

MSLA Forum: April 2013

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President's Message



From Valerie Diggs

It is April, and as I begin to think about how I will wrap-up this year's annual report, and begin end of the school year, I am prompted to think of many different endings. It is not only the end of the school year for me, however, but the end of my two years as the president of MSLA. As MSLA Forum editor Ann Perham put it so nicely, this message can be my "Swan Song." The end of anything can be bittersweet. Sweet in the knowledge that you tried to do your best, worked hard, and hopefully made a difference. The bitter part for me is the knowledge that I will now help from the sidelines, but that can often be just as rewarding and effective!! I am looking forward to continuing my work with MSLA in any way they will have me.

Why am I including a picture of me at our Wellness Fair this past fall? It occurred to me, as I was sorting and categorizing pictures recently that wellness comes in a variety of forms: Not only physical and mental wellness, but professional wellness, too. If I can leave one last message with the members of MSLA, it is to remember to nurture your professional wellness for as long as you walk the halls of a school and serve students. Nurturing yourself is a direct path to nurturing your students and the staff you work with every day.

So, how do you accomplish this? Aren't you already reading professional journals, attending conferences, and taking courses for credit or PDPs? This is certainly commendable, but can often not be enough. Here are my suggestions for achieving wellness in different ways:

Professional Nurturing

All the standard and accepted ways of keeping up with the profession fall in this category: attending conferences, reading in the literature, taking courses, and participating in the myriad of webinars that come our way. However, remember to also look outside of the profession of school librarianship. What are the teachers in your building learning about? What courses, professional organizations, and study groups do they belong to?? Ask for copies of conference handouts, or access to online presenter notes from the conferences they attend. Participate in webinars that the teachers participate in, learn their language, and feel their concerns. Do the same for the administrators in your buildings.

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How do I find the time to do this, you say? By easing slowly into this, one conference and webinar at a time. Ask teachers in different departments to keep you abreast of their activities, listen in at lunch about recent activities, and as teachers visit you, ask them what they have been focusing on recently. I know they will be happy to share with you. Making yourself knowledgeable about UDL, RTI, PLCs, and much more will help you speak teacher talk, and more importantly, be able to understand and support teacher and student needs.

Personal Nurturing

Daniel Pink? Michael Fullan? I am putting reading outside of our profession in the section about personal nurturing. For me, reading books that enlighten my mind, and open up my thinking to new and different ways of doing things is nurturing me. This all helps me see myself as a person and as a professional in new and different scenarios. Teacher Librarian recently featured a wonderful article called [Best Professional Books of the Year](#). In this extensive compilation of great reads are books such as one by Tony Wagner, *Creating Innovators: The Making of Young People Who Will Change the World*. Some books are library-specific, most are not.

Take a step back and examine your current practices. Do students feel comfortable coming in to your library? Are books being checked out, or do they sit on the shelf, unused? If so, what are you doing about this?

Do you limit items checked out, and if so, why? Are students allowed to come and visit the library and simply talk to their friends? If not, why not? Do you make every effort to accommodate teachers, even if it is that last-minute assignment they should have told you about last week? Open your minds, your hearts, and give of your time. The rewards and respect will be ten-fold.

People Nurturing

Ahh...to the heart of the issue. Pay attention to those you work with. Learn about your colleagues' families, stay in touch with students after they graduate, be in tune with your community. Attend the drama club's play, go to sporting events, and sponsor a club or a book group. These acts (and more) make you a people person, and, most importantly, your school community sees you as more than just the "school librarian." You become part of the fabric of the school, and not just for that piece of information students come to find, or the book that needs checking out, but because you care outside of your designated job description.

Is there a Rotary Club fundraiser and evening event? Attend, and touch elbows with the business community. Know the public library's calendar, and attend events there, whether they are art exhibits, author talks, or special presentations. Invite the public librarians to attend your events. If they see you at their events, they will be more likely and willing to come to yours. Cultural events, parades, friends of the library gatherings, and community gatherings are all opportunities to get the members of your community to know you. The return investment can be in multiples.

Of course, we nurture and grow our students. This must always be first and foremost. The rest, however, cannot be left to someone else. Your job, success, and influence may depend on it.

I want to thank the MSLA membership for these last two years of glorious learning experiences. Above all, I extend heartfelt thanks to MSLA's Executive Board for believing in me, and wish our incoming president, Judi Paradis, all the best as she embarks on this wonderful journey of leadership.

Thank you in wellness, Valerie

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FROM THE EDITOR: "Good" Problems

from MSLA Forum Editor, Ann Perham



I confess....I didn't meet my goal of publishing this issue of the Forum by mid-April. In fact, I have been scrambling to get the work completed so that it can be an "April" issue! What is my excuse? I found myself literally inundated. Is there such a thing as TOO MANY articles written by TOO MANY members? This is a **"Good" Problem!**

This issue is the largest I have ever edited and in fact is the **largest since MSLA went to an online format in 2002**. There are 16 reflection articles from the 2013 award winners, 16 author interviews, and 6 additional submissions ranging from president Valerie Diggs's "Swan Song," to the back story on the song, "We Are Librarians!" These 38 articles have taken many hours to edit, format and post.

Kudos to Sandy Kelly, our Awards Chairperson, who set a goal of procuring articles from our awardees. Wow – did she deliver! To read the articles by the Web Seal of Excellence qualifies as a high quality professional development activity. Want to learn about Word Press? Or, how about designing your site? Have you considered using LibGuides? Read and delight in these bits of advice from our top webmasters. Learn the secrets of success from our "newbies" and be inspired by our SUPER Librarians. In all, we have **17 different members** who submitted awards articles.

One should always be careful about asking Judi Paradis to do something (another **"Good" Problem**). In a Conference Committee meeting back in February, I had asked for volunteers to facilitate author interviews for our conference. Not only did Judi line up the interviews, but she inspired **14 different members** to submit articles.

Just before vacation, I realized that I needed proofreaders. Without any expectation, I put out the call for help with the editing. I could not believe that I had **8 different members** answer the call. Thank you to Carol Hermann, Wayne McDonald, Melissa Legg, Alida Hanson, Sharon Lux, Marianne McGowan, Pat Keogh, and Audrey Borus. It took me days to wade through the careful edits from this crew (another **"Good" Problem**) and I am so grateful for their work.

I had to save two articles for the next issue of the Forum, both of them feature articles. My apologies to Audrey Borus who worked very hard to prepare her third installment of the series on eBooks. I was unable to ready it for this issue. Similarly, I ran out of time to report on the question that I posed to members back in March about delivery of Information Literacy in their programs. I definitely had to make a course correction on my goals for this issue of the Forum.

I hope you will find this issue exciting, informative and inspiring. Plan on plenty of time to read it....another **"Good" Problem.**

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Member News WELCOME, to our newest MSLA Members



Wendy Arnold	Melrose Middle School	Melrose
Jonathan Booth	Dawe Elementary	Stoughton
Britt Buckenroth	Conte Community	Pittsfield
Janet Buttafuoco	Federal Furnace Elem.	Plymouth
Jessica Callahan	Lynch Elem.	Winchester
Elizabeth Clappin	North Attleboro HS	North Attleboro
Debora Collison	Shore Country Day	Beverly
Joanne Crerand	Glen Urquhart School	Beverly
Jessica Gillis	Alvarez HS	Salinas, CA
Anastasia Glass	Brookwood School	Manchester
Chris Gonsalves	Best Book Fairs, LLC	
Cathy Hamel	McKay Arts Academy	Fitchburg
Annmarie Higgins	Whitin Elem.	Uxbridge
Amity Johnson	Ursuline Academy	Dedham
Suzanne Joiley	South Elem.	Stoughton
Jenna Lanterman		Florence
Arminda Lawrence	Catholic University	Washington DC
Amy Levine	Assabet Valley Reg.Tech	Marlborough
Wayne MacDonald	Assabet Valley Reg.Tech	Marlborough
Matthew Mena-Landry	Plymouth Public	Plymouth
Kate Millerick	Salem State	Salem
Samantha Musher	Dana Hall	Wellesley
Erin Piazza	Simmons College	Boston
Amy Ricciuti	Florence Sawyer Sch.	Bolton
Jeffrey Roth	Harris School Solutions	Niagara Falls NY
Pauline Spinrad	Springfield Schools	Springfield
Joanne Stebbins	Providence MS	Richmond, VA
Ann Tenreiro		Newton
Elizabeth Vaccaro	High Rock Sch.	Needham
Susan Viveiros	Westport Elem.	Westport



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AASL Midwinter '13 - Seattle Washington

by Sharon Hamer, MSLA delegate to AASL Affiliate Assembly



Leaving Boston on January 23 the temperature was a frigid seven degrees. The mild, mid-40s temperatures of Seattle were a welcome relief for the MSLA delegation to the ALA/AASL Midwinter conference. This was not only my first Midwinter, but it was also the first ever ALA conference. I can't imagine what is in store in Chicago in June. There were so many vendors it took two halls to accommodate everyone. There were so many meetings and presentations that making it mandatory.

As an AASL Affiliate Assembly Delegate, there were a few meetings I was required to attend. The first one was a little bit social, a little bit business. We had an icebreaker activity in which we were paired with a librarian we didn't know and had a conversation about ourselves and our libraries. We then exchanged emails so that when we were feeling isolated, which is so often the case with school librarians, we could reach out to a colleague and get support. We then had a guided activity in which we were able to take an in-depth look at the three issues to be discussed when the Assembly had its formal meeting on Sunday.



One of the most anticipated events for school librarians was the panel discussion about Dewey vs. Genre. As expected, there were wildly divergent views on the subject, ranging from "why fix it if it ain't broke" to "it's not working and there is something better". Some of the panelists presented real life situation where libraries had undergone the transition from Dewey to Genrefication, all of whom asserted that their circulation increased as a result. Other traditionalists maintained that Dewey is flexible enough to accommodate any local modifications an individual library wants to make and is designed to incorporate new ideas and creations into the system. A very cogent argument arose about whether or not this whole discussion will be moot in a few years with the rise of e-books that will occupy no physical space whatsoever!!

The AASL Affiliate Assembly met on Sunday morning. First there were the committee reports including one from the committee working on the AASL National Conference in Hartford (practically our back yard!) and the committee working on AASL's presence at the ALA annual conference in Chicago this coming June. ALA Cognotes of January 27, 2013 described the event as "a versatile, active learning space to showcase the possibilities of what a school library can be going forward. Vendors will partner to create a space divided into three areas. Social, global access space and a versatile learning space easily converted for us as collaborative space. There will presentations and demonstrations and selected vendors and librarians will be on hand to answer questions."

AASL President Susan Ballard presented the three issues of concern and where those issues now stand:

- Making AASL the leader and guiding force on information and recommendations concerning Dewey vs. Genre
- Communication in the Delegate Assembly, especially with new delegates
- Creating a database of the studies and reports on the importance and effectiveness of school libraries and having that database be a part of the AASL website

Each region then caucused about what is going on in the regions. We then reported out to the group on those discussions. ALA Cognotes of January 27, 2013 recapped the list of exciting things happening around the country: "Website day; AASL PD days; School Libraries Count; AASL databases; Fall PD Dates; affiliate organizations joining forces; working toward common ground; Keith Curry Lance Grant; approved rubrics; gaming; un-shelved guys; conferences; elimination of librarians; *Knowledge Quest*; changing perceptions of our jobs and the state of school libraries."

Lastly, many of the candidates for ALA offices were introduced, including Barbara Immroth and Courtney Young who are both running for ALA president.

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On the less business side, there were many vendor events, including a wonderful luncheon put on by Ebsco and a dinner reception at the Space Needle sponsored by Credo Reference. After that event, most of us then took the opportunity to go to the Chihuly Garden and Glass Museum, located right there at the Space Needle, featuring the work of glass artist, Dale Chihuly. It was extraordinary.

School Libraries Matter

Report from ALA Midwinter Meeting in Seattle

by Judi Paradis, MSLA delegate to AASL Affiliate Assembly



The evidence keeps coming in! School libraries matter. At the ALA Midwinter meeting in Seattle, results from two major studies conducted in Pennsylvania and New Jersey demonstrated more value for school library programs.

Eileen Kern of the Pennsylvania School Library Association and Dr. Mary Biagini of the University of Pittsburgh provided a comprehensive review of their 2012 study of data collected by a state commission charged with evaluating the status of school library programs in their state. (Note, MSLA has filed legislation to form a similar commission in Massachusetts.) Researchers studied data collected by this commission and examined it against reading and writing test scores on Pennsylvania's standardized test, the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA).

The results provide compelling evidence for quality school library programs. Pennsylvania demonstrated that library programs with full-time, certified librarians are associated with better student test scores, and interestingly, the impact is even stronger on student writing scores. In addition, students from several groups that are often cited in discussions of achievement gaps (e.g., economically disadvantaged, Hispanic, African-American, and students with IEPs) benefit even more from a school library program. Kern and Biagini emphasized that the Pennsylvania study demonstrated that five factors were positively associated with increased student achievement, including:



Learn. Explore. Excel.

- Funding—school libraries need a budget for more materials each year
- Access—students need access to their school library beyond the school day (especially before and after the school day)
- Collection—current resources in various physical formats are important
- Technology—access in school and at home (e-books and databases) matters
- Teaching—teaching information literacy skills in collaboration with teachers and having a flexible schedule is important
- Staffing—the single most important factor associated with improved student outcomes was having a fulltime certified school librarian with a support staff

Complete details of this study are available on the Pennsylvania School Library Project website: www.paschoollibraryproject.org.



New Jersey researchers next discussed a study that looked at what a good school library program contributes to educating students. Dr. Carol Gordon of the Center for International Scholarship in School Libraries (CISSL) presented findings from a study she conducted with Dr. Ross Todd at 12 school districts in that state. Gordon said that their findings really support

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the role a good school library program can play in implementing the Common Core standards. Focus groups with administrators in this study indicated that principals with strong library programs recognized that these programs helped students to become independent learners. Gordon also noted that school librarians serve an important role in literacy. She noted that school librarians “provide a refuge from lexile-driven reading.” She noted that research is being done that shows motivation and reading for pleasure leads to a growth in comprehension, and libraries can help build a culture of literacy.

Results from the CISSL study can be found at www.njasl.info/cissl-study/.

Gordon noted that New Jersey administrators in focus groups said they wanted more librarians and bigger libraries for collaborative work and group work. “In schools where there are effective people who are changing the way teachers teach, the sky is the limit,” said Gordon.

The Story behind "We are Librarians!"

by **Chris Steinhauser**

Sharon Hamer (left) and Chris Steinhauser (right) sang with passion and enthusiasm. Photo credits: Richard Curran

I am always trying to make my lessons fun for my middle school students yet educationally rich with library skills. One way I have managed to fit both in is by writing "new" lyrics to favorite songs. My students will choose a topic, choose a song, do some research and then re-write the lyrics to include the information they want to convey. Researching, using the thesaurus, brainstorming, being creative and integrating technology all build into one fun lesson. This activity has me always listening to the radio, listening to the pop songs and looking the next topic for a rewrite.

We have all had one of those days at work--you know the kind--when it feels like everyone was out to get you. As librarians, we just get up and keep on going. The song, “Titanium” by David Guetta spoke to me. When I heard the lyrics, “I am Titanium,” they just screamed out to me.

