

January 2025

Volume 32, Issue 2

THE Teaching Librarian

THE MAGAZINE OF THE ONTARIO SCHOOL LIBRARY ASSOCIATION
ISSN 1188679X

Levelling up to Detective Inspector Librarian

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The alchemy behind making audiobooks

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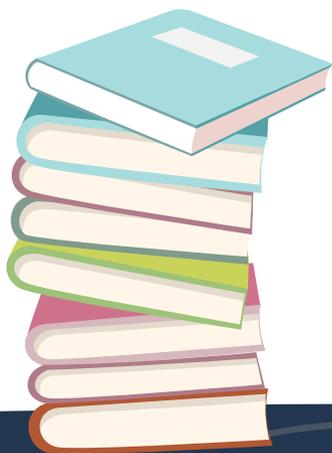
Whodunnits, thrills, and mysteries about mysteries

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THE Teaching Librarian

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mystery @ your
library

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TingL Contributors

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**WENDY
BURCH JONES**

is the current OSLA President and a teacher-librarian with the Toronto District School Board.



**JESSICA
HO**

is a Library Systems Technician with the Toronto District School Board.



**HUDSON
LIN**

is the Program Coordinator for the Festival of Literary Diversity.

Photo by Sarah Bodri



**LISA
LOFFREDI**

is a secondary school teacher-librarian with the York Catholic District School Board.



**DIANA
MALISZEWSKI**

is the teacher-librarian at Agnes Macphail Public School in the Toronto District School Board.



**MARY
MALISZEWSKI**

is a graduate of UTSC's Creative Writing program and a contributing writer for blogTO.



**MARTHA
BRACK MARTIN**

is a retired teacher-librarian and published children's author. She now works as an Educational Consultant and TVO Learn Mathify Ambassador.



**DANNY
NEVILLE**

is an educator with the OCDSB and the editor-in-chief of *The Teaching Librarian* magazine.



**LISA
NOBLE**

is a demonstrator at Trent University's School of Education. She chairs the school's library committee and facilitates the makerspace.



**RICHARD
REID**

is a teacher-librarian in Oshawa Ontario. He is the OSLA councillor for the Mid Central Region and 2019 President of the Ontario Library Association.



**JAEL
RICHARDSON**

is the Founder and Executive Director of the Festival of Literary Diversity.

Photo by Sarah Bodri



**JOANNE
SALLAY**

is the president of Teachers on Call, a personalized home and online tutoring service providing support by OCT educators.



**KIMBERLY
SENF**

is the middle and senior librarian at Elmwood School, an independent girls' school in Ottawa.



**SHELAGH
STRAUGHAN**

is the senior school librarian and a teacher of AP research at Trinity College School in Port Hope, Ont.



**STEPHANIE
WELLS**

is the Executive Director of the Canadian Children's Book Centre. She has 25+ years' experience in senior leadership roles in publishing and non-profit organizations.



**KASEY
WHALLEY**

is a library technician with Sheridan College and past Editor of *The Teaching Librarian*.



**TINA
ZITA**

is a teacher-librarian at Aylesbury Public School in the Peel District School Board.

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.

TingL Editorial Board

Lisa Loffredi	York Catholic DSB lisa.loffredi@ycdsb.ca
Martha Martin	Retired, Greater Essex County DSB mlbrackmartin@gmail.com
Danny Neville	Ottawa-Carlton DSB theteachinglibrarian@accessola.com
Kimberly Senf	Elmwood School, Ottawa ksenf@elmwood.ca
Angela Thompson	Kawartha Pine Ridge DSB angela_thompson@kprdsb.ca
Deborah Vert	Durham DSB deborah.vert@ddsbc.ca
Kasey Whalley	Sheridan College kaseywhalley@outlook.com
Tina Zita	Peel DSB tina.zita@peelsb.com

TingL Submission Guidelines

Please Note: Themes are subject to change.

May 2025 V. 32, Issue 3	Heroes @ Your Library Deadline: February 6, 2025
September 2025 V. 33, Issue 1	Belonging @ Your Library Deadline: May 5, 2025
January 2026 V. 33, Issue 2	Passion @ Your Library Deadline: October 10, 2025

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

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To become a member, contact:

Ontario Library Association
192 Spadina Avenue, Suite 205
Toronto, Ont., M5T 2C2
Tel: 1-877-340-1730
membership@accessola.com
accessola.com

TingL Editor

Danny Neville
theteachinglibrarian@accessola.com

OLA Design

Laurel McLeod
Ontario Library Association
lmcleod@accessola.com

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The Editor's Notebook



DANNY NEVILLE

As school library professionals, we are often the solvers of mysteries, detectives in our own spaces. Before we dive into this issue, let's play a game. Give yourself a point for each time you've heard the following phrase in the last two weeks.

"Where can I find a book about (fill-in-the-blank)?"

"The computer says the book is here, but it's not on the shelf. Somebody took it!"

"I'm looking for this book with a *<insert-random-colour-here>* cover. Can you find it for me?"

My guess is you'll be in the double-digits on the scoreboard before long. I'll also go out on a limb and predict that you'll be able to solve the mystery about 95% of the time. So, congratulations, dear readers! You've now levelled up to Detective Inspector Librarian!

Usually we're the ones solving the mysteries, but today you get to snuggle up in your cozy reading nook and let us do the solving for you.

In this issue of *The Teaching Librarian*, we get a few behind-the-scenes reports from some mysterious people and organizations that support school libraries. Stephanie Wells, Executive Director of the Canadian Children's Book Centre, gives us the inside scoop on all the CCBC has to offer us in her article about Canadian books for Canadian kids. We also have an excellent piece put together by the team at The FOLD (Festival of Literary Diversity) as Program Coordinator, Hudson Lin, chats with Founder and Executive Director, Jael Richardson about the festival's ten-year anniversary and the many resources available to students, teachers and librarians.

Our regular articles continue to shine in this issue as well. We are very excited for the revival of a TingL feature, *The Buzz!* Follow along with Joanne Sallay, President & CEO of Teachers on Call, as she takes us on a deep dive into the mining industry, along with an incredible opportunity available to educators at the elementary and secondary level. We'd also love to offer a warm welcome to two brand new features, *Tech Bytes with Lisa*, by Lisa Loffredi and our *Back Cover Bookshelf*, chock full of resources connected to our theme, by Kimberly Senf.

Many thanks to all our super-sleuths who have contributed to the magazine for our Mystery @ Your Library edition.

Take care and stay warm, dear readers! Hope to see you at Super Conference! ■

Danny

Danny Neville
Editor of *The Teaching Librarian Magazine*

President's Report

Where is the mystery in our libraries?

 There is mystery in the unknown substance that comes back on some Graphic Novels... [Nope... I really don't want to know!]

 There is mystery in the ratio of erasers of books to erasers sold at book fairs... [Look, there are books over there too, kids! sigh]

 There is mystery in the number of Pokémon cards I have collected that have come back in book returns to the library stuck between pages as bookmarks... [Have I been under the misguided impression that these were collectors cards?!?]

It's easy to see the curiosity in our readers when they come looking for a new title or come seeking something different to read. The question is what keeps the mystery alive for us, as school library professionals?

I look for the mystery in the eyes of our youngest readers, those primary students who come into the library with eyes wide, amazed at "all the books" and elated that they can borrow "any one they want!"

I look for the mystery in the questioning voice of the Grade 6 students in our K-8 school (who have come to us from smaller feeder schools) unsure of the rules, and wanting to be sure that they get it right. "So I really can take out more than two? Are you really sure about that, Mrs. Burch Jones?"

I look for the mystery in the wonder that is weeding. What gems will I find this week (because I've learned that slow and steady wins the weeding race, my friends)? Will it be a 1942 original publication of a Margaret Wise Brown classic? Another in the 1990's series "Cool Careers for Girls?" Or perhaps another Dewey book with Pluto as a planet, the U.S.S.R., or only two Canadian territories (sorry, Nunavut!).

Other times the mystery happens in the scope of our role itself. Often, our days can feel so disjointed and discombobulated that it's hard to find any semblance of routine. Being pulled in a dozen directions, as we often are, makes it hard to find the "regular" sometimes. Wearing as many hats as we do, it can be tough to find the hat rack and return to the comfort of our librarianship homes. There have been many mornings where I've turned into the parking lot and wondered, "will I get to be 'me' today?" And sometimes that's the mystery.

Why do our school library professional roles seem to be devalued seemingly more so than some of our colleagues to the point where we get pulled so much more often than others. Why are the contributions that we bring to our school communities not seen and understood to be as impactful to student success as those of our colleagues, despite the data that shows otherwise? What do we have to do to be seen as worthy by our administrators and staff teams? It's a mystery.

Another mystery I can't wrap my head around is the disconnect between the importance of literacy and the consistent defunding of libraries and school library professionals across the province. Year after year I listen to all the stakeholders in education: Ministry officials, Ministry documents, studies and the powers that be in school boards talk about the critical importance of literacy and how we, as "partners in education" must do "everything we can" to "improve our students access to quality literacy instruction and resources." And every time I want to scream back, "Hey, we're over here, your Ontario school library professionals, the ones with

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WENDY BURCH JONES

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specialized literacy training? The ones who can help with literacy resources, that's us!" Yet somehow we are invisible in this space, too. Instead, the province spends precious education funding to hire "literacy specialists" and Boards, faced with ongoing competing interests and budget deficits due to a flawed funding formula, find themselves having to make difficult choices.

Then there's the mystery of having to justify my job. Whether it's fighting for the library budget (at my school, with the School Board, provincially, or just general advocacy) or trying to help someone understand the scope of the school library professional (yes, we do more than shelve books... sigh), it's exhausting. And while this is part of a bigger issue in education that has roots in misogyny, misplaced perceptions of librarianship and school libraries, it doesn't make it any easier for those of us on the front line who end up having the same conversations day after day. No, it's not a "cushy job" and it's a mystery to me why anyone would think that's the case. Every school library professional I know works really hard and serves their school community as best they know how. They are amazing educators and they care, truly and deeply.

The greatest mystery of all is why we don't celebrate more often. Loudly and unabashedly. In school libraries all across the province each and every one of you are making a difference in the lives of your students. You are impacting your school communities. You are out there doing such amazing things (yes, you!) and the world deserves to know about it. And here's why - every time we share about what's happening in our school libraries two things happen:

1. We help people understand a little better about the role of school library professionals in the 21st century: what it is we do, what partnering/collaboration looks like, what relevant & reflective books we're buying and displaying for our school communities, etc.; and,
2. We help highlight the impact of our work with the students in our school communities, showing "the powers that be" why we're important and how our work matters.

So, share your #SchoolLibraryJoy and tag @OSLACouncil and/or @ONLibAssoc so we can help spread your great work. Let's help each other uncover the mystery of what it means to be a school library professional in Ontario. And maybe, just maybe, in the process we'll spread a little #SchoolLibraryJoy, too. ■

Yours in story,

Wendy Burch Jones
2024 OSLA President

Who We Are: Professional Connections While Wearing a Super Conference Red Vest

We are going off script! To the editors of TingL, please let us write again.

Everybody loves a great origin story - especially a regional approach that highlights the unique stories of library professionals across the province. With creative liberties included, these two origin stories focus on building professional bridges instead of connections by region. Richard Reid and Kate Johnson-McGregor have worn the Ontario Library Association Super Conference Red Vest for many years and here are their stories.



Richard Reid - Teacher-Librarian, Oshawa ON.

School libraries and collaboration go hand in hand. We do this daily with staff, students and the communities we serve. Although teamwork and collaboration are a part of our daily work, many of us are “solo-librarians,” and an early piece of advice I received from two legends in school library land, Nancy Dalrymple and Isabelle Hobbs, was to “get involved in professional organization like the OLA.” Without this advice, my journey in school libraries would look very different.

Taking this advice, I zipped up my Red Super Conference vest and began volunteering as a Super Conference planner with OSLA. Soon after completing my term as the OSLA planner, I was asked to join as a conference co-chair, which I did for many years under the direction of Liz Kerr and Michelle Arbuckle. My involvement with Super Conference opened my eyes to the diverse nature of OLA and all of its divisions. The power of thousands of library people together under one roof is infectious and with just one visit to Super Conference, one quickly understands how school libraries and other library sectors have co-mingling goals.

