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Volume 30, Issue 3

THE

# Teaching Librarian

The Magazine of the Ontario School Library Association

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## Diversified Collections

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## Student Voice, Student Choice

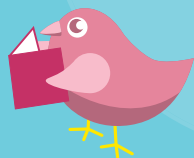
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OLA  
SUPER-  
CONFERENCE  
RECAP

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**readers' rights** @ your library





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# THE Teaching Librarian

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# readers' rights @ your library

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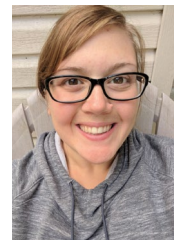
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## TingL Mission

### *The Teaching Librarian*

*The Teaching Librarian* (TingL) is the official magazine of the Ontario School Library Association (OSLA). It is published three times a year to support OSLA members in providing significant and effective library programs and services. *The Teaching Librarian* promotes library programs and curriculum development that furthers exemplary educational objectives. The magazine fosters effective collaboration within the school library community and provides a forum to share experience and expertise.

## TingL References

*The Teaching Librarian* is a general magazine for OSLA members and not a scholarly journal. If your article does require citation of sources, please provide them within the text of your article or column with as much or as little bibliographic information as necessary for identification (e.g. book title, year). If you feel that the works you are citing require full identification, please provide a bibliography at the end of your piece, formatted according to the latest Chicago Manual of Style (16<sup>th</sup> edition) or APA Style.

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## TingL Submission Guidelines

Please Note: Themes are subject to change.

September 2023 V. 31, Issue 1	“Everybody @ Your Library” Deadline: May 31, 2023
January 2024 V. 31, Issue 2	“Gaming @ Your Library” Deadline: September 30, 2023

Articles of 150-250 words, 500 words, or 800-1,300 words are welcome. Articles, when approved, should be accompanied by high quality images and/or graphics whenever possible. Text must be sent electronically, preferably in a Microsoft Word (or compatible) file. Images or graphics must be sent separately in a digital format, such as .jpeg, .png, .tiff, or .ai. The minimum resolution must be 1000 px at 150 dpi. With photos that contain a recognized individual, please secure the individual's permission in writing for the use of the photo. Photos taken at public events or crowd shots taken in a public place do not require permission from the subjects. All submissions are subject to editing for consistency, length, content, and style. Journalistic style is preferred. *The Teaching Librarian* adheres to Canadian Press Style. Articles must include the working title, name of author, and email address in the body of the text. OSLA reserves the right to use pictures in other OSLA publications unless permission is limited or denied at the time of publishing.

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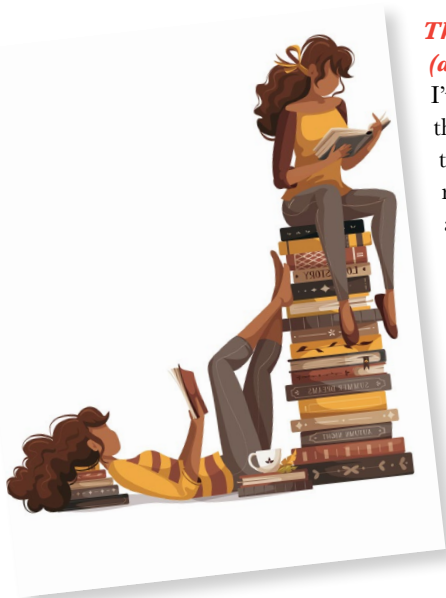
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# The Editor's Notebook

In 1992, French author and teacher Daniel Pennac wrote the short essay *Comme un Roman (Like a Novel)*, that was later translated into English as *The Rights of the Reader*. In this playful essay, Pennac outlined ten rights that our young readers should have. The articles in this issue look at some of these rights in ways that are exciting, daring, and innovative.

## *The right not to read / The right to skip / The right not to finish a book*

The first three rights in Pennac's essay speak to something so fundamental about reading that, I fear, booklovers can sometimes forget. I also think that these are rights that school libraries have embraced over the past few decades. We realize that school libraries are more than places where students come to sit quietly and read. Instead, they are vibrant social and academic spaces that encourage learning and experimentation through a plethora of pursuits. The right not to read, to skip, or to put down a book is so crucial for many of our students. Reading is a very important part of education, but it's also important to encourage other educational pursuits. Christopher Knapp's article on the value of gaming at the library is a great jumpstart to embracing the right not to read.



## *The right to read it (again)*

I've added the brackets to this right to emphasize the right to read *and* the right to read something again – both rights that have a lack of judgement at their core. In the LLC, we can make space for readers to choose not to read, while at the same time making space for our voracious readers to find a welcoming spot to devour their

favourite book over and over again. School libraries are safe spaces for our readers to not be judged for what they read and to connect with others about what they find on the shelf. Shelagh Straughan's article presents a fundamental argument for accessibility and protection from judgement. It also sparks a connection to those books we love and makes connections to the other rights Pennac expressed. Likewise, Tina Zita's visual essay for this issue brings together a variety of opinions and is a brilliant representation of the right to read it again (and many other rights) that are echoed in Straughan's article.



## *The right to read anything / The right to mistake a book for real life*

These are tricky rights to balance in a school library since LLC's are parts of a larger bureaucratic system, plagued with barriers we didn't make and constraints we cannot always work around. However, these two rights are so fundamental in supporting children that we cannot sit idly by as they are ignored or actively dismantled. Jonelle St Aubyn writes a powerful article

with thoughtful steps to protect a student's freedom to read. In the same way that we protect them from judgement, we must also protect their right to access books that they can see themselves in. Amie Wright and Lindsay Gibb also explore this right through their article that examines other forms of reading, and how we can support and protect a student's right to read something that has traditionally been diminished. The crucial part at the centre of these rights is giving students the chance to see themselves in the things that they are reading – to help make meaning of their real, lived experiences.

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Kasey Whalley

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### ***The right to read anywhere / The right to read out loud***

Although we would all love for students (and staff) to come to the LLC to read, it's important that we look to support readers wherever they happen to be. The visual essay "Live from OLASC" and Kate Johnson-McGregor's recap of the 2023 SuperConference are fantastic representations of these two rights. Reading is something we can, and arguably should, do everywhere, with other people and out loud. Oral storytelling is an important part of reading's rich history, and the SuperConference is a place that embraces the connections and learning that can arise in a public, spoken sharing of stories and truths.

### ***The right to dip in***

Figuring out if a book or piece of reading is the right fit can sometimes be tumultuous. Dipping into a story is a right that readers should have, without the pressure to know right away if they love a book. Lisa Noble has given great suggestions in this issue's "Shelf Awareness" that we can all dip into. Likewise, our amazing author spotlight on Leanne Lieberman gives readers the opportunity to dip into some of her motivations and thoughts about her new novel, *Cleaning Up*. Dipping in is a great way to figure out if our next favourite is right under our nose.

### ***The right to be silent***

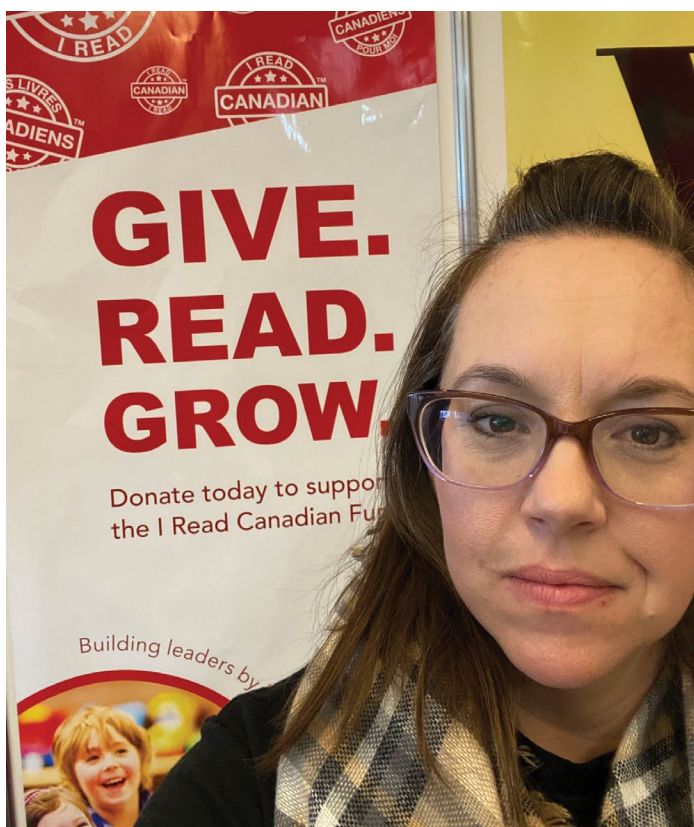
If you've ever been in a stadium with thousands of people all observing a moment of silence in remembrance or memorial, you know how powerful silence can be. There is a strong need to be vocal advocates of school libraries, and we are certainly in a time when we need to speak out about the injustices we witness being committed against our spaces and resources. There is also a quiet power in looking across a room and nodding to someone, recognizing them as a comrade without saying a word. The right to be silent is less about *not speaking up*, and more about *finding our strength* in the quiet truth that school library professionals are here for each other and we are all committed to protecting the rights of our readers.

