

THE

# Teaching Librarian

The Magazine of the Ontario School Library Association  
ISSN 1188679X

## Epic Quests

PAGE 28

## From Game To Shelf

PAGE 32

## *Equity work*

Demanding diverse books  
in your collections

**gaming** @ your library





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# THE Teaching Librarian

Volume 31, Issue 2 January 2024 ISSN 1188679X

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## gaming @ your library

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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.

May 2024	“Joy @ Your Library”
V. 31, Issue 3	Deadline: January 30, 2024
September 2024	“Community @ Your Library”
V. 32, Issue 1	Deadline: May 27, 2024

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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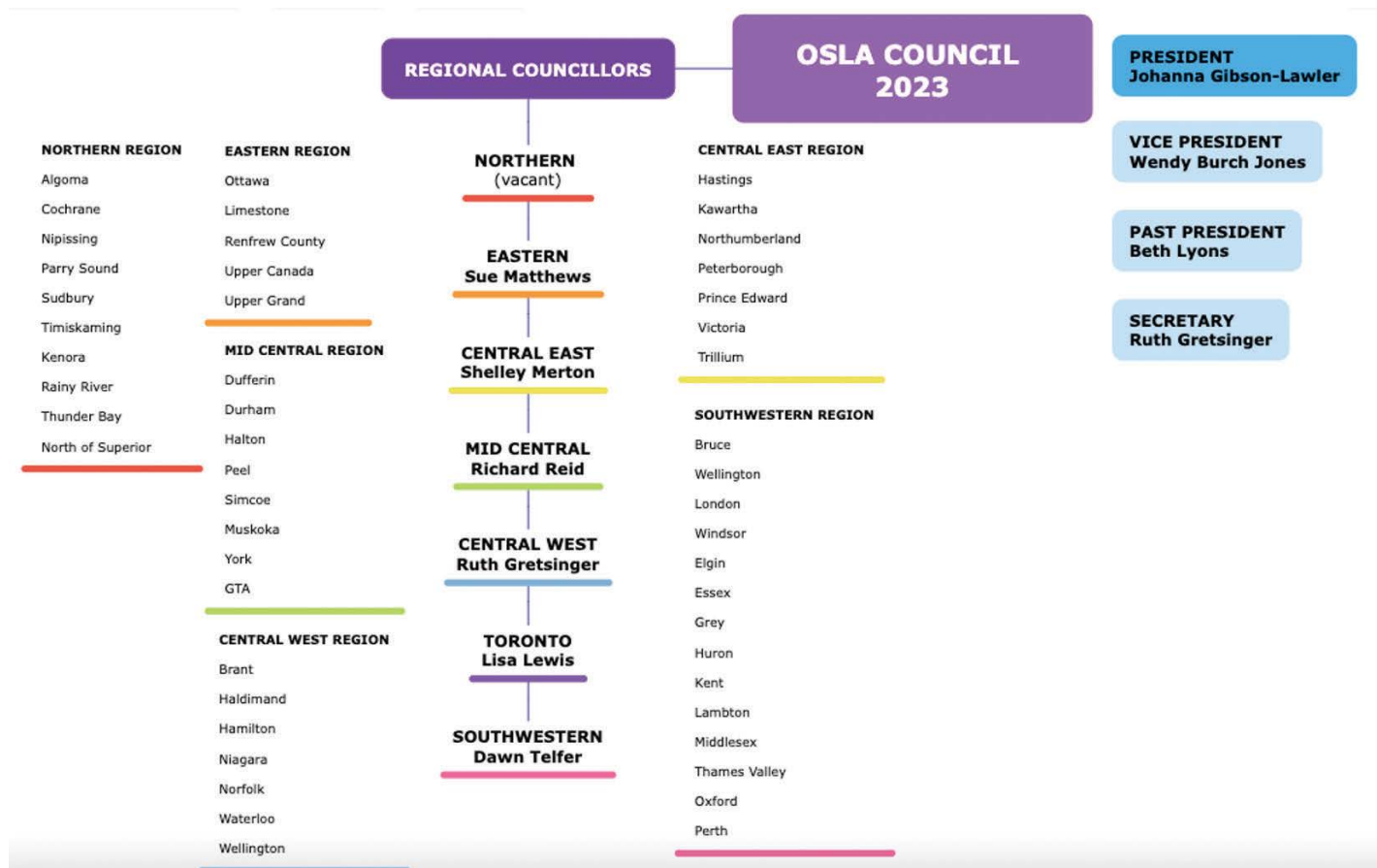
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# The Editor's Notebook



Danny Neville

**H**ello and thank you to all the wonderful library people from across the province who have welcomed me to this new and exciting role. I'm honoured to be the latest in a long line of *TingL* editors, taking the reins from the talented, committed, and cherished people before me. I'd like to begin with a particular message of gratitude to our most recent Editor-in-Chief, Kasey Whalley, who has filled the role with grace and extreme skill over the past few challenging years. Thanks, Kasey. Your guidance throughout this transition has been vital and much appreciated.

In this issue, we explore Gaming @ Your Library. First, let's agree on a definition of 'gaming.' Well, who's kidding who? I'll shoot out a definition and hope you all more-or-less agree with me. For the purposes of this issue, I'm going with the following definition:

Gaming (n.) the act or practice of playing games (such as board games, card games, dice games, or video games).

Some of you may be surprised at the inclusion of 'old school' games in this definition rather than the ultra-modern idea of gaming as the latest and (arguably) greatest handheld device or online roleplaying technology. Gaming is not a new invention. In fact, the act of playing games in libraries has been around for much longer than one might assume. I did a little digging around and learned that libraries in Great Britain in the mid-nineteenth century, for example, "created game rooms and billiard parlours as a service designed to lure people out of the public houses and into a more 'appropriate' location for these games." (Nicholson, 2013) Another historical example is the chess club that began in the Mechanics' Institute Library in San Francisco, founded in 1854, now the oldest chess club still in existence in the U.S. (Nicholson, 2013)

So, what does gaming have to do with school libraries? A lot. Just take a look at Diana Maliszewski's article and you'll see a vast array of gaming examples, both the modern techie kind and the good old-fashioned variety. Jonelle St. Aubyn tells us about a return to

some face time without a phone in her article about board games in the library. Or maybe you'd like to dive into the role-playing world with Mary Maliszewski's or Ashley Allen's articles featuring role-playing games. We've even got a student perspective in this issue from Josh, who took over the leadership of his school's Smash Club after his older brother graduated. Whatever style of gaming you're interested in, the ideas and success stories shared by our inspiring crew of contributors in this issue are sure to ignite some fun in your school library.

Before I sign off on my first Editor's Notebook, I'd like to issue a challenge to all of you school library people out there. A gaming challenge, of course. And the game is called...tag. Original, right? Anyway, the rules of the game are simple. Once you've opened this issue, you're 'it.' Your challenge is to spread the *TingL* word in one of three ways (bonus points if you choose more than one...just sayin'). Follow and post about *TingL* on social media (@TingL\_OSLA on X/Twitter or Instagram, @tingl.bsky.social on Blue Sky) and tag as many library people as you can (1 point per tag). If you're lucky enough to receive your very own hard copy of this magazine, pass it on to someone who doesn't have one when you're done (10 points). Or, if you're viewing this article electronically, share it with other library peeps any way you like (5 points per share). Tally up your points and give yourself a pat on the back for every point earned, satisfied with the knowledge that you've played the game and had some fun along the way (we're going for intrinsic motivation here, people).

Thanks in advance for playing and for all you do to make your school libraries the fun, safe spaces our students deserve. ■

Nicholson, Scott. "Playing in the Past: A History of Games, Toys, and Puzzles in North American Libraries." *The Library Quarterly: Information, Community, Policy*, vol. 83, no. 4, 2013, pp. 341–61. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.1086/671913>. Accessed 23 Oct. 2023.

# President's Report

**“Equity work isn’t for the faint of heart... Continue to demand diverse books in your collections. Be wary of the single story.”**



## **A Guide to the Selection and Deselection of School Library Resources**

Ontario School Library Association  
A Division of the Ontario Library Association  
2023



interested in dissecting a particular school board’s directive for their teacher-librarians to weed their collections using an equity, diversity and inclusion lens. The press initially didn’t include all

the variables and factors that school library professionals must consider when weeding, but instead decided to sensationalize their stories by focusing on weeding based solely on copyright date. To be honest, after spending close to an hour on the phone with a reporter discussing the weeding process and criteria, I was dismayed and disillusioned to find out that not one “sound bite” from my interview was used to counter the sensationalized narrative from the initial story.

My takeaway? Continue to do the equity work that I know is right for the students in my care and for their families. Regardless of how many times I must have the conversation, vulnerable students and educators are depending on this work. Having students being seen in library books is unbelievably powerful. I will forever be reminded about working in an inner-city school in Windsor where I assisted the teacher-librarian in a thorough weeding project. We then mapped the collection to determine what areas needed attention.

The very supportive Principal was able to secure some modest funds and a list of titles was created. I happened to be at the same school for the release of the new books and even did several book talks

**I**t literally seems like yesterday that I was wishing you a beautiful start to the school year and encouraging you to be brave, bold, and bodacious... It’s time to check in and see where we are at with this! In your roles as school library professionals, you no doubt have had to have some courageous conversations with parents, community members, students and fellow colleagues about some of your book choices in your collections this school year. You may have had to defend a title that you have on your shelves or weed a title that has the real potential to cause harm to someone who reads it.

Equity work isn’t for the faint of heart. In the fall, I spent a considerable amount of time speaking with reporters and journalists

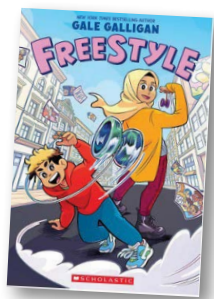
*...continued on page 9*





## Johanna Gibson-Lawler

...continued from page 8



that day to a grade 4 class. I happened to introduce this class to the popular graphic novel entitled “Freestyle” by Gale Galligan. As soon as I revealed the cover art, I had several students, who happen to be wearing hijabs, hurdle towards me. One particular student had tears in her eyes. When I asked about the tears, the student said that she had never seen

herself in any book until that day.

