraries because some parents find them offensive or inappropriate, voters oppose efforts to remove books from school libraries by a 34-point margin (67% oppose, 33% support).
- Similarly, after hearing arguments on both sides, parents oppose efforts to remove books from school libraries by a 22-point margin (61% oppose, 39% support), and this view holds true for parents with children of all grade levels: 59% of parents with children in pre-K through 5th grade, 66% with middle schoolers, and 64% with high schoolers oppose book removals.

3) There is near-universal high regard for librarians and recognition of the important role that local public libraries and school libraries play in communities.

- Nine in 10 voters (90%) and parents (92%) have a favorable opinion of librarians who work in local public libraries and school libraries, including 66% of voters and 65% of parents who are very favorable toward librarians.
- The vast majority of voters (89%) and parents (93%) say local public libraries play an important role in communities across the country including their own, including 64% of voters and 70% of parents who believe they play a very important role.
- At even higher rates, voters (92% important, 72% very important) and parents (95% important, 71% very important)

Figure 2. Role local school librarians play in elementary, middle, and high schools

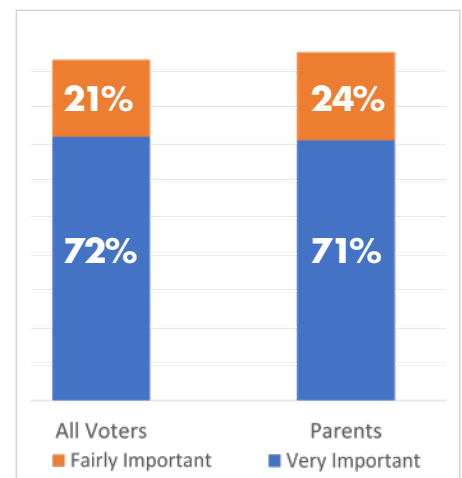


Figure 3. *Belief that Libraries Do a Good Job Offering Books with Variety of Viewpoints*

Voters	Good job representing variety of viewpoints	Parent	Good job representing variety of viewpoints
All voters	79%	All parents	79%
Democrats	89%	Democratic parents	86%
Independents	77%	Independent parents	83%
Republicans	70%	Republican parents	70%
Men	74%	Child in Pre-K to 5th grade	78%
Women	84%	Child in 6th to 8th grade	80%
White voters	79%	Child in 9th to 12th grade	79%
Black/African-American voters	83%	White parents	76%
Hispanic/Latino voters	75%	Parent of color	83%

very important) say school libraries play an important role in public elementary, middle, and high schools.

- Voters across the political spectrum have a keen sense of the importance of public libraries (95% of Democrats, 78% of independents, 87% of Republicans) and school libraries (96% of Democrats, 85% of independents, 91% of Republicans).

4) Most voters are confident in local public libraries to make good decisions about their collections and think libraries do a good job representing a variety of viewpoints. Figure 3.

- Large majorities of voters (75%) and parents (80%) have quite a lot or a great deal of confidence in their local libraries to make good decisions about what books to include in their collections and make available in their communities.
- Nearly eight in 10 voters (79%) and parents (79%) say libraries in their community do a good job of offering books that represent a variety of viewpoints, a sentiment held by majorities of Democrats (89%), independents (77%) and Republicans (70%), and by majorities of voters across demo-

graphic backgrounds. Only small proportions think libraries go too far in promoting books that present a liberal (16% voters, 17% parents) or conservative (5% voters and parents) point of view.

- Fully 83% of voters and 86% of parents say that they are more likely to trust librarians when they hear that librarians are trained to not impose their own thoughts and opinions on which ideas are right but to make knowledge and ideas available so that people have the freedom to choose what to read.

5) Parents express a high degree of confidence in school libraries' decisions about their collections and very few think that school librarians ignore parents' concerns.

- Three in four parents (74%) have quite a lot or a great deal of confidence in public libraries in their local school district to make good decisions about what books to include in their collections.
- Only 12% of parents say librarians in their district's public school libraries ignore the concerns of parents. Majorities of parents (59%) say school librarians in their district generally listen to the concerns of parents and try to work with them if they have concerns; 29% of parents indicate that they do not know enough to say.

Figure 4.

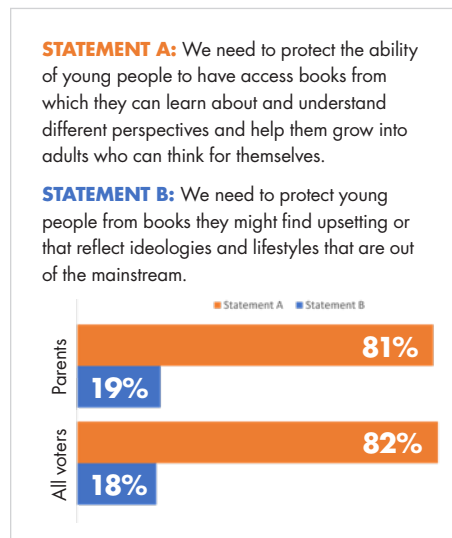
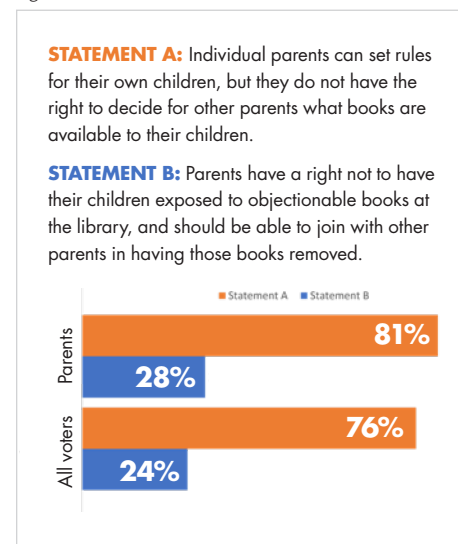


Figure 5.



6) Voters and parents affirm the importance of giving young people access to books and not allowing individual parents to decide what books are available to other people's children. Figures 4 and 5.

- When presented with pairs of statements that represent different viewpoints about removing books from libraries, voters and parents consistently align with opponents of these removals by large margins.

Joining Forces to

Sue Kowalski

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Amplify Voice



Picture it. You hear about an amazing new title. The reviews are spot-on for what you need. You get your hands on the book and after reading it you are beyond motivated to connect with your students. You order this gem, and it is now a part of your school library collection. Your outreach has it flying off the shelves. The readers you thought might love it, do. New readers surface because they, too, feel a connection. For some, it's not a good fit, and that's OK, too. In the world of school libraries, this is what librarians call VICTORY! What could disrupt the parade of joy you are relishing on your way to making more perfect selections for your students?

Opposition surfaces. And this opposition is not your run of the mill, "no thanks" or "I didn't like it" or "I couldn't get into it" rejection. This one is picking up speed and attention. Unlike the usual individual dismissal of a book, this time the disapproval demands action. The concern over the book is public, vocal, and commands the attention of authority in your school community. Your confidence is rattled. Your competence is being questioned. Your emotions run the gamut. The complainant is asking for information and action.

Now What?

If you have been through a formal book challenge, you have experienced victories and defeats throughout the process. If nothing formal has been done yet, it is up to you to shore up your team, gather necessary information, and provide leadership in the process. If you don't have those allies, support systems, or resources in place, it's time to identify gaps and take immediate and strategic action.

Administrative Partners

"Tough" is an understatement to describe this year, and school administrators are managing a heavy load. Superintendents and principals are likely to be notified first with concerns about library materials currently available to students. If this is the first time you have interacted with this administrator, the process of responding may be more cumbersome. If you have maintained a solid working relationship, moving forward with the protocols will, ideally, be more collaborative.

As an instructional leader, you must keep your administrators informed about the mission, programs, initiatives, and instruction happening in and through the school library. Establish channels of communication that work for both of you and consistently share what the school library is doing to align with the school's and district's goals. Face-to-face meetings, library visits, social-media promotions, monthly reports, family outreach, and student and teacher feedback help grow a healthy working partnership with administrators. Equip your local school board with ongoing information, as well, so members are also connected. If concerns have surfaced or you sense an inquiry might go further, keep your administrative team on top of things so no one is caught off guard.

Early in this school year, book challenges were becoming more prevalent and impacting communities across the country. Call me paranoid or prepared, but I knew my department and district needed to update, clarify, and share protocols and procedures.

Honestly, I remember reviewing the materials selection policy each time I hosted an intern or graduate student.

I was confident I was adhering to the policy, but realized I was not particularly organized with having all necessary collection development materials at my fingertips.

My mission was to get my own act together, coordinate with my department, work with district leaders, and create a portal of resources necessary for collection development and potential inquiries. ALA's free "Selection & Reconsideration Policy Toolkit for Public, School, & Academic Libraries" provides specific and research-based guidelines. The introduction to the toolkit states:

Every library — academic, public, and school (public, private, charter, independent, and international) — should have a comprehensive written policy that guides the selection, deselection or weeding, and reconsideration of library resources. The most valuable selection policy is current; it is reviewed and revised on a regular basis; and it is familiar to all members of a library's staff. The policy should be approved by the library's governing board or other policy-making body and disseminated widely for understanding by all stakeholders. (ALA 2018)

I quickly realized that my team had some work to do in the areas of familiarity for all stakeholders and regular review of the policy. Yes, our team has conversations about these topics, but—full disclosure—we had work to do. I took the lead and gathered the relevant material we did have. I curated those on a Google site for easy access and then requested a meeting with our department coordinator and our assistant superintendent. At this meeting, I shared what we had and what we needed to firm up. I was emphatic about the national movement and the

likelihood of concerns coming our way, as well.

I shared a checklist from the “Why Do I Need a Policy?” page of the ALA toolkit:

- Ensures that the selection of materials reflects the institution’s philosophy, mission, guiding principles, or other foundational documents
- Provides a framework for the consistent selection and acquisition of library resources in all formats using a standard set of criteria
- Avoids haphazard patterns of acquisition that will result in waste or overlap of content
- States who is responsible for selection and the parameters under which the individual(s) work, but allows for professional judgment
- Ensures a diversity of viewpoints on all topics, including those that may be considered controversial
- Identifies cooperative collection development arrangements such as resource sharing including interlibrary loans, agreements to purchase or lease e-content, and resource retention commitments (for example, archival materials, government documents, local author materials)
- Provides standards for collection maintenance and the removal of library resources that are out-of-date, inaccurate or no longer reflect the consensus of the field, in poor condition, rarely used, in an obsolete format, no longer fit the needs of library patrons, or have excess copies
- Supplies guidelines for consideration of gifts and donations

- Establishes a process by which individuals may share their concerns about library resources in a discussion with a librarian or, if their concerns are unresolved, invoke a formal reconsideration process
- Affirms the importance of intellectual freedom, referencing key documents such as the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, the Library Bill of Rights, and the Freedom to Read Statement (ALA 2018)

Quickly, I recognized our gaps. If you are a new member of your school community or a veteran who needs to update information, you must take the lead. I could lament or be mortified about what I didn’t have clearly curated, but instead I made it my mission to get it together for our school community. Some of our materials were accessible and updated and some needed work. As I write this late in 2021, we still have some work to do and are working collaboratively to complete it. I follow up routinely with our assistant superintendent and director to ensure we have updated and revised materials, and have access to the same critical resources. I know our follow-up meetings are on the radar, but I will have to be persistent to keep moving forward. Legal backing, too, is significant and that is a piece that must happen at the district level, as well.

Make sure you have located all relevant materials, confirm they are updated, and establish a chain of command that won’t leave multiple parties scrambling to find what they need. Creating a shared folder, binder, drive, document, or website for internal use will help ensure members of the team can easily access materials they need. Updating the format, content, and accessibility of all relevant materials is important, too. For example, a policy written several years ago in my district still

referred to VHS and CDROMs on the Reconsideration Form. Though a simple fix, the form should be updated before it is needed. Potential changes or updates to existing documents may need school board, administrative, or legal approval, so make that a priority. Don’t wait to be asked to gather the resources—be proactive. Though policies are more difficult than simple forms to change, protocols and procedures are often in need of clarification and updating. Be a leader in advocating for these critical shifts.

Organizational Partners

Librarians have many professional resources at their fingertips to support a book challenge. At times, we may even seem to have too much to sort through. The ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom provides confidential support during censorship challenges to library materials, services, and programs and is a great place to start. Anyone can report censorship, even if they do not require assistance.

Finding resources to manage a challenge is not a difficult quest, but securing your community team to forge through the process at the district level can be more difficult without a plan. Clearly outlined policies and protocols related to materials selection, collection development and maintenance, reconsideration resources, and intellectual freedom must be in place and accessible for all stakeholders. As an instructional leader, make sure you have easy access to information and guidance about the library mission, objectives of a collection, managing donations, weeding, controversial materials, and the path of filing a request for reconsideration. Reach out to your library department, peers, and your regional, state, and national library organizations. Ongoing involvement

in these organizations will make connecting at time of need even more efficient based on the relationships you already have. Tap into the expertise of your professional network to assist in your preparation for a reconsideration challenge and ensure you have a clear point of access to these partners.

It is critical not to make assumptions about what resources are available within your district policies. Librarians must take the lead to identify strengths and gaps in the existing access to policies and protocols related to all aspects of collection development. If we fail to identify gaps, we are failing our community. In their 2020 article *Analyzing the Diversity of a High School Library Collection*, Sarah Jorgenson and Rene Burruss direct school librarians to ensure their library collection represents the community. Those authors shared that “diversity covers many areas: race, culture, ability, sexual preference or identity, religion, gender, and class. In order to serve all students, school librarians must be ready to advocate and promote diversity within their own environment” (2020, 53). Failure to analyze the collection with integrity will not only provide a gap in meeting the needs of students, but also challenge the reality of policies and protocols when collection items are challenged.

In a recent *School Library Research* paper by Dr. April M. Dawkins and Emily C. Eidson, library leaders are reminded that “having a selection policy is important because no library can collect everything. In a school library the selection policy should serve as the foundation of a collection that supports an equitable, inclusive, and learner-centered environment” (2021). A selection policy and ongoing analysis of the collection will benefit the entire community.

Reaching Out to Stakeholders

In 2021 I reached out to stakeholders via a survey to ask for input about topics relating to book banning and individual choice. Students were asked about factors that help them decide what books to read. Parents/guardians were asked how their guidance, support, conversations, and beliefs influence what their children read, and about how parents/guardians would proceed if their child had a book that doesn’t align with parents’ beliefs.

All respondents were asked what they do if they don’t feel comfortable with a book they run across or that has been assigned for a class. All respondents were also asked questions about diversity of books in school libraries, book banning, and the school librarian’s role in providing access to diverse resources. Stakeholders were also given an opportunity to provide comments about their views on issues affecting individual choice.

The responses were interesting and thought provoking. You might want to do your own survey to get a broader perspective and to identify allies. Some of the responses to my survey have been included in the following sections.

Teacher Partners

School librarians can’t grow a reading community alone. Teacher partners are key players in conversations, outreach, and modeling. When students hear messaging from multiple perspectives about the power of choice, their confidence as a reader grows. Andrew Zupan, ELA teacher at Pine Grove Middle School, for example, shared how he models choice for his students. “When I come across a book I am uncomfortable with, I just walk on by it. Unless it defames a marginalized group, then I try to do something about it. In the past when I was uncomfort-

able with an assigned book, I still read it. I have never been assigned a book that made me uncomfortable through discrimination but through violence. That being said, it is important to read things that make you uncomfortable inside. That is how we grow and change as people.” Andrew shares his reading experiences in conversations with students and is teaching students how to use their voices in the process. You can’t, however, expect teachers like Andrew to be part of the support team in difficult times if you haven’t had a solid working relationship before that.

Many factors may impede strong teacher-librarian partnerships with the entire staff of a building. Schedules, staffing, content, and even a pandemic can all impact the depth and frequency of these working relationships. Some collaborations are organic, and some take more work to build. Foster solid partners who are aware of the mission of the school library, understand student involvement in the school library, are exposed to the collection, and are clear how the school library aligns with the instructional goals of the school and district.

Lisa DiCosimo, grade 6 ELA teacher, is a strong library advocate and instructional partner. Lisa is emphatic that “kids need to see themselves in literature to know they are not alone in their feelings about gender identity, those students of color and those who have [emigrated] from other countries so they can learn about others. I love the choices in our school library, and I try to read different kinds of titles for *First Chapter Fridays*, and the students love it!” Because of the culture she builds in the classroom, Lisa’s students are well equipped and empowered to come to the school library to ask for specific titles, subjects, and genres. They are equally comfortable in

sharing what they are *not* interested in and that comfort reflects student ownership in their reading journey. Conversations and modeling in the classrooms by teachers like Lisa play a critical role in growing a culture of literacy and building allies for the school library.

Family Partners

Every school has unique opportunities and challenges when it comes to making valuable connections between the school and families. In some communities, parents and families are embedded partners in growing a culture of literacy. Some students are exposed to author visits, book fairs, special events, promotions, public library collaboration, community outreach, summer reading programs, and overall support of literacy and the school library within their families. Often the school librarian will fit nicely into the existing literacy ecosystem and will continue to help these connections thrive. Other times, however, the librarian needs to start small and build partnerships one family at a time. Librarians need to continually assess their communities, identify gaps, and pursue potential areas of partnership. For example, some students may not be checking out books because of a negative experience with an overdue record from prior years that tainted their comfort level with checking books out. Families may have guidelines for what their children can or cannot take out, and understanding these concerns is helpful. A student may be experiencing challenges in using the online catalog or signing out audiobooks, hindering their access. Providing an easy way to identify what is NOT working for families is key in breaking down barriers. Parents and caregivers who are involved in their children's reading lives should be celebrated. Their input and meaningful conversations with



their children about their reading choices provide powerful guidance for students.