As Co-Chair of Super Conference, our whole team spent time exploring the notion of cross-divisional ideas and exploration of themes that involve diverse libraries and our commonalities. I enjoyed this work and was fortunate enough to become OLA president in 2019. Fueled by the power of building bridges between library sectors, my presidency was an opportunity for myself and colleagues to jointly dig deeper in understanding how all libraries fit together.

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After my presidency, I took some time away from OLA to do some Graduate Studies work around public pedagogies and of course, school libraries entered into this research. But after the completion of this work, OLA started calling once again and I am happy to be back on OSLA Council as a regional representative. I could not finish this origin story without a big thank you to Kate, whom I share this article with and to everyone in the school library world. Thank you for your support and everything you do that makes school libraries a going concern across the province.

Kate Johnson-McGregor

As anyone who works in a school library learning commons can tell you, the LLC is a place of endless possibility and opportunity. When I took on the role of teacher-librarian initially, my predecessor, the legendary Bobbie Henley, passed on essential wisdom. “Get involved in provincial organizations! You will never regret it!” and 12 years into my life in the LLC, her words continue to ring true.

School libraries are about connections: connections through inquiry, connections in coding, connections in literature, and connections with students, staff and the community. One of the most energizing and enriching opportunities I have had to connect with school library professionals and folks who enrich the LLC environment has been as an OSLA Super Conference Stream planner. Like many of the people who find themselves on the OLA Super Conference Planning Committee, I sort of fell into the position, as there was an opening and I was wrapping up my role as past president of OSLA. I felt like I still had lots to give to the OLA but my time on council was done. Enter OLASC!

Super Conference planning is a fabulous way to learn about issues facing libraries, collaborate with folks from other divisions and meet authors, innovators and experts in all sorts of library-related roles. Super Conference planning is a finite task – the conference runs at the end of January (or first of February) every year - and the opportunity to see your vision made into reality through the hard work of co-planners and the indomitable OLA staff is extremely rewarding. The opportunity to partner with other OSLA Conference Planners to put together programming for the stream is enriching – I am a better teacher-librarian because of my work with Diana Maliszewski, Dawn Telfer and Richard Reid. The honour of donning a red vest and walking 15,000+ steps a day at the Metro Toronto Convention Centre is reward in itself, but the real gifts lie in the connections I have made and the learning I have done. The friendships and professional growth opportunities involved in participating in the Ontario Library Association as a volunteer have enriched my personal and professional life. The joy in walking through the busy lobby and hallways at the MTCC and seeing people I met through OSLA planning and council cannot be measured. OLA Super Conference is a highlight of the year in libraries across the country; being a member of the team that makes the dream into reality has been a privilege. ■

Why Treasure Mountain and Other TMC Mysteries Explained

I am old enough to remember the 1987-2010 TV show “Unsolved Mysteries.” Robert Stack, the somber host, would describe, with the help of re-enactments and interviews, situations in which there was no current resolution.

There are mysteries in library land, even in my own space (“Where is the book that the circulation system insists is on the shelf? Why do the students turn the books around so the pages face outward instead of the spine?”) but some of the biggest mysteries surround the entity often known by its initials: TMC. This article is meant to help dispel some of the mysteries around the “research symposium and think tank.”

What is Treasure Mountain Canada?

According to Canadian School Libraries, Treasure Mountain Canada is a school library learning commons research symposium and think tank. More simply, it’s a gathering of people who work in and care about school libraries to have deep, meaningful conversations about the latest issues in the field. It’s biannual (every two years) and a very important event for school libraries in Canada. A symposium is usually smaller in size than a regular conference with a much more specific focus. For instance, the focus of the upcoming Treasure Mountain Canada research symposium (the 8th one in the series) is the recent document *Foundations for School Library Learning Commons in Canada: A Framework for Success*

Why is it called Treasure Mountain anyway?

The name of the think tank comes from an event organized by Dr. David Loerschter back in 1989. Treasure Mountain, Colorado, was the original location of the American school library research retreat. As Liz Kerr described in the preface to the printed compilation of the very first Treasure Mountain Canada, the “vision was to provide researchers in school librarianship an opportunity to share their research, gather ideas, and interact with practitioners in the field.” (2010). Canadian associates of Dr. Loerschter, like Carol Koechlin, were inspired by this work. Kerr wrote back in 2010, “this inaugural Treasure Mountain Canada is truly a think tank. The decision to continue or not will be made at this event. And if the group decides to continue, they will be pioneers in the shaping of subsequent events.”

What happens at a think tank?

The day’s agenda is a full one. There are spotlight speakers that the entire group will listen to. There are also table talks in the morning and then in the afternoon; a half dozen or so participants who submitted papers spend a minute sharing a short blurb about their research, and then the attendees can decide where they would like to go. We sit at small tables, briefly share the research, and then discuss the findings more thoroughly. It helps if people have read the papers beforehand, but it isn’t mandatory. The end of the think tank involves what David and Carol call “The Big Think.” It’s a chance to synthesize, prepare next steps and think beyond. Collins English Dictionary defines a think tank as, “a group of experts who are gathered together by an organization in order to consider various problems and try and work out ways to solve them.” Some of the results of previous TMC “big thinks” have led to the creation of national documents of significance, such as *Leading Learning: Standards of Practice for School Library Learning Commons in Canada* and *Foundations for School Library Learning Commons in Canada: A Framework for Success*.

I’m not a researcher - how can I contribute?

On my blog back in 2015, I wrote this about contributing to Treasure Mountain Canada:

“Me? Write a research paper? I’m not an academic! That’s probably the first reaction teacher-librarians might have to such a proposition. I’d challenge you to undertake a lesson I’d often do with my elementary school students in the library - ask them (and ask yourself) to draw what a researcher looks like. What do you get? What gender or age do the drawings show? What clothes do the researchers wear? What tools do the researchers use? Why do the pictures look the way they do? What do we mean when we say research? Google the definition of research and you won’t find a focus on the person but on the process. Research involves systematic investigation, inquiry with a purpose. Don’t we research when we are purchasing a car to discover which model would best suit our needs? Shouldn’t we do a bit of research prior to an election to learn about the candidates running for office in our region? Even the youngest children conduct research, be it to see how to conquer the last level of Super Mario Brothers, discover how to build a redstone-powered roller coaster on Minecraft or select the coolest Halloween costume or Christmas gift for themselves. Teacher-

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librarians are conducting research frequently too, although they may not realize it. We are all researchers.”

Where do I start?

Begin with yourself and your own school library. Consider the subthemes, as described in the Winter 2024 Canadian School Libraries Journal article, <https://journal.canadianschoollibraries.ca/announcing-tmc8-strengthening-foundations-for-school-library-learning-commons-in-canada/>



Are there any areas that evoke a particular reaction in you, whether it be triumph, despair or another emotion? Look at the section on the CSL website that shares Resources to Get You Thinking: <https://tmc.canadianschoollibraries.ca/tmc8-resources-to-get-you-thinking/>



Remember that your ordinary may be someone else’s extraordinary.

Prior to the big event, various provincial school library associations will host webinars to help potential participants refine their ideas into a possible submission. BCTLA hosted one on October 16, 2024. OSLA ran a session on October 22, 2024. Even if you missed the broadcast, reach out to a CSL member and they can share the slide decks and offer helpful advice; the webinars are archived.

When and where is the next TMC?

Treasure Mountain 8 will be held January 31 - February 1, 2025 in Toronto, Ontario, in conjunction with the Ontario School Library Association’s annual Super Conference.

Is it too late for me to be a part of TMC?

Even if you miss the deadline for joining the think tank in person, there are other ways to get involved:

- Read the papers, all of which are posted on the tmc.canadianschoollibraries.ca website for free.
- Comment on the submissions online.
- Monitor the TMC website as dates are usually announced a year in advance.

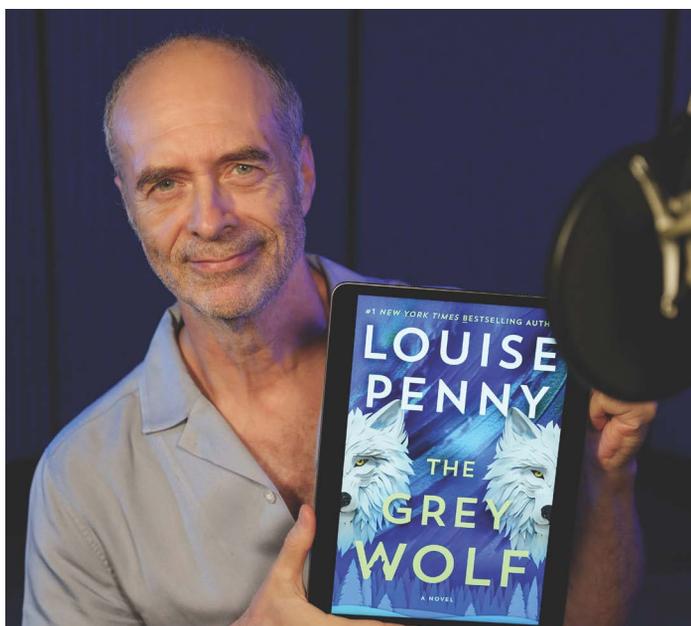
Treasure Mountain Canada does not have to be an unsolved mystery - put on your detective trench coat and investigate the possibilities! ■

Meet the Actor: Jean Brassard and the Mystery of the Audiobook Narrator

As school library professionals and literature lovers, the value of audiobooks is not a mystery to us. Whether we are listening to our own favourites or sharing great titles with our students, most of us have embraced audiobooks as yet another valuable resource to make books more accessible to everyone. And we are not the only ones.

According to BookNet Canada, 45% of Canadians listened to audiobooks in 2021. The revenue for audiobooks in Canada alone is projected by Statista to reach \$374 million (US dollars) by the end of 2029. What began in the United States as a tool for the visually impaired in 1932 has morphed into a booming business, with savvy readers expecting high quality, immersive storytelling by sophisticated narrators essentially acting out every aspect of the book. This role of an audiobook narrator is not for the faint of heart – but how do these audiobook narrators find their calling? What mysterious alchemy goes into making an audiobook – and most importantly, is it fun?

I had the opportunity to speak with award-winning actor Jean Brassard recently. Jean's talents are wide-ranging; he's a television, stage and movie actor who has written and directed a variety of projects. He's also a singer/songwriter and composer – and is best known by some as a commentator for the WWE in the international French market! Jean has over 80 audiobook titles to his name, but his latest project launched in October 2024, when he became the new narrator for the English version of award-winning author Louise Penny's latest book featuring Armand Gamache, *The Grey Wolf*.



TingL: Thanks for chatting with me today, Jean.

Jean: Hello Martha, it's a great pleasure to converse about books with you. I am actually blown away by the statistics you've mentioned in your intro. What an incredible expansion in the book industry.

First let me congratulate you for your work on *The Grey Wolf*! Your narration is absolutely stellar – and how lovely that your work was recognized by Audiophile with the Earphones Award! What was that like when you heard?

Thank you, I appreciate both your compliments and the award and even more so the opportunity I've been given to succeed two great narrators in Louise's fascinating invention. My reaction to the award? Well, this is sort of funny, or maybe a bit embarrassing. When I first saw the announcement and postings, I did read Earphone Award but for some reason it didn't click. I thought this was an award for Louise's book itself. Then I saw people were congratulating me and I figured they were confused. Ha! Turned out I was the confused one. I'm honoured for sure, especially taking on the lead on this adventure after two powerful narrators for a big change of direction for the series.



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MARTHA BRACK MARTIN

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You're the first Quebecois narrator for Louise's extensive series featuring the village of Three Pines, which is set in the Eastern Townships of Quebec. I understand Louise felt it was time to have a Quebecois narrator for the English audiobooks. Did you feel a heavy responsibility knowing that?

I have to say that it was an intensive process to get to the studio and we did a lot of prep for it with my great producer Katy Robitzski and director Lorelei King. I listened to some of both Ralph Cosham's and Robert Bathurst's narrations beforehand to immerse myself in the worlds they had created. One of the challenges was to slip into the characters that Louise's fans recognize and love without changing them too much and yet giving them my own flavour. I also wanted to really deliver the story as best as I could because, and you might say I'm partial, I think this is Louise's best book.



You're allowed to be partial after the work you did to make the audiobook "sing." And I'm sure you realize, most school library professionals consider themselves to be experts at "read alouds," myself included, but your work is so much more than just a read aloud! I can't get over how you had so many accents you had to keep straight. How challenging is that?

