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Volume 33, Issue 1

THE Teaching Librarian

THE MAGAZINE OF THE ONTARIO SCHOOL LIBRARY ASSOCIATION
ISSN 1188679X

**Bringing people together
through stories**

PAGE 11

**Creating mindful moments
for students and educators**

PAGE 24

**Helping children discover
their place in the world of books**

PAGE 26

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THE Teaching Librarian

VOLUME 33, ISSUE 1 SEPTEMBER 2025 ISSN 1188679X

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**belonging @ your
library**

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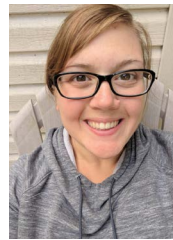
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TingL Mission

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 (16th edition) or APA Style.

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TingL Submission Guidelines

Please Note: Themes are subject to change.

January 2026 V. 33, Issue 2	Passion @ Your Library Deadline: October 10, 2025
May 2026 V. 33, Issue 3	Story-Telling @ Your Library Deadline: February 5, 2026
September 2026 V. 34, Issue 1	Theme TBD Deadline: May 4, 2026

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.

When writers consent to having articles published in *The Teaching Librarian* magazine, permission is also granted to online distribution of the periodical through accessola.com and educational databases, without expectation of financial compensation. Ownership and copyright of the article is still retained by the original authors. Any questions about submissions should be directed to the editor of *The Teaching Librarian*: theteachinglibrarian@accessola.com.

TingL Subscriptions

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The Editor's Notebook



DANNY NEVILLE

All school library professionals are experts at developing a sense of belonging. We work hard everyday to create inclusive, authentic spaces for our students and patrons. But it's not always easy for us to recreate that sense of belonging with our library colleagues across schools, boards and the province.

So, how do we do it? I'm going to be so bold as to suggest that the sense of belonging so many of us crave in our profession is best created in-person. Of course, our world has changed dramatically in recent years, opening up all sorts of experiences that happen online. This has improved accessibility greatly, and should be a cherished component of our professional development, personal lives, education and employment.

But...

How often have you heard sighs of relief from colleagues at the refreshing nature of in-person vs. virtual PD. Or the excited hum of voices chatting around the proverbial water cooler, connecting about all aspects of life. This, my friends, is the adult version of recess. Where new connections are forged, life lessons are learned and memories are made.

One place to start is at the OLA Super Conference, and now is the time to start planning. Speak to your administrators about creative solutions to coverage. Contact your union to see if you're eligible for financial support. Or create a workshop proposal to present your ideas, learning and experience at the conference. Whatever strategy you use, I strongly urge you to make the trip. Your sense of belonging in the library sector is sure to grow tenfold.

Of course, not everyone can get to Toronto in the middle of winter, so what other options exist for creating in-person opportunities to connect with one another? Check out the wonderful article by the folks from the Telling Tales Festival and join them at their event on October 4 & 5 in Burlington. Or take some advice from Marena Gillen in her article about developing a year-long writer's program that blends virtual and in-person events. Or, start planning now to join us at the Forest of Reading Festival at Harbourfront Centre in downtown Toronto next year! After reading Marty Chan's behind-the-scenes look at the festival, you'll definitely want a ticket!

However you choose to develop your sense of belonging, I hope you'll let us know. Follow and tag us on BlueSky (@tingl.bsky.social) or Instagram (@tingl_osla) to keep the conversation going and the ideas flowing! ■

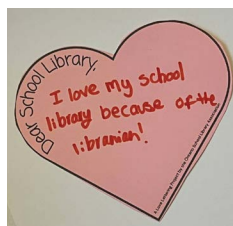
Danny

Danny Neville
Editor of *The Teaching Librarian Magazine*

President's Report



WENDY BURCH JONES

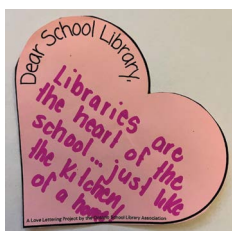


What does belonging mean for school library professionals? When so many of us are siloed in our school communities, what does it mean to belong to a community like the Ontario School Library Association? Well, for starters, let's be clear that ALL school library professionals in the province of Ontario belong. Regardless of your title, your

role, your assignment or what your students call you, you belong here. We have school library professionals working in school libraries across the province that go by many different names: school library technicians, library clerks, school librarians, teacher-librarians, Miss/Mister/Ms, The Library Lady, The Book Teacher and (perhaps my personal favourite) "um,... Ms..(mumble), Can you help me?" And at the end of the day, it doesn't matter what role we have in our school libraries. We ALL belong. We all come to schools every day with the goal of encouraging a life-long love of reading. That is what unites us. That is what belonging means.

We belong in our school boards and regions within this province. Some boards have strong grassroots networks of school library professionals (I'm looking at you Peel!) or more formal ones supported by a central department (good job, TDSB!). And some are even award-winning (way to go, NNDSB!). Regardless of which region you find yourself as a school library professional in Ontario, please know that you, too, belong in the OSLA. It doesn't matter where you work. If you work in a school community in Ontario - you belong!

We also belong because of, and perhaps in spite of, our spaces. Ostensibly, we all work in school communities. And while some outside of #onted might think that all schools are the same, we know that school communities are vastly different. Especially our school libraries. Some school libraries are blissfully well-funded, with an incredible administrator who values the role that library and school library professionals play in the school community. Those libraries are B-E-A-utiful (I really hope you heard that in Jim Carrey's voice)! Then there are those libraries that are dusty and neglected. It is not for lack of trying that these libraries are in the state that they're in. But years of no budget (or being ignored altogether) take their toll. We do the best we can with what we have. Some libraries are on carts and in bins - wheeled from room to room. Each and every one is used to spread the joy that we know is hidden within those pages.

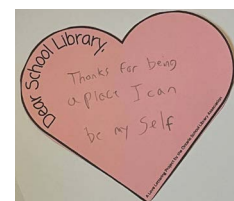


Sometimes I hear colleagues suggest that they aren't really a "[insert role title here]" anymore because they don't get to do "[insert part of role they used to do and don't anymore]." To this I say - hogwash! The very nature of our roles as school library professionals continues to evolve over time. My mother, a retired teacher-librarian who started her career with the North York Board of Education (yep - *that* long ago) started out writing due dates on library



cards in pockets in the backs of books. She saw the advent of microfilms, the first computers, the first books on tape, the first circulation software rollout (that's a story) and the first time she could "Quick Cat" books for processing. Just because you teach Kindergarten Prep, ELL Resource or teach at more than one worksite doesn't mean you are not a school library professional. Our programming has evolved over time. In some schools, we get to do a lot of collaboration and partnering work. In other schools, we do our best to collaborate with our students to help them make the very best choices for book exchange. In some schools, we are asked to do coding and robotics, while in others, we are asked to do a read-aloud and "follow-up activity." But all of this is library programming. It ALL counts.

And on that note, your timetable isn't your fault either. You don't get to decide how many periods of "library" are in your timetable. First of all, it's the Board that decides on staffing allocations for schools. Then it's up to the administrator to determine how to timetable those staff to best meet the needs of the students in the school community. So despite how often you get to "be in the library" - you belong. Perhaps the most important part of your role is that you create belonging. You get to create that for your school community - through a love of reading, through the shared adventure of #kidlit, through the magic of storytelling. With every word off the page, you help your students remember that they belong. I hope you remember that you are a valued member of this OSLA community. And we're really glad you're here.



Yours in story,

Wendy B Jones

Wendy Burch Jones
2024 & 2025
OSLA President

P.S. It has been my sincerest pleasure to be the President of the OSLA for these past two years. Getting to hear your stories from regions all across the province has made me keenly aware that while my term as President is soon coming to a close (at the end of 2025), the fight for your school libraries and the struggle to keep them open with inclusive and relevant books on the shelves is nowhere near done. As I step into the role of Past-President and continue to serve on the Ontario Library Association's Board of Directors, I will also continue to loudly advocate for every student in Ontario to have a fully-staffed and fully-funded school library. Because they each deserve a sense of belonging in a great school library learning commons, too. ■

Origin Stories: School Library Professionals from the Greater Toronto Area

LISA LEWIS



Lisa Lewis

Since 2011, I have been a teacher-librarian at two elementary schools. My journey started as a child.

I became hooked on books growing up in Toronto and I thank my mother for that. Her excitement every time a new Nancy Drew book

was published was equal to my zest to crack open the book and devour it. My mom loved Judy Bloom books as much as I did, and these novels, now considered classics, are available in most schools.

I didn't start out as a librarian, though, or even as a teacher. After University, I spent almost 20 years in the corporate world, as a marketing and communications professional. I wore many hats, from organizing events to writing reports to creating workshops, learning how to multitask. I had to figure out how to bring people together so that they could learn, question, discuss and explore.

But in my heart, I knew I wanted to become a teacher, so I changed career paths and never looked back. I took the skills that I learned in the corporate world and applied them to teaching.

Teaching has been more challenging, but also more invigorating than I'd imagined. I'm honoured to have the privilege and responsibility to be part of the development of Canada's next generation. My goal as a teacher-librarian is to help children be prepared for the challenges they face in life.

I often travel when I'm not teaching, and I seek out books for the library that help kids gain an understanding of other cultures and see how our world is diverse. It allows me to nurture children's senses of self and identity. Children see that there are people who are different from them, but also people who are like them. Stories about other cultures teach acceptance and tolerance, and allow kids to see that we can embrace our differences, not be embarrassed by or afraid of them.

I am a proud Canadian Jewish woman, and I try to bring Jewish values about family, community and learning to my job. We are grounded in our own culture and I hope to help children see me as a positive role model. We can be proud of who they are, and yet respectful of and curious about others.

One of the things I am most proud of is the adult/child book club I created in 2017. I invite children and parents (and other relatives) to all read the same book, and we get together to discuss it as an after-school activity. I try to find diverse books that encourage conversations about life's challenges, and we talk about how the issues in the book relate to the students' and their relatives' lives. The children and their parents see themselves as equals in the club and the kids feel empowered to discuss what they read.

It is an honour to be a teacher-librarian, helping students learn to love reading and get comfort in seeing how books can help them navigate life.



Christine Julien-Sullivan

Like so many book plots, my path to librarianship has been far from linear! I grew up in a suburb of Ottawa, and on Saturday afternoons my dad – an avid reader – would take me to the local public library during our weekend errands. I couldn't wait to get home to read the books I selected. I was that kid who would read by

flashlight under the covers way past my bedtime and who helped in my school library at recess!

I also loved to write, so my high school counsellor advised me to apply to journalism at Ryerson (now TMU). After completing my degree, I applied that education and skill set to a career in PR at Ryerson itself, where I co-created the Public Affairs department that managed internal communications, special events, speechwriting and media relations for the university – all while completing my post-graduate certificate in public relations. I loved my role; a highlight was working on events where we hosted the likes of Nelson Mandela, Pierre Trudeau, Bryan Adams and Christopher Plummer.

When I put my PR career on pause to raise my kids, I managed my own writing and editing business, and volunteered in the community, namely for the Oakville Santa Claus Parade, the local Terry Fox Run, Friends of the Oakville Public Library... and my children's school. The energy and vibe of their elementary school resonated with me. My mom had begun her career as a teacher, and I felt at home in a school. But books were my passion – so I went back to school and completed my LIT diploma at Mohawk. As I graduated I was offered a position at the Oakville Public Library, and soon after, at the Halton Catholic District School Board.

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I had landed.

Thirteen years later, I've worked at three elementary schools in Oakville, most recently opening a brand-new school, St. Cecilia – which is uniquely meaningful to me as the school bears my late mom's name.

Over my tenure at the HCDSB, I have championed the transition of libraries to learning commons and spaces fit for 21st Century learning and presented on the evolving role of the library & information technician at the Ontario Library Association Super Conference. I find library spaces most engaging when they are dynamic and welcoming, comfortable and well-equipped, with a diverse collection of books and resources to meet everyone's needs and interests.

My role is rewarding and fulfilling – is there a better feeling than seeing the joy on a student's face when they find the perfect book for them, when they are the first to check out a new release or when they connect with a narrative? As a dedicated supporter of Canadian books, the Forest of Reading program, and the I Read Canadian initiative, I'm always excited to connect my students to Canadian authors & illustrators, and have been extremely fortunate to befriend a number of Canadian creators. (Can I squeeze the word Canadian one more time into this paragraph?!)

