

# MSLA Forum: Spring 2007

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## Advocacy and Alliances: The Art of Shameless Self-Promotion

By Kathy Lowe, MSLA President & Acting Executive Director



We’ve been brought up not to brag about ourselves. We’ve been told it makes us appear arrogant and self-serving. We have to get over it. It’s really not true at all when it pertains to school librarians advocating for their own programs. Our very existence depends on learning how to blow our own horns. And not just when we’re facing a crisis, like an impending staff reduction due to lack of funds. By then it’s too late. We have to continually remind our administrators, fellow teachers, students and their parents in a myriad of ways that what we do matters.

This year I’ve had the honor of serving on the committee that decides which school library programs in the United States will win the prestigious AASL School Library Media Program of the Year Award. One of the finalists said it best in her application: “We realize that shameless self-promotion is a necessity, and are confident that our efforts will help us to continue increasing our program’s visibility throughout our learning community.” The fact that this school library program is a finalist for a national award is not an accident. This librarian has worked for years to so imbed the library program into the fabric of her school that they cannot conceive of operating that building without it. How did she do this? Obviously her program is great. Her staff is exceptional, the library collection first-rate. Students feel welcome and get the help and instruction they need to be successful, as I am sure they do in countless other school libraries – even many whose existence is now in jeopardy right here in Massachusetts. The difference is that this librarian, and others like her whose programs have thrived and won recognition and prestige, has not been shy about spreading the good news about the priceless contribution her library program makes to her school at every possible opportunity. And better yet, she has so infected those around her with regard for her program that they too sing its praises far and wide. And THAT’S what makes the difference. She has cultivated alliances that have turned her stakeholders into advocates and solidified the library program’s status at her school.

Increasing your program’s visibility in your learning community should be right up there at the top of your job description. This is the time of year when the sad news of impending cuts in school library positions looms over us all. I feel miserable each time I hear from a colleague who is about to lose his job or from a parent concerned that her child’s district is planning to eliminate its library teachers, because there is honestly very little that MSLA can do to help by the time an administrator or school committee has arrived at this sorry decision.

That doesn’t mean that we won’t try. Your MSLA Executive Board members:

- lobby legislators in person at the State House and through email messages and phone calls
- write letters to public officials, like the Governor, his Education Task Force, and members of the DOE
- speak at meetings and conferences about teacher/librarian collaboration and it’s positive impact on student achievement

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- connect with other organizations, like MLA, MTA, AFT Massachusetts, MBLC, the Regional Library Systems and MassCUE and serve on their committees to represent the interests of school libraries
- seek opportunities to work with groups like the Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills to advance the status of school libraries in Massachusetts
- develop program standards, evaluation rubrics, information fluency standards, position statements, and a whole cache of documents confirming the value of school libraries
- attend national library conferences to find out what works in other states and funnel information to you through the *MSLA Forum*, our email list, and the speakers we bring to our annual conference
- provide advocacy resources on our web site
- disseminate widely our Advocacy Packet full of MSLA documents and others, such as Scholastic's *School Libraries Work* that underscore the impact of good school libraries on student achievement and justify staffing school libraries with professionals

We do all of these things routinely, and step up our efforts anytime we hear about threats to school library programs or positions, but at the same time, we lament the fact that the value of those programs hadn't already been established. So, while all the members of your Executive Board continue to do everything we can to form alliances with individuals and organizations that can help us establish the unquestionable value of school libraries, and while we will ceaselessly advocate for you and your programs, we challenge each of you to embrace shameless self-promotion. If you – in your own building – make advocacy a priority, you will form among your colleagues, your administrators, and your students' parents, strong and lasting alliances that can pay off when times get tough.

Here are some things you can do to garner critical support for your program:

- volunteer to serve on the curriculum committee, school site council, or other policy-making committees in your school
- speak to parent groups about what you teach in the library, emphasizing projects collaboratively planned with classroom teachers
- buy *Massachusetts Power: A Parents Guide to School Libraries* for the president of your PTA/PTO (see <http://maschoolibraries.org/content/view/69/119/> for details)
- run a workshop for teachers on how to use blogs, pod casts or other Web 2.0 tools with students
- start a book discussion blog and invite parents and teachers, along with students, to post comments
- develop a long-range plan for your library, with a yearly action plan, and share your goals not only with your principal, but with your faculty and parents
- use the MSLA model program rubrics to have teachers evaluate your program
- form a library advisory board of teachers and students and ask them to help you develop goals to address perceived weaknesses in your program
- write a regular column, with photos, for parent newsletters and local newspapers
- attend a Legislative Breakfast in your region – or better yet, host one – and bring along some students to speak about the value of school libraries
- use your library web page (a must-have) to promote reading, program features and online resources
- appropriate a bulletin board in a prominent location to showcase your program
- sponsor events that bring in parents, like book fairs, author visits, and reading celebrations
- develop a parent collection in your library and promote it through your PTO/PTA and at parent conferences and open houses

Most likely, you are the only library teacher in your building and it is probable that you have no district wide administrator for the library program. You may be alone, with no one else to advocate for you. If you don't actively

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promote your program, who will? I am convinced that our profession will only survive and thrive through small, but constant, acts of advocacy, one school at a time. And if I am right, this means that it is up to you to advocate at every opportunity.