Well, the accents are not that complicated in the end. I always follow expert narrator Scott Brick's advice from a seminar that he and Michael Charzuk, Audible's head of production, gave to SAG-AFTRA actors in 2012. He said, and I paraphrase,

that finding the *essence* of a character is more important than accuracy or authenticity. In the end the mix of both is what I think brings the best results. Also, I am not a native English speaker; I grew up in Quebec City in the 60's and nobody spoke English where I lived; now over 40 years in Manhattan, I've done my best to master that wonderful language. Being an outsider, so to speak, I've always played at imitating people's tones and rhythms, their music. If you anchor your delivery within a strong character point of view and interior emotional life, then you're off to a very good start.

Clearly your extensive work in television, stage and screen demonstrates how capable you are at becoming other characters. Are audiobooks just another version of this, or do audiobooks have their own special "flavour" for actors?

I guess that to me, the most exciting thing about voicing books is that when I'm in a TV show, a film or on stage, I get to be one character and with a book you can be all of them. Such fun!

You've had a very diverse career, but what surprised me the most was your dive into announcing wrestling – and for Wrestlemania no less! Can you tell us what that was like?

Announcing for the WWE was the biggest surprise of my career. It's a long story but starting in 1994, from a simple audition through my commercial agent at the time, I became the commentating partner to Ray Rougeau, very well known in the wrestling world. I was not a wrestling fan and didn't know the world I was entering and it turned out to be one of life's greatest gifts. I got to learn about a universe I had no context for, do a lot of improv and since I did the colour commentary for such a wild part of the entertainment industry, it seemed there was no limit to what I could do and get away with. Being ringside with often very vocal audiences of anywhere between 20 to 80 thousand passionate fans was quite a trip.

I bet!

That experience made me feel like you can throw anything my way and I'll be able to create with it. It also taught me the value of fans, their knowledge of and passion for the field they are connected to. So, I have a lot of respect and understanding for Louise's numerous and dedicated fans and I pay a lot of attention to what they have to say without feeling like I need to cater to them either.

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What’s the most fun part for you in making an audiobook? (Hopefully it isn’t just a hard slog and there are some fun elements? <grin>)

I LOVE READING OUT LOUD!! I do it all the time, always have. I’m a singer. I like to be vocal. Do I like to hear my own voice? (I must, right?) And when you’re handed a great story and characters, it’s such a joy to take on the challenge and see how you can make the words jump off the page and really honour someone else’s intentions and craft. You get to sculpt a book, pace it, create the room where people are having a dialogue, create tension, tenderness, mystery... Oh, don’t let me go on!



I love your passion for this! You are speaking our library language!

Good!

I have heard that a working actor is only as happy as their next gig. Can you tell us what is next on your agenda?

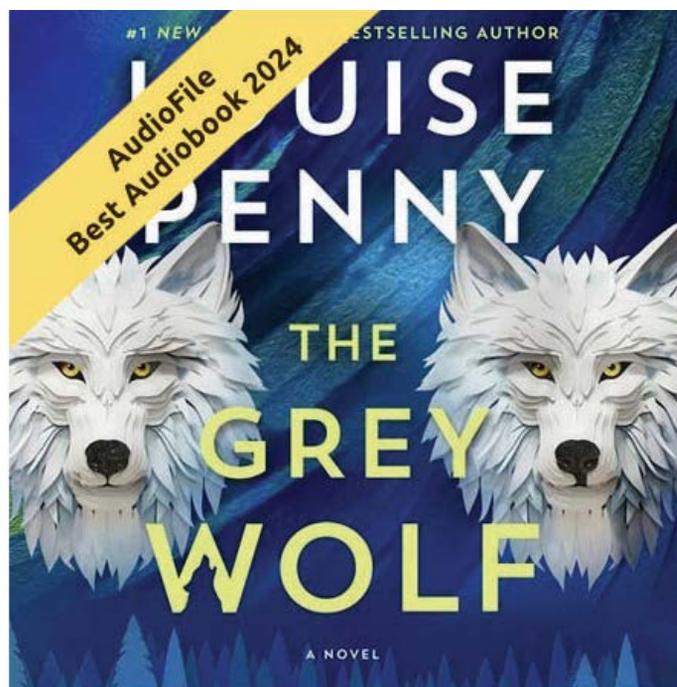
I’ve got a couple of movies I’ve finished. Paul Shrader’s *Oh, Canada* came out on December 6, and I’m also in a film called *On The End*, as well as having a streaming series in the works. I have a personal book project I’m developing and I try to play as much accordion and sing as much as I can.

Oh, a personal book project! I love the sound of that! We can follow you on social media to keep track of your work. And now let me thank you for “solving the mystery” of audiobook creation with us, and for engaging audiences so perfectly in your narration of *The Grey Wolf*!

It’s been a pleasure. Thanks Martha. I do hope that audiobook listeners will thoroughly enjoy the combination of Louise’s words and my delivery. And I cannot wait to get my hand on the next script! And yes, I invite folks to follow me on social media, mainly Instagram and Facebook and to subscribe to my YouTube channel where I’ll be putting out my personal book project later on. Cheers! ■

You can purchase your own version of the audiobook version of *The Grey Wolf* in English, narrated by Jean Brassard, here: <https://us.macmillan.com/books/9781250354167/thegreywolf>

You can find Jean on Instagram @jean.brassard1 and on YouTube @jeanbrass. You can also connect with him on his website, <https://jeanbrassard.com/home>.



Jean Brassard's narration of *The Grey Wolf* by Louise Penny was recently selected as one of AudioFile's Best Audiobooks of 2024.

Mysteries of the Senior School at Trinity College School

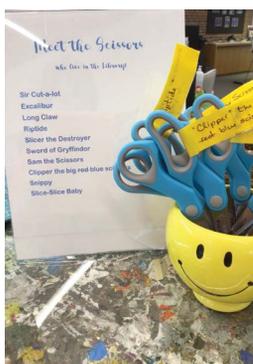
SHELAGH STRAUGHAN

But our library is similar to others in that there is a fair amount of unexplained phenomenon. In the spirit of the theme of this issue, here is a tongue-in-cheek look at some of the mysteries of our high school library:

Where do all the glue sticks go?
Didn't we refill the paper yesterday?
And how can scissors disappear so quickly?

We named ours after reading an article that suggested anthropomorphizing items can help students feel more of a responsibility to return them to us.

Which worked until it didn't, which led to a poster that we thought was hilariously entertaining, one that proved somewhat successful, as we had 4 pairs of scissors returned!



How can the library be full of hard-working students and then empty out the minute before the Head of School walks through the door? It's so bizarre and sadly true.



How many students can fit in an area designed for two? This group averages between 8-10 and seems to prefer this cramped spot to some of the more spacious options.

How many signs have to be posted before students read one to realize the printer is not working (or the library is

closing early, or the Wi-Fi is down)? Our current record is 5 (one on the printer, one on a signboard in front of the printer, 2 on the library doors and 1 on the whiteboard at the library entrance)



What is up with this furniture in this space? The students who take over this area annually (a new group of grads every year) are lovely, considerate and responsible humans until they sit in this specific location and morph into a cacophonous collection of chatterboxes who have little regard for the volume of their voices. Perhaps proximity to mystery books has it cursed?



How can an idea seem fairly simple until it's given the green light? After our 2014 renovation, we were left with an expansive bulkhead that seemed to cry out for adornment. Being a school with 300 boarders from 29 different countries, we thought adding a selection of clocks that represent where many of our students hail from would be a thoughtful and eye-catching addition. Until we had to decide how many clocks, what size of clocks, how to determine which geographic locations would be highlighted and what turned out to be the biggest conundrum of all - tracking different time zones and daylight savings zones and keeping each clock accurate. Anytime we think of a fabulous new idea, we ask ourselves "Is this another clock wall?"



NYCC2024: Where Libraries Meet Pop Culture

KASEY WHALLEY



It's no mystery that New York Comic Con is one of the largest, most well-attended pop culture and comic book conventions in North America. In October 2024, I was incredibly lucky to attend three days of NYCC as a professional (educator/librarian). While I loved the wonderful costumes, instant comradery, pop culture references, celebrity sightings and unbelievable artistic talent, I was also deeply excited to attend panel sessions that focused

on the intersection of pop culture, comic books and education. Most of these sessions were supported or affiliated with the New York City Department of Education and allowed New York City educators to claim professional development credits. These sessions featured a variety of classroom educators, city-level educators, community liaisons and artists, and although I can't claim any PD credits, the information shared at these sessions is likely to inform my professional practice. Here are some highlights from my NYCC2024 visit that I found insightful, helpful, or just plain fun!

Civics for All Comics Group – Booth Visit



Created by the NYC Department of Education in partnership with comic book artists and writers, the Civics for All Comics Group publishes comic books aligned with the civics curriculum in NYC schools. These resources are available for free to be used in classrooms or other educational

settings and actively bridge the gap between what students want and need to be reading.

In a Canadian context, we can see a similar idea with the *Tales from Big Spirit* series by David A. Robertson and *Louis Riel: A Comic-Strip Biography* by Chester Brown; the main difference being that the Civics For All Comics Group is actively creating and publishing resources for teachers to use in their classrooms. A wonderful aspect about the intentional creation of these resources, and the fact that there are similar Canadian resources available, is that this idea of connecting curriculum to comics is so adaptable. Bringing comics that have an educational connection (beyond literacy) into the classroom means that students can be engaged with the content in a

form they may find accessible, relatable and familiar. This concept was reiterated throughout many of the discussions and panels that I visited and is something that I think many of us can adapt into our own professional settings.

The Ultimate Team Up: Collaboration and Comics for All - Panel Session

Panelists: John Shableski, Jim Killen, Amy Chu, Christian Zabrieski, Maria Scrivan, Julio Anta, Elisha Li, Laura Silver

The major takeaway from this session is something I think some educators and librarians may forget (I often do): *just ask and see what happens*. The panel consisted of librarians, educators and retailers and focused on how libraries, specifically, can help bring together educators and retailers to create fun, educational and engaging comic book programming for students. While the panelists did speak about the support that libraries and library professionals can offer in moments of need, they also explained how reaching out to community members can create relationships that will be important during (and beyond) those moments.

The panelists spoke about starting small – creating a classroom or school library comic con, book swap or artist fair and inviting community members to sit in on a panel or be a keynote speaker. The idea here is to create something that will engage students in literacy, learning, building social and interpersonal skills and encouraging those connections between the school and community. The emphasis was on using our own connections to help mentor and connect others and recognize that this intersection of community members, schools and libraries is a win-win-win for all involved. It was an inspiring panel that had me thinking: I bet we could create something like that. While many of the smaller events the panelists spoke about have turned into larger, often city-wide initiatives, there was a deep appreciation and encouragement to create a space, even if it's small, for students to connect with one another over a shared love of pop culture while mixing in the educational aspects.

Clifford is a Kaiju! Engaging Students in Analysis and Argument Through Pop Culture – Panel Session

Panelists: Christina Taylor, Christopher Graham, Colleen AF Venable, Jana Tropper, Sasha Kaplan, Tami Stronach

This was a wonderful panel that I have thought about many times since it ended. The panelists for this session spoke about the different ways in which they have met students where they are, specifically related to engagement and understanding using comic books. While the panelists were all very knowledgeable about pop culture, they encouraged the audience to ask their students what

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their interests are and begin the educating there. Educators on the panel had taught all grades and higher education and had found that connecting with students about the things they love is a genuine way to have students fully committed to the content; they spoke about connecting the passion of what students love to the rigours of what must be taught.

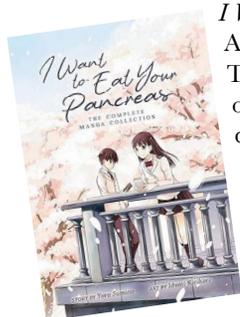
Looking at pop culture content through the lens of education can be incredibly helpful for having students make meaningful connections to the broader learning experience. For example, one of the panelists used a comparison of superheroes (Superman, Spiderman, etc) to real-life heroes and had students explore how heroism doesn't necessarily depend on having magic/superpowers. This lesson was extended to explore how common storylines in comic books are able to build empathy and understanding – the idea that something is happening to my favourite superhero is also happening to my friend next door. One of the examples given was *The Amazing Spider-Man Vol.2 #36*, which takes place after September 11, 2001, and explores what Spider-Man/Peter Parker (and, arguably the artist and writer of this book) were feeling and seeing after the 9/11 attacks in New York.