I hope you dip into this issue wherever it may find you, reading it quietly or sharing it aloud with a friend as you each find yourself in the pages and exclaim "that's just like me" perhaps skipping over paragraphs, rereading it cover to cover, or barely at all. However you read this issue (or don't), school libraries are here to support your rights as a reader. ■



# President's Report

“We can imagine the books we'd like to read, even if they have not yet been written, and we can imagine libraries full of books we would like to possess, even if they are well beyond our reach, because we enjoy dreaming up a library that reflects every one of our interests and every one of our foibles--a library that, in its variety and complexity, fully reflects the reader we are.” — Alberto Manguel



It has been an honour to serve on the OSLA Council for the last three years, and especially through 2022 as the OSLA President. Being on the OSLA Council is a volunteer position that I was presented with as an opportunity, not only my own learning, but as a chance to advocate for learning for all those within the education system about the importance of school libraries. Little did I know, in the fall of 2019, just how much I would learn and how much I would gain from connecting with other like-minded school library advocates across Ontario.



We made it a goal this year to connect with the OSLA membership through consistent member engagement emails about school library news, ONLibChats, #ONSchoolLibrary Twitter chats, and perhaps the most successful campaign, sharing our #SchoolLibraryJoy. To share our joy even further, we created t-shirts that have been sold through the Library MarketPlace and were also featured at the BCTLA conference and Treasure Mountain Canada Research Symposium. Seeing posts of school libraries re-opening and coming

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Beth Lyons

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back to vibrant full-colour life this past year has fueled my own #SchoolLibraryJoy and that of many of us across the education system. I continue to see posts about book tastings, students' beaming smiles as they choose books for pleasure, the 'aha' moment of working with a new maker material or technology, the clustered groups of students pouring over provocation tables, around Lego walls and creating inquiry questions to guide their own learning. School libraries are without a doubt the heart and hub of a school community, and the beat of learning is back. Loud and clear!

Being a school library professional and an educator means continuing to grow and continuing to learn. OSLA made a commitment to our learning journey as anti-racist, anti-bias, and anti-oppressive educators by extending our learning sessions from the previous year with Dr. Andrew Campbell to engage in the work of dismantling structures of oppression in our libraries. As a council, we met and discussed two books to further our own learning and invited members to share their own reading and insights via Twitter as we worked through *Cultivating Genius: A Equity Framework for Culturally and Historically Responsive Literature* by Gholdy Muhammad and *Resurgence: Engaging with Indigenous Narratives and Cultural Expressions In and Beyond the Classroom* by Christine M'Lot and Katya Adamov Ferguson. Over the past year we have been working to revise and update our Equity Based Weeding and Selection Criteria to support school library professionals, schools and school boards in this ever-increasing area of importance as we see a rise in the number of book challenges across the country.

An incredible resource for our members this year has been *The Teaching Librarian* magazine, which has returned to its published paper format. Sadly, we lost our incredible editor, the late Caroline Freibauer, over the summer. The ongoing legacy of her dedication

and passion for school libraries and publishing the stories of school library professionals will undoubtedly be felt within these pages under the leadership of our current editor, Kasey Whalley.

While 2022 continued to challenge the education system, I want to give thanks to all of the school library professionals across the province who work hard each day to support their community(ies) of learners in so many vast and varied ways that they can't possibly be listed here. I am thankful for the opportunities over the past three years to work to be a voice for your unending collaborative spirit, commitment, and support of students, educators, education workers and the broader school library community. I am thankful for our school library allies, who are administrators, superintendents, authors/illustrators, publishers, bookstores, podcasters and more. Of course, a special thank you to the OSLA Super Conference planners Kate Johnson-McGregor and Dawn Telfer for their resiliency, hard work and enthusiasm in building an amazing program for a return to an in-person conference with an enhanced digital experience. Lastly, a thank you to the OSLA Council and OLA staff, who work tirelessly to support the school library community and membership. We say goodbye this year to the following council members: Maureen McGrath, Melanie Mulcaster, Cathy MacKechnie and Heather Webb-Makin. Your commitment, dedication and ongoing advocacy for school libraries are a joy to behold.

I am honoured to have served as your president of OSLA for 2022, wholeheartedly welcome Johanna Lawler into the role of president, and will continue to serve as past president in the year to come.

May your library continue to reflect the readers we are, and the readers we hope to become. ■

# The Buzz

Joanne Sallay

## Readers' Rights @ Your Library

**A**s we enter the last stretch of the school year, educators and students are excited to welcome summer, which hopefully includes time for recreational reading. The final issue of *The Teaching Librarian* is focused on readers' rights, which represents a great opportunity to explore how to support students in finding books that represent them, during school as well as independently outside of the classroom.

To learn more on this topic, I reached out to the Toronto Public Library's Suzanne Fernando - a Senior Services Specialist in the Children's Services Department at TPL - to share advice for guiding students and understanding the role that public libraries can play as welcoming community spaces. As a member of the Ontario Library Association's Cultural Diversity and Inclusion Committee and past co-chair of the Equity and Diversity Group for Employees at TPL, Suzanne is quite experienced in answering questions for our community. As an added bonus, she also gives her take on the age-old question of whether to finish or stop reading a book that's simply not working for you.



Photo: courtesy of the Toronto Public Library

### 1) How do you recommend students pick books that will represent them?

In order for students to pick books that will represent them, our shelves must include stories from a wide range of voices and experiences. Research from Canada and the US demonstrates that we are still struggling with representation on our bookshelves -- but the good news is we are taking steps to improve that!

Ensuring your bookshelves reflect your students requires thoughtful collection development, and staying up-to-date on books that reflect a variety of lived experiences. Booklists from libraries, publishers, and literary nonprofits like the FOLD Foundation (Canada) or We Need Diverse Books (US) are a few examples of places to begin.

As we assess what's on our shelves, we must ask ourselves -- are we providing a fulsome range of voices on our shelves? Are we working to highlight underrepresented voices through displays and reader's advisory? How do we ensure we are offering high quality books to represent a broad range of lived experiences? Seeking out recommendations from high-quality sources in the literary world enables us to offer books that represent our students.

Offering representative books also means being mindful of our community as we select diverse titles. A colleague was recently mentioning how a picture book with a mixed race family that represents the make-up of her family is one of her favourite books to share with her child. This book portrays a family that looks like hers engaging in everyday activities. I think this is a really important piece to mention here. Representation matters! And representation of characters engaging in everyday activities, too. It's up to us to ensure we have books with a wide range of stories and characters.

Encouraging young readers to read widely and experience stories containing many lived experiences is a great place to begin the journey of finding books that represent the intersectionality of one's own lived experience. Having as much variety as possible on our shelves will help our young readers find stories that represent them and their peers.

### 2) Why is it important that we have libraries with diverse collections, including dual language books?

Diverse collections are important for a few different reasons. Not only do they ensure all students feel seen when selecting what they read, but they also encourage students to read stories that represent voices that are different from their own. Reading stories from a variety of voices inspires empathy and acceptance -- and I think we can all agree that these are important values to instill in our young readers.

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While dual-language books can provide reading opportunities for English language learners, they also provide a learning opportunity for students whose first language is English. Being aware that English is one language in a world where there are literally thousands of languages spoken is extremely important for young readers. It teaches them to be curious about the world around them, and that includes languages and cultures from around the world!

Seeing text in other languages can be a starting point for learning about another language, country or story. This is actually a metaphor for reading itself -- you never know where a new book or idea can take you. Share the excitement of this with your young readers!