This is my last message to you as president of MSLA. I will enthusiastically pass the torch to Sandy Kelly in June, but you haven't heard the last from me. As your Executive Director and advocate, I will continue to shamelessly promote YOU and all you do for years to come. Thank you for the support and inspiration you have given me over the years. I am very proud to be counted among the members of MSLA and treasure my alliances with you.

### **2007 CONFERENCE: School Libraries in a 2.0 World....**

**November 11 and 12, 2007!!**

By Sandy Kelly

If you follow LM\_NET discussions you have probably formed your own opinion about the topic that school libraries are becoming obsolete. Is that really possible? Well according to many, yes, it is!

How does one respond to this? For some it is to complain, for others it is to defend how hard we work. Some choose to get actively involved in professional organizations and legislative efforts, but the one thing EVERYONE should be doing is staying on top of the topics and innovations that are continually evolving around us. Call it professional development. Call it job protection. Call it being an educational leader in your school. Any way you look at it, to be effective in our jobs we need to be informed! It is hard but the alternative will not be any better.

**So how to you learn to stay current and effective in your job????**

**GO TO THE MSLA CONFERENCE - School Libraries in a 2.0 World!**

Mark the date on your calendar right now.... November 11-12, 2007

At the Sturbridge Host Hotel.

Your conference planning committee has gone all out to bring to you the best upcoming professional opportunity. Together we will look into the *crystal ball*.

This year will bring both the best from the past and some of the newest refreshing faces.

Sunday will have 3 morning sessions and they will repeat again in the afternoon so you can choose 2 that appeal to you. Chris Harris will be back by popular demand, with a new presentation, new technologies and the best ideas on how to implement them into your program. Two newcomers are Allison Zmuda and Meredith Farkas. Allison works with Wiggins and McTighe authors of the Understanding by Design curriculum planning model. She recently spoke at the AASL conference held last fall in Providence and she is bright, innovative and very motivational. Meredith writes the new technology column in American libraries, an ALA publication and will bring us her own fresh perspective. In March 2006, she was named a Library Journal Mover and Shaker for her passion for playing with technology and sharing what she's learned with others. Look at her "Information Wants to be Free" blog.

The President's reception will be in full swing Sunday afternoon with many new local authors, representing a wide range of genres and reading levels. So many people enjoyed our live entertainment last year that City of Roses will

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return again to play for this event and a cash bar will be available. Sunday dinner brings us special guest, Brian Kenney, editor of School Library Journal. Brian will share with us his knowledge on what he sees coming our way. He is not to be missed! Dessert anyone? Yes, Randy Testa will spoil us once again by providing dessert and sneak previews of Walden Media's upcoming arrivals. The entire day will be a wonderful chance to network with colleagues, receive current information from some of the best and freshest faces in our field and just have some fun.

Monday will continue with a packed agenda of speakers: Pat Keogh will update us on What's New in Children's Lit, our regional library system colleagues have a wide range of options for us to choose from, the Center for the Book will return and meet Sarah Kelly Johns the president of the American Association of School Librarians who will update us on the new ALA/AASL Information Standards.

Many of us have the good fortune of having that Monday off as a holiday with no need to worry about taking personal time off or missing classes! We are also working up a list of local options for those who might enjoy making this a family weekend in beautiful Sturbridge. On Veterans Day, Sturbridge Village will offer unique programs and demonstrations honoring America's military history, with special discounts for active service members and their families. In addition to the Village, there are also parks, museums and hiking areas. Watch for future details about this.

**And...WIN A CHANCE FOR FREE REGISTRATION...** RECRUIT A NEW MEMBER AND BOTH WILL BE ENTERED INTO A DRAWING FOR A FREE DAY'S REGISTRATION AT THE CONFERENCE!!!

Save that date and watch the conference website for details as they emerge. This is a fun conference with wonderful vendors, excellent presentations and fantastic colleagues! **Do it for yourself.**

## MSLA Letter to Governor Patrick and Response

March 20, 2007

Governor Deval Patrick  
The State House  
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Governor Patrick,

I applaud your creation of a Pre-K to Grade 12 Education Task Force.

As the Task Force studies the state of education in the Commonwealth, I hope that you will urge its members to carefully scrutinize the serious inequity that currently exists across the state in students' access to quality literature, information resources, and school library professionals. Some cities and towns offer excellent school library programs and resources, managed by credentialed professionals. However, many school districts have libraries that are run by parent volunteers, with resources that are out of date and inadequate for students' academic needs.

The Department of Education has no one designated to provide leadership and set standards for school library programs statewide, so there is no consistency in services from town to town, and sometimes even within a single district. Because school libraries are not included in Chapter 70, there are often no funds for districts to keep collections current and aligned with the Curriculum Frameworks. Almost half of Massachusetts schools do not have a full-time librarian. This is a situation that I implore the Education Task Force to address.

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I hope you have had a chance to look at the materials I left for you on March 8th when I was at the State House for the Massachusetts School Library Association's Legislative Day. The packet contains several documents that enlarge upon the information in this letter and underscore the impact a good school library program has on student achievement.

Leadership in support of school libraries will help education reform succeed and Massachusetts students achieve. Please let me know if I can provide you with further information or assistance.