Continue to demand diverse books in your collections. Be wary of the single story. Publishers are getting better at curating stories where the main character isn’t going through some type of cultural strife but is simply a character in the story who happens to be from an equity-seeking group. When we know better, we do better!

We have some news to share from OSLA and OLA! I’m sure that you are aware by now that Shelagh Paterson has stepped down from her position as the Executive Director of the Ontario Library Association. I would personally like to thank Shelagh for her years with the Association and for her unwavering support of our division. Shelagh was gracious to hang on for a few weeks in the fall to ensure that we had a smooth transition with our new Executive Director.

The Ontario School Library Association would now like to welcome Michelle Arbuckle to the role of Executive Director. Michelle has already hit the ground running as she had already been an integral part of OLA for years. All of us are in fabulous hands. Michelle oozes passion for all libraries and is not afraid to advocate in a brave, bold, and bodacious way! The Ontario School Library Association is thrilled to continue our work in partnership under Michelle’s guidance.

Also, as was announced in our last edition of the *The Teaching Librarian*, our Editor, Kasey Whalley had decided to turn the page and devote her time to other passion projects and would be stepping down. Thank you, Kasey, for devoting your time to this award-winning publication! Your work didn’t go unnoticed and was very

appreciated by the membership and by OSLA Council. Kasey was also instrumental in finding a wonderful and eager new editor of TingL. OSLA would like to welcome Danny Neville as this publication’s new editor.

Danny is a qualified teacher who has recently moved to Ottawa and is supplying with the Ottawa-Carlton DSB. Before moving, he was the Lower School teacher-librarian at Bayview Glen School in North York. He sits on the Blue Spruce Selection Committee, reviews books for the Canadian Children’s Book Centre Book News magazine and is a facilitator for the teacher-librarian AQ courses at the University of Toronto. He is currently working on a Certificate in Creative Writing from the University of Toronto School of Continuing Studies. Thank you, Danny, for joining the team at TingL and welcome!

To close out my President’s Report, I would like to share the news that OSLA and The Council of Public Affairs has been working extremely hard to continue to advocate with the Ministry of Education over the reporting by school boards on how funding for school libraries was spent under the Grant for Student Needs fund. You may recall that boards were asked a few years ago to report on how this funding was spent and to indicate if funding was reallocated to reflect other board priorities. Since this data was recently released, we are certainly asking questions about accountability and encouraging the Ministry to continue this reporting practice as we advocate for the proper spending of funding on library personnel and for library resources. We know that funding varies between geographical locations around the province, between boards and even between schools from the same board. Your OSLA Council will continue to be brave, bold, and bodacious on this front as well.

For now, enjoy this edition of TingL! ■

*Johanna Gibson-Lawler*

Johanna Gibson-Lawler  
2023 OSLA President

Wendy Burch Jones

# Origin Stories: Who We Are

In this issue we are introducing members from the Eastern Region. Your representative for this region is Sue Matthews, an amazing library tech from the Ottawa area whose voice we are thrilled to have on OSLA Council. She is passionate about school libraries, library programming, and the essential role of school library professionals in our Ontario schools. You'll also get to meet OCDSB Library Technician, Shelby McEachern, and get a glimpse into how our new editor, Danny Neville, got his start in the world of library.

We'd love to hear your origin story! If you want to share your story, send it to us at [theteachinglibrarian@outlook.com](mailto:theteachinglibrarian@outlook.com).

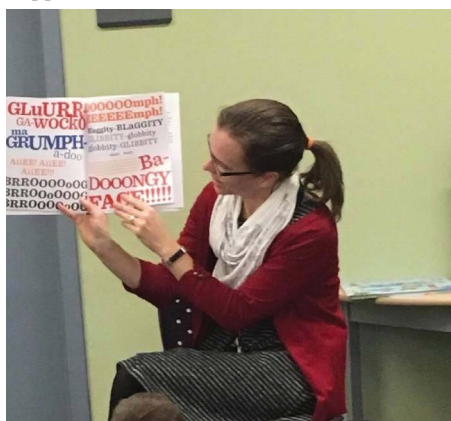
## **Making A Career Out of Books Sue Matthews**

I started reading when I was four years old and never really stopped! I just loved the ability to step into other worlds even for a short amount of time. I became a regular in my school libraries but I wasn't always sure I was welcome. My elementary school (which will remain nameless) had a librarian who was typical of the time period. She definitely believed libraries were meant to be silent places and she didn't shy away from shushing us regularly. Our visits there weren't fun. Most students dreaded the visits and stopped visiting libraries at all as a result.

Even with my huge love of reading and maybe because of my elementary school experience, it never occurred to me to make books and reading my career. After high school I studied Television and Radio Broadcasting. I worked for several years writing catalogs and newsletters for a retail company, but I knew that wasn't the right fit for me. I ended up working for The Salvation Army for 10 years, running

programs for teens and children. I loved that time and the kids in my programs but with the birth of my second child I felt it was time to stay at home for a few years.

I knew it was time for a change so while my kids were young, I finally figured out that my love of books, reading and learning could be a possible career. I started doing the Library Technician program part time and knew I had found my place. After having worked with children for many years I entered the program with hopes of working in a government or special library. However, after doing a placement in a high school library I realized that school libraries were the place for me. I want to provide students with a very different experience than the one I had (my brother teases me for choosing this career after our school experience). My goal is that my students will love their visits to the library and love the books they find there. It is my personal mission to have a collection that reflects our student population and which allows all our students to see themselves in our books. I hope our students grow to love libraries as they move through their lives and I'm privileged to play a part in making that happen.



Sue Matthews reading to students at Jockvale Elementary School, OCDSB



Sue Matthews in front of her home outside Nepean, ON

## **From One Elementary Library Technician to Another Shelby McEachern**

I've loved libraries for as long as I can remember. As early as Kindergarten, I would be immersed in books from both my elementary school library and my local Ottawa Public Library branch. As an autistic child growing up, getting lost in the imaginary worlds of lots of children's authors (both picture books and chapter books) was really great.

The person who really made an impact on my love of reading and childhood was my elementary Library Technician, Lynda Bell. She did more than just introduce me to amazing books and book series. She let me help out in the library at recess when I didn't want to go outside. Occasionally, when I had after school activities in the library, she would give me a snack.

When I was in Grade 9 and neither of my parents' workplaces supported the "Take Your Kid to Work Day" I had to do, Lynda had me come back to St. Luke Elementary

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School and do that program with her. She was a library technician that truly made an impact on my life even after I graduated from my elementary school in Grade 6.

As soon as I started taking the Library and Information Technician program at Algonquin College, I knew I really wanted to work in elementary school libraries so that I could give back to kids what Lynda gave me: unconditional kindness, support, and fostering a love of reading in the students.

In the 2021-2022 school year, I made my entry into the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board. Currently, I work at two elementary schools in OCDSB, Connaught Public School and Charles H. Hulse Public School. I love the students at both schools so much. They warm my heart and giving them the love of reading really warms my heart. I aim to be my own library technician with some of the influence that Lynda Bell gave me when I was younger.

I am a neurodivergent library technician and I am really proud of it. As someone on the Autism Spectrum, I feel that if we are in a field that we are really passionate about, we can thrive. Because of Lynda Bell, I am really passionate about education and helping children find the love of reading.

With my passion, I submitted an application for Charles H. Hulse Public School to be a part of the 2023-2024 Indigo Love-of-Reading, Adopt-A-School campaign and we got accepted as one of the 140 schools this year! I feel like my passion for school libraries will help me tremendously in this field and help me through the stressful times that happen at times.

I have hope that maybe one day one of my students from Connaught PS and/or Charles H. Hulse PS will be inspired to be a library technician because of me, just like Lynda Bell was to me when I was growing up.



St. Luke's Catholic School

### **Choosing My Own Adventure By Danny Neville**

My first library memory is of our local public librarian reading stories to my elementary school class. My tiny school in rural eastern Ontario didn't have a library, so our teachers walked us down the street every few weeks to get new books. The shelf I went back to, week after week, was the Choose-Your-Own-Adventure section. Remember those? Read a few pages, then choose your own path through the story, which is just like my path toward working in school libraries. A few years into my teaching career, I knew I wanted to work in the library, but how would I ever get there? I started by 'opening the book.'

*If you choose to take the Library AQ's and see what happens, turn to page 37.*

I took the first two AQ's (the third only being available after working in the library for a year), thinking this might lead to something. I met a lot of great people and learned a ton about school libraries, but my dream job didn't immediately land in my lap. So, back to the beginning I went.

*If you choose to develop your PLN on your own and see what happens, turn to page 46.*

This is when I started to chat with every school library professional I could and build my PLN. Twitter became my go-to resource for library people and information, and I regularly chatted with the library staff at my school. I started watching the job postings and wondering if anyone would hire me

with no library experience. Still no library job, so once again, I flipped back to the beginning.

*If you choose to wait your turn and then pounce on an opportunity, turn to page 59.*

Soon after, the librarian at my school announced her retirement. These were big shoes to fill, but I decided to throw my hat in the ring. I was offered an interview and I gave it everything I had. Thankfully I had the two AQ's and the PLN to show my learning and dedication to the role.

I was fortunate to have a very supportive administrative team who decided to take a chance on me. I'm so grateful that they did because that job has changed my life.

After a big move with my family, I've recently found myself back at the beginning of that old Choose-Your-Own-Adventure book of life. Although I'm no longer working in a school library, I continue to stay closely connected to this world by facilitating AQ courses, volunteering with the Forest of Reading, and advocating for fully funded, fully staffed school libraries across the province. So, what's next for this guy?

*If you choose to become the next Editor-in-Chief of The Teaching Librarian, turn to page 75.*

That's what I've done. And I'm so happy to be here.