### **3) What is TPL's philosophy on libraries as community spaces for readers, including the ability to offer reflective programming?**

Our strategic priority of opening up our public space recognizes that young people need after-school and out-of-school spaces for learning, socializing, growth and well-being. As Toronto's population and urban density grow many don't have easy access to free public spaces that are comfortable and welcoming. We recognize that the library needs to have a healthy mix of quiet and active spaces, programs and accessible spaces that address the unique needs of our young readers.

As we begin to ramp up our programming again, programs like book clubs featuring diverse titles are an important place for children and youth to engage in conversations around timely topics. Young readers are our future leaders and change makers, and it is so important for them to be discussing topics like the environment, inequality and social causes, among others.

If we want to have programming that reflects our readers, we have to ask! What are you interested in? What would you like to learn more about? What is currently impacting you and your peers? Start your inquiry by addressing the questions already burgeoning amongst your readers, and use that as a jumping-off point for library programs that address their interests.

### **4) How do educators incorporate this advice into our own school libraries to best support our students?**

School library shelves are microcosms of the school's immediate community and the broader world. As a result, the collections and programs offered by a school library must aim to address the curiosities and interests of their students.

Offer a library collection that supports students in being active, engaged citizens in their world. This means exposing them to books that have a variety of ideas, voices, opinions and stories. While this might seem like a tremendous task, what it really means is being aware of your school community and seeking out books and resources that can best support your students.

Is there an influx of new English language learners in your community? Find books that support their learning and transition. Sometimes it's as simple as having a new layout or a few new inexpensive tools to enhance your library space and create a better experience for your learners. Do your spaces have lighting and seating that support an accessible reading experience for all of your learners? If not, find ways you can update your space.

I think now more than ever, the library space, whether it be a public or school library, provides a refuge for our students in a busy, bustling world. Keeping that in mind will help guide us in creating spaces that support readers and their needs.

### **5) This is a question that plagues many of us. What advice would you give a reader or educator if the book is not working for them?**

I think a book that doesn't "work" is in fact a great opportunity for a conversation. Why isn't this book working for you? Is it the length? Themes? Start understanding where the reader is coming from, and this may help with your next steps.

It's important to share the idea of perseverance with young readers, and I would often recommend they try to see a book through until the end if they can. However, if a reader is unable to finish a book, I don't think it's necessary to force them through - use it as an opportunity to reflect on the experience.

Could trying another book by the same author be an option? Or a read-alike? Could it be that you expected something different? I would explain that while it's not wrong to abandon something that isn't working for you, it is important to understand why and use that to inform how you proceed. And I'd say the same thing to an educator! If a book isn't working for you -- what is the why? Use the answer to this question to inform your next steps.

As librarians and educators, we have such an integral role in supporting young readers by creating diverse collections that are representative of the communities we serve. ■



Photo: courtesy of the Toronto Public Library



# Meet the Author

Kasey Whalley

## Leanne Lieberman



I think it's essential that children and teens see their realities reflected in the books they read. Diverse books show kids that their lives are important enough to be part of stories, that their lives matter. Diverse books teach the rest of us - children and adults - about other people's lives and realities. That creates empathy.

**The characters in your books often grapple with issues facing many of our younger generation, such as anxiety and identity. How do you decide (or discover) what issues a character will contend with in your stories?**

I'm always listening and absorbing what is going on around me. In recent years, I have noticed a significant increase in anxiety in my students, so it has naturally crept into my writing.

Sometimes I read something that gives me a specific idea for a story. For example, my 2017 book, *The Most Dangerous Thing*, was partly triggered by an article I read about a group of girls who weren't allowed to put on a production of Eve Ensler's *The Vagina Monologues* at their school. I thought that was an interesting conflict. At the time, I was teaching a lot of health classes and thinking about what I called The Doom and Gloom approach to sex education - how to avoid pregnancy, how to avoid STI's. I was trying to include a more sex-positive attitude to sexual education, and that crept into *The Most Dangerous Thing* too.

My most recent book, *Cleaning Up*, features characters who come from very different socio-economic groups. The main character Jess comes from an impoverished background, and she fantasizes about being friends with a girl whose room she cleans as a summer job. This book was partly inspired by the growing socio-economic gap I see in Ontario schools, and in one school in particular where I taught for many years.

**Your new book *Cleaning Up* is releasing this year. What about this book makes you feel proud or good? What are you looking forward to the most with this release?**

I am excited to have written a book set in my adopted hometown of Kingston, ON. I have lived here for sixteen years, but it's taken me a

**What was the journey you took to writing novels for young adult audiences?**

My first novel, *Gravity*, was my graduate thesis for my MA program at the University of Windsor. I didn't know that I was writing for teens initially. Then, when I completed my degree, my professor, Darryl Whetter, suggested I enter a contest run by Orca Books called, *So You Think You Can Write*. *Gravity* won that contest and was published with Orca Books in 2008. I've been writing for teens ever since.

**Why did you choose to write about modern Jewish female teenagers in most of your books? Why do you think it's important to write books with strong character identities?**

As a child and a teen, I loved books that reflected my Jewish identity. I was fascinated by characters that celebrated Shabbat in Sydney Taylor's All-Of-A-Kind-Family stories, and I loved Judy Blume's books. When I started writing, it felt natural to write stories that reflected my own Jewish background and to explore the questions I had around faith and culture.

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while to write a book set here. I'm looking forward to readers being able to imagine Jess, the protagonist of *Cleaning Up*, biking around the city in places they live.

I'm also proud to have written a teacher character that I love in this book. None of my previous books featured an important teacher, and I think that was because those other characters came from strong families that could support them. Jess from *Cleaning Up* doesn't have strong parental support, but she has a teacher, Mrs. M, who becomes a mentor and friend. Mrs. M isn't based on any specific colleague, but she is a celebration of the many amazing educators I have worked with in my twenty-plus years of teaching who work so tirelessly for children's learning and well-being.

**Why might readers resonate with Jess in general and specifically her desire to live a 'perfect' life? What advice would you give for readers who see the world like Jess does at the beginning of *Cleaning Up*?**

Teen years are a time of amazing growth and change. Kids are thinking about their future and making plans to achieve goals. Jess has some very specific goals to improve her life and have more financial stability. While these are great goals, she forgets about the importance of social connections.

My advice for Jess, and for all teens, is to put effort into your relationships. The trips I've taken, the jobs I've done, and the objects I own, none of them are as important as my relationships with my family and friends. For people like Jess who haven't had strong adult role models or good friendships to lean on, the effort might seem like too much or not worth it, but it's these connections and relationships that make life rewarding.

**You once wrote about re-reading your novel *The Book of Trees* that: "I still have secret hopes that somewhere Jewish teens are reading it and reconsidering their perceptions." Why do you think it's important for young readers to have the opportunity to read material that may challenge or redefine their perspectives?**

More and more, we spend time with people who share our political views and come from similar social economic groups. Fiction is a remarkable opportunity to create empathy for different viewpoints. For example, I've read a number of non-fiction books about trans and non-binary children, but it was only recently when I read Laurie Frankel's *This Is How It Always Is* that I understand the heartbreak that can come with trying to find a place in the world for a child that doesn't fit in our binary girl/boy mold.

A book can take you on an adventure. A book can change your opinion. That's a powerful thing. My novel, *The Book of Trees*, which is about a girl who travels to Israel and learns about the Israeli Occupation of Palestinian land, is an uncomfortable book for many Jews. Many people disagree with its premise and the term occupation. I stand by it. I still hope teens, especially Jewish North American teens, are reading the book, learning a different narrative than they usually hear and thinking about the conflict in Israel with

more nuance.

**What are some of the books that have made an impact on you? What would you recommend to young readers (or adults) looking to expand their reading lists?**

I am a huge fan of Rainbow Rowell's book. I adore her characters and find her books hard to put down. I also love the way Carol Goodman blends fantasy and historical fiction in her Blythwood series. I think it's great that readers get to imagine flying while also learning about the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire.

In my adult reading, I cannot say enough good things about Sarah Polley's *Run Toward The Danger*. I was particularly interested in what she had to say about Jian Ghomeshi and why convicting abusive men is so complicated.

My other favourite read this past year was the latest Lucy Barton book by Elizabeth Strout, *Lucy by the Sea*. Lucy is what I call an insider/outsider character. She's from an impoverished rural background, but she's become a successful author in the city. In *Lucy by the Sea*, Lucy reflects on the American cultural divide of haves and have-nots, and because she has lived in both worlds, she can understand each side in ways that those of us who only have one perspective struggle to see. The book helped me gain new empathy and understanding of characters that I don't always get to meet in my day-to-day life.