Sincerely,

Katherine Lowe  
MSLA President and Executive Director

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DEVAL L. PATRICK  
GOVERNOR  
TIMOTHY F. MURRAY  
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

May 21, 2007

Ms. Katherine Lowe  
Massachusetts School Library Association  
PO Box 658  
Lunenburg, MA 01462

Dear Ms. Lowe:

Belated thanks for your letter regarding school libraries. Certainly, I understand the value of libraries and the treasures they contain. Libraries play an important role in educating the whole child, and I am glad to hear your enthusiastic support for public libraries in the Commonwealth. I have shared your letter with Michele Norman of my education team. Please be assured we hear you and that your voice is welcome in the discussion as we work together to craft meaningful and lasting education reform in Massachusetts.

Best regards,

cc: Michele Norman

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Legislators and others roaming the State House on March 8<sup>th</sup> found it hard to miss the impact that school libraries have on students. Giant blowups of bookmarks on display at the bottom of the Grand Staircase announced that books “take you to new heights,” help you “experience the world,” and allow kids to “get lost in your own fairy tale.” Nearby exhibits showcased some of the best practices at school libraries in various cities and towns around Massachusetts. Legislators listened as MSLA gathered at the State House for our third annual Legislative Day.

The day began at the Grand Staircase of the State House, with a continental breakfast and the opportunity for informal conversation and for looking at the bookmark contest display and the school library best practices display. Almost 20 library teachers prepared the best practices displays showing some of what they contribute to their school’s culture and their students’ learning.

The formal presentations began with a new event. MSLA held an awards presentation for the winners of the annual bookmark contest. Twelve of the fourteen award recipients traveled to Boston with their library teachers and families to accept their awards. MSLA President Kathy Lowe served as Master of Ceremonies. Author and illustrator Mary Newell DePalma spoke in a brief, insightful and inspiring comment about authors, readers and libraries. Representative Frank Smizik who is sponsoring House Bill 564 on behalf of MSLA addressed the winning students and their families. H564 seeks to include libraries in Chapter 70 of the Education Title of Massachusetts law. Representative Smizik also presented the award to each student recipient.

Following the awards ceremony, MSLA members and some parent supporters formed teams of about 3 to 5 people each. The teams visited approximately 40 legislators—including every member of the Joint Committee on Education, the committee that will vote on H564. During the visits, many legislators reported hearing about the MSLA Legislative Day in advance from library teachers across the state who sent postcards and e-mails.

The day was productive. We discovered strong support from several members of the House, including members of the Education Committee. We also learned that an opportunity to strengthen support for school libraries may come from a restructuring of the Board of Education, which oversees the Department of Education in Massachusetts. Newly-elected Governor Deval Patrick and some members of the legislature are considering the creation of a Department of Education to be headed by a cabinet-level Secretary. It was suggested that MSLA become involved now to be a prominent voice as this restructuring takes place.

As our Legislative Day concluded, members gathered to share the information gathered during office visits, and to offer suggestions for improvement. Several people spoke of the impact that parents made this year, and we are hoping that more parents who support school libraries will join us next year.

Overall, this year seemed a great success. Please watch the MSLA list-serve for messages asking our members to provide support as we attempt to move our legislative agenda forward.

### **2007 Bookmark Contest: the Adventure Beyond Information** Gerri Fegan

Cameras flashed, banners were unfurled, and the audience broke into wild applause. This wasn’t a scene in a movie – it was the award ceremony for the third Annual MSLA Bookmark Contest, and all those smiling faces on the Grand Staircase at the State House were the winning participants. It was an incredible moment for twelve students from all over Massachusetts but what brought them together happened four weeks earlier.

The judging for the third annual MSLA Bookmark Contest took place on February 8<sup>th</sup>, 2007 at the Plympton School in Waltham. There were almost 300 entries from across the Commonwealth of Massachusetts from students in grades K-8, and once again local authors and illustrators, as well as members of the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners experienced the joys and agonies of selecting division winners and awards of honorable mention.

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This was an exceptional year because the awards were going to be presented at the State House as part of MSLA Legislation Day in March, so judges were particularly careful to choose the best bookmark designs in each of four divisions. Our panel consisted of Kathy Lowe, President of MSLA; Stephen Krensky, Mary Newell DePalma, Brian Lies and David Biedrzycki, authors and illustrators; and Em Claire Knowles and Vicky Kaufman, MBLC.

Round one's judges were full of enthusiasm as they compared all the student artistry that captured the theme of the contest, "Adventures in Information." Students of all ages used a variety of media and techniques to demonstrate their enthusiasm for school library programs – crayons, watercolors, pastels, glow-in-the-dark paint and collage. There was animated discussion about the choice of colors and the faithfulness to the theme. Slowly, the entries that were not chosen for the second round were gently removed and placed on a separate table. The judges took a break for refreshments and discussed all the news about legislation. Over soft drinks, cookies, and specially-wrapped candy, we discussed the future of school library programs in Massachusetts and the positive steps that MSLA is taking toward bringing attention to our legislative efforts. It seemed fitting that we were surrounded by mountains of bookmarks that celebrate all the diverse aspects of school librarianship.