As for my next chapter, I haven't "written off" publishing a children's book of my own. Stay tuned!

Connect with me on IG @stecialibrary_hcdsb / X @amusebook

Home is Where the Books Are

Kim Kondo

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Thinking back, it makes sense that I've fallen in love with being a teacher-librarian. My earliest memories are of my dad reading to me before bed and taking me to the public library. I remember eagerly completing the TPL's summer reading club and can still picture the look and feel of the cozy children's section. My mom kept the house stocked with books so I could read everything from *A Series of Unfortunate Events* to *Little Women*. My most memorable school experiences were in the library, from my very first teacher-librarian's songs and stories in our semicircle, to my first year reading the Silver Birch books in Grade 6 and being chosen to attend the awards, all the way to reading in my favourite cubicle

during spares in high school and breaks in university, I have always been at home in a library.

When I graduated almost 15 years ago, jobs were extremely scarce so I decided to take as many AQs as I could to help my resume. Librarianship Part 1 was the second and unbeknownst to me at the time, the most important one I would complete. Once I made it into the board, I started applying to any and all postings. When I did get interviews, they were mainly library positions. I got extremely lucky and owe my start to my wonderful first principal, Victor Tran. He took a chance on me and I am grateful to say I've been in the library ever since. It has been an honour to grow as a teacher at the same time that I hope I have grown the library.



Over the years, I have changed the physical space to be more accessible, developed an organization system that seems to work well for everyone, run clubs and contests to build engagement and excitement about literacy, brought coding and tech into the space and am constantly working to build a collection that I hope reflects the many diverse perspectives and voices that exist in our world. Most importantly, I have thoroughly enjoyed the relationships being a

teacher-librarian has allowed me to build with students, staff and families. It is such a joy to get to know students and provide them with a safe space they know they are always welcome in. Students know they are able to come at recess and lunch to read, do centres (STEM bins, puzzles, games, etc) or just hang out for a chat.

This connection and sense of community is really what a library is all about. Our students need and deserve to feel at home in a well-staffed and well-funded space. They deserve to feel like they belong, see themselves reflected in the space and learn about others. They deserve to fall in love with books and reading, discover new worlds or perspectives and have fun while doing it. It has been an immense privilege to be a teacher-librarian for as long as I have and I don't take a day for granted. ■

Meet the Author: Wali Shah

MARTHA BRACK MARTIN



Wali Shah learned at a young age the power of using his voice. As a spoken word poet and hip-hop artist (under the moniker Flo), Wali found audiences eager for his powerful messages about belonging, discrimination, anti-bullying, toxic masculinity and creating change. As his talents became more recognized, he took his passions and channeled them into a variety of public speaking opportunities in Canada

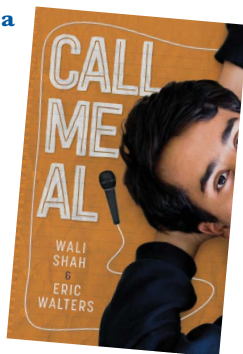
and around the world, earning a host of accolades for his work. Most recently, Wali used his gifts in a new medium, co-writing the novel *Call Me Al* with renowned children's author Eric Walters. It was a nominee for the 2025 Forest of Reading's Red Maple award. Recently I spoke with Wali about that experience, as well as how his life has shaped his creative work.

TingL: Hi Wali! Thanks for chatting with me.

Wali: Thanks for reaching out!

The book *Call Me Al* was written as a collaboration between you and Eric Walters. How did that collaboration come about?

I met my friend Eric when I was about 19 years old and I was invited to speak and share some poetry at an event hosted by the Mississauga Library. I remember talking to him briefly that day, and we agreed to keep in touch, and many years later, Eric reached out with the idea to write something collaboratively together. At the same time, I had my own ideas about coming up with a novel based on my own lived experience as a young person, and now we have our story together!



You're both very different people. How did that collaboration work?

Eric, being an experienced and prolific writer and a Caucasian Christian man in his 60s and me, being a first-time novelist and a Muslim man in his late 20s, meant that this was a collaboration which included both of us learning from one another. *Call Me Al* is a story that really brought together our own individual diverse experiences as a bridge for people to see how we can come together as a community to share stories.

We need stories that bring people together, now more than ever. And clearly, you're comfortable with the spoken word. You're well-known for your spoken-word poetry, Ted Talks and motivational presentations. You were even chosen as the Poet Laureate for the City of Mississauga. So how far out of your comfort zone was being asked to collaborate on a novel? Did it take some convincing?

Being tasked with writing a novel was definitely a unique experience which pushed me outside of my comfort zone. Although I really truly appreciated the challenge because it created an opportunity for me to learn and grow as a writer tremendously. When I think about the opportunity to write poetry as a young kid in high school, I never would have thought this would one day translate into me being a novelist. Being where I am now, I find that it's definitely made me a better writer working with someone like Eric and working on long form storytelling, because there is a great opportunity to really delve into nuance when you have 200 pages to work with as opposed to a 3-minute performance for poetry. Though I will be honest, it didn't take much convincing because working with Eric was really an honour, and writing a novel was something that I had always considered and was working on in my own time.

I understand Eric fasted for a day during Ramadan, just like Ali's classmates do in the book. How did that come about?

As Eric and I were discussing the idea, he chose to do it to walk in solidarity with our community.

I love that! Besides Eric, you've had some really cool opportunities to meet other inspirational people while sharing your artistic works. How has meeting these other creatives influenced your own understanding of yourself and what you want to achieve?

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Well, it's been an honour to meet some incredible people on this journey. My favourite has to have been President Obama! I think the one thing I can really take from both collaborating and meeting people that have inspired me greatly is to see that I am able to carve a career out for myself in what I love to do. It's been really validating for me to be in the same room and to be able to have my name next to individuals that have done incredible things. And it pushes me forward, knowing that if I can be there, I can take my work to the next level as well. I'd really love to see some of the work that I write one day turned into a feature film or television show. If Barack Obama can become the first Black president in American history, why can't I become the first Muslim Canadian novelist with a feature film?

Absolutely! Why not? And think of how many more people you could inspire! I mean, look at your spoken-word poem, *Home* (<https://youtu.be/k-o-A0kyqn0?si=HePxtm5ixh4KJyLa>) It's an incredibly powerful wake-up call for Canadians – and not just Canadians – to recognize how we marginalize, stereotype and discriminate. Yet it's still hopeful and inspiring. Is that essentially the goal of your work?

Canada is truly such a beautiful and diverse country and it's a place that has made me and my family who we are. As a proud Canadian, I know that I have a responsibility to respect and try to understand other cultural traditions, but also an opportunity to truly share and bring context to my own. I feel that many people often have preconceived notions about immigrants who come to Canada or other countries around the world, and I feel that my spoken word poetry is something that can be used to break down some of those prejudices and stereotypes that exist. My poem *Home* is one example of that.

***Home* is just as relevant now as it was when you wrote it a number of years ago. How do you feel about that?**

In all honesty, Islamophobia really hasn't gone anywhere. From certain biases and prejudice after the attacks of 9/11, I remember my parents being genuinely scared to leave our home. Even as a kid, my parents were very careful with where I was and what I was doing - all the time. My family faced both overt and covert racial discrimination. I saw the deep effects of racial

prejudice both in my own life with my family and in the lives of other immigrants around me who weren't even Muslim. When I wrote *Home*, not only did I want to capture the experiences that my family faced and that I faced growing up, but I wanted it to be a bridge that anyone who's experienced racial discrimination could relate to. And the unfortunate reality is that there's still so much work to be done. Even a few years ago I remember my heart sinking when I heard about the London family that was killed or the Christchurch Mosque shooting. I knew then and I know now, that the work must continue. Art must continue.

Well, *Call Me Ali* is a powerful next step in continuing to do the work; your readers learn a lot through Ali's perspective in the book and what he experiences. How similar is Ali to you?

Ali is a character that I really based off of myself, and see myself in. But Ali is not necessarily me. I have to admit that I was far more off the tracks as an adolescent. I made some very unfortunate and poor choices that led to being arrested in front of my family, and led to multiple run-ins with police as a young person. It's not something I'm proud of, it's not something that I want to glamorize, but it's something that definitely gave me lessons and taught me who I want to be and what I needed to learn from, going forward. It made me who I am. The first poem I wrote was based on those exact experiences, and it was



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something that I needed to share as an outlet. It was through writing that I was able to not only overcome the circumstances that I was involving myself in, but also see myself grow and change into a different, more mature person, by using creativity to channel my emotions and my frustrations.

Do you think your emotions are also why you are so able to understand and inspire young people today? Can you talk about that a little bit?



I feel that I can speak their language. I feel that I understand their struggles and their problems, having gone through similar things myself not too long ago. The reality of wanting to fit in, being a strong and hyper-masculine type of man in high school was something that was a very stark reality for me, that I tried very hard to fit into. However, the more that I tried to “fit in,” the more I realized I was actually losing touch with myself and who my parents

really raised me to be. I think the reason I am able to resonate and relate with a younger audience is because I’m vulnerable about these experiences, I’m open about my emotions as a man and I want other people, especially young boys, to be able to do the same. They just need role models that practice good behaviours. That’s who I want to be. I want to bring my journey and the moral of my stories to the forefront of my artistic endeavours.

You’ve spoken of how you didn’t find yourself represented in the reading material you could access growing up. Today we are much more aware of the need to provide resources that support culturally sensitive pedagogy – despite groups that seek to restrict libraries from putting those resources into the hands of our students. Do you have any words of wisdom for library staff who are facing this kind of opposition?

I’d say that knowledge is power, and as librarians, teachers and administrators in schools, we are the gateway to helping students and young people acquire that knowledge and power. I’d like to thank all of you for the work you do, and recognize that it does come with barriers and difficulties, but this is the work that is not only shaping our future generation but creating a lasting change. I’d also like to add that sometimes the opposition and barriers that we face are meant to make us grow stronger and firmer in our values and our beliefs. It’s the racism and prejudice that I felt growing up, and that my family experienced, that is precisely the reason that I’m doing what I’m doing today. Let those challenging moments fuel your *why*.

What’s next for you? An anthology of your poetry? A solo novel? A further collaboration? Fill us in.

A poetry anthology, and a second (solo) novel are already in the works, and I am super excited to share them with the world when the time is right!

That’s fabulous – and a great way to finish our chat. Thanks for joining me today.

Thank you so much for all your support! ■

To learn more about Wali, check out these resources:
<https://www.lifeaswali.com/>
<https://youtu.be/k-o-A0kyqn0?si=HePxtn5ixh4KJyLa>
<https://www.owltail.com/people/aZJSG-wali-shah/appearances>

Connections

SHELAGH STRAUGHAN



When we asked students what made them feel like they belonged in our library, we got a variety of answers, of which a good number focused on 3 things available at our main desk. Our fruit basket (briefly mentioned in a previous article), weekly poll and birthday board all together act as an alternate water cooler space, inviting students and staff to stop and linger, allowing us time to converse and connect.

The Fruit Basket

Like many of you, we work with teenagers who are perpetually hungry. A few years ago, we asked the amazing dining hall at our boarding school if we could fill up a basket of fruit from their stash every morning to make available to students using the library. Here is a short list of feedback from students who make use of it:

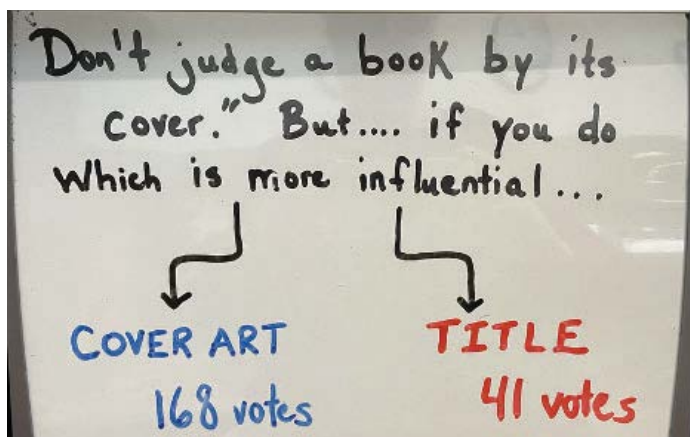
- "I know I shouldn't skip breakfast, but it saves me when I do."
- "It gives me my fruit fix in the quiet library, away from the very busy dining hall."
- "I like that the type of fruit indicates the season; it's exciting when we get plums and peaches."
- And from two friends who have a morning tradition of coming to the library for fruit on their way to first period, "sometimes, she peels my orange for me, which makes me feel really special."