**What do you enjoy most about writing? Is there anything you find difficult or unpleasant about writing (and how do you deal with that)?**

The only thing I find challenging about writing is finding enough time to write all the stories I have in my head. I'm often writing in the winter dark at 6 a.m. in my kitchen.

My favourite part of the writing process is the early stages of writing a novel, when ideas come to me very quickly and I'm trying to record them all, but also when I hear the character's voice clearly in my head. No judgement or internal critic has set in yet, and my ideas feel fresh and unfettered.

I also love the moment when the various parts of a story finally come together and I have a first draft. It doesn't matter how baggy or unwieldy the story will feel when I read it a few days or weeks later. That first sense of first completion is very satisfying. ■



# Shelf Awareness

**W**elcome back to Shelf Awareness, readers! The theme of this month's issue is Readers' Rights, so the titles I'm suggesting this month will lean into that.

## *Highly Suspicious and Unfairly Cute*

**Talia Hibbert**

**Joy Revolution, January 2023**

I've chosen this title for a few reasons. It touches a lot of bases in terms of representation. The main characters are young, Black and British. One of them deals with OCD, and shares his thought process when he's dealing with that. It's a terrific romance with a wide range of characters, many of whom are kids of colour, some of whom are part of the LGBTQIA+ community. It is also the first book published by the exciting new Joy Revolution imprint. Created by bestselling YA authors (and married couple) Nicola and David Yoon, the goal of Joy Revolution is to publish YA romance that will act, in David's words, "as an antidote for a media landscape where people of colour have relentlessly been erased, except for those rare occasions when their pain can teach white people about racism. Joy Revolution is a safe haven for readers like me and Nicki to see themselves as the romantic heroes, free to pursue their bliss however they want, unrestrained and unencumbered. After a literal lifetime of waiting for more romantic literary heroes who look like us—largely to no avail—we're thrilled to help take the lead in making sure those heroes' stories are told to a wide and beautifully diverse audience."

Bradley and Celine have grown up together. They know all of each other's secrets and fears, and until the start of high school, were best friends. Until the thing happened. Bradley is pretty much perfect - an athlete, gorgeous and academically gifted. Just that little OCD problem, which he's largely got under control and which his closest friends and family help him navigate. Celine is his only academic competition, a star in her own right with a vision board and the drive to achieve it. Now, it's Grade 12, graduation looms, and they are both trying to figure out what the heck their next steps are, as opposed to the ones their parents would like them to take. They are also competing to be top three in a multifaceted leadership course. And along the way, of course, they are working their way through the thing that happened, and maybe, just maybe, finding their way back to one another.

I experienced this one as an audiobook, thanks to Libro.fm's amazing educator advanced listening copy program (<https://libro.fm/alcprogram>) (get on this, if you aren't already). My family got used to me snorting with laughter as I listened while making dinner.

Celine is the queen of snark, and her character is amazingly written and beautifully performed by Amina Koroma. Jonathan Andrew Hume is the perfect foil as Brad. The banter between the characters is much of the magic of this book, and for me, the audiobook brought that to the forefront. If you don't laugh at the mud-slinging scene in the woods, you may need to have your humour sensor adjusted. Along with the banter, though, Talia Hibbert has managed to craft a really thoughtful book about figuring out who you are, and how much difference it can make to have someone who really knows you on the journey.

The families of both main characters are extremely important, and they are very well-drawn, from Celine's wise older sister to Bradley's highly annoying younger brother. The crew of friends who support Bradley and Celine are also diverse and charming, and I found myself attached to them as well.

## *What will your students enjoy?*

One of my absolute favourite moments in the book comes when Celine unexpectedly runs into her high-profile lawyer absentee dad. Students whose reality includes fractured family relationships will very much relate to the scene and the internal chaos it creates for the very much "has it together" Celine. Your romance readers will love this one, and the fan art the reader community is creating for these two characters is worth an explore.

If you are looking to increase your collection of titles that feature BIPOC characters in non-trauma-based contexts, this one fits the bill!

## *Walking in Two Worlds*

**Wab Kinew**

**Penguin Teen/Tundra Books, September 2021**

If we are going to talk about representation in a Canadian context, we need to talk about books by First Nations, Metis, and Inuit authors. There are lots of options out there, including books by David Alexander Robertson (his *Reckoner* graphic novel series rocks!) and Katherena Vermette (*A Girl Called Echo* graphic novels, which align beautifully with Grade 8 history curriculum). If you are a high school librarian, I would also suggest having conversations with your English department, as they may be looking for suggestions for their NBE3 courses. I've chosen the first in Wab Kinew's series because it is a Red Maple nominee this year, and the sequel (*The Everlasting Road*) arrived in January of this year.

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Bugz is a character who is dealing with a lot. She is an absolute star of the virtual reality universe, which most of her peers are hooked into as much as they possibly can be (I see this story as being situated in a slightly alternate near-future). She is raking in money and sponsorships, has a huge streaming following and regularly shuts down a group of misogynistic players who try to take her on. However, in the non-virtual world, she's an awkward teen who struggles immensely with body image issues, and doesn't really fit in socially. She finds a safe place in Feng, a new student in her community who has come from China to live with his aunt after being taken from his Uyghur parents and "re-educated".

Kinew has written a strong story of a young Anishinaabe woman who has found a way to channel her strong connection with the natural world into incredible strength in the Floraverse, the AR/VR world that teens in her timeline inhabit as much as they can. What the author also does extremely well is show the anxiety of a young character dealing with issues around body image and misogyny. In an age when many teachers are having to deal with discussions around the work of misogynistic influencers, this part of the plotline could open up some rich discussions. There's a LOT to talk about with this book, including parallels between residential schools in Canada and those for Uyghur children in China. There's also powwow joy, mean girl drama and romance. So much to dive into here!

This book isn't perfect. Some readers will struggle with a male-identified author telling Bugz's story. It does, however, bring the very modern world of gaming into a very different parallel context. If you have kids looking for action scenes, some of the gaming scenes in this book are spectacular.

#### **What will your students enjoy?**

I think students who game and watch their favourite players' livestreams will be hooked right into the action parts of this story. It may also be a way to bring them into discussions on some of the bigger issues addressed in the book.

TW: body dysphoria, suicidal thoughts.

#### **Moxie**

**Jennifer Mathieu**

**Roaring Brook Press, 2017**

I wanted to go back in time for at least one title to go with this theme. *Moxie* came out in 2017, and the Netflix movie, directed by and starring Amy Poehler, came out in 2021. When thinking about student voice, this is the book that comes to mind for me. Its tagline is "Find Your Voice". I am a diehard library user, and rarely buy books for myself. This book meant enough to me that I carry an e-copy with me on my device.

*Moxie* is the story of Vivian Carter, a teen at a Texas high school

that could really be anywhere. The boys who play on the sports teams are gods and can do no wrong. The only roles available to young women in the social strata are based on how they are seen by those boys. Anyone who's ever had to walk past a group of young men that she knows are commenting on her knows what Vivian is dealing with. She is frustrated but doesn't know what to do with that frustration. And then she finds her mom's 90s-era 'zine stash, filled with RiotGrrrl anger and energy, and starts to wonder if maybe there is something she can do. In the process, she builds community, and finds out that there is power in numbers and that there is power in using your voice.

There are times, while reading this book, when I want to stand up and cheer. There are times when I want to cry. It is fiercely intersectional. The main character is white, but other characters in the story bring in the experience of Black and other young women of colour. Pushing back against blatant sexism and misogyny is what brings the characters in this book together, but the book acknowledges explicitly that each person's experience with fighting that system is different. At least part of the reason Viv can do what she does is that she is white, and the book acknowledges that. There are also young men who come on board with this movement, and that's an important piece to acknowledge as well. This is a powerfully written book with a very important message for teen readers. If you are choosing books to help drive student voice, *Moxie* should be on the list.

#### **What will your students enjoy?**

Your female-identified high school students will want this one. Anyone who has been rated, graded, or knows that it happens will understand the anger and frustration in this book. Anyone who has been told that it just means "he likes you" or "boys will be boys" will find a voice here. Sadly, the issues in this book have not gone away. If you are an intersectional female-identified person, you're even more likely to be dealing with them. Could a book club or lit circle reading this lead to student-driven change in your building?