Sharon Hamer and I are co-directors of the Northeast area. Because we are Facebook friends, I know that she likes karaoke. As we were planning a workshop for December, I had a weak moment and sent her lyrics and my crazy idea. Lucky for me, Sharon is as crazy as I am! With a collaborative re-write of the lyrics, Sharon and I decided to share our rendition of "We are Librarians!" at the workshop. Unfortunately, it ended up that I was not able to be at the workshop.

Sharon decided that we could not go without sharing our creation. We decided to surprise MSLA members with our performance on Sunday night, after the awards banquet. Only a few conference committee members knew about the surprise. We were honored to be asked for an encore performance after the Administrators Panel on Monday.

We hope that we brought a smile to your face, and you will always remember, “We are Librarians!” Check out the video: <http://m.youtube.com/watch?v=MTpdvgLMhW0>



PALS Award: Carlisle School Association

Parent as Library Supporters Award by Sandy Kelly



Carlisle School Association President, Rebecca Bestoff, receives the PALS Award from MSLA President, Valerie Diggs. Photo credits: Richard Curran

Do you know who your PALS are? As the lone librarian in a Pre-K through grade 8 school, I do! I couldn't do my job without the support of my students' parents.

It became clear to me that parents were my allies right from the start of my tenure in Carlisle. In my second year, an override failed and my job was slated to be cut to half time. Without my knowledge, the Carlisle School Association began a drive to restore the job to full time status. Private donations and a student-sponsored "carnival" day raised over \$80,000 in less than six weeks. Later, I learned that the library had been reopened in a similar way many years before. *The Carlisle School Library was not to be cut.* The CSA is this year's deserving recipient of the MSLA PALS Award.

Our partnership has continued to grow in strength. More recently, when my aide was lost due to fiscal restraints, my volunteers took over all of the shelving and circulation duties along with the printing and distribution of overdue notices. I even have an at home volunteer whose job is to schedule the volunteers. Some volunteers have moved shelves and built shelves. Some have made personal donations such as purchasing a rug and pillows for our story area. Another volunteer had a birthday party and asked for donations to the school library in lieu of gifts. They are truly my partners in building a library that is loved by the entire school community.

CSA has sponsored an annual book fair each spring that is the main support of our collection budget. It lasts a full week and has become a festive event that students look forward to every year. Their organization added funds to their annual budget to provide an author visit during the book fair. The author always stays for a book signing which adds additional funds to our profit.

CSA also funds two grant rounds for school staff. Over the years, they provided grants to the school library with the knowledge that all resources in the library are available to all students. When teachers loved the *Brainpop* subscription that CSA purchased, the following year the CSA added *Brainpop Jr.* When the State Regional Library System made cuts to our database lineup, CSA came to the rescue with a subscription to *World Book Online.* As our curriculum needs have changed, they have given money to help align our nonfiction collection to support students' research.

Building relationships with community and parents is important in creating the lasting support we need to make our programs successful. It is not just about financial support; the parents are our advocates when there are difficult financial decisions on the table. Thank you, Carlisle School Association for all of your contributions!

AWARDS: Web Seal - Concord-Carlisle RHS

The Concord-Carlisle High School Learning Commons and Virtual Library by Robin Cicchetti

Robin Cicchetti receives the Web Seal of Excellence Award from MSLA President, Valerie Diggs. Photo credit: Richard Curran.

A few years ago I was reviewing our database statistics, and noticed that the overwhelming majority of students were active between 8 PM to 1 AM, and usage peaked between 9 PM and 11 PM. It was suddenly clear that we needed to build up our ability to support students when and where they worked because it wasn't occurring during school hours.

We had already invested a lot of time building a [wiki](#), but in June of 2011 abandoned it because of two reasons. First of all, it had gotten too big and was becoming difficult to navigate and secondly, it didn't have the functionality we required. Luckily, our [EDCO collaborative](#) had run a workshop introducing [LibGuides](#), and I knew this platform would provide the robust support we wanted for our students.



Specifically, features such as content widgets that I could fill with pathfinders, e-books and tutorials that teachers could either link to or embed in their own pages. It was a way to bring curated research content directly to students, when and where they worked. It allowed us to create a virtual library, customized to the learning task.

In June 2011, we started developing [our new LibGuide](#) and haven't looked back.

The thought of rebuilding our wiki was a little overwhelming, but luckily we had a secret weapon. Practicum students from the Simmons Graduate School of Library and Information Science were unbelievably helpful in building pages and creating new resources. These students came with fresh ideas and superb tech skills. They developed amazing resources that continue to support student work and add to our school life.

- Alida Hanson, now at Weston High School, developed a [poetry resource guide](#).
- Alex Caram, now at Summer Street School in Lynnfield, developed a [guide in collaboration with Spectrum, our GLBT club](#).

These pages feature self-refreshing news content, embedded e-books, links to student blogs, embedded database widgets, and Google custom search boxes. The key here is that practicum students not only helped to build the pages, but they also taught me the new features and capabilities of LibGuides.

Our LibGuide changes constantly, and we are always adding new content tabs and pulling older ones out as curriculum changes and projects are revised. We can provide the best resources to accomplish the information task and also scaffold students in developing the skills they need to navigate the digital information environment. As we build our reference and nonfiction collection, we can embed specific resources and provide an authentic experience that they can replicate later when they come across e-books independently while using our catalog.

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The statistics information is wonderful, allowing the tracking of hits. This yields superb feedback on what is and isn't working or being utilized. We also use it for professional development. Recent sessions on our e-book platforms and the new supervision and evaluation system for librarians are archived. One feature I love was recommended by Buffy Hamilton. I have an embedded weekly newsletter using the free platform, Smore. It is easy to update, and I can distribute the weekly link to both our student and parent listserv when we need to get out important information. This improves the efficiency of our communication, and keeps the page dynamic and relevant.

The Concord-Carlisle Learning Commons supports students during the day, providing them with a place to study, access to computers, printers and the media lab. We host classes for lessons in all the things we teach. The Concord-Carlisle Library services really reside in our LibGuides, offering curated collections and tutorials to support specific information needs and goals. Our webpage makes life easier and more efficient for our educational community by providing the resources they need when and where they need it.

Web Seal of Excellence: Dana Hall School

New & Improved: Our Library's Website Today

by Liz Gray, Library Director & Sam Musher, Assistant Librarian Dana Hall School, Wellesley

The **Helen Temple Cooke Library's website** is now in its third iteration. In many ways, its evolution has paralleled the growth of websites: in its first form (c. 1999) it was a fairly clunky and static set of pages; in its second (2004) it was visually appealing but still required lots of behind-the-scenes massaging by one person to keep it up to date; and in its third (2011) it is flexible, multi-modal, more interactive, and updated frequently by three librarians, an archivist and a library assistant. The website was designed using WordPress software during a summer project supported by professional development funds.



Right: Sam Musher accepts the Web Seal of Excellence at the MSLA Awards banquet.

Photo credit: Richard Curran

What Is WordPress?

WordPress is, in effect, two companies. WordPress.com lets you set up a free site with free hosting. The catch? You're limited to just a few design templates. WordPress.org, on the other hand, is software, which you install on a host server. You have to learn more to set it up, but you're rewarded with far more options for customizing your site. In this article, we'll get you up to speed on what you need to know to start developing your WordPress.org site.



Hosting

The host is the server on which your site resides and the people who maintain that server. Make sure you have a reliable host, whether that's your school or district's IT department or an outside vendor. Problems will crop up, and you want to know they'll be resolved quickly. Note that most hosts will only help get the database set up initially and resolve any server problems along the way; they won't help design your site.

Right: Liz Gray, Director of the Cooke Library at Dana Hall School

WordPress Lingo

■ Themes

When you install the WordPress software on your host server, it creates a database, which will contain your posts, pages, images, and comments. The theme is the "skin" that governs how that information is displayed. Some themes are very customizable, with endless menus of options. Most are more restrictive. (You can change anything about a theme if you're willing to learn some code. More on that later.)

WordPress has more than 1500 free themes, so how do you find the right one for you? It is far easier to learn the code to change your theme's colors than to change its layout, so your first priority should be finding a layout that works for you. WordPress categorizes layouts by the number of columns and where those columns appear on the page, so spend some time looking at websites and thinking about how they organize their information into columns.

Also, try searching for "magazine-style" themes. Those themes do a better job of organizing large amounts of content rather than focusing on the most recent post; think of a magazine's website vs. a blog. Finally, if you find another WordPress site you like, check the bottom of the page to see what theme they used. Switching the look of your site is as easy as activating a new theme, so expect to play with many themes before settling on one.

■ Pages vs. Posts

Since all WordPress sites are blogs, posts are the core of your site. When you want to share news – new books, an author event, a display – write a post. It will show up at the top of your site, pushing the older posts down. Pages, on the other hand, are static. You can edit them, of course, but they always stay in the same place on your site. Use these for your library hours, databases, and summer reading list – any information that people will want to refer to over and over.

■ Menus

You can organize your pages with menus. As you start brainstorming what information to include in your site, you'll probably find that you have enough for many pages. You'll want a theme that will display at least one menu, if not two. Menus usually stretch across the top of the window, and can include links to pages within your site as well as external links. You can create hierarchical menus, which display as drop-downs. This helps organize your site logically, so your homepage isn't a mess of links.

Don't get too organization-happy and hide important links in a drop-down, though! The links your students and faculty use every day should be one click away from every page "above the fold" (without scrolling), either as top-level menu links or in widgets. In our library, that includes NoodleBib for creating bibliographies, the LibGuides for current projects, and the catalog search box.

■ Widgets

Widgets appear as little boxes in the "widget-ready" areas in your theme. Usually these are the left and/or right columns. WordPress provides some prepackaged widgets, like a calendar and a tag cloud for your posts. Some third-party tools you might use, such as LibGuides, also provide widgets. Most usefully, WordPress offers a basic text widget, which will display any HTML code. You can use this to effectively create your own widgets. For example, our

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patrons can search the catalog from any page on our site because we pasted the search box code into a text widget.

■ **Plugins**

Plugins extend the capabilities of a basic WordPress site. Want to link your site with Facebook, so every new post shows up on your library's Facebook page? Want your site to automatically switch to a mobile version when someone loads it on a smartphone? You need a plugin! Finding the right plugin usually requires sifting through long lists of reviews, and no small amount of trial and error.

■ **Dashboard**

The dashboard takes you "behind the scenes" of your site. This is how you set up your site and make changes to it along the way. You'll also use the dashboard every time you add a post. It's just like using a word processor, so even your less tech-savvy colleagues will be posting in no time.

Know Your Code

All those `<a>` and `` tags might look scary if they're new to you, but taking a few hours to learn the basics will open up a world of possibilities for tailoring your site. For example, we couldn't find a widget we liked for displaying our new books. They all took up too much space. So we used the text widget to lay out a series of book cover images, linked to their OPAC records. It only takes a few minutes of copying and pasting to update, but since there's no form to enter the information, we have to be comfortable with what each element of the basic HTML code does.

If you go a step further and learn CSS (Cascading Style Sheets, the code that themes are written in), you won't have to rely on finding a theme that lets you choose, say, the exact colors you want. You can get into the guts of the theme and tinker with any aspect of it yourself.

So We Can Make Our Site Look Like Facebook, Right?

Well... no. WordPress is extremely flexible, especially if you're willing to invest some time. However, no matter how fancy your theme or how many great plugins you use, it is still a blog. Most of your site's "screen real estate" will always be posts and pages: basic text and images. Know when that won't meet your needs, and find a better tool for the job. For instance, our research pathfinders were too limited in WordPress – just boring lists of links, with no way to organize them in a visually appealing way. We decided to buy a LibGuides subscription and link it to our main site instead.

Research (Librarians Are Good at That!)

The WordPress software is free because it's open source. That means that the code is openly accessible; anyone can use it to create a theme, widget, or plugin. Just like the Internet itself, open source gives you a world of options ranging from amazing to useless, and it's up to you to learn the difference. The WordPress community provides (usually) excellent documentation and lively support forums, but there's no tech support to call.

Accept that setting up your site will take some time. You'll spend hours customizing a theme only to discover that it simply won't do a particular thing you wanted, and you'll need to find a new theme or adjust your design plan. You'll dig through pages of plugin reviews but find nothing that meets your needs. Before you dump coffee on your laptop and/or set it on fire, take a deep breath and remember: frustration is all part of the process. Your site will be beautiful and functional, *just the way you want it*. (Or close, anyway.)

That said, WordPress isn't for everyone. It does require some comfort with computers and a willingness to tinker. If you feel stymied by WordPress or can't afford hosting, WordPress.com (or Blogger or Posterous) will still give you an attractive, straightforward way to start organizing the excellent information you want your students to have at their fingertips. Some libraries also successfully use a LibGuide as their main site. Find what works for you.

Overall, we are extremely pleased with our website. It's not perfect—we wish it were more interactive, for example—but it serves our needs well at the moment. Its structure allows us to provide access to critical information, to integrate old standbys (the catalog) and new tools (scheduling software for reference interviews), and to spontaneously add a timely resource, image or video clip. Most importantly, we have received positive feedback from our users, and we will use that feedback, as well as suggestions for improvements, to inform the next redesign. Check back in a few years for the fourth edition!

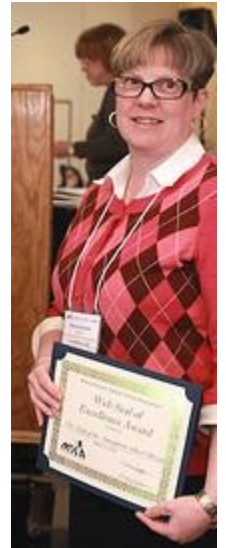
Web Seal of Excellence: Our Lady of the Assumption



My Virtual Presence with Google Sites by Mary Gaeta, Librarian

Our Lady of the Assumption School, Lynnfield

Today's library must be available to students, teachers, parents, and community members twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. The librarian plays a crucial role in providing 24/7 information. Like the librarian of twenty years ago who meticulously scoured reviews for the perfect books and journals resources, the librarian of the 21st century meticulously scours the Internet for reliable webpages, engaging Web 2.0 tools, worthwhile databases, YouTube videos, and books (eBooks and physical) to support the school's Common Core Curriculum. Both the librarian of yesterday and the librarian of today provide crucial services by helping their patrons sort through the myriad of information resources to obtain knowledge. Most of today's patrons are plugged in 24/7, and as such, expect their resources to be available 24/7. How do I make this happen with a limited budget? Google Apps for Education! *Photo Credit: Richard Curran*



The school's website template did not work for our library as the template already had horizontal and vertical tabs relating to the school. It would be too busy to add additional library tabs to the school website, so I decided to create a separate library page using Google Sites. Google Sites is easy to set up whether you are using one of the many school templates available or using a blank template. I started with Google Sites' school template, but I made so many changes to the original template that for future websites I will start with a blank template. After selecting the school template, I changed the colors of the template to match the colors of my school's website. It is a good idea to use the same colors and the same layout as your school's website to provide consistency between the library website and the school website. Before building your website, have a vision of what the website will look like. Look at other school library websites for ideas on what information to include or for ideas on design. I spent a good part of the summer looking at elementary and middle school websites to get design ideas. I am in a K-8 school and I wanted a website that was enticing and useable for the elementary and for the middle school students. After looking at many websites, I began to sketch out on paper what I wanted my library website to look like. Most importantly, I took the time to plan what information was

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critical to have on the library website for our school's community. Every library community is different and the library website should reflect the needs of that community.