We get a lot of feedback about selection and ripeness, so much that I've considered doing an action research project on preferences! Opinions vary widely on what a perfectly ripe banana looks like and what type of apple is best. Mandarin orange season is particularly popular. We also keep a compost bucket close by for peels and cores.

The Poll

Last year, one of our team members started posting a weekly poll at the desk with a simple system involving mason jars and dried beans. More than one student has commented that it's fun to have something hands-on in our age of technology. We post the past polls elsewhere in the library as everyone is curious about the results.

Note that this data collection method is highly suspect and not approved by any research ethics board: there is no proper sampling and students often vote multiple times, which obviously skews the results. The point seems not so much about accuracy as reflection. The prompts provoke a lot of thoughts being shared, which leads us to an unanticipated bonus of all 3 offerings; they all tend to spark conversation between students and staff. Students will think out loud and engage in conversation with each other and us, oftentimes debating their answers. Chat sometimes leads to book recommendations and definitely to suggested poll questions.



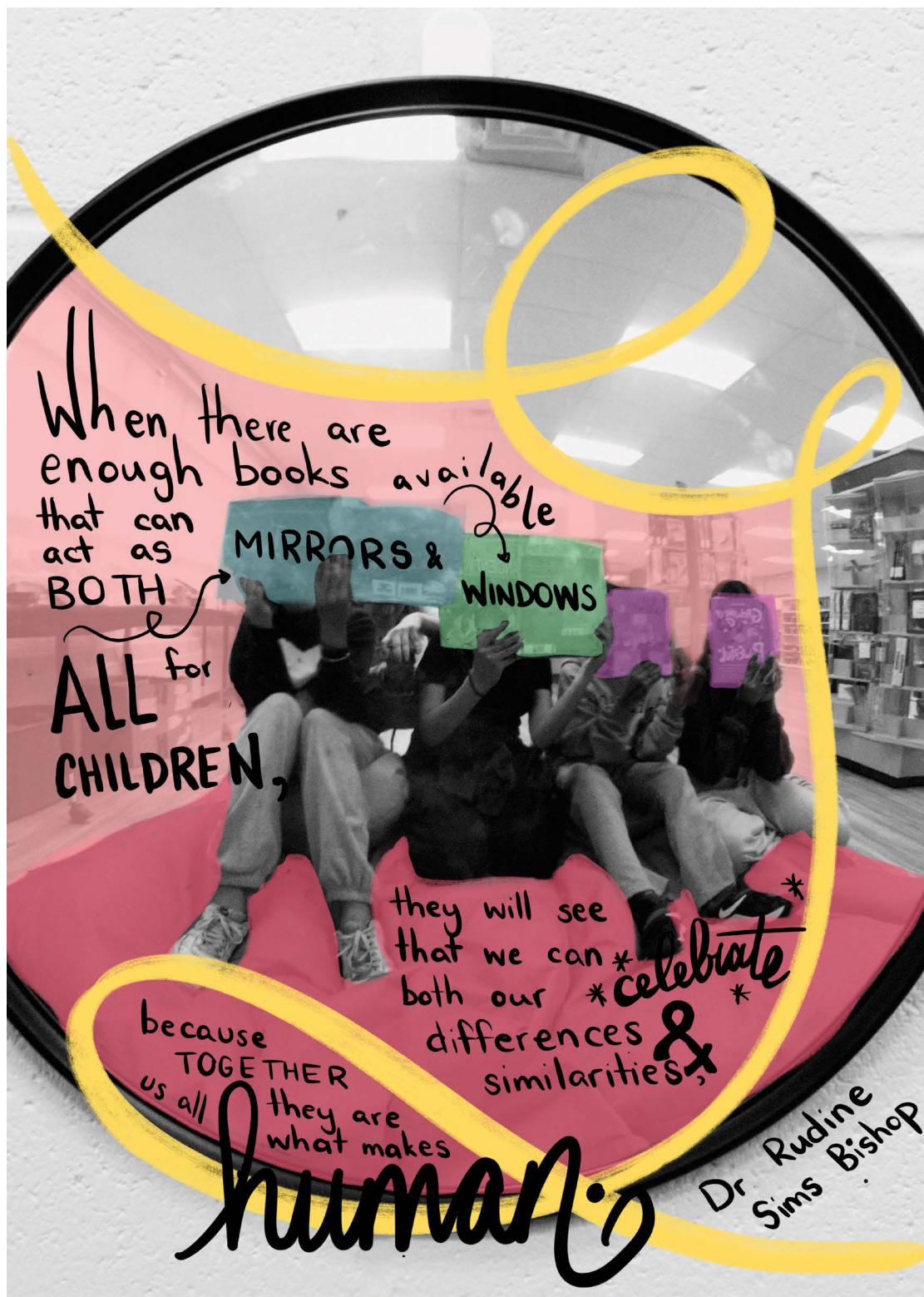
The Birthday Board

At the beginning of the year, we obtain a list of birth dates from the administration and begin noting the names of students celebrating a birthday each week; the large whiteboard is prominently placed at the end of a highly visible bookshelf near our desk. It is very common for students and staff to stop and check this sign when they're walking by, making note of people they know. Sometimes it's the birthday person taking a peek on their big day! While it may not be possible for all schools to obtain and/or post names of students, we appreciate our opportunity to celebrate everyone, especially those students who may not feel like they are recognized in other areas of school life.

Our experience with these 3 small initiatives speaks to the idea of "library as place", and hopefully for our students and visitors, one where they feel they belong. ■

Visual Essay

TINA ZITA



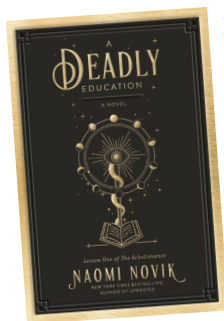
Shelf Awareness: Heroes in the Library

I need to start this issue's installment of Shelf Awareness by admitting that I write a lot of my columns in my head before I put them on paper. Out for my evening Pokewalk (yes, I still play Pokemon Go)? Composing in my head. Grocery shopping? Totally composing in my head. On my bike, riding to and from work? Composing in my head.

This issue's theme was a humdinger, and I would find myself having conversations (in my head, with myself) about the fact that if we are talking about YA, belonging IS the underlying theme, whether it's at school, at home, in oneself or in the surrounding community. The adolescent character and reader are searching for the place where they belong as the person they are growing into. With that in mind, here's where my wanderings (physical and mental) took me.

Belonging @ school:

It's likely September as this issue is arriving in your mailbox, and so I thought it made sense to start with school as a belonging theme. So many of our students are coming into new environments in the fall. Maybe it's a chance to put together a display of characters who are feeling all the feels about that exact situation. You can go a lot of different directions here - dark academia, new kid (and yes, you can totally put that series of graphic novels out for your YA readers), the entire boarding school trope - there are innumerable titles to choose from.



My main choice for this category is Naomi Novik's Scholomance Series (the first title is *A Deadly Education*, Del Rey, 2020). This series mashes up boarding school and dark academia. The students who are lucky enough to attend THIS school for magic are the utter elite of the communities that raised them. In this particular magical universe, there are particularly nasty monsters who are very attracted to magic, especially magic as it is produced by magicians around the age of puberty.

The lucky ones get sent to the Scholomance to train to survive, and help their communities or enclaves survive. The school they attend is also possibly trying to kill them. This is substantially darker, snarkier and grittier than that other series about magical kiddos finding a place where they belong. Finding the Scholomance may help some of your readers feel at home after realizing that maybe Hogwarts isn't the place for them after all.

Main character El, who is half Welsh and half Indian, has a lot on her plate. She's been a loner for a very long time, but knows she has to build alliances in order to survive graduation (when students have to run a gauntlet of monsters to get out of the Scholomance). Figuring out where she fits is not going to be easy, and readers

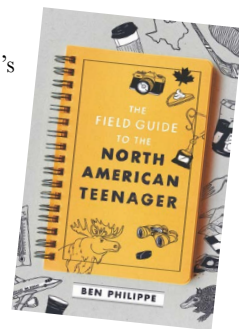
will relate to a great deal of what she's going through. There's some slow-burn romance, lots of fabulous, strong, intersectional female characters to navigate friendships with, dysfunctional family baggage - basically, a lot of the stuff we have to figure out when we're figuring out where we belong.

What your students will appreciate:

El is a complex character - she's not easy to like, which some YA readers will appreciate. She's a prickly teenager trying to figure her stuff out. The supporting cast is brilliant. The world-building is freaking spectacular and you learn more about all the pieces of it as the trilogy continues.

Honourable mention, belonging @ school

I do not think you can go wrong with Ben Philippe's *Field Guide to the North American Teenager*, Clarion, 2019. Black Quebecois Habs fan has to move to Texas to live with his mom. He is not pleased. Many social mishaps ensue, some more serious than others. It's a beautiful, nuanced, hilarious, heartbreaking book. If you haven't read it, do.



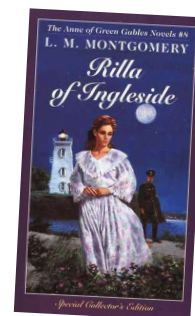
Also in the school category, the entire Susin Neilsen catalogue. I know you know, but nobody does family dysfunction and how it impacts belonging at school better than she does.

Moving on (I think you're starting to see why I was having so many self-conversations before I wrote this piece)...

Belonging @ home:

Anne of Green Gables, Lucy Maud Montgomery, 1908

Yes, I went there. Yes, Anne is 11 at the start of this book, but by the time the book ends, she's well into her teens, and I'm going to suggest that readers go on to *Anne of Avonlea* etc, all the way to my favourite, *Rilla of Ingleside* (1921), with Anne's daughter Marilla as the main character, dealing with the aftermath of World War 1.



If there is a touchstone book for me about belonging, and finding that place and the people where you belong, this might be it. This is the template for so much of what comes after. Spunky, brainy, independent female character who might act like she knows it all, but really, really deep down knows she doesn't? Grumpy, set in their ways "olds" who may not be related to this character but might have wisdom and love to share? Quirky, oddball friends and neighbours? An enemies to sweethearts romance? It's all here. All of

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it. And L.M. wrote it in 1908, as she tried to navigate her own sense of being the one who didn't belong as a clergy wife in Ontario. If you've got students who are falling for Anne, but find the setting a little old-fashioned, you can always point them in the direction of the most recent TV incarnation, which pulled Avonlea forward in terms of social justice by a good leap.

What your students will appreciate:

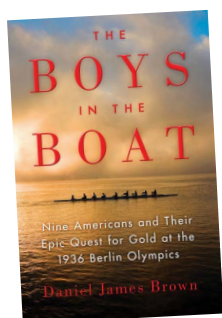
Being introduced to a classic character and discovering that she's actually pretty cool (in a nerdy way). Understanding that a century ago, people were still trying to figure out where they fit in, and building their own families of choice. Knowing that all families don't look the same.

Honourable mention: *Belonging @ home:*

Totally on the other end of the reality equation is *The Notorious Virtues*, Alwyn Hamilton, Viking for Young Readers, 2025. Fantasy set in an alternate, slightly steampunk past. There is a family that controls much of the city. The heir has just died under suspicious circumstances and now each of the next generation must compete in trials to see who becomes the heir. And unexpectedly, an extra cousin appears to compete. There is so much within-family backstabbing going on in this one that it's mind-boggling. Lots of intrigue, lots of class struggle, lots of characters trying to figure out where they belong in the family or if they even want to belong to this family at all.