Beyond comic books, the panelists also spoke about other forms of pop culture that can be brought into the classroom or library – Pixar short films often have no talking but can communicate a lot of meaning, commercials that we decode without thinking about it or tropes in gaming that can ignite passionate debates (the Forza racing games are, essentially, Mario Kart). One of the overarching themes to this panel was the idea that we, as educators and librarians, shouldn't start teaching new things with new things – instead use media that students are familiar with and deeply interested in to introduce new concepts. Besides, it also helps us get cool points from our students, and that's always a bonus.

Titles That You Should Be Reading, Recommending, and Teaching – Panel Session

Panelist: Michael Gianfrancesco, Sasha Kaplan, Wendy Arabian, Steenz, Andrew Rostan, Liz Frances, Beth Hetland

This was a rapid-fire book recommendation panel, very reminiscent of the Dewey Divas and Dudes panels. For the sake of space and time, here are five of the titles recommended.



I Want to Eat Your Pancreas written by Yoru Sumino; Art by Idumi Kirihara

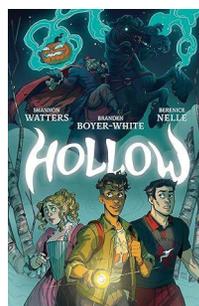
This Japanese translated manga explores ideas of unexpected friendship, secret keeping and disease in young people. It tells the story of two high school students: Haruki, a shy boy who finds a classmate's journal and learns she is dying of pancreatic cancer, and Sakura, the owner of the diary.

Milk Without Honey by Hanna Harms; Translated by Ruth Ahmedzai Kemp
This is a beautiful graphic novel with minimal colouring and text, that explores climate



change and the global decreases in bee populations. It was originally written in German and translated to English, giving the book a global perspective on the eco-crisis the world is currently facing.

X-Men: Magneto Testament (#1-5) written by Greg Pak; Art by Carmine Di Giandomenico
A harrowing telling of Magneto's origin as a Holocaust survivor. Although this series is fictional, the events and experiences of Magneto are based on real events and people who experienced the Holocaust.

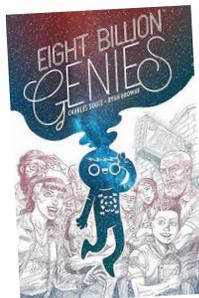


Hollow written by Shannon Watters & Branden Boyer-White; Art by Berenice Nelle
An energetic retelling of the *Sleepy Hollow* story with humour and high school students in mind. Although this is a retelling of a classic story, the graphic novel pulls it into the modern age which makes it highly appealing to students.

The Best We Could Do: An Illustrated Memoir by Thi Bui
This stunning book tells the story of displacement, immigration and growing up. The author beautifully explores ideas of belonging, surviving, love and family through her prose and art.



Bonus:



Eight Billion Genies written by Charles Soule; Art by Ryan Browne
A hilarious and highly recommended story of *what ifs* – what if, once the world hit 8 billion people, we were all granted a single wish. This emotional and insightful book will have students thinking long after it's been read.

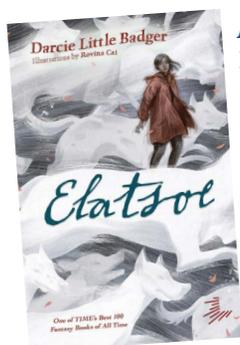
Attending NYCC2024 was a wonderful, exciting and incredibly fulfilling experience. I'm grateful for the opportunity to attend these sessions (and more) as a professional and connect with other educators and librarians. If you'd like to chat about the other sessions and booths I visited, get some help with a new pop culture project you're thinking about, or hear more about these sessions in depth, please email me - kaseywhalley@outlook.com - I'd love to hear from you. Stay nerdy, colleagues. 📖



Shelf Awareness

Oh, I am so excited! When I saw the topic for this issue, I might have done a happy dance. Mystery is my personal reading jam (for the data nerds: in 2023, a full 43% of what I read could fall into a mystery category, so far in 2024, it's looking like about 48%). I have some mysteries about mysteries to rant about a little at the end of this column, but first let's dive into the good stuff.

There are as many sub-categories of mysteries as there are variations on friendship bracelets at a Taylor Swift show, so I have chosen a few of my favourites to focus on. One of my sweet spots right now in YA mystery is work by Indigenous writers.



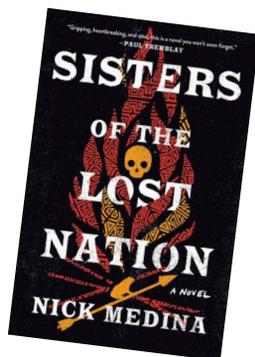
Elatsoe
Darcie Little Badger (Rovina Cai, illustrator)
Levine Querido, 2020

Darcie Little Badger's books always bridge categories, but this one is the closest to a structured mystery. It takes place in an alternate United States, so it reads like it's taking place now, but there are vampires and other supernatural beings around.

The main character, Elatsoe (more often known as Ellie), is a Lipan Apache asexual teen, who has the gift of speaking with ghost animals (including her own dog, who accompanies her regularly). When she discovers that a cousin has been killed, and that all is not as it appears, she sets out to uncover the truth. Ellie is a great, well-drawn character - she's a typical teen with lots of snark, but her existence is also hugely informed by her culture and her inherited connection to the animal spirits around her. The author's latest book, *Sheine Lende*, is a prequel, and takes you into Ellie's family's back story. Little Badger is Lipan Apache and her books get the stamp of approval from Dr Debbie Reese's amazing American Indians in Children's Literature organization.

Sisters of the Lost Nation
Nick Medina
Berkley, 2023

If you like your mystery with a strong dose of creepy, this is so completely the book for you. I could not bring myself to read this one before bed. It is a contemporary mystery with themes of life in an Indigenous community,



missing and murdered Indigenous women, the dark side of gambling, but also, like *Elatsoe*, brings in the supernatural. Medina is a member of the Tunica-Biloxi tribe (Louisiana) but sets his story on an unspecified fictional reserve. The main character here is Anna, who is feeling a little bit like all the possible roads for her lead to dead ends. She knows that something very, very wrong is happening at the casino and hotel down the road, that it is linked to the girls going missing from her community and that something terrifying has been following her home. When her younger sister, Grace, goes missing, Anna has to do everything she can to get her back. Medina does an amazing job blending horror, mystery, Indigenous belief and contemporary issues in this one, and Anna's journey is one that YA readers will relate to.

I can't talk about Indigenous mystery without rolling in the fabulous thrillers (both reviewed in this column) by Angeline Boulley. *Firekeeper's Daughter* (2021) and *Warrior Girl Unearthed* (2023) are both edge of your seat mysteries incorporating modern Indigenous life, with strong female leads (you may start to sense a trend here). The audiobooks are both amazing.

What will your students enjoy?

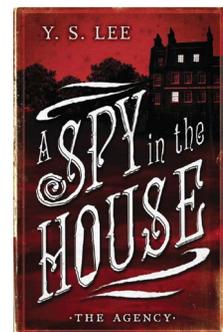
All of these titles feature strong female characters, modern Indigeneity and great pacing. The First Nations students accessing your library will see themselves here, where they might not in other fiction sections.

Content Warning: Mysteries often have a murder as the inciting event, so they almost automatically need a trigger warning. Some of these titles also contain sexual violence.

For our next category, let's dip into historical mystery:

The Agency (books 1-4)
Y.S. Lee
Candlewick (2009 - 2014)

This is a great introduction to period mystery for YA readers and there are endless places to go from here. These novels are the story of 1850's orphan and thief, Mary Quinn, who finds herself rescued from the gallows and drawn into a mysterious investigation service known as the Agency. The first book is *A Spy in the House*, which was a Red Maple nominee in 2011. For your readers who really want to feel like they are "there", this series does a



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terrific job evoking Victorian London. Mary has to fight all the “isms” of her time (and ours) as a young mixed-race woman, but she does it with panache. There’s also a charming romance that develops over the course of the books. Perhaps for those who would like *Bridgerton* if there was a bit less messing about going on.....

For students who love this one, you could send them on to Katharine Schellman’s *Lily Adler* series, or the lovely botanically themed *Saffron Everleigh* series from Kate Khavari - these are both technically adult series, but a strong YA reader looking for more like *The Agency* would enjoy these. All are “cozy” historical mysteries, which means less of the blood and guts, but still lots of conflict (including sexual harassment).

Vampires of El Norte

Isabel Cañas

Berkley, 2023

Another genre-bending mystery here. Set on the Texas-Mexico border as the United States moves to expand Texas in 1846, this is astoundingly atmospheric writing. Yes, there is a strong female character (I know, you’re shocked) in Nena, daughter of a wealthy ranch family, but she trades narration duties with her longtime love, Nestor, a much in-demand vaquero (a ranch worker who moves from ranch to ranch as needed). The last time the two saw one another, they encountered something that left Nena near death and Nestor exiled from the rancho for not protecting her. Now, on the brink of war, they are thrown back together, along with whatever that something was that almost killed Nena the first time. It’s back, and the Yanquis are using it in their military operation. This is mystery, horror and romance all wrapped up and tied with a bow. There is definitely some steamy stuff here, with Nena and Nestor’s slow-burn finding their way back to one another, so decidedly for your older YA readers.



What will your students enjoy?

These books are for your crew who genuinely want to situate themselves in place and time as they are reading. In *The Agency*, you can feel the grey fog of London wrapping around you, and I learned a great deal in *Vampires* about the Texas/Mexico conflict and how the ranch system worked which I knew very little about before.

And so we come to the thriller subset of mystery, and my first “mystery” about YA and the mystery field. Where are the YA cozies?

I am a big cozy reader - series about mysteries that take place in bookstores, in small British towns, in cheese shops, in bakeries, in space....pretty much all featuring a plucky female lead (of all shapes, sizes, races, gender identifications and sexualities) figuring out whodunnit. There are some great middle grade cozy series. One of my favourites is Elizabeth Bunce’s *Myrtle Hardcastle* series, featuring a curious mixed-race girl solving mysterious happenings in her neighbourhood. Nancy Springer’s *Enola Holmes* would fit in here, too, although she could edge over into the YA category. There’s the classic *Screech Owl* series from Roy McGregor about a mystery solving bunch of hockey players - wait, could that be a series with male mystery-solving characters?

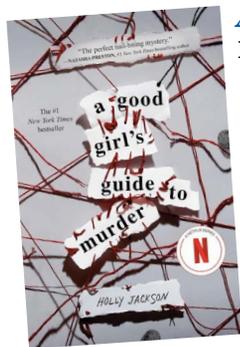
For the most part, however, YA mystery seems to steer clear of cozy and heads straight down the path to thriller. I realized as I noticed this trend that a) I am old and b) I was somehow looking for a modern equivalent of the (horrendously white and middle-class) Nancy Drew and Trixie Belden (and yes, Frank and Joe Hardy, too) that I was reading as I was moving into my YA years. It is this gap that often has me pointing YA mystery readers who are looking for a comfort read towards adult cozies. The plotting tends to be good, if sometimes predictable; you know the main character is going to figure it out with a minimum of mayhem; there will probably be food involved, and if there is romance, it will be low-key. This is the crew who might enjoy Agatha Christie’s *Miss Marple* novels - and if you are looking for a modern version of those, you can’t really go wrong with a short-story collection called *Marple* (2022, William Morrow, various authors). 12 of the top mystery writers around (Leigh Bardugo, Ruth Ware, Elly Griffiths and Naomi Alderman among them) contribute their own version of a Marple mystery. Any student who has discovered there are advantages to being underestimated will enjoy getting to know Jane Marple. There is one specifically YA-targeted story in this collection, but they are all beautifully crafted, and readers Grade 7 and up will enjoy these.

And so, onto thrillers. This is not my favourite mystery space, but whew, if we want YA mystery, this is where it lives.

We can’t really have this discussion without talking about the book that spawned a kajillion clones.