I added horizontal tabs to the top of the website with the most important information links going from left to right and vertical tabs on the left side of the website for quick links. Items included on the horizontal tabs include Databases (with a drop-down menu of all our databases), How To (with a drop-down menu of how to access Google Docs, Glogster, Noodletools, and Quia), LiveBinders, Student Work, Book Lists, Featured Authors, and Teacher Resources. The vertical quick links include an e-book link, e-book help link, local public libraries link, and a Cluster Map. Quick access to all the above is important to my library community. It provides us with a place for teachers, students, parents and other community members to find easy access to information needed or for Web 2.0 tools. My goal is for the library website to be the "gathering place" for all the information resources and Web 2.0 tools used by the school community twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

If you do not use Web 2.0 tools, you may want to look at a few of the great free tools that are available. LiveBinders is one of my favorites and I have a separate horizontal tab for it. I use LiveBinders to organize school projects/assignments. I will also be using LiveBinders for Pathfinders in the future. I use Jing to record short informational videos for students on how to complete tasks. For example, if the student is at home and he/she forgets how to create a QR code, he/she can watch the video. The video is available 24/7 on the LiveBinders section.

The Cluster Map is another one of my favorite features on the library website. I frequently ask my students to look at the Cluster Map and see where people live that look at our website. This provides a visual to show the students that there are many people all over the world looking at what we publish on our website. It is a reminder that the world is our audience (for our projects) and that everything we put on the web can be seen anywhere in the world. This is a big hit with the students!

The Teacher Resource tab is one way to reach out to teachers that I am unable to meet with during the week. (I operate on a full-time fixed schedule that makes it difficult to meet with all the teachers.) By having a Teacher Resource tab, I am able to share information and tools with the staff at a time that works well for the staff. I also use this tab to post videos to reinforce what the staff has learned at workshops (Google Docs).

One caveat if you use Google Sites for your website: check how the widgets you select appear in all the browsers. Many of the widgets work fine for Safari, Explorer, and Firefox. However, the newest form of the Chrome browser does not display all the widgets. For example, the Twitter feed widget and the Shelfari widget do not display well in the new Chrome browser. To work around this for my Twitter feed, I made an Announcement page (a Google Sites template) and inserted it into my home page. I then embed the individual tweets I select from my Twitter account on the Announcement page. The Google Sites Announcement page may also be used as a blog.

Finally, I am using YouTube to upload my How To videos. When I started uploading videos to the website, some of the videos were Quicktime and some were Windows Media. I found it easier to put all the videos on YouTube because I did not have to remind students/teachers to make sure they had the latest version of Quicktime or Windows Media. Also, many students were better able to access the YouTube videos on their home computers or smartphones. However, check with your school administrator to make sure that YouTube is not blocked.

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Building a library website is a slow process and a continually changing process. This is my third version of the library website and I am sure it won't be my last! Despite constant changes to the website, my goal for the library website is the same. I want it to be the virtual gathering place for our school community to access information, to learn, and to use Web 2.0 tools.

Massachusetts SUPER Librarian Accolade: Chris Steinhauser

Collaboration, Real World Connections and Whole School Read!

by Christine Steinhauser



Left: Chris Steinhauser receives the award. from MSLA President, Valerie Diggs. Photo credit: Richard Curran.

This year, the Coolidge Middle School in Reading is participating in a whole school quest to learn about Sudan. One of our goals is to have our students make real world connections and learn about other parts of the world. The program is the collaboration between the librarian and a 7-8 grade social studies teacher. The project involves the entire school community: students, staff, and administration.

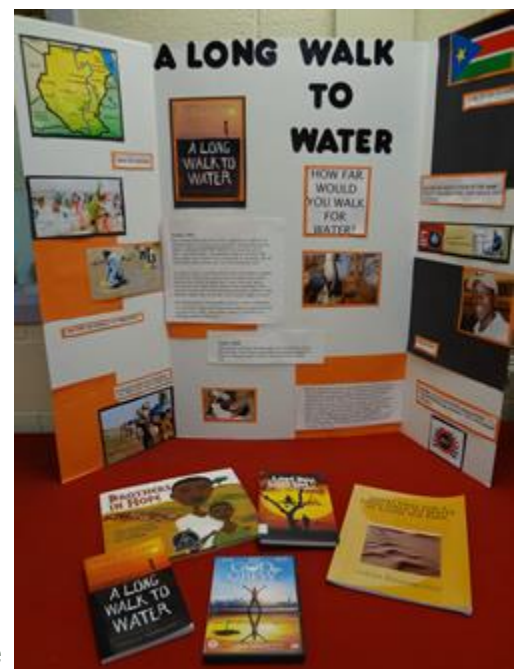
The program started in early October with a whole school read of *A Long Walk to Water* by Newbery Award winning author Linda Sue Park. Each student and staff member had a copy of the book to read during Sustained Silent Reading (SSR). This time was enriched with read-aloud times with the principal over the loud speaker, guest readers from the community and staff. This was followed by group discussion. Staff members were given

discussion guides and materials.

In addition, I purchased the picture book *Brothers in Hope: The Story of the Lost Boys of Sudan* by Gregory Christie, and R. Gregory Christie, a picture book, as well as *Lost Boy, Lost Girl: Escaping Civil War in Sudan* by John Bul Dau, a nonfiction selection for the library. These are used with students who would benefit from materials at an easier or more difficult reading level.

In December, Simon Deng, a former Sudanese slave and human rights activist, visited our school for a whole school assembly, and then worked with small groups of students. PTO parent volunteers arranged a luncheon for Simon and selected students. Students were asked to write about their experience. Several of these essays were published in the local newspaper, documenting the event.

Since December, teachers have done various interdisciplinary activities. In Wellness, students had a walking relay. For "A Day without Water," we



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asked all students to refrain from drinking bottled water for the day, and documented their visits to the water foundation. We are working on having a Skype visit from author Linda Sue Park.

Funding for these programs was obtained through a grant with the Reading Education Foundation, a nonprofit foundation committed to supporting innovation and excellence in the Reading Public Schools and by the school PTO. The grant purchased copies of *A Long Walk to Water* for each student as well as a picture book, non-fiction titles, 2 videos, a teaching guide and funding for the speaker. We plan to pass along the materials (books, videos and teaching guide) to the other middle school in our district when we are finished with them.

A whole-school read is a great way to build community. There is nothing that makes me feel better than when a student comes to class and talks about how the conversation around the dinner table was about a library-related event. Students discussed the book and speaker with parents, siblings, and extended family. They were eager to share their feelings and opinions about news events from Africa and asked questions about related topics.

In the future, I would like to do more whole-school reads. Funding is always an issue, so I am considering contacting middle schools from other school districts in Massachusetts and create a "lending library" of whole-school resources to be shared within the state, making it possible to have all school reads with less expense. Our library has collaborated with other districts in the past for speakers and workshops. This would be one more way to stretch our resources. We are librarians after all and sharing our resources just seems to come naturally!

If you are interested in helping to create a lending library of large collections, please contact me chrissteinhauser@yahoo.com

The screenshot shows a website page with a yellow and orange background. At the top, it reads "SUDAN: REAL WORLD CONNECTIONS AT COOLIDGE MIDDLE SCHOOL" in large black letters, with a silhouette of a person walking. Below this is the tagline "MAKING CONNECTIONS, ONE AT A TIME". The main content area is white with black text. It features a date "October 1, 2012" and the title "A LONG WALK TO WATER BY LINDA SUE PARK" in large yellow letters. Below the title is the author "by Mrs. S." and a link "read more to water". The text describes a PTO meeting on October 2nd for a whole school read of the book. It mentions that the book is based on the life of Salva Dut, an eleven-year-old separated from his family and walking through Sudan, Ethiopia, and Kenya. It also mentions a speaker, Simon Deng, who will visit in December. The page includes several paragraphs of text and links to videos and book trailers. On the right side, there are sections for "ARCHIVES" (October 2012, March 2012, February 2012), "CATEGORIES" (Categories, Unintegrated), "SEARCH" (with a search bar and "Go" button), and "LINKS" (Entries RSS, Comments RSS). At the bottom right, it says "Radford theme designed by Ruffy. Provided by WPKU OCV. The WordPress Experts. Hosted by Edublogs.org".

[View a video presentation.](#)

Massachusetts SUPER Librarian Accolade: Kendall Boninti

Waltham Reads by Kendall Boninti

Summer reading has been conducted the same way for years at Waltham High School. Students are required to read a book or two from a list of titles selected by the English department. The book lists often don't come out until the very last day of school and students are on their own to find copies. The outcome? Not surprisingly, many students don't do the required reading. This is particularly true of our lower-performing students and English language learners. According to Emilie Perna, an English teacher at Waltham High, students cite numerous reasons for not doing their summer reading, but the number one obstacle seems to be a lack of access to the books. For those students who can't afford the books, their only real option is the public library, where there are usually long waiting lists for required reading. To make matters worse, students can't even find the books at the high school library because by the time the lists are made available, the library's budget is long gone and spent. For many students, this barrier to access can have devastating effects on their academic success. Not participating in summer reading program adds anxiety to the start of each new school year, as unprepared students typically begin the year with a grade of F. *Photo Credit: Richard Curran*



This past spring, Emilie Perna approached me about overhauling our summer reading program. I was thrilled to collaborate with her and develop a proposal for an all-school read, also known as a *One School, One Book* program. Many schools throughout the country have had great success with these types of programs, where *everyone* in the school community, from students, teachers, and admins to parents, custodians, and coaches (and everyone in between) read the same book. I really like the idea of a one-book program for our school, because it equalizes the educational opportunities for every student and holds the entire school community to high standards. Emilie put it best when she said that through this unifying experience all students will come to understand that literacy is a community priority.

Step 1: Collect Data & Build a Rationale for Change

Every fall, I conduct a short information literacy skills pre-assessment with the 9th grade students during library orientation. We modified the survey and added a couple of questions about their reading habits and summer reading. The survey is totally anonymous.

1. Did you do all of the required summer reading?
2. If you had to recommend ONE book for the entire school to read over the summer, what would it be and why would you recommend it?
3. What do you like to read? Check all that apply (adventure, romance, biography, gossip, history, war stories, etc.)
4. Where do you do most of your reading for fun?
 1. Print (books, print magazines, etc.)
 2. On a computer (eBooks, blogs, social media)

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3. Mobile (cell phones, iPad, iTouch)

The data confirmed our original assumptions. Only half of the freshmen had done the summer reading. A month or so later, we asked the English teachers to survey all of their sophomore, junior and senior classes. The results showed that less than 50% of these students had read the required text.

Step 2: Start Planning & Create a Summer Reading Study Group

After collecting the data, Emilie and I met with our principal Greg Demeo, and secured his support to move forward with the changes. We submitted a proposal for a paid summer reading study group (*pictured, right*) composed of teachers in nearly every department, as well as administrators, a school adjustment counselor (SAC), and Laura Bernheim, the head reference librarian at the Waltham Public Library. The summer reading study group had two primary goals:



1. Select an appropriate book for the *One School, One Book* initiative
2. Plan events that get teachers and students excited about summer reading.

The group met once a month for an hour, for a total of five meetings. The first task was to pick a book. We had hoped to find a high interest title with broad appeal, written on an accessible reading level, published in multiple languages and formats, and available in paperback. We learned early that our selection criteria were probably a bit too narrow, so we focused our efforts on books with an appropriate reading level and young adult/high interest appeal. Thanks to the surveys that we conducted earlier in the year, we knew that our students liked to read mysteries and adventure. We brainstormed and pitched titles that fit the genre and nixed titles that matched lower interest genres like science fiction and urban fiction. We eventually settled on five books and asked the members of the high school's book club to read the books and give us their feedback. Their input led to the following selections:

1. *Left for Dead: A Young Man's Search for Justice for the USS Indianapolis* by Peter Nelson (Not available as an audiobook or in other languages)
2. *Never Fall Down* by Patricia McCormick (not available in other languages or paperback)
3. *Home of the Brave* by Katherine Applegate (not available as an audiobook or other languages)

Finally, we solicited feedback from the entire school. Students read passages from each book, as well as brief summaries and then voted for their favorite title. The winner was...*Left for Dead* by Peter Nelson.

Step 3: Secure Funding

In Waltham, we are blessed with a local nonprofit, Waltham Education and Beyond Foundation (WEBF) that provides educational grants to Waltham Public Schools teachers, administrators and parents. These grants

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have provided many meaningful and enriching educational opportunities for our students, including the transformation of the high school library into a dynamic, 21st century library program. Thanks to Emilie Perna's amazing *One School, One Book* grant proposal, the WEBF and the Sally Elizabeth Peters Enrichment program awarded us \$5,000 to purchase books for students and fund a guest speaker. And just recently, we received news that the Friends of the Waltham Public Library are donating \$5,000 dollars to the program, which means we can buy a book for every Waltham High School student!

Step 4: Work with Community & School Partners

Since receiving the grant, we have experienced an outpouring of support from the Waltham community. Local businesses, veterans associations, the Waltham Public Library and other community organizations have all volunteered to promote the initiative and make the book available to the broader public. One member of the Waltham community that has gone above and beyond to make this program a success is Alex Green, the owner of Back Pages Books in Waltham. He has reached out to key people in the Waltham community on our behalf and has very graciously agreed to hold book events and discussion groups in his store over the summer. Alex is taking care of all of the ordering for the program through his bookstore, which works out great for us because he gets a corporate discount on bulk orders.

In order to build excitement and support for the initiative, we've invited students and teachers to participate in planning and publicizing the program. Art students are working on developing promotional posters and stickers. Career and Tech Ed students are creating a series of short videos that will be played on the public access channel. Students in the Youth Tech Entrepreneur program are working on a website for Waltham Reads: www.WalthamReads.org. We dropped *One School, One Book* and renamed the initiative. Foreign language students are translating and recording passages from the book into Spanish and French. English teachers are creating discussion guides. ESL and SPED teachers are developing reading guides for families and students. A science teacher created a *Left for Dead* book trailer, and teachers in every department are developing lessons and activities that connect their curriculum to the book's topics and themes. We hope to have one day in the fall where all faculty, staff and students are involved in activities or discussions related to the book.

Step 5: Measuring Success

We still have a lot to do to achieve our goal of increasing student participation in the summer reading program, but the momentum is building and already we've seen more teachers and students talking about summer reading than ever before. Of course, the real gauge of whether or not the program was a success will come in the fall, when we evaluate student and community participation in the summer reading program through a survey and classroom activities/discussions. This will create a baseline data point against which we will be able to measure future participation.

One side note...if there are any high schools out there that would be interested in swapping summer reading books with us in the future, please let me know! The enrollment at Waltham High School is about 1,400 students.

Massachusetts SUPER Librarian Accolade: Laura Gardner

Promoting Your Library, On and Off the Web by Laura Gardner

Editor's Note: In addition to winning the SUPER Librarian Accolade, Laura was also honored with the 2013-14 "Web Seal of Excellence" for her webpage. Photo credit: Richard Curran.