Parent Caira Cramer-Walter shared, "With my teenager, I make sure to show an interest in anything she is reading. She reads constantly. I will have her talk to me about the book, or I will read the book myself after she is done. We will have a book talk. If there are issues that pop up that go against our family beliefs/guidelines I make it a point to talk to her about it and look up information if needed. With my youngest, he isn't into any difficult topics yet, but I have already established a system where he talks to me about his book when he has finished a chapter or two."

Parent Mary B. said, "We talk to our son about his traits and what he likes to read, and those are the books he takes out and we buy for him. If we don't like a book he has, which hasn't happened yet, we would sit down with him and talk about why he wants to read it and what he thinks he would get out of reading the book."

Ms. Lenahan, an ELA teacher, is a valuable community advocate who sends clear messages to her students that they have the right to choose

what they do and don't want to read. She shared, "I think that it's the school's job to provide students with a safe environment to explore ideas, and the library is one of the sources of this. I think that it's a parent's responsibility to pay attention to what their child is reading and to have conversations with them about what they're reading—especially if it's sensitive material. If a parent doesn't want a student to read something, they should have the authority over that." Ms. Lenahan honors the role of a parent (family) in the decision-making process of considering a book challenge.

Parents and teachers who take an active interest in what learners read and value access to diverse materials of interest to diverse students can be strong allies for a school library.

Student Partners

Students. They are why we do what we do. Not only do we want to have a library collection that reflects each of them, but we also want learners to have the option to choose what works (or does not) for them. School libraries flourish when students feel a genuine connection to the program, the environment, the collection,



and the people. Librarians create authentic connections to students through direct instruction, classes, library programs, special interest groups, clubs, student volunteers, promotions, contests, class visits, guest speakers, authors, digital resources, books, and daily interactions.

When learners are equipped with the strategies to advocate for what they want to see in the school library and feel comfortable in choosing or passing on a specific title, genre, or subject, conversations are possible. When a parent/caregiver shares a concern or belief related to their child's selection, that input should be celebrated and acknowledged. In interactions that are centered around individual student-family expectations, the school librarian offers an important voice.

Our students are our most valuable advocates, and the library must be a safe, nurturing environment where they see themselves reflected. They deserve opportunities to choose, to refuse, and to have opinions.

Student DP, when asked about the role of the library, said, "I believe that it's to get books that teach kids about different things."

Eighth-grader Kayden shared, "Some people might be interested in a certain topic, and removing it is taking that away from them. Kids should be able to pick what matches them. When I find a book I don't feel comfortable with, I will probably return it. I also would be willing to tell the librarian just to let her know." She adds, "I think students should be able to choose what they want."

Kaleigh, another eighth-grader, expressed her belief that parents have the right to tell their kids not to read something, but other kids should be able to still read it to have a wide range of options. She continued, "Knowing that this library isn't one age group, some people might enjoy things others don't. If I find a book that I am not into, I return it. If a parent doesn't think a book is OK, the librarian should talk to the parent to see what they don't like and

work through it with their student, not decide for everyone."

Ariella, in grade 6, also believes that parents should talk to the teacher or librarian to see what their students can and can't read. She said, "All students should be able to read about people and their life stories. Even if a student is not like the character in the book, students can learn more about what matters to different people by reading it."

Seventh-grader Dorothy said, "I think that parents should have some control over what they want their kids to read or to not read. However, they should not make the decision to remove books for all students. Instead, the parents should be using their voices to add books to the library in order to grow it and its community."

Students like these can be powerful advocates for the school library and its collection.

Looking Forward

Ideally, our school communities are places where everyone is encouraged to have and share their opinions, and with a culture that promotes choice and voice. Ideally, the school is also a place for healthy discord that helps everyone grow as an individual. The school library is an essential component of such a community.

The reality, however, shows that some stakeholders want their perspectives and opinions to be the only ones or be recognized as the "right" ones. Though many people will celebrate the availability of a range of relevant and credible options for readers, some stakeholders will want to have greater control over exactly what is considered to be relevant or credible. Librarians must acknowledge that the interpretation of what is *inappropriate*, *profane*, *obscene*,

racist, immoral, or subversive will be as individual as each person who makes those claims.

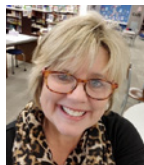
Some inquiries may warrant a conversation to resolve concerns, but others will need a more-formal path. Librarians are ambassadors of intellectual freedom and our mission is to connect our communities to ideas and perspectives to expand thinking. There will be times, however, when addressing a challenge needs to be less dialogue and more protocols. As passionate as we are about what we do, we will need to minimize emotion and opinion, and instead focus on the process for the formal inquiry.

Book challenges will happen. School librarians can provide the leadership needed to grow a culture of literacy that is a collaborative venture with administrators, teachers, organizations, families, and students. These partnerships may not reduce challenges or calls for material removal, but they will strengthen the foundation of a solid community to foster regularly occurring, open dialogue.

It is up to the school librarian to proactively cultivate partnerships. By means of effective leadership, the librarian must identify gaps and seize opportunities to create a program that continues to thrive and meets the needs of each community. Finding out what is missing is a cyclical process. Firming up access to policies, guidelines, and protocols that ensure an ethical and responsible collection is non-negotiable. It is equally important to continually identify what is streamlining access for all and what barriers may be standing in the way. Library leaders must have a keen eye on what is not working for community partners in terms of the content, format, perspective, voice, genre, and subjects of the collection. What adjustments or shifts are warranted to better

reflect community needs. Yes, hard work and leadership will strengthen a school library. We also must keep a critical eye on what shifts or changes are needed to expand the impact of the school library.

Are you ready?



Sue Kowalski is a middle school librarian at East Syracuse Minoa Central School District in East Syracuse, NY.

She is a past winner of the National School Library Program of the Year (AASL), I Love My Librarian Award (Carnegie/ALA), iSchool Alumni Impact Award (Syracuse University), Super Librarian Award (Central New York School Librarians), and Teacher Librarian Journal Leadership Award, and has been named a Library Journal "Mover and Shaker." Sue is passionate about the role of strategic leadership and the impact that has on strong school library programs. She is actively involved in the New York Library Association and its Section of School Librarians, Onondaga Cortland Madison Board of Cooperative Educational Services, Northern Onondaga Public Library Board of Trustees, New York State Board of Regents Advisory Council on Libraries, and AASL in varying capacities. Amplifying student voice is always her focus, and she works to do that through the iStaff library service program for school students, and multiple channels in and through the library. She shares the power of how school libraries connect to the school community and beyond, and continues to grow those collaborative partnerships. Sue believes librarians must #LEADOUTLOUD (bullhorn optional). Conversations happening on Twitter @spkowsalski.

Recommended Resources:

To read more about growing a culture of literacy to prepare for challenging times:

- American Library Association. 2022. "Office for Intellectual Freedom." <www.ala.org/aboutala/offices/oif>
- American Library Association. 2018. "Selection & Reconsideration Policy Toolkit for Public, School, & Academic Libraries" <www.ala.org/tools/challengesupport/selectionpolicytoolkit>
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- Gustafson, Brad. 2021. *The 6 Literacy Levers: Creating a Community of Readers*. Chicago: ConnectEDD.
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- Jorgenson, Sarah, and Rene Burress. 2021. "Analyzing the Diversity of a High School Library Collection." *Knowledge Quest* 48 (5): 48–53. <<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1252581.pdf>> (accessed Feb. 12, 2022).

APPROACHING THE STORM

**Using the Shared Foundations
to Grow in the Face of
Book Challenges and Attacks
on Intellectual Freedom**



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For a few years, I was an assistant instructor at the North Carolina Outward Bound School. We brought groups of students into the western Carolina wilderness to teach them outdoor skills and to help participants step out of their comfort zones and grow. As one of the instructors, I was also responsible for the safety of the group. We prepared participants for lightning storms and medical emergencies, and worked on developing leadership and communication skills within the group, skills that could help the entire group under potentially hazardous conditions.

One of the key skills we taught and practiced was orienting by reading maps, compasses, and the changing landscape. In an emergency or during a difficult journey, the group needed to know where they were and where they were going. By mastering use of these orientation tools under safe conditions, group members could respond more nimbly and calmly under challenging conditions.

School librarians also need to prepare for ongoing and coming storms, but in a way that makes our individual practices, our learning communities, and our profession stronger. As school librarians, we are facing book challenges and more. At LibLearnX in January 2022, ALA

President Patty Wong explained that the Office of Intellectual Freedom dealt with triple the number of book challenges in 2021 than during the previous year. This could be a time to panic, or this could be a time for us to strengthen our practice, community bonds, and our professional associations so that we can not only weather this current storm, but come out more capable and strong.

School librarians also need to prepare for ongoing and coming storms, but in a way that makes our individual practices, our learning communities, and our profession stronger.

Fortunately, we have a map, compass, and instructor guidebook. It is AASL's *National School Library Standards for Learners, School Librarians, and School Libraries*. Like any document, it is not perfect and doesn't contain all the answers. However, the National Standards represent a road map and habits of mind that can help us, individually and in groups, to undergo

growth-oriented inquiry and to face any challenge and growth area.

In 2018 our Emerging Leaders team of public and school librarians was tasked with creating a guide to help school librarians to address intellectual freedom as they considered growing and maintaining their LGBTQ+ collections. As we faced this daunting task, we turned to the AASL Standards to guide our inquiry. There were six of us on the team and six Shared Foundations: Inquire, Include, Collaborate, Curate, Explore, and Engage. These Shared Foundations not only helped us divide up the work but also helped us establish a powerful interlinked inquiry that school librarians could dip into or fully engage in to become stronger defenders of LGBTQ+ materials and intellectual freedom. AASL's "Defending Intellectual Freedom: LGBTQ+ Materials in School Libraries" webpage is a great place for school librarians to expand their knowledge of and practice supporting intellectual freedom and how to use Shared Foundations to engage in a meaningful inquiry and change process. In addition to a link for the free downloadable resource guide we developed (with the same title as the webpage), the page includes links to an infographic and other free tools for assessing a collection.



Our Emerging Leaders team used the Shared Foundations, which are explained by Key Commitments, to raise essential questions that could help us individually and as a profession become stronger defenders of intellectual freedom and LGBTQ+ materials. I've adapted the essential questions we developed for the *Defending Intellectual Freedom: LGBTQ+ Materials in School Libraries* resource guide (see pages 6–7) and applied them to the issue of how to think about ways to defend intellectual freedom in the face of book challenges. The following is a short explanation of each Shared Foundation, its Key Commitment, and some essential questions that might help us become stronger defenders of intellectual freedom during these trying times and beyond.

Inquire: Find and Mind Your Gaps

The Key Commitment of the Inquire Shared Foundation is to “build new knowledge by inquiring, thinking critically, identifying problems and developing strategies for solving problems” (AASL 2018, 34). When defending intellectual freedom in the context of book challenges, this Shared Foundation calls for asking questions, finding our gaps in knowledge and practice, and beginning to strategize on how to overcome those gaps. Some essential questions might be:

What is intellectual freedom and what should school librarians know about it?

What does our district and local collection development policy say and how could it be improved?

What questions come to mind as we read the Library Bill of Rights—and the

various interpretations of the Library Bill of Rights—regarding access, advocating for intellectual freedom, challenged resources, diversity in collection development and more?

You don't need to know everything at once. Keep calm and inquire on.

Include: Widen the Net

The Include Shared Foundation asks us to “demonstrate an understanding of and commitment to inclusiveness and respect for diversity in the learning community” (AASL 2018, 35). In a time when voices are being restricted, this is a time to challenge ourselves to practice inclusion even more and challenge our own gaps. For example, after attending LibLearnX this year, I realized that I need to work on my gap around Asian-American history and its erasure. A key essential question might be:

How can we as school librarians expand the value of an inclusive collection as part of the health and well-being of individual learners and learning communities?

At LibLearnX ALA President-Elect Lessa Kanani'opua Pelayo-Lozada invited all members to visit or revisit ALA's Office for Diversity, Literacy and Outreach Services' “Glossary of Terms.” Contemplating the definitions in the glossary could lead us to ask:

How do these definitions of equity, diversity, inclusion, racial justice, social justice, and systemic vs. individual bias help us look at our collections, our justification for our collections, our practice, and our professional associations?

ALA's “Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion: An Interpretation of the



Library Bill of Rights” is another short but powerful guide and stimulus for thought.

Book challenges and the climate of attack may at times cause us to want to retreat, but now is the time to keep growing and know our communities.

Collaborate: Create and Strengthen Bonds

The Key Commitment of the Collaborate Shared Foundation calls for us to “work effectively with others to broaden perspectives and work toward common goals” (AASL 2018, 36). Book challenges and the climate of attack may at times cause us to want to retreat, but now is the time to keep growing and know our communities. We can consider:

How can we find out more about the interests and concerns of those in the local community?

Who are our community’s stakeholders and elected representatives?

How can we collaborate with librarians through local, state, or national associations?

Who are our local peers in public and academic libraries?

How can we take advantage of collaborations across the library ecosystem such as the *Defending Intellectual Freedom: LGBTQ+ Materials in School Libraries* resource guide?

You don’t have to do it all. Take one small action regularly. Renew or start your membership in local, state, and national library associations. Your membership at whatever level of involvement you choose makes a difference to the profession and to other librarians who may be facing even more challenging situations than you are. Make connections and collaborate with library workers of other library system types. Familiarize yourself with the ALA library ecosystem toolkit as a framework for making connections between and beyond different library types. (The toolkit is accessible through the “One Voice” webpage of the ALA Ecosystem Initiative).

Also, make sure that your work and concerns go beyond the echo chamber of the library community by leveraging social media, traditional media, and membership in other organizations, and reach out to people in different levels of government. Share once a week, once a month.

Barbara Stripling, former ALA and AASL president and current president of the Board of Trustees of the Freedom to Read Foundation, has explained the importance of widening and working within what she called the Library Ecosystem for Intellectual Freedom. Her remarks are part of a webinar presented by ALA’s Public Policy and Advocacy Office: “ALA Library Ecosystem: Together We Make a Difference.” (Dr. Stripling’s presentation begins at the 26-minute mark in the webinar, but the entire presentation is important to our work.)

You don’t have to go through a challenge alone. Your local or state library association can collaborate with ALA’s Office of Intellectual Freedom (OIF) in the event of book challenges or book censorship. In fact, if you are faced with a book





challenge, contact the OIF in addition to other partners. The OIF gathers information about challenged titles and prepares materials to defend them. By taking this collaborative step and working with library partners such as OIF, you may be helping your peers and library users.

Curate: Build the Collection, Build Your Community

The Curate Shared Foundation Key Commitment asks us to “make meaning for oneself and others by collecting, organizing, and sharing resources of personal relevance” (AASL 2018, 37). This Shared Foundation is at the heart of what we do. When our Emerging Leaders team was creating the *Defending Intellectual Freedom: LGBTQ+ Materials in School Libraries* resource guide, one of the essential questions we asked ourselves was:

How can we as school librarians build collections using strong, effective collection development policies while avoiding self-censorship?

With LGBTQ+ materials, we discovered that many school librarians were limiting themselves at the point of acquiring materials in the school library. With all materials, it is important to think about which materials or resources make us pause or hesitate.

To curate your collection more effectively, you also need to curate your relationships. As Emerging Leaders we asked:

How can learners be involved in collection development?

However, that question might also be extended to teachers, parents, other librarians and thoughtful allies, and advisers. These are allies who can be involved in examining and rethinking collection development policies and practices, and in articulating the need to have a robust and inclusive collection. As a school librarian, you will be less alone when you not only focus on curating diverse materials but also on curating diverse relationships.

To curate your collection more effectively, you also need to curate your relationships.

Explore: Grow, Experience, Reflect, Repeat

The Explore Shared Foundation is about actions we take to address our gaps. The Key Commitment is to “discover and innovate in a growth mindset developed through experience and reflection” (AASL 2018, 38). The essential questions the Emerging Leaders developed for the LGBTQ+ resource guide readily apply to the issue of learning to defend intellectual freedom:

How can we as school librarians explore their own biases and grow by looking at their biases?



How can we examine the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of our own current collections?

How can we engage with a wider community around challenged materials and intellectual freedom?

Conferences, whether they are ALA, AASL, state, local—or even outside of the library field—are excellent places to start your exploration. They are great places to build your knowledge base and community. In the spirit of Explore, choose events that are both fun and will challenge your thinking.

Engage: Don’t Do it Alone

The Engage Shared Foundation calls on us to “demonstrate safe, legal, and ethical creating and sharing of knowledge products independently while engaging in a community of practice and an interconnected world” (AASL 2018, 39). This directive raises two essential questions:

How can we prepare for responding to challenges to materials?

How can all stakeholders be encouraged to actively engage with the issues of intellectual freedom, the freedom to read, and book challenges?