I wanted to quickly lean into non-fiction to finish, as I am solidly a fiction human myself. One of the places that students find their belonging place as they move through their adolescent years is sports, and sport history/memoir may lure some unsuspecting readers through your doors.



The Boys In The Boat, Daniel James Brown, Penguin, 2013

This is only one of a kajillion titles you could put out about teams and finding community within them. I chose it because it adds in a difficult time period (pre-World War 2 American and the Depression) and can introduce readers to social inequity in a context that may surprise them. The book chronicles the unexpected success of the men's 8 rowing team from the

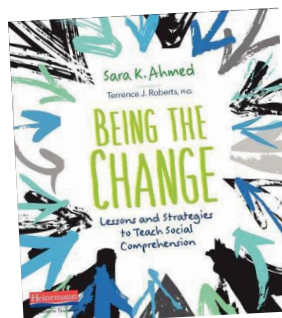
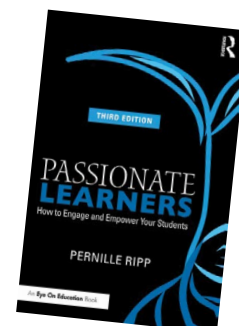
University of Washington as they attempt to qualify and compete at the 1936 Olympics in Berlin. Those were the Olympics where the leader of the host country refused to shake the hand of the astounding Black Olympian, Jesse Owens.

Many of the athletes on the rowing team came out of extreme Depression-era poverty. At least one had been abandoned by his family. They found that they belonged in a boat with 7 other people, and that working together, almost as one body, they could do something better than anyone else in the world could. They remained a community for one another until their deaths.

What your students will appreciate:

Getting to know the characters in the story. Students who are finding it challenging to show up every day because of their own circumstances may find it helpful to know that other people go through that experience, too, and that sometimes, telling someone means that they can get some support. The 2023 movie is a solid adaptation of the story, which students may also appreciate.

To finish, I wanted to share some resources that continue to help me, as an educator, create classroom spaces and classroom libraries of belonging for my students. The work of the amazing Pernille Ripp (she is on Instagram, and has authored several books, including *Passionate Readers* [Routledge, 2017] and *Passionate Learners* [Routledge, 2023]; her blog is at <https://pernillesripp.com/>) has helped me create community among readers. She now works with younger learners, but did a great deal of work with intermediate students.



The other book that is dog-eared and stickied into oblivion and that I constantly suggest to my students is Sara K Ahmed's *Being the Change* (Heinemann, 2018). If you want to build a community of students who work to help one another feel like they belong, this is where to start. It is a profound book, with a terrific mix of research theory and practical application, all around concepts of identity and intersectionality. "What's in Your News," one activity in the book, is still my go-to

when it's been a difficult news cycle. It's also a great book to work through with a leadership group, or with students who are moving into leadership roles at camp or with a service organization.

So, there you have it. Belonging is a multifaceted, intersectional concept. It's one we strive to offer to the students who come through our doors. I hope, this fall, that some of these titles might resonate with the crew who come to you. Please let me know what you think and what titles are helping you and your community of readers feel like they belong. ■

Tech Bytes with Lisa



Book Creator is my newest favourite content creation app, and who is better at creating content than your very own teacher-librarian. The Book Creator app is exactly how it sounds – an app that allows you to create and publish eBooks online. This app has been around since 2011. I have heard about it before and dabbled with it here and there, however this year I dove right in and simply fell in love with its many possibilities. I love it so much that I became a Book Creator Champion by taking their two-hour course online. Here is my official certificate.



What features and capabilities does this tool offer?

Book Creator is compatible with Google Chrome, Safari, Microsoft Edge and Apple.

Teachers and school librarians can get started for free. Every teacher who signs up with a free account receives one library with 40 books they can create, and an unlimited number of students that can be invited to one's library. The free version also provides access to the core creativity features to create the books. Similar to apps such as Google Slides and Canva, Book Creator gives you access to various fonts, allows you to insert or search for images, drop in video or music, record your voice, use the pen feature to draw or annotate, insert shapes, icons, arrows, and emojis to express your ideas, as well as choose from portrait, square, or landscape book layouts. You can also upload PDF files into the pages of your eBook or embed HTML created content. If you ask me, that sounds like a very generous amount to get one started and to begin building one's virtual library of resources.

Not sure what to create or simply have no time? Check out the 'Discover' tab, which allows you to peruse the many eBooks that have already been created by other educators. There are books that have been created for all ages and for all subject matters. For many of them you can also make a 'Remix' which simply means that the creator of the book has given permission for others to make a copy and edit for their own purposes. If you don't like any of the books you see, I'm sure they will be a source of inspiration for whatever project you are working on or wish to create.

Once you fall in love with the numerous possibilities this app has to offer to engage and empower learning, you might want to upgrade to the premium version for access to even more features. The premium version allows teachers to create an unlimited number of libraries with up to 1000 books and access to new translation tools, more than 800 pre-created templates and access to several third-party apps such as Canva and Adobe AI Image Generator. It also allows one to add co-teachers, which is perfect for the role of the school librarian when collaborating with classroom teachers to create content and resources.

Book Creator can be used in any subject area, in every classroom and for any project students need to create. The best part of using this app is that it is accessible for every student. It is an app that is fully inclusive and offers features for every student's ability.

What is the Book Creator Story?

The origin of this amazing app begins with a child who was reluctant to read. In 2011, parents Dan Amos and Ally Kennen were worried that their 4-year-old son was making slow progress when it came to reading or recognizing words. Their son was later diagnosed as dyslexic. As frustrated parents, they asked themselves two very important questions: ***"Wouldn't it be better if kids could create their own books about things they love?"*** and ***"How does one get kids to be as engaged with reading as they are with an iPad?"*** These questions were the driving force for the creation of the Book Creator app and today, over 200 million eBooks have been created worldwide.^[1]

If you're not convinced yet about the amazing potential this educational app has to empower teaching and learning in the classroom and in the library, perhaps the following recognitions it has received may convince you:

- Voted the best website for teaching and learning by The American Association of School Librarians (AASL) in 2018^[2]
- Winner of the EdTech "Cool Tool" Award in 2020.
- Winner of the 2021 Best Remote Learning Tool
- Common Sense Selection gives Book Creator 5 stars in 2021

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What privacy and security features are included in this digital tool?

Book Creator is compliant with all privacy and security laws. In the creation of books in the app, the teacher is fully in control. A student's book is private by default and only teachers can choose to share a book with a wider audience. Book Creator does not sell user data or advertise. All data is stored in Google Cloud, using security industry best practices. Best of all, your Book Creator gives you ownership of your own content. Yes, you own your own books!!

How can the school librarian use Book Creator with their students and staff?

So, it may seem as though I'm overselling this app, but as I discover the many possibilities it has to offer, I realize it truly is a great EdTech tool. As the school librarian, the possibilities with Book Creator to empower and engage teaching and learning are numerous. Here are just a few of such possibilities:

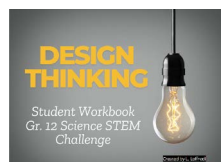
- supporting English Language Learners,
- formative assessment strategies and process work,
- reading response journals,
- teaching digital citizenship and media literacy,
- guiding the research and inquiry process,
- enhancing numeracy and literacy initiatives,
- project-based learning,
- student digital portfolios,
- interactive guidebooks,
- digital storytelling,
- documenting the design thinking process,
- teaching coding.

These are just some of the many options available for school librarians to use Book Creator in collaboration with students and staff.

How have I used Book Creator?

As I mentioned earlier, I have recently jumped on the Book Creator bandwagon and immersed myself in learning everything there is to know about this app. In the past two months, I have used Book Creator to support the design thinking process with Grade 9 and 12 students and to engage our special needs students in the Forest of Reading Blue Spruce program. In both instances, I created workbooks that students were allowed to make copies of for themselves and work on the tasks and activities included in the workbooks. Below are the book covers and links to both published workbooks.

Design Thinking Workbook

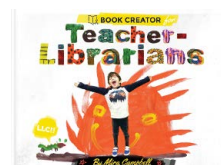


Forest of Reading 'Lost Stick' Workbook



For more inspiration, check out this book created by Mira Campbell, an elementary teacher-librarian with the Toronto District School Board (TDSB).

Book Creator for Teacher-Librarians



Through its versatility and user-friendly interface, Book Creator has proven to be an invaluable tool for fostering creativity, collaboration

and engagement in the school library setting. By continually experimenting with and integrating innovative tools like Book Creator, school librarians can strengthen the connection between the library, its resource and the learning community, ensuring that the library remains a dynamic hub for inspiration and growth. Instead of being the reader, you can now be the author. Happy book-making, friends! ■

^[1] <https://bookcreator.com/press/the-book-creator-story/>

^[2] <https://bookcreator.com/2018/06/book-creator-wins-aasl-award-for-best-website/>

Drawn to the Form

DIANA AND MARY MALISZEWSKI



The 2025 Toronto Comic Arts Festival.

In our column from Volume 32 Issue 1 (“Creating Comic Book Communities”) Mary explained about her relationship with various comic book communities.

“I think it’s important that members of a community feel a sense of belonging. In a large group, it can be difficult to find people who truly understand your perspective. In a smaller group, it’s easier to connect with like-minded individuals.”

Finding a place where you belong might mean going further afield to find those smaller affinity groups. There are many events throughout the year that comic-loving readers in Ontario can attend. Here is a short list of Ontario comic conventions and events.

Toronto Comic Arts Festival (TCAF) - founded in 2003, this two-day festival has grown to become one of the country’s largest comic book events. It is typically held in mid-May and features authors and artists from all over the world.

Toronto Comic Book Show (TCBS) - this one-day event is a favourite of comic book collectors across southern Ontario. Here, you can buy, sell and trade vintage comics with vendors or discuss your favourite titles with fellow fans.

Fan Expo Canada - while not solely dedicated to comics, Fan Expo is the largest fan convention in the Greater Toronto Area,

with over 130,000 attendees each year. Comic books, graphic novels and manga are just some of the attractions at this four-day festival.

Niagara Falls Comic Con - one of the largest conventions outside of GTA, this yearly festival helps to kick off summer in the Niagara region. Many cosplayers use this con as an opportunity to bring their favourite comic book characters to life, as well as to connect with like-minded individuals.

ThunderCon - Thunder Bay’s premiere pop culture festival, Thunder Con is an annual event that draws people of all ages to northern Ontario.

What does your signage in your school library indicate about belonging?

Even if we focus on just the comics / graphic novel section, consider these factors:

- What do you call your section? Comics? Graphic novels? Manga? Manwa? Bandes dessinées? A combination?
- What images, if any, are included on your sectional signs? What series, if any, are represented? Which are omitted?
- What languages are included on your sectional signs?
- What size is your sign? What height is it posted at?

We cannot guarantee that everyone will have a sense of belonging in a school library learning commons but if we think about how everything from the physical space to the collection contributes to community-building, we can try our best to set the stage so that as many people feel like the library is “their” place as much as ours. ■

An advertisement for 'The Library Marketplace' featuring school library merchandise. On the left, the text 'celebrate school library' is written in white, with 'JOY' in large, stylized orange letters below it. To the right of 'JOY' is the text 'ENCOURAGE A LOVE OF READING AND A SENSE OF WONDER WITH OUR LATEST COLLECTION'. Below this is a purple button that says 'ORDER TODAY' and a QR code. On the right side of the ad, there is a green bookshelf filled with books. In front of the shelf are three items: a white tote bag with a colorful bookshelf graphic and the text 'HAVE NO SHELF NO CONTROL', a white mug with a similar graphic and text, and a pink t-shirt with a bookshelf graphic and the text 'School Library Joy'. In the bottom right corner, there is a logo for 'THE LIBRARY MARKETPLACE' featuring a stylized open book.

Ordering for your school? Contact us at orders@accessola.com and ask about Purchase Orders

Did You Know Cheese Could Actually Be Addictive?

ZIYAD ZAIDI

Since ancient Mesopotamia, farmers have been eating cheese, the whey of cow milk. It was full of protein and nutrients, which gave them an advantage when harvests were bad and sustained them through the long winter months.