My library is an active, bustling place from the moment I walk in the door until the second bus bell rings at the end of the day. I have no paid support staff. There are 1000 kids in the school and a space that is less than ideal, but I try to maximize all our resources every day to enhance learning experiences for my middle school students. I have found that promoting my library to administrators, parents, students and teachers in multiple ways on and off the web is the best way to gain both support and keep my program at the heart of the school. Here are some things that have worked for me. Many of them I've learned from all of you! *Photo Credit: Richard Curran*

Content is King!

My school website is not perfect. We use School Fusion, which is set up so students can log in and comment on blog posts, etc. The software is somewhat clunky and our school's web address, <http://dartmouthps.dms.schoolfusion.us> is pretty cumbersome. I've come to believe, however, that what matters most is content. I could move the content somewhere else if need be (maybe a Google Site?), but the categories and the content itself is what I'd want wherever it is located. The library blog is my most active page, with new posts every week and often several comments on each. I love seeing what students are thinking and wondering on these pages. In addition, I've started a weekly Digital Quest this year that keeps my website sticky. I also redirect students back to library webpages and links using the DMS library's Facebook and Instagram accounts.

Volunteers, Volunteers, Volunteers

Like many other librarians, I'm alone. I teach two periods of Library Skills each day to sixth graders and teachers sign up to bring classes in for the rest. Often the library is double booked all six periods long and I can barely leave to go to the bathroom. I love being busy, but of course want the library to run efficiently. Parent volunteers run the circulation desk, process holds from MassCat, reshelve books and answer a myriad of questions. They also see the work that goes on in the library every day and become awesome advocates for the library to administrators and other parents. The PTO is a huge supporter of my program and they make it possible for me to buy lots of "extras." In turn, my student volunteers are great at promoting the library (and the fun of working in the library) to other students. I've made being a student library volunteer at DMS a big deal. The application process includes teacher recommendations and an essay. I had over 30 students apply last year for 20 positions. I now have student volunteers before, during and after school, which means I never do tasks like plugging in iPads or checking books out and even have help recommending books. Thanks to student volunteers, we even hand deliver library holds the day they arrive; students love getting those hotly desired books right away! Volunteers free me up to do what I'm truly passionate about: recommend books to students, help students find, use and cite information and assist teachers in planning and executing successful research projects.

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Volunteer Yourself!

I've found that the very best way to promote my program is to assist in the program of the rest of the school. I serve on the School Improvement Committee, founded the National Junior Honor Society and run two after school clubs: the Book Club and the Manga Club. I also lead professional development sessions for teachers on a regular basis.

Flip that Library

The newest addition to my library webpages are online tutorials using screencasting tools like Screencast-o-matic (my personal favorite). Teachers love these because they can refer students back to them. I love them because I've finally found a way to clone myself! I've created tutorials on topics like using EasyBib or citing a website. With multiple research projects occurring at once and a semi-fixed schedule in the library it can sometimes be difficult to meet with all the classes and ensure that research is being conducted ethically. Now even if a research project is taking place in a computer lab on the other side of school, students and teachers have access to my input. Screencast-o-matic is easy to use and the Pro version costs only \$15 per year.

Dig into Digital Content

We've invested in eBooks and digital audiobooks from Follett with great success. The first challenge was letting students know we had content that could be downloaded to their Android and iOS devices. I make announcements over the intercom, students have made posters, and I plug the services heavily whenever I am before a group of students. I also offer to load the required apps and help sign kids in if they bring their device to the library. Even teachers bring in their own devices! Recently created DMS library FaceBook and Instagram accounts have also been very successful in getting out the word to both parents and students. So far we have around 99 eBooks and over 50 digital audiobooks. Fortunately a large percentage of students in my district have their own devices on which to download content, but we also have ten Kindles with popular titles that I loan out to students for three weeks at a time. We also have 50 PlayAways that are popular with students.

Be Willing to Experiment

We recently got iPads in the library. I don't own an iPad or any other tablet of my own so I was somewhat intimidated, but I've embraced it wholeheartedly and now love to brainstorm with teachers about new ways to use various apps to create multimedia projects. Currently a 6th grade class is doing PSAs on endangered animals using Voicethread and various photo editing apps. We've also started diving into Google Drive with our students. Two blocks in 7th grade use Google Drive to share documents with students and assign collaborative projects. I'll also be using Google Drive to do collaborative projects this spring with my 6th grade Library Skills classes. I'm hoping that once all the 6th graders in the school use it with me they will be prepared to use Google Drive with their other teachers.

Share Successes

Don't be afraid to give yourself credit! Every month I prepare a monthly report for my administrators that shows the increase in circulation over the previous month and previous year, the projects that are going on in the library, the contests sponsored by the library, the status of various projects and more. My administrators love to see the data and it keeps me honest and hungry for more success. This data has also helped to spur changes in the curriculum. Two years ago my annual report indicated that some teachers never taught a

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research project all year. This report inspired a group of faculty members to develop a research continuum for the school. Now all 7th grade ELA, social studies and science teachers each assign at least one research project. The data I share with my administration has also shown big jumps in circulation as a result of our joining MassCat—my principal is always happy to see that our use of resources are having a clear impact on student reading habits!

We librarians need to tell the story of our library in as many ways as we can. Running a great program is not enough. We need to constantly find ways to share our successes in a way that is compelling to administrators, parents and especially students.

Massachusetts SUPER Librarian Accolade: Arleen Flaherty

Flexibility, Communication, Anticipation by Arleen Flaherty

Left: Arleen Flaherty receives the M.S.L.A. from MSLA President, Valerie Diggs. Photo Credit: Richard Curran.

When I was first notified of this award, I thought it must be given for endurance. I have since been told it is for “general awesomeness,” which always looks good on the resume, but I’m going with endurance.

I was considering what makes my libraries work, starting with the three elementary libraries I covered simultaneously as my first assignment, up to the two middle school libraries I currently manage. I thought about the ongoing study of state and district standards, now core standards, and curriculum guides. I included writing selection policies, long range plans and grant applications. I counted writing lesson plans for every grade level from kindergarten through eighth grade. I pondered the never-ending quest to keep up with the technology and teaching vital 21st Century Skills while dealing with budget cuts, tech glitches and lack of staffing. We are all well aware of the numerous and varied tasks and tools of our profession. We know the challenges and sometimes we know the solutions. This is what we do. You don’t need to hear that from me. So I am focusing on some of the intangibles. They may not be in the job description or the course catalog for librarians, but they have worked for me.

What makes my libraries work...flexibility, communication, and anticipation. I once had a superintendent tell me flexibility was one of my greatest strengths. I have never forgotten that although at times it has made me feel like silly putty. But it also describes that ability to bend without breaking, in the face of job assignments, curriculum changes, and limited resources. Change is sometimes very difficult to accept, and may follow brief periods of venting and justifiable outrage, but it does follow. We adapt, we adjust and we go on. I tell my students this is a sign of intelligence. We survive and hopefully, we do it with style.



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Communication is not overrated. In spite of a technological avalanche of voice email, email, texting and tweeting, it seems we sometimes still fail to connect with each other. I like to get the message out early and often. I send individual and group notices and library notes on every available medium. I go to scheduled team, grade and departmental meetings whenever possible. (Sometimes I invite myself). I have impromptu meetings in the halls and open the library early every morning to accommodate staff and substitute teachers. I host workshops and meetings and use those opportunities to connect with administrators, and sometimes learn about new initiatives. I invite comments, suggestions and responses in all forms including notes on cocktail napkins. This feedback may be the most important part of the process. We become more aware of the needs, and the resources, we share with each other.

This outreach must be extended to the students. With reduced budgets and limited time available, it is vital that we spend our budgets (yes, I have one for each building) wisely. Student recommendations and requests are just as important as those determined by curriculum and faculty. I think of us as a community of readers, so we need to serve an extensive variety of interests, levels of maturity, and reading skills. All those who have ever worked in a middle school know what I mean. I want to encourage every student to be part of the community of lifelong learners, to feel welcome, and find what he or she may call “good books” in our library. That may include current titles on robotics for some, graphics and fantasy for others, and bilingual or world language titles for those seeking the comfort of their native language.

Anticipation can be a powerful tool in our profession. I have endeared myself, and the library, to many a faculty member by anticipating changes in the social studies or science curriculum, responding to the specific needs of a lesson plan, and learning the unique interests and approaches of individual staff. Suggesting books, passing along relevant articles and providing links to websites all strengthen the bonds between library and classroom and may help a teacher finish a graduate course. Book fairs, and book talks for ELA classes, introduce students and staff to wonderful new titles that enrich their recreational reading and the classroom experience.

Flexibility, communication, anticipation, each develops over time, nurtured by familiarity and collegiality, and the luxury of working with a faculty over an extended period. During my career, I have worked in multiple schools, developed library programs, and helped design a new middle school media center when I had the luxury of being assigned to a single school. Times change and I am once again assigned multiple schools, so I am now in the process of building those relationships at my second school, bonds that I have had time to forge at my “home base”. And so the journey continues. We work, we grow, we occasionally vent, and we go on. Pack your sense of humor, we live in interesting times!

Nomination of Arleen Flaherty by Leigh Barnes, West Area Director

Arleen Flaherty is this year's recipient of the Director's Award for the Western region. She was selected for her 25 years of outstanding service as a librarian for the Pittsfield Public Schools in Berkshire County. During this tenure, Arleen has worked at both the elementary and middle school levels. She has presided over as many as three elementary schools at once, and now serves as the sole middle school librarian for two buildings and 1,300 students.

Arleen has been an excellent advocate for high-quality library programs in Pittsfield. She has served on the Superintendent's Advisory Committee for two administrations. She helped develop Pittsfield's first Long Range Plan, resulting in its first LSTA grant, and has been awarded two more grants since then. She has also helped craft official district policies—such as the Selection Policy—and the library space itself as an input provider on

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the new Herberg Middle School construction project.

Arleen is a familiar face not only to the children she instructs in groups or one-on-one, but to parents and fellow teachers as well. She considers collaboration one of her highest priorities and has worked together with many members of the school community on outreach and fundraising opportunities. One of her favorites is the "Legacy" program, which invites students, families, and friends to contribute a book to the library collection in honor or memory of students, staff, or family members.

Massachusetts SUPER Librarian Accolade: Katie DePorter

Energy and Persistence Conquer All Things by Ellen DePorter

Photo Credit: Boston Public Schools website .

"I HATE books, and I hate the library!" Those were the words that greeted me on my first day as a school librarian. Tears sprang to my eyes, in part because of the words I had just heard, but mostly because the cute little first grader who had uttered those words had just kicked me in the shins before running out of the library. This was NOT how I had envisioned my first day!



The library was not the most popular place in my school and I knew that I had my work cut out for me. Prior to my arrival, the school did not have a professional librarian for several years, so it became my mission to introduce the students to this wonderful place. The library had seen better days and I was essentially starting the program from scratch. The few books we did have were covered in cobwebs and dust and most were not even on bookshelves, much less organized by author or Dewey number. The students had never been to the library and didn't know what to expect. So, like many in uncomfortable or unfamiliar situations, they decided to avoid it or act out while in the library. No one wanted to even touch the books, much less borrow them to read. I was completely heartbroken and overwhelmed. How could I get these kids to feel about books the way that I feel? As if this wasn't enough of a challenge, a month after I started my school was identified as a "turnaround" school, which are schools that have been designated by the state as significantly underperforming over several years. I certainly had my work cut out for me.

Little did the students know, I am an extremely persistent person. Slowly but surely, after many school-wide events and one-on-one conversations, students began coming into the library of their own free will. They were checking out books, smiling, and even talking to their friends about the latest books they have read. As we all know, students love to talk, and soon the library was getting a positive buzz. Things were finally beginning to turn around.

Four years later, I still begin each day by looking at books that still need to be shelved and thinking of the hundreds of things that still need to be done, but I've learned that this feeling is a sign of a true librarian. A librarian's job will NEVER be complete. You will always have work that needs to be done, trying to better yourself and your library. You will constantly be searching for the latest and greatest; for new gadgets to try, for new, popular books, and new technologies to incorporate in your library. You just have to learn to prioritize and keep your head above water.

While my school's library budget is practically non-existent compared to other libraries and our only technology was received a few months ago (used, donated computers that have seen better days), I remain persistent. I refuse to use these as excuses for not improving the library. Be creative. Be flexible. Be energetic. Write those time-consuming grants. We have won the Laura Bush grant two out of three years and we were a finalist in the Target School Library

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Makeover last year. Think of imaginative ways to put your library in the spotlight and make it shine.

This year, I asked staff members to participate in a music video where we are all singing, dancing, and reading books to play at a Pep Rally to kick-off Literacy Month. This was an entire month with activities and events to showcase the importance of books and reading, planned by me. Students were immensely excited about seeing their teachers, administration, and staff members reading books in a music video. As part of Literacy Month, I also organized a book spirit week with activities such as "Reading Rocks, Wear Silly Socks" or "We're Crazy About Books" when students come to school with crazy hair. I even planned a Literacy Night where families can come and learn some tips on how to increase reading at home.

Over each school vacation, I send home donated books for students to read and participate in a "Reading Challenge". If we reach a certain number of minutes read over break as a school, our principal has graciously offered to get a pie in the face at our next assembly. When I began my job as a librarian, I wasn't expecting to do things like this, but if it motivates even one student to pick up a book or come into the library, I consider it worthwhile.

There are still days when I have my doubts about whether I'm doing a good enough job as a librarian, so I remember one of my favorite quotes by Benjamin Franklin, "Energy and persistence conquer all things." And in case you're wondering about that girl from my first day, she has become one of my most avid readers and supporters of the library. My tears are now those of joy knowing that in some small way the library and its books have opened the door to a child's brighter future.

President's Award: Suzanne Mathews

The Luckiest Librarian by Suzanne Mathews

Photo credit: Boston Public Schools website

While I don't usually consider myself to be particularly lucky, last year I became the luckiest librarian in the state of Massachusetts. Less than six months into my first position as a school librarian, my school (the William Monroe Trotter in Dorchester) was awarded a library makeover from the Target Corporation and the Heart of America Foundation.

First, some background. I accepted the job at the Trotter without seeing the library. It was the end of August and I had been in library school (and not working) for two years. I needed a job and returning to Boston Public Schools as a librarian after having been a classroom teacher for many years was a perfect situation for me. Before I started, I returned to my old school where teachers there were thrilled to be receiving a library makeover courtesy of Target. I had never heard of such a thing—how wonderful and yet how ironic—that the school where I had worked for eighteen years was getting a new library and here I was beginning my new career as a school librarian in a different school!

Then I saw "my" library and my plan took root—the Trotter was the perfect library to qualify for a library makeover if I ever saw one. Not in service for an unclear number of years, the library was a large, though oddly shaped space—perhaps closest to a trapezoid. The highlight was an entire wall of windows with the potential to let in a lot of sunlight. Many people remarked on the large round tables



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and chairs supplied by Boston University which used the space for some of its Education School classes. Large was right—great for adults attending meetings, large enough to fit 8-10 people, but much too large for elementary school-aged children.



The green metal shelves that filled the library must have been the originals—dating back to the opening of the school in 1969. They were rusty and filthy, but especially those under the aforementioned windows, due to an unknown number of floods over the years. Also as a result of the floods, entire patches of floor tiles were becoming loose every day. The library had become a dumping ground for all kinds of materials: old printers, overhead projectors, television sets, other random odds and ends, and many books. (Eventually, though, I discovered that no new books had come into the library since 2002.)