TW: Sexual harassment, sexual assault

There are a couple middle-grade novels that deserve mention if you are talking about censorship or book bans. Amy Sarig King's *Attack of the Black Rectangles* came out in September 2022 and has been a success in my Grade 7 classroom. It's about a group of Grade 6's in a small town who can't figure out why there is blacked-out text in the novel they are reading in class. Their search for answers, aided by some sympathetic grown-ups, would make a terrific read-aloud and discussion prompt. Kelley Yang's latest, *Finally Seen* (February 2023), also tackles censorship head on. It's the story of a student, newly arrived from China, who falls in love with graphic novels that reflect her experience. When a parent who holds power tries to have those books pulled from the school, Lina becomes a fierce advocate for the books she loves. ■

# Bringing the School Library ALiVE!

“

“Our emphasis is that the professional or credentialed school librarian is the key staff member to make all the ideas happen since the library envisioned here goes far beyond a place where resources are curated and circulated to students and teachers.” — ALiVE Library: Tours

”



**A**LiVE Library is a grassroots initiative facilitated by Dr. David Loertscher and his students at San José State University. The purpose of the ALiVE Library website is to demonstrate how the school library learning commons plays a powerful role in supporting student success through visionary and creative practice. At the core of the ALiVE Library message is that this success depends on the leadership of qualified teacher-librarians.


The ALiVE Library project addresses the challenges of making connections to the larger goals of education and advocating for professional staffing. The target audience is decision-makers and influencers. Through the website, school administrators, school board leaders, teachers and parents can see the potential for themselves.

When you visit the site, you are invited to tour nine virtual rooms, each named for an aspect of the school library learning commons program: Literacies, Information, Inquiry, Instruction, Innovation, Technology, Expertise, Service and Space. Each room includes a brief video tour, video presentations and interviews with school librarians explaining their cutting-edge approach to dealing with the topic. The virtual rooms also include “Think Boxes,” designed to inspire deeper exploration and implementation.

Sounds wonderful, but I’m quite sure you’re asking if the project, which originates in the United States, has direct relevance to Canadian education systems and practices in Canadian school libraries. The reality is that the whole project was inspired in

part by Canada. Says Dr. Loertscher in his article in the Winter 2023 edition of *Canadian School Libraries Journal*, “Canada has led the world in the vision of the role the school library and learning commons can play in the education of successful and capable young learners,” citing visionary Canadian documents such as *Partners in Action, Together for Learning and Leading Learning*. Dr. Loertscher goes on to laud Canadian teacher-librarians who have led the way in implementing that vision. (<https://journal.canadianschoollibraries.ca/alive-library/>)

When you take the ALiVE Library tour, you will find five videos featuring interviews that Dr. Loertscher conducted with participants in CSL’s seventh Treasure Mountain Canada Symposium, held in October 2022 in New Westminster, BC. You are sure to recognize OSLA members and exemplary educators Alanna King, Tim King and Beth Lyons.

You are invited to use this valuable resource and also to contribute to it by sharing your own video, agreeing to be interviewed or contributing to a Think Box. Want to learn more? Visit the website at [www.alivelibrary.info](http://www.alivelibrary.info). 



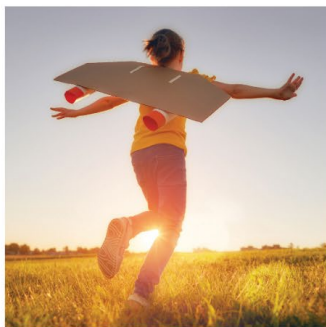
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A Learning Commons becomes the physical and virtual catalyst where inquiry, imagination, discovery, and creativity come alive and become central to growth — personal, academic, social and cultural.

The school library, a key component of a Learning Commons, has an integral and transformative role to play in implementing this fresh and innovative vision for education.

*Together for Learning: School Libraries and the Emergence of the Learning Commons (OSLA 2010)*



**THE RIGHTS  
OF THE  
READER**  
*Inspired by  
Daniel Pennac*


1. THE RIGHT TO NOT READ
2. THE RIGHT TO SKIP PAGES
3. THE RIGHT TO NOT FINISH A BOOK
4. THE RIGHT TO REREAD
5. THE RIGHT TO READ ANYTHING
6. THE RIGHT TO MISTAKE A BOOK FOR REAL LIFE
7. THE RIGHT TO READ ANYWHERE
8. THE RIGHT TO DIP IN
9. THE RIGHT TO READ OUT-LOUD
10. THE RIGHT TO BE SILENT



THE CHANGING FACE OF YOUR CLASSROOMS:  
BEING INTENTIONAL ABOUT INCLUSION

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A virtual workshop with Dr. ABC  
May 13 @ 10AM - 12PM ET



/osla  
: ontario school library association



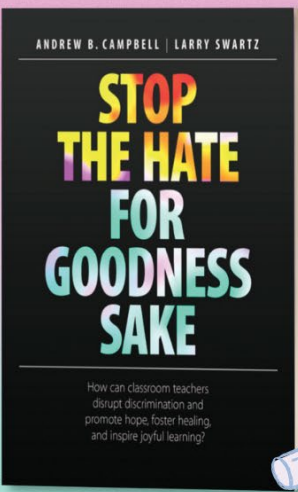
**OSLA Workshop Recap**  
**The Changing Face of Your Classrooms: Being Intentional about Inclusion**  
**Held on Saturday, May 13 @ 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM ET**

With Dr. Andrew B. Campbell (DR.ABC) (<https://drabc.ca/>)

In this engagement, participants shared through their own lens and experiences the ways in which the Ontario classroom has been changing. Events that impact the changing face of the classroom, such as refugee crisis, immigrant, rural migration, and the covid pandemic, were examined. The session also discussed the need for increased cultural competence from all stakeholders and more inclusive and responsive classroom practices and pedagogy from educators, as well as investigated the intentional and actionable steps that must be taken to ensure all students feel a sense of belonging and safety in schools.

Thanks to all who joined us! To register for more upcoming workshops, please visit <https://accessola.com>.

Don't miss out! Dr. ABC's new book, *Stop the Hate for Goodness Sake*, is available for purchase from The Library Marketplace. Grab your copy at [www.thelibrarymarketplace.com](http://www.thelibrarymarketplace.com).



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Kate Johnson-McGregor

# OLA SuperConference Recap

**T**he theme of the 2023 OLA Super Conference was *Walking in Two Worlds / Marcher entre deux mondes*. As 2022 OLA President Dr. Sabrina Saunders noted, “as we move through the past few years, we realize in so many ways we are Walking in Two Worlds. We are embracing our country’s Indigenous History and questioning the Truths we may have held as we begin the Reconciliation Process; we find ourselves in cross-roads of divergent realities in our personal lives and our workplaces; we are re-entering the hybrid world, away from virtual and distanced only; we work to balance justice with a just society; and we realize the importance of our library and information sector, but don’t know what our service demands will be or how our libraries will take shape as we continue to come through the pandemic. This walking in two worlds, knowing and not knowing, old and new, equity and diversity, truth and reconciliation is where we find ourselves as we embrace for our next steps together.”

As planners for the school library stream, my amazing partner Dawn Telfer and I had the honour and responsibility of curating a program of teaching, learning and sharing for the school library community. We reflected on the theme; it spoke to us as school library professionals. Like the other library sectors, we are actively engaging with Indigenous history and Reconciliation in our schools, we are navigating the challenges of the virtual and digital landscape in education, and we most certainly are educating our young people to value and strive towards justice and a just society.

School libraries are often unique; as a result of the pandemic, we have had enormous cutbacks in staffing and budgets in recent years, cutbacks from which we may be struggling to recover. If you’re in a school as a qualified library staff person, chances are you are not full time in the library, so you’re walking in two worlds between multiple schools or between roles in your building. These realities make the value of the Super Conference experience all the more significant for us. Whether we are able to attend in person or through the Digital Experience, Super Conference is an opportunity for us to come together as a community and support one another in our daily practice.