As school librarians with limited budgets and time, wisely vetting and sharing resources safely can be a challenge. Again, you don’t have to be alone. You can engage in the community of practice that supports your work. At LibLearnX for example, representatives from *Booklist* and ALA’s OIF presented “Reading and Writing Book Reviews in a Climate of Book Challenges.” One of the main tools that OIF uses is book reviews that help defend the purchase

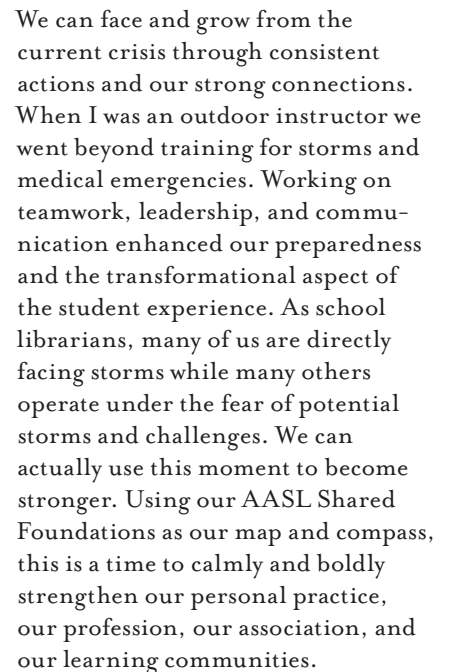
Activist and author Grace Lee Boggs reflected in her 2011 book *The Next American Revolution* that



He wrote the chapter "Graphic Novels and Inclusive Practice" in the book Include, in the Shared Foundations series published by ALA Editions.

“One Voice: Building a Strong Library Ecosystem” (includes toolkit) <www.ala.org/advocacy/ala-ecosystem-initiative>

Looking Ahead



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STRADDLING PARALLEL TRACKS

Diversifying Novels
in the ELA Curriculum
while Facing Book
Challenges about
Diverse Texts

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Introduction

As in many districts across the country, my school, a suburban junior high in central New York, faced book challenges during the 2020–2021 and 2021–2022 school years, as parents and members of the community expressed concerns about both classroom novels and library books. Although the experience was stressful and often contentious, it proved to be a catalyst for positive curricular changes.

In the spring of 2021, ninth-grade teachers faced the daunting challenge of selecting a new novel with the goal of diversifying the English Language Arts (ELA) curriculum while simultaneously defending a diverse novel already in the curriculum. Although the experience was stressful, the juxtaposition of family concerns expressed during the book challenge and our conducting the selection process for new texts forced us to consider strategies to address both community needs and curricular demands. As a result, the district developed a formalized procedure for selecting new texts.

Book Challenges

Although the book challenge and text-selection process occurred concurrently, I'll start with the book challenge. Ninth-grade students in the district have been reading *All American Boys* by Brendan Kiely and Jason Reynolds for ELA classes since 2018. However, in January and February of 2021, ELA teachers began to observe a noticeable uptick in parent concerns about the text. Among the parents that contacted classroom teachers and building administrators, most mentioned that they felt the book negatively portrayed law enforcement and did not accurately depict racism. Additionally, there were concerns that

classroom teachers weren't doing enough to present both sides of a controversial issue.

In response, some families opted their students out of the *All American Boys* unit, and teachers provided alternative assignments. In March 2021 a parent issued a formal request for re-evaluation of instructional materials, and, as per board policy, a committee was formed in early April to review the text and its place in the curriculum.

Text-Selection Process

Simultaneously, in mid-February, the district's director of curriculum and instruction tasked secondary ELA programs with identifying new, diverse texts to add to the curriculum. Building librarians were asked to lead each text-selection committee. Like many districts around the country, our district has spent the last several years investing time and resources in developing its diversity, equity, and inclusion practices. This process included diversity audits of both the high school and junior high school libraries, and careful examinations of the short stories, poems, and novels read in ELA classrooms. The conclusions of these inspections revealed that students would benefit from additional exposure to diverse texts, especially those in which the character's diverse racial or ethnic identity is *not* the primary source of the novel's conflict.

Once the text-selection committee understood their task, they began to formalize a text-selection process, ultimately arriving at a six-step method. The outside response to this six-step process has been largely positive. A TikTok video providing an overview has been viewed more than 28,000 times and shared almost 300 times. Comments on the video include "This is an amazing process!" and "I so wish we could do this in my district!"

Before discussing specific titles or projects, it's important to instead identify learning goals.

Let's walk through the steps and the ninth-grade ELA team's experience during each stage of the process.

Step 1: Identify Desired Goals.

The first part of the process mirrors Backward Design Theory. Before discussing specific titles or projects, it's important to instead identify learning goals. This process requires participants to answer questions like 1) What big goals do we want to accomplish with this unit? 2) What standards do we want to address with a new book? 3) What skills are students expected to master? In answering these questions, participants will begin to develop a list of criteria for a new book.

Our experience: The concurrent community concerns that ran alongside the text-selection process informed much of the decision-making process. One overarching goal the ninth-grade team identified early on was a commitment to developing a text bundle that would allow parents and students to select one title from a handful of options. Rather than identifying just one novel to add to the curriculum, the department instead decided to focus on adding a minimum of four titles. Each student would work with their family to select a title. In addition to increasing family agency and participation in curricular decision-making, this strategy also aligned with building goals focused on increasing student choice and voice. Another overarching goal we

In determining developmental appropriateness, the committee reflects on their student population and the community.

WHAT MIGHT BE CONSIDERED APPROPRIATE IN ONE DISTRICT MAY NOT FLY IN ANOTHER.

identified was a desire to assemble a set of titles that was diverse in characters, authorship, and format. In selecting learning standards on which to focus, those associated with identifying text evidence, determining and analyzing themes, and examining text structure were prioritized. Additionally, because we knew teaching a variety of texts simultaneously would require students to work in small groups, we prioritized discussion skills.

After these goal-setting conversations, we were able to establish a few early criteria for the books:

- Nontraditional formats, like novels in verse and graphic novels, were a high priority
- We wanted stories featuring characters from traditionally marginalized groups, including socioeconomically diverse characters and immigrant communities, and representation of mental health-related considerations.
- All the books that were ultimately selected should share a common universal theme to unify class discussions.

Step 2: Identify potential titles.

In the second step, participants identify a list of potential titles that could be used to address the goals established in Step 1. Librarians should feel especially at home in this step as an immensely valuable resource to any team building a book list. In developing a list of potential titles, participants should consider book awards, book reviews, and recommendations from stakeholders, including classroom teachers, students, and community members.

Our experience: Working together, our team of six participants identified approximately twenty-five titles that met the criteria established in Step 1. Everything we put on the “to read”

list for the next step had to have been positively reviewed for a ninth-grade audience. Figure 1 gives you an idea of some of the titles we considered.

Step 3: Read the books.

During this step, a committee divides up the list of potential titles and begins reading.

Our experience: We were working with a compressed timeline, and with twenty-five books and a committee of six, that meant each person had to read four books in about a month. As we read, we kept our criteria in mind and made notes (see figure 2).

Step 4: Evaluate potential titles.

This step in the process requires committee members to consider a book’s developmental appropriateness and academic rigor. In determining developmental appropriateness, the committee reflects on their student population and the community. What might be considered appropriate in one district may not fly in another. In addition to using the ages/grades indicated in professional reviews, Common Sense Media is another valuable information source to consult. In determining academic rigor, evaluate a text’s complexity by looking at quantitative measures like Lexile scores and qualitative measures like structure, language conventionality, and knowledge demands (Council of Chief State School Officers and National Governors Association n.d.). Additionally, during this phase, it’s important to consider the developmental appropriateness of a title.

Our experience: Because of the community criticism surrounding *All American Boys*, we focused extra attention on this stage of the process. In narrowing down our list of finalists, we automatically discarded any titles that were not reviewed for a



Figure 1. ELA teacher posing with some of the books evaluated.



Figure 2. A chart that helped us as we narrowed our field of candidates.

ninth-grade audience by both professional journals and Common Sense Media. Should the community have future concerns about the appropriateness of these titles, we wanted to be able to demonstrate that the titles were age-appropriate by multiple measures.

Step 5: Think about instructional considerations.

Once the list of finalists has been narrowed on the bases of academic rigor and developmental appropriateness, the next step is to further weed titles based on the potential for student engagement and a text's ability to address local and national conversations in the context of our students' needs. When considering engagement, one aspect is to determine if the title provides mirrors, windows, and sliding doors, reflecting students' personal experiences and/or helping them learn about others' experiences (Bishop 1990). A fantastic tool for this stage of the process is the "Reading Diversity Model" published by Learning for Justice (Learning for Justice n.d.). Available in both a "Lite" version and a more extensive version, this tool walks educators through criteria such as an accurate reflection of lived experiences, author's promotion of inclusion and equality, gaps and silences, and connection to student interests. In this stage, consider not only diversity in general, but also traditionally marginalized groups of special significance to the local community.

Our experience: In further narrowing our list of finalists, we went through each title and applied the "Reading Diversity Model." We also considered the *type* of diversity represented by each book. It was important for us to consider books that included conversations about people living with mental illness, as members of this population often face unfair stigmas. Based on our own student population, we knew this topic would provide a mirror for many students. In addition to mental illness, we also prioritized nontraditional family structures as an important diversity lens, as many students in our community are being raised by grandparents and extended family members.

At this point, if creating a text bundle that allows for student choice, participants can begin to think about how different titles work together.

Step 6: Finalize title selection.

Now that participants have weeded an initial list of candidates based on academic rigor, developmental appropriateness, student engagement, and community needs, they have a tidy list of books that align with their instructional goals. At this point, if creating a text bundle that allows for student choice, participants can begin to think about how different titles work together. Considerations at this stage include creating a balance among the works, including a mix of male/female/non-binary protagonists; a variety of text formats, including graphic novels, novels in verse, and traditional prose; and titles that present a range of diverse identities and reader challenges. Participants wishing to tie the text bundle together with a common theme would also mix and match final titles as appropriate.

Our experience: In the end, we had approximately ten titles that met all our criteria, and we chose to further narrow it down to four, a number that we thought would allow for an appropriate range of options without overwhelming a classroom teacher. We also wanted to connect the texts thematically and chose to focus on those dealing with parent/child relationships. Ultimately, the final four titles we selected were *The Poet X* by Elizabeth Acevedo, *Hey Kiddo* by Jarrett J. Krosoczka, *Darius the Great Is Not Okay* by Adib Khorram, and *This Is My Brain in Love* by I. W. Gregorio.

THE ADDITION OF A FORMAL BOOK SELECTION PROCESS HAS MADE IT EASIER TO DEFEND THE TITLES AND HARNESS A PORTION OF THE COMMUNITY AS VOCAL ADVOCATES FOR THESE WORKS.

Status Update

As I write this, the district is approaching the one-year anniversary of the initial challenge to *All American Boys*. The committee appointed to review this book ultimately recommended that it be retained, and it continues to be taught in the ninth-grade ELA curriculum. The four new books chosen by the text-selection committee were approved by the school board, purchased by the district, and integrated into the ELA curriculum.

Ideally, it'd be fantastic to be able to say that the new titles were embraced by the entire community without any controversy, but that isn't the case. Specifically, concerns were recently raised about one passage in *The Poet X* deemed "explicit."

Although our selection process hasn't silenced criticism, the process we developed *has* made it easier to defend the new titles. At a recent school board meeting, when parents raised complaints, board members were able to remind the audience that the book in question was one of at least four options students had to pick from, and ELA teachers had invited parents to be part of the decision-making process in selecting their student's text. As the controversy continued on social media, one community member posted the following: "It sounds like a big theme in the use of these texts is choice, non-required reading, and encouraged family involvement in book choice" (Baszto 2022). So although book challenges continue, the addition of a formal book selection process has made it easier to defend the titles *and* harness a portion of the community as vocal advocates for these works.



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of Esports in the School Library—and How To Start a Team," published in 2020 in *School Library Journal*, and "Using Alternative Data Sources to Develop Programming for Parents," published in 2017 by *School Library Connection*. In 2021 she presented "Building Community & Information Literacy with Esports" as part of ALA's GameRT webinar series and at the New York State Library Association (NYLA) Annual Conference. In 2019 she and Rebecca Fletcher presented "Save Your Space! Harnessing Student Voice for Game-Changing PBL" at NYLA's Section of School Librarians Annual Conference.

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377 BOOK CHALLENGES TRACKED BY ALA IN 2019—AND THE PROBLEM IS GROWING

Book Banning and Its Adverse Effects on Students

Joshua Spilka

Across the United States, an epidemic of sorts has struck. Both parents and politicians feel it's their duty to assert control over the information within school libraries. Parents especially feel that they should have access to and control over the books within school libraries. According to "Here Are the Books Parents Want to Ban in Schools Now," an article that appeared recently in *Vice News*,

In recent weeks, parents have complained to school boards in Missouri, Virginia, Texas, Florida, and other states about novels they consider to be obscene or inappropriate—most often, books that illuminate stories of marginalized identities. As a result, some districts have pulled books for review, while a handful of conservative politicians have seized upon the movement as a rallying cry to their side. In a few instances, parents or school board members have also tried to elevate their concerns to law enforcement. (Ockerman 2021)

This act, book banning, has affected no one more than students and school librarians. Students find that the people who are supposed to advocate for them, parents and guardians, are often working against them. Two issues stand out. One of these issues is student voice and representation—or, rather, the lack thereof. The other is how book banning can affect students' lives, not only on an educational and informational level but on a deeper, more-personal level.

Students' Voices

Students are often the reason for book banning, although they are not the direct cause. Parents

want the best for their children. Toward that end, parents are often concerned about ideas their children are exposed to and keep certain types of information locked away until the parents think the child is mature enough to handle it. However, many parents believe that their child shouldn't be the only one following their standards, and try to impose their restrictions on all children. This belief leads to the situation in which many school libraries now find themselves: forced to defend learners' access to diverse ideas and perspectives. However, what is even more important is the impact on students in this situation. At first

However, even though parents try to speak for their children, students have banded together to speak up and combat book banning due to how it affects them.

glance, students may seem to be represented, as a parent appears to be speaking on behalf of a student. However, in many instances of book challenges, this is a misrepresentation. The student's voice may not be heard, as the parents have assumed control of it.

Students certainly do have opinions on banning of books, even though their voices may be stifled by parents claiming to advocate on behalf of students. However, even though parents try to speak for their children, students have banded together to speak up and combat book banning due to how

it affects them. For example, *Pico v. Island Trees Union Free School District Board of Education* began in 1976 when a group of students sued their school district for a violation of First Amendment rights after the school removed books from the library shelves. After the case had been dismissed by a local court, Steven Pico and others appealed the decision. Ultimately, in 1982 the Supreme Court decided 5–4 in favor of Pico (Brannen, Hanes, and Valentine 2011).

In a more-recent case, after a school district in York County, Pennsylvania, disallowed teachers from using a select group of books within their lessons, a group of students banded together to overturn the ban. According to an article published in *The Guardian*, "US Conservative Parents Push for Book Bans – and Unintentionally Make Reading Cool Again,"

Today, the confluence of students and teachers who overturned the ban are known as the Panthers Anti-Racist Union, named after the mascot of Central York High School. The group aims to continue their social justice advocacy into the future, which could soon result in much bolder action than the mealy proclivities of the local school board. (Winkie 2021)

Another recent case of students pushing back against banning was in Kansas City, Missouri, where a group of parents affiliated with the organizations No Left Turn in Education and Northland Parent Association pressured schools in the Kansas City area to ban a selection of books, claiming that the books (such as *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison) were sexually explicit and didn't belong in a public school. The tipping point came, however, when the Northern Kansas City district removed memoirs *Fun Home* by Alison

Bechdel and *All Boys Aren't Blue* by George M. Johnson from its high school libraries. In response, two students in the district circulated a petition that led to the school board returning the two books to the shelves, setting up a process for parents to limit only their own children's access to titles, and expressing willingness to review selection and reconsideration policies. To emphasize the importance of diverse titles in the school library, the students who drafted the petition followed up by speaking, along with other students, at a school board meeting after the books had been restored to the library (Ujiyediin 2021).

Students rose to the occasion to combat problems brought about by adults. Even though students are not always included in discussions about book banning, they still have a voice—though limited at times—and some are willing to push back and express their concerns.



How can people expect school to be a place for learning and growth, but at the same time push for restricting material and inhibiting students from educating themselves on timely topics?

Book Banning's Impact on Individuals

Besides a lack of say about what resources they can access in school, students are affected in other adverse ways by banning books. Instances of book banning aren't random. They're targeted at specific ideas or topics of information. These are issues some adults feel are inappropriate for students to read about and, thus, should be purged from schools so that parents can either educate their child on the issues or not even make students aware of them.

However, these issues are often ones many students either experience or struggle with, and topics that students need information about. Resources about topics such as racial hatred and discrimination, sexual orientation and gender identity, substance abuse, alcoholism, mental health, and many more have been targets of adults who want to restrict students' access to books and other resources.

Blocking access to information about reality can have a range of negative effects for students.

One is that students are robbed of materials that could relate to their own lives at a time when many feel that no one else has gone through the things they have. An article written by a ninth-grader and published by the African Leadership Group states:

Why would we rob them of the opportunity to learn more about themselves, to see life as it is in a different light? School libraries should not be allowed to ban certain books because banning a book is like banning an opportunity. Why would you want to miss out on an opportunity that could change your life? (Dia 2021)

For those who don't experience certain issues or have the same perspectives as those who do, access to diverse books is a crucial element in learning more about issues other people face in our society. For example, suppose a white student in a predominantly white community wants to learn more about racial issues and injustice. Access to diverse books in the school library would give the student the perfect opportunity to explore and learn more about the subject. However, if a local controversy led to books' removal, that student might be unable to find a quality book about the topic. How can people expect school to be a place for learning and growth, but at the same time push for restricting material and inhibiting students from educating themselves on timely topics?