Left: Suzanne Mathews receives the President's Award, March 3, 2013. Photo Credit: Richard Curran.

Soon, nearly every sentence out of my mouth concerning the library included the phrase “when we get the Target school library makeover.” One day when the principal rolled her eyes at me, I knew I had begun to sound too much like a broken record, but the idea stayed firmly in my mind. When Amy Short, Director of Boston Public School libraries, explained to me that we couldn’t even be sure that Target would return to Boston, my hopes underwent another adjustment. Target had already completed three school library makeovers in Boston—two already in Dorchester. They may want to expand their scope beyond those parameters. We would have to wait and see.

In the meantime, I set about the monumental job of weeding. Knowing that it was dangerous territory to weed a collection as a librarian new to the school and unproven to staff, I basically played pass the buck and boxed the majority of the books I weeded for donation to Reading Tree. They would send a truck for free pickup if I had 20 boxes of books to donate; ultimately we loaded 60 boxes (none of them small) one evening in November. Even though a large “collection” became a small collection, I maintained a commitment to keeping only titles that were in excellent condition and of interest/relevance to an urban student body composed of approximately 75% African American students and 25% Latino students. Still, I was shocked to find many non-fiction titles that dated as far back as the 1950s and 1960s. (I have photos to prove it!)

Once I completed the heavyweight weeding, I set about cleaning and organizing the books that remained. Thankfully many groups and individuals offered their time to wipe down books and shelves, attach contact paper to the shelves, and sort and donate books. A relationship with Dorchester’s Global Ministries and Lexington’s Grace Chapel Church brought teams of volunteers to the school on several occasions. Students from Boston University came one Saturday and devoted several hours to the library. One staff member reached out to friends, Girl Scout troops, and churches in her Natick neighborhood which resulted in entire vans of used books being donated to the library. Alumni and friends of the school purchased 300 new titles from the Amazon wish list I set up. Not only was the existing collection being cleaned and organized, but many new titles were ready to be added.

Towards the end of January, the news came through that Target had decided to return to Boston and our school met the criteria to apply. Not only did we have the opportunity to win the library makeover, but we were also making the case for a monthly food pantry program called Meals for Minds. As a Turnaround

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School, we are fortunate to have a staff person whose title is Director of Budget, Outreach, and Accountability. She and I worked on the application together. By the end of the week, through many drafts and innumerable edits, we were ready to take our chances and submit. We felt pleased with our efforts in putting together a top notch application, but at the same time we didn't want to get our hopes up too high.

Nevertheless, we anxiously waited on pins and needles past the date we were told we would hear one way or another. Then, one Monday in February at about midday, we received an email that we were finalists and that the Target and Heart of America team would be coming to meet with us the next day! After school, we met with the principal and assistant principal to plan our tactics. The assistant principal planned to present a welcoming spread of food and cute Target-type knick knacks. I was going to bake my irresistible triple chocolate brownies. In addition, borrowing an idea from my old school, we all planned to wear red (both Target and HOA colors). We were ready. (Or, as ready as we could be with less than 24 hours to prepare!)

We were the last school that the team visited that day which may have been to our advantage. We had a dedicated team and both the principal and assistant principal laid out strong narratives of how far our school had come in recent years and an exciting, dynamic vision for the revitalization of the library. One of the main features of the principal's plan was to open up the library to the community, especially to families with small children in order to help build positive relationships with the school before their children reach school-age and also to provide early literacy experiences for the youngest children prior to kindergarten. And once the meeting was over, I encouraged everyone to eat plenty of brownies!

To be honest, one year later, it is all a blur. We knew we would hear one way or the other later on the same day as the visit. I hounded the secretary for the rest of the day asking whether the call had come. Right at dismissal time as I was asking again, the call came. Coincidentally, the Director of Budget and I were both there, and we silently crowded into the principal's office as she picked up the telephone. The principal's voice was low and disappointed as she said words like "Yes, I understand," while we turned to each other and whispered that we would try again next year. Then all of a sudden, the principal began to shriek and scream positive words like "Oh my God!" and "Thank you so much!" and "I can't believe it!" We all looked at each other in amazement --we had actually won!

Thus began an eight-month whirlwind of conference calls, speedy decisions, and then, deliveries! My goal for the summer was to enter the existing collection into the online catalog Library World. Next, I had to pack up all the books and move the boxes to an empty classroom that became the library annex. Then several workers hired by BPS removed everything from the library (including all the shelving and a monstrous circulation desk) so that only an empty shell remained. When workers from Suffolk Construction began work on September 21st, they covered all the library windows so that no one else in the school could see what was happening within. It was meant to be a wondrous surprise for the school community, as it soon would be.

First imagine the empty shell of a large trapezoidal room with the shades drawn and windows covered over with brown paper. Then imagine bright green, orange, and blue walls with colorful patterned carpeting...a classroom area consisting of round, kid-size tables with bright tangerine-orange chairs...a SmartBoard...a cozy reading area with an elliptical alphabet rug...a large reading chair and eight bean bags...another corner with comfy reading chairs and 150 parenting resource books...and finally, imagine wooden shelves filled with 2,000 beautiful new books. That is the new library that materialized before our eyes in less than two weeks at the end of September 2012. The dream came true for the entire Trotter community on October 3rd when we had the library grand opening complete with 150 Target volunteers, the first food pantry, a book giveaway to all students, and many other activities around the school.

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Sometimes I still have to pinch myself to believe that this all really happened in my first year as a school librarian. I am so grateful to everyone who helped make it happen, from the team at my school to Amy Short to Target, Heart of America, Suffolk Construction, and to all the other people along the way who invested time, energy, and interest in bringing the best possible library to the children of the Trotter School. All these months later, I still have a moment of wonder nearly every day as I look around the now incredible library and remember the dank and drab place it was not too long ago. And without fail, every single day at least one child tells me how much they love the library. They are happy with so many beautiful books and such an inviting and comfortable setting in which to enjoy them.

President's Award: Jennifer Dimmick

Metrowest President's Award by Jennifer Dimmick

Right: Jennifer Dimmick receives the MSLA President's Award on March 3, 2013. Photo credits: Richard Curran.

When I was notified of my status as winner of the Metrowest President's Award I was at once proud and humbled. Proud because it is of course an honor to be recognized in this way, but humbled because I realize how many more deserving new library teachers there are out there. It didn't take long for me to deduce that my incredibly good fortune of working closely with my library teacher colleagues at both Newton North and South High Schools, in addition to my prized practicum placements with Judi Paradis and Ann Perham probably contributed to my continued good fortune of being nominated for this award. Unlike many of my friends and recent Simmons graduates who toil away in relative obscurity as solo librarians, my work is mentored, improved upon and appreciated every day by my wonderful colleagues. This is where the humility comes in: I should have nominated my hard working solo librarian friends for this award, because who else will? I regret that there is no award specifically designed to recognize new solo librarians, and would like to dedicate this award to my many fellow Simmons alums from 2011 who I know are making a significant impact on student learning in their libraries, but who lack the invaluable partner librarian support that I have.



Three years ago I walked away from a 20+ year career in business to embark on the path to teacher librarianship and I haven't looked back. I traded competition for collaboration and collegiality, making a difference in corporate profitability for making a difference in student learning, and financial reward for intrinsic reward. In the past year and a half since I have been at Newton South High School, my colleagues Ethel Downey, Marnie Bolstad and I, with welcome support from our Principal, Joel Stembidge, have made great strides in embracing the learning commons philosophy and on developing students' 21st century skills in our library by accomplishing the following:

- Reorganized the library's physical space and adjusted our collection development to emphasize and display popular YA fiction.
- Significantly weeded the entire collection.
- Revamped the library website and pathfinders by adopting Libguides as our site platform.
- Adopted EasyBib School Edition for our students to use to create citations, bibliographies, note cards and outlines.

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- Flipped our library classroom by creating screencast tutorials for database use and EasyBib and posted them on our library website and research guides (aka pathfinders).
- Established a social media presence for the library on Twitter, Facebook, Wordpress and Goodreads and used these to communicate with students, teachers and parents.
- Created a book blog for the library and collaborated with English teachers to populate the blog with student-written book reviews.
- Created an iPad teaching lab in one of our classrooms with a cart of 15 iPads, an Apple TV and an interactive whiteboard, and co-taught iPad enabled lessons with a growing list of innovative teachers.
- Collaborated with the PTSO to create an electronic newsletter for the library that goes out to parents and faculty on a regular basis to promote library programs and acknowledge our generous supporters.
- Embedded assessment tools and Common Core Standard citations into our research guides.
- Added display boards to our walls to feature student artwork.
- Co-taught nearly 800 research, literature and technology classes per year with subject teachers in nearly every department.

There is no way we could have accomplished this without working as a collaborative team of librarians, and we still have a long way to go to achieve our vision of operating as a vibrant library commons at the heart of the school. We don't yet have an e-reader solution for our students, and haven't settled on an ideal e-book or audio-book option. We don't have enough seats in our library to accommodate every student who wants one, and we have far too few computers to respond to student need. Our students' information literacy is not where it should be, and despite some fantastic teacher collaboration initiatives, there is still not enough teaching and learning time devoted to addressing this gap. No matter how much effort we put into teacher collaboration and information literacy instruction, there are always teachers we haven't reached or converted, and some remain who still view the library as critical only because it warehouses a large number of students during free blocks and directed study.

The moral of this story is that a good learning commons is never "finished," even with the professional expertise of 2.5 committed library teachers supported by hard working library aides (a role shared by 3 fantastic women in our community), in addition to valuable administrative support from our principal, district library coordinator and Director of Information Technology. This further underscores the impressive accomplishments of those solo librarians out there—my hat is off you all. I don't know how you do it. I hope that your teachers, students and administrators are as grateful for you as I am inspired by you. *Bravo!*

President's Award: Lisa Norcross

Making It Your Own: Developing a Successful Library Program

by Lisa Norcross

Left: Lisa Norcross receives the MSLA President's Award from Valerie Diggs, MSLA President. Photo Credits: Richard Curran.

This is my third year as School Librarian at Wood End Elementary School in Reading. I was excited to hear that I was nominated for the award and honored when I learned I had won. I feel fortunate to have ended up at Wood End. The moment I walked into the school for my interview, I felt like it would be a good fit and the feeling grew stronger as I met and interacted with the staff. I work with some pretty amazing people who are open to new ideas, work together and welcomed me with open arms.

I have been a paraprofessional, classroom aide and preschool teacher. This however was my first library job and I replaced a fantastic librarian. Everyone spoke highly of her and I knew I had big shoes to fill. The school

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is less than ten years old and she had built the library program. At first, I often heard, “She used to do this” or “she did things this way.” That can be intimidating, but I knew I had to do things my own way to be comfortable and make a home at the school. I honestly took the full first year to get used to the curriculum, students, staff and community. Now I think one of the biggest compliments I receive is when teachers and families tell me that it feels as though I have been here for much longer than three years and that they are lucky to have me.

By no means would I say my library is perfect. There are lots of things I want to change, add or alter to fit the needs of my students and staff, but things take time. Over the last three years there are some key factors I’ve learned to make a successful library program.

Change

Even though I have been in the library for a short time I have seen significant changes each year to my position. My second year, I took on grading and teaching technology standards. I already taught many of these standards, but now I develop new lessons, create rubrics, align standards and create assessments. At first it seemed daunting. Instead of complaining about it, I used my time to figure out a plan and a timeline. I had to evaluate what I did that was working and assess where I needed to make changes.

Advocacy

As the school librarian you need to be your biggest advocate and this means speaking up for yourself and the best interest of you students. I have a strong program and my kids like to come to library. The parents like to come into the library for displays and to volunteer. I have worked hard to develop relationships with the teams of teachers in my school. I believe that the library is an important part of education and the school. I speak up on behalf of the library, ask for support and fight to keep my program. As the librarian, you need to know what you and your library have to offer and back it up by sharing what you do.

Collaboration

Anyone in education knows that Common Core has been a topic of discussion over the last year. I have been working with teachers to promote the idea that you don’t have to do it alone. The information literacy and technology skills that I teach work best when taught with the grade level curriculum. These standards work well together and provide opportunities to collaborate with other teams and specialists. For example, I worked with my third grade team last year to develop a new project that incorporates research, reading, writing, presentation and technology standards. As teachers we are hitting all of our standards with a worthwhile project the students are invested in. The best part is the kids love it too! I think the best ideas arise from throwing ideas back and forth during planning time. I am fortunate that the teachers in my school are often willing to try something new. I let the kids know this is the first time we are trying something and we all learn together. The students benefit from two teachers and the expertise they both bring to the lesson or project.

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Organization

The library is a crazy place and I mean crazy in the best sense of the word. Most days I have classes back to back and when there is not a class there is always library management. With so many things going on, (often at the same time), the best advice I have is to stay organized. It makes life so much easier and allows me to make quick transitions.

Community

Wood End is a great community of teachers and parents. I am alone in the library and my parent volunteers make everything run smoothly. Last fall I was out for two weeks and parent volunteers kept the library running. I stay as involved in the community as possible. I work with PTO and invite administrators into the library and develop valuable relationships, especially with the PTO, which does a lot to support the library. I have presented at PTO meetings and am currently partnering with them on a school-wide Read-a-Thon. Together with the PTO, the teachers and the fifth grade created a music video, "Read Like Crazy" to kick off the event. I use my website as another way for families to see what we do.

I absolutely love my job. I walked away from my first interview here saying "I hope they hire me. I hope they hire me." I have learned a lot from those that I work with as well as from being hands on and diving right in. I think the key to success is to become a part of the school; as a school librarian you can't operate in isolation. I have worked to create an atmosphere and program that meets the needs of my students and staff. I learned I can't make all the changes I want at once, but that I need time and I definitely put my own stamp on the program. When people talk to me about my job they often say they can tell I love it and am passionate about it. I am thankful and honored to receive this award.

ADMINISTRATOR ADVOCATE Awards:

Marianne Young and Laurencio Garcia

Marianne Young Principal of Monument Mountain Regional High School

Submitted by: Kara Staunton-Shron

(l-r) Sandy Kelly, MSLA Awards Chairperson, presents Marianne Young with the 2013 MSLA Administrator Advocate Award. Photo credits: Richard Curran.

It was my pleasure to nominate Marianne Young, principal of Monument Mountain Regional High School in Great Barrington for the Administrator Advocate Award. Marianne became principal in 1999 and then left us a few years later to be superintendent of the Lenox School System. However, after two years as superintendent, she returned as principal at Monument Mountain. She stated her main reason for doing so was she missed the connection with students.

This explains Marianne; she is an educational leader who always puts students first. Marianne recognizes what students need, and she knows that they need a vibrant school library. Her support of the library at Monument Mountain Regional High School has been invaluable in creating a space that is loved by much of the school.