The 2023 face-to-face conference included outstanding, thought-provoking keynote speakers, a vibrant EXPO floor for vendors and library-associated organizations to share with conference attendees, several opportunities to recognize excellence in the library community through awards and some outstanding socials – Drag Bingo was a raging success! The sessions in the school library stream

were diverse in their subject matter and provided insights into best practices from around our province. Some of our best-attended sessions included:

- *Pushing Inquiry to Death: Finding Lost Voices in Abandoned Cemeteries*
- *The Evolution of the Library Learning Commons: Building a Future Ready Space*
- *Learning Reciprocity: with the Land, with Books, with Each Other*
- *Learn Sketchnoting (aka Visual Notetaking)*
- *Why YA Books Featuring Rural LGBTQ2IA\* Teens Matter for All Readers*

Our OSLA Spotlight this year was Dr. David Anderson, who spoke engagingly on the reconciliation process in school libraries with a focus on culturally responsive and reflective collection development. Dr. Anderson shared his insights, his lived experiences and his knowledge in a warm, humorous manner, inviting all of us to engage with the reconciliation process starting wherever we are. His presentation was given live but is still available via the Digital Experience until the end of July.

It is difficult to capture and accurately describe the energy of finally being back together in the same space, talking, listening, learning and – for those who were comfortable doing so, hugging – one another after the imposed isolation of the past two years. Libraries are community spaces and, as the OSLA School Library Joy campaign reminds us, they are places of joy that deserve celebration! We are grateful to all of the presenters who shared their learning with us so willingly, to the vendors and sponsors, to OLA staff and volunteers who do so much all year long, and mostly to the attendees. We know it is not easy to get to the Super Conference with funding cuts and limits on professional development, so seeing so many of you there is a testament to the value you place on learning from the library community. Recognizing that face-to-face doesn’t work for everyone, we are thrilled about the inclusive nature of the dual stream – allowing those who could not or were not comfortable attending in person to be able to access sessions. I didn’t get a chance to see any virtual sessions during the conference, so I am personally making it a goal to watch one virtual session a week from now until July to keep the energy and learning from OLA Super Conference 2023 alive for a few more months.

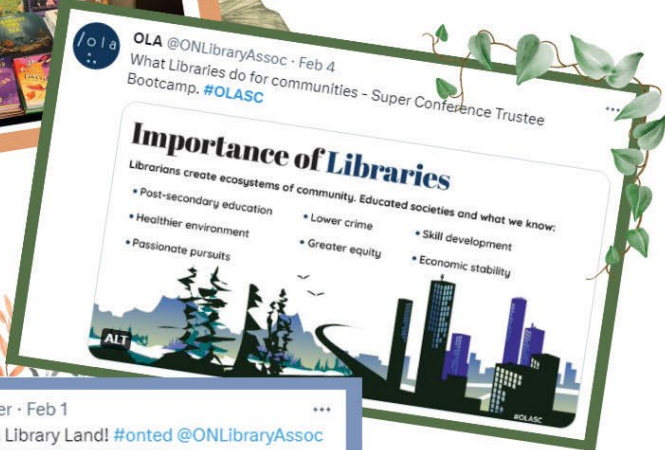
The planning has already begun for next year! Watch for the call for proposals in the summer, and please consider sharing your ideas and school library joy with us at OLA Super Conference 2024. #OLASC ■





Live from  
#OLASC

Walking in two worlds,  
knowing and not knowing,  
old and new,  
equity and diversity,  
truth and reconciliation;  
this is where we find  
ourselves as we embrace  
for our next steps  
together.







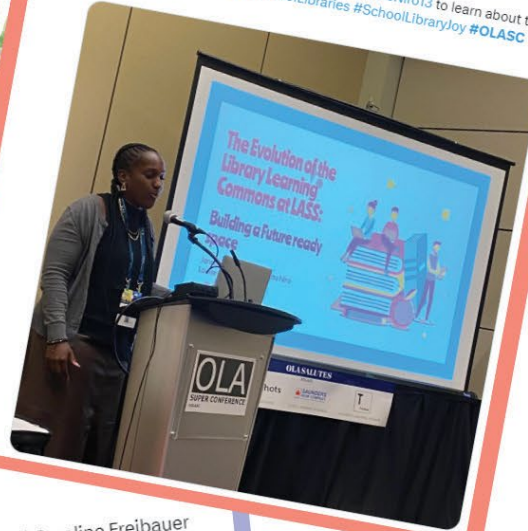
**Cdn School Libraries** @CdnSchoolLibrar · Feb 3  
 We are thrilled to have been able to support this inspiring and affirming campaign, under the leadership of @oslacouncil and its most awesome 2022 president @mrslyonslibrary. #SchoolLibraryJoy #OLASC



**Joseph Jeffery** @JosephJeffery1 · Feb 3  
 #SchoolLibraryJoy campaign being honored at #OLASC2023 for bringing awareness to the awesome work and professional issues in School Libraries in Canada. Shout out to @bctla @mariamartella @CdnSchoolLibrar and @oslacouncil for joining together for this #ONSchoolLibraries



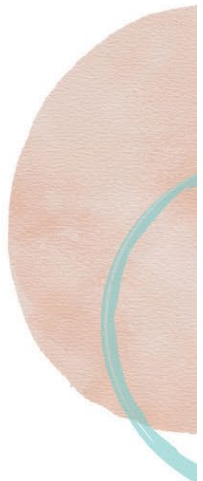
**OSLA Council** @oslacouncil · Feb 3  
 Starting the morning with @MsStAubyn & @MsNiro13 to learn about the Evolution of the LLC. #ONSchoolLibraries #SchoolLibraryJoy #OLASC #Onted



**OLA**  
 @ONLibraryAssoc

Remembering and honouring the late and beloved Caroline Freibauer with the Ontario School Library Association Lifetime Achievement Award at the School Library Spotlight #OLASC.

Thank you to Caroline's daughter Natalie and family for accepting and sharing their love with us.



# Protecting the Freedom to Read

Last year, I joined the Book and Periodical Council to sit on their Freedom to Read Week Committee. Despite already having a busy schedule, it was important to me to join as a representative for school libraries, given the increase in book banning students are experiencing in the United States and Canada. Although many think book banning is primarily an American issue, especially given what has been happening recently in the state of Florida, book banning in schools is a Canadian concern as well. In 2022, the Durham District School Board temporarily removed the book *The Great Bear* from schools, with the reasoning that the book contained “too much culture and ceremony” and that there was a section of the book that was “particularly harmful to Indigenous youth and families”; no specific reasons or examples from the book were cited (Pasieka).

If you look at the list of challenged works on the Freedom to Read Week website (<https://www.freedomtoread.ca/challenged-works/>), the majority of the books that have been challenged are stories about, or were written by, members of traditionally marginalized communities. This is why it is so important for teacher-librarians to stand up against the push to keep particular books off of our school shelves that represent the communities that we serve and seek to have our students learn more about.

As a teacher-librarian, I know how difficult it can be when trying to decide what to add to the collection and what to weed out. There are many varying opinions about what books should be on our shelves and why. I also understand that there is a very real fear of ‘getting in trouble’ for selecting a book that a parent, trustee, or community organization might not want on our shelves. However, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees the right to intellectual freedom, and it’s our responsibility as teacher-librarians to protect that right.

Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop coined the phrase “Windows, Mirrors and Sliding Glass Doors” to explain how children see themselves in books and how they can also learn about the lives of others through literature. Dr. Bishop makes the point that it’s “crucial for children from marginalized groups to view themselves in the books they read” (Potter). Allowing outside pressure to dictate what is available

to students on our school library shelves is a disservice and an injustice to the students that we are there to support. Fear cannot, and should not, stop us from doing what is right for students. So what should a teacher-librarian do when a book or books that they have in their collection are being questioned or challenged? Who should they look to for support or assistance?

1. **Refer to the policies, procedures, and guidelines outlined by your school board.** Although provinces set the curriculum, educators have the freedom to use their professional judgement to determine the types of resources that are used to teach the curriculum. This includes book selection. However, you need to refer to your board’s policies to allow you to justify your selections. You can take this a step further and be proactive to ensure that students, parents/guardians, and other stakeholders are aware of the policies and procedures that are in place for challenging a book.
2. **Read the Selection Guidelines and Reconsideration Procedures created by Canadian School Libraries.** “Well-written guidelines defend universal principles of protecting intellectual freedom, and put collection diversity within the context of the rights and freedoms of all Canadians, as expressed in The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (<https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/how-rights-protected/guide-canadian-charter-rights-freedoms.html>). The Charter protects the rights of everyone, including children” (Canadian School Libraries). This website clearly outlines the importance of inclusive curriculum and assessment practices across Canada and the responsibility of teacher-librarians to ensure we are supporting equity, inclusion, and diversity in our collections.
3. **Seek advice and support from organizations that work to support intellectual freedom.** Organizations like the Book and Periodical Council (BPC) continually fight to uphold the freedom to read. Don’t be afraid to connect with outside organizations in your community that do the same. Although it is an American website, <https://uniteagainstbookbans.org/> has an excellent toolkit with talking points that you can use when explaining your book choices to those who might be questioning or challenging those choices.