The judges carefully evaluated the next round with care, and finally the winners were chosen: In Division One, grades K-1: winner Giselle Pilette, Fitzgerald School, Waltham (MSLA member Kathleen Finnerty); honorable mentions Emily Jackson, Bancroft School, Andover (MSLA member Nancy Snow); and Leora, South Area Solomon Schechter Day School, Stoughton (MSLA member Carol Fanger Bell). In Division Two, grades 2-3: winner Lindsey Elliott, Great Oak School, Danvers, (MSLA member Lorraine Miller); honorable mentions Francesca Smigliani, Cedar School, Hanover, (MSLA member Susanne McHugh); Taylor O'Brien, Marsh Grammar School, Methuen (MSLA member Ken Hoffman); Maddie Harrington, Lt. Job Lane Elementary, Bedford (MSLA member Linda Coviello); and Claire Glover, Bancroft School, Andover (MSLA member Nancy Snow). In Division Three, grades 4-6: winner Emma Wang, Overlook Middle School, Ashburnham (MSLA member Eileen Barnacoat); honorable mentions Maggie Rubin, Lt. Job Lane Elementary, Bedford (MSLA member Linda Coviello); and Lily Lu, Field School, Weston (MSLA member Lorraine Sousa). In Division Four, grades 7-12: winner Alexandra Seager, Amherst Regional High School, Amherst (MSLA member Leslie Lomasson); Dylan Young, Belchertown High School, Belchertown (MSLA member Marianne O'Brien); and Melanie Dauphinais, Overlook Middle School, Ashburnham (MLSA member Eileen Barnacoat).

Thus it was on a sunny March 8, 2007, these honorees and their families smiled for the cameras, shook the hands of their state representatives, and received commendations from state legislators. The librarians shared their contest experiences and looked forward to the prizes that were donated by vendors who have generously supported MSLA. With certificates, bookmarks, and prizes in hand, they were all together to receive recognition for their bookmarks that will be distributed at schools, conventions, and events. It was difficult to tell who was having a better time: the children, their parents, the librarians, or the officials who admired their artwork. Representative Smizik handed out the framed certificates and reminded parents to keep supporting school library programs, especially in the face of financial cutbacks. Rep. Barbara L'Italien gave a group of guests a tour of the House of Representatives and wisely told students that their libraries held the keys to leadership. For everyone involved in the 2007 Bookmark Contest, it was indeed a day of "adventures in information!"

## Adventures in My School Library By Maria P. D'Orsi

I'm Nobody! Who are you?

Are you Nobody too?

Then there's a pair of us!

I hope there's more than a pair reading this article! Since it is April – poetry month - I thought I'd begin with a few words from Emily Dickinson, which speaks to me of the times when I feel overworked and under appreciated. I'll bet there are more than a few of you important nobodies out there as well! As Hillary Clinton said of her new presidential campaign, I'd like to begin a "conversation" with my colleagues, especially those of you who work alone or who got a late start like me, beginning with my journey and life as a school librarian, and maybe my unique perspective and experiences will resonate, or at least amuse, some of you.

I am a library teacher in an elementary school, a second career that began when I volunteered in my own children's school library in the early nineties. I did not come from an education background, but I'm certainly one of those "detail oriented" types as well as a voracious reader, prerequisites for librarianship! I never entertained the idea of being a teacher, but being an involved parent (in fact, a P.T.O. president), and an active supporter of education, I volunteered to run my children's school library and thought, "this is for me!!" I moved on to a paid position as library coordinator, and after a few years my community qualified for a grant to build new schools, which promised professionally staffed school libraries. My principal, who knew how much I loved the position, advised me to get my licensure or I would lose my job to a certified library media specialist.

Well, I really hated to spend the money!! And the time!! And especially, how long it would take to pay off the loan on a new teacher's salary. But I truly loved the children, the books, the organization, and my colleagues as well, and decided to go for it. After the shock of discovering most of the credits from my incomplete 1970s undergrad program wouldn't transfer, I "bit the bullet" for four years to finish my undergrad and master's degrees and teaching certification, and the good news is the loan will be paid just five years *after* I retire!

I loved my undergrad program at Cambridge College and what a joy it has been to go to school as an adult. There were times when I wished I could make my career as a student! Then I began the library teacher coursework, and past MSLA president Dr. Joseph (Joe) Angelo, director of the Library Teacher program at that time, taught my very first course, "Overview of the School Library". He talked about print resources vs. online, fixed schedules vs. flexible, collaboration and frameworks and standardized testing. He warned us about the dangers of being warehouseers, keepers of the books, professional organizers. Joe also stated emphatically that the job of a library teacher was to be a teacher first. *Library Teacher?* Who changed the name? I wanted to be a library media specialist. I *never* wanted to be a *teacher*.

I have always believed that teaching is the hardest job in the world; trying to keep 20 or 25 kids busily engaged and well-behaved, self esteem intact, parents placated, curriculum covered, room attractive, etc., etc. I just signed my loan (did I mention it will be paid five years after I retire?) and now I find out I have to let someone else do the cataloging and organizing and covering (I LOVE covering books), and all the wonderful things we bibliophiles do. I have to write lesson plans? What's this curriculum mapping? When am I going to have time to read the Follett catalog, my professional magazines, or order books? What was I getting myself into? The more Joe talked, the more depressed I became. Well, after a few deep breaths, I decided to finish my first semester coursework that was



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already paid by loan anyway, and then reevaluate.