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One of the first major projects I took on when beginning this position was a revamp of the physical space of the library. The school was built in 1968, and the library was originally designed to be open concept, no walls and open to the hallway. Not soon after, the design model no longer worked and walls were put up. However, this meant that there are now no windows and no natural light in the space. There were large eight foot bookcases spanning almost half of the room. Moving the bookcases would make it more spacious and light. I discussed my plan with Marianne who was open to the idea, even allowing me to repurpose some comfortable chairs from other rooms in the building. Marianne gave me a lot of freedom to make the changes needed to create a more open space. This would involve a lot of carpentry and moving bookcases in and out of the library. When I approached Steve Soule, Assistant Business Administrator in charge of the Building and Grounds, he said, "Let's go for it", and had his carpenters here the next week to take the first bookcase away.

The library now has lower shelving that enables better visibility and provides multiple meeting areas for students and classes. Best of all, the whole project cost under \$200. But, it would not have been possible without the support and effort of Marianne Young. Our school is in the midst of a feasibility study for the Massachusetts School Building Authority and Marianne has assured me that I am on that Building Committee.

Marianne Young is a constant champion of the library. She praises the work that happens here in all ways and to all people, whether at a school committee meeting or at public informational sessions on the possible renovations. Marianne frequents the library, observing the daily buzz of activity. Sometimes, she just walks through, or more often, Marianne does her work in the library. She recognizes the balance that a modern school library is: a place to do work, but also a central gathering spot for students and staff alike. What I like most about Marianne, though, is that she is a reader. She makes it a point to read the books that students are reading in classes, but she will also stop in and check books out of my library. We discuss books and she asks for recommendations of what to read next.

Last year, from a school of 520, there were just over 27,000 student visits to the library. While I am a solo librarian, I am far from alone, because I have the support of an administrator who has allowed me to run with my vision of a 21st century school library. Without the support and effort of Marianne Young, that would not have happened.



Dr. Laurencio Garcia Principal, Revere High School

Dr. Laurencio Garcia (R) receives congratulations from Carolyn Markuson (L) who consulted on the project to redesign the Revere High School Library. Photo credits: Richard Curran.

Dr. Garcia is a visionary who believes in the importance of school libraries as centers of learning and creativity. The newly renovated Learning Commons is a testament to those beliefs. His devotion and dedication to the renovation and rebirth of the Revere High School Library can only be called extraordinary.

Originally, the library in his school was a tired, seventies-looking space with unattractive furnishings and dimly lit space. Dr Garcia spear-headed the effort to renovate and re-imagine the space with the help of his school librarian, Rachel Bouhanda. Using district

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funds he hired Bibliotech Library Design consultants Carolyn Markuson and Rolf Erickson to assist in the reconceptualization of Revere High School Library.

After a successful Grand Opening event in November of 2012 the new Learning Commons is a thriving, innovative place for the entire school community. Dr. Garcia's vision and ideas resulted in an interactive space that is an avenue for his student's success in a changing and ever evolving world.

A video of the RHS Learning Commons transformation including comments from Dr. Garcia can be viewed on Schooltube at <http://tinyurl.com/brsykuq>.

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT: Donna Guerin and Pat Fontes



*Pat Fontes (Left) and Donna Guerin (Center) receive Lifetime Achievement Awards from MSLA President, Valerie Diggs (Right).
Photo credits: Richard Curran.*

DONNA GUERIN

Donna Guerin was among the “Founders” of the Massachusetts School Library Association and has contributed to our state association and to our profession for over 30 years. Before her retirement Donna was the Director of Library Information Services for Palmer Public Schools. She is currently a national education and library consultant and is an Intel Master Teacher and Thinkfinity trainer. Donna is a senior instructor in the School Library Teacher Certification Program at Cambridge College in the Graduate School of Education, Springfield campus.

Throughout her career, she has been an advocate for school libraries and has held a variety of positions on the MSLA Board including President and Western Region Co-Director. Donna also chaired Public Relations, Conference, and Newsletter Committees. Her efforts in promoting school and public library cooperation include the Joint Committee on School Public Library Cooperation, past president of the Western MA Regional Library System (WMRLS) and member of the MBLC strategic planning process that resulted in the regional multitype library system.

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PATRICIA FONTES

Pat first joined the MSLA Executive Board and became an active member in the late 1980s. She has served as an Intellectual Freedom Chair, Legislation Co-chair, Conference Chair and has contributed her time as the Central Area Director several times over the years.

Pat has also served as a Library Trustee in her hometown of Westborough, forging a strong school/public library connection that still exists in that community. Pat could always be counted on to advocate for school libraries at Legislative Breakfasts and Library Legislative Days at the State House. Pat has been a contributor to many MSLA committees and task forces, as well as a mentor for her colleagues during her career. She still Chairs the Westborough Public Library Board of Trustees. We wish Pat a well-deserved and restful retirement, although we suspect she will continue to contribute her enthusiasm and expertise to the library community for years to come.

MSLA Service Award: Gerri Fegan



MSLA President Valerie Diggs (Right) congratulates Gerri Fegan on the 2013 MSLA Service Award. Photo credits: Richard Curran.

Sincere Thanks by Gerri Fegan

I am humbled and honored to be recognized by my peers with the MSLA Service Award. There is much more that I will give to the organization and call upon all of you to join me in the worthwhile efforts that are essential to keep our profession vibrant. MSLA is the heart of our state's profession. We keep MSLA strong by serving each other in a variety of ways, all for the benefit of our school children.

Recently, I was asked by the American Association of School Librarians to write a brief article about my volunteering experiences, [reprinted in the January 2013 MSLA Forum](#). While I spent the time contemplating the past fifteen years in school libraries and another ten in public libraries, it became obvious that it was not my efforts alone that made a difference. Today, I work with a dedicated school library team in Andover that has created a brilliant Information Literacy Scope and Sequence that links ISTE, AASL, Common Core and state standards. They are an inspiration as they strive to meet the challenges set forth by national initiatives.

I offer tribute to some of the teams on which I have served that have resulted in some very unexpected benefits for me, my colleagues, children in my community and internationally.

[Open Learning Exchange](#) is currently creating an open source children's library for the country of Ghana. While there are many information literacy programs and lessons available through the Internet, the English language children's literature selections available through open source sites needs to be curated for the Ghana Project. I have learned more about the international librarian community and the new, cutting edge resources that are being made easily available for children in rural areas. Many more fascinating details are available on the website and the Children's Library team would love your help.

[Amesbury for Africa](#) has a wide variety of service projects, and we have work to do in the Esabalu region of Kenya. Several schools are in need of library materials and construction, and the latest project in

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agroforestry requires information resources for children about growing plants and forests as a cash crop to sustain their communities. I will be approaching AFA about creating a book of paperless lesson plans and original stories for children in grades K-8 that will support the women's reforestation program. For those school librarians interested in international librarianship and cultural literature, I would welcome your service.

New England School Library Association is an extraordinary association that provides professional development for all librarian levels and works toward a regional response to school library concerns in all six New England States. Leadership summits which are offered once or twice a year are often cutting edge opportunities that reflect the emphasis on national trends. This year's summit to be held on August 5th at the Eric Carle Museum in Amherst will focus on the digitization of picture books and the impact on children's literacy skills at all levels. It is our hope that, by joining NESLA, you can take advantage of professional development opportunities in the region without too many travel costs. Our AASL representative is always on call for discussions about your concerns and commendations. As we approach our 100th organizational anniversary, we need members to plan the festivities!

The American Association of School Librarians is the consummate resource for not only information about our profession, but for the collaboration and energy that we all need to support each other. The variety of committees and programs are endless and there is something for everyone in which to take part. From intellectual freedom to international librarianship, awards committees to legislation, and early child literature to college-level information literacy standards, there is a need for your talents. My experiences on panels, Affiliate Assembly, committees and workshops has been so fulfilling that I must recommend that you join our national organization for the most exhilarating experiences.

MSLA has changed the way I work, think, and act as a school librarian. I was fortunate that, early in my career, I sought out those who could help me in my efforts as an international librarian. To this day, I can't remember how I got invited to work on the Bookmark Contest, but I do remember my first friends on the MSLA board whom I still consider to be personal muses and inspirations. I remember the thrill of beginning a new project, the pride of speaking with legislators and administrators on behalf of my colleagues, the joy of representing such an organization of talented school librarians at national conferences, and the humility of being in the presence of all of MSLA's membership at our own state conference. It has been, and always will be, an honor to work with you.

Audrey Friend Scholarship: Gabrielle Sobilo

MSLA Forum: April 2013

Audrey Friend, a role model for library teachers entering the profession, is an original founder of the state school library association and a Past President of MSLMA (MAEM). Throughout her career, she promoted the role of library teachers and library programs as integral components of the teaching and learning process. She has also been a strong advocate of school and public library cooperation and was inducted into the MLA Hall of Fame in 1998. She served as the MSLMA liaison to MLA and other educational organizations for over 25 years.

This award honors Audrey's dedication and selflessness.

Technology and Library School in the 21st Century

by Gabriello Sobilo

What is it like to be a current library student in the 21st century? The School Library Teacher Program of the Simmons College Graduate School of Library and Information Science (GSLIS), focuses on a wide range of skills and tools to help prepare students for the many roles of a school library teacher. Simmons College GSLIS and my work experiences have given me the opportunity to experience technology, both in and out of the traditional classroom settings. These experiences made me realize how much I not only love being an information specialist and a teacher, but a technology leader as well.



In my "Technology and the School Library Teacher" course we used a wide range of tools including, but not limited to, Voicethread, Prezi, Scratch, and Animoto. It was a wonderful experience, especially since we not only reviewed these tools, but also were able to craft projects that could be made by either the school librarian or the students. Creating these projects helped to illuminate how difficult or long it could take to construct a project. I look forward to trying them out in my own school library in the future as a school library teacher. Please check out some of my work in my Technology Portfolio at <http://gsobilo.tumblr.com/>.



(Left) Gabrielle Sobilo receives the Audrey Friend Scholarship from MSLA President, Valerie Diggs. Photo credits: Richard Curran.

iPads have also been a major topic of discussion in my classes. iPads and other tablet devices are effective tools in the school library or classroom setting. In "Instructional Strategies for the School Library Teacher" and "Curriculum and the School Library Teacher," I learned how to incorporate different iPad apps into a lesson. We even had an iPad "smack down." In a five-minute presentation each student discussed the positives and negatives of their chosen app and how it would be beneficial to students, teachers and the school librarians. For this assignment, we also had to connect the chosen app to a Common Core State Standard and explain how the app fulfills that standard. I chose to talk about the app, "Shakespeare in Bits: Romeo and Juliet."

I was fortunate to have the opportunity to take my technology skills to the school library media center at Dale Street School in Medfield where I had the opportunity to cooperate with a fifth grade teacher on the creation of a Glogster for her students' explorer project. Glogster allows users to create a digital interactive poster by incorporating videos, pictures, sounds and texts. I used both the SMART Board and the Glogster site to instruct students on how to use the different features in designing their digital poster board. I found it helpful to have a [step-by-step guide for both teachers and students to use](#).

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Working at Dale Street School has given me a great chance to apply the Web 2.0 and iPad technologies that I have learned from my courses at Simmons College. Yet, I still continue to work to expand my computer skills and knowledge through attending technology conferences and workshops, such as the Massachusetts Computer Using Educators (MassCUE) conference this past fall and the Massachusetts School Library Association (MSLA) Spring 2013 conference. As a future school library teacher, I look forward to teaching my school community about these new technologies and how they can incorporate them every day into their classrooms.

Thank you to the MSLA Awards Committee for awarding me the 2013 Audrey Friend Scholarship. I am very grateful for this wonderful opportunity.

AUTHOR INTERVIEWS: David Biedrzycki

A Visit with David Biedrzycki by Sandy Kelly



*David Biedrzycki greets a fan at the Author Meet & Greet.
Photo credit: Richard Curran.*

This has been a good year of school visits for author and illustrator David Biedrzycki. While that may be fun and glamorous, it has both good and bad points. Dave finds it exciting that his program has developed into an extension of his bookmaking process. He uses school visits not only as a chance to show students how he creates, but also to gauge their reaction to his ideas and sketches. The students' reactions give him valuable insight into what they are grasping. It is almost like test marketing! The hard part is finding a couple of weeks free to work in the office on his current project. Working in hotel rooms is not ideal.

Dave's new project is a story about two bears rudely awakened from hibernation by a nature film crew. Suddenly, the film crew gets word that they have to head back downtown to cover a breaking news event. They do not realize that the bears are hitching a ride on the back of the news truck. The fun starts as the bears make their way around the town having a wonderful time. However, the town residents are freaking out! David has been sharing this story with students all over

the country and as far away as Mumbai, India. After these school visits, he re-sketches and rewrites parts of the story. Students' feedback has helped David to shape the story.

Me and My Dragon was created in the same manner. "I showed it to over 60,000 students over a period of 3 years!" Dave said. "It is now a crowd favorite, and a sequel, *Me and My Dragon: Scared of Halloween* is due out in July."

Dave's two visits to my school were fantastic! Kids, teachers and parents are clamoring to have him back again. He will be appearing at the Author Festival in Newburyport on April 26-27, 2013.

AUTHOR INTERVIEWS: Loree Griffin Burns

By Amy Bloom

Loree Griffin Burns has been a lifelong writer. She admits that in her younger days, it was bad fiction that she wrote! The one thing she knows much more about: science. Loree never intended to write books for budding young scientists. She wrote her doctorate in a very obscure topic, something about protozoa and yeast.



Life, as it always does, had other plans for Loree. Shortly after graduation, she took her love of writing and meshed it with her passion and curiosity for science. Her *Field* series, *Tracking Trash: Flotsam, Jetsam, and the Science of Ocean Motion*, is about trash on our world.

Loree went on to write *The Hive Detectives: Chronicle of a Honey Bee Catastrophe* and *Scientific Discovery from Your Own Backyard*.

As we continue to build our accessible nonfiction collections, especially in the Science section, we are excited to see children become lifelong scientists. Loree does not visit www.loreeburns.com.

AUTHOR INTERVIEWS: Rob Buyea

by Susan Harari

Picture credits: Richard Curran.

My students picked *Because of Mr. Terupt* (2010) as their choice for this year's Massachusetts Children's Book Award, so I will meet author Rob Buyea during this year's MSLA conference. A sequel, *Mr. Terupt Falls Again*, came out in 2012. Both books are so good that I can't keep either one on the shelf. Rob taught third and fourth grades for six years in Connecticut and currently teaches biology at Northfield Mount Hermon in Massachusetts, where he also coaches wrestling.

S.H.: What drew you to teaching and specifically to science? Did you have a childhood interest in science?

Rob: My primary interest in school was wrestling. I've been wrestling since I was four years old. I went to Syracuse to study education, and he suggested pursuing science, which had been a favorite subject in high school. So I studied biology and I wrestled. I had a teacher who took a class that got me into the elementary classroom, and ended up getting a masters in elementary education. I was surrounded by people who always wanted to teach, but once I started, it became a passion.

S.H.: You're not a guy with a lot of free time: teaching, coaching, three young daughters (ages 6, 7 and 9); what made you write?

Rob: I got inspired by my students. I thought, if I'm going to teach writing, then I have to be a writer. Initially, I wrote stories all the time. I talk to kids about a writing switch, like a switch on the wall you can turn on and off. That happened in my writers' group.

S.H.: *Because of Mr. Terupt* is narrated by seven of his students; it's an ambitious structure for a children's book.

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Rob: I had the characters from the beginning. They showed up, telling me about the first day of school. Some of them instance --

S.H.: The smart one.