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A Good Girl's Guide to Murder

Holly Jackson

Electric Monkey, 2019/Delacorte, 2020

Holly Jackson's book, featuring spiky, spunky, definitely good at making bad decisions Pippa Fitz-Amobi, was a monster of a book. It's got it all. Strong female lead (check); attractive, highly intelligent, romantic interest who is connected to the crime (check); thoroughly nasty adults in positions

of responsibility (check); a murder victim who is far more complex than her "good girl" image (check); an assumed murderer who took his own life (check); and, of course, a true crime podcast that solves the case that has been hanging over the small town for years. I know, it's a lot. But Jackson, at least in this first book, does it all really well. Pippa is a fascinating, well-developed character, doing a lot of figuring out about who she is. The podcast is a train wreck, opening up all kinds of cans of proverbial worms that no one wants to see. I listened to this (thanks to libro.fm) as I drove to and from the Eastern Townships of Quebec on that weekend in March of 2020 to collect my older son from university. Pippa kept me company on that trip and she was pretty solid company. I am not as fond of the sequels, *Good Girl*, *Bad Blood* and *As Good as Dead*, where things really start to get morally murky, but based on a hit Netflix series, I may be the only one.

There are LOTS of books in this vein - Karen McManus' *One of Us is Lying* among them. I'm a fan of Ripley Jones' take, *Missing Clarissa*, which takes the true-crime podcast as a school assignment storyline and does some big thinking around whose disappearance we care about and whose we don't.

We Were Kings

Court Stevens

Thomas Nelson, 2022

This is another terrific edge-of-your-seat thriller. This time it's not a podcast, but a true-crime YouTube channel, and there is a terrific twist, which the reader will figure out before the protagonist does. A young woman goes to bat for her mom's best friend, facing the death penalty for murdering the third dear friend in their triangle. As time runs out, layers of "what it looks like isn't what it is" keep getting pulled back, Nyla and handsome sidekick, Sam, work to unravel a very complex family story full of privilege and lies. There's a fabulous car, fascinating red herrings and a banger of a finish. This is a stay-up-late-at-the-lake-to-finish-it book.



What will your students enjoy?

The thrills, of course. The uncertainty of the ending - will the heroine figure it out or not? How many bodies will pile up along the way? These are all about the drama, llama, and sometimes that's exactly what YA readers are looking for. All the content warnings apply - these go to some dark places.

I'll close with my other "mystery" as I started to sort titles for this column. Where the heck are the YA mysteries with male leads? This is a serious question. I put the question out to my T-L community, asked friends who read YA, checked in with my #EduKnitNight crew, who are the best-read bunch I know, and we were largely stumped. If we head into adult procedural mysteries, there are lots of men (again in a variety of shapes, sizes and all the rest), but other than John Grisham's Theodore Boone (who is really more middle grade than YA) and Kevin Sylvester's amazing Neil Flambé (who I think is a great YA read, but might appeal more to a middle-grade audience), the mystery-solving YA men are thin on the ground. I'd love to know people's thoughts on this one. ■

TINA ZITA

Visual Essay



Inspired by the Find Momo series by Andrew Knapp & the Aylesbury Book Creators.

Drawn to the Form: The Magic and Mystery of the Gutter - How Comics Convey Layered Meanings

We hope that the readership of *The Teaching Librarian* are all in agreement that comics and graphic novels are media texts worthy of study. If you still have educators or community members in your building that question the validity of comics as legitimate reading and writing forms, you can always direct them to the following links that will support the claims with research (and wit).

<https://www.comicsineducation.com/home/comics-arent-real-literature-and-other-stupid-things-people-say>

<https://www.literacyworldwide.org/blog/literacy-now/2018/12/20/the-power-of-comics>

<https://www.scholastic.com/parents/books-and-reading/raise-a-reader-blog/raising-super-readers-benefits-comic-books-and-graphic-novels.html>

https://www.sdkrashen.com/content/articles/1996_is_comic_book_reading_harmful.pdf

https://www.tracyedmunds.com/uploads/8/2/5/6/82569464/comics_research.pdf

The general public may not realize how exactly a comic or graphic novel works to convey meaning simultaneously in both simple and increasingly complex ways. We will go over an example from a title that might be found in an elementary and in a secondary school library to illustrate (pun intended) how a comic is the ultimate differentiated instruction reading material, since it can be read on multiple levels. Diana will explain the elementary example and Mary will explain the secondary example.

Elementary Example

This sample comes from *The Ferret's A Foot*, volume 3 of the *Guinea PI: Pet Shop Private Eye* series by Colleen AF Venable and Stephanie Yue, published in 2011. These pages come from the first section of the book.



Reading “Just” the Pictures

If a reader was going to focus on the illustrations alone, from pages 4-5 they would realize that a little creature was reading a book and another creature was reading another book. The sight of the other animals may give a clue that the setting is a pet store. They would infer that the book was very exciting, based on the wide eyes of the gray rodent.

Reading the Speech Bubbles

If a reader looked primarily on the words, they might realize that there’s shouting happening, based on the large, bolded words and exclamation marks on page 4. Turning the next page mirrors the suspense – who is yelling? – in the book that Hamisher, the grey hamster, is reading. When Hamisher says, “If I don’t turn the page, she won’t open that door. DON’T OPEN THAT DOOR!”, we can infer that it’s an exciting thriller. A few panels down, Hamisher the hamster says to Sasspants, the guinea pig, “Do you think if I read enough of these, I’ll be as great a detective as you one day?!” further suggesting that it was a mystery or detective novel that Hamisher read. Sasspants’ reply implies that she is herself a detective.

Reading the “Entire Package”

Reading the words, images, and layout all together in tandem gives an even more nuanced experience. Why is the panel on page four with Sasspants a circle in the center of the page, with the other animals in spokes around it? What does that tell the reader about Sasspants as a character? What do the actions of the other animals in the pet store reveal about their personalities?

When looking at page five, did you gloss over the background? There are important details that reveal a lot about the characters, from the empty soda cans to the books with parodies of real detective novels on the spines. Miss Marbles references Miss Marple, the famous detective created by Agatha Christie. The Hearty Boys is a play on words for the popular boys detective novel series, *The Hardy Boys*. Encyclopedia Off-White is supposed to be Encyclopedia Brown, the hero of several mystery books by Donald J. Sobel. Can you recognize the other allusions, such as “The Circletrain Children”, “The Easting Game” and “Sure-Locked Homes”? These references suggest a knowledge far advanced beyond the typical first or second grader.

Here’s another example from a few pages later. Note the increasing level of sophistication.

DIANA AND MARY MALISZEWSKI

...continued from page 24



Ask yourself questions like

- Why did one fish yell, “PANTS”?
- What play on words occurs in the fish dialogue?
- How would you describe the fish, based on this short snippet?
- Describe the five wordless panels on page 8. Who or what does it remind you of?
- Why is the sign on page 9 upside down?
- What does the sign tell you about the creator, Mr. Venezia?

Secondary Example

This sample comes from Volume 3 of *Chainsaw Man*, the manga by Tatsuki Fujimoto.



Reading “Just” the Pictures

This two page spread depicts a young man in a business suit

fighting a monster with a sword for a head. Each panel depicts a brief moment in their battle. The young man stabs the monster in the back, before driving his weapon through its chest. His attacks are empowered by a giant hand, which appears from the edge of the page.

Though the panel composition is fairly simple, this section of the manga does a lot to keep readers engaged. Even without context, it is clear that this scene is part of a larger fight. It is also clear that both the man and the monster are using special techniques to turn the fight to their advantage.

That said, the presence of the giant hand raises a number of interesting questions. Who does the hand belong to? Why is it helping the man? Is there any significance to its placement in the gutter?

Reading the Speech Bubbles

There is only one speech bubble in this section of the manga. It is connected to a disembodied mouth and contains the number three. Without context, it is unclear who the mouth belongs to or what the number means. Is it part of a countdown? A point system? Or something else entirely?

Reading the “Entire Package”

This fight is depicted over the course of several chapters, with each scene building on the ones that came before.

Long time readers will recognize the young man, Aki Hayakawa, a stoic, taciturn sword fighter who fights monsters on behalf of the Japanese government. His opponent is Katana Man, a human-devil hybrid with a grudge against Aki’s friend, Denji.

The hand belongs to Aki’s ally, the Curse Devil, a powerful entity with the ability to kill any enemy in three strikes. Because the Curse Devil is so large, we never get to see it in its entirety. We only get brief glimpses of its fingers and its mouth, which makes it seem all the more intimidating.

The Devil’s presence in the gutter only heightens this effect. In most comics, the gutter simply separates the panels; it isn’t “part” of the story itself. In *Chainsaw Man*, the Curse Devil intrudes upon the story from outside the bounds of the panels, making it seem as if it is lurking just out of sight.

By breaking the rules of the comic book medium, Fujimoto is able to make the scene more engaging and suspenseful. ■

The Buzz: Rock-Solid Reads to Demystify the World of Mining

The theme of this issue is Mystery @ Your Library, and while there are countless captivating reads in this genre for students, I'm taking a different approach for this column. As someone who loves a good Agatha Christie-inspired mystery, I'm stepping away from the world of fictional whodunits to explore how we can "demystify" real-world subjects that students often know little about. As the President & CEO of Teachers on Call, an in-person and online tutoring company, I had the unique learning opportunity to visit Gogama, Ontario, this summer, where I joined the Mineral Resources & Mining Education Tour with **Mining Matters**, the **Canadian Ecology Centre** and the **Ontario Mining Association**. My goal was to gather valuable insights about mining—an industry that remains a mystery to many students and adults alike—and share them with educators to help open up new career pathways.



Photo by Michael Scholz

Tools of the Trade: Using Books to Demystify Mining

Just as a good book can unlock the secrets of a gripping mystery, teachers and librarians play a vital role in bringing the hidden world of careers to life for young learners, helping them explore and thrive in diverse fields. Every professional relies on their tools, and for teachers and school library professionals, one of the best tools available are books. I had the good fortune to bring back a 'Fool's Gold' rock from the mining tour, which I learned from books is actually called pyrite and contains absolutely no gold! Reading from the pages of knowledgeable books can help "demystify" these topics, offering teachers a way to bring complex subjects to life and ignite curiosity in young learners. For this reason, here are some book considerations to help demystify the mining industry, STEM fields and skilled trades for students. Read on!



Photo by Michael Scholz

This is Mine Life: Just the 20 of Us!

My first trip to Northern Ontario took me to IAMGOLD's Côté Gold Mine, one of Canada's most advanced mining operations. The tour brought together 20 educators from diverse backgrounds and geographies across Ontario, including representatives from Carleton Place, Ottawa, London, North Bay, Toronto and beyond. The group featured educators from Ontario School Boards, Universities, First Book Canada, Royal Ontario Museum and, of course, Teachers on Call. Situated in Gogama, a small town rich in mining history and nestled between Sudbury and Timmins, the experience revealed a world of exciting opportunities in STEM fields and skilled trades, from engineering and environmental science to cutting-edge roles in robotics and AI. For educators, breaking down barriers around unfamiliar industries can help students uncover future academic and career possibilities. To read more about my first-hand learning experience, check out the Teachers on Call blog ([teachersoncall.ca](https://www.teachersoncall.ca/blog-toronto-gta-tutor-copy1/2024/09/29/modern-mining-future-careers-for-students)) - Uncovering Modern Mining: The Future Careers for Students You Didn't Know Existed.



Photo by Jennifer Allison from JShutter Photography



Photo by Michael Scholz

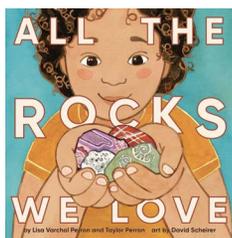
<https://www.teachersoncall.ca/site/blog-toronto-gta-tutor-copy1/2024/09/29/modern-mining-future-careers-for-students>



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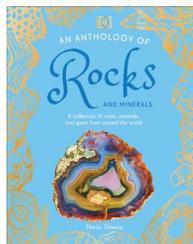
Here's a selection of both fiction and non-fiction titles, blending classic works and newer releases, to spark interest in geology, earth sciences and the natural world in your school library.



All the Rocks We Love
Written by Lisa Varchol Perron and Taylor Perron, Illustrated by David Scheirer
Publisher: Penguin Young Readers Group
(July 2024)
ISBN: 9780593662151
For ages: 3 - 6

This book is a great introduction to rocks for little learners, offering a fun and engaging way to explore geology. Written by Lisa Varchol Perron, author of several children's books including *Tell Me About Space*, *Tell Me About Oceans* and *Patterns Everywhere*, and Taylor Perron, a professor of geology at MIT, the story brings the wonders of the Earth's natural treasures to life. At the end of the book, there's additional information for those interested in diving deeper into rocks, geology and ecology.