For students who are personally affected by the issues presented in books that some people want to ban, the situation is even worse. Not only are these young people and their classmates restricted from access to diverse information and perspectives, but these affected students have to sit and watch as parents object to material exemplifying the

students' own experiences. Unfortunately, as I write this early in 2022, a bill advancing through the Florida state legislature could have wide negative impacts on students. If the bill becomes law in its current form:

A school district may not encourage classroom discussion about sexual orientation or gender identity in primary grade levels or in a manner that is not age-appropriate or developmentally appropriate for students. (Florida House of Representatives 2022)

The bill also would give parents the right to take legal action against schools that violate the law. I think Chasten Buttigieg tweeted it best, "This will kill kids...You are purposefully making your state a harder place for LGBTQ+ kids to survive" (Yang 2022). This situation is, quite frankly, abhorrent. Will including resources in the school library be considered "encouraging" discussion that some people will consider inappropriate for some students, blocking access for all students?

As with the example of the white student who wanted to learn more about racial issues, students who want to learn about perspectives of and issues that affect LGBTQ+ people may be unable to access books that would provide these insights. Even worse, think about a student I'll call "Dahlia." Dahlia is a closeted trans girl (meaning that she isn't openly expressing her transgender identity to most around her). Not being able to find many people to relate to, she seeks refuge in books that reflect how she feels. If those books become banned books, she no longer has refuge. Adults, the people who should be there to help and inform, are now fighting about whether her gender identity should be allowed to be discussed or even mentioned in an environment she encounters daily. The books containing the per-

spectives and experiences that she hasn't been allowed to have yet would be gone, removed from the shelves. Thousands of other students are in the same situation as Dahlia, lacking a voice, as parents and politicians threaten to restrict the information that not only informs others, but helps young people understand themselves.

The whole idea of book banning is, in itself, a tragedy—especially in school libraries. In a society that preaches acceptance and equality, it's hypocritical that in some places people also want to restrict students from learning about issues that affect not only them, but others in their lives as well. Burdened with an issue that they are told is for their own good, many students find themselves adversely affected by this censorship. As book banning targets certain topics and ideas, many students personally affected by the topic are at a loss about what to do. Lacking a voice—or stifled when they try to exercise it—they can only sit by as books and information reflecting their experiences and struggles are pulled from shelves, leaving access to no student. While some students are finding their voice and protesting for change, book banning is an issue they shouldn't have to fight against in the first place.

Josh Spilka is a junior at East Syracuse Minoa Central High School in Syracuse, New York. A part of his junior year studies, he's been given the opportunity to take a capstone class. This allowed him to pursue a topic of interest, culminating in a final project. Fueled by his love of reading and interest in social issues, his project focused on the issue of banned books, and their adverse effects on students.

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DEFEATING THE CENSOR WITHIN:

How to Hold Your Stand for
Youth Access to Literature in
the Face of School Book Bans

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What do school librarians need to know about the book challenges and bans sweeping across the country? How do you keep the focus on students and their needs when heavily organized right-wing groups put targets on the books in your collection?

If these questions spike your anxiety or you feel that this isn't what you signed up for, I understand. As a former high school English teacher and a current YA author and literature professor, I never expected to be at the center of public controversy, much less book banning. My historical novel *Out of Darkness* was published in 2015 and the recipient of multiple awards, including being named a Michael L. Printz Honor Book by ALA. The book was not challenged or the cause for complaint anywhere, ever, until 2021. Since then, *Out of Darkness* has become one of the books most often targeted by book banners. Although I've always been an advocate for literacy, now I find myself having to fight for students' physical access to books.

But the threat posed by these book banning efforts is not just the removal of specific books like *Out of Darkness*. It's the broader chilling effect in schools, the silent ripple of "soft" censorship or self-censorship by students, teachers, librarians. More pernicious than public book bans, soft censorship has many subtle expressions. An

Although I've always been an advocate for literacy, now I find myself having to fight for students' physical access to books.

administrator suggests that a school librarian relocate controversial books behind the counter or in the back. Books representing certain communities, or with certain themes, or included on certain lists suddenly become the focus of collection "weeding." A teacher rewrites their spring novel study unit to remove a text by a recently challenged author even though students in the past have responded well to the book and succeeded in accomplishing curricular goals. Targeted books are checked out and never returned to the school library; once "lost," they are not replaced. A librarian opts not to order an LGBTQ-friendly relationship book and an up-to-date puberty guide, although the materials are highly recommended by professional journals and relevant to some students in the school.

Free speech and anti-censorship organizations like PEN America, the National Coalition Against Censorship (NCAC), and the Office for Intellectual Freedom (OIF) at ALA, as well as journalists, have documented that public bans, quiet removals, and other forms of censorship are rampant in U.S. libraries, but we can't let it go unchecked. I offer my perspective on the issues in hopes that it inspires you to steel yourself—and your colleagues—against this harmful effort to undermine education and free inquiry. In addition to the steps below, please report *any* pressure to remove particular content from your school library to the NCAC and ALA's OIF. Students are counting on you.

Be ready to protect the rights and needs of EVERY student you serve, not just the majority.

Unfortunately, 2021 saw an unprecedented number of book challenges, removals, and bans across hundreds of school districts all over the country, and that harmful trend has

More pernicious than public book bans, soft censorship has many subtle expressions.

continued in 2022. In the overwhelming number of cases, these attacks target books by or about people with BIPOC, LGBTQ+, or other marginalized identities. You may not yet be seeing local attacks on young people's access to diverse literature, but your resolve and preparation *now* can make a difference if—or when—challenges come to your community. And your voice and advocacy can be part of the collective response we need to shift focus from the shouting of a few misguided adults to our obligation to serve *all* learners, including those whose values, needs, experiences, and identities are marginalized.

Recognize the new tactics in book banning.

A handful of recent challenges have followed the old model of a single parent targeting a single book, but most reflect a new, far more coordinated strategy. Well-funded "parents' rights" groups—some of which formed around anti-masking activism—have pivoted to a focus on curriculum and books. Objections to the honest and complete teaching of history intertwine with vague claims about pornography. These groups often use misleading terms like "pornographic," "inappropriate," "controversial," and "divisive" to describe books by or about non-white or non-dominant people, and/or that address experiences such as sexual assault or police brutality.

Remember, to the banners and the groups behind them, it's not *really* about the books.

Although individual parents may believe the rhetoric and actions are about reading materials and parenting, right-wing politicians have embraced attacking books as a two-for-one issue: mobilize their base *and* undermine public education. Texas State Representative Matt Krause published a list of 850 books he claimed should be investigated by school officials. (Here is a link to the list, with analysis that reveals the political motivations behind this haphazard compilation of keyword searches using "trigger" words like "LGBTQ" and "racism": <https://bookriot.com/texas-book-ban-list/>.) Parental control over reading material became pivotal in the Virginia governor's race, and state legislatures have taken up bills to criminalize the fulfillment of high school teachers' and librarians' normal duties.

Attacks on school library materials vary in scope from one book in the case of the South Carolina governor's letter mischaracterizing the memoir *Gender Queer* (to learn more, go to www.wistv.com/2021/11/19/superintendent-spearman-responds-gov-mcmasters-letter-about-controversial-book-school-library) to the 850 books targeted by Matt Krause's list. Coverage of these bad-faith actions in conservative media outlets have too often presented them as credible, reinforcing suspicions and resentments already being stoked by anti-Critical Race Theory efforts and cultivating the false impression that vaults of pornography exist in school libraries.

Know how attacks on books hurt students.

The recent attacks on diverse, relevant, complex literature in schools are, at bottom, a proxy war on students who share the mar-

ginalized identities represented in the challenged books. These proxy wars cause collateral damage. The casualties are our kids.

I see three immediate harms. First, when adults attack books that center people with LGBTQ+ or non-white or non-dominant identities, they broadcast the message that stories about "these people" are not fit for school, impoverishing the range of representations available to young people. Second, these attacks on diverse books imply that LGBTQ+ or non-white or non-dominant students' very presence in schools is controversial—just like the presence of the books branded as unfit for school libraries. Now, these two harms occur the minute parents begin publicly maligning the books in question. But a third harm is still more concerning, both because it is preventable and because it lends these attacks an unearned appearance of legitimacy.

The third harm occurs when school boards disregard their own content review policies and remove books on the sole basis of parent complaints. This wrongly elevates the questionable judgment and biases of a handful of people over the training of librarians as well as the policies and procedures put in place to ensure school library services do, in fact, serve all learners. When the targeted books are overwhelmingly about non-white, non-dominant experiences, this action essentially endorses the disenfranchisement of already marginalized people, creating an environment that is hostile to the students whom school boards ought to be serving. School boards

engaging in this kind of capitulation have lost their priorities—and their bearings. This is especially evident when, as in the case of removals of my book in Lake Travis ISD and Keller ISD, the book challenges and complaints are not even being brought by people who have students in the schools where the books are held.

Anticipate hostile, dramatic behavior.

Parents participating in the agenda of right-wing groups often attempt to circumvent review policies through attention-grabbing antics in school board meetings. These include dramatic and decontextualized readings of passages from the books under attack, extreme accusations such as that YA authors and librarians are pedophiles and "groomers" who are peddling pornography to minors. In Leander, Texas, a parent gave her public comment about *In the Dream House* by Carmen Maria Machado while brandishing a pink dildo. A woman in Lake Travis, Texas, targeted my novel *Out of Darkness* in an unhinged rant about anal sex—a rant that then went internationally viral, contributing in large part to the pervasiveness of attacks on my novel. (See my response video here: www.youtube.com/watch?v=z4dNu4UA-As.)

This level of sensationalism might seem absurd, but it's important to know that, in too many communities, *it is having its intended effect*. In both districts mentioned above, the attacks succeeded in getting books removed. Often, this occurs without any review

In addition to talking to the people you can count on to be passionate about youth access to literature, also engage those who may not initially be fired up about responding to censorship but who genuinely care about kids and education.



process being completed, in violation of district protocols and procedures.

It can be hard to know how to handle extreme behavior. If it comes your way, calmly acknowledge that parental concerns are valid and share resources with the parent about any options for addressing what their child or teen is reading. Neutral, non-reactive, non-defensive responses (even if repeated almost verbatim) avoid feeding energy into the attack. As soon as you can, reach out to trusted colleagues for support, and seek guidance from relevant local, state, and/or national professional organizations and library associations.

Gain strategy from those taking action and cultivate new allies.

Don't wait until you're up to your nose in a challenge to reach out; begin building partnerships now. For example, EveryLibrary is a nonprofit group that offers pro bono practical political, strategic, and tactical consulting for librarians and citizen's groups <www.everylibrary.org>. There is also the Freedom to Read Foundation (FTRF), a non-profit legal and educational organization affiliated with the American Library Association <ftrf.org>. The FTRF protects and defends the First Amendment to the Constitution and supports the right of libraries to collect – and individuals to access – information. Here are some other excellent resources:

- Accounts like @FReadomFighters and #freedom on Twitter provide examples of *positive* messages about targeted books and access to relevant reading materials
- Tips from @ncacensorship for defending LGBTQ+ texts (can be adapted to respond to other attacks): <<https://bit.ly/ncacslgbtq>>
- An NCAC resource to help educators and their allies respond to book challenges and preserve an environment in which ideas are exchanged freely: <<https://bit.ly/ncacedu>>
- BookRiot.com guide to fighting bans and censorship: <<https://bit.ly/fightbans>>
- PEN America Tip Sheet for Students on Fighting Book Bans: <<https://bit.ly/bantips>>

Once you get your footing and build a stronger set of core explanations, try to reach as far into the “middle” of your community as you can. That is, in addition to talking to the people you can count on to be passionate about youth access to literature, also engage those who may not initially be fired up about responding to censorship but who genuinely care about kids and education. Help these folks see what is being *taken away* from learners. Even if they don't think their kid needs a certain book, the issue may become real to them if you can capture what that challenged book

means to some students—and what not having it might mean. It takes twenty supportive, grateful voices to match the volume of one hostile, uninformed voice.

Inform yourself and others about policy, legal precedent, and principles of librarianship.

Now is the time to ensure you know the process for content challenge or review in your district. Identify any guidelines for collection building or materials selection as well. You may want to establish the practice of making a note for any books acquired regarding how they serve students within your school community. (Emphasize that a book does not need to serve *every* student to be an essential part of a collection.) In addition to strategies mentioned elsewhere in this issue, if you know a book has been or will be challenged, consider supplementing policy information with context and alternatives to book removals.

- **Context for the targeted literature:** Consider offering comparisons between content in the targeted work(s) and “classics” (e.g., parent objects to depiction of rape, note a comparable scene in Bible, Shakespeare, etc.). You may also note how long the book has been on shelves, reviews, etc. as well as comparable books featuring white, straight characters (although we don't want to throw more cannon fodder to the book banners).

- **Information on groups pushing book challenges:** Ensure that leaders are aware of the influence of groups like No Left Turn in Education, Moms for Liberty, and any state or local groups with political ties. This may help school leaders understand that these are not spontaneous parent concerns. It can be revealing to show leaders the online book lists from which these challenges often spring—as well as how similar they are to lists originally intended to help diversify collections. What the targeted books have in common is not explicit content; it's engagement with experiences

Once we name our values, explicitly, we can resist the censors—without and within—and keep our actions aligned with our mission.



of minoritized communities and tough topics like racism and sexual assault.

- **Alternatives to book removals:** Suggest ways of *responding* to parent concern or creating opportunities for dialogue without restricting access to materials that are important to other students. For example, a district might host a “How to Talk to Your Teen about Books” discussion. For language that may especially appeal to “concerned” parents focused on “content” issues, see the chapter “Parents’ Guide to Talking about Difficult Topics” in this guide created by the Utah Library Association: <<https://ula.org/guide>>. This is a great example of how to frame issues of access in terms that won’t alienate parents who haven’t yet been won over to the cause.

Librarians can most-effectively fight back against banning efforts when school boards receive relevant information early in the process. Often school boards head down a path of removal before they understand the limits on their actions—and the potential harms to students. An emphasis on the challenged books’ value can be an especially important part of educating stakeholders. Folks with reservations about a book when all they know about is the “concerning” content may support student access to diverse books once they have a broader picture of the situation and of what the text means to young people.

Show up at your school board meeting and make public comment in support of youth access to diverse books. Read a short, powerful passage from a challenged book. Highlight a positive message. Let kids know that they have a right to speak, too. One parent I talked to described the strategy of having a few parents

sign up to speak in support of a specific topic; then others who came in solidarity with that position (plus the speakers) all wore the same color T-shirt. This strategy makes the fact of broader support more obvious.

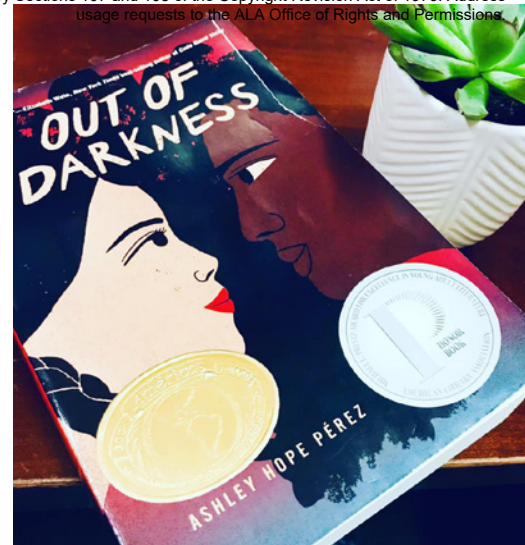
Amplify student voices.

In my experience, the single most-powerful challenge to book bans comes from those that schools are charged with serving. Ask young people in the community who have read a challenged work to comment on what it meant to them and why they want friends and classmates to be able to read it. Parents and youth allies can help students prepare comments for school board meetings. Youth activism had an impressive impact in North Kansas City Schools, where students gave powerful testimony during the district school board meeting. (For inspiration, watch these amazing young people speak truth to power, starting at 28:15: <www.youtube.com/embed/I8hGg2lVHNI>.) Students have also created banned book clubs, petitions, demonstrations, and read-ins to protest the removal of literature and resources from their libraries.

Go the extra mile for targeted books and targeted kids in whatever ways you can.

A lot of what I’ve described above is preemptive; still, you can also go out of your way to highlight targeted books in your library so that they *do* find their readers. Consider doing the most that you can while not incurring excessive professional risk. Librarians in communities where parent groups and politicians have created controversy may have to adopt more-subtle methods, but here are some ideas for highlighting the books:

- **Go big:** Make huge posters with many banned or challenged titles to show what would be missing from their library if book banners



succeeded. Offer space for readers to express, with sticky notes or scribble pages, what they value in those books.

- **Go clever:** If a book has already been removed, print the cover of the banned book and wrap it around a piece of foam or something to make a placeholder for the book where it *should* be on the shelf. A message could go on or in the “book” to inform kids about where or how they could find and read the book.
- **Go small:** Create a sense of curiosity or mystique. Make jars or small displays with miniature versions of the books that have been banned or are under attack. You can add a message such as, “Ask me about these books,” or even have a mini-zine or booklet attached to explain where kids *can* get the books.
- **Go subtle:** If that feels too risky, a simple decoration or poster can feature the removed books with no other words attached. Then, if students ask about it, you can tell them what the books have in common and answer questions about how they might access them.
- **Go public:** Partner with your public libraries and bookstores to prominently display books that are being targeted, especially any that

have been removed from the school libraries. Could extra copies be purchased? What about displays to help readers find what has gone missing from their schools?