Rob: Right, I had him nailed right away. Jeffrey, the one who hates school? That's really all I knew about him; I didn't know I never considered having more or less than seven, or telling it in a different way. Once I started sharing it, people were

S.H.: Including John Irving! I've never seen a blurb from him on a children's book.

Rob: We met through wrestling. John's sons went to N.M.H. He asked to read my work, loved it and jumped on board

S.H.: Middle grade books can be tricky in an elementary school. I have kids reading *Twilight* on their own, and that counts as *Again* more of a middle grade novel?

Rob: Well, the characters are in 6th grade now. I have fans who are 9-year-old kids and others who are 8th grade girls. It's laughable that people are worried that a girl gets her period in my story or that I mention cigarettes, but in *Hunger Games*

S.H.: What's the future for books and reading?

Rob: My school visit schedule is slamming busy. The state book award contests really help; *Because of Mr. Terupt* has been used for summer reading, or as an all-school book. I think teachers and students can both connect to Mr. Terupt. I used to read it and wanted me to stop so we could talk about what was going on in the book. Sadly, it's harder to have these discussions in

S.H.: I should have asked you about . . .

Rob: My new book, tentatively titled *Me and Maggie*. I hope to have it done by next spring. It's about a brother and sister who you laugh, but also make you think, much like my first two. Will I get back to Mr. Terupt someday? I hear from readers who are not a big reader of series, but writers do get really attached to their characters, so Mr. Terupt might come back for another

AUTHOR INTERVIEWS: David Hyde Costello

by Laura Beals D'Elia

Picture credits: Richard Curran.



with my sketchbook and just coming up with "Author's Sketchbook" presentation. "I liked the same. I just have more technique built up

Some of David's best work is inspired by his nephews. The middle nephew was into pig stories. His birthday was coming and he wanted to make him a pig story for a birthday present. At the time, the nephew's little brother was having a hard time being part of the group. He wanted to write a story that addressed that problem. *Little Pig Joins the Band* is a story with the message that everyone can contribute to a group endeavor no matter how little. What a birthday present!

In David's school visit for *Little Pig Joins the Band*, he shares some of his original songs, and some of his homemade instruments, some of which are either very inexpensive or found in a typical recycling bin. "There is a bit of engineering, a bit of invention, and a lot of creativity."

What do you do when you struggle with writing or illustrating?

After some consideration, David realized that "it's fun to have a problem to think about. I'm much happier if I'm trying to solve a problem than I am if I'm just part of the process."

What advice would you give aspiring authors/illustrators?

David believes that until you sell your first book, find something else that you also enjoy doing that could be a means of support. "What is unique and what works for one person may not work for another." "Don't worry," says David, "you're going to figure it out."

Oh yeah! What was one of your favorite books as a child?

What were some of your influences as a child?

To see David perform at school visits, you would know that he loves to get into his presentations, which made me wonder, what influenced him as a child? "I love television" and remembers watching a lot of *The Muppet Show*. His favorite TV show was "Turn the World Around." Looking back on it now, David feels that that was something that both kids and grownups would like and it didn't talk down to anyone.

Some would say that when you grow up you lose the ability to fully enjoy things. In fact, David remembers being about ten years old and being aware that he was growing up. The first time he saw Jim Henson's *The Dark Crystal* and having the revelation that there's not a lot you have to give up just because you're a grownup. Costello's school visits. In his picture books, *I Can Help*, and *Here They Come*, he gets into his performances.



Where do you get your ideas?

Whenever David needs a new idea for a story or a drawing, he likes to start with a scribble. He doesn't know what he's drawing but he keeps going. "The scribble is the stuff." David loves showing kids how to do this and how to draw as a kid; I still draw now and the process is the same after doing it for 40 years."

How did you come up with the idea for Little Pig Joins the Band?

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David was quick to respond. The story “Christmas Eve,” which is the last story in the book *Frog and Toad All Year* by A literature.”

For more information about David Hyde Costello and school visits, please go to www.davidhydecostello.com.

AUTHOR INTERVIEWS: Jef Czekaj
by Barbara Zinkovich

*Jeff Czekaj has a loyal fan in Cindy Erle.
Photo credits: Richard Curran.*

When I looked through the list of choices of authors to interview at the MSLA conference I immediately recognized Jef Czekaj’s name. Just the Sunday before, I had read an article in the *Boston Globe Magazine* about the Somerville Cat Festival. Czekaj served as the emcee. Feeling an immediate kinship with a fellow cat lover AND children’s book author, I looked forward to meeting him all week. Here are the top ten facts I learned about Jef Czekaj in no particular order:

1. It’s pronounced “check-eye”.
2. Czekaj loved science and playing the violin in middle school.
3. A Charlesbridge Publishing Company art director saw a poster he made for a rock band and tracked him down. He Mary Corcoran.
4. Czekaj participated in speed dating with an author at the Massachusetts Library Association conference last year.
5. He created a comic for Nickelodeon magazine called *Shark Hunters*.



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6. Nickelodeon made a pilot episode of *Shark Hunters* with Dustin Hoffman's voice as Grandpa Shark.
7. Unfortunately, the pilot wasn't picked up, but now Czekaj's mom believes he finally has a "real job."
8. A linguistics major, Czekaj actually used his degree when writing *A Call for a New Alphabet*.
9. His next book will be about geography.
10. "People say to do what you love and I've always loved drawing."

AUTHOR INTERVIEWS: Diane DeGroat
by Linda Walkins

Photo credits: Richard Curran

As a devoted picture book fan, award-winning illustrator Diane DeGroat has assembled an amazing collection of picture books, arranged alphabetically by artist, line her shelves. She loves beautiful books, particularly those that like David Wiesner (*Art & Max*) and Roberto Innocenti (*Rose Blanche*).



Diane is a talented water colorist herself. Throughout her career, she has painted pencil or charcoal drawings for a number of chapter books. She enjoys going back and forth with black and white. To date, she has illustrated over 130 books, providing artwork for many authors, including Anne Drummond (*The Pioneer Woman*).

Although, she considers herself an illustrator first, she has also taken on the challenge of writing her own books, the *Gilbert and Friends* series, which she wrapped up in 2012 with *Gilbert and the Lost Tooth* for her young classmates. Each title centers on a holiday or other significant childhood event.

When illustrating another writer's book, Diane doesn't actually meet or work directly with the author. She has the opportunity to team up with co-author and photographer, Shelley Rotner to create the artwork for *Teeth* (Scholastic 2009) and *Homer* (Scholastic 2012). Diane enjoyed collaborating with the author who composed the stories and created the digital artwork.

When asked to complete the sentence, "Picture books are . . .," Diane quickly said, "they are fun to work with." She has the ideal career and thinks highly of everyone involved in the field, from the publishers and finally the librarians and teachers.

Diane is available for school visits. She likes to talk with the young readers after the visit and share the ideas they come up with during question and answer sessions. She especially appreciates working with enthusiastic students who bring excitement about her work to the students.

Now that Gilbert has been retired, she is working on a new series which will be unlike anything she has done before. She is currently working with Photoshop software and her digital drawing tablet. She plans to continue her exploration of digital art.

While we chatted in the exhibit hall at the MSLA conference, Diane greeted several other fans, autographed books and

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welcoming. Everyone at MSLA 2013 was most fortunate to have the opportunity to meet this talented and engaging author and her titles to my own growing collection of picture books.

To learn more about Diane deGroat, her books, or her school visit programs, please take a moment to explore her full list of titles at <http://www.dianedegroat.com/index.html>

AUTHOR INTERVIEWS: Kathleen Duble

by Chris Steinhauser

Schools are trying to connect literature with the curriculum as much as possible. Historical fiction is popular now for a variety of reasons. If you are looking for some great historical fiction and a great author to visit your school, you should consider Kathleen Duble.

Kathleen was at the MSLA conference this year and, along with her colleague Anne Broyles, gave a wonderful workshop titled "How to Make History Come Alive for your Students." The workshop included an extensive book list of titles and projects for schools working on Common Core Standards.

Kathleen Duble is the author of several historical fiction titles including *Sacrifice*, *Hearts of Iron*, *Quest*, *The Story of S* and recently, *Phantoms in the Snow*. She visited my middle school two years ago and it was a wonderful visit. Her books are popular and have won numerous awards. On top of all that, Kathleen is a really nice person. If you are looking for a great local author to consider Kathleen.

Contact information for Kathleen Duble can be found on her web site: <http://www.kathleenduble.net/home.html>

AUTHOR INTERVIEWS: Jack Gantos

by Barbara Zinkovich

Photo credits: Richard Curran

Jack Gantos is a children's literature icon. He's given the world many beloved characters through the years –characters like Rotten Ralph and Rotten Ralph. Ubiquitous at the MSLA conference this year, Gantos not only presented two sessions, but he also held a round table at the author Meet & Greet and delivered a side-splitting keynote speech at the awards banquet.

My task: to interview Gantos. But what more could I possibly share about Mr. Gantos that this audience of savvy and well-read librarians wouldn't already know? While waiting in line to have my *Jack Drift* books signed, I marveled at how Gantos makes every person feel special. So, once I reached the table, I told Mr. Gantos about my task but I knew I could see that his time was limited. I asked if I could hover at the table and observe. Of course, he agreed.

He doesn't rush. He takes your hand, looks you in the eye and doesn't move you along. He writes names on a scrap of paper and you can be sure to spell each one correctly with his signature flourish using a Mont Blanc 146 pen. Gantos scoffed that someone else had asked if it was a quill pen. Gantos listens and seems to gain energy from each interaction.

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A librarian
she discovered *Joey Pigza Swallowed the Key*. After years of struggling, her da
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Yet another shared that she read *Hole in My Life* aloud on a family road trip. Someone else informed Gantos that she could H
hard. After two endorsements in a five minute period, I added that title to my "To Read" list.

A 38-year teaching veteran told Gantos she always uses his books in her classroom.

And so on. Everyone who waited patiently in line was rewarded with a personal conversation as Jack signed their books. Wh
and said, "These are for my UNborn grandchildren!"

As I walked away, the line was still growing. Gantos was busy signing a book for a young girl. He told her that he
as prominently as he wrote his own. He took his time talking to her, drawing and laughing. Years later when she
won't remember waiting in line, but she will remember how special Jack Gantos made her feel.



AUTHOR INTERVIEWS: Wayne Geehan

by Judi Paradis

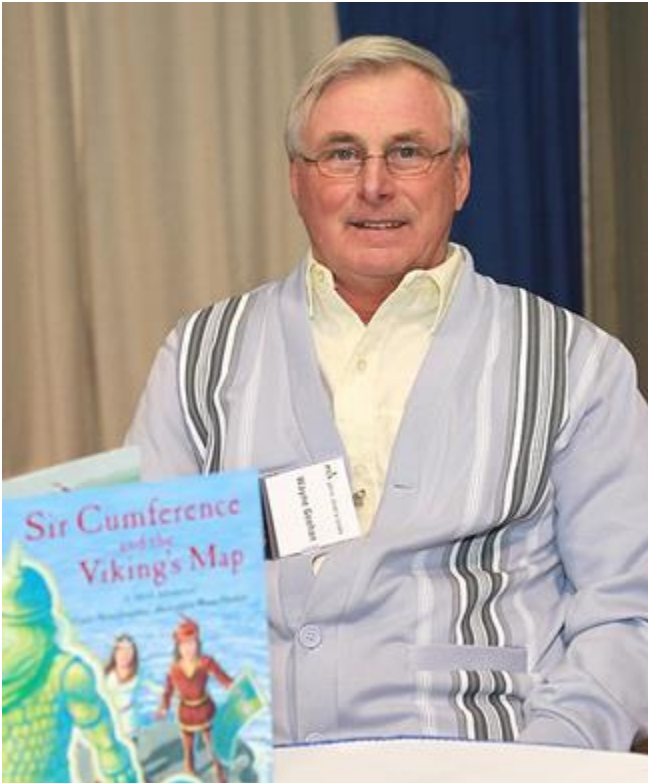


Photo credit: Richard Curran.

Wayne Geehan is probably best known as the illustrator of the popular *Sir Cumference* series of math adventure books for middle grade children. These books, written by teacher-author Cindy Neuschwander, follow the adventures of an Arthurian-style knight who uses big ideas from mathematics to help him conquer his world. Geehan has illustrated eleven books in this series, and the eleventh, out later this year, will follow *Sir Cumference* as he uses graphs and pie charts to help him select the best chef for a party at the castle.

Geehan has also illustrated books for other artists including *Multiplying Menace: The Revenge of Rumpelstiltskin* by Pam Calvert. Like many illustrators, Geehan does not work directly with the authors of his books, but works through an editor. It can be challenging, as in the case of the *Sir Cumference* books, where the author actually lives on the opposite coast and his editor is in Texas.

Geehan also creates sets for local theater companies and designs jigsaw puzzles and games. He and his family are currently working on developing a series of party games where participants role play as pirates or other characters and work together to solve a problem.

Geehan lives in Massachusetts, and his website is <http://www.waynegeehan.com/profile.asp>

AUTHOR INTERVIEWS: Grace Lin

by Jennifer Kelley Reed

Photo credits: Richard Curran

Grace Lin is the author of early readers, picture books and novels, including *Ling and Ting*, *Dim Sum for Everyone!*, and *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon*. She has a [wonderful website](#) full of information about her, her books, her family, and the writing process. I enjoyed meeting and speaking with her at MSLA13. Here's what we discussed:

JKR: You have a very loyal following in my library. How might you explain this?

GL: Thank you! I hope it's because readers can sense how much I care about them. In my new book, *Starry River of the Sky*, there is a character who says, "When people tell stories, they share things about themselves." So, my books are my way of trying to share myself and, in a way, I become friends with the reader.

JKR: When do you know if a story idea will be a novel, picture book or early reader?

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GL: I write out my idea. I sketch it out and it just happens organically. The story seems to choose.

JKR: Which is the hardest format to write for?

GL: For me, it is the early readers. I have to be concise and interesting. Writing early readers that have enough of a story and are interesting is harder than writing a novel.

JKR: *Ling and Ting* is wonderful! As a library teacher, I love having great early readers to promote. This book is also fun because we have many twins in my school and they love telling people that this is exactly what it is like to be a twin. Are there plans for more books in this series?

GL: Yes! I have just finished *Ling and Ting Share a Birthday*.

JKR: What is your favorite part of the writing process?

GL: It depends upon the book. Mostly it is the revision. The first drafts are hard, but I like to go back and work with what I have written.

JKR: Do you have your entire story complete before you begin writing or does it unfold as you write?

GL: For novels, yes, I have to submit an outline to my editor and publisher. Sometimes things change along the way.

JKR: The titles of your books are lyrical and magical. How do you come up with them? Does the title emerge from the story or is it the other way around?

GL: Thank you! It's really, really hard to come up with the titles. Sometimes I start with a title, but my editor will want something different and we have to go back and forth. For *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon*, I ultimately realized the last line of the book should be the title. When I was writing *Starry River of the Sky*, I also knew that the last line would be the title. However, we had to change the title because it was similar to another book in publication.

JKR: The imagery in your novels is so strong. Do you visualize your stories when you are writing them?

GL: I'm happy to hear this. I draw a map of the story so I can see the whole environment and where the characters will be during the story. I can see where the characters will be traveling. The third book may include a map!