An Anthology of Rocks and Minerals: A Collection of Rocks, Minerals, and Gems from Around the World
Written by Devin Dennie
Publisher: DK (Oct 2024)
ISBN: 9780593846148
For ages: 6 - 9



Calling all aspiring geologists and gemologists—this book is perfect for students curious about rocks, minerals and gems from around the world! It provides a fantastic introduction to over 100 unique specimens and even includes a handy blue ribbon to keep your place as you explore each one.

Ana's Adventure at the Mine: The Secret of La Esperanza
Written by Ana Gabriela Juárez
Publisher: Independently published (September 2023)
ISBN: 9798861443777
For ages: 8 - 13

This Amazon bestseller connects to the theme *Mystery @ Your Library* with a magical mining adventure written by Toronto-based mining professional and environmental consultant, Ana Gabriela Juárez, named one of the Top 100 Most Inspirational Women in Mining globally. In the debut title, Ana and her friends discover a hidden mining valley, where they learn to believe in themselves, overcome obstacles and uncover the true strength within. Guided by friendship and teamwork, they seek the most precious gem of all: the Esperanza emerald. As an educational bonus, the book includes an Augmented Reality component, allowing readers to scan a

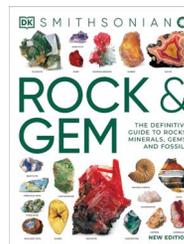
QR code and explore the mine alongside Ana and her friends.

Ana's Adventure at the Mine: Enigmas Buried in History
Written by Ana Gabriela Juárez
Publisher: Independently published (September 2024)
ISBN: 9798338895559
For ages: 8 - 13



Join Ana and her friends in the second book of this mining adventure series as they uncover the mysteries of mining throughout history, from the ancient mines of Nubia to the medieval tunnels of Europe. Through challenges and discoveries, they learn how courage and friendship can reveal the wonders of mining and change the course of history. Each chapter presents riddles and mysteries for only the sharpest and most daring to solve.

Rock & Gem Smithsonian: The Definitive Guide to Rocks, Minerals, Gems and Fossils
Publisher: DK; New edition (June 2023)
ISBN: 9780744088168
For ages: 10 - 16



This primer is perfect for students looking to dive deeper into earth science. Created in association with the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC, the world's largest museum complex, this guide provides accurate and comprehensive coverage of over 450 specimens, including rocks, minerals, crystals, gems and fossils. Feature panels on folklore, historical artifacts and famous gems add fascinating context, and there's even guidance on collecting and displaying specimens.

School library professionals play a unique role in shaping the next generation, introducing students to diverse books that demystify the world around them and open their eyes to exciting academic and career pathways. Your library can be their gateway to a world of possibilities, inspiring curiosity and a sense of adventure they'll carry with them into the future.

A Complete Reading List from Mining Matters

Mining Matters is a national charitable organization dedicated to supporting students and educators to develop knowledge and awareness of Canada's geology and mineral resources. They have prepared this reading list for educators.

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UNDERGROUND! My Mining Adventure

By Theresa Nyabeze (Author), Misheck Matambanadzo (Illustrator) (2016)

The Earth Book for Kids: An Introduction to Earth Science

by Dan Lynch (2022)

Geology Activity Book for Kids: Hands-On Fun Exploring Rocks, Minerals, and the Earth's Surface

by Meghan Vestal (2022)

Spenser and the Rocks

By Lawrence F. Lowery (Author), June Goldsborough (Illustrator) (2013)

The Mineral Maniacs and the Magic Hardhat

By Jules Miles (Author), Meg Whalen (Illustrator) (2017)

Understanding the Gem Minerals: A Practical Guide

By William Revell Phillips, James Shigley (2016)

Geology of Mineral Resources

By Michel Jébrak and Éric Marcoux (2015)

Canada Rocks: The Geologic Journey 2nd Edition

by Nick Eyles and Andrew Miall (2018)

Sedimentary Rocks

by Rebecca Pettiford (Author) (2018)

STEM Starters for Kids Geology Activity Book

by Jenny Jacoby (Author), Vicky Barker (Illustrator) (2019)

Why Do Tectonic Plates Crash and Slip? Children's Earth Sciences Books

by Baby Professor (2017)

Geology Lab for Kids: 52 Projects to Explore Rocks, Gems, Geodes, Crystals, Fossils, and Other Wonders of the Earth's Surface

by Garret Romaine (Author) (2017)

Rock Collecting for Kids: An Introduction to Geology

by Dan R. Lynch (Author) (2018)

Old Rock (is NOT Boring)

by Deb Pilutti (Author/Illustrator) (2020)

Water Is Water: A Book About the Water Cycle

by Miranda Paul (Author), Jason Chin (Illustrator) (2015)

Rock Collecting for Kids: An Introduction to Geology

by Dan Lynch (2018)

Fossils for Kids: An Introduction to Paleontology

by Dan Lynch (2020)

Canada Close Up: Canadian Rocks and Minerals Paperback

by Joanne Richter (2007)

Go! Field Guide: Rocks and Minerals

Scholastic Canada (2019)

Rocks & Minerals Activity Book

by Jonah Jacobson (2021)

We Are Water Protectors

by Carole Lindstrom (2020)

I'm Trying to Love Rocks

by Bethany Barton (2020)

Joanne Sallay is the President & CEO of Teachers on Call, an in-person and online tutoring service providing support to students from K - 12 by OCT educators. ■



Photos by Michael Scholz

Tech Bytes with Lisa: Unleashing Creativity in the Library Learning Commons with Canva for Education

LISA LOFFREDI

Welcome to Tech Bytes with Lisa! I am so excited to launch this new feature of the magazine in which I will share with you 'teach-worthy' educational tech tools that I feel are pedagogically significant. This first article features Canva for Education, an app that is known for its creative superpowers. Canva for Education is a teacher's 'one-stop shop' for all publishing and designing needs. I've been a Canva for Education user since 2020 and, after having created 1000 designs, I know this is an app worthy of your attention.

PURPOSE OF THIS TECH TOOL: Canva for Education is an amazing digital tool that has become a game-changer in the educational sphere. The purpose of this tech tool is to allow educators and students to create visually appealing content such as presentations, infographics, lesson plans, student worksheets, newsletters and so much more, with little to no design experience.

CAPABILITIES OF THIS TECH TOOL: Canva for Education offers educators thousands of free ready-to-use templates that can be personalized, along with access to premium content and graphics. It will easily become a teacher's creative BFF with its full suite of publishing and content creation options that make lesson planning more engaging for students and branding our school libraries more efficient. It also allows teachers and students to share, review and manage their work together through the integration of various learning management systems (LMS), such as Google Classroom, Canvas, Moodle, Schoology, D2L, Blackboard and Microsoft Teams. Lastly, student use of Canva for Education supports differentiated instruction as it provides students with a myriad of options to demonstrate their learning.

FEATURES: The countless number of features Canva offers makes content creation simple. Some of the features include image enhancement, video editing, photo effects, online screen recording, a library of icons, AI image and text generators, as well as third-party app integrations.



PRIVACY & SECURITY: Canva for Education services offer a safe space for children to use this tool under the supervision of their teacher. Educational institutions with Canva for Education accounts for their staff and students always have direct control over student data. For more details about Canva for Education's privacy policy visit <https://www.canva.com/policies/privacy-policy/>.

CANVA FOR EDUCATION TEACHER ACCOUNTS: Did you know that Canva for Education is 100% free for educators? All you need to do is sign up with your education email (board mail) and ID. Once you've been approved, you will receive a verification notice from Canva via email. Although Canva is free to all

users with a basic account, sadly, this free version doesn't allow the user to access all graphics and photo elements for free. However, when you are verified for a Canva for Education account, you have access to all the design elements. Visit the Canva for Education website to begin your verification process: <https://www.canva.com/education/>



HELPFUL RESOURCES: For those who need more guidance in the design process or for those less tech savvy, fear not! Canva offers an entire 'Help' section complete with tutorial videos and resources to guide you along. Furthermore, Kristina A. Holzweiss, a high school edtech librarian in New York, is a teacher Canvassador. She has created an amazing resource and hosts Canva PD for librarians and teachers. Check out her website at kristinaholzweiss.com and click on 'Professional Development' or follow her on Instagram at @lieberrian.

Don't delay any further. Unleash the artist in you and explore a whole new creative world of possibilities by using Canva for your library learning commons. I promise, you will not be disappointed! ■

An Inside Look at the FOLD: Ten Years of Celebrating Diversity in Canadian Literature

The Festival of Literary Diversity (FOLD) is Canada's first and only literary festival dedicated to celebrating underrepresented authors and storytellers across the country. Based in Brampton, Ontario, the festival provides an important space for authors, readers, educators and librarians to come together and share their love of books and stories.

The FOLD will be celebrating its 10th anniversary in 2025. Over the past decade, the organization has had the honour of hosting preeminent authors such as Laurence Hill, Waubgeshig Rice, Talia Hibbert, Omar El Akkad, Chloe Gong and Tanya Talaga, as well as incredible emerging authors with unique debut titles.

The FOLD's flagship festival is held in April of each year. In addition, the annual FOLD Kids Book Fest happens in November, as well as monthly FOLD Academy webinars and Reading Challenges.

Here to talk more about the FOLD's history, the 10th anniversary and how the FOLD works with libraries across the country are Executive Director Jael Richardson and Program Coordinator Hudson Lin.

Hudson Lin: Jael, 2025 is an exciting year for the FOLD! We'll be celebrating ten years of incredible programming, events and conversations under the theme of "A Decade of Change." What kinds of questions and discussions do you hope to spark with this theme? Why is it important to look back on the past decade?

Jael Richardson: Anniversaries provide an important moment to look back at a set amount of time and reflect on what has, or has not, happened. It's especially helpful for us given that FOLD is so young. It's not just ten years for us. It's our first ten years. And since we started the festival with the goal of changing the way things are done in the Canadian literature landscape, it's worth considering if we've been successful. That will help us set new goals for the next decade that are built on our successes and improve on anything we haven't yet done.

With a *Decade of Change*, we want to talk about the ways the publishing industry has progressed, and specifically how FOLD has been able to contribute. What are lessons we've learned that we want to take into the future? What are some victories we can celebrate? What issues do we still need to address?

Certainly, a lot has changed in the past ten years, both for the FOLD and for the book world at large. Looking back, how do you think the FOLD and FOLD Kids have evolved over the past decade?

Every year, the FOLD has evolved. We added the Reading Challenge and FOLD Academy in the first few years. We added FOLD Kids Book Fest in year four, went digital in year five and then multi-modal in year seven. We've moved venues and the festival has grown from three days to four days to eight days.

What I'm most proud of, though, is the community we've built around the FOLD. From the authors who come to share their books, to the loyal readers who attend every event, every year, to our fantastic team of volunteers and our community partners in Brampton, we've been able to cultivate a welcoming and inclusive environment. Books and stories bring people together, and that's something we want to continue doing in the future.

Libraries have always played a big role in the FOLD's programming and events. How does the FOLD work with libraries and librarians?

Libraries are one of the most accessible spaces in a community, and they're the place where book lovers go. The communities we serve aren't always able to purchase all the latest book releases, so partnering with libraries has been a key part of our growth and development.

For example, we work very closely with the Brampton Library. They've been so helpful in promoting our events, but we also collaborate with them on programming. Together, we've started a really exciting Author Talk Series that has already hosted some amazing authors, such as Tanya Talaga and Louisa Onomé.

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JAEL RICHARDSON AND HUDSON LIN

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We're thrilled to be able to create these local, community-based environments where readers can meet authors they otherwise probably wouldn't have access to.

FOLD 2025, held from April 27 – May 4, 2025, will have events dedicated to school groups and high school students. What can students and educators expect from these events? How can teachers incorporate FOLD 2025 events into their classroom curriculum?

The FOLD school group events are designed for all teens – the keen readers and the reluctant ones. They provide information about writing and books, but they also centre important conversations about race, culture and community.

For teens who are thinking about their futures, the events also spotlight a variety of interesting career options. For example, in our Writer's Life series last year, we had an amazing Canadian author who had published a book but was also working as a crime lawyer in New York City.

We make a point of designing our school group events so they can be easily integrated into curricula. Teachers don't have to purchase anything or read anything before participating in the festival. Our educator guide helps students and educators learn more about the authors and consider the themes and topics of an event. All of the virtual events are available on demand after the festival so they can be used in the classroom regardless of class times or time zones.

Aside from the festival in April and FOLD Kids Book Fest held in November, what other resources does the FOLD have for educators and librarians throughout the year?