Keep reconnecting to what you stand for.

As an author dealing with bans, I struggle to maintain my resolve; I can only imagine how difficult it is for teachers, librarians, and students. But here is a final—and perhaps most important—strategy.

Even as we fight *against* attacks on youth access to books, we can find strength by articulating, to ourselves and to others, what we stand *for*. In fact, we must state what we are *for*, because we can’t hold a stand that we haven’t defined for ourselves. Once we name our values, explicitly, we can resist the censors—without and within—and keep our actions aligned with our mission. For example:

My stand is for EVERY student’s right to read.

My stand is for books that turn kids into readers.

My stand is for telling the stories that haven’t been told.

Post your stand in multiple places where you will see it. Announce it

to students and colleagues. Repeat it internally when you are in hostile or unsupportive spaces. If you advocate from a grounded place, every action will be more impactful. And since this struggle isn’t going away, we need to conserve energy and renew our inner resources in every way we can.



Ashley Hope Pérez
is an assistant professor
of world literature at The
Ohio State University and
the author of three novels

including *Out of Darkness* (2015), which has recently been banned and challenged in school districts across the country. *Out of Darkness* was described by The New York Times Book Review as a “layered tale of color lines, love and struggle in an East Texas oil town,” and received a 2016 Michael L. Printz Honor Award, the 2016 Tomás Rivera Book Award, and the 2016 Américas Award. *Out of Darkness* was selected as a best book of the year by both Kirkus Reviews and School Library Journal, and Booklist named it one of “50 Best YA Books of All Time.” Follow Ashley on Twitter or Instagram: @ashleyhopeperéz. Learn more about efforts to challenge book banning: <<https://linktr.ee/ashleyhopeperéz>>.

ACCESS

Why we defend this core value

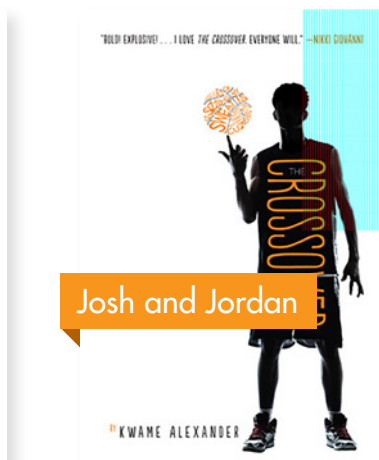
Mitzi Mack



Do you know their stories?



Starr



Josh and Jordan



Xiomara

Diverse reads. Marginalized characters. According to the grassroots organization We Need Diverse Books (WNDB), the books that tell the stories of Starr, Josh, Jordon, and Xiomara are just a few of the available published books reflective of the diversity of human lives. Providing access to and promoting diverse books—especially in these times of increased book challenges—is key to addressing growing trends and adjusting attitudes toward stereotypes, re-engaging teens in the art of reading for the sake of connection, telling more than a single story, and, lastly, securing an inclusive future built on choice.

Equitable access to resources and diversity are among the core values of librarianship (ALA 2019). Equitable access and diversity are important to me professionally and personally.

My Professional Journey

Appealing, sunny television commercials prompted my move to Florida nineteen years ago to teach in a suburban Latinx community at an elementary school with 410 students: 48.05 percent Latinx, 33.66 percent African American, 13.17 percent

white, and 5.12 percent multiracial. More than 40 percent of the students were considered English Language Learners (ELLs). Though considered a suburban community, the median annual income was \$42,000. Since the census of 2010, Florida's population has seen exponential growth, added a congressional seat, and shifted the racial makeup, which, according to the 2020 census, is 64.1 percent non-white, with the Latinx community showing the most growth over the years, growing to 26.5 percent (Sachs 2021).

My next school assignment as a librarian, just forty-five minutes down Interstate 75, took me to the heart of Tampa. At this magnet middle school in the city, we had 500 students: 79 percent African American, 15 percent Latinx, 3 percent multi-racial, 3 percent white. This corridor community included three public housing units, a park, a community center, and a city library as well. Both school settings shared the common denominator of more than 70 percent of the students benefiting from free and/or reduced-price lunch. The staff makeup for each school was quite different, as the middle school staff consisted primarily of African American and

a few Latinx females. In contrast, most staff members of the elementary school had been white women, with higher numbers of Latinx people in varying roles than at the middle school.

The most important resources gathered for both schools were diverse books, best defined by Malinda Lo as books "by and about people of color, LGBT[Q] people, and/or disabled people" (ALA OIF 2015). Gathering these resources was not always easy because of the relative scarcity of titles, especially in the early years of my career as a school librarian.

WNDB began with the outreach of authors, including Malinda Lo, proclaiming the need for more diverse books in response to an all-white panel at a book conference (Mabbott 2017). However, the conversation about how white the children's book world was had started much earlier. It was fueled in 1965 when Nancy Larrick wrote an article "The All-White World of Children's Books," published in *Saturday Review*, yet by 2013 there had been little change (Mabbott 2017). The conversation continued and expanded into a hashtag.

In 2018, David Huyck and Sarah Park Dahlen created an infographic based on statistics compiled by the Cooperative Children's Book Center, School of Education, University of Wisconsin-Madison, depicting the number of characters from diverse backgrounds in children's literature published in 2018. According to the infographic, in 2018 more books were published in the United States with animals as characters than books with characters who were people of color. This was alarming to educators, including librarians, because in 2020 the U.S. diversity was at 61 percent while Florida's was at 64 percent (Sachs 2021), and yet in the publishing world, barely 30 percent of new books published in 2018 would reflect children of color, or expose white children to diverse characters or subjects. In fact, this preliminary data from the Cooperative Children's Book Center revealed far more than the number of books published reflecting children of color. It also highlighted the lack of diversity in the publishing world and a need for diverse imprints (Fernando 2021). Today, almost five years later, amid the pandemic, we hear outcries over alleged teaching of Critical Race Theory—or even objections to teaching accurate history—in K–12 schools, and over Black Lives Matter campaigns. From my perspective, society is at a critical crossroads as we see the uptick of book challenges focused on LGBTQ+ issues and people of color, especially in the state of Florida.

At the two school communities where I served as school librarian, the diverse books I selected as resources focused on Latinx and African American students since at least 50 percent of the books already in the libraries featured White students. Though the main ethnicity was different in each school, I could not presume either was the “norm,” any more than a school librarian in

a different district could presume whiteness was the norm. I also could not assume that all Latinx learners, for example, were interested in the same stories. Both school settings had Latinx students from Puerto Rico, Cuba, and Mexico. Therefore, stories of deportation could not dominate the Latinx titles. Likewise, depictions of African American culture had to consider that students identified as “Black” could also be Haitian Creole, Dominican, Jamaican, or Nigerian. There is never just one story—especially for learners living in what Rudine Sims Bishop referred to as a parallel culture (Bishop 1990).

Ours is a nation in which there are many stories but too often only the most dominant is maintained as the norm. Because books are socializers, this presents an issue when only the dominant story is represented in books. Books demonstrate what is valued in languages, traditions, cultures (Bishop 1990). Books set precedence. Therefore, diverse titles selected for the school libraries in which I served had to offer students opportunities to see themselves and their experiences represented in the books they read. For learners who were not from cultures that are sometimes marginalized in literature and in library collections, diverse titles in the school library also provided windows to view experiences beyond their own.

According to Rudine Sims Bishop, “one of the reasons literature exists is to transform human experience, and reflect it back to us so we can better understand it” (1990, 3). How would books in our school libraries transform human experiences if they lacked the diversity to reach the many perspectives and intersectionality's of lives of individuals in the school and the broader community? Bishop's promotion of publishing and making available to all children

books that provide windows, mirrors, and sliding doors encouraged educators to allow room in schools and libraries for the complexity of an individual's life, demonstrating the need for resources that tell more than a single story.

My Personal Story

My own life has influenced my strong belief in access as a core value of librarianship. Personally, my story evolved through access to diverse reads. The day I walked into a school library at the age of eight, feeling scared and alone, I looked through the shelves and saw two books that grabbed my attention: *Tell Me a Mitzi* by Lore Siegel and *Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry* by Mildred D. Taylor. In that moment, I acquired a culture and community empowered by books across a broad spectrum. This was access. Every day, I walked, ran, or skipped over a broken-down bridge to find my way to this access. The American Library Association's “Equity of Access” brochure states that libraries serve as “cornerstones of the communities they serve” and must provide free and equitable access to “books, ideas, resources and information” to all (ALA n.d.). Though just a child, I was able to partake in the services of one of these cornerstones, and I learned two lessons. First, my name was important, as it graced the cover of an ALA Notable Book and National Book Award Finalist, honors bestowed with the intent of celebrating the best literature in America and giving honored stories a prominent place in American culture. Secondly, I learned that access is a valuable asset, as Neil Gaiman explained in his plea for libraries:

“[L]ibraries are about freedom. Freedom to read, freedom of ideas, freedom of communication. They are about education (which is not a process that finishes the day we leave

school or university), about entertainment, about making safe spaces, and about access to information..." (Gaiman 2013)

Access was granted to me by a mirror when I was introduced to the characters and author of *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*. I was given a window with *Tell Me a Mitzi*, provided by a Jewish author and with a setting quite different from my own community, a fact that opened sliding doors in my life.

Giving 21st-Century Readers Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Doors

Angie Thomas, author of *The Hate U Give*, a book that can give young people mirrors and windows today, has been quoted as saying, "It's important to have diverse characters in books because books give kids mirrors and windows. Books create empathy. If we do not have diversity, if we are only showing things from one perspective, how are we creating empathy?" (Penn 2017). *The Hate U Give*, featuring Starr Carter—one of the characters featured at the top of this article, was a *New York Times*

young adult bestseller that won ALA's Coretta Scott King Award and was shortlisted for a Carnegie Medal. As a diverse read, it speaks to teens about Black lives amid awareness of racial sociopolitical issues impacting community. Teens still enter the school library asking for access to *The Hate U Give*, seeking that connection to community, compassion, and critical literacy. All learners need access to books like this. I have done my best to provide that access.

Poetry served as a sliding door allowing me to embrace worlds created by others. A 2014 novel in verse with Josh and Jordan, the basketball duo mentioned at the top of the article, slid me into a world of sports and family. These marginalized protagonists in Kwame Alexander's *The Crossover* never listened to the naysayers. In his writing, Kwame Alexander took the versatility of language to the next level, peeling apart each layer until it was crowned with a Newbery. *The Crossover*, as a One School, One Book title, has captured the ears and hearts of teens in my urban school. National Assessment of Educational Progress data published in 2020

showed young teens' daily reading dropped to its lowest levels since the mid-1980s (Schaeffer 2021), and I felt one way to reengage students was through the use of diverse novels in verse. I learned early in my teaching career about the importance of the O-I-C (Oh I See) in voice and choice and sought to use it alongside Gholdy Muhammad's teachings on historical responsive literacy to motivate teens to read and engage. Gholdy Muhammad, a Chicago professor of literacy, language, and culture supports the use of best practices in culturally and historically responsive and equitable instruction for students (Muhammad 2020). An important aspect of her (Gholdy) equity framework is identity development, meaning students need to understand themselves within their world and the world around them. This was another way of saying books help people transform, which is exactly what Rudine Sims Bishop believed.

As an educator, poetry became my means to build bridges, so I no longer walked, skipped, or ran over a bridge. Instead, I introduced students to novels in verse and built

**OURS IS A NATION IN WHICH THERE ARE MANY STORIES
BUT TOO OFTEN ONLY THE MOST DOMINANT IS MAINTAINED
AS THE NORM. BECAUSE BOOKS ARE SOCIALIZERS, THIS
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REPRESENTED IN BOOKS.**



bridges and communities. Using novels in verse, like *The Crossover*, I started book clubs, worked with other ALA members on compiling African American book lists, and developed a website devoted to diverse reads <www.mackmedialibrarian.com>. Novels in verse, my diverse read of choice, have been around since the 1990s, generally addressing historical fiction, displacement, or stories centered on the life of a character. Additionally, novels in verse have been considered shorter, faster reads (Farish 2013). Terry Farish, author of *The Good Braider*, considered the white space to be silence and a friend to striving readers. Just as Josh felt he was losing his identity after his locs were cut in *The Crossover*, many teens experience loss of identity when immersed in situations in which they see few learning resources that reflect them or in which language fluency is a barrier or the faculty lacks the diversity of the student body. Seeking a sense of competence, fluency, or just a safe space, for some students reading a novel in verse is like a match made in heaven as they learn to embrace the lyrics that fit the narrative and reveal identities teens can connect with and embrace. I see reading novels in verse as a path back to reading for teens. Use of such novels is consistent with Muhammad's ideas of building connections between curriculum, texts, and students' individual identities, cultural behaviors, and practices (Muhammad 2020).

Serving in the capacity of librarian/gate opener in an urban middle school, I introduced my students—including striving readers—to Xiomara, the last character featured at the top of the article. In Elizabeth Acevedo's *The Poet X*, joining poetry club gave Xiomara a lifeline. (I feel like becoming a member of the Florida Association of Media

In 2019 I knew increased book challenges were a "thing" when it was suggested to have students complete parent-signed forms to join book clubs prior to reading YA books. It took longer to notice that the books challenged were more frequently those relating to diverse characters, LGBTQ+ characters, or written by people of color.

Educators (FAME) has stood the test of time as my lifeline to continued support for diverse reads in the lives of the students I serve!) I started a young poet's club for all interested students, regardless of their reading proficiency. Our reading and writing led us to explore a crop of new novels in verse with diverse characters and plots. In addition to *The Poet X*, *Booked and Rebound* by Kwame Alexander became popular reads, as did *Long Way Down* by Jason Reynolds and *Other Words for Home* by Jasmine Warga. Currently a group of students have settled in to read *Becoming Muhammad Ali* by James Patterson and Kwame Alexander.

Maintaining Learners' Access to Diverse Books

In 2019 I knew increased book challenges were a "thing" when

it was suggested to have students complete parent-signed forms to join book clubs prior to reading YA books. It took longer to notice that the books challenged were more frequently those relating to diverse characters, LGBTQ+ characters, or written by people of color. Here in Florida, talk of Critical Race Theory put more than books about and written by people of color in the line of fire. Most recently, as I write this in early 2022, support for the idea of limiting learners' access to resources that reflect diversity—especially books about marginalized groups—has led to a legislative proposal referred to by its supporters as the Stop WOKE Act (Florida HB 7 "Individual Freedom"). Librarians in my state and elsewhere need to ensure they are well versed in library collection policies and challenge procedures.

As a school librarian in Tampa, Florida, following the annual FAME state conference in December 2021, I placed several to-dos on my list so that I could continue to provide mirrors, windows, and sliding doors for my students.

1. Revisit my district collection development plan and challenge procedures. When I did this, I realized our district procedures acknowledge the school librarian's role and professional responsibility in selecting materials as well as the parent and student interests in the process and choices made. In fact, the district policy even mentions,

Occasional objections to some materials may be voiced by the public despite the care taken in the selection process ... Library media materials that are sensitive or mature may not be appropriate for all readers in a school but could be appropriate to remain a part of the collection to address the needs of some of the reading community if it meets

the district selection criteria.
(Milburn and Defusco 2021, 16)

This statement supports my role of assisting students in book selection but made it clear that ultimately, it is the student's choice.

2. Review my own school collection development plan in the context of my most recent school library diversity audit. A collection diversity audit informs the librarian of the inventory in a collection and reveals areas needing growth or weeding. It is important to be aware of specifics regarding your own collection should a question arise about a book new to the collection. Data will be available to justify its purchase for a balanced collection.

After the audit and adding items to the collection to fill gaps, I strongly recommend drawing attention to areas recently improved with new inventory by posting book displays curated based on the audit with pictures of the audit and student survey results showing areas of interest. At the beginning of each year, students at our school are

surveyed on the types of book they most like to read. The survey results are also compared with the quarterly library checkout statistics to verify the types of books most read by students. These types of displays can serve as ways to justify curation in various areas of the collection.

3. Finally, gather important contacts for resources supporting intellectual freedom. In our state, an essential contact is the chair of the FAME Committee on Intellectual Freedom, as this individual has a team that responds to challenges via a protocol. Recently, FAME posted a graphic on its website to remind others of the association's ability to offer support (see figure 1). Another resource is ALA's Office for Intellectual Freedom <www.ala.org/aboutala/offices/oif>, which offers confidential support and training, and works to increase public awareness of attacks on intellectual freedom and the importance of supporting the rights of all readers in all types of libraries. If you are faced with a book challenge, do not hesitate to reach out to the school librarian community in your state and nationwide.

There are several other ways FAME—and your own state and local organizations—can assist when you face a materials challenge. These other interested parties can e-mail letters to school board members and other stakeholders, attend meetings to support diverse access, and take their case for access to the local media. FAME is, in fact, proactive in their support through their work with state book award selection by adding statements to clarify the type of list and considerations to be made when the list is used. For instance, the Florida Teens Read program webpage states:

This program is designed to entice teens to read. In order to engage their interest and to provide a spur to critical thinking, the book selections include those that involve sensitive issues. The content of some of the titles may be more mature than younger students may have previously encountered. Please recognize that this is a voluntary reading program. Not every book selected will suit every student. In a democratic society,



Figure 1. Florida Association for Media in Education offers support to school librarians.