New editor-in-chief of *The Teaching Librarian*, Danny Neville. ■



# Meet the Author Liam O'Donnell



**L**iam O'Donnell is the perfect author for this issue of *The Teaching Librarian* magazine. He is the creator of over 40 novels for children, including award-winning graphic novels and stories set in the gaming world of Minecraft. He's also an elementary teacher who completed his Masters of Early Childhood Studies by researching the impact of digital play on young children's learning. Liam is passionate about creating works that engage reluctant readers, and he's always looking for new ways to make learning fun and relevant.

**TingL:** Thanks for chatting with me today, Liam.

Liam O'Donnell: Thanks for inviting me.

**Back in 2011, you and some other fabulous educators created something called the GamingEdus Project with the support of the EDGELab at Metropolitan University. You basically legitimized the idea of videogaming as a learning tool for educators – or maybe we should say you helped launch Gaming @ Your Library! Can you explain the goals of the project, and how it came to be?**

GamingEdus was a reaction to a trend that I and some other amazing educators, Diana Maliszewski, Denise Colby and Andrew Forgrave, saw emerging from the world of technology. Like comics before them, videogames were shedding their image of something that would corrupt the minds of the youth. Now people saw them as an amazing resource for educators to connect with some of the hardest students to reach. Just as comics had engaged reluctant readers with bright colours and action-packed illustrations, videogames connected with tech-savvy students who shunned bland static pages in a book or worksheet.

The challenge was that many “tech experts” in the teaching field were merely slapping videogame elements, like experience points, leaderboards, achievements, etc. onto problematic pedagogy. The big term back then was to “gamify” your classroom. Teachers were encouraged to not call the school work an assignment, but rebrand it a “quest.” Don't award grades, give them “experience points” and on and on. They were using the same “sage on the stage” teaching approach and activities, but wrapped up in the language of gaming culture. I felt these surface level changes undermined the real potential that videogames held for learning.

We drew a lot on the work of James Paul Gee and focused on helping teachers understand the difference between gamifying your classroom and “game-based learning,” where educators use the whole video game, not

just elements of it, to connect a student's in-game experience with learning in the curriculum. *Minecraft* was the perfect game for that because it gave players so much freedom and I had great experience using it with students. We set up a *Minecraft* world and invited teachers around the world to come play with us so they could see its potential for inquiry-based, student-led learning in videogames. It was our way of inviting educators to explore the world of videogames in a safe, non-judgmental way. Our motto was “n00b it up!” Teachers were allowed to be newbs (beginners) in video games so they could better use them to connect with their students. We had a blast playing games and met some great teachers from around the world.

**Collaboration at its finest.**

Yes!

**You've written some novels set in the gaming world with your *Unofficial Minecraft Adventures* series. Was that a natural progression from the GamingEdus Project?**

Creating books set in *Minecraft* was definitely inspired by my work with GamingEdus and students using the game. For a game not even designed for children, *Minecraft* did an amazing job of tapping into the fun of being a kid with a big bag of Legos and no bounds on what to create. The open world nature of the game and its appeal to children made it a perfect vehicle for a new book series.

In those books, I drew a lot on my experience with GamingEdus. Scenes from the book were inspired by some of the in-game antics of students in our Minecraft worlds. Andy Forgrave's *Minecraft* character, Gumbyblockhead, even makes an appearance to help save the world from the baddies. I had a lot of fun!

**Clearly your day job as a teacher directly influenced that series, but I bet it has influenced your other writing as well.**

Teaching and writing have definitely combined to help me create my stories. I actually got into teaching because I enjoyed visiting schools as a touring author. Speaking to students about the writing process and listening to their amazing ideas led me to train to become a teacher and enter the classroom. Since then, many of the characters in my series like *Tank & Fizz* and situations in my *West Meadows Detectives* series have been inspired by teachers I've worked with and things I've seen in the classroom. Teaching and writing for children go very well together!



**They do – all that raw material! And you clearly know your audience well, with much of your work crafted to appeal to reluctant readers. I'm thinking of your *Graphic Guide***

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**Adventures, Tank & Fizz, Geeked Out Mysteries, and your game-based novels particularly. Were you a reluctant reader, or does that longing to engage reluctant readers come from your teaching background?**

I was totally a reluctant reader! Before the age of 11, I had no interest in books or reading anything. I didn't realize this until I began creating books for reluctant readers. When I look back on my childhood, I was the typical reluctant reader: obsessed with videogames (primitive *Atari* 2600 games!) and driven by a desire to be outside tramping around in the woods or farm fields that surrounded our home. I feel these experiences help me relate to the student who has no time for words on a page. I can see a bit of myself in there and hopefully know what to do to begin to spark some kind of interest in the printed word.

**A number of your books, including your Tank & Fizz series, have earned you recognition and award nominations from across Canada. How important is this kind of recognition to you as an author?**

I'm really proud of this recognition, namely the Forest of Reading© nominations. I love the ethos behind the "Tree Awards" and respect the hard work the folks at the OLA do to create this project. It's an award series for children who love reading, and my books are aimed at kids who *don't* love reading. With each nomination, I hoped my zany stories about goblins and trolls and mysteries would work to welcome the non-reading kids into the world of books. The highlight of these nominations was meeting the children who proudly stated that my books were the first ones they actually enjoyed and finished to the end. They saw themselves as readers and a part of something special.

**I love that!**

Yes, for an author, it doesn't get better than that.

**You've worked with a few different illustrators in your various series. How hard is it to collaborate on a graphic novel? What's that process like?**

When I was doing a lot of author visits to schools, students and teachers were always surprised that I created graphic novels without knowing how to draw. This led to great discussions around teamwork, collaboration and reaching out to others for support.

I've been so lucky to work with some great illustrators and each time the process is a little bit different. I trained as a film and television writer, so my graphic novel manuscripts are more like scripts for TV or movies. I describe what happens in each panel and put in the dialogue. The illustrator takes it from there and uses their talent and imagination to make my descriptions look amazing. There is usually some back and forth via email over the

## Martha Brack Martin

details, but we rarely meet in person. They are usually in another country or province, so meeting face to face is not practical.

**Do you think your skills at collaborating have become better thanks to your gaming experiences?**

I think gaming has a lot to teach about collaboration. These days, I'm playing fewer videogames and more role-playing games, like *Dungeons & Dragons*. I actually run the D&D club at my school and really enjoy watching the players work together to harness the various skill sets of their characters to overcome the challenges in front of them. Having played D&D since I was 12, I really feel this is the game that has taught me so much about creativity, collaboration and community. With just a few weird dice, some paper and pencils, players can learn skills like leadership, risk-taking and resilience. No micro-transactions needed!

**I love how accessible that sounds. Definitely doable in most of our school libraries today, even with challenging budgets! What other skills can gaming provide our students?**

Gaming has definitely taught me perseverance. To fail, dust yourself off and try again is a really important skill that is best learned in a safe environment. Games of all kinds provide that environment and allow us to try out new things, inhabit new roles and take chances we couldn't take in the real world.

**What advice would you give to educators looking to support gaming in their school libraries?**

I would encourage teachers to look beyond videogames when thinking about bringing games into their school libraries. In my opinion, *Minecraft* was a once in a lifetime game that provided amazing learning opportunities and tons of fun. Newer videogames seem to be focused on capturing user attention for as long as possible while wrapping it up in elements of *Minecraft*. I encourage educators to look at role playing games like D&D to capture the interest of young people and foster skills like inquiry-based learning, perseverance, collaboration and storytelling. *Dungeons & Dragons* is having a moment right now, just as *Minecraft* did a decade ago, so getting students excited about playing D&D is not difficult.

For this educator and author, it's time to unplug the game console, grab some d20s and let the magic of gaming take me (and my students) into distant lands where new adventures await.

**Thanks so much for the chat. Here's to library gaming!**

**To learn more about Liam, his books or the GamingEdus Project, check out these resources:**

<https://youtu.be/MBVeHBS2Z6M?si=-nR1XzmmPx2XT1e2>

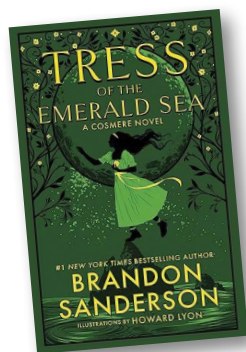
<https://liamodonnell.com/>

<https://www.insidetheartistsshanty.com/liam-odonnell/>

# Shelf Awareness

It's January already! Time to bundle up with a great book and encourage our students to do the same. These are books that will hopefully sustain you and your readers through the cold months. Do you find that your reading choices change seasonally? I've veered from this month's theme a little bit but have been sure to give you a couple picks that fit in!

***Tress of the Emerald Sea***  
**Brandon Sanderson**  
**Dragonsteel Entertainment,**  
**January 2023/Tor, April 2023**



This one surprised me. When I looked back over my reading list between my last column and this one, this title jumped out at me and said, “include me!” Brandon Sanderson likely needs little introduction to YA readers, particularly those who read fantasy, but this was the first novel of his that I had read (cue the shocked gasps).

The story of how this book came to be added to its appeal for me. Sanderson decided to write something for his wife during the early stages of lockdown. It was not designed to be published and when they eventually talked about publishing it, they decided to do it through Kickstarter. It began life exclusively as a digital product and was published in print by Tor. It is a visually beautiful book, so I would recommend getting at least one physical copy for that enjoyment.

This is a beautifully conveyed story of a girl who decides that rescuing the person she loves, against all odds, is worth whatever risks she has to deal with along the way. Tress lives on an isolated island in the middle of nowhere where not a lot happens. When her upper-class best friend is kidnapped by an evil sorceress and his parents really don't seem to care, she decides that she needs to be the person who cares enough to go and get him. Adventures ensue - complete with evil spores, pirates, dragons, a talking creature and of course, true love. Yes, there is a genuine Princess Bride vibe here.