One of the things we often hear from educators and librarians is that they want to diversify their classroom and library

bookshelves, but it can be so difficult to know where to find works by diverse Canadian authors. That's something we're dedicated to helping with.

On social media (IG @the_fold), we regularly spotlight diverse books by Canadian authors. Every month, we have reading challenges for both adults and kids. FOLD Kids also does an extra Book of the Month on their social media (IG @foldkids). And finally, throughout the year, we release seasonal lists that include authors we think libraries and educators should know about.

We have some special projects lined up for the FOLD's 10th anniversary. Can you tell us more about the different ways we're celebrating? How can readers, educators, and librarians attend or get involved with FOLD 2025?

One of our most exciting projects for the 10th anniversary is our podcast mini-series, *Into the FOLD: A Books and Lit Fest Podcast*. The podcast takes listeners behind the scenes of planning a literary festival, with special guest interviews. The first episode is already live and available on all major podcast players.

We're also hosting a FOLD Read Along, creating special book recommendation lists and designing some really fun 10th anniversary swag. Follow us on social media and subscribe to our newsletter for all the latest info!

*The Festival of Literary Diversity will be held from April 27 – May 4, 2025, with both virtual events and in-person events held in Brampton, ON. For more information on individual passes or school board passes, please visit TheFoldCanada.org. **!***

There are Imposters Among Us – Investigating AI-Generated Picture Books in the Library

All opinions are my own. Examples of AI-generated picture books were found by searching Amazon Canada with the query “Self-published kid’s books.”

It would be remiss to say that generative artificial intelligence (AI) remains a mystery amongst librarians. As the profession turns its investigative eye towards AI as a pedagogical tool, or as an opportunity for digital literacy education... mysterious imposters may have already infiltrated your library collection.

The clues are there if one looks carefully: a peculiar sounding title, differing cover art styles between titles in a series or cover art that just doesn’t look quite right. These (often) self-published books are comprised of images and text created either wholly or with the aid of generative AI tools. Sold amongst their non-AI counterparts, AI-generated picture books are already finding their way into library collections through purchases and donations. Now is the time to begin investigating, and discussing, the implications of having AI-generated works in our libraries.



The Case of the AI Picture Book

In early 2023, the picture book *Alice and Sparkle* went viral online. Its author, @ammaar, tweeted: “I spent the weekend playing with ChatGPT, MidJourney, and other AI tools... and by combining all of them, published a children’s book co-written and illustrated by AI!”

The backlash was immediate. Some people lambasted the illustrations for their flaws and lack of consistency. Others lamented the death of the writer and writing for pleasure. Artists rightfully expressed concern about the trend of using AI

tools to illustrate books, a cost-cutting alternative to commissioning that threatens artist livelihoods. Further discussions were had about the ethical implications of profiting from images generated by AI tools that utilize artist’s intellectual property in training datasets without giving proper credit. I deemed the book an anomaly; a one-off experiment that only highlighted the limitations of AI as a creative tool and the fraught debate over AI copyright.

Then I encountered an AI-generated picture book while cataloguing in May 2023. The book had no pre-existing records within large cataloguing organizations, but this is common with new or independently published books. A quick Google search of the book’s ISBN returned results from Amazon and Indigo – again,

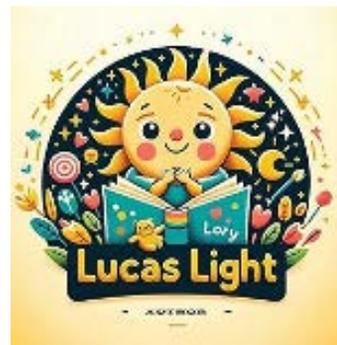
nothing to arouse suspicion. However, when looking at the warped front and back cover art of the book on Amazon, it became clear that the images were AI-generated. I then noticed the book’s odd, redundant title and robotic book description. Unlike *Alice and Sparkle*, there was no written indication that any portion of this book was AI-generated.

Further research revealed that that book’s author (AI-generated profile image) has 194 titles listed on Amazon. All the listings are for picture books featuring odd titles, wildly different subject matter and varying illustration styles. The author’s website disclaims:

“As an experiment, some of the blog posts on this site have been generated or assisted by artificial intelligence (AI) technology. While these posts aim to provide high-quality and informative content about children’s literature, please be aware that the AI-generated content may not be as unique or nuanced as human-written material. We are transparently exploring the use of AI to streamline content creation, but human expertise and editing remain essential parts of the process. Please let us know if you have any feedback or questions about our use of AI.”

Despite avowing transparency, the website also advertises the author receiving a writing accolade *that does not really exist*. The publisher’s website is a two-page blog with a picture of a building that, upon reverse image searching, returns results from an office building in the Middle East. What about this author is real? What has been fabricated to resemble legitimacy and trustworthiness? And it was not just this one author – further searching led me to find many “authors” on Amazon using AI-generated text and images in their books, listings and profiles without disclaimers about AI use.

Though it was just one AI-generated picture book, and though I have not encountered another AI-generated picture book while cataloguing since, this experience left a lasting impression on me.

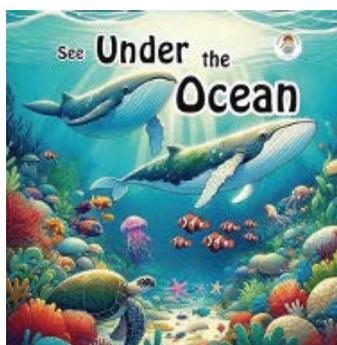


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Investigating the AI-Generated Picture Book

Beyond issues of information ethics and the trustworthiness of AI “authors,” AI-generated picture books have accelerated the trend of producing children’s books for profit. Books are published quickly, in bulk and of varying quality, capitalizing upon popular topics in the curriculum and/or social milieu. When searching for “self-published kid’s books” on Amazon, one does not have to scroll far before finding AI-generated books about timely concepts like financial investment, environmental stewardship and social-emotional learning. Generative AI tools have allowed for such books to be produced in greater number and with greater ease.



Examples of AI-Generated Book Covers of books sold on Amazon.

Like all self-published books, AI-generated books are published without any rigorous editing or vetting process, so there is no guarantee about quality. The ease of book production enabled by AI can further shift the focus from book quality to quantity. Looking at AI-generated picture books, I found that inaccurate AI images are not edited, illustrations from page-to-page are not cohesive and sometimes the book’s only illustration is the cover image. If the

author did not bother to illustrate every page well, one begins to question the quality of the text, too. Why bother taking time and care to research and write about a topic if AI can do it for you?

Furthermore, AI text generators cannot “tell” a unique story. A user can give an AI model a prompt and the model then predicts the best response based on the data it has been trained on. This response can often lack human nuance and personality. The capabilities of AI image generation are similarly limited. This is not about the accuracy of AI images; as the AI image models are further refined, there may come a time where AI-generated images become nearly impossible to distinguish from the real ones. Rather, this is about the programmed biases present in generative AI models. Without hyper-specific prompts, AI models make assumptions based on their training data about what the “most likely” protagonist and characters will look like, which can severely limit the representation that is now expected from picture books. Images of generic characters and settings are at best boring; at worst they interfere with the relationship between words and images from which readers of picture books derive meaning. As long as low-effort books are created mainly for profit, there is no guarantee that AI creators will take the time to craft prompts that meaningfully engage readers or reflect a diversity of human experiences.

Towards the Future

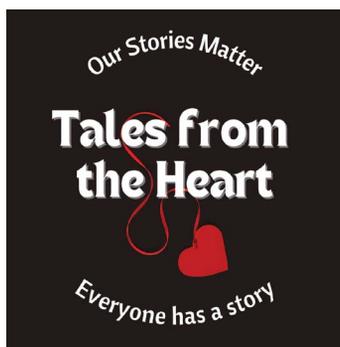
Children’s books and publishing will always be entwined with current technologies. This was the case with books with accompanying cassette tapes and continues with books with QR codes linking to online resources. The future of picture books could be one of further innovation, such as using 4D and virtual reality technology to create immersive book experiences for readers.

In the present, one where AI-generated picture books are being generated in bulk and are readily available for purchase through established vendors, comes the need to investigate the potential benefits and challenges of including AI-generated picture books in the library. Perhaps these books are suitable for leisure reading or can serve as valuable tools in teaching digital and information literacy. Or perhaps the liabilities arising from limited and opaque generative AI tools and how they are used outweigh the potential benefits. To frame AI-generated picture books as “culprits” is fun, but the books themselves are not active agents; the responsibility still rests on librarians and library professionals to make informed decisions and advocate for intellectual property rights, valuable stories and diverse representation. ■

A Narrative Unveiled: Tales from the Heart Storytelling Program

What if we could empower students to tell their own stories and make them believe that their story is worth telling? What if through storytelling we could help create a school culture built on trust, respect and empathy? And, what if, by telling or hearing our stories, we can help build community and strengthen our connections with each other?

These inquiries have been the driving force behind a storytelling initiative at Sacred Heart Catholic High School in Newmarket, Ontario, which began four years ago in our library learning commons. This new initiative was given the moniker, ‘Tales from the Heart’, as it is meant to be a program in which students contribute genuine real-life experience stories straight from the “heart”...Sacred Heart! Sacred Heart is a secondary school in the York Catholic District School Board.



What is Tales from the Heart?

Over the past four years, our ‘Tales from the Heart’ initiative evolved into a literacy program that focuses on the power and art of storytelling. The program encourages students from grades nine to twelve to think critically and creatively in telling their own story and to reflect on their own identities and individual

experiences.

Telling one’s story is a means of acknowledging who we are, where we came from, who we want to become as well as our values and beliefs. When we teach students the power of storytelling, we teach them to be self-reflective, empathetic and courageous as authors of their own lives. Even more so, we teach them that they are not alone, because stories connect us across time and space. Stories help to shine a light into the darkness.

In LeRon L. Barton’s insightful TED Talk video, “The power of sharing your story,” (Oct. 21, 2020) Barton states: “I cannot think of anything more innovative than giving everyone a chance, a place, or a platform in which to share their story. When you share your story, a domino effect starts; a new perspective gets out, which shows a new point of view, which allows a new voice to be heard until the entire world looks different. This is real diversity, real equity. When everyone has a say, everyone has power.”

This is precisely the intention of our storytelling program.

Tales from the Heart

The Power of Storytelling

- Intrinsic Part of Being Human**
Stories are how we pass on culture, language, and lived experiences. They connect us to our ancestors and elders., and remind us who we are and where we came from.
- Builds Connection & Stronger Communities**
Stories connect us emotionally to those around us and helps us deepen our relationships with each other. Storytelling highlights our similarities and promotes a deeper understanding despite our differences.
- Amplifies Diverse Voices**
Provides students with a platform to tell their unique tale.
- Improves Literacy Skills**
Reading and writing improves when students are at the center of their learning. It becomes more meaningful and purposeful, rather than automatic.
- Differentiated Learning**
There is not just one way to tell one's story. Stories can be told in different forms - spoken word, poetry, song, artwork, audio-visual recording, sculpture, etc.
- Supports Mental Health & Reduces Stigma**
Sharing one's story provides comfort and solidarity. It gives others hope, courage, and strength to overcome their own challenges.
- Explore Identities & Diversity**
Stories act as windows into the diversity of our world or mirrors that reflect our own identities.
- Stories Engage the Whole Mind**
The art of storytelling engages a large part of the brain during the listening and telling of a story. When we connect with characters in a story, our brain releases oxytocin.

Sacred Heart CHS

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Where did the idea come from?

The inspiration for our storytelling program came from a meeting back in November 2021 that included some of our students along with our board's newly appointed Human Rights and Equity advisor. I was grateful to be able to attend as it took place in my 'home away from home' – our library learning commons. During the meeting, one of our students was asked to share a poem she wrote on her experience being 'hyphenated' – a Filipino-Canadian. It was such a powerful poem that I still remember parts of it today. In her poem, the student bravely shared some of the stereotypes and assumptions made by others towards people of the same ethnicity. She captivated the audience and at the end, received a sounding applause from everyone. This reminded me of the message that Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie mentions in her TED Talk about the 'Dangers of a Single Story' and how they convey stereotypes and incomplete truths.

This is when something sparked for me. I immediately thought about the impact that telling one's story could have both for the storyteller and the listeners of the story. I gathered up a group of interested teachers and we got to work brainstorming various possibilities of the type of program we wanted to create. We applied for a grant that our board offered to get our initiative off the ground and were lucky to receive some funds. The seed had been planted. We sowed and toiled, and our amazing program has grown into what it is today.