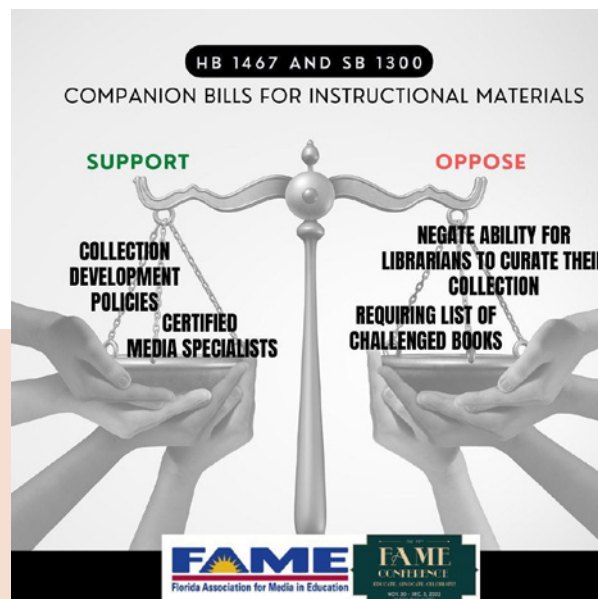


Figure 2. Florida Association for Media in Education tracks bills affecting school librarians and their students.

a variety of ideas must find voice. As readers, teens have the choice to read the more mature titles or to close the book. (FAME 2015)

Currently, in Florida, FAME, its members, and other interested parties are tracking the state bills HB 1467 and SB 1300 (see figure 2).

HB 1467 and SB 1300 focus on instructional materials. However, they also include best practices of placing a school librarian on every campus and having collection development policies on file and open to the public. In the past several years, several Florida counties saw cuts in positions for school librarians (called "library media specialists" in our state), so supporting HB 1467 could result positive changes for librarians and learners across the state.

Access can be the greatest asset, especially if it is acquired in a culture and community empowered by scholarship across a broad spectrum. Let's ensure access to diverse reads continue to be accessible for all.



Dr. Mitzi Mack is a middle school librarian, member of AASL and AASL ESLS. She volunteers on the ALA

Evaluating Volunteer Resources Task Force, ALA Black Caucus, and ALSC BIPOC. She serves on the Florida Association of Media Educators (FAME) Board representing Region 4 and is a member of the FAME Diversity Committee. She is also a member of a Scholastic Teachables advisory board.

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Whatever you need—research, scholarly articles, or webinars—
the AASL Learning Library has it ALL.



Intellectual Freedom & Book Challenges

Browse these resources and more at all.aasl.org.

WATCH

Conversations on Censorship, Book Challenges and the FReadom to Read

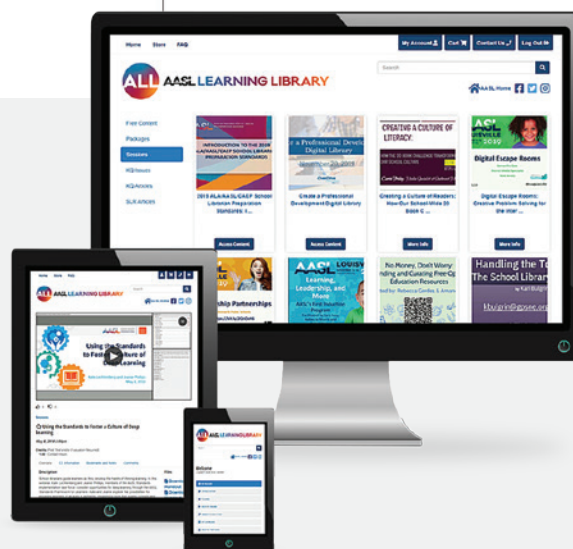
School librarians Becky Calzada, Miranda Doyle, Carolyn Foote, and Nancy Jo Lambert hold a thoughtful conversation around censorship, book challenges, and the FReadom to read.

Defending Intellectual Freedom: LGBTQ+ Materials in School Libraries

Explore AASL's resource guide, *Defending Intellectual Freedom: LGBTQ+ Materials in School Libraries*, which includes easily accessible activities, reflective questions, real-world scenarios, and extensive resources – and why this is such crucial equity work.

AASL Town Hall: Book Challenges

AASL President Jennisen Lucas and OIF Assistant Director Kristin Pekoll facilitate a discussion on the current rise of book challenges. Explore how school librarians can keep their school libraries safe havens reflective of the school community.



After Banned Books Week: Intellectual Freedom Programming Throughout the Year

Learn about intellectual freedom programming and how it can be used to develop critical thinking and collaboration skills, reach underserved audiences, broaden perspectives, and develop empathy.

READ

Why Intellectual Freedom and Equitable Access Are Even More Important Today

Explore the school librarian's role to provide access to the widest diversity of resources that encourage students to think critically and become effective and ethical users of information.

Collection Development Answers from the Field

A group of school librarians from across the country discuss preparing for challenges and the importance of EDI in collection development.

School Librarians and the Intellectual Freedom Manual

Learn what's new in the *Intellectual Freedom Manual* and how intellectual freedom connects with AASL Standards.

The Freedom to Learn: Teaching Intellectual Freedom Principles Using the AASL Standards

Explore how the AASL Standards provide opportunities for students to learn the complexity and nuance of their intellectual freedom rights through inquiry-based learning, questioning, and exploration.

Reflecting Our Students and Our World in Our School Library Collections

Reflect on why and how school librarians develop collections and the factors that go into curating a collection that is relevant, appropriate, and purposeful.

Manage ALL your learning on
your time and at *your* pace.

VISIT **ALL.AASL.ORG**

Harnessing the Power of STEM Education

Heidi Barber

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Whether you have been a school librarian for thirty years or three months, it is likely that you have heard educational buzzwords such as STEM, inquiry-based learning, and makerspaces. You may have already dived headfirst into learning and implementing within your library or you may be hesitant to dip your toes into such a foreign world. No matter where you are in the journey, harnessing the power of relevance through STEM education is at your fingertips!

Experts at the U.S. Department of Education believe that it is more important than ever that our nation's youth are prepared to bring knowledge and skills to solve problems, make sense of information, and know how to gather and evaluate evidence to make decisions (U.S. Dept. of Ed. n.d.). They believe these skills develop through exploring and learning about science, technology, engineering, and math, as well as computer science. In addition, *STEM Education for the Future: A Visioning Report* indicates,

"Rapid technological advancements and societal changes are our daily reality. While the future of work, the economy, and society is uncertain, one thing is not: To maintain the nation's leadership in science and technology discovery, we must create an approach to science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) education that prepares and advances the U.S. for this future." (National Science Foundation 2020, 7)

Educational standards at the state and federal level currently integrate STEM education components for students, whether explicitly stated or through technical and soft skill development. The International Society for Technology in

Education (ISTE) has standards for constructing knowledge, innovative design, and computational thinking, among others (ISTE 2021). The AASL *National Standards for Learners, School Librarians, and School Libraries* have been cross-walked to both ISTE and Next Generation Science Standards (<standards.aasl.org/project/crosswalks>). Being an integral component to education today, the school library is in a prime position to support the growth and development of all students through integration of STEM education.

As a prior middle school science teacher and STEM junkie, I have experienced the power of connecting STEM to literacy in my new school librarian role. STEM fuels my library programming, and the excitement of learning is contagious. So how exactly do you get started? In what realistic ways can you make the largest impact on the students and staff at your school? Let's look at some potential ways to try STEM education in your school library.

Benefits of STEM Programming

Working in a school library affords many opportunities to design and provide authentic learning experiences for students. As a school librarian, you have the opportunity to work directly with teachers to provide quality instruction. STEM education, integrated within the school library, can bring life, depth, and excitement to learning! The benefits of incorporating STEM into the library program can be measured in multiple facets: educational achievement, discipline data, social skills, and emotional development.

STEM programming provides a clear pathway for cross-curricular

learning experiences. STEM activities, by design, are relevant and tied to real-world applications. When designing STEM activities, you are able to take a cross-curricular approach by pulling into the lessons content standards from multiple sets of standards. By harnessing the power of a professional learning community (PLC), you can meet with classroom content-area teachers who are experts in their standards, and design activities that are authentic and powerful learning tools in multiple areas. Allow the standards to drive the planning. The time and energy your PLC puts forth will be worth the result of motivated students engaged in learning through inquiry.

STEM activities in the library (and classroom) target technical skills as well as soft skills, such as communication, collaboration, and critical thinking, all of which are core components to successful learning experiences. It is incredibly important to provide students opportunities to foster these skills. Employers frequently list teamwork, collaboration, and oral and written communication skills as highly valuable yet hard-to-find qualities in potential new hires (Jerald 2009). Integrated STEM education is student centered and has demonstrated potential for increasing content retention as well as promoting problem-solving and higher-level thinking skills (Stohlmann, Moore, and Roehrig 2012). It can be concluded that frequent opportunities to practice building these skills through inquiry-based learning is vital in education. In my experiences, my students are often hesitant to work within certain groupings. However, within just a few minutes into a STEM lesson or challenge, they are utilizing one another's strengths to find success. That is something I can't

teach without providing experiences for students to feel, see, and grow from. What a powerful message it sends to them each and every time. Students recognize that they all come to the table with different skillsets. They all have strengths and weaknesses. They all need each other to learn, succeed, and grow.

An engineering mindset builds a framework to tackle problems innovatively and creatively. STEM education challenges students to use a design-thinking framework, to develop and test ideas, to fail, adapt, and try again. In a 1973 document, Dr. Bernard Roth outlined a formal design process, describing how successful engineers go through a series of steps to critically think about the problem and, as a result, create alternative approaches for solutions (Hill-Cunningham, Mott, and Hunt 2018). In our school library we consistently follow

Dr. Bernard Roth's Engineering Design Process: ask, imagine, plan, create, improve. STEM education has allowed my students to see that their failures are how they learn and that failures are encouraged. STEM for my students has also taught them the power of reflection and perseverance. They are willing to take risks. They are no longer afraid to fail. They want to try again. These environments are powerful learning opportunities!

Starting Small

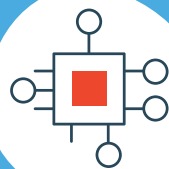
Getting started can be overwhelming. It can be scary. It can also be exhilarating. You can take a big bite and start large, or you can start small. The most important part is that you take a risk and give integrating STEM a shot in your library. Let's look at some ideas that have

been successful for my students; you may want to give them a try!

As a prior middle school science teacher, I spent eight years focused on STEM, project-based learning, and personalized learning for students. I have always had a passion for professional development and consistently sought new opportunities to gain knowledge, explore resources, and network with educators. Through attending conferences and workshops, I was able to invigorate my STEM activities with students. When I made the transition to school librarian, my role drastically shifted within the school building. I knew I needed to still find ways to incorporate my passion for STEM education into my new job responsibilities. I started small.

One of the very first things I decided to do was incorporate quick STEM

Getting started can be overwhelming. It can be scary. It can also be exhilarating. You can take a big bite and start large, or you can start small. The most important part is that you take a risk and give integrating STEM a shot in your library.



challenges into each lesson I did with students. Working at an elementary school, I have the opportunity to see classes on a flexible schedule. My time with a group of students includes: a book read-aloud with built-in literacy instructional components, a hands-on activity directly connected to the story, book checkout, and a STEM challenge. Because of the excitement for the STEM challenge, my students rarely show any inappropriate behavior. They are excited but focused and motivated to use design thinking together. Since my time with students is short, these STEM challenges are designed to take only ten to fifteen minutes.

One challenge my students love is tied to the picture book *Creepy Carrots* by Aaron Reynolds. For this challenge they are provided an image of a carrot patch on paper, four large popsicle sticks, and eight wooden

clothespins. Learners are challenged to design and build a fence that will keep the creepy carrots detained. It's short, simple, requires very little in supplies—and provides an opportunity to pull in math with thinking about perimeter and area, as well as have discussions on fence designs and the engineering behind them.

Another challenge that my students have had great success with focuses on the fairy tale "The Gingerbread Man." Pick your favorite author's

STEM challenges can be a great way to engage your students for little cost, while you are gaining comfort and experience with STEM integration.

version! After reading the fairy tale aloud, students are challenged to design a raft that will allow the Gingerbread Man to cross the river to get away from the fox. Each student group is provided with the same consumable materials: straws, craft sticks, tape, and aluminum foil. I give my students a Gingerbread Man cutout that they get to color and tape onto a clothespin. This way, it provides some weight when placed in the raft. Students test their raft designs in a large tray of water. They are challenged to redesign their rafts after test runs for optimal success. You could expand this lesson by adding a fan to one side of your tray of water. With a timer, you could challenge students to design a raft that gets across the river the fastest! Scientific ideas of flotation and waterproof materials are easily investigated, along with data collection. Bump it up by graphing your data

and analyzing your findings! STEM challenges can be a great way to engage your students for little cost, while you are gaining comfort and experience with STEM integration.

Makerspaces have become extremely popular in libraries in recent years. A makerspace is a collaborative work space inside a school, library, or separate public/private facility for making, learning, exploring, and sharing through use of high-tech to no-tech tools (What Is a Makerspace 2021). Makerspaces provide students the resources to be innovative and creative while using critical thinking. Makerspaces often remove the parameters that STEM challenges set and allow students to interact, design, and grow in a less-structured environment. While there are costs associated with supplying a makerspace with consumable materials, materials for a makerspace in your school library can often be funded through grant opportunities. By planning with teachers, the school librarian can provide the makerspace area for students to utilize for classroom projects or for extensions of learning and enrichment. If you are worried about not having a dedicated space in your library, consider that many librarians have formulated solutions with portable makerspaces!

Another start-small project idea is to create Storybook STEM kits. As I was deciding on how I could best support the students and staff at my school, I recognized that teachers needed quick access to cross-curricular STEM materials that they could use in their classrooms. The idea of these Storybook STEM kits was developed. I secured a small local grant to purchase enough materials, including consumables, to build twenty kits. Each kit includes a hardcover library-bound picture book, STEM curriculum explicitly connected to grade-level standards across curriculum,



and all consumable materials needed for the activity. The kits also include a teacher's guide for easy implementation. I added the kits to my school library collection for teacher circulation. With the grant funding, I was able to purchase enough consumables to replenish the kits after classroom usage. They have been a huge hit!

If these ideas seem still too large or daunting, think about small-scale ideas that you could provide to your students, classroom teachers, or families. You could create STEM challenge videos and push them out through a learning management system, such as Google Classroom or Canvas. Teachers could use the videos within their classrooms or students could try them at home with their families. You could provide monthly STEM choice boards that include mini-challenges. You could even focus on collection development and buff up your library's STEM resources for circulation.

Diving Deep

Are you ready to tackle some large-scale STEM ideas? Consider having your students participate in com-

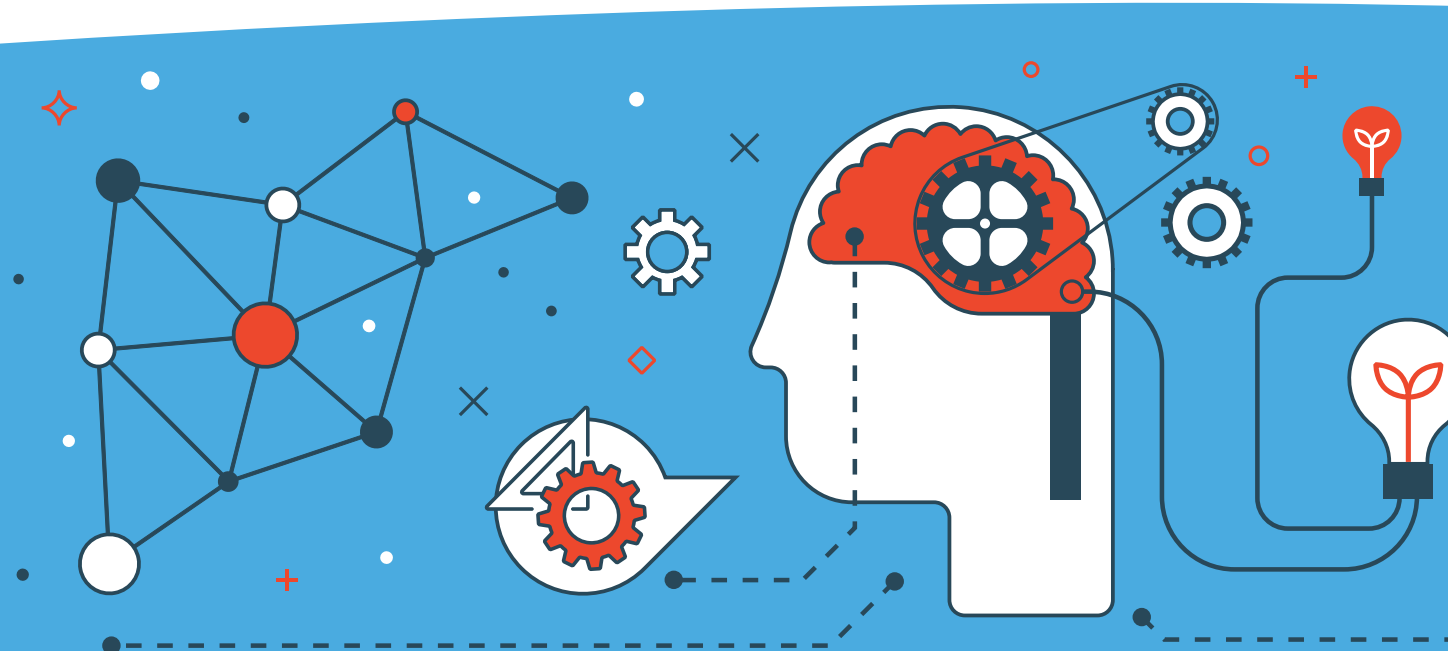
petitions. Some options include Discovery Education 3M Young Scientist Competition, Google Science Fair, FIRST Robotics Competitions, Botball, Modeling the Future Challenge, SeaPerch, and Science Olympiad. Check out local universities and organizations to see what STEM opportunities they have for your K–12 students.