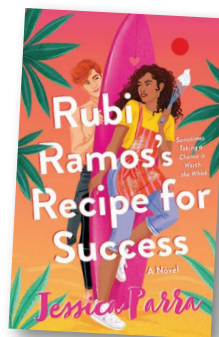
It is probably the sweetest (but not too sweet) story I have read in a long time. It is also, in places, absolutely laugh out loud funny. I think anyone from 12 to infinity would enjoy this one. Suggest this to someone who you know is brave, but they don't quite know it.

I gave this a 5-star review, which I rarely do. It hit a sweet spot for me, and I hope it might for your readers as well. It also pops

beautifully into that space for your early YA readers who want a well-constructed story but don't necessarily want the sex and violence that sometimes go with those in YA.

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

The quirkiness of this story will appeal to your readers who are looking for a deeper read that will still make them laugh out loud. Tress is also a female lead for the ages, which we don't always find in YA epic fantasy. She never stops learning about herself along the way. It's a terrific book for a snowy weekend.



***Rubi Ramos' Recipe for Success***  
**Jessica Parra**  
**St Martin's Press/Wednesday**  
**Books, May 2023**

I was thinking about which of my recent reads might fit into this month's topic of Gaming @ Your Library and Rubi Ramos' Recipe for Success felt like a great match. It has aspects of competition, with both a baking competition and a debating team, so I thought I could stretch the definition of “gaming” a little. This is an amazing confection of a book. It may appear light and fluffy, but, like the remarkable Cuban delicacies Rubi creates for the bake-off competition she's in, there's more going on under the surface!

Rubi is a graduating senior. Her “recipe for success” is perfectly delineated - captain her school debate team to a championship and head off to the college she and her immigrant parents have determined is the right one for her law career. A few things are standing in the way. She's been waitlisted for the law program (she hasn't told her parents) and she's got to keep her trig mark up to have a hope of getting in. Oh, and there's that baking competition she's entered despite “the ban” - her mom's decree that her baking does not get in the way of her scholastic endeavours. Her parents run two successful bakeries, working extremely hard, and do not want her to have to do the same - even if it may be what she wants.

How Rubi solves the assorted pitfalls in the recipe is the joy of this book. She has an amazing best friend, a fabulous trig tutor/boyfriend, the love of her parents (expressed in very different ways), a terrific debating coach and her own remarkable independence and ingenuity. This book gets past the “I want to do something different from what my parents want me to do” trope in creative ways and honours the relationship between parent and daughter in a disarmingly honest way.

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There's a lot here. The weight of being the child of immigrants and focus of a lot of dreams other than your own; navigating who you are and helping your friends do the same; dealing with racist and classist stereotypes about who you should be; figuring out how to date in the context of the immigrant parent thing and in this book specifically, trying to respect your parent's struggles with their home country (Cuba) while doing your own exploring around that culture. Jessica Parra navigates all this very deftly.

Warning: You might want to look up some recipes or find a local Cuban bakery before reading this book! It's sure to leave you hungry for some tasty Cuban treats.

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

Well-written relationships between the characters; the frustration of trying to find your own way while maintaining a relationship with your parents; kids of hard-working immigrant parents will hugely relate to this story, as well those who deal with systemic racism and stereotyping. Grade 7 and up.

### **My Mechanical Romance**

**Alexene Farol Follmuth**  
**Holiday House, May 2022**

I'm going back a little bit into the stacks for another book that stretches that gaming theme a little, but in a way that should attract some readers. This terrific read came to me as an audiobook through the remarkable ALC (Advanced Listening Copy) that libro.fm runs. If you are not signed up yet, as an educator or librarian, get on that (as an example, October's titles included the newest in the Misewa saga). You get to indicate which local bookstore you'd like your purchasing points to go to as well.

My Mechanical Romance was a winner for me on a number of levels. The main character is a young woman who is trying to figure stuff out and it is tough. Bel's parents have recently split, her mom has moved her to a "better" school, her older siblings are dealing with their own stuff and she really, truly doesn't know what she wants to do after high school. She does not perceive herself as academically strong, but she is an amazing maker. Luckily, someone in her new school spots that talent and points her in the direction of the robotics club.



Anyone who has ever participated in, or watched, student robotics competitions knows that it is utterly cutthroat and, in some ways, very much like gaming - just in face to face, 3D form. It takes teamwork, problem solving on the fly, great communication and a true mix of skills on your team. Bel doesn't have a clue about the ins and outs of competitive robotics leagues. But her brain does know what's going to work mechanically and that makes her a huge asset to her team.

I did not like the male character, Mateo, who captains the robotics team at all at the beginning of this book. One of the impressive things about the writing is that by the end of the book, I was enjoying his story as much as Bel's.

This one comes with a stamp of approval from a friend who is both an experienced teacher-librarian and a mom of robotics league competitors. She loved it and so did her voracious reading teenaged daughter.

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

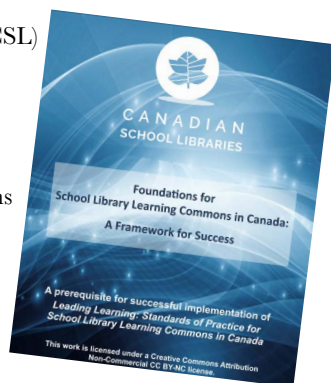
The authentic teenage voices (the text conversations are very on point); the competition aspect, which is very well-conveyed; a strong female lead in a book about a robotics team.

As you step into the second block of your teaching year, I hope that you are feeling a spark of excitement about new titles and a new year. I'd love to know what's flying off the shelves in your library.

In terms of this month's theme (and to get some Canadian content in here!) I want to also send you back to my column in the May 2023 issue of *The Teaching Librarian* to find my review of *Walking in Two Worlds*, Wab Kinew's novel about a main character who finds themselves having trouble navigating between the real world and the virtual reality world in which they spend a great deal of time. There is also a sequel set in the same context, *The Everlasting Road*. There are difficult topics in here - grief, suicidal ideation, body dysphoria, gender bias - but I think that students who are strong readers, and particularly those who are gamers, will be drawn into these. It's not every day that you get to recommend a novel written by Canada's first Indigenous premier, is it? ■

# Foundations and Frameworks for Canada's School Libraries

Canadian School Libraries (CSL) is very pleased to announce the release of *Foundations for School Library Learning Commons in Canada: A Framework for Success*. This new document grew out of concerns raised by representatives of school library associations from across the country, and by participants at CSL's TMC7 Symposium 2022. With continued erosion of funding, professional staffing and policy support for school libraries, there has been increasing demand for a Canadian resource that clearly presents the conditions necessary for building the effective library learning commons program as presented in *Leading Learning: Standards of Practice for School Library Learning Commons in Canada*.



The CSL board had already been exploring how to address this concern. Our existing standards, *Leading Learning: Standards of Practice for School Library Learning Commons in Canada*, is presented as a framework for program growth. It describes a concrete path forward as schools move from library to library learning commons, realizing the vision first presented by OSLA's *Together for Learning: School Libraries and the Emergence of the Learning Commons* (2010). The whole notion of standards for Canada's school libraries was transformed with the publication of *Leading Learning*. Rather than setting an arbitrary assessment rubric, *Leading Learning* focuses on growth and a culture of learning and continuous improvement.

*Leading Learning* was developed through a massive collaborative process, with input from all regions of the country. A strong conviction that emerged was that an arbitrary and inflexible set of standards, no matter if they were based on the latest thinking and best research, would not be useful in the Canadian context, with so many disparities in programs existing between jurisdictions across the country. There was a clear need for a different approach than that taken in *Achieving Information Literacy: Standards for School Libraries in Canada* (CASL, 2003). A landmark document in its time, *Achieving Information Literacy* provided measures for assessing programs and included standards for things such as collections, budgets, staffing and facilities. Its rubrics have been useful in assessing these concrete aspects of school libraries.

## The Benchmarks Dilemma

And so emerged the dilemma. We are convinced that while the growth framework of *Leading Learning* is the best approach to program improvement, there is still a need for tangible approaches to measuring things like the size of the collection and facility, or hours of operation, for example. We also realize that while the output measures of *Achieving Information Literacy* were once useful, the associated benchmarks for excellence were unachievable in many schools.

Looking for a solution to this dilemma, we took inspiration from the International Federation of Library Association's (IFLA) *School Library Guidelines, 2nd revised edition* (2015), internationally-approved standards for school libraries, created "to inform decision makers at national and local levels around the world, and to give support and guidance to the library community." The IFLA guidelines provide the advice that, "Because schools and school libraries vary a great deal from country to country, the guidelines will need to be read and used with awareness of and sensitivity to the local context." (IFLA, p. 12).

Canadian School Libraries fully endorses the vision and associated standards set out by IFLA. The foundations of school libraries in Canada should, at the minimum, aspire to achieve the goals and meet standards set out by this respected international institution. Our approach then, would be to adapt recommendations from the IFLA guidelines to the Canadian context, focusing on the solid foundations and infrastructures or frameworks necessary for successful implementation of *Leading Learning: Standards of Practice for School Library Learning Commons in Canada*.

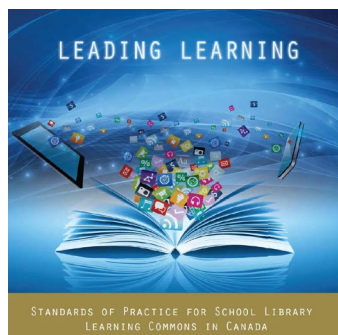
**Frameworks for school libraries:** School libraries exist within a framework of local, regional, and national authority to provide equity of opportunity for learning and for developing the abilities needed to participate in the knowledge society. In order to maintain and continuously respond to an evolving educational and cultural environment, school libraries need to be supported by legislation and sustained funding.

*IFLA School Library Guidelines 2nd revised edition* (2015), p. 7.

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## Foundations for School Library Learning Commons in Canada: A Framework for Success



*Foundations for School Library Learning Commons in Canada: A Framework for Success* serves as a prerequisite for the successful implementation of *Leading Learning: Standards of Practice for School Library Learning Commons in Canada*.