JKR: You are a very talented illustrator. I think it helps that you create the cover illustrations and interior art for your novels.

GL: Thank you. It is important that I am able to create my cover art. I can control what is there and ensure the cultural integrity of the cover.

JKR: Are there any books or writers who have influenced your writing?

GL: Lucy Maud Montgomery for one. I love *Anne of Green Gables*. Natalie Babbitt is another. Her writing is



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amazing. There are many books, but *Cricket in Times in Square*, *Charlotte's Web* and *The Search for Delicious* would definitely be on the list.

JKR: Do you have any advice for young writers?

GL: Read! Read everything!

AUTHOR INTERVIEWS: Ralph Masiello

by Ellen Brandt



Ralph Masiello loves coming to the MSLA conference! "It's like family," he says as librarians stop by to catch up and give him a hug.

I first encountered Ralph Masiello's enthusiasm and energy when he did a presentation at the 2010 MSLA conference. After the conference I purchased some of his signature drawing books for my elementary school library; They were a big hit with the students, many of whom were ready to move beyond the Ed Emberley thumbprint books but frustrated by the sophistication needed to master the Lee Ames drawing books.

Q: What new books should we expect from you in the near future?

A: *Ralph Masiello's Fairy Drawing Book* just came out. A Christmas drawing book is due out in July and I am finishing a train drawing book. After that is an aliens drawing book which will be structured like my robots book. It will be a mix and match where you learn how to draw body parts and then put them together as completely new aliens."

Q. Do you visit schools?

A: Oh yes! I have been to over 2300 schools since I started in 1987. [Check out my website](#) for more information, or take a look at this [school visit flyer](#).

Q. What grade levels do you work with?

A. Preschool through college! Some examples:

- Elementary schools: drawings at a level that kids can do themselves.
- Middle schools: visual journals, altered books, research (because 70% of an author's job is research)
- High schools: portfolio reviews

Q. Visual journal?

A. Here's an example. [Ralph handed me a copy of *The Mystic Phyles*, beasts which he illustrated.] A lot of people are visual learners. I was a reluctant writer. If teachers had let me start with a visual journal, I would have been more motivated!

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Q. Who are your favorite illustrators?

A. N.C. Wyeth (no longer with us) who illustrated many of the children's classics, Paul Zelinsky and others.

Q. What mediums do you use for your illustrations?

A. Oil paint. If I could use oil paint for the rest of my life, I'd be a happy guy! I also use pen and pencil for the drawing books.

Q. Can you teach me how to draw something?

A: Sure! [Ralph then drew an owl on the tablecloth while guiding me through the steps using simple shapes and letters. Sadly, I didn't take a photo of the masterpiece.]

AUTHOR INTERVIEWS: Richard Michelson

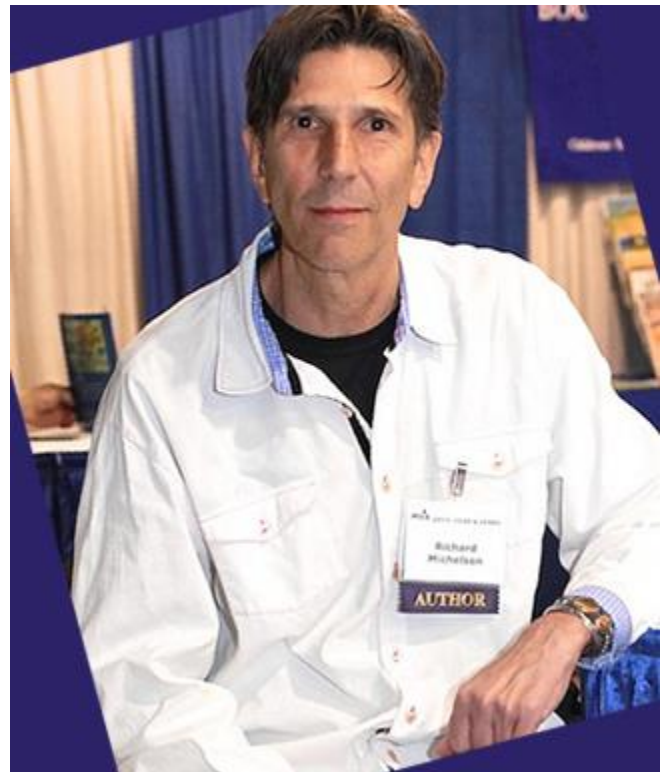
by Judi Paradis

Photo credits: Richard Curran.

Richard Michelson is an award-winning poet, art dealer, and author of a number of children's picture books. Many of his books have strong social justice themes.

Michelson is current the Poet Laureate of Northampton, Massachusetts, and has published several books of poetry. He conducts poetry workshops for groups of all ages, "from second grade to adult." Michelson says he often starts workshops with middle and high school students by asking, "Who likes poetry?" and admits that few hands go up. "But," he says, "by the end of the session, I can convince kids they really like poetry." He links poems to music to help them understand it. Michelson says he mostly does day-long presentations in the U.S. but has traveled abroad to India, Russia and other countries to conduct longer poetry residencies.

The great majority of Michelson's school visits, however, are invitations to talk to kids about race and social justice, and the connection with bullying. Michelson grew up in a Jewish family living in an African-American neighborhood in New York, and many of his books address the difficulties facing these groups as they acclimate to the American culture. For example, his book *As Good As Anybody* shows how Polish Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel worked to help Martin Luther King, Jr. and chronicles their remarkable friendship. Michelson said, "The book shows kids that it is okay to reach out. Even Martin Luther King needed support to reach his dream. You don't have to do everything on your own."



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Michelson's most recent book *Twice As Good* tells the story of the first African-American to build and operate a golf course. Willie Powell dreamed of playing golf but experienced discrimination. Michelson shows how this relatively unknown figure in history worked "twice as hard" to reach his dreams.

Michelson also writes poetry books for children. In *Animals That Ought to Be*, Michelson and illustrator Leonard Baskin create a series of animals that would make great pets. They include creatures that will clean up your room, yell at your siblings, or spy on your parents. Michelson says when he works with students, he invites them to come up with their own ideal pets using either words or pictures. He explains that this is exactly how he and Baskin created their book.

Michelson owns the R. Michelson Gallery in Northampton, Massachusetts. His website is <http://richardmichelson.com>

AUTHOR INTERVIEWS: Gregory Mone

by Anita Celluci



Photo credits: Richard Curran.

As I looked through the list of authors, I was interested in interviewing an author unfamiliar to me. I got to know them informally by visiting their websites and reading their blogs. Gregory Mone's writing style and sense of humor caught my interest and I decided to interview him at MSLA 2013. I approached him during the Author Meet & Greet on Monday and asked for a few minutes of his time. He was very friendly and open to chatting informally. We had an enjoyable conversation.

Gregory is a Harvard College graduate and a contributing editor at *Popular Science* magazine. He writes articles for adults about intelligent robots, Irish mythology, cartoons and alternative energy for many publications. I was interested to find out how he made the leap from adult science articles to writing novels for kids.

AC: Often we hear that writers know from the time that they were young that they would become an author. Was it like this for you?

GM: Actually, I was a history major in college but I did like to write as a kid. I was very influenced by the writing center in school. Two of my friends and I wrote collaboratively in elementary school. One of us would start the story, save it to a CD, and pass it on to the next guy. It was the first time I realized that writing could be fun and not work. I use this strategy when I do workshops with kids now.

AC: Why did you decide to write for kids?

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GM: It was because of my nieces and nephews. I enjoyed playing with them and creating elaborate treasure hunts. After one particularly intricate treasure hunt, my nieces and nephews asked me to write it down, and I thought, hey, I can do that!

AC: Is there a writer who was an influence to you?

GM: My biggest influence came from *A Wrinkle In Time* by Madeleine L'Engle. In fact, I am reading it again now! I think what intrigued me about this book is the cosmology and adventure.

AC: What advice would you give to young writers?

GM: Read! Wait, every author says that! Be unique, read, find your voice.

AC: Do you have any strategies for when you get “stuck”?

GM: Yes, I get up and move! I usually will take a walk, do yard work or play basketball. I also like to dictate into a handheld device when I take long drives. This is a way that I record ideas for my writing.

AC: What are you working on currently?

GM: I am working on a science book for kids for the first time! It's also the first time that I am working with the illustrator. The book is about the life cycle of a soda bottle. The title isn't firm yet, but I think it might be *Bottle of Pop*.

Learn more about [Gregory Mone](#) on his blog or watch a [video](#) about his book!

AUTHOR INTERVIEWS: Heidi Stemple

by **Alissa Rosellini**

Photo credits: Richard Curran

One of the first things I noticed when I looked at Heidi Stemple's table was the riveting cover of her newest book, co-authored with her mother, Jane Yolen: *Bad Girls: Sirens, Jezebels, Murderesses, Thieves & Other Female Villains*. In this book, Yolen and Stemple delve into the lives of 26 infamous women from history in an attempt to go beyond their “bad girl” reputations to a more nuanced view of their deeds and misdeeds. The combination of witty essays and sassy comic book style art makes this book a sure winner for teen readers!

As a librarian, I had to ask Heidi if libraries play a role in helping her research her books. She gave me the answer I was looking for, which of course was yes! Her mother has researched folk and fairy tales at the British Library, and Heidi herself spent a lot of time in the Jones Library in Amherst, Massachusetts, during the writing of *Bad Girls*. Heidi also reminisced about her elementary school library at the Smith College Campus School. Apparently, there is a reading nook under the eaves that is painted to look like Narnia!

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Heidi has contributed countless recipes to her mother's books, and noted that recipes, like folklore, are passed down from generation to generation. She likes the fact that everyone, even young children, can participate in the cooking process. I asked her to pretend that she had to eat one dessert every day for the rest of her life. She had a hard time picking just one, but in the end, decided on "pot de crème," a French custard often made with chocolate. If you Google this dessert, you will instantly understand why she picked it!

Coming into this interview, I was aware of Heidi's collaboration with her mother, but I had no idea that her two brothers were involved in the book business as well! Jason Stemple, a nature/wildlife photographer, and Adam Stemple, a writer and musician, frequently collaborate with their mother on various projects. Currently, all four of them are working on a book of stories about real animals, including Owen and Mzee, George Balanchine's elephant ballerinas, and more!

Being a children's author is only one of Heidi's many roles. She is also a dedicated mother, ballet costume designer, and owling aficionado. Owling is just what it sounds like: observing owls in their natural habitat. Heidi goes owling once a year, from midnight to 7 AM. She had some of her equipment with her, and it was so neat to hear the owl calls she had recorded! I was also extremely impressed by the ballet costumes she has created.

If you are interested in booking Heidi for school visits, take a look at her website:<http://www.heidiestemple.com/> or email her at: HeidiEys@gmail.com.



AUTHOR INTERVIEWS: Melissa Stewart

Common Core and Nonfiction

by Sandy Kelly

Photo credits: Richard Curran.

Melissa Stewart is an award-winning nonfiction author who loves to learn, understands what is important in the Common Core and inspires her listeners with some great ideas! She presented a wonderful conference session for the elementary level, *Using Nonfiction to Address Common Core*. Attendees came away with lesson plans and fabulous resources. She even provided her audience with flash drives to take home which included information on text features, Reader's Theater, Reading Buddies and extensive booklists. Her own list of published works is multiple pages and can be accessed from her content-rich website, Melissa's Clubhouse: <http://www.melissa-stewart.com>.



Her presentation drilled right down into the Common Core,

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addressing what resources to be searching for and how to evaluate them. She offered suggestions to connect actual books with the writing standards. She has extensive knowledge of the skills on which teachers and school librarians need to be working. Melissa also contributes to magazines including *National Geographic World* and *Natural New England*. When she isn't writing or researching, Melissa speaks at schools and teaches local writing courses.

As a result of her conference session, Melissa will be speaking at Carlisle School on May 2nd. Those who would like to attend or who want additional information should contact [Sandy Kelly](#).

AUTHOR INTERVIEWS: Matt Tavares

by Sarah T. Novogrodsky

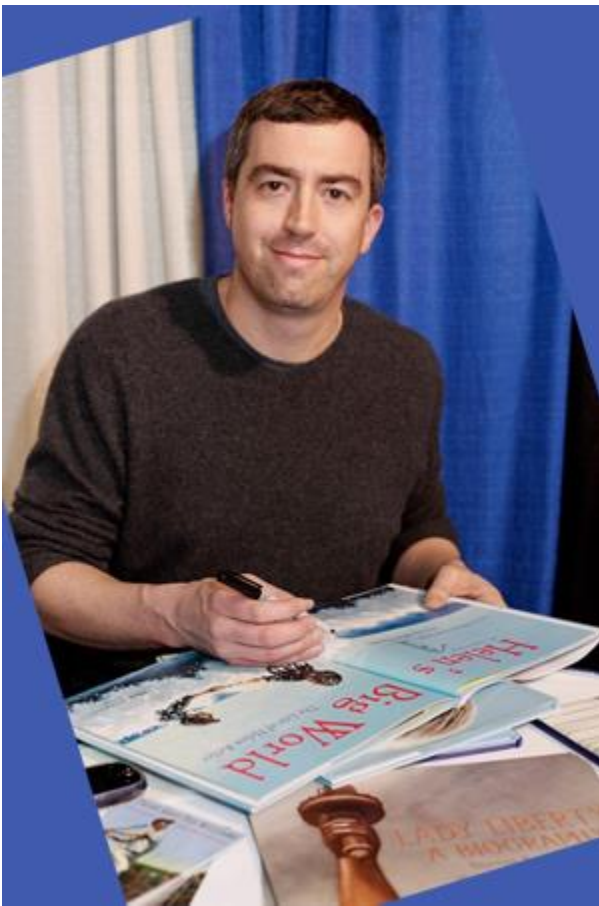


Photo credits: Richard Curran

Matt Tavares's books first entered our household shortly after my son was born in 1999. *Zachary's Game* was the perfect book to introduce my young reader to the joy of being a baseball fan. The night before the MSLA conference, I mentioned to my sons that I was going to speak with Matt, the author/illustrator of *Zachary's Game*. They remembered it enthusiastically, "Oh yeah, that was a great book!" Several of Matt's books have made their way onto the boys' shelves as they've continued to collect baseball books over the years.

Matt himself played ball as a kid and got his fill of sports stories, thanks to Matt Christopher. When he's not working, he makes time to play on a softball league. I asked him about the origin of his baseball stories, and he explained that books like *Mud Ball* and *Oliver's Ball* are from baseball-related stories that he has stumbled across during his own reading. Tavares's non-fiction titles include *Becoming Babe Ruth*, *There Goes Ted Williams: The Greatest Hitter Who Ever Lived*, and *Hank Aaron's Dream*. He has more baseball stories up his sleeve, and we have the eager readers waiting to read them.

Matt has developed a good working relationship with writer Doreen Rappaport through their joint work on *Lady Liberty: A Biography*, *Jack's Path of Courage - The Life of John F. Kennedy*, and *Helen's Big World: The Life of Helen Keller*. The illustration of these non-fiction books requires research and the study of primary sources, a whole different process compared to letting his imagination flow with the art work for *Jack and the Beanstalk*.

Tavares loves his work, but if he could explore another career it would be animation. Speaking with my wisdom of a half a century of life, I told him it's not too late to learn something new.