I also completed Children's Literature, References Resources, and Evaluation, Selection and Management that summer and in time came to realize I was exactly where I belonged. It also occurred to me that teaching was what I had been doing all along and the skills Joe taught were the guideposts that gave my position as a library teacher meaning and value. It made me a professional. I had been so respectful and even intimidated by the wonderful teachers I had known that I felt unsure of myself, as if I couldn't measure up to their level of expertise. Now I proudly call myself a teacher and still feel a thrill when I get a chance to state my occupation. On occasion I cover books and love it when I'm asked to solve a cataloging dilemma, and once in a while I'll even go to the shelves and straighten and fuss, checking the call numbers and copyright dates and the condition of well-used materials...and get it out of my system.

Several months ago I had the opportunity to have lunch with the staff of this newsletter and was pleased that (now past) MSLA President, Kathy Lowe, would be joining us. She is every bit the powerhouse and wealth of information I suspected by the numerous articles she has written and the wonderful job she did representing us nationally. Even her lunch contribution wowed me...a delicious bleu cheese salad! I asked many questions and hung on her every word, and when the subject came up about the professional name change to library teacher and how I was confused at first, Kathy said she goes by...librarian. Librarian??? She stopped fighting it a long time ago. No matter how important we are, or what we call ourselves, in the school library we go with the flow!!

*Little Gem:* Chalk this one up to too much TV. One of my first graders is a very well behaved, bright, and caring little boy. One day a student asked for a dinosaur book and A.J., who was beside the boy, turned and said, "I'll show him, Mrs. D'Orsi." He said to his classmate, "Follow me. The dinosaur books are in the erectile section."

### **HELP IS JUST A CLICK AWAY!** By Patsy Diver

**"When you're alone in the library and it's making you lonely, you can always go... to the Resource Members page!"**

As Petula Clark's "Downtown" reminded us, there is always a place to make our lives easier, whenever we're feeling "lonely". Since being a school librarian can often be a "one person" role, and sometimes bring that frustration of where to go with your question or problem, here's some great news... you've got at least 78 friends to help you!

On the Massachusetts School Library Association's home page, [www.maschoollibraries.org](http://www.maschoollibraries.org), there is a link under "Members" to "Resource Members", with over 78 names showing their expertise and areas of help. Like the introductory page asks, "What do School Librarians do best? We SHARE and HELP".

The librarians on this list can help you get through such problems as Long Range Planning, Curriculum and Collection Development, NEASC, and Library Design/Renovation. Do you have a question about web development or technology? How about teaching a new class or developing a book club? Connect with your colleagues and make your library life less "lonely" and more enriched.

If you would also like to offer some guidance in your area of 'expertise', connect with us and add your name. Not an expert, you say? We beg to differ - your school library experience is one to share, and your method of handling a difficult student, solving a search for a book, or creating an interest project for your class, can be the lifesaving technique for another.

### Lunch with an Author – Irene Smalls

By Kathy Donovan and Linda Redding

Irene Smalls was hard to catch up with for lunch. She was busy touring the country attending conferences on reading and children's literature. We finally caught up with her on a beautiful afternoon in Boston. She showed us around the city and took us to one of her favorite places—the Boston Public Library!

*You have mentioned that kindergarten was an important experience in your life. How did your kindergarten experience lead you to be an author?*

Kindergarten was truly a life affirming experience for me. I am a very active and physical person and rather than my teacher seeing me as being hyper or a behavior problem she saw me for what I was a kinesthetic learner. She geared her teaching to fit the various learners in her classroom. We danced books, played hand games to books, acted out books and made hats or costumes to go along with the stories. I had no idea she was teaching me to read. It was fun. So for me reading is strongly associated with fun. Also because there were no books in my house and no one read to me kindergarten was the kindling fire of my passion for books. There was this beautiful black woman who told me I was wonderful in her storytelling. The reading text was Fun with Dick and Jane. My kindergarten teacher, off curriculum read, Lil brown baby with the sparkling eyes. I was that lil brown baby.

*One of our favorite stories is "Jonathan and His Mommy". How does your son feel about being the inspiration for one of your books?*

You bring up a touchy subject. My children have discussed charging for the use of their stories. Kidding aside, it was important to me as a parent that I give my children the gift of their own little brown baby story. A book that spoke of them, to them and of their experience. Jonathan has always had Jonathan and His Mommy in his life. He takes it as part of his landscape. I am hard at work reimagining Jonathan and His Mommy turning it into an interactive playspace for children an installation. With rising obesity rates it's important we activate the learning experience.

*Many of your books are a great way to introduce children to history. We hear you spend a great deal of time at the Boston Public Library. Does the process of writing a historical picture book differ than writing a story like "I Can't Take a Bath"?*

The process of writing a historical picture books is very different from writing, a *I can't Take a Bath*. First the research is extensive and I am always looking for aspects of history other people have not written about. Secondly, I am always looking for the fun aspect of the research to make it appealing to children. Finally, it has to be true I can be artistic with the truth but every book is based on real history. Being in the library doing research is so comfortable to me. It's like coming to my second home. It's rather funny. I go to the library to read books to do research and if I ask a librarian a question they go on the Internet.

*Students are so engaged in your presentations. From sharing your experience of growing up in Harlem to getting students involved in a Johnkankus celebration, you are a gifted storyteller Tell us about your new interactive storytelling CDs.*



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The interactive storytelling CDs of which there are three available on my web site: Heart Hugs and Holidays - Includes 7 stories including the Black History stories

Heart Hugs 4 little 1's - This is my early childhood CD

And Black Histories This includes the 4 black history stories I have written thus far. My goal is to write 12 Black Histories, one for each month of the year.