This new publication from CSL establishes strong policy, robust funding and a commitment to equity of access as necessary foundations for all school libraries. It also describes the elements that frame program success.

*Foundations for School Library Learning Commons in Canada: A Framework for Success* was written collaboratively by members of the CSL Board of Directors and the CSL Leading Learning Committee: Lila Armstrong, Anita Brooks Kirkland, Joseph Jeffery, Carol Koechlin, Melanie Mulcaster and Judith Sykes. We are grateful to the following representatives of school library associations and school library scholars for reviewing the new document: Chelsea Baker, Dr. David Loertscher, Diana Maliszewski, Ariane Régnier, and Harold Semenuk. The writing team is particularly indebted to Dr. Dianne Oberg, co-editor of IFLA's *School Library Guidelines, 2nd revised edition*, for her excellent advice, and for reviewing and editing this document prior to publication.

Across the country there are widely divergent understandings of the role of the school library and equally divergent or even non-existent policy frameworks. Funding is the practical expression of

policy and strategic planning. Equity of access to quality resources and learning opportunities is a basic foundation of all libraries, based on the values of our democratic society. *Foundations for School Library Learning Commons in Canada: A Framework for Success* describes these critical foundations, elaborating on specific issues and making the case for the policy frameworks and funding required to provide equitable access. "Equity of access to quality school library programs should be considered as a core foundation for education in Canada. Every child in Canada deserves access to an excellent school library." (Foundations p. 8).



These foundations support the practical frameworks for a successful school library learning commons program. *Foundations for School*

*Library Learning Commons in Canada: A Framework for Success* elaborates

on eight essential frameworks: Physical and Virtual Library Learning Commons Spaces, Technological Infrastructures, Human Resources, Accessibility, Ethical Standards, Library Learning Commons Management, A Culture of Growth, and Accountability. The guideline makes statements of principle about each essential framework and



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associated structures, drawing on the IFLA guideline and other important international and Canadian standards and key resources. Specific details are provided in a series of associated appendices. This structure provides clarity, and flexibility in how the document can be used.

## Leading Into the Future

Canadian School Libraries is very pleased to offer this new guideline document. As IFLA states, “All guidelines represent a compromise between what we aspire to achieve and what we can reasonably expect to achieve.” *Foundations for School Library Learning Commons in Canada: A Framework for Success* is a tool to advocate for transforming aspirations into expectations and achievements. *Leading Learning: Standards of Practice for School Library Learning Commons in Canada* helps give immediate and relevant purpose to that transformational journey, guiding professional practice and setting a path for growth, leading into the future.

***Foundations for School Library Learning Commons in Canada: A Framework for Success* is available at:**  
<https://www.canadianschoollibraries.ca/foundations-frameworks/>. **!**

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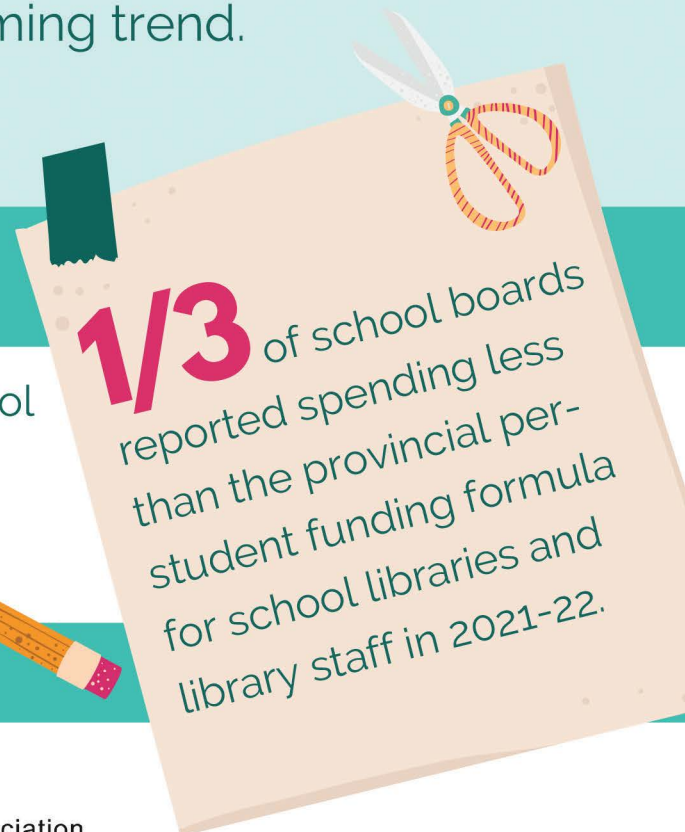
Schools with libraries and trained library staff see better outcomes on the Grade 3 and 6 EQAO assessments.



Over the past two decades, hundreds of thousands of students across Ontario have lost access to school libraries – and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and its fallout have accelerated this alarming trend.



Since then, several of Ontario's largest school boards have made dramatic reductions to school libraries and library staff affecting hundreds of thousands of students.



∴ ontario school library association



∴ ontario library association

# Two Stars and a Wish: An Update on School Library Funding and Advocacy Work

**T**he School Library Learning Commons landscape has always been a narrative with dire outcomes and plot twists caused by various funding levels, access to staffing, resources and physical spaces. Yes, we have seen some money moving into school libraries appropriately through funding channels. However, we also know that the prescribed funding methods and the associated budgets from the provincial government and school districts do not, in many cases, always make it to the school library. These are stories that we know all too well – inequitable funding and access to school libraries across the province. Both the OLA and the OSLA have always advocated for change and continue to do so.

We know through historical research from our organizations and others, as well as from anecdotal narratives from the trenches, that staffing is being eroded, libraries are closing and resources are not always available. At the same time, there are serious disparities related to geography. Access to library spaces, staffing and resources drastically fades in northern and rural communities compared to southern and more urban school districts. In 2017, People for Education noted that “elementary schools in central Ontario are over 8 times more likely to have teacher-librarians compared to those in northern Ontario, where only 11% of elementary schools have these specialized staff” (2017, People for Education).

To help summarize our next steps in protecting school library funding, I would like to use the tried and tested ‘Two Stars and a Wish’ feedback tool to harness our next steps and highlight the issue of funding in school libraries.

## Two Stars

OSLA and OLA deserve a star for their continued advocacy work towards protecting school library funding. It has been a long road, but we are beginning to see the Ministry of Education requiring school board accountability within the realm of school library funding. “Beginning last year, the Ministry of Education now requires school boards to report annually on how provincial funding is used to meet the provincial expectations for school library investment” (2023, Ontario Library Association). This has been no small task and these accolades are well-deserved. Having this data and next steps is imperative for our advocacy journey to continue. Thank you to everyone who helped get this process started and addressed by the Ministry of Education.

While we advocate and engage with the Ministry, it is essential that all school library professionals celebrate the impact that our collective energy and tireless work has had on our school communities and student success. The second star is for all school library workers across the province. We must always remember that school libraries are a direct link to our students’ love of reading as

reported in a 2011 Queen’s University and People for Education report that said, “in schools with library staff, students were more likely to report that they *liked to read*” (2011, Queen’s University/ People for Education). While we acknowledge the importance of a love of reading, we must also continue to highlight the impact that properly funded libraries have on Grades 3 and 6 EQAO assessments.

These stars are for each one of you. Everyone who does the work every day, keeping our libraries open and providing support for our students as they reach their greatest potential. The stars also go out to the strong team of advocates across library land who have fought for this accountability reporting and who continue to take action. Together, our voices are getting louder, creating space for even more accountability and securing the importance of libraries in our schools across the province. Without the work of library staff and advocates, we might see an even more problematic landscape in school libraries.

## And a Wish

Ultimately, our wish is for the increased protection and continued reporting of funding that flows properly from the Ministry of Education to school boards and then into library staffing, programming and resources. In fact, let’s suggest even more.

As your representatives, OSLA Council will continue to ensure that our messaging to the Ministry of Education is uniform, advocating for the mandate that school boards must use allocated money *for* libraries *in* libraries. The funding should be used to support staffing and resources. This nimble approach allows for the respect of school boards to have independence and flexibility with library spending while ensuring the provincial funding formula is used accurately. Although this is an uphill battle, the OSLA and OLA see it as an opportunity to protect and commence restoration of school libraries across Ontario.

Through the new reporting process that school districts must complete, we discovered that Ontario provides over \$230 million to school boards for school library programming and staff based on the government’s model. However, as we know from the Ministry’s GSN requirements, less than “10% of that funding is explicitly required to be used, or enveloped, for school libraries” (2023, Ontario Library Association).

Although this data is not good news, it provides another opportunity for anyone who believes in the power of school libraries to get active, get loud and continue to do what we do best - fight for fully funded, fully staffed school libraries for all students across the province. ■



# Educational Escaping and Breakout EDU

**T**he BreakoutEdu escape room platform and kits have proven helpful and versatile as an engagement tool for classes visiting the LLC. Although initially they were often used as team-building activities, they are now being tied to curriculum.

For example, we recently planned an escape room for our Grade 11 Biology classes called “Stop the Pandemic!” The escape room clues helped them to review their learning about viruses. The game was already created on the BreakoutEdu platform, and the resources were all provided.



As a teacher-librarian, I prepared the kits, locks and clues based on the platform instructions, and ensured they were ready the morning of the activity in our library seminar room. Our seminar room can be divided in half, which was helpful; the class could be divided into two groups, creating a sense of healthy competition that was also helpful for engagement!

While these escape rooms could have been played in the regular classroom, some of the advantages of setting these in the library were:

- A dedicated space that could stay “set” in place for the day
- The opportunity for separate “rooms” for each group (this could be adapted in a more open-concept LLC by having groups in different corners of the space)
- The ability to help the classroom teachers by setting up the game in advance and coordinating the reset and takedown, which can be time-consuming
- The activity could be done with all course sections on the same day with a common facilitator (the teacher-librarian)

We have also successfully run similar escape rooms for the Grade 12 Biology classes relating to DNA and photosynthesis. There are many more curricular areas that have escape room game connections. Unfortunately, there are fewer options for topics like Canadian geography since BreakoutEdu is an American company.