You may also consider designing a large-scale project within your library built on STEM principles. One example of this could be to ultimately build a raised garden for your school. You could set challenge parameters, such as the garden must fit within a certain area of the schoolyard, or it must be under a certain budget. Students could use the engineering design process to move through the phases of the project. You could work with a specific grade level, tying in their state standards across the curriculums. You could invite community members and experts to support your students' research, design ideas, and construction processes. You could showcase their work in a public ribbon-cutting ceremony! As a project-based learning teacher, I

have had the opportunity to design yearlong cross-curricular STEM activities, all connected to the United Nations Sustainability Goals (UN n.d.). Depending on the age of the students, your large-scale project can have a rigid framework or allow students to work within parameters to choose ideas about which they are most passionate.

Professional Development

No matter how much experience you have with STEM education, professional development opportunities can always add new insights and resources to your toolkit. Many opportunities designed for groups of classroom teachers will also invite school librarians to participate. You can then apply your new knowledge to impact students directly or provide professional development to the staff of your building. A great way to find STEM professional development is to start local with your school district, as well as any local colleges or universities that have STEM education programs. Local science museums can also be another great resource. As a school librarian in eastern North



Carolina, I take part in opportunities from both North Carolina State University's Science House and University of North Carolina Wilmington's CESTEM program. Both have a technology loan program and scheduled workshops for educators at little or no cost.

Larger opportunities for educators to participate in STEM professional development exist, too. These programs often occur in the summer and include an application and selection process. Do not be intimidated that your job title or description may not exactly match their requirements. I have had great success in being selected for these programs as a school librarian. A key to acceptance is being able to articulate clearly how you will incorporate the learning into your library to support staff and students at your school and community. The U.S. Space & Rocket Center in Huntsville, Alabama, offers a Space Academy for Educators program. This used to be free but does now charge a tuition fee. Two free programs that I have found beneficial—and fun—are Air Camp for Educators in Dayton, Ohio, and Real World Science at the National World War II Museum

in New Orleans, Louisiana. You can also join organizations such as the Civil Air Patrol as an Aerospace Education Member (AEM) for a one-time \$35 fee. By being an AEM, you gain access to free aerospace/STEM educational materials and free STEM kits! You also get to participate in a free teacher-orientation flight at a local airport.

Harnessing the power of STEM education in the school library supports learners' skill development across curriculums. Do not be afraid to try it on! Take advantage



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Resources to Jumpstart Your Transformation

Hess Toy Truck: STEM Curriculum Guide <<https://hesstoytruck.com/stem>>. Pro Tip: Apply for their STEM classroom kit giveaway each year. School librarians are eligible!

Oak Ridge Institute for Science and Education <<https://orise.ora.gov/resources/ki2/lesson-plans.html>>

Science Buddies <www.sciencebuddies.org/>

Teach Engineering: STEM Curriculum for K–12 <www.teachengineering.org>

Teachers Pay Teachers <www.teacherspayteachers.com>. The power of this educational community is immense. Be selective and choose materials wisely. Adapt to match your comfort level!

of professional development, network and plan with your professional learning community, and implement with enthusiasm. No matter how big or small, your efforts will impact the students and staff of your school in a positive way.

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LibraryDen:

A Tool for Learning about
Research & Information
Literacy Pedagogy

START HERE →

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Melanie: In the fall 2020 semester, I taught a new, fully online course at the University of West Georgia (UWG): Multiple Literacies for School Library Media. This course is required for students to obtain school library media (SLM) specialist certification in Georgia and is one of the first courses students take within their graduate-level school library media program. The course focuses on enabling students to develop expertise in multiple literacies, which are identified by the American Association of School Librarians as literacy, information literacy, media literacy, visual literacy, and technical literacy (2018). A significant portion of this course focuses on guiding students in how to develop instruction in information literacy for K–12 students. As I finished designing this course during the summer of 2020, I was delighted to learn that UWG’s librarians had just developed a fully online tutorial called LibraryDen to guide our university students through learning how to access, evaluate, and use the information resources available through UWG’s Ingram Library.

Anne: In March 2020 when UWG shifted to online learning, the library staff was compelled to reexamine our online asynchronous information literacy instruction offerings. The library had a fairly robust information literacy instruction program, including both face-to-face and synchronous online workshops, but had not yet dedicated as many resources to developing standalone online modules. The online resources the library previously developed had been created for specific courses and programs, but no general introductory tutorials or digital learning objects had been developed. With the switch to online learning, it became clear to us in the Ingram Library that we needed to add to our suite of offerings to better support students

who were already comfortable with online learning as well as all of the students and faculty who now needed to experiment with this new modality.

The main asynchronous online learning object the library already had was a series of approximately seventy text-based tutorials with an FAQ-style structure. Ours was a local adaptation of Portland State University Library’s creation, *Library DIY*, which they licensed through Creative Commons and shared with the academic library profession (2021). In our library we decided to create a course shell in the university’s learning management system using the UWG implementation of *Library DIY* as a course outline (2021). We chose approximately forty-five of our seventy tutorials and grouped them into eight thematic modules covering the following topics: starting research, finding specific kinds of resources, evaluating resources, citing sources, and institutional-specific library policies for interlibrary loan and off-campus access.

We selected the subset of pages for our version of *Library DIY* based on our learning outcomes, which we had designed using language from the Association of College Research Libraries 2016 document “Framework for Information Literacy

for Higher Education” and the American Association of Colleges and Universities 2021 document “Inquiry and Analysis VALUE Rubric.” The learning outcomes for LibraryDen are:

- Students will discriminate between different library resources.
- Students will identify resources appropriate for different information needs.
- Students will explain how to get research help from a librarian.
- Students will evaluate search strategies.
- Students will recognize elements in citations.
- Students will describe criteria to evaluate the reliability of information.

We also created a question bank with hundreds of quiz questions using pop-culture references to make the questions fun and interesting for the students. Each module links to several *DIY* pages with brief optional self-assessments for the students to check their own understanding of the material. Also available is a summative quiz for each module with a subset of the assessment questions so if the students have done the self-assessments, they will

With the switch to online learning, it became clear to us in the Ingram Library that we needed to add to our suite of offerings to better support students who were already comfortable with online learning as well as all of the students and faculty who now needed to experiment with this new modality.

have already seen the questions on the quizzes. Before reading any of the library's mini-course content, students do a pre-test and then there is a final post-test at the conclusion. The pre- and post-tests cover the same topics as the self-assessments but use different questions to measure student learning as opposed to students' ability to recognize and memorize questions.

Throughout creation of the mini-course, we were also beta-testing different pieces of it. The initial rounds of testing were done by student employees of the library who worked remotely to test the modules and offer feedback on the flow and question structure. With this student help we identified several questions that had to be rewritten for clarity as well as issues with continuity. We then did subsequent rounds of testing using student workers from other areas on campus. Fortunately for us, several supervisors of campus student workers were looking for remote work tasks to keep their students employed over the summer. This circumstance allowed us to get feedback from students who were not as familiar with the library as our own student assistants were. As part of the testing, we also asked the students to time themselves for each module. We wanted to make sure that we had a good distribution of work across the modules, and we wanted to know approximately how long the entire mini-course would take. We needed this information so we could advise faculty on how to assign it and how much weight to give it as part of an overall grade. Both the mean and median times the students reported for the entire course were between five and six hours for completion.

We spent the spring and summer of 2020 developing and testing the mini-course. During the summer we also began marketing it to faculty because we hoped to get it included in

fall 2020 courses. Part of this process included branding the tutorial in a way that would make sense. The UWG mascot is a wolf (named "Wolfe"), and the campus locally brands services and locations with wolf-themed names. For example, the learning management system is locally branded as "CourseDen." We named our library mini-course "LibraryDen" to align with these local themes. We began marketing it in May 2020 by presenting it to faculty at a campus pedagogy conference that was online due to the pandemic. We presented the content and had student testers talk about their experiences from their perspective. In addition to this presentation, we created a video about the course and sent notes to individual faculty members teaching intro-to-the-discipline courses.

Melanie: I found LibraryDen to be the perfect example of information literacy in action. I decided to incorporate it into the Multiple Literacies for School Library Media course curriculum with two goals: a) to orient our new graduate students to the Ingram Library and the resources they would be required to use throughout their program, and b) to serve as a model of a type of online tutorial that our students might adapt for use in their K–12 school libraries. I appreciate that LibraryDen was designed to be a self-paced program that allows instructors to use it in a variety of ways within their courses. I chose to have my students complete it within a six-week period of my course. Though LibraryDen is set up to calculate a standalone grade for completion, I was able to use it as a pass/fail activity. I required my students to complete each of the modules and their respective quizzes with an overall 70 percent score and submit brief narrative responses describing what they learned from the activity—from the perspective

of a UWG graduate student and as a future school librarian.

LibraryDen is a well-designed, cohesive educational resource that effectively uses video and activities to engage students in the learning process. I appreciate the flexibility afforded by this resource and the regular support provided by the Ingram Library librarians. They regularly sent me reports of student completion progress and reset accounts if students asked to redo one or more quizzes within LibraryDen.

As of fall 2021, over 140 students have taken the Multiple Literacies for School Library Media course and completed LibraryDen. I have received only positive feedback from students, who shared that they found it to be a valuable learning experience in virtually orienting them to the Ingram Library. In particular, students said that they:

- appreciated how LibraryDen was organized with:
 - modules of content
 - tools to check their understanding through quizzes, self-assessments, and review
 - immediate feedback that required them to master the material before moving forward
- gained knowledge in:
 - how to begin exploring a research topic
 - applying search techniques
 - using Wikipedia and Google Scholar
 - identifying and locating peer-reviewed/scholarly sources
 - avoiding plagiarism
 - using citation generators
- were surprised to learn that:

- they should never pay for resources (because they're covered by tuition for library services)
- research help is provided via in-person meetings, online, and over the phone
- materials can be accessed through other University System of Georgia libraries
- materials can be shipped to their homes
- they have live 24/7 access to librarians located throughout the United States and United Kingdom
- really enjoyed the mix of academic and current pop-culture references.

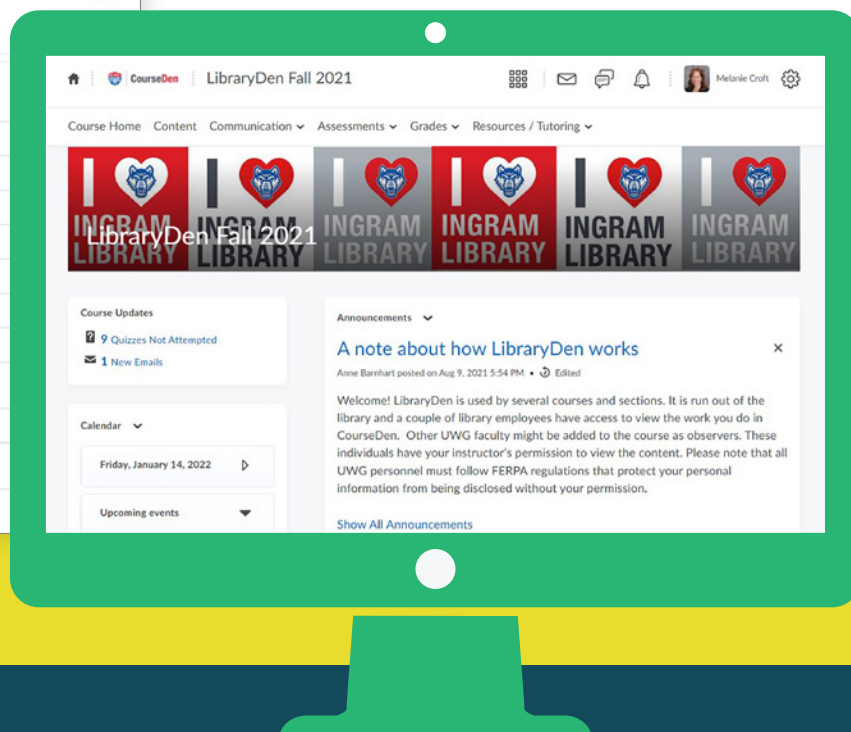
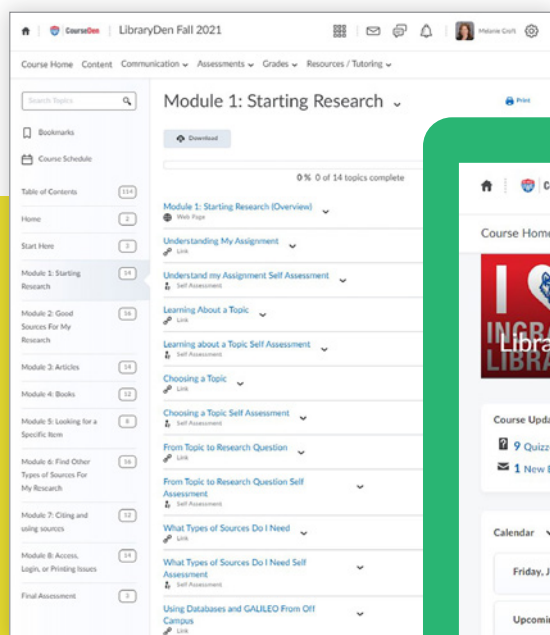
One student shared, "I liked the movie and TV references in the questions; they were funny and

allowed for the feeling of common interests and connections when online learning can often seem robotic and impersonal."

Anne: In our pilot year we had thirty class sections (a total of 685 students) enrolled in the LibraryDen mini-course. These students ranged from second-year undergraduates to incoming graduate students. Some faculty assign it as part of the course grade, while others offer it as an extra-credit option. Not surprisingly, there were greater completion levels in the courses that required LibraryDen when compared to those for which it was merely extra credit.

We were pleased with the assessment data that we gathered. At the end of the first semester (fall 2020) we saw a mean increase of 11.99 percent (median 13.59 percent) in scores when comparing the pre-test

to the post-test. Several students and faculty asked that students be allowed multiple attempts for the quizzes. Based on this feedback, for subsequent semesters students could have two attempts for each quiz, including the post-test. The following semester (spring 2021) the mean increase from the pre-test to the post-test was 26 percent (median was also 26 percent). These figures indicate to us that LibraryDen works as an instructional tool. Aside from assessing student learning, we wanted to know what students thought about the learning experience. We included an optional anonymous survey asking students to provide feedback. We learned that 80 to 85 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "LibraryDen is useful to me as a UWG student." Additionally, 70 to 77 percent of student respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "I would recommend LibraryDen to friends and classmates." In short, LibraryDen works as a pedagogical tool, and students see value in it.



The library professional community also sees value in it. In 2021 Ingram Library won the American Library Association's Library Instruction Round Table Innovation in Instruction award for the creation of LibraryDen (ALA 2021). We licensed LibraryDen through Creative Commons (CC-BY-SA). Because LibraryDen is a course that uses Ingram Library DIY tutorials as its course text, libraries interested in adopting LibraryDen would first need to adapt or create a set of tutorials customized for their libraries. The LibraryDen course structure, modules, and quizzes can be downloaded from GitHub (a website where software developers share copies) and imported into other compatible learning management systems. Information about LibraryDen and links for downloading its content are available on our information page: <http://libguides.westga.edu/LibraryDen> (Barnhart 2021). Since LibraryDen's content is specific to the UWG's resources and policies, it serves as a model or starting point for school librarians to adapt for use by their community. School librarians working within a school district could collaborate to import, adapt, and maintain their version of LibraryDen within their selected learning management system for use across their school sites.

LibraryDen will require some maintenance and updating as a course. The pop-culture references that make the questions fun for students will gradually become outdated and need to be refreshed. We also will soon confront issues about the integration of LibraryDen in the curriculum. While the School Library Media (SLM) program has integrated LibraryDen in one of its required courses so that all graduate students have the information, programmatic integration is not consistent across the university. In

other departments, one professor teaching an introduction-to-the-discipline course might assign LibraryDen to their section, but other sections of the same course do not include it. This means that students do not uniformly carry the basic knowledge from LibraryDen into upper-level courses within a division. This uneven approach also results in some students being assigned LibraryDen in multiple courses across multiple semesters. By making the self-assessments optional, a student could move quickly through LibraryDen as a refresher by skipping the tutorials and taking the module-level quizzes in approximately thirty minutes. As this continues to happen, we anticipate seeing student satisfaction numbers decrease out of frustration resulting from having to repeat the same content. In the library we would prefer to achieve systematic program-level integration, but that is difficult in an academic setting in which departments in the disciplines can take independent actions.