Nowadays, we don't need cheese to survive. We eat it for fun. Whether it's on pizza, an omelet, or just plain, it tastes so good! In fact, if you were in my apartment most nights after dinner, you may have caught me sneaking into the kitchen to stuff my face with that delicious aged marble cheddar cheese. I might even be addicted to cheese! But why?

Cheese, as I said earlier, is full of protein. One protein is called casein. A similar protein, casomorphin, is also found in cheese. Casomorphin is a peptide-opioid. It's similar to morphine (usually prescribed by doctors as a painkiller, which also has side effects that make you feel good) so we get these same opioid effects, thus the joy you have when you eat cheese. Oh, and don't forget the good taste, of course!



Let's compare the casomorphins in cheese to other drugs: a stimulant, caffeine, and a depressant, morphine. First, let's remember that cheese does not make you high, compared to morphine, or the less potent caffeine. However, cheese does activate the same part of your brain as these chemicals do, creating feelings of happiness and fulfillment. The effect of morphine is much more intense, creating feelings of euphoria, and can sometimes lead to dependency. In contrast, caffeine affects the brain's reward system in a different way. It works by blocking

adenosine receptors, a molecule that makes you feel tired. I could go into more detail, but that's for another day. Because you're less tired, your body produces more dopamine, essentially a chemical that makes you feel happy!

While the biochemical mechanisms behind cheese consumption might explain why it can feel addictive, it's important to clarify that cheese doesn't have the same addictive potential as drugs like nicotine or alcohol. Addiction typically involves a cycle of tolerance (needing more of a substance to achieve the same effect) and withdrawal (experiencing negative symptoms when not using the substance). While cheese can trigger cravings, it does not typically lead to these patterns of behavior. However, individuals who

consume large amounts of cheese frequently may find it difficult to resist, largely due to the reinforcing effects of the casomorphins.

While cheese can activate the brain's reward system, it is a natural and mild response. However, this "addictive effect" can still contribute to overconsumption in the same way that people may eat more chocolate, snacks or sugary foods. The feeling of satisfaction that accompanies eating cheese may lead to eating it more often, reinforcing a habit that some people may describe as "addiction."

In conclusion, cheese does more than just satisfy hunger—it taps into the brain's reward system, triggering feelings of pleasure and comfort through the release of dopamine. The casomorphins in cheese activate the same opioid receptors targeted by drugs like morphine, though much more weakly. This explains why cheese can feel so irresistible and why people might describe it as addictive. While the effects are mild and safe compared to drugs, the way cheese interacts with the brain highlights the complex relationship between food and the reward systems that influence our cravings. So, next time you indulge in a slice of pizza or a cheesy snack, remember that your brain isn't just enjoying the taste—it's rewarding you for eating something that feels really good. ■



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The Buzz: From Belonging to Bookshelves - The Programs Supporting Schools Across Canada

“If you have a book, you have a friend,” wrote author Kate Thompson — and there’s no shortage of quotes that echo this sentiment. Stories can transport us when we need to escape, provide companionship when we feel lonely and offer guidance when we feel lost. Reading also helps us connect to — and make sense of — the world around us by expanding our understanding, deepening knowledge and sparking imagination. That’s why this fall’s theme, *Belonging @ Your Library*, feels especially timely and important — particularly at the start of the school year, when feelings of jitters and uncertainty are common for both students and educators.

Personally, I’ve always found comfort in the cozy corners of libraries and the warm welcome of bookstores. Yet, behind every beloved story is a network of people — authors, illustrators, publishers, teachers and school library professionals — who make reading possible. There’s something inherently inviting about being surrounded by books, whether in a school library or a bookstore setting like Indigo, which has long been a champion of Canadian creators and teachers. From showcasing local authors to launching learning programs that benefit schools and libraries, Indigo continues to reinforce a powerful message: reading matters — and so do the educators who make it happen.

This month in *The Buzz*, I had the pleasure of speaking with Rose Lipton, Vice President of Education and Executive Director of the Indigo Love of Reading Foundation. Our conversation highlights Indigo’s growing commitment to supporting educators — both personally and professionally — from the exciting launch of *plumTeacher* last fall to the Foundation’s transformational grants for high-priority school communities. Keep reading to discover how Indigo is helping educators, school library professionals and students foster a deeper sense of belonging — one program at a time.



A Conversation with Rose Lipton, Vice President of Education and Executive Director of the Indigo Love of Reading Foundation

TingL: Indigo has designed a variety of programs to support and benefit educators. What inspired this focus, and why is it important to create initiatives like *plumTeacher* and the Teachers’ Choice Survey?

Rose Lipton: Indigo has always been dedicated to promoting a love of reading amongst all children and we’ve always served teachers in our stores, but it’s never been more important to do this work than right now. Covid impacted student literacy rates across the country and all kids are faced with endless distractions with hours spent on screens increasing. We are supporting teachers to make their jobs just a little bit easier and more inspiring as they, in addition to parents, can make the difference between a child falling in love with reading or not!

As a new school year begins, whether shopping for the classroom or their own nightstand, how can *plumTeacher* support educators both professionally and personally?

plumTeacher is designed to provide teachers with exceptional value during our discount events that happen in store but also with access to resources and events that will inspire them in their jobs everyday. Whether it’s a new book idea suggested in our newsletter or a lesson plan template on our *plumTeacher* hub that inspires a new idea for the classroom or just the motivation to pick up a new book for yourself before the summer, *plumTeacher* is here to support teachers as whole people.



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JOANNE SALLAY

For those unfamiliar with Adopt a School, what's the core mission behind the fundraiser and grant program—and how does it help foster literacy equity?

Adopt A School is one of the programs run by the Indigo Love of Reading Foundation. We partner a local school with an Indigo, Chapters or Coles location through the month of September and all the funds raised go to help that high needs school fill their library shelves with books. It's so incredible to see the support from our community and the way it truly makes a difference in school libraries – which, as we know, are the heart of so many schools.

What are some practical tips for schools hoping to apply for the grant or be adopted by a local Indigo store?

Schools can either apply for Adopt A School or our other national school granting program, the Literacy Fund Grant, by applying through indigoloveofreading.org. These applications generally launch between January and March. The best way to get selected is to make a clear case for why your school needs the funds and what your vision is for literacy in your community. A culture of reading doesn't happen in the library alone so the more school-wide engagement you have the better!

Could you share a favourite story where the Adopt a School program had a meaningful impact on a school library or student community?

It's SO hard to pick just one! But I do remember one student who told me she fell in love with reading because she found a very special book. Although she lived in Canada, she was adopted from the Dominican Republic, and thanks to the grant her school received, she found a book called *If Dominican Were a Colour*. It helped her connect with her identity and better understand herself and her culture. Stories like that are why I do what I do. It's too often these amazing, new, diverse titles are sorely lacking in libraries with such limited budgets.

On a personal note—can you share the book that made you fall in love with reading?

As a kid I loved stories about other kids who charted their own course and set themselves apart in some way so I was a big fan of *The Paper Bag Princess*. In terms of longer stories, I remember my Grade 3 teacher reading *Stuart Little* to our class chapter by chapter. I'll always remember her teaching us the meaning of the word *sarsaparilla* in that book – I loved that word! Not only did it sound beautiful, but the definition was so fun and unexpected it just really cemented for me the way that books can be gateways to whole new worlds.

If plumTeacher had a staff picks shelf, what's one book you think every educator or library professional should have in their collection—and why?

There are SO many amazing texts for professional learning, but I honestly think every educator that works in this country should have read *Seven Fallen Feathers* by Tanya Talaga.

Looking ahead, what is your hope for the future of literacy in Canada—and how do you see your programs empowering educators and library professionals in shaping that vision?

I think our ambition is to make Canada the most literate country in the world! I genuinely believe that great readers make great citizens and in the face of so much change globally and technologically we need the next generation of Canadians to be full of curiosity, ambition, empathy and creativity – all things reading supports! Our programs are here to help but ultimately, we only get there as a society if teachers, parents, administrators, policy makers and kids themselves all work together to build a culture of reading and have the support they need to do so. But I think together and with the right resources, we can do it! ■

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A Guide to the Selection and Deselection of School Library Resources

A resource for school library professionals, educators, staff, administrators, school boards, students, and families.

Carving Calm into the Chaos

The Learning Commons is an ideal space to slow down, be mindful and recover.

Life is busy, and school is no exception. There are competing demands for staff and students' time, attention and energy. Many people are walking around in a low-grade fight-or-flight response; anxious, worried and stressed. So, how do we create calm? How do we slow down when everything around us demands that we go fast, speed up and accomplish more? Carving mindful moments into the library is an excellent way to create calm for students and educators. The library space lends itself perfectly to this task. It is already quiet; the act of reading can be a mindful pause, there are flexible and comfortable seating options, the space is relaxing, welcoming and inclusive, and young students generally feel calmer in the library. It's the ultimate place where everyone can feel they 'belong.'

"I used mindfulness to help me calm down so I can focus on schoolwork or exams. Practicing helped me get the work done more efficiently and quickly. - Anonymous student"

I am an experienced elementary teacher of 27 years. Early in my career, I began taking courses from MindfulSchools.org and have long used their Foundations of Mindfulness curriculum as a cornerstone for classroom management. However, I'm a brand-new teacher-librarian. This role and space instantly felt perfect, like the ideal 'container' to share mindfulness strategies and tools with students. Four decades of research highlight that mindfulness practice leads to improved focus and better emotional regulation, remedying two of our biggest challenges in education today. Practicing mindfulness is inclusive and fosters a sense of belonging because it is accessible to ALL students regardless of ability, academic or athletic success, socioeconomic status or cultural background. We practice as a community, together. Explicitly teaching the foundations of mindfulness lessons empowers students to regulate attention and emotions, creating a supportive classroom environment that fosters learning and cooperation. By teaching it as part of a library class, I'm able to support all the students, as well as all the educators whose students receive that training.

Teach a Lesson on Paying Attention

Due to cultural forces, students' ability to focus and attend has been eroded. It's helpful to formally teach them how to listen and

self-reflect about their listening skills. When talking to students about being good listeners and the importance of paying attention in life, ask what distracts them. If they are not focused on the lesson, a friend's conversation or the book they are reading, where is their focus/attention? Where has their mind gone? Lost in thought? Daydreaming? Explain that human beings' minds like to jump around! We mentally time travel to the future and pre-live things that are coming up, like mentally reviewing our "to do" list as educators. Sometimes we mentally time-travel to the past and relive things that have already happened. Often, it can be an embarrassing moment or a time when we got into trouble. Who can relate? Let's agree to learn the lesson and then leave it in the past. The only place our lives are happening is right here and right now. This moment, the present moment, is the only place we have a chance to make a change or a difference in our lives. Don't keep thinking some future moment will be better. Be here, now. This is your life. Don't miss it. Explain to your students that you are going to teach them about mindfulness, which means "paying attention right here and right now with kindness and curiosity." Display the definition.

How I Start Each Class

- When students arrive, I start the period with a "mindful moment" (a formal mindfulness practice), unless I feel energy is high and they need to move first. If that's the case, we begin with movement/music (DPA) and afterwards have a mindful moment to settle, calm and refocus attention. I display and read a SEL poster strategy from School Mental Health Ontario (SMHO). (See the link in the resource section.)
- I use a chime, bell or special sound (like a rain stick or part of a calming song) to signify that I am starting. I use this again at the end to signal that the practice has ended. Be mindful not to use an item that would be cultural misappropriation.
- I ask students to sit upright but relax their shoulders downwards, saying "move into your mindful body."
- I invite them to close their eyes OR gaze/look down.
- I remind them to notice everything that happens over the next few minutes with kindness and curiosity, and I challenge them not to react to anything.
- I like to tell them, "I'm going to teach you a human superpower called 'non-reactivity.'" If an announcement comes on, I explain they are only to listen but not move or react, to practice this superpower. The same goes if someone laughs or talks out. They can notice but keep themselves quiet and still.
- I reinforce that this is a very special time.
- Then I slowly read the SMHO SEL poster strategy in a calming voice, and we practice it before moving to the rest of our library class. Eventually, students lead the practices!