For more information on pricing for the kits and platform for your school, check out the BreakoutEdu website. [I](#)



# How Gamification Offers Insight into Student Learning in the Challenging Interdisciplinary Subject of Cybersecurity

**F**or many years I coached sports at my school and observed the resources we poured into the same 15% of the school population who have the means to enjoy this traditional gamified experience. I shifted my focus to competition opportunities in my subject of computer technology in 2012 and never looked back. Suddenly students from single parent families who had to work regular part time jobs to make ends meet could enjoy school gamification usually reserved for the wealthy.



Our first successes came in Skills Ontario, which not only gave a wider diversity of students an opportunity to represent our school, but also raised our standards. Within a few years what we were aiming at in class went well beyond Ontario's garbled computer technology curriculum. Skills events are primarily solo, but in competition rounds simulated environments were used to explore tangible skills, there was little paper or screen-based information regurgitation; it was show me, don't tell me.



In 2017 I noticed that the Information and Communication Technology Council of Canada (ICTC) was introducing a new student cybersecurity competition called CyberTitan which would run in partnership with the U.S. Air Force Association's international CyberPatriot competition. When I started reading through the competition requirements, I got excited because this was a team-

based event that happened in increasingly challenging virtual environments.

If you're a Star Trek fan you'll have heard of the Kobayashi Maru, an intensive simulation designed to test the mettle of Star Fleet officers by seeing what they do in an unwinnable scenario. This kind of immersive simulation has always fascinated me as a teacher. When teaching Lord of the Flies in English, I often had the class roleplay the situation. Many students thought it wasn't realistic (everyone wouldn't go crazy like that!), but our in-class simulations often did and the student writing I got out of them was many degrees better than studying the book at arm's length.

An opportunity to get into a new (scary!) interdisciplinary subject (cybersecurity) through this interactive simulation approach was fascinating to me pedagogically. Game play in learning is often sold with engagement, but this is only a sliver of what it can deliver. From observing students in our LotF sims, I'd seen game play throw light on iterative attempts at mastering skills. This is something we often avoid in school as it's difficult to set up. It's why most of our means of assessment are hopelessly static. Gamification offers educators insight into how students grapple with new knowledge. The tests and other assessments we ply at them are not as enlightening as watching a student in suspended disbelief demonstrating skill and knowledge in an immersive simulation that has them believing that what they do has real consequence.

Our first round of CyberPatriot was intense and the learning curve steep for all of us. As a coach you're not allowed to assist students in competition, but there is a lot of technical material to prepare beforehand. The event takes place using a virtual machine platform called VMWare. Virtual machines are whole computer systems that exist only in software. When you start a VM, it's like turning on a computer. You see the Windows boot screen and the VM runs all the same start up routines that a physical machine does, but it does it all in software. When it's ready, the VM gives you a virtualized environment where you can explore an anxiety inducing subject like cybersecurity safely. If you accidentally infect your VM with a virus, you can just exit out of the application and no harm is done. Cybersecurity professionals use VMs to study all the nasty things you read about.



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## Tim King

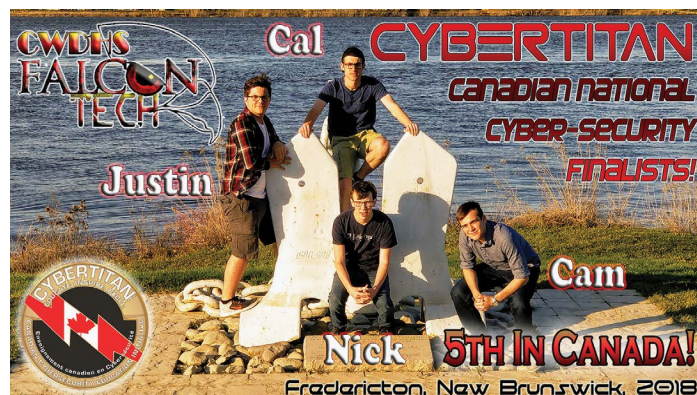
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CyberPatriot rounds deliver three or more virtual machine images. Students unpack these zip files and open them up in VMWare on competition days and then they have a six-hour window to analyze and repair these damaged environments. Typically, they are working on Windows 10, Server and Linux images, but it's all virtualized and gamified. The point scoring system is live and international, so students can see how they are doing against all the other active teams.

You'll see teams high fiving and cheering as they get points and you'll also see them trying aggressive fixes that break the VM, but this is part of the competition! When your VM breaks you can just reset it and start again. If you've been keeping track of where you found points, you can recover four hours of detective work in twenty minutes. Scores change wildly as teams tackle this event with the 'respawn' and try again approach they have learned as gamers.

On top of the virtual machines, there is also a Cisco Networking Academy component that has students building a secure network in the Packet Tracer simulator. For students who like architecture and building rather than sleuthing and repairing hacks, this is another gamified aspect of the competition that delivers differentiation and honours an iterative building approach.

Over a six-hour competition round I've seen teams of four to six learn new things together, come to trust and respect each other's skills and character explicitly through the intensity of the event and build new skills at astonishing speeds. Our first-year team had never done any cybersecurity before, but we were the top Skills school in IT and networking, had one of the provinces strongest coders and an excellent electronics engineer. Those diverse experts were all able to collaborate together to tackle cybersecurity, a new to us multi-disciplinary subject that scares most people away from even trying.



The next year CyberTitan made a point of encouraging more girls to try the competition and we became the first all-female team to attend the national finals. Watching how this team leveraged superior communication and collaboration skills to become competitive in a different way showed yet another strength of this gamified approach; there isn't just one way to win. All of our senior competitive teams have been co-ed ever since.



I've seen this gamified event create pathways and engage diverse students from applied and academic streams. Graduates have gone on to work overseas and across Canada in everything from the Canadian Navy to academia, government, and industry. The spark began in a game but that's no coincidence. ■





## Josh Breadner

# Smash Club

I didn't start Smash Club; however, I'm one of the students the torch has been passed to. The main goal of Smash Club was to have people take their minds off of school with a max effort [serious] Smash game. It started as a group of friends who just wanted to play *Super Smash Bros.* at break, and it turned into a small club in the library.

I was handed the torch by my older brother who ran the club until I was in grade 11, which is when he graduated and made me responsible for handling the club. Since I started running it, there's been less activity in the club, mainly because all of the most active members have graduated. It's made me think more about the importance of advertising and announcements.

For anyone trying to start a video games club, I'll let you know what you need to provide and expect.

Provide:

- console
- games
- spare controllers
- a TV or projector
- a system so everyone who's at the club can play (player rotation, multiplayer games, multiple consoles going at once)

Expect:

- People to bring their own controllers if possible
- Many people may show up for the initial week of advertising

Consider moving stronger players to their own bracket/console/rotation. ■

## HELP US REACH OUR GOAL \$25K



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**Donate \$25** and you will send a young reader to the Forest of Reading Festival.



**Donate \$50** and you will cover the cost of the annual registration fee for Forest of Reading Program.



**Donate \$150** and you will cover the cost of one set of books for the Forest of Reading Program.

# Facetime Without the Phones

I'm old enough to remember when facetime didn't involve phones or technology, when facetime meant human interaction with friends face-to-face. The library can and should be a place where students can come and enjoy some facetime with each other that does not require the use of technology. That does not mean that video gaming doesn't have a place in a library learning commons.

At McMaster University they have a huge space dedicated to letting students unwind and play some video games. They even provide the gaming systems, games and individual rooms for people to get together and game to their heart's content. This setup allows for more human interaction as opposed to gaming online and never seeing or personally knowing who you are playing against. At our LLC we allow students to use desktops for gaming with friends as long as the games are not violent. Students love the opportunity for a bit of a mental break during the lunch hour, but it's not their favourite way to get some facetime in at lunch.

Facetime in the library learning commons at my school involves the use of board games as a way to get that much needed human interaction, as well as learning a bevy of other useful and important skills. Board games often rely on strategic and critical thinking, foresight and planning and sometimes teamwork to be successful. Literacy is needed to read and follow instructions and depending on the game, numeracy is needed to keep score. There may be some risk involved that leads to big rewards.

When playing board games, students have the opportunity to communicate directly with each other instead of communicating through devices. For some students, board games are a new adventure in which they have to spend time learning how to play the game before they can put to use the other more nuanced skills required to win. Due to the pandemic, students were unable to spend time with each other in person and that led to a decline in their ability to communicate effectively. Board games are a small and relatively simple way to help students regain those skills.

Our foray into board games started when I noticed some students sitting on the floor beside a pair of students playing chess. When I asked them why they were on the floor and not on the couch, they said that they were waiting for their turn to play. I was shocked as I didn't realize there was so much interest in chess! The next day, more sets were purchased and our journey into board games began. Jenga, Uno and Connect 4 were instant hits and we had to buy multiple sets to keep up with the demand. Students started to fall in love with old classics like Monopoly and Scrabble (despite the long time they take to play). Guess Who has been a surprising fan favourite with students, despite it being a game geared toward an elementary school audience.

We bought so many games we had to create a games menu as it was taking us too long to tell the students about all the games that we had. Even better, we had classes booking board game periods with us as a way of relieving stress, taking care of their mental health and getting to know their classmates better. We make it a phone-free zone during game time to allow students to focus on the game and each other without distractions.