Melanie: School librarians may have a greater ability to integrate learning experiences like LibraryDen across grade levels within their K–12 school settings. When asked how they might adapt LibraryDen for their future school libraries, SLM students provided many helpful suggestions. They considered the following regarding:

- delivery:
 - it could be used as a self-paced course, avoiding standard informational presentations that can be overwhelming, especially because school librarians aren't always available when they're needed by students and staff
 - it could be used in place of or in addition to a library orientation as a resource that would be helpful to both in-person and virtual learners

- in the words of one SLM student, "it's a great way to show students (and their parents helping them at home) all the resources available to them to still complete their assignments and do research on their own interests without having to physically be in the library"
 - it could be used as professional development to "help my colleagues because, as a previous classroom teacher, I didn't know everything the library had to offer until I was in the media specialist role"
- format:
 - add a search bar so students/staff can quickly locate specific information when needed
 - turn quizzes into scavenger hunts
 - add graphics and audio to increase engagement
 - create certificates or badges (because students like to feel rewarded!)
 - give it a catchy name aligned to a current trend like "LibraryTok" or "LitTok"

- content:
 - use it to introduce research skills
 - use it to demonstrate how to use the library management system (e.g., Follett Destiny) and state databases (e.g., GALILEO)
 - include a section on digital citizenship

Finally, one student emphasized that an adaptation of LibraryDen "... would show my administrators my dedication to our students and to the job!"

Melanie & Anne: We've been thrilled with the results of LibraryDen thus far. We are particu-

The ability for school librarians to adapt an instructional model such as LibraryDen for the K–12 setting provides an opportunity for them to collaborate with their local academic librarians in designing a continuum of information literacy skills that spans all grade levels.

larly impressed by the transferability of skills between the academic and school library settings. The ability for school librarians to adapt an instructional model such as LibraryDen for the K–12 setting

provides an opportunity for them to collaborate with their local academic librarians in designing a continuum of information literacy skills that spans all grade levels.

Also, K–12 students that engage with efforts like these may be better prepared for the rigors of academic research upon entering a college or university. We look forward to continuing to refine our instruction in our respective settings to best meet the needs of learners who engage with LibraryDen.



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Georgia. She has worked with all grade levels and subject areas across a variety of learning environments in public, private, urban, and rural school systems. She served the K–12 field of education for seventeen years as a state-certified elementary-level classroom teacher, secondary-level school librarian, and district administrator of technology, library services, and curriculum. Since 2014 she has worked at the university level serving as both a faculty member and program coordinator of graduate education programs in school library media in California and Georgia. She currently serves AASL on the School Library Research Editorial Board and as a Knowledge Quest blogger. Her recent publications include “Enabling School Librarians to Serve as Instructional Leaders of Multiple Literacies” in *School Library Research* and “A Certified School Librarian Is a Professional Learning Powerhouse” in *The Learning Professional*.



Anne C. Barnhart is a professor and Head of Outreach and Assessment at the University of West Georgia. In addition, she

is an adjunct instructor for the iSchool of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign where she teaches *Collection Development*, and *Library and Information Resources for Spanish-Speaking Populations*. She received ALA’s Library Instruction Round Table Innovation in Instruction Award for 2020–2021. She is vice president/president-elect of the Seminar on the Acquisition of Latin American Library Materials, and is a member of ALA, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, the Association of College and Research Libraries, and the Georgia Library Association. Her recent publications include “The Course-Integrated Unconference: A Pedagogy of Courage and Mutual Trust,” forthcoming in the *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science*, and “¿Enseñar o crear experiencias para aprender? Cambiando el enfoque del papel del bibliotecario en el desarrollo de ALFIN” in *30 motivos para celebrar a las bibliotecas*.

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School Library Instruction: Does Experience Matter?

David Robinson

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Imagine that you are a school-based administrator searching for a school librarian. Your primary goal is to hire a school librarian who will facilitate an exemplary school library instructional program. Three certified school librarians have applied for the position. Each has recently earned a Master's degree with a specialty in school librarianship from a program recognized by the American Association of School Librarians in an educational unit accredited by the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation. The first candidate has no teaching experience; the second candidate has three years of teaching experience; and the third has nine years of teaching experience.

Intuitively, you may hire the candidate with the most teaching experience based on the premise that more teaching experience will yield better pedagogical skills. Existing research examining traditional classroom teaching indicates that "the simple assumption that more teaching experience is better requires greater nuance; experience effects are complex and depend on a number of factors" (Rice 2010, 1).

Background

In my previous experiences as an elementary, middle, and high school librarian, I experienced challenges providing instruction in school library settings in comparison to experiences in the traditional classroom. I was fortunate as a novice school librarian to be provided with mentoring and professional development opportunities to address those challenges.

I currently work with pre-service school librarian degree candidates in securing practical experiences and employment with local school systems. I have noted a preference by school system library supervisors and building-based administrators to hire school librarians with greater teaching experience vs. those candidates with little or no teaching experience.

Research Study

To explore whether teaching experience correlates with success in the teacher role of school librarians, I collaborated with Dr. Scot McNary in conducting a research study "School Library Instruction: Does Teaching Experience Matter?" (Robinson and McNary 2021).

We examined the relationship between years of classroom teaching experience and teaching in the school library.

The study addressed the following research questions:

1. Are experienced classroom teachers more effective in planning, implementing, and reflecting on school library media instruction than inexperienced or novice teachers?
2. How much teaching experience might make a difference; for example, are ten years of teaching experience better than two years or five years?

The study was conducted using fifteen years of archived lesson-observation data from 196 school library candidates' practicum experiences in public school settings. The candidates were grouped into four categories of classroom teaching experience:

- No Experience (N=46): candidates with no teaching experience
- Novice (N=28): candidates with 1–3 years of teaching experience

- Experienced (N=98): candidates with 4–9 years of teaching experience
- Experienced Plus (N=26): candidates with 10 or more years of teaching experience

The research instrument was adapted from the assessment document used by university supervisors in observing practicum lessons. The instrument was aligned with the 2010 AASL Standards for the Initial Preparation of School Librarians, and consisted of the following twenty competencies:

- Planning competencies: resources, collaboration, goals/objectives/indicators, assessment plan, instructional procedures, and universal design for learning and differentiation
- Implementation competencies: objectives, use of preassessment data, motivation, introduction, modeling, guided and independent practice, critical thinking, universal design for learning, formative assessment, feedback, closure, and summative assessment
- Reflection competencies: analysis/instructional design making, and reflection and self-evaluation

An ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) was conducted for each of the competencies to determine significant differences between the competency means in relation to the experience levels.

Findings

The results were nuanced and complex. For example, in comparing instructional competencies between Novice candidates (1–3 years classroom experience) and Experienced candidates (4–9 years of experience), Experienced candidates scored significantly higher in thirteen instructional and reflection

competencies. However, no significant differences were noted among the planning, instructional, and reflection competencies when comparing the No Experience and Novice candidates (1–3 years' experience). While the research study was initially focused on preparation and performance of school librarians in relation to teaching experience, the data analysis revealed themes relevant to all in-service librarians serving K–12 learners. The following section provides an overview of these emergent themes and their practical implications for school librarianship.

Themes, Questions, and Implications for Practice

The following practical themes/trend differences emerged from the data analysis:

- **Theme 1 (T1)** – Lesser-experienced candidates tended to do more formal planning of instruction in comparison to candidates with relatively more experience.
- **Theme 2 (T2)** – In terms of teaching in the school library, no significant differences were noted between those candidates with no teaching experience and Novice candidates (1–3 years of experience) across all competencies.
- **Theme 3 (T3)** – Novice candidates (1–3 years' experience) rated significantly less competent than Experienced candidates (4–9 years of experience) across thirteen competencies.
- **Theme 4 (T4)** – Something happens in years 4–9 in terms of a maturation of pedagogy; perhaps mastery of the teaching craft in the classroom transfers to school librarian pedagogy.

One consideration for hiring school librarians is the finding that teaching experience doesn't significantly translate into success as a teacher in school library settings until the fourth year of classroom teaching.

Questions Raised

The data analysis raised the following questions having practical implications:

- **Question 1 (Q1)** – How might the research study data impact preferences for employing school librarians in relation to levels of teaching experience?
- **Question 2 (Q2)** – Why are there no differences in instructional implementation between candidates with no teaching experience and Novice candidates (1–3 years of experience)?
- **Question 3 (Q3)** – How can newly hired school librarians be supported in their role of teacher?
- **Question 4 (Q4)** – Should school librarians with fewer than four years of teaching experience be provided with more and/or different types of on-boarding and on-going support than more-experienced candidates?

- **Question 5 (Q5)** – What factors would account for differences between teaching in a classroom vs. a school library?
- **Question 6 (Q6)** – What happens to classroom teachers in years’ 4–9 to account for increased performance across most of the assessed competencies?

Practical Implications

Hiring

One consideration for hiring school librarians is the finding that teaching experience doesn’t significantly translate into success as a teacher in school library settings until the fourth year of classroom teaching. In terms of the effectiveness of instruction and discounting the other school librarian roles, candidates with greater than four years of classroom teaching experience will, on average, be more effective school library instructors (T2–3, Q1). [Note: “T2–3” indicates alignment of this practical implication with themes 2 and 3, and question 1 from the sections above.]

Support

Varied mentoring and professional development can be provided for school librarians in relation to levels of their teaching experience. As school librarians accumulate

teaching experience, less-formal written planning documentation may be needed, as gains in experience facilitate school librarians’ ability to visualize or project planning phases. Lesser-experienced school librarians may need more support in the formal design and planning of instruction, and those with less than four years of teaching experience would benefit most from support in refining the implementation of school library instruction (T1, Q3–Q4).

School librarians with more than four years of classroom teaching experience have accumulated instructional proficiencies that could be applied to mentoring school librarian interns and school librarians with 0–3 years of teaching experience (T3–4, Q3–4).

Professional development and mentoring support may help new school librarians, including those with teaching experience, transition to the unique school library instructional setting, while also addressing the other four roles of school librarians: instructional partner, program administrator, leader, and information specialist (AASL 2018) (T1–4, Q5).

Multiple factors impact school librarians’ instructional effectiveness in comparison to effectiveness in the classroom. The transition to school library instruction can

Multiple factors impact school librarians’ instructional effectiveness in comparison to effectiveness in the classroom. The transition to school library instruction can be supported by providing professional development and guidance in the adapting to unique factors impacting school library instruction.

be supported by providing professional development and guidance in the adapting to unique factors impacting school library instruction:

- Simultaneously teaching and managing students (and faculty) in multiple instructional environments within the school library (for example, some students receiving formal whole-class instruction, while other learners are working independently, in small groups, or in makerspace areas)
- Minimizing distractions while supporting large-class instruction, groups, and individual students working simultaneously
- Adapting to collaborative planning and instruction

One consideration for hiring school librarians is the finding that teaching experience doesn’t significantly translate into success as a teacher in school library settings until the fourth year of classroom teaching.

- Adapting to flexible scheduling where applicable
- Working with the entire school's student population, and teaching different students each day in multiple class sessions
- Having to constantly set expectations and routines with each new class arriving at the school library
- Dealing with other building responsibilities while teaching, such as being interrupted while teaching to address a technical issue somewhere else in the school
- Focusing on program administration and management of student learning behaviors in all areas of the library
- Adjusting from standardized and/or scripted curriculum in the classroom to having more freedom in planning and implementing information-literacy lessons to meet the unique needs of each class in the school library (T5, Q5).

Conclusion

Analysis of the research study data revealed differences among planning, implementing, and reflecting on instruction across degree candidates in the context of the pre-service school librarians' levels of prior classroom teaching experience. The research data does not support the assumption by those hiring new school librarians that applicants with more classroom teaching experience will always be more-effective teachers in the school library than will applicants with less classroom experience. The results of the research are more nuanced and affected by school librarians' multiple roles and responsibilities. School librarians with fewer than

four years of teaching experience may need more and specialized mentoring and professional development to advance their pedagogy in complex school library settings. As in many research studies, ours raised multiple questions to be explored for continued improvement of preparation and practice of school librarians.



David Robinson is the director of the School Library Media Master's Program in Towson University's Department

of Educational Technology and Literacy. An AASL member, he received Towson University's Gloria Neubert Faculty Excellence in Teaching Award (2019–2020). He is a past recipient of the Mae I. Graham Award from the Maryland Association of School Librarians and Maryland State Department of Education for the state's Outstanding School Library Media Program of the Year. His most-recently published research paper is the one on which this article is based. In addition to authoring research papers, he has also previously written for *Knowledge Quest*: "Universal Design for Learning and School Libraries: A Logical Partnership."

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Many good books go undiscovered, unopened, unread. I would call this a Lack-of-Strangers Danger. A strange book enlarges my world more than an online book search ever can.

Covid Kills Books, Too

Lois Wickstrom

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When I was a child, I had open access to vast shelves of books at my local libraries. My favorite multistoried library filled an entire block. It was open from 6 a.m. until at least 10 p.m. Even though I frequently browsed the shelves before school and after work, I felt I would never come to the end of it. And new books appeared all the time. No matter where I wandered down aisles and into alcoves, books on topics I'd never thought about demanded to come home with me, called out to be read. Books seemed to jump off the shelves into my hands or summoned me from distant racks. I read about everything from deep-sea pearl diving to the invention of the Dvorak keyboard. One particular librarian at the Hill Street Branch liked to tell me about books she enjoyed. I had the feeling she'd read every book in her branch of the library. She even convinced me to try holding my breath underwater, like the deep-sea pearl divers.

When I moved to Philadelphia, that changed. While the central library in the system is one of the biggest libraries in the world, only a small fraction of the books sit on browsable shelves. These are mostly popular books, and books that have been made into movies. Movies, too, are on the shelves. Random discovery became difficult, but not impossible. Various rooms in the library, like the history room and the rare book room have browsable shelves holding books I've never seen before, along with Charles Dickens's raven (now stuffed) that inspired Edgar Allen Poe's poem. Just not as many browsable books as I was used to. Some librarians still like to chat and tell me about their favorite books in backroom storage. I know it's eccentric to read as randomly as I do. And I don't know why I walk by some books and not others. But there's something magical about the freedom to meet a new book based on a chance encounter.

Newspapers and magazines used to pay book reviewers. Now writers and publishers pay them. Thus, despite the fact that more books than ever are being published, fewer books are being reviewed.

A computer system in my new library allows book searches, which I suppose makes my shoes last longer—but I have to type a keyword to see the titles on a specific selected subject. No more just walking down an aisle and feeling the urge to pick up an inviting book. The only way to obtain the multitudes of hidden books is to present a staff member with a

call number. Many good books go undiscovered, unopened, unread. I would call this a Lack-of-Strangers Danger. A strange book enlarges my world more than an online book search ever can.

Then came Covid-19. No more conversations with librarians. No more browsing shelves. As I write this in early 2022, I'm faced with interacting only with the library database, accessible online, where I can reserve books for pickup during regular work hours. It's hard to guess what keywords might bring me an unexpected treasure. And it's hard to get to the library during work hours. (We all work the same hours.) Covid-19 isn't just killing our families and friends. It is also killing our access to books.

Covid-19 has also made it easier to find groups of like-minded people on the Web. This facilitates both book banning and book clubs. A member of a group with a specific focus may find a book offensive and get the entire group (which has not read it) to campaign to ban that book. Book banning is treason. But treason makes headlines. And headlines make sales for those controversial books.

Meanwhile a book may become a favorite of a book club because one member falls in love with it. The leaders in both these types of groups (the hate groups and the booklovers) are influencers, typically on social media, who develop a reputation and then often charge fees to even consider recommending a book. Book popularity has thus become something for sale. Newspapers and magazines used to pay book reviewers. Now writers and publishers pay them. Thus, despite the fact that more books than ever are being published, fewer books are being reviewed. And fewer still are reviewed in the



major trade journals, which still pay their staffs, and can be relied on for unbiased reviews.

My local libraries don't carry books by independent presses unless those books get reviewed in *Publishers Weekly* or *School Library Journal*. So, not only are my chances of finding spectacular old books gone (from lack of browsing access), so are my chances of finding a wonderful new book that nobody ever heard of.

In an ideal world, nobody would ban books. Schools would teach a broad range of opinions and viewpoints.

Zillions of books, old and new, are dying because nobody knows they exist.

Libraries would help the curious find out more about the world. And more books would be reviewed. But the problems are far deeper than inaccessible library stacks, banned books, and Covid-19 closures.

Lois is a former high school chemistry teacher and former head science teacher at Science in the City Summer Camp in Philadelphia. She has also been an adjunct science teacher at the University of South Florida. Since retiring, she continues to take science classes. Her class in *Forensic Biology* led to *Little Red, The Detective*, in which Red is studying fingerprint identification, so she can tell that "Grandma" isn't who she says she is.

Lois has taken so many science classes that she believes science is the solution to almost every problem, including the dilemmas in fairy tales. She has invented what she calls *Science Folktales*. In each science-based tale, the protagonist achieves a better ending than the original because of learning scientific principles. She has turned some of these tales into plays.

She has also created a series of *Mermaid Science* stories, which make use of water science.

Lois is married to the love of her life. She has two children, four grandchildren and a dog.

Thanks to the Covid-19 necessity to minimize random socializing, combined with narrow-interest online groups, I'm seeing a lack of curiosity about books that aren't bestsellers. The random book discovery method of my childhood is gone. Furthermore, the random encounter with people of differing opinions is minimized.

I am an Indie author of middle-grade and picture books. I don't want to pay influencers to push my books. I don't want to pay *Publishers Weekly* or *Kirkus Reviews* the \$400 fee they charge to look at Indie books. (They review big publishers' titles for free.) I'm sure my books have a bigger audience than they have currently found. I can't use the old methods of doing a reading at a library (which is closed for Covid-19) or having somebody randomly discover my book on a shelf that nobody can look at.

Zillions of books, old and new, are dying because nobody knows they exist. This is one of the many deaths from Covid-19. I don't have answers. I'm hoping that pointing out the problem will inspire new thinking. This has to be a solvable problem.

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