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It can be a challenging and uncomfortable thing when there is a formal or informal challenge to a book on the shelf in your school library. Just because it is uncomfortable or difficult doesn't mean it shouldn't be done. When pushing back against a ban, you are upholding the rights and freedoms that students are entitled to. Students deserve the best that we can give them, and that includes providing collections that meet their needs and interests. ■

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Celebrating Graphic Novels  
Wednesday June 14th  
Virtual Event  
Join us from anywhere!  
Featuring: Duane Murray, Kathleen Gros, Paul Gilligan & Shawn Daley, Emcee Kevin Sylvester

15th Annual  
**Telling Tales**  
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Hamilton Public Library, Rotary, Royal Botanical Gardens, Dan Eaves's International Sculpture Collection, Canada, Canada Council for the Arts, Ontario, EarlyON ON y va, Hamilton, City of Burlington, TellingTalesOrg, tellingtales.org



# Multimodal Literacies:

## The Superpowers Inherent in Reading

### Comics

As we conclude Freedom to Read Week 2023, it's ever more important to be reminded of school libraries' core mission to cultivate inquiry, imagination, student success, and protect students' reader rights. In 2021-2022, more bans and challenges of student materials were recorded than in the preceding decades that the American Library Association (ALA) Office of Intellectual Freedom (OIF) has tracked censorship. Disproportionately, many of these titles recently banned or challenged are visual materials, especially graphic novels. Some recently challenged titles include works from Governor General Award-winning authors Elise Gravel (*Pink, Blue, and You!*), Mariko and Jillian Tamaki (*This One Summer*), David A. Robertson (*7 Generations*), and Margaret Atwood (*A Handmaid's Tale: The Graphic Novel*, illustrated and adapted by Renee Nault).

Comics and graphic novels challenges tend to focus on the text images, taking them out of context and reacting personally to the information. However, this viscerally engaged response to comic images is also the format's superpower. Not only some of the popular items on school library shelves, comics and graphic novels are also dynamic multimodal texts, combining two streams of learning: (1) Visual and (2) Reading / Writing. When students read graphic novels, they build both textual and visual literacies and develop critical visual inquiry skills.

Both the IFLA International Standards for School Libraries and the AASL Standards Crosswalk for Whole Child Tenets note the vital need for diversified collections, formats, and viewpoints to achieve learning standards and foster students' personal, social, and cultural growth. As we build and cultivate our school library collections and programming, it's imperative to ensure that students have access to a range of formats and materials, and comics and graphic novels are one of the best ways to teach and engage students - and diversify our collections and perspectives.



*This Place: 150 Years Retold* is a 2019 award winning graphic anthology by Indigenous creators offering needed and expanded understandings and lived experiences on the past 100+ years of Canadian history. Covering events including the Northwest Rebellion, the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline protests, and the Oka Resistance, and combining oral histories and previously under-discussed archival documents, *This Place* visually narrates the long legacy of Indigenous resistance and resilience. As a companion learning piece targeted at school libraries

### Comics & Learning Styles

- Multimodal learning incorporates multiple streams of learning
- All comics and graphic novels combine at least two streams
  - (1) VISUAL
  - (2) READ / WRITE
- Reading comics combines textual **and** visual literacies

#### VISUAL

- LEARN BY INFORMATION DEPICTED GRAPHICALLY
- LEARN BY DRAWING
- CHARTS
- GRAPHS
- DRAWINGS

#### AUDITORY

- LEARN BY LISTENING
- LEARN BY SPEAKING
- PODCASTS
- LECTURES
- PUBLIC SPEAKING

#### READ / WRITE

- LEARN BY INFORMATION IN WRITTEN TEXT
- LEARN BY WRITING
- BOOKS
- PRINTED MATERIAL

#### KINESTHETIC

- LEARN BY DOING
- LEARN THROUGH EXPERIENCES

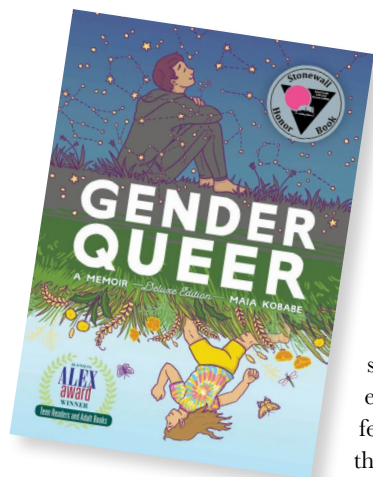
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and classrooms, CBC created a ten-part podcast series hosted by Rosanna Deerchild to dramatize each of the ten chapters and events covered in *This Place*. Adding the additional auditory learning style, students who read and listen to *This Place* develop multiple literacies while broadening their knowledge and understandings of Indigenous and Canadian history.

Beyond the valuable multimodal aspects of comics and graphic novels, these texts are also, importantly, places where students can see themselves in the work. Graphic memoirs are an expanding segment of the comics industry and include the stories of authors' experiences from the extraordinary (such as tales of first-hand participation in pivotal moments in history) to the ordinary (reflections on youth, travel, divorce, death, and even dance class). But even the most ordinary stories can be relatable to students who are figuring out who they are and looking for others to connect with. Comic storytelling can make difficult subjects accessible and can detail complicated subjects in a way that allows students to see, and possibly relate to, another person's experience.

Ensuring the rights of students to see these works can be life-changing. As comic artist Robyn Smith says in a comic she created for Booklist in June 2022 entitled "Why are comics important," comics are a window into the artists' lives, but they are also a mirror. Readers can quite literally see themselves in comics. They can see themselves in the artists' depiction of themselves, of their movements, of their style, of the way they interact with others in the panel and with the space around them.



*Gender Queer*, a 2019 award-winning graphic memoir by Maia Kobabe, details the author's experience exploring gender identity throughout adolescence, and uses (and cites) research the author did on gender while coming to conclusions about eir feelings and approaches to eir own identity (Kobabe uses e/em/eir pronouns). The imagery not only shows a younger Kobabe as e changes eir appearance to match the way e feels more closely, but it also diagrams the spectrum of gendered feelings and does a thorough job of explaining how someone can fall somewhere outside

the lines of the gender they were assigned at birth. While there is very little literature on the subject of non-binary identities, this book is a great tool for both teaching the concepts of gender queerness and alternate pronouns and also giving folks who identify as gender queer, or who maybe are gender queer but don't have the words for it, something to connect with. The graphic novel has topped many banned book lists in recent years, most likely because of how well it succeeds in describing these feelings and concepts visually and making them relatable to such a broad spectrum of readers.

School libraries should be spaces where students' reading, inquiry, research, thinking, imagination, and creativity are encouraged. School libraries also protect students' readers rights and students' Freedom of Expression rights. Beyond the current bans and challenges impacting comics and graphic novels, many schools and libraries are still reticent to see graphic novels as more than 'stepping stones' for reading - perceiving them to be impactful only for young, struggling, or 'reluctant readers.'

Comics are important visual and textual multimodal materials for *all* readers.

In classrooms and libraries that have embraced comics, educators have been able to incorporate additional learning styles into instruction - having students both read and draw comics, incorporating elements of perspective, point of view, image selection, and editing, which teach critical inquiry and visual decoding skills. Teaching political cartoons has long been a mainstay of social and global studies classrooms; teaching comics and graphic novels is a contemporary way to build on this.

Championing comics in school libraries recognizes the many superpowers contained in this medium. They not only give readers access to stories that are accessible, enlightening, educational, and empowering, but, most importantly, they can deliver something students really need: their next favourite book. ■

#### End Note

This article builds on Amie and Lindsay's presentation, "Multimodal Literacies: The Superpowers Inherent in Reading Comics," delivered during OLA Superconference 2023. The authors wish to thank *The Teaching Librarian* for giving us this opportunity to expand on our presentation and our continued advocacy for comics and graphic novels in educational spaces.