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“*I used the practices when I was distracted so it helped me focus more. - Anonymous student*”

Offer Flexibility & Model Practices

Once students understand what mindfulness is, and everyone is participating well, I offer flexibility. If a student has high energy, they may practice standing up, feet glued to the ground with a gentle sway to help regulate and calm or they can tap their fingers to their thumb. These get the wiggles out but are silent and respectful to classmates. This is empowering because students reflect and choose a posture that will be supportive for them. Everyone does not need to be still, although many will “*be still as a statue*” and this will be calming for them.

If you are frustrated, model the “*Name it to tame it, feel it to heal it*” strategy. I might say something like, “we are forgetting our library etiquette, the noise in here is too loud, some people seem off track. I feel frustrated. I am having a hard time hearing the student speaking to me, and my muscles are getting tense. I am going to take a few mindful breaths. Perhaps a mindful minute could support us all right now?” If it seems like it will be helpful, I then ring the chime and use the script above to guide us into a short practice such as 5-finger breathing.

Fostering Belonging and Mindfulness in the Library

- In September, run a poster contest inviting students to create posters that say, “All are Welcome.” First, teach a lesson asking what it means to be inclusive and how we can display this message to help everyone feel welcome. You likely have books in your library that would be great read-alouds for this! Put the posters up on the front doors and in the library.
- As students enter, display a calm scene with jazz, classical or soothing music on the screen or interactive whiteboard if you have one. I like the fantasy library scenes, Hogwarts Library, coffee shop vibes or something that mirrors the season outside, e.g., a fireplace surrounded by bookcases on a cold winter day with calming music, a rainy bookstore scene on a rainy spring day, flowers as the flowers begin to bloom outside, or as the weather heats up to summer, an ocean view with waves and a blanket with a book spread open, ready for the reader. There are countless versions of this online. I use search keywords like bookstore, calm, jazz, relaxing, spring, nature and ambience.
- Do specially themed scavenger hunts with students to find books in a specific colour. For example, in March, we found

green books (Spring Equinox & St. Patrick’s Day) and then the library stayed a sea of green for April’s Earth month and National Poetry month. The green colour felt soothing and grounding. Many students noticed and commented about it.

- Mindfulness practices may only take 2 to 5 minutes, but give students a chance to pause, check in with themselves, feel calm, safe, connected and like they belong. As a library professional who supports the whole school, it could be one of the most effective and empowering things you do to support learning, well-being and mental health for students and staff in today’s educational world.

Further Learning & Resources

Palouse Mindfulness for Stress Reduction - Take a course and learn the foundations of mindfulness for yourself. A MBSR-certified and trained university professor put his course online for free. Even if you stop there, your students will benefit because a calm educator with a regulated nervous system supports student regulation and learning. As mammals, we attenuate to each other’s nervous systems.

School Mental Health Ontario SEL Posters - If you haven’t taken courses and don’t have an approved curriculum, try *School Mental Health Ontario* resources. These are Ministry and board-promoted, vetted resources. Our school, Erie Migration District Elementary, focused on one poster strategy a month. Repetition and practice of the same skill helps students internalize the tool. They learn 10 different strategies to calm and regulate themselves over the school year. These are effective and empowering life tools! ■

Palouse Free Course found here: <https://palousemindfulness.com/index.html>

Social-Emotional Learning Posters found here: <https://smho-smso.ca/online-resources/sel-posters/> (There is also a set for Secondary on the site.)

Supporting Minds Document from the Ontario Ministry of Education found here: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/supporting-minds-educators-guide-promoting-student-mental-health-and-well-being>

Self-Compassion with Dr. Kristen Neff - excellent educator support here: <https://self-compassion.org/>

Mindup.org - full Mindfulness curriculum to use with students here: <https://www.mindup.org/>

Storytime for Every Mind: Making Literacy Accessible for All Readers

The increase in the enjoyment level of an activity is proportional to the increase of freedom you give children to show up as themselves.

If you work with young learners, then you know the challenge: keeping kids engaged, focused and genuinely connected to stories. We all want children to develop a lifelong love of reading—to lose themselves in books, to think critically and to make sense of an increasingly complex world. But what happens when storytime just doesn't hold their attention anymore? When reading feels more like a struggle than a joy?

Back in 2023, at our 15th anniversary **Telling Tales Festival**, we began asking ourselves some hard questions. Why is it so difficult to get kids reading on their own? Why do some children have trouble sitting still for a story? And even when they're listening, how can we help them connect with the plot, characters or deeper themes?

In rethinking our programming with the support of an occupational therapist (OT), two guiding principles shaped our approach. First, we embraced the idea that when children struggle to engage, it's often due to a skills gap—not a lack of interest or motivation. Children do well when they can. Second, we recognized that neurodivergent children need freedom to play and explore stories in their own ways. All play is okay.

Through Telling Tales' Inclusive Tales Research Project, we uncovered a simple but powerful insight: **the increase in the enjoyment level of an activity is proportional to the increase in freedom you give children to show up as themselves.** This realization informed our new Inclusive Tales Model, transforming how we design our events and interact with young audiences.



By meeting kids where they are—across all reading levels, learning styles and neurotypes—Telling Tales is building a more inclusive, engaging and joyful literary experience. It's storytelling reimagined, and it's helping every child discover their place in the world of books.

As producers of Canada's leading literary festival for children, our first imperative as part of the Inclusive Tales Research Project was to address a major reason kids struggle with traditional storytime: self-regulation. Self-regulation is being able to match your energy to the energy required for an activity. For many learners, that's just not possible without additional support.

It's easy to focus on *why* there's an energy mismatch. Is a child's overactivity or distractibility due to neurodivergence, the result of a great nap or maybe a sugar rush? While understanding a child's individual neurotype is essential in one-on-one settings, when you're welcoming over 12,000 attendees to a public event, it requires a different approach.

Through a series of piloted events and extensive research in collaboration with our OT, we identified three strategies to adapt to our festival programming for readers of every kind.

1. Play, Play, and Play some more!

At Telling Tales, *all* play isn't just okay—it's encouraged. Play is not just a break between stories—it's a gateway into them. One of the most significant shifts in our programming was reimagining how children enter a story—not just by sitting and listening, but by moving, exploring, and choosing their own way in.

To support this, each reading tent featured a carefully curated mix of age-appropriate activities designed to promote self-regulation. This helped children get into the right energy space to connect meaningfully with the stories being told.

For our youngest participants (ages 0–6), we offered traditional sit-and-listen storytime with a twist. Alongside readings, children could engage in loose parts sorting games—matching objects by colour, size and shape. Sessions were kept to 15 minutes, with open activity time between presentations to reset and refocus.

For the 9–12 age group, hands-on workshops helped bring literature to life. In a poetry session led by author Carol-Ann Hoyte, kids created poems using visual media—from invisible ink revealed by heat to blackout poetry crafted with book pages and Sharpies. These interactive formats sparked creativity and let kids choose their own poetic path.

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MICHELLE FERNANDES

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In the 13+ Young Adult Tent, teens explored stories through crafts like beading friendship bracelets, making cut-out collages, and themed colouring—all offered alongside author panels and writing workshops. By providing a relaxed, low-pressure environment, teens could engage at their own pace and in their own way.

At the heart of all of this was one goal: to give young readers the freedom to choose how and when to engage. Whether during the story or after, when we gave the freedom of choice and considered differing abilities, the joy and connection multiplied.

2. Good Vibrations: Tuning into audience energy needs

Running a festival that meets audiences' energy needs takes creativity and care. Creating high-energy space to support attendees at a book festival requires presenting storytelling in multidisciplinary and exciting ways like drama and dance. While reading is an often quiet endeavor, creating lower-energy spaces at a busy festival requires designating and maintaining sensory-safe quiet areas. These zones were designed and spread out throughout the festival, with different age groups and needs in mind.

Each tent included a nearby Regulation Station—an area stocked with age-appropriate fidget tools and calm activities children could explore at any time.

What we discovered was powerful. High-energy and more sensory sensitive kids alike stayed engaged during storytime, picked up books and were able to interact with authors while genuinely enjoying themselves in their own ways and speeds. And all of this amidst a large, lively event. We had done it. That was the goal.

We were proud of the progress—but our journey toward true accessibility wasn't over yet.

3. ASL in Action: Storytime Adapted for Everyone

Accessibility goes beyond wheelchair-accessible washrooms and ramps at entrances. Thankfully, our festival is committed to inclusion in all its forms. Our prime location at the Royal Botanical Gardens in Burlington, Ontario, allows us to offer a mostly wheelchair- and power chair-accessible experience for all guests (grass can provide some challenges).

As we continued our exploration into disabilities and accommodations through the Inclusive Tales Research Project, we recognized a significant gap in storytelling opportunities for the Deaf and hard-of-hearing community. That insight led to a meaningful partnership with Silent Voice Canada. In our first year working together, we were proud to present 18 performances with

ASL interpretation across our Main Stage, Ages 6-8 Tent and Ages 9-12 Tent, as well as added guest services and audience outreach.

Through our work with Silent Voice, we also learned that ASL translation for children comes with added layers of complexity. Many children who are still learning ASL cannot keep up with standard adult-level interpretation. To support these young learners, we implemented a dual interpreter model. One hearing interpreter sat in the audience, translating the presentation directly, while a Deaf performer on stage observed what the hearing interpreter signed to them and adjusted the ASL to better suit the children in the audience.

ASL learners span a wide range of literacy levels and age groups, and our goal was to meet every learner exactly where they were so that enjoyment could increase in tandem. With this model in place, ASL learners of all ages and skill levels were able to participate fully, making these performances truly designed for every mind.

At Telling Tales, we've learned that when children are free to engage in ways that match their minds and bodies, stories come alive. From play-based activities and sensory-safe zones to thoughtful ASL interpretation, we're not just reading books—we're building belonging. Literacy, when made accessible, becomes joyful, empowering and truly for every mind. ■



Belonging Through DSBN Writes/Écrit



Picture this: the grand hall erupts in applause, and kids leap to their feet; clapping, cheering and shouting names. They clutch bookmarks like concert tickets, eager for a signature. But this isn't a rock concert. In front of our students stand Canadian literary legends like Wali Shah, Deborah Kerbel and Eric Walters. This is the energy seen and heard at the celebration of District School Board of Niagara (DSBN) Writes/

Écrit, a new literacy initiative that brings Junior and Intermediate students, teacher-librarians and educators together to celebrate the love of literacy and the efforts and accomplishments of young authors in Niagara. Now in its third year, this initiative has grown into something more than just a series of reading and writing sessions. This is a powerful community, and for many of our students, a place where they finally feel like they belong.

More Than a Club

DSBN Writes/Écrit supports and amplifies student voice through writing, creative expression and authentic author interactions. Guided by the belief that writing is a way to connect, reflect and celebrate student identity, this initiative offers students meaningful opportunities to explore and share their own stories through a club format. Unlike traditional extracurriculars, DSBN Writes/Écrit is a space for those who might not gravitate toward athletics or other mainstream activities. It shines a spotlight on students who find joy in escaping in a good book, crafting stories, and exploring language in ways that feel personal and empowering. Teacher-librarians across Niagara play a key role by creating safe and inspiring spaces where all students, regardless of reading or writing level, are welcome.



For a few months leading up to the big celebration, clubs were run across the Niagara Peninsula, drawing Junior and Intermediate students from 51 elementary schools, spanning Grimsby to Fort Erie. Every other week, students gathered for meetings that often began with a virtual author talk from Canadian writers. Over the past two years, these talks have featured a diverse selection of authors including Anthony Antoniou, Marty Chan, Heather Fawcett, Natalie Hyde, E.K. Johnston, Danny Ramadan, Jael Richardson, Joel Sutherland and Kevin Sylvester. These sessions were filled with personal stories, insider author tips and writing advice based on lived experience. Last year's focus on "setting" helped students connect reading and writing in tangible ways, enriching both skills. On the days that author visits weren't planned, the DSBN Writes/Écrit committee provided engaging activities in both English and French to support the teachers who facilitated the club meetings, and help students drive their writing. What if a school's club facilitator wanted to create and present their own activities during the session? No problem! Educators were given flexibility and could tailor the experience to their club's needs and student interest. This was done so the club was inclusive, exploratory and student-centered.