Board games in the library learning commons have helped to bring students together in person and give them a break from the phones, tablets and other devices that consume so much of their lives. We didn't realize just how powerful an impact board games would have in our library learning commons. When we hear the laughter and see the smiles on faces as they challenge each other in the games that they play, we know that this kind of facetime can play an important role in the mental health and well being of students. ■

## BOARD & CARD GAMES

### 2+ Players



# Roll for Initiative

*Dungeon Master (DM): As your group approaches the inn, you notice that a crowd has gathered around a large sign nailed to the door. You can hear angry mumbling from a number of the townsfolk closest to the sign. From here, you can only see the top, which appears to have the seal of the King.*

*Player 1 (P1): I gently push my way through the crowd to get a better look at the notice.*

*Player 2 (P2): I'll hang back to keep my eye on the crowd.*

*Player 3 (P3): I will stay with P2.*

*Player 4 (P4): Same.*

*DM: Okay, P1, how do you move through the crowd? Are you trying to be stealthy, or just careful?*

*P1: I'll try to be stealthy, just in case there are people in the crowd who may recognize me.*

*DM: Okay, roll a Stealth Check.*

*P1: [rolls a 20-sided die] Uh oh, I rolled a 1!*

*DM: As you try to carefully walk through the crowd, you accidentally kick the shin of the large guard who was standing right next to your group. As he turns to confront you, you notice a glimmer of recognition on his face. [in a different voice] "Oi! I know you! You're the one who stole the Queen's chalice!"*

*All Players: Oh no.*

*DM: [grinning wickedly] Time to roll for initiative!*

game with no clear winners or losers. It is also a game that requires time and space to play.



About seven years ago my co-worker was approached by a small group of students who were interested in learning more about D&D. They asked him if he would be willing to help them start an after-school club. What started as one group of 12 students has, as of this year, become 50+ students, divided into nine groups. Some are groups who already play together and are just looking for the convenience of a set date, time and place to play every week, but most are students who don't have a group yet and just want the opportunity to play.

I began volunteering with the group two years ago, once the hiatus on extra-curricular activities during the COVID-19 pandemic had ended. This was when the real surge of new players began. After not being able to be in-person for several years, many students saw the club as a good opportunity to dip their toes back into socializing with their peers outside of a classroom setting. Something I noticed was how many of the players had to share the books among them-

**T**he classic tabletop roleplaying game Dungeons & Dragons (D&D) has seen a massive resurgence in popularity in the last several years. This increased awareness can be traced to many sources, but the most popular one may be the Netflix series *Stranger Things*, where the main characters are a group of friends who regularly play D&D in their friend's basement. References to the game are peppered throughout the series.

If you are unfamiliar, D&D is typically played by a group of five to seven people with one person acting as the Dungeon Master (DM). The best way to describe play is: co-operative oral storytelling with the chaos element of a dice roll. While the majority of the group, called a "party", act as characters, the DM acts as the narrator. Outcomes of actions players take are often determined by a roll of the dice, literally. It's the DM's job to interpret how dice rolls will affect the story they've written and the characters being played. It is a

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selves. There are three core rulebooks for D&D and each typically cost about \$58. That can be a very high start-up cost for people who might not be ready to commit to playing regularly. I vividly remember having to constantly borrow my friends' books between sessions when I first began playing 18 years ago and wishing I could have borrowed them from the library.

To help eliminate this common barrier to play, I approached my fellow “dungeoneer” and my teacher-librarian to talk about adding a few of the books to the school library collection. We all agreed that since the club had grown so much in popularity it made sense to add a few books to the library collection for students to borrow as needed. We started with just two copies of *The Player's Handbook*, one copy of *The Dungeon Master's Guide*, and one copy of *The Monster Manual* – the three core books. All four books were regularly borrowed not only by club members, but also by students who were just curious about the game. After a local hobby shop generously donated several more books, we now have five copies of *The Player's Handbook*, three copies of *The Dungeon Master's Guide*, two copies of *The Monster Manual* and eight different supplemental books, all of which are circulated regularly and have helped enhance the play of not only club members, but also the students who play outside of the club.

While D&D is a great deal of fun and an opportunity to build relationships, it also helps build literacy, numeracy and research skills. Oral storytelling is one of the oldest forms of literature and literacy. Many of the folktales and myths that permeate pop-culture have roots in the traditions of oral storytelling. The players and the DM must remember key details of what happened in previous sessions and be able to pick up on subtle pieces of context that the DM may have given to help move the plot. For numeracy, most actions require a die roll where the player must “meet or beat” a certain number to be successful. The die roll is often added to a skill listed on the player's character sheet. The higher the roll, or the skill, the more likely the character will be successful in whatever they are attempting. These checks are often done quickly at the moment of action.

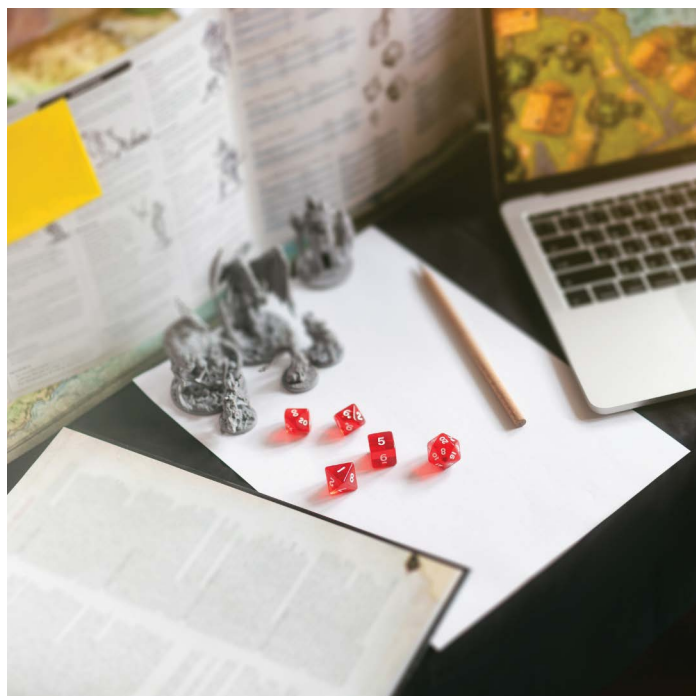
In terms of research, D&D has rules and conditions that affect gameplay. To help keep the rhythm of play going, players and the DM need to be able to quickly find a particular rule, spell description, or special ability in one of the various rulebooks. This teaches students to use the index and table of contents to find key pages and

## Ashley Allen

the ability to scan a page to find specifically what they are looking for.

D&D is also great at showing students the importance of preparation. Most of this burden is upon the DM to plan the story they want to tell. If that story includes monsters, a dungeon, or treasure, they must prepare and plan all those things ahead of time. While some flexibility is usually required, most DMs spend hours plotting what the next session will look like for their players. Preparedness for players includes developing their character sheets to make sure all the information on it is up-to-date, especially if they gained a level at the end of the previous session, and knowing what abilities might help them play cooperatively with their party members.

D&D is also a great opportunity for marginalized students to freely express themselves and tell the stories that they want to hear. A personal favourite character was a gender fluid halfling bard who played the bagpipes and fell in love with a medusa. In D&D, you can be whoever you want to be. You can explore different parts of your own identity or just try to understand someone who is completely different from you. The library learning commons is a safe space, a place for learning, for collaboration, for story and for adventure. In both the fantasy world of D&D and the real world of the school LLC, the possibilities for storytelling are endless. Now, grab your d20 and get ready for adventure! ■



# Epic Quests: Gaming through your lifetime

**D**o you consider yourself a gamer? I certainly didn't. Whenever I heard the term "gamer," I imagined a skilled video game player with lightning reflexes (and possibly a dedicated Youtube following). With my poor hand-eye coordination and tiny digital footprint, I was about as far from that ideal as humanly possible.

It was only after writing a "gaming autobiography" in university that I realized how much gaming experience I truly had.

The assignment was simple: describe your relationship with games and the way that it has developed over the course of your life. My professor – the ever awesome Dr. Sonja Nikkila – made a point of mentioning that the games we discussed didn't have to be digital, nor did we have to play them ourselves. Watching friends or siblings play was an equally valid form of engagement.

These qualifications helped me figure out how I wanted to proceed. I wrote about watching my dad play World of Warcraft as a kid and playing Mario Kart with my brother as a teenager.

Though it was shaping up to be a memorable (not to mention comprehensive) autobiography, I felt like it was missing something. Dr. Nikkila reassured me that secondhand experience still counted, but I wanted to write about a game that I was actually good at.

Enter Dungeons & Dragons, Wizards of the Coast's flagship product and the world's so-called greatest roleplaying game.

I have been playing Dungeons & Dragons since early elementary school, when my dad first let me read his Monster Manual. To date, I have more than twenty characters and own most of the official rulebooks and supplements. I've run one-shots for both friends and strangers and have even dipped my toes into the game's thriving homebrew scene.

Once I realized that D&D was fair game — no pun intended — the autobiography practically wrote itself.

So what changed? Why did the inclusion of D&D suddenly make the project so easy for me? I think one of the biggest factors is expertise. I've known about Dungeons & Dragons for almost my entire life and, in that time, absorbed a lot of information about the game. If pressed, I can even recite stat blocks from memory.

I'm also incredibly passionate about the game. Though most members of the online RPG community roll their eyes at overly-invested gamers, to the point that the phrase "let me tell you about my character" has become a minor meme, I have a tendency to get attached to my characters and enjoy creating content (sketches, short stories and the like) based on their adventures.

It's for these reasons that I'd strongly suggest writing gaming autobiographies with your students.

As noted in my anecdote, it can be difficult for students to connect

with certain topics, especially when they have a (real or perceived) lack of relevant experience. By giving them an opportunity to write about something that they're invested in, they can develop the confidence necessary to engage with other, more complicated subjects.

I would recommend bringing Dungeons & Dragons to the classroom for many of the same reasons. Not only does it boost students' self-esteem, it also encourages problem solving, creativity and critical thinking.

I once ran a one-shot for a group of eighth graders: all but one of them were unfamiliar with D&D. Though I offered the group a bit of guidance before starting the game, most had no idea what to expect and spent the first half of the session floundering. One student even tried to attack the quest giver!