# Gaming in the Library: Creating Human Narratives Through Community Gaming

## **Youth & Gaming: Creating Human Narratives Through Community Gaming**

The ways in which we, as librarians, view the practice of reading, the elements of immersive storytelling, and the skills upon which youth find and process meaning-making from the materials they engage with is forever evolving. As youth are engaging with newer mediums every day, whether analog or digital, so should librarians evolve to reflect the new and upcoming mediums of storytelling; one of which, is gaming.

Gaming, and the ways in which we game, are more accessible and bountiful than ever. With video gaming consoles, including the Nintendo Switch and PlayStation 5, filling more households than ever before and a resurgence in board and tabletop games, such as *Dungeons and Dragons*, starting to capture the attention of even the youngest generations, gaming is quickly becoming one of the most successful forms of narrative storytelling. Gaming is a medium that can be used to connect youth of all reading levels and backgrounds to narratives which will resonate with them and, in turn, give them a sense of pride and self-accomplishment in their own skills. Whereas in the past gaming was viewed as a pastime, sometimes with negative associations attached to it, it is important to regard the narrative and storytelling elements found within gaming as a form of interactive literature that can be utilized by youth to give them voice.

The narrative storytelling within gaming is not limited to just the

fictitious stories told by characters and storylines embedded within the games themselves. There is also a living, real-life narrative being developed amongst the players and larger communities playing these games that should be recognized as well; communities that for many youth are places of safety, inclusion, and belonging, where they know they can be themselves around others without concern of stigma or judgement.



An example of one such game is *Dungeons and Dragons* (D&D). At its core, D&D is a pen and pencil game with players rolling multi-sided dice to determine everything from their character's attributes to the success rate of their actions; however, D&D relies just as much on the player's ability to roleplay all of their interactions in order to develop the game's world. While this roleplaying is often done in the framework of the game's pre-existing world, for some marginalized youth, for example those from the 2SLGBTQ+ community, the roleplaying of a D&D character is not just that of a make-believe character but also a projection of themselves, either their present selves or of someone they wish to be.

Games such as *Dungeons and Dragons*, as well as video games, when used in a programming or group setting, offer safe and inclusive spaces which youth can use as an opportunity to meet other peers and potential friends. Gaming offers a safe ground upon which youth can introduce themselves and share their own experiences and narratives. While gaming is the initial topic and catalyst of sharing, it is not limited to the game, and youth often find similar interests in other topics as well. In sharing their lived experiences, youth can see their own selves in others and know that they are not alone.

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## **How Gaming Provides Social Currency**

The safer youth feel in a gaming environment, the more open they will be to exploring new games and expanding their gaming repertoire. This allows for greater knowledge acquisition about games and the potential for social capital to be developed.

Whether it is the newest pop culture reference added to *Fortnite*, the latest fighter to join *Super Smash Bros. Ultimate*, or figuring out who is “sus” in *Among Us*, gaming comes with its own wealth of language and meaning-making that, when cultivated by youth, can be used to develop a social currency that can be used within the library and outside of it.

This social currency comes from the shared experiences and narratives that youth are exposed to during gaming programs at the library. Even if new to a particular game, once participants in a program have had enough time to play the game, they will come away from it knowing the newest characters, the common phraseology, or even the newest happenings within a live game’s world. Though this may be an experience that youth can have at home, for some youth, gaming programs at the library are the only way they will get to partake in these experiences themselves; outside of the library, they may not have ready access to the games, devices, or connectivity to play them.

Once this social currency is acquired, youth can then bring this knowledge with them to social circles outside of ones that are established in the library – namely, at home, in the classroom, or amongst personal friend groups – and share in the same experiences as their peers and friends without feeling ‘out of the loop’.

In providing this social currency to youth who would otherwise not have the means of doing so, it allows them the opportunity to connect and socialize on more equal footing with their peers around them. It also provides youth with a sense of pride and self-accomplishment in being knowledgeable about a complex topic, like gaming, giving them a sense of ownership and authority over their own voice.

By providing youth with access to gaming in library spaces, it offers them a fun and relaxing medium in which they can be themselves, and in turn transforms the library into a safe and inclusionary space for all. Gaming programs in the library provide youth with tools, both tangible and intangible in nature, that they can use for years to come as they navigate an ever-evolving social world in a hybrid realm of physical and digital environments.



In 2023, gaming transcends past the traditional box and controller and is, more than ever, a social activity and communal experience wherein youth can be creative, gain agency over their own voice, and, in exceptional cases, discover who they truly are or want to be in the years ahead. ■

# Visual Essay

## AS A READER I HAVE THE RIGHT TO



choose where &  
when to read



choose what I read  
without judgement



see myself in the texts  
I read



abandon a book



ask questions



read for joy



not be punished with  
late or missing items



to wonder



a well-funded library



be free of censorship



an informed librarian



Thank you to those on Twitter & Instagram that added to our thread.

**What would you add?**

# Connections: Readers' rights

Shelagh Straughan

Judy Blume's *Forever* was a sensation in my Grade 7 class; a book about teenagers having premarital sex was deemed scandalous by adults and therefore was enormously appealing to us. Accessing a copy of *Forever* proved difficult. It wasn't in the school library collection, and my local bookstore would only sell it to kids if they provided a note of parental permission; I wasn't brave enough to have that conversation with my mom. This complication simply fuelled our fire, a timeless phenomenon recently validated by Stephen King:



Somehow, my best friend procured a copy, wrapped it with a cover she ripped off of a copy of *Grimm's Fairy Tales*, and generously circulated it throughout the class for the rest of the year. Silent reading was never the same, and she was our hero.

Whether or not you think *Forever* is appropriate for a group of young teens, the issue of readers' rights predates this title and rages on today. In honour of my student self, I went to my own students (grades 9-12) to ask what reading rights are important to them.

Their thoughts seemed to fall into two camps - accessibility & perception.

Rights related to accessibility ran the gamut. Some were as simple as physical access; students at schools that don't have a school library, or who don't live in close proximity to a public library. One step up were those who had school libraries but without trained library staff, or without current collections, or without collections that offered material in languages and cultures representative of their student body. Overall, it was heartwarming to hear how strongly students felt about their right to supportive, timely readers' advisory and reference services: services that honour diversity, equity, and inclusion.

While technology may be seen as levelling the playing field, readers' rights can be stymied by issues related to digital access. While I appreciate copyright and digital ownership, I get very frustrated on students' behalf when I'm unable to procure a certain title in audio format for any reader, and particularly those with learning challenges or who are learning English as a second language. For instance, publishers of Joseph Boyden's *Three Day Road* or Trevor Noah's *Born a Crime* (both texts on our English curriculum) will not sell to Overdrive, which, as you well know, allows us to properly and legally circulate books to our students. Legal issues often morph into economic barriers; while I can procure an audio copy of Faridah Àbíké-Íyímídé's *Ace of Spades* from Overdrive, it costs \$81.50. In US dollars. For a copy that can only be borrowed by one student at a time.

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In addition to issues of access, many students expressed a desire for reading rights that protect them and others from being judged or perceived poorly for their choice of book. The right to choose what they read, which is upheld in so many Canadian school libraries and in-class literature circles (“student voice, student choice”), seems not only tied to personal appeal but to acceptance. We know how important it is for readers to feel accepted and not judged for their reading taste. I loved hearing about students’ fervent desire to protect this right, while I also recognize how strongly they can weigh in about other’s recommended books in discussion. This is a great nudge for me to raise the issue in our next book club meeting; where is the line between reviewing a book and criticizing a reader?

One student described a utopia where she has the right to interpret what she reads, whether it be in book club discussions or in English class; holding true to her vision of a book is very important to her. Others talked about the right to re-read an old favourite, whether it be a seasonal or an emotional choice like comfort eating. Personal

aside: Lucy Maud Montgomery’s *The Blue Castle* fills this need for me.

Some readers feel strongly about the right to not finish a book; “life is too short, Mrs Straughan!”. One acknowledged the emotional connection she makes with stories and their characters. She wants to protect her right to become very attached to a book and/or mistake a book for real life. I don’t think any of us in the library world would argue with the concept of a book hangover.

Ironically, I had more than one student talk to me about the right not to read. Even my most avid readers acknowledge their own reading slumps and feel it important that no one be shamed about their reading habits (or lack thereof) by anyone. In addition to it being the decent thing to do, young readers know that by respecting someone’s right not to read for pleasure at any given time, we are encouraging them to leave the door to reading open. ■



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