The Big Event: DSBN Writes/Écrit Celebration

After a few months of club meetings and virtual author talks, students were ready for the big celebration. Held at Club Roma in St. Catharines, the event welcomed over 500 students and educators for a full-day literacy extravaganza. From the moment students entered the facility, the sense of belonging was evident. This wasn't just a field trip for them, rather a recognition and true celebration of their passion and effort.



The day featured 38 workshops designed to meet a wide range of interests and identities. Students explored cartooning with Kevin Sylvester and spooky storytelling with Joel Sutherland along with other workshops that included video storytelling and music-writing. While some baked after writing a recipe, others learned about Indigenous storytelling through the traditional roots of Lacrosse and the value of stick-making. A workshop that was in high demand was Reading,

Writing & Creating with Therapy

Dogs, with the help of furry friends from Therapy Tails of Ontario, a non-profit organization that serves Niagara and Hamilton. Here,

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MARENA GILLEN

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students read to the dogs, used expressive words and pictures to write about the cute canines in front of them and designed an original bandana to give them or take home for their own pet.

Keynote speakers took centre stage mid-day, among them Paul Coccia, Deborah Kerbel, Lorna Schultz Nicholson, Joel Sutherland, Kevin Sylvester and Eric Walters, who each delivered moving talks about challenges they've faced, and the ins and outs of writing a story. The crowd favourite was none other than poet and motivational speaker Wali Shah, who also facilitated a student workshop on writing. To weave more French language into the day, French-Canadian singer and DJ, DJ DELF, delivered a lunchtime concert filled with energy and catchy lyrics en Français.



Paul Coccia signing autographs.



Deb Kerbel presenting to DSBN students.

For many students, this day was transformational. One Grade 7 student from James Morden Public School in Niagara Falls shared, *"I like to say I'm an avid reader and writer, so a club specifically for doing both, AND having special events like virtual author visits, especially with the author of one of my favourite books to date, was really enjoyable."*

Educators weren't left out of the celebration either. While students were deeply immersed in workshops, attending teachers had their

own professional development session led by DSBN's Equity Team which focused on selecting inclusive texts. This session helped reinforce the initiative's commitment to representation and belonging in school libraries.



Wali Shah speaking to a group of students.
community amongst other students that they may not have sought out had it not been for this group. The author talks were great (as always) and we REALLY enjoyed the trivia; we hope that comes back again next year (maybe even twice?). The conference was excellent; the keynote authors were engaging and approachable. The workshops were a lot of fun and truly had something for everyone."



Libraries, A Place to Belong

One of our attending educators was thrilled with the whole experience of DSBN Writes/Écrit and how the initiative brings students together.

"I so appreciate the time and effort the DSBN Writes team puts into this program. The students at my school LOVE the opportunity to come together...so many of them don't 'fit in' with the other extracurriculars most schools offer. This club offers a safe space for students to truly be themselves and be seen and heard for WHO they are. It allows them to shine in their own unique ways and feel a sense of

community amongst other students that they may not have sought out had it not been for this group. The author talks were great (as

always) and we REALLY enjoyed the trivia; we hope that comes back again next year (maybe even twice?). The conference was excellent; the keynote authors were engaging and approachable. The workshops were a lot of fun and truly had something for everyone."

DSBN Writes/Écrit proves that library learning commons are so much more than shelves filled with books. They are places of creativity, curiosity and community. Teacher-librarians across the District School Board of Niagara have turned these spaces into welcoming environments that encourage students to write from experience, to tell stories that matter to them and to know that their words make a difference. One Grade 8 student from Ferndale Public School in St. Catharines summed it up beautifully. *"I love to*

read and write, they are true passions of mine and I get to do all of them as well as have wonderful conversations with people with the same passions as me."

If you have questions, or would like more information on setting up a similar program in your school board, please reach out to Marena (marena.gillen@dsbn.org). **I**

The Ottawa Indie Bookstore Crawl

As school library folks, you've likely heard about Canadian Independent Bookstore Day. This annual event has become a call sign for spring, a day in late April that gives us the chance to celebrate local indie bookstores and the Canadian creators that fill their shelves. With contests, giveaways and lots of bookish swag, CIBD is a wonderful opportunity to say thank you to your favourite booksellers and explore the many different literary businesses that exist across the country, both in person and online.

In Ottawa, CIBD has taken on a whole new identity with the creation of an entire weekend dedicated to our wonderful independent bookstores. Back in 2023, a group of local business owners, spearheaded by the gang at The Spaniel's Tale, created a unique literary event that many local residents now look forward to each year. The Ottawa Independent Bookstore Crawl is a 3-day family-friendly event that gets people out and about, heading to parts of the city that they might not otherwise visit. With 8 bookstores participating, it's a weekend filled with book love, supporting those neighbourhood literary hubs that work hard year-round to bring us the hottest new titles, special book requests, author and illustrator events, school book fairs and so much more.



Ottawa crawlers have three days to collect stamps in their passports by visiting at least seven out of the eight participating businesses. Although no purchase is necessary for the passport stamp, it's hard to walk out of those places empty-handed! Many booklovers also use the event as an excuse to visit other local establishments, like ice cream parlours, coffee shops, pubs and specialty bakeries. Once the passport is complete, participants are entered into a draw for the grand prize of \$200 to spend, plus eight runner-up prizes of \$25.

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I spoke with Cole Davidson about the event. He is one of the crawl organizers, the co-owner of The Spaniel's Tale bookstore (1131 Wellington Street West, Ottawa ON) and board member of the Canadian Independent Booksellers Association. He told me that in the first year of the crawl, there were six participating businesses and over 200 people submitted a completed passport, with many more participating but not finishing. Two years later, they've added two more booksellers to the roster and had 464 participants hand in their completed passports.

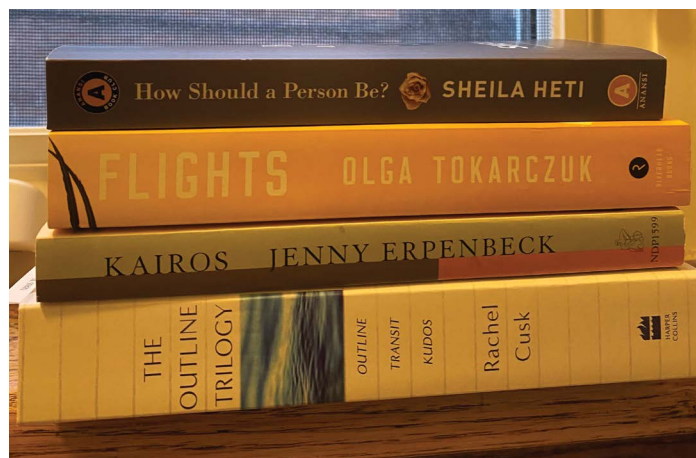
If you know of any bookstores who might be interested in starting a similar event in your area, here are Cole's top tips:

1. Do it! The community has responded so well to it, and by early March we already have customers asking us if it's happening again. We've done it since our first Canadian Independent Bookstore Day but we've heard from other stores that it has really taken CIBD to the next level for them.
2. We develop a clear plan and present it to the others by email. The only thing we ask from the invited stores is a 'yes' or a 'no.' Everyone is busy so reducing the number of emails we send and being clear with what we're asking has been really important. We follow up with additional requests only when absolutely necessary, like when we need volunteers to appear on the local TV morning show to promote it. Everything we ask the other booksellers is a simple yes/no approval.
3. A couple of weeks after the Crawl, we invite everyone to a debrief meeting and dinner. This gives everyone enough time to reflect on what worked and what didn't, while still getting together to share ideas while it's fresh in our minds. This is the opportunity for everyone to share feedback and shape next year's crawl. By soliciting their feedback at this stage, it makes it that much easier to present a clear plan for the next year that everyone has already discussed and agreed to.
4. We time the crawl with Canadian Independent Bookstore Day. Having such a highly visible day anchor the crawl really increases promotion and participation.



For my family, the Ottawa Indie Bookstore Crawl has become a cherished yearly tradition and I'm grateful for our dedicated community of booksellers who put so much time and effort into creating this wonderful experience. ■

The indie book crawl in Ottawa pushed me to head to some of the local independent bookstores I had never visited after living in the city for more than a decade. I picked up a small pile of new books and got the chance to see what each store specializes in and has to offer its clients. I will definitely be back to most (if not all) of these stores again soon. I have found my favourite bookstore in the city and the first time I visited was on the indie bookstore weekend - so that's a win! - Kimberly Senf, Middle and Senior Librarian, Elmwood School



View from a Tree Nominee

MARTY CHAN

As a kids' author, I thought I had seen everything until the Silver Birch Express ceremony. With twenty-five years of school presentations under my belt, I've met kids who sheepishly whispered that they liked my books, brash kids who boldly told me they hated reading and everyone in between. But none of my experiences prepared me for what I witnessed at the Forest of Reading Festival.

"You'll be a rockstar" was a common refrain from the Forest volunteers and a few authors who had attended the festival before. I didn't know what they meant until I was backstage for the Silver Birch Express ceremony. While I couldn't see the kids, I could hear all 1,500 of them. A deafening cheer greeted each nominee as they took to the stage. When I stepped out, the wave of sound nearly blew me back. I was stunned to see many kids holding their favourite book and waving to get the authors' and illustrators' attention.

At one point, a group of students chanted "lost and found," the book that took home the Silver Birch Express award. These kids were expressing their pure joy for the book they voted for. They were excited about this book in the same way hockey fans might cheer on their team; moreover, it wasn't just *Lost and Found* that garnered all the attention. Every nominee had their contingent of adoring fans, who expressed their love for the book in decibels.

However, the true impact of the Forest of Reading hit me when I met kids at the autograph tent. As the parade of students lined up to get my autograph, I spoke to many of them. Some of the kids gushed about their favourite character. Others begged for a sequel. More than a few went one step further and told me they'd love to be like me—an author. I was witnessing the origin stories of the next generation of creators, some of whom might eventually stand on the same award stage I had just occupied.

While I loved the rockstar treatment, the undeniable joy I took from this festival was that all the nominated books inspired these kids. While my book might not have won over every kid, I knew there was a good chance one of the nine other nominated books did. Over my years of writing and touring, I often wondered if I was making a difference when I was promoting literacy. Was I inspiring kids to develop a lifelong passion for reading? Did books still have a place in today's technological society? I found my answer at the Forest of Reading—a resounding yes! ■



Marty Chan signing autographs on Day 1 of the Forest of Reading Festival.



Marty Chan on the way to the Silver Birch Express Award Ceremony on Day 1 of the Forest of Reading Festival.



Students cheering at the Silver Birch Express Award Ceremony on Day 1 of the Forest of Reading Festival.



Marty Chan and Jael Richardson with a Sign Carrier and Student Presenter on Day 2 of the Forest of Reading Festival.



The Forest of Reading® Festival

Making as much noise for books as we did at this year's Forest of Reading Festival was a real highlight, and it was so exciting to be able to reach our readers from afar through our Digital Award ceremonies. Here are some of our favourite moments!



To learn more, visit:
forestofreading.com/festival/

Dear School Library...

A Love Lettering Project by the
Ontario School Library Association

The Dear School Library Project

At the 2025 Forest of Reading Festival, OSLA Council exhibited Dear School Library, a project all about capturing student voice!