How Storytelling in the Library Learning Commons Builds Inclusive Learning Environments

As school library professionals, we work in an environment surrounded by stories and we play a critical role in selecting books that validate the voices of everyone. We build our library collections, abiding by culturally relevant and responsive policies and tailored to our individual school communities, to ensure that there isn't just a 'single story' about anyone, rather that there are many diverse narratives represented.

The stories we put on our shelves are either windows or mirrors. If it is a mirror story, they allow our readers to see their identities reflected, developing in our readers a positive social identity and increasing their pride, confidence and self-esteem. Contrarily, if it is a window story, they allow the reader to explore the lived experiences of others, developing empathy and understanding, while examining diversity in social, cultural, political and historical contexts. Both types of stories are important and necessary to have on our library shelves for students to explore, reflect upon and learn about concepts of identity, diversity, empathy, belonging, inclusivity and equity.

Now, what if, after reading a story, students are inspired to tell their own?

In her book *Cultivating Genius: An Equity Framework for Culturally and Historically Responsive Literacy*, Gholdy Muhammad outlines that, "Youth need opportunities in school to explore multiple facets of selfhood, but also to learn about the identities of others who may be different. If they are going to enjoy a quality of life and live alongside other people, they must deeply know themselves and the histories and truths of other diverse people. Knowing about the cultures of other people teaches them how to respect, love and live in harmony with others who don't look or know the world as they do." (67) Muhammad offers us an Historically Responsive Literacy framework (see image) to guide our work in creating spaces and evaluating our curricula to know how we can cultivate the genius in our students to begin to tell their story.

Teacher-librarians play a key role as instructional leaders and partners to support such an initiative that offers differentiated instruction. We can partner with educators at our schools to not only leverage the diverse stories in our library collections, but to use these stories to empower students to begin to tell their own. In our ministry curriculum documents, you will find several expectations that ask students to improve their writing, to connect to real-world experiences and to think critically and creatively. Moreover, there are curriculum expectations that require students to reflect upon any one of the following topics: diversity, identity, perspectives, empathy, respect, oppression, citizenship, community, belonging, culture, inclusivity and advocacy. These are just some of the key themes behind teaching students to own their stories, write them down and share them with others. As literacy experts, teacher-librarians are in a good position to contribute to a storytelling initiative.

Our 'Tales from the Heart' program is an excellent example of Universal Design for Learning (UDL). When students write their own stories, they take ownership of their own learning. Students choose what story they wish to share and how they wish to share it. This is the power of student voice and choice. In *Equity by Design*, Mirko Chardin and Katie Novak quote educator Andratesha Fritzgerald, who states, "When learning becomes deeply personal, it becomes deeply rich. When the audience is no longer just the teacher of the students in the classroom, the effort of the student increases. When we help our students discover the truth – that their voices are powerful enough to speak to experts, to question the powers that be and cause an earthquake strong enough to shake the status quo – then the floodgates of learning are not just opened to them but controlled by them. When learning is personal, then it matters." (76-77). Encouraging students to share their stories with others provides an authentic audience that isn't just the classroom teacher. Moreso, having an authentic audience can lead to more genuine and reflective stories that are shared within the school community for stronger and empathetic connections.

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HISTORICALLY RESPONSIVE LITERACY & TALES FROM THE HEART

How Storytelling Builds Inclusive Learning Environments and Cultivates Empathy & Joy

Inspired By G. Muhammad (2020)

IDENTITY



Stories and storytelling play an important role in student learning by providing a **window into diverse experiences**. Through storytelling, students gain insights into their own identities, empathize with others, and develop a deeper understanding of the human condition.

SKILLS



Teaching students about the power of storytelling enhances their literacy skills by fostering **critical thinking, creativity, and encouraging active engagement with personal narratives**. In writing stories, especially their own, students develop a deeper appreciation for creatively communicating their thoughts and ideas.

INTELLECT



Teaching students how to write their own story cultivates their **narrative intelligence**. Students learn how to craft their own story using various writing prompts and develop a deeper understanding of **storytelling techniques**, honing their ability to engage and captivate audiences.

CRITICALITY



Storytelling prompts students to write and reflect on critical issues related to **power, privilege, equity, and challenges of oppression**. By crafting narratives through these lenses, students gain awareness of societal structures, learn how to foster empathy, and advocate for social change.

EMPATHY & JOY



Storytelling has the remarkable ability to ignite joy and foster empathy among students. By immersing themselves in personal narratives, students experience the thrill of imagination and connect deeply with themselves, others, and God, ultimately cultivating a sense of shared humanity.

Historically Responsive Literacy Model & Tales from the Heart Connections © 2024 by Lisa Loffredi is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

Implementation of our Storytelling Program

In our storytelling program, I have collaborated with several of our teachers to integrate the power of diverse narratives into their curricula, which has led to several workshops in the library for our students. My partnerships have included working with our ELL students who tell their stories of coming to Canada and their struggles with leaving their home countries. I have worked with our grade 12 leadership classes who reflect on what it means to be a leader, the leaders they most admire, and as future graduates, the type of leader they aspire to be. I have also worked with our Integrated Regional Arts Students (iRAP) to express their stories in a variety of artistic and technological formats including music, singing, painting, sketches, dancing, dramatic monologues, graphic designs and video creation. Although stories are primarily associated with those written as prose or poetry, stories can be effectively conveyed in many ways. In all this work with our students, the stories that have been produced and published have been powerful and beautiful!

More recently, we have empowered student mentors to become our ‘Tales from the Heart’ ambassadors who lead our elementary outreach initiatives. We work with our elementary schools to bring the power of storytelling to some of our primary, junior and intermediate classes. Using the amazing stories authored by our Forest of Reading nominees, particularly in the Blue Spruce category, we engage our student mentors to read aloud to the younger students and then have them reflect on the stories by connecting the message to something about themselves. This, ultimately, becomes the premise for their own story. Not only do the younger students enjoy connecting with our high school mentors, but seeing them explore the story is the foundation of a community of writers supporting each other.

All stories contributed by our students through our program are compiled into a digital book that is published online every year and shared with our school community.

Thomas King says, “All that we are is story. From the moment we are born to the time we continue on our spirit journey, we are involved in the creation of the story of our time here. It is what we arrive with. It is all we leave behind.” Our stories matter and everyone has a story. As teacher-librarians, let us give power to student voice through storytelling to ensure that our students author their own stories before others choose to do so for them.

A special thank you is owed to all those supporters of our program in our school community. First and foremost, our school principal, Mr. Danny DiLallo, who is a true equity champion, and our ‘Tales from the Heart’ teacher champions, Ms. Erica Gismondi and Ms. Jennifer Sellecchia.

For more information about our program, please feel free to visit our website at <https://mystorytotell.edublogs.org/>.



Discovering Canadian Books for Canadian Kids

STEPHANIE WELLS

Have you heard of the Canadian Children's Book Centre?

If we haven't had the pleasure of meeting yet, hello!

At the Canadian Children's Book Centre (CCBC), we are dedicated to helping librarians, teachers, caregivers—and everyone—discover the wealth of Canadian books for kids and teens that are released each year. As a not-for-profit organization that aims to support and promote Canadian books and their creators, we know about the challenges of discoverability—both of finding the right books to connect with your library kids—and of finding where to go for trusted recommendations. We can help you with both of these challenges. We have a whole lot to offer school librarians!

The top 5 ways the CCBC can help make your job a little easier (in no particular order):

Canadian Children's Book News

As the go-to magazine serving teachers and librarians for nearly 50 years, *Canadian Children's Book News* is filled with reviews of fantastic books by Canadian authors and illustrators, just perfect for students from Kindergarten to Grade 12. Each issue will help you select what's new and hot for your school and classroom libraries. Our articles will help you stay in the know, covering issues affecting children's education, literacy and the world of children's books in Canada.

Annotated book lists on a variety of themes—from National Day for Truth and Reconciliation to books by Black Canadian authors and illustrators—can be used to augment student research and learning and to help create displays to attract readers.

Best Books for Kids & Teens

Released each spring and fall, *Best Books for Kids & Teens* is the ultimate guide to the best new Canadian books for children and teens. Every title listed has our stamp of approval and our expert committees of educators, booksellers and librarians handpick all materials, including magazines, audio and video, previewing hundreds and hundreds of titles so you don't have to! Selections are chosen based on excellence in writing, illustration or performance, as well as what's most captivating to children and young adults.

Best Books helps you make the most of your budget, by highlighting books you can feel confident knowing your students will love.

Canadian Children's Book Week

In celebration of books and reading, each year the CCBC hosts a week-long tour of authors and illustrators into communities across Canada! Our touring authors and illustrators speak to audiences from

Kindergarten to Grade 12 about the delights of reading Canadian children's books, and offer an inside look into their own work. These workshops and presentations can be a turning point in a child's life, inspiring a lifelong love of reading.

Wherever your school or library is located, you can apply to host authors and illustrators and build excitement around reading. Travel and accommodation for Book Week tours are subsidized by the CCBC and our supporters, making Book Week an affordable way to build enthusiasm for books.

When Canadian creators tell their stories, they capture experiences unique to the cultures, identities and geographies that make up our country. Giving Canadian children and youth access to these diverse stories helps them see their own experiences represented in the books they read and inspires them to tell their own stories.

The Accessible Books Bank

Like you, we believe all kids should be able to find and read books they love. But not all kids can read all books because they might have a print or perceptual disability. Accessible books allow all young readers to access books in the way that works best for them. With close to 1,000 titles, the Accessible Books Bank allows you to search and browse great ACCESSIBLE Canadian books for young readers, including titles that are available as ebooks, audiobooks, large print, braille and more. Plus, it is free to access 24/7!

The CCBC Monthly Newsletter and Socials

Speaking of free, make sure you are receiving our monthly newsletter and following us on social media. These are the spaces where we regularly engage with the kid's book community. Each month, the CCBC Newsletter features a book creator interview, a thematic reading list, book news, recommendations, contests and more! You can also find us on Instagram, Facebook and X (formerly Twitter) (@kidsbookcentre) for book news and recommendations. We also have curated video content featuring books, authors and illustrators on the CCBC YouTube Channel.

Whether you are looking for picture books, YA, middle grade, non-fiction, board books or something else, the CCBC is sure to share the best of the best, representing a diversity of experience, voices and geographical representation.

We hope you visit us online at bookcentre.ca to take advantage of all the resources we are creating just for you—and we hope you discover wonderful new Canadian books that connect with all the kids and teens in your circle of influence. Together, let's build a new generation of curious, engaged and empathetic readers! ■



THE

Teaching Librarian

LAUNCHES NEW VISUAL IDENTITY

SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS WITH US!

Connect with Danny Neville, Editor-in-Chief at:



theteachinglibrarian@accessola.com

A NOTE ON SUBMISSIONS

Are you interested in writing for *The Teaching Librarian*? The theme for our May 2025 edition is *Heroes @ Your Library* and the submission deadline is February 6, 2025. We are also seeking recurring feature articles related to podcast recommendations, library infographics or puzzle pages. Email us at our new email address, theteachinglibrarian@accessola.com or scan the QR code to visit *The Teaching Librarian* website for more information.



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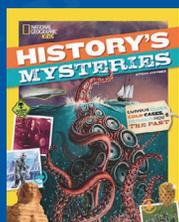
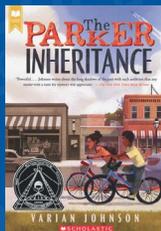
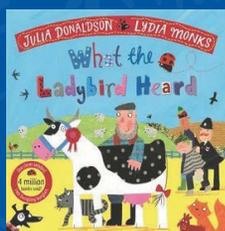
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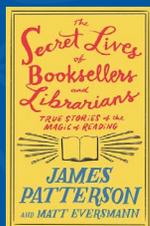


BACK COVER Bookshelf

RESOURCES FOR YOUNGER READERS / MIDDLE GRADE BOOKS



YA ADULT AND ADULT BOOKS



The Teaching Librarian Submissions

Are you interested in writing for *The Teaching Librarian*? The theme for our May 2025 edition is Heroes @ Your Library and the submission deadline is February 6, 2025. We are also seeking recurring feature articles related to technology in the school library, podcast recommendations, and library infographics. Email theteachinglibrarian@accessola.com for visit <https://accessola.com/media/the-teaching-librarian/> for more information.

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