The CDs were produced in response to the many requests I received for a CD. They have sound effects, original music and my telling the story behind the stories.

*What resources do you offer on your website that will help teachers utilize your books in the classroom?*

On my web site [www.irenesmalls.com](http://www.irenesmalls.com) I have lesson plans for most of my books, Black History Fact sheets and background information about me personally and my books.

*Do you have any new books in the works?*

New books is my middle name. Writers are always creating new works. It is our reason for being. I am working on two more grandparent books, all my friends are grandparents. Then, I have some angst stories I have to revisit. After that it's up to the muses.

Linda Redding, Library Teacher, Silver Lake Regional High School  
[lredding@slrsd.org](mailto:lredding@slrsd.org)

For more information on Irene Smalls, please visit <http://www.irenesmalls.com>

### **Books by Irene Smalls**

*Because You're Lucky*

*Don't Say Ain't*

*Ebony Sea*

*I Can't Take a Bath*

*Irene and the Big Fine Nickel*

*Irene Jennie & the Xmas*

*Jenny Reen & the Jack Muh Lantern*

*Jonathan and His Mommy*

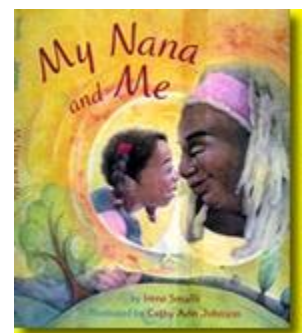
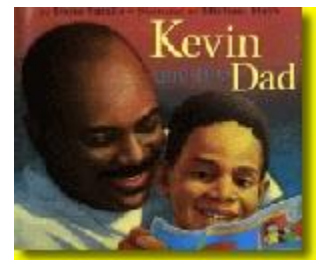
*Kevin and His Dad*

*Masquerade*

*My Nana and Me*

*Pop Pop & Me & A Recipe*

*A Straebeatere's Thanksgiving*



## **James Patterson Page Turner Award** Connie Kreuger, Huckleberry Hill School, Lynnfield

The Huckleberry Hill School in Lynnfield was awarded a \$5000 James Patterson PageTurner Award for our "Fit and Lit" program. This is one of two prizes awarded in New England and the only one that was given to a school.

When we saw that the criteria listed for the award were for an original, creative, and innovative approach to spreading the excitement of books and reading, we knew we had to apply. We have been doing "Fit and Lit" (fitness and literature), a program encouraging reading and exercise, since the fall of 2000 and were excited to be invited to share it in a presentation at the 2005 MSLMA conference.

To read more about these awards, go to <http://www.pattersonpageturner.org/index.html>

## **Online Databases**

Among the Thomson Gale products will be 13 periodical, biographical, reference and news databases covering an array of subjects and 23 Gale Virtual Reference library titles. ProQuest CSA will be providing 12 Massachusetts full-text newspapers (some going back to 1980), and EBSCO, its Literary Reference Center.

These resources will be available to all Massachusetts Regional Library System member libraries. All residents of the Commonwealth holding a valid library card from Massachusetts can also use these resources from any computer with Internet access. School libraries and academic libraries that are members of the Massachusetts Regional Library System will have campus-wide access, and non-profit institutional member libraries are permitted access for their offices in Massachusetts.

To read the entire release and see a list of the individual database titles, go to [www.mass.gov/mblc](http://www.mass.gov/mblc) and click on Statewide Online Database Contracts Awarded."

If you are a certified library teacher, you should be able to connect to your regional library network. These online resources are only a part of the value of this connection, but one many of us can't afford to lose. It's made a difference in my school, and helped to supply information needed for student learning when my budget was reduced.

However, shortly after receiving the email announcing these upcoming contracted resources, I noticed a question on our MSLA Listserv. Michelle Tanguay, Library teacher at the Pollard Middle School in Needham, posted the following query about databases:

"I'm exploring spending less on reference books and investing in databases. I'm interested in feedback about databases other than those provided via regional library systems. Does anyone subscribe to any EBSCO databases, for instance? Are they worth the investment? Are there any other products I should consider?"

The following are the responses (no names!) I found these to bring a different perspective to the topic, and – once again – I have new information to investigate for my library.

\*\*\*\*\*

We subscribe to EBSCO. It has many student-oriented features. We are a high school, but it might be even more useful for your middle school. Also, you can sometimes find articles that you can't find in Infotrac - this happened to me the other day when I was trying to find a New Yorker article for a staff member. It is expensive, but we think worth the price.

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We have a small resource center on our middle school campus in addition to our main school library. Due to the limitations of space among other things I purchased additional databases specifically for use in the middle school. These would include World Book Online, Science Resource Center, Culturegrams, AP multimedia archive. I have continued to add databases each year as well--some to replace some print sources, but mostly to supplement them. My reference purchases have been mostly specialized books that are directly related to our courses and curriculum. I also highly recommend NoodleBib for bibliography creation. It is not too expensive--we pay \$240 for our school population of 650. I realize that I have a very generous budget to supplement what we get from the regional library system. I think that what they offer is pretty good and you just have to keep working with teachers to get them to incorporate these resources into their assignments (as I am sure you know!).

\*\*\*\*\*

We subscribe to EBSCO, Access Science, Infotrac (Opposing Viewpoints and History Resource). I have found the Infotrac databases especially helpful. I am curious about what other school libraries purchase other than those offered through SEMLS.