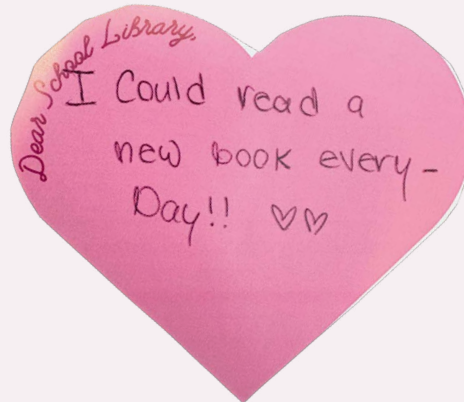
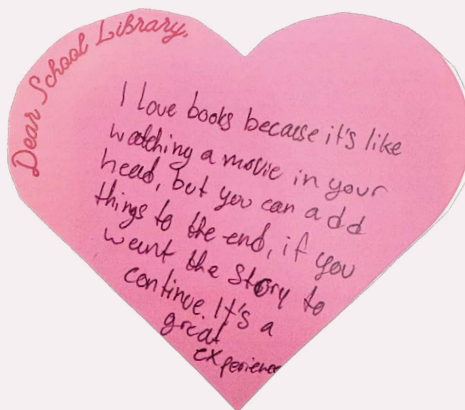
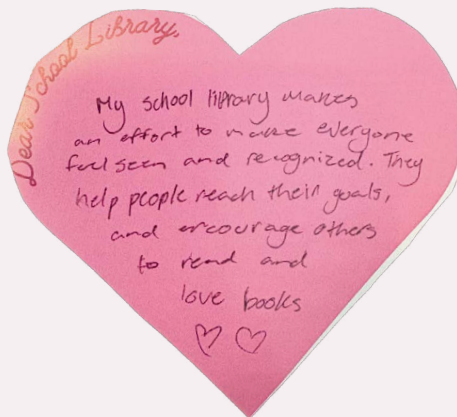
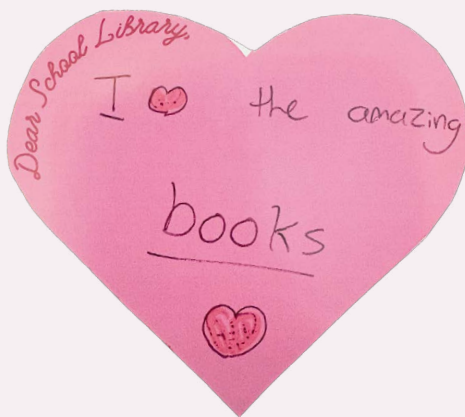
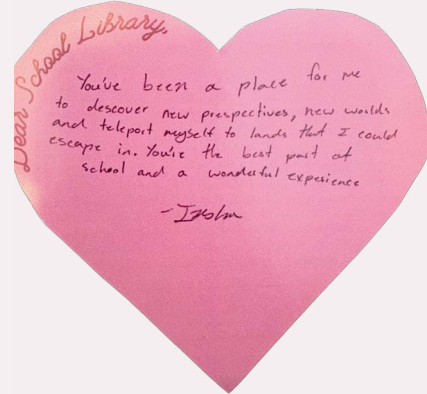
Inspired by Lindsay Zier-Vogel's "Dear Street," students dropped by to write their stories about what makes their school library a special space and to share their #SchoolLibraryJoy!



Just a few of the student responses
collected over the two-day Festival.



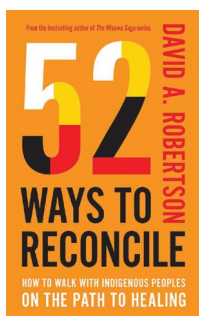
Dear School Library...



Professional Resources

KASEY WHALLEY

Finding your space in the world – and helping others find theirs – is a journey that can be difficult, confusing, evolutionary, rewarding and affirming (and sometimes all of those things at once). The following professional resources were chosen to highlight diverse experiences and explore ways in which we can think about, cultivate and celebrate belonging in our communities.



52 Ways to Reconcile: How to Walk with Indigenous People on the Path to Healing

David A Robertson

“If we are complacent and do nothing, other people will do nothing. If we are active and do something, we will inspire other people to do something.”

Prolific Indigenous writer David A. Robertson has released a new book focused on practical and meaningful ways that communities and individuals can support reconciliation – though, as Mr. Robertson explains, *reconciliation* might not be the best word; instead this book aims to give 52 ways that a strong, equitable and true relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people can be created. Broken down into weekly objectives, the book takes readers on a journey of support and healing. It is a tangible call to action that offers Canadians the opportunity to create a space for

Indigenous peoples, cultures and belonging. This is a great book for personal action, but many of the activities would

work well as events, initiatives and actions led by school library professionals.



Neurodiversity and the Myth of Normal (2-part series) – Ideas: Radio for the Mind
CBC Radio

This two-part series explores how perceptions of neurodivergence are evolving and how doctors, teachers, communities and individuals are handling the differences in our brains. Looking at the societal and cultural history around neurodivergence, this CBC *Ideas* episode examines how different communities and people treat differences in the way people think, act or process information. This series examines a variety of neurodivergent conditions and provides perspectives

and insights about how neurodiversity not only fits into our communities but also makes them better. This is a well-researched series with a wealth of perspectives and strategies for creating a space in our communities and libraries for neurodiversity.



Safeatschool.ca – Strategies for Positive Action

The Safe@School website was developed in 2007 by OTF and COPA National to foster “safe, strong and free” schools. The resources on this site are well-developed, detailed and plentiful. While there is a comprehensive Professional Learning Module, taking a specific look at the Strategies for Positive action is a great starting point. This page explores ideas of resistance and how to deal with these barriers. Though the content is geared towards teachers in the classroom, these strategies can be applied to school library professionals and their environments. This content may be especially helpful if book bans, shadow bans, budgetary constraints and misinformation are being used against the school library. There have been changes in the world since this content was first developed, but the core ideas and strategies can still be used to create a sense of belonging for students in the library as we continue to support equity, diversity and understanding in our spaces. ■

Creating Belonging And Growth At Our Council Table: Representation of Our Membership

RICHARD REID

The Ontario School Library Association has a long history of advocacy, professional development and member engagement. We have strived to reflect our community and the needs of the professionals within it while promoting the value and impact of our school libraries and learning commons spaces. Council members and our members as a whole continue to do this. We do this with a sense of urgency now more than ever!

Johanna Gibson-Lawler, a past OSLA president and long-time council member has recently stated, “Ontario school libraries are on fire!” Today, this fire isn’t a “good news” story but one that details the dire conditions and inequalities that exist in the school libraries of Ontario.

Staffing cuts, library professional central staff reassignment, funding changes and book censorship are common headlines. These reports overshadow the positive impacts that school libraries have on school communities, student achievement and well-being. Working in the background to advocate against these hardships that many school library staff currently face, is the OSLA Council.

Although the council is small, the collective action that takes place around the table is mighty. At times quiet, and at times vocal, the goal is to advocate for all library staff and, of course, the school communities we serve. As we advocate, empower and provide opportunity, we have recently updated our own governance by-law structure to reflect the work we do by encouraging diverse representation at the council table of the OSLA

At our January 2025 Annual General Meeting, OSLA By-Law Number 2 was passed. This by-law, as noted in our communication to members, was created and ultimately approved to ensure OSLA Council structure “remains current, effective and aligned with the organization’s mission, governance practices and standards” (OLA, 2024) of our whole organization. Along with alignment to our goals as an association, OSLA Council had the important opportunity to update our council membership to reflect who we are as a community of professionals. When seeking our council members, we now have a mandate to reflect our profession in all job areas while prefacing this with the importance of having racialized community members present at our decision-making table. Our updated membership structure will allow us to, “have representation of diverse voices on council that represent the various school libraries across our province.” (OLA, 2024)

Operationally, in our next election cycle we will be encouraging diverse school library professionals from across our various geographic regions to consider joining our council table. This fall, please watch for updates regarding vacant geographical positions and membership at large council seats. ■

For members who wish to volunteer on an OLA Board or Council, visit [OLA Elections](#).



/ o l a
:: ontario library association

School Libraries Connect

An OSLA Learning Portal

A new initiative designed to inspire, motivate and engage OSLA members through virtual events. Use this portal to network, share, ask questions, and celebrate the incredible impact school libraries have on our communities!



oslalearning.vfairs.com



Inside OLA: What Our New Strategic Plan Means for OSLA Members

MICHELLE ARBUCKLE

The **Ontario Library Association (OLA)**'s new **Strategic Plan (2025–2028)** brings renewed energy and focus to the entire library sector — and for members of the Ontario School Library Association (OSLA), it's a meaningful call to action. Whether you're a teacher-librarian or library technician, this plan speaks directly to the challenges you're facing — and offers a path forward.

At the top of the priority list is **advocacy**. With ongoing cuts to funding and staffing in Ontario's public school libraries, the plan commits to expanding and deepening the **Save Our School Libraries** campaign. This means stronger public messaging, direct engagement with policymakers, and renewed efforts to secure qualified library staff in every school. OSLA is also a key partner in the national launch of the **Dear School Library** campaign — giving students a voice in supporting and recognizing the important role of their school libraries. OLA recognizes what you already know: strong school libraries are not a luxury — they're a cornerstone of student success.

The plan also emphasizes **investing in people**. As school library professionals face rapidly changing technologies, curriculum shifts and rising censorship pressures, there's a growing need for professional learning that's relevant, practical and supportive. The plan promises to expand training and resources on key issues like

artificial intelligence, intellectual freedom and cybersecurity — all through a cross-sector lens that includes school libraries at the table. Through the OSLA Learning Portal, OSLA members will have access to a year-long calendar of virtual events to network, share, ask questions and celebrate the incredible impact school libraries have on our communities.

While advocacy and professional learning take centre stage, the plan also focuses on **creating value and building belonging**. For school library staff who often work alone in their schools or feel siloed within their boards, this is a welcome reminder that you're not alone. By enhancing volunteer opportunities, creating more spaces for collaboration and offering targeted outreach to those taking AQ courses and early-career professionals, OLA aims to build stronger networks and a deeper sense of community.

Throughout the plan, there's a consistent thread: school libraries matter. The needs of OSLA members are woven into broader priorities — not treated as separate or secondary. Whether it's championing literacy, promoting inclusive collections or navigating new tech, the plan offers support that is practical, responsive and grounded in what's really happening in schools.

In short, this is a plan that sees you — and backs you. And that's something we can all get behind. ■



“

This plan reflects who we are, where we want to go, and the values that will guide us along the way.



I READ CANADIAN DAY

NOVEMBER 5, 2025

A national celebration of
Canadian books for
young people.



Celebrate with us! Visit:
ireadcanadian.com/day

HELP US REACH OUR GOAL OF \$25K!



HELP GET CANADIAN BOOKS INTO THE HANDS OF YOUNG PEOPLE

Donate to the *I Read
Canadian* fund

Help us spread the word!
[#IReadCanadian](https://twitter.com/IReadCanadian)



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 the Forest of
Reading Program.



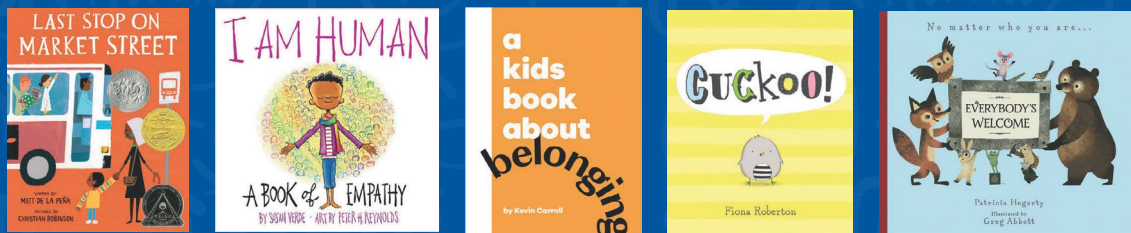
Donate \$150 and you will cover the cost of
one set of books for the Forest of Reading
Program.



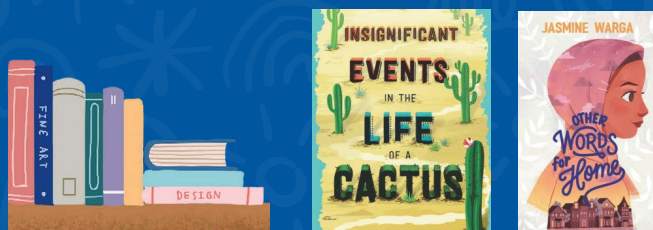
BACK COVER

Bookshelf

RESOURCES FOR YOUNGER READERS



RESOURCES FOR MIDDLE GRADE / YOUNG ADULT & ADULT READERS



The Teaching Librarian Submissions

Are you interested in writing for *The Teaching Librarian*? The theme for our January 2026 edition is Passion @ Your Library and the submission deadline is October 10, 2025. Email theteachinglibrarian@accessola.com or visit <https://accessola.com/the-teaching-librarian/> for more information.

Follow us on Instagram: @tingl_osla and Blue Sky: tingl.bsky.social