Eventually, the player who knew the most about the game appointed himself "team leader." He came up with a detailed list of objectives and began brainstorming ways that the group could achieve them.

Before long, the rest of the team was following his lead. They bounced ideas off one another and solved puzzles through trial and error. By the end of the session, everyone was talking excitedly about what they wanted to do next.

It's moments like these that remind me how important it is to feel confident in your abilities. Once you overcome your initial apprehension, I think you'll be surprised by what you can do.

Will writing a gaming autobiography change your life? Probably not. But it might just change the way that you see yourself. ■



# Old Games, New Players / New Games, Old Awe

**G**ames have been a part of my professional repertoire for a long time. As one of the founding members of the GamingEdus, a “group of like-minded educators who believed in the power of video games in education and the positive possibilities of games-based learning” (Maliszewski, 2023), learning and playing are intrinsically woven together in a tapestry of joy. Joy is important to cultivate, especially in the school library.



The games that school library professionals are familiar with may not be the ones that the students know and love. This generational gap does not prevent groups from enjoying these media texts together. When approached with genuine curiosity and enthusiasm, everyone can learn about new ways to play.

## Repurposing Old Consoles

You can use old video game systems for exploration in your library MakerSpace take-apart station but, if they still work, you can set up these less-than-current consoles in your library as a play center. As Wreck It Ralph says in the film bearing his name, “The gamers say we’re retro, which I think means old but cool.” Way back in 2009, my colleague and I used funds we won from a competition to purchase two Nintendo Wii gaming systems. We used the Wii for instructional and recreational purposes, and documented our successes (Johnson and Maliszewski, 2011). Nintendo Wiis are obsolete, replaced by the more portable Nintendo Switch, but we still use our Nintendo Wii in the library for some DPA and collaborative play as part of our Just Dance Club or through the old game Outdoor Challenge. Many of our younger students are unfamiliar with the large, white Wiimote controls and find it fascinating to play these games with others.

## Board Games and Card Games

Board games are in a renaissance phase. According to a recent

article by the Washington Post, “the industry now has more categories and themes, prettier boxes and higher quality game pieces. In many cases, the rules are simpler and there are more offerings that focus on cooperation rather than competition. These developments have opened the doors for a broader audience to embrace the hobby.” Whether you play virtually or in-person, introducing students to classic or brand-new board games has many pedagogical and mental health benefits (Maliszewski, 2022).

To keep older students engaged during book exchange periods, I’ve placed board games that have STEM elements and are short to play out for students to use. This has resulted in fewer off-task disruptive behaviours and a more positive attitude towards the library.



Some of my favourite games for brief play at centres include Jenga, Buildzi, Tenzi, tabletop Sling Hockey, tabletop Curling, Perfection, Hungry Hippos and Spot It.

Games that take a bit longer to play but still captivate users of all ages include titles such as Blokus, Imagine, Tsuru, Telestrations, Just One and Dixit.

Don’t forget card games! Several long-standing friendships were forged in my university days over games of Euchre. Card games can provide hours of quiet (or not-so-quiet) fun for different ages and stages. You can teach students all sorts of card games.

## Discovering Gacha Games and Other Online Mobile Entertainment

Learning about new games does not have to be a one-way street. Students have their own games that they like to play, and you can leverage those games to build relationships. It doesn’t mean you are required to play them in school (Maliszewski,

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2020). Ask students what they like to play. Have informal discussions to find out how to play these games and why they are fun for your students. Resist the urge to apply your own personal value judgments on games; negative vibes shut down dialogue.

For instance, my own son is an avid gamer. He's a recent college grad who trained as an animator, so his involvement with video games is both personal and professional. He really likes gacha games, which are games that entice players to spend in-game currency (usually collected by either spending real money or "grinding" missions to earn points) to have a chance to acquire new characters or equipment, depending on the specific game. Here are some of the games that my 21-year-old enjoys, along with his explanations for his "n00b mom."

- **Cookie Run Kingdom.** This is a role-playing base-building game. You have a grid, and you can place buildings to create items which serve a greater purpose, but you can also level up your characters to engage in battle in story mode or PVP.
- **Bomb Rush Cyberfunk.** This is a movement heavy game focused on doing tricks and keeping your combo going along with putting up graffiti on different locations.
- **Genshin Impact.** This gacha game is available on PC and mobile and features an open world along with an elemental system where mixing elements determines the outcome of the battles.
- **Kirby and the Forgotten Land.** A 3D platformer where you use powerups and other abilities to solve puzzles and defeat enemies as you explore this new space.
- **Monster Hunter Rise.** This is a team-based PVE (player-versus-enemy) game where players pick one of the various weapons available and hunt down colossal creatures to collect materials and create new weapons and armour to take on stronger enemies.



I am rather impressed that my son can be so articulate when describing one of his passions. I've watched him play CupHead and am amazed by his quick reflexes (as well as the incredibly detailed visuals).

### Participation Through Viewing and Speaking

People frequently watch other people play games virtually. Online gaming communities are plentiful. Twitch is a live stream platform dedicated to gaming. People can watch their favourite streamers play games and can also interact with the streamer via the real-time Twitch chat. There is a YouTube equivalent, called YouTube Live, but takes inspiration from Twitch, which popularized it first. Live streams can then be polished and recorded and transformed into videos, which often generate large followings.

As you can tell by some of the descriptions, gaming has its own vocabulary and terms. Gamer talk can feel impenetrable at times, such as when I used to ask my husband about his WOW (World of Warcraft) raids when he was an active player, but it can be insightful to get even just a glimmer of understanding into these activities. Conversations about games are also important to ensure that healthy balances are maintained between gaming and other tasks. Gaming addiction is a reality. Check out <https://gamequitters.com/> for a quiz to see if your gaming habits (or those of a loved one) are out of control.

The world of games is a large one. Find your entry points for your library and school community and don't be afraid to have fun. ■



# Professional Resources

## Kasey Whalley

*Why have games in libraries?* ALA Games and Gaming Round Table. <https://games.ala.org/why-have-games-in-libraries/>



**T**his site is a very helpful place to start if you don't have games available in your library...yet. If you're looking for a well-developed and clear list of reasons why gaming in libraries is beneficial to patrons, this ALA Games and Gaming RT provides that in abundance. Though the content is sometimes geared towards public library spaces and has an American focus, the information presented can still be applied to school libraries in Canada.

A part of particular interest on this webpage is the section "Are there people that think that games don't belong in libraries – what are their arguments?" Breaking down some of the pushback and challenges you may experience when introducing games into library spaces can be incredibly helpful. Some of the arguments weren't fully explored – specifically one where a quote from an American author was used as the counterpoint – but overall, the sentiments and evidence for supporting games in a library is a good starting point when looking for succinct answers to challenges.

In addition to this page, the Games and Gaming RT has other resources that teacher-librarians may find useful, including articles about Games Based on Banned Books<sup>1</sup>, Free Print and Play Games<sup>2</sup> and an entire blog category for game reviews. This site is recommended as a very good starting point for understanding and establishing games and gaming in a library.

<sup>1</sup> Admin. (2023, October 5). *Games based on banned books*. ALA Games and Gaming Round Table. <https://games.ala.org/games-based-on-banned-books/>

<sup>2</sup> *Print and play games*. ALA Games and Gaming Round Table. <https://games.ala.org/print-play-games>

TVO Learn mPower. <https://www.tvompower.com>



This delightful site was created through a collaboration with Ontario educators and TVO Kids. The mPower site offers free STEM games for students in grades K – 6. Although it is behind an account sign-up, everything is free to play and completely without ads. This means that students can learn and play without being interrupted by commercials.

Accounts can be set up by parents or educators, and students have individual profiles under the adult account. Adults can edit the grade level of a player or remove the profile from the account. Under the educator account, player progress can also be monitored. Players have the freedom to choose the games they want to play, and the adult can feel comfortable knowing that the content has been created by other Ontario educators.

Home
Scholarly Resources
Division I (Grade K-3)
Division II (Grade 4-6)
Division III (Grade 7-9)
Division IV (Grade 10-12)
Language Learning
Indigenous Games
Teaching with Robots 

Games on this platform align with the Ontario curriculum and engage students with fun and friendly interfaces. They seamlessly fit with STEM content that students are being exposed to in the classroom and helps make sense of real-world applications for many of the concepts they are encountering. This is a great site to support and bolster learning objects and curriculum content, especially for students who may need

a differentiated learning experience.

While this site is geared towards classrooms or at-home learning, the applications in school libraries are evident. This site could be part of an after-school gaming club, a game you could offer to support STEM learning in classrooms, or an option for a fun and quick education games for students to play when they need a quick break – like a modern-day Math Circus.

*Teaching with games*. Subject Guides at University of Alberta Libraries. <https://guides.library.ualberta.ca/teaching-with-games>

This library guide from the University of Alberta Library is designed for students in the university's education program. Because of the nature of library guides, some of the content is only available to students in the program – however, a significant portion of the information provided is available for the public and it's been vetted by a subject expert librarian.

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The interesting and most useful part of this guide is the breakdown of games by grades that can help school library professionals develop their game collection to meet a wide range of student levels. The links in these lists redirect to protected content, but the lists themselves are valuable resources. Each game has a brief description, age range, and (usually) an average play duration. This information, presented in a single space, can be incredibly helpful when library professionals are trying to sort through the mountains of games and make collection decisions. By using this list, you can get a head start.

It's important to mention that there are also Indigenous games and language learning games alongside the grade-

leveled games. These lists are shorter, but still provide a brief description of the game and most often an age range and average play duration. Using these lists in conjunction with other knowledge specialists (like book retailers or industry experts) can help build inclusive and responsive library game collections.

In addition to the grade-levelled game lists, the guide also provides websites, apps, or other content that can support gaming in the library. These sites are found on the right-hand side of the grade-leveled lists and similarly reflect the focused age ranges. These externally linked sites can have a variety of subject focuses, including numeracy, literacy or science. ■

Tina Zita

## Visual Essay