\*\*\*\*\*

I put out a survey to my teachers about what they most need, which I highly recommend b/c otherwise you are throwing money at things they may not use. The science teachers requested Science Online through Facts on File, but I am going to preview one from Ebsco Host to see if it is better. All of these places will give you a free trial so you and your teachers can check them out.

My special ed. tutors and math teachers LOVE Ed-Helper, and everybody's in love with BrainPop - These are both just subscription web sites, not databases, but don't dismiss them b/c teachers often like what they come across themselves. We currently have a subscription to United Streaming, but BrainPop is winning the video battle.

\*\*\*\*\*

I am trying to do the same thing at the Sharon High School. We have a 90-day free trial running through the end of June for the ABC-CLIO history & geography on the recommendation of the Soc. Studies dept. who are exploring it now. Expensive (\$500/year for each database) but the PTO is funding one database for a year. If the usage is high, we can justify the expense the following year. I would appreciate hearing any helpful feedback you get from the rest of the school libraries.

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Although we can't afford these databases, there are many I use at the BPL all the time. Go to the BPL.org and get your free E-card and try them all. You'll have a much better idea of what can help your library.

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Please post your responses--I am wondering about this also....do you know anyone that uses Accelerated Reader--or the site license cost for this...I am also thinking of funneling some money toward databases if it makes sense...how many classes of what grade levels do you teach-- I will have 7-8-9th next year--maybe 11 or so classes--and thus far have been using the NOBLE databases--but I would love to know what would be helpful for teaching besides these....

\*\*\*\*\*

Our library serves students in grades 4-7. We subscribe to EBSCO's Middle Online Package and find it excellent. It's good design makes the content accessible even for younger students. Many articles and excerpts come with a lexile rating which is very useful for both teachers and students. Also included is a professional online package for research in education -- a great feature for faculty taking graduate courses.

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I've had good luck until this year (changes in the school server over the summer and subsequent school vacations that I'm still trying to get tech to fix) with Grolier on line. Our subscription when it works is the deluxe package for 5 encyclopedias plus a subscription for New Book of Popular Science and Land and People's Encyclopedia. (URL go.grolier.com) Costs are based for individual schools re their size and also for districts. Next year's projected cost is about 2100 if memory serves correctly. All the info is at school. I also use Proquest --newspaper and magazine database for Vocational Schools. They also have other areas. I was looking going to do a trial version for Proquest

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Select but had trouble getting tech to break the firewall for the trial. I may try again later this spring. Had I been able to do this, the full cost for all subscriptions would have been about \$5000. Expensive, yes but worth it when one figures the cost of reference books. Proquest select had the options for lesson plan suggestions, and choosing book carts, which could consist of titles of articles and web sites teachers found and wanted saved for students. I had a bad experience with EBSCO years ago and haven't gone back. They may be better now, but I think they're a bit expensive. One can get print and digital info from them. Another source is Newsbank. I've never been able to justify its expense as it's predominantly newspapers. Advantage, they're from all over the world and in a variety of languages. I've liked the Proquest and Grolier for their easy to use search menus and primary source info. I discourage students from going to Wikipedia. Feel free to call or email me at school for more info.

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Because we belong to Western Mass Regional Library System (WMRLS) we receive Infortrac database for free. The database is from Thompson-Gale and the URL is [www.gale.com](http://www.gale.com). It has a tremendous amount of information, all credible sources. I'm sure you must have a similar organization out your way. Check it out! I hold classes in my library on how to navigate the database for my students.

\*\*\*\*\*

... subscribe to five FOF databases and LOVE them! ... great value, and teachers as well as students use them all the time.

\*\*\*\*\*

Michelle, I subscribe to CobblestoneOnline.net - it's the database archive for all of the Carus Publications, including Cobblestone, Appleseeds, Odyssey, Faces, etc. A school-wide license is \$50 per year. We use the database mostly for American history and other social studies projects. The magazines are designed for middle school, so the reading level is just right. The search interface is pretty easy to use, although kids expect the functionality of the web - i.e. did you mean this word instead of your misspelled word, etc. I often just review the articles myself and print off a few copies for sharing. For \$50, it's an incredible bargain. I also subscribe to four of their magazines for about \$95/year total.

\*\*\*\*\*

So glad you are asking this question. I am also looking at this before budget time rolls in. I currently use the state databases and some additional Thomson Gale products, but I'm wondering about redundancy. I would love to know what everyone else is doing, since budget money is slim and I'm trying to get the most bang for my buck. I'll be anxious to hear what the responses are.

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Check out the Boston Public Library site ... electronic resources. Have your students get bpl cards and they get free access to many many databases. We are too far away here to do that, but you can make a field trip out of it! [bpl.org](http://bpl.org)

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The two databases that I purchase that receive the most usage are Culturegrams Online and Grolier's Lands and People. They are used extensively during the 6th grade geography curriculum. There is a smattering of use for other grades and projects as well. I highly recommend either or both.

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I subscribe to ABC Clio History, Gale's Science Resource Center, SIRS Researcher, Historical NYT, and ProQuest Literature & History. Worth every penny.

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Thanks, everyone, for helping to learn more about databases, through the regional network and otherwise!

## Library Leaders Selected For Institute

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By Carolyn Noah

Fifty applicants have been selected to participate in Library Leadership Massachusetts 2007, sponsored by the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners and the six Massachusetts Regional Library Systems. The 3.5-day Institute drew applications from a highly qualified pool of candidates from across the state and included professional staff and paraprofessionals from all types of libraries. Successful applicants had fewer than ten years in their fields.

Maureen Sullivan and Jack Siggins, prominent national consultants, will guide the Institute from July 15 - 18, 2007. Future leaders will relate to library issues through case studies, readings, discussions, and other planned learning activities. The Institute will create a structure for continuing supportive relationships among its participants. In exchange, graduates will play a role in advocacy efforts for Massachusetts's libraries through professional organizations and/or contributions to publications or newsletters.

## **ALA Midwinter Meeting - Seattle, January 2007** by Bob Roth

Librarians zealous about running their national professional organization flock to the American Library Association (ALA) Midwinter Meeting each January. Okay, they also attend the ALA Annual Conference in June, but Annual is broader. In addition to sessions about running the ALA and its divisions, Annual includes more sessions on providing patron services, handling technical services, the latest developments in the digital environment, and other topics that concern the profession of providing library services to patrons. In contrast, Midwinter focuses largely, although not exclusively, on the administration, organization and operation of the ALA.

The ALA is so big that librarians with a great variety of interests can and do find areas of the organization where they want to devote their effort. At the outset, there are at least a dozen major areas of the organization where work can be done. These are the ALA itself and its eleven divisions. Three of these divisions hold particular interest to library teachers: the American Association of School Librarians (AASL), the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC), and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA). Beyond these major divisions, there are within the ALA and within each division many committees addressing many areas of interest. So there is ample opportunity for librarians to get involved. AASL, for example, currently has 31 committees (an AASL reorganization is in process so the names and the number of committees are expected to change). The current committees are listed at <http://www.ala.org/ala/aasl/aboutaasl/aaslgovernance/aaslcommittees/committees.htm>. Although most of these committees are specific to AASL, there are two interdivisional committees: The AASL and ALSC Interdivisional Committee on Information Literacy; and the AASL, ALSC and YALSA Interdivisional Committee on School/Public Library Cooperation.

My major interests at Midwinter this year were legislation and the Emerging Leaders Program. The ALA Washington Office (WO) provided briefings on the political climate in Congress, the legislative topics that concern libraries, and the position of the ALA on various legislative matters. For one thing, "Reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) is a stated priority for the 110<sup>th</sup> congress." (WO Update on Issues for the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress) The ALA seeks to have library teachers included in NCLB similarly to the way classroom teachers are included. "To be a critical part of a comprehensive and renewed strategy to ensure that students learn to read (and to read well), every school library should be staffed by a highly qualified, state certified library media specialist and every school should have a school library." (ALA-WO 2007 Midwinter Meeting, "A 'Highly Qualified' Librarian in Every School Library")

As for the Emerging Leaders Program, we met for a full day and covered such things as the essentials of leadership in ALA and the process for working on the projects that are part of our program. Each division of ALA, I believe, had

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the opportunity to design projects for the Emerging Leaders. I requested and received assignment to Team E. Our project, proposed by the AASL, is "Outreach to NCATE programs as a sustainable component of our [AASL's] student member cultivation-strategies that mirror the intensity of our attention to ALA-MLS programs." At Midwinter we began planning our approach to this project. Anyone interested in learning more about the Emerging Leaders Project is welcome to visit our blog at [link removed] or our wiki at [http://wikis.ala.org/emergingleaders/index.php/Main\\_Page](http://wikis.ala.org/emergingleaders/index.php/Main_Page).

The sessions at Midwinter that dealt with librarianship, as distinct from running the ALA or working with Congress, included a discussion about the acquisition of series titles now that the Library of Congress no longer provides series authority records; and a session where librarians shared "their personal experiences on gathering, using and analyzing usage [of e-resources] data in their libraries."

### **Upcoming Workshop on MA Parent Power** By Connie Champlain

On Tuesday, 22 May, 2007, from 3 P.M. to 6 P.M., MSLA and the Northeast Massachusetts Regional Library System (NMRLS) will be co-sponsoring a workshop presented by Connie Champlin on **MA Parent Power: What Parents Should Know about MA School Libraries and How You Can Tell Them**. Susan Babb, Youth Services Consultant, is the NMRLS contact person, and Gerri Fegan and Linda Friel, Northeast Area Co-Directors, are the contact people for MSLA. This workshop is designed for library media specialists, and there is no charge. Media specialists from other regions are cordially invited to attend. *Massachusetts Power: A Parents' Guide to School Libraries* booklets and CDs will be the main resources used and can be purchased at a discounted price before the workshop. The workshop will be held at the Tewksbury Public Library and interested participants should register and check for directions to the library at the NMRLS Website (<http://www.nmrls.org/>). MSLA wishes to thank Susan Babb and NMRLS for their help in presenting this workshop.

Connie Champlin's description of the workshop follows: "Parents can be powerful advocates for school library programs. Yet few parents have an understanding of what the school library program actually does and how it helps every child succeed. Do parents know why a professional school librarian is necessary? Or what the research says about school libraries and student achievement? Are parents aware of the school library program in their child's school and how it supports the curriculum? This presentation will provide you with ideas and resources to inform, encourage, and enlist the support of parents for your